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## Sex, Contraception and Childbearing Among High-Risk Youth: Do Different Factors Influence Males and Females?

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**Context:** The likelihood that adolescents will engage in sexual activity, use contraceptives or become parents is influenced by a range of attitudes and behaviors. These factors may differ for males and females.

**Methods:** Data on female respondents to the 1979-1992 waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and the linked 1994 young adult data file on their children provided background information on 959 adolescents who had been born to young mothers. Partial correlation analysis was used to examine the factors related to sexual behavior, contraceptive use and childbirth, controlling for maternal and familial characteristics, in this relatively disadvantaged sample.

**Results:** Youth who are inclined toward risk-taking and those who have run away from home are more likely than others to be sexually active. For young women, having intercourse at an early age, not using contraceptives and having a child are linked with depression, low self-esteem and little sense of control over their lives. The results for young men are less consistent and often in the opposite direction. Young people who have become parents evidence greater maturity than their childless peers; women are less likely to consume alcohol or to spend time with friends who drink, and men are more likely to participate in socially productive work.

**Conclusions:** Although sexual behavior is tied to risk-taking in both adolescent males and females, some noticeable psychological differences are evidenced early. Behaviorally, there is room for optimism, in that young parents appear to adopt more mature traits.

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