

**Psychological Impacts Not Found for Casual Sex Among Young Adults.** Science Daily (12.08.09)

Federal abstinence-only sex education policy requires teaching students that there are likely to be harmful psychological consequences to sex outside of a committed marital partnership. However, this emotional damage may be overstated, according to a recent study.

In 2003-04, researchers surveyed a diverse sample of 1,311 sexually active young adult participants (mean age 20.5 years) of the ongoing University of Minnesota "Project Eating Among Teens" study. They compared the mean psychological well-being scores between those reporting recent sex with casual acquaintances or close but not exclusive partners and those reporting sex with committed partners.

Of the participants, one-fifth said their most recent sex partner was close but not exclusive (12 percent) or a casual acquaintance (8 percent). Men reported casual partnerships more commonly than women (29 percent vs. 14 percent), and the proportions of both sexes reporting casual partners differed by race and ethnicity. Psychological well-being scores were "generally consistent across sex partner categories, and no significant associations between partner type and well-being were found in adjusted analyses," wrote Marla E. Eisenberg, of the university's School of Public Health, and colleagues.

"While the findings from this study show that young adults engaging in casual sexual encounters do not appear to be at increased risk for harmful psychological outcomes compared to those in more committed relationships, this should not minimize the legitimate threats to physical well-being associated with casual sexual relationships, and the need for such messages in sexuality education programs and other interventions with young adults," Eisenberg said.

The full report, "Casual Sex and Psychological Health Among Young Adults: Is Having 'Friends with Benefits' Emotionally Damaging?" was published in *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2009; 41(4): 231-237).