

# Why It Matters



## Linking Teen Pregnancy Prevention to Other Critical Social Issues

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Despite a one-third decline since the early 1990s, the United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and birth among comparable countries.<sup>1</sup> In fact, 3 in 10 girls in this country become pregnant by age 20—over 750,000 teen pregnancies annually.<sup>2</sup>

Early pregnancy and childbearing is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues, including poverty and income disparity, overall child well-being, out-of-wedlock births, and education, to name just a few. Simply put, if more children in this country were born to parents who are ready and able to care for them, we would see a significant reduction in a host of social problems afflicting children in the United States, from school failure and crime to child abuse and neglect.

**What if?** The teen birth rate declined by one-third between 1991 and 2002. What if it had not? What if the teen birth rate in the United States had stayed at the 1991 level?

- **1.2 million** more children would have been born to teen mothers.
- **460,000** additional children would be living in poverty.
- **700,000** more children would be living in single mother households.<sup>3</sup>

The decrease in the teen birth rate between 1995 and 2002 is directly responsible for:

- **26%** of the decrease in the number of children under age six living in poverty.
- **68%** of the decrease in the number of children under age six living with single mothers.<sup>4</sup>

**If more children in this country were born to parents who are ready and able to care for them, we would see a significant reduction in a host of social problems afflicting children in the United States, from school failure and crime to child abuse and neglect.**

**What are the chances?** What are the chances of a child growing up in poverty if: (1) the mother gave birth as teen, (2) the parents were unmarried when the child was born, and (3) the mother did not receive a high school diploma or GED.

- **27%** if one of these things happen.
- **42%** if two of these things happen.
- **64%** if three of these things happen.
- **But, if none of these things happen, a child's chance of growing up in poverty is 7%.<sup>5</sup>**

Put another way, if these three things happen, a child's chance of growing up in poverty is **nine times greater** than if none of these things happen.

**Public Costs.** Teen childbearing is costly to the public sector—federal, state, and local governments and the taxpayers who support them.

- Teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least \$9 billion each year, including public sector health care costs,

increased child welfare costs, increased prison costs, and lost tax revenue.

- Put another way, between 1991 and 2004 there were over 6 million births to teens in the United States. The estimate cumulative public costs of teen child-bearing during this time period is \$161 billion dollars.
- Due to the dramatic decline in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2004, taxpayers saved an estimated \$6.7 billion in 2004 alone.<sup>6</sup>

**Poverty and Income Disparity.** Continuing to reduce teen pregnancy will help sustain recent decreases in poverty.

- Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor.<sup>7</sup>
- Approximately one-quarter of teen mothers go on welfare within 3 years of the child's birth.<sup>8</sup>

**Overall Child Well-Being.** The children of teen mothers bear the greatest burden of teen pregnancy and childbearing, and are at increased risk for a number of economic, social, and health problems.

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight<sup>9</sup> and are two times more likely to suffer abuse and neglect<sup>10</sup> compared to children of older mothers.
- The daughters of teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves when compared to the daughters of mothers who were age 20-21.<sup>11</sup>

**Out-of-Wedlock Births and Marriage.** Reducing teen pregnancy will decrease out-of-wedlock births and increase the proportion of children born to married couples.

- About half of all non-marital first births occur to teens.<sup>12</sup>
- Teens who have a non-marital birth are significantly less likely to be married by age 35 than those who do not have babies as teens.<sup>13</sup>

**Child Welfare.** Teens in foster care are more likely to get pregnant than teens not in the foster care system and children born to adolescent parents are more likely than children born to older mothers to enter the foster care system.

- Teen girls in foster care are two and a half times more likely than their peers not in foster care to experience a pregnancy by age 19.<sup>14</sup>

- Children born to teen parents are more likely than those born to older parents to end up in foster care or have multiple caretakers throughout their childhood.<sup>15</sup>

**For More Information,** please visit The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy's website, [www.TheNationalCampaign.org](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org). For specific information about the link between teen pregnancy and other critical social issues, please visit [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/why-it-matters](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/why-it-matters).

