

Teen births: Current trends

in New Zealand

RESEARCH SUMMARY

JANUARY 2015

Purpose

This summary provides information from the University of Waikato report: 'Current Trends for Teenage Births in New Zealand' (NIDEA, 2014).

This updates the 2012 report to include data from 2012 and 2013, examines current trends and identifies the factors that contribute to the declining teen birth rate.

KEY FINDINGS

- > New Zealand's teen birth rates are high internationally, **but continue to decline.**
- > In 2013, the proportion of all births that are teen births reached 5.9%, which is the **lowest percentage ever recorded.**
- > **Over 71%** of all teen births were to **18 and 19 year olds** in 2013.
- > The decrease in birth rates is **shared across most regions** (with the exception of Northland). The Wellington and Taranaki regions have experienced the largest decreases.
- > The **Māori teen birth rate is decreasing**, although it remains higher than the national average.
- > A reduction in teenage pregnancy is also evident in the **declining teenage abortion rate** (which halved between 2007 and 2013).
- > Factors reported to *directly* impact on teenage birth rates include **increased contraception use** and **postponement of sexual activity.**

Teen births in New Zealand

- Births to teenage women are a relatively small proportion of all births representing 5.9% of all births nationally.
- In 2013, there were 3,546 births to teenage women in New Zealand (aged 15-19 years). Teenage births are not equally distributed across New Zealand, with higher rates in provincial regions of the North Island.
- Internationally, New Zealand has the second highest teenage birth rate in the developed world, second only to the United States (in 2010).

Statistical measures and definitions

Number of teenage births: The number of teenagers giving birth in a given year.

Proportion of teenage births: The proportion of teenagers amongst all women giving birth in a given year.

Teenage birth rate: The number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years.

Age-specific fertility rates: The number of live births per 1,000 women for a particular age group in a given year.



Methodology

Two primary sources of birth data were used to examine national and regional trends in teenage births in the original analysis and the update:

- > Births Registration data (Statistics New Zealand)
- > National Maternity Collection (MAT) data (Ministry of Health).

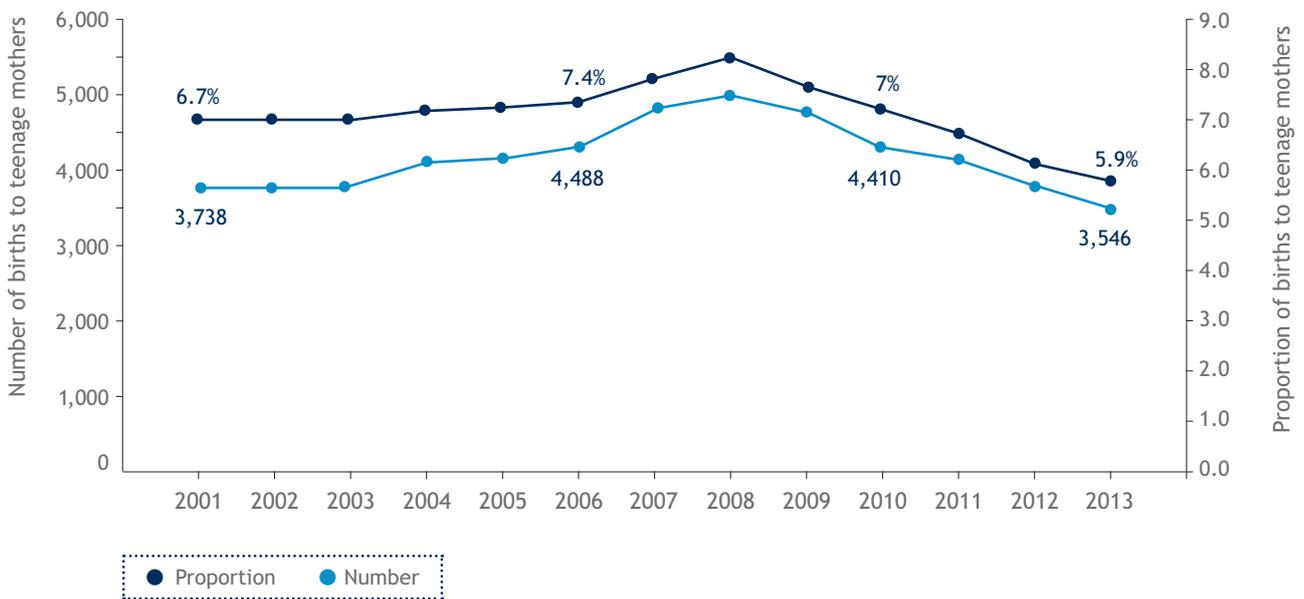
A review of the New Zealand and international literature was also undertaken as part of the updated analysis to examine what might be driving the declining teenage birth rate in New Zealand and other developed countries.

