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Change in adolescent mental health between age 12 and 14 predicts sexual activity and sexual orientation at age 14

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Abstract

This study sought to explore whether change in mental health between age 12 and age 14 relates to self-identified sexual orientation and having become sexually active at age 14. In total, 3460 Australian adolescents (1748 boys, 1712 girls) provided information on sexual activity and sexual orientation at age 14. Parents provided information on facets of mental health when the adolescent was age 12 and again when the adolescent was age 14. Results showed that higher levels of mental health problems at age 12 (hyperactivity and conduct problems) and increases in mental health problems between age 12 and 14 (hyperactivity and conduct problems) were associated with an increased likelihood of being sexually active at age 14. Results also showed that higher levels of mental health problems at age 12 (hyperactivity and peer problems) and increases in mental health problems between age 12 and age 14 (negative emotional symptoms and peer problems) were associated with an increased likelihood of reported homosexual or bisexual orientation at age 14. There were no significant sex moderation effects. These findings provide evidence that change in mental health relates to sexual activity and sexual orientation in early adolescence. Findings might be used to improve prognostic capabilities that could be valuable to health care professionals working with adolescent clients.

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