

Teenage Pregnancy: A Preventable Calamity

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A preventable calamity is taking place in communities all across America: Young women who are still children themselves are bearing children of their own.

It is a calamity for these young mothers because early motherhood denies them opportunities and choices. It is a calamity for their children because most will grow up poor and fatherless. And it is a calamity for this nation because these children are likely to repeat the tragic cycle of poverty and dysfunction into which they were born.

Compelling evidence now supports what most Americans have long understood intuitively. Family structure and lifestyle, as well as economics, influence how children turn out. Children of young, unmarried mothers fare badly, and society pays the cost. The equation is straightforward: As poverty is the most accurate predictor of teen pregnancy, teen pregnancy is a near certain predictor of poverty. And in this country, two-thirds of never-married mothers now raise their children in poverty.

Beyond these statistics are stories of personal tragedy stories of children who begin life with disadvantages from which they may never recover. Children of unmarried teen mothers are far more likely than the children of older, two-parent families to fall behind and drop out of school, to get into trouble with the law, to abuse drugs and join gangs, to have children of their own out of wedlock, and to become dependent on welfare.

The problem is urgent. There are now nine million children living in welfare families (Committee 1993). As those nine million children reach adolescence, many are "scripted" to repeat the lives of their parents. We must intervene and break the cycle before those children, too, become parents too soon and create a new generation of disadvantage.¹

To reverse this cycle requires nothing less than a categorical declaration by our nation's civic, moral, and community leaders that it is wrong not simply foolish or impractical for women and men to make babies they cannot support emotionally and financially. We must reject moral relativism and reassert our common values.

It is also time to challenge the complacent view that having babies out of wedlock is simply a lifestyle choice, and that since all lifestyle choices are equally valid, no behavior should be condemned. This stance is untenable in the face of compelling evidence that not all choices are equal in terms of their impact on children, and that children need fathers as well as mothers.

Massive federal spending on remedial programs will not solve the problem. Neither will castigating teen mothers, cutting off their welfare checks, and moving their children into orphanages. Government's role is not to insulate individuals from the consequences of their behavior. Nor should government insulate individuals from the values of their own communities. The role of government must shift radically. Government must be the catalyst for strategies to change public perceptions about teen pregnancy as well as public perceptions about who is responsible for it, and how it should be solved.

All parents must be held accountable for supporting their children, and those who accept government help must also accept reciprocal obligations. At the same time, society must recognize its obligation to young parents and young people who are not yet parents. We must offer them real opportunities to create better lives for themselves and their children and a great deal of help along the way.

If we choose to ignore the problem, this self-perpetuating cycle will continue to create a separate society of single mothers and fatherless children. It will continue to deepen the social and economic divide between two-parent and single-parent families. It will continue to deepen resentments between rich and poor, and between black and white. And all of these divisions will further penetrate our culture.

What was once a socially unacceptable choice is now commonplace. In 1993, 6.3 million U.S. children were living with a single parent who had never married: 21 percent of white children, 32 percent of Hispanic children, and 57

percent of African-American children (Saluter 1994).²

Unmarried motherhood is not limited only to teenagers. Out-of-wedlock births are increasing more rapidly, in fact, among women in their 30s than among teens, among whites than among minorities. But society has a particular interest in and responsibility for preventing unwed teenage childbearing.

First, teenage mothers who enter the welfare system early are the most likely welfare recipients to get "stuck" in the system: Nearly half of long-term welfare recipients are women who gave birth before age 17. Teenage mothers are far more likely than older mothers to rely on government to support their children.

But government in the form of an army of social workers and counselors is no substitute for a missing parent. Bureaucratic compassion is a poor substitute for the nurturance, moral guidance, and kinship that strong families can offer children.

When an older woman chooses single parenthood, she may be creating a serious disadvantage for her child by denying that child a life with two adult parents. When a teenager makes that same choice, she creates an even graver disadvantage for her child: denying her child a life with even one adult parent. Teenage mothers, who often have little adult support, face the nearly impossible task of trying to raise children while growing up themselves. No amount of welfare, no social support system, can lift that enormous burden.

Finally, we must acknowledge that while older women may consciously choose unwed motherhood, teenage motherhood is not always such a conscious choice. In many communities, teen childbearing is commonplace while marriage is uncommon (Moore 1994).³ For young women whose mothers and sisters and schoolmates all are unmarried mothers, teen childbearing seems inevitable. We owe it to these young women to insist that it is not inevitable. We must insist that they delay motherhood until they are able to understand its consequences. Then we must offer them other choices.

Each year, more than one million American teenage girls become pregnant one in nine. Before the end of their teenage years, 43 percent of teenage girls become pregnant once (Forrest 1987). The United States has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates of any western industrialized nation. About half of these young women give birth; the majority do not marry. By 1991, 69 percent of teen mothers were unmarried a rate that doubled in just one generation (Moore 1994; Simons 1991).^{4 5}

For too long, policymakers have chosen an easy path providing a marginal existence for teenage mothers and their children and consigning them to impoverished lives in a separate welfare society. It has been more convenient to declare preventing teen pregnancy "beyond the capacity of government" than to take an unequivocal moral position against it and take steps to reverse the trend.

Instead of debating the critical question how to reverse the trends and reinstate the presumption that all children deserve to be born into stable and nurturing families politicians have been arguing over peripheral issues. Should we give out condoms in high schools? Is it politically incorrect to use the term "illegitimate"? And was the decision of an unmarried fictional television character to have a child a moral one? Debate on these issues diverts attention from the lives of real children.

Now we must pay attention to the lives of real people and acknowledge our urgent and compelling national interest in preventing pregnancies by young women unprepared to be mothers. To do that, we must change both the culture of acceptance and the context in which teenagers make decisions about sex and childbearing. Only then can we begin to arrest the trend.

This paper proposes a four-part strategy to accomplish those objectives:

- 1) Launching a national campaign to end the moral relativism that has characterized discussions of teen pregnancy. The campaign must begin with the unequivocal assertion that unmarried teen childbearing is morally wrong because of its costs for children and society. We must cast single motherhood as a selfish act because it harms children; we must resurrect the notion that it is dishonorable for a man to father a child he does not support.

- 2) Shifting government's role to that of catalyst. Government can no longer insulate those responsible for teen pregnancy from the consequences of their actions. Public policy must discourage, rather than support, decisions to bear or father children out of wedlock. This shift includes ending unqualified public assistance for unmarried teen mothers, requiring accountability for all fathers, and punishing sexual predators. At the same time, government must

become a catalyst for solutions designed at the community level solutions that strengthen and support families and reinforce community values.

3) Redefining responsible sexual behavior. That definition should be based on this simple premise: While many in our society now accept sex outside of marriage, we must reassert that children belong inside marriage.

4) Creating new opportunities and incentives for young women and men at risk of becoming parents too soon. We must stop rewarding the wrong behavior and instead offer rewards for disadvantaged young women and men who finish school and delay parenting. To help them, we must offer the support of caring adults, the chance to do well in school and go on to good jobs, and the reinforcement along the way of tangible and meaningful incentives, such as Individual Development Accounts.

The Need for a Progressive Strategy

As this crisis has developed over the past three decades, a fundamental social problem that cries out for consensus instead has been politicized and polarized. Why? Our national leaders have viewed the issues of illegitimacy and family breakdown through a dense fog of ideology. Liberals have offered palliatives but refuse to condemn unwed teen parenting as wrong; conservatives have offered condemnation and moral righteousness unaccompanied by constructive solutions to change the circumstances that lead to teen parenting.

America's political leaders are at last rousing themselves to action. Why? Because the social devastation caused by family breakdown and out-of-wedlock births now threatens our health, education, and criminal justice systems. It has finally become too obvious to ignore.

Changing attitudes about family. Many liberals have been reluctant to make moral or prudential judgments about unmarried childbearing. Many view it as a natural outgrowth of changes in family structure, and therefore irreversible. Attempts to restore the idealized family of the 1950s are judged quixotic if not downright reactionary.

It is true that the Ozzie and Harriet model of family life is no longer economically practical. Nor is it desirable: A division of labor that relegates women to staying at home and raising children with little help from men who work outside the home limits opportunities for both children and parents. But changing work patterns and important gains in women's equality should not negate the long history of the two-parent family. For literally thousands of generations, the two-parent family has been the most durable and effective method for nurturing and supporting children. Children may now need the financial support of two parents; they have long needed the emotional support of two parents to nurture them.

Militant feminists, seeing the traditional family as a focal point for patriarchal oppression, hail its dissolution as liberating for women. Yet this dissolution shifts to women a disproportionate share of the responsibility for raising children, and it frequently absolves men of obligations to their own children.

Changes in divorce laws have weakened the institution of marriage and contributed to what Barbara Whitehead calls a shift in the "social metric" during the 1970s and 1980s. Many states provide for a "no-fault" divorce, in effect allowing individuals an easy way out of marriage and parental responsibilities (Kamarck 1993). While law and custom once reinforced adults' obligations to children, the new metric celebrates the adult quest for freedom and self-fulfillment all too often at the expense of children.

One immediate loss to children of single parents is some of the richness of belonging to a large community of relatives. When women and men marry and make a formal commitment to raising children together, their children inherit two family networks to watch out for them.

And families are the primary socializers of children; families teach children how to be citizens. To deprive children of crucial adult models of citizenship, anthropologist David Murray suggests, is to "undercapitalize" society's investment in its own future. When successive generations of children are born to single parents, these children are deprived of important family resources human as well as financial. The child of a single mother whose mother did not marry has only one grandparent instead of four. Single-parent families rarely accumulate enough financial assets to pass something along to the next generation (Murray 1994).

To concede that fathers do not matter to children is to deny those children half of their birthright. A young man with no father is deprived of his most natural role model for manhood. He has no opportunity to watch a man who gets up every morning and goes to work to support his children. He has no opportunity to experience nurturing from a man who helps with homework or reads bedtime stories. He has no moral guidance from a man who sets limits for him

and disciplines him for risky behavior.

A young woman with no father has little opportunity to experience the love of a man who places her well-being ahead of his own. She loses a natural protector from sexual predators. And she has no model for what to expect from a man who would father her own children.

Racial politics. No less than gender politics, racial politics inhibits frank discussion. The image of illegitimacy is a racial stereotype: a poor, inner-city African-American adolescent. And while the rate of increase in unmarried births is much greater, in fact, among women in their 30s than among teens and greater among whites than among African-Americans there is one important element of truth in the stereotype. Most teen mothers are poor. Poverty, not race, is the single most accurate predictor of teenage pregnancy (Moore 1994; Bachu 1991; Henshaw 1994).^{6 7 8} Because poverty is pervasive in minority communities, teen pregnancy is pervasive in those communities as well.

When Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued a prescient warning in 1965 about the breakdown of the African-American family, he was shouted down by an angry chorus that accused him of "blaming the victim." Since then, many liberals have been afraid to speak candidly about the issue. Their reticence severely handicaps efforts to solve the problem.

These ideological taboos have widened the gap between how Washington and how ordinary Americans talk about the family and illegitimacy. The public sees the unraveling of family bonds as a serious social problem with moral ramifications, stemming from what President Clinton has aptly called a "crisis of the spirit."

Moral relativism. By contrast, governing elites and social welfare professionals address these issues in technical and morally neutral terms. And in an approach that is essentially therapeutic, their interventions often come too late after teens become parents. Visit a teenage pregnancy clinic, and it's quickly apparent that questions of right and wrong rarely arise. The prevailing sensibility is fatalistic, the language medical. Social and health workers focus on avoiding disease, producing healthy babies, and helping young women become better mothers. These are all sensible goals, but we must do more than limit the damage. We must prevent it.

