

CRS Report for Congress

Nonmarital Childbearing: Trends, Reasons, and Public Policy Interventions

November 20, 2008

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Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

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Summary

In 2006, a record 38.5% of all United States births were nonmarital births. Many of these children grow up in mother-only families. Although most children who grow up in mother-only families or step-parent families become well-adjusted, productive adults, the bulk of empirical research indicates that children who grow up with only one biological parent in the home are more likely to be financially worse off and have worse socioeconomic outcomes (even after income differences are taken into account) compared to children who grow up with both biological parents in the home.

In recognition of the potential long-term economic and social consequences associated with nonmarital births, the federal government's strategy with regard to nonmarital childbearing has been varied. The federal government recognizes that an effective approach for teenagers may be inappropriate for older women. Federal policy toward teens has primarily focused on pregnancy prevention programs, whereas federal policy toward older women has focused on healthy marriage programs. Federal income support programs are available to mothers of all age groups.

In the U.S., nonmarital births are widespread, touching families of varying income class, race, ethnicity, and geographic area. Many analysts attribute this to changed attitudes about fertility and marriage. They find that many adult women and teenage girls no longer feel obliged to marry before, or as a consequence of, having children. With respect to men, it appears that one result of the so-called sexual revolution is that many men now believe that women can and should control their fertility via contraception or abortion and have become less willing to marry the women they impregnate.

Factors that are associated with the unprecedented level of nonmarital childbearing include an increase in the median age of first marriage (i.e., marriage postponement), decreased childbearing of married couples, increased marital dissolution, an increase in the number of cohabiting couples, increased sexual activity outside of marriage, participation in risky behaviors that often lead to sex, improper use of contraceptive methods, and lack of marriageable partners.

This report analyzes the trends in nonmarital childbearing, discusses some of the characteristics of unwed mothers, addresses some issues involving the fathers of children born outside of marriage, covers many of the reasons for nonmarital childbearing, examines the impact of nonmarital births on families and on the nation, and presents the public policy interventions that have been used to prevent nonmarital births or ameliorate some of the negative financial consequences that are sometimes associated with nonmarital childbearing. This report will not be updated.

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Nonmarital Childbearing: Trends, Reasons, and Public Policy Interventions

Introduction

In the United States, being born to an unmarried mother is more likely to lead to less favorable outcomes than is being born to a married mother. In the U.S., births to unmarried women (i.e., nonmarital births) are widespread, touching families of varying income class, race, ethnicity, and geographic area. Many analysts attribute this to changed attitudes about fertility and marriage. They find that many adult women and teenage girls no longer feel obliged to marry before, or as a consequence of, having children. During the 66-year period from 1940 to 2006, the percentage of births to unmarried women increased by a multiple of nine, from 3.8% in 1940 to 38.5% in 2006. This represented about 1.6 million children in 2006.

“Nonmarital births” can be first births, second births, or higher-order births; they can precede a marriage or occur to a woman who has never married. “Nonmarital births” can occur to divorced or widowed women. Moreover, a woman with several children may have had one or more births within marriage and one or more births outside of marriage.¹ Many of the children born outside of marriage are raised by a single parent (who may or may not have a “significant other”).²

Parents and family life are the foundation that influences a child’s well-being throughout the child’s development and into adulthood. The family also is the economic unit that obtains and manages the resources that meet a child’s basic needs while also playing an instrumental role in stimulating the child’s cognitive, social, and emotional development. Children born outside of marriage often are raised solely by their mothers, but sometimes live in other types of family situations. Some are raised solely by their fathers, some are raised by both biological parents who are not married to each other (i.e., cohabiting). Others may be raised by a mother who is living with a male partner. Still others may be living with a mother who is

¹ Kristin A. Moore, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States,” Child Trends, Inc. in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, “Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing,” Executive Summary, September 1995 [DHHS pub. no. (PHS) 95-1257-1], p. 6.

² The Census Bureau data do not indicate the number of newborns by the marital status of their parents, but data are available for children under age one by parents’ marital status. In 2007, 59.4% of the 1.038 million children under age one were living with their biological mothers who had never married, 3.4% were living with their biological fathers who had never married, and 37.2% were living with both biological parents who were not married to each other. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2007*, Table C3.

divorced from someone other than their father. Additionally, some may be living with a mother whose husband died (i.e., the mother is a widow but the child was not fathered by the deceased husband).

Although most children who grow up in mother-only families, father-only families, step-parent families, or families in which the mother is cohabiting with a male partner become well-adjusted, productive adults, a large body of research indicates that children who grow up with only one biological parent in the home are more likely to be financially worse off and have worse socioeconomic outcomes (even after income differences are taken into account) compared to children who grow up with both biological parents in the home.³ To emphasize, this research indicates that all family situations in which both biological parents are not living together (regardless of whether the mother is divorced, separated, widowed, or was never married) are more likely to result in less favorable outcomes for children than a family situation in which the child is living in a household with both biological parents. It is also noteworthy that some researchers conclude that even among children living with both biological parents, living with married parents generally results in better outcomes for children than living with cohabiting parents mainly because marriage is a more stable and longer lasting situation than cohabitation.⁴

The federal concern about nonmarital childbearing centers on its costs via claims on public assistance. These federal costs primarily reflect the fact that many of these “nonmarital children” are raised in single-parent families that are financially disadvantaged. Federal concern also arises because of the aforementioned research indicating that children living in single-parent families are more likely to face negative outcomes (financially, socially, and emotionally) than children who grow up with both of their biological parents in the home. As mentioned earlier, many children born outside of marriage are raised in single-parent families.⁵

This report analyzes the trends in nonmarital childbearing in the U.S., discusses some of the characteristics of unwed mothers, addresses some issues involving the fathers of children born outside of marriage, covers many of the reasons for nonmarital childbearing, examines the impact of nonmarital births on families and on the nation, and presents the public policy interventions that have been used to prevent nonmarital births or alleviate some of the problems that are associated with nonmarital childbearing. This report concludes with commentary on public policy interventions — healthy marriage programs, responsible fatherhood programs, and teen pregnancy prevention strategies — that may receive renewed attention and debate in the 111th Congress.

³ Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, “Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); see also L. Bumpass, “Children and Marital Disruption: A Replication and Update,” *Demography*, vol. 21(1984), pp. 71-82.

⁴ Marcia Carlson, Sara McLanahan, and Paula England, “Union Formation and Dissolution in Fragile Families,” Fragile Families Research, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University, August 2002.

⁵ Steven L. Nock, “Marriage as a Public Issue,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005), p. 26.

Key Findings

Nonmarital childbearing sometimes results in negative outcomes for children mainly because children born outside of marriage are generally not raised by both of their biological parents but rather by single mothers. (Children living in a household maintained by a never-married mother are among the poorest population groups in the U.S.) Even in cases in which cohabiting parents start off raising their children together, it is often of short duration. This section presents some of the major findings of the report.

- After stabilizing in the 1990s, nonmarital births are again increasing. In 2006, 38.5% of all births were nonmarital births. This surpasses the percentage in 1960 that prompted some policymakers to claim that the black family was disintegrating because a large share of nonmarital births were to black women. In 2006, 70.7% of African American births were nonmarital births compared with 64.6% of American Indian births, 49.9% of Hispanic births, 26.6% of white births, and 16.3% of Asian births.⁶
- Nonmarital births can be first births, second births, or higher-order births; they can precede a marriage or occur to a woman who has never married. Nonmarital births can occur to divorced or widowed women. Moreover, a woman with several children may have had one or more births within marriage and one or more births outside of marriage.⁷
- After declining for 14 straight years, *all* teen births increased in 2006. Contrary to public perception, women in their early twenties, not teens, have the highest percentage of births outside of marriage. In 2005, women ages 20 through 24 accounted for 38% of the 1.5 million nonmarital births. The comparable statistic for females under age 20⁸ was 23%. However, many women who have nonmarital births in their twenties were also teen moms.⁹

⁶ The sources of data for this report are varied. They primarily consist of (1) birth data from the National Center for Health Statistics at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), (2) income and poverty data from the Census Bureau, and (3) data on economic and demographic factors from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study and the 2002 panel of the National Survey of Family Growth.

⁷ Kristin A. Moore, "Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States," Child Trends, Inc. in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing," Executive Summary, September 1995 [DHHS pub. no. (PHS) 95-1257-1], p. 6.

⁸ This report often uses the term women in describing data that include females who are under age 18.

⁹ Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Jennifer Manlove, and Kristen A. Moore, "Births Outside of Marriage: Perception vs. Reality," Research Brief, *Child Trends*, April 2001.

- Births to teenagers are an important component of nonmarital births because more than 80% of births to teenagers are nonmarital births.
- Although women have been postponing marriage, women of all ages do not view marriage as a requirement for sexual activity.¹⁰ With the longer time span between the onset of sexual activity and marriage, the trend of high numbers of nonmarital births may/could continue.
- Although nonmarital births are increasing, many more children than in previous decades live with both biological parents in cohabiting situations for some period of time.
- According to analysts, marriage is considered a better option for children than cohabitation because marriage is more stable (i.e., lasts longer) than cohabiting situations.
- Growing up in a single-parent family is one of many factors that put children at risk of less favorable outcomes. The economic, social, psychological, and emotional costs associated with children with absent noncustodial parents are significant. Nevertheless, most children who grow up in single-parent families become productive adults. Children living in a single-parent home are more likely to do poorly in school, have emotional and behavioral problems, become teenage parents, and have poverty-level income (as children and adults) compared to children living with married biological parents.¹¹ In 2007, 67.8% of the 73.7 million U.S. children (under age 18) lived with both of their married parents, 2.9% lived with both parents who were not married, 17.9% lived with their mother, and 2.6% lived with their father.
- The advent of multiple relationships that produce children adds complexity to the problem. These relationships, often referred to as multiple partner fertility (i.e., when mothers and fathers have had children with more than one partner), generally complicate the family situation of children.

¹⁰ Sexual Behavior of Single Adult American Women, by Laura Duberstein Lindberg and Susheela Singh. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 40., no. 1. March 2008.

¹¹ Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, "Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); see also L. Bumpass, "Children and Marital Disruption: A Replication and Update," *Demography*, vol. 21(1984), pp. 71-82; see also Rebecca A. Maynard, ed., "Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing" (New York, 1996); see also Mary Parke, "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being," *Center for Law and Social Policy* (May 2003).

- Compared to women without nonmarital children, women with children who were born outside of marriage are less like to marry;¹² if they do marry, their spouses are more likely to be economically disadvantaged.¹³
- Demographically, without nonmarital births, the U.S. would be far below population replacement levels. Having the birth rate reach the replacement rate is generally considered desirable by demographers and sociologists because it means a country is producing enough young people to replace and support aging workers without population growth being so high that it taxes national resources.
- Nonmarital births are expected to increase over time because of a projected population shift toward more minorities. The Census Bureau projects that by 2050, 54% of the U.S. population will consist of minority groups (i.e., Hispanics, blacks, Indians, and Asians). Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54% minority in 2050. By 2023, minorities will represent more than half of all children. The Hispanic population is projected to nearly triple, and its share of the nation's total population is projected to double, from 15% to 30%. Thus, nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic.¹⁴ In 2005, 48% of Hispanic births were nonmarital births.

¹² Andrea Kane and Daniel T. Lichter, "Reducing Unwed Childbearing: The Missing Link in Efforts to Promote Marriage," *Center on Children and Families*, Brief no. 37 (April 2006).

¹³ Daniel T. Lichter and Deborah Roempke Graefe, "Men and Marriage Promotion: Who Marries Unwed Mothers?," *Social Science Review* (September 2007).

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau News. CB08-123. *An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury*. August 14, 2008. Note: Non-Hispanic whites are projected to represent 46% of the total population in 2050, down from 66% in 2008. The black population is projected to increase from 14% of the population in 2008 to 15% in 2050. The Asian population is expected to rise from 5.1% to 9.2%. Among the remaining race groups, American Indians and Alaska Natives are projected to rise from 1.6% to 2% of the total population. The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population is expected to more than double, from 1.1 million to 2.6 million, comprising about 0.6% in 2050. The number of people who identify themselves as being of two or more races is projected to more than triple, from 5.2 million to 16.2 million, representing almost 4% of the population in 2050.

Trends in Nonmarital Births: 1940-2006

In this report, births to unmarried women are termed nonmarital births. Data on nonmarital births¹⁵ are usually expressed by three measures: the number of nonmarital births, the percent of births that are nonmarital, and the rate of nonmarital births per 1,000 unmarried women.

The number of nonmarital births provides the absolute count of babies who are born to women (including adolescents), who are not married. The percent of all births that are nonmarital¹⁶ is the number of all nonmarital births divided by all births (both nonmarital births and marital births). The nonmarital birth rate is defined as the number of nonmarital births per 1,000 unmarried women.

During the 66-year period from 1940 through 2006, there was a 17-fold increase in the number of babies born to unmarried women living in the United States. The number of babies born to unmarried women increased from 89,500 in 1940 to 1,641,700 in 2006. In 2006, 38.5% of all U.S. births were to unmarried women, up from 3.8% in 1940 — a nine-fold increase.

Numbers, Percentages, and Rates

The number of nonmarital births reached a record high in 2006 with 1,641,700 births to unmarried women. As mentioned above, the number of births to unmarried women has generally increased over the years, with some downward fluctuations. As shown in **Figure 1**, nonmarital births rose 17-fold from 1940-2006. (Also see the data table in **Appendix A**.) The average annual increase in nonmarital births has slowed substantially from earlier decades. The average annual increase in nonmarital births was 4.9% from 1940-1949; 5.6% from 1950-1959; 6.1% from 1960-1969; 5.0% from 1970-1979; 6.4% from 1980-1989; 1.2% from 1990-1999 (and 3.6% for the seven years from 2000-2006). The 1990s showed a marked slowing of nonmarital births, dropping from an average increase of 6.4% a year in the 1980s to an average of 1.2% a year in the 1990s. During the first six years of the 2000 to 2010 period, the average annual increase in nonmarital births increased to 3.6%.

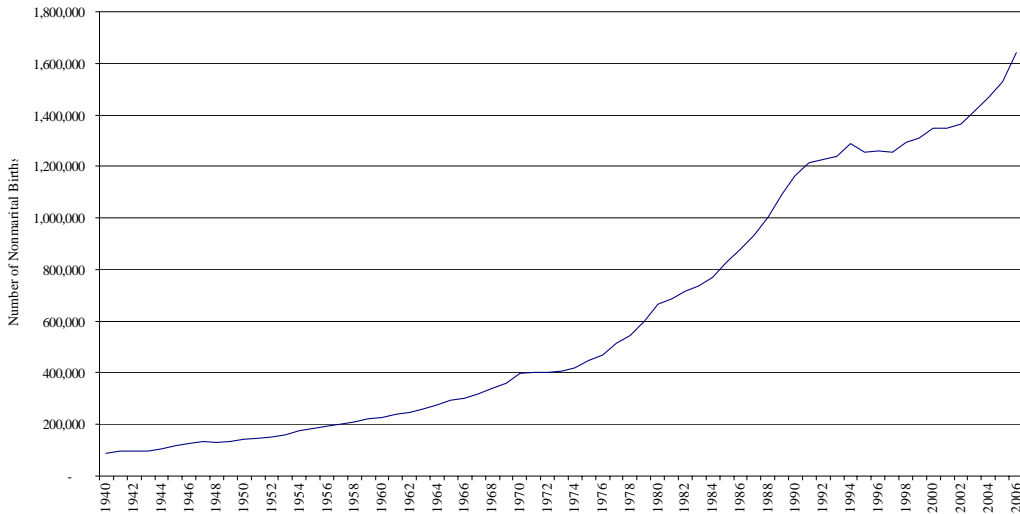
The percent of births to unmarried women increased substantially during the period from 1940-2006 (see **Figure 2** and the Appendix table). (However, from 1994-2000, there was almost no change in this measure.) In 1940, 3.8% of all U.S. births were to unmarried women. By 2006, a record 38.5% of all U.S. births were to unmarried women.

¹⁵ Even though one of the underlying purposes of this report is to discern why women get pregnant outside of marriage, this report solely uses birth data rather than pregnancy data. The reason for this is that birth data are more current and reliable than pregnancy data. Because of the difficulty in gathering the abortion and miscarriage data needed to calculate pregnancy data, pregnancy data lag about two to three years behind birth data reports.

¹⁶ The proportion (i.e., percent) of births that occur to unmarried women is sometimes referred in the literature as the nonmarital birth ratio.

The nonmarital birth rate provides a measure of the likelihood that an unmarried woman will give birth in a given year. The birth rate for unmarried women increased dramatically during the 1940-2006 period, with many upward and downward fluctuations. (However, during the years 1995-2002, the nonmarital birth rate remained virtually unchanged.¹⁷) The nonmarital birth rate increased from 7.1 births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15 through 44 in 1940 to a record high of 50.6 births per 1,000 women ages 15 through 44 in 2006 (a six-fold increase). (See **Figure 3** and the **Appendix, Table A-1**.)

