Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Parenting Teens

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Teenage pregnancy can have a profound impact on a teen's life, yet pregnant and parenting teens are often overlooked and stigmatized. Teen mothers disproportionately have childhoods that include adverse events and experiences such as family instability, chronic stress and social inequities. Strikingly, more than 4 in 10 low-income adolescent and young adult mothers have past exposure to the child welfare system. The convergence of psychosocial factors—including poverty, inadequate social supports and exposure to traumatic events—can increase a teen mother's vulnerability to postpartum depression and interfere with accessing care. Pregnant and parenting teens represent a highly vulnerable population, and in many ways, our health care and social support systems are not designed for them.

To improve access to mental health care for parenting teens, we need to leverage existing physical and behavioral health care systems to improve how the mental health needs of this underserved population are addressed. This brief details early findings from a project that seeks to address this issue, and make recommendations for policy, practice and programmatic change.

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