The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Briefly...

Unplanned Pregnancy Among Unmarried Young Women

Background

The *teen* pregnancy rate in the United States has declined a remarkable 42% over the past two decades.[1] By contrast, the overall rate of *unplanned* pregnancy has remained roughly unchanged over this period. In 2008, there were 6.6 million pregnancies among women age 15-44 and nearly half of these (3.2 million) were unplanned—that is, the women themselves said they either did not want to get pregnant at that time or did not want to get pregnant ever.

These unplanned pregnancies result in more than 1.1 million abortions each year. In addition, women who experience an unplanned pregnancy are less likely to get prenatal care. Children born as a result of an unplanned pregnancy tend to have poorer physical and mental health during childhood, and on measures of behavior and educational success they tend to not do as well as children born as a result of a planned pregnancy.[2] The direct medical costs of unplanned pregnancy to the public sector also total in the billions of dollars.[3]

In 2008, more than half (55%) of all unplanned pregnancies occurred to women in their twenties, while teens accounted for less than 20%. Not surprisingly, the vast majority (70%) of women experiencing unplanned pregnancies were unmarried, including roughly one-third (31%) who were cohabiting.

Overall, 40% of all unintended pregnancies—or 1.3 million pregnancies—occurred to women who were *both* unmarried *and* in their twenties (not shown). This fact sheet describes the prevalence and characteristics of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried women in their twenties. As shown below, the majority of pregnancies (69% in 2008) were unplanned. These unplanned pregnancies included 564,000 that resulted in a birth, 588,000 that resulted in an abortion, and 192,000 that resulted in a miscarriage.

FIGURE 1. Total Unplanned Pregnancies by Age, 2008

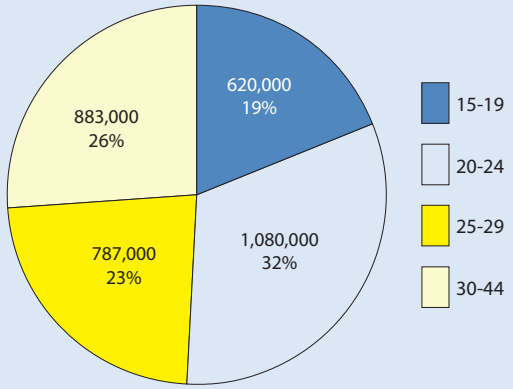
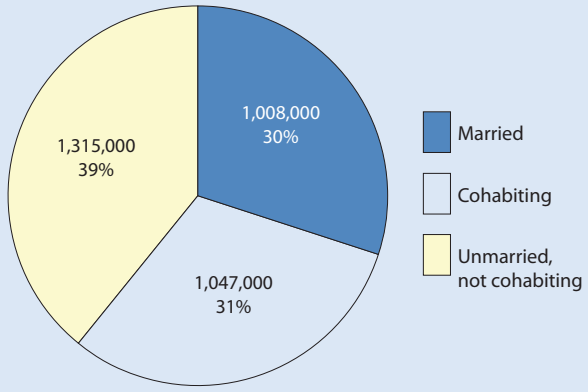


FIGURE 2. Total Unplanned Pregnancies by Marital Status, 2008



How common is unplanned pregnancy among young unmarried women?

In 2008, the rate of unplanned pregnancy among unmarried women in their twenties was 95 per 1,000 women. This means that

FIGURE 3. Planned and Unplanned Pregnancies Among Unmarried Women Age 20-29, 2008

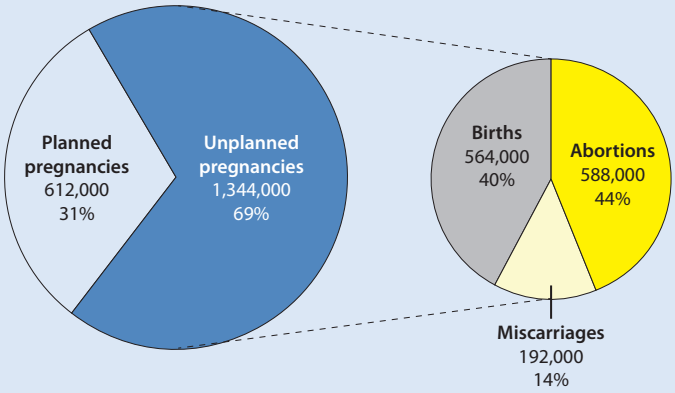
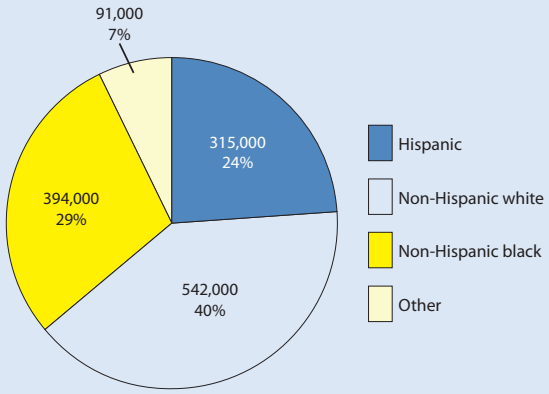


