U.S. fertility rates fall to all-time lows, Nebraska rates remain relatively high

*National declines largest among Hispanics, falling below key replacement level for first time in newly-released 2016 census data.*

OMAHA – A new report from the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s (UNO) Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) shows that while the nation’s overall fertility rate has hit a new low, Nebraska’s birthrate continues to outpace the national average by a double-digit margin.

The report compares data compiled since 1990 by the National Center for Health Statistics, analyzing U.S. birthrates by race and ethnicity. David Drozd, research coordinator for CPAR, authored the report, which provides an update to his last report in 2015.

“Most studies on this topic focus on trends related to the age of the mother, for which there is a longer time series, and while that is important, understanding trends related to race and ethnicity help tell an important story as well,” he said. “Changes in births and lifetime fertility influence the demographic makeup of the country. They significantly affect the characteristics of our current and future labor force, and many programs such as Social Security.”

**Among the key findings in the new data:**

- The nation’s overall fertility rate (62 births per 1,000 women age 15-44) hit an all-time low in 2016, based on data dating back to 1940.

- The same was the case for both Hispanic women (70.6) and non-Hispanic Black women (63.3), which were the lowest fertility rates since their data series began in 1990, when they were 107.7 and 89 per 1000, respectively.

- The non-Hispanic White rate of 58.8 is slightly above that group’s all-time low of 56.8 in 1997, but still the lowest among major races and ethnicities.

Nebraska’s fertility rates have continued to climb relative to the U.S. average since 2000. During the 1990s, Nebraska’s rate was at or below the national average, but has since climbed to be 17 percent higher than the national rate in 2016. In fact, Nebraska was one of just five states to outpace the notable Total Fertility Rate (TFR) average of 2,100 births per 1,000 women over a lifetime, or 2.1 births per woman, the number needed to “replace” the current population.

The rates in Nebraska are particularly noteworthy for both Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black women between the ages of 15 and 44; the two groups are 30 percent and 50 percent higher than the national average, respectively.

According to the report, the fertility rate for Hispanic women in Nebraska has been above the national average since 1991. Nebraska Hispanic fertility rates were over 120 births per thousand women from 1992 to 2008, before falling sharply to less than 100 during and
after the recession. However, the U.S. rate fell even more sharply, increasing the differential between local and national rates.

Comparatively, the fertility rate for non-Hispanic Black women in Nebraska has consistently been above the national average and was essentially tied with Hispanic women in 2004 and 2005 at 30 percent over the national average. Nebraska Black fertility rates only dipped slightly during the recession and have held steady thereafter; with the national Black rate falling, the local differential increased to be 50 percent higher than the national average in 2016.

Drozd says that one of the more significant trends is that the previous gaps in fertility between these different races and ethnicities have been shrinking.

“The sharpest decline has been among the Hispanic population, which is now more in line with the rates for other major races and ethnicities” Drozd said. “In 1990, the Hispanic fertility rate stood 45 points above the White rate, and in the mid-2000s it was nearly 30 points higher than the Black rate, but today the rates for all three groups are within about 10 points of each other.”

The report points to the 2008 recession as a key turning point for total fertility rates nationwide, particularly for Hispanic women. In 2007, the Total Fertility Rate for all women was 2,120 births per 1,000 women, which matched the suggested replacement rate, whereas in 2016, that number dropped to 1,820.5 per 1,000 women. Among Hispanic women, the drop was much larger, moving from 2,840 to just 2,092. This marks the first time that Hispanics have joined other racial and ethnic groups in being below the replacement rate.

Other highlights from the report include:

- Births to mothers outside of the Hispanic, non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black groups (primarily Asian and Native American) set an all-time high of nearly 350,000 births in 2016, which accounted for 8.9 percent of all U.S. births, also an all-time high.

- From 1990 to 2016, the Total Fertility Rate for all women nationally has dropped 12.5 percent. Comparatively, the rate for non-Hispanic White women has dropped 7.2 percent, while the rate for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women has dropped nearly 30 percent (28.1 and 29.3 percent respectively).

- Nebraska’s total replacement rate of 2,137 ranked fifth highest in the country. Other states that were higher included South Dakota, Utah, North Dakota and Alaska.

- Fertility rates by age have changed over time. The number of mothers having children in their teens (15-to-19-years old) and early 20s (20-to-24 years old) fell to record lows in 2016. Fertility rates for those in their 30s (30-to-39 years old) and
early 40s (40-to-44 years old) have increased to levels not seen since the early-to-mid 1960s.

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