

*Private Members' Business*

becoming sexually active, the numbers of abortions that result, and so on.

I think it is sometimes more effective to talk about real people to whom this happens, rather than about statistics. Therefore, I am going to talk about two young women I know and their stories, which are somewhat different despite their similar backgrounds.

First, I am going to talk about a young woman named Jan who came to see me at my constituency office very recently. She phoned and said: "You said if I ever needed some encouragement to go back to school to give you a call, so I am calling you". We spent about an hour talking one Saturday afternoon.

Jan had grown up in a public housing community. That meant that about two-thirds of the families in that community were living on public assistance. The ones who were not on public assistance were in very low paying jobs. It meant that the vast majority were single parents and the vast majority of the children were living in single parent households. That meant that at least two-thirds of them were living in conditions of extreme poverty.

Jan said to me: "You have known our community for a long time. You have watched a lot of us grow up". She mentioned a few people I would remember. She said: "Of all of us there are only two out of that community of 132 homes who grew up, finished high school and did not get into drugs or did not get in trouble with the law or did not get pregnant". There were only two out of the hundreds of young children who grew up in that community.

Jan is all set to go back to community college now. She has been working two jobs so she can earn the money to do that. If she achieves her dream, she will have a college diploma in a couple of years and may even go on to university. She will have some hope for her life and she will have some prospects. We talked about all the young girls who became pregnant and why they did.

I want to talk about another young girl, Penny, whom I have also seen grow up from a little two-year-old. She grew up in another public housing community, also in poverty, with not enough social services, not enough

support for the families in those communities. She had her dreams too.

Her dream was to be an aeronautical engineer. That may seem an unrealistic dream for a little girl growing up in poverty. In fact she was just about to finish her high school education at a technical school as an auto mechanic, which was a good entry into being an aeronautical mechanic. However, she got pregnant, lost the baby, and then got pregnant again.

We talked about the lack of self-esteem that one develops growing up in poverty and all the reasons that young girls get pregnant rather than dreaming the same dreams as others in society and trying to fulfil them.

I am not saying that only young women growing up in poverty get pregnant, but they do disproportionately. That is one major issue we have to deal with. Why do we have a society, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, in which one million children live in poverty? We know that means they are four times more likely to drop out of school.

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They are much less likely to go on to university even if they finish high school. They are more likely to die. They are more likely to get sick. They are more likely to be injured. They are more likely to commit suicide.

If we start talking about programs to prevent unwanted pregnancies, we must start looking at the fundamental reasons that young girls get pregnant. Poverty is certainly one of them. The biggest one, and it arises out of poverty, is a lack of self-esteem.

Until we are able to deal with that problem I am going to continue to see in my community nine, ten and eleven year old girls being sexually approached by young boys and responding, because that is what their sense of self-worth and self-esteem comes from.

Look at the advertising on our airwaves. Look at how we use sexuality to sell products and how that convinces very young girls that only by being sexually active, sexually attractive and sexually aggressive can they have value.

There are a lot of things in our society that tell women they do not have value. There is a lot of money spent telling them that their only value is sexual.