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Sources of Support for Adolescent Mothers

A CBO STUDY

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CBO STUDY ON ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

Concerns about the economic and social problems of teenage mothers and their children and about the budgetary effects of young parents' reliance on public assistance have made adolescent pregnancy and parenthood increasingly important public policy issues in recent years. A new CBO study, *Sources of Support for Adolescent Mothers*, examines the sources of income, both private and public, used by young mothers and their families. It also evaluates their overall economic well-being and outlines strategies that might be used to address their problems.

Although the share of teenage women who give birth each year fell during the 1960s and 1970s and has been stable over the last decade, births to unmarried teenagers have become increasingly common. In 1988, two-thirds of the teenagers giving birth were single, compared with less than one-third in 1970. Because single teenage mothers face greater difficulties than do young married mothers, this trend has worsened the problems associated with adolescent motherhood.

Many teenage mothers have severely limited economic resources to support themselves and their families. During their early years of motherhood, nearly half have incomes below the poverty line, and of those who are single and living with only their children, almost 90 percent are poor. Because they generally have few private resources, many adolescent mothers rely on assistance from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. About half receive AFDC at some time within five years after first giving birth, but their time on the program is generally short, with half getting benefits for less than one year.

Two broad approaches are available for dealing with the problems of adolescent motherhood. The first would use a variety of services and educational programs to encourage teenagers to delay having children. The second would provide services and programs to improve the well-being of young mothers and their families. Because the problems are complex and interrelated, a wide range of policies would probably be required, but even a comprehensive set of policies might take some time to have a significant impact.

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SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

The Congress of the United States
Congressional Budget Office

PREFACE

Concern about the social and economic problems of young mothers and their children has focused attention on the need to improve their ability to support themselves and to reduce their dependence on public assistance. In response to a request from the Committee on Ways and Means, this study examines the sources of private and public support used by teenage mothers and considers various policies that might be used to address their problems. In accordance with the Congressional Budget Office's mandate to provide objective and impartial analysis, this study contains no recommendations.

Gina C. Adams, formerly of CBO's Human Resources and Community Development Division (HRCD), and Roberton C. Williams of HRCD wrote the report under the direction of Nancy M. Gordon, Bruce Vavrichek, and Martin D. Levine. Many people provided useful comments on earlier drafts of this study, including Douglas J. Besharov, Deborah Colton, Frances Lussier, Kristin A. Moore, Janice Peskin, Wendell Primus, Freya Sonenstein, and Walter E. Williams; Daniel Koretz provided advice on the analytic methods. Invaluable programming assistance, was provided by Roald F. Euller, Eileen J. Griffin, Jodi L. Korb, Tahirih Senne, and Karen E. Smith. Sherry Snyder edited the manuscript. Ronald L. Moore and Norma A. Leake typed portions of various drafts, and Kathryn Quattrone prepared the paper for publication.

Robert D. Reischauer
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SUMMARY

Adolescent pregnancy and parenthood have become increasingly important public policy issues in recent years for many reasons, including concerns about their prevalence, about the economic and social problems faced by young mothers and their children, and about the budgetary effects of adolescent parents' reliance on public assistance programs. Much of the discussion of these issues has occurred with inadequate information about the sources of income, both private and public, used by young mothers and their families. This paper examines some of the private and public resources available to these young mothers, as well as the overall economic well-being of their families. This information should be useful in evaluating and modifying existing strategies--and in developing new strategies--to improve the well-being of young mothers and their children.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH EARLY PARENTHOOD

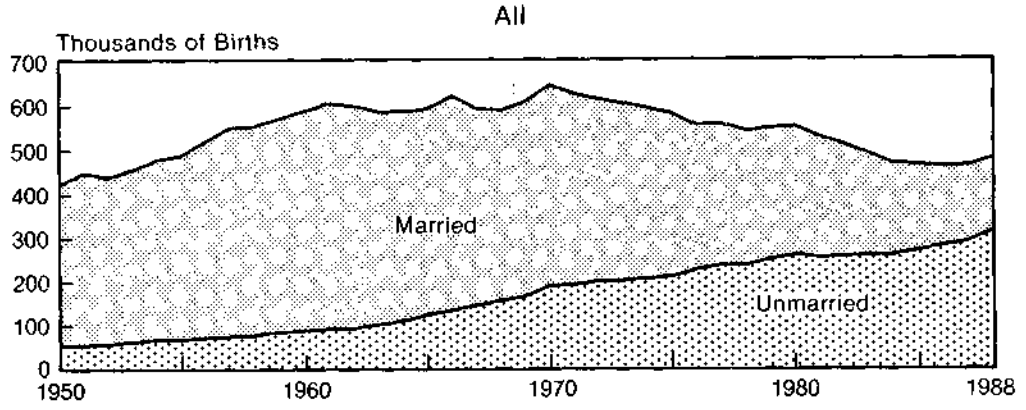
Although much of the concern about early parenthood has been based on the belief that the problem has grown rapidly, teenage pregnancy and birth rates have, in fact, remained roughly stable in recent years. After rising during the 1970s, teenage pregnancy rates leveled off during the 1980s with about 10 percent of young women ages 15 to 19 becoming pregnant each year. In combination with the declining teenage population overall and an increase in the abortion rate during the 1970s, this leveling yielded a drop of more than 25 percent in the number of births to adolescents between 1970 and 1988 (see the Summary Figure). Over the same period, however, the fraction of births to unmarried teenage women more than doubled, from about 30 percent to 65 percent. This greater likelihood of young mothers being unmarried has increased the prevalence of problems associated with adolescent motherhood, including lower educational attainment than mothers who delay childbearing, inadequate job skills, and a high probability of being poor.

Like all adolescents and young adults, young mothers are in the process of making a transition from childhood, which implies dependency on parents or others, to adulthood and eventual self-sufficiency. In this process, the young mother relies on a changing mix of private resources and, in many cases, public assistance to support herself and her family.

PRIVATE SOURCES OF INCOME

A young mother has three potential sources of private income: her parents and other relatives, her husband or the father of her children, and her own earnings. While information on these different kinds of income is limited, a general picture can be drawn by examining data about young women during their early years of motherhood. The data for the analysis discussed in this section come from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys (CPS). The sample comprises mothers under age 25 who first had children when they were teenagers, during the five years preceding the surveys.

Summary Figure.
Births to Women Ages 15 to 19, By Marital Status, 1950-1988



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States*, various years.

The private resources available to and used by a young mother depend heavily on her marital status and living arrangements. Although the marital status and living arrangements of young mothers tend to change over time, more than 90 percent of young mothers in the CPS sample fell into three combinations: 42 percent were married and living with only their husbands and children; 28 percent were single and living with their parents or other relatives; and 21 percent were single and living with their children in their own homes. These groups rely on different sources of income for their economic well-being.

Assistance from Parents and Other Relatives

Many young mothers rely on their parents or other relatives for assistance. In 1986 and 1987, about one-third of young mothers in the CPS sample still lived with adult relatives other than their husbands. They were particularly likely to live with relatives if they were not married, if they were under age 18 when their children were born, or if their children were still very young. For example, more than half of the young unmarried mothers in the CPS sample lived with their parents or other relatives, compared with less than one-tenth of young married mothers. Furthermore, black mothers were more likely to live with relatives than were their white counterparts, even taking marital status into account.

By sharing living quarters with parents and other relatives, these mothers were probably able to benefit from the incomes of others in the household, as well as, in some cases, to contribute to the family's income themselves. They also were likely to receive in-kind support from the relatives with whom they lived, generally in the form of shared housing, food, and child care. Although there is little information on the benefits and drawbacks of this living arrangement, available data suggest that young mothers were more likely to continue their schooling if they lived with relatives than if they had their own households. It is unclear, however, whether this situation occurred because it is easier for mothers to stay in school if they live with relatives or because mothers who want to continue their education are more likely to choose to live with relatives.

Assistance from Husbands or Absent Fathers

A young mother may also receive support from her husband, if she is married, or from the absent father of her children. The type and extent of the support received from this source, however, varies according to the mother's marital status and living arrangement. In particular, a young mother is much more likely to receive significant and regular support from a husband with whom she lives (who may or may not be the father of her child), than from an absent father. Because of this difference, the two groups are analyzed separately.

Support from Husbands. In 1986 and 1987, just under half of all young mothers were married and living with their husbands. This fraction varied from about one-third of young mothers who first gave birth within the previous year to 55 percent of mothers whose oldest children were four or five years old.

The extent of the support available to young mothers from their husbands varies by the husbands' characteristics--such as age, employment status, and educational attainment--that affect their ability to support their families. The majority of these husbands are in their early twenties, and three-quarters are employed. They may, however, have more limited earning ability than their peers who have delayed taking on the responsibility of a family. In particular, the young fathers tend to have less education than their counterparts without children, and may therefore be less able to earn enough to support their families. Nearly 40 percent are high school dropouts and only 15 percent have attended college, compared with 15 percent and 40 percent, respectively, of all men in their twenties. Not surprisingly, fathers under age 20 and those who have not attended college are somewhat less likely to have jobs.

Support from Absent Fathers. Just over half of young mothers were not married in 1986 and 1987, and about three-fourths of this group had never been married. Because absent fathers cannot generally be identified with existing data, information about them is scant, and what little is known from special studies is probably not representative of absent fathers more generally. The following observations should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Studies suggest that roughly half of absent fathers maintain contact with their children and that many provide both financial aid and in-kind resources such as food, clothing, and child care, particularly during the first few years after their children are born. Some absent fathers also pay court-mandated child support payments, although mothers who were never married are much less likely to receive such aid--and to get smaller payments when they do--than are their counterparts who were previously married. Furthermore, the low levels of support provided by some absent fathers may be related to their own inadequate resources. These fathers tend to have less education, to have higher unemployment rates, and to rely on parents or other relatives for their own support.

Self-Support

Young mothers appear to be less able to support themselves and their families than older mothers who delayed having children. In the CPS sample, they generally had fewer years of schooling, more limited job skills, and less work experience, all of which lead to lower wages. Compounding these problems are their responsibilities of caring for young children, a further constraint on employment. Not surprisingly, therefore, only one-third of young mothers had employment as their major activity in 1986 and 1987. Younger mothers were less likely to be employed and more likely to be in school than those who were older: 13 percent of those under age 18 worked and 40 percent were in school in 1986 and 1987, compared with 35 percent and 3 percent, respectively, of mothers in their early twenties. Finally, married mothers were more likely to work and less likely to be in school than single mothers, in part because they were generally older and in part because single mothers were more likely to live with relatives, who may have provided both financial support and child care and thus have made continued schooling a viable option.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Because adolescent mothers often have limited private resources, many of them receive public assistance--primarily Aid to Families

with Dependent Children (AFDC)--during their first few years of motherhood. An examination of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) reveals patterns of young mothers' entries into and exits from the AFDC program.

About half of all adolescent mothers in the NLSY sample received AFDC benefits sometime during the five years after they first gave birth. The timing of entries and patterns of receipt varied, however, with the mother's marital status at the time of her child's birth and her race. Mothers who were single when they had children were much more likely than their married counterparts to enter the AFDC program during their initial years of motherhood, probably because AFDC is more readily available to unmarried mothers and because their family incomes were lower than those of their married counterparts. About half of the single mothers received benefits during the first year after giving birth and over three-fourths received aid sometime during their first five years of motherhood, compared with less than one-tenth and one-fourth, respectively, of married mothers. Black mothers were twice as likely as whites to begin getting AFDC, although much of the difference between the two races appears to result from their different marital patterns.

These young mothers also tend to leave the program fairly quickly, although some subsequently resume getting benefits. Nearly half of all adolescent mothers getting AFDC stopped receiving benefits for at least a three-month period within one year of their entry, and nearly three-fourths left the program within three years. Again, exit rates varied with marital status and race. Nearly 40 percent of recipients who were not married when their children were born left the program within one year and more than 70 percent left within four years, compared with about 70 percent and 90 percent, respectively, of their married counterparts. Blacks stayed on the program longer than whites: two-thirds of blacks left within four years compared with four-fifths of whites. Again, however, much of this difference appears to result from the higher marriage rates among whites. Exit rates of younger mothers who did not marry during the survey years were similar for blacks and whites.

The net effect of the entries into and exits from the AFDC program was that a fairly constant proportion of young mothers--between 27 percent and 30 percent--received AFDC during each of the early years after they first gave birth. The AFDC participation rate for mothers who were unmarried when they gave birth was also nearly constant at just under 50 percent in each year. The rate for married mothers, however, was somewhat less stable: while 7 percent of them received AFDC during the first year after giving birth, the fraction doubled to 14 percent by the fourth year, probably as a result of separations and divorces. Participation rates were higher for black teenage mothers than for whites, and for younger adolescent mothers (those who were ages 15 to 17 when their children were born) than for older teenage mothers; however, these differences narrow significantly when the marital status of the two groups is taken into account.

THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF YOUNG MOTHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Young mothers use several sources of income and in-kind support in the first years of parenthood. While the individual sources of support are of interest, of greater importance are the cumulative effects of all sources of income on the economic well-being of young mothers and their families.

Young mothers are likely to be poor during the first few years after they have children, particularly those who are unmarried and living with only their children. Almost half of adolescent mothers had family cash incomes below the poverty line in 1985 and 1986--just over $600 per month for a mother with one child--and nearly two-thirds were below one and one-half times poverty. Married mothers who lived with only their husbands and children had a poverty rate of about 28 percent, about one-third of the 81 percent poverty rate of unmarried mothers living with only their children. Living with relatives sharply reduced the likelihood of being poor: unmarried mothers who lived with relatives had a poverty rate of 34 percent based on the cash income of the extended family unit--less than half that of their counterparts who did not live with relatives.

The economic well-being of a young family depends heavily on the employment status of the mother--and father (or husband), if present. Almost two-thirds of young families in which neither the mother nor father worked were poor in 1985 and 1986, compared with about one-fourth of families in which at least one parent worked. The situation was even worse for young families in certain marital and living arrangements: among unmarried mothers living with only their children, for example, over 60 percent of those who worked were poor, as were nearly 90 percent of those without jobs.

APPROACHES TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

Federal policies addressing the problems associated with adolescent motherhood might follow two approaches: policies to reduce the incidence of births to teenagers, thus avoiding the problems, and policies to increase the resources of young mothers. Because the problems faced by teenage mothers are complex and interrelated, a wide range of policies would probably be required to address them. Even in combination, however, the effectiveness of policies may be limited, particularly in the short run. Furthermore, determining whether individual approaches would work may be difficult, and the choice of appropriate policies might in some cases have to be based on common sense and expert advice, rather than on concrete evidence about their effectiveness.

Perhaps the most direct way to address the problems faced by young mothers would be to reduce the incidence of teenage parenthood. Instilling in young women the sense that their lives will be better if they delay childbearing, for example, could be accomplished by providing more positive experiences through improved educational services and work opportunities. An alternative approach would involve family life courses that provide sexuality education and help teenagers understand the issues they will face as young adults. Family planning services, including information about and wider availability of contraceptives, could reduce teen pregnancy rates. Studies have found that such services are effective and have little impact on sexual activity. Finally, for young women who become pregnant, expanded counseling services providing information about the full range of options--from abortion to adoption to rearing the child--could help

teenagers make the emotionally and morally difficult decisions about how to deal with their pregnancies.

Many of the problems of adolescent parenthood could be eased if young mothers had more resources available to support their families. This goal might be accomplished through programs to improve the mother's earning ability, to raise the amount of support provided by young fathers or other relatives, or to expand the benefits offered by federal and state governments.

Programs offering education, training, and job experience, as well as providing services such as child care or transportation that are needed by many mothers who work, could improve the earning ability of young mothers. The Family Support Act of 1988 addressed some of these needs, but it is too early to assess its effectiveness. Comprehensive programs that offer a range of services, including education, child care, medical and nutritional advice and aid, employment and training opportunities, and family planning services, could mitigate the problems of teenage motherhood while providing the skills necessary for independence.

Various policies could increase support from fathers and other relatives. The Family Support Act of 1988 enacted policies, not all of which are yet in place, that should increase the amount of child support young mothers receive from the absent fathers of their children. Many young fathers, however, themselves have inadequate incomes and are unable to provide much support for their families. Education, training, and employment assistance programs could improve their earning ability. Support from other relatives appears most likely to be obtained by young mothers who live with those relatives. Policies that encourage such living arrangements--for example, by requiring young welfare recipients to live with their parents or offering favorable tax treatment in such situations--could increase the likelihood that young mothers receive this kind of aid.

A final means of raising the incomes of young mothers would be to increase federal or state welfare benefits. Many approaches are available, including establishing national minimum benefit levels above current standards, liberalizing the deductions allowed for families

with earnings, and providing higher benefits to families during an initial period of receipt. A major difficulty with such policies would be the unavoidable conflict between providing larger benefits and maintaining incentives to work and become self-sufficient.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Over the last four decades, the birthrate among teenage women has declined markedly, from about 80 births per thousand women in 1950 to just over 50 births per thousand women in 1988. During the same period, however, the fraction of adolescent mothers who were not married when they first gave birth more than quadrupled, from under 15 percent to 65 percent. This trend has caused increasing concern, primarily because of the many difficulties young mothers and their families are likely to face, but also because of the costs that they may impose on society in both the short run and long run.

Women who have children during their teenage years are likely to have multiple problems. Most young mothers today are not married when they first have children, and many of those who are married do not stay married. Young mothers generally have less education and experience in the labor force than their peers who delay childbirth, and consequently tend to have lower earning power. These factors combine to leave young mothers and their families with inadequate incomes, the difficulties associated with those low incomes, and few means by which to improve their situations.

The children of teenage mothers are also likely to encounter problems that are either directly or indirectly related to their mothers' age. For example, because they are more likely to have low birthweights, babies of adolescent mothers are at greater risk of health problems--including infant mortality--than are the infants of older mothers. In addition, the children of teenage mothers are at greater risk of developmental difficulties that affect learning. They also appear to be more likely to have behavior problems. Over the longer run, children of young mothers are themselves more likely than other children to become teenage parents.

