

**PREGNANT TEENS AND TEENAGE MOTHERS:  
A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT**

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## Introduction

The success of the greatest number of students is a daily concern for all players in education. It is one of the primary goals of the current education reform and one of the commitments made by the various socioeconomic partners of the Québec Youth Summit. To honour this commitment to educational success, one of the measures recently implemented by the Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ) is the success plans involving elementary and secondary schools as well as vocational training and adult general education centres.

Certain populations such as pregnant teens and teenage mothers are more exposed to failure than others. From the moment they decide to carry their pregnancy to term and throughout their new life as mothers, these young women must face many obstacles that make the pursuit of their studies difficult, thus often reducing their chances for success. It is clear that the situation of pregnant teens and teenage mothers concerns not only educational circles but all sectors of society. In this regard, the 2000-2003 action program, which aims for equality for all Québec women, defines objectives and intervention plans to support pregnant teens and teenage mothers that are in line with the implementation of the Ministère's policy entitled *Politique en matière de condition féminine*, adopted in 1993 and in force until 2003.<sup>1</sup>

According to many, educational success is one of the key elements in helping these young women escape poverty and dependency. Everyone agrees that we must adopt concerted measures to support these teenagers and help them earn a high school diploma. Thus, partners at the Québec Youth Summit have asked that we continue our efforts in supporting pregnant teens and teenage mothers so that they might pursue their studies without being penalized for their condition.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context that in the spring of 2001, the MEQ conducted a study so as to better understand the range of educational services offered to pregnant teens and teenage mothers and to determine how we could offer adapted and equitable services in all regions across Québec. The data was collected in all school boards and in the three regular education sectors: youth, adult and vocational education. The results of this study are presented in the document published by the MEQ entitled *The Organization of Educational Services Provided for Pregnant Teens and Teenage Mothers by the School System: Results of a Study* (forthcoming).

Moreover, to better understand the significance and development of the phenomenon of pregnant teens and young mothers under 20 years of age in Québec, we must examine the statistical data, which is the purpose of this document. The pages that follow provide a summary of the data for Québec concerning this phenomenon.

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1. An interdepartmental committee coordinated by the Secrétariat à la condition féminine and involving the MEQ was established to meet government objectives in matter of preventing teenage pregnancy and supporting teenage mothers. Its mandate is to combine resources and ensure a greater consistency of government measures with respect to supporting pregnant teens and teenage mothers.
  2. Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, *Déclaration commune faisant état des consensus dégagés par les participants et les participantes associés au sommet du Québec et de la jeunesse* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), pp. 2-3. <<http://www.mce.gouv.qc.ca/1/html/12015018.html>>.

The text is divided into the four following sections:

- the current situation, presenting regional differences
- the characteristics of pregnant teens and teenage mothers
- the changes in the situation from 1980 to today
- some comparisons with the rest of Canada and other countries.

The differences between young women under the age of 18 and adolescent females 18 or 19 years of age were emphasized when necessary. Given the many figures contained in the document, the highlights are presented in simplified tables and figures. For a more in-depth analysis, readers may consult the documents cited in the references from which all the data are extracted. The main terms and methodology used are explained in the appendix.

## 1. The current situation

In 1998, for young women under 20 years of age, the pregnancy rate was 36.9 per 1 000 women, or 68.4 per 1 000 among those aged 18 and 19, and 20.1 per 1 000 among young women under 18 years of age.

For that same year, the fertility rate among young women under age 20 was 12.6 per 1 000 women, or 26.6 per 1 000 among young women aged 18 and 19 and 5.3 per 1 000 among young women under 17 years of age.

The proportion of adolescents aged 18 and 19 who became pregnant and carried their pregnancy to term was greater than that of adolescents under 18 years of age.

- In Québec, it is estimated that each year approximately 2 per cent of teenagers under 18 years of age and 8 per cent of adolescents aged 18 and 19 become pregnant. In 1997, the combined risk of becoming pregnant for the first time was 22 per cent among young women under 20 years of age.
- Of the total number of births each year in Québec, 4.7 per cent occur among women under 20 years of age. This proportion has been stable since 1995 but is slightly higher compared to the percentage in the early 90s where it wavered around 4 per cent.
- According to data from the 1996 Canadian census, 3 745 women in Québec under 20 years of age were listed as having one or more children; close to 40 per cent of these women headed single-parent families (n=1 480). In comparison, 555 men pertaining to the same age group were reported as having children, 35 of whom were single parents.

### *Two thirds of teenage pregnancies occur in the 18- to 19-year-old age group*

- In 1998, there were 10 513 pregnancies among young women under age 20 (see Table 1). Two thirds of these pregnancies (6 758) were among the 18- and 19-year-old age group, while the remainder (3 756) were among teenage girls under the age of 18. Thus, the teenage pregnancy rate was 36.9 per 1 000 women, or 68.4 per 1 000 among young women aged 18 and 19, and 20.2 per 1 000 among young women under 18 years of age.

Table 1  
Births and pregnancies among adolescents under 20 years of age  
in Québec, 1998

Pregnancies and births	Under age 18		Ages 18 and 19		Total Under age 20	
	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000
Pregnancies	3 756	20.2	6 758	68.4	10 513	36.9
Births	981	5.3	2 625	26.6	3 606	12.6

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

- In 1998, about one third of pregnancies (34.3 per cent) among young women under 20 years of age resulted in births. For that same year, the fertility rate among young women under 20 years of age was 12.6 per 1 000 women; it was five times higher among young women aged 18 and 19 (26.6 per 1 000) than among young women 17 years of age and under (5.3 per 1 000).

