



FocusFamilyINSIGHT

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Helping Families Thrive

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Date: May 18, 2009
To: FOF Leadership and Management
Re: Unmarried Births Continue to Climb, Sharply Among 20s and 30s Aged Women/Hispanics

How Recent Shifts in Unmarried Child-bearing Significantly Decrease Human Thriving

A new report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services explains that both the number of births and birth rates to unmarried mothers have risen dramatically in the past few years, particularly among Hispanic and 20- and 30-Something mothers. These increases will continue to have a profound impact on the general well-being of both children and mothers across many important health measures.

Raw Numbers

- Babies born to unmarried mothers increased 4% since 2006 and 26% higher 2002.
- The 2007 total is 2.5 times the number in 1980 and 19 times higher than the estimated 1940 numbers.

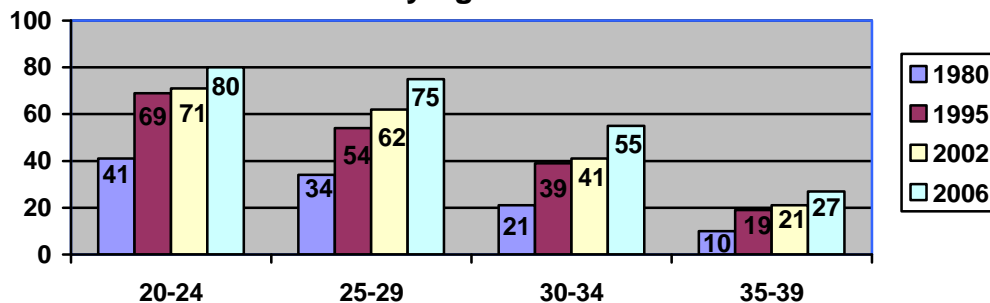
Birth Rate (# of births per 1,000 *unmarried* women)

- The rate increased 5% between 2006 and 2007 and 21% since 2002.
- The rate for 2007 is 80% higher than the 1980 rate.

Age Groups

- Not long ago, to speak of unmarried child-bearing was largely to speak of teen-age child-bearing, for the two were essentially the same. That has changed dramatically in the last few decades.
- Births to unmarried teens (ages 15-17) have declined since 1995 and have remained stable since.
- Births to unmarried teens (ages 18-19) have declined since 1995 and only increased slightly of late. Taken as a whole, births to unmarried teens have declined.
- The increases among women ages 20-40 have been largely consistent and quite dramatic.
- Since 2002, birth rates have risen 13% for women 20-24 years old and 34% for women 30-34 years old.

Birth Rates for U.S. Unmarried Women by Age and Year



Race

- Overall, non-marital births are highest for Hispanic women, followed by black women.
- Overall rates for non-Hispanic white women and Asian and Pacific Islander women are much lower.
- From 1995 to 2002, non-marital birth rates for black women *decreased* from 75 to 66, while the rate for white and Hispanic remained essentially steady (28 and 89/88 respectively) over those years.

- However, in the recent period (2002-2006) unmarried birth rates rose 9% for black women, 14% for white women, 20% for Hispanic women and 24% for Asian/Pacific Islander women.

Proportion of Unmarried to Married Births

- Nearly 40% of U.S. births are to unmarried mothers of all age groups.
- Over all, 45% of births to twenty-something mothers are to unmarried women.
- The largest age group is 20-24, where 60% of births are non-marital, compared with 52% in 2002.
- For women aged 25-29, nearly 1/3 were to unmarried women in 2007, up from 1/4 in 2002.

NOTE: Contrast this 40% rate today with the unmarried birth rate of 24% among Blacks in 1963 which prompted then Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan to urgently issue what became infamously known as the “Moynihan Report” calling for “national action” to help recover the Black family. This call was issued because “at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family.”¹

Why? Delays in Marriage and Increases in Cohabitation

- Increasingly, twenty- and thirty-something women are becoming more alarmed by their biological clocks ticking out, then their wedding bells not ringing. Therefore, they are increasingly willing to become moms prior to becoming wives.
- Also, our nation’s dramatic increase in cohabitation is a factor, with about 40% of recent non-marital births being from cohabiting women, according to this new report.

By Social Class

- Charles Murray from the American Enterprise Institute has done some early analysis of these new data and how they break down by working/social class among whites.
- Women in the white over-class (at least 17 years of education and over \$100,000 annual income) almost never have babies without a husband. The ring-less Hollywood starlet mom is a national anomaly. He explains these over-class women are “still living in the 1950s.”²
- The non-marital birth rate for the white underclass (women with less than 12 years of education and under \$20,000 annually) is probably now in the region of 70%.
- Of course, these different decisions among the under- and over-class are major drivers in keeping people in either of these groups, i.e., mothers who marry are more likely to improve their class status and mothers who don’t are more likely to diminish their social class.

