



MERCYHURST CIVIC INSTITUTE

Strengthening our community through education and awareness.

Birth to Teens

An Overview of Trend Data for Erie
County

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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 have not achieved the same degree of consistency or fallen below the national or state levels. In fact, the past couple of years have shown an increase in local births to teens. The questions at hand then change to *Are we about to witness another long-term upswing in teen pregnancies* and *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 Pennsylvania 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 locales.

Births

During the past two decades, national, state and local birth rates for females ages 15-19 have recognized much variance (Figure 1). Nationally, the figure for this age group reached its peak during this period in 1991 (62.1 births per 1000), and then has steadily declined. Though up in 2007 (the most recent year data is available) from 2006 (42.5, 41.9 respectively), the latest figure is still considerably lower than most years in the study. Like the national rate, the 2007 state figure is up slightly from the 2006 rate (31.1, 30.5), but still lower than historical figures. The most recent rate for Erie County is up 14% in 2007 from the previous year, to a rate that hasn't been seen in approximately 10 years. This increase has also been recognized in both City of Erie (8% increase) and County minus City rates (20% increase).

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

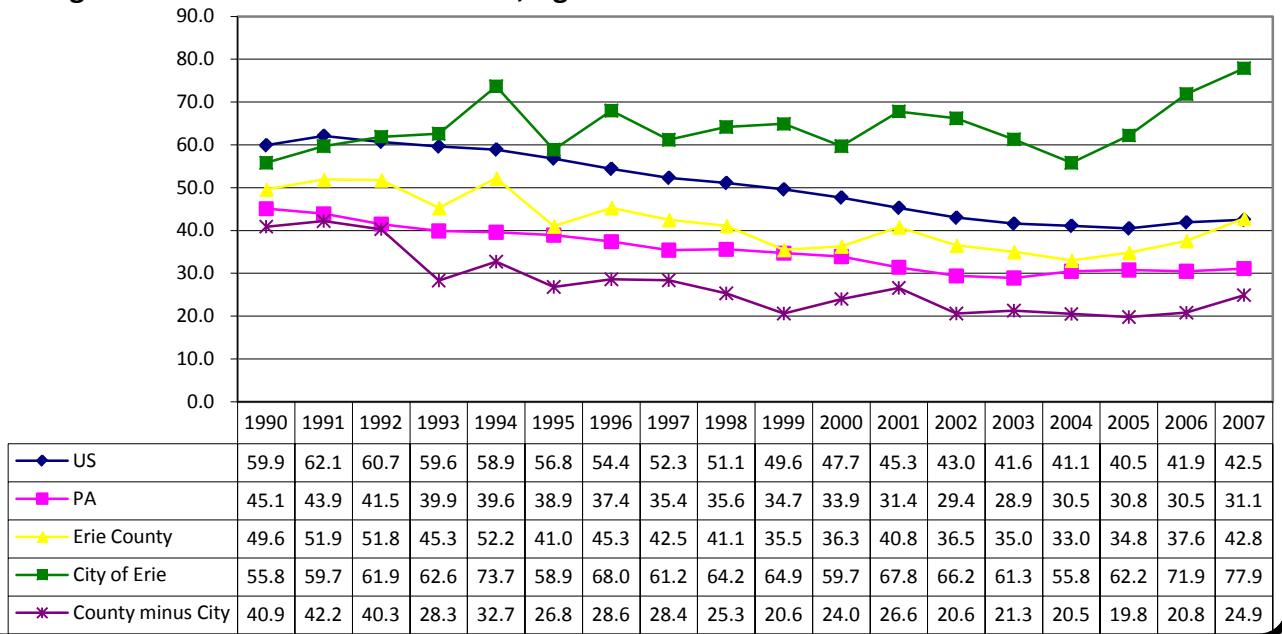


Figure 2 demonstrates a comparison of the teen birth rate of Erie County to similar sized third-class Pennsylvania counties, and the larger counties of Allegheny and Philadelphia, over the past eight years. Erie County now has the third-highest rate among these counties, behind Philadelphia and Dauphin Counties. A comparison of teen birth rates of the City of Erie to 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 County's rate tends to trend much higher, however, than Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, and Bethlehem as well as Pittsburgh. Note: figures shown in graphs reflect 2007 rates per thousand.

