



Understanding Young-Parent Families

A Profile of Parents Ages 18 to 24 Using the Survey of Income and Program Participation

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In 2013, there were 3.6 million young parents (those ages 18 to 24) living with their children in the United States.¹ These young adults face particular challenges gaining the skills, education, and experiences necessary to obtain good, family-sustaining jobs. Although persistence in college and employment are difficult for many young adults, young parents face additional hurdles. However, being a parent provides added motivation because of the desire and responsibility to provide for one's children.

Understanding the characteristics of young parents and their children, their life circumstances, and their unique challenges is important for developing effective strategies and policies to support improved outcomes for this group. The transition to early adulthood from the late teens is critical for building the foundations for success in the labor market, but raising children can interfere with obtaining needed postsecondary education or job skills training. This in turn can contribute to lower wages and employment instability, affecting the children of those parents in both the short and long run. Research and programs that address this broader age group have typically focused on its subpopulations, such as noncustodial parents, parents returning from prison, parents who are college students, disconnected young parents, and others. Significant research has also been conducted on teen parents.

This brief uses data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to add to this body of knowledge by providing a portrait of young parents who live with their children. The SIPP is useful because it provides information about the entire household, making it possible to understand the complex lives and supports available to young parents and their children as well as what strategies may be required to address their needs. We first describe our methodology, then we offer a brief review of the literature. We then present demographic information on the young-parent population and the characteristics of their families and households, and examine the experiences of young parents in school

and work. Finally, we discuss implications for designing strategies to address the education and workforce needs of young parents to improve outcomes for these families.

Methodology

The SIPP is a nationally representative panel survey administered by the US Census Bureau that collects information on household composition, receipt of public benefits, education, and employment. It is one of the primary sources of information on topics related to family well-being and family dynamics. The newest SIPP panel interviews the same families every year, asking them questions about the prior year to provide data on changes in family circumstances and income over time.²

We examined the first wave of the 2014 SIPP, the most recent available data. The first wave of the survey contains information on 29,825 households that were interviewed between February and June 2014. The survey gathered information for the year before the interview, so the data represent information for January 2013 through December 2013. A household roster was compiled for each household interviewed, and an attempt was made to interview all individuals age 15 or older in the household. The head of household was typically defined as the owner or renter, and members included those who slept in the household most nights.

This report uses a sample of 916 young adult parents who were living with their children at the time of the survey, representing a total of 3.6 million young adult parents. These are individuals who reported that at least one of their children lived in their household, and it excludes those in the same age range with only children who lived elsewhere. Young parents may also have noncustodial children in addition to those living with them. Fewer than one-fifth (17 percent) of the young parents lived in the same household as another parent in the sample. An additional 225 individuals were exclusively noncustodial parents of the same age range—that is, young parents who were not living with any of their children. This additional group represents a national sample of approximately 0.9 million individuals; they are discussed separately below and excluded from the main analysis. For comparison and context, two additional samples were examined: 5,740 nonparents ages 18 to 24 (representative of 25.9 million individuals); and 20,364 parents age 25 or older with at least one custodial child age 17 or under (representative of 66 million parents). The person weight from the final month of the analysis period was used to construct our nationally representative sample.³

Background

Young parents face many challenges that can interfere with education and training, economic stability and security, and the care of children. Addressing these challenges can improve outcomes not only for these young parents but also for children and families. Research has focused on different subgroups of young parents, such as teens, noncustodial parents, parents in college, and those disconnected from both school and work, as well as on effective strategies aimed at addressing the particular challenges these groups face.

A key area of focus in the literature and in public policy is on teen parents. Although not the focus of this brief, it is important to understand the challenges teen parents face because many of these challenges continue into adulthood or affect the transition to adulthood. Adolescents who have children while in high school face unique obstacles to completing their education as they must balance their complex needs as a student with the needs of their children. Indeed, only about half of mothers who have children in their teens finish high school (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2015). Reliable child care is often a major determining factor of young parents' success in school, and teen parents commonly struggle to find stable, affordable, high-quality child care that meets their scheduling needs (Sadler et al. 2007). Young parents also have lower levels of social support (such as networks of family, friends, and neighbors that can provide emotional and practical support in times of need) than older mothers (Albritton et al. 2014; Ozbay et al. 2007), making it even more challenging for them to balance their complex demands. Many schools are not equipped to address teen parents' needs for flexible hours, alternative courses, and on-site child care (Aron and Zweig 2003). Further, young parents who do not complete high school have especially low basic skills. That, coupled with the effects of parenting responsibilities, limits their employment opportunities beyond low-wage jobs (Maynard 1995).

The challenges that continue as young parents enter adulthood include difficulty staying in school or managing work and parental responsibilities (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2015). Nearly 25 percent of all college students are parents, and 13 percent of all college students are single parents (Mosle and Patel 2012). Young parents in postsecondary education who also need to provide for their children financially can face the additional burdens of paying for college and of balancing work and school (Spaulding, Derrick-Mills, and Callan 2016). Young parents also struggle with affording and accessing child care. Although policies are designed to provide child care assistance to low-income parents in employment, most parents do not receive it because of limited funding, inadequate subsidy rates, administrative barriers, or eligibility requirements (Genettian et al. 2004). Young parents who have low-wage jobs because they did not complete high school may also work nonstandard hours or have irregular work schedules that they have little control over, making it even more difficult to find suitable care (Enchautegui 2013; Sandstrom et al. 2012; Adams and Rohacek 2010; Henly and Lyons 2000).

Young parents' limited employment opportunities and barriers to successful postsecondary education completion affect their well-being as well as their children's. Research has demonstrated that parents' level of educational attainment is the best predictor of economic mobility for their children (Mosle and Patel 2012) and that children of teen parents in particular face poorer health and cognitive development and are more likely to become teen parents than children born to older parents (Berzin and De Marco 2010). Children of young parents also tend to perform worse on school-readiness indicators, such as social skills, communication, and cognition, and they tend to score lower on standardized tests (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2015). Only about two-thirds of children of teen parents graduate from high school (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2015). These long-term outcomes of young parents' children can be attributed to young parents having fewer economic, social, and cultural resources to share with their children than do older parents (Berzin and De Marco 2010).