From society's perspective, the likelihood that adolescent mothers will need federal and state assistance for lengthy periods--and that

their children will have problems that society must address--is of concern, because of the costs both to taxpayers and to the individuals themselves. Furthermore, the dependence of many young mothers on government aid violates widely held principles stressing the importance of self-reliance.

Despite these concerns, relatively little is known about how teenage mothers support themselves during their early years of parenthood. These young women appear to rely on a patchwork system of private and public sources of income. The private support includes assistance from parents or other relatives, support from husbands or fathers of the children, and the young mothers' own earnings. Public support comes from federal and state welfare programs, most notably Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) for cash assistance and food stamps and housing subsidies for in-kind aid.

These patterns of support and dependency have implications for modifying existing strategies and developing new strategies to improve the well-being of young mothers and their children. Government efforts could focus on delaying pregnancies and births to teenagers, thus reducing the need for assisting adolescent mothers. Alternatively, policies could be directed toward increasing the incomes young mothers receive from private sources. Offering assistance in completing school, acquiring job skills, and finding employment could raise the earnings of teenage mothers. Other strategies could be used to improve the support provided by absent fathers, including efforts to ensure that financially able fathers pay child support as well as policies to raise the incomes of poor fathers so they can provide more support. In addition, welfare programs might be modified, either to improve the incentives for young mothers to obtain help from private sources or to increase the level of benefits provided.[1]

1. The Family Support Act of 1988 addressed some of these issues. Because the data used in this analysis are for periods before the provisions of the act went into effect, the analysis reveals nothing about its effectiveness.

This paper investigates the economic well-being of young mothers and their families by examining their social and economic circumstances during the years immediately after first having children. The remainder of this chapter reviews recent trends in adolescent pregnancy and parenthood and considers some of the problems associated with early parenthood. Subsequent chapters explore in more detail the private and public sources of income. The final chapter discusses the economic well-being of young mothers and their families, and the implications for government policy.

RECENT TRENDS IN ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND PARENTHOOD

Several important changes in the patterns of pregnancy and parenthood among adolescent women have occurred in recent decades. Although pregnancy rates rose through the 1970s before leveling out in the 1980s, the number of births to teenagers has fallen steadily since 1970 because of both a decline in the teenage population and a drop in the birthrate as a result of a rise in the abortion rate. At the same time, however, an increasing fraction of teenagers having babies were unmarried. Here, and throughout this report, teenagers--or, interchangeably, adolescents--are people ages 15 to 19.

The pregnancy rate of teenage women rose steadily through the 1970s, from 95 pregnancies per thousand women in 1972--the first year for which data are available--to about 110 per thousand in any year during the 1980s (see Figure 1).[2] This rate is much higher than the rates in comparable industrialized nations. One study found that, in 1981, 24 percent of 18-year-old women and 44 percent of 20-year-old women had experienced at least one pregnancy.[3]

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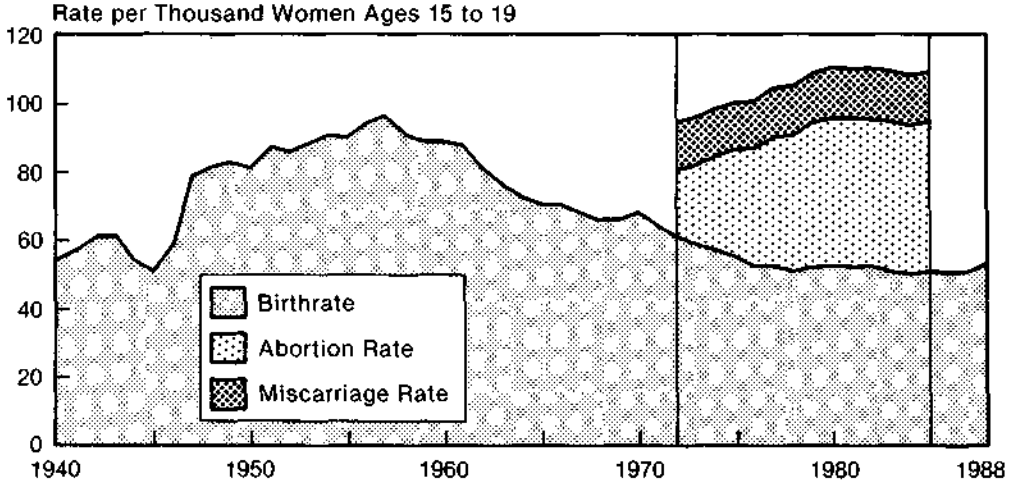
2. The most recent data on teenage pregnancies, miscarriages, and abortions are for 1985. Data on births through 1988 are available.

3. Jacqueline D. Forrest, "Proportion of U.S. Women Ever-Pregnant Before Age 20: A Research Note," unpublished manuscript, Alan Guttmacher Institute (1986), cited in Sandra L. Hofferth and Cheryl D. Hayes, eds., *Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing,* vol. II (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1987), Table 3.3, p. 420.

At the same time, the share of adolescent pregnancies that were ended by abortions rose rapidly during the 1970s--from 20 percent in 1972 to 39 percent in 1980. Like the pregnancy rate, the abortion rate also leveled off in the 1980s, however, and in 1985, 40 percent of pregnant teenagers were having abortions. As a result, between 1970 and 1988, the birthrate of women ages 15 to 19 fell from 68 per thousand to 54 per thousand. As shown in Figure 1, this decline was a continuation of a downward trend in the teenage birthrate that began in the late 1950s: after rising from 54 births per thousand women in 1940 to a peak of 96 births per thousand in 1957, the birthrate has fallen steadily to just over 50 per thousand in recent years.

These trends, in combination with a declining number of teenage women, resulted in a substantial decline in the number of births to

Figure 1.
Adolescent Pregnancy Rates and Outcomes, Women Ages 15 to 19, 1940-1988



SOURCES: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States*, various years; and Stanley K. Henshaw and others, *Teenage Pregnancy in the United States: The Scope of the Problem and State Responses* (New York: Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1989).

NOTE: Abortion and miscarriage rates are not available for years before 1972 or for 1986 to 1988. The pregnancy rate equals the sum of the birthrate, the abortion rate, and the miscarriage rate, and is shown only for the period 1972 through 1985.

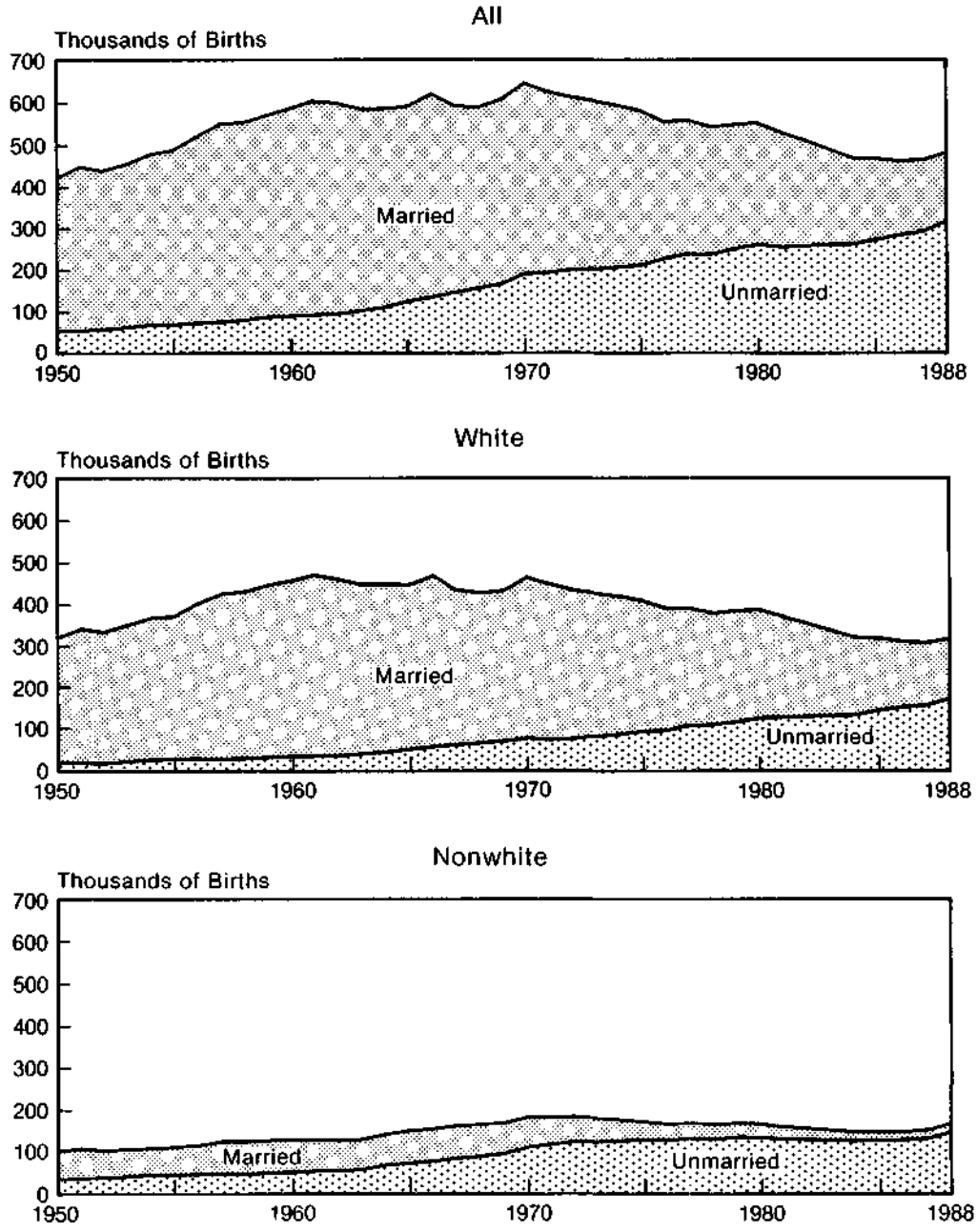
teenage women. Between 1970 and 1988, births to teenage mothers dropped by one-fourth, from 645,000 to 478,000.

At the same time, however, an increasing fraction of teenage women having babies were unmarried (see Figure 2). In 1950, less than 15 percent of births to adolescents were to single mothers; that fraction doubled to 30 percent by 1970, and doubled again to 65 percent in 1988. Two factors caused this trend: an increasing share of births to adolescent mothers resulted from premarital sexual activity, at the same time as a decreasing share of pregnant unmarried teenagers were marrying before giving birth. As a result, even though there were roughly the same number of births to teenage mothers in 1988 as in 1950, the number of births to unmarried teens was more than five times as great in the later year--312,000 versus 56,000. Furthermore, while total births to teenagers declined by about 25 percent between 1970 and 1988, the number of births to single teenage mothers increased by nearly two-thirds.

These trends were similar for both whites and nonwhites, although birthrates and the share of births to single women were substantially higher for nonwhites. (Rates for Hispanic teenagers, which are available only for recent years, were between those for whites and nonwhites.) After rising through the 1950s, the birthrates of both groups fell by about 40 percent between 1960 and 1988--from 79 per thousand to 44 per thousand for whites and from 158 per thousand to 95 per thousand for nonwhites. As was the case for all teenage mothers, fewer children were born to young mothers in both groups in the 1980s than in the 1970s, while a rising share of births was to single mothers (see Figure 2). Between 1950 and 1988, the proportion of births to single mothers increased from 6 percent to 53 percent for white adolescents, and from 36 percent to 88 percent for nonwhite adolescents.

As a result of these trends, in 1985 there were about 900,000 teenagers with at least one child. These young mothers accounted for approximately 10 percent of all female teenagers and about 7 percent of all mothers with children under age six.

Figure 2.
Births to Women Ages 15 to 19, By Marital Status and Race, 1950 to 1988



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States*, various years.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUNG FAMILIES

In 1986 and 1987, nearly half of teenage mothers were 19 years old, about two-thirds were white, and nearly 90 percent had only one child, as Table 1 shows. Similar patterns were apparent in 1989, the most recent year for which data are available. Although these characteristics help to describe young mothers, other factors may be more important in determining their well-being. The marital status and living

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS IN 1986 AND 1987 OF MOTHERS AGES 15 TO 19 LIVING WITH THEIR CHILDREN

Characteristic of Mother	Percent
Age	
15 or 16	10
17	17
18	27
19	46
Race[a]	
White	68
Black	30
Other	2
Number of Children	
One	88
Two	11
Three or More	1

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTE: This analysis is based on an unduplicated sample of young mothers who first gave birth while they were teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

a. Hispanic women are included in categories for whites and blacks.

arrangements of adolescent mothers and their children strongly influence the types of support available to them, while the mother's educational attainment affects her earning power. This section examines each of these factors and then assesses the economic status of young mothers and their families.

Marital Status and Living Arrangements

In 1986 and 1987, roughly one-third of mothers ages 15 to 19 were married and living with their husbands, while most of the rest had never been married. Four out of every five young married mothers lived with their husbands and children only. In contrast, young unmarried mothers were much more likely to live with their parents or other relatives; more than three-fourths were in that living arrangement (see Table 2).

The marital status and living arrangements of young mothers varied dramatically by race. Half of all white teenage mothers were married and living with their husbands, compared with just 6 percent of young black mothers. About three-fourths of these married mothers, both white and black, lived with only their husbands and children, while virtually all of the rest lived with their parents or other adult relatives. Teenage mothers who were separated from their husbands or not married--half of young white mothers and over 90 percent of blacks--were much more likely to live with relatives: two-thirds of unmarried or separated white mothers and five-sixths of their black counterparts had this living arrangement. Only 15 percent of white teenage mothers and 12 percent of black teenage mothers were single and living alone with their children.

Marital status and living arrangements also differed greatly by the age of the mother. Younger teenage mothers were less likely than their older counterparts to be married and were more likely to live with their parents or other relatives. These differences by age do not, however, explain the racial differences in marital status and living arrangements.

The marital status of young mothers changes markedly, particularly during the first few years of motherhood. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth indicate that 14 percent of single mothers married within 12 months of giving birth, and nearly one- third were married within three years. Single white mothers were far more likely to marry than were their black counterparts: 56 percent of white mothers married within four years, compared with only 17 percent of blacks.

TABLE 2. LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN 1986 AND 1987 OF ADOLESCENT MOTHERS (In percent)

	Married with Husband Present[a]		Other[b]	
	Living with Husband and Children Only	Living with Husband, Children, and Other Relatives	Living with Children Only	Living with Children and Other Relatives
All	29	7	14	46
Age				
15 to 17	21	6	5	64
18 to 19	32	8	17	39
Race[c]				
White	40	10	15	32
Black	5	2	12	78

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTES: Entries in each row do not sum to 100 percent because these data exclude the approximately 4 percent of adolescent mothers who live with unrelated adults.

This analysis is based on an unduplicated sample of young mothers who first gave birth while they were teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

a. Includes mothers with husbands in the armed forces, regardless of whether they live with their husbands.

b. Includes mothers who have never married and mothers who are divorced, separated, widowed, or married but not living with their husbands (except those with husbands in the armed forces).

c. Hispanic women are included in categories for whites and blacks. The "other" category is not included here because the sample of cases was small.

The marriages of adolescent mothers, however, are more likely to end in separation or divorce than are those of women who first gave birth when they were older. One study found that women who had children at ages 14 to 17 were four times as likely to separate or divorce within five years of marriage than were women who were age 20 or older when they became mothers.[4] At every age, married blacks were more likely than married whites to separate or to divorce. As a result, women who become mothers during their teenage years--and particularly black mothers--are more likely to spend some time as single parents than are women who delay childbearing, regardless of their marital status when they give birth.

Because of these changes in marital status, as well as accompanying changes in living arrangements, it is important to look not only at mothers in their teen years, but also at those a few years older. The balance of this study therefore focuses primarily on women who had children while they were teenagers, encompassing the period from the time they first gave birth until their oldest children turned age five. The analysis thus includes young mothers through age 24. In 1986 and 1987, over 90 percent of these mothers were in one of three marital status/living arrangements categories:

- 42 percent were married and living with only their husbands and children;
- 28 percent were single mothers living with their children and parents or other adult relatives; and
- 21 percent were single mothers living with their children in their own homes.[5]

4. James McCarthy and Jane Menken, "Marriage, Remarriage, Marital Disruption and Age at First Birth," *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January/February 1979).

5. These percentages differ from those in Table 2 because they are based on a different group of young mothers. Table 2 considers mothers who were ages 15 to 19 in 1986 and 1987, while these data refer to young mothers in 1986 and 1987 who first had children when they were teenagers during the preceding five years.

Educational Attainment

Mothers who first give birth when they are teenagers are more likely to drop out of school either before giving birth or shortly thereafter than are mothers who delay childbearing, although the fraction dropping out has declined in recent years. A recent study estimated that just over half of women who were ages 14 to 22 in 1979 and who first had children before they were 18 had graduated from high school by the mid-1980s, compared with three-fourths of those who first had children when they were 18 or 19 and over 90 percent of those who delayed childbearing into their twenties.[6] Because they are less likely to have finished high school, young mothers tend to have lower earnings than women who first had children when they were older.

The higher dropout rate of younger mothers seems to result in part from preexisting differences between adolescent mothers and those who delay childbearing. Studies suggest that school-age mothers are likely to have lower levels of basic academic skills and lower educational expectations even before they give birth than do young women of the same age who delay childbearing.[7] Furthermore, between one-fourth and one-third of the young mothers in one study had dropped out of high school before becoming pregnant, indicating that problems in school may have predated their pregnancy rather than being caused by it.[8]

Despite these preexisting differences, however, having a child while in high school appears to lower the likelihood that the mother will complete school. School attendance may decline because of child care responsibilities, the need to work to support a family, and other time constraints that make it difficult to study. These factors affect the probability of completing school for school-age mothers generally, but are especially important for young mothers who start off with low educational expectations and poor school records.

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6. Dawn M. Upchurch and James McCarthy, "Adolescent Childbearing and High School Completion in the 1980s: Have Things Changed?" *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol . 21, no. 5 (September/October 1989), p. 200.

