

# The Role of Open Communication with Parents in Dating and Sexual Behaviors Among Female Adolescents

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## ABSTRACT

Among developed nations, the USA has the highest rate of pregnancy among 15- to 19-year-olds, which puts girls at risk of low academic achievement, poverty, and even death due to complications.<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup> This study was a secondary data analysis using the baseline wave of data from the Cross-Site Evaluation of the Title XX Adolescent Family Life (AFL) Program in 14 States, which included a sample of 250 female adolescents who participated in the AFL sexual education program. A negative correlation was found between the frequency of dating someone 3 or more years older and willingness to abstain from sex.

## INTRODUCTION

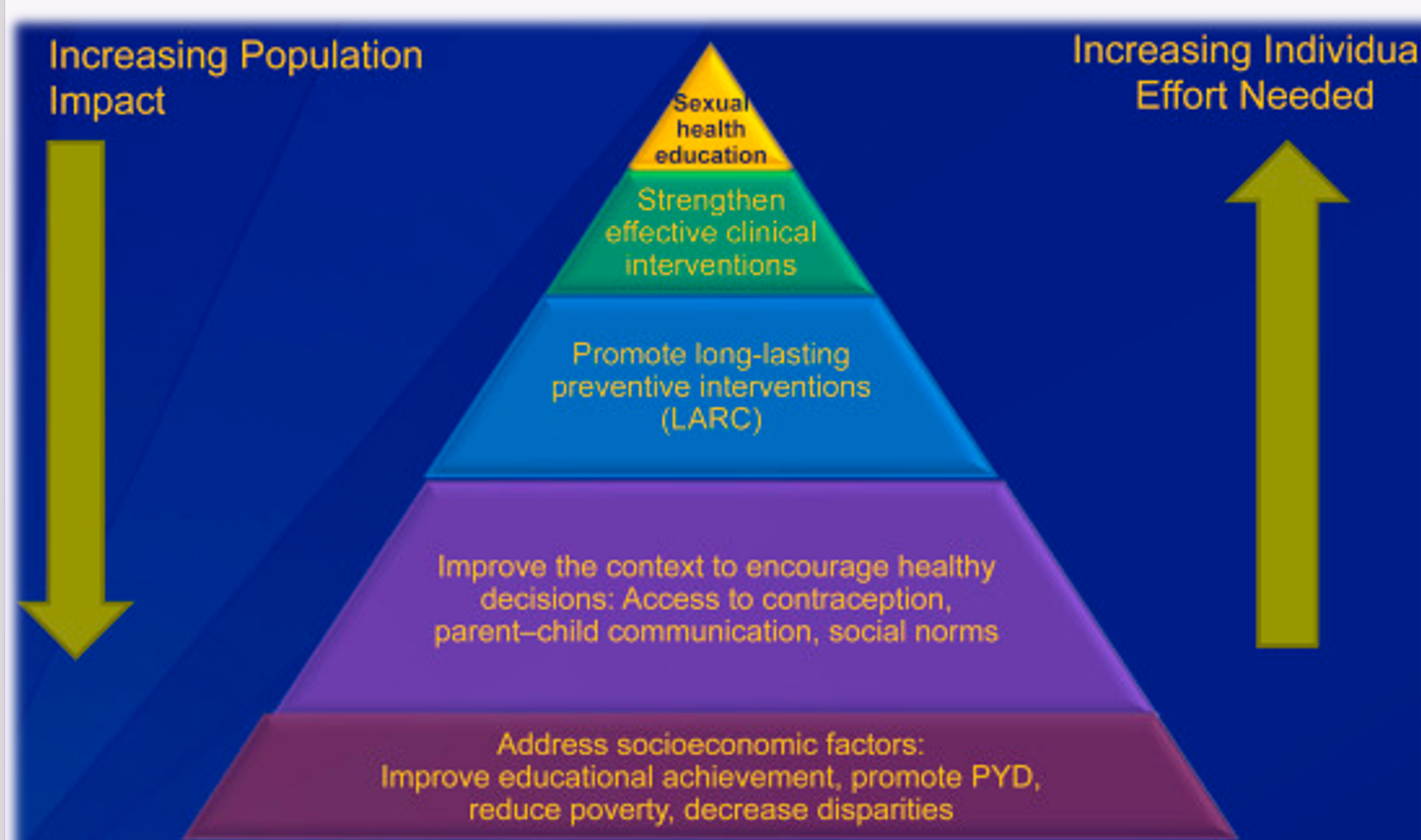
- ❖ **Purpose of Study:** Examine role of open parental communication on teens' sexual intentions
- ❖ **Research Questions:** What is the effect of open parent-child communication on teens' intentions to abstain from sex & use safer sex practices?
- ❖ **Hypotheses:** Frequency of open parental communication has direct effect on intentions of teens to abstain from sex and to use safer sex practices (condoms/birth control)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- ❖ Teen girls tend to obtain information regarding sex from parent(s): informal form of sexual education<sup>6,7</sup>
- ❖ Pregnancy prevention from familial level may be more effective than school-based sexual education<sup>10</sup>
- ❖ Adolescents greatly influenced by their social networks; prevention should focus on multiple systems that affect sexual behaviors & intentions<sup>6</sup>

### Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory

- ❖ **Exosystem:** Parental Support Networks<sup>8</sup>
- ❖ **Macrosystem:** Racial/Ethnic Factors<sup>9</sup>
- ❖ **Mesosystem:** Education<sup>10</sup>
- ❖ **Microsystem:** Parental Factors<sup>9</sup>



## METHODS

- ❖ **Type of Design:** Secondary data analysis; cross-sectional study
- ❖ **Dataset:** Cross-Site Evaluation of the Title XX Adolescent Family Life Program in 14 States (ICPSR 34398)
- ❖ **Sampling Strategy:** Convenience Sampling
- ❖ **Data Collection Procedures:** Data collected 2 months before AFL intervention began, using computer-assisted self-interviews & self-administered paper and pencil interviews

### Dependent Variables:

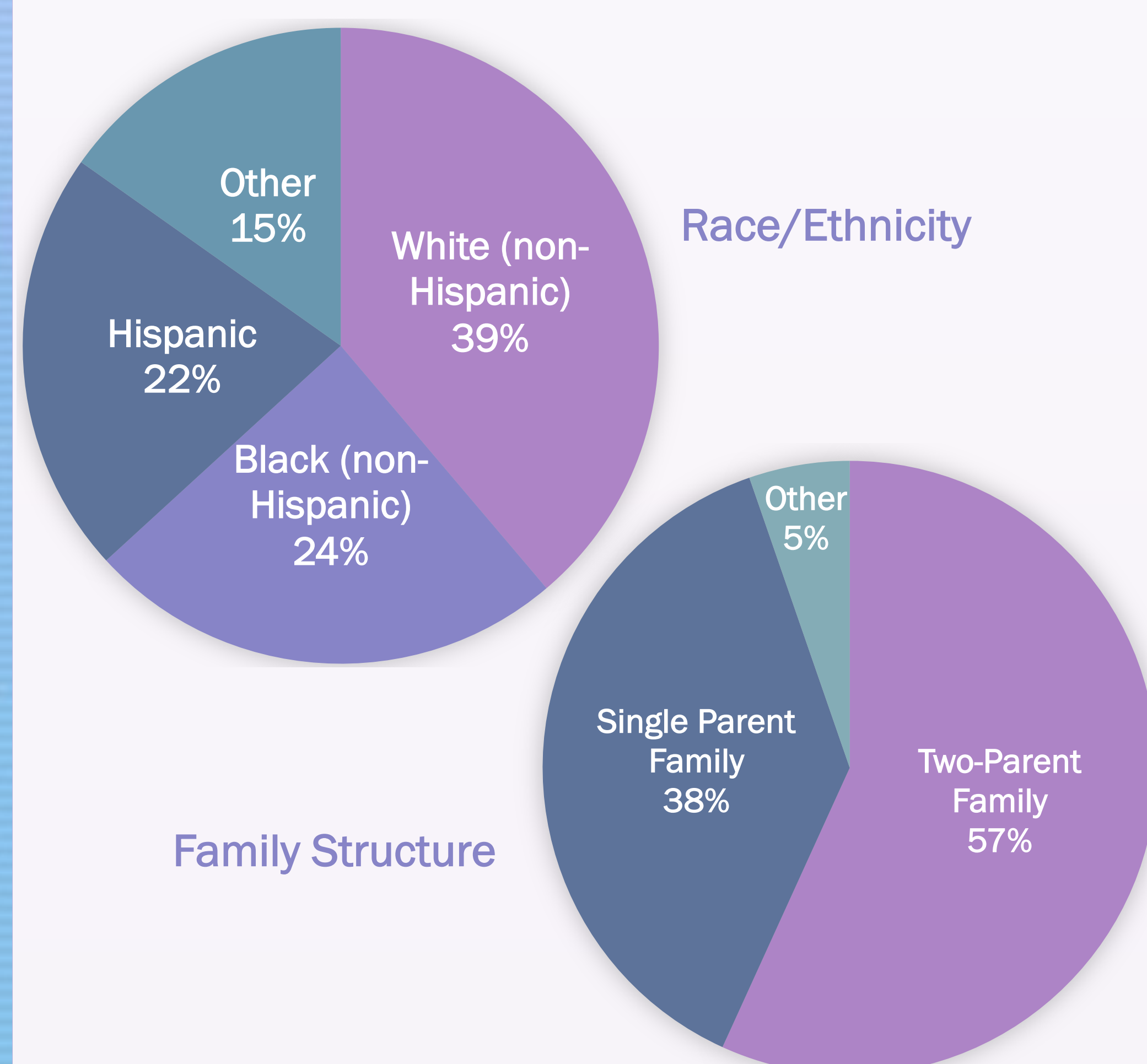
- Teens' intentions to abstain from sex**
  - ❖ Combines 3 variables from original data set
  - ❖ 1 = "strongly agree" to 5 = "strongly disagree"
  - ❖ Scores: 5-15 (higher scores = higher likelihood of abstinence)
- Intention to have safe sex**
  - ❖ "How likely is it that you will use birth control or pregnancy protection when you have sex?"
  - ❖ 1 = "definitely likely" to 5 = "not at all likely"
- Risky dating behaviors**
  - ❖ "How many times have you gone out on a date with someone who is at least 3 years older than you?"
  - ❖ 1 = "never" to 4 = "more than 10 times"
  - ❖ Reverse coded: higher scores = less risky behavior

