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Sexual Consequences at the Most Recent Encounter in Emerging Adulthood: A Person-Centered Approach

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Introduction

Young adults report varying consequences of their sexual encounters, which may have downstream implications for their future sexual practices. In general, episodes characterized by high positive consequences (e.g., enhanced intimacy) tend to have low negative consequences (e.g., regret), but this correlation is relatively modest, suggesting considerable individual variability. To date, little is known about whether psychosocial consequences form coherent profiles, and if those profiles vary in meaningful ways. The sole personcentered inquiry centered on consequences following first intercourse, and revealed discrete gender-specific profiles of positive, negative, and mixed consequences (Vasilenko et al., 2022). However, it is unknown whether these findings generalize to other types of sexual encounters and how the profiles relate to individual characteristics and contextual factors. In this study, we explored the number and composition of profiles of consequences related to young adults' most recent sexual encounter (MRE) and to their encounters over the past year (LY). We also explored consistency in both sets of profiles and linked group membership to theoreticallyrelevant covariates.

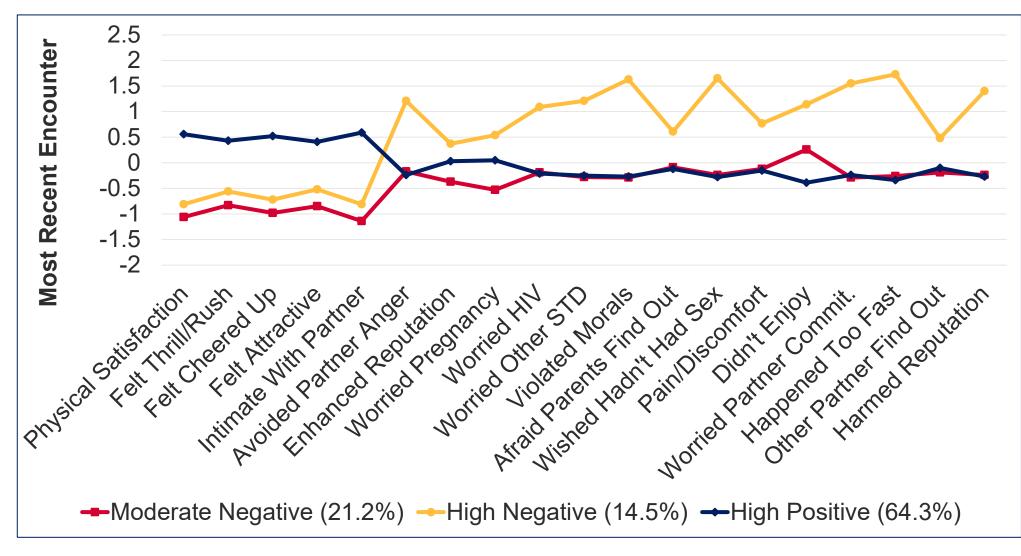
Method

Respondents were 258 sexually-experienced young adults ages 18-22 years (M = 19.48, SD = 1.23; 85.7% female, 87.8% European American, 90.3% heterosexual) from two U.S. universities. Participants completed an online survey about the characteristics and consequences of their most recent sexual encounter and of their encounters over the past year (Moilanen et al., 2023; Vasilenko et al., 2012), and standard measures of correlates.

Results

Profiles at the Most Recent Encounter

Cluster analysis of the 19 MRE consequences revealed three profiles: one with high positive and moderate negative (HP) consequences, and two with low positive and either moderate (MN) or high negative (HN) consequences.



Covariates of MRE Profiles

Respectively, the HP and HN profiles exhibited the best and worst patterns of sexual wellbeing (see Table 1). The HP profile was characterized by encounters with romantic partners that were recent, consensual, planned, and that involved penile-vaginal sex and low levels of condom use. The HN and MN profiles were more diverse in partner types and included more first encounters, but the MN profile reported less sexual experience and somewhat better wellbeing, whereas the HN profile reported the highest number of non-volitional encounters.

