The forgotten story: Teen-age unwed fathers

by Henry Duvall

A boy in a foster home in Washington, D.C., became a father at age 12. Although a child himself, he maintains contact with the 14-year-old mother and lends support the best way he can.

Another young father, an 18-year-old in Tulsa, Okla., has a fairly decent job, plans to buy a home soon, and intends to marry the mother of his child.

While much public attention has focused traditionally on the unmarried teen-age mother, the adolescent father virtually has been excluded from the family picture.

But the attitude toward fatherhood for most young fathers today seems to show emotional concern for both the mother and child, according to a study conducted by Dr. Leo E. Hendricks, senior research associate at Howard University's Institute for Urban Affairs and Research in Washington, D.C.

"Adolescent fathers are extremely interested in their children," says Hendricks. "We found relationships to be serious," and a "genuine concern for the mother."

In a survey of unwed adolescent fathers, Hendricks discovered that 96 per cent of the young fathers expressed concern for their child's future, and 80 per cent saw nothing wrong in having a child out of wedlock.

Moreover, the majority of the young fathers perceived love in their relatonships, with 77 per cent indicating no serious problems between them and the young mothers.

Hendricks has collected data over the past two years from 194 young fathers under the age of 21. "One-on-one interviews," he says, were conducted in Tulsa, Okla.; Chicago, Ill.; Columbus, Ohio; Albuquerque, N.M.; and Washington, D.C.

Most of the adolescents surveyed were black, but Hispanic, Anglo and native Americans were also interviewed.

In drawing a profile, the unwed teen-age father tends not to be a churchgoer, doesn't use contraceptives, and is likely to be a school dropout. "This was consistent in all the cities," says Hendricks. And adolescent fathers tend to be between the ages of 16 and 18.

Little research has been done on teen-age fathers. Hendricks is only one of a few social scientists in the nation who has worked on this subject. "Fathers aren't as visible as mothers," Hendricks notes, "and they just don't come forth."

Teen-age fathers tend to come from large, two-parent families. In the study, 59 per cent grew up with both parents in the home and 64 per cent came from families with five or more children, with 75 per cent of the young fathers feeling closer to their mothers than to their fathers when they were growing up.

On sexual attitudes, 55 per cent of the young fathers reported that they learned about sex from a friend. Sixty-three per cent reported they had their first sexual encounter with a girl by the time they were 13 years old.

The study also found that the majority of the fathers were against abortion. Ninety per cent of the youths reported they disapproved of abortion.

"In general, there had been ongoing relationships," Hendricks explains, "not fly-by-night relationships."

There were some differences between ethnic groups. White fathers were older than black and Hispanic fathers when they first engaged in sexual intercourse, and more white fathers are employed than those in the two other groups. Whites also tend to marry sooner after the pregnancies.

The number of teen-age pregnancies in this country increased during the '70s, with the biggest increase among youths between the ages of 11 and 15, says Lucy Eddinger, information officer for the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The number of teen-age births, however, declined in the '70s while the number of abortions rose. There were 657,000 such births in 1970 compared to 560,000 in 1979, says Eddinger. Among this age group, abortions numbered 244,070 in 1973 and 433,900 in 1978.

Births out of wedlock have risen substantially. In 1960, there were 91,660 such teen-age births, 199,900 in 1970, and 262,700 by 1979, according to Eddinger.

And more than 90 per cent of those teen-age mothers who give birth keep their babies, she adds.

One question in Hendricks' study zeroed in on unwanted pregnancies: "Did you want to get the mother of your first child pregnant?" There was a resounding "no" from the majority of the young fathers.

In interviews with fathers in Columbus, Ohio, Hendricks found that 46 per cent of them indicated they weren't ready for the pregnancy, while 19 per cent reported they were too young to be fathers.

Of the 25 per cent who didn't view the pregnancy as unwanted, 41 per cent said they were in love with the young mothers, while 25 per cent planned to marry and have children.

The major problems faced by the unmarried adolescent father relate to financial responsibilities, parenting skills, the difficulties in completing an education, and getting along with the unwed mother and her parents. A limited social life and babysitting were other problems indicated in the study.

Hendricks says the family seems to be the major source of help. In the survey, 59 per cent of the young fathers indicated they would go to their family first with a problem. The family member sought out for help was likely to be the young father's mother. "Only 6 per cent of the subjects indicated they would seek help from a human-service agency," says Hendricks.

