

Teen Parents: A Population in Crisis

A Special Project Presented to

Dr. Gordon Martinen

Heritage College

In Partial Fulfillment

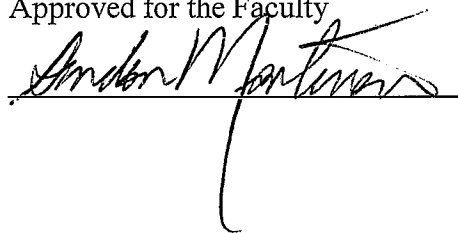
of the Requirements for a Degree of
Masters in English as a Second Language

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FACULTY APPROVAL
TEEN PARENTS AND SEXUAL EDUCATION

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, Faculty Advisor

ABSTRACT

Teen parents and their offspring were at great disadvantages in the areas of health, education and finances (Pesic, 2007). In this special project, the author will observe teen parents in Yakima, by way of survey. The researcher will examine the level of sexual education teen parents received in and out of school as well as the public school parenting programs they are involved in and the effects on their parenting and academic skills, among other impacting statistics. The researcher will compare these findings to national statistics and use this information to better the curriculum in the Yakima School District's parenting and childcare programs.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The United States had the highest rate of teen pregnancy within the industrialized western world, and the Yakima Valley was among the highest in teen pregnancy statistics in the state, as shown in Figure 1 (Teen Pregnancy.Org, 2007). The numbers were rising in today's society despite the "Abstinence-Only" Education students were receiving in school (Pesic, 2007). The researcher recognized a need for comprehensive sexual education in the public schools in Washington State. Dr. Terry Bergeson reported a need for change in the 2005 State of Education Address, stating:

We must personalize education. We must put our students at the center of everything we're doing. We must empower them not only with academic knowledge and skills, but with the opportunity and support to plan and prepare for their future while they go through school (2005).

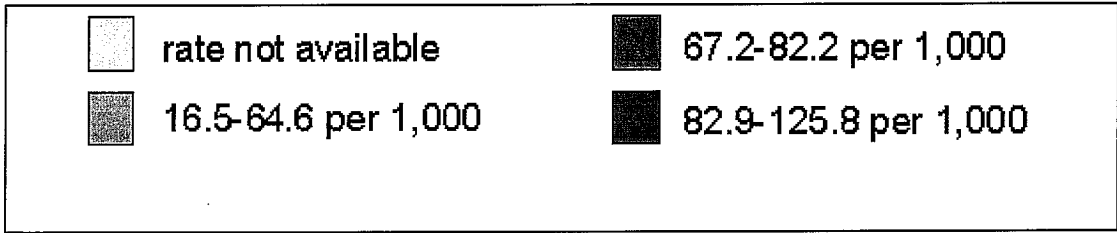
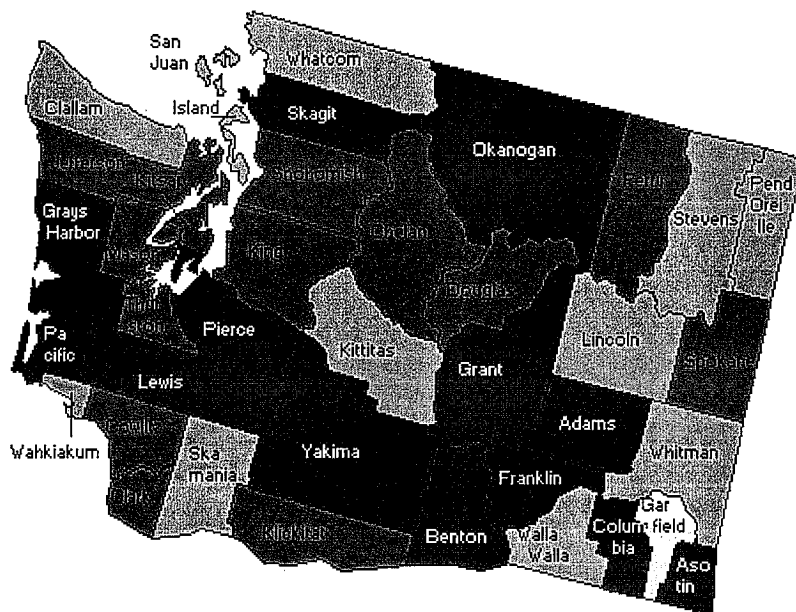


Figure 1. Teen Pregnancy Rates per 1,000 girls, 15-19, WA Counties, 1999.

In response to the high number of teen parents, many career and technical education groups, in partnership with public schools, have developed parenting curriculum for the teen parents enrolled in their schools. This was an effort to increase parenting skills and promote academic success throughout other content areas and life. Childcare centers in public school settings were also becoming increasingly common, in hopes of promoting parenting skills, aiding teen parents in staying enrolled in school, and increasing graduation rates of teen parents. Senator Patty Murray, at a recent celebration of a local effort to help teen parents and their children, addressed the need for teen parenting programs in the public

school. Senator Murray stated the following statistics:

1. "Only one-third of teen parents graduate from high school."
2. "85 percent of teen parents come from low-income families."
3. "One in five teen mothers will become pregnant again before they turn 20."
4. "Many need help breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect (2004)."

The Senator went on to say,

I saw the difference that was made for many young families. It helped them get started on the right foot, and that's why we're here today- to help teen parents get the support they need to build a better life.... To make a difference one parent- and one teenager- at a time (2004).

Background for the Project

Although the rates of teen pregnancy have decreased in recent years, the United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy throughout the western industrialized world (Pregnancy Information.Net, 2007). Yakima County was among the highest in the state (Teen Pregnancy.Org, 1999). Teen parents faced hurdles such as discrimination in school, being less likely to graduate high school, and loss of educational opportunities (Help On Teen Parenting, 2007). The children of teen mothers also faced many challenges consisting of compromised prenatal care, lower birth weight and more medical problems, a higher likelihood to be exposed to abuse and neglect, and more (Help On Teen Parenting, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Due to the growing number of teen parents in the public school system, implementing comprehensive sexual education was eminent, as well as offering childcare and parenting curriculum. School district and government officials needed to examine the statistics and evaluate the current sexual education curriculum, with a goal of lowering teen pregnancy. If school districts refused to adapt for this new subset of students, communities at large faced a large number of students who failed to graduate high school, thus not fulfilling their role as productive members of society. Failing to support this growing number of teen parents in the mainstream public school system was also illegal and schools faced lawsuits. Another possible problem that developed from a lack of parental

education and childcare for teen parents was a following generation of teenagers who were unprepared for the challenges they faced academically and in the real world.

