

# Briefly...

## Unplanned Pregnancy in the United States

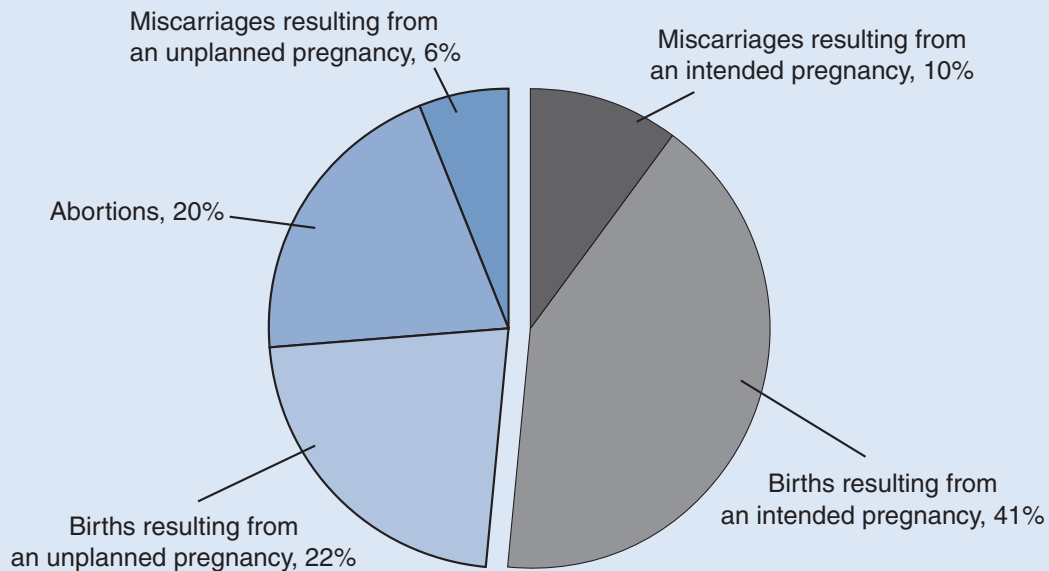
### One-half of pregnancies in the United States are unplanned.

Approximately one-half of the 6.4 million pregnancies in 2001 (the most recent year for which adequate data are available) in the United States were unplanned.\* That is, one in two pregnancies—about 3 million—were unplanned. These three million unplanned pregnancies include 1.3 million pregnancies that ended in abortion;† 1.4 million live births that women reported

were unplanned at time of conception; and 411,000 miscarriages of unplanned pregnancies. The remaining pregnancies (over 3 million) were distributed among births resulting from an intended pregnancy, and miscarriages of intended pregnancies. Moreover, about two-thirds of all unplanned pregnancies—2 million—are unwanted.‡

Figure 1 shows these distributions graphically. The blue area shows those pregnancies that are unplanned.

**FIGURE 1.** Pregnancy Distribution for All Women Aged 15-44, 2001



Source: Special Tabulations by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2007.

\* Unplanned pregnancies include those reported by the woman to be unwanted or mistimed (also known as “unintended”).

† A small number of women who plan their pregnancy make the difficult decision to terminate it after learning that it poses a serious maternal health risk or that the fetus has severe abnormalities. Other reasons may arise as well.

‡ The primary source of information on unplanned pregnancy is the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), a periodic survey of women aged 15-44 conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics. The NSFG defines a pregnancy as unwanted if the respondent reports that she did not want to become pregnant now or at any time in the future.

**The rate of unplanned pregnancy remained the same between 1994 and 2001.**

Not only is unplanned pregnancy common, but it also appears that the rate of unplanned pregnancy has not changed at all between 1994 and 2001. Furthermore, during the same time period, the rate of unwanted pregnancy actually increased four percent—from 31.9 to 33.2 unwanted pregnancies per 1,000 women age 15-44.

Compared to women in other age groups, teens made the most progress in reducing rates of unplanned pregnancy between 1994 and 2001 (18 percent decrease). It is also the case that teens are the only age group that made progress in reducing rates of unwanted pregnancy between 1994 and 2001 (eight percent decrease). By comparison, the rate of unplanned pregnancy among women in their early twenties remained virtually unchanged between 1994 and 2001 while the rate of unwanted pregnancy increased six percent. In large part, the decrease in the rate of unplanned pregnancy among teens reflects a significant decrease in the overall pregnancy rate among teens between 1994 and 2001. Overall pregnancy rates among adults remained relatively stable during the same time period.

