

## Pregnancy truly tough for many

BY JULEYKA LANTIGUA-WILLIAMS

**T**his month, I will give birth to my first child. And I can't help but realize how much different my pregnancy experience has been from that of the average Latina or black woman in our country.

First, I'm in my early 30s, which is more than a decade later than when the average Latina has a child. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics, 53 percent of Latinas are pregnant by their 20th birthday. In 2007, the latest year for which data are available, the birth rate among Latina teens ages 15 to 19 was 81.7 per 1,000, compared with 27.2 for white teens, and 64.3 for black teens in the same age range.

In my case, waiting to have a child enabled me to complete my education and earn a master's degree. It allowed me to advance in a career from intern to executive level. And it gave me the opportunity to find the best life partner with whom to start a family. Waiting this long also meant that I was able

to make mistakes, take major tumbles along the way and learn some hard lessons without putting another life in jeopardy.

**S**econd, I'm also different from most Latina and black moms because I'm married. Nearly 40 percent of babies in 2007 were born to unwed mothers, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

While 28 percent of white women gave birth out of wedlock, nearly 72 percent of black women and more than 51 percent of Latinas did.

Having a loving and supportive husband during pregnancy has made a significant difference in my outlook toward pregnancy and in the amount of support I receive during this challenging experience. Having a committed partner who is invested in my mental and physical health — and who makes sacrifices to ensure both — has brought a tremendous sense of security and peace of mind to my pregnancy experience.

Being married to a caring husband has eradicated my risk for domestic violence. The American Pregnancy Association reports that 240,000 pregnant women are subjected to domestic violence every year, and that we face twice the risk for battery.

**A**nd, third, I have full medical coverage. Throughout my pregnancy, I

have been seen regularly by my obstetrician, and have received additional medical treatments, diagnostic procedures and specialist visits. In contrast, almost half a million babies are born to mothers who do not have adequate prenatal care, according to the American Pregnancy Association.

The Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration concludes that in 2006, white women "were most likely to receive first trimester prenatal care" while Latina and black women "were more than twice as likely to receive late or no prenatal care." I am not naive. I understand that not all new mothers are in an ideal situation. Nor am I condemning those who have made different choices than I have. Nor am I looking down upon the tireless efforts of mothers who are doing their best with scant resources and support.

But I do believe that we, as a society, can and should do more to ensure that more women — whether married, single, teen or otherwise — have a healthy and safe pregnancy.

I'm certainly grateful for mine.

**Lantigua-Williams is a writer for Progressive Media Project, a source of liberal commentary on domestic and international issues.**

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