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Sexual communication and risky sexual practices and perceptions among university students from Lebanon

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Aim: Investigate the association between youth sexual practices and perceptions and their sexual communication with partners, parents/guardians and peers.

Methods: Cross-sectional online survey data on 2180 undergraduate and graduate students (18-30 years) attending a large private university in Lebanon. Statistically significant (p-value<0.05) sex-adjusted findings are reported.

Results: 81% talked about sex with their close friends, 57% with their partners, 31% with their mother and only 23% with their father. Students who felt comfortable communicating with peers were more likely to engage in sexual intercourse with 3 or more partners, engage in first oral sex with an unfamiliar partner and drink/use drugs at sexual debut. Students who discussed sexual activity preferences with partners were more likely to perceive condoms as effective at preventing pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other STIs, and were more likely to believe that birth control pills were effective at preventing pregnancy. Not communicating with partners was associated with increased odds of not knowing about the effectiveness of condoms at preventing pregnancy and misperceiving that birth control pills are effective at preventing HIV/AIDS. Besides, students who didn't communicate with a partner, close friends, or parents were more likely to admit never hearing of emergency contraceptive pills or unsure of their use.

Conclusion: Students who communicated with partners about sexual preferences/matters were more likely to engage in risky sexual practices but were also more well-informed about sexual health matters. Further studies must investigate the content/frequency of sexual communication to better guide interventions promoting positive sexual communication, and sexual assertiveness in youth.

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