



Breaking the Link between Teen Pregnancy and Poverty Among Latinas

The key to reducing teen pregnancy among Latinas lies in education, according to a report released by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

The study examined 25 of the most consistently under-performing school districts in the country. Those districts accounted for 20 percent of this country's drop-outs and 16 percent of teen births, according to the study.

The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancies in the developed world with about 750,000 pregnancies yearly. Nearly half the Latinas in the U.S. get pregnant before age 20, a statistic that has caused concern among activists who argue that teen pregnancy coupled with low degree attainment is a surefire way to perpetuate a cycle of poverty.

"We believe addressing teen pregnancy and dropout rates is one way in which we can end poverty," said Ann Marie Benitez, senior manager of the Latino Initiative at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

The effects of teen pregnancy affect families and ripple throughout the country. Teen births in the United States cost taxpayers (federal, state, and local) at least \$10.9 billion in 2008. A student who graduated college would earn about \$1 million more than a high school dropout over the course of a lifetime.

Those national statistics combined with Latino dropout rates make for a compelling argument about why teen pregnancy is an issue that churches, families and schools in Latino areas cannot ignore, said those who worked on the study.

"We don't talk about teen pregnancy prevention in the context of education," said Benitez. "In most cases that connection is not being made. We need to make school districts aware that when addressing drop out rates teen pregnancy has to be part of the conversation."

Overall, Latino teens and young adults are twice as likely as non-Hispanic blacks and four times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have dropped out of high school. More than 35 percent of Latinas who drop out of high school between their sophomore and senior years say it is because of pregnancy. More than half (54 percent) the Latina teens who have babies do not complete high school, compared to 34 percent of teen moms overall.

"When talking about teen pregnancy you can go straight into the negative political part," said Benitez. "But pointing out that there is a relationship between academic achievement really helps move along the dialogue."