

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY

PLEASE NOTE—THIS INFORMATION IS MEANT TO BE USED AS A TEACHER RESOURCE, NOT DISTRIBUTED TO STUDENTS

Marital Status and Family Structure: Being in a mother-only household predicts higher sexual activity for girls. For boys, the disruption of the two-parent household, rather than the state of being in a single-parent family, predicted the transition to sexual activity.

Parent and Sibling Sexual Experience and Pregnancy: If parents or older siblings have experienced early sexual activity, pregnancy, or childbearing, the teenager will be more likely to begin sexual activity at an early age.

Parent-Child Relationships: Lack of parental control is a contributing factor to adolescent sexual activity. Parents who have clear rules and expectations about dating and are more strict, have adolescent children who are less likely to be sexually involved. This pattern was slightly reversed for parents who were seen by their adolescents as very strict.

Parental Education: Parental emphasis on achievement and seeking meaningful and worthwhile goals is also a factor discouraging early sexual involvement among teenagers. Low educational goals and poor educational achievement are associated with greater sexual activity for both teenage boys and girls. Teens who score well on intelligence tests, are academically motivated, and do well in school are less likely to become sexually involved at an early age. Better educated parents tend to set more goals and put a higher value on achievement and value work more than play.

Race, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status: Blacks are much more likely to be sexually active than are whites. Living in poverty is associated with both early sexual activity and early pregnancy. As socioeconomic status increases, rates of sexual activity and early pregnancy decline.

Peer Group and Interpersonal Factors: Peer groups can influence an adolescent either positively or negatively in decisions regarding sexuality. If the peer group is sexually active, they are more likely to be sexually active also.

Substance Abuse and Delinquency: Women who were currently using illicit drugs and those who had used them in the past, were about twice as likely as women who never use these drugs, to experience a premarital pregnancy. Studies of males who have become teen fathers suggest that there is a higher percentage of them with known conduct disorders and criminal activity. Among both males and females, delinquent behavior, smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs and early onset of sexual intimacy tend to occur among the same teenagers.

Independence and Achievement: Adolescents who value independence highly, yet have low expectations for achievement, are more likely to be sexually active.

Self-Esteem: Whether self-esteem influences sexual behavior, or sexual behavior influences self-esteem is unclear. In general, adolescents who value achievement, are future-oriented, and have a sense of influence over their own future, tend to initiate sexual activity at a later age, and are less likely to become adolescent parents.

Decision Making Skills: In decisions about sexual behavior, teens' lack of knowledge and insight about future consequences can lead to disastrous outcomes. However, with increasing age through adolescence, the ability to consider the future consequences of decisions increases.

Perception of Invulnerability: Adolescents seem to have a feeling of invulnerability and tend not to associate consequences with actions. Infallibility is a common belief in adolescence which makes them more prone to risk-taking behaviors. Some adolescents live in a fantasy world where they think everything will turn out well.

Age: Older teenagers are more likely to have had sexual intimacy. Regardless of age, when first-time adolescent girls have intercourse, they tend to have partners who are about three years older. For boys, the initial partner is generally about one year older.

Biological Factors: Biological factors influence sexual activity by stimulating sexual interest and establishing reproductive capacity. There is general agreement that early pubertal development is associated with early sexual activity.

Dating: Age at first date and at first sexual intimacy are associated. Early steady dating was strongly related to permissive attitudes and to premarital sexual experiences. Males and females who never dated during ninth grade were much less likely than early daters to have had sexual intimacy when they were in high school.

Religiosity: Being devout and observant of religious custom and teaching is more important than any specific affiliation. Teens who attend religious services regularly and consider religion to be an important part of their lives are less likely to initiate sexual intimacy at an early age.

The Mass Media: The mass media portrays sexual activity in the context of instant gratification without real or lasting consequences. Premarital sex and cohabitation are visible ways of life among adults.

Sexual Abuse: Young women who become pregnant appear to be more likely to have been sexually or physically abused during their childhood. They feel a need to reaffirm themselves and to know that they are loved. It is through the sexual activity that they feel someone loves them. They may lack assertiveness and have fewer skills to clearly state what they want and to regulate what happens to them.

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