FIGURE 4. Unplanned Pregnancy Among Unmarried Women Age 20-29, by Race/Ethnicity, 2008



nearly 10% of unmarried young women have an unplanned pregnancy each year. Unplanned pregnancy was more common within some groups of young unmarried women than others. The table below reflects the rate of unplanned pregnancy among young unmarried women by age and race/ethnicity for 2008. As noted above, the overall rate of unplanned pregnancy in 2008 for unmarried women age 20-29 was 95 per 1,000 women. This varied somewhat by age (102 per 1,000 women age 20-24 compared to 84 per 1,000 women age 25-29), and varied more widely by race/ethnicity (ranging from 63 per 1,000 non-Hispanic white women to 155 per 1,000 non-Hispanic black women). Among young, unmarried non-Hispanic black women, this rate equates to nearly 16%—or one in six women—experiencing an unplanned pregnancy each year.

What are the characteristics of young unmarried women who have an unplanned pregnancy?

The table below describes how common unplanned pregnancy is, both among young unmarried women overall, and within particular groups of young unmarried women. The figures below describe the characteristics of women who experience an unplanned pregnancy, and the share of unplanned pregnancy that is accounted for by various subgroups.

Distribution by age. Women in their early twenties accounted for the majority of unplanned pregnancies among young unmarried women—65% or 866,000 pregnancies out of 1.3 million—as compared to women in their late twenties, who accounted for 35% or 470,000 pregnancies. This is due in part to the fact that unmarried 20-24 year-olds had a higher rate of unplanned pregnancy compared to their 25-29 year-old peers (see table below). It also reflects the fact that 20-24 year-olds make up more than half of the population of unmarried women in their twenties (not shown).

Distribution by race/ethnicity. The largest share of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried women in their twenties occurred to non-Hispanic white women, who accounted for 40% of unplanned pregnancies. Non-Hispanic black and Hispanic women accounted for 29% and 24% respectively, and 7% were to women of other race/ethnicities.

This may seem counterintuitive given that the rate of unplanned pregnancy for unmarried twenty-somethings was much higher

TABLE 1. Unplanned Pregnancy Rate Among Unmarried Young Women, by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2008

	Unmarried 20-29*	Unmarried 20-24*	Unmarried 25-29*	Unmarried Non-Hispanic White 20-29	Unmarried Non-Hispanic Black 20-29	Unmarried Hispanic 20-29
Unplanned Pregnancy Rate in 2008	95 per 1,000 women	102 per 1,000 women	84 per 1,000 women	63 per 1,000 women	155 per 1,000 women	141 per 1,000 women

*Note that these statistics include women of race/ethnicities other than non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, and Hispanic.

FIGURE 5. Unplanned Pregnancy Among Unmarried Women Age 20-29, by Poverty Level, 2008

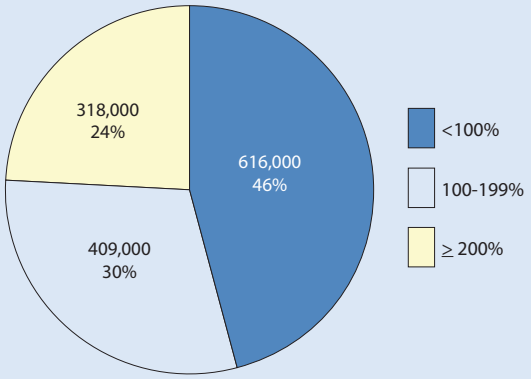


FIGURE 6. Unplanned Pregnancy Among Unmarried Women Age 20-29, by Education, 2008

