

Campus Pregnancy:

Officials Struggle to Curb Unplanned Pregnancies

A number of college women find out each year that they're carrying more than credit hours. Despite educational programs, access to birth control and the AIDS scare, unplanned pregnancies among students continue to occur at a steady rate.

The emotional and physical turmoil of students — male and female — dealing with unplanned pregnancies is at least a slight interruption of their studies. For some students, an unplanned pregnancy can mean an end to their chance to earn a degree.

Pregnancy Rates on the Rise?

About 35 to 40 pregnancy tests are done each week at the student health center at the U. of Maryland, College Park, and 40 percent of these tests are positive, said Mary Hoban, coordinator of health services. She added that 99 percent of these pregnancies are unplanned.

Of 15 health officials at large universities polled in the fall, most said the number of positive pregnancy tests has remained consistent the past two years while some said they've seen a decrease in campus pregnancies. But because not all college women who become pregnant go to their student health centers for testing — off-campus facilities and home pregnancy tests also are used — schools are unable to record all campus pregnancies, and the actual numbers may be higher.

Deborah Richie, sexuality education coordinator at the U. of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, said that "considering where (undergraduate) women are in their lives," she thinks most campus pregnancies are unplanned.

About 200 tests were positive this year at Auburn U., and Terry Smith, a certified registered nurse practitioner, said this rate is consistent with the number of positive tests at this time last year.

Student health centers at Stanford U. and Indiana U. both have seen a decrease — attributed to the possible use of other testing methods or off-campus facilities — in the number of positive pregnancy tests in the past several years. Dr. John Dorman, director of public relations and outreach at Stanford, said the number of positive tests has gone down from 167 in 1986 to 126 in 1989. Dr. Hugh Jessop, director of Indiana's student health center, recorded the most radical change: 750 to 800 tests were positive during the 1988-89 school year compared to 350 during 1989-90.

The Most Prevalent Choice: Abortion

Jessop said health professionals at IU counsel women on all of the available options, but the choice is up to each student.

"More than half of the women we have are going to opt for abortion," he said.

This number is higher at other universities, including the U. of California, Los Angeles, where 96 percent of pregnant college women counseled choose abortion, said Amy Goldner, UCLA marriage, family and child counselor.

Hoban said 90 to 95 percent of pregnancies at the U. of Maryland end in abortion.

While national statistics specific to pregnancy among college women are not available, a

survey of abortion patients conducted in 1987 — the most recent national data — by Stanley K. Henshaw and Jane Silverman of The Alan Guttmacher Institute showed abortion rates were highest among women ages 18 to 19, and the numbers dropped sharply after age 24.

And according to the study, 31 percent of all abortions in 1987 were performed on women attending school.

"School enrollment was positively associated with abortion rates, except among women aged 15 to 19," Henshaw and Silverman wrote. "After excluding teenagers and standardizing for age differences, we found that the abortion index among women enrolled in school was 61 percent higher than that of women not enrolled. The desire to complete school is a common reason for seeking to terminate an unplanned pregnancy."

Aida Torres and Jacqueline Darroch Forrest, other researchers from The Alan Guttmacher Institute, also compiled results of the 1987 survey of abortion patients, focusing on the reasons the women decided to have abortions.

"Three-quarters said that having a baby would interfere with work, school or other responsibilities, about two-thirds said they could not afford to have a child and half said they did not want to be a single parent or had relationship problems," Torres and Forrest wrote. "Slightly fewer than one-third of respondents said they had decided to have an abortion because they were not ready for the responsibility of having a child, because they did not want others to find out that they were sexually active or had become pregnant, or because they were not mature enough to have a child. . . . Eighteen to 29 percent of women of all ages reported that their husband's or partner's desire that they have an abortion influenced their decision."

Education vs. Responsibility

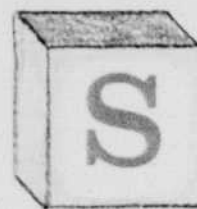
Health professionals at all of the universities agreed that while education about birth control and the consequences of sexual activity is important, other factors, such as drugs and alcohol, contribute to the number of campus pregnancies.

