Teen Pregnancy: Lessons in Both Health Policy and Social Norms

Annual George Silver Lecture
George Washington University
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Teen Births

Teen birth rates internationally, per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years, 2008 and 2009

Teen birth rates in the US are higher than in some other developed countries.

- Bulgaria
- United States
- Romania
- United Kingdom
- Ireland
- Israel
- Canada
- Germany
- France
- Norway
- Italy
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Netherlands
- Switzerland

National Teen Pregnancy Rates, 1972-2006

National Teen Birth Rates, 1940-2009

Teen birth rates by state per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years, 2009

Teen birth rates were lowest in the Northeast and upper Midwest and highest across the southern states.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics; 2009.
National Teen Pregnancy Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 1990-2005

Consistently Inconsistent

Pregnancy Protection Status Among Unmarried Young Adults Currently in a Sexual Relationship and not Pregnant or Trying to Get Pregnant
Unmarried Young Adults Age 18-29 Who Agree with the Statement: “It is OK for an unmarried female to have a child,” by Gender

- Total: Men 70%, Women 77%
- 18-19: Men 59%, Women 72%
Why Tempt Fate?

It Doesn't Matter if You Use Birth Control or Not, When it's Your Time to Get Pregnant it Will Happen

- Total: 40% Strongly agree, 21% Somewhat agree
- Men: 38% Strongly agree, 20% Somewhat agree
- Women: 44% Strongly agree, 23% Somewhat agree
- 18-19: 49% Strongly agree, 27% Somewhat agree
- 20-24: 36% Strongly agree, 17% Somewhat agree
- 25-29: 41% Strongly agree, 23% Somewhat agree
- non-Hisp White: 34% Strongly agree, 17% Somewhat agree
- non-Hisp Black: 29% Strongly agree, 17% Somewhat agree
- Hisp: 49% Strongly agree, 26% Somewhat agree
Unmarried Young Adults Age 18-29 Who Somewhat or Strongly Agree With the Following Statements

- Total: 31% (light blue), 43% (dark blue)
- Non-Hispanic White: 26% (light blue), 24% (dark blue)
- Non-Hispanic Black: 40% (light blue), 53% (dark blue)
- Hispanic: 40% (light blue), 46% (dark blue), 43% (light blue)
Aunt Sarah’s Tips

• Babies need adult parents.
• Babies don’t cement relationships, they stress them.
• Babies don’t give unconditional love; they demand it from the adults around them.
More Aunt Sarah...

- To girls: sex won’t make him yours and a baby won’t make him stay.

- To boys: making a baby doesn’t make you a man; being a devoted husband and father might...

- “If it happens, it happens” is no way to start a family. And “I just never really thought about it” isn’t either.
And finally….

• Getting pregnant or causing pregnancy, having babies, and starting families are perhaps the most important things we ever do, with generational effects. These major steps need to be thought about carefully, not stumbled into. We think and talk about so many less important things all the time: what’s for dinner, March Madness brackets, what movie to see this weekend… Surely the event of when to become a parent, with whom, and under what circumstances deserve at least the same amount of time and attention….
Thank You!

TheNationalCampaign.org
StayTeen.org
SexReally.com
Bedsider.org

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