

# Introduction

Perhaps no issue is more important to a society than the reproductive health of its population. Family formation is central to the wellbeing of individuals. Individual success in coping with sexuality, fertility, marriage, and childbirth determines the quality of life in society as a whole.

To assess the status of Americans' reproductive health, the federal government periodically collects data on the factors affecting the formation, growth, and dissolution of families, including sexual activity, contraception, cohabitation, marriage, divorce, sterilization, infertility, pregnancy outcomes, and births. It does this through the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), first fielded in 1973 and conducted periodically since then. In publishing the NSFG data, the National Center for Health Statistics produces a variety of reports focused on particular topics such as teenage sexual activity, women's reproductive health, and men's fertility and fatherhood. *American Sexual Behavior: Demographics of Sexual Activity, Fertility, and Childbearing*, a new addition to New Strategist's demographic reference book offerings, presents in one volume the latest results from this important government effort.

*American Sexual Behavior* includes more than the NSFG results, allowing researchers easy access to the facts about the sexual activity and reproductive behavior of teenagers, men, and women. In these pages you will find birth data from the National Vital Statistics System, fertility and marital history data from the Census Bureau, the latest estimates from the HIV / AIDS and STD surveillance programs of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and profiles of adopted children from the 2000 Census. *American Sexual Behavior* is a compendium of facts about reproductive health and family formation practices in the United States.

## How to use this book

*American Sexual Behavior* is divided into 11 chapters, each exploring a different facet of reproductive health. The topics are Sexual Initiation, Teenage Sexual Activity, Adult Sexual Activity, Sexual Orientation, AIDS and STDs, Cohabitation and Marriage, Fertility and Infertility, Contraception, Pregnancy, Births, and Caring for Children. Each chapter includes a variety of tables showing the behavior—and the attitudes—of a nationally representative sample of Americans. The book also includes explanatory text and charts revealing the most important trends. Most of the tables in the book show how reproductive and family formation behaviors vary by demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, number of children, race, education, region, metropolitan status, and even religion.

The tables in *American Sexual Behavior* are based on data collected by the federal government, primarily the National Center for Health Statistics. The federal government continues to be the best source of up-to-date, reliable information on the activities and characteristics

of Americans. In the area of sexual and reproductive behavior, the federal government is often the only source of reliable information.

While the federal government collected the data appearing in *American Sexual Behavior*, most of the tables published here are not just reprints of the government's tabulations. Instead, New Strategist's editors individually compiled and created the tables to reveal the trends—the story behind the statistics. If you need more information, you can explore the data source cited at the bottom of each table.

*American Sexual Behavior* includes a list of tables to help you locate the information you need. For a more detailed search, use the index at the back of the book. Also at the back of the book are a bibliography of data sources, more information about the National Survey of Family Growth, and a comprehensive glossary defining the terms used in the tables and text.

*American Sexual Behavior* is the reference book on the American family. With this book in hand, you will be armed with the facts about some of the most important issues of the day.