

The association between welfare and crime

Firstly, welfare encourages teenage parenthood through the availability of benefits.

Although some argue that the teenage birth rate has declined since the creation of the DPB, this misunderstands the underlying pattern.

In the early nineteen seventies 70 out of every 1000 female teenagers was having a child. This trended down to our lowest rate in recorded history at 25.6 per female in 2002. It has fluctuated since. At June 2011 it was 27.1 births per 1,000 15-19 year-olds.

A majority of teenage births in the early seventies occurred within a marriage albeit many were shotgun marriages. There were 9,150 teenage births in 1971, 55 percent within marriage. Many ex-nuptial teenage births resulted in adoption which peaked at around this time.

The contraceptive pill became available in the 1960s and abortion in the 1970s. Thereafter teenagers with an interest in controlling their fertility were better able to do so. There was a strong likelihood the teenage birth rate would decrease, as did the general fertility rate, dramatically. This doesn't mean the DPB availability wasn't having any influence.

Looking at the general teenage birth rate alone obscures a great deal. It doesn't tell us about the tenfold likelihood that teenage births will be in the poorest communities when compared to the richest. For uneducated and unskilled girls in poor communities the DPB is an incentive because it pays as much as any wage they could hope to command. MSD figures show the average all-up benefit for a sole parent in 2006 was \$21,580. Its incentive appeal obviously lessens through the rising deciles as young women's alternatives to the DPB improve.

In 2006;

* 65.8 girls per 1000 aged 15-19 gave birth in the most economically deprived areas, classified as decile 10.

* 6.92 per 1000 gave birth in the most affluent areas, or decile one.

Looking at the general teenage birth rate also tells us nothing about ethnic differences. In 2000-02 the Maori rate was still up at 70 per 1000 - the *same as the general rate in the early 70s*. The Pacific rate was 48 and the European rate 22.

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US research



An American study into income inequality found that adolescent birth rates and general homicide rates were closely correlated with each other internationally and within the United States.¹

A report about recent US research into the cost of teenage births said:

Most of the costs in 2004 – \$8.6 billion – were incurred by mothers 17 and younger. Compared with women who have a first child at 20 or 21, those girls are more than twice as likely to have a child placed in foster care, to be reported for child abuse or neglect, and to have a son sent to prison. Their kids are far more likely to drop out of high school and their daughters to become teen mothers themselves, the report states.²

Analysis of over 50,000 Washington State birth certificates from 1974 to 1975 revealed that males born to unmarried mothers under 18 years old had an 11-fold increased risk of chronic offending when compared with males born to married mothers aged 20 and older.³

¹ *Adolescent birth rates, total homicides, and income inequality in rich countries*, American Journal of Public Health, vol 95(7), July 2005, www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1449337 (last accessed April 2009).

² Wendy Koch, *Fewer teens are giving birth, but cost to taxpayers still steep*, USA Today, 30 October 2006, www.usatoday.com/news/health/2006-10-29-teen-births_x.htm (last accessed 20 April 2009).

3 Amy Conseur, Frederick P Rivara, Robert Barnoski and Irvin Emanuel, *Maternal and perinatal risk factors for later delinquency, Paediatrics, vol 99, no 6, June 1997, pp 785–790.*

That a similar pattern operates in New Zealand cannot be discounted without the relevant research. The findings may partly explain why Maori make up around half of our prison population. As shown the Maori teenage birth rate is much higher than non-Maori. Maori are eight times more likely than non-Maori to be teenage parents on welfare, which compounds disadvantage.

Canadian Research

Canadian academic, Jennifer Hunt found;

The United States has a teenage birth rate that is high relative to that of other developed countries, and falling more slowly. Children of teenagers may experience difficult childhoods and hence be more likely to commit crimes subsequently. I assess to what extent lagged teen birth rates can explain why the United States had the highest developed country crime rates in the 1980s, and why US rates subsequently fell so much. For this purpose, I use internationally comparable crime rates measured from the 1989-2000 International Crime Victims Surveys. I find that an increase in the share of young people born to a teen mother increases the assault rate. The type of assault affected is perpetrated by unarmed lone assailants known to the victim by name, particularly at home or at work, and is not reported to the police. The pattern of teen births in the United States explains -30% of the relative fall in assaults by assailants known to the victim, but more than explains the 1980s gap with the rest of the world. I also present evidence on larceny and burglary.

<http://ideas.repec.org/p/nbr/nberwo/9632.html>

Canvassing other links between welfare and crime Michael Tanner, author and researcher for the Cato Institute, made the following testimony to Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Youth Violence

June 7, 1995

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Tanner and I am the director of health and welfare studies at the Cato Institute. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee on an issue of extreme importance to the American people. There is no doubt that juvenile crime is a serious and continuing problem in this country. There are many factors contributing to the rise in juvenile violence and crime, from the glorification of violence in the media to the failure of the "war on drugs." But, today, I would like to focus on a factor that has received far less attention -- the relationship between the welfare state and crime.

