

Enjoying school key to tackling teenage pregnancy

November 13 2009

Youth development programmes that tackle deprivation and help children and young people enjoy school are successful in reducing teenage pregnancy rates, say researchers in *BMJ* today.

UK teenage [pregnancy](#) rates are the highest in Western Europe and there is widespread concern that policies to reduce teenage pregnancies are not working, say the authors.

A recent evaluation of the Young People's Development Programme (YPDP) concluded that it had failed to reduce teenage pregnancies, indeed more women in the YPDP got pregnant than in other programmes.

But lead author, Professor Angela Harden from the University of East London, argues that perhaps the YPDP failed because it targeted and therefore stigmatised 'high risk' young people and ultimately brought them together.

The YPDP kept young people out of mainstream schools and worked with them in alternative educational settings, but the programmes reviewed by Professor Harden and colleagues focused on after school and community projects.

Their research shows that projects that tackle social disadvantage and aim to improve school experiences and raise expectations for young people, are successful.

The authors evaluated ten trials and five qualitative studies that focused on early [childhood](#) interventions or youth development programmes. Teenage pregnancy rates were almost 40% lower in groups that participated in youth programmes compared to those who did not.

The main themes that emerged from the qualitative studies were that dislike of school, poverty, unhappy childhoods and low expectations for the future were all linked to [early pregnancy](#).

The authors conclude that "young people who have grown up unhappy, in poor material circumstances, do not enjoy school, and are despondent about their future may be more likely to take risks when having sex or to choose to have a baby."

They argue that policies aimed at tackling these issues, combined with high quality [sex education](#) and [contraceptive](#) services, are successful in lowering teenage pregnancy rates.

They say the results "provide a small, but reliable, evidence base that early childhood and youth development programmes are effective and appropriate strategies for reducing unintended teenage pregnancy rates. Our findings on the effects of early childhood interventions highlight the importance of investing in early care and support in order to reduce the socioeconomic disadvantage associated with [teenage pregnancy](#) later in life."

Source: British Medical Journal ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Enjoying school key to tackling teenage pregnancy (2009, November 13) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-11-school-key-tackling-teenage-pregnancy.html>

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