that depressed fertility. Teen childbearing was less often planned and hence less regulated by contraception. Moreover, in times past, an ill-timed pregnancy was routinely followed by marriage. However, in the 1960s, early marriage became increasingly difficult, and its swift demise created a painful dilemma for sexually active teenagers who became unintentionally pregnant.

Up until the 1960s, marriage and childbearing had been tightly linked. Researchers have documented relatively high rates of pre-marital pregnancy throughout American history (Bachu 1999; Cutright and Jaffe 1977; Smith and Hindus 1975). In agricultural communities and in the rapidly urbanizing cities, women often became pregnant in the anticipation that their partner would marry them. “Shotgun weddings” were an integral feature of the courtship system in America. Especially in the middle of the past century, pregnancy propelled many couples into marriage earlier than they otherwise might have wed. The fact that nearly half of all teenagers in the 1950s who married were pregnant at the time (O’Connell and Moore 1980)
Moynihan was incorrect in assuming that the growth of non-marital childbearing was confined largely to young black women. By the end of the twentieth century, it was evident that black women were only at the vanguard of a new pattern of family formation that was being rapidly adopted by all teens and eventually by older couples.

Although many left-leaning scholars excoriated Moynihan for singling out the disintegration of the black family, most accepted the proposition that teenage nonmarital childbearing came at a
twenties. I hoped to get a final reckoning on how the women were doing and at the same time learn the fate of their children as they reached an age when they could be expected to have families or, at least, to be self-supporting. As before, I compared the women with their counterparts in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), a study that has tracked a nationally representative sample of young adults from the late 1970s to the present. The findings strongly reinforced the lessons learned in the previous waves.

Figure 2.1 shows an array of conventional markers of economic and social success reported by the women in the Baltimore Study and by their counterparts in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). Descriptives of the national sample come from the 2004 wave of data collection of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). Sample restricted to black women forty-five years old and older who resided in an urban area. “Young mothers” are those who had their first birth at the age of nineteen or younger; “older mothers” are those who had their first birth when older than nineteen.
between the working poor and welfare poor. These figures suggest that they might not have been doing much better economically had they waited to have their first child until they were in their twenties. The minority who had become welfare dependents differed greatly from the rest of the sample: they were considerably less educated, more often suffered from emotional difficulties, and had a particularly difficult time maintaining stable relationships with men.

The thirty-year follow-up produced some other notable results as well, some of which were foreshadowed in earlier waves of the study. For example, all but a few of the young mothers had discontinued childbearing by their late twenties. Their completed family sizes were only modestly larger than the families of women who began childbearing later in life (see figure 2.1). In addition, the differences in the marital distribution between the two populations were not nearly as great as might have been expected, especially in view of the known link between premarital pregnancy and marital disso-
FIGURE 2.3 Self-Evaluation Over Time: The Well-being of Mothers as They Age from Young Adulthood to Middle Adulthood

Source: Author’s compilation.

Source: Author’s compilation.
stressful events such as the death or incarceration of family members, economic hardship, and substance abuse are all too familiar. Therefore, it is not possible to say for sure from these results whether we would have found any differences in the level of everyday adversities faced by early and later childbearers who came from similar backgrounds. Still, it is important to recognize that however well the teenage mothers did compared with societal or their own expectations, many women in the Baltimore Study were still living close to the margin at midlife, even if they were economically self-sufficient and functioning well socially and psychologically.

Apart from residing in communities that imposed considerable risks on them and their families, the majority of the teen mothers exhibited an extraordinarily high level of life skills, some of which were probably acquired from living a life of adversity. We learned

**FIGURE 2.4 Stressful Life Events for Teenage Mothers, 1995 to 1996, Weighted for Attrition**

![Graph showing various stressful life events for teenage mothers, 1995 to 1996, weighted for attrition.](image)

*Source: Author’s compilation.*
their late twenties, only 59 percent of young men had a high school degree. (If anything, these differences are probably understated, because our retention rate for the males is slightly lower than for the females in the study, and the attrition rates for the parents were a bit higher for the mothers who were not faring as well or who were deceased by the later follow-ups.)

A slightly higher proportion of the daughters than the sons had become parents by their late twenties, and sons and daughters had produced roughly the same number of children. A higher proportion of the daughters than the sons, however, were married or living in consensual unions with their child’s parent. As I reported earlier, almost two-thirds of the daughters and 80 percent of the sons did not become parents while still in their teens. Ten years later, a majority of the males and a substantial minority of the females still had not entered parenthood. Whereas their parents

**FIGURE 3.1 Well-being of the Children of the Baltimore Women, 1995 to 1996**

Source: Author’s compilation.

- Married
- Ever Married
- High School Diploma
- Poor Health
- Health Insurance
- Had Teenage Birth
- Employed Full-time
- Received Welfare in Past Year

Percentage

- Male (N = 110)
- Female (N = 116)
produce more lasting consequences, especially in combination with the absence of a committed and protective male figure.

The origin of the gender differences can probably be traced to several related difficulties that combine to limit the progress of low-income minority males in making a successful transition to adulthood. We know from existing research that low-income males have greater difficulties adjusting to school settings and teachers who may harbor doubts about their abilities and commitment to education. We also know about the influence of neighborhood peer groups—especially in affording opportunities for involvement in crime or with drugs—and the discriminatory treatment of the criminal justice system (Pager and Western 2005a, 2005b). We should probably add to that list of risk factors the difficulty of obtaining gainful employment during adolescence owing to the common fear of employers that minority males may be unreliable or untrustworthy (Holzer and Offner 2001).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3_2.png}
\caption{Negative Outcomes of the Children of the Baltimore Women, 1995}
\end{figure}

\textit{Source:} Author’s compilation.
remained relatively stable, judging from a number of national surveys. Surveys differed somewhat in the samples, the wording of questions, and the method of data collection, but an examination of a number of surveys generally points to a slight rise until the early 1990s in the proportion of women who were nonvirgins, albeit at a much slower pace than the increase in the 1970s and 1980s. Beginning in 1993, there was a more noticeable decline, especially as reported in the school-based survey called the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) funded by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). A closer inspection of the data suggests that the rates did not decline for white and Hispanic females, though they did appear to drop off significantly for black women. Interestingly, the pattern was different among males: their sexual behavior dropped off significantly from the early and late 1990s, as shown in figure 4.1 (Santelli et al. 2000; see also Risman and Schwartz 2002).
The funding of TANF was generous when the legislation was approved because it was based on current caseload levels. As the numbers receiving TANF dropped, there was relatively ample funding to provide the job placement services and child care required to help nonworking mothers transition into the labor force. Further, during the late 1990s the booming economy created an unprecedented number of new jobs, allowing those with limited skills and education to find employment. In short, it was the perfect historical moment to introduce welfare reform.

This much we can say so far. First, the program has been judged a great success by those who wanted to shrink the number of families receiving assistance (Sawhill et al. 2002). Some combination of the bureaucratic hurdles, recipients' fear of exceeding time limits, the robust economy, and the supportive services that many states offered to low-income working parents did change the structure of opportunities for those who might otherwise have begun receiving public assistance in the past. As shown in figure 6.1, the number of women receiving cash assistance plummeted, and declines also

---

**FIGURE 6.1 AFDC/TANF Caseload, 1960 to 2001**