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# Why It Matters



## The Costs of Teen Childbearing

**T**een childbearing is associated with negative consequences for teen mothers, fathers, and their children. In addition to the many personal and social costs, teen childbearing is also costly to the public sector—federal, state and local governments, and the taxpayers who support them.<sup>1</sup>

- In 2004, teen childbearing in the United States cost taxpayers at least \$9.1 billion, an average of \$1,430 per teen mother annually.
- The public sector costs of young teens (17 and younger) having children is particularly expensive. These births account for \$8.6 billion of costs, an average of \$4,080 per teen mother annually.
- Most of the costs of teen childbearing are associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers, including \$1.9 billion for public sector health care costs, \$2.3 billion for increased child welfare costs, \$2.1 billion for increased costs for state prison systems, and \$2.9 billion in lost revenue due to lower taxes paid by the children of teen mothers over their own adult lifetimes.

**In 2004, teen childbearing in the United States cost taxpayers at least \$9.1 billion, an average of \$1,430 per teen mother annually.**

- Between 1991 and 2004, there were nearly 6.8 million teen births in the United States. The estimated cumulative costs during this time period were \$161 billion.

**If the teen birth rate had not decreased by one-third between 1991 and 2004, teen childbearing would have cost \$15.8 billion in 2004 rather than \$9.1 billion.**

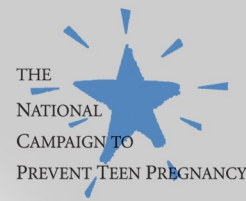
- Due to a dramatic decline in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2004, taxpayers saved an estimated \$6.7 billion in 2004 alone. Put another way, if the teen birth rate had not decreased by one-third between 1991 and 2004, teen childbearing would have cost \$15.8 billion in 2004 rather than \$9.1 billion.
- Visit [www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs](http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/costs) for state-specific information about the costs of teen childbearing.

Making further progress in reducing teen pregnancy will benefit national and state economies as well as improve the educational, health, and social prospects for this generation of young people and the next. Despite the impressive strides that have been made in reducing teen pregnancy and childbearing in the United States, there is still much work to be done. These cost data make a powerful case for investing additional resources, attention, and effort in reducing teen pregnancy. Sustained progress in reducing teen pregnancy and childbearing, will not only improve the well-being of children, families, and communities, but will also reduce the burden on taxpayers, thereby freeing up funds that could be invested in other priority areas as policymakers see fit.

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy, Poverty, and Income Disparity

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Continuing to reduce teen pregnancy will help sustain the recent decreases in poverty, especially persistent child poverty. Poverty is a cause as well as a consequence of early childbearing, and some impoverished young mothers may end up faring poorly no matter when their children are born. Nevertheless, although disadvantaged backgrounds account for many of the burdens that young women shoulder, having a baby during adolescence only makes matters worse:

- Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor.<sup>1</sup>
- Approximately one-quarter of teen mothers go on welfare within 3 years of the child's birth.<sup>2</sup>
- Teen mothers are less likely to complete the education necessary to qualify for a well-paying job—only 38 percent of mothers who have children before age 18 obtain a high school diploma.<sup>3</sup> In addition, other data indicate that less than two percent of mothers who have children before age 18 complete college by the age of 30 compared to nine percent of young women who wait until age 20 or 21 to have children.<sup>4</sup> This disparity in education, not surprisingly, tends to affect income level. In fact, over the past 20 years the median income for college graduates has increased 19 percent while the median income for high school dropouts has decreased 28 percent.<sup>5</sup>
- Virtually all of the increase in child poverty between 1980 and 1996 was related to the increase in nonmarital childbearing, and half of never-married mothers begin their childbearing as teens.<sup>6</sup>
- Nearly 80 percent of fathers of children born to teen mothers do not marry the mothers. These fathers pay

### WHAT ARE THE CHANCES?

What are the chances of a child growing up in poverty if: (1) the mother gave birth as a teen, (2) the parents were unmarried when the child was born, and (3) the mother did not receive a high school diploma or GED?

- 27% if one of these things happen
- 42% if two of these things happen
- 64% if three of these things happen
- Only 7% if none of these things happen

Put another way, if these three things happen, a child's chance of growing up in poverty is **9 times greater** than if none of these things happen.<sup>7</sup>

less than \$800 annually in child support, often because they are quite poor themselves.<sup>8</sup> Since child support can be an important source of income for poor children—accounting for 23 percent of the family income among those families who do receive child support—children born to young fathers are at further disadvantage.<sup>9</sup>

- Teen mothers are likely to have a second birth relatively soon—about one-fourth of teenage mothers have a second child within 24 months of the first birth—which can further impede their ability to finish school or keep a job, and to escape poverty.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, preventing teen pregnancy is a highly effective and efficient way to reduce poverty and improve overall child and family well-being.

