

# Acculturation and Sexual Behavior among Latino Adolescents in California's Teen Pregnancy Hot Spots

Findings from The California Wellness Foundation  
Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative

Prepared by  
Philliber Research Associates  
SRI International – Center for Education & Human Services  
University of California, San Francisco – Institute for Health Policy Studies

Funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative is funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as an independent, private foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention programs.

The evaluation of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative is a joint project of Philliber Research Associates, SRI International's—Center for Education and Human Services, and the University of California, San Francisco's—Institute for Health Policy Studies.

For further information on evaluation results of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative contact:

Philliber Research Associates  
16 Main Street  
Accord, NY 12404  
(845) 626-2126  
[pra@philliberresearch.com](mailto:pra@philliberresearch.com)

In 1996 The California Wellness Foundation began a \$60 million 10-year Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative designed to decrease the incidence of teen pregnancy by increasing the proportion of teens who delay the initiation of sexual activity and/or effectively use contraception.

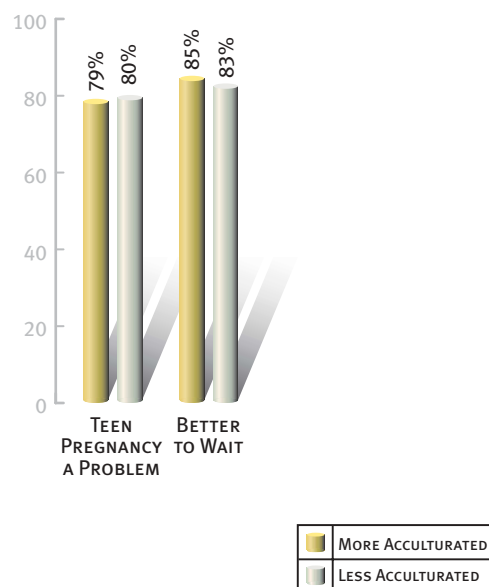
Seven California hot spot communities were selected as target communities to reduce teen pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> These communities included neighborhoods of large cities (Hollywood and South Los Angeles), suburban communities (Oceanside and Richmond), and small cities (Indio, Madera and Modesto). Some were in southern California, some in northern California, while the rest were in the Central Valley.

Surveys were conducted among adolescents and their caregivers in each of these communities. A total of 2,995 pairs of surveys were completed. Of these, 1,877, or 63%, were with adolescents who identified themselves as Latino. Almost all of these (88%) were from Mexico.

This brief explores differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors between more and less acculturated Latino adolescents. Latino adolescents were classified as more acculturated if they were interviewed in English and read, wrote, and spoke English very well. They were classified as less acculturated if they were interviewed in Spanish or read, wrote, or spoke English less than very well. By these criteria, 975 Latino adolescents were classified as more acculturated and 796 were classified as less acculturated.

## Attitudes toward Sex, Sex Education, and Communication about Sex

Degree of acculturation among Latino adolescents was unrelated to attitudes toward sex, sex education, and communication about sex.



## Attitudes Toward Pregnancy

More and less acculturated Latino adolescents were equally likely to agree that:

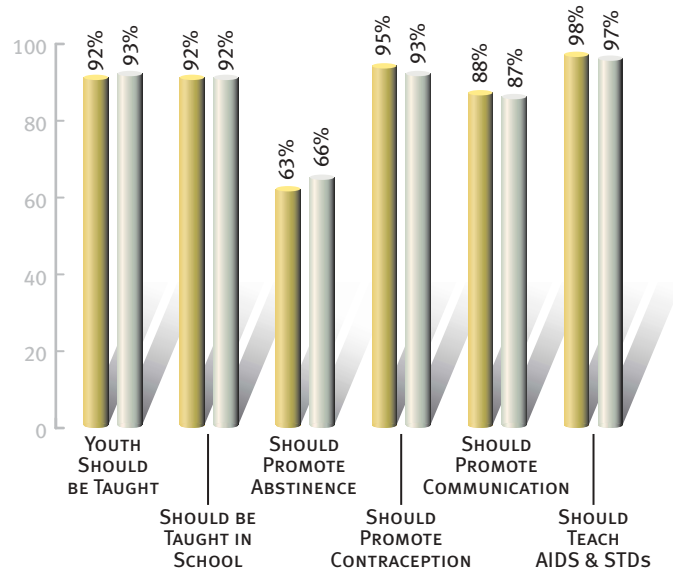
- Teen pregnancy is a very serious problem
- It is better to wait to have sex until after high school

<sup>1</sup> Hot spot communities are the 25% of California ZIP codes that contain the highest rate of births to 15-17 year olds (Jeffrey Gould California Potential Project Areas for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs UC Berkeley School of Public Health, 1996.)

