



# Voices of California: Findings in Brief

A Look at Ethnic Californians'  
Views on Teen Pregnancy

April 2003

## INTRODUCTION

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The Get Real About Teen Pregnancy campaign commissioned Field Research Corporation in late 2002 to conduct a public opinion poll of more than 1,300 adults in California representing several different ethnic backgrounds. The poll was conducted to assess attitudes and opinions regarding teen pregnancy, and as a follow-up to qualitative research conducted in 2000 and 2001 which was released under the title “Voices of California: A Multicultural Perspective on Teen Pregnancy.” This study is also a follow-up to a previous Field Research public opinion poll conducted in 1999.

The research focused on adults representing various ethnic backgrounds including African-American, Caucasian, Filipino, Latino and Vietnamese. These groups were chosen based on their percentage of the overall population and rates of teen births among each population. The interviews were conducted by

phone over a one-month period, and many of the interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the person being interviewed.

While many of these findings mirror those of the prior qualitative research, this study more firmly states the issues and concerns of these specific populations and how the similarities and differences between cultures affect the way the issue of teen pregnancy is perceived.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Assess the significance of teen pregnancy as a public concern;
- Explore knowledge levels, attitudes and normative beliefs related to teen pregnancy and prevention;
- Determine views about the most effective solutions; and
- Assess awareness of, and access to, prevention-related information and services.



## THE LATEST ON TEEN PREGNANCY

As births to teens continue to drop across the nation, California's teen birth rate recently dipped below the national average for the first time in more than 20 years. However, there were still 45 births per 1,000 teens between the ages of 15 and 19 in 2001, equaling more than 52,966 babies born to teens.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the teen population continues to grow as a result of a predicted 30 percent increase from 1995 to 2005.

The sense of urgency also increases when birth rates are broken down by ethnicity. The birth rate to Latino teens remains the highest among California's populations with 86.2 births per 1,000 teens. African-American teens have the next highest birth rate with 53.3 per 1,000 teens and Asian and Pacific Islanders have the lowest with 15.6 per 1,000 teens.<sup>2</sup> Filipino and Vietnamese represent the second and third largest Asian American populations in California, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Births to Vietnamese teens represent nearly four and a half percent of all teen births, and births to Filipino teens represent six percent of all teen births.

While births to teens continue to decline, the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are climbing among teenagers, making it clear that while pregnancies are being averted, unprotected sexual activity is still occurring. More than 15 million new STIs occur every year in the United States and one-fourth of those new infections occur in teenagers.<sup>4</sup> In California more than 30,000 teens were diagnosed with chlamydia in 2000 with rates among African-American teens several times higher than rates for Latinos, Asian and Pacific Islanders and Caucasians.<sup>5</sup>

Research has shown that many factors influence the number of teen births among California's various populations, including: socio-economic status of the community or neighborhood in which a young person is raised; cultural norms that dictate behavior patterns, moral codes and values; lack of basic knowledge of reproduction and contraception; and level of access to information and services, specifically health care services.

Detrimental effects on the teen mother's future, such as a lack of educational and vocational opportunities, and children being raised by teen parents with poor parenting skills and little money, were cited as reasons why the problem is serious.

## KEY FINDINGS OVERALL

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEEN PREGNANCY ISSUE

Californians are worried about teen pregnancy, but are even more worried about other problems facing teens, such as drug and alcohol abuse and lack of parental support. When asked specifically about the seriousness of the teen pregnancy problem, over half the population considered it very serious; African-Americans and Latinos are the most concerned. Detrimental effects on the teen mother's future, such as a lack of educational and vocational opportunities, and children being raised by teen parents with poor parenting skills and little money, were cited as reasons why the problem is serious.

<sup>1</sup> California Department of Health Services, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Weitz, T., Harper, C., Shen, E., Acebo, R., Mohllajee, A.P., & Milliken, N. "Teen Pregnancy among API Communities: The Importance of Understanding Subpopulations."

<sup>4</sup> Sacramento Bee, December 16, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Health Services, 2002: "STD in California 2000".

