



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

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# Responsible Fatherhood Spotlight



## Teen Fatherhood

The teen birth rate has continued to decline after peaking in 1991. Yet some teens are still becoming fathers at a young age. Research indicates that this early fatherhood typically is unintended, regularly occurs outside of marriage, and has implications for teen fathers, their children, and their families. Some key demographic differences shape who becomes a teenage father, as well as the consequences of being a teen father.

### Definition

The term *teen fathers* refers to males in the United States who father children before reaching age 20 or, sometimes, before reaching 18.

### Importance and Implications of Teen Fatherhood

Research has found that becoming a teen father has negative consequences for teen fathers themselves, for their children, and for their partners or spouses.<sup>i</sup> These outcomes both cause and reflect the disadvantages that teen fathers experience.

#### *Implications for Fathers*

Research has distinguished a number of critical consequences associated with fathering children at a young age.

- The risk factors associated with becoming a teen parent, such as low income and poor academic achievement, are often exacerbated when teenage males become fathers. Specifically, teenage fatherhood is associated with decreased economic stability, income, and occupational attainment, as well as with increased turbulence in relationships and decreased likelihood of marriage.<sup>ii</sup> These negative outcomes can be attributed to the fact that teen fathers typically are simply not ready to assume the immediate financial demands associated with having and raising a child. These demands can prompt teen fathers, in some cases, to forgo schooling in favor of obtaining unskilled work, reducing their chances for upward mobility.

- A number of the key developmental tasks of adolescence may be impeded by teenage parenthood, because the demands and responsibilities of parenting have the potential to heighten stress and undermine teen parents' abilities to solidify a sense of identity and autonomy.<sup>iii,iv,v</sup>

#### *Implications for Fathers' Involvement with Children*

- Children suffer the greatest consequences when they have a teenage father.<sup>vi</sup> Men who become fathers in adolescence tend to have less contact and overall involvement with their children than do men who wait to become fathers until later in life.<sup>vii, viii</sup>
- Teen fatherhood also has implications for fathers' parenting styles, support for children, and parent-child relationships.<sup>ix</sup> Teen fathers report that their partners' pregnancies were either mistimed or unwanted, sentiments that have been associated with more authoritarian parenting styles, reduced financial and emotional support, and poorer father-child relationships.<sup>x</sup>
- The decreased involvement and less positive parenting approaches of teen fathers are two factors that are associated with poorer outcomes for children, including diminished academic achievement and lower IQ,<sup>xi</sup> poorer mental health,<sup>xii</sup> early onset of sexual activity,<sup>xiii</sup> and delinquency.<sup>xiv</sup>

### Implications for Fathers' Partners

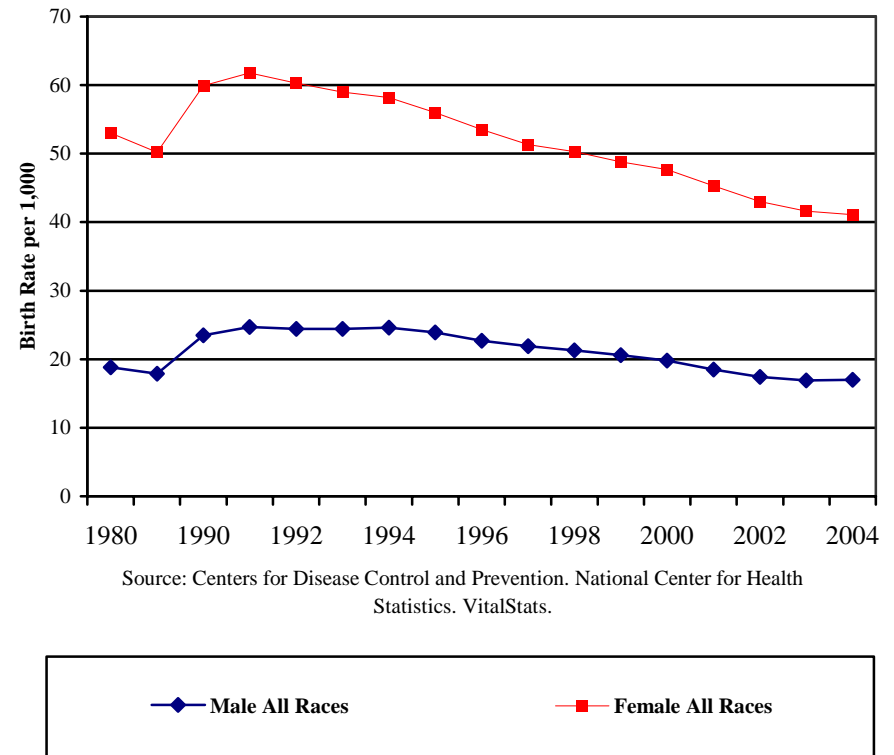
Adolescent males who become fathers tend to become less involved with their partners over time.