Economics matters. On the right, many conservatives refuse to look beyond cultural explanations. While they have properly identified cultural shifts that tolerate, if not sanction, such behavior, they ignore the powerful interaction of economics and culture.

The global economic realignment has hit America's poor communities particularly hard. Stable, high-wage jobs for workers with low education and skills have all but disappeared in urban areas. As economist William Julius Wilson has pointed out, rising unemployment in poor urban communities means a shortage of "marriageable males": men who can earn enough to support a family.

Welfare and other social policies also shape the economics of marriage and family. Why should a young woman marry a man with dim job prospects when the welfare system is a more reliable provider? Why marry when marriage leads to a reduction in welfare benefits?

The conservative answer abolishing welfare altogether is simple and wrong. Granted, cutting off support to single mothers, supporting their children in orphanages, and denying parental rights to all unmarried fathers is a radical response to the public outcry over the failure of the welfare system. But such strategies would harm the children we seek to protect and undermine the family values we claim to revere.

Welfare is only part of the cause. What's more, the conservative approach rests on a crudely reductive formula: Welfare equals illegitimacy. Conservatives claim that the welfare system, with its offer of automatic support for single mothers, is the primary factor in young women's decisions to bear children out of wedlock. All available evidence, as well as common sense, suggests that welfare benefits are only one of many reasons.

Instead of forcing welfare recipients to go "cold turkey," a principled conservative response would respect the organic nature of social change and choose a more humane way to reintegrate poor families into the larger society. A principled response would not naively presume that civic, religious, and charitable groups can step instantly into the vacuum created by the abrupt ending of government support.

The conservatives' sudden discovery of illegitimacy as the fundamental social ill is also politically suspect. It is, perhaps, a tactical response to President Clinton's call for replacing welfare with a work-centered social policy. Although conservatives have long demanded such a shift, many are now having difficulty taking "yes" for an answer at least from a Democratic President. Now they have redefined the objectives, insisting that eliminating public aid to young mothers should be the litmus test of true welfare reform.

Finally, conservative prescriptions are strictly punitive quick to offer moral censure and punishing cutoffs for those who act irresponsibly, yet slow to offer young people hope and opportunities to improve their lives. It is both hypocritical and impractical for leaders to preach at young people without offering demonstrable proof that behaving differently could lead to a better life.

It is time to reject the false choices offered by liberals and conservatives. Reversing the rise of illegitimacy and decline of marriage is a monumental national task that requires recognition of both personal and societal responsibility. Liberals must recognize that intact, two-parent families are, in the aggregate, better for children than single-parent families. They must recognize that fathers matter and that marriage remains the principal means by which societies legitimate childbearing and ensure that children's needs are met. Conservatives must recognize that problems that have developed over the past quarter-century will not vanish overnight if government withdraws its helping hand. They must recognize the economic as well as cultural stresses that families face. They must support child-centered policies that give parents the resources and skills to raise and nurture their children well.

The time has come for a progressive synthesis that combines an insistence on personal and moral accountability with a recognition that poverty is deeply implicated in teenage pregnancy and the breakdown of families, and that government has a critical responsibility to reinforce in concrete ways the value of marriage and strong, two-parent families.

This paper elaborates such a synthesis, and proposes changes in the culture that accepts unmarried teenage childbearing as well as the incentive system that supports it. In *Mandate for Change* and subsequent work, the Progressive Policy Institute called for returning the welfare system to its original mission an offer of "transitional support" for needy families and ending welfare as a subsidy for dependency. It now proposes a series of changes in the welfare, education, and legal systems to address the national crisis in births to unmarried teenagers.

Specific proposals include:

Launching a serious and unrelenting national campaign against teen pregnancy, begun by the President but carried out and reinforced by communities, churches, schools, and the media. The goals of this campaign should be as ambitious as the problem is urgent:

- 1) Reducing teen pregnancies by 5 percent a year;
- 2) Ensuring that at least one-quarter of the 80,000 communities in the United States adopt their own teen pregnancy prevention goals and strategies by the end of 1996.

Holding a presidential summit with entertainment industry executives aimed at defining the industry's appropriate role in reversing this trend.

Making the federal government a catalyst in creating two new, community-based national networks to assist unwed teen mothers and families:

"Second-chance homes." Every community should offer homes where teen welfare mothers and their children could live in safe and supportive environments that also provide the structure and discipline they need to finish school and raise their children. These community-run homes would eliminate teen mothers' option of setting up separate households, yet allow them to move out of abusive or unstable situations.

"Neighborhood opportunity centers." Welfare families are often isolated. They need help finding and choosing activities to meet their obligations for reciprocity and a place to go where they can make connections and form networks of mutual support. New neighborhood opportunity centers, run by community organizations and modeled after the settlement houses that once helped immigrants, can offer opportunities to make these critical connections.

Offering every welfare family a "passport" out of welfare. Proposed changes in the welfare system will impose new obligations of reciprocity on welfare recipients by obliging them to work after two years. Reciprocity should begin sooner than that. During the two-year period, they need opportunities to get ready for work. Every welfare family should get a passport, designed like the "smart cards" used for banking. These passports would record activities such as part-time work, community service, or civic involvement that move welfare recipients toward self-sufficiency and recognize them as citizens able to give something back to their communities.

Holding non-custodial parents responsible for the well-being of their children by establishing orders of support for all

children. This entails withholding child support payments from paychecks of parents who are able to pay and establishing "zero-dollar" support for those who cannot. School-age parents could satisfy these zero-dollar support orders by staying in school or job training; such orders would also establish a basis for collecting payments when unemployed parents begin working.

Mounting a national campaign against sexual predators, including mandatory state minimum sentences for sex crimes against children, to halt the predatory sexual practices that play a significant role in teen pregnancy.

Offering disadvantaged young women and men tangible incentives and supports to convince them that they have a future that would be at risk by early childbearing by creating "opportunity accounts" for low-income teens who stay in school and do not become parents.

The four-part strategy, outlined in detail in this paper, elaborates the need for each element of the strategy and includes these proposals, along with others, at the conclusion of each section.

I. The National Campaign What Government Can Do

Nothing short of a sustained national campaign can reverse the trend that has allowed teen pregnancy and early childbearing to become a crisis. Government can play a limited but critical role in such a campaign.

President Clinton must begin a national conversation about teenage pregnancy by declaring unequivocally that unmarried teenage childbearing is morally wrong because it endangers children. Once the President begins that conversation, others must echo that message. Everyone who has standing with young people to reinforce the message should do so. Parents, communities, schools, and churches must join the President and affirm a point on which most Americans agree: Unmarried teenagers should not be having children.

The goal of this national campaign should be ambitious: reducing the teen pregnancy rate of 117 pregnancies per 1,000 teens by 5 percent a year over the next decade, until it is cut by half and returns to the 1972 rate (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994).⁹ The slogan of the campaign, directed at both young men and young women, could be just as simple: "Get a life of your own before you make another one."

Government is only a catalyst. The real capacity to reverse the trends in teenage pregnancy rests with communities. The President should challenge each community to set its own goal for reducing teen pregnancy and let each devise its own strategies. If federal funds are offered, these funds should be matched by private-sector contributions and in-kind contributions from communities.

The Role of the Media

Our nation is no longer a nation "villages." Children rarely grow up in neighborhoods where extended families and community institutions support their parents and reinforce common values. The media have become a significant source of information and values for teens; television and music are the new "common experience." The influence of the media is pervasive: Parents, teachers, and social workers cannot counter its effects so long as teenagers spend an average of 21 hours weekly watching television.

Thus the President must challenge the media to join this campaign. This is not a call for censorship; it is a call for truth-telling. In our culture, children and teenagers learn from music and television as well as from parents, schools, and churches. Yet teenagers are less able than adults to differentiate their own lives from the fantasies portrayed on television. MTV and soap operas depict rich and beautiful characters who indulge in endless sexual encounters without adverse consequences. Ask teachers and social workers to identify the obstacles to teaching young people to be responsible, and their lists inevitably include the influence of soap operas such as *The Young and the Restless*, popular rap music groups, and Madonna.

Research has established a link between several media and unrealistic views of what real-life relationships are all about. Soap operas tend to cause some viewers to see relationships as perfect and free of responsibility, leading them to disappointment in real-life relationships. There also is evidence that media violence causes some young people to act violently and that pornography causes some men to see women as inferior and undeserving of respect (Roberts 1993).

After years of debate about the influence of mass media on teens' sexual behavior, it is time to seriously examine the possible linkage between media portrayals of sex and adolescent sexual behavior. The media should stop

glamorizing teenage sex and out-of-wedlock parenting. It is time for the President to convene a national summit of entertainment industry executives who should be asked to define their responsibility for this problem and their potential role in solving it.

The Human Costs of Teen Childbearing

This national campaign must tell the story of the lives of teenage mothers and their children, both to discourage young women from early childbearing and to build public support for interventions that will reverse the trend.

The pattern of life for a poor young woman who becomes pregnant and has a child is predictable. She is likely to have one more child usually within two years (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1993).¹⁰ If she has a second child, she is less likely to finish high school.¹¹ She is unlikely to marry. And she is at great risk of cycling in and out of the welfare system for a significant portion of her life.

She will share her poverty with her children. In 1993, the median family income in two-parent households was \$43,578. In one-parent families headed by divorced mothers, the median income was \$17,014; in families headed by never-married mothers, the median income was \$9,272. Similarly, 10.6 percent of children in two-parent families were living below the poverty level. By contrast, 38.4 percent of children living with divorced mothers and 66.3 percent of those whose mothers had never married were living below the poverty level which in 1993 was \$11,529 for a family of three (Committee on Ways and Means 1994).¹²

While one in four American children now lives in poverty, a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation compares the children of two groups of Americans: those who finished high school, got married, and reached age 20 before having a first child, and those who did not. Of children in first group, the poverty rate was 8 percent; in the second group, the poverty rate was 79 percent (The Annie E. Casey Foundation 1993).

And finally, teens from one-parent families are more likely than children of two-parent families to become pregnant and repeat the cycle of teen pregnancy (Zill 1994).¹³

Teen mothers are also at the greatest risk of any welfare group of becoming long-term welfare dependents. The Congressional Budget Office reports that 77 percent of unmarried adolescent mothers are welfare recipients within five years of the birth of their first child. Child Trends, Inc. reports that 43 percent of long-term AFDC recipients were 17 years old or younger at the time they first gave birth. Welfare rolls swelled to nearly five million in 1993, and experts attribute much of that growth to the increase in single-parent families, especially those begun by teen mothers.

Most teens who become pregnant come from poor and disadvantaged families. As researcher Joy Dryfoos has noted, teenage pregnancy is just one "marker" of disadvantage one result of growing up poor and poorly nurtured. But teen pregnancy is also a strong predictor of a new generation of disadvantage (Dryfoos 1990). The equation is as simple as this: As poverty is the most accurate predictor of teen pregnancy, teen pregnancy is a near-certain predictor of poverty.

The social costs for children of teen mothers also are now apparent. Compared to children living in two-parent families, children in single-parent households score worse on measures of health, education, and emotional and behavioral adjustment (Dawson 1991; Prince 1993). Later on, if these children continue to live with never-married single parents they become more likely to drop out of school, to become heads of single-parent families themselves, and to experience a lower socioeconomic status as adults. The 1993 report of the Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children makes this point: "These findings during both early and later childhood appear to persist even after one adjusts for family income, mother's education, and minority status" (Carnegie Corporation 1994; McLanahan 1989; Furstenberg 1991).

Children who grow up in single-parent households are at much greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, poor educational performance, and criminality, according to the National Commission on Children. And two-thirds of the occupants of juvenile detention centers are fatherless young men, many of whom have already fathered children who will grow up fatherless as well. Such consequences are not hard to comprehend: It is difficult to socialize the next generation in neighborhoods where a new generation is born every 14 years.

