

RESEARCH You May Have Missed

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RESEARCH YOU MAY HAVE MISSED . . . provides brief summaries of recent research relevant to youth development practice. It is designed to help youth development professionals keep up-to-date with contemporary research.

- Albert, B., Brown, S., & Flanigan, C. (Eds.) (2003).
14 and younger: The sexual behavior of young adolescents.
Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

This new report from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy focuses on sexual behavior among young adolescents. The researchers used six different data sets to examine sexual activity rates among young adolescents, ages 12 to 14. They found that about 18 to 19 percent of adolescents have had sexual intercourse before age 15. Boys were more likely than were girls to report having had sex. Sexual activity among young adolescents tended to be sporadic and often unwanted. Contraceptive use was relatively infrequent (between half and two-thirds reported using birth control the last time they had sex), and about half of 14-year-olds incorrectly believed it was illegal for youth under age 16 to buy condoms. Young people seemed also relatively uninformed about sex; for example, only 8 percent could correctly identify the time

in a cycle when a female is most likely to become pregnant. About 14 percent of sexually experienced 14-year-olds reported having been pregnant. Overall, about half of 12- to 14-year-olds had been in a romantic relationship during the past 18 months. About one in eight of these relationships was with someone three or more years older than the respondent; such relationships were substantially more likely than same-age relationships to include intercourse. Among adolescent girls who first had sex at age 14 or younger, 13 percent described the experience as non-voluntary. Even many of those who said it was voluntary also described it as unwanted. Sexually experienced youth were also more likely than other youth to report smoking, using drugs, drinking alcohol, and participating in delinquent behavior such as shoplifting and fighting. (KEH)

- Bruzzese, J. M., & Fisher, C. B. (2003).
Assessing and enhancing the research consent capacity of children and youth.
Applied Developmental Science, 7(1), 13-26.

Recent concerns at universities across the country regarding the protection of human subjects have led to increased attention to the role of children and youth in research and evaluation. Many community-based academics never used to think about Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for their routine data collection on youth programs; in recent years that has changed. This article presents an important investigation of the capacity of children and youth to consent to participate in research. They studied 4th, 7th, 10th graders and college students, testing both their consent capacity as well as an intervention designed to enhance this capacity. Students' understanding of their

rights increased for all ages following exposure to the Research Participants' Bill of Rights. While 10th graders were no different from college students in their understanding of consent, 7th graders still struggled to understand their veto power over adult permission, their right to be protected, and their right to be informed about the research. Fourth graders performed generally lower on their understanding of their rights in research. The results suggest that by middle adolescence, youth may be as competent as adults to consent to research participation, and that lessons about rights in research are a useful tool for youth of all ages. (STR)

- Ellis, B., Bates, J., Dodge, K., Fergusson, D., Horwood, L., Pettit, G., & Woodward, L. (2003). **Does father absence place daughters at special risk for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy?** *Child Development*, 74(3), 801-821.

Using a longitudinal, cross-national study, Ellis et al examined the effects of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy. This study is unique in that it is the first to explore the effects of timing of father absence on rates of pregnancy while controlling for prospective life-course adversity. Participants included a community sample of girls followed in both the U.S. and New Zealand from the summer before kindergarten and infancy through age 18. Although the data cannot demonstrate causation, results revealed that girls whose fathers were absent early in life (at or before age 5) had 7-8 times higher rates of pregnancy than did girls with later father absence. The importance of this finding is reinforced by findings that indicated that measures of conduct problems and life adversity did not account for

the link between father absence and early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy in the U.S. study, and could only be partially accounted for in the New Zealand sample. After controlling for all co-variates, the link between early father absence and teenage pregnancy was still particularly strong for girls whose fathers were absent early in life, with U.S. and New Zealand girls 5 and 3 times, respectively, more likely to have a teenage pregnancy than were girls with fathers present. Thus, even with other risk factors, father presence can be a major protective factor against early sexual outcomes. These results underscore the importance of programs and policies which encourage and assist fathers to remain active in their daughter's lives. (SND)

- Gulek, C. (2003). **Preparing for high-stakes testing [Electronic version].** *Theory into Practice*, 42(1), 42-50.

