

## **Children of Unwed Teen Mothers: Reasons, Outcomes and Solutions**

by  
Jill Waity

### **I. Introduction**

For every story about a child who overcomes his single parent background to become successful, there are many more who are poorly educated, poorly fed, and poorly supported. Jonathan Alter makes the strong statement, “The fact remains: every threat to the fabric of this country -- from poverty to crime to homelessness -- is connected to out-of-wedlock teen pregnancy” (Alter 41). While this is certainly not true, children of teen mothers face additional disadvantages that other children, even of single mothers, do not face. Up until the 1970’s, there was a widespread belief that single mother families were harmful for children. Once the data was reexamined, an overly optimistic picture of the situation was painted, essentially saying these children had the same outcomes as those from two parent families. Current information suggests a compromise between these two extreme positions.

While some studies show children growing up with single parents are as likely to succeed, others show that they are not. Single mothers tend to be less wealthy than their two parent counterparts and one of the most impoverished groups in the nation. Most studies conclude that children of single parents are at a disadvantage.

This paper looks in particular at the most disadvantaged demographic in this subset: teenage never-married mothers. I am focusing on this demographic because, as Ruth Sidel explains, “...teen pregnancy is of special concern because of the physical, psychological, social, and economic consequences of early parenthood on young mothers and their babies” (Sidel 118).

Births to single mothers, especially teenagers, are on the rise because fewer women are marrying, social norms are loosening and sexual activity is increasing. Poor teens are more likely to get pregnant because they are not as future oriented and are less likely to use contraceptives. Teen mothers generally come from poor backgrounds and usually the fathers of their children are older. Variables affecting child outcomes that correlate with never married teen mothers are lack of father figures, poor education and lack of experience raising children. Outcomes for mothers as a result of this situation include poor health, decreased educational achievement and lower wage earnings. For children, they also include poor health, lower educational and job attainment, and early family formation. Policies and practices can successfully diminish these outcomes. There is no one solution to teenage motherhood and the child outcomes associated with it. These policies must both prevent teenagers from having children to begin with through giving teens positive and negative incentives, educating them and instilling them with a sense of purpose. To alleviate the situation once it occurs, support must be provided through adequate child support, affordable child care, and work that pays enough on which to live.

## **II. What's the Debate All About?**

### **A. Who and What Outcomes?**

Children living with a single parent are disadvantaged. This disadvantage increases when the mother is a teenager and is further exacerbated when she is living in poverty. While single motherhood does not cause as many problems as some would like

to think, McLanahan and Sandefur outline its many negative effects. These increase substantially in my particular cohort.

In *Growing Up With A Single Parent*, Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur present information supporting the belief that children living in a household with one biological parent are worse off than those with two parents, regardless of race, education and marital status. Although most of the situations they describe do not relate specifically to teenage never married mothers, the problems exist for all children including those born to teenagers. Children living with one biological parent are twice as likely to drop out of school and have a child before the age of twenty and one-half times more likely to be out of work in their late teens and early twenties (McLanahan and Sandefur 2). Having one parent deprives children of economic, parental, and community resources, and in turn undermines future chances of success. Low income is probably the most important factor in the lower achievement of children from single parent homes.

Judy Stephenson, in her book *The Two Parent Family is Not the Best*, disagrees with McLanahan and Sandefur that any type of single parent family negatively affects the children. Stephenson interviewed 368 women raised in single parent families. Most of the women were Caucasian with some blacks, Asians, Native Americans and Hispanics. Their ages ranged from 18-88, with the median age of 35 and the average age of 39. She found that, "There is no one group that stands out as being the best family situation for raising children" (Stephenson 349). Daughters living with fathers developed feminine traits and daughters living with mothers developed masculine traits. These families also had some advantages over two parent families. In addition, her study focused more on the psychological effects of single parent families that tended to be older, middle class, and

divorced or widowed. Educated and older, these women differ from the cohort I focus on in this paper. The demographic she studies has high outcomes for children, implying that the teenage never married mothers significantly bring down the average outcome for children.

