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California Department of Health Services, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Branch

Unintended Pregnancy Among Women Giving Birth

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Unintended Pregnancy Among Women Giving Birth, 2002

Some studies suggest that whether or not a woman intends to get pregnant around the time she conceives has consequences for her health behaviors and ultimately for her and her baby's health.

In this survey of women who gave birth in California, we define "unintended pregnancies" as those pregnancies in which women who gave birth had wanted to become pregnant later, never wanted to become pregnant, or were unsure of what they wanted. It is important to keep in mind that this report is about unintended pregnancy among women who actually gave birth, not among all women.

Rates of unintended pregnancy among all women are even higher than those reported here for women who gave birth.

The California Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA) is a collaborative project of the California Department of Health Services, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Branch and researchers in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. Modeled on CDC's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), MIHA is an annual, statewide, representative survey of women who recently gave birth, randomly sampled from birth certificate data. Self-administered surveys in English and Spanish are mailed to women 10 to 14 weeks postpartum, with telephone follow-up to non-respondents. Response rates for MIHA ranged from 70% - 72% during 1999-2002; approximately 3,500 mothers complete the survey each year. Completed surveys are linked with birth certificate data. Researchers do not have access to personal identifiers. The majority of this report focuses on data from 2002. However, for some analyses, data from 1999-2002 were examined. For more information about MIHA, please see http://www.mch.dhs.ca.gov/epidemiology/

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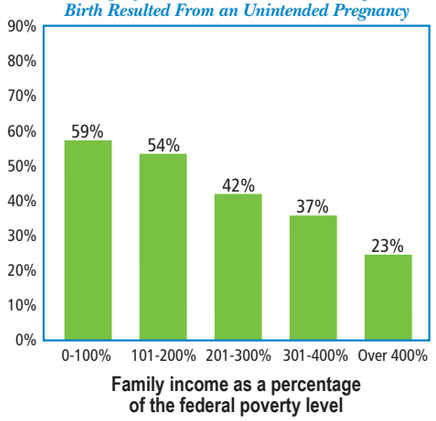
Approximately 46 percent of California women who had a live birth in 2002 reported that their pregnancies were unintended (these women got pregnant sooner than they wanted, had not wanted to get pregnant then or in the future, or weren't sure what they wanted). It has been estimated that in 1995, 31 percent of births in the United States resulted from unintended pregnancies.[1]

Family Income

The rate of unintended pregnancy among women who gave birth was higher for women with lower income. The percentage of births that were unintended was more than double for the poorest women, compared to women with family income levels above 400% of poverty.

Percentage of Women in Each Income Group Whose Birth Resulted From an Unintended Pregnancy



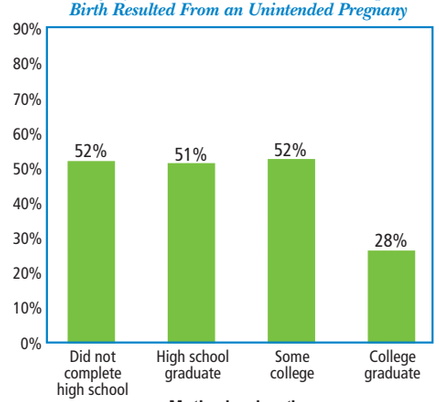
[1] *Stanley K. Henshaw. 1998. "Unintended Pregnancy in the United States." Family Planning Perspectives, 30(1):24-29 & 46.*

[2] *Multivariate analyses were conducted with data from 1999-2002, adjusting for a wide array of factors.*

Mother's Education

Mothers who had not completed college were nearly twice as likely to have had an unintended pregnancy as women with college degrees.

