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Adolescent Mothers, AFDC and JOBS

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CLASP

ADOLESCENT MOTHERS, AFDC and JOBS

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BIRTHS AND MARRIAGE

The adolescent birth rate is significantly lower than it was in the 1950's.

- In 1955, the adolescent birth rate (ages 15-19) was 90.3 per 1000 females (Moore, 1992). It reached an all-time low of 50.2 in 1986 and has risen since then to 62.1 in 1991 (National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS], as cited by Moore, 1994).
- The birth rate for females under age 15 (10-14 years) has increased. In 1970, it was 1.2 per 1000 females; but by 1990 it had risen to 1.4 (NCHS, 1993, p. 21).

Even though the 1990 adolescent birth rate in the United States is far lower than that of the 1950's, births are more "visible" today because most adolescent mothers are unmarried.

- In 1970, 30% of births to adolescents (under age 20) occurred to unmarried mothers; in 1980 it was 48%; and in 1991, it had reached 69% (Moore, 1994).
- The rate of first marriages for females ages 18-19 declined from 151.4 per 1000 in 1970 to 57.8 in 1987 (Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI], 1991, p.14).

In the 1980's the large increase in births to unmarried women was primarily concentrated among older women, not adolescents.

- For adolescents (15-19) the number of out of wedlock births grew from 253,000 in 1980 to 350,000 in 1990; in contrast, for adult women aged 20-24 the number of out of wedlock births grew more substantially, rising from 237,000 in 1980 to 404,000 in 1990 (U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, [Greenbook], 1993, p. 1115).
- The unmarried adolescent (15-19) birth rate per 1,000 unmarried women was 28% in 1980 and rose to 43% in 1990; in contrast, the rate for adult women aged 20-24 rose from 41% to 65% over the same time period (Greenbook, 1993, p. 1115).

Births to unmarried women of all ages have increased in the United States and in other developed countries; at the same time, overall birth rates have declined.

- Between 1960 and 1986, the birth rate decreased in many industrialized countries, but the decline was less in the United States than in many others, e.g., 12% decline in the United States, 55% decline in West Germany, and a 39% decline in Italy. Birth rates have also declined in Canada, Denmark, France, Japan, Sweden, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (OERI, 1991, p. 25).

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- By 1986, the births to unmarried women as a percentage of all live births reached levels that at least doubled the 1970's rate in the United States and in other industrialized countries: United States, 23%; the Netherlands, 9%; Sweden, 48%; Denmark, 44%; France, 22%; the United Kingdom, 21%; Canada, 17%; and Italy, 6% (OERI, 1991, p. 25).

The adolescent birth rate in other countries is significantly lower than in the United States.

- Since 1970, the United States has had a higher adolescent (age 15-19) pregnancy and birth rate than other western industrialized countries such as Canada, France, Sweden, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (Jones et al., 1986, pp. 31-33).
- Since 1970, the United States birth rate for adolescents under age 15 has been five times higher than that of France, Sweden, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. It is four times higher than that of Canada (Jones et al., 1986, pp. 24-30).
- Since 1970, adolescent (ages 15-19) birth rates have fallen in European countries and have remained considerably lower than in the United States. In 1989, the United States adolescent birth rate of 58 per 1000 women was approximately 6.5 times higher than that of Denmark or France; 5.3 times higher than West Germany; 9.7 times higher than the Netherlands; and 1.8 times higher than the United Kingdom (Moore, 1993).

While marriage may increase family income, adolescent marriages often end in divorce.

- Married adolescent females (ages 15-19) living only with their husbands and children had a poverty rate of 28%. This was about 1/3 of the 81% poverty rate among unmarried mothers living alone with their children (Congressional Budget Office [CBO], 1990, p. xvii).
- Within five years of giving birth, those who married as adolescents (ages 14-17) were four times more likely to divorce or separate than those who married at age 20 or older (CBO, 1990, p. 10).
- In a 17-year follow up of 306 adolescent mothers (ages 14-19 at first birth) in Baltimore, approximately 33% had married by age 20. Over 50% of the marriages dissolved within five years (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987, p. 30).

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- A study using 1980 Current Population Survey results of white respondents showed that the younger the age at marriage the greater the likelihood of marital dissolution. Couples with premarital births experienced marriage disruption twice as great as couples without children during the first seven months of marriage and 60% higher during 8 to 15 months of marriage. Blacks were excluded from the study due to their small numbers (Morgan & Rindfuss, 1985, pp. 1068-1069).

AFDC

The perception that all adolescent mothers receive AFDC is incorrect.

- The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) (1978-1984) showed that 51% of all adolescent mothers (ages 15-19 at birth of child) did not receive AFDC benefits during the initial 5 years after their first birth (CBO, 1990, p. 49).
- Among single adolescent mothers in the NLSY, 50% received AFDC benefits within a year after giving birth; and 77% received AFDC benefits within 5 years after giving birth (CBO, 1990, pp. 50-51).
- Among married adolescent mothers in the NLSY, 7% received AFDC benefits within a year of giving birth; and 25% received them within five years after giving birth (CBO, 1990, p. 52).

Many single adolescent mothers who receive AFDC do so for a short first "spell."

- The NLSY showed that 40% of single adolescent mothers left AFDC within one year and 70% within four years after giving birth (CBO, 1990, p. xvi).

Adolescent mothers account for a small percentage of the AFDC program at any given point in time, but they account for the majority of AFDC households over time.

- In 1991, about 8% of all AFDC mothers were adolescents (ages 11-19). This represents about 293,000 young women (Health and Human Services [HHS], Administration for Children and Families, Characteristics and Financial Circumstances of AFDC Recipients, 1991, p. 42-43).
- The proportion of all AFDC recipients who were age 19 or younger when they first became mothers was estimated as 54% in 1975; 55% in 1984; and 51% in 1990 (Moore, 1993).

While the incidence of younger adolescent mothers is troubling, the vast majority of AFDC adolescent mothers are 18 or 19.

- Almost 50% of the adolescent mothers who receive AFDC in a given year are 19 years old.
- In 1991, of AFDC adolescent mothers, 82% were 18 or 19: 47.2% were 19 years old and 33.4% were 18 years old. Nearly 10% (9.7%) were 17 years old; the remaining 10% were 16 years old or younger (HHS, Characteristics and Financial Circumstances, p. 43).

