

PRAMS Prints

No. 1

November 1998

The **Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)** is an ongoing mail/telephone survey of women who have recently given birth. The goal of PRAMS is to improve the health of mothers and babies in North Carolina.

Through this first issue of our "PRAMS Prints" newsletter, we want to introduce you to PRAMS. Future issues will provide news and data about specific PRAMS topics.

From the PRAMS survey, we collect information on pregnancy risk factors, access to health care services, and other issues related to improving the mother's and baby's health. We ask questions about characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes before, during, and after pregnancy including:

- Prenatal care
- Infant health care, safety, and sleep position
- Alcohol and tobacco use
- Obstetric history and nutrition
- Economic status of the mother
- Psychosocial support and stress
- Attitudes and feelings about pregnancy
- Domestic violence
- Intendedness of pregnancy and use of birth control
- Family income
- Breastfeeding
- Knowledge and use of folic acid

This information will augment the birth certificate data and will be used to evaluate and improve services to mothers and babies. Descriptions of several proposed analyses are on page three of this newsletter.

How the Project Works

The first month of data collection was for July 1997 births, and data collection will continue on a monthly basis for at least five years. Each month, approximately 200 women who have recently given birth are selected at random from the birth certificate file. (Please see the profile of 1997 births in North Carolina on the next page.) The sample for the PRAMS survey is drawn from three categories of birth weight, as recorded on the birth certificate: (1) normal birth weight, over 5 pounds 8 ounces; (2) moderately low birth weight, 3 pounds 5 ounces to 5 pounds 8 ounces; and (3) very low birth weight, less than 3 pounds 5 ounces. We send up to three mailed surveys, and then try to contact by telephone women who did not respond. So far, we have received completed surveys from at least 70% of the women selected.

Partners

PRAMS is a joint project between the North Carolina Center for Health Statistics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A five-year grant from CDC provides most of the funding for the operation of the project. Other partners in North Carolina include: March of Dimes, N.C. Healthy Start Foundation, N.C. Division of Medical Assistance, N.C. Division of Women's and Children's Health, Office of Minority Health, and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Public Health. There are PRAMS projects in 16 other states, which represent about 35% of all births in the United States annually.

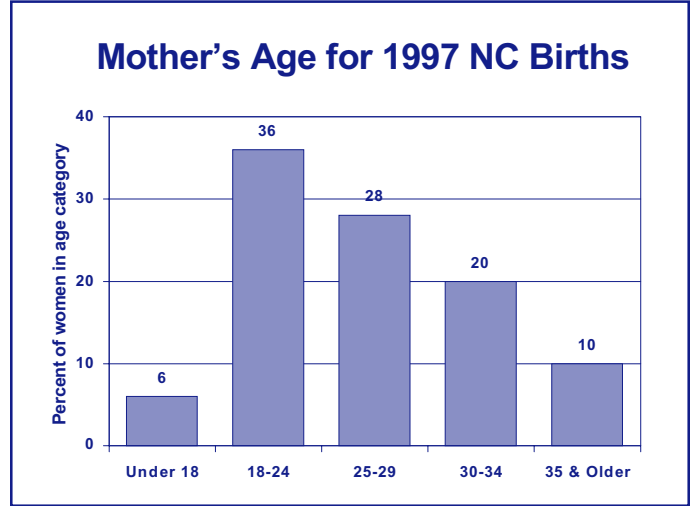
PRAMS appreciates the NC Healthy Start Foundation for providing funds for a quarterly drawing as an incentive to mothers who complete the survey. The selected participant receives a \$300 gift certificate.



