



Research Update

Trends in teen pregnancy in Canada with comparisons to U.S.A. and England/Wales

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Abstract: This report provides an overview of trends in teen pregnancy in Canada since 1974. In Canada, teen pregnancy rates are calculated as the sum of recorded live births, induced abortions, and miscarriages per 1,000 of the population of females aged 15 to 19. Between 1974, the year Statistics Canada began collecting and disseminating data on teen pregnancy, and 2003, the most recent year for which data is available, the teen pregnancy rate declined from 53.9 to 32.1. The decline was more pronounced among younger teens (15-17) than older teens (18-19). There were considerable variations in rates of teen pregnancy among the Canadian provinces/territories with higher rates occurring in the prairie provinces and territories. Canada, the USA, and England and Wales all saw their combined birth/abortion rates among women under age 20 decline since 1990 and Canada's rate remains less than half the rate of both the USA and England and Wales.

Key words: Teen pregnancy rates, Canada, trends.

In Western countries rates of teenage pregnancy are often viewed as a general indicator of adolescent sexual and reproductive health as well as a bellwether of community socio-economic status. For example, teen pregnancy is classified by Statistics Canada as 1 of over 80 health indicators that are measured by the agency and included as 1 of 11 indicators under the category of "Community and Health Systems Characteristics" (Statistics Canada, 2006a). In many cases, researchers have sought to establish links between teen childbearing and socio-economic disadvantage. For example, an international comparative study of teenage sexual behaviour in five developed countries (Canada, U.S.A., France, Sweden, U.K.) found that in all five countries there was a strong negative association between level of educational attainment and bearing a child before the age of 20 (Darroch, Frost, Singh et al., 2000). However, the validity of uniformly conceptualizing teen pregnancy as a social problem has been questioned (Bissell, 2000; Bonell, 2004). For example, teen pregnancy and child birth is more

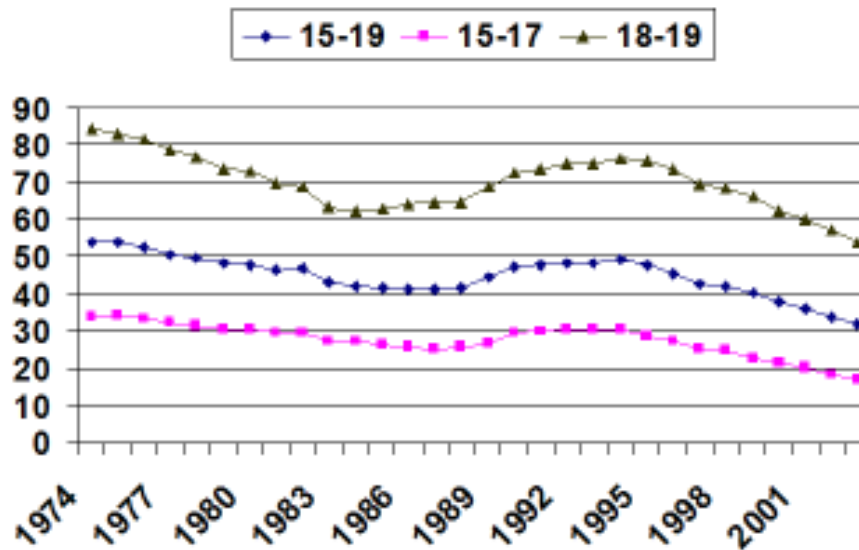
accepted within some ethno-cultural communities than in others. Furthermore, untangling the extent to which teen pregnancy and child rearing is a precursor to socio-economic disadvantage or is a reflection of it is highly complex and does not lend itself to definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, trends in teen pregnancy rates, particularly if rates are declining, can be viewed as a fairly direct indicator of young women's increasing opportunities and capacity to control their sexual and reproductive health.

