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Roles of Couples' Relationship Skills and Fathers' Employment in Encouraging Marriage

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ROLES OF COUPLES' RELATIONSHIP SKILLS AND FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT IN ENCOURAGING MARRIAGE

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This paper examines the factors that are most likely to contribute to healthy marriages among low-income couples. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing survey, we analyzed couples who were unmarried at the time of their child's birth, but who subsequently married within the first year after that birth.

The analysis revealed four factors that were significant predictors of subsequent marriage among couples who were unmarried at the time of their child's birth. These factors were:

- Parental marital attitudes and relationship skills;
- Mother's race;
- Mother's age (25 or older); and,
- Father's employment.

Neither the annual earnings nor education level of mothers or fathers were found to be significant predictors of post-birth marriage among unmarried parents.

The analysis also indicates that improving paternal employment alone would have, at best, a modest impact on marriage. Increasing fathers' employment, so that all fathers were currently employed and worked 52 weeks per year, would increase the marriage rate among unmarried couples only slightly; from a base rate of 11.3 percent up to 13.2 percent.

The Fragile Families data indicate that the marital attitudes and relationship skills of a couple play an important role in encouraging marriage. An 11-point scale for each parent was devised, measuring attitudes toward marriage, gender trust, supportiveness, and conflict in the relationship. An upward shift of one point for each parent on this scale doubled a couple's probability of marriage.

The analysis suggests that healthy marriage programs should put their primary emphasis on improving couples' attitudes and relationship skills. Effective job training and employment services can also play a positive role in encouraging healthy marriage, but job training should play an ancillary and supportive—rather than a dominant—role in marriage promotion programs.

BACKGROUND

Each year, one in three U.S. children is born out of wedlock. Children born and raised without married fathers in the home are more likely to suffer from a wide array of social maladies, such as increased poverty, welfare dependence, more emotional and behavioral problems, increased school failure, and expanded criminal activity. In recent years, a new consensus has emerged among both liberals and conservatives on the benefits of marriage to children, adults, and society, and on the need for government to develop policies to promote healthy marriage.

A strong policy to promote healthy marriage would have overlapping components: enhancing the relationships of married couples; reducing divorce; reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing; and promoting healthy marriage among unmarried parents. Of these, promoting marriage among unmarried parents (generally termed "fragile fami-

lies") at the "magic moment" of a child's birth (or shortly thereafter) has drawn, by far, the most attention.

Out-of-wedlock childbearing has increased dramatically during the last four decades, rising from 7 percent of all births in the mid-1960s to 34 percent today.[1] There are four broad theories to explain the rise in out-of-wedlock childbearing (or the share of parents who are not married at the time of a child's birth). These theories focus on the role of:

Male Wages and Employment. It is often argued that the decline in the earnings and employment of low-skill fathers has made them less attractive and reliable as husbands and breadwinners. This, in turn, has led an increasing share of women to devalue marriage as a support to childrearing, and to opt for single parenthood.

Welfare Penalties Against Marriage. All means-tested benefit programs inherently penalize marriage among low-income parents by ensuring that a mother will receive higher benefits if she does not have an employed husband or male partner in the home. Many argue that the anti-marriage features of welfare have strongly contributed to non-marriage among low-skill parents.

Cultural Values and Norms. The last four decades have seen dramatic changes in cultural norms and values concerning non-marital sex, the importance of marriage, maternal employment, co-habitation, and out-of-wedlock childbearing. In large sub-classes within the U.S., marriage is no longer seen as an important prerequisite to childbearing. For a large portion of the population, the father's expected role within the family has become severely attenuated, and any link between marriage and childrearing has become tenuous. It seems likely that changes in cultural values and norms have had a significant effect on individual attitudes and behavior.

Individual Skills and Attitudes. Individual skills and attitudes can play an important role in marriage formation and stability. Critical attitudes and skills can include views on the importance of marriage, life-planning skills, the willingness to defer gratification, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, fidelity, and the capacity to develop trust and commitment. Education and counseling programs to alter attitudes and improve skills can, potentially, play an important role in increasing healthy marriage.

It is likely that each of these four factors has played a role in the current high level of non-marriage among parents. However, in shaping policies to promote healthy marriage, it is important to understand the relative weight of each factor in encouraging out-of-wedlock childbearing. Which of these factors, if adjusted, is likely to have the largest impact on encouraging non-married parents or "fragile families" to become and remain married?

PRESENT ANALYSIS

This paper uses data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing survey to assess the factors contributing to marriage. The Fragile Families survey is a nationally representative sample of couples in large cities at the point of a child's birth. Roughly 40 percent of these couples were unmarried at the time of their child's birth. The survey also provides follow-up data showing that among those couples who were unmarried at the time of their child's birth, roughly 11 percent had married one year later. This paper will examine the factors that contributed to marriage among unmarried couples during the one-year follow-up period, or the year subsequent to their child's birth.

Examination of "fragile families" (or couples who are not married at the time of their child's birth) is especially important because they are likely to be a primary intervention group of any healthy marriage initiative. Our paper will focus on comparing the relative role of: 1) male employment and earnings and 2) couples' marital attitudes and skills in fostering marriage among this group. What are the

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1. In 1964, for example, 274,000 children were born to unwed parents out of a total of just over 4 million born (about 6.8 percent). In 2002, 1.37 million illegitimate children were born out of a total of just over 4 million (about 34.0 percent). See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970,* Series B 1-4, pg. 49, and B 28-35, p. 52 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Births: Final Data for 2002," National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 52, No. 10, Tables 15 and 17, December 17, 2003, at *www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr52/nvsr52_10.pdf*.

roles of economics and attitudes in promoting marriage among fragile families?

WHAT VARIABLES AFFECT MARRIAGE?

In order to assess the factors that are important in the future marriage of unwed parents, this analysis looks at the Fragile Families couples who were not married at the time of their child's birth to determine what factors help explain why some couples got married within one year of the birth and why other couples did not. A set of eight logistic regression models was used for this purpose. Many of the explanatory factors used in these models are borrowed from previous academic research using the Fragile Families data.[2]

The independent variables in these models include:

- *Father's annual earnings* (expressed in thousands of dollars). Do men with higher earnings get married more often than those with lower earnings?

- *Mother's annual earnings* (expressed in thousands of dollars). Do women with higher earnings get married more often than those with lower earnings?

- *Race*. Is there a difference in marriage rates across racial lines?

- *Parents of different races*. Do marriage rates change if the parents are of different races?

- *Father's education*. Are fathers with more education more likely to marry?

- *Mother's education*. Are mothers with more education more likely to marry?

- *Mother's and father's health*. This variable is a self-evaluated, five-point health scale, rating health from low (1) to high (5). It might be reasonably theorized that healthier individuals may be more predisposed toward marriage.

- *Mother's age*. Older individuals may be more likely to marry.

- *Couple has other children*. Has the couple had other children together in the past? If the couple has already had children together, it might make them more likely to marry.

