

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study Baseline City Report August 2001

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New York, New York is one of twenty cities across the United States in which parents are participating in a study of Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing.¹ The study follows a new birth cohort of approximately 5,000 children and their parents in an effort to learn more about the growing number of families that are comprised of unmarried parents and their children. We use the term *fragile families* to underscore the fact that unmarried parents and their children are families, and to remind the reader that these families have a higher risk of poverty and family dissolution than traditional families. The proportion of children born to unmarried parents has increased dramatically during the past forty years, with close to one-third of births now occurring outside of marriage. Despite this trend, very little is known about the resources of and relationships within these families, and the ways in which government policies affect the parents' and children's lives. As a consequence, public perceptions are often shaped by unsubstantiated myths about unmarried couples, and policymakers and community leaders often must rely on anecdotal evidence when designing policies and programs. Without adequate information, such programs may not be as effective as intended, and in some cases, may even unintentionally undermine the stability of these families.

The study addresses four sets of related questions:

- What are the conditions and capabilities of new unmarried parents, especially fathers? How many of these men hold steady jobs? How many want to be involved in raising their children?
- What is the nature of relationships between unmarried parents? How many of these couples are involved in stable relationships? What proportion expects to marry? What proportion is exposed to high levels of conflict or domestic violence?
- What factors strengthen the relationships between new unmarried parents? What factors cause conflict between them? In particular, how do public policies affect parents' behaviors and living arrangements?
- What are the long-term consequences for parents, children, and society of new welfare regulations, stronger paternity establishment and stricter child support enforcement, and changes in healthcare and childcare financing and delivery?

To answer these questions, our study follows families from the birth of the child through age four. New mothers are interviewed in-person at the hospital within forty-eight hours of giving birth. Fathers are interviewed either at the hospital or elsewhere as soon as possible after the birth. Three follow-up interviews are conducted when the children are twelve, thirty, and forty-eight months old, including in-home child assessments at thirty and forty-eight months. The full sample will be representative of all non-marital births in the U.S. to parents residing in cities with populations over 200,000. Also, the data are representative of non-marital births within each of the cities that comprise our sample. A comparison group of married parents is also being followed in each city.

Our hope is that the information contained in this report and those that follow will help community leaders and policymakers design programs that meet new, unmarried parents' needs and thereby strengthen fragile families in New York City.

The study design has several benefits. First, gathering data at birth and tracking child development throughout infancy and early childhood allows differences that are present at birth (or shortly thereafter) to be distinguished from those that evolve over time. In addition, given that there is little existing research on unmarried fathers, this study provides new information about these fathers and allows us to develop a more complete understanding of unmarried parents' relationships and interactions. Finally, by following children as well as parents, we can relate changes in parental behavior and family environment to fluctuations in the health and development of children.

Policy developments indicate that the time is right to expand our understanding of fragile families. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 requires welfare clients (the majority of whom are unmarried) to work and limits the total number of years they can receive welfare. The legislation also strengthens child support enforcement and requires states to strengthen paternity establishment. These political developments raise many issues, among them the affordability and quality of childcare and non-resident fathers' rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, since many of these policy changes are being implemented at the local level, families in various parts of the country are experiencing very different policy environments as well as disparate labor market conditions.

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is a major step toward identifying the individual and joint effects of these changes on some of the most vulnerable families in our country. Because families formed outside of marriage are disproportionately African-American and Hispanic, research on unmarried parents is essential to understanding the health and development of children in these populations. We undertake this effort so that policymakers and program directors can design programs that encourage—rather than undermine—the efforts of new parents to raise healthy children, maintain self-sufficiency, and make productive contributions to their communities.