Purpose of the Project

Despite the effort of Yakima public high schools, the number of teen pregnancies and repeat pregnancies continued to grow at Davis High School and Stanton Academy. The researcher determined that there was a need for teens to have access to medically accurate sexual education. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the teen parents who have children enrolled in one of the two public school childcare centers in Yakima, WA and the GRADS (Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role) Programs, and their access to sexual education before becoming pregnant. Additionally, the author wanted to determine if there was a relationship between English as a Second Language (ESL) students and migrant students who become pregnant as teens in Yakima and receiving sexual education

Delimitations

The study was conducted at Davis High School and Stanton Academy Alternative Program in Yakima, Washington. The participants were ninth through twelfth grade students enrolled in the GRADS programs and who have a child in the childcare center at one of the two locations during the 2006-2007 school year. The researcher was the Davis High School Cooperative Child Care Center

Director/ Family and Consumer Sciences teacher who was responsible for teaching the teens parenting program, or the GRADS curriculum.

Assumptions

The assumption of the research was that the teen parents involved in the study were a convenient sample that reflected the population of Davis High School and Stanton Academy. The researcher also assumed that all students who were enrolled in Washington public schools received abstinence-only sexual education, and those who were not enrolled in Washington public schools did not receive any abstinence only sexual education. Additionally, the researcher assumed that the educators teaching sexual education in the Washington public school system were competent and taught only what the state mandated.

Hypothesis

The teen parents of Yakima public High Schools GRADS programs had limited access to the proper sexual education in school or in their homes. There was a relationship between the teen parents and type of sexual education they received. Additionally, English as a Second Language (ESL) students and migrant students specifically showed a relationship in becoming a parent at a young age and not receiving proper sexual education.

Significance of the Project

Society, school systems, communities, and the nation suffered consequences when students were unable to complete high school. The cost to our

nation in government assistance programs for teen parents was significant and reached over seven billion dollars annually (Family First Aid, 2004). Preventing the problem was the key instead of treating the symptoms of it. Among the many social and economical reasons why student drop out of high school was teen pregnancy. By providing teens with medically accurate information about sexuality and pregnancy prevention, the public school system was aiding them in their goals to finish high school and become productive members of society. Those students who already have children needed to be provided with quality daycare for their children, as well as parenting curriculum that promoted life and academic skills that helped them in school and the job force.

Procedure

With the permission of the principal's of both Davis High School and Yakima School District, given December 4, 2007, the researcher distributed a survey to the teen parents enrolled in the childcare center and GRADS programs at both schools. The survey given to the teen parents in December 2007 was contained in the Appendix. The survey was reviewed, refined, and approved by multiple Family and Consumer Science Educators throughout the state of Washington in November 2007. The research collected data about the teen parent regarding the type and amount of sexual education each teen parent received, and whether the students felt that their pregnancy could have been postponed by receiving medically accurate information about pregnancy prevention. The

researcher also collected information about teen parents who received public assistance, what grade they entered the Washington public schools, and if they were an ESL or migrant student. Additionally, the students were asked whether they felt the GRADS program they were involved in helped them be a better parent and pursue their future goals.

Acronyms

AIDS. Auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ELL. English Language Learner

ESL. English as a Second Language

GRADS. Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role.

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

TANF. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The debate on sexual education was an ongoing one. As early as the 1960's conservative groups tried to ban sexual education in the public school, stating reasons such as sexual education resulted in an increase in sexual thoughts and acts among teens (Pardini, 2003). Despite their efforts, by 1983, human growth and development courses included information about conception and responsibility in sexual decision making became the norm, largely due to the new threat of AIDS (Auto-Immune Deficiency Disorder) that panicked many in the 1980's. Religious groups fired back with a new tactic for controlling sexual education, which was to control how it was taught (Pardini, 2003). The results of this Christian crusade was abstinence-only education.

Teen Parenting Statistics

Although efforts were being made to reduce the number of teen parents and their strain on the economy, the numbers were far from perfect. Statistics projected that "every 6 seconds another adolescent gives birth" (Hofstra, 2006). In 2000, the United States was reported to have 821,000 which was equivalent to about 84 pregnancies per 1000 people (Pregnancy Information.Net, 2007). Compare that with Yakima's shockingly high statistics of pregnancy that were estimated to reach up to 125.8 pregnancies per 1000 teens (Teen Pregnancy.org).

Even more shocking, over 405,000 teens in the United States will have abortions this year (Mary's Shelter, 2007). Ninety-five percent of these births and abortions were the result of unintended pregnancies (Help On Teen Parenting, 2007). The United States and Yakima in particular, had a serious problem when it came to teen pregnancy. Additionally, one in four of parenting teens had a second child within two years (Help On Teen Parenting, 2007).

Teen mothers were more likely not to finish high school. The United States estimated that over 80 percent of teen parents either felt or chose that they needed to drop out of high school (Pesic, 2007). Additionally, it was reported that about 80 percent of teen mothers ended up on welfare or government assistance (Pregnancy Information.Net, 2007). By dropping out of high school parents were lacking the academic skills and diploma they needed to get decent paying job, as well as the life skills to make them the best parent they can be. Additionally, only 1.5% of teen parents have a college degree by age 30 (Family First Aid, 2004). There were also health risks to the pregnant teens themselves including anemia, premature deliveries, higher blood pressure, and even death. (Pesic, 2007). A majority of these ailments resulted because teen mothers were immature in their physical development and many received little to no pre-natal care (Pesic, 2007).

The statistics for children of teen parents were also very bleak. Children born to teen mothers were automatically at a disadvantage. Children of teen mothers have lower birth rates, were more likely to do poorly in school

themselves, and have a greater risk of experiencing abuse or neglect. (Pregnancy Information. Net, 2007). Interventions for pregnant teens and their children significantly improved the quality of life for these individuals, as well as took the strain off our government assistance programs. These programs resulted in better attendance for medical visits, improved birth outcomes among children of teen parents, higher graduation rates, and better parenting skills (New Mexico Department of Health, 2002).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), otherwise known as welfare, provided temporary assistance for families who needed cash assistance, childcare, employment related services, or other services to help families and individuals become self-sufficient. Teen parents qualified for TANF as long as they were enrolled full-time in school. Statistically, half of all individuals who received welfare were teen parents (Sangalang, 2006). Research also showed that teen parents were more likely to receive welfare benefits over time (Sangalang, 2006).

Because of the shocking statistics about teen parents and their offspring, the United States needed to make more of an effort to prevent pregnancy, provide care for pregnant teens, and offer support and education to parenting teens. Teens needed to be informed about the benefits of abstaining from sex, but also needed information about pregnancy prevention if they chose not to abstain.

