

## **Comparing the Life Situations and Early Development of the Children of Current and Past Teenage Mothers and Adult Mothers**

Despite recent decreases, the United States still has the highest rate of teenage childbearing in the fully industrialized world. Preventing teenage childbearing and reducing its negative consequences are two important social policy goals in the U.S. today (Furstenberg, 2003), and the effects of teenage parenthood on children are of special concern. Concerned citizens and researchers alike worry about teenage mothers' and their children's future prospects: 75% of all single teenage parents in the U.S. raise their children in poverty (Cherry, Dillon, and Rugh, 2001). Much of the literature on the outcomes of teenage mothers and their children reflects biases from public discourse and media portrayals, examining the outcomes only of specific subpopulations of teenagers and children (particularly racial/ethnic minorities in urban areas) and investigating psychological and individual-level influences without sufficiently attending to socioeconomic and structural factors. There is a vital need for national-level research that uses recent quantitative data to draw conclusions that apply to all teenage mothers and their young children in the United States, and our study fills this gap on a descriptive level.

What are the effects of having a teenage mother on the lives of young children? Most previous research agrees that the children of teenage mothers have substantially worse developmental outcomes in their preschool years than children of older mothers (Luster et al., 2000). The first years of a child's life are a time of rapid physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth that lays the groundwork for future development (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1997). Despite its importance, less is known about children's development in these early years than in later periods (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

### **DATA**

This study uses newly released data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), a nationally representative survey that investigates the lives and early development of children born in 2001 from birth to age 2. Among the approximately 12,000 children in the sample are more than 1,200 children whose mothers were less than 20 years old at their birth. The statistical power afforded by the unusually generous size of this subsample, in combination with the newness of the survey and its detailed focus on the critical period of early childhood, make this survey an excellent data source for research on teenage mothers and their children.

This study examines the developmental outcomes of 2-year-olds, which have been accurately and reliably measured. The developmental outcomes measured in the ECLS-B data are based on 60 minutes of one-on-one assessment and are intended to provide a comprehensive picture of each child's age-appropriate developmental progress. This study uses a variety of health-related and other developmental outcomes, some from parent interviews and others based on reputable and widely used assessment measures in the child development literature.

### **FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Our study describes the life situations of teenage mothers and their children when the children were 9 months and 2 years old. Accounting for weights and complex survey design using Stata, univariate and bivariate analyses compare characteristics and outcomes of children who have teenage mothers, adult mothers who were teenagers at first birth, and adult mothers who were adult at first birth (see table). The second group is an interesting comparison because if prior teenage mothers' current children have worse outcomes than the third group, it cannot be due to developmental problems from the mother's young age. Some psychologists suggest that this is the reason for teenage mothers' children faring worse, but sociologists would contend that it is the array of disadvantages faced by teenage mothers (both with their first children and subsequent children) that leads to worse outcomes. Analyzing the comparison group of prior teenage mothers can help adjudicate between these explanations.

In the table, we find that teenage mothers come from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to adult mothers, and this disadvantage persists for their children in a wide variety of areas. For example, nearly half of teenage mothers and over one third of prior teenage mothers live in households in the lowest 20% of the

overall sample's distribution of socioeconomic status, compared to just over 10% of adult first-time mothers. Supplemental analyses (not shown) reveal that by Wave 2, being in this quintile is associated with being in the worst 25% of cognitive outcomes among teenage mothers' children. 25% of teenage mothers are married at Wave 1, compared to about half of prior teenage mothers and over three quarters of adult first-time mothers. The quality of current and prior teenage mothers' parenting behaviors is lower across the board, and supplemental analyses link low-quality parenting behaviors to overrepresentation in the lowest quartile of cognitive and behavioral outcomes among teenage mothers' children, and underrepresentation in the highest quartile. Not surprisingly, then, many of the outcomes of current and prior teenage mothers' children are compromised compared to their peers. While results differ for specific variables, we generally find that the situations and outcomes of prior teenage mothers' children are better than those of current teenage mothers' kids, but worse than those of adult first-time mothers' kids. This suggests that there may be some validity to both developmental and structural explanations for the compromised development of teenage mothers' children.

