This document provides insight and understanding about how culturally diverse populations perceive, understand and deal with teenage pregnancy so that policymakers at all levels can make informed, respectful and effective decisions about teen pregnancy prevention programs in their communities.
The Get Real campaign conducted a wide range of in-depth research during 2000 and 2001 to provide the information presented in this document.

Fourteen focus groups were held throughout California with adult audiences. Managed by Garcia Research Associates, these small group sessions were ethnic-specific and conducted in appropriate languages. Participating parents and community leaders included Latinos (Spanish and English speaking); African Americans; Thai; Filipino, Hmong; Cambodian/Khmer and Pacific Islanders.

Additionally, more than 100 interviews were conducted with representatives of local and statewide advocacy organizations, health care providers, ethnic media, elected officials, teen program managers and school officials. Ten Town Hall meetings and Community Roundtables gathered information from community leaders. A review of all related literature on the issue nationally over the past four years completed the process.
MANY STATES, AND CALIFORNIA IN PARTICULAR, HAVE A LOT TO BE PROUD OF WITH REGARD TO TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION.

Overall, the birth rates to teens are declining. Each year community-based organizations, schools and local government agencies introduce creative, successful programs to help their young people deal with the pressures of growing up and delaying sex and/or pregnancy. Many adults now realize that everyone has a role in helping young people develop a healthy lifestyle that includes delaying pregnancy until they are emotionally and financially ready to raise a child.

While adults across the country debate the exact reason for the decline in births to teens, experts on the front line agree that the decline is due to a number of factors that all work together. These include: increased social pressure to use condoms; a variety of education programs designed to help teens delay sex or use contraception if they are sexually active; the availability of health services to teens; and the accessibility to and information about contraception. In addition, other factors such as the increase in social support activities such as mentoring, work skills programs, school-based buddy systems and recreational services also help adolescents develop the personal skills and motivation necessary for delaying sexual activity and early pregnancy. In many communities, male responsibility programs that include culturally relevant role modeling programs are successfully helping young men prepare for their future by preventing teenage pregnancy and assuming an active role with their families. The impact of a healthy economy is also a factor. Young people with a sense of successful future opportunities are also much more likely to delay pregnancy and early parenting than those that see no other motivating options for their life.

But while the statistics would indicate victory in the effort to reduce unplanned teen pregnancy, a closer look tells a different story.

For example: in California alone, the Attorney General predicts that the teenage population will increase by nearly a million teens more than the number living in California only a decade ago. So while the teen birthrate may be declining, the potential to have a lot more teenage parents is staggering. And births to teens are disproportionately represented among some ethnic groups. For example, births to young Latinas have declined at a much slower rate than births to Caucasian teens. Birth rates to African American teens are also declining at a slower rate than births to Caucasians, and African American teens are likely to initiate sexual activity at an earlier age than their counterparts. And among certain Southeast Asian communities, early adolescent parenting is a cultural norm rather than perceived as a problem.

INTRODUCTION

California’s increasingly diverse population is a challenge to anyone involved in teen pregnancy prevention programs. California’s population represents at least six major different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, speaking over 150 different languages. And within different ethnic populations, a variety of levels of assimilation in the United States culture represent additional challenges. The concept of “minorities” has taken on a new meaning in California, where the ethnically diverse population boasts a majority of non-white residents. In this state with a population of more than 33 million, nearly 33 percent are of Latino origin, 11 percent are of Asian origin and nearly seven percent are of African American heritage.
Against this backdrop of cultural diversity, government and private funders have dedicated a substantial amount of resources to teen pregnancy prevention in California. The state of California has invested millions of dollars over the past 10 years on a variety of intervention and education programs designed to reduce teen pregnancy rates in the state. The state’s involvement has been enhanced by teen pregnancy prevention programs and other educational strategies supported by The California Wellness Foundation, the Kaiser Family Foundation and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, among others. Community, health provider and school-based programs funded by state and private resources have provided a wealth of information about successful approaches, as each has responded to the ethnic and cultural nuances of the communities they serve.

While teen pregnancy rates have declined in the past few years there is an increasing concern among California’s various ethnic communities that their numbers are not decreasing at the same rate as Caucasians. Many community leaders recognize that specialized, tailored outreach efforts are necessary to curb a potentially stratospheric rise in births to teens in California in the next decade.

The Field Institute in 1999 conducted a statewide public opinion poll for the Get Real campaign to assess the opinions of more than 2,500 California adults on teen pregnancy prevention issues. The survey indicated that 56 percent of California adults believe that teen pregnancy is a “very serious” problem and while that view spanned all subgroups of the state’s population, 80 percent of Latino parents and 77 percent of African American parents were even more likely to consider it a very serious problem.

In order to fully understand the implications of creating policy and programs that will be effective with a diverse population base, the Get Real About Teen Pregnancy public education campaign conducted a twelve-month study to gather information and assess attitudes about this important topic. Two things became clear during our research: first, that a “one size fits all” approach does not apply within specific ethnic communities any more than it does across the board; and two, that culturally-diverse parents have one thing in common: they all want what’s best for their children, including a future filled with opportunities for success.

