

When hard times hit, fewer teens become parents, study finds

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When the economy falters and communities lose jobs, teen birth rates fall, at least among black youths, a new Duke University study has found.

The study, which appeared Thursday in the online edition of *Demography*, looked at two decade's worth of job and fertility data for all 100 North Carolina counties. Authors Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat, Anna Gassman-Pines and Christina Gibson-Davis of Duke 's Sanford School of Public Policy found that when a county experienced an economic "shock" in the form of job losses, [teen birth rates](#) among African-American girls in that county dropped 4 to 12 months later. A one percent job loss in the community translated into a two percent drop in births among African- American [teenage girls](#), the study found.

The pattern suggests a direct effect of community job losses on teen childbearing, said Gassman-Pines. Black girls ages 15 to 19 are reacting to economic bad news by deciding not to become parents. The numbers suggest that the connection between the job losses is not coincidental: girls are either practicing contraception or pursuing abortions.

"This isn't just happening to girls," Gassman-Pines said. "They're making choices about their lives."

The findings echo studies showing that adults are less likely to give birth during economic hard times. Other [health behaviors](#), including smoking and drinking rates, also show improvement during economic downturns,

studies have shown.

What isn't entirely clear is why job losses affect African-American girls' decisions to become parents, but don't affect birth rates among white girls.

"It could be that African-American teens and their families are more directly affected by job losses," Gassman-Pines said. "Their families may also have less wealth available to buffer the effects of [economic hardship](#)."

Provided by Duke University

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