

The Changing Composition of Young Fathers and the
Effects of Early Fathering on Education and Labor Market Outcomes

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This article examines differences in the composition of teen (up to age 19) and young (ages 20-24) fathers using the 1979 and 1997 panels of the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experiences – Youth Cohorts (NLSY). The NLSY panels are nationally representative surveys that cover, among other things, fertility, educational outcomes, and labor market outcomes. In order to have a valid comparison between two generations, we compare three cohorts (born between 1962 and 1964) from the 1979 NLSY with three cohorts (born between 1980 and 1982) from the 1997 panel of NLSY. Respondents were 15 to 17 years of age when they responded to the first survey in both panels. By comparing birth cohorts from both the 1979 and 1997 panels, we can assess the extent to which early fathering has increased or decreased as well as the changing characteristics of these populations. We also estimate the extent to which the impacts of early fatherhood on education and labor market outcomes have changed between the 1979 and 1997 panels. As such, this work contributes to a modest but growing literature on young fathers. It also has implications for teen pregnancy prevention programming, education policy, labor market programming for fragile families and child support policy.

Initial estimates indicate that reports by teenage males of fathering children are more common in the 1997 panel compared to the 1979 panel. See Figure 1. By age 22, however, this trend reverses with higher cumulative birth rates in the 1979 panel. Table 1 demonstrates that these overall differences are markedly different by racial categories. The incidence of teen and early (ages 20-24) fatherhood declined for nonblacks/nonhispanics across the two panels. For blacks, teen fathering increased and this increase exceeded the decline in but early fathering for this group. Among Hispanics, there were large increases in both teen and early fathering across the two panels. This is largely driven by the fact that the U.S. population is increasingly Hispanic and the panels are nationally representative. There was a seven percentage point increase of

Hispanic male respondents across the two panels. Looking specifically at teen and early fathers, however, Table 1 clearly indicates that blacks and Hispanics are still overrepresented in this population.

Table 1 also presents results by parental education, family income at age 15 and family structure. Parental education increased by roughly one year across the 1979 and 1997 panels for all groups. When we look at the percent of parents with some college education, however, we find that this percentage has more than doubled in households with teen and early fathers. In fact, for early fathers, the increase in college education among their parents exceeded the gains in education of the parents of men who delayed parenting. Household income (measure in 2007 constant dollars) at age 15 increased dramatically for all groups as well. However, the gains in households with teen and early fathers were less than the gains in households of males who delayed parenting past the age of 24. Family structure was measured at age 14 in the 1979 panel and age 12 in the 1997 panel so these results are not perfect comparisons. Keeping this caveat in mind, the percentage of young men living with both biological parents declined dramatically (nearly 21 percentage points) across the two panels. There is a similar decline for teen fathers although roughly one-third of teen fathers lived with both biological parents at age 12 compared to 41.6 percent of early fathers and 55 percent of males who delayed fatherhood past age 24.

The education and labor market outcomes of teen and young fathers are also given in Table 1. While education by age 25 was quite similar across the two panels for teen and young fathers, the percentage of these young men who had acquired some college education had increased dramatically. Earnings at age 25 decreased across the two panels for teen fathers but increased substantially for young fathers across the two panels far eclipsing the gains in earnings for men who delayed fatherhood. Together these results indicate greater variance in the population of young fathers and may suggest that they are increasingly drawn from the social mainstream.

Our results at this point are quite preliminary and exploratory. Subsequent analyses will be conducted using multivariate methods to help isolate the impacts of teen and young fatherhood on their education and labor market outcomes.

