



Opinion Research  
Strategic Communication

# African-American Attitudes on Abortion, Contraception and Teen Sexual Health

## Findings of a national study of African-American adults

February 2013

### Introduction

Most African Americans support legal abortion in at least some cases and believe that abortion should be covered by health insurance and available from health care providers in their communities. Strong majorities also believe that publicly-funded contraception should be available to those who need it and that teenagers should have access to contraception and to sex education that covers sexually transmitted infections (STIs), contraception and healthy relationships, as well as abstinence from sex. These attitudes are broadly shared by African Americans across age, gender, education, income, religious, and ideological lines.

These are some of the findings of the Belden Russonello Strategists study among a random sample of 1,006 African-American adults conducted by landline and cell phone between November 29 and December 17, 2012. The margin of sampling error for a random sample of this size is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level, and sampling error is larger for subgroups within the survey.

# Findings

## Abortion

**1. Most African Americans say abortion should be legal in at least some circumstances.** In addition, a large majority says that, putting aside their own feelings on the issue, they believe abortion should remain legal and women should be able to access it safely.

- Eight in ten African Americans (79%) say abortion should be legal, though there is disagreement about whether it should be broadly legal or legal only in more limited circumstances: half say it should be legal in all (12%), almost all (20%), or most cases (19%), and another quarter says it should be legal in just a few cases (28%). Only 18% say abortion should never be legal.

- A similar number (80%) agrees that “regardless of how I personally feel about abortion, I believe it should remain legal and women should be able to get safe abortions.” Agreement with this statement crosses political and religious lines, with 74% of self-identified conservatives concurring as well as 88% of liberals. Three-quarters (76%) of those who attend religious services weekly, along with 84% of those who attend less regularly, also agree.

### Beliefs about Abortion Remaining Legal

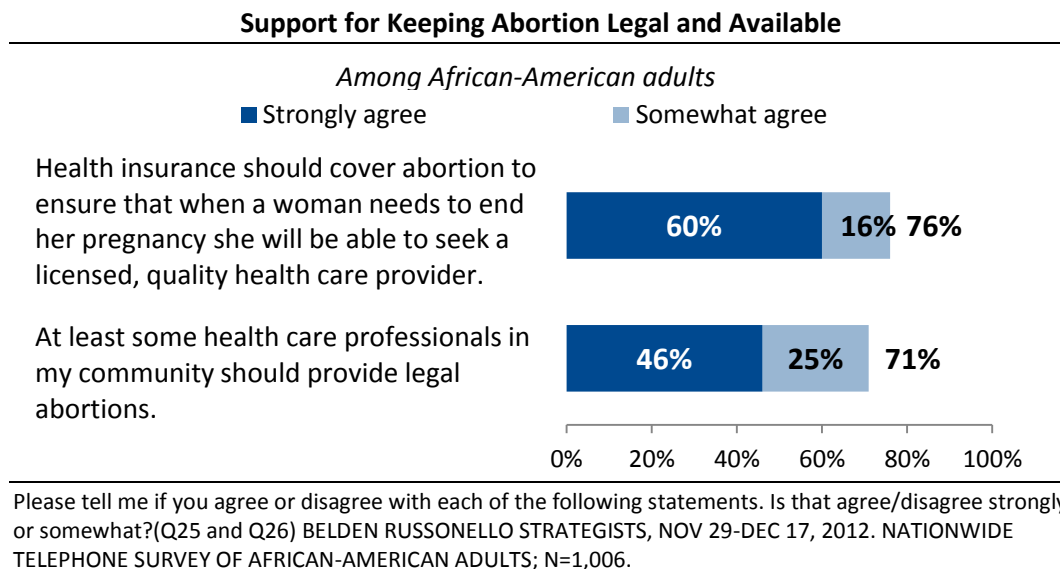
Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Q24. Regardless of how I personally feel about abortion, I believe it should remain legal and women should be able to get safe abortions.

	Agree	Disagree
<b>Total</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>19</b>
Women <45	79%	20
Women 45+	81%	17
Men <45	80%	20
Men 45+	80%	19
Liberal	88%	12
Moderate	81%	18
Conservative	74%	25
Religious attendance:		
Weekly+	76%	23
Less frequent	84%	15

**2. The great majority says efforts to prevent unintended pregnancy are preferable to making abortion illegal.** Ninety-one percent agree “rather than making abortion illegal, we should help prevent unintended pregnancy with high quality sex education and making birth control available.”

### 3. Large majorities believe abortion should be made available through health insurance and from health care providers in their communities.

