

Parents With Promise, a Care Demonstration Project

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Introduction

While the teen pregnancy and birth rates nationally show trends exhibiting decreases in these rates, Texas has not made as much headway. A primary concern is that nearly one fourth of all teen pregnancies in the state are to females that are already parenting a child and approximately one fourth of these teen parents have not completed a high school education. The Parents With Promise (PWP) program provides intensive case management, an educational component and expanded community services. The target population is pregnant and/or parenting teen females and males, ages 12 to 19, living in underserved neighborhoods in Dallas, Texas,

Goals and objectives of PWP include:

- Reduce subsequent pregnancies.
- Improve relationships between youth and their parents and extended family members.
- Improve parenting skills of pregnant and parenting youth.
- Increase teen fathers' involvement in and responsibility for their children.
- Increase the level of educational attainment.

The study is a quasi-experimental design, with an intervention group and two comparison groups (no services provided). The intervention group is provided with intensive case management and an educational component, the *Teen Parent Academy* (TPA). The TPA is a weekly program that allows participants an opportunity to receive pertinent education and information that is consistent with program goals and objectives. This is accomplished in both didactic and interactive fashion, wherein clients are encouraged to having and showing interest and motivation in being involved in TPA. In addition, a *Male Initiative* component has begun, focusing specifically on issues facing teen fathers.

A major function of the PWP program evaluation in the first year was to describe, assess, and recommend improvements to program implementation. The second and subsequent years' focus is to conduct an examination and analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention, i.e., whether teens participating in the intervention fare better—with respect to PWP's goals and objectives—than those in the comparison groups.

Methods

Pregnant and parenting adolescents are recruited for the PWP intervention through multiple service agencies and word of mouth. Additionally, a number of clients are referred to PWP by truancy and other municipal courts, often as a mandated stipulation. Comparison group recruitment is conducted at two area public high schools, through presentations by the Study Coordinator and assistance from at least one school official at each site. A packet of surveys are administered, individually for the intervention group and typically in groups at the comparison school sites (at baseline, 6 months and 12 months in-program and post-program follow up) including:

- AFL Core (measures pregnancy outcome and reproductive health status; infant health status and care arrangements; young father's involvement; adolescent mother's goals, parenting practices and attitudes, mother's future plans for education and career)
- McMaster Family Assessment Device (identifies six dimensions of family functioning: Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, Behavior Control)
- Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2; assesses parenting child rearing attitudes and behaviors)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (a self-report measure of overall feelings of self-worth or self-acceptance).
- Demographic data

Results

This project is in its second year. With respect to implementation, the program has successfully begun all phases of operation. These include the case management component, the Teen Parent Academy, the Male Initiative, and data collection within intervention and comparison groups. Preliminary data analysis currently is being conducted.

The PWP program has enrolled 196 clients in its first 18 months. A number of discharges resulted from teens completing their court mandate and choosing to discontinue with PWP. Of the 106 clients currently enrolled, 82 (77.4%) are female and 24 (22.6%) are male; their average age is 16.3 years; 68.9% are Hispanic, 30.2% African American, and 1% other; 49.5% scored at or below levels consistent with low self-esteem. These data are not statistically different across intervention group, comparison groups, and those that were discharged.

Discussion

While most data has yet to be analyzed, the PWP has achieved significant progress. The Teen Parent Academy is fully operational and experiencing consistent participation. Retention of qualified and committed staff has represented a significant challenge in the first two years. Maintaining caseloads that are manageable is a primary concern for program progress, in general, and the Male Initiative, in particular. Other limitations and challenges include that a significant number of clients chose to cease participation once their court-ordered mandate period was satisfied.

Implications

The PWP has a number of important implications for informing the field of adolescent health and well-being. The comprehensive assistance from case managers, the dynamic nature of the Teen Parent Academy, and placing a systematic focus on issues relevant to adolescent fathers are hypothesized to result in demonstrably positive outcomes. Issues such as program dropout, particularly among at-risk populations such as those with court mandates, represent dynamics to be explored and hopefully inform the field. In turn, the data and lessons learned have the potential for providing essential directions for future initiatives that seek to meet the PWP program's goals and objectives.

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