Part 1: Trends in Canadian Teen Pregnancy Rates

Statistics Canada began collecting and disseminating data on teen pregnancy in 1974. As indicated in Figure 1, although there was a period from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s in which the reported number of teen pregnancies increased in Canada, the overall, long-range trend indicates that rates of teen pregnancy declined substantially during the last quarter of the 20th century and this downward trend



Figure 1 Teen pregnancy rates per 1,000 15- to 19-, 15-to 17-, 18- to 19-year-olds, Canada, 1974-2003.



Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada CANSIM database <http://cansim2.statcan.ca>, Table 106-9002. Retrieved 10/03/07.

continued into the first years of the 21st century. The teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 declined from 53.9 in 1974 to 41.8 in 1988, increased to 49.2 in 1994, and then declined to 32.1 in 2003. The overall decline was more pronounced among younger teens aged 15-17 where the rate fell by slightly more than half from 33.9 per 1,000 in 1974 to 16.8 in 2003. Table 1 provides the teen pregnancy, live birth, and abortion rates for each of the last ten years for which data is available (1994-2003). For teenagers aged 15-19 the total pregnancy and live birth rates decline every year from 1994 to 2003. The induced abortion rate fluctuated within a narrow range but decreased overall between 1994 and 2003.

Figure 2 indicates trends in the teen birth and abortion rates from 1974 to 2003. The teen birth rate declined

from 35.7 per 1,000 in 1974 to 14.4 in 2003 whereas the teen abortion rate increased from 13.9 to 17.1. Prior to 1996, the teen birth rate was higher than the teen abortion rate while slightly more teen pregnancies ended in abortion compared to live births after 1996. Given the concurrent decline in both birth and abortion rates since 1996, it is clear that the drop in teen birth rates is due to the overarching trend of steadily declining teen pregnancy rates and not to an increase in abortion rates.

Figure 3 provides provincial/territorial comparisons of pregnancy rates for 15- to 17- and 18- to 19-year-olds for the year 2003. Similar to previous years (data not shown), teen pregnancy rates were higher in the prairie provinces and in the territories and varied considerably across the country. For 15- to 19-year-

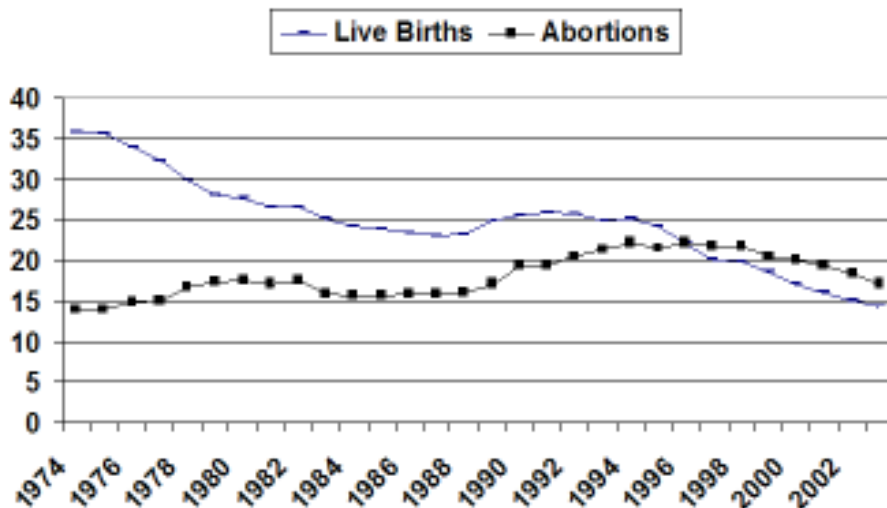
Table 1 Total pregnancy, live birth, and induced abortion rates per 1,000 15- to 19-year-olds, Canada, 1994-2003

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Pregnancies	49.2	47.6	45.6	42.8	42.4	40.1	38.0	36.1	33.9	32.1
Live Births	25.0	24.3	22.1	20.0	19.8	18.6	17.0	16.0	14.9	14.4
Abortions	22.1	21.5	22.1	21.6	21.6	20.5	20.1	19.4	18.4	17.1

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada (2006b). *Pregnancy Outcomes – 2003*. Catalogue no. 82-224-XIE, p. 10.



