

Sexual and Reproductive Health: Women and Men

Men and women experience similar sexual and reproductive events, but with some important differences.

Sexual Activity

- Men experience first intercourse at age 16.9, on average, and women at age 17.4. Men spend slightly longer being sexually active before getting married: nearly 10 years, on average, compared with just under 8 years for women.
- By their late teenage years, at least 3/4 of all men and women have had intercourse, and more than 2/3 of all sexually experienced teens have had 2 or more partners.
- Among sexually experienced people in their 20s, 31% of men and 20% of women had more than one sexual partner in the past year.
- In their 30s and 40s, when the great majority of men and women are married, most have only one sexual partner in a given year.

Contraceptive Use

- In their first experience with intercourse as adolescents, more than 2/3 of men and women rely on the condom.
- Condom use declines among both men and women as they grow older. Only 16% of men and women 35–39 used condoms in the past month, either alone or with another method.
- As they grow older, both men and women are more likely to rely on female methods of contraception, whether they are married, cohabiting or single. By their late 20s, 45% of men

and 44% of women use only female methods.

- By their late 30s, 15–20% of men and women rely on vasectomy for contraception. However, female methods continue to provide the greater part of overall protection: 24% of men and 31% of women in this age-group rely on female sterilization, and 21% of men and 14% of women on other female methods.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

- At all ages, women are more likely than men to contract genital herpes, chlamydia or gonorrhea.
- Adolescents and youth in their 20s are much more likely than older men and women to contract chlamydia and gonorrhea.
- During 2001, adolescent and adult women represented 26%

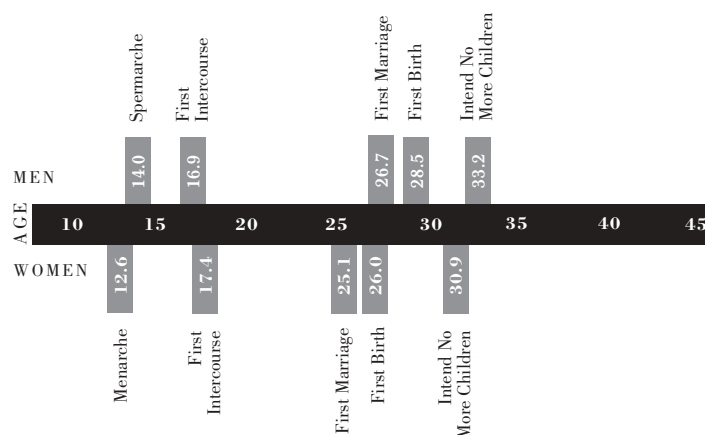
of new AIDS cases, compared to only 11% in 1990 and 6% in 1982. 13% of men who received AIDS diagnoses in 1999 were exposed to HIV solely through heterosexual activity, a proportion that has grown substantially in recent years.

Abortion

- Pregnancies that result in abortion are almost twice as likely to involve teenage women as they are to involve teenage men (22% as opposed to 13%).
- The majority of abortions involve men and women aged 20–29: 53% of abortions involve men in their 20s, and 55% involve women in their 20s.
- 34% of abortions involve men 30 or over, and 24% involve women 30 or over.

chart a
Sexual and Reproductive Timeline

Men and women experience important sexual and reproductive events at similar ages.



Source: AGI, *In Their Own Right*, page 8.

table 1
Distributions of Births and Abortions

Most births, and most abortions, involve people in their 20s and early 30s.

Age at conception	% distribution			
	Births		Abortions	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
15–17	2	8	5	10
18–19	5	8	8	12
20–24	21	26	29	33
25–29	28	27	24	22
30–34	25	22	15	14
35–39	14	8	11	8
40–44	5	1	8	2

Source: Darroch JE, Landry DJ and Oslak S, Pregnancy rates among U.S. women and their partners in 1994, *Family Planning Perspectives*, 1999, 31(3):122-126 & 136; and Deardorff KE, Hollmann FW and Montgomery P, *U.S. Population Estimates, by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990 to 1994*, Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Pregnancy, Childbearing and Parenting

- Teenage women are more than twice as likely as teenage men to be involved in a pregnancy, and nearly three times as likely to become parents.
- Approximately 1/2 of all births involve men and women in their 20s, and the percentage of men and women involved in pregnancies each year is roughly equal at this stage in life (14% for men and 15% for women). However, women begin childbearing slightly earlier than men, with half of women having a child by age 26 and half of men by age 28.5.
- In their 30s, women are more likely than men to have had children: 82% of women, compared with only 67% of men. By their 40s, this disparity virtually disappears: 85% of men and 87% of women have children.
- By their 40s, 13% of women have one child, 35% have 2 children, and 39% have 3 or more. Among men in their 40s, 16% have one child, 38% have 2 children and 31% have 3 or more. 13% of women and 15% of

men in their 40s have no children.

- In 1998, married women with children younger than 18 spent one and a half times as much time with them as fathers did. Between 1965 and 1995, however, the average amount of time fathers spent with their children increased by an hour per day.
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Marriage

- By their early 20s, slightly over 1/4 of all women, but fewer than 1/5 of men, are married. As men approach their late 20s, their rate of marriage sharply increases; by their late 20s, 42% of men and 48% of women are married.
- In their 30s, approximately 2/3 of men and women are married. However, women's likelihood of being divorced, separated or widowed sharply increases, reaching 16%, almost twice that of men.
- By their 40s, a larger proportion of men than of women are married (78% and 69%, respectively). Women's likelihood of being divorced, sepa-

rated or widowed in their 40s remains substantially higher than that of men.

Disadvantage

- On nearly every indicator—including early parenthood, divorce rates, rates of sexually transmitted infection and health insurance coverage—poor women and men fare worse than those who are better-off, and minority women and men fare worse than whites.
- As adolescents, approximately 1/5 of men and women lack health insurance coverage.
- Both men and women are more likely to lack insurance coverage in their 20s than at any other period during the reproductive years (ages 15–49). Nearly 40% of men and nearly 30% of women 20–24 have no health insurance.
- As adults, men are more likely than women to lack health insurance; levels of private (employer-based) insurance coverage are similar, but women are more likely than men to be covered by Medicaid.

Services

- Many federally and state funded reproductive health programs are designed to serve women but not men, and do not offer male services.
- Most women begin seeing a doctor for routine reproductive health care services after they become sexually active, and women who have children become linked to the health system when they are pregnant and giving birth. Men do not have a similar routine channel for obtaining sexual and reproductive health services.

- An appropriate sexual and reproductive health “service set” for both men and women should include counseling and education, as well as purely medical services.

Sources of Data

Sources include research conducted by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) and published in *In Their Own Right: Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of American Men* and the peer-reviewed journal *Family Planning Perspectives*, and unpublished AGI tabulations of the 1988–1994 National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys, the 1991 National Survey of Men, the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey, the 1992–1994 National Survey of Families and Households, the 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Men, the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth and the 1999 Current Population Survey. Additional sources include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Bureau of the Census.

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