**KEY FINDINGS - WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON**

- Across the board, among all ethnic communities and cultures interviewed, youth development and socio-economic opportunities are seen as key factors in reducing teen pregnancy. If young people have a sense of hope for the future and a clear sense of how to set and achieve goals, they are less likely to experience an unplanned pregnancy or to choose early parenting. Likewise, they are more likely to take steps to prevent pregnancy.

- Across all cultures, the influence of parents or other important adults in a child’s life is important to reducing the risk factors of early sexual involvement or teen pregnancy.

- Across all cultures parents agree that their children need to be informed/educated about sex, but express concern about their own ability to be effective in sharing this information with their own children.

**In 2000, there were 36,892 births to Latino teens; 10,526 births to White/Non-Hispanic teens; 5,131 births to African American teens and 2,466 births to Asian/Pacific Islander teens ages 15-19.**

(Source: California Center for Health Statistics)

**From 1990 to 1998, birth rates among teens age 15-19 declined 37.4% for African Americans, 12.5% for Hispanics, 42.3% for Whites/Other and 30.5% for Asian/Pacific Islanders.**

(Source: Maternal & Child Health Branch, California Department of Health Services, May 2002)

**The median age of onset of sexual activity is 16.5 years of age and in 1999 half of all high school students reported having had sexual intercourse.**

(Source: Centers for Disease Control, Family Planning Perspectives)
• Cultural nuances may include such issues as behavior “patterning” where young people choose a path similar to the one they grew up in because it is a familiar way of life. Health officials note that many teens that have babies at a young age were themselves born to teen mothers.

• Motivators and barriers to parental support for teenage pregnancy prevention vary among different ethnic communities. However, common themes within ethnic populations have emerged, which indicates an opportunity to tailor policies and programs for maximum effectiveness.

• Adults throughout California are proud of the advances they have made in helping young people to develop healthy lifestyles and prevent pregnancy. They stress that successes must be recognized and success models emulated. One key to success has been the personalization and localization of program strategies to meet specific cultural needs within neighborhoods.

• Community leaders involved in youth development and teen pregnancy prevention issues stress that the foundation for healthy adolescence begins early in childhood, and that policies to prevent teenage pregnancy must be formulated from the “whole youth” perspective rather than just from a sex perspective.

• Among all cultures religion and spirituality continues to play a factor in people’s decisionmaking and views about teenagers and sexuality.

FRAMING THE ISSUE: AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

California’s African American population is concentrated in Los Angeles, San Diego, Fresno and Oakland. Teen birth rates are particularly high in these major population centers. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, African American youth are significantly more likely than their White and Latino counterparts to have become sexually active before the age of thirteen. However, of those teens that reported being sexually active, 70 percent reported condom use.

From a cultural perspective, opinions about teenage pregnancy and teen pregnancy prevention are as diverse as the African American community itself. There are differences of opinion based on region, level of existing involvement in teen pregnancy prevention programs and understanding of the environment in which teens live. However, some observations were made while conducting this research.

First and foremost, many African Americans believe that education and community involvement are critical strategies that must be employed to prevent teen pregnancy. Yet, when asked if there are specific cultural nuances that affect teen pregnancy or development of solutions, many of those we interviewed felt that there isn’t an overwhelming unique cultural aspect; rather it is a socio-economic phenomenon.

KEY FINDINGS:

• African American adults tend to support abstinence-only messages directed to teens yet they want teens to have solid information about contraception just in case they become sexually active.

There is acknowledgement that this issue is complex and does not lend itself to a one-size-fits-all approach, which calls for additional
information to enhance the basic “don’t have sex” theme. One primary reason for this is the overwhelming research data indicating that African American youth become sexually active at an earlier age than their counterparts, and that sexually active young people that do not use contraception are likely to experience pregnancy within the first year of having sex.

• African American adults expressed concern that African American communities and families send mixed messages to youth.

On one hand adults say they don’t want their teens having babies, yet when the baby is born it is rightfully welcomed into homes and communities. Often the young mother is showered with more attention than the young girl had ever previously experienced. The resulting mixed messages add to the confusion about whether or not teen pregnancy is supported or not supported, acceptable behavior or unacceptable behavior within the African American community structure.

• African American adults report they believe that the most critical issues concerning teen pregnancy are the lost or delayed educational opportunities and the economic hardships for the family and the community.

• African American teens respond well to role models that help them make a variety of decisions about how to have a healthy life and successful future.

Adults agreed that the best thing they can do is help teens develop goals and skills to have a successful future, which is good encouragement to prevent early pregnancy.

• Many adults lament the decline in African American dominant neighborhoods where adults look after the welfare of each other’s children and have a positive influence in young peoples’ lives.

• Many influential African Americans believe the key to reducing teen pregnancy among their youth lies in providing honest, comprehensive sexuality education for young people and adults; and that the entire community must become involved in the issue in one way or another.

• Teen pregnancy is more likely to be viewed as a personal problem than a community problem.

In spite of the social and economic toll that births to teens take on communities, most people aren’t concerned about the issue unless it happens within their own families.

• The faith community has a pivotal role in teen pregnancy prevention efforts.

