

NEEDS ASSESSMENT CASE SCENARIO: **TEEN PREGNANCY**

According to the Center for Disease Control (2014), in 2012, 305,388 babies were born to girls aged 15–19 years. While this was a record low for U.S. teens in this age group, rates for African American teens and Hispanic teens were two to three times higher than for Caucasian teens. Teen pregnancy rates remain high, with approximately one million girls becoming pregnant each year in the U.S.

Teen pregnancy is one of the most difficult experiences a young person might ever face. Teen pregnancy is an important issue for several reasons. For example, children born to teenage mothers are more likely to suffer health, social, and emotional problems than children born to older mothers. In addition, those who become pregnant during their teens are at increased risk for medical complications, such as premature labor and social consequences (Swierzewski, 2014). Environmental factors shape children's behavior. Before it is possible to change young people's behavior, their environment must be reshaped and the attitudes and behavior of adults and institutions around them must support appropriate decisions.

Teenage births are associated with lower annual income, reliance on welfare, dropping out of high school, increased rates of alcohol and substance abuse, and reduced earning potential for teen fathers (Swierzewski, 2014). The annual cost of teen pregnancies in the U.S. from loss of tax revenues, public assistance, child health care, and involvement with the criminal justice system is estimated at \$7 billion.

Teen pregnancy is a serious consequence of underage drinking, but it is not the only consequence. Teen pregnancy is linked to rape, suicide, and other unintended crimes/injuries. In addition, teen pregnancy results from reckless sex, which can lead to exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and the HIV virus. Research conducted by the National Institute on Teen Pregnancy found that young girls who were sexually active before age 15 were four times more likely to become pregnant than those who were sexually active after the age of 18.

Prevention has shown that changing the environment in which people make decisions offers the greatest probability of success. Prevention programs aimed at youth are not new. Traffic safety organizations have been conducting youth anti-drinking and driving

campaigns for a number of years. The results of these efforts have been successful and have produced a 50% reduction in alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities involving youth over the last 10 years. Unfortunately, statistics in communities across America indicate there has been no similar reduction in teen pregnancy. A comprehensive program examines *all* of the issues surrounding teen pregnancy.

Comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention projects approach the problem of teen pregnancy from a public health perspective, combining enforcement, education, public policy, media relations, and other elements. They are designed to change the social and legal environment within which young girls function and to create an environment that helps them make better decisions about sexual activities.

References

Center for Disease Control. (2014). *Teenage pregnancy statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/>

Swierzewski, S. (2014). Teen pregnancy overview. *Sexual Medicine Society of North America*.