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It's a Guy Thing:

Boys, Young Men, and Teen
Pregnancy Prevention

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Summary

Although girls have traditionally been the major focus of efforts to prevent teen pregnancy, the importance of targeting teen boys and young men is increasingly apparent to researchers, practitioners, parents, and others who work with youth. One of the many reasons for this new focus is that the substantial reductions in teen pregnancy and birth rates in recent years can be attributed, in part, to dramatic shifts in the sexual behavior of boys. For instance:

- Fewer teen boys are having sexual intercourse. Slightly less than half of 9th-12th grade boys (48%) reported having had sexual intercourse in 2003—a 16% decrease since 1991 when 57% of boys in 9th-12th grade were sexually active. By contrast, the decline for girls in grades 9-12 during the same time period was 11 %—from 51% of girls in 1991 to 45% in 2003. (Grunbaum et al., 2004).
- Condom use is up. Among boys in 9th-12th grade who have had sexual intercourse, 69% used a condom the last time they had sex. In 1991 only 55% reported using condoms (Grunbaum et al., 2004).

- Fewer teen boys report having had multiple sexual partners. Of high school-aged boys, 18% reported having four or more sexual partners in their lifetime, down from 23% in 1991 (Grunbaum et al., 2004).

However, our collective understanding of how boys' attitudes and behavior have contributed to these trends is not as clear as it is regarding girls. Our hope is that this volume will redress this imbalance. The full report on which this summary is based includes three papers that address, from different perspectives, how boys and young men factor into teen pregnancy trends. This summary provides an overview of each paper's key points as well as some crosscutting conclusions and implications for the field.

Chapter One

Chapter one, authored by William Marsiglio, Ph.D., is an extensive review of research on the attitudes and behavior of boys and young men regarding sex, contraception, pregnancy, and related issues. In addition to documenting such trends as condom use and rates of sexual activity, this chapter explores the more nuanced factors that con-

tribute to such behavior. These qualitative topics include boys' perspectives on romantic relationships, concerns about pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and the role of religiosity, and family dynamics. These topics are examined within three major categories: sexual activity, contraceptive use, and fertility issues. Some of the most notable conclusions include the following:

Sexual activity:

- The proportion of teen boys who have had sexual intercourse is decreasing. This trend was documented both through surveys of 9th-12th grade male students (in 2003) and in household surveys of teen boys (in 2002), some of whom were not in school. Both surveys found that fewer than half of those surveyed reported having had sexual intercourse, which represents a significant decrease over the last decade.
- The median age of first intercourse for male 9th-12th graders is approximately 16.4 years of age.
- Boys are more likely to have casual sex (defined as sex with people outside an ongoing relationship or with persons they don't know well) than girls; however, the gap has narrowed in recent years.
- Fewer teen boys now report having multiple sexual partners than in past years.
- Boys are more troubled about being virgins than are girls.
- Both teen girls *and* boys say the primary reason why they have not had sexual intercourse is because it is "against religion or morals." One interesting study found that virgin boys who wanted to have sex tended to blame their virgin status on lack of opportunity, whereas those who did not expect to have sex cited wanting to postpone sex until marriage as the reason for delay.

- Sexual activity other than intercourse is commonplace among boys. Various studies have looked at rates of such intimate behavior as oral sex and mutual masturbation and found that between one quarter and one half of teenage boys have had such experiences.
- Having first intercourse at a younger age is associated with many factors, ranging from family characteristics (e.g. mother's educational level and the number of siblings) to engaging in other risky behavior (such as substance use).
- Teenaged boys who are more religious are more likely to delay having sex.
- Boys and young adult men with more "traditional" views of what it means to be masculine are more likely to be sexually active, according to some studies.
- Parents are far more likely to discuss sex with their daughters than with their sons.

Contraception:

- Rates of condom use have increased. Teen boys are using condoms more consistently and are more likely than in past years to have used condoms the last time they had sex. More than two thirds of teen boys report using a condom the last time they had sex.
- Boys cite pregnancy prevention as the primary motivation for using condoms.
- Other factors associated with increased condom use among teen boys include feeling responsible for contraception, fear of HIV/AIDS, talking with a partner about contraception, and being in the early stages of a relationship. African-American teens are more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to use condoms.
- About one quarter of teenaged boys have used a condom in tandem with a female hormonal method of contraception.

