Research Paper
Impact Factor: 4. 695
Peer Reviewed & Indexed Journal

IJMSRR
E- ISSN - 2349-6746
ISSN -2349-6738

DIFFERENTIALS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG NEVER MARRIED INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN COIMBATORE CITY, TAMIL NADU

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Abstract
Premarital sexual relation has been noted to be stigma in India. The sexual activity among the never-married men is an emerging area of research and most of the researcher have not studied the sexual behaviour of never married adolescents especially working in the industrial sectors among whom the premarital sexual relations are likely to be high, since they are more prone to be in contact with commercial sex workers or neighbourhood relations. 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 present study is therefore, intends to examine the differentials viz socio-economic characteristics and demographic characteristics in sexual behaviour among 160 adolescent never married industrial workers in Coimbatore city, Tamil Nadu. Chi-square test was used to test the association between the sexual behaviour index (dependent variable) and the background variables (independent variables). The results shows that the differentials in the intensity of sexual behaviour (index) are statistically highly significant in the case of respondents' participation in risk behaviour (index) followed by exposure to mass media (index), knowledge about condom, monthly income and type of residence (room/hotel and house).

Introduction

The pattern of sexual relation and behaviour 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 restricted and even condemned.

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. Sexual relation especially before marriage i.e., premarital sexual relation has been noted to be stigma in the communities of developing countries like India. But it has been put forward that the institutional changes forced by modernization transform cultural practices, values and attitudes relating to life styles in general and sexual behaviour of people in particular. However, in India, not many studies have been done so far in this aspect. So knowledge about the differentials of sexual behaviour in the Indian population is lacking. Hence, an extensive study on sexual behaviour 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 sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Adolescence (11-19 years) is a distinct and crucial phase in the development of a human being and is categorized by physical, psychological and behavioural changes. In India, where adolescents who occupy a substantial proportion appear to be more active in sexual behaviour and sexual relations as compared to others (The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1997). The incidence of sexual activity is comparatively more among adolescent males than females. It has been widely found that a greater involvement in sexual relations among individuals at younger ages (Ramasubban, 1990; Sehghal, 1992; Jejeebhoy, 1994; Watsa, 1994; Nag, 1996). Despite an increase in sexual practices among youth, knowledge and practice of contraception was found to be very low (Watsa, 1994). Hence, there is an emerging need for studying the adolescent and their sexual behaviour 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. Besides these, most had not studied the sexual behaviour of never married adolescents especially working in the industrial sectors among whom the premarital sexual relations are likely to be high, since they are more prone to be in contact with commercial sex workers or neighbourhood relations. The present study is therefore, intends to examine the differentials in sexual behaviour among adolescent never married industrial workers in Coimbatore city, Tamil Nadu.

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.

An attempt is made to anaylse and discusses the differentials in sexual behavior (based on an index) by respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics. 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. For the purpose of the differentials in sexual behavior the variable (sexual behavior index) has been categorized into three groups viz., lower (0), moderate (1-4) and higher (5-12). The sexual behavior (Index) have been examined across the respondents' current age, place of birth, type of residence, total family size, education, occupation, monthly income, exposure to mass media (index), participation in risk behavior (index) and knowledge about condom. In this study, chi-square test was used to test the association between the sexual behaviour index (dependent variable) and the background variables (independent variables).

Results

Current Age and Sexual Behaviour

Current age is one of the important factors that may affect the sexual behavior of a person. Generally, as age increases the knowledge of never married men about reproductive systems of male and female including sex organs may also increases which in turn arouse the curiosity to practice various forms of sexual behavior. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that the sexual behavior of the never married men is associated (positively) with their current age. Some of the studies conducted around the world have conclusively proved this assertion (VanLandingham, 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).

Results provided in panel 1 of table 1 show that the intensity of sexual behavior, by and large, increases as age increases. For example, the percentage of respondents who have been categorized as higher sexual behavior category is comparatively less for those in the age group of 18-21 (30%) which has increased to 51 per cent for those in the age group of 26-31. On the contrary, the percentages of respondents belong to lower and moderate sexual behavior categories have consistently declined when their age increased. However, these differentials in sexual behavior are statistically turned out to be insignificant.

