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Sociology 201

Essay #2

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Teenage Pregnancy; Through A Social Lens

It is a common sight in our present social age to see teenage mothers. This unique social group deserves a great deal of study and attention. Breaking the boundaries of social norms through the very event of their pregnancy, teen mothers walk a fine line between a socially acceptable form of family, and a deviant type of reproduction. Teenage pregnancy has been conceptualized as a social problem requiring prevention efforts (Maynard, 1996). By viewing the issue of teenage pregnancy and birth rate, we can gain a better understanding of how conflicts and changes occur in society depending on these pregnancies. To understand these variables from a sociological perspective one must look at them through a sociological lens, which in this case will be a social-conflict approach. Issues that affect the conflicts and changes that teen pregnancy impose on society such as education, economic status, and ethnicity will be explored.

In order to clearly observe how teenage pregnancy functions in society as well as what conflicts it causes, the social-conflict approach must be defined. The social-conflict approach essentially shows how inequality in various cases creates conflict and causes changes in society. Women who find themselves pregnant while under the age of twenty tend to find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when compared to the rest of society, and must strive to overcome the inequality gap. Research has indicated that one of the primary reasons for this inequality has much to do with differences in the level of

education attained by teenage mothers. In the majority of cases, teenage pregnancies tend to occur more frequently in young women who have education levels lower than non-teenage mothers. Data indicates that women who dropped out of school due to a pregnancy during their teen years were less likely to finish their education than other women who dropped out for other reasons (Marry Bissell, 191). This causes an inequality in other aspects of life tied to education, such as employment opportunities, income rates, and health care options. As issues like education barriers have come to the attention of government officials and policy makers, more specialized education programs are being created specifically for teenage mothers. These programs offer benefits like childcare, flexible hours, and lower tuition rates, which allow teenage mothers to complete their education, and in doing so be able to reach higher goals in their lives.

Economic status is another issue that becomes quite understandable when viewed with the social-conflict approach. Economic statuses have created conflicts and gaps in society throughout history. People have fought wars to level the playing field of the economic standing of both entire countries as well as individuals. Teenage pregnancies tend to lead to a greater gap in economic standing, e.g. income and personal property, for these individuals than other mothers who delay pregnancy until their 20's and beyond. In many ways, this gap in economic status causes conflict between the two groups in rather indirect ways. Teenage mothers find themselves aggressively competing against older mothers for the same jobs. There is speculation that this increased competition for these jobs on the part of the teenaged mothers is due in part to the greater economic need for the increased income (Bissel, 194).

Ethnicity and race are two final key factors in the occurrence of teen pregnancies. While neither race nor ethnicity is a biological factor in increased birth rate in teenage women, they do produce a social-based factor. In some areas because race and ethnicity are directly related to poverty rates, low education levels, and poor socioeconomic standing, and since these issues are often correlated with teen pregnancy levels, race and ethnicity can be major players in increased teen pregnancy rates. In addition to either the increase or decrease in pregnancy rates among teenagers, the negative effects of these pregnancies are also tied to race and ethnicity. According to research, while white women experience some negative impacts from a teen pregnancy, the greatest negative issues in areas such as income, labor market participation, and welfare receipt were experienced by black women. This correlation has been observed in connection with most minorities, and has prompted our society to create various programs for financial aid, welfare, and job placing.

The social-conflict approach allows individuals to view various social issues such as teen pregnancy in different ways. The effects that teen pregnancies have on society and the problems it causes are very apparent when using a social-conflict approach. While research indicates that pregnancy rates among women under the age of 20 fell during the period of 1996-2006 (Kost, Henshaw, & Carlin, 2010; Ventura et al., 2009), it is still an issue that continues to cause conflicts in today's society on a range of different levels. Although as of yet complete solutions have not been found to fix such conflicts as economic status, low education rates, and the race and ethnicity differences in teenage mothers, we can better understand how these issues interact in our society.

References

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