

Do Church Attendance, Confession of Faith, Individual Performance of Faith Influence on the Sexual Activities among Christian Youth?

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent sexual behaviors and its negative effects are a significant public health problem that frequently draws the interest of researchers and health practitioners. Sexual activity among young people has been identified as a increased risk factor for teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (Abma et al. 2010). According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the year 2010, 46.0% of US high school students (female 45.7%, male 46.1%, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009, 98: Table 6.1) reported that they had ever had sexual intercourse, while Korean adolescents reported only 3.8% (female 2.4%, male 5.2%; 43% among adolescents at risk, Korean Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, 2010, 56). There was an increasing tendency toward the early initiation of sex in many countries (Sieving et al. 2002). Risk factors that contribute to adolescent sexual behaviors have been documented such as poverty, familial conflict, low school achievement, substance use, dropping out of school, and association with delinquent peers (Halpern-Felsher et al. 1996; Santelli et al. 1999; Santelli et al. 2004; Mmari & Blum, 2009). Protective factors include close attachment with families, affiliation with pro-social peers, high levels of school performance, and attending church (Blum & Ireland, 2004; Yang, et al. 2006; Crawford et al. 2011). In addition, religiosity likely delay the onset of sexual activity, and may reduce sexual activity related problems; As young people with no religion take a liberal stance toward sexuality, however, youth with religiosity likely remain abstinent sexual activity until marriage. Thus religiosity could influence sexual behavior, as Christian faith and individual performance provides motivation for confirmity to their faith (Youniss et al. 1999). But very limited studies have empirically explored this possibility and it seems that the available research findings only report the linkage between higher levels of religiosity and less likelihood of teen sexual involvement. Hence, to advance our understanding of not only the importance of religiosity but also the Church activity factors which contribute to abstain Christian from sexually misguided behaviors until marriage.

The purpose of this current was to examine significant religiosity related factors predicting sexual behavior among Christian youth. Based on prior research, three hypotheses were formulated. First, it was hypothesized that Christian youth who reported higher religious attendance would be less likely to show sexual experience than those who reported lower levels of attendance. Second, it was hypothesized that Christian youth who reported higher levels of religiosity would be less likely to show sexual experience than those who reported lower levels of religiosity. Third, it was also

hypothesized that Christian youth who reported higher levels of individual performance of religiosity would be less likely to show sexual experience than those who reported lower levels of individual performance of religiosity. Gender and age were additionally included to examine the demographic effects on sexuality among Christian youth as control variables.

The available literature on religion and sexual behavior among youth can be categorized as three major themes: attendance, confession of faith, and individual performance.

Church attendance and sexually healthy behavior

Young People Less Religiously Affiliated

Percent unaffiliated with a religion, by generation

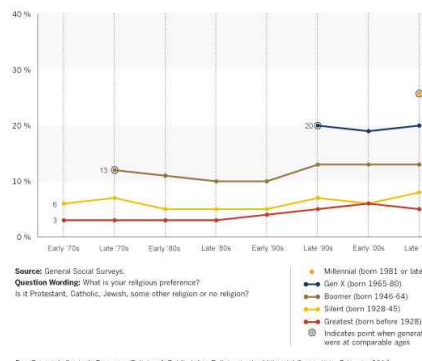


Figure 1: Young people with religious affiliation, by generation

Attendance at Religious Services, by Generation

Percent saying they attend several times a week, every week or nearly every week

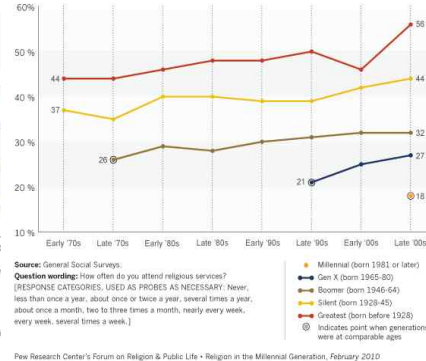


Figure 2: Attendance at religious services, by generation

Christian faith among young people in USA continue to have impact on the lives of young people, although they are less religious than older people and are not active church participants (see Picture 1 & 2).

