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UNMARRIED YOUNG ADULTS

Their Sexual Activity, Relationships, and Social Circumstance

KEY FINDINGS

- Most unmarried young adults have had sex and have used contraception.
- More are living with their parents than either alone or with each other.
- For many, sex education occurred years ago.

Several characteristics of the young unmarried adults we surveyed are worth noting and provide a critical backdrop to the later discussions of why unplanned pregnancy is so common among this group.

The vast majority of unmarried young adults are sexually active.

Overall, nearly nine out of ten of those surveyed have ever had sex and 78% have had sex in the past year (Table 1). In addition, more than half (55%) say they are currently in a sexual relationship, nearly one-quarter (23%) report they have had sex in the past year but are not currently in a sexual relationship, and 7% say they have not had sex in the past year. Fourteen percent say they have never had sex. The average age that unmarried young adults in this survey say they first had sex is 16.4 years.

When it comes to sexual activity, there is not much difference among unmarried young men and women. For example, the age at which women and men begin to have sex is relatively similar. However, men are slightly more likely than women to be in a current sexual relationship and to have had a higher number of sexual partners in the past year—half of men (50%) and nearly one-third (31%) of women report having had more than one sexual partner in the past year (among those who've had sex in the past year).

TABLE 1 Unmarried Young Adults Age 18–29, by Sexual Relationship Status, Age at First Sex, and Number of Partners in the Last Year

Sexual Relationship Status	Total	Men	Women
Never Had Sex	14%	13%	16%
Had Sex, not this year	7%	9%	6%
Had Sex This Year, not currently in a sexual relationship	23%	27%	19%
Had Sex This Year, currently in a sexual relationship	55%	52%	60%
Percent Total	100%	100%	100%
Age at First Sex (Among Those Who Have Ever Had Sex)			
<15	20%	24%	15%
15–16	34%	34%	33%
17–18	30%	28%	33%
19+	16%	14%	18%
Percent Total	100%	100%	100%
Number of Sexual Partners in Past Year (Among Those Who Have Had Sex in Past Year)			
1	59%	50%	68%
2–4	30%	33%	26%
5+	11%	17%	5%
Percent Total	100%	100%	100%

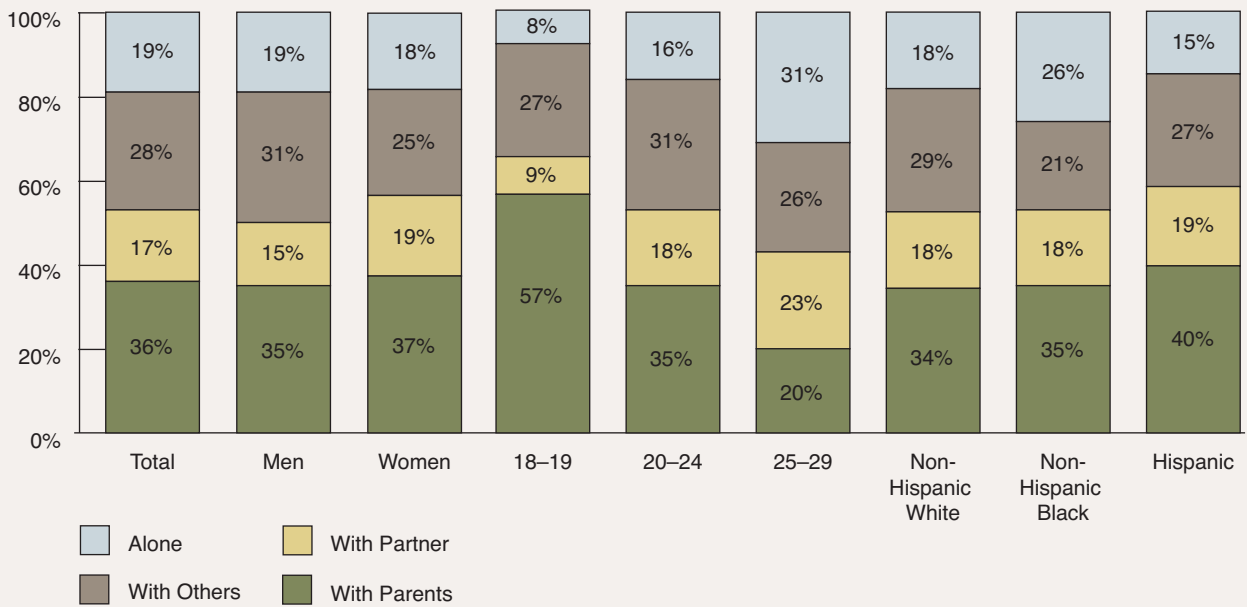
Parents remain front and center in the lives of most unmarried young adults.

