

Aggression, rule-breaking common among Taiwanese teenagers who have early sex

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Taiwanese teenagers – and especially females – who become sexually active at a very young age are more likely to be rule-breakers and be more aggressive than their peers. These are the findings of a national study of Taiwanese youth led by Wei J. Chen of the National Taiwan University, with Chia-Hua Chan as first author. It is published in Springer's journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

Nearly 19,000 sixteen- to nineteen-year-old Taiwanese adolescents took part in a [national survey](#) which was conducted through a self-administered web-based questionnaire. Sociodemographic data and information on respondents' [sexual experience](#) and substance abuse was collected. Adolescent emotional and [behavioral problems](#) were assessed using the Youth Self-Report that focuses on eight syndromes associated with teenagers, ranging from anxiety and somatic complaints to having social problems or showing rule-breaking and aggressive behavior.

The percentage of adolescents reporting to have sexual experience in this study was relatively low - up to 5.8 percent of tenth graders and 11.4 percent of twelfth graders. Compared with that in Western societies, the figures were 42.8 percent of American tenth graders and 63.1 percent of twelfth graders, according to a 2005 national survey. The researchers say the Taiwanese figures might be underreported due to perceived stigmatization or negative social attitudes that are part of many East Asian societies.

Chen's team found that sexual initiation during adolescence was

consistently associated with externalizing problems including rule-breaking and [aggressive behavior](#). This was especially true for adolescents who started having sex at a very young age, and for females. Adolescents who were withdrawn or socially isolated tended to delay their first sexual experiences more than others.

Youths who became sexually active before age 16 had a much more risky sociobehavioral profile than their peers. This included having more sexual partners, truancy, coming from a single-parent family, and using a variety of substances. Chan and her colleagues believe this might be because younger people are still not good at impulse control and decision making. Adolescents with same-sex partners, regardless of being male or female, reported more internalizing problems such as being withdrawn or being anxious and/or depressed. Bisexual males reported struggling with a whole range of syndromes, while female bisexual youths were only found to be especially aggressive.

The researchers hope their findings will guide efforts to develop preventive and interventional sex education programs aimed at adolescents' distinct needs.

"Although sexual initiation in adolescence is less common in Taiwan, the results indicate that the sexually experienced adolescents were associated with a cluster of adverse sociobehavioral consequences, similar to those found in Western societies," writes Chan. "These [adolescents](#) exhibited a higher level of emotional or behavioral problems that deserve more attention in order to improve their health and well-being."

More information: Chan, C-H. et al (2014). Sexual Initiation and Emotional/Behavioral Problems in Taiwanese Adolescents: A Multivariate Response Profile Analysis, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*
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