

The Affect of School Status on the Health Behaviors of Young Fathers

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For many young men, adolescence can be a life stage filled with a great deal of uncertainty. The ambiguity of adolescence is further complicated when these adolescents become teen fathers. Studies suggest there is an association between teen fatherhood and risk behaviors such as; unemployment, antisocial behaviors, substance use and poor contraception use among other risk behaviors. The study presented examined the extent to which school status affects risk behaviors from among a group of 198 young fathers who participated in a school linked multi-service community program. School status was defined by three groups: those still in school, 21%, those who had dropout, 52% and those who graduated from high school or completed a GED, 27%. The groups were analyzed to determine the extent to which school status affects risk behaviors young fathers engage in from intake through follow up, and how school status affects service needs. Demographic and risk behavioral data was gathered at entry into the program, and at three months, six months and twelve months. The results indicate that young fathers who were still in school had lower rates of risk behaviors at both intake and at the 12-month follow-up compared to school dropouts and graduates. Though, throughout the course of the study consistent contraceptive use was poor among all groups, teen fathers who were still in school reported the most consistent use of contraceptives. Teen fathers who were still in school also reported lower rates of cigarette and alcohol use. Though many young fathers reported having numerous issues, few requested services other than employment assistance or vocational training. The findings suggest that being in school might add a protective factor and thus might be the optimal time for program managers to address risk behaviors. Findings also suggest that though young fathers report various issues they identify matters related to employment as their primary service need.