

Why It Matters



Teen Pregnancy and Overall Child Well-Being

Reducing 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,¹ which raises the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.²
- 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.³
- The sons of teen mothers are two times more likely to end up in prison than the sons of mothers aged 20-21.³
- 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 20-21.³

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- 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

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school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.^{3,4}

- 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 20-21.⁵
- 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).⁵

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.

SOURCES

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4. Haveman, R.H., Wolfe, B., & Peterson, E., *Children of early childbearers as young adults*, in *Kids having kids: Economic costs and social costs of teen pregnancy*, R. Maynard, Editor. 1997, The Urban Institute Press: Washington, DC.
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