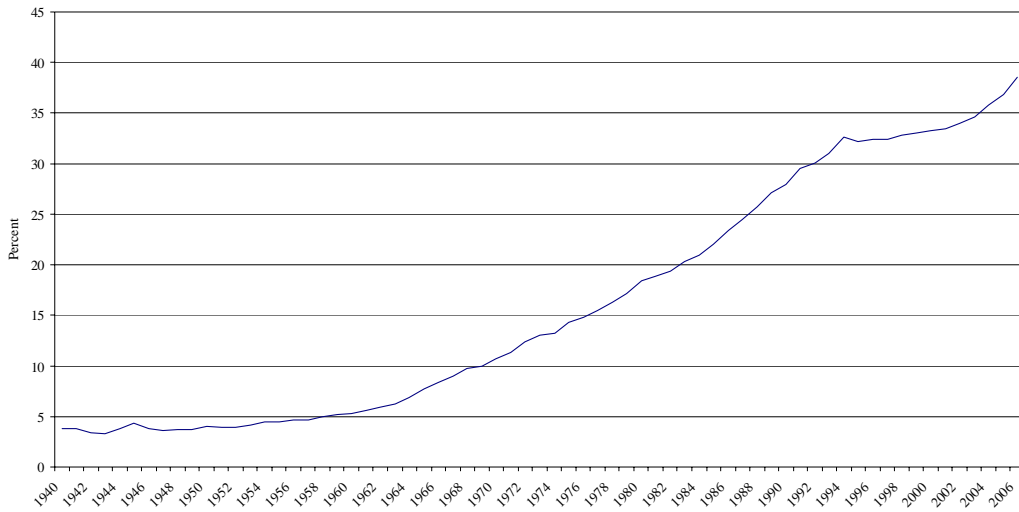
Figure 1. Number of Births to Unmarried Women, 1940-2006



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99,” *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000). See also *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007).

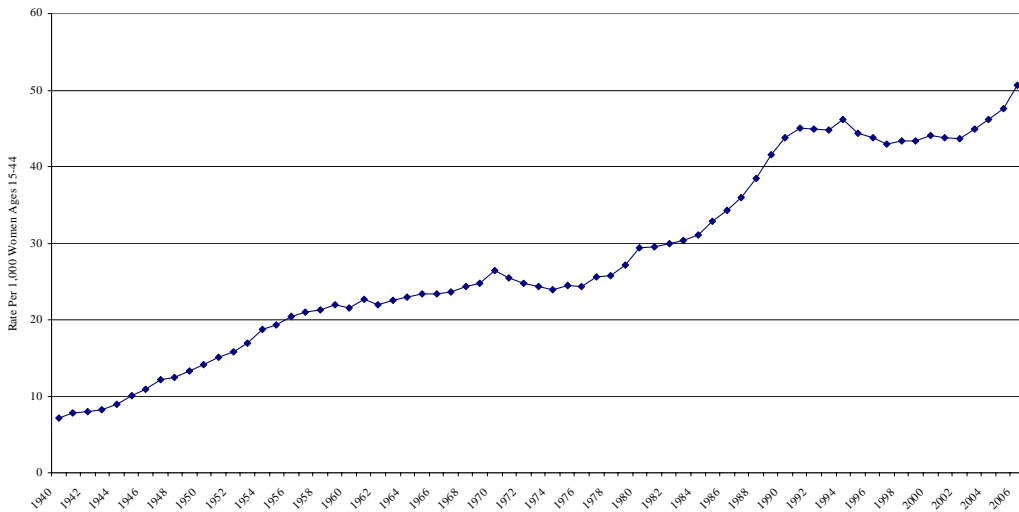
¹⁷ The nonmarital birth rate during this period ranged from 42.9 to 44.3 births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15-44.

Figure 2. Percentage of Births to Unmarried Women, 1940-2006



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99,” *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000). See also *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007).

Figure 3. Rate of Births to Unmarried Women, 1940-2006



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99,” *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000). See also *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007).

Characteristics of Unwed Mothers

This section discusses some of the characteristics of unmarried mothers. It includes some of the demographic characteristics like race, ethnicity, and age as well as other features like whether the unwed mother has additional children, her income status, whether or not she marries, and whether or not she is in a cohabiting relationship. Some of the highlights include the following:

- black women are more likely to have children outside of marriage than other racial or ethnic groups;
- it is not teenagers but rather women in their early twenties who have the highest percentage of births outside of marriage;
- single motherhood is more common among women with less education than among well-educated women;
- a substantial share of nonmarital births (44%) were to women who had already given birth to one or more children;
- a significant number of unwed mothers are in cohabiting relationships; and
- women who have a nonmarital birth are less likely than other women to eventually marry.

Race and Ethnicity

The rate at which unmarried women have children varies dramatically by race and ethnicity. As mentioned earlier, in 2005, the nonmarital birth rate for all U.S. women was 47.5 births per 1,000 unmarried women.¹⁸ In 2005, Hispanic women had the highest nonmarital birth rate at 100.3 births per 1,000 unmarried women. The nonmarital birth rate in 2005 was 67.8 for black women, 30.1 for non-Hispanic white women, and 24.9 for Asian or Pacific Islander women. Although Hispanic women had the highest nonmarital birth rate, a greater share (percentage) of black women had nonmarital births.

In 2005, 36.9% of all U.S. births were to unmarried women.¹⁹ In 2005, 69.9% of births to black women were nonmarital births. The percentage of nonmarital births for American Indians or Alaska Natives was 63.5%. The nonmarital birth percentage was 48.0% for Hispanic women, 25.3% for non-Hispanic white women, and 16.2% for Asian or Pacific Islander women.²⁰ (See **Table 1**.)

¹⁸ The nonmarital birth rate for all women in 2006 was 50.6 births per 1,000 unmarried women. The segmentation of the nonmarital birth rate by race and Hispanic origin for 2006 has not yet been published.

¹⁹ The percentage of all U.S. births that were to unmarried women was 38.5% in 2006. The segmentation of the percentage of nonmarital births by race and Hispanic origin for 2006 is shown in **Table 1**.

²⁰ The text in this section discusses 2005 data because comparable 2006 nonmarital birth data on rates and numbers by race and ethnicity have not yet been published.

Table 1. Percentage of All Births That Were to Unmarried Women, by Race, Ethnicity, and Age, Selected Years 1960-2006

	1960	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total Births	5.3	10.7	18.4	22.0	28.0	32.2	33.2	34.6	35.8	36.9	38.5
Race/Ethnicity											
White (non-Hispanic)	NA	NA	9.6	12.4	16.9	21.2	22.1	23.6	24.5	25.3	26.6
Black (non-Hispanic)	NA	NA	57.3	62.1	66.7	70.0	68.7	68.5	69.3	69.9	70.7
Hispanic	NA	NA	23.6	29.5	36.7	40.8	42.7	45.0	46.4	48.0	49.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	NA	NA	7.3	9.5	13.3	16.3	14.8	15.0	15.5	16.2	16.3
American Indian or Alaskan Native	NA	NA	39.2	46.8	53.6	57.2	58.4	61.3	62.3	63.5	64.6
Age											
Under 15 years	67.9	80.8	88.7	91.8	91.6	93.5	96.5	97.1	97.4	98.0	98.3
15-19	14.8	29.5	47.6	58.0	67.1	75.2	78.8	81.3	82.4	83.3	84.2
20-24	4.8	8.9	19.4	26.3	36.9	44.7	49.5	53.2	54.8	56.2	57.9
25-29	2.9	4.1	9.0	12.7	18.0	21.5	23.5	26.4	27.8	29.3	31.0
30-34	2.8	4.5	7.5	9.7	13.3	14.7	14.0	15.1	16.1	17.0	18.3
35-39	3.0	5.2	9.4	11.2	13.9	15.7	14.3	14.8	15.2	15.7	16.4
40 years and over	3.1	5.7	12.1	14.0	17.0	18.1	16.8	17.9	18.2	18.8	19.4

Source: Child Trends, Data Bank, Percentage of Births to Unmarried Women. National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Reports, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000). National Center for Health Statistics, Births: Final Data for 2005, vol. 56, no. 6 (and other selected years). National Vital Statistics Reports, vol. 56, no. 7 (December 5, 2007).

NA = Not available.

The greatest share of children born to unmarried women are white; however, minority children, particularly black children and Hispanic children, are overrepresented. Of the 1.5 million children who were born outside of marriage in 2005, 38% were white (whites constituted 80% of the U.S. population), 27% were black (blacks constituted 13% of the population), 2% were American Indian/Alaskan Native (American Indians or Alaskan Natives constituted 1% of the population), 2% were Asian or Pacific Islander (Asians or Pacific Islanders constituted 4% of the population), and 32% were Hispanic (Hispanics constituted 14% of the population).

In 2005, the percentage of nonmarital births to black women (nearly 70%) was more than three times the 22% level of the early 1960s that so alarmed Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then President Johnson's Assistant Secretary of Labor. Moynihan addressed the issue in a report called "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action."²¹ One theory that attempts to explain the disproportionate share of nonmarital births to black women hypothesizes that the universe of males (ages 15 and above) who are unmarried is disproportionately lower for blacks. For example, in 2005, there were 74 black unmarried males for every 100 unmarried black females; 87 white non-Hispanic unmarried males for every 100 unmarried white non-Hispanic females; 98 Asian unmarried males for every 100 Asian unmarried females; and 113 Hispanic unmarried males for every 100 Hispanic unmarried females.²² Supporters of this theory argue that if the universe of possible marriage partners is reduced to desirable marriage partners (e.g., heterosexual men, men with steady jobs, men without a criminal record, and men with a similar educational background), the black "male shortage" is drastically increased.²³

Age

Teen marriage and birth patterns have shifted from a general trend of marrying before pregnancy, to marrying as a result of pregnancy, to becoming pregnant and not marrying.²⁴ Early nonmarital childbearing remains an important issue, especially in the U.S., because young first-time mothers are more likely to have their births outside of marriage than within marriage, and because women who have a nonmarital first

²¹ Moynihan's 1965 report argued that black Americans were being held back economically and socially primarily because their family structure was deteriorating. The report was very controversial and sparked decades of debate. It was not until the 1990s that there was widespread agreement that Moynihan's prognostications were generally true.

²² With respect to these statistics, "unmarried" is defined as being divorced, widowed, or never-married. The figures were calculated on the basis of data from the Census Bureau — America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2005 (males ages 15 and above and females ages 15 and above, by race and ethnicity), Table A1.

²³ Some commentators contend that in order for black women to find desirable marriage partners they may have to consider men of other races or cultures (e.g., African, Caribbean).

²⁴ "Teenage Motherhood and Marriage," *Child Trends* and the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*.

birth are increasingly likely to have all subsequent births outside of marriage, although often in cohabiting unions.²⁵

The proportion of births to unmarried women (i.e., nonmarital births) who are teenagers also has decreased over the last half-century. In 1950, 42% of the 141,600 nonmarital births were to females under age twenty. In 1970, 50% of the 398,700 nonmarital births were to females under age twenty. In 1990, 31% of the nearly 1.2 million (1,165,384) nonmarital births were to females under age twenty. In 2005, 23% of the 1.5 million (1,527,034) nonmarital births in the U.S. were to teenagers.

In contrast, the percentage of *all* teen births that are nonmarital has increased dramatically. In other words, in recent years, most teenagers who give birth are not married. For example, only 13% of the 419,535 babies born to teens (ages 15 to 19) in 1950 were born to females who were not married. Whereas, in 2005, 83% of the 414,593 babies born to teens (ages 15 to 19) were born to unwed teens. There are two reasons for this phenomenon. The first is that marriage in the teen years, which was not uncommon in the 1950s, has become quite rare. (As mentioned earlier, the typical age of first marriage in the U.S. has risen to 25.5 for women and 27.5 for men.) The second is that this general trend of marriage postponement has extended to pregnant teens as well: In contrast to the days of the “shotgun marriage,” very few teens who become pregnant nowadays marry before their baby is born.²⁶

Contrary to public perception, it is not teenagers but rather women in their early twenties who have the highest percentage of births outside of marriage. In 1990, 31% of the 1,165,384 nonmarital births in the U.S. were to teenagers (under age 20), 35% were to women ages 20 through 24, 20% were to women ages 25 through 29, 10% were to women ages 30 through 34, 4% were to women ages 35 through 39, and less than 1% were to women ages 40 and above (see **Figure 4**). In 2005, 23% of the 1,527,034 nonmarital births in the U.S. were to teenagers (under age 20),²⁷ 38% were to women ages 20 through 24, 22% were to women ages 25 through 29, 11% were to women ages 30 through 34, 5% were to women ages 35 through 39, and 1% were to women ages 40 and above.²⁸ (See **Figure 5**.)

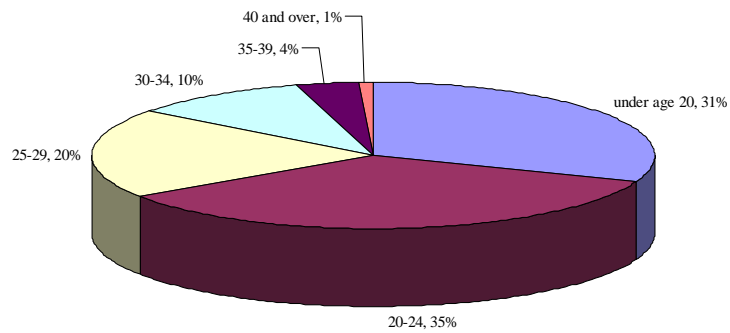
²⁵ Karen Benjamin Guzzo, “Multipartnered Fertility Among Young Women With a Nonmarital First Birth: Prevalence and Risk Factors,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, March 2007.

²⁶ The Guttmacher Institute, “Teen Pregnancy: Trends and Lessons Learned,” *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, vol. 5, no. 1 (February 2002).

²⁷ In 2005, 23% of nonmarital white (non-Hispanic), black, and Hispanic births were to teenagers (under age 20); 25% of nonmarital American Indian/Alaskan Native and 16% of nonmarital Asian/Pacific Islander births were to teens (under age 20).

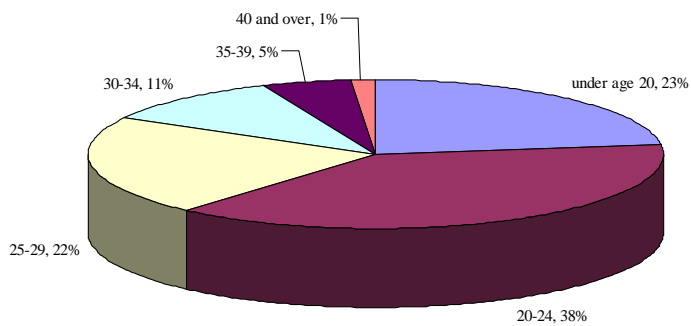
²⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, “Births: Final Data for 2005,” *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007).

Figure 4. Percentage Distribution of Nonmarital Births, by Age of Mother, 1990



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000).

Figure 5. Percentage Distribution of Nonmarital Births, by Age of Mother, 2005

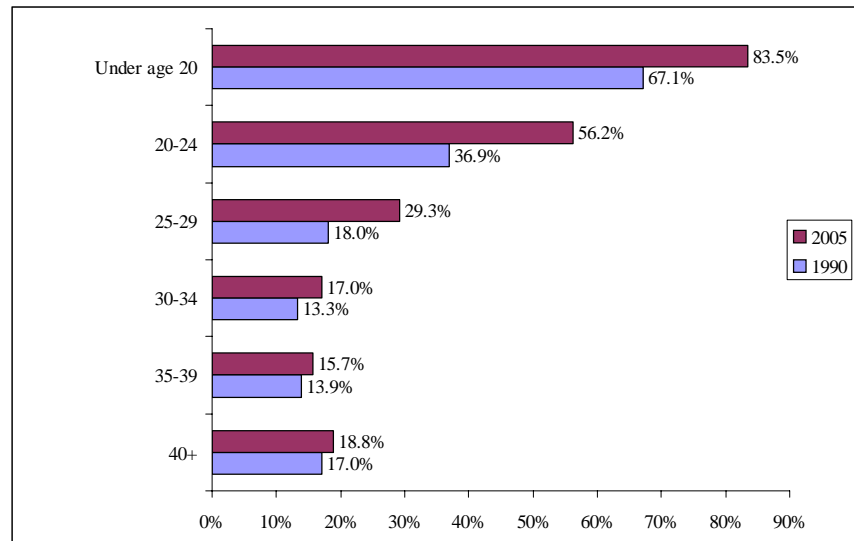


Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Births: Final Data for 2005," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007).

