

Says:

Pregnancy Among Sexually Experienced Teens, 2002



The dramatic progress made in reducing rates of pregnancy among teens in the United States has been widely noted and justifiably celebrated. This research brief makes clear, however, that the **proportion of sexually experienced teens who get pregnant or cause a pregnancy remains startlingly high.**

As a general matter, the vast majority of teen pregnancy rates presented in the press and in various reports and articles are based on data collected from all teens aged 15-19 (often girls only) *regardless* of their sexual experience. While this is certainly useful and important research—for example, work in this area has made clear that heartening decreases in teen pregnancy and childbearing are due to both more teens delaying sex and more consistent contraceptive use among those who are sexually experienced—limiting the examination of teen pregnancy to those teens known to be *sexually experienced* allows for a more focused analysis.

This report presents statistics on teen pregnancy from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) for both boys and girls aged 15-19. Researchers have long noted that pregnancy is often underreported in surveys, especially among teens. Therefore, the data presented here are subject to underreporting bias and may very well be a conservative estimate of how many teens actually do become pregnant or cause a pregnancy.¹ This underreporting bias may be particularly acute for certain racial/ethnic, age and gender population subgroups.^{2,3} Nonetheless, using data from the NSFG does permit examination of teen pregnancy rates by a number of variables—such as age of first sex, contraceptive use at first sex, and number of sexual partners—that would not be possible using vital statistics data. The estimates presented here can be used as a guideline for determining the risk of pregnancy among sexually experienced teens along some important dimensions. It is strongly suggested that the reader also refer to the teen pregnancy rate published by either the National Center for Health Statistics (www.cdc.gov/nchs) or the Guttmacher Institute (www.guttmacher.org) for specific rates and numbers of teen pregnancies in the United States.⁴

Highlights:

- Almost one third (31%) of sexually experienced teen girls have been pregnant.
- More than one in eight sexually experienced teen boys (13%) have caused a pregnancy.
- Over half of sexually experienced Hispanic teen girls (52%) have been pregnant compared to 40% of sexually experienced Non-Hispanic black teen girls and 23% of sexually experienced non-Hispanic white teen girls.
- Almost half of teen girls who first have sex before age 15 report having been pregnant compared to only one quarter of those girls who wait to have sex until later.
- Girls with three or more sexual partners are more likely to report having been pregnant than girls who have had one or two partners.
- Girls who used contraception the first time they had sex were less likely than those who did not to report having ever been pregnant.

Details:

Many sexually experienced teens report being involved in a pregnancy (Figure 1).

Almost one-third of sexually experienced teen girls (31%) report having been pregnant.

More than one in eight sexually experienced teen boys (13%) report having been involved in a pregnancy.

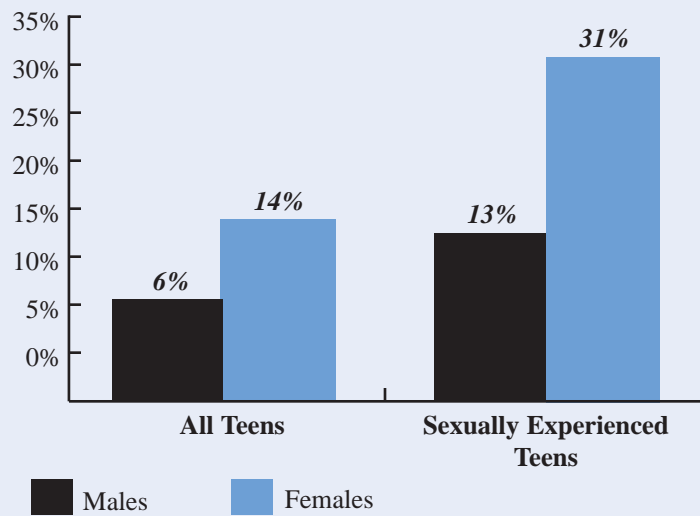
By way of comparison, among *all* teens, one in seven girls (14%) report having been pregnant and one in 16 boys (6%) report causing a pregnancy.