***Abortions are proportionately higher among adolescents under 18 years of age***

- The proportion of adolescents aged 18 and 19 who become pregnant and carry their pregnancy to term is greater than that of adolescents under age 18. In 1998, the abortion rate was at 22.5 per 1 000 teenagers aged 14 to 19, which represents a 10-point difference compared to the fertility rate. This means that in 1998, 61 per cent of pregnancies were terminated through abortion. The abortion rate is higher among young women under 18 years of age (69 per cent) than among young women aged 18 and 19 (56 per cent).
- The most recent figures published by the Institut de la statistique du Québec indicate that, in 1999, 3 476 children were born in Québec to mothers under 20 years of age. In three-quarters of the cases (2 595), the mother was 18 or 19 years old. Among mothers under age 18, the number of births was 881. This is the lowest figure ever recorded for young women under age 20, although a similar decline occurred in 1985, with a total of 3 527 births among this age group.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Data for 1999 are not presented in table form for some information, such as the pregnancy outcomes and the data per region, is not available. The year 1998 was therefore chosen as the last year for comparison.



### *Significant regional variations<sup>4</sup>*

The regions of Chaudière-Appalaches (20.2 per 1 000) and Bas-Saint-Laurent (20.6) have the lowest pregnancy rates among adolescents, whereas the Montréal (52.1) and Outaouais (42.6) regions have the highest rates.<sup>5</sup>

Fertility rates also vary according to region. The Abitibi-Témiscamingue (21.9 per 1 000) and Côte-Nord (20.5) regions present the highest rates.

The relative share of abortions and births also fluctuates according to region. The rate of abortions is higher in Montréal (34.0 per 1 000), Laval (27.1) and Outaouais (25.2).

- Pregnancy rates vary considerably according to region (see Table 2). Besides the northern regions (Nunavik, Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James), the highest pregnancy rates are in the Montréal (52.1 per 1 000) and Outaouais (42.6) regions. Conversely, the lowest teenage pregnancy rates are found in the Bas-Saint-Laurent (20.6) and Chaudière-Appalaches (20.2) regions.
- In absolute numbers, the Montréal (n=2 908), Montérégie (n=1 849) and Mauricie-Centre-du-Québec (n=723) regions have the highest number of pregnancies.

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4. The differences observed in the total number of pregnancies in Table 1 (n=10 513) and Table 2 (n=10 490) are due to the fact that regional data (Table 2) do not include abortions that were refunded by the Régie de l'assurance maladie when performed outside the province of the insured if the region of the person was not known (see appendix on methodology).

5. However, the two northern regions, Nunavik (147.4 per 1 000) and the Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie James (90.7) have much higher pregnancy rates. Their fertility rate is also much higher.

Table 2  
Rate and number of pregnancies per 1 000 adolescents under 20 years of age  
in Québec and in the health and social service regions, 1998

Health and social service regions	Under age 18		Ages 18 and 19		Total Under age 20	
	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000
Bas-Saint-Laurent	53	8.6	142	43.0	195	20.6
Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean	163	17.6	301	59.1	464	32.3
Capitale-Nationale	225	15.0	438	51.2	663	28.1
Mauricie–Centre-du-Québec	233	17.2	490	67.0	723	34.7
Estrie	157	20.0	275	66.2	432	36.0
Montréal	995	27.6	1 913	96.8	2 908	52.1
Outaouais	194	23.7	320	82.5	514	42.6
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	78	16.3	191	77.3	269	37.1
Côte-Nord	78	25.4	104	64.2	182	38.8
Nord-du-Québec	8	13.0	26	75.6	34	35.4
Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine	52	17.6	78	52.1	130	29.2
Chaudière-Appalaches	116	10.2	238	39.1	354	20.2
Laval	166	19.8	307	69.1	473	36.8
Lanaudière	194	17.9	305	57.7	499	31.0
Laurentides	246	20.3	394	65.4	640	35.3
Montérégie	719	20.3	1 130	60.8	1 849	34.3
Nunavik	38	116.2	42	283.8	80	168.4
Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James	32	66.5	49	198.4	81	111.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3 747</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>6 743</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>10 490</b>	<b>36.8</b>

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

Note: Health and social service regions refer to the territorial divisions used by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. They do not necessarily coincide with the administrative regions used by the MEQ, but they are very similar.

- With regard to fertility rates (see Table 3), Nunavik (147.4) and the Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James (90.7) had very high rates, but absolute numbers were low (70 and 66 births respectively in these two regions in 1998). Moreover, the Abitibi-Témiscamingue (21.9) and Côte-Nord (20.5) regions had the highest fertility rates among young women under 20 years of age, for both teenagers under age 18 and young women aged 18 and 19. As in northern regions, a high number of adolescents gave birth in the Côte-Nord region (11.7 births per 1 000) or more than double the provincial average. This phenomenon may possibly be linked to generally higher fertility rates in aboriginal population in these regions.

- In terms of absolute numbers, Montréal (n=898), Montérégie (n=579) and Mauricie–Centre-du-Québec (n=304) had the highest number of births among young mothers under age 20.