Nonetheless, even though the percentage of all nonmarital births to teens has declined, teen mothers are likely to have subsequent births outside of marriage.²⁹ In 2006, 19% of all teen births were second or higher-order births. According to some research, 20%-37% of adolescent mothers give birth a second time within 24 months.³⁰ Thus, some of the women who have a nonmarital birth in their early twenties were teenage mothers as well.

An alternate analysis of the age and nonmarital birth data shows that across all age groups a growing share of women are having nonmarital births. In 1990, 67.1% of births to females under age 20 were nonmarital, as were 36.9% of births to women ages 20 through 24, 18.0% of births to women ages 25 through 29, 13.3% of births to women ages 30 through 34, 13.9% of births to women ages 35 through 39, and 17.0% of births to women ages 40 and over. Whereas in 2005, 83.5% of births to females under age 20 were nonmarital, as were 56.2% of births to women ages 20 to 24, 29.3% of births to women ages 25 to 29, 17.0% of births to women ages 30 to 34, 15.7% of births to women ages 35 to 39, and 18.8% of births to women ages 40 and over. (See **Figure 6**.)

Figure 6. Percentage of Births That Are Nonmarital Births, by Age Group, 1990 and 2005



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Births: Final Data for 2005," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007).

²⁹ Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Jennifer Manlove, and Kristen A. Moore, "Births Outside of Marriage: Perception vs. Reality, Research Brief," *Child Trends*, April 2001.

³⁰ "Social Ecological Predictors of Repeat Adolescent Pregnancy," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (March 1, 2007).

Until recently, a commonly held view was that if childbearing was deferred until a woman reaches her early or late twenties, she would most likely be married. Given that nonmarital birth rates and percentages are at their highest recorded levels and that the number of babies born to teenagers has dramatically decreased in fourteen of the last fifteen years, policymakers are faced with a new paradigm of whether to address births outside of marriage for older women. In these times of scarce resources, it is debatable whether a consensus can be garnered for using public funds to educate women in their mid-twenties and thirties about the negative consequences associated with nonmarital births.³¹ Many observers hold the view that older women who have children outside of marriage should have known better, or believe that these women have children for selfish reasons and should live with the consequences, without government assistance or interference.³² Others argue that the motto “in the best interest of the child” should prevail³³ and that if government aid is necessary and appropriate it should be given.

Educational Attainment

Single motherhood has always been more common among women with less education than among well-educated women. But the gap has grown over time. In 1960, 14% of mothers in the bottom quarter of the education distribution were unmarried, as compared to 4.5% of mothers in the top quarter — a difference of 9.5 percentage points. By 2000, the corresponding figures were 43% for the less educated mothers and 7% for the more educated mothers — a gap of 36 percentage points.³⁴

Income Status

An examination of never-married mothers shows that in 2007, 41.1% of never-married mother families (with children under age 18) had income below the poverty level. With respect to the various income categories, 23.0% of never-married mother

³¹ As mentioned earlier in the report, many women who have nonmarital births in their twenties first became mothers in their teen years. Thus, some observers contend that if teen pregnancy prevention programs were more effective, there would be fewer nonmarital births.

³² Michael E. Foster and Saul D. Hoffman, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the 1980s: Assessing the Importance of Women 25 and Older,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, (May/June 1996). See also Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *The Atlantic* (April 1993).

³³ Andrea Kane and Daniel T. Lichter, “Reducing Unwed Childbearing: The Missing Link in Efforts to Promote Marriage,” *Center on Children and Families*, Brief no. 37 (April 2006). See also Paul R. Amato and Rebecca A. Maynard, “Decreasing Nonmarital Births and Strengthening Marriage to Reduce Poverty,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall 2007).

³⁴ Andrew J. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005), p. 38.

families had income below \$10,000, 45.9% had income below \$20,000, and 55.1% had income below \$25,000; 19.2% had income above \$50,000.³⁵

Additional Children

Some studies have found that a woman is most likely to have a second birth while in the same type of situation (single, cohabiting, or married) as she was in for the first birth.³⁶

The public perception is that nonmarital births are first births. The reality is that in 2005, 44% of the 1.5 million nonmarital births occurred to women who had already given birth to one or more children.³⁷ In 2007, 46% of mother-only families had more than one child.³⁸

Cohabitation

In 2007, 6.4 million family households in the U.S. were classified as unmarried-partner, or cohabiting, households.³⁹ This represented 8.2% of the 78.4 million U.S. family households.⁴⁰ Thirty years earlier, in 1977, only 1.1 million family households consisted of cohabiting couples — this represented 2% of the 56.5 million family households in 1977.⁴¹ A report on trends in cohabitation indicated that cohabitation is now the norm with approximately 54% of all first marriages beginning with a cohabiting relationship. The report estimated that a majority of young men and women of marriageable age today will spend some time in a cohabiting relationship.⁴² Cohabiting relationships are generally considered less stable than marriages. According to several sources, cohabiting relationships are fragile and

³⁵ Ibid., Table FG6.

³⁶ Lawrence L. Wu, Larry L. Bumpass, and Kelly Musick, “Historical and Life Course Trajectories of Nonmarital Childbearing,” University of Wisconsin-Madison. *Center for Demography and Ecology*, Working Paper no. 99-23 (revised July 2000), p. 28.

³⁷ Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Jennifer Manlove, and Kristin A. Moore, “Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality,” Research Brief, *Child Trends*, April 2001.

³⁸ In 2007, 54% of mother-only families had one child, 31% had two children, 11% had three children, and 4% had four or more children. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2007,” Table FG6.

³⁹ This means that the householder was living with someone of the opposite sex who was identified as his or her unmarried partner.

⁴⁰ This percentage is generally considered a low estimate because only householders and their partners (not all unmarried couples present in a household) are counted. In addition, some respondents may not want to admit that they are cohabiting and may instead described themselves as roommates, housemates, or friends.

⁴¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey and Annual Social and Economic Supplements. July 2008.

⁴² Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, “Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children’s Family Contexts in the United States,” *Population Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1 (March 2000), p. 29-41.

relatively short in duration, with fewer than half lasting five years or more.⁴³ A 2004 study found that, a year after the birth, 15% of cohabiting couples had married.⁴⁴

The notion that unmarried births equals mother-only families is no longer correct. The decline in the percentage of births to married women has in large measure been in tandem with the increase in births to parents who are living together but who are not married (in cohabiting relationships). According to one study, the proportion of babies of unmarried women born into cohabiting families increased from 29% to 41% from 1980-1984 to 1990-1994, accounting for almost all of the increase in unmarried childbearing over that period.⁴⁵ According to Census data, in 2006, approximately 160,000 never-married women (4%) who gave birth within the last 12 months were in a cohabiting relationship.⁴⁶

Some children live with cohabiting couples who are either their own unmarried parents or a biological parent and a live-in partner. Approximately 39% of the 6.4 million unmarried-partner (cohabiting) families in 2007 included biological children (of either the mother or father or both) under the age of 18 (i.e., this amounted to 2.5 million families).⁴⁷ This is compared to the 44% of the 58.9 million married-couple families with biological children under age 18 (this amounted to 26.2 million families); and the 60% of the 14.4 million mother-only families with biological children under age 18 (this amounted to 8.6 million families); and the 40% of the 5.1 million father-only families with biological children under age 18 (this amounted to 2.0 million families).⁴⁸

Some analysts contend that the increase in nonmarital childbearing could be seen as less of an issue if viewed through a framework that portrays out-of-wedlock births as babies born to cohabiting couples rather than “single” women. Consistent with the data mentioned earlier, several reports and studies indicate that about 40% of unmarried mothers are cohabiting with the father of their baby, at least at the time of the baby’s birth.⁴⁹ According to the National Survey of Family Growth, about 9% of annual births to white women were to cohabiting women; among black women,

⁴³ Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Jennifer Manlove, and Kristin A. Moore, “Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality,” Research Brief, *Child Trends*, April 2001.

⁴⁴ Marcia Carlson, Sara McLanahan, and Paula England, “Union Formation in Fragile Families,” *Demography* vol. 41 (2004), p. 237-61.

⁴⁵ Bumpass, Larry and Lu, Hsien-Hen(2000). “Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children’s Family Contexts in the United States.” *Population Studies*, 54: 29-41.

⁴⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006, August 2008, Table 8.

⁴⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2007, Tables F1 and UC3.

⁴⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey and Annual Social and Economic Supplements, July 2008, Table F1.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Jennifer Manlove, and Kristin A. Moore, “Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality,” Research Brief, *Child Trends*, April 2001. Also see U.S. Census Bureau, “America’s Families and Living Arrangements 2000,” P20-537 (June 2001), p. 13.

15% were to cohabiting women; and among Hispanic women, 22% of births occurred to women who were cohabiting.⁵⁰

Others point out that cohabitation is a complex phenomenon that has an array of meanings. Some view it as a precursor to marriage while others view it as an alternative to marriage.⁵¹ According to one study:

“cohabitation is a continuous rather than a dichotomous variable. At both ends of the continuum, there is substantial agreement across measures about who is (not) cohabiting. In the middle of the continuum, however, there is considerable ambiguity, with as much as 15% of couples reporting part-time cohabitation. How we classify this group will affect estimates of the prevalence of cohabitation, especially among African Americans, and may impact the characteristics and outcomes of cohabitators.”⁵²

Subsequent Marriage of Mothers

Many women marry after having a child. According to the research, about 40% of unwed mothers marry within five years after giving birth (it is not known whether they marry the father of their child).⁵³ Yet, women who have a nonmarital birth are less likely than other women ever to marry. A study based on retrospective life histories found that at age 17, girls who had a nonmarital birth were 69% more likely to be never married at age 35 than 17-year old girls who did not have a nonmarital birth (i.e., 24% vs. 14.0%). Women ages 20 to 24 who had a nonmarital birth were more than twice as likely (102%) to not be married at age 35 than women ages 20 to 24 who did not have a nonmarital birth (i.e., 38% vs. 19.0%). The reported implications of these findings is that there probably is a causal relationship between nonmarital childbearing and subsequent marriage.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Survey of Family Growth. Fact Sheet. The percentages mentioned in the text are based on 2002 data and were limited to the first births of the mother. April 2008.

⁵¹ Musick, Kelly, “Cohabitation, Nonmarital Childbearing, and the Marriage Process,” *Demographic Research* [Germany], vol. 16, article 9 (April 20, 2007), p. 251.

⁵² Jean Tansey Knab, “Cohabitation: Sharpening a Fuzzy Concept,” Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Working Paper # 04-05-FF, May 2005, p. 2.

⁵³ Dore Hollander, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States: A Government Report,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January-February 1996), p. 32.

⁵⁴ Daniel T. Lichter and Deborah Roempke Graefe, “Finding a Mate? The Marital and Cohabitation Histories of Unwed Mothers,” (November 1999), p. 9. Note: Some analysts contend that nonmarital fertility may be a behavioral manifestation of difficulties in finding a suitable marriage partner. The authors, based on their research, contend that nonmarital fertility has been a cause of the retreat from marriage. (Ibid, p. 4).

Another study⁵⁵ points out the racial differences associated with the eventual marriage of many women who had a nonmarital birth. The study found that white women were more likely to be married than their minority counterparts. Some 82% of white women, 62% of Hispanics and 59% of blacks who had a nonmarital first birth had married by age 40; the corresponding proportions among those who avoided nonmarital childbearing were 89%, 93% and 76%, respectively.

By some estimates, having a child outside of marriage decreases a woman's chances of marrying by 30% in any given year. Even when they do marry, women who have had a nonmarital birth generally are less likely to stay married. Analysis of data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth indicates that women ages 25 to 44 who had their first child before marriage and later got married are half as likely to stay married as women who did not have a nonmarital birth (42% compared to 82%).⁵⁶

The following section highlights a couple of demographic factors associated with the fathers of children born outside of marriage. It also discusses the importance of establishing paternity for children born outside of marriage.

Fathers of Children Born Outside of Marriage

It has been pointed out that fathers are far too often left out of discussions about nonmarital childbearing. It goes without saying that fathers are an integral factor in nonmarital childbearing. It appears that one result of the so-called sexual revolution was that many men increasingly believed that women could and should control their fertility via contraception and abortion. As a result, many men have become less willing to marry the women they impregnate.⁵⁷

There are myriad reasons why so many children live in homes without their fathers. Some reasons are related to choices people make about fertility, marriage, and cohabitation. But others are the result of unexpected events, such as illness, or incarceration. Some noncustodial fathers are active in the lives of their children, whereas others are either unable or unwilling to be involved in their children's lives. Whatever the reason, a father's absence from the home results in social, psychological, emotional, and financial costs to children and economic costs to the nation. A 2008 report maintains that the federal government spends about \$99.8

⁵⁵ Deborah Roempke Graefe and Daniel T. Lichter, "Marriage Among Unwed Mothers: Whites, Blacks and Hispanics Compared," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 34, no. 6 (November/December 2002), p. 289.

⁵⁶ Andrea Kane and Daniel T. Lichter, "Reducing Unwed Childbearing: The Missing Link in Efforts to Promote Marriage," *Center on Children and Families*, Brief no. 37 (April 2006).

⁵⁷ George A. Akerlof, Janet L. Yellen and Michael L. Katz, "An Analysis of Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing in the United States," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 111, no. 2 (May 1996).

billion per year in providing financial and other support (via fourteen federal social welfare programs) to father-absent families.⁵⁸

This section of the report discusses the race and ethnicity of fathers to children born outside of marriage, age of fathers, and the importance of establishing paternity for children born outside of marriage. One of the prominent, but perhaps not unexpected, findings related to fathers and nonmarital births is that when older men have sexual relationships with young women it often results in nonmarital births.

Race and Ethnicity

According to the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, 33% of unmarried Hispanic men and 33% of unmarried non-Hispanic black men have had a biological child, compared with 19% of unmarried non-Hispanic white men. Non-Hispanic black fathers were less likely to be married at the time their first child was born (37%) compared with non-Hispanic white fathers (77%) and Hispanic fathers (52%). A nonmarital first birth was more prevalent among younger fathers, black and Hispanic fathers, and fathers with lower levels of income, and men whose mothers had lower levels of education.⁵⁹

Age

In the United States, it is not unusual for a man to be several years older than his female partner. Some data indicate that the man is three or more years older than the woman in almost four in 10 relationships today. Therefore, it is not unexpected that a similar pattern exists for sexually active teenagers. However, such age differences often have adverse consequences for young women.⁶⁰ Several studies have found that the unequal power dynamic that is often present in relationships between teenage girls and older men is more likely to lead to sexual contact not wanted by the female, less frequent use of contraceptives, and a greater incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) among the adolescent females.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Steven L. Nock and Christopher J. Einolf, “The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man: The Annual Public Costs of Father Absence,” *The National Fatherhood Initiative* (June 2008) The federal programs include the Earned Income Tax Credit, TANF, CSE, Supplemental Security Income, Food Stamps, Special Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), School Lunch, Medicaid, State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Head Start, Child Care, Energy Assistance, Public Housing, and Section 8 Housing.

⁵⁹ Gladys M. Martinez, Anjani Chandra, Joyce C. Abma, Jo Jones, and William D. Mosher, “Fertility, Contraception, and Fatherhood: Data on Men and Women from Cycle 6 (2002) of the National Survey of Family Growth,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *National Center for Health Statistics*, series 23, no. 26 (May 2006).

⁶⁰ Jacqueline E. Darroch, David J. Landry, and Selene Oslak, “Age Differences Between Sexual Partners In the United States,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 31, no. 4 (July/August 1999), Guttmacher Institute.

⁶¹ Suzanne Ryan, Kerry Franzetta, Jennifer S. Manlove, and Erin Schelar, “Older Sexual Partners During Adolescence: Links to Reproductive Health Outcomes in Young Adulthood,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 40, no. 1 (March 2008),

(continued...)

Further, a significant share of teenagers in relationships with older men have children outside of marriage. According to one study, about 20% of births to unmarried, teenage girls are attributed to men at least five years older than the mother.⁶² According to another report, unmarried teenagers younger than 18 were especially likely to become pregnant when involved with an older partner: 69% of those whose partner was six or more years older became pregnant, compared with 23% of those whose partner was three to five years older and 17% of those whose partner was no more than two years older.⁶³

Paternity Establishment

Paternity is presumed if a child is conceived within marriage. In other words, the husband is presumed to be the father of a child born to his wife. In cases in which the child is born outside of marriage, paternity can be voluntarily acknowledged or it can be contested. It would be contested in cases in which (1) the mother does not want to establish paternity, thereby forcing the father to take his case to court to assert his rights, (2) the biological father does not want to pay child support and denies paternity to delay establishment of a child support order, or (3) the alleged father has genuine doubt about his paternity. If paternity is contested it is generally resolved through either an administrative process or a judicial proceeding.

