

# A Seven-Year Investigation of Marital Expectations and Marriage Among Urban, Low-Income, African American Adolescent Mothers

Sarah E. Oberlander  
University of Maryland School of Medicine

Wendy R. Miller Agostini  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Avril Melissa Houston  
Baltimore City Health Department

Maureen M. Black  
University of Maryland School of Medicine

Welfare reform has targeted marriage promotion among low-income women. This study explores patterns of marital expectations and marriage among 181 urban, low-income, African American adolescent mothers and their mothers. Using PROC TRAJ to analyze developmental trajectories of adolescent mother–grandmother relationship quality over 24 months, we categorized relationships as either high or low support. We examined the effects of intergenerational marriage models and adolescent mother–grandmother relationship quality on marital expectations and marriage over the first 7 years postpartum. At 24 months, half (52%) of adolescent mothers expected to marry, but marital expectations did not predict marriage. Marital expectations were associated with concurrent involvement in a romantic relationship, not intergenerational marriage models or a supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship. After 7 years, 14% of adolescent mothers were married. Married mothers lived in families characterized by the joint effects of intergenerational marriage models and supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationships. They were older and had more children than did single mothers, suggesting that they were in a family formation phase of life. Policies that promote the education and employment opportunities necessary to support a family are needed.

*Keywords:* marital expectations, marriage, adolescent parenting, grandmother, multigenerational household

Romantic relationships contribute to adolescents' sense of identity and self-esteem (Furman & Shaffer, 2003) and prepare them to move away from parents and toward a romantic partner as a primary attachment figure (Tracy, Shaver, Albino, & Cooper, 2003). However, adolescent romantic relationships often include sexual intimacy that may result in pregnancy. Each year, approximately 41.9 per 1000 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 years give birth (Martin et al., 2009; Ventura, Abma, Mosher, & Henshaw, 2008). Birth rates for African American adolescents remain above the national average at 63.7 per 1000 (Martin et al., 2009). Nearly all (96%) African American adolescent births occur to unmarried women, often in the context of poverty (Martin, Kochanek, Strobino, Guyer, & MacDorman, 2005; Mollborn, 2007). Marital rates among adolescent mothers are low, often resulting in multigenerational

(grandmother–adolescent, mother–infant) households rather than traditional partner (mother–father) households.

The goal of this study is to investigate romantic relationships, marital expectations, and marriage in a sample of urban, low-income, African American adolescent mothers living in multigenerational households.

## Conceptual Model

This study uses attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) to examine the intergenerational transmission of marital expectations and behavior among adolescent mothers living in multigenerational families. In attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978), the security and interpersonal closeness that adolescents experience in relationships with their family of origin serve as the basis for subsequent relationships. Attachment security continues to be important through the adolescent years, contributing to affect regulation and healthy romantic relationships (Allen et al., 2004; Kobak, Sudler, & Gamble, 1991). However, attachment stability in adolescence may be threatened by environmental stressors, such as poverty or a breakdown in adolescent–parent relationships (Evans, Boxhill, & Pinkava, 2008).

In social learning theory, the family of origin provides a social context for adolescents to observe and model behav-

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Sarah E. Oberlander and Maureen M. Black, University of Maryland School of Medicine; Wendy R. Miller Agostini, University of Maryland, Baltimore County; and Avril Melissa Houston, Baltimore City Health Department.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Maureen M. Black, Department of Pediatrics, University of Maryland School of Medicine, 737 West Lombard Street, Room 161, Baltimore, MD 21201. E-mail: mblack@peds.umaryland.edu

ior (Bandura, 1977). During adolescence and young adulthood, a strong adolescent mother–grandmother relationship may allow grandmothers to transmit messages about the benefits of marriage. For example, daughters of unmarried grandmothers are more likely than other young women to become young unmarried mothers themselves, and an adolescent's marital expectations can be predicted by her mother's marital expectations (Haveman, Wolfe, & Pence, 2001; Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986; Shulman, Rosenheim, & Knafo, 1999). In addition, adolescents in families with a biological father in the home have more positive attitudes toward marriage than do those without coresiding fathers (Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986). Thus, from the perspective of attachment theory and social learning theory, marriage is most likely to be a positive option among adolescents who have a strong, stable adolescent mother–grandmother attachment with active models of healthy marital relations.

