

Factors from Birth for At Risk Youth

A study of a professor and Sociologist Renata Forste of Brigham Young University implicates three factors from birth that are early indicators of at risk youth. They are: low education of the parents, parents who had children young (while in their teens or early 20's), and single parents. The percentages of children identified as at risk were such that 8% had none of the three risk factors cited, while 26% had one factor, 48% had two, and 79% had all three. Almost half of the children in the study had at least two out of three of these factors from birth and most had all three factors against them. These factors therefore, create disadvantages that cause a youth to be at risk.

What are the disadvantages?

I recently attended a seminar regarding at risk youth, where Renata Forste was the guest speaker. Besides relaying the above statistics as found by her study published in the most recent issue of the journal *Fathering*, she cited other sources in meeting with us, that verify some grim facts. Youth in at risk circumstances grow up in homes where one or both parents are more often than not under educated and under employed. Many live with a single parent. According to the U.S. Secretary of Labor Statistics of 2007: the average income per week of salary with less than a high school degree is \$552, with a 7.1% unemployment rate; with a high school degree is \$704, with 4.4% unemployment; with an Associates degree is \$856, with 3.5% unemployment; and with Bachelor's degree is \$1,393; with a 2.1% unemployment.

Poverty breeds poverty. Parents have to work more hours to earn less. They devote less time with their children and can afford less opportunity for their kids.

When living at or below the poverty level, it becomes a child's reference point. Most don't even consider that life could be better. And the percentage of children attending higher education is starkly related to how much schooling their parent's attained to. Many disadvantages are economic related and are readily seen, but professor Forste's study associates some other less apparent difficulties at risk youth must overcome.

How can youth overcome at risk circumstances?

Poverty or less education will lead to less cognitive stimulation and more difficulty in implementing proper parenting. The more children are exposed to books, music, zoos, museums, and other opportunities the better off they will be in developing their cognition. With the lack of parental supervision, other good mentors or adult guidance must take its place, but rarely does. Unfortunately, today there is more of a media influence than ever before in a child's life. Forste recommends that no more than two hours of screen time (computer or television) be allowed per child per day. She points out that there is less extracurricular activity available, but that it is needed as never before. Kids need a good active outlet. Many at risk kids are forced to be "mini-adults" in many ways. They have to deal with many adult problems they should not have to be in the middle of. They oftentimes are left to take care of themselves and other kids. In talking

with children who grew up in this mold and now are single parent's taking care of their own kids, Forste said that all expressed a wish to have had someone to talk to, to pattern their life and their direction after. They lacked a good role model and now find it difficult, as much as they want to be able to, to know how to be the role model they never had.