


 Science Says

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Acculturation and Sexual Behavior among Latino Youth

Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997-2003

Introduction

Previous research has shown an association between certain measures of acculturation (such as generational status and language) and Latino teens' sexual behavior (such as contraceptive use at first sex, consistent use of contraception, and becoming a teen parent). Research also suggests a relationship between country of origin and Latino teens' sexual behavior. However, the associations between acculturation, country of origin, and Latino teens' sexual behavior remain poorly understood and understudied. This research brief explores acculturation and country of origin in greater detail. Measures of acculturation have specifically been defined as generation status and language for purposes of this research brief.

Despite a recent increase in the teen birth rate, overall teen pregnancy and birth rates have decreased by 38 percent and 32 percent, respectively, since the early 1990s. However, the teen pregnancy rate among Latinas decreased only 19 percent during the same time period. In addition, 53 percent of Latina teens become pregnant before the age of 20, compared to 3 in 10 teen girls overall.¹ It is also the case that, by 2025, Latino adolescents will comprise 24 percent of the U.S. teenage population; thus, issues affecting the Latino community will have a tremendous impact on the nation as a whole.¹

In order to better understand and address teen pregnancy in the Latino community, it is critical to gain a better understanding of the diversity within the Latino population. This is challenging, given that measures of acculturation such as generation status and English-language proficiency are often not included in surveys. Even when they are included, small samples sizes often do not allow for comparisons within the Latino community. The Hispanic category offered on surveys often includes individuals whose families have been in this country for generations as well as recent immigrants; it includes people who are proficient in the language and culture of the United States as well as those who are unable to speak English; and it encompasses 22 different countries of origin. While the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are useful in many ways and make survey research easier, the varying degrees of acculturation and specific countries of origin are lost in these generalizations. It is possible that teen contraceptive use, teen pregnancy, and birth rates all vary and are influenced differently, depending on level of acculturation or country of origin.

This research brief is based on an analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997-2003², conducted by Child Trends in collaboration with the CDC. It seeks to better illustrate the complexities that exist within Latino populations, as well as the effects of acculturation and country of origin on certain risky behavior. Additional analyses focusing on these measures would generate greater understanding of the effect of acculturation, and more specific information could be used to develop teen pregnancy prevention programs, services, and messages that are better tailored to the needs of the diverse Latino community.

Highlights

- Among Latino teens, generation status is associated with contraceptive use at first sex and with consistent contraceptive use at age 17. In general, third generation Latino teens are *more* likely to use contraception the first time they have sex and are *more* likely to use it consistently at age 17 than first or second generation Latino teens.
- Language status is associated with contraceptive use among Latina teens; Latina teens interviewed in Spanish are *least* likely to use contraception (including condoms) at first sex. Latina teens living in households where English is the only language spoken are *most* likely to use contraception (including condoms) the first time they have sex. The pattern is less clear among Latino teen boys.
- Among Latina teens, language status is also associated with being a teen parent or having multiple children by age 18-22. Nearly half of Latina teens whose parents answered the survey in Spanish—but the teen themselves answered in English—report being a teen mom.
- Country of origin is associated (among Latina teens only) with having sex before age 18, being a teen mom, and having multiple children by age 22. Among Latino teen boys, there are no significant differences in sexual behavior by country of origin.

Study Sample of Latino Teens

This study uses data from a nationally representative dataset, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), which includes both girls and boys. More Latino youth in the sample are third generation Americans than first or second generation Americans, and one-third lived in households in which English is the only language spoken. Nearly half of the Latino teens in the sample are of Mexican origin (46 percent), 11 percent are Central/South American, 9 percent are Puerto Rican, 4 percent are Cuban, and nearly one-third are classified as “other” for country of origin. All results included in this research brief are weighted to reflect the general U.S. Hispanic population.

Additional information on methodology is included at the end of this brief.