### Welfare Reform

Welfare reform has targeted marriage promotion. In 1996, the U.S. Congress declared that marriage is the foundation of a successful society and an essential institution to promote the interests of children (U.S. House of Representatives, 1996). The goals of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 were to increase the number of two-parent families and reduce childbearing among unmarried women. PRWORA increased the costs of non-marriage by reducing and limiting resources available to unmarried women (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Welfare reform included a mandate that adolescent mothers live with a supervisory adult, usually their mother, on the basis of the belief that living with an adult promotes education and economic opportunities (Kalil & Danziger, 2000). The Healthy Marriage Initiative, part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, provides \$150 million annually for marriage promotion and fatherhood (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

Marriage may be an important resource for adolescent mothers, if they share caregiving and financial responsibilities. Conversely, adolescent mothers who move away from the multigenerational household may lose support from their family of origin (Mollborn, 2007). Extant research does not adequately examine economic benefits or drawbacks of marriage among adolescent mothers (Lichter, Graefe, & Brown, 2003). Marriages that end in divorce often expose women to high rates of poverty and poor physical and psychological health (Lichter et al., 2003; Williams, Sessler, & Nicholson, 2008). In some cases, unmarried mothers prefer to remain unmarried rather than marry an undesirable partner (low socioeconomic status or substance abuse); likewise, young women with children may be seen as poor marriage candidates among economically attractive men (Lichter et al., 2003; Lichter & Graefe, 2007).

Although current policies promote marriage among young mothers, the effects of adolescent marriage vary. In one study of adolescent mothers, 66% married at some point during approximately 15 years postpartum, and marriage

was not associated with changing poverty status, psychological well-being, or educational attainment (Gillmore, Lee, Morrison, & Lindhorst, 2008). Adolescent mothers who marry are at risk for low educational attainment, perhaps because of the increased role demands of being a spouse, running a household, and having more than one child (Kalmuss & Namerow, 1994; Seiler, 2002). Adolescent marriages are fragile and are twice as likely to fail as adult marriages (Graefe & Lichter, 2002; Lichter, 2001). African American adolescent mothers' transition to adulthood deviates from the traditional trajectory of completing education and securing employment, engaging in a committed relationship, and then bearing children (Burton, 1990). Nearly 60% of African American young women in one sample indicated a higher ideal age for marriage than for first birth (Smith & Zabin, 1993). The median age at marriage among African American women is 29.5 years, which is 3½ years older than the national median of 25.9 years (U.S. Census, 2009). Young women who begin childbearing early and marry several years later acknowledge that the timing is not optimal, but they do not view childbearing outside of marriage as stigmatizing (Cherlin, Cross-Barnet, Burton, & Garrett-Peters, 2008).

Explanations for the alternative paths to adulthood may be derived from attachment and social learning theories. For example, Burton (2007) has described an adultification process that occurs in the absence of a secure parent attachment as children in low-income families take on adult roles and responsibilities, such as childbearing. Alternatively, from a social learning perspective, childbearing during adolescence and raising children in multigenerational households is normative in some communities. Another possibility is that with limited support or few models, young women may feel that education and labor force opportunities are out of reach (Elise, 1995; Stevens-Simon & Lowy, 1995). Alternatively, living in poverty may lead to an accelerated life course because of a shortened healthy life expectancy (Burton, 1990; Geronimus, 1991). Finally, young women with limited access to desirable marital partners may choose to bear children while unmarried rather than remain childless (Shanok & Miller, 2007).

### Marital Expectations

The common belief that African American mothers do not value marriage is not supported by research (Harknett & McLanahan, 2004). On the contrary, results of qualitative and quantitative research suggest that marriage may be held in such high esteem that it is difficult to find a suitable partner (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005).

Among unmarried adult parents in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, marital expectations were the strongest predictor of subsequent marriage (Waller & McLanahan, 2005). Less is known about marital expectations among adolescent mothers. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth indicate that young parents between the ages of 15 and 21 years are significantly more likely than their childless peers to report high likelihood of marriage in the next 5 years, indicating that efforts are not

needed to promote the ideal of marriage in this population (Gassanov, Nicholson, & Koch-Turner, 2008). While almost one half of unmarried adolescent mothers in the Fragile Families study reported that it was likely that they would marry their child's father, less than 8% had married the father by 1 year postpartum (Child Trends, 2005).

### Intergenerational Factors Associated With Marital Expectations

Adolescents' expectations about family formation are influenced by their family's structure and values, cultural background, and socioeconomic status (Plotnick, 2007). One study (Shulman et al., 1999) found that adolescent marital expectations were associated with parent expectations, particularly among closely attached adolescent-parent dyads. Studies investigating marital timing (van Poppel & Monden, 2008) and divorce (Sassler, Cunningham, & Lichter, 2009) indicate that the family of origin serves as a template for intimate relationships.

