imicates the typical legal criterion for statutory rape in the five largest states, although other states may use stricter or looser criteria.

Using this five-year definition of age differences between 15–17-year-olds and their partners, we examine three related questions: What is the frequency with which children of 15–17-year-olds are fathered by older men? Second, what are the characteristics of these minors and of their relationships? Finally, how do the socioeconomic characteristics of the older men who father children with minors differ from those of other adult fathers, and from those of younger fathers?

Materials and Methods

Our analysis uses data from the National Maternal and Infant Health Survey (NMIHS), which was conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics from 1988 to 1991. (The analysis by Landry and Forrest used the same data set.) The NMIHS is a nationally representative follow-back survey of women aged 15–49 who had had a live birth, fetal death or infant death in 1988. Information was collected from both the infant’s birth certificate and a questionnaire either mailed or administered over the telephone 6–30 months after the birth.

In the live birth sample, the response rate for the questionnaire was 71% among women aged 15–17 at the time of delivery, similar to the 74% response rate for the overall sample. We excluded six of these young mothers because of missing information on key variables, which resulted in a final sample of 673 15–17-year-olds. In all of the results presented, we weighted the data to adjust for the NMIHS sampling design and nonresponse. After weighting, 34% of these young women were black, 18% were Hispanic and 48% were white or of “other” races (Asian, Aleutian Islander and American Indian). Almost equal proportions lived in households with an annual income of less than $10,000 and in households with an income of more than $10,000 (51% vs. 49%); 88% were first-time mothers.

The NMIHS data were also used to identify 5040 22–30-year-old males who fathered a child in 1988. Within this group, we examine differences between men who fathered a child with a minor and men who had a child with an adult partner.

We set the lower age boundary for these men at 22 years so that they would be at least five years older than a 15–17-year-old partner. We limited the upper boundary to age 30 to avoid comparing increasingly dissimilar men. (A wider age interval would not capture appreciably more men with teenage partners.)

The NMIHS is unique because information about the partners is available for a large share of the sample. Birth certificates often contain incomplete information on fathers, and the data on the partners of teenage mothers are especially unlikely to be entered. For example, among women interviewed for the NMIHS, 62% of those aged 15–17 at delivery did not report their partner’s age on the birth certificate, compared with only 27% among women aged 18–30.

The NMIHS questionnaire corrected for this underreporting by directly asking mothers about the father’s age, education, race and employment. Thus, the mother’s interview, and not the infant’s birth certificate, served as the source for the father’s age at the infant’s birth. Respondents were asked to give the father’s current age in whole years; we calculated his age at the time of the birth. To obtain the parents’ age difference, we subtracted the mother’s age from the father’s, and rounded to the nearest whole year. Finally, we added six months to each parent’s whole-year age, to adjust for not knowing when in the year they were born. Data on the age of the baby’s father were available for 95% of the 15–17-year-old respondents; the NMIHS imputed the remaining missing values using a “hot deck” procedure based on maternal age and race.

We present descriptive measures of the characteristics of each parent and their relationship. Although we estimated multivariate models, the small sample sizes and high intercorrelation between the measures made the models very unstable, so in this article we present descriptive results only.

The NMIHS data have at least three important limitations. First, they represent only the experience with older men of minors who gave birth; as such, they do not indicate the overall incidence of sexual relationships with older men, since not all sexual activity results in a pregnancy and not all pregnancies result in a birth. Second, the NMIHS provides no direct information about the quality of the relationship between the teenage mother and her partner. For example, we do not know if the sexual relationship was voluntary. Finally, data about the male partner is limited by the female respondent’s recollections and by the accuracy of what she was told (i.e., she might be unsure about the father’s age or employment status, or may report this information incorrectly). This uncertainty may add some bias to the measures, but the direction of that bias is unknown.

Results

How Many Minors?

As expected, conclusions about the role of adult men in adolescent childbearing are sensitive to how the behavior is defined; much of the discussion on the issue has been framed in terms of partners who are at least 20 years old. However, as Figure 1 illustrates, the proportion of 15–17-year-old mothers in 1988 whose partner was at least five years older was substantially lower than the proportion whose partner was at least age 20 (27% vs. 50%). The proportion with at least a five-year age difference among these younger women is not significantly different from that among women aged 18–30 (27% vs. 26%, not shown).

The youngest mothers in the sample were the most likely to have a partner five or more years older (40%) (By definition, the same proportion had a partner at least 20 years of age.) This proportion dropped to 27% and 24% among 16- and 17-year-olds, respectively. Thus, births to the youngest mothers were disproportionately fathered by much older men who had engaged in sex nine months earlier with 14- and 15-year-olds. On the other hand, births to 15-year-olds made up only 13% of all births to 15–17-year-old women. They thus contribute relatively little to the overall incidence of minors having children fathered by older men.

Births to minors and older men consti-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Age of minor</th>
<th>Age of adult</th>
<th>Minimum age difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>≤17</td>
<td>≥3 years older</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>18–17</td>
<td>≥24</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>13–16</td>
<td>≥5 years older</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>≤16</td>
<td>≥27</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>≤16</td>
<td>≥33 years older†</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†This age difference is legislated as an “affirmative defense”: the statute does not specify the age of the perpetrator. Sources: California, Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Act, Penal Code (1993), sec. 261.5; Florida Statutes (Page 2937), sec. 794.05; 720 Illinois. Comp. Stat. Ann. § 5/12-15 (1993); NY Penal Law § 130.25 (McKinney 1987); and Texas Penal Code, sec. 21.11.