

## Abstract

The dissertation treats early onset of sexual intercourse among adolescent females from a broad life-course perspective. Its main focus is on the structures and processes involved in the early onset of sexual intercourse in the contexts of personal relationships, well-being, self-perception and adjustment.

Data are based on four cohorts of females. The first comes from the Swedish longitudinal research program "Individual Development and Adaptation" (IDA), which encompasses all 522 Grade-8 girls (15-year olds) from a municipality in central Sweden in 1970. The second belongs to a project designed to investigate adolescent behavioral problems, and includes all 567 Grade-8 girls in a single Swedish municipality in 1996. The third covers 30 females with documented sex-related gynecological problems who had attended a youth clinic during adolescence, plus a matched control group. The fourth consists in a representative sample of 90 females within the so-called "Solna Project" who were followed regularly from birth up into mid-life (age 38).

Results from Cohort 1 show that sexuality has quite similar developmental implications in the lives of adolescent girls now as it did 26 years ago. Findings from Cohort 2 demonstrate that a majority of girls with early sexual onset experienced their adolescent sexuality as negative, and suffered from recurrent and varied gynecological illnesses in young adulthood. Girls in a "multi-problem situation" were found to be most affected, with respect to both internalizing and externalizing maladjustment. Early sexual activity in itself is not a deviant behavior, but the situation is different when problem behavior and sexuality co-occur. Results from Cohort 3 show that the developmental process differs between subgroups of girls according to whether or not there is such co-occurrence. The combination of early sexuality and problem behavior was found to have negative implications in adolescence and adulthood. Examination of the girls in Cohort 4 suggests that the timing of the acquisition of adult roles is embedded in developmental processes that extend far back into the life of both the young female and her parents. Early sexual onset was found to be associated with both childhood problems (externalizing problems of the child and strained mother-child relations) and future difficulties (adult life situation related to leaving home early, setting up a family at an early age, low education, and social-adjustment problems).

Keywords; early onset of sexual intercourse, adolescent female, relationship, well-being, self-perception, social adjustment; longitudinal study.