

*I am totally
in accord.
R.E.S.*

Mr. John Patterson
Director, Division of Vital Statistics
and
Ms. Dorothy Rice
Director, National Center for Health
Statistics
5600 Fisher's Lane
Rockville, MD 20852

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Illegitimate Births on Future Natality Followback
Surveys for the Division of Vital Statistics, NCHS

Dear Mr. Patterson and Ms. Rice:

Participants in the Conference on CONSEQUENCES OF ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND
CHILDBEARING recognize that the 64-66, 67-69 and 1972 National Natality
Surveys have not involved followback questionnaires to mothers, physicians,
or hospitals in the case of illegitimate births. While we recognize that
there are difficulties in collecting data regarding illegitimate births we
urge that you consider adding illegitimate births to the followback surveys
for the following reasons:

First, in 1973, there were an estimated 407,300 illegitimate births,
approximately 13 percent of all births. To omit such a large per-
centage of the population from a national study results in serious
gaps in coverage for national estimates, and hampers research based
on that data.

Second, the National Natality Survey focuses on the health of the
mother and her infant. Primarily due to the association of illegiti-
macy with poverty and poor health, infants born out-of-wedlock and
their mothers experience more health problems than are found for
births within marriage.

Third, more than half of the illegitimate births, in 1973, occurred
to women who were under the age of 20. Of the 617,000 births to
teenage women in 1973, 35 percent were illegitimate. Therefore, the
omission of data on illegitimate births is a major block to under-
standing the phenomena of teenage childbearing. While fertility
rates are generally declining in the U.S. the declines have been
slower for teenagers and, for the very young ages (under 15), the
birth rate appears to be increasing. Teenage fertility has been

an increasing component of total U.S. fertility and often represents births which are problematic either for the parents involved, the child, or society in general. The omission of data on illegitimate births seriously hampers our understanding of trends and patterns in teenage childbearing.

Fourth, approximately 42% of births to blacks and over 71% of births to black teenagers are recorded as illegitimate. The omission of these births from the followback study affects our ability to understand the health needs of a large segment of our population.

Therefore, as a participant in the Conference on Consequences of Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing, I recommend that the National Center for Health Statistics seriously consider including data for illegitimate births in the next National Natality Followback Survey. I would also be willing to, either singly or jointly with other participants in this conference, serve as a consultant in the consideration of such an extension of the survey.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert E. Shank".

Robert E. Shank, M.D.
Danforth Professor and
Head of the Department
of Preventive Medicine
Washington University