



HIGHLIGHTS

- Rates of sexual activity among Latino youth decreased during the 1990s.
- The rates of Latino teens who have had sex fall between those of African Americans and non-Latino whites.
- Latino teen males are more likely to have had sex than females.
- Latino males are more likely to have sex at younger ages than Latinas and to have more partners.
- Condom use increased considerably among Latino youth during the 1990s.
- After increasing in the early 1990s, Latino pregnancy and birth rates are on the decline.
- The Latino teen birth rate fell by 8% between 1990 and 2001.

Background

Though adolescent sexual activity rates are falling, risk behaviors such as unprotected sex, multiple sex partners, and substance use during sexual intercourse continue to put many sexually active youth at risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Young people whose goals and plans for the future would be jeopardized by a pregnancy are more likely to either delay sex or to better protect themselves against pregnancy and STIs. Not only do young people need resources to protect their physical health, they also need reasons to do so. Improving the sexual health of Latino youth involves providing them with meaningful opportunities for a positive and productive future.

Sexual Intercourse

In the last decade, Latino high school students were consistently more likely than non-Latino whites and less likely than African Americans to have had sex (See **Figure 1**). In 1993, 56% of Latino youth reported ever having sex, decreasing to 48% in 2001. Non-Latino white youth showed a similar trend, with 49% having had sex in 1993, decreasing to 43% in 2001. African American youth showed a consistent decline from 80% in 1993 to 61% in 2001.

Latino students (8%) are half as likely as African American (16%) and more likely than non-Latino white (5%) students to have initiated sexual intercourse before age 13. Across racial and ethnic groups, male students are more likely to have sex and to start having sex at an early age; 11% of Latino males first had sex before age 13 compared to 4% of Latinas. In 2001, 53% of Latino male high school students reported having had sex, compared to 44% of Latinas (See **Figure 2**). However, Latino males (37%) and females (35%) have similar rates of recent sexual activity (i.e. had sex in the past 3 months). Latina females who have had sex are more likely than males to continue being sexually active: 80% of sexually experienced Latino females are sexually active, compared to 70% of males.

Risky Sexual Behavior

Latino (21%) and African American (39%) male teens are significantly more likely to have had 4 or more sexual partners than their female counterparts (10% and 16%, respectively). These proportions are similar among non-Latino white males (13%) and females (11%). Latino students (24%) are more likely than African Americans (18%) and less likely than non-Latino whites (28%) to have used alcohol or drugs at last sexual intercourse. Across ethnic and racial groups, male students are more likely than females to report using alcohol or other drugs the last time they had sex; 26% of Latino males compared to 22% of Latinas report this behavior.

FIGURE 1

Percentage of high school students who have had sex by race/ethnicity 1993-2001

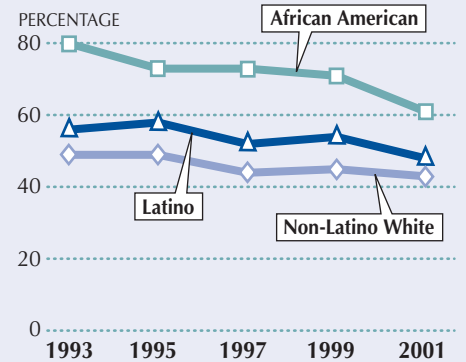
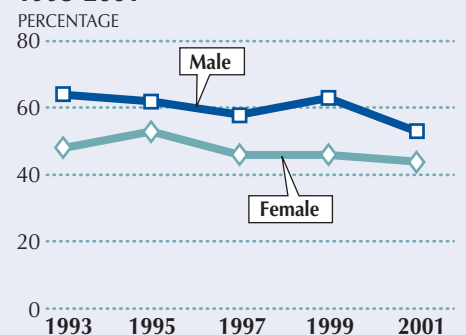


FIGURE 2

Percentage of Latino high school students who have had sex by gender, 1993-2001



Condom Use

Condom use among all youth increased during the 1990s (See Figure 3). However, in 1991, Latinos were less likely than African Americans and non-Latino whites to have used a condom the last time they had sex. By 1999, condom use rates for Latinos increased to 55% (up from 37% in 1991), equaling the rates of non-Latino whites. In 2001, Latino condom rates fell slightly to 54%. Across ethnic and racial groups, males are consistently more likely to report using a condom than females. In 2001, 59% of Latino males and 48% of Latino females reported using a condom the last time they had sex.

Pregnancy and Abortion

Latino teen pregnancy rates declined in the mid-1990s after increasing during the early part of the decade. In 1990, 156 Latina teens out of every 1,000 became pregnant (156/1,000). By 1997, the rate had fallen to 149/1,000 (a 5% decline) (See Figure 4).¹ The rates for African Americans and non-Latino whites fell steeply between 1990 and 1997. During this period, the rate for African Americans declined 23% from 221/1,000 teens to 170/1,000 teens. Non-Latino whites had the lowest rates throughout this period, falling from 87/1,000 in 1990 to 65/1,000 in 1997, a decline of 26%.

