

1979 Author Reflections

Original contributing authors whose manuscripts were published in the 1979 issues of *Pediatrics in Review* were asked to look back and reflect on changes to the health topic and their career paths.



Adolescent Pregnancy—A Multifaceted Problem

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After my wonderful time with co-author Dr Lissa McAnarney, life took me to various places in an exciting journey as a pediatric residency program director (25+ years), adolescent medicine fellowship director (12+ years), Department Chair, and grandfather of 12!

Adolescent pregnancy endures as one of 6 priorities of the US CDC in adolescent health. It persists as a perplexing public health quandary (Gordian knot) in current society. As it is a serious global cause of morbidity and mortality, the need for confidential, comprehensive sexuality education remains in the 21st century for sexually active adolescents—as it was when our 20th century article was published. Three major issues loom large then as now: *teen pregnancy, contraception, and abortion.*

Some adolescent pregnancy reduction has been seen in the USA (2015 historic birth rate low of 22.3 per 1,000 15-19 year- old females-- representing a 40% drop over the past few decades); however, this persists as the highest rate in the industrialized world! Also, risks for mother and baby, as noted in our article, continue especially without access to appropriate health care.

Early, repeat, unwanted, unintended pregnancy prevails as a health conundrum for teens and a stigmatizing situation in 21st American society. Rates remain increased in racial-ethnic-minority youth and vary widely from state to state—still greatly influenced by low SES/economic status. Sexual assault (including incest) endures as a major cause of teen pregnancy—especially with young adolescents.

Adolescent pregnancy research now reviews data from online surveys utilizing modern technology. Old and new research reveal that simple access to sexuality education along with increased access to contraception are not sufficiently lowering teen pregnancy rates. Teens need incentives for avoiding pregnancy until later in life. Social and economic realities remain important for many youths today as they were in the past.

We continue to monitor postpartum teens for depression (part-partum depression is higher in teens vs adults). The need to lengthen inter-pregnancy intervals in adolescents is important for the better health of the mother and the offspring—now as then!

Contraception has improved in 40 years with oral contraceptives of newer formulations, extended & continuous use of oral contraceptives (OCs) and LARC methods (i.e., IUDs, injectable contraceptives and subdermal implants). Lower estrogen dosages have made OCs safer with decreased estrogen side effects. Newer formulations of progestogens also have less side effects. Youth utilizing the contraceptive effectiveness of LARC methods may lose the understanding of the use of (need for) condoms for STD prevention—the classic dual method of condoms with effective contraception!

Abortion abides as a contentious, stigmatizing procedure and controversies regarding abortion in adolescents as well as all women persist after the past 40 years. The possibility of over-turning the 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v Wade* is powerfully present in 2019+; if abortion becomes illegal, a return to pre-1973 issues will occur including dealing with sequelae of unsafe, illegal abortions.

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” George Santayana (1863-1952)

Further Reading

Read Donald Greydanus' and Elizabeth McAnarney's 1979 article, Adolescent Pregnancy—A Multifaceted Problem: <https://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/1/4/123>

Read the 2013 PIR article, Adolescent Sexuality: <https://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/34/1/29>

Read [related articles and cases on Contraception and Adolescent Pregnancy](#)

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