

# Mercyhurst College Civic Institute



## **BIRTHS TO TEENS**

An Overview of Trend Data for Erie County

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## Table of Contents

Overview.....	3
Births.....	3
Births by Unmarried Status.....	5
Births by Age Group.....	6
Births by Race and Ethnicity.....	7
Higher Order Births.....	8
Conclusions.....	9

## Overview

The 1980's and early 1990's ushered in many social factors that alarmed communities across the country. One of these occurrences was the high prevalence of teen birth rates. When adolescents are thrust into the role of parents, they and their children are subject to a number of negative influences such as increased maternal health problems, lower infant birth weights, higher rates of birth defects, limited educational opportunities for parents, and reduced earning potential. Both Erie County and the City of Erie were thrust in this national issue, as local rates were also problematic. Armed with data to support their causes, community leaders and citizens began to tackle the growing issue of kids having kids; the efforts have continued. Numerous local and national programs have been instituted to provide both services and education to teens in an effort to reverse these trends. At the national and state levels, the data reflect some degree of success in reducing the teen birth rates. However, data at the level of the local environments of the City of Erie and Erie County, while generally in decline, have not achieved the same degree of consistency or fallen below the national or state levels. The question at hand then changes to *Are we doing what we should to combat this dilemma?*

The Mercyhurst College Civic Institute has been involved in the analyzing and disseminating of data in the form of an annual report, demonstrating local trends as well as comparisons between counties and cities similar in population size to that of the City of Erie and Erie County. As done previously, this report will provide comparisons of birth rates for the City of Erie and Erie County to these corresponding locals.

## Births

During the past sixteen years both the state and national teen birth rates have been declining at continual rates since reaching highs in the early 1990's (Figure 1). Erie County has also experienced an overall decline in the number of females ages 15-19 giving birth during this same time period; however, it has not been a continuous decline. The birth rate for City of Erie females in this age group increased 11% in 2005 from 2004, now standing at 62.2 births per thousand. County-wide the number is approximately half the City figure, standing at 34.8 births. Erie County and Erie City figures are higher than the state's figure of 30.8. Interestingly, Erie County minus Erie City recognized a slight decrease, meaning that the county-wide increase was attributable to the gain in the city.