Figure 2 Teen birth and abortion rates per 1,000 15- to 19-year-olds, Canada, 1974-2003.

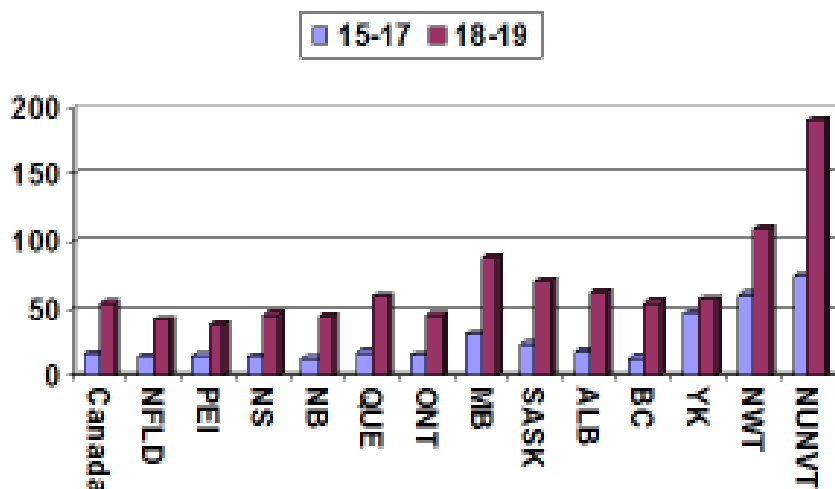


Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada CANSIM database <http://cansim2.statcan.ca>, Table 106-9002. Retrieved on 10/03/07.

olds, 6 provinces had pregnancy rates below the national average of 32.1 per 1,000: Prince Edward Island (23.4), Newfoundland and Labrador (26.0), New Brunswick (26.0), Nova Scotia (27.2), Ontario (27.4), and British Columbia (30.5). Four provinces and the three territories had teen pregnancy rates above the national average: Quebec (34.7), Alberta (35.7), Saskatchewan (42.6), Manitoba (53.4), Yukon

Territory (51.2), Northwest Territories (78.7), and Nunavut (118.8) (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

Figure 3 Teen pregnancy rates per 1,000 15- to 17-, 18- to 19-year-olds, by province/territory, Canada, 2003.



Source: Statistics Canada (2006a). *Health Indicators*. Catalogue no. 82-221. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/82-221-XIE/82-221-XIE2006001.htm>



Part II: A Comparison of Trends in Birth/Abortion Rates Among Women Under Age 20: Canada, USA, and England/Wales

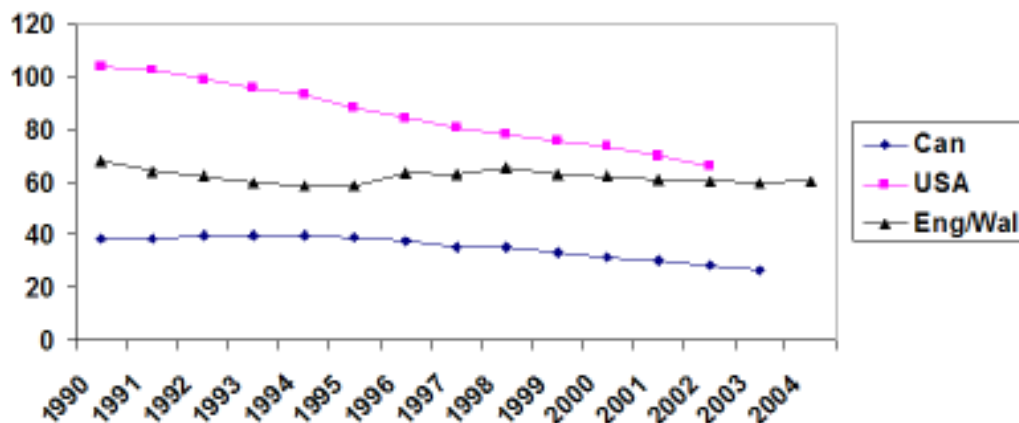
International comparisons of trends in teen pregnancy between countries similar in socio-political, economic, and demographic characteristics can be useful in gauging and interpreting trends in teen pregnancy for a particular country. Canada, the U.S., and England/Wales are northern hemispheric nations that share a number of basic characteristics including relatively advanced economic development, modern health care systems, and populations that are predominantly Anglo-Saxon but are becoming progressively more diverse in terms of ethno-cultural background.

