

Study links skipping school, failing tests to more sex, less condom use in teenagers

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What do skipping school, failing tests and engaging in risky sexual behavior have in common? Lots, according to Indiana University researchers who combed through 80,000 diary entries written by 14- to 17-year-old girls.

Although the findings are intuitive, this is the first study to examine the day-to-day relationship between teenage girls' reports about [school](#)-related events, how they felt and the sexual behaviors they participated in. Published Sept. 9 in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, the findings are based on a 10-year study of the development of 387 teenage girls' romantic/sexual relationships and [sexual behavior](#). During the study, the teens contributed daily reports of their activities and mood.

"This study demonstrates that young women's weekday reports of skipping school and failing a test were significantly linked to more frequent [vaginal sex](#), less frequent condom use and different sexual emotions, on that same day," said lead author Devon J. Hensel, Ph.D., said.

Prior studies have shown that academic success is linked to lower sexual risk, but researchers have relied on retrospective information, she said.

"The strength of using multiple daily reports is that allows us a more ecologically valid, or 'real world,' look at how young women's academic and romantic behaviors are linked from one day to the next. Rather than relying on reports about what happened in the past, we have a unique

view of events as they unfold," said Dr. Hensel, who is an assistant research professor of pediatrics in the Section of Adolescent Medicine at the IU School of Medicine, and an assistant professor of sociology at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

"Romantic relationships become a primary social focus during adolescence, and school provides a venue where young women meet and interact with their partners," Dr. Hensel said. "Many of the same skills underlying academic outcomes—such as communication, emotional awareness and behavior regulation—are also linked to what happens in young women's relationships. Using this idea, we hypothesized that what happened academically during a given school day would impact how an adolescent felt about her romantic partner, and the behaviors she engaged in with that partner."

Academic behaviors included skipping school and failing a test; sexual behaviors were vaginal sex and condom use; and emotions involved [positive mood](#), [negative mood](#), feeling in love, sexual interest, partner support and partner negativity.

What she and co-author Brandon H. Sorge, M.S., found is that vaginal sex was more frequent (13.5 percent vs. 5.4 percent) and condom use was less frequent (13.8 percent vs. 33.1 percent) on weekdays when school was skipped as compared to weekdays when school was attended. However, incidents of vaginal sex did not vary if the diary author failed or did not fail a test (6.4 percent vs. 5.8 percent); but when sex did occur, condom use was less frequent when she failed a test (6.9 percent) compared to when she did not (27.1 percent).

Emotionally, young women reported significantly higher levels of negative mood, sexual interest and feeling in love, and lower levels of positive mood, on weekdays when they skipped school or failed a test, as compared to weekdays when neither of these events occurred. Moreover,

skipping school was associated with significantly higher levels of partner support.

"Our findings raise the possibility that the emotional and behavioral experiences in [young women](#)'s romantic and sexual relationships may impact her reaction to academic events, particularly if an event is more salient to her or to her partner. For example, condom use might be lower after failing a test if a young woman feels supported and loved by her partner. Conversely, if a boyfriend pressures a young woman to skip school, that same pressure could influence her to eschew condom use when sex occurs," Dr. Hensel summarized. "Our data reflect the importance of considering how the close links between different areas in an adolescent's life can impact her overall health and well-being."

Provided by Indiana University

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