

# 1 Introduction: Evolution of Unwed Fatherhood as a Policy Issue

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After centuries of anonymity unwed fathers are emerging from the shadows into the harsh spotlight of public scrutiny. The dramatic increase in children growing up without fathers and in the public costs of out-of-wedlock childbearing have led federal and state governments to take an increasingly active role in requiring unwed fathers to face up to their paternal responsibilities. In 1989 over one-quarter of all births were outside marriage, but new paternities constituted only about 30 percent of the number of out-of-wedlock births.<sup>1</sup> About four of five young unmarried mothers report going on welfare within a few years of their first child's birth (U.S. Congress, Congressional Budget Office 1990).

The declining presence of fathers is particularly serious because of the associated impacts on child poverty. Most of the rise in U.S. child poverty rates between 1970 and 1989 can be attributed to the declining proportion of children living in married couple families.<sup>2</sup> The one-parent families most subject to poverty—those headed by never-married mothers—have also increased rapidly. Between 1970 and 1989 the share of children living with never-married mothers jumped over eightfold, from 0.8 to 6.7 percent. Poor children of never-married mothers accounted for nearly 1 in 4 poor children in 1989, up from only about 3 percent in 1970 (Lerman 1991).

Federal and state governments have responded to these developments with several initiatives.<sup>3</sup> In 1988 Congress passed the Family Support Act

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(FSA) in a new effort to reduce welfare dependency by helping mothers heading families increase their earnings and collect additional child support from absent fathers. Although the law directed most employment and training funds toward mothers on welfare, it also authorized demonstration projects to provide training for noncustodial fathers, including unwed fathers.<sup>4</sup>

Since mothers and children are the visible actors in one-parent families, absent fathers receive limited attention from welfare laws. After all, mothers typically raise the children, interact with welfare programs, select living arrangements, manage family expenses, and respond to national surveys. Only recently have researchers and policymakers taken a serious interest in fathers, at least in their child support obligations and their willingness to pay what they owe. The emphasis on child support has meant a corresponding focus on divorced, separated, and remarried fathers, mainly because married or formerly married fathers are more likely than unwed fathers to be subject to support orders.

Reliable research on never-married fathers has lagged far behind and left policymakers with inadequate information. Too often, judgments about unwed fathers are formed on the basis of unrepresentative anecdotes that tell of young men fathering large numbers of children and then failing to acknowledge any responsibility. Even basic facts—such as the size and characteristics of the unwed father population—have been largely inaccessible. The current volume is an effort to lessen the information gap and to present to the public an array of findings and policy perspectives about unwed fatherhood among American young men.

Several contributors to the volume address key empirical questions, such as: Who are the young unwed fathers? What causes young men to become and remain unwed fathers? How do unmarried young men respond to fatherhood? How often do unwed fathers provide financial support and take an active parenting role? What is the impact on children of growing up without a father?

Others ask: What are the appropriate legal and moral responsibilities of unwed fathers towards their children? How should they be enforced? What are the rights of unwed fathers? To what extent do their rights come into conflict with the rights of their children and their children's mothers?

Still others consider how to improve public policy by asking: How can programs and policy best encourage and enhance young fathers' ability to be responsible parents? Do service and counseling programs attract unwed fathers to become involved with their children? Should public programs provide special employment and training assistance to unwed fathers?

A decade ago this book could not have been written. Too few systematic studies and too little data were available. Today we have studies

based on nationally representative data on unwed fathers, serious ethnographic work on unwed fathers in two cities, research that has tracked the children of unwed fathers, analyses of the changing legal status of unwed fathers, and several reviews of programs and policies dealing with unwed fathers. While the scope of research and policy initiatives dealing with unwed fathers is still modest, many findings have emerged that separate fact from fancy and that are thus important to share with a wide audience. This volume brings together many of these new findings.

### The Historical and International Context

Although the book concentrates on young unwed fathers in the contemporary United States, we should remember that illegitimacy is hardly a new phenomenon, nor one exclusive to this country. The social meaning of unwed parenthood, the rights of unmarried parents and their children, and even the language and analytical categories have differed significantly over time and across countries. Community disapproval of unwed parents has varied in intensity, depending largely on prevailing religious attitudes. For example, early New England Puritans responded to nonmarital births with moral outrage, while their Chesapeake Anglican contemporaries were only concerned about how the potential dependency of such children affected the community's purse (Vinovskis 1986).

Whatever their attitudes, nearly all societies have tried hard to limit the community costs of raising children born outside marriage. Bastardy in England prior to the sixteenth century was quite common and clearly deviant, but was not considered to be a shameful status. In the Middle Ages children born out of wedlock were raised in families with their half brothers and sisters with little hint of disgrace. However, they did suffer from having no legal rights of inheritance (Laslett, Oosterveen, and Smith 1980).