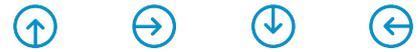
Fewer teenagers are giving birth

National trends can be examined by looking at both the proportion of teenagers amongst all women giving birth in New Zealand in a particular year, and in terms of teenage birth rates.

In 2013, teenage births made up 5.9% of all births in New Zealand. This is the lowest recorded percentage accounted for by teenage mothers and 0.8 percentage points below the level in 2001 which was 6.7% (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 _ Number and proportion of registered births to teenagers (2001-2013)

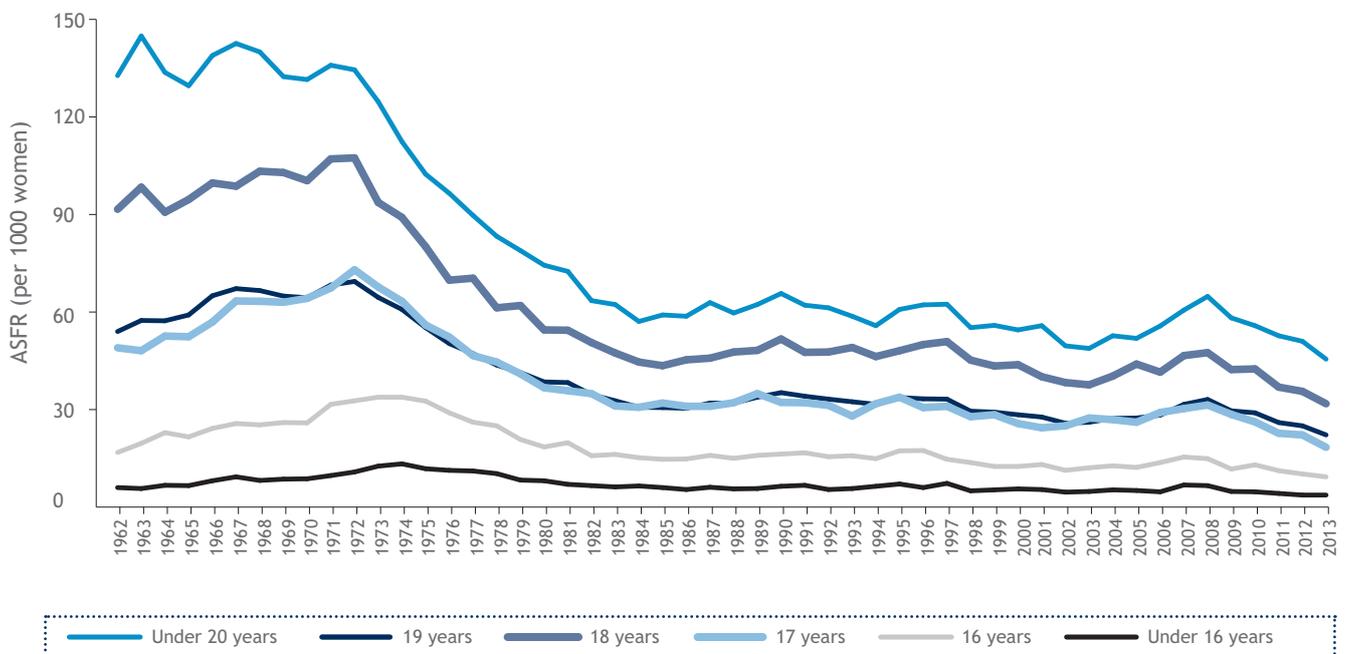




New Zealand’s teenage birth rate in 2013 was 23.8 births per 1,000 women aged under 20. The rate is the number of births per 1,000 women in the specific age group in the year. There has been a decline in the teenage birth rate long-term over the period 1962 to 2013 (see Figure 2).

Births to teenage mothers are increasingly occurring during the older teenage years. Almost three-quarters (71.6%) of all teenage births in 2013 were to 18 and 19 year olds, up from two-thirds (66.6%) in 2006. Conversely, there were fewer births to younger teenagers (17 years and under) over the period 2006 to 2013, with the proportion declining from 33.4% of all teenage births in 2006, to 28.4% in 2013.