International Comparison

- U.S. has a lower overall unmarried birth rate than Iceland, Sweden, Norway, France, Denmark, U.K. (from highest to lowest).
- U.S. has a higher overall rate than Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, Canada, Spain, Italy, Japan (from highest to lowest).
- The upward trend in non-marital child-bearing in the U.S. is matched in most developed countries, each with dramatic shifts from 1980 to 2007; however Scandinavian countries have been consistently high over these years. Japan’s rate has been markedly and uniquely low over these years. Data on China, India and Africa are not available.

Diminished Dignity and Thriving of Parent and Child

Choosing to bear children outside of marriage is not merely a personal decision without impact upon others. It is a decision to greatly increase the likelihood that one’s child will face greater physical, psychological, economic, educational, abuse and life-choice challenges as they grow.

This report from HHS warns that children from “nonmarital births are at higher risk of having adverse birth outcomes such as low birthweight, preterm birth and infant mortality than are children born to married women. Children born to single mothers typically have more limited social and financial resources.”³

Even children living with cohabiting biological parents, contrasted with children living with married parents, have elevated levels of poverty, health, behavior and emotional problems and lower levels of interest in school and completing homework.⁴ Cohabiting homes more closely resemble single-parent than married homes in most important well-being measures.

Impact on Children

“Research clearly demonstrates that children growing up with two continuously married parents are less likely than other children to experience a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and social problems, not only during childhood, but also in adulthood. Although it is not possible to demonstrate that family structure is the cause of these differences, numerous studies...suggest that this is the case.”⁵

Paul Amato, Penn. State sociologist



“Moreover, children living in cohabiting unions with stepfathers or mother’s boyfriend are at higher risk of sexual abuse and physical violence, including lethal violence, than are children living with married biological parents. ... Several studies have found that children currently living with a mother and her unmarried partner have significantly more behavior problems and lower academic performance than children in intact families.”⁶

David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead, National Marriage Project

“The vast majority of children who are raised entirely in a home where parents are married will never be poor during childhood. By contrast, the vast majority of children who spend time in a fatherless home will experience poverty.”⁷

David Ellwood, Harvard professor

“It is no exaggeration to say that a stable, two-parent family is an American child’s best protection against poverty.”⁸

The Progressive Policy Institute

Impact upon the Parent

“Many single parents, however, find it difficult to function effectively as parents. Compared with continuously married parents, they are less emotionally supportive of their children, have fewer rules, dispense harsher discipline, are more inconsistent with dispensing discipline, provide less supervision, and engage in more conflict with their children.”⁹

Paul Amato, Penn State sociologist

Implications for Focus on Family’s Work

We often see unmarried child-bearing as a moral problem – something contrary to God’s direction for us – and it certainly is. But Christians must also make the connection that God’s moral law doesn’t exist in a vacuum, separated from human experience. It has a real measurable connection with societal and individual outcomes. When we obey God’s commands, our God-created humanity functions as it was intended and we are more likely to thrive. When we disobey, we are living contrary to our created design and our well-being is seriously compromised. Such facts show up in honest scientific inquiry.

We see this rule at work in the issue of family formation and unmarried child-bearing. Are we surprised that the social and medical sciences would reveal diminished well-being for both adults and children when babies are born outside the protective walls of marriage?

We must see this in our continually increasing unmarried childbearing rates, not merely as something to wag our finger at, but also as a critical humanitarian issue that affects human dignity and thriving. Emphasizing this critical point is not a “cop-out” on our moral or prophetic voice, but to also connect it meaningfully with the design in which God created us and *what* He created us *for*.

Helping families thrive is, among many things, a very real social justice effort.

Endnotes

¹ “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, March 1965, p. 5, 8.

² Charles Murray, “When it Comes to Illegitimacy, We’re Living in Separate Worlds: An Update on the White Underclass, *The Journal of the American Enterprise Institute*, May 14, 2009.

³ Stephanie Ventura, “Changing Patterns of Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States,” *NCHS Data Brief*, No. 18, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, May 2009., p. 1.

⁴ Susan Brown “Family Structure and Child Well-Being: The Significance of Parental Cohabitation,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 66 (2004) 351-367.

⁵ Paul Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation,” in *The Future of Children*, “Marriage and Child Wellbeing,” Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2005, (Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton and The Brookings Institution), 89.

⁶ David Popenoe and Barbara Whitehead, “Should We Live Together?” a report from the National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, 2002, p. 8.

⁷ David Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 46.

⁸ Elaine Kamarck and William Galston, “Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s,” whitepaper from the Progressive Policy Institute (September 27, 1990), p. 12.

⁹ Paul Amato, “The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation,” in *The Future of Children*, “Marriage and Child Wellbeing,” Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2005, (Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton and The Brookings Institution), p. 83.