Place of Birth and Sexual Behaviour

Place of birth is another factor which may affects the sexual behavior of the respondents. Generally, those with urban background are likely to participate more in premarital sexual practices than the respondents with rural background. This is because the urban respondents would likely to be more knowledgeable of sexual practices by various media, viz., mass media, and internet and peer groups etc., besides their higher participation in risk behavior like use of alcohol and drugs. In rural Uganda both male and female adolescents were found to be more sexually active in trading centres closely followed by intermediate centre as compared to rural areas (Kunde-Lule et al., 1997).

From panel 2 of table 1 it is evident that the extent of sexual behavior is comparably higher among the respondents with rural background as compared to the respondents with urban background. For example, the percentage of respondents those who

had higher intensity of sexual behavior is relatively higher among the rural respondents (45%) than urban respondents (35%). The association between the place of birth and sexual behavior is insignificant.

Type of Residence and Sexual Behaviour

Type of residence viz., at hotel/rooms and house may affect the sexual behaviour. Generally, the respondents in homely settings may not be highly exposed to sexual behavior activities because of parents' supervision and control over them. On the other hand, those who are residing at room/hotel have full-fledged freedom to do anything as they wish and therefore, sexual behavior is likely to be more among them. Sharma and Sharma (1996) in their study among college students in rural Gujarat found that the mean knowledge score about sex was notably greater among girls who were stayed in the hostel than those who do not stay.

Data from panel 3 of table 1 highlight that the intensity of sexual behavior, by and large, is high among the respondents who reside at room/hotel (59%) as compared to respondents in homely setting (35%). On the other hand, reverse trend is noticed in the case of respondents who belong to lower and moderate categories of sexual behaviour. The association between the type of residence and sexual behavior is found to be statistically significant at a moderate level ($\chi^2 = 7.663$; sig. at 0.05 level).

Total Family Size and Sexual Behaviour

Besides the residence at home setting, the total family size (members in the family) may also exert influence on the sexual activity of the adolescents. It is expected that as family size increases, on the one side, the knowledge about sexual behavior would increases. On the other hand, in settings (families) where large number of persons (grand parents, parents and other relatives), the sexual behaviour of the adolescents may be under control to a larger extent. To examine this proposition data has been analysed and presented in panel 4 of table 1.

It is evident from the table that the percentage of respondents categorized as higher sexual behaviour is found to be higher when they are living as single person as compared to those living in the families consist of 2-3 members and 4 and more members (35% and 38% respectively). The reverse pattern has been noticed in the case of respondents categorized as lower sexual behaviour. However, all these differentials in sexual behaviour across their family size have turned out to be insignificant.

Educational Status and Sexual Behaviour

Educational status, in general, is likely to affect the sexual behavior. Generally, as education increases the sexual behaviour also increases. This is because education facilitates the never-married men to acquire greater knowledge about sexual behaviours which in turn arouse curiosity to practice these (even by contraceptive methods). More or less similar positive relationship was noticed in Bostwana (Meekers and Ahmed, 1997) and Jakarta (Utomo and McDonald, 1997). On the contrary, it may also be seen that illiterate adolescents may participate to a larger extent in various forms of sexual behaviour because of lack of knowledge and ignorance.

Among the study population (panel 5 of table 1) it is observed that the percentage of the respondents categorized under higher sexual behavior (index) group is higher among those who have completed secondary education and above (46%) as against those whose education is up to secondary level (33%). The reverse trend is noticed in the case of those respondents who are classified as lower sexual behaviour category. But the association between education and sexual behavior of the respondents is statistically observed to be insignificant.

Occupational Status and Sexual Behaviour

Occupational status also influences the sexual behavior because of peer group influence. Respondents belong to higher order of occupations are likely to exposed more to various forms of sexual behavior being likely to be higher educated and therefore, practice in real terms since their income level also will be higher. Such pattern was observed among never-married men in Thailand (VanLandingham et al., 1993). Of course, it can be argued that persons in higher order occupational category behave properly to maintain their dignity and thus have less intensity towards sexual activity. In order to examine this pattern in the study population the data has been analysed and presented the same in panel 6 of table 1.