Table 3  
Fertility rate and number of births per 1 000 adolescents under 20 years of age  
in Québec and in the health and social service regions, 1998

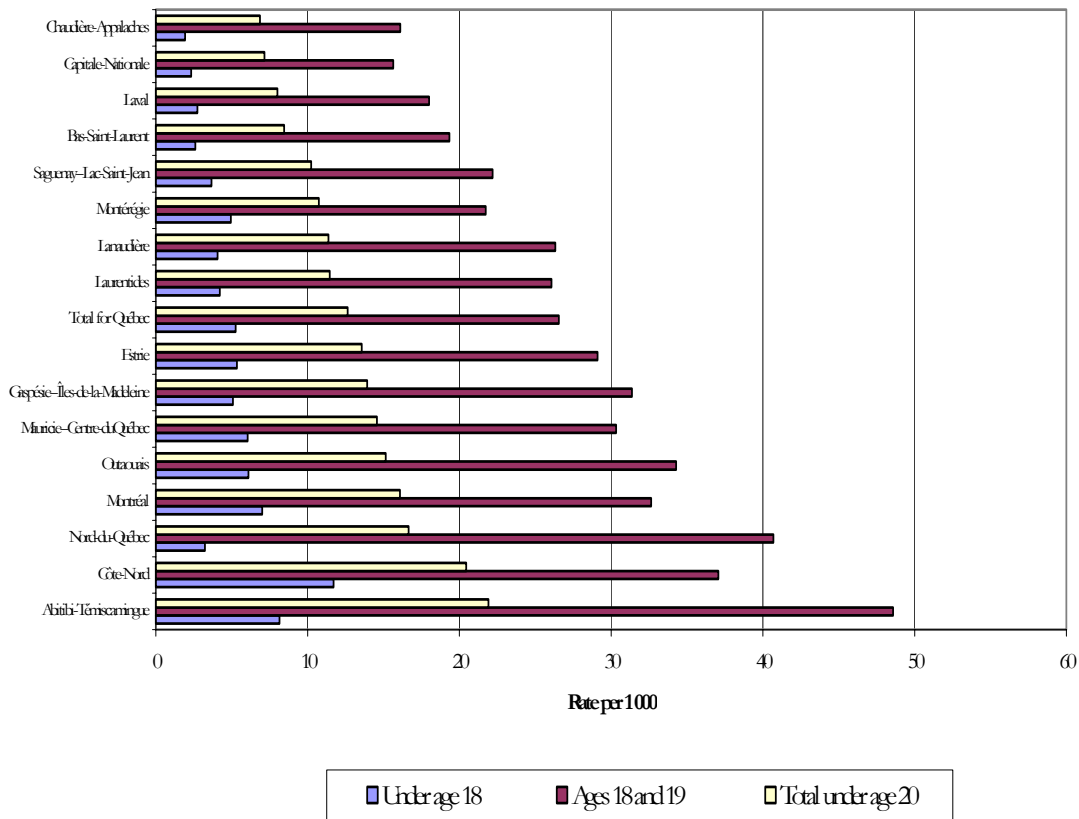
Health and social service regions	Under age 18		Ages 18 and 19		Total Under age 20	
	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000
Bas-Saint-Laurent	16	2.6	64	19.4	80	8.5
Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean	34	3.7	113	22.2	147	10.2
Capitale-Nationale	35	2.3	134	15.7	169	7.2
Mauricie–Centre-du-Québec	82	6.1	222	30.3	304	14.6
Estrie	42	5.4	121	29.1	163	13.6
Montréal	253	7.0	645	32.6	898	16.1
Outaouais	50	6.1	133	34.3	183	15.2
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	39	8.2	120	48.6	159	21.9
Côte-Nord	36	11.7	60	37.1	96	20.5
Nord-du-Québec	2	3.2	14	40.7	16	16.6
Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine	15	5.1	47	31.4	62	13.9
Chaudière-Appalaches	22	1.9	98	16.1	120	6.9
Laval	23	2.7	80	18.0	103	8.0
Lanaudière	44	4.1	139	26.3	183	11.4
Laurentides	51	4.2	157	26.1	208	11.5
Montérégie	175	5.0	404	21.7	579	10.7
Nunavik	33	100.9	37	250.0	70	147.4
Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James	29	60.3	37	149.8	66	90.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>981</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>2 625</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>3 606</b>	<b>12.6</b>

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

Note: Health and social service regions refer to the territorial divisions used by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. They do not necessarily coincide with the administrative regions used by the MEQ, but they are very similar.

Figure 1  
Fertility rate per 1000 adolescents under 20 years of age according  
to health and social service regions in Québec, 1998

Health and social service regions



Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

Note: The regions are ranked in descending order according to the overall birth rate among young women under 20 years of age. Given their distinctive features, data for the Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James and Nunavik regions are not included in this chart (see data from Table 3).

- The Chaudière-Appalaches (6.9), Capitale-Nationale (7.2), Laval (8.0) and Bas-Saint-Laurent (8.5) regions had the lowest fertility rates in the province, both among teenagers under 18 years of age and young women aged 18 and 19. The Chaudière-Appalaches region stood out with the lowest fertility rate (1.9 per 1 000) among adolescents under 18 years of age. The Capitale-Nationale region followed with a rate of 2.3 for the same category.
- The relative share of abortions and births fluctuates considerably according to region (see Table 4). Although in 1998 the fertility rate for the whole province of Québec was almost twice as low as the abortion rate (12.6 vs 22.4) among young women under age 20, the situation was very different in several regions. In fact, the fertility rates for Nunavik and the Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James were 6 to 8 times higher than the abortion rates. The fertility rate also exceeded the abortion rate in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Côte-Nord regions, while the two were similar in the Nord-du-Québec and the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine regions. The abortion rate was higher in the regions of Montréal (34 per 1 000), Laval (27.1) and Outaouais (25.2). It should be noted that the abortion rate in the Laval region was three times higher than the fertility rate.

