

The Relationship Between Parent-Adolescent Relationship and Sexual Behavior Amongst Adolescents

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Abstract

Parent-adolescent relations have a salient impact on adolescent sexual behavior. Parents instill values, ideologies, cultural norms, and religious beliefs in their children through modeling and communication. The present study seeks to examine the relationship between parent-adolescent relationship and sexual behavior among adolescents. Data from the 1994-2008 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) was utilized for this study. The current study consisted of 2,694 participants in grades 7 through 12 in the 1994-1995 school year, who came from two-parent households. This cohort was tracked and interviewed periodically until 2008 when the respondents were young adults. The present study concluded that protective factors, closeness to mom, closeness to dad, behavioral support from mom, and behavioral support from dad were all significantly and negatively related to risky sexual behavior, motivation to use birth control and contraction of STDs. All factors except for behavioral support from mom were significantly influential on sexual debut. The current study affirmed prior research studies regarding close, open, and egalitarian relationships positively influencing risky sexual behavior among adolescents. Because early and risky sexual activity is linked to an increase in delinquent behavior, which is predictive of criminality and substance abuse later in life, the current study aims to increase understanding of what factors are protective against early and risky sexual activity. These findings can empower parents to provide positive and supportive environments for their children and increase the likelihood of favorable behavioral outcomes during teenage years.

Introduction

Significance of Study:

- Approximately 46.8% of high school students have had sexual intercourse (Schuster et al., 2012).
- Adolescents are at increased risk for STIs compared to adults. AFA and Latinx teens are at increased risk (CDC, 2018).
- Unplanned teen pregnancy statistics are relatively high compared to other Western civilizations. In 2017, the birthrate for women aged 15-19 was 18.8 per 1,000 females (CDC, 2018).

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge related to sexual behavior among adolescents and to clarify which parental characteristics impact these behaviors.

Research Question:

What is the relationship between parent-adolescent relationship and sexual behavior amongst adolescents?

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis for this study is that adolescents with close, open, and less authoritarian relationships with parents will have decreased frequency of risky sexual behavior and higher prevalence of abstinence rates than those who come from homes with poor communication styles and punitive punishment techniques. Essentially, healthy parent-adolescent relations will predict safer sex practices.

Literature Review

Parenting Styles:

- Permissive or uninvolved parents yield more sexually active teens (Romer et al., 1999).
- Egalitarian, open, and receptive parental communication styles predicted a later sexual debut and reduced risk-taking behavior (Rogers et al., 2015).
- Securely attached teens are less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior (Moretti & Peled, 2004).

Parenting Styles and Adolescent Sexual Behavior:

Parents who exhibit unsafe behavior are modeling low self-efficacy. Teens with low self-efficacy are more likely to drink, smoke and engage in risky sexual behavior (Wilder & Watt, 2002). Conversely, parents with high expectations of themselves and their children tend to have higher achieving children who are less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior (Lam et al., 2008).

Gaps in Research:

There is also a lack of information regarding what constitutes parent-adolescent quality time. Most research on this topic covered parent-adolescent bonds and closeness but mentioned nothing about shared activities or interests. There is also a lack of data on the paternal influence on adolescent problem behavior; most scholarly articles found during the literature review featured solely on maternal influences.

Methods

Research Design:

The current study is a secondary data analysis from the Add Health project. A cross-sectional survey design is used to evaluate the relationship between parent-adolescent relationship and sexual behavior amongst adolescents. The present study used Wave I data for analysis.

Sampling Method:

The sample used in the current study eliminated individuals who lived in a single-parent home or whose parents had divorced. Adolescents who did not fully respond to parent relationship and sexual behavior questions were excluded from the study. This resulted in a final sample size of 2,694 adolescents in grades 7-12 living in two-parent households.

Measures:

Parent-Adolescent Relationship: A self-report subscale that consisted of 7 items for mom and 5 items for dad rated the degree to which participants experienced closeness to either parent. Behavioral support was measured using an 8-item cumulative scale for each parent. Perceived parental and family caring (i.e., protective factors) was measured using a 5-item cumulative scale.

