

## STATISTICS RELATED TO TRENDS IN THE SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS OF CANADIAN TEENAGERS

This installment of Check the research highlights trends in three important aspects of the sexual health and/or behaviour of Canadian youth. They are: (1) Trends in sexual intercourse experience; (2) Trends in teen pregnancy; and (3) Trends in oral sex experience.

### TRENDS IN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE EXPERIENCE AMONG CANADIAN TEENS

Several large-scale studies provide data on the percentage of Canadian teens who have experienced sexual intercourse at least once. These include Statistics Canada's *Canadian Community Health Survey*, the *British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey* and the *Health of Canada's Young People* survey. Because these surveys have been repeated over a number of years using similar samples, they also allow us to observe trends in the percentages of Canadian youth who have experienced sexual intercourse.

Most Canadian youth will have their first experience of sexual intercourse at some point during their teenage years. In the most recent *Canadian Community Health Survey: 2009/2010*, in response to the question "Have you ever had sexual intercourse?" 30% of 15 to 17 year-olds and 68% of 18 to 19 year-olds reported that they had had intercourse (Roterman, 2012). In sum, while less than half of Canadian teens report having intercourse before age 18, more than two-thirds do so before age 20. When these data are added to data from previous cycles of the *Canadian Community Health Survey* we can see that the percentages of Canadian young people in the 15 to 17 and 18 to 19 year-old age groups who reported ever having sexual intercourse remained remarkably stable from 1996/1997 to 2009/2010 (Rotermann, 2012, 2008) (Table 1).

**TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF CANADIAN YOUTH AGED 15-17, 18-19 REPORTING EVER HAVING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, 1996/1997, 2003, 2005, 2009/2010**

Age Group	1996/1997	2003	2005	2009/2010
15-17	32%	30%	29%	30%
18-19	70%	68%	65%	68%

Sources: Rotermann, M. (2008). Trends in teen sexual behaviour and condom use. *Health Reports*, 19, (3), 1-5. Rotermann, M. (2012). Sexual behaviour and condom use of 15- to 24-year-olds in 2003 and 2009/2010. *Health Reports*, 23, (1), 1-5.

The *British Columbia Adolescent Health Surveys* (McCreary Centre Society, 2009; Saewyc, Taylor, Homma & Ogilvie, 2008) include data on the percentage of male and female adolescents in Grades 7 to 12 (ages 12 to 17+) who reported ever having had sexual intercourse in 1992, 1998, 2003 and 2008. These data indicate stable to declining percentages of youth who had experienced intercourse between the time periods of 1992 and 1998, with the percentages remaining stable thereafter (Table 2). The results indicate that the percentage of both males and females in grades 7 to 12 who had ever had intercourse declined between 1992 and 2008.



**TABLE 2: BC ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY: PERCENTAGES OF MALE AND FEMALE YOUTH IN GRADES 7 TO 12 WHO REPORT EVER HAVING INTERCOURSE, 1992, 1998, 2003, 2008**

	1992	1998	2003	2008
<b>Male</b>	33.9%	24.9%	23.3%	22.0%
<b>Female</b>	28.6%	23.0%	24.3%	22.0%

Sources: Saewyc, Taylor, Homma & Ogilvie. (2008). Trends in sexual health and risk behaviours among adolescent students in British Columbia. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 17 (1/2), 1-14. McCreary Centre Society. (2009). *A Picture of Health: Highlights from the 2008 British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey*. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

The *Health of Canada's Young People: A Mental Health Focus* presents the findings of the 2009/2010 cycle of the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* study (Freeman, King, Pickett, Craig, Elgar, Janssen, & Klinger, 2011). For the period 2002 to 2010, the percentage of Grade 9 and 10 males and females who had ever had sexual intercourse increased slightly.

