# "One-Night Stands" and Short-Term First Sexual Relationships

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*Background and Research Question*

Recent analyses of teens' first sexual relationships suggest that close to one in four first sexual relationships lasted for a very short period of time (e.g., lasted less than one month or were one time occurrences—one night stands) (Ryan, Manlove, & Franzetta, 2003). We have also found that adolescents in shorter-term relationships are less likely to ever use a contraceptive method than those in longer-term sexual relationships (Manlove, Ryan, & Franzetta, 2003). This may be due to short-term relationships being less planned and thus at a greater risk of contraceptive inconsistency. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of teens and young adults who engage in short-term first sexual relationships will help parents, educators, and policymakers to develop strategies for identifying and preventing casual sexual experiences, as well as stressing for the need for consistent contraceptive use at every sexual act, potentially reducing unwanted STIs and/or pregnancies.

Our study examines the longevity of adolescents' and young adults' first sexual relationships. Our primary goal is to enhance our understanding of which characteristics predict the termination of a sexual relationship with a first partner after only one month or less of sexual activity. This topic is important because we expect that shorter-term relationships are more casual, and that adolescents in these short-term relationships are less likely to use contraception and more likely to acquire an STI or experience an unplanned pregnancy. Our specific research question is: What characteristics of the individual, family, sexual partner, and sexual relationship are associated with teens and young adults ending their first sexual relationship after one month or less of sexual activity?

We hypothesize that the following factors will be associated with length of first sexual relationship:

1. individual and family background factors
2. characteristics of the sexual relationship
3. partner characteristics

*Data and Measures*

We use data from two sources in order to assess factors associated with short-term first sexual relationships among teens and young adults: 1) data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Waves 1 and 2; and 2) data from the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), 1995 cohort. The Add Health data offer a nationally representative sample of males and females in grades 7-12 in 1994-95 (Wave 1). These teens were followed-up in 1996 (Wave 2). The survey provides retrospective information on sexual partners and

duration of sexual activity within relationships. The NSFG data are nationally representative of U.S. women of childbearing ages (15-44). These data provide event histories with information on timing of sexual experiences and month-by-month reports of sexual activity. Both data sources have the advantage of allowing us to measure first sexual relationships. However, the different approaches used to gather sexual activity and relationship information provide slightly different measures and allow an interesting comparison of findings across the two surveys.

For our analyses, the Add Health sample includes 806 unmarried adolescents who had first sexual intercourse between Waves 1 and 2 of the survey and who reported a complete date of first sex that occurred at least two months prior to the Wave 2 interview date. With the NSFG data, we analyze 905 respondents aged 14-24 at the date of interview in 1995 who reported a first sexual relationship between January of 1991 and two months prior to the interview date.

Our dependent variable, created for both datasets, is a dichotomous variable measuring the length of a respondent's first sexual relationship: 1) one month or less and 2) more than one month. Measures of individual characteristics include gender (Add Health only), age, race/ethnicity, educational performance and engagement, sexuality education, discussions with parents on how pregnancy occurs (NSFG only), religious attendance, and runaway status (Add Health only). Family background indicators include family structure, parent education, and whether the respondent's mother was a teenage mother (NSFG only). For measures of relationship characteristics, both surveys include information on age at first sex and relationship type at the time of first sexual intercourse. Partner characteristics are measured via age and racial/ethnic difference between partners and importance of religion to partner (NSFG only). Additionally, the Add Health data offer information on relationship activities that occurred before sexual intercourse, discussions about contraception, number of months from start of relationship to sexual initiation, and number of friends who knew the respondent's partner at the start of the relationship.

*Methodology*

Bivariate analyses describe differences in the characteristics of adolescents and young adults by duration of first sexual relationship. Characteristics for comparison include individual and family background as well as characteristics of the sexual partner and relationship. Analyses are conducted separately for teens who are in a romantic versus non-romantic relationships in Add Health.

