

Religiosity and sexual risk among African American and Caucasian youth

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Purpose: To examine associations between subcomponents of religiosity (private and public religiosity) and sexual risk outcomes that may be differentially important for African American and Caucasian adolescents.

Methods: Using data from Waves I and III of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a total of 14,322 African American and Caucasian adolescents who reported having a religion at Wave I were included in this secondary data analysis. I used multivariate logistic regression, stratified by gender and controlling for known confounders, to examine the relationship between public and private religiosity scores with the outcomes of number of lifetime sexual partners, reported history of sexually transmitted infection (STI), and positive biomarker for STI.

Results: Among African American females, higher private religiosity scores were associated with having ≤ 5 lifetime sexual partners (OR 0.8, $p=0.005$). Among African American males, higher private religiosity scores were associated with being less likely to report a history of a STI (OR 0.77, $p=0.005$). I found no significant associations between public religiosity scores and sexual risk among African American adolescents. Among Caucasian female and male adolescents, higher public and private religiosity scores were significantly associated with having ≤ 5 lifetime sexual partners.

Conclusions: I found a strong association of private religiosity with decreased sexual risk among African American youth. However, both private and public religiosity were associated with decreased sexual risk in Caucasian youth. This study suggests the importance culturally sensitive interventions to decrease sexual risk behaviors among youth in the US.

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