- Seventy-six percent agree that “health insurance should cover abortion to ensure that when a woman needs to end her pregnancy she will be able to seek a licensed, quality health care provider,” including 60% who strongly agree.
- Seventy-one percent say “at least some health care professionals in my community should provide legal abortions,” including 46% who strongly agree.



African Americans are more divided as to whether abortion is “part of basic health care services for women,” with 44% who say it is and 51% who say it is not.

### 4. Themes of personal autonomy have a great deal of resonance. Large majorities agree that decisions about abortion should be left up to the women involved.

- Almost nine in ten (89%) agree, “We cannot know all the personal and medical reasons behind every decision to have an abortion. Every person’s case is different and very private and personal, so we should leave decisions about abortion up to the individual woman,” including 76% who agree strongly.
- Eighty-five percent agree, “When it comes to abortion, we should trust [Black women/women] to make the important personal decisions that are best for themselves and their families.” This represents the combined results of a split sample experiment in which part of the sample heard “Black women” while the rest heard “women.” The difference in reaction to the two terms is not statistically significant.

**5. Although Roe v. Wade has made abortion legal for the last 40 years, many African Americans mistakenly believe individual states can ban abortions.**

- Slightly more than half either mistakenly believe that individual states can make abortion illegal (39%) or are unsure (15%), while 46% correctly say abortion is “legal across the United States before a fetus is able to live outside the womb.”
- A majority of African Americans (63%) also say most of the women who have abortions are under age 20, though according the Guttmacher Institute women in their twenties actually have a majority of abortions in the U.S.\*

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\* Jones RK, Finer LB and Singh S, [Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients](#), 2008, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2010.

## Sexual health and contraception

**1. Large majorities of African Americans view contraception and STD screening and treatment as part of women’s basic health care along with screening of cervical and breast cancer and prenatal care.** Over eight in ten say each of the following items are “part of basic health care services for women”:

- Screenings and treatment for cervical and breast cancers (94%);
- Care for pregnant women (94%);
- Screening and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV-AIDS (91%); and
- Contraception, such as birth control pills, diaphragms, IUDs, and Depo-Provera shots (86%).

**2. Over nine in ten say publicly-funded contraception should be available.** Ninety-four percent agree that “publicly-funded health services should include birth control for low-income people who want it,” including 79% who agree strongly. This view is shared by African Americans of all stripes, including 91% of self-identified conservatives and 92% of those who attend religious services weekly or more.

### Support for Publicly-Funded Contraception

Q6. Please tell me if you agree or disagree that publicly-funded health services should include birth control for low-income people who want it.

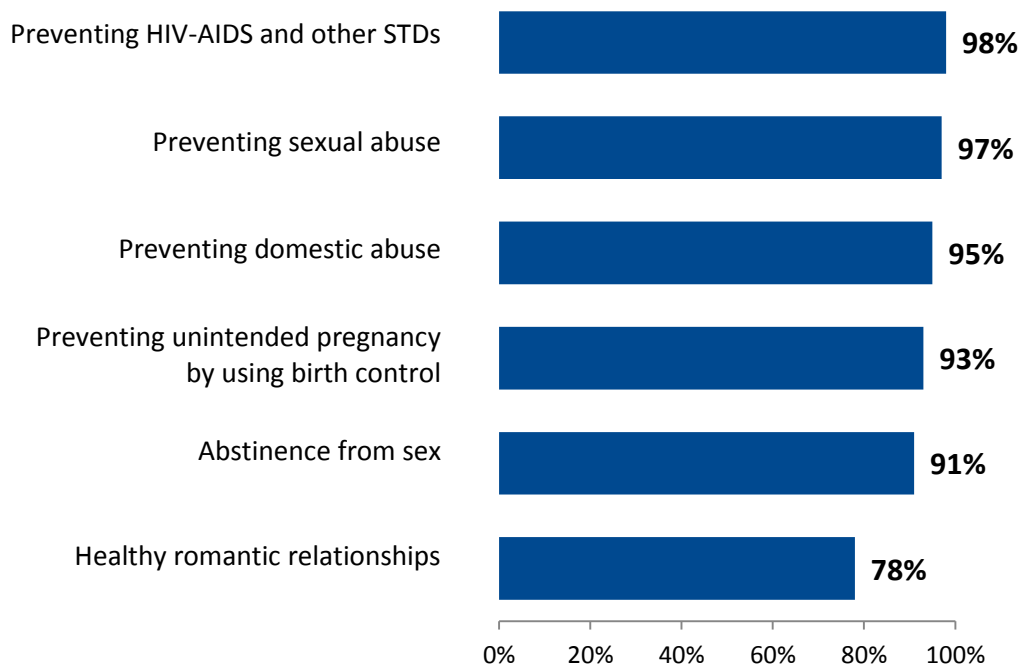
	Agree	Disagree
<b>Total</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>6</b>
Women <45	97%	3
Women 45+	94%	5
Men <45	93%	7
Men 45+	89%	10
Liberal	95%	5
Moderate	95%	4
Conservative	91%	8
Religious attendance: Weekly+	92%	7
Less frequent	95%	5

