

Preventing boys' risky sexual behavior

Informing policymakers through research

The issue. The number of teens who are sexually active is increasing. Approximately 85 percent of boys have engaged in sexual intercourse by the age of 19 and nearly 20 percent are sexually active before age 15. Research has shown that teens who engage in such behavior are at an increased risk for lower levels of academic achievement and increased levels of school problems and substance use. Additionally, participating in early sexual intercourse increases teens' risks of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or experiencing an unintended pregnancy. However, little research has focused on low-income, adolescent boys to simultaneously examine what places teens at risk, what protects teens from early sexual debut (i.e., engaging in sexual intercourse before age 15), and what prevents risky sexual behaviors (i.e., not using protection, having multiple partners).

According to our research. Nearly a third of the boys in our study (ages 11 to 15 years) had engaged in sexual intercourse before age 15 and nearly half of those had engaged in risky sexual behavior. Findings showed that academic achievement and parental monitoring protected adolescent boys from early sexual debut and risky sexual behaviors. Drug and alcohol use as well as school problems placed adolescent boys at risk for these behaviors. When risk and protective factors were assessed together, findings showed that early parental monitoring and academic achievement protected adolescent boys' early sexual debut and risky sexual behaviors because those protective factors reduced their delinquent behavior, including early drug and alcohol use and school problems.

We recommend. Our results show the need to focus the discussion about early sexual intercourse and risky sexual behaviors at even

younger age groups than currently is taking place.

We recommend that intervention and prevention programs start before middle school or high school. Our findings reiterate the fact that the family environment is very important in influencing adolescent boys' early sexual behavior. However, policymakers and educators should examine the other social contexts, particularly school, that influence adolescent boys' early sexual behavior. Specifically, policymakers and educators should implement programs that help youth pursue academic achievement and should address issues such as high rates of problem behaviors at school. Programs that address early sexual behavior among adolescent boys should be multi-systematic, incorporating both parents and schools in effective prevention and intervention programs.

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