Table 4  
Rate and number of pregnancies per 1 000 adolescents under 20 years of age  
according to health and social service regions, 1998

Health and social service regions	Number			Rate per 1 000		
	Pregnancies	Live births	Induced abortions	Pregnancies	Live births	Induced abortions
Bas-Saint-Laurent	195	80	104	20.6	8.5	11.0
Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean	464	147	290	32.3	10.2	20.2
Capitale-Nationale	663	169	476	28.1	7.2	20.2
Mauricie–Centre-du-Québec	723	304	382	34.7	14.6	18.3
Estrie	432	163	251	36.0	13.6	20.9
Montréal	2 908	898	1 847	52.1	16.1	34.0
Outaouais	514	183	304	42.6	15.2	25.2
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	269	159	95	37.1	21.9	13.1
Côte-Nord	182	96	76	38.8	20.5	16.2
Nord-du-Québec	34	16	16	35.4	16.6	16.6
Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine	130	62	65	29.2	13.9	14.6
Chaudière-Appalaches	354	120	215	20.2	6.9	12.3
Laval	473	103	348	36.8	8.0	27.1
Lanaudière	499	183	294	31.0	11.4	18.3
Laurentides	640	208	407	35.3	11.5	22.4
Montérégie	1 849	579	1 161	34.3	10.7	21.5
Nunavik	80	70	9	168.4	147.4	18.9
Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James	81	66	11	111.3	90.7	15.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 490</b>	<b>3 606</b>	<b>6 401</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>22.4</b>

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

Note: Health and social service regions refer to the territorial divisions used by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. They do not necessarily coincide with the administrative regions used by the MEQ, but they are very similar.

- In absolute numbers, more abortions were performed in the Montréal region (n=1 897) among young women under age 20, followed by the Montérégie region (n=1 161) and the Capitale-Nationale region (n=476). These three regions total more than half of all abortions performed among young women under age 20 in Québec.
- If we compare the fertility of adolescents with that of women of other age groups according to health and social service regions, the pregnancy rates at adolescence generally follow the pregnancy indicator for all ages, with the exception of the Outaouais and Côte-Nord regions rates. Indeed, these two regions have a pregnancy rate higher than the provincial rate, while that of women 25 years of age or over is under the Québec average. As seen previously, the Côte-

Nord region presents a particular portrait of teenage fertility; adolescents in this region, along with those in northern regions, are the only ones to show a pregnancy rate higher than that of women aged 35 to 39. While the pregnancy rate for the Outaouais region is higher among adolescents, its abortion rate is also high, which is not the case for the Côte-Nord region.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Characteristics of teenage mothers

Motherhood at adolescence reduces the chances of pursuing one's studies and getting a job and increases the risk of becoming a single parent and living in poverty.

There is an increase in abortions and repeated abortions among young women. However, the number of births among young women under age 20 is also higher.

### *Indicators of unsafe sexual behaviour*

- According to the latest health and social survey in Québec,<sup>7</sup> almost 6 out of 10 teenagers (58.7 per cent) aged 15 to 19 have already had sexual relations, the vast majority of them involving penetration. Among these, 7 per cent have had their first sexual relation before the age of 15. Results therefore show that first-time sexual relations involving penetration occur at an increasingly younger age.<sup>8</sup>
- According to the same survey, 42 per cent of young women aged 15 to 17 and 77 per cent of 18- and 19-year-olds are sexually active, that is to say that they have had at least one sexual partner over a 12-month period.
- A greater proportion of teenagers have more than one sexual partner over a 12-month period. Such is the case for almost one third of 15- to 19-year-olds (32.7 per cent), compared to 6 per cent or less for people over 40 years of age.
- Teenagers partake in unsafe sexual behaviour (and young girls more so than young boys) more often than older men and women, especially since a greater proportion of them have had more than one partner and have been treated for a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

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6. Madeleine Rochon, *Taux de grossesse à l'adolescence, Québec, 1980 à 1995, régions sociosanitaires de résidence, 1993-1995 et d'autres groupes d'âge* (Québec: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, Direction générale de la planification et de l'évaluation, 1997), p. 20.

7. Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Enquête sociale et de santé 1998* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000). (Collection La santé et le bien-être). Please note that data concerning sexual behaviour apply to both boys and girls, unless otherwise indicated.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 212. Data concerning sexual behaviour are not presented in table form; see chapters 9 and 11 of the *Enquête sociale et de santé 1998*, cited in reference.

- Approximately 30 per cent of young women under 18 years of age and 57 per cent of young women aged 18 and 19 say they use oral contraceptives. The figures for teenagers under 18 years of age are comparable to those of the 1992 survey. Yet the implementation of the drug insurance plan in June 1996 promoted greater access to contraceptives and, consequently, an increase in their use.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Increased risks for the health of teenage mothers and their children***

- Pregnancy before the age of 20 involves several risks for the health of the mother or the child, especially due to the young mothers' socioeconomic living conditions. On one hand, they are more likely to give birth to a premature baby or an infant with a congenital defect. They also face a slightly higher risk of giving birth to a low-birth-weight baby.<sup>10</sup> According to data provided by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ), 7.4 per cent of mothers under age 20 gave birth to low-weight babies compared to 6.1 per cent for all women.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, children of teenage parents are more likely than other children to be neglected and present adjustment problems later on.<sup>12</sup>
- Mothers under age 20 are at a higher risk of suffering from health problems such as anemia, hypertension, nephropathy, eclampsia and depressive disorders.
- Canadian figures show that abortions and repeated abortions among teenagers are on the rise, as are pregnancies. In fact, in 1994, 9 per cent of the teenagers between ages 15 and 17 who had given birth had already done so before. This proportion is 20 per cent among 18- and 19-year-olds.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Limited formal education of teenage mothers and general poverty conditions***

- According to data compiled in 1998 by the Institut de la statistique du Québec, approximately two thirds of teenage mothers (70 per cent) have 11 years or less of schooling, and 22 per cent have from 12 to 14 years.<sup>14</sup> Many pregnant teenagers have already had a difficult time at school, increasing their likelihood of dropping out of school once they are faced with new responsibilities as mothers.<sup>15</sup> In fact, according to data from the Ministère de l'Éducation, the two variables most closely correlated with failure in school are the mother's limited formal education and the fact that neither of the two parents is employed.<sup>16</sup> In other words, studies show that teenage motherhood reduces the chances of pursuing studies and having a job, and

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9. Ibid., p. 246.