But young parents can be supported to complete their education, obtain better jobs, and build longer-term financial stability for themselves and their families. Economic supports such as transportation assistance, child care subsidies, and tax credits, as well as social supports manifested as coaches, peer support, or participation in community organizations, can help young parents focus on building skills that lead to long-term success (Mosle and Patel 2012). Some colleges and universities offer peer models, one-on-one and group counseling with staff counselors, and group workshops to better support young parents, providing them with information and referrals to counseling or support services (Schumacher 2013). Campus-based child care programs in both high schools and colleges also help young parents manage and balance their family's needs (Levin-Epstein and Greenberg 2003; Schumacher 2013).

Two-generation or family-centered approaches have also gained traction in recent years. Such strategies involve efforts to design systems, policies, and programs to intentionally meet the needs of both parents and children through a well-aligned set of interventions (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2014; Mosle and Patel 2012). Evaluations currently under way will yield importance evidence about the effectiveness of this model of services for young parents and their children (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2017; King 2016)

This brief offers a descriptive analysis of young parents who live with their children, their families, their experiences in school and work, and their access to child care and supportive services. Understanding the characteristics of young parents can help policymakers, funders, and practitioners focus on what approaches might be most effective in meeting these families' needs.

Who Are Young Parents?

Young parents constituted 5 percent of the approximately 66 million parents who reside with their children, and about 15 percent of all individuals ages 18 to 24 in 2013 were parents. The following are some of the key characteristics of this population in 2013:

- The average age of young parents was 22. Most were on the older end of the age spectrum: 69 percent were ages 22 to 24.
- More than three-quarters of young parents living with their children (77 percent) were women (table 1).⁴
- About three-quarters of young parents were white; 19 percent were black.
- Thirty-one percent of young parents were of Hispanic or Latino origin. Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin constituted a higher percentage of young parents than nonparents of the same age range (19 percent).
- Most young parents were US citizens (91 percent) and were born in the US. Eighty-eight percent of citizens were born in the US, and another 2 percent were naturalized. Of those who moved to the US as noncitizens, more than half (59 percent) did so as a permanent resident. As

of 2013, nearly 100 percent of the children of young parents were born in the US and were citizens.

- Most young parents spoke English either “well” or “very well” (87 percent), and one-fifth (20 percent) spoke a language other than English at home. Of young parents who were Hispanic or Latino, most were proficient in English (74 percent), and a similar percentage spoke a language other than English at home (17 percent).
- Eighty percent of young parents reported living in a metropolitan area for at least part of 2013. Young parents were also most heavily concentrated in the South in 2013 (table 2),⁵ with almost one-half (44 percent) of young parents living there. In contrast, 35 percent of young nonparents lived in that region in 2013. A smaller percentage of young parents lived in the Northeast (10 percent) than did young nonparents (19 percent). Another 21 percent of young parents were concentrated in the Midwest, and 24 percent were located in the West.

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics of Young Parents

Demographic characteristic	Number (millions)	Percentage
Age		
18	0.1	3
19	0.2	5
20	0.3	10
21	0.5	13
22	0.6	17
23	0.9	25
24	1.0	27
Gender		
Female	2.8	77
Male	0.8	23
Race		
White	2.7	75
Black	0.7	19
Asian	0.1	1
Other	0.2	5
Hispanic or Latino origin		
Yes	1.1	31
No	2.5	69

Source: SIPP 2014 panel 1.

Note: Racial and ethnic categories are those used in the SIPP. Those of Hispanic or Latino origin may have also identified as one of the racial categories.

TABLE 2

Regional Concentrations of Young Parents and Young Nonparents

Region	Young Parents		Young Nonparents	
	Number (millions)	Percentage	Number (millions)	Percentage
Midwest	0.8	21	5.8	22
Northeast	0.4	10	4.9	19
South	1.6	44	9.1	35
West	0.9	24	6.1	24
Total	3.6	100	25.9	100

Source: 2014 SIPP Panel 1.

Note: Regions are aggregations of respondent state of residence in December 2013. Regions are aligned with US Census Bureau definitions.

Who Are Young-Parent Families?

Young parents tended to have young children, and most had never been married.

Most young parents (92 percent) had two or fewer children (table 3), and the average child age among those surveyed was 2.6.⁶ A small number of young parents (3 percent) also had children living elsewhere. Approximately 93 percent had children under age 5, and 74 percent had at least one child age 2 or younger. Caring for younger children can be challenging because fewer affordable child care options are available for preschoolers, infants, and toddlers (Adams, Zaslow, and Trout 2007).

More than two-thirds (64 percent) of young parents reported never having been married (figure 1). In total, more than half (56 percent) of young parents were single mothers. The high percentage of young, single parents has implications for the economic stability of these families, as single parents have higher rates of poverty (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2015). At the same time, the rates of marriage for young parents (around 33 percent) were much higher than for nonparents, with 95 percent reporting that they had never married. These differences could be cultural, caused by varied expectations around marriage and parenting at young ages, or they could be because young nonparents face less financial and social pressure to marry.

Most lived in households with at least one other working adult, yet a large percentage of these households were poor.