Overall abortion rates among teens have declined in recent years. Among Latinos and African Americans, this decrease is primarily due to lower pregnancy rates. Among non-Latino whites, these declines are due both to lower pregnancy rates and to lower proportions of teens choosing abortion. The proportion of pregnant Latina teens who choose abortion has remained steady between 1990 and 1997, at about 24%.¹ African Americans exhibit a similar steady pattern; approximately 37% of African American teen pregnancies end in abortion. In 1990, 37% of pregnant non-Latino white teens chose abortion; in 1997, the abortion rate fell to 28%.

Births

Teen births rates have declined for all groups since 1990. African Americans have experienced the steepest decline with a 35% decrease between 1990 and 2001 (See Figure 5).² By contrast, the Latina rate fell by only 8% during the same period. As a result of these trends, Latinas now have the highest birth rate. During the same period the non-Latino white rate fell by 29%.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of high school students who used condoms at last sex, by race/ethnicity, 1991-2001

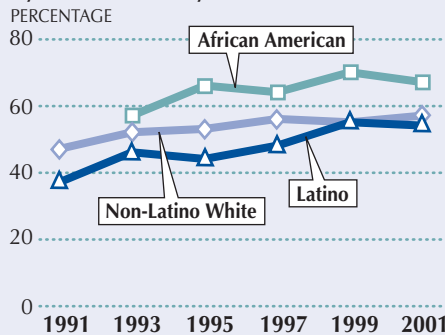
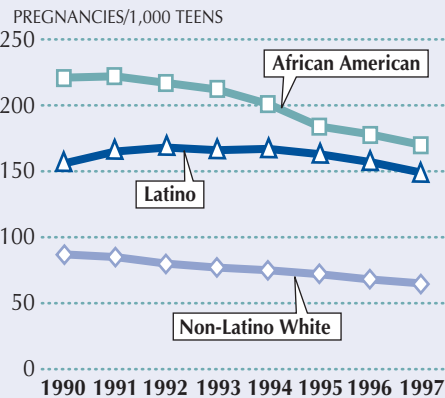


FIGURE 4

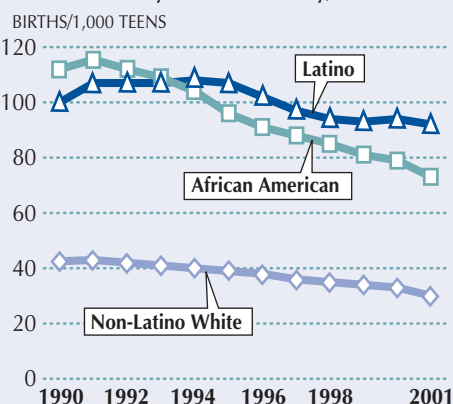
Teen pregnancy rates by race/ethnicity, 1990-1997



SOURCE: Ventura SJ, Mosher WD, Curtin SC, Abma JC, Henshaw S. 2001. Trends in Pregnancy Rates for the United States, 1976-1997: An Update, National Vital Statistics Reports 49 (4). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

FIGURE 5

Teen births by race/ethnicity, 1990-2001



SOURCE: Martin JA, Park MM, Sutton PD. 2002. Births: Preliminary Data for 2001. National Vital Statistics Reports 59 (10). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

REFERENCES

1 Ventura SJ, Mosher WD, Curtin SC, Abma JC, Henshaw S. 2001. Trends in Pregnancy Rates for the United States, 1976-1997: An Update, National Vital Statistics Reports 49 (4). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

2 Martin JA, Park MM, Sutton PD. 2002. Births: Preliminary Data for 2001. National Vital Statistics Reports 59 (10). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

All other data presented in this fact sheet were drawn from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports on five waves of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001. The citations for these reports are:

Grunbaum J, Kann L, Kinchen S, Williams B, Ross J, Lowry R, Kolbe L. 2002. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 2001. MMWR, 51 (SS-4): 1-68.

Kann L, Kinchen S, Williams B, Ross J, Lowry R, Grunbaum J, Kolbe L. 2000. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 1999, MMWR, 49 (SS-5):1-96.

Kann L, Kinchen S, Williams B, Ross J, Lowry R, Hill C. 1998. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 1997, MMWR, 47(SS-3):1-89.

Kann L, Warren C, Harris W, Collins J, Williams B. 1997. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance - United States, 1995, MMWR, 45(SS-4):1-83.

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Fact Sheet on Latino Youth: Sexual Behavior

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