- *Mother has had a child with another man*. If there are children in the home who are not the biological offspring of the current father, it might make marriage less likely.

- *Physical and drug/alcohol abuse*. Does such discord decrease the probability of future marriage?

- *Religious observance*. This scale variable reports the level of religious attendance and worship (without regard to the specific denomination), from never (1) to weekly (5). More religious parents may be more predisposed toward marriage.

- *Mother's marriage attitudes and relationship skills*. This variable measures the mother's attitudes about marriage and the quality of her interactions with the father on an 11-point scale. Do pro-marriage attitudes and relationship skills increase the probability of marriage?

- *Father's marriage attitudes and relationship skills*. This variable measures the father's attitudes about marriage and the quality of his interactions with the mother on an 11-point scale. Do pro-marriage attitudes and relationship skills increase the probability of marriage?

The dependent variable, again, is a binary (yes/no) variable about whether or not the single parents became married within roughly a year of their baby's birth. This period around the time of a child's birth is typically known as the "magic moment" when it is most likely that single parents will get married to each other.[3]

We first examined the impact of these variables on marriage in the logistic regression analysis shown as Model I in Appendix 1A. Among the variables examined, only the following were found to be significant:

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2. Marcia Carlson, Sara McLanahan, and Paula England, "Union Formation in Fragile Families" Center for Research on Child Wellbeing Working Paper No. 01–06–FF, February 2004, at *crcw.princeton.edu/workingpapers/WP01-06-FF-Carlson.pdf* (October 18, 2004). Generally speaking, the methodology used in this analysis is similar to the one used in the Carlson, McLanahan, and England paper.

3. Princeton University family researcher Sara McLanahan once commented, "The birth of a child is a magic moment. At the time of the birth, parents are highly motivated to make a strong family and provide for their children." See Princeton Alumni News, February 12, 2002 at *www.princeton.edu/~paw/archive_new/PAW02-03/09-0212/moment.html* (October 18, 2004).

- Mother's race;
- Mother's age (25 or older);
- Mother's eleven-point Marital Attitude and Skills Scale; and,
- Father's eleven-point Marital Attitude and Skills Scale.

Critically, neither education nor annual earnings were significant for mothers *or* fathers.
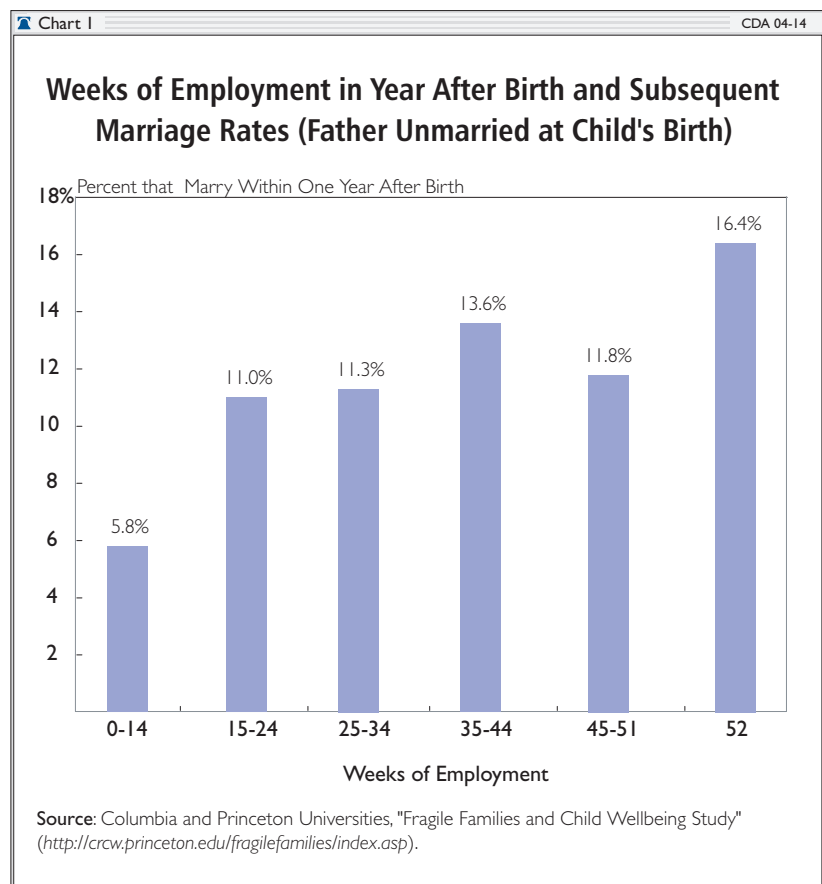
In Model II (shown in Appendix 1A), we removed most insignificant variables, but retained the education and income variables for both parents. Again, race, age of mother (over 25), and parental attitudes were found to be significant. Parental education and incomes remained insignificant and low in power.

Because education and income are correlated, it is possible that the presence of both variables in the regression masks their significance. To test for this possibility, in Model III we omitted the mother's and father's income variables but retained the education variable. Little changed in the regression—the education variables remained insignificant. In Model IV, we reversed this process, retaining the income variables while omitting the education variables. Again, little changed in the regression—the variables race, age, and parental attitudes remained significant, while father's income and mother's income remained insignificant and nearly flat.

FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT AND MARRIAGE

Although male annual income does not appear to contribute to marriage among fragile families, it is possible that male employment does. It may be that the stability of a father's employment, rather than his income *per se* creates, over time, a sense of confidence that facilitates marriage.

As Chart 1 shows, fathers in fragile families who maintained 52 weeks of employment during the year following a child's birth were more likely to marry. We tried several variables to test the impact

Chart 1 CDA 04-14

Weeks of Employment in Year After Birth and Subsequent Marriage Rates (Father Unmarried at Child's Birth)

Percent that Marry Within One Year After Birth

Weeks of Employment	Percent
0-14	5.8%
15-24	11.0%
25-34	11.3%
35-44	13.6%
45-51	11.8%
52	16.4%

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

of paternal employment on marriage among fragile families: Whether a father was employed at the time of a child's birth was found to be insignificant, as was unemployment during the year after birth.

However, father's employment at the time of the one-year follow-up interview was found to have a significant and robust link to marriage. This finding agrees with Mincy and Dupree.[4] At first glance, the fact that father's employment at the time of birth fails to predict subsequent marriage, while employment one year after the birth is strongly linked to marriage, appears puzzling. It may be that a pattern of improvement in the father's employment instills confidence that fosters marriage.

Through trial and error, we developed a three-part set of dummy variables that best explained the role of paternal employment in post-birth marriage rates. These variables were:

Currently Employed: 52 Weeks. These fathers were employed at the one-year follow up and

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4. Ronald B. Mincy and Allen T. Dupree, "Welfare, Child Support and Family Formation," *Children and Youth Services Review,* Vol. 23, No. 6–7 (2001), pp. 577–601.

were employed for 52 weeks in the year after their child's birth.