It can be seen that the percentage of respondents belong to higher occupational category have higher participation in sexual behavior (42%) as compared to those in lower occupational strata (33%). However, the chi-square results between the occupational status and sexual behavior (index) have turned out to be statistically insignificant.

Monthly Income and Sexual Behaviour

Higher the income of the persons higher will be the practice of sexual behaviour, because of visiting sex workers with money is possible. Also income indirectly influence through greater exposure to pornographic books/films as well as risk behaviours. Results from panel 7 of table 1 reveal that, by and large, as income level goes up, the intensity to participate in sexual activities declines, the pattern is contrary to the expectation. For instance, the percentage of respondents fall under moderate sexual behavior category has consistently declined as income increases. On the other hand, an U-shape and inverted U-shape relationship between the monthly income and sexual behavior of the respondents has been observed among those who belong to lower and higher sexual behavior categories. The chi-square results observed to be statistically highly significant (χ^2 = 15.06; sig. at 0.01 level).

Exposure to Mass Media (Index) and Sexual Behaviour

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.

In general, exposure to mass media (print and tele media) would have an adverse effect on sexual behavior of adolescents. This is because during adolescence young people will be attracted towards such literature, figures and films, which in turn motivate them to learn more about the secrecy of sex and related aspects. Therefore, it is proposed here that higher the adolescents' exposure to mass media greater will be their participation in sexual behaviour (Meekers and Ahmed, 1997; Utomo amd McDonald, 1997). Data presented in panel 8 of table 1 highlight that there exists a strong association between the respondents' exposure and the level of sexual behaviour (χ^2 = 31.03; sig. at 0.001 level). It can be seen that the percentage of respondents who have higher form of sexual behavior increases from a low level of 22 to a high level of 66 in correspondence to their lower and higher levels of exposure to mass media. Conversely, a clear decreasing pattern of sexual behaviour is noticed with an increase in the exposure among those who have lower sexual behavior.

Participation in Risk Behaviour (Index) and Sexual Behaviour

Besides the exposure to mass media, adolescents' participation in risk behavior viz., gambling, smoking, alcohol, use of drugs etc., may also influence their sexual behavior. Particularly, it is common among alcohol and drug using adolescents. In the present study, information about the personal habits of respondents such as smoking, tobacco chewing, alcohol and drug use etc., have been collected with their frequency from which an index viz., participation in risk behaviour (index) has been constructed. Studies from Thailand (VanLandingham et al., 1993) and Jakarta (Utomo and McDonald, 1997) have conclusively proved that heavy drinking and participation in risk behaviour respectively lead to higher sexual practice.

In the study area, overall (panel 9 of table 1) there is a positive and highly significant relationship (χ^2 = 35.95; sig. at 0.001 level) between the respondents' participation in risk behaviour (index) and their sexual behaviour (index). For instance, the proportion of respondents in the upper sexual activity category has tremendously increased from a low level of 29 to a high level of 72 when their risk index increased from lower to higher. On the contrary, an inverse trend is observed in the case of lower sexual activity group.

Knowledge about Condom and Sexual Behaviour

As knowledge of condom increases the practice of sexual behaviour is likely to increase because of they can practice safe sex and thereby avoid further complications like premarital conceptions, STDs, RTIs, and HIV/AIDs.

From panel 10 of table 1 it can be seen that 42 per cent of those respondents who knows about condom have participated in sexual behaviour at a large extent as compared to those who do not have such knowledge (14%). The opposite trend is noticed in the case of respondents belong to lower sexual behaviour category. The differential appeared to be highly significant at 0.001 level (χ^2 = 18.77).

Summary

The study of sexual behaviour i.e., particularly premarital sex is gaining importance in recent years, because of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, especially among adolescents, would be immense use, since they who indulge more in such relations – mostly in unsafe sex. The results shows that the differentials in the intensity of sexual behaviour (index) are statistically highly significant in the case of respondents' participation in risk behaviour (index) followed by exposure to mass media (index), knowledge about condom, monthly income and type of residence (room/hotel and house). The differentials in sexual behaviour (index) though appeared to be in the expected direction in the case of current age, total family size, education and occupation statistically they turned out to be insignificant. Interestingly, the extent of sexual behaviour is found to be higher among those respondents who have rural background than their urban counterparts.

