Sexual Risk Behaviors and Academic Achievement

What is the relationship between sexual risk behaviors and academic achievement?

Data presented below from the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show a negative association between sexual risk behaviors and academic achievement after controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level. This means that students with higher grades are less likely to engage in sexual risk behaviors than their classmates with lower grades, and students who do not engage in sexual risk behaviors receive higher grades than their classmates who do engage in sexual risk behaviors. These associations do not prove causation. Further research is needed to determine whether low grades lead to sexual risk behaviors, sexual risk behaviors lead to low grades, or some other factors lead to both of these problems.

Students with higher grades are significantly less likely to have engaged in behaviors such as

- **Ever having sexual intercourse.**
- **Having sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years.**
- **Having sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life.**
- **Being currently sexually active** (having sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey).
- **Drinking alcohol or using drugs before last sexual intercourse.**
- **Not using a condom during last sexual intercourse.**

Percentage of high school students who engaged in sexual risk behaviors, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D's/F's)—United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009

Sexual Risk Behaviors	Percentage of U.S. high school students who engaged in each risk behavior, by type of grades mostly earned			
	A's	B's	C's	D's/F's
Ever had sexual intercourse*	32	46	59	69
Had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years*	3	4	9	18
Had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life*	7	13	19	31
Currently sexually active (had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey)*	24	34	43	54
Drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse*,†	16	18	25	40
Did not use a condom (during last sexual intercourse)†,‡	38	38	39	46

* $p<.0001$ based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

† Among the students who were currently sexually active.

‡ $p<.001$ based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

Figure 1. Percentage of high school students who ever had sexual intercourse, were currently sexually active, had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years, and who had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D's/F's)—United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009