AFDC

AFDC caseload growth does not appear to be strongly related to the timing of increases in female-headed families (adolescents and older women).

- Between 1972 and 1989 the number of children who received AFDC decreased by 0.5 million (6%). At the same time, the number of children living in female-headed families rose by 4 million (44%) (U.S. Census Bureau, Characteristics of the Low Income Population: 1971, and Greenbook, 1991).
- Between March, 1989 and March, 1991, the number of children living in female headed families rose by 0.6 million (5%). At the same time, the number of children who received AFDC increased by 1.1 million (15%) (U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty in the United States: 1988 and 1989, Poverty in the United States: 1990).

EDUCATION and TRAINING

Inadequate basic education skills are critical factors in adolescent pregnancy and childbearing.

- The likelihood of becoming an adolescent mother by age 16 is 5 times greater for young women (ages 14-15) who score in the bottom 20% in reading and mathematical skills than for those who score in the top 50% (William T. Grant Foundation Commission [WTGFC], 1988, p. 30).
- The likelihood of becoming an adolescent parent by age 20 is 2.5 times greater for young women and 3 times greater for young men who have weak basic education skills (reading and mathematical) than for those who rank in the top half of the basic skills distribution (WTGFC, 1988, p. 31).

Academic achievement and school behavior are problems for AFDC and non-AFDC poor children.

- The National Health Interview Survey on Child Health (NHISCH) (1986) showed that among children ages 7-17: 60% of AFDC children, 55% of non-AFDC poor children, and 41% of non-poor children were in the bottom half of their class (Zill, Moore, Smith, Stief, & Coiro, 1991, p. 16).
- The NHISCH also showed that among children ages 7-17: 34% of AFDC children, 28% of non-AFDC poor children, and 15% of non-poor children had to repeat one or more grades (Zill et al., 1991, p. 16).
- The NLSY Child Supplement, 1986, (ages 4-7) showed that school suspension for AFDC and non-AFDC poor children were similar: 14% and 13% respectively. In non-poor families, 7% were suspended (Zill et al., 1991, p. 17).
- The NLSY Child Supplement also showed that almost as many non-AFDC poor children (32%) as AFDC children (34%) scored above the 90th percentile on the Behavior Problems Index. Nineteen percent of non-poor children scored in the 90th percentile (Zill et al., 1991, p. 17). The Behavior Problems Index is a short behavior scale that identifies children in need of psychological help.

States can now require AFDC adolescent mothers who have dropped out of school to participate in an educational activity.

- The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training Program was established in 1988. The teen mothers that may be required to participate in JOBS are those who are age 16-19, not enrolled in school and lacking a high school degree or its equivalent. Federal rules say that if the JOBS program operates in the area and the state has sufficient resources, the state must require

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these custodial teen mothers to participate in JOBS. In most states, older parents of children under age 3 are generally "exempt" from JOBS and cannot be required to participate in the program. However, a custodial parent under 20 who has lost full-time student status can be required to participate in education-on a full time basis if the state so chooses — as soon as the infant is born. Failure to participate can result in reduction of AFDC benefits (Levin-Epstein, *Statistical Snapshot*, 1993, p. 2).

- In 1992, there were 32,000 adolescent mothers participating in JOBS Training Programs in 25 states. Participants included those who volunteered to do so while in school and those who were mandated to do so because they had dropped out of school (Levin-Epstein, 1993, p. 8).
- Roughly 1/4 of AFDC teen parents were estimated to have been enrolled in JOBS according to a 1992 General Accounting Office (GAO) analysis of 16 states' caseloads (GAO, *Welfare to Work: States Move Unevenly to Serve Teen Parents in JOBS*, July 1993, p. 4).

Some states have implemented Learnfare Programs which place special attendance requirements on adolescent mothers enrolled in school and those who have dropped out of school. Failure to meet the attendance requirements can result in a reduction of the AFDC grant.

- The Learnfare Program in Wisconsin applies to AFDC mothers, as well as to other AFDC adolescents. A multi-year evaluation found that Learnfare failed to improve attendance: after one year, about 33% had improved their attendance while over 50% showed poorer performance (Pawasarat, Quinn, & Stetzer, 1992).
- Adolescents (mothers or others) sanctioned under the Wisconsin Learnfare Program are often severely at-risk for child abuse or neglect. Over 40% of those sanctioned in Milwaukee were already known to be at-risk for either child abuse or neglect or were in the Children's Court System (Pawasarat and Quinn, 1990).
- Adolescent mothers in the Milwaukee Learnfare Program appear to be particularly vulnerable for abuse or neglect: of the adolescent parents from families coded for abuse and/or neglect fully 77% were sanctioned (Levin-Epstein, *States Update*, November 18, 1993, p.4).
- The Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program in Ohio (1989-1991) is a state-wide initiative that is mandatory for all pregnant women and custodial parents under 20 years of age who receive AFDC and do not have a high school diploma or GED certificate. LEAP imposes a \$62 sanction when the attendance requirement is not met and a \$62 bonus when it is met. LEAP

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offers a variety of services including case management, child care assistance, and transportation to attend school. Of the adolescents eligible for LEAP, 61.3% of the program group and 51.1% of the control group remained enrolled or graduated when enrolled. Of the adolescents who were drop-outs when they enrolled in LEAP, 46.8% of the program group and 33.4% of the control group enrolled in high school or adult education. Attendance of LEAP adolescents was greater than that of the control group; and more LEAP adolescents passed the GED test. The proportion of LEAP teens for whom sanctions were requested with more than three times the highest sanction rates estimated for mandatory employment and training programs for adult welfare recipients evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration on Research Corporation (Bloom, Fellerath, Long, & Wood, 1993, pp. xviii-xix).

- The federal Teenage Parent Demonstration tested mandatory participation in a case management program by new AFDC teen mothers in three localities, from 1987-1991. Of the 90% of the eligible teenagers who completed the program intake, 92% participated in subsequent activities (82% percent of the full sample). Participation in the 3 major activities ranged from 47% attending school, 29% in job training, and 33% in employment. Participation was highest amongst those who had higher basic skills, were enrolled in school at intake, did not have any health problems, were black, and/or lived with mothers not employed outside the home. Participation was lowest among school drop-outs (30 to 35 percent in any month, compared to 40 to 50 percent for high school graduates and those in school at the time of program enrollment) (Maynard, 1993, pp 1-8).