- Teenage fathers are less likely to be married or in cohabiting unions, which, in turn, is associated with reduced financial and emotional support for partners,<sup>xv</sup> as well as with reduced relationship satisfaction for both males and females.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Teen parents – especially fathers – tend to be in less committed and more contentious relationships with their partners, and they often have not considered the implications of a pregnancy on their relationships.<sup>xvii</sup> While unmarried couples with children generally are likely to break up without marrying, teen parents are even less likely to ever marry.<sup>xviii</sup> Moreover, even teenagers who do conceive children in the context of romantic or official unions are more likely than are older parents to end relationships after the birth of their children.<sup>xix</sup>
- Men who become fathers in their teens are significantly more likely to conceive children with multiple women throughout their adult lives than are men who wait to have children.<sup>xx</sup> This trend has considerable implications for teen fathers' relationships with the mothers of their children, since having children with more than one woman is a consistent predictor of poor relationship quality, decreased father involvement, reduced co-parenting, and increased conflict.<sup>xxi</sup>

### Overall Trends in Teen Fatherhood

As indicated in **Figure 1** and **Table 5**, births to teen parents reached record lows in the United States in 2004, but the United States continues to have higher rates of teen pregnancy than any other developed nation.<sup>xxii</sup> Results from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG, 2002) show that 1,020,800 males aged 15-19 have a child.

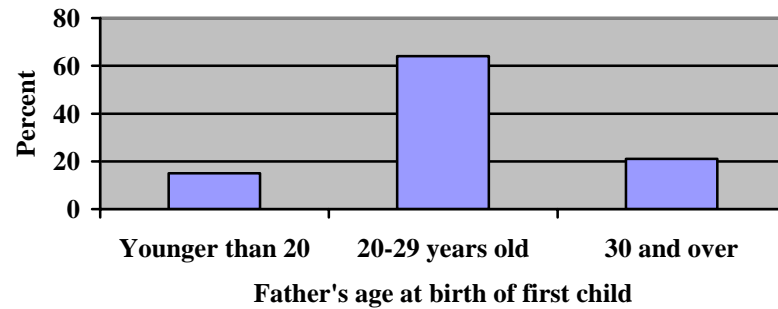
**Figure 1. Birth Rates (per 1,000), Teens Aged 10-19, Selected Years 1980-2004**



### Differences in Teen Fatherhood by Subgroup

**Differences by Age.** As indicated in **Figure 2**, approximately 15 percent of males aged 15-44 in the United States fathered at least one child before reaching age 20.<sup>xxiii</sup> This Figure also shows that the highest proportion of men become fathers for the first time between the ages of 20 and 29.

**Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of Fathers by Age at the Birth of Their First Child**



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2002

*Differences by Union Status.* **Table 1** shows that a higher proportion of men who are married have at least one biological child than do men who are unmarried.

**Table 1. Percentage of Men with at Least One Biological Child by Age and Marital Status**

Age	Percentage of Men with at Least One Biological Child	
	Married	Unmarried
15-29	58%	12%
30-44	85%	47%

Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2002

*Differences by Race.* **Table 2** indicates that teenagers' race is often associated with their likelihood of becoming parents during adolescence. Overall, minority males and females report the highest rates of teen childbearing, with the exception of individuals of Asian descent.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**Table 2. Total Number and Percentage of Births to Fathers in the United States in 2002 by Race/Hispanic Status and Age**

	Total Number of Births to Fathers 2002	Percentage of Births		
		Under 15 Years	Ages 15-19	Ages 20-24
<b>Total Births<sup>a</sup></b>	4,021,726	0.01%	3.1%	15.1%
<b>Non-Hispanic Total</b>	2,692,674	0.01%	2.9%	15.3%
Non-Hispanic white	2,057,103	0.00%	2.3%	14.2%
Non-Hispanic black	419,404	0.02%	6.1%	23.5%
Non-Hispanic other race	216,167	0.00%	1.9%	9.3%
<b>Hispanic Total</b>	763,463	0.02%	5.5%	24.3%
Unknown	565,589	0.00%	0.6%	2.0%

<sup>a</sup>Total births refer to births for males from under age 15 to 99 years.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. VitalStats (2002).

