The 20th Anniversary of Welfare Reform: Lessons for Marriage and Families

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PURPOSE.
(a) IN GENERAL.—The purpose of this part is to increase the flexibility of States in operating a program designed to—
(1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
(2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
(3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
(4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.
Some TANF Provisions

- Promote work among single mothers
- Time limits on welfare receipt
- State bonuses for reducing nonmarital fertility
- Caps on welfare receipt for new mothers
- Restrictions on teen mothers living on their own
- Marriage education and *Healthy Marriage Initiatives*
Healthy Marriage Initiatives and Demonstration Grants

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of healthy marriages.
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting.
- Marriage and relationship skills programs that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement.
- Premarital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals who are interested in marriage.
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity described above.
“Results indicate that about 24 months after implementation of program services, the primary outcomes showed no pattern of significant differences, whether examined overall or separately within each of the three matched-community pairs.”

“Despite its effects on work and income, the transformed safety net has had little impact on family formation and stability, at least in the ways researchers have traditionally measured these things. Welfare reform, EITC expansions, and growing access to in-kind benefits have had little influence on marriage or on nonmarital fertility.”

Tach and Edin (2017), *Annual Review of Sociology*
My Own Work on Marriage


“Graefe and Lichter (2008) . . . [use the] 1995 and 2002 waves of the National Survey of Family Growth, which measures marital and fertility histories of a cohort of women pre-welfare reform and post. Their difference-in-difference estimates suggest that marriage rates of women whose first birth was out of wedlock compared to women with no child prior to marriage were no higher after welfare reform than before, and those women in the later cohort were more likely to marry men with weaker labor-market potential.”
What’s Actually Happened to US Families, Post-1996?

1. Marriage trends
2. Cohabitation
3. Nonmarital fertility
4. Children’s living arrangements
1. Marriage Trends
Figure MS-1b. Women’s marital status

Percent of women


Married

Never married

Divorced

Widowed


Note: Married includes separated and married spouse absent.
Figure MS-2.
Median age at first marriage: 1890 to present

Percentage of U.S. Women Ages 40-44 Who Had Ever Married by Race/Ethnicity, 1940-2014

Source: Vanorman & Scommegna (2016)
Share Married by Age 30, by Educational Attainment, 1990 and 2008

% ever married by age 30

- Not college-educated
  - 2008: 60
  - 1990: 75
- College-educated
  - 2008: 62
  - 1990: 69

Source: Decennial Censuses and 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) Integrated Public Use Micro Samples (IPUMS)
2. Cohabitation

SOURCES: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2006–2010. Table 1 in this report.
Percent of Women whose First Union was Cohabitation, Aged 22-44.

Source: Copen, Daniels, and Mosher (2013)
Predicted Annual Probabilities of Transitioning from Cohabitation to Marriage

Source: Kuo and Raley (2016)
3. Nonmarital Fertility
The number of nonmarital births reached a record high in 2008 with 1,726,566 births
## Nonmarital Fertility Rates, 1995 & 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nonmarital Births (000’s)</th>
<th>Percent of Births to Unmarried Women</th>
<th>Nonmarital Birth Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,254</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,606</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Birth Rates (per 1,000) for Females Ages 15 to 19, by Race and Hispanic Origin: Selected Years, 1960-2014*

* Data for 2014 are preliminary.
The Share of All Births by Relationship/Union Context at Birth, 1980-1984 to 2009-2013

- **1980-1984**:
  - Single Mother: 15%
  - Cohabiting Mother: 6%
- **1990-1994**:
  - Single Mother: 16%
  - Cohabiting Mother: 11%
- **1997-2001**:
  - Single Mother: 17%
  - Cohabiting Mother: 18%
- **2003-2007**:
  - Single Mother: 17%
  - Cohabiting Mother: 23%
- **2009-2013**:
  - Single Mother: 18%
  - Cohabiting Mother: 25%

Source: Vanorman and Scommegna (2016)
4. Living Arrangements of Children
Figure CH-1.
Living arrangements of children: 1960 to present


Note: Direct identification of both parents began in 2007, resulting in the ability to identify children living with two unmarried parents.
Figure CH–5. Children under 18 living with their mother only


Note: Separated includes married spouse absent. Direct identification of both parents began in 2007, resulting in the ability to identify children living with 2 unmarried parents. To derive data for years after 2014, see detailed Table C3 for the year(s) of interest.
Complexity Arrangements of America’s Children

- Grandparents
- Same-sex couples
- Cohabiting couples (biological)
- Cohabiting couples (but biologically-related to only one)
- Remarriages—Stepfamilies, blended families
- Living with single-father families
- Fosterage, adoption, nonrelatives
- Joint physical custody arrangements
- Decline in stay-at-home mothers
Bottom Line: Hard to Demonstrate Big Causal Effects of TANF

- Instead, we see . . .
  - Growing family complexity
  - Diverse pathways to family formation
  - Diverse family patterns by economic status, race, and geography
Questions Going Forward

- How should welfare and social policy address questions of growing cohabitation and subsequent childbearing?
- How does welfare address today’s majority-minority children, who will replace the mostly white baby-boomers over the next 25 years? They are America’s future and require investments now.
- How do patterns differ across geographic space – different policies and implementation strategies that may be creating new spatial inequalities (e.g., concentrated disadvantage)?
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