Policy Implications

It may be suggested that

- Commercial sex-workers seem to play a crucial role besides hotels/rooms, in promoting the premarital intercourse. Programmes may be directed to curb this practice wherever possible and if not possible they may be directed to keep up and practice sexual health habits. Also efforts should be taken to check up the hotels/brothels of all types so as to keep under control the illicit relationship.
- The HIV/AIDS public awareness campaigns need to be highlighted the risk of HIV transmission from both commercial and non-commercial sex workers. This can be possible through non-government organizations. Importance must be given through mass media in fostering widespread awareness about the need for condom use in and promoting the safer premarital sex behaviour.
- This study is confined to unmarried industrial workers especially men in the age group 18 – 31, so their sexual behaviour may not necessarily reflect the general young population. Attempts may be made to carry out the research on the patterns of sexual behaviour, networking of sexual activity and the problems arises by these among different gender and groups of adolescents/youth as well as in rural and urban settings.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents by Their Sexual Behaviour (Index) across their Socio-economic Characteristics

Socio-economic Characteristics	Sexual Behaviour (Index)						Total	
	Lower		Moderate		Higher			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1. Current Age								
18 - 21	15	32.6	17	37.0	14	30.4	46	100.0
22 - 25	18	28.6	23	36.5	22	34.9	63	100.0
26 - 31	11	21.6	14	27.5	26	51.0	51	100.0
	χ^2 = 5.0249; Sig. Level = NS							
2. Place of Birth								
Rural	10	18.9	19	35.8	24	45.3	53	100.0
Urban	34	31.8	35	32.7	38	35.5	107	100.0
	χ^2 = 3.1238; Sig. Level = NS							
3. Type of Residence								
Room/Hotel	1	4.5	8	36.4	13	59.1	22	100.0
House	43	31.2	46	33.3	49	35.5	138	100.0
	χ^2 = 7.6625; Sig. Level = 0.05							
4. Total Family Size								
1	3	3.0	8	34.8	12	52.2	23	100.0
2	17	30.9	19	34.5	19	34.5	55	100.0
3	24	29.3	27	32.9	31	37.8	82	100.0
	χ^2 = 3.447; Sig. Level = NS							
5. Educational Status								
Upto Secondary	28	32.6	30	34.9	28	32.6	86	100.0
Diploma/College	16	21.6	24	32.4	34	45.9	74	100.0
	χ^2 = 3.6405; Sig. Level = NS							
6.Occupational Status								
Helper/Welder/Moulder Machinist	19	32.8	20	34.5	19	32.8	58	100.0
Fitter / Turner /	25	24.5	34	33.3	43	42.2	102	100.0

Supervisor / Engineer								
	χ^2 = 1.7722; Sig. Level = NS							
7. Monthly Income (in Rs.)								
Below 1500	17	27.0	26	41.3	20	31.7	63	100.0
1501 - 2000	9	15.5	18	31.0	31	53.4	58	100.0
2001 and above	18	46.2	10	25.6	11	28.2	39	100.0
	χ^2 = 15.0617; Sig. Level = 0.01							
8. Exposure to Mass Media (Index)								
Lower (5 - 8)	29	49.2	17	28.8	13	22.0	57	100.0
Moderate (9 - 10)	12	19.0	27	42.9	24	38.1	63	100.0
Higher (11 - 18)	3	7.9	10	26.3	25	65.8	38	100.0
	χ^2 = 31.0343; Sig. Level = 0.000							
Socio-economic Characteristics	**Sexual Behaviour (Index)**						**Total**	
	Lower		**Moderate**		**Higher**			
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
9. Participation in Risk Behaviour (Index)								
Lower (9 - 15)	29	44.6	17	26.2	19	29.2	65	100.0
Moderate (16 - 18)	11	18.6	31	52.5	17	28.8	59	100.0
Higher (19 - 22)	4	11.1	6	16.7	26	72.2	36	100.0
	χ^2 = 35.9527; Sig. Level = 0.000							
10. Knowledge about Condom								
No Knowledge	14	66.7	4	19.0	3	14.3	21	100.0
Have Knowledge	30	21.6	50	36.0	59	42.4	139	100.0
Total	44	27.4	54	33.8	62	38.8	160	100.0
Note: Not Significant								

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