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Media Relations

June 7, 2016

UNH Demographer Finds New Birth Data Reflect Fewer Births in U.S. in the Post-Recession Era

DURHAM, N.H. – Review of new birth data released late last week by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) finds no evidence of any increase in births or birth rates in the U.S. after the Great Recession. New research estimates there were 3.4 million fewer births between 2008 and 2015 than would have been expected, according to analysis from the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire.

“Even though the number of women in their prime childbearing years (20-39) is growing, there were 8 percent fewer births in 2015 than in 2007, prior to the Great Recession,” said Kenneth Johnson, senior demographer in the Carsey School and a professor of sociology. “If 2007 fertility rates had been sustained through 2015, we would have expected nearly 600,000 more children in 2015 than were actually born.”

Much of this decline is reflected in the fertility rates of women 20 to 29 in 2015, who had 19 percent fewer babies than would have been expected if 2007 rates had been sustained. Fertility declines were greatest among women 20 to 24, who saw a 27 percent decrease in fertility rates. Women in their teens also had significant fertility declines. Such declines in teen births are considered by many to be a positive change, since teenage mothers and their babies often face significant economic, social, and health challenges.

In contrast, women in their 30s actually had 50,000 more births than expected in 2015 because of slightly higher fertility rates in 2015 than in 2007. Fertility rates increased slightly for women of all racial groups age 30 to 39, except for Hispanics.

“A critical question now is ‘have women just delayed births because of the Great Recession and its aftermath or will they forego these births entirely?’” Johnson said. “There is no evidence of any upturn in births or birth rates in the new data. Whether these births are just delayed or foregone, the 3.4 million missing births mean there are currently many empty beds in maternity wards, less business for firms in the baby industry, and many empty seats in kindergarten classrooms.”

The Carsey School brief about this research is available at <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/us-births-low>.

The Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire is nationally recognized for its research, policy education, and engagement. The school takes on the pressing issues of the twenty-first century, striving for innovative, responsive, and equitable solutions.

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