

Teenage pregnancy policy

2017

The UK has one of the highest birth rates among under-18s in Western Europe. FPA believes that young people should have the right to control their sexual and reproductive health, including the decision to become parents. We believe that young parents should be supported and should not face stigma or be negatively stereotyped. However, evidence suggests that teenage pregnancy is often unplanned and unwanted, and that teenage parents and their children are more likely to experience a range of long-term negative educational, social, and health outcomes. FPA believes that a reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate would be positive for teenage parents and their families.

Our beliefs about teenage pregnancy

1. FPA would like to see the teenage pregnancy rate reduced, to improve outcomes for teenage parents and their children.
2. FPA believes that all young people should have accurate information about, and access to, all methods of contraception, including emergency contraception.
3. FPA believes that pregnancy prevention should form a key part of a comprehensive, statutory programme of relationships and sex education (RSE).
4. FPA believes that good RSE must present young people with a full range of pregnancy choices, to include non-judgemental discussion of abortion. All young people must have access to clear, evidence-based information about abortion and counselling services.
5. FPA believes that there are a range of cultural and social reasons underlying the UK's high teenage pregnancy rate and that these should be addressed.
6. FPA believes that young parents should not be stigmatised and that all young parents should be supported.

Why we believe this

1. *FPA would like to see the teenage pregnancy rate reduced, to improve outcomes for teenage parents and their children.*

FPA welcomed the news that, in 2014, conception rates among under-18s in England and Wales fell to their lowest levels since records began.¹ This was an extraordinary halving of the rate, achieved by the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, a government initiative launched in 1999 and ending in 2010. The programme

¹ Conceptions in England and Wales: 2014 (ONS, 2016)
www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/conceptionstatistics/2014



approached teenage pregnancy holistically, combining engagement with local practitioners, effective education programmes and easier access to contraception helping young people to make informed choices, lowering rates even in the most deprived areas.

However, there is still more to be done. The UK still has one of the highest birth rates to under-18s in Western Europe, lagging behind other countries with similar economies.² Regional differences also remain, with London seeing a 57.9% reduction between 1998 and 2014, compared to a 46.5% reduction in the North East, where rates remain significantly higher than the South East or South West.³

Evidence shows that teenage parents and their children are more likely to experience a range of long-term negative educational, social, and health outcomes. This includes child poverty, infant mortality, poor maternal mental health and levels of young people not in education, employment or training. For example, teenage pregnancy is associated with a higher risk of stillbirth and 41% higher rates of infant mortality, as well as higher rates of poor mental health among teenage mothers.⁴

Continuing the reduction in the rate of under-16 and under-18 conceptions is one of four priority areas in the government's Sexual Health Improvement Framework⁵, however, FPA is concerned that disinvestment across sexual and reproductive health services risks an upturn in rates. We believe the government needs to maintain a focus on teenage pregnancy. This includes investment in open access, confidential and comprehensive contraception services, training to support education and healthcare workforces to understand the needs of young people, support for young parents and wide-ranging, statutory relationships and sex education (RSE).

² Live births to women aged 'under 18' and 'under 20' (per 1,000 women in EU 28 countries (Eurostat, 2017)

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/adhocs/006816/livebirthstowomenagedunder18andunder20per1000womenaged15to17and15to19ineu28countries20052014and2015

³ Conceptions in England and Wales: 2014 (ONS, 2016)

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/conceptionstatistics/2014

⁴ Teenage Pregnancy and Young Parents - PHE Conference (Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange, 2015)

⁵ A Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England (Department of Health, 2013)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-framework-for-sexual-health-improvement-in-england



2. *FPA believes that all young people should have accurate information about, and access to, all methods of contraception, including emergency contraception.*

Research shows that pregnancies in women aged 16-19 are most likely to be unplanned⁶ and that contraceptive use among women aged 16-49 is lowest among 16-19 year olds.⁷ Risk of unplanned pregnancy remains high, as around one in 10 16-19 year olds with a sexual partner does not use contraception.

FPA believes that every young person should have the freedom and capacity to choose whether to be sexually active, use contraception, become pregnant and, if pregnant, whether or not to continue with the pregnancy. As it stands, many young people do not have accurate information or access to services that support them. The Tellus4 survey found that 32% of young people surveyed said that the information they had received on sex and relationships was unhelpful, or that they had received no such information⁸ and polling has shown that, very often, young people do not know that there are 15 methods of contraception to choose from.⁹

FPA is committed to providing everyone with the information they need to prevent unplanned pregnancy. We believe in engaging young people in information production to ensure that advice and information is accurate, clear and meets the needs of young people. Services should also be designed to meet the needs of young people, and all should be given the support they need to make the pregnancy choices that are right for them.

3. *FPA believes that pregnancy prevention should form a key part of a comprehensive, statutory programme of relationships and sex education (RSE).*

RSE provision is variable across the country and young people often report that it is too little, too late and too focused on the science of reproduction.

