

(4-part series)—SENTINEL-VOICE REPORTS

SENTINEL-VOICE REPORTS ON COMMUNITY TEENAGE PREGNANCY PROBLEMS

By Bob Palm

It is a traumatic experience that overwhelms the victims making them feel ashamed and embarrassed. Their mothers are disappointed and dumbfounded.

In 1984 in Clark County alone, 1,199 children -- all 19 or under -- had children.

Olga Larson, with the Vital Statistics Division of the State Health Department, said 830 of the children giving birth were white, 341 were black, 12 were Indian and there were 16 others.

Larson said girls 14 years old and under in the county 31 live births, 24 of them had abortions and one child was born dead.

In the 15-19-year-old group, there were 1,168 births, 606 induced abortions and 22 fetal deaths, Larson said.

Because the girls are so young, virtually still children themselves, they run a higher risk than a grown woman of medical complications and premature

births.

The girls increase the risk of complications by trying to hide their pregnancies, getting upset and not eating and refusing to discuss their problem with anyone because of shame and embarrassment, according to Marty Marrett of the county health department.

Marrett said the girls are prone to reesclampsia, which prompts a drastic increase in the fluid in the girls' bodies, causing them to swell. Their blood pressure also increases, and if the girls don't get help, they could go into convulsions.

Mary Pedersen, a county social worker, attached to Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital, said there isn't much difference in the medical problems facing black and white girls belonging to middle class families in getting pregnant and having babies, but girls belonging to poor families face more medical and psychological problems

because their families cannot give them the total support they need.

"Those problems are compounded because of a lack of education," Pedersen said.

However, she related she has found strong extended family support by both middle-class and poor families of girls with babies.

Black girls get help from their sisters, mothers and grandmothers, the same as in white families, Pedersen said.

At one time, according to Pedersen, girls could get financial help from the federal government, but in March 1984, the federal government terminated financial aid to all pregnant girls 18 and under, who were living with families that did not qualify for welfare.

Young mothers 18 and under, who are living with their family cannot get on welfare if the entire family does not qualify for welfare. However, the babies can be

enrolled in the Aid To Dependent Children program.

However, Pedersen said, the county now has programs to help pregnant teenagers with financial

who get pregnant is that they get sexually involved with their boyfriends while they are too young to admit their own sexuality and thus are overwhelmed by it.

they are eight months pregnant, or until someone else notices the pregnancy.

Pedersen said once a girl finds out she is pregnant, she should not be afraid to tell someone, so that she can get pre-natal care.

According to Pedersen, more black girls than white keep their babies. She said poor families don't consider abortion as an option, because they consider abortion murder.

Further, very few poor girls have abortions because they cannot afford them.

The federal government will not pay for an abortion, unless the pregnancy is life-threatening to the young woman, Pedersen said. She related she had seen only one such case and that was for an 11-year-old girl.

However, she said, very few families, black or white consider adoption as an option.

Pedersen said that the future mental and physical growth of the child born to a teenager depends on the quality of parenting.

"A single parent can do an adequate job of raising a child," she said. "Statistics show a high number of single parent families throughout the country."

(PART II will examine the reasons for such an increase in teenage pregnancies and the medical and psychological problems facing the young mothers.)



needs and the girls can enroll on welfare if they live apart from their families.

Pedersen said, "The mothers are still little girls who still need supervision and need to go to school, which puts quite a burden on the mothers of the young mothers."

She said the pregnancy problem among young black girls is so pronounced, because they are ashamed to ask for birth control devices.

According to Pedersen, the general pattern for the girls

Once they realize they are pregnant, they become ashamed and embarrassed. She said girls belonging to middle-class families more easily admit their sexuality, which causes them to take more precautions against getting pregnant.

Pedersen revealed that some girls don't realize when they are pregnant and for a while many deny it.

Some stop eating, and their pregnancies are not noticed until, in some cases,

Forty-four States Establish King Holiday

With less than three weeks remaining before the first official celebration of the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., 44 states and three U.S. territories have established their own official holidays in conjunction with the federal holiday. Two more states are in the process of establishing the holiday on Jan. 20.

The latest count of participation by states and territories was conducted by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission

on Dec. 23. Coretta Scott King, chairperson of the holiday commission, also noted that four states and one territory have taken no action to establish a holiday.

Thirty-three states and three territories have established the official holiday on Jan. 20. Eleven states will observe the holiday on Jan. 15.

States and territories observing the Jan. 20 date are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut,

Delaware, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, NEVADA, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Virgin Islands, Washington and West Virginia.

States observing the holiday on Jan. 15 are Alaska, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah and Wisconsin.

Establishment of a Jan. 20 holiday is pending in Idaho and Vermont.

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