

## **Inquiry into teenage pregnancy**

### **Zero Tolerance**

Zero Tolerance is a national charity working to end violence against women through awareness-raising, training and campaigning. Our response to the Teen Pregnancy Inquiry will therefore focus on aspects of teen pregnancy policy which relate to violence against women and girls.

a. Do you have any views on the current policy direction being taken at the national level in Scotland to reduce rates of teenage pregnancy?

As noted in the SPICE briefing on teenage pregnancy, SRE is patchy across Scotland. Where SRE does take place, the focus is largely on the biological aspects of sex and the basics of preventing pregnancy and STIs – e.g. condom use and delaying first sexual activity.

There is growing evidence that young people feel increasingly pressured by peers and wider culture to engage in sexual activity that they are not comfortable with (e.g. NSPCC 2011 & 2012, Zero Tolerance and YWCA Scotland 2011). Young people who engage in sexual activity through pressure or coercion are less likely to have taken precautionary measures or feel able to ask their partners to use contraception.

Zero Tolerance would strongly recommend that schools are encouraged to provide SRE which includes broader discussions about respectful relationships and the importance of 'active consent' – a term that goes beyond the bare legal definition of consent to encompass the idea that sexual activity should be both mutually desired and freely consenting.

While this could have an impact on teen pregnancy, it is also an approach that complements anti-violence and equality work taking already place in many schools.

c. What are your views on the relationship between high levels of teenage pregnancy and socio-economic inequality?

As noted in the SPICE briefing, research shows a clear relationship between teen pregnancy and inequality. Given the connections between socio-economic inequality and gender inequality (see e.g. Bradshaw 2003), any new policy on teen pregnancy should not foster further inequality and therefore:

- Should avoid stigmatising teen parents and/or sexually active teens

- Should place the responsibility for preventing teen pregnancy equally with boys and girls
- Should ensure adequate support for teen parents so that teen pregnancy does not lead to further inequalities

d. What are the barriers and challenges to making progress in achieving positive change in communities that might lead to reductions in the levels of teenage pregnancy?

Gender inequality, including stereotypes about the appropriate sexual roles and responsibilities of men and women, can foster the use of sexual pressure, coercion and violence against girls. Policy on teen pregnancy should be informed by wider gender equality and violence against women policies which seeks to tackle this.

g. Are there specific approaches to reducing teenage pregnancy that are not currently getting sufficient attention in order to affect positive change for children and young people?

- Given the wide range of policy areas that feed into teen pregnancy, it is important to ensure that local, national and schools strategies are coherent and compatible. Local authorities should be encouraged to use national strategy, but also to adapt this to specific local circumstances e.g. of social exclusion and varying community cultures.
- Acknowledging the role of pressure and coercion in many young people's first sexual experiences. Placing the responsibility for this with those using coercion, pressure or violence rather than with the young people, usually girls, experiencing this.
- Educating young people about the importance of mutual 'enthusiastic' or 'active' consent, i.e. sex is only ok when both partners actively decide to participate.
- Acknowledge and critique harmful gender stereotyping about sexual roles, for example that sex is something girls do for boys, that it is girls responsibility to prevent pregnancy, or that sexually active boys are 'real men' but sexually active girls are 'sluts'.
- Focus preventative education equally on boys and girls
- Avoid stigmatising teen parents
- Promote respectful relationships and active consent
- Promote equality

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Wood, M., Barter, C. and Berridge, D. (2011) Standing on my own two feet: Disadvantaged

Teenagers, Intimate Partner Violence and Coercive Control

[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/findings/standing\\_own\\_two\\_feet\\_pdf\\_wdf84557.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/findings/standing_own_two_feet_pdf_wdf84557.pdf)

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[http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/sites/all/files/UnderPressure\\_Doc\\_Web\\_sm.pdf](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/sites/all/files/UnderPressure_Doc_Web_sm.pdf)