

Adolescent Fertility Attitudes and Childbearing in Early Adulthood

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Introduction

- Attitudes towards childbearing are generally predictive of fertility
 - Adolescents with more negative attitudes towards having a teen pregnancy are less likely to experience a teen birth
 - Adults who emphasize family over work are more likely to have children
- The literatures linking attitudes and fertility among teens and adults are largely separate, with different theoretical approaches

Teen Attitudes & Teen Fertility

- Research on teens' fertility attitudes typically takes a rational choice approach and reflects teens' perceptions of the costs and benefits of having a child as a teenager

*"Getting pregnant now is one of the worst things that could happen to me."
"If I got pregnant, I might have to drop out of school."*

- In a rational choice framework, these attitudes would only affect fertility in the short-term (i.e., teen fertility)
 - Any link to adult fertility would be due primarily to background factors and adult achievements and statuses

Adult Attitudes & Adult Fertility

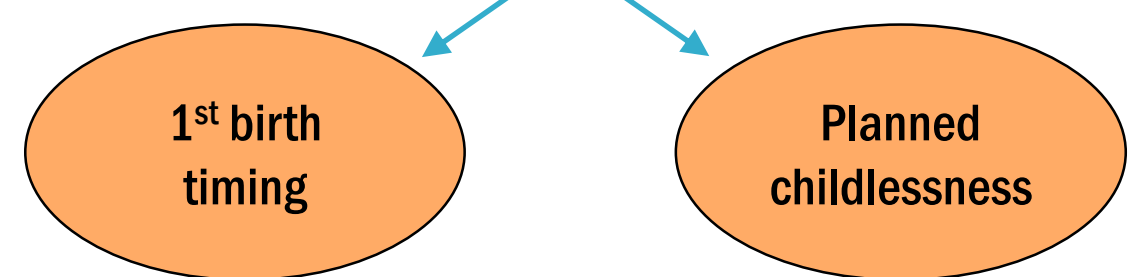
- Work on adult attitudes and fertility assumes that such attitudes reflect a more general orientation towards family and childbearing

*"People can't really be happy unless they have children."
"Women are much happier if they stay home and take care of their children."*

- These attitudes show how adults prioritize childbearing and the centrality of the parent role
- Adults' orientation towards childbearing is generally viewed as affecting childlessness, the timing of births, and the number of births

Research Question: Are Teen Attitudes Linked to Adult Fertility?

- These literatures do not fully consider how people view childbearing vis-à-vis the life course
 - Is having children a 'big deal' that should only occur under ideal circumstances?
- This orientation likely forms during adolescence, when teens consider adult roles
- If this is the case, then teens' fertility attitudes could have long-term links to adult fertility



Data & Methods

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
 - Childless adolescent females ages 15 and older in 1995 at Wave I, and
 - Reinterviewed in 2007-08 at Wave IV when ages 26-32 (N=5,078)
- Key predictor: Eight-item *Pregnancy Attitudes Scale* measured at Wave I ($\alpha = 0.76$)

Table 1. Pregnancy Attitudinal Items (Wave I)

Getting pregnant at this time of your life is one of the worst things that could happen to you.

It wouldn't be all the bad if you got pregnant at this time in your life.*

If you got pregnant, it would be embarrassing for you.

If you got pregnant, it would be embarrassing for your family.

If you got pregnant, you would have to quit school.

If you got pregnant, you might marry the wrong person, just to get married.

If you got pregnant, you would be forced to grow up too fast.