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

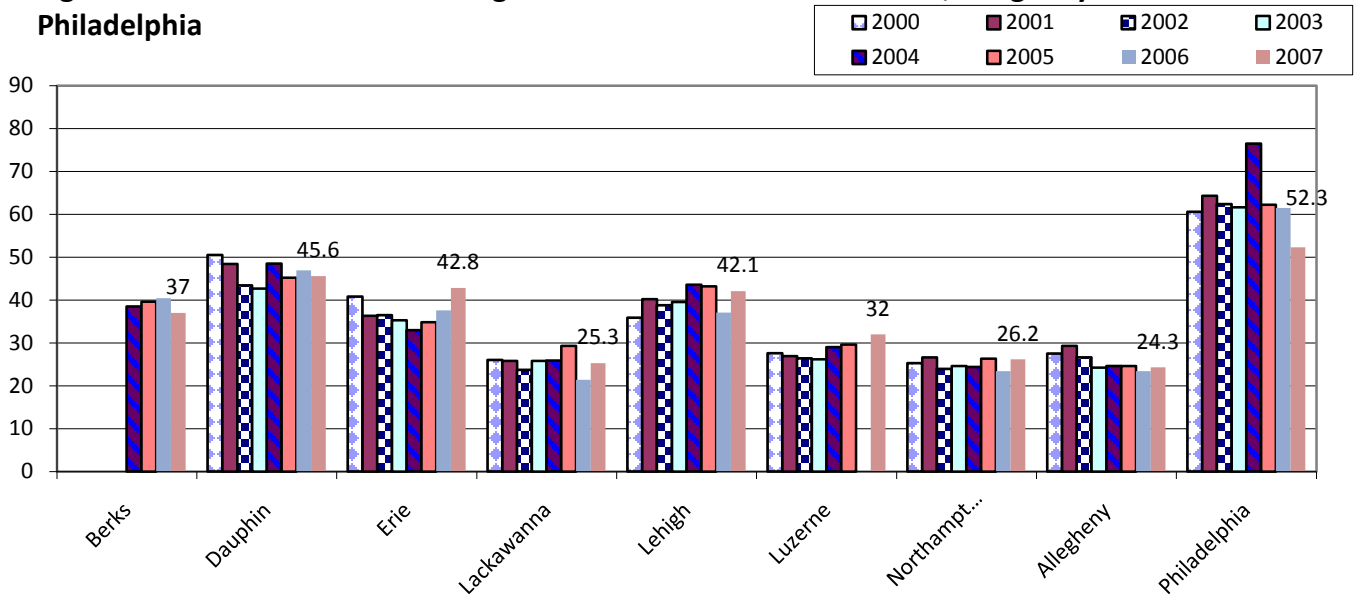
