

# Teen sex not always bad for school performance

August 15 2010, By ALICIA CHANG , AP Science Writer

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(AP) -- There's good news for parents who worry that their teenagers' sex lives are affecting their school performance: A provocative new study has found that teens in committed relationships do no better or worse in school than those who don't have sex.

The same isn't true for teens who "hook up." Researchers found that those who have casual flings get lower grades and have more school-related problems compared with those who abstain.

The findings, presented Sunday at a meeting of the American Sociological Association in Atlanta, challenge to some extent assumptions that sexually active teens tend to do poorer in [school](#).

It's not so much whether a teen has sex that determines academic success, the researchers say, but the type of sexual relationship they're engaged in. Teens in serious relationships may find social and [emotional support](#) in their sex partners, reducing their anxiety and [stress levels](#) in life and in school.

"This should give some comfort to parents who may be concerned that their teenage son or daughter is dating," said sociologist Peggy Giordano of Bowling Green State University, who had no role in the research. Teen sex is "not going to derail their educational trajectories," she said.

Last year, nearly half of [high school students](#) reported having sexual intercourse, and 14 percent have had four or more partners, according to

a federal survey released this summer.

For the study, University of California, Davis sociologist Bill McCarthy and University of Minnesota sociologist Eric Grodsky analyzed surveys and school transcripts from the largest national follow-up study of teens that began during the 1994-95 academic year. The researchers said not much has changed in terms of when teens first have sex or attitudes toward teen sex in the past decade.

The duo examined how teens' sexual behaviors affected their learning and controlled for factors that might influence their results.

Among the findings:

- Teens in serious relationships did not differ from their abstinent counterparts in terms of their grade-point average, how attached they are to school or college expectations. They were also not more likely to have problems in school, be suspended or absent.

- Compared with virgins, teens who have casual sex had lower GPAs, cared less about school and experienced more problems in school. For example, female teens who have flings had GPAs that were 0.16 points lower than abstinent teens. Male teens who have casual sex had GPAs that were 0.30 points lower than those who do not have sex. Teens who hook up also were at greater risk of being suspended or expelled and had lower odds of expecting to go to college.

- Teens who have sex - whether it's a serious or casual relationship - were at higher risk of being truant and dropping out compared with [teens](#) who don't have sex. The researchers said the dropout results should be interpreted with caution because the numbers were small.

"Having sex outside of a romantic relationship may exacerbate the stress

youths experience, contributing to problems in school," Grodsky said.

In a statement, the Family Research Council said the study confirms what the group has long advocated about the negative consequences of casual sex.

But the council said it "would not interpret less severe educational impacts on students involved in 'committed' sexual relationships as a green light for comprehensive" sex education.

University of Southern California sociologist Julie Albright disagreed. She said it might be time to revamp sex education to "emphasize the importance of relationships and spell out the consequences of casual sex."

The study dispels the notion that all teen sex is bad, said Marie Harvey, professor of public health at Oregon State University.

"The type of relationship really matters. When it comes to [sexual behavior](#), it takes two to tango," said Harvey, adding that safe sex should be practiced to prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

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