This report summarizes what we have learned from our initial analysis of the first wave of data on unmarried parents collected in New York, New York in the first six months of 2000.² The sample contains 384 families (268 unmarried couples plus 116 married couples who serve as a comparison group). Three findings stand out:

- *Unwed parents in New York City are committed to each other and to their children at the time of the birth.* Eighty-six percent of unmarried parents are romantically involved; 53 percent live together. Seventy-two percent of unmarried mothers say the chances that they will marry the baby's father are "fifty-fifty" or better. Four-fifths of unmarried fathers in New York City provide financial or other types of support during the pregnancy, and 83 percent of mothers plan to put the father's name on their child's birth certificate. The overwhelming majority of mothers want the father to be involved in raising their child.
- *Although they have high hopes for their families, most unmarried parents in New York City are poorly equipped to support themselves and their children.* Although 62 percent of mothers and 97 percent of fathers worked at some time during the previous year, 75 percent of mothers and 59 percent of fathers earned less than \$20,000 in the past twelve months. In addition, the human capital of both parents is low: 44 percent of mothers and 35 percent of fathers lack a high school degree, and only 34 percent of mothers and 31 percent of fathers have more than a high school degree. Increases in human capital and earnings are likely to play critical roles in the success or failure of parents in maintaining stable families. In fact, a majority of respondents felt that steady employment of both partners is "very important" to a successful marriage.
- *Most unmarried mothers in New York City are healthy and bear healthy children.* However, one-fourth of these mothers do not receive prenatal care in the first trimester, and 7 percent of mothers have babies that are born below normal weight. Furthermore, 6 percent of mothers drank alcohol, 2 percent used drugs and 13 percent smoked cigarettes at some time during the pregnancy, according to their self-reports. Improving the healthcare of all mothers during pregnancy should be an important objective of policymakers.

We undertake this effort so that policymakers and program directors can design programs that encourage--rather than undermine--the efforts of new parents to raise healthy children, maintain self-sufficiency, and make productive contributions to their communities.

We are re-interviewing both parents one year later to ask about their child's health and development as well as their parenting styles, childcare arrangements, relationships, access to and use of community resources, personal health, and economic wellbeing.

I. PARENTS' CHARACTERISTICS AND CAPABILITIES

We begin by describing the characteristics of new unmarried parents in New York City to gain a better sense of their needs as well as their capabilities and constraints. We are particularly interested in their human capital – age, education, work experience, and health status – and their obligations to other children. These indicators can reveal a great deal about parents' ability to support themselves and their new babies. We also are interested in the cultural backgrounds of new parents – ethnicity, religion and immigrant status – as these are likely to affect access to public and private resources.

Table 1 presents profiles of mothers and fathers obtained from the baseline interviews in New York City.³ As nearly all the mothers we approached in the hospitals agreed to participate in the study, and because we interviewed mothers in a representative sample of the birthing hospitals, we are confident that our sample is representative of the population of unmarried women giving birth in New York City.⁴ We are less confident that our sample of unmarried fathers is representative, as we were able to interview only 72 percent of these men. Compared to the average unmarried father, the men in our sample are more strongly attached to the mothers of their children than the men we were unable to interview, and they are likely to differ in other ways as well. Anticipating this problem, we asked all mothers a few

Lack of education is a serious problem for unmarried parents in New York City. Forty-four percent of mothers lack a high school degree, and only 34 percent have attended any college.

questions about the fathers of their children so that we could compare fathers who participated in the study with those who did not. The information in Table 1 about fathers' age, education, work status, race/ethnicity, and drug and alcohol problems is based on mothers' reports; thus, it characterizes all unmarried fathers in New York City. The rest of the information in Table 1 (immigration status, religion, number of children, and health status) is based on the self-reports of the 72 percent of unmarried fathers who were interviewed. Sample sizes might preclude precise estimates of certain rare events, such as serious drug problems.

Parents' Human Capital

In our New York City sample, the typical unmarried mother is in her early twenties. Fourteen percent of mothers are under twenty, and 27 percent are thirty and older. For legal reasons, we were only able to include a fraction of mothers under age eighteen in our study.⁵ As a consequence, this New York City sample of unmarried mothers is slightly older than the actual population of new unmarried mothers in New York City. According to data computed by the National Center for Health Statistics, 31 percent of all births to unmarried mothers in the United States in 1997 were to women under age twenty, and 12 percent were to women under eighteen (Martin, 1999). In our New York City sample, only 8 percent of births were to very young teen mothers under age eighteen.

The typical unmarried father in New York City is in his twenties. He is less likely than the mother to be a teenager and more likely to be thirty or older. On average, fathers are three

and a half years older than their children's mother. Recent reports in the popular press have raised concerns about the proportion of teenage mothers having children with much older men. To investigate this claim, we examined age differences between teen mothers in our sample (under age twenty) and their partners. Fifty-one percent of teen mothers in New York City had partners who were within four years of their own age, while 20 percent had partners who were eight or more years older.