Due to the major scope of religious affiliation among young people in USA, the scope of church attendance and its impact in a young person’s life becomes an interesting topic for non-Christian researchers as well as Christian society. Empirical studies have documented a close relation between religious attendance and improving poor health behaviors, including a analysis of a protective effect of close associations on pro-social behavior (Silver & DiGiuseppe, 2001; Lujan & Campbell, 2006; Shinha, Cnaan, & Gelles, 2007). Religious attendances offer a positive influence on health life style such as a abstinence from drinking, smoking, and sexual behaviors among young people, depending on the attending frequency. The more attending at church services, the more having opportunities to pro-social behaviors; many people who attend church regularly might be exposed to have a sense of purpose in life. A sense of meaning and purpose in life has been shown to be positively related to avoidance of antisocial behaviors (Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, & Kaplan, 2001). Thus religious affiliation can work as buffers to risky sexual behavior (Benda, 1995; Crepez & Marks, 2001).

Confession of faith and sexually healthy behavior

Behavioral intention models, which emphasize the behavioral intention to perform a behavior, suggest that actual behavior is determined by a person's beliefs about behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Adolescent behavior is guided by their beliefs about what they think. For Christian youth, then, heightened knowledge resulting from exposure to Christian education can be found to affect behavior beliefs about the importance of abstinence until marriage. In the context of free sexual attitudes among young people, a behavior drive towards deviance can be restrained by Christian faith including expectation of faithful life style about sexual activity (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003). O'Connor et al. (2002) found that adolescents who had more religious beliefs were less likely to be involved in sexually risky behaviors. This finding portionally supports the current study's hypothesis that confession of faith is associated with postponed sexual activities for young people, indicating the linkage between the levels of belief and lower likelihood of sexual experience.

Individual performance of faith and sexually healthy behavior

Performance of faith such as Involvement in Bible study or prayer group, practicing individual prayer and reading Bible might influence motives for abstinence from sexual behavior until marriage (Cnaan, Gelles, & Sinha, 2004). Accumulated individual commitments in those church networks and personal attachments to God might provide rational choices Christian young people make weighing the pleasure and guilt of sexual activity for his or her Christian faith. For instance, those commitment may foster faithful behavior style through increasing a sense of responsibility to his or her faith. A faithful attachment to church and performance of faith is the nature of spiritual growth in Christian faith (Acts 2:46; Hebrews 10:25).

It is expected that intrinsically religious people tend to be more involved in religious activities such as Bible study or prayer group, practicing individual prayer and reading Bible. Involving in Bible study or prayer group as a social network may also influence sexual abstinence through the affiliation with pro-social church peers. For example, a youth involved in Bible study or prayer group may have a sense of spiritual attachment to those of the same faith and those spiritual ties to church members would let him or her have pro-social behaviors rather than unacceptable sexual behaviors. Practicing individual prayers and reading Bible frequently may also increase one's opportunities of involving in church activities and programs designed for spiritual growth and helping people in needs (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates 1999), fostering moral frameworks to curb sexual activity (Smith, 2003).

METHODS

The Sample and Characteristics

This present study used the National Study of Youth and Religion(NSYR), Wave 3 (collected September 24, 2007 through April 21, 2008), USA where the respondents were aged 14 to 24. The first NSYR study employed a random-digit-dial telephone survey method in order to sample nationally-representative households with young ages. The Howard W. Odum Institute for Research in Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill re-contacted and re-surveyed

all original National Study of Youth and Religion respondents, on September 24, 2007 through April 21, 2008. Total cases were 2,532 including Christian and non-Christian young people.

