



# Unintended Pregnancy Rates: Reproductive Rights and Opportunity

*A recent study conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) highlights an alarming increase in unintended pregnancies that threaten women's health and life opportunities. In 2001 an estimated 3.1 million unintended pregnancies accounted for nearly half (49%) of all pregnancies in the United States. Each year one in twenty women becomes unintentionally pregnant. Women of color, those with low incomes, and those with lower levels of education are disproportionately at risk for unintended pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>*

## Disparities by Income

- The disparity by income grew between 1994 and 2001, with low-income women's rate of unintended pregnancy increasing by 29% while the rate for women at or twice the poverty level declined by 20%.<sup>2</sup>
- As a consequence of unintended pregnancies in 2001 poor women had unintended births at five times the rate of their counterparts in the highest income category.<sup>3</sup>
- Within income categories, racial and ethnic differences are stark. Among women whose income is below poverty level Hispanic women have a much higher unintended pregnancy rate than white and African-American women.<sup>4</sup>
- Among women with incomes greater than the poverty line African-American women have an unintended pregnancy rate that is

more than twice that of their white counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

## Disparities by Education

- The unintended pregnancy rate for women without a high school diploma was about three times that of college graduates.<sup>6</sup>
- Among college graduates, the rate of unintended pregnancy fell by 25% from 1994 to 2001.<sup>7</sup>
- In the same time period, unintended pregnancy rates rose for women with a high school diploma or GED by about 9%.<sup>8</sup>

## Disparities by Race and Ethnicity

- African-American women had the highest rates of unintended pregnancy overall, more than two times the rate of white women.<sup>9</sup>
- For Hispanic women, unintended pregnancies accounted for 54% of all pregnancies in 2001, up from less than half in 1994.<sup>10</sup>

The disparities found in the AGI study reflect the government's abandonment of women, thereby creating obstacles to their opportunity. Funding for state and federal family planning services is threatened in light of evidence proving the continued need for those very services that prevent unintended pregnancies.

- For example, poor women and women of color are more likely than women overall to be among the 45 million uninsured people in America.<sup>11</sup>
- Title X spending declined between 1994 and 2001, meaning that low-income women who depend on the only federal funds dedicated to family planning services face further threats to their personal and economic security.<sup>12</sup>
- Since 2001 the trends to funding for family planning services have continued, while funding has increased for abstinence-only programs that offer only partial sexual education and distort the facts about pregnancy prevention.<sup>13</sup>

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The decision to have a child can impact a woman's opportunities drastically. When women of all ages are empowered by comprehensive health education and access to health services their abilities to pursue higher education and get ahead in life, obtain economic independence and security, and simply take control of their lives improve. Being able to fully access all of these opportunities and achieve one's full potential is impeded when women are denied the resources to do so.

*In light of the latest research on unplanned pregnancy in America a new conversation should emerge around reproductive health and improving life opportunities. Concrete actions in the form of public policies must respond to women's and community needs by:*

- Funding family planning services according to community's needs and restoring the cuts made to Medicaid programs and Title X programs.
- Creating a system of universal access to comprehensive and high-quality health care that includes reproductive services and education for all families.
- Improving education for all students to close the gender and racial gaps in educational attainment and help decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies.

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<sup>1</sup> L.B. Finer and S.K. Henshaw, *Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy In the United States, 1994 and 2001* (New York, NY: Alan Guttmacher Institute, 5 May, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> US House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform- Minority Staff- Special Investigations Division, *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*, December 2004, <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf> (8 May, 2006)