Abstinence Only Education vs. Comprehensive Sexual Education

In 2003, President Bush increased the public sexual education funding to \$135 million a year for schools who taught abstinence-only sexual education (Pardini, 2003). This large amount of money, a proverbial dangling carrot in front of public school's face, lead people to believe that abstinence only sexual education programs were credible. Funding for abstinence only education was estimated at more than \$1.5 billion in state and federal monies, that were used to support a program that was not proven to have its desired outcomes (Advocates for Youth, 2007). In fact, those abstinence-only programs that insinuated that sex before marriage may lead to mental illness and tried to shame or guilt students into remaining abstinent did not prevent pregnancy any more that comprehensive sexual education programs. Comprehensive sexual education were programs where both abstinence and contraception were stressed, and they have been shown to reduce the frequency of sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners, and increase contraceptive use (Advocates for Youth, 2007). "It is a great cause of concern...The president is keeping a campaign promise without regard for public health" (Pardini 2003).

There was in fact no Federal policy on what type of sexual education was taught in public school and control of this issue was supposed to remain local (Pardini, 2003). But with the large amount of money the President was willing to throw into an ineffective program, it was hard for school districts, especially those

who needed the money to stay alive, to turn away from the abstinence-only funding. Abstinence was the first choice when it comes to teen sexual activity, but it was not the only choice, as was shown in the high numbers of reported teen sexual activity. Experts estimated that over half of teens in the United States were sexually active (Advocates for Youth, 2007). By age 20, 75 percent of Americans have engaged in sexual intercourse outside of marriage (Advocates for Youth, 2007). Some abstinence-only programs which have been implemented into many schools across the country teach falsehoods such as, "Women who have abortions are more prone to suicide," and "Pregnancy can result from touching another person's genitals" (Advocates for Youth, 2007). These programs aimed to scare students into remaining abstinent. Students who received false information from their educators about sex cannot be expected to make informed and smart sexual decisions. Students were entitled to medically correct health information on the positives and negatives of contraceptives as a means to prevent pregnancy.

The President attributed the recent decline in teen pregnancy to the effects of abstinence-only education. One possible explanation for the recent decline was the increase in abortions, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2. "What the abstinence-only programs are attempting to do is put the most absurd kind of Band-Aid on this huge problem" (Pardini, 2003). Abstinence programs, which failed to equip teens with the necessary pregnancy prevention plans and information to make complex decisions, resulted in an increase of abortions (Pardini, 2003).

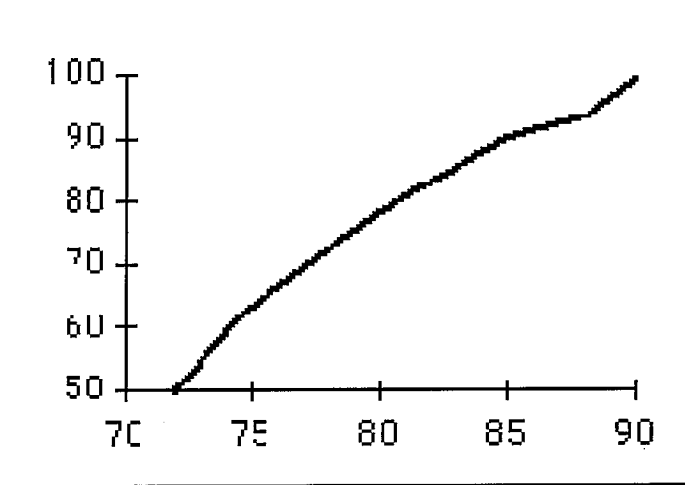


Figure 2. Pregnancies per 1,000 Teenage Girls, 2007

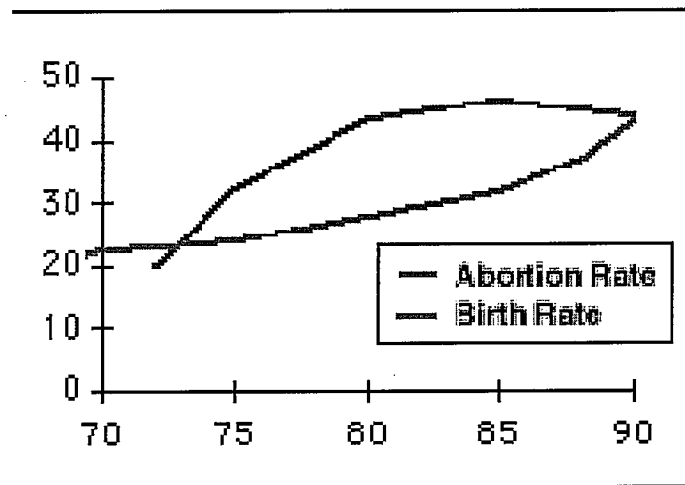


Figure 3. Abortions/Births per 1,000 Teenage Girls, 2007.

Despite the decline in teen pregnancy, there was still a call from teens for medically accurate information about pregnancy prevention from adults they trust. Over half of teens in the United States were sexually active and it was estimated that between 800,000 and 900,000 teens under the age of 19 became pregnant every year in the United States (Pardini, 2003). When wise sexual decision making was taught from early grade levels, age-appropriately, it was shown to increase abstinence in teens, as well as reduced the amount of unwanted pregnancies, which was about 95% of teen pregnancies (Help On Teen Parenting, 2007). The general public, who paid taxes to fund sexual education in schools, also disagreed with abstinence-only programs. Studies showed that 81 percent of the general public and over 65 percent of parents believed that abstinence should be encouraged, but students should also be provided with information on pregnancy prevention (Pardini, 2003). In another study of voters polled recently, three out of four respondents supported comprehensive sexual education and 71% of voters want students to know where they can obtain forms of birth control (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

Teen Parents and the Law

From as long ago as public schools have been enrolling students, there has been a stigma about being a teen parent. Females who became pregnant while still enrolled in school were shipped off to alternative programs and isolated from their peers by way of alternative schools. They were even suspended or expelled

from schools because of their special needs. Teen fathers, on the other hand, because they showed no signs of pregnancy, were allowed to remain in their mainstream classrooms. "It is as if girls who become pregnant have failed...the systems in place ignore them and render them invisible" (California Women's Law Center, 2002). There was a common misconception that teen pregnancy was contagious, or that if young students saw a teen mother with her baby, they too would want to become a parent. The researcher felt that it was in fact the opposite; when students see a teen parent, and how hard it was to do, it deterred students from wanting to have a baby young. Teen parents can be positive role models, despite public opinion. The issue of opinion of teen pregnancy aside, the law no longer allowed school districts to isolate their teen mothers, unless the girls chose to enter a special program or school voluntarily to complete their education.

