

This ICPH research brief is the fourth in a series that highlights the characteristics of families with young children who become homeless in the urban United States. The series explores poverty in the context of housing status and puts a spotlight on the characteristics that make families who experience homelessness different from otherwise similar poor families who consistently maintain stable housing. The current brief builds on the third in this series, “Profiles of Risk: Family Structure,” and examines the role of fertility.

Age at First Birth

Figure 1, using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), presents the mean age at which poor mothers first gave birth by their housing status over a five-year period (ever homeless or doubled up, ever at risk of homelessness, or always stably housed). The FFCWS tracks approximately 5,000 families from the birth of a focal child through the child’s fifth birth-

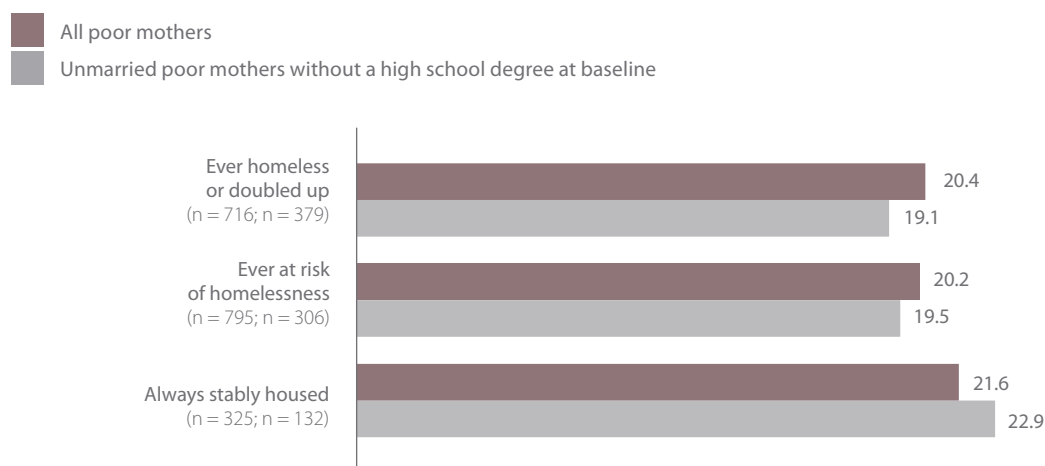
day and provides detailed information on both housing status and fertility (see description on back). Figure 1 shows the age at first birth for poor mothers by her housing status from the focal child’s first to fifth birthdays.

Poor women who maintained stable housing during the five-year period became mothers at a later age than those who experienced housing instability. Mothers who experienced or were at risk of homelessness between years one and five reported an average age at first birth of approximately 20 years. Ever-homeless or ever-at-risk mothers who were unmarried and lacked a high school education — characteristics also associated with risk of

Figure 1

AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

(by housing status years 1–5)



Source: ICPH analysis of Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing data. n = 1,836. Excluded are mothers who did not participate in the year-five survey, do not live with the focal child at least half of the time at year five, do not have valid sample weights, or report an average (baseline to year five) income-to-poverty ratio greater than 1.25. Differences in age at first birth are statistically significant at 10% for always stably housed vs. ever-homeless or ever-at-risk women.

homelessness (see “Profiles of Risk: Education” and “Profiles of Risk: Family Structure”)—at the focal child’s birth were even younger when they first became mothers (approximately 19 years old).¹ Comparatively, mothers who were always stably housed were significantly older when they first became mothers, regardless of education level or marital status—suggesting that age at first birth plays an important role in determining housing stability. Early pregnancy and childbearing has been linked to family poverty and negative outcomes for mothers and children; women who delay childbearing are better prepared to be mothers (see “In Context: Early Motherhood, Poverty, and Child Outcomes,” below).

Multiple-partner Fertility

In addition to age at first birth, Figure 2 (see page 3) demonstrates that lower rates of multiple-partner fertility—having biological children with more than one partner—also sets stably housed poor women apart from their peers who experience housing instability.² Nearly half (45%) of women who ever experienced homelessness and the majority (53%) of those at risk of homelessness reported having children with more than one partner. Comparatively, only about one-third (38%) of poor mothers who maintained stable housing over the five-year period engaged in multiple-partner fertility. As with age at first birth, this pattern is more pronounced for unmarried

mothers with less than a high school education. Multiple-partner fertility is associated with increased relationship instability for parents and decreased paternal support for children (see “In Context: Childbearing with Multiple Partners,” page 3).

