



PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

Summary: Both pregnancy and childbirth rates declined dramatically for African American females during the 1990s. Despite these declines, they remain more likely than their white or Latina counterparts to report having been pregnant. However, black female teens were less likely to report childbirth than Latina teens in 2000.

Authors

Wilhelmina A. Leigh and
Julia L. Andrews

Pregnancy

- The late 1990s was a period of record low pregnancy rates for all teens. Teens were less likely to become pregnant in 1997 than at any time since 1976 (when national data about pregnancy rates first became available). Between 1990 (when peak rates were recorded) and 1997, pregnancy rates for African American teens ages 15 to 19 declined 23 percent, only slightly less than the 26-percent decline in pregnancy rates for white teens.¹
- Despite these declines, African American teens are more likely than others to report having ever been pregnant.²⁻⁵ In 2001, African American high school students were about twice as likely as their white or Hispanic counterparts to indicate that they had been pregnant or that they had gotten someone pregnant. (Figures A and B)
- If a black teen has a first pregnancy by 19, she is nearly twice as likely as a white teen to carry the pregnancy to term and to have a live birth.⁶
- However, not all pregnancies are carried to term. Some are terminated either by abortion or by other forms of fetal loss. In 1997, the pregnancy rate among African American females ages 15 to 19 was 170.4 (per 1,000), and the live birth rate was 88.2. The rate of induced abortions was 62.7 (per 1,000), and the rate of other forms of fetal loss was 16.9. The 1997 pregnancy, live birth, and abortion rates for African American teens were more than double the rates for white teens, although the rates for Hispanic teens (especially for pregnancies and live births) were comparable to the rates among African American teens.¹

The Joint Center gratefully acknowledges the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which supported the research for, and publication of, this fact sheet. We also thank the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and our general support donors for helping to make this publication possible.

Childbirth

- Births to teens ages 15 to 19 traditionally have been more common among African Americans than among all other teens. During the late 20th century, birth rates for black teens were at least double the rates for white teens.⁷ (Figure C)
- After declining from higher rates in the 1970s and early 1980s, births to females ages 15 to 19 as a share of all U.S. births increased during the 1990s. In 1990, teen births were less than 13 percent of all U.S. births; in 1998, teen births were nearly 15 percent of all U.S. births. However, black teen births as a share of all black births declined slightly during the 1990s. Teen births were nearly a quarter of all black births in 1990, declining to 21.5 percent of all black births by 1998.^{8,9}

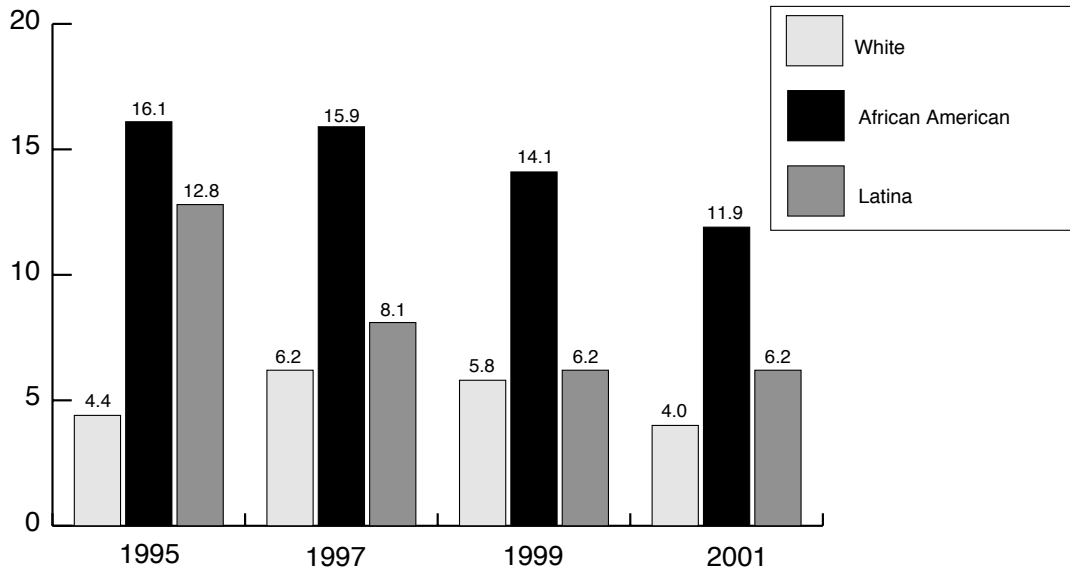
- Also during the late 20th century, the proportion of babies born to unmarried adolescents increased. In 1980, of all births to black teens, 86 percent were to unwed mothers, and of all births to white teens, 33 percent were to unwed mothers. By 1999, most births to all teens occurred outside of marriage (79 percent).^{8, 10-12}
- However, childbirth rates declined dramatically for black teens between 1991 and 2000. The birth rate declined 40 percent among black teens ages 15 to 17 and 24 percent among black teens ages 18 to 19. (Figure D) Rates of decline were comparable (although smaller) for white and Hispanic teens during this period.⁷