Currently Employed: Less than 52 Weeks. These fathers were employed at the one-year follow up survey, but had worked less than 52 weeks in the year after their child's birth.

Not Currently Employed. These fathers were unemployed at the time of the one-year follow up survey.

The effects of these variables are shown in Appendix 1B, which reproduces the first four models in Appendix 1A, except that the fathers' income variable has been replaced by the fathers' employment variable. The findings in Appendix 1B replicate those in the models in Appendix 1A, except that the paternal employment variables remain significant as predictors in all four models. Overall, we found five variables to be significant in explaining marriage within one year after a child's birth. These were:
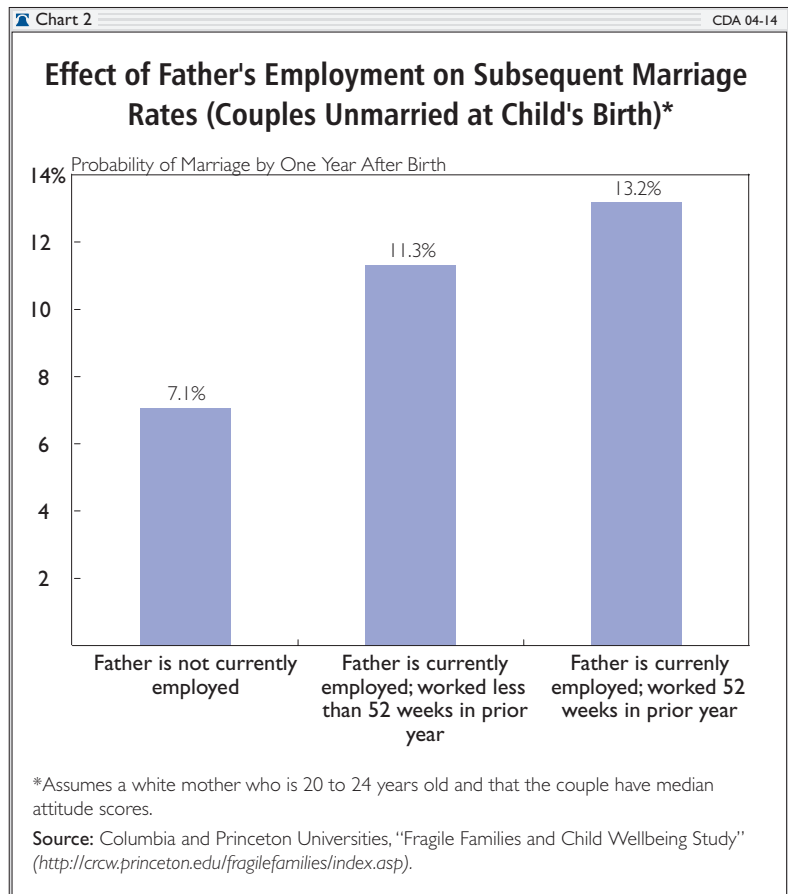
- Father's employment;
- Mother's race;
- Mother's age (25 and over);
- Father's marital attitudes and relationship skills; and
- Mother's marital attitudes and relationship skills.

The final regression using these variables is shown in Appendix 1C.
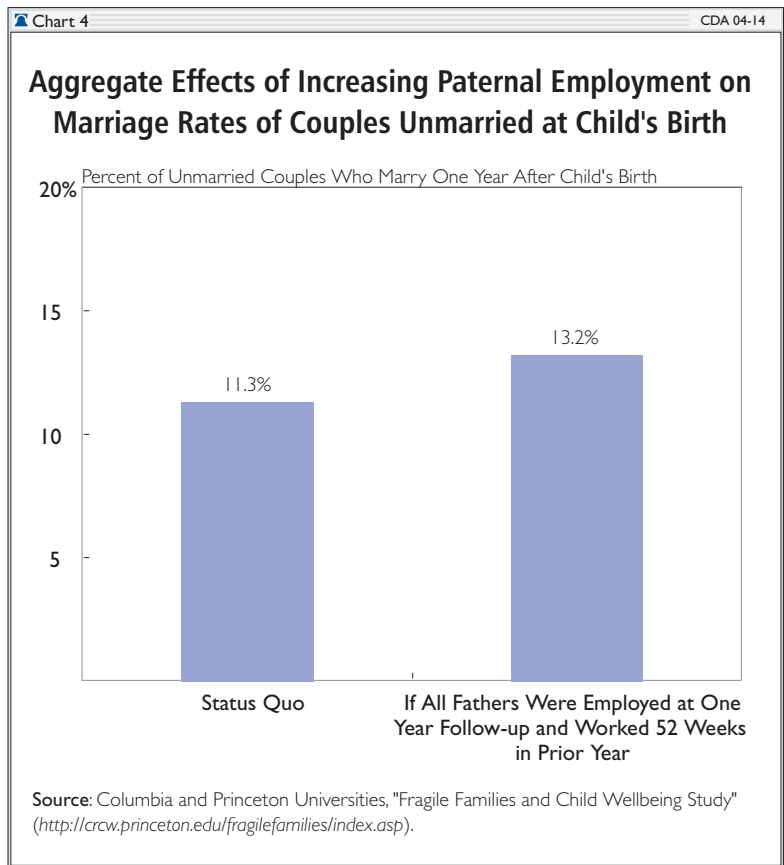
THE IMPACT OF FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT

The effects of fathers' employment on marriage in the year after a child's birth are summarized in Chart 2. The chart shows that, holding race, mothers' age, and parental attitudes constant, a father who was employed at the follow-up survey and who had maintained employment during the 52 weeks after his child's birth was almost twice as likely to marry the child's mother as was a father who was unemployed at the one-year follow-up. Some 13 percent of employed fathers became married compared to 7 percent of those who were not employed.

Although doubling the marriage rate appears to be a strong effect, two caveats must be applied. First, because the marriage rate of unemployed

Chart 2   CDA 04-14

Effect of Father's Employment on Subsequent Marriage Rates (Couples Unmarried at Child's Birth)*

Probability of Marriage by One Year After Birth

*Assumes a white mother who is 20 to 24 years old and that the couple have median attitude scores.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" *(http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp).*

fathers was only 7 percent, doubling that rate yields only modest gains. Second, as Chart 3 shows, roughly three-quarters of the fathers who were unmarried at the time of the birth were employed at the one-year follow-up, and nearly half had maintained employment for a full 52 weeks in the year after the birth. As a consequence, increases in employment would affect less than half of all the unmarried fathers, diminishing the potential impact of enhanced employment on the overall marriage rate.

This is shown is Chart 4, which simulates the effects of increased male employment. The chart shows the projected marriage rate if all the fathers who were unmarried at the time of the birth had maintained employment for a full 52 weeks in the year after the birth and were still employed at the follow-up survey. Under these conditions, the overall marriage rate at one year after the child's birth would rise by roughly two percentage points—from 11.3 percent to 13.2 percent. This suggests that increases in employment alone are not likely to have an appreciable effect in expanding marriage among fragile families.