Fertility: A Differentiating Factor

There are clear differences in characteristics of childbearing between poor women who experience housing instability and those who remain stably housed. Stably housed women are both more likely to delay childbearing and less likely to have had children with multiple partners. These patterns are especially pronounced when examining unmarried poor mothers with less than a high school education—indicators of disadvantage the “Profiles of Risk” series has established as being related to family homelessness. These results suggest that economically and socially disadvantaged young women at risk of housing instability would benefit from efforts to reduce early parenthood and multiple-partner fertility. Policy makers and those invested in reducing child and family homelessness would be wise to consider the impact of programs promoting responsible family planning.

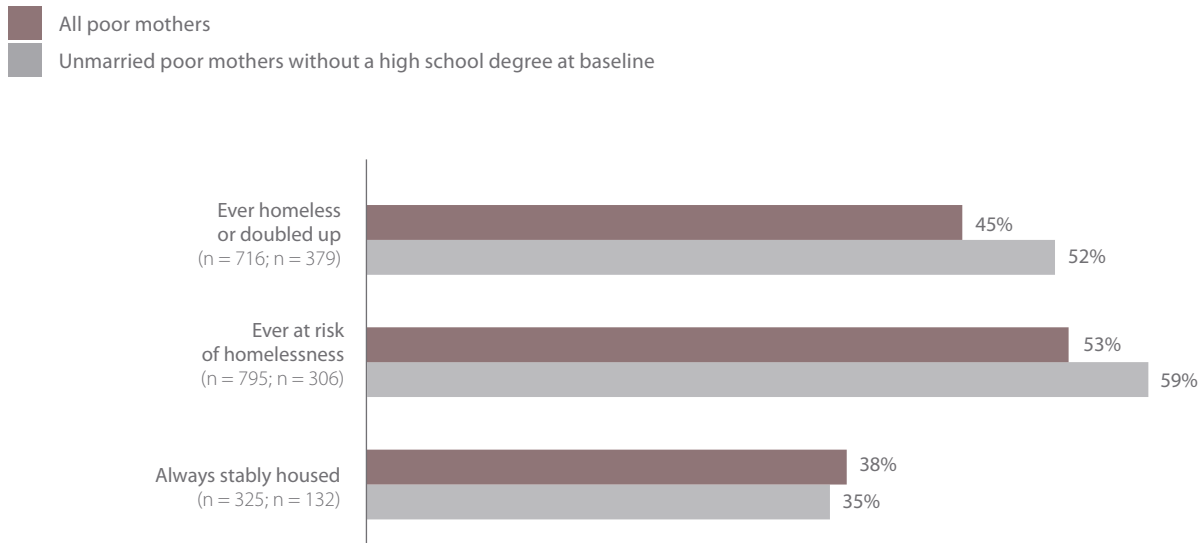
The snapshot of poor families presented in this brief reveals distinct differences in patterns of childbearing by housing status. The next brief in this series will explore another component of family poverty: sources of income.

In Context

Early Motherhood, Poverty, and Child Outcomes

The relationship between early childbearing and poverty has long been of concern to policy makers and researchers. Becoming a mother early disrupts the transition between adolescence and adulthood, a key period in the development of young adults. While some of the negative impacts of early age at first birth can be attributed to prevailing background characteristics, early childbearing is associated with decreased economic and emotional stability for mothers and negative outcomes for children. Women who become mothers at an early age are less financially capable of supporting their children; they are more likely to drop out of high school, to work in low-wage jobs, and to live in poverty, relative to older mothers.³ Young mothers also report higher rates of depression and lower rates of marriage.⁴ Children of young mothers are more likely to have academic and behavioral problems, to display delinquent behaviors such as truancy and fighting, to be incarcerated, and to initiate early sexual activity and become young mothers themselves.⁵

Figure 2
MULTIPLE-PARTNER FERTILITY BY YEAR FIVE
 (by housing status years 1–5)



Source: ICPH analysis of Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing data. n=1,836. Excluded are mothers who did not participate in the year-five survey, do not live with the focal child at least half of the time at year five, do not have valid sample weights, or report an average (baseline to year five) income-to-poverty ratio greater than 1.25. Differences in rates of multiple-partner fertility are statistically significant at 10% for always stably housed vs. ever-homeless or ever-at-risk women.

In Context

Childbearing with Multiple Partners

Concurrently with changes in patterns of marriage and childbearing, multiple-partner fertility has become increasingly prevalent, particularly among the poor, minority, and unmarried.⁶ This growth is alarming; multiple-partner fertility is associated among both mothers and fathers with relationship instability, decreased rates of marriage, lower social support from friends and family, and higher rates of depression.⁷ These impacts are due in part to the ambiguous nature of such family structures, which introduce confusion about the expectations and social norms regarding parental roles. Fathers who have biological children with other partners face constraints in both economic and temporal resources; their children experience reduced child-father contact and receive less child support.⁸ Such children also exhibit poor physical health and increased externalizing behaviors.⁹

Homelessness in Fragile Families

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey is a nationally representative study of nearly 5,000 mostly poor urban American families with young children born between 1998 and 2000. The survey follows mothers from the birth of a focal child through the child's first, third, and fifth birthdays. When weighted, Fragile Families is representative of births in 20 U.S. cities with populations greater than 200,000.

