

# The problem of teen pregnancy research paper examples

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There are many issues that young people have to deal with as they grow up; as puberty besets them, they become curious about sex and often engage in it. However, with the act of sex comes the possibility of pregnancy; as children have sex younger and younger, the chance for an unwanted pregnancy increases for a teenage girl, or a teenage boy who fathers a child. The problems of premarital sex include the disruption of finances and plans for the future; however, an abstinence-only education such as those conducted in many schools around the country is not working. The solution, then, must be a more progressive form of sex education that is honest and communicative with these teenagers, teaching them proper use of contraception and safe sex techniques, and making sure they are educated so that they can be more responsible with their exploration of their sexuality.

Teen pregnancy is on the rise throughout the world; each year, 13 million children are born to people under the age of 20 worldwide (Makinson, 1985). This is due greatly to the large increase in the percentage of teenagers who are having sex - statistics indicate that over 80% of teenagers have had sex, including 25% of 15 year olds and 50% of 17 year olds (Treffers, 2003). The teenage birth rate in America is higher than in any other developed country, as well as the abortion rates. While the teenage pregnancy rate dropped substantially in the 1990s, it is still a substantial problem which continues to baffle those who are working for a solution.

There are many causes for this increase in premarital sex; in the past few decades, conservative and puritanical views regarding sex have lightened up with the deemphasizing of religion in American life, and less conservative

and involved parenting has also led to at least a more open acknowledgement of teenagers having premarital sex. Sexuality in the media also exposes children to these types of thoughts and ideas at younger and younger ages, giving implicit permission or encouragement to engage in sexual acts. Over time, it has grown into a socially acceptable part of the teenage experience; regardless of whether or not the actual rates of teenage sexual activity has increased or decreased, the openness of communication regarding sex with teenagers has grown over time. As a consequence, children can often become pregnant either through misuse of contraceptives or their lack of use. Studies have shown a remarkable number of teenage males who report inconsistent or incorrect condom use when having sex, which is linked to unwanted pregnancies and STDs (Anda et al., 2002).

If we are to take the position that teenagers engaging in premarital sex is normal, and not necessarily a problem, we must discuss the issue of teen pregnancy itself. In order to prevent that while still allowing for teenagers to engage in sexual activity, this means using contraception. However, there are many different obstacles that prevent this from being a fully effective strategy at this time. First, there is tremendous pressure from religious conservative groups to advocate abstinence-only sex education; in these programs, the only thing that is taught about sex, or how to deal with it, is to remain abstinent and not have sex. In essence, abstinence-only sex education has to focus on "teaching the social, psychological and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity," depicting it as the

norm and the only 100% way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy (Kohler et al., p. 345).

Abstinence-only sex education programs, despite their intentions of preventing the initiation of sexual activity, have been shown to not have any noticeable effect on preventing children from having sex (Kohler et al., 2008). Of those students who take virginity pledges, 88% of students of abstinence-only sex education have sex anyway, making the effort seem almost entirely ineffective. Furthermore, because of the lack of knowledge about contraceptives due to an ignorance of that particular section of education, STD rates for teenagers were also on the rise.

This is not to say that abstinence is not a worthwhile method of sex education; students do need to be informed that abstaining from sex is the only 100% guaranteed way to prevent teen pregnancy and STDs. However, there exist "abstinence-plus" programs that can instruct teenagers in safe sex techniques should they choose to have sex, while still encouraging the use of abstinence as a method of birth control (Kirby, 2002). This is an extremely comprehensive form of sex education which should be actively encouraged, as it provides the largest number of options for teenagers regardless of their attitude or their level or desire to have sex.

A comprehensive safe sex education program instructs students on the proper use of contraception, discussing success rates, dispelling myths about sexual health, among other services (Kirby, 1999). While abstinence can still be a part of this type of sexual education, it also provides the same

emphasis on proper safe sex practices if sex is to occur. The advantages of proper contraceptive use are many, not the least of which is proven results in substantially lowering the rates of teen pregnancy (Kohler et al., 2008). Furthermore, the costs incurred in using contraception are miniscule when compared with the costs of carrying a child to term and raising them at such an emotionally and economically fragile time in a person's life; even abortions are less financially and physically taxing than the practice of safe sex (Anda et al., 2002). Since most teenagers break these virginity pledges and have sex despite their abstinence-only education, it is much safer and much more responsible to give them the tools they need to do so responsibly. Furthermore, it prevents the stigmatization of teenagers who do have sex that is often espoused in abstinence-only education, offering them greater emotional health as well when they do it.

In conclusion, teen pregnancy is a very prevalent phenomenon throughout the world, and in America in particular. Abstinence-only education simply does not work; it often comes from a motivation to prevent teenagers from doing what is socially unacceptable, without giving them the resources to do it safely if their willpower is not strong enough (if they planned on suppressing their desire for sex in the first place). Instead, a comprehensive sex education which includes contraceptive education and instruction would dramatically reduce the rates of teen pregnancy, as it would give teenagers the tools to behave responsibly while still engaging in premarital sex. This would, in essence, lead to more healthy sex lives to these individuals, even if they do not have sex until they are adults.

## Works Cited

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