

# Sexual Risk Behaviors

## and Academic Achievement

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

Data presented below, from the 2003 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 had sexual intercourse.**
- **Had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years.**
- **Had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life.**
- **Currently sexually active** (Had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey).
- **Drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse.**<sup>1</sup>
- **Had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant.**

Percentage of U.S. high school students receiving mostly A's, B's, C's, or D/F's who engaged in sexual risk behaviors, by type of grades earned – National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2003.

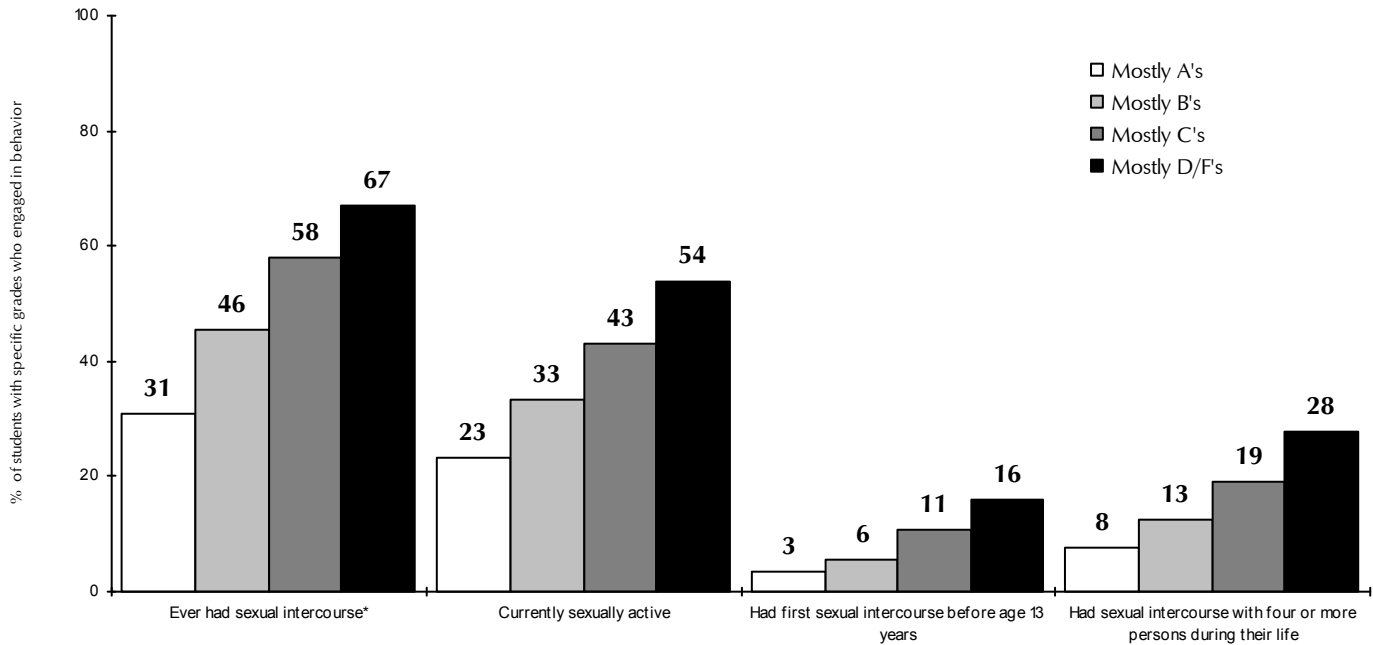
| Sexual Risk Behaviors  | Percentage of U.S. high school students who received mostly |     |     |       |
|--|---|-----|-----|-------|
|  | A's   | B's | C's | D/F's |
| Ever had sexual intercourse <sup>2</sup>   | 31  | 46  | 58  | 67    |
| Had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13 years <sup>2</sup>   | 3   | 6   | 11  | 16    |
| Had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life <sup>2</sup>  | 8   | 13  | 19  | 28    |
| Currently sexually active (Had sexual intercourse with at least one person during the 3 months before the survey) <sup>2</sup> | 23  | 33  | 43  | 54    |
| Drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse <sup>1,3</sup>  | 20  | 22  | 28  | 34    |
| Had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant <sup>2</sup>  | 3   | 4   | 6   | 8     |

<sup>1</sup>Among the students who were currently sexually active.