Chart 3   CDA 04-14

Employment of Fathers One Year After Child's Birth*

Not Currently Employed

27.4%

Currently Employed, Worked 52 Weeks in Last Year

47.3%

25.3%

Currently Employed, Worked Less Than 52 Weeks in Last Year

*Fathers who were not married at the time of their child's birth

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

Chart 4   CDA 04-14

Aggregate Effects of Increasing Paternal Employment on Marriage Rates of Couples Unmarried at Child's Birth

Percent of Unmarried Couples Who Marry One Year After Child's Birth

20%

15

13.2%

11.3%

10

5

Status Quo

If All Fathers Were Employed at One Year Follow-up and Worked 52 Weeks in Prior Year

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

PARENTAL MARITAL ATTITUDES AND RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

All eight regression models in Appendices 1A and 1B show that parental attitudes and relationship skills are strong and significant predictors of marriage. The attitude and skill scores for the mothers and fathers are based on 14 questions taken from the baseline survey. The questions measure four different factors:[5]

- *Positive attitudes toward marriage.* These questions measure the extent to which the parent believes marriage is important and beneficial for children and adults.

- *Gender trust.* These questions measure the degree to which the individual believes the opposite gender is exploitative and unfaithful.

- *Support in the relationship.* These questions measure how much affection, support, and encouragement individuals receive from their partners.

- *Conflict in the relationship.* These questions measure the extent of disagreement and conflict in a relationship.

The exact questions used for the scale are shown in Appendix 1D. To compose an overall attitude and skill score for each parent, an average score for the questions under each factor was determined. The average scores for the four factors were then summed. This procedure yielded a possible range of scores (for each parent) from 4 to 14. For purposes of simplicity, the summary scores were recalibrated to a scale of 1 to 11.

Thus, each parent has a potential attitude score ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 11. The median score of mothers who were not married at the time of their children's birth was 7.8 with a standard deviation of 1.15. The median score of fathers who were not married at the time of their child's birth was 8.2 with a standard deviation of 1.15. The scores for the mothers and fathers can be added to produce a joint couple score ranging from 2 to 22. The median joint couple score for parents who were not married at the time of their child's birth was 16.0 with a standard deviation of 1.81.

Each of the regressions in Appendices 1A, 1B, and 1C shows that the mother's attitude and skill score has a greater impact on marriage than the father's. However, this is misleading because the mother's responses to the supportiveness questions, in fact, refer to the father's behavior—and vice versa. To understand marital behavior, it is best to look at the mothers' and fathers' scores in tandem.
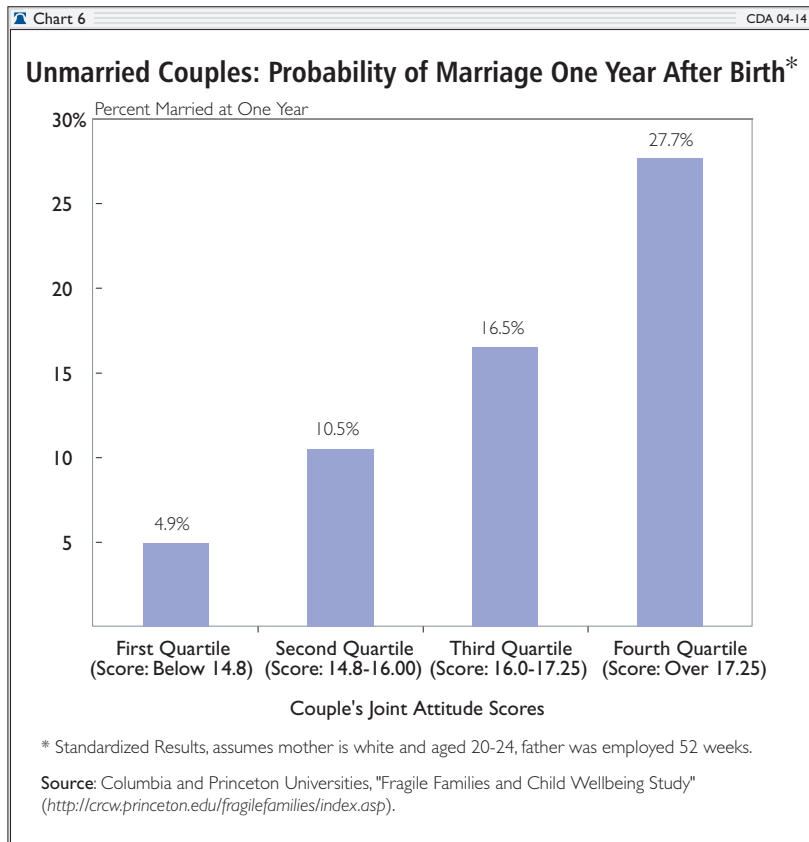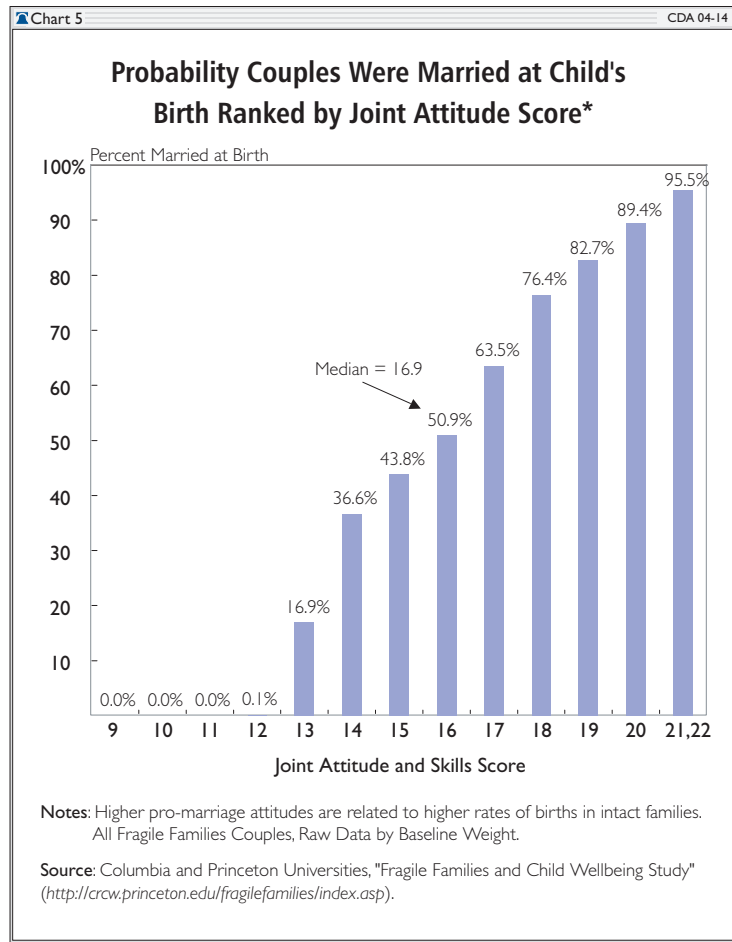
EFFECT OF ATTITUDE AND SKILLS ON MARRIAGE

A couple's attitude and skills score is highly correlated with marriage rates. Chart 5 shows data for all the couples in the Fragile Families survey, both those who were married at the time of their child's birth and those who were not. The chart shows the percent of couples at each joint-score level (on a scale of 2 to 22) who were married when their child was born.[6] The higher a couple's score on the attitude and skills scale, the greater the likelihood that they were married at the time of their child's birth. Virtually none of the couples with joint scores below 14 were married at the time of their child's birth. By contrast, over 80 percent of couples with scores above 18 were married at the time of their child's birth.