Previous researchers have focused on cultural explanations for low marriage rates, often limiting their explorations to racial differences in marital expectations (Crissey, 2005; Graefe & Lichter, 2002; Harknett & McLanahan, 2004; Plotnick, 2007). The sample in this study is culturally and geographically homogeneous, enabling the use of attachment and social learning theories to examine factors associated with marital expectations and marriage among urban, low-income, African American first-time adolescent mothers. The goals of this study are (a) to examine patterns of marital expectations and agreement among adolescent mothers and their mothers (grandmothers) and (b) to examine how adolescent age, marital expectations, intergenerational marriage models, and adolescent mother-grandmother relationship quality are related to marriage by 7 years postpartum.

We examine the direct and indirect effects of intergenerational marriage models and a supportive adolescent mother-grandmother relationship during the first 24 months of parenting on marital expectations at 24 months and on marriage at 7 years. We test two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is based on developmental expectations that increasing maternal age and positive marital expectations predict marriage. The second hypothesis integrates attachment and social learning theories by predicting that the strength of intergenerational marriage models in predicting marriage depends on the context of a supportive adolescent mother-grandmother relationship.

## Method

### Participants

The present study utilized data from a longitudinal randomized control trial of home intervention designed to promote parenting and adolescent development (Black et al., 2006). Eligible adolescent mothers were under age 18 years at delivery, primiparous, African American, low-income (defined as eligible for Special Supplemental Nutri-

tional Services for Women, Infants, and Children, WIC: family income under 185% of poverty level), and had no chronic illnesses that would interfere with parenting or adolescent development. National policies require that eligibility for public services be restricted to adolescent mothers who are in the guardianship of an adult, and we limited our sample to adolescent mothers who were living with their mother. Infants of eligible adolescent mothers had to be full term ( $\geq 37$  weeks), with a birth weight above 2500 g and no congenital problems. None of the infants experienced complications following delivery that required neonatal intensive care services.

The sample included 181 adolescent mothers. Maternal age ranged from 13.5 to 17.9 years at delivery ( $M = 16.4$  years,  $SD = 1.0$ ; 68% were ages 16–17 years; Table 1). All adolescent mothers were unmarried, 97% received public assistance, and they had an average of 10.1 years of education ( $SD = 1.12$ , minimum = 7, maximum = 12).

### Procedures

Adolescent mothers were recruited after delivery from three urban hospitals in Baltimore, Maryland, between June 1997 and September 1999. Adolescent mothers were given information regarding the study, and those who chose to participate were scheduled for a baseline evaluation in their homes within 3 weeks of delivery. Over 83% of eligible mothers agreed to participate, and 181 completed the baseline evaluation. There were no differences in maternal age or education between those who completed the baseline evaluation and those who did not.

Adolescent mothers and grandmothers completed baseline measures in their homes within 3 weeks of delivery, which included family demographics, personal and mental health, adolescent mother-grandmother relationships, access to public services, and early adjustment to parenting. Participants completed these measures on laptop computers, and items were presented both visually on the computer screen and aurally through headphones. Participants recorded responses with a computer mouse.

Using a randomization procedure, we assigned adolescent mothers to either the intervention group or the control group. Families in the intervention group received home visits every other week over the next 12 months. The manualized curriculum was designed to promote healthy adolescent development and positive parenting. Families in the control group received no contact other than the follow-up evaluations. Data were collected at baseline ( $N = 181$ ), 6 months ( $N = 148$ , 82%), 13 months ( $N = 127$ , 70%), 24 months ( $N = 146$ , 81%), and 7 years ( $N = 120$ , 66%) postpartum. Families who participated in the baseline through 24-month evaluations did not differ in maternal age, maternal education, infant birth weight, infant gender, or intervention status from nonparticipating families. Adolescent mothers who participated in the 7-year evaluation interview reported slightly more education at baseline than did nonparticipating adolescent mothers (10.28 vs. 9.91 years,  $r = .16$ ,  $p = .04$ ); there were no differences on other variables.

Table 1  
*Sample Characteristics (N = 181)*

Characteristic	N (%)	SD	Minimum, maximum
Demographics			
Public assistance	176 (97)		
Adolescent mother age at baseline (mean age in years)	16.3	1.0	13.5, 17.9
Grandmother age at baseline (mean age in years)	38.6	4.8	30.1, 54.3
Child gender (% male, % female)	51, 49		
Intergenerational Marriage Index			
Grandmother married at first birth	22 (12)		
Grandmother believes it is likely/very likely her daughter will marry between 24 months and 7 years postpartum	46 (26)		
Biological father or father figure in the household	46 (27)		
Biological father characteristics <sup>a</sup>			
Age at baseline (mean age in years)	18.7	2.6	15, 31
Education (mean years)	10.7	1.5	7, 14
Employment in the last year (% yes)	48.5		
Duration of relationship prior to pregnancy	6–12 months		<2 weeks, >2 years
Previous child/children (% yes)	27		

<sup>a</sup> Information provided by adolescent mothers at the baseline assessment.

