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



Teen Pregnancy and the Link to Poverty in the U. S. with A Focus on Western Ma Especially Holyoke and Springfield Mass

The rate at which teens are becoming pregnant worldwide is alarming.

Teenage pregnancy refers to pregnancy in human females who are under the age of 20 at the time they deliver the child. It can occur just at the beginning of puberty before the first menstrual cycle (Weiss, David, and Bullough 43). Normally, teenage pregnancy occurs after the teenager has started experiencing her periods at around the age of 12 or 13. In developed countries like the United States (U. S.), these pregnancies are associated with social factors, which include levels of education, extreme poverty and another outcome in children born by teenage mothers.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of teens becoming pregnant in the U. S. Studies show that in 2011, the rate of teenagers giving birth in U. S was so low compared to the last 70 years. The reduction is courtesy of the campaign for abstinence and the use of contraceptives among sexually active teenagers who are in the adolescent stage (Weiss, David and Vern L. Bullough 46). Other studies attribute this reduction to the fact that adolescents were increasingly substituting vaginal intercourse with other sexual activities.

Although this reduction sounds as good news, the problem is far from over as at least one in five sexually active teenage girls become pregnant every year. In spite of the low rate of teenage pregnancy in the U. S, the rate is still the highest among other most developed countries worldwide. For instance, the rate is twice as high as countries such as Australia and Canada. It is three times as high as France and Germany, six times higher than

Netherlands, but seven times higher than Japan (“ Birth, Abortion” 2) Most of these pregnancies are unintended which lead to negative outcomes for the parents, the children and the society in general. The most affected areas are the Western Massachusetts, Holyoke, and Springfield.

The residents in these regions live under prevalent poverty conditions. The children in this region either work or live on the streets, which increase their exposure to unsafe sexual activities. Some of these teenagers feel the pressure to have sex from their peers. They develop a relationship with men either their age or relatively older than they do. In these relationships, they end up doing something sexual just to feel like their peers who are indulging in sex.

Early pregnancies affect both social and economic life of teenagers in Holyoke and Springfield. The teenagers are less likely to get adequate parental care, which is a risk for their health. After childbirth, the teenagers are likely not to get married, and those in relationships are more likely to be dumped by their children’s father. Teenagers are getting pregnant experience stigma from their friends and even some family members. The stigma tempts them to abort a pregnancy, which in turn risks their lives even further. Those who manage to carry this pregnancy for a full term have to drop from school, and some never go back to complete their studies. Lack of education makes them unable to secure a decent job. They are, therefore, forced to continue working along the streets of this region to cater for their children. As Hoffman, Saul, and Rebecca (14) assert, these children just like their parents are forced to adapt to poverty life at a very young age. They miss basic necessities, which compromise their healthy growth. Worse still,

teenage pregnancies impact negatively on psychological development of the children born. The teenage parents are more likely to give birth prematurely. Their children are characterized by low birth weight, low immunity, and health conditions, which affect their general growth. They perform poorly in class with high risk of intellectual, language, and socio-emotional delays (Weiss, David & Vern L. Bullough 44). They are at higher risk of being incarcerated during their adolescent stage as compared to children born by older parents (Brown et al. 4).

Teenage pregnancies also affect hugely the economy of Western Massachusetts Especially Holyoke and Springfield Mass and the U. S in general. It is estimated that annual costs of teenage births is about \$10. 9 billion per year in tax revenue (Weiss, David and Vern L. Bullough 14). Much resource is consumed through public assistance, child health institutions, foster care, and criminal justice system. Millions of families around these regions are struggling with the emotional and economic challenges that this pregnancy brings. Further, teenage pregnancy negatively affects workforce development, increases healthcare as well as education cost (Hoffman, Saul and Rebecca 14).

The States continue to create a mechanism to reduce this menace beyond zero. The prevention is anticipated to play a pivotal role in the economic recovery of these regions. Other institutions also have initiated programs to tackle this problem. Schools provide sex education advocating abstinence while others distribute condoms while providing guidance on how to use them. Private organizations in these States also finance home for pregnant teenagers who ran away from consequences of the stigma associated with

teenage pregnancy (Finer, Lawrence and Mia 480). They also provide free health services for teenagers. Some punitive measures have also been developed to discourage the teens from engaging in sexual activities. Such measures include enforcement of fornication laws for adult males who impregnate teenage girls. It is presupposed that proper enforcement of such measures will prohibit the teenagers from indulging in sexual activities. If the rate of teenage pregnancy is successfully lowered, the regions will be able to save itself from the consequences of this menace.

Experts have continuously voiced their concern about teenage pregnancy in Holyoke and Springfield Mass. It is estimated that about 30 percent of American women in general become pregnant during their teenage years (Book bags and baby bottles 2). According to Book bags and baby bottles (2) around 13 percent of sexually active teenage boys, have confirmed that they made their female teenage counterparts pregnant. However, 82 percent of these pregnancies are unwanted. Element of racism also features in teenage pregnancies. Hispanic white teenagers experienced a rate of 43. 3 for every 1000 girls between the ages of 15 to 19 For African Americans; the rate was 117 per cent. Among these pregnancies, 31percent were aborted by the teenagers (Brown et al. 4).

Most of these teenagers become pregnant when engaging in their first sexual experience. During this time, they are poorly equipped with information regarding contraceptive methods. Nonetheless, they are motivated by stories from their peers who tell them about their first experience in sexual activity. The peer pressure makes most of the teenagers to try and experience firsthand what they are simply told by

others. As a result, they get pregnant unintentionally, and when they are not ready to handle the pregnancy. On the contrary, the teenagers who use contraceptives during their sexual experience less often become pregnant. Twenty-seven percent of teenage girls who use contraceptives during their first sexual intercourse were less likely to become pregnant compared to 43 percent who did not use them (Finer, Lawrence and Mia 482).

