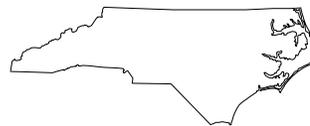


Statistical Brief



State Center for Health Statistics

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Repeat Teenage Pregnancy in North Carolina

by Paul A. Buescher, Ph.D.

Widespread concern about the social, economic, and health consequences of teenage pregnancy has led to statewide efforts to reduce those pregnancies. Girls under age 18 are a special concern because they have not reached the age of legal consent, they are often less mature biologically, and they are less apt to have adequate support systems.

Narrowing the focus a bit, Governor Hunt's 1995 "agenda for action" supports actions to discourage teenage parents from having another child until they are "married, have completed their education, and are ready to raise a strong family."¹ To the extent that effective family planning and other programs can help accomplish that mission, more babies will be born healthy and live in a healthy environment.

With the above concerns in mind, **repeat teenage pregnancy** is the focus of this statistical brief, with an emphasis on "unmarried girls under age 18." In North Carolina, those repeat pregnancies are considered *sentinel health events*, meaning that the occurrence of a single event is a matter of concern to the health community.²

Statewide Data

In 1996, 6,908 girls under age 20 had a second or higher-order pregnancy resulting in a live birth (72%), induced abortion (27%), or fetal death (1%). Those events are detailed in the accompanying table according to age, marital status, race,

and outcome. They represent 31 percent of all teenage pregnancies in North Carolina in 1996.

Among the 6,908 repeat pregnancies to girls under age 20, more than 70 percent (4,916) were to unmarried girls; of those, one-fourth of the girls (1,247) were under age 18. Those 1,247 events are further characterized as follows:

- Repeat pregnancies represented 17 percent of all pregnancies to unmarried girls under age 18.
- One-third (417) of the girls were white, two-thirds (825) were minority races.
- Minorities (78%) were more likely than whites (71%) to have a live birth. Alternatively, whites (28%) were more likely than minorities (21%) to have an abortion.

In 1995, the statewide number reported was 1,262, which compares to the 1,247 figure for 1996. These numbers equate to a decline of only 1.2 percent in 1996. However, the decline from 1990 to 1996, from 1,755 to 1,247, was a more substantial 29 percent. At least some of that decline has been attributed to the community-based Adolescent Parenting Program.¹ The program now operates in 27 counties.³

County-Level Data

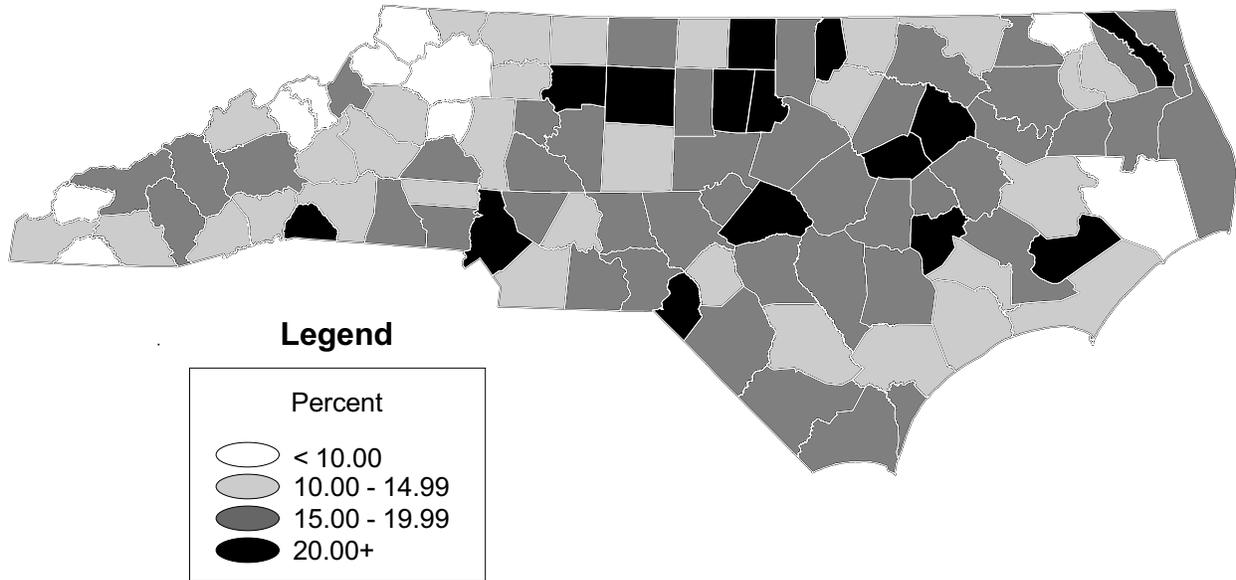
Because of their status as sentinel health events, the counties' numbers of "repeat pregnancies to unmarried girls under age 18" are routinely reported to local health departments.² The hope is that these young unmarried girls will be targeted for appropriate health education and family planning intervention.