Title IX was the law enacted in 1972 that protected pregnant teens and teen mothers from discrimination in the school or classroom. The also guaranteed that, regardless of gender, all teen parents have the same rights in schools which receive public funds (Hayhurst, 2006). Title IX went on to state that pregnant and parenting teens were allowed an appropriate leave of absence for pregnancy, child birth and recovery, as well as being excused from school for legitimate medical appointments for themselves or their child. Teen parents also expected that they had the educational opportunities that their peers do, that they could attend and

participate in all school activities, clubs, and sports, providing it did not affect their health or the health of their child, as well as that teen parents could expect confidentiality regarding all pregnancy issues (Hayhurst, 2006). By denying students the right to participate in honors classes or be involved in school activities, schools were handicapping their resumes and chances of getting into college. Schools must, ethically and legally, help teen parents fulfill their educational, social, and economic potential by supporting them and aiding them in bridging the gap between themselves and their counterparts. By interfering or discouraging pregnant and teen parents, public school staff was denying them the right to obtain life and academic skills that will enhance their future economic status and social-well-being, as shown in Figure 4.

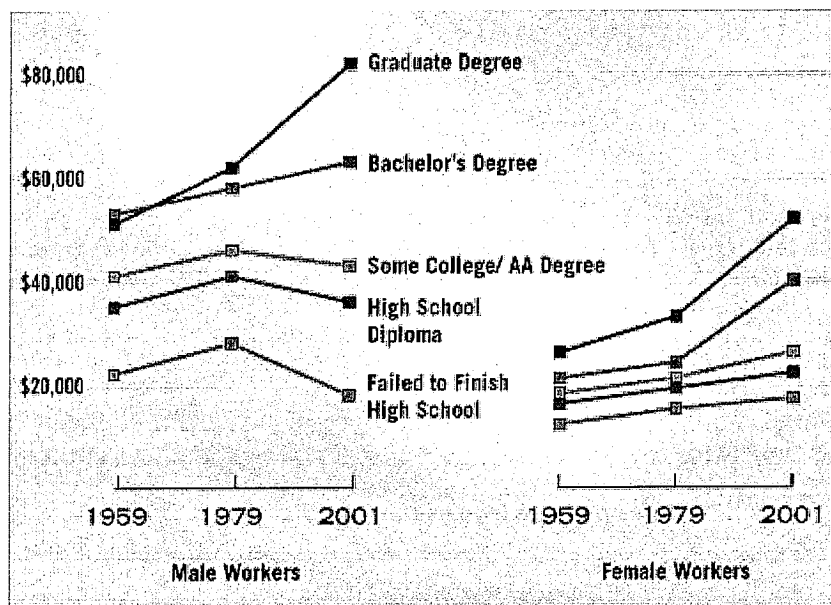


Figure 4. Earnings Depend Increasingly on Education Attainment: Earnings of Prime-Age (30-59) Workers in 2001 Dollars, 2006.

More recently, another law was enacted that helped to support the large number of teen parents in our public schools. In 2001, President Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, which worked to “close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their more advantaged peers.” (U.S. Department of Education) This law required schools to be “meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities...” (Ed.Gov, 2004). Another service schools were to focus on was “coordinating services under all parts of this title with each other, with other educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with other agencies providing services to youth, children, and families” (Ed.Gov, 2004). Although the researcher had issues with many aspects of NCLB, it was through this act more support and support services have been provided to teen parents in the public schools. Requiring schools to treat pregnant teens and teen parents with the same educational opportunity presented to all students was one thing, but making sure that it was actually happening was quite another. Unfortunately, many educators discouraged programs that support pregnant and parenting teens, and not all staff were trained in how to support these students academically (Hayhurst, 2006). School boards needed to develop policies and protocol to be in compliance with the laws regarding teen pregnancy, to protect themselves and provide pregnant and teen parents with support at a time in their lives when they needed it the most.

On the other hand, there were many schools throughout the United States that have recognized not just the rights of teen parents, but what this large population of students needs. These schools offered programs that helped teen parents develop basic and higher thinking parenting skills, recognize their own rights as teen parents and understand the legal practices that accompany them, and encourage a willingness to utilize community resources to meet their needs (Hofstra, 2006). These schools understood that stopping the cycle of teen pregnancy and poverty, shown in Figure 2, was beneficial to society at large. Schools have a responsibility to their students to encourage pregnant teens to flourish in school by eliminating discriminatory practices in schools and providing support to ensure that these students make a better life for themselves and their children.

Most recently in the battle between abstinence-only sexual education and comprehensive sexual education, an act was passed that required schools to adopt an all or nothing policy. This act stated that Washington public schools must have taught comprehensive sexual education or have had no sexual education program at all (Teen Pregnancy.org, 1999). The researcher looked forward to see the effect, if any, this new policy had on Washington teen pregnancy rates.

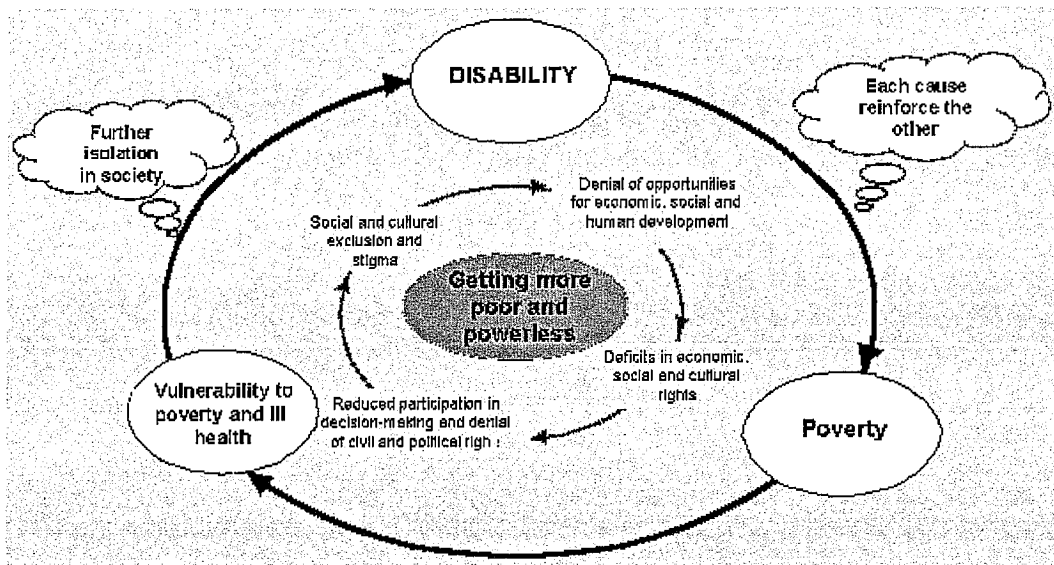


Figure 5. Cycle of Poverty, 2001.

