

YO! Impact on Youth Birth Rates

Executive Summary

National studies indicate that teen parents face many additional issues and have a more difficult time in successfully making the transition to the adult world-of-work. When programs assist young people to delay childbirths, they help the participants to get a solid foundation in the world-of-work. This is, consequently, a positive aspect of program participation. Therefore, we decided to investigate if the Baltimore Youth Opportunity (YO!) program has had any impact in relative to overall childbirths.

With the assistance of the State Health Department, we were able to collect data for young women who were a part of a comparison group as well as young women who were considered to be YO! participants. One thousand, five hundred and nine women (1,509) were included in our study. Nine hundred and sixty (960) of the group were YO! participants, and 549 young women applied for the program but did not participate.

For the total of all the young women in our review, 608 birth incidents were recorded following the date reported as the first contact with the program staff. In our comparison group, there were 264 birth incidents. This equates to 48% of the comparison having given birth during the period reviewed. In our YO! participant group, only 36% of the young women (344) had babies for the time following their enrollment.

This twelve-percentage point difference between the participant and comparison groups is significant. It means that young women in the participant group –the group who were active YO! Program participants and benefited from the services of the program -- were 25% less likely to become pregnant and give birth than the young women in the comparison group.

This difference is even more significant when two specific characteristics of the groups are considered. While both groups of females were from the same neighborhoods and shared similar economic backgrounds, the youth in the comparison group were slightly older and a little better educated. Both of these factors are connected to more positive outcomes relative to avoiding or delaying teen pregnancy. The fact that the comparison group had a slight advantage over our YO! Participant group relative to these factors but still had a higher percentage of youth giving birth is noteworthy and adds additional importance to the difference found.

Background

National studies indicate that teen parents face many additional issues and have a more difficult time in successfully making the transition to the adult world-of-work. Many reports have indicated that babies being born to children have a long-term impact of perpetuating the cycle of poverty in many communities. Thus, programs which provide services that assist young women to delay child bearing until they are more economically and emotionally ready for a family generally help their participants to gain a more solid start in the adult world. Along with education and workforce development services, the Baltimore Youth Opportunity (YO!) Program provides a range of support and health services for all of its participants. A part of the health continuum of care is education about parenting and safe sex. The YO! Program requested Callahan Consultants, Inc. to review available information to ascertain what – if any – impact the Program had on the teen birth rates for program participants and/or youth who lived in the Empowerment Zone.

Our first endeavor to gain insight into this issue was to look at the birth rates of the Empowerment Zone to see if the rates had risen or declined during the years that YO! operated. This approach proved unworkable for several reasons. First, birth data tabulated by specific census tracts for specific years was not readily available to us. Secondly, the YO! Program never engaged the majority of female residents in the target areas. Lastly, in any one-year time period of the program, only a relatively small portion (less than 30%) of the total female population was engaged in the program. Thus, we concluded that the expectation of the program to demonstrate a community-wide impact on this issue was probably unrealistic.

Our second approach for examining the impact was to consider an analysis of the YO! program data. But YO! Program data – designed by the US Department of Labor and mandated for use by all YO! programs – did not track births by YO! enrollees. While some data on births existed in the case notes, the information was sporadic and not comprehensive enough to provide any insight that could be seen to apply to the total program.

Clearly, an outside supplemental data source was needed if a meaningful review of impact on teen births was to be performed. We contacted the State Health Department to solicit their assistance. The Health Department records all births in the State, and the birth was connected to the mother's name and social security number. While they could not provide us with individual data – they are charged with protecting the confidentiality of all their records – they did offer to take our enrollee data and to provide us with aggregate information as to births that occurred in our enrollee population.

The cooperation of the Health Department addressed the issue of obtaining accurate (although aggregate) data as to the births that our enrollees experienced. Our next challenge became how to compare/contrast/evaluate our enrollee data? The YO! Program was not permitted by its Department of Labor contract to use resources for evaluation or to develop a control group for program comparison purposes. Our search for a similar comparison group in the Baltimore community did not yield any results.

After considering other potential approaches for investigating this issue, it was determined that given the resources and data available we should examine the possibility of using a sub group of the YO! enrollees as a comparison group. Via USDOL definitions there are young people

enrolled in the program that are considered “participants” and other who have not met specific program criteria who do not qualify as a “participant”. Specifically, USDOL requires all YO! programs to report monthly the actual participation of each youth in the program. In order to be considered a “participant” a youth must have a minimum number of hours in specific program activities. Furthermore, USDOL requires that each youth annually complete at least one developmental (education or occupational skill building) program activity in order for that youth to be considered a program “completer” for that year. By using these two USDOL defined criteria and sorting our enrollee pool to see which youth were program “completers” and achieved program participation status for a specified period, we could effectively create a bifurcated enrollment pool. The participant group of the pool includes youth who were actively engaged in the program and met the USDOL standards, and the comparison group includes youth who did not take advantage of the program and failed to participate. More information as to how our comparison and participant groups were constructed can be found in Attachment 1.

