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Initiation of sexual intercourse among middle school adolescents: the influence of psychosocial factors

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Abstract

Purpose

To explore potential psychosocial predictors for initiation of sexual intercourse among middle-school, inner-city youth, using longitudinal data from the *Healthy and Alive!* project.

Methods

We conducted hierarchical, logistic regression with adjustment for intraclass correlation over two sequential periods, including seventh and eighth grades (N = 3163), to assess the independent influence of psychosocial and demographic factors. Internally reliable scales to assess psychosocial influences were created, based on major theories of

behavior. The sample was 52% female, 51% black, 30% Hispanic, 9% white, and 3% Asian. At baseline, 13% of girls and 39% of boys reported already having initiated sexual intercourse.

Results

Personal and perceived peer norms about refraining from sex were a strong and consistent protective factor. Alcohol and other drug use, poor academic performance, male gender, and black race were consistent risk factors. Self-efficacy showed a mixed effect: protective in the seventh grade but increasing risk in the eighth grade. Speaking a language other than English was a protective factor in seventh grade. Both psychosocial and demographic factors provided independent explanatory power.

Conclusions:

Psychosocial factors, particularly norms about having sex, influence initiation of sexual intercourse. These data suggest that programs to delay initiation of sexual intercourse should reinforce norms about refraining from sex.



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Keywords

Abstinence; Adolescence; Drug and alcohol use; Initiation of sexual intercourse; Peer norms; Psychosocial factors; Risk behaviors

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