7. See, for example, Hofferth and Hayes, *Risking the Future*, vol. II.

8. Hofferth and Hayes, *Risking the Future*, vol. II, p. 126.

In spite of these difficulties, many adolescent mothers eventually obtain diplomas or alternative forms of accreditation such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Roughly half of the young women in one study who were ages 15 to 17 when they gave birth obtained diplomas or GEDs by some time in their twenties, compared with about 77 percent of those who became mothers at age 19.[9] Many of these women delay education, however. A study of a small group of poor, mostly black, adolescent mothers found that more than half of the education they obtained after having children occurred more than five years after they first gave birth.[10]

The educational attainment of young mothers also varies with marital status and childbearing. School-age women who marry--and especially those who have children--are most likely to drop out of school. One study found that about 75 percent of married adolescent mothers dropped out of high school, compared with about 60 percent of married teenage women without children. Similarly, about half of single teenage mothers left school, compared with 8 percent of their counterparts without children.[11] Young black mothers appear to be less likely to drop out of school as a result of pregnancy than are young white mothers.

Economic Status

As a result of such factors as marital status, living arrangements, and educational attainment, over 40 percent of all young mothers who first had children as teenagers during the previous five years were in families with incomes below federal poverty thresholds in 1985 and 1986.[12]

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9. Frank L. Mott and William Marsiglio, "Early Childbearing and Completion of High School," *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 5 (September/October 1985), pp. 234-237.

10. Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., J. Brooks-Gunn, and S. Philip Morgan, *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 26.

11. Stephen Barro, "The Incidence of Dropping Out: A Descriptive Analysis," unpublished analysis of the High School and Beyond Survey, 1984, cited in Children's Defense Fund, *A Children's Defense Budget* (Washington, D.C.: CDF, 1987).

12. Federal poverty thresholds vary by family size and composition and are adjusted annually for inflation. The 1990 poverty thresholds are about $8,700 for a nonelderly family of two and roughly $10,350 for a family of three.

In contrast, young mothers who first had children when they were in their twenties had a poverty rate of 24 percent. Furthermore, adolescent mothers are likely to continue to have low incomes over time: 33 percent of mothers ages 25 to 29 who first gave birth when they were teenagers were poor in 1985 and 1986, compared with 15 percent of mothers of the same age who delayed childbearing.

The well-being of young mothers and their families varies, however, depending on whether the mothers are married and whether they live with other people. Young mothers who lived with their husbands fared the best in 1985 and 1986, with a poverty rate of 28 percent, roughly twice that of the population as a whole, but only about two-thirds that of all young mothers. Young single mothers who lived with adult relatives were somewhat worse off: 34 percent had incomes below the poverty level. In contrast, young unmarried mothers living with only their children were more than twice as likely to be poor, with 81 percent living in poverty.

The lower poverty rate of married mothers does not, however, imply that marriage would solve the economic problems of young mothers. The male partners whom young mothers did not marry are likely either to have lower earnings prospects than their counterparts who did marry or to be less willing to accept responsibility for their children.

Not surprisingly, young mothers and their families tend to be better off economically if at least one family member works, although employment does not guarantee that the family will not be poor. For example, among young married mothers living with only their husbands and their children, 21 percent of those in families with at least one worker were poor in 1985 and 1986, compared with 63 percent of those in families with no workers. Similarly, 66 percent of young unmarried mothers who lived with only their children and who worked had incomes below poverty, compared with 88 percent of their counterparts who did not have jobs.

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INTERPRETING THE RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The focus of this paper is on the economic resources available to and used by young mothers, and the correlations between those resources and the characteristics of the mothers receiving them. The analysis reports differences in incomes among mothers differentiated by age when they first gave birth, marital status, educational attainment, and race. The effects of these various characteristics on the support received by young mothers are difficult to disentangle. For example, mothers who first had children before the age of 18 are also less likely to be married than their older counterparts and may also have completed fewer years of school. It would therefore be incorrect to conclude that the support--or lack of support--received by such mothers results from their young age, because marital status and educational attainment probably also play a role in determining the sources and levels of their incomes.

Because of the high degree of correlation among characteristics of young mothers, it is impossible to determine the impact of an individual characteristic on a mother's well-being. In particular, statistics that correlate sources of support with a single characteristic such as race or marital status should not be construed as showing the pure effect of that characteristic.

Two other factors should be kept in mind when examining the results of this analysis. First, like all adolescents and young adults, young mothers are in the process of making a transition from childhood, which implies dependency on parents or others, to adulthood and eventual self-sufficiency. As the young mothers move through this process, their living arrangements, marital status, and sources of support are likely to change. Many of them rely on multiple sources of support, with the particular sources depending heavily on their living arrangements. The fact that this period is one of transition--and therefore change--is important in interpreting the findings.

Second, many of the problems faced by teenage mothers and their children may be associated with other factors that increase the likelihood of having economic and social difficulties. In fact, some of these basic factors such as poverty and educational problems may

themselves contribute to teenage childbearing. The same can be true of difficulties faced by the children of young mothers. Their health problems, for example, appear to be caused by the poor nutritional and health practices of adolescents in general, and not directly by the young age of their mothers. Other problems, such as potential learning and emotional difficulties, may arise from growing up in poverty, in single-parent families, or in families with inadequate education or limited resources. In simplest terms, poverty and associated problems, early childbearing, and the difficulties faced by young mothers and their families are intertwined in ways that may be impossible to sort out.

CHAPTER II

PRIVATE SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG MOTHERS

Few teenage mothers are able to support themselves and their children during the first few years of parenthood. Fewer than half have jobs, and more than half of those with jobs only work part-time. For some, attending school may preclude full-time employment; for others, the demands of child care leave little time to work outside the home. Furthermore, even if young mothers are working, their wages are likely to be low. Young adults generally have little work experience and few job skills, and young mothers may be even more limited in the jobs and wages they can command because many lack even basic academic skills. As a result, young mothers rely on a combination of private and public sources of support--including their own earnings, assistance from their parents or other relatives, support from their husbands or their children's absent fathers, and public assistance--to support themselves and their families.

This chapter examines the extent to which young mothers rely on private sources of support. Much of the analysis is based on a sample of young mothers in 1986 and 1987 from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The sample consists of women who first gave birth within five years prior to the survey, when they were teenagers.[1] Thus, these women may be up to 24 years old and their oldest children are under age five.

In reviewing this analysis, the reader should keep in mind that the characteristics of these mothers and their families relate to the time of the survey, not to the time they gave birth as teenagers. Many of the young mothers will have reached their twenties, married or divorced, left or returned to their parental homes, finished school, gotten jobs, or experienced some other change in their lives between giving birth and

1. The sources of the sample were the Current Population Surveys for March 1986 and March 1987. Half of the sample population surveyed for the CPS in March 1986 was also surveyed in March 1987. To avoid problems of duplication, the observations for 1986 were omitted for such cases.

responding to the survey. The analysis thus portrays adolescent mothers during the first few years after they have their babies, not just when they are teenage mothers.

ASSISTANCE FROM PARENTS AND OTHER RELATIVES

Many young mothers rely on their parents, in-laws, or other relatives for assistance, particularly during the first few years of their children's lives. This assistance takes many forms, including direct financial aid, in-kind support--such as shared housing, child care, and food--and emotional support. Unfortunately, except for the case of shared living arrangements, relatively little information is available about young mothers' access to and use of such assistance. This section examines the characteristics of young mothers who live with their parents or other relatives, the forms that familial assistance can take, and the relationships between aid from families and the educational attainment of young mothers.

Living with Parents or Other Relatives

Perhaps the most common form of assistance that young mothers receive from their families is a place to live. Many adolescent mothers live with their parents or other relatives both before and after having children. About three-fifths of teenage mothers interviewed for the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) lived with their parents or other relatives in the year before giving birth (see Table 3).[2] A significant share subsequently moved into their own households, but a large fraction continued to live with parents or other relatives after giving birth: nearly half did so during the first year, while more than one-third did so during the second year.[3]

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2. The NLSY provides longitudinal information on a sample of women who were ages 14 to 21 in 1979. See Chapter III for a further discussion of these data.

3. Because the NLSY data indicate living arrangements at only one point in time during any year, they may underestimate the mobility of young mothers. For example, some mothers who appear to have lived continuously with their parents may have moved out and returned between surveys.

TABLE 3. ADOLESCENT MOTHERS LIVING WITH PARENTS OR OTHER RELATIVES BEFORE AND AFTER GIVING BIRTH
(As a percentage of all adolescent mothers)

Characteristics of Mother at Birth of First Child	Living with Parents or Relatives		
	During Year Before Birth[a]	First Year Following Birth	Second Year Following Birth
All Mothers	62	47	37
Marital Status			
Married	42	22	16
Unmarried	84	74	58
Age			
15 to 17	76	57	50
18 to 19	54	40	28
Marital Status and Age			
Married			
15 to 17	57	21	26
18 to 19	34	23	12
Unmarried			
15 to 17	92	82	67
18 to 19	78	65	49
Race			
White	54	36	25
Black	87	78	71
Marital Status and Race			
Married			
White	41	22	16
Black	62	39	32
Unmarried			
White	80	66	44
Black	91	83	75

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTE: This analysis is based on a sample of adolescent women who first gave birth between 1978 and 1983. Each mother was interviewed during the specified period.

a. These percentages exclude mothers who first had children in 1978, because it was not possible to observe their living arrangements before their children were born.

Young mothers who were married were less likely to live with parents or other relatives either before or after their children were born. For example, by the second year after giving birth, only 16 percent of the young mothers who were married when their children were born lived with parents or other relatives, compared with almost 60 percent of the young mothers who were not married when they gave birth. Furthermore, many young mothers who were separated or divorced from their husbands apparently moved back into their parental household, at least for a short time. Almost one-third of separated or previously married mothers in the CPS sample lived with their parents or other relatives. Although the data do not tell whether these young mothers had lived away from their parents' homes during their marriage, they probably did--90 percent of young married couples have their own households.

Living arrangements also vary with the mother's age and race. Like most young adults, adolescent mothers were less likely to live with their parents as they got older. While this resulted in part from the higher marriage rates of older mothers, differences remained even after marital status was taken into account. Young black mothers were more likely than their white counterparts to remain in their parental household during the first few years after giving birth, although the fact that fewer young black mothers were married explains some of the difference.

Another factor in a young mother's decision to live with her parents or relatives is their willingness and ability to provide such support. Although relatively little is known about this issue, one study of a small number of low-income, mostly black, adolescent mothers in Baltimore found that young mothers were more likely to live with their parents after giving birth if they had a close relationship with their parents before their pregnancies, if their parents' homes were not overcrowded, and if their parents had higher incomes.[4]

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4. Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Albert G. Crawford, "Family Support: Helping Teenage Mothers to Cope," *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 10, no. 6 (November/December 1978), pp. 329-330. Because this study was based on a group of low-income black teenagers who had their children in the late 1960s, these findings may not be representative of current behavior of adolescent mothers overall.

Other Forms of Familial Assistance

Although there are no national data describing familial assistance to young mothers other than shared housing, some studies suggest that assistance such as direct financial aid or in-kind support is common. For example, the Baltimore study found that almost two-thirds of the single mothers living with their families, and one-third of the married mothers living with their husbands and with parents or other relatives, reported receiving nonfinancial contributions other than shared housing from their families. In contrast, only about one-tenth of young mothers living in their own homes reported such assistance. A study by Zitner and Miller found that more than half of adolescent mothers in their sample--three-fourths of whom lived with parents or other relatives--reported receiving nonfinancial assistance such as child care, clothing, furniture, and food from their parents, and half reported receiving financial assistance.[5] Data from these small studies may not, however, reflect the experiences of adolescent mothers more generally.

Other than housing, child care appears to be the most common form of in-kind assistance provided by parents and other relatives. In the Baltimore study, for example, more than 40 percent of the single mothers who lived with their parents and one-third of young mothers with their own households reported that family members provided at least one-half of their child care. Zitner and Miller found that more than half of their sample reported receiving help with child care from their parents, and approximately one-quarter reported such assistance from other relatives.

The Effects of Familial Support on Educational Attainment

While receiving familial assistance probably helps a young mother's well-being in many ways, a lack of adequate data makes it difficult to evaluate many of the effects of this support. One can, however,

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5. Rosalind Zitner and Shelby H. Miller, *Our Youngest Parents: A Study of the Use of Support Services by Adolescent Mothers* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, Inc., 1980), p. 18. The study did not report differences in receipt of such assistance between young mothers living with parents or other relatives and those living in their own homes.

examine the relationships between shared living arrangements and the educational attainment of young mothers.

Young mothers who live with their parents after giving birth are less likely to drop out of school than those who have their own homes. For example, a study of adolescent welfare recipients in Chicago found that those who did not live with their parents were twice as likely to experience a disruption in their education as young mothers who lived in their parents' homes, even controlling for other factors such as marital status.[6] Because more schooling is associated with better employment prospects and higher future earnings, this pattern could have long-term effects on the young mother's ability to be self-supporting.

There are several possible explanations of why young mothers who live at home are less likely to drop out of school. On the one hand, having less need to work or having help with child care may make continued schooling easier. On the other hand, the causality could be reversed: young mothers who want to remain in school may be more likely to stay in their parental homes so they can receive family support. Or both conditions may result from a third factor: having supportive parents or a positive home atmosphere may lead to both a young mother's decision to live with her family and her decision to stay in school. Unfortunately, adequate data are not available to test these competing hypotheses.

SUPPORT FROM HUSBANDS AND CHILDREN'S FATHERS

The father of her child can be an important source of support for a young mother. The amount of assistance provided and its effect on the young mother's economic well-being differ substantially, however, depending on whether the father is married to and lives with the mother. This difference appears to have two causes. First, a father who is married to and lives with his child's mother generally provides direct support to his family by sharing financial and in-kind resources.

6. Mark F. Testa, Pat W. Mosena, and Linda K. Bowen, "The Social Support of Adolescent Mothers: A Longitudinal Survey of Young Parents onWelfare" (final report to the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, Department of Health and Human Services, December 1986).

In contrast, an absent father is much less likely to give any assistance at all, and what he does provide is either irregular and informal, or is court-ordered child support.

Second, whether a young mother is married is itself related to more basic characteristics that are also associated with higher levels of private income. For example, when compared with their single counterparts, young married mothers tend to be older, to have been older when they gave birth, to have finished high school, and to be white--characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of having adequate support.

The marital status of many adolescent mothers changes in their early years of motherhood, regardless of whether they were married when their children were born. While most young mothers are not married when they first give birth, they are increasingly likely to be married in succeeding years. Nearly 60 percent of young mothers in the CPS sample whose oldest children were under one year old had never been married, compared with only one-fourth whose oldest children were ages four or five (see Table 4). The fraction of young mothers who were married and living with their husbands rises steadily over time, from about one-third of those whose oldest children under age one to more than half of those with oldest children ages four or five. Marital break-ups also increase sharply over time: nearly one-fifth of all young mothers--and one-fourth of those who had married--were divorced or separated when their oldest children were ages four or five.

A lack of adequate data makes analyzing support from fathers difficult. CPS data do not identify either absent fathers or fathers who live with their children and their children's mothers but are not married to the mothers. Furthermore, the husbands of young mothers can only be assumed to be fathers of the children, since the children could have come from earlier relationships. Because of these limitations of the data--and because of the different levels of support coming from coresident and absent fathers--the following analysis is in two parts. The first uses CPS data to examine the characteristics of the husbands of young mothers as proxies for coresident fathers to determine their ability to provide support. The second part uses the limited

information from various sources to study the assistance that young mothers get from their children's absent fathers.

Many of the fathers are older than the teenage mothers, and are not themselves adolescents when their children are born. Among cases where the father's age is reported, the majority of fathers of children born to adolescent mothers are in their early twenties.

TABLE 4. MARITAL STATUS IN 1986 AND 1987 OF WOMEN WHO FIRST GAVE BIRTH AS TEENAGERS DURING THE PRECEDING FIVE YEARS, BY AGE OF OLDEST CHILD (In percent)

Marital Status of Young Mother	Age of Oldest Child				
	Less Than One Year	One Year	Two Years	Three Years	Four or Five Years
Married with Husband Present[a]	36	41	44	47	55
Divorced or Married with Husband Absent[b]	5	9	11	14	18
Never Married	59	50	45	39	27

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTE: This analysis is based on an unduplicated sample of young mothers who first gave birth while they were teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

a. Includes mothers with husbands in the armed forces, regardless of whether they live with their husbands.

b. Includes the few young mothers who are widowed.

Support Available from the Husbands of Young Mothers

Although about one-half of adolescent mothers are married within five years after they first give birth, little is known about their husbands. This section uses the CPS sample to examine some of the characteristics of these men that are associated with their ability to help support their families, as well as their employment status.

Both age and educational attainment, which should in turn be associated with work experience and wage levels, affect a husband's ability to help support his family. Only 6 percent of husbands in the CPS sample were under age 20, and most of the remainder were in their twenties (see Table 5). Furthermore, the vast majority of husbands were older than their wives: nearly three-fourths were at least two years older and almost one-third were at least five years older.

The husbands of young mothers in the CPS sample had less schooling than young men in general. In 1986 and 1987, nearly 40 percent had not completed high school, compared with only 15 percent of all men ages 20 to 29. Similarly, only 15 percent had attended college, compared with over 40 percent of all men in their twenties. Few were still attending school. The high school dropout rate was higher for younger husbands than for their older counterparts. Furthermore, in about 55 percent of the couples considered, at least one member had not completed high school, and in over one-quarter of the couples, neither member had done so. In other words, in only about 45 percent of the couples were both parents high school graduates.

Most husbands of young mothers are working or seeking jobs, although age and educational attainment affect their status in the labor force (see Table 5). In 1986 and 1987, 75 percent of husbands in the CPS sample were working and another 7 percent were looking for jobs. Younger husbands and those who had not attended college were less likely than their older and more educated counterparts to be employed.