Profile of 1997 Births in North Carolina

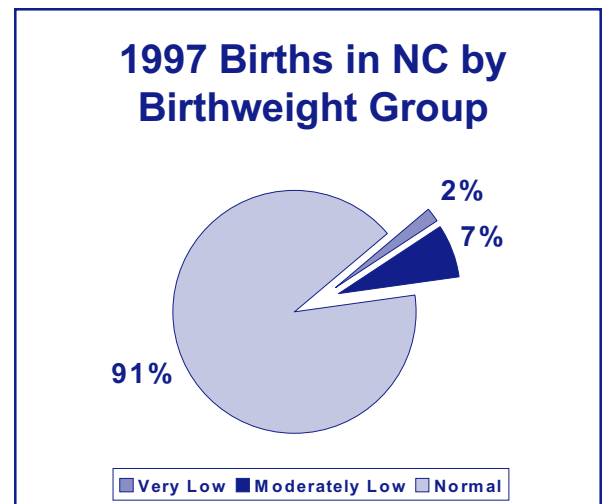
Though the PRAMS survey is completed by only about 1,800 women each year, we will use the PRAMS data to generalize to the entire population of live births in North Carolina. Following is some information from the birth certificates about 1997 live births to North Carolina residents.

- There were 106,949 live births to North Carolina residents in 1997.
- The age of the mothers of these babies is summarized in the chart to the right. The percentage of women under 18 years old is relatively small, and declined somewhat from 1996 to 1997. The percentage of women in the older group has been increasing over time.
- Other demographic characteristics of North Carolina resident births as reported on the birth certificate are presented in the table below.



Maternal Characteristics of 1997 NC Resident Births		
Marital Status	Married	68%
	Not Married	32%
Education	Less than high school	5%
	1-3 years high school	17%
	High school graduate	33%
	1-3 years college	23%
	4+ years college	22%
Race	White	71%
	Black	26%
	American Indian	2%
	Other	2%
Hispanic Ethnicity	Yes	6%
	No	94%

- In 1997, 2% of all infants were born of very low birthweight, representing an increase over the percentage from 1996. Percentages for the three birthweight groups are shown in the pie chart. Minority women continue to experience markedly higher rates of low and very low birthweight births than white women.
- The percentage of women who smoked during pregnancy in 1997 was 15%. This is a decrease from the previous year and continues a downward trend over the past 10 years.



Uses for PRAMS Data

Since data collection has been under way for less than a year, no reports have been generated yet. Analysis of the 1997 data has just begun. Some of the first topics to be investigated include:



“I sincerely feel that if the proper information were available to women before they became pregnant it would greatly increase the number of healthy babies.”

Comment from PRAMS Participant

- **Knowledge and use of folic acid** – The survey asks the women if they knew that taking folic acid can help prevent some birth defects. We also ask where they obtained this information (i.e. health professionals, magazines, or brochures) and if they took vitamins containing folic acid.
- **Access to prenatal care** – Prenatal care is an important factor for the health of mothers and their babies. The survey asks about the timing and frequency of prenatal care visits and if there were certain barriers to receiving this care.
- **Prevalence of domestic violence** – PRAMS data contains questions about domestic violence before, during, and after pregnancy. We will look at risk factors for domestic violence in an effort to target high-risk women.
- **Intendedness of pregnancy and the use of birth control** – We will analyze responses of the women about whether their pregnancy was intended and whether or not birth control was being used when they became pregnant.

Reports will be prepared on each of these and other topics using the PRAMS data. Analyses will investigate differences among the birthweight groups and demographic categories. Due to the relatively small sample size, we cannot generate PRAMS data for individual counties in North Carolina. We will however, be able to do comparisons with other states and develop trend data. These will be reported in future issues of this newsletter, as well as on our Web page.

An important part of this project is making use of the data that is collected from approximately 1,800 women each year in North Carolina. If you have a particular need for information that is collected by PRAMS, or if you would like a copy of the survey to see what questions are asked, let us know (see contact information on page 4).

Visit our Web Page at:

www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/projects/prams.html

We will be updating our page with preliminary PRAMS findings in the near future.

If you have comments or suggestions about the Web page please let us know.

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Please share this newsletter with co-workers and others that you think may be interested. Let us know if there are names to add or remove from our mailing list.

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