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, high-stakes state-mandated testing programs have increased pressures on public school practitioners to raise student scores, often at the risk of detracting from teaching and learning. This article presents five test preparation practices that school practitioners can use to help students more effectively demonstrate their knowledge and skills on high-stakes tests, and five recommendations that practitioners can employ to appropriately use testing information and results. While interested readers are encouraged to review all of these practices and recommendations, this summary will focus specifically on the five test preparation practices for use with students. *Teach the content domain:* Build mastery of the broader subject area by exposing students to all curriculum objectives at their grade levels and not limiting instruction only to those content areas addressed by tests. *Use a variety of assessment approaches and formats:* Utilize multiple assessment modalities which allow students to apply

their knowledge and skills in a variety learning situations, and learn what students are capable of and adjust instruction accordingly. *Teach students time management skills:* Provide students with timed tests throughout the school year so they do not panic when faced with similar tests, and help them conduct daily, weekly, and major reviews of course material. *Foster student motivation:* Help students develop a positive outlook about high-stakes tests by setting cooperative learning goals, connecting the curriculum to students' personal experiences, and giving students informative compliments and feedback. *Reduce text anxiety:* Provide students with information about tests in advance, teach them to recognize and effectively deal with stress, and model a positive attitude for test taking. In all, the author maintains that when school practitioners approach test preparation practices from an instructional perspective, the integration of such practices into the classroom becomes easier, and the focus is shifted from merely raising students' test scores to real learning. (MSB)

- Hofferth, S. L. (2003). **Race/ethnic differences in father involvement in two-parent families: Culture, context, or economy?** *Journal of Family Issues*, 24(2), 185-216.

There have been few studies on fathering in minority populations. This study examines the contribution of economic circumstances, neighborhood contexts and cultural factors explaining race/ethnic differences in fathering in two-parent families. The sample was taken from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) which is a nationally representative sample of U.S. men, women and children and their families, followed for more

than 30 years. The 1,229 children selected from this sample were living in two-parent families (stepfather as well as biological father) where information was reported and available from each parent. Results identified several differences in parenting:

- African American children's fathers exhibit a more authoritarian mode of parenting than White children's

fathers by exhibiting less engagement and warmth but exerting more control and taking more responsibility.

- Hispanic children's fathers do not differ from White children's fathers in warmth, but exert less control and take more responsibility than White children's fathers.
- Parenting attitudes are a major factor in race differences in control and responsibility.
- Economic factors strongly affect engagement and responsibility.

- Differences in warmth are due to background differences, neighborhood and family structures.

The author discusses specific findings that relate race/ethnicity, cultural attitudes, neighborhood contexts and economic differences with paternal parenting. This work is especially informative for professionals working with culturally diverse families and makes a special contribution to an area that few address. (AS)

- Jenkins, J. M., Rasbash, J., & O'Connor, T. G. (2003).

The role of the shared family context in differential parenting.
Child Development, 39, 99-113.

Differences in how parents treat siblings has been questioned by both theorists and researchers interested in family dynamics. Research has supported the theory that differential treatment by parents may account for some of the variance seen in sibling outcomes. However, it is unclear what contributes to this differential treatment when siblings are residing in the same environment. This study utilized large multiple children families (from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth) and advanced modeling techniques to examine the simultaneous effects of child-specific and shared family context variables on the degree to which parents directed more negative behavior toward one child than toward the other (i.e. "differential negativity"). A total of 8,476 families with children aged 0-4 years completed measures of demographic composition, affection in the parent-child relationship, children's negative affectivity, and marital dissatisfaction. Results from the study revealed several important findings: 1) low SES, large family size, single parenthood, and marital dissatisfaction all contribute to

