

Findings in Brief

A Look at Californians'
Views on Teen Pregnancy
May 1999

TEEN PREGNANCY IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE TO CALIFORNIANS

In 1999 The Field Institute conducted a state-wide public opinion poll of more than 2,500 adults in California to assess their opinion on teen pregnancy prevention issues. The survey included a cross-section sample of 1,508 adults and an additional sample of 1,300 parents of pre-teens/teens. The survey was funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation and included interviews in Spanish and English.

Results from the overall sample are subject to a sampling error of ± 2.5 percentage points.

CALIFORNIANS BELIEVE TEEN PREGNANCY IS A "VERY SERIOUS" PROBLEM

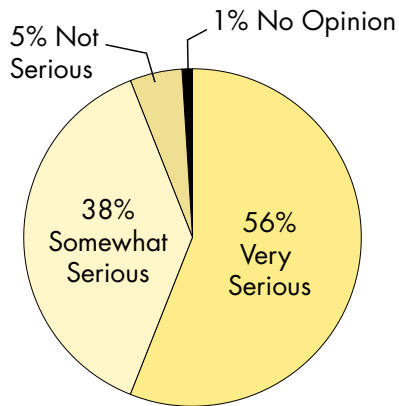
A majority of adults (56%) and two in three parents (66%) feel that teen pregnancy is a "very serious" problem. While this view spans all subgroups of the state's population, Latino parents (80%) and black/African American parents (77%) are even more likely to consider it a very serious problem.

THE GREATEST CONCERN IS FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE CHILD

When asked about the consequences of teen pregnancy, majorities of adults (63%) and parents (59%) worry most about the potential effect that this can have on the child born to teen parents. This concern far outweighs other concerns, such as the potential effect it can have on the mother (22% of adults) or cost to taxpayers (12% of adults).

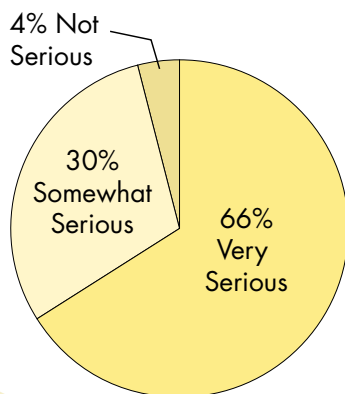
Perceived Seriousness of the Problem of Teen Pregnancy in California

California Adults Responded:



Perceived Seriousness of the Problem of Teen Pregnancy in California

California Parents Responded:



CALIFORNIANS HAVE VERY STRONG OPINIONS ON HOW TO ADDRESS TEEN PREGNANCY

- PARENT-CHILD DISCUSSIONS

Californians believe the most effective method for addressing teen pregnancy is to encourage parent-child discussions about these matters. Two in three (65%) say that encouraging parents to talk openly about sex and birth control with their children would be “extremely effective” in reducing teen pregnancy.

Adults can provide accurate, age-appropriate information and education about reproductive health and sexuality; foster and support responsible decision-making skills; offer guidance and the means for young people to explore and affirm their own values; and model healthy sexual attitudes and behavior.

Haffner; Facing Facts: Sexual Health of America's Adolescents, 1995

- SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS

There is widespread agreement among Californians that young people should be provided with the information necessary to understand and prevent pregnancies. For example, greater than eight in ten adults (84%) believe specific instruction should be provided to young people about how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, while 88% of California's adults support teaching age-appropriate sexuality education in the schools. The majority of Californians think this should begin by the 6th grade.

Comprehensive sexuality education is distinguished by its focus on the whole person, its emphasis on age-appropriate sexuality education that begins before puberty. It acknowledges that many adolescents will become sexually active, and should be provided with information about contraceptives.

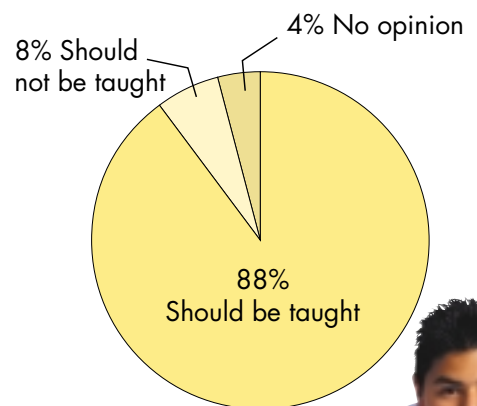
Comprehensive sexuality education programs are abstinence-based, but also incorporate components such as contraceptive education and life skills.

Haffner; Facing Facts: Sexual Health of America's Adolescents, 1995



Should Age-Appropriate Sexuality Education Be Taught in the Schools?

California Adults Responded:



MORE ABOUT SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS

When asked what types of content sexuality education in high schools should cover, greater than nine in ten said discussions should include information on AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (99%) and teaching students the basic facts of human reproduction (97%). In addition, 85% support high school discussions with teens about how to talk about sex with a partner.

Balanced and accurate sexuality education programs that are introduced in sequence over the entire span of adolescence do encourage young people to postpone sexual activity. But they place this message in the context of accurate and complete information. They teach ways to lower the risk of adverse consequences when sexually active, and they teach communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. They specifically focus on skills development that enable teens to avoid pregnancy and STDs. Such programs have demonstrated their effectiveness in rigorous evaluations. They have been found to be effective in delaying first intercourse, and in increasing the use of protection by sexually active teens. These programs do not contribute to increased levels of sexual activity, earlier sexual activity, or higher numbers of sexual partners among those who are sexually active.

Jemmott & Fong; Journal of American Medical Association, 1998

ENCOURAGING SEXUALLY ACTIVE TEENS TO USE CONTRACEPTION

More than nine in ten adults surveyed (93%) believe sexually active teens should be encouraged, in school-based sexuality education courses, to use protection to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.

Regardless of the socio-economic variables, it stands to reason that if a sexually active teen does not have access to contraceptives or information about how to properly use contraceptives, it is far more likely a pregnancy will occur.

Begin Age-Appropriate Sexuality Education in the Schools in What Grade?

