

Educational development stunted by teenage fatherhood

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Public interest in the issue of teenage childbearing has recently increased, largely due to increases in both the teen pregnancy rate and the teen birth rate. A new study from *Economic Inquiry* examines the negative educational and economic outcomes of teenage fatherhood, a topic far less researched than teenage motherhood.

In their study the authors utilized the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a school-based, nationally representative longitudinal study of 7th to 12th graders in the United States beginning in 1994-1995. Their dataset included 362 men younger than 18 years and nine months. The authors compared young men whose partners experienced a pregnancy but suffered a miscarriage, with those whose partners gave birth.

The authors found that while only 64 percent of the study participants received a high school diploma and 16 percent received a GED, the experience of teenage fatherhood dramatically shifted these outcomes by reducing the chances of graduating high school by fifteen percentage points and increasing the chances of receiving a GED by eleven percentage points.

The authors also found that the experience of teenage fatherhood increased the chance of full-time employment by six percentage points and military employment by two percentage points following a birth. Additionally, teenage fatherhood is also associated with an increased likelihood of early marriage and cohabitation: out of the young men

surveyed 26 percent were married, and 62 percent were living with their partner.

The authors' results suggested substantial variation in the impact of teenage fatherhood. For example, teens that practiced birth control preceding the birth face smaller consequences than those who do not practice birth control.

Co-authors Jason Fletcher and Barbara Wolfe stated, "Educational interventions may need to target new teenage fathers in order to increase their chances of completing their high school diplomas. This may include the provision of sex education as well as access to contraceptives. We need to focus on teenage fathers and those in danger of becoming teenage fathers in order to create opportunities for them to increase their chances of completing school."

The analysis provides evidence that teenage fatherhood leads to a decrease in years of schooling. Nevertheless these fathers may yet experience longer term earnings and income differences as they age. Further, the negative effects of teenage fatherhood may also limit opportunities for the child. The recent increase in the teenage birth rate suggests that the nation would do well to consider additional and innovative programs to reduce teen pregnancies and births.

More information: "The Effects of Teenage Fatherhood on Young Adult Outcomes."; Jason Fletcher, Ph.D. & Barbara L. Wolfe, Ph.D. Economic Inquiry; Published Online: March 24, 2011
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