

Teen pregnancy prevention programs are mostly ineffective. Multi-component programs may work.



Most programs for preventing teenage pregnancy are ineffective

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effectiveness of teenage pregnancy prevention programs in promoting abstinence, encouraging the use of contraception and reducing the likelihood of pregnancy among teens. The review summarises findings from 31 studies conducted in the United States or in developed countries with higher than average rates of unplanned teen pregnancy, such as Canada, England, New Zealand, and Australia.

Teenagers who become pregnant, especially at a young age, face both immediate and long-run negative consequences. Teen pregnancy prevention programs aim to reduce teenage pregnancy by promoting abstinence and using contraception. Evaluations show most programs evaluated fail to achieve these goals. However, there are reasons to continue evaluating pregnancy prevention programs as they evolve and the social context changes.

What did the review study?

High rates of sexual activity, pregnancy and teen births, particularly in the United States, has led to a wide range of teenage pregnancy prevention initiatives, some emphasizing contraceptive use and others emphasizing abstinence as the primary means of reducing teen pregnancy rates.

This review examines the effectiveness of teenage pregnancy prevention programs in lowering sexual activity rates, encouraging the use of contraception, and reducing pregnancy among teens.

What studies are included?

The review includes randomized controlled trials of teenage pregnancy prevention programs. Included studies focused on programs that primarily served youth between 11 and 18 years old. These programs included: one-time consultations, sex-education programs with an abstinence focus, sex-education programs with a contraception component, and multi-component youth development programs.

The review includes 31 studies published prior to 2006, with include an aggregate sample size of over 37,000.

What are the main results in this review?

Taken together, the findings for each of the first three types of interventions- one-time consultations, sex education programs focused



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published until April 2006. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in October 2006.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by by Ada Chukwudozie and Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2006:12 "Interventions Intended to Reduce Pregnancy-Related Outcomes Among Adolescents: A Systematic Review" by Lauren S. Scher, Rebecca A. Maynard, and Matthew Stagner (DOI 10.4073/csr.2006.12). Copy-editing and layout was done by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration). Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



on contraception, and sex education programs focused on promoting abstinence- show no evidence of having reduced sexual activity or pregnancy rates among participating youth. The most promising results are for multi-component youth development programs, which resulted in modest reductions (six percentage points) in pregnancy rates among participants as compared with their control group counterparts. The impacts were larger for females than males.

What do the findings in this review mean?

When this review of randomized controlled trials was conducted, most of the programs evaluated were not achieving their intended goals of reducing pregnancy rates.

However, these results should not be interpreted as evidence to eliminate prevention efforts, for several reasons: (1) the studied programs may not be typical; (2) the social context has changed quite substantially in the 10 years since this review was published; and (3) teen pregnancy remains as a problem warranting intervention. There is value in building on these findings when designing interventions and assessing the effectiveness of adopted strategies.