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Individual and Family Correlates of Adolescents’ Sexual Behavior: Multiethnic Findings

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine correlates of adolescent sexual activity, including age of first date, family composition, clarity of long term goals, and maternal and paternal views about premarital sex. There were 672 males and females, three races/ethnicities, both urban and suburban settings, and socioeconomic diversity. Sexual behavior was most related to parental views about premarital sex, adolescents’ own values toward premarital sex, clarity of adolescents’ long term goals, and the age when adolescents first learned about sexual intercourse. Important implications for sex education are discussed. Potential intervention variations by gender and race/ethnicity should be considered.

Correlates of Adolescents’ Sexual Behavior: Multiethnic Findings

Adolescence is a time of exploration of one’s own limits. Currently many teenagers discover their own boundaries through risky sexual behaviors. The price for early onset of sexual activity is high; each year over one million teenagers become pregnant and over four million receive the diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease (STD) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). Additionally, those adolescents that have been victims of sexual abuse are at greater risk of these problems and others, including anxiety and depression (for review, see Saewyc, Pettingell, & Magee, 2003). HIV diagnosis due to sexual contact is reported as early as age 13 among teenagers in the USA, with the highest prevalence rates among ethnic minorities such as Hispanics and African Americans (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Only 50% of teen mothers receive their high school diploma by age 22 (Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010), making pregnancy a significant contributor to high school dropout. The purpose of this study was to examine the contri-