10. Surinder Wadhwa and Wayne J. Millar, "Teenage pregnancies, 1974 to 1994," *Health Reports*, vol. 9, no. 3, (1997), 9.

11. Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Statistical Data*, (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000). <[http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/demograp/naissance/index\\_an.htm](http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/demograp/naissance/index_an.htm)>.

12. Québec, Secrétariat à la condition féminine, *Programme d'action 2000-2003 : l'égalité pour toutes les Québécoises* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), p. 19.

13. Surinder Wadhwa and Wayne J. Millar, pp. 13 and 15.

14. More detailed data concerning the schooling of young mothers are not available. However, according to the 1996 census, about half of teenagers between ages 15 and 19 had 13 years or less of education. This figure is much lower than the 90 per cent proportion of mothers under age 20 who declared having 14 years or less of education, according to data from the ISQ.

15. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Challenges... and Choices: Keeping Teenage Mothers in School* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1998), code: 21-0031-A.

16. Work in progress at the Direction de la recherche et de l'évaluation concerning success indicators illustrated with the new map of school population.

increases the risk of becoming the head of a single-parent family and of constantly living in poverty.

- According to data from the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale (unpublished data, March 2000), 1 881 single mothers under 20 years of age receive employment assistance benefits, which indicates the state of poverty in which many young mothers live.

### 3. Changes in the situation since 1980

From 1980 to 1998, the fertility rate among teenage mothers dropped, from 13.4 per 1 000 women to 12.8. This reduction was more prevalent among young women aged 18 and 19. The fertility rate among teenagers under age 18 did not change much.

However, the pregnancy rate increased substantially during the same period, from 24.2 per 1 000 women to 36.9. The pregnancy rate increased more among the 18- to 19-year olds than among the younger age group, but their fertility rate dropped.

#### *Decline in births and relative stability of the fertility rate*

- From 1980 to 1998, the number of births among mothers under age 20 dropped from 5 035 births in 1980 to 3 606 in 1998, a decline of 28 per cent (see Table 5). This percentage corresponds to the decline in the number of women aged 20 years or under in the population (24 per cent). Births dropped mainly among 18- and 19-year-olds. Between 1990 and 1998, the fertility rate among 18- and 19-year-olds dropped by 6.3 points, while the decline among teenagers under age 18 was only 0.8 points (see Table 7).
- The fertility rate among young women under age 20 reached an all-time high of 15.2 births per 1 000 women in 1990, then remained relatively stable until 1995, hovering at around 14 per 1 000. The rate then dropped to 12.6 per 1 000 women in 1998 (see Table 5).



Table 5  
**Rate and number of pregnancies among adolescents under 20 years of age  
according to pregnancy outcomes, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1992 to 1998**

Year	Number			Rate per 1 000		
	Pregnancies	Abortions	Births	Pregnancies	Abortions	Births
1980	9 051	3 321	5 035	24.2	8.9	13.4
1985	7 875	3 680	3 527	27.1	12.7	12.1
1990	9 231	4 425	4 132	33.9	16.2	15.2
1992	9 802	5 001	4 121	35.4	18.1	14.9
1993	10 121	5 387	4 078	35.9	19.1	14.5
1994	10 359	5 546	4 182	36.0	19.3	14.5
1995	10 324	5 570	4 134	35.6	19.2	14.2
1996	10 349	5 794	4 003	35.7	20.0	13.8
1997	10 300	5 972	3 779	35.8	20.8	13.1
1998	10 513	6 418	3 606	36.9	22.5	12.6

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS, unpublished data.

***Highest teenage pregnancy rate in 1998 since 1980***

- From 1980 to 1994, there was at least a 50 per-cent increase in the pregnancy rate among young women under age 20 in Québec, rising from 24.2 to 36 pregnancies per 1 000 women. After 1994, this rate remained relatively stable, only to slightly rise again to 36.9 per 1 000 women in 1998 (see table 5).
- Overall, the number of pregnancies increased by 16 per cent, growing from 9 051 in 1980, to 10 513 in 1998. The 1998 number and rate of pregnancies among young women under age 20 is thus the highest ever recorded since 1980.
- Moreover, Table 6 shows that the increase in the number of pregnancies was more prevalent in the 18- to 19-year age group. From 1990 to 1998, the pregnancy rate increased by 4.6 points in this age group, but only 1.6 points among teenagers under age 18.