Sexual Behavior: A self-report scale defined by social perceptions about sex and birth control, beliefs about pregnancy, and history of STDs.

Results

- There was a statistically significant, negative relationship between protective factors and lower levels of motivation to engage in risky sexual behavior. As protective factors increased, motivation to engage in risky sexual behavior decreased among adolescents.
- There was a statistically significant, negative relationship between closeness to dad and closeness to mom and motivation to engage in risky sexual behavior.
- There was a statistically significant, negative relationship between behavioral support from dad and behavioral support from mom and motivation to engage in risky sexual behavior.
- There was a statistically significant, negative relationship between closeness to dad and closeness to mom and motivation to not engage in birth control.
- There was a statistically significant, negative relationship between behavioral support from dad and behavioral support from mom and motivation to not engage in birth control.
- The mean closeness to dad score and closeness to mom score of adolescents who identified as having sexual intercourse was significantly different from the mean score of adolescents who identified as never having sexual intercourse.
- Interestingly, parental behavioral support from dad appears to have more of an impact on sexual debut than does parental behavioral support from mom. No significant difference was found when measuring behavioral support from mom ($t(2692) = .145, p = .443$). The mean parental behavioral support from mom scores of adolescents who identified as having sexual intercourse ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.79$) was not significantly different from the mean closeness to mom score of adolescents who identified as never having sexual intercourse ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.66$).

Table 2
Pearson Correlation for Parent-Adolescent Relationship and Risky Sexual Behavior

Parent-Adolescent Relationship Scale	Motivation to engage in risky sexual behavior	Motivation to not engage in birth control
Protective factors scale	-.164***	-.094***
Closeness to dad scale	-.121***	-.064***
Closeness to mom scale	-.120***	-.116***
Parental behavioral support from mom	-.126***	-.197***
Parental behavioral support from dad	-.094***	-.129***

*** $p < .001$

Table 3
Parent-Adolescent Relationship and Sexual Behavior (Ever had Sex)

Relationship Scale	Mean Sexual Behavior (SD)	Mean Difference	t
Protective Factors***	Yes	13.95 (3.45)	-1.18
	No	15.13 (3.11)	
Closeness to Mom***	Yes	29.64 (4.59)	-.091
	No	30.55 (3.92)	
Closeness to Dad***	Yes	20.16 (4.26)	-1.22
	No	21.38 (3.57)	
Parental Behavioral Support from Mom	Yes	3.17 (1.79)	0.01
	No	3.16 (1.66)	
Parental Behavioral Support from Dad***	Yes	2.14 (1.79)	-0.22
	No	2.36 (1.66)	

Comparisons made using independent t tests. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Conclusion

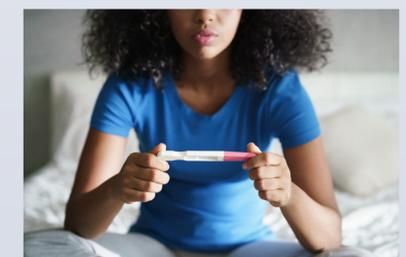
Attachment to one's primary caregivers is a powerful influencing factor on the risk-taking activities of adolescents. Clinicians should psychoeducate about the parent-child relationship during pregnancy and continue into the child's adolescent years. No-cost parenting classes should be offered to everyone regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, or parenting beliefs.

Strong bonds formed between parent and child during infancy are protective against risky sexual behavior that can result in unplanned pregnancy, STDs, or other forms of trauma. The researcher proposes that if all parents were aware of these factors, our society would see a decrease in the number of unplanned teen pregnancies, the prevalence of children in foster homes, STD contraction amongst youth, and emotionally challenging teen abortions.

Implications for Future Research:

Early sexual intercourse is correlated with an increase in delinquent behavior, which is predictive of criminality and substance abuse later in life (Engqvist & Rydelius, 2007). For this reason, social workers must understand the protective and risk factors involved in early, risky sexual behavior.

Clinicians can use the present information to increase the presence of protective parenting factors in families. The present study can also be used as a form of psychoeducation for parenting classes or individual sessions with new parents. Understanding the role that a parent plays in their child's decision-making process is imperative to successful child-rearing.



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