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Most adolescent unmarried mothers (ages 15-19) live with relatives. More black than white unmarried adolescent mothers live with relatives.

- About 33% of adolescent mothers were married and living with their husbands and children only (CBO, 1990, p. 8).
- Fifteen percent of white and 12% of black adolescent mothers were single and living alone with their children (CBO, 1990, p. 8).
- Sixty-six percent of white and 83% of black adolescent mothers who were unmarried or separated lived with relatives (CBO, 1990, p. 8).

AFDC budget rules require that when an adolescent mother lives at home, the income of her parents is counted in determining AFDC eligibility.

- Since 1981, AFDC rules have counted the income of the parents of an adolescent mother when determining her AFDC eligibility (Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 602 (a)(43)). While this rule prevents middle class teen mothers from receiving AFDC, it also could push poor adolescent mothers away from their families. This is because a poor teen mother may be better able to financially care for her infant if she lives alone and receives AFDC than if she lives with her low-income parents.

While there are often short term benefits of living with relatives, they may erode over time and co-residence can signal a disadvantageous situation.

- One research study that compared adolescent mothers who lived with their parents for over two of the first five years with those who did not concluded that living with parents slightly lowered the likelihood of achieving economic security. Those who lived with parents for longer than two of the first five years postpartum were less likely to achieve economic security later in life. However, those living with parents a short time were more likely to remain enrolled in school while pregnant and during the postpartum period (Furstenberg et al., 1987, p. 70).
- After five years, adolescent mothers who remained in the family were not as well off as those who lived independently (Furstenberg et al., 1987, p. 57).
- Evaluation of a New Haven, Connecticut, alternative school program for pregnant adolescents found little difference in educational success at two years postpartum between adolescents who lived with their mothers for 18 months postpartum and those who did not (57% to 62% respectively) (Seitz, Apfel, & Rosenbaum, 1991, p. 923).

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- Seventeen percent (19) of 111 children born to adolescent mothers in the New Haven, Connecticut, Young Mothers Program became parents themselves before the age of 19. Many parents had suffered significant emotional loss as children. One loss was their removal from their grandmother's home before 2 years of age without replacement of her caretaking role by another nurturing relationship. The second emotional loss was having a mother who experienced a lifetime of depression (Horwitz, Klerman, Kuo, & Jekel, 1991, pp. 170-171).

Pregnant and parenting adolescents have been subject to abuse and neglect at significant levels by family members.

- A study of 535 adolescents (ages 13-21) in Washington State indicated that 66% had experienced molestation, rape, or attempted rape at some point in their lives. Fully 54% of those molested were victimized by a family member (Boyer & Fine, 1992, p. 8).
- A review of Milwaukee adolescent parents sanctioned under the Wisconsin Learnfare Program found that of those from families coded by the county for abuse or neglect 77% were sanctioned (Levin-Epstein, *States Update*, November 18, 1991, p. 4).

Under the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988, states may require never-married minor AFDC adolescent mothers to live at home, with relatives, or in a supervised setting. States that impose FSA residence requirements may exempt adolescent mothers under certain situations, such as when the "physical or emotional health or safety of (the teen mother) would be jeopardized." However, translating this policy into practice may be difficult for states that are already hard pressed to address child welfare needs.

- Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Michigan, Mississippi, and Wisconsin along with Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, have opted for the FSA residency restriction. In Michigan, data indicates that the number of teen parents living independently has remained essentially stable between October 1992 and September 1993. The state requires that teen mothers live at home unless they have a good reason not to. Child welfare agency staff often undertake the evaluation of the appropriateness of an independently living adolescent parent (Michigan Department of Social Services, Program Eligibility Manual: Minor Parents). The relative stability in the number living outside of the home, even after the rule has been in effect, could be due to a number of factors. Among the possible explanations for the number is that the state acknowledges that the teen mother's circumstances warrant independent living (Levin-Epstein, *States Update*, December 23, 1993, p. 11).
- Child welfare systems are generally overburdened. For example, in the last decade, the number of children in foster care has grown by nearly 70% from

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262,000 in 1982 to 442,000 in 1992. During the period from 1985 to 1990, the number of children in foster care increased by 47% while the number of foster family homes declined by 27%, according to the Congressional Research Service. By the beginning of 1992 there were class action lawsuits in over 35 jurisdictions across the country designed to improve child welfare system performance (Center for Law and Social Policy [CLASP], *Family Matters*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Winter, 1994, pp 3,5).

SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCY

The consequences of multiple births during adolescence can be severe. Contraception contributes to better long-term outcomes.

- A 17 year longitudinal study of women who had given birth as adolescents showed that additional births at young ages severely constrained their ability to attend school and obtain and maintain jobs. Education and employment were essential for economic self-sufficiency in later life (Furstenberg et al., 1987, p. 75).
- Teenagers who marry are at a very high risk of having a second birth within two years of the first birth (Mott, 1986, pp. 5-12).
- Adolescent mothers continue to have larger families than older women, though family size has declined among both young and older mothers. Larger family size is associated with reduced labor force participation and increased poverty (Nord, Moore, Morrison, Brown & Myers, 1992, p. 313).
- Postpartum birth control is associated with high educational aspirations and helps determine economic self-sufficiency as an adult. In the 17 year longitudinal study, the more educationally ambitious adolescents were more likely to be using contraception at one and five years postpartum (Furstenberg et al., 1987, p. 68).

Few programs have been able to effectively assist adolescent mothers to delay a subsequent pregnancy. Those that do invest resources in intensive individual counseling and other individualized services.

- One of the earliest comprehensive programs to assist economically disadvantaged mothers to achieve economic independence was Project Redirection (1980-1983) sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the United States Department of Labor. The four-site program was for pregnant and parenting adolescents 17 years or younger without a high school diploma or GED certificate. A five year follow-up showed that participants had better employment records, higher average earnings, less welfare dependency, more positive home environments, and higher scores on parenting tests than a socio-economically matched group of women (Polit, 1989, pp. 166-168).