Table 1. Unmarried Parents' Characteristics and Capabilities^a
Percentage (%)

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Age		
Under 20	14	6
20-24	40	27
25-29	19	27
30 and older	27	40
Average age difference		3.44 years (5.68) ^b
Education		
Less than high school	44	35
High school only	22	34
Some college	30	24
College or higher	4	7
Worked in past year^c	62	97
Very good or excellent health	66	69
Drugs or alcohol interfere with work or personal relationships	1	3
Race/ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	3	2
Black, non-Hispanic	35	34
Hispanic	60	62
Other	2	2
Immigrant	40	44
Religious affiliation		
Protestant	28	28
Catholic	57	50
Other religion	8	14
No religion	7	8
Have other children	53	57
Total number of respondents	268	193

^a The information about fathers' age education, work status, race/ethnicity, and drug and alcohol problems is based on mothers' reports. All other father information comes from the self reports of the 72 percent of fathers who were interviewed.

^b Standard deviation in parentheses.

^c About 6 percent of mothers had missing information on own work history.

Lack of education is a serious problem for unmarried parents in New York City. Forty-four percent of mothers lack a high school degree, and only 34 percent have attended any college. Although fathers are slightly more likely than mothers to have just a high school degree, overall, they have similar levels of education, as most mothers and fathers have a high school degree or less.

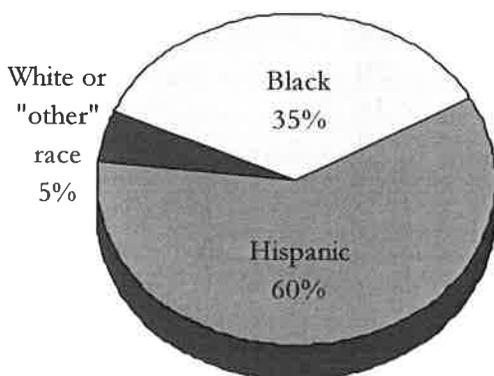
The baseline interviews were conducted in the context of a strong economy in New York City—the unemployment rate was around 5.7 percent during the data collection period (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001), and 62 percent of the mothers and 97 percent of the fathers had worked at some time during the past year. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2000), the 1999 national labor force participation rate for mothers in female-headed families with children under six years was 67 percent, while the rate for fathers in male-headed families with children under six years was 89 percent.

Parents' Individual Characteristics

We find that 60 percent of the new, unmarried mothers in New York City are Hispanic, 35 percent are non-Hispanic black, and 5 percent are non-Hispanic white or "other" race/ethnicity.⁶ Forty percent of mothers and 44 percent of fathers indicate that they are immigrants. Fifty-seven percent of new mothers and half of new fathers report their religion as Catholic, 28 percent of mothers and fathers identify as Protestant, and 8 percent of new mothers and 14 percent of new fathers belong to other religious groups. Seven percent of mothers and 8 percent of fathers report that they have no religious affiliation. Fifty-three percent of mothers and 57 percent of fathers indicate that they have other children.

According to their own reports, unmarried parents in New York City appear to be in fairly good health. When asked whether their own health was "excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor," about two-thirds (66 percent of mothers and 69 percent of fathers) said "very good" or "excellent." The national averages for persons ages 25 to 44 reporting "very good" or "excellent" are 68 percent of women and 73 percent of men (Benson and Marano, 1998). Because we interviewed the mothers shortly after the birth of their children, we might expect their self-assessed health status to be lower than otherwise.

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of Unmarried Mothers



On a less positive note, New York City parents do not always engage in healthy behaviors. One percent of mothers reported having a drug or alcohol problem that interfered with their work or personal relationships in the past year, and 3 percent of mothers reported that the father of their child had a drug or alcohol problem that interfered with his work or personal relationships in the past year. As the data on drug and alcohol problems are based on mothers' self-reports, they are likely to be underestimates of the true proportions.

II. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN FRAGILE FAMILIES

The media often present negative stereotypes of unmarried parents, sometimes depicting babies as the products of casual sexual liaisons or portraying mothers as the victims of irresponsible fathers. For policymakers and program directors, getting the facts straight about the nature of parents' relationships is critical for designing effective programs and policies. If, for example, mothers and fathers are truly indifferent to one another, it makes sense to treat them separately. If, on the other hand, they are involved in marriage-like relationships, policies and programs need to treat them as such. Otherwise, these policies and programs may be ineffective, or may even undermine parents' relationships.