**TABLE 3: THE HEALTH OF CANADA'S YOUNG PEOPLE: A MENTAL HEALTH FOCUS: APPROXIMATE PERCENTAGES OF GRADE 9 AND 10 MALES AND FEMALES WHO REPORT EVER HAVING HAD INTERCOURSE, 2002, 2006, 2010**

	2002	2006	2010
<b>Male Grade 9</b>	20%	20%	24%
<b>Female Grade 9</b>	18%	19%	19%
<b>Male Grade 10</b>	27%	25%	31%
<b>Female Grade 10</b>	25%	27%	31%

Source: Freeman et al. (2011). *The Health of Canada's Young People: A Mental Health Focus*. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada.



## SUMMARY

Three on-going, large sample, Canadian studies have collected data on the percentages of Canadian youth who report ever experiencing sexual intercourse. Two of these studies first collected data on youth intercourse experience in 1992 (B.C. *Adolescent Health Survey*) or 1996 (*Canadian Community Health Survey*) and two reported data collected as recently as 2010 (*Canadian Community Health Survey; Health of Canada's Young People*). Several conclusions can be drawn from these three studies. First, from the early/mid 1990's to the mid 2000's, the percentage of both male and female teens who reported ever having experienced sexual intercourse declined. Second, between the mid 2000's and 2010 the percentages of youth who reported ever having intercourse remained stable for some groups (e.g., Grade 9 females, 15-17 year-olds) and increased slightly for others (e.g., Grade 10 males and females, 18-19 year-olds). Third, overall, the available data indicate the percentage of male and female teens in Canada who reported ever having sexual intercourse declined between the early/mid 1990's and 2010.

## REFERENCES

Freeman, J.G., King, M., Pickett, W., Craig, W., Elgar, F., Janssen, I. & Klinger, D. (2011). *The Health of Canada's Young People: A Mental Health Focus*. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada.

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## TRENDS IN TEEN PREGNANCY

Trends in teenage pregnancy rates are of interest to educators, health care providers, researchers and policy makers for a variety of reasons including the connection between socio-economic factors and the incidence of adolescent pregnancy/child bearing and the use of teen pregnancy trends as indicators of adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

In terms of teen pregnancy rates as indicators of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, it is assumed that a majority of teenage pregnancies are unintended and that such trends therefore reflect the extent to which young women have the capacity to control their sexual and reproductive health. It is likely that declining trends in teen pregnancy rates (in contrast to stable or increasing rates) may reflect increasing levels of effective contraceptive use, greater access to reproductive health services, exposure to higher quality sexual health education, and/or a shifting of social norms in a direction that provides greater support for young women's capacity to exercise reproductive choice.

Below, data that illustrate trends in Canadian teen birth and abortion rates is summarized. Data on still birth/miscarriage which is typically included in the calculation of teen pregnancy rates is excluded so that we can make direct comparisons between different countries (note: still births/miscarriages make up a small fraction of teen pregnancies).



## TEEN BIRTH/ABORTION RATE TRENDS IN CANADA

If we look at the most recent decade for which we have complete data we can see that the combined teen birth/abortion rate in Canada declined in each consecutive year from 44.2 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 1996 to 27.9 in 2006, a decline of 36.9% (Statistics Canada, n.d.a., n.d.b., n.d.c.) (Table 1). The Canadian teen birth rate decreased from 22.1 per 1,000 in 1996 to 14.2 in 2009, a decline of 35.7% and the teen abortion rate decreased from 22.1 in 1996 to 14.2 in 2006, a decline of 35.7%. Throughout the period of 1996 to 2006, births accounted for about 47% of the birth/abortion rate with only slight fluctuations in an overall range of 45%-50%.