Chart 6 shows that this linkage also obtains for unmarried couples during the period after a child is born out of wedlock. Among couples who were not married at their child's birth, higher attitude and skill scores lead to a higher probability of marriage during the first year after birth. Among the one-quarter of couples with the lowest attitude and skills scores, the predicted rate of marriage is only 4.9 percent. Among the one-quarter of couples with the strongest scores, 27.7 percent were likely to marry.[7]

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5. These factors are taken from Marcia Carlson, Irwin Garfinkel, Sara McLanahan, Ronald Mincy, and Wendell Primus, "The Effects of Welfare and Child Support Policies on Union Formation" Center for Research on Child Wellbeing Working Paper No. 02–10–FF, October 2003 at *crcw.princeton.edu/workingpapers/WP02-10-FF-Carlson.pdf* (October 18, 2004).

6. The data in Chart 5 are raw data using base year weights.

7. The figures in Chart 6 are based on the regression model in Appendix 1C, assuming the mother is white and 20 to 24 years old, and the father was employed for the last 52 weeks.

Chart 5   CDA 04-14

Probability Couples Were Married at Child's Birth Ranked by Joint Attitude Score*

Percent Married at Birth

Median = 16.9

Score	Percent
9	0.0%
10	0.0%
11	0.0%
12	0.1%
13	16.9%
14	36.6%
15	43.8%
16	50.9%
17	63.5%
18	76.4%
19	82.7%
20	89.4%
21,22	95.5%

Joint Attitude and Skills Score

Notes: Higher pro-marriage attitudes are related to higher rates of births in intact families. All Fragile Families Couples, Raw Data by Baseline Weight.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

Chart 6   CDA 04-14

Unmarried Couples: Probability of Marriage One Year After Birth*

Percent Married at One Year

Quartile	Percent
First Quartile (Score: Below 14.8)	4.9%
Second Quartile (Score: 14.8-16.00)	10.5%
Third Quartile (Score: 16.0-17.25)	16.5%
Fourth Quartile (Score: Over 17.25)	27.7%

Couple's Joint Attitude Scores

* Standardized Results, assumes mother is white and aged 20-24, father was employed 52 weeks.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

THE IMPACT OF IMPROVING ATTITUDES AND SKILLS ON MARRIAGE

Chart 7 shows the potential effect of improving attitudes and skills on marriage. Under current circumstances, 11.3 percent of couples that were unmarried at their child's birth do marry within the subsequent year. Raising each couple's attitude and skills score by two points (on a scale of 2 to 22) would nearly double the probability of marriage, raising it to 21.9 percent.[8]

Marital attitudes and skills will play an increasingly prominent role in debates about marriage policy. The healthy marriage programs contained in both the House and Senate welfare reform bills direct funds toward marriage skills education programs. These programs, in turn, will be specifically designed to address many of the relationship issues measured in the attitude and skill scales used in this paper.

Our current knowledge concerning the capacity of marriage education programs to greatly improve attitudes and skills in target populations is limited.[9] It is unclear to what extent such attitudes and behaviors are rigid or malleable. However, on the surface, at least, shifting attitude scores does not appear difficult. In general, a one point shift in a parent's attitude score can be achieved by shifting the intensity of response to a few of the 14 questions listed in Appendix 1D. For example, a one-point rise in a parent's attitude score will occur if the parent states that he or she "strongly agrees" (rather than just "agrees") with the following two statements:

- "It is better for a couple to get married than to just live together," and,

- "It is better for children if their parents are married."

COMPARING THE EFFECTS OF FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT AND PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND SKILLS ON MARRIAGE

The foregoing discussion has indicated that changes in a couple's marriage attitudes and relationship skills are likely to have a far greater effect on increasing marriage than are changes in paternal employment. This is demonstrated in Chart 8. Under status quo conditions, 11.3 percent of unmarried parents will marry during the first year after their child's birth. If all unmarried fathers had maintained employment for the first 52 weeks after their child's birth, the marriage rate one year after the birth would have risen to 13.2 percent.
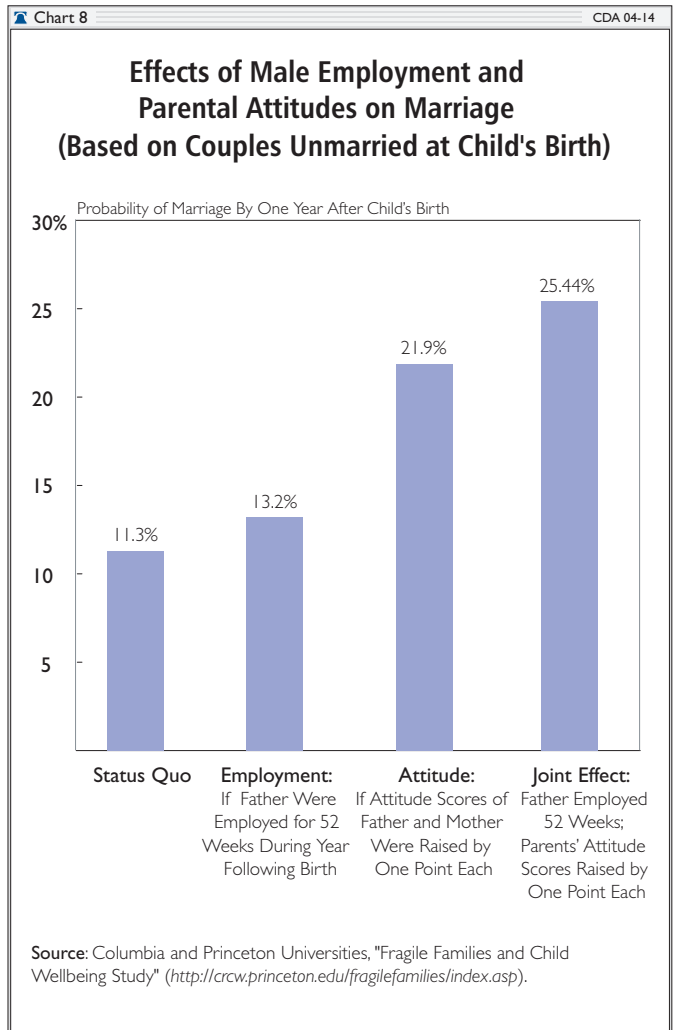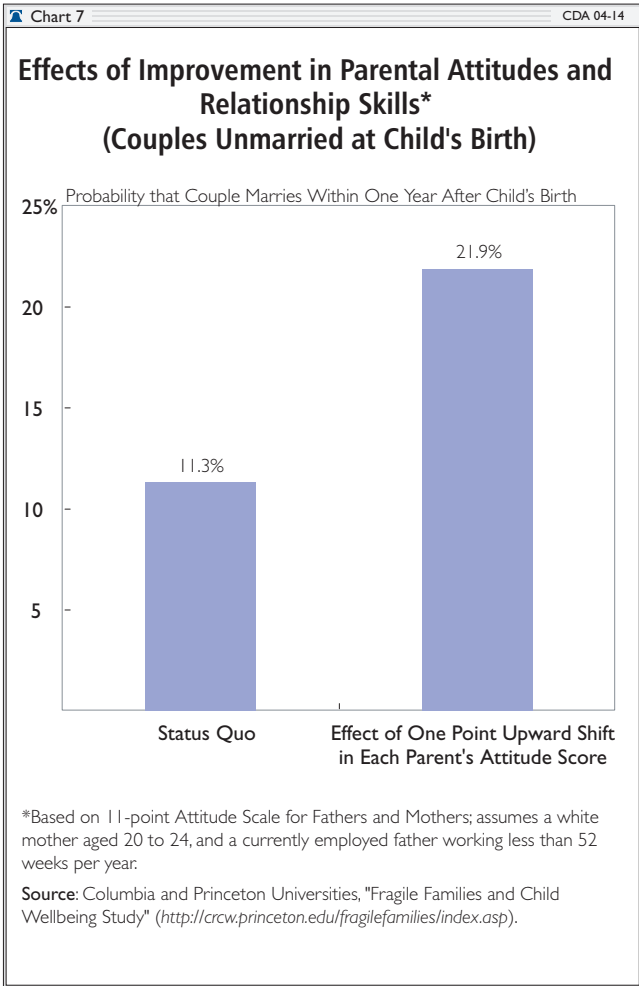
By contrast, if paternal employment remained unchanged, but each parent had a one-point increase in their attitudes and skills score, the marriage rate would rise to 21.9 percent. If improvements in attitudes and increases in employment were combined, the effect on marriage would be somewhat stronger. If all fathers maintained full employment and each parent had a one point upward shift in his or her attitude score, the marriage rate in the group as a whole would be expected to rise to 25.1 percent.