## Support for Sex Education

More and less acculturated Latino adolescents were equally supportive of sex education. They were equally likely to agree that:

- Youth should be given information to protect from unwanted pregnancies
- Sex education should be taught in school
- Sex education should promote abstinence
- Sex education should promote contraceptive use
- Sex education should promote discussion with partners
- Sex education should teach dangers of AIDS and STDs
- Sex education should teach facts of reproduction

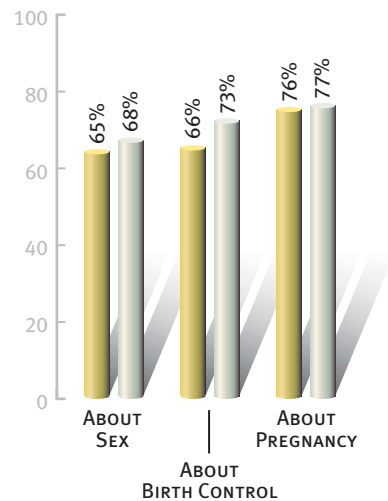




## Ability to Communicate with Caregivers

More and less acculturated Latino adolescents were equally supportive of communication with caregivers, such as parents or other guardians, about sex. They were equally likely to agree that they:

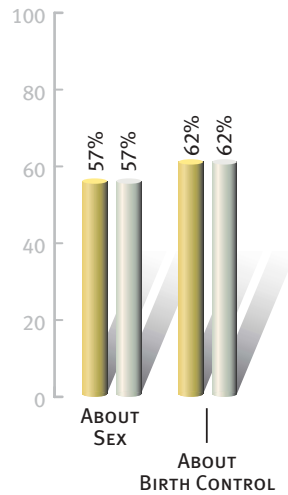
- Could talk to caregivers about sex
- Could talk to caregivers about birth control
- Could talk to caregivers about pregnancy
- Were comfortable talking with caregivers about sex
- Were comfortable talking with caregivers about birth control

Whether the adolescents were younger than 15 or older, male or female, there were no differences between those who were more acculturated and those who were less.



	MORE ACCULTURATED
	LESS ACCULTURATED

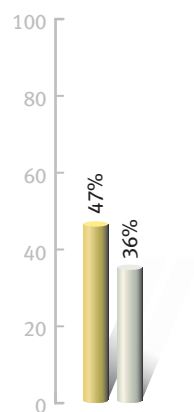
## Comfortable Communicating with Caregiver



### Differences in Communication About Sex by Degree of Acculturation

Latino adolescents who are more acculturated are more likely to report discussing sex or birth control with caregivers (e.g., parents, guardians).

## Has Discussed Sex with Caregiver



Although they did not differ in whether they said they could talk to caregivers about sex, contraception, or birth control or whether they said they felt comfortable having such discussions, more acculturated Latino adolescents were more likely than less acculturated Latino adolescents to report having such conversations. More acculturated Latino adolescents were 30% more likely to say they had talked with a caregiver about sex or birth control.

These differences between more and less acculturated Latino youth are equally strong among males, females, younger, and older adolescents.

<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	MORE ACCULTURATED
<span style="color: grey;">■</span>	LESS ACCULTURATED

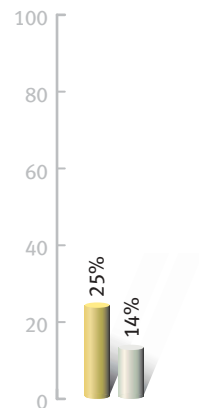
## Differences in Sexual Experience by Degree of Acculturation

- More acculturated Latino adolescents were more likely to report they had sexual intercourse than were Latinos who were less acculturated.
- Among sexually experienced Latino adolescents, those who are more acculturated were more likely to report having sex recently.

### Ever Had Sex

One in four Latinos who were classified as more acculturated reported having had sexual intercourse compared to fewer than one in seven Latinos who were less acculturated. Almost 80% more Latinos who were more acculturated were sexually experienced.