**TABLE 1: BIRTH, ABORTION, AND COMBINED BIRTH/ABORTION RATES PER 1,000 WOMEN AGED 15-19, CANADA**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Birth</b>	22.1	20.0	19.8	18.6	17.0	16.0	14.9	14.4	13.6	13.3	13.7	14.0	14.3	14.2
<b>Abortion</b>	22.1	21.6	21.6	20.5	20.1	19.4	18.4	17.1	16.3	15.3	14.2			
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>27.9</b>			

Sources: Statistics Canada. (n.d.a.). *Table 106-9002 – Pregnancy Outcomes. By age group, Canada, provinces and territories, annual*, CANSIM (database); Statistics Canada. (n.d.b.). *Table 102-4505 – Crude birth rate, age specific and total fertility rates (live births), Canada, provinces and territories, annual*, CANSIM (database); Statistics Canada. (n.d.c.). *Table 106-9034 – Induced abortions in hospitals and clinics, by age group and area of residence of patient, Canada, provinces and territories, annual*, CANSIM database.

## TRENDS IN TEEN BIRTH/ABORTION RATES IN CANADA'S PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES: 1995 TO 2005

In this section, we compare birth/abortion rates in the provinces and Yukon in 2005 (the most recent year for which data were available) and look also at the percent decline in these rates from 1995 to 2005. Data on abortions for 2004 and 2005 were not available for the Northwest Territories and Nunavut so these rate comparisons could not be made.

Teen birth/abortion rates in Canada in 2005 (Statistics Canada, n.d.a.) varied considerably among the provinces from 22.5 per 1000 females 15-19 in Newfoundland to 42.4 in Saskatchewan (Table 2). Against a national reference point rate of 28.6 for the entire country in 2005, five provinces were below that level (P.E.I., Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Nova Scotia; 18.5-23.7) and five provinces, plus the Yukon exceeded it (British Columbia, Yukon, Quebec, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan; 29.3-42.4). In terms of regional differences, rates were lower in Eastern Canada (and Ontario) and higher in Western Canada (and Quebec and Yukon). In all cases, birth/abortion rates were lower in 2005 than in 1995 although the percentage decline varied considerably from the relatively low declines in Quebec (10%), Saskatchewan (25.5%), and Newfoundland (28.3%) to the highest declines in P.E.I. (48.9%), Ontario (51.5%) and Yukon (51.8%).



**TABLE 2:** BIRTH/ABORTION RATES, 15-19 YEAR-OLD WOMEN, CANADA, PROVINCES, AND YUKON, 1995 AND 2005, PERCENTAGE DECLINE.

	1995	2005	% Decline
<b>Can</b>	<b>45.8</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>37.6%</b>
<b>NFLD</b>	31.4	22.5	28.3%
<b>PEI</b>	37.0	18.9	48.9%
<b>NS</b>	43.2	23.7	45.1%
<b>NB</b>	40.4	22.6	44.1%
<b>Q</b>	36.0	32.4	10.0%
<b>ON</b>	47.4	23.0	51.5%
<b>MB</b>	63.9	40.5	36.6%
<b>SK</b>	56.9	42.4	25.5%
<b>AL</b>	53.7	33.0	38.5%
<b>BC</b>	45.3	29.3	35.3%
<b>YK</b>	65.1	31.4	51.8%

