

Working too much can be dangerous for teen's sexual health

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Allowing teens to work too many hours in the wrong environment can be dangerous for their sexual health by fostering conditions that lead them to older sex partners, a new study shows.

This is just one of the key findings in a University of Michigan study of youth on what predicts age of sex partners. Jose Bauermeister, one of the authors, says age difference of sex partners is important, because a larger age difference is associated with riskier [sexual behavior](#) and STDs, including HIV.

The study found that a youth's self esteem and alcohol use also play a role in the age difference between sex partners, says Bauermeister, an assistant research professor in the School of Public Health.

Bauermeister stresses the research shows that overall, teenagers who work part-time benefit in almost all areas over those who don't have jobs. However, those benefits come with caveats, he said.

Bauermeister's team followed youths in Flint, Mich. as they transitioned from adolescence to young adulthood (ages 14 thru 25), to see what factors predicted sex partner age difference. Many factors can lead to age differences in sex partners, with girls usually dating older than boys and young men, the study found.

Working too many hours in an adult atmosphere without adequate supervision can lead to exposure to adults and eventually [sexual activity](#)

with older partners, especially for young girls, Bauermeister said. Age and number of work hours matter in adolescents, but any negative impact isn't apparent after age 18 or 19, the study found.

"It's OK to let kids work," Bauermeister said. "We want to make sure they are spending time in an environment where it's safe to work. Parents must ask the right questions and make sure it's a safe place for their children."

High self esteem and low use of alcohol offset the negative effects of working too many hours, he said. Those factors also protect youths overall from engaging in riskier sexual behavior.

The study also found that girls tend to date older from age 14 on, as do high school dropouts and [teens](#) who use alcohol. Boys at age 14 date their own age until they reach age 18, when they start dating younger women, Bauermeister said.

Sex education programs and other efforts to reduce young sex partners' age differences should aim to enhance self-acceptance and academic achievement and decrease alcohol use, the study said.

The study, called "What predicts sex partners' [age](#) differences among African American youth? A longitudinal study from adolescence to young adulthood," appears online.

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Provided by University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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