For multivariate analyses, we use logistic regression to examine the effects of sexual relationships (partner characteristics, sexual activity, etc.) on relationship duration, controlling for individual and family background. We hypothesize that respondent-specific characteristics may be associated with a teen or young adult's initial choice of becoming sexually experienced, and therefore, use Heckman selection models in order to assess possible endogeneity between an individual's choice to become sexually active and the length of their first sexual relationship.

*Preliminary Findings*

To date, we have completed preliminary bivariate and logistic regression analyses using Add Health and NSFG data. Table 1 shows bivariate analyses of the NSFG data; findings indicate that teens and young adults who were younger at first sex and whose partners did not place importance on religion are more likely to experience short-term first sexual relationships. Teens who were in more casual relationships with their partner at the time of first sex are more likely than teens going steady with or engaged to their partner to have a short-term sexual relationship. Unexpectedly, respondents who have discussed with their parents how pregnancy occurs are more likely to have a short-term first sexual relationship.

Analyses of Add Health data (Table 2) indicate that males and teens in non-romantic relationships are more likely to experience a short-term first sexual relationship. Additionally, teens in the romantic sample who are closer in age to their partner, who do not talk to their partner about contraceptive use before initiating sexual intercourse, who experience fewer couple-like and physical activities before initiating sexual intercourse, and who wait less than one month before initiating sexual intercourse with their partner were more likely to experience a short-term first sexual relationship. Teens living with two biological parents and teens who have higher parental educational attainment, have had pregnancy/AIDS education, have consumed alcohol in the past year, and were older at first sex are less likely to have a short-term first sexual relationship.

Logistic regression analyses of both data sets (see Tables 3 and 4) indicate that having some form of sexuality education, having an older age at first sex, and being in a romantic or steady relationship with the partner at the time of first sex are associated with reduced odds of having a short-term first sexual relationship, net of individual and family characteristics. Additional factors associated with lower odds of a short-term relationship in the Add Health data include having a partner of the same race/ethnicity, and, among the romantic sample, greater age difference between partners, having a higher number of pre-sexual couple-like activities, and having higher levels of parental educational attainment. In the NSFG, women whose mother was a teen mom had greater odds of having a short-term first relationship than women whose mothers were older at first birth. Unexpectedly, in both surveys, higher levels of church attendance are associated with increased odds of having a short-term sexual relationship (romantic partners only for Add Health).

Final analyses will include Heckman selection models to test whether these relationships exist after controlling for selection into the sample of sexually active teens and young adults

References

Manlove, J., Ryan, S., & Franzetta, K. (2003). Contraceptive Use Patterns within Teens' First Sexual Relationships. (Forthcoming). *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*.

Ryan, S., Manlove, J., & Franzetta, K. (2003). *The first time: Characteristics of teens' first sexual relationships*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

TABLE 1. *NSFG* Family, Individual, and Sexual Relationship Characteristics, by Length of First Sexual Relationship (weighted)

| | Sex in one month only (n=196) | Sex in more than one month (n=709) | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Family characteristics | | | |
|   Family structure | | | |
|     2 biological/adoptive parents | 42.27% | 48.72% | |
|   Mother was a teen at first birth | 40.85% | 33.33% | |
|   Parents educational attainment (range:0-19) | 14.06 | 13.68 | |
|   Discussed with parents (before age 18) how pregnancy occurs | 74.00% | 65.49% | * |
| Individual Characteristics | | | |
|   Age (range:14-22+) | 18.18 | 18.81 | ** |
|   Race/ethnicity | | | |
|     Hispanic | 10.38% | 13.20% | |
|     Non-Hispanic White | 71.58% | 66.84% | |
|     Non-Hispanic Black | 15.63% | 15.98% | |
|     Non-Hispanic Other | 2.42% | 3.98% | |
|   Religious attendance at age 14 (range: 1-3) | 1.63 | 1.63 | |
|   First sex non-voluntary | 7.09% | 8.15% | |
|   Average grades received in school  (range: 1=low - 9=high) | 6.68 | 6.81 | |
|   Received 3 or more forms of formal sex educ prior to age 18 | 64.95% | 66.37% | |
| Characteristics of First Sexual Relationship | | | |
|   Age at first sex (range: 11-24) | 15.76 | 16.55 | *** |
|   Relationship with partner | | | |
|     Just met/just friends | 26.95% | 8.65% | *** |
|     Went out once in a while | 18.67% | 7.49% | *** |
|     Going steady/engaged | 54.38% | 83.86% | *** |
| Characteristics of First Sexual Partner | | | |
| Age difference between R and 1st partner (range: -4-16) | 2.29 | 1.98 | |
| Partner same race as R | 80.82% | 81.27% | |
| Importance of religion to R's first partner | | | |
|   Very important | 3.92% | 11.00% | *** |
|   Somewhat important | 20.38% | 37.45% | *** |
|   Not important | 75.69% | 51.55% | *** |

