

Neighborhood Factors and Depression: Associations with Adolescents' Sexual Behavior

Lonny Jay Born

OBJECTIVE. The purpose of this study was to examine whether perceived neighborhood factors, depression, and alcohol use are associated with adolescent risky sexual behavior in a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school students.

METHODS. The study sample included young adults ages 14 to 19 who were eligible to complete the young adults interview in the 2002 or 2004 waves of the National Longitudinal Study on Youth 1979 – Child Young Adult cohort (n=2374). The data were summarized using univariate and bivariate statistics. Associations between the independent and dependent variables were measured with the Chi square statistic. Multivariable logistic regression models were used to model adolescent sexual activity outcomes as functions of the neighborhood factors, perceptions of peer drinking, and depression (CES-D >16), controlling for all covariates. Sample weights were applied in all models to account for the complex survey design.

RESULTS. Bivariate statistics indicate an association between some neighborhood factors and risky sexual behavior. In fully-adjusted models, alcohol use is clearly associated with risky sexual behavior, mainly having multiple partners in the past 12 months. Perceptions of neighborhood-level disrespect for rules and laws were associated with adolescents ever having sex, but not with measures of risky sexual behavior. No model covariates were associated with condom use and sexually active adolescents. We found that depression was not associated with risky sexual behavior.

CONCLUSION. Results of this study suggest that adolescent drinking and their perceptions that neighborhood-level peer drinking is a big problem are independently associated with having sex with multiple partners. These findings highlight the need for further research to develop effective alcohol prevention interventions alongside programs to educate teens about risky sexual behavior. Such programs would be well-suited to schools and other neighborhood settings. Future research with new methodologies is required to better understand the direction and significance of relationships between adolescent depression and risky sexual behavior.

Thesis Committee:

Fred Zimmerman PhD, (chair)

Janice Bell PhD, MPH, MN

Mary Kay Gugerty PhD

Supported in part by a Pediatric Dentistry Residency and Project #T76 MC 00011 from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services.