

- > In The Age of Unwed Mothers, newly released from the Institute for American Values, Gallagher points out that the number of young women who
 - > have their first child during their teen years was about the same in the early 1970s as it is today:
 - > "What has changed most in recent decades is not who gets pregnant, but who gets married. The single biggest change in recent decades has been the declining proportion of pregnant single teens who marry."
 - > Moreover: "Our 'teen pregnancy' crisis is inseparable from the disconnect between marriage and childbearing that increasingly characterizes the procreative behavior of adults in their 20s." In fact: "The majority of unwed births in the United States today are to adult women in their 20s. These are not 'children having children,' nor are they 'Murphy Browns.'"
 - > For Gallagher, the key to understanding the teen pregnancy crisis is marriage:
 - > "For a young woman today who does not see marriage as an essential support to her motherhood, or who does not foresee much possibility of making a good marriage in the future, the decision to become a single mother at age 18 or 19 is not especially irrational or hard to understand. If it is not marriage that confers special meaning to the sexual act, then perhaps it is her giving the gift of unprotected sex, or making a baby. If it is not marriage that a young woman is waiting for before becoming a mother, then how much difference will a few more years
 - > of waiting really make?"
 - > The Age of Unwed Mothers is a richly detailed, comprehensive review of the current scholarly literature on teen pregnancy. Carefully documented,
 - > it also draws upon interviews with experts in the field, school personnel, social workers, and teen mothers themselves.

- > The report concludes with 16 recommendations for change, in areas ranging
 - > from adoption to Norplant, from what Congress should do to how public schools can both improve educational outcomes for pregnant and parenting students and help to reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy.
 - > The report's first recommendation is that "we retire the term 'teen pregnancy' from our public discourse."
 - > In a section on "School-Age Girls and the Wisdom of Mainstreaming," Gallagher investigates whether current federal law requiring communities to "mainstream" pregnant teens in the public schools is helping or hurting teenage mothers. Pregnant girls appear to perform better academically - and also have less welfare dependence and reduced repeat childbearing -- when they attend separate schools. The pregnant girls themselves often feel more comfortable in separate schools. Yet the current federal mandate for "mainstreaming" interferes with local school districts' efforts to deliver services to pregnant teens more effectively, including experimenting with alternative schools.
 - > Partly a work of scholarship, The Age of Unwed Mothers is also a work of cultural criticism and a passionate call for change. Consider:
 - > "Why should a teenager postpone having a baby? What our society as a whole, and especially our 'teen pregnancy' rhetoric, currently tells these young people-until you reach age 20, having a baby is a huge mistake, as is getting married, but after that, it's up to you -- is not likely to capture their moral imagination. Does it capture yours?"
 - > And: "To a degree that might make many of us uncomfortable, when young women today prefer unwed motherhood over adoption or early marriage, they
 - > have not been ignoring adult counsel. They have been heeding it."
 - > And: "When a teenager is postponing having a baby, what is she waiting for? Having more of our young people answer, 'a good marriage,' should become our highest priority."