



Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

BACKGROUND

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Family Structure and Children's Well-Being

New to the report this year is a special section presenting five indicators of child well-being analyzed by family structure. The indicators are: percentage of births that are low and very low birthweight; death rates among infants; percentage of adolescents ages 15-17 enrolled in school; percentage of adolescents ages 15-17 reported to be in excellent or very good health; and percentage of adolescent girls who became unmarried birthmothers by ages 17-19.

Information provided in these indicators shows that children with married parents fare better, on average, on many outcomes than children who do not live with their two married parents, explained Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary For Children And Families.

“Statistics in this report show there are differences in the well-being of children when family structure is examined,” Dr. Horn said.

Dr. Horn stressed that the majority of children will do well regardless of the structure of their families. He added that, because family structure is correlated with children's well-being, teachers, physicians and other professionals would do well to take family structure into account when evaluating the needs of the children they serve.

According to Dr. Horn, the special section examines family structure with regard to infant well-being, showing: 7 percent of births to married mothers in 2002 were low birthweight, compared with 10 percent of births to unmarried mothers; the mortality rate for infants born to married mothers was 5 per 1,000 live births in 2002, compared with 10 per 1,000 live births for infants born to unmarried mothers.

Moreover, the special section also provided an opportunity to look at family structure of females ages 15-17 and the likelihood that they would become unmarried teenage mothers by ages 17-19. The data showed that 2 percent of females who lived with their married biological parents at ages 15-17 became unmarried mothers by age 17-19, compared with 9 percent of those who lived with a single parent at ages 15-17 and 27 percent of those who did not live with either parent at ages 15-17.