Even if Stephenson is correct in her findings, the cohort I focus on has been shown to have negative child outcomes. Regardless of the results, single motherhood is on the rise. This has recently generated enormous attention and concern. One third of the increase results from married women having fewer children, and consequently raising the share of children born to unmarried women. The number of unmarried women has also grown rapidly because of a general decrease in marriage.

#### A. Why?

Teenagers become pregnant for complex and multifaceted reasons. Statistics show more teens are having children. One of the reasons for the increase in single motherhood is a shift in social norms to more accepting of single motherhood. Teen unwed pregnancy is increasing especially because of the decrease in teen marriage and the increase in teen sexual activity, although some argue that not much has changed. Although studies have shown this increase to be relatively small, it is still worth noting.

Ruth Sidel and Rebecca Blank point to the shift in social norms towards acceptance of single motherhood as a factor in the birthrate increase. Wade Horn and Isabel Sawhill feel that these norms are beginning to shift towards increased marriage should be shifted even farther. They think that cultural norms for marriage no longer exist and that they need to be rebuilt.

Jean Bethke Elshtain says there is not a rise in teens getting pregnant; there are just more unmarried teens than previously. In the 1960's, there were many teen mothers but they were married. The couple either married very young before the pregnancy or the man was forced to marry the mother. Even if marriage did not occur, there was a more traditional supportive network of friends and family on which the mother could rely. Today women are not married when they get pregnant and they do not marry before they give birth. Men who father these children do not feel compelled to marry these women, or the women do not want to marry because of male joblessness. Sidel finds evidence that more teens are having sex. In the 1950's, only 25% of eighteen year old females had had sex, as compared with over 50% in the 1990's.

Only four percent of unwed teenagers give birth, which amounts to nine percent of all births in the country being to unwed teenagers. Stating the facts in this manner should not minimize the problem. There has indeed been an increase in the probability that single teenagers will give birth as well as an increase in the number of single teens.

Teens living in poverty are more likely to become pregnant than those who are not. Some conservatives like Charles Murray argue this increase is due to public assistance that can be gathered by having more children. Others say this population is discouraged and do not think they have a future. Another reason some point to are lack of attractive males to marry.

Charles Murray believes that poor teens are getting pregnant to obtain public assistance money. Ruth Sidel disagrees. She attributes pregnancy to a lack of education and economic opportunities, and ignorance about reproduction.

Rebecca Blank has found little evidence agreeing with the often used argument that nonmarital births have increased due to changes in public assistance programs. The factors that she has found causing nonmarital births to rise include decreasing attractiveness of men due to incarceration or joblessness, and decreasing stigma of single motherhood (Blank 37).

Teenagers living in poverty make up the majority of teen mothers because they are more likely to get pregnant than other teens. “In general, ‘higher income’ teenagers (defined by a Guttmacher Institute study as 200 percent or more of the federal poverty line) are much more likely to use contraceptives than ‘lower income’ young women (defined as 100 to 199 percent of the poverty line or “poor” (those below or at the poverty line)” (Sidel 123). This lower use of contraception automatically puts low income teenagers at a higher risk of getting pregnant. In addition, teens from more affluent families and those more future oriented are more likely to terminate a pregnancy. This also increases the poorer women’s chance of getting pregnant.

Young middle class white women know if they have a child they cannot go to college or pursue their goals, so they avoid or terminate pregnancy (Sidel 126). In contrast, “Those who had few dreams for the future, are burdened by dilemmas of day-to-day living, and feel hopeless about their lives, those with personal or family problems, and those so mired in poverty and a lack of options that they cannot imagine another way of life are the girls and young women who often become teenage mothers” (Sidel 126). Kristen Luker argues that teenagers who become pregnant are discouraged already. She suggests that poverty makes women bear children at an early age. Women with limited

options in life often feel having a man to love them is very important, leading them to have sex in order to extend relationships with men which leads to pregnancy (Sidel 130).