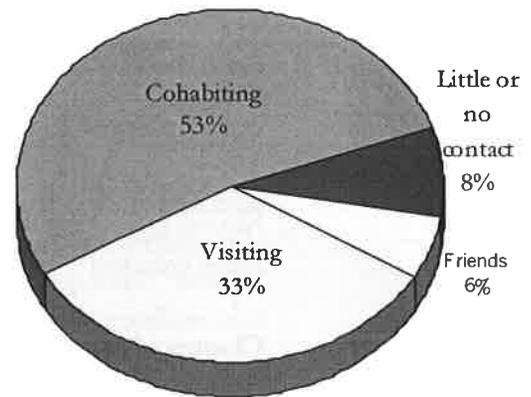
Mother-Father Relationships

Table 2 presents information on the living arrangements, relationship expectations, attitudes about marriage, and sources of conflict between unmarried parents in New York City. We present information on three groups of unmarried mothers – all mothers in the sample, mothers for whom a father interview was not completed, and mothers for whom a father interview was completed.

One of the most striking findings is the high rate of cohabitation among unmarried parents. Fifty-three percent of unmarried mothers are living with the father of their child at the time of the child's birth, and another 33 percent are romantically involved with the father but living apart. Six percent are "just friends," and 7 percent have little or no contact with the father. Mothers without a father interview (column 2) are much less likely to be cohabiting and much more likely to report little or no contact with the father than mothers with a father interview (column 3). The difference between columns two and three confirms our suspicion that the fathers who agreed to be interviewed are much more involved with the mothers than are the fathers who did not complete interviews.

The majority of unmarried parents in New York City have high hopes for the future of their relationships. Seventy-two percent of the unmarried mothers surveyed in New York City believe that their chances of marrying the father are 50 percent or better. Eighty-eight percent of fathers say their chances of marriage are 50 percent or better. In addition, the majority of mothers and fathers believe marriage has positive effects on children. When asked if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement, "it is better for children if their parents are married," 64 percent of mothers and 73 percent of fathers said they agree or strongly agree that marriage is beneficial for children. When we look at unmarried couples in which both the mother and father of the same child were interviewed, the fathers are more positive than the mothers about marriage and its effects.

Figure 2. Relationship Status of Unmarried Parents



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**Table 2. Unmarried Parents' Relationships and Attitudes About Marriage
Percentage (%)**

	<u>All Mothers</u>	<u>Mothers without Father Interview</u>	<u>Mothers with Father Interview</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Relationship status^a				
Cohabiting	53	24	64	66
Not cohabiting -- romantic	33	47	28	29
Not romantic -- friends	6	12	4	3
Not romantic -- little or no contact	7	15	4	2
Father unknown	1	2	0	n/a
Chances of marrying baby's father				
"50-50" or greater	72	47	82	88
Marriage is better for kids				
Agree	51	61	48	46
Strongly agree	13	9	14	27
Successful marriage (Percentage who said the following are Very Important)				
Same friends	13	15	12	18
Husband has steady job	89	89	89	90
Wife has steady job	59	57	60	56
Same race/ethnicity	13	14	13	14
Good sex	48	44	49	59
Same religion	29	24	31	28
Emotional maturity	91	82	95	81
Often a source of conflict (Percentage reporting the following)				
Money	12	7	14	7
Spending time together	14	13	14	17
Sex	10	6	12	10
The pregnancy	8	13	6	7
Drinking or drug use	5	6	5	2
Being faithful	9	12	8	8
Total number of respondents	268	75	193	193

^a In six cases, the mothers' and fathers' reports of marital status did not concur. In each of the six cases, the father reported that he and the baby's mother were married. Two of these mothers reported they were cohabiting with the baby's father, three reported she and the father were in a romantic relationship but not cohabiting, one reported they had little or no contact with the baby's father.