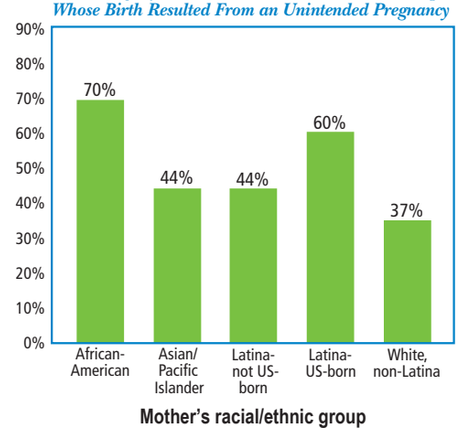
Percentage of Women in Each Education Group Whose Birth Resulted From an Unintended Pregnancy



Mother's Racial/Ethnic Group

Rates of unintended pregnancy among women giving birth were very different across racial/ethnic groups. African-American and US-born Latina women reported much higher rates than women of other racial/ethnic groups.

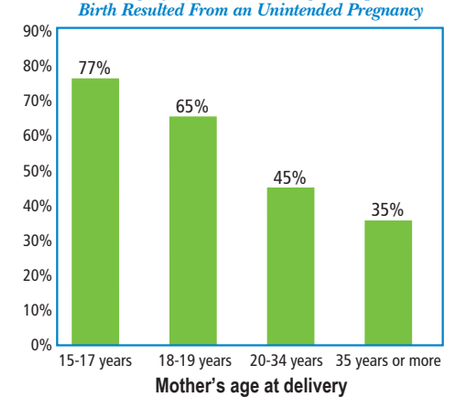
Percentage of Women in Each Racial/Ethnic Group Whose Birth Resulted From an Unintended Pregnancy



Mother's Age at Delivery

Younger women had higher rates of unintended pregnancy than older women. Adolescent women, 15 to 19 years of age, were about twice as likely to have an unintended birth as women who were age 35 or older.

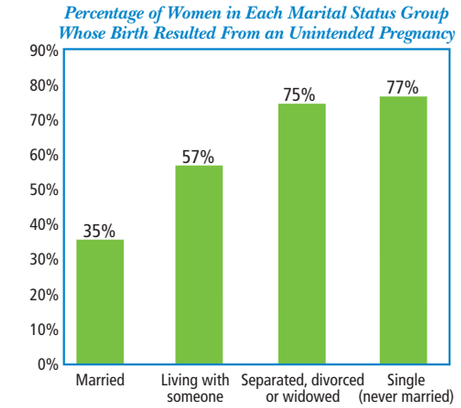
Percentage of Women in Each Age Group Whose Birth Resulted From an Unintended Pregnancy



Mother's Marital Status

Women who were single (either never married, separated, divorced, or widowed) were more likely to have an unintended pregnancy than women who were married or living with a partner. The rate of births resulting from unintended pregnancies for married women was less than half the rate for single women; the rate for women living with a partner was between married and single women.

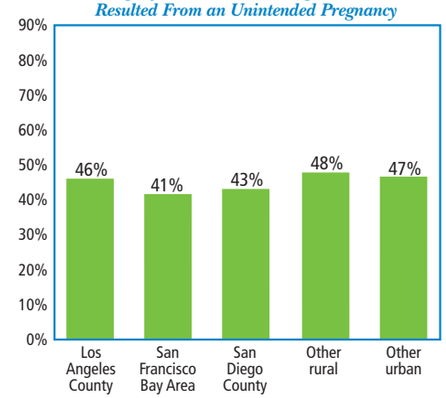
Percentage of Women in Each Marital Status Group Whose Birth Resulted From an Unintended Pregnancy



Region

Women in different regions of California had similar rates of unintended pregnancy.

Percentage of Women in Each Region Whose Birth Resulted From an Unintended Pregnancy



Other Factors

Further analyses of MIHA data[2] suggest that women with no insurance coverage prior to pregnancy were 40% more likely to have had their birth result from an unintended pregnancy than women with coverage before pregnancy, even after adjusting for a wide range of relevant characteristics.

Women with a low sense of control over their lives were also at higher risk of unintended pregnancy. A number of approaches have been tried to increase women's sense of control, particularly in adolescence. These results suggest the potential importance of such efforts with respect to reducing unintended pregnancy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

California's Family PACT Program information for providers: www.familypact.org. Client referral helpline: (800) 952-1054

CDC: www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/unintendedpregnancy/index.htm

The Alan Guttmacher Institute: www.agi-usa.org

Pharmacy Access Partnership: www.pharmacyaccess.org/EmergencyContraception.htm