ASPE RESEARCH BRIEF

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATION
OFFICE OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY - U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Vulnerable Youth and the Transition to Adulthood

Young Men and Young Women

This fact sheet considers differences in behaviors and out-comes between young men and young women as they tran-sition to adulthood. It also considers whether differences between young men and young women are related to the fact that some women are caring for children. Using the Na-tional Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, the analysis com-pares adolescent risk behaviors and young adult outcomes for young men and women. Youth of all races and income levels are included and the analysis does not differentiate among them. All differences discussed below are signifi-cantly different at the 95 percent confidence level or above.

- Young men engage in more risk behaviors during ado-lescence (3.8 mean cumulative risks) than young women (2.7 mean cumulative risks).[1] Specifically, young men are more likely to initiate alcohol use at an early age and engage in criminal activities (i.e., join a gang, sell drugs, destroy property, steal, and carry a gun).

- Young men are more likely to have high school as their highest degree than young women (54 versus 48 per-cent)[2] and are less likely to obtain a degree from a four-year college (23 versus 30 percent). Young women are more likely than young men to be enrolled in school be-tween the ages of 20 and 23: 65 percent of young women were enrolled in school between the ages of 20 and 23, on average, compared with 59 percent of males.

- A quarter of young men (25 percent) have been charged with an adult crime by age 24, compared with only 8 percent of young women.

- Young men have consistently higher earnings than young women between ages 18 and 23, with an average difference of $3,768 in median annual earnings over five years (see Figure 1).[3]

- Young men are more likely to be employed at age 24 than young women (81 percent versus 74 percent).

- Young men and women are equally likely to consistently connect to school and work between the ages of 18 and 24. Young women, however, are more likely than young

men to connect initially and then disconnect (13 percent of young men versus 16 percent of young women) and are less likely to not connect initially but then later connect (17 percent of young men versus 13 percent of young women).[4]

- Differences between young men and young women may be related to the fact that some young women are caring for children. Young women are more than twice as likely to have children by age 24 than young men (38 percent of young women versus 16 percent of young men). Young women with children at age 24 had lower earnings between ages 21 and 23 and were less likely to be consistently-connected to school or work between ages 18 and 24 than their female peers without children. Young women without children at age 24 are relatively similar to young men of the same age in both earnings and connectedness.

FIGURE 1. **Median Annual Earnings by Age**
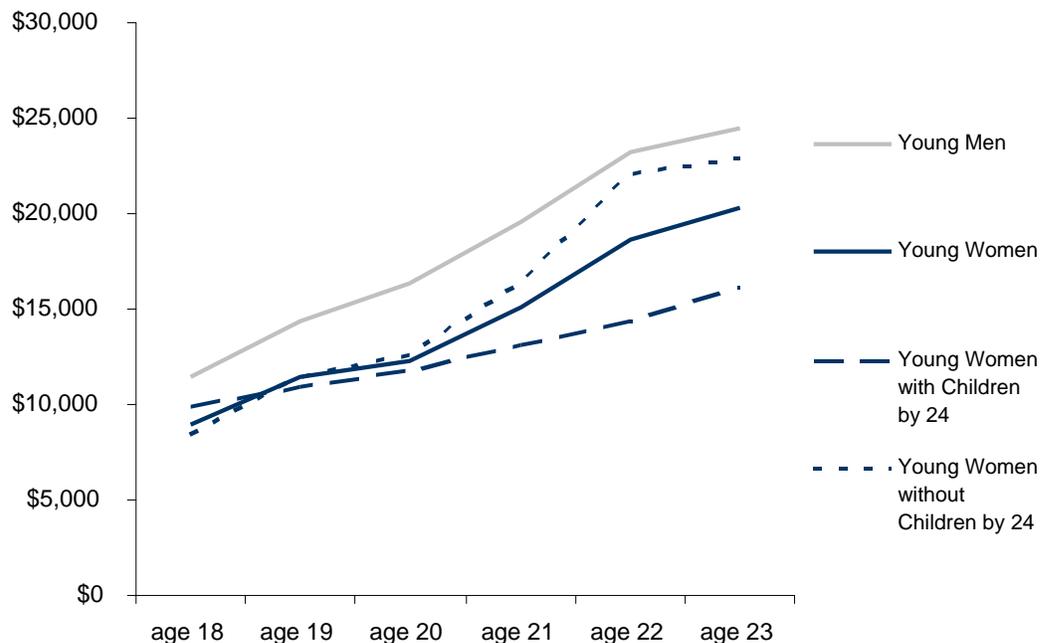
Source: Urban Institute estimates of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997.
Notes: Sample sizes: young men, *n* = 995; young women, *n* = 1,046; young women with children by 24, *n* = 460; young women without children by 24, *n* = 560. Median earnings exclude youth who did not work and therefore had zero earnings. Differences in earnings for young men and women at each age are significant at the 95% confidence level or above. Differences in earnings for young women with and without children are significant at the 95% confidence level or above at ages 21, 22, and 23.

