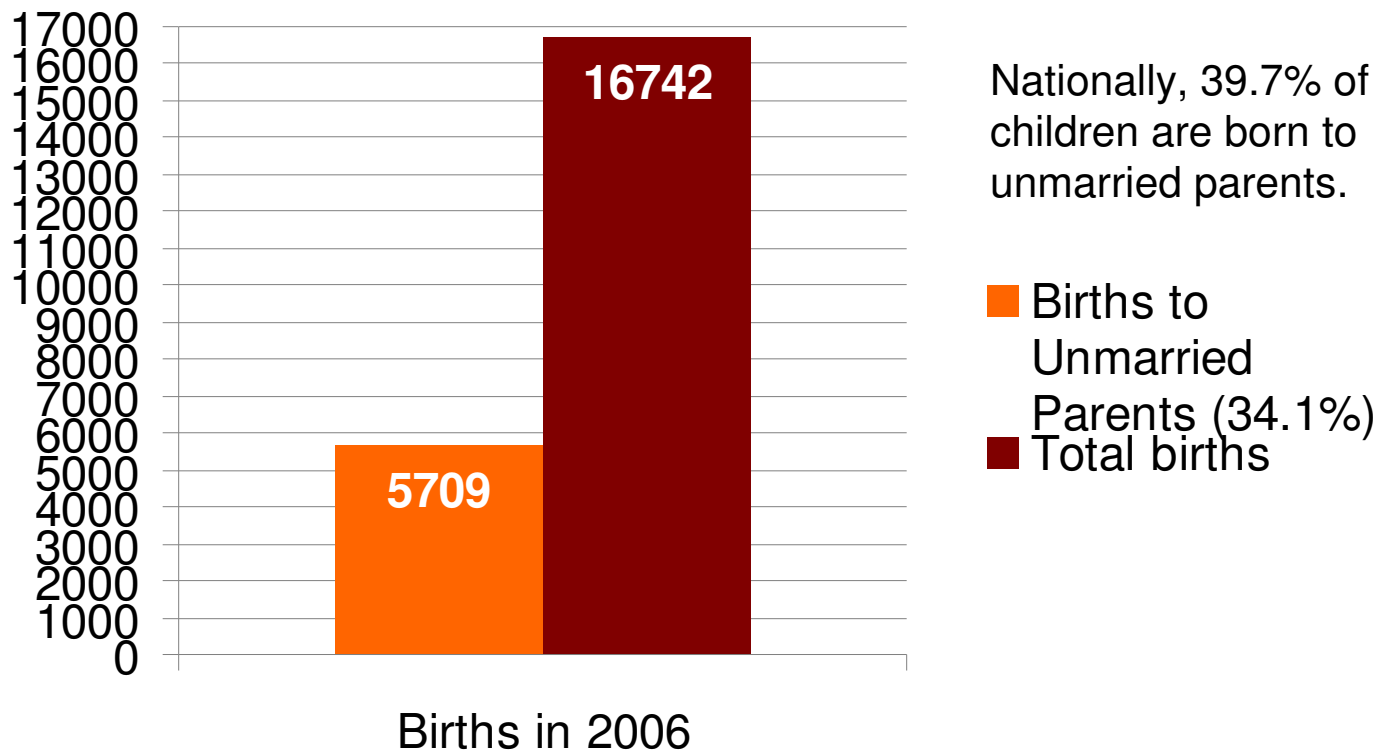


Co-Parent Court: A Problem- Solving Court for Children and Families

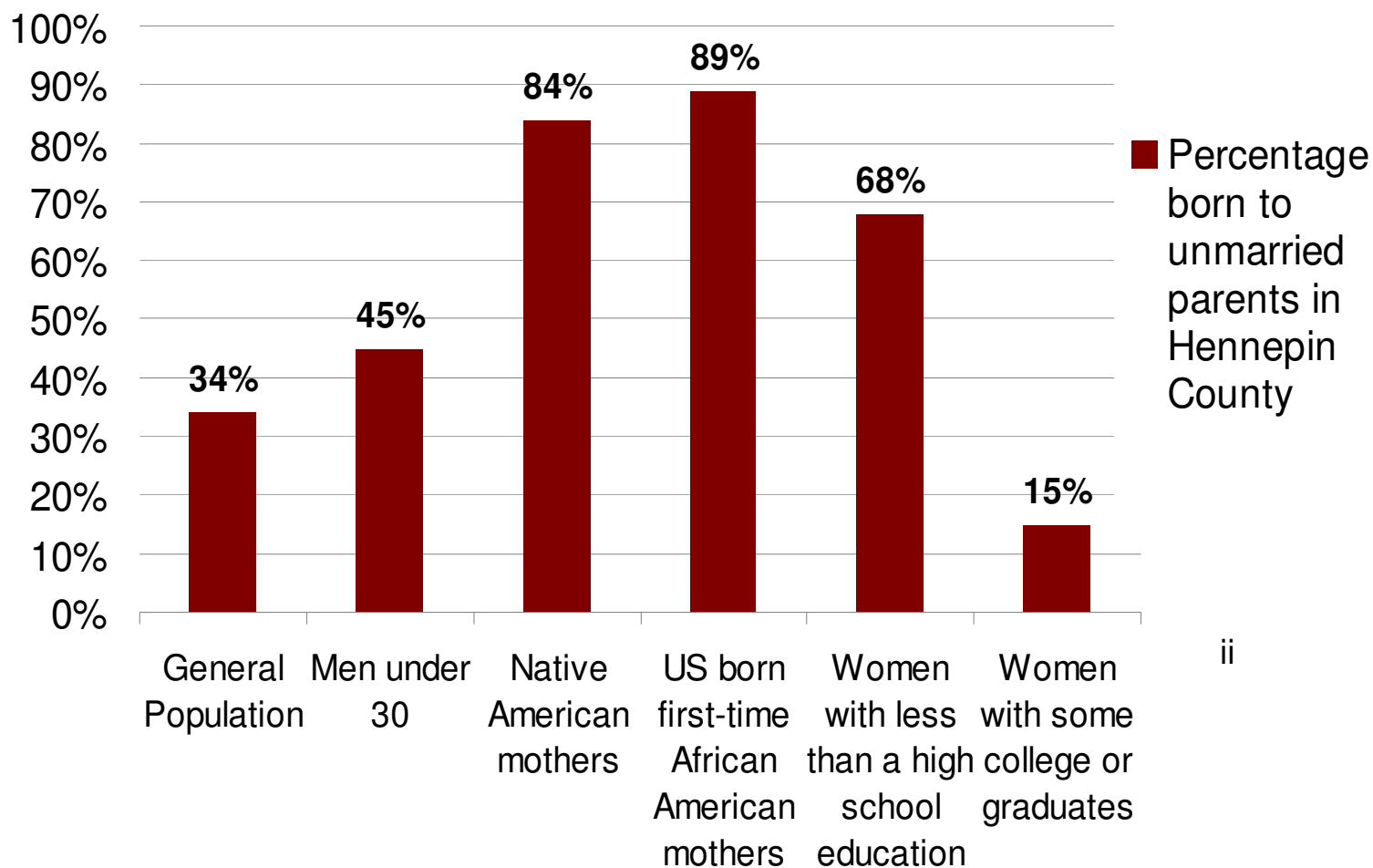


Each year in Hennepin County about one in three children is born to an unmarried parent.