siblings being treated differently by parents; 2) older children, boys, and children who display more negativity received more negative affectivity; 3) parenting in step-father families tended to be more negative than in families with two biological parents. The trends in these key findings are that when family resources are taxed due to factors such as low SES or marital dissatisfaction, children tend to be treated differently. The authors conclude that in such circumstances, parents may unconsciously choose to direct their resources toward one child over another. The child factors indicate that in these cases, the resources are directed toward younger siblings, toward girls and toward children who show less negativity. While siblings may share the same family environment, these shared attributes influence the individual relationships between children and parents. These findings indicate that it is important to take into account shared family variables as well as "non-shared" factors, such as child-specific variables, when conceptualizing parent-child relationships." (LO-G)

- Kaplan, C. P., Erickson, P. I., & Juarez-Reyes, M. (2002).

Acculturation, gender role orientation, and reproductive risk-taking behavior among Latina adolescent family planning clients [Electronic version].
Journal of Adolescent Research, 17(2), 103-121.

Further exploration of the factors related to pregnancy and childbearing among Latina adolescents is clearly needed because Latina teens have the highest birth rates of all ethnic groups in the United States. Seeking to increase the understanding of the sociocultural correlates of sexual risk taking by Latina adolescents, researchers examined data from a sample of 670 adolescents age 14-19 recruited from two publicly-funded family planning clinics in Los Angeles. Specifically, researchers sought to determine the influence of demographic variables, acculturation, gender role orientation, and substance experimentation on age at first intercourse, number of lifetime sexual partners, and number of pregnancies. Researchers expected that less acculturated

Latina adolescents holding more traditional gender role norms would be less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, and that Latina adolescents who had experimented with substances would have a younger sexual debut, more sexual partners, and more pregnancies. As expected, Latina adolescents who were more acculturated were younger at first intercourse, and had more lifetime sexual partners and more pregnancies than their less acculturated peers. Latinas with more traditional gender role orientations were older at first intercourse. Those who had experimented with substances were found to have an earlier sexual debut and more sexual partners, but fewer number of pregnancies. Researchers conclude that acculturation is a

moderately important factor in understanding the reproductive risk-taking behavior of Latina teens, and that gender role orientation is important for delaying first intercourse, but that other factors (such as substance use) become more salient following sexual debut.

Practitioners working with Latina adolescents are recommended to become aware of the intracultural differences of their clientele so as to provide culturally appropriate counseling, screening, treatment, and prevention options. (MSB)

- Klaw, E. L., Rhedes, J. E., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (2003). **Natural mentors.** *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32(3), 216-223.

Researchers are beginning to focus on positive factors that might help young African American mothers achieve positive outcomes after the birth of a child. There has been a growing interest in the protective influence of natural mentors, such as special aunts, neighbors or teachers. Natural mentoring relationships typically arise within adolescents' social networks and are characterized by bonds between an older, more experienced adult and younger protege. This study examined adolescent mothers' relationships with natural mentors over a two year period to understand the different paths such relationships take. The study focused on 198 African American mothers attending an alternate school for parenting and pregnancy in a large Midwestern city. The participants, ranging from 11-19 years of age, were followed for a period of two years after the birth of their child. Results indicated that

- compared to adolescent mothers who did not identify mentors at either time point, participants whose mentor relationships endured for two years were 3.5 times more likely to have remained in school or graduated; and
- long-term mentoring relationships were characterized by weekly, and in many cases, daily interactions and many were formed in early childhood.

A large number of participants in the study had no support in their lives. The authors state, "This is not surprising, given that the institutions that have historically been sources of intergenerational contact in African American communities . . . have changed in ways that have dramatically reduced the availability of caring adults" (Wilson, 1996). The authors suggest, in light of these changes, that it may be possible to provide young mothers with volunteer mentors who could potentially earn their trust and offer them the benefits that natural mentors seem to offer. (AS)

- Lease, A. M., McFall, R. M., & Viken, R. J. (2003). **Distance from peers in the group's perceived organizational structure: Relation to individual characteristics.** *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 23(2), 194-217.