For the 1992-96 period, the map below depicts each county's **percentage repeat pregnancies** among total pregnancies to unmarried girls under age 18. The choice of map categories was based upon visual inspection of the 100 county percentages.

The county percentages depicted below ranged from zero in Yancey and Hyde counties to 25.0 in Camden with a state average of 17.7 percent. The 15 counties having the highest percentages are listed below the map. These counties should be especially concerned about high levels of repeat pregnancy among their young unmarried girls. Note that eight of the 15 counties have an Adolescent Parenting Program.

**Percentage Repeat Pregnancies
Among Total Pregnancies to Unmarried Girls Under Age 18
North Carolina Residents 1992-96**



Counties with Repeat Pregnancies At Least 20 Percent of Total Pregnancies to Unmarried Girls Under Age 18, 1992-96

<u>County</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Camden	25.0	*Orange	21.0
*Durham	21.0	Pamlico	20.4
*Edgecombe	21.3	Person	20.0
*Forsyth	21.6	Polk	21.2
*Guilford	21.6	Scotland	22.4
Harnett	20.9	*Vance	23.2
*Lenoir	22.6	Wilson	20.9
*Mecklenburg	21.4		

*County has an Adolescent Parenting Program.³

Comment

*Healthy People 2000*⁴ identifies two principal objectives in the area of family planning: to reduce pregnancies among teenagers under age 18, and to reduce the number of unintended (unwanted or mistimed) pregnancies among all women. Both of these objectives apply to the present data since most repeat pregnancies to unmarried girls under age 18 meet the criteria for “unintended.” These unintended pregnancies often involve a short birth interval, which is a well established risk factor for low birthweight.⁴

For a young girl and her family, few situations are as life-changing as an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Moreover, the societal costs of teen child-bearing are immense.⁴ Thus, the reduction of teenage pregnancies — especially **repeat pregnancies** among young unmarried girls — is particularly challenging. Approaches to the problem include reducing sexual activity, approaching sexual activity with a greater sense of responsibility, and increasing effective use of contraceptive methods.⁴ Better educational and employment opportunities for teens may encourage these changes in sexual behavior.

References

¹*A North Carolina Agenda for Action: Governor Jim Hunt, 1996.* Paid for by Citizens for Jim Hunt, 1996.

²North Carolina Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources, State Center for Health Statistics. *Guide for a Community Diagnosis: A Report for Local Health Departments.* 1995 Sentinel Health Events by County. August 1997.

³Adolescent Parenting Program Directory provided by Sidney Atkinson, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. FAX November 26, 1997.

⁴United States Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. *Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives*, DHHS Publication No. (PHS) 91-50212. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, September 1990.

Repeat Pregnancies Under Age 20 – N.C. Residents 1996						
Race and Outcome	Age and Marital Status					
	Under 18			18-19		
	Married	Not Married	Unknown	Married	Not Married	Unknown
All Races						
Abortion	20	294	78	104	1,083	299
Live Birth	204	937	0	1,276	2,554	0
Fetal Death	1	16	0	10	32	0
Total	225	1,247	78	1,390	3,669	299
Whites						
Abortion	13	117	24	66	471	117
Live Birth	178	295	0	1,073	882	0
Fetal Death	1	5	0	9	12	0
Total	192	417	24	1,148	1,365	117
Minorities						
Abortion	6	172	50	36	601	168
Live Birth	26	642	0	203	1,672	0
Fetal Death	0	11	0	1	20	0
Total	32	825	50	240	2,293	168

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Information is timely and relevant Yes No

Charts and graphs are clear and concise Yes No

Enough detail was presented on each topic Yes No

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