

***Love-ship and sex: exploring the formation of pre-marital partnerships among young females and males in urban slum settings, Pune, India***

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**Introduction**

Young people in urban India are at a crossroads, confronted by opposing forces. More than ever before, they are in schools and colleges, are healthier and better nourished, have access to wide-ranging media and the benefits of technological change and are exposed to new ideas about their roles and rights. At the same time, they face a persistent age- and sex-stratified culture and patriarchal norms that espouse gender double standards and prohibit the formation of intimate partnerships and even friendships among the unmarried or the selection of one's own spouse. Policies and programmes, moreover, make no special efforts to provide sexual and reproductive health information, counselling or services to unmarried youth (Government of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2000). While there is a persistent perception at community level that in these circumstances, pre-marital partnerships are rare, however, there is a small and unrepresentative literature that suggests that despite the sanctions enforced, youthful partnerships are formed and sexual relations are experienced, among, typically, fewer than 10% of young women and 15-30% of young males (e.g. Abraham, 1999; Awasthi et al., 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004). Unfortunately, little is known at population level, about opportunities to form partnerships, and about the magnitude of youth who form partnerships and who engage in sexual relations. With few exceptions, there is also a dearth of information available on the nature and patterns of partnership formation and progression, and the characteristics at individual, parental, peer and community levels that are associated with the experience of partnerships among young people.

Moreover, few studies in India and in developing countries more generally have explored risk and protective factors surrounding sexual partnerships of young people. What is available comes largely from developed countries in which dating and partnership formation among youth is relatively common. This literature has identified a number of factors that influence the shift to sexual activity – rather than partnerships per se -- among young people. It is likely, that in this highly restricted social setting in which even pre-marital interaction between young females and males is proscribed, formation of partnerships, irrespective of whether sexual relations are experienced, may be influenced by a similar set of factors.

The general aim of this paper is to shed light on the magnitude, nature and correlates of partnership formation and progression among unmarried young females and males in an urban slum setting in India. This paper has two specific objectives. First, it will assess the extent to which young females and males engage in pre-marital partnerships, the progression they experience from friendship to partnership, and gender disparities in these patterns. Second it will explore the correlates of different types of partnerships (with and without physical and sexual contact) and draw inferences about the factors that are associated with these in terms of (a) the individual's own characteristics, namely, (i) autonomy and gender role attitudes; (ii) work and schooling status, including school attendance, performance and access to money; and (iii) substance abuse, exposure to pornographic materials; (b) peer influences including the extent and nature of peer contacts and extent of

communication/support on sensitive matters; and (c) family level influences, including co-residence patterns, parents' own risk behaviours including substance abuse and domestic violence and the extent and nature of parental supervision, communication on sexual and reproductive health matters and supportive interaction on significant life choices as well as family socio-economic conditions. Findings are intended to provide population-based evidence about the nature of partnership formation and the kinds of services that programmes will need to deliver to the unmarried in order to make these partnerships safe and informed.

Deriving from the available literature, our conceptual framework acknowledges that partnership formation in our context is influenced at several levels: individual, household and family, peer and school, in particular. At individual level, key factors include young people's own problem solving skills, ability to negotiate, self-esteem (Kirby 2002; Jessor 2000; Gerard and Buehler 2004) and attitudes (Kirby 2002; Serovich and Green 1997), but authors stress that these personal assets may have limited value on their own to prevent negative outcomes when the environment is unsupportive (Gerard and Buehler 2004). Individual level factors observed to be related to adverse sexual outcomes also include substance use and exposure to pornographic materials, frequently linked to negative peer influences (Kirby 2002; Abraham et al. 1999; Mott et al. 1996). At the family and household level, household socioeconomic status is related to a wide range of adverse outcomes or lack of opportunity to prevent adverse outcomes. Other influences at the family level, moreover, have been identified: these include one-parent households and absence of father (Kirby 2002; Newcomer and Udry 1987; McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988), inadequate monitoring and inappropriate supervision (Romer et al. 1994), poor parent-child communication and connection, and family violence as well as a misperception that conveying sexual and reproductive health information to their adolescent children will encourage sexual risk taking (see for example, Jessor 2000; Kirby 2002; Holtzman and Rubinson 1995; Mehra et al., 2002). Peer level influence are also indicated (Jessor 2000; Kirby 2002): perceived peer norms and behaviour of peers are observed to influence an adolescent's own behaviour (Romer et al. 1994; Holtzman and Rubinson 1995); Finally, school level influences are also cited: young people who have difficulty in school and/or discontinue school prematurely are more likely than others to engage in risky behaviours (Kirby 2002; Romer et al. 1994).

