The Impact Family Structure has on 
Sexual Activity and Educational Aspirations for 
African American adolescents ages 12 – 17

Shani R. Roberts*, Rhonda Lewis Moss PhD

Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Abstract. Within the past few decades African Americans have made a lot of progress in educational attainment and achievement. The gaps between Caucasians and African Americans are slowly narrowing because more African American adolescents are completing high school and going on to college. The present analysis uses archival data collected as part of the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), which surveyed various health and educational variables of 462 African American adolescents. The present study serves to address three empirical questions: 1) Is there a relationship between educational aspirations and family structure; 2) Is there a relationship between educational aspirations and sexual activity; and 3) Is there a relationship between family structure and sexual activity? The results showed that there was a negative correlation between family structure and educational aspirations. As educational aspirations increased the number of parents in the home decreased, suggesting that having a single parent did not interfere with educational aspirations $r = -.173$. The results also showed that as educational aspirations increased, the number of sexual partners decreased $r = -.141$. There was no significant relationship between family structure and sexual activity.

Introduction

Over the past few decades African American have made a lot of progress in reaching their educational goals. The gaps between Caucasians and African Americans are slowly narrowing because more African American adolescents are completing high school and going on to college. However, the number of African Americans going on and completing college degrees is still less than Caucasians. One factor could be the status of the family. For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reports “less than one-half of Black children lived with two parents in 2000; and that black children are less likely than Whites or Hispanic children to live in a married couple family.” NCES (2003) states that “in 2000, 37 percent of Black children under 18 lived in two parent families, and 53 percent lived in single parent families.” “The percentage of African American children that live within two parent families is significantly lower than Whites, 78 percent, and Hispanics, 65 percent.” (NCES, 2003) Also, among African American adolescents under 18 years of age, “49 percent are more likely to live with single mothers, rather than single fathers, 4 percent.” (NCES, 2003) Thus it appears that there is a difference in family structure between African Americans and Caucasians. The question is does this current structure interfere with African American adolescents getting an education.

Experiment

Participants and Setting
Participants in this study were 462 African American adolescents between the ages of 12 – 17 the mean age was 14. The YEP was a 12 month program that recruited African American adolescents from Wichita, Kansas and the surrounding communities. Wichita, Kansas population is 354,000 (Census 2004). Within the study males made up forty seven percent of the total and females made up fifty three percent.

Procedure
The YEP training sessions took place on Saturday at Wichita State University. Upon arriving parents and adolescents would sign in. Parents and adolescents were asked to sign consent forms which informed them that they could withdraw from the program at anytime. Youth participants also received a behavioral contract that informed participants they should respond truthfully as the information from the survey would not be shared with parents. Youth were given a baseline survey and then they underwent five hours of training and then a posttest survey was
Conducted. Participants received a $40.00 stipend once they completed the survey. Participants also received a $40.00 stipend each time they completed the remaining follow-ups at 3, 6, and 12 months. For each of the 3, 6, and 12 month follow-up participants underwent a one hour training session to refresh what they learned in the initial training session. At each of the three month follow-ups participants completed the same survey that was given during the baseline.

Measures
The survey consisted of questions from the government results and performance act and questions taken from HIV/AIDS prevention Dr.’s John and Loretta Sweet Jemmott. The survey consisted of 274 questions that asked several health questions, self efficacy, sexual behaviors, and educational questions. For the purpose of the present study, six questions were used to describe family structure, five questions were used to define educational aspirations and five questions were grouped as sexual behaviors.

Results
The results showed that there was a negative correlation between family structure and educational aspirations. As educational aspirations increased the number of parents in the home decreased, suggesting that having a single parent did not interfere with educational aspirations $r = -.173$. The results also showed that as educational aspirations increased, the number of sexual partners decreased $r = -.141$. Thus, participants that had high educational aspirations had fewer sexual partners. There was no significant relationship between family structure and sexual activity.

Discussion
There is research that suggests that adolescents living in a two parent household will experience more favorable outcomes than adolescents coming from single parent households. The present research suggests that there is more going on in the home than just the structure of the family. Perhaps other variables such as parenting styles, supervised free time and family income regardless of two parents are factors that might explain these results. These results are encouraging that single parents do not negatively impact educational aspirations of their children. More research is needed on the impact of African American single parents have on child outcomes.

Conclusions
After analyzing the data for three variables; family structure, educational aspirations, and sexual activity; selected from the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) survey done at Wichita State University, the results showed that there was a negative correlation between family structure and educational aspirations. As educational aspirations increased the number of parents in the home decreased, suggesting that having a single parent did not interfere with educational aspirations $r = -.173$. The results also showed that as educational aspirations increased, the number of sexual partners decreased $r = -.141$. There was no significant relationship between family structure and sexual activity.

Acknowledgements
Funding provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).