• Stakeholders in the African American community believe that all policymakers should view teens as the future of California and help prepare them to be productive and responsible citizens.

Policies and programmatic resources should concentrate on preventing problems such as teenage pregnancy and other issues that impact young adult’s success factors.

SUMMARY: AFRICAN AMERICAN FOCUS GROUPS

Four focus groups were conducted with African American participants.

For many African Americans the issue of teen pregnancy has much less of a stigma than it did twenty years ago. In many of their communities it has become almost a normal situation and it appears to even have become accepted among teens and adults.

Focus group participants pointed out that marriage is less of an option because of the changing values and behavior. They also believe that the traditional family structure has been devalued through the influence of the media, music, movies and the aggrandizement of celebrities.

“I don’t think there is a true community anymore. You have individuals who live in homes, but not a community. You don’t have parents that will tell other kids to behave.”

– Focus Group Participant
Across all the groups, teen pregnancy is seen as being symptomatic of the broader issues of family relationships, the communication between parent and child and the dynamic ways that people’s lives are changing. For the African American groups the issues that are most closely linked to teen pregnancy are parenting skills, spiritual guidance, educational attainment and gainful employment.

**ADULTS’ VIEW OF BEING A TEENAGER TODAY**

Focus group participants identified the lack of church influence, decline of behavior guidance at home, and the deterioration of the ‘old neighborhood’ as major factors in the issue of teen pregnancy. The fact that many African Americans no longer live in predominantly black neighborhoods has greatly influenced their sense of community. They also decried the loss of communal upbringing that made them feel secure.

**EDUCATION AS A CULTURAL VALUE**

The African American focus group participants were very much concerned about the quality of education, discipline in the schools and safety in the schools. There was some disappointment that education seems to be not valued among teenagers today.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SEXUAL CURIOUSITY AND ACTIVITY**

Across all the focus groups there was an acceptance that it is natural for teens to be sexually curious and that sexual activity is a realistic probability. There was also real empathy for the emotional, physical and behavioral changes that teens go through and sympathy for the parents who are trying to deal with the changes. The older African Americans expressed concern about sexually transmitted diseases while the younger African Americans believe everything is discussed more openly and that the media has a major influence on young people.

**ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEEN PREGNANCY**

Each group had a distinctly different attitude towards teen pregnancy, but there was an agreement across all groups that teen pregnancy is more likely to be viewed as a personal problem than a community problem. In general, many of the respondents seemed resigned to it because as far as they were concerned, it has always happened and it always will. However, the older respondents were very much concerned about the consequences from a family and community point of view.

**CONSEQUENCES OF TEEN PREGNANCY**

The disruption of education and the economic implications were the most common consequences cited across all the focus groups conducted for this research project. However, African American respondents were more likely to point out that teen pregnancy delays or derails educational and employment opportunities. They also cited the fact that there are many programs that can help pregnant teens, but that those very same programs can lessen the real impacts of teenage pregnancy. African American focus group participants supported the premise of the programs, but believe they undermine the urgency of teen pregnancy prevention.

**SUMMARY: FAITH LEADERS’ FORUM**

Church and spirituality are major forces in the lives of many African Americans. According to a study published by the Barna Institute in 2000, two-thirds of African Americans list their pastors as the most important leaders in their community. Because faith within the African American community is such a critical element in addressing any issues, whether it is social, economic or political, the Get Real campaign met with fifteen members of the faith community to assess attitudes and opinions among this group. The meeting included representatives from Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and non-denominational Christian churches, as well as

“It weakens the community even more if one in five homes has a pregnant teen. In twenty years you can imagine what it will be like. It puts a strain on your tax dollars for programs for these kids.”

– Focus Group Participant
Islamic and Buddhist temples to discuss their attitudes and opinions about teen pregnancy.

The faith leaders overwhelmingly agreed that their community plays an important role in teen pregnancy prevention and sexuality education. The consensus among them was that adults need education and dialogue, but that it would take more than one meeting among a diverse faith group to discover common ground on which they can form messages and develop a comprehensive plan. However, they did offer some suggestions for what role the faith community could play in teen pregnancy prevention:

• Resume their role as cultural leaders and not let the media define and educate youth.
• Tell youth and adults the truth. Give them facts and statistics that are relevant to them.
• Begin sexuality education with youth prior to the teen years.
• Develop mentoring programs specifically focused on teen pregnancy prevention and sexuality education.
• Lead the effort to put the emphasis back on every adult having a stake in every child’s future.

The Faith Leaders in this convening also acknowledged that the faith community needs to come up with clear and consistent messages for youth and then be direct and honest in delivering those messages. However, given the diversity of religious ideologies and teachings, it is a challenge to find common ground. They did agree that the faith community should deal with this issue as a health issue and that contraception is necessary in addressing the issue from every standpoint. They agreed that they could share methods and ideas while helping other adults realize and understand the power and influence they have with youth.

While there was not always uniformity in what types of messages to give to young people, there was complete unanimity in the statement that the faith community has a pivotal role in teen pregnancy prevention efforts.