The procedures were approved by the institutional review boards at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and all participating hospitals. Evaluators were not aware of the participants' intervention status, and participants were compensated for evaluation visits.

## Measures

At each follow-up evaluation, adolescent mothers reported on their marital status, involvement in a romantic relationship, and childbearing history. Adolescent mothers who were unmarried described the likelihood that they would marry the father of the baby or someone else in the next 5 years on a Likert scale from *very unlikely* (1) to *very likely* (5). Grandmothers described the likelihood that their daughters would marry the father of the baby or someone else in the next 5 years, from *very unlikely* (1) to *very likely* (5). Grandmothers were asked to report on their own marital status at the time of their first birth, as well as their marital status at the baseline visit.

An intergenerational marriage index was calculated by summing responses to three dichotomous items, two of which were collected at baseline—(a) grandmother married at her own first birth and (b) father or father figure of the adolescent mother currently living in the household—and one item that was collected at 24 months—(c) grandmother reported that it is likely or very likely that her daughter will marry in the next 5 years.

A supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship was measured using the Network of Relationship Inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) Support factor. The NRI is a self-report measure of quality of adolescent–grandmother relationship completed by the adolescent at the baseline, 6-month, 13-month, and 24-month evaluations.

The Support factor measures supportive interactions, with responses to 15 items ranging from *little or none* (1) to *the most* (5). The Support factor includes items such as “How much does your mom treat you like you are good at many things?” The reliability and validity of this measure have been empirically supported in previous research (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Cronbach's alpha of the Support factor in this sample ranged from 0.89 to 0.94 at the four time points.

## Data Analysis

We used descriptive statistics to examine adolescent romantic relationships and marital expectations over time. Correlational analyses were used to examine associations between adolescent mother and grandmother marital expectations. Developmental trajectories of adolescent mother–grandmother supportive relationship quality were estimated using PROC TRAJ (Jones, Nagin, & Roeder, 2001; Nagin, 1999; Nagin, 2005). Logistic regression analyses were used to predict marital expectations and marriage. Maternal age at 7-year follow-up was included, along with the intergenerational marriage index, the indicator of adolescent mother–grandmother relationship quality, and the intergenerational marriage index by adolescent mother–grandmother relationship quality interaction term. A significant interaction term was analyzed by dividing the sample into low and high adolescent mother–grandmother supportive relationship groups and repeating the logistic regression. Marital expectations and marriage by 7 years postpartum were not associated with intervention group status or with intervention by predictor interactions. Intervention group status and maternal age were included as covariates in all models. To further explore the impact of adolescent mother age, we investi-

gated moderation of the associations between the predictors (relationship quality and intergenerational marriage models) and outcomes (marital expectations and marriage) by age at the 7-year follow-up.

## Results

At baseline, 66% of adolescent mothers reported that they were in romantic relationships with the father of the baby, and 7% were in relationships with someone else. Rates of romantic involvement with the father of the baby decreased across the five time points: 66%, 44%, 41%, 34%, and 10%;  $F(1, 43) = 68.56, p < .001$ . Involvement with new partners increased over time: 7%, 36%, 32%, 50%, and 61%;  $F(1, 40) = 57.29, p < .001$ . Many adolescent mothers reported breaking up with a romantic partner between evaluation time points (41% at 6 months, 26% at 13 months, 50% at 24 months, and 31% at 7 years). Adolescent mothers reported that the father of their child was an average of 18.7 years old, and most had been involved in a relationship for 6–12 months prior to the pregnancy (Table 1; also see Gavin et al., 2002).

Developmental trajectory models were estimated for adolescent mother–grandmother supportive relationship quality assessed at baseline, 6 months, 13 months, and 24 months postpartum. As with hierarchical and latent curve modeling, this semiparametric, group-based method uses a polynomial function to model the association between age at assessment and supportive relationship quality (Nagin, 1999; Nagin, 2005). Maximum likelihood estimation was used to estimate the trajectories. This method identifies the shape of each group's trajectory, the proportion of the sample belonging to each group, and the posterior probability of group membership for each participant. On the basis of these calculations, participants are assigned to the group that best conforms to their trajectory of supportive relationship quality.