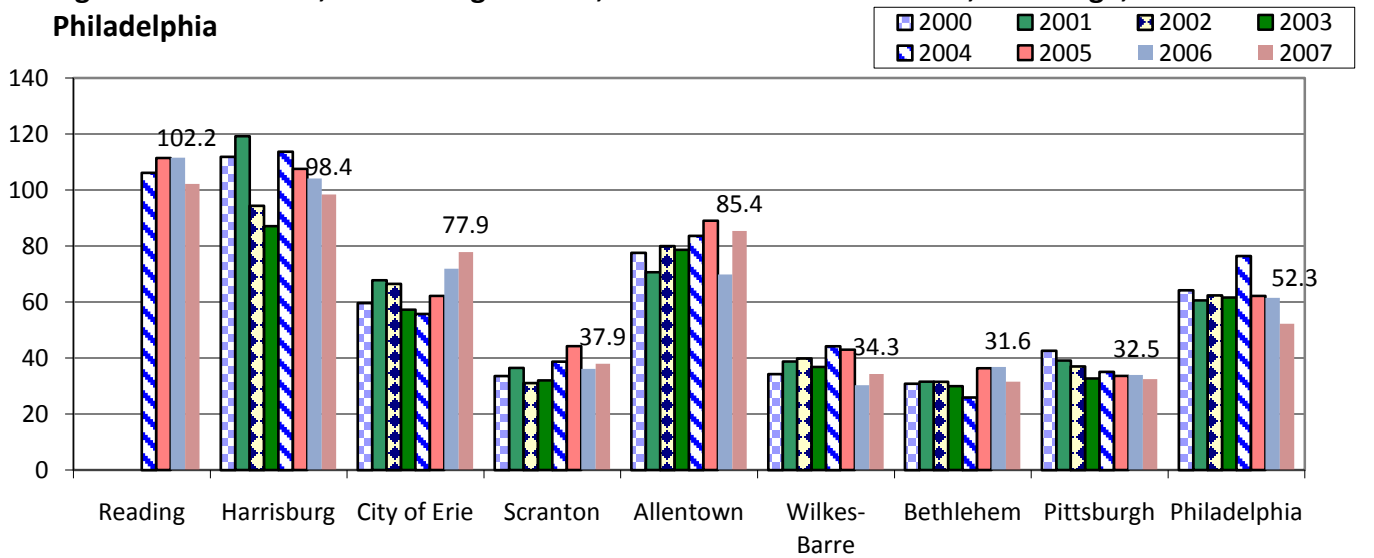
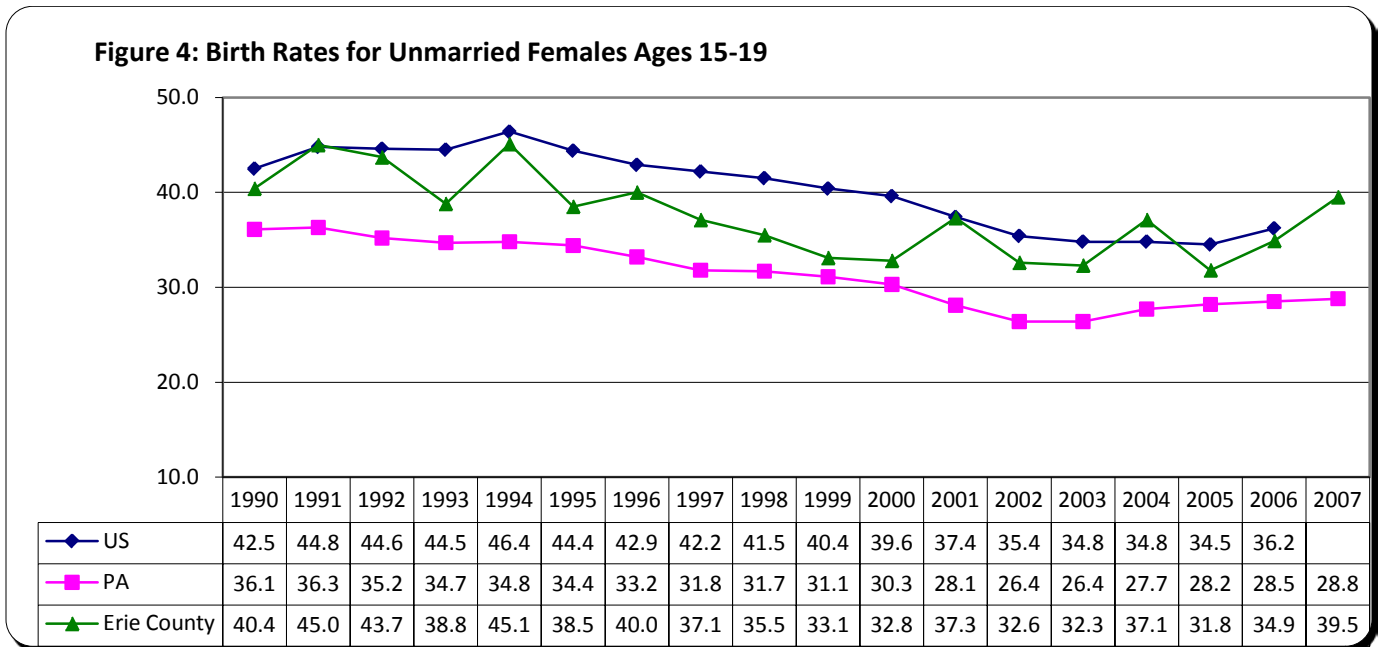