SUMMARY: AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLES

The Get Real Campaign convened a series of Community Roundtables for African American adults. The purpose of these community events was to bring together community leaders from diverse backgrounds to address the issue of teen pregnancy in their communities. Attendees came from all walks of life, and while some were active in teen health issues, many were not. The Community Roundtables were held in Oakland and Los Angeles, and each had over 100 participants representing business, social service, media and educational organizations.

The roundtables were designed to engage participants in an open and honest discussion about what all adults can do to reduce teen pregnancy rates.

The panelist’s comments and group discussions led to the following proposed solutions.

• How can adults insure that sexually active teens have access to the contraceptives they need to in order to reduce pregnancies and prevent sexually transmitted infections?

  Be an example to youth. Teach by doing. Provide funding and resources. Sponsor programs that provide contraceptives. Implement comprehensive sexuality education courses in schools.

• What specifically can business, policy maker, faith-based, civic and healthcare communities do to help teens prevent pregnancy?

  Provide jobs to youth to keep them occupied and give them skills. Donate money and condoms to youth programs. Have churches offer education and support to both youth and parents. Support youth-driven community centers.

“Let’s teach the beauty of sexuality as God ordained it – not just say ‘No, no, no.’”

“It’s time for the faith community to put a real plan into action.”

– Focus Group Participants
SUMMARY: AFRICAN AMERICAN STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

More than a dozen African American educators, medical professionals, policymakers, business people, faith leaders and media were interviewed in November 2001 to gauge their viewpoints regarding teen pregnancy prevention and sexuality education. The major finding was that many influential African Americans in California believe the key to reducing teen pregnancy among their youth lies in honest, comprehensive education for youth and adults as well as the entire community’s involvement in teen issues.

Many of the respondents felt that people are less shocked when a teen experiences pregnancy than they might have been during previous generations. They believe that most adults and teens feel sympathetic towards a teen that becomes pregnant, although most of them agreed that pregnant girls, as opposed to the teen father, experience the harshest stigmatization, since they are easily identified as being sexually active.

Interviewees pointed out that teens in lower income neighborhoods or from less educated households were in situations where they are at higher risk for teen pregnancy, as many are a part of a repetitious cycle of teen pregnancies. Teens from middle and higher income levels were viewed as being less likely to become pregnant. Most respondents felt that teens coming from an actively involved and caring household have a better chance of not becoming a teen parent. They also believe that teens involved in church and church-related activities were more likely to avoid teen pregnancy and early sexual activity.

Interviewees were willing to share their time and resources in developing programs, educating teens and adults and distributing information about sexuality and pregnancy prevention. More importantly, all the stakeholders were clear that every adult should be involved in the future of youth. They also believe that policymakers should concentrate resources on prevention and that they should view teens as the future of California and help prepare them to be productive and responsible citizens.

FRAMING THE ISSUE: ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) COMMUNITY

Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) constitute a large, heterogeneous population that includes members of 34 ethnic groups differing in language, culture, and how recently they immigrated to the states. Opinions about teen pregnancy and prevention strategies are as diverse as this ethnic classification. California has the greatest number of AAPIs nationwide, accounting for 36.5 percent of all Asian Americans and 29.3 percent of all Pacific Islanders in the United States.³

The issue of teen pregnancy among AAPIs has been largely ignored by both service providers and members of the community because of the misperception that they are far less susceptible than the general population. In sharp contrast to this stereotype, research has shown that when teen birth rates are disaggregated by ethnic subgroup, some AAPIs have the highest rates relative to their population size among all ethnic communities in California.⁶

KEY FINDINGS:

- Immigrant parents struggling for survival are at a huge disadvantage for understanding the pressures their teens are experiencing. The generation gap compounds the cultural divide that accounts for the tremendous differences between values and traditions in their country of origin versus the United States. This dynamic contributes to the pressures youth experience who don’t have a clear identity as either Asian or American.

- The conflict between tradition and assimilation makes it difficult for parents to exert control over the behavior of their children. This is further compounded by
the transformation in roles where children become the cultural translators for their limited-English-speaking elders.

- Asian American females, in particular, face a conflict between their educational and professional aspirations and women’s revered role as wife and mother. Second and third-generation families that have assimilated tend to have a less traditional outlook than newcomers do.

- There are significant cultural barriers to discussing teen sexuality and pregnancy. Many AAPI adults refuse to talk about sexuality with their children out of embarrassment or shame, believing it will only encourage teenage sexual activity. Parents may acknowledge that it’s a reality, though they deny that their own child is at risk. When a teen does become pregnant, the issue is treated as a private family matter rather than a community concern.

- In certain communities, teen pregnancy brings tremendous shame to the family and, in some instances, is cause for being disowned.

- Among other ethnic groups, particularly Hmong and Mien, being pregnant at the age of 16 is more a cultural norm than a stigma. Frequently when teens do become pregnant, families encourage them to get married and will assist the young couple with raising the child.

- Early marriage is a tradition in the Hmong and Laotian communities and teen pregnancy is a normal outcome of this practice. However, the economic and emotional demands of raising a family are bringing about a change in this view. This change is coming from the realization that education is directly linked to financial well-being. Two groups within the Hmong and Lao communities are prompting this change: the elders who are beginning to acknowledge the value of education as it relates to earning power and the second generation teen mothers who lament the loss of dreams and opportunities.