Model selection is determined by the optimal number of groups to describe the data. The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) can be used to identify the optimal model (Jones et al., 2001; Nagin, 1999; Nagin, 2005). The BIC calculations indicated that the two-group model (BIC =  $-602.22$ ) was a slightly better fit than was the three-group model (BIC =  $-602.40$ ). The two-group model was selected, also given a desire for parsimony, a relatively small sample size, and a limited number of evaluation assessments. One group ( $N = 71$ ) had high supportive relationship quality scores at baseline that remained fairly stable over time. The other group ( $N = 71$ ) had low support scores at baseline that decreased over 6 months postpartum and then remained stable through 24 months postpartum. Figure 1 graphs the actual versus predicted trajectories by group. Group membership was used in subsequent analyses to represent high or low adolescent mother–grandmother support over the first 24 months of parenting.

Only 12% of grandmothers were married when their first child was born. One quarter (26%) of grandmothers reported that it was likely or very likely that their daughter would marry between 24 months and 7 years, excluding two

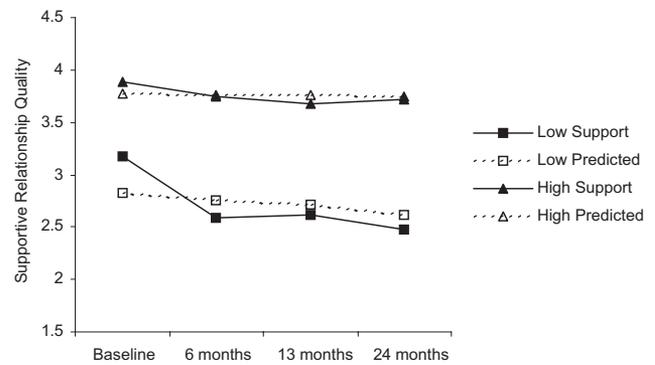


Figure 1. Trajectories of adolescent mother–grandmother supportive relationship quality.

grandmothers whose daughters married by 24 months. One quarter (27%) of adolescents had a father or father figure in the household at baseline. Scores on the intergenerational marriage index ranged from 0 to 3 ( $M = 0.63, SD = 0.77$ ).

## Marital Expectations

At baseline, nearly one quarter of adolescent mothers expected to marry the father of the baby within the next 5 years, and their expectations remained fairly constant over 24 months (23%, 29%, 29%, and 24%). In contrast, expectations to marry someone else increased over time: 16%, 18%, 23%, and 30%;  $F(1, 97) = 5.17, p = .03$  (Figure 2a). Overall, marital expectations increased over time,  $F(1, 98) = 4.83, p = .03$ , but at 24 months postpartum only half of adolescent mothers (52%) reported that it was likely that they would marry anyone in the next 5 years (Figure 2b). At 24 months, adolescent mothers in a romantic relationship were more likely to report that it was likely or very likely that they would get married in the next 5 years in comparison with those who were not in a romantic relationship,  $\chi^2(1, N = 134) = 6.93, p < .01$ .

Grandmother expectations about their daughters' marriages did not vary over time for the father of the baby (9%, 16%, 10%, and 10%) or for someone else (19%, 28%, 21%, and 23%). By 24 months postpartum, only 30% of grandmothers believed that it was likely or very likely that their daughter would marry anyone in the next 5 years (Figure 2b). Adolescent mothers' marital expectations were associated with grandmothers' expectations for both fathers ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ) and other partners ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ) at baseline but were not associated at 6, 13, or 24 months.

In a logistic regression model including intervention status and adolescent mothers' age as covariates, the intergenerational marriage index and adolescent mother–grandmother supportive relationship quality were not associated with marital expectations at 24 months. There was no evidence of a statistically significant interaction between the intergenerational marriage index and adolescent mother–grandmother relationship quality (Table 2). We found no support for moderation of the association between the intergenerational marriage