**Figure 1: Birth Rates for All Females, Ages 15-19**

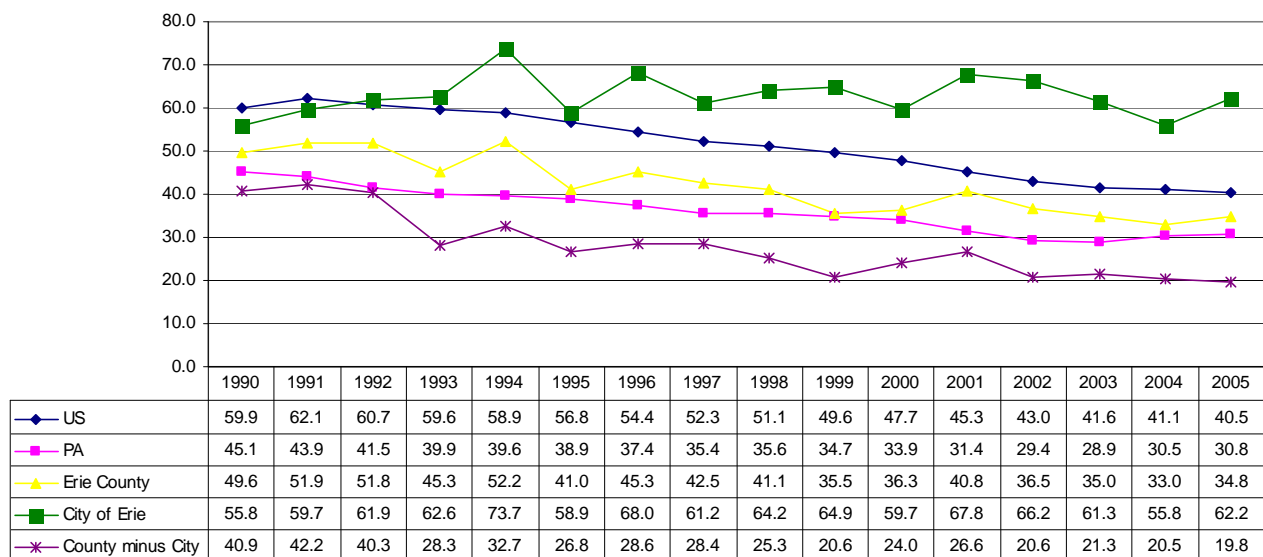
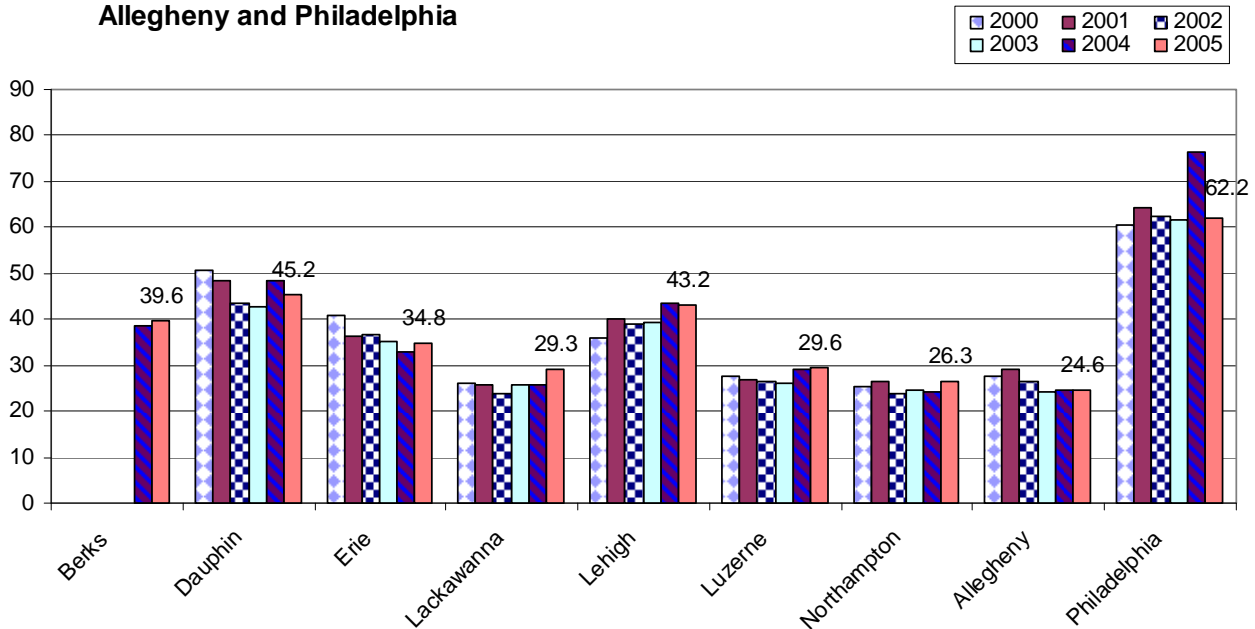
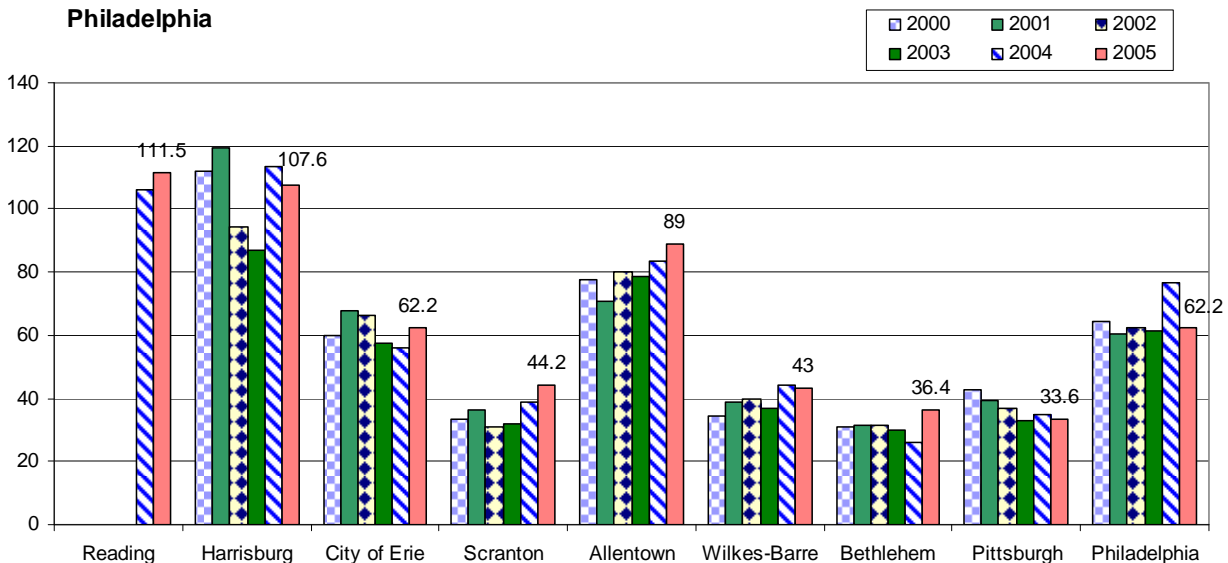


