The Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Risky Sexual Behavior in Women Ages 12-21

Presented by
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Research has shown that young women ages 12-21 who had adverse childhood experiences are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior.
Risky Sexual Behaviors

- Early Onset of Sexual Activity
- Multiple partners
- Unprotected Sex
Risky Sexual Behavior

Unintended pregnancy
Early Childbearing

POVERTY
Early Childbearing Impacts

- Socio-economic achievement
- Family Formation
- Family Stability
Repeat the Adversity Cycle with Children

- Poverty
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Brain Development
- Unintended Pregnancy
- Risky Sexual Behavior
We must stop this cycle!
Current Interventions

Community and Faith-based Programs

- Understanding God’s Design for Sexuality/marriage
- Build self esteem
- Communication
- Reproductive and Sex Education
And yet...........

49% of all pregnancies Are Unintended
4 out of 5 pregnancies of women 19 years old and younger

98% of pregnancies among teens younger than 15 are unintended
1 in 5 teenage mothers will have a second unintended pregnancy
What are we missing?
We Ask Why?

Why do you have sex before marriage?

Why do you put yourself at risk for sexually transmitted disease or infection?

Why do you have sex with multiple partners or high risk partners?
What’s Wrong with You?
What if....... we asked a different question?
What if we asked instead......

What happened to you?
Broader Context of Adversity

Family Dysfunction
and
Neglect
as well as Abuse
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study
ACE Study

Focused on

- public health aspects of disease
  - where it occurs
  - who is at risk
- measures the extent to which childhood trauma translates into poor health and social well-being in life
Adverse Childhood Experiences

- **Neglect**
  - Physical and Emotional

- **Abuse**
  - Physical, Verbal, Sexual

- **Family Dysfunction**
  - Witnessed domestic violence
  - Lived with adults who were:
    - Substance abusers
    - Mentally ill
    - Suicidal
    - Imprisoned
ACEs Do Not Happen in a Silo

If you have one ACE....... Look for More!
How ACEs are Scored

Each experience gets 1 point
Total is ACE score
Example of ACE Score

1. A person who is physically abused
2. Has an alcoholic parent
3. Witnessed their mother being beaten up

= an ACE score of 3
The higher the ACE score, the higher the risk.
WHY
Variety of adult chronic disease

Heart Disease, lung disease, skeletal fractures, liver disease, severe obesity, diabetes
Resulting Behavioral Problems

- Alcoholism
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Unsafe sex
- And other life altering outcomes
Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Adult Chronic Illness
- Social/Behavioral Problems
ACEs ask the question:

“What happened to you?”
Brain Development
3 Part to the Brain
Survival Brain

- Controls automatic functions (heartbeat, body temperature, balance and respiration)
- Activates fight or flight reactions to danger or distress.
- Reflexive, instinctive and patterned
Emotional (Limbic) Brain

- Responsible for emotions such as fear, anger, love.
- The primary task of the emotional brain is to sort incoming stimuli as pleasurable or threatening.
- Activate stress response system to prepare body to fight, flight or freeze.
The Logical Brain
( Neo-cortex or Pre-frontal Brain)

- Last to develop-not fully developed until mid-20’s.
- Key role in
  - Planning
  - weighing alternatives
  - making decision
  - regulating emotional impulses.
Nature vs. Nurture?
All born with 100 billion neurons.

NATURE
Einstein or Beethoven?
NURTURE

Stable ATTACHMENT
Human Connections
Impact
Brain Connections
Nature vs Nurture?

BOTH!
Key Question:

How do ACEs impact brain development?
Stress causes Impaired Brain Development
ADVERSITY

Learning to Cope

Calm

Fear

Alarm

Terror
THREAT

Fight....Flight...Freeze
Supportive Relationships
TOXIC STRESS
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Alter the “set point” of the HPA axis
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Deficit in reasoning, attention, processing, impulse control
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Poor regulation in arousal and physiological function,
Heightened anxiety to fear-related stimuli
Poorer memory retrieval
Habitation to adverse stimuli
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Wear Out areas of the brain

Imbalance of functioning
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Affects health and quality of life throughout the lifespan
Interventions
Strong correlation between childhood adversity and Unintended pregnancy
AND yet............
1/3 of all Teenage Pregnancies

Could be prevented by eliminating exposure to ACE
Intervention within the Mother/Child Dyad
Intervention Prevention of Additional Unintended Pregnancies
Intervention

Safe Environment/Healthy Role Models
Adlerian Theory

Need to belong and feel significant