References

- 1 Ventura, Stephanie J., W.D. Mosher, Sally C. Curtin, Joyce C. Abma, and Stanley Henshaw. 2001. "Trends in Pregnancy Rates for the United States, 1976-97: An Update," *National Vital Statistics Reports* Vol. 49, No. 4 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics).
- 2 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 1995. 1996. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (CDC Surveillance Summaries)* Vol. 45, No. SS-4 (September 27).
- 3 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 1997. 1998. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (CDC Surveillance Summaries)* Vol. 47, No. SS-3 (August 14).
- 4 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 1999. 2000. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (CDC Surveillance Summaries)* Vol. 49, No. SS-5 (June 9).
- 5 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2001. 2002. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (CDC Surveillance Summaries)* Vol. 51, No. SS-4 (June 28).
- 6 Hogan, Dennis P., Rongjun Sun, and Gretchen T. Cornwell. 2000. "Sexual and Fertility Behaviors of American Females Aged 15-19 Years: 1985, 1990, and 1995," *American Journal of Public Health* Vol. 90, No. 9, pp. 1421-1425.
- 7 Ventura, Stephanie J., T.J. Mathews, and Brady E. Hamilton. 2001. "Births to Teenagers in the United States, 1940-2000," *National Vital Statistics Reports* Vol. 49, No. 10 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics).
- 8 Moore, Kristin A., Margaret C. Simms, and Charles L. Betsey. 1986. *Choice and Circumstance: Racial Differences in Adolescent Sexuality and Fertility* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers).
- 9 United States Census Bureau. 2000. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000* (120th edition) (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office).
- 10 Chilman, Catherine S. 1980. "Social and Psychological Research Concerning Adolescent Childbearing: 1970-1980," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, pp. 793-805.
- 11 Freeman, Ellen W., and Karl Rickels. 1993. *Early Childbearing: Perspectives of Black Adolescents on Pregnancy, Abortion, and Contraception* Vol. 192, Sage Library of Social Research (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications).
- 12 Moore, Kristin A., Jennifer Manlove, Elizabeth Terry-Humen, Stephanie Williams, Angela Romano Papillo, and Juliet Scarpa. 2001. *CTS Facts at a Glance* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc.).

