

NEW YORK POST

A Pregnant Pause: Forty-Eight Percent of First Births in America are to Unmarried Women

We did a double-take when we first saw the figure. Turns out that it's just one of the startling numbers in a new report sponsored by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the Relate Institute and the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia.

The report is called "Knot Yet: The Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage in America," and it starts with a basic fact: Women of all educational and socioeconomic groups are postponing marriage — often until after they've had at least one child.

For women as a whole, says the report, the median age at first birth is 25.7, while the median age at first marriage is 26.5. The authors call this trend to childbearing before marriage the "Great Crossover."

But the impact can be very different for different groups. Delaying marriage translates into higher annual income for all women — but especially for college-educated women. It also seems to bring down the divorce rate.

For American women outside the elite, the price of delaying marriage but not motherhood can be high. These are the people the report describes as "Middle American" women — "moderately educated women with a high-school degree and perhaps a year or two of college." For these people, the consequence for their earnings, their children's welfare and even their happiness are not good.

Partly, it's cultural: Marriage is no longer seen as

necessary to start a family. Some of this is because we have more children of divorce, who are more wary about making a commitment. Some of it is because working-class men are finding it more difficult to provide for families.

Whatever the reason, the authors say it is leading to two different outcomes for American women. Here in New York, the mayor is now trying to address one sliver of this phenomena: teen pregnancy.

In recent weeks, the administration has posted ads around the city about the impact of unplanned pregnancy on teenagers. By almost every measure, these young moms and their children will have less-satisfying and less-productive lives — not to mention the greater potential for dependency.

The point is that the growing trend toward having babies before marrying isn't just something that preachers worry about. It's something that policymakers need to be concerned about, as well. Fixing the problem will be nowhere near as easy as identifying it. But it's a welcome start.