Fertility:

- Data on the number of teen fathers is limited. Surveys suggest that approximately 13% of sexually experienced boys aged 15-19 caused a pregnancy, and about 4% were fathers. These estimates are believed to be low since many men are not informed about partners' miscarriages or abortions.
- Teen fathers tend to come from disadvantaged backgrounds. They often perform poorly in school, have low or moderate income levels, engage in problem behavior such as gang involvement, and are more likely to have a mother who also was a teen parent.
- Young adult men who have sex with significantly younger women (more than 6 years younger) are far *less* likely to use contraception and far *more* likely to get their partner pregnant.
- Qualitative research has helped clarify how young men's readiness to become fathers evolves over time and is linked to life experiences.

In conclusion, Dr. Marsiglio notes that cultural, societal, familial, interpersonal, and personal factors affect teen boys and young men's involvement in teen pregnancy in complex ways. The breadth of factors means there are many opportunities for intervention by programs, parents, and others who work with boys. Continuing to collect high quality data on the experiences of boys and young men with relationships, sex, contraception, pregnancy, and parenting can help researchers, program directors, policymakers and parents better understand how to influence teen boys' behavior and further reduce teen pregnancy rates.

Chapter Two

Chapter two, by Amy Vastine Ries and Freya Sonenstein, Ph.D., reviews evaluation research on the effectiveness of school-based, coed programs in reducing risky sexual behavior among adolescent

boys. In order to continue the nation's progress in reducing rates of teen pregnancy and births, the authors note the importance of stepping up prevention efforts that specifically target males. They also note, however, that boys-only programs are relatively new to prevention efforts and very few have been rigorously evaluated and/or shown to change behavior. Therefore, the authors focus their analysis on co-educational school-based programs and identify those that have produced positive changes in the sexual and contraceptive behavior of teen boys.

The chapter is based on a systematic and extensive literature review that identified studies reporting results by gender, including whether the program was effective for boys, girls, or both. Programs were reviewed only if their evaluation met strict inclusion criteria designated by the authors. Those that did were grouped into four categories based on components of the program:

- I. Sexuality education component only
 - Postponing Sexual Involvement (1990)
 - Postponing Sexual Involvement (2000)
 - Teen Talk
 - [Untitled] Program by Walter & Vaughn
 - Protection Express Program
- II. Service learning component
 - Reach for Health Service Learning Program
 - Teen Outreach Program
- III. Sexuality education and a parent component
 - Reducing the Risk
 - Taking Charge
 - Rochester AIDS Prevention Project
 - Sex Can Wait
- IV. Sexuality education and other components
 - Self Center
 - School/Community Risk Reduction Replication Initiative
 - Children's Aid Society Carrera Program
 - Seattle Social Development Project
 - Safer Choices
 - Draw the Line/Respect the Line
 - Aban Aya Youth Project

For each of the four program categories, the authors discuss the findings, the strength of the evidence, and the implications for those considering putting a program into place for boys. Below is an overview of the findings for programs with strong evidence of success for boys, girls, or both.

Both service learning programs showed strong evidence of effectiveness for boys (and girls).

Compared to teens who were not in these programs, teens enrolled in Reach for Health were more likely to delay first sex and less likely to have had sex recently. Teen Outreach Program participants were less likely to get pregnant or cause a pregnancy. The authors conclude that service learning programs offer a promising strategy for influencing sexual behavior and teen pregnancy among boys and girls.

Five of the seven sexuality education programs with multiple additional components showed strong evidence of success. Of those five, two were effective for boys only, two were effective for boys and girls, and one was effective for girls only.

- Both programs with an added “cultural” component, meaning they included elements related directly to the values or customs of a particular culture, showed strong evidence of effectiveness among boys. Aban Aya Youth Project targeted African American youth, and Draw the Line/Respect the Line served primarily Latino teens. The former reduced the likelihood that program participants had sex in the past three months and also increased condom use, while the latter was successful in delaying first sex and the frequency of sex in the last 12 months among boys who participated in the program. While the authors note that it is unclear whether it was the cultural component that made the programs effective for boys but not girls, they point out that both programs shared that common characteristic and demonstrated similar results.
- Two programs that combined sexuality education with a school, community or parent component showed strong evidence of effectiveness

with boys and girls—the Seattle Social Development Program and Safer Choices. The evaluation of the Seattle Program found it decreased incidence of first sex, increased condom use at last intercourse, and reduced the number of lifetime sexual partners for boys and girls. Girls in the program also had lower pregnancy and birth rates than girls in a comparison group. Safer Choices participants had less unprotected sex. Boys in the program used contraception more frequently than boys in a comparison group. The authors point out that these programs were unique in that they extended their influence beyond the classroom in an effort to affect other aspects of the students’ lives. One program in this category showed strong evidence of success among girls only. The CAS-Carrera program reduced sexual activity and pregnancy rates and increased condom use among girls but not boys.

