

CHAPTER 5

Sexual and Contraceptive Behavior of Young Adults

The reproductive health knowledge of young adults and their sexual and contraceptive behavior have important implications for the future of a population's health and well being. Worldwide, it has been estimated that almost half of new HIV infections and one-third of all new sexually transmitted infections occur to people younger than 25 years of age. In addition, an unintended pregnancy can disrupt a young girl's life by interrupting further schooling and training. Parents, teachers, and health professionals are often unable to communicate effectively with young adults about their sexual and reproductive lives. In many countries, young people are seldom prepared with the information, skills, and resources needed to make a healthy transition to adulthood. Inadequate programs and lack of sex education can leave youth at the mercy of mass media and misinformation from peers.

A young adult module for women and men aged 15–24 was included in the last survey conducted in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The young adult modules included questions related to first sexual experience and current sexual behavior, including contraceptive use. The female questionnaires also included questions on the educational status of women at the time of their first pregnancy, and whether their pregnancy disrupted their studies.

In each of the surveys, first sexual experience is classified as premarital or marital. If the respondent's first sexual partner was their husband, the first sexual experience was classified as marital. Sexual experience was



classified as premarital if the first sexual experience occurred with someone other than their husband or if it occurred at least one month prior to the date of marriage.

First Sexual Experience

The reported sexual experience of young adult women and men is shown in Table 5.1. Focusing first on the women, at least half of the women aged 15–24 in El Salvador and Honduras reported sexual experience, compared to 43.0 percent in Guatemala. Of those with sexual experience in Guatemala and Honduras, 27.2 and 28.6 percent reported marital experience, respectively, while 15.8 and 27.2 percent reported premarital experience. The situation in El Salvador is different in that the majority of the women reported premarital experience (39.3 percent premarital vs. 12.4 percent marital). As may be expected, sexual experience increases as age increases, with marked differences between adolescents (15–19 years) and 20–24-year-olds (Graph 5.1).

Among the men, from 58.0 percent (Guatemala) to 66.4 percent (El Salvador) reported sexual experience. In all three of the countries, almost

all of the men who reported sexual experience have had premarital sex. Like the women, sexual experience increases as age increases, with marked differences between adolescents (15–19 years) and 20–24-year-olds (Graph 5.1).

In Guatemala and Honduras, rural women were more likely to be sexually experienced than their urban counterparts, while the opposite was the case in El Salvador, although the urban/rural differential is small (Table 5.2). Also, in Guatemala and Honduras, rural women were more likely to be married at first sexual experience, while in El Salvador they were more likely to be single. In El Salvador and Honduras, urban women tended to report that their first sexual experience was premarital, while in Guatemala near equal percentages of urban women reported marital and premarital experiences (circa 19 percent).

With respect to the men, in all three countries urban men were more likely to be sexually experienced than men living in the rural area. Regardless of area of residence, the vast majority of the men with sexual experience reported that their first sexual experience was premarital.

Table 5.1
Reported Sexual Experience, by Marital Status at Time of First Sexual Experience, According to Current Age: Women and Men Aged 15–24 (Most Recent Survey)

Country/ Age	Year of Survey	Females			Males				
		No Sexual Experience	Marital	Premarital	Total	No Sexual Experience	Marital	Premarital	Total
El Salvador	2002/03								
Total		48.3	12.4	39.3	100.0	33.6	1.4	65.0	100.0
15–19		67.5	7.5	25.1	100.0	49.7	0.0	50.3	100.0
20–24		25.6	18.2	56.2	100.0	13.5	3.2	83.3	100.0
Guatemala	2002								
Total		57.0	27.2	15.8	100.0	42.0	5.4	52.6	100.0
15–19		77.0	14.2	8.8	100.0	59.8	2.4	37.8	100.0
20–24		32.6	43.1	24.4	100.0	11.3	10.6	78.2	100.0
Honduras	2001								
Total		44.2	28.6	27.2	100.0	35.3	2.2	62.5	100.0
15–19		61.9	19.9	18.2	100.0	51.3	0.6	48.1	100.0
20–24		22.9	39.0	38.1	100.0	15.6	4.1	80.3	100.0

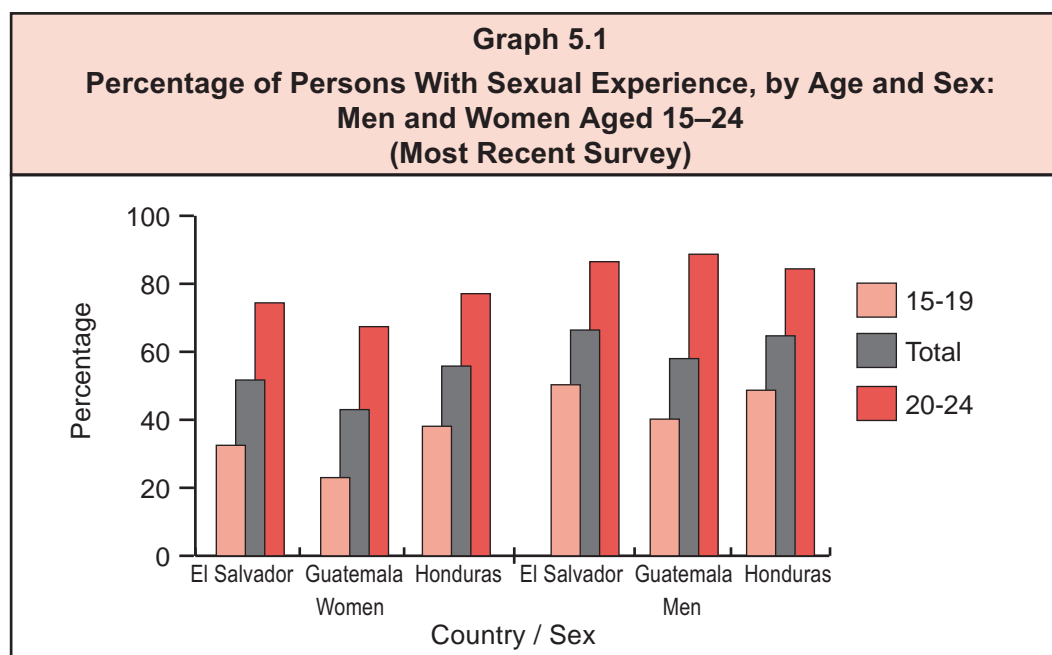


Table 5.2
Reported Sexual Experience, by Marital Status at Time of First Sexual
Experience, According to Area of Residence: Women and Men Aged 15–24
(Most Recent Survey)