- Risky sexual behavior is tied to involvement in the gang culture for some AAPI youth, including Cambodian, Filipino, Laotian and Vietnamese. Teen pregnancy is one by-product of the gang initiation ritual for girls. It also serves as the only respectable (and safe) way for members to leave a gang.

- Many Asian adults - of all cultures - feel the pressure of being members in minority communities that are constantly under scrutiny by the mainstream. When teen pregnancy is presented as a social issue within the broader context of the community, it takes on additional meaning and has broader implications.

- Any approaches to teen pregnancy prevention must take into account the ethnic characteristics and tremendous variability among the AAPI subgroups.

SUMMARY: AAPI FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted with representatives from the Lao, Hmong, Cambodian/Khmer, Thai, Filipino and Pacific Islander communities.

HMONG AND LAO

Early marriage is a tradition in the Hmong and Lao communities and teen pregnancy is a normal outcome of this practice. However, the economic and emotional demands of raising a family are bringing about a change in this view. This change is coming from the realization that education is directly linked to financial well-being. Two groups within the Hmong and Lao communities are prompting this change: the elders who are beginning to acknowledge the value of education as it relates to earning power and the second generation teen mothers who lament the loss of dreams and opportunities.

Due to the education requirement in the United States, they have been exposed to the possibilities and opportunities that are now beyond their reach of early marriage and childbearing. The respondents also noted the waning influence that elders have on the family as more Laotians accept American culture. Because of the cultural and language gaps, it is harder to assert parental control and provide guidance.
The lack of communication with parents about sexual issues is undeniable, but focus groups participants included sex and sexuality among the list of topics that they want to learn about in order to establish meaningful communication with their children.

THAI AND FILIPINO

For the Thai and Filipino groups, there is not only the stigma, which indicates a lack of respect for values and customs, but also the effect that teen pregnancy has on achieving an education. In Thailand and the Philippines education is highly regarded, conferring respect and status on a family. For both groups, education is a class issue. They realize that in the United States, economics and education can drive class status.

The Thai group specifically stated that in Thailand, education is very important and the focus of the students is to finish school. They have the same expectations of their children in the U.S., but are worried about the distractions and outside influences.

CAMBODIAN (KHMER)

The Cambodian (Khmer) group fears teen pregnancy because it epitomizes the lack of parental control that disrupts the entire education process. Similar to the Thai and Filipino groups, Cambodians highly regard education and are sensitive to the problems that their children are already experiencing in school. They also know that education is the key to economic well-being – not just the well-being of the individual – but the how that economic well-being improves the lives of the family and the community.

While noting that sex is not a topic that is usually discussed, the women in these groups said that they would talk to their daughters. However, they lamented that they do not know how to ensure their children will heed the message amid all the other influences such as advertising and movies. Many of the respondents were concerned about teen pregnancy because of the effect on the family and its reputation in the community. They expressed fears about teens’ growing independence and parents’ lack of control.

PACIFIC ISLANDER

Among the Pacific Islander focus group members (which included Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan and Tongan), teen pregnancy is perceived as an issue and defined in terms of educational achievement, assimilation and family. The respondents cited a lack of respect, lack of social skills and living by an intrinsic code of honor as a member of the community. They are worried about the loss of the sense of community.

Respondents also related that conversations about sex are very much taboo, particularly in consideration of the strong role of the church and reluctance of faith leaders to discuss teen sexuality and contraception. While they were especially sensitive to cultural values, they believe that the problems accompanying teen sexual behavior are urgent and warrant a direct approach.

“They don’t teach us to not have sex or to have safe sex. They never say anything about AIDS or not to get pregnant.”

– Focus Group Participant

“The parents feel ashamed. But the teenagers talk among themselves. The parents should have the relationship with the child so that they can talk about sex.”

– Focus Group Participant
Opinions about teen pregnancy and prevention strategies are as diverse as this ethnic classification. Focus groups were conducted with representatives from the Lao, Hmong, Cambodian/Khmer, Thai, Filipino and Pacific Islander communities.
All the AAPI groups stated that they felt the pressure of being members in minority communities that were constantly under scrutiny by mainstream audiences. When teen pregnancy is presented as a social issue within the broader context of the community, it takes on additional meaning and has broader implications. Recognizing the mainstream’s tendency to compare ethnic communities according to an established set of indicators, no group wants to be the negative “statistic.” At the same time, they do acknowledge that these comparisons are a tool by which they can gauge their own progress, which is extremely important to them. Many respondents reported that the number of unmarried teenage mothers in their communities seems to be rising. They all stated that they want information that allows them to assess what is going on in their communities and they also want to have input into how that information is interpreted and presented to the mainstream and within their communities. There is concern over framing the information within the context of their culture and the rapid changes that are taking place. Each group has a distinct experience, which should be a part of the subtext of the information and they emphasized that acknowledgement and inclusion of that experience is crucial. They believe community organizations and ethnic media are the most vital tools for raising public awareness and initiating change. However, there continues to be a fear among these groups that this problem is unsolvable.

