

Pregnancy prevention targeted at male teens

By Cheryl Wetzstein
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Teen pregnancy prevention programs have suffered from a near-myopic focus on girls while ignoring the role and responsibilities of boys, according to experts.

To counter this imbalance, the Urban Institute has prepared a guide highlighting 24 programs directed at men.

"We've always known that men are involved in pregnancies. Duh," Urban Institute researcher Freya L. Sonenstein said Tuesday at a forum hosted by the Washington-based think tank.

But until recently, all the data collection has been on teen girls, not boys, she said.

Once people started thinking about how to involve boys in pregnancy prevention, the question became "how to get the guys to actually walk in the door," she said.

To be in the new guide, which was released yesterday, programs have to involve at least 50 males a year and have pregnancy prevention as a primary goal.

None of the programs has been evaluated yet, but all appeared promising, Ms. Sonenstein said.

Programs included the Always on Saturday program for teen-age boys in Hartford, Conn.; the Shiloh Baptist Church's Male Youth Enhancement project in Washington; and the Teens on Track sports-based program offered in Camden, N.J., by Planned Parenthood of Southern New Jersey.

Programs could be as inexpensive as the \$2,000 events sponsored

by the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity in San Jose, Calif., or as hefty as the \$450,000-a-year budget of the Afro-centric Fifth Ward Enrichment Program Inc. in Houston.

Several programs, including the \$90,000-a-year Young Men's Clinic in a poor Manhattan community, stress health services to men.

Other programs are school-based, such as the Responsive Fathers Program in Philadelphia.

In the Philadelphia program, middle-school boys are asked to attend three assemblies in which they and male leaders talk about issues, program director Gregory L. Patton Sr. said.

In the first session, the boys are asked when they want to have children — and their answers are often frank, Mr. Patton recalled.

For instance, one boy said he wanted kids "as soon as possible because I may not live to be 21."

Another teen said if he got a girl pregnant, she could go on welfare.

A third teen said he didn't worry about having a baby because as long as he didn't take a blood test to determine paternity, he wouldn't have to pay child support.

By the time the boys reach the third assembly meeting, the leaders have been able to change their attitudes on topics relating to girls, violence, manhood and family life, Mr. Patton said.

In the end, many of the boys begin to think in terms of finishing school, getting a job and then starting a family, he said, adding that the \$50,000-a-year program served 10 schools last year.