

Research into adolescent sexual habits reveals surprising findings

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Females are more likely to have an unprotected first sexual encounter than their male counterparts.

This finding was a surprise to Nicole Weller, an Arizona State University graduate student working toward her doctoral degree in sociology, who presented preliminary findings on research she is conducting on the relationship between early [sex education](#) and the onset of sexual activity at the 138th annual American Public Health Association Social Justice Meeting and Expo in Denver on Monday, Nov. 8. Weller is a student in the School of Social and Family Dynamics in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at ASU.

"I'm looking at the interaction between sexual education and how it impacts young adolescent sexual behavior," she said. "This in particular was an interesting finding because males usually report that they are having more sex than females."

Weller's research looks for answers to questions such as: Are adolescents more likely to have [unprotected sex](#) or protected sex? Are adolescents who know the risk of sexually transmitted diseases more likely to use contraception?

"In general, the younger that you are when you have sex, the more at risk you are of contracting a sexually transmitted disease," Weller said. Teaching adolescents early about sex is advantageous because the younger one learns, the more likely that younger person is to take

precautions when they do have an encounter.

"The younger one receives sexual education, the less likely you are to engage in risky sex," Weller said.

Weller is analyzing data from the National Survey of Family Growth that has been conducted since 1973. The comprehensive sexual health history survey reports information on topics such as sexual health and pregnancy.

Research also shows that young people are waiting longer than in the past to have a first sexual encounter, but the age at which people contract a sexually transmitted disease is decreasing.

"Fifteen to 19-year-olds have the most sexually transmitted diseases," Weller said. "Even though they are waiting, they are having risky sex and not taking precautions."

The disparities in different ethnic groups' sexual habits were also examined by Weller. For instance, African American males and females are more likely to have unprotected sex than their peers.

Sexual education is prevalent in America's school system in a variety of formats from abstinence to sexually transmitted disease awareness and from birth control to pregnancy awareness.

"It varies in school districts and from state to state. More than 80 percent of students get some type of sex education in the school," she said. In addition, young people receive sexual education from parents, peers and medical professionals.

Further research that Weller will conduct on the subject includes looking at the different types of contraception use since some methods prevent pregnancy; others prevent sexually transmitted diseases; and some such as condoms can prevent both. She plans to measure adolescent's

knowledge of the different methods and whether they know which methods are the best to use. Another focus of her studies is if the type of relationship has an influence on the type of contraception used, whether it is a serious boyfriend-girlfriend relationship or a random hook-up.

Weller has conducted previous research on infertility and is interested in the relationship between contracting [sexually transmitted diseases](#) and future infertility.

"Young people probably are not thinking about having children later. When you are young, you're not necessarily thinking of those future consequences."

Provided by Arizona State University

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