

Evaluating an Enhanced Home Visiting Program to Prevent Rapid Repeat Pregnancy Among Adolescent Parents

Despite declines in adolescent pregnancy over the past three decades, many young women still become mothers before they turn 20 years old. Teen mothers are more likely to experience adverse health, education, and economic outcomes. Repeat pregnancies during adolescence can further compound these adverse consequences. A small but growing body of evidence suggests a combination of individualized support services and improved access to effective contraception can promote healthy birth spacing among adolescent mothers.

To help build the evidence base on programming to prevent rapid repeat pregnancies among adolescent mothers, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) partnered with Mathematica to conduct an evaluation of Steps to Success, a home visiting program for young mothers in San Angelo, Texas. The program aims to reduce rapid repeat pregnancy through counseling on contraception, with an emphasis on increasing the use of long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs); adequate birth spacing; parenting; child development; father involvement; and education and career planning. The study of Steps to Success used a random assignment design to compare the impacts of Steps to Success to those of a traditional home visiting program, offered to a control group, which focused only on parenting and child development. The study examined effects on healthy birth spacing, father involvement, mothers' education and career aspirations, and mothers' parenting behavior.

Key findings

At the two-year follow-up, rates of repeat pregnancy were similar for mothers in Steps to Success and in the traditional program. However, some evidence indicated that Steps to Success improved other outcomes related to healthy birth spacing, most notably LARC use. Two years after entering the program, 53 percent of Steps to Success mothers reported using LARCs, compared with 44 percent of mothers in the traditional home visiting group. The impact was concentrated among younger adolescent mothers, who were ages 14 to 18 at program enrollment. Steps to Success also decreased the reported incidence of unprotected sex among younger adolescents,



Program Impacts After Two Years Compared to the traditional home visiting program, Steps to Success:

- Did not have a detectable impact on repeat pregnancy.
- Increased the use of LARCs, particularly among younger adolescent mothers (those ages 14 to 18 at program enrollment).
- Decreased the incidence of unprotected sex for younger adolescent mothers.
- Did not improve outcomes related to father involvement, mothers' education and career aspirations, or mothers' parenting behavior.
- Cost about \$2,500 more to deliver per participant (\$7,689 compared with \$5,140 for the traditional program).

by 11 percentage points. Compared to the traditional home visiting program, there was no evidence that Steps to Success improved father involvement, mothers' education and career aspirations, or mothers' parenting behavior.

Steps to Success in San Angelo

Teen pregnancy and birth rates in San Angelo, and throughout Texas, are among the highest in the nation. Using federal funding from the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) Competitive Grant program, Healthy Families San Angelo (HFSA)—an experienced, community-based organization—developed Steps to Success by enhancing its traditional home visiting program. HFSA supplemented the traditional program model, focused on parenting and child development, with counseling on contraception, adequate birth spacing, father involvement, and education and career planning. As part of the study, HFSA implemented both Steps to Success and the traditional home visiting program that was offered to the control group.

To allow time to address the broader variety of topics, Steps to Success home visitors made more visits than did home visitors for the traditional program. On average, Steps to Success families received 32 home visits each, compared with about 20 visits for families in the traditional program. Steps to Success visits covered contraception (3.2 hours, on average), education (3.7 hours), employment and career training (5.3 hours), and relationships (1.1 hours). These topics were not discussed by home visitors for the traditional program. Steps to Success home visitors spent somewhat less time discussing parenting than did home visitors in the traditional program (10.3 versus 12.6 hours). As intended, fathers were more likely to participate in Steps to Success visits. They participated in 39 percent of Steps to Success visits, compared with 4 percent of traditional visits.

Program costs were higher for Steps to Success, mainly driven by the difference in the number of visits per participant. Steps to Success cost \$7,689 per participant, compared with \$5,140 per participant for the traditional home visiting program. Program costs were similar when measured as the cost for a single home visit.

Evaluation methods

From May 2013 to May 2016, HFSA staff recruited pregnant and recently postpartum adolescent mothers, ages 14 to 20, from local hospitals, health care providers, high schools, nonprofits, and offices of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. The study team randomly assigned mothers to a program group offered the Steps to Success home visiting program or a control group offered the traditional home visiting program. Mothers in both research groups completed a baseline survey upon enrolling in the study and were invited to complete follow-up surveys one and two years later. The response rate was 84 percent for the one-year follow-up and 81 percent for the two-year follow-up.

Characteristics of mothers at study enrollment

Characteristic	Percentage
Age	
14 or 15	8
16 or 17	25
18	19
19 or 20	48
Race and ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	28
African American, non-Hispanic	3
Hispanic	67
Other	2
English is main language spoken at home	93
Currently married to baby's father	14
Currently living with baby's father	54
Currently in a romantic relationship with baby's father	78
Pregnant at study enrollment	40
Pregnant more than once	20
Sample size	594

Source: Baseline survey conducted by Mathematica.

Response rates were similar for the Steps to Success and traditional home visiting groups.

The mothers in the study reflected the characteristics of the broader San Angelo community. Across both research groups, 67 percent of participants were Hispanic, and 93 percent reported that English was the primary language spoken at home. Mothers' ages ranged from 14 to 20 at enrollment, with about half ages 19 or 20. More than three-quarters of mothers reported they were in a romantic relationship with their baby's father at the time they enrolled; 14 percent were currently married to the father. Forty percent were pregnant at the time of study enrollment and 20 percent have been pregnant more than once.

The PREP Multi-Component Evaluation

This brief, and the accompanying full report, "Enhancing a Home Visiting Program to Address Repeat Adolescent Pregnancy: The Longer-Term Impacts of Steps to Success," are part of a series of products from the PREP multi-component evaluation. Learn more about the evaluation at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/personal-responsibility-education-program-prep-multi-component>. Learn more about the PREP initiative at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/programs/adolescent-pregnancy-prevention>.

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