Figure 1: Cumulative Rates of Early Fatherhood in the 1979 and 1997 NLSY

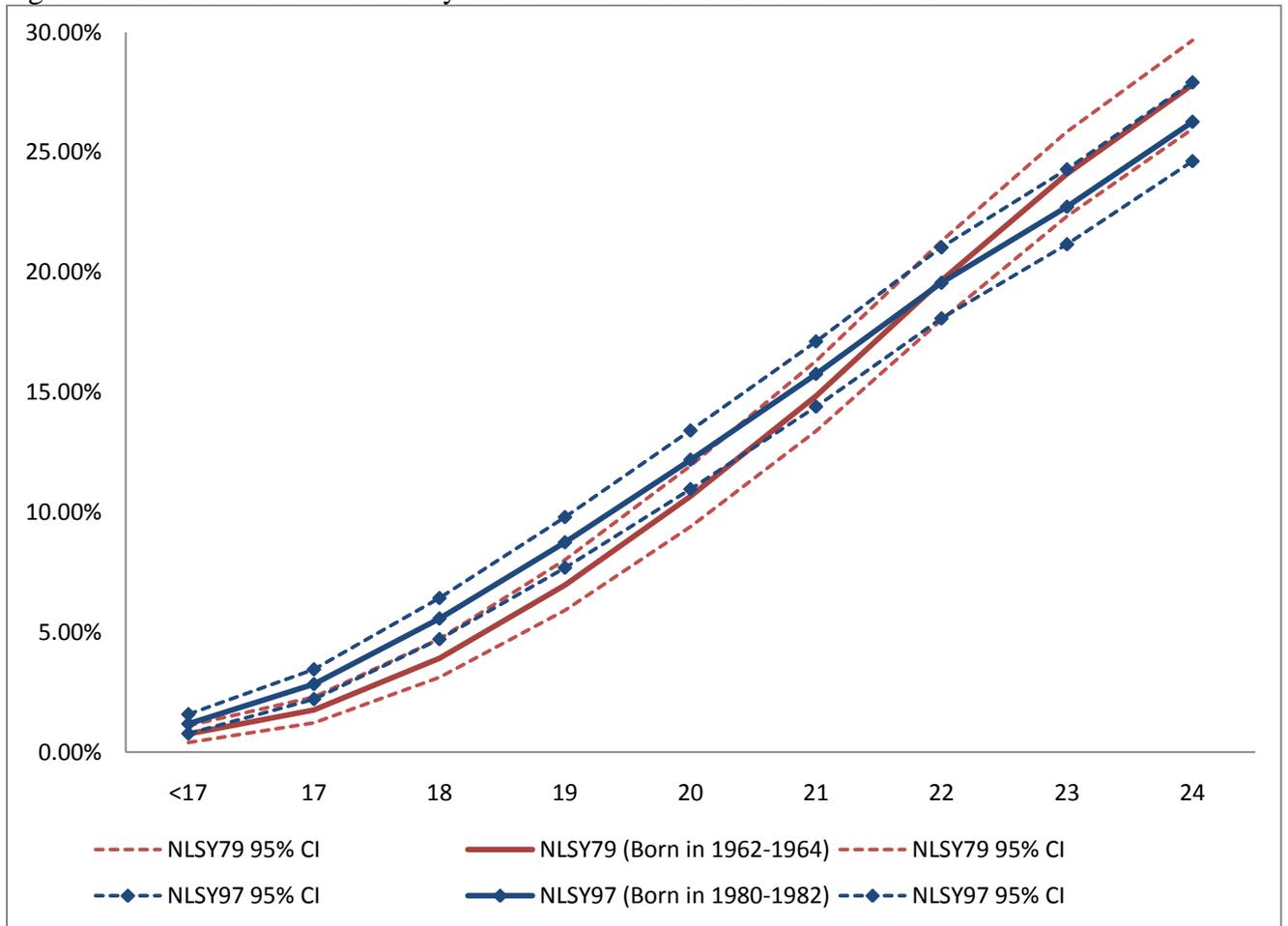


Figure 1 includes 95 percent confidence intervals about the trend lines.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Teen Fathers Compared to Other Men

	Teen Fathers		Age 20 to 24 at Birth of First Child		No Child Untill Age 24		All Men	
	NLSY79	NLSY97	NLSY79	NLSY97	NLSY79	NLSY97	NLSY79	NLSY97
Race Composition (Column)								
Percentage of NonBlack/ NonHispanic	58.78%	52.37%	71.21%	57.34%	83.03%	76.15%	78.87%	70.77%
Percentage of Black	27.52%	29.61%	19.06%	23.12%	11.64%	11.81%	14.29%	15.35%
Percentage of Hispanic	13.70%	18.01%	9.73%	19.54%	5.34%	12.04%	6.84%	13.88%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.00%	100.00%
Race Composition (Row)								
Percentage of NonBlack/ NonHispanic	5.20%	6.47%	18.82%	14.20%	75.98%	79.33%	100%	100%
Percentage of Black	13.42%	16.88%	27.81%	26.40%	58.77%	56.72%	100%	100%
Percentage of Hispanic	13.97%	11.35%	29.68%	24.68%	56.35%	63.97%	100%	100%
All Men	6.97%	8.75%	20.85%	17.53%	72.18%	73.73%	100%	100%
Men's Education at Age 25								
Education in Years	11.13	10.92	11.85	12.03	13.40	13.74	12.91	13.14
Percentage of Some College Education	8.80%	17.75%	22.97%	31.53%	49.36%	59.34%	40.80%	50.02%
Maximum of Men's Parents' Education								
Education in Years	11.17	12.18	11.70	12.80	12.90	13.95	12.53	13.61
Percentage of Some College Education	15.88%	36.95%	20.33%	45.73%	40.07%	60.79%	34.36%	56.20%
Family Structure								
	At Age 14	At Age 12	At Age 14	At Age 12	At Age 14	At Age 12	At Age 14	At Age 12
Both Biological Parents	54.50%	33.23%	69.89%	41.58%	74.00%	55.04%	71.78%	50.86%
Stepfather or Stepmother	15.15%	6.92%	11.78%	7.96%	7.94%	7.35%	9.24%	7.42%
Biological Mother and Others	20.03%	48.95%	14.24%	37.36%	13.51%	29.82%	14.12%	32.74%
Other	10.32%	10.90%	4.09%	13.10%	4.55%	7.79%	4.86%	8.97%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.00%	100.00%
Men's Labor Earnings								
Labor Earnings at Age 25 (2007 \$)	\$25,820	\$24,325	\$25,317	\$30,743	\$29,993	\$29,712	\$28,674	\$29,437
Labor Earnings at Age 29 (2007 \$)	\$23,679	NA	\$29,270	NA	\$50,526	NA	\$44,213	NA
Family Income at Age 15* (2007 \$)								
	\$45,977	\$50,261	\$53,074	\$57,113	\$66,746	\$76,138	\$62,348	\$70,417
Number of Observations								
	238	303	552	540	1472	1911	2262	2754

Note: First Year Sample Weight is Used. *Average Age.