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**Race and Ethnicity Factors of Teen Pregnancy**

Racial and ethnic groups in the United States do not all have the same teen pregnancy and birth rates. Fertility rates among American women are different because of religion, age, and socioeconomic status. During the 1970s and 1980s, African American women had the highest fertility rate, Hispanics had the second highest, and white women had the lowest. Today, however, it is Hispanic women with the highest rate, followed by African Americans, and whites. The rate of teen births among African Americans has dropped more dramatically than the rates of any other ethnic group. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2005 the birth rate for Hispanic teens was 82 births per 1000 girls age 15 to 19. Comparable data for black and non-Hispanic whites were 61 per 1000 and 26 per 1000, respectively. The group with the lowest teen birth rate was Asian and Pacific Islander teens at 17 per 1000.

The reasons that birth rates among races differ are because of socioeconomic factors, family structure, and perceived options for the future. Risk factors for teen pregnancy include living in rural areas and inner cities, where many minority groups are clustered. White adolescent girls are less likely to carry their pregnancies to term than are African American or Hispanic girls. Because of their economic status and parental pressure, many will end their pregnancies through abortion. Often minority women, particularly those on public assistance, cannot afford abortion and legislation has changed so that government funds will not cover elective abortion.

Likewise, education and religion can play a role in teen births. Girls who perceive few educational or employment opportunities (usually minority girls) may be more interested in becoming mothers. Pregnancy and mothering may be a way to avoid going to work in low-paying, dead-end jobs. At least they can have control in one aspect of their lives. This is more likely to be the case for African American girls. One study in Alabama found more than 20% of African American teens between 14 and 18 wished that they were pregnant. For Hispanics, socioeconomic status is also important; however, Roman Catholicism, which disapproves of both birth control and abortion, also plays a role. Hispanic culture places a high value on children, particularly in their ability to contribute to the family group.

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