

This Age Group Has the Most Unplanned Pregnancies

The first thing that comes to my mind when I think of an unplanned pregnancy is a teenage girl who can't fully enjoy her prom because she's too busy thinking about how to tell her parents about her pregnancy test results. That, or Ellen Page's hilariously charming character in the movie *Juno*. If you think about it, we've all sort of been duped into thinking that teenagers are the most vulnerable bunch when it comes to surprise pregnancies: After all, we're surrounded by reality TV shows about teen moms and we've been warned from a young age by our parents that teenage pregnancy will mess up our lives. Odds are, the connection between being a teen and unplanned pregnancy been drilled into our heads for as long as we can remember.

It takes no more than a single glance at reliable research, though, to see that teenagers aren't the ones who most find themselves in this sort of pickle. Seven out of every 10 pregnancies among single, educated women in their 20s are unplanned, and a woman in her 20s is three and a half times more likely to unexpectedly become pregnant than a teenage girl. In 2011, the Guttmacher Institute reported that women between the ages 20-24 were the most likely to experience unintended pregnancy. In fact, 81 out of every 1,000 women in this demographic became pregnant that year. The scariest part is that women in this age group are often almost as ill-equipped, both financially and psychologically, to handle a baby as high schoolers — which puts a lot of stress on these suddenly pregnant individuals.

Bustle spoke with Ginny Ehrlich, CEO of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, who tells us that the vast majority of women in their 20s report that they're not ready for motherhood (86 percent of them, to be exact), yet 40 percent of them aren't using birth control regularly. "There's a slight disconnect between intention and intentionality, if you will," she says. We may say over and over again that we aren't ready for a baby — but our actions don't seem to reflect our words.

It's not that these unexpectedly pregnant 20-something women are irresponsible, careless, or lazy. The reality is much more complicated than that. For starters, the sex ed we received as prepubescent youngsters hardly makes the cut. We don't know enough about our bodies, our reproductive systems, or sex itself to make sound decisions all the time. In fact, one survey from a few years ago found that 50 percent of young adults don't even know which part of a menstrual cycle a woman could become pregnant during.

"Good sex education is really important," Ehrlich notes. "What we learn in middle school... there's a lot that happens between that time and our 20s." The problem is we're not provided with the resources to learn about those changes as they happen to us. We don't know who to ask or where to find the answers. Plus, there's a lot of misinformation out there, like that myth that rogue sperm swimming in a pool can impregnate you. No wonder any talk about sex and babies gets a little confusing when we're moving from adolescence to the adult life.

There are also the lifestyle changes to consider. We generally live under our parents' roof until we're 18, and then most of us get abruptly dropped into a pool of youthful independence, whether we're attending college or living on our own for the first time. There are no more curfews or lectures about completing chores, and there isn't really anyone to answer to. Ehrlich notes that, during this period, there's "so much independence, so many different decisions, so many different things happening in life." We seize the opportunity to do whatever we want, which often includes sex. This is both normal and totally awesome, but it happens at a crucial time in our development when we're still likely to make rash decisions — particularly if we aren't given the proper tools to recognize which choices lead to serious consequences.