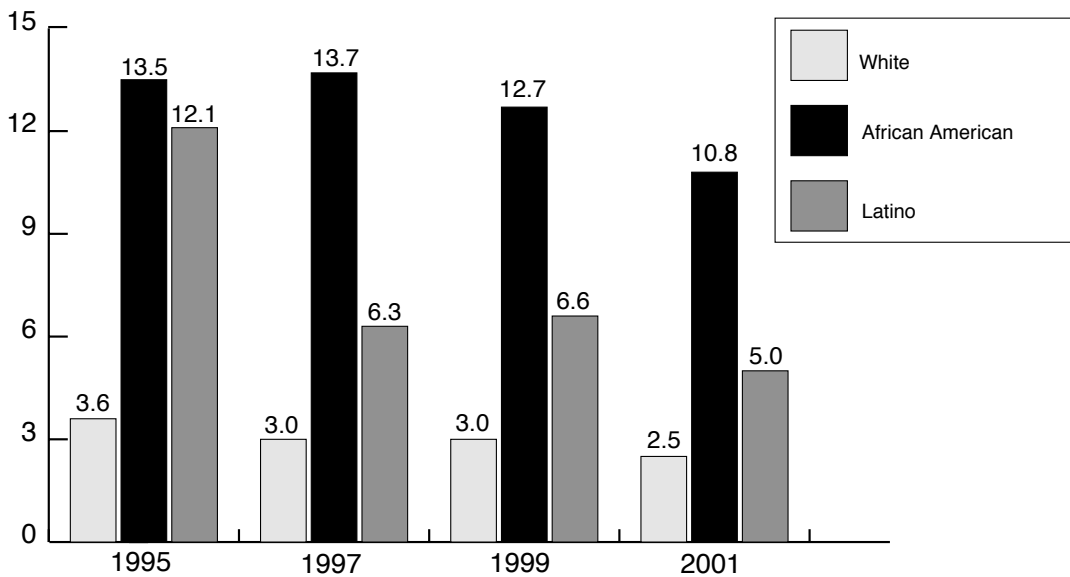
For a full report of these findings, see Wilhelmina A. Leigh and Julia L. Andrews, *The Reproductive Health of African American Adolescents: What We Know and What We Don't Know* (2002). Short issue briefs by the same authors are also available: "Peer Influence on Sexual Behavior: What We Know About African American Teens" and "Family Influence on Sexual Behavior: What We Know About African American Teens." For ordering information, contact the Joint Center's Office of Communications and Marketing.

Figure A. Percent of Female Students (Grades 9-12) Who Have Ever Been Pregnant, by Race/Ethnicity, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001



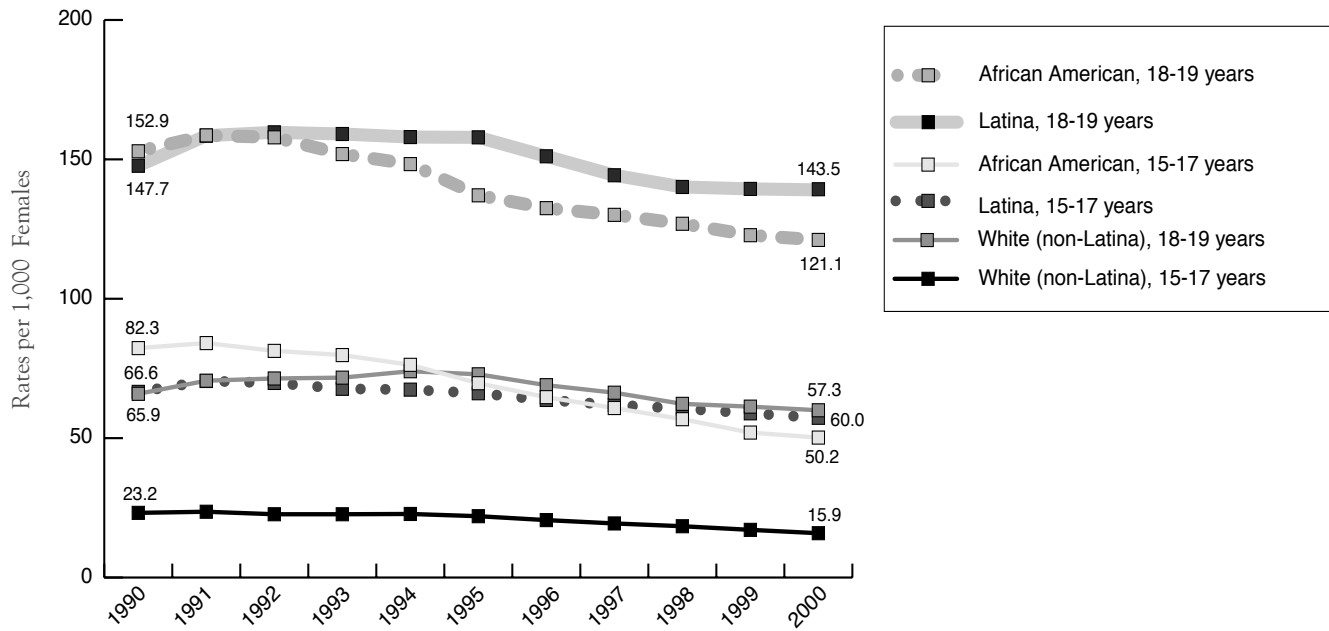
Source: See notes 2 to 5.

