



Friday, November 02, 2007

Youth & Health

National Effort Seeks To Reduce Teenage Hispanic Birth Rate by Making Message More Culturally Appropriate

Although teenage pregnancy rates across the nation generally are on the decline, "they remain stubbornly high" among blacks and Hispanics, *Newsweek* reports.

According to the [National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#), 51% of Hispanics become pregnant at least once before age 20 --20 percentage points higher than the national average. While black teenagers have a higher pregnancy rate (58%), that rate declined by about 29% during the 1990s. At the same time, the rate for Hispanic teens declined by only about 19%, *Newsweek* reports.

The reason for the disparity, in part, is because educational and prevention programs targeting Hispanics have not been culturally appropriate, according to [Bill Albert](#) and [Ruthie Flores](#) of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy's [Latino Initiative](#). Until recently, the difference between general pregnancy prevention programs and ones targeting Hispanic youth is that the latter were available in Spanish, Liany Arroyo of the National Council of La Raza's [Institute for Hispanic Health](#) said. However, Arroyo said that "in order to ensure that all groups are able to access the critical health messages being delivered, we do need to acknowledge that there may be cultural, as well as access barriers."

For example, "one of the most important cultural differences involves gender," *Newsweek* reports. According to *Newsweek*, "teenage daughters receive messages about chastity and demureness, [while] teenage sons hear about virility and conquest." In addition, gender roles sometimes lead to contraception not being discussed, *Newsweek* reports.

Hispanic teenagers also might interpret traditional pregnancy prevention messages as "anti-baby" or anti-family," when the message simply recommends that teenagers do not have children, Albert said. Hispanic culture embraces and encourages a family unit, *Newsweek* reports. A more effective message targeting Hispanic teens would "need to make clear that it's a matter of sequencing," Albert said. "The message isn't, 'Don't have children.' It's, 'Don't have children when you're seventeen,'" he added.

The Latino Initiative created a manual that "emphasizes that Latino teens straddle two worlds and that they need to learn to navigate between them." The manual -- which will be distributed to schools, community centers and health clinics across the nation in November -- also talks about the importance of traditional Hispanic values, including family-centeredness, affection and respect (*Newsweek*, 10/30).