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CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

Teen Parents and Abstinence Education **Research Findings: 2003**

Compiled by Jodie Levin-Epstein

December 18, 2003

Research Findings: 2003 is designed as a reference tool for practitioners, policymakers, and others interested in teen parents (and particularly their relationship to welfare programs) and abstinence education. *Research Findings: 2003* pulls together research that focuses specifically on these topics, as well as selected broader studies that include findings on teen parents or abstinence education. Not included in this listing is the wealth of research on the broad topic of teen pregnancy prevention, except as it relates to welfare.

The following summaries are drawn directly from or paraphrase the research papers themselves. This compilation does not evaluate the validity of the studies or their methodology. Each summary includes a link to a web posting of the full research report, article, or presentation or the e-mail address of one of the researchers. Readers are encouraged to contact CLASP (jodie@clasp.org and cgrisham@clasp.org) with suggestions for research released in 2003 that should be included in this summary. We also encourage researchers and others to send us research that might be included in *Research Findings: 2004*.

Research on Teen Parents

State-Level Welfare Policies and Subsequent Non-Marital Childbearing

Authors: Suzanne Ryan, Jennifer Manlove, and Sandra L. Hofferth, Child Trends/University of Maryland

November 2003

Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM) Research Conference Presentation, Washington, DC

Data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics was used to assess the influence of particular state-level welfare policies (implemented prior to the 1996 TANF law) to determine which ones are particularly effective at reducing subsequent births, especially non-marital births among of sample of women who receive welfare and have ever had children. A primary focus of the analysis was to determine if teenage mothers represent an especially high-risk group for subsequent and non-marital births, and to examine

whether welfare policies have differential effects depending upon the age of the mother. Overall, the researchers conclude that the state-level welfare policies did not operate as intended—they did not have any influence on women’s childbearing behaviors in the sample. Instead, personal characteristics are stronger determinants than public policy of women’s childbearing decisions. Such personal characteristics include the number of previous children, marital status, and race/ethnicity. Age is also a significant characteristic, and the findings note that teenage mothers and women in their early twenties are more likely to have another non-marital birth than are women in their early thirties.

For further information, contact: Suzanne Ryan, sryan@childtrends.org.

Welfare Reform and Nonmarital Childbearing in the Transition to Adulthood

Authors: Kathleen M Harris, David Guilkey, Mariah Cheng, and Eve Veliz,

University of North Carolina

November 2003

**Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM) Research Conference
Presentation, Washington, DC**

Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) was used to look at the effects of welfare reform policies on non-marital childbearing among adolescents and young adults. The data set follows adolescents from 1994-95 through their transition to adulthood in 2001-02. Because new welfare policies were implemented during this period, the researchers were able to examine whether changes in the laws at the state level impacted the rates at which young people in the study made transitions into non-marital pregnancy and childbearing. Among the eight welfare policies examined were the presence of a family cap, eligibility rules for minor parents and pregnant women, and how much time a family could receive cash aid over a lifetime. The researchers conclude that the effects of these policies on marital and pregnancy transitions among those entering adulthood to be “weak or nonexistent.”

For further information, contact: Kathleen Harris, kathie_harris@unc.edu.

Transition to Welfare Parenthood by Welfare Recipients’ Daughters: Do Recent Trends Suggest a Culture Change?

Author: David J. Fein, Abt Associates, Inc.

November 2003

**Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM) Research Conference
Presentation, Washington, DC**

This analysis uses administrative records data to identify trends in the first transitions to welfare parenthood for 3,118 young women in Delaware raised in welfare families. The findings show modest declines in transitions to welfare parenthood among young women reaching their 18th birthdays over the first six years of Delaware’s welfare reform program. Echoing other research, the findings include that daughters are more likely to

become welfare parents when their own mothers spend more time working while their daughters are teens.

For further information, contact: David Fein, david_fein@abtassoc.com.

Teen Parents and Academic Success

Authors: K.M. Perrin and K.A. Dorman, University of South Florida

October 2003

Journal of School Nursing, 19(5): 288-93

The purpose of this study was to explore the personal life stories of women who became mothers while still in their teen years. The focus was on themes that evolved as important in the lives of these women, including family support, partner support, mentor support, economic opportunity, resiliency, optimism, and spirituality. Each of the 22 women in the study offered her formulas for success, which are useful for consideration by school nurses. Factors the women perceived to contribute to their success in achieving a master's or doctoral degree are explored. This study helps to identify the support and community efforts necessary to improve the outcome for teen mothers today.

