



ResearchLink

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Preventing Latina Teen Pregnancy: Challenges and Solutions for Practitioners

Two studies look at Latino teenage pregnancy prevention from a new angle. They focus on the perspective of professionals who work in Latino teen pregnancy programs rather than of the teenagers themselves. Practitioners discuss the importance of differentiating between U.S. mainstream culture and the culture and experiences of Latino youth and their families. They also stress the need for program staff to be culturally sensitive and to include male partners in pregnancy prevention strategies.

Background

The Latino teenage birthrate in the United States is twice that of non-Latino whites. Given that early parenthood may limit the life options of young Latinos and their children, there is a strong need to develop effective interventions. But many health professionals question whether current teen pregnancy prevention programs are useful for Latinos. They say that few of these programs have been developed specifically for Latino populations. Most programs stress U.S. ideals of financial independence, equality between men and women, and education before marriage. Yet



U.S. ideals may conflict with traditional Latino values of family loyalty, large families, and early motherhood; these values often influence a Latino teen's choice to finish school or go to college.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest Latino organization in the United States, recommends five strategies to increase program effectiveness:

- Hire culturally sensitive, nonjudgmental staff
- Focus on education and support career goals
- Be responsive to differences among Latino subgroups
- Involve parents, families, and male partners
- Recognize cultural values regarding roles of men and women



Preventing Latina Teen Pregnancy:

Practitioners' Perspectives on NCLR Strategies:

Do these strategies help program practitioners to prevent teen pregnancy? Researchers interviewed 8 professionals in California who work with Latina teen mothers, their families, and their partners.

These professionals included program administrators, caseworkers, and healthcare providers, about half of whom were women and about half Latino. According to the interviews, most practitioners tried to apply the NCLR strategies. But they faced many challenges in doing so. The most difficult issues centered around cultural values and program goals. The findings that follow are among the most helpful ways to deal with these challenges.

Must program staff be culturally the same—or just culturally aware?

Practitioners said that Latino families tend to welcome Latino and bicultural staff members more readily than non-Latino staff. When staff members share the same ethnic background, Latino youth often view them as positive role models. Also, Latino staff may better understand how the teens' parents grew up; they can help family members develop trust in the program. At the same time, practitioners said that having non-Latino program staff can benefit Latino families, too. Some families may want to avoid members of their community when dealing with pregnancy concerns; they may prefer to work with an outsider. Ultimately, families are more likely to respond and listen to advice from staff that has cultural sensitivity skills, whether or not the staff is culturally the same.

Should teen mothers stay home with their children or finish school?

According to practitioners, Latinas face many challenges in pursuit of their educational goals. Barriers include transportation problems, low income, lack of childcare, and little knowledge about higher education. Latina young women who want further education may face disapproval by parents, especially those with little schooling. They may get pressure from boyfriends who worry that their girlfriends' schoolwork may get in the way of the relationship. Also, some Latinas



Important Cultural Sensitivity Skills for Practitioners:

- The ability to understand and speak Spanish
- Knowledge of important Latino cultural values, with a focus on the strengths of Latino youth and families
- A nonjudgmental attitude and openness to the ideas and decisions of teenagers
- A focus on providing options and resources
- The ability to connect to and care for young people, and to communicate with their families

believe that motherhood is one of the few meaningful roles available to them as adults.

Practitioners talked about the need to balance efforts to promote education and career goals with sensitivity to the daily realities of Latino youth. To achieve this balance, they tried to:

- Help Latino teens build self-esteem
- Present them with different career opportunities
- Coach them through the college application process
- Connect them to adult mentors through contact with Latino speakers or other role models

Can prevention programs treat the issues of all Latino subgroups in the same way?

Practitioners reported that the degree to which families have acculturated to U.S. society affects how they respond to prevention programs. Recent immigrants are less likely to adopt U.S. values. Country of origin and social class also influence whether parents are supportive of a program's goals. Parent education matters as well: Parents with more education are likely to encourage their daughters to continue in school. To help clients get the right services and programs, practitioners must:

- Respect their clients' need for confidentiality
- Assure them that they will not contact the Immigration and Naturalization Service

Challenges and Solutions for Practitioners

- Recognize the differences in subgroups around English language ability, comfort level with school officials, and work demands

Without family and partner support, can teen moms finish school and pursue careers?

Practitioners said that, if young mothers want to explore other options besides staying home, they need their parents' help. To increase this support, program staff spent time developing relationships with parents. They tried to:

- Find ways to talk to them effectively
- Build trust
- Show respect for the parents' role in their teens' lives



Ways to Involve Male Partners

To include the male partners in the pregnancy choices of Latina teens is often hard. First, most reproductive health programs are geared toward women, so male partners may feel left out. Also, adult male partners often stay invisible to avoid legal consequences; many fear arrest for having intercourse with a minor. Efforts to involve men include:

- Job training and help finding employment
- All-male support groups
- Case management that includes personal contacts and home visits

Do program goals honor their clients' views of male and female roles?