Adolescent mothers, either because of their lack of maturity or the circumstances under which they must raise their children, show distinctly different mothering patterns than older mothers. Younger mothers are more likely to describe their children as "difficult-to-manage" (NICHD 1992). In one study, two-thirds of adolescent mothers described their

babies as "difficult," compared with just 10 percent of older mothers (Utah 1990).

The home life of preschool children of teen mothers is poor compared to that of children born to older mothers in terms of intellectual stimulation and emotional support. Teen mothers are less likely to have children's books in their homes and less likely to read to their children frequently (Zill 1994). Adolescent mothers also talk to their babies less, are less expressive, exhibit poorer quality of play and less reciprocity, and have less positive attitudes about their infants than older mothers.

In a 20-year follow-up study of the children of a group of Baltimore teen mothers, most of whom were unmarried, researcher Frank Furstenberg compared two groups of young people ages 18-21 and delineated the difference in behaviors of those whose mothers were 17 or younger at their birth versus those whose mothers were 20 or older at their birth. The study found remarkable differences between children of older mothers and children of younger mothers. Twice the number of children of younger mothers dropped out of high school, compared with children of older mothers. Children of younger mothers were twice as likely to be on welfare, twice as likely to be suspended or expelled from school, four times as likely to have been in jail, seven and a half times as likely to have been pregnant by age 16, and only half as likely to be married (Furstenberg 1992).

Some children of teen mothers are also physically endangered. Many teen mothers were abused or neglected as children; some are destined to visit these same tragedies on their own children (Levin-Epstein 1991).¹⁴ Mothers under age 20 were vastly overrepresented among a sample of 5,000 families reported for both abuse and neglect. In the early 1980s, 30 percent of mothers who neglected their children were under the age of 20, a figure three times their representation in the population (Utah 1990).

A 1992 study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that childhood abuse increased the odds of future delinquency and adult criminality overall by 40 percent. Researchers followed more than 1,500 children who were abused or neglected at age 11 or younger and then compared them with others who had not been abused or neglected. The majority of both groups had no juvenile or adult criminal record. The abused and neglected children, however, were 53 percent more likely to be arrested as juveniles, 38 percent more likely to be arrested as adults, and 38 percent more likely to be arrested for violent crimes.

That study contains a disturbing implication. While the link between physical abuse in childhood and a predisposition to adult violence has long been established, the NIJ study suggests that neglect victims also are more likely to develop later violent behavior. Among females, childhood abuse or neglect increased the likelihood of arrest by 77 percent over comparison groups. While physical abuse was the most likely predictor of a later arrest for a violent crime, neglect alone also was significantly linked to violent criminal behavior (Widom 1992).

Finally, the link between single-parent families and crime has been documented in a study by Douglas Smith and G. Roger Jarjoura. Neighborhoods with larger percentages of youth ages 12-20 and higher percentages of single-parent households also have higher rates of violent crime. The relationship is so strong, they concluded, that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime (Smith 1988).

The Public Costs of Teenage Childbearing

Teenage childbearing incurs many costs for taxpayers as well. Any public campaign against teen pregnancy should also emphasize how costly it is for all citizens to ignore the problem.

The Center for Population Options estimates that 53 percent of the costs of AFDC, food stamps, and Medicaid are attributable to households begun by teen births. From 1985-90, the five-year public cost of programs for the families of teen mothers totaled \$120.3 billion, while the savings, if those mothers had postponed childbearing until age 20, would have been \$48.1 billion. Further, the federal government reports that for every public dollar spent on family planning services for all women, \$4.40 is saved by averting expenditures on welfare, medical, and nutritional services (Forrest 1990).

Medical services for teen mothers and their children are especially costly. Young, poor, unmarried, uneducated, and uninsured mothers are much less likely than older, more stable mothers to obtain prenatal care. Pregnant teens also frequently deny their pregnancies in the early stages and have poor access to medical services. They often receive inadequate prenatal care and deliver low-birthweight babies.

Infants born to younger women are more likely to be born prematurely, to die in the neonatal period, and to be of low birthweight. Each low-birthweight baby averages \$20,000 in hospital costs; total lifetime medical costs for such

children can average \$400,000 (Carnegie Corporation 1994).

One in four sexually active teens contracts at least one sexually transmitted disease, and these diseases pose serious health risks to mothers and their children. One of those diseases is AIDS. Yet most teenagers don't believe they can get AIDS because they don't comprehend risk. Or they insist they don't know anyone infected with HIV. The 10-year median incubation period from HIV infection to AIDS diagnosis explains the relatively small number of adolescent AIDS cases; many people in their 20s contracted the virus as teenagers, and over the next decade many more people in their 20s are likely to be diagnosed with the disease.

In 1991, HIV/AIDS became the sixth leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds in the United States. The number of AIDS cases reported annually among U.S. adolescents was just 159 in 1992; in 1993, that number rocketed upwards to 1,412 reported cases.

AIDS disproportionately affects older teens, males, and racial and ethnic minorities. The number of AIDS-infected females, however, has increased rapidly: The proportion of adolescent AIDS patients who are female more than doubled from 14 percent in 1987 to 38 percent in 1992. Because large numbers of teens have sex without adequate protection, and because many have multiple partners, teens are a very high-risk group. As a social worker at a clinic in Maryland explained, once any sexually transmitted disease is introduced into a group of sexually active teens, it can spread exponentially.

Recommendations

The President should lead a national campaign against teen pregnancy, asserting firmly that unmarried parenting by minors is morally wrong because of its consequences for children.

The goals of this national campaign should be as ambitious as the problem is urgent: -- Reduce the current teen pregnancy rate of 117 pregnancies per 1,000 teens by 5 percent a year over the next decade until it is cut by half and returns to the 1972 rate.

-- At least one-quarter of the 80,000 communities in the United States should adopt their own teen pregnancy prevention goals and strategies by the end of 1996.

The President must challenge the media to join in this effort, convening a national conference of entertainment industry executives to define and agree on their appropriate role in reversing this trend.

-- As part of this effort, the federal government should conduct and make public an annual survey of the state of media and its portrayals of sexual activity and parenting, the time slots in which these depictions appear, and the estimated number of viewers under age 18 who watch those programs.

The President should challenge corporate entities that market successfully to teens such as Nike, Reebok, Coke, Pepsi, and Levi's to devise a national advertising campaign aimed at halting teen pregnancy.

The campaign to curb teen pregnancy must publicize both the human and economic costs of teen childbearing. The federal government should devise measures of "National Human Savings," that include such calculations as the savings from a prevented teen pregnancy, a prevented school dropout, or a prevented juvenile detention.

II. Shifting Responsibility for Children from Government to Families and Communities

The Role of the Welfare System

The social welfare system created to help single mothers because society recognized that fatherless families were disadvantaged has created an unintended consequence as well. It has "normalized" fatherless families. The dilemma is this: Everything the welfare system does to create normal and acceptable lives for the children of teen mothers creates the perception that their parents' behavior is normal and acceptable.

And it makes government rather than parents ultimately responsible for the lives of children. As we move to transform the welfare system into a transitional system that moves parents into the workforce, we must also transform the expectations of young people about who bears responsibility for their children.

Just as the current welfare system rewards failure rather than progress, it creates a set of perverse incentives and harmful expectations for many teens. When a young woman who is poor has a child out of wedlock, the social welfare

bureaucracy offers her financial support, special attention, and some measure of independence. In fact, she receives more attention by having a child than a young woman who delays childbearing.

The social welfare system marginalizes fathers by replacing them with welfare checks. Jobless young men are often shunned by the families of their girlfriends and dismissed by the social welfare establishment as useless or a bad influence on their own children. The system discounts their non-monetary value to their children their potential to help nurture and care for those children.

In many communities, young men and women grow up in families where women are viewed as self-sufficient and men as unnecessary. If families appear to be functioning without fathers, why should young women seek fathers for their children? Why should men feel compelled to take responsibility for their children?

Why Teens Become Parents: How the Game is Played

The welfare system is only one factor in the set of decisions that leads to early childbearing. For many teens, early childbearing fulfills needs for intimacy, independence, and peer approval.

"Sex Codes Among Inner-City Youth," an American Enterprise Institute report by ethnographer Elijah Anderson, explores relations among young men and women in impoverished neighborhoods. Anderson paints a picture of deception, manipulation, and relentless pursuit of status. A young woman dreams of a better life. She dreams of a family, a home, and a man who will provide for the family so that she can, in turn, care for the family. A young man, coming into his own sexuality, wants an opportunity to explore it. He is encouraged by his peers to have sex with as many young women as possible to validate his manhood.

The young man knows about the young woman's dreams of a good man with a home and family, and even though he may realize he cannot provide these things, he tries to make her think that he is one of "the good ones." Thus the games begin.

Ronald Mincy of the Ford Foundation, editor of *Nurturing Young Black Males*, offers his own recollection of being raised by a single mother in a South Bronx public housing project: "Our ability to attract young women, with sex as the goal, was fundamental to our concept of manhood. Sexual conquest was the grand game and our ability to score was an important determinant of our standing within the peer group." Mincy continues, "This puzzled me, because most of the children I knew were from mother-only families. Why did we fail to see that the result was to reproduce another generation of mother-only families, because young men had experienced the privilege of sexual intercourse before being prepared for the responsibility?" (Mincy 1994).

In recent years, two more disturbing factors about young men's motivations have emerged. Mincy cites the lack of responsible male role models in underclass communities. Since the mid-1970s, the decline in demand for low-skill jobs has undermined the economic status of African-American fathers who lack a college degree. The position of working-class males in African-American communities individuals who once served as important socializing agents especially for boys and young men has been eroded by glossier, higher-profile gang members and hustlers.

In addition, young men who live in violent urban neighborhoods sometimes view paternity as a means of "replacing themselves" before they die. Indeed, from 1985-91, the annual rate at which young men aged 15-19 were being killed jumped 154 percent. Nearly all of the increase was attributable to the use of guns (Centers for Disease Control 1994). Denver Mayor Wellington Webb, chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Juvenile Justice, calls these young men "soldiers of death."

The reasons that young women choose to bear children are even more complicated. For many teenagers, pregnancy may not be a conscious choice. Johns Hopkins University researcher Laurie Schwab Zabin, who studied young women taking pregnancy tests in Baltimore, reported that less than 5 percent said they had planned to become pregnant, while nearly half expressed negative feelings and the other half expressed "ambivalence" about sex, contraception, and pregnancy (Zabin 1993). According to the National Survey of Families and Households, only 15 percent of births to teens are described by mothers 17 and younger as being wanted at the time, compared with one-third of births to 18- and 19-year-olds.

There is a growing body of research to explain this behavior. Most teen mothers are daughters of teen mothers. And many are daughters of women who suffer from periods of depression and who left their own mothers' homes while their children were still very young. With no father or grandparents to turn to, a young woman whose main source of emotional support is a single mother, poorly equipped to be a good nurturer, may seek emotional attachment by becoming sexually active or by having a child of her own (Horowitz 1991).

Researcher Janet Jacobs suggests that while many mothers may exhort their daughters to avoid pregnancy, those exhortations may, in fact, achieve the opposite effect as those daughters seek independence. Jacobs notes that as control over sexuality becomes the focus of mother-daughter relations, the daughter, who has no other parent to turn to for affection, may search out affection through an alternative relationship (Jacobs 1994).

While many mothers urge their daughters to be "different," a powerful unspoken imperative exists for young women to behave like their mothers, sisters, and peers. "For a young woman to be different," says founder Judith Musick of Chicago's Ounce of Prevention Fund, "is to imply that she is better" (Musick 1994).