To view the study's abstract, visit:

<http://highwire.stanford.edu/cgi/medline/pmid;14498777>.

A Cross-site Evaluation of Iowa's Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, Intervention, and Community Programs

Authors: Edward J. Saunders, Miriam J. Landsman, Nancy Graf, and Veronica Horowitz

September 2003

University of Iowa School of Social Work

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice

Iowa Department of Human Services

This evaluation presents an analysis of data from participating sites in Iowa that provided TANF-funded programming for pregnant and parenting teens during 2002-2003. Questionnaires were designed to gather demographic information and elicit feedback on the effectiveness of the intervention. Ten sites were able to collect responses from participating teens for a total of 227 respondents. Ninety percent of the respondents were female, and participating teens were involved in activities anywhere from three months to 15 months. Analysis was conducted on seven domains including decision-making and goal-setting, health care, birth control, parenting, life skills, relationships, and self-esteem. Perceptions of improvement were uniformly positive with the highest ratings in the area of parenting skills, birth control, and health care. Respondents also indicated an enhanced sense of future direction. (This report also provides an evaluation of curricular programs and community-wide efforts that focus on adolescent pregnancy prevention.)

For further information, contact: Nancy Graf, nancy-graf@uiowa.edu.

The Parenting Project for Teen Mothers: The Impact of a Nurturing Curriculum on Adolescent Parenting Skills and Life Hassles

Authors: E.R. Woods, D. Obeidallah-Davis, M.K. Sherry, S.L. Ettinger, E.U. Simms, R.R. Dixon, S.M. Missal, and J.E. Cox, Children's Hospital Boston, Harvard Medical School

September 1, 2003

Ambulatory Pediatrics, 3(5): 240-5

Many teen parents and their babies are at a significant disadvantage because of poverty and inadequate parenting skills. We undertook a study aimed at increasing parenting skills and improving attitudes of teen mothers through a structured psychoeducational group model based on the Nurturing Curriculum. All adolescent mothers in the Young Parents' Program were offered enrollment in a 12-week group parenting curriculum (intervention group) and were compared with those who declined the intervention but agreed to participate as comparison subjects (comparison group). There were 91 young mothers in the intervention group, compared with 54 in the comparison group. The intervention group showed improvement in parenting skills and life hassles after participation in the intervention curriculum. More interventions are needed to confirm the positive effect of the group-based interventions on parenting and life skills of young mothers that may improve the social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes for the children born to teen parents.

For further information, contact: Elizabeth Woods, elizabeth.woods@tch.harvard.edu.

The Welfare Time Limit in Minnesota: A Survey of Families Who Lost MFIP Eligibility as a Result of the Five-Year Time Limit

Author: Leslie I. Crichton

July 2003

Minnesota Department of Human Services

This report focuses on those families whose welfare (MFIP) cases closed after having received assistance every month for at least 5 years. The welfare agency conducted telephone interviews with 130 closed cases and added in some administrative case reviews to learn about other families. The research, about families with closed cases who had "timed-off" welfare, found that overall the families reported being generally in poor shape economically and with numerous other problems. While the report covered families independent of their age, some information about those who had been teen parents is noted. For example, the report compared those who "timed-off" welfare with those who left earlier and found that for both groups about the same percent (30 percent) were minors when their first child had been born. For the "timed-off" group as a whole, about one-third had not completed high school (similar to the general caseload). When asked why they had not finished high school, nearly half of the non-graduates cited pregnancies and parenting responsibilities that kept them too busy to go back to school.

To view the report, visit: www.dhs.state.mn.us/ECS/Reports/default.htm.

Prepped for Success? Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Teens in Chicago Schools

Author: Helene M. Marcy

July 2003

Center for Impact Research

To determine how pregnant and parenting teens are faring within the various educational systems in Chicago, the Center for Impact Research (CIR) hired and trained eight teen mothers to conduct a survey of pregnant and parenting teens in April and May 2003. A total of 181 pregnant and parenting teens were interviewed. CIR supplemented the survey by interviewing teen service providers and staff at alternative schools. Among the findings: of those who were in school when they became pregnant, 16 percent were in 8th grade or lower; 26 percent of those currently enrolled in school reported that they were encouraged to leave; 76 percent of those who were not in school said they wanted to return but the most frequent reason that prevented them from going back to school was a need for childcare. The report includes a set of recommendations.

To view the report, visit: <http://www.impactresearch.org/documents/prepped.pdf>.

