The Impact of Welfare Reform and Work-based Welfare on: Marriage, Non-Marital Births and Abortion

Robert Rector
The Heritage Foundation
June 22, 2022
Main Points

Work-Based Welfare Reform Led to a:

• Halt in the Rapid Decline in Two Parent Families

• Halt in the Rise of the Non-Marital Birth Rate

• Two Thirds Drop in the Teen Birth and Abortion Rates
Percent of Children on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
Welfare Reform Halted the Rapid Decline in Married Two Parent Families

Welfare Reform Enacted

% of Children in Two Parent Families

Percent If Pre-Reform Decline had Continued"
Unmarried Teen Birth Rates:
(Annual Births Per 1000 Unmarried Girls and Young Women)

1963: War on Poverty Begins
1992: Clinton Pledges to End Welfare
1996: Welfare Reform Act

Total: Ages 15-19
Ages 15-17
Ages 18-19
Pregnancy, Birth and Abortion Rates for Teen and Young Adult Women

Pregnancy, Birth and abortion Rates per 1000 Women aged 15 to 19

- 1996: 96 Pregnancies, 54 Births, 29 Abortions
- 2017: 31 Pregnancies, 19 Births, 8 Abortions
Main Points on Abortion

• Most abortion occurs to non-married women.

• Work-based Welfare Reform did not lead to an increase in abortion. After reform, the non-marital abortion rate declined steadily.

• The pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates among teens, in particular, declined dramatically and in unison.
Percent of Abortions by Marital Status: 2017

- 85.0% Abortions to Married Women
- 15.0% Abortions to Non-married Women
Abortion Rate for Married and Non-Married Women

(Abortions Per 1000 Women Aged 15 to 44)

- Roe v. Wade
- Clinton pledges to end welfare
- Welfare Reform Enacted
- Married Women 15-44
- Non-married Women aged 15-44
The conventional view is that there is a trade off between abortions and non-marital births. An increase in abortion will lead a drop in non-marital births.

Historical data show there is no trade off; abortions and non-marital births tend to rise and fall in unison.
Birth and Abortion Rates for Non-Married Women Aged 15 to 44

- Births or Abortions per 1000 Non-married Women ages 15-44
- Annual Abortions per 1000 women
- Annual Births per 1000 Women

Key Events:
- Roe V Wade
- Clinton Pledge to End Welfare
- Welfare Reform Enacted
- Annual Abortions per 1000 women
- Annual Births per 1000 Women
Births per 1000 Women aged 15 to 44

Marital and Non-Marital Birth Rates

Clinton Pledge to End Welfare
Welfare Reform Law
Roe V Wade
marital birth rate
Non-marital Birth Rate