



DETERMINANTS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG NEVER-MARRIED INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN COIMBATORE CITY

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Abstract

Human beings are the top most creatures on the earth having sixth sense, i.e., to move with others socially. The pattern of sexual relation and behavior among human beings differ across the countries in the world and it depends upon the prevailing life styles of a country. Studying sexual behavior, especially premarital sexual behavior is getting more importance since there has been a drastic and sporadic incident of HIV / AIDS and STDs resulting from multipartner and unsafe sexual relations and only a few studies have done so far in the Indian context. Further, earlier studies are mostly descriptive or exploratory in nature and thereby the differentials in sexual activity have been examined to a little extent, mostly with age, sex, rural-urban residence etc. The determinants of premarital sexual activities controlling for other factors (background and socio-economic characteristics) have also not been studied in detail. The present study is, therefore, intends to examine the sexual behavior among adolescent unmarried industrial workers (who are more vulnerable to premarital sexual activity) in Coimbatore city, one of the major industrial cities of Tamil Nadu state. In this study, a multivariate analysis was carried out to understand the net effect of the background variables on sexual behavior (index) of 160 never-married workers. The result highlighted that given the condition the respondents who ever had higher participation in risk behavior (gambling, smoking, drinking, tobacco and use of drugs) and exposure to mass media and older by age (among the never-married men), are more likely to participate in premarital sexual relations.

All living beings on the earth are to reproduce and grow their generation including human beings. Human beings are the top most creatures on the earth having sixth sense, i.e., to move with others socially. The pattern of sexual relation and behavior among human beings differ across the countries in the world and it depends upon the prevailing life styles of a country. Further, it is different from one region to other region within a country and also different from one community to other community. People in the primitive tribal community have polygamy and polyandry systems and people in modern societies do have sexual relations with many persons. On the other hand, in traditional and more orthodox communities which are bound by norms and customs the practice of having sexual relations with many persons is strongly and even condemned.

Importance of Premarital Sexual Behaviour

Studying sexual behavior, especially premarital sexual behavior is getting more importance in the recent past since there has been a drastic and sporadic incident of HIV / AIDS and STDs resulting from multipartner and unsafe sexual relations. It might be due to the pace of modernization. Modernization may have strong impact on sexual behavior of the people in the world (Nash, 1984; Billet, 1993). It has been suggested that institutional changes forced by modernization modify cultural practices, values and attitudes relating to life styles in general and of sexual behavior of people in particular. This is otherwise called westernization or western culture. This has been first originated in the western countries and gradually spread over most of the African countries. It has been noted that contact with western societies had a larger impact on many southern African societies and cultures, through economic changes, urbanization, education and religion (Letamo, 1993; Motshologanse, 1978). These changes altered the religious customs and practices, which in turn lead to a gradual change in sexual norms and behavior. Consequently, change in marriage customs, especially later ages at marriage and the abandonment of formal polygamy, non-marital (both pre-marital and extra marital sexual activity) tends to be on increasing side (Solway, 1990). In developing countries like India heterosexual relationship is acceptable only after the marriage has taken place, whereas in developed countries such sexual relationship is somewhat liberal outside marriage. Consequently, the age at entry into sexual relation is earlier in the latter situation than in the former one.

Kinsey et al., (1948) was a forerunner who studied the sexual behavior in men and women in the United States. After that, there have been many surveys done on sexual behavior patterns in many western countries. However, in developing countries like India, not many studies have been done; so knowledge about the pattern of sexual behavior in the Indian population is lacking. This is mainly because, sex is a topic which is rarely talked about in India. In many traditional and conservative societies, sex is still considered taboo and sexual matters are not generally discussed in the family. Hence, an extensive study on sexual behavior of people in different communities is relevant to social demographers and medical demographers because of its close association with marriage, fertility and the spread of sexual transmitted diseases (STDS).



Need for the Study

There is an emerging need for studying the adolescent and their sexual behavior since only a few studies have done so far in the Indian context. Further, earlier studies are mostly descriptive or exploratory in nature and thereby the differentials in sexual activity have been examined to a little extent, mostly with age, sex, rural-urban residence etc. The determinants of premarital sexual activities controlling for other factors (background and socio-economic characteristics) have also not been studied in detail. In the light of the preceding discussions it is crucial to study the knowledge about, attitude towards and the practice of sexual behavior among the adolescents. This has become an emerging area of research for the social scientists and demographers in the recent past. This is because of the increasing incidence of premarital sexual activity among adolescents which in turn may lead to illegitimate births, illicit abortions, spread of STDs and HIV / AIDS, especially in African countries and in the recent past in India too. The present study is, therefore, intends to examine the sexual behavior among adolescent unmarried industrial workers (who are more vulnerable to premarital sexual activity) in Coimbatore city, one of the major industrial cities of Tamil Nadu state.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is :

- To find out the net effect of some of the background characteristics of never-married men on their sexual behavior.