TANF and the Status of Teen Mothers under Age 18

Authors: Gregory Acs and Heather L. Koball

June 2003

Urban Institute

The authors find that, in the short term, there is no evidence that minor teen mothers were harmed or helped much by residency and school/training requirements in TANF or even by welfare reform policies in general. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-1997 cohort, they find few significant differences in minor teen birth rates, living arrangements, and school enrollment between 1997 and 2000. While not significant, the trends are consistent with the goal of welfare reform to reduce teen childbearing. Although their receipt of cash assistance has dropped significantly, about 80 percent of minor teen moms receive some form of public assistance.

To view the report, visit: <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310796>.

Teenagers and Welfare Reform

Author: Paul Offner

June 2003

Urban Institute

The problems of teenage parents were high among the concerns of the drafters of the 1996 welfare reform law, as a result of which several provisions targeted to this group were added to the legislation. Surprisingly, however, there has been little effort to determine how welfare reform has affected teenagers. This paper attempts to address that need. In particular, it seeks to answer three questions: first, how did implementation of the 1996 reforms affect school attendance among teenage parents/teenagers; second, how did it affect living arrangements; and third, how did it affect out-of-wedlock fertility. The

analysis concludes that welfare reform is strongly associated with certain changes in teen outcomes between 1989 and 2001. In particular, it seems to have significantly reduced the school dropout rate of low-income teenage girls, had little effect on living arrangements (with the exception of young low-income mothers), and reduced the number of never-married girls who have children.

To view the report, visit:

<http://www.urban.org/Template.cfm?Section=ByTopic&NavMenuID=62&template=/TaggedContent/ViewPublication.cfm&PublicationID=8464>.

No Place to Grow: The Unsafe and Unstable Housing Conditions of Illinois Pregnant and Parenting Youth and Their Children

Author: Helene M. Marcy

June 2003

Center for Impact Research

A statewide needs assessment to obtain more information about the housing needs of pregnant and parent youth in Illinois was undertaken through a survey of organizations that provide services to pregnant and parenting youth. Among the findings: of the roughly 3,000 pregnant or parenting youth (aged 21 or younger) served by the organizations, over 26 percent were reported to be living in unsafe or unstable conditions; of this group, 61 percent were in need of alternative living arrangements; and, of those in need of alternatives, 21 percent were transient. The report includes a set of recommendations.

To view the report, visit: <http://www.impactresearch.org/documents/noplacetogrow.pdf>.

Supporting Adolescent Mothers and Their Children Through a High School-Based Child Care Center and Parent Support Program

Authors: L.S. Sadler, M.K. Swartz, and P. Ryan-Krause, Yale University School of Nursing

May-June 2003

Journal of Pediatric Health Care, 17(3): 109-17

A pilot study was conducted of adolescent parents and their children at a high school-based child care center to examine the influence of the program on parental competence, parent-child interaction, and child development. A sample of 18 urban adolescent mothers with children was interviewed at the end of one academic year. The results of this pilot study indicate that adolescent mothers and their young children in the sample benefited from the educational and support services offered at a school-based child care and parent support program. Further study is indicated to test the strength and duration of the effects.

For further information, contact: Lois Sadler: lois.sadler@yale.edu.

Review of Sanction Policies and Research Studies: Final Literature Review
Submitted by LaDonna Pavetti, Mathematica Policy Research
March 2003
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

This review of the literature on sanctions and welfare includes findings that point to the disproportionate sanctioning of younger families, including those started when the mother was a teen. The review covers five primary aspects of TANF sanctions: (1) the incidence and duration of sanctions, (2) the characteristics of sanctioned families, (3) the circumstances of sanctioned families; (4) the impact of sanctions on various outcomes, and (5) the implementation of sanctions. With respect to sanctions and age, the review states that Hasenfeld et al. (2002) reported that TANF recipients under the age of 24 are somewhat more at risk for sanctions than older recipients and that the one study that looked at the age at which a recipient had her first child found that 53 percent of sanctioned clients were 20 years old or younger when they had their first child, compared to 45 percent of non-sanctioned mothers (Born et al., 1999).

To view the report, visit: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/TANF-Sanctions03/index.htm#Characteristics>.