## Sex education and teen sexual health

- 1. African Americans endorse comprehensive sex education wholeheartedly**, and most believe teens should have access to accurate information about sex.
  - African Americans would like high school sex education to cover everything from how to prevent diseases to birth control, abstinence, domestic abuse, and healthy relationships.

### Support for Wide-Ranging Sex Education

*% of African-American adults saying high school sex education should cover:*



Please tell me if you think a sex education program in high schools should cover each of the following. (RANDOMIZE Q11-Q16) Q14. Preventing HIV-AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; Q15. Preventing sexual abuse; Q16. Preventing domestic abuse; Q13. Preventing unintended pregnancy by using birth control, such as condoms, birth control pills, IUDs, Depo shots, etc.; Q11. Abstinence from sex; Q12. Healthy romantic relationships. BELDEN RUSSONELLO STRATEGISTS, NOV 29-DEC 17, 2012. NATIONWIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS; N=1,006.

- Seventy-three percent agree that “teen sexual development is a normal part of growing up and the best approach is to ensure that young people have all the information and education about sex and contraception that they need.” Only 25% side, instead, with the view that “teen sexual development needs to be closely controlled and giving young people information about things like condoms and birth control will only encourage them to have sex too early.”

**2. Eight in ten believe teenagers should have access to contraception, rejecting the idea that limiting access will reduce sexual activity.** Seventy-nine percent say “we need to have plenty of access to contraception, like condoms and birth control pills, to help teens and young people stay healthy and to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases,” while only 19% say “we need to limit access to things like condoms and birth control pills to discourage sexual activity among teens and young people.”

Even 77% of self-described conservatives along with 72% of those who attend religious services weekly or more say there should be plenty of access to contraception.

### Teenagers’ Access to Contraception

Q7. Thinking about policies affecting contraception, which of these comes closer to your point of view: [ROTATE] We need to have plenty of access to contraception, like condoms and birth control pills, to help teens and young people stay healthy and to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; OR We need to limit access to things like condoms and birth control pills to discourage sexual activity among teens and young people.

	Should have plenty of access to stay healthy	Limit access to discourage sexual activity
<b>Total</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>19</b>
Women <45	86%	12
Women 45+	74%	24
Men <45	78%	18
Men 45+	78%	20
Liberal	82%	17
Moderate	82%	15
Conservative	77%	22
Religious. attendance: Weekly+	72%	25
Less frequent	86%	12

**3. Almost nine in ten indicate they would help their own children get birth control.** Sixty-five percent say if they had teenage children, they would *definitely* “take them to get birth control if they needed it” and another 23% say they probably would. Sixty-five percent of those who identify as conservative and 59% percent who attend religious services weekly or more also say they would *definitely* take their own teenager to get birth control pills. Only 11% of those surveyed overall say they would not.

**4. A majority would have their daughters vaccinated against HPV.** Eighty-five percent of African Americans would take their pre-teen daughters “to get the HPV-vaccine, that is a vaccine that prevents some strains of sexually transmitted viruses from causing cervical cancer” (54% definitely, 31% probably). Again, more than half of conservatives (58%) and those who attend religious services weekly or more (53%) say they would *definitely* take their pre-teen daughter to get the HPV-vaccine.

#### **Parents Granting Teens Access to Birth Control and HPV-Vaccine**

Q8. If you had children, do you think you would definitely take your own teenagers to get birth control if they needed it, probably take them, or you would not take them? Q9. If you had a pre-teen daughter, would you definitely take her to get the HPV-vaccine, that is a vaccine that prevents some strains of sexually transmitted viruses from causing cervical cancer, probably take her, or not take her?

	<b>Definitely take teen to get birth control</b>	<b>Definitely take pre-teen to get HPV-vaccine</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>54%</b>
Women <45	74%	63%
Women 45+	60%	46%
Men <45	63%	56%
Men 45+	60%	50%
Liberal	70%	54%
Moderate	60%	50%
Conservative	65%	58%
Religious. attendance: Weekly+	59%	53%
Less frequent	71%	55%



## Sexual and domestic violence

### 1. Forty-five percent of African Americans say they or someone close to them has “experienced violence within an intimate relationship.”