Project Redirection utilized community service providers, mentors, peer group counselors, and individualized participant plans to coordinate a wide range of health, education, parenting, life-management, and employment services. Evaluation at one year showed that participants were less likely than non-participants to have experienced a subsequent pregnancy and more likely to have used contraception, completed school or be enrolled, and to have held a job. At two years, participants and non-participants were similar

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on all the preceding outcomes, but participants who remained in the program for 12 or more months showed greater positive effects on school enrollment, employment, and subsequent pregnancy. However, at the five year point, the participants had a higher average number of births than the non-participants; while both groups averaged the same number of pregnancies, the non-participants had a higher average number of abortions (Polit & Kahn, 1985, pp. 152-154).

- Participants in the Illinois Ounce of Prevention (OFP) Program for adolescents 19 years old and younger (enrolled 1985-1987) were 1.4 times less likely to experience a subsequent pregnancy than a national sample drawn from the NLSY (Ruch-Ross, Jones, & Musick, 1992, p. 69).

The OFP Program is multi-site, state-wide, and community based. It provides for up to two years of home visits and weekly peer-led parent support groups.

- A single-site home visitation program in rural New York state found that during the first four years after delivery of their first child, nurse-visited women had fewer subsequent pregnancies and postponed the birth of the second child an average of 12 months longer than women who received more limited services (e.g., free transportation for prenatal care) (Olds, Henderson, Tatelbaum, & Chamberlin, 1988, p. 1440).

The sample included 400 women; 47% were under 19 years of age and 62% were unmarried. The treatment plan included screening, transportation services, and nine visits during pregnancy (Olds et al., 1988, p. 1437).

- A parent training program for 80 low income black adolescents (ages 13-19) during the first six months postpartum compared home-visit instruction and an infant nursery teacher aid training program with a control group. At two years, the lowest percentage of subsequent pregnancies occurred in the nursery teacher program (13%) followed by the home visit group (27%) and the control group (39%) (Field, Widmayer, Greenberg, & Stoller, 1982, p. 706).

The home visit program consisted of 12 months of biweekly visits to train mothers in infant stimulation. The nursery intervention program provided parent and job training and income for adolescent mothers (Field et al., 1982, p. 704).

- A two-year follow up study of 106, low income, black adolescents (ages 14-19) in New Haven, CT, revealed that the longer the duration of postnatal

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intervention the less the likelihood of subsequent childbearing (Seitz et al., 1991, p. 911). Of the 106 adolescent mothers, 24% became pregnant within two years after their first birth. Of the 52 who received less than the median 6-8 weeks of postnatal care, 35% became pregnant again within two years, compared to 13% of the 54 who received 6.8 or more weeks of postnatal care (Seitz et al., 1991, p. 924).

Medical, educational, and social services were provided at a center for pregnant students that was part of the New Haven school system (Seitz et al., 1991).

- A 1985-1988 community-based Adolescent Pregnancy Program (APP) in five rural counties in Washington state revealed that 11.7% of the APP group compared to 16.8% of the comparison group became pregnant within a year (McBride, 1989, p. 9).

A case management and community network model were utilized to provide individualized services to 1132 adolescents (under 19) for an average of 13 months (McBride, 1989, pp. 4-6).

Repeat births are apparently unrelated to AFDC benefit levels.

- "Neither the baseline (AFDC) benefit level nor the incremental benefit for additional children influences young mothers' decisions to have second children according to a study of teenagers and young women through the age of 23" (Acs, 1993, pp. 1011-93).
- Additional benefits for larger families do not appear to exert an overall effect on family size according to a study of never-married women between the ages of 18-30. The researchers assert that "eliminating the benefit differentials for larger families will not influence family-size decisions" (Robins & Fronstein, 1993, pp. 1022-93).

A federal waiver has been granted to Wisconsin to conduct an experiment to determine if diminished financial resources through an adolescent parent AFDC "family size cap" will result in fewer subsequent adolescent pregnancies. Under the "cap" the families welfare grant does not increase incrementally if a new baby is added to the family. It is also questionable whether AFDC mothers have high fertility.

- A 1980-1981 study examining fertility rates among AFDC mothers (ages 15-44) in Wisconsin determined that the 45.8 fertility rate of AFDC women was lower than the 75.3 rate for Wisconsin women in general and the 71.1 rate for the United States general population (Rank, 1989, p. 299).

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- The Wisconsin study also determined that the longer a woman remained on AFDC, the less likely she was to become pregnant (Rank, 1989, p. 296).

Adolescent birth rates are not higher in states with higher AFDC grants.
(Table 1).

- There is no evidence that benefit levels encourage child bearing. Welfare benefits may affect decisions about abortion, adoption, or marriage (CBO, 1990, p. 43).
- In 1990, the states with the highest adolescent (ages 18-19) birth rates per 1000 women were: New Mexico (124); Arkansas (121); Alaska (120); Nebraska (115); Arizona (112); and Texas (112) (Moore, 1993). All had AFDC benefits below the national median of \$360 except Alaska (\$846) and Nebraska (\$364), (Office of Family Assistance [OFA], 1990-1991, p. 454). (See, Table 1, Part A).
- The states with the lowest adolescent (ages 18-19) birth rates per 1000 women in 1990 were: Massachusetts (47); Vermont (50); New Hampshire (51); Connecticut (54); Rhode Island (56); and Minnesota (58) (Moore, 1983). All had AFDC benefits above the national median and all ranked in the top 12 AFDC grant states (OFA, 1990-1991, p. 455). (See Table 1, Part C).
- The same pattern is seen for adolescents ages 15-17. In 1990, the states with the highest birth rates per 1000 women were well below the AFDC median payment: Mississippi (57); Arkansas (50); Georgia (50); Louisiana (49); Arizona (48); and Texas (48) (Moore, 1993; OFA, 1990-1991, p. 454). (See Table 1, Part B).
- The states with the lowest 1990 birth rates per 1000 women were above the AFDC median payment: North Dakota (16); New Hampshire (17); Iowa (20); Minnesota (20); and Vermont (20) (Moore, 1993; OFA, 1990-1991, p. 454). (See Table 1, Part D).

