



# The protective role of parents and parental support in preventing Latina teen pregnancy

Ralph L, Biggs MA, Schwartz S, Arons A, Minnis A, Marchi K, Brindis C, Braveman P  
University of California, San Francisco

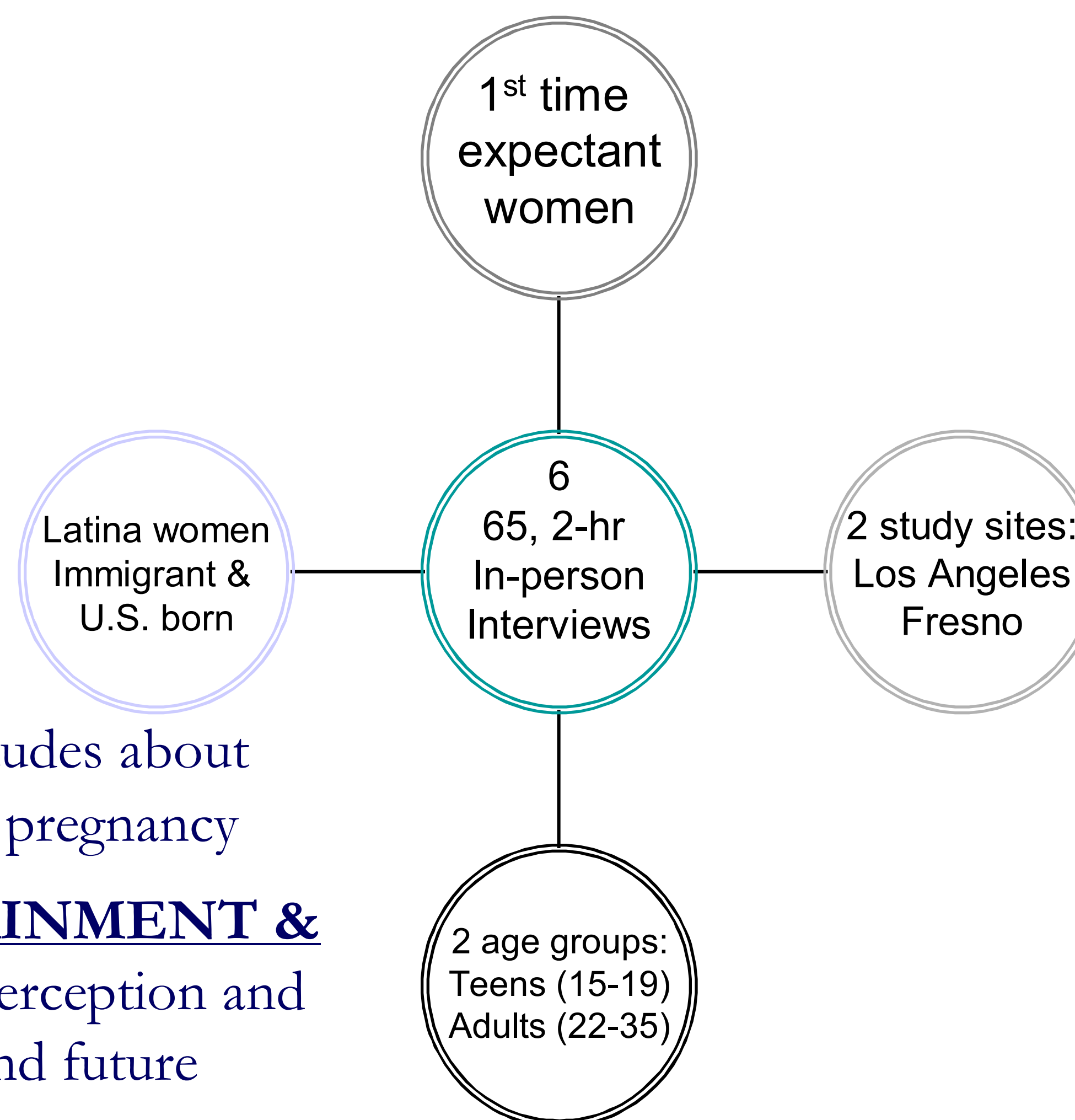
## Introduction

The Latina teen birth rate is the highest of any major racial/ethnic group in the U.S., more than double the national average. Latinas have the highest rates of intended teen births, report an earlier desired age for childbearing, and express more ambivalence towards the timing of childbearing than other racial/ethnic groups. These factors, often in addition to financial and linguistic barriers to health care, result in lower levels of contraceptive use among Latino teens.

