



Analytics

Published by the Caesar Rodney Institute

RELEASE: CRI - Center for Economic Policy and Analysis

RE: And Baby Makes Two

DATE: 1/20/2012

The latest data from the Center for Disease Control on out-of-wedlock births does not bode well for Delaware. During 2009 nearly 48% of all the births in the First State were to unwed mothers. This ranges from 34% of all births to whites, 65% for Hispanics, and 72% for blacks.

In 2009 the nation hit a high water mark with 41% of all births out-of-wedlock. Among all the states, Delaware ties for fourth highest. The proportion of births to Delaware's white unwed mothers is above the nation (34% vs 29%), while the black rate is similar to the nation, and the rate among Hispanics is well above the U.S. (65% vs 53%).

Is this a cause for concern? Yes, according to a compilation of recent scholarship by the University of Virginia National Marriage Project. Although the divorce rate is coming down, cohabitation is soaring and accounts for more than half of the births to unmarried mothers.

A growing research literature shows that compared to children raised in married families, children in cohabiting households are about as likely as children living in single-parent families to live in poverty, have poorer health, do poorly in school, drop out of high school, have higher levels of psychological problems and mental illness, attempt suicide, use drugs and engage in criminal activity. Cohabitation is not the functional equivalent of marriage.

Marriage is certainly not a panacea for all social ills. There are single parents who despite all the challenges are able to provide a very stable family life, just as there are unstable married couple families. When it comes to child well-being, however, research suggests that family structure is a better predictor of children's psychological and social welfare, whereas poverty is a better predictor of educational attainment. Being raised by unmarried parents in a poverty household is, obviously, problematic.

So, what challenges are facing Delaware as a result of nearly one out of every two children being borne out of wedlock? Obviously this significantly increases the complexity and difficulty of education younger children. Not only will children be less academically prepared, they will be struggling with many behavioral and emotional issues.

It also means a continued rising demand for social services, including Medicaid and youth services. It also makes it likely that Delaware's already high violent crime rate will stay that way.

What might be done to curb this destructive trend? More abortions are not the answer since the abortion rate and out-of-wedlock birth rate among the states are not correlated...that is, more abortions does not reduce the proportion of births out-of-wedlock. And Delaware already has a high

abortion rate. And there is no correlation among states in the out-of-wedlock birth rate and self-reported religious commitment.

Perhaps it would be helpful if schools were allowed to reinforce the values of sex after and within marriage, rather than the Hollywood philosophy of sleep together anywhere, anytime. Perhaps it would help if young people were made aware of the standard outcomes of cohabitation relative to marriage. And exposure to the realities of raising children while working full-time while taking community college courses might be helpful.

Data and research may lead to other important causal relationships. A major driver of out-of-wedlock birth in the black community is the limited pool of marriageable young black males...that is young men who are employed full time. And a major obstacle to the employment of many young black males is a felony record.

Certainly there are other steps that might be taken or tried. But to do nothing to address this disturbing trend is not an option.

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