There is strong consensus among these unmarried parents about what qualities make a successful marriage. When asked to identify the qualities that are important for a successful marriage, over 89 percent of the mothers rated *emotional maturity* and *husband having a steady job* as very important. In addition, 59 percent rated *wife having a steady job* as very important. The fathers expressed values similar to those of the mothers, although they rated *husband having a steady job* slightly higher and *emotional maturity* and *wife having a steady job* somewhat lower than mothers did. They also rated *good sex* higher (59 percent of fathers as compared with 48 percent of mothers). In addition, when asked about the level and sources of disagreement in their relationship during the past month, mothers identified *money*, *spending time together*, and *sex* as the major points of contention. Comparing columns three and four, unmarried fathers reported less conflict than mothers about *money* and *sex*, and more conflict about *spending time together*. With regard to *being faithful*, *the pregnancy*, and *drinking/drug abuse*, fathers' reports of conflict were very similar to those of the mothers. Both mothers and fathers agreed that the major source of conflict was *spending time together*.

In summary, the unmarried parents in this New York City sample have high hopes about their future together. The majority view marriage as a positive institution that benefits their children. Steady employment and emotional maturity are widely regarded by both the new mothers and fathers as essential prerequisites for good marital relations.

Paternal Involvement

Questions about the paternal role – how and to what extent a father is and should be involved in his child's life – are at the core of many moral, social, and economic debates. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study investigates several indicators of paternal involvement within fragile families, including whether the parents want the father's name on the birth certificate, whether the child will take the father's surname, whether the father helped the mother during her pregnancy, and whether the mother wants the father to be involved in raising the child. For each of these indicators, both mothers and fathers are highly intent on, and interested in, strong paternal involvement.⁷

The figures in Table 3 will surprise those who believe that unmarried fathers are indifferent to their children. About 87 percent of mothers and 92 percent of fathers indicated that the father contributed financially during the pregnancy, and 80 percent of mothers and 92 percent of fathers reported that he contributed in other ways during the pregnancy. In addition, 83 percent of mothers and 94 percent of fathers indicated that the father's name will be on the birth certificate and/or that their child will take the father's surname. Finally, the overwhelming majority of unmarried parents, including mothers who are no longer romantically involved with their children's fathers, *want* the fathers to be involved in their children's lives. Again, fathers' responses to these questions need to be viewed in light of the fact that the unmarried men who participated in our study are likely more committed to the mothers and children than the average unmarried father in New York City. Even so, the mothers' responses to these questions, which do not reflect a select group of unmarried mothers, indicate very high levels of intended father involvement.

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**Table 3. Indicators of Unmarried Father's Involvement with Child
Percentage (%)**

	<u>All Mothers</u>	<u>Mothers without Father Interview</u>	<u>Mothers with Father Interview</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Father contributed during pregnancy				
Gave money or bought items for baby	87	71	93	92
Helped in other ways	80	63	87	92
Father's name on birth certificate	83	66	91	94
Child will have father's surname	83	68	88	94
Mother wants father involved/Father wants to be involved	92	81	97	99
Total number of respondents	268	75	193	193

**Table 4. Unmarried Parents' Attitudes About Fatherhood
Percentage (%) reporting the following**

	<u>All Mothers</u>	<u>Mothers without Father Interview</u>	<u>Mothers with Father Interview</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
<u>Defining a "Good Father"</u>				
Most Important				
Provide financial support	13	19	11	9
Teach child about life	11	7	13	21
Provide direct care	4	0	6	9
Show love and affection	57	58	56	50
Provide protection	6	8	5	5
Serve as authority figure	9	8	9	6
Least Important				
Provide financial support	37	34	38	24
Teach child about life	7	9	6	7
Provide direct care	27	30	26	16
Show love and affection	0	0	0	2
Provide protection	3	6	2	9
Serve as authority figure	26	21	28	42
Total number of respondents	268	75	193	193

The Fragile Families study seeks to generate a greater understanding of new parents' perceptions of what being a father means as well as the images of fatherhood that shape these perceptions. The results presented in Table 4, which show parents' views about the characteristics of a good father, are especially interesting. When asked to rank the qualities of a good father, the majority of unmarried mothers (57 percent) identified *showing love and affection to the child* as the most important quality. Fifty percent of unmarried fathers ranked this quality first as well. Similarly, when asked to name the least important characteristics, mothers and fathers chose *providing direct care, serving as an authority figure, and providing financial support*.