Latino families, in particular parents, play an important yet complicated role. Teens who communicate openly with their parents about sex are more likely to delay initiation of sexual activity and use contraception; yet Latino youth are less likely to report having these conversations with parents. Further, the value placed on motherhood and attention paid to mothers in Latino families may send mixed messages to youth regarding the benefits of delayed childbearing.

## The Latina Childbearing Study

Bilingual interviewers met with 65 low-income Latina women in California who were pregnant with their first child. The qualitative interview focused on:



- **PREGNANCY:** their attitudes about childbearing and reasons for pregnancy
- **EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & EXPECTATIONS:** their perception and characterization of current and future educational & career opportunities/aspirations
- **NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY:** the influence of neighborhood environment, family, partners, and peers on childbearing
- **BIRTH CONTROL ACCESS & USE:** their attitudes toward and experience accessing and using birth control

Contact: Lauren.Ralph@ucsf.edu

This study was supported by contract #05-45122 from the State of California, Department of Public Health, Office of Family Planning. All analyses, interpretations, or conclusions reached are those of UCSF, not the State of California.

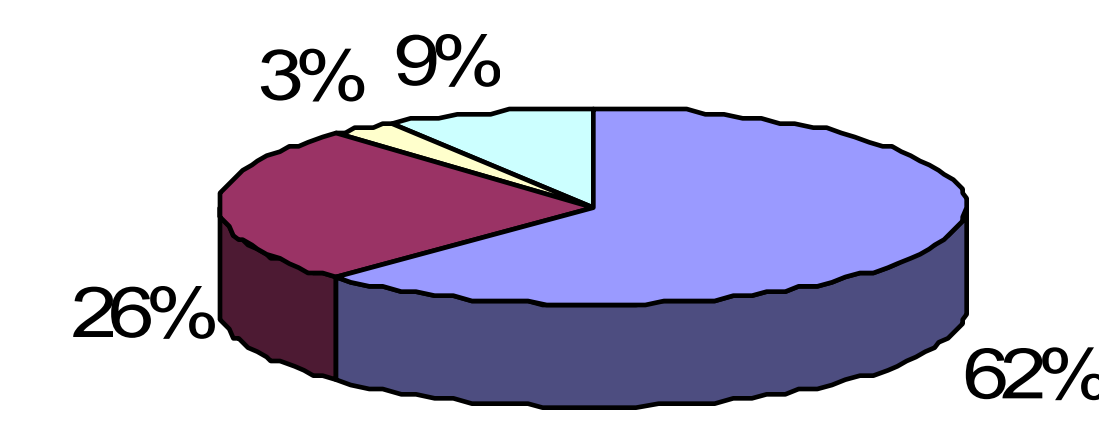
## Comparing pregnant Latina teens to adult Latina women who avoided teen childbearing:

