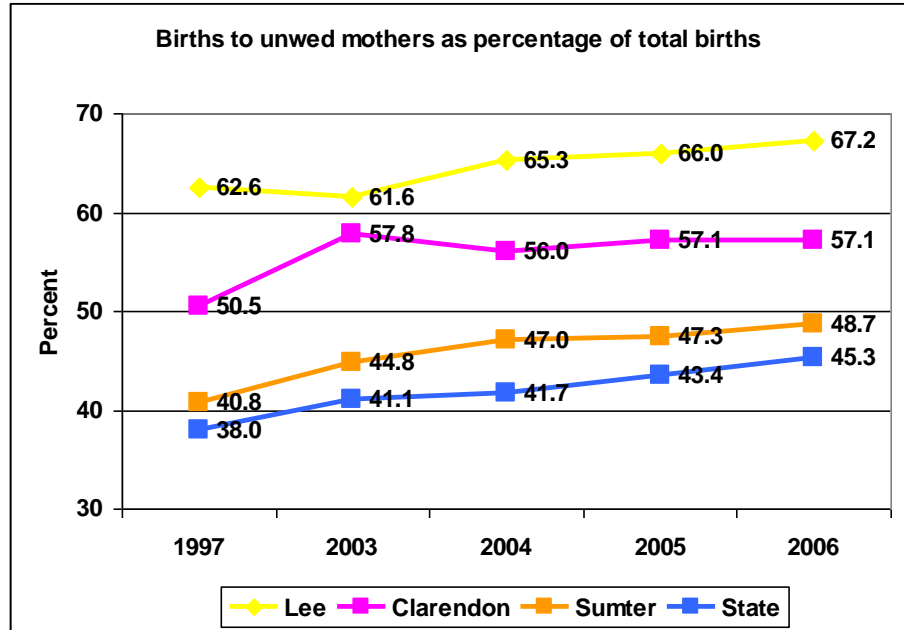


Out-of-wedlock births, single-parent families lead to more poverty, youth further behind in education

During the last decade, births to unwed mothers have become an increasingly serious issue in the region and across the U.S. The major dilemma facing unwed mothers is they and their children face a high risk of poverty because of low relative household income.

Additionally there is a significant parental strain placed on the mother in these situations. Clarendon, Lee and Sumter counties have all seen higher annual percentages of out-of-wedlock births since 1997 as the accompanying chart shows. In 2006, 48.7 percent of all births in Sumter were to unwed moms, about 3.4 percent above the state average. In Lee and Clarendon the totals were more telling. About two of every three births in Lee in recent years are to unwed mothers. In Clarendon, the percentages have increased from 50 percent in 1997 to 57.1 percent in 2006.



In regards to income, statistics over the last decade show about one in three unwed mothers in the tri-county area who gave birth had less than a high school diploma or GED, seriously curtailing their earnings potential. As mentioned, these mothers also face a difficult challenge in balancing work and rearing children during the child's early years of cognitive, social and emotional skill development. Statistics also reveal most out-of-wedlock births in the counties since '97 (79 percent) have been by African-American females. A total of 59 percent of all unwed mothers since '97 in the tri-county area have been in the age category of 18-24 years old.

As of Census 2000, about one half of all minority children in the tri-county area were in single-parent families and one in three minority children in the area were in poverty as the next table shows. In comparison, only one in 12.5 white children in the area was in poverty. State averages were similar to the local statistics.

County single-parent family & poverty rates for children 17-and-under – 2000

Area	Minority children in single-parent families	Minority children in poverty	White children in single-parent families	White children in poverty
Clarendon	53.2%	36.3%	17.9%	12.1%
Lee	51.6%	33.5%	18.1%	1.9%
Sumter	49.0%	32.0%	17.3%	7.7%
STATE	52.0%	31.9%	19.0%	9.4%

Given higher annual percentages of out-of-wedlock births since 2000 and increased unemployment, overall poverty rates and the racial gap in poverty most likely have gradually increased from 2000 levels.