It is correct to say teens are getting pregnant because they are discouraged. The meager amount of public assistance money is not enough of a reason to get pregnant. Also, even if social norms were lax, they are shifting towards a more conservative direction, making this reason less viable.

### **III. Characteristics of the Cohort Considered**

Teen never married mothers living in poverty are more likely to be from poor families and be on welfare. In addition, the fathers of their children tend to be older and less desirable marriage partners.

Teen mothers are more likely than other teens to come from economically disadvantaged families. In fact, while 38% of teenage females are poor, 83% of teenage mothers are poor. Even if they did not have children at a young age, this data suggests these women would still be living in poverty.

Generally, teenage mothers do not face situations substantially worse than other single mothers from similar backgrounds. To counter the argument that being a single mother causes a woman to become economically disadvantaged, Blank cites a study that suggests long term earning power of these women is likely to be limited, even if they did not become teenage mothers (Blank 39). The study compared teen mothers to their sisters who were not teen mothers and found that by the mid-twenties, teen mothers only earned slightly less than their sisters. This evidence does not suggest that the teens do particularly well, but that women from some family backgrounds do just as poorly

regardless of when they have children. “This suggests that the problems of unwed motherhood among young women may be less related to their childbearing per se than to the whole host of factors that limit their opportunities and make motherhood at age 15 or 16 more attractive than school or work” (Blank 38).

Even if teenage mothers were not poor to begin with, they are likely to become poor. In the mid 1980’s the median income of teen mothers was less than half that of women who gave birth at twenty five or older. They were also more likely to have an income 50% below the poverty line. When AFDC existed, teen mothers were more likely to become welfare recipients, with 13% of those on welfare being teen mothers and 42% current or former teen mothers on welfare.

The US Bureau of Census calculated in 1992 that 45% of families headed by a single mother were living below the poverty line whereas only 8.4% of two parent families were below the line. The disappearance of decent jobs that allow unskilled workers to provide for their families exacerbates this problem of single motherhood.

The fathers of children born to teenage mothers are generally older, with men over the age of twenty more likely than teenage boys to father these children. The National Center for Health Statistics cited in 1991 that 67% of teenage mothers were impregnated by men over the age of twenty (Sidel 131). Many of these men walk away from their responsibilities because of their poor economic situations. A male with less than a college education does not make enough money to support a family. This shrinking pool of marriageable, in particular black, men has implications for women because they no longer have men to marry and help care for their children. Teen mothers are less likely to marry and more likely to have larger families.



#### **IV. Variables**

Many variables that are associated with unwed teen mothers cause poor child outcomes. First, children lack a father figure, which impacts their development as well as the family. This lack of a father contributes to income poverty which adversely affects children. Second, educational deficits are more likely because of poor neighborhood conditions and lack of quality time spent with parents. Third, teens are usually not prepared to raise children.

Charles Murray makes an excellent point about growing up fatherless. It is fine for a boy to grow up fatherless if he lives in a neighborhood where everyone else has a father and it is easy for him to get the role model of a father from another source. So often now, especially in low income areas, there are neighborhoods with no fathers around to act as role models, making it especially hard for the children because they lack a role model. Murray outlines the problems facing young poor males today, including increased correctional supervision. He gives a dismal sketch of the problems of single parents and their increase. This explains why the men are not marriageable. The fathers are often unknown to the children, and in some cases even to the mother herself.

Parent involvement increases educational achievement, especially through such activities as reading to the children. Single parents have more responsibilities that they must accomplish themselves, leaving less time to spend with their children. The non custodial parent is usually not around to help. Parental support is actually more important than the number of parents in a household, but generally an economically disadvantaged single parent family is less likely to have a supportive environment.

Children of single parents are less successful because children need many positive influences from their parents in order to succeed, such as intellectual stimulation, good education, and a hard work ethic. Having a close relationship with parents and other adults who care and provide positive influences helps them stay on track. This care is harder for children of single mothers to receive.

Lacking a father figure affects labor force attachments. Parents in the work force often give children jobs through networks and local connections. With only one parent in the workforce, these connections are limited.