## ATTITUDES AND NORMS

Among parents surveyed, teen pregnancy prevention is a high priority compared to other family needs. In addition, nearly everyone surveyed acknowledged the negative effect on impacted families. However, respondents are divided regarding its effect on their community. Most Californians do not see teen pregnancy as primarily a societal problem. They are more inclined to see it as an individual or family problem. This is especially true of Latinos and Filipinos. Also, teen pregnancy is acceptable to over half of the respondents, as long as the teens are married. This is especially true for Filipinos and Vietnamese.

## COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Californians overwhelmingly support offering sex education in public schools, beginning in elementary school. Eighty-five percent of all California adults and 84 percent of Latino adults strongly favor comprehensive sexuality education for high school students. This mirrors the findings of many other studies, including the Field Poll commissioned by the Get Real campaign in 1999. That poll showed that 84 percent of California adults believe specific instruction should be provided to young people about how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, while 88 percent supported teaching sex education in elementary, middle and high school.

## ADULT-CHILD COMMUNICATION

Most adults surveyed agreed that parental conversations/discussions about sex would help teens prevent pregnancy, but just over half of African-American and Caucasian parents and mentors say that they feel comfortable talking with teens about sex and birth control. The majority of Vietnamese report that they are not very comfortable with this type of discussion. Less than half of Filipino and Latino parents feel comfortable talking to teens about sex and pregnancy prevention, citing their

lack of knowledge and their discomfort with having the conversation. Filipino parents report the greatest discomfort, with just 38 percent saying parents should talk to their kids about sex.

## SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

Across ethnicities, parents are considered the most important source of influence on teens' attitudes and behaviors. Popular figures, other adults that know and care about teens, and health professionals are also considered very influential. Adults responded that religious leaders are not highly ranked as influential figures among most populations; however, African-Americans and Filipinos are more likely to find them very influential than other populations. Community groups and elected officials were viewed as having little influence.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SERVICES

Eighty percent of the respondents think it is easy to find information about pregnancy prevention for both adults and teens; however, Filipinos, Latinos and Vietnamese are much more likely to consider it difficult. Seventy percent of those surveyed think it is easy for teens to access birth control; however, there is less support among all groups for providing free contraceptives to sexually active teens.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Almost all respondents say that they should express their opinions to their elected officials. In terms of actual practices, however, only about one-third of Californians at least occasionally express their opinions to elected officials. Vietnamese, Latino and Filipino respondents were significantly less likely to do so than respondents generally.



Most Californians do not see teen pregnancy as primarily a societal problem. They are more inclined to see it as an individual or family problem.

## EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

There is strong support among adults for both the provision of emergency contraception (EC) to adult women and the provision of information about EC to teens, with 63 percent of those interviewed stating that information about EC should be made available to teens. Filipinos and Vietnamese lend the least support to this contraceptive option.

*(Note: Emergency contraception (EC) will prevent pregnancy if taken within a few days of unprotected sex. EC is a form of high-dose birth control pills that is taken orally. EC does not interrupt a pregnancy already in progress. The sooner it is used, the more effective it is.)*

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/LIFE OPTIONS

Nearly all of the respondents agreed that parental involvement and communication is key in combating the problem of teen pregnancy. Nearly 80 percent of African-American respondents believe that providing teens more employment, educational and recreational opportunities will be the most effective solution, with many of the other ethnic groups focusing on a combination of parental communication and increased opportunities for young people as the best solutions.



