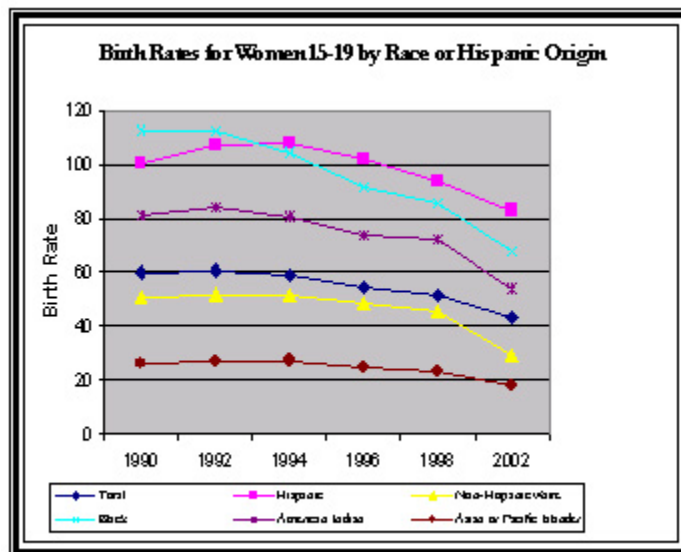


Latina Teen Pregnancy: Problems and Prevention

The Latino population is the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States today, representing 13 percent of the total population. Cultural and economic barriers, however, have limited access to health care and teen pregnancy education and prevention programs for the Latino population. Consequently, Latinas have the highest teen birth rate of all major racial/ethnic groups in the U.S., resulting in an increasing number of young Latina mothers and children who are especially vulnerable to poverty, lack of health care, and welfare dependence. Successful pregnancy prevention efforts for this population must address their unique cultural concerns through programs that offer comprehensive, diverse approaches to curbing teen pregnancy. In the next twenty years, the Latino teen population will grow by 60 percent while the total teen population will grow by only eight percent. By 2020, one in five teens will be Latino, and by 2050, approximately one-quarter of the U.S. population will be Latino.

PREGNANCY AND BIRTH RATES

- Although the overall U.S. teen birth rate decreased 28.5 percent in the 1990s, it only decreased 15 percent for Latinas. Black, non-Hispanic teenagers had the greatest decline at 32 percent. Although black teens are more likely than Latinas to become pregnant, they are also more likely to have an abortion, which accounts for their lower birth rate.

