

Fewer young men fathering children outside of marriage: CDC

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Rate of first-time dads having child out of wedlock fell from 1980s to 2000s, research shows.

(HealthDay)—Fewer unmarried American men are becoming first-time fathers, U.S. health officials reported Thursday.

Thirty-six percent of first-time [fathers](#) younger than 44 had a child out of wedlock during the first decade of the 2000s, officials said.

"This represents a decline from the previous two decades," said report author Gladys Martinez, of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics.

In the 1980s, she said, 42 percent of first-time fathers were unmarried, as were 40 percent in the 1990s.

The [national survey](#) also found a larger proportion of unmarried first-

time fathers living with the mother and child than in the past.

The report is good news, given prior research indicating that "having a father involved positively with his child benefits the child and the family on a number of outcomes," said Dr. Craig Garfield, an associate professor of pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

"This [benefit] is across the age spectrum," said Garfield, who wasn't involved with the new research. "For infants, having an involved father results in improved breast-feeding initiation and duration, toddlers have improved language development, and teenagers engage in less delinquent behaviors."

The trend largely reflects changing patterns among black fathers, the study authors said.

To gain insight into fatherhood trends over the last 30 years, Martinez sifted through information collected by the National Survey of Family Growth in three time frames: 1980-1989, 1990-1999 and 2000-2009. Surveys involved interviews with men and women between the ages of 15 and 44.

Besides the decline in unmarried first-time fathers over the three decades, the report noted more first births in cohabiting relationships: 24 percent in the 2000s, up from 19 percent in the 1980s.

Martinez reported the trends in the June edition of the CDC's *National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief*.

While no notable drop was seen among unmarried white or Hispanic fathers, the percentage of unmarried black men having kids for the first time dropped from 77 percent during the 1980s to 66 percent during the

2000s, the report said.

First births for black fathers in cohabiting relationships also became more common over time, increasing from 23 percent to nearly one-third.

In the 2000s, unmarried men with a first birth were less likely to be black (21 percent) than Hispanic (33 percent) or white (39 percent), the report said.

The survey also showed that dads in the 2000s who did have a first child outside of marriage tended to be older than their peers during the 1980s and 1990s.

The survey focused on the numbers, and did not set out to explain what is driving the changing trends.

That said, Garfield said future research should focus on the long-term implications of fathering children in a cohabiting, but unmarried, context.

He noted that despite initial intentions to marry eventually, most cohabiting couples never do. And it remains unclear how such relationships might affect child development, he said.

"Nevertheless, from my perspective as a pediatrician working with moms and dads to take care of their [child](#), I am excited by the optimism that new dads bring, married or not, to being involved and participating in the care of their new baby," Garfield said.

More information: Boston Children's Hospital has information for [teen fathers](#).

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