Country/ Area	Year of Survey	Females			Males				
		No Sexual Experience	Marital	Premarital	Total	No Sexual Experience	Marital	Premarital	Total
El Salvador	2002/03								
Total		48.3	12.4	39.3	100.0	33.5	1.1	65.4	100.0
Urban		47.8	8.3	43.9	100.0	24.9	0.7	74.4	100.0
Rural		49.0	17.6	33.4	100.0	43.1	1.5	55.4	100.0
Guatemala	2002								
Total		57.0	27.2	15.8	100.0	42.0	5.4	52.6	100.0
Urban		61.9	19.2	18.9	100.0	39.2	3.8	56.9	100.0
Rural		53.6	32.7	13.7	100.0	43.9	6.5	49.6	100.0
Honduras	2001								
Total		44.2	28.6	27.2	100.0	35.3	2.2	62.5	100.0
Urban		49.0	19.6	31.5	100.0	29.5	1.3	69.2	100.0
Rural		39.3	37.9	22.9	100.0	40.3	3.0	56.7	100.0

Table 5.3
Age at First Sexual Experience, According
to Area of Residence: Women Aged 15–24
(Most Recent Survey)

Country/ Area	Year of Survey	Age									Doesn't Remember	Average Age	
		<13	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20–24			
El Salvador	2002/03												
Total		4.0	5.6	12.2	18.3	14.5	12.3	12.5	7.8	12.0	0.8	16.4	
Urban		2.8	4.7	10.6	18.6	13.6	12.9	13.8	8.7	13.8	0.5	16.7	
Rural		5.5	6.7	14.2	18.0	15.7	11.6	10.7	6.7	9.8	1.3	16.1	
Guatemala	2002												
Total		3.0	6.0	13.2	16.6	16.2	15.1	11.5	7.7	10.2	0.5	16.4	
Urban		2.3	6.6	11.5	16.0	13.8	13.8	13.0	9.2	13.7	0.2	16.6	
Rural		3.4	5.6	14.1	17.0	17.5	15.9	10.7	6.9	8.2	0.6	16.2	
Honduras	2001												
Total		3.9	6.0	14.2	17.1	17.2	13.7	12.3	7.0	8.4	0.3	16.2	
Urban		3.4	5.9	13.2	14.5	17.8	13.2	13.1	7.7	10.7	0.6	16.4	
Rural		4.3	6.0	15.1	19.4	16.6	14.1	11.5	6.4	6.4	0.1	16.0	

Age at First Sexual Relation

In Tables 5.3 and 5.4, age at first sexual experience is shown for women and men, respectively. In the last column of each table average age at first sexual relation is also shown.

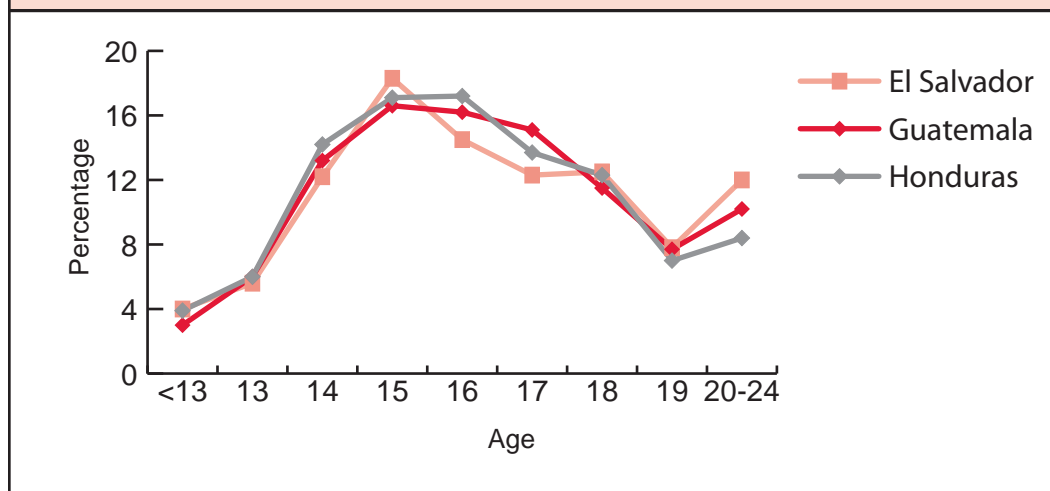
As shown in Table 5.3 and Graph 5.2, the modal age at first sexual experience for women is 15–16 years, as approximately a third of the women have their first relation in this age interval. However, it should be noted that 22 to 24 percent of the

women are sexually experienced before their fifteenth birthday. Thus, by age 16, 54.6 percent (El Salvador) to 58.4 percent (Honduras) of the women have had their first sexual experience. Age at first sexual experience varies according to area of residence. For example, in Honduras, three-fourths of rural women are sexually experienced before their eighteenth birthday compared to 68.0 percent of urban women. The differential is even greater in Guatemala—73.6 percent vs. 63.9 percent. In sum, in all of the countries, rural women initiate sex earlier than urban women, as indicated by average age at first sexual relation.

