Outcomes of Teenage Motherhood in Europe: Evidence from the EU-Silc

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The Big Question: Why are teenage pregnancy rates so high, and what can be done about it?

By Richard Garner
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Why are we asking this now?

The case of Alfie Patten, said to have fathered a child at the age of 13 with a girl of 15, has reignited controversies over sex and morality education, with Conservative party leader David Cameron believing the case is evidence that his claim that Britain has become a "broken" society is right.

The case comes on top of the fact that statistics show that the UK has the highest percentage of teenage pregnancies in Western Europe – and is second only to the United States, according to figures compiled by the
England worst in Western Europe for obesity and teenage pregnancy

England fares worse than any other country in Western Europe on a range of health measures such as obesity and teenage pregnancy, a new report shows.

By Kate Devlin, Medical Correspondent
Published: 7.23PM GMT 27 Jan 2009
The issues around teenage motherhood:

- Reduces life chances due to truncated human capital development
- Children of teenage mothers themselves have limited life chances
- Teenage mothers often come from teenage mothers, continuing cycle of poverty (at least in the UK, USA, and Canada)
- The outcomes differ greatly by country
Outcomes associated with teenage parenthood, 2004 ECHP

Figure 1. Adjusted effects of teenage motherhood on SES outcomes
Being in non-working family by ethnic group and proportion of mothers whose first birth was <27

Figure 5. Increased odds of being in a non-working family associated with each year’s delay in having a first birth, plotted against proportion of mothers whose first birth was before age 27.
Explanations around differential outcomes

- Culture
- Public policy
- Bad statistics
The EU SILC is an annual household survey coordinated by Eurostat and carried out by all EU member states since 2003.

Information collected on poverty, living conditions, and income, as well as various items assessing health and social exclusion.

Information is collected at both the individual and household level.

The survey uses an integrated model which includes a cross-sectional and 4–year rotational longitudinal component (data from which was not yet available at the time of writing).

Sampling frames, for the vast majority of countries, were created from population registers or dwelling registers and samples were generated using probabilistic techniques (exact technique dependent upon country).
• While the predecessor to the EU-SILC (the ECHP) used a translated blueprint questionnaire to ‘harmonize’ the data, there is no such standardized questionnaire used in the EU-SILC as several weaknesses with this approach were determined retrospectively. Instead, ‘target variables’ along with common guidelines, procedures, concepts and classifications were determined prior to data collection. As such, the data are considered highly comparable among countries.

• Data analyzed here are 2006 cross-sectional data for all countries where sufficient numbers of young births were observed.
Key variables

• Teen mother – whether first birth occurred <20
  – Removed from analysis if current age >35 and if eldest child in household >16

• Analysis controls for
  – Mother’s current age
  – Age of youngest child in household
  – Immigrant status (third country national or not)
Key Variables (Outcomes)

- **Poverty**
  - <60% equivalized household income
- **Low Education**
  - Less than ISCED level 4 (maximum of upper secondary education)
- **Non-Working Family**
  - Whether or not a woman or her partner (where present) is in paid employment
Adolescent fertility rates, 1980 and 2005

Sources: Eurostat Demographic Data and United Nations Statistical Division.
First, look at Europe as a place
Observations of teen mothers and other mothers (2676 teen mothers in data)

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Percent of mothers with low education

- Other mothers
- Teen mothers
Prevalence of Adolescent Motherhood by Poverty Coefficient
After regrouping some smaller countries, removing statistically non-significant
Plotting by Average Age of First Birth

Poverty Coefficient by Average Age of First Birth

R² = 0.07
Poverty Coefficient and Average Age at First Birth

R²=.026
What drives these outcomes?

- Partially a stigma effect? The less prevalent, the worse off they are.
- Does appealing to ‘regimes theory’ help?
  - Nordic countries – some suggestion of harshest outcomes (consistent with previous finding)
  - Ireland and Hungary only countries with three significant outcomes
    - Ireland “tainted woman” experience, abortion not available
Adolescent Fertility Rate Change 1980-2005 by Poverty Coefficient
By regimes...

- Poverty
- Low Education
- Non-Working Family

- UK
- Corporatist
- Nordic
- Baltic
- Eastern
- Southern
“It is analytically difficult to confront detailed historiography with a table of regression coefficients. The former paints a dense portrait of how myriads of events impinged upon social policy formation; the latter seeks economy of explanation, and reduces reality to a minimum of variables. From the former, it is difficult to generalize beyond any particular case, in the latter, we have no history.” (p. 160)