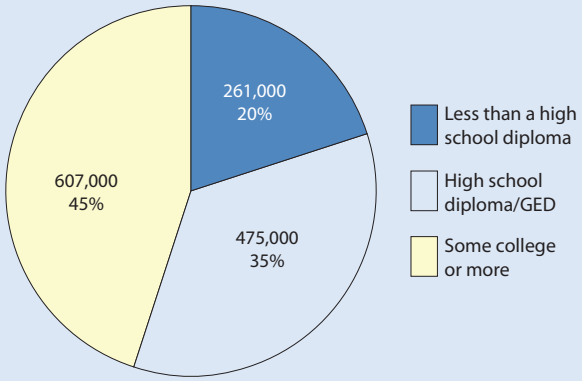


FIGURE 7. Pregnancy Resolution Among Unmarried Women Age 20-29, 2008

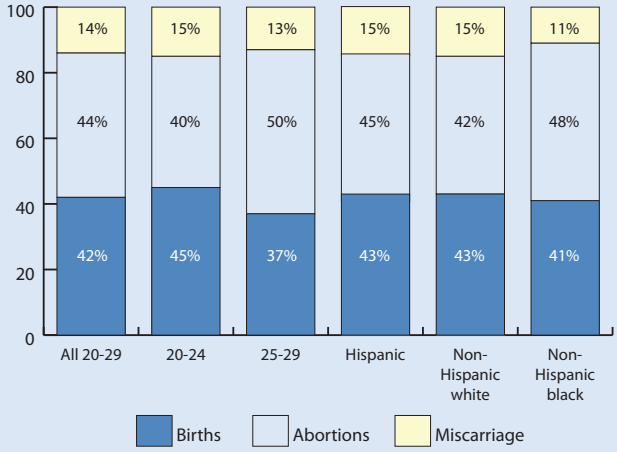
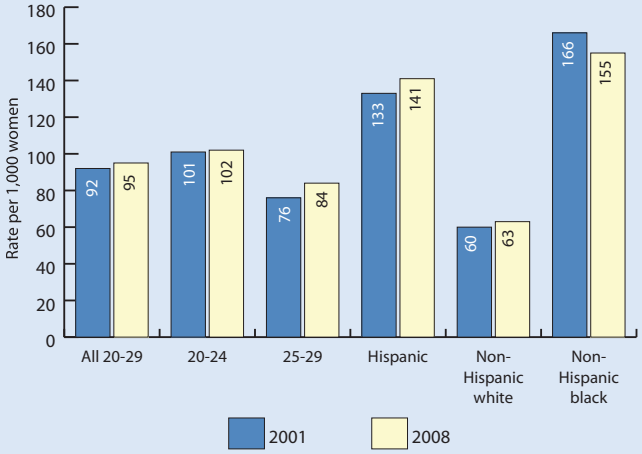


FIGURE 8. Rates of Unplanned Pregnancy Among Unmarried Women Age 20-29, 2008



among non-Hispanic black and Hispanic women; however this statistic reflects the fact that non-Hispanic white women account for the majority of the population of unmarried women age 20-29.

Distribution by income and education. In general, unplanned pregnancy was concentrated among more disadvantaged women. Among unmarried 20-29 year-old women having an unplanned pregnancy, only about one-quarter (24%) had incomes above 200% of the federal poverty level, while another 30% had incomes between 100% and 200% of poverty, and nearly half (46%) had incomes below poverty. Findings by educational attainment show similar levels of disadvantage—one in five unplanned pregnancies occur to women with less than a high school diploma, and more than one-third (35%) to women with a high school diploma or its equivalent. Less than half (45%) occurred to women with some college or more.

Other characteristics. Nearly half (47%) of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried women in their twenties occurred to cohabiting couples, while 53% were to single women (that is, neither married nor cohabiting). Finally, fully three in four unintended pregnancies to unmarried women in their twenties were subsequent pregnancies, while one-fourth were first pregnancies. In other words, roughly one million unmarried women age 20-29 who had an unplanned pregnancy in 2008 had already been pregnant at least once before.

