

Parents-Adolescents' Communication on Sex: Which Role on the Age at the First Sexual Intercourse of Young People?

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Introduction

The “sex talk” is often one of the most challenging conversations for parents and children during adolescence. Research has established that parent-adolescent communication about sex can greatly reduce adolescents' sexual risk; the development of interventions that support this process are vital (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2012; Harris, 2016). However, many parents still avoid these conversations due to uncertainty or lack of confidence in how to best educate their children on topics such as sexual health and relationships. In addition, little is known about family communication about sex from the adolescent perspective. Parents undoubtedly have influence on teens' sexual risk-taking behavior (Fisher, 1989; Harris, 2016). Over three decades of research have established that parents can greatly increase youth' knowledge of sex-related topics and reduce the likelihood that adolescents will engage in precocious sexual behavior (Booth-Butterfield and Sidelinger, 1998; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2012). In particular, parent-child closeness, frequency of conversation about sex, and parent-adolescent sex differences have emerged consistently as factors important to understand the link between parent socialization and child attitudes and behaviors towards sex.

Aim of the paper

The aim of this paper consists into verifying that the more the parents communicate with their children, the less are the sexual risks for the adolescents and in particular, the age at the first sex increases leading to adult experiences.

Data and methods

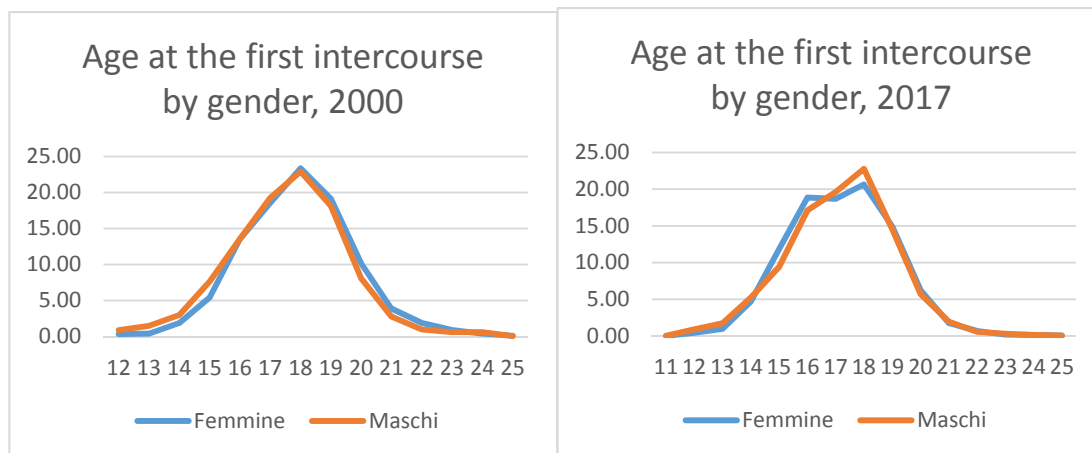
Data we use in this contribute derive from two surveys carried out on university students in 2000 and in 2017, respectively amounting to a little less than 5000 and more than 7000. The availability of two data sets will permit to verify the changing over time in the youth behavior. Both the surveys include questions on the parent-child communications on sexual items (Caltabiano et al., 2006; Caltabiano and Dalla Zuanna, 2013).

The method used is the linear regression with dependent variables age at the first intercourse, with explicative variables the relationships with parents, adding some control

variables, such as the year of the survey, the sex of the adolescent, if parents are separated, the level of education of father and the working condition of mother.

Preliminary results

In figure 1 we show the age at the first intercourse where we see that precocious sexual relationships are weakly increased during the period 2000-2017.



In table 1 we report some frequencies of the variables measuring the relationships parents-children, where we see that generally, the relationships with parents are good, but are less frequent when the dialogue concerns the sexual experiences.

Table 1 – Distribution of respondents according to communications with parents

| | General relationships | | | Dialogue on sex | | | Dialogue on sexual experiences | |
|---------|-----------------------|-------|---------|-----------------|-------|---------|--------------------------------|-------|
| | Freq. | % | | Freq. | % | | Freq. | % |
| No | 2416 | 19,3 | No | 6346 | 50,9 | No | 8754 | 71,1 |
| Yes | 10078 | 80,7 | Yes | 6121 | 49,1 | Yes | 3561 | 28,9 |
| Total | 12494 | 100,0 | Total | 12467 | 100,0 | Total | 12315 | 100,0 |
| Missing | 110 | | Missing | 137 | | Missing | 289 | |
| Total | 12604 | | Total | 12604 | | Total | 12604 | |

The association with the age at the first intercourse is positively significant and increases with the increasing of general relationship, while is negative with the variables defining the conversation on sex and on sexual personal experiences of the adolescents (table 2). The meaning of these results are clear enough: while the good relations with parents conduct to a lower precocity in the sexual life (positive coefficient), the dialogues on these topics are probably the consequences of a precocious behavior (negative coefficients). The inclusion of some control variables (such as gender, separation of parents, level of education of father and working situation of the mother) seem to go hand in hand with the hypothesis.

In particular (table 3), males enter into the sexual life later than the females, to have a mother that is working diminishes the age at first intercourse and in 2000 (reference 2017) a higher age at the first intercourse is implied by the positive coefficient, that is in the period age diminishes.

Table 2 – Linear regression. Dependent variable: age at first intercourse-

| | Not standard Coeffic. | | Standard Coeffic. Beta | t | Sign. |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|---------|-------|
| | B | Standard error | | | |
| Constant | 17.192 | 0.048 | | 357.327 | 0.000 |
| Year | 0.591 | 0.042 | 0.149 | 14.186 | 0.000 |
| General relationships | 0.160 | 0.049 | 0.034 | 3.262 | 0.001 |
| Dialogue on sex | -0.147 | 0.041 | -0.039 | -3.557 | 0.000 |
| Dialogue on love experiences | -0.147 | 0.045 | -0.036 | -3.266 | 0.001 |

Source: Our elaborations on data sets 2000 and 2017

Table 3 – Linear regression. Dependent variable: age at first intercourse-

| | Not standard Coeffic. | | Standard Coeffic. Beta | t | Sign. |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------------|---------|-------|
| | B | Standard error | | | |
| Constant | 17,418 | 0,063 | | 275,079 | 0,000 |
| Year | 0,552 | 0,043 | 0,140 | 12,701 | 0,000 |
| General relationships | 0,128 | 0,052 | 0,028 | 2,448 | 0,014 |
| Dialogue on sex | -0,117 | 0,043 | -0,031 | -2,745 | 0,006 |
| Dialogue on love experiences | -0,184 | 0,046 | -0,045 | -3,974 | 0,000 |
| Gender | -0,094 | 0,041 | -0,025 | -2,299 | 0,022 |
| Parents separated | -0,270 | 0,073 | -0,042 | -3,691 | 0,000 |
| Level of educ. father | -0,062 | 0,042 | -0,016 | -1,472 | 0,141 |
| Work situation of mother | -0,124 | 0,041 | -0,033 | -2,990 | 0,003 |

Source: Our elaborations on datasets 2000 and 2017

References

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