Begetting or conceiving a child was not against the law in England. If the parents were able to support the "bastard" offspring, the community gave little overt disapproval. But if the child became a public charge, the parents became the object of the community's scorn and punishment (Macfarlane 1980). Historian Lawrence Stone relates how justices of the peace in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England would condemn both the unwed mother and father to public whipping, and to sitting in the stocks if their child lacked financial support. The justices were determined to impress on young people the costs of fornication. Stone reports that "tremendous pressure was put on the mother to reveal the identity of the father, who could then be required to pay for the child's maintenance" (Stone 1979, 401).

Echoing our own time, the purpose of many laws was to force fathers to pay support for their children. For example, a 1733 English law made any man identified by the mother as the father of an illegitimate child liable for payment of the child's upkeep. It is striking that this law also established an incentive to marry. When the alleged father was too poor to provide support, marrying the mother gave him eligibility for a child's allowance from the poor rate (taxes) in his own parish (Stone 1979, 398).

English common law considered a child whose parents were not married as an "illegitimate" child, because in Sir William Blackstone's summary "he cannot be heir to any one . . . for, being nullius filius (the son of no one), he is therefore of kin to nobody. . . ." The bastard child therefore had neither a legal father nor a legal mother. Such provisions meant that illegitimate children could not inherit property from either parent and that they faced widespread discrimination.

The legal treatment of illegitimacy varied significantly across countries. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries English society dealt ever more harshly with unwed mothers and their offspring as attitudes towards out-of-wedlock childbearing hardened. "Illegitimate" children were regarded with shame and derision, and their parents, especially the mother, were shunned and often punished by various religious and civil authorities. The Poor Law of 1834 fastened responsibility for illegitimate children almost entirely on the mother. Unmarried mothers were viewed as sinners and their children as illegitimate or "bastards." In general, the fathers escaped serious notice and appear to have gotten off scot free.

In Bavaria, however, the harsh penalties against illegitimacy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave way to a significant liberalization, beginning with an 1808 edict that abolished all fines for nonmarital pregnancies (Lee 1980). The removal of a variety of legal constraints, perhaps together with an increasingly liberal attitude about sexual activity, led to a rapid increase in illegitimacy and premarital conceptions over the 1750-1850 period (Shorter 1980). Similar growth in illegitimacy took place in many parts of Western Europe. At the same time women becoming pregnant by a man of equal social status were expected to marry the father. Thus, increasing rates of nonmarital conceptions legitimated by marriage occurred alongside the growth in illegitimacy.

By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century the ratio of illegitimate births to total births had leveled off across most of Europe. Declines occurred in England, Scotland, Italy, Switzerland, and Norway, but increases took place in France and Germany. As of 1921-25, the proportion of illegitimate to total live births varied from about 2 percent in the Netherlands, 4-5 percent in England, Switzerland, and Italy, to 11

percent in Germany and 15 percent in Sweden (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1929, 12:84–85). In the United States the decline appears to have begun nearly fifty years earlier (Smith and Hindus 1980).

A cyclical pattern of illegitimacy rates and premarital conception is apparent in the United States as well as in Europe (Smith and Hindus 1980). In New England the proportion of births conceived out of wedlock rose from 10 percent of first births in the mid-seventeenth century to 30 percent a hundred years later. By the mid-eighteenth century, the pendulum had swung back toward declining out-of-wedlock births. Still, the U.S. experience is distinctive because of the clear racial differentials in illegitimate births. In the 1920s, 12.6 percent of black births, but only 1.4 percent of white births, were out of wedlock (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1929, 12:85).

Overall, despite variations across countries, illegitimacy was a marginal phenomenon by the early twentieth century, usually affecting one in twenty children or fewer. Legal restrictions had become liberalized, but serious social and economic barriers remained. Not only did unmarried mothers lack welfare benefits, they faced a near-impossible situation in keeping their family. If they remained at home, they were not able to support their families. If they worked, officials would see them as irresponsible for leaving their children.

The process of giving birth involved considerable stigma for unmarried mothers. In the United States a white unmarried pregnant woman would often choose to enter a maternity home located far away from her hometown, where she would receive shelter, medical care, and support until she gave birth. The social worker would provide some counseling and help her give up her baby for adoption. She would usually go through this whole experience in secrecy from her family and most of her friends (Young 1954). The social work literature of this period makes virtually no mention of the pregnant woman's sexual partner, the baby's father.

Between the 1920s and 1950s momentous events shook the world, but the tendency to have children outside marriage was unaffected. In fact, the illegitimacy ratios (the proportion of children born to unmarried mothers) broadly declined in Western countries. As of 1960, out-of-wedlock births constituted about 4–6 percent of total live births in Germany, France, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. The illegitimacy ratio was even lower in Italy and the Netherlands (Kamerman 1991).