Unmarried young adults report a variety of living situations—more live with their parents than either alone or with each other.

Parents remain front and center in the lives of most unmarried young adults (Chart 1). More than one-third of unmarried young adults in the survey (36%) report living with their parents at the time of the interview. Not surprisingly, the proportion of unmarried young adults living with their parents steadily decreases with age: 57% of those 18–19, 35% of those 20–24, and 20% of those 25–29 say they live with their parents. Overall, 19% of unmarried 18- to 29- year-olds live alone, ranging from 8% among those 18–19 to 31% among those 25–29.

Most young adults are *not* living together. Overall, 17% say they are living with a partner of the opposite sex (9% of those 18–19, 18% of those 20–24, and 23% of those 25–29). Living arrangements differ somewhat by race/ethnicity. Hispanic young adults are more likely than non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black young adults to live with their parents, and non-Hispanic black young adults are much more likely to live alone than non-Hispanic white and Hispanic young adults.

CHART 1 Unmarried Young Adults Age 18–29, by Living Situation



For many, sex education occurred years ago and sources of current information on contraception vary considerably.

Approximately three-quarters of unmarried young adults in the survey report that they have had a class on sex education (78%), and for many these classes included information about both abstinence and contraception—although the quantity and quality of the information they received is unknown. Nevertheless, 71% of young adults report they were age 16 or younger the last time they had a class on these topics and 27% report they were age 14 or younger.

Regarding current information on contraception, young people say that doctors or other professionals are their most trusted source of information about birth control, yet they more often rely on other sources such as the media. About seven in ten unmarried young adults (73%) say that professionals (doctors, teachers, religious leaders) are their most trusted source of information about contraception (Table 2). Yet, only 32% list a professional source as their most common source of information about contraception. Unmarried young adults are more likely to get information about contraception from the media (35%) or a personal source (34%) than they are from a doctor or other professional source. Moreover, more than half (52%) of unmarried young adults say they would turn to the media

More than half of young adults would turn to the media first if they wanted to learn about a new method of contraception.

first if they wanted to learn about a new method of contraception. Some 42% of young adults say they would first consult a professional source. Women tend to rely on professional sources of information more than men, who lean more toward the media as their source of information.

They report a wide variety of social contexts and circumstances.

Unmarried young adults live in a variety of social contexts, and many aspects of their lives likely influence their world view, their decisions, and both their sexual and contraceptive behavior.

RELIGION. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of unmarried young adults belong to a religious denomination. About one-third (34%) of unmarried young adults overall say they never attend religious services.

TABLE 2 Unmarried Young Adults Age 18–29, by Source of Information									
	Total	Men	Women	Age 18–19	Age 20–24	Age 25–29	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic
Source Most Trusted									
Personal Source	15%	21%	8%	23%	13%	10%	14%	16%	15%
Professional Source	73%	62%	85%	66%	76%	74%	74%	75%	71%
Media Source	13%	18%	7%	11%	11%	16%	13%	9%	15%
% Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Source go to First for New Method Information									
Personal Source	6%	8%	3%	9%	3%	6%	5%	9%	5%
Professional Source	42%	30%	56%	44%	40%	43%	39%	50%	48%
Media Source	52%	62%	41%	47%	56%	51%	56%	41%	47%
% Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Source Used Most Often in the Past Year									
Personal Source	34%	41%	25%	41%	35%	25%	35%	37%	27%
Professional Source	32%	16%	50%	29%	29%	37%	32%	35%	32%
Media Source	35%	43%	25%	29%	35%	38%	33%	29%	41%
% Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

WORK. Most unmarried young adults are either working (43%) or going to school (25%), and some are juggling both (18%).

EDUCATION. More than one-third (36%) of unmarried young adults have either completed their associate's degree or attended some college. Education does not vary notably between men and women.

HEALTH INSURANCE. Fully three-quarters of unmarried young adults say they had some type of health insurance in the 12 months before the interview. This includes 51% who relied solely on private health insurance and 22% who relied on Medicaid (either alone or in combination with private insurance). Young adults age 25–29 are slightly more likely to be uninsured compared to other age groups, and Hispanic young adults are much more likely to be uninsured compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE. Approximately one in ten unmarried young adults—women more than men—received public assistance in the past 12 months.