*Differences by Socioeconomic Status (SES).* **Table 3** shows that men of low SES consistently report more births in their adolescent years than do men from higher SES groups.<sup>xxv, xxvi</sup> Further, both males whose parents are unemployed and those whose parents are employed in low-paying jobs tend to have children at an earlier age than do other men.

**Table 3. Percentage of Adults Aged 18 to 59 Who Reported Having a First Birth Before Age 20 by Poverty Status and Gender at Time of Interview**

	Poverty Status	
	Poor	Nonpoor
<b>Males</b>	21%	10%
<b>Females</b>	53%	29%

*Differences by Region.* **Table 4** indicates that the highest teen birth rates have consistently been reported in Mississippi, followed by a number of other Southern states.<sup>xxvii</sup> States with the lowest teen birth rates were New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts.

**Table 5**, Trends in Birth Rates (Births per 1,000 persons) for Males and Females Aged 10-19 by Race and Hispanic Status (for Females), Next Page

**Table 4. Teen Birth Rates (per 1,000) by Top 15 States, Years 1992-2004**

State	Teen Birth Rate per 1,000			
	1992	1996	2000	2004
1) Mississippi	83.6	74	70.1	61.9
2) Arizona	80.2	71.5	67.9	60.1
3) New Mexico	79.7	70.5	65.6	60.8
4) Texas	78.2	73.1	68.9	62.6
5) Louisiana	76.1	66.8	62.1	56.2
6) Arkansas	74.8	73.5	66.2	60.3
7) Georgia	74.2	66.8	62.8	53.4
8) California	72.8	61	47	39.5
9) Alabama	72	67.1	60.7	52.4
10) Tennessee	70.9	64.5	59.5	52.1
11) Nevada	70.6	69.5	63	51.1
12) Oklahoma	69.8	63.1	59.7	55.6
13) South Carolina	69.7	60.2	58	52.1
14) North Carolina	69.2	62.3	58.6	48.8

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. VitalStats (2004).

Source: National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992<sup>xxviii</sup>

**Table 5. Trends in Birth Rates (Births per 1,000 persons) for Males and Females Aged 10-19 by Race and Hispanic Status (for Females) Selected Years 1980-2004**

Year	Males - All Races	White Males	Black Males	Females - All Races	White Females	Black Females	Hispanic Females
1980	18.8	15.4	40.1	53.0	45.4	97.8	82.2
1986	17.9	13.8	42.6	50.2	42.3	95.8	--
1991	24.7	19.0	57.8	61.8	52.6	114.8	104.6
1996	22.7	18.7	46.7	53.5	47.5	89.6	94.6
2001	18.5	15.5	36.5	45.3	41.2	71.8	86.4
2004	17.0	14.3	32.7	41.1	37.7	63.3	82.6

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. VitalStats.

### Definitions and Measurement

Birth rates to teen parents over time refer to live births (as opposed to pregnancies) per 1,000 people. Race and Hispanic origin are reportedly separately on birth certificates and in the U.S. Census; most individuals of Hispanic descent classify themselves as white.<sup>xxix</sup> Census estimates for births to Hispanic teenage fathers over time are not currently available. Also, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) notes that data on fathers' age were not reported for 13 percent of births across all years, 1980-2004, and many of these fathers were young.<sup>xxx</sup>

### Data Sources

Data documenting trends in births to teen parents over time were gathered from reports published by the National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Birth rates by age of father were computed based on ages documented on birth certificates and compiled by NCHS. Additional data examining males by subgroup classifications were compiled from reports from Cycle 6 of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG, 2002). Finally, the source for data on teen parenthood by poverty status was the National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992.

### Data Limitations

Information about male fertility is not collected regularly in studies of parenting; and when male fertility information is collected, it is often incomplete and lacking in detail.<sup>xxxi</sup> Analyses indicate that all males, and teenaged males in particular, have a tendency to underreport their fertility rates and behaviors.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### Resources

- The **National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy** offers information for teens, parents, policy makers, and the press on issues concerning teen pregnancy: <http://www.teenpregnancy.org>.
- The **Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics** Web site includes demographic and trend data on births to parents of all ages on its **VitalStats** Section: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh/vitalstats/VitalStatsbirths.htm>.
- The **National Fatherhood Initiative** has compiled an array of resources for fathers of all ages, which are targeted at supporting fathers and at-risk youth: <http://www.fatherhood.org/links.asp>

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