Table 6  
**Changes in the rate and number of pregnancies among adolescents under 20 years of age  
in Québec according to age group, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1992 to 1998**

Year	Under age 18		Ages 18 and 19		Total	
	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000
1980	3 068	12.6	5 983	45.6	9 051	24.2
1985	2 835	15.3	5 040	47.8	7 875	27.1
1990	3 349	18.6	5 882	63.8	9 231	33.9
1992	3 723	19.9	6 079	68.0	9 802	35.4
1993	3 379	19.9	6 343	68.4	10 121	35.9
1994	3 688	19.1	6 671	70.2	10 359	36.0
1995	3 629	18.7	6 695	69.8	10 324	35.6
1996	3 681	19.0	6 668	69.2	10 349	35.7
1997	3 779	19.8	6 519	67.3	10 300	35.8
1998	3 756	20.2	6 758	68.4	10 513	36.9

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

- The increase in the number of pregnancies and the decline in the number of births can be explained by a significant increase in abortions. From 1980 to 1998, the number of abortions almost doubled, rising from 3 321 to 6 418 (see Table 5). It is only in 1985 that, according to available data, the number of abortions surpassed the number of births among women under age 20 for the very first time, a ratio unchanged to this date. The abortion rate was 19 per 1 000 women in 1993, 1994 and 1995, but later rose to 22.5 per 1 000 women in 1998.

Table 7  
**Changes in the fertility rate and number of births among adolescents under 20 years of age  
in Québec according to age group, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1992 to 1998**

Year	Under age 18		Ages 18 and 19		Total	
	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000	Number	Rate per 1 000
1980	1 384	5.7	3 651	27.8	5 035	13.4
1985	897	4.8	2 630	24.9	3 527	12.1
1990	1 099	6.1	3 033	32.9	4 132	15.2
1992	1 125	6.0	2 996	33.5	4 121	14.9
1993	1 120	5.9	2 958	31.9	4 078	14.5
1994	1 090	5.7	3 092	32.6	4 182	14.5
1995	1 057	5.4	3 077	32.1	4 134	14.2
1996	1 066	5.5	2 937	30.5	4 003	13.8
1997	1 055	5.5	2 724	28.1	3 779	13.1
1998	981	5.3	2 625	26.6	3 606	12.6

Source: Unité des études et des analyses, Service de la recherche, DGPE, MSSS.

- The increase in abortions was the strongest among 18- and 19-year olds (103 per cent), rising from 1 876 in 1980 to 3 814 in 1998. Among teenagers under age 18, for the same period, the number rose from 1 445 to 2 605, an increase of 80 per cent. These figures are consistent with the changes presented in the previous chart which show that the increase in pregnancies and the decline in births are two phenomena more prevalent among young women aged 18 and 19 than among teenagers under 18 years of age (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2  
 Pregnancy rate among adolescents under 18 years of age\* in Québec according to  
 teenage pregnancy outcomes, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1992 to 1998

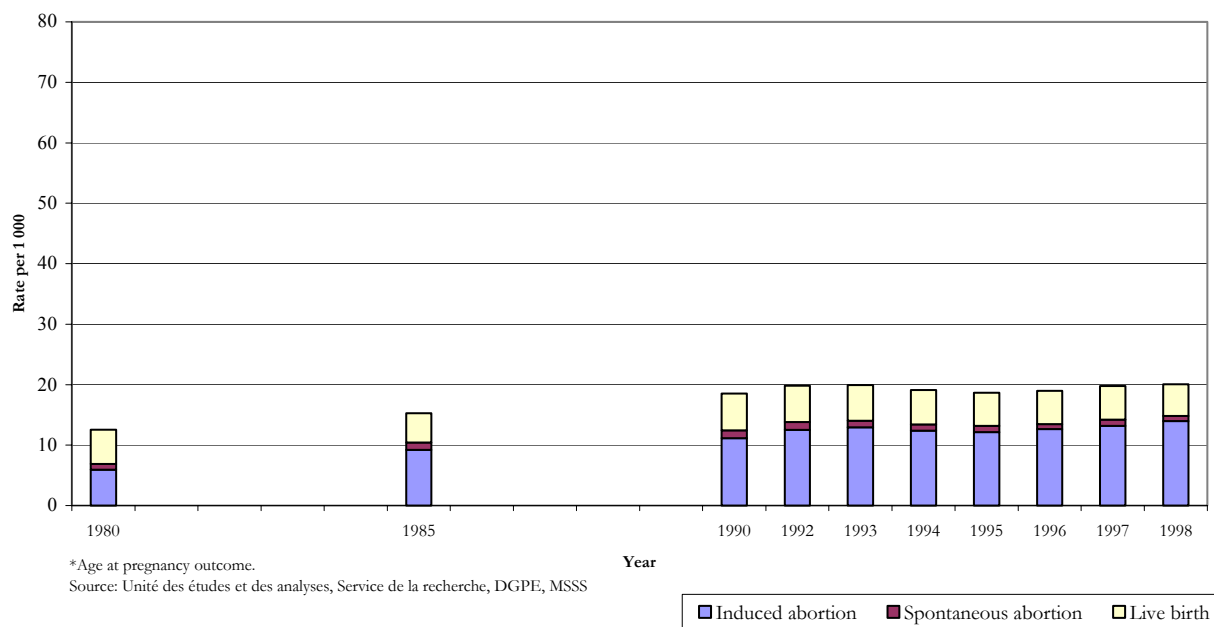
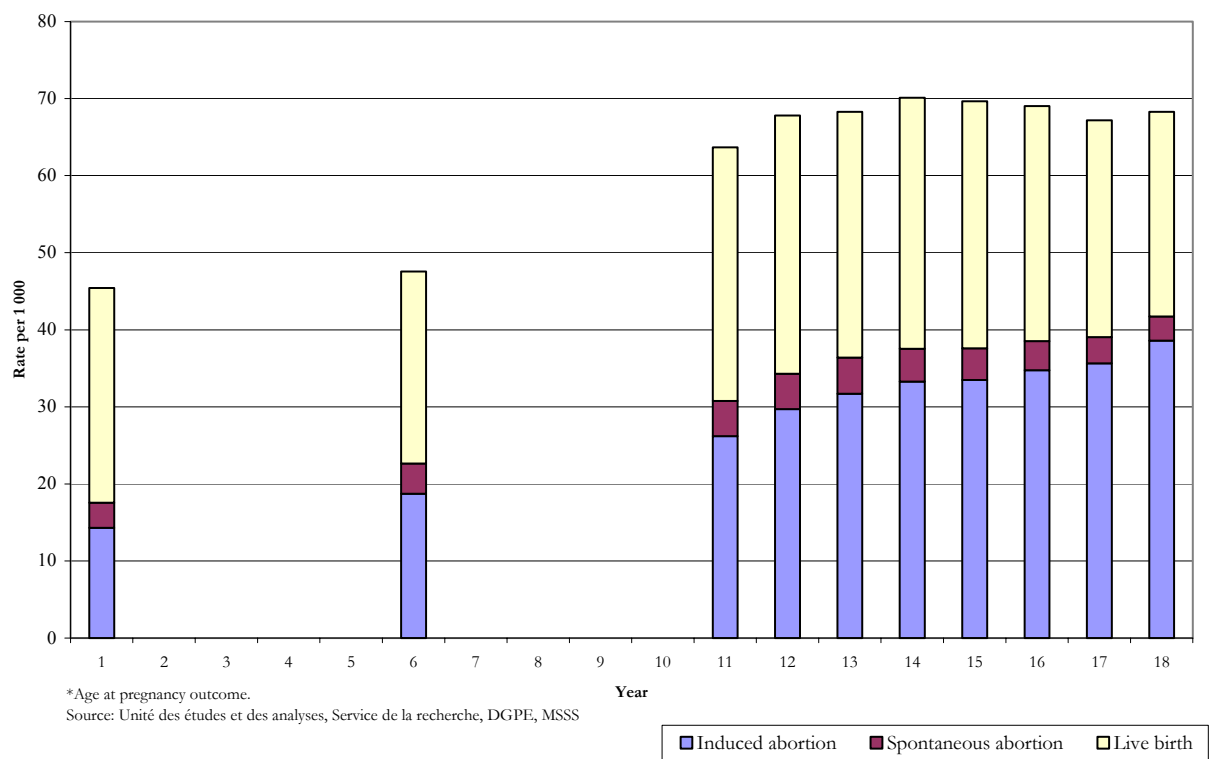


