

Do virginity pledges cause virginity?: Estimating the efficacy of sexual abstinence pledges

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Abstract

Objectives: To determine the efficacy of virginity pledges in delaying sexual debut for sexually inexperienced adolescents in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health).

Methods: Subjects were virgin respondents without wave 1 pledge who reported their attitudes towards sexuality and birth control at wave 1 (n=3443). Nearest-neighbor matching within propensity score calipers was used to match wave 2 virginity pledgers (n=291) with non-pledgers, based on wave 1 attitudes, demographics, and religiosity. Treatment effects due to treatment assignment were calculated.

Results (Preliminary): 17% of virginity pledgers are compliant with their pledge, and do not recant at wave 3 their earlier report of having taken a pledge. Similar proportions of virginity pledgers and non-pledgers report having had pre-marital sex (54% and 61%, $p=0.16$) and test positive for chlamydia (2.7% and 2.9%, $p=0.89$).

Conclusions: Five years after taking a virginity pledge, most virginity pledgers fail to report having pledged. Virginity pledges do not affect the incidence of self-reported pre-marital sex or assay-determined chlamydia.