The single parent situation also reduces social control and contraceptive use. It is harder for single parents to discipline a child with no backup support. Because parents act as role models to their children, a mother who dates or cohabits sends the message to her daughter that premarital sex is okay or even preferable. The father not paying child support sends the message that children are the woman's responsibility and his son does not need to support the offspring that he fathers.

Single motherhood lowers the quality of schools that children attend. These families usually are not as wealthy so they cannot attend private schools or afford after school lessons, trips and summer camps. In addition, they typically do not live in the best neighborhoods that have better public schools.

Just merely the fact that these women are teenagers affects child outcomes. Blank suggests, "If some of these teenagers are also unprepared to be effective parents, teen parenting might limit their children's cognitive and emotional development as well" (Blank 38). In addition to all the other problems they face, being a teenager puts these women at a disadvantage for raising their children.

## **V. Outcomes**

### **A. For Mothers**

Even though I focus on teen motherhood's effect on children, it is important to note the outcomes for the mothers themselves. The three major outcomes that occur when unwed teenagers become mothers are increased health problems, decreased educational attainment and an increased chance of living in poverty.

Health problems, while having the biggest impact on the children, also affect the mother during pregnancy, including, "excessive weight gain to maternal mortality, and include anemia, nutritional deficiencies, toxemia, prolonged or abrupt labor, and caesarean sections" (Prater 5).

For teens in particular, the responsibilities of motherhood cause long term problems. Pregnancy interrupts education because it forces the mothers to drop out of high school in order to raise their children. In addition, without a good education, it becomes harder for her to assist her child with school work. Teenage single mothers attend disproportionately lower quality schools. They are also less likely to have high school diplomas and go on to college. Because of this, they have difficulty finding and keeping a job.

This lack of a degree limits earning potential to provide a secure life for themselves and for their children. The economic situation is so bad that, "Almost 75 percent of American children living in single-parent families will experience poverty before they turn 11 years old, but only 20 percent of children in two-parent

families”(Horn and Sawhill 422). This poverty has severe effects on both the mother and her children.

### **B. For Children**

The outcomes of children born to teen mothers are vast. Elshtain lists them saying, “...children of teen moms pay the heaviest price of all in poor health, deteriorated home environments, lower cognitive development, worse educational outcomes, higher rates of behavioral problems of all kinds, and higher rates of adolescent childbearing”(Elshtain 130). Children born to teenage mothers experience negative consequences from this situation. The first major outcome is poorer health. The second is decreased educational achievement. The third is earlier childbearing. The fourth is difficulty finding and maintaining a job.

Babies born to teenage mothers are less likely to flourish, to have a normal birth weight, and to have prenatal care (Elshtain 129). They also tend to experience, “prematurity, congenital malformations, neurological defects, perinatal mortality and childhood growth failure” (Prater 6). The children born into this situation have an increased likelihood of special problems including low birth weight, premature birth, health problems, and hospitalization during childhood. In the past this has been associated with the poverty conditions such as low economic status, educational disadvantages, poor nutrition and lack of prenatal care. Recent studies have shown these outcomes may not be limited to teen mothers living in poverty. These deficiencies seem to hold somewhat true of children born to teenage white middle class children.

McLanahan and Sandefur look at educational achievement in children of single mothers and find that they achieve lower, as I mentioned earlier. Eighty-seven percent of children from two parent families have a high school degree while only 68 percent of single-parent children do. While lower achievement has been shown, other factors such as race and language barriers also account for these lower outcomes.. These children score lower on IQ tests and have lower academic achievement. This does not necessarily correlate with the teenage motherhood specifically, but can be attributed to whether or not the mother eventually marries or returns to school (Prater 5). These children are also 40% more likely to drop out of school.

McLanahan and Sandefur also look at family formation issues in single parent families and find that they are more likely to have children at a younger age. Teen mothers are more likely to come from single parent families themselves, so they are forming families like those in which they were raised. Growing up in a single parent family means one is more likely to have children younger. Girls in this situation often do not expect to go to college or find good jobs, so they are less likely to avoid or terminate a pregnancy than girls who might have a “brighter” future. I described this situation earlier in the section about why poor teenagers are having more children. The same factors that applied to their mothers also apply to them.