Support Available from Absent Fathers

Absent fathers are a potential source of support for single mothers and their children. About half of the young mothers in the CPS sample were single, and 40 percent had never been married. Absent fathers

TABLE 5. MAJOR ACTIVITY IN 1986 AND 1987 OF HUSBANDS WHO WERE MARRIED TO AND LIVING WITH WOMEN WHO FIRST GAVE BIRTH AS TEENAGERS DURING THE PRECEDING FIVE YEARS (In percent)

	Percentage in Category	Major Activity in Survey Week[a]			
		Employed[b]	Looking for Work	Attending School	Other[c]
By Age of Husband					
16 to 19	6	58	5	5	32
20 to 22	26	69	10	2	18
23 to 25	36	80	7	1	11
26 to 29	23	77	3	1	19
30 or Older	10	73	5	5	17
All Ages	100	75	7	2	17
By Educational Attainment of Husband[d]					
Did Not Complete High School	38	75	7	n.a.	18
High School Graduate	46	75	7	n.a.	18
Attended or Completed College	15	84	4	n.a.	12

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTES: This analysis is based on men married to and living with mothers who first gave birth as teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

n.a. = not applicable.

a. Response to the survey question "What was your major activity last week?"

b. Includes those who had a job but were not working in the survey week.

c. Includes those who were keeping house and those who were unable to work.

d. Excludes husbands who were in school.

are hard to identify in available data, however, so little is known about them or the support they provide for their children. What information is available is for men who acknowledge fathering children. Because these fathers are almost certainly unrepresentative of all absent fathers--for example, since they admit paternity, they may be more likely to provide support--findings about absent fathers should be interpreted with caution.

Many absent fathers lack the resources to provide significant amounts of financial assistance for their children. They are more likely to have dropped out of school than are men of the same age who delayed having children, and many rely on parents or other relatives for support. Over half of the unwed fathers ages 19 to 26 in one study lived with one or both of their own parents, and another 10 percent lived with other relatives.[7] Furthermore, unmarried fathers--most of whom live apart from their children--have lower average scores on tests of basic academic skills and higher rates of unemployment than do other young men. All of these characteristics are associated with low wages, low incomes, and low levels of child support payments, particularly in cases involving adolescent mothers.

Available data suggest that absent fathers provide a range of emotional, financial, and in-kind support to their children and their children's mothers. The level and particular combinations of support vary widely, however, and may change over time. While aid can be either voluntary or court-mandated, evidence on either form of assistance is limited.

Voluntary Aid. Many young mothers receive voluntary financial and in-kind aid from absent fathers, although the amounts are unknown. One study of unmarried teenage mothers found that about two-thirds of those interviewed got some financial assistance from absent fathers

7. Robert I. Lerman, "A National Profile of Young Unwed Fathers: Who Are They and How Are They Parenting?" (paper prepared for Conference on Unwed Fathers, Washington, D.C., Catholic University, October 1986), Table 2.

during the first year after they gave birth.[8] Other studies indicate that many absent fathers and their relatives provide in-kind assistance such as babysitting, food, and clothing. Informal support of this kind appears, however, to decline over time.

Absent fathers are more likely to provide aid voluntarily if they maintain contact with their children. Studies of young unmarried mothers indicate that roughly half of all absent fathers are in touch with their children on a regular basis, at least during the first few years after birth.[9] Not surprisingly, such contact is more likely if the father is willing and able to provide some form of support for his children and if the parents maintain a personal relationship. Many young unmarried parents continue to be involved with each other after their children are born. This involvement may wane over time, a likely cause of observed declines in voluntary assistance from absent fathers.

Court-Ordered Support Payments. Absent fathers also provide for their children through court-ordered support payments. Whether young mothers receive such payments depends on two factors: whether the mothers get court orders requiring absent fathers to provide child support, and whether the fathers actually make the mandated payments. Mothers who are divorced or separated from their children's fathers are more likely to be awarded child support than those who were never married. Comprehensive statistics for adolescent mothers are unavailable, but in 1987, only 20 percent of never-married mothers of all ages had been awarded child support payments, compared with 55 percent of separated mothers and 79 percent of divorced mothers.[10] This may stem, in part, from the fact that many never-married mothers do not identify the fathers of their children.

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8. M.E. Lorenzi and others, "School-Age Parents: How Permanent a Relationship?" *Adolescence*, vol. 45 (1977), pp. 13-22, cited in Sandra L. Hofferth and Cheryl D. Hayes, ed., *Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing*, vol. II (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1987), p. 162.

9. See, for example, review of the literature in Hofferth and Hayes, *Risking the Future*, vol. II, chap. 7, and Lerman, "A National Profile of Young Unwed Fathers."

10. Bureau of the Census, *Child Support and Alimony: 1987*, Current Population Reports, series P-23, no. 167 (June 1990), Table 1.

Only about three-quarters of all mothers who were due child support actually received any payments in 1987. The percentage getting at least some of the payments owed them varied little by marital status. Never-married mothers, however, received much smaller payments than mothers who were either divorced or separated. Among those due payments, the average amount received in 1987 by mothers who were never married was about $1,600, compared with over $2,800 for mothers who were previously married.

Although national data are lacking on child support payments to young mothers, detailed information is available from Wisconsin, which has a rigorous child support assurance program, characterized by relatively generous standards for levels of court-ordered child support and strenuous enforcement efforts. Because Wisconsin's child support enforcement system differs sharply from those in other states, these data cannot be representative of the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, the state's experience provides the best data available.

A study by Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt of child support in Wisconsin in the early 1980s found that young never-married mothers were substantially less likely than young separated or divorced mothers to be awarded child support, primarily because most did not establish paternity.[11] In only one-fifth of births to unwed adolescent women was paternity adjudicated by the courts, a requirement for participation in the child support system. Once in the system, however, never-married mothers were nearly as likely to be awarded child support as previously married mothers: 78 percent versus 87 percent (see Table 6).

In addition, adolescent mothers were about as likely to receive child support awards as older mothers, and slightly more likely if they had been married to the child's father. In contrast, teenage mothers who had never married received a much smaller fraction of the court-ordered amount: they received only about one-third of payments due, compared with about half received by previously married and older mothers.

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11. Sandra K Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support: Eligibility, Participation, and Payment," *Journal of Social Service Research*, vol. 11, nos. 2/3 (1987/1988).

The Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt study also found that in child support cases involving teenage mothers, the fathers who had never been married to the mothers had higher rates of unemployment and more frequently had no source of income, compared with those whose marriages had ended in separation or divorce (see Table 7).

TABLE 6. CASES WITH CHILD SUPPORT AWARDS AND RATIO OF PAYMENTS MADE TO PAYMENTS DUE, SELECTED WISCONSIN COUNTIES

	Parents Never Married to Each Other[a]	Parents Previously Married to Each Other
Mothers Age 19 or Younger at Birth of First Child		
Percentage with Child Support Awards	78	87
Ratio of Payments Made to Payments Due[b]	0.33	0.52
Mothers Age 20 or Older at Birth of First Child		
Percentage with Child Support Awards	79	82
Ratio of Payments Made to Payments Due[b]	0.46	0.56

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office based on data in Sandra K. Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support: Eligibility, Participation, and Payment," *Journal of Social Service Research*, vol. 11, nos. 2/3 (1987/1988), Table 3.

a. Includes only cases in which paternity had been established, which was the case for only about 20 percent of children born to teenage mothers.

b. Total dollar amount of child support paid during the sample period as a proportion of the total dollar amount that was owed. Only court-ordered child support awards were included.

Furthermore, fathers who were never married to teenage mothers were also more likely to be unemployed or have no income than were similar fathers of children born to older mothers. Again, however, these findings are almost certainly not nationally representative.

TABLE 7. INDICATORS OF FATHER'S ABILITY TO PAY CHILD SUPPORT, SELECTED WISCONSIN COUNTIES
(As a percentage of cases)

	Parents Never Married to Each Other	Parents Previously Married to Each Other
Mothers Age 19 or Younger at Birth of First Child		
Cases with Child Support Awards in Which the Father Is Unemployed	35	16
Cases with Child Support Awards in Which the Father Has No Income	15	3
Mothers Age 20 or Older at Birth of First Child		
Cases with Child Support Awards in Which the Father Is Unemployed	27	16
Cases with Child Support Awards in Which the Father Has No Income	5	2

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office based on data in Sandra K. Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support: Eligibility, Participation, and Payment," *Journal of Social Service Research*, vol. 11, nos. 2/3 (1987/1988), Table 4.

SELF-SUPPORT OF YOUNG MOTHERS

Women who have children as teenagers are less likely than other mothers to obtain well-paying jobs and to build up work experience, perhaps because they have less education than older mothers. Their job skills tend to be more limited and consequently they may receive lower wages. This situation is compounded by the time spent out of the labor force caring for small children; with less on-the-job experience, their wages are lower yet. In addition, the jobs that adolescent mothers hold are less likely to provide fringe benefits, such as health insurance, that can be particularly important for families.

These differences may diminish over time. For example, women who become mothers in their teens are more likely to be in the labor force when they are in their mid- to late-twenties than are their counterparts who delay childbearing, even though their wages may be lower. This shift probably occurs because children born to teenagers are older--and hence less in need of child care--when their mothers are in their mid-twenties than are children born to older mothers. Alternatively, young mothers may have a greater incentive to work, because they are more likely to be the only or the primary earner in the family.

The differences between the work experiences of early and late childbearers are smaller for blacks than for whites. In addition, young black mothers accumulate slightly more work experience than do young white mothers. The reasons behind these racial differences are not clear. They may result from the different educational experiences of black and white adolescent mothers, or from differences in marital patterns which imply that young black mothers are less likely than otherwise similar whites to have a husband as an alternative source of support.

Fewer than half of young mothers are not employed outside their homes during the first few years after they have children, and more than half of those who have jobs do not work full time. In 1986 and 1987, only 31 percent of young mothers in the CPS sample reported that their major activity during the survey period was employment, while an additional 4 percent said they were looking for work (see

Table 8). For many, the decision not to work is a function of their need or desire to care for their young children: nearly half the mothers in the sample said they were keeping house. About one-tenth of these mothers were still in school.

TABLE 8. MAJOR ACTIVITY IN 1986 AND 1987 OF MOTHERS WHO FIRST GAVE BIRTH AS TEENAGERS DURING THE PRECEDING FIVE YEARS (In percent)

Characteristic of Mother	Major Activity in Survey Week[a]				
	Employed[b]	Looking for work	Keeping House	Attending School	Other[c]
All Mothers	31	4	49	9	8
Age					
15 to 17	13	1	36	40	10
18 to 19	27	3	49	12	9
20 to 24	35	4	51	3	7
Marital Status and Living Arrangement[d]					
Married with husband present[e]	35	1	58	3	4
Unmarried or married with husband absent[f]					
Living alone	30	4	51	6	9
Living with relatives	26	6	34	22	12

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTE: This analysis is based on an unduplicated sample of young mothers who first gave birth as teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

a. Response to the survey question "What was your major activity last week?"

b. Includes those who had a job but were not working in the survey week.

c. Includes mothers who were unable to work.

d. Excludes adolescent mothers who live with unrelated adults (about 4 percent of the CPS sample) regardless of their marital status.

e. Includes all mothers with husbands in the armed forces, regardless of whether they live with their husbands.

f. Includes mothers who have never married and mothers who are divorced, separated, widowed, or married but not living with their husbands (except those with husbands in the armed forces).

Among mothers in the CPS sample, younger mothers were most likely to remain in school, while their older counterparts split between working and keeping house. In 1986 and 1987, 40 percent of mothers under age 18 were still in school, compared with 12 percent of older teenage mothers. Only 13 percent of the younger mothers worked, while about one-third kept house. In contrast, about one-fourth of 18- and 19-year-old mothers held jobs and about half stayed home with their children.

Although about one-third of the mothers in each type of family were in the labor force (either working or looking for work), married mothers living with their husbands were more likely to have jobs, and mothers in other living arrangements were more likely to be looking for work. At the same time, young unmarried mothers in the sample who lived with their parents or other relatives were far more likely to be attending school and less likely to be keeping house than were young mothers in other living arrangements. This situation probably results from the fact that mothers who live with parents or other relatives are younger and therefore more likely to be of school age. In addition, mothers who live with others may receive more help with child care and have less need to work, and thus be more able to continue their schooling.

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG MOTHERS

Many young mothers are poor in spite of the support they receive from private sources. As a result, many of them qualify for and rely on public assistance. This assistance comes in a variety of forms, including cash payments, in-kind aid such as food stamps, and services. After briefly describing the government programs that provide assistance for young mothers and their families, this chapter focuses on Aid to Families with Dependent Children to analyze patterns of receipt of cash assistance by young mothers.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS THAT AID ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

Federal, state, and local governments operate a variety of programs to deal with problems associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood. Many of these programs are operated jointly by more than one level of government, and may either focus on or simply include young mothers and their families as recipients of aid. Some programs give cash grants to supplement the family's income, some offer goods in kind, such as medical care or subsidized housing, and others provide services to meet specific needs (see Table 9).

It is difficult to determine the extent to which young mothers use these programs. Estimating the extent to which participation could have been avoided if the young mothers had delayed having children until they were older is even more difficult, because some would have used these programs eventually, even if they had waited to have their children.

Cash Assistance

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is the primary program providing cash income assistance to families with children. The AFDC program is administered by states, which set eligibility rules and benefit levels within federal guidelines, while costs are shared by the federal and state governments. Single-parent families

TABLE 9. MAJOR GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS THAT ASSIST YOUNG MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN, FISCAL YEAR 1990

Program	Aid Provided	Target Groups	Total Estimated 1990 Outlays[a] (Billions of dollars)
		Cash Assistance	
Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)	Cash Grants	Low-income, single-parent, and some two-parent families with children	20.6[b]
		In-Kind Assistance	
Medicaid	Free or low-cost medical care	All AFDC recipients and most recipients of Supplemental Security Income; pregnant women and children up to age six in families with incomes up to 133 percent of poverty; some medically needy families who have lost AFDC coverage for specific reasons (coverage limited in duration)	71.0[b]
Food Stamps	Food vouchers	Most low-income families and individuals	15.3
Housing Assistance	Subsidized housing units or rent subsidies	Families and elderly and handicapped individuals with low incomes	15.9[c]
Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Food supplements, nutritional screening	Low-income pregnant and postpartum women, their infants, and children up to age five who are at risk nutritionally	2.1

(Continued)

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office.

a. Total estimated costs for all program beneficiaries, not just for adolescent mothers.

and some married-couple families are eligible for benefits, with eligibility ending when the youngest child reaches age 18. Maximum benefit levels vary widely among states. In 1990, among the contiguous 48 states, California had the highest monthly benefit for a single mother with one child ($560), and Alabama offered the lowest ($88). About one-fourth of adolescent mothers get AFDC during any given year.

TABLE 9. Continued

Program	Aid Provided	Target Groups	Total Estimated 1990 Outlays[a] (Billions of dollars)
		Services	
Child Support Enforcement	Location of absent parents, and help establishing and collecting child support	All AFDC recipients and all others who request assistance	0.5
Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)	Work-related training and services	Economically disadvantaged individuals, including youth and welfare recipients	3.8
Social Services Block Grant	Child care, child welfare, adoption, foster care, family planning information and referral services, and other social services	Determined by the states	2.8
Maternal and Child Health Block Grant	Health services	Determined by the states	0.6

b. Includes benefits and administrative costs incurred by both the federal government and the states.

c. Administration's estimates for outlays for programs administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

d. Federal costs net of the federal share of child support collections. Gross federal expenditures total an estimated $1.3 billion. Net costs to states--and to the Child Support Enforcement program as a whole--are negative, because the government's share of collections exceeds expenditures.

In-Kind Assistance

Government programs provide in-kind assistance in the forms of health services, food and nutrition aid, and housing assistance. Medicaid offers free or highly subsidized medical care to all families receiving AFDC as well as to some other low-income families. The program is jointly funded by federal and state governments.

Food stamps are vouchers available to virtually all low-income people; they can be used to purchase food at most retail outlets. The federal government pays for all benefits, but states and local governments pay part of the administrative costs. In 1990, a single mother with one child could get as much as $182 in food stamps each month if she had no cash income. In general, benefits are reduced by 30 cents for each dollar of countable cash income.

Housing aid comes in a variety of forms, ranging from public housing units in large projects to vouchers that can pay part or all of a family's rent in privately owned housing. Funding is primarily from the federal government.

Finally, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutritional screening and food supplements to low-income pregnant and postpartum women and their children up to age five. WIC is federally funded, but is administered by state and local governments. Because of limited funding, the program does not serve all families eligible for assistance.

Services

Adolescent mothers and their families also benefit from four major service programs. The Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program, funded jointly by the federal and state governments, helps to locate absent parents and to obtain child support payments from them. The program was strengthened significantly by the Family Support Act of 1988, with changes scheduled to be phased in gradually over the next five years. Of particular value to adolescent mothers may be the

increased emphasis on establishing paternity and the greater state powers to collect child care support from absent fathers.

The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) offers work-related training and services to assist economically disadvantaged people to develop skills and get jobs. It, too, is financed entirely by federal funds. It is unlikely that many teenage mothers enroll in the program when their children are young, but participation may be much higher in later years.

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) provides federal funds to the states for a wide variety of services, ranging from child care subsidies and family planning information to foster care and adoption assistance. Within federal limitations, state and local governments decide what services will be offered.

Finally, the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant provides federal funding--about $550 million in 1990--for state efforts to maintain and improve the health of mothers and children. States have considerable flexibility in choosing the programs to fund, provided they are in areas such as preventive care, prenatal care, health assessments for children, and children's rehabilitation. Similarly, the federal government does not restrict benefits to specific categories of people such as members of low-income families.

THE AFDC PROGRAM AND ADOLESCENT RECIPIENTS IN 1986

The main source of cash assistance for young mothers is Aid to Families with Dependent Children. This section provides more detailed information about AFDC, discusses the possible effects of program rules on the behavior of adolescent mothers, and offers a profile of teenage AFDC recipients in 1986.

The AFDC Program

As noted earlier, the AFDC program provides financial assistance to single-parent families with children--and, in about half of the states, to married couples with children--who have low incomes. States set benefit levels and specific eligibility criteria within federal guidelines. The federal government pays between 50 percent and 80 percent of benefit costs, depending on the state's per capita income. In fiscal year 1990, AFDC benefits are expected to total nearly $18 billion, of which the federal share will be about 55 percent, or about $9.7 billion. In addition, the federal government pays about half of the program's administrative costs.