The authors offer several conclusions about the types of programs that appear to be effective with boys – that is, delaying first sex, increasing contraceptive use and/or reducing teen pregnancy rates. First, many of the programs address teen sexual behavior by going beyond the classroom. This is exemplified by the two service learning programs mentioned above. Second, it appears that including a cultural component contributes to program effectiveness. Although the authors are not certain that this addition was responsible for the two programs’ effectiveness, Ries and Sonenstein do note that those with the cultural component were the only two evaluated programs that showed strong evidence of success among boys. Finally, programs that extend across school years – at least two years – seem to be more effective than those that are shorter in duration. All told, it appears that programs that reach beyond the classroom have been most effective with young males.

Chapter Three

The third and final part of this report by Molly Whitehead and Karen Troccoli offers a more qualitative look at the challenges in engaging teen boys and young men in teen pregnancy prevention and

some strategies for overcoming them. In contrast to the first two chapters of this publication, which are based on rigorous research and analysis, this chapter is intended to provide a more descriptive and qualitative perspective. The chapter is based in large part on discussions with practitioners who work with boys and young men as well as programmatic materials and other background information. The information gleaned from these sources is grouped into five categories of challenges and corresponding strategies for overcoming them:

- *Many programs are not inviting to teenaged boys and young men.*
 - Make programs/initiatives boy-friendly
- *Most boys are not in programs*
 - Go to where the boys are
- *Parents often struggle to communicate with their sons about pregnancy and related issues*
 - Help tongue-tied parents
- *Boys are not all the same*
 - Tailor approaches
- *Punitive measures after the fact may not be preventive.*
 - Emphasize prevention to reduce the need for punitive measures

For each of the five strategies, a continuum of activities is described ranging from school-based programs to media campaigns. Although not all of these interventions have been formally evaluated, they are offered as examples of innovative and promising ways to connect with teen boys and young men. The key points under each strategy include the following:

Make programs male-friendly

Making programs male-friendly demands more than transforming a pink pamphlet into a blue one. Practitioners suggest creating male-friendly environments by adjusting program elements ranging from the staff to program messages and content. This requires starting at the core of the program and ensuring that the stated goals include language specifically about serving boys and young adult men. Achieving those goals often requires altering a program's infrastructure so it appeals to boys directly. Examples include creating waiting

rooms that have boy-friendly magazines and posters; hiring some male staff members; and ensuring messages and other program information include topics that are of particular interest to boys, such as puberty, sexually transmitted diseases, peer pressure, and fatherhood. It also can be useful to ask the boys in the program what can be done to make them and their peers feel particularly welcome, since they are the customers.

Go to Where the boys are

Even the most male-friendly programs cannot be effective unless boys participate in them. Most teen boys and young men are not actively seeking or enrolled in programs that focus on preventing teen pregnancy. Therefore, creative outreach strategies are often needed. These can range from using trained outreach workers to connect with boys at community centers, sporting events, and other popular gathering places to partnering with juvenile justice, job training, fatherhood, and other programs/agencies.

Help tongue-tied parents

Despite research showing that close parent/child relationships help young people successfully navigate adolescence and steer clear of risky behavior, many parents mistakenly believe they have little or no influence over their children's decisions about sex. Parents freely admit that they want to talk with their children about these issues but are unsure of what to say and how to say it. Moreover, teens report that what parents tell their sons is often quite different from what they say to their daughters. Practitioners suggest making parental involvement part of prevention initiatives, emphasizing the influence parents can have on their children, and giving parents guidance and background information to start conversations with their sons.

