Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Attitudes and Knowledge and Sexual Partnerships in Young Adulthood: Variation by Gender

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Background

- There is a growing body of work demonstrating that adolescent attitudes influence behavior well into adulthood.
- Teens’ sexual attitudes and knowledge predict adult contraceptive use and fertility
- Adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors likely differ for men and women.
- Teens’ attitudes about sex are also probably a key predictor of adult sexual behaviors.
- However, given gender differences in stigma about sex and in social views on pregnancy responsibility, associations between adolescent attitudes and knowledge and adult behavior likely differ for men and women.

Research Question

- Do adolescents’ knowledge and attitudes about sex and reproduction predict their sexual partnerships in adulthood, and does this association vary by gender?

Data & Methods

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
  - Aged ≥15 at Wave I, interviewed at Wave IV & had N=8,503
- Dependent variables measured at Wave IV
  - Lifetime number of sex partners
  - Lifetime number of ‘one-night stands’
  - Concurrent sex partners in last year (dictomous)

Figure 1. Sexual Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifetime # of sex partners</th>
<th>Concurrent Sex Partners in Past Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.86***</td>
<td>4.61 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women: 2.38</td>
<td>Men: 4.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Adolescent attitudes and knowledge predictors (averages based on constructs identified in factor analyses):
  - Reproductive Attitudes: feelings toward pregnancy, birth control attitudes, life course consequences of early fertility
  - Reproductive Knowledge: female reproductive biology knowledge, condom knowledge, birth control confidence
  - Attitudes Toward Sex: social costs, (fewer) social benefits, (fewer) physical benefits
  - Control for key sociodemographic and background characteristics
  - OLS and logistic regression, run separately by gender
  - Concurrent sex partners by Wave IV (dictomous)

Data & Methods, cont’d

Table 1. OLS and logistic regression models for sexual partners for men and women by Wave IV of Add Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Wave IV</th>
<th>Wave V</th>
<th>Wave VI</th>
<th>Wave VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
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- Both men and women who perceived fewer physical benefits of sex as adolescents had few lifetime partners and ‘one-night stands’ as adults.
- For women, but not men:
  - Greater adolescent condom knowledge and birth control confidence, more lifetime partners
  - Perceiving more social costs to sex, fewer lifetime partners
  - Perceiving greater life course consequences to early pregnancy, more ‘one-night stands’
  - Fewer men, but not women:
    - More positive attitudes toward birth control attitudes, fewer ‘one-night stands’
    - Greater birth control confidence, reduced odds of having concurrent sex partners

Multivariate Results

- **Teens’ attitudes and knowledge about sex, reproduction, and contraception have long-term influences on behavior.
- Teen boys and girls have different levels of knowledge and attitudes, AND these are related to outcomes differently.

Conclusions

- Sex ed programs should acknowledge social influences on sexual activity.
- Need to ensure boys are being taught about contraception and female reproductive biology.
- May need to consider that comprehensive sex ed could increase the number of partners.

Implications

All models include control variables. *p<0.05, **p<0.01. ***p<0.001. Bracketed indicates significant gender differences.

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