McLanahan and Sandefur find children of single mothers have problems with labor force attachment. As I mentioned earlier in the variables section, these children have a harder time getting a job because of their poor educational achievement and single parent situation.

The most important outcomes are education and health. Both mothers and their children need to be healthy and educated. Being well educated leads to success in jobs and better decisions on family formation. Better education and health can be achieved in part through increased income.

## **VI. Policies and Practices**

### **A. Prevention**

There are two types of policies and practices for dealing with single motherhood. The first use preventive policies which try to prevent teen pregnancies from occurring. Preventive policies include negative ones like cutting off benefits or shame tactics to positive ones like education, jobs, role models, and encouraging marriage. The most important form of prevention involves encouraging young women and men with a sense of purpose. This can be done through education and job placements. There are many policies aimed at the prevention of teenage pregnancy. The three preventive policies are positive and negative sanctions, education through sex education and job skills, and instilling a sense of purpose.

Charles Murray, after making a detailed analysis of different projects around the nation and their effects on family formation, which were in general unsuccessful, comes up with what he considers to be a worthwhile solution. He entertains the absurd idea that all benefits should be cut off to young single mothers to find out if it would decrease fertility (Murray 159). Instead of helping young mothers out of poverty, this harsh tactic would only serve to harm the children that it was trying to prevent. He recommends cutting off support in order to prevent pregnancy. The money these women received on

AFDC still qualified them as being in poverty, making Murray's argument flawed. In addition, I explained earlier that these women are not getting pregnant in order to receive public assistance, so cutting off assistance is not the logical solution. The belief that teenagers have children because of the money, a belief held by many lawmakers, is simply not the case. Taking away cash assistance from unmarried mothers only punishes and harms mothers and children, and is not a "rational preventative measure" (Sidel 119).

Jonathan Alter in *Newsweek* suggests a completely different approach to teenage single motherhood: shame. He proposes tactics such as forcing teenagers to remain at home and attend more school instead of dropping out.

Charles Murray's article called "Family Formation" addresses the role that government has in encouraging marriage. He quotes Sarah McLanahan in her book as saying, "After taking the relevant socioeconomic and cultural/ethnic variables into account, children fare best in two-parent families, next best in divorced families (with remarriage doing little to improve the situation), and worst in families where the mother has never married"(Murray 138). Given this statistic, Murray values marriage as a social institution. He feels enforcing marriage decreases out of wedlock births and also helps support children from previous marriages.

Horn and Sawhill agree with Murray that marriage should be encouraged. They feel that current economic disincentives that exist for marriage should be taken away and incentives for marriage should be given. Ronald Mincy responds to this by saying marriage does not occur results from other factors such as no desirable men to marry not because of incentives or disincentives. The root of the problem needs to be solved, starting with basics such as giving men jobs. In order to do this, financial disincentives

should be taken away but financial incentives should not necessarily be given. Monetary incentives for encouraging marriage simply create the wrong reason for marriage, which have the possibility of creating poor child outcomes regardless. He advocates a program called Fragile Families which intervenes with fathers shortly after or before birth.

Ellwood does not force marriage because it would not result in the supportive two parent families provide a better alternative to single parent families. Even though I included marriage on the prevention section, marriage can also serve as a type of support. Through marriage, two incomes are combined as well as providing the much needed father figure for the children.

The solution is not as simple as handing out birth control as some politicians may think. In reality, some partners might refuse to use them, some females fear them, or asking their parents for them. Also, teens in general use birth control more and more effectively than in the past. For many teens that do become pregnant, abortion is not an option because of religious, personal or financial reasons. What is needed instead is education. Ruth Sidel's main suggestion to combat teenage pregnancy is education. She quotes a young teenage mother saying, "I didn't know how sex led to pregnancy. No one spoke about sex, contraception, or menstruation. I never had the information. If I had had the complete information, I would not have engaged in sex at the time" (Sidel 117). She wants these young women to have the education, in hopes that this education will lead to more careful and less frequent sexual activity. In addition to educating young men and women against the dangers of unprotected sex, she advocates pregnancy prevention programs. The program gives girls sex education, homework help, sports opportunities, counseling and admission to a college if they complete the program. From



the outcome of the story, Sidel believes such programs as this pregnancy prevention one to be key in helping teens and their children.

