

Sex between adolescents in romantic relationships is often harmless to their academics

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The context in which adolescent sexual activity occurs can substantially moderate the negative relationship between sexual intercourse and education, according to research to be presented at the 105th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"Compared to abstinence, sexual intercourse in committed romantic relationships is often academically harmless, whereas in other types of relationships it is more detrimental," said Bill McCarthy and Eric Grodsky, sociologists at the University of California-Davis and the University of Minnesota, respectively. "Females and males who have sex only with [romantic partners](#) are generally similar to abstainers on most of the education measures we examined."

Titled, "Sex and School: Adolescent [Sexual Intercourse](#) and Education," the study considers nine education measures:

1. school attachment,
2. high school GPA,
3. college aspiration,
4. college expectations,
5. problems in school,
6. ever truant,
7. the number of days truant,
8. school sanctions (suspended/expelled), and

9. dropping out.

The analysis uses two waves of data from the "National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health" and the "Adolescent Health Academic Achievement Study."

Compared to abstainers who are otherwise similar to [adolescents](#) who have sex, youth who have sex only with partners with whom they are not romantically involved are at greater risk on the following measures:

1. experiencing problems in school,
2. being suspended or expelled,
3. being less likely to expect to attend college,
4. being less attached to school, and
5. earning lower grades.

In contrast, youth who have sex only with romantic partners are not statistically different from virgins on any of these five measures, adjusting for other characteristics of the students. The only outcomes for which youth engaging in either type of sex are at greater risk than abstainers are truancy and, in some contexts, dropping out.

"Collectively, our results find that the detrimental outcomes commonly attributed to adolescent sexual intercourse occur mostly in non-romantic contexts," said McCarthy and Grodsky. "These findings raise doubts about the veracity of sexual education programs that link adolescent [sex](#) to a plethora of negative outcomes."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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