A child born outside of marriage has a biological father but not necessarily a legal father. Paternity establishment refers to the legal determination of fatherhood for a child. In 2006, 38.5% of children born in the United States were born to unmarried women, adding approximately 1.6 million new children to the list of children without a legally identified father. Data from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) indicate that in 2006 the total number of children in the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) caseload⁶⁴ who were born outside of marriage amounted to about 10.4 million.⁶⁵ Paternity has been established or acknowledged for

⁶¹ (...continued)

Guttmacher Institute.

⁶² David J. Landry and Jacqueline D. Forrest, "How Old Are U.S. Fathers?" *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1995).

⁶³ Jacqueline E. Darroch, David J. Landry, and Selene Oslak, "Age Differences Between Sexual Partners In the United States," *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 31, no. 4 (July/August 1999), Guttmacher Institute.

⁶⁴ The following families automatically qualify for CSE services (free of charge): families receiving (or who formerly received) Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits (Title IV-A of the Social Security Act), foster care payments, or Medicaid coverage. Other families must apply for CSE services, and states must charge an application fee that cannot exceed \$25. In FY2006, the CSE caseload consisted of 15.8 million cases, of which 2.3 million were TANF cases; 7.3 million were former-TANF cases, and 6.2 million had never been on TANF.

⁶⁵ These 10.4 million children who were born outside of marriage represented about 60% of the children in the CSE caseload in 2006.

about 8.9 million (86%) of these children (1.7 million during FY2006), leaving nearly 1.5 million children in the CSE caseload without a legally identified father.⁶⁶

Paternity establishment is not an end in itself, but rather a prerequisite to obtaining ongoing economic support (i.e., child support) from the other (noncustodial) parent.⁶⁷ Once paternity is established legally (through a legal proceeding, an administrative process, or voluntary acknowledgment), a child gains legal rights and privileges. Among these may be rights to inheritance, rights to the father's medical and life insurance benefits, and to social security and possibly veterans' benefits. It also may be important for the health of the child for doctors to have knowledge of the father's medical history. The child also may have a chance to develop a relationship with the father and to develop a sense of identity and connection to the "other half" of his or her family.

The public policy interest in paternity establishment is based in part on the dramatic increase in nonmarital births over the last several decades and the economic status of single mothers and their children. The poorest demographic group in the U.S. consists of children in single-parent families. Paternity establishment generally is seen as a means to promote the social goals of (1) providing for the basic financial support of all minor children regardless of the marital status of their parents, (2) ensuring equity in assessing parental liability for the financial support of their children, and (3) promoting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions.⁶⁸

Many observers maintain that the social, psychological, emotional, and financial benefits of having one's father legally identified are irrefutable. They suggest that paternity should be established, regardless of the ability of the father to pay child support. They argue that the role of both parents is critical in building the self-esteem of their children and helping the children become self-sufficient members of the community.

Current literature and studies suggest that in most cases visitation with the noncustodial parent is important to the healthy emotional development of children. Children with regular contact with their noncustodial parent often adjust better than those denied such contact. Moreover, generally it is in the best interest of the child to receive social, psychological, and financial benefits of a relationship with both

⁶⁶ Office of Child Support Enforcement (HHS), "Child Support Enforcement, FY 2006 (preliminary report)," March 2007.

⁶⁷ Among custodial parents (living with children under age 21) who actually received child support payments in 2005 (latest available data), 41% were divorced, 25% were married, 24% were never married, 9% were separated, and 1% were widowed. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Children: 2005," *Current Population Reports*, P60-234 (August 2007), Table 4.

⁶⁸ Laurene T. McKillop with preface by Judith Cassetty, "Benefits of Establishing Paternity," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, (June 1981, reprinted September 1985), p. ix-xii.

parents. Visitation (i.e., contact with one's children) is the primary means by which noncustodial parents carry out their parenting duty.⁶⁹

The following section discusses some of demographic factors that have contributed to the increase in nonmarital births as well as some of the reasons, cited by women, for nonmarital childbearing.

Reasons for the Increase in Nonmarital Childbearing

Declining marriage rates, increased childbearing among unmarried women, increased number of unmarried women in the childbearing ages (i.e., 15-44), and decreased childbearing among married women have contributed to the rising share of children being born to unwed women.

Many social science analysts attribute the increase in nonmarital births to the decades-long decline of “shotgun marriages,” rather than to an increased incidence of nonmarital conceptions. They contend that when the social pressure to get married once pregnancy became obvious ended, the likelihood that women would marry between conception and birth decreased substantially.⁷⁰ The entry of more and more women into the paid labor force also made childbearing outside of marriage more economically feasible.

Through the 1960s, most Americans believed that parents should stay in an unhappy marriage for the sake of the children. By the 1970s, this view was not as prominent. Divorce and not getting married to the father of a child — which were generally considered to not be in the best interest of the child — were acceptable if it resulted in the happiness of the adult. Thus, many observers and analysts agree that marriage is now more likely to be viewed through a framework of adult fulfillment rather than through a framework of childbearing and childrearing.⁷¹

Factors that have contributed to an unprecedented level of nonmarital childbearing include an increase in the median age of first marriage (i.e., marriage postponement), delays in childbearing of married couples, increased marital dissolution, an increase in the number of cohabiting couples, increased sexual activity outside of marriage, participation in risky behaviors that often lead to sex, improper

⁶⁹ For an array of information on the impact of father involvement in their children's lives, see the following website: National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (HHS), “Father Involvement in Children's Development,” [<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/fatherinvolvement.html>].

⁷⁰ Dore Hollander, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States: A Government Report,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January-February 1996), p. 31.

⁷¹ Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, “Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage,” University of California Press, 2005, p. 136.

use of contraceptive methods,⁷² and lack of marriageable partners. This section of the report does not try to verify, refute, or support any of the reasons commonly cited for nonmarital births. Instead, its purpose is to give the reader a better understanding of the nonmarital birth phenomenon by synthesizing and simplifying the large body of research on the subject and presenting the views of analysts and other observers in a way that helps to clarify the complexity of the topic.

Demographic Factors Contributing to the Increase in the Number and Percent of Nonmarital Births

The combined factors of more unmarried women of childbearing age in the population and the increased birth rates of unmarried women resulted in dramatic increases in the *number* of nonmarital births over the last several decades. The text box shows that the percentage of women of childbearing age increased about 16% during the period from 1960 to 1990, from 39.7% to 46.0%. **Table 3** shows that the percent of women who never married increased from 11.9% in 1960 to 22.0% in 2006 (an 85% increase).

In addition, the *percent* of all births to unmarried women rose substantially over the last several decades as well. The reason for the increase was primarily due to three concurrent demographic factors. First, the number and proportion of unmarried women increased as more and more women from the baby boom generation postponed marriage.

Percent of Female Population Ages 15-44	
1960	39.7%
1970	40.7%
1980	45.4%
1990	46.0%
2000	42.9%
2006	41.0%

Postponement of Marriage. Since the 1960s, couples have postponed marriage. **Table 2** shows that in 1950 and 1960 the median age at first marriage was 22.8 years for men and 20.3 years for women. In 2006, for both men and women the median age at first marriage had increased by more than four years. An increasing share of men and women also have never been married. **Table 3** shows that in 1960, 11.9% of females age 15 and older (and 17.3% of males of the same age) had not yet married, compared to 22.0% of females (and 28.6% of males) in 2006.

⁷² In general, the use of contraceptives has increased substantially over the last twenty years and women have become more proficient in properly using contraceptives. Thus, contraceptive misuse or non-use is not discussed in this report as a reason for increased nonmarital childbearing. Nonetheless, it is important to note that shifts in the types of contraceptives used has had offsetting influences on the risk of unintended pregnancy. The chances of contraceptive failure (including method failure and incorrect or inconsistent use) in the first 12 months of use are higher for the condom (14%) than for oral contraceptives (8%), and lowest for injectables (3%), implants (2%), and sterilization. Thus, the mix of methods used by women included greater proportions of both more effective and less effective methods. Source: Stephanie J. Ventura and Christine A. Bachrach, "National Vital Statistics Reports," vol. 48, no. 16, October 18, 2000, p. 9.

Table 2. Median Age at First Marriage, 1950-2006

Year	Men	Women
1950	22.8	20.3
1960	22.8	20.3
1970	23.2	20.8
1980	24.7	22.0
1990	26.1	23.9
1995	26.9	24.5
1996	27.1	24.8
1997	26.8	25.0
1998	26.7	25.0
1999	26.9	25.1
2000	26.8	25.1
2001	26.9	25.1
2002	26.9	25.3
2003	27.1	25.3
2004	27.4	25.3
2005	27.1	25.3
2006	27.5	25.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Historical Time Series, Marital Status (MS-2), Family and Living Arrangements, 2008.

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Never Married Women, by Age, Selected Years 1960-2006

Age and Sex	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2006
Women (all)	11.9	13.7	17.1	18.9	19.4	21.1	21.6	22.0
15-19	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
20-24	28.4	35.8	50.2	62.8	66.8	72.8	74.6	75.3
25-29	10.5	10.5	20.9	31.1	35.3	38.9	41.3	43.1
30-34	6.9	6.2	9.5	16.4	19.0	21.9	23.6	24.0
35-39	6.1	5.4	6.2	10.4	12.6	14.3	15.6	16.7
40-44	6.1	4.9	4.8	8.0	8.7	11.8	12.1	13.1
45-54	7.0	4.9	4.7	5.0	6.1	8.6	9.7	10.3
55-64	8.0	6.8	4.5	3.9	4.3	4.9	6.1	6.5
65-74	8.5	7.8	5.6	4.6	4.0	3.7	4.1	3.9
75 and older	—	7.5	6.3	5.4	4.4	3.5	3.8	3.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2007 and selected years.

Note: Although the (all) category represents the percentage of persons age 15 years and older who were never married, data for persons under age 20 are not available consistently for the selected years. Also, data for 1960 represent persons 65 years and older.

NA = Not available.

The second demographic factor is that the birth rates for unmarried women of all ages continued to increase. Third, the birth rates for married women decreased. Thus, the percent of all births that were to unmarried women rose because births to unmarried women increased while births to married women decreased.⁷³

Attitude Toward Marriage

During the last half-century, the median age at first marriage has increased for both men and women by more than four years. As seen in **Table 2**, in 2006, the median age at first marriage was 27.5 years for men and 25.5 years for women. Marriage postponement has increased the number of unmarried women in the population. In 2006, 22.0% of all females (ages 15 and older) had not yet married, the comparable figure in 1960 was 11.9% (see **Table 3**).⁷⁴

Attitudes towards marriage are varied and complex. Fifty years ago, marriage was the central and defining feature of adult identity. It was intertwined with moral rightness. Although some viewed marriage as a form of social obligation and a restriction on personal freedom, it was considered the proper progression by most Americans.⁷⁵ Today, most Americans continue to view marriage as a natural stage in life. They also generally perceive marriage as a way toward personal growth and deeper intimacy. Some view it as a way to share one's life with someone in a committed loving relationship.⁷⁶ Others view it as a safe haven that imbues sexual faithfulness, emotional support, mutual trust, and lasting commitment.⁷⁷ Others are more cynical and view it as a relationship mainly designed for the sexual and emotional gratification of each adult.⁷⁸

Although attitudes towards marriage have changed, most people eventually marry and the desire to marry is widespread. Generally, teens think that having a good marriage is important, and most say that it is likely they will get married. But they are less than certain that their future marriages will last a lifetime. In addition, marriage is facing stiff competition from cohabitation. Living together before getting

⁷³ Stephanie J. Ventura and Christine A. Bachrach, "Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99," Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000), p. 3.

⁷⁴ Some analysts note that the economic returns associated with a college education are also a factor in marriage postponement. They contend that for many youth, college delays "adulthood" well into a person's twenties.

⁷⁵ Andrew J. Cherlin, "American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century," *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Steven L. Nock, "Marriage as a Public Issue," *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005).

⁷⁸ Andrew J. Cherlin, "American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century," *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005). Also see Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *The Atlantic* (April 1993).

married is considered acceptable by most young people.⁷⁹ Moreover, sex outside of marriage (especially for adults) is almost considered the norm and has virtually no stigma attached to it.

There is much agreement that the link between marriage and parenthood has weakened considerably. Many policymakers contend that the link must be firmly reestablished for the well-being of children and the good of the nation.⁸⁰

Lack of Marriageable Partners

The so-called shortage of “marriageable” men (both the number of unmarried men and the “quality” of unmarried men, as viewed in terms of their ability to support a family) has been cited as one explanation for declining marriage rates, and to a lesser extent for why nonmarital childbearing has increased.⁸¹ In effect, although some women may have sexual relations with certain men, it does not mean that they consider those men to be viable marriage partners. A national survey of unmarried adults under age 35 found that more than two-thirds of the women surveyed and one-third of the men said that they would be “not at all willing to marry someone who was not likely to hold a steady job.” This sentiment was shared across racial and ethnic groups.⁸² Nonetheless, the “shortage of marriageable” men argument is primarily associated with black men and women. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson argued that as rates of employment and rates of labor force participation dropped for young black men, the number of *desirable* marriage partners for black women also decreased.⁸³ In other words, many black women (and women generally) limit their marriage universe to men with steady jobs (and other desirable attributes).

Biological Clock Issues

Women may choose to have children outside of marriage because of concerns that they are older, unmarried, and may no longer have the opportunity to have children. This is especially true among professional women who have pursued post-secondary education and have been entrenched in time-consuming careers. In addition, some women are not willing to sacrifice their independence or their desire

⁷⁹ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe, “Changes in Teen Attitudes Toward Marriage, Cohabitation and Children: 1975-1995,” 1999.

⁸⁰ Steven L. Nock, “Marriage as a Public Issue,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005).

⁸¹ Daniel T. Lichter, George Kephart, Diane K. McLaughin, and David J. Landry, “Race and the Retreat from Marriage: A Shortage of Marriageable Men?,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 57 (December 1992), p. 781-799.

⁸² Dennis A. Ahlburg and Carol J. DeVita, “New Realities of the American Family,” *Population Bulletin*, vol. 47, no. 2 (August 1992), p. 14. See also Scott J. South, “Sociodemographic Differentials in Mate Selection Preferences,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 53, no. 4 (November 1991). p. 928-940.

⁸³ William Julius Wilson, “The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy,” The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

to have children, simply for sake of marriage.⁸⁴ Since the 1990s, some women have used new technology such as in-vitro fertilization and sperm donation procedures to have a child without a spouse.

Cohabiting Relationships

In contrast to years past, today many children born outside of marriage are born to cohabiting parents rather than to biological parents who live in separate households. Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that cohabiting relationships are less stable than marriage. In 1977, there were 1.1 million family households (with children under age 18) that consisted of cohabiting couples. In 2007, 6.4 million family households (with children under age 18) consisted of cohabiting couples. Thus in that 30-year period, cohabiting couples as a share of all family households increased from 2% to 8.2%. According to one report: “Just as it has become more common for couples to have intercourse and to live together without marrying, it has become more likely that couples who conceive outside marriage will remain unmarried.”⁸⁵

Growing up with two continuously cohabiting biological parents is rare. The Fragile Families Study indicates that about one-fourth of cohabiting biological parents are no longer living together one year after the child’s birth.⁸⁶ Another study of first births found that 31% of cohabiting couples had broken up after five years, as compared to 16% of married couples. A study using the 1999 National Survey of American Families found that only 1.5% of all children lived with two cohabiting parents at the time of the survey. Similarly, an analysis of the 1995 Adolescent Health Study revealed that less than one-half of 1% of adolescents ages 16 to 18 had spent their entire childhoods living with two continuously cohabiting biological parents.⁸⁷

Divorce

If a woman is divorced and engages in sexual relations she may become pregnant and thereby may have a child outside of marriage. A recent study using cohort analysis found that 14.4% of nonmarital births were to women who had

⁸⁴ Andrea Kane and Daniel T. Lichter, “Reducing Unwed Childbearing: The Missing Link in Efforts to Promote Marriage,” *Center on Children and Families*, Brief no. 37 (April 2006).

⁸⁵ Dore Hollander, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States: A Government Report,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January-February 1996), p. 31.

⁸⁶ Marcia Carlson, Sara McLanahan, and Paula England, “Union Formation and Dissolution in Fragile Families,” *Fragile Families Research*, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University, August 2002, p. 21.

⁸⁷ Paul R. Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Well-Being of the Next Generation,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005), p. 79.

divorced but not yet remarried.⁸⁸ The discussion below briefly highlights trends in divorce, median duration of divorce, and proportions of women who remarry.