SUBSEQUENT PREGNANCY

Table 1

AFDC Grants Tend to be Higher in States with the Lowest Adolescent Birth Rates and Lower in States with the Highest Adolescent Birth Rates (1990)*

State	Birth Rate/1000 Women	AFDC Grant Rank (\$)
A. States with the Highest Adolescent Birth Rates among 18-19 Year Olds		
New Mexico	124	36 (310)
Arkansas	121	48 (204)
Alaska	120	1 (846)
Nebraska	115	28 (364)
Arizona	112	38 (293)
Texas	112	51 (184)
B. States with the Highest Adolescent Birth Rates among 15-17 Year Olds		
Mississippi	57	53 (120)
Arkansas	50	48 (204)
Georgia	50	42 (516)
Louisiana	49	50 (190)
Arizona	48	38 (293)
Texas	48	51 (184)
C. States with the Lowest Adolescent Birth Rates among 18-19 Year Olds		
Massachusetts	47	7 (579)
Vermont	50	3 (679)
New Hampshire	51	12 (280)
Connecticut	54	6 (581)
Rhode Island	56	9 (554)
Minnesota	58	10 (532)
D. States with the Lowest Adolescent Birth Rates among 15-17 Year Olds		
North Dakota	16	23 (401)
New Hampshire	17	12 (516)
Iowa	20	18 (426)
Minnesota	20	10 (532)
Vermont	20	3 (679)

Note: Rank includes 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia.

* Birth rates for 1990 are unpublished data from the NCHS. Data will be forthcoming in Vital Statistics for the United States, 1990, Vol 1, Natality. Source is Moore (1993).

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The Coming White Underclass

By Charles Murray

Every once in a while the sky really is falling, and this seems to be the case with the latest national figures on illegitimacy. The unadorned statistic is that, in 1991, 1.2 million children were born to unmarried mothers, within a hair of 30 percent of all live births. How high is 30 percent? About four percentage points higher than the black illegitimacy rate in the early 1960s that motivated Daniel Patrick Moynihan to write his famous memorandum on the breakdown of the black family.

The 1991 story for blacks is that illegitimacy has now reached 68 percent of births to black women. In inner cities, the figure is typically in excess of 80 percent. Many of us have heard these numbers so often that we are inured. It is time to think about them as if we were back in the mid-1960s with the young Moynihan and asked to predict what would happen if the black illegitimacy rate were 68 percent.

Impossible, we would have said. But if the proportion of fatherless boys in a given community were to reach such levels, surely the culture must be "Lord of the Flies" writ large, the values of unsocialized male adolescents made norms—physical violence, immediate gratification, and predatory sex. That is the culture now taking over the black inner city.

But the black story, however dismaying, is old news. The new trend that threatens the United States is white illegitimacy. Matters have not yet quite gotten out of hand, but they are on the brink. If we want to act, now is the time.

In 1991, 707,502 babies were born to sin-

gle white women, representing 22 percent of white births. The elite wisdom holds that this phenomenon cuts across social classes, as if the increase in Murphy Browns were pushing the trendline. Thus, a few months ago, a Census Bureau study of fertility among all American women got headlines for a few days because it showed that births to single women with college degrees doubled in the last decade to 6 percent from 3 percent. This is an interesting trend, but of minor social importance. The real news of that study is that the proportion of single mothers with less than a high school education jumped to 48 percent from 35 percent in a single decade.

Class Differences

These numbers are dominated by whites. Breaking down the numbers by race (using data not available in the published version), women with college degrees contribute only 4 percent of white illegitimate babies, while women with a high school education or less contribute 82 percent. Women with family incomes of \$75,000 or more contribute 1 percent of white illegitimate babies, while women with family incomes under \$20,000 contribute 69 percent.

The National Longitudinal Study of Youth, a Labor Department study that has tracked more than 10,000 youths since 1979, shows an even more dramatic picture. For white women below the poverty line in the year prior to giving birth, 44 percent of births have been illegitimate, compared with only 6 percent for women above the poverty line. White illegitimacy is overwhelmingly a lower-

class phenomenon.

This brings us to the emergence of a white underclass. In raw numbers, European-American whites are the ethnic group with the most people in poverty, most illegitimate children, most women on welfare, most unemployed men, and most arrests for serious crimes. And yet whites have not had an "underclass" as such, because the whites who might qualify have been scattered among the working class. Instead, whites have had "white trash" concentrated in a few streets on the outskirts of town, sometimes a Skid Row of unattached white men in the large cities. But these scatterings have seldom been large enough to make up a neighborhood. An underclass needs a critical mass, and white America has not had one.

But now the overall white illegitimacy rate is 22 percent. The figure in low-income, working-class communities may be twice that. How much illegitimacy can a community tolerate? Nobody knows, but the historical fact is that the trendlines on black crime, dropout from the labor force, and illegitimacy all shifted sharply upward as the overall black illegitimacy rate passed 25 percent.

The causal connection is murky—I blame the revolution in social policy during that period, while others blame the sexual revolution, broad shifts in cultural norms, or structural changes in the economy. But the white illegitimacy rate is approaching that same problematic 25 percent region at a time when social policy is more comprehensively wrongheaded than it was in the mid-1960s, and the cultural and sexual norms are still more degraded.

The white underclass will begin to show its face in isolated ways. Look for certain schools in white neighborhoods to get a reputation as being unteachable, with large numbers of disruptive students and indifferent parents. Talk to the police; listen for stories about white neighborhoods where the incidence of domestic disputes and casual violence has been shooting up. Look for white neighborhoods with high concentrations of drug activity and large numbers of men who have dropped out of the labor force. Some readers will recall reading the occasional

news story about such places already. As the spatial concentration of illegitimacy reaches critical mass, we should expect the deterioration to be as fast among low-income whites in the 1990s as it was among low-income blacks in the 1960s.

My proposition is that illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare, or homelessness because it drives everything else. Doing something about it is not just one more item on the American policy agenda, but should be at the top. Here is what to do:

In the calculus of illegitimacy, the constants are that boys like to sleep with girls and that girls think babies are endearing. Human societies have historically channeled these elemental forces of human behavior via thick walls of rewards and penalties that constrained the overwhelming majority of births to take place within marriage. The past thirty years have seen those walls cave in. It is time to rebuild them.