The unwed adolescent fathers surveyed in the five cities all expressed some desire for child growth and development services, including parenting education and counseling. Employment services was another major desire.

Hendricks says his study grew out of community concern about the lack of information on teen-age fathers that could help social-service agencies to include the father in the planning for the welfare of the mother and child. "Five years ago," Hendricks speculates, "most human-service agencies didn't have the data to focus on the whole picture of teen-age parenting."

But another problem has been the view of the teen-age father as a scoundrel. "Most agencies in the past have tended to have a punitive attitude toward the father. Some of it still lingers today," says the researcher.

DeLaney wins suit

Reginald A. DeLaney was awarded $31,800 by a jury in his discrimination complaint against Taco Time International.

DeLaney was employed by Taco Time International in September of 1978, as manager of the Interstate store. "I loved my job," he said. "It was just what I wanted and I believe I did a good job."

He testified that in August of 1979 he was assigned a new district manager, Greg Ledbetter. In Novemer, a survey of the store's customers was made which found the service fast, the food good and the restaurant clean. Two white customers allegedly stated that there were too many black employees on the day shift.

DeLaney claims that the district manager told him to hire more whites but the only way to accomplish this was to terminate blacks, which he refused to do.

He later was forced to terminate a black employee, he said, stating on her termination papers "does not meet standard."

While DeLaney was on vacation, he said, the former employee filed a civil rights complaint. DeLaney was then instructed to rehire her but she would not return to work. DeLaney said he was then given an evaluation that implicated him in the termination of the employee, which he refused to sign.

DeLaney said he was told by the district manager and the director of operations that if he did not sign he would be terminated. Refusing to sign, he was terminated on January 15, 1980.

After 2½ hours deliberation the jury awarded DeLaney $31,800 in back pay, punitive damages and emotional stress.

DeLaney, who is currently studying accounting at Portland Community College, has not had substantial employment since his termination, blaming poor references and an attitude that followed him: "Are you going to sue us?"

Israel in Lebanon: An opposition viewpoint

(Continued from page 1 col. 6)

ing," they are profoundly worried. For the first time, there is not this great spur of generosity culminating in massive contributions, that we have witnessed in the past. No donations, no line-ups of volunteers, but an unprecedented Jewish demonstration at an Israeli Embassy (France), headed by Jewish personalities, some of whom are distinguished and dedicated to the existence of Israel.

Israel has never been able to digest a defeat. Today—it must be admitted—she cannot even digest her victories. After the Yom Kippur War, tens of thousands of young Israelis left the country. Once their companions are buried and the dust of tanks has settled, how many more will leave, refusing to digest the next victory? For 2,000 years, we have been threatened by our weakness. Today, we are threatened by our uncontrollable strength. Once the guns are silenced, we will be the occupants of another country's territories: a "temporary" occupation which may well become, once again, a long-term one, as we await a hypothetical international agreement. According to Sharon and Begin, this situation would guarantee our security. Should there be need for proof, we have but to turn to the West Bank to see that an occupation ensures neither security nor coexistence.

We are confronted with two political delusions, both fundamental: if Israeli politics is distorted by the disproportion between its military strength and its political means, in Palestinian politics, the same disproportion exists, but reversed. Its policy of steadfastness is not substantiated by any military potency. Hence, a realistic attitude, as well as respect of universally-recognized principles, demand that both parties find a political solution based on recognition and peaceful coexistence. Spilled blood, desolation and hate will deepen the gap between our two nations, which are doomed to live or die together. How many more victories will we have to submit to before we realize that the only victory is Peace, a reconciliation reached through negotiation and mutual recognittion? We, in Israel, must fight off the illusions of victory and strive, as best we can, to terminate our occupation of the West Bank and Lebanon. On their side, the Palestinians will have to draw the conclusions of this terrible lesson, and refuse to suffer the abuse of irresponsible leaders and demagogic, unrealistic slogans. War opposes one nation against another. The battle for peace must be fought from within each of these nations.

District 18's Democratic Committee will meet Wed., Oct. 6th, 7:30 pm, at the Original Pantry, meeting room, 1025 N.E. Broadway. All democrats welcome. District 18 business plus preview of Kulongoski ads. All Democrats welcome.

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