Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries: Can More Progress Be Made?

The Alan Guttmacher Institute
120 Wall St., NY, NY 10005
www.guttmacher.org


% Births to Unmarried Teens
1950 2000
13% 79%
Teenage birthrates declined less steeply in the United States than in other developed countries between 1970 and 2000.

U.S. teenagers have higher pregnancy, birth and abortion rates than adolescents in other developed countries.

Because U.S. teenagers are much more likely to become pregnant unintentionally than adolescents in other developed countries, they also have a higher abortion rate than their peers in other countries.
Most teenage births are to unmarried teenagers, but many teenage mothers in Sweden and France are in cohabiting unions.

![Bar chart showing distribution of births to women 15-19 by marital status in Sweden, France, Great Britain, and the United States.]

Note: Data are for mid-1990s.

Differences in levels of teenage sexual activity across developed countries are small.

![Bar chart showing percentage of women 20-24 who had sex in their teenage years by age in Sweden, France, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States.]

Note: Data are for mid-1990s.

Half of young women in all study countries begin intercourse between ages 17 and 18.

![Bar chart showing age by which half of women aged 20-24 had intercourse in Sweden, France, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States.]

Note: Data are for mid-1990s.
Teenagers in the United States who had sex in the last year are more likely than those in other developed countries to have had two or more partners.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of 18-19-year-olds who had two or more partners in different countries, with the United States having the highest percentage.]

Note: Data for mid-1990s. 
*Source: Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries, 2001.*

U.S. teenagers are less likely to use a contraceptive method than teenagers in other developed countries.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of women 15-19 who used a method at last intercourse in different countries, with Sweden having the highest percentage.]

Note: Data for early to mid-1990s. 
*Source: Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries, 2001.*

U.S. teenagers are less likely to use a contraceptive method and to use a hormonal method than teenagers in other developed countries.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of women 15-19 who used a method at last intercourse and the percentage using a hormonal method in different countries, with Sweden having the highest percentage.]

Note: Data for early to mid-1990s. 
*Source: Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries, 2001.*
Summary

• Higher teenage pregnancy, birth and abortion rates in the United States compared with the other countries reflect:
  – Less contraceptive use;
  – Less use of hormonal methods;
  – And, probably, less effective method use.

AGI
Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries, 2001.

Summary

• Higher teenage STD rates in the United States compared with the other countries reflect:
  – More sexual partners;
  – Higher prevalence of infection;
  – And, probably, less condom use.

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Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries, 2001.

Section 2: Societal Influences on Teenagers' Sexual and Reproductive Behavior
Social and economic well-being and equality are linked to lower teenage pregnancy rates and birthrates.

- In all study countries, youth growing up in conditions of social, familial and economic disadvantage are most likely to have a child during their teenage years.
- U.S. teenagers are more likely than those in the other countries to grow up in disadvantaged circumstances, and those who do are more likely to have a child during their teenage years.
- At all socioeconomic levels, however, U.S. teenagers have lower levels of contraceptive use and higher levels of childbearing than their peers in the other study countries.

Strong and widespread governmental support for young people’s transition to adulthood, and for parents, may contribute to low teenage birthrates.

- Education and employment assistance help young people become established as adults.
- Support for working parents and families signifies the high value of children and parenting, and gives youth the incentive to delay childbearing.

Positive attitudes about sexuality and clear expectations for behavior in sexual relationships contribute to responsible teenage behavior (1).

- Countries other than the United States have greater openness and more supportive attitudes about sexuality.
- There is a strong consensus in countries other than the United States that childbearing belongs in adulthood.
- Countries other than the United States give clearer and more consistent messages about appropriate sexual behavior.
Positive attitudes about sexuality and clear expectations for behavior in sexual relationships contribute to responsible teenage behavior (2).

- Comprehensive sexuality education, not abstinence promotion, is emphasized in countries with lower teenage pregnancy levels.
- Media is used less in the United States than elsewhere to promote positive sexual behavior.
  - Government media campaigns in the other countries promote condom use, contraceptive use and awareness of where to get methods.
  - Media campaigns in other countries offer more positive views of sexually active teenagers as worthwhile, responsible people.

Easy access to contraceptives and other reproductive health services contributes to better contraceptive use and lower teenage pregnancy and STD rates (1)

- Only in the United States do substantial proportions of adolescents lack health insurance and therefore have poor access to health care.
- Contraceptive services and other reproductive health care are generally more integrated into regular medical care in countries other than the United States.
- U.S. teenagers have greater difficulty obtaining contraceptive services than do adolescents in the other study countries.

Easy access to contraceptives and other reproductive health services contributes to better contraceptive use and lower teenage pregnancy and STD rates (2)

- Types of service provision vary across and within countries.
- Easy access means adolescents
  - Know where to obtain information and services,
  - Can reach a provider easily,
  - Are assured of receiving confidential, nonjudgmental care, and
  - Can obtain services and contraceptive supplies at little or no cost.