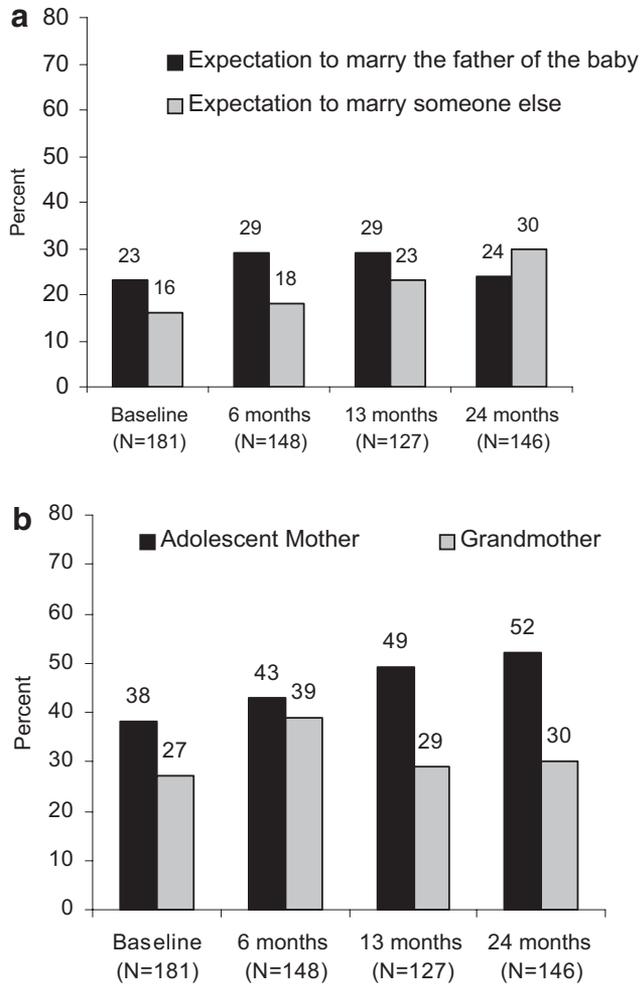


Figure 2. a. Adolescent mothers' marital expectations over the next 5 years. b. Adolescent mother and grandmother reports of marital expectations over the next 5 years.

index, relationship quality, and marital expectations by adolescent mother age.

**Marriage**

Two adolescent mothers (1%) had married by 24 months postpartum. Both married the father of their first baby, one during the first year and one during the second year postpartum. At baseline, neither adolescent mother lived with the father of the baby, but both reported being involved in a romantic relationship with him and that marriage in the next 5 years was likely or very likely. Both adolescent mothers had delivered a second child by the 24-month follow-up.

At 7 years, 14% (N = 17) of the sample had married. Four adolescent mothers (3%) were married to their first child's father, 12 (10%) were married to a new partner, and 1 (1%) was separated or divorced. The 2 adolescent mothers who married during the first 24 months postpartum continued to be married at 7 years. In comparison with unmarried

mothers, adolescent mothers who married by 7 years postpartum were older (24.68 vs. 24.12 years),  $t(115) = -2.03, p < .05$ , and had given birth to more children (2.69 vs. 1.91),  $t(115) = -3.16, p < .01$ . Marriage by 7 years postpartum was not associated with marital expectations at baseline, 6, 13, or 24 months (all  $ps > .10$ ). However, the two adolescent mothers who married their first child's father between 2 and 7 years postpartum had reported at 24 months that marriage was likely or very likely. At 24 months, 6 of the 12 adolescent mothers who married someone else by 7 years had reported that marriage with another partner was likely or very likely.

At 7 years postpartum, 92 adolescent mothers (77%) had obtained a high school diploma or a general educational development (GED) degree, and 95 (80%) were employed or full-time students. Adolescent mothers who married were marginally more likely to have obtained a diploma or GED,  $\chi^2(1, N = 117) = 2.84, p = .08$ , than were unmarried adolescent mothers, but there was no difference between the groups on employment status,  $\chi^2(1, N = 119) = 0.08, p > .10$ .

In a logistic regression model adjusting for intervention status, older maternal age predicted marriage, and adolescent mother-grandmother quality moderated the association between the intergenerational marriage index and marriage by 7 years postpartum (Table 2). For each point increase of the intergenerational marriage index, adolescent mothers in

Table 2  
*Logistic Regression Models Predicting Marital Expectations and Marriage by Intergenerational Marriage Index Scores and Supportive Mother-Grandmother Relationship*

Step	OR	95% CI	Wald $\chi^2$
Marital expectations at 24 months (N = 143)			
Step 1			
AM age	1.19	0.81, 1.75	0.75
Intervention status	1.12	0.48, 2.59	0.07
Intergenerational Marriage Index	1.40	0.78, 2.51	1.24
AM-GM supportive relationship quality	1.14	0.49, 2.63	0.09
Step 2			
Intergenerational Index $\times$ Supportive Relationship	0.93	0.28, 3.11	0.01
Marriage by 7 years (N = 120)			
Step 1			
AM Age	1.91	1.05, 3.45	4.54*
Intervention status	1.78	0.54, 5.89	0.90
Intergenerational Marriage Index	1.48	0.77, 2.83	1.39
AM-GM supportive relationship quality	0.51	0.16, 1.62	1.31
Step 2			
Intergenerational Index $\times$ Supportive Relationship	12.13	1.94, 75.91	7.11**

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; AM = adolescent mother; GM = grandmother.  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

the high support group ( $N = 71$ ) were 3.80 times (95% CI: 1.31, 11.01,  $p = .01$ ) more likely to marry than were other mothers. Among adolescent mothers in the low support group, the intergenerational marriage index was not associated with marriage by 7 years (OR = 0.38, 95% CI: 0.12, 1.27,  $p > .10$ ). We found no support for moderation of the association between the intergenerational marriage index, relationship quality, and Marriage  $\times$  Adolescent Mother Age.