Sample Frame and Size

This study has been conducted in Coimbatore city, which is purposively selected, since it is one of the major industrial cities in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, it is felt that the incidence of sexual behavior would likely to be high in urban setting. Six industries were selected at random and from that there were a total of 176 never-married workers of which 160 were interviewed and the remaining refused to give information either fully or partially. In this study, a multivariate analysis was carried out to understand the net effect of the background variables on sexual behavior (index) of the respondents.

Details about the Computation of Indices

1. **Sexual Behaviour Index:** With the information obtained from the respondents' experiences in one or other forms of sexual behavior, a sexual Behaviour Index was framed by assigning weights.

Forms of Sexual Behaviour	Weights to the Responses
1. Deep Kissing	0 = Not practiced 1 = Had kissing
2. Placing of hand on sex organ	0 = Not placed 1 = Placed
3. Masturbation	0 = Not practiced 1 = Practiced
4. Premarital Sexual Intercourse	0 = Not practices 1 = Practiced
5. Homosexual Contact	0 = No 1 = Yes

The weight used for each variable is the reciprocal of the proportion of respondents who had practiced that form of behavior. For each respondent the weights have been added which forms the sexual Behaviour Index. The sum of weights describes the intensity of sexual behavior. To simplify the analysis, the sexual behavior index score is categorized into three groups viz., low (0), medium (1-4) and high (5-12).

2. Exposure to Mass Media (Index)

For calculating the respondents overall exposure to various channels of mass media scores were assigned to the frequency of exposure as given below:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------|
| 1. Reading News Paper | } | |
| 2. Reading Magazine | } | Never = 1 |
| 3. Reading Pornographic Books | } | Monthly = 2 |
| 4. Watching Cinema | } | Weekly = 3 |
| 5. Watching TV | } | Daily = 4 |



6. Watching Pornographic Films } }

The assigned scores were then pooled together for each of the respondent separately and thus, the exposure to mass media index was obtained, which ranges from 9-22. The total score was graded and classified into lower (9-15), moderate (16-18) and higher (19-22). Here, higher the total score of the respondents, higher will be their exposure to mass media.

3. Participation in Risk Behaviour (Index)

In order to calculate the respondents' participation in risk behavior index the score were assigned in the following manner:

- | | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| 1. Gambling | } | |
| 2. Smoking | } | Never = 1 |
| 3. Drinking | } | Monthly = 2 |
| 4. Tobacco | } | Weekly = 3 |
| 5. Use of Drugs | } | Daily = 4 |

The assigned scores were then pooled together for each of the respondent separately and thus, the participation in risk behaviour index was obtained, which ranges from 5-18. The total score was graded and classified into lower (5-8), moderate (9-10) and higher (11-18). Here, higher the total score of the respondents, higher will be their participation in risk behavior.

Determinants of Sexual Behaviour: A Multivariate Analysis

Bivariate associations are a simplified exposition of complex system, they are less that conclusive and should be interpreted cautiously. Therefore, an attempt is made to study sexual behavior of never married men one step beyond two-way classification, by subjecting the data to regression analysis. Multivariate analysis allows a more accurate assessment of the relevance of sexual behavior, by taking account of other confounding effects of the other variables on sexual behavior. Also it allows whether the observed differentials are statistically significant or not. For the regression analysis the following variables have been used based on its theoretical and statistical importance.

Dependent Variable

Sexual Behaviour (Index) - Weighted pooled scores (ranges between 0 – 12)

Independent Variables

- Current Age - Actual age in completed years (range between 18 - 31)
- Type of Residence - Room/Hotel = 1 & House = 2
- Education - Upto Secondary = 1 & Secondary Plus = 2
- Monthly Income - Actual monthly income (in Rs.)
- Participation in Risk Behaviour (index) - Pooled scores (range between 5 - 18)
- Exposure to Mass Media (index) - Pooled scores (range between 9 - 22)
- Knowledge about Condom - No = 0; and Yes = 1

Results

From Table 1, it is evident that all the variables included in the model together explained 23.5 per cent of variation in sexual behavior of the respondents. Respondents participation in risk behavior exert a stronger (sig. at .02 level) positive effect on their sexual behavior and thus supported the proposition that as respondents' participation in the risk behavior increases they are more prone to indulge in premarital sexual relations. This finding is on line with those observed elsewhere (VanLandingham et al., 1993 in Thailand and Utomo and McDonald, 1997 in Jakarta).