All single-parent families with children are categorically eligible for AFDC, but married couples with children can receive benefits only if they meet the additional requirements of the Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program. To qualify for benefits, the principal earner in a married-couple family must be unemployed or work less than 100 hours per month to qualify for assistance. Prior to the Family Support Act of 1988, only about half of the states offered AFDC-UP. As of October 1990, however, all states must offer AFDC-UP benefits, although states that did not previously provide AFDC for married couples may limit a family's receipt of aid to six months out of every year. Finally, in about two-thirds of the states, a first-time mother can begin receiving AFDC benefits during the last trimester of her pregnancy. However, less than 1 percent of all AFDC families qualify for benefits on this basis.

Eligibility for AFDC benefits depends on the characteristics of members of the relevant family unit. In general, the unit consists of children under age 18 and their parents. The situation is more complex for teenage parents living with their own parents or other relatives, a criterion that states may set for eligibility. If the young parents are under age 18, the income and assets of their own parents with whom they are living must be taken into account in determining their eligibility for and amount of benefits.

Each state sets its own definition of the income a family requires (the need standard) as well as the amount of income guaranteed under

the AFDC program (the payment standard), although benefit levels are also determined by family size and by the amount and sources of other income. In January 1990, the median state had a maximum monthly AFDC grant of $294 for a single parent with one child, about 40 percent of the poverty level. Maximum benefits for a two-person family in the 48 contiguous states ranged from 12 percent of the estimated 1990 poverty threshold in Alabama to 77 percent in California. Alaska had a maximum of 104 percent of the estimated 1990 poverty threshold.

Many AFDC recipients also receive other federal benefits. Recipients qualify automatically for health care under Medicaid, paid for by federal and state funds. Almost all AFDC recipients are also automatically eligible for food stamps. Furthermore, AFDC applicants are required to assign their rights to child support to the state, and the Child Support Enforcement program then undertakes to collect any child support owed to the AFDC child. Unless child support payments exceed AFDC benefits, only the first $50 due each month goes to recipient families; the balance is used to offset the costs of AFDC. In addition, about half of all AFDC families receive free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch or Breakfast programs, and nearly one-fourth live in subsidized housing. Most young mothers do not benefit from these last two programs, however, during the first few years after giving birth.

A family's AFDC benefits are reduced as its income increases, but some earnings are disregarded to encourage mothers to work. In particular, there is a standard deduction of $90 per month for work expenses, and child care expenses up to $175 per child per month (and up to $200 per month for children under age two) may be deducted. In determining benefits, the program also ignores the first $30 earned each month during the first 12 months of employment, as well as one-third of additional earnings during the first four months of employment. Regardless of these deductions, however, federal law prohibits states from paying benefits to any family whose total income exceeds 185 percent of the relevant need standard.

Although these allowed deductions from earnings provide an incentive to work, a family member who takes a job does not have to

earn a large amount before the family no longer qualifies for benefits, particularly in states with low need standards. In the median state, for example, a mother with one child (and no child care expenses) no longer qualifies for AFDC if she takes a job paying about $560 per month or more, roughly what she would earn working 34 hours per week at the minimum wage of $3.80 per hour. After four months, the limit falls to $414 per month--the earnings from working about 25 hours per week at the minimum wage--and after one year, she could earn no more than $384 per month and still receive any cash aid. The Family Support Act of 1988, however, provided two additional incentives to encourage recipients to work. For families who lose AFDC eligibility because of increased earnings, states must provide transitional child care benefits with sliding-scale fees for one year and Medicaid coverage for one year. States may impose an income-related premium for the health care coverage during the second six months.

An increase in earnings or other income is only one reason that AFDC recipients may no longer qualify for assistance. Families can also change in ways that make them categorically ineligible. For example, a family can no longer receive benefits if the mother marries a person who is employed full time.

A family can also be suspended from the program if members who are required to participate in specific education, job-training, or employment programs fail to do so. Under the Family Support Act of 1988, states must operate a Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program that includes education, training, and job readiness activities, as well as at least two of the following activities: job search, Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) or other work experience, work supplementation in which recipients work for part or all of their AFDC benefits, and on-the-job training. All AFDC recipients must participate in JOBS, unless exempted by illness or other incapacity, dependent care responsibilities, employment for at least 30 hours per week, or other specified reasons. States must target their JOBS funds on those families most likely to receive AFDC for long periods, such as adolescent mothers.

Possible Effects of AFDC on Adolescent Childbearing and Single Parenthood

AFDC policies may affect the behavior of recipients and potential recipients. For example, many states deny benefits to married couples, thus providing young unmarried women with incentives to have children outside of marriage and married mothers an incentive to divorce or separate from their husbands. However, the extent to which this incentive actually changes behavior is unclear. The program's benefits also may allow young mothers to live separately from their parents or relatives, which may, in turn, mean that they have less familial support. This appears to be of particular concern for younger mothers, for whom the program rules on counting parental income and assets in determining eligibility and benefits provide an incentive to live alone.

Several studies have examined the possible effects of the AFDC program on childbearing and single parenthood by comparing the characteristics and experiences of recipients in states with differing benefit levels and program rules. These studies have focused on fertility, divorce and separation rates, and the living arrangements of young mothers.

Effects of AFDC Benefit Levels on Fertility. Studies of the effects of AFDC on the fertility of female teenagers find no evidence that benefit levels encourage childbearing. The evidence is less clear about whether the availability of welfare affects the pregnant woman's decisions about having an abortion, allowing her child to be adopted, or getting married. Some studies have found that such effects exist, while others conclude that AFDC does not influence the woman's decisions.[1] Further research is needed to reach firm conclusions on these issues.

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1. See, for example, Cheryl D. Hayes, ed., *Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing*, vol. I (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1987), chap. 4.

Effects of AFDC Benefit Levels on Marital Status and Living Arrangements. Variations in AFDC benefit levels appear to have an effect on the likelihood of divorce or separation, and also an effect on the living arrangements of young mothers, although the precise reason behind this latter effect is somewhat unclear.

One study found that higher AFDC benefit levels are associated with increased rates of divorce and separation, more so among young married mothers than among their older counterparts.[2] That study also found that higher benefit levels appear to increase the likelihood that young single mothers will establish their own households. In low-benefit states, young single mothers were more likely to live with their parents, while in high-benefit states they were more likely to live on their own. Another study elaborates on the latter finding, however, and suggests that much of this difference can be explained by differences between high- and low-benefit states with regard to their policies toward young mothers who live with other adults.[3] In particular, high-benefit states appear more likely to provide lower benefits to mothers who share living arrangements, giving mothers who live in these states more incentive to have their own households, at the same time as the high overall level of benefits make such living arrangements more feasible financially.

AFDC Recipients in 1986

In fiscal year 1986, about 11 million people in 3.7 million families received AFDC benefits; two-thirds of the recipients were children. The father was absent in over 90 percent of the families. On average, families received $352 per month, or about $120 per person. The average single-parent family had 2.8 members, while AFDC-UP families were larger, averaging 4.4 people.

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2. David T. Ellwood and Mary Jo Bane, "The Impact of AFDC on Family Structure and Living Arrangements" (paper prepared for the Department of Health and Human Services, March 1984).

3. Robert Hutchens, George Jakubson, and Saul Schwartz, "Living Arrangements, Employment, Schooling, and Welfare Recipiency of Young Women," Special Report No. 40 (Institute for Research on Poverty, Madison, Wisconsin, 1986), p. 166.

In 1986, over half of all AFDC mothers were in their twenties and about 7 percent were teenagers (see Table 10). Although teenagers were a small proportion of all mothers on AFDC, a large share of mothers receiving AFDC benefits had been teenage mothers: in 1986, roughly 60 percent of AFDC mothers age 30 or under had first given birth when they were teenagers.

Adolescent mothers receiving AFDC differ markedly from older AFDC mothers. In 1986, over 80 percent of teenage mothers in the program had never been married to the fathers of their youngest children, compared with just over half of AFDC mothers age 20 or older. They also tended to have fewer and younger children, probably the result of their own young age. Over 80 percent of young AFDC mothers had only one child, and most of their children were under age two. In comparison, more than half of the older AFDC mothers had at least two children, and, for most, the youngest child was at least three years old.

PATTERNS OF WELFARE USE AMONG ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

Developing policies to help young mothers requires a clear understanding of the dynamics of welfare receipt--a sense of which mothers are most likely to go on the AFDC rolls and how long they tend to stay there. This section examines the patterns of welfare use among adolescent mothers, focusing on the likelihood that adolescent mothers will start--and stop--receiving AFDC benefits within the first few years after giving birth. A discussion of the rates of welfare recipiency among young mothers concludes the chapter.

The findings presented here only describe characteristics associated with different patterns of welfare receipt; they should not be interpreted as suggesting that these characteristics are the causes of differing welfare experiences. Instead, these characteristics are probably associated with other explanatory factors, such as inadequate income or low levels of education or skills.

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TABLE 10. CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL MOTHERS AND ADOLESCENT MOTHERS RECEIVING AFDC IN FISCAL YEAR 1986 (In percent)

Characteristic of Mother	All Mothers	Adolescent Mothers (Ages 13 to 19)
Average Number of AFDC Mothers (Thousands)	3,189	212
Current Age		
13 to 19	7	--
13 to 17	--	16
18	--	31
19	--	53
20 to 21	9	--
22 to 30	46	--
Over 30	38	--
Race and Ethnicity		
White non-Hispanic	42	37
Black non-Hispanic	41	47
Hispanic	14	13
Other	4	3
Relationship to Father of Youngest Child		
Married		
Husband incapacitated	3	1
Husband unemployed[a]	7	6
Husband absent	15	7
Previously married[b]	18	3
Never married	56	83
Age of Youngest Child		
Under three	40	--
Under two	--	76
Two	--	15
Three or over	--	9
Three to five	24	--
Over five	36	--
Average age of youngest child	5	1
Number of Children		
One[c]	43	81
Two	31	17
Three or more	26	2
Average number of children	2	1

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of information from the quality control sample of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) cases for 1986.

a. States have the option of providing benefits to married-couple families whose principal earner is unemployed.

b. Includes women who were widowed.

c. Includes women pregnant with their first children.

This analysis is based on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), a national survey of about 12,500 young men and women who were interviewed annually beginning in 1979 concerning events of the preceding year. The data used in this analysis cover the years from 1978 through 1984. The survey was limited to people who were ages 14 to 21 in 1979. This analysis includes only those teenagers in the survey who first gave birth during the survey years. The data and the methodology used for the analysis are described in greater detail in Appendix A.

While age and marital status are measured at the time the child was born, these characteristics change over time. The mothers obviously grow older, and marriages and divorces alter their marital status. As a consequence, observed entrances onto AFDC may occur when a young mother is no longer an adolescent or when her marital status has changed from that reported at the birth of her first child.

While these data are uniquely suited for examining the patterns of welfare receipt among adolescent mothers, they have two limitations. First, the sample of adolescent mothers was small, consisting of only 802 young women. As a result, the findings do not provide precise estimates but rather are only indicative of general patterns of behavior. This caution is especially important with respect to time periods furthest from the birth of the child, for which samples were particularly small. Second, to maximize the number of observations available for analysis, data were aggregated from the years 1978 through 1984--a period that was marked by significant economic and social changes, as well as by major legislation affecting welfare programs. It is unclear how these changes affected patterns of receipt of welfare by young mothers, or how these patterns might differ if the births had occurred more recently.

The teenagers examined in this analysis were ages 15 to 19 when they first had children, and just over 40 percent were under age 18 (see Table 11). About half were married when they gave birth, with the older mothers more likely to be married than their younger counter-

TABLE 11. CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENT MOTHERS AT THE TIME THEY FIRST GAVE BIRTH

Characteristic of Mother	Percent
Marital Status	
Married	51
Unmarried	49
Age at Birth of First Child	
15 to 17	43
18 to 19	57
Age and Marital Status	
15 to 17	
Married	42
Unmarried	58
18 to 19	
Married	58
Unmarried	42
Race	
White	70
Black	26
Other	4
Race and Marital Status	
White	
Married	67
Unmarried	33
Black	
Married	11
Unmarried	89

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office calculations based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTE: The characteristics of these mothers differ from those presented in Chapter I because the NLSY sample is limited to adolescent mothers first giving birth, whereas the Current Population Survey sample used earlier included mothers who first gave birth as teenagers during the preceding five years, regardless of their current ages.

parts: nearly 60 percent of mothers ages 18 and 19 were married, compared with about 40 percent of younger mothers. White mothers were much more likely to be married than black mothers--two-thirds compared with only about one-ninth. In terms of these characteristics, the NLSY sample of young mothers is comparable with nationally representative data on vital statistics for the same years (see Appendix A for a comparison).

Transitions onto AFDC

Almost half of all young mothers in the NLSY sample began receiving AFDC benefits within five years after first giving birth (see Table 12).[4] The majority of the mothers who received these welfare payments started doing so quickly--more than half of those who started receiving welfare within five years did so during pregnancy or during the 12 months immediately following the birth.[5] These statistics relate only to the first receipt of AFDC, however, and not to the number of young mothers actually receiving benefits in any particular period. The latter topic is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The likelihood of a young mother's becoming an AFDC recipient varies with her marital status and age at the birth of her first child, as well as with her race. Marital status appears to be the most important factor associated with welfare receipt; in fact, differences in AFDC participation associated with age and race largely disappear when marital status is taken into account.

Women who were not married when they first had children were the most likely to start receiving AFDC within five years of giving birth. Half of these young women went onto the AFDC rolls within 12

4. If the definition of welfare is broadened to include receipt of non-AFDC public assistance payments, the proportion of young mothers entering welfare within five years is somewhat higher, about 57 percent. (See Appendix A for a discussion of the reasons for limiting the definition of welfare to include only AFDC.)

5. States have the option in the AFDC program of providing assistance to pregnant women, beginning in the sixth month of medically verified pregnancies. About two-thirds of the states offered such assistance in 1986.

TABLE 12. AFDC ENTRANCE RATES FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS
(In percent)

Timing of Entrance in Relation to First Birth	Percentage Who First Entered During Period	Cumulative Percentage Who Entered by End of Period[a]	Sample Size (Number of cases in NLSY)[b]	
			All Cases	Entrances onto AFDC
Before Birth[c]	7	7	1,054	100
Between 0 and 12 Months After Birth	21	28	954	241
Between 13 and 24 Months After Birth	8	35	593	83
Between 25 and 36 Months After Birth	6	41	413	46
Between 37 and 48 Months After Birth	5	46	277	25
Between 49 and 60 Months After Birth	3	49	157	12

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTES: Entrance rates for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program refer to the proportion of adolescent mothers who started receiving AFDC payments in the specified period. Adolescent mothers are defined as all women who first gave birth when they were between the ages of 15 and 19.

These findings are based on relatively small samples and therefore should be taken as indicative of general patterns of behavior rather than as precise estimates, particularly for the period 49 months to 60 months after birth.

a. These estimates reflect the total number of adolescent mothers who entered the program for the first time, regardless of their subsequent exits from or reentries into the program. Thus the values do not relate to the proportion receiving benefits in any particular period.

b. AFDC entrance rates were calculated from weighted data, and therefore differ from rates calculated from unweighted sample sizes.

c. States have the option of providing assistance to pregnant women, beginning in the sixth month of medically verified pregnancies.

months after giving birth, compared with only about 7 percent of young married mothers (see Table 13). Moreover, by five years after giving birth, over three-fourths of unmarried mothers had begun receiving welfare, more than three times the fraction of their married counterparts.

These factors help to explain the large differences in welfare receipt by married and single women. First, as shown in Chapter II, a young single mother is less likely to receive financial support from her child's father, and thus tends to have greater need, than her married counterparts. Second, because married couples could not qualify for AFDC in about half of the states at the time the data were collected, single mothers were more likely to be eligible for benefits. Finally, young single mothers may be less likely to have connections with the labor force than married mothers, who may be working themselves or have husbands who work.

While far fewer mothers who were married when they gave birth went on welfare, eventually almost one-fourth of those in the sample did so. The NLSY data, however, do not indicate whether these mothers were still married when they began receiving AFDC. Given that some married adolescent mothers--particularly those who were under age 18 when their child was born--are likely to have dropped out of school, they may find it difficult to support themselves if their marriages dissolve. In such cases, marriage may delay but not prevent the receipt of welfare.

Adolescent mothers who were under 18 when they first gave birth were more likely than older mothers to start receiving welfare within five years after first having children (see Table 13). Nearly 60 percent of younger mothers got benefits within that time span, compared with 43 percent of older mothers. These differences by age largely disappear, however, when marital status is taken into account. Roughly three-fourths of unmarried mothers in each age group received welfare during the five years after giving birth.

TABLE 13. CUMULATIVE AFDC ENTRANCE RATES FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS, BY MOTHER'S MARITAL STATUS AND AGE AT FIRST BIRTH, AND RACE (In percent)

Characteristic of Mother	Cumulative Proportion Who Started Receiving AFDC[a]		
	By Birth of First Child[b]	By 12 Months After Birth of First Child	By 60 Months After Birth of First Child
All	7	28	49
Marital Status at Birth of First Child			
Married	2	7	24
Unmarried	13	50	77
Age at Birth of First Child			
All mothers			
15 to 17	5	30	58
18 to 19	9	26	43
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth			
15 to 17	8	47	77
18 to 19	19	53	76
Race			
All mothers			
White	7	22	39
Black	9	44	76
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth			
White	17	53	72
Black	10	49	84

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTES: Entrance rates for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program refer to the proportion of adolescent mothers who first started receiving AFDC payments in the specified period. Adolescent mothers are defined as all women who first gave birth when they were between the ages of 15 and 19. The results for married adolescent mothers of different ages and races are not included separately because of the small sample size.

These findings are based on relatively small samples and therefore should be taken as indicative of general patterns of behavior rather than as precise estimates, particularly for the period furthest from the birth.

a. These estimates reflect the total number of adolescent mothers who entered the program for the first time, regardless of their subsequent exits from or reentries into the program. Thus the values do not relate to the proportion receiving benefits in any particular period.

b. States have the option of providing assistance to pregnant women, beginning in the sixth month of medically verified pregnancies.