## KEY FINDINGS BY ETHNIC POPULATION

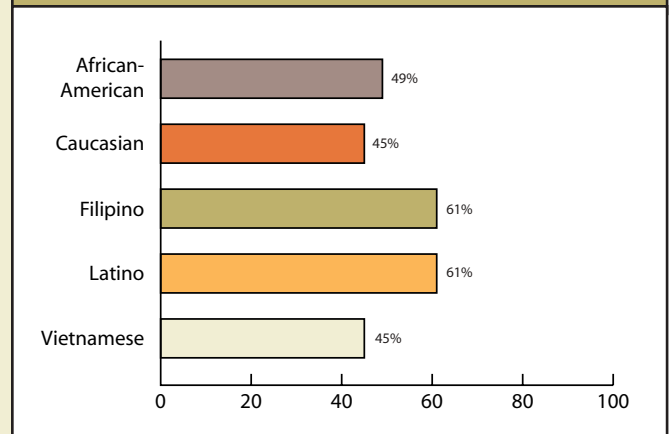
### AFRICAN-AMERICAN

- 71 percent of African-Americans surveyed view teen pregnancy as a very serious problem.
- 49 percent of respondents do not view teen pregnancy as a societal problem, but rather as an individual or family problem.
- 52 percent surveyed thought teen birth rates have increased.
- 60 percent believe that parents of teens are the most effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers.
- 80 percent were identified as feeling comfortable talking to their teenage daughter about sex and birth control, while 86 percent feel comfortable talking about those issues with their teenage sons.
- 88 percent believe that helping their teen to prevent teen pregnancy was very important compared to other current issues parents of teenagers have to deal with.
- 96 percent indicated strong support for employment, educational and recreational opportunities as effective means to help prevent teen pregnancies.
- Nearly 80 percent consider it easy for adults and teens to access information on pregnancy prevention.
- 82 percent believe it is very or somewhat effective to make available free contraceptives to sexually active teenagers.
- 85 percent surveyed support providing comprehensive sexuality education in public schools and 44 percent believe it should begin in the 6th or 7th grade.
- 48 percent believe teen pregnancy is acceptable as long as the teens are married.

### CAUCASIAN

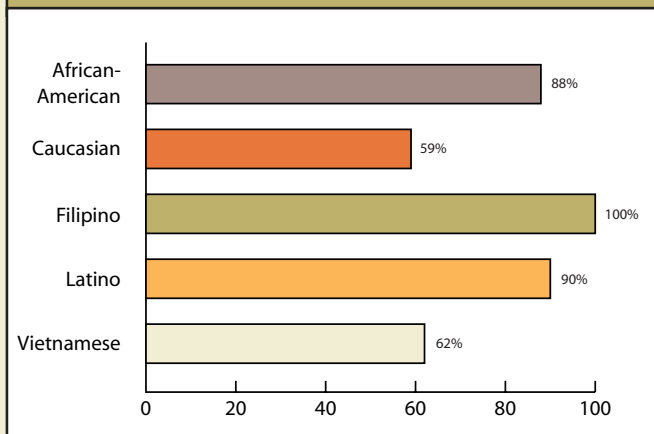
- Only 43 percent of Caucasians interviewed view teen pregnancy as a very serious problem.
- 45 percent of respondents do not view teen pregnancy as a societal problem, but rather as an individual or a family problem.
- 39 percent surveyed thought teen birth rates have increased.

Percentage of respondents who feel teen pregnancy is an individual/family problem



- 65 percent believe that parents are the most effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers.
- 65 percent were identified as feeling comfortable talking to their teenage daughter about sex and birth control, while 72 percent feel comfortable talking about those issues with their teenage sons.
- 59 percent believe that helping their teen to prevent teen pregnancy was very important compared to other current issues parents of teenagers have to deal with.
- 90 percent indicated strong support for employment, educational and recreational opportunities as effective means to help prevent teen pregnancies.
- 86 percent consider it easy for adults and teens to access information on pregnancy prevention.
- 80 percent believe it is very or somewhat effective to make available free contraceptives to sexually active teenagers.
- 87 percent surveyed support providing comprehensive sexuality education in public schools and 44 percent believe it should begin in the 5th or 6th grade.
- 56 percent believe teen pregnancy is acceptable as long as the teens are married.

Percentage of respondents who believe that helping their teen prevent pregnancy is very important compared to other issues.



### FILIPINO

- 50 percent of Filipino respondents consider teen pregnancy to be a very serious problem.
- 61 percent surveyed do not view teen pregnancy as a societal problem, but rather as an individual or family problem.
- 44 percent surveyed thought teen birth rates have increased.
- 80 percent believe that parents of teens are the most effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers.
- Nearly 40 percent were identified as feeling comfortable talking to their teenage daughter about sex and birth control, while 56 percent feel comfortable talking about those issues with their teenage sons.
- 100 percent believe that helping their teen to prevent teen pregnancy was very important compared to other current issues parents of teenagers have to deal with.
- 94 percent believe that providing teens more employment, educational and recreational opportunities is the most effective solution to the problem.
- 59 percent consider it easy for adults and teens to access information on pregnancy prevention.
- 77 percent believe it would be very or somewhat effective to provide free contraceptives to sexually active teenagers.

