Fertility and Birth Rates

Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being
In 2014, the birth rate for young women (ages 15 to 24) continued to decline, after a small peak in 2007, although it increased slightly for the 25 to 44 age group. The fertility rate for all U.S. women rose slightly from 2013, when it was the lowest it has been since these data have been recorded.

Importance

The *fertility rate* measures the number of births per 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44 occurring in a particular year; *birth rates* refer to this measure within particular age groups. Tracking trends in fertility and birth rates is essential in planning for the current and future needs of multiple generations. Sustained high fertility rates lead to disproportionately large populations of young dependents, driving demand for supports for young families, for additional schools, and for affordable child care.\(^1\)\(^2\) For example, during the baby boom period (births from 1946 to 1964), unanticipated high fertility rates caught communities unprepared, and without the facilities needed to accommodate rapidly increasing numbers of school-age children. On the other hand, sustained low fertility rates can lead to an aging population and, in the long run, may place burdens on the economy and social services, because the pool of younger workers responsible for supporting the elderly accounts for a relatively smaller share of the population.\(^3\)

Tracking age-specific and race/ethnicity-specific trends in fertility and birth rates also provides information on the divergent needs of different population groups. For example, high teen birth rates among Hispanics in recent years alerted groups working in adolescent pregnancy prevention to anticipate the particular needs of this population.\(^4\) At the other end of the continuum, increasing fertility among older mothers may be related to an increased risk of pregnancy complications, and to elevated risk for infant mortality and presence of autism spectrum disorders.\(^5\)
Trends

Fertility rates in the United States declined sharply between the baby boom years of the 1950s and early 1960s, and 1976 (118 and 65 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age for 1960 and 1976, respectively). Since the 1970s, fertility rates have been relatively stable, varying between 63 and 71 births per 1,000 women. There were small peaks in 1990 and 2007, but rates have since gone down, and are the lowest in recent history, standing at 63 per 1,000 women in 2014. (Figure 1) The total number of births in 2007—4,317,119—was the highest ever registered in the United States, though that annual number has since fallen.6

Figure 1

Trends in the Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-44): Selected Years, 1950-2014

Differences by Age

Women in the middle of their childbearing years have the highest birth rates. Specifically, rates are highest for women ages 25 to 29 (at 106 births per 1,000 in 2014), followed by those for women ages 30 to 34 (at 101 births per 1,000), and women ages 20 to 24 (79 births per 1,000). (Figure 2) Beginning in 2003, the birth rate for women ages 35 to 39 has been higher than that for young women ages 15 to 19—a marked change from previous years. Birth rates for women ages 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, and 45-54 increased between 2010 and 2014, while birth rates for younger women decreased. Declines were greatest for women between the ages of 15 and 24 (falling by 29 percent for women 15 to 19, and by 12 percent for women 20 to 24). (Appendix 1) Birth rates for women over 45, and for those under 15, were below one birth per 1,000 in 2014. (Figure 2)
Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin\textsuperscript{7}

In 2014, fertility rates were highest for Hispanic women (72 per thousand), followed by rates for black (65 per thousand), Asian (61 per thousand), white (60 per thousand), and American Indian women (45 per thousand). (Figure 3) Between 2010 and 2014, rates rose for the white and Asian groups, and fell for the black, Hispanic, and American Indian groups. Declines were greatest among Hispanics. (Appendix 1) Among teens (ages 15-19), declines were seen in all groups, and for Hispanic teens the birth rate reached an historic low.\textsuperscript{8}

![Figure 3](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_12.pdf. Table 5. Figure 3)

Among Hispanic women in 2013 (the latest data available), Central and South American women had the highest fertility rate, at 94 births per 1,000. Mexican women also had a relatively high fertility rate (68 births per 1,000), while Puerto Rican and Cuban women had lower fertility rates (58 and 48 births per 1,000, respectively). (Appendix 1)
State and Local Estimates


International Estimates


  **Note: The international definitions of crude birth rates and total fertility rates differ substantially from the birth rates and fertility rates referenced in this indicator. For this reason, these international estimates are not comparable to the estimates presented here. Crude birth rates are defined as births per 1,000 of the total population (including all ages, races, and both genders). Total fertility rates are defined as the average number of children a woman would have if the current age-specific birth rates did not change during her childbearing years (usually between ages 15-49). For more details about these definitions, please see the publication listed above.

National Goals

None.

Related Indicators

- Number of Children: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=number-of-children
- Teen Births: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=teen-births
- Unintended Births: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=unintended-births
- Births to Unmarried Women: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=births-to-unmarried-women

Definition

The fertility rate is defined by the National Center for Health Statistics as the total number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years. These rates are based on the most recent population estimates from the Census Bureau. Birth rates are different from fertility rates in that the denominator is not all women aged 15 to 44, but rather a specific age group.

For more detailed information, see Table 3 and the Technical Notes section of “Births: Final data for 2014” at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_12.pdf
Data Sources


Raw Data Source

National Vital Statistics System birth data

[http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/births.htm)
### Appendix 1 - Fertility Rates¹ (per 1,000 Women, Ages 15-44) by Race & Hispanic Origin, and Birth Rates² by Age Group: Selected Years, 1950-2014

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¹The total number includes births to women of all ages, 15-44 years. The rate shown for all ages is the general fertility rate, which is defined as the total number of births per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years. Age-specific birth rates are defined as the total number of births per 1,000 women in a specific age group (between ages 15 and 44).
Data for estimates before 1980 are based on the race/ethnicity of the child, from 1980 on estimates are based on the race/ethnicity of the mother. Before 1980 data for the mother’s marital status was estimated for the United States from data for registration areas in which marital status of mother was reported. For 1980 on, data for States in which the mother’s marital status was not reported were inferred from other items on the birth certificate and included with data from the reporting States.

Includes all persons of Hispanic origin of any race.

Birth rates computed by relating births to women ages 45-54 years to women ages 45-49 years.

Endnotes


3 Ibid.


7 Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites and blacks in this report do not include Hispanics.