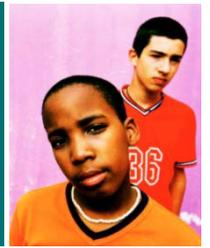


Advocacy Resource Guide



Making a Difference . . .

Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Young Men

ISSUE IN BRIEF

Sexual and reproductive health needs of young men have been continually ignored by government, health professionals and social programs. The implicit assumption buried within this omission is that pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy, and parenting are female concerns about which only women should be educated. However, successful prevention policies and programs require the involvement and education of young males. Increasing awareness about the male role in pregnancy and parenting, as well as providing counseling on sexual and reproductive needs, exposing gender stereotypes and fostering healthy relationships is crucial to shaping young men into knowledgeable and responsible adult men, fathers, citizens and partners. For this reason, the notable absence of educational resources and research studies regarding the sexual and reproductive health needs of young men necessitates immediate attention and resolution.

Putting Healthy Teen Network's Advocacy Resource Guides to Work

You can use Healthy Teen Network's Advocacy Resource Guides to:

1. Urge local and state policymakers to address issues that are important to the health and success of today's youth.
2. Educate school administrators or health care officials about unique issues facing adolescents.
3. Engage with the media (e.g., in a letter to the editor or an interview) using effective language to frame an issue facing youth.
4. Present to funders on why they should invest in your work with or on behalf of youth.
5. Connect to more information on youth issues and other organizations advocating for youth.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Concern

The sexual and reproductive health and development of young men is a policy concern that has been largely ignored at all levels of government decision-making. Services for males have traditionally not been included in educational or clinic-based efforts to reduce the incidence of teen conception or childbearing. Although Title X of the Public Health Service Act has been funding male and particularly adolescent male, reproductive health services for over a decade, services do not always reach the intended population.

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The lack of access of adolescents and young men to preventive care is a major issue. For example, very few gender- and age-appropriate settings for reproductive and sexual health services exist. Moreover, there is a lack of health insurance coverage for young men. (1) For these and other reasons, many young men may not take advantage of services even when they are available. It is evident that there is a pressing need for effective outreach and promotion of young male services.

Historically, a great deal of attention has been paid to women’s needs around their sexual and reproductive health as they enter adolescence, while attention to the needs of young men has only begun to gain attention over the last decade. We are increasingly aware of the need to engage young men in family planning and safer sex education if we are to address teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS prevention more effectively within the adolescent population.

Prevalence

In the United States, half of all pregnancies are unintended (CDC, 2001) and there are 820,000 teenage pregnancies a year. (2) By the age of 17, most American males have begun to engage in sexual intercourse and the median age for first marriage 27.6. (3) So basically, the average male is sexually active and unmarried for at least ten years before ostensibly settling down to one partner. This opens up a decade of public experience and contact. During this time, 1.7 million pregnancies occur for men younger than 25 years old, resulting in 1.1 million predominately unplanned births and 600,000 abortions. (4) Before, during and after these peak years, it is imperative that young men receive the appropriate information needed to protect and honor themselves as well as their loved ones.

Impact on Behavior

The consequences of early sexual activity, as well as the impact of early unintended parenthood, have a profound effect on young men. Even so, there is great variation in the behavior of young men who are sexually active. Adolescent males sexual activity is often sporadic and many of their relationships do not last long (5). By their late teens, three out of ten young men have had six or more partners (6).

Although most young men use a condom the first time they have intercourse, the frequency and consistency of their use decreases significantly in time and reliance on female methods of contraception markedly increase. (7) Additionally, adolescent males often do not know how to use a condom correctly. These facts are troubling indicators of the glaring omission of young male needs programs. Without responsible and proper condom use, young men face an increased risk of unintended pregnancy and STIs. (8) The behavior patterns among men in this age group greatly affect the health of female adolescents, because men in their early 20s father most births to teen girls. (9)

Another factor to consider is the impact of class and race on adolescent males sexual and reproductive needs. For example, how poor and minority youth initiate intercourse somewhat earlier than wealthier and white teen males (10); how African American adolescent males, while only 15 percent of all male teens, constitute 40 percent of all reported AIDS

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cases (11); and why poor Latino young men are less likely to use condoms in combination with another method (12). These variables can affect a young male's knowledge and access to resources, or address a specific cultural issue. The need for programs that respond to these issues is vital to reaching young men of all classes and races.

AIDS is the seventh leading cause of death among young men ages 15-24 and an estimated 600,000 American men live with HIV. (13) Rates of STIs are higher among young men; especially poor, minority men in their early 20s. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are especially common, with 500 to 600 reported cases a year per 100,000 men in their early 20s. (14) Many STIs remain untreated because they do not present painful symptoms. If unchecked, they can cause sterility, increase susceptibility to HIV, and be transferred unknowingly to partners. The only way to diagnose these STIs is by getting tested regularly. However, this often requires a level of personal initiative and outside knowledge concerning specific test requests that many young men lack.