TARGETING HEALTHY MARRIAGE SERVICES

Because future healthy marriage funds will be quite limited, it is important that programs be targeted toward couples that have reasonable prospects for entering and sustaining marriage. Clearly, services provided to couples with poor attitude scores (below a joint score of 16) are unlikely to lead to many marriages, healthy or otherwise. By contrast, providing marriage skills training to unmarried couples with reasonably strong initial attitudes (above a joint score of 16) may substantially increase marriage rates and improve relationship quality.

In some cases, effective employment services will also play a useful role with this group. If a couple has positive marital attitudes and decent relationship skills, but the father has difficulty sustaining work, increases in his employment may substantially improve the couple's marital prospects. However, providing job training across the board to all unmarried parents is unlikely to have a discernable impact on marriage rates.

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8. The figures in Chart 7 are based on the regression model in Appendix 1C, assuming the mother is white and 20 to 24 years old, and the father is currently employed but worked for less than 52 weeks in the last year.

9. Marriage education programs have been shown to lead to significant changes in couples' attitudes and behaviors. However, the connection between the attitude and skills scale used in this paper and the scales used in prior evaluations of marriage education is uncertain. For evidence on the effectiveness of marriage education programs, see Patrick F. Fagan, Robert W. Patterson, and Robert E. Rector, "Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence that Marriage Education Works," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1606, October 25, 2002, at *www.heritage.org/Research/Welfare/bg1606.cfm*.

Chart 7   CDA 04-14

Effects of Improvement in Parental Attitudes and Relationship Skills*
(Couples Unmarried at Child's Birth)

Probability that Couple Marries Within One Year After Child's Birth

Status Quo — 11.3%

Effect of One Point Upward Shift in Each Parent's Attitude Score — 21.9%

*Based on 11-point Attitude Scale for Fathers and Mothers; assumes a white mother aged 20 to 24, and a currently employed father working less than 52 weeks per year.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

Chart 8   CDA 04-14

Effects of Male Employment and Parental Attitudes on Marriage
(Based on Couples Unmarried at Child's Birth)

Probability of Marriage By One Year After Child's Birth

Status Quo — 11.3%

Employment: If Father Were Employed for 52 Weeks During Year Following Birth — 13.2%

Attitude: If Attitude Scores of Father and Mother Were Raised by One Point Each — 21.9%

Joint Effect: Father Employed 52 Weeks; Parents' Attitude Scores Raised by One Point Each — 25.44%

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

THE ROLE OF JOB TRAINING IN HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROMOTION

The preceding analysis shows that job-training programs are likely to have a modest effect in increasing marriage among non-married parents. Marriage programs that place a dominant focus on providing job training to non-married fathers are unlikely to be successful. There are four reasons why a primary focus on job training is inappropriate as a strategy for promoting healthy marriage:

1. As noted, training and counseling to improve attitudes toward marriage and relationship skills are likely to be more effective in promoting marriage. In part, this is due to the fact that increasing paternal employment will be important only for a minority of unmarried fathers, whereas improvements in relationship attitudes and skills would have a beneficial effect on all unmarried couples.

2. The federal government has conducted extensive job training programs for 40 years. The impact of these programs on employment and wages has been modest at best. Pinning hopes for promoting healthy marriage on old-style programs with mediocre track records seems to be an unwise strategy.

3. The federal government already spends around $6 billion per year on job training. Piling additional funding on top of this sum is unlikely to accomplish much. To the extent that job training would be a useful support to marriage promotion, the best strategy would be to re-target existing job training funds for this purpose rather than to divert limited funds available for marriage skills education into job training programs that are already amply funded.

4. In general, marriage skills training per couple will be far less expensive than job training. Therefore, given limited funds, a marriage program with a focus on job training will reach far fewer couples than a program focused on marriage and relationship education.

Promoting healthy marriage is a new policy goal. Meeting this goal will require developing entirely new programs, rather than re-treading old job training programs, which were never developed to promote marriage in the first place. The analysis presented here suggests that marriage promotion programs should focus on providing marriage education with the aim of improving couples' attitudes and relationship skills.

This does not mean that effective job training and related employment services cannot play a meaningful role in marriage promotion. In some situations, helping a father maintain steady employment could greatly facilitate a couple's marriage. Overall, however, job training and employment services should play an ancillary and supportive—rather than a dominant—role in marriage promotion.

IS THE GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?

