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Environment may impact teens' likelihood of getting chlamydia

By Christopher Lynch, MD Jun. 03, 2013

Ohio State University recently conducted a study on the effect that a teen's neighborhood has on the chances that he or she will get a sexually transmitted disease, specifically chlamydia. Researchers found that those who grew up in a high-poverty area were more likely to contract the infection later in their life, even after moving.

OSU Study

The report examined a group of 11,460 teenagers from when their average age was 15.6 to when they were between 18 and 27 years old. They determined what constituted a poor neighborhood by looking at the proportion of households below the national poverty line, total unemployment rate, proportion of female-headed households with children and proportion of households on public assistance. The researchers found a correlation between the likelihood of testing positive for chlamydia and high concentrations of poverty in the area that those studied grew up in.

The study noted that there was no evidence to support an increased prevalence of risky sexual behavior or depression in poor neighborhoods, and it did not affect the chances of being diagnosed with the infection.

Young adults and chlamydia

Teens and young adults only make up 25 percent of the sexually active population, but they account for half of all new STDs annually, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Chlamydia is the predominant STD in the country, and while curable, it can cause infertility in women.

"Adolescents and young adults are the most likely to experience chlamydia infection in the U.S.," said Jodi Ford, lead author of the study. "This study strengthens the evidence that to fully address the sexual health needs of this population, STI prevention efforts should also acknowledge the effects of neighborhood poverty."

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