Figure 2 demonstrates a comparison of the teen birth rate of Erie County to similar sized third-class counties and the larger counties of Allegheny and Philadelphia over the past six years. Erie County continues to be positioned in the middle of the compared areas. The counties of Berks, Erie, Lackawanna, Luzerne, and Northampton recognized increases in birth rates per 1000, while the counties of Dauphin, Lehigh, and Philadelphia saw a decrease. A comparison of birth rates of similar sized cities and the cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia is shown in Figure 3. The City of Erie's rate has increased, but is still significantly lower than peer cites Reading, Harrisburg and Allentown. Erie counties to trend much higher, however, than Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Bethlehem, as well as Pittsburgh.

**Figure 2: Birth Rates for Females Ages 15-19: PA Third-Class Counties, Allegheny and Philadelphia**



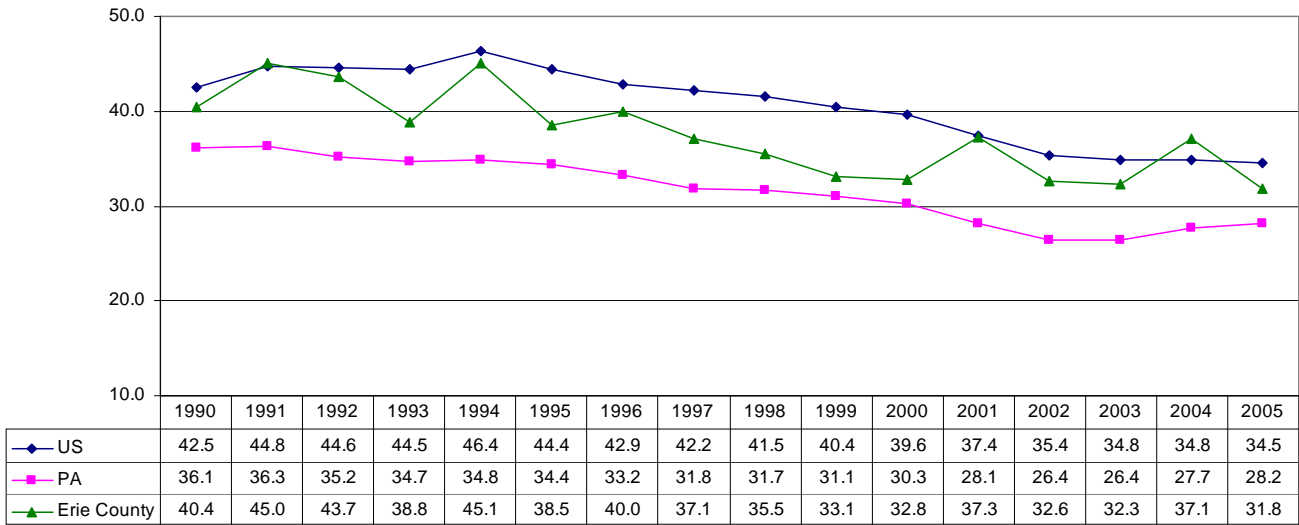
**Figure 3: Birth Rates, Females Ages 15-19; PA Urban Third-Class Cities, Pittsburgh, & Philadelphia**