In 1950, the marriage rate was more than four times the divorce rate (11.1 per 1,000 population versus 2.6 per 1,000 population); by 2006, it was only twice the divorce rate (7.3 per 1,000 population versus 3.6 per 1,000 population). Although marriage and divorce data are usually displayed as rates, researchers generally agree that a comparison of marriage and divorce rates is misleading because the persons who are divorcing in any given year are typically not the same as those who are marrying.

In 2004, 23% of U.S. women who were once married had been divorced. The median duration of marriages before divorce was about 8 years. The median time between divorce and a second marriage was about three and a half years. In 2004, 12% of men and 13% of women had married twice, and 3% of both men and women had married three or more times. Among adults 25 and older who had ever divorced, 52% of men and 44% of women were currently married.⁸⁹

Sexual Activity Outside of Marriage

Sexual activity outside of marriage is associated with nonmarital births. A study that was based on data from several panels of the National Survey of Family Growth found that, by age 44, 95% of those surveyed had engaged in sexual activity (intercourse) before marriage.⁹⁰ According to the survey, 69% of women ages 15 through 44 who had never been married and who were not cohabiting had engaged in sexual intercourse.⁹¹ If in fact such a large percentage of unmarried men and women are engaging in sex they are at risk of becoming parents (unless their choice of contraception is effective).⁹²

Risk factors and behaviors may contribute to the increase in sex outside of marriage among teenagers. A report on research findings on programs that attempt

⁸⁸ Lawrence L. Wu, "Cohort Estimates of Nonmarital Fertility for U.S. Women," February 2008.

⁸⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2004 Panel. 2007; [<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/marr-div.html>].

⁹⁰ Contrary to the public perception that premarital sex is much more common now than in the past, the study found that even among women who were born in the 1940s, nearly 90% had sex before marriage. Source: Guttmacher Institute, "Premarital Sex is Nearly Universal Among Americans, and Has Been for Decades," News Release (December 19, 2006).

⁹¹ William D. Mosher, Anjani Chandra, and Jo Jones, "Sexual Behavior and Selected Health Measures: Men and Women 15-44 Years of Age, United States, 2002," National Center for Health Statistics, Advance Data from *Vital and Health Statistics*, no. 362 (September 15, 2005).

⁹² Lawrence B. Finer, "Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954-2003," *Guttmacher Institute*, Public Health Reports, January-February 2007, vol. 122. See also *Guttmacher Institute* News Release, "Premarital Sex Is Nearly Universal Among Americans, and Has Been For Decades," (December 19, 2006).

to reduce teen pregnancy and STDs contends that hundreds of factors affect teen sexual behavior. Among them are (1) community disorganization (violence and substance abuse are prevalent); (2) family disruption, including substance abuse by family members and physical abuse and general maltreatment; (3) the mother had a child at a young age; (4) an older sibling engaged in sex; (5) close friends are older; (6) friends drink alcohol and use drugs; (7) friends have permissive views regarding sex; (8) friends are sexually active; (9) the youth is romantically involved with someone older; (10) the youth has problems with understanding and completing schoolwork; (11) the youth uses alcohol and other drugs; (12) the youth is part of a gang; (13) the youth is frequently involved in fighting and has carried a weapon; (14) the youth works more than 20 hours per week; (15) the youth has permissive attitudes toward premarital sex; (16) the youth dates frequently or is going steady; and (17) the girl has several boyfriends.⁹³ The author maintains that many of the risk factors and behaviors can be changed with effective youth development programs.⁹⁴

Declining Abortion Rates

The decrease in the rate of abortions may contribute to the increasing share of unmarried women who have children. According to the Guttmacher Institute, nearly half of all pregnancies to American women are unintended. Moreover, about 20% of all pregnancies end with an abortion. The annual number of legal abortions in the United States increased through the 1970s, leveled off in the 1980s, dropped in the 1990s, and has continued to drop from 2000 through 2005. The number of abortions was 1.554 million in 1980, 1.609 million in 1990 (a record high), 1.313 million in 2000, 1.287 million in 2003, and 1.206 million in 2005.⁹⁵

Women who have abortions tend to be unmarried and white, and a disproportionate share are in their twenties. In 2003 (latest available comprehensive data), about eight of ten females who had abortions were unmarried. White females (who represented about 80% of the U.S. female population in 2003) constituted 56% of the females who had abortions in 2003, followed by black and other women who had 44% of the abortions in 2003. Also in 2003, of those females who had abortions, the largest percentage was among women ages 20 through 24 (33%). The remaining shares were 1% for girls under age 15; 17% for women ages 15 through 19; 23% for women ages 25 through 29; 15% for women ages 30 through 34; 8% for women ages

⁹³ Douglas Kirby, "Emerging Answers: 2007 — Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases," *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy*, November 2007, p. 53-71. Note: Although there is a widely held perception that low self-esteem is a risk factor for teenage pregnancy, the empirical research does not reach such an unequivocal conclusion.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹⁵ Alan Guttmacher Institute, "Abortion in the United States: Incidence and Access to Services, 2005," *Perspectives of Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 40, no. 1 (March 2008). See also Stephanie J. Ventura, Joyce C. Abma, William D. Mosher, and Stanley K. Henshaw, "Estimated Pregnancy Rates by Outcome for the United States, 1990-2004," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 15 (April 14, 2008).

35 through 39; and 3% for women age 40 or over. For nearly half (46%) of the women who had an abortion in 2003 it was not their first abortion.⁹⁶

Impact of Nonmarital Births on Families

Although 38.5% of all U.S. births in 2006 were to women who were not married, 23.3% of the 73.7 million U.S. children under age 18 lived in mother-only families in 2006.⁹⁷ The difference occurs because the proportion of births to unmarried women has increased over the past several decades and because some of these women married and some were in cohabiting relationships.⁹⁸

A wide body of research indicates that children who grow up with only one biological parent in the home are more likely to be financially worse off and have worse socioeconomic outcomes (even after income differences are taken into account) compared to children who grow up with both biological parents in the home.⁹⁹ Specifically, children living in a single-parent home are more likely to do poorly in school, have emotional and behavioral problems, become teenage parents, and have poverty-level incomes (as children and adults) than children living with married biological parents.¹⁰⁰ Further, children in single-parent families are six times

⁹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2008*, Table 97.

⁹⁷ Note: The data in the text above is highlighting 2006 data related to living arrangements of children because the 2007 birth data is not yet available. The 2007 data related to living arrangements of children specifically includes a category titled “children living with both parents not married to each other” (i.e., cohabiting parents). In 2007, 67.8% of the 73.7 million U.S. children (under age 18) lived with both of their married parents, 2.9% lived with both parents who were not married, 17.9% lived with their mother, and 2.6% lived with their father. The other 8.8% of children lived with neither parent (3.5%) or lived with their mother (4.7%) or father (0.6%) who was separated (by absence or a “formal” separation agreement) from the other parent. In general, if a woman has a child while she is formally married, the child’s father is considered to be the woman’s husband (regardless of whether or not he is “absent”). Note: In 2007, about 13% of the children living with their unmarried mothers (“mother-only families”) were in a household that included non-relatives. A non-relative could be a stepfather, adoptive father, or the mother’s significant other or it could be someone not romantically involved with the mother (e.g., a friend, male or female). U.S. Census Bureau, “America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2007,” Table C3.

⁹⁸ Ariel Halpern and Elaine Sorensen, “Children’s Environment and Behavior — Children Born Outside of Marriage,” *Snapshots of America’s Families*, Urban Institute, January 1, 1999.

⁹⁹ Although the early research did not distinguish between married and cohabiting parents, later research has found that cohabiting relationships are less stable than marriages and thereby from the standpoint of the child less desirable than marriages.

¹⁰⁰ Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); see also L. Bumpass, “Children and Marital Disruption: A Replication and Update,” *Demography*, vol. 21(1984), pp. 71-82; see also Rebecca A. Maynard, ed., “Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood (continued...)”

more likely to be poor than children in two-parent families. It has been reported that 22% of children in one-parent families will experience poverty during childhood for seven years or more, as compared to only 2% of children in two-parent families.¹⁰¹ In 2007, 7.5% of children under age 18 living in married-couple families were living below the poverty level compared to 38.3% of children living with mother-only families.¹⁰²

One analyst makes the following assertion regarding two-parent families:

Social science research is almost never conclusive. There are always methodological difficulties and stones left unturned. Yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent and stepfamilies.¹⁰³

Others assert that although marriage of biological parents is associated with greater child well-being, little is known about why or how much of the relationship is caused by marriage and how much by other factors. In other words, it could be that the effect of marriage on child well-being is derived not from marriage itself, but rather from the distinctive characteristics of the individuals who marry and stay married (sometimes referred to as the “selection effect”).¹⁰⁴ It is sometimes argued that some of the problems associated with non-intact families may be the effect of poverty rather than the father’s absence. Further, most children who grow up in mother-only families or step-parent families become well-adjusted, productive adults. For some children, the absence of the father may result in freedom from an abusive or otherwise difficult situation and may result in a more supportive loving mother-child relationship.

¹⁰⁰ (...continued)

Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing” (New York, 1996); see also Mary Parke, “Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being,” Center on Law and Social Policy, May 2003; see also Glenn Stanton, “Why Marriage Matters for Children,” *Focus on the Family*, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *The Atlantic* (April 1993).

¹⁰² Current Population Survey, A joint effort between the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau. Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement. Table POVO5.

¹⁰³ David Popenoe, “The Controversial Truth: Two Parent Families Are Better,” *New York Times* (December 26, 1992), p. A21.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Parke, *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being*, Center on Law and Social Policy, May 2003.

Impact of Nonmarital Births on the Nation

This section reviews assertions that it is not just the family that is negatively affected by nonmarital childbearing, but the taxpayer as well. It discusses some of the impacts of financial and demographic factors associated with nonmarital births on the population as a whole.

Potential Financial Costs

Although the three reports mentioned below do not categorically say that nonmarital births cost the federal government a specific dollar amount, they do provide a context in which to consider the financial costs associated with nonmarital childbearing. The first report examines nonmarital childbearing and divorce together to measure taxpayer costs of what the author calls family fragmentation, but it does not separately attribute costs to nonmarital childbearing. The second study examines how poverty in the U.S. would be affected if more children were living in two-parent families. The third report attributes a specific dollar amount to the consequences of teens having children.

A 2008 report¹⁰⁵ examines the economic costs associated with the decline in marriage (which the authors contend increases the number of children and adults eligible for and in need of government services). The authors of the report maintain that the decline in marriage is a product of both divorce and unmarried childbearing. The report estimates that *combined*, the high rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing costs U.S. taxpayers at least \$112 billion per year in federal, state, and local costs — \$70.1 billion of which is federal costs.¹⁰⁶ The report states that “These costs arise from increased taxpayer expenditures for antipoverty, criminal justice, and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals who, as adults, earn less because of reduced opportunities as a result of having been more likely to grow up in poverty.”¹⁰⁷

Another study examined the impact of nonmarital childbearing on poverty by using a regression approach that was based on hypothetically matching single women and men in the population on the basis of factors such as age, education, and race. It found that if the share of children living with two parents in 2000 was increased to what it had been in 1970, the child poverty rate in 2000 would have declined by

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin Scafidi, “The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and for All Fifty States,” Institute for American Values, Georgia Family Council, Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, and Families Northwest, April 2008.

¹⁰⁶ The report does not separately estimate the economic costs associated with nonmarital childbearing.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Scafidi, “The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and for All Fifty States,” Institute for American Values, Georgia Family Council, Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, and Families Northwest, April 2008.

about 29% compared to the actual decline of 4.5%.¹⁰⁸ If that analysis is applied to 2007 data, 3.7 million fewer children would be in poverty.¹⁰⁹

In addition, a 2006 report quantified the costs of adolescent childbearing.¹¹⁰ As noted earlier, births to teens represented 10% of all births and 23% of nonmarital births (2005 data). The report estimated that, in 2004, adolescent childbearing cost U.S. taxpayers about \$9 billion per year.¹¹¹ Specific estimates cited were \$2.3 billion in child welfare benefits; \$1.9 billion in health care expenses; \$2.1 billion in spending on incarceration (for the sons of women who had children as adolescents); and \$6.3 billion in lost tax revenue because of lower earnings of the mothers, fathers, and children (when they were adults). Added to these cost figures are \$3.6 billion in savings that result from the declines in births to teens.¹¹² Research indicates that teens who give birth are less likely to complete high school and go on to college, thereby reducing their potential for economic self-sufficiency. The research also indicates that the children of teens are more likely than children of older parents to experience problems in school and drop out of high school and, as adults, are more likely to repeat the cycle of teenage pregnancy and poverty. The 2006 report contends that if the teen birth rate had not declined between 1991 and 2004, the annual costs associated with teen childbearing would have been almost \$16 billion (instead of \$9 billion).¹¹³ Although these data are interesting, it is important to remember that although 83% of births to teens are nonmarital births, adolescent childbearing is only a subset of nonmarital childbearing.

Demographic Impacts

Having the birth rate reach the replacement rate is generally considered desirable by demographers and sociologists because it means a country is producing enough

¹⁰⁸ Paul R. Amato and Rebecca A. Maynard, “Decreasing Nonmarital Births and Strengthening Marriage to Reduce Poverty,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall 2007), p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ The 3.6 million figure was derived by applying the 29% reduction rate to the 12.8 million children who were in families with below poverty-level income in 2007. Note: According to the Census Bureau, in 2007, 12.8 million of the nearly 73 million related children (under age 18) living in families were in families with poverty-level income. Also, in 1970, 85.2% of children lived with both parents; in 1980, 76.7%; in 1990, 72.5%; in 2000, 69.1%; and in 2007, 67.8%.

¹¹⁰ Saul D. Hoffman, “By the Numbers: The Public Cost of Teen Childbearing,” *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*, October 2006.

¹¹¹ The report differentiates teens ages 17 and younger who give birth and those who are ages 18 through 19 who give birth and finds that \$8.6 billion of the costs are associated with the younger teens and only \$0.4 billion with the older teens.

¹¹² According to the report, the steady decline in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2004 yielding costs savings of \$3.6 billion (\$2.0 billion from the TANF program, \$1.4 billion from the Food Stamps program, and \$0.2 billion from the housing programs).

¹¹³ Saul D. Hoffman, “By the Numbers: The Public Cost of Teen Childbearing,” *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*, October 2006.

young people to replace and support aging workers without population growth being so high that it taxes national resources.¹¹⁴

An examination of nonmarital births from a demographic perspective is perhaps the only analysis that does not view nonmarital births as a negative phenomenon. The nation's total fertility rate — the number of children the average woman would be expected to bear in her lifetime — has been below the replacement level since 1972.¹¹⁵ The replacement rate is the rate at which a given generation can exactly replace itself. The fertility level required for natural replacement of the U.S. population is about 2.1 births per woman (i.e., 2,100 births per 1,000 women). The replacement rate was reached in 2006 for the first time in many years.¹¹⁶

Given that the marital birth rate has been decreasing over time, if the birth rate of unmarried women had begun to reverse itself, the U.S. population would cease growing (if the immigration factor is excluded).¹¹⁷ From a geopolitical perspective, this means that those who support policies to lower nonmarital fertility do so at the risk of lowering overall U.S. fertility that has been hovering near replacement levels.¹¹⁸ In the United States, non-Hispanic white women and Asian women 40 to 44 years old had fertility levels below the replacement level (1.8 and 1.7 births per woman, respectively). The fertility level of black women ages 40 to 44 (2.0 births per woman) did not differ statistically from the natural replacement level.¹¹⁹ Hispanic women ages 40 to 44 had an average of 2.3 births and were the only group that exceeded the fertility level required for natural replacement of the U.S. population.¹²⁰

Nonmarital births are also influencing other demographic shifts. On the basis of the fertility rate of women by racial and ethnic groups, by 2050, 54% of the U.S. population will consist of minority groups (i.e., Hispanics, blacks, American Indians, and Asians). Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54% minority in

¹¹⁴ Rob Stein, "U.S. Fertility Rate Hits 35-Year High, Stabilizing Population," *The Washington Post* (December 21, 2007), p. A11.

¹¹⁵ James R. Wetzel, "American Families: 75 Years of Change," *Monthly Labor Review* (March 1990).

¹¹⁶ Jane Lawler Dye, "Fertility of American Women: 2006," U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports*, P20-558 (August 2008).

¹¹⁷ Because the number of persons immigrating to the U.S. continues to increase, the U.S. population would have continued to grow even though the U.S. was below the demographic replacement level of 2.1 births per woman.

¹¹⁸ Lawrence L. Wu, "Cohort Estimates of Nonmarital Fertility for U.S. Women," February 2008.

¹¹⁹ With respect to black women, this means that if unmarried women had not been having babies, the growth of the black population would have severely shrunk.

¹²⁰ Lawrence L. Wu, "Cohort Estimates of Nonmarital Fertility for U.S. Women," February 2008.

