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Updating you about current events in the battle against addictions

Pessimism And Risky Behaviors

It is a commonly held belief that youth engage in risky behavior because they think they will never die. However findings from a new study seem to challenge this notion that "...risky behavior reflects a youthful sense of immortality..."

The findings published in the July issue of the journal *Pediatrics* come from a three year study which aimed to track attitudes and behaviors among more than 20,000 teens in grades 7-12 at the start of the study. Interviews were used to gauge the teens' views of their own mortality and to determine the degree to which they engaged in risky or destructive behaviors like suicide attempts, drug use and unprotected sex. According to the author Dr. Iris Wagman, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Minnesota, 15% of teens thought they had just a 50/50 chance of surviving to the age of 35. Youth with a more pessimistic outlook were more likely to engage in risky behaviors.

Race and wealth did appear to be important factors in this study. Just 10% of white teens had a pessimistic view compared to 15% of Asian youth, 21% of Hispanic youth, 26% of African American youth and 29% of Native American youth.

The authors found that perception and behavior appear to influence each other. Youth who predicted a shortened lifespan were more likely to engage in risky behavior in the future. However, youth who engaged in risky behavior during the first year of the study were also more likely to develop a pessimistic view.

The authors suggest that the key to preventing this cycle of pessimism and risky behavior is to focus on instilling optimism in youth. Some suggestions include encouraging parental involvement and attachment as well as creating safe and supportive school environments.

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