## Births by Unmarried Status

During the 1990 – 2003 time period, the birth rate of unmarried mothers in Erie County has been consistently lower than the national teen birth rate but higher than that of the state. In 2004 however, the rate in Erie County surpassed that of the national birth rate. The 2005 birth rate in Erie County (31.8) again dipped below that of the nation level (34.5). The rate for PA continues to be lower than the US or Erie County rates, however it continued its increase for the second year in a row, as seen in Figure 4.

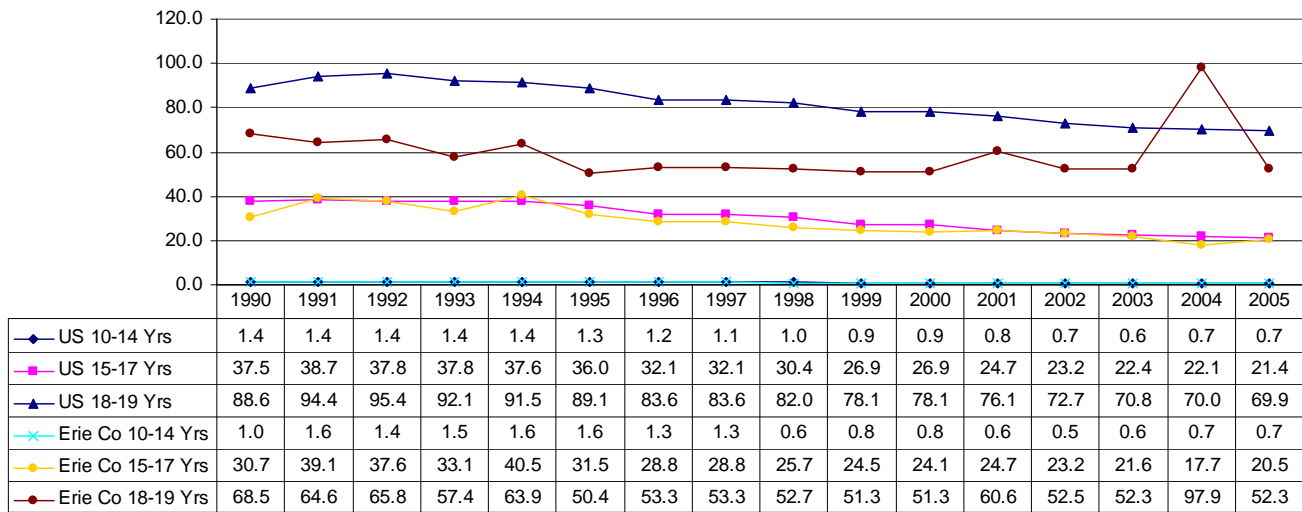
Figure 4: Birth Rates for Unmarried Females Ages 15-19



## Births by Age Groups

Due to developmental differences in reproductive maturation of teenage children, it is not surprising to see that teens of different ages differ in their likelihood of having children. Teens ages 10-14 continue to demonstrate the lowest birth rate for all levels. Figure 5 shows that in Erie County, the 10-14 year-old birth rate continues to be comparable with the same aged national population. Erie County's rate for 15-17 year-olds had fallen below the national average for this age group in 2004 and continued to do so in 2005, though the county rate increased 16% from 2004 to 2005. The rate for Erie County females ages 18-19 dropped back to 2003 levels, indicating that the 2004 rate could be a one-year anomaly.

