

Attitude on Premarital Sex, Marriage and Family Size among Adolescents in Pokhara Valley

¹Deepak Raj Paudel

¹School of Business, Pokhara University, Kaski, Nepal

ABSTRACT

This is a cross-sectional descriptive study aimed to assess the attitude on premarital sex, marriage and family size among school going adolescents in Pokhara valley in 2006. The study included 400 students carried out from 170 from 8 government schools and 230 from 8 private schools of the classes X, XI, and XII of the Pokhara valley. The self administered questionnaire prepared in Nepali method was applied for collecting information from randomly selected students in each selected school. Out of total, 57.5 % students were boys and 91% were in age group of 15-18 years. About two-fifths (41%) of the students did not agree with the statement that "premarital sex is not good". This attitude was higher in boys than girls (46% versus 34%) and in government school students than private school students (57% versus 33%). More than half (62%) students preferred arranged marriage, and it comprised 73% of girls and 53% of boys. Almost all of the students (97%) were of the opinion that a couple should not have more than two children. Of total, 85% of the students preferred to have one son. The preference of a son is slightly higher in girls (87%) than in boys (84%). About half of the students (53%) were aware that biologically male is responsible for the sex of the child. This knowledge was higher in the boys (54%) and those studying in government school (58%) than girl students (51%) and private school students (50%). This concludes that male were more liberal towards premarital sex, self arranged marriage, sex preference than girls.

Key words: Attitude, Premarital Sex, Marriage, Adolescents, Family Size

Corresponding address: Deepak Raj Paudel, School of Business, Pokhara University, Kaski, Nepal.
E-mail: deepakpauldel@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

A series of studies on the adolescent and youth population have been carried out in different countries. Earlier studies related to knowledge and attitude on marriage and sexual behavior of adolescents reveal that a substantial proportion of young people in many countries engage in largely unprotected premarital sex.¹ A study carried out in Thailand among young people aged 10-24 years indicated that parents appeared to play a minor role in informing their children about issues related to sexuality. The adolescents sought advice from peers and friends, who might be equally uninformed or incorrectly informed, rather than from their parents. The adolescents realized that it might not be considered appropriate for young people to be engaged in premarital sex, but they regarded it as normal behavior. In fact it is now apparent that Nepal has entered the stage of a "concentrated epidemic", i.e. the HIV/AIDS prevalence consistently exceeds 5% in one or more sub-groups.² Nepal is one of the least developed countries characterized by an average of low socio-economic status of people and a high young age structure. Approximately three-fifth of the total population of Nepal is age 25 and under.³ Basic reproductive health services are grossly underused by most young couples aged 10 to 24 in the country. Less than one quarter (23%) of the married women aged 20 to 24 years and only 12% of those aged 19 and under practice family planning.⁴

Activities, CREHPA administered a baseline survey to the people aged 24 and under. The baseline survey, conducted in October 2000, covered a total sample of 1,000 respondents from the two experimental sites and 800 from the two control sites as well as studies done by this organization from the follow up surveys after the date concluded that there was almost universal awareness of at least one family planning method.⁵ NDHS demonstrated that knowledge of AIDS is much higher among men (72%) than among women (50%).⁴ Although women's knowledge of AIDS is lower than men's, the percentage of women who have heard of AIDS has nearly doubled in the last five years from 27 % in 1996. Two-fifths of women and two-thirds of men believe there is a way to avoid HIV/AIDS. The findings of the survey indicated least prevalence of knowledge among respondents living in the Western mountain sub-region.⁴ Parajuli and Wolfgang carried out the research on "Knowledge, Attitude and Practices on HIV/AIDS and Sexual Behaviour" among campus students of Pokhara; and this study clearly showed that almost all students have heard about HIV/AIDS and overall knowledge about HIV/AIDS was sufficient.⁶

The countries in the Asian and Pacific region were aware of adolescent health needs long before the 1994 Conference and have responded in various ways to meet those needs, mainly through Information, Education and Communication (IEC), population education, and family life education program. While the onset of adolescence is usually associated with the

commencement of puberty and the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, the end of adolescence is less well defined. Adolescents find themselves facing new opportunities and are eager to assume new responsibilities. It is also a formative stage in terms of sexual and reproductive maturity. During this phase of transition from childhood, adolescents are often confused about the physical and emotional changes in their bodies and feel hesitant and embarrassed to discuss them with anyone. Therefore, adolescence is a critical period which influences one's reproductive health and well-being throughout life. Adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to the biological and social changes taking place during this time and their effects, owing to the existing inequity between the sexes. According to recent statistics, more than 50% of the world's population is below the age of 25 and one fifth were adolescents.⁷ In the countries of the ESCAP region, adolescents comprise about one fifth of the total population and, when added to the 20-24 year-old cohort, form 29% of the population.⁸ As this is a large percentage of the population, any change in the pattern of education, behavior, age at marriage and lifestyle of adolescents would have a significant impact on the societies in which they live.