This trend was not to last beyond the 1950s. The sixties saw the beginning of a sharp rise in sexual activity and soaring illegitimacy ratios in the United States as well as in many other countries. Note in Table 1-1 that the U.S. proportion of births that took place outside marriage doubled

TABLE 1-1 Percentage of Births Out of Wedlock in Selected Countries, 1960-1986

	1960	1970	1986
United States	5.3	10.7	23.4
Canada	4.3	9.6	16.9
Austria	13.0	12.8	21.8
Denmark	7.8	11.0	43.9
Finland	4.1	5.5	15.0
France	6.1	6.8	24.0
West Germany	6.3	5.5	9.6
Italy	2.4	2.2	5.6
Netherlands	1.3	2.1	8.8
Norway	3.7	6.9	24.0
Sweden	11.3	18.4	48.4
United Kingdom	5.4	8.5	21.0

Source: Kamerman 1991, table 5.

between 1960 and 1970 and then more than doubled from 1970 to 1986. By the late 1980s over one in five births were outside marriage in the United States, Austria, Denmark, France, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Since birthrates were declining among married couples, not all of the growth in illegitimacy ratios was the result of a greater tendency of the unmarried to have children. Moreover, in some countries—especially Sweden and other Scandinavian countries—the rise in out-of-wedlock births partly represented a longer period of cohabitation prior to marriage.

The jump in the U.S. proportion of out-of-wedlock births took place among blacks and whites, but the patterns and magnitudes differed considerably by race. Between 1960 and 1989 the chances of a black child being born to an unmarried woman rose from about one in five (22%) to over three in five (64%); at the same time, the white child's chances increased from about one in fifty (2.3%) to almost one in five (19%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1985, 62, and 1992, 69). These increases can come about via several mechanisms, including a declining marriage rate, a falling birthrate among married women, and/or a rising birthrate among unmarried women.

Some analysts have viewed the rising share of out-of-wedlock children, especially among blacks, as largely the result of a trend in which married women are having fewer children.<sup>5</sup> To isolate the impact of changing birthrates, we calculated what the 1960-89 illegitimacy ratio would have been under two scenarios: (1) constant (1960) proportions of married and unmarried women with changing (actual) marital and non-

marital birthrates; and (2) constant (1960) marital and nonmarital birthrates with changing (actual) proportions of married and unmarried women. These decompositions reveal that one-third of the rise in the black illegitimacy ratio and about half of the rise in the white ratio can be attributed to the declining birthrates among married couples.<sup>6</sup>

In any event, with the rise in nonmarital births has come a profound shift in law and social attitudes. The Uniform Parentage Act of 1973 and other similar state laws now have the effect of giving the nonmarital child complete legal equality with the legitimate child, as long as paternity was legally established. Several Supreme Court decisions in the late sixties outlawed most discrimination against children born outside marriage on grounds of equal protection. However, out-of-wedlock children can take advantage of the same rights as marital children only if paternity has been established.

Meanwhile, unwed motherhood no longer carries the same stigma, partly because of the increasingly liberal attitudes toward premarital sexual activity. Legalized abortion has given unmarried mothers an added way to avoid unwed parenthood. Although each year about 400,000 teenage women choose this option, many young mothers decide to keep and raise their babies on their own. Young people, their parents, and their communities no longer view marriage as necessarily the best solution to an unwed pregnancy, and some have actively discouraged marriage (Chase-Lansdale and Vinovskis 1987). To some experts, teenage marriages are inherently unstable, married teenage mothers are less likely to complete their education than if they remain unmarried, and their babies receive better care if teen mothers live with their parents.

Still, public institutions in the United States are increasingly providing unwed mothers with financial help and services. Prior to the 1935 enactment of the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program as part of the Social Security Act, unwed mothers rarely qualified for any public aid. Although the primary goal of ADC was to help widows, the program did explicitly provide public support for the children of divorced, separated, and never-married mothers. By the late 1960s only about 6 percent of assisted children received support on the basis of a widowed parent and 28 percent were in families with unmarried mothers. Since then, the proportion of welfare children with unmarried parents has continued to rise and reached 53 percent in 1989.

The shifts in the availability of services for unwed mothers are also significant. Before the last two decades, high schools usually suspended or expelled pregnant students. Today many school districts offer alternative school programs, on-site day care, and other special services to unmarried mothers or pregnant students. In 1978 Congress set up the Office

of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs (now the Adolescent Family Life Office), which funded community-based programs to provide comprehensive services to pregnant teenagers and adolescent mothers.

### A New Policy Focus

Particularly worrisome to policymakers and the public has been the problem of children (teenagers) having children. Teen pregnancy and parenthood rose high on the list of policymakers', foundations', and advocates' concerns, as reports documented an epidemic of teenage pregnancy (Hayes 1987; Moore and Burt 1982). The high proportion of out-of-wedlock births and of mother-headed families has created a serious dilemma for American social policy. As more of the nation's children live in one-parent families and face serious economic hardships, the need for social benefits expands. Indeed, reducing child poverty directly would require substantially increasing benefits to one-parent families. Yet, despite the lack of convincing evidence connecting welfare benefits to illegitimacy, the public has been uncomfortable providing generous income support to one-parent families, especially to young, unmarried mothers. Leaders across the political spectrum have called for limiting welfare benefits to a short time period. In the early days of his administration President Bill Clinton proposed a two-year maximum for the receipt of cash welfare. Welfare programs have repeatedly attempted to impose work requirements on recipients, including unmarried mothers raising young children, and to draw these mothers into training programs so that they can work their way off welfare.