Using this approach, we identified 1,509 female enrollees. These young women enrolled in the YO! program between July 2000 and March 2003. Of the total, 960 youth qualified as participants and 549 young women did not meet the participation definition and became our comparison group.

About the Youth Compared

Our first consideration was to see how comparable the two groups were. The USDOL eligibility requirements mandated that all youth in the study be between the ages of 14 to 21 and come from a specific area in Baltimore’s Empowerment Community. Therefore, our assumption was that the two groups were very similar. To further examine this assumption we looked at several demographic characteristics of the two groups. The following table shows the racial characteristics of the two groups.

Racial Distribution			
	Black / African-American	White / Caucasian	Other
Comparison Group	98.2%	1.6%	0.2%
Participants	97.2%	2.5%	0.3%

From the perspective of race, the two groups were nearly identical, the overwhelming majority of youth in both groups were African American with less than three percent of the youth coming from other racial groups.

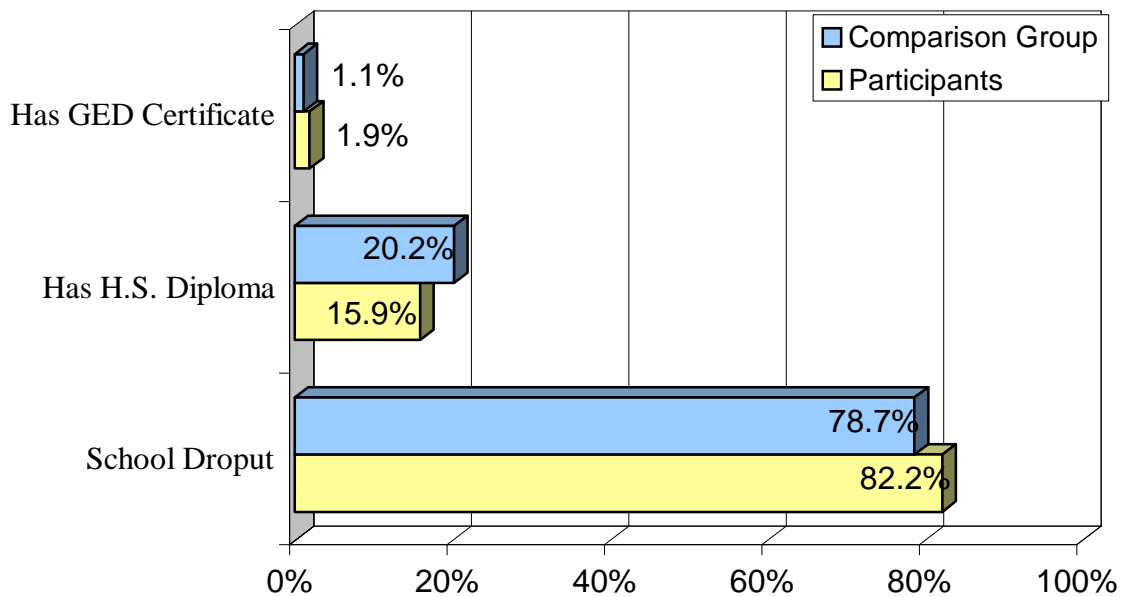
Age of the youth in the two groups was the second characteristic reviewed. While the YO! Program only works with youth who are between the ages of 14 and 21, significant age differences within this age span could be an indicator that that the participant and comparison groups were not similar. The table which follows indicates the distribution of the ages of both the participant and comparison group. The table indicates that the comparison group was older than the participant group, but this difference was not seen as significant, with no age cohort varying by more than seven percent.