TABLE 3

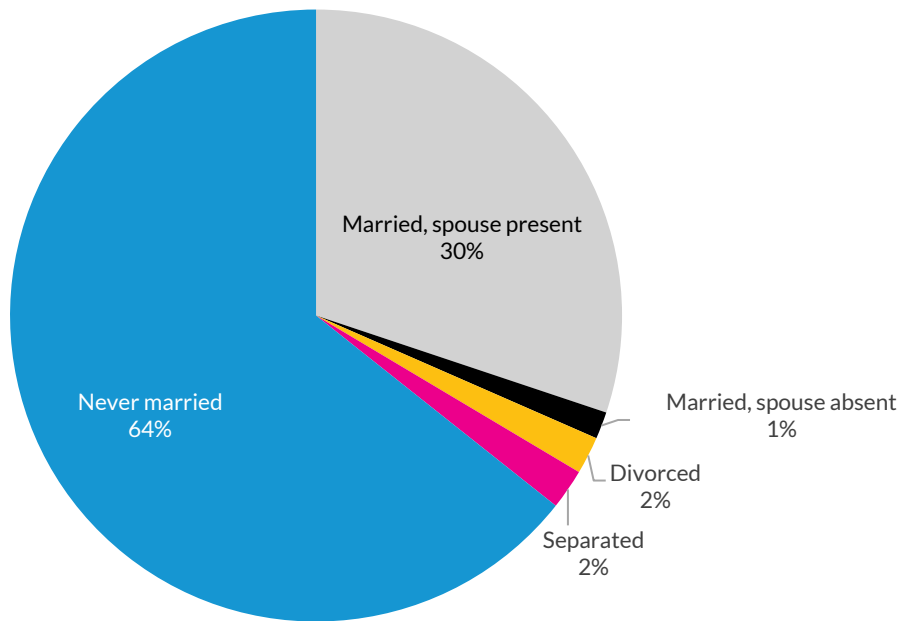
Number of Children of Young Parents

Number of children	Number (millions)	Percentage
1	2.4	67
2	0.9	25
3 or more	0.3	8

Source: SIPP 2014 panel 1.

FIGURE 1

Marital Status of Young Parents



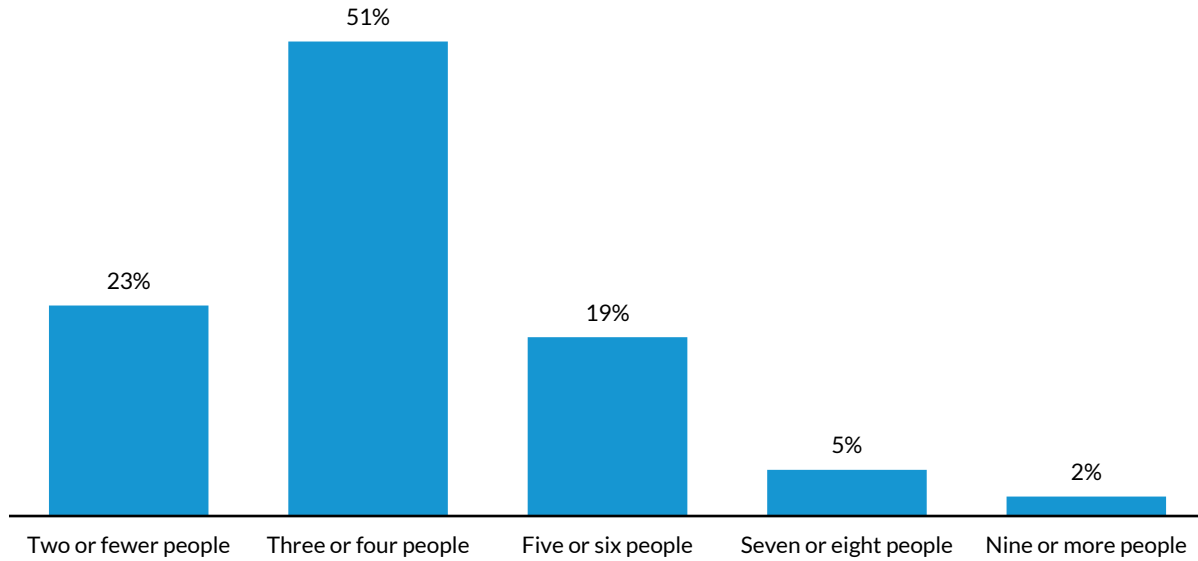
Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

More than half (51 percent) of young parents lived in a household of three or four people (figure 2). Approximately one-fifth lived in households of two or fewer people (23 percent) or five to six people (19 percent).⁷ Young parents were frequently living with family members or their spouse, especially the young parents’ parents, and 38 percent of households contained someone age 36 or older. For single parents and young parents, family can be an important source of support, and they may help with child care or share household expenses.