Table 5.4
Age at First Sexual Experience, According
to Area of Residence: Men Aged 15–24
(Most Recent Survey)

Country/ Area	Year of Survey	Age									Doesn't Remember	Average Age
		<13	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20–24		
El Salvador	2002/03											
Total		13.0	9.4	17.7	19.6	15.5	10.8	6.4	2.7	3.8	1.0	15.0
Urban		14.4	8.9	21.7	16.5	16.5	8.9	7.4	2.9	2.4	0.4	14.8
Rural		11.0	10.2	12.0	24.2	14.0	13.6	5.0	2.3	6.0	1.7	15.2
Guatemala	2002											
Total		7.5	10.3	16.1	22.0	14.8	10.2	9.0	6.1	3.8	0.2	15.5
Urban		6.3	8.9	20.2	22.8	10.8	11.7	11.5	6.4	1.5	0.0	15.4
Rural		8.4	11.3	13.0	21.4	17.8	9.1	7.2	5.8	5.6	0.3	15.5
Honduras	2001											
Total		9.4	8.9	16.5	20.5	18.2	13.1	6.2	3.6	2.2	1.4	15.1
Urban		11.3	10.5	15.8	19.9	18.2	12.8	6.5	2.2	1.2	1.5	15.0
Rural		7.5	7.2	17.2	21.1	18.2	13.4	5.8	5.0	3.2	1.3	15.3

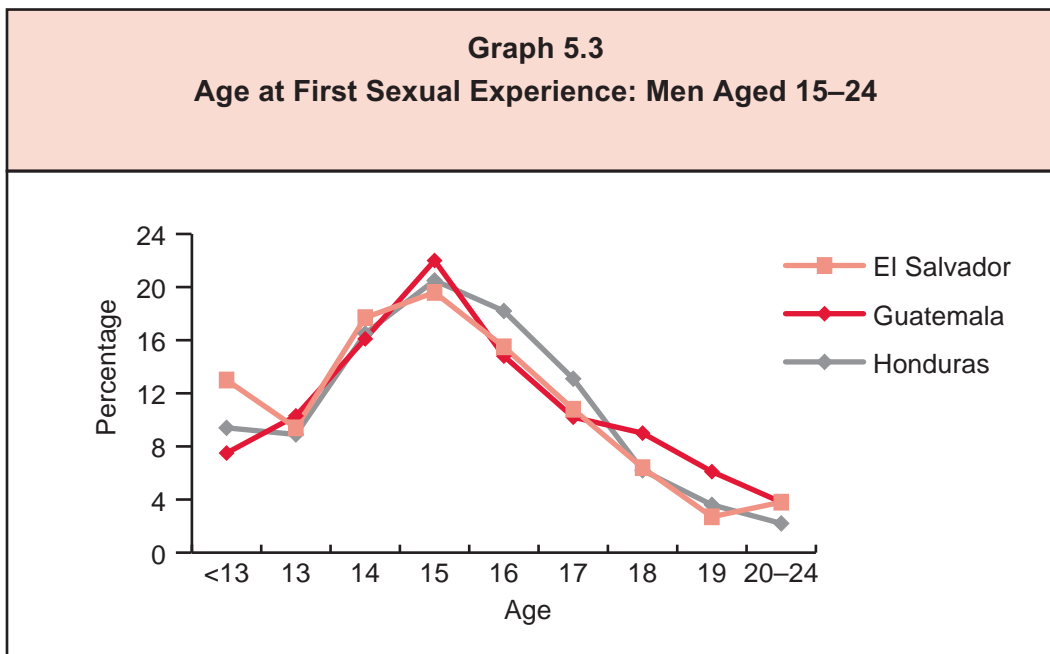
Graph 5.2
Age at First Sexual Experience: Women Aged 15–24



The modal age at first sexual experience among men is 15 (Table 5.4 and Graph 5.3), but when disaggregated by area of residence some interesting variations emerge. In El Salvador the modal age in urban areas is 14, and initial age at first sex is highly concentrated at ages 14–15 in urban areas of Guatemala. While 21.8 to 24.0 percent of the women are sexually experienced before their fifteenth birthday, approximately a third of the men are. Of sexually experienced young men, three-quarters in El Salvador, 73.5 percent in Honduras, and 70.7 percent in Guatemala have had intercourse by age 16. Average age at first sexual experience does not vary substantially according to area of residence. In all of the countries, first sexual intercourse occurs soon after the fifteenth birthday, one year less than among the women.

It is worthwhile mentioning, although the supporting data are not shown in this report,

that the age of the first sexual partner of both adolescent women and men is considerably higher than their own age at first sexual experience. For example, among Honduran women who were less than 15 years of age at first intercourse, 47.3 percent of their first male partners were 20 or more years old. The corresponding percentages for El Salvador and Guatemala are 34.6 and 38.8 percent respectively. And, among Honduran men who were 13–14 years of age at first intercourse, 23.0 percent of their first female partners were 18 or more years old. These age differences suggest that the reproductive health of some women and men may have been in danger at their first sexual encounter, and that they may have had little to say on whether or not sexual activity should be initiated. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that their first sexual partners were sexually experienced.



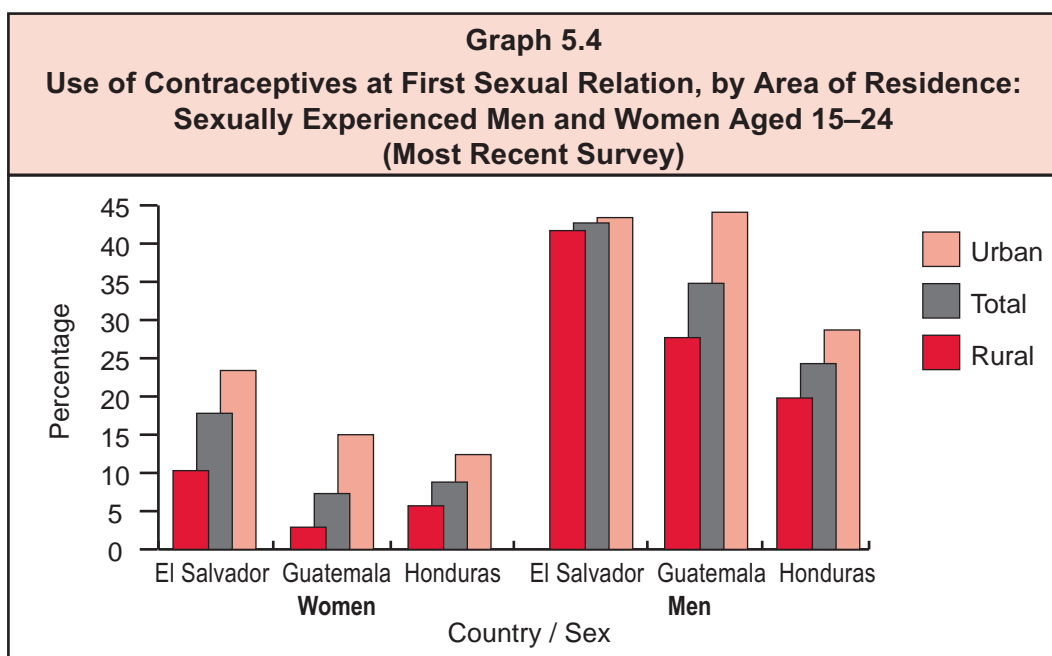
Use of Contraceptives at First Sexual Intercourse