Beginning in the 1960s, with the explosive growth in one-parent families and the tripling of the welfare rolls, studies and policy initiatives dealing with one-parent families began to proliferate.<sup>7</sup> Virtually all the research and program activities dealt with mothers and their children.<sup>8</sup> The only interest in fathers was in their status before a divorce or separation.<sup>9</sup> The fact that problems associated with unmarried fatherhood were especially serious among blacks was one factor that inhibited research.<sup>10</sup>

In the mid-1970s Senator Russell Long drew attention to another aspect of fatherhood—the tendency of many absent fathers to avoid paying child support. At the time, Long's legislative initiative to exact added child support payments from absent fathers was controversial. But only a few years later the idea of intensifying enforcement of child support obligations became widely supported across the political spectrum.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from analyses related to the new child support policies, researchers and policymakers did little to understand the experiences of



absent fathers, especially fathers who never married the mother of their children.<sup>12</sup> Data on even the most basic issues were lacking. No one knew the number of unwed fathers or their characteristics, the factors influencing their fatherhood, their employment and schooling patterns, nor how many subsequently married the mother of their child or formed second families. Teen pregnancy programs seldom had any contact with the young fathers. Few policy discussions of the 1970s and early 1980s even mentioned unwed fathers (Ooms 1981).

Suddenly, starting in the mid-1980s, articles, reports, and books on teen fathers began to surface; a few teen father demonstration programs were set up, and national organizations such as the National Urban League and the Children's Defense Fund held forums and promoted "male sexual responsibility" media campaigns designed to prevent adolescent pregnancy.

The popular media began to take an interest in unwed fathers and to note their contribution to rising proportions of out-of-wedlock births and unmarried mothers. In a prime-time television documentary produced by Bill Moyers, one of the central figures was a young black unwed father who expressed no responsibility for his several children born to several different women.<sup>13</sup> Young Timothy nonchalantly, even proudly, boasted he had sired several kids, was supporting none of them, and was in fact himself being supported by the welfare checks received by the various mothers of his children. The same portrait of irresponsibility also emerged from the series of *Washington Post* articles by Leon Dash.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to these images some researchers and health care professionals were describing a type of young unwed father who was both anxious and eager to be a good father and who provided intermittent financial support to his child's upkeep when he could and brought diapers when he could not. This father visited his child regularly, sometimes baby-sat, and occasionally cared for his child over the weekend in his own home or his parents' home. Some program operators reported young unwed fathers who were themselves raising their babies as single parents, often with the help of their parents (see Elster and Lamb 1986; Parke and Neville 1987).

No one knew how many young unwed fathers fit into either stereotype and what kind of range of behavior there was in between. And no one had figured out how policymakers should respond to these fathers' behavior or their needs although a few in the federal government were beginning to ask the questions.

Policymakers began to take seriously the data showing that the rapidly growing share of female-headed families was the result of nonmarital births, not of divorce or separation. By 1989 children of never-married

mothers constituted the majority of children receiving AFDC and an even higher proportion of children at greatest risk for long-term welfare dependency.<sup>15</sup>

Several studies have attempted to calculate the public costs of teen parenthood. One estimated that 40–50 percent of AFDC dollars went to mothers who were teenagers or who first gave birth as teenagers (Moore and Burt 1982). Another study projected that in 1985 the total federal and state public outlays for AFDC, Medicaid, and food stamps attributable to teenage childbearing was \$16.65 billion (Burt and Levy 1987).

Policymakers and researchers have increasingly blamed the nonpayment of child support as a factor contributing to the persistent poverty of female-headed families. But child support enforcement efforts have largely concentrated on increasing support payments from separated or divorced fathers. Child support enforcement officials generally assumed that never-married fathers had few financial resources and that pursuing them for support would not be cost-effective.

Recently policymakers have started to see the earnings of unwed fathers as an untapped source of financial support, especially over the long run. They learned that only about one-quarter of out-of-wedlock children's fathers have established legal paternity. Even fewer officially pay child support, although some may provide informal support. In 1988 sponsors of the Family Support Act used scanty data on the earnings of unwed fathers to argue for provisions to stimulate state agencies to attach a higher priority on the establishment of paternity. The final law mandates that states establish paternity in a certain percentage of out-of-wedlock births.<sup>16</sup>

### New Viewpoints

The rise of an ecologically based systems framework for understanding social problems has also contributed to the growing interest in young unwed fathers. (This book is an example of this approach.) In the sixties and seventies, health care professionals viewed the problems of unwed pregnancy and childbearing as an issue solely concerned with the well-being of individual pregnant women and their babies. This view justified targeting health and social services on sexually active and pregnant women and on young mothers and their babies. Professionals taking this stance simply reflected the predominant medical and disease model of social problems. Unfortunately, such models resulted in a system of fragmented services designed to prevent or remedy particular problems (symptoms) experienced by particular categories of (diseased) individuals.