### WHAT IF?

The significant decrease since the early 1990s in the teen pregnancy and birth rates has led to important declines in the rate of child poverty. In fact if the teen birth rate had not declined by one-third between 1991 and 2002:<sup>11</sup>

- **1.2 million** more children would have been born to teen mothers.
- **460,000** additional children would be living in poverty.
- **700,000** more children would be living in single mother households.

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy and Overall Child Well-Being

**R**educing teen pregnancy will enhance overall child well-being. The children of teen mothers bear the greatest burden of teen pregnancy and childbearing, and are at significantly increased risk for a number of economic, social, and health problems.

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight compared to children of older mothers,<sup>1</sup> which raises the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.<sup>2</sup>
- The children of teen parents also suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect (2 times more likely) than would occur if their mothers had delayed childbearing.<sup>3</sup>
- The sons of teen mothers are two times more likely to end up in prison than the sons of mothers aged 20-21.<sup>3</sup>
- The daughters of young teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves when compared to mothers who had a child at age 20-21.<sup>3</sup>

**The sons of teen mothers are two times more likely to end up in prison than the sons of mothers aged 20-21.**

- Children of teen mothers do worse in school than those born to older parents. They are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, are less likely to complete high

**The daughters of young teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves when compared to mothers who had a child at age 20-21.**

school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.<sup>3,4</sup>

- Children of older mothers are more prepared to enter the school system and score higher on measures of school readiness compared to the children of teen mothers. In fact, even after controlling for background characteristics, the children of teen mothers score lower on assessments of cognition, knowledge, and language development compared to the children of older mothers. They are also less likely to read simple books independently and to demonstrate early writing ability compared to the children of mothers aged 20-21.<sup>5</sup>
- Children of mothers age 17 and younger are more likely than those born to mothers age 20-21 to be impulsive or overactive, and to suffer from anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, or sadness (before controlling for background characteristics).<sup>5</sup>

Preventing teen pregnancy is critical to improving not only the lives of today's young women and men but also to enhancing the future prospects of their children. Indeed, one of the surest ways to improve overall child well-being is to reduce the proportion of children born to teen mothers.

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy, Out-of-Wedlock Births, Healthy Relationships, and Marriage

**R**educing teen pregnancy will decrease out-of-wedlock childbearing and increase the percentage of children born to married couples. While the majority of non-marital births are to adult women, the teen years are frequently a time when unmarried families are first formed—a strong rationale for focusing on teens in any broad effort to reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing and strengthen marriage.

- Although only three out of ten non-marital births in the United States are to teenagers, nearly half (48 percent) of all non-marital first births occur to teens—the largest single group.<sup>1</sup>
- More than 80 percent of teen births are to unmarried teens, up from only 15 percent in 1960.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Men and women today marry, on average, four to five years later than did their counterparts in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> As a result of later marriage, earlier menarche, and earlier age of first sex, on average, teens today begin having sex approximately eight to ten years before marriage.<sup>4,5</sup>
- In contrast with the 1960s and 1970s, when most of the growth of single-parent families was caused by increases in divorce or separation, nearly all of the growth in the past several decades has been driven by increases in out-of-wedlock childbearing.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Despite a reduction in the teen birthrate, which contributed to the leveling off after 1994 of the proportion of children born outside marriage, in recent years the proportion of non-marital births has increased. In 2004, the number of births to unmarried women reached a record high.<sup>2,6</sup>

**Although only three out of ten non-marital births in the United States are to teenagers, nearly half (48 percent) of all non-marital first births occur to teens—the largest single group.**

- Teen mothers spend more of their young adults years as single parents than do women who delay childbearing.<sup>8</sup>
- Only 30 percent of teen mothers who marry after their child is born remain in those marriages at the age of 40.<sup>9</sup>
- Teen marriages are twice as likely to fail as marriages in which the woman is at least 25 years old.<sup>10</sup>
- Teenagers who have a non-marital birth are significantly less likely to be married by the age of 35 than those who do not have babies as teens.<sup>11</sup>
- Children in single-parent families are more likely to get pregnant as teenagers than their peers who grow up with two parents.<sup>12</sup> In fact, teen girls without fathers are twice as likely to be sexually active at an early age and are seven times more likely to get pregnant than their peers with both parents.<sup>13</sup>
- For teen boys, living with two parents decreases the odds of early sexual initiation by 70 percent.<sup>13</sup>
- Since twenty-nine percent of teen pregnancies end in abortion, and teens account for approximately 17 per-

cent of all abortions performed annually, preventing teen pregnancy also has the advantage of reducing the need for abortions.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that since 1990, the teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates have all declined steadily, and in fact, abortion rates among teens have declined 45 percent compared to only 13 percent for women aged 20-24.<sup>15-17</sup>

When asked about their aspirations for marriage and childbearing, most teens would like to get married and have children within marriage.