- More than one-third of Latino teens in this sample report having had sex before age 16 (38 percent) and two-thirds had sex before age 18 (67 percent). Latino teen boys were significantly^b more likely than girls to have had sex before age 16, and to have had sex before age 18. More than 4 in 10 Latino teen boys reported having had sex before age 16 (43 percent) compared to about one-third of Latina teens (32 percent). Seven in 10 Latino teen boys in this sample had sex before age 18 (70 percent), and less than two-thirds of Latino teens report having had sex before age 18 (63 percent).
- Nearly three-fourths of sexually experienced Latino teens used some form of contraception the first time they had sex, and the vast majority of those used a condom. About half are consistent users of contraception (mostly condoms) at age 17. Latino teen boys are significantly more likely to report using condoms each time they had sex at age 17 compared to Latina teens (55 percent vs. 34 percent, respectively).
- Latina teens are significantly more likely to report being a teen parent compared to boys—nearly one-third of Latina teens (27 percent) and 12 percent of Latino teen boys said they were parents. In addition, 12 percent of Latina teens have had two or more births by age 18-22, compared to 5 percent of Latino teen boys in the sample.

Acculturation: Generation Status and Language Status

Generation Status. Generation status is clearly associated with contraceptive use at first sex, and with consistent contraceptive use. The relationship between condom use and sexual initiation, or becoming a teen parent, is less clear.

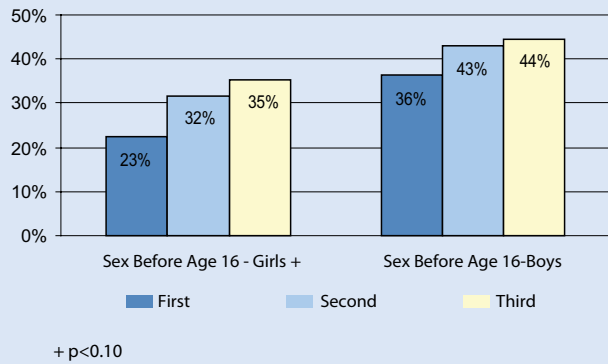
- Among Latina teens, generation status is marginally associated^c with sex before age 16 (Figure 1). Among first, second, and third generations Latina teens, first generation

Measures of Acculturation and Association with Specific Adolescent Sexual Behavior Among Latino Teens

Measure	Sexual Initiation		Contraceptive Use at First Sex		Consistent Contraceptive Use at Age 17		Teen Parent	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Generation Status	No	Yes (at age 16)+	Yes*	Yes+	Yes*	Yes*	No	No
Language	No	No	Yes*	Yes*	Yes+	Yes+	No	Yes*
Country of Origin	No	Yes (at age 18)*	No	No	No	Yes+	No	Yes*

“No” indicates that the measure was not found to be associated with the specific behavior, “Yes” indicates that the measure was found to be associated with the specific behavior. * p<0.05 +p<0.10

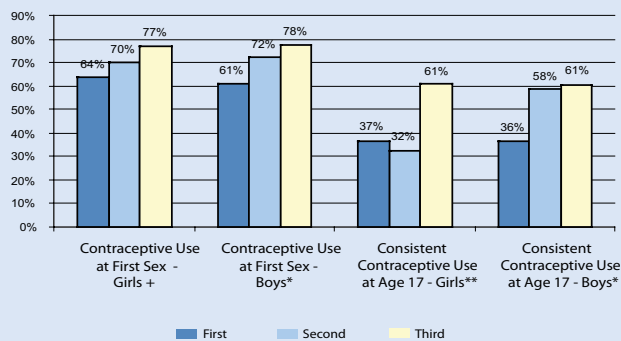
FIGURE 1. Sexual Initiation Among Latino Teens, by Generation Status (NLSY)



Latinas are *least* likely to have had sex before age 16 and third generation Latinas are *most* likely. Although there are no significant differences in having sex before age 16 among Latino teens, analyses with the full sample indicate that for all Latino teens first generation Latino teens are the *least* likely to have sex before age 16 and third generation Latino teens are the *most* likely to have sex before age 16.

- In general, first generation Latino teens are *least* likely to use contraception at first sex, and third generation Latino teens are *most* likely to use contraception the first time they had sex. Third generation Latino teens are also *most* likely to report consistent contraceptive use at age 17 (Figure 2) compared to first and second generation Latino teens.
- Approximately 6 in 10 first generation Latino teens used contraception the first time they had sex compared to 7 in 10 second generation Latino teens and nearly 8 in 10 third

FIGURE 2. Contraceptive Use Among Latino Teens by Generation Status, (NLSY)



**P<0.001 *p<0.05 + p<0.10

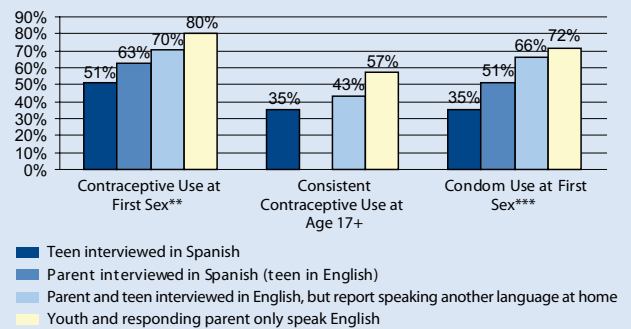
generation Latino teens (Figure 2).

