

Strengthening Fragile Families

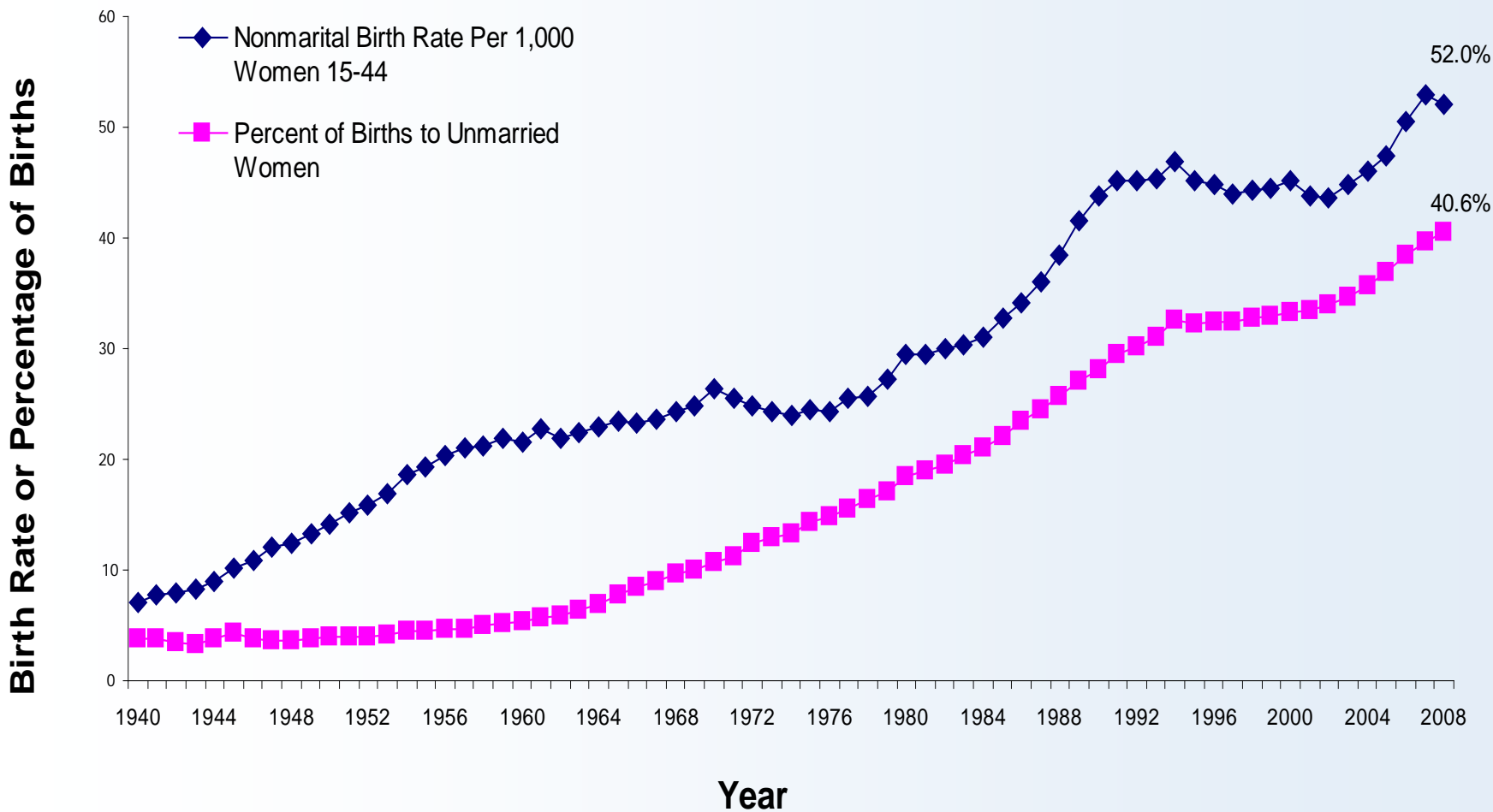
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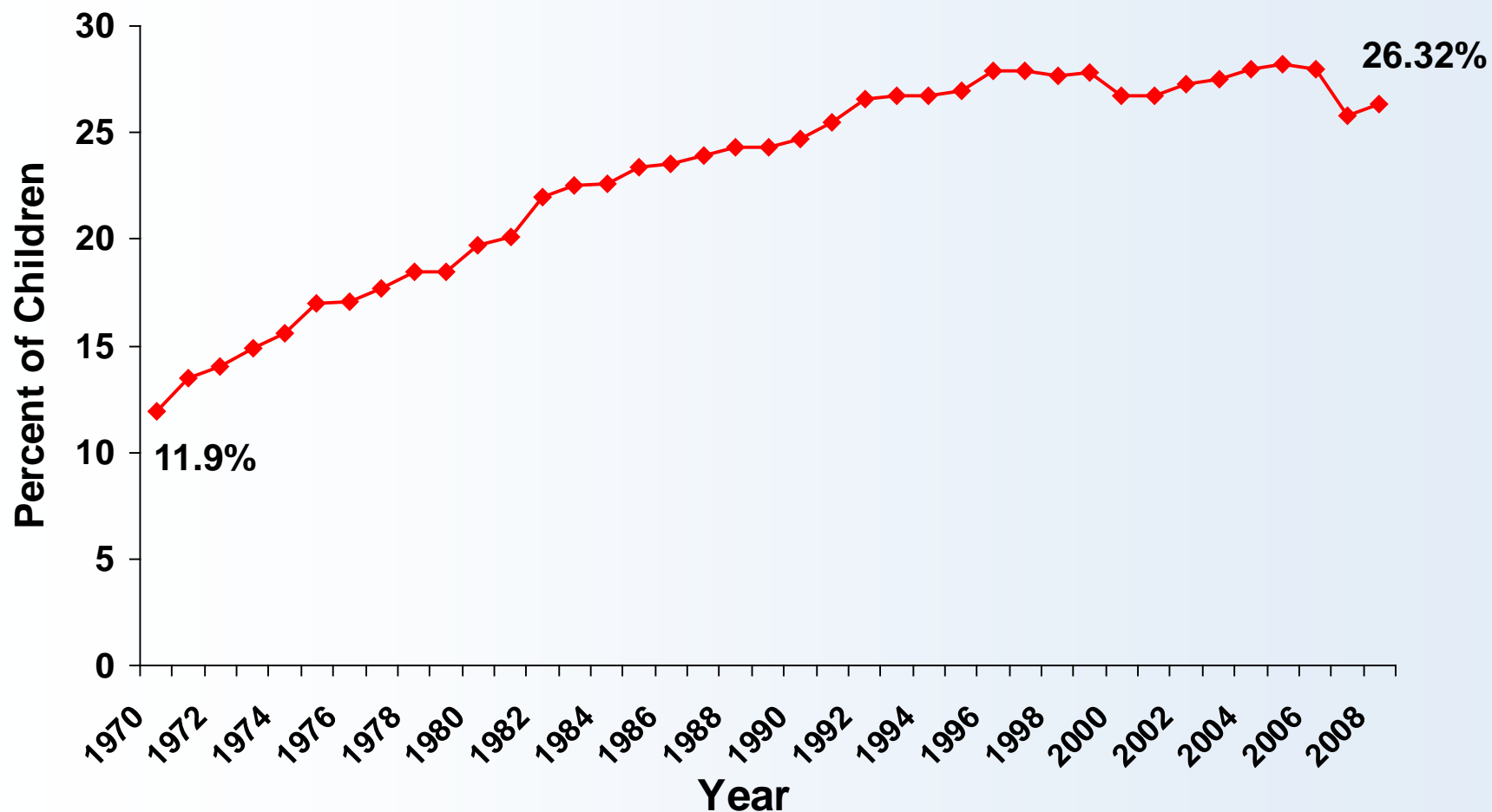
The Problem: Too Many Children in Fragile Families

