

Fewer unmarried women having children, CDC reports

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Declines seen in every age group except for those over 35

(HealthDay)—Fewer unmarried America women are having babies, with the notable exception of those who are over 35, federal health officials reported Wednesday.

Births outside of marriage continued a slight decline in 2013, accounting for 40.6 percent of all births, according to a report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's 7 percent lower than the peak in 2008, with reductions in all age groups under the age of 35, the CDC found.

"It's still high compared with previous generations, but there has been a decline," said report author Sally Curtin, a statistician at the CDC's

National Center for Health Statistics.

The fall-off is recent, Curtin said. "Since the 1940s, except for a few brief periods, there has been almost a continued increase in non-marital childbearing," she explained.

That climb represented a cultural shift, she added. "Of all unmarried births, only 15 percent are to teenagers. The majority of these births are in co-habiting unions," she said.

Babies born to unmarried women living with a partner increased from 41 percent of all births in 2002 to 58 percent in the late 2000s, according to the report. About half of these pregnancies were intended, Curtin said.

The slight drop in births to younger unmarried women since the late 2000s mirrors the decline in all births in the United States, Curtin said. "The fertility rate has declined, but the percent of decline in births to unmarried women has been greater," she said.

This pattern began with the start of the recession in 2007, she said. "The areas that had the worst economic downturn also had the largest drops in the fertility rate," Curtin said.

In 2013, births to unmarried women totaled more than 1.6 million. About four of every 10 births were to single mothers every year from 2007 through 2013, the report found.

Experts track births to unmarried women because they're linked to higher risk for complications such as premature delivery, low [birth](#) weight and infant death.

Dr. Jill Rabin, co-chief of ambulatory care and women's health programs at North Shore-LIJ Health System in New Hyde Park, N.Y., considers

fewer births to single mothers a plus. But she views the rise in births among unmarried partners as a positive trend.

"It's true that in two-parent families, regardless of the gender of the couple, kids tend to do better," Rabin said.

"It's easier when you have a partner raising your child in terms of psychosocial support in addition to the financial benefit," she said. "I do think it takes a village to raise a child."

Other highlights of the childbearing report:

- Single teens aged 15 to 17 accounted for the largest fall-off in births to unmarried mothers. The rate dropped almost one-third between 2007 and 2012, reaching 14 births out of every 1,000. The rate for older unmarried teens fell more than one-quarter, to 46 per 1,000 births.
- The [birth rate](#) among unmarried women in their late 30s was 7 percent higher in 2012 than in 2007 —and nearly twice the 2002 rate.
- In 2012, [unmarried women](#) aged 40 to 44 accounted for nine of every 1,000 births—up 29 percent from 2007.
- Declining birth rates to unmarried mothers were more significant among black and Hispanic women than whites. Although unmarried Hispanic women had the highest birth rate—73 per 1,000 births—in 2012, that also represented a 28 percent decline from 2007.
- Among unmarried black women, the birth rate dropped 11 percent between 2007 and 2012, to 63 of every 1,000 live births.
- For unwed white women, a 6 percent decline in births was reported for unmarried white women during those years. That rate—32 of every 1,000 births in 2012—was about half that of black and Hispanic women.

More information: For more on birth rates to unmarried women, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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