The pattern among teen parents is fairly consistent. After the birth of a child or frequently even before it the father moves on in search of another conquest. As the responsibility for the child falls to the young mother, she becomes disillusioned with male intimacy. The new mother discovers, however, that there are advantages to having a baby, and her family often accepts responsibility for the child. Research shows that at this point in the decision-making process, teens' assessments are deeply affected by their families. Grandmothers, who frequently were teen mothers themselves, often eagerly assume primary responsibility for grandchildren in what they view as a second chance at motherhood.

A child also provides status. The state officially recognizes and provides assistance to a young woman with a child. Moreover, she now has ammunition in the status battles that occur between teen mothers in the inner city: whose baby is cuter, whose is better dressed. Young mothers form a community with common interests and develop stronger bonds than they had before their children were born.

Finally, for many young women, a child is an economic asset. A baby and the ensuing support of the welfare system with its guaranteed income and medical care, food stamps, and subsidized housing may seem the surest way to make a life. These assets can also be perceived as strong attractors in the mating game five or 10 years down the road. In this context, childbearing is not a wholly unreasonable decision in the short term.

Changing the Rules of the Game

To make teenage parenting less attractive for both young women and men, the first step is changing the rules of the welfare game. There must be obvious and immediate negative consequences for choosing unmarried parenting. Young women who are minors should no longer be allowed to set up independent households. School-age mothers must stay in school or participate in job training. Young men as well as young women must be held accountable for their actions with requirements to stay in school, work, or make in-kind contributions to the welfare of their children.

But in implementing such requirements, we must consider the social context. There must be a series of changes in the welfare environment that make it possible to hold them to these new standards. The notion of requiring mothers under age 18 to live with a parent sounds like a practical and reasonable solution. In many cases, it is not. The mothers of these young women are frequently lacking in parenting skills themselves. Many teens, moreover, come from homes where they have been subjected to sexual or physical abuse. They must not be required to return to such dangerous environments.

Second-Chance Homes

That is why we must construct a new environment. We must offer young women stable and safe places to raise their children.

The first building block of this new environment should be a national network of "second-chance homes." Teen welfare mothers who are judged to come from unstable or unsafe homes would be required to live in these homes as a condition for receiving welfare.

In earlier eras, homes for unwed mothers offered shelter and support to pregnant teens before their babies were born. As out-of-wedlock childbearing was destigmatized, most of these homes disappeared. Now that many young women are choosing to keep their babies, it is time to bring these homes back in a new form. We must offer mothers and their children safety and support when they need it most when they are trying to move ahead with their own lives and raise small children at the same time.

These community-based "second-chance homes," supervised by older couples, would offer young mothers a refuge from the difficulties of their own families. They would also provide these young women with an opportunity to observe a respectful and caring relationship between a woman and a man, and to expose their young children to a

responsible male role model.

At the same time, the homes would provide the structure and discipline these young mothers will need to satisfy the obligations they must meet in order to receive welfare payments. When teen mothers are required to return to school, they will have reliable day care. When they are required to take parenting classes, they will have support in practicing what they learn. Teen mothers often are eager to learn about child development and nutrition but have no one to teach them. In other instances, they learn practical childrearing skills in parenting classes, but face opposition from their own mothers, whose childrearing practices were different.

It will take some experimentation to find the right combination of support, services, and obligations that will help these young women learn to be good mothers, finish school, and gain enough skills to support their children. There are, however, some models that can be studied.

The Clark Street House of Mercy in an inner-city area of Des Moines, for example, offers comprehensive services for 12 pregnant or parenting teens, including educational, vocational, personal and family counseling, parent education classes, and assistance in developing independent living and homemaking skills. On-site staff include a program director, a counselor, an education specialist, tutors, a nurse, and a night security officer. Each teenager or mother-child pair has a private room, and participants share common living areas, including a dining room, a lounge, and play areas for children. All have access to an on-site health clinic, an on-site day care center, a library, vocational classrooms, and a large playground.

Referrals to other services include a "Young Moms" support group, adoption counseling, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, substance abuse programs, family planning clinics, the public assistance office, and a visiting nurse program. Foster Grandparents and participants in VISTA, the federal community volunteer program, also participate in the Clark Street program.

Early evaluations of the Clark Street program indicated that a safe, nurturing home environment offering on-site services and referrals to community agencies enhanced the lives of teen parents and their children. The program's weaknesses were identified as the staff's inability to impose enough discipline and structure, difficulties in dealing with the low education levels of the residents and adequately preparing them for work or vocational training.

The federal government should conduct more research on residential facilities for young mothers and children and offer support to communities to experiment with them.

These second-chance homes would not be government-run institutions. They should be run by churches and community groups with some national guidance about how they might be structured and what services might be offered. These homes could be opened in residential properties foreclosed and owned by the Department of Housing and Urban Development or the Resolution Trust Corp. and turned over to community organizations.

Operating expenses could be supported in part by cashing out the residents' welfare payments, food stamps, and housing assistance. The maximum median monthly benefit for a family of two in 1994, for example, was \$294. Monthly food stamp benefits, child care subsidies, and housing subsidies can bring the total typical monthly benefits for a family of two to more than \$850.¹⁵

But the bulk of the commitment should come from communities themselves. Federal incentive grants should go to communities that pledge private funding and in-kind services equal to no less than half the costs of operating the second chance homes.

Neighborhood Opportunity Centers

The next step in changing the welfare culture is offering welfare recipients opportunities to improve their own lives and their own communities. A new national network of "neighborhood opportunity centers" would expand informal networks of social support and allow families to help each other.

The idea of such a "resource exchange" is not new. It grows out of the experience of the settlement houses that helped European immigrants assimilate into this country nearly a century ago. The settlement houses did not define disadvantaged citizens in terms of dysfunction; rather, they emphasized social activities that brought people together and capitalized on their strengths. Most were privately funded and reflected community consensus about what role they should play in helping families.

A handful of these institutions remain active in communities across the country. They offer "resource exchanges"

where neighbors can make "deposits" by contributing services and "withdrawals" for services they need. Those unable to make deposits can draw upon balances accrued by volunteers. Members exchange babysitting, transportation assistance, and home repair help. Some offer summer camps, exercise classes, and adult education. They offer "homework clubs" for schoolchildren and "friendship groups" for people of all ages (Husock 1992).

This idea should be revived and used as a model for a national network of "neighborhood opportunity centers." These need not be new, bureaucratic, government-run institutions. Every community has schools. These schools, or centers attached to schools, could be used as the focal point for offering families opportunities to connect with one another and with resources in their own communities.

These centers can strengthen supports that help families deal with stress, reduce isolation, and have a positive effect on families by recognizing that they have "assets" to offer their communities. Such positive experiences are known to improve mothers' perceptions of themselves and their children, fathers' involvement in childrearing, children's self-esteem, and children's school success (Carnegie Corporation 1994).

Passports Out of Welfare

Third, every welfare family should receive a "passport" out of welfare. With welfare reform's strong emphasis on reciprocity and entry into the workplace, it is only sensible to link those two ideas together. That means defining "work" broadly and giving welfare recipients "credit" for productive activities that lead them back to work. (Herr 1994).

Reciprocity should begin as soon a welfare recipient begins receiving benefits. Every welfare family should get a passport, designed like the "smart cards" used for banking. Every member of the family could earn credit toward satisfying requirements for the monthly welfare check. Such a system would be based on the idea that everyone on welfare can and should be actively engaged in a productive lifestyle.

It would also acknowledge that many welfare recipients, lacking basic job skills, need a series of meaningful "first steps" or starting points on the way to self-sufficiency. These steps would be designed on a flexible basis. The education and skills of the mother and the ages of her children, for example, would be taken into account. But the guiding principle would be this simple: Everybody does something.

Welfare recipients would earn credits for a variety of activities: doing things that benefit their children, volunteer work, part-time work, education and training, and participation in civic or community organizations. For participation to be legitimate, it would have to be measurable, but individuals could choose activities relevant to their own goals and personal situations.

Allowing welfare recipients to work at their children's day-care centers, would teach parenting skills. Other activities could include enrolling in GED classes or the Parents as Teachers program, which helps parents and children learn together, or participating in community service activities such as babysitting at welfare offices or working in day care centers or clinics. They could be credited for taking infants to well-baby clinics and older children to teen health clinics. Teens in families could also help by volunteering for community activities, which would give them a sense of accomplishment and involvement. Adults could also be offered recognition of their roles as citizens: They could receive credit for registering to vote, getting library cards, or serving on local school councils.

States and communities could devise their own lists and point systems, and they would have the option of raising or lowering welfare payments according to participation thus building in incentives and an expectation of reciprocity. The neighborhood opportunity centers could be the locus for connecting families to these activities.

Devising such a system is not as complicated as it might sound. An innovative prototype already has been developed by Project Match of Chicago's Erikson Institute. The idea behind PRIDE, which stands for Progress Information Directed Toward Employment, is to translate the concept of the "social contract" into a productive relationship between welfare recipients and the welfare system. The PRIDE system would allow welfare recipients to identify personal goals and then to become involved in productive activities to help them meet those goals. These productive activities can count toward meeting their reciprocal obligations in the welfare system.

How We Treat Teen Parents

There is no question that teen parents should be required to return to school. Their own futures and the futures of their children depend upon it. But as teen parents return to school, we must take a serious look at the consequences of that requirement for them and for their peers. In areas where pregnant and parenting teens are required or encouraged to go back to school, some return to their regular schools and others attend special schools. Many junior

and senior high schools now have day care centers.

It is time to evaluate these policies and practices to determine what is best for teen mothers and their children and how regular and special schools treat teen mothers and their children. We must also evaluate what effect these policies have on other teens, whether they have the effect of "normalizing" or discouraging teen childbearing. Caseworkers report, for example, that when teenage girls are exposed to teen mothers with tiny babies, most see the babies as "cute" and express eagerness to get pregnant. By contrast, young women exposed to older teen mothers struggling to raise toddlers or school-age children find the idea of motherhood much less attractive.

It is important now to address these questions about the treatment of school-age teen mothers. Should they be assigned to separate schools or kept in regular high schools? What offers them the best chance to avoid repeat pregnancies? What effect does their presence have on other students? How should the needs of their children be addressed? What effect do day care centers in schools have on other teens? How should parenting classes be designed?

Equally important, we must evaluate the treatment of teen fathers. When teen mothers must spend their lunch hours in the school day care centers and give up after-school activities to care for their children, what corresponding obligations are imposed on teen fathers? What message does that send about male responsibility?

Finally, we should consider the characteristics of schools with low teen pregnancy rates. These schools are likely to be the same schools that report low dropout rates, fewer incidences of violent behavior and higher academic achievement. Many advocates suggest that a strong cost-benefit argument can be made for spending an extra \$1,000 per child per year to create safe, clean, well disciplined and supportive environments for learning what Joy Dryfoos calls "full service schools" rather than the millions spent on remediation programs to address the consequences of poor school achievement, violent behavior and teen pregnancy.

Men: Missing from Solutions

Most teenage pregnancy programs do not include men. More importantly, they do not acknowledge that three distinct sets of men bear responsibility for teen pregnancies: teenage fathers and two sets of sexual predators including fathers who are significantly older than the teen mothers, and rapists and sexual abusers who exploit young women and leave them vulnerable to early sexual activity and pregnancy.

Most men who father children by teen mothers are not, in fact, adolescents.

In 1991, the most recent year for which figures are available, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that almost 70 percent of births to teenage girls were fathered by men 20 and older (National Center for Health Statistics 1993).

