Programs for widespread dissemination of birth control information and devices among adolescents are subject to strong resistance from many groups and may be ineffective anyway. An alternative approach to reducing the alarming frequency of unplanned pregnancy among unmarried adolescents might be group or individual counseling for those most susceptible to unplanned pregnancies. Accurate identification would be necessary to implement this alternative. Developed in this paper is an inferential strategy for identifying in well-defined groups unmarried adolescents who seem "susceptible." When carefully evaluated, an inferential strategy, based on several concepts from Bayesian inference theory, appears remarkably accurate as a means of identification. Besides specific predic-
tions, its application also suggests some general characteristics of a selected group of adolescents who seem particularly susceptible to unplanned pregnancy. Risks and human-value issues are involved in using any strategy which identifies certain individuals for special treatment. A constructive framework in which to use a “pregnancy susceptibility” index is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The high incidence of unplanned, and sometimes unwanted, pregnancy among unmarried adolescents is becoming a national concern (Baizerman et al., 1971; Braen & Forbush, 1975; Furstenberg, 1969; Klerman, 1975; Piotrow, 1975). By 1972, the number of births to single girls under 20 was three times what it was in 1940 (Kantner and Zelnick, 1975). In Houston, Texas, some 2348 births to unmarried indigent teenagers were recorded in 1974.

In addition to the physical difficulties which often accompany early pregnancies (Coates, 1970; Puffer and Serrano, 1975), serious psychosocial problems frequently affect the teenager, her infant, and her family (Baizerman et al., 1971). A recent large-scale study of pregnancy in indigent adolescents (Goldfarb, 1973), from which the present work grew, revealed that although the adolescent mother is usually ill equipped to assume the responsibility of child care, most unmarried teenagers chose not to have abortions, and very few offered their children for adoption (P. B. Smith et al., 1975). Instead, many of these young mothers turned to their overburdened families for assistance.

Added to existing humanitarian concern for affected individuals, there is, in some segments of society, a growing hostility about welfare support of the teenage indigent mother and her child. Yet opinions vary on what, if anything, should be done about the high incidence of unplanned pregnancy among adolescents. Programs designed for widespread, unselective dissemination of birth control information and devices among adolescents have met with resistance (Minkowski et al., 1974). Certain groups consider such programs open invitations to promiscuity. Other groups see in a birth control program, even broadly applied, a disguised attempt to preserve racial or other social imbalance (Chrisman, 1971; M. Smith, 1968).

The value of birth control programs aimed at the adolescent population at large is questionable, particularly if the programs involve no more than dissemination of birth control devices and instructions for their use. The decision to use or not to use contraceptives involves complex motivational processes and other factors not completely dependent on the availability of information or means of contraception. For instance, the Godfarb study suggests that the consequences of pregnancy out of wedlock are less disturbing to indigent adolescents than to adolescents reared in more fortunate circumstances. It should not be surprising, therefore, if the former fail to use contraceptives consistently, if at all, no matter how well informed they are. Clearly, the values of the indigent adole-