Sexually experienced respondents were asked if they or their partner used any contraceptive method during their first sexual encounter. Table 5.5 shows that the highest rate of contraceptive use at the time of first intercourse among women was in El Salvador (17.8 percent). Lower rates were found in Honduras (8.8 percent) and Guatemala (7.3 percent). In all three countries, a higher proportion of women reporting premarital sex used a contraceptive method than women reporting marital sex, ranging from 10.4 percent in Honduras to 19.6 percent in El Salvador. The probability of using a contraceptive method at the time of first intercourse is much higher in urban areas than in rural areas in all of the countries, regardless of marital status at first sexual encounter. As

noted in the table, contraceptive use is very low in the rural area, particularly in Guatemala and Honduras (see Graph 5.4). In El Salvador and Guatemala the most used method at first intercourse was the condom, while in Honduras it was withdrawal (data not shown).

Since the vast majority of men reported that their first sexual encounter was premarital, only total contraceptive use is shown in Table 5.5. Use at first intercourse varied from a high of 42.7 percent in El Salvador to a low of 24.3 percent in Honduras. In Guatemala and Honduras, use at first intercourse is substantially higher among men living in the urban area than among men living in the rural area, especially in Guatemala. Use in El Salvador does not vary significantly according to area of residence (see Graph 5.4). As expected, the method of contraception most widely used by the men at first intercourse was the condom (data not shown).

Country/Area	Year of Survey	Women Total	Marital	Premarital	Men Total
El Salvador	2002/03				
Total		17.8	12.1	19.6	42.7
Urban		23.4	15.1	25.0	43.4
Rural		10.3	10.3	10.3	41.7
Guatemala	2002				
Total		7.3	3.8	13.2	34.8
Urban		15.0	7.8	22.2	44.1
Rural		2.9	2.2	4.6	27.7
Honduras	2001				
Total		8.8	7.4	10.4	24.3
Urban		12.4	12.2	12.6	28.7
Rural		5.7	4.8	7.2	19.8



Reasons for not Using Contraception at First Intercourse

Table 5.6 shows the primary reasons for not using contraception among sexually experienced respondents who did not use contraception at first sexual intercourse.

A large share of married, female respondents did not use contraception because they “wanted to become pregnant.” This response ranked highest in Guatemala (with 41.5 percent of respondents) and in El Salvador (with 37.7 percent), and in second place in Honduras (22.3 percent). In Honduras, the principal reason was they “didn’t know any contraceptive method” at the time of first intercourse (27.5 percent), and was the second ranked reason in Guatemala (with 35.9 percent) and El Salvador (20.0 percent).

Common reasons unmarried women gave for not using contraception at first sexual intercourse was that they “did not expect to have sexual relations at that moment” and “they didn’t know any contraceptive method.” The former was the principal reason given in El Salvador and Honduras with 45.5 and 31.4 percent of the

respondents giving this reason respectively, and ranked second in Guatemala with 22.7 percent. “Not knowing any contraceptive methods” was the principal reason given in Guatemala among a third of respondents and ranked second in Honduras and El Salvador. It should be noted that 15.8 percent of unmarried women in Guatemala responded that they “wanted to become pregnant” as the reason for not using a contraceptive method. This reason was also cited by 7.2 and 6.6 percent of the women living in Honduras and El Salvador, respectively.

Among El Salvadoran and Honduran men whose first sexual relation was premarital, the most common reason for not using contraception was “they did not expect to have sexual relations at that moment.” This reason ranked second in Guatemala. Like young unmarried women the most common reason given by Guatemalan men was they “didn’t know any contraceptive method.” (46.9 percent). This reason ranked second in El Salvador and third in Honduras (29.8 and 25.6 percent respectively). In Honduras, the second most mentioned reason was that it “was the first time had sexual relations,” implying that the respondent and/or his partner believed that it is not possible for a woman to become pregnant the first time she has sex.

Table 5.6
Primary Reasons For Not Using Contraceptives During First Sexual Experience: Women and Men Aged 15–24 Whose First Sexual Relation Was Marital Or Premarital (Most Recent Survey)

	El Salvador 2002/03	Guatemala 2002	Honduras 2001
Women			
Reason—Marital			
Wanted to become pregnant	37.7	41.5	22.3
Didn't know any contraceptive method	20.0	35.9	27.5
Partner opposed the use of contraceptives	10.3	4.2	6.1
Did not like to use contraceptives	6.0	7.4	11.9
Contraceptives are dangerous to your health	5.8	0.6	na
Didn't expect to have sexual relations at that moment	5.3	0.3	4.1
Was the first time had sexual relations	na	na	11.1
Reason—Premarital			
Didn't expect to have sexual relations at that moment	45.5	22.7	31.4
Didn't know any contraceptive method	18.7	33.7	23.5
Wanted to become pregnant	6.6	15.8	7.2
Partner opposed the use of contraceptives	6.3	2.7	4.5
Did not like to use contraceptives	2.9	7.7	8.7
Was the first time had sexual relations	na	na	8.0
Men			
Reason—Premarital			
Didn't expect to have sexual relations in that moment	37.7	23.1	32.4
Didn't know any contraceptive method	29.8	46.9	25.6
Had confidence in my partner	5.3	na	1.1
Didn't have contraceptives in that moment	4.8	3.9	na
Did not like to use contraceptives	4.0	10.3	na
Was the first time had sexual relations	na	7.1	27.1
na: Not available.			