- Among Latina teens, first and second generation girls are much *less* likely to use contraception consistently compared to third generation girls (37 percent, 32 percent, and 61 percent respectively).
- Compared to their peers, first generation Latino teen boys are *less* likely to use contraception consistently at age 17. About one-third of first generation Latino teen boys (36 percent) report using contraception consistently, compared to more than half of second generation (58 percent) and about 6 in 10 third generation Latino teen boys (61 percent).
- Generation status is not associated with becoming a teen parent or having multiple children by age 18-22.

Language Status. Language status is significantly associated with Latino teen contraceptive use and with teen childbearing among girls. However, language status is not associated with the age that Latino teens begin having sex.

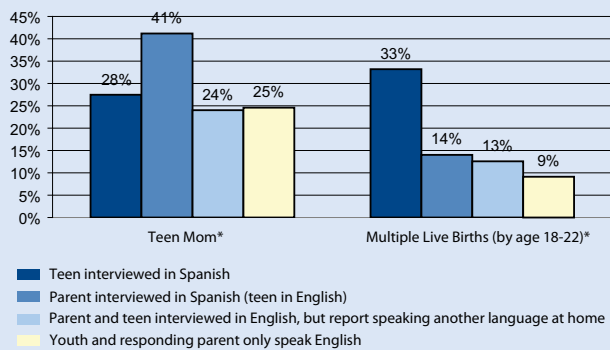
- Latina teens in English-only households are the *most* likely to use contraception at first sex. Fully 8 in 10 Latina teens in English-only households used contraception the first time they had sex, compared to 7 in 10 girls from bilingual households; less than two-thirds of Latina teens whose parents answered the survey in Spanish (63 percent); and approximately half of Latina teens who answered the survey in Spanish (51 percent) (Figure 3).
- Nearly 6 in 10 Latina teens in English-only households use

FIGURE 3. Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Latina Teen Girls, by Language Used at Home (NLSY)



***p<0.001 ** p<0.01 + p<0.10; In the "Consistent Use" category, the Youth interview in Spanish was combined with the 'Parent Interview in Spanish' group due to small cell size.

FIGURE 4. Birth Outcomes for Latina Teen Girls by Language Status (NLSY 1997)

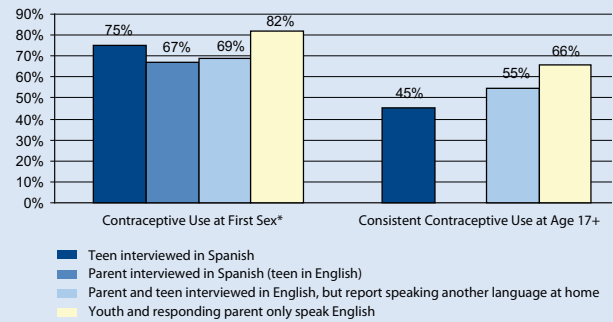


+ p<0.05

contraception consistently at age 17 (57 percent), compared to less than half of Latina teens in bilingual households (43 percent) and approximately one-third of Latina teens who themselves, or their parents, answered the survey in Spanish (35 percent) (Figure 3).

- Latina teens from English-only households are also *most* likely to report using a condom at first sex (72 percent), and Latina teens who answered the survey in Spanish are the *least* likely to report using a condom at first sex (35 percent).
- Among Latina teens who themselves completed the survey in English, but their parents completed the survey in Spanish, nearly one-half report being a teen mom (41 percent). This compares to about one-quarter of Latina teens from either Spanish-only, bilingual, or English-only households who report being a teen mom (Figure 4).
- A clearer pattern is apparent when looking at the proportion of Latina teens who have multiple children by age 18-22. Latinas who interviewed in Spanish are the *most* likely to report having multiple children by age 18-22 (33 percent), and Latinas in English-only households are the *least* likely to report having multiple children by age 18-22 (9 percent) (Figure 4).
- There are differences by language status, between Latino teen boys regarding contraceptive use at first sex and consistency of contraceptive use (Figure 5). Specifically, Latino teen boys who live in English-only households are the *most* likely to report using contraception at first sex (82 percent). Three-quarters of Latino teen boys who completed the survey in Spanish also report using contraception at first sex (75 percent), compared to about two-thirds of Latino teen boys from bilingual households (69 percent) or whose parents interviewed in Spanish (67 percent).

