

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.¹ In fact, 3 in 10 girls in this country become pregnant by age 20—over 750,000 teen pregnancies annually.²

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.³

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.⁴

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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%.⁵**

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.⁶

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.⁷
- Approximately one-quarter of teen mothers go on welfare within 3 years of the child's birth.⁸

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 birthweight⁹ and are two times more likely to suffer abuse and neglect¹⁰ 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 20-21.¹¹

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.¹²
- 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.¹³

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 19.¹⁴

- 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.¹⁵

For More Information, please visit The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy's website, 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.

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