

The Behavioral and Psychological Antecedents of Sexually Risky Behaviors Among High Risk Adolescents

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Early Initiation of Sexual Intercourse

- Most studies consider initiation of sexual intercourse “early” when an adolescent is age 13 or younger
- This behavior might lead to a pattern of risky sexual behaviors that is related to negative outcomes
- Associated with forcing a partner to engage in sexual intercourse

Sexual Risk Behaviors

- Unprotected sexual activity
- Engaging in sexual activity while under the influence of alcohol and other drugs
- Having multiple sexual partners
- Initiating sexual intercourse at or before age 13 (Controversial)

Hopelessness

- High hopelessness predicts violence, substance use, and sexual activity.
- 50% of young males and 25% of young females experiencing high levels of hopelessness in some studies
- Might explain risk behaviors that are demonstrated more often among males than females, such as sexual aggression.

Limitations of Current Literature

- Few studies conducted in high risk populations
- Limited research on both males and females
- Less amenable to intervention programs
- Research conducted after incarceration

Purpose

- To assess the association between age of onset of sexual experience with sexually risky behaviors.
- To identify the association between levels of hopelessness and sexually risky behaviors.

Mobile Youth Survey

- The Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) is a community research project designed to annually determine decision making and subsequent health risk among adolescents (10-18) males and females who are living in extreme poverty
- The median household income was ~ \$5000 in 1990 and ~ \$12,000 in 2000 according to census data

Study Selection

- Only data from sexually active subjects who participated in the MYS in 2005 was analyzed
- 1192 subjects: 761 Males and 410 Females

Variables

- “Have you ever had sexual intercourse?
Sexual intercourse means having sex with the male’s penis inside the female’s vagina. This is sometimes called ‘going all the way’.”
- “How old were you when you first had sexual intercourse?”

Variables

- Hopelessness was measured using five items adapted from the Hopelessness Scale for Children, selected for their high item-total correlations.
- A sixth statement was added, “I do not expect to live a very long life”, based on low expectations of survival among many inner-city adolescents.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were be calculated for all participants from the year 2005.
- The data were screened for outliers and potential data entry mistakes.

Data Analysis

- Early initiation → sexual risky behaviors
- Hopelessness → sexual risky behaviors
- Multiple and logistic regression was utilized to determine if there are associations between age of onset of sexual intercourse, levels of hopelessness and sexually risky behaviors, using age as a covariate.

Descriptive Results

- 64.8% (761) male and 35.2% (410) female.
- 97.1% African American
- 74.3% of males were considered early initiators
- 29.6% of females were early initiators
- The mean age of initiation for sexual intercourse was 13 for males and 15.3 for females

Descriptive Results

- 72.5% reported consistently using condoms
- 64.1% reported consistently using contraceptives other than condoms
- 16.4% of participants reported having sexual intercourse while drunk or high

Descriptive Results

- 17.7% reported high levels of hopelessness
- Female participants were significantly older than male participants, mean age for females was 16.04 and mean age for males was 15.07
- Adolescents reported an average of 3.29 sexual partners in the past year

Correlations

- There was a positive correlation between an early initiation of sexual intercourse and reporting a high level of hopelessness
- Most sexual risk factors were correlated with each other and hopelessness

Correlations

- Positive relationship between age and initiation of sexual intercourse
- Age was negatively correlated with hopelessness
- Age of initiation of sexual intercourse was negatively associated with the number of sexual partners reported in the past year

Early Initiation → Sexually Risky Behavior

- Early initiators were not more or less likely than later initiators to utilize condoms or other contraceptives
- Early initiators were more likely than later initiators to report engaging in sexual intercourse while drunk or high (OR =2.72)
- On average early initiators had .88 more sexual partners than later initiators (2.26, 3.14)

Hopelessness → sexually risky

- Those with high hopelessness were less likely than those with low levels of hopelessness to report consistent condom use (OR = 1.9, OR = 2.42 for males)
- Those with high hopelessness were less likely to use contraceptives (OR = 2.28)
- No relationship for females

Hopelessness → sexually risky

- Those with high hopelessness were more likely to report having sexual intercourse while drunk or high (OR = 1.81)
- There was no statistically significant relationship between hopelessness and number of sexual partners

Summary

- Early initiation of sexual intercourse is an important predictor for some, but not all sexually risky behaviors
- Hopelessness is an important predictor for sexually risky behavior for males

Contrast with Literature

- Early initiation of sexual intercourse was not associated with inconsistent condom or other contraceptive utilization
- Early initiation of sexual intercourse was associated with multiple sexual partners and having sexual intercourse while under the influence of alcohol and drugs

Limitations

- Sexual behavior questions are inconsistently reported more often than other risk behaviors, especially for males
- Disparity in the number of males and females in this study

Implications

- Research on the role of hopelessness for adolescent males
- Male and female sexual behavior studied both together and separately

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