# Teenage pregnancies in Germany

*Report by the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)*

Research and Practice of Sex Education and Family Planning

For some years teenage pregnancies have been of increasing interest to schools, information centres, universities and the media. If the number of teenage pregnancies is assessed on the basis of international comparisons, the figures for the Federal Republic of Germany tend to be at the lower end of the scale and are falling. Irrespective of the statistical data and the benchmarks chosen to interpret the figures, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) believes that all unwanted underage pregnancies pose a serious problem for the individuals concerned, requiring personalised support.

As a result of continuous specialist discussions on the subject, increasingly trustworthy knowledge is available on the 'phenomenon of teenage pregnancies'. Attempts to explain the situation range from psychosocial conditions, socio-economic factors and the educational potential of the individual affected, to knowledge about types and use of contraception. It has meanwhile been demonstrated that young women with higher levels of education and good career prospects tend to opt for a termination. Girls with limited career or life prospects on the other hand, 'choose' to carry the pregnancy to full term at their young age. This situation confirms that sex education as a primary preventative measure is only one area that is needed.

Sex education in its broadest sense supports young people in overcoming their developmental issues. It makes a contribution to personality and character development, based on encouraging young people to take control of their sexuality themselves. Consequently, sex education for adolescents focuses on educating young people about their bodies and getting them to see themselves as sexual beings. This includes:

- knowledge of one's body,
- perception of one's body,
- use of contraception,
- support in finding a role,
- learning how to communicate in intimate situations,

- dealing with feelings and their 'unpredictable' fluctuations,
- knowledge about the relationship between being sensible and being in love,
- dealing with responsibility for oneself and one's partner.

In order to achieve this, sex education has to be included as early as possible in children's education and taught in an appropriate manner for their age. To this end all the parties involved must make every effort to achieve their educational task. Not all the socialisation entities are the 'appropriate' or desired points of contact for children and adolescents when it comes to every single matter of sex education. The family home, school, day-care centres, nurseries and public youth work are all required in different ways.

Since 1992 the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has been obliged by law to design and develop target group-specific concepts, media and measures relating to sex education, contraception and family planning and make these available free of charge. In doing so, it works with the federal states and their responsible authorities, and also to a large extent with specialist organisations and experts.

The media and these measures pursue the common goal of helping people avoid conflict arising from a pregnancy through means of sex education and prevention.

The basis for preventing unwanted pregnancies, not only in underage women, is the communication of knowledge about bodily functions and sexuality at all stages in life. The Federal Centre for Health Education concentrates on making available and distributing information concerning knowledge about the body and contraception to the various relevant parties. Issues concerning being in love and the review of communication and models for dealing with such issues which contribute to strengthening young people's identities and developing their personalities are all supported with

appropriate age-specific media services which take into account specific problems (different learning abilities and development levels). BZgA media and materials are not only available to the target groups themselves; aids are also provided for disseminators of information working in the various fields.

Young adolescents are a particular focus of educational work. The younger the teenagers are, especially girls, the less disciplined they are with regard to using contraception. Age-specific and gender-specific educational materials are therefore produced and distributed. Another target group is socially-disadvantaged young people. The BZgA has therefore intensified its work with initiatives and programmes in this target group area. It supports networking of local operations which are already underway to improve low threshold services.

Despite all the efforts made in the form of sex education, which forms an essential contribution to the prevention of teenage pregnancies, it should not be forgotten that girls become pregnant for reasons other than a lack of knowledge, not using contraception or incorrect use of contraception. Teenage pregnancies can be related to a lack of career or future prospects in young girls; a connection that is made all too rarely.

In order to provide adolescents with help in their career and life planning in good time, the BZgA has developed the 'Komm auf Tour' ['Take a tour'] project. This provides realms of experience enabling secondary general school pupils to match their life prospects and environment with a broad and flexible career-based orientation (www.komm-auf-tour.de). The focus must be increasingly on structural conditions, for example the provision of training places and jobs. Creating the conditions for secure life planning is therefore an important social task.


List of materials

# Prevention of underage pregnancies

Order No. 13010100

The Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has been assigned the task of preventing unwanted pregnancies in Section 1 of the SchKG [Act on Conflict Situations during Pregnancy]. To this end, the BZgA designs, produces and distributes media and measures on sex education and family planning. A particular focus of this work is the prevention of teenage pregnancies.

Assuming that comprehensive sex education at all the relevant stages in life is the best method of preventing pregnancies, this brochure will inform you about the services we offer in terms of sex education and, in particular, the prevention of pregnancies among underage girls.

This media has been designed specifically for teaching children and adolescents and has been adapted to suit their various stages of development. Key areas of focus are knowledge of the body and contraception.

Aids to help you to use the media in your area of work, as well as materials to give you background knowledge are listed and accompanied by a short informative text.

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