- A majority of teens say that they want to get married and stay married during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>
- Less than eight percent of teen mothers marry their baby's father within one year of the birth.<sup>18</sup>
- A study of first births found that almost one-third of cohabitating couples had broken up five years after the birth of their child compared to 16 percent of married couples.<sup>19, 20</sup>
- Approximately two-thirds of teen boys agree that it is better to get married than to go through life single compared to just over half of teen girls. Slightly more than four in ten teen boys approve of divorce as a remedy for a troubled marriage compared to about half of teen girls.<sup>20</sup>
- Teen boys are also less likely than teen girls to approve of non-marital childbearing.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, helping more women reach adulthood before they have children would go a long way toward ensuring that more children grow up in stable, married families. And considering the large body of research on the benefits to children of growing up in such families, the link between reducing teen pregnancies and improving overall child well-being is clear.

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy and Responsible Fatherhood

**R**educing teen pregnancy is closely connected to the goal of promoting responsible fatherhood. Research shows that involved and committed fathers are important to the well-being of their children. Unfortunately, children born to teen parents are often denied a close connection with their father because the relationship between their parents frequently dissolves over time.

- Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poor than children with both parents at home.<sup>1</sup>
- Boys and girls without involved fathers are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, twice as likely to end up in jail, and two to three times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Teen girls who don't have a father in their life are two times more likely to initiate sexual activity early and are seven times more likely to get pregnant compared to girls with fathers present.<sup>3</sup>
- Also, teen girls who have a higher quality relationship with their fathers are less likely to initiate sexual activity compared to those who report a lower quality relationship with their fathers.<sup>4</sup>
- Teen boys who live with both parents initiate sex at an older age compared to teen boys in other family situations.<sup>5</sup>
- Over two decades of research confirms that parents – both fathers and mothers – are an important influence on whether their teenagers become pregnant or cause a pregnancy.

There is growing attention to the responsibilities of boys and young men in preventing teen pregnancy. At last

**Eight of ten teen fathers do not marry the mothers of their first children. These absent fathers pay less than \$800 annually for child support, often because they are quite poor themselves.**

count, 40 states had strategies to prevent unwanted or too-early fatherhood. This emphasis on primary prevention for boys and men is a welcome trend. Still, too many young men are not waiting until they are ready – emotionally and financially – to become fathers:

- The good news is that sexual activity among teenage boys is declining; in fact, less than half of all teen boys report that they have ever had sex.<sup>6</sup>
- More teen boys are also using condoms when they have sex, and almost one in four sexually active teen boys report that they used dual methods the last time they had sex (they used a condom and their partner used a hormonal method).<sup>6</sup>
- When it comes to marriage, divorce, and non-marital childbearing, teen boys tend to have slightly more traditional attitudes compared to teen girls—only about half of teen boys approve of non-marital childbearing compared to almost two-thirds of girls; close to three-quarters of teen boys think that getting married is better than staying single compared to about half of teen girls; about 4 in 10 teen boys approve of divorce as a solution to marriage problems while close to half of girls agree.<sup>7,8</sup>

- The best available data show that after increasing 32 percent between 1986 and 1991, the teen birth rate for fathers aged 15 - 19 decreased 31 percent between 1991 and 2004.<sup>9,10</sup>
- Eight of ten teen fathers *do not* marry the mothers of their first children.<sup>11</sup>
- These absent fathers pay less than \$800 annually for child support, often because they are quite poor themselves.<sup>11</sup>
- Some research suggest that teen fathers have lower education levels and suffer earning losses of 10-15 percent annually.<sup>11,12</sup>

Clearly, there is more that could be done to send a strong message to teen boys and young men that they should wait to become a father until they are ready to have a lasting — ideally married — relationship with the mother of their children and are able meet their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children. In addition, there is more that could be done to build on efforts within the teen pregnancy prevention field to reach out to boys and young men through what are sometimes called “male involvement programs.” It is also important to recognize and support the important role that fathers can play in helping their own sons and daughters avoid becoming teen parents.

