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# 'No easy answers' found on teen sex

## Efforts don't slow pregnancy rate

By Cheryl Wetzstein  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A landmark review of published research on nearly 80 teen-pregnancy-prevention programs has concluded that there are "no easy answers" to the national problem of unwed childbearing.

The review, conducted by researchers with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, found "promising" results in programs where entire communities took a stand against teen pregnancy and programs that encouraged skill-building in young people.

But virtually all the programs reviewed had weaknesses, inconsistent results or short-term positive effects — disqualifying any of them as a "magic bullet," said Douglas Kirby, the lead author of "No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy."

The most-questioned finding of the study was that, based on a review of the research on six "abstinence-only" programs, such an approach did not appear to delay or reduce sexual activity.

"The jury is still out" on abstinence-only programs, said Mr. Kirby, who joined other campaign leaders in calling for more research to definitively answer the "what works" question in teen-pregnancy prevention.

A bill about to be introduced in Congress will seek \$3.5 million a year for the next three years to do such research, said Reps. Michael

### TEEN PREGNANCY

A review of nearly 80 teen-pregnancy prevention programs found:

- No single or simple approach markedly reduced teen-pregnancy rates.
- "Abstinence-only" programs didn't appear to delay or reduce sexual activity.
- Sex education, including condom-availability programs, didn't appear to increase sexual activity.
- Some sex and AIDS education programs appeared to reduce sexual risk-taking behavior at least in the short term.
- AIDS education programs significantly increased contraceptive use.
- Family planning clinics "presumably" helped prevent many teen pregnancies and could prevent more if barriers to access were removed.
- Communitywide programs that focused on pregnancy prevention and improved access to contraceptives saw an increase in contraceptive use and a decrease in pregnancy rates — but only while the programs were active.
- Youth-development programs that focused on building skills and planning showed "promise."

Source: "No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy," National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Washington

The Washington Times



Photo by Sharon Natoli/The Washington Times

Lead author Douglas Kirby says "the jury is still out" on abstinence-only programs.

N. Castle, Delaware Republican; Constance A. Morella, Maryland Republican; and Nita M. Lowey, New York Democrat, who attended the press conference.

The privately funded national campaign has set a goal of reducing the teen pregnancy rate by one-third by 2005.

Patrick Fagin, an analyst with the Heritage Foundation and a member of the national campaign,

was troubled by the assessment of abstinence-only programs.

Most of the six abstinence-only programs reviewed "would not be recognized by those in the abstinence community as abstinence programs," he said.

Moreover, he said, the study did not include evaluations of two of the best-known abstinence-only programs — Best Friends of Washington, and Project Reality in Golf, Ill.

The 1995 study of Best Friends, conducted by David R. Rowberry for his doctoral dissertation, found that among 88 D.C. public school girls who had been with the program for at least two years, nine had had sexual intercourse and one had become pregnant.

In a survey of 990 D.C. public school girls not in the program, 712 said they had had sexual intercourse and 200 had become pregnant.

The study of the Project Reality program was conducted last year by John T. Vessey at Northwestern University Medical School. That report, based on responses of 2,541 students before and one year after they participated in the "Choosing the Best" curriculum, found attitudes toward sex, drinking and smoking strongly in favor of abstinence.

Mr. Kirby said yesterday that those two studies were excluded from his review because they were "not yet published."

# NATION