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Cultural Assumptions Often Misleading

Statewide Survey Examining California's Diverse Populations' Opinions About Teen Pregnancy

(Sacramento – August 8, 2006) California's ethnically diverse populations have as many similarities as they do differences in their attitudes and opinions about teen sexuality and pregnancy prevention, according to a public opinion poll conducted by the Field Research Corporation.

The *Get Real About Teen Pregnancy* public education campaign today released the results of a statewide telephone survey of more than 1,300 adults in California, with equal representation among African American, Caucasian, Filipino, Hispanic and Vietnamese respondents. These ethnic groups were chosen based on their percentage of the overall population and rates of teen births among each population. This survey was designed to identify the impact that cultural identity may have on teenage pregnancy prevention in an effort to help develop or reinforce successful prevention strategies that are respectful of cultural attitudes. The survey also tested a few assumptions about various ethnic groups' attitudes and opinions about teenage pregnancy prevention, finding that some stereotypical assumptions were incorrect.

Disparity of teen birth rates among ethnic groups makes this issue compelling. For example, birth rates to Latino and African American teens are disproportionately higher than births to Caucasian teens. And teen births among some Asian sub-populations are higher than any other ethnic group.

“The cultural stereotypes that are often applied to ethnic groups and adolescent health and reproductive services can do more harm than good,” said Christi Black, Public Education Director for *Get Real*. “For example, contrary to popular opinion, most Hispanic adults support making contraceptives available to sexually active teens; and over half of the Asian/Pacific Islander adults surveyed support providing comprehensive sex education in public schools.”

In 2002 California’s teen birth rate 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 some 52, 966 babies born to teens. The birth rate for Latinos remains the highest among California’s populations with 86.2 births per 1,000 teens. African Americans have the next highest birth rate with 53.3 births per 1,000 teens.

“The data clearly shows that California adults, across all ethnic groups, support the measures that have helped to reduce teen birth rates in this state,” said Larry Bye, Senior Research Associate at Field Research Corporation. “However, teen birth rates are disproportionately high among some ethnic groups, and our survey discovered that the adults in these populations are well aware of the importance of teen pregnancy prevention options.”

Key findings from the study include these similarities in public opinion across ethnic groups:

- Across all ethnicities, parents are considered the most important source of influence on teens’ attitudes and behaviors.
- Nearly all parents acknowledged a higher comfort level talking with their teenage sons about sex and birth control than talking with their teenage daughters, although the same respondents agreed that parental influence is important in helping to prevent teenage pregnancy.
- More than 78 percent of all respondents support providing condoms and sex education to high school students.
- There is support across all groups for providing emergency contraception (EC) to adult women and for providing information about EC to teens.

- Nearly all of the respondents agree that providing teens more employment, educational and recreational opportunities would be an effective means to help prevent teenage pregnancy.

Key findings from the study include these differences in public opinion across ethnic groups:

- Ninety one percent of African American adults view preventing teen pregnancy as very important as compared to other family problems, while just 66 percent of Caucasians feel this way.
- Sixty nine percent of Latino adults report that teen pregnancy is a family concern rather than a societal one, while just 45 percent of Vietnamese adults share this belief.
- Support for offering comprehensive sex education in public schools (teaching abstinence *plus* information about how to prevent pregnancy and disease) varies among ethnic groups. Almost 80 percent of the Caucasian and African American adults strongly support this approach, 74 percent of Hispanic adults strongly support this approach, and 64 percent of Vietnamese adults strongly support this approach.

Field Research Corporation conducted this survey in early 2006 as a follow up to a similar survey conducted in 2002. For more information or to secure a copy of the Survey Findings in Brief, visit www.letsgetreal.org

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