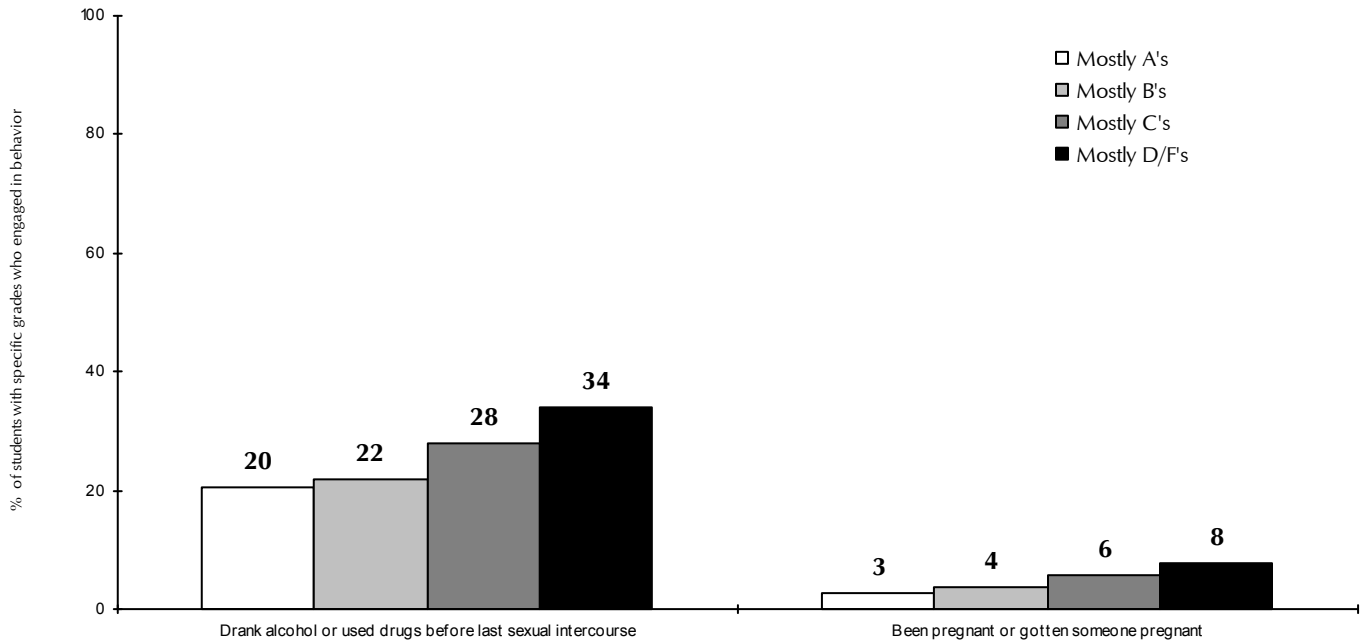
<sup>2</sup>p<.0001 based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

<sup>3</sup>p<.001 based on logistic regression analysis controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level.

**Figure 1. Percentage of U.S. high school students receiving mostly A's, B's, C's, or D/F's who ever had sexual intercourse, were currently sexually active, had first sexual intercourse before age 13 years, and who had sexual intercourse with four or more persons during their life—Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2003.**



**Figure 2. Percentage of U.S. high school students receiving mostly A's, B's, C's, or D/F's who drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse and had been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant—Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2003.**



\*This means that 31% of students with mostly A's ever had sexual intercourse and 67% 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 two years during the spring and provides data representative of 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in public and private schools throughout the United States. In 2003, students completing the YRBS were asked, "During the past 12 months, how would you describe your grades in school?" and given 7 response options (Mostly A's, Mostly B's, Mostly C's, Mostly D's, Mostly F's, None of these grades, Not sure). In 2003, 27% of students received mostly A's, 38% received mostly B's, 23% received mostly C's, 6% received mostly D's or F's, and 5% reported receiving none of these grades or not sure.

For more information visit [http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health\\_and\\_academics/](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics/) or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).



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