FIGURE 2

Number of People Living in Young Parents' Households

Share of all young-parent households

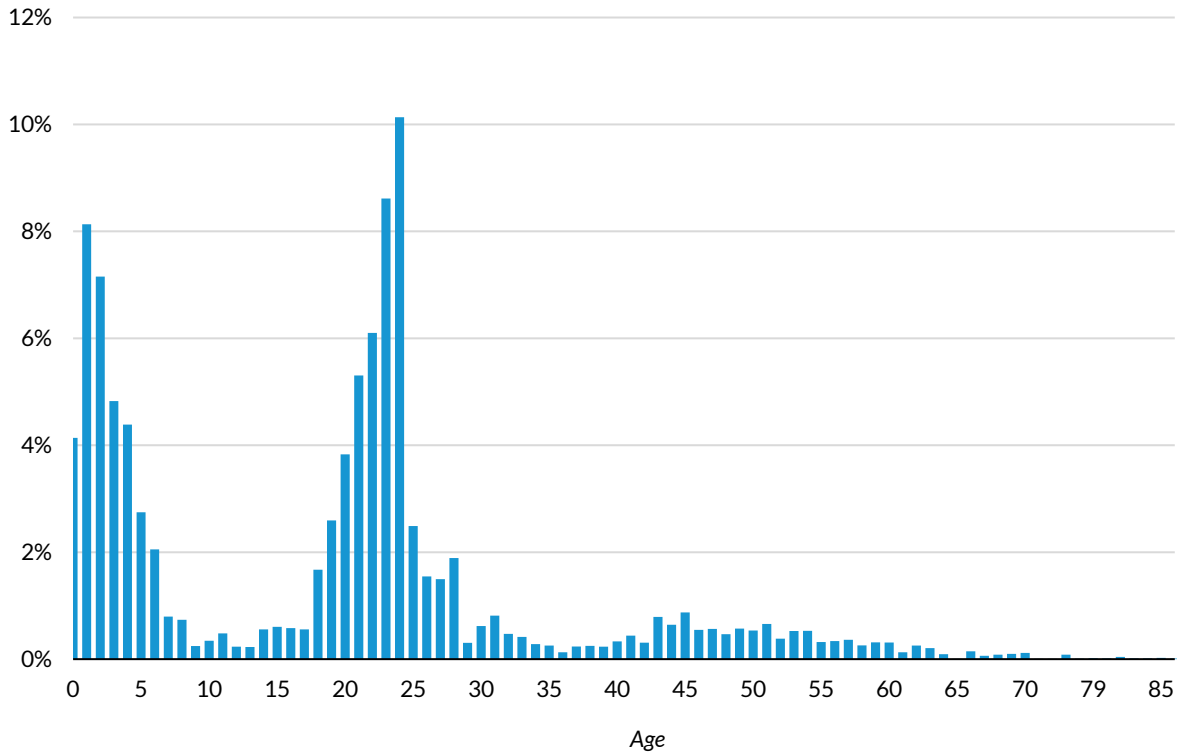


Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

The distribution of individuals living in the households of young parents (figure 3) shows that although many of the occupants were under age 10 or in their early 20s (as expected), many individuals were also ages 44 to 54. The majority (71 percent) of other adults in the household held at least one job during the year, and 46 percent had at least one jobless spell. As described in a later section, this is a higher percentage of individuals with jobs and a lower percentage of individuals with at least one jobless spell than among young parents alone. This suggests that other individuals in the household often are contributing to overall household income.

FIGURE 3

Distribution of Ages in Young Parents' Households



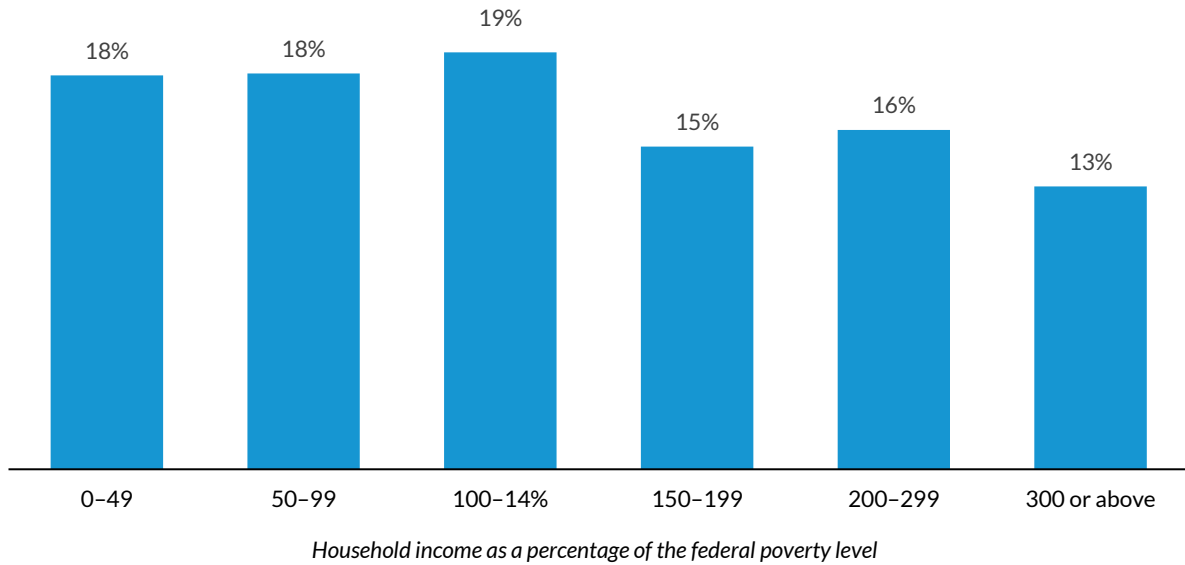
Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

Note: Chart shows bars for each year of average age of individuals who were associated with the households of young parents, but labels are every five years. Percentages are calculated out of all individuals in the sample of young-parent households.

Young-parent households were generally low income. More than one-third (36 percent) had incomes below 100 percent of the federal poverty level for the household size (figure 4), and 71 percent of young parents' household incomes fell below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Approximately 15 percent of young-parent households received cash benefits through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, child support payments, general assistance, or general relief. In 2013, the average amount of benefits received from these sources was \$5,100 per household.

FIGURE 4

Young-Parent Households by Income



Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

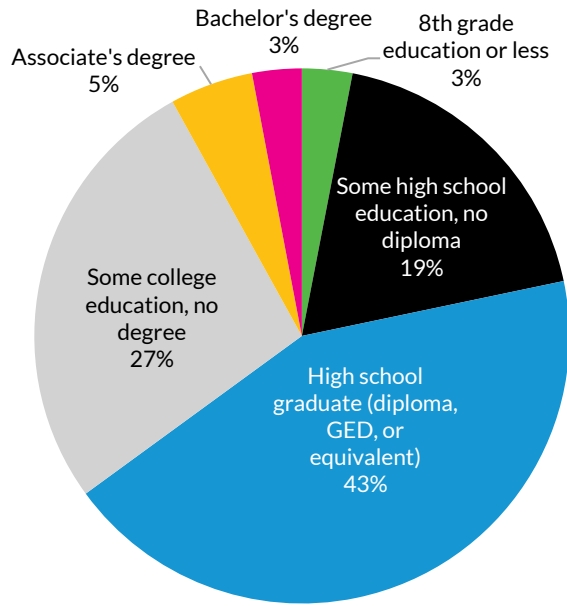
What Are Young Parent’s Educational Experiences?