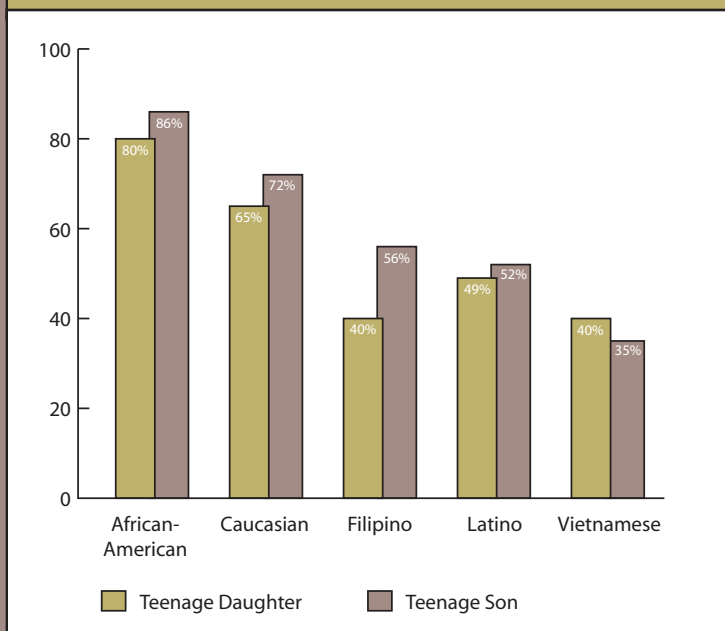
- 82 percent surveyed support providing comprehensive sexuality education in public schools and 44 percent believe it should begin in the 6th or 7th grade.
- More than 60 percent believe teen pregnancy is acceptable as long as the teens are married.

### LATINO

- 64 percent of Latinos surveyed view teen pregnancy as a very serious problem.
- 61 percent believe teen pregnancy is mostly an individual or family concern, while 26 percent believe it is an important problem for society to solve.
- 65 percent believe that birth rates in California have increased and 22 percent believed rates had remained the same.
- 67 percent believe that parents of teens are the most effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers.
- Nearly 49 percent were identified as feeling comfortable talking to their teenage daughter about sex and birth control, while 52 percent feel comfortable talking about those issues with their teenage sons.
- 90 percent believe that helping their teen to prevent teen pregnancy was very important compared to other current issues parents of teenagers have to deal with.
- 94 percent believe that providing teens more employment, educational and recreational opportunities is the most effective solution to the problem.
- 70 percent consider it easy for adults and teens to access information on pregnancy prevention.
- 86 percent believe it is very or somewhat effective to make available free contraceptives to sexually active teenagers.
- 84 percent surveyed support providing comprehensive sexuality education in public schools and 40 percent believe it should begin in the 5th or 6th grade.
- 50 percent believe teen pregnancy is acceptable as long as the teens are married.



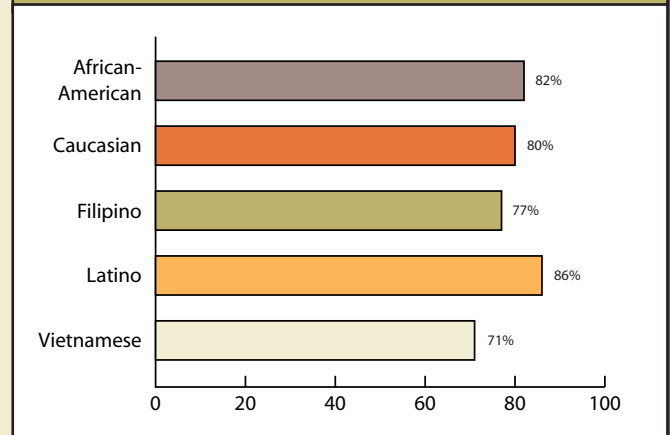
Percentage of respondents comfortable talking to their daughters and/or sons