The overwhelming majority of unmarried parents, including mothers who are no longer romantically involved with their children's fathers, want the fathers to be involved in their children's lives.

III. PARENTS' ACCESS TO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES

The next section of this report focuses on parents' access to and use of public and private resources. This information is important in determining the needs of unmarried parents, as well as their potential and actual sources of support, and for ensuring that policies and programs complement rather than compromise existing family networks and community support networks.

Unmarried parents rely on multiple sources of income and in-kind support to help raise their children. According to Table 1, 38 percent of all mothers reported not working in the twelve months prior to the survey. Furthermore, according to Table 5, three quarters of those mothers who did work earned less than \$20,000 per year. Comparatively, fathers were more likely than mothers to have made over \$10,000 per year.

Household income is substantially higher than earnings. While 12 percent of mothers and 11 percent of fathers reported a household income of less than \$5,000 in the past 12 months, 48 percent of mothers and 60 percent of fathers reported household income of \$20,000 or higher. The substantial difference between the earnings and household income figures for mothers in part reflects the fact that over half of new unmarried mothers are cohabiting or living with another adult. Even so, the majority of new parents live either below or just barely above the poverty line. Thirty-five percent of unmarried mothers in New York City are poor (according to the official poverty line based on total household income) and another 27 percent are "near poor," with incomes below 200 percent of poverty. (It is important to note that the majority of new parents have other children to support, which is taken into account by the poverty threshold.) Not all un-

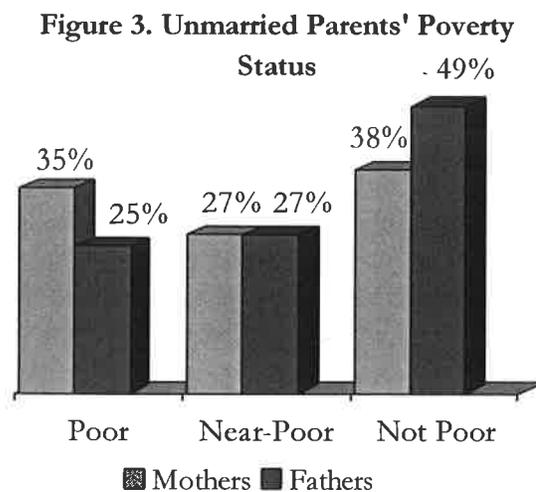


Table 5. Unmarried Parents' Access to Resources: Personal, Household and Kin

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Total earnings in past 12 months		
(Percentage of those who were employed)		
Under \$5,000	30	20
\$5,000 - \$9,999	18	10
\$10,000 - \$19,999	27	29
\$20,000 and over	25	41
Total household income in past 12 months (percentage)^a		
Under \$5,000	12	11
\$5,000 - \$19,999	40	26
\$20,000 - \$49,999	37	40
\$50,000 and over	11	20
Poverty status (percentage)		
Less than 50% of line	21	15
50 - 99% of line	14	10
100 - 199% of line	27	27
200 - 299% of line	20	18
300% or more	18	31
Kin resources		
(Percentage receiving during mother's pregnancy)		
Financial assistance	46	22
A place to live	39	20
Childcare assistance	19	N/A
Percentage that consider family a source of potential help		
	90	89
Total number of respondents	268	193

^a There were a substantial number of missing values on the household income measures; 62 percent of mothers and 68 percent of fathers reported their total household income. Comparatively across the twenty cities, New York City has the third highest rate of non-response on household income measures among mothers (behind Oakland and San Jose). The majority of the non-respondents reported that they "do not know" the total income of the household.

married parents in New York City are in such dire straits, however: 38 percent of mothers and 49 percent of fathers enjoy more comfortable living standards.

The extended family is an important source of support for new, unmarried parents. Nearly all unmarried parents we interviewed in New York City said there was someone in their family to whom they could turn for help with financial problems, housing, or childcare. Forty-six percent of mothers received financial support from relatives during the past year, 39 percent received a place to live, and 19 percent received free childcare from kin. Although mothers were more likely than fathers to rely on relatives, a non-trivial proportion of fathers also received financial support (22 percent) or a place to live (20 percent).