In conjunction with sex education, Sidel recommends giving teens an adequate education in order to plan for the future and jobs that give them a future. This education needs to include teaching men about their responsibilities as fathers and the needs and rights of young women.

Rebecca Maynard also sees education as the best way of dealing with illegitimacy. The education she advocates in addition to sex education is a strengthening of American values. She notes the shifting in norms and wants to reestablish them. Maynard writes insightfully that, "...the nation should experiment and systematically evaluate the impacts of strengthening the messages regarding the value Americans place on parental responsibility and on the institution of marriage" (Maynard 164). She sees education, especially sex education, as a valuable way to reduce nonmarital births. While she agrees with the importance of marriage as a value, she recognizes that more has to be done than just encouraging marriage. Many other factors prevent marriage from occurring that have to be dealt with first. The government can do more by using educational programs in addition to encouraging marriage.

Blank recommends instead of focusing on sexual behavior and marriage, focus on providing more economic opportunity, adult role models and a sense of possibility in the lives of young men and women (Blank 38). She writes, "The women least likely to become teen mothers are those who believe that education is important and who have a sense of future opportunities...Girls who see little advantage to education are much more likely to become pregnant and/or leave school" (Blank 280). Through education, Blank

hopes to instill in teens a sense of purpose. She recommends these actions because women with stronger educational aspirations, greater sense of future economic opportunities and more choices in life are less likely to become teenage mothers. School to work programs are a recent attempt to help at risk youth. The studies she cited demonstrated sex education had no effect on teens' sexual behavior. The only educational programs that showed small decreases in sexually activity involved targeting younger adolescents and providing an active learning environment.

Education is a key way to reduce some of the nonmarital births for those where marriage is not an issue or an option. If one is feasibly able to get married, and chooses not to, the government does not have a right to interfere. Education is a better alternative because it helps the mother to achieve a brighter future and her own source of income instead of income from a man.

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### **B. Support**

While there are many things that can be done to prevent teenage unwed pregnancies from occurring, until these preventive measures prove 100 percent effective, we still must provide support to mothers and children to alleviate their problems. Instead of cutting off all benefits like Charles Murray suggests in order to encourage young single mothers to stop having children, support needs to be provided since a high percentage of them are being born and they are the most likely to perpetuate this cycle of poverty given the situation in which they were raised. Sidel concludes, "...it is clear that women who bear their first child during their teenage years should be specifically

targeted for help in completing their education, in job training, and with first-rate child care”(Sidel 133).

The three ways to help the mother and children survive the conditions in which they live are child support, child care and jobs that pay. Child support payments help single parent families out of poverty. Providing affordable childcare helps mothers continue in school instead of dropping out to care for their children. The government must provide enough jobs at a living wage so teen mothers could get jobs and support their families, or so fathers could get jobs and support families while the mothers continued with their schooling. Ellwood’s proposal encompasses all three. Child care needs to be a high priority because this can ameliorate negative outcomes. In addition, enough money has to be provided to these women through child support and jobs that pay so they can adequately support their families.

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One of the three programs Rebecca Blank and David Ellwood propose to make work pay for the poor is government provided assured child support payments for low income single parents (Blank 260). Blank proposes moving child support enforcement to the tax collection system. She calls her support system for low income mothers Child Support Assurance (CSA). In this system, the government collects money from fathers and what it cannot collect, pays the difference in state budget dollars. Blank focuses on government guarantee only for low-income mothers because they are presumably the children who need money the most. She suggests starting the per child benefit at \$1,500. The advantages of this program reach beyond monetary support for these children. Since the government must subsidize payment, it increases their motivation to identify and locate fathers. This program forces fathers to take a more active role in providing for

their financial security. In addition, with this system in place, working single parents no longer need general cash assistance in order to escape poverty. It helps fathers at the same time as requiring them to pay support, through providing them with short term services such as job skills training, education, and parenting classes (Blank 267).

