

The Links between Sexual Abuse & Teen Pregnancy in Minnesota

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First:
mindfulness of our own care
within a painful issue

Teen pregnancy: A problem nearly solved?

- Has declined more than 30% over the past decade--every year since 1989
- Across all age groups, all ethnic groups
- 2002--lowest teen birthrate in over 90+ years of tracking
- Why? Later sexual debut, better contraception
- But.....

Among those still getting pregnant

- Changing clinic populations
 - More complex problems and life issues
 - Interventions to prevent pregnancy may be missing the point
 - Sexual abuse history

“Jessie”

- At 6 years old, her father took pornographic films of her (incl. physical genital trauma)
- Frequent foster care placements
- At 14, runaway living with 56-yr-old man who created teen sex films
- Showed up for prenatal care in bustier and mini-skirts

At increased risk for sexual abuse:

- Boys before puberty
 - Especially gender non-conforming
- Girls at and just after puberty
 - Early maturing
- Children from chaotic families
 - Substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual teens
 - Less protection in or outside of family

“Yvette”

- Abused by 17-yr-old brother when age 12
- Kicked out by father at 14, pregnant at 15
- Comes to teen pregnancy clinic with her “street sister” (later informs nurse she is bisexual)

How many Minnesota teens?

- 12% to 17% of girls, 4% to 5% of boys
 - ◆ 1992 & 1998 MSS
 - ◆ More girls than boys reporting:
 - ◆ 5,000+ girls 1,500+ boys (9th & 12th grade)
 - ◆ All ethnic groups
 - ◆ Extra-familial abuse most common, but 1,500+ teens each year reported both incest AND extra-familial abuse

– Saewyc, Pettingell & Magee, *Journal of School Nursing*, October 2003

“Amanda”

- Abused by step-father at age 11; told and step-father was arrested
- Mother gave her pot on her 13th birthday
- Mother’s drug dealer began molesting her at 14; he is the father of her baby at 15
- Frequent STDs during pregnancy

Defining sexual abuse in the MSS

- Two items assessed sexual abuse:

“Has any adult or older person outside the family ever touched you sexually against your wishes or forced you to touch them sexually?”