Evidence repeatedly demonstrates that young people rate the RSE they receive at school as either bad or very bad.¹⁰ Studies also show that school-based RSE

⁶ The prevalence of unplanned pregnancy and associated factors in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3) (Lancet, 2013)

[www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)62071-1/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)62071-1/abstract)

⁷ Key data on adolescence (Association for Young People's Health, 2015)

www.youngpeopleshealth.org.uk/key-data-on-adolescence

⁸ Tellus4 National Report (DCSF Research Report 218), Chamberlain, T, George, N, Golden, S, Walker, F and Benton, T (London: DCSF, 2010) www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/TEL01

⁹ Sex and contraception survey (Populus, 2009)

www.populus.co.uk/poll/sex-and-contraception-survey/

¹⁰ Heads or Tails: What young people are telling us about SRE (Sex Education Forum, 2016)

www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/34250/Head-or-tails-SRE-2016.pdf



acts as a delay for the start of sexual activity and increases condom and contraceptive use among those already sexually active.¹¹

RSE also provides young people with the confidence and skills they need to negotiate the use of contraception that suits them. FPA believes that all pupils should be able to access a comprehensive programme of RSE and all schools be supported to dedicate enough class time to the subject. FPA welcomes the government's decision to implement statutory RSE in all secondary schools in England and relationships education in all primary schools in England from 2019.

4. *FPA believes that good relationships and sex education (RSE) must present young people with a full range of pregnancy choices, to include non-judgemental discussion of abortion. All young people must have access to clear, evidence-based information about abortion and counselling services.*

Young people grow up in a culture that can be both biased and ill-informed about abortion as a valid choice when faced with an unwanted pregnancy.

Despite abortion being a safe healthcare procedure that one in three women accesses during their lifetime, at many schools it is only taught in the context of ethics, morals or discussion of religious opinion. An audit undertaken by Education for Choice found that in some schools abortion is not addressed at all.¹² In others, anti-abortion groups are invited to talk about contraception and abortion to young people. This means that young people are often exposed to bad practice, including misinformation about abortion and contraception and the reinforcement of stigma associated with abortion.

We believe that non-judgemental, evidence-based education on all pregnancy choices, including abortion, becoming a parent and adoption, should be a compulsory part of all RSE. There should also be a range of services in place for young women, including free, non-directive, counselling services, easily accessible without delay.

FPA believes that the decision to have an abortion rests with the woman herself, whatever her age; education and access to treatment should centre on this principle.

¹¹ Associations between source of information about sex and sexual health outcomes in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3) (BMJ, 2015) bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/3/e007837.full

¹² Abortion education in the UK: Failing our young people? (Education for Choice, 2012) www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/EFC/abortioneducationreport.pdf



5. *FPA believes that there are a range of cultural and social reasons underlying the UK's high teenage pregnancy rate and that these should be addressed.*

Research demonstrates that poverty and deprivation are strongly associated with under-18 conception.¹³ The rate of progress in reducing teenage pregnancy from 1998-2012 also varies widely around the country.

Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that often the neighbourhood characteristics of young teenage parents, for example limited employment and training opportunities and local acceptance of young parenthood, influenced decisions.¹⁴ This shows the need for an approach to teenage pregnancy that also addresses issues relating to poverty and lack of opportunity.

6. *FPA believes that young parents should not be stigmatised and that all young parents should be supported.*

Not all teenage pregnancies are unplanned; many are the result of a positive life choice taken by young people.

In order to reduce the negative outcomes for young parents and their children, it is necessary to support them. FPA believes that this should include the provision of education options that can fit around childcare, housing support, help with childcare costs, and parenting support.

Further resources

- FPA relationships and sex education factsheet
www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/sex-and-relationships-education
- FPA's young people policy statement
www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/young-people-policy-statement.pdf

Additional reading

- Teenage pregnancy: past successes - future challenges, Department for Education
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181078/TPIAG-FINAL-REPORT.pdf

¹³ Studying sexual health in the UK (Lancet, 2013)
[www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)62535-0/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)62535-0/abstract)

¹⁴ 'Planned' teenage pregnancy: Views and experiences of young people from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006) www.jrf.org.uk/report/planned-teenage-pregnancy-views-and-experiences-young-people-poor-and-disadvantaged



- Conceptions to women aged under 18 in England and Wales, ONS
www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/datasets/quarterlyconceptionstowomenagedunder18englandandwales
- Abortion education in the UK: failing our young people? Education for Choice
www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/EFC/abortioneducationreport.pdf
- Sex and contraception survey, Populus
www.populus.co.uk/poll/sex-and-contraception-survey/
- Teenage Pregnancy Knowledge Exchange, University of Bedfordshire
www.beds.ac.uk/knowledgeexchange/briefings