- Parents with low education
- Single-parent child rearing
- Poverty
- Low school achievement

Birth Rate and Percent of Births to Unmarried Women, 1940 - 2008



Percent of Children Living in Single-Parent Families, 1970 - 2008



*2007 and 2008 use new parent variables introduced in 2007 (PELNMOM and PELNDAD).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March and Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 2007 and earlier data available at <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch1.xls>.

Fragile Families Study: Four Findings

Finding #1

- 82% of couples have close relationships (51% live together) at time of birth
- 87% of fathers and 72% of mothers said they had 50/50 chance of marriage

Finding #2

Both mothers and fathers have demographic and human capital characteristics that complicate getting good jobs, forming stable families, performing successfully as parents:

1. Youth
2. Previous births
3. Lower education
4. Lower earnings/Higher poverty
5. Health Limitations
6. Drug Use
7. Incarceration

Finding #3

Unstable relationships:

1. 65% of couples not together at 5 years
2. 25% of moms lived with new partner; 20% have had a child with another father
3. 60% of moms had 3 or more relationship transitions
4. By year 5, about 50% of fathers involved in splits saw their child less than once a month

Finding #4: Child Development

Measure of Impact	Number of Studies	Negative Effects of Single Parenting or Instability
Cognitive Development	3	2 of 3
Behavior Problem	7	6 of 7
Health (obesity, asthma, low birth rate, overall health rating)	6	6 of 6
Child Abuse	2	2 of 2

Source: Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gunn, 2010, p. 96.

Note: There were a total of 14 studies of child outcomes using fragile families data.

Recommendations

- Strengthen safety net
- Prevent unwed births:
 1. Social marketing campaigns
 2. Teen pregnancy prevention programs
 3. Subsidize contraception for more women (Medicaid)
- Prison sentencing reform (scarlet “A”)
- Experiment on Building Strong Families

Building Strong Families Program Overview

- Marriage education curriculum sessions:
 1. Effective communication
 2. Showing affection
 3. Managing conflict
 4. Co-parenting
 5. Family finances
 6. 30-42 hours
- Family coordinator
- Referral for services (mental health, job training and search, child care)

Impacts

- No average differences between program participants and controls
- Several impacts for black couples
- Several impacts for the Oklahoma program

Obama Initiative

- Replace Bush marriage and fatherhood grant program
- Boost funding from \$450 million to \$500 million over 3 years
- Two components:
 1. Comprehensive responsible fatherhood initiatives (could include marriage)
 2. Comprehensive demonstrations to improve outcomes in low-income families with barriers to self-sufficiency

Our Marriage Recommendations

- Slight modification of Obama marriage and fatherhood proposal
- New marriage-education initiative of \$50 million over 3 years (10% of total funding)
- Strong data reporting and evaluation requirement
- Follow Oklahoma model or other models with good evidence