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy and Other Health Issues

**T**een pregnancy can have negative health implications for both the mother and child. Of course, the health and health-related behavior of teen mothers before, during, and after pregnancy affect the health of the baby. Evidence suggests that babies born to teen mothers are at increased risk for specific health problems compared to babies born to older mothers. In addition to these personal costs, there are considerable costs to taxpayers associated with the public healthcare expenses of teen childbearing. Reducing teen pregnancy will not only improve the health of teens and their future children, it will also reduce some of the costs of public health services.

- Infants born to teen mothers are at increased risk of being born prematurely and at a low birthweight. This puts newborns at greater risk for infant death, respiratory distress syndrome, bleeding in the brain, vision loss, and serious intestinal problems.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Teen mothers are also more likely than mothers over the age of 25 to smoke during pregnancy, and often teen mothers are not at adequate pre-pregnancy weight and/or do not gain the appropriate amount of weight while pregnant.<sup>1</sup>
- Compared to older pregnant women, pregnant teens are far less likely to receive timely and consistent prenatal care.<sup>1</sup>
- Recent research indicates that while there is little difference in their child's health status as reported by teen mothers or by older mothers, the children of teen mothers are less likely to visit a medical care provider.<sup>3</sup> Teen mothers are also slightly more likely than similarly situated older mothers to report that their child has a chronic health condition.<sup>3</sup>

**The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight compared to children of older mothers, which raises the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.**

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to depend on publicly-provided healthcare than the children of older mothers. In fact, 84 percent of healthcare expenses for children (ages 0-1) of teen mothers aged 18-19 are provided through public programs. Three-quarters of health care expenses for pre-school children of teen mothers 17 and younger are provided through public programs. This is compared to about half of the expenses for children born to mothers who were aged 20 or 21.<sup>3</sup>
- Despite their lower utilization of healthcare resources, the costs associated with providing health and medical care (primarily Medicaid and SCHIP) to the children of teen mothers is nearly \$2 billion each year.<sup>3</sup>
- Furthermore, approximately 72 percent of teen births in the United States are financed by Medicaid.<sup>4</sup>

Early pregnancy not only has health implications for the

children of young mothers, it has implications for the teens as well. Helping more teens to avoid or reduce risky sexual behavior (by either delaying sex or using contraception effectively) will help prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS.

- Even though young people aged 15-24 represent 25 percent of the sexually active population, they account for about half of all new cases of STDs.<sup>5</sup>
- The rate of reported Chlamydia cases among teens age 15-19 increased 20 percent between 2000 and 2004—the second highest rate among all age groups and nearly five times the overall rate.<sup>6</sup>
- Although the rate of reported Gonorrhea cases decreased slightly between 2000 and 2004, the rate among teens remains second only to young adults aged 20-24 years and is almost four times the overall rate.<sup>6</sup>
- Between 2001 and 2005, the estimated number of HIV/AIDS cases increased among teens aged 15-19. By the end of 2005, there were more than 6,300 reported AIDS cases among teens aged 13-19 in the United States.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in the 33 areas with confidential HIV infection reporting, an estimated 5,300 teenagers were reported to be living with HIV/AIDS in 2005. Approximately half of all new HIV infections occur among young people aged 15-24 annually.<sup>8</sup>

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# Why It Matters



THE  
NATIONAL  
CAMPAIGN TO  
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

## Teen Pregnancy and Education

March 2010

**B**ecause the relationship between academic failure and teen pregnancy is so strong, and because teen pregnancy affects the educational achievement of teens themselves as well as that of their children, those concerned about educating young people should also be concerned with preventing teen pregnancy. Moreover, given the increasing demands in schooling necessary to qualify for a well-paying job, it is more important than ever for teens to finish high school and attain post secondary education when possible.

