

# Teen pregnancy issues in america

[Family](#), [Teenage Pregnancy](#)



Although the rate of teenage pregnancy in the United States has declined greatly within the past few years, it is still an enormous problem that needs to be addressed. These rates are still higher in the 1990's than they were only a decade ago. The United State's teenage birthrate exceeds that of most other industrialized nations, even though American teenagers are no more sexually active than teenagers are in Canada or Europe. Recent statistics concerning the teen birthrates are alarming. About 560, 000 teenage girls give birth each year.

Almost one-sixth of all births in the United States are to teenage women. Eight in ten of these births resulted from unintended pregnancies. (Gormly 347) By the age of eighteen, one out of four teenage girls will have become pregnant. (Newman 679) Although the onset of pregnancy may occur in any teenager, some teens are at higher risk for unplanned pregnancy than others. Teenagers who become sexually active at an earlier age are at a greater risk primarily because young teenagers are less likely to use birthcontrol.

African-American and Hispanic teenagers are twice as likely to give birth as are white teenagers. Whites are more likely to have abortions. Teenagers who come from poor neighborhoods and attend segregated schools are at a high risk for pregnancy. Also, teenagers who are doing poorly in school and have few plans for the future are more likely to become parents than those who are doing well and have high educational and occupational expectations.

Although the rate of teenage pregnancy is higher among low- income African-Americans and Hispanics, especially those in inner city ghettos, the

number of births to teenagers is highest among white, nonpoor young women who live in small cities and towns. (Calhoun 309) In addition to the question of which teenagers become pregnant, interest is shown in the social consequences of early parenthood. Adolescent parents (mostly mothers) may find that they have a "lost or limited opportunity for education. (Johnson 4) The higher a woman's level of education, the more likely she is to postpone marriage and childbearing.

Adolescents with little schooling are often twice as likely as those with more education to have a baby before their twentieth birthday. Some 58% of young women in the United States who receive less than a high school education give birth by the time they are twenty years old, compared with 13% of young women who complete at least twelve years of schooling.

(Tunick 11) Teens who become pregnant during high school are more likely to drop out. (Calhoun 310) A teen mother leaves school because she cannot manage the task of caring for a baby and studying, and a teen father usually chooses a job over school so that he can pay bills and provide for his child. (Johnson 4)

Teen mothers usually have fewer resources than older mothers because they have had less time to gather savings or build up their "productivity" through work experience, education, or training. (Planned Parenthood 1) Because of this, teen mothers are generally poor and are dependent on government support. (Newman 679) The welfare system is usually the only support a teen parent will receive.

Welfare benefits are higher for families with absent fathers or dependent children. (Calhoun 309) In some cases, teen mothers may also receive help like Medicaid, FoodStamps, and " Aid to Families with Dependent Besides educational and financial problems, teenage mothers may face a great deal of emotional strain and may become very stressed. Teen mothers may have limited social contacts and friendships because they do not have time for anything other than their baby.

Lack of a social life and time for herself may cause the teenage mother to become depressed or have severe mental anxiety. (Johnson 5) Depression may become worse for a teenage mother because she usually does not know much about child development or about how to care for their children. Children who are born to teenage mothers usually suffer from poor parenting. (Berk 188) Also, children of teenage parents start being sexually active before their peers and they are more likely to become teenage parents themselves. These children may also suffer from financial difficulties similar to that of their parents.

Children whose mothers are age seventeen or younger are three times as likely as their peers to be poor, and are likely to stay poor for a longer period of time. " (Calhoun 311) The children born to teenage mothers sometimes score lower on development tests than the children of older mothers. It seems that " rather than declining over time, educational deficits increase in severity and the children show lower academic achievement, higher drop out rates, and are more likely to be held back in school. " Teenage pregnancy comes with not only a child, but also many consequences.