Data are drawn from a population-based study conducted among married and unmarried young females and males aged 15-24 in one urban slum setting and one rural setting in Pune district, Maharashtra. Findings reported here will focus on data from the urban slum setting that focus on pre-marital formation of partnerships.

## **Background**

Maharashtra is an appropriate site for such a study for several reasons. Among these, it is a highly developed state and provides a range of opportunities to youth in terms of education, information and employment; it is also a state in which HIV prevalence is high, including among its youth (NACO, 2002). At the same time, like India and South Asia more generally, Maharashtra is typically patriarchal and patrilocal, and unequal gender relations are evident. In terms of marriage patterns, arranged marriages, patrilocal residence and large dowries characterise the state.

The 2001 national census reports a total of 29 million young people in Maharashtra today, representing almost one third (31%) of its population: specifically, 19% of the population are youth aged 15-24 (Registrar General India, 2005). A look at their socio-demographic profile suggests that educational attainment levels are considerably higher in Maharashtra than in India more generally and gender disparities in enrolment are considerably narrower. While 9% of young males aged 15-19 are illiterate, twice this percentage (18%) of females are illiterate. Over one quarter – 27.7% and 28.9% of females and males aged 15-19 have completed high school. However, attendance rates suggest continuing gender disparity: among those aged 15-17, 65% of males compared to 54% of females are in school (IIPS and ORC Macro 2001).

Also evident is that despite rising age at marriage and laws prohibiting early marriage (Child Marriage Restraint

Act of 1929 and its amendment in 1978), marriage occurs in adolescence for large proportions of young females but few young males in Maharashtra: the 2001 census data show, for example, that among those aged 15-19, while 17% of females were currently married, only 2% of males were (Registrar General 2005). And data from the 1998 National Family Health Survey show that as many as 48 percent of all women aged 20-24 were married by the time they were 18 and 23 per cent by the time they were 15 (IIPS and ORC Macro 2001).

Pune district was considered an appropriate setting for the study for several reasons. Among a total of 35 districts in Maharashtra, Pune district is one of the most developed, containing a total population of 7.2 million ([www.maharashtra.gov.in](http://www.maharashtra.gov.in)), considerable opportunities for non-agricultural employment, a well-established educational infrastructure, and relatively easy access to modern consumer goods and new ideas. The site is also appropriate because the district is one of six high HIV prevalence districts in the state (NACO, 2002). Pune city, the setting for the urban sample, contains a population of 2.5 million and reports a literacy rate of 71% (Census of India, 2001, provisional; [www.pune.diary.com](http://www.pune.diary.com)). A population of some 500,000 resides in slums. Slums included in the study contain a population of some 100,000 and are densely populated. Residents are largely long term migrants engaged in wage labour or petty trading. In many families, both men and women are working. Homes tend to be semi built-up and consist mostly of one room tenements shared by six to seven members of a family.

Pune district was also considered appropriate for this study also because it is an area in which youth programmes are readily available. The KEM Hospital, with which three of the five principal investigators are associated, has been engaged in health and development outreach activities and has developed close rapport with the community on development issues as well as more sensitive health issues, including sexual risk behaviour and adolescent sexual and reproductive health needs. In addition, investigators collaborated with a second organisation, CASP that has had a long-standing relationship of over 10 years in the urban slum community in which the study was conducted and has engaged in such activities as vocational training, sponsorship programmes for school going youth and sexual and reproductive health communication activities for young people. Both KEMHRC and CASP enjoy considerable rapport with and insight into study communities.

### **Data**

Data pertain to both young females and males, and both married and unmarried youth aged 15 to 24. The married were included for two significant reasons: first, because marriage continues to define the onset of sexual partnerships for large proportions of Indian youth, especially females; and second, because we hypothesised that in this setting in which disclosure of relationships could be perceived to jeopardise marriage prospects of the unmarried, married youth may be more willing than the unmarried to disclose pre-marital sexual partnerships. Data are drawn from a survey designed explicitly to explore young people's transitions into sexual life. The survey was conducted in 2004-5 and was preceded by an extended qualitative phase that not only informed the development of the survey instrument but also provided insight into the perspectives and experiences of young females and males.

We aimed to select a sample size of 2150 and 1350 unmarried and married females, respectively, and 950 unmarried and 850 married young males. Sample size estimation was based on assumptions of pre-marital sexual activity and were inflated to make allowances for non-availability (of males) and refusal by the young respondent or the parent of a respondent aged under 18 from whom consent was also sought. Prior to implementing the survey, a rapid house-listing was completed, in which any adult household member was asked to report all youth residing in the household. Four lists were then generated, comprising married and unmarried females and males. From these four lists, the sample was randomly selected for interview. No replacement was permitted.

The questionnaire was administered to no more than one young person aged 15-24 (selected randomly) falling into each of the four categories. Hence not more than one unmarried female, one unmarried male, one married female and one married male could be interviewed from any household. In addition, the strategy ensured that both a woman and her husband would not be interviewed for ethical reasons.

Special efforts were made to build rapport between the study communities and the study team: community level meetings were held to apprise communities of the study, study investigators were young, extensively trained and able to connect to young respondents and community demands, in terms of health camps, were met by study investigators.

We must acknowledge the huge difficulties encountered in reaching the targeted sample. While we were able to reach 1784 unmarried females, 1154 married females and 817 unmarried males – that is, over 80 per cent of the targeted sample -- reaching married males proved to be an enormous challenge and we could reach no more than 458 or 54% of the targeted sample. Main reasons for non-response, were not, however, related to refusal – indeed refusal rates tended to be lower than five percent for all groups. Rather, among young married males, non-availability resulted largely from work-related mobility even during the short period between house-listing and interview (less than one month) and because long working hours followed by widespread alcohol use significantly curtailed any window of opportunity for interview.

The survey questionnaire covered a range of topics, from schooling and work patterns to marriage and marriage related decision making and pre-marital friendships and relationships. For the most part, all four groups (married and unmarried females and males) were administered an identical set of questions. There were however some exceptions: for example, married respondents were asked a series of questions about early marital experiences; females were not asked questions about whether they had ever paid for sex, married males were not asked questions about their mobility. With regard to pre-marital sexual activity, questions were appropriately worded so that married respondents were asked to recall their relationships prior to marriage. Different modules probed different types of relationships (for example consensual, forced, paid sex and so on). While the module on consensual relationships was extensive and aimed to cover the progression of the relationship, questions on other types of sexual relations were somewhat briefer.

The survey instrument, informed by findings from the qualitative phase, delved in detail into friendships and partnerships, explored not only activities in which young couples engaged (going out in a group, alone on a bus, to a park) but also the types of behaviours in which they engaged (ever held hands, ever kissed, ever had sex). Other experiences, such as forced, paid and same-sex experiences were explored in separate sections of the instrument. Finally, efforts were made to enable anonymous reporting as follows: if pre-marital sexual activity were not reported in the course of the interview, the respondent was asked to report whether or not s/he had engaged in pre-marital sexual activity by marking a blank card which was then placed in a sealed envelope and attached to the respondent's questionnaire. Interviewers were also trained to indicate within the questionnaire if they suspected, through body language or any other hint that the respondent may have engaged in pre-marital sexual relations.

Table 1 highlights background socio-economic characteristics of the households in which each of the four youth groups resided at the time of the interview. The majority lived in semi-pucca housing and homes; however this is a long-term slum and almost all respondents live in homes with electricity, cook with gas and have access to piped or well water within the home. The large majority was Hindu. Economic status appears to be relatively similar across all groups. For example, of a total of some seven consumer goods (TV, telephone, pressure cooker, mobile phone, motorcycle/car, CD player), the average household owned some 3-3.3 goods. Findings on parental education and occupation suggest that, as expected, fathers were, on average, better educated than mothers, and that parents of unmarried youth tended to be better educated than those of married youth.

**Individual profiles:**

Notwithstanding the similarities in background socio-economic profiles, individual characteristics vary widely as is evident from Table 2. Age profiles of the four groups suggest that unmarried females are the youngest group and married males the oldest. Age differences are obviously influenced by marriage patterns in which females are significantly more likely than males to be married in adolescence. Indeed, among the married, only 5.7% of males compared to over half (54.5%) of females had married before they were 18. As expected, married groups are older than the unmarried and within each marital status group, male respondents are older than female respondents.

Survey findings confirm that the majority of young respondents live with one or both parents or, in the case of married females, parents-in-law.

Schooling profiles suggest that the overwhelming majority of all young people have been to school. Unmarried youth are particularly well educated and gender disparities among them do not exist: four fifths of unmarried girls and boys have completed Class 8, and the mean number of years of schooling attained is over nine years. Of note is the finding that girls report better school performance, in terms of passing the last school examinations, than do boys. That the unmarried are better educated than the married may reflect a cohort effect on the one hand and the likelihood that out-of-school youth are more likely to be married off earlier or that early marriage leads them – notably girls -- to discontinue school prematurely.

In contrast to schooling profiles, wage work profiles reflect considerable disparity by sex and marital status. As expected in an urban slum setting, few families have their own businesses and hence unpaid family work is reported by a small minority (4-6%). However, 40% of females, 70 per cent of unmarried males and almost all married males have at some point engaged in wage earning work – and aside from married women, most of these have engaged in wage work in the last year as well. A significant minority of the unmarried (12% and 9% of males and females respectively) combine work with schooling. And finally, large percentages of both unmarried and especially married females are engaged only in housework: almost one in three of the unmarried and more than three in four of the married. In contrast, some 10% and 4% of unmarried and married males, respectively report that they are neither working nor in school or college. Leisure time varies from an average of 2.8 hours per day among married females to 1.3 among married males, with both unmarried females and males reporting an average of 2.4 hours of leisure time.

**Pre-marital partnerships among the currently unmarried and married**

Pre-marital friendship networks are reported by all respondents. Over 90% of each group reported same-sex friendships, but it is clear that the networks of young males were larger than those of young females – while on average, young males reported 3.5-3.7 close same-sex friends, young females reported significantly fewer (1.5-1.6). Our findings clearly suggest that interaction between young females and males is rarer than same sex friendship networks. Although many fewer reported opposite-sex friends, a significant proportion of young people – for example, almost two in five unmarried males and a quarter of unmarried females -- responded that they had friends of the opposite sex (in this question, we did not distinguish between platonic interactions including going out in a group, doing homework together etc) and romantic interactions. Married females were, however, least likely to admit a pre-marital opposite-sex friend.

In the course of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with youth and key informant interviews, it became clear that young females and males were aware of an array of different kinds of relationships in which the unmarried engage and that they employed a distinct set of terms to refer to these different relationships. For example, frequently used is the term “to propose” to indicate any offer of romantic or sexual partnership. Romantic partnerships were described by young females and males either as friendship or *love-ship* relationships [English word used by young people to describe more intimate relationships, including or

excluding sex, with or without marriage in mind]; it was clear that the terms “proposing friendship” and “proposing loveship” were used interchangeably. For example:

*“We used to talk. So one day he said "will you give me love-ship?" I didn't understand so I said, "what does that mean?" He said "will you have friendship with me?" I didn't say anything. Then he started sending 'chitthis' and he used to write "I love you.” (In-depth interview, unmarried female, age 17).*

*There are mixed groups in 12<sup>th</sup> standard, not in the 11<sup>th</sup> as we are still new. They [the groups] enjoy themselves. They sing songs. They play games. Boys in the group have proposed to the girls from the group for love-ship (FGD, unmarried females, Class 11).*

*“...then the boy sees what are the girl's ideas are (about him) and thoughts and then they propose for love-ship. (Focus group discussion, unmarried females, Class 11)*

*“She starts giving 'line' (signs of liking the boy)... Then they smile, talk. Then they directly go and propose love-ship. (FGD, unmarried males, Class 10 completed).*

They described, moreover, how many young people made proposals through intermediaries, as evident from the following passage from a focus group discussion:

*R: Girls are sensitive (bhavanik) they may help the boy [convey his interest to a girl].*

*M: How?*

*R1: They phone (on behalf of the boy).*

*R3: send chits / letters (chit pathavatat, on behalf of the boys)*

*R8; Put the chit in the girl's bag without her knowledge (nakalat).*

*R6: They throw the chits into the girl's house.*

*M: What else?*

*R1: They try to convince the girl (FGD, unmarried girls, Class 11)*

*“Like that, I looked after 2 or 3 small boys, giving them chocolates and through them I used to send the chits. (In-depth interview, married male, passed Class 9, driver, eloped).*

Finally, they explained that once a proposal of friendship or *love-ship* was accepted, the couple would be considered “girl-friend” and “boy-friend”. And they suggested that although opportunities to pursue romantic relationships were limited, there did exist meeting places that were typically frequented by young couples, including a nearby park and in buses or rickshaws on the way to work, school or college.

*“Then they start meeting each other. In Sarasbaug, Paravati, on the terrace of the school, in the college, on the road. Before the school is over the boy comes at the gate to pick up the girl. They back walk together and separate when they come close to their homes.” (FGD, unmarried females).*

In addition, study participants were familiar with the practice of proposals for sex and marriage, and they acknowledge that young males and females may interpret love-ship relationships differently, particularly with regard to whether or not it entails sex.

Following from these insights, our survey inquired about friendship or *love-ship* relationships and proposals for love-ship, sex and marriage as well as the use of intermediaries and frequenting of commonly mentioned locations. Findings suggest a clear continuum of behaviours and are reported in Table 3. It is clear that where

proposals were made or received, they were by and large for friendship/*love-ship*. Females rarely proposed (fewer than 2 per cent), but among young males, the percentage reporting that they had proposed was about equal to the percentage reporting that they had received a proposal (one quarter to one third); the disparity between girls' reports of initiating a proposal and boys' reports of receiving one may be attributed to the general reluctance of girls to disclose information about their relationships, and perhaps, to some extent, to the tendency of young males to exaggerate their attractiveness to girls. Nevertheless, with the exception of married females, about one in three of each of the remaining three groups either received or made a proposal of friendship or *love-ship*. Between one fifth and one third of proposals were made through an intermediary, including friends, younger siblings or other children in the community, who conveyed messages or arranged meeting places.

Beyond this point in the continuum of partnership formation, gender disparities are very clear. Well over half of all males who made or received a proposal reported acceptance, compared to about half of all married females who received a proposal prior to marriage and fewer than one in four unmarried females. In total, 24% of unmarried males reported having a girlfriend; somewhat more, 30% of all married males reported a girlfriend prior to marriage. In contrast, few females reported having a boyfriend: 8 per cent of both the unmarried and the married. Multiple girlfriends were reported by 6 per cent of young males and under one percent of young females. Gender inconsistencies in reporting of intimate relationships are clear and reflect, again, the social norms that make it extremely unacceptable for young females to engage in – or report -- a pre-marital romantic relationship, although the possibility that some young males may exaggerate their experiences cannot be discounted.

Of those who admitted a relationship, moreover, gender disparities persist. For one, it is evident that relationships among young females take place at an earlier age than do those of young males: among those aged 16 and above, almost two in three unmarried females and three in five married females report that the relationship was first initiated by the age of 16 – among males, only 43% and 23% report such an early age for first romantic relationship. Age of first partner also suggests that young males were likely to first date a 15-16 year old female; females in contrast were more likely to date somewhat older males aged 19-20.

Of those who reported a boy or girl friend, some two-thirds or more of all young males and around three fifths of young females reported being alone in a park, on a bus or in a rickshaw with their partners. However, just as young females were considerably less likely than young males to admit the experience of a pre-marital partnership, so also, those who admitted an intimate partner were far less likely to report any physical contact with that partner. As Table 3 shows, well over 80% of all young males reported holding hands; in contrast fewer than two-thirds of young females did so. Three quarters of young males reported kissing their partners; about one third of young females so reported. And while more than one third and two fifths of unmarried and married males, respectively, reported sexual relations with their partners, only 6 percent of unmarried females and 19 percent of married females reported sexual relations. Regular condom use in these sexual partnerships was, moreover, rare: about two in five males who had sexual relations in a friendship or *love-ship* relationship reported condom use on the first occasion, and only about one quarter (including those reporting a single sexual encounter) reported condom use on every occasion that they had engaged in sex.

Although the available evidence (see Sodhi et al., 2003; Mehra et al. 2002) suggest that young people prefer not to disclose their romantic involvements to their parents, the conditions of slum living make it difficult to conduct a relationship in privacy. Significant gender differences are apparent both in the percentage of those who experienced a *love-ship* relationship whose parents came to know of it, and of the latter, the percentage whose parents reacted by either shouting at, beating, forbidding further involvement or marrying off the young person; indeed, boys were not only more successful at hiding the relationship from their parents but also those whose parents came to know reacted far less negatively than did the parents of girls who came to know of their daughters' relationship. Approximately two in five young males who reported a friendship or *love-ship*

relationship reported that their parents had become aware of the relationship – in about one fifth of these cases, parents became angry, beat the son or forbade him from seeing the partner. Among females, half and two thirds of the parents of unmarried and married respondents who had a pre-marital relationship reported that their parents had become aware of the relationship; in this case about one in three had the negative reactions reported above, and, among the currently married group, one in three parents reacted by arranging the daughter's marriage, often with someone other than the male in question.

*“They do this when their parents have gone out for work. If they cut classes and go out the parents will not know. If someone sees them together then they might tell the parents. They abuse the girl and beat her and tell her not to do it. She would keep quiet for few days (ghap basthath) and start all over again.”* (Key informant, works as volunteer in government schemes)

*The girl's father saw her meeting with a boy, then immediately she was married with another boy.”* (FGD, unmarried females).

Young people also described situations in which girls and boys whose parents disapproved of their relationship “eloped.”

*In some cases it is like this, that there is difference of opinion in parents and boy, so the 'problem' gets created. People of old thinking go according to the community. They say she is from one caste and we are from another caste. It happens like this. So they have to elope.... Or she is from a rich family. I am from a poor family.... So they secretly elope and get married.* (FGD unmarried males)

*Sometimes it [the relationship] stops. Sometimes if they feel what they are doing is right then they leave parents and elope and get married. I know many examples who eloped and got married.* (FGD unmarried females)

*They cannot live (rahavat naseel) without each other so they run away. Sometimes the family members do not allow them to meet, so they run away. Sometimes the family conditions in the home are not conducive for marriage, so they run away.* (In depth-interview, unmarried female studying law).

In addition to the discussion of romantic partnerships, our qualitative exploration suggested that youth were aware of other types of sexual relations among their peers, including sex worker relations, sex with older women in the family or community and forced sex. Our survey also inquired about a range of different types of relationships that youth may experience. Findings, reported in Table 4 raise concern about considerable under-reporting of sexual activity among both young females and young males. In total, some 18 per cent of unmarried males report a pre-marital sexual experience, compared to 22 per cent of currently married young males and 1-2% of young females. Aside from sexual relations with a steady partner, other relationships are also reported by young males: sex worker relations (6-7%), sex with older married women (1-2%), same-sex relationships (1-2%) and forced sex (1%). Another 2-3% of young males admitted pre-marital sex in a self-administered form enclosed in a sealed envelope. Although findings fall within the range observed in a range of small case studies (see Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004), it does appear that these are under-reports, of sexual relationships, and particularly those reported by females (married and unmarried), those that were forced, with a same-sex partner or, in the case of males, with a sex worker. What is clear, however, is that for almost all those who experienced pre-marital sex, relations were risky, in that condoms were not used or forced sex or sex worker relations were experienced.

### **Context in which partnerships are formed: Unmarried youth**

In this section, we limit our analysis to the unmarried youth and explore the context in which partnership formation takes place and progresses among unmarried youth in the Indian context. At individual level we



explore work and schooling profiles, including school attendance, performance and access to money; extent of autonomy exercised by the young person in daily life, gender role attitudes and attitudes towards pre-marital partnerships and such risk behaviours as substance abuse and exposure to pornographic materials. At peer level, we explore the extent and nature of peer contacts and communication/support on sensitive matters. And finally, we include such family level influences as co-residence patterns, parents' own risk behaviours including maternal absence from the home, paternal substance abuse, domestic violence