Recent Sexual Activity

Tables 5.7 and 5.8 show the percentage of sexually experienced respondents aged 15–24 who had sexual relations during the 30 days prior to interview, and the percentage that used a contraceptive method. Focusing first on the women, from 61.6 percent (El Salvador) to 69.0 percent (Guatemala) had sexual intercourse during the 30 days prior to interview (Table 5.7). As expected, the majority of married women in each country reported sexual activity (over 80 percent). Of the previously married women

(separated, divorced or widowed women), from 12.2 percent (Guatemala) to 20.2 percent (Honduras) reported current sexual activity. Of those single women with sexual experience, from 20.1 percent (Guatemala) to 27.8 percent (El Salvador) reported having sex at least once in the 30 days prior to interview.

Use of contraceptives among women with sexual relations in the past month varied from country to country, ranging from a low of 36.0 percent in Guatemala to a high of 60.8 percent in El Salvador. Honduras was not far behind

Table 5.7 Sexual Activity and Use of Contraceptives During the 30 Days Prior to Interview, According to Current Marital Status: Women Aged 15–24 With Sexual Experience (Most Recent Survey)			
Country/Marital Status	Year of Survey	Had Relations	Used Contraceptives
El Salvador	2002/03		
Total		61.6	60.8
Married		80.9	63.9
Previously Married		16.7	47.3
Single		27.8	50.4
Guatemala	2002		
Total		69.0	36.0
Married		80.2	35.4
Previously Married		12.2	*
Single		20.1	*
Honduras	2001		
Total		66.5	58.4
Married		83.4	58.4
Previously Married		20.2	62.4
Single		24.6	53.7
na: Not available.			
* Less than 25 cases.			

Table 5.8
Sexual Activity and Use of Contraceptives During the 30 Days Prior to Interview, According to Current Marital Status: Men Aged 15–24 With Sexual Experience (Most Recent Survey)

Country/Marital Status	Year of Survey	Had Relations	Used Contraceptives
El Salvador	2002/03		
Total		45.3	62.1
Ever-Married		73.9	62.6
Single		33.8	61.7
Guatemala	2002		
Total		54.8	42.7
Ever-Married		90.2	37.1
Single		36.0	53.5
Honduras	2001		
Total		42.3	61.9
Ever-Married		76.9	54.5
Single		25.3	72.1

El Salvador with 58.4 percent of the women reporting contraceptive use. It should be noted that at least 50 percent of single women living in El Salvador and Honduras used a contraceptive method, while about 50 percent in each country did not. Comparing Table 5.7 with Table 5.5 it is obvious that a much higher percentage of sexually active young adult women were currently using a contraceptive method than at time of their first sexual experience.

Among the men, from 42.3 percent (Honduras) to 54.8 percent (Guatemala) reported sexual

activity during the 30 days prior to interview (Table 5.8). In all three populations, there was greater reported sexual activity among ever-married men compared to single men, which ranged from 25.3 percent in Honduras to 36.0 percent in Guatemala. Almost an equal percentage of men (62 percent) living in El Salvador and Honduras used a contraceptive method during the 30 days prior to interview, while only 42.7 percent of Guatemalan men reported use. Among single men, contraceptive use ranged from 53.5 percent in Guatemala to 72.1 percent in Honduras.

