

Public Abstract

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Title:Environmental Risk Factors and Risky Sexual Behavior Outcomes: Attitudes as a Mediating Factor

The goal of this study was to examine environmental risk factors for risky sexual behaviors and, using an attitude measure designed specifically for adolescents, determine the mediating effects of attitude between risk factors and risky sexual behavior outcomes. The study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory in that risk factors from participants' "systems" of influence are examined. Subjects were recruited from four mid-western public schools, female, and ranged in age from 14 to 17. Participants completed measures to assess the presence and severity of risk factors for risky sexual behaviors and to identify sexual behaviors of the teens. Additionally, participants completed the Adolescent Attitudes Regarding Dating Relationships scale (AARDR), a theoretically derived, gender-specific quantitative instrument that measures high school-aged adolescents' attitudes regarding dating relationships (Davidson, 2005). Three models were examined using structural equation modeling to determine the impact of attitudes on sexual behaviors, with and without consideration for other risk factors. Results indicated that the model with a direct path between attitudes and sexual behavior outcomes was the best fit to the data collected. Implications for treatment include utilizing an attitudinal measure to identify "at-risk" teens for risky sexual behaviors and cognitive therapy focused on attitude change. Additional suggestions for future research and applied practice are discussed.