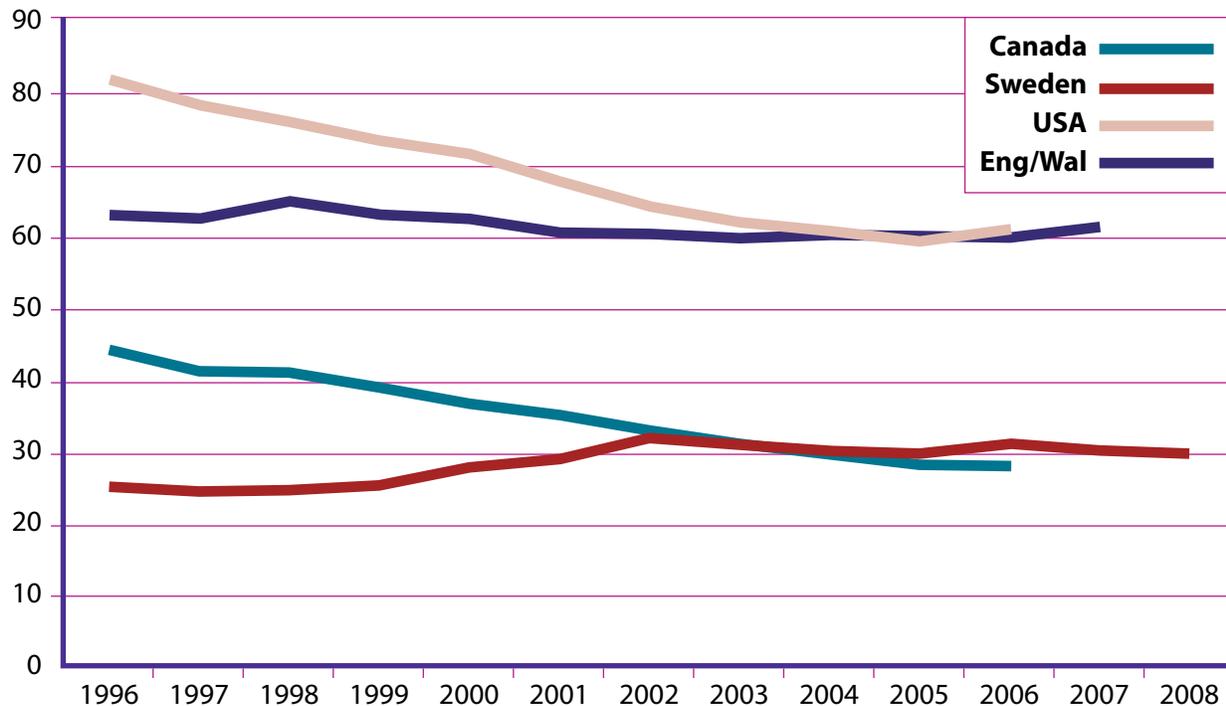
Source: Statistics Canada. (n.d.a.). *Table 106-9002- Pregnancy outcomes, by age group, Canada, provinces and territories, annual, CANSIM (database).*

## COMPARING TRENDS IN TEEN BIRTH/ABORTION RATES: CANADA, U.S.A., ENGLAND/WALES AND SWEDEN

McKay and Barrett (2010) compared teen pregnancy rates from 1996 to 2006 between Canada, U.S.A., England/Wales and Sweden (Figure 1). In 2006, the most recent year for which data are available for all four countries, Canada had a lower teen birth/abortion rate (27.9) than the United States (61.2), England/Wales (60.2), and Sweden (31.4). Overall, from 1996 to 2006, the teen birth/abortion rate declined by 36.9% in Canada, 25% in the U.S.A., and 4.75% in England/Wales and increased 19.1% in Sweden.



**FIGURE 1:** COMBINED BIRTH/ABORTION RATES PER 1,000 WOMEN AGED 15-19, CANADA, SWEDEN, U.S.A, ENGLAND/WALES, 1996-2006



Source: McKay, A. & Barrett, M. (2010). Trends in teen pregnancy rates from 1996-2006: A comparison of Canada, Sweden, U.S.A., and England/Wales. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 19, (1-2), 43-52.

## SUMMARY

For the most recent decade for which complete teen birth/abortion rate data is available (1996-2006) both birth and abortion rates declined. It should be noted that the decline in teen pregnancies evident for this ten year period are an extension of a long-term decline of teen pregnancy rates that has occurred in Canada over the past quarter century (McKay, 2006). For the period 1995-2005, the teen birth and abortion rates fell in all the measured Canadian provinces and territories although the magnitude of the declines differed between jurisdictions. It should also be noted that the decline in the teen pregnancy rate in Canada during the 1996-2006 period was greater than in other countries such as the U.S.A. and England where teen pregnancy rates declined but to a lesser extent. The decline in teen pregnancy rates in Canada during this period provides a stark contrast to Sweden where teen pregnancy rates increased.

## REFERENCES

Saewyc, Taylor, Homma & Ogilvie. (2008). Trends in sexual health and risk behaviours among adolescent students in British Columbia. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 17 (1/2), 1-14.

