

Attitudes, Intervention and Sexual Initiation among Chinese Adolescents

Bo Wang, *University of Wisconsin at Madison*

Ann Meier, *University of Minnesota*

Revised abstract:

This study investigates the role of sex education in changing sexual attitudes and behaviors among adolescents in a developing nation where western influences and liberalizing norms have only taken hold over the last several decades. Based on pre- and post- intervention data from a “treatment” and “control” group study in suburban Shanghai, China, we investigate the effects of a WHO-sponsored comprehensive sex education program on adolescent sex attitudes and behavior. We found that while the intervention did not deter all groups of adolescents from initiating sexual activity, it had an effect on delaying the onset of premarital sex among participants still in high school at the time of the post-intervention survey. In addition, the intervention had a significant effect on adolescents’ attitudes about sex. In turn, attitudes influenced sexual initiation. In this way, the intervention program indirectly delayed the start of sexual behavior among Shanghai adolescents. This study suggests diffusion pathways through which rapidly changing adolescent sexual behavior may be influenced in this cultural context.