



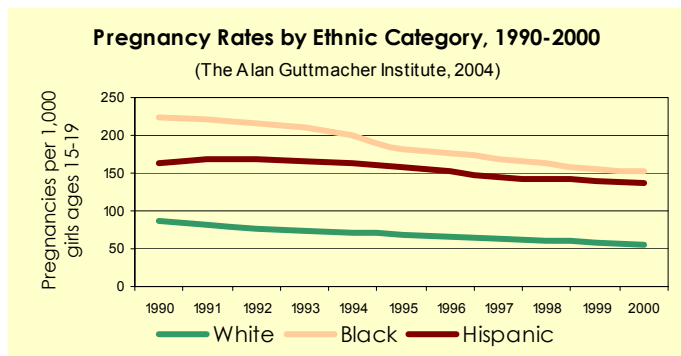
# Teen Pregnancy Among Latinas in San Diego County: Contraceptive and Abortion Attitudes and Behavior

A series of fact sheets from the NLRC ♦ Summer 2005

The incidence of pregnancy among teenage girls is considered a serious societal problem in the United States due to the economic and health issues associated with early parenting. Teen mothers are less likely than their peers to complete high school and more likely to live in poverty or rely on public assistance. Children of teen mothers experience increased risk of health complications and are more likely than other children to live in poverty. Among Latinas, the prevalence of pregnancy and birth has not declined at the same rate as for other teens. In San Diego County, as in the rest of the country, teenage Latinas are far more likely than other teens to become teen mothers.

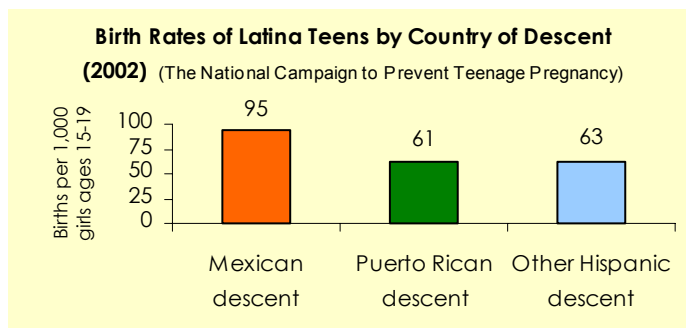
## Teen Pregnancy in the U.S.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

The overall teen pregnancy rate in the U.S. declined by 29% between 1990 and 2000.<sup>1</sup> Among Latinas, the pregnancy rate decreased only 15% during that same time period, and among Mexican-Americans, the rate dropped only 13%.<sup>2</sup>



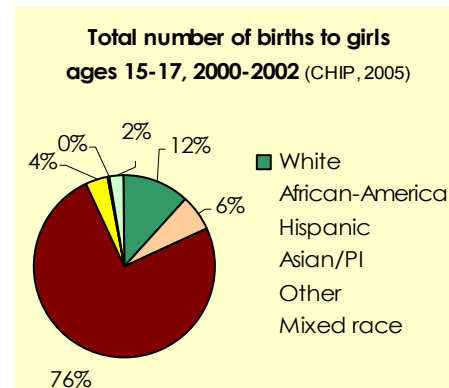
Additionally:

- ♦ Nationwide, 34% of girls become pregnant at least once before age 20.<sup>3</sup> Among Latinas, 51% of girls become pregnant before age 20.<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Teen pregnancy rates among Latinas vary by country of descent, with the highest rates among Mexican-American teens.<sup>2</sup>

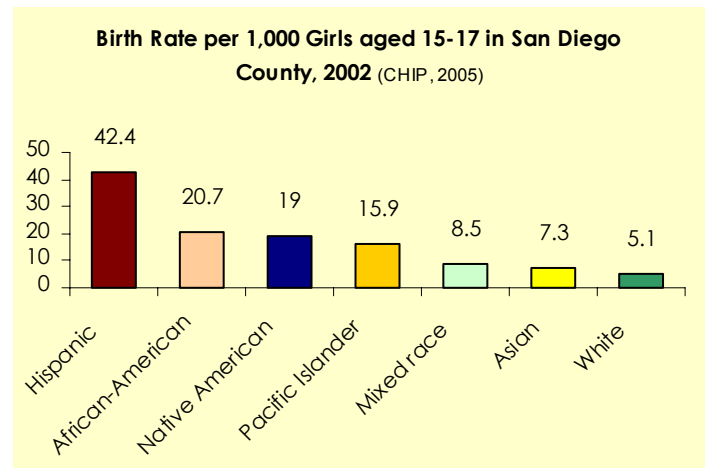


## Teen Pregnancy in San Diego County<sup>4,5</sup>

In San Diego County, Latinas account for 35% of all girls ages 15 to 17 and 34% of girls ages 18 to 19.<sup>4</sup>



