

'Parents Speak Up' National Campaign Encourages Parent-Child Communication about Sex, Study Finds

Washington, DC (June 9, 2009) – Advertising can be an effective way to encourage parents to talk with their children about sex, according to a new study by researchers at George Washington University and RTI International and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The study, published in the June issue of *Journal of Adolescent Health*, found that the “Parents Speak Up National Campaign,” successfully encouraged parents to initiate conversations with their children about sex.

“This is an important first step in the evaluation of the efficacy of the Parents Speak Up National Campaign,” said Evelyn Kappeler, Acting Director for the Office of Population Affairs within HHS. “These findings demonstrate that the advertisements developed through the Campaign can effectively influence parental behavior and increase parent-child communication.”

The study included nearly 1,500 parents of children 10 to 14 years old, selected from the Knowledge Networks, an online panel based on a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. Participants were randomly assigned to experiment conditions, receiving exposure or no exposure to campaign ads and materials. All participants completed a baseline survey prior to exposure and then two follow-up surveys four weeks and six months later.

Doug Evans, Ph.D., Director of Public Health Communication and Marketing at George Washington University and the study’s lead author said, “We found that messaging delivered to parents through mass media is efficacious in promoting parent-child communication about sex and thus may be an effective public health strategy.”

The results showed that four weeks after exposure to the ad campaign, fathers initiated more conversations with their children than they had previously. And after six months, both fathers and mothers who were exposed to the campaign were more likely to specifically recommend to their children to wait to become sexually active.

Study findings indicated that there were improvements at four weeks post-baseline regarding the initiation of conversations about sex, particularly among fathers. Changes were also noted at six months post-baseline about the extent of recommendations by parents to children to wait to have sex. Kevin Davis, M.A., a Senior Researcher at RTI and the study’s co-author, said. “This suggests the campaign succeeded in communicating its ‘call to action,’ particularly among fathers.”

The public awareness campaign, launched in June 2007, uses public service announcements as well as paid television, radio, print and outdoor announcements; community outreach and trainings; and a Web site. The campaign was designed to direct parents to the 4parents.gov Web site, which provides a wide-range of information to parents about how to talk with their preteen or teenage children about waiting to have sex.