"I don't think you can talk about sex without talking about alcohol," Hoban said. "I can provide all the education I want, but if you're too drunk to open the package or drunk enough not to care, there's not much I can do."

Jessop agreed. "Education is a great process (to prevent unplanned pregnancy), but after a few joints and a few drinks, all the education in the world isn't going to matter," he said. "That's one of the things we try to point out to students. We try to get them to consider exactly what they're willing to get into."

Smith attributes many of the pregnancies at Auburn to sexual attitudes and incorrect or no use of birth control.

"Most believe it's not going to happen to them," Smith said. "You ask (the women) if they've had unprotected intercourse since their last period, and they say yes. Then you ask them if they're trying to get pregnant, and they are surprised you would ask."



herri, a senior at Ohio State U., had a pretty good excuse for missing her spring quarter final exams last year. In fact, facing a desk and calculus equations instead of the hospital bed where she gave birth to a 6-pound, 10-ounce baby girl may have been an easier test.

She named the baby Jean Louise after the main character in her favorite book "To Kill a Mockingbird," and held her the day after she was born.

"She was beautiful," Sherri said. "I was so proud of her. I couldn't believe she was mine . . . but she wasn't mine. I rocked her for an hour and then it was time for me to leave. It's been over a year since the adoption and not a day goes by that I don't stop and say a little prayer for her. I just want her to know that I love her."

Sherri had just started her senior year when she found out she was pregnant. She didn't want to drop out of school, but living in her sorority house was out of the question. So, she moved in with her sister and brother-in-law and continued with her classes.

When she told the baby's father, they both decided that adoption was the best answer because he didn't want his family to know, and he and Sherri weren't ready for marriage.

Another sister of Sherri's knew about a couple looking for a baby to adopt. Sherri contacted the lawyer who described the adoption process and what would happen to the baby after its birth.

"I was now considered the 'birth mother,'" she said. "I felt cheated. It sounded so impersonal."

Sherri said she wanted to find out as much as she could about the adoptive parents so she could find the best possible home for her baby.

"The parents had written a letter for the lawyer to give me," she said. "I felt an instant bond. The adoptive mother knew how I was feeling. She had miscarried in her sixth month of pregnancy and knew what it was like to lose a child. After reading the letter, I knew I was doing the right thing."

At first, attending classes was hard, Sherri said. She was afraid of what people would think, but she was glad to see they treated her the same as they had before.

The last time Sherri saw the baby's father was the day he visited her in the hospital.

"We went down to the nursery to see the baby, and although he would never admit it, I saw him cry. It was then I realized how permanent my decision was."

Before leaving, she gave Jean Louise a Peter Rabbit musical toy and a white coming home outfit for her to be baptized in. She also gave her a dress she had worn as a little girl that her mother had saved, along with a picture of herself wearing the dress.

Through the lawyer, the adoptive parents have forwarded to Sherri pictures of the baby, including one taken on her first birthday wearing the dress Sherri had worn.

She said she still feels she made the right choice. Raised a Roman Catholic, Sherri said abortion was never a consideration for her.

"I could never have done that," she said. "It's a baby. It's a human being. What girls have to realize is that there are agencies that will help them get through it."



or Carla, an Indiana State U. senior, having an abortion seemed to be the only alternative.

"I was a freshman in college, 18 years old," Carla said. "I had recently had my first sexual experience. I met my boyfriend the first week of school and every-

thing happened really fast."

"I even know the night I conceived," she said. "It was the one single night we didn't use a condom."

She was nervous when her period didn't come. "I knew in the back of my mind," Carla said. "In the doctor's office, I felt sick, like I was going to throw up. She (the doctor) told me about all the available options and counseling services. She didn't judge me or pressure me into any one option."

"I had to walk about a mile to pick up my pap smear