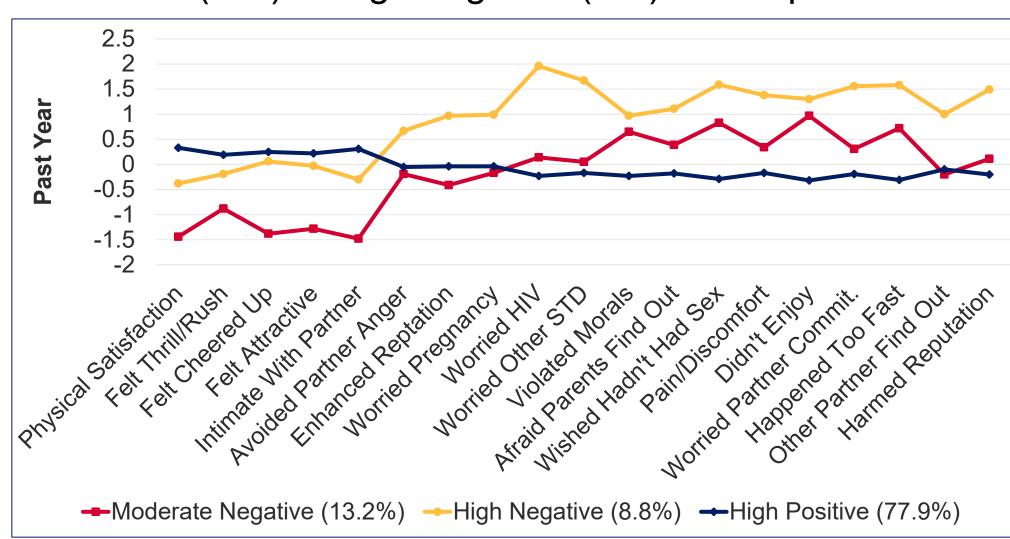




Table 1								
Covariates of MRE Profiles								
		t Recent Encounter I		-2/11				
	Mod. Negative	High Negative	High Positive	η^2 / V				
Operation			Mod. Negative (HP)					
Covariate		eristics (Indicators of		4 = 444				
Sexual Subjectivity	3.40 (.47) a	3.33 (.43) a	3.77 (.46) b	.15***				
Sexual Autonomy	3.23 (.58) ^a	2.87 (.59) b	3.41 (.51) a	.11***				
Sexual Anxiety	2.36 (.60) ^a	2.65 (.65) a	1.93 (.52) b	.20***				
Lifetime Number of Sexual	3.29 (1.25) ^a	3.69 (1.02) ^a	4.12 (.60) b	.14***				
Behaviors	0.47.44.04	0.44.44.00\		4 Oshabab				
Positive Emotions After	2.47 (1.01) ^a	2.41 (1.29) ^a	4.18 (.75) ^b	.46***				
Encounter	4.40.7.00\ 0	0.70 (4.40) b	4.44.4.00	4 7 4 4 4				
Negative Emotions After	1.46 (.66) ^a	2.70 (1.12) b	1.14 (.30) °	.47***				
Encounter	Destace							
Douting at Taxas	Partner a	and Encounter Chara	acteristics	20***				
Partner Type	07.50/ 0	04.00/.0	22 22/ h	.36***				
Romantic Partner	37.5% a	24.2% ^a	80.3% b					
Friend	20.8% a	33.3% a	7.9% b					
Former Romantic Partner	18.8% a	12.1% ^a	7.9% ^a					
Other Casual Partner	22.9% a	30.3% a	3.9% b					
First Encounter With This	43.1% ^a	57.1% ^a	12.5% b	.41***				
Partner								
Expect Future Encounters	52.4% ^a	28.1% ^a	92.5% b	.58***				
With This Partner								
Most Advanced Sexual				.33***				
Behavior in Encounter	7.00/ 0	0.00/ 0	0.00/					
Kissing	7.8% a	2.9% a	0.0%					
Petting	29.4% a	8.6% ab	3.2% b					
Oral Sex	17.6% ^a	20.0% a	11.0% a					
Coitus	45.1% a	62.9% a	82.6% b					
Anal Sex	0.0%	5.7% ^a	3.2% a					
Condom Risk #	21.6% ^a	37.1% ^{ab}	52.9% b	.26***				
Other Birth Control Risk #	9.8% ^a	20.0% a	15.0% a	.09				
Planned Encounter	54.0% ^{ab}	42.9% b	67.1% ^a	.19*				
Non-volitional Encounter	2.0% ^a	25.7% b	0.0% a	.45***				
Alcohol/Drugs Before	33.3% ^a	34.3% a	20.6% a	.14+				
Encounter								
Occurred Within Last Two	66.7% ^a	68.6% ^a	92.3% b	.32***				
Months								
Note. Mod. = Moderate. No statistics are reported for demographic variables, as there were no								
significant group differences for these covariates. #Scored as 0 = low risk (encounter did not involve								
oral, penile-vaginal, or anal sex; or encounter involved any of these behaviors and condoms were used)								
and 1 = high risk (encounter involved any of these behaviors but condoms were not used). Other birth								
control risk was scored similarly but referred to other forms of contraception (e.g., pills). Groups with								
different superscripts differ significantly, with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.								
p < .10. p < .05. p < .01. p < .001.								