Social workers echoed these views of health care professionals. Leone Young, a social worker and author of the influential book *Out of Wedlock* (1954), had a clear idea of the origins of teenage pregnancy. She was convinced that a young woman's pregnancy was no accident, but a result of pathological relationships with her parents. In this view there was little reason to consider anyone other than the teen mother and her baby to be the focus of intervention. Both needed practical services and the young mother needed individual casework dealing with dynamic intrapsychic issues to help her resolve her psychological problems.

As researchers and service providers probed more deeply into the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy, they learned that the problem was complex, that the young fathers, their peers, and their families were all involved (Ooms 1981). This new focus led to a shift away from the medical model to what became known as the "systems paradigm" in the psychological and social sciences.

The systems view emphasizes that the causes of nonmarital pregnancy have as much to do with attitudes and situations of young men as with the circumstances of young women. While the female partner is the person most seriously affected by her pregnancy, her male partner's behavior and feelings often have a considerable degree of influence on decisions she makes about the pregnancy and, if she carries it to term, about the future well-being of their child. The unwed father's own future may also be affected by the birth of his child. A systems framework highlights multiple, interacting forces in the family, social, institutional, cultural, and community environment that help shape both young men's and young women's sexual behavior and their response to becoming parents. The ethnographic papers by Mercer Sullivan and Elijah Anderson in this volume (Chapters 3 and 4) deal with how individual young men are affected by a rich interplay of forces, including the attitudes of families and peers and the state of the job market. Both papers offer insights into ways unwed fatherhood develops within the black community.

Another reason for the new emphasis on unwed fathers is an increased focus in some quarters on the moral dimensions of public policy. In recent debates about welfare reform and the nature of poverty, conservatives and liberals have raised traditional questions of social obligation and individual responsibility and argued that the government can and should require work from those who benefit from public support (Novak 1987) and that noncustodial as well as custodial parents should bear the primary financial responsibility for children.

The Family Support Act explicitly promotes family responsibility as part of a new social contract. Under this contract the government provides income support and services to the custodial parent in exchange for

each parent assuming specific duties. The AFDC custodial parent must now enroll in job training or education and move toward economic independence once the baby becomes three years old, or even earlier in some states. The noncustodial parent must cooperate in setting a support award and make the appropriate support payments.

As Linda Mellgren points out in Chapter 9, the Family Support Act does not explicitly identify unwed fathers as a separate group, but the provisions mandating standards for establishing paternity are clearly aimed at raising substantially the amount of support payments coming from unwed fathers. In recognition of the potential job market problems faced by noncustodial fathers, the act encourages up to five states to mount a demonstration employment and training program specifically for noncustodial fathers.

One result of the feminist questioning of traditional gender roles within the family has been to increase research on the role of fathers (rather than just mothers) in their children's development (Lamb and Sagi 1983). Today a range of cultural and media influences exhorts men to become more involved in the nurturing of their children at home, as women become more involved in life and achievements outside the home (see Pruett 1987).

Although the first books and conferences on fatherhood did not mention unwed fathers specifically (Lamb and Sagi 1983), the initial programs targeting unwed fathers drew on the new emphasis on fatherhood and included a strong focus on helping these young men learn to interact with and care for their children (Elster and Lamb 1986). Joelle Sander, in Chapter 15 of this volume, describes a multiple-site demonstration program of counseling, parenting skills classes, and prenatal education aimed at encouraging unwed fathers to develop a constructive fathering role.

### The Rights and Obligations of Unwed Fathers

Ironically, attempts to strengthen paternal financial responsibility and fathers' increased nurturing of their children have prompted some divorced men to create a fathers' rights movement—a development greeted with ambivalence by feminists. As long as single mothers faced nearly all the obligations, issues about the rights of the noncustodial fathers were marginal. However, now that fathers are less able to avoid paying child support, some are insisting that they should have rights to go along with their responsibilities.

George Harris, in his contribution to Part II of this volume (Chapter 8), argues for taking the rights of unwed fathers as seriously as their obligations. He reviews the circumstances under which it may be morally

appropriate for the unwed father to claim certain rights with respect to his child—for example the rights to procreate, to notification of an abortion request, to paternity determination, to custody or to visitation, and to consent to adoption. Since the analysis by Harris shows that the law is a blunt instrument for resolving conflicts among the rights of fathers, mothers, children, and society, the distinctions that should determine the morally just course of action may be difficult to write into the law.

Nevertheless, the nation's statutes and case law have confronted and will increasingly confront questions dealing with the legal rights of unwed fathers. Chapter 7, by Ruth-Arlene Howe, provides a comprehensive review of the current legal status of unwed fathers. Howe sees a contradiction facing unwed fathers between the legal basis of their obligations and the legal basis of their rights. The obligations of unwed fathers depend entirely on a blood tie with their children irrespective of the degree of interest the father shows in the child. On the other hand, their rights to seek custody or veto an adoption exist only when they can demonstrate showing a strong paternal interest in their children. Howe predicts that the law will continue to evolve on this subject.