For the purpose of this study, the selected Christian sample consisted of a convenience sample of 1,183 (male 542, female 641) aged 14 to 24 years, who were in attendance at the church service. About 50 % of respondents had attended church approximately at least 2-3 times a month. Only 32% of participants were attending Sunday school on a weekly basis. Majority of participants believed in God, Jesus as a Christ, and life after death, whereas only a small portion of them were practicing involvement in Bible study or prayer group, personal pray, and reading Bible.

Table 1. Characteristics of research participants (N = 1,183)

Variables	N	%	
Gender	Male	542	45.80%
	Female	641	54.20%
Age	14	20	1.70%
	15	28	2.40%
	16	141	11.90%
	17	433	36.60%
	18	15	1.30%
	19	7	0.60%
	20	4	0.30%
	21	186	15.70%
	22	189	16.00%
	23	105	8.90%
Numbers of attending religious services	24	55	4.60%
	A few times a year	327	27.60%
	Many times a year	122	10.30%
	Once a month	130	11.00%
	2-3 times a month	202	17.10%
	Once a week	241	20.40%
Numbers of attending Sunday school	More than once a week	161	13.50%
	Never	323	27.30%
	A few times a year	319	27.00%
	Once a month	87	7.40%
	A few times a month	132	11.20%
	Almost every week	112	9.50%
Belief in God	Once a week	131	11.10%
	More than once a week	79	6.70%
	Yes	1112	94.00%
Belief in Jesus Christ as a Savior	No	4	0.30%
	Unsure/Don't know	67	5.70%
	Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead	1047	88.50%
	Jesus was an important human teacher, but was not the Son of God	40	3.40%
	Jesus never really existed	0	
Belief in life after death	Believe something else	16	1.40%
	Unsure what you believe about Jesus/Don't know	80	6.90%
Belief in life after death	No	56	4.70%
	Yes	1127	95.30%

Involvement in Bible study or prayer group	No	856	72.40%
	Yes	327	27.60%
Numbers of praying time	Never	55	4.60%
	Less than once a month	83	7.00%
	One to two times a month	143	12.10%
	About once a week	138	11.70%
	A few times a week	214	18.10%
	About once a day	261	22.10%
	Many times a day	289	24.40%
Numbers of reading Bible	Never	301	25.40%
	Less than once a month	241	20.40%
	One to two times a month	230	19.40%
	About once a week	142	12.00%
	A few times a week	134	11.30%
	About once a day	97	8.20%
	Many times a day	45	3.20%

Table 2 shows numbers of prior sexual experiences according to religion types. Only 29.6% of Christian adolescents reported no sexual experience, whereas over 70% of them told of frequent sexual experiences. Catholic and Buddhist/Hindu adolescents showed similar sexual experiences with Christian adolescents but Jewish and Islamic/Muslim adolescents spoke of 34.7% and 50% sexual experiences. Respondents with no religion reported only 17% of no sexual experience.

Table 2. Numbers of sexual experience according to religion of adolescents

		Religion type					N	o Religion
		Christianity	Catholic	Jewish	Islamic & Muslim	Buddhist & Hindu		
Numbers of Sexual experience	Never had sex	350(29.60%)	88(25.20%)	17(34.70%)	2(50.00%)	2(22.20%)	161	(17.03%)
	Once	14(1.20%)	8(2.30%)	1(2.00%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	11	(1.16%)
	A few times	122(10.30%)	27(7.90%)	3(6.10%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)	65	(6.87%)
	Several times	150(12.70%)	64(18.70%)	7(14.30%)	0(0.00%)	2(22.20%)	139	(14.70%)
	Many times	547(46.20%)	155(45.30%)	21(42.90%)	2(50.00%)	5(55.60%)	569	(60.2%)
	Total	1183(100%)	342(100%)	49(100%)	4(100%)	9(100%)	945	(100%)

Measurements

Numbers of attending religious services are measured with a six-point scale ranging from "a few times a year" to "more than once a week". Numbers of attending Sunday school are measured with a six-point scale ranging from "never" to "more than once a week".