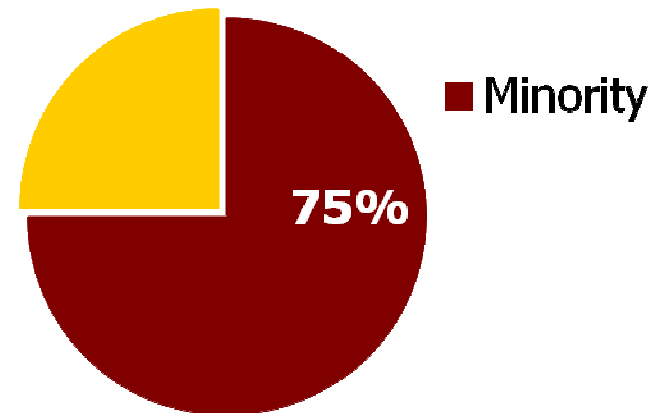
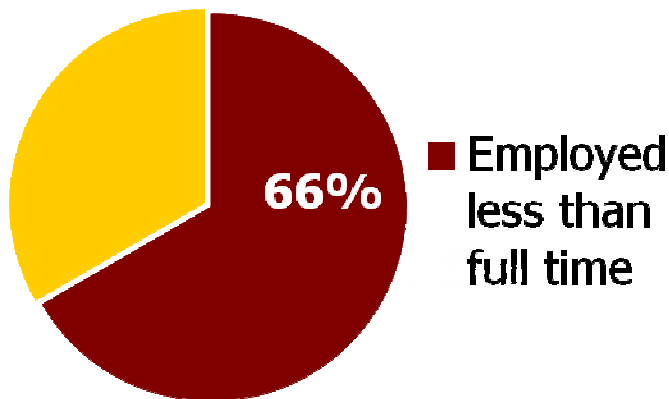
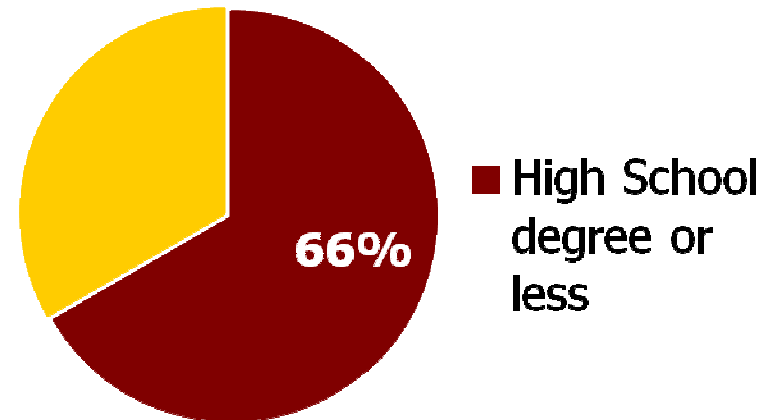
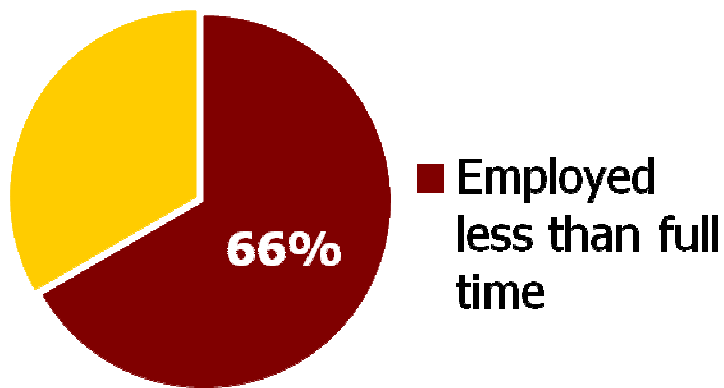
[i]

The percentage of children born to unmarried parents varies significantly for certain groups.