2050. By 2023, minorities will represent more than half of all children.¹²¹ By 2050, the Hispanic population is projected to nearly triple, and its share of the nation's total population is projected to double, from 15% to 30%. Thus, nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic.¹²² (As mentioned earlier, in 2005, 48% of Hispanic births were nonmarital births.) The black population is projected to increase from 14% of the population in 2008 to 15% in 2050. The Asian population's share of the nation's population is expected to rise from 5.1% to 9.2%. Among the remaining race groups, American Indians and Alaska Natives are projected to rise from 1.6% to 2% of the total population. The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population is expected to more than double, from 1.1 million to 2.6 million, representing about 0.6% in 2050. The number of people who identify themselves as being of two or more races is projected to more than triple, from 5.2 million to 16.2 million, representing almost 4% of the population in 2050. Non-Hispanic whites are projected to represent 46% of the total population, down from 66% in 2008.¹²³

Public Policy Interventions

In recognition of the potential long-term consequences of nonmarital births, the federal government's strategy to nonmarital childbearing has been varied. The federal government acknowledges that an effective approach for teenagers may be inappropriate for older women. Some observers criticize women much farther along the age spectrum who have nonmarital births as being selfish and not looking long-range to what would be in the best interest of their offspring. Other observers counter, pointing out that it is not the unmarried, college-educated, thirty-something-year-olds with well-paying jobs who are worried that their time for having a child is running out that should be a concern. Rather it is the millions of women for whom single motherhood is the norm, who entrench themselves and their children in a less favorable economic lifestyle by having a child outside of a healthy marriage. Many of these women become mothers in their teenage years.

In order to address these two distinct groups of females, federal policy toward teens has primarily focused on pregnancy prevention programs, whereas federal policy toward older women has focused on healthy marriage programs. Income support programs, such as the Child Support Enforcement program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program, that attempt to reduce or ameliorate negative financial consequences that are sometimes associated with nonmarital childbearing are available to mothers of all age groups.

This section discusses the public policy interventions (1) directed at teens, such as abstinence education programs, comprehensive sex education programs, and youth programs; (2) focused on adults, namely the healthy marriage programs and the responsible fatherhood programs (that usually include several components dealing

¹²¹ U.S. Census Bureau News, CB08-123, "An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury," August 14, 2008.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

with improving communication skills with respect to the other parent); and (3) provided to all persons regardless of age such as family planning programs, adoption services, and federal income support programs — the Child Support Enforcement and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs.

Abstinence Promotion

Many argue that sexual activity in and of itself is wrong if the individuals are not married. Advocates of the abstinence education approach argue that teenagers need to hear a single, unambiguous message that sex outside of marriage is wrong and harmful to their physical and emotional health. These advocates contend that youth can and should be empowered to say no to sex. They argue that supporting both abstinence and birth control is hypocritical and undermines the strength of an abstinence-only message. They also cite research that indicates that teens who take virginity pledges to refrain from sex until marriage appear to delay having sex longer than those teens who do not make such a commitment. (One study found that teens who publicly promise to postpone sex until marriage refrain from intercourse for about a year and a half longer than teens who did not make such a pledge.)¹²⁴ They further argue that abstinence is the most effective (100%) means of preventing unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS).¹²⁵

Three federal programs include funding that is exclusively for abstinence education: Adolescent Family Life (AFL) program, the Title V Abstinence Education Block Grant to States, and the Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) program.¹²⁶ All of these programs are carried out by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). For FY2008, federal abstinence education funding totaled \$177 million: \$13 million for AFL abstinence education projects; \$50 million for the Title V Abstinence Education Block Grant to states; and \$109 million for the CBAE program (up to \$10 million of which may be used for a national abstinence education campaign); and \$4.5 million for an evaluation of the CBAE program.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Peter S. Bearman and Hannah Bruckner, “Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges as They Affect the Transition to First Intercourse,” *American Journal of Sociology*, January 2001.

¹²⁵ Those opposed to the abstinence-only education approach generally favor a comprehensive sex education approach (discussed later), but also claim that abstinence-only programs often use medically inaccurate information regarding STDs, condoms, and other contraceptive devices. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) now requires grantees of abstinence education programs to sign written assurances in grant applications that the material and data they use are medically accurate.

¹²⁶ For more information on these abstinence education programs, see CRS Report RS20873, *Reducing Teen Pregnancy: Adolescent Family Life and Abstinence Education Programs*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

¹²⁷ Abstinence education funding totaled \$79 million in FY2001, \$100 million in FY2002, \$115 million in FY2003, \$135 million in FY2004, \$168 million in FY2005, and \$177 million in FY2006 and FY2007.

The AFL demonstration program was enacted in 1981 as Title XX of the Public Health Service Act (P.L. 97-35). It is administered by the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs at HHS. From 1981 until 1996, the AFL program was the only federal program that focused directly on the issues of adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting.¹²⁸ The AFL program was designed to promote family involvement in the delivery of services, adolescent premarital sexual abstinence, adoption as an alternative to early parenting, parenting and child development education, and comprehensive health, education, and social services geared to help the mother have a healthy baby and improve subsequent life prospects for both mother and child. The AFL program authorizes grants for three types of demonstrations: (1) projects that provide “care” services only (i.e., health, education, and social services to pregnant adolescents, adolescent parents, their infant, families, and male partners); (2) projects that provide “prevention” services only (i.e., services to promote abstinence from premarital sexual relations for pre-teens, teens, and their families); and (3) projects that provide a combination of care and prevention services. Any public or private nonprofit organization or agency is eligible to apply for a demonstration grant. AFL projects can be funded for up to five years.

The Title V Abstinence Education Block Grant to States was authorized under P.L. 104-193 (the 1996 welfare reform law). The law provided \$50 million per year for five years (FY1998-FY2002) in federal funds specifically for the abstinence education program. Although the program has not yet been reauthorized, the latest extension, contained in P.L. 110-275, continues funding for the abstinence-only block grant through June 30, 2009. Funds must be requested by states when they solicit Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) block grant funds and must be used exclusively for teaching abstinence. To receive federal funds, a state must match every \$4 in federal funds with \$3 in state funds.¹²⁹ This means that full funding (from states and the federal government) for abstinence education must total at least \$87.5 million annually.

Additional abstinence-only education funding, for the CBAE program,¹³⁰ has been included in appropriations measures. The program provides abstinence-only education for adolescents aged 12 through 18. Funding for the program increased incrementally, from \$30 million in FY2002 to \$109 million in FY2008.

Evaluation of Abstinence Education Programs. Mathematica’s April 2007 report presents the final results from a multi-year, experimentally based impact study on several abstinence-only block grant programs. The report focuses on four

¹²⁸ The predecessor of the AFL program was the Adolescent Pregnancy program, which was enacted in 1978 (P.L. 95-626). The Adolescent Pregnancy program was designed to alleviate the negative consequences of pregnancy for the adolescent parent and her child. The Adolescent Pregnancy program was consolidated into the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant when the AFL program was enacted.

¹²⁹ States use a variety of methods to meet the federal matching requirement, such as state funds, private or foundation funds, matching funds from community-based grantees, and in-kind services (e.g., volunteer staffing and public service announcements).

¹³⁰ The CBAE program was known as the Special Projects for Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) until FY2005.

selected Title V abstinence education programs for elementary and middle school students. On the basis of follow-up data collected from youth (aged 10 to 14) four to six years after study enrollment, the report, among other things, presents the estimated program impacts on sexual abstinence and risks of pregnancy and STDs. According to the report,

Findings indicate that youth in the program group were no more likely than control group youth to have abstained from sex and, among those who reported having had sex, they had similar numbers of sexual partners and had initiated sex at the same mean age.... Program and control group youth did not differ in their rates of unprotected sex, either at first intercourse or over the last 12 months.... Overall, the programs improved identification of STDs but had no overall impact on knowledge of unprotected sex risks and the consequences of STDs. Both program and control group youth had a good understanding of the risks of pregnancy but a less clear understanding of STDs and their health consequences.¹³¹

In response to the report, HHS has stated that the Mathematica study showcased programs that were among the first funded by the 1996 welfare reform law. It stated that its recent directives to states have encouraged states to focus abstinence-only education programs on youth most likely to bear children outside of marriage, that is, high school students, rather than elementary or middle-school students. It also mentioned that programs need to extend the peer support for abstinence from the pre-teen years through the high school years.¹³²

Comprehensive Sex Education

Advocates of a comprehensive approach to sex education argue that today's youth need information and decision-making skills to make realistic, practical decisions about whether to engage in sexual activities. They contend that such an approach allows young people to make informed decisions regarding abstinence, gives them the information they need to set relationship limits and to resist peer pressure, and also provides them with information on the use of contraceptives and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.¹³³ They argue that about 50% of high school students have experienced sexual intercourse.¹³⁴ They maintain that

¹³¹ Christopher Trenholm, Barbara Devaney, Ken Fortson, Lisa Quay, Justin Wheeler, and Melissa Clark, "Impacts of Four Title V, Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs (final report)," *Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.*, April 2007; [<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/abstinence07/>].

¹³² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), "Report Released on Four Title V Abstinence Education Programs," HHS Press Office, April 13, 2007, [<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/abstinence07/factsheet.shtml>].

¹³³ Some contend that the abstinence-only approach leads to a substitution of other risky behaviors such as oral sex. They cite recent data that indicates that about 25% of virgin teens (15-19) have engaged in oral sex. Source: *Child Trends Data Bank. New Indicator on Oral Sex*, September 15, 2005, at [<http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/whatsNew.cfm>].

¹³⁴ For more information on sexual activity of high school students, see CRS Report (continued...)

abstinence-only messages provide no protection against the risks of pregnancy and disease for those who are sexually active. They point out that, according to one study, teens who break their virginity pledges were less likely to use contraception the first time than teens who had never made such a promise.¹³⁵

In addition, the alarming number of females under age 25 with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)¹³⁶ has re-energized efforts to persuade girls and young women to abstain from sexual activity or to use condoms (along with other forms of contraceptives) to prevent or reduce pregnancy as well as reduce their risk of getting STDs.¹³⁷

No earmarked federal funding currently exists for comprehensive sex education in schools. In other words, there is no federal appropriation specifically for comprehensive sex education. Although there is not a federal comprehensive sex education program per se, many federal programs provide information about contraceptives, provide contraceptive services to teens, and provide referral and counseling services related to reproductive health. These programs include Medicaid Family Planning, Title X Family Planning, and Adolescent Family Life care services. Also, funds from the Maternal and Child Health block grant, the Title XX Social Services block grant, and the TANF block grant can be used to provide contraceptive services to teens.¹³⁸

Evaluation of Comprehensive Sex Education Programs. There have been numerous evaluations of teen pregnancy prevention programs, but most of them did not use a scientific approach with experimental and control groups — an approach that most analysts agree provides more reliable, valid, and objective information than other types of evaluations. A recent report by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy,¹³⁹ however, highlighted five teen pregnancy prevention programs that were subjected to a random assignment, experimentally

¹³⁴ (...continued)

RS20873, *Reducing Teen Pregnancy: Adolescent Family Life and Abstinence Education Programs*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

¹³⁵ Peter S. Bearman and Hannah Bruckner, “Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges as They Affect the Transition to First Intercourse,” *American Journal of Sociology*, January 2001.

¹³⁶ This report uses the term sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) rather than sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In the literature the terms are often used interchangeably.

¹³⁷ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 19 million new infections occur each year, almost half of them among young people ages 15 to 24. Source: “Trends in Reportable Sexually Transmitted Disease in the United States, 2006,” November 13, 2007.

¹³⁸ U.S. General Accounting Office, “Teen Pregnancy: State and Federal Efforts to Implement Prevention Programs and Measure Their Effectiveness, GAO/HEHS-99-4, November 1998.

¹³⁹ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, “Putting What Works To Work: Curriculum-Based Programs That Prevent Teen Pregnancy,” 2007.

designed study.¹⁴⁰ These five comprehensive sex education programs were found to be effective in delaying sexual activity, improving contraceptive use among sexually active teenagers, or preventing teen pregnancy.

Many analysts and researchers agree that effective pregnancy prevention programs: (1) convince teens that not having sex or that using contraception consistently and carefully is the right thing to do; (2) last a sufficient length of time; (3) are operated by leaders who believe in their programs and who are adequately trained; (4) actively engage participants and personalize the program information; (5) address peer pressure; (6) teach communication skills; and (7) reflect the age, sexual experience, and culture of young persons in the programs.¹⁴¹

Youth Programs

Youth programs generally include one or more of the following components to address teen sexual activity: sex education, mentoring and counseling, health care, academic support, career counseling, crisis intervention, sports and arts activities, and community volunteer experiences. Youth programs receive funding from a wide array of sources, including the federal government, state and local governments, community organizations, private agencies, nonprofit organizations, and faith-based organizations.

The sex education component of many youth programs usually includes an abstinence message (which enables teens to avoid pregnancy) along with discussions about the correct and consistent use of contraception (which reduces the risk of pregnancy for sexually active teens). There is a significant difference between abstinence as a *message* and abstinence-only *interventions*. Although the Bush Administration continues to support an abstinence-only program intervention (with some modifications), others argue that an abstinence message integrated into a comprehensive sex education program that includes information on the use of contraceptives and that enhances decision-making skills is a more effective method to prevent teen pregnancy. A recent nationally representative survey found that 90% of adults and teens agree that young people should get a strong message that they should not have sex until they are at least out of high school and that a majority of adults (73%) and teens (56%) want teens to get more information about both abstinence and contraception.¹⁴² The American public — both adults and teens —

¹⁴⁰ The report only examined studies that had been published in 2000 or later.

¹⁴¹ The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, “Putting What Works To Work: Curriculum-Based Programs That Prevent Teen Pregnancy,” 2007. Note: There also are many reasons why programs are not considered successful. For example, in some cases the evaluation studies are limited by methodological problems or constraints because the approach taken is so multilayered that researchers have had difficulty disentangling the effects of multiple components of a program. In other cases, the approach may have worked for boys but not for girls, or vice versa. In some cases, the programs are very small, and thereby it is harder to obtain significant results. In other cases, different personnel may affect the outcomes of similar programs.

¹⁴² Bill Albert, “With One Voice 2007 — America’s Adults and Teens Sound Off About (continued...)”

support encouraging teens to delay sexual activity *and* providing young people with information about contraception.¹⁴³

A study that evaluated youth programs that sought to delay the first time teens have sex partly summarized the research by highlighting some characteristics or activities associated with teenagers who delayed sexual activity. The study reported that (1) teens who do well in school and attend religious services are more likely to delay sexual initiation; (2) girls who participate in sports also delay sex longer than those who do not; and (3) teens whose friends have high educational aspirations, who avoid such risky behavior as drinking or using drugs, and who perform well in school are less likely to have sex at an early age than teens whose friends do not.¹⁴⁴

Some youth programs have an underlying goal of trying to decipher the root reasons behind teen pregnancy and childbearing. Is it loneliness or trying to find love or a sense of family? Is it carelessness — not bothering with birth control or using it improperly — or shame — not wanting to go to the doctor to ask about birth control or not wanting to be seen in a pharmacy purchasing birth control? Is it a need to meet the sexual expectations of a partner? Is it trying to find individual independence or is it defiance (a mentality of you can't boss me or control me, "I'm grown")? Is it trying to validate or provide purpose to one's life? Is it realistically facing the probability that the entry-level job she can get at the age of 18 is the same or similar to the one she will likely have when she is 30, thus why should she wait to have a child?

In addition, many youth programs also want to prevent second or additional births to teens, and they realize that a different approach may be needed to prevent secondary births as compared to first births. Research has indicated that youth programs that include mentoring components, enhanced case management, home visits by trained nurses or program personnel, and parenting classes have been effective in reducing subsequent childbearing by teens.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² (...continued)

Teen Pregnancy," February 2007, p. 2; [http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/WOV2007_fulltext.pdf]

¹⁴³ There appears to be significant public support for the involvement of religious groups in preventing teen pregnancy. When asked what organizations could do the best job of providing teen pregnancy prevention services, 39% said religious groups, 42% said non-religious community groups, and 12% said government. (Source: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *Keeping the Faith: The Role of Religion and Faith Communities in Preventing Teen Pregnancy*, by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Brian L. Wilcox, and Sharon Scales Rostovsky. September 2001.)

¹⁴⁴ Jennifer Manlove, Angela Romano Papillio, and Erum Ikramullah, "Not Yet: Program To Delay First Sex Among Teens," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and Child Trends, September 2004, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Erin Schelar, Kerry Franzetta, and Jennifer Manlove, "Repeat Teen Childbearing: Differences Across States and by Race and Ethnicity," *Child Trends*, Research Brief no. 2007-23, October 2007.

