



UNPLANNED PREGNANCY AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

June 2016



The U.S. teen birth rate is at an all-time low and the unplanned pregnancy rate, among women of all ages, recently reached a 30-year low. Despite these positive trends, rates are still high compared to similar countries and dramatic disparities remain. Teen and unplanned pregnancy can hinder future opportunities for young parents and their children, and have significant costs for states.

Even with the recent decline, about 45 percent of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, as reported by women themselves. Among women ages 20 to 24, approximately one in 12 experiences an unplanned pregnancy each year. And significant disparities in unplanned pregnancies remain between socioeconomic and racial and ethnic groups. The unplanned pregnancy rate among women living in poverty is more than five times higher than women with the highest incomes.

Pregnancy planning is also important for those who already have children. Among unmarried women in their 20s, 75 percent of unplanned pregnancies are among women who have already had at least one pregnancy.

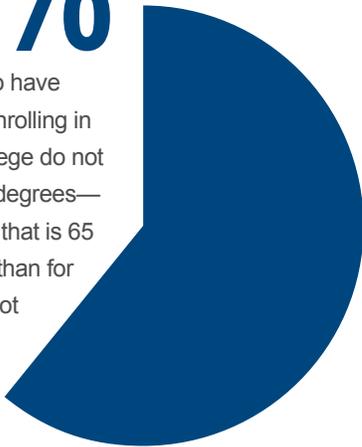
The story is similar for teens. Despite plummeting rates in recent years, approximately one in four teens will become pregnant at least once by age 20, and great disparities persist between race and ethnic groups, rural and urban teens, and age groups. Older teens (ages 18 to 19) are four times more likely to become parents than are younger teens (ages 15 to 17). In addition, the older teen birth rate is declining at a slower rate than the younger teen birth rate.

Older teens and young women in their early 20s are typically finishing high school and entering the job market, or pursuing postsecondary education. Delaying or planning for children can help young people achieve their goals for their education, career and family.

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61%

of students who have children after enrolling in community college do not complete their degrees—an attrition rate that is 65 percent higher than for those who do not have children during college.



\$12 billion

The annual cost in publicly funded medical care for unplanned pregnancies among women of all ages.

Costs and Consequences

- Teen and unplanned pregnancy can have short- and long-term effects for family economic success, as well as child health and well-being. Teen and unplanned births also incur significant costs to states in areas such as health care, foster care and criminal justice.
- Teen childbearing cost federal, state and local taxpayers at least \$9.4 billion in 2010.
- Teen mothers, on average, have lower educational attainment and are more likely to live in poverty compared to their peers. In fact, nearly half of teen mothers ages 15 to 19 have incomes below the poverty line.
- Women with an unplanned pregnancy are less likely to receive prenatal care, increasing the risk of premature birth.
- Children born as a result of an unplanned pregnancy have poorer health, on average, compared to other children.

By the Numbers

72% of all teen births are to older teens (ages 18-19).

45% of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned.

Impact on Education

Unplanned pregnancy can disrupt young people's educational and career goals, limit earning potential, and affect their children's health and educational outcomes. New responsibilities, demands on time and financial stress that can be associated with an unplanned pregnancy or having another child can make it more difficult to achieve educational goals.

As postsecondary education is increasingly important in the competitive job market, curtailed educational attainment is likely to limit the career and earning potential of young parents, putting them and their families at increased risk of living below the poverty line and having poor health outcomes. This leads to costs for states, as well, in public assistance programs and lost tax revenue.

Data support the challenges that teens and young women with an unplanned pregnancy face in reaching their educational goals. Only about half of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by age 22. Eighty-two percent of community college students report that it would be more challenging to reach their goals if they had a child while in school. Nationally, nearly one in 10 female community college students drops out because of unplanned motherhood.

There are also significant intergenerational effects. Children born as a result of an unplanned pregnancy have poorer measures of behavioral and educational success, compared to their peers. Sixty-six percent of children born to teen parents earn a high school diploma, compared to 81 percent of children not born to a teen mother.

Policy Options

Due to the high costs of unplanned pregnancy for young women, families and states, reducing such pregnancies can help create economic opportunity. State leaders may wish to consider the following policy options for preventing teen and unplanned pregnancy:

- **Invest in evidence-based programs.** Since 2010, the federal government has provided grants to support evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs through the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP) and the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). State leaders may look to the evidence-based policies and program models supported by the two initiatives as examples of effective interventions to address teen pregnancy in their communities.

- **Integrate pregnancy planning and prevention into human services, education, workforce and other initiatives** that support youth and young families. For example, ensure that programs focused on supporting young parents, including home visiting programs, also focus on helping delay or space a subsequent pregnancy. In addition, ensure that young people transitioning out of foster care receive relevant information and health care to help them avoid unplanned pregnancy.

- **Ensure access to information and services.** Lack of relevant knowledge about how to prevent pregnancy, as well as lack of access to effective prevention services, are frequent barriers to preventing unplanned pregnancy. Mississippi and Arkansas recently enacted innovative policies to address these challenges by requiring community colleges and public universities to develop a plan to address unplanned pregnancy on their campuses. The plans include efforts such as incorporating information on unplanned pregnancy into courses, conducting public awareness campaigns and increasing student access to health services. In addition, at least 19 states and the District of Columbia allow Medicaid to reimburse for long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC) immediately postpartum, which can help prevent a subsequent unplanned pregnancy.

- **Focus efforts on groups with the greatest need.** State leaders may wish to identify the disparities in unplanned pregnancy in their communities, in order to maximize scarce resources and ensure that efforts address groups most in need of services. For example, states may choose to focus programs or other efforts in rural regions, which often have higher teen birth rates than urban and suburban areas, or where there may be unique health care access challenges. Mississippi and Arkansas' recent policies also targeted age groups with the highest teen pregnancy rates by focusing on college campuses.

Resources

- **NCSL Teen Pregnancy Prevention**
www.ncsl.org/Default.aspx?TabId=23141
- **The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy**
www.thenationalcampaign.org