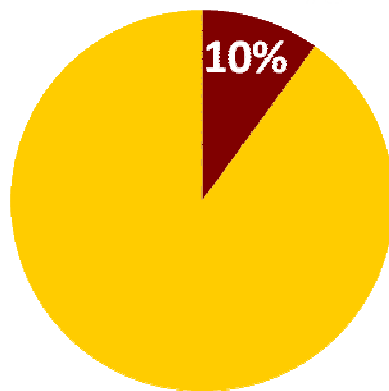


ii

Unmarried Parents in Hennepin County Family Court

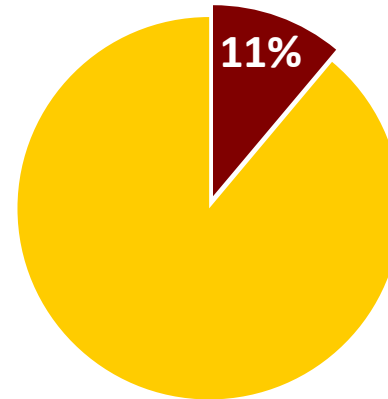


Unmarried Parents in Hennepin County Family Court



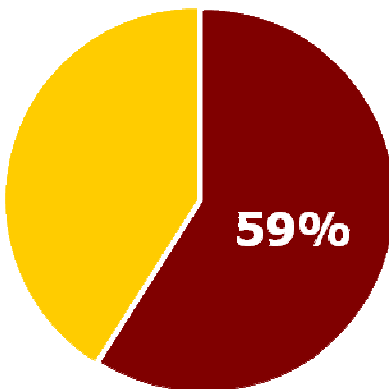
Men

■ Have a
Child
With
Special
Needs

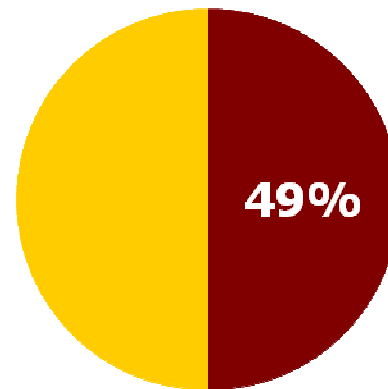


Men

■ In Treatment



■ Lack Stable
Housing

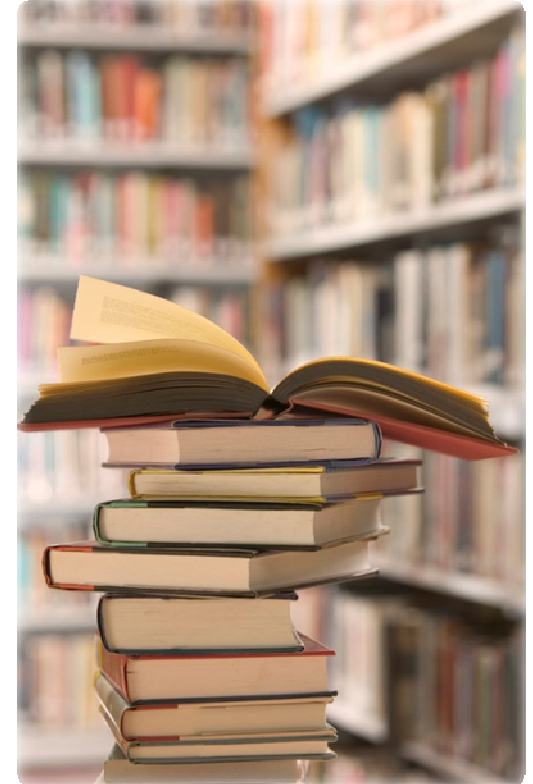


■ Have a
Criminal
Record

Research Establishes Four Realities



1. Children who live away from a biological parent are at increased risk for a wide range of negative outcomes. [iv, v]
2. High-quality involvement by the non-residential parent can provide important benefits. [vi, vii, viii]
3. Intensive involvement by non-residential fathers near birth falls off over time. [ix, x]
4. Cooperative co-parenting increases involvement of the non-residential parent. [xi, xii]



Risks to Children:



Quitting School and Teenage Pregnancy

| Parents | Percentage of Children Who Drop out of High School by Parent Status | Percentage of Daughters Experiencing Teenage Pregnancy by Parent Status |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Married Parents | 13% | 11% |
| Divorced Parents | 31% | 33% |
| Never Married Parents | 37% | 37% |