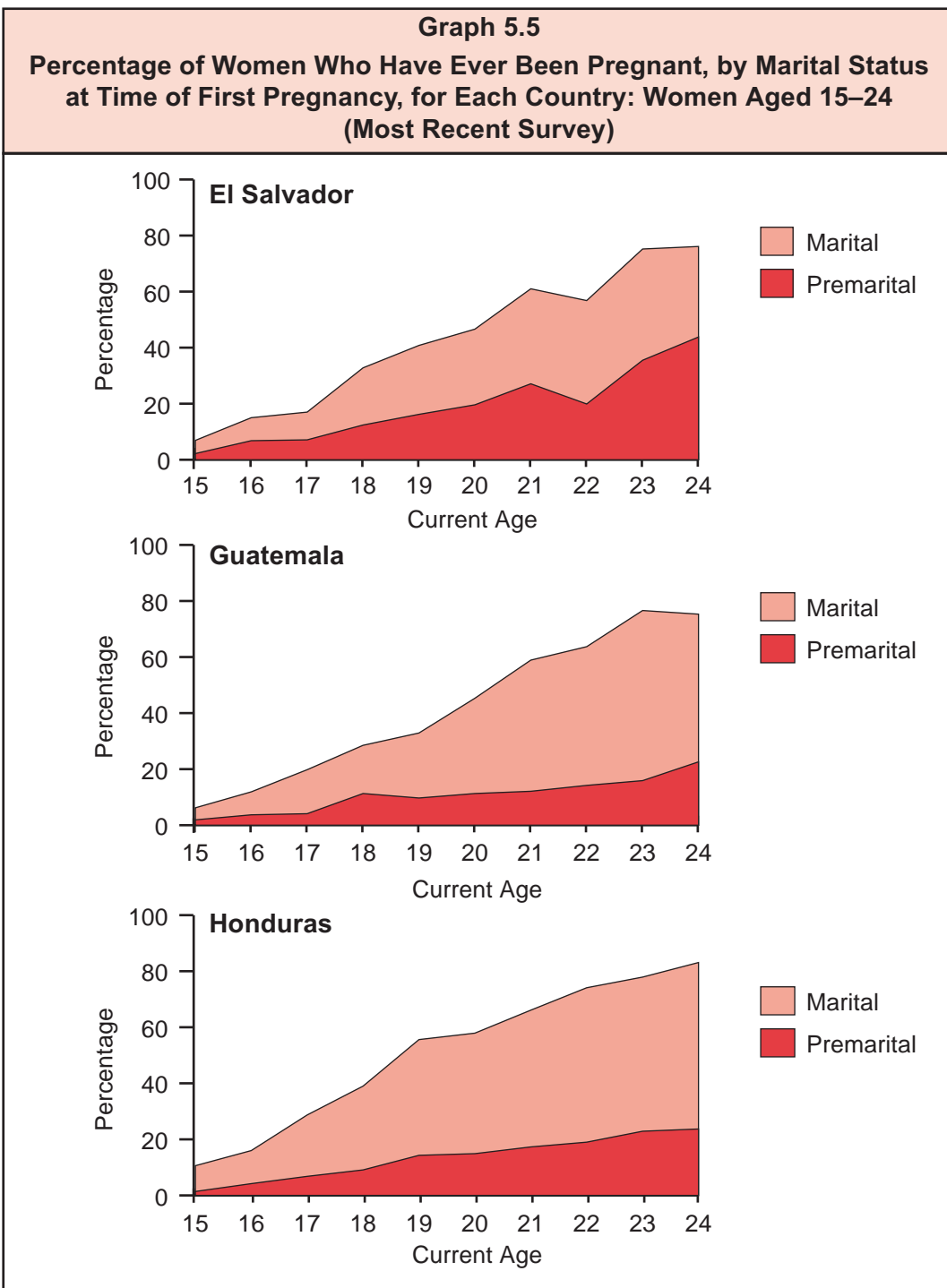
First Pregnancy

Table 5.9 and Graph 5.5 show the percentage of all women aged 15–24 who have ever been pregnant in their life, by current age. In general, 48.3 percent of women living in Honduras reported having ever been pregnant compared to 40.9 percent in El Salvador and 38.5 percent in Guatemala. As expected, a higher proportion of pregnancies were conceived after marriage than before marriage. In Honduras, by the time women are 17 years of age, 28.7 percent have been pregnant, and by the time they are 20

years of age, 57.8 percent. The corresponding percentages for El Salvador and Guatemala are 17.0 and 46.7 percent, and 19.8 and 45.3 percent, respectively. At all ages, the percentage of pregnancies conceived after marriage is higher than those conceived before marriage. However, it should be noted that from 11.3 percent (Guatemala) to 19.6 percent (El Salvador) of the women aged 20 years reported that their first pregnancy was conceived before marriage. In general, the percentage of first pregnancies that were conceived before marriage increases as the age of the respondent increases.

Table 5.9
Percent of Women Who Have Ever Been Pregnant, According to
Marital Status at Time of First Pregnancy, By Actual Age:
Women Aged 15–24 (Most Recent Survey)

Country/ Marital Status	Year of Survey	Total	Current Age										
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
El Salvador	2002/03												
Total		40.9	6.9	14.9	17.0	32.7	40.8	46.7	61.1	56.8	75.3	76.1	
Marital		22.8	4.7	8.2	9.9	20.4	24.6	27.0	33.9	36.9	39.7	32.3	
Premarital		18.1	2.2	6.8	7.1	12.4	16.2	19.6	27.1	19.9	35.5	43.8	
Guatemala	2002												
Total		38.5	6.2	11.9	19.8	28.5	32.9	45.3	58.9	63.7	76.6	75.3	
Marital		28.7	4.3	8.2	15.7	17.2	23.2	34.0	46.8	49.5	60.7	52.7	
Premarital		9.8	1.9	3.7	4.1	11.3	9.7	11.3	12.1	14.2	15.9	22.6	
Honduras	2001												
Total		48.3	10.7	16.0	28.7	39.0	55.6	57.8	66.1	74.1	77.9	83.1	
Marital		35.8	9.2	11.8	21.9	29.9	41.3	43.0	48.8	55.1	55.0	59.4	
Premarital		12.6	1.4	4.2	6.8	9.1	14.3	14.9	17.3	19.0	22.9	23.7	



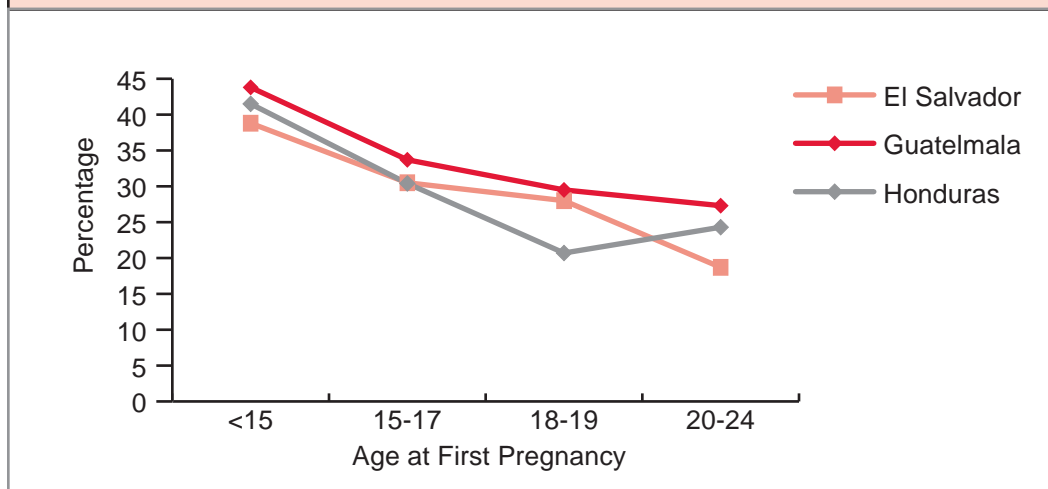
Of the women who have ever been pregnant, a substantial proportion did not believe that they could become pregnant at the time they first became pregnant, ranging from 28.2 percent in Honduras to 32.6 percent in Guatemala (Table 5.10). In all three countries, the percentage who

believed that they could not become pregnant decreases as age at first pregnancy increases (Graph 5.6). Nonetheless, it is interesting that from 18.7 to 27.3 percent of the women aged 20–24 at first pregnancy did not believe that they could become pregnant when they did.

