At-risk Adolescents and Their Risk-taking Behaviors
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Introduction

Risk-taking behavior presents a prevalent problem in the U.S. Almost one-half of adolescents in high school have engaged in sexual intercourse, and almost 40% of these adolescents reported not using a condom when last engaging in sexual intercourse (CDC, 2009). Seventy-three percent of adolescents reported having at least one drink of alcohol, and 37% reported using marijuana at least once (CDC, 2009). Several studies have found that that low socioeconomic status (SES) is associated with greater sexual activity in adolescents (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Furthermore, based on data from the CDC (2009), 29% of Black high school students responded that they had engaged in sexual intercourse with four or more partners, and 15% of these teens reported that they had engaged in sexual intercourse before the age of 13. These percentages are the highest when compared to the other racial groups (i.e., American Indian/Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander, Asian, Hispanic, and White).

Purpose: Research has not specifically evaluated the effects of race and gender on risky behaviors among teens who reported being sexually active. In other words, research has not focused on the impact of a sexual debut on engagement in other risk-taking behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol use) in adolescents. Therefore, we sought to identify the effect of race and gender on the age of sexual debut and other risky behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol) of middle and high school students who self-reported engaging in sexual intercourse.

Methods

Participations
308 7th – 12th graders at Midwestern schools where 78% of students were of low income status (as determined by the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch). Researchers focused on the 187 students who reported having a sexual debut.

Materials
To obtain information concerning engagement in risky behavior (e.g., sex, drugs, and alcohol) and self-reported symptoms of Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Conduct Disorder (CD) items from the following scales were utilized:

1. Youth Risk Behavior Survey (CDC, 2009)

Design

Bivariate Correlations
1. The presence of CD symptoms was more strongly associated with other risk-taking behavior (e.g., marijuana, sexual risk-taking) than the presence of ADHD symptoms.
2. Students who reported engaging in drug, alcohol, or sexual risk-taking behaviors were likely to also report engaging in the other risky behaviors, as these risk-taking clustered together.

ANOVAs
1. Low income at-risk non-Black students engage in more risky behaviors that are related to the use of alcohol and drugs (with the exception of marijuana) compared to Black students.
2. Males engage in more risky behaviors related to marijuana use compared to females.
3. Males reported a significantly younger age of sexual debut than females.
4. Students who reported having the most CD symptoms also reported having more sexual partners than those who reported fewer CD symptoms.

Results

Conclusion

❖ Students at these schools reported engaging in more risky behaviors than those reported by the CDC (2009). Specifically, a larger percentage of these students engage in sexually risky behaviors (e.g., number of partners) and marijuana use compared to national data from the CDC (2009).

❖ Students who have had a sexual debut are more at-risk for engaging in other risky behaviors related to drug use.

❖ These needs assessment data will directly inform prevention and intervention strategies to be utilized at the participating middle- and high schools.

❖ These findings are significant to the field of school psychology, as they provide insight concerning the relation between adolescent risky behaviors, while also shedding light on how certain disorders (e.g., ADHD and CD) relate to risk-taking.