The GRADS Program

Gradating from high school was essentially a way of breaking the cycle of poverty. Sadly, over 59 percent of teen mothers did not graduate from high school, and only 1.5 percent completed college (Ducker, 2007). Even those teen mothers from privileged backgrounds find it more difficult to remain out of poverty. "The cycle of poverty, early childbearing, and lack of education, is exacerbated by the lack of any coherent strategy to address these issues" (California Women's Law Center, 2002). Schools, and their staff, must be more proactive in addressing the needs of pregnant and parenting teens, who already have many obstacles against them.

The future looked even bleaker for the children of teen parents. These children were more likely to repeat a grade in school and less likely to complete high school themselves. They were also subjected to a likelihood of living in poverty, and were more likely to become teen parents themselves (Ducker, 2007). Statistically, sons of teenage mothers were more likely to end up in prison and daughters of teen mothers have a greater chance of becoming teen mothers themselves (Pregnancy Information.Net, 2007). Further more, nearly one in five teen mothers got pregnant again before they turned twenty (Mary's Shelter, 2007). Interventions in the public school systems were vital to teach student how to provide a better life for themselves and their child.

Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Skills Programs were a specific intervention that some public schools adopted. This program taught parenting skills, improved use of academic strategies, encouraged support services for pregnant and parenting teens, and provided full-day childcare for teen parents. These programs empowered teen parents in parenting skills, job skills, and seeking farther education (Boyle, 2007). These programs were also specifically designed to decrease prolonged use of the welfare system for teen parents (Sangalang, 2006).

Eligibility for a program such as GRADS was that the teen parent must be enrolled full time in school, attend the parenting class, and have a desire to complete high school. Parents and their children must be present in daycare and parenting class a certain number of days every month or they will be removed from the program. This helped reduce the higher number of absences teen parents usually acquire, and thus helped them pass their classes.

In addition to being enrolled in a parenting class, teen parents were required to work for a certain amount of time in the day care each day. Parenting was difficult under the best of circumstances, and because teen parents often were trapped in cycles of poverty and violence, it became the school's responsibility to model a healthy and nurturing environment for students to raise their children in (The Infant Welfare Society of Evanston). Progress of parenting practices and knowledge were measured by pre- and post-test instruments, as well as

observations done in the childcare center (Educational Programs that Work, 1995). Programs such as GRADS decreased repeat pregnancies, increased graduation rates, and overall were responsible for happier and healthier teen parents and their children.

The school and community were encouraged to see more programs that support teen parents being incorporated into public education settings. One such program, known as mentoring, extends with students through their first year of secondary education or other training. In such a program, volunteers from the community help the teen parents with college or training selection, the application process, and financial planning. Workshops that teach interview skills and community connections were also available for the teen parents. Other subjects included in the curriculum included money management, nutrition, meal planning and family focus (Chaney, 2007). A program such as this was the hope for a future of teen parents who go on to be productive and contributing members of society.

Non-Mainstream Students

Students who were English Language Learners (ELL) were in an even more difficult situation when dealing with sexual education. According to the law, ELL's were entitled to have sexual education information available to them on an equal basis (Belcher, 2003). But all too often these students were not getting what they were entitled to, which was auxiliary aids, modified curriculum and

materials, as well as instruction in alternate formats. Under the strict policies the government has placed on schools regarding sexual education, many ELL's were not receiving the information they needed to become informed and make their own decision about their sexuality. In addition, migrant students or those who arrived late in their education into the public schools in the United States failed to get the basic human development curriculum that was so necessary for choosing life skills such as abstaining from sexual intercourse or choosing a pregnancy prevention plan. This reason, among many, contributed to the high number of minority students becoming teen parents in public schools.

We're waging an uphill battle...In a class of 28, even if two students are putting themselves at risk, shouldn't I be working with those kids too?

When we have kids with severe learning disabilities in class, we don't say, "Too bad for you. I'm just dealing with the other kids." As teachers we have a responsibility to deal with everyone (Pardini, 2003).

Another group of students to consider when debating the issue of sex before marriage education were gay and lesbian students. The definition of abstinence-only education as "having the exclusive purpose of teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity until marriage" (Advocates for Youth, 2007). Because this growing population of people in our country cannot legally be joined in marriage, abstinence-only education was in fact discriminating against them (Advocates for Youth, 2007).

Students, even in the most open settings, find talking and asking for information about safer sex to be extremely difficult. Further isolating non-mainstream students in our public schools was unfair and unethical. Dr. Terry Bergeson stated “consider that our states population, especially our population of young children, is becoming more multi-cultural and multi-lingual, and will increase in it’s diversity in the future” (Bergeson 2002). The Superintendent of Public Instruction said, “We must implement fair and appropriate alternates for kids with disabilities, second language learners, and kids who have skills but need a different way to show us” (Bergeson, 2005).

Summary

Research has shown that comprehensive sexual education programs that teach abstinence as a first option, but also include information on sexual responsibility and pregnancy prevention, delayed the onset of sexual activity. Furthermore, students who have had comprehensive sexual education were more likely to use contraception when they do become sexual active (Belcher, 2003). Dr. Terry Bergeson summarized this issue best when she said,

We must eliminate the achievement gap and not just between advantaged and disadvantaged kids, but between all of our kids, all the students they compete with in the rest of our diverse world. . . We must ask ourselves: What will be the payoff tomorrow if we act wisely today? What will be the quality of life in Washington sate? What is the dream? (Bergeson, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The state of Washington, and the Yakima area specifically, were witnessing high rates of teenage pregnancy. The question was raised of whether or not the current sexual education curriculum was effective or if there was a need for change. Additionally, the researcher was curious about the quality, type, and amount of pregnancy prevention being offered to ESL and migrant students in the Yakima School District.

Methodology

The research design utilized in this study was the self-report. This design involved obtaining information by questionnaire from teen parents enrolled in the Yakima High School GRADS program and who had a child in one of the childcare centers at Davis or Stanton Academy. Research undertaken sought to determine a relationship between the amount and type of pregnancy prevention and the parenting situation of Yakima's Public School teen parents received in the school setting and in the home.