## VIETNAMESE

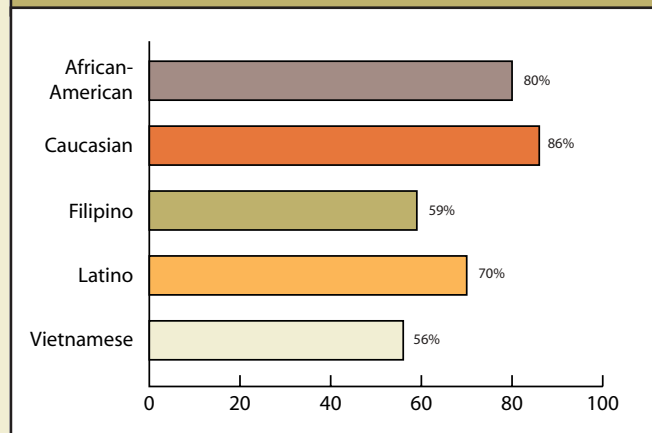
- 55 percent of Vietnamese surveyed believe that teen pregnancy is a very serious problem in California today.
- Of all ethnic groups surveyed, Vietnamese respondents were most likely to believe that teen pregnancy is a societal problem, with only 45 percent responding that they believed it is an individual or family problem.
- 65 percent believe that birth rates in California have increased and 22 percent believed rates had remained the same.
- 78 percent believe that parents of teens are the most effective in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of teenagers.
- Nearly 40 percent were identified as feeling comfortable talking to their teenage daughter about sex and birth control, while 35 percent feel comfortable talking about those issues with their teenage sons.
- 62 percent believe that helping their teen to prevent teen pregnancy was very important compared to other current issues parents of teenagers have to deal with.
- 93 percent believe that providing teens with more employment, educational and recreational opportunities are the most effective ways to prevent teen pregnancy.

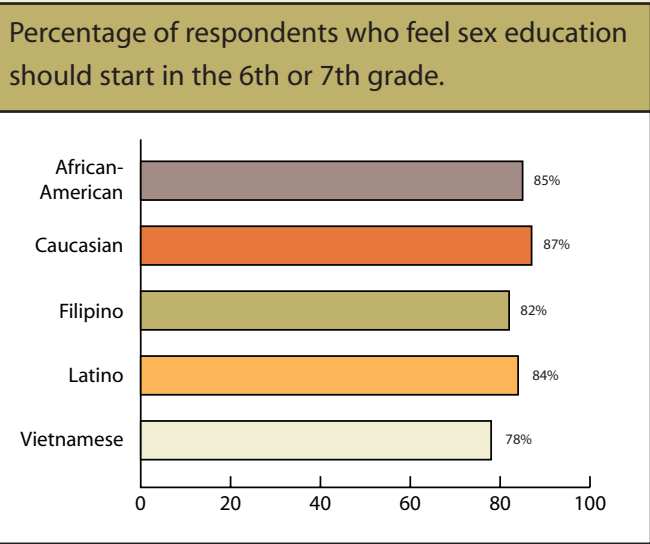
Percentage of respondents who feel it is important to make contraceptives available.



- 56 percent believe it is easy for adults and teens to access information on pregnancy prevention.
- 71 percent believe it is very or somewhat effective to make available free contraceptives to sexually active teenagers.
- 78 percent support school-based sexuality education, but don't believe it should begin until the 8th grade.
- More than 50 percent believe teen pregnancy is acceptable as long as the teens are married.

Percentage of respondents who feel information is accessible.





## POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

As California continues to grow and the population becomes even more diverse, it is important to take cultural and ethnic backgrounds into consideration when creating, supporting or implementing teen pregnancy prevention efforts.

It is simply not enough to take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to teen pregnancy prevention. Programs and outreach must be designed for the populations they serve. Funding must be allocated by not only geographic and statistical considerations such as total population numbers and birth rates within the population, but by cultural and ethnic ones as well.

Some of the most effective solutions recommended by respondents included:

- Increased parental involvement;
- Encouragement of parental communication about sex and birth control;
- Creation of more employment, educational and recreational opportunities for teenagers;
- Increased involvement of ethnic professionals and community groups in communicating about the issue with parents and teens;
- Provision of greater access to sex education programs for teens and adults; and
- Increased availability of free contraceptives for sexually active teens.

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](http://www.letsgetreal.org)



**GET REAL!**  
ABOUT TEEN PREGNANCY

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