



SHARP News



“Choices” Program Reduces Pregnancies

A recent study published in *Military Medicine*¹ reports the effectiveness of “**Choices**” to reduce pregnancies among young Sailors. During the study period (October 1999 through September 2000), just over half (53.7%) of eligible sailors attended *Choices*. The results of this initial study provide strong evidence that the program is effective. Unmarried female sailors who did not attend *Choices* were more than **three times more likely to become pregnant** than those who did attend the seminar.

“Choices” is a two-day program designed by the Naval Hospital Sigonella, Italy in response to high pregnancy rates among unmarried Sailors at that base. The goal of this two-day program is to reduce the rate of pregnancies among young Sailors to less than the national average. The program is now scheduled as part of mandatory military indoctrination for new arrivals and is held weekly. The program champion is Traci L. Scott, the hospital's Health Promotions Coordinator (DSN 314-624-4710).

The program covers multiple topics, including lifestyle changes, responsibilities of young military parents, budgeting issues, legal issues, anatomy and physiology, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), sexual assault prevention, and moral issues. Program participants assume 'custody' of baby simulators after the educational session. Participants are required to care for the 'baby' until the next morning. Through these simulators, participants experience the challenges of caring for a new life, and the dramatic impact on their lifestyle.

The new simulators are programmed to reflect the schedules of real babies. They “request” feeding, diaper changes, and burping. Sometimes they are just fussy and need to be rocked. To care for the baby, the participant must actually place a bottle to its lips for feeding, pat its back for burping, and keep the baby’s diaper on and change it as needed. The simulators record how often they needed each type of care, and how often their needs were met or neglected. The simulators also record non-support of the head, holding the simulator in the wrong position, and shaken baby syndrome. The amount of time the baby cried is also recorded.

A PowerPoint presentation about **Choices** and supporting documents may be downloaded from the SHARP website at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp/index.htm> (click on “HEALTH EDUCATORS” then “PRESENTATIONS”).

1 – Thomas C., Staren-Doby D. (2003). Reducing unintended pregnancy in young, single active duty women in an overseas environment. *Military Medicine* 168, 1:11 (Jan 2003)

Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP)

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