



## The Unique Needs of Young Fathers

Adolescent fathers have remained an understudied and underserved population.<sup>1</sup> While teen fatherhood appears to be associated with similar consequences to those observed for teen mothers,<sup>2</sup> most national programs serving low-income families focus on mothers rather than fathers.<sup>3</sup> Recently, attempts to include young fathers in services have increased, but relatively few programs for young fathers exist.<sup>4</sup>

### FAST FACTS

#### Adolescent Male Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Without responsible and proper condom use, young men face an increased risk of unintended pregnancy and STIs.<sup>5</sup>
- Most sexually experienced teenage males have used condoms, but they tend to use them inconsistently. Less than half of teenage males reported use of condoms 100% of the time they had sexual intercourse during the last year.<sup>6</sup>

***Teen males have high levels of involvement in social institutions, providing many settings to involve them in pregnancy prevention.***

- Rates of STIs are higher among young men; especially poor, minority men in their early 20s.<sup>7</sup>
- AIDS is the seventh leading cause of death among young men ages 15-24 and an estimated 600,000 American men live with HIV.<sup>7</sup>
- Most causes of adolescent male morbidity and mortality are preventable.<sup>8,9</sup>

#### Adolescent Fatherhood

- Teenage males have high levels of involvement in key social institutions, providing many settings in which to contact and involve them in pregnancy prevention efforts.<sup>5</sup>
- Despite the stereotypes, there is increasing evidence that teen fathers want to be (and are) involved with their children, though this involvement may not always include financial support.<sup>10,11</sup>
- Teen fatherhood appears to be associated with negative consequences, both for the father and child, that are similar to those observed among teen mothers.<sup>2</sup>

- These consequences include reduced educational attainment, greater financial hardship, and less stable marriage patterns for the teen parent, along with poorer health, educational, and behavioral outcomes among children born to teen parents.<sup>2,12,13,14</sup>
- Young fathers are more likely to have economic and employment challenges and are more often economically disadvantaged than adult fathers.<sup>15,16</sup>
- Young fathers face premature role transition, which causes added stress to their lives.<sup>17</sup> These young men are expected to mediate both the transition to parenthood and the tasks of adolescent development.<sup>4</sup>

#### Risk Factors

- Many studies have found a correlation between teenage fatherhood and delinquency, however, not all teen fathers are criminals and they should not be stereotyped as such.<sup>18,19</sup>
- The multiple risk factors involved include:
  - Low academic performance and early school dropout<sup>20</sup>
  - Low family income<sup>20,21</sup>
  - Antisocial behavior<sup>22</sup>
  - High arrest rates<sup>20</sup>
  - Deviant peer association<sup>21,22</sup>
  - Living in neighborhoods characterized by poverty<sup>20</sup>

#### Research Gap

- There are few research studies which look at the unique needs of teen fathers and few programs that address their needs because:
  - Early studies of teen fathers assumed they were psychologically unstable and stigmatized teen fathers.<sup>22</sup>

- There are fewer teen fathers than teen mothers.<sup>21</sup> A large percentage of fathers involved in teen pregnancies are 20 years old or older.
- Paternity is harder to determine than maternity. It is harder to reach teen fathers than teen mothers.<sup>21</sup>
- Teen fathers may be reluctant to become involved in research studies because they may fear attempts to collect child support or punishment for their involvement in the pregnancy.<sup>23</sup>

pediatricians and other health care providers can build on their established relationship as the child's provider and pay attention to the needs of the adolescent parent as well.<sup>35</sup>

### **Key Focus Areas for Young Fathers' Programs to Address**

- Financial and personal self-sufficiency<sup>36</sup>
- Gainful employment and job skills<sup>37</sup>
- Education completion<sup>37</sup>
- Effective parenting skills<sup>36</sup>
- The legal aspects of fatherhood<sup>36</sup>
- Behavioral issues<sup>36</sup>
- Delay of future unplanned pregnancies<sup>37</sup>
- Self-esteem<sup>38</sup>
- Community involvement<sup>38</sup>

### **Opportunities for Health Care Providers**

- Factors that create barriers to care among adolescent males include lower socioeconomic status,<sup>24</sup> lack of health insurance,<sup>25,26</sup> and lack of a regular source of care,<sup>27</sup> whereas factors that promote adolescent male access to care include the availability of confidential services,<sup>28,29</sup> gender of the provider,<sup>30</sup> assistance with appointment making,<sup>31,32</sup> and school-based health clinics.<sup>33</sup>
- It is essential for health care providers to offer ongoing conversation, consistent reinforcement and structured support to the adolescent parent.<sup>34</sup>
- Given that teen parents are more likely to seek health care for their children than themselves,

## **RESOURCES**

**Healthy Teen Network:** [www.healthyteennetwork.org](http://www.healthyteennetwork.org)

**The Prevention Researcher:** [www.tponline.org](http://www.tponline.org)

- Teen Fathers, 11(4), November 2004
- Resource Issue 2004: Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Teen Parents, 11(Supplement), December 2004.

**Resource Guide of Best Practices for Pregnant and Parenting Teen Programs: Teen Father Services:** [www.center-school.org/education/ppt/pptfather.htm](http://www.center-school.org/education/ppt/pptfather.htm)

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