Teen mothers face greater health risks than older mothers, such as anemia, pregnancy induced hypertension, toxemia, premature delivery, cervical trauma, and even death. Many of these health risks are due to inadequate prenatal care and support, rather than physical immaturity. The teenage mother is more likely to be undernourished and suffer premature and prolonged labor. (Calhoun 311) The death rate from pregnancy complications are much higher among girls who give birth under age fifteen. (Gormly 347)

Poor eating habits, smoking, alcohol and drugs increase the risk of having a baby with health problems. Johnson 3) The younger the teenage mother is, the higher the chances are that she and her baby will have health problems. This is mainly due to late prenatal care (if any) and poor nutrition. (Planned Parenthood 1) An adolescent mother and her baby may not get enough nutrients and, because the mother's body is not fully mature, she may have many complications throughout the duration of the pregnancy. Along with the mother, the children of teenage parents too often become part of a cycle of poor health, school failure, and poverty.

Infants born to teenage mothers are at a high risk of prematurity, fragile health, the need for intensive care, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, and mental retardation. (Johnson 5) Low birth weight is the most immediate health problem. Babies born to teenagers are often born too small, too soon. Low birthweight babies may have immature organ systems (brain, lungs, and heart), difficulty controlling body temperature and blood sugar levels, and a risk of dying in early infancy that is much higher than that of normal weight babies (five and one-half pounds or more). Calhoun 310)

" The death rate for babies whose mothers are under fifteen years of age is double that of babies whose mothers are twenty to thirty years old. "

(Johnson 5) Because of these extremely serious problems, many government, as well as local, organizations are fighting to stop the occurrence of teenage pregnancy by helping to educate children of the risks involved and the consequences after. Some research indicates that " the percentage of teenage birthrates has declined simply because fewer teenagers are having sexual intercourse and more adolescents are using contraceptives.

Researchers say that the recent trends in sexual activity and contraceptive use are the result of a number of factors, including greater emphasis on abstinence, more conservative attitudes about sex, fear of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, the popularity of long-lasting birthcontrol methods such as the contraceptive implant (Norplant) and the injectable (Depo-Provera), and even because of the economy. In addition, researchers say that young people have become somewhat more conservative in their views about casual sex and out-of-wedlock childbearing.

Some attribute this change in attitude mainly to concern about sexually transmitted diseases. Others say that it is because of the involvement of conservative religious groups in the public debate over sexual behavior. Many researchers believe that the strong economy and the increasing availability of jobs at minimum wage have contributed to fewer births among teenagers. (Donovan 32) Americans, however, seem to be against some of

the methods used by these various organizations to reduce the teen pregnancy rates.

The most controversial aspect of adolescent pregnancy prevention is the growing movement to provide teenagers with easy access to contraceptives. " Most Americans believe that giving teenagers birth control pills and/or condoms is the same as telling them that early sex is allowed. Some studies that were conducted in Europe show that some clinics in Europe that distribute contraceptives to teenagers have the same sexual activity rate as in the United States. However, in these European studies, it is apparent that teen pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion rates are

Teenage pregnancy does cause many problems for the mother, child, and economy. There are, however, some incidences where the mother overcomes this down-hill trend and makes a successful life for her and her child. The outcome of teenage pregnancy turns out better if the mother goes back to school after she has given birth. (Berk 190) Staying in school may help to prevent teenage mothers from having a second pregnancy. (Planned Parenthood 2) The outcome is also better if the mother continues to live with her parents so that they can help to raise the child.

Young, teen mothers need health care for themselves as well as their children. An adolescent mother also needs a great deal of encouragement to get her to remain in school. Single teenage mothers also need job training so that they can get a good job to support themselves and their children. Teen mothers need to be taught parenting and life-management skills and also need high quality and affordable daycare for their children. Schools that

provide daycare centers on campus reduce the incidence of teenagers dropping out of school. These school programs also decrease the likelihood that the teen mother will have more children.

Because the government has begun to take action in preventing teen pregnancies, the rate has continued to decline. The large numbers of young people in America--as well as the values, health, education, skills they gain--will greatly affect the future of society. Therefore, increased attention should be given to the well-being of adolescents. Since greater care is being given to the young people, improvements are already occurring. The level of education that young people receive is much higher than that of their parents, and the "expectation that young people should obtain at least some secondary schooling" is growing.

The numbers of women who have a child during their teen years is declining, and recognizing the impact of childbearing on education, parents and communities are continuing to discourage sexual activity, marriage, and motherhood at a young age. (Tunick 13) These recent trends, if continued, will more than likely educate the adolescent population about the risks and consequences of teenage pregnancy and reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy and childbirth altogether.