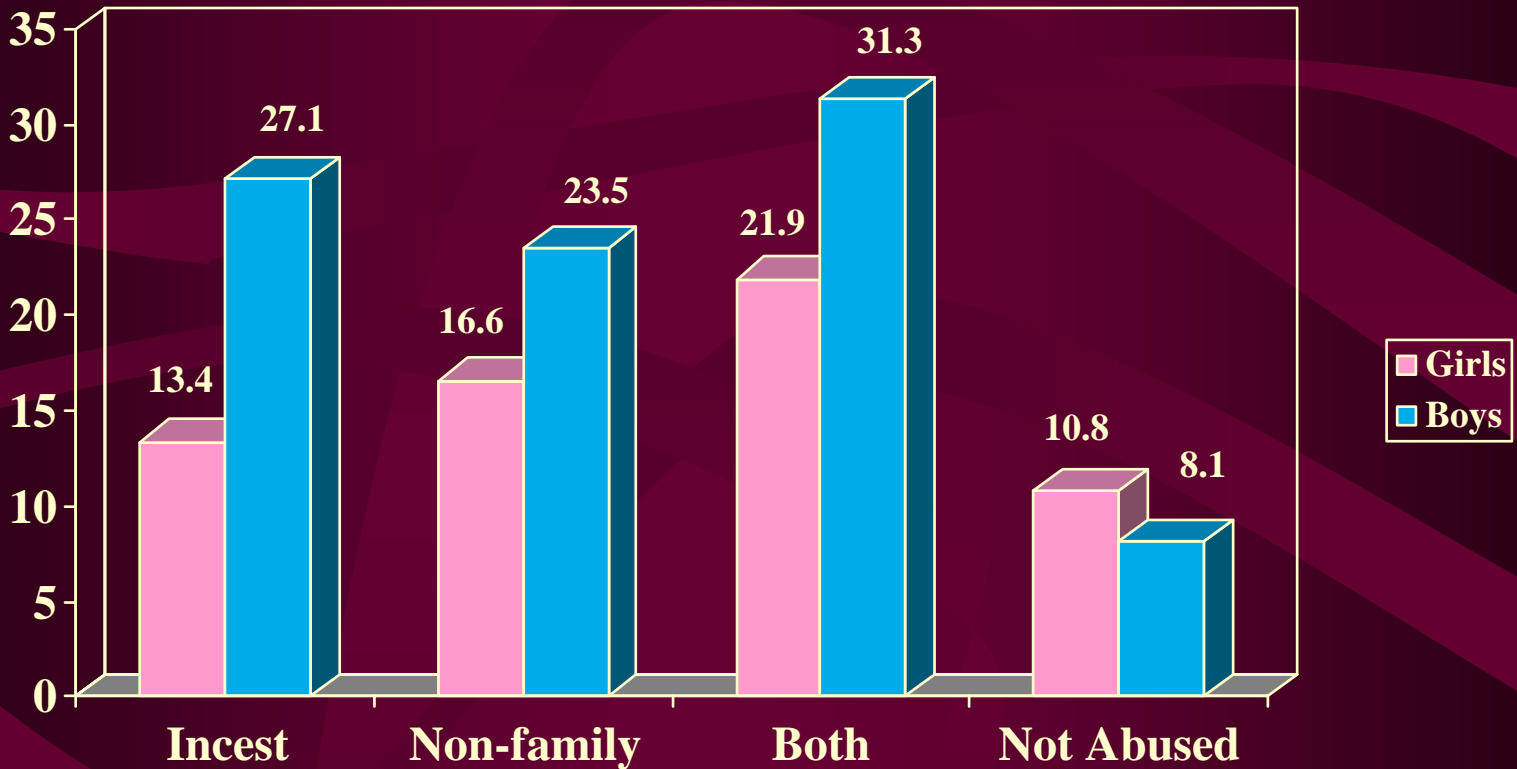
“Has any older or stronger member of your family ever touched you sexually or had you touch them sexually?”

Teen Pregnancy & Sexual Abuse

- Study of sexually active teens in MSS found:
 - More than 1 in 4 girls, 1 in 12 boys sexually abused
 - Abused were more likely to report pregnancy involvement, no matter which type of abuse
 - Those who experienced multiple types of abuse had highest prevalence of pregnancy

Saewyc, Magee, Pettingell, *Perspectives of Sexual & Reproductive Health* (in press)

Prevalence of Pregnancy, MSS 1998



Risk of Pregnancy Involvement

Girls, adj. OR*

- Incest only: 1.36
- Non-family: 1.77
- Both: 2.29

Boys, adj. OR*

- Incest only: 3.98
- Non-family: 3.17
- Both: 4.48

*adjusted for age & ethnicity

“Tony”

- Sexually abused by school teacher at age 11
- Joined a gang at 14 “for protection”
- Became a teen father at 16; left town with pregnant girlfriend one step ahead of angry drug dealers
- Supported them two states away by doing “street tattoos,” fast food cook, prostitution

Why pregnancy involvement?

- Increased risk behaviors among abused

Early debut, multiple partners

Substance use with intercourse

Inability to negotiate safer sexual behaviors

- Violent partners, date rape
- Lack of contraception and condom use

“Brandy”

- Sexually abused by uncle from age 9 to 12
- Raped when she first ran away at age 14
- Intimate partner violence with every boyfriend since, including father of baby
- Father of baby recently bought a gun

Why pregnancy involvement?

- Increased risk behaviors among abused

Running away, survival sex, prostitution

Depression, suicidal--reason to go on living

Intentional pregnancy to improve self-concept?

- Motherhood & fatherhood positive roles
- Continuing pregnancy = Taking control over body

“Gabrielle”

- Was molested by babysitter at age 5
- Depression, self-cutting, suicide attempts in junior high
- “If I weren’t pregnant, I’d probably be dead now.”