Figure 2 _ Age specific fertility rates (ASFR per 1,000) for teenage mothers over the period 1962 – 2013



Source: ASFRs provided by Statistics NZ

The latest figures indicate that approximately 11% of women give birth during their teenage years. The researchers also looked at the probability of a particular cohort of young teenage mothers having a subsequent birth during their teenage years. Their findings showed that after having a first birth at age 15 in 2008, very few of this cohort of teenagers were likely to have a second or subsequent birth before their 20th birthday (a cumulative probability of 0.02).

However, this finding is based on a very small cohort of those who gave birth at aged 15. The probability of teenagers having a subsequent birth was lower than the national average in Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury, as well as in the rest of the South Island. The smaller rural regions had marginally higher probabilities of teenage mothers progressing to a subsequent birth, with the highest likelihood being in Northland and Gisborne.

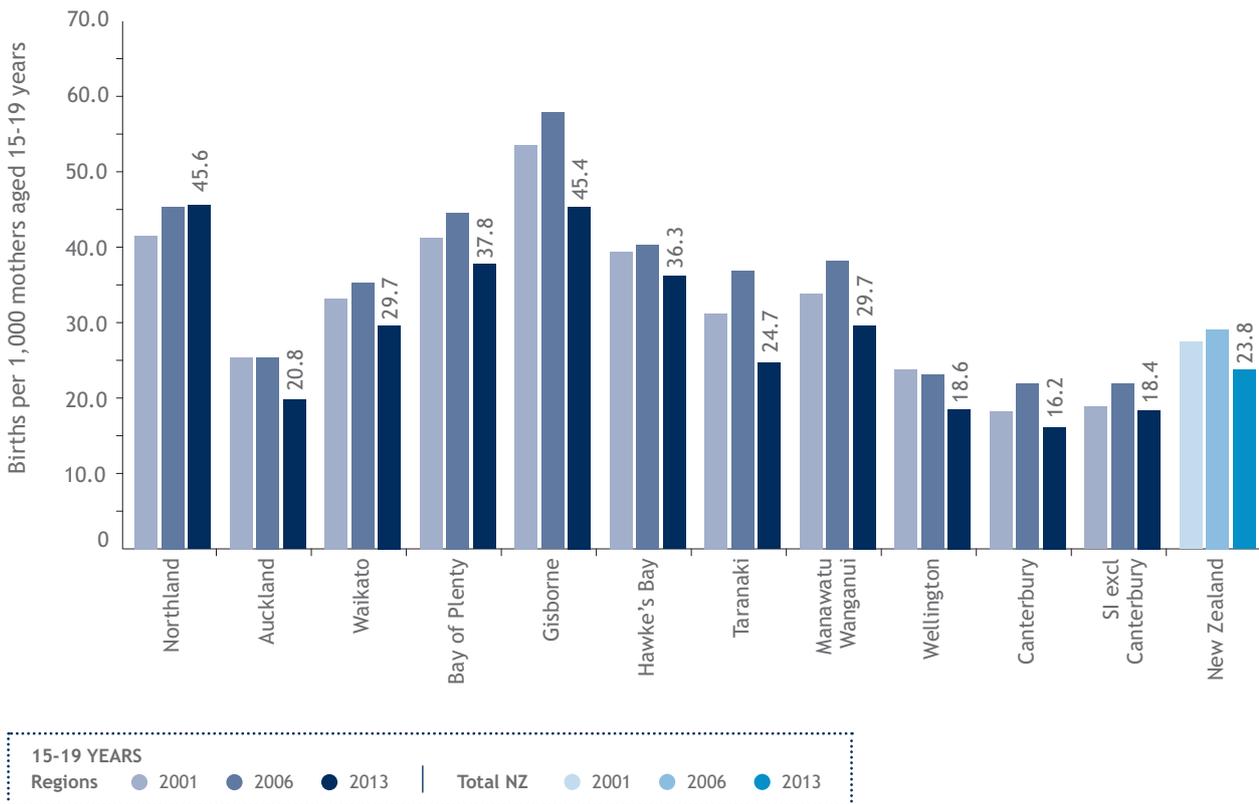


Teenage births have decreased as a proportion of all births in all regions since 2006

As with national trends, regional trends can be examined by looking at both the proportion of teenagers amongst all women giving birth in a region in a given year, and teenage birth rates. The research findings showed that births to teenage mothers as a proportion of all births at a regional level continue to decline, with lower proportions for all regions

compared to 2006. Figure 3 shows that the teenage fertility rate has declined across all regions between 2001 and 2013, with the exception of Northland where there was a small increase (+9.6%). The most significant declines over the 2001-2013 period were seen in Wellington (-22.2%) and Taranaki (-21.1%).