Healthy Marriage Programs

Much of the increase in nonmarital childbearing results from changes in marital behavior rather than changes in fertility behavior. In other words, Americans are not having more babies, they are having fewer marriages.¹⁴⁶ The first finding of P.L. 104-193 (the 1996 welfare reform law) is that marriage is the foundation of a successful society. The second finding is that marriage is an essential institution of a successful society that promotes the interests of children. The law sought to promote marriage through the new TANF program. As authorized by P.L. 104-193, the TANF program established as statutory goals to promote the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and to reduce welfare dependence via job preparation, work, and marriage. Pursuant to the law, states may spend TANF funds on a wide range of activities (services) for cash welfare recipients and other families toward the achievement of these goals.

P.L. 109-171 (the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005) established new categorical grants within TANF for healthy marriage promotion and responsible fatherhood initiatives.¹⁴⁷ The healthy marriage promotion initiative is funded at approximately \$100 million per year (FY2006-FY2010), to be spent through grants awarded by HHS to support research and demonstration projects by public or private entities; and technical assistance provided to states, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and other entities. The activities supported by the healthy marriage promotion initiatives are programs to promote marriage to the general population, such as public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and education in high schools on the value of marriage; education on “social skills” (e.g., marriage education, marriage skills, conflict resolution, and relationship skills) for engaged couples, those interested in marriage, or married couples; and programs that reduce the financial disincentive to marry,¹⁴⁸ if combined with educational or other marriage promotion activities. Entities that apply for marriage promotion grants must ensure that participation in such activities is voluntary and that domestic violence concerns are addressed (e.g., through consultations with experts on domestic violence).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Kristin A. Moore, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States,” Child Trends, Inc. in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, “Report to Congress on Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing,” Executive Summary, September 1995 [DHHS pub. no. (PHS) 95-1257-1], p. 27.

¹⁴⁷ As originally enacted and continuing under the Deficit Reduction Act, TANF law allows states to use block grant and Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds for activities to further any TANF purpose, including promotion of the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. However, state expenditures in this category have generally been small.

¹⁴⁸ Public policy frequently financially punishes married couples. The U.S. tax code, for example, contains a marriage penalty for high-earner, two-income couples. The earned income tax credit penalizes lower-wage married couples. Moreover, welfare rules have frequently made it harder for married households than for single-parent households to get benefits. Source: Wade F. Horn, “Wedding Bell Blues: Marriage and Welfare Reform,” The Brookings Institute, Summer 2001.

¹⁴⁹ CRS Report RS22369, *TANF, Child Care, Marriage Promotion, and Responsible Fatherhood Provisions in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-171)*, by Gene Falk.

Critics of healthy marriage programs caution that government must be careful about supporting programs that provide cash incentives to induce people to marry or that coerce or cajole individuals into marrying. They note the problems associated with child-bride marriages and the short-term and often unhappy nature of the so-called “shot-gun” marriage. Supporters of healthy marriage programs remark that many long-lasting marriages were based on financial alliances (e.g., to increase economic status, family wealth, status in the community, etc.). They assert that policies or programs designed to promote healthy marriages are not intended to force anyone into unwanted, unhealthy relationships, trap women in abusive relationships, or withdraw support from single mothers. Supporters maintain that a relationship is not healthy if it is not safe.

Nonetheless, many observers are concerned about the impact of healthy marriage promotion programs on survivors of domestic violence or those still in abusive relationships. They assert that all marriage promotion programs must identify and respond to domestic violence issues in a manner that is effective for the individual program in question.¹⁵⁰ Some observers contend that policymakers should focus healthy marriage programs on couples who want to get married, couples who are free from substance abuse problems and/or violent tendencies, and couples who do not have any children by other partners.¹⁵¹

Evaluation of Healthy Marriage Programs. HHS is sponsoring three multi-year impact evaluations of the Healthy Marriage program. Two of the three studies use a random assignment approach in which couples are assigned to either an experimental group (group that receives the program services) or a control group (group that does not receive program services). One study, called Building Strong Families, focuses on low-income unmarried parents. This study began in 2002 and is expected to continue through 2011; it is using an experimental design. A second study, called Supporting Healthy Marriages, focuses on low-income married parents, began in 2003 and is expected to continue through 2012; it is using an experimental design. A third study, called Community Healthy Marriage Initiative, focuses on families in three geographic communities (i.e., Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Dallas, Texas; and St. Louis, Missouri — with comparison communities (Cleveland, Ohio; Ft. Worth, Texas, and Kansas City, Missouri) where there are no federally funded healthy marriage programs. This third study began in 2003 and is expected to continue through 2011. A final report on the impact of each of the three programs is expected between 2011 and 2013.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ (...continued)

March 1, 2007. Also see Healthy Marriage Initiative Home Page, [<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/index.html>]

¹⁵⁰ Anne Menard and Oliver Williams, *It's Not Healthy If It's Not Safe: Responding to Domestic Violence Issues Within Healthy Marriage Programs*, November 2005 (updated May 2006), p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, “Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage,” University of California Press, 2005.

¹⁵² U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (continued...)”

Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Connecting or reconnecting children to their noncustodial parents has become a goal of federal social policy. During the 106th Congress, then-Representative Nancy Johnson, chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, stated, “to take the next step in welfare reform we must find a way to help children by providing them with more than a working mother and sporadic child support.” She noted that many low-income fathers have problems similar to those of mothers on welfare — namely, they are likely to have dropped out of high school, to have little work experience, and to have significant barriers that lessen their ability to find or keep a job. She also asserted that in many cases these men are “dead broke” rather than “dead beats” and that the federal government should help these noncustodial fathers meet both their financial and emotional obligations to their children.¹⁵³

In hopes of improving the long-term outlook for children in single-parent families, federal, state, and local governments, along with public and private organizations, are supporting programs and activities that promote the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial fathers to their children and increase the participation of fathers in the lives of their children. These programs have come to be known as “responsible fatherhood” programs. To help fathers and mothers meet their parental responsibilities, many policy analysts and observers support broad-based collaborative strategies that go beyond welfare and child support agencies and include schools, work programs, prison systems, churches, community organizations, and the health care system.

Most responsible fatherhood programs include media campaigns that emphasize the importance of emotional, physical, psychological, and financial connections of fathers to their children. Most fatherhood programs include parenting education; responsible decision-making; mediation services for both parents; providing an understanding of the CSE program; conflict resolution, coping with stress, and problem-solving skills; peer support; and job-training opportunities.

Although responsible fatherhood programs have been debated in Congress since the 106th Congress (1999) and supported from the start by the Bush Administration (2001), it was not until the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-171, enacted February 8, 2006) was passed and enacted that specific funding was provided for responsible fatherhood programs.

P.L. 109-171 included a provision that provides up to \$50 million per year (for each of the five fiscal years 2006-2010) in competitive grants through TANF to states, territories, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and public and nonprofit community organizations (including religious organizations) for responsible

¹⁵² (...continued)

Initiative — Further Progress Is Needed in Developing a Risk-Based Monitoring Approach to Help HHS Improve Program Oversight,” GAO-08-1002, September 2008.

¹⁵³ U.S. Congress, House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, “Hearing On Fatherhood Legislation,” Statement of Chairman Nancy Johnson. 106th Congress, 1st Session (October 5, 1999), p. 4.

fatherhood initiatives. Under P.L. 109-171, responsible fatherhood funds can be spent on activities to promote responsible fatherhood through (1) marriage promotion (through counseling, mentoring, disseminating information about the advantages of marriage and two-parent involvement for children, etc.), (2) parenting activities (through counseling, mentoring, mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices, etc.), (3) fostering economic stability of fathers (through work first services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, education, etc.), or (4) contracting with a nationally recognized nonprofit fatherhood promotion organization to develop, promote, or distribute a media campaign to encourage the appropriate involvement of parents in the lives of their children, particularly focusing on responsible fatherhood; and to develop a national clearinghouse to help states and communities in their efforts to promote and support marriage and responsible fatherhood.¹⁵⁴ According to data from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 99 grantees were awarded five-year contracts to implement responsible fatherhood programs. The contracts (in aggregate) amounted to \$41 million per year.¹⁵⁵

Evaluation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs. Although Congress only recently authorized federal funding specifically earmarked for responsible fatherhood programs (via P.L. 109-171), many states and localities, private organizations, and nonprofit agencies have been operating responsible fatherhood programs for several years. Some researchers have noted that although there is a growing body of research on the impact of father absence in the lives of their children, there is not enough research on the benefits of father presence in the lives of their children. Several rather large demonstration projects have focused on noncustodial fathers, and this report highlights two of them.¹⁵⁶

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration (designed and evaluated by MDRC) was a national demonstration project (that operated between 1994 and 1996) that combined job training and placement, peer support groups, and other services with the goal of increasing the earnings and child support payments of unemployed noncustodial parents (generally fathers) of children on welfare, improving their parenting and communication skills, and providing an opportunity for them to participate more fully and effectively in the lives of their children. The final report on the PFS demonstration concluded that the program did not significantly increase employment or earnings among the full sample of PFS participants during the two years after they entered the program. However, the program reportedly increased earnings among a subgroup of men who were characterized as "less employable"

¹⁵⁴ CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears. Also see Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Home Page, [<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/index.shtml>].

¹⁵⁵ Information on the responsible fatherhood grants in each of the 10 HHS regions is available at [<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/hmabstracts/index.htm>].

¹⁵⁶ See Karin Martinson and Demetra Nightingale, "Ten Key Findings from Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives," *The Urban Institute*, February 2008.

(i.e., those without a high school diploma and with little recent work experience).¹⁵⁷ Some analysts maintain that most of the fathers who participated in the PFS demonstration were estranged from their children when they entered the program and that some of them participated in lieu of serving time in jail. They assert that new unwed fathers are generally very attached to their children around the time of the child's birth and probably are more motivated than fathers of older children to take advantage of the opportunities or services offered by responsible fatherhood programs.¹⁵⁸

The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) provided \$2.0 million to fund Responsible Fatherhood demonstrations under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. The programs operated in eight states between September 1997 and December 2002. The following eight states received Section 1115 grants or waivers from OCSE/Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to implement and test responsible fatherhood programs: California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Washington, and Wisconsin. These projects attempted to improve the employment and earnings of under- and unemployed noncustodial parents, and to motivate them to become more financially and emotionally involved in the lives of their children. Although the projects shared common goals, they varied with respect to service components and service delivery. The outcome report found that employment rates and earnings increased significantly especially for noncustodial parents who were previously unemployed. In addition, child support compliance rates increased significantly especially for those who had not been paying previously. The report found that 27% of the fathers reported seeing their children more often after completion of the program.¹⁵⁹

The outcome report on the OCSE Responsible Fatherhood programs also found that (1) low-income noncustodial fathers are a difficult population to recruit and serve; (2) many of the participants found jobs with the programs' help, but they were low-paying jobs, and relatively few of the participants were able to increase earnings enough to meet their financial needs and those of their children; (3) child access problems were hard to define and resolve, and mediation should be used more extensively; (4) child support guidelines result in orders for low-income noncustodial parents that are unrealistically high; (5) CSE agencies should collaborate with fatherhood programs and pursue routine enforcement activities, as well as adopt policies and incentives that are responsive to low-income fathers; and (6) criminal

¹⁵⁷ John M. Martinez and Cynthia Miller, "Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment" (New York: MDRC, October 2000). Also see Cynthia Miller and Virginia Knox, "The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share" (New York: MDRC, November 2001), pp. v-vi.

¹⁵⁸ Sara McLanahan, "Testimony before the Mayor's Task Force on Fatherhood Promotion, National Fatherhood Summit," Washington, D.C., June 14, 1999.

¹⁵⁹ Jessica Pearson, Nancy Thoennes, and Lanae Davis, with Jane Venohr, David Price, and Tracy Griffith, "OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs: Client Characteristics and Program Outcomes" (Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies, September 2003).

history was the norm rather than the exception among the program participants, many participants faced ongoing alcohol and substance abuse problems, many did not have reliable transportation, and many lacked a court-ordered visitation arrangement.¹⁶⁰

Although several new evaluations are underway to scientifically determine whether responsible fatherhood programs work, they are many years from impact findings. Most are still at the initial stage of providing information on the implementation of the responsible fatherhood programs. An HHS-sponsored evaluation of responsible fatherhood programs, called the National Evaluation of the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and Their partners (MFS-IP), began in 2006 and is still enrolling participants. The evaluation is a multi-year (quasi-experimental) study that is expected to run from 2006 through 2013. A final report on the impact of the program is expected between 2011 and 2013.¹⁶¹

Family Planning Services

One of the purposes of family planning services is to prevent unwanted pregnancies that may lead to nonmarital births. The National Family Planning Program, created in 1970 as Title X of the Public Health Service Act, is administered through the Office of Population Affairs/Office of Public Health and Science at HHS. It provides grants to public and private non-profit agencies to provide voluntary family planning services for individuals who are otherwise ineligible for medical services. Family planning programs provide basic reproductive health services: contraceptive services and supplies; infertility services; natural family planning methods education; special services to adolescents; adolescent abstinence counseling; gynecological care; screening for breast and cervical cancers; STD and HIV prevention education, counseling, and referrals; and reproductive health counseling, education, and referrals.

Priority for the provision of these services is to be given to lower-income families; grantees may use a sliding fee schedule for determining client contributions for care, but grantees may not charge low-income persons for care. The services must be provided “without coercion and with respect for the privacy, dignity, social, and religious beliefs of the individuals being served.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative — Further Progress Is Needed in Developing a Risk-Based Monitoring Approach to Help HHS Improve Program Oversight,” GAO-08-1002, September 2008.

¹⁶² In 2006, 25% of Title X clients were ages 19 or younger. CRS Report RL33644, *Title X (Public Health Service Act) Family Planning Program*, by Angela Napili.

Adoption

Some have said that adoption makes nonmarital childbearing “less visible” and perhaps to some more acceptable.¹⁶³ Mothers who place their infant for adoption are more likely to finish school and less likely to live in poverty. Further, mothers who choose to give up their infants for adoption are more likely to marry than those who parent their baby.¹⁶⁴

Although adoption is not an intervention to negate nonmarital childbearing, it does present an alternative living arrangement for children born to unmarried parents. Adoption is the legal process of adding a person to an existing family. Adoption, unlike foster care, is meant to be permanent. The goal of adoption is to provide lifelong security to the child. According to some studies, children placed in adoptive homes have better scores in school and engage in less delinquent behavior than children raised by a single parent.¹⁶⁵

“Shotgun” marriages and adoption were once viewed as the common remedies for a nonmarital birth. Even so, historically, adoption has played a very limited role as an alternative to mother-only families. Adoption has been and remains rare. There were approximately 130,000 adoptions in the U.S. in 2002.¹⁶⁶ Of these 130,000, the number that are children born to unmarried women is not known.¹⁶⁷

Some observers contend that adoption might be viewed as a more viable option for an unwanted pregnancy if school systems included a meaningful discussion of adoption in their sex education classes.¹⁶⁸

Child Support Obligation as a Deterrent

The Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program was enacted in 1975 as a federal-state program (Title IV-D of the Social Security Act) to help strengthen families by securing financial support for children from their noncustodial parent on a consistent and continuing basis and by helping some families to remain self-sufficient and off public assistance by providing the requisite CSE services. Over the years, CSE has evolved into a multifaceted program. Although cost-recovery still remains an important function of the program, its other aspects include service delivery and promotion of self-sufficiency and parental responsibility.

¹⁶³ Dore Hollander, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States: A Government Report,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 28, No. 1 (January-February 1996), p. 31.

¹⁶⁴ Patrick F. Fagan, “Promoting Adoption Reform: Congress Can Give Children Another Chance,” *The Heritage Foundation*, Backgrounder #1080, May 6, 1996.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ National Council For Adoption, “Adoption Factbook IV,” 2007, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Child Welfare Information Gateway, “How Many Children Were Adopted in 2000 and 2001?” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau), August 2004, pp. 15-17.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

The CSE program contains numerous measures to establish and enforce child support obligations.¹⁶⁹ Because strict child support enforcement is thought to deter nonmarital childbearing, the child support provisions are seen by some in Congress as another method of attempting to reduce nonmarital pregnancies. Child support enforcement measures include streamlined efforts to name the father in every case, employer reporting of new hires (to locate noncustodial parents quicker), uniform interstate child support laws, computerized statewide collections to expedite payment, and stringent penalties, such as the revocation of a drivers' license and the seizure of bank accounts, in cases in which noncustodial parents owe past-due child support.