For an emotionally vulnerable young woman whose cognitive abilities are not fully developed, sexual activity cannot be viewed as voluntary. When a 13-year-old girl has sex with a 20-year-old man, it is rape. A 1990 study by the California Vital Statistics Section showed that the younger the mother, the greater the partner age gap. Among mothers aged 11-12, the fathers' age averaged nearly 10 years older (California 1992).¹⁶

Mike Males of the University of Southern California, one of the first researchers to call attention to these shocking statistics, points out that "early pregnancy with older men, especially among girls from harsh environments, appears to be an adaptive mechanism with considerable biological and evolutionary history." Adult men may appear to offer more status for young women who want to escape their environments than do peer-age boys (Symons 1979).

Social workers frequently describe a scenario in which younger teenage girls pair off with adult men, lured by the promise of clothes and other gifts or believing that those men offer security. Even in cases in which these adult men are unemployed and unattractive to women their own age, their status as adult men makes them attractive to many younger women.

While the goal of sexual activity for younger teenage boys may be limited to sexual conquest and sexual gratification, the goal for men in their 20s often differs. For many of these men, who are uneducated and unemployed, paternity is a means of asserting manhood; the number of women seduced and the number of children fathered are measures of achievement. Some of these men use paternity to support themselves, by fathering children by several mothers and then making claims on portions of the mothers' welfare checks.

Sexual abuse and rape also play a significant role in teenage pregnancy. A 1992 sample of 500 teen mothers, for

instance, revealed that two-thirds had histories of sexual and physical abuse, primarily with adult men averaging age 27. While these men may not father children, their abuse is nonetheless a major factor in pregnancies that occur later in these young women's lives. Early and involuntary sexual initiation sends a message to a young woman that she has no power to control her own body (Boyer 1992).

In 1986, the Chicago-based Ounce of Prevention Fund surveyed teen mothers with a mean age at first pregnancy of 16.2 years. The survey revealed a high incidence of sexual abuse by adult men. Of the 445 teen mothers surveyed, more than 60 percent said they had been forced into an unwanted sexual experience sometime in their lives. More than 45 percent were abused by a family member; the majority of those cases involved a father, stepfather, foster father, adoptive father, or grandfather (The Ounce of Prevention Fund 1986). The mean age for the first incidence of sexual abuse was 11.5 years (The Ounce of Prevention Fund 1986).¹⁷

Researchers Debra Boyer and David Fine, who studied a group of young teen mothers, note that sexual abuse often delays cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological development. It interferes with their ability to adapt to the difficulties of their lives. In their study of 535 teen mothers in the state of Washington, the mean age at first intercourse was 13.8 years; their partners' mean age at the time was 17.9 years. Of the sample, 62 percent had experienced molestation, rape, or attempted rape prior to their first pregnancy. On average, these girls were 9.7 years old at first molestation, and 24 percent reported their first experience at the age of five or younger. The mean age of the offenders was 27.4 years (Boyer 1992).¹⁸

The literature on child abuse shows that young women who have been victims of rape and sexual abuse are at risk of earlier onset of puberty, earlier initiation of voluntary sexual activity, perpetuation of incestuous behavior, and higher likelihood of adolescent pregnancy and childbearing. Clinical literature reports other long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse: psychiatric illness, depression, suicidal tendencies, drug addiction, alcoholism, and repeated victimization.

As the long-term consequences of sexual abuse are studied more thoroughly, researchers have come to some conclusions about young women with histories of sexual abuse. They generally have lower self-esteem and believe they have little "bargaining power" in relationships; they are socialized to believe that they are valued primarily for their sexuality; and they exhibit a "learned helplessness," taking little initiative to control their lives.

States are revising their laws to reflect this new evidence. Some reforms in state statutory rape laws include defining the degree of assault based on the age of the victim, the ages of the victim and perpetrator, or the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

Still, evidence about enforcement is discouraging. An American Bar Association study published in 1987 of state criminal statutes revealed little or no difference between sentencing guidelines for sexual offenses with child victims compared with adult victims. Worse, sentences imposed were tougher in cases involving adult victims. The majority of sentences in child victim cases were less than one year, with just over 30 percent less than six months. In comparable cases involving adult victims, 77 percent of sentences were more than one year, 40 percent over 10 years. Courts granted probation more than twice as often in cases involving children as those involving adults. The most common jail term for parent offenders or others related to victims was one year or less, while strangers who abused children were more likely to be sentenced to 10 years or more in prison.

The predators were strangers in almost half of the adult cases, but in only 12 percent of child victim cases. Strangers who molested children were incarcerated in 86 percent of cases, while parents molesting their children were incarcerated in only 65 percent of cases. Offenders with other relationships to their victims such as uncles, family friends, or acquaintances were incarcerated at about the same rate as parents (Chapman 1987).

Redefining and Expanding the Definition of Fatherhood

We must reassert that fathers are important in the lives of children and that they have essential contributions to make to them both monetary and personal.

The decline of marriage and the welfare system have diminished the role of men in the lives of their children. Less than one-fifth of all unmarried men aged 18-23 who acknowledge having children live with their children. After the first year, some may provide financial support, but this generally declines (Adams 1988). Of more than one million babies born to unmarried mothers in 1989, paternity was established for less than one third (Sonenstein 1993; Downey 1992). Never-married mothers of all ages have a very difficult time collecting child support from absent fathers (Bureau of the Census 1989).¹⁹

For many single-parent families, the responsibility of fathers is defined only by their financial contributions; in welfare families, fathers have no responsibility at all. To reaffirm that fathers matter to children, a series of issues must be addressed.

First, paternity must be established for all children. Child support must be collected from non-custodial parents who are able to pay. The wages of working parents should be garnished through paychecks in the same way that social security payments are collected; then payments should be passed along to custodial parents. For parents who cannot pay, such as school-age fathers, "zero-dollar" orders of support should be entered on the record, and these parents should satisfy their support orders through in-kind contributions on behalf of their children. Parents who cannot pay could also satisfy these requirements by staying in job training and education programs. Zero-dollar orders could also be used to establish a basis on which to collect support from parents' later earnings based on ability to pay.

These parents must also be taught about their value to their children. While some fathers are clearly unfit, those who are fit should be encouraged even required to spend time with their children. Paternity should be established in all cases and child-support orders enforced from men who are able to pay; all fathers, however, should be required to contribute to the welfare of their children regardless of ability to pay.

Paternity adjudication should be decriminalized, making it simpler for those who voluntarily acknowledge paternity to make it legal. States should implement a simple, non-adversarial administrative process to establish paternity outside the hospital setting when a hospital-based attempt fails, and the judicial process should be replaced with genetic testing. Because genetic tests yield such a high degree of probability, most fathers are convinced to acknowledge paternity without a court hearing. Fathers should have six months, no more, to challenge genetic test findings. Once paternity is established, both the father's and mother's names and social security numbers should be added to the child's birth certificate.

The system must also be changed to remove disincentives to establish paternity and collect child support payments for welfare families. Current law allows AFDC recipients a \$50 per month "pass through" of child support benefits collected from non-custodial parents. This amount of money is so small that it offers little incentive for mothers to help establish paternity when they may be better off refusing to identify their children's fathers and accepting financial help from the fathers off the books.

Once paternity is established, even fathers who cannot offer financial assistance must be required and encouraged to contribute to their children's welfare. A recent study of non-custodial parents of children on welfare, the Parents' Fair Share program, paints a grim picture of these parents. Almost two thirds of the parents said they had worked three months or less in the past year, while one in seven said they had been unemployed for more than two years. Almost three fourths reported that their most recent wage was less than \$7 per hour.

The basic needs of fathers saddled with court-ordered support payments often superseded the mandatory payments. Many faced staggering debt, and 40 percent admitted there had been a time in the last three months when they needed food but could not buy it; one third said they had failed to make a rent payment within the same period (Bloom 1994).

But the study yielded an even more telling conclusion about the fathers in the program: More than half had been fatherless themselves as teens, and most defined fatherhood very narrowly. They had little notion that "fatherhood" had any obligations beyond financial support.

Child support is not all that a child loses when paternity is not established. Without a legal father, a child cannot receive Social Security benefits when his or her father dies or becomes disabled, and loses access to important genetic and medical information. In cases in which the father has a job or assets, a child cannot be placed on his or her father's health insurance and may not legally be able to claim an inheritance.

What All Fathers Can Do

Unwed fathers must be educated about the benefits that flow from paternity establishment, and more importantly, to the other responsibilities and rewards of fatherhood. Programs must teach unwed fathers their value to their children and how to parent. Fathers should be recognized for non-financial contributions, such as spending time with their children, tutoring, and taking them to sports events and entertainment.

There is limited but growing evidence that this approach works. The Cleveland-based National Institute for

Responsible Fatherhood and Family Development was opened in 1982, and since then it has helped more than 2,000 young fathers, their fathers, and their families. The program seeks to change the way men perceive their value to their children and teaches them how to solve problems. It offers role models to teach young fathers how to be responsible parents and links them with an extended support network.

Results from a limited survey are promising: 62 percent of these young fathers are employed full-time; 11 percent are employed part-time; 96 percent report an improved relationship with the child's mother; and 97 percent spend more time with their children and are providing financial support.

In the end, the lives of teen fathers are remarkably similar to the lives of their children's mothers. Approximately 20 percent of men who father teen mothers' babies are teens themselves (National Center for Health Statistics 1993; Marsiglio 1987).^{20 21} Only 39 percent receive high school certification by age 20, as opposed to 86 percent of male teens who do not father a child (Marsiglio 1987). Teen fathers are half as likely to complete college as their peers who delay fatherhood (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1981). In fact, 18- and 19-year-olds with poor basic skills are three times as likely to be fathers as their counterparts with average basic skills (Children's Defense Fund 1986).

Though the patterns varied widely by type of behavior and race, unwed fathers also exhibit more drug use and criminal behavior than other young men. Having lived in a welfare family even controlling for family income raised the occurrence of unwed fatherhood and reduced the likelihood of marriage. Finally, teen fatherhood, like teen motherhood, is repeated from one generation to the next (Dryfoos 1988).

While the welfare system requires young mothers to return to school, there is no corresponding demand for responsibility by young fathers to stay in school, and because rates of paternity establishment are low, teen fathers are infrequently ordered to pay child support. New policies should require teen fathers to make a contribution to their children's welfare through community service jobs after school for those who are in school and full-time for those who are not. Fathers who don't pay and don't make a public service contribution should be denied future public assistance and have future wages garnished. Such policies, which would demonstrate the "inconvenience" of fatherhood, also would provide a disincentive to other young men to father children.

We must also approach this issue in a positive manner, encouraging young fathers to accept responsibility for their children, teach them parenting skills, link them to their children in a constructive way, and give them a presumptive right to see their children.

Recommendations

Communities should create a national network of "second-chance homes" where teen welfare mothers can live with their children in a safe and supported environment and meet the responsibilities that are a condition for receiving AFDC benefits.

Communities should create a national network of "neighborhood opportunity centers" modeled after the settlement houses that helped new immigrants integrate into communities to expand informal networks of social support and promote community-based problem-solving.

Every welfare family should get a "passport." With this passport, families would receive credit for a variety of activities that could be counted toward the new work requirements for welfare recipients.

The federal government should gather data and commission a study about the best way to deal with teen mothers and their children when those mothers return to school. The commission's work should extend to treatment of teen fathers as well.

The federal government should commission more research about the men who father the children of teen mothers. As paternity is established in more births, it is crucial to gather information about these men their age, their education, their employment status, and their motivations to make sure that prevention programs are appropriately targeted.

The federal government must exercise its moral leadership to mount a national campaign to halt predatory sexual practices. This includes public acknowledgment of the scope of the problem and funding to ensure appropriate counseling for rape and incest victims. The states must pass mandatory minimum sentences for sex crimes against children to end the lenient treatment of those who commit such crimes.

States should be required to establish paternity for the children of all unmarried women at birth, delinquent child support should be collected through paycheck withholding, "zero-dollar" orders of support should be established for

parents unable to pay so payments can be collected later based on the ability to pay.