Figure 3  
 Pregnancy rate among adolescents 18 and 19 years of age\* in Québec according to  
 teenage pregnancy outcomes, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1992 to 1998



#### 4. Canadian and international comparisons

In 1997, the pregnancy and fertility rates among young women under the age of 20 in Québec were among the lowest in Canada. With respect to its abortion rate, Québec was close to the Canadian average.

The fertility rate among young women in Québec is higher than that of young women in the Netherlands and Sweden, but is lower than that of other Canadians in other provinces and British women.

***For Canada as a whole, the pregnancy rate among young women under age 20 is at 42.7 per 1 000 women compared to 36.7 in Québec***

- If the 1997 Canadian figures are taken into account (see Table 8), the pregnancy rate among young women in Québec (36.1 per 1 000) is still among the lowest in Canada. Only two provinces are lower than Québec: Newfoundland (32.7) and New Brunswick (34.6). Yukon and the Northwest Territories (65.8 and 123.3), as well as the northern regions of Québec have the highest pregnancy rates. They are followed by Manitoba (63.2) and Saskatchewan (54.2).
- The Canadian pregnancy rate is 42.7 per 1 000 women. While the number and rate of pregnancies in Canada have declined steadily since 1994, the rate in Québec has remained stable since that same year. In fact, even though the situation in Québec is enviable compared to Canada as a whole, the gap observed in favour of Québec with regard to births and pregnancies in the early eighties tends to be closing up.
- Two thirds of all pregnancies among young Canadians occur in the 18- to 19-year old age group. This is also true in Québec.

***The fertility rate among adolescents in Québec is 15.5 per 1 000, compared to the Canadian rate of 20.0 per 1 000***

- The fertility rate in Québec is the lowest in Canada (15.5 per 1 000), followed by Ontario (17.1) and British Columbia (17.4). The highest fertility rates are found in the Northwest Territories (90.2), Manitoba (36.3), Saskatchewan (37.3) and Yukon (31.4). The rate for Canada as a whole is 20 births per 1 000 women between the ages 15 and 19 (see Table 8).
- With regard to the abortion rate, Québec (19.9 per 1 000) stands between the maritime provinces and Saskatchewan, which both have low abortion rates, and the other provinces, which all have higher rates than Québec.

Table 8  
**Teenage pregnancy outcomes among adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age  
in Canada, provinces and territories, 1997 (rate per 1 000)**

Provinces and territories	Pregnancies	Abortions	Live births
Newfoundland	32.7	8.0	22.6
Prince Edward Island	36.5	6.1	29.0
Nova Scotia	38.9	14.5	23.7
New Brunswick	34.6	7.6	25.4
<b>Québec</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>15.5</b>
Ontario	42.4	24.5	17.1
Manitoba	63.2	23.6	36.3
Saskatchewan	54.2	14.6	37.3
Alberta	51.5	23.2	25.8
British Columbia	42.1	23.6	17.4
Yukon	65.8	32.4	31.4
Northwest Territories	123.3	27.9	90.2
<b>Canada</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>20.0</b>

Source: Health Statistics Division, Canadian Vital Statistics Data Base and Canadian Institute for Health Information, quoted by Dryburgh (2000).

