

Factors Influencing Age at First Sexual Intercourse for South African youth

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Premarital adolescent and young peoples' sexual activity is common around the world and early age at first sexual encounter without protection has been found to pose both social and public health challenges especially in the developing nations of the world. Many cross-sectional studies around South Africa confirmed low age at first sexual intercourse with its attendant negative consequences.

METHOD: The Cape Area Panel Study data were analysed to identify the factors associated with the reporting of risky sexual behaviours among 3,210 selected adolescents and young adults who participated in the three waves of data collection between 2002 and 2005. The statistical methods used were simple descriptive statistics, chi-square test of association and Cox proportional hazard regression models together with their associated estimators.

RESULTS: The median age at first sexual intercourse in the study area remains 16 years during the study period between 2002 and 2005 with a difference of one year in favour of females only at the third wave of data collection. The significant predictors of timing of first sexual intercourse between 2002 and 2005 using the Cox proportional hazards regression model were age, sex, population group, educational level, degree of happiness as a measure of self-efficacy, type of family structure, school attendance, childhood place of

residence, peer sexual characteristics (whether peers were sexually active), educational aspiration, neighbourhood type and participation in prosocial activities.

CONCLUSIONS: This paper, using a longitudinal dataset, concluded that past policy and programme interventions have not succeeded in raising the age at first sexual intercourse in the study area especially during the study period. Specifically, with respect to the timing of first sex, the socio-demographic factors- age, sex, racial group, and educational level; the self-efficacy factor measured through degree of happiness; and the socio-structural factors of not attending school, having low educational aspirations and type of family structure must be the focus of intervention programmes if age at first sexual intercourse is to be raised, risky sexual behaviours prevented and the upcoming generation protected, in the study area in particular, and South Africa in general.