Resolution of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried young women

Distribution by outcome. Slightly more unplanned pregnancies to young unmarried women in their twenties resulted in abortion (44%) than in birth (42%). This differed somewhat by age group—

FIGURE 9. Distribution of Unplanned Pregnancies by Poverty Level, 2001 and 2008

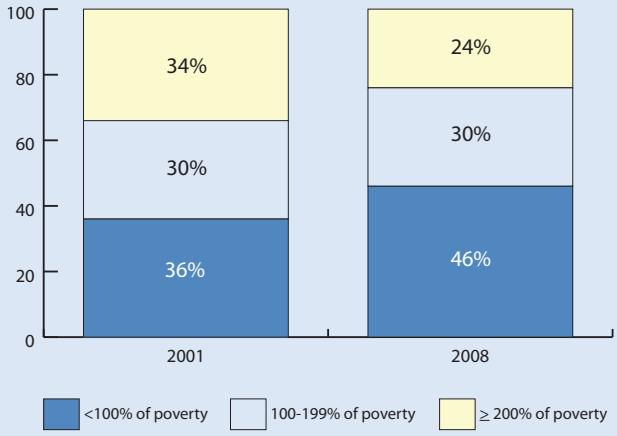
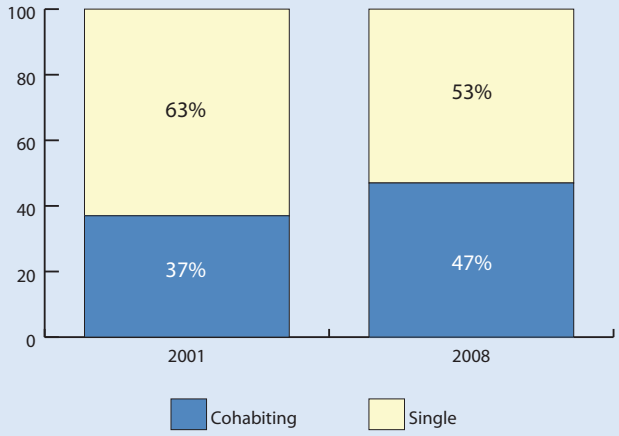


FIGURE 10. Distribution of Unplanned Pregnancies by Relationship Status, 2001 and 2008



half (50%) of pregnancies to women in their late twenties (25-29) ended in abortion, compared to 40% of pregnancies to women in their early twenties (20-24). Pregnancy outcomes varied little by race/ethnicity.

Trends in unplanned pregnancy among unmarried young women

Trends in prevalence. The *number* of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried women in their twenties grew between 2001 and 2008, from 1.1 million to 1.3 million (not shown). However, this primarily reflects an increase in the population of unmarried young women. By contrast, the *rate* of unplanned pregnancy increased only slightly, from 92 per 1,000 women to 95. Trends were variable across specific age and racial/ethnic groups, but in general the changes were modest, with rates actually declining among non-Hispanic black women.

The share of all pregnancies to unmarried young women that are unplanned (currently 69%) has remained nearly unchanged over this same period (not shown). This is true for all unmarried women in their twenties, as well as for subgroups by age and race/ethnicity.

Trends in characteristics. Perhaps more notable than changes in the prevalence of unplanned pregnancy were changes in the composition. Among unmarried women in their twenties, unplanned pregnancies have become increasingly concentrated among disadvantaged women, with definitive changes in just the last few years. As noted above, only about one-quarter of unplanned pregnancies were to women with incomes above 200% of poverty in 2008—considerably less than in 2001, when roughly one-third (34%) had incomes over 200% of poverty. The share of unplanned pregnancies that are to cohabiting women as opposed to single women also increased between 2001 and 2008, from 37% to 47%.

SOURCES

Unless otherwise noted, all results are based on special tabulations, commissioned by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, of data from the Guttmacher Institute. More information on the methodology pertaining to these tabulations and unintended pregnancy more generally is available in:

Zolna, M. & Lindberg, L. (2012). *Unintended Pregnancy: Incidence and Outcomes Among Young Adult Unmarried Women in the United States, 2001 and 2008*. New York: Guttmacher Institute. Retrieved from *http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/unintended-pregnancy-US-2001-2008.pdf*.

1. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. (2012). *Fast Facts: Teen Pregnancy in the United States*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from *http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/FastFacts_TeenPregnancyinUS.pdf*.
2. Logan, C., Holcombe, E., Manlove, J., & Ryan, S. (2007). *The Consequences of Unintended Childbearing: A White Paper*. Washington DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplannned Pregnancy. Retrieved from *http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/consequences.pdf*.
3. Trussell, J., Henry, N., Hassan, F., Prezioso, A., Law, A., & Filonenko, A. (in press). Burden of unintended pregnancy in the United States: Potential savings with increased use of long-acting reversible contraception. *Contraception*. Retrieved from *http://www.contraceptionjournal.org/article/S0010-7824(12)00723-8/pdf*.