Chapter 11

Preventing Teen Pregnancy Among Minority Populations: Risk and Protective Factors

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ABSTRACT

Despite reduction in the rates of teen pregnancy nationwide, teen pregnancy in the United States remains higher than other industrialized countries. Minority youth are at higher risk for teen pregnancy than their White counterparts. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to examine risk and protective factors for teen pregnancy among racial and ethnic minorities. Risk and protective factors exist on multiple levels and pregnancy prevention programs often target such factors to reduce teen pregnancy. In addition, intervention strategies aimed at reducing teen pregnancy among these populations will also be discussed. Researchers have identified components of successful teen pregnancy prevention programs. New strategies also include focusing on after school programs and technology among others to reduce teen pregnancy among minority youth. Collective efforts of families, schools, and communities are warranted.

INTRODUCTION

Despite a reduction in the rates of teen pregnancy nationwide, teen pregnancy in the United States remains high compared to similar countries. In 2015, greater than 225,000 babies were born to women 15 to 19 years of age (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Driscoll, & Mathews, 2017). Unfortunately, racial and ethnic minorities are at high risk for teen pregnancy, with rates greater than those of their white counterparts. Recent statistics indicate that compared to white teens, Hispanic teens are greater than twice as likely, African American teens are twice as likely, and American Indian/Alaskan Native teens are one and a half times as likely to experience teen pregnancy. Disparities in teen pregnancy rates based on race/ethnicity are clearly apparent and warrant greater attention.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017a) has identified teen pregnancy prevention as a top public health priority. Enhanced prevention efforts can improve immediate health and social outcomes for teens, as well as long-term positive outcomes, such as increased academic achievement, increased productivity, higher levels of employment, and increased life satisfaction. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to examine risk and protective factors for teen pregnancy among racial and ethnic minorities. In addition, intervention strategies aimed at reducing teen pregnancy among these populations are also discussed.

ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES, PROBLEMS

Significance of Preventing Teen Pregnancy Among Minority Youth

Short and long-term negative outcomes of teen pregnancy serve as a primary motivator for preventing teen pregnancy. Teen mothers are less likely to complete high school or attend college than women who delay having children until age 30 or later (Hoffman, 2006). In fact, by age 22, only half of teen mothers receive a high school diploma compared to 90% of non-teen mothers (Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010). This educational disparity has lasting effects on the teen mother and child, as well as on society and the economy. In addition, an estimated one in ten (9.0%) males between the ages of 12 to 16 became fathers before the age of 20 (Scott, Steward-Streng, Manlove, and Moore, 2012). Research indicates teen fathers are also less likely than teens who are not fathers to receive a high school diploma (Mollborn, 2010).

US taxpayers spent over $9 billion dollars in 2010 on health care, foster care, and incarceration costs of children of teen parents, while also losing tax revenue due to the lower levels of education and income of teen mothers. Unfortunately, teen motherhood often results in a cycle of poverty and other negative problems, with the children of teen moms having lower education levels and achievements, lower levels of employment, greater health problems, higher incarceration rates, and higher levels of teen pregnancy (Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, 2008). In fact, it is estimated that teen mothers have approximately two years less education than their counterparts. Preventing teen pregnancy is crucial to stopping this negative cycle and promoting greater well-being for those at risk of teen pregnancy.

Protective Factors

Enhancing protective factors is one method of preventing teen pregnancy among minority youth. Protective factors decrease the likelihood for an individual to encounter a specific disease or condition (in this case, teen pregnancy) or to engage in an unhealthy behavior. Protective factors for teen pregnancy have been identified and exist on multiple levels. The following are protective factors at the individual, family, school, and community levels.

Individual Level Protective Factors

At the individual level, certain characteristics of youth may reduce the risk of teen pregnancy. Higher academic performance, high educational aspirations, and future plans are all protective of early sexual debut and risky behavior. In addition, having higher levels of cognitive development, greater internal locus of control, and higher levels of motivation to avoid pregnancy are considered protective factors.
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