Without programs that facilitate healthy sexual development and relationships, or promote reproductive health visits, young men are not being given the tools to improve or insure their own lives.

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Healthy Teen Network makes the following recommendations in order to increase awareness about and provisions for male sexual and reproductive health needs. We strongly urge the creation of comprehensive support services that address physical, emotional, social and sexual male health issues and promote the widespread prevalence of such programs.

Awareness

- ✓ HTN recommends and encourages widespread efforts to increase awareness about and creation of programs that focus on male sexual and reproductive needs.

Education

- ✓ HTN believes that young men are entitled to medically accurate information and health care that is respectful of culture, age, setting, language, and gender, and skills formation to maintain sexual health and development.
- ✓ HTN recommends that young men receive developmentally and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education and skills development to postpone sexual involvement, prevent unintended pregnancy, and avoid STIs, including HIV.
- ✓ HTN recommends that the sexuality education and skills development that young men receive should be taught in a multitude of settings, including public schools and community-based organizations. Such education should provide:
 - complete, positive, accurate information on human sexuality throughout the lifespan, including male and female anatomy and pubertal development;
 - social and emotional development with a focus on healthy relationships, gender roles, sexual identity and orientation;
 - how to access services; and
 - self testicular exams, hygiene, nutrition, and physical activity.
 - Skills include:
 - effective communication; decision-making;
 - risk assessment and avoidance, and resisting peer pressure.

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- ✓ HTN believes that young men need to learn the responsibilities of parenthood , including:
 - prenatal health and childbirth,
 - child development, child health, and child care,
 - as well as relationship-building skills (parent-child and father-mother) and life skills (education, career skills, and finances).

Support Systems

- ✓ HTN strongly believes that programs and clinical practices should be accessible, confidential, affordable, and sensitive to cultural differences, including the potential diversity of values and motivation, in order to be effective.
- ✓ HTN wholeheartedly supports the key actions at the federal level called for in the Urban Institute report, *Young Men's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Toward a National Strategy* (15).

Behaviors

- ✓ HTN recognizes that society has historically designated concerns regarding teen pregnancy prevention, relationship/dating violence, and adolescent parenting as singularly women's issues and encourages a shift away from this cultural perception. We recommend the creation and implementation of programs that expand the scope of responsibility, prevention, and skills to young men, as well as women.
- ✓ HTN recommends that the concept of healthy relationships be promoted to young men, including information about forms of sexual expression, sexual coercion and violence, readiness for sexual involvement; and the development of such skills as negotiation, communication and listening, and violence prevention in their intimate relationships.
- ✓ HTN recognizes that engaging young men to be active partners in reducing pregnancies and STIs requires innovative thinking and the building of linkages within a variety of communities, programs, and agencies. We cannot wait for young males to seek services and support, but rather must reach out to them in unlikely settings and venues (e.g., employment agencies, social clubs, sports settings, barber shops), and partner with a diverse mix of agencies, groups, and individuals.

Funding

- ✓ HTN recommends increased funding for:
 - Initiatives designed to promote awareness of young male sexual and reproductive health needs
 - Promotion of effective programs nationally, as well on a state and local level
 - Programs that relate to young men's sexual and reproductive needs and take into account social stereotypes and cultural variations or pressures;
 - Resources restructured to connect with, motivate and educate young men about male/female anatomy, sexuality, gender roles, dating violence, STIs, etc;
 - Medical and psychological health services and practitioners to exam or evaluate young men for:
 - testicular cancer,
 - HIV/AIDS,
 - STIs
 - emotional health issues

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DEFINITIONS

Reproductive needs: Needs based on reproductive functions and processes. Education curriculum of these issues would include sexuality, sexual orientation, abstinence, contraceptive use, pregnancy, and parenting.

Health needs: Needs based on medical, mental and physical concerns. Education curriculum of these issues would include puberty, testicular cancer, HIV/AIDS, and STIs. It would also cover socially relevant topics that tackle emotional and mental issues, i.e. gender roles, gang/peer pressure, and media influence.

RESOURCES

Guttmacher Institute

<http://www.guttmacher.org/>

Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stds/MC00052>

Reproductive Health Outlook

http://www.rho.org/html/menrh_keyissues.htm#reaching-adolescent-males

Urban Institute

<http://www.urban.org/publications/307327.html>

ABOUT HEALTHY TEEN NETWORK

Healthy Teen Network (HTN) is a national membership organization that provides resources and services to professionals working in the field of adolescent reproductive health – specifically teen pregnancy prevention, teen pregnancy, and teen parenting.

Healthy Teen Network believes youth can make responsible decisions about sexuality, pregnancy and parenting when they have complete and accurate information, resources, and support that are culturally relevant and appropriate to their age, gender, and developmental stage.

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