

Why It Matters



Teen Pregnancy and Child Welfare

Early 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).¹
- 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 18.² Adolescents both in foster care and those who age out of foster care are at increased risk of pregnancy compared to their peers.^{2,3}
- 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 19.²
- 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.²
- 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.²
- 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 19.⁴

- 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 21.⁵

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.⁵
- 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.⁶
- 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.⁷

- 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 21.⁷
- 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 2004.⁷

SOURCES

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