Racial differences in welfare receipt are closely related to the different marriage patterns of white and black teenagers. While young black mothers were almost twice as likely as young white mothers to start receiving welfare during the first several years after giving birth--about 75 percent compared with just under 40 percent--the disparity derives primarily from the much greater likelihood that young black mothers are not married. The racial differences shrink markedly when marital status is taken into account: among unmarried young mothers, about 72 percent of whites and 84 percent of blacks went onto welfare within five years.

Transitions off AFDC

Young mothers have different patterns of welfare receipt. Some receive benefits for short periods and then leave the program permanently. Others continue to collect benefits for many years. Still others move onto and off the program several times before becoming self-sufficient. This section examines the durations of welfare spells--that is, periods of AFDC receipt--for young mothers, as well as the characteristics associated with spells of different lengths. This analysis is limited to each mother's first spell of welfare, however, and all subsequent spells are ignored.

Identifying welfare spells requires defining what constitutes an exit from the AFDC program. Many families have several spells of AFDC receipt that are separated by varying periods off the program. The length of time a family must not get benefits before they are considered to have left the program is therefore important. This analysis counts as program exits only cases in which a family does not receive benefits for at least three consecutive months. It thus ignores one- or two-month breaks in AFDC receipt, which sometimes result simply from the family's failure to comply with program rules. For comparison--and to provide an indication of the frequency of repeated welfare spells--the analysis also uses an alternative, more restrictive definition of AFDC exits, by counting only families that have not received benefits for 12 consecutive months as having exited AFDC.

Because a family can leave the AFDC program only if it has been receiving benefits, the group of AFDC mothers examined in this section is substantially different from the larger population of all teenage mothers discussed earlier. In comparison, the mothers who received AFDC tended to be younger and to have been unmarried when they gave birth, and were disproportionately black.

Roughly half of all of the young mothers who received welfare left the program for more than three months within one year of first

TABLE 14. AFDC EXIT RATES FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS
(In percent)

Duration of First AFDC Spell (Months)[a]	Left for at Least Three Months		Left for at Least Twelve Months	
	Left During Period	Cumulative Proportion[b]	Left During Period	Cumulative Proportion[b]
Between 0 and 6	31	31	24	24
Between 7 and 12	18	49	13	37
Between 13 and 24	16	65	15	51
Between 25 and 36	9	73	10	61
Between 37 and 48	3	76	5	67

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTES: Exit rates for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program refer to the proportion of adolescent mothers receiving AFDC payments who left the program for the first time within the specified period. Adolescent mothers are defined as all women who first gave birth when they were between the ages of 15 and 19.

These findings are based on relatively small samples and therefore should be taken as indicative of general patterns of behavior rather than as precise estimates, particularly for the period furthest from the birth.

a. Number of months between first entry into the AFDC program and first exit for a period of at least either three or twelve months.

b. These estimates reflect the total number of recipients who left the program for the first time, regardless of subsequent reentries or reexits. Thus the values do not relate to the proportion receiving benefits in any particular period.

getting benefits (see Table 14). Almost three-quarters of the young mothers on AFDC had initial spells that lasted less than three years.

Naturally, AFDC exit rates were lower when exits were based on the more restrictive 12-month requirement. Under this definition, about 37 percent of initial welfare spells of adolescent mothers lasted less than one year (see Table 14). This means that about one-quarter of teenage mothers who were off AFDC for at least three months within a year of their entry into the program did not stay off the program for a full year. The difference was smaller over longer periods: under the more restrictive exit definition, about two-thirds of adolescent mothers on AFDC left the program in less than four years, compared with about three-fourths under the less constrained definition. To simplify the discussion, the analysis in the remainder of this section uses only the three-month definition of welfare exits; results using the alternative definition appear in Appendix B.

Young AFDC recipients who were single when they first had children were much less likely than their married counterparts to leave the AFDC program within their first four years of welfare receipt. Over 40 percent of recipients who were not married when they first gave birth had initial welfare spells lasting less than a year, and about 70 percent were off welfare within four years (see Table 15). This exit pattern is only partially explained by the young recipients getting married: only about one-third of all single mothers who received welfare married within four years of first giving birth. In contrast, recipients who were married when they first had children left AFDC more quickly; about 70 percent stopped getting AFDC within one year, and over 90 percent had left the program by the end of four years. Because very few married mothers received AFDC, however, the latter results are less reliable and should be viewed with caution.

Recipients who first had children when they were under age 18 tended to receive welfare for slightly longer periods than older teenage mothers. For example, as Table 15 shows, about 70 percent of these younger mothers left the AFDC program within four years, compared with over 80 percent of recipients who were ages 18 or 19 when they first gave birth. In this instance, however, the differences by age remained even after taking marital status into account. Among

TABLE 15. CUMULATIVE AFDC EXIT RATES FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS, BY MOTHER'S MARITAL STATUS AND AGE AT FIRST BIRTH, AND RACE (In percent)

Characteristic of Mother	Cumulative Proportion Who Left AFDC[a] Within 6 Months After First AFDC Receipt	Within 12 Months After First AFDC Receipt	Within 48 Months After First AFDC Receipt
All	31	49	76
Marital Status at Birth of First Child			
Married	60	69	94
Unmarried	23	43	71
Age at Birth of First Child			
All mothers			
15 to 17	30	45	70
18 to 19	32	52	82
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth			
15 to 17	23	39	66
18 to 19	24	48	76
Race			
All mothers			
White	40	57	82
Black	19	40	66
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth			
White	27	48	77
Black	19	40	66

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTES: Exit rates for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program refer to the proportion of adolescent mothers receiving AFDC payments who left the program for the first time within the specified period. Adolescent mothers are defined as all women who first gave birth when they were between the ages of 15 and 19. The results for married adolescent mothers of different ages and races are not included separately because of the small sample size.

These findings are based on relatively small samples and therefore should be taken as indicative of general patterns of behavior rather than as precise estimates, particularly for the period furthest from the birth.

a. These estimates reflect the total number of recipients who left the program for the first time, regardless of subsequent reentries or reexits. Thus the values do not relate to the proportion receiving benefits in any particular period.

unmarried AFDC recipients, about two-thirds of the younger mothers had welfare spells lasting less than four years, compared with roughly three-quarters of their older counterparts. Furthermore, the age-related differences cannot be explained by differences in subse-quent marriage rates of these single mothers.

There are two possible explanations of why older teenage mothers tend to leave the AFDC program more quickly than their younger counterparts. First, simply because they are older, mothers who were age 18 or 19 when they first gave birth may be more likely to find jobs, become self-sufficient, and stop getting AFDC. As the younger mothers grow older, more of them would get jobs, but in the meantime they would tend to have longer welfare spells than the older group.

A second explanation is that there are fundamental differences in the characteristics of younger and older adolescent mothers that affect their ability to become self-sufficient later in life. For example, younger adolescent mothers are much less likely to have high school or equivalency degrees than are older adolescent mothers. In the NLSY sample, 21 percent of younger single teenage mothers getting AFDC had graduated from high school or had GEDs within roughly two years after the birth of the child, compared with 58 percent of the group who were slightly older when they became mothers.

Black teenage mothers were less likely than white teenage mothers to leave welfare within four years after their first receipt of benefits. About two-thirds of blacks had initial AFDC spells lasting less than four years, compared with over 80 percent of whites. This difference is slightly smaller for young mothers who were unmarried when they first had children: two-thirds of the single black recipients left the program within four years, while three-fourths of their white counterparts had similar experiences.

These differences by race may result from the fact that among single teenage mothers getting AFDC, whites are more likely to marry than are blacks. In the NLSY sample, nearly 60 percent of the young white recipients who were single when they first gave birth were married within four years, compared with only 14 percent of their

black counterparts. Furthermore, welfare exit rates calculated only for those young white and black recipients who remained single during the survey were similar, once again lending support to the view that racial differences in exit patterns are explained in large part by marital patterns.

Another possible factor explaining the different AFDC exit rates of black and white mothers who were not married when they first gave birth is the likelihood of having more children outside of marriage. The additional responsibilities and expenses of a second child may leave a single mother less able to become self-sufficient. Although white adolescent mothers were more likely than black adolescent mothers to have additional children within a few years after first giving birth, they were also more likely to get married before having those children. Among young mothers who remained single during the survey, blacks were twice as likely as whites to have second children within the four years after first giving birth.

Rates of Receipt of AFDC

An alternative way to look at patterns of welfare receipt is to ask what proportion of adolescent mothers receives AFDC during specific periods after they first give birth. This approach combines patterns of welfare entry and exit to examine the use of AFDC by adolescent mothers over time.

In spite of the movement of young mothers onto and off AFDC, a roughly constant fraction of them was on the program during any given year after they became mothers. Half of adolescent mothers went onto AFDC within five years after first having children (see Table 12), and three-quarters of these recipients had AFDC spells lasting less than four years (see Table 14), but, during each of the four years after they first gave birth, just over one-fourth of adolescent mothers received benefits (see Table 16).

TABLE 16. ADOLESCENT MOTHERS RECEIVING AFDC (In percent)

Characteristic of Mother	Time Between Birth and Receipt of AFDC (Months)			
	0 to 12	13 to 24	25 to 36	37 to 48
All	27	28	29	30
Marital Status at Birth of First Child				
Married	7	8	12	14
Unmarried	48	49	50	49
Age at Birth of First Child				
All mothers				
15 to 17	29	32	39	38
18 to 19	26	25	23	24
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth				
15 to 17	45	49	57	52
18 to 19	51	49	42	44
Race				
All mothers				
White	21	21	22	23
Black	42	46	50	47
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth				
White	52	49	45	47
Black	46	51	56	52

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTES: Adolescent mothers are defined as all women who first gave birth when they were between the ages of 15 and 19.

These findings are based on relatively small samples and therefore should be taken as indicative of general patterns of behavior rather than as precise estimates, particularly for the period furthest from the birth.

The apparent contradiction between the mobility indicated by the welfare entrance and exit patterns and the stability of the rates of welfare receipt is explained by the fact that the welfare population is not static. Although many young mothers leave the program, some stay on and others enter or reenter the program, keeping the proportion receiving welfare roughly constant over time.

Adolescent mothers who were single when they first had children were quite likely to receive AFDC benefits during the first few years after giving birth; almost half of these mothers received welfare in any given year. In contrast, among teenage mothers who were married when they first had children, the proportion receiving AFDC rose from 7 percent in the first year after birth to 14 percent in the third year. This rising participation rate may be the result of marriages breaking up over time.

Differences by race and age are largely explained by marital status. While mothers who were under age 18 when they first had children were more likely than older teenage mothers to be getting AFDC--especially beyond the first year after giving birth--the differences are much smaller when the comparison is limited to mothers who were single when they gave birth. Similarly, black adolescent mothers were roughly twice as likely as their white counterparts to get welfare during any year, but among single mothers, there were only slight differences in rates of AFDC receipt for blacks and whites.

CHAPTER IV

THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG MOTHERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FEDERAL POLICY

Adolescent motherhood can be associated with a wide range of problems that might be addressed through federal policies. From society's perspective, the likelihood that adolescent mothers will be dependent on federal and state assistance for extended periods imposes costs on taxpayers at the same time as it violates widely held principles stressing self-reliance. Society must also deal with the problems of children of young mothers, including problems resulting from poor health, inadequate nutrition, and substandard education, as well as from the consequent likelihood of their having low earnings as adults.

The more immediate problems of the adolescent mothers themselves are also a cause for concern. These mothers are less likely to be married than their peers who delay childbirth, and if they do marry, their marriages are more likely to end in divorce or separation, leaving them on their own to provide for their families' needs. Because they are also likely to have finished fewer years of school and to have acquired less work experience, young mothers will generally have lower earnings than their older counterparts. Support from absent fathers, other relatives, and federal and state governments is also limited. As a result, nearly half of all young mothers and their families live in poverty, and many others have incomes only slightly above the poverty level. This chapter first examines the economic well-being of young mothers and then presents an overview of ways in which government policies might address the problems associated with adolescent motherhood.

THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF YOUNG MOTHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Young mothers and their families rely on income and in-kind support from a variety of sources to provide for their economic well-being. Most

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have some private sources of income such as earnings and cash support from their children's fathers and other relatives, or in-kind aid such as housing and child care, as discussed in Chapter II. Many of those with low cash incomes supplement their private resources through Aid to Families with Dependent Children and other government programs, as outlined in Chapter III. This section examines the cumulative effect of these sources of support on the economic well-being of young mothers and their families. The incomes shown in this chapter, however, are only those reported by respondents to the Current Population Survey. A substantial amount of the nation's total income is not reported on the CPS, so these statistics almost certainly understate the true well-being of young mothers and their families.[1]

Because the greatest policy concern is for families who are least well off, this discussion focuses on families with incomes near the poverty level. In 1986, a single mother with one child was considered poor if her total cash income for the year was less than $7,370, or about $610 per month. (In 1990, this annual threshold is about $8,700.) Only cash income is used to determine poverty status; income received in kind--such as food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance, or child care--is ignored, largely because of the difficulty of assigning it a cash value. Thus, families who receive in-kind assistance are better off than is indicated by their cash income alone.

Mothers who have children when they are teenagers are likely to be poor during the first few years after they give birth. In 1985 and 1986, about 43 percent of mothers who first gave birth as teenagers within the preceding five years had incomes below the poverty level according to data from the Current Population Survey. This poverty rate was four times the 11 percent rate for all families and nearly three times the 16 percent rate for all families with children. Many more young mothers had incomes only slightly above poverty. Altogether, nearly two-thirds of these mothers had family incomes of less than one and one-half times the poverty level. How well off these young families

1. Data on wage and salary income appear to be fairly accurate, but other kinds of income are underreported for various reasons. Respondents may not know or remember the sources or amounts of all of their income, particularly if the income is received irregularly. This situation appears to be most common for interest and dividends. Money received from illegal or other underground sources is probably not reported at all. Little is known, however, about how the extent of underreporting varies across demographic and socioeconomic groups of respondents.

were varied widely according to their marital status and living arrangement, as well as to the mother's employment status (and, if she was married, her husband's).

Economic Well-Being, Marital Status, and Living Arrangements

In 1985 and 1986, over 90 percent of young mothers were in one of three groups determined by their marital status and living arrangement (see Table 17). Among young mothers who first gave birth as teenagers during the first half of the 1980s:

- About 42 percent were married and living with only their husbands and children;
- About 28 percent were unmarried and living with their children and other relatives; and
- About 21 percent were unmarried and living with only their children.

Economic well-being varied widely among these three groups, although families in all three groups were much more likely to be poor than were families in general.

Among all young mothers, those who were married and living only with their husbands and children were least likely to be poor, with a poverty rate of about 28 percent--about two-thirds of the 43 percent rate for all young mothers (see Figure 3). Many of these married mothers who were not poor found themselves not far above the poverty line: about half had incomes below one and one-half times the poverty threshold. In contrast, unmarried mothers living with their children were most likely to be poor, with more than 80 percent having incomes below the poverty line. Unmarried mothers living with adult relatives were substantially better off, with a poverty rate of 34 percent. Many more of these mothers would have been poor, however, if it had not

TABLE 17. INCOME OF MOTHERS IN 1985 AND 1986 WHO FIRST GAVE BIRTH AS TEENAGERS DURING THE PRECEDING FIVE YEARS (In percent)

Marital Status and Living Arrangement of the Mother and Her Children	Distribution of Mothers	Families with Income Below Poverty	Families with Income Below 1.5 Times Poverty
Based on Income of Mother and All Relatives Living with Her			
Married, Living with Husband	47	28	49
Living with husband only	42	28	50
Living with other relatives	4	23	34
Separated from Husband or Not Married	53	57	71
Living alone	21	81	91
Living with other relatives	28	34	54
All Young Mothers	100	43	61
Living alone or with husband only	64	46	64
Living with other relatives	32	33	51
Based on Income of Mother and Husband, If Present[a]			
Living with Other Relatives	32	86	93
Married, living with husband	4	46	69
Separated or not married	28	92	96

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTES: Mothers who lived with unrelated adults (about 4 percent of the CPS sample) are excluded from the detail in the table but are included in the totals.

This analysis is based on an unduplicated sample of young mothers who first gave birth as teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

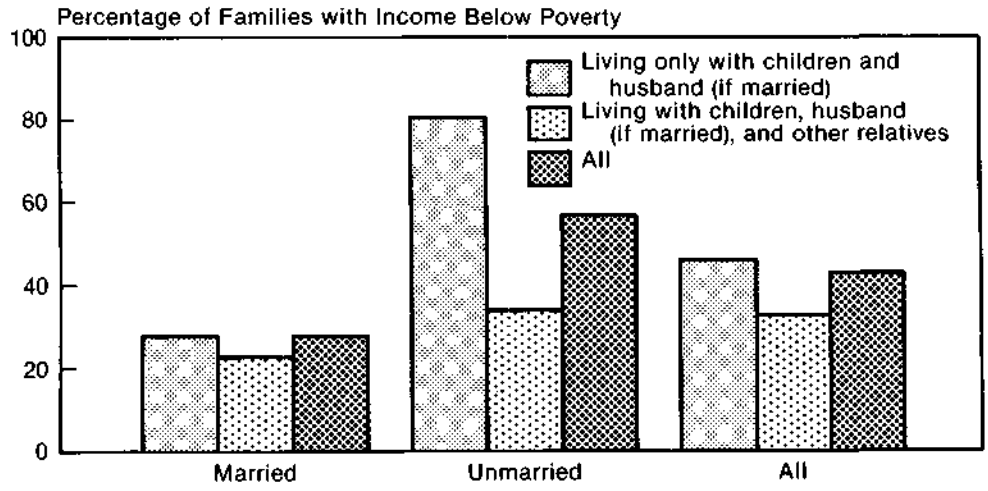
a. Excludes income of relatives living with mother, except husband, if present.

been assumed that they shared resources with relatives (and if their other sources of income remained the same); based only on their own incomes, over 90 percent of them would have been poor.

Employment

The economic well-being of young mothers and their families depends strongly on whether or not the mothers--or their husbands, if present--are employed. Almost two-thirds of all young mothers and their families with no workers had incomes below the poverty line, compared with about one-fourth of families with at least one worker (see Table 18).