Table 5.10
Percentage of Women Who Did Not Believe They Could Become Pregnant When They Became Pregnant the First Time, According to Age at First Pregnancy: Ever-pregnant Women Aged 15–24 (Most Recent Survey)

Age at First Pregnancy	El Salvador 2002/03	Guatemala 2002	Honduras 2001
Total	28.5	32.6	28.2
< 15	38.8	43.8	41.5
15–17	30.5	33.7	30.4
18–19	28.0	29.5	20.7
20–24	18.7	27.3	24.3

Graph 5.6
Percentage of Women Who did Not Believe They Could Become Pregnant When They Did: Ever-pregnant Women Aged 15–24



The reason most frequently mentioned by Salvadoran women for believing that they could not become pregnant the first time was that “I had sexual relations infrequently,” while the principal reasons in Guatemala and Honduras were “it was the first time to have sexual relations” and “I didn’t believe that I was old enough to become pregnant,” respectively (Table 5.11). From 7.4 percent (Honduras) to 19.3 percent (El Salvador) of the women reported that their “partner said that I would

not become pregnant.” Also, 13.8 and 15.5 percent of women in El Salvador and Honduras, respectively, reported that “I believed I was not in my fertile period,” while 13.3 percent of Guatemalan women reported that “I didn’t know when my fertile period was.”

From 27.3 percent (Guatemala) to 40.8 percent (El Salvador) of first pregnancies were not planned (Table 5.12). In general, the proportion of first pregnancies that were not planned decreases as age at first pregnancy increases.

Reasons	El Salvador 2002/03	Guatemala 2002	Honduras 2001
Had sexual relations infrequently	25.3	9.7	5.5
Partner said that I would not become pregnant	19.3	11.8	7.4
Was the first time to have sexual relations	18.2	30.8	16.1
Believed I was not in my fertile period	13.8	na	15.5
Didn't believe I was old enough to become pregnant	10.3	16.4	32.2
Previously had relations without becoming pregnant	na	na	7.8
Didn't know when my fertile period was	na	13.3	na

na: Not available.

Age at First Pregnancy	El Salvador 2002/03	Guatemala 2002	Honduras 2001
Total	40.8	27.3	35.7
< 15	55.0	32.3	45.4
15–17	44.8	26.4	35.6
18–19	40.9	25.9	35.3
20–24	23.6	27.5	27.9

This relationship is strongest in El Salvador, followed by Honduras, and is relatively small in Guatemala (Graph 5.7). It is interesting to note that a surprising 45.0 to 67.7 percent of women, who were less than 15 years of age at first pregnancy, actually planned their first pregnancy. In other words, these pregnancies were wanted by these adolescent women.

In El Salvador, 25.2 percent of the women were students at the time they first became pregnant, while only 11.9 and 12.8 percent of women living in Guatemala and Honduras, respectively, were students (Table 5.13). Only 9.8 percent of Guatemalan women who were less than 15 years of age at time of first pregnancy were students, proportion that increases to

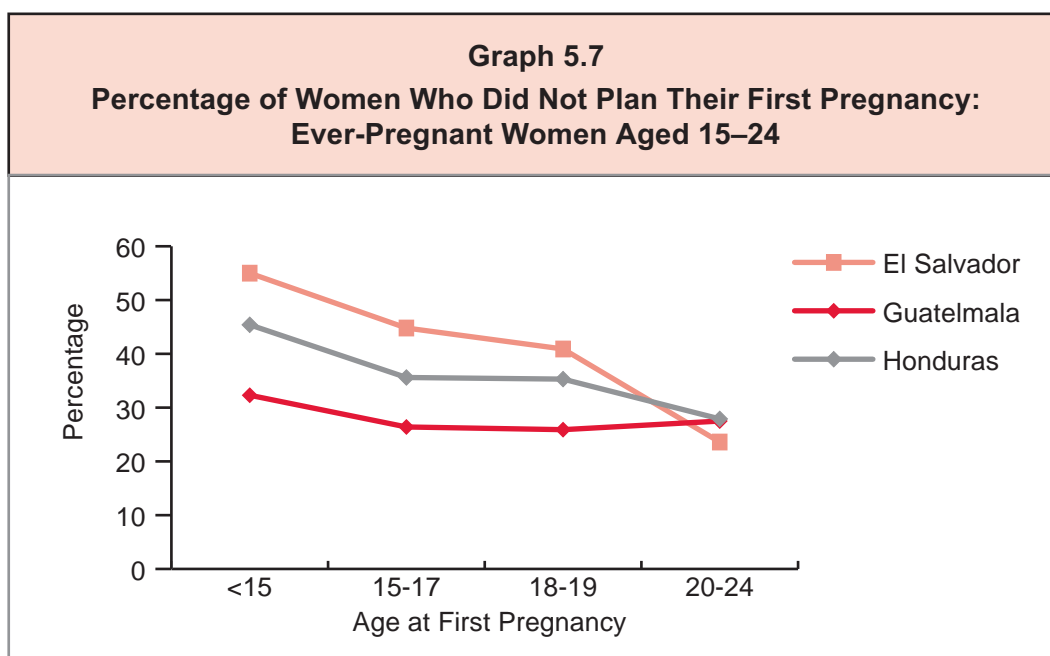


Table 5.13
**Percentage of Women Who Were
Students When They First Became Pregnant, According
to Age at First Pregnancy: Women Aged 15–24
(Most Recent Survey)**

Age at First Pregnancy	El Salvador 2002/03	Guatemala 2002	Honduras 2001
Total	25.2	11.9	12.8
< 15	32.6	9.8	17.3
15–17	30.2	12.0	12.7
18–19	22.4	13.3	11.4
20–24	12.4	11.6	12.0

17.3 percent in Honduras and to 32.6 percent in El Salvador. Similarly, from 12.0 percent (Guatemala) to 30.2 percent (El Salvador) of women aged 15–17 were in school at the time of their first pregnancy. These findings suggest that the only career alternative available to these women at the time of their first pregnancy was “motherhood.”