Figure 3: Birth Rates, Females Ages 15-19; PA Urban Third-Class Cities, Pittsburgh, & Philadelphia



Births by Unmarried Status

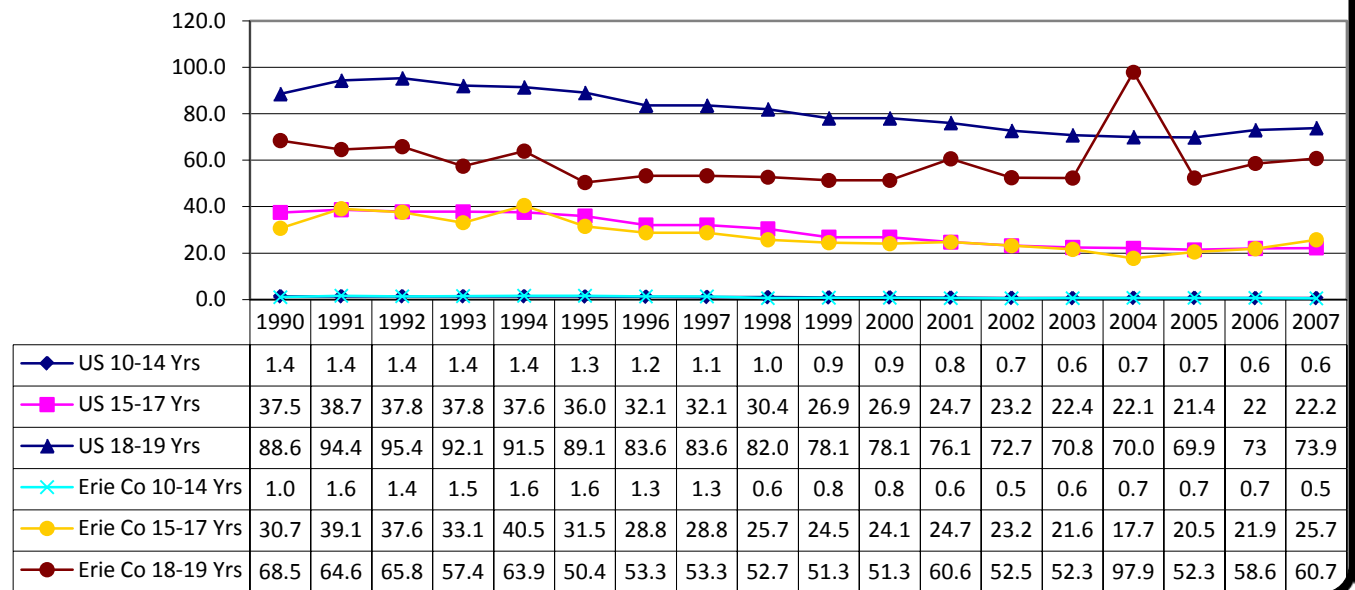
During the 1990 – 2003 time period, the birth rate of unmarried mothers in Erie County has been consistently lower than the national teen birth rate but higher than that of the state. In 2005 and 2006, the birth rates dipped below the national figure for this group, but still remained higher than the state average. The 2007 rate for Erie County again is higher than the state figure; the 2007 national figure was not available at time of publication.



