

Researchers study psychological impact of casual sex

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University of Minnesota Project Eating Among Teens (EAT) researchers have found that young adults engaging in casual sexual encounters do not appear to be at increased risk for harmful psychological outcomes as compared to sexually active young adults in more committed relationships. While this study focused on the psychological impact, researchers caution that the physical risks of casual sex should not be overlooked.

Marla E. Eisenberg, Sc.D., M.P.H., Medical School, and colleagues used data from Project EAT, an ongoing study that assessed a diverse sample of 1,311 sexually active young adults. From 2003-2004, 574 males and 737 females in Minnesota with a mean age of 20.5 were surveyed regarding sexual behaviors and emotional well-being.

Of the sexually active respondents, 55 percent reported that their last [sexual partner](#) was an exclusive dating partner followed by 25 percent whose most recent partner was a fiancé/e, spouse, or life partner. Much lower percentages reported that their last sexual partner was a close but not exclusive partner (12 percent) or a casual acquaintance (8 percent). Over twice as many males as females reported that their last partner was casual (i.e. , either a "casual acquaintance" or "close but not exclusive partner").

Although there has been speculation in public discourse that sexual encounters outside a committed romantic relationship may be emotionally damaging for young people, this study found no differences

in the psychological well-being of young adults who had a casual [sexual partner](#) verses a more committed partner.

"While the findings from this study show that young adults engaging in casual sexual encounters do not appear to be at increased risk for harmful [psychological outcomes](#) compared to those in more committed relationships, this should not minimize the legitimate threats to physical well-being associated with casual sexual relationships, and the need for such messages in sexuality education programs and other interventions with young adults," Eisenberg said.

Source: University of Minnesota ([news](#) : [web](#))

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