

# YOUNG WOMEN SPEAK OUT!

*Perspectives and Implications of Reproductive  
Health, Rights and Justice Policies*



**CLRJ RESEARCH REPORT**

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*California Latinas for Reproductive Justice*



# OVERVIEW

How have notable reproductive and sexual health policies impacted California adolescents' rights to complete and accurate information and services? Does family communication about sex really influence their decisions? Are pregnant and parenting youth provided equal access to educational opportunities? Does the public debate surrounding adolescent childbearing recognize underlying systemic factors or vilify youth?

In *Young Women Speak Out!* California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) assessed young Latinas' perceptions about the implementation of key California reproductive and sexual health policies in order to address the questions posed above. This community-informed research project explored the views and documented the experiences of young Latinas in diverse California regions regarding reproductive and sexual health concerns in order to showcase the day-to-day implications that such policies have among youth in our communities. The young women's experiences highlight the significant gap between existing policies and their connection to the most underserved young Latinas' lives. They also highlight the systemic discrimination experienced by pregnant and parenting Latina youth within educational institutions and the absence of public debate focusing on health, educational and social support networks for these young parents.

**"A lot of my friends, we discuss options for birth control...but I am not a doctor, I am not a nurse. [We need] someone to talk to us, we just [need] to have someone who is educated to give us better answers with respect."  
—22 year-old**

## KEY FINDINGS

CLRJ's qualitative research project identified the following key findings:

- There continues to be a wide gap between the passage of key reproductive and sexual health policies and their implementation, particularly for the most disenfranchised youth of color.
- Young Latinas continually face a range of obstacles in accessing comprehensive and medically accurate information about their reproductive and sexual health.
- Information about California minors' constitutionally protected rights to confidential reproductive health services has failed to reach young Latinas.

- Although Latina/o parents are concerned about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended adolescent childbearing and keeping their children safe, many lack the information and tools to engage their children in these important discussions.
- Pregnant and parenting young Latinas face systemic discrimination in educational institutions, lack access to equal educational opportunities and experience a dearth of social supports in their communities.

Despite California's longstanding policies and laws supporting comprehensive sexuality education, many of the young participants recall receiving abstinence-based sexual health education at either the middle or high school level.

In addition to ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education for youth, many participants suggested there should be comprehensive sexual health education classes for parents. These classes should not only provide parents with medically-accurate information regarding topics such as contraception, birth control and STIs, but also provide parents with tools to broach these topics openly with their children.

While participants recognized the importance of learning about their rights to confidential health services and increasing accessibility to such services, they also stressed the value of delivering these services with respect.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROMOTE THE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE OF YOUNG LATINAS**

In response to the key research findings, CLRJ has proposed an array of policy recommendations in the following areas:

- Promoting and implementing policies that advance young Latinas' rights to access sexual and reproductive health information and services that are comprehensive, confidential and medically-accurate in order for youth to make well-informed decisions about their health and lives.
- Promoting policies that enforce implementation of the California Comprehensive Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Act<sup>1</sup> and supporting culturally and linguistically appropriate programs to educate students, families and communities about the Act's provisions.
- Promoting and enforcing existing laws that prohibit discrimination against pregnant and parenting youth, including laws that ensure equal access to educational opportunities.