These new, nationally representative findings provide important descriptive information about the characteristics and experiences of teenage mothers and their young children in the U.S. today that has been lacking in the past. Understanding the most prevalent life situations faced by teenage mothers and their children, as well as the sources of material and social support in their lives, can help policymakers create appropriate types of intervention programs to improve their situations. Because this study focuses on early development, it can provide new data to inform policymakers who are trying to close the early developmental gap between the children of teenage parents and their peers. If their developmental outcomes can be improved at an early age, then there is less opportunity for this gap to widen and lead to more entrenched disadvantage during the school years (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg, 1986; Jaffee et al., 2001).

Variables	Teen mom (n~1200)	Adult Mom (n~9450)	Sig.	Previous teen mom (n~1750)	Adult at first birth (n~6600)	Sig.
Overall sample	0.11	0.89		0.18	0.72	
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS/BACKGROUND</b>						
Child Race/Ethnicity						
White	0.37	0.56 ***		0.39	0.62 ***	
Black	0.25	0.12 ***		0.23	0.1 ***	
Hispanic	0.33	0.24 ***		0.32	0.21 ***	
Asian/Pac. Islander	0.01	0.03 ***		0.01	0.03 ***	
American Indian	0.01	0.005 †		0.01	0.004 ***	
Mixed Race	0.03	0.04 NS		.06 <sup>a</sup>	0.04 *	
Mom's HS academic ach. (1 low, 7 high)	4.47	4.72 ***		4.58	4.79 ***	
Mom's mother's educ attainment (0-20)	10.82	11.49 ***		10.44 <sup>a</sup>	11.91 ***	
Mom's father's educ attainment (0-20)	10.50	11.84 ***		10.31	12.33 ***	
Mom have any teen parent?	0.19	0.14 **		0.22	0.12 ***	
Ready for child when became pregnant?	0.22	0.61 ***		0.42 <sup>a</sup>	0.66 ***	
Mom perspective of partner's readiness	0.72	0.87 ***		0.77 <sup>a</sup>	0.89 ***	
Prenatal care start 2nd trimester or later	0.17	0.07 ***		0.12 <sup>a</sup>	0.06 ***	
Wave 1 Mother's good health	0.90	0.93 *		0.88	0.95 ***	
<b>SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION</b>						
Wave 1 SES Quintile						
First Quintile	0.47	0.17 ***		0.35 <sup>a</sup>	0.11 ***	
Second Quintile	0.33	0.18 ***		0.32	0.14 ***	
Third Quintile	0.14	0.21 ***		0.21 <sup>a</sup>	0.21 NS	
Fourth Quintile	0.05	0.22 ***		0.10 <sup>a</sup>	0.26 ***	
Fifth Quintile	0.01	0.22 ***		0.01	0.28 ***	
Receive government benefits (0-4)	2.14	1.07 ***		1.98 <sup>a</sup>	0.82 ***	
Receive welfare	0.18	0.07 ***		0.15	0.05 ***	
Subsidized housing	0.26	0.12 ***		0.21 <sup>a</sup>	0.09 ***	