According to social science research, stronger child support enforcement may increase the cost of children for men and should make men more reluctant to have children outside of marriage. In other words, by raising the cost of fatherhood to unmarried men, effective paternity establishment and child support enforcement deter nonmarital births.¹⁷⁰ In contrast, stronger child support enforcement may reduce the cost of children for women (making them more willing to have children outside of marriage).¹⁷¹ However, according to recent evidence, once a single woman becomes a mother, her chances of marrying anyone other than the father of her child are greatly reduced.¹⁷²

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Title IV-A of the Social Security Act

The TANF block grant (Title IV-A of the Social Security Act) funds a wide range of benefits and services for low-income families with children. TANF was created by P.L. 104-193 (the 1996 welfare reform law). Its funding was extended through FY2010 by P.L. 109-171 (the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, enacted February 8, 2006). One of the four goals of the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193) is to prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies.¹⁷³ To this end, unmarried minor parents may only receive TANF assistance if they live at home or in an adult-supervised setting and attend school if they lack a high school diploma.

¹⁶⁹ Child support is paid until the child is age 18 (the age limit is higher in some states). Past-due child support (i.e., child support arrearages) are still owed even though the child has reached age 18 — in some states for an additional five to seven years, in some states to age 30.

¹⁷⁰ Paula Roberts, "The Importance of Child Support Enforcement: What Recent Social Science Research Tell Us," *Center for Law and Social Policy*, Spring 2002, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ Chien-Chung Huang, "The Impact of Child Support Enforcement on Nonmarital and Marital Births: Does It Differ by Racial and Age Groups?," *Joint Center for Policy Research*, November 20, 2001, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷² Daniel T. Lichter, "Marriage as Public Policy," *Progressive Policy Institute*, Policy Report, September 2001.

¹⁷³ Although P.L. 104-193 seeks to reduce pregnancies, birth data, and not pregnancy data, have become the indicator because birth data are more current and reliable.

States are using TANF funds to support activities that may prevent nonmarital pregnancies. Generally these activities focus on preventing teen pregnancy. These activities are often classified as “youth services” (includes after-school programs for teens and sub-grants to community organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs). Several states have reported that they conduct home visits to new parents, in an effort to reduce subsequent pregnancies. Many states reported operating abstinence education programs (which may be funded in whole or in part through TANF or other federal abstinence education programs). In addition, family planning services can be funded in part from TANF or other federal grant programs.¹⁷⁴

Another one of the four TANF goals is to promote the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. States have separate funding via their TANF programs to operate responsible fatherhood programs and marriage promotion initiatives (discussed below).

Future Prospects

The language regarding births to unmarried women has changed in significant ways. What once were referred to as “bastard” or “illegitimate” children are now termed “out-of-wedlock,” “outside of marriage,” or “nonmarital” births. The stigma and shame that had once been attached to these children is no longer recognized by the public.¹⁷⁵ Further, some commentators argue that the facts have been twisted in such a way that mothers are justified in having a nonmarital birth and that having a baby without a husband represents a higher level of maternal devotion and sacrifice than having a baby with a husband.¹⁷⁶ They assert that it is often the case that adults pursue individual happiness in their private relationships, which is in direct conflict with the needs of children for stability, security, and permanence in their family lives.¹⁷⁷

Some observers contend that the problem is not the weakening of marriage (about 75% of all women ages 15 and older eventually marry), but rather the de-linking of marriage and having children and the abdication of the traditional view of marriage as a life-long commitment.¹⁷⁸ Some researchers and policymakers argue that although couple relationships are a private matter, an overwhelming body of

¹⁷⁴ U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Ways and Means. *Green Book: 2008*, Section 7. 2008. pp. 7-92; [<http://waysandmeans.house.gov/Documents.asp?section=2168>].

¹⁷⁵ Paula Roberts, “Out of Order? Factors Influencing the Sequence of marriage and Childbirth Among Disadvantaged Americans, Center for Law and Social Policy, *Couples and Marriage Series*, Brief no. 9 (January 2007).

¹⁷⁶ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *The Atlantic* (April 1993).

¹⁷⁷ Andrew J. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005). Also see Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *The Atlantic* (April 1993).

¹⁷⁸ Paula Roberts, “Out of Order? Factors Influencing the Sequence of marriage and Childbirth Among Disadvantaged Americans, Center for Law and Social Policy, *Couples and Marriage Series*, Brief no. 9 (January 2007).

evidence suggests that not all family structures produce equal outcomes for children. They maintain that there is widespread agreement that a healthy, stable (i.e., low-conflict) family with two biological parents is the best environment for children.¹⁷⁹ Finally, some observers assert that we as a society have not strayed too far, and that it is not too late to return to the somewhat old-fashioned, but not simplistic, precept of falling in love, getting married, and having a baby, in that order.¹⁸⁰

Although marriage and family life are generally considered private issues, they have become part of the public arena primarily because of public policies that help families affected by negative outcomes associated with nonmarital births to maintain a minimum level of economic sufficiency.¹⁸¹ The abundance of research on the subject of the impact on children of various living environments also raises the stakes — in that it is now almost unanimously agreed that children living with both biological parents fare better on a host of measures — economic, social, psychological, and emotional — than children living with a single parent or in a step-parent or cohabiting situation.¹⁸²

One of the things that this report highlights is that although there has been a rise in nonmarital births, it does not mean that there has been a subsequent rise in mother-only families. Instead, it reflects the rise in the number of couples who are in cohabiting relationships. Because the number of women living in a cohabiting situation has increased substantially over the last several decades, many children start off in households in which both of their biological parents reside. Nonetheless, cohabiting family situations are disrupted or dissolved much more frequently than married-couple families.

As discussed in an earlier section, the federal government funds a number of programs that seek to (1) reduce or eliminate nonmarital childbearing or (2) ameliorate some of the negative outcomes often associated with children of unmarried parents. The rest of this section highlights several interventions that may receive further attention and more debate in Congress. Although this report does not base the analysis of increased nonmarital childbearing by segmenting teen births from other births, it is important to note that more than half of *first* nonmarital births are to teens. This means that policies that are successful in reducing births to teenagers would significantly lessen the problem of nonmarital childbearing.

¹⁷⁹ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *The Atlantic* (April 1993).

¹⁸⁰ Linda C. McClain, “Love, Marriage, and the Baby Carriage: Revisiting the Channelling Function of Family Law,” Hofstra Univ. Legal Studies Research Paper no. 07-14, April 2007.

¹⁸¹ Theodora Ooms, “The Role of Government in Strengthening Marriage,” Center for Law and Social Policy, *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law*, vol. 9:1 (2001).

¹⁸² This report does not discuss childbearing (biological child of one member of the couple, adoption or through new reproductive technologies, such as sperm donation, egg donation, or surrogate birth mothers) or childrearing with respect to gay couples. For a discussion of the subject, see William Meezan and Jonathan Rauch, “Gay Marriage, Same-Sex Parenting, and America’s Children,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005), p. 97-115.

The difference between the average age of first intercourse (seventeen) and the age at first marriage (twenty-five) for women is eight years. For the majority of adult women, living without a married spouse does not mean living without sex,¹⁸³ nor in many cases does it mean living without having children. In 2005, almost 20% of the women ages 40 and older who gave birth had a child born outside of marriage. For women ages 20 through 24, the percentage was almost 60%. These figures reflect the new paradigm of women in all age groups, not just teenagers, having children outside of marriage. Some observers and analysts assert that new strategies that account for this new paradigm must be developed to significantly reduce nonmarital births. Others argue that the nation must decide whether to try to change the fertility behavior of women in their thirties and forties. They contend that given the new economic framework and the scarcity of resources in most areas of public finance, it may be wiser to pursue a strategy that focuses primarily on adolescents and women in their early twenties.

Given the patterns of swift transitions into and out of marriage and the high rate of single parenthood, a family policy that relies too heavily on marriage will not help the many children who will live in single-parent and cohabiting families — many of them poor — during most of their formative years.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, national data from the 2002 panel of the National Survey of Family Growth indicate that 14% of white men, 32% of black men, and 15% of Hispanic men had children with more than one woman.¹⁸⁵ Thus, children in the same family may potentially face different outcomes. For example, children with the same mother and different fathers may potentially face less desirable outcomes if their mother marries the biological father of their half-brothers or half-sisters.¹⁸⁶

The advantages married couples and their children have over those in other living arrangements led the Bush Administration and Congress to propose marriage promotion initiatives. The knowledge that American society has changed in ways that will no longer permit all children to live with their biological parents led the Bush Administration and Congress to support responsible fatherhood programs. Both the healthy marriage programs and the responsible fatherhood programs were funded by the same legislation (i.e., P.L. 109-171 under the auspices of the TANF

¹⁸³ Laura Duberstein Lindberg and Susheela Singh, “Sexual Behavior of Single Adult American Women,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 40, no. 1 (March 2008).

¹⁸⁴ Andrew J. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *The Future of Children*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005) p. 33.

¹⁸⁵ Cassandra Logan, Jennifer Manlove, Erum Ikramullah, and Sarah Cottingham, “Men Who Father Children with More Than One Woman: A Contemporary Portrait of Multiple-Partner Fertility,” *Child Trends*, Research Brief no. 2006-10 (November 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Christina M. Gibson-Davis and Katherine A. Magnuson, “Explaining the Patterns of Child Support Among Low-Income Non-Custodial Fathers,” December 2005. Also see Ronald B. Mincy, “Who Should Marry Whom?: Multiple Partner Fertility Among New Parents,” Columbia University, February 2002. See also Paula Roberts, “The Implications of Multiple Partner Fertility for Efforts to Promote Marriage in Programs Serving Low-Income Mothers and Fathers,” *Center for Law and Social Policy*, Policy Brief no. 11 (March 2008).

block grant program).¹⁸⁷ The rationale for implementing these two approaches in a complementary manner was to promote the best interest of children.¹⁸⁸

Although there was some animosity between proponents of healthy marriage programs and proponents of responsible fatherhood programs¹⁸⁹ when they were debated during the period from 2001 through 2005, there is a growing consensus that the two programs can be implemented in a complementary manner to promote the best interest of children.¹⁹⁰ Some of the impact analysis on the two programs, based on scientifically designed evaluations with experimental and control groups, is to be completed during the next Congress. This may help the 111th Congress and the new Administration to determine whether or not they need to shift priorities between the programs, redistribute funding, or make other changes that will improve the effectiveness of both programs.

Similarly, there is now some discussion about a middle ground between abstinence education and comprehensive sex education.¹⁹¹ Some call this approach abstinence-plus. Under the abstinence-plus education approach, participants are given a hierarchy of safe-sex strategies. At the top of the hierarchy is the promotion of sexual abstinence as the safest route to pregnancy prevention and HIV and STD prevention. Recognizing that some participants will not be abstinent, the abstinence-plus approach encourages individuals to use condoms and to adopt other safer-sex strategies.¹⁹² Proponents of the abstinence-plus approach contend that it does not encourage teens or young adults to have more sex, it just encourages them to do so safely if they do have sex. Some policymakers maintain that this middle ground approach accepts the reality that sexual activity among older teens and young adults is an entrenched by-product of today's society. They argue that it is not bad policy

¹⁸⁷ The healthy marriage program and the responsible fatherhood program are designed to accommodate individuals of all ages, although individual programs may cater to persons in specific age groups. Administrators of the programs point out that the message of the programs are applicable to persons of all ages, from teens to middle-aged couples.

¹⁸⁸ Although several evaluations are underway to scientifically determine whether healthy marriage programs and responsible fatherhood programs work, they are many years from impact findings. Most are still at the initial stage of providing information on the implementation of the programs.

¹⁸⁹ The animosity mainly centered around funding concerns — in some of the early proposals marriage promotion initiatives were earmarked up to five times as much money as fatherhood initiatives. Supporters of responsible fatherhood programs argued that the promotion of marriage debate was overshadowing the precept that fathers should participate in the lives of their children regardless of the marital status of the parents.

¹⁹⁰ Also, it is interesting to note that many analysts contend that the many of the “soft skills” individuals learn in healthy marriage or responsible fatherhood programs are transferrable to the workplace. They assert that skills such as being able to communicate effectively with others, being consistent, and being on-time are abilities that may help individuals gain entry into the workforce as well as help them advance in their jobs.

¹⁹¹ Both abstinence-only education programs and comprehensive sex education programs are currently focused on middle-school and high-school aged children.

¹⁹² Shari L. Dworkin and John Santelli, “Do Abstinence-Plus Interventions Reduce Sexual Risk Behavior among Youth?,” Public Library of Science Medicine, September 18, 2007.

but rather good planning to educate persons who thought they would remain abstinent until marriage, but do not, with the appropriate information regarding contraceptive methods. They contend that an abstinence-plus education approach is in the best interest of young people and in the best interest of the nation.

As mentioned earlier, no federal funding is specifically earmarked for comprehensive sex education. Some observers contend that the debate over abstinence-only education versus comprehensive sex education will likely continue for several more years. They surmise that the issue of which approach is more appropriate and more effective for adolescents and older teens may receive renewed attention by the 111th Congress and the new Administration. They also note that the abstinence-plus approach may be further scrutinized within the context of the debate on abstinence-only versus comprehensive sex education.

Appendix A. Data Table

Table A-1. Number, Percent, and Rate of Births to Unmarried Women and Birth Rate for Married Women, 1940-2006

	Number of Births To Unmarried Women	Percent of Births To Unmarried Women	Birth Rate per 1,000 Unmarried Women Ages 15-44	Birth Rate per 1,000 Married Women Ages 15-44
1940	89,500	3.8	7.1	NA
1941	95,700	3.8	7.8	NA
1942	95,500	3.4	8.0	NA
1943	98,100	3.3	8.3	NA
1944	105,200	3.8	9.0	NA
1945	117,400	4.3	10.1	NA
1946	125,200	3.8	10.9	NA
1947	131,900	3.6	12.1	NA
1948	129,700	3.7	12.5	NA
1949	133,200	3.7	13.3	NA
1950	141,600	4.0	14.1	141.0
1951	146,500	3.9	15.1	NA
1952	150,300	3.9	15.8	NA
1953	160,800	4.1	16.9	NA
1954	176,600	4.4	18.7	NA
1955	183,300	4.5	19.3	153.7
1956	193,500	4.7	20.4	NA
1957	201,700	4.7	21.0	NA
1958	208,700	5.0	21.2	NA
1959	220,600	5.2	21.9	NA
1960	224,300	5.3	21.6	156.6
1961	240,200	5.6	22.7	155.8
1962	245,100	5.9	21.9	150.8
1963	259,400	6.3	22.5	145.9
1964	275,700	6.9	23.0	141.8
1965	291,200	7.7	23.4	130.2
1966	302,400	8.4	23.3	123.6
1967	318,100	9.0	23.7	118.7
1968	339,200	9.7	24.3	116.6
1969	360,800	10.0	24.8	118.8
1970	398,700	10.7	26.4	121.1
1971	401,400	11.3	25.5	113.2
1972	403,200	12.4	24.8	100.8
1973	407,300	13.0	24.3	94.7
1974	418,100	13.2	23.9	94.2
1975	447,900	14.3	24.5	92.1
1976	468,100	14.8	24.3	91.6
1977	515,700	15.5	25.6	94.9
1978	543,900	16.3	25.7	93.6
1979	597,800	17.1	27.2	96.4
1980	665,747	18.4	29.4	97.0
1981	686,605	18.9	29.5	96.0
1982	715,227	19.4	30.0	96.2
1983	737,893	20.3	30.3	93.6
1984	770,355	21.0	31.0	93.1
1985	828,174	22.0	32.8	93.3

	Number of Births To Unmarried Women	Percent of Births To Unmarried Women	Birth Rate per 1,000 Unmarried Women Ages 15-44	Birth Rate per 1,000 Married Women Ages 15-44
1986	878,477	23.4	34.2	90.7
1987	933,013	24.5	36.0	90.0
1988	1,005,299	25.7	38.5	90.8
1989	1,094,169	27.1	41.6	91.9
1990	1,165,384	28.0	43.8	93.2
1991	1,213,769	29.5	45.0	89.6
1992	1,224,876	30.1	44.9	88.5
1993	1,240,172	31.0	44.8	86.1
1994	1,289,592	32.6	46.2	82.9
1995	1,253,976	32.2	44.3	82.6
1996	1,260,306	32.4	43.8	82.3
1997	1,257,444	32.4	42.9	82.7
1998	1,293,567	32.8	43.3	84.2
1999	1,308,560	33.0	43.3	84.8
2000	1,347,043	33.2	44.1	87.4
2001	1,349,249	33.5	43.8	86.7
2002	1,365,966	34.0	43.7	86.3
2003	1,415,995	34.6	44.9	88.1
2004	1,470,189	35.8	46.1	87.6
2005	1,527,034	36.9	47.5	87.3
2006	1,641,700	38.5	50.6	NA

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99," *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 48, no. 16 (October 18, 2000). See also *National Vital Statistics Reports*, vol. 56, no. 6 (December 5, 2007). Birth rates for married mothers data are from — National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States, 1994*, vol. I, Natality, Table 1-19.

NA = Not available.