[xiii]

Reasons for Risks of Single Parenting



- Financial disadvantages
- Harder to provide quality parenting
 - Less supervision
 - More conflict
 - Harsher discipline
 - Fewer rules
 - Less emotional support
- More stress
 - Conflict
 - Moving
 - Re-partnering



Relationship Stability:



Unmarried Parent Contact as a Function of a
Child's Age

| Child's Age | Married | Cohabiting | Romantically involved | Friends | No Contact |
|-------------|---------|------------|-----------------------|---------|------------|
| Birth | 0% | 50% | 32% | 8% | 10% |
| Age 5 | 17% | 19% | 3% | 20% | 42% |

[xv]

Child Connection:



Contact With Children by Non-Resident Fathers

| | Regular Contact | Limited Contact | No Contact by Father |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Age 1 | 62% | 26% | 13% |
| Age 3 | 47% | 24% | 29% |
| Age 5 | 43% | 20% | 37% |

[xvi]

Barriers to Co-Parenting



- Multiple Partner Fertility
 - 32%-37% among unmarried parents (well over half with more than one child)
 - 12%-14% among married parents
 - 59% of Couples
 - Bigger problem for father than mothers
- Mental health problems
- Father's prior incarceration [xvii]



Why is Co-Parenting Beneficial

- Parents agree on the rules and support each other's decisions
- Children learn parental authority is not arbitrary
- Children are not subjected to inconsistent discipline
- Children internalize social norms and moral values
- Children observe the modeling of interpersonal skills like communication, respect, and compromise
- Co-Parenting fosters non-resident fathers' involvement



[xviii]

Mission of Co-Parent Court



- The mission of the Hennepin County Co-Parent Court is to create a model for paternity establishment that supports co-parenting to improve the social, emotional, and financial outcomes for children, families, and communities.



Goals



- To improve outcomes for children by helping unmarried parents **work together** to parent their children.
- To **remedy the disparities** between judicial processes and resources allocated to married parents (largely white and middle class) and unmarried parents (largely people of color and poor).
- To encourage families, and the systems that serve families, to consider the **emotional and social contributions** of non-residential parents, primarily fathers, in addition to their economic contributions.
- To **reduce conflict** between parents and decrease judicial and other resources needed to resolve disputes.



Project Elements

- Intake assessment and domestic violence screening conducted in court by Family Court Navigators.
- Referral to the “Together We Can” education program for single parents designed by the University of Minnesota Extension Service and taught at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center.
- Couples with domestic abuse issues referred for appropriate Co-Parent Education and counseling to the Domestic Abuse Project at NorthPoint and other area providers.



Project Elements



- Mothers with social services needs referred for case management to the Gateway Project at NorthPoint.
- Fathers with social service needs referred for case management to the FATHER Project (a division of Goodwill/Easter Seals).
- Following completion of the classes, mediation and family group conferencing services by the Legal Rights Center provided for couples unable to agree on a parenting plan.



Scope of Pilot Project



- Services to 300 parents each year for 3 years.
- Control group of 300 additional parents.
- Grant funding: \$450,000 per year.



Planning Process



- ❑ Formation of a large Advisory Group and smaller working groups.
- ❑ McKnight Foundation planning grant used to hire Advance Consulting.
- ❑ Research survey of unmarried parents in Family Court.
- ❑ Focus groups with mothers and fathers.
- ❑ University of Minnesota Extension Service provides specialized curriculum.



Planning Process



- ☐ Project team selected from county-wide solicitation of interest.
- ☐ Planning meeting with Katherine Edin.
- ☐ Briefings for senior county administrators.
- ☐ Meetings with domestic abuse advocates.
- ☐ Fundraising.



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- xvii. Carlson & Hognas, *supra*, at 7, 15-16, 19.
- xviii. Amato, *supra*, at 83-84.

