FIGURE 5. Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Latino Teen Boys, by Language Used at Home (NLSY, 1997)



+ p<0.10, *p<0.05

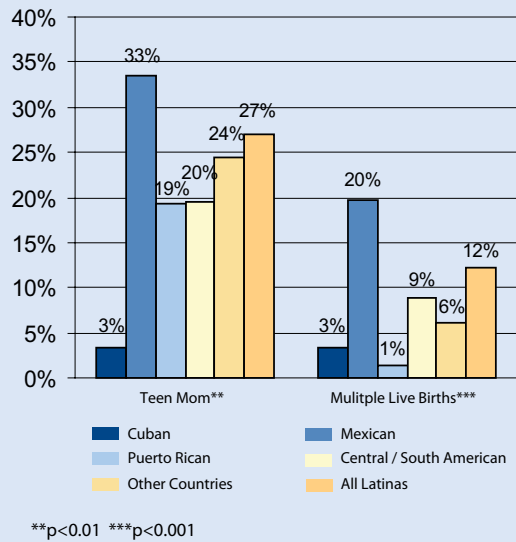
- Consistent contraceptive use at age 17 was marginally associated with language status among Latino teen boys. Latino teen boys who interviewed in Spanish, or whose parents interviewed in Spanish, were *least* likely to report using contraception consistently at age 17 (45 percent). Latino teen boys who were from English-only households were *most* likely to report consistent contraceptive use at age 17 (66 percent), and about half of those from bilingual households reported using contraception consistently at age 17 (55 percent) (Figure 5).

Country of Origin

Country of origin is another important factor to consider when exploring the sexual and contraceptive behavior of Latino teens. There are no significant differences by country of origin and sexual behavior and contraceptive use among Latino teen boys (Table A). Among Latina teens, there are significant differences by country of origin in regard to having sex before age 18, using contraception consistently, being a teen mom, and having multiple children by age 22.

- Among Latina teens, there are significant differences in the proportion who have sex before age 18 by country of origin. Latina teens from Puerto Rico are *most* likely to report having had sex by age 18 (77 percent) and those from Cuba are the *least* likely to report having had sex by age 18 (53 percent). More than half of Latina teens from Mexico have sex before age 18 (56 percent), two-thirds from Central/South America have sex before age 18 (68 percent), and 7 in 10 from other countries have sex before age 18 (70 percent).
- Similar proportions of Latina teens report using contraception the first time they have sex regardless of country of origin.

FIGURE 6. Proportion of Latina Teen Girls who Have a Birth by Country of Origin, NLSY



Latina teens from other countries were also marginally more likely to report consistent contraceptive use at age 17 (55 percent), compared to Latina teens from Mexico (39 percent) and Puerto Rico (49 percent). Please see Table B for more information about age of sexual initiation, contraceptive use, and condom use by country of origin.

- Among Latina teens, country of origin is significantly associated with the likelihood of being a teen mom and of having two or more children by age 18-22. Overall, more than one-quarter of Latina teens report being a teen mom (27 percent). However, when broken down by country of origin, there is considerable variability. In fact, one-third of Latinas of Mexican origin had a child as a teen compared to one-quarter from other countries of origin, 20 percent of Central/South American and Puerto Rican origin, and 3 percent of Cuban origin (Figure 6).
- Overall, more than 1 in 10 Latinas aged 18-22 report having two or more children (12 percent). Twenty percent of Latinas of Mexican origin report having two or more children at the time of the survey, compared to 9 percent of young women from Central/South America, 6 percent of young women from other countries, 3 percent of young women from Cuba, and 1 percent of young women from Puerto Rico (Figure 6).

What it all means

Generation status and language are closely linked with teens' contraceptive behavior.

Among Latino teens, first generation Latino teens were

the *least* likely to use contraception the first time they had sex. Latino teens who lived in Spanish-only households were also less likely than those in English-only households to use contraception at first sex, and were less likely to use contraception consistently at age 17. While these analyses do not provide insight into why these differences occur, it does suggest that program providers should be aware of these differences and tailor programs appropriately for their target population.

