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Teen Birth Rate Impacted by GDP per Capita

Teen birth rates in the United States have been dropping since the mid-2000s, yet there is still a drastic difference between states. Some tend to have very low birth rates, while others may be dropping but are still quite high. Moreover, there is high variability between state GDP per capita, which has been rising slowly over time. There is a negative correlation between GDP per capita and teen birth rate.

There are some states on the east coast, Rhode Island and Maine, that both have relatively low GDP per capita, yet have a low teen birth rate nonetheless. Both states decided to fund many more sex education programs after having some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the 1980s and 1990s (Power to Decide, 2023). Educating people about safe sex practices is one of the most effective ways of preventing teen pregnancy.

Rural areas, such as the northwest region of the United States, tend to have high teen birth rates and low GDP per capita (PBS). There are fewer job opportunities in rural areas, thus making it more difficult to find a high-paying job. The low cost of living also leads to employers paying less than they would in more urban areas (PBS). In areas with low GDP per capita, there are high rates of poverty, and tend to have poor sex education in schools. Since these teenagers are not as well educated about safe sex practices, they are more likely to become pregnant. Teen pregnancy is part of the cycle of poverty, which leads to generational poverty (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018). People are most likely to end up in the same financial

situation as they grew up in - it is nearly impossible to move up the social ladder. And thus in these rural areas, this cycle continues. If rural areas funded more sexual education programs, it would improve their rates of teen pregnancy.

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