Policies must treat school-age mothers and fathers equally. Non-working school-age fathers must be required to stay in school. Fathers who cannot make financial contributions must be served with zero-dollar support orders and required to make in-kind contributions, such as working at their children's day care centers or at community service.

III. A New Definition of Sexual Responsibility

The sexual revolution, the development of effective contraceptives, and legalized abortion have contributed to a "delinking" of sex and marriage. As a healthier U.S. population matures sexually at an earlier age, yet does not mature emotionally any sooner, a growing biological "gap" emerges between the onset of puberty and the ability to manage its consequences.

A changing economy and changing marriage patterns have created a similar "gap." A high school education no longer equips a young man or woman with skills that can support a family; thus most young people delay marriage but not sexual activity until their mid 20s.

Sensible policy must take these changes into account. We must stop condemning all sexual activity by all teenagers and redefine "moral behavior" as responsible sexual activity. We must acknowledge the crucial distinction between sexual behavior and the socially undesirable outcomes of sexual behavior. While many in our society now accept sex outside of marriage, we must reassert that children belong inside marriage.

The number of births to unmarried women is growing: 1.2 million in 1991, the highest number ever reported in the United States, 4 percent above 1990, and 82 percent above 1980. In 1991, nearly one out of three births was out of wedlock; among teens, the rate was 69 percent (National Center for Health Statistics 1993; Bureau of the Census 1988).²²

The United States is not unique in this dramatic increase in non-marital births. Other advanced industrial nations, including Great Britain, Canada and France, report similar increases (Smith 1994).²³ Nor is the United States unique in the changes in teenage sexual behavior. The average age at which teenagers are maturing and initiating sex is younger now than it was a generation ago in many nations. In the United States, the average age of first intercourse is 15.7 years for males and 16.2 for females (Armstrong 1990). More adolescent females are having sex: That number increased by 23 percent from 1970-90 and is now at the highest level in 20 years (Henshaw 1993).

What sets the United States apart is not the sexual behavior of teenagers but its result: a far higher proportion of pregnancies and abortions. Of the one million teens who become pregnant each year, about half give birth, about 40 percent choose abortion, and the remainder miscarry.

The U.S. pregnancy rate of 117 per 1,000 women aged 15- 19 is at least twice as high as those of Canada, France, and Great Britain, three times as high as that of Sweden, and seven times as high as that of the Netherlands (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994; National Center for Health Statistics 1993).²⁴

While Western Europeans oppose early adolescent sex, their attitudes about sex among older adolescents differ markedly from those of Americans. In general, these nations accept that many teens are likely to have sex, and rather than trying to prevent sexual activity, they focus on contraception with a goal of preventing teen pregnancies and abortion.

Western European countries generally offer more extensive sex education at earlier grade levels, including information on contraception. Contraceptive services also are widely accessible. Teens can obtain birth control from a family doctor or from clinics, usually confidentially and without parental consent. Birth control is generally provided at low or no cost to teenagers. Abortions are provided to teens confidentially and at little or no cost. Abortion rates in those countries, for teens, are less than half that of the United States (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994).²⁵

The average age at which young women and men begin the rites of adulthood steady employment and marriage now comes later than a generation ago. When sexual activity began in the late teens, with marriage following a year or two later, there was a shorter span of time in which unprotected sex could result in pregnancy. Today, young women begin having intercourse about seven years before they are likely to marry; the gap for men is 10 years.

Men and women continue to delay marriage, with the median age at first marriage rising last year to 26.5 years for men and 24.5 years for women. These figures represent the highest median age for both men and women since

1890. The delay in marriage is greatest among African-Americans, with 22 percent of African-American women aged 40-44 never having been married, compared with 7 percent of white women, and 9 percent of Hispanic women (Saluter 1994).

Policies and programs also must acknowledge the cognitive differences between the early and late teenage years. In early adolescence, when teens are incapable of making mature choices and using birth control responsibly, there is no such thing as "safe" sex. Abstinence is the only responsible behavior.

Older teens who engage in sex are behaving the way 18- and 19-year-olds have behaved for generations. The adolescent birth rate, in fact, is significantly lower than it was a generation ago. In 1955, 90 of every 1,000 teenage females gave birth; (Moore 1992) by 1991, that birth rate had dropped to 62 in every 1,000 (National Center for Health Statistics 1993). The decline of marriage and availability of birth control account for the difference.

How Teens Think About Sex

To effectively curb teen pregnancy, public policy must also be practical. It must be better informed about adolescent development and patterns of adolescent sexual behavior. Researchers Laurie Schwab Zabin and Sarah Hayward detail these findings: Teenagers have sex much less frequently than adults. Teenage sexual relations are episodic and often short-lived. Teenagers are likely to have multiple partners, especially when their first experience occurs at a young age. The younger adolescents are, the less likely they are to use contraceptives. Even when they use contraception, young teens are less likely than older teenagers and adults to use it consistently and effectively.

Because adolescent relationships are often unstable, intercourse is rarely planned among adolescents. And the younger the teenager, the more likely that the first sexual experience will be unprotected. More than one-third of all teenage girls use no contraception at first intercourse, and on average, it takes teens one year after becoming sexually active to receive family planning services.

Teens also are misinformed about contraceptive use. For example, teenagers have exaggerated fears about side effects of the birth control pill. Many teens think abortion is illegal, and one study revealed that 39 percent of boys thought, incorrectly, that parental consent is required every time a teenager visits a family planning clinic. Fifty-two percent also thought, incorrectly, that they needed parental permission to buy non-prescription birth control in a drugstore (Clark 1984).

Young men also have a more difficult time seeking and getting advice. Clinics, often staffed predominantly by women, are not always hospitable to young men. Researcher Mercer Sullivan found that trying to reach males, either subtly or explicitly discouraged them from attending the clinics (Levine 1985).

There are practical barriers to contraception and family planning services as well. Many teens have difficulty negotiating the health care system. Arranging an appointment, finding transportation, receiving and paying for contraceptives are all barriers for adolescents. The estimated 1.5 million teens who use health clinics account for just one-third of sexually active teens.

Finally, a basic inability to internalize knowledge is a major factor in teenage pregnancy. Teens believe they are immune to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and they believe they cannot die of AIDS (Morrison 1985). In the early teen years, when their cognitive skills are still underdeveloped, many teens are poorly equipped to link cause and effect. They are unable to grasp the concept of delayed gratification.

Sexual relations should be consensual. That means both participants should be old enough, physically mature enough, and emotionally mature enough to understand the significance of their actions. Thus, we must preach two messages to young people simultaneously.

First, younger teens should abstain from sex until they are mature enough to understand the consequences of their actions and make informed decisions. Second, when teens are old enough to make that choice, they must do so responsibly. They must not endanger their own health and the health of their partners with unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancies, or unnecessary abortions.

The pregnancy rate among sexually experienced teenagers actually fell 19 percent from 1972-90, suggesting that teenagers who have access to birth control and are motivated have been successful at preventing pregnancies (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994).²⁶

There is no national law or policy on sexuality education. At present, 47 states either require or encourage teaching

about human sexuality, and 48 states either require or encourage teaching about HIV/AIDS. In many states, however, policies preclude teaching such relevant subjects as intercourse, condoms and safer sex. Because of the political divisiveness that surrounds these issues, few communities have implemented comprehensive sexuality education programs at all grade levels.

Yet research indicates that young people who have had sexuality education are not more likely to have sexual intercourse than those who have never taken a course. Among those teenagers who are sexually active, students who have taken sexuality education classes are significantly more likely to use contraception.

The most effective sexuality education programs are community-based, comprehensive, and teach young people skills to negotiate sexual situations and to say no. Innovative programs that combine sexuality education with clinic services and community support help reduce teenage pregnancy rates. In Baltimore, a school-based education and clinic program led to increased use of contraception by both males and females, delayed first intercourse, and increased use of family planning clinics. A community-based education program with a strong school-based sexuality education component in South Carolina reduced the community's teen pregnancy rates. A California program called Reducing the Risk led to a significant decrease in unprotected intercourse among students who took the course before they became sexually active, by both delaying the onset of sexual intercourse and increasing the use of contraceptives.

The vast majority of Americans support sexuality education, and support for HIV/AIDS education is even higher. Many youth and community groups, as well as national organizations, have adopted policies supporting sexuality education. More than 60 national organizations have joined together as the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education, a group of national organizations committed to assuring that all children and youths will receive comprehensive sexuality education by the year 2000.

A New Rite of Passage

Government protects public safety by regulating and actively discouraging young people from driving cars or drinking alcohol until they are old enough and have the skills to do so responsibly. If we label underage driving and drinking as reckless behavior, we must label early and unwed parenting as reckless behavior as well.

Teenagers pay attention to rites of passage. Getting a driver's license, being old enough to drink legally, being able to go to adult movies without a chaperon all are milestones in the lives of young men and women. Yet biological development has become the only criterion for parenting. Many young people operate under the presumption that they can be parents without reaching an appropriate age or demonstrating any parenting skills.

While government cannot regulate sexual activity, it can help to redefine parenting as an activity requiring three essential elements: a level of maturity, a set of skills, and a marriage partner. As part of the national campaign to redefine parenting as an adult responsibility, states and communities should be permitted to experiment with linking parenting "certification" with other rites of passage.

In these states and communities, young people could be required to complete parenting certification as a requirement for high school graduation or obtaining drivers' licenses. These parenting classes need not be offered by the schools. Churches, YMCAs, and community organizations could offer them, and parents and adolescents could choose them.

Another crucial function of such a campaign is to emphasize the positive aspects of parenting. We must teach young people that they should delay parenting because it is an experience worth preparing for and one to be valued.

The Role of Churches

The conflict over what young people should be taught about sex, and what values that teaching imparts has in many instances led to paralysis. In the debate over whether abstinence or contraception is the right message, often neither is offered.

While the religious right has received attention for blocking sex education and sexuality education in some public school systems, other segments of organized religion are responding to the issue in a different way, developing programs to teach young people about sex outside the schools. Organized religion has a significant role to play in sexuality education for young people.

The American Baptist Church's Sexuality Project, for instance teaches teens that saying no to premature, unwanted sexual activity is important, helps them develop plans and strategies for saying no before they are faced with powerful

feelings in compromising situations. It also teaches teens that reserving sexual experiences for marriage is a real option.

The Presbyterian Church, while asserting that abstinence is best, acknowledges that abstinence may not be the choice of all teens, and uses peer counseling to help teens make the right decisions for themselves.

The United Church of Christ, in conjunction with the Unitarian Universalist Association, approaches the issue from the perspective that abstinence is best, but the best way to encourage teens to make that decision is to provide accurate/explicit information about sex, enabling teens to make medically sound, healthy decisions about sexual activity.

The Catholic Church has always preached abstinence, and to bring home this message, the church chooses senior high school and college students to visit classrooms in Catholic schools and provide real-life examples of teens who abstain.

The validity of all of these approaches should be recognized, and churches or community groups should be encouraged to develop curricula that reflect their own values. The goal is to reach every young person, so that peers are not the only influence they encounter in making decisions about sex.

Creating a Sense of Belonging

As we ask teens to behave more responsibly with regard to sex, we must do all that is possible to reinforce that message. The best way to reinforce that message is through their peers. Teenagers are conformists. They have very strong desires to be liked by others, to behave the way their friends behave, and to belong to an intimate group.

Young women have babies in order to fit in and belong to a group. Young men and women join gangs for the same reason. We must offer them alternatives. When they can belong to an intimate group that holds them accountable for responsible sexual behavior and when they can win peer approval for being responsible it creates a more powerful incentive than any exhortation by an adult to say no.

