



Teen Pregnancy: Yet Another Economic Drain

Raising a baby while finishing high school doesn't exactly seem like it would set young mothers up for financial success. Between daycare costs, diapers, doctor appointments, and various other baby-related necessities, it's easy to understand how teen moms become easily overwhelmed.

It's not just financial stress, either. I can't imagine the mental, emotional and even physical pressures young mothers must be under. They've barely crossed the threshold into adulthood themselves, and they're expected to be responsible for another person? While — cross your fingers — finishing high school and college? I'm not exactly sure how they manage to cope.

Unfortunately, a recent report by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy confirms that they may not be coping very well, at least when it comes to finishing school and subsequently securing quality employment. Granted, the frequency of teen pregnancy in the U.S. has fallen 42 percent since 1990, but according to the NCPTUP report, roughly 30 percent of females still get pregnant before their 20th birthday — the highest rate among developed nations.

Additionally, 30 percent of female high-school dropouts (38 percent and 36 percent respectively for Black and Latino girls) point to their pregnancies and/or the stresses they face as new mothers as the primary factor preventing them from finishing school. These numbers seem further exacerbated in school districts with low performance records and high dropout rates in general. Some young mothers go on to complete a GED, but roughly another third of teen moms fail to earn either a diploma or a GED, and not even 2 percent of teens who give birth before they turn 18 go on to earn a college degree before the age of 30.

Most people would agree that it is becoming increasingly harder for anyone to get a good paying job that allows them to maintain a decent quality of life without some measure of higher education. It seems that even young adults with master's degrees are having trouble securing employment

for a fair wage, let alone a high-school dropout constrained by the pressures of new parenthood. Obviously, the inability to find adequate employment has direct economic consequences for teen mothers and their children.

Apparently, college graduates earn roughly \$1 million more than high school dropouts, and children of teen mothers perform at lower academic levels and have less developed social skills upon entering kindergarten. Not exactly great prospects for successful academic and professional careers. NCPTUP suggests, however, that the ripples reach much further than young mothers' immediate families. From their recent report:

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, it is estimated that... a single high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity. Put another way, if students who dropped out of the Class of 2011 had graduated from high school, the nation's economy would likely benefit from nearly \$154 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes.

Not only do high school dropouts withhold potential money from the national market, but teen pregnancies also put a strain on the country's economic resources. In 2008 alone, resources for teen parents accounted for \$10.9 billion of local, state and federal taxes.

What to do

NCPTUP cites several examples of school districts, particularly low performing ones, using a combination of abstinence and contraception to bring down teen pregnancy rates even further. The one thing they seem to highlight the most is the necessary collaboration between schools, government task-forces, and community organizations. It seems more heads really are better than one when attacking a multifaceted problem with far-reaching economic and social consequences for us all.

What do you think?