In Chapter 14 Arthur Shostak tackles the rarely examined subject of men's reactions to abortions. Drawing on his interviews with men waiting in abortion clinics, Shostak writes about how unmarried men, both in law and in practice, are excluded from the abortion decision and from the processes of obtaining an abortion. He discusses proposed legal reforms, recommends many reforms in clinic practice and in broad community education and for males themselves to assume more equal responsibility with their partners to prevent pregnancy.

## Who Unwed Fathers Are

Most unwed fathers do not fit the stereotype of a young man who takes no responsibility for his children. Half or more visit their children often and provide support payments. As the children age, visits become less frequent, but the child support payments continue, at least according to the fathers. These and other results are found in Chapter 2, by Robert Lerman, which uses data from a large national survey of youth to provide the first national estimates of the trends in unwed fatherhood, the number and characteristics of young unwed fathers, their fathering activities, and the factors causing young men to become unwed fathers, to marry, or to delay fatherhood and marriage.

The close association between early sexual activity and unwed fatherhood—even among young men with the same racial, family, and personal characteristics—makes it important to learn about the sexual and

contraceptive experience of unmarried adolescent males. Chapter 5, by Freya Sonenstein, Joseph Pleck, and Leighton Ku, presents the first national estimates of these activities. The authors find that sexual activity increased between 1979 and 1988 for those 17 and over, but so did the use of contraception. Of the 17-19-year-olds who were sexually active, most had only one partner during the year and only about 20 percent had more than two. The low percentage is inconsistent with the common image of these young men having multiple sexual partners.

Data from national surveys are useful, but they cannot substitute for in-depth ethnographic research to capture the feelings of young men who might become unwed fathers. In the two ethnographic studies in Part I, Mercer Sullivan and Elijah Anderson draw on their close and continuing relationships with small groups of inner-city young men to examine attitudes and behavior with regard to becoming a father, to taking care of their child, and to marrying their child's mother. The two authors come up with very different images of the process.

Sullivan reports that the young men in his sample from white and Hispanic neighborhoods in Brooklyn tended to marry the young woman they made pregnant, while black young men rarely did so. In fact, black young men did not face strong community pressure to marry, but were expected to find work, engage in education or training, and assist the mother through financial or in-kind help. The black unwed fathers Sullivan interviewed showed a willingness to acknowledge paternity, at least on an unofficial basis, and to try hard to help care for their child. One young man even suggested that those who did little to take care of their children lost their respect within the community. Sullivan traces the lack of fatherly support and infrequent marriage largely to the instability of jobs and low pay faced by unwed fathers. Anderson paints a much more disturbing picture of early unwed fatherhood in the inner city. Many of the black young men he interviewed were strongly committed to peers who boasted about sexual exploits and derided conventional family life. In this world, young men gained status among their peers by conquering young women and by not admitting paternity.

A major concern about out-of-wedlock childbearing is the long-term impact on children. We know that children of young, never-married mothers are most likely to experience long-term poverty and welfare dependency (Ellwood 1988) and that growing up in one-parent families reduces children's school achievement and family stability (McLanahan 1988). The links between the father's absence and social problems have led some researchers to believe that involving fathers—even noncustodial fathers—in their children's upbringing can mitigate the likely harmful effects of marital disruption or illegitimacy.

In Chapter 6 Frank Furstenberg, Jr., and Kathleen Harris ask how the extent and the quality of paternal involvement influence a child's educational and employment attainment, teenage childbearing, imprisonment, and/or depression. Furstenberg and Harris draw on data from a special sample of children born to black teenage parents in Baltimore during the mid-1960s. The children's involvement with fathers varied from having their biological father live with them during their entire childhood (9%) to having no father figure at all (8%). On average, children in this sample spent about one-third of their childhood living with their biological father. About half of the children had strong bonds to biological fathers living in the home, but only 13 percent had such bonds with absent fathers. The most striking finding from the Furstenberg and Harris results is that the quality of the paternal bonds was more important than the simple presence of fathers. Although strong bonds were more likely to occur when biological fathers lived with the mother and child, often close relationships developed with resident stepfathers and with absent fathers who continued to visit their children.

### Public Policies and Programs

How have public policies and programs responded to out-of-wedlock childbearing? As the chapters in Part III discuss, some responses have concentrated on raising the incomes of children through the establishment of paternity, support awards, and the collection of support payments. A few programs have attempted to go beyond the economic dimension and increase the involvement of fathers in raising their children.

Esther Wattenberg (Chapter 10) points out that having paternity determined legally can bring many benefits to the child, and indirectly to the mother, and therefore is nearly always in the best interest of the child. Wattenberg reports on interviews in Minnesota conducted with service providers, teen mothers, and their partners that explore the attitudes and barriers to establishing paternity. Responses revealed widespread ignorance of the law and the benefits of paternity as well as young couples' reluctance to get involved in what was perceived as a punitive child support system.

Unfortunately, administrative practices in the state agencies charged with establishing paternity and collecting child support have often fallen far short of the tasks. In Chapter 11 Sandra Danziger, Carolyn Kastner, and Terri Nickel detail the numerous barriers in procedures and practice in this complex system including, in many jurisdictions, punitive court procedures. At the same time, the authors point out that many states and localities have embarked on new approaches, such as the state of Wash-

ington's efforts to inform young parents about paternity and family responsibility, New Hampshire's school-based teen awareness program dealing with the financial consequences and other responsibilities of parenthood, and Illinois's successful efforts to establish paternity by increasing funds for blood testing and promoting an informal "consent process" that takes place outside the courts.