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Statistics Canada. (n.d.c). *Table 106-9034 – Induced abortions in hospitals and clinics, by age group and area of residence of patient, Canada, provinces and territories, annual*, CANSIM (database). Retrieved 23/03/2010 from [http://cansim2.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&CNSM-Fi=CII/CII\\_1-eng.htm](http://cansim2.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&CNSM-Fi=CII/CII_1-eng.htm)

## TRENDS IN ORAL SEX EXPERIENCE AMONG YOUTH

Most of the large sample research examining sexual behaviour among Canadian teens has focused on vaginal intercourse. Relatively less is known about trends and behavioural patterns related to oral sex behaviours among Canadian youth. However, several studies conducted in Canada have examined teen oral sex behaviour. Relevant research data from the United States helps to provide a more complete picture of oral sex behaviour among teens.

The *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study* (Boyce et al., 2006) conducted in 2002/2003 as well as an elicitation research survey conducted in 1992 in conjunction with the *Skills for Healthy Relationships* curriculum (Warren & King, 1994) are the two largest sample surveys to examine oral sex among Canadian youth. Both surveys asked Grade 9 and 11 students if they had ever participated in oral sex.

Comparing the data from these two studies indicates that between 1992 and 2002/03 there was an increase in the percentages of male and female students in each age group reporting that they had ever engaged in oral sex (Table 1). In 2002/2003, less than a third of Grade 9 students and just over half of Grade 11 students reported that they had ever experienced oral sex.



**TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF CANADIAN GRADE 9 AND 11 STUDENTS REPORTING ORAL SEX AT LEAST ONCE 1992, 2002/03**

	1992	2002/03
<b>Male Grade 9</b>	27%	32%
<b>Female Grade 9</b>	21%	28%
<b>Male Grade 11</b>	48%	53%
<b>Female Grade 11</b>	47%	52%

Source: Boyce, et al. (2006). Sexual health of Canadian youth: Findings from the *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study*. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 15 (2), 59-68.; Warren & King. (1994). *Development and Evaluation of an AIDS/STD/Sexuality Program for Grade 9 Students*.

As a point of reference, it can be informative to compare the prevalence of ever having oral sex with the prevalence of ever having intercourse. Data from the *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study* (Boyce et al., 2006) enables a comparison of the prevalence of the two behaviours. As shown in Table 2, in 2002/03 for each grade and gender category, students were more likely to report ever having oral sex than ever having intercourse.

**TABLE 2: CANADIAN YOUTH, SEXUAL HEALTH AND HIV/AIDS STUDY, PERCENTAGE OF CANADIAN GRADE 9 AND 11 STUDENTS REPORTING ORAL SEX/INTERCOURSE.**

	Oral Sex	Intercourse
<b>Male Grade 9</b>	32%	23%
<b>Female Grade 9</b>	28%	19%
<b>Male Grade 11</b>	53%	40%
<b>Female Grade 11</b>	52%	46%

Source: Boyce, et al. (2006). Sexual health of Canadian youth: Findings from the *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study*. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 15 (2), 59-68

Neither of the two studies cited above distinguished between who was giving and receiving oral sex. It is sometimes assumed that with respect to teen oral sex there is a gender discrepancy in which females are more likely to be giving (fellatio) rather than receiving (cunnilingus) oral sex from their male partners. Nor do we have large sample data on oral sex among Canadian youth that is more recent than the 2002/2003 data provided by the *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study*. Thus, to get a more complete picture of adolescent oral sex and examine more recent data for this behaviour it is useful to examine research on oral sex among teens in the United States.



The *National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior* was a nationally representative sample survey of adolescents and adults in the United States conducted in 2009 (Hebenick, Reece, Schick, Sanders, Dodge, & Fortenberry, 2010). Table 3 provides a more comprehensive break-down of oral sex behaviour than is available from the Canadian data. Differences in the percentages of male and female teens giving and receiving oral sex were smaller among 14-15 year-olds than among the older age groups. Among younger teens (14-15), females were more likely than males to give oral sex. However, at age 18-19, females were almost as likely to report that they had received oral sex from a male as they were to report that they gave oral sex to a male and females in this age group were more likely than males to report that they had received oral sex from an opposite sex partner in the previous year.