Is it just sexual abuse?

- Families of sexually abused children often experience other violence
 - Domestic violence
 - Physical abuse/neglect of children
 - Substance abuse by parents
- Even when you include all these, sexual abuse is still an independent predictor of teen pregnancy

Risks for abused teen parents

- Sequelae of sexual abuse increase risk of poor parent and child outcomes
 - Post-partum depression, dissociation
 - Substance abuse
 - Intimate partner violence, family conflict
 - Running away, homelessness
 - Inability to protect children from abuse

“Teena”

- Raped at 14 by stranger at a party, mother dead, her father in jail for drug charges
- Arrested for assault several times by age 17
- Father of baby ran an “escort service,” currently had 4 other pregnant “girlfriends”
- Her father died of heroin overdose when she was 32 weeks pregnant

One population at particular risk

GLBQ youth

- More likely to have a sexual abuse history
- GLB youth also more likely to report pregnancy than heterosexual teens
- Among sexually abused teens in Minnesota, recent same-gender sexual behavior was one of the strongest predictors of teen pregnancy

“Damien”

- Filipino, self-identified as gay at age 15
- Came out to family and was kicked out
- Worked as a prostitute on the street, but “wanted a family, children, all those things they say you can’t have if you’re gay.”

GLBQ youth & teen pregnancy

- Where teen pregnancy is declining among heterosexual teens, prevalence of teen pregnancy *increased* among GLB teens over the 1990's in Minnesota, Seattle, and Canada.

Saewyc, Pettingell & Skay, *Journal of Adolescent Health*,
February 2004

Is there no hope?

- Not all abused teens become pregnant
- Identifying protective factors, even in the presence of risk factors, that lower the odds of pregnancy involvement
- MSS 98, boys and girls, abused only

Risk & Protective Factors

- Strongest risks associated with teen pregnancy for abused boys and girls:
 - IV drug use (not alcohol or smoking, because most abused teens used these)
 - Previous suicide attempts
 - Same-gender sexual partners/past year (GLB)

“Andrea”

- Abused by stepfather at age 11
- “Jumped” into gang at age 13 (gang rape)
- In and out of juvenile detention for assault
- Spent time in Mexico as exotic dancer at 15
- At 17, heroin addict, arrested, boyfriend “Rico” deported back to Mexico

Risk & Protective Factors

- Protective factors varied by type of abuse
 - Incest only girls, band & condom use
 - Girls non-family abuse, condom use, school plans & parents caring
 - Girls with both, school plans & condom use
 - Boys were similar, except boys with both types of abuse had NO protective factors

With all risk factors & no protective factors, probability of pregnancy:

Incest only girls: 84%

- Incest only boys: 89%

Non-family girls: 70%

- Non-family boys: 67%

Both types: 84%

- Both types: No model possible (no protective factors)

With no risk factors & all protective factors, probability of pregnancy:

Incest only girls: 3%

- Incest only boys: 3%

Non-family girls: 6%

- Non-family boys: 9%

Both types: 11%

- Both types: N/A

Risk & Protective Factors

Even with some risk factors, having one or more protective factors can lower the probability of pregnancy involvement **by more than half**.

Example: Girls Both Types: drops from 84% to 34%

What are the implications?

- Current teen pregnancy prevention efforts may not be effective for sexually abused teens (especially GLB)
- Screen for abuse among all youth
- Harm reduction AND asset building needed

What can we do?

- For prevention of sexual violence and sexual abuse?
- For teen pregnancy prevention among abused teens?
- For working with abused teen parents?

Wrapping it up

- Sexual violence and abuse affect 1 in 5 Minnesota teens
- Teen pregnancy strongly linked to history of sexual abuse, especially for boys
- GLB youth at increased risk

Wrapping it up

- There are protective factors that lower the odds of pregnancy for this group
- Be aware of trust issues, fostering relationships is not easy with abused youth
- Raising awareness in the community for prevention and support

Wrapping it up

- Recommendations from the group

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