### What role did the family play in helping young Latinas delay childbearing?

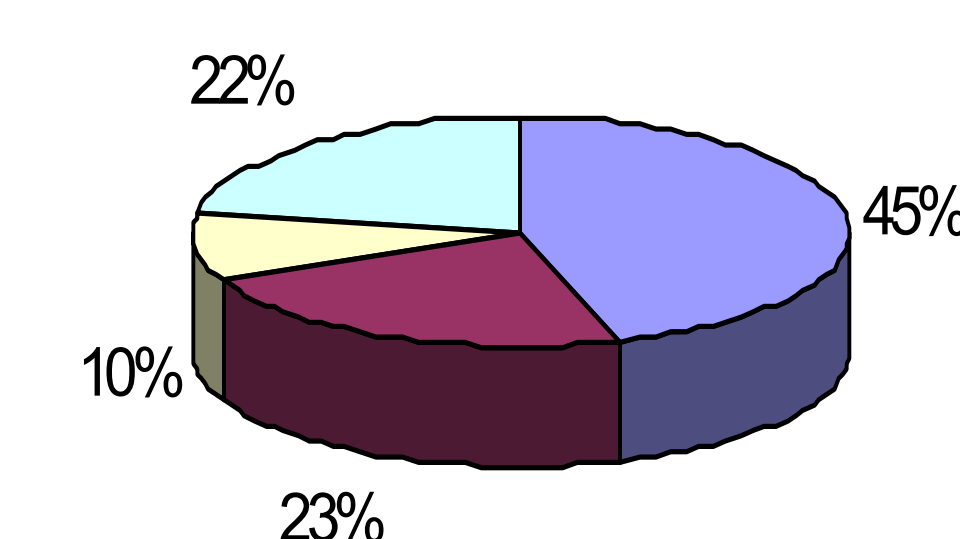
## Key survey findings

- Nearly 1/3 of pregnant teens and 2/3 of adults who avoided teen childbearing described their current pregnancy as intended.
- Adults were more likely to live with both parents at age 13/14:

Adults who avoided teen childbearing



Pregnant teens



Nearly 60% of teens currently lived with at least one parent.

- Pregnant teens were more likely than adults who avoided teen childbearing to have a mother who had experienced a teen birth (55% vs. 32%).

## Discussions about sex

“...my dad would be like.. ‘Oh my goodness! No! She’s going out and doing ungodly things!’ And my mom...I didn’t want to make her paranoid and make her start thinking that I’m trying to get pregnant..... So I wouldn’t really talk to her about birth control either.” - age 18, U.S. born

- Adults and teens alike reported that their parents did not talk to them openly about sex, birth control, and childbearing due to their own discomfort and sometimes lack of information.
- Lack of communication was particularly evident among teens who described their pregnancies as unintended; whereas teens with intended pregnancies did report talking to their parents about delaying childbearing prior to their pregnancies.
- Communication, when it did occur, was often described as ambiguous or limited to statements such as “you better not get pregnant”, “don’t do it”, or “use precautions.”

## Parental relationships & family environment

- Adults were much more likely to describe the quality of their relationship with their parents during their teen years as open, communicative, supporting and caring.

“Personally, I think our family was the nicest ....[my parents] always raised us to be a close family, and they were always concerned about giving us a good upbringing. They didn’t want us just hanging out, or playing all the time. They did let us go out, but I think that, compared to what was around us, they gave us a lot of love, a lot of attention, understanding.” – age 33, immigrant

- U.S. born teens in particular described difficult relationships or lack of communication with a parent preceding the pregnancy.

“I feel that my mother doesn’t care what happens in the future for me...She won’t talk about it. It’s like, ‘Well, either you’re lazy and you don’t want to do it or whatever.’ .... I don’t feel that she cares.” - age 16, U.S. born

- Although the sample was primarily low-income, U.S. born pregnant Latina teens were much more likely to come from unstable homes and to have experienced severe distress or abuse in the family.

## Parental supervision as a teen

- Adults, in particular immigrant adults, described being heavily monitored by their caregivers as teens, usually to protect them from neighborhood violence and “boys” and to help them focus on school work.

“I would stay at home and would need my dad’s permission to go out. I would tell him exactly where I was going and how long I would be there....he needed to know exactly where I was and with whom.” - age 32, immigrant

## Conclusions

- The family – particularly the presence of supportive, positive relationships with parents and high parental supervision – emerged as an important asset for adults when they were teens.
- Unlike adults who delayed teen childbearing, family upheaval and turbulence often characterized pregnant teens’ family environments.
- All families could benefit from encouraging and facilitating better parent-teen communication related to sex, contraceptive use, and fertility.