

Sexual Initiation in Adolescents' Peer Networks: Influence or Selection?

Sam Hyun Yoo, *Arizona State University*

Abstract

Similarities between close friends and associates in attitude and behavior are commonly observed. In particular, adolescents tend to have peer effects in experiencing sexual debut, contraceptive use, and pregnancy. Despite a body of literature about it, it is still not clear why sexual experience diffuses through social network among adolescents: is it due to peer influence or selection process? With the actor-based Simulation Investigation for Empirical Network Analysis (SIENA), the current study investigates 1) whether peer effect on sexual debut exists in adolescents' network and 2) if it exists, whether it is due to influence effect or to selection effect. The result of this study suggests that the dominant norm and behavior of close friends are much more influential to predict the spread of sexual initiation than the selection effects in adolescents peer networks.