Minnesota Family Investment Program Longitudinal Study: Special Report on Teen Mothers
Author: Leslie I. Crichton
Minnesota Department of Human Services
January 2003

Two-hundred-forty-eight women, all teens when they newly applied for welfare in Minnesota (the Minnesota Family Investment Program or MFIP), told interviewers about a lifetime of experiences. Thirty months after application for assistance: 60 percent had finished high school; 60 percent were working; 55 percent had left MFIP; 18 percent had family incomes above 200 percent of poverty. Yet, there were still many challenges for teen mothers: 44 percent had given birth to a second child; 26 percent were on MFIP and not working; an, 40 percent had incomes below poverty. Furthermore, 11 percent had suffered a serious illness or injury in the previous six months, and 9 percent of children had special needs. Mental health issues were reported by one in five, and one in five scored high on a depression screener. Having enough money for the family was a problem for 41 percent of the teen mothers. The report also reviews such issues as available services and identifies a set of questions to consider when seeking to improve outcomes for these teens.

To view the report, visit: <http://edocs2.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Legacy/DM-0095-ENG>.

Research on Abstinence Education

Evaluation of Abstinence-Only Education in Iowa

Authors: Edward J. Saunders, Miriam J. Landsman, Nancy M. Graf, and Brad Richardson

October 2003

University of Iowa School of Social Work

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice

Iowa Department of Public Health

This report provides an analysis of data from two community programs and four educational programs funded through the federal abstinence-only program, Section 510. The analysis utilizes a pretest-posttest format and includes data from 1,438 matched responses. Regarding effect on student attitudes and intentions toward abstinence, several survey items showed significant positive change across the programs; these items dealt with communication with parents or trusted adults, intentions to wait until marriage before having sexual intercourse, understanding that young teens are not ready for sex, and believing teens can resist peer pressure to have sex. Regarding sexual activity, responses at posttest indicated that 68 teens (4.7 percent) had had sexual intercourse. Examination of gender differences showed that overall males had more significantly negative attitudes toward abstinence at both pretest and posttest as compared to female students. Examination of grade differences revealed that, in some cases, older grades (8-12) were more negative in their attitudes toward abstinence than students in younger grades (6-7). This report also includes a comparison of abstinence education and adolescent pregnancy prevention programs in Iowa through items that appeared on both program surveys.

For further information, contact: Nancy Graf, nancy-graf@uiowa.edu.

Virginity and The First Time

October 2003

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and *seventeen* magazine

This nationally representative survey, the eighth in the partnership between the Kaiser Family Foundation and *seventeen* magazine, asked 15- to 17-year-old teens a set of questions about their views towards virginity. To the question “At what age do you personally think it is OK for someone to lose his or her virginity?” one-quarter responded ages 17 or younger, and roughly another quarter said age 18. About 17 percent responded that ages 19, 20, and more than 20 are the “OK” age, and about 25 percent volunteered that the right time is when you are married. Another 2 percent volunteered that the OK time is when you are in a committed relationship.

To view the survey results, visit: <http://www.kff.org>.

Abstinence Education for Rural Youth: an Evaluation of the Life's Walk Program

Authors: J.E. Barnett and C.S. Hurst

September 2003

Journal of School Health, 73(7): 264-8

This paper summarizes an evaluation of a school-based abstinence-only program, taught in public schools to 8th- and 10th-graders. The program uses infant simulators to provide adolescents with a realistic view of parenting and to encourage them to delay initiation of sexual behavior until marriage. Two evaluations are summarized here. The first evaluation used a pretest-posttest design. Significant increases in parent-adolescent communication, knowledge about sexuality, and sexual behavior were found. No changes were found in attitudes toward teen sexual activity. The second evaluation employed a quasi-experimental design with a treatment group and a comparison group, with testing delayed four months after the program. No group differences were found in attitudes, behavior, or communication. Program effects were found only for knowledge about sexuality.

For further information, contact: Jerrold E. Barnett: Barnett@mail.nwmissouri.edu

Sexually Active Teenagers Are More Likely to Be Depressed and to Attempt Suicide

Authors: Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, and Lauren R. Noyes

June 2003

Heritage Foundation

This analysis focuses on the link between sexual activity and emotional well-being among teens ages 14 through 17. The data used in this analysis are taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The findings include that one-quarter of teenage girls who are sexually active report that they are depressed all, most, or a lot of the time, which is three times greater than for girls who are not sexually active. In addition, more than 14 percent of girls who are sexually active report having attempted suicide, which is nearly three times greater than girls who are not sexually active. The researchers conclude that “theoretical questions about whether teen sexual activity leads to depression or, conversely, whether depression leads to teen sexual activity should not distract attention from the clear message that adult society should be sending to teens. Teens should be told that sexual activity in teen years is clearly linked to reduced personal happiness. Teens who are depressed should be informed that sexual activity is likely to exacerbate, rather than alleviate, their depression.”

