



THE  
NATIONAL  
CAMPAIGN TO  
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

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

## **What If: How Declines in Teen Births Have Improved Poverty and Child Well-Being in North Carolina April 2005**

### **Introduction**

Years of research have closely linked teen pregnancy and early childbearing to a host of other critical social issues, including overall child health and well-being, out-of-wedlock births, educational attainment and workforce readiness<sup>i</sup>, responsible fatherhood, and poverty in particular – especially child poverty. For example, young children born to a mother who is a teenager, is not married, and did not finish high school are nine times more likely to be poor than children born to mothers without these three risk factors.<sup>ii</sup> Adolescent pregnancy and childbearing cost taxpayers at least \$7 billion annually and place a serious economic burden on schools and on health, welfare and social service systems.

The U.S. teen birth rate declined by 30 percent between 1991 and 2002—a significant decrease that has made major contributions to American communities. Illustrating this very point, the U.S. Congress' Joint Economic Committee completed an analysis in April 2004 that the National Campaign in turn summarized.<sup>iii</sup> The congressional study posed an intriguing question: if the nation's teen birth rate had remained at its 1991 level through 2002 (rather than decreasing as it did), how many more children would have been born to teen mothers and to single mothers, and what would have been the effect on poverty and on the living arrangements of children? Findings included the following: if teen birth rates had not declined nationally by 30 percent during that time, there would have been an additional 1.2 million more children born to teen mothers, approximately 460,000 additional children in poverty and almost 700,000 more children living with a single mother.

Here, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has replicated that same congressional analysis at the *state level*. This new study details what would have happened to *state-level* poverty rates and the living arrangements of children if teen birth rates remained constant during the 1991-2002 interval.

## Key Findings for North Carolina

Between 1991 and 2002, the teen birth rate for girls aged 15-19 declined 25 percent in North Carolina. If the teen birth rate had not improved in the state:

- Over 26,000 additional children (under age 18) in the state **would have been born to teen mothers** between 1991 and 2002, and
- Fully 77 percent of these children **would have been under age six** in 2002.

Focusing specifically on children under age six in 2002:

- 7 percent more children in the state **would have been living in poverty**, and
- 7 percent more children **would have been living in single mother households**.

While reductions in teen births are usually *not* cited as one of the reasons why child poverty and the living arrangements of children have improved, this analysis estimates that the decline in the teen birth rate in North Carolina between 1991 and 2002 resulted in:

- A 4 percent improvement in the state's poverty rate for children under age six in 2002. That is, child poverty would have been worse in 2002 if the teen birth rate had not declined.
- A 4 percent improvement in the proportion of children under age six in the state living with a single mother in 2002.

## Actual Numbers

If the teen birth rate in North Carolina had not declined 25 percent between 1991 and 2002, there would have been over 26,000 additional children born to teen mothers during that time period. In 2002, there would have been nearly 11,000 more children under age six in poverty and over 9,600 additional children under age six living with a single mother.

## Going Forward

Despite the impressive strides North Carolina has made in reducing the teen birth rate and the important contribution this progress has made to improving the number of children living in poverty and in single parent families, there is still much work to be done. If the state can continue to bring down teen pregnancy and birth rates, the prospects of this generation of children and the next will greatly improve.

## For more details about North Carolina

Please visit [www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/whatif.asp](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/whatif.asp) for more detailed information about this analysis of the effects of the state's declining rate of teen births. The web-based material presents some of the data summarized here by race/ethnicity and provides information about how North Carolina's progress compares with other states.

## For more general information

To read a technical description of the analysis and for citation information, go to *Estimating Child Poverty and Single Mother Impacts of Declining Teen Birth Rates by State* at [www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/whatif.asp](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/whatif.asp). For more information about teen pregnancy prevention generally or the National Campaign in particular, please visit [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Terry-Human, E., Manlove, J., & Moore, K. (2005) *Playing Catch Up: How the Children of Teen Mothers Fare*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

<sup>ii</sup> *Preventing Teen Pregnancy: Why It Matters* (2005). National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Washington, DC. Author.

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Congress, Ways and Means Committee-Democrats (2004). *Steep Decline in Teen Birth Rate Significantly Responsible for Reducing Child Poverty and Single-Parent Families*. (Issue Brief, April 23, 2004). Washington, DC. Available: <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/about/announcements/pdf/Ways&MeansReport.pdf> and National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2004). *What If: How Declines in Teen Births Have Reduced Poverty and Increased Child Well-Being*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Available: [www.teenpregnancy.org/about/announcements/pdf/WhatIfSummary.pdf](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/about/announcements/pdf/WhatIfSummary.pdf)