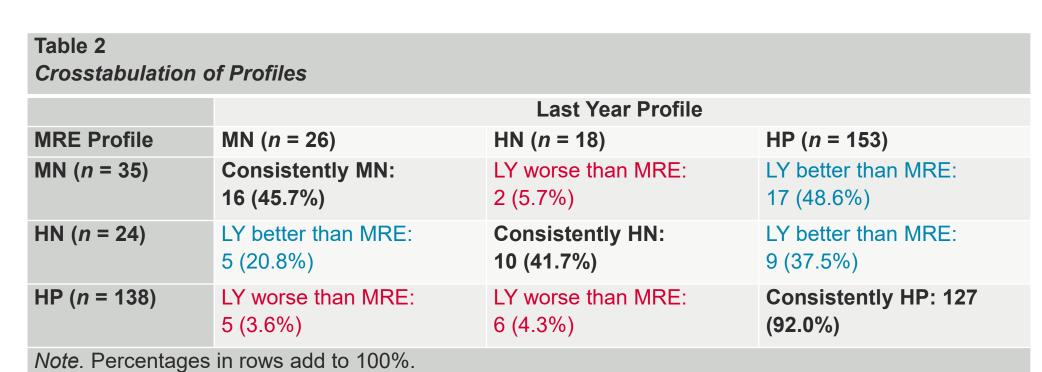
Profiles Over the Last Year

A separate cluster analysis of consequences over the last year (LY) revealed three profiles which resembled those at the MRE: one with high positive and moderate negative (HP) consequences, and two with low positive and either moderate (MN) or high negative (HN) consequences.



Consistency Across Profiles

There was consistency across the two sets of profiles, with most participants (77.7%) classified to the same profile in both analyses, $X^{2}(4) = 82.56$, p < .001, V = .46(see Table 2). Of those with inconsistent classifications across the two analyses, a larger proportion shifted from the MN and HN profiles at the last encounter to comparatively positive profiles over the last year (blue cells) rather than the reverse (red cells; 15.7% vs. 6.6%).



Covariates of LY Consequences Profiles

As in the MRE profile comparisons, the HP profile exhibited the most favorable pattern across the past year and lifetime sexual wellbeing indicators (see Table 3): relative to the MN and HN profiles, they reported higher sexual self-restraint, sexual subjectivity and autonomy, and lower sexual anxiety.

