

# Early living together, marriage and parenting benefits some young adults

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Young people are always encouraged to complete their education and postpone marriage and children to achieve more rewarding lifestyles. However, a Penn State study found that for some young adults, getting married or living together and having children have provided positive benefits.

"In industrial countries, young people age 18 to 25 are expected to explore their identity, work and love by delaying marriage and parenthood," says lead author Alan Booth, distinguished professor of sociology, human development and demography. "It is believed that those individuals who fail to postpone these family transitions miss out on better career opportunities, make poor choices on partners, and may experience problems.

"However, our research has shown that early family choices may be a productive option for many young adults, especially those who are disadvantaged with respect to family income, parental education and structure, mother-child relationship, verbal ability, school attachment and delinquent behavior," he notes.

Booth, Elisa Rustenbach, graduate student in sociology, and Susan McHale, professor of human development and family studies, examined the family and personal characteristics of more than 8,000 young adults who participated in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Half of the sample made an early family transition and half did not over a five-year period.

The researchers compared the depressive symptoms of those who made a transition with those who did not, and found very few differences in depressive symptoms between the two groups.

"The only exception was women who experienced a breakup of their live-in relationship. They were more likely to see an increase in depression compared to women who did not break up with the live-in partner or did not make a transition," Booth notes. Only 14 percent of those who made a transition were in this category.

The researchers selected depressive symptoms as a measure of wellbeing because they are associated with many types of adversity such as poor physical health, unemployment and harsh family relationships, and apply to males and females and people of all ages.

"The findings are even more remarkable when we take into account that young adults who transitioned into early families were more likely to come from low-income families, had parents with lower levels of education and likely lived in a household with one or no biological parents," Booth says.

In low-income families, teens may experience a divisive home environment and parents with poor parenting skills. Leaving to live together, marry or have children may provide an opportunity to escape from an unloving home and create a more positive family, according to the study.

The difference between men and women on early family transitions and protective family factors requires more study, however, he adds.

"Most research on emerging adulthood has been on college students," Booth notes. "Our study highlights the importance of studying early family transitions in context, in light of the range of opportunities open to a

person. Post-high school experiences of young adults are more diverse than popular belief, and early co-habitation or marriage and parenting may be productive for many young people, at least over the short haul."

Source: Penn State

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