Figure B. Percent of Male Students (Grades 9-12) Who Reported Ever Getting Someone Pregnant, by Race/Ethnicity, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001



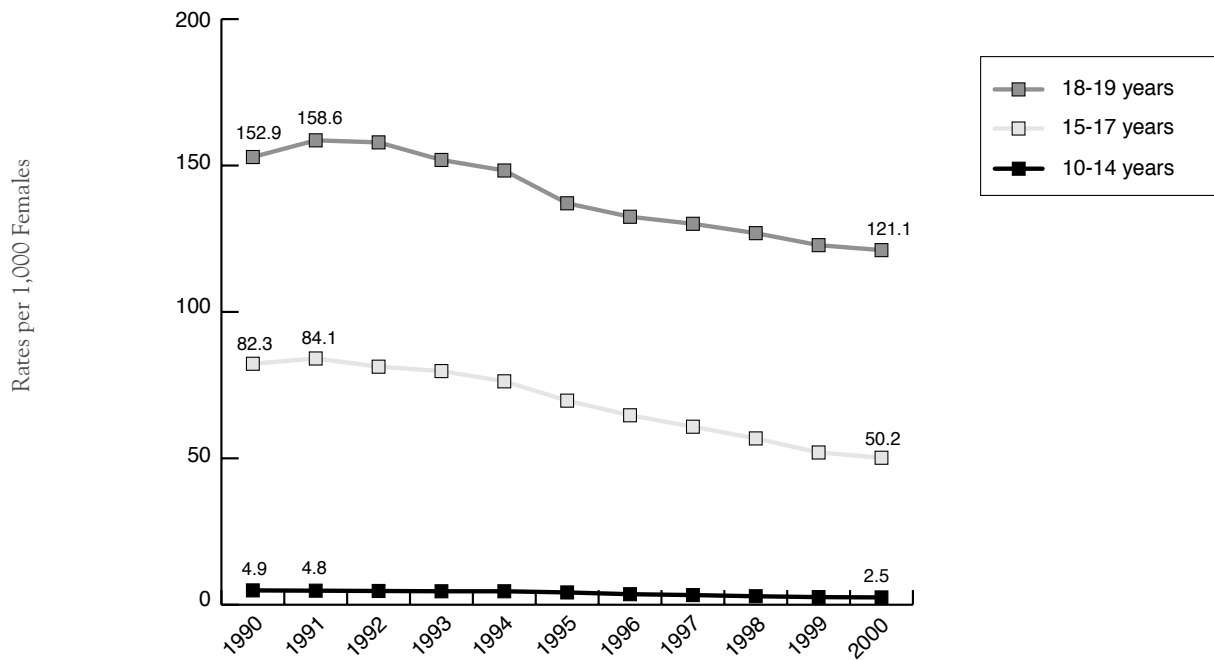
Source: See notes 2 to 5.

Figure C. Birth Rates by Mother's Age and Race/Latino Origin, 1990-2000



Source: See note 7.

Figure D. Birth Rates for African American Adolescents, by Age of Mother, 1990-2000



Source: See note 7.