

Teen pregnancy facts distorted

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Statistics on sexual behavior of teen-agers are distorted to win acceptance for contraception and abortion programs for young women, a leading Catholic anti-abortion spokesman said Wednesday.

"Despite the contrary impression, overall rates of teen-age childbearing have actually fallen in recent years," said Monsignor James T. McHugh, staff director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities.

McHugh's suggestion that teen-age pregnancy is dropping contrasted with the findings of Wendy Baldwin of the National Institutes of Health. Baldwin said the illegitimacy rate for teen-age mothers soared in the past 15 years.

"Out-of-wedlock childbearing is increasingly becoming a teen-age phenomenon, as teen-agers are responsible for 52 percent of the out-of-wedlock births," she told the panel Tuesday.

McHugh said Wednesday that teen pregnancy statistics often are distorted "so as to increase the crisis atmosphere and generate acceptance for government-funded programs of abortion and contraception for teen-agers without parental knowledge or consent."

He said sex education reflects "a utilitarian philosophy (give contraceptive information to cut down out of wedlock pregnancy) while re-

fusing to acknowledge moral principles.

"Sexual responsibility must be grounded in moral principles and no amount of 'information' or 'sexual counseling' can substitute for moral conviction."

Harriet Presser, University of Maryland professor of sociology, cited the costs of teen pregnancy.

"Teen-age childbearing... is associated with higher morbidity and mortality rates for the mother, the fetus and the child," she said. Babies of young mothers are generally smaller and often more susceptible to illness, mental retardation and birth defects, she added.

"Young teen-age mothers, in particular, may have to drop out of

school or stop working, at least temporarily," she said. Those mothers thus have lower skills, narrow job options, little opportunity, and increased social and economic pressures, so that many "find public assistance the only short-term solution."

"It is thus not surprising that over two-thirds of teen-ager mothers in one group studied became welfare recipients soon after the birth of their first child," she said.

Insects could help trim unwanted range weeds

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ALPINE, Texas—Tiny bugs that poisonous weeds eventually may trim rangelands of toxic plants can paralyze and kill cattle, according to researchers.

Scientists at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute want to find out if insects native to the southwest can be used to control weeds that have pestered stock and ranchers since the days of the buffalo. Then they want to find out which bugs would be best for the job.

Apparently they've discovered a few insects that are natural enemies of weeds, said Dwight Deal, research director. "What we're interested in right now is basically determining a little bit about the life cycle of these critters."

Dr. Grainer Hunt, research director, called the project a "shot in the dark." Although there is no way to believe it will work, he said, it's certainly worth investigating.

The wooly loco weed is a poisonous plant in West Texas, Hunt said. "The kinds of insects haven't been determined, but we think there are some natural insects that control it. But we're not sure."

Initial studies focus on fly, weevil and moth larvae that feed on the flower, seeds and roots of the plant. Experiments in California have had limited success using non-native insects to trim patches of non-native weeds, such as Russian thistle or tumbleweeds, but the interaction between weeds and insects native to the Southwest is relatively unknown.

Ultimately, the researchers want to find out which of the bugs should be bred and then placed among unwanted weeds.

"The insects will reduce the numbers of the plant species to a certain level, but it won't give complete eradication," said Wehmeyer. "Hopefully, a certain equilibrium will be reached where there are still some plants around."

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