Participants

The method used to survey individuals was a convenience sample. The sample that was surveyed were all twenty-four students enrolled in Davis High School and Stanton Alternative Programs GRADS program during December

2007. The students were grades 9-12, male and female, at multiple academic levels. There were four ESL and three migrant students who participated in the study. Jack Irion of the Yakima public schools approved the survey. The childcare Director/ Family and Consumer Sciences Education GRADS teacher at Davis and Stanton, as well as other teachers throughout the state played a part in this study.

Instruments

The instrument used to gather necessary data was a questionnaire shown in the appendix, created by the researcher. The questionnaire reduced the chance of error by having five Family and Consumer Sciences educators/GRADS teachers across Washington review the survey, and then adapted it according to their suggestions. Jack Irion of the Yakima Public Schools reviewed and approved the questionnaire. A final copy of the survey was submitted and filed at Yakima School District in December 2007.

The survey consisted of demographic questions that inquired about the age, grade, ethnicity, and primary language of the pregnant and parenting teens. The researcher was seeking to find commonalities between different demographic groups that participated in this study. The researcher also inquired through the survey method about the financial assistance that each pregnant or parenting teen was receiving from the government in order to determine if the members participating in this study contributed to the financial strain of the economy that many young parents do. Another aspect of the survey that the researcher was

interested in was the pregnant and parenting teen's opinions on abstinence-only sexual education, whether or not they felt they were educated well-enough about pregnancy prevention in public school or at home, and if they thought more information on pregnancy should have been available to them. Opinions were also sought about if the students felt more information could have prevented their situations as pregnant or parenting teens. The researcher gathered this information to advocate for a change in the sexual education curriculum in the Yakima School District from abstinence-only to comprehensive sexual education, as well as improve instruction and curriculum in the teen parenting class at Davis High School.

Design

The research design utilized in this study was self-report. The survey method compromised the validity because the questions asked were opinion questions. The reliability of the instrument was improved by asking close-ended questions in order to minimize grey areas. The validity was effected by students taking the survey not understanding questions, or leaving them blank. Language barriers and treatment interactions also caused a skew in accurate results. Migrant and ESL students who need assistance were read the survey in their first language by a non-biased translator. The validity of this study was also effected by the continual dropout and poor attendance of a few of the teen parents enrolled in the GRADS program.

Procedure

The researcher conducted a survey method study. The questionnaire was produced by the researcher, then reviewed and approved by five Family and Consumer Sciences teachers throughout the state of Washington in November 2007. Jack Irion of the Yakima Public Schools reviewed and approved the survey on December 4, 2007. Data were collected in the parent rooms at both Davis High School and Stanton Academy child care centers. The teen parents were given a survey by their teachers to complete and return to the teacher before leaving the childcare center, as shown in Appendix A. A non-biased translator was available to those ESL/migrant students who need translations. The survey was collected by the researcher. The participants and their answers were kept anonymous.

Treatment of the Data

The information was gathered and plotted using a survey created by the research and a system of graphs from the program Excel, specific to the project. The results were summarized. Results from the study were reported to Yakima School District. Results from the study were reported to Yakima School District. The information helped the researcher advocate for a change in the sexual education curriculum.

Summary

A survey method was used in this study to research a relationship between teen parents enrolled in the GRADS program and who had a child in the childcare

center at one of the public childcare programs in Yakima, WA and the amount and type of pregnancy prevention they received. The data collected intended to reveal the relationship, if any, between abstinence-only education and teen pregnancy rates in Yakima High Schools.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

Introduction

The focus of this study was the increase of teen pregnancies in the Yakima Valley and the abstinence-only sexual education that was being taught at the time the researcher conducted the survey. The focus also encompassed the sexual education switching from abstinence-only to comprehensive in schools, and the need for these materials to be conducive to the education of the students in order to lower teen pregnancy rates among this population in crisis.

Description of the Environment

The study took place in Yakima, Washington. Surveys were given to a convenient sample of pregnant and parenting teens in the Yakima public school system. The individuals were asked to complete the surveys in the parenting room at the Davis High School Cooperative Child Care Center and the Stanton childcare center, and return them to the researcher the same day. A non-biased translator was available to those students who asked for additional translation. The parameters of the study took place in only a small population of the pregnant and parenting teens in the Yakima Valley. The study was completed to get a basic sense of what the students involved in the Parenting programs in the Yakima School District felt about abstinence-only verses comprehensive sexual education,

and the affects of school sexual education on their current pregnant or parenting situation.

Hypothesis/Research Question

The findings have shown a desire for more effective sexual education then abstinence-only, which was being taught when the teens in this study went through the program and when the researcher conducted this study. Abstinence-only was no longer an effective form of sexual education and teen parents themselves were calling for a more comprehensive approach to pregnancy prevention.

Results of Study

The tables verified the desire of the selected population for a change and adaptation of the abstinence-only sexual education program. A majority of the participants felt that factual information about birth control options should be available to students in the public school. Conversely, the data also revealed that only a small percentage of the selected population felt that a change in sexual education may have prevented their current pregnant or parenting teen situation. The researcher was surprised to find a large percentage of the group had received information about pregnancy prevention in a classroom setting and therefore had not participated in a true abstinence-only program. Many participants also received information about pregnancy prevention in their homes, which is contradictory to past data. Additionally, only a very small percentage of

ESL/migrant students felt that being ESL or a migrant student had an effect on the pregnancy prevention information they received. One hundred percent of the students involved in a Yakima School District parenting program felt that the program empowered them to get a better education, become a better parent, and pursue their future goals. Results were shown in graphs.

Results of the Study

The first issues that the researcher focused on were the sexual education the teen parents received throughout their public education and in their homes. The researcher wanted to see if there was a relationship between the teens becoming pregnant at a young age and the amount and type of sexual education they received. The results are shown in Figure 6.