Figure 3.
Poverty Rates of Young Mothers and Their Families, By Marital Status and Living Arrangement, 1985-1986



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTE: Poverty rates for all young mothers include those living with nonrelatives, although the poverty rates for these mothers are not shown separately.

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TABLE 18. POVERTY RATES IN 1985 AND 1986 OF MOTHERS WHO FIRST GAVE BIRTH AS TEENAGERS DURING THE PRECEDING FIVE YEARS (In percent)

Marital Status and Living Arrangement of the Mother and Her Children	Employment Status of Mother (and Husband, If Present): Mother, Husband, or Both Work	Employment Status of Mother (and Husband, If Present): Neither Mother nor Husband Works
Poverty Status Based on Income Received by Mother and All Relatives Living with Her		
Married, Living with Husband	22	56
Living with husband only	21	63
Living with other relatives	24	21
Separated from Husband or Not Married	41	64
Living alone	66	88
Living with other relatives	15	42
All Young Mothers	27	62
Living alone or with husband only	29	80
Living with other relatives	18	41
Poverty Status Based on Income of Mother and Husband, If Present[a]		
Living with Other Relatives	67	97
Married, living with husband	40	61
Separated or not married	77	99

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the March 1986 and March 1987 Current Population Surveys.

NOTE: Mothers who lived with unrelated adults (about 4 percent of the CPS sample) are excluded from the detail in the table but are included in the totals.

This analysis is based on an unduplicated sample of young mothers who first gave birth as teenagers during the five years preceding the survey.

a. Excludes income of relatives living with mother, except husband, if present.

Similar differences occur when families are grouped according to marital status and living arrangement. About 20 percent of young married couples living alone that had at least one worker had incomes below the poverty line, compared with over 60 percent of those with no workers. The poverty rates for single mothers who lived with their relatives were somewhat lower: 15 percent of those who had jobs and about 42 percent of those who were not employed had family incomes below the poverty line. Based only on their own incomes, however, over 75 percent of those who worked and virtually all of those who did not work would have been poor. Finally, young single mothers living only with their children were most likely to be poor, whether or not they worked. About two-thirds of those with jobs and nearly 90 percent of those without jobs had incomes below the poverty line.

POSSIBLE GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Federal policies could follow two major approaches to address the problems associated with adolescent motherhood. Policies might be devised to reduce the incidence of births to teenagers or to encourage adoptions, thus preventing problems from occurring in the first place. Alternatively, policies could be implemented to raise the young mother's income--by improving her own ability to earn, by increasing the support provided by absent fathers or other relatives, or by raising the amount of aid offered by government assistance programs.

As the analysis of earlier chapters makes clear, the problems faced by young mothers and their families are multiple, complex, and interrelated, and no single approach is likely to solve them. Rather, the problems almost certainly require a wide range of policies, no one of which is likely to be very effective by itself. In addition, many approaches--particularly those that aim to change the behavior of adolescents--may only have significant effects over longer periods; quick results should not be expected. Finally, it may be difficult to judge the effectiveness of individual policies. Even those that succeed in meeting their immediate goals may appear to have only a minimal impact because of the difficulty in measuring them accurately or because of interrelationships among the problems to be addressed. As a result, decisions about appropriate policies may have to be based on common

sense and the advice of experts, rather than on concrete evidence about their effectiveness.

One approach that might be suggested by the poverty statistics provided in this analysis would be to encourage young mothers to marry, because the poverty rate of young married mothers is less than half that of their single counterparts. Such a conclusion is probably not warranted, however, because it assumes that the men in the lives of single mothers are similar to the husbands of married mothers. Because the decision to marry may rest in part on the economic prospects of the father or on the willingness of the father to support his children, young mothers who remain single could be those whose partners have low earnings potential or who do not view themselves as having responsibility for their offspring, while those who marry may do so in part because their husbands are willing and able to help them support their families.

Policies to Reduce the Incidence of Adolescent Parenthood

From a strictly analytic perspective, the most direct way to address the problems faced by teenage mothers and their families would be to prevent their occurrence by reducing the incidence of adolescent parenthood.[2] Considerable controversy exists as to what motivation teenagers have to avoid sexual activity and early parenthood and, hence, there is little agreement about which policies would be successful in changing teenagers' behavior. Some analysts believe that many teenagers, particularly those who are poor, see no reason to avoid parenthood because their education and employment opportunities offer little hope for successful futures.[3] If delaying motherhood would leave them no better off, there would be little reason to wait to have children. Others feel that teenagers are simply unaware

2. For further discussion of these issues, see Congressional Budget Office, *Reducing Poverty Among Children* (May 1985).

3. See, for example, Children's Defense Fund, *A Vision for America's Future* (Washington, D.C.: CDF, 1989) p. 95. Others extend this argument, suggesting that early childbearing is an adaptive, even rational, response to poverty. See, for example, Arline T. Geronimus, "Why Teenage Childbearing Might Be Sensible: Research and Policy Implications" (paper presented at the 1990 Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, New Orleans, La., February 1990).

of the actual difficulties associated with being single parents, and that teenagers have greater concerns about the effects of sexual abstinence or contraceptive use on their relationships with partners, family, and friends. Still others point to the widespread misconceptions that many teenagers have about the risks of sexual activity and the importance of either delaying sexual activity or being responsible sex partners. They argue that teens cannot avoid parenthood unless they have the knowledge and the means to do so. Finally, some critics of cash assistance programs argue that many teenagers become pregnant in order to obtain welfare benefits, although available evidence offers little direct support for this view.

Raising the aspirations of young women and instilling in them the belief that they can have a better future if they delay childbearing might be one way to reduce the number of births to teenagers. To do this, however, teens need to be able to succeed in school and believe they can either continue in school--including higher education--or get decent jobs. These aims might be accomplished, for example, by improving the educational experiences of young teenagers, providing early remedial education, and offering financial assistance for obtaining further education or employment-related experience and skills. Of particular importance would be policies that help to create good jobs for which young workers could qualify; it would not be useful to prepare teenagers for nonexistent jobs. In addition, some programs have focused on providing teens with more positive experiences, adult supervision, and opportunities to engage in productive activities through programs involving community service, after-school and summer activities, and mentors. Such programs can significantly improve school performance and reduce dropout rates, although the effects on births are difficult to assess.

An alternative approach to reducing adolescent parenthood involves family life courses that provide sexuality education and help teenagers understand the issues they will face as young adults. Programs offering sexuality education have been shown to increase knowledge about the issues surrounding sexuality and have not increased sexual activity.[4] Furthermore, when coupled with accessible

4. Congressional Budget Office, *Reducing Poverty Among Children*, p. 114.

clinic services, these programs have proved effective in substantially reducing pregnancy rates. Whether components that focus on teaching teens about family responsibilities and financial management help to reduce adolescent pregnancy rates is less clear.

Wider or more effective use of contraceptives by teenagers would also reduce the number of births to adolescent women. This approach could involve providing more information about contraceptives through sexuality education courses, as well as increased access to contraceptives through clinics and health services aimed at teenagers. Critics argue that the availability of such courses and services causes increased sexual activity and therefore more pregnancies, and some object on ethical or religious grounds. Several studies, however, have found evidence indicating that the availability of family planning services has little effect on sexual activity, but does reduce the incidence of pregnancy and does lower birthrates.[5]

Some pregnancies will still occur, however, regardless of efforts to reduce the pregnancy rate of teenagers. Adolescents who become pregnant must face the emotionally and morally difficult decisions of whether to give birth or to seek abortions, and, in the former case, whether to raise the children or allow them to be adopted. While there is great disagreement about whether abortions should be available at all, or provided with public funds, many pregnant adolescents decide that this is their best alternative. Relatively few teenagers who get pregnant choose to give birth and then allow their children to be adopted, although there does not appear to be a shortage of families willing to adopt healthy infants. More young mothers might elect this option if they had more information about adoptions, including assurances that their children would live with good families.

Many state and local programs currently provide information about the various options available to pregnant teenagers, as well as the potential consequences of those options. Expanding such counseling services could increase teenagers' awareness of their alternatives and make it easier to choose among them.

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5. Congressional Budget Office, *Reducing Poverty Among Children*, p. 117.

Policies to Improve the Economic Well-Being of Young Mothers

Many of the problems associated with adolescent parenthood are tied to the low incomes of young mothers and their families. These problems might be mitigated if young mothers had larger incomes. This aim might be accomplished through programs to improve the mother's earning ability, policies designed to raise the amount of support provided by absent fathers or other relatives, or increases in federal or state welfare payments.

Improve the Mother's Ability to Earn. Many young mothers do not earn enough income to support their families because their education, training, and job experience do not qualify them for jobs paying high enough wages, because child care responsibilities and the costs of working make it impractical or impossible to take jobs, or for both reasons.

Various policies could address these problems. Encouraging adolescent mothers to continue their schooling and obtain high school degrees would improve their employability, while programs dealing more directly with employability through job training and job search assistance could improve their employment prospects. Finally, providing affordable child care and subsidizing other work-related costs could make it easier for young mothers to work.

The Family Support Act of 1988 addressed some of these problems by requiring that nonexempt members of families receiving AFDC either be in school or participate in job search and training programs, and by providing child care assistance to AFDC families who need such aid to enable members to work. It is too early to tell, however, whether the employment services provided through the act will actually enable more young mothers to be self-sufficient. In any case, because the act's provisions affect only AFDC recipients, they would not help young mothers who do not get AFDC.

The educational and employment problems of all young mothers with low incomes--whether or not they are receiving AFDC--could be attacked through programs that offer comprehensive services, including education, child care, medical and nutritional advice and

assistance, employment and training opportunities, and family planning services. Some programs provide mentors to act as role models and advisors.

Although comprehensive programs vary widely in their effectiveness, some have improved pregnancy and health outcomes for teenage mothers and their infants by providing timely prenatal care and have helped young parents remain in school. Less evidence is available, however, on the long-term education, employment, and economic benefits of these programs. For example, Project Redirection, an experimental program providing comprehensive services along with "community women" acting as role models and counselors, apparently had only short-term effects on school attendance, but generated small increases both in the likelihood of participants being employed and in their average earnings.

Increase Support Provided by Absent Fathers. Most single adolescent mothers receive no regular financial assistance from their children's fathers. Various policies already in place attempt to tap this potential source of income. During the 1980s, and most recently in the Family Support Act of 1988, the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program was strengthened to increase the likelihood that children will receive support due from their noncustodial parents. When fully phased in, that act will require that judges use state guidelines to make child support awards, that states help mothers to establish paternity, and that states automatically withhold child support payments from the wages of noncustodial parents. Because these provisions are not yet fully operative, their effectiveness cannot be judged.

One problem with relying on child support to improve the incomes of teenage mothers and their children is that, like young mothers, many young fathers have only limited earnings and therefore may not be able to provide much support for their children. Furthermore, this problem has worsened in recent years, as the earnings of young men, particularly those who have not finished high school, have fallen in real terms.[6] One approach to helping adolescent mothers and their

6. See, for example, Cliff Johnson and Andrew Sum, "Declining Earnings of Young Men: Their Relation to Poverty, Teen Pregnancy, and Family Formation" (Children's Defense Fund, Washington, D.C., May 1987).

families would be to increase the earnings of these fathers through, for example, programs that encourage young men to finish high school or that provide job training and employment assistance. One model allows fathers to work off their child support payments by engaging in activities that are expected to improve their long-term earning capabilities, even if there is no short-term increase in income. In addition, the Job Corps, which provides literacy and vocational training to youth in residential centers, has had significant success in raising the incomes of participants.

Improve the Support from Other Relatives. Yet another way of increasing the well-being of young mothers and their children would be to increase the support provided by the mother's parents or other relatives. Again, the Family Support Act of 1988 takes a step in this direction by empowering states to require minors to live with their parents or other relatives in order to qualify for AFDC benefits. As indicated in Chapter II, young mothers who live with relatives generally receive significant amounts of in-kind assistance, including not only housing but also food and child care. Other encouragement for these living arrangements could be offered through favorable income tax treatment or through provisions in the AFDC program that would increase the benefits that young mothers who are no longer minors could receive while living with relatives.

The effectiveness of such policies is highly uncertain, however, in part because forcing families to live together may not be best for young mothers and their children. Thus, pursuing them could mean spending large amounts of government funds with little impact on either the number of young mothers living with relatives or their well-being. Moreover, as noted earlier in this chapter, one-third of teenage mothers who live with relatives are poor, even counting their relatives' incomes.

Increase Welfare Payments. A final means of raising the incomes of adolescent mothers would be to increase federal or state welfare benefits. Because AFDC benefits have not risen as rapidly as prices, the maximum cash assistance available to young mothers has declined sharply in real terms over the last two decades. For example, between 1970 and 1990, the real value of the maximum AFDC benefit for a

family of three in the median state dropped by 39 percent. Even in the most generous state in 1989, the combination of AFDC and food stamps provided a family of three with assistance just above the poverty level; in the median state, the maximum combined benefit was only 73 percent of poverty.

Cash assistance to young mothers could be increased in various ways. One of the simplest approaches, though by no means the least controversial one, would be to establish national minimum AFDC benefit levels, perhaps as a fixed percentage of the poverty thresholds.[7] In states with benefits currently below the minimum, this policy would increase the incomes of AFDC recipients and make more young mothers eligible for benefits. Both effects would raise costs to both federal and state governments; these increases could be significant, thereby exacerbating current budgetary difficulties. Furthermore, setting a single minimum benefit level would ignore cost-of-living and wage differentials among geographic areas, leading to higher real benefits in low-cost areas relative to high-cost areas, and creating significant work disincentives in low-wage locations.

An alternative approach that could increase work incentives and cost less would be to liberalize the deductions allowed for working families in determining eligibility and benefits. The Family Support Act of 1988 pursued this approach by increasing the standard income disregard and the monthly disregard for child care costs; it is still too early to assess the effects of these changes. If still larger amounts were deductible for work expenses, however, or if a greater fraction of earned income were excluded from eligibility and benefit calculations, young mothers who work to support their families could qualify for larger AFDC payments and thus have higher incomes. By focusing increased benefits on families with workers, this approach would encourage young mothers (and fathers) to acquire work skills and experience, and eventually to become self-supporting. This policy would not, however, provide additional income for families in which parents cannot work because they lack skills, are incapacitated, or need to take care of young children. Furthermore, significant new work incentives have already been created by the Family Support Act. For example,

7. See, for example, Congressional Budget Office, *Reducing Poverty Among Children*, pp. 35-38.

the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program requires many adults in AFDC families to participate in education, training, or employment activities. The act also contains provisions for transportation, child care, and Medicaid coverage for AFDC families who work, including those who leave the AFDC program because of increased earnings. Because these requirements of the act have not yet been fully implemented, however, their effectiveness cannot be judged.

A final alternative would provide larger AFDC benefits to families for an initial period, and smaller benefits for families that had been on the program beyond a specific period of time. This approach could give greater support to families during their early years when they might be most in need, yet could reduce the incentive for families to remain dependent on AFDC over long periods. Particularly if it were combined with education or training requirements, such an option could help young families to become self-sufficient. At the same time, however, the higher initial benefit levels could induce more families to receive assistance, and thus increase dependence in the short run. Furthermore, for families that are unable to become self-supporting, and who might therefore be considered to be most in need, the subsequent reduction in benefits could impose additional hardships.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis in Chapter III is based on a sample of young mothers taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). This appendix describes the survey data and discusses some of the methods used in the analysis.

THE DATA

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of 12,686 young men and women who were between the ages of 14 and 21 on January 1, 1979. The respondents were first interviewed in the beginning of 1979 about events that occurred in calendar year 1978; seven years of data were used in the analysis. (All subsequent references to specific calendar years refer to the year to which the data apply, rather than the year in which the survey was taken.)

The survey includes roughly equal numbers of each sex, but black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged white youths are overrepresented. The NLSY uses appropriate weights to create nationally representative population statistics; all of the estimates in the body of the report are based on weighted counts.

By the final year of the survey, the NLSY had lost 8 percent of the original survey sample because respondents could not be located or refused to be interviewed. To correct for these losses, the analysis used population weights from the final year of the survey that had been adjusted to account for attrition.

Creating the Extract File

The analysis used a subset of data from the NLSY that comprised all the young women in the survey who first gave birth during the survey years when they were 15 to 19 years old, and who responded to the survey questions in each year after giving birth (see Table A-1). The latter requirement excluded 82 young mothers from the file, but there was little difference between these mothers and those kept in the sample. In addition, data for an additional 51 mothers were not used because they were considered to be unrepresentative of their age groups (see note a, Table A-1). The final NLSY file included 802 adolescent mothers.

TABLE A-1. ORIGINAL NLSY SAMPLE (In number of cases)

Year of Birth of First Child	Mother's Age at Birth of First Child					All Ages
	15	16	17	18	19	
1978	14	28	43	43	36	164
1979	10	22	34	48	45	159
1980	a	28	45	51	57	181
1981	n.a.	a	40	39	65	144
1982	n.a.	n.a.	a	46	52	98
1983	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	a	56	56
Total	24	78	162	227	311	802

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office calculations based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1984).

NOTES: Aside from those births mentioned in note a, there were no births to adolescents recorded for 1984 because the women in the sample were no longer teenagers. Data for 1984 were, however, used for other events--such as welfare receipt--that occurred after the birth of the child.

n.a. = not applicable.

a. Because truncation of the original sample limited it to young women who were at least 14 years old on January 1, 1979, the cases in these cells were not representative of their respective ages. Because of this, and because they would have complicated the replication procedure explained in the text, the 51 observations in these cells were dropped from the analysis. While this omission reduced the sample size, it removed a source of potential bias from the subsequent results.

Because of the aging of the cohort of young women ages 14 to 19, the original sample of births is disproportionately made up of those to older teenagers (see Table A-1). For example, there were 311 births to 19-year-olds during the entire survey period, compared with only 24 births to 15-year-olds. While most of the difference reflects the higher birthrates of older adolescents, some derives from the fact that the younger ages are absent from later years of the survey. The initial NLSY sample was limited to youths who were at least age 14 in 1979; two years later, in 1981, the youngest people in the survey were at least age 16, so from 1981 on, no births to 15-year-olds could occur in the sample. Each subsequent year of the survey excluded another age of new mothers, until, in the 1985 survey, no further adolescent births could be recorded because every person in the survey was over age 19. The successive losses of age groups meant that six years of births could be observed only for 19-year-old mothers.