Religiosity consists of 3 items (3 point scales ①Yes ②No ③Unsure or don't know and 5 point scales ①Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead ②Jesus was an important human teacher, but was not the Son of God ③Jesus never really existed ④Believe something else ⑤Unsure what you believe about Jesus/Don't know)($\rho = .78$).

Performance of religiosity are measured with three items (2 point scales ①Yes ②No) asked about involvement in Bible study or prayer group, with two other items (7 point scales ①Never ②Less

than once a month ③One to two times a month ④About once a week ⑤About a few times a week ⑥Once a day ⑦Many times a day) ($\rho = .78$)

Table 3. Measurement methods

Variables	Measurement
Gender	Male=0, female=1
Age	
Religion type	1=Christianity, 2=Catholic, 3=Jewish, 4=Islam & Muslim, 5=Buddhist & Hindu, 6=No religion
Numbers of attending religious services	①A few times a year, ②Many times a year, ③Once a month, ④2-3 times a month, ⑤Once a week, ⑥More than once a week
Numbers of attending Sunday school	①Never ②A few times a year, ③Once a month, ④2-3 times a month, ⑤Almost every week, ⑥Once a week, ⑦More than once a week
Belief in God	(Question) Do you believe in God, or not, or are you unsure? ①Yes ②No ③Unsure or don't know
Belief in Jesus Christ as a Savior	(Question) Which of the following comes closest to your beliefs about Jesus Christ? ①Jesus was the Son of God who was raised from the dead ②Jesus was an important human teacher, but was not the Son of God ③Jesus never really existed ④Believe something else ⑤Unsure what you believe about Jesus/Don't know
Belief in life after death	(Question) Do you have a belief in life after death? ①No ②Yes ③Unsure or don't know
Involvement in Bible study or prayer group	①No ②Yes
Numbers of praying time	(Question) How often, if ever, do you pray yourself alone? ①Never ②Less than once a month ③One to two times a month ④About once a week ⑤About a few times a week ⑥Once a day ⑦Many times a day
Numbers of reading Bible	(Question) How often, do you read from Bible to yourself alone? ①Never ②Less than once a month ③One to two times a month ④About once a week ⑤About a few times a week ⑥Once a day ⑦Many times a day

Statistical Analysis

The data were analysed by means of the PASW Statistical package 18 using th reliability, correlation, multiple regression analysis procedures.

FINDINGS

Correlations between selected religious activity variables and sexual experiences among Christian adolescents

Pearson correlations between selected religious activity variables and sexual experiences among

Christian adolescents are displayed in Table 4. These bivariate analyses showed that performance of religiosity such as involvement in Bible study or pray group, numbers of praying time, and numbers of reading Bible had higher correlations than religious service/education attendance or religiosity variables. The standardized coefficients indicated that the performance of religiosity variables had the strongest relationship to sexual experiences among Christian adolescents (Involvement in Bible study/Beta=.084, $p<.01$; Numbers of praying time/Beta=.087, $p<.01$; Numbers of reading Bible/Beta=.100, $p<.01$), whereas religious service attendance (Religion type/Beta=-.137, $p<.01$, Numbers of attending religious services/Beta=-.136, $p<.01$; Numbers of attending Sunday school=.050, $p<.05$) and religiosity variables (Belief in God/Beta=.76, $p<.01$; Belief in Jesus/Beta=.68, $p<.01$) showed a relatively small relationship to sexual experiences among Christian adolescents.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Gender	-											
Age	.099 ^{**}	-										
Religion type	-.062 [*]	-.043	-									
Numbers of attending religious services	-.058 [*]	-.0039	.989 ^{**}	-								
Numbers of attending Sunday school	-0.033	-0.018	-.051 [*]	-.50 [*]	-							
Belief in God	-0.024	-0.038	0.012	0.013	.259 [*]	-						
Belief in Jesus Christ as a Savior	-0.004	-.046	0.001	0.002	.223 [*]	.650 [*]	-					
Belief in life after death	-0.014	-0.032	0.038	0.039	.140 [*]	.419 [*]	.358 ^{**}	-				
Involvement in Bible study or prayer group	-0.014	-0.025	-0.011	-0.01	.211 [*]	.615 [*]	.526 ^{**}	.337 ^{**}	-			
Numbers of praying time	-0.008	-0.026	-0.026	-0.025	.212 [*]	.614 [*]	.526 ^{**}	.335 ^{**}	.999 [*]	-		
Numbers of reading Bible	-0.012	-0.027	-0.025	-0.025	.198 [*]	.576 [*]	.492 ^{**}	.314 ^{**}	.936 [*]	.937 [*]	-	
Numbers of sexual experiences	-0.005	-0.033	-.137 [*]	-.036	.050 [*]	.076 [*]	.068 ^{**}	0.012	.084 [*]	.087 [*]	.100 [*]	-