Most young parents graduated from high school but a large percentage was not currently in school.

Education and training is a pathway to potentially higher earnings for young parents. However, young parents may face barriers to achieving their educational goals. Although most young parents had at least a high school diploma (or equivalent), nearly one-quarter (22 percent) had not graduated from high school (figure 5). More than one-quarter (27 percent) had completed at least some college education, and almost half (43 percent) had only a high school diploma or equivalent. Eight percent had received an associate’s degree or higher. In addition to academic degrees, 13 percent had earned a professional license or certification, and 11 percent had earned an educational certificate.

FIGURE 5

Educational Attainment of Young Parents



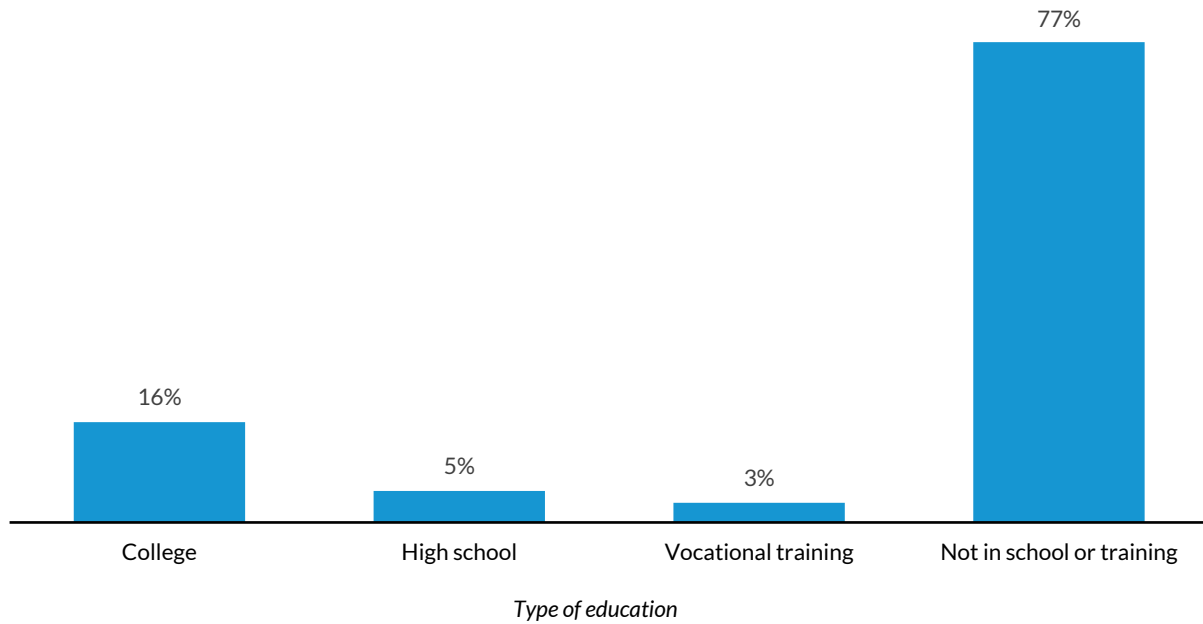
Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

Note: About 0.1 percent of respondents held master's or professional school degrees; this value is rounded to zero and is not shown.

The majority of young parents in 2013 had completed high school, but relatively few had gone on to enroll in college. Some continued to engage in education and training after high school. Almost one-quarter (23 percent) of young parents participated in some form of education (either academic or vocational) during 2013. Of those enrolled in education in 2013, around one-fifth of young parents (22 percent) were in high school (figure 6). These were mostly the younger end of the age spectrum—two-thirds were 18 or 19 years old. The majority of young parents participating in education or training during 2013 were in college (69 percent) or vocational training (14 percent). Most young parents in 2013 were simply not attending school, with 77 percent of high school graduates not enrolled in any form of education during the year. Nonparents ages 18 to 24 were far more likely to be in school (65 percent with an enrollment spell), with 41 percent of them attending college.

FIGURE 6

Type of Education Enrolled in by Young Parents



Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

Note: Percentages are out of all young parents (N=3.6 million). Percentages sum to more than 100 because individuals may have been enrolled in more than one type of education during the year.

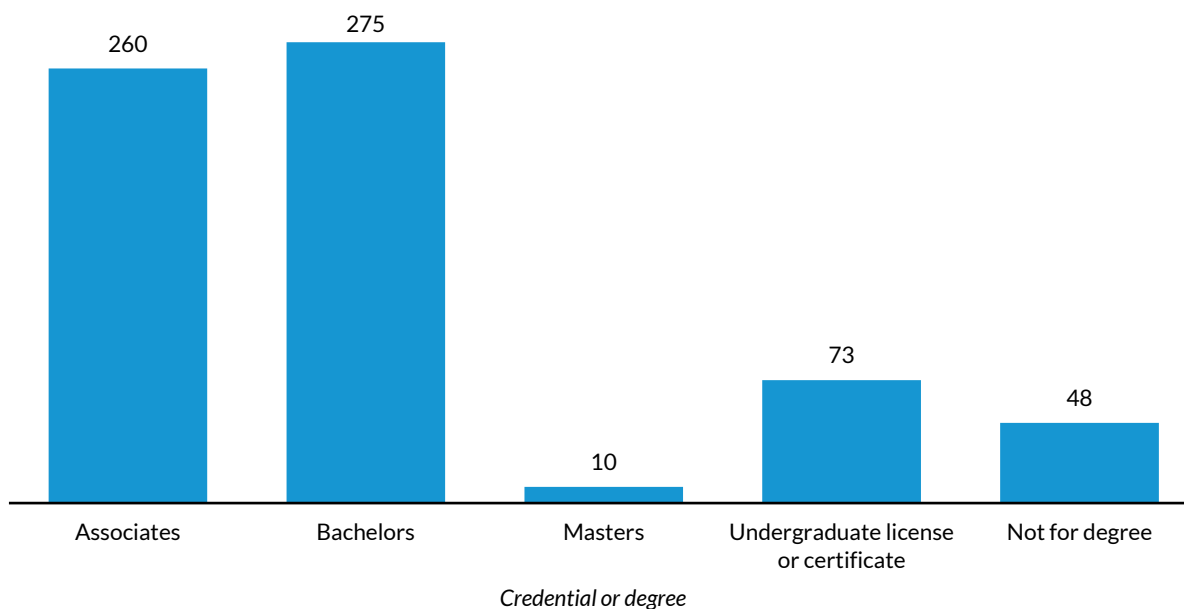
Of those engaged in education or training, most were working toward an academic degree.