Between 2000 and 2002, Latinas accounted for 76% of all births to teens ages 15 to 17 in San Diego County.<sup>5</sup>



The birth rate among San Diego County's 15 to 17 year old Latinas dropped between 2000 and 2002. However, it remained higher in 2002 than the rate for any other ethnic group and was more than double the next highest rate.<sup>5</sup>

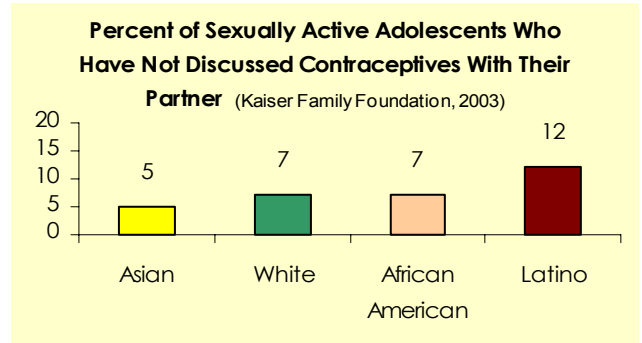
## Contraceptive Use by Sexually Active Teens<sup>6,7</sup>

Teen pregnancy research has demonstrated that contraceptive use is among the most important variables affecting the likelihood of pregnancy. In one study, inconsistent contraceptive users were 2.8 times more likely than consistent users to become pregnant; nonusers were 11.4 times more likely to become pregnant than consistent users.<sup>6</sup> A recent national survey asked sexually active teens about their contraceptive use and also provided information on ethnic differences in relation to contraceptive use.<sup>7</sup>

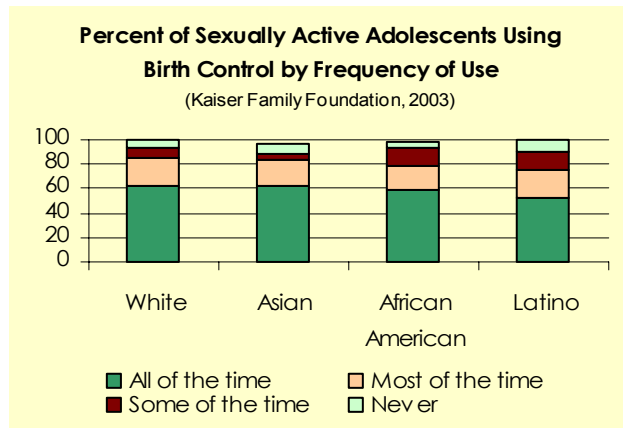
### Communicating about Contraceptives<sup>7</sup>

Many teens are uncomfortable talking about sensitive topics such as sex and contraception, even with a sexual partner. Research indicates that Latino teens are less likely than other teens to talk with their sexual partners about:

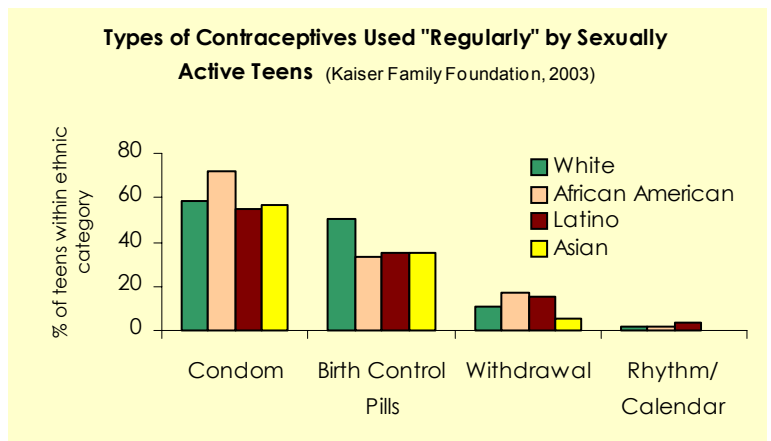
- ♦ What they feel comfortable doing sexually (in comparison to white teens)
- ♦ Birth control or condoms (in comparison to white, African American, and Asian teens)