### Independent Variable:

#### Open parent-child communication regarding sex

- ❖ Scores of 15 items combined to create single variable
- ❖ "How often in the last 3 months have you talked to one/both of your parents about..." topics including "reasons for not having sex" & "how babies are made"
- ❖ 0 = none; 1 = 1 time; 2 = 2-3 times; 3 = 4+ times
- ❖ Scores: 0 – 45 (higher scores = more open communication)

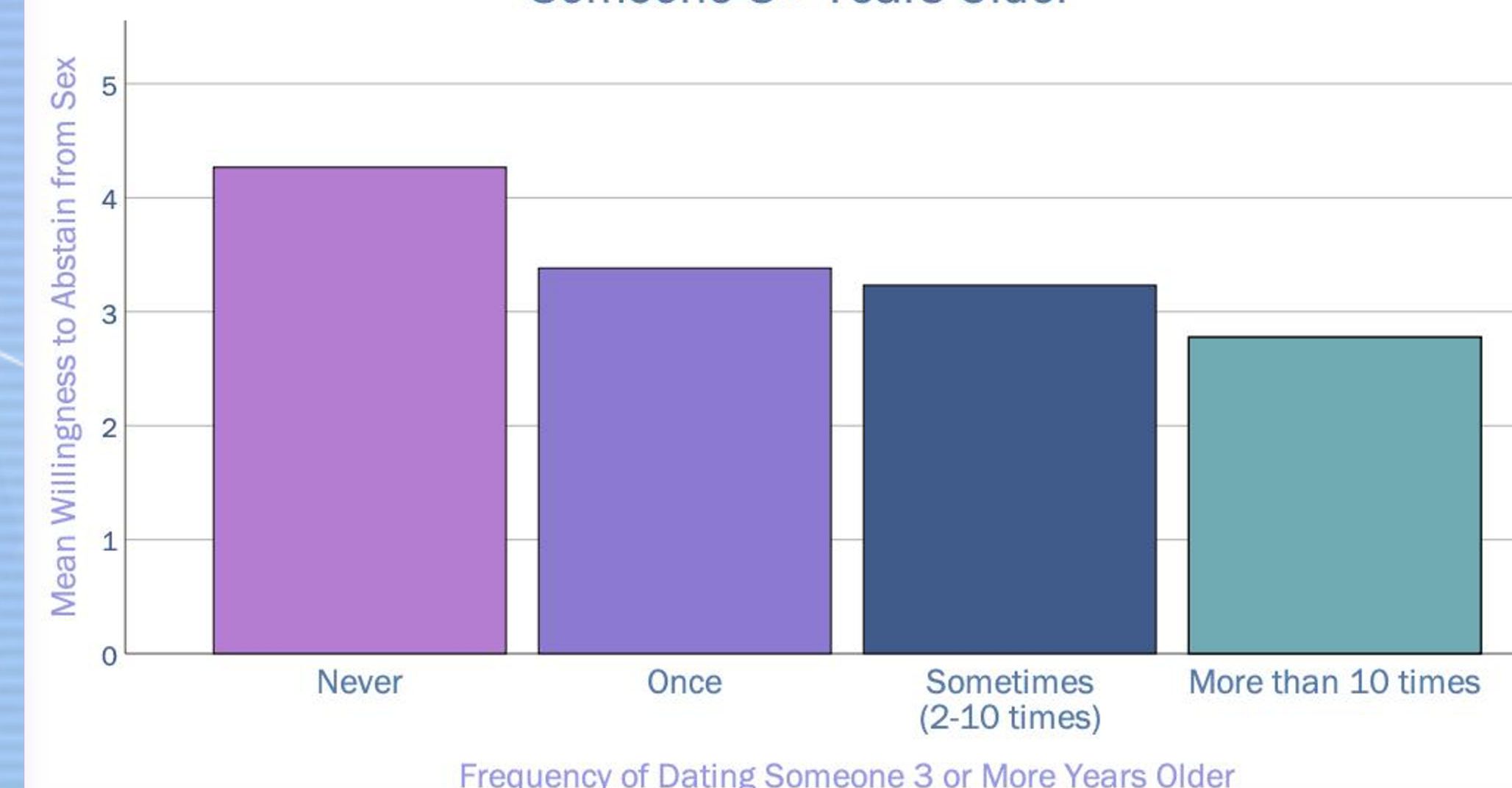
### Demographic Variables:



## RESULTS

- ❖ Spearman *rho* correlation coefficient computed to examine relationship between openness of parent-child communication and (1) willingness to abstain from sex; (2) likelihood of using birth control; & (3) frequency of dating someone 3 years older or more
- ❖ There was not a statistically significant correlation between parental communication and willingness to abstain from sex, likelihood of using birth control, or frequency of dating someone 3+ years older.
- ❖ Hypotheses that the frequency of open parent-child communication would have a direct effect on the intentions of teens to abstain from sex and use safer sex practices were **not supported**
- ❖ Relationship between frequency of dating someone 3 + years older & willingness to abstain from sex examined using Spearman *rho* correlation analysis
- ❖ Results indicated a **negative** and statistically significant association between frequency of dating someone 3+ years older and willingness to abstain: **Higher frequency of dating someone 3+ years older was related to lower willingness to abstain from sex.**

Simple Bar Mean of Willingness to Abstain by Frequency of Dating Someone 3+ Years Older



## DISCUSSION

### Implications

- ❖ Future research: how to improve quality of informal sexual education (parents' communication skills)
- ❖ Increase access to affordable, confidential, client-centered reproductive & mental health care services for adolescents
- ❖ Social workers: encourage parents to be actively involved in children's health, provide psycho-education on effective ways to communicate with about sensitive subjects (sex, relationships, dating)

### Study Limitations

- ❖ Lack of data on quality (as opposed to frequency) of communication; did not specify the emotional tone
- ❖ Cross-sectional data: conclusions cannot be drawn regarding cause and effect; self-reported measures

### Conclusion

- ❖ New policies should be developed to provide services that focus on positive youth development to prevent risky sexual behavior<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Comprehensive sexual education programs should address social factors (peer & partner influence)
- ❖ Due to risks of relationships with older partners, interventions must empower teens with strategies to establish and maintain boundaries about sex

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