One innovative child support program in Indianapolis has attempted to improve the long-term prospects that unwed fathers will develop a close relationship with their children and will earn enough to provide children with adequate financial support. Young unwed fathers can receive credit in lieu of actual support payments by visiting their children, attending parenting classes, assisting mothers with child care and other assistance, and/or enrolling in education or training. The idea is to promote long-term responsibility by offering relief from short-term financial obligations.<sup>17</sup> Maureen Pirog-Good (Chapter 12) presents an evaluation of this program and gives it a mixed review.

The federal government has played a key role in sponsoring research and demonstration projects aimed at encouraging unwed fathers to become involved in parenting and to fulfill their financial responsibilities to their children. Linda Mellgren describes how the planning and evaluation office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services created a Young Unwed Fathers Project in 1985 to stimulate research, to assist in the development of demonstration projects, and to raise the awareness of the issue in other parts of the federal government. The vehicle chosen was a conference and subsequent report that was widely disseminated (Smollar and Ooms 1987). In 1992 the office sponsored a major conference on policies aimed at establishing paternity (see Institute for Research on Poverty 1992).

Joelle Sander (Chapter 15) and M. Laurie Leitch, Anne Gonzalez, and Theodora Ooms (Chapter 13) examine the experience of a range of outreach and service programs for unwed fathers. Sander reports on the pioneer multisite demonstration program to specifically target adolescent fathers with services designed to meet their needs. The lessons of these programs—such as the importance of outreach and male staff—have not been heeded in subsequent efforts to serve young fathers (Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs 1991). Leitch, Gonzalez, and Ooms find that operators of teen pregnancy and parenting programs are enthusiastic about the idea of involving unwed fathers, but that they are encountering a range of barriers to doing so. While some programs have been successful in attracting fathers, there is little concrete evidence about which practices are most effective and whether the results of program-induced involvement by fathers ends up helping the children.



A major thrust of policies for unwed fathers is to raise their earnings, largely so they can increase support contributions to their children. Robert Lerman examines the rationale for such policies and the context of recent demonstrations by analyzing the reasons for the low earnings of unwed fathers. The evidence points to the need for programs to promote responsibility among unwed fathers as well as to improve their skills.

### Looking toward the Future

Society is only beginning to cope with the reality that one of every four U.S. children is born out of wedlock. Research is still in its early stages about whether the phenomenon is an inevitable part of modern societies or whether improved education, the availability of jobs, and strict child support enforcement can begin to reverse the trend. For example, most studies in this volume focus on unwed fathers in urban, low-income, and largely black communities, in which nonmarital childbearing results in high social costs. But the problem extends far beyond these groups. Sensible policies require that we know more about the causes and consequences of unwed fatherhood among suburban, rural, and other groups of young people.

More sophisticated research is needed if we are to gain a deeper understanding of unwed parenthood. Instead of simply studying unwed mothers and unwed fathers independently of each other, researchers should examine the relationships between young men and women before and after pregnancies and childbirth. They should also study those young parents who marry and stay married. And of course it will be important to study the implementation of the 1988 welfare reforms, the impacts on out-of-wedlock childbearing, and the potential effects on the relationships between absent fathers and their children. Finally it is still not well understood why so many young people, especially African-Americans, are delaying or forgoing marriage but not parenthood. William J. Wilson's (1987) explanation of the declining number of marriageable young black males, because of unemployment, incarceration, or premature death, is plausible but far from proved (see, for example, Ellwood and Crane 1990; Lerman 1989; and Mare and Winship 1991).

Presently, much of the demonstration and evaluation money is invested in improving the employment and earnings potential of noncustodial parents. Although these programs are an important investment in human capital, their success in recruiting and retaining unwed fathers depends largely on whether paternity has been established and on both parents' (and often both families') attitudes toward the fathers' involvement. This suggests devoting more resources to interventions around the time of

birth, when, studies indicate, the willingness of both unwed parents to have the father involved is greatest.<sup>18</sup> Success at this stage may well make it easier to accomplish the goals of expanded employment and support payments. Strategies to establish paternity at birth address the needs of all out-of-wedlock children, not solely those dependent on public welfare.

The problems arising out of paternal irresponsibility continue to attract public and congressional attention. Proposed legislation introduced in 1992 by Congressmen Thomas Downey and Henry Hyde calls for federalizing the child support system and setting up demonstrations to test the concept of a minimum assured child support. Under this system, the custodial parent would receive some minimum payment in the event the government was unable to collect support payments due from the noncustodial parent. The proposed bill calls for "establishing paternity at birth (with as few exceptions as possible) for each child born in America, regardless of welfare status." Custodial parents would not qualify for the assured support payment without the establishment of paternity. In many senses the bill is another reminder of the significance of the unwed fatherhood phenomenon.