+p<.1  *p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001

TABLE 2. *Add Health* Family, Individual, and Sexual Relationship Characteristics, by Length of First Sexual Relationship (weighted)

| | Full Sample (n=806) | | | Romantic Sample (n=751) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sex in one month only | Sex in more than one month | | Sex in one month only | Sex in more than one month | |
| | (n=230) | (n=576) | Sig. | (n=184) | (n=576) | Sig. |
| Family characteristics | | | | | | |
|   Family structure | | | | | | |
|     2 biological/adoptive parents | 40.67% | 50.71% | * | 40.98% | 51.12% | + |
|   Parent education (range: 1-7) | 4.36 | 4.68 | + | 4.33 | 4.70 | + |
| Individual Characteristics | | | | | | |
|   Gender (Male) | 51.54% | 36.74% | ** | 49.14% | 35.66% | * |
|   Race/ethnicity | | | | | | |
|     Non-Hispanic White | 67.51% | 70.94% | | 68.27% | 71.67% | |
|     Non-Hispanic Black | 16.24% | 9.29% | | 14.68% | 8.89% | |
|     Hispanic | 11.48% | 13.68% | | 12.98% | 13.25% | |
|     Other | 4.76% | 6.08% | | 4.06% | 6.20% | |
|   Picture Vocabulary Test Score (range: 32-132) | 101.37 | 102.32 | | 101.22 | 102.18 | |
|   Religious attendance (range: 0-4) | 1.98 | 1.97 | | 2.07 | 1.97 | |
|   Had pregnancy/AIDS education | 78.77% | 86.75% | * | 79.77% | 86.48% | |
|   Drank in past 12 months[†] | 52.21% | 63.22% | * | 56.19% | 62.69% | |
|   Ever ran away from home[†] | 64.95% | 6.70% | | 10.45% | 6.83% | |
| Characteristics of First Sexual Relationship | | | | | | |
|   Age at first Sex (range:13-20) | 15.41 | 15.81 | ** | 15.41 | 15.81 | ** |
|   R and partner same race | 79.01% | 80.54% | | 76.92% | 80.96% | |
|   Type of first sexual relationship | | | *** | | | ** |
|     Romantic | 64.15% | 91.40% | | 83.07% | 93.21% | |
|     Liked | 13.07% | 6.66% | | 16.93% | 6.79% | |
|     Non-romantic | 22.78% | 1.94% | | -- | -- | |
| Characteristics of First Sexual Partner | | | | | | |
|   Age difference between R and 1st partner (range: -18-10) | 0.82 | 1.17 | | 0.75 | 1.17 | + |
|   Talked about birth control before first sex[§] | -- | -- | | 38.45% | 58.16% | *** |
|   Number of couple-like activities before sex[§] (range: 0-6) | -- | -- | | 3.13 | 4.54 | *** |
|   Number of physical activities before sex[§] (range: 0-4) | -- | -- | | 3.02 | 3.40 | ** |
|   Number of close friends who knew partner at start of relationship[§] (range:0-4) | -- | -- | | 2.82 | 2.70 | |
|   Length of time between start of romantic relationship and first sex[§] (range -12-122) | -- | -- | | 4.85 | 4.90 | |

+p<0.1  *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001 [†]W1 measure. [§]Measured for romantic partners only.