Table A: Age At Enrollment

Age Group	Participants	Comparison Group	Difference
14	9.2%	8.2%	1.0%
15	7.6%	6.0%	1.6%
16	19.1%	12.4%	6.7%
17	18.4%	18.8%	-0.3%
18	16.7%	19.3%	-2.6%
19	12.6%	14.4%	-1.8%
20	8.8%	10.9%	-2.2%
21	7.7%	10.0%	-2.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	

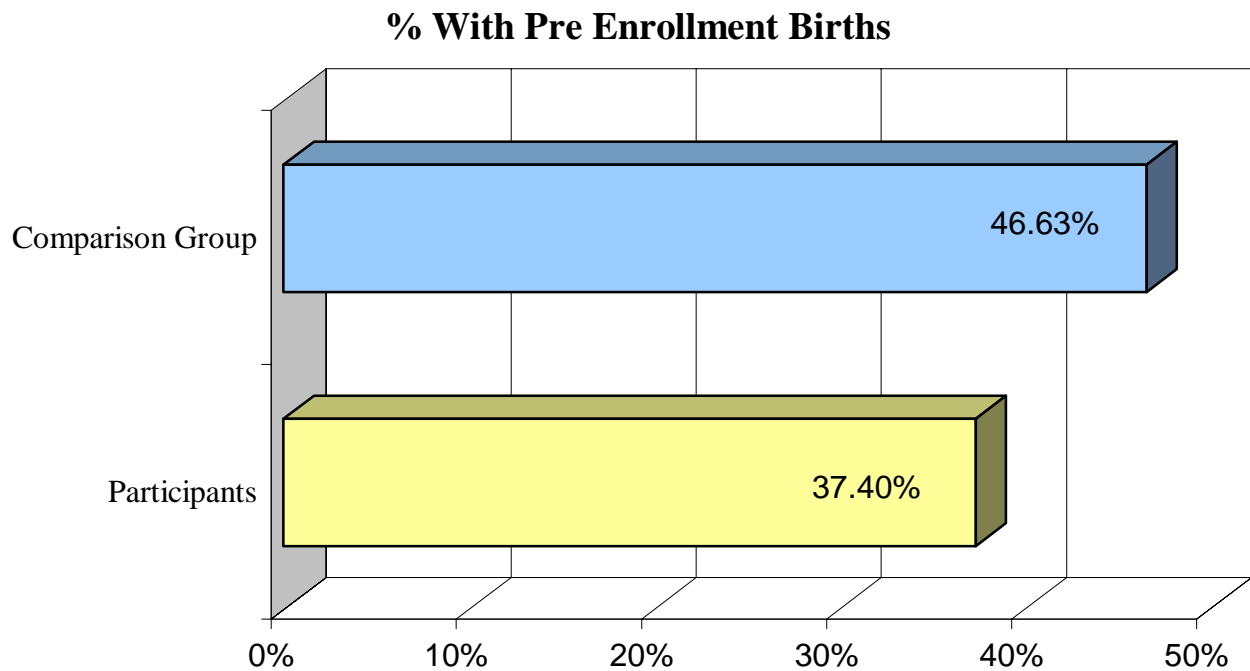
Next, the educational level of the youth was considered. National data indicates a statistical correlation between lower educational levels and higher birth rates among young females. Therefore, if a significant difference between the education achievement levels of the two groups existed, it could indicate that the two groups were not similar enough to consider differences found in the teen birth rates to be meaningful in terms of program participation/intervention.

Educational Achievement Levels



As the graph shows, the youth in the comparison group were slightly better educated than the youth in the participant group, with over 21% of the youth in the comparison group having a high school credential as opposed to only 19% in the participant group.

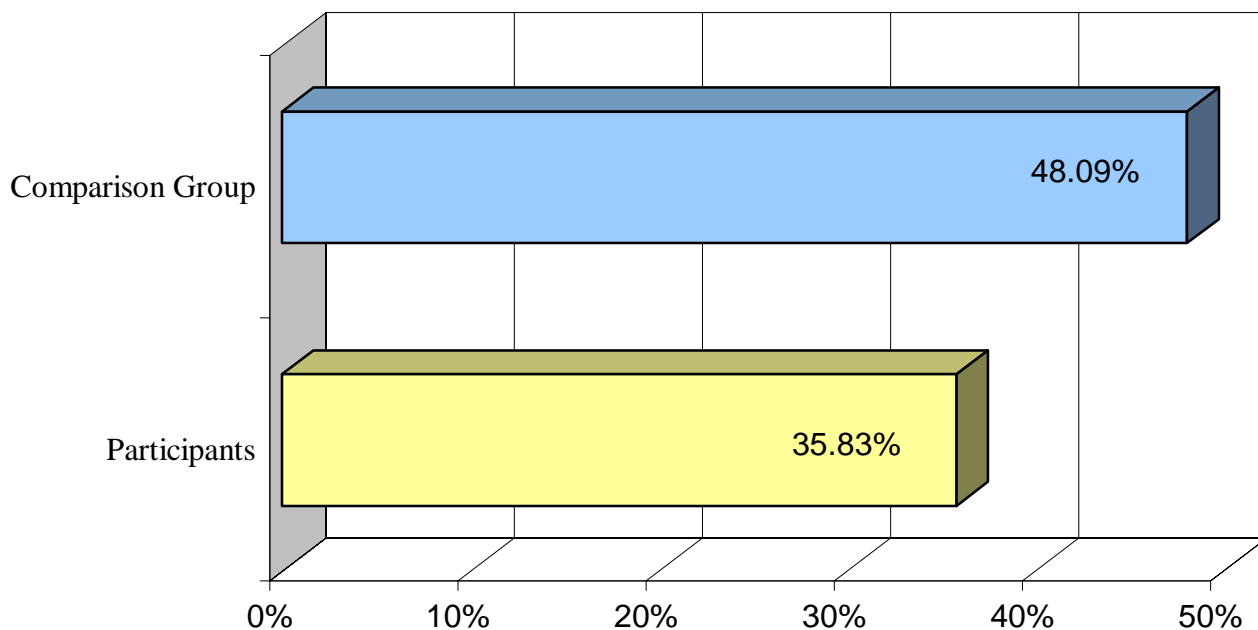
The last characteristic we reviewed was births before enrollment. There are indicators that second births to young mothers typically occur at a lower rate, and therefore if there were significant differences between the two groups in the pre-program births it could mean that the two groups were not similar. Thanks to the State Department of Health we were able to obtain the pre enrollment births rates for our two groups. The data indicates that our comparison group had a higher incidence of pre program births, which could translate to an expectation of slightly lower subsequent birth rates.



