



Out-of-Wedlock Babies: Intended . . . Or Not?

by

Janice Shaw Crouse

Planned Parenthood and other leftist, pro-abortion organizations have succeeded in painting a picture of unwed motherhood as that of an ill-fated teenager who — from ignorance, impulsiveness, lack of “protection,” or emotional vulnerability — “finds” herself pregnant. But is this correct? Planned Parenthood also conveys the idea that most of the babies being born out of wedlock are unintended and unwanted. Is that correct?

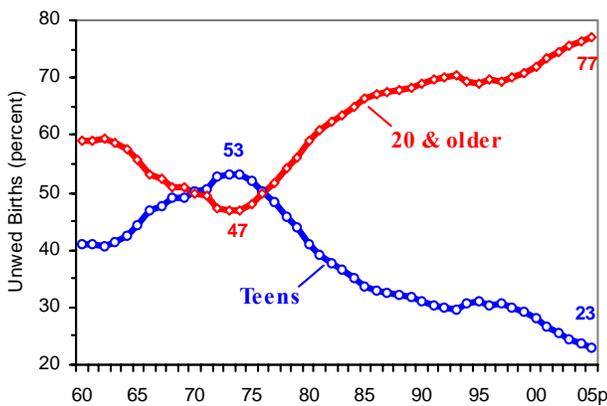
Despite all the anecdotal evidence that “everybody knows,” the two Planned Parenthood depictions about unwed births are not representative of the situation in the vast majority of cases today.

overwhelming majority of cases, a matter of consciously-made choices. When more than three-fourths of the 1.5 million unwed births are to women age 20 and older, these results cannot be blamed on youthful immaturity. These post-teen behaviors can only be characterized as reckless and irresponsible, given what is well known about (a) the skyrocketing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among sexually active unmarried women, as well as (b) the abysmally high rates of poverty of children living in female-headed families and (c) the well-documented risks of negative outcomes attributed to children living in father absent households. These toxic fruits are a cocktail made up of sexual revolutionaries pushing promiscuity, secular liberalism’s unrelenting attacks on the boundaries of religion and morality, and radical feminism’s raging hostility toward marriage.

From 1960 to 1975, the number of unwed births in each age group increased at about the same rate (see Figure 2). But in the late 1970s, the number of unwed births to women 20 and older began to rise at an accelerated rate. The availability of legal abortions did not restrain the increase in the unwed birthrate as liberals anticipated it would. In sharp contrast, by the early 1990s, the number of unwed teen births stopped rising, and from 1998 to 2005, unwed teen births declined by more than 10 percent as (a) the abstinence message gained an audience and (b) pregnant teens were required to live with parents (or a court approved adult) and stay in school in order to receive a welfare check.

The downturn in teenage pregnancies shows that responsible behavior, guided by strong values and common sense, makes a positive difference. Likewise, the increase in out-of-wedlock childbearing among older women highlights an inevitable result of the feminist myths about women not “needing a man.”

Figure 1. —Percent of Births to Unmarried Teens Has Declined Compared to Unmarried Women Age 20 & Older



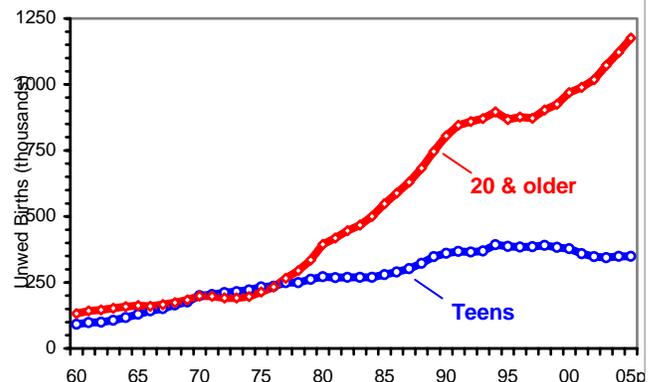
Note: These percentages are the ratio of unwed births to women in the individual age groups to total unwed births.

Source: Unwed births are published by the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics.

The “Frightened-Teen” Myth. Figure 1 shows the percentage of unwed births to teens compared with that of women age 20 years and older. In the early 1970s, more than half of all unwed births (53 percent) were to teens. Thereafter, teen unwed births dropped precipitously as a percentage of all unwed births. Figure 1 also points out an astounding and appalling fact: Currently 77 percent of all unwed births are to women 20 years of age and older. With the concept of “marriage as optional” spreading like a viral infection, the incidence of out-of-wedlock childbearing has risen spectacularly but primarily among older women and most especially among African-American women.

The “Unintended Pregnancy” Myth. While many of the children born out-of-wedlock are unplanned (and in that sense unintended), the idea that millions of women 20 years of age and older are hapless victims is not credible. Their pregnancies may not have been intentional, but the behavior that led to their “condition” was, in the

Figure 2. —Unwed Births to Women Age 20 & Older Have Risen While Unwed Teen Births Leveled Off



Source: See Figure 1.