### Discussion

Few adolescent mothers married by 7 years postpartum, but those who did were older and lived in families who promoted marriage in the context of an affectionate, supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship. Variables derived from attachment and social learning theories did not independently predict marriage, but adolescent mothers with both strong adolescent mother–grandmother attachment and intergenerational marriage models were most likely to marry.

The current study furthers our understanding of marriage among urban, low-income, African American adolescents. Young women who gave birth as adolescents continued to follow nontraditional trajectories toward adulthood that excluded long-term committed relationships and marriage. Although marital expectations increased over the first 2 years of parenting, by 24 months, only half (52%) of adolescent mothers believed it was likely or very likely that they would marry, and by 7 years only 14% had married. Shortly after birth, adolescent mothers and grandmothers agreed on their expectations of marriage, possibly because the celebratory events surrounding the birth kindled feelings of marital possibilities. As the nature of the adolescent parents' relationship changed over time and new partners became involved, adolescent mothers' and grandmothers' expectations for marriage no longer agreed.

Marriage served as a marker of family formation, because married adolescent mothers were older and gave birth to more children than did unmarried adolescent mothers. Married adolescent mothers were somewhat more likely to have attained a diploma or GED than were unmarried mothers. A strong, supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship may allow for the transmission of attitudes toward educational attainment. Possible explanations related to increasing maturity are that high school or GED completion made adolescent mothers more focused on marriage or more attractive marriage partners, or that the developmental step of marriage increased the importance of completing high school as preparation for future employment. Another possible explanation is that married adolescent mothers received support from their partner that allowed them to successfully further their education.

Marriage is designed in part to form a stable and supportive environment for parents to raise their children. However, this study found that adolescents were unlikely to be in committed, long-term relationships after the birth of their first child, supporting previous research (e.g., Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Gee & Rhodes, 2003). Rates of involve-

ment in romantic relationships with the father of their first baby, which decreased from 66% at baseline to 10% at 7 years, were even lower than rates from comparable samples. Toledo-Dreves, Zabin, and Emerson (1995) reported that approximately half of adolescent mothers in their urban, low-income, African American clinic sample were in a romantic relationship with the father of their first child at 24 months postpartum, in comparison with one third of adolescent mothers in the current sample. The unstable nature of adolescent romantic relationships raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of policies based on marriage promotion.

Marital expectations at 24 months did not predict marriage by 7 years postpartum. Adolescent mothers expected to marry at higher rates than were observed, suggesting that some adolescent mothers hold marriage in high esteem but may have been unable to find suitable, eligible marital partners. The weakened link between a successful high school career and future employment has led to urban neighborhoods in which the majority of adults are unemployed and disconnected from the labor force (Wilson, 1996). In many communities, young African American men have difficulty securing legitimate employment opportunities that allow them to financially provide for a family (Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Wilson, 1996). Previous research has connected grandmother history of marriage, grandmother expectations that her daughter would marry, and the presence of a father or father figure in the household with adolescents' attitudes and marital expectations (Haveman et al., 2001; Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986; Plotnick, 2007; Shulman et al., 1999). However, the absence of an independent relationship between grandmother marital support and a supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship with marital expectations suggests that attachment and social learning theories are not sufficient for understanding marital expectations. In this sample, marital expectations were associated with concurrent involvement in a romantic relationship, suggesting that marriage is considered a viable option only for those with a potential partner. Older age, support during the pregnancy (Gee & Rhodes, 2003), employment, and educational attainment have been identified as predictors of marriage among low-income adult African American men (Seiler, 2002).

Few families had strong intergenerational marriage models. Grandmothers may not have promoted marriage because they did not follow the traditional developmental trajectory of marrying and rearing children in a two-parent household themselves. Most grandmothers were not married at the time of their first birth, and many were not married at the time of this study. Grandmothers may also have felt that the father of their daughter's baby was not a suitable partner or provider, and they may have discouraged their daughter from marrying him. Grandmothers have been identified as gatekeepers of adolescent mothers' romantic relationships, and a lack of financial and emotional support provided by fathers has been associated with grandmother opposition of the relationship (Krishnakumar & Black, 2003). The influence of grandmothers on adolescent mothers' romantic relationships has heightened since the passage

of PRWORA, when an increasing number of adolescent mothers continue to live in their household of origin.

We identified two distinct developmental trajectories of adolescent mother–grandmother supportive relationship quality. A birth during adolescence leads to role shifts and adaptations among all members of a multigenerational family. Adolescent mothers in the high support group continued to report a positive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship characterized by high support over time, suggesting that the family system was able to successfully stabilize. Adolescent mothers who described their relationships as less supportive at baseline experienced a further decline in their relationship and in support over time. These families may have experienced conflict and upheaval during the adjustment process. Future research is needed to understand other potential vulnerabilities associated with adolescent mothers and children living in families characterized by low support.