- The trend toward an increase in abortions has been observed in Canada since the mid-eighties. However, it was only in 1997 that the number of abortions in Canada surpassed the number of births, while in Québec, this trend has been apparent for a much longer period, since 1985.

***The pregnancy rate among Québec adolescents is lower than the rates observed in Canada and in Anglo-Saxon countries***

- According to the most recent figures concerning pregnancy rates among teenagers aged 15 to 19 in 33 countries,<sup>17</sup> Canada's rate of 45 pregnancies per 1 000 young women falls within the average pregnancy rate. Countries in this category have pregnancy rates between 40 and 69 per 1 000 young women under age 20. Canada falls in the same category as Anglo-Saxon countries such as England (47), New Zealand (54) and Australia (44). Canada, however, lags far behind Japan (10) and the Netherlands (12), which have the lowest pregnancy rates. Other countries such as Finland (21), Denmark (23) and Sweden (23) are also among the group of countries with low pregnancy rates. The United States has an extremely high pregnancy rate at 84 per 1 000.
- Given Québec's rank within Canada (see Table 8), the pregnancy rate among 15- to 19-year-olds in Québec puts the province far behind Japan and the Netherlands but in a better position than the other Canadian provinces and other Anglo-Saxon countries.

17. Sunsheela Singh and Jacqueline E. Darroch, "Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing: Levels and Trends in Developed Countries," *Family Planning Perspectives*, volume 32, no. 1, January/February 2000, 16.

*The United States has one of the highest fertility rates among adolescents in industrialized countries*

- Québec ranks moderate compared with the countries mentioned previously with respect to teenage fertility rates. Although higher than that of the Netherlands and Sweden, nevertheless the teenage fertility rate in Québec remains lower than the Canadian (24) and British(28) rates. Moreover, the United States, with a rate of 54 per 1 000, ranks among the countries with the highest teenage fertility rates in the western world.<sup>18</sup>

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18. Madeleine Rochon, p. 16.

## Conclusion

These few statistics on the situation of pregnant teens and teenage mothers in Québec could, at first glance, seem somewhat reassuring. In effect, the pregnancy and birth rates in Québec among teenagers under 20 years of age are among the lowest in Canada and compare favourably with that of several industrialized countries. Furthermore, although the pregnancy rate has increased considerably since the early eighties, it has been stable since 1994, and the fertility rate among young women under age 20 for 1998 was the lowest ever recorded in Québec.

However, it is important to note that in Québec, each year more than 10 000 young women under the age of 20 become pregnant and approximately 3 600 children are born to teenage mothers, most of whom will become single parents. One third of these infants are born to a mother under 18 years of age. The situation is even worse in certain regions such as Nunavik, the Terres-Cries-de-la-Baie-James, Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Côte-Nord where the fertility rate among adolescents, particularly among young aboriginal women, is higher than the rest of Québec.

For the majority of these new families, a cycle of dependency and poverty sets in and is likely to compromise the future of their offspring. The ensuing social and economic costs are very heavy, both for the individual concerned and the community:

Without support, teenage mothers too often end up dropping out of school, poor, living on the fringes of society, isolated and dependent. (...) These connections between poverty and intergenerational problems have been confirmed by several studies which state that children who suffer from poverty at a young age are much more likely to drop out of school. Not to mention that the daughters of such families in turn risk duplicating the model of teenage pregnancy.<sup>19</sup>

In short, beyond the statistics, the pregnancy prevention measures, the support offered to pregnant teens struggling with the decision to terminate a pregnancy or not, the assistance offered to teenage mothers in pursuit of their studies, lies a very real concern for all educational circles in every region of Québec.

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19. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, 1998, pp. 14-15.



## Appendix

### *Glossary and methodology*

All pregnancies ending in abortions (spontaneous or induced) or births occurring while the mother is under the age of 20 are included in the statistics from the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. Consequently, young women who became pregnant at age 19 but give birth at age 20 are not included in the data.

Unless otherwise indicated, the number of pregnancies includes live births, induced abortions, spontaneous abortions (miscarriages) and stillbirths. These last two pregnancy outcomes represent close to 5 per cent of all pregnancies. Reporting concerning spontaneous abortions is incomplete since it is related to the performance of a medical procedure. Furthermore, because of changes in medical practices, the data has become less reliable in the last decade. For ease of reference, these figures will not be presented in the tables.

The pregnancy rate corresponds to the number of pregnancies per 1 000 women.

The fertility rate corresponds to the number of live births per 1 000 women.

The induced abortions recorded by the MSSS include all abortions performed on Québec residents and refunded by the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec, regardless of where they took place (hospital, women's health centre, private clinics) and whether they were performed in or outside of Québec as well as all abortions performed by doctors who are not paid on a fees for service (source: CLSC and concerned hospitals).

For Statistics Canada, induced or therapeutic abortions consist of: abortions authorized under the 1969 abortion law and performed in accredited and/or approved hospitals from 1974 to 1987; abortions filed as "legal induced abortions" and performed in hospitals from 1988 to 1993; abortions performed in specialized clinics from 1978 to 1994 and counts of therapeutic abortions obtained by Canadian women in the United States. Prior to 1998, statistics for the province of Québec are incomplete due to the non-participation of several institutions and clinics in Statistics Canada's recording system. Data concerning pregnancy do not include spontaneous abortions.

Data presented by the MSSS and Statistics Canada for the province of Québec differ for induced and spontaneous abortions.

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