The most successful approaches use older peers to influence or help younger peers either as classroom instructors in social skills training or as tutors and mentors. Students selected to act as peer mentors gain the most from the experience, probably because of the intensive individual attention and enrichment they receive. A number of variants of personal and social skills training have emerged that generally involve teaching youngsters about their own risky behavior, and giving them the skills to cope with and, if necessary, resist the influences of their peers in social situations. Techniques such as role-playing, rehearsal, peer instruction, and media analysis are typical. (Dryfoos 1994).

There are a number of programs that do this very successfully. In Atlanta, Grady Hospital's Postponing Sexual Involvement, has reduced both the number of teens initiating sexual intercourse and the incidence of pregnancies among its participants compared to a similar group of non-participants.

The philosophy of Postponing Sexual Involvement is that teens younger than age 16 are not able to fully understand the implications of their sexual actions, yet they are often pressured into unwanted sexual activity by their peers and by glamorous images presented by the media. The program uses peer counselors to send the message that saying no to sex is okay, and to help them learn to resist the pressure for early sexual involvement.

A sequential program taught at Girls, Inc. chapters found that young teens who participated in an assertiveness training program were half as likely to have intercourse as non-participants.

Who Makes the Choice of Early Childbearing

When considering teenage pregnancy, the important distinction to keep in mind is the distinction of advantage. Young women who are poor are more likely to become pregnant than middle-class or affluent teens, and less likely to have abortions. For a middle-class teen, premarital sex may bring no serious consequences. But for a young woman who is poor, premarital sex is very likely to cause pregnancy and an adverse impact on another life.

Teens make three sets of choices about sexual behavior and its consequences. The first is when to start having sex. The second is whether to use contraceptives. The last is whether to choose abortion or adoption if a pregnancy occurs.

With regard to the first choice, there are some distinctions by gender and race in this country. By age 15, 10 percent of white females, 18 percent of African-American females, 16 percent of white males, and 48 percent of African-American males have had intercourse (comparable data are not available for Hispanics).

With regard to the second choice whether to become pregnant the distinctions by income are dramatic. In 1994, of all women ages 15-19, 38 percent are defined as "poor" or "low-income"; of these same women, 73 percent were projected to become pregnant (Dryfoos 1994).

With regard to the third choice, teens of all races choose abortion in roughly the same numbers. While abortion rates are declining overall, white and non-white teens opt for abortions at the same rate: 41 abortions per 100 pregnancies (Henshaw 1992).

Again, the important distinction is by income. Just as poor adolescents are more likely to become pregnant, they are less likely to choose abortion. In 1988, 56 percent of pregnant girls ages 15-19 with family incomes less than \$12,000 gave birth to children. By contrast, 27 percent whose family incomes were between \$12,000 and \$24,999 gave birth and only 17 percent whose family incomes were above \$25,000 gave birth (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994).

The end result of these divergences is reflected in teen birth statistics broken down by race. In 1991, there were 62 births per 1,000 to unmarried teens: 43 for white teens, 107 for Hispanics, and 118 for African-Americans (Moore 1994; The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1993).²⁷

A Lack of Choices

For young women in those communities where teenage childbearing has reached epidemic proportions, there appear to be no alternatives to becoming pregnant, giving birth, and trying to raise the child.

While preventing pregnancy so that young women don't face such difficult choices, we must pursue policies that give young women options all along the way.

When abortion became legal, it created a presumption that all women who did not want to give birth would choose abortion. It is not as simple as that. Many pregnant teens reject abortion for moral or religious reasons; others are denied access to abortions or the means to pay for them. But perhaps more significantly, many young women are swept up in the tide of inevitability of teenage childbearing within their own communities.

They cannot imagine making any other choice. These young women are convinced that motherhood will be easy to manage, even when they see friends struggling to care for small children. Ask a pregnant teenager who will take care of her baby, and she'll answer that her mother will do it. Ask her how she will afford disposable diapers, and she will say that her boyfriend will buy them. The initial outpouring of support for teen mothers including baby showers and friends who lend baby strollers and cradles puts a great deal of pressure on teen mothers to continue their pregnancies and keep their babies.

Few unmarried teens are choosing to give up their children, causing a dramatic decline in adoptions. For the years 1965-72, the percentage of white teenagers who gave their children up for adoption was 19 percent, for African-Americans it was 2 percent; during the period 1973-81, the numbers dropped to 8 percent for whites and 0.2 percent for African-American; in 1982- 88, to 3 percent for whites and 1 percent for African-Americans (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1994).

Overall, only 6 percent of infants born premaritally are given up for adoption, despite evidence that teens who give up their children are more likely than teens who keep their babies to complete vocational training, to avoid a rapid subsequent pregnancy, and to join the workforce (McLaughlin 1988).

Evidence shows that pregnant teens are rarely counseled about adoption. In one study, those who were counseled were almost seven times more likely to choose adoption. Pregnant teens asked to compare their lives if they chose to raise their children with their lives if they chose adoption were also much more likely to choose adoption.

Another factor influences young African-American women as well. They fear that their babies may not be adopted, a fear that is not unfounded. The National Association of Black Social Workers promotes policies that deny white families opportunities to adopt African-American children. While an African-American family may be preferable for an African-American child than a white family, a real family is preferable to an institution. Policies that prevent African-American children from being adopted by white families relegate these children to the foster care system longer than white children. And some will spend their entire lives in foster care.

The American Public Welfare Association estimates that 38 percent of the children in foster care awaiting adoption are African-American, though African-Americans currently make up about 12.5 percent of the U.S. population.

The National Association of Black Social Workers has spearheaded efforts in the last decade to recruit African-American adoptive families. Some programs, such as "One Church, One Child," which broaden the definition of "family," have been very successful. The African-American community also has a long history of informal adoption.

So statistically, while African-Americans would be required to adopt at a much higher rate than whites in order to find families for all the children in need, the supply far exceeds demand: 38 percent of the children in need of adoptive families are African-American, but only 25 percent of the children who are adopted from the foster care system in any given year are African-American. There may not be enough families to absorb the demand; thus the children may be relegated to foster care or institutional care.

There is ample evidence most notably in statistics about foreign adoption that families will eagerly cross racial boundaries to adopt young children, especially babies. If practices regarding interracial adoption were changed, the National Council for Adoption estimates that large numbers of the children in foster care or institutions would be adopted, and many of those adoptions would cross ethnic lines (National Council for Adoption, Inc. 1992).

The Crisis in Foster Care

The trend away from adoption creates enormous pressure on the foster care system. In a 1991 survey by the National Foster Parent Association, the number of children in need of foster care increased by 47 percent from 1985-90, while the number of homes decreased by 27 percent. On any given day, an estimated 450,000 children are in the foster care system.

It is a system in serious disarray; many children languish for years while waiting to go back to their biological parents or to be put up for adoption. Reasons for these delays include bureaucratic red tape, agencies' financial incentives to keep children in foster care, and the difficulty of making decisions about children whose parents are drug-addicted. While federal law requires disposition of cases for children in foster care within one year, the practical reality is that in many cases, hearings are held but decisions are delayed.

The best parents for virtually all children are their own mothers and fathers. Every effort should be made to enhance their parenting skills and support their efforts to raise their children. But in cases in which parents have no wish to make that effort or when there is no prospect that they can ever become good parents their children deserve a better life.

Recommendations

The U.S. Department of Education should offer a plan for comprehensive sexuality education in the schools in grades K-12. The plan should use as its starting point the model developed by the National Guidelines Task Force, a group of 15 national organizations that has laid out an age-specific agenda delineating what children should know about 36 specific topics related to sexuality, and guidelines for teaching them decision-making and negotiating skills with regard to sexual behavior. At the same time, the federal government should make available information about all sexuality education curricula that have proved effective (National Guidelines Task Force 1993).

The federal government should offer challenge grants to communities and states to experiment with demonstration programs requiring all teens to receive "parenting certification" as a condition for a drivers' license or for high school graduation. This certification can be offered by churches, community organizations, or any entity parents and adolescents choose.

Schools and communities should establish peer support groups as an alternative to the pervasive peer pressure for early sexual involvement and parenting.

The federal government should provide challenge grants to the states through Title X of the Public Health Act to fund clinics that will provide easy access to health care including contraceptive information and family planning services for young men and women. These services must be confidential and comprehensive. Because many young women and their partners are not in school, these services cannot be only school-based. Contracts should go to community-based collaborative efforts designed to serve all the health needs of adolescents.

The President should appoint a national commission to study the causes of low adoption rates, barriers to transracial

adoption, and the crisis in the foster care system. The panel should recommend policies to make adoption a realistic alternative to both abortion and single parenting, to encourage transracial adoption as an alternative to institutional care, and to explore the effect of the presumption of parental rights on the foster care system.

IV. A New Compact With At-Risk Teens

Young people who believe that they have real futures to risk have real incentives to delay parenting. That is why when we demand responsible behavior, we have a reciprocal obligation to offer a real future beyond early parenting and poverty. Young women and men who become teen parents have expectations, few ties to community institutions, few adult mentors and role models, and too much spare time. They live in communities where crime and drug use are common, where dropping out of school and chronic unemployment are even more common.

Teens who do not become parents have higher expectations about their lives and perceive rewards for not having children: They expect to succeed in school, to get good jobs, and to marry. For disadvantaged teens, there are no such expectations, thus no apparent incentives for avoiding early childbearing. Indeed, as we have demonstrated, there are some perceived rewards.

While we cannot instantly replicate the lives of middle-class teens for the poor, we must offer incentives for delayed childbearing, school completion, community service, work, and marriage. Our solutions must also look to building stronger schools and community institutions, and to helping teens of both genders form strong relationships with adults who can be mentors and role models.

Young people respond to incentives. We must experiment with how incentives can be most effective and pursue those that work. An Ohio program known as the Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP) offers young pregnant women \$62 a month in additional welfare benefits for staying in school and meeting monthly school attendance requirements. The additional grant is withheld for each month in which she is not enrolled or has poor attendance (Bloom 1993).²⁸ Preliminary results show attendance rose among those students who were still attending school. By contrast, attendance fell in a Wisconsin program that penalized teens from AFDC families for poor school attendance without offering positive incentives (Pasawarat 1992).²⁹

Programs run by the "I Have a Dream" Foundation offer college scholarships. The Children's Aid Society of New York promises its participants admission to Hunter College. And that program, considered one of the most effective in the country, has now been replicated with some initial success. New York's Robin Hood Foundation funded several other New York youth organizations to enable them to expand based on the Children's Aid Society's comprehensive and long-term approach to helping disadvantaged young people. Three years later, the programs reported reductions in high school dropout rates, increases in college enrollment, and fewer teen pregnancies (Philliber Research Associates 1994). More replications must be encouraged.

There is also evidence that small incentives, such as programs that pay teens \$1 for every day they don't get pregnant, also produce results. What isn't clear yet is why these programs work whether they succeed because they offer incentives, mentoring by the caring adults who run the programs, or the formation of peer groups with a common goal.

A number of programs have demonstrated the positive effects of community involvement on the lives of disadvantaged adolescents. One exemplary program is the Teen Outreach Program (TOP), established in St. Louis in 1978 as a teen pregnancy prevention program. Now expanded to serve at-risk youth in 32 cities, the program has three components: membership in a peer group, a relationship with a facilitator/mentor, and a volunteer experience.

Students in the peer groups are encouraged to stay in school, but they also get a chance to succeed outside of school by volunteering in the community. They choose their own projects, which might include anything from visiting the elderly in nursing homes to reporting and writing a neighborhood history. The basic idea behind the program is that when young people become effective as volunteers, they begin to believe in their own worth and ability to succeed in school and in the adult world.

TOP's accomplishments are impressive. During the nine years of the evaluation, from 1984-93, the program reduced school dropout rates by 50 percent, course failure rates by 8 percent, school suspension rates by 22 percent, and teen pregnancy rates by 33 percent (The Association of Junior Leagues International 1994).