Nineteen percent of young parents were attending college or vocational training during 2013. Of those young parents attending college or vocational training, most (78 percent) were working towards an academic degree, evenly split between associate's and bachelor's degrees (figure 7). More than three-quarters of young parents in college or vocational training were enrolled in public institutions (78 percent) and most were attending school full time (78 percent).

FIGURE 7

Degrees and Credentials Young Parents in Postsecondary Education Were Working Toward

Thousands of parents



Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

What Are Young Parent's Experiences with Work?

Young parents were generally low income and struggled with steady employment.

On average, the hourly wage of young parents during 2013 was \$10.19 per hour, equivalent to \$21,200 annually (table 4). However, because many did not work the entire year or held jobs with different wages, the actual average total annual earnings for 2013 were \$16,200. Many young parents spent periods of the year not working. Total average household earnings were \$35,000.⁸ Average household earnings for young nonparents were far higher, at \$62,000, but average individual wages for that group was similar at \$10.00 per hour (or \$20,790 annually). This suggests that young nonparents tended to live in wealthier households.

TABLE 4

Workforce Participation of Young Parents

Employment	Number (millions)	Percentage
Employed at some point during the year	2.3	63
At least one spell without a job during the year	2.2	60
In both employment and education for at least one month	0.5	14

Wages and earnings	Dollars
Average individual wage	\$21,200
Average total individual earnings	\$16,200
Average total household earnings	\$35,000

Source: SIPP 2014 panel 1; authors' calculations of average wage from all jobs held in the year and average of total annual earnings.

Not working can create multiple challenges for young-parent families. In the short term, income instability or a lack of income can be detrimental to parents and their young children. In the long run, joblessness can affect future employment and earnings for both parents and children. When parents hold jobs, however, issues such as the arrangement of schedules and child care can create challenges (Adams, Spaulding, and Heller 2015). Approximately two-thirds (63 percent) of young parents worked during 2013, but almost the same amount (60 percent) reported at least one jobless spell during that period (table 4). Three-quarters of those with a jobless spell went without work for more than six months. Young nonparents were slightly more likely to have worked in 2013 (64 percent) but were also slightly more likely to have gone jobless at least once during the year (66 percent). These differences may speak to nonparents' increased flexibility and higher frequency of attending school.

Forty-one percent of young parents attributed their jobless spells to challenges with child care, and some went jobless because they were attending school (26 percent) or because of an inability to find work (19 percent). Young nonparents were far more likely to cite school as their reason for going jobless (46 percent), with fewer reporting that they were jobless because of an inability to find work (11 percent).

Caring for children also affected the work schedules of some young parents who had jobs. A small portion of young parents with jobs (9 percent) reported that they worked the schedule that they did mainly to get better child care arrangements. The challenge of child care affected parents 25 and older less than half as often (4 percent of those with at least one job) as it did young parents. Eighty percent of young parents worked regular daytime, evening, or night shifts rather than rotating, split, or irregular schedules.

How Do Young Parents Combine Work and School?

Balancing work and school can be a challenge for young parents. About 14 percent of young parents both worked and went to school at some point in 2013, while 27 percent did neither at any point during the year. Young parents' participation in work and school was less frequent than young individuals

without children, 38 percent of whom worked and went to school. Only 9 percent of nonparents neither worked nor went to school at any point in 2013.

Most young parents who were enrolled in school were working at the same time (59 percent). This echoes previous research showing that a high percentage of low-income parents enrolled in school full time also work full time (Spaulding, Derrick-Mills, and Callan 2016). The need to manage both work and school while parenting can create multiple challenges, such as the management of complex schedules; the costs of transportation to school and work; and the ability to find child care, likely in part during nontraditional hours for child care centers (Adams, Spaulding, and Heller 2015).

What Supports Do Young Parents Receive?

A majority of young parents receive public benefit assistance to help support themselves and their families, with a large number receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and health insurance through Medicaid.

Young parents received a variety of public benefits (table 5). The most frequent source of public benefits for young parents was food and nutrition assistance. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits were received by 42 percent (1.5 million) of young parents during 2013. Assistance from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children was received by 23 percent (0.8 million). Housing assistance (housing vouchers and rent subsidies) was received at least once in 2013 by 14 percent of young-parent households. Despite the presence of young children, only 5 percent of young parents received child care assistance. Four percent or fewer of young parents received benefits from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, transportation assistance, unemployment or worker's compensation, or general assistance. The average annual amount of individual cash assistance benefits received was \$3,800.⁹ Nearly half (43 percent) of young parents did not receive any of the above benefits.

Young nonparents were less likely to receive these benefits, with only 10 percent receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, 6 percent receiving housing assistance, 3 percent with transportation assistance, and less than 1 percent receiving any benefits from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, general assistance, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or unemployment and worker's compensation.