Dr. Leon Sullivan, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has said that "the greatest family challenge of our era is fatherhood . . . male absence from family life."<sup>19</sup> The country will need to confront this issue and other intimate aspects of family life. Coping with these problems in a sensible way will require sensitivity, wisdom, and common sense, but also knowledge about the attitudes, roles, and activities of young men and women before and after they become parents.

## Notes

1. Births to unmarried mothers as a proportion of all births rose from 18 percent in 1980 to 27 percent in 1989. The numbers vary widely by race and Hispanic origin. In 1989 nonmarital births constituted 36 percent of Hispanic births, 16 percent of births to white, non-Hispanic women, 66 percent of births to black, non-Hispanic women (Monthly Vital Statistics 1991).

2. Measuring the precise impact of family structure changes on child poverty is a complex and controversial task. The approach used by Lerman (1991) was to calculate child poverty rates in 1970, 1979, and 1989 by holding constant the child poverty rates within family categories at 1989 levels, while taking account of the actual shifts in the proportion of children across family categories. Using these results, one can attribute virtually all of the 1970 to 1989 increase in child poverty rates, and about 80 percent of the 1979 to 1989 increase, to the changing family situations of children.

3. The current volume is a product of this new interest. All the authors focus

on young unwed fathers between ages 14 and 25. They use a number of common terms, which we can define here. *Unwed fathers* are men who have never married. *Teenage* or *adolescent* refers to persons between age 13 and age 19. *School-age* or *minor parents* are mothers or fathers who have not yet reached their eighteenth birthday. *Absent parents* includes separated, divorced, and never-married parents who are not living with their children.

4. Fathers living in welfare families, under the AFDC-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) component, have long been subject to work requirements and have long had access to employment and training programs. However, little research is available on the impacts of these programs on AFDC-UP fathers. For a review of findings on the way work programs affect mothers on welfare, see Gueron and Pauly 1991.

5. For example, David Ellwood (1988) concludes, "The reason for the changed proportion for nonwhite children born out of wedlock is not that more and more babies are being born to unmarried nonwhite women. The reason is that fewer and fewer babies are being born to married nonwhite women."

6. The data for this analysis come from Ellwood and Crane 1990.

7. The number of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) increased from 992,000 in 1964 to 3 million in 1972.

8. Researchers studied the impact of welfare programs on work, marriage, psychological well-being, and poverty; the duration of poverty and the time mothers spent on welfare; the mechanisms by which mothers escaped poverty and left the welfare rolls; and the long-term effects on children of growing up in a one-parent family. Government policies have emphasized work requirements, day-care services, training, and other mechanisms to stimulate mothers to take jobs and ultimately leave welfare. Other programs have also tried to provide counseling services, prenatal care, and food in order to reduce the incidence of low-birth-weight babies.

9. A notable example was Daniel Moynihan's report on the black family, which highlighted the role of male joblessness in causing divorce, separation, and the growth in one-parent families and reliance on welfare.

10. To quote William J. Wilson (1987,4), "The controversy surrounding the Moynihan report [on the Negro family] had the effect of curtailing serious research on minority problems in the inner city for over a decade, as liberal scholars shied away from researching behavior construed as unflattering or stigmatizing to particular racial minorities." The link between family disruption and race continues to be a highly charged issue. Vice President Quayle related the Los Angeles riots to family disruption (Suro 1992). On the other hand, Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, sees welfare bashing as a substitute for race baiting (Toner 1992).

11. In 1984 and 1988 Congress passed by wide margins increasingly tough measures to raise support awards, to establish paternity, and to collect payments owed by noncustodial parents.

12. A few studies on the subject did appear in the social work literature (see, for example, Pannor, Nassarik, and Evans 1971; and Hendricks 1980).

13. The program, "The Vanishing Black Family—Crisis in Black America," appeared as a two-hour CBS Special Report on 25 January 1986.

14. The findings appear in expanded form in Dash 1989.

15. Between 1969 and 1989 the proportion of AFDC mothers who were unmarried increased from 29 percent to 53 percent (Committee on Ways and Means 1991). Bane and Ellwood (1983) found mothers receiving AFDC who gave birth out of wedlock as teenagers were the group at highest risk of becoming long-term welfare recipients.

16. The precise figure depends on the state. Federal requirements are that a state must achieve a paternity establishment rate that (1) is 50 percent; (2) is the average of all states; or (3) has increased by 3 percentage points from fiscal year 1988 to fiscal year 1991 and by 3 points per year thereafter.

17. Since the father's support payments supplant AFDC benefits after the first \$50, mothers would lose at most \$50 per month from the substitution of in-kind credits for support payments.

18. The state of Washington and a few other communities are mounting vigorous and apparently successful efforts to establish paternity on a voluntary basis in the hospital at the time of birth (see Ooms and Owen 1990). Also, see the analysis of the Wisconsin experience by McLanahan, Monson, and Brown (1992).

19. Secretary Sullivan used this phrase in a speech delivered to the Council on American Families, Institute for American Values, in New York City, 9 January 1992.

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