Facts about Teenage Parenting: Why We Must Become More Proactive

A teenager who parents a child has a serious risk of not finishing her education:

- Only **40 percent** of teenagers who have children before age 18 go on to graduate from high school, compared to **75 percent** of teens from similar social and economic backgrounds who do not give birth until ages 20 or 21.\(^\text{i}\)

- With her education cut short, a teenage mother likely lacks job skills, making it hard for her to find and keep a job. A teenage mother may become financially dependent on her family or on public assistance. Teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty than women who delay childbearing, and **more than 75 percent of all unmarried teen mothers go on welfare within 5 years** of the birth of their first child.\(^\text{i}\)

High-school dropouts face serious risks and disadvantages in life:

- On any given day, about **1 in every 10** young male high-school dropouts is in jail or juvenile detention, compared with **1 in 35** young male high-school graduates; more specifically, nearly **1 in 4 young African-American male dropouts** is incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized on an average day (compared with **about 1 in 14** young, male, white, Asian, or Hispanic dropouts).\(^\text{ii}\)

- According to 2008 unemployment rates, **54 percent** of dropouts ages 16 to 24 were jobless, compared with **32 percent** for high-school graduates of the same age, and **13 percent** for those with a college degree; the statistics were worse for **African-American dropouts**, whose unemployment rate in that year was **69 percent, compared with 54 percent** for white Americans, and 47 percent for Hispanics.\(^\text{ii}\)

- Young female dropouts are **9 times** more likely to become single mothers than young women who went on to earn college degrees.\(^\text{ii}\)

- U.S. Census figures from 2006 show high-school dropouts **earn $17,299 a year**, compared to **$26,933** for high-school graduates (**$260,000 less** in estimated lifetime earnings).\(^\text{iii}\)

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Likewise, the child of a teenage parent faces serious risks and disadvantages:

- About **64 percent** of children born to an unmarried teenage high-school dropout live in poverty, **compared to 7 percent** of children born to women over age 20 who are married and high-school graduates.\(^i\)

- A child born to a teenage mother is **50 percent** more likely to repeat a grade in school, and is more likely to perform poorly on standardized tests and drop out before finishing high school.\(^i\)

- Sons of teenage fathers are **13 percent** more likely than their peers with older parents to end up in prison.\(^iv\)

- Children born to mothers age 15 and younger are **twice as likely** to become a victim of child abuse/neglect in the first five years of life than children born to mothers ages 20-21.\(^v\)

- 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.\(^v\)

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\(^i\) Teenage Pregnancy Fact Sheet, March of Dimes Foundation, March 2009.