

## Decline in sexually active teenagers is 'stalling'

Those surveyed more accepting of pregnancy

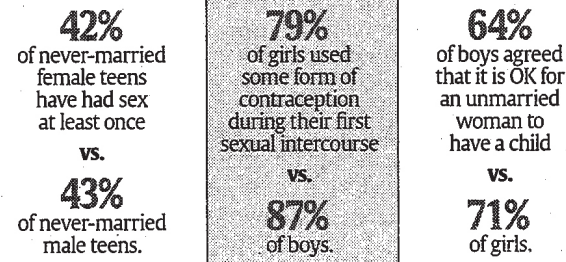
By Rita Rubin  
USA TODAY

Among teens in the USA, the percentage who have had sexual intercourse or say they'd be pleased if they or their partner were to get pregnant hasn't changed much since early in the decade, and there appears to be a growing acceptance of having babies outside marriage, a government report said Wednesday.

From 1995 to 2002, "it was pretty much across-the-board improvements in those risk factors," says lead author Joyce Abma, a statistician at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National

### Boys vs. girls

Highlights from the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth:



Source: Teenagers in the United States: Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use, and Childbearing, National Survey of Family Growth 2006-08

Center for Health Statistics. "It is a source of concern to see that forward movement kind of stalling."

Based on in-person interviews with 1,381 girls and 1,386 boys ages 15 to 19 in 2006-2008, more than four in 10 never-married teens in the USA have had intercourse at

least once, Abma and her co-authors estimate. That's a slight drop from 2002, the last time the National Survey of Family Growth was conducted, but it was not statistically significant.

Meanwhile, teenagers have grown more accepting of pregnancy, the latest survey

found. In 2002, one out of four male teens who had never had sex cited "don't want to get female pregnant" as the main reason. In the latest survey, that figure had dropped to 12%.

In addition, the percentage of male teenagers who responded "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "It is OK for an unmarried female to have a child" increased from 50% in 2002 to 64% in 2006-2008.

"I think we need to better understand if this is a change in attitude toward pregnancy or a change in attitude toward abortion," says Laura Lindberg, a senior research associate at the Guttmacher Institute.

Given the publicity about unmarried celebrities having babies and the growing number of single mothers overall, Lindberg says, it's not surprising that teens are more ac-

cepting of the notion.

"Teens don't live in a vacuum," she says. "What they see adults doing around them is going to reflect in their own behaviors and attitudes."

The percentage of survey respondents who said they would be "a little pleased" or "very pleased" if they were to get pregnant or get a partner pregnant remained unchanged from 2002: 24% of sexually experienced boys and 22% of sexually experienced girls.

Abma's report shows why the 15-year decline in the teen pregnancy rate began to flatten out in 2005, says Sarah Brown, CEO of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

"It seems to me we have failed as a nation to convince teens that it is in their best interest for them to postpone families," Brown says.