Births by Age Groups

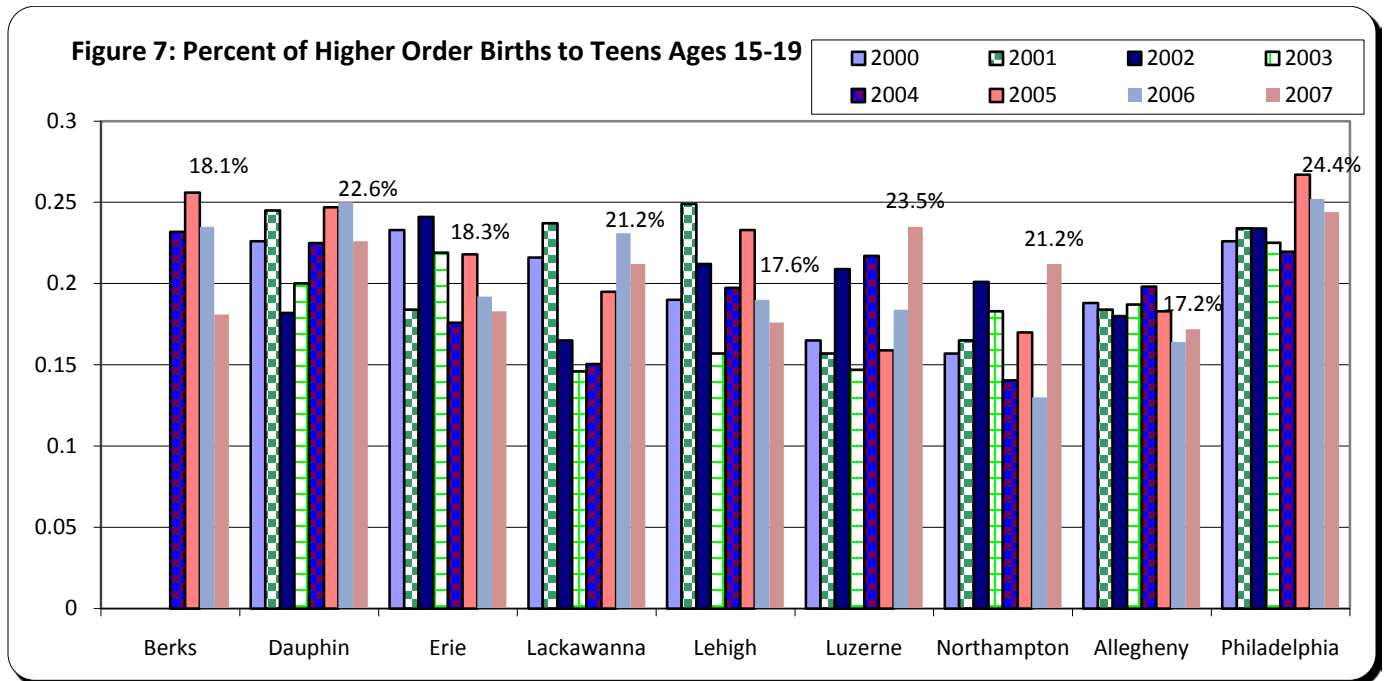
Due to developmental differences in reproductive maturation of teenage children, it is not surprising to see that teens of different ages differ in their likelihood of having children. Teens between the ages of 10-14 continue to demonstrate the lowest birth rate for all levels. Figure 5 illustrates that the Erie County rate for females 15-17 has increased significantly since 2004 (45% increase), while the national figure has remained static over that time and is now lower than the Erie County figure (22.2 vs 25.7). The rate for Erie County females aged 18-19 has increased slightly over that last year, but is still significantly lower than the national figure.

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



Higher Order Births

The percentage of teens having a second or third child born during the 2000 to 2007 time period is depicted in Figure 7. Erie County recognized a decrease over the past two years, as just over 18% of births to females aged 15-19 were not the first child. As with other comparisons of similar 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

The ramifications of teens giving birth impacts not only the mother and child, but many lives associated with these individuals. As the majority of these young mothers find themselves raising fatherless children, the moms and extended families of caregivers find themselves in economic and financially straining situations. Educational attainment is also a struggle for the young parents, which further leads to lower standards of living, and fuels an ongoing cycle of poverty that can be passed on from generation to generation.

Erie County has seen a variety of programs to tackle this issue during the past two decades. The efforts here mirrored many national initiatives aimed at preventing teenaged females from having children, and subsequently potentially giving up many of their dreams and aspirations. For many years, these initiatives seemed to have worked. From the high point in the early 1990's, the birth rates in most categories for teen females have declined substantially. In some instances, the rates have been cut by almost half. Progress in preventing teen births gives various program advocates credence in proclaiming that their methods are proven and can be successful.

But pause should be taken by all who point quickly to lower birth rates. An uptick in teen birthrates nationally, at the state-level, and locally has occurred over the past two years. This increase does not seem tied to one population segment, as it has been apparent locally across all races. Future analysis will best illustrate if this is indeed a true upsurge or if it is a 'blip' in the long-term picture. However, society cannot wait to measure data to see and be reactive. The implications for our young, as they turn to adults, can no doubt have huge negative ramifications. Both the children, and their mothers who are children themselves, cannot wait for our communities to react.

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.