



May, 2004
Los Angeles Foster Care Awareness Campaign

Fostering the Bond: Dependent Teens and Their Babies
What Research Studies Tell Us About Dependent Minor Parents

In Foster Care...

- In a study of foster youth in 3 Midwestern states, 1/3 reported having been pregnant, and 2/3 of those reported that the pregnancy was unwanted (Courtney, Terao, and Bost, 2004).
- Among older foster girls in Illinois, 40% of African American and 12% of Caucasian girls were pregnant or parenting (Leathers and Testa, 2002).
- Twenty-eight per cent of older girls (17 and up) in foster care in Illinois had custody of one or more children (Leathers and Testa, 2002).
- Among young women emancipated in 1997 in California, those with five or more placements were more than twice as likely to have become pregnant before emancipation than those with just one placement. (Nearly 1/3 of those emancipated had more than 5 placements.) Among that group, Latinas were twice as likely to have become pregnant as Caucasian or African American young women (Needell, et al., 2002).

After Emancipation...

- Two to four years after leaving foster care, over half the young women in a national study had given birth to a child and were on welfare (Wald and Martinez, 2003).
- In California, 67% of females emancipated from the child welfare system had at least one birth within five years of leaving care (Needell, et al., 2002).
- In California, birth rates for 19 year olds emancipated from Probation approach 25%, about twice the rate for those leaving foster care (Needell, et al., 2002).

Issues and Challenges Related to Pregnancy and Parenting

- 40% of foster youth with one child and 58% of foster youth in Illinois with two or more children reported having special needs due to pregnancy or parenting which interfered with independent living (Leathers and Testa, 2002).
- Social workers in Illinois reported that, of older foster girls with custody of a child, 30% were having “somewhat of a problem” and another 8% were having “very much of a problem” with parenting (Leathers and Testa, 2002).
- Pregnancy and parenting *doubled* the risk of dropping out of school among older foster teens, based on a study of Illinois youth. Dropping out of high school put youth at high risk of unemployment (Leathers and Testa, 2002). Interestingly, though, rates of dropouts among dependent mothers is about the same as teen mothers in general (Wald and Martinez, 2003).
- Existing services for teen mothers - both in and out of dependency – lack continuity, universality, and entitlement. Many programs fail to include mothers as full participants and beneficiaries (Wald and Martinez, 2003).

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