Table 3. *NSFG* Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Models, Short Term (One Month) Sexual Relationships in Teens' and Young Adults' First Sexual Relationships (weighted)

| | (n=905) | Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| <u>Family Characteristics</u> | | |
|    Family structure: 2 bio/adoptive parents | 1.04 | |
|    Parents' educational attainment | 1.10 | * |
|    Mother was a teen mom | 1.48 | + |
| <u>Individual Characteristics</u> | | |
|    Race/Ethnicity | | |
|      Non-Hispanic White | (1.00) | |
|      Hispanic | 0.86 | |
|      Non-Hispanic Black | 0.66 | |
|      Non-Hispanic Other | 0.54 | |
|    Discussions with parents on how pregnancy occurs | 1.36 | |
|    Average grades | 0.97 | |
|    Church attendance at age 14 | | |
|      < 1 time / week | 0.69 | + |
|      1 time / week | (1.00) | |
|      > 1 time / week | 1.12 | |
|    Received 3+ forms of sex education before 1st sex | 0.58 | * |
|    First sex was non-voluntary | 0.81 | |
| <u>Characteristics of First Sexual Relationship/Partner</u> | | |
|    Age at first sex | 0.79 | *** |
|    R and partner same race | 0.92 | |
|    Relationship with partner | | |
|      Just met / just friends | 4.22 | *** |
|      Went out once in a while | 3.29 | *** |
|      Going steady / engaged | (1.00) | |
|    Importance of religion to first partner | 0.75 | |
|    Age difference between respondent and 1st sexual partner | 1.01 | |
| F statistic | 6.49 | *** |
| (df) | 19 | |

+$p<0.1$  *$p<0.05$ **$p<0.01$ ***$p<0.001$

Table 4. *Add Health* Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Models, Short Term (One Time or One Month) Sexual Relationships in Teens' First Sexual Relationships (weighted)

| | Full Sample (n=806) | | Romantic Sample (n=751) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family Characteristics | | | | |
|   Family structure: 2 bio/adoptive parents | 0.77 | | 0.71 | |
|   Parents' educational attainment | 0.87 | | 0.80 | * |
| Individual Characteristics | | | | |
|   Gender | | | | |
|     Female | (1.00) | | (1.00) | |
|     Male | 1.36 | | 1.52 | |
|   Race/Ethnicity | | | | |
|     Non-Hispanic White | (1.00) | | (1.00) | |
|     Hispanic | 0.59 | | 0.85 | |
|     Non-Hispanic Black | 1.23 | | 1.30 | |
|     Other | 0.60 | | 0.51 | |
|   Picture Vocabulary Test Score | 1.00 | | 1.00 | |
|   Religious attendance | 1.05 | | 1.16 | * |
|   Had pregnancy/AIDS education | 0.51 | * | 0.50 | * |
|   Drank in past 12 months[†] | 0.77 | | 0.93 | |
|   Ever ran away from home[†] | 1.62 | | 1.31 | |
| Characteristics of First Sexual Relationship/Partner | | | | |
|   Age at first sex | 0.87 | * | 0.92 | |
|   Partner same race | 0.59 | * | 0.77 | |
|   Relationship with partner | | | | |
|     Romantic | (1.00) | | (1.00) | |
|     Liked | 2.42 | * | 1.37 | |
|     Non-Romantic | 16.26 | *** | -- | |
|   Age difference between respondent and 1st sexual partner | 0.91 | | 0.89 | + |
|   Talked about birth control before sex[§] | -- | | 0.83 | |
|   Number of couple-like activities before sex[§] | -- | | 0.68 | *** |
|   Number of physical activities before sex[§] | -- | | 1.21 | |
|   Number of close friends who knew partner at start of relationship[§] | -- | | 1.09 | |
|   Length of time between start of romantic relationship and first sex[§] | -- | | 1.03 | + |
| F statistic | 4.08 | *** | 2.67 | *** |
| (df) | 17 | | 22 | |

+$p<0.1$  *$p<0.05$ **$p<0.01$ ***$p<0.001$ [†]W1 measure.  [§]Measured for romantic partners only.