

Births To Young Teens

In 1996, nearly eight thousand (7,842) babies were born to Oklahoma women under the age of twenty. Close to five thousand (4,939) of those babies were born to teen mothers ages 18 and 19. Nearly three thousand (2,903) Oklahoma school age girls (age 17 and under) had babies. One hundred forty-five of those school age girls were between eleven and fourteen years of age.

The rate of births to Oklahoma young teens continued to steadily decline (from 41.0 to 38.3 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) during the past year. Birth rates for that age group improved in a majority of Oklahoma counties (51 of 77) during the year.

The progress made in decreasing the high Oklahoma birth rate to young teens of the early 1980s (from 42.2 to 38.2 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) has been evident at the county level where such rates also improved in most (58 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period of time.

The rates of births to young teens in a majority of Oklahoma counties (41 of 77) were worse than the average county rate (36.1 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17). During this most recent period, the highest and worst rate (66.5 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) is found in Tillman County; the lowest and best (5.4 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 through 17) is in Grant County.

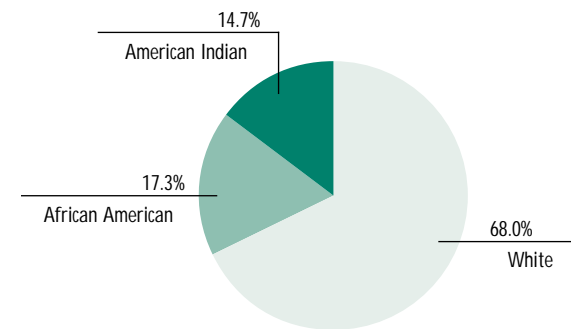
The large majority (67.4%, excluding Other) of Oklahoma's young teen mothers are White. However, while non-White teenage girls comprise only about one-fifth (21.6%) of the teenage girl population, they account for almost one-third (32.6%) of the teenage girls giving birth in Oklahoma.

On the average, every three hours an Oklahoma child (age 17 or younger) becomes a mother.

Oklahoma's teen childbearing rate was substantially above other states in 1980, but by 1996, the gap had narrowed. Even so, Oklahoma's young teen childbearing ranking relative to other states is poor, with two-thirds (33 states) having a teen (age 15 through 17) birth rate lower than Oklahoma during the most recent year (1996) measured.

Impact on Oklahoma

- ▶ *Disquieting trends.* More young people are having sex in their teens than ever before. A child's age at their first experience with sexual intercourse is becoming increasingly younger.
- ▶ *Teen mothers face bleak futures.* Each young mother is more likely to be poor, to be a victim of physical violence, to have another child before reaching adulthood, to drop out of school, to have unsteady employment, to be on public assistance at some point in her life, to be less skilled, and to experience marital instability compared to peers who delay childbearing until age twenty or later.
- ▶ *Sexual abuse plays a major role.* There is a direct link between child sexual abuse, early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. Most teen mothers indicate



Births to Mothers
Ages 15-17
By Race, Oklahoma, 1994-96

their first sexual experience was non-consensual and occurred between the ages of nine and twelve.

- ▶ **The children born to teen mothers are the youngest victims.** These children are more likely to repeat the cycle of teen childbearing, to have lifelong developmental and health problems, to have lower cognitive functioning, to do poorly in school, and to exhibit problem behavior.
- ▶ **Teen childbearing is costly to Oklahoma taxpayers.** During the most recent year for which information is available (FY 95) Oklahoma spent \$647,633,777 on public expenditures (AFDC, WIC, Food Stamps and Medicaid) to support families begun by teens. For every dollar Oklahoma spends on the consequences of teen childbearing, less than one-half of one cent is invested in the prevention of teen pregnancy.

- ▶ **Risk factors.** Poor literacy skills, poor progress in school, academic failure, drug use, and the loss of self-esteem are good predictors of early childbearing. Children who don't read well are at risk for early pregnancy.
- ▶ **Improving the outcomes.** Being connected with community, school and family decreases the risk of teen pregnancy and birth. School success, involvement in activities during non-school hours and opportunities to develop decision-making and

problem-solving skills join to prevent premature pregnancy and birth. Having positive options, aspirations for the future and goals for education and training beyond high school help young women make good choices and avoid becoming teen mothers. Having healthy family communication and positive peer and adult role models decrease the likelihood that children will have children.

Births to Young Teens
Three-Year Number & Average Annual Rate of Births to Mothers Ages 15 through 17; Oklahoma: 1994-96, State Rate: 38.3 per 1000 Births, Average of County Rates: 36.1 per 1000 Births

Just over one third (1,013 per year or 36.5%) of the births to mothers ages 15 through 17 occurred to mothers living in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with about one third (33.1%) of the girls ages 15 through 17.