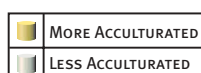
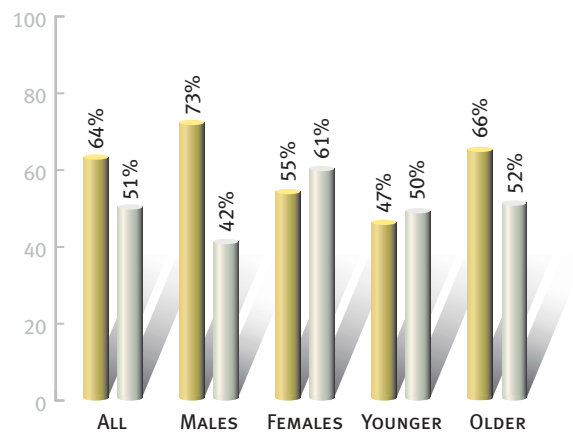
These differences between more and less acculturated Latino youth existed among males, females, younger and older adolescents. The difference was not as pronounced among older adolescents (43% compared to 32%), but it was still quite strong.



### Had Sex in the Past Two Months

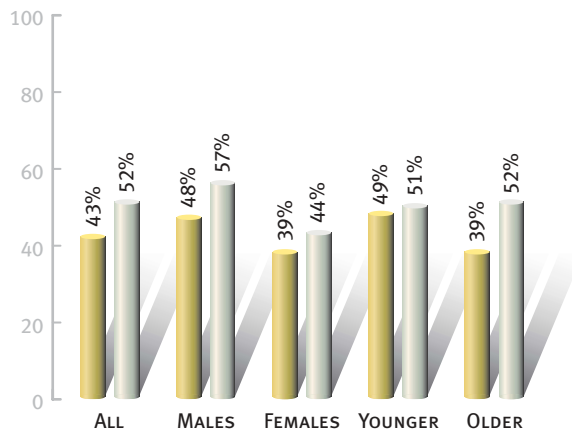
Among sexually experienced adolescents, more acculturated Latinos were more likely to report having had sex in the past two months. Two-thirds of sexually experienced Latino adolescents who were more acculturated report having had sex recently compared to half of those less acculturated.

However, differences in recent sexual experience between more and less acculturated Latino adolescents differed by gender and age. Recent sexual experience was higher among more acculturated males and less acculturated females. Among younger Latinos, acculturation is not a factor in whether they have had sex recently, but among older youth, more acculturated Latinos who are sexually experienced are more likely to report having had sex recently.



## Differences in Contraceptive Use by Degree of Acculturation

- Less acculturated Latino adolescents were less supportive of contraceptive use than were those who were more acculturated.
- Use of contraception was higher among Latino adolescents who were more acculturated.
- Less acculturated males were more likely than more acculturated males to always contracept, but more acculturated females were more likely than less acculturated females to report always contracepting.

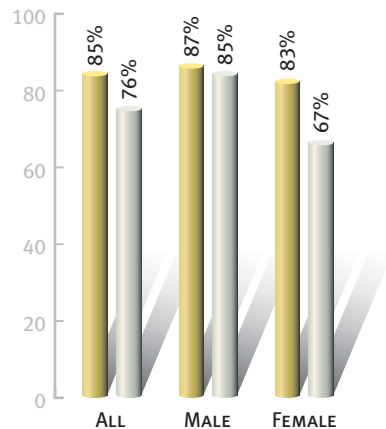


## Believe Contracepting is Lots of Trouble

Less acculturated Latino adolescents were 21% more likely than those who were more acculturated to agree that using contraception was a lot of trouble.

The relationship between support for contraception and degree of acculturation was stronger for males than for females. Less acculturated Latino males were 19% more likely than their more acculturated counterparts to believe using contraception was a lot of trouble while less acculturated Latino females were only 13% more likely than other Latino females to hold that belief.

Among younger Latinos, difference in support for contraception did not differ by degree of acculturation, but among older Latinos less acculturated adolescents were 33% more likely to say that using contraception was a lot of trouble.



## Ever Contracepting

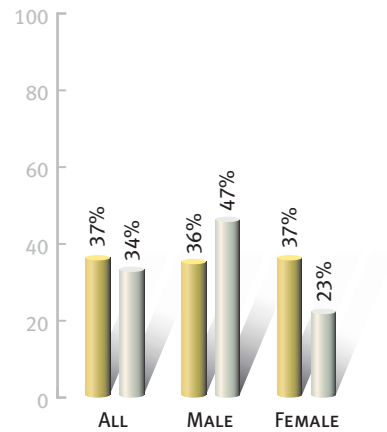
Ever using contraception was higher among those who were more acculturated. Five out of six sexually experienced Latinos who were more acculturated reported having used contraception compared to only three out of four who were less acculturated.