Adolescence in general is a complex period and often not well understood by either adolescents themselves or adults. This is particularly true in relation to sexuality and reproductive health. In recent years, a number of factors have affected sexual behavior and reproductive health-related risks. These include an increase in age at marriage, improved levels of literacy, change in cultural values brought about by rapid socio-economic changes such as globalization, urbanization, widespread availability and use of communication technologies, high migration rates, and decline in the prevalence of the extended family system. There are a large number of publications, reports, researches on knowledge, attitude and sexual behavior of the different targeted groups. However, there are very few studies that have been done from the perspective of school going children and their knowledge and attitudes on marriage and sexual behavior. This study might help concerned authorities to plan appropriate programs in accordance with the necessity of the various groups of people, especially for Pokhara valley. The objective of this study is to identify the knowledge, attitudes on premarital sex, marriage and family size among school going adolescents in Pokhara valley.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross- sectional descriptive was conducted in Pokhara Sub-metropolitan city of Kaski district in 2006. The study was done among 400 students studying in class X, XII and XII in sixteen schools of Pokhara metropolitan city. Out of the 16 schools selected for the study, 8 were private English medium schools and eight schools were government schools. From each school, 25 students - approximately 8 from each X, XI and XII classes were randomly selected for the survey.

Attendance registers of the classes were used as sampling frame and students were selected systematically after a random start. The selected students were taken in separate class room and structured questionnaire was administered to collect the relevant information. The self administered structured questionnaire was prepared in Nepali and given to the students to fill by themselves. The students were briefly informed about the purpose of the study, explained how to answer questions in the questionnaire and were encouraged to ask questions if they faced any difficulty in filling the answers. They were assured about the confidentiality of their responses and they were asked not to write their names, addresses or any such things which could identify them.

RESULTS

Out of total 400 students, 230 were from private school and 170 from government schools. Of total, 52.5% were boys and 47.5% were girls (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of study population

School Type	Number of students	Percentage
Government	170	42.5
Private	230	57.5
Gender		
Boys	210	52.5
Girls	190	47.5

Out of total students, 91% of the students were in the age group of 15 to 18 years. Most of these students (86%) were staying with parents (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage distribution of students by their socio-demographic factors

	Government	Private	Boys	Girls	All
Age					
14	3	0.5	1.6	0.8	1.3
15	21	12.3	10	22.8	15.2
16	36	23.1	29.5	24.4	27.4
17	18	26.1	25.5	20.3	23.4
18	13	30.6	24	26	24.8
19 or more	9	7.4	9.4	5.7	7.9
Staying with					
Parents	86.9	84.8	80.7	91.3	85.5
Relative and other arrangements	13.1	15.2	19.3	8.7	14.5
Total number of students	170	230	210	190	400

Of total, 62% preferred arranged marriage. Girls were more in favor of arranged marriage than the boys (73% and 53%). Similarly, government school students were more in favor of arranged marriage than the private school students

(65% and 60%). About four-fifths of the students felt that inter-caste marriage should be encouraged. More boys were in favor of inter-caste marriage than girls. Similarly private school students were in favor of inter-caste marriage than the government school students. Only 16% of private school students disagreed with statements while 21% of the government school students disagreed with the inter-caste marriage. Most of the students were also in favor (62%) of intra-religion marriage. But more students were in favor of inter-caste marriage than the intra- religion marriage. Opinion on intra-religion marriage did not significantly differ by type of sex but it is significantly different by type of school. Private school students were more favor with respect to the intra-religion marriage than the government school (73% vs. 43(Table 3).

Table 3: Students’ attitude on marriage and premarital sex (percentage)

	Gov.	Private	Boys	Girls	All
Arranged marriage by parents/relatives is the best way to getting married					
Disagree	34.9	39.5	46.9	27.1	37.9
Agree	46.5	47.2	38.6	57.1	46.9
Fully Agree	18.6	13.3	14.5	15.9	15.1
Inter-caste marriage should be encouraged					
Disagree	21.1	15.7	15.0	20.5	17.5
Agree	43.8	60.2	52.4	57.3	54.6
Fully Agree	35.2	24.1	32.5	22.2	27.9
Intra-religion marriage should be discouraged					
Disagree	42.5	72.5	60.3	64.7	62.3
Agree	36.2	19.0	27.9	21.2	24.9
Fully Agree	21.3	8.5	11.8	14.1	12.8
It is not good to have pre-marital sex					
Disagree	56.7	32.7	46.3	34.1	40.8
Agree	26.8	37.5	31.7	36.5	33.9
Fully Agree	16.5	29.8	22.0	29.4	25.3
Pre- marital sex is alright if both partner agree					
Disagree	50.4	41.4	30.4	61.5	44.1
Agree	30.7	40.2	43.0	29.6	37.0
Fully Agree	18.9	18.5	26.6	8.9	18.6
Sexual experience is necessary before marriage					
Disagree	53.5	57.6	37.2	79.1	56.2
Agree	31.0	27.6	40.6	14.5	28.8
Fully Agree	15.5	14.8	22.2	6.4	15.0
A male can go for premarital sex but a woman should not					
Disagree	70.1	80.2	69.6	85.3	76.7
Agree	18.9	15.4	20.1	12.4	16.6
Fully Agree	11.0	4.5	10.3	2.4	6.7
Total number of students	170	230	210	190	400