To view the report, visit:

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=43062>.

Virginity Pledges: Who Takes Them and How Well Do They Work?

Authors: Angela Lipsitz, Paul D. Bishop, and Christine Robinson, Northern Kentucky University

May 2003

Presentation at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association

An analysis of 527 never-married college undergraduates at a Midwestern university who completed confidential surveys about various behaviors and attitudes, including a special section on virginity pledges, found the majority who took virginity pledges did not keep them. Typically, a virginity pledge campaign reaches out to youth independent of whether or not they are virgins at the point of pledging. Of the sample, 84 students (16 percent) reported having taken a virginity pledge at some point in their lives. The majority of these pledgers, 61 percent, “broke their vows” over time. Pledgers (both virgin and non-virgin) were more conservative than non-pledgers in their general attitudes, perceived parental values, and religiosity. Sixty-six percent of pledgers had had intercourse compared to 78 percent of non-pledgers. The majority of virgin pledgers—55%—reported having had oral sex yet. Furthermore, when virgin pledgers broke their pledge, they were less likely to use condoms at first intercourse or ever use condoms than those who were not virgins when they took the pledge. Virgin pledge-takers who broke their vows did have intercourse at a later age; the median age at intercourse is about one year later for those pledge takers who had been virgins compared to non-pledgers.

For further information, contact: Angela Lipsitz, lipsitz@NKU.EDU.

Causes of Declines in Teenage Pregnancy Rates and Birthrates

April 2003

Alan Guttmacher Institute

In response to an article in the Adolescent and Family Health (AFH) Journal (see below), which challenged an Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) analysis of the causes of declines in teen birth and pregnancy rates, AGI issued a list of concerns about the methodology used in the AFH article. According to AGI, “the *AFH* study’s bottom-line conclusion—that increased abstinence is responsible for the entire decline in birthrates among unmarried teenagers and most of the decline in pregnancy rates—is inaccurate and misleading because of at least four significant methodological flaws in its analytical approach: separating teens by marital status ignores when and why teenagers marry and leads to inaccurate conclusions; analyzing birthrates alone ignores the impact of abortion and obscures declines in unintended pregnancy; using data collected in 1995 for 1991 behavior may introduce recollection bias; and ignoring available data and failing to investigate possible changes in sexual behavior and contraceptive practice among sexually experienced teenagers weakens conclusions.”

To view the AGI analysis, visit: <http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/memo042803.pdf>.

An Analysis of the Causes of the Decline in Non-marital Birth and Pregnancy Rates for Teen from 1991 to 1995

Authors: Joanna K. Mohn, Lynne R. Tingle, and Reginald Finger

March 2003

***Adolescent and Family Health Journal*, 3(1)**

According to this study, increased abstinence is the major cause of the declining birth and pregnancy rates among single teenage girls. The paper notes that other research (including from the Alan Guttmacher Institute) has found that the use of contraceptives was either the predominant reason for declines in overall pregnancy and birth rates—or accounted for between 50-80 percent of the declines. Mohn, Tingle, and Finger assert that, among unmarried teenage girls ages 15 to 19, increased abstinence accounted for 67 percent of the decrease in the pregnancy rate from 1991 to 1995.

To view a summary of the study by the Heritage Foundation, visit:

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/em872.cfm>.

For more information about the *Adolescent and Family Health Journal*, visit:

www.afhjournal.org

Defining Abstinence: Views of Directors, Instructors, and Participants in Abstinence-Only-Until Marriage Programs in Texas

Authors: Patricia Goodson, Sandy Suther, B.E. (Buzz) Pruitt, and Kelly Wilson

March 2003

***Journal of School Health*, 73(3): 91-96**

This study examines how program directors, instructors, and participant youth from a sample of federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage education programs in Texas define the term “abstinence” and its object (that is, from what one abstains). Interviews were held with program staff, and focus group sessions were conducted with youth. The researchers conclude that the qualitative study offered three lessons. First, that program staff in Texas have clear definitions of abstinence. Second, program staff and youth both have “positive” definitions of abstinence, such that abstinence is not solely about avoidance and self-denial. The third lesson is that the presence of avoidance messages along with positive messages that include character-based messages and youth-development skills fits well with the history of grantees, many of whom are focused on youth-development.

For further information, contact: researcher Patricia Goodson, pgoodson@hlkn.tamu.edu, or the state agency program officer, Ramdas Menon, Ramdas.Menon@tdh.state.tx.us.