ABSTRACT

TITLE:	High or Low Risk? Sexual Health Knowledge, Risk Perception & Behavior Among College Students
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PRESENTED AT:	4th Annual Natural & Behavioral Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium, Fort Lewis College

ABSTRACT: Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have a high rate of transmission by means of sexual contact or exchange of bodily fluids (American College Health Association, 2007). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2008), 26% of women 14 to 19 in the U.S. are infected with one or more STIs. This study was conducted in partnership with the Fort Lewis College (FLC) Health Center, evaluating sexual health knowledge, risk perception, and behavior in a sample of 63 FLC students to discover whether sexual health knowledge predicts accuracy of risk perception, and any effect relationship context has on risk perception. More than one-third of participants lacked accurate knowledge, and participants generally did not accurately predict their risk for STIs. The study included a survey and personal interviews concerning use of clinic services, sexual health knowledge, sexual risk perception, high-risk sexual behavior, and interest in opportunities for education. Attitudes regarding contraceptives and communication with sexual partners about STIs were assessed. Independent t-tests examined differences between females and males for sexual health knowledge, sexual risk perception, and high risk sexual behavior. A two-way ANOVA was used to look at the interaction of gender and relationship type with condom use. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess factors related to risk perception, knowledge, and behaviors. Group differences by gender revealed a higher level of sexual health knowledge among females $t(58) = 2.34$, $p = .02$; similar levels of risk perception $t(56) = .09$, $p = .93$; and no statistically significant difference in behavioral risk $t(57) = 1.45$, $p = .15$. The difference in condom use within open relationships as compared with use in exclusive ones approached significance $F(1,30) = 4.01$, $p = .07$; both females and males were slightly more likely to use condoms in open relationships. Results did not support the hypothesis that knowledge would influence accuracy of risk perception. Although about two-thirds of participants had accurate knowledge, more knowledge did not correlate with more accurate risk perception. Neither was the hypothesis that relationship context would affect risk perception supported. These results suggest a need for both sexes to adopt action plans for safer sex.