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[1] Cumulative risky behaviors include consuming alcohol before age 13, using marijuana before age 16, using other drugs before age 18, selling illegal drugs before age 18, engaging in sex before age 16, stealing something worth less than $50 before age 18, stealing something worth more than $50 before age 18, destroying property before age 18, committing other property crime before age 18, being a member of a gang before age 18, getting into a fight before age 18, carrying a gun before age 18, and running away from home before age 18.
[2] Youth who did not obtain a high school degree may have obtained a General Equivalency Diploma.
[3] Median earnings exclude youth who did not work and therefore had zero earnings.
[4] Results of a trajectory analyses conducted using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 identify four pathways for youth connectedness to employment or school between ages 18 and 24: consistently-connected, initially-connected, later-connected, and never-connected. For more information see Kuehn, D., Pergamit, M., and Macomber, J., and Vericker, T. (2009). *Multiple Pathways Connecting to School and Work.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

TABLE 1. Adolescent Risk Behaviors and Early Adult Outcomes for Male and Female Youth

	Male youth (*n* = 995)	Female youth (*n* = 1,046)	Female youth with children at 24 (*n* = 460)	Female youth without children at 24 (*n* = 560)	All youth (*n* = 2,041)
Adolescent Risk Behaviors					
Cumulative Risky Behaviors (mean)	3.8*	2.7	--	--	3.3
Alcohol by age 13	17%*	12%	--	--	15%
Marijuana by age 16	36%	33%	--	--	35%
Used other drugs	29%	26%	--	--	27%
Sex by age 16	52%	49%	--	--	51%
Attack someone/get into a fight	35%*	21%	--	--	28%
Member of a gang	11%*	5%	--	--	9%
Sell drugs	23%*	15%	--	--	19%
Destroy property	46%*	25%	--	--	36%
Steal something worth less than $50	50%*	41%	--	--	46%
Steal something worth more than $50	19%*	10%	--	--	15%
Other property crime	23%*	5%	--	--	14%
Carry a gun	26%*	6%	--	--	16%
Ever run away	16%*	20%	--	--	18%
Highest Degree Completed by Age 23-24					
None	18%	15%	--	--	17%
High school diploma	54%*	48%	--	--	51%
Associate's degree	5%*	7%	--	--	6%
Four-year college degree or higher	23%*	30%	--	--	26%
In School					
Age 20	63%*	68%	--	--	65%
Age 21	61%*	67%	--	--	64%
Age 22	58%*	64%	--	--	61%
Age 23	54%*	61%	--	--	57%
Median Annual Earning (among Earners)					
Age 18	$11,417*	$9,007	$9,920	$8,430	$10,139
Age 19	$14,347*	$11,412	$10,901	$11,412	$12,637
Age 20	$16,353*	$12,302	$11,723	$12,606	$13,876
Age 21	$19,596*	$15,125	$13,082[†]	$16,366	$17,384
Age 22	$23,237*	$18,695	$14,394[†]	$22,133	$21,430
Age 23	$24,485*	$20,288	$16,172[†]	$22,927	$22,411
Employment					
Employed on 24th birthday	81%*	74%	--	--	77%
Connectedness to School or Work between Ages 18 and 24					
Consistently-connected	59%	60%	34%[†]	76%	60%
Initially-connected	13%*	16%	26%[†]	11%	15%
Later-connected	17%*	13%	19%[†]	10%	15%
Never-connected	10%	10%	21%[†]	3%	10%
Parenting					
Has a biological child at age 24	16%*	38%	--	--	27%
Charged with Crime					
Charged with an adult crime by age 24	25%*	8%	--	--	17%

Source: Urban Institute estimates of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997.

Notes: Some youth who did not complete high school may have earned a General Equivalency Diploma. Median earnings exclude youth who did not work and therefore had zero earnings. Health insurance coverage is asked about a point in time and therefore does not capture a youth's coverage throughout the year. The cumulative risk behavior score is based on the 13 risk behaviors listed beneath it. Adolescent risk behaviors are measured up to age 18, except where otherwise noted. Never-connected youth may make extremely short connections to school or the labor market.

* Estimates for males are significantly different from females at the 95% confidence level or above.

[†] Estimates for females with and without children by age 24 are significantly different at the 95% confidence level or above.

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