

TEENAGE EX-NUPTIAL BIRTHS

Some concern exists that Australian teenage ex-nuptial birth rates are on the rise, and that if this is so Australia will mirror the higher teenage birth rates of the United States. This concern arises mainly from a confusion over the relationship between teenage births and births generally.

A surface reading of a sentence such as 'the proportion of births to teenagers outside marriage more than doubled between 1971 and 1991' (ABS 1994) has left the impression among some people that teenage ex-nuptial births have soared. But have they?

Teenage ex-nuptial births . . .

. . . have risen in terms of numbers

Figure 1 shows that over the period 1950–1996 nuptial births to teenagers have been falling, while ex-nuptial births to teenagers have been rising.

. . . have fallen and risen in terms of age-specific rate

Figure 1 does not take account of the growing number of teenagers available to have children, nor of the changing pattern of births in the total population of women. Once we consider the increase in teenagers in the population, we see that since 1971 ex-nuptial teenage births fell and then rose (particularly in the early 1990s), peaked at a rate similar to that in the early 1970s, and have plateaued since then (Figure 2).

. . . now make up almost the only component of a declining teenage birth rate

Taken together with the nuptial component of the birth rate, though, the overall teenage birth rate has declined (Figure 3). That is, there are many fewer teenagers per thousand giving birth in 1996 than there were in 1971. In that year, 55 teenagers per thousand gave birth during the year; by 1996 this had dropped to 20 per thousand.

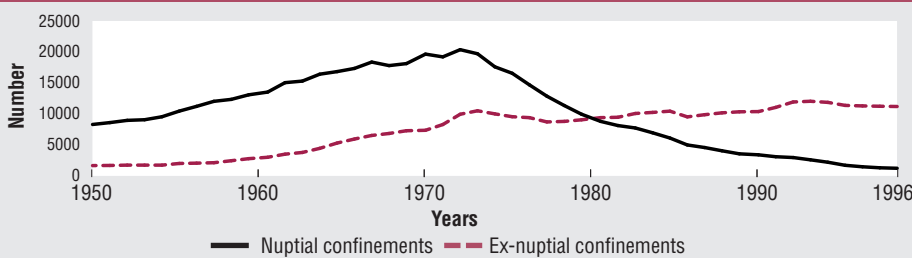
What has changed during that time, as Figure 3 shows, is the proportion of those births which are ex-nuptial. In 1971, two-thirds of all births to teenagers occurred within a marriage. In 1996, only one tenth of all births were nuptial. This change has been due to factors such as the decreasing pressure to marry once pregnant, improved contraceptive availability and associated caution about HIV infection, and expanding educational opportunities for young women.

. . . and have fallen in terms of their contribution to overall ex-nuptial births

Compared with what has been going on generally among women giving birth, the teenage pattern is not so unusual and we see teenage ex-nuptial births in relative decline, rather than on the rise.

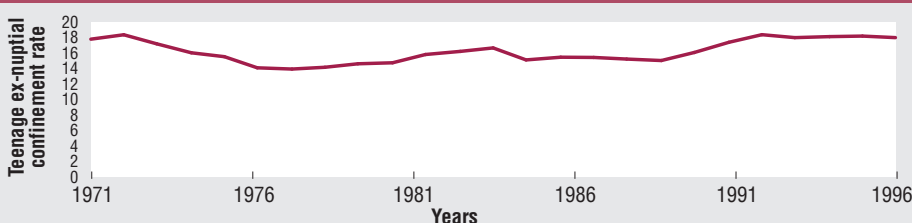
Figure 4 shows the contribution which teenage births have made to total births over the period 1971–1996. The top line in the figure shows teenage ex-nuptial births as a percentage of all ex-nuptial births. The

Figure 1 Number of teenagers giving birth, Australia, 1950–1996



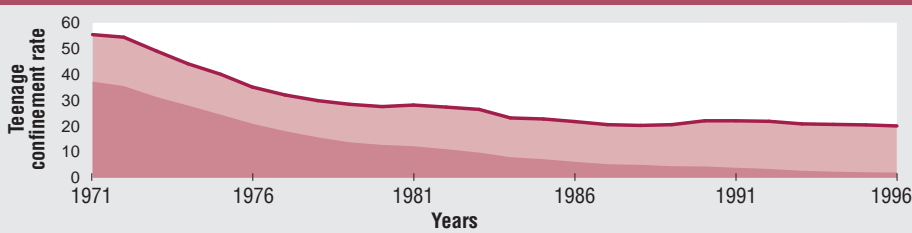
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (various years), *Births Australia*, Catalogue No. 3301.0.

