

16 November 2007

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[A Stable Family and Low Body Weight Mean Later Puberty Onset for Girls](#)

What causes early onset of puberty?

You may say that, in a stable family, children are less exposed to sex imagery and these more protected girls are less prone to early sex. But a new research, published in "Child Development", shows they really turn later from little girls into little women. The research team at the University of Arizona and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, shows that girls growing up with supportive family experience have a delayed puberty onset.

Early puberty has been connected by various researches to mood disorders, substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy and increased risk of reproductive system cancers. Knowing these risks means early intervention and improved prevention strategies.

In 1991, psychologist Jay Belsky came with the theory that family environment speeds up or slows down puberty onset in girls. Family stress just speeds up puberty and sexual activity onset. Stress factors involved are poverty, marital conflict, negativity and coercion in parent-child relationships, and lack of support delivered by parents to children. Children's bodies develop sexually faster reacting to the adverse conditions inside the family.

The research team investigated families of 227 preschool children in Wisconsin, assessing socioeconomic conditions, marital conflict, parental depression and supportive versus coercive parent-child relationship based on interviews with the parents.

The children were monitored through middle school, the puberty onset being linked to hormonal changes, such as the activation of the adrenal glands in 120 subjects (73 girls) in the first grade, and the development of secondary sexual traits, like breast and body hair growth, in 180 girls in the fifth grade.

"The data on puberty were obtained from "mother-and-daughter reports. Essentially, mothers and daughters were independently shown a series of diagrams depicting different levels of physical development and then selected the diagram that most closely resembled the daughter," said lead researcher Bruce J. Ellis, an associate professor in the Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences at the UA.

Children coming from families with greater parental supportiveness (from both parents), less marital conflict and less depression displayed a delayed puberty onset. Delayed development of secondary sexual traits was connected to genetic factors, family support during preschool and lower body weight.