Last year, the Maryland NAACP released a report concluding that "the ready access to a lifetime of welfare and free social service programs is a major contributory factor to the crime problems we face today."⁽¹⁾ Their conclusion appears to be confirmed by academic research. For example, research by Dr. June O'Neill's and Anne Hill for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services showed that a 50 percent increase in the monthly value of combined AFDC and food stamp benefits led to a 117 percent increase in the crime rate among young black men.⁽²⁾

Welfare contributes to crime in several ways. First, children from single-parent families are more likely to become involved in criminal activity. According to one study, children raised in single-parent families are one-third more likely to exhibit anti-social behavior.⁽³⁾ Moreover, O'Neill found that, holding other variables constant, black children from single-parent households are twice as likely to commit crimes as black children from a family where the father is present. Nearly 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes, as do 43 percent of prison inmates.⁽⁴⁾ Research indicates a direct correlation between crime rates and the number of single-parent families in a neighborhood.⁽⁵⁾

As Barbara Dafoe Whitehead noted in her seminal article for *The Atlantic Monthly*:

The relationship [between single-parent families and crime] is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and again in the literature. The nation's mayors, as well as police officers, social workers, probation officers, and court officials, consistently point to family break up as the most important source of rising rates of crime.⁽⁶⁾

At the same time, the evidence of a link between the availability of welfare and out-of-wedlock births is overwhelming. There have been 13 major studies of the relationship between the availability of welfare benefits and out-of-wedlock birth. Of these, 11 found a statistically significant correlation. Among the best of these studies is the work done by June O'Neill for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Holding constant a wide range of variables, including income, education, and urban vs. suburban setting, the study found that a 50 percent increase in the value of AFDC and foodstamp payments led to a 43 percent increase in the number of out-of-wedlock births.⁽⁷⁾ Likewise, research by Shelley Lundberg and Robert Plotnick of the University of Washington showed that an increase in welfare benefits of \$200 per month per family increased the rate of out-of-wedlock births among teenagers by 150 percent.⁽⁸⁾

The same results can be seen from welfare systems in other countries. For example, a recent study of the impact of Canada's social-welfare system on family structure concluded that "providing additional benefits to single parents encourages births of children to unwed women."⁽⁹⁾

Of course women do not get pregnant just to get welfare benefits. It is also true that a wide array of other social factors has contributed to the growth in out-of-wedlock births. But, by removing the economic consequences of a out-of-wedlock birth, welfare has removed a major incentive to avoid such pregnancies. A teenager looking around at her friends and neighbors is liable to see several who have given birth out of wedlock. When she sees that they have suffered few visible immediate consequences (the very real consequences of such behavior are often not immediately apparent), she is less inclined to modify her own behavior to prevent pregnancy.

Proof of this can be found in a study by Professor Ellen Freeman of the University of Pennsylvania, who surveyed black, never-pregnant females age 17 or younger. Only 40% of those surveyed said that they thought becoming pregnant in the next year "would make their situation worse."⁽¹⁰⁾ Likewise, a study by Professor Laurie Schwab Zabin for the Journal of Research on Adolescence found that: "in a sample of inner-city black teens presenting for pregnancy tests, we reported that more than 31 percent of those who elected to carry their pregnancy to term told us, before their pregnancy was diagnosed, that they believed a baby would present a problem..."⁽¹¹⁾ In other words, 69 percent either did not believe having a baby out-of-wedlock would present a problem or were unsure.

Until teenage girls, particularly those living in relative poverty, can be made to see real consequences from pregnancy, it will be impossible to gain control over the problem of out-of-wedlock births. By disguising those consequences, welfare makes it easier for these girls to make the decisions that will lead to unwed motherhood.

Current welfare policies seem to be designed with an appallingly lack of concern for their impact on out-of-wedlock births. Indeed, Medicaid programs in 11 states actually provide infertility treatments to single women on welfare.⁽¹²⁾

I should also point out that, once the child is born, welfare also appears to discourage the mother from marrying in the future. Research by Robert Hutchins of Cornell University shows that a 10 percent increase in AFDC benefits leads to an eight percent decrease in the marriage rate of single mothers.⁽¹³⁾

As welfare contributes to the rise in out-of-wedlock births and single-parent families, it concomitantly contributes to the associated increase in criminal activity.

Secondly, welfare leads to increased crime by contributing to the marginalization of young black men in society. There are certainly many factors contributing to the increasing alienation and marginalization of young black men, including racism, poverty, and the failure of our educational system. However, welfare contributes as well. The welfare culture tells the man he is not a necessary part of the family. They are in effect cuckolded by the state. Their role of father and breadwinner is supplanted by the welfare check.