According to Blank, this issue has even more immediacy now given the AFDC cutbacks in the mid-1990's. It should be limited to low income women because it will make the program less expensive to run. Ellwood advocates a child support that is reasonable, on time and in keeping with inflation. The reasonable level he uses is 25-30 percent of the father's income. Combining this with even part time work would keep the family out of poverty without welfare.

Irwin Garfinkel's article "Child Support in the New World of Welfare" outlines how dismal the prospects of receiving child support used to be and how the improvements in the system have helped a great deal. The Child Support Amendments Act of 1984 and additional acts following of the same type increased establishment of paternity in out-of-wedlock births, increased payment from fathers of children on welfare and centralized the office of collecting and distributing child support through individual states. Receiving more money from fathers is not necessarily a good thing, leading to parental conflict and harm to the father which in turn harms the children and possibly pushes fathers from being involved in the lives of their children. Even as Garfinkel supports guaranteed child support, he agrees that, "There is ample evidence that parental conflict is bad for children and some evidence that strong child support enforcement increases parental conflict"(Garfinkel 448). Since the money collected supposedly benefits the children, if the actual collection of the money harms the children, the process

needs to be reevaluated. High support payments harm fathers who do not have enough money to pay. Strong enforcement damages these fathers, and the punishment for not paying, imprisonment, is even more detrimental to both the father and the children. Garfinkel describes how cohabitation needs to be father and family friendly with incentives because by helping fathers we in turn help children. The amount of child support that a father needs to pay should relate to how much he can pay. Garfinkel briefly mentions the advantages and disadvantages that would accompany a minimum child support benefit. Also, because they do not receive support from their fathers, they are at a further disadvantage.

Wade Horn and Isabel Sawhill state the important point that generally the more monetary support the child receives, the less informal support he receives. In addition, child support should not be as strict because father involvement is sometimes unwanted or dangerous.

The controversy over whether or not to strictly enforce child support lies in if it is more beneficial to get money out of fathers or to have them involved in their children's life. I like Ellwood and Blank's proposal because it avoids this situation. If the money is too hard to get from the father, the government makes up the difference.

Good childcare is one of the most important issues to address given the focus on child outcomes. Quality child care can ameliorate negative child outcomes and help the family get out of poverty by allowing the mother to work. Children of teenagers often lack adequate childcare, which affects their cognitive and physical development. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), created under the 1996 welfare law, combined three existing child care programs together with additional funding to create a

new program. The voucher system in place now allows parents to choose where to send their children for childcare, including relatives and other unlicensed providers in addition to typical centers. Most states reimburse parents based on the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of local market rates. Co-payments are usually based on a sliding scale. There is no evidence that lower reimbursement and higher co-payments leads parents to use unlicensed providers (Besharov and Samari 469). Even with vouchers, it is difficult to find child care for mothers who work part time or abnormal hours. It is a stretch to suggest lower reimbursement has not affected the parent's choice or quality of childcare. "It [child care] is important to all children, but may be especially important as an opportunity for the development of children in poverty" (Moore et al. 477). Better data needs to be made available in order to determine what constitutes quality care and its outcomes for children.

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As Ellwood writes in *Poor Support*, some, like Lawrence M. Mead, feel that day care is not as serious of a problem as it is made out to be. Others argue that day care is so essential and only with new funding can changes be made. Women cannot work without day care, but a large percentage of their income goes towards day care because it is so expensive.

Society needs to make work pay, using such methods as raising the minimum wage and providing refundable day care credit. Transitional assistance should replace ADFC (which it already has) and those who run out of transitional assistance should be given jobs.

