

BY LIDIA NESCI

HOUGHTON LAKE, MICHIGAN, May 7- Some people may argue, a large issue amongst teens involves sexual activity; but more importantly the end result, teenage pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy has been going on for quite some time, but the teen pregnancy rate has dropped no thanks to some health organizations in Michigan. These health organizations have not been doing their part in preventing teen pregnancy to their full ability.

According to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, “Despite the impressive overall decline in the nation’s teen pregnancy rate, it is still the case that nearly three in 10 girls in the United States get pregnant by age 20.” The teen pregnancy rate has gone down in the United States, but that doesn’t mean the problem has gone away.

America is still significantly higher than other countries when it comes to teen pregnancy. The National Campaign also said, “the teen birth rate in the United States is roughly 7 times higher than in the Netherlands, more than 2.5 times higher than in Canada, and 1.5 times higher than in the U.K., our closest competitor.”

Autumn Sherwood, 18 and former student at Houghton Lake High School became pregnant her senior year. She was 17 at the time and her pregnancy was due to a birth control failure.

Sherwood had stated that her high school did not offer sexual education, nor did they believe it was a big deal. “It’s a small town and no one cared enough to try and prevent anything” says Sherwood referring to teen pregnancy.

Sherwood mentioned the closest thing the students had for help with this subject was the local School Based Health Center found in Houghton Lake High School. Even then, the students

had to take the initiative; health professionals, and teachers did not speak or educate the students on these matters.

The center's website lists services that will and will not be provided or discussed. Some of which aren't provided include the distribution of birth control, abortion counseling, or prenatal care. They did not mention anything on the subject of teenage pregnancy or the efforts used to prevent it. When asked, the local health center had nothing to say on this topic.

On the National Conference of State Legislatures website, they discuss the individual state policies on sex education in schools. Michigan does not have a policy referring to Sexual Education Legislation or teenage pregnancy for that matter. They do however have a policy on Medical Accuracy in Sex Education that states, "The superintendent of a school district shall cooperate with the Department of Public Health to provide teacher training and provide medically accurate materials for instruction of children about HIV/AIDS."

Sherwood believes teenage pregnancy is "still a big issue in America today." She continued by saying, "It's the lack of contraception use. Students are aware of the risks that come along with using no contraception."

There are facts expressed by The National Campaign to support Sherwood's beliefs. Only 61.2% of sexually active high school students in Michigan used condoms and 21.2% used birth control.

A former student and resident at Houghton Lake, 18-year-old Katie Fusciardi, agreed with Sherwood in saying that teen pregnancy is still an issue. Fusciardi had a different reason as to why and said, "It is because of the students not being informed on the consequences and ways they could have prevented it." This statement ties back to the idea that the school does not offer sexual education.

The National Campaign said, “Many don’t know much about even the most commonly-used methods of contraception—30% say they know *little or nothing* about condoms and 63% say they know *little or nothing* about birth control pills.”

Other health organizations like Planned Parenthood are located across the country and offer assistance with teen pregnancy. Planned Parenthood’s website discusses the services they provide once a teen gets pregnant. They give the options of parenting, adoption, and abortion; however the website says nothing on what they do to help prevent teen pregnancy, besides giving some quick facts.

When contacted, and asked more questions about their efforts in preventing teen pregnancy, Planned Parenthood did not respond. If you look hard enough, you can find articles on their website about the free condoms available as a way to promote safe sex and unwanted pregnancy. Planned Parenthood does not advertise this on their site, it is just something clients would know.

The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists offer FAQ’s and fact sheets for teens looking at birth control, or are pregnant. Planned Parenthood does the same, but that’s as much effort that these organizations put in to help prevent teen pregnancy.

ACOG’s website gave no information on their actions for preventing teenage pregnancy . The website does not refer to talking to students at schools or have events for teens to inform them about teenage pregnancy and contraception methods. ACOG was asked several questions on teenage pregnancy but decided not to answer.

Some organizations are dedicated to preventing teen pregnancy like The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. They offer programs, information, special

events and they go to schools to talk to students about the issue. They do not offer services for teens to prevent pregnancy, but they do try and make the teens in America gain knowledge.

Ultimately, the teenage pregnancy rate has lowered, but the health organizations that are helping to prevent it aren't doing the most they should be. The United States still has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy throughout the world.

Sources

<http://www.acog.org/>

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

<http://www.hlcsk12.net/high-school/school-based-health-center>

<http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx>

<http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/>

Autumn Sherwood- Phone Number Upon Request

Katie Fusciardi- Phone Number Upon Request