Community support can also play an important role in the lives of new parents. However, many new, unmarried parents in New York City do not appear to have particularly strong ties to their neighborhoods or communities. As shown in Table 6, 46 percent of new mothers and 35 percent of new fathers lived in their neighborhoods for two years or less. In general, the longer people live in a neighborhood, the more likely it is that they know their neighbors and will have them available as a source of support. Additionally, the quality of the neighborhood can affect the degree of interaction, and thus the support, between neighbors: eighty-seven percent of mothers and 79 fathers in New York City characterize their neighborhoods as “safe” or “very safe.”

Many unmarried parents in New York City do not have particularly strong ties to their neighborhoods or communities.

Another source of community support is organized religion. Recently, attention has been focused on community, faith-based initiatives as potential mechanisms to serve and help unmarried parents. In order to assess the potential impact of faith-based programs, it is important to examine the ties between unmarried parents and organized religion in their communities. As noted in Table 1, 93 percent of mothers and 92 percent of fathers in our unmarried sample report having a religious preference. However, only 18 percent of unmarried mothers and 14 percent of unmarried fathers attend religious services at least once a week. Results also indicate that married couples use organized religion as a source of support more often than unmarried parents. The married rates of religious attendance are substantially higher than those of unmarried couples, with over 24 percent of married mothers and 29 percent of married fathers attending religious services at least once a week (figures not shown.)

A substantial proportion of unmarried mothers in this sample relies on government support. During the past year, 28 percent received welfare or food stamps, 29 percent received some type of housing subsidy, and 6 percent received other government transfers (unemployment insurance, workmen’s compensation, disability, or social security). The proportion receiving government assistance is even higher for women who have another child—41 percent of these mothers received welfare or food stamps (figure not shown in Table). As expected, unmarried fathers are much less likely than unmarried mothers to receive government support in the form of welfare or food stamps.

**Table 6. Parents' Access to Resources: Neighborhood and Government
Percentage (%)**

	<u>Mothers</u>	<u>Fathers</u>
Neighborhood resources		
Lived in neighborhood two years or less	46	35
Neighborhood safe or very safe	87	79
Weekly religious attendance	18	14
Government transfers and services in last year		
Welfare, food stamps or public assistance	28	9
Housing subsidy or live in public housing	29	27
Other government transfers	6	9
Awareness of welfare rules (% lacking information)		
Years eligible for welfare assistance	68	79
Work requirements for welfare recipients	70	77
Received information on voluntary paternity establishment in hospital	18	12
Total number of respondents	267	193

Yet unmarried fathers are almost as likely as unmarried mothers to receive housing subsidies and public housing.

Recent changes in welfare policy have shifted much of the responsibility for assistance from the federal government to individual states, which differ in terms of their eligibility restrictions and work requirements for welfare recipients. Given these changes, it is important that welfare recipients and potential recipients understand the new policies in their respective states. We found that many unmarried parents in New York City are uninformed about the new welfare rules and regulations. Sixty-eight percent of the mothers say they do not know how many years a woman can receive welfare in New York City and 70 percent do not know how long they can receive benefits before

having to work. The fathers are somewhat less knowledgeable than the mothers about new welfare rules. It is difficult to imagine that policies intended to encourage parental responsibility and create disincentives for dependence can be effective if many of those who are the most likely recipients are not aware of them.

In contrast, unmarried parents in New York City are much better informed about establishing paternity (figures not shown). When asked whether a blood test can prove whether a man is the father of a child, 91 percent of mothers answered yes. However, only 18 percent of mothers and 12 percent of fathers reported receiving information about establishing paternity at the hospital. It is possible, however, that some parents may have received information after we spoke with them or they did not understand the information presented to them.

IV. HOW ARE THE CHILDREN DOING?

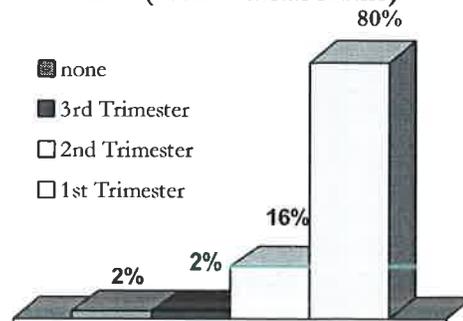
Drinking, smoking and drug use during pregnancy can pose substantial health risks for newborns. Six percent of mothers reported drinking alcohol during their pregnancy, and 2 percent reported using drugs. Thirteen percent of mothers reported smoking cigarettes during their pregnancy, a behavior strongly associated with low birth weight and other poor birth outcomes.⁸

Low birth weight is an important indicator of children's current and future health status. In this New York City sample of non-marital births, 7 percent of mothers had babies that weighed less than 2,500 grams at birth. This figure is close to the 1998 national average of 7.6 percent, which includes both marital and non-marital births (National Center for Health Statistics, 2000a), but less than the 1997 average proportion of low birth weight births among unmarried mothers in New York City of 10.9 percent (New York City Department of Health, Office of Vital Statistics and Epidemiology, 1999).

