

Facts about Teenage Parenting: Why We Must Become More Proactive

A teenager who parents a child has a serious risk of not finishing her education:

- Only **40 percent** of teenagers who have children before age 18 go on to graduate from high school, **compared to 75 percent** of teens from similar social and economic backgrounds who do not give birth until ages 20 or 21.ⁱ
- With her education cut short, a teenage mother likely lacks job skills, making it hard for her to find and keep a job. A teenage mother may become financially dependent on her family or on public assistance. Teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty than women who delay childbearing, and **more than 75 percent of all unmarried teen mothers go on welfare within 5 years** of the birth of their first child.ⁱ

High-school dropouts face serious risks and disadvantages in life:

- On any given day, about **1 in every 10** young male high-school dropouts is in jail or juvenile detention, **compared with 1 in 35** young male high-school graduates; more specifically, nearly **1 in 4 young African-American male dropouts** is incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized on an average day (**compared with about 1 in 14** young, male, white, Asian, or Hispanic dropouts).ⁱⁱ
- According to 2008 unemployment rates, **54 percent** of dropouts ages 16 to 24 were jobless, **compared with 32 percent** for high-school graduates of the same age, and **13 percent** for those with a college degree; the statistics were **worse for African-American dropouts**, whose unemployment rate in that year was **69 percent, compared with 54 percent** for white Americans, and 47 percent for Hispanics.ⁱⁱ
- Young female dropouts are **9 times** more likely to become single mothers than young women who went on to earn college degrees.ⁱⁱ
- U.S. Census figures from 2006 show high-school dropouts **earn \$17,299 a year, compared to \$26,933** for high-school graduates (**\$260,000 less** in estimated lifetime earnings).ⁱⁱⁱ

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Likewise, the child of a teenage parent faces serious risks and disadvantages:

- About **64 percent** of children born to an unmarried teenage high-school dropout live in poverty, **compared to 7 percent** of children born to women over age 20 who are married and high-school graduates.ⁱ
- A child born to a teenage mother is **50 percent** more likely to repeat a grade in school, and is more likely to perform poorly on standardized tests and drop out before finishing high school.ⁱ
- Sons of teenage fathers are **13 percent** more likely than their peers with older parents to end up in prison.^{iv}
- Children born to mothers age 15 and younger are **twice as likely** to become a victim of child abuse/neglect in the first five years of life than children born to mothers ages 20-21.^v
- According to parents' reports of their children's health status, **60% of children** born to non-teen mothers were rated in "excellent" health, **compared to 38%** for children born to the youngest adolescent mothers.^v

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ⁱ Teenage Pregnancy Fact Sheet, March of Dimes Foundation, March 2009.

ⁱⁱ "Dropouts graduate to jail: 1 in 10 in U.S.," *The Commercial Appeal*, October 12, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Dropouts to cost Tennessee billions," *The Commercial Appeal*, October 4, 2009.

^{iv} "Editorial: Region leads in teen births," *The Commercial Appeal*, January 9, 2009.

^v George, R. M., & Lee, B.J. (1997), "Abuse and neglect of the children," in R. Maynard (Ed.), *Kids having kids*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.