

Study: Social influence on teen sex global

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Social pressures and perceptions that influence young people's sexual behavior are markedly similar around the world, London researchers said.

Researchers at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found the influences generally fell into seven themes, WebMD.com said. The researchers analyzed more than 250 studies of sexual behavior in teens and young adults.

Worldwide, researchers said, "not only is sexual behavior strongly shaped by social forces, but those forces are surprisingly similar in different settings."

Among the themes were:

- Sex-related decisions are based on a partner's social position or behavior.
- Condoms carry a stigma and are associated with a lack of trust.
- A sexual partner can influence not only condom usage but sexual behavior in general.
- Gender stereotypes of boys being experienced and girls sexually naive exist.
- Sex offers both penalties and rewards.

- Reputations are important.
- Social expectations impede discussions about sex.

Researchers said knowing about the themes isn't enough to change teens' sexual behavior, nor is handing out condoms and increasing sexual education. To instigate change requires understanding why young people stray from expected behaviors, understanding details of sexual behavior by asking new and more searching questions and analyzing not just sexual behavior but the social forces that influence that behavior.

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