Table 3				
Covariates of LY Profiles				
		Last Year Profile		
	Mod. Negative	High Negative	High Positive	η^2 / V
	Low Positive (MN)	Low Positive (HN)	Mod. Negative (HP)	
Covariate	Individual Demo	graphic Characteris	tics and Lifetime	
	Indic	ators of Sexual Well	being	
Age	18.74 (.81) ^a	19.11 (.96) ab	19.64 (1.26) b	.07***
White	77.8 % ^a	77.8% ab	92.9% b	.21*
Sexual Self-Restraint	3.59 (.86) ^{ab}	3.24 (.73) a	3.68 (.66) b	.03*
Sexual Subjectivity	3.33 (.37) a	3.58 (.44) ab	3.76 (.46) b	.11***
Sexual Autonomy	3.01 (.68) ^a	3.00 (.56) a	3.39 (.54) b	.08***
Sexual Anxiety	2.56 (.48) ^a	2.50 (.48) a	1.95 (.54) b	.18***
Lifetime Sexual Experiences				
(yes/no)				
Petting	92.6% a	100.0% ab	99.4% b	.19*
Oral Sex	85.2% a	94.4% ab	97.5% b	.20*
Penile-Vaginal Sex	63.0% a	94.4% b	89.3% b	.27***
Anal Sex	7.4%	16.7%	23.9%	.14
Any Lifetime	26.9%	52.9%	25.7%	.17+
Nonconsensual Sexual				
Experiences				
Age of Coital Debut	17.29 (1.07)	16.18 (2.01)	16.79 (1.70)	.02
	Last Year Relationa	l and Sexual Behavi		
Any Romantic	84.2% ^a	100.0% ab	97.3% b	.22*
Relationships in LY				
Positive Emotions After	2.57 (.85) ^a	3.56 (1.16) b	4.31 (.67) °	.40***
Sexual Encounters				
Negative Emotions After	2.52 (1.13) ^a	2.88 (.76) ^a	1.52 (.58) b	.33***
Sexual Encounters	0.00 (0.05)	= 44 (0 00) h		4 = 0.00
Number of Penile-Vaginal	2.28 (2.85) ^a	5.41 (3.06) b	6.04 (2.96) b	.15***
Encounters	4.00 (0.40) 0	0.07 (0.00) h	4.00 (4.05)	0044
Number of Penile-Vaginal	1.93 (2.48) ^a	3.67 (2.66) b	1.89 (1.85) ^a	.06**
Partners	20.00/ 2	77 00/ h	70. 40/ b	20***
Inconsistent Condom Use	30.8% ^a	77.8% b	76.1% b	.33***
Inconsistent Other Birth	31.3%	23.5%	19.7%	.08
Control Use	47.8% a	88.9% b	34.0% a	.32***
Any Casual Sex	26.1% ^{ab}	52.9% ^a		.26***
Any One-Night Stands	17.4% ^{ab}		16.0% b	.23**
Any High Risk Partners	21.7% ^a	27.8% ^a 66.7% ^b	6.4% b	.25**
Alcohol/Drugs Before Any	Z1.1 /0 ~	00.7 70 ~	58.2% ^{ab}	.25
Encounters Any Unplanned Encounters	51.9%	33.3%	35.7%	.12
	3.7% ^{ab}	11.1% ^a	1.3% b	.12
Any Non-volitional	J. 7 / 0	11.170 -	1.3 /0 ~	. 10
Encounters <i>Note.</i> Mod. = Moderate. No sta	tistics are reported for	other demographic v	ariables, as there were	no
Note. Mod. – Moderate. No sta	usuos are reported for	otner demographic va	anables, as there were	

As before, relative to the MN class, the HP and HN profiles reported greater lifetime sexual experience. In the past year, most of these participants reported having at least one romantic relationship. The HP profile reported higher positive and lower negative emotions after sexual encounters than both other profiles. The HP and HN classes reported having more frequent coitus and more inconsistent condom use than the MN class, but the HN profile reported higher numbers of coital partners and greater involvement in higher-risk practices and nonvolitional encounters in the last year.

significant group differences for these covariates. Group differences for number of oral sex partners and

encounters were consistent with those reported above for penile-vaginal sex and are thus not reported

The profiles did not differ in reports of anal sex during the past year. Groups with different superscripts

differ significantly, with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

⁺ *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Discussion

The present study demonstrates that young adults' experiences of sexual consequences at the MRE and over the LY form coherent profiles. There was also consistency across the sets of profiles, particularly for the HP class, which was the largest and comprised youth who reported the most favorable array of consequences and correlates.

While the cross-sectional design precludes directional interpretations, these findings suggest that many young adults experience favorable profiles of consequences in the context of romantic relationships, which ideally provide a setting for shared exploration of sexual fulfillment. Repeated sexual encounters with a consistent partner may serve as a supportive setting for the development of sexual subjectivity and autonomy, which may in turn reduce sexual anxiety. In contrast, there is greater diversity in the partner types and the characteristics of encounters in which young adults experience comparatively less positive consequences. While relative sexual inexperience or unfamiliarity with a partner may hinder experiencing positive consequences at the most recent encounter and in aggregate over the last year, higher-risk and non-volitional encounters tend to culminate in elevated negative consequences.