1=Gender, 2=Age, 3=Religion type, 4=Numbers of attending religious services, 5=Numbers of attending Sunday school, 6=Belief in God, 7=Belief in Jesus Christ as a Savior, 8=Belief in life after death, 9=Involvement in Bible study or prayer group, 10=Numbers of praying time, 11=Numbers of reading Bible, 12=Numbers of sexual experiences

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$

Church Activities Predicting Sexual Experiences among Christian Adolescents

Table 5 shows that no demographic control variables didn't make any significant differences for sexual experiences among Christian adolescents. When adding religious attendance variables, numbers of attending Sunday school were significant for sexual experiences among Christian

adolescents, explaining 8% of the variance in the model. Numbers of attending Sunday school dropped out when religiosity variables were added, and the variance explained improved by 17%. Adding the performance of religiosity variables improved R² by an additional 15%, showing that belief in God was negatively related to sexual experiences among Christian adolescents ($\beta = -.079$, $p < .05$). With all the variables included (Model IV), involvement in Bible study or prayer group ($\beta = -4.571$, $p < .001$), numbers of praying time ($\beta = -4.469$, $p < .001$), and numbers of reading Bible ($\beta = -.167$, $p < .05$) were negatively related to sexual experiences among Christian adolescents.

Table 5. Regression Model Predicting Sexual Experience among Christian Adolescents (N = 1,183)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Demographic controls								
Gender	-0.044	-1.433	-0.039	-1.322	-0.042	-1.432	-.062*	-2.006
Age	-0.004	-0.144	-0.008	-0.278	-0.004	-0.148	-0.003	-0.009
Religious attendance								
Numbers of attending religious services			-0.052	-1.778	-0.049	-1.697	-0.045	-1.551
Numbers of attending Sunday school			-.056*	-1.916	0.028	0.908	0.021	0.633
Religiosity								
Belief in God					-.079*	-1.814	0.055	1.41
Belief in Jesus Christ as a Savior					0.058	1.456	0.044	1.112
Belief in life after death					-0.061	-1.614	-0.062	-1.657
Performance of Religiosity								
Involvement in Bible study or prayer group							-4.571***	-3.73
Numbers of praying time							-4.469***	-3.648
Numbers of reading Bible							-.167*	-2.539
R ²	0.02		0.08		0.17		0.35	
Adjusted R ²	0.00		0.04		0.11		0.26	
R ² change	0.02		0.04		0.06		0.05	
F value	1.155		2.250*		2.818**		4.214***	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The rates of sexual experience, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents are rapidly increasing among adolescents and even among Christian youths. Various factors that contribute to adolescent sexual activities have been reported such as familial conflicts, low family income, substance use, low performance in school, dropping out of school, and association with delinquent peers. But limited efforts and researches within Christian communities to guide church programs and activities leave unmet needs for helping Christian youths for resolving sexual problems. Which programs and activities within and outside church can make an effect on the sexually un-appropriate behaviors among Christian youths? The identification of factors that predict sexual activities among Christian young people is an important matter for the development of prevention and intervention programs with Christian youths at sexual risk.

