

## Contributions of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (BSSR)

### The Public Health Problem

**16.7** In 2019, the teen birth rate in the U.S. was 16.7 births per 1,000 females. Although this rate has been falling since 1991, the U.S. teen birth rate remains high compared to the rate in other industrialized countries.<sup>1</sup>

**>2x** Teen birth rates among Black and Hispanic Americans, as well as among American Indians and Alaska Natives, were more than double those among non-Hispanic whites in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

**\$9.4B** Teen childbearing costs taxpayers in the U.S. approximately \$9.4 billion annually (e.g., in health care and welfare expenditures).<sup>3</sup>

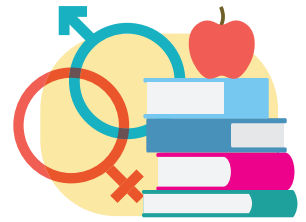
Teen pregnancy contributes to many socio-economic and health problems, including the following:

- Low educational attainment
- Difficulty obtaining and holding a job
- Disrupted adolescent development
- Increased risk for mental health issues (e.g., depression)
- Increased risk of low birth weight, preterm birth, and infant death

## BSSR Health Impacts

### Comprehensive Sexual Education

BSSR has demonstrated that comprehensive sex education<sup>4</sup> can significantly reduce rates of teen pregnancy and that the highest teen pregnancy rates occur in states whose sex education laws most narrowly emphasize abstinence.<sup>5</sup> One meta-analysis found that programs addressing gender and power in relationships were 5 times more likely to reduce sexually transmitted infection (STI) and pregnancy rates than programs that did not address these topics.<sup>6</sup>



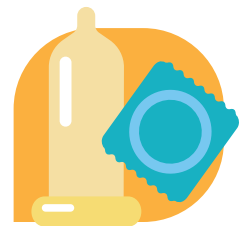
### Youth Programs

Group-based youth programs have successfully reduced the risk of teens engaging in unprotected sexual activity by approximately 25%, with declines in both amount and frequency of sexual activity.<sup>7</sup> Youth programs incorporating mentorship and community services integrate teenagers within their community, which can lead teens to practice healthier sexual behaviors (including delaying sexual initiation and increasing condom use) that prevent teen pregnancies.<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>



### Contraception Counseling

Contraception education and counseling in primary care clinics is associated with contraception use. In one study, women who received counseling were 12% more likely to have used contraception at their last intercourse than women who had not.<sup>11</sup> Public health guidelines recommend incorporating specific elements, such as an assurance of confidentiality, that can improve the effectiveness of counseling for adolescents.<sup>12</sup>



### Parent-Child Communication

Parenting behaviors and strategies are known to impact many facets of adolescent behavior, including whether teens engage in safe or risky sexual behaviors.<sup>13</sup> BSSR-based interventions, such as Saving Sex for Later,<sup>14</sup> have led to improvements in open parent-child communication—even among parents who struggle with economic hardship, full schedules, and complicated lives—and lower reports of risky teen sexual behavior that can lead to pregnancy.<sup>15</sup>



## References and Definitions

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- Comprehensive sex education goes beyond encouraging students to remain abstinent: it teaches medically accurate, age-appropriate sexual health knowledge (e.g., about sexual diversity, healthy relationships, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections) to help adolescents make safe sexual choices.  
  
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- Saving Sex for Later is an audio-based sexual health education intervention designed to help young people abstain from sexual activity.  
  
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