**SUMMARY: AAPI COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLES**

In January 2001, the first of two community roundtables was held in Carson, California gathering more than 50 community members and civic leaders to discuss the issue of teen pregnancy in the Filipino community. The roundtable was designed to challenge the participants to discuss the “taboo” subjects of teen sexuality and pregnancy. Participants were asked to develop some strategies and actions for adults to take responsibility in breaking the silence and tackling the problem of teen pregnancy. Some recommendations that were suggested included:

- Promote parental involvement
- Foster intergenerational communication
- Conduct more research to explore how culture, attitudes, and beliefs impact teen pregnancy rates and prevention
- Expand and improve sexuality education programs
- Provide services and facilities for teens
- Create a public education campaign targeting Filipinos
- Encourage collaboration between schools, community leaders, faith-based organizations and youth.

In June, 2001, the second roundtable was held in Oakland, California and brought together more than 70 community members and civic leaders to hear from various community leaders about the issue of teen pregnancy as it affects the various Southeast Asian communities, particularly Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese. Participants included representatives from school districts, public health departments, local offices of education and family planning. Several panelists presented information including the latest statistics on teen pregnancy in the Southeast Asian communities, how cultural norms affect teen pregnancy prevention, and how teen pregnancy is connected to larger public policy issues.

When asked how participants felt about sexual activity and pregnancy among teenagers, responses included the following: early pregnancy is viewed as something positive, marriage is viewed as desireable before teen pregnancy and contraceptives are viewed as taboo and hard for teens to access.

The group did recommend several approaches for preventing teen pregnancy in the Southeast Asian communities including:

- Provide education to increase understanding and communication

“Recent Southeast Asian immigrants are confused by ads that tell teenagers to wait until they are married to have sex. The elders used to expect young teens to get married and start a family. But here it is supposed to be different. They wonder – are these ads encouraging teen marriage?”

– Community Roundtable Participant
• Involve community leaders and key decision makers
• Increase resources to support services that are culturally appropriate, in-language and confidential
• Involve men in the discussion and strategy
• Create a public education campaign
• Conduct and understand research
• Be patient and “go where they are”

**SUMMARY: AAPI STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

In the fall of 2001, 18 AAPI community leaders and legislators were interviewed regarding their opinions about teen pregnancy in the AAPI community. AAPIs tend to approach family issues, such as teen pregnancy, as a private matter with little to no involvement or assistance from outside resources. Respondants noted that many immigrant parents struggle on a daily basis to survive and are therefore at a huge disadvantage for having any concept of the pressures their teens are experiencing. A significant number of those interviewed cited socio-economics as a contributing factor to disparate pregnancy and birth rates in certain communities, and were concerned that low income parents working several jobs to make ends meet may not have the time to monitor their teens’ behavior and provide guidance. Respondents also felt that this audience may have limited access to public health information and local community resources, which could help prevent unplanned teenage pregnancy.

AAPI families note that there is a significant difference in attitudes about teen relationships and willingness to talk about difficult issues between newcomers who are more conservative and second or third generation who are more assimilated. Many find it inappropriate to talk openly about sex. The generation gap between parents and their children is further compounded by the tremendous differences between values and traditions in their country of origin versus the United States. Interviewees did agree that distribution of contraceptives is a difficult and sensitive issue in the AAPI communities, but they were interested in incorporating teen pregnancy prevention information into existing programs such as parenting, child development and youth outreach.

It was recommended that the issue of teen pregnancy be framed as something that affects the entire family’s future, including education and economics, that more health education programs featuring peer-to-peer counseling and mentorship programs be offered and respected members of the community be selected to deliver messages and information. Public education efforts should consider the importance of interpersonal relationships and word of mouth in effectively engaging these diverse AAPI communities.
FRAMING THE ISSUE - 
LATINO COMMUNITY

Every day parents, teachers, researchers, community leaders and advocates are confronted with teen pregnancy and its effects in the Latino community. In California, Latinos have become the most impacted group in regards to teen pregnancy. More than half of Latino teens report having sex and placing themselves at risk of becoming teen parents. Although teen pregnancy rates are decreasing statewide, they are decreasing at a much slower rate for Latinos. In 2000 there were 36,892 births to Latino teens in California, representing 67 percent of all teen births in the state. While birth rates for teens age 15-19 declined 42.3% among White/Other, 37.4% among African Americans and 30.5% among Asian/Pacific Islanders, from 1990 to 1998, the decline was only 12.5% among Hispanics.

There are many factors that contribute to Latinos’ high teen pregnancy rates. This is a community that is staunchly adverse to discussing sexuality and accepting the fact that teenagers do have sex. Oftentimes, in an effort to avoid discussing the topic, Latino parents will rely on public schools to educate their children on the issue.

KEY FINDINGS:

• Latinos are the fastest growing, youngest major racial/ethnic group in the United States. Latinos are also more likely to be poor, have low education and have a higher high school dropout rate than any other ethnic/racial group in the country.

• Latino youth engage in unprotected sex for a variety of reasons. These range from difficulty accessing pregnancy prevention programs due to language barriers and fear of using services among undocumented immigrants, to the desire to start a family or to attain the status and respect that Latino culture confers on parents.