In the present study, the authors were interested in the internal representations young adolescents make about those within their peer group (for this study, same-gender classmates) whom they consider similar and dissimilar to themselves. This line of research is based on the consideration that when one is entering a group, an internal map is created of the new social environment which includes information about others in the group, figuring out the roles each person plays within the group, the relationships between people and the power dynamics within the group. Young adolescence tends to be a time in life when there is a concern for social positioning, providing the basis for their own social identity. The authors used a method called multidimensional scaling (MDS), which,

through the use of questionnaires about similarity judgments and peer nominations, provides information about a youth's peer group's organizational structure, including the characteristics of those youth within a peer group as well as those considered on the periphery of a peer group. Results indicated that the more dissimilar from peers a group member was rated, the more odd, less cool and less fun to hang around s/he was perceived to be. The results of this study can provide information for youth workers who seek to find ways to help youth fit in their social group. The authors caution against the limitations to the study which include exclusive use of peer reports, and limiting the construction of the organizational structures to same-gender groups. (RC)

- Levine, S. B., & Coupey, S. M. (2003). **Adolescent substance use, sexual behavior, and metropolitan status: Is "urban" a risk factor?** *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 32, 350-355.

The authors used the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) from 1999 to examine substance use, sexual behavior, dietary behavior, and physical activity among U.S. adolescents in the 9th-12th grades by metropolitan status (urban, suburban, rural). They found no

significant differences among the three groups on most substance use or sexual risk behaviors. There was slightly higher prevalence of ever having used heroin among urban youth than among other youth, but the difference was very small (3 percent vs. 2 percent). About 35 percent

in each area were current cigarette smokers; about half currently used alcohol; and about a third were binge drinkers (had 5 or more drinks in one sitting). Slightly less than 30 percent were recent marijuana users, and much smaller numbers had used other types of drugs. About half of youth in each area reported ever having had

sexual intercourse; close to 40 percent in each area were currently sexually active; and most had used a condom at last intercourse. The authors note this is one of the few studies to examine the association between metropolitan status and youth risk behaviors. (KEH)

- Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003).

What exactly is a youth development program? Answers from research and practice.
Applied Developmental Science, 7(2), 94-111.

In the past 10 years, there has been a growing array of programs for adolescents reflecting a paradigm shift in the view of youth as “resources to be developed” rather than “problems to be managed.” This view has led programs to focus on youth preparation and development, not just problem prevention and deterrence. The field of youth development programming has been guided by the philosophy that resilience and competency building are central to helping young people grow in healthy ways. However for both definitional and methodological reasons, there has been very little empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of programs in promoting youth development. There has been no specific definition of what exactly constitutes a youth development program and there has been a lack of valid and reliable measures of

positive behaviors and for understanding if and why a program positively impacts youth. In this article, the authors attempt to get a clearer picture of the defining features of a youth development program by examining three characteristics of youth development programs: goals, atmosphere and activities. Although the results provide a provisional definition of youth development programs, they also indicate consistencies and inconsistencies in the importance of these characteristics among youth programs. The authors emphasize the need for better evaluative measures, including standardized observational measures, to become better informed about the types of supports and opportunities experienced by youth in youth programs and the effectiveness of these with regard to outcomes for youth. (RC)

- Roth, J. L. and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003).

Youth development programs: Risk, prevention and policy.
Journal of Adolescent Health, 32(3), 180-182.

