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Teenage Pregnancy Rates and Sex Education in the United States

The teenage pregnancy rate in the United States remains high despite decades of steady decline. According to the CDC, “In 2015, a total of 229,715 babies were born to women aged 15–19 years, for a birth rate of 22.3 per 1,000 women in this age group. This is another record low for U.S. teens and a drop of 8% from 2014” (“Reproductive Health: Teen Pregnancy”). This issue should concern everyone because the solution is simple, and because high teenage pregnancy rates have long-term societal implications. The teenage pregnancy rate is higher in the United States than any other western nation because of the lack of comprehensive, science-based sex education in public schools.

In countries that have comprehensive sex education programs the teenage pregnancy rate is far lower than in the United States. Take the Netherlands for example, which “boasts one of the lowest teen birth rates in the world — 5.1 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 — a rate six times lower than that of the U.S.” (“Reducing Teen Pregnancy”). Their success in this area hinges on their comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education which begins in preschool. There is no reason to believe that these results could not be replicated in the United States. In fact, “An analysis of data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)...found that 86 percent of the decline in teen pregnancy rates through 2002 occurred because teens were using contraceptives better” (“Reducing Teen Pregnancy”). Proper condom use is already proven to have a positive effect on the teenage pregnancy rate. Ensuring that this knowledge is a part of every sex education curriculum would certainly help lower the teenage pregnancy rate further.

Lowering the rate of teenage pregnancy would benefit the entire country. The CDC points out that teenage pregnancy has adverse effects that reach beyond the pregnancy itself, explaining that “Only about 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by 22 years of age, whereas approximately 90% of women who do not give birth during adolescence graduate from high school” (“Reproductive Health: Teen Pregnancy”). Not completing high school is a decision that reverberates

throughout a person's life; many high school drop-outs are unable to attend college or to secure a well-paying job. Without well-paying jobs, teenage mothers are more likely to struggle below the poverty line than women who delay childbearing until adulthood.

Teen pregnancy is an issue that should concern everyone. Not only do teenagers who become pregnant suffer a lasting stigma because of their situation, they are also more likely not to graduate high school. They are more likely to live below the poverty line and rely on some form of government assistance. The solution to this public health issue is simple: encourage public schools to offer comprehensive, science-based sex education so that all teenagers, boys and girls, know how to avoid an unwanted pregnancy.

Works Cited

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