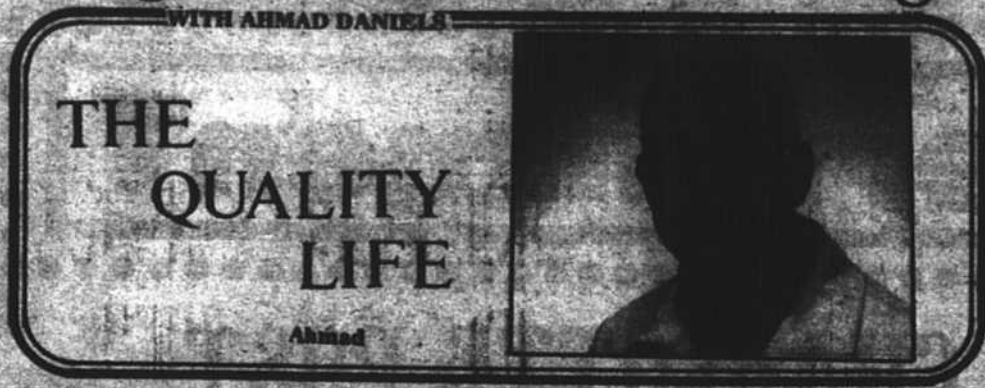


26,000 Teenage Women Become Pregnant Each Year

WITH AHMAD DANIELS

I was recently thumbing through the pages of "The State of the Child in Mecklenburg County" written and published by the Council for Children (June, '85), when I came across some interesting statistics: "Nationally," it stated, "some 1.1 million teenagers became pregnant in 1981, most of them unintentionally. Over half of these young women gave birth, and another 434,000 terminated their pregnancies by abortion. If current trends continue, 40 percent of today's 14-year-old girls will become pregnant at least once before age 20. Sexual activity among unmarried teenage women increased by approximately 67 percent during the 1970s; by 1979 between 50 percent to 70 percent of women aged 17 to 19 were sexually active." (The Council For Children lists sources too numerous to mention here. Call me if you want these vitals.) It further states, "In North Carolina more than 26,000 teenage women become pregnant each year. One-third or more of young people subsequently undergo abortions. North Carolina now ranks fifth in the nation in live births and 11th in total pregnancies in the 10 to 19 year old po-



ulation. **STATISTICS vs. REALITY**
There is some thing about numbers that make them very cold and insensitive. When the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 16 percent of all white teens between 16 and 19 were unemployed in 1984 versus 42.7 percent for black teens, we are immediately taken aback by the disparity in percentages. What would have a greater impact on us all would be a televised showing of these teenagers at one time and let the viewer see how prodigious 42.7 percent really is.

The Vietnam War would most certainly have lasted longer had it not been for the six o'clock evening news, bringing stop-action close-ups of blood and gore right into your living room each night.

HITTING HOME
The more of the five senses involved, the greater the impact and the more memorable the experience. I have always known the black adolescent pregnancy rate was disproportionately high; statistics are continuously reminding me of this. Nor does one have to search very long before spotting an adolescent mother-to-be. However, none of these experiences had the numbing effect as did my discovering my 15-year-old daughter was six months pregnant. Never mind that she lives in New York City with my former wife — the shock wouldn't have been any

less stultifying had she lived in Peking, China. Immediately I began to ask myself where had I failed? Maybe, just maybe if I was still with my daughter's mother this would not have happened. I know only too well however teenage pregnancies occur in two-parent homes also. When my daughter was asked by her mother why she kept the pregnancy hidden for so long (thus depriving mother and fetus of crucial pre-natal care) she stated she did not want to kill her baby.

SEX EDUCATION
Sex education is a personal and very heated subject. One need only look at

the controversy surrounding how sex education was being taught in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. Some parents, uncomfortable with discussing reproduction, would rather let the school do the job. Still other parents would prefer to discuss sex education at home. I do not have any answers but I just cannot help but feel that these kids understand what they are doing and understand what the consequences are. Unfortunately there is no way these children can understand the far reaching effects of their actions. They

do appear to understand their desire to have something they can love and call their own. We as parents can try to be as understanding as possible if ever confronted with this situation and to remember to provide our children with all the love they will need to assist them through a very difficult time.

Editor's Note: Ahmad Daniels, exercise and wellness consultant for Alternative Lifestyles, provides private and group seminars on exercise, nutrition, stress, and other health related concerns.

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