– Extended Abstract –

Age at first birth and life outcomes: the case of teenage mothers in the ONS Longitudinal Study

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Context

Based upon the hypothesis that a teenage birth represents a "major disruption" in the lifecourse (Charbonneau, 2000), much interest has been devoted to the question of what becomes of teenage mothers in later life? If in later life women having had a child as a teenager suffer poorer life outcomes, the direct effect of the timing of entry into motherhood is hard to establish and poses a methodological challenge – the question being whether the life trajectory observed post teenage birth is a continuation of a pre-existing pathway or represents a veritable turning point. Several studies have used innovative methods to try to evaluate the effect of a teenage birth on ulterior life outcomes (Geronimus et Korenman, 1992 ; Ermisch et Pevalin, 2003 ; Hotz et al., 2005). This study attempts to respond to this question by following the familial, professional and housing trajectories of women using the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS).

Data and method

Using the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS), this study observes 73,562 female LS members born between 1959 and 1991, and having had at least one child, using linked census records from the 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 censuses.

Multilevel models are used to model life outcomes for these women concerning their family, work and housing situations. The structure of the models sees the individual at the higher level with their census data from each observation point at the lower level. The total number of observations is

255,511 with 46 % of the LS members studied having recorded observations at each of the censuses from 1981 to 2011 and 80 % of them being present at a minimum of 3 of the 4 censuses.

For each life outcome studied, we aim to isolate the effect of the age at first birth, and secondly to investigate the presence of interaction effects based upon the social origin (parents' social class) and birth cohort of the mothers studied.

Results

Table 1 shows that becoming a mother during adolescence increases the chances of having certain life outcomes. Compared to mothers having had their first birth aged between 25 and 29 years old (age range comprising the mean age at first birth for women in England and Wales), teenage mothers are less likely to be in a couple and thus more likely to be single parents as well has being more likely to experience a breakup of couple. In regards to their work life, they are less likely to be active than older first time mothers and far more likely to have never worked during their lifetime. Finally, they are more likely to live in a deprived household and to live in social housing rather than owning their own home.

For certain outcomes, the adverse effects of a teenage birth are felt more by those coming from a lower social class background (Table 2). Teenage mothers whose own parents were of semi- / unskilled social class are more likely to be inactive than those from higher social class backgrounds as well as facing more constraints in the housing market.

Table 1 - Odds ratios associated with age at first birth

Outcome	≤ 18	19-24	25-29	≥ 30
Being in a couple	0.53 (0.45-0.62)	0.64 (0.57-0.72)	1 (ref.)	1.16 (1.02-1.32)
Couple breakup between censuses	2.67 (2.41-2.96)	1.71 (1.60-1.82)	1 (ref.)	0.83 (0.77-0.90)
New couple formed following breakup	1.15 (0.99-1.33)	1.15 (1.03-1.28)	1 (ref.)	0.96 (0.84-1.10)
Being married	0.35 (0.29-0.42)	0.51 (0.45-0.59)	1 (ref.)	0.83 (0.72-0.96)
Being head of single parent family	2.34 (2.07-2.66)	1.80 (1.65-1.97)	1 (ref.)	0.85 (0.76-0.95)
Having higher social class than partner	1.26 (1.00-1.59)	1.12 (0.97-1.31)	1 (ref.)	0.74 (0.64-0.86)
Having lower social class than partner	0.83 (0.69-1.00)	0.95 (0.84-1.08)	1 (ref.)	0.91 (0.80-1.03)
Being active	0.47 (0.41-0.54)	0.66 (0.59-0.73)	1 (ref.)	0.69 (0.61-0.77)
Being inactive	1.75 (1.49-2.06)	1.40 (1.23-1.58)	1 (ref.)	1.08 (0.94-1.24)
Working part-time	0.49 (0.40-0.59)	0.55 (0.49-0.62)	1 (ref.)	1.48 (1.31-1.67)
Having never worked	8.40 (6.35-11.10)	2.32 (1.85-2.91)	1 (ref.)	0.60 (0.41-0.88)
Being long-term unemployed	0.59 (0.42-0.81)	0.94 (0.73-1.20)	1 (ref.)	1.15 (0.86-1.54)
Living in household deprived in at least 1 dimension	1.65 (1.53-1.77)	1.35 (1.29-1.42)	1 (ref.)	0.91 (0.85-0.96)
Living in household deprived in 3 or more dimensions	1.92 (1.53-2.42)	1.82 (1.49-2.21)	1 (ref.)	0.94 (0.71-1.26)
Living in an owned home	0.20 (0.17-0.25)	0.45 (0.39-0.51)	1 (ref.)	0.94 (0.81-1.09)
Living in social rented housing	3.86 (3.36-4.44)	2.31 (2.09-2.57)	1 (ref.)	0.75 (0.65-0.86)

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

Table 2 – Stratified odds ratios by social class of origin for women having given birth as a teenager

Outcome	Professional / intermediate	Skilled (ref.)	Semi- / unskilled
Having higher social class than partner	1.43	1.26	1.07*
Being active	0.48	0.47	0.38*
Being inactive	1.56	1.75	2.10*
Living in an owned home	0.33*	0.20	0.12*
Living in social rented housing	2.14*	3.86	5.08*

* indicates significant interaction

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

References

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