

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN FATHER ABSENCE IN CHILDHOOD AND LATER RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN ADOLESCENCE

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Background: Early age of first sexual intercourse (FSI) is associated with significant challenges to the present and future health and wellbeing of adolescents including sexually transmitted infections, unwanted sex, unplanned pregnancy, partner violence and lower educational achievement. Absence of the biological father in childhood has been demonstrated to predict early age of FSI.

Methods: A large, representative Australian birth cohort (Raine) study was used to address the question of whether father absence in childhood predicts early FSI in adolescence after controlling for other known confounds of early FSI. From 1148 mothers who indicated absence of the father prenatally, 1065 adolescents (50.6% female) at the 16 year followup reported on whether they had experienced early FSI.

Results: A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of father absence on the likelihood that participants had experienced early FSI. The logistic regression model was statistically significant $\chi^2(6) = 46.64 p < .0005$. Participants who had a father absent at baseline had 2.23 times higher odds of reporting early FSI after controlling for family income, maternal education, and maternal age.

Conclusion: Past father absence positively and significantly predicted early FSI. These results are compelling due to the large birth cohort sample, length of followup, and control of multiple possible confounders. This research allows identification of at-risk groups and has important implications for targeted interventions, clinical care and health promotion strategies for adolescents and young people.

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