’16 and Pregnant’ TV Show Linked to Drop in Teen Birth Rate

January 16, 2014

Next time your teen tunes in to MTV’s hit reality show 16 and Pregnant, try to avoid the usual snarky comments about trashy television programs. Turns out, findings from a new study by the National Bureau of Economic Research showed that the TV program may have ultimately led to a 5.7 percent reduction in the number of American teenagers giving birth during the 18-month period after the show aired, CNN reported.

For those unfamiliar with the documentary-style show, 16 and Pregnant, which debuted in 2009, follows one pregnant teen every episode for several months before and after she has a baby.

Critics say the program glamorizes teen pregnancy. But lead researchers Melissa Kearney and Phillip Levine said they were curious to investigate the real effects of the show after noticing how quickly the teen birth rate started dropping during the last four years.

To test their hypothesis and determine the show’s potential impact, the two researchers reviewed the program’s Nielsen ratings, as well as searched data from Google Trends and Twitter. They noticed high levels of tweets and searches for terms such as “abortion” and “birth control” whenever new episodes of 16 and Pregnant aired. What’s more, the researchers also found that higher viewership in certain areas corresponded with a bigger drop in teen births in those areas.

“Shows that make it clear how hard [being a teen parent] can be…affect girls who might not care otherwise,” Kearney said. “You see she’s fighting with her boyfriend on a daily basis. She’s gaining weight. Her friends are partying without her.” In short, the show makes the immediate cost of teen pregnancy clear to its viewers.

Of course, the study authors aren’t suggesting that MTV alone is responsible for the decrease in the numbers of teen moms. Research shows about half the decline can be attributed to the recession, as teen births always fall when the economy is slow. In addition, improved birth control methods as well as easier access to these contraceptives may also help explain why fewer young girls are choosing to become mothers.

Want to promote safe sex to your teen without the tube? According to experts, children whose

parents talk to them about contraception are more likely to use it when they become sexually active.

Click here for more information.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/16-and-pregnant-teen-birth-rate-25072-1697