

Teen Pregnancy Rates Up by 3%

BY ROBERT FINN

Teen pregnancy rates increased 3% in the United States in 2006 after declining every year since 1990, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

In addition, teen births rose 4% and teen abortions rose 1% between 2005 and 2006,

according to the report compiled from a variety of national and state-level sources.

The teen pregnancy rate hit its peak in 1990, with 117 pregnancies per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years. By 2005 it had declined 40%, to 70/1,000. But in 2006, the rate increased to 72/1,000.

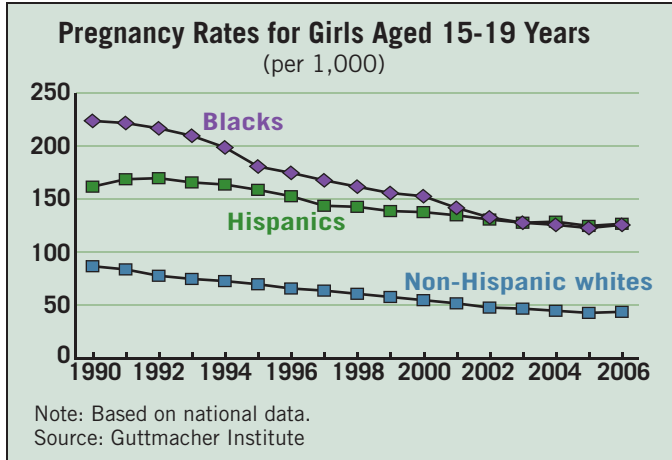
"After more than a decade

of progress, this reversal is deeply troubling," Heather Boonstra of the Guttmacher Institute said in a statement. "It coincides with an increase in rigid abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, which received major funding boosts under the Bush administration."

Two experts interviewed by this newspaper weren't so sure that the increase could be attributed to abstinence-only sex education.

"The temporal association between the increase in abstinence-only programs and the increase in the pregnancy rate definitely deserves closer attention," said Dr. Lee Savio Beers of Children's National Medical Center, Washington, D.C. "It's such a multifactorial issue that we may never have an answer."

Dr. Melissa Kottke, of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Emory University and director of the Jane Fon-



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Major Finding: The rates of teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion increased in 2006 after declining every year since 1990.

Data Source: Data compiled from national-level and state-level sources.

Disclosures: Preparation of the report was funded by the Brush Foundation, the California Wellness Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

da Center for Adolescent Reproductive Health, both in Atlanta, said, "I think there's going to be a lot of things contributing to [increases in teen pregnancy rates], and I don't think we're going to know what all of those are."

Among those contributors according to Dr. Kottke: teenage sexual activity, poverty, the media, parenting, funding for care, and funding for family planning services.

"All of those things are going to contribute," she said, "and I don't think we're going to be able to point our finger at one thing or the other."

About the Guttmacher Institute, Dr. Beers said, "They're a well-respected organization. Their policy views tend to be on the liberal side. But I think everyone pretty much agrees that their facts are good, and their numbers are good, and for pregnancy numbers, they're better than pretty much anyone."

Although the long decline and recent uptick in teen pregnancy rates were seen in blacks, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites, there were some substantial racial and ethnic differences. (See chart.) Among black teens, the pregnancy rate increased 2.4%, to 126/1,000, in 2006.

Among Hispanic teens, the pregnancy rate increased 1% to 127/1,000 in 2006. Among non-Hispanic whites, the rate increased 2% to 44/1,000 in 2006.

Dr. Kottke said there's evidence the 1-year uptick is not a statistical fluke. She's seen preliminary data for 2007 indicating that teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates increased for a second year. ■

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