

TEEN SEX DATA INCOMPLETE

The media are trumpeting the Guttmacher Institute's report showing that teenage pregnancies, births, and abortions have dropped to their lowest level since they peaked in the 1990s. This is good news, but the data is incomplete.

The teenage pregnancy rate in the United States is still 5.5 times higher than in Western Europe. Moreover, the report says nothing about rates of teenage oral sex, or same-sex sex. Also, it is entirely possible for pregnancy rates to decrease at the same time that "hooking up," or casual sex encounters, are increasing. We know, for example, that there has been an increase in pre-teen "hooking up."

Even more important, the Guttmacher Institute, and most other organizations that track sexual activity, never discuss the emotional effects of sexual experimentation among teenagers; among girls, in particular, the effects are serious. If we look at studies on teenage wellbeing—measures of their physical and mental health, coupled with their level of happiness—the results are not encouraging.

It is entirely logical that organizations bent on seeing technology as the great elixir to contemporary social problems would neglect to report on the wellbeing of teenagers. That is because wellbeing is tied to moral issues, and that is a subject that makes sexologists uncomfortable.