Premarital Sex in College Students: Factors that Influence Their Attitudes and Practices

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PREMARRITAL SEX IN COLLEGE STUDENTS: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THEIR ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

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Introduction

- College is a time of sexual exploration for many students.
- Students vary in the sexual education (SE) they received as teens:
  - Abstinence-only education
  - Comprehensive sex education (abstinence-plus)
  - Safe sex education
- Both teens and professionals see sexual behaviors as a hierarchy.
- College students who engage in casual hook-ups have more relaxed attitudes towards sex and are more accepting of genital contact.
INTRODUCTION

Sex Education Programs

**Abstinence-only (SE)**
- Ambiguity about the term “abstinence”
- Correlated with an increase in teen pregnancies
- Does not encourage safe sex, so those who do not follow are left with no information on protection

**Comprehensive (SE)**
- More effective in preventing teenage pregnancies
- Does not necessarily decrease rates of sexual activity
- Promotes protection when engaging in intercourse
Parental influence

- Parents advising abstinence tends to increase abstinence in a teenager
- Teenagers from single parent homes are more likely to have had sex
- Abstinence information from parents can often appear to superficial to teenagers
- One study found that mother-daughter conversations about sex is linked with higher sexual behavior in the daughter
Hypotheses

• **H1**: Parents have a greater influence in teaching abstinence than do schools.

• **H2**: Teaching safe sex leads students to practice safe sex rather than unprotected sex and have more sex than those taught abstinence.

• **H3**: Those who practice abstinence view other sexual behaviors as unacceptable.

Variables

- **IV**: source and type of sex education (H1 & H2); abstinence (H3)
- **DV**: sexual behaviors and attitudes
- **Purpose**: Understand the educational and experiential variables behind students’ sexual practices and attitudes towards sexual behavior
METHOD

Participants

- 1042 college students
  - 280 from Cedarville University
  - 480 from University of Dayton
  - 92 from Wright State University
  - 97 from Antioch
  - 102 from University of Cincinnati

- Ages 18-35

- Mean age = 20.28
METHOD

Questionnaire
- Type of sex education
- Values of parents and parental encouragement
- Sexual activity and protection
- Level of acceptability for college students
  - Hugging
  - Kissing
  - Touching on top of clothes
  - Touching under clothes
  - Hand jobs
  - Oral sex
  - Vaginal sex
  - Anything
  - None
RESULTS

Table A
Crosstabulation of Students by Sex Education and Sexual Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Education</th>
<th>Sexually Active</th>
<th>Abstinent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Sex</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Abstinence    | 155 | 41.0| 223 | 59.0| \n
**\(p<.01\)

Table B
Crosstabulation of Students by Abstinence Taught by Parents or School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstinence</th>
<th>Sexually Active</th>
<th>Abstinent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| School      | 97  | 28.0| 46  | 10.0| \n
**\(p<.01\)

Table C
Crosstabulation of Students by Sex Education and Sex Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Education</th>
<th>Practicing Safe Sex</th>
<th>Not Practicing Safe Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Sex</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Abstinence    | 68  | 43.9| 87  | 56.1| \n
*Note: these statistics only include those who are sexually active

Those taught abstinence were more likely to be abstinent than those taught safe sex.

Parents had a greater influence over students' abstinence than did schools.

Abstinence programs reduced the number of sexually active youth, but they were not prepared for safe sex.

Safe sex education had no impact on the actual practice of safe sex (condom use).
H3: Those who practice abstinence view other sexual behaviors as unacceptable.
DISCUSSION

Limitations

- Does not account for homeschool education
- Vague questions
  - Contraception v. protection
  - Missing information

Implications and future research

- Implement safe sex behavior/abstinence
- Qualitative research to find out why students behave these ways
- Role of parents
  - Father-to-son, father-to-daughter, mother-to-daughter, etc.
  - Education from non-biological parents


Walcott, C. M., Chenneville, T., & Tarquini, S. (2011). Relationship between recall of sex education and college students' sexual attitudes and behavior. Psychology In The Schools, 48(8), 828-842.