In order to help bring the single parent family out of poverty, the government must make work pay. Ellwood realizes this, writing, "Unless we make work pay better,

we cannot expect to improve the independence and security of single mothers” (Ellwood 178). Ellwood suggests three ways to do this which Blank and Schmidt also update and elaborate. Society must find a way to make work pay, and can do this through raising the minimum wage, expanding Earned Income Tax Credit and using a refundable day care credit. Making work pay will help the children of single teens because it will get their mothers out of poverty. It is important to raise the minimum wage because full time work when Ellwood wrote his book in 1988 was not enough to push a single mother out of poverty with child care expenses. The minimum wage has been increased and in 1999 was raised to \$5.15 an hour, but this is still not enough. Blank and Schmidt are cautious about raising the minimum wage and prefer instead to expand EITC. Ellwood points out that the minimum wage has fallen as the drastically with inflation. Even though raising it has the potential to take away jobs and reduce employment, Ellwood still favors an increase.

In addition to the Earned Income Tax Credit, Ellwood describes other wage subsidies designed to make work pay. Because studies have not proven their effectiveness, he prefers EITC because it is easier to administer and has a wider target group. EITC targets low-wage workers in low-income families and it has been shown to increase work among single mothers. It works by giving low income families tax credits for every dollar that they make. EITC supplements the minimum wage as well as lessens the pressure to increase it. The more a person works, the more he makes up to the maximum benefit level. Since it is a tax refund, Ellwood suggest creating a way for it to be spread out over the year into each paycheck, making it like a raise. Because of these factors and the fact EITC is already in place making it easier to expand, Ellwood calls for

an increase in the EITC program. Ellwood's desire for the expansion of EITC became a reality with the expansions during the 1990s, bringing it up to \$30 billion in 2000 (Blank and Schmidt 83). Affordable childcare goes hand in hand with making work pay because with childcare supplemented in some way, the money earned from work can be saved instead of going towards childcare. For this, Ellwood calls for a refundable childcare tax credit.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Teen pregnancy is of special concern because of its negative effects on the children. While many authors have given reasons for the increase in teen pregnancy among those living in poverty, Blank gives the most accurate reasons and solutions. These women do not believe they have a future, so they do not make decisions based on the future. While some argue that teen pregnancy has always been this high, I believe it has increased because teens are not learning a sense of purpose.

In order to prevent teens from making these decisions, Blank recommends educational programs that will instill in these teens a reason to plan for the future, including educational job training and job availability that pay living wages. If teenage women have this to look forward to, they are more likely to take precautions to prevent pregnancy. Some degree of sex education also needs to be provided so these teens are aware of the consequences of sex, but this should not be the main focus. Educating teen mothers not only helps them to get better jobs to provide for their children, but it helps the children. If the mother is more educated, she can help the child and overcome some of the negative effects teenage motherhood has on education. Negative sanctions do the



opposite of what Blank suggests. By taking away government support, these women will not think they have much of a future at all.

The variable that most affects child outcomes is lack of a father. If the mother is able to stay home more to care for her children, this effect is lessened. By giving these families enough money, mothers can afford to stay home with their children instead of being forced to work two jobs. These mothers who receive support have more time to spend with their children and are more interested in their child's development. Since they are less stressed, they are more responsive and on the whole better parents towards their children. This information seems sufficient enough to convince the government as to the importance of this support.

Affordable child care not only allows the mother to work without spending exorbitant amounts on child care, but it also allows these women to use quality child care that improves the child's education from an earlier age. Having additional money from child support can also push the mother into an income level that allows her to only work one job. With more money also comes better nutrition and healthcare which helps alleviate these children's health problems. The jobs that need to be created must not only paying a living wage but provide the women with a sense of purpose, which will help prevent future pregnancies.

The policies I discussed in the support section can also be applied to prevention, making them even more important. Because teenage motherhood is cyclical, the children of teenagers should be targeted with support measures. Most teenage mothers come from poor backgrounds, so giving these families adequate income through child support, child

care and jobs will not only improve the situation for the children now but it will help prevent these children from becoming teenage mothers themselves.

Washington and Lee University

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