The ethical underpinning for the policies I am about to describe is this: Bringing a child into the world is the most important thing that most human beings ever do. Bringing a child into the world when one is not emotionally or financially prepared to be a parent is wrong. The child deserves society's support. The parent does not.

The social justification is this: A society with broad legal freedoms depends crucially on strong nongovernmental institutions to temper and restrain behavior. Of these, marriage is paramount. Either we reverse the current trends in illegitimacy—especially white illegitimacy—or America must, willy-nilly, become an unrecognizably authoritarian, socially segregated, centralized state.

To restore the rewards and penalties of marriage does not require social engineering. Rather, it requires that the state stop interfering with the natural forces that have done the job quite effectively for millennia. Some of the changes I will describe can occur at the federal level; others would involve state laws. For now, the important thing is to agree on what should be done.

I begin with the penalties, of which the most obvious are economic. Throughout human history, a single woman with a small child has not been a viable economic unit. Not being a viable economic unit, neither have the single woman and child been a legitimate social unit. In small numbers, they must be a net drain on the community's resources. In large numbers, they must destroy the community's capacity to sustain itself. *Mirabile dictu*, communities everywhere have augmented the economic penalties of single parenthood with severe social stigma.

Restoring economic penalties translates into the first and central policy prescription: to end all economic support for single mothers. The AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) payment goes to zero. Single mothers are not eligible for subsidized housing or for food stamps. An assortment of other subsidies and in-kind benefits disappear. Since universal medical coverage appears to be an idea whose time has come, I will stipulate that all children have medical coverage. But with that exception, the signal is loud and unmistakable: From society's perspective, to have a baby that you cannot care for yourself is profoundly irresponsible, and the government will no longer subsidize it.

How does a poor young mother survive without government support? The same way she has since time immemorial. If she wants to keep a child, she must enlist support from her parents, boyfriend, siblings, neighbors, church, or philanthropies. She must get support from somewhere, anywhere, other than the government. The objectives are threefold.

First, enlisting the support of others raises the probability that other mature adults are going to be involved with the upbringing of the child, and this is a great good in itself.

Second, the need to find support forces a self-selection process. One of the most shortsighted excuses made for current behavior is that an adolescent who is utterly unprepared to be a mother "needs someone to love." Childish yearning isn't a good enough selection device. We need to raise the probability that a young single woman who keeps her child is doing so volitionally and thoughtfully.

Forcing her to find a way of supporting the child does this. It will lead many young women who shouldn't be mothers to place their babies for adoption. This is good. It will lead others, watching what happens to their sisters, to take steps not to get pregnant. This is also good. Many others will get abortions. Whether this is good depends on what one thinks of abortion.

Third, stigma will regenerate. The pressure on relatives and communities to pay for the folly of their children will make an illegitimate birth the socially horrific act it used to be, and getting a girl pregnant something boys do at the risk of facing a shotgun. Stigma and shotgun marriages may or may not be good for those on the receiving end, but their deterrent effect on others is wonderful—and indispensable.

What about women who can find no support but keep the baby anyway? There are laws already on the books about the right of the state to take a child from a neglectful parent. We have some 360,000 children in foster care because of them. Those laws would still apply. Society's main response, however, should be to make it as easy as possible for those mothers to place their children for adoption at infancy. To that end, state governments must strip adoption of the nonsense that has encumbered it in recent decades.

The first step is to make adoption easy for any married couple who can show reasonable evidence of having the resources and stability to raise a child. Lift all restrictions on interracial adoption. Ease age limitations for adoptive parents.

The second step is to restore the traditional legal principle that placing a child for adoption means irrevocably relinquishing all legal rights to the child. The adoptive parents are parents without qualification. Records are sealed until the child reaches adulthood, at which time they may be unsealed only with the consent of biological child and parent.

Given these straightforward changes—going back to the old way, which worked—there is reason to believe that some extremely large proportion of infants given up by their mothers will be adopted into good homes.

This is true not just for flawless blue-eyed blond infants but for babies of all colors and conditions. The demand for infants to adopt is huge.

Some small proportion of infants and larger proportion of older children will not be adopted. For them, the government should spend lavishly on orphanages. I am not recommending Dickensian barracks. In 1993, we know a lot about how to provide a warm, nurturing environment for children, and getting rid of the welfare system frees up lots of money to do it. Those who find the word "orphanages" objectionable may think of them as 24-hour-a-day preschools. Those who prattle about the importance of keeping children with their biological mothers may wish to spend some time in a patrol car or with a social worker seeing what the reality of life with welfare-dependent biological mothers can be like.

Finally, there is the matter of restoring the rewards of marriage. Here, I am pessimistic about how much government can do and optimistic about how little it needs to do. The rewards of raising children within marriage are real and deep. The main task is to shepherd children through adolescence so that they can reach adulthood—when they are likely to recognize the value of those rewards—free to take on marriage and family. The main purpose of the penalties for single parenthood is to make that task easier.

One of the few concrete things that the government can do to increase the rewards of marriage is make the tax code favor marriage and children. Those of us who are nervous about using the tax code for social purposes can advocate making the tax code at least neutral.

A more abstract but ultimately crucial step in raising the rewards of marriage is to make marriage once again the sole legal institution through which parental rights and responsibilities are defined and exercised.

Little boys should grow up knowing from their earliest memories that if they want to have any rights whatsoever regarding a child that they sire—more vividly, if they want to grow up to be a daddy—they must marry.

Little girls should grow up knowing from their earliest memories that if they want to have any legal claims whatsoever on the father of their children, they must marry. A marriage certificate should establish that a man and a woman have entered into a unique legal relationship. The changes in recent years that have blurred the distinctiveness of marriage are subtly but importantly destructive.

Together, these measures add up to a set of signals, some with immediate and tangible consequences, others with long-term consequences, still others symbolic. They should be supplemented by others based on a reexamination of divorce law and its consequences.

