

FACT SHEET



FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy

The Children of Teen Parents

Poverty, inadequate social support, mothers' lack of education, mothers' cognitive immaturity, and greater maternal stress have all been suggested as possible factors contributing to poor social and educational outcomes for the children of teen mothers. *

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RESEARCH

The children of adolescents are more likely to be born prematurely and 50% more likely to be low-birth weight babies (less than five and a half pounds) when compared to the children of mothers whose age was 20 or 21 when they had their first child.

Teenagers often receive less adequate prenatal care – and receive it later – when special programs are not provided for them. When early, frequent, and quality obstetrical care is available, no increased risk is found in terms of the health of infants born to teenage mothers. The exception may be very young mothers, under 15 years of age.

Although developmental delay is not an inevitable consequence for infants of adolescent mothers, data suggests that this special class of children, when compared to children born to adult mothers, is at greater risk for a variety of developmental problems.

As they grow, the children of adolescent mothers tend to suffer poorer health than do the children of women who were age 20 or 21 when their first child was born. 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.

The children born to the youngest teen mothers are at greater risk of being an "indicated case" of child abuse or neglect (and being placed in foster care) than are those born to older mothers. Children born to mothers age 15 and younger are two times more likely to become an indicated case of child abuse/neglect in the first five years of their lives than are the children born to mothers ages 20-21.

One study found that the living situation of the teen mother was the single most predictive variable in terms of maltreatment. Adolescent mothers living with a related adult were much less likely to abuse or neglect their children than were those living apart from related adults.

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The children of adolescent mothers are at higher risk for problems in affect regulation, including both flattened affect and aggressive behavior.

The negative effects on the cognitive development of children born to adolescent mothers are evident. A study of children ages four to 14 showed that those born to the youngest teen mothers performed more poorly on tests of cognitive ability, were more likely to be retained a grade, and were less likely to be perceived by their teachers as performing favorably by the time they reached high school.

Children of adolescent mothers are more likely to drop out of high school when compared to the children of mothers age 20-21. Only 77% of children born to adolescent mothers complete high school by early adulthood compared to 89% of the comparison group.

One researcher looked at the incarceration rates of the sons of young mothers. His findings revealed that 10.3% of those born to mothers age 17 and younger were incarcerated, compared to 3.8% of the sons born to older mothers. That is, the sons of young teen mothers are nearly three times more likely to be incarcerated than those born to adult mothers.

When compared to women born to mothers aged 20-21, the daughters of adolescent mothers are significantly more likely to give birth themselves before the age of 18. An analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data demonstrated that early childbearing is much more common among the daughters of adolescent mothers. In addition, daughters of adolescent mothers are more susceptible than their mothers to economic dependence and less likely to escape poverty.

Children born to teen mothers often do not have an even start in life. They are more likely to grow up in a poor and mother-only family, to live in a poor or underclass neighborhood, and to experience high risks to both their health status and potential school achievement.

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