

## Children's Environment and Behavior

### Children Born Outside of Marriage

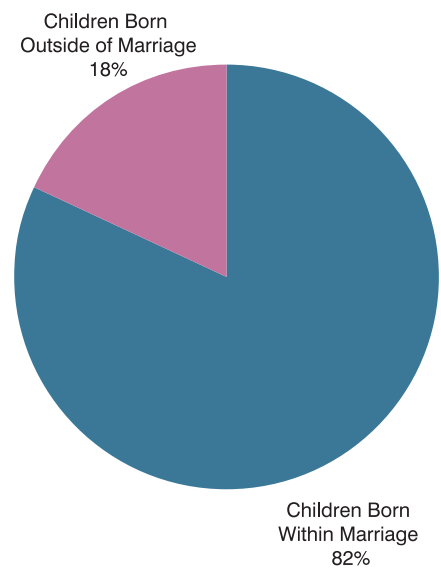


**B**etween 1978 and 1996, the number of babies born to unmarried women doubled, from just over 500,000 to over 1.2 million. Although this dramatic rate of increase has slowed in recent years, 32 percent of all U.S. births are still to unmarried women. These children are more likely to be poor than children born to married women.

Legislators have made an effort to curb births outside of marriage. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, for example, made it easier for states to design welfare programs that serve married parents as well as unmarried parents. It also established \$20 million bonuses for the five states that show the greatest decrease in births to unmarried women and set aside \$50 million for abstinence education.

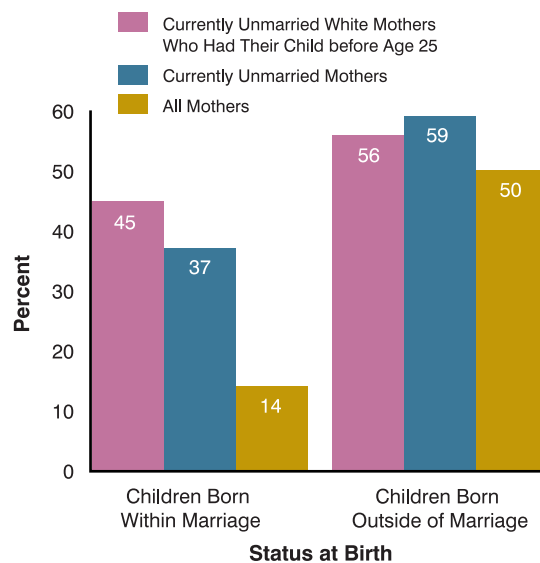
To examine poverty among children born outside of marriage—defined here as children under age 18 born to unmarried parents who were not married to each other at the time of this survey—mothers were asked about their marital status

**Children Born Outside of and Within Marriage, 1997**



Source: Urban Institute

**Child Poverty, by Maternal Characteristics, 1997**



Source: Urban Institute

when their children were born, whether they were currently married to the children's biological father, and their income. It is important to note that although 32 percent of births nationwide occurred outside of marriage in 1996, only 18 percent of all children under age 18 fell into this category. These figures differ both because the proportion of births outside of marriage has risen over the past 18 years and because some parents of these children later marry each other.

Nationally, 50 percent of children born outside of marriage lived in families with incomes below the poverty level, compared to 14 percent of children born within marriage, a statistically significant difference. Among all children living

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This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 households with and without telephones that are representative of the nation as a whole and of 13 states. As in all surveys, the data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error.

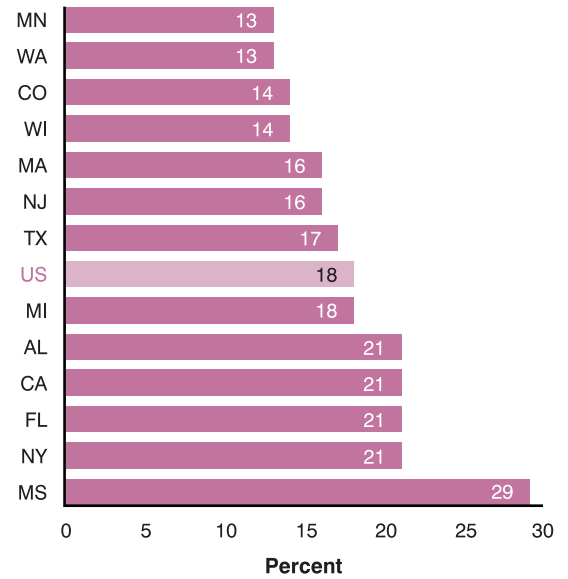
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with just their mother, 59 percent of those born outside of marriage were poor, compared to 37 percent of those born within marriage, a statistically significant difference.

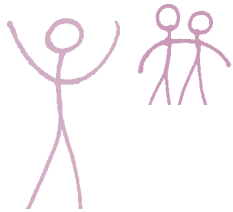
Including other maternal characteristics further reduced the differences in poverty rates between children born outside of and within marriage, but it did not eliminate them. For example, 56 percent of children who were born outside of marriage to a young (under 25) white woman were poor. In contrast, 45 percent of children born within marriage to a young white woman were likely to be poor, a statistically significant difference.

The proportion of children born outside of marriage varied among the 13 states surveyed. Mississippi had the highest, with 29 percent; Minnesota and Washington, at 13 percent each, had the lowest. Five states had a lower percentage of children born outside of marriage than the national average (Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, Washington, and Wisconsin), and five states had a higher percentage (Alabama, California, Florida, Mississippi, and New York).

### Children Born Outside of Marriage, by State, 1997



Source: Urban Institute



### Children (%) Born Outside of and Within Marriage, 1997

Parents' Marital Status	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
Unmarried	20.6	21.1	13.8	21.4	16.4	18.5	12.8	29.2	16.1	20.8	16.9	12.8	14.4	18.2
Married	79.4	78.9	86.2	78.7	83.6	81.5	87.2	70.8	83.9	79.2	83.2	87.2	85.6	81.8

Figures in color represent statistically significant differences from the national average at the .05 confidence level. Figures in black are not statistically significantly different from the national average. All figures in text, charts, and table are rounded.

Source: Urban Institute