In the preceding analysis we have outlined the changes in attitudes and employment that could potentially lead to a doubling of the marriage rate among currently unmarried fragile families. On the one hand, doubling marriage rates sounds impressive. On the other hand, because the base marriage rate among these couples is low (around 11 percent in the first year after the child's birth), even if the rate were doubled, most couples would be unaffected. If the upper boundary for subsequent marriage among parents who have non-marital births is really around 20 percent, this could be judged a cause for pessimism.

For a number of reasons, we feel this pessimistic interpretation is unwarranted. First, if the post-birth marriage rate among unmarried parents were raised from 11 percent to 22 percent, roughly 400,000 children would be affected over the course of a decade. This would be a notable policy success. Second, without intervention, a number of unmarried couples will marry in the second and third years after their child's birth. Presumably, pro-marriage services could raise the marriage rates in these succeeding years as well, thereby raising the overall marriage rate well above the first-year figure. Third, we currently do not know how much marriage skills training can shift attitudes in the target population: The actual changes could be considerably greater than the one-point shifts described in this paper. Finally, an effective healthy marriage policy will target not merely unmarried parents at the time of their child's birth, but many other groups as well. These additional groups may, in fact, be better candidates for healthy marriage promotion.

A BROADER VIEW OF HEALTHY MARRIAGE PROMOTION

Policy discussions about how to promote healthy marriage are of very recent origin. Much of the discussion to date, has focused on "fragile families" at the "magic moment" of a child's birth (i.e., unmarried couples at the time of, or shortly after, their child's birth). This focus has been reasonable given the abundant, and often surprising, data about these couples provided by the Fragile Families survey. The child's birth also provides social service agencies easy access to nearly all low-income mothers. Thus, the maternity ward seems to be an excellent venue for beginning an intervention.

Although parents who are unmarried at the time of a child's birth should be an important target group in any healthy marriage initiative, there are reasons to believe that these parents are not necessarily the ideal candidates for marriage programs, and that the "magic moment" of birth, while important, may not be the optimum point for initiating an intervention.

A serious pro-marriage initiative would target a broader array of groups in a variety of venues. It should include:

- *Education* about the value of marriage and life-skills planning for high school students who are at risk of out-of-wedlock childbearing;

- *Marriage skills training* for low-income married couples at the time of a child's birth. Childbirth places considerable strain on relationships and this can lead to divorce. It is possible that lower-income married couples could benefit from pro-marriage services as much or more than unmarried parents;

- *Pre-marital counseling programs* for engaged couples and marriage enrichment programs for married couples. These programs have potential to reduce future divorce. While it would not be necessary for the government to broadly subsidize middle-class use of these programs, government funds should be used as a catalyst to promote awareness and make such programs more widely available; and

- *Marriage and relationship skills training* for young unmarried adults prior to a child's conception.

It is clear that many unmarried, new parents are not well prepared for either marriage or parenthood. There is widespread agreement that the best point of intervention with these young couples would have been prior to their child's conception, rather than after the child's birth. However, while the government has virtually guaranteed access to low-income mothers at the time of birth, contact with young, low-income adults at an earlier stage is commonly thought to be difficult or impossible.

In fact, this perception may be erroneous. The federal government currently funds some 4,700 birth control clinics through the Title X program. These clinics provide birth control to 4.4 million low-income persons each year—most of which are young adult women. Many of the clientele of these clinics will become members of the "fragile families" of the future.

In addition to birth control, it should be relatively simple for these clinics to offer referrals to programs providing life-planning, marriage, and relationship training to those who are interested. The goal of such programs would be to encourage young adult women to delay childbirth and to develop stable marital relationships before bringing children into the world. The potential for outreach through the Title X clinics may actually be greater than through maternity wards. Expanding healthy marriage services to cover points prior to a child's conception may considerably increase the effectiveness of future programs.

CONCLUSION

For 40 years, the attitude of the welfare system toward marriage has ranged from indifference to hostility. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. An increased recognition of the importance of marriage should lead to policies to help couples, who are interested, enter into and sustain healthy marriages. Success in this endeavor will entail new and different policies, rather than a continuation of old programs that had only a marginal relationship to marriage in the first place.

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Model Results

Dependent Variable: Married One-Year Post-Birth of Child

Independent Variables:	Model I Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.	Model II Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.	Model III Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.	Model IV Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.
Mother's Annual Earnings ($1000s)	1.0074	0.688		1.0078	0.774					1.0093	1.171	
Father's Annual Earnings ($1000s)	0.9968	0.386		0.9964	0.496					0.9973	0.292	
Mother's Race, White Non-Hispanic	2.9452	24.44	***	2.6574	22.75	***	2.7100	25.69	***	2.6665	22.98	***
Mother's Race, Other Non-Hispanic	3.0652	6.350	**	2.7386	5.637	**	3.0422	8.469	***	2.7410	5.693	**
Mother's Race, Hispanic (ref=Black Non-Hispanic)	2.8234	28.20	***	2.8810	31.31	***	2.7456	31.88	***	2.8276	31.82	***
Mother Is a High School Graduate	1.1860	0.677		1.1821	0.685		1.2227	1.106				
Mother Has Some College (ref=HS Dropout)	1.0177	0.006		1.0566	0.060		1.1435	0.405				
Father Is a High School Graduate	0.8692	0.498		0.8984	0.303		0.9290	0.161				
Father Has Some College (ref=HS Dropout)	1.1249	0.270		1.1628	0.463		1.1992	0.753				
Parents Are of Different Race	0.8762	0.333										
Mother's Age: 20-24	1.0725	0.089		1.0833	0.124		1.1110	0.247		1.0944	0.161	
Mother's Age: 25+ (ref: Less than 20)	1.9804	6.977	***	2.0334	9.162	***	2.0774	11.78	***	2.0746	10.06	***
Mother's Health Score (1-5)	0.9445	0.439										
Father's Health Score (1-5)	1.0079	0.008										
Mother and Father Have Other Children Together	1.0991	0.282										
Mother Has Other Child	0.9025	0.334										
Father Abuses Mother	0.9180	0.023										
Mother Abuses Father	0.7251	1.356										
Mother's Religious Attendance (1=not at all, 5=weekly)	1.1585	5.035	**									
Father's Religious Attendance (1=not at all, 5=weekly)	1.1095	2.464										
Mother Has Drug/Alcohol Problems	0.6060	0.815										
Father Has Drug/Alcohol Problems	0.7730	0.270										
Mother's Attitude Scale (11 point)	1.6440	36.26	***	1.7351	47.72	***	1.7828	58.78	***	1.7375	48.39	***
Father's Attitude Scale (11 point)	1.2390	7.621	***	1.2811	11.01	***	1.2228	8.132	***	1.2844	11.29	***
Constant	0.0000	87.66	***	0.0000	113.1	***	0.0000	122.9	***	0.0000	114.1	***

* Significant at the 90 percent level
** Significant at the 95 percent level
*** Significant at the 99+ percent level