Several methodological considerations warrant caution when generalizing these findings to independent samples of adolescent mothers. In an effort to parallel the living conditions of many low-income adolescent mothers after the passage of PRWORA, we restricted this sample to African American mothers living with their mothers at delivery. Required coresidence with the baby's grandmother may make it difficult for adolescents to develop and maintain romantic relationships. This may be particularly important for older adolescent mothers who are developmentally ready for a separate household and in a position to pursue adult romantic relationships that might lead to marriage. Half of the adolescent mothers participated in an intervention (Black et al., 2006). Although the intervention was not designed to address marriage and there were no group differences in rates of marriage or marital expectations, there may have been unmeasured effects of the intervention on intimate relationships.

This study is a unique contribution because, to our knowledge, it is the first prospective, long-term follow-up of marital expectations of both adolescent mothers and grandmothers living in mandated multigenerational households after welfare reform. This study moves beyond individual characteristics to include family-level variables derived from attachment and social learning theories. The inclusion of both marital expectations and marriage to biological fathers and new romantic partners adds strength to the study, particularly with the recognition that adolescent romantic relationships are often transitional. Although there are clear developmental differences across the age span of the participants, who were all under age 18 at delivery, this age range removes the confound present in many other studies that have included young mothers up to the age of 21 or 25 at delivery. At 7 years postpartum, the adolescent mothers in this sample were still under the median age of marriage for African American women, suggesting the need for longer-term follow-up studies.

Marriage promotion efforts often target low-income women and their children's fathers. In this sample, only 1% of adolescent mothers married their first child's father by 24 months, and 3% married him by 7 years postpartum. When

marriage to either the first child's father or a new partner was considered, adolescent mothers who married were older and lived in a context of marriage models and a supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship. The promotion of marriage among adolescent mothers should be re-evaluated in light of evidence suggesting that early marriage leads to ongoing childbearing and high rates of divorce (Graefe & Lichter, 2002). Adolescent mothers who complete their education and limit childbearing may have the best chance of building the competencies that will lead to successful futures for themselves and their children (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, Chase-Lansdale, 1989). Marriage rates in low-income neighborhoods are associated with employment (Wilson, 1996), and those hoping to promote sustained romantic relationships in fragile families should consider intergenerational marriage models and focus on the education and employment opportunities necessary to support a family.

This study highlights the challenges of marriage promotion among adolescent mothers. Although their aspirations toward marriage increased over time, 7 years after giving birth, only half the adolescent mothers expected to marry, and their earlier aspirations did not predict marriage. In addition, the adolescent mother–father relationship was characterized by frequent breakups, with only 10% still involved in a romantic relationship after 7 years, raising concerns about adolescents' readiness for marriage. In contrast, in keeping with attachment and social learning theories, marriage was predicted by intergenerational models of marriage in the context of a supportive adolescent mother–grandmother relationship. Thus, family-friendly policies that support marriage and promote healthy parent–child relations among the general population may help young parents move toward marriage as they mature and are prepared.

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**Call for Papers for a Special Section of the  
*Journal of Family Psychology*:  
U.S. Military Operations: Effects on Military Members’  
Partners and Children**

**Editors: Michelle Kelley and Ernest Jouriles**

The *Journal of Family Psychology* invites manuscripts for a special section on military families. The deployment of U.S. military personnel to global hot spots, whether as combatants or as peacekeepers, has prompted increased attention to the psychological well-being of those deployed and their families. A driving force behind this attention has been the high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) documented among military personnel exposed to combat. Yet, the influence of military deployment and combat exposure is much more far-reaching and complex. Presently, there is a dearth of theory and research on how the deployment and reintegration of military personnel influence family, couple, and child functioning. The intent of this special section is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding how U.S. military operations might influence family interactions and family members’ mental health and to showcase new developments in the study of military families.

The deadline for receipt of papers for this special section is **October 31, 2010**. Review papers, theoretical papers, and empirical papers will be considered. Please follow the journal’s Instructions to Authors for information about how to prepare an article, which can be found on the journal’s web page ([www.apa.org/pubs/journals/fam](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/fam)). Manuscripts must be submitted electronically through the Manuscript Submission Web Portal of the *Journal of Family Psychology* ([www.apa.org/pubs/journals/fam](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/fam)). Please be sure to specify in the cover letter that the submission is intended for the special section on military families. All papers will be initially screened by the editors, and papers that fit well with the theme of this special section will be sent out for blind peer review.