Correcting the Age Distribution

Because age limitations restrict the years in which births to younger adolescents can occur in the sample, the data are not representative of the national population of adolescent mothers. To reflect the age distribution more accurately, the sample was reweighted using data from the earlier years to impute values for the empty cells in Table A-1. This procedure implicitly assumed that the attributes of the mothers observed in the earlier years of the survey were similar to those of mothers of the same ages in subsequent years who could not be observed because of the survey's age limitations. In other words, if 15-year-old mothers behaved differently in 1978 from 15-year-old mothers in 1983, the sample would not reflect the difference, because the 15-year-old mothers from 1978 and 1979 were used to represent those in 1983. This assumption is discussed further below.

In particular, the reweighting was accomplished by creating "clones" of the younger mothers from the early years of the NLSY by replicating their records into the later years. For example, as shown in Table A-1, the sample could contain no 15-year-old mothers who first gave birth between 1980 and 1983. The records of those 15-year-old

TABLE A-2. FINAL ADJUSTED NLSY SAMPLE (In number of cases)

Year of Birth of First Child	Mother's Age at Birth of First Child					All Ages
	15	16	17	18	19	
1978	14	28	43	43	36	164
1979	10	22	34	48	45	159
1980	12[a]	28	45	51	57	193
1981	12[a]	26[a]	40	39	65	182
1982	12[a]	26[a]	41[a]	46	52	176
1983	12[a]	26[a]	41[a]	45[a]	56	180
Total	72	156	243	272	311	1,054

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office calculations based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1984).

NOTE: Details may not sum to totals because the weights of replicated observations have been rounded.

a. These cells include adjusted replicated cases. For example, the twelve 15-year-old adolescents who gave birth in 1980 reflect the annual average of the 15-year-old mothers whose children were born in 1978 and 1979; similarly, the twenty-six 16-year-old mothers having children in 1981 reflect the annual average of the 16-year-old mothers whose children were born in 1978, 1979, and 1980.

mothers who first gave birth in 1978 and 1979 were replicated and reweighted to the average of the two observed years. The averaging procedure corrected the replicated records for the fact that the replicated observations were from more than one year. For example, because imputations for the 15-year-old mothers came from two years of original observations, each replicated 15-year-old was assigned a weight equal to one-half its original value. These replicated records were then assigned to each of the relevant empty cells for 15-year-olds--that is, 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983. Thus, as shown in Table A-2, the equivalent of 12 cases of 15-year-old mothers--the average of the 14 observed cases in 1978 and the 10 cases from 1979--were added to each year from 1980 through 1983. A similar procedure was followed for mothers ages 16 to 18.[1]

1. These duplicated records were truncated appropriately according to the year into which they were placed. For example, if a record from 1978 was used for 1983, the record was limited to the information that could have been observed by the end of the survey period in January 1985--between 12 and 24 months of data, depending on the birth month.

This adjustment successfully corrected the age distribution of the sample, making it quite similar to that found in national data on adolescent mothers (see Table A-3). Furthermore, except for the marital status of younger mothers (discussed below), the NLSY sample is similar--in terms of age, race, and marital status--to the national population of adolescent mothers (see Table A-4).

Nevertheless, the data still have two weaknesses. First, the findings for the youngest ages are based on few observations and may therefore be inaccurate. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the youngest mothers could be observed only for two or three years, so a larger fraction of them in the adjusted NLSY sample are imputed. Second, the assumption implicit in adjusting the sample--that the experiences of the adolescent mothers who first gave birth in the early years of the survey were the same as those of adolescents who first

TABLE A-3. COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND FINAL ADJUSTED NLSY SAMPLES AND NCHS DATA (In percent)

Age at First Birth	NLSY Sample		NCHS Data
	Original	Final Adjusted	
15	3	6	6
16	9	14	13
17	20	23	21
18	27	25	27
19	42	32	33
All Ages	100	100	100

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth; National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1980*, vol. 31, no. 8, Supplement (November 30, 1982), pp. 10-11; and NCHS, *Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1981*, vol. 32, no. 9, Supplement (December 29, 1983), pp. 12-13.

NOTES: Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) sample are for 1978 through 1983. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) are an average of those for 1980 and 1981 and correspond to the midpoint of the NLSY sample period.

The distributions for the original NLSY sample and the adjusted NLSY sample are based on weighted population counts.

TABLE A-4. CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENT MOTHERS AT FIRST BIRTH, FINAL ADJUSTED NLSY SAMPLE AND NCHS DATA

Characteristic of Mother at First Birth	Percentage of the Final Adjusted NLSY Sample	Percentage of the NCHS Sample
Marital Status		
Married	51	50
Unmarried	49	50
Age		
15 to 17	43	40
18 to 19	57	60
Marital Status by Age		
15 to 17		
Married	42	35[a]
Unmarried	58	65[a]
18 to 19		
Married	58	57[a]
Unmarried	42	43[a]
Race		
White	70	73
Black	26	25
Other	4	3
Marital Status by Race		
White		
Married	67	63
Unmarried	33	37
Black		
Married	11	12
Unmarried	89	88

SOURCES: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth; National Center for Health Statistics, *Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1980*, vol. 31, no. 8, Supplement (November 30, 1982), pp. 10-11; and NCHS, *Advance Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1981*, vol. 32, no. 9, Supplement (December 29, 1983), pp. 12-13.

NOTE: Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) sample are for 1978 through 1983. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) are an average of those for 1980 and 1981 and correspond to the midpoint of the NLSY sample period.

a. These percentages are for 1982 because NCHS data for 1980 and 1981 were not available. The discrepancy between the NCHS and NLSY data in this particular tabulation would probably be smaller if 1980-1981 NCHS data had been used, because births to married adolescents as a proportion of births to all adolescents fell substantially during the years covered by the NLSY surveys (1978-1983).

gave birth in the later years--may be wrong. The adjusted NLSY sample contains too large a proportion of mothers ages 15 to 17 who were married when they first gave birth (see Table A-4). This situation probably results from two factors: births to married adolescents as a proportion of births to all adolescents dropped noticeably between 1978 and 1983, and data for the younger mothers in the sample come primarily from the earlier part of that period.[2] To reduce the possible bias introduced by this problem, most of the results of this analysis are presented separately for married and unmarried mothers.

METHOD

The methods used in this study were based on the approach developed by Bane and Ellwood in their analyses of the dynamics of welfare use.[3] The remainder of this appendix explains why the analysis was limited to receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits and describes how AFDC entrance rates, exit rates, and recipiency rates were calculated.

Limiting the Analysis to Receipt of AFDC

Many studies of the receipt of public assistance examine a wider range of aid programs than just AFDC, generally on the argument that survey respondents do not accurately distinguish among sources of assistance payments.[4] For two reasons, however, the analysis in Chapter III considered only the receipt of benefits from the AFDC program. First, the receipt of AFDC appears to be measured reasonably well in the NLSY, because the survey clearly distinguished between AFDC and other forms of welfare. It seemed somewhat more likely to have elicited the correct response, at least from those

2. During the period covered by this sample, all births--as contrasted to first births--to married women ages 15 to 19 dropped from 56 percent of all births to adolescent mothers in 1978 to 47 percent in 1983. The decline was greater for mothers ages 15 to 17--from 43 percent to 32 percent.

3. See Appendix B of Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, "The Dynamics of Dependence: The Routes to Self-Sufficiency" (prepared for the Department of Health and Human Services, June 1983) for a discussion of their methodology.

4. See, for example, Bane and Ellwood, "The Dynamics of Dependence."

respondents who knew what they received. This conclusion was confirmed by an examination of individual NLSY records, which suggested that while there may have been some confusion among different kinds of public assistance, it was not prevalent enough to justify combining them.

Second, unlike the samples examined in some other research efforts, the sample used in this study probably includes actual recipients of non-AFDC public assistance payments because it includes married mothers, who are less likely to qualify for AFDC than single mothers.[5] Therefore, combining AFDC and other public assistance into a single category might result in a loss of information about actual differences in patterns of welfare receipt among different groups.

Determining AFDC Entrance Rates

In this analysis, the AFDC entrance rate for adolescent mothers in a given time period was defined as the proportion of all adolescent mothers who first entered the AFDC program during that time period. It was unnecessary to consider whether the observed entrance (or transition) onto AFDC was the mother's first; all entries of these mothers onto the AFDC program had to have been first transitions because, as first-time mothers, the women could not have received AFDC previously on their own behalf.

Six time periods were examined: before the birth of a mother's first child, between birth and 12 months after birth, 13 months to 24 months after birth, 25 months to 36 months after birth, 37 months to 48 months after birth, and 49 months to 60 months after birth. Although data were available for the period 61 months to 72 months after birth, this period was not used because the sample involved--women

5. During the period covered by the NLSY, about half of the states did not provide AFDC benefits to married-couple families unless one parent was incapacitated. Moreover, the other states provided AFDC benefits to able-bodied two-parent families only if the parent who was the family's primary earner was unemployed.

who first gave birth in 1978--was too small. The entrance rate in period t, or E_t, is defined to be:[6]

$$E_t = n_t/N,$$

for t = 1 (before birth) to t = 6 (49 to 60 months after birth),

where n_t = the number of adolescent mothers first receiving welfare in period t, and N = the number of adolescent mothers in the sample.

Because of data limitations and the truncation caused by the end of the survey, however, not all of the mothers could be observed for all time periods. Instead, the observation period depends on the year in which their child was born--that is, there were six full years of information for the cohort that gave birth in 1978, and five complete years of information for those who had their first child in 1979, but only one full year of information for those who had their first child in 1983. Cohorts are defined here by the year of birth of the first child rather than by the age of the mother. Therefore, the 1978 cohort refers to women who were ages 15 to 19 in 1978 and who first gave birth in that year.[7]

Because of this truncation problem, AFDC entrance rates could not be calculated directly. Instead, entrance rates--or probabilities of becoming a recipient of AFDC--were estimated in two steps. The first step involved estimating the probability of going onto AFDC separately for each period after birth. These transition probabilities are defined as the proportion of young mothers who had not entered AFDC by the beginning of the period but who began receiving benefits during

6. The formulas in this appendix are illustrative and do not reflect technical complications in actual calculations. In particular, the formulas do not acknowledge changes over time in the actual size of the NLSY sample that are attributable to the survey's methodology.

7. Depending on the precise timing of the birth during the year, more data are available for some women within specific cohorts. For example, a woman who gave birth in January of 1978 could be observed for almost seven years, whereas a woman who gave birth in December of that year could be observed for only six years. Therefore, there are at least six full years of data available for the 1978 cohort.

the period. That is, the transition probability for period t, or T_t, is defined to be:

$$T_t = n_t/M_t,$$

where

M_t = the number of adolescent mothers in the sample who had not received AFDC by the beginning of period t;

so that

M_1 = N, and

M_t = $N - n_1 - n_2 - \ldots - n_{t-1}$, for $t = 2,3,\ldots,6$.

This approach allowed the use of data involving births in all of the survey years to estimate the AFDC transition probability for the first two periods (that is, up to 12 months after birth), but only data for the earlier birth years could be used to calculate transition probabilities for periods occurring further after birth. Thus, for example, the transition probability for the period 49 months to 60 months after the birth of the child could only be based on women who first gave birth during the initial two years of the survey.[8] Consequently, the estimated transition probabilities for the periods closest to birth are more reliable, while those for the periods furthest from the birth are based on smaller samples--that is, fewer cohorts--and therefore may be less reliable.[9]

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8. Note that the analysis combines information from all of the cohorts; that is, all adolescents who started receiving AFDC two years after they first gave birth were used to estimate that transition probability, regardless of the years or their ages when they first gave birth. This approach is most useful if the behavior of the later cohorts resembles that of earlier cohorts. The results, however, are for adolescents ages 15 to 19 who first gave birth during the period from 1978 to 1983, rather than in any particular year.

9. Only those periods that contained at least two cohorts were included in the analysis; as a result, the longest period considered is 49 months to 60 months after birth, based on the 1978 and 1979 cohorts. Moreover, because estimates for the periods furthest from the birth are also based on the earliest cohorts, they may be less representative of adolescents during the entire 1978-1984 period.

The second step was to apply the estimated transition probabilities to the sample of adolescent mothers to calculate their AFDC entrance rates (see Table A-5). For example, during the first period (before the birth), 7 percent of the sample received AFDC for the first time (column 2). During the second period (the first 12 months after the birth of the child), 22 percent of the adolescent mothers who had not yet started receiving AFDC made their first transition onto the program. To estimate the proportion of the entire sample that first received AFDC during the second period, the transition probability for

TABLE A-5. USING TRANSITION PROBABILITIES TO ESTIMATE AFDC ENTRANCE RATES FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS

(1) Timing of Entrance in Relation to First Birth	(2) Entrance Transition Probability	(3) Entrance Rate[a]	(4) Cumulative Entrance Rate
Before Birth	7	7	7
Between 0 and 12 Months After Birth	22	21	28
Between 13 and 24 Months After Birth	10	8	35
Between 25 and 36 Months After Birth	9	6	41
Between 37 and 48 Months After Birth	9	5	46
Between 49 and 60 Months After Birth	5	3	49

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office calculations based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

a. Percentage of initial population that started receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in each period.

that period (.22) was multiplied by the proportion of the initial sample that had not started receiving AFDC by the beginning of that period (93 percent, which is 100 percent minus the 7 percent that had entered by the end of the preceding period). This product is the 21 percent shown in column 3. This method was used to calculate each of the AFDC entrance rates shown in column 3. Symbolically,

$$E_t = T_t * (M_t/N).$$

Finally, the cumulative proportion of mothers who had made their initial transition onto AFDC by the end of various periods after first giving birth--shown in column 4--equals the sum of the appropriate entrance rates in column 3.[10] Thus, the cumulative entrance rate in period t, C_t, is defined to be:

$$C_t = (n_1 + ... + n_t)/N = E_1 + ... + E_t.$$

Determining AFDC Exit Rates

The AFDC exit rate for adolescent mothers receiving AFDC during a given time period is the proportion of all such mothers who first left the program during that time period. An exit from the AFDC program was recorded when a mother who had been getting AFDC received no AFDC for at least three consecutive months. Requiring a three-month period off the program reduced the likelihood of counting only true exits and excluding cases in which benefits were temporarily terminated because of failure to meet administrative requirements.[11] An alternative definition required that a mother not receive payments for at least 12 consecutive months before she was said to have left AFDC.

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10. Note that the estimates in column 4 reflect the cumulative proportion of adolescent mothers who first entered the AFDC program by the end of various periods after first giving birth, regardless of whether some of them also left the program within that period. The estimates therefore do not represent the proportion actually receiving benefits in any given period.

11. The three-month criterion is the same as that used in the AFDC Quality Control Review Survey. An exception to the three-month rule was made for cases in which the mother stopped getting benefits within three months of the end of the survey; such cases were assumed to be exits from AFDC. Assuming that none of these cases represented an exit from AFDC did not affect the results significantly.

Comparing the results based on these two definitions shows the extent to which adolescent mothers who left the program returned quickly.

The exit rates were determined in a manner analogous to that for AFDC entrance rates, with three exceptions. First, because the analysis was necessarily limited to adolescent mothers in the sample who had started receiving AFDC at some point in the survey, the AFDC exit rates were calculated on a smaller sample--roughly half the size--than that used to estimate the AFDC entrance rates. Second, the exit rates are calculated relative to the year in which the mother first went on AFDC rather than the year when her first child was born. Third, although data were potentially available for up to seven years after the mother first started receiving AFDC, few mothers were observed for periods longer than 48 months after they first received AFDC. The analysis was therefore limited to mothers who left during the first four years of AFDC participation.

Determining AFDC Recipiency Rates

The probability of receiving AFDC in each time period after first giving birth was estimated as the proportion of adolescent mothers observed in that time period who reported receiving any AFDC benefits. Because some recipients leave the program, this proportion is not the same as the cumulative probability of young mothers entering the AFDC program.

APPENDIX B

EXITS FROM THE AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN PROGRAM UNDER AN ALTERNATIVE DEFINITION OF EXIT

Table 15 in Chapter III shows exit rates based on a definition of exit requiring mothers to be off AFDC for at least three months. Table B-1 shows exit rates under an alternative definition requiring that the period off AFDC last at least 12 months.

TABLE B-1. CUMULATIVE AFDC EXIT RATES FOR ADOLESCENT MOTHERS UNDER AN ALTERNATIVE DEFINITION OF EXIT, BY MOTHER'S MARITAL STATUS AND AGE AT FIRST BIRTH, AND RACE (In percent)

Characteristic of Mother	Cumulative Proportion Who Left AFDC for at Least 12 Consecutive Months[a]		
	Within 6 Months After First AFDC Receipt	Within 12 Months After First AFDC Receipt	Within 48 Months After First AFDC Receipt
All	24	37	67
Marital Status at Birth of First Child			
Married	49	56	85
Unmarried	14	26	51
Age at Birth of First Child			
All mothers			
15 to 17	22	28	54
18 to 19	21	36	63
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth			
15 to 17	14	20	48
18 to 19	15	32	55
Race			
All mothers			
White	30	38	68
Black	12	26	48
Mothers who were unmarried when they first gave birth			
White	17	26	56
Black	11	26	48

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office tabulations of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-1985).

NOTES: Exit rates for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program refer to the proportion of adolescent mothers receiving AFDC payments who left the program for at least 12 consecutive months for the first time within the specified period. Adolescent mothers are defined as all women who first had children when they were between the ages of 15 and 19. The results for married adolescent mothers of different ages and races are not included separately because of the small sample size.

These findings are based on relatively small samples and therefore should be taken as indicative of general patterns of behavior rather than as precise estimates, particularly for the period furthest after birth.

a. These estimates reflect the total number of recipients who left the program for the first time, regardless of subsequent reentries or reexits. Thus the values do not relate to the proportion receiving benefits in any particular period.