The aspect of the age difference in teenage pregnancy forms part of discussions by the experts. Some of the teenage girls engage in sexual activities with men who are older than they are. These girls are more likely to be impregnated than teenagers with men who are almost their age are. Darroch et al. (166) assert that 6.7 percent of teenagers between the age of 15 and 17 have partners who are six or more years older than they are. The rate of pregnancy for this group of teenager is 3.7 times higher than those teenagers whose partners are less than three years older than they are. For sexually active teenage boys below the age 16 years having sex with partners twice as old as they are, are more likely to impregnate them as compared to those who abstain until they are 16 to 17 years old Darroch et al. (166).

Another determinant for the rate of teenage pregnancy is the number of sex partners a teenager indulge in sexual activities with. Evidence point to the fact the higher the number of sex partners a teenage has the higher the chances of pregnancy. Thirty-seven percent of teen girls and 18 percent of teen boys who engage in sexual activities with more than one partner have had or have been involved in a pregnancy. The rate of pregnancy incidence within this group significantly reduces by 25 percent as the number of

partners reduces to two (Darroch, Jacqueline et al. 165).

The rate of teenage pregnancy is alarming to the experts who spend massive resources to look for its solution. They advocate various methods that could be used to minimize if not to eliminate all together incidence of teenage pregnancies. Some of these methods include increasing the rate of contraceptive use among the teenagers. Most of the messages delivered to the teenagers either through sex education or through the media encourage them to use contraceptives if they cannot abstain. It is proved that messages about abstinence-only do not produce desired results as most of the teens rarely abstain. The experts also insist that the Federal government should establish health institutions in these regions. The institutions should be tasked to provide cheaper and where possible free health services to the teenagers. The institutions will help the teenagers to know where they can get information and services on how to protect themselves against unintentional pregnancies (Stencel 3). They will be assured of getting this information in a confidential setting. Most of the scholars concur that this problem must be confronted in biological and cultural angle.

Another method of tackling the teenage pregnant is quite controversial. Some of the experts propose that Federal laws should be enacted to punish men who indulge in sexual activities with the teenagers. Proponents of this measure such as Douglas Varie an attorney argue that enforcing such laws will discourage teenagers from indulging in risky sexual behavior. Such laws will also force the fathers of these children to take paternal responsibility for their children thus reducing the poverty level in the family (Hoffman, Saul and Rebecca 16). However, opponents of the measure contend that the

prosecution cannot help teenagers avoid pregnancy as it comes after the fact. They suggest that the funds should instead be directed towards sex education as it will inform teenagers about possible repercussions of sexual activity.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a case study on the enforcement of fornication laws. Fornication charges were placed against Smisek, who was a 17-year-old teenage for indulging in sexual activities. Jack Van Valkenburgh appearing for the ACLU argued that enforcing fornication charges against his client was unconstitutional as it violated equal protection guarantee. He described the prosecution as the worst kind of government interference in family matters in the U. S. Other critics said that the prosecutions only target the poor who often get themselves in such circumstances so as to lower public spending. Kristin Luker through her book *Dubious Conception*, which talks of teenage pregnancy laments about the State's symbolic use of archaic laws to punish the poor.

Teenage pregnancy is doubtlessly a menace that requires collective efforts of all people to resolve. The experts need to come together and propose measures including normative once to protect the teenagers from early pregnancy. As it has been discussed in part one of this study, teenage pregnancy is no longer an individual's problem. Its effects transcend the relationship between the young parents and their partners. It is imperative that objective discussions be pursued to come up with the best solution to this problem.

Personal Opinion on Teenage Pregnancy

Holyoke and Springfield are evident with the highest number of teen births among the cities of Massachusetts. The disparity between these cities is exhibited by the difference in their population size. Racial aspect of teenage pregnancy is also clearly exhibited within the two cities. The reasons for high rate of teenage pregnancy are many and varied. Such factors as peer pressure, as well as a lack of information about protection method, are just some of the reasons. However, I think that even the kind of sex education provided to the teenagers in these cities is likely to contribute to teenage pregnancy. The literature review does not suggest that there is no guarantee that if the teenagers are well informed about sex through sex education will reduce the rate of teenage births. There are some teenagers who appear to be adventurous and would want to try everything they have been told not to (Weiss, David, and Vern L. Bullough 46). Availability of contraceptive just makes the situation worse. The readily available contraceptive to the teenagers of these cities is condoms. The campaigns about using contraceptives such as condoms make the teenager overindulge in sexual activities thinking that they are protective. Unfortunately for them, condoms do not guarantee protection against pregnancy and at times the risk attaches, and they become pregnant, for instance, when the condom bursts. I think the best method of reducing the rate of teenage birth is abstinence. The teenagers should just abstain and concentrate on their studies until when they are mature enough to carry a pregnant. The parents should be proactive in protecting their teenagers against activities that expose them to sexual exploitation. There is also need for the authorities in this region to

look for ways to improve the living conditions of the teenagers. Poverty plays an immense role in pushing these teenagers to sexual activities. It is prudent that they should be assisted to start up economic ventures that will help them raise money for themselves, make them independent as well as keep them too busy to indulge in sex. If these measures are adequately implemented, then the teenagers in Holyoke and Springfield would be kept safe from teenage pregnancy.

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