**Youth's Problems**

To some observers, teens today may seem spoiled (undisciplined and egocentric) compared to those of earlier times. The reality, however, is different. While poverty has decreased and political turmoil has lessened, young people are still under many types of stress. Peer pressure, changing family conditions, mobility of families and unemployment are just a few reasons why some young people may try to escape reality by turning to alcohol or drugs. However, most young people in the United States do not have problems with drinking, drug abuse, teen pregnancies or juvenile delinquency. Drug use (marijuana and cocaine are the most commonly used drugs) has decreased among young people in the United States within the last 10 years, though alcohol abuse has increased.

According to a 1991 government survey, about 8 million teenagers are weekly users of alcohol, including more than 450,000 who consume an average of 15 drinks a week. And, although all 50 states prohibit the sale of alcohol to anyone under 21, some 6.9 million teenagers, including some as young as 13, reported no problems in obtaining alcohol using false identification cards. Although many teenagers say they never drive after drinking, one-third of the students surveyed admitted they they has accepted rides from friends who had been drinking.

Many young Americans are joining organizations to help teenagers stop drinking and driving. Thousands of teenagers have joined Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD). They sign contracts in which they and their parents pledge not to drive after drinking. In some schools, students have joined anti-drug programs. Young people with drug problems can also call special telephone numbers to ask for help.

Aside from drug abuse, another problem of America's youths is pregnancy among young women. One million teenagers become pregnant each year. Why are the statistics so high? The post-World War II baby boom resulted in a 43 percent increase in the number of teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s. The numbers of sexually active teens also increased. And some commentators believe that regulations for obtaining federal welfare assistance unintentionally encourage teenage pregnancies.

Many community programs help cut down on the numbers of teenage pregnancies. Some programs rely on strong counseling against premarital sex and others provide contraceptive counseling. The "Teen Health Project" in New York City has led to a decline of 13.5 percent in the rate of teenage pregnancies since 1976. Why? Their program offers health care, contraceptive counseling, sports programs, job referrals and substance abuse programs.

About one million young people run away from home each year. Most return after a few days or a few weeks, but a few turn to crime and become juvenile delinquents. In 1989, approximately one-third of those arrested for serious crimes were under 18 years of age. Why are young people committing crimes? Among the causes are poor family relationships (often the children were abused or neglected while growing up), bad neighborhood conditions, peer pressure and sometimes, drug addiction.

Laws vary from state to state regarding juvenile delinquents. Once arrested, a juvenile must appear in a juvenile court. Juvenile courts often give lighter punishments to young people than to adults who commit the same crime. Juvenile courts hope to reform or rehabilitate the juvenile delinquent.

New programs to help troubled youths are created every year. For example, the city of New York and the Rheedlen Foundation provide an after-school program at a junior high school to help keep teens from becoming juvenile delinquents. Young people can go 4 after school and talk with peer counselors (people their own age), receive academic tutoring or take part in athletic and social activities. One New York community's library offers weekday evening workshops in dance, art, music and theater. They also sponsor social events, such as theater productions, in which young people can participate. Another group, the "Youth Rescue Fund" has a celebrity peer council of 15 teenage actors and actresses who volunteer their time to increase teen crisis awareness. As one young television actress said: "Teenagers are an important resource in improving the quality of life for all people."