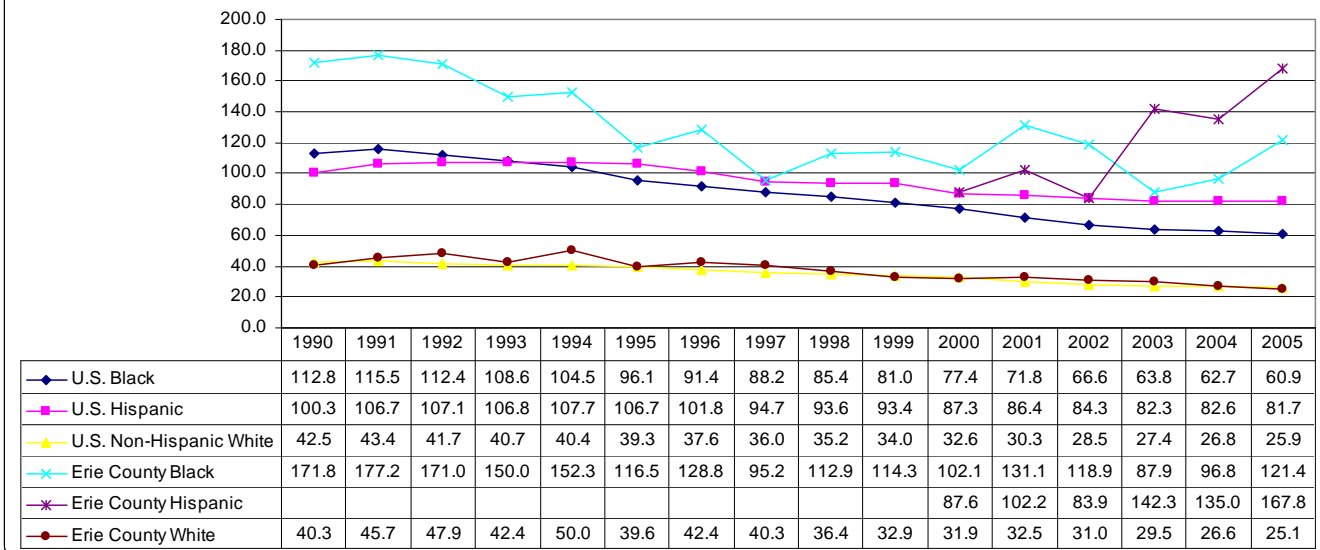
**Figure 5: Birth Rates for Females Ages 10 -19 by Age Group**



## Births by Race and Ethnicity

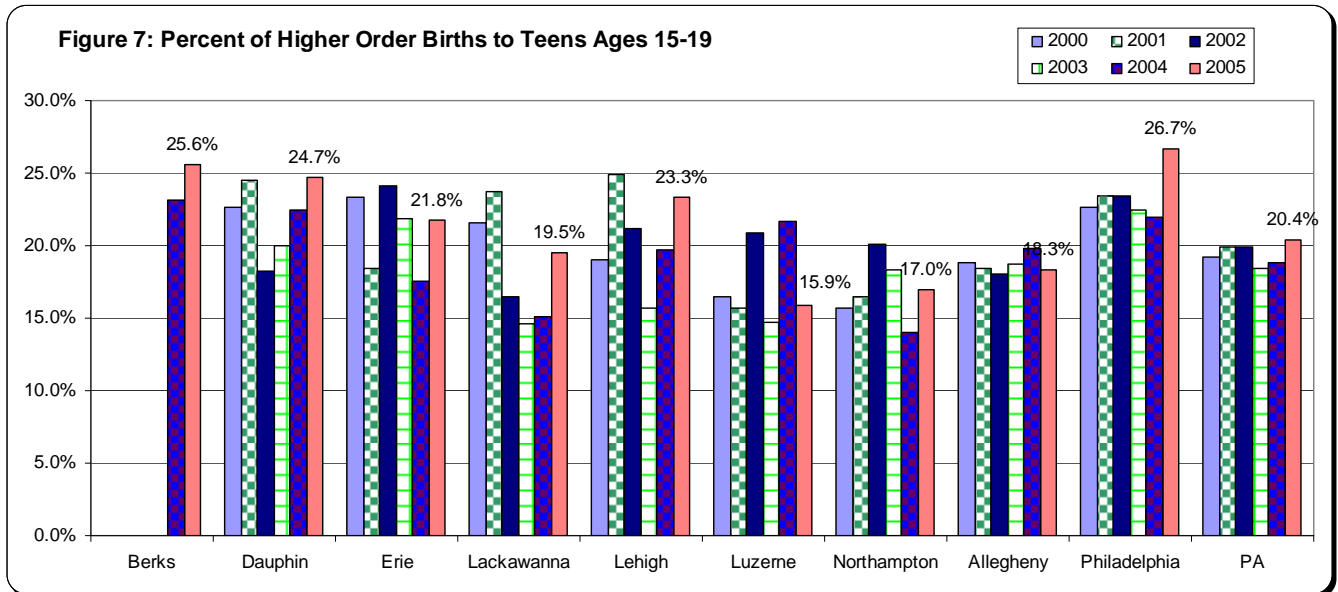
Figure 6 illustrates birth rates by race/ethnicity for females ages 15-19 both in Erie County and the US as a whole. The rates for Erie County White females ages 15-19 mirrors the national rate. This rate for Erie County (25.1 births per 1000) continued its steady decrease to half of the 1994 rate (50 births per 1000), which was its benchmark high. However, the rates for both Black and Hispanic females ages 15-19 in Erie County surpassed the national average substantially. The rates for both Black and Hispanic females 15-19 in Erie County are roughly twice the national rate. The Black rate increased approximately 1/3 from 2004, to 121.4 births per 1000, consistent with pre-2003 levels. The 2005 rate for Hispanic females ages 15-19 continued its steady increase from 2000.