Practitioners discussed the emphasis in U.S. culture on values such as self-reliance and economic independence. But in Latino culture, they pointed out, the homemaker is interdependent within her family. Her role in the family may be more important than being able to support herself. To address these differences, program staff focused on how gender roles influence young women's education. They tried to:

- Avoid judging Latino parents who value marriage of their daughters to reliable older men

- Encourage young women to identify and pursue goals, as well as honor their values around family
- Respect traditional attitudes about gender roles held by young men and women

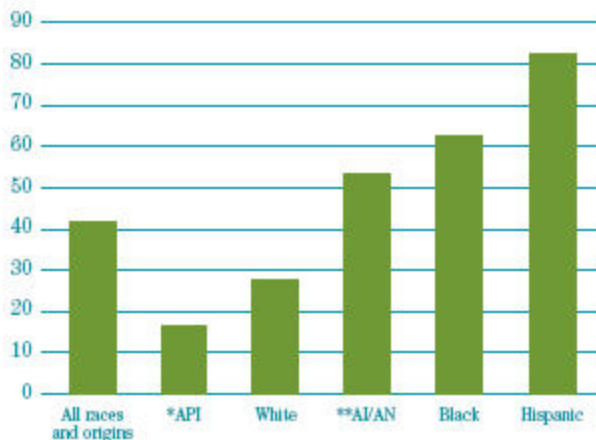


Questions for Reflection

Policymakers and practitioners need to agree on the purpose of teen pregnancy prevention programs. Thinking about the following questions can help reach consensus. To what extent:

- Is the purpose of their programs to promote good health and well-being among participants?
- Is the goal of programs to encourage and teach the most common U.S. cultural values?
- Do we trust in the abilities of young people to make the best choices for themselves and their futures?

BIRTH RATES PER 1,000 WOMEN AGES 15-19 YEARS, BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN: U.S., 2006 (preliminary data)

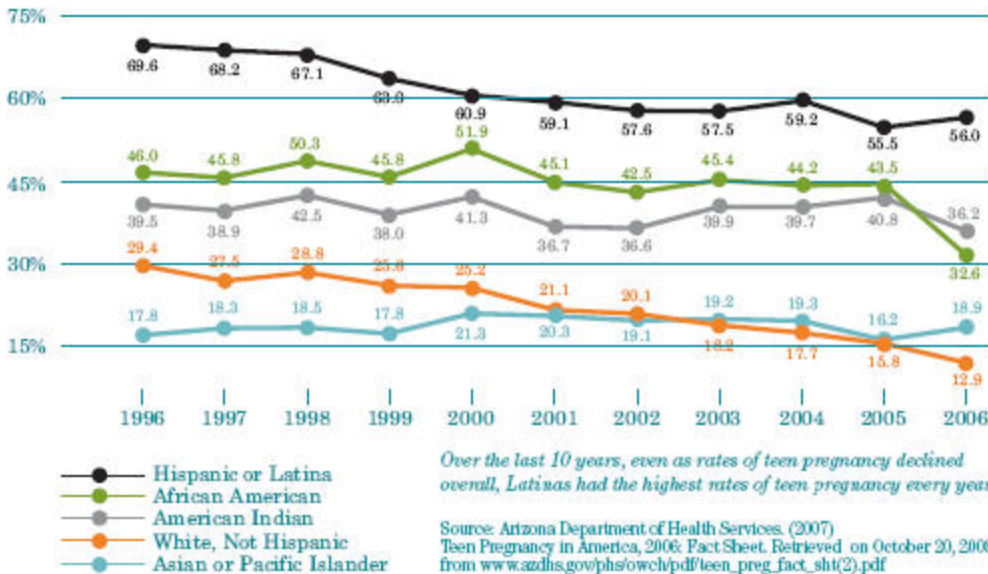


*API: Asian/Pacific Islander

**AI/AN: American Indian/Alaska Native

Source: Hamilton BE, Martin JA, Ventura SJ. Births: preliminary data for 2006. Table 3. *National Vital Statistics Reports* 2007;36(7).

TEENAGE PREGNANCY RATE BY RACE/ETHNICITY ARIZONA 1996-2006



This research brief summarizes two reports:

- (1) Russell, S. T., Lee, F. C. H., & Latina/o Teen Pregnancy Prevention Workgroup. (2004). Practitioners' perspectives on effective practices for Latina/o teenage pregnancy prevention. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 36, 142-149.
- (2) Wilkinson-Lee, A. M., Russell, S. T., Lee, F. C. H., & the Latina/o Teen Pregnancy Prevention Workgroup. (2006). Practitioners' perspectives on cultural sensitive in Latina/o teen pregnancy prevention. *Family Relations*, 55, 376-389.

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Frances
McClelland Institute
Children, Youth, and Families

P.O. Box 210033 • Tucson, AZ 85721-0033

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