



CELEBRATING A DECADE OF PROGRESS
IN IMPROVING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN,
YOUTH AND FAMILIES

What If: How Declines in Teen Births Have Contributed to Improving Poverty and Child Well-Being in States

April 2005

Questions and Answers

Q: Why did you do this analysis?

A: One of the challenges of working on teen pregnancy *prevention* is figuring out how to quantify and communicate the benefit of something that does not happen. Last Spring, an analysis by the Congressional Joint Economic Committee, released by the Ways & Means Committee, provided compelling evidence for how the progress on reducing teen birth rates over the past decade has contributed to reducing child poverty and reducing the number of children living in single mother households. This very powerful *national* data has helped the National Campaign and many others around the country make the case for why teen pregnancy prevention matters. However, state and program leaders have often expressed the importance of having data for their state. We responded to this need by replicating the national analysis for each state and the District of Columbia. This is intended to give people working hard in states useful information that will help them educate policymakers, press, and the public about the important contribution teen pregnancy prevention makes to broader social issues.

Q: Why did you rank states? Is it fair to compare states that are so different?

A: The tremendous news is that teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined in all states and among all ethnic and racial groups. The decline in state teen birth rates (Table 1) has contributed to improvements in all states in the number of young children in poverty (Table 3) and the number of young children living with single mothers (Table 4).

The differences shown among states are in their degree of improvement, specifically the percent change in the number of children who would be living in poverty and with single mothers if teen birth rates had not declined. While we recognize that there are important social, economic, political and other differences among states, we also believe there is value in showing how

states' progress compares. This provides important recognition for those who have made particularly impressive strides, and helps motivate those who have seen less impressive progress.

It is worth noting that a variety of states did very well: large and small, from different regions and with different populations. For example, the top 10 states showing the largest improvements in terms of young children living in poverty include the largest (CA) and smallest state (RI) in the nation, as well as states from the east coast, west coast, and mid-west (OH, MI). In other words, high levels of progress are possible among a variety of states.

Q: Are you suggesting that it is a good thing to prevent babies from being born?

A: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy strongly believes that adolescence is a time for education and growing up, not pregnancy and parenthood. Of course, once a child is born, we must all do everything we can to support that child and his or her parents. At the same time, the evidence is very clear that children born to teen mothers face a number of challenges in terms of health, education, repeating the cycle of teen pregnancy and more. Therefore, our goal is to help improve the well-being of children, families and communities by preventing teen pregnancy in the first place.

Q: Why focus in on specific ethnic and racial groups?

A: Again, the most important story is that teen birth rates have declined in all states *and* for all ethnic and racial groups. However, the amount of progress varies. The National Campaign's experience suggests that there is great interest in knowing how different populations are faring. This makes the data more relevant to specific communities and can help target resources and services to those where help is most needed.

Q: Why does Table 2 show negative numbers for some groups, and no numbers for other groups?

A: Negative numbers reflect that there were actually *more* teen births for a particular ethnic/racial group by 2002 than there would have been if teen birth rates had remained at the 1991 level. This typically indicates that teen birth rates for this group increased in a particular state over the decade. This occurred most often with Hispanics, where the teen birth rate increased over the 1991-2002 period in a number of states, compared with decreasing birth rates for other populations. This also occurred in some instances where we used the national rate in lieu of state specific rates for small populations (as explained below).

Numbers are not shown for some ethnic/racial groups where the number of teens in those groups in a particular state are too small to develop reliable birth rate estimates. In this case, national rates for this population were used to calculate the total number of children who would have been born to teen mothers. By definition, these were small groups in the state so they did not have a major impact on the total number. However, because these counts were included in the total but not in the breakouts for ethnic/racial groups, the total is larger than the sum of the breakouts in some cases.

Q: How did you do the state-specific analysis?

A: We used the basic methodology that the Joint Economic Committee used for its national analysis, which was released by the Ways and Means Committee in April 2004 (See “Steep Decline in Teen Birth Rate Significantly Responsible for Reducing Child Poverty and Single-Parent Families”). The National Campaign worked closely with researchers Wendell Primus and Richard Bavier to develop a method for creating state-level estimates. The analysis involved four steps:

1 – Estimating the Number of Additional Children That Would Have Been Born to Teen Mothers if Birth Rates Had Remained at 1991 Levels

2 – Estimating the Number of Additional Young Children Who Would be Living In Poverty and the Number Who Would be Living with Single Mothers if Teen Birth Rates Had Remained at 1991 Levels

3 – Estimating the Impact of the Additional Teen Births on the Poverty Rate for Young Children and the Proportion of Young Children Living in Single Mother Households.

4 – Calculating the Percentage Change in the Number of Young Children Living in Poverty and with a Single Parent, and Ranking States

A full description of the methodology is available at www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/whatif.asp

Q: Why are the national totals on your state tables different from the national figures developed by the Joint Economic Committee and cited by the National Campaign?

A: The analysis conducted by the National Campaign examines only those children *under age six* who would have been living in poverty and/or living in single mother households. The national figures cited in each state fact sheet are based on children *under age 18* who would have been living in poverty and/or living in single mother households. Please see the methodology memo for a detailed description of the state analysis.

Q: Isn't there more recent data available? Why did you use 2002?

A: While the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has released preliminary national teen birth rates for 2003, we used 2002 teen birth rates for this analysis because 1) it is the most recent year for which state-specific birth data are available and 2) the Joint Economic Committee's national estimates were based on 2002 data which were the most recent available at the time their analysis was done. We hope to update the state-level estimates later in 2005 after NCHS releases the 2003 state teen birth data.

Q: How can I find the fact sheets on the web?

A: All state fact sheets (and one for the District of Columbia), state tables, state press releases, a methodology memo, and related materials can be found on the National Campaign's website at the following address:

www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/whatif.asp

Q: How should I cite the state fact sheet information?

A: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2005). *What If: How Declines in Teen Births Have Improved Poverty and Child Well-Being in* [enter state name here]. Washington, DC: Author.