**Figure 6: Birth Rates for Females Aged 15-19, by Race and Ethnicity for Erie County and US**



## Higher Order Births

The percentage of teens having a second or third child born during the 2000 to 2005 time period is depicted in Figure 7. Erie County recognized an increase of almost 5% points from 2004, as 21.8% of births to females 15-19 were not the first child. As with other comparisons of like state regions, Erie County trends toward the middle. The graphical depiction of this data illustrates that there is inconsistent fluctuation on an annual basis for all measured counties.



## Conclusions and Implications for Erie

Erie County's history of battling high rates of teens giving birth has recognized many initiatives. The Erie County Network for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ECNAPP) was formed in December of 1997 with a goal to recognize a reduction in teen pregnancy rates reaching a pregnancy rate of 25.0 per 1,000 for all women aged 15-19 by the year 2000. A second goal included a reduction in the pregnancy rate among Black teens aged 15-19 to 100.0 per 1,000 females by the year 2000. The first goal has not yet been met, though the rate for Erie County is about 65% of what it was in 1994. The second goal has been reached, but at a later point than what was hoped (2003). ECNAPP was restructured in 2003, adopting a more holistic approach to reducing teen pregnancy and changing the name to Healthy Youth Development.

Though 2004 continued to show many positive trends in teen birth rates, 2005 has seen some figures that can be troubling if it sets precedent. The birth rates for 15-19 year old females increased significantly in the City of Erie, attributing to a county-wide increase. More alarmingly the rates for Black females, a population troubled by these events, has spiked to a high not seen since 1996. The minority community in Erie County has also seen a dramatic increase in Hispanic teen mothers; the birth rate for this population is twice that of the 2002 figure.

The problem is not isolated to Erie County or Erie City. Throughout the state, other demographic areas have seen an increase from the previous years. Erie stands in company with Reading, Scranton, Bethlehem and Allentown and their corresponding counties; most of the increases stem from city increases, while the surrounding county continues to show progress. Whether this is a one-year anomaly or a turn of events is yet to be determined; however, early indications for 2006 seem to paint a bleak picture. The Center for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics released a preliminary report indicating that once complete, the 2006 data will show teen birth rates increased for the first time in 14 years on a national level. If the data continues to show increasing rates, it may signal to the community that it must not rest on its previous goals and readdress the issue. The trend of increasing teen birth rates can, and will, have detrimental effects for years to come.

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State data comes from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Bureau of Health Statistics Research; national data is from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Center for Health Statistics reports. Rates per 1000 are calculated using data from the US Census website. Each of these organizations specifically disclaims responsibility for any analyses, interpretations, or conclusions.