Conducting precise comparisons of teen pregnancy rates between countries is confounded by the different ways in which such data is collected in different countries and in the different ways that the data is presented. For example, in Canada the teen pregnancy rate is calculated by Statistics Canada using the sum of reported live births, abortions, and miscarriages (e.g., Statistics Canada, 2006a). The Office for National Statistics for England and Wales, however,

calculates a “conception” rate by summing the numbers of live births and abortions but does not include miscarriages (e.g., Office for National Statistics, 2006). In the United States, the most comprehensive data for teen pregnancy is accumulated by the Guttmacher Institute. Since no national data is collected in the U.S. on numbers of miscarriages, the Guttmacher Institute uses an estimate of miscarriages based on a percentage of live births (20%) and abortions (10%) to calculate a teen pregnancy rate (Guttmacher Institute, 2006). Given these different methodologies for calculating rates, a more accurate comparison can be conducted by excluding miscarriage counts and estimates from the Canadian and U.S. data in order to compare the combined birth/abortions rates for the three countries. In addition different countries use different age categories to calculate rates. The only relevant age category that is available in all three countries to calculate pregnancy rates is “under age 20”.

As indicated in Figure 4, the birth/abortion rate for women under age 20 has declined in all three countries since 1990. The declines in the U.S. and Canada were more substantial than in England and Wales. The U.S., which, through most of the 1990s had, by a considerable margin, the highest rates of

Figure 4 Combined birth/abortion rates per 1,000 women under age 20, Canada, USA, England/Wales, 1990-2004.



Sources: Canada: Adapted from Statistics Canada CANSIM database <http://cansim2.statcan.ca>, Table 106-9002. Retrieved 10/03/07. England/Wales: Office for National Statistics, All Conceptions-Rates per 1,000 Women in Age-Group, (www.statistics.gov.uk). USA: Guttmacher Institute. (2006). U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity. New York, NY: Guttmacher Institute.

Note: U.S. and Canadian data have been recalculated here to exclude U.S. (estimated) and Canadian (reported) miscarriage rates.



birth/abortions among women under age 20 of the three countries, saw its rate per 1,000 drop from 103.6 in 1990 to 66.2 in 2002. The U.S. is the only country of the three for which the birth/abortion rate dropped in every year for this time period. For England and Wales, which had birth/abortion rates lower than the U.S. but higher than Canada for all years, the birth/abortion rate per 1,000 women under age 20 declined from 68.0 in 1990 to 60.3 in 2004. For Canada, which had the lowest rates for all years, the birth/abortion rate for women under age 20 declined from 38.3 per 1,000 in 1990 to 26.6 in 2003. It is notable that in 1990 Canada's birth/abortion rate was considerably lower than that of England and Wales and dramatically lower than that of the U.S. and that after over a decade of declines in all three countries, Canada's rate in 2003 remains less than half the rate in either the U.S. or England and Wales.

Statistics Canada CANSIM database <http://cansim2.statcan.ca>, Table 106-9002. Retrieved 10/03/07.

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