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Study Measurement Details

See Crockett et al. (2023) and Moilanen et al. (2023) for details about the measures of the characteristics of the partner and the most recent encounter and of the aggregate experiences over the past year.

Measure	Source	# Items	α	Sample Item	Response Scale	M (SD) / %	Range
Sexual Consequences at the Most Recent		19		"Wished you had not had sex."			
Encounter	Moilanen et al.'s (2023)				16 6 6 6 6 10		
Sexual Consequences Over the Past Year	modification of Vasilenko et al. (2012)	19		"Felt close to partner."	1 (not at all) to 5 (very much)		
	, , ,			•			
				tics and Lifetime Indicators of Sexua		1	T
Sexual Self-Restraint	Galliot and Baumeister (2007)	10	.83	"When I set a limit on my sexual behaviors, I stick to what I had planned."	1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me)	3.67 (.70)	1.30 – 5.00
Sexual Subjectivity	Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2006) and Zimmer-Gembeck and French (2016)	27	.88	"I would expect a sexual partner to be responsive to my sexual needs and feelings."	1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)	3.63 (.49)	1.76 – 4.90
Sexual Autonomy	Hensel and Fortenberry	3	.71	"It's easy for me to say no if I don't want to have sex."	1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly	3.28 (.57)	1.33 – 4.00
Sexual Anxiety	(2013)	5	.81	"I worry about being taken advantage of sexually."	agree)	2.12 (.61)	1.00 – 3.80
Lifetime Number of Sexual Behaviors		5		Count of behaviors reported in lifetime (i.e., kissing, petting, oral sex, penile-vaginal intercourse, anal sex)	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	3.91 (.88)	1 - 5
Lifetime Sexual Experience: Petting		2		"In your lifetime, have you ever felt or touched each other above the waist (light petting)?"	0 (no: neither light or heavy petting) to 1 (yes: either/both light and/or heavy petting)	96.9%	0 - 1
Lifetime Sexual Experience: Oral Sex		2		"In your lifetime, have you ever received oral sex from a partner?"	0 (no: neither received or gave oral sex) to 1 (yes: either/both given and/or received oral sex)	90.7%	0 - 1
Lifetime Sexual Experience: Penile-Vaginal Sex		1		"Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a partner?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	79.1%	0 - 1
Lifetime Sexual Experience: Anal Sex		1		"Have you ever had anal intercourse with a partner?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	22.1%	0 - 1
Any Lifetime Nonconsensual Sexual Experience		1		"In your lifetime, have you ever been forced, threatened, coerced, or pressure to engage in any sexual activities when you didn't want to?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	26.4%	0 - 1
Age of Coital Debut	Moilanen and Manuel (2018)	1		"How old were you in years the first time you had sexual intercourse?"	Age in years	16.65 (1.64)	10 - 21

