Data Snapshot of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Young Women in Foster Care in California

DEMOGRAPHICS

As of July 1, 2015, there were 62,413 youth in California’s foster care system.1 About half (50.4%) were female.2

One-fifth (20.2%) of foster youth in California are between the ages of eleven and fifteen, and about 23% are sixteen or older.3

More than half of California’s foster youth are Latino. Most of the remaining youth are white or black.4

Almost 60% of seventeen-year-olds in foster care in California have lived in a group home.5 Of those, more than half have been placed in two or more group homes.6

SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND CONTRACEPTION USE

Young women in the foster care system are almost twice as likely to have engaged in sexual activity as their same-aged peers in the general population.7

They are also less likely to have used contraception during sexual activity than their peers who are not in the child welfare system.8

About 70% of foster and former foster youth interviewed about their most recent pregnancy did not describe the pregnancy as wanted, and yet only 25% were using birth control at the time of conception.9

PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

Young women in foster care and those who have “aged out” of foster care are more than twice as likely to have experienced teen pregnancy than their peers not in care.10 They are also more likely to become pregnant more than once.11

Young women who have been in foster care are more likely to have unwanted pregnancies than those not in care: about 70% did not describe their most recent pregnancy at age 21 as wanted, compared to half of their peers not in care.12

By age 21, more than a third of California young women who grew up in foster care are mothers.13 Among seventeen-year-old young women in foster care in California who have been pregnant, 20% reported that they received no prenatal care during their pregnancy.14

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Female teens who have been in foster care are more than four times as likely to have ever experienced forced sex than those who have never been in foster care.15

More than 30% of female foster youth in California were raped before they entered care, and about 45% were sexually molested.16

For further information, contact Rebecca Gudeman, rgudeman@youthlaw.org, (510) 835-8098 ext. 3037
References


2 Id.

3 Id.

4 Id.


6 Id.


8 Id.


11 Id.


14 Courtney, M.E., et al., supra note 5.


16 Courtney, M.E., et al., supra note 5.