Virtue and Temperance

That these policy changes seem drastic and unrealistic is a peculiarity of our age, not of the policies themselves. With embellishments, I have endorsed the policies that were the uncontroversial law of the land as recently as John Kennedy's presidency. Then, America's elites accepted as a matter of course that a free society such as America's can sustain itself only through virtue and temperance in the people, that virtue and temperance depend centrally on the socialization of each new generation, and that the socialization of each generation depends on the matrix of care and resources fostered by marriage.

Three decades after that consensus disappeared, we face an emerging crisis. The long, steep climb in black illegitimacy has been calamitous for black communities and painful for the nation. The reforms I have described will work for blacks as for whites, and have been needed for years. But the brutal truth is that American society as a whole could survive when illegitimacy became epidemic within a comparatively small ethnic minority. It cannot survive the same epidemic among whites.

[from the *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1993]

Charles Murray is Bradley Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

1993 - # 51



CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES

WELFARE AND OUT-OF-WEDLOCK BIRTHS

Representative James Talent (R-Mo.) and Senator D. M. Faircloth (R-N.C.) have proposed a welfare reform plan that eliminates welfare benefits (both AFDC and food stamps) to children born to an unmarried mother who is under 21 years of age. The mother and the child would remain ineligible for benefits forever unless she subsequently marries the child's father or marries a man who becomes the child's legal guardian. As stated repeatedly in the April 28 press conference by Rep. Talent, Sen. Faircloth, and Bill Bennett of Empower America, this provision is based on their assumption that welfare causes out-of-wedlock childbearing.

This view has recently been espoused by Charles Murray, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Mr. Murray wrote in his now famous October 1993 *Wall Street Journal* article, "The Coming White Underclass," that "Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time — more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else." Murray and others argue that welfare is the root cause of out-of-wedlock births and, therefore, calls for the elimination of welfare.

The data and the research do not support the hypothesis that welfare is the cause of out-of-wedlock births. Most researchers find that welfare benefits have little effect on out-of-wedlock childbearing and those researchers who do find a significant connection find one only for whites, not blacks. Furthermore, welfare benefits have fallen precipitously over the past two decades. If higher welfare benefits did cause higher rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing, then nonmarital births should have fallen — or grown more slowly — as benefits fell. That out-of-wedlock childbearing did not fall suggests that welfare benefits actually have little to do with fertility patterns.

- **The rise in out-of-wedlock childbearing is a society-wide trend.** If welfare were to blame, one would expect that out-of-wedlock births would be rising primarily among low-income, less-educated women. But this is not the case. The trend toward increased childbearing by unmarried mothers has occurred among high school graduates, those with college education, and school dropouts alike.

Furthermore, the proportion of never-married mothers who did not graduate from high school has *fallen* over the past decade, while the proportion of such mothers with postsecondary education has risen. In 1982, only 16% of never-married mothers had postsecondary education. By 1992, some 26% of these mothers had postsecondary schooling.

- **Two-thirds of all women who give birth outside of marriage are not poor.** While poor women are more likely than non-poor women to have a non-marital birth, this is a society-wide phenomenon.
- **Since the early 1970s, welfare benefits have fallen sharply in purchasing power while the proportion of children born outside of marriage has risen.** AFDC benefits in the median state are now 45 percent lower than in 1970, after adjusting for inflation. (This is for a family of three with no other income, the standard way of measuring benefit trends.) AFDC benefits in the typical state have fallen from \$660 in 1970 to \$370 in 1993 (these figures are expressed in 1993 dollars). AFDC and food stamp benefits combined in the average state have now receded to the level of AFDC benefits alone in 1960, before the food stamp program was created. *If welfare were the cause out-of-wedlock births, the rate of out-of-wedlock births should have fallen —or risen more slowly —as welfare benefits dropped. This didn't happen.*
- **Some proponents of the Murray view have attempted to respond to this point by claiming that the total value of the "welfare package" has continued to rise in recent decades.** This, however, is not the case. The value of the "welfare package" appears to have increased if the rising costs of Medicaid are included. That medical care providers charge escalating amounts for their services does not help poor families pay rent, heat their homes, buy clothes, or feed their families. Standard expressions of benefit packages by non-ideological researchers exclude Medicaid costs because including Medicaid badly distorts the results. (Moreover, the rising cost of Medicaid does not make it easier for poor mothers to raise their children and pay other bills than it was in the past. That doctors and hospitals charge more than in the past does not create an incentive to give birth.)
- **States with higher welfare benefits do *not* have higher rates of out-of-wedlock births or higher proportions of children living in single parent families.** For example, in both Mississippi and New Jersey, about half of black children and one in seven white children live in single-parent families. Yet the combined value of AFDC benefits and food stamps in Mississippi is \$238 per month *lower* than it is in New Jersey. If AFDC were causing out-of-wedlock births and the formation of single-parent families, the much larger benefits in New Jersey should result in a higher proportion of children living in single-parent families. While conservatives often claim that it is the existence of welfare rather than the level of benefits that induces high rates of out-of-wedlock childbearing, the differences in state benefit levels are so large that if welfare caused the formation of single-parent families, we would expect to see a correlation between state benefit levels and the proportion of children in single-parent families.
- **There also seems to be no relationship between AFDC benefit levels and teen birth rates.** While Mississippi and Alabama have the two lowest AFDC benefit

