



Bimonthly updates to Congress on RAND's work in child policy.

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HOT TOPIC

The Impact of TV's Sexual Content on Teenagers

A new RAND study, led by RAND Health behavioral scientist Rebecca Collins, presents an empirical connection between television viewing and adolescent sexual behavior. Key findings of the study, funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, include the following:

- Adolescents who watch large amounts of television containing sexual content are twice as likely to engage in sexual activities and intercourse the following year than their peers who watch little of this kind of TV.
- Talk about sexual behavior had as much effect on teens as depicted behaviors.
- Television shows that portray the risks of sex can help educate teens.

Researchers considered teens' prior sexual experience as well as outside factors that influence sexual behavior, such as how closely parents monitor their teenagers' activities, religiosity, getting older, and problems in school. Even after these differences were taken into account, television viewing was still related to behavior.

The study showed adolescents seem to conclude that normal people are as preoccupied with sex as the characters on television, and so they advance more quickly sexually to be "part of the crowd." In related studies, the researchers found that parents may counter television's effect on sexual behavior by monitoring what their children watch and discussing the content of programs.

Television may be an educational resource for adolescents when portrayals address the risks associated with sexual behaviors such as STDs and unwanted pregnancies, and show how to be sexually responsible. African-American youth who saw more of these portrayals were less likely to advance in their sexual activities over the following year. Researchers are following up on the findings to learn whether viewing sexual content is also associated with higher rates of STDs and unwanted pregnancies among teens, problems more common among youth who begin sexual activity at an earlier age.

READ MORE: [Does Watching Sex on Television Influence Teens' Sexual Activity?](#)

Health-Related Quality of Life as a Predictor of Healthcare Costs Among Children

The patient's perspective has become an influential factor in preventing, diagnosing, and treating common ailments, especially chronic conditions. Doctors and researchers often use a Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQL) survey to gather important subjective feedback from patients on myriad issues, including their physical state, emotional well being, and social functioning. These surveys enrich the information obtained from a traditional medical evaluation.

For more information, go to [RAND Washington External Affairs](#) or contact us at wea@rand.org or 703.413.1100 x5632. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

RAND Health researchers recently conducted a study to determine whether parent reports of their child's HRQL could prospectively predict healthcare costs in children. Researchers used the Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory™ (PedsQL™), a brief HRQL measure that can be used by children as well as parents to report the child's HRQL.

Researchers found that, when combined with information about chronic health conditions, the PedsQL™ assessments can be used to identify the relatively small subgroup of children who account for a disproportionate share of health care costs. These children's costs were higher over the course of two years, suggesting that these are children with ongoing care needs and costs as opposed to children with one-time health care needs. This at-risk group could benefit from proactive care coordination and timely access to appropriate care. If successful, such care coordination could provide significant return on investment, even in the first six months of enrollment.

Further research is necessary to establish the applicability of the findings on a larger scale, and to determine if this methodology could be useful in predicting costs and needs in other groups.

READ MORE: [Health-related quality of life as a predictor of pediatric healthcare costs](#)

PROJECT UNDER WAY

Examining Gaps in Mathematics Achievement Among Racial and Ethnic Groups, 1972–1992

RAND education researchers are examining trends in the mathematics scores among various racial and ethnic groups of senior high school students from the early 1970s to early 1990s. They will consider how changes in family, school, and schooling measures help explain changes in test score gaps. To date, their study finds that there were few positive changes in the test score gaps between schools. However, the within-school experiences of black and Latino students changed for the better compared with white students when measured by student self-reported academic track placement. Socioeconomic conditions of black and Latino youth have also improved, closing the gap with white students and corresponding to the convergence of mathematics scores. Large gaps remain, however, in both socioeconomic conditions and math scores.

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