How the Groups Compared

With the assistance of the State Health Department, we were able to collect data for all of our young women. The start date was their YO! Program enrollment date and the time span reviewed ended as of June 30, 2004. For the total of all the young women in our review 608 birth incidents were recorded following the date reported as the YO! Program enrollment date. In our comparison group, there were 264 birth incidents, (a birth incident counts the birth of twins as one incident). This equates to 48% of the comparison group having given birth post enrollment. In our participant group, only 36% of the young women (344) gave birth in the time following their enrollment. Based on this data we developed the following graph.

% Having Post Enrollment Births



This twelve-percentage points difference between the participant and comparison groups is significant. It means that young women in the participant group –the group who were active YO! Program participants and benefited from the services of the program -- were 25% less likely to become pregnant and give birth than the youth in the comparison group.

Considering that youth in the comparison group were older, better educated and as a group had a higher incidence of pre enrollment births – all factors which would tend to influence the comparison group in a more positive fashion – the differences between the two groups is even more pronounced.

YO! Baltimore Comparison Group

In an effort to evaluate the YO! Baltimore program it was decided to ascertain if a control or a comparison group of youth could be identified, youth who were essentially similar to the young people who are engaged in the YO! Baltimore program but who did not participate in the program. In line with a traditional research and evaluation approach it was thought that comparing the status of the youth who participated in YO! Baltimore to the status of those who did not participate would yield important information that would provide insight to the overall effectiveness of the program. While the creation of a traditional control group typically takes place at the onset of program operations, this approach was not allowed by US Department of Labor. In fact, at the onset of the program, all of the Youth Opportunity programs were prohibited from using any of the allocated resources for any type of program evaluation or the creation of a control group.

While not as effective as a pre identified control group, it was decided to seek a comparison group of youth who could be used for a comparison study of the youth in YO! Baltimore who actively took part in the program and youth who did not participate in the program. After exploring available alternative data sources it was determined that the best data source for identifying a group of young people to compare the YO! Baltimore participants is the YO! Baltimore data source itself. This decision was based on a number of facts. First, the US Department of Labor insisted that all Youth Opportunity programs be considered an entitlement program. Furthermore, all Youth Opportunity programs were designed as community saturation programs. US DOL monitored and rated these programs based on their efforts to actively recruit ***all youth*** who resided in the target neighborhoods. Consequently, it is believed that the overwhelming majority of the all youth who lived in the targeted areas were aggressively recruited and offered YO! Baltimore services. This provides us the opportunity to construct a comparison group of similar youth to compare to the youth who participated in the YO! Baltimore program.

Because concerted efforts were made to engage all youth in the targeted neighborhoods, the unintended result was that some youth came to one of our Ports but did not continue to actively participate in YO! Baltimore. A review of the demographic information on this group of young people indicated that they share essentially the same demographic and socio-economic circumstances as the group of youth who did actually enroll in YO! Baltimore and actively participated in the program. Therefore, these circumstances offer the opportunity to use this group of young people – youth who initially enrolled in YO! Baltimore but did not actually follow through and obtain services – as a comparison group. We have identification data on these youth, permission to obtain information on them from other agencies and the capacity to track these individuals in a similar fashion as we can track our YO! Baltimore participants.