By age: Sexually experienced older teens (aged 18-19) are significantly more likely than younger teens (aged 15-17) to have been involved in a pregnancy (Figure 2).

Almost one quarter of sexually experienced girls aged 15-17 (24%) report having been pregnant compared to over one third (35%) of sexually experienced girls aged 18-19.

Among sexually experienced teen boys, 9% of boys aged 15-17 report having been involved in a pregnancy compared to 16% of boys aged 18-19. These age differences are statistically significant for both girls and boys.⁵

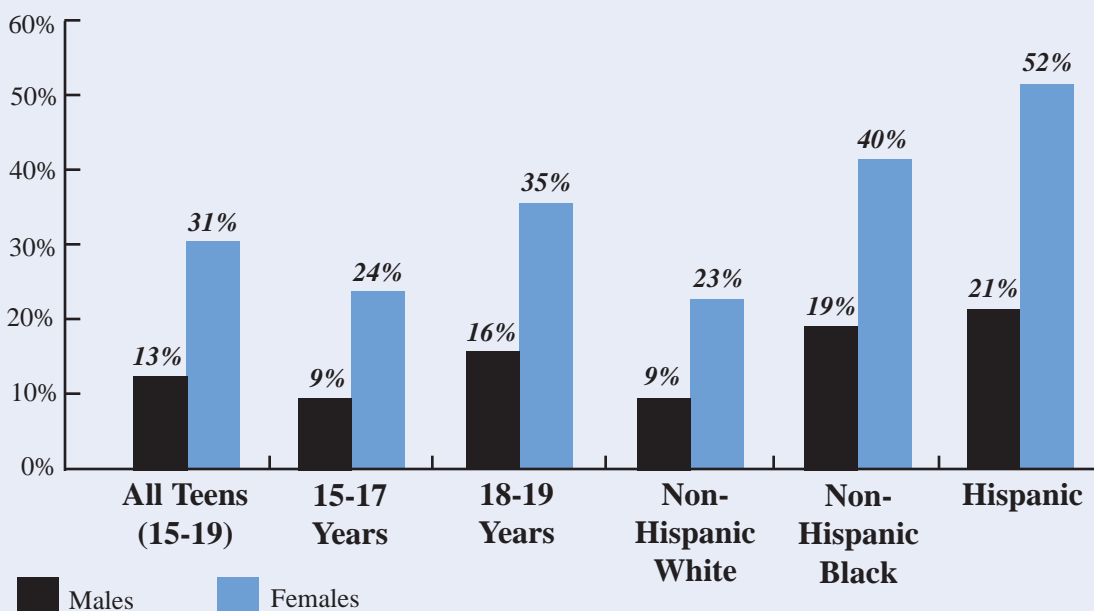
FIGURE 1: Percentage of teens (aged 15-19) who report being involved in a pregnancy, 2002



By age—more: Teens who first have sex at a very young age are significantly more likely to have been involved in a pregnancy than teens who delay first sex (Figure 3).

Almost half of sexually experienced teen girls who first have sex before the age of 15 report having ever been pregnant (46%) compared to one quarter of girls who first have sex at age 15 or older (25%).

FIGURE 2: The proportion of sexually experienced teens (aged 15-19) who have ever been involved in a pregnancy by age group and race/ethnicity, 2002



More than one in five sexually experienced teen boys (22%) who first have sex before the age of 15 have been involved in a pregnancy compared to less than one in ten (9%) who first have sex at age 15 or older. The differences according to age at sexual initiation are statistically significant for both boys and girls.