- While substantial numbers of men and older women report a personal connection to these problems, it is younger women who are especially likely to report a connection to domestic violence: 56% of women under 45 say they or someone close to them has experienced it.
- Reporting a connection to violence in an intimate relationship is higher among individuals with high levels of education. More than half of all college graduates (56%) say they have experienced or know someone who has experienced violence within an intimate relationship, compared to 41% with a high school education or less.

### 2. Thirty-three percent say that they or someone close to them has “experienced rape or sexual assault.”

- Again, women under 45 are more likely than men or older women to report knowing someone who has experienced rape or sexual assault or experienced it themselves (45%).
- The likelihood of reporting a personal experience with rape or sexual assault increases with the level of education: 28% those with a high school education or less report having such experience while 42% of college graduates report the same.

#### Personal/Others’ Experience with Relationship Violence and Sexual Assault

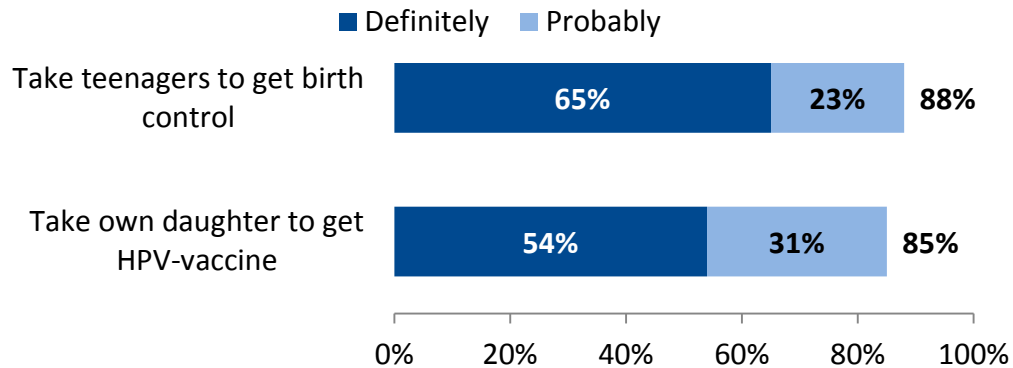
Q38. Have you or someone close to you ever experienced violence within an intimate relationship? Q39. Have you or someone close to you ever experienced rape or sexual assault?

	Violence in intimate relationship	Rape or sexual assault
<b>Total</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>33%</b>
Women <45	56%	45%
Women 45+	43%	33%
Men <45	46%	26%
Men 45+	36%	25%
Liberal	49%	37%
Moderate	43%	30%
Conservative	46%	32%
Religious attendance: weekly+	45%	33%
Less frequent	47%	32%
<HS/HS grad	41%	28%
Some college	47%	35%
College+	56%	42%

# Appendix A: Additional Charts

**Assisting Teens with Sexual Health Needs**

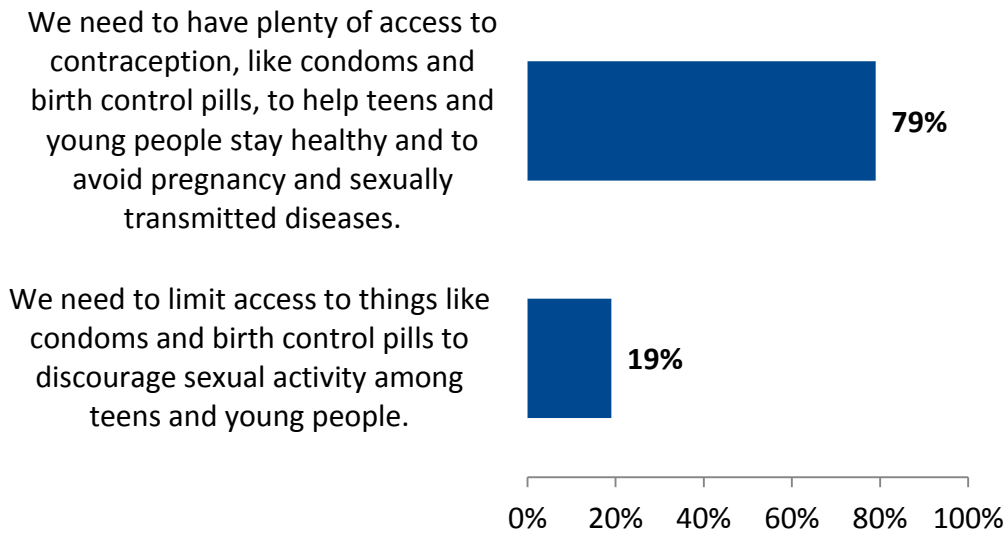
*Among African-American adults*



Q8. If you had children, do you think you would definitely take your own teenagers to get birth control if they needed it, probably take them, or you would not take them? Q9. If you had a pre-teen daughter, would you definitely take her to get the HPV-vaccine, that is a vaccine that prevents some strains of sexually transmitted viruses from causing cervical cancer, probably take her, or not take her? BELDEN RUSSONELLO STRATEGISTS, NOV 29-DEC 17, 2012. NATIONWIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS; N=1,006.