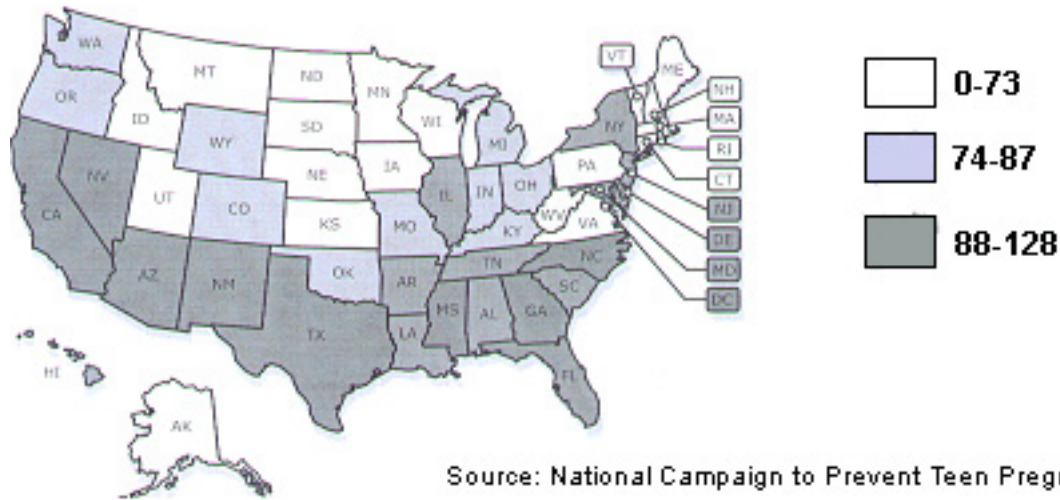


Source: National Center for Health Statistics

- Latinas had the highest teen birth rate of all major racial/ethnic groups in the United States, 83 births per 1,000 teenage women aged 15-19 in 2002, a rate nearly twice as high as the national rate of 43. Birth rates were highest for Latinas of Mexican descent (94.5), followed by those of Puerto Rican descent (61.4), and pregnant, they are also more likely to have an abortion, which accounts for their lower birth rate.
- Thirty one percent of the births in 2002 to teens aged 15-19 were to Latinas. About 43 percent of mothers ages 15-19 were white, 24 percent were black and 2 percent were from other racial or ethnic groups.
- Young Latina mothers are likely to face quite different circumstances than white, non-Hispanic mothers; not only do they have lower educational and income levels, but they are also more likely to be concentrated in high poverty neighborhoods. Additionally, Latino cultural norms tend to be more family-oriented, favoring strong family ties and higher levels of fertility.

- More than three-quarters of Latinos live in the West and South, and half of all Latinos live in California and Texas. The Latina teen birth rate for those states in 2000 was 103 in both cases, but was highest in North Carolina at 147. Teen birth rates are consistently higher in the southern and western states than in other regions.

State Comparison of Teen Pregnancy Rate (births per 1,000 females age 15-19), 2000



LATINO SUBGROUPS

- According to the 2002 Current Population Reports, approximately 66.9 percent of Latinos are from Mexico, 14.3 percent from Central or South America, 8.6 percent from Puerto Rico, 3.7 percent from Cuba, and 6.5 percent of other Hispanic origin. While a small percentage of Latinos identified themselves as black, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Native American, the vast majority chose either white (48 percent) or "some other race" (42 percent).
- Puerto Rican mothers are worse off than mothers in other Latino groups: they are less likely to be married or to be living with parents or other adults, and more likely to be living in poverty and receiving welfare. In contrast, Cuban mothers have the highest household incomes of any group and the lowest rates of welfare participation.
- Foreign born teen mothers are considerably more likely than their U.S. born counterparts to rely on family or kin resources. The strategy of living with parents or relatives appears to take the place of welfare for many immigrants.

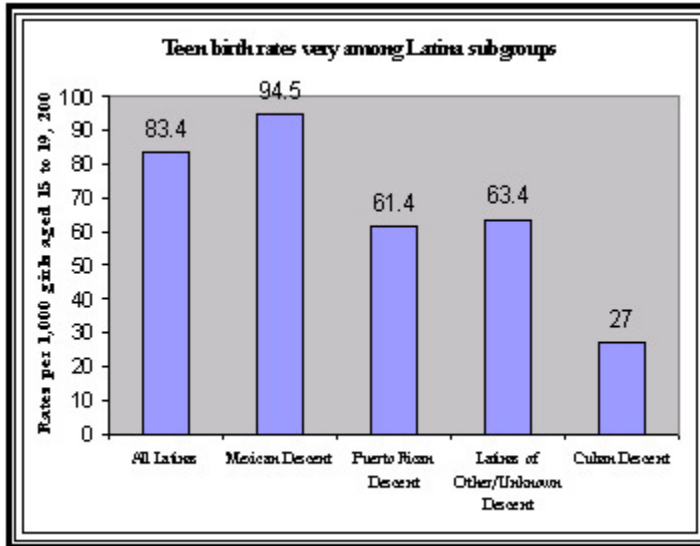
CONTRACEPTION

- The proportion of teen births that are unintended varies significantly by race and ethnicity. In the 1990s, only 46 percent of Latina teen mothers reported that the birth was unintended, compared to 67 percent of white teens and 75 percent of black teens.
- Latino teens report higher rates of sexual activity and lower-than-average rates of contraceptive use. In 1995, 56 percent of Latina females and 61

percent of Latino males reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared with national figures of 51 percent for teenage females and 56 percent for teenage males. Only 29 percent of Latino teenagers reported always using condoms in the past year compared with the national average of 44 percent.