TABLE 5

Public Assistance Benefits Received for at Least One Month during 2013

Public assistance	Young parents		Nonparents	
	Number (millions)	Percentage	Number (millions)	Percentage
SNAP (food stamps)	1.5	42	2.5	10
WIC	0.8	23	0.2	1
Any housing assistance ^a	0.5	14	1.6	6
Child care assistance from social service or welfare	0.2	5	0.0	0
TANF	0.2	4	0.0	0
Transportation assistance	0.1	4	0.7	3
Unemployment or worker's compensation	0.1	2	0.2	1
General assistance	0.1	2	0.1	0
None of the above	1.6	43	21.4	83

Source: SIPP 2014 panel 1.

Notes: SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. Benefit receipt is for the respondent, but respondent error over who in the household is receiving the benefit could lead to nonzero response rates for benefits that were likely not received by a nonparent (WIC, for example).

^a Includes both housing voucher receipt and rent subsidy receipt for the individual's household.

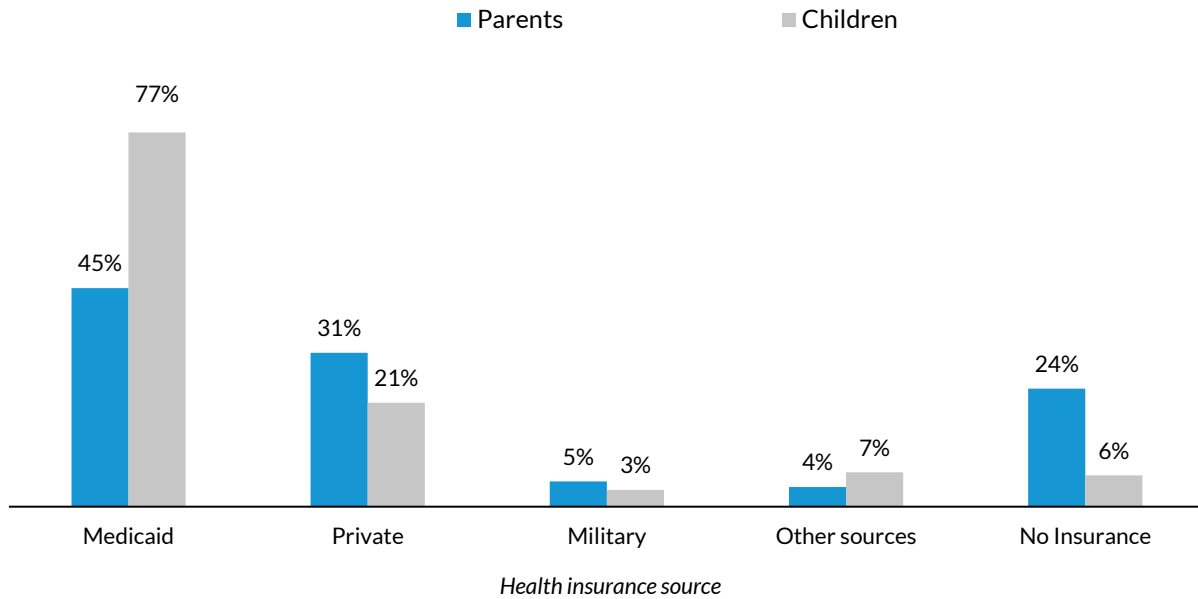
Health care can be another major challenge for young parents given how costly both medical care and health insurance can be. In 2013, many young parents (45 percent) received Medicaid benefits for at least one month (figure 8). Most young parents (76 percent) had health insurance, with Medicaid accounting for the largest source, followed by private health insurance (31 percent). Military, Medicaid, and miscellaneous other sources were received by 5 percent or less of young parents. Almost one-quarter (24 percent) of young parents (870,000 individuals) were not insured at any point during 2013. Young nonparents exhibited the opposite insurance source trends: more than two-thirds (68 percent) were covered by private health insurance, 13 percent received Medicaid, and 7 percent were covered by any other source.

The children of young parents received public health insurance more often than their parents (figure 8). A total of 2.9 million (77 percent) of children of young parents received Medicaid, while 0.8 million (21 percent) were covered by private health insurance. Military and other sources of insurance each covered 7 percent or fewer of these children. A large percentage of children received funding through the Medicaid program.

FIGURE 8

Share of Young Parents and Their Children with Health Insurance

By insurance type



Source: SIPP 2014 Panel 1.

Notes: Percentages may sum to more than 100 because individuals may have received more than one source of insurance during the year.

How Do Young Parents Manage Child Care?

Young parents often relied on family members to help with child care and rarely received public child care benefits.

Child care is a major consideration for many young parents. Table 6 shows child care activities for all young parents.¹⁰ Almost two-thirds of young parents reported requiring child care while they were working or otherwise unavailable to care for their children (63 percent). Many parents (57 percent) leveraged the help of family members to provide child care. The most common family members to provide child care were the children’s grandparents (50 percent). A smaller portion (30 percent) said that they used a non-family member to provide child care during the year. Although more than half of young parents used some form of child care, fewer than one-quarter (19 percent) reported paying for those arrangements. Furthermore, only 13 percent reported using a daycare center to provide child care, and very few were on daycare center waiting lists. Overall, very few young parents received child

care assistance despite their low income. Most used family members to provide child care while they worked, went to school, or were otherwise unavailable.

Older parents (age 25 and over) needed child care at a much lower rate (38 percent), but this difference could be because they have older children. However, they still relied on family (29 percent) more than non-family members (22 percent) to provide child care. Older parents received even less assistance to pay for child care (2 percent) but also paid for child care less (17 percent) and used less day care (9 percent).

TABLE 6

Child Care Activities of Young Parents

Care activity	Number (millions)	Percentage
Any child care needed while parent was working or not available	2.3	63
Any child care by a family member while parent was working or not available	2.1	57
Any child care by a non-family member while parent was working or not available	1.1	30
Did parent or parent's family pay for child care arrangements?	0.7	19
Did the parent receive assistance to pay for child care?	0.2	5

Source: SIPP 2014 panel 1.