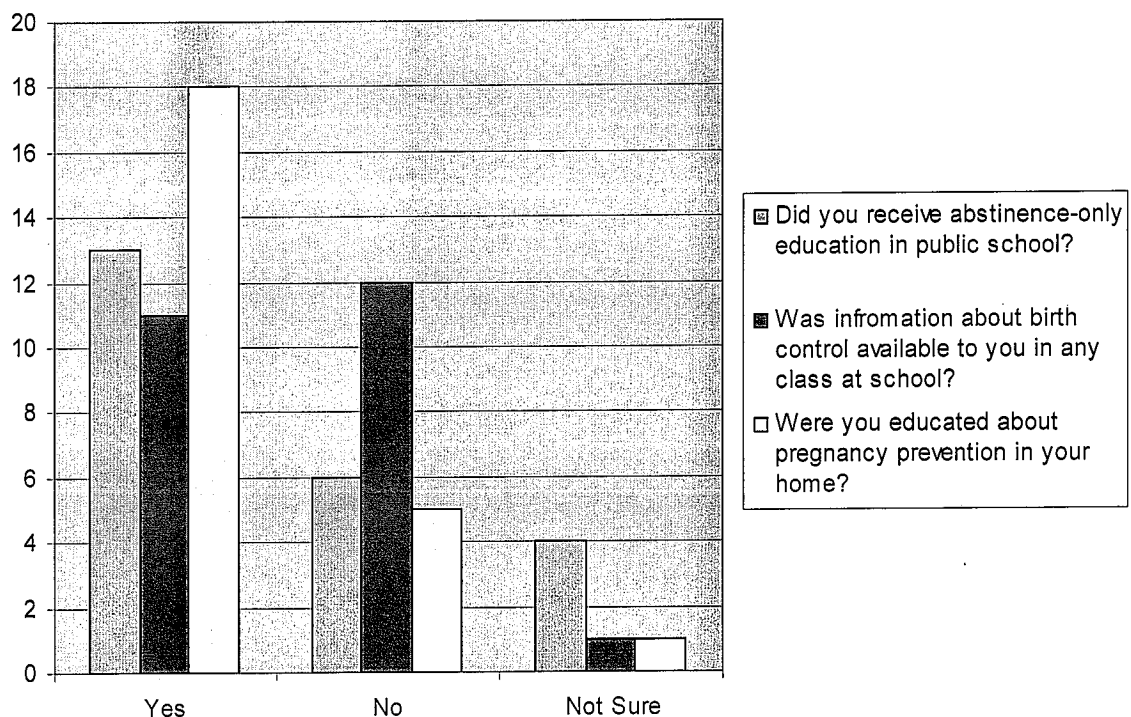


Figure 6. Yakima Pregnant and Parenting Teens Respond to Sexual Education Survey, 2008.

The next topics the researcher inquired about regarded teen parents' opinions about their current parenting situation and whether or not they felt that situation could have been prevented by more information about pregnancy prevention. The researcher also questioned the teen parents on whether they felt the teen program they were involved in was beneficial to them as students, parents, and individuals. The results are shown in Figure 7.

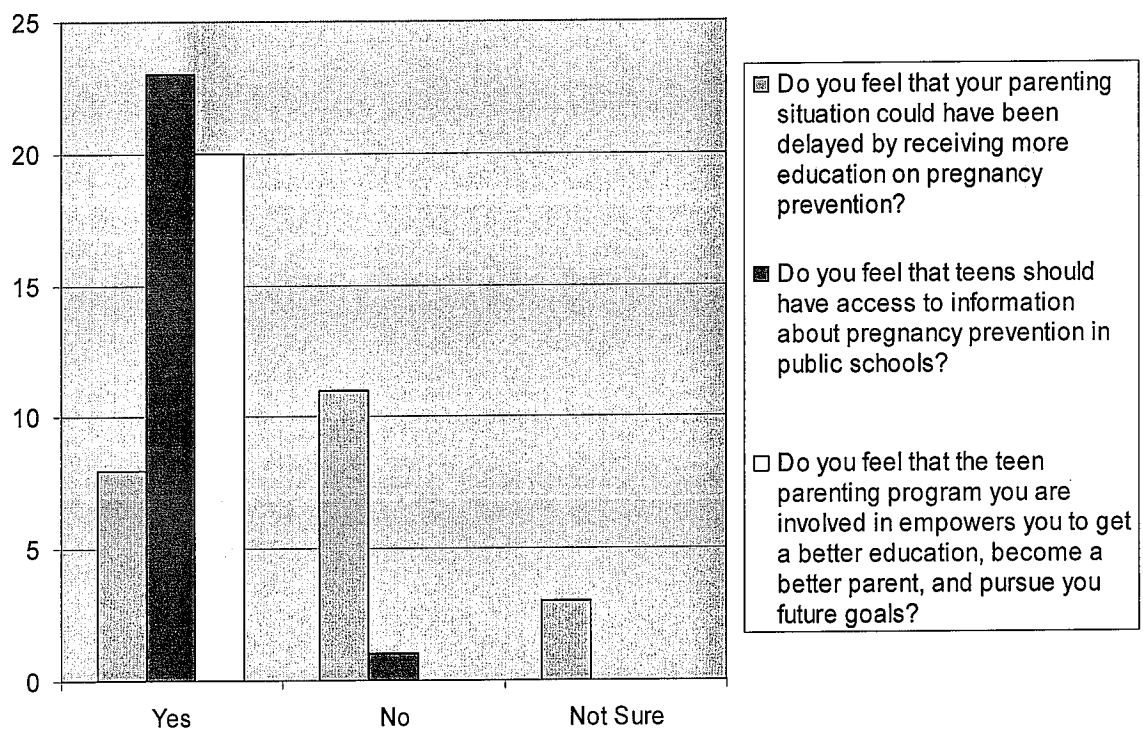


Figure 7. Opinions of Pregnant and Parenting Teens of Yakima on Pregnancy Prevention in the Public School Setting, 2008

The final information the researcher reported on from the survey regarded non-traditional teen parents, or those who were ESL or migrant students. The research questions whether sexual education in public schools was provided to them in a way that they was understandable and conducive to their education on pregnancy prevention. The results are shown in Figure 8.