Hope in a Concrete Form

The federal government should lead the search for answers by promoting more community experiments. Experts call these kinds of incentives "hope in a concrete form" and suggest that as little as \$500 a year accumulating in a bank might convince a young person to stay in school a minuscule amount compared to the cost of supporting a school dropout on welfare. Thus, we must learn how "investment" can create the sense of a future for a disadvantaged teenager.

One experiment should be the creation of "opportunity accounts" for teens in poor communities, based on the model of Individual Development Accounts. These accounts offer government contributions to help low-income persons build assets. In most cases, government matches individual financial contributions; in the case of teenagers, government could match their in-kind contributions, guaranteeing hope for the future to individuals who have little else balanced in their favor (Sherraden 1990).

Such accounts could be designated for post-secondary education, job training, or small-business development. These programs should reward teens for achievements such as good school attendance and not getting pregnant or not fathering a child, with monthly stipends deposited in an "opportunity account."

One such program is the Quantum Opportunities Program, aimed at low-income ninth graders and funded by the Ford Foundation in five communities. The students were not recruited, but merely offered a chance to join the program. They were paid \$1 an hour for each hour they participated in the program, and for each dollar they earned, another was placed in an accrual account for college or job training. For every 100 hours they completed, a \$100 bonus was added. The young people were required to be neatly dressed and groomed; they received counseling and intensive remedial work in subjects such as math and English; they were encouraged to read and talk about what they read; they were required to perform community services; they were taken to the opera and plays and restaurants. They were also assured that they would have continued support for all four years of high school.

In June 1993, at the end of four years, the students in the Philadelphia program, where organizers were able to create a group identity, showed the most impressive results. Of 25 participants, 18 were in college and three in apprenticeships, while only 42 percent of a control group had finished high school (Hahn 1994; Herbert 1993).

Experiments such as these are worth pursuing. Government alone, however, cannot fund them or operate them or offer opportunities for summer jobs. Businesses can play a strong role in this effort by offering funds or matching funds for such programs in every community in the country.

Offering Adult Support

Neighborhood opportunity centers could also be places where young people who have no caring adult in their lives are offered a chance to find one.

Many adolescents, but especially those who are poor, spend most of their free time with no adult companionship or supervision. Programs that address this issue with mentors, or programs that simply give teens "someplace to go," must be part of the solution to teen pregnancy. One of the important components of successful programs for high-risk children is individualized attention from a responsible and caring adult.

Psychologists studying "resilient" children have found a triad of protective factors that recur in their histories: a high degree of personal and social responsiveness; close-knit, cohesive, and supportive families; and extra-familial support such as mentors. While no government program can influence the personality of a child or in the short run change the characteristics of a family, it can improve the chances that a child will find a caring adult.

Bernard Lefkowitz, who interviewed 500 young people categorized as "at-risk" youth, notes that, again and again, the young person "who managed to climb out of the morass of poverty and social pathology was the kid who found somebody usually in school who helped them invent a promising future. In practical terms, the presence of the understanding, concerned, yet demanding mentor transforms the meaning and quality of education."

Public/Private Ventures of Philadelphia conducted its own study of older adults who chose to be mentors to teen mothers, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and potential middle school dropouts. Two types of relationships evolved: primary relationships, "characterized by attachments approximating kinship, great intimacy, and a willingness on the part of elders to take on the youth's full range of problems and emotions," and secondary relationships, in which "elders served as helpful, friendly neighbors, focusing on positive reinforcements, but maintaining emotional distance." The young people benefited by improved day-to-day living, and an enhanced sense of competence.

The Foster Grandparent Program provides a good model. In 1990, 77,000 children spent time with 27,000 grandparents who gave 28 million hours of service. Mentoring expert Marc Freedman calls this program an example of the "important enabling role government can play in the service arena" (Freedman 1994).

Freedman suggests that senior citizens could play an important role in the lives of at-risk teenagers. At present, less than 1 percent of all senior Americans perform volunteer service, and as baby boomers retire, the senior population is expected to double in 30 years. The U.S. Administration on Aging reports that of the 14 million Americans over age 65, more than 37 percent might be willing to come forward if asked, and the four million current volunteers indicate they would like to volunteer more time. Helping children is the top choice of volunteers (Freedman 1994; Marriott Senior Living Services 1991). To ignore this potential is to squander valuable social capital.

Recommendations

The federal government should encourage broad experimentation with incentives through a program of challenge grants to the states for Individual Development Accounts and other demonstrations that build on the models of successful incentive programs.

Every community that agrees to reduce its teen pregnancy rate should offer its young people opportunities for community involvement through the schools or through after-school programs. Businesses can play a strong role in this effort by offering funds to support such programs.

The federal government should provide mentors for young men and women through the National Community Service Act and the Foster Grandparents Program. These mentors should be members of the communities from which the young men and women come: older teens, adults, and retirees with a ratio of no more than 25 volunteers to each paid staff person to ensure that the mentors are well trained and well supported.

V. Conclusion

There is no instant solution to the calamity of teenage pregnancy. No solution will reduce the 80 and 90 percent teenage pregnancy rates in our inner cities overnight. A social change that took decades to become a crisis cannot be eradicated in a year or two. But the trend can and must be reversed.

All of these actions are incremental. Yet together, they could produce a dramatic effect and reverse this destructive social trend. Like the teenagers we chastise for seeking immediate gratification, policymakers also are guilty of seeking immediate gratification. Each strategy that we employ may have only a small effect reducing teenage pregnancy by a percentage point or two a year. Yet each percentage point represents an enormous achievement. It represents progress toward a society that values its children.

The problem is not insoluble, and there is no time to waste in addressing it.

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Notes

2. In 1983, there were 3.7 million, and in 1960, there were only 243,000.

3. In 1991, 95 percent of Atlanta's teen mothers were unmarried; the rate was 88 percent in Baltimore, 90 percent in Cleveland, 71 percent in Oklahoma City, 92 percent in Milwaukee and 93 percent in Richmond.

4. The rate of unmarried teenagers in 1970 was 30 percent.

5. In 1950, 14 percent of births to teenagers were to unmarried mothers.

6. Births have risen most dramatically among non-teenagers: 39 percent of women 20-24 who gave birth in 1991 were unmarried, compared with 9 percent in 1970, a four-fold increase, while the rate for unmarried births to teens rose to 69 percent from 30 percent.

7. The rate of increase in unmarried births has been much greater for whites than for African-Americans. For white women, the percentage of unmarried births has expanded almost ninefold, from 2.3 percent of all births in 1960 to 20.4 percent in 1990, while the level among African-Americans in that same period grew by just over threefold, from 21.6 percent to 66.5 percent. By age 30-34, 17 percent of never-married white women have given birth, while 71 percent of never-married black women have had a child.

8. A teen whose family income is below the poverty level is 10 times more likely to become pregnant than one whose annual family income is over \$25,000.

9. In 1972, the teenage pregnancy rate was 95 pregnancies per 1,000 girls ages 15-19.

10. Nearly one in five teenagers who has a premarital pregnancy will become pregnant again within one year. Within two years, more than 31 percent will have had a second pregnancy.

11. Census data from 1992 reveal that among never-married mothers ages 18-44, 34 percent had not completed high school a percentage expected to increase dramatically as younger and younger teens become mothers.

12. The poverty level for 1994 is estimated to be \$11,840 for a family of three.

13. For example, compared to young white women who were living with both birth parents at age 14, white women who came from

mother-stepfather families had twice the chance of becoming teen mothers. Among young African-American women, those who came from either mother-only or mother-stepfather families had 1.5 times the chance of becoming teen mothers as those from families with two birth parents.

14. A review of Milwaukee adolescent parents in the Wisconsin Learnfare program determined that of those sanctioned for poor school attendance, 77 percent were from families identified by the county for abuse or neglect.

15. Calculations compiled by PPI analyst Lyn A. Hogan, 1994.

16. Among ages 13-14, the fathers' age averaged 4.6 years, and among ages 15-19, 3.7 years.

17. These young women had become pregnant before the age of 20 and no older than 26 at the time of the survey. Of the 445 participants, 53 percent were African-American, 38 percent were white and 8 percent were Hispanic. Seventy-six percent were single, 20 percent were married and 4 percent were separated or divorced. Forty-one percent had completed high school, and 28 percent were currently enrolled. Only 51 percent had one parent who had completed high school. When the young women were asked on the survey if they ever had been asked or made to have an unwanted sexual contact, 61 percent answered yes. When asked the same question regarding a second abuser, 65 percent of those answered yes.

18. About 44 percent had been raped with the average age at first rape being 13.3 years, that of the perpetrator was 22.6 years.

19. Between 20-24 percent of never-married mothers collected child support in 1989 compared to 48 percent of separated women and 77 percent of divorced women.

20. In 1991, 129,579 teenage boys became fathers of children whose mother was 15 and under and 16-44 years of age.

21. By their own reports, the percentages of young men who claimed to have fathered a child in that year were, by race: Latino, 10.9 percent; African-American, 14.8 percent; disadvantaged white, 11.9 percent; non-disadvantaged white 4.6 percent.

22. There are at least two other factors contributing to the rise in the proportion of non-marital births. The first is that birth rates among married women are dropping, a factor that raises the proportion of unmarried births. The second is the increase in Hispanic immigration to the United States. Of almost 1/2 million births to adolescents in 1989, 18 percent were to Hispanic adolescents; Mexican-Americans accounted for 9 percent of adolescent births nationally but only 6 percent of the total female adolescent population.

23. It rose from 1960 to 1989 respectively from 5 percent to 27 percent in Great Britain, from 4 percent to 23 percent in Canada, and from 6 percent to 28 percent in France.

24. In the United States, however, the teen pregnancy rates are rising dramatically. In the last year, births to 15-17 year olds increased three percent to 38.7 per 1,000 teens, while between 1986-1991 births to this age group increased fully 27 percent. In the 18-19 year old age group, births increased seven percent to 94.4 births per 1,000, while between 1986-1991, this group saw an increase of 19 percent.

25. In 1988, the U.S. abortion rate was 44 per 1,000 women ages 15-19 and younger. Rates in many other nations including Great Britain, Canada and Denmark were less than half that. In 1988, abortion rates per 1,000 women ages 15-19 and younger were 19 in England and Wales, 16 in Canada, and 16 in Denmark.

26. The pregnancy rate for sexually experienced girls ages 15-19 fell from 254 per 1,000 in 1972 to 207 in 1990.

27. From 1982-1988, a higher proportion of white teenagers became sexually active; the proportion of sexually active minority teens remained steady. But pregnancy rates among minority teens increased while rates for white teens dropped, suggesting more effective contraceptive use among white teens.

28. The Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program in Ohio (1989-1991) is a state-wide initiative that is mandatory for all pregnant women and custodial parents under 20 years of age who receive AFDC and do not have a high school diploma or GED certificate. LEAP imposes a \$62 sanction when the attendance requirement is not met and a \$62 bonus when it is met. LEAP offers a variety of services including case management, child care assistance, and transportation to attend school. Of the adolescents eligible for LEAP, 61.3 percent of the program group and 51.1 percent of the control group remained enrolled or graduated when enrolled. Of the adolescents who were drop-outs when they enrolled in LEAP, 46.8 percent of the program group and 33.4 percent of the control group enrolled in high school or adult education. Attendance of LEAP adolescents was greater than that of the control group; and more LEAP adolescents passed the GED test.

29. Wisconsin's Learnfare Program applies to AFDC mothers and AFDC adolescents. A multi-year evaluation found that Learnfare failed to improve attendance: after one year, about 33 percent had improved their attendance while over 50 percent showed poorer performance.