Consistent with prior research, sexual experience is prevalent even among Christian youths aged 14-24 years in USA, although the rate of sexual experience was relatively low, compared to those

of young people with no religious affiliations. The high numbers of sexual experiences among Christian youths indicate that sexual activity may be able to be working as a major risk factor for further negative health outcomes, including teenage childbearing and increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases as well breaking Christian ethics. The demographic variables such as gender or age did not make any significant differences for sexual experiences among Christian youths, consistent with description of diminishing gender differences (Koniak-Griffin, Lesser, Uman, & Nyamathi, 2003; Mmari & Blum, 2009).

There were small associations of attending religious services or Sunday school, confession of faith and sexual experiences among Christian young people, while these factors were very poorly predicted the numbers of sexual experiences among them. associations accounting for only 8 and 17% of the variances in the numbers of sexual experiences. This result suggests that young people with low levels of church attendance and confession of faith may be at increased risk for future involvement in sexual activities (Hardya, S. & MRaffaelli, 2003), functioning as a low level of risk factor to the development of sexual involvement. One important practice implication is that church leaders need to encourage young people to attend church services/Sunday schools and to have strong confession of faith guiding to forming Christian sexual ethics.

Performance dimensions of religiosity such as involvement in Bible Study/prayer group, frequent praying time, and reading Bible showed significant effects on sexual experience among Christian young people, explaining 35% of the variance. Young people exposed to Bible Study/prayer group, frequent praying time, and reading Bible may feel obliged to have strong Christian ethics. Such obligation may manifest in choosing appropriate sexual behaviors in accordance with Christian social norms rather than showing socially unacceptable behaviors (King, 2003). Young people who regularly practice his or her faith through involvement in Bible Study/prayer group, frequent praying time, or reading Bible may view sexual activities outside a marriage relationship as an inappropriate way for Christian life, which may lead to break his or her relationship with God (Francis, & Lankshear, 1990, 1991). et al ()found that confession of faith and participation in church activities significantly related to all dimensions of Christian life.

Thus far, little studies have focused on the impacts of church activities on youths' sexual behaviors and designing church activities to guide their sexual behaviors. Although the bulk of sexual experience among Christian youths in Korea has not been reported yet, the high prevalent rate of sexual experiences among Christian adolescents in USA warns the possibility of underestimated problems among Korean Christian youths. Therefore, church leaders should help to enhance Bible-driven sex education for young people within church, focusing on encouraging them active involvement in Bible study/prayer group, performing of individual prayer and reading Bible. How to work with Christian schools in advocating appropriate sexual behaviors is also desirable (Francis, & Lankshear, 1990). In addition, integration of confession and church attendance into individual religiosity performance such as involvement in Bible study/prayer group, performing of

individual prayer and reading Bible, is a crucial direction for church programs and activities that aim to help Christian youths behave as an healthy and mature Christian.

Overall, the findings support the urgent need for church programs and activities designed for preventive and interventive for young people with increased sexual experiences, who are at multiple other risk factors (Davidson, Moore, & Ullstrup, 2004; Crawford, Rawlins, McGrowder, & Adams, 2011). Programs and activities should put emphasis on active participation in Bible Study/prayer group, frequent praying time, or reading Bible. For further development of appropriate interventions, it is crucial that longitudinal research be conducted to enhance the understanding of the underlying multifaceted factors and longitudinal course of patterns that lead to risky sexual behaviors among young people in USA and Korea.

As one of the few studies that have explored the predicting factors of individual performance of religiosity on the sexual experience among Christian youths, the present study has its strength. Despite this strength, there are some limitations of this study that require some cautions in the interpretation of the study results. First, because the collecting data was relying on the self-report of adolescents about their sexual experiences, there is a possibility of inflated scores. Second, the current data is cross-sectional, and not proper for determining causal relations.

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