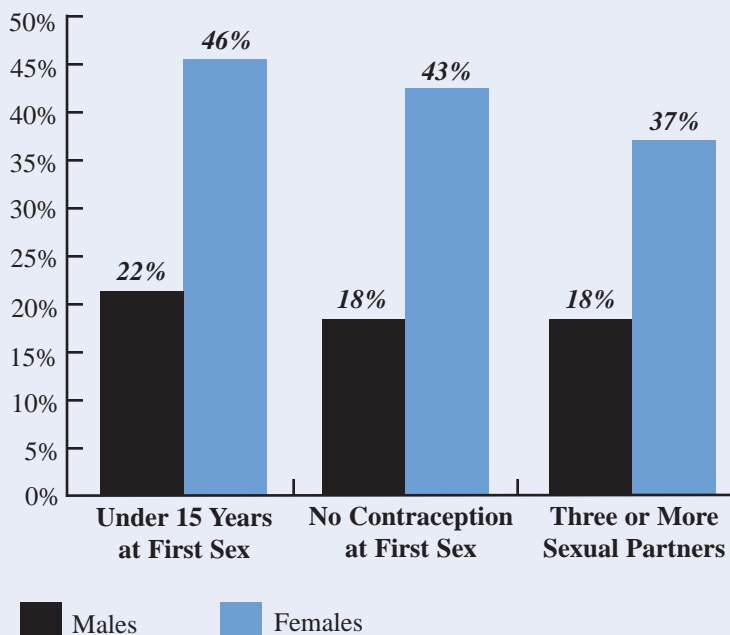
Among sexually experienced non-Hispanic white teen boys, 9% report causing a pregnancy compared to approximately one in five sexually experienced Hispanic (21%) and non-Hispanic black (19%) teen boys.

The difference in the proportion of teens who report being involved in

ception the first time they had sex report having been pregnant compared to 27% of those who did use a method of contraception the first time they had sex. This difference is statistically significant.

Almost one in five sexually experienced teen boys (18%) who did not use any method of contraception the first time they had sex have been involved in a pregnancy compared to 12% of those who did use a method of contraception at first sex. This difference is not statistically significant.

FIGURE 3: The proportion of sexually experienced teens (aged 15-19) who have ever been involved in a pregnancy by sexual risk behavior, 2002



By number of sexual partners: Sexually experienced teens who have had three or more sexual partners are significantly more likely to report being involved in a pregnancy than those who have had two or fewer sexual partners (Figure 3).

More than one in three sexually experienced teen girls (37%) who have had three or more sexual partners have been pregnant compared to one in four sexually experienced girls (25%) who have had two or fewer sexual partners.

Almost one in five sexually experienced teen boys (18%) who have had three or more sexual partners have been involved in a pregnancy compared to 9% of sexually experienced teen boys with two or fewer partners. The differences reported in this section are statistically significant.

By race/ethnicity: Sexually experienced non-Hispanic white teens are less likely than sexually experienced Hispanic and non-Hispanic black teens to be involved in a pregnancy (Figure 2).

More than half of sexually experienced Hispanic teen girls (52%) have been pregnant compared to four in ten sexually experienced non-Hispanic black teen girls (40%) and about one quarter of sexually experienced non-Hispanic white teen girls (23%).

a pregnancy is statistically significant for both boys and girls.

By use of contraception: Sexually experienced teens who used a method of contraception the first time they had sex are less likely to report being involved in a pregnancy than those who did not (Figure 3).

More than four in ten sexually experienced teen girls (43%) who did not use any method of contra-

Discussion:

As has been widely reported, the teen pregnancy rate among *all* teens has been decreasing since 1990. Research suggests that these heartening decreases are because more teens are delaying sex and

those who are having sex are using contraception more consistently.⁶ Still, as the data in this research brief make clear, the risk of pregnancy remains very high among *sexually experienced* teens, especially those in some racial/ethnic groups, among younger teens, and among teens with more than one or two partners.

- **More young people need to be convinced about the value of delaying sexual activity.**

Consistent with findings in this report and previous research, teens who have sex at a young age are more likely to have multiple partners and are at higher risk for pregnancy during their teen years.⁷ Therefore we need to continue increasing the proportion of teens who are not sexually experienced. We also need to talk to teens who are sexually experienced about postponing additional sexual activity.

- **At the same time, those young people who are sexually active and are likely to remain so need to be encouraged to use contraception consistently and carefully.**

Letting teens know about the high risk of pregnancy among those who are sexually experienced—nearly *one-third* of teen girls who have ever had sex say they have been pregnant—might help motivate young people to make more cautious decisions about sex.