The role of marriage and family as a civilizing influence on young men has long been discussed. Whether or not strict causation can be proven, it is certainly true that unwed fathers are more likely to use drugs and become involved in criminal behavior.⁽¹⁴⁾ Indeed, single men are five times more likely to commit violent crimes than married men.⁽¹⁵⁾

Finally, in areas where there is a high concentration of welfare, there may be an almost total lack of male role models. This can lead to crime in two ways. First, as the Maryland NAACP puts it, "A child whose parents draw a welfare check without going to work does not understand that in this society at least one parent is expected to rise five days of each week to go to some type of job."⁽¹⁶⁾

Second, boys growing up in mother only families naturally seek male influences. Unfortunately, in many inner city neighborhoods, those male role models may not exist. As George Gilder, author of *Wealth and Poverty*, has noted, the typical inner-city today is "almost a matriarchy. The women receive all the income, dominate the social-worker classes, and most of the schools." Thus, the boy in search of male guidance and companionship may end up in the company of gangs or other undesirable influences.⁽¹⁷⁾

Given all of the above, I believe it is clear that our current social welfare system is a significant cause of juvenile crime and violence in America today. Exactly how welfare should be reformed is undoubtedly beyond the scope of this hearing. The Cato Institute's position, however, is well known. Our research indicates that the current federal welfare system cannot be reformed. Accordingly, we have suggested that federal funding of welfare should be ended and responsibility for charity should be shifted first to the states and eventually to the private sector.(18)

In conclusion, let me simply say that, whatever Congress eventually decides to do in the way of welfare reform, I hope that you will recognize the disastrous consequences of our current welfare system. The status quo is plainly and simply unacceptable. The relationship between our failed social welfare system and juvenile violence and crime is one more urgent reason for reform.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

Notes

1. John L. Wright, Marge Green, and Leroy Warren, Jr., "An Assessment of Crime in Maryland Today," Maryland State Conference of Branches, NAACP, February 1994, "Executive Summary," p. 7.
2. M. Anne Hill and June O'Neill, "Underclass Behaviors in the United States: Measurement and Analysis of Determinants," Baruch College, City University of New York, March 1990.
3. Deborah Dawson, MD, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Well-Being: Data From the 1988 Interview Survey on Child Health," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, May 1990.
4. William Barr, "Crime, Poverty, and Family," Heritage Foundation Lectures, July 29, 1992, citing statistics from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.
5. See, for example, Douglas Smith and G. Roger Jarjoura, "Social structure and Criminal Victimization," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, February 1988; William Niskanen, "Crime, Police, and Root Causes," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 218, November 14, 1994.
6. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1993.
7. Hill and O'Neill.
8. Shelley Lundberg and Robert Plotnick, "Adolescent Premarital Childbearing: Do Opportunity Costs Matter?" *Population Association of America*, May 1990.
9. Douglas Allen, "Welfare and the Family: The Canadian Experience," *Journal of Labor Economics*, January 1993.
10. Ellen Freeman, Karl Rickles, et. al., "Adolescent Contraceptive Use: Comparisons of Male and Female Attitudes and Information," *American Journal of Public Health*, August 1980.
11. Laurie Schwab Zabin, Nan Marie Astone, and Mark Emerson, "Do Adolescents Want Babies? The Relationship Between Attitudes and Behavior," *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 1993. Professor Zabin reports that among those teens who chose an abortion, fully 78 percent believed that having a baby would pose a problem. But, as Douglas Besharov of the American Enterprise Institute points out "that is exactly the point: the more inconvenient unwed parenthood seems to a teenager, the less likely it is that she will become a mother. Douglas Besharov, letter to the editor, *Wall Street Journal*, April 27, 1994.

12. Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. "The Infertility Trap," Newsweek, April 4, 1994.
13. Robert Hutchins, "Welfare, Remarriage and Marital Search," American Economic Review, June 1989.
14. Robert Lerman, "Unwed Fathers: Who Are They?" The American Enterprise, September/October 1993.
15. "From Home Life to Prison Life: The Roots of American Crime," Rockford Institute Center on the Family in America, Vol. 3, no. 4, April 1994.
16. Wright, Green, and Warren.
17. See, for example, David Blankenhorn, Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem (New York: Basic Books, 1995), pp. 26-32.
18. See, Michael Tanner, "Ending Welfare as We Know It," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 212, July 7, 1994.

Counter-intuitively, many people believe that welfare reduces crime by providing an income to people who might otherwise become destitute.

Yet New Zealand statistics show that welfare benefits are supporting the criminal classes.

Figures released under the Official Information Act show there has been a sharp increase in the number of people who have had their benefits cancelled because they went to prison.

In 2009 4,192 people had their benefit cancelled because they were going to prison. That is 37 percent up on the 2008 figure, and 47 percent up on the 2007 figure.

58 percent were Maori, 89 percent male and 47 percent came off a sickness or invalid's benefit. 468 parents or caregivers also left the DPB to go to prison.

Most criminals break the law many times before they are incarcerated. No doubt there are thousands more people who are serving community sentences or home detention while continuing to receive welfare. Additionally 3,496 people were granted a benefit last year on release from prison.

This situation rather puts paid to the idea that benefits discourage crime by providing people with a living income.

The Prime Minister was correct when early in 2010 he described New Zealand's welfare rolls as out of control. Welfare was not designed to aid and abet thousands of criminals.