Approximately 37 to 39 percent of women who were students at the time of their first pregnancy

resumed their studies after their pregnancy ended (Table 5.14). In Guatemala, 39.2 percent resumed their studies, while 38.5 and 37.3 percent of the women in Honduras and El Salvador returned to the classroom, respectively. As shown in the table, the probability of returning to the classroom after completing the first pregnancy increases substantially as grade level at time of first pregnancy increases. The percent returning to school among women in primary education is below 20 percent.

Country/ Education	Year of Survey	Percentage
El Salvador	2002/03	
Total		37.3
1–6		15.4
7+		41.0
Guatemala	2002	
Total		39.2
Primary		9.5
Secondary+		43.4
Honduras	2001	
Total		38.5
0–6		15.0
7+		44.9

Sex Education

The threat of increasing rates of HIV/AIDS infections, increased rates of premarital intercourse and other related changes in sexual and reproductive health behaviors, and increased media sexual imagery have raised questions about the coverage and quality of sexuality education in the region. In general, efforts to educate young adults on sexuality, pregnancy, and sexual health have not been standardized, lacked national coverage, and often were limited in scope and time frame.

Table 5.15 shows the percentage of all women and men aged 15–24 who have been exposed to information from talks or courses on various topics related to sexuality and reproductive health. For example, only 28.5 percent of women in Guatemala have received information about menstruation, compared to 42.4 percent of Honduran woman and 84.7 percent of El Salvadoran women. Similarly, the percentage of women who have received information about contraceptive methods ranges from a low of 25.8 percent in Guatemala to a high of 76.9 percent in El Salvador. In El Salvador the

Table 5.15
Percentage of All Women and Men Who Have Received Information
From Talks Or Courses on Various Topics Related to Sexuality and
Reproductive Health: Women and Men Aged 15–24
(Most Recent Survey)

<u>Women</u> Topic	El Salvador 2002/03	Guatemala 2002	Honduras 2001
Menstruation	84.7	28.5	42.4
HIV/AIDS	76.4	28.0	42.1
Sexual relations	75.3	28.0	38.2
Pregnancy and birth	77.5	25.9	37.9
Reproductive organs	68.4	26.8	37.8
Physical changes in the body	68.5	25.6	36.9
Contraceptive methods	76.9	25.8	34.2
Men			
Topic			
Menstruation	68.9	28.7	19.0
HIV/AIDS	62.0	36.1	28.9
Sexual relations	68.9	34.4	25.6
Pregnancy and birth	67.9	27.3	20.4
Reproductive organs	75.1	32.0	21.7
Physical changes in the body	66.5	31.5	19.3
Contraceptive methods	57.9	30.7	18.2

majority of respondents interviewed indicate that information about reproductive health and contraception was learned at school (data not shown). In general, the probability of having been exposed to the various topics shown in the table is lowest in Guatemala and highest in El Salvador.

With the exception of Guatemalan men, men have had less exposure to the individual topics shown in the table than the women have. Using menstruation again as an example, only 19.0 percent of Honduran men reported having ever received information on this topic, compared to 42.4 percent of Honduran women. Perhaps this is why some men told their sexual partners that they could not become pregnant (see Table 5.11). In Honduras, more women have been exposed to information on HIV/AIDS than the men, which is an interesting finding given the number of talks that have been presented to both sexes on this subject in that country.

In all three countries, there are indications that a greater proportion of women and men aged 15–19 have been exposed to sexual and reproductive health information than women and men aged 20–24 (data not shown), indicating that health promotion in schools has been increasing in recent years.

Summary of Findings

- At least one-half of young adult women in El Salvador and Honduras reported sexual experience compared with 43.0 percent of women in Guatemala. The percentage of men aged 15–24 who were sexually experienced increases from 58.0 percent in Guatemala, to 64.7 percent in Honduras, and to 66.4 percent in El Salvador.
- More young adult women living in Guatemala and Honduras who reported sexual experience have had marital sexual intercourse than premarital intercourse, while in El Salvador the opposite is the case. The vast majority of young adult men in all three countries reported premarital sexual intercourse.
- The modal age at first sexual experience for both women and men in all three countries is about 15–16 years. Among young adult women who are sexually experienced, the average age at first intercourse ranges from 16.2 to 16.4 years, while among men it ranges from 15.0 to 15.5 years.
- In all of the countries, a higher proportion of women with premarital sexual experience reported that they or their partner used contraception at sexual debut than did women whose first sexual experience was at the time of marriage. For both women and men, use of a contraceptive method at time of first intercourse was substantially higher in the urban area.
- The two principal reasons for not using a contraceptive method among women whose first sexual relation was premarital were “didn’t expect to have sexual relations at that moment” and “didn’t know any contraceptive method.” These are the same reasons given by men in El Salvador and Guatemala, while in Honduras the second most frequently mentioned reason was “it was the first time had sex.”
- Of the women and men who were sexually active during the 30 days prior to interview, a much higher proportion used contraception than at the time of their sexual debut.
- In general, 48.3 percent of women aged 15–24 living in Honduras reported having ever been pregnant compared to 40.9 percent in El Salvador and 38.5 percent in Guatemala. In Honduras, by the time women are 20 years of age, 57.8 percent have been pregnant. The corresponding percentages for El Salvador and Guatemala are 46.7 percent and 45.3 percent, respectively. At all ages, the percentage of pregnancies conceived after marriage is higher than those conceived before marriage.
- Of the women who have ever been pregnant, a substantial proportion did not believe that they could become pregnant at the time

they first became pregnant, ranging from 28 percent in Honduras and El Salvador to 32.6 percent in Guatemala.

- A surprising 45.0 to 67.7 percent of women who were less than 15 years of age at first pregnancy actually wanted their first pregnancy.
- The probability of young adults receiving information on various topics related to sexuality and reproductive health from talks or courses on sexual education is particularly low in Guatemala and Honduras. It appears that the most important source of information on sexual matters for many young people is friends and peers.