- Overall, about half (51%) of teen moms have a high school diploma compared to 89% of women who didn't have a teen birth. Young teen mothers are even less likely to graduate from high school. Fewer than four in ten (38%) mothers who have a child before they turn 18 have a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup>
- Parenthood is a leading cause of school drop out among teen girls—30% of teen girls cited pregnancy or parenthood as a reason for dropping out of high school.<sup>2</sup>
- Other data find that less than two percent of young teen mothers (those who have a baby before age 18) attain a college degree by age 30.<sup>3</sup>
- Children of teen mothers are more likely than mothers who gave birth at age 20-21 to drop out of high school. In fact, only about two-thirds of children born to teen mothers earned a high school diploma compared to 81 percent of children of later childbearers.<sup>3</sup>
- Children of teen mothers also do not perform as well as children of older mothers on measures of child development and school readiness such as cognition, language and communication, and interpersonal skills.<sup>4</sup>

They are also less likely to read simple books independently and to demonstrate early writing ability compared to the children of mothers aged 20-21.<sup>4</sup>

- Children of teen mothers do worse in school than those born to older parents. They are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, are less likely to complete high school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.<sup>3,5</sup>

**Parenthood is a leading cause of school drop out among teen girls.**

The relationship between education and teen pregnancy works both ways. That is, teen pregnancy often has a negative impact on education, as noted above. It is also the case that school achievement, attendance, and involvement helps reduce the risk of teen pregnancy. Put another way, staying in school and getting an education helps prevent teen pregnancy.

- Teens who have dropped out of school are more likely to become pregnant and have a child than their peers who stay in school.<sup>6</sup>
- Teens who are more involved in their school are less likely than their peers who are not as closely connected to their school to get pregnant. Important aspects of school engagement include grades, test scores, class participation, homework completion, and a perception of support and connectedness with teachers and administrators. Planning to attend college after high school is also associated with a lower risk of teen pregnancy.<sup>6</sup>

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy and Child Welfare

**E**arly pregnancy and parenthood is directly related to child welfare, including abuse and neglect and foster care. Teens in foster care, many of whom suffered abuse and neglect before leaving their homes, are more likely to get pregnant than teens not in the foster care system and children born to adolescent parents are more likely than children born to older mothers to enter the foster care system.

- More than 500,000 children in America live in foster care—about 8 out of every 1,000 children. Most children in foster care return to their families or are adopted (often by their foster parents).<sup>1</sup>
- Each year close to 20,000 adolescents in the foster care system begin living independently—or “age out” in the parlance of the child welfare system—and many are essentially on their own. In most states this happens at age 18.<sup>2</sup> Adolescents both in foster care and those who age out of foster care are at increased risk of pregnancy compared to their peers.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Teen girls in foster care are two and a half times more likely than their peers not in foster care to experience a pregnancy by age 19.<sup>2</sup>
- Almost half of all teen girls in foster care who have been pregnant experience a subsequent pregnancy by age 19 compared to less than one-third of girls not in foster care.<sup>2</sup>
- Sexually active teens who age out of foster care are less likely than youth still in foster care to report using condoms or birth control at all in the last year.<sup>2</sup>
- Remaining in foster care until age 19 is associated with a 38 percent reduction in becoming pregnant compared

to those youth who age out before 19.<sup>4</sup>

- Nearly three out of four young women in foster care report being pregnant at age 21 compared to only one-third of young women not in foster care. Repeat pregnancies are common with almost two-thirds of the young women in foster care experiencing more than one pregnancy by age 21.<sup>5</sup>

**Not only are adolescents in foster care more likely to become parents in their teen years, children born to teen parents are more likely to end up in foster care or have multiple caretakers throughout their childhood.**

- By age 21, over half of young women and nearly one-third of young men in foster care have had at least one child.<sup>5</sup>
- Not only are adolescents in foster care more likely to become parents in their teen years, children born to teen parents are more likely to end up in foster care or have multiple caretakers throughout their childhood.<sup>6</sup>
- Young teen mothers (aged 17 and younger at the time of birth) are 2.2 times more likely to have a child placed in foster care than mothers who delayed childbearing until age 20 or 21, and they are twice as likely to have a reported case of abuse or neglect compared to mothers who delayed childbearing.<sup>7</sup>

- Teen mothers aged 18-19 are about one-third more likely to have a child placed in foster care when compared to mothers who had their first child at age 20 or 21. They are almost 40 percent more likely to have a reported case of abuse or neglect than children born to mothers aged 20 or 21.<sup>7</sup>
- As noted previously, the children of teen mothers are at increased risk of either being in foster care or being a victim of abuse and neglect when compared to children born to mothers aged 20 or older. The public costs associated with these child welfare costs were \$2.3 billion in 2004.<sup>7</sup>

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy, Substance Use, and Other Risky Behavior

It often is the case that risky teen behavior, including drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, delinquency, and sexual activity, occur among the same groups of teens. Therefore, teens who drink or use drugs often are more sexually active and less likely to use contraception when they have sex than teens who take fewer risks. They also tend to have more sexual partners, and often start having sex at younger ages.