Figure 2 Teenage ex-nuptial confinement rate, Australia, 1971–1996



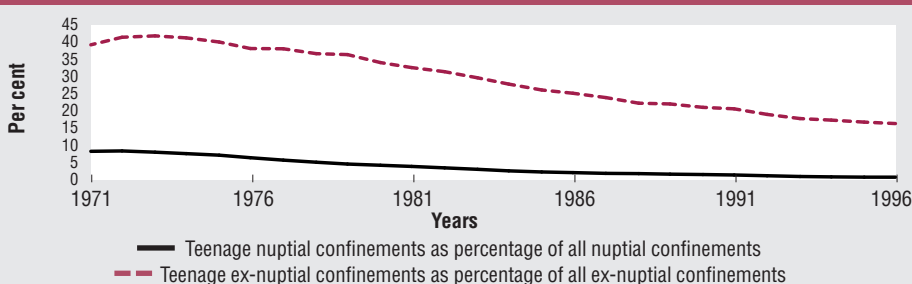
Note: Rate refers to ex-nuptial confinements per '000 women aged under 20.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (various years), *Births Australia*, Catalogue No. 3301.0.

Figure 3 Nuptial and ex-nuptial components of teenage confinement rate, Australia, 1971–1996



Note: Rate refers to confinements per '000 women aged under 20.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (various years), *Births Australia*, Catalogue No. 3301.0.

Figure 4 Ex-nuptial and nuptial teenage confinements as a percentage of total annual confinements of the same type, Australia, 1971–1996



Note: Nuptial confinements are those occurring within a marriage and include conceptions before marriage. Ex-nuptial confinements are those occurring to a woman not married (that is, never married, separated, divorced or widowed).
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (various years), *Births*, Catalogue No. 3301.0.

Framework for Child Abuse Prevention

Annette Michaux

lower line shows teenage nuptial births as a percentage of all nuptial births. Both lines show a decreasing contribution from teenage births to total births, nuptial and ex-nuptial.

In summary, the teenage ex-nuptial birth rate has indeed been increasing, but not as fast as the rate of increase of ex-nuptial births to older women. Thus, relative to the changing nature of births in Australian society, the teenage ex-nuptial birth rate has been making a decreasing contribution – or falling.

In 1997, fewer than 1 per cent of families with children at home had teenage parents.

Reference

ABS (1994). Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Focus on Families: Demographics and Family Formation*, Catalogue No. 4420.0, Canberra.

Notes

• There is a difference between *teenagers giving birth* and *births to teenagers*. The first focuses on the number of mothers and the second on the number of children born. The difference is due to the number of multiple births, and is usually slight: there are about 1 per cent more births to teenagers in any year than there are teenagers giving birth. The data in this article cover teenagers giving birth, or teenage confinements. However, for ease of language, they will be called teenage births within the text.

• Ex-nuptial births are those occurring to women who are not currently married. They may be separated, divorced, widowed or never married. They may be living in a de facto relationship, whatever their legal marital status.

Christine Kilmartin is a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The New South Wales Child Protection Council has recently developed a *Framework for Child Abuse Prevention*. Building on the 1993 National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Abuse, the Framework will assist policy and decision makers to develop comprehensive plans to prevent child abuse and neglect and give options to those working in the field on ways in which their work can contribute to the overall prevention effort.

The Framework document details how child abuse and neglect can be prevented by recognising the many factors which contribute to it at societal, community, family and individual levels and targeting interventions to change or ameliorate these.

The overall aim of the Framework is to build a child-friendly society which supports families throughout the child rearing process and provides a healthy environment for children's development.

The Framework will help to identify the factors at the societal, community, family and individual levels which increase the risk of child abuse and neglect, and those which help protect against them (that is, protective or resiliency factors). It will also help to identify programs and strategies which help to reduce child abuse and neglect by reducing the risk factors or strengthening the protective factors.

In developing the Framework the Council worked collaboratively with the

National Child Protection Clearing House. Two projects were commissioned by the Council and undertaken by the Clearing House.

The first project was a discussion paper describing the structural barriers to prevention and innovative practice which may assist in overcoming these barriers. The Council believed it important to situate the Framework within the broader social context to avoid a situation which discounted the impact of the 'big issues' such as poverty and unemployment on the ability of families to care adequately for their children.

The second project was a statewide audit of prevention programs in New South Wales, designed to give the Council a better picture of the spread of services and to identify any obvious gaps in service provision.

The *Framework for Child Abuse Prevention* document, discussion paper and audit report have been presented to the New South Wales Government through the Minister for Community Services and their release is anticipated in the near future. Interested readers may contact Annette Michaux at the New South Wales Child Protection Council for further information about the Framework.

Annette Michaux is the Executive Officer of the New South Wales Child Protection Council.

BECOME PART OF THE CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION NETWORK!

The National Child Protection Clearing House at the Australian Institute of Family Studies serves as an interchange point for information, research and initiatives in the child abuse prevention field. It collects and distributes information, and aims for a two-way involvement with the community concerned with child protection.



To participate in the work of the Clearing House –

- send us materials relevant to child abuse prevention;
- complete and return a questionnaire on research and program activities relevant to child protection with which you are involved;
- join the National Clearing House mailing list – you will receive two newsletters and two issues papers free of charge each year.

Please fill in details overleaf ►