Among Latina teens, both language status and country of origin are strongly associated with becoming a teen parent, but this is not true for Latino teen boys.

More than 1 in 4 Latina teens who themselves conducted the interview in English, but their parents conducted the interview in Spanish, is a teen mom. In addition, one-third of Latinas from Mexico become a teen parent, compared to one-fifth of Latinas from Puerto Rico and Central/South America, and 3 percent of Latinas from Cuba. Program providers should consider these differences when tailoring pregnancy prevention programs for their teens.

The association between acculturation, country of origin, and teens' sexual behavior and reproductive health outcomes is very complex.

The results presented in this brief illustrate that measures of acculturation such as generation status and language are strongly associated with some behavior, such as contraceptive use, but that these associations might be different for boys and girls, and do not hold true for all sexual behavior.

Methodology

The data presented in this issue brief are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which was initiated by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1997 (NLSY97). The NLSY97 is a nationally representative survey that collects information annually on a broad range of topics from 8,984 U.S. adolescents who were aged 12-16 years in 1997.⁵ The analyses in this brief are limited to 1,901 adolescents of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, as defined by a resident household informant 18 or more years old, and an additional 123 adolescents for whom at least one biological parent was reported to be Cuban, Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, or of other Hispanic or other

Table A: Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Latino Teen Boys by Country of Origin (NLSY 1997)

Country of Origin	Sex Before Age 18	Contraceptive Use at First Sex	Consistent Contraceptive Use at Age 17	Condom Use at First Sex
Mexico	71.3%	69.8%	51.6%	54.9%
Puerto Rico	71.6%	72.9%	61.0%	56.1%
Cuba	55.6%	75.5%	-- ^a	65.3%
Central/South America	70.8%	67.0%	-- ^a	65.1%
Other	71.3%	79.1%	59.3% ^a	58.2%

^a For outcomes at age 17, Cuba, Central/South America and Other are combined due to small sample sizes

Table B: Reproductive Health Outcomes Among Latina Teen Girls by Country of Origin (NLSY 1997)

Country of Origin	Sex Before Age 18**	Contraceptive Use at First Sex	Consistent Contraceptive Use at Age 17+	Condom Use at First Sex
Mexico	56.0%	67.8%	38.5%	60.9%
Puerto Rico	77.0%	72.7%	48.6%	73.9%
Cuba	53.4%	77.6%	-- ^a	62.8%
Central/South America	67.9%	71.0%	-- ^a	61.4%
Other	70.3%	78.5%	55.0% ^a	69.7%

^a For outcomes at age 17, Cuba, Central/South America and Other are combined due to small sample sizes + p<0.10, *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Spanish origin. The final sample consisted of 1,614 Hispanic adolescents with a valid biological-parent survey.

About the Putting What Works to Work Project

Putting What Works to Work (PWWTW) is a project of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy funded, in part, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Through PWWTW, the National Campaign is translating research on teen pregnancy prevention and related issues into user-friendly materials for practitioners, policymakers, and advocates. As part of this initiative, the *Science Says* series summarizes recent research in short, easy-to-understand briefs.

Author Information

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About the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported largely by private donations. The National Campaign's mission is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and

ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

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NOTES

- For the purposes of this analysis, Latino teens refers to Latino teen boys and girls; Latina teens refers to Latino teen girls; and Latino teen boys refers to Latino teen boys.
- For those unfamiliar with the term "statistical significance," this refers to the results of statistical testing to measure whether observed differences between groups (boys versus girls, etc) are true differences in attitudes/behavior, or are due to the particular teens included in the survey, which is meant to be representative of the U.S. teen population. For the purposes of these analyses, the threshold for statistical significance is 0.05. That is, results are considered significant if the "p value" (or probability of the difference being just a random occurrence) is equal to or less than 5%.
- Differences referred to as being "marginally significant" have P values between 0.06 and 0.10.

SOURCES

- This brief is based on the analyses conducted for the full report by: McDonald, J.A., Manlove, J., and Ikramullah, E (under review) Immigration measures and reproductive health among Latino youth: Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997.
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, (2007). An Overview of Latina Teen Pregnancy. Washington, DC: National Campaign.
 - Bureau of Labor Statistics US Department of Labor. (2005). *NLSY97 User's Guide: A guide to the Rounds 1-7 Data*. Columbus, Ohio: Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University.