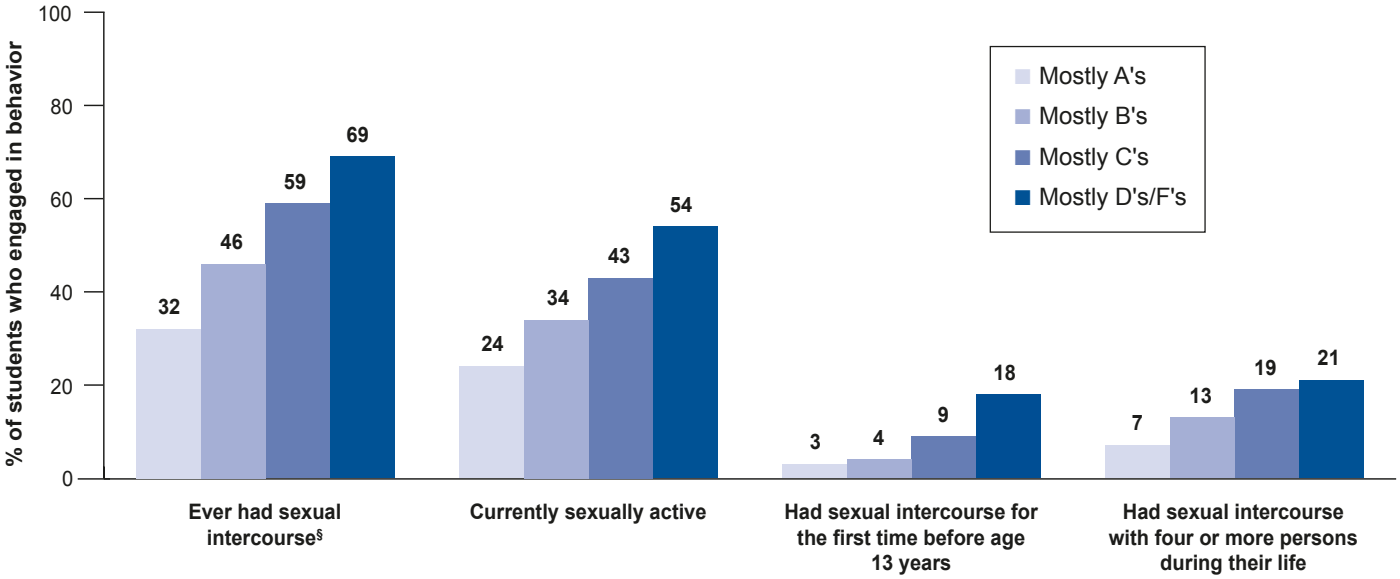
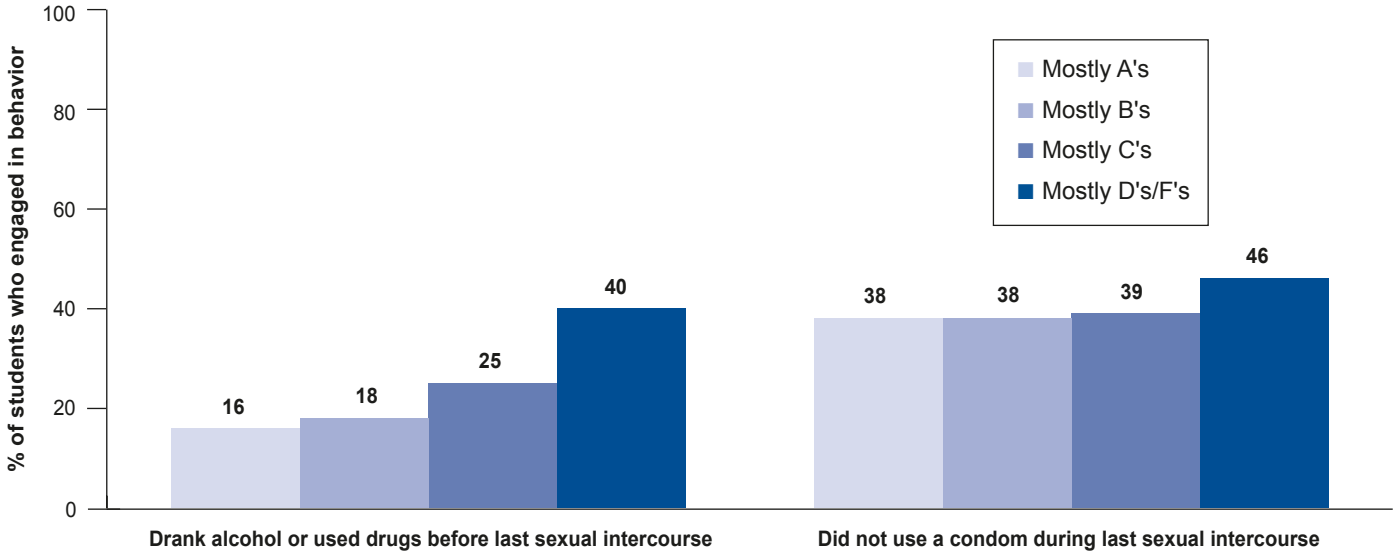


Figure 2. Among high school students who were currently sexually active, percentage who drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse, and percentage who did not use a condom during last sexual intercourse, by type of grades earned (mostly A's, B's, C's, or D's/F's)—United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009



§ This means that 32% of students with mostly A's ever had sexual intercourse and 69% of students with mostly D's or F's ever had sexual intercourse.

The national YRBS monitors priority health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. It is conducted every 2 years during the spring and provides data representative of 9th- through 12th-grade students in public and private schools throughout the nation. In 2009, students completing the YRBS were asked, "During the past 12 months, how would you describe your grades in school?" and given seven response options (Mostly A's, Mostly B's, Mostly C's, Mostly D's, Mostly F's, None of these grades, Not sure). In 2009, 31% of students received mostly A's, 40% received mostly B's, 19% received mostly C's, 6% received mostly D's or F's, and 4% reported receiving none of these grades or not sure.

For more information visit www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Adolescent and School Health
www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth