

THE WAY THEY ARE GOING

A Study of Sexual Behaviour of Urban Youth (Male) in Puri; India

EXTENDED ABSTARCT

Young peoples sexual health is a major international concern, both because of an urgent need to reduce the high level of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases particularly in developing countries and because of a desire to improve less tangible aspects of health such as psychological well being. Young people's vulnerability in terms of sexual health is highlighted by ICPD, Cairo, which identified them as a priority group for research interventions. Due to lack of systematic and proper information on matters related to sex and sexuality, youths in India face dilemma between traditional Indian norms and western patterns of expression. Young age with its associated uncertainty and emotional insecurity may lead to sexual experimentation, reliance on inappropriate information sources or the avoidance of seeking professional guidance. In the process of discovering their sexuality, youths often experiment and are thus more vulnerable to unprotected sexual acts. Moreover, cultures, which have difficulty talking about sex with young people, may contribute to risk taking behaviour (Miller and Whitaker 2001).

Sexual behaviour consists of actions that are empirically observable: what people do sexually with others or with themselves, how they present themselves sexually, how they talk and act. On the other hand, sexuality is a more comprehensive concept which refers to wide range of physical characteristics, behaviour, ideas and attitudes through which individuals express (or think about) their maleness or femaleness within the web of heterosexual or homosexual relationships.

Need for the study:

In the age of AIDS and in a country like India, where talking sex is a taboo, examining the interlinks of sexual behaviour holds an importance. Youths particularly males, who are less addressed in reproductive and sexual issue demands special attention. Again from an intervention point of view, young sexually active males, before forming stable partnerships, is an important area of concern. Early sexual debut and the number of pre-marital partners have been shown to be correlated with risk behaviour later in life. Though some works have been done on youth sexuality in India, only a handful of them have been carried out in cultural centers like Puri. Puri, one of the cultural heritages of the

country is a growing city in eastern India. The city is the conglomeration of people from different socio-economic background, race, religion, culture, and tradition.

Objectives:

1. To examine the extent as well as the sources of information regarding sex, reproduction, contraception, STD, and specifically HIV/AIDS.
2. To identify the needs and helps felt by the youths related to their sexuality and sexual behaviour.
3. To understand the strategies adopted by the youths in the process of growing up.
4. To explore the cultural and contextual factors that give rise to risky sexual behaviour.

Methodology

Sampling design:

At the first stage, the city is divided into four Regions on the basis of geographical location and certain unique features inherited by the areas. **Region-1**, located in extreme south of the city consists of 7 municipal wards and is mostly inhabited by **fishermen** (originally migrants). **Region- 2**, that is located around the Temple is the combination of 7 municipal wards and the inhabitants are **priests or Sevayats** of Lord Jagannath (traditional and conservative in nature and includes stalwarts of Hinduism). The **Region-3** consists of those wards connecting beach from Baliapanda (extreme north) to Penthakata (extreme south) **enriched by hotel industries** consists of 8 municipal wards (exposed to western culture). The remaining 8 municipal wards of the city come under the **Region-4**.

At the second stage, two wards are selected randomly from each region. At the third stage, one Census Enumeration Block is selected randomly from each ward. After that from each CEB, 25 households (comprising atleast one male in the age group 15-24) are again selected randomly keeping in view full representation of the CEB. This 25 household includes **25 percent households for non-response**. 20 respondents are selected, one each from 20 households. Thus in total 160 respondents are interviewed, irrespective of caste, class, religion, marital status and other socio-economic characteristics.

Tools of data collection:

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to collect information from the respondents. Under qualitative methods, the tools like **Social Mapping, Free Listing** and **Case Study** are used. A **semi structured interview schedule** after pre testing is used to collect data for quantitative analysis. **All the interviews, followed by case studies are conducted by the first author of the paper.** It may

be mentioned that before carrying out interviews with minors (less than 18 years of age) covered in the present research, written consent of the parents has been obtained. Further all the respondents are given **assurances of confidentiality** of the data collected from them. Key informants were selected during participatory social mapping for their extensive knowledge of local cultural; beliefs and practices. Two respondents, those engaged in high-risk behaviour are selected purposely from each CEB for the Case study.

Analysis:

Quantitative Data from the field has been analyzed by the software package “SPSS” and for analysis of those case studies, the help of package “ATLAS Ti” has been taken. A **composite index of standard of living** has been constructed by taking into account variable like-“Type of house, Rented or own House, Source of lighting, Source of drinking water, Type of toilet, Type of fuel, ownership of land”.

Findings:

The study reveals that almost all youths in puri are aware of the knowledge of sex and most of them learnt it from friends and pornographic literatures. About three fourth of youths in puri have the correct knowledge of pregnancy as well as methods to avoid pregnancy. In the first cases, friends and relatives were the sources of information about pregnancy while in case of the second, mass media followed by friends are the main source of information. Surprisingly one third of youths are aware of STDs, and the important sources of information are mass media and friends. Though almost all the youths are aware about AIDS, only a half of them have the right knowledge. Only one in five youths are aware about all modes of AIDS transmission. Unfortunately **four out of every 10 youths in the Heritage City are reportedly suffering from atleast one of the sexually transmitted infections.** The study clearly shows that nine out of every ten respondent have experienced masturbation and for most of them, it is the alternative way to fulfill sexual desire.

In the survey sample, one out of every 10 youths is married before completing 25 years. Out of the total sample, around **39 percent have already experienced sexual intercourse, 36 percent of them being single males.** Notably, 70 percent of youths, who are married have had their sexual debut with a person other than their spouse. It may be emphasized here that **most of those sexual debuts are unplanned** and are risky in nature, since only a few of them use any preventive in their sexual debut. Besides, one-third of those partners of first act were either CSWs or stranger (either domestic or

international tourists), followed by girl friend/fiancée, which constitute slightly less than one fifth. An interesting finding of the study is that one out of every 10 youths have their initiation with so called BHAUJAs (Oriya term for sister in law) and three percent are with the PEELA BAIDAS (local term for MSM/Gay).

Another important finding emerging from the study is that about 57 percent of youths who ever had experienced intercourse have multiple partners and half of them have either CSW or stranger as one of the partners. Again, around five percent of youths (who ever experienced intercourse) are found to have a male sexual partner. Unfortunately, those, who ever have had sex with either CSW or Strangers, a quarter of them don't use condom always during each act. Further almost all those youths sometimes use intoxicants prior to sex. Findings from qualitative analysis explore the linkage between unsafe sex and unwanted fatherhood. One out of every four case study respondents reveal that they have avoided **unwanted fatherhood**, either by persuading or forcing the partner for induced abortion.

An important linkage has been found between standard of living and sexual encounter of the youths. **Those belong to either low or very high SLI, the sexual activity is more than those who falls under medium SLI.** So far as the linkage between tourism and sexual behaviour of youths of Puri is concerned, both the qualitative and quantitative findings support that tourism is one of the most important factors influencing youth sexual behaviour. Interestingly those youths that are either **dropouts or illiterates, the sexual involvement is more than 50 percent**, which declines with increase in literacy level.

Conclusion & Policy Implication:

This is an exploratory study that attempts, for the first time, to understand the extent and nature of sexual risk behaviour of youths in a city, which is known as the cultural capital of Eastern India and one of the centers for Hindu pilgrimages. The findings of the survey may not necessarily be indiscriminately generalized to other states in India (or even to other cities within the state). As drinking habit has emerged as a strong predictor of risky sexual behaviour, it is important to develop suitable educational messages linking STD and HIV/AIDS infections to increased risk in casual sexual relations resulting from alcohol consumption. Again efforts should be concentrated on areas where male to male sex is more prevalent. Programs strengthening abstinence from risky behaviour should be emphasized. Besides that campaigns promoting safe sex should be made for those deviants of accepted norms on sexuality and sexual behaviour. Above all, youths still need the proper information on unsafe sex and condom use, which should be done in the broader context of sexual health.