

INTRODUCTION

If current trends in adolescent pregnancy and child bearing continue, four out of ten girls who are now 14 years old will get pregnant in their teens, two in ten will give birth and three in twenty will have abortions. While overall fertility rates have fallen in the United States, the decline is less pronounced among the teenage population, particularly among teens under 15 years of age whose rate appears to have stabilized and even increased among some groups. Perhaps even more alarming than the increasing percentages of young teens bearing children is the growing proportion of teen births to single mothers. In 1985, over half (59%) of all teen births were to single mothers, and these young mothers appear less likely to marry than teen parents in the early 1970s, or to surrender their children for adoption. These two factors, a stable and in some groups increasing number of births to very young teens, and the growing numbers of births to single teen mothers, means that a larger percentage of teen parents will need help over an extended period of time if they are to lead productive lives.

Adolescent pregnancy and the consequent demands of parenting have been associated with increased dropout rates and subsequent poverty due to poor employment prospects. Policy makers and practitioners have, therefore, paid increased attention to these issues and have often tried new approaches without benefit of systematic research or evaluation of which approaches are most successful for specific populations. Policy makers have often viewed adolescent pregnancy and parenting as a single issue. However, young parents have unique and often unaddressed problems. While many young women dropout of school prior to or during pregnancy, for a large number of teen parents the negative educational consequences begin with the birth of their child.

Historically, services have focused on the pregnancy and the immediate postpartum period assuming that the baby would be adopted or that the young mother would drop out of school to care for the child. In either event, little attention was given to ensuring that these young mothers could continue their education. During the past decade, programs have begun to address the need for services into the extended postpartum period. The increased emphasis on postpartum services reflects, in part, the changing nature of adolescent childbearing. More significantly, it is a recognition of the increasing importance of education, job training and supportive services not only for the future success of the teen parent but to ensure that the children of teen parents have a good beginning in life. (Moore, et al, 1981)

It is estimated that over 800,000 of the 1.3 million children of teenage mothers are in need of child care services. It is felt, by many in the field, that the lack of appropriate, acceptable, and affordable care for the children of teen parents severely limits the educational, training and employment opportunities of these young mothers. While some adolescent parents do have child care available within their family network, it has been reported that a significant number of young parents must drop-out of school, training or work because this service is either unavailable, unacceptable, or too costly (Burt et al, 1984; Wallace, 1982; Zellman, 1981; Presser, 1980, 1979, 1977; Cartoof, 1979; Furstenberg, 1980, 1976). Thus the educational consequences of teenage pregnancy and parenting are twofold: young mothers, and to some extent young

fathers, do not gain the educational skills necessary to be self-supporting, economically productive citizens and their children often enter the educational system with economic and developmental disadvantages (Hoffreth, 1987; Campbell et al, 1986; Zuckerman et al, 1984; Kinard and Klerman, 1983; Baldwin and Cain, 1980).

Preliminary findings from several studies suggest that quality child care services delivered in a manner acceptable to and supportive of teen parents can facilitate school attendance and completion and can increase the chances of positive outcomes for young women and their children (Marx, 1987). In light of these findings, the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women has conducted a study of child care programs specifically designed to serve the needs of teen parents. Building on the prior work of the Academy for Educational Development (Cahill et al, 1987) and a recent study by the Children's Defense Fund (1987), the Wellesley study surveyed child care programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, 14 programs in three states were selected for in-depth, on-site examination. The survey and site visits were carried out during the spring and summer of 1987. Specifically, the objectives of the study were:

To identify a range of model child care services targeted specifically to teenage parents. This includes child care programs offered under the auspices of public schools, alternative schools, community agencies, including programs provided under multiple funding and service delivery auspices.

To select programs which represent each of these models and conduct an indepth examination of the components of these programs and the context within which they operate.

To disseminate the results of the study to educators and policy makers across the country in a manner that will maximize the impact of the findings.

SURVEY RESULTS

Using lists and contacts provided by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), the Public School Early Childhood Study, the National Conference of State Legislatures and state networks of pregnant and parenting teens service providers, the Wellesley study generated a mailing list of 800 individuals, state agencies and programs. A program survey instrument based on the protocol used in a prior CDF survey was used to gather basic program information. Completed surveys were received from a total of 220 programs providing child care to the children of adolescent parents. Data analysis was conducted to ascertain if there were significant differences between programs operated by school districts and non-profit agencies or between programs serving teen parents only and those serving some proportion of adult parents.

A total of 158 programs (72%) were exclusively devoted to serving teen parents. The remaining 28% served adult and teen parents, evenly divided between programs serving up to one-fourth adult parents and programs serving 50% or more non-teen parents. Responses were obtained from 38 states. States with the greatest number of responses include California (55), Pennsylvania