- According to a 1995 study, almost half of Latina teens aged 15-19 did not use any form of contraception the first time they had sex, compared to 29 percent of all teens. Although contraceptive use at first sexual intercourse for all teens *increased* from 65 to 71 percent during the early 1990s, the percentage actually *decreased* from 55 to 53 percent for Latino teens.

FAMILIES



Source: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Among teen mothers, 26 percent of Latinas are currently married, compared with less than five percent of blacks and 41 percent of whites. Of the Latina subgroups, Mexicans are the most likely to be married (30.6 percent) and Puerto Ricans the least likely (12.3 percent). While married teen mothers are better off than single teen mothers raising their children alone, recent studies show they are clearly worse off than single mothers who live with their parents or other adults.

- Teen mothers are more likely than mothers who have their first birth in their twenties or thirties to come from poor or low-income families, live in poverty and depend on welfare (at a cost of \$7 billion a year). More than 80 percent of teens who become mothers receive welfare during the 10 years following the birth of their first child, 44 percent of them for more than 5 years. Latino groups are less likely to receive welfare, in part, because a large proportion of Latinas are immigrants who are ineligible for welfare.
- Of all Latina teen mothers aged 15-19 in 2002, only 4 percent completed high school and went on to college, compared with 6 percent of blacks and 5 percent of whites. Of all teenage mothers, only 40 percent finished high school, versus 94 percent among those who had not had a child.
- Over 80 percent of all unmarried Latina teen mothers live with their parents or other adults, except Puerto Ricans. While 65 percent of Puerto Rican single teens raise their children in extended families, only 41 percent of teens born in Puerto Rico do so.
- Children of teenage mothers are at greater risk for low birth weight, premature birth, poverty and welfare dependence. They are more likely to lack father involvement, receive insufficient health care and experience school failure and mental retardation.

PROGRAMS

- Teen pregnancy prevention programs for youth are most likely to be effective when they address the cultural and individual factors influencing behavior. As programs provide information on the facts about teenage childbearing, they should also consider related social and cultural factors and be in the native language of the target population.
- Successful programs offer comprehensive and diverse approaches and activities, including peer support, gender-specific opportunities and youth empowerment. Community involvement in program planning and implementation also increases effectiveness.
- Given the large number of Latino students who leave school between elementary, middle, and high school, efforts should be targeted to reach younger children with messages about the importance of continuing their education, even when they plan to marry and begin families. Additionally, there is a need to develop materials regarding the implications of citizenship and births along with Spanish language materials to help parents communicate with Latino teens.
- Hispanic families who experience a rapid rate of acculturation may be particularly stressed as the younger generation adopts beliefs, values, and lifestyles in conflict with those of the older generation. To cultivate a positive self-concept and a focus on education in Latino children, educators need to work toward increasing student awareness of the differing roles and expectations they feel as a part of growing up in their families, their own culture, and the larger culture in which they interact.
- Historically, male involvement in preventing teen pregnancy has often been overlooked, and little is known on the subject of how to shape programming to address the needs of teen males. In recent years, however, knowledge has been accruing about how to develop pregnancy prevention programs that involve males. Frequently, these programs meet the need for an all-male environment in which teens can talk openly about sexual issues, and for collaboration between the program and the outlying community.
- Many influential family, community, cultural, and individual factors - such as growing up in a poor community, failing at school, and being depressed - are not directly related to sex but are closely associated with teen pregnancy. Some programs with strong evidence for success in reducing teen pregnancy concentrate on the non-sexual antecedents of teen pregnancy: youth development programs, service learning, and vocational education and employment programs.

This executive summary was prepared by Mary C. Dickson of the Population Resource Center and updated by Megan McNamara in March 2004. Sources include various publications from the U.S. Census Bureau, CDC National Vital Statistics Reports, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, The Urban Institute, The Alan Guttmacher Institute: U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Journal of School Health, and Advocates for Youth. For more information or specific citations, please contact PRC at (202) 467-5030, prc@prcdc.org, 1725 K Street NW, Suite 1102, Washington DC 20006; or visit our web site at www.prcdc.org.