Using Fragile Families data, ICPH has classified families into three distinct housing categories based on their most severe living arrangement in years one, three, and five: homeless or doubled up, at risk of homelessness, or stably housed. "Homeless" families are those who have lived in a shelter or place not intended for housing as well as those who have doubled up with friends or family. Families who are "at risk" were not homeless or doubled up but have had trouble paying essential bills, move frequently, or have been evicted. "Stably housed" families faced none of these housing challenges.

A total of 1,836 families are included in the final analysis, which employs the year-five sample. Families with an income greater than 125% of the federal poverty line are excluded from the analysis to ensure that comparisons between groups reflect differences in housing status rather than poverty. Please see the first brief in this series, "Profiles of Risk: Characterizing Housing Instability" for additional details on the sample used in this series.

Endnotes

- ¹ Please visit <http://www.icphusa.org> to access "Profiles of Risk: Education" and "Profiles of Risk: Family Structure."
- ² As depicted in Figure 4 of the first brief in this series, "Profiles of Risk: Characterizing Housing Instability," there exist distinct differences by housing status in the average age at baseline for our Fragile Families sample. Women who ever become homeless are, on average, three years younger than their more stably housed peers at the survey's baseline. Because of this age discrepancy, the means presented in Figure 2 likely underrepresent the prevalence of multiple-partner fertility among mothers who ever experienced homelessness, as fewer childbearing years are observed.
- ³ Saul Hoffman, "Consequences of Teen Childbearing for Mothers: Updated Estimates of the Consequences of Teen Childbearing for Mothers," in *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, 2nd ed., eds. Saul Hoffman and Rebecca Maynard (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2008), 74–92; Jacqueline Corcoran, "Consequences of Adolescent Pregnancy/Parenting: A Review of the Literature," *Social Work in Health Care* 27, no. 2 (1998): 49–67.
- ⁴ Daniel Lichter and Deborah Garafe, "Finding A Mate? The Marital and Cohabitation Histories of Unwed Mothers," in *Out of Wedlock: Causes and Consequences of Nonmarital Fertility*, eds. Lawrence Wu and Barbara Wolfe (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 317–43; John Mirowsky and Catherine Ross, "Depression, Parenthood, and Age at First Birth," *Social Science and Medicine* 54, no. 8 (2002): 1,281–98.
- ⁵ Judith Levine, Clifton Emery, and Harold Pollack, "The Well-Being of Children Born to Teen Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 1 (2007): 105–22; Cristina Meade, Trace Kershaw, and Jeanette Ickovics, "The Intergenerational Cycle of Teenage Motherhood: An Ecological Approach," *Health Psychology* 27, no. 4 (2008): 419–29; Lauren Scher and Saul Hoffman, "Consequences of Teen Childbearing for Incarceration Among Adult Children: Updated Estimates Through 2002," in *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*, 2nd ed., eds. Saul Hoffman and Rebecca Maynard (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2008), 311–22.
- ⁶ Karen Guzzo and Frank Furstenberg, "Multipartnered Fertility Among American Men," *Demography* 44, no. 3 (2007): 583–601.
- ⁷ Maureen Waller and Sara McLanahan, "'His' and 'Her' Marriage Expectations: Determinants and Consequences," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, no. 1 (2005): 53–67; Kristen Harknett and Jean Knab, "More Kin, Less Support: Multipartnered Fertility and Kin Support Among New Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 69, no. 1 (2007): 237–53; Kristen Turney and Marcia Carlson, "Multipartnered Fertility and Depression Among Fragile Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 47, no. 3 (2011): 570–87.
- ⁸ Marcia Carlson and Frank Furstenberg, "The Prevalence and Correlates of Multipartnered Fertility Among Urban U.S. Parents," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, no. 3 (2006): 718–32; Daniel Meyer, Maria Cancian, and Steven Cook, "Multiple-Partner Fertility: Incidence and Implications for Child Support Policy," *Social Service Review* 79, no. 4 (2005): 577–601.
- ⁹ Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew, Allison Horowitz, and Mindy Scott, "Fathering With Multiple Partners: Links to Children's Well-being in Early Childhood," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 3 (2009): 608–31.

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