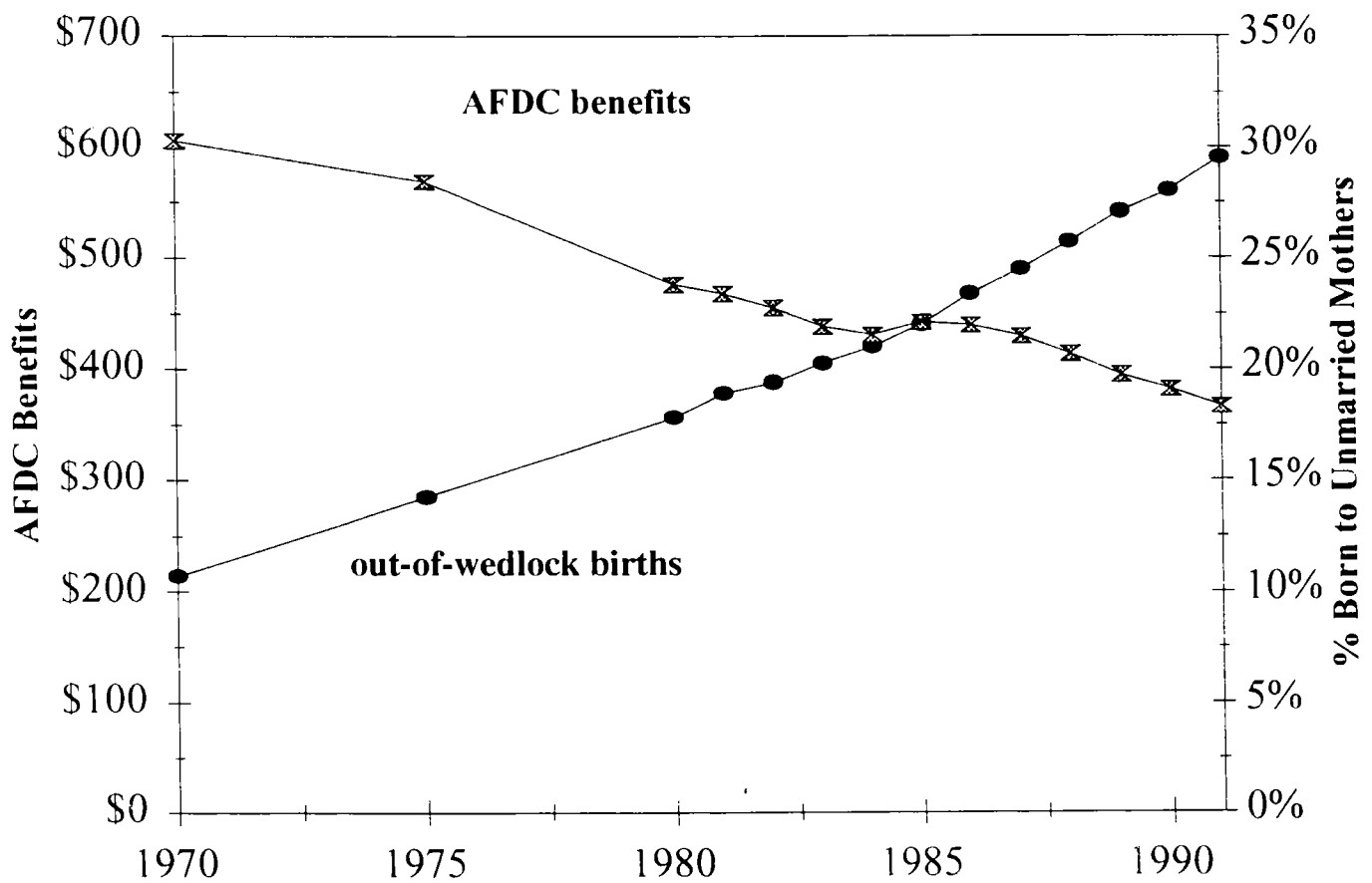
levels in the nation, their white teen birth rates rank twelfth and thirteenth highest in the nation — and Alabama's black teen birth rate is the nation's highest. (Mississippi's black teen birth rate ranks twenty-third.) Meanwhile, Vermont, with the fifth highest AFDC benefits in the country, has the nation's lowest white and black teen birth rates.¹

- **The proportion of children born outside of marriage has been rising throughout western industrialized countries despite their very different social policies.** Between 1960 and 1988, the proportion of children born outside of marriage rose nearly five-fold in Canada, France, the United Kingdom and Sweden. Similarly, divorce rates in each of these countries also increased dramatically.
- **Proponents of these proposals seem to argue that harsh steps are justified because the consequences of bearing a child outside of marriage are so universally destructive.** While children who grow up in poor, single parent families are less likely to graduate from high school and are more likely to become teen parents, *most children who grow up in such families finish high school, do not become criminals, and (for girls) are not welfare dependent as adults.* In fact, one study found that fully two-thirds of young women who grew up in families that received welfare throughout their adolescence received no welfare as adults.

April 28, 1994

¹ These data are only available for total births to teens, not births to unmarried teens.

Percent of Children Born to Unmarried Parents and Median AFDC Benefits (in 1991 Dollars)



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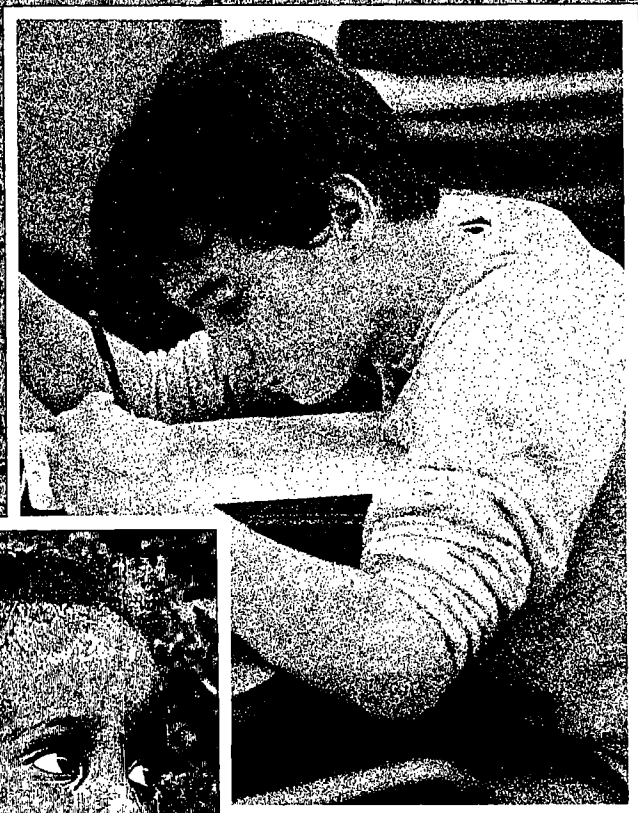
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ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY

IN THE SOUTH:



*Breaking
the Cycle*

A Report of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality
in cooperation with Southern Governors' Association and Southern Legislative Conference

May, 1989

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Chance

Implementing a Comprehensive
Program for Disadvantaged
Young Mothers and Their Children



Janet C. Quint
Barbara L. Fink
Sharon L. Rowser

December 1991

Manpower Demonstration
Research Corporation

MDRC