• The level of acculturation among residents influences teen pregnancy prevention issues, attitudes and behavior. A large majority of California’s Latino population immigrated from elsewhere and a high percentage emigrated from Mexico. This is especially important when considering that “Mexican-origin teens have the highest birth rate of all Latino groups (112 per 1,000).”

• Family support and community interaction is very important in Latino communities, which makes it especially important to deal with this issue from a community perspective.

• The Catholic Church may not have the level of influence on personal behavior in Latino communities that is commonly assumed. Teens tend to make decisions independent of what the Church may want them to do, but they are very concerned about not alienating family members or close family friends.

• There is a strong desire among Latino parents and community leaders for teens to delay sexual activity and pregnancy in favor of pursuing education and career opportunities. However, once a young Latino couple has a baby, the family and community support structure tends to welcome the infant with open arms and showers the young mother with lots of attention. This presents a perceived “double standard” within the Latino community that parents and community leaders acknowledge.

• Adults cite a general reluctance within their culture to discuss sexual matters with teens. Most respondents consider it a cultural taboo to mention the topic.
Four different focus groups were conducted, including participants who spoke only Spanish and some who were bilingual in English and Spanish.

As in the African American groups, participants in the Latino focus groups noted that teen pregnancy doesn’t carry the stigma that it used to two decades ago. They still view teen pregnancy as connected directly to lost or delayed educational opportunities, but are more likely to view the issue within the context of a loss of cultural values. The issues that resonated for them were respect for traditions and values, family relations, and completion of education and socio-economic advancement. They believe that the best outlets for sharing information are through the Spanish media and community-based organizations.

Many of the respondents observed that as Latinos move up the socio-economic ladder, they seem to be losing the values that helped them persevere and that culture differences, language and technology often appear to conspire against them in their quest to keep their families “safe.”

“Adolescence is often a turning point in people’s lives and a time when choices have potentially long-term consequences. This is particularly true in the area of sexual behavior. The difficulties of navigating through this life stage, compounded by the challenges of navigating two cultures, can make the teen years especially perilous for young Latinos. Having few economic and/or social resources on which to rely further exacerbates these challenges and increases the odds of negative outcomes. A better understanding of how acculturation influences the choices that young Latinos make is imperative if we are to shape programs, policies, and interventions that are to be effective in attaining such goals as a reduction in teen pregnancy and STIs.”

“Being Teenagers Today

When asked what they thought were the main concerns of teenagers today, focus group participants identified sex, fitting in, jobs and money as the primary concerns. They clearly hold the media responsible for the negative images and influences and worry about the economic pressures that result in both parents working all the time.

Education as a Cultural Value

The Latino respondents focused on completion of school as a way of staying out of trouble. They also acknowledged that literacy issues in the non-English speaking communities precluded a heavy reliance on direct mail pieces and distribution of fliers and that oral communications and interpersonal interaction will be most effective when discussing the issue.

“The family life has totally changed. When I was young, the family was always together. They were very influential on my behavior, but family unity has changed. Now, even for a young couple like us, my husband eats dinner at a different time than I do.”

– Focus Group Participant
PARENT/CHILD COMMUNICATION

All of the groups cited a general reluctance within their culture to discuss sexual matters with teens. With most of the groups it was considered a cultural taboo to mention the topic. The older Latino groups pointed out their conservative upbringing primarily related to their Catholicism, which discourages having the “sex conversation” with their children. However, they insist that they are more direct with their children than their parents were with them. They expect to have the conversation and provide the information.

ATTITUDES TOWARD TEEN PREGNANCY

Many of the younger Latinos accept teen pregnancy as a natural, everyday occurrence. Several respondents had been teen parents and said they were no different from their friends. But they were split into two groups: one baffled by the ongoing nature of the problem and the other not concerned. Both groups indicated that it carried no stigma in their communities and were quick to point out that a teen pregnancy does not mean that a person cannot finish school and lead a productive life.

“I don’t see what a big deal it is. Most of my friends had babies when they were sixteen.”

– Focus Group Participant

But as the discussion continued there was a shift in attitude as those who had been teen parents started sharing their stories.

“It just delays all your dreams.”

“Everything you enjoy is put on hold.”

“Trust me - it’s hard.”

– Focus Group Participants

CONSEQUENCES OF TEEN PREGNANCY

The respondents were very much aware of the overall effects that teen pregnancy can have on the community. While not blaming all the community ills on teen pregnancy, they certainly understood and accepted some of the problems associated with “babies having babies.”

“But many of the younger respondents do not necessarily think or respond in terms of community. They were less likely to be concerned about the effect that teen pregnancy can have on the community and felt less of a responsibility to become involved.

“No one felt that they were going to do anything about it.”

– Focus Group Participant

KEY ACTION STEPS

Everyone interviewed agreed that more programs are needed for teens; programs that would give teens the opportunity to freely discuss their problems, provide counseling as needed, teach them how to handle their individual situations and keep them engaged in their education. They also believe that the strongest messages play on the parent’s responsibility to provide opportunities for their children; and the consequences, the education and economic losses that occur when a teen gets pregnant. They suggested using messages that speak to the parent’s hopes and dreams for the child and encourages them to talk with their child, openly show affection to the child and make family time for the child.
Family support and community interaction is very important in Latino communities, which makes it especially important to deal with this issue from a community perspective. Adults cite a general reluctance within their culture to discuss sexual matters with teens. Most respondents consider it a cultural taboo to mention the topic.
SUMMARY: LATINO COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE

More than 50 people including representatives from healthcare, legislative, local government, advocacy groups, economic development and education gathered in Pasadena, California in November, 2001, with the goal of identifying challenges and solutions to the problem of teen pregnancy affecting the Latino community.