- Nearly four in ten high school students report having experimented with marijuana at least once, and over one-third of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report they have used some type of illicit drug.<sup>1,2</sup> Approximately two-thirds of 9<sup>th</sup> graders report having tried alcohol at least once and one-quarter of all high school students say they drink heavily on occasion.<sup>1</sup>
- Teens 15 and older who use drugs are more likely to be sexually experienced than are those teens who do not use drugs—72 percent of teens who use drugs have had sex, compared to 36 percent who have never used drugs.<sup>3</sup>
- Teens who have used marijuana are four times more likely to have been pregnant or to have gotten someone pregnant than teens who have never used marijuana.<sup>4</sup>
- More than one-third of sexually active teens and young adults age 15 to 24 report that alcohol or drug use has influenced them to do something sexual.<sup>5</sup>
- Nearly one-quarter of sexually active teens and young adults age 15 to 24 report that they have had sex without a condom because they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. And 43 percent of teens and young adults say that they are concerned that they

might do more sexually than they had planned because they are drinking or using drugs.<sup>5</sup>

- Boys who start drinking or smoking at a young age are 40 percent more likely to start having sex at a young age when compared to boys who refrain from such activities. Girls who smoke or drink are even more susceptible—prior use of alcohol and/or cigarettes increases the risk of early sexual experience by 80 percent.<sup>6</sup>

**More than one-third of sexually active teens and young adults age 15 to 24 report that alcohol or drug use has influenced them to do something sexual.**

- Many teenage girls who use alcohol when they first have sex are too drunk to use birth control successfully.<sup>7</sup>
- Almost one-quarter of all high school students used alcohol or drugs prior to their last sexual experience. Non-Hispanic white and Hispanic teens are more likely than non-Hispanic black teens to report having used alcohol or drugs before their last sexual experience.<sup>1</sup>
- Seventh graders who report being sexually experienced are more likely than their sexually inexperienced peers to report having committed a theft, damaged property, or threatened a teacher.<sup>8</sup>

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# Why It Matters



## Teen Pregnancy and Violence

**T**een pregnancy is linked with various types of violence, including intimate partner violence and sexual abuse, and often leads to other risky behavior. It is also the case that teens who are pregnant are at increased risk of experiencing domestic violence.

- Girls in high school who reported experiencing dating violence were four to six times more likely to have ever been pregnant than peers who had not experienced dating violence.<sup>1</sup>
- Teens in high school—both boys and girls—who had experienced physical dating violence in the past year were almost three times more likely than teens who had not experienced physical dating violence to be sexually active.<sup>2</sup>
- When compared to teens who had never experienced abuse, teens who reported a history of sexual abuse were more likely to have ever been pregnant, and were more likely to never or rarely use birth control or condoms.<sup>3</sup>
- One in five teen girls who have ever been in a relationship say that their boyfriend threatened harm or self-harm when they tried to end the relationship.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Approximately 50 percent to 60 percent of adolescents who become pregnant have a history of childhood sexual or physical abuse.<sup>6</sup>
- Adverse childhood experiences such as physical abuse, verbal abuse, and witnessing intimate partner violence are linked with having sex at an early age. For example, women who experienced frequent verbal or physical abuse during childhood were almost three times more likely than those who rarely experienced verbal or physical abuse during childhood to have had sex before

the age of 15. Women who report that their mother was often hit during their childhood were two and a half times more likely than those who report that their mother was rarely or never hit during childhood to have had sex before age 15.<sup>7</sup>

**Girls in high school who reported experiencing dating violence were four to six times more likely to have ever been pregnant than peers who had not experienced dating violence.**

- One report determined that although sexually active respondents who had experienced abuse were not more likely than other sexually active teens to have been pregnant, they were twice as likely as their peers who did not experience abuse to report *not* using birth control the last time they had sex, and they were almost one and a half times more likely to report having had more than one sexual partner.
- Several studies have also found that teens are at increased risk of physical abuse during pregnancy as compared to older women.<sup>1,8</sup>
- In a survey of young mothers on welfare, two-thirds of those who reported intimate partner violence also reported birth control sabotage (i.e. their partner would not let them use birth control) compared to one-third of those who did not report intimate partner violence. This was particularly true among girls with a boyfriend aged 26 and older.<sup>9</sup>

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