Respondents' current age and their exposure to mass media also exhibited a significant (at .05 level) positive effect on the practice of sexual behavior. These patterns are found to be almost universal (VanLandingham et al., 1993; Pillai and Yates, 1993; Owuanaman, 1995; Kanbargi and Kanbargi, 1996, Konde-Lule et al., 1997; Meekers and Ahmed, 1997; Utomo and McDonald, 1997; Murray et al., 1998).

Unexpectedly, an increase in the level of income among the respondents emerged as a strong (sig. at .05 level) predictor of sexual behavior, but in a negative direction i.e., higher the level of income lower will be the participation in premarital sexual behavior. This can be possible because in the study higher income group constitutes of engineers, supervisors, who are better



educated, and inclined to go for safer sex (quality sex i.e., partner may not be available to their standards), besides, the social stigma attached to them in terms of dignity and respectability. However, among those belong to lower level of income people are least bothered about these. Also at lower level of income, the environment where they live makes considerable influence on their sexual behavior (usually reside nearer to red light areas or neighbourhood where the possibility of getting comparatively 'cheaper sex' is possible).

Respondents' knowledge about condom has also exhibited significant (to a lesser extent, sig. at .10 level) positive effect on sexual behavior, which means that as the knowledge about condom increases among the respondents, they are more prone to sexual activity, since the fear of complications arise out of premarital sex is likely to be weakened. The variables such as education and type of residence though show the expected direction of influence on sexual behavior did not turned out to be statistically significant.

Summary

The multivariate regression analysis reiterate that respondents' participation in risk behavior viz., gambling, smoking, drinking, use of drugs etc., would significantly (at .02 level) lead to indulge in premarital sexual relations. Respondents' current age and their extent of exposure to mass media also have exhibited significant (at .05 level) positive effects on the practice of sexual behavior. Contrary to the expectation, an increase in the level of income among the respondents would significantly decrease their extent of sexual behaviour. Respondents' knowledge about condom has a lesser significant effect on their sexual behavior. Lastly, the variables such as education and type of residence though excreted the influence on sexual behavior in the expected direction, did not turn out to be statistically significant, thus, it may be concluded that given the condition the respondents who ever had higher participation in risk behavior and exposure to mass media and older by age (among the never-married men), are more likely to participate in premarital sexual relations.

Policy and Implications

Knowledge on sexual attitudes and behavior is important to family planning researchers, policy makers and providers because such attitudes and behavior underlies virtually all the conditions that their programmes address. Some of the following suggestions are putforth in this direction.

- By and large, among the study population the extent of participation in sexual relations is moderately high as far as the Indian situation is concerned. Efforts can be made to educate the adolescents and never-married youth about the benefits and disadvantages of the various premarital sexual relations. Both social education through peer group and parents and formal education through books and teachers can be made use for this purpose effectively.
- The addiction to alcohol, drug, smoking (participation in risk behaviour) enhances the sexual relations among industrial workers. Measures may be initiated by the government to ban liquor besides levying exorbitant taxes (both direct and indirect) so as to make them more costly, which may motivates the respondents to use at lesser extent and thereby less premarital sexual relations.
- From operational perspective, introduction of sexual health programs, particularly in factories or industries, highlighting the importance of sexual and reproductive matters including the adverse effects of premarital sexual relations especially with commercial sex workers, to the young people would be beneficial to them to lead a happy sexual life. Those who do not participate in such programmes may learn such matters by social interaction with their peers who attended such programmes.
- The study is confined to unmarried industrial workers especially men in the age group 18 – 31, so their sexual behavior may not necessarily reflect the general young population. Attempts may be made to carry out the research on the patterns of sexual behavior, networking of sexual activity and the problems arise by these among different gender and groups of adolescents/youth as well as in rural and urban settings.

Table 1, Net Effects of Background Variables on Sexual Behaviour (Index)

Background Variables	Beta	Standard Error	T	Sig. T
Participation in Risk Behaviour (Index)	.1888	.1042	2.354	.0198
Current Age	.1674	.0790	2.211	.0285
Exposure to Mass Media				



(Index)	.1800	.1127	2.145	.0335
Monthly Income	- .1713	.0413	- 2.103	.0371
Knowledge about Condom	.1285	.7883	1.670	.0970
Education	.1248	.2731	1.561	.1207
Type of Residence	- .0805	.4010	- 1.082	.2811
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Multiple R	= .4847	Multiple R Square = .2349		

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