The goal of this review article is to identify the principles of youth development programs. The authors first assess rigorous evaluations of 48 youth development programs from five recent reports. These reports demonstrate that programs can positively affect adolescents’ development. They then seek to clarify the definition of such programs by suggesting three defining characteristics: 1) program goals; 2) program atmosphere; and 3) program activities. Five specific goals were identified, the “5 Cs”: competence, confidence, connections, character, and caring. Competence includes social, academic, cognitive and vocational competencies. Confidence consists of self esteem, self concept, self efficacy, identity and belief in the future. Encouraging connections involves building and strengthening teens’ relationships with other people and institutions. Character is difficult to define, but may include increasing self control, decreasing involvement in risky behaviors, respect for cultural or societal rules and standards, a sense of right and wrong and spirituality. Caring involves improving youths’ empathy and identification with others. The authors also list five dimensions to describe program atmosphere: a) encouragement of the development of supportive relationships with adults and among peers; b) empowering youth; c) communication of expectations for positive behavior; d) providing opportunities for recognition; and e) providing services that are

stable and relatively long-lasting. Program activities are the vehicle through which most programs attract and engage participants. The three features of program activities that capture the youth development philosophy include the opportunity for teens to develop skills, engage in real and challenging activities, and broaden their horizons. In addition, the authors include a fourth dimension, increasing developmental support in other contexts of adolescents’ worlds, such as family, school and community. Using these criteria, the authors determined the extent to which the 48 evaluated programs could be considered youth development programs. The authors suggest that their operational definitions to determine program goals, atmosphere and activities can serve as the basis for the development of survey or observational measures for use in program evaluations. Survey items should also provide information on the types of support and opportunities teens experience in programs by measuring youths’ sense of safety, sense of belonging, participation in challenging and interesting activities, perceived social support from adults, input and decision-making opportunities, leadership opportunities, and participation in volunteer and community service to capture both program atmosphere and activities. Such information will allow for improvement in program evaluations, giving more information on how best to serve youth. (AKD)

- Russell, S. T. (2003).

Sexual minority youth and suicide risk.

American Behavioral Scientist, 46, 1241-1257.

Over the past 25 years, numerous studies have documented elevated level of suicidal thoughts, plans, and attempts among sexual minority (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and same-sex attracted) youth. Multiple study designs and research methods have been used in different research settings with fairly consistent results. This article reviews the limitations of past research, including issues of sampling, the measurement of sexual minority status, and the measurement of suicide risk. Attention is then given to both risk and protective factors for suicide among

sexual minority youth. Risk and protective factors that may be unique to sexual minority youth are reviewed. Finally, attention is given to the few published suicide prevention and intervention efforts that target sexual minority youth, along with recommendations for further research. The article provides an overview of the state of research on this topic, one that is often contentious, but that has important implications for the health and well-being of young people. (STR)

- Whitlock, J., & Hamilton, S. (2003).

The role of youth surveys in community youth development initiatives.

Applied Developmental Science, 7(1), 39-51.

Whitlock and Hamilton describe three youth development surveys: the Communities That Care (CTC) Youth Survey, Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors and the Teen Assessment Project. Based on interviews with representatives from 17 different upstate New York communities as well as published information, the authors assess the strengths and limitations of the surveys. The Search Institute's philosophy focuses on a positive assets-based frame work, identifying 40 contextual and individual factors shown to build resiliency in children. Programs following the Search Institute's paradigm identify and build pathways to positive developmental outcomes. Criticism of this paradigm includes an inability to address specific problems in the lives of youth. While the Search paradigm is thought to be an excellent way to mobilize communities, the CTC is seen as a great way to fill the gaps and target specific issues for specific communities. The CTC model evolved out of the drug and alcohol prevention theory and research and supports

community-wide initiatives to prevent negative outcomes in addition to promoting healthy youth behaviors. The third model, TAP, is unique in that it allows communities to adapt and interpret the surveys to fit the individual needs and goals of the community. Unlike the CTC and Search surveys, TAP is not accompanied by a comprehensive youth development strategy. Communities are encouraged to collaborate broadly as this is seen as the first step towards community mobilization. The authors suggest that hybrid strategies that view the different models as complementary rather than competitive are most effective. For example, Search's strength is its ability to mobilize communities, while CTC identifies the most vulnerable youth and targets their needs, and TAP gives communities more flexibility and control. Thus, these models can be tailored to fit the varied needs of each individual community as they work to build more healthy relationships and caring neighborhoods for youth. (SND)

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