

TEENAGE BIRTHRATES

President Bush is propagating abstinence for teenagers. One of his objectives is to reduce teenage birthrates, which are much higher in the United States than in other OECD countries. In the late 1990s the teenage birthrate in the United States reached 52 per thousand: 52 teenagers per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years gave birth. Other countries with high teenage birthrates were the United Kingdom and New Zealand. But there are marked differences among countries. The lowest rates can be observed in Japan, Switzerland and in the Netherlands, where the birthrates were ten times lower than in the United States (see Chart 1).

There are many interacting factors behind teenage births. Teen pregnancy is rarely intended and is mainly the result of the inappropriate use of contraceptives, together with attitudes of teenagers towards sex. Full sexual intercourse tends to start at earlier ages. On the other hand, family planning,

contraception and abortion are used differently from one country to the other.

Chart 2 indicates that where school drop-outs are high, teenage birthrates also tend to be high. Furthermore, the likelihood of unprotected sex is correlated with growing up in single parent households, with low parental educational levels and poverty. Moreover, these teenagers abort less often than their counterparts in richer families.

Teenage mothers are more likely to bring up their children as single mothers and to live on welfare. Their children are often neglected and have less attachment to school. Policymakers should help young women choose when to become mothers so that they can provide their children with a more favourable environment.

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Chart 2

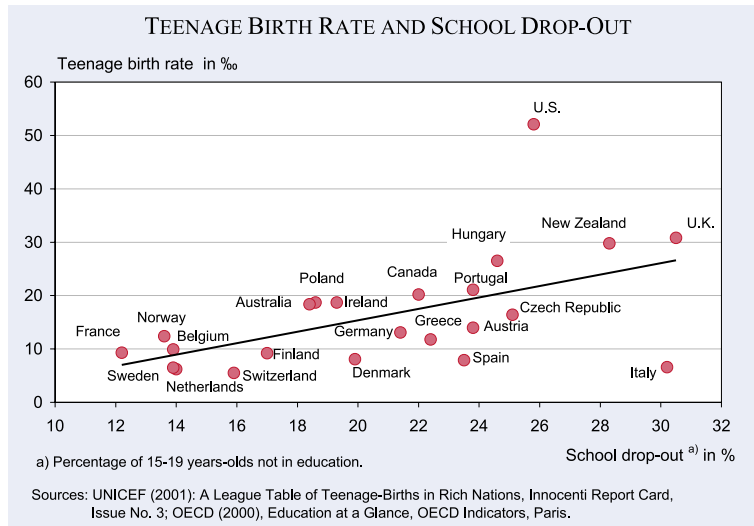


Chart 1