Fully 96 percent of unmarried mothers in New York City reported receiving prenatal care by the end of the second trimester. Eighty percent of mothers initiated prenatal care in the first trimester, a figure similar to the 77 percent national average for all pregnancies among never-married women (Abma et al., 1997). The data on medical insurance coverage during pregnancy show that Medicaid is an important resource for unmarried mothers in New York City, with 82 percent of unmarried mothers covered by Medicaid. However, mothers covered by Medicaid were less likely to receive prenatal care during the first trimester than mothers with private health insurance (81 percent versus 88 percent, figures not shown).

The length of maternity stay in the hospital is another issue that has attracted much public attention. Hospital stays for women who deliver babies have become longer in recent years after an outcry against the practice of "drive-through deliveries." Eighty-four percent of mothers said they were ready to go home and did not want to stay in

Figure 4. Initiation of Prenatal Care (Non-Marital Births)



**Table 7. Children's Health and Wellbeing
Percentage (%)**

<u>ALL MOTHERS</u>	
Substance use during pregnancy	
Any alcohol use	6
Any drug use	2
Any cigarette use	13
Low birth weight baby	7
Initiation of prenatal care	
1st trimester	80
2nd trimester	16
3rd trimester	2
No prenatal care	2
Health insurance	
Medicaid	82
Private	16
Other	2
Enough time in hospital	84
Baby's living arrangements	
Mother and father	49
Mother only	25
Mother and others	26
Total number of respondents	268

the hospital any longer at the time they were interviewed. This response may reflect the fact that mothers are benefiting from the federal "Newborns and Mothers Health Protection Act of 1996." Implemented January 1, 1998, this law prohibits all health insurance providers who cover hospital stays for childbirth from restricting hospital stays for mothers and newborns to less than forty-eight hours.

Finally, as a way of measuring the resources that would be available to the child in the near term, we asked the unmarried mothers with whom the baby was going to live. Going home meant very different things for different babies. Forty-nine percent were expected to live with their mother and father, 25 percent with the mother alone, and 26 percent with the mother and another adult.⁹

CONCLUSION

From a public policy perspective, these baseline findings in New York City are of tremendous import, not only because they debunk popular perceptions but also because they provide a foundation for new policy initiatives. Given that mothers *want* the fathers' assistance in raising their children, and given that fathers *want* to be a part of their children's lives, policies and programs should facilitate, build upon, and maintain the commitment that unmarried fathers articulate at the "magic moment" of their children's births. However, at the same time it is important to recognize that a small but significant percentage of mothers do not want the father involved. Thus, the major challenge for policymakers is to find ways to support new parents as they work to raise their children under a variety of circumstances.

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THE FRAGILE FAMILIES AND CHILD WELLBEING STUDY

RESEARCH TEAM

Sara McLanahan (Princeton University) and Irwin Garfinkel (Columbia University) are the Principal Investigators and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (Columbia) and Marta Tienda (Princeton) are co-investigators. Other investigators include Nancy Reichman (Princeton), Julien Teitler (Columbia), and a network of (primarily) minority scholars at seven different universities and research institutes. Network scholars include Waldo Johnson (University of Chicago), Yolanda Padilla (University of Texas at Austin), Lauren Rich (University of Pennsylvania), Mark Turner (Johns Hopkins University), Melvin Wilson (University of Virginia), and Maureen Waller (Public Policy Institute of California). The research team is multi-disciplinary (economics, sociology, psychology, social work) and its members have expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Advisory Board members include Greg Duncan, Frank Furstenberg, Donald Hernandez, Sandra Hofferth, and William Julius Wilson. The fieldwork for the New York City site was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

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