Figure 3 _ Regional age specific fertility rates per 1,000 teenage mothers aged 15-19 years, 2001, 2006 and 2013

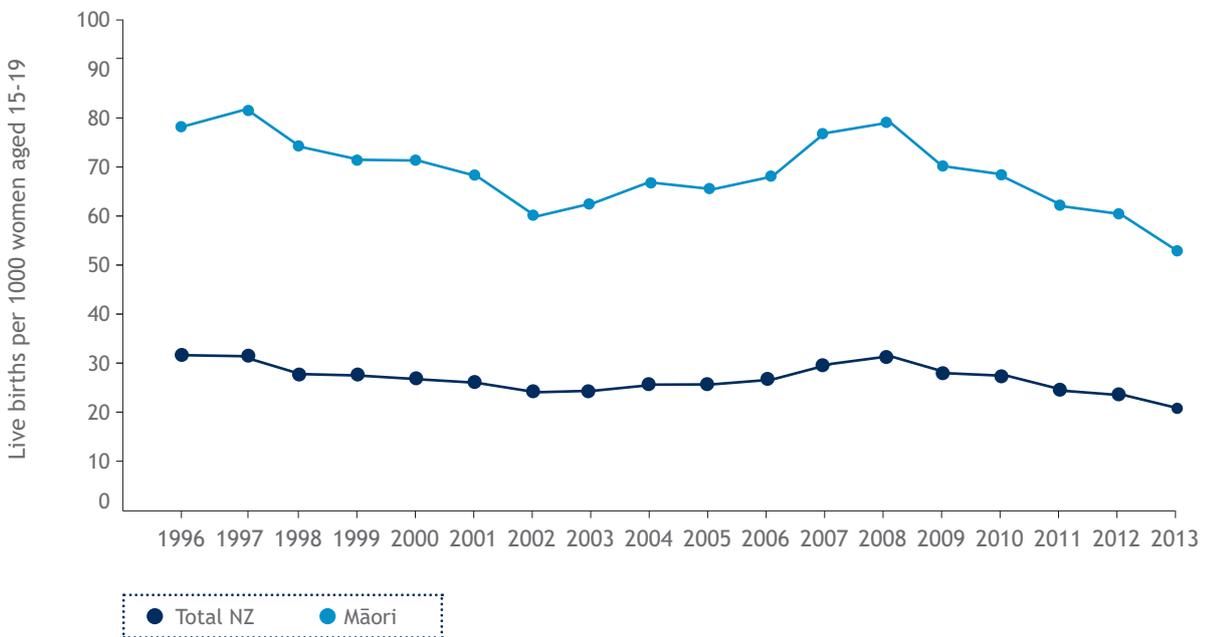




The teenage birth rate is declining for Māori

The Māori teenage birth rate in 2013 was 53.1 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years, down from 72.2 births in 2000 (see Figure 4). The Māori teenage birth rate is still higher than the national rate, but both rates are declining and the gap between them is narrowing. With Māori accounting for nearly one in five women aged 15–19 giving birth in 2013, trends in the Māori birth rate will influence the total birth rate.

Figure 4 _ Teenage birth rates, Total NZ and Māori, 1996 – 2013



Source: Statistics New Zealand Vital Statistics annual data online through Infoshare.



Factors that may be driving the declining teenage birth rate

There are no simple explanations for the current declines in teenage birth rates. The research literature suggests that the factors driving trends in teenage birth rates are multifaceted, operating both directly and indirectly, and at several levels:

individual, family, community and society. The report draws on very little New Zealand evidence and there are difficulties in applying this international research to the New Zealand context, as acknowledged in the report.

MAIN FACTORS IDENTIFIED

The main factors identified in the literature are:

- > **Increased contraception use and postponement of becoming sexually active** *directly* impact on teenage birth rates.
- > **Pregnancy prevention programmes** may also have an impact, and differences in the way they are delivered and the broader social contexts in which they are delivered, may help explain differences across countries.
- > Research suggests a link between high rates of teenage births and **socio-economic disadvantage** and other related factors.
- > International research also indicates that trends and drivers vary for different ethnic and age groups and therefore **interventions need to be targeted** to be effective.

Relatively high teenage birth rates in countries like New Zealand and the United States are part of generally higher total fertility rates. A potential benefit of a relatively high teenage birth rate is that it may offer some protection against the impacts of structural ageing to support a growing proportion of elderly people.

References

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Download the full report: superu.govt.nz/teenbirths

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