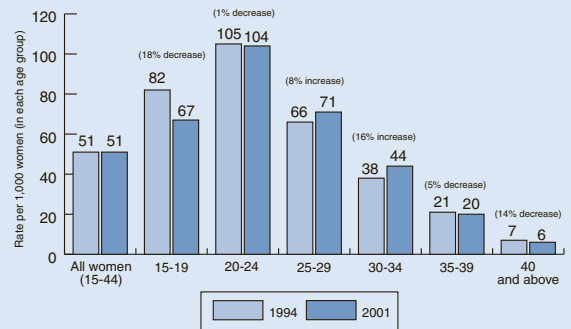
**Most unplanned pregnancies are to women ages 20 and older and to unmarried women.**

Figure 2 shows that unplanned pregnancy is common. Figures 3 and 4 develop this picture further by showing more about who experiences unplanned pregnancy.

Figure 3 clearly demonstrates that unplanned pregnancy is not just a teen problem; in fact, only 21 percent of all unplanned pregnancies occur to teen girls. Over half (55 percent) of all unplanned pregnancies occur to women in their twenties, and fully 1 million occur to women in their early twenties. In part, this concentration of unplanned pregnancy among women in their twenties reflects the fact that this same cohort also accounts for the majority of pregnancies overall.

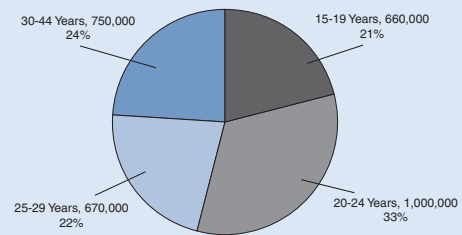
It is also the case that more than two-thirds of all unplanned pregnancies—about 2.2 million—occur to unmarried women (Figure 4). That is, unplanned pregnancy is closely associated with being unmarried.

**FIGURE 2.** Rate of Unplanned Pregnancy (per 1,000 women) by Age Group, 1994 and 2001



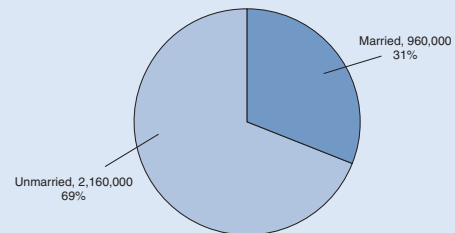
Source: Special tabulations of data from Finer, L.B. and Henshaw, S.K., (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 38(2):90-96.

**FIGURE 3.** Number and Percent of Unplanned Pregnancies by Age Group, 2001



Source: Special tabulations of data from Finer, L.B. and Henshaw, S.K., (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 38(2):90-96.

**FIGURE 4.** Number and Percent of Unplanned Pregnancies by Marital Status, 2001



Source: Special tabulations of data from Finer, L.B. and Henshaw, S.K., (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 38(2):90-96.

**Women of every age experience high levels of unplanned pregnancies.**

Figure 3 on the previous page shows that when one looks at all unplanned pregnancies, adult women account for a much larger share of unplanned pregnancies than do teens. However, it is also true that the risk of a pregnancy being unplanned is high within all age groups—that is, within each age group, the proportion of all pregnancies that are unplanned is high. Figures 5 and 6 show the proportion of all pregnancies that are unplanned by age and how these unplanned pregnancies are resolved.

Figure 5 shows that, in general, unplanned pregnancy is common across all age groups. For example, 81 percent of all teen pregnancies are unplanned; among women in their early twenties, fully 60 percent of pregnancies are unplanned; and almost half of pregnancies to women aged 25-29 are unplanned.

Figure 6 shows differences by age in how unplanned pregnancies are resolved. For example, roughly one-third of unplanned pregnancies among teens end in abortion and the remainder end in either birth or miscarriage. Among women in their twenties, almost half of unplanned pregnancies end in abortion. In fact, teens are less likely than women in other age groups to end an unplanned pregnancy in abortion. It is worth noting that while a large share of teen pregnancies are reported as unplanned and end in abortion, teen pregnancies and abortions have both declined dramatically. The teen pregnancy rate declined 36 percent between 1990 and 2002, and the teen abortion rate decreased 50 percent between 1988 and 2002, reaching an all-time low.

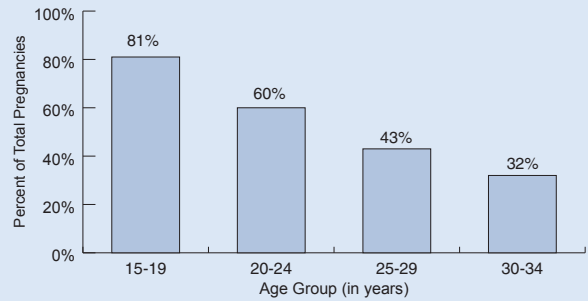
These numbers show clearly that women in their twenties and even their thirties are struggling with pregnancy planning. Once again, it's not just teens.

