Every Year Counts: The Long-Run Consequences of Pregnancy Timing among Teenagers*

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Abstract

While the teen pregnancy rate is high in the US relative to other countries, a notable change has occurred, with these pregnancies shifting toward later teenage years. However, little is known about the consequences of pregnancy timing among teenagers. This paper seeks to fill that gap in the literature by studying the effects of pregnancy timing among teenagers aged 15–18 on their short- and long-run educational and labor market outcomes. Specifically, I estimate the marginal impact of a one-year difference in pregnancy timing for each age interval—15–16, 16–17, and 17–18—leveraging linked administrative data from Texas. To identify the effect of pregnancy timing, this paper examines both within-individual changes in outcomes surrounding pregnancy and across-individual comparisons in outcomes after pregnancy, among matched individuals who are balanced on a wide range of characteristics but differ in the timing of pregnancy. The results indicate that experiencing pregnancy one year earlier increases absences and the likelihood of leaving school, particularly during the postpartum year. Further, the results indicate that becoming pregnant one year earlier has adverse long-term consequences: it reduces high school graduation by age 20, decreases college enrollment and completion in the early 20s, and leads to lower employment and earnings in the mid-20s, with these detrimental effects being most pronounced for the youngest group. Finally, I present suggestive evidence that providing parental support to teenage mothers during the postpartum year could mitigate the short-term disruptions they face, such as increased absences and higher dropout rates.

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