**Teens' Access to Contraception**

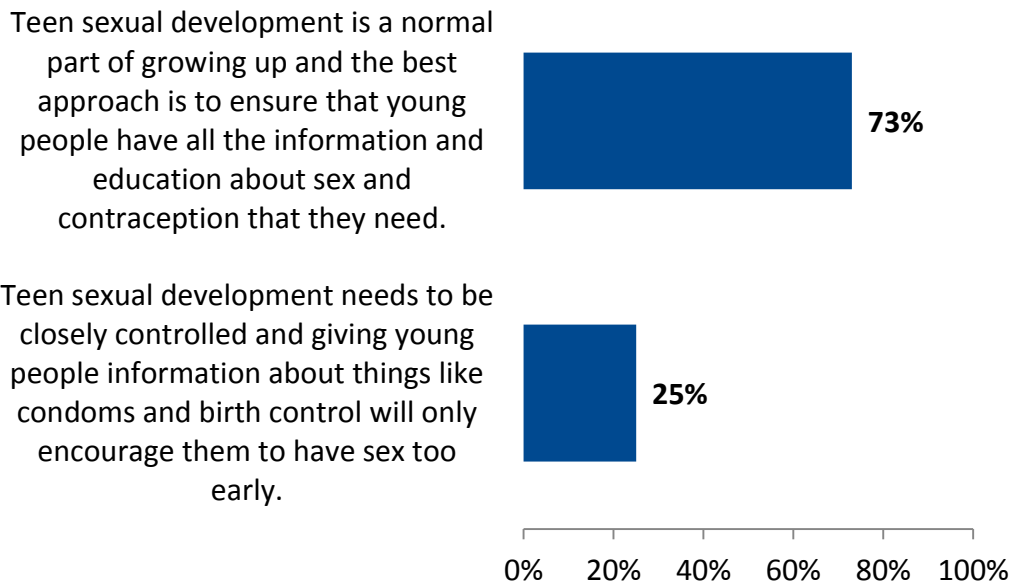
*Among African-American adults*



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**Providing Teens with Information about Sex and Contraception**

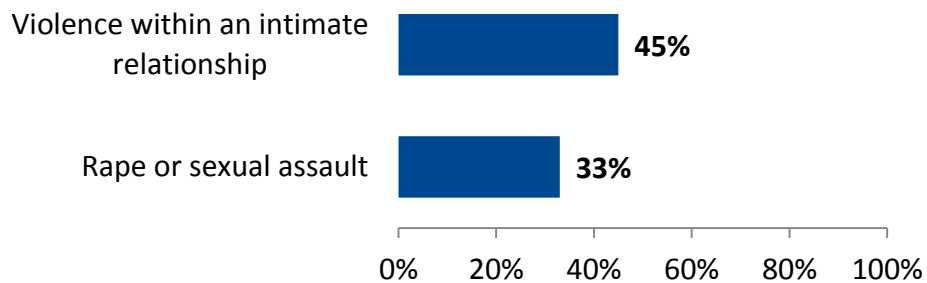
*Among African-American adults*



Q10. Which comes closer to your own views: [ROTATE] Teen sexual development is a normal part of growing up and the best approach is to ensure that young people have all the information and education about sex and contraception that they need; OR Teen sexual development needs to be closely controlled and giving young people information about things like condoms and birth control will only encourage them to have sex too early. BELDEN RUSSONELLO STRATEGISTS, NOV 29-DEC 17, 2012. NATIONWIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS; N=1,006.

**Personal/Others' Experiences with Relationship Violence and Rape or Sexual Assault**

*% of African-American adults saying they or someone close to them experienced:*



Q38. Have you or someone close to you ever experienced violence within an intimate relationship? Q39. Have you or someone close to you ever experienced rape or sexual assault? BELDEN RUSSONELLO STRATEGISTS, NOV 29-DEC 17, 2012. NATIONWIDE TELEPHONE SURVEY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ADULTS; N=1,006.