Presentations were heard on the latest research, policy recommendations were discussed and breakout sessions were conducted on the topics of comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, positive life options and economic opportunities for young men.

These community leaders and representatives presented the following policy recommendations:

- Ensure and mandate that all public schools teach comprehensive sexuality education to their students
- Educate Latino parents on health and sexuality education
- Provide positive life options for Latino teens
- Promote business internships to build work skills and expand life options
- Advocate for a 200 to one ratio between school counselors and students
- Provide culturally relevant programs addressing teens’ emotional needs
- Support after-school and mentoring programs provided by schools and communities
- Advocate teen’s access to contraceptives without parental consent
- Support confidential medical care policies to allow teens to access school-based clinics without parental consent
- Support sexuality education programs that include condom distribution
- Provide culturally relevant educational materials available in different languages
- Advocate for more resources such as job placement, training, application workshops, and job preparation for young Latinos
- Encourage male responsibility through school and community organization programs

SUMMARY: LATINO STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Several Latino elected officials from across the state were interviewed in the fall of 2001 regarding their perceptions and viewpoints on the issue of teen pregnancy. When asked how high teen pregnancy ranked as an issue of concern in their community they gave an average ranking of five out of 10. Most of them acknowledged that the lack of education is a major factor in the prevention of teen pregnancy and that we need to get groups like the PTA and churches more involved in the issue. Respondents cited another barrier to effective teen pregnancy prevention being the “generation gap” because there are many different mentalities in each generation regarding this issue.

Respondents suggested several ways to reach young people with pregnancy prevention messages. These included: mentoring programs, encouraging teens to be involved in sports activities, internships and church; and using television to carry positive messages of teen pregnancy prevention.

There was also an acknowledgement by interviewees that there is a need for more state government funds to be allocated to the issue as well as an increase in the availability of teen health clinics and awareness programs.
SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS

- Respected adults in each community, regardless of the level of professional involvement with teens, should be recruited to assist parents and community-based organizations in understanding the impact of teen pregnancy in their community and learn how to help teens avoid unplanned pregnancies and infections.

- Schools and community-based organizations should make comprehensive sexuality education classes available to adults and teenagers in the primary languages specific to each neighborhood.

- Same ethnicity healthcare specialists, psychologists, teachers and other officials should be included in workshops and community forums where parents and other adults that work with teens can learn how to help the young people in their community avoid unplanned pregnancy and prevent sexually transmitted infections.

- “Non-traditional” community partners must be included in the effort to help educate teens about reproductive health and motivate them to make informed decisions about their lives. This means including churches, local media, recreation programs, law enforcement agencies, job training centers, and businesses in the community effort to help teens realize their future potential by preventing unplanned pregnancies.

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICYMAKERS

Recognize that policies must consider the tremendous variability in experiences, outlook, traditions and resources available in these communities.

- Support resources for a broad range of teenage pregnancy prevention efforts. These include school-based sexuality education and easily-accessible teen health clinics.

- Support programs that train adults on how to work and interact with young people on a variety of levels.

- Expand programs that train teen peer-educators to work at health clinics and in middle and high schools.

- Mandate that state-supported HIV education be broadened to include more information on all sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

- Continue to support, and increase support for, male responsibility-focused outreach and training.
FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH RELATED TO THE ISSUE OF TEEN PREGNANCY WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES:

Academy for Educational Development (www.aed.org)
Advocates for Youth (www.advocatesforyouth.org)
Alan Guttmacher Institute (www.agi-usa.org)
Annie E. Casey Foundation (www.acef.org)
California Adolescent Health Collaborative (www.calforniateenhealth.org)
California Center for Health Improvement (www.cchi.org)
California Department of Education (www.cde.ca.gov)
California Department of Health Services (www.dhs.ca.gov)
California Department of Social Services (www.dss.cahwnet.gov)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)
ChildStats (www.childstats.gov)
Get Real About Teen Pregnancy Campaign (www.letsgetreal.org)
Kaiser Family Foundation (www.kff.org)
National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (www.teenpregnancy.org)
National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Research Center (www.peds.umn.edu)
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (www.siecus.org)

REFERENCES

1. Family Planning Perspectives, 1998
2. California State Census Data, 2000
4. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 1999
5. U.S. Census Data 2000
6. Fact Sheet on Latino Youth: Sexual Behavior; Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy, 2002
7. U.S. Census Data 2000
8. California Center for Health Statistics, 2002
10. California Department of Health Services, Office of Family Planning, 1999
12. Ibid
The “Get Real About Teen Pregnancy” public education campaign is funded by a grant to Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide from The California Wellness Foundation. For more information, visit our web site at www.letsgetreal.org.