Note: "Any child care" can be from family or another source. Parents may have had child care from both family and nonfamily sources, so some parents may be counted in both metrics.

For young parents who worked or went to school, we expect child care could be more of a concern. Young parents who were either working or enrolled in education at some point during the year reported using child care at a higher rate than those not working or in school. Of parents without any employment or school enrollment during 2013, 59 percent reported using any form of child care compared with 65 percent of parents with employment or education spells.

What Are the Characteristics of Young Noncustodial Parents?

Noncustodial parents were more likely to be male but shared many of the same characteristics as custodial parents; the majority reported seeing their children, and about half said they paid child support.

In addition to the 3.6 million young parents with at least one custodial child, 0.9 million individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 had no child living with them but reported having at least one noncustodial child or paying child support. Two-thirds (66 percent) of young noncustodial parents were

male. More than half (59 percent) were white, less than one-third (28 percent) were black, and 27 percent were of Hispanic or Latino origin. The majority (88 percent) had never been married.

Most noncustodial young parents had one child living elsewhere (1.1 children on average). Generally, these parents saw that child on a weekly basis, with 57 percent reporting time spent with the child weekly or several times a week. Less than one-fifth (17 percent) reported no contact at all with their child or children. Around half (51 percent) were paying child support. On average, child support payments by young noncustodial parents amounted to \$3,800 per year.

In general, young noncustodial parents had similar characteristics to young custodial parents. More than two-thirds (72 percent) were employed at some point during the year, while 58 percent reported at least one jobless spell. More than one-third (37 percent) reported participating in some form of education, notably higher than the 23 percent of custodial parents who reported doing so. This increased education participation may be caused by these individuals' lower time commitment of direct child care.

Discussion

These data point to the challenges that young parents face in caring for their children, continuing their education, and finding success in the labor market. Here, we highlight key findings and implications for practice:

- Although most young parents have never been married, a large percentage lived in households with other family members (such as parents, grandparents, and spouses). Families can provide an important source of financial and emotional support, and more than half of young parents leaned on family members to provide child care. Given these dynamics, there is a need for a family-centered approach when developing strategies to assist young parents, which may involve engaging grandparents, both custodial and noncustodial parents, and other household members who provide support.
- Young parents are still developing emotionally while learning to be parents, typically of young children. Although many young parents reside with their own parents or other family members, they may not receive the support needed to navigate the challenges that come with parenting young children. One strategy to provide additional nonfamily support is mentoring, where young parents can receive guidance on how to navigate educational institutions, the labor market, and parenting. The Young Parents Demonstration, a grant program of the US Department of Labor, reflected this approach, with participants receiving access to mentoring assistance along with job training and placement. Results of the evaluation are forthcoming.
- A large percentage of young parents are not engaged in any education activities. With 22 percent having less than a high school degree and 65 percent having no education beyond high school, these young parents will face challenges in a labor market that increasingly demands postsecondary credentials. Young parents in school need child care more often than those who

are not in school, and many young parents balance work and school simultaneously. Effective strategies are needed to make it easier for these young parents to access education and training opportunities and persist in school. Such strategies may include flexible schedules, accelerated courses, robust counseling, better access to financial supports, and pathways into the workforce targeted specifically to young parents, as well as interventions that more intentionally address the needs of children while serving parents.

- As demonstrated by the large percentage of young parents who experienced jobless spells, employment is a key challenge for this population. More than 71 percent of young-parent households had incomes under 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In recognition of these challenges, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the primary law governing workforce programs, expanded services to young adults and young parents opening up new opportunities in local areas for focusing on this population (Spaulding, Derrick-Mills, and Callan 2016). For young parents, these employment services likely need to be provided in conjunction with other supports that address the variety of needs that young parents and their families face.
- A large percentage of young parents receive public benefits, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and health insurance through Medicaid. Young parents received at least one major public benefit more than twice as often as their nonparent counterparts. Children have higher rates of insurance coverage than their parents, suggesting the benefits of Medicaid coverage and expanded coverage through the Children's Health Insurance Program. Further erosion of public benefits will have detrimental effects on young parents and on their children because it may affect their financial stability.
- Communities often do not have enough quality child care for infants and toddlers. As shown in the data, very few young parents access financial supports for child care. Access to child care can be a barrier to obtaining education and employment. To address these issues, workforce programs can work with partners to meet the needs of the population, including developing child care plans, facilitating access to child care subsidies, helping participants identify appropriate care, or offering child care directly. Program design can also reflect scheduling options that are consistent with child care availability.

Given what is known about strategies for serving young parents, it is clear that more research is needed to understand what works for parents who are transitioning from their teen years to adulthood. Understanding the characteristics of this group and the potential barriers they face can help design strategies that effectively meet the needs of young parents and their children.

Notes

1. From authors' calculations.
2. For more information, please visit the SIPP website at www.census.gov/sipp.
3. Person weights vary slightly by month because of adjustments to compensate for population dynamics and household composition. The person weight from the month of December 2013 (the latest available) was assigned to each individual in the sample.
4. Custodial parents were primarily female; noncustodial parents were mostly male (66 percent).
5. Young-parent location was analyzed by state of residence in December of 2013. Regions are aggregations of states and align with the US Census Bureau definitions.
6. Not all children referenced in the SIPP data have ages available. Average child age and percentages of respondents with children of a certain age are out of the 94 percent of individuals with child ages recorded.
7. Young parents may have lived by themselves at some point during the year.
8. Value includes all individuals identified on the household roster. Limiting to only individuals who were in the household at the time of the interview increases average annual household earnings to \$37,200.
9. Includes Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, pass-through child support payments, general assistance, or general relief (N = 0.3 million individuals with nonzero amounts of these benefits received).
10. Child care data was only collected for children under age 14. In this sample, 100 percent of individuals had at least one child under age 14.

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