Variables evaluated as potential predictors included demographic characteristics (age; race or ethnicity; marital status; and urban, rural or suburban residence), the scales for alcohol and illicit drug use, and a sexual behavior variable (age at first coitus). Generally, we entered demographic factors first into each logistic analysis. We also assessed interactions between significant demographic variables and each independent variable or scale.

We used direct standardization with sample weights in SUDAAN to demonstrate the independent effect of the alcohol scale on having multiple sexual partners in the previous three months. Probabilities were standardized for age, race or ethnicity, marital status and age at first intercourse. SUDAAN was used to calculate 95% confidence intervals for estimates. All estimates were based on weighted data.

Results

In all, 63% of females and 64% of males in our sample were sexually experienced (Table 1). Most sexually experienced respondents (72% of females and 50% of males) reported having had one partner in the past three months, although sizable proportions reported no recent partners (15% and 24%, respectively) or more than one (13% and 26%, respectively). Among those who were currently sexually active, 35% of males and 15% of females reported two or more sexual partners in the previous three months (not shown).

At every age, most sexually experienced young people reported two or more lifetime partners (Table 2). A progression to multiple lifetime partners was apparent even among 14- and 15-year-olds. The proportion of sexually experienced youth reporting six or more lifetime sexual partners rose from 8% at age 14 to 31% at age 21 among females and from 14% to 45% among males. Correspondingly, the proportion reporting one lifetime partner declined steadily with age. Among 21-year-olds, only 20% of sexually experienced females and 13% of sexually experienced males reported a single lifetime partner.

Next, we examined cross-tabulations between an individual’s number of recent sexual partners and potential risk factors (not shown). For females and males, age at first intercourse, alcohol use and illicit drug use were related to the number of sexual partners in the past three months. The proportion who had had multiple partners in the past three months increased from 7% among currently sexually active females who reported no alcohol-related behaviors to 61% among those who reported all five behaviors; among males, these proportions were 28% and 65%, respectively.

Married males and females had had fewer recent partners than their single counterparts. Among females, age, race or ethnicity and urban residence showed little relationship to the number of recent partners. Black males and males living in urban areas were somewhat more likely to report two or more partners than were those in other racial or ethnic groups and residents of nonurban areas.

Results of the first set of logistic regression analyses (Table 3) revealed that among those who were currently sexually active, married females were significantly less likely than their never-married counterparts to have had multiple partners in the past three months (odds ratio, 0.4). Alcohol use substantially raised the probability that a female had recently had multiple partners; the odds ratio (1.7) indicates that for each alcohol-related behavior a young woman reported, the likelihood that she had had multiple partners increased by about 70%. Illicit drug use also had a significant, although smaller, effect (1.2). Finally, young women who first had sex before age 14 were about twice as likely to have had multiple partners as were those whose first intercourse occurred at age 16 or later (2.0).

For currently sexually active males, many of the results were similar to those for females. Being married lowered the probability of having had multiple partners (0.1), and alcohol use substantially increased the odds (1.6). Early initiation of sexual intercourse raised the probability of multiple partners, and the effect was greater than for females. However, several notable differences also emerged. Black and Hispanic males were significantly more likely than whites to report multiple partners in the past three months (odds ratios, 2.8 and 1.4, respectively); illicit drug use did not affect the odds.

Urban residence was not significant in the final calculations for males. However, because of multicollinearity between race or ethnicity and urban status, we reran the analyses with race or ethnicity removed (not shown). In these calculations, urban residents were significantly more likely than suburban males to have had multiple partners (odds ratio, 1.5; p<.001).

The analyses estimating the effects of various factors on the odds of having had six or more lifetime sexual partners yielded generally similar results for each gender (Table 4). Alcohol use and illicit drug use showed substantial impact for both (odds ratios, 1.4–1.9). Older current age and earlier age at sexual initiation significantly increased the odds of having had six or more lifetime partners; this finding is not surprising, since both of these factors in-