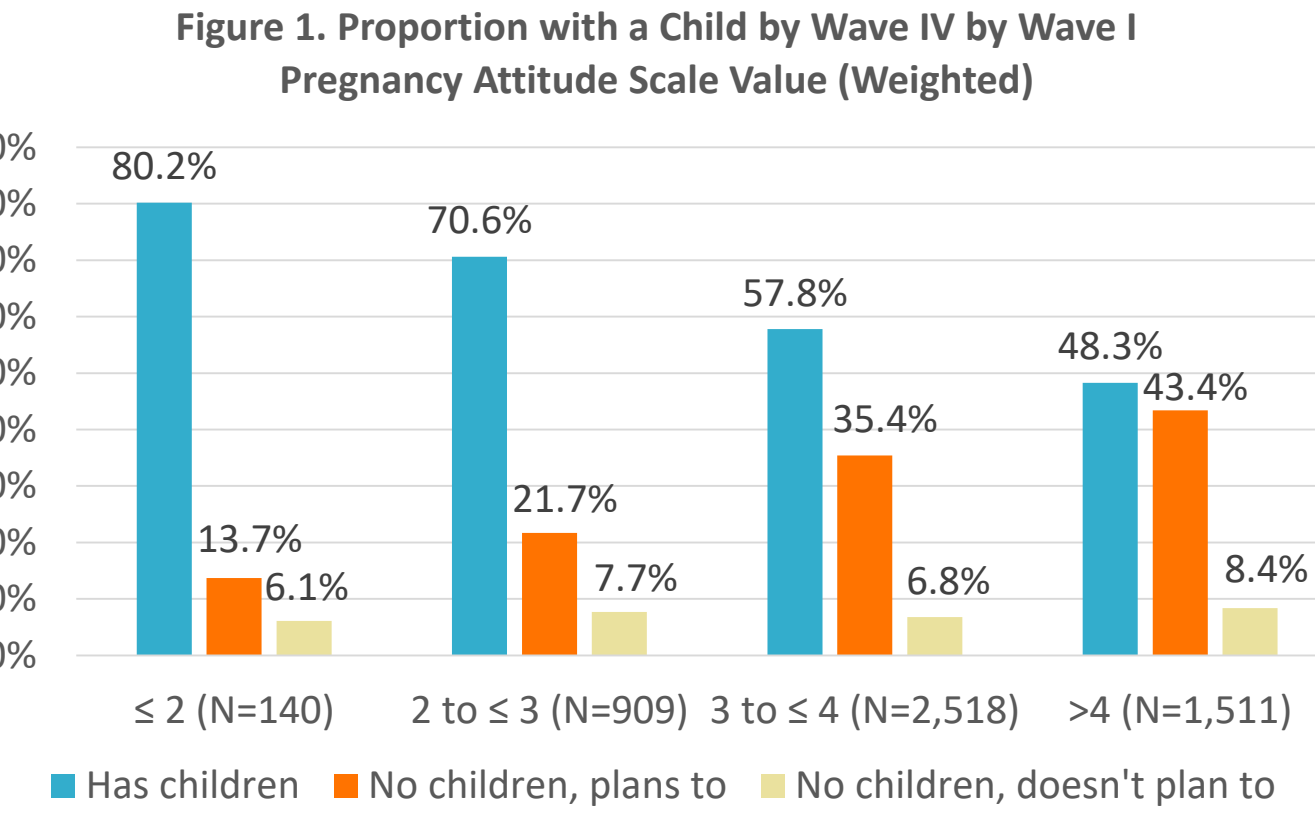
If you got pregnant, you would have to decide whether or not to have the baby, and that would be stressful and difficult.

*Note: All items coded on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. *Reverse coded*

- Two analyses using Wave IV data, predicting
 - 1st births using event history methods
 - Future fertility intentions using multinomial logistic regression for 3-category outcome: no children yet but plans to have children; no children yet and doesn't plan to have children; has children already
- Control for a range of demographic, socio-economic, and psychosocial factors, including adult statuses and aspirations

Descriptive Results

- There is a clear association between Wave I attitudes and having a child by Wave IV
- BUT**, the majority of those who are childless still plan to have children, especially at the most negative scores



Multivariate Results

- Teen fertility attitudes are negatively associated with fertility in unconditional model (Model 1)
- Teen attitudes remain a significant predictor of adult fertility even with controls for background factors (Model 2) and adult statuses such as education and union status (Model 3)

Table 2. Odds Ratios Predicting 1st Birth From Event History Models

Wave I Pregnancy Attitudes	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age (time-varying)	0.66 ***	0.74 ***	0.80 ***
15-19	0.58 ***	0.56 ***	1.09
20-24	--	--	--
25-29	1.12 *	1.14 **	0.79 ***
30 or older	1.31	1.07	0.73 *

*p≤.05 **p≤.01 ***p≤.001

Multivariate Results, continued

- To test whether the association weakens with age, we ran interactive models (not shown)
 - Teen attitudes remain a significant predictor of 1st birth timing into the mid-20s but do not predict births after 25
- Among those with no children by Wave IV, teen fertility attitudes are not associated with future fertility intentions

Discussion

- Teenagers' negative attitudes towards adolescent pregnancy are associated with lower birth rates not only during adolescence but well into early adulthood
- However, these attitudes are unrelated to future childbearing plans
- These findings are consistent with the notion that adolescent fertility attitudes reflect individuals' long-term views on how childbearing should be incorporated into the life course
 - Delayed fertility, rather than planned childlessness
- Because the sample is still young, it remains to be seen whether those with delayed fertility will achieve their fertility preferences
 - If people believe fertility should ideally occur under the "right" conditions, some may never reach that point

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