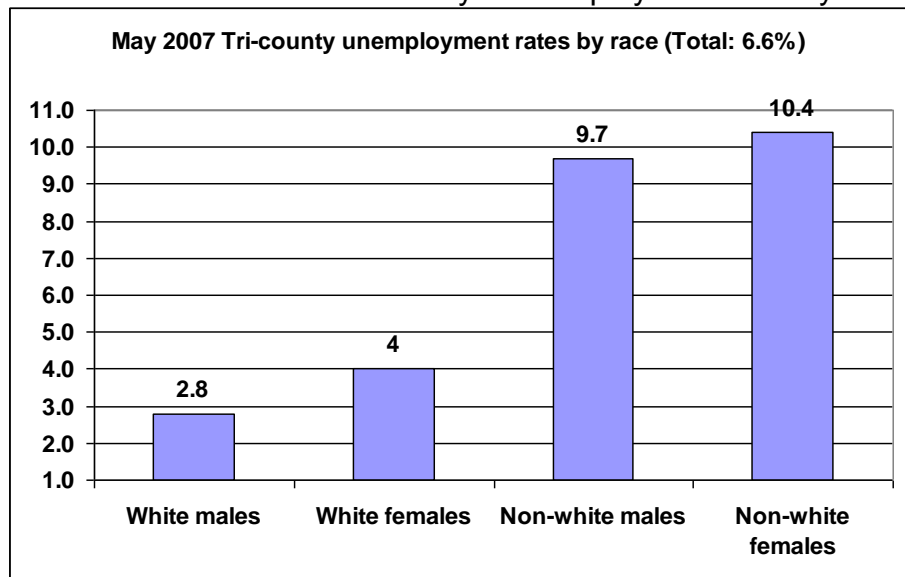
How out-of-wedlock births, poverty and parenting relate to educational attainment?

Many studies – including *The Future of Children* published by Princeton University – attribute inadequate parenting behaviors (lack of nurturance, discipline, teaching and language use) for as much as 50 percent of racial differences in school readiness, given higher rates of out-of-wedlock births, single-parent families and poverty among minorities. The lack of school readiness, measured by standardized test scores in the elementary grades, is especially prevalent in African-American males. In 2007 about 36 percent of minority male kindergartners in the three counties were considered not consistently ready for 1st grade according to the South Carolina Readiness Assessment, which was administered in all public schools.

Given inadequate parenting behaviors, which often result from the high relative rates of out-of-wedlock births, single-parent families and poverty in the African-American community, minorities often experience an “achievement gap” in comparison to white children throughout their school years in the form of lower standardized test scores and higher dropout rates. **The “achievement gap” often results in minorities experiencing a lack of educational attainment and skill development, which are essential to secure job and financial security in the adult workforce in today’s economy.**

Outcomes and breaking the cycle

The final chart below is a recent measurement of the tri-county’s unemployment rate by race and gender from May 2007 by the state Employment Security Commission. For that month, the tri-county unemployment rate was 6.6 percent. The unemployment rate among whites was 3.4 percent; while the rate for minorities was basically three times larger at 10.0 percent. ESC emphasizes these percentages are “loose estimates” based on Census 2000 employment trends, but the overall trends are alarming and necessitate further intervention among African-Americans and other minorities to break a potential poverty cycle.



Research shows the most effective approaches to breaking the cycle directly address child and parental behaviors that contribute to school readiness and therefore lesson the potential for an achievement gap. Many believe the most promising strategy is to increase access to high-quality center-based early childhood education programs for all low-income 3- and 4-year-olds with small class sizes, well-trained teachers, a parent-training component, and a health services component. South Carolina citizens overwhelmingly supported high-quality early childhood education for 3- and 4-year-olds when surveyed in the Riley Institute’s recently completed 18-month study of the state’s public education system.