

# Sexual Health Information Sources for College Students: Sex Differences and Associations with Sexual Healthcare

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## Introduction

Other than school and parents, little is known about the sources of sexual health information (SHI) that contribute to the sexual health education of young adults. This exploratory study examines how young people access a broad range of SHI sources.

The research questions:

- What sources of SHI have college students used?
- How does utilization of these sources differ by sex?
- Are specific sources associated with specific sexual healthcare behaviors?



Planned Parenthood Hudson-Peconic. 2014.

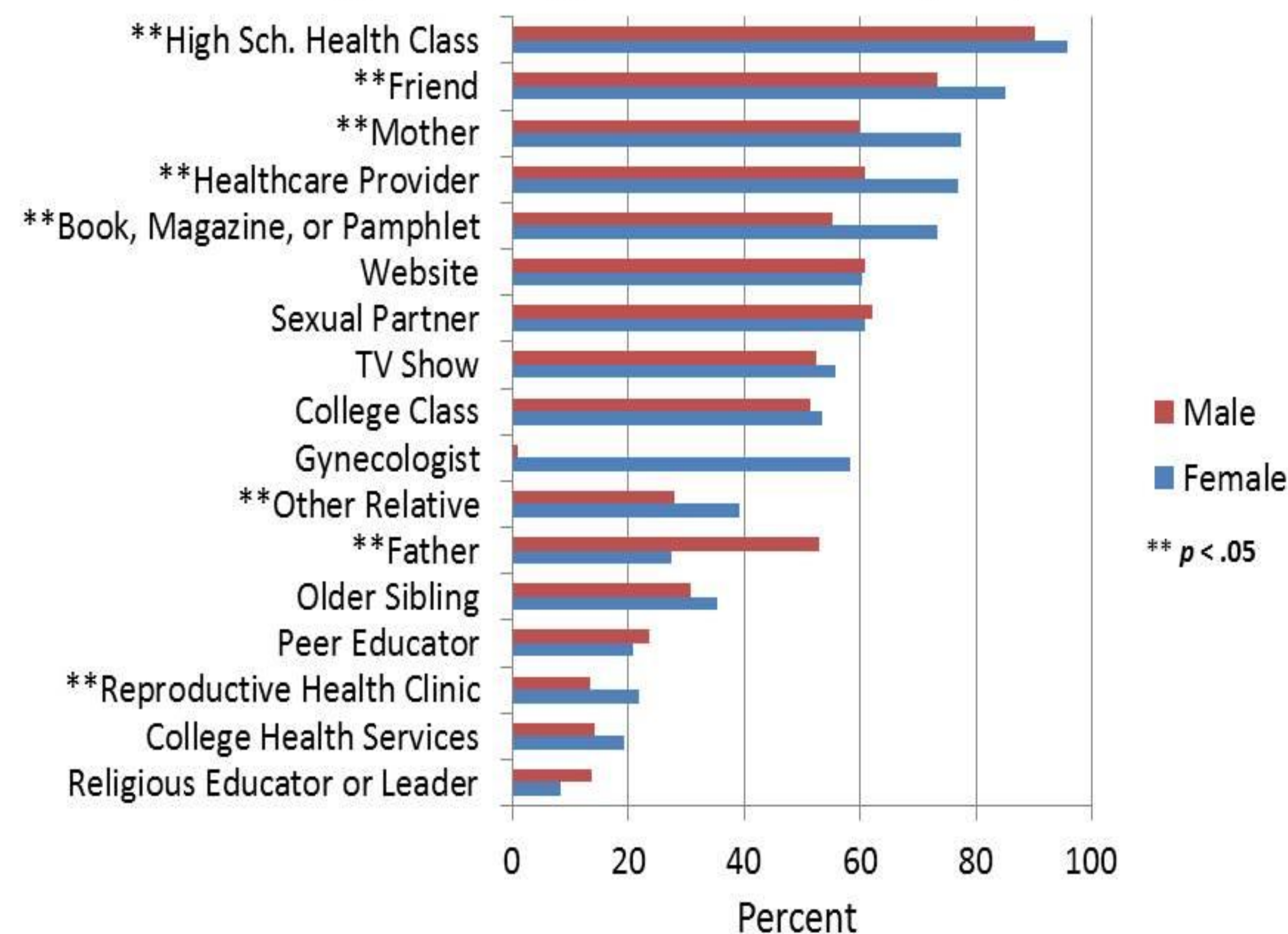
## Method

In 2011, a cross-sectional study was conducted among 1,021 US-born students ages 18 to 26 attending two northeastern universities. An anonymous, web-based survey included questions about SHI sources, risk reduction practices, and sexual healthcare. One question asked: "Have any of the following been a source of sexual health information for you?" Respondents could select answers from a list of 17 potential SHI sources. Respondents were primarily female (73%), 18 to 20 years old (81%), and white (83%). Chi-square tests were used to compare male and female responses and to identify associations between SHI sources and specific sexual healthcare behaviors. These comparisons were made for all students as well as sexually experienced students.

## Results

The mostly commonly reported SHI sources were high school health class (94%), friend (82%), mother (73%), doctor (73%), and book/magazine/pamphlet (68%). Females were significantly more likely than males to report several SHI sources, including mother, other relative, friend, and reproductive health clinic. Males were significantly more likely to identify their father as an SHI source. Among sexually experienced students, several sources were associated with HIV/STI testing and using a condom for vaginal sex, but no sources were associated with receiving the HPV vaccine. SHI sources with no significant associations with sexual healthcare behaviors include mother, father, high school health class, peer educator, TV show, and book/magazine/pamphlet.

### Sexual Health Information Sources among College Students, by Sex



### Associations between SHI Sources and Sexual Healthcare Behaviors among Sexually Experienced Students

| SHI Source                 | Females          | Males              |
|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Older Sibling              | HIV              |                    |
| Other Relative             | HIV, STI         |                    |
| College Health Class       |                  | HIV, STI           |
| Primary Care Provider      | HIV              |                    |
| Gynecologist               | HIV, STI, condom |                    |
| Reproductive Health Clinic | HIV, STI, condom | HIV, STI           |
| College Health Services    | HIV, STI, condom | STI (.058), condom |
| Friends                    |                  | condom             |
| Sexual Partner             | condom           | condom             |
| Website                    | HIV, STI         |                    |

( $p < .05$ , HIV = ever had an HIV test, STI = ever had an STI test, condom = ever used a condom during vaginal sex)

## Discussion

These results reveal that the sources of sexual health information accessed by young people are numerous and span multiple domains of their lives, including school, family, peers, healthcare providers, and media. They also indicate that several of these sources are used by more young women than young men. This marked gender disparity suggests that adolescent and young adult males may need additional support to learn about sexual healthcare. Similarly, more of these SHI sources are associated with sexual healthcare behaviors for females than for males, suggesting that females may benefit more from these experiences. These associations are worthy of further research.