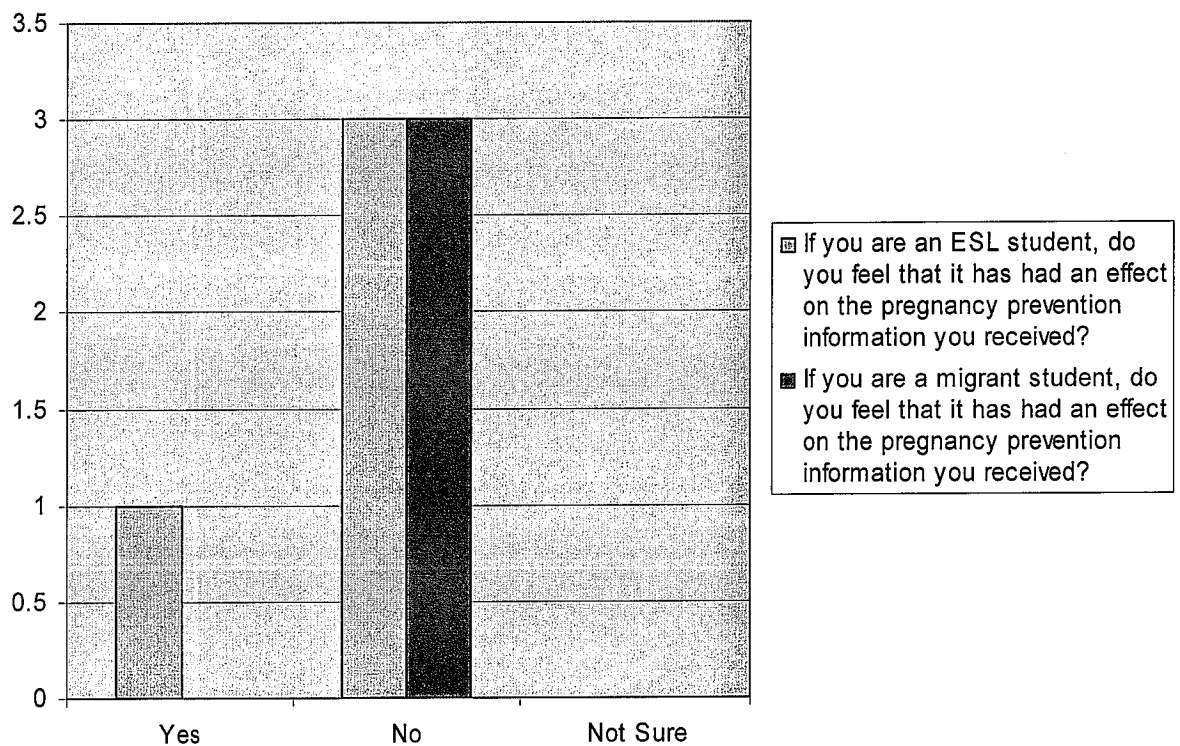


Figure 8. Non-Traditional Pregnant and Parenting Teens Weigh in on Pregnancy Prevention Programs of the Yakima Public Schools, 2008

Findings

The results of the study revealed that the selected population felt that curriculum and materials were not available to them in a fashion that was conducive to them learning, and that more information should be available to all teens in the public school system about birth control. The low number of students who felt that more information on pregnancy prevention could have prevented their parenting situation contradicts how they felt about information being available to them. From this information, the researcher sadly concluded that the majority of the students in this study did not have an unintended pregnancy. This showed the researcher that many of these students know how to prevent pregnancy; they just didn't do it or chose not to, and thus contradicts the hypothesis.

Discussion

Although the President felt that sexual education was something that should be discussed in the home, there is still a percentage of students who do not receive any or adequate information at home about pregnancy prevention. This meant that students had a need for medically accurate information about sex in the public school setting. According to a new poll done by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, less than seven percent of individuals in America do not want a comprehensive sexual education program taught in public schools. Over 76 percent of these individuals polled wanted

topics covered such as how babies are made, birth control, and sexual transmitted infection prevention (NPR, 2004). Other topics such as oral sex and homosexuality were still viewed as controversial within the group surveyed (NPR, 2004).

Summary

The hypothesis was that the pregnant and parenting teens at Davis High School did not feel that the current system of sexual education was not effective for preventing teen pregnancy in the Yakima Valley. The survey of the conveniently chosen population showed that the students desire a change in abstinence-only education to comprehensive sexual education for all teens.

Although the government of the United States would like to believe that comprehensive sexual education was not needed, the students of the survey called for more medical accurately information regarding pregnancy prevention. This type of sexual education has been proven to reduce pregnancy rates, as well as abortion rates, and was needed to aid the population of pregnant and teen parents in the Yakima School District. The reality was that young students were becoming sexually active at younger ages and needed information to make informed decisions that can potentially impact the rest of their lives.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

In recent years, sexual education in the United States has been one that stressed only abstinence and failed to give students medical accurate information to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies. This may or may not have attributed to the increased number of teen pregnancies in the Yakima Public Schools. According to the results of this study, the students of Davis High School were calling for a more comprehensive approach to sexual education which would encompass abstinence as the only one 100 percent effective pregnancy prevention tool, but would also included information on birth control, sexual development, reproductive health, intimacy, body image, and sexual responsibility.

Conclusions

The project consisted of a conveniently chosen sample of pregnant and parenting teens at Davis High School and Stanton Academy in Yakima, WA. The students were asked a series of questions regarding their opinions on the current system of sexual education and pregnancy prevention. The need for change was proven by the responses of the pregnant and parenting teens enrolled in the Yakima Schools District, as well as the climbing number of teen pregnancy static throughout the Yakima Valley. The public school system has been determined to

be the best place for teens to receive up to date, medically accurate information of pregnancy prevention.

Recommendation

The culminating research resoundingly supports the call for comprehensive sexual education in the public school setting. The graphs and chart researched and created in this research project support the request of the polled students in the Yakima School District for a change in the current sexual education program. The overall outlook for sexual education as a whole would include the current teachings of abstinence as the only 100 percent effect form of pregnancy prevention, but would also include medically accurate information on health, reproduction, pregnancy prevention and responsible sexual decision making.

Sexual education of the future needs to be more than the current system of telling students to abstain from sexual intercourse. Teens are becoming sexual active at younger and younger ages, and because pregnancy prevention is not being taught in the home to all students, it needed to be taught as part of a comprehensive sexual education program in the public school. Legislature, school boards, community members, teachers and parents have a duty to provide medically accurate information to students about pregnancy prevention and responsible sexual decision making, in order to prevent repeat pregnancies for the students polled in this survey, as well as the rest of the students in the public

schools. Decision makers need to separate value and moral issues from the effectiveness of sexual education, and provide a population in crisis with the information they need to become happy, healthy, contributing members of society.

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TEEN PARENT SURVEY

Yes No Not Sure

Yes No Not Sure

Explanation:

Explanation:

Explanation:

Yes No Not sure

Explanation:

Explanation:

Demographics:

Age: _____ Grade _____ Sex: _____

Are you a pregnant teen? _____ Are you a teen parent? _____

Are you currently receiving government assistance for any of the following?

Housing? Yes No Not sure

Childcare? Yes No Not sure

Additional Supplies (WIC, food stamps)? Yes No Not sure

What age did you enter Washington public schools? _____

What grade did you enter Washington public schools? _____

What language is spoken most in your home? _____

Are you an ESL (English as a second language) student? _____

Is yes, do you feel that being an ESL student had an effect on the pregnancy prevention education you received? Yes No Not sure

Explanation:

Are you a migrant student? (Does your family long leave for a period of time each year and travel somewhere else?) _____

Is yes, do you feel that being a migrant student had an effect on the pregnancy prevention education you received? Yes No Not sure

Explanation:

Is there anything else about pregnancy prevention information in schools that you would like your teacher to know?