Among males, whether contraception was ever used did not differ by degree of acculturation, but among females those who were more acculturated were substantially more likely to report using contraception.

<span style="color: #d4b87d;">■</span>	MORE ACCULTURATED
<span style="color: #a6a6a6;">■</span>	LESS ACCULTURATED

## Always Contracept

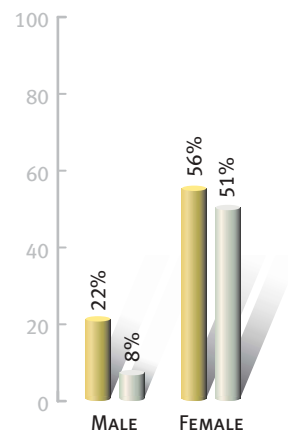
Overall, degree of acculturation is unrelated to whether a sexually experienced Latino adolescent always uses contraception. However, closer inspection reveals that this is because patterns of contraceptive use differ for males and females. Among Latino males, those who are less acculturated are more likely to report always contracepting, but among females the pattern is the opposite. Less acculturated females are less likely to report always contracepting.<sup>2</sup>





## Differences in Pregnancy by Degree of Acculturation

## Always Contracept

Whether a sexually experienced Latino female had ever been pregnant was unrelated to degree of acculturation, but, among males, those who were more acculturated reported almost three times as many pregnancies as did those who were less acculturated.



	MORE ACCULTURATED
	LESS ACCULTURATED

<sup>2</sup> Too few cases make it impossible to compare relationship between degree of acculturation and contraceptive use within age groups.



Programs serving Latino youth need to be aware of the extent to which their youth are acculturated. Using knowledge of English as a surrogate for acculturation, this brief found differences in communication with caregivers, support for contraception, sexual experience, contraceptive use, and pregnancy. Policy makers and program administrators are probably already aware that there are cultural differences between Latino youth and others that should affect program design. They need to also recognize that the needs of less acculturated Latino youth are different from those who are more acculturated.

Less acculturated Latino youth are less supportive of contraception. They are more likely to believe that contraception is a lot of trouble and less likely to report using contraception. This is especially true for females. Fewer than one in four of these females who were sexually experienced reported always using contraception. They are less likely to report having sexual intercourse, but if they are having sex there is a high probability they are doing so without contraception and therefore at a higher risk of becoming pregnant.

It would seem unlikely that simply making contraceptive services available to less acculturated Latino adolescents would be effective. Their attitudes toward contraception would be a barrier. Thus, programs need to tailor their program strategies to be responsive to this population. For example, identifying and training less acculturated clients who do use contraceptives effectively might help create a new role model for a population that is more challenging to serve.

More acculturated Latino youth show greater support for contraceptive use, but frequently have unprotected intercourse. The majority do not believe that using contraception is a lot of trouble and six out of seven who are sexually experienced have used contraception. However, almost two-thirds are unprotected at least some of the time when having intercourse. Making services more available and tailoring messages to the necessity of consistent contraceptive use might have more positive impacts on this subgroup.

## The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative is a 10-year, \$60 million grantmaking program of The California Wellness Foundation. The goal of the Initiative is to help decrease the incidence of teen pregnancy by increasing the proportion of teens who delay the initiation of sexual activity and/or effectively use contraception. With input from a variety of constituencies, a comprehensive grantmaking program was designed that includes funding for:

- community action;
- public education and policy advocacy;
- professional development and leadership recognition;
- research, and
- substantial evaluation.

## The Survey of Teen Pregnancy Hot Spot Communities

Surveys were conducted in each of the communities targeted by the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative as teen pregnancy hot spots. Random samples were drawn of households and pairs of interviewers screened those households to find where adolescents lived. In households with adolescents a randomly selected adolescent and caregiver (most often a parent) were paid to complete interviews.

Interviewers worked in pairs with one person interviewing the adolescent while the other interviewed the caregiver. Adolescents and caregivers were separated and interviewed simultaneously to reduce the influence one might have on the responses of the other.

Using this procedure, 81% of the randomly selected households were screened and pairs of interviews were completed in 86% of the households where adolescents lived.