**The majority of all pregnancies among unmarried women are unplanned.**

As noted in Figure 4, unmarried women account for a much larger share of all unplanned pregnancies (69 percent) than do married women (31 percent). Figure 7 shows that when one looks only at unmarried women, the share of their pregnancies that is unplanned is very high—74 percent. This compares to roughly one-quarter of pregnancies among married women that are unplanned (27 percent).

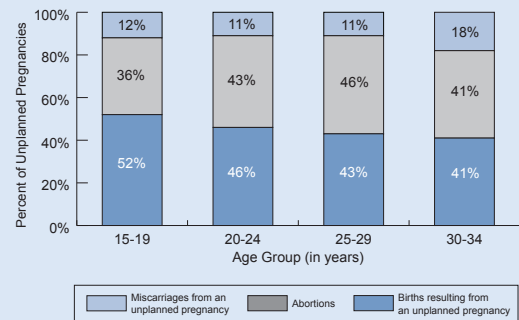
Furthermore, unplanned pregnancies among unmarried women are more likely to end in abortion, as shown in Figure 8 on the next

**FIGURE 5.** Percent of All Pregnancies that are Unplanned by Age Group



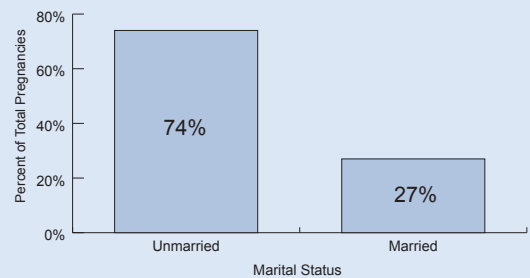
Source: Special tabulations of data from Finer, L.B. and Henshaw, S.K., (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 38(2):90-96.

**FIGURE 6.** Distribution of Unplanned Pregnancies by Outcome and Age Group, 2001



Source: Special tabulations of data from Finer, L.B. and Henshaw, S.K., (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 38(2):90-96.

**FIGURE 7.** Percent of All Pregnancies that are Unplanned by Marital Status, 2001



Source: Special Tabulations by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2007.

page (51 percent of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried women compared to 22 percent of unplanned pregnancies among married women). Nonetheless, as noted earlier, married women still account for nearly one million unplanned pregnancies each year.

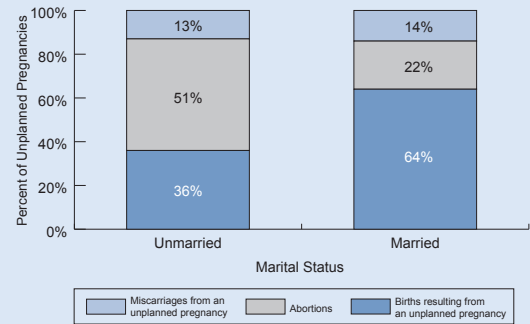
## Sources

Special tabulations of data from *Finer, L.B. and Henshaw, S.K., (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 38(2):90-96.*

The resolution of unplanned pregnancy and unwanted pregnancy numbers presented in this document are special tabulations of the National Campaign. The following sources were used:

1. Special tabulations of data from *Finer and Henshaw (2006). Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001, Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 38(2):90-96.*
2. *Martin, J.A., Hamilton, B.E., Ventura, S.J., Menacker, F., Park, M. M., and Sutton, P.D. (2002). Births: Final Data for 2001. National Vital Statistics Reports, 51(2).*
3. *Chandra, A., Martinez, G.M., Mosher, W.D., Abma, J.C., and Jones, J. (2005). Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: Data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, Vital and Health Statistics, 23(25).*
4. *Finer, L., Henshaw, S. (2006). Estimates of U.S. Abortion Incidence 2001-2003. Guttmacher Institute: New York, NY.*

**FIGURE 8.** Distribution of Unplanned Pregnancies by Outcome and Marital Status, 2001



Source: Special Tabulations by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2007.

5. *Ventura, S.J., Mosher, W.D., Curtin, S.C., Abma, J.C. and Henshaw, S. (2000). Trends in pregnancies and pregnancy rates by outcome: Estimates for the United States, 1976-96. Vital Health Statistics, 21(56).*
6. *Abma, J.C, Chandra, A., Mosher, W.D., Peterson, L., and Piccinino, L. (1997). Fertility, family planning, and reproductive health of U.S. women: Data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth, Vital and Health Statistics, 23(19).*
7. "Table 1. Total population and female population by age, bridged race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2001" As accessed from *Vital and Health Statistics, 2001 Natality Data Set, CD-ROM Series 21, Number 15, Reissued September 2003.*
8. Special tabulations of *Vital and Health Statistics, 1994 Natality Data Set, CD-ROM Series 21, Number 4, Issued May 1997.*