

E. Summary and Recommendations

38. Some fetuses are at risk from the moment of conception or shortly thereafter. As we have seen there are a variety of predictable and preventable conditions that can cause permanent damage — poor diet, drugs, alcohol, tobacco and exceptional emotional stress. When we discuss high risk pregnancies, we often overlook the high risk parent. Frequently, it is a very young mother, emotionally unfit at that time in her life to be a parent. When a young woman, unmarried or living outside of a stable relationship with a man, decides not to terminate the pregnancy she is assuming a great responsibility, not only for her own health, but also for the health of her child. It is a responsibility for which she is often completely unprepared, psychologically, emotionally, and practically. The unmarried, pregnant woman is only one example of the future high risk parent. Many girls 17 or 18 years old who had unpleasant childhoods, suffering from parental neglect and abuse, will be high risk mothers. In order to escape life at home, they marry or live with a boy of similar age who may also have a background of neglect and abuse. Together they are scarcely better prepared for parenting than the young unmarried mother.

39. Recommendations

1. We recommend that Governments at all levels and health agencies intensify their efforts

a) to make the public aware that the nine months *in utero* are as important in the development of a child as any other nine month period in the life of a child; and

b) to provide services and information to the public, particularly to women, on the importance of nutrition for the growth and development of the child.

2. We recommend that courses in parenting be promoted by all levels of government and non-governmental agencies concerned with the welfare of children.

3. We recommend that the Federal Government, after consultation with the Provinces and Territories,

a) pay a prenatal child allowance to a pregnant woman, as soon as possible after the confirmation of a pregnancy and the decision not to terminate it, in order that the woman have the financial resources to feed and care for herself properly during pregnancy as is essential for the future physical and mental health of the unborn child; and