An analysis of questions on attitude towards sexual practices show that about two-fifths (41%) of the students did not mind having a premarital sex. Attitude towards premarital

sex was high in boys (46%) than in girls (34 %). Similarly this attitude was higher in government school students (67%) than in private school students (43%). More than half (56 %) of the students felt that pre-marital sex is alright if both partner agree. This attitude was high in boys (70%) and private school (59%) than in girls (38%) and government school (49%). A large proportion of girls (79%) disagree that sexual experience is necessary before marriage. Regarding the attitudes on ‘ a male can go for premarital sex but a women should not’, about three-fourths (77%) of the students were against this opinion. More girls were against this aspect.

Table 4: Students opinion about family size (percentage)

	Government	Private	Boys	Girls	All
Number of children a couple should have					
1	9.2	7.2	9.2	6.4	7.9
2	89.2	89.6	86.9	92.5	89.4
3 or more	1.6	3.2	3.9	1.2	2.7
Average number of children	1.9	2.0	2.0	1.9	2.0
Number of sons a couple should have					
0	10.8	6.6	7.5	8.7	8
1	81.5	87.3	84	86.7	85.3
2 or more	7.7	6.1	8.5	4.6	6.7
Number of daughters a couple should have					
0	0	4.1	4.6	0.6	2.7
1	92.3	90.2	89.2	93.1	91.0
2 or more	7.7	5.9	6.4	6.3	6.3
Who should decide about the number of children					
Husband	6.2	0.8	2.4	2.9	2.6
Wife	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9
Both	87.7	96.0	93.7	92.5	93.2
Other members of the family	3.1	0.4	1.0	1.7	1.3
Total number of students	170	230	210	190	400

Almost all of the students (97%) were of the opinion that a couple should not have more than two children. Of total, 90% of the students gave the opinion of two children and only 8% of the students preferred only one child. 85% of the students’ preferred to have one son. The preference of a son is slightly higher in females (87%) than in males (84%). Similarly, preference of exactly one son is higher in private school than the government school. Only, 8% of the students preferred any sons while only 3 % of the students preferred any girls. Almost all the girls (99.4%) preferred there should be at least one girl. Preference of at least one girl is higher than the preference of at least one boy. Only about half of the students (53%) of the students were aware that biologically male is responsible for the sex of the child. This information was relatively better among the boys (54%) and those studying in government school (58%) than girl students (51%) and private school students (50%). A probing that between husband and

wife who should decide about the number of children a couple should have, about 93 % felt that it should be jointly decided by both husband and wife (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

Out of total 57.5 % are male students and rest are female students and 91% in age group 15-18 years. More than half (62%) students preferred arranged marriage. Girls were more in favor of arranged marriage than the boys (73% versus 53%). Similarly, government school students were more in favor of arranged marriage than the private school students (65% and 60%). About four-fifths of the students felt that inter-caste marriage should be encouraged. More boys were in favor of inter-caste marriage than girls. Similarly private school students were in favor of inter-caste marriage than the government school students.

In the study 41% of the students did not mind having a premarital sex. In contrast to this study, 19% youth were agreed with the approval of premarital sex in India.⁹ In contrast to this study, a study conducted in Dhankuta district of Nepal revealed 16% of adolescents preferred premarital sex.¹⁰ In the study, attitude on premarital sex was high in boys (46% versus 34%) and government school students than in private school students (57% versus 33%). Again in contrast to the study, it was found that only 27.9 % of males and 7.2 % of females approved premarital sex and 54% of males and 74 % of females disapproved premarital sex in two cities of India.¹¹ It shows that boys are more liberal towards premarital sex than girls. Similar gender difference was observed in a study conducted in New Delhi that females were less likely

than males to report that it is okay to engage in premarital sex if the male and female love one another (14% vs. 33%).¹² It is also interesting the students of private schools appeared to be less to liberal premarital or extramarital sex than students of government schools. Regarding the attitudes on ' a male can go for premarital sex but a women should not', about three-fourths (77%) of the students were against this opinion. More girls were against this aspect. It means that if a man has right to go for premarital sex, then a woman can also go for sex.

Almost all of the students (97%) were of the opinion that a couple should not have more than two children. More than half (62%) students preferred arranged marriage. Similarly, government school students were more in favor of arranged marriage than the private school students (65% and 40%). Almost all the girls (99.4%) preferred there should be at least one girl. Preference of at least one girl is higher than the preference of at least one boy. Only about half of the students (53%) of the students were aware that biologically male is responsible for the sex of the child. This information was relatively better among the boys (54%) and those studying in government school (58%) than girl students (51%) and private school students (50%). This analysis thus reveals that while concept of small family size norm has been well accepted by the young generation, but they still need information on biological fact that between husband and wife who is responsible for the sex of the child. Female students, particularly those studying in government schools need orientation. We can conclude that boys students were more liberal towards premarital sex, self arranged marriage, sex preference than girls.

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