Tailor approaches

Although some messages about the importance of avoiding unintended pregnancy are universal, tailoring an intervention to boys' age, socioeconomic status, and cultural identification can make it more effective. Messages should be age

appropriate, since developmental levels vary greatly from early to late adolescence. Messages also should be grounded in cultural and/or religious tenants that will resonate with the target audience. Finally, because research has found an association between teens' socioeconomic status and their attitudes about sex and pregnancy—particularly a relationship between poverty and increased incidence of teen pregnancy—those working with low-income youth should consider including services that can help prevent school dropout and joblessness.

Emphasize prevention

A primary way that young men have been linked to teen pregnancy is through laws that seek to make them accountable for children they have fathered. While such measures are necessary for the well-being of the mothers and children involved, many practitioners believe that attention should also be focused on encouraging young men to be accountable as fathers for their own sake. Teaching young fathers and young men who have not yet had children that being a good father entails more than financial obligations capitalizes on an opportunity to build stronger families and to break the cycle of too-early parenthood. Several fatherhood programs seek to do just that—they communicate positive messages to young fathers about the importance of their involvement in their children's lives and about not having more children until they are financially and emotionally ready to do so. Other programs have targeted middle school-aged boys in order to reach them before they become fathers.

This chapter concludes with eight overarching themes and related tips for engaging boys around teen pregnancy:

- 1) Make sure initiatives are welcoming and engaging to boys and young men.
- 2) Trust is key between programs and their clientele.
- 3) Include male staff and volunteers.
- 4) Try to be positive rather than punitive.

- 5) One size does not fit all—tailor programs to target populations.
- 6) Make connections between teen pregnancy and other issues in program participants' lives.
- 7) Be creative with outreach efforts.
- 8) Involve parents in programs, outreach, and other activities.

Overall Implications

Collectively these three chapters offer several key insights regarding boys' contributions to recent declines in teen pregnancy and birth rates. Several of these crosscutting headlines are highlighted below, along with pertinent implications for those working with teen boys and young adult men.

Boys are delaying first sex and using more contraception when they do have sex.

Teen boys and young men are contributing significantly to the decreasing rates of teen pregnancy and births in the United States. More boys are delaying sex until they are older, and those who are having sex are using contraception more consistently. The shifts in the sexual behavior of boys and young men should underscore for parents, program leaders, community leaders, school officials and others who work with boys the importance of including boys and young men in prevention efforts.

Teen pregnancy prevention programs can be effective with boys.

Although the pool of literature is small on what works to alter the sexual behavior of boys, the existing research on coed programs does offer some guidance. Programs that reach beyond the classroom—that is, those that include community service and other out-of-school activities—have had consistently positive outcomes among boys. Programs with a cultural component also seemed to be very effective with boys. Future evaluations of coed programs should separately examine outcomes for boys and girls to further clarify what works for each group. Moreover, additional programs for males-only should be evaluated to fur-

ther increase our understanding about what is—and is not—working.

Much can be learned from those on the front lines.

When it comes to working with boys and young men, practitioners, community leaders, and others in communities across the country have amassed a valuable collection of insights and promising approaches. Although not all initiatives have been rigorously evaluated, anecdotal evidence from practitioners who have years of experience working with boys can benefit those who are just beginning such efforts. Creating new opportunities for information sharing—through conferences, teleconferences, websites, and publications—is important for encouraging more work with boys and young men.

We still have much to learn.

The three chapters in this volume also highlight how much we still do not know about the sexual attitudes and behavior of teen boys and young men. Although common sense tells us that boys play an important role in the decisions couples make about sex and relationships, we still lack in-depth information about what influences those

decisions and their outcomes. For instance, we have trend data on the percentage of high school-aged boys who have had sex, but we do not fully understand what has led to recent declines in these percentages. There are several reasons for these gaps in information. Until recently, most efforts to prevent teen pregnancy, including relevant data collection, were focused on girls. With growing awareness of the importance of focusing on boys as well, additional attention is being devoted to this topic. But more is needed still. The same is true regarding program evaluation—only a few prevention efforts target boys specifically, and information is limited about what works for boys and why, even within the evaluation research on coed programs.

These information gaps are problematic for two reasons. First, they limit our ability to paint a complete picture of the dynamics between boys and girls that result in continued high rates of teen pregnancy and parenting in the United States. Second, they hinder efforts to create programs for boys that could help reduce these rates. The more we know about boys, the more we can tailor interventions to address how boys view and understand sex, love, and relationships.