Variables	Teen mom	Adult Mom	Sig.	Previous teen mom	Adult at first birth	Sig.
Wave 1 Food Security						
Food Secure	0.83	0.88 **		0.79 <sup>a</sup>	0.91 ***	
Food insecure w/ hunger	0.04	0.02 †		0.04	0.02 *	
Wave 2 hours worked						
0 hours	0.57	0.44 ***		.49 <sup>a</sup>	0.42 ***	
1-19 hours	0.05	0.07 NS		0.03	0.08 ***	
20+ hours	0.38	0.50 ***		0.48 <sup>a</sup>	0.51 NS	
Wave 2 school status						
Not in school	0.73	0.89 ***		0.87 <sup>a</sup>	0.9 *	
Part time school	0.11	0.07 **		0.08	0.06 †	
Full time school	0.16	0.04 ***		0.05 <sup>a</sup>	0.04 †	
Wave 1 household structure						
Sing mom alone	0.10	0.08 NS		0.18 <sup>a</sup>	0.06 ***	
Sing mom w/ gp	0.34	0.05 ***		0.07 <sup>a</sup>	0.05 †	
Sing mom w/ oth	0.03	0.02 *		0.03	0.01 *	
Bio parents alone	0.28	0.72 ***		0.57 <sup>a</sup>	0.77 ***	
Bio parents w/ gp	0.14	0.06 ***		0.06 <sup>a</sup>	0.05 NS	
Bio parents w/ oth	0.06	0.05 NS		0.07	0.04 **	
Bio mom, no bio dad	0.03	0.01 *		0.01 <sup>a</sup>	0.01 NS	
No bio mom	0.02	0.01 †		0.01	0.004 NS	
Wave 1 - Total hours child care (0-60)	17.41	15.04 **		14.52 <sup>a</sup>	15.13 NS	
W1 Receive care from relative	0.44	0.27 ***		0.26 <sup>a</sup>	0.26 NS	
HOME ENVIRONMENT						
Married wave 1	0.25	0.72 ***		0.50 <sup>a</sup>	0.78 ***	
Wave 1 Primary Household Language						
English	0.80	0.82 NS		0.82	0.84 NS	
Spanish	0.18	0.13 **		0.16	0.11 **	
Other Language	0.02	0.05 ***		0.02	0.05 ***	
Breakfasts & Dinners together/wk (0-14)	9.92	10.78 ***		10.35 <sup>a</sup>	10.91 ***	
Average Daily hours of TV	2.53	2.23 **		2.52	2.15 ***	
Someone smokes inside the house	0.15	0.08 ***		0.17	0.06 ***	
MOTHER'S PARENTING BEHAVIORS						
Spend time w/ child (0-12)	7.94	8.35 ***		7.86	8.53 ***	
Play w/ child (0-18)	15.14	14.97 †		14.8 <sup>a</sup>	15.03 **	
Wave 1 NCATS behavior rating (23-49)	33.25	34.85 ***		33.82 <sup>a</sup>	35.14 ***	
Wave 2 Two Bags behavior rating (1-7)	4	4.43 ***		4.13 <sup>a</sup>	4.54 ***	
W2 interviewer-rated negative behavior (0-7)	0.76	0.58 ***		0.75	0.52 ***	
Wave 2 Mother-Child Attachment						
Secure	0.54	0.62 ***		0.59	0.63 *	
Avoidant	0.18	0.16 NS		0.17	0.16 NS	
Ambivalent	0.10	0.09 NS		0.09	0.09 NS	
Disorganized	0.18	0.13 **		0.14	0.12 NS	
CHILD'S HEALTH OUTCOMES						
Birth Weight						
<2500 grams at birth	0.10	0.07 **		0.08	0.07 *	
Very low birth weight (~bottom 10%)	0.02	0.01 **		0.01 <sup>a</sup>	0.01 NS	
Wave 1 mom reports good child health	0.86	0.89 NS		0.84	0.9 ***	
Wave 2 Number of injuries (0-3)	0.18	0.18 NS		0.19	0.18 NS	
Wave 2 Body Mass Index						
Low	0.15	0.14 NS		0.15	0.14 NS	
High	0.26	0.22 †		0.24	0.21 †	
OTHER CHILD OUTCOMES						
Wave 2 Child Behavior Problem Rating (std)	-0.06	0.08 ***		-0.01	0.11 ***	
Wave 2 Standardized Mental Scale (15-89)	48.00	50.25 ***		47.72	51.13 ***	
Change in Raw Mental scale W1-2 (2-111)	48.63	50.53 ***		48.31	51.4 ***	
Change in Raw Motor score W1-2 (-13-59)	24.29	25.63 **		25.2	25.83 NS	
Wave 2 bottom 25% mental score	0.30	0.24 **		0.32	0.21 ***	
Wave 2 top 25% mental score	0.16	0.26 ***		0.17	0.29 ***	
Wave 2 bottom 25% behavior rating	0.31	0.24 **		0.26	0.23 **	
Wave 2 top 25% behavior rating	0.21	0.26 **		0.23	0.27 *	
Total well baby visits: age(months) ratio	0.37	0.34 ***		0.34 <sup>a</sup>	0.33 NS	

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (2006)

†p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>a</sup>significantly different from teen mom at p<.05

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