### Contraceptive Use<sup>7</sup>

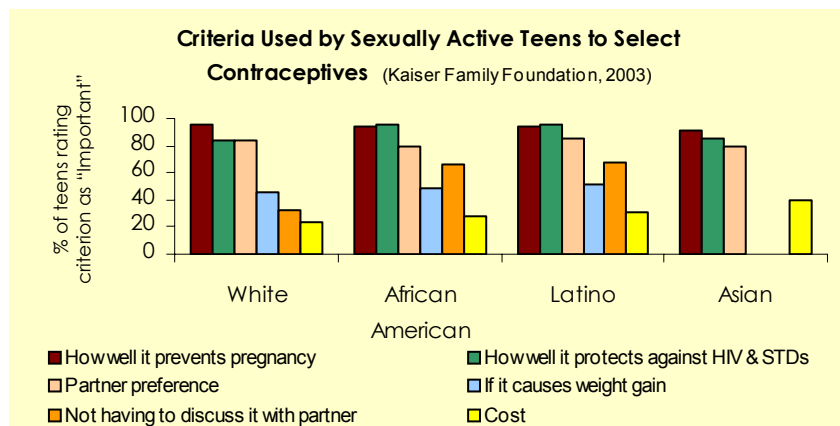


The type of contraception used by Latinos may also contribute to higher pregnancy rates. Latino teens are less likely than other groups to use condoms and less likely than white teens to use birth control pills. In contrast, Latino teens are more likely to use the less effective withdrawal and rhythm methods.



Latino teens who are sexually active are the least likely to report having used birth control all of the time. Ten per cent of sexually active Latino teens report **never** having used birth control.

### Decision-making About Contraceptives<sup>7</sup>



Sexually active adolescents use various criteria in selecting contraceptives.

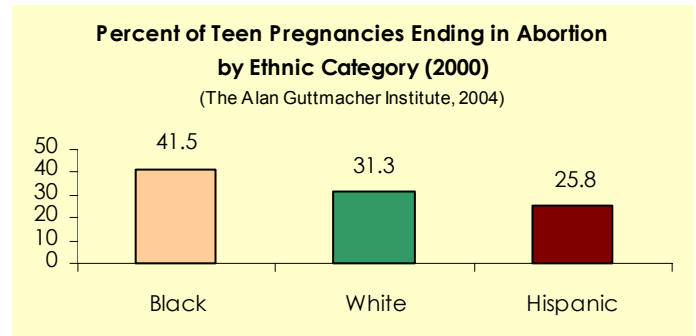
- ♦ Teens of all groups are most likely to list three criteria as important: how well it prevents pregnancy (95%), how well it protects against HIV and other STDs (88%), and their partner's preference (84%).
- ♦ However, Latino teens are more likely than others to rate other criteria as important: not having to discuss it with their partner (67% of Latinos), whether it causes weight gain (51% of Latinos), and how much it costs (31% of Latinos).

## Trends in Teenage Abortions<sup>1,8,9</sup>

While African American teens nationwide still experience the highest teen pregnancy rates, Latinas have the highest teen birth rates.<sup>1</sup> A likely explanation for this difference is the rate at which these groups seek abortions when they do become pregnant, a consideration that is probably influenced by different cultural and religious beliefs about abortion. Only a few studies have addressed Latinos' attitudes about abortion and abortion rates among teenage Latinas, and unfortunately no data are available regionally.

Available national data suggest that adult Latinos are more likely than adult non-Latinos to oppose abortion. It also appears that Latinas are less likely than non-Latino women to seek an abortion once they become pregnant.

- ◆ According to a Pew Hispanic Center survey, adult Latinos are less likely to approve of abortion than Whites and African Americans.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ In the same survey, language use (as a proxy for acculturation) was predictive of abortion attitudes. English-dominant Latinos have attitudes closer to attitudes of non-Latino Whites than to other Latinos.<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ An evaluation of teen pregnancies in 1992 showed that Latina teens who became pregnant were less likely to seek an abortion than other teens.<sup>9</sup>



A national review of state data on pregnancy and abortion revealed that in 2000, African American teens were more likely than White or Latina teens to have abortions. Latinas were the least likely to terminate a pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

- ◆ Teenage pregnancy and motherhood have serious consequences for teen parents, their children, parents of teens, and society as a whole.
- ◆ Pregnancy and birth rates among teenage Latinas are high nationwide and locally. Rates among Latinas have failed to decline as rapidly as rates among other ethnic groups.
- ◆ While Latinos comprise just over a third of the teenage population in San Diego County, Latinas account for more than three-quarters of teen births in the area.
- ◆ In comparison to other ethnic groups, Latino teens are less likely to discuss contraceptive use with their sexual partners and to actually use contraceptives.
- ◆ Latinos are less likely than other teens to use highly reliable forms of contraception (condoms and birth control pills) and more likely to use less reliable methods (withdrawal and the rhythm/calendar method).
- ◆ Latino teens, in comparison to teens from other ethnic groups, are more likely to rate as "important" criteria for selecting contraceptives that are unrelated to effectiveness (e.g., if it causes weight gain).
- ◆ Latinas who become pregnant as teens are less likely than other teens to terminate a pregnancy.

## References

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