



CWHS

Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Early initiation of sexual intercourse is a risk factor for sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy.¹ It has been suggested that cultural, economic, and demographic factors could influence early debut of sexual activity.¹ In particular, there is evidence that differences in attitudes, values and sexual norms are possible explanations for observed differences in early sexual debut by race/ethnicity.¹

Both the 2006 and 2007 California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) asked all women: "How old were you at the time of your first sexual intercourse experience with a man?" This analysis was limited to women ages 18-49 from the combined 2006 and 2007 surveys and included 5,283 respondents. Responses were examined by age, race/ethnicity, place of birth, and foster care history² and weighted in these analyses by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population.

More than two-thirds of women (68.0 percent) responded that their first sexual experience was before age 20, 24.4 percent between ages 18-19, and 43.7 percent before age 18. A quarter of respondents (25.0 percent) had sex for the first time at age 20 and above and the remaining seven percent replied that they had not yet had sex.

The average age at first sexual intercourse among women ages 18-49 was 18.2 years. The average age of sexual debut was highest among Asian/Pacific Islander (21.3 years), followed by Hispanic (18.6 years), White (17.5 years) and lowest among

African American/Black (16.9 years) women.

Highlights from the CWHS on the timing of first sexual intercourse among women ages 18-49 by their different socio-demographic characteristics are:

- More African American/Black women had their first sexual intercourse before age 18 (53.9 percent) than White (51.7 percent), Hispanic (38.0 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islander (19.7 percent) women³ (see Figure 1).
- Foreign-born women had sex for the first time, on average, at 19.9 years, some 2.6 years later than U.S.-born women who first had sexual intercourse, on average, at 17.3 years.
- U.S.-born Hispanic women reported their first sexual intercourse experience, on average, to be two years earlier than their foreign-born counterparts (17.3 years versus 19.3 years). There was a 16 percentage point difference in the proportion of foreign-born and U.S.-born Hispanic women who had their first sex before age 18 (32.3 percent versus 48.8 percent).³
- Nearly equal proportions of women born in Mexico (31.6 percent) and Central-South America/Caribbean (32.6 percent) countries reported having their first sexual experience before age 18 than woman born in Asia³ (15.3 percent).

Demographic Differences in the Timing of First Sexual Intercourse Among California Women, 2006-2007

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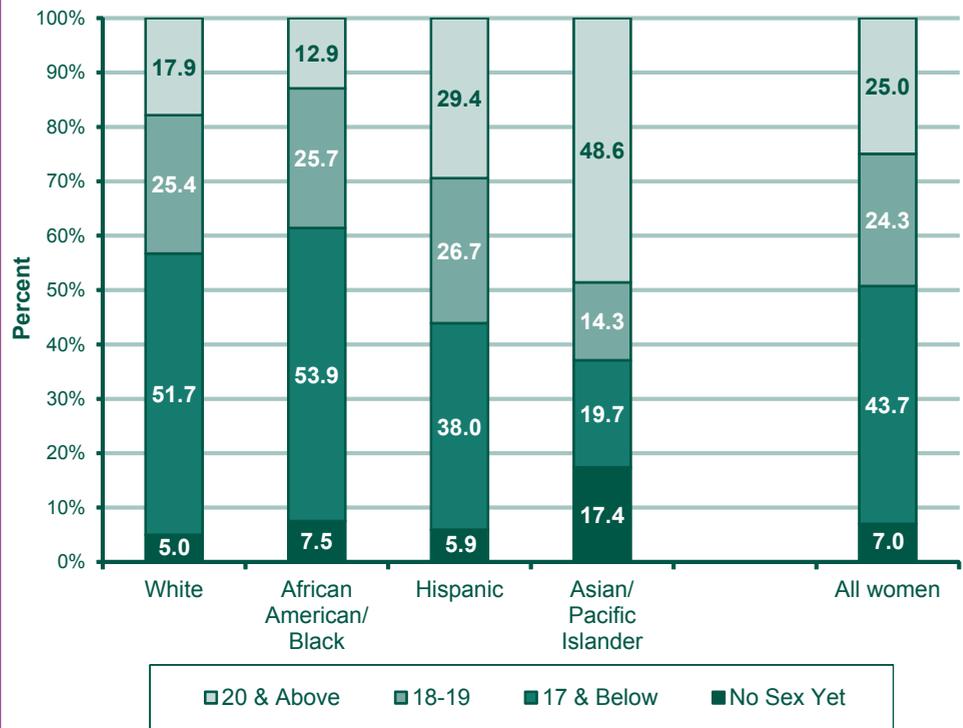
These findings indicate that certain subgroups of women were likely to report an earlier age at sexual intercourse than others. It is critical to provide these women with education and interventions that provide the skills and information they need to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases once they become sexually active.

Demographic Differences in the Timing of First Sexual Intercourse Among California Women, 2006-2007

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- Women with a history of foster care before age 18 initiated sexual intercourse two years earlier than women without this history (16.1 years versus 18.3 years).

Figure 1 Timing of First Sexual Intercourse With a Man Among California Women Ages 18-49, By Race/Ethnicity, 2006-2007



Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2006-2007

1. *Finer LB. Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954--2003. Public Health Rep* January-February 2007;122(1):73-8.
2. Removal from home before 18 years of age.
3. $p < 0.0001$, chi-square test

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