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College Students' Sexual Health: Personal Responsibility or the Responsibility of the College?

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Background and Theory

- 90% of college students are sexually experienced
 - Approximately half make sexual debut during college
 - College-aged youth at disproportionate risk of negative sexual health outcomes
 - Perceptions of health resources affect use
- Theory of Emerging Adulthood (Arnett, 2000)
 - Life stage: 18-29 years old
 - Transition period: not adolescents, not adults
- Social Ecological Model (Glanz et al, 2008)
 - Environment influences behavior
- Interpretive Interactionism (Denzin, 1989)
 - Understanding perceptions of resources is critical to creation of effective interventions

Research Question

How do college students perceive the role of responsibility for sexual health resources?

Methods

- Physical, virtual "go-along" interviews
- Semi-structured interview guide
 - No specific questions on responsibility
- 78 students, 5 diverse campuses:
 - Significant differences observed between two-year and four-year participants
- Iterative, qualitative analysis, ATLAS.ti software

Results

- Participant Demographics**
 - 49% women, 51% men, 33% students of color, 67% white students, mean age=20.6 years
- Perspectives on seeking sexual health resources during emerging adulthood**
 - Focused on coming-of-age as a reason for personal responsibility
 - Participants described themselves as adults, expected to be treated as adults
 - Embraced responsibility to access resources when needed
 - Wanted support from the institution
 - Provide resources, provide referrals to community resource

Not that [students] shouldn't be able to look after themselves, but just [support with] a first step on a transition on how to go seek out information for yourself because a lot of people are on their own for the first time.

Emerging adults' perspectives on sexual health resources available via their college

College type	Students believe...	Students expect...
4-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institution is responsible for educating students on sexual health Institution should provide sexual health resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical resources for sexual health from the school (e.g., condoms, STI testing, birth control) To be educated holistically and to be empowered to make informed decisions A supportive community, esp. for LGBT students
2-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institution is responsible for the academic education of students Institution should provide links to reliable sexual health resources Existing resources, when available, should be easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic, trustworthy information on sexual health to be made easily available in the form of pamphlets and websites A list of referrals to local clinics and other resources for sexual health A staff person from whom they can seek advice and guidance regarding sexual health concerns

- A small minority (n = 3, 4%) would not seek sexual health resources from the school
- Emerging adults' financial considerations relevant to sexual health resources**
 - The college should assist due to the financial burden of attendance
 - School is a business, cannot provide for all needs

Application and recommendations

I think at this age, individuals need to take most of the responsibility, if not all of it. We're all over 18, we're all growing older, and the university can provide the resources, but...I think it's up to each person to do what they think is best for themselves.

- Communicate availability of resources
 - Students will access as needed
- Centralize existing resources to be easily-accessible, e.g. website, bulletin board
- Provide referrals to community resources
 - Can supplement existing campus resources in a cost-efficient way when not available on campus
 - Some students prefer off-campus resources
- Make educational materials and safer sex supplies available
- Foster a supportive environment for:
 - Emerging adults
 - LGBT students
 - Nontraditional and pregnant/parenting students

I'm not saying it is [the institution's] job to have clinics and hand out medicine or birth control...but if they could help you find out where to go, that'd be just as helpful.

Conclusions

- To enhance the wellbeing of students and assist through their emergence as adults, colleges should provide:
 - Resources for sexual health when feasible
 - Links, recommendations to community resources

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