		Chara	cteristics (of the Most Recent Encounter			
Positive & Negative Emotions After the	Owen et al. (2011)	P: 5	.93	"Happy"	1 (not at all) to 5 (very much)	3.57 (1.23)	1 - 5
Encounter	Owen et al. (2011)	N: 5	.89	"Awkward"	1 (not at ait) to 3 (very much)	1.43 (.78)	1 - 5
Partner Type	Crockett et al. (2023)	1		"What was your relationship with this partner?"	1 (romantic partner) 2 (friend or friend with benefits) 3 (former romantic partner) 4 (other casual partner: a hookup, booty call, fuck buddy, stranger, prostitute, or customer)	RP: 63.5% FR: 14.2% FRP: 10.7% OC: 11.6%	1 - 4
First Encounter with Partner		1		"Was this your first encounter with this partner?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	25.9%	0 - 1
Expect Future Encounters with Partner		1		"Do you expect to have any sexual encounters with this partner again in the future?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	72.8%	0 - 1
Most Advanced Sexual Behavior in Encounter		5		"From the list below, indicate which behaviors were included in that [most recent] encounter:"	1 (kissing) to 5 (anal sex)	K: 2.1% P: 9.5% O: 13.7% PV: 71.8% A: 2.9%	0 - 5
Condom Risk (CR) & Other Birth Control Risk (OBC)	Crockett et al. (2023)	10		"If any, what type(s) of birth control did you or your partner use at this most recent encounter? Please check all that apply."	0 (low risk: encounter did not involve oral, penile-vaginal, or anal sex; or encounter involved any of these behaviors and condoms/other forms of contraception were used) to 1 (high risk: encounter involved any of these behaviors but condoms/other forms of contraception were not used)	CR: 41.9% OBC: 14.6%	0 - 1
Planned Encounter	Crockett et al. (2023)	1		"Was this encounter expected/planned?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	60.2%	0 - 1
Non-Volitional Encounter	Crockett et al. (2023) Moilanen et al. (2023)	1		"Was this encounter in any way against your will? 'Against your will? 'Against your will' means that your partner tried to engage in sexual activity with you when you didn't want to; they may have tried to force, threaten, pressure, or coerce you into this encounter."	0 (no) to 1 (yes/unsure)	4.3%	0 - 1
Alcohol/Drugs Before Encounter	Crockett et al. (2023)	1		"Had you used alcohol or any other intoxicating substance prior to the encounter?"	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	26.2%	0 - 1
Occurred Within the Last two Months	Moilanen et al. (2023)	1		"How recently did this encounter occur?"	1 (within the past week) to 7 (more than one year ago); recoded to 0 (more than two months ago) to 1 (within the last two months)	82.9%	0 - 1

	L	ast Year Re	lational aı	nd Sexual Behavioral Characteristics			
Any Romantic Relationships in the Last Year		1		"Approximately how many people have you had a romantic relationship with in the past year?"	0 (zero) to 6 (five or more); recoded to 0 (zero) to 1 (one or more)	90.8%	0 - 1
Positive & Negative Emotions After Last Year Sexual Encounters		P: 5	.90	"Excited"	1 (not at all) to 5 (very much)	3.92 (1.04)	1 - 5
	Owen et al. (2011)	N: 5	.83	"Disappointed"		1.81 (.86)	1 - 5
Number of Penile-Vaginal Encounters		1		"How many times have you had sexual intercourse during the past year?"	0 (zero times) to 8 (13 or more times)	5.51 (3.19)	0 - 8
Number of Penile-Vaginal Partners	Crockett et al. (2023)	1		"With how many partners have you had sexual intercourse during the past year?"	0 (zero partners) to 10 (10 or more partners)	2.05 (2.07)	0 - 10
Inconsistent Condom Use & Inconsistent Other Birth Control Use	Crockett et al. (2023)	9		"Thinking of all the times that you had sexual intercourse during the past 12 months, about what proportion of the time have you or a partner used each of these forms of birth control?"	For each method, original response scale was from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time), which we recoded to 0 (used condoms/other birth control all of the time) to 1 (used condoms/other birth control less than all of the time)	CR: 70.4% OBC: 21.1%	0 - 1
Any Casual Sex	Crockett et al.'s (2023) adaption of Cooper et al. (1998)	1		"How recently did you last engage in casual sex?"	0 (no instances in the last year) to 1 (any instances within the last year)	40.6%	0 - 1
Any One-Night Stands		1		"How recently did you last have a one-night stand?"		20.4%	0 - 1
Any High Risk Partners		2		"How recently did you last have oral, penile-vaginal, or anal intercourse with a stranger or prostitute?" "How recently did you last have oral, penile-vaginal, or anal intercourse with a high-risk partner? A high risk partner is someone who has had many sexual partners, has used IV drugs, or is infected with HIV/AIDS."		9.6%	0 - 1
Alcohol/Drugs Before Any Encounters		1		"How recently did you last have oral, penile-vaginal, or anal intercourse while under the influence of alcohol or drugs?"		54.6%	0 - 1
Any Unplanned Encounters	Crockett et al. (2023)	1		Modification of most recent encounter variable that denotes whether that unplanned encounter occurred in the last year	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	37.6%	0 - 1
Any Non-Volitional Encounters	Crockett et al. (2023)	1		Modification of most recent encounter variable that denotes whether that non-volitional encounter occurred in the last year.	0 (no) to 1 (yes)	2.5%	0 - 1

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