**TABLE 3: NATIONAL SURVEY OF SEXUAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR, PERCENTAGES OF MALES AND FEMALES REPORTING GIVING AND RECEIVING HETEROSEXUAL ORAL SEX IN THE PAST YEAR, AGES 14-19**

Oral Sex Behaviours	Age 14-15	Age 16-17	Age 18-19
Male Received	11.9%	30.9%	53.6%
Male Gave	7.8%	18.3%	50.7%
Female Received	10.0%	23.5%	58.0%
Female Gave	11.8%	22.4%	58.5%

Source: Adapted from Hebenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S.A., Dodge, B., & Fortenberry, J.D. (2010). Sexual behavior in the United States: results from a national probability sample of men and women ages 14-94. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7 (suppl 5), 255-2654.

The Canadian and U.S. data on oral sex among teens summarized above are not directly comparable (i.e., the Canadian data refers to ever having oral sex, the U.S. data refers to oral sex in the past year; the Canadian data is categorized by grade, the U.S. data is categorized by age). However, a general comparison of the *Canadian Youth, Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Study* (Boyce et al., 2006) and the *National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior* (Hebenick et al., 2010) with respect to the time of data collection (2002/2003 and 2009 respectively) and the prevalence of oral sex among teens suggests that oral sex did not become more common among teens between the early 2000's and late 2000's.

## SUMMARY

Data from Boyce et al. (2006) suggests that less than a third of Grade 9 and just over half of Grade 11 Canadian youth report ever having oral sex; somewhat higher percentages of both Grade 9 and 11 students and male and female students reported ever having oral sex than ever having intercourse. Data from the U.S. suggests that there are some gender differences in patterns of oral sex behaviour among teens (Hebenick et al., 2010). However, these data are not consistent with a general assumption that oral sex among teens is largely confined to females giving oral sex to males without reciprocation.



A comparison data from two similar Canadian studies (Boyce et al., 2006; Warren & King, 1994) suggests that the percentage of Canadian teens ever having experienced oral sex increased somewhat between 1992 and 2002/2003. A comparison of the most recent large sample study of oral sex behaviour among Canadian youth conducted in 2002/2003 (Boyce et al., 2006) with a more recent study of oral sex behaviour among U.S. youth conducted in 2009 (Hebenick et al., 2010) tentatively suggests that the percentage of youth ever having had oral sex did not increase between the two time periods in which these two studies were conducted.

## REFERENCES

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## WHAT'S THE TAKE HOME MESSAGE?

Reliable research data are an important source of information on trends related to the sexual and reproductive health of Canadian youth. However, the range and availability of high quality data that allows us to track trends related to the sexual health of Canadian youth is limited.

In this installment of Check the Research, a summary of data which can be utilized to discern trends in three key areas was provided. It is notable that, in general, trends in the percentages of teens who have ever participated in sexual intercourse and oral sex, or experienced a teen pregnancy are encouraging with respect to their implications for adolescent sexual and reproductive health. For example, Canadian teens were less likely to report ever having intercourse in 2010 compared to teens in the early/mid 1990's. Although the available data on the percentages of youth who have engaged in oral sex is less definitive in terms of identifying clear trends, it does not appear that the practice of oral sex among teens increased substantially in recent years: Rather, the available data suggests that the percentages of youth engaging in oral sex has remained relatively stable. The trend with respect to teen pregnancy rates is clear. The percentage of teenage women who became pregnant declined significantly between the mid-1990's and the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. The decline for these years are part of a longer-term trend in which fewer teenage women have become pregnant that began in the mid-1970s. Measures of sexual intercourse, oral sex, and pregnancy among teens provide evidence on only a few of many important aspects of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. Nevertheless, with respect to these three particular indicators of sexual health, we can conclude that the trends are generally pointed in the right direction.