- **The impressive progress the nation has made in reducing teen pregnancy and births overall may have inadvertently convinced policymakers and others who decide how resources are allocated that preventing teen pregnancy is no longer a priority.** Clearly, however, these data on the high proportion of sexually experienced teens who are involved in

a pregnancy show that major efforts are needed to help young people postpone pregnancy.

Author Information

This research brief was written by National Campaign staff members Katherine Suellentrop, and Christine Flanigan.

About the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization supported largely by private foundations and donations. The National Campaign's mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. The National Campaign's goal is to reduce the teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006 and 2015.

Funding Information

This research brief was prepared with support from the Office of Populations Affairs (OPA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the National Campaign, however, and do not necessarily represent the official views of OPA.

Data Sources

All statistics for 2002 were generated with data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) Cycle 6, a periodic national survey of fertility-related issues conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). NSFG data sets on CD-ROM are available free of charge from NCHS: visit www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm, call (301) 458-4222, or e-mail nsfg@cdc.gov for more information.

Please Note

The NSFG has typically been conducted about every 7 years. According to NCHS, it plans to change to continuous data collection in 2006, interviewing about 4,000 people each year. With continuous interviewing, adequate data for analysis will be available for populations such as teens after two years of data collection. NCHS expects that by late 2008 or early 2009, data for about 1,500 to 1,600 teens will be available for research and analysis. Data for an additional 800 teens will be available by late 2009, bringing the sample size for teenagers to 2,400, compared with about 2,300 in the 2002 NSFG. With continuous interviewing, larger samples of teens can be combined for more in-depth analysis, and data will be available more frequently.

Notes

The difference in the proportion of teen girls versus teen boys who report being involved in a pregnancy is generally attributed to the fact that, on average, teenage mothers are 3.3 years younger than the men who father their children.⁸ This means that 65% of girls aged 15-19 become pregnant from men who are over the age of 20.⁹ For this analysis, all boy-girl differences are statistically significant.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2004). User's Guide. Public Use Data File Documentation, National Survey of Family Growth Cycle 6:2002. Hyattsville, MD.

² Fu, H., et al (1998). Measuring the Extent of Abortion Under-reporting in the 1995 NSFG. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 30(3):128-133.

³ Martinez, G.M., et al (Forthcoming in 2006). Fertility, contraception, and fatherhood: Data on men and women from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth. *Vital and Health Statistics*, 23(26). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

- ⁴ The Alan Guttmacher Institute. (2004). U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information. New York, NY: The Alan Guttmacher Institute.; Ventura, S.J., Abma, J.C., Mosher, W.D., & Henshaw, S. (2004). Estimated pregnancy rates for the United States, 1990-2000: An update. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 52(23).
- ⁵ The term “statistical significance” refers to the results of statistical testing to measure whether observed differences between groups (boys versus girls, older versus younger teens, etc.) are true difference in attitudes/behavior, or are due to the particular teens included in the survey, which is meant to be representative of the U.S. teen population. For the purposes of these analyses, the threshold for statistical significance is 0.05. That is, results are considered significant if the “p value” (or probability of the difference being just a random occurrence) is equal to or less than 5%.
- ⁶ Santelli JS, Abma J, Ventura S, et.al. (2004). Can Changes in Sexual Behaviors Among High School Students Explain the Decline in Teen Pregnancy Rates in the 1990s? *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 35 (2): 80-90.
- ⁷ Finer, L. B., Darroch, J.E. & Sungh, S. (1999). Sexual partnership patterns as a behavioral risk factor for sexually transmitted diseases. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 31(5), 228-236.
- ⁸ Elo, I., R. Berkowitz King, & F. Furstenberg (1999). Adolescent Females: Their Sexual Partners and the Fathers of Their Children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 74-84.
- ⁹ Landry, D.J., & J. Darroch Forrester. How Old Are U.S. Fathers? *Family Planning Perspectives*, 27, 159-161, & 165.