

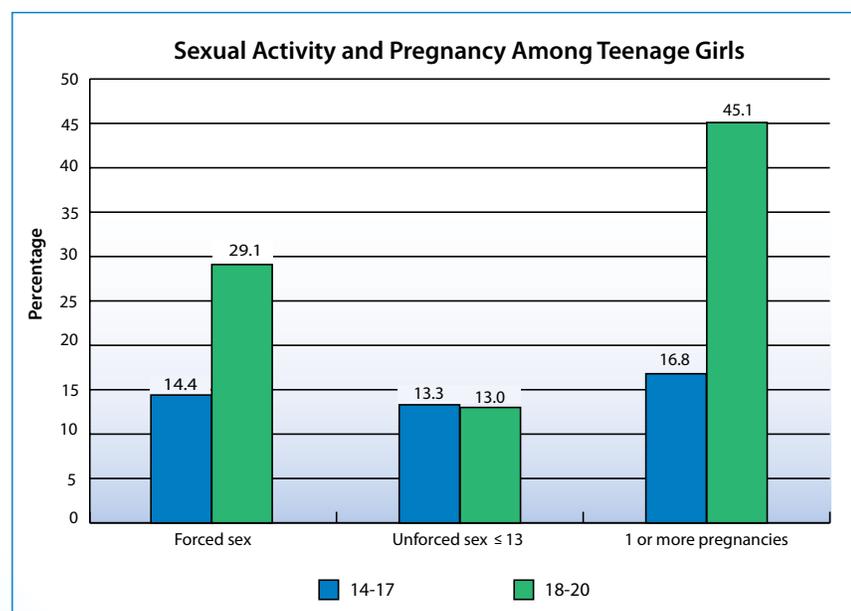
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## NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING

# Child Well-Being Spotlight

## Teenage Girls in the Child Welfare System Report High Rates of Risky Sexual Activity and Pregnancy

Risky sexual behaviors such as early age of sexual initiation, sex with multiple partners, and unprotected sex pose a serious threat to adolescents' well-being, increasing the risk of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Teen childbearing is associated with numerous negative consequences for both mothers and their children.<sup>1,2</sup> Adolescents involved with



child welfare services are at especially high risk of harmful sexual behaviors and negative outcomes. In addition, forced sex is prevalent for this population. According to the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being,<sup>3</sup> 3 years after the index report of maltreatment, almost a third of girls aged 18 to 20 had experienced forced sex,<sup>4</sup> one in eight had unforced sex at age 13 or younger, and almost half had a pregnancy.<sup>5</sup> These risks are more than double those observed in the general population of teenage girls.<sup>6</sup> Sexual risk behaviors and forced sex were associated with the following factors: poverty, not living with both biological parents, forced first sex, caregiver alcohol or drug abuse, delinquent behavior, having run away, substance use, low levels of religiosity, affiliation with deviant peers, and low levels of school engagement. Among girls aged 18 to 20

who reported having had sex in the past year, for last sexual intercourse 32.6% reported that they did not use contraception, 25.8% reported use of condoms alone, 6.9% reported use of withdrawal, and 34.7% reported use of hormonal or other methods (alone or with condoms). Among the general population of girls aged 15 to 19 who had sex in the previous 3 months (2006-2008), 16.5% did not use any contraceptive method.<sup>7</sup> Nearly twice as many girls (32.6%) in the child welfare system did not use any contraceptive method, indicating a need for education and support to decrease risky sexual activity among teenage girls.

For more information on the well-being of children and their caregivers in the child welfare system, visit:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/national-survey-of-child-and-adolescent-well-being-nscaw-1>.

<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, S. D. (2008). *Kids having kids: Economic costs and social consequences of teen pregnancy*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

<sup>2</sup> Pogarsky, G., Thornberry, T. P., & Lizotte, A. J. (2006). Developmental outcomes for children of young mothers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68(2), 332-344.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being II (NSCAW II). Baseline data collection began in 2008-2009. The study includes 5,872 children ranging from birth to 17.5 years old at the time of sampling. This report focuses on the subset of 417 teenage girls who were 11 to 17 years old at baseline, and 14 to 20 years old at the 36-month followup. Information is based on baseline, 18-month, and 36-month followup.

<sup>4</sup> Youth were asked at each wave "Have you ever had sex or sexual intercourse? By sex or sexual intercourse, we mean where a male puts his penis into a female's vagina" (Yes/No). If the answer was yes, then youth were asked if the first time they had sex was forced or not; age the first time they had sex; and if they had ever had sex that they wanted to happen and their age at that time.

<sup>5</sup> For pregnancy, youth were asked: "How many times have you ever been pregnant?" Responses were from 0 (I have never gotten pregnant) to 4 = (four or more times).

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013b). *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System: Selected 2011 national health risk behaviors and health outcomes by sex*.

<sup>7</sup> Abma, J. C., Martinez, G. M., & Copen, C. E. (2010). Teenagers in the United States: Sexual activity, contraceptive use, and childbearing, *National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2008. Vital Health Statistics*, 23(30). Washington, DC: National Center for Health Statistics.

Source: The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being is a nationally representative sample of children reported to child protective services sponsored by the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF). The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews with caseworkers, children, caregivers, and teachers.

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