Default is a child born to a teenage mother whose parents are both black, high school dropouts who do not have other children together and do not have abuse or drug/alcohol problems.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

Model Results

Dependent Variable: Married One-Year Post-Birth of Child

Independent Variables:	Model V Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.	Model VI Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.	Model VII Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.	Model VIII Odds Ratio	Wald	Sig.
Father Currently Employed, Worked 52 Weeks Last Year	1.9270	6.966	***	1.9460	7.384	***				1.9370	7.365	***
Father Currently Employed, Worked Less Than 52 Weeks Last Year	1.7960	4.659	**	1.7680	4.518	**				1.7770	4.644	**
Mother's Annual Income ($1000s)	1.0010	0.011		1.0010	0.003					1.0000	0.001	
Mother's Race, White Non-Hispanic	2.5920	17.71	***	2.3640	16.36	***	2.7100	25.69	***	2.3750	16.60	***
Mother's Race, Other Non-Hispanic	2.6500	4.254	**	2.3540	3.584	*	3.0420	8.469	***	2.3260	3.503	*
Mother's Race, Hispanic (ref=Black Non-Hispanic)	2.4920	19.46	***	2.5160	21.23	***	2.7460	31.88	***	2.5320	22.93	***
Mother Is a High School Graduate	1.1690	0.518		1.1810	0.618		1.2230	1.106				
Mother Has Some College (ref=HS Dropout)	0.9040	0.166		0.9550	0.038		1.1430	0.405				
Father Is a High School Graduate	0.8130	0.980		0.8280	0.844		0.9290	0.161				
Father Has Some College (ref=HS Dropout)	1.0110	0.002		1.0380	0.026		1.1990	0.753				
Parents Are of Different Race	0.9200	0.120										
Mother's Age: 20-24	1.1950	0.531		1.2040	0.617		1.1110	0.247		1.2000	0.600	
Mother's Age: 25+ (ref: Less than 20)	2.1450	8.033	***	2.2000	10.39	***	2.0770	11.78	***	2.1880	10.61	***
Mother's Health Score (1-5)	0.9720	0.097										
Father's Health Score (1-5)	0.9890	0.014										
Mother and Father Have Other Children Together	1.1020	0.269										
Mother Has Other Child	0.9120	0.250										
Father Abuses Mother	0.7040	0.296										
Mother Abuses Father	0.7000	1.474										
Mother's Religious Attendance (1=not at all, 5=weekly)	1.1560	4.450	**									
Father's Religious Attendance (1=not at all, 5=weekly)	1.0980	1.817										
Mother Has Drug/Alcohol Problems	0.6930	0.415										
Father Has Drug/Alcohol Problems	0.8690	0.062										
Mother's Attitude Scale (11 point)	1.6440	32.42	***	1.7250	41.45	***	1.7830	58.78	***	1.7180	41.34	***
Father's Attitude Scale (11 point)	1.2620	7.820	***	1.3010	10.77	***	1.2230	8.132	***	1.3030	11.04	***
Constant	0.0000	85.20	***	0.0000	108.2	***	0.0000	122.9	***	0.0000	108.9	***

* Significant at the 90 percent level
** Significant at the 95 percent level
*** Significant at the 99+ percent level

Default is a child born to a teenage mother whose parents are both black, high school dropouts who do not have other children together and do not have abuse or drug/alcohol problems. Further, the father is currently unemployed.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

Model Results

Dependent Variable: Married One-Year Post-Birth of Child

Independent Variables:	Logged Odds Coefficient	Standard Error	Wald/t-statistic	df	Significance	Note	Odds Ratio
Father Currently Employed, Worked 52 Weeks Last Year	0.6964	0.2327	8.9572	1	0.0028	***	2.0065
Father Currently Employed, Worked Less Than 52 Weeks Last Year	0.5190	0.2585	4.0305	1	0.0447	**	1.6803
Mother's Race, White Non-Hispanic	0.8746	0.2080	17.6774	1	0.0000	***	2.3979
Mother's Race, Other Non-Hispanic	0.9250	0.4242	4.7556	1	0.0292	**	2.5218
Mother's Race, Hispanic (ref=Black Non-Hispanic)	0.8233	0.1867	19.4421	1	0.0000	***	2.2780
Mother's Age: 20-24	0.2376	0.2234	1.1314	1	0.2875		1.2682
Mother's Age: 25+ (ref: Less than 20)	0.8071	0.2236	13.0302	1	0.0003	***	2.2414
Mother's Attitude Scale (11 point)	0.5460	0.0812	45.2076	1	0.0000	***	1.7264
Father's Attitude Scale (11 point)	0.2461	0.0769	10.2455	1	0.0014	***	1.2790
Constant	-12.3548	1.1568	114.0595	1	0.0000	***	0.0000

* Significant at the 90 percent level
** Significant at the 95 percent level
*** Significant at the 99+ percent level

Default is a child born to a black teenage mother whose father is not employed.

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study" (*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).

Questions Used in Marriage Attitude and Skills Scale

Factor 1: Positive Attitudes Toward Marriage
This first factor is represented as an average of two questions. Four responses are possible to the questions: strongly disagree (coded 1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4).

Question 1: "It is better for a couple to get married than to just live together."
Question 2: "It is better for children if their parents are married."

Factor 2: Gender Trust
Two questions are asked as above. This time, however, the responses are inverted, such that a "strongly agree" response is assigned a score of 1, agree is assigned a 2, etc.

Question 1: "In a dating relationship, a man/woman is largely out to take advantage of a woman/man."
Question 2: "Men/women cannot be trusted to be faithful."

Factor 3: Support in the Relationship
Supportiveness in the relationship is the average of four questions on the level of compromise, love, criticism, and encouragement that exists in the relationship. In this case, the possible responses to the questions are on a scale of 1 to 3: often (3), sometimes (2), and never (1). All questions begin as follows:

"Thinking about your (past) relationship with [BABY'S FATHER/BABY'S MOTHER], how often would you say that:"

Question 1: "He/She expressed affection or love for you?"
Question 2: "He/She was fair and willing to compromise when you had a disagreement?"
Question 3: "He/She insulted or criticized you or your ideas?"
Question 4: "He/She encouraged or helped you to do things that were important to you?"

Factor 4: Conflict in the Relationship
Conflict in the relationship is the average of six questions. The possible answers are on a scale of 1 to 3: often (1), sometimes (2), and never (3). All questions begin as follows:

"The following is a list of subjects on which couples often have disagreements. How often, if at all, in the last month (or, when you and [BABY'S FATHER/BABY'S MOTHER] were last together) have you and [BABY'S FATHER/BABY'S MOTHER] had disagreements about each of the following:

Question 1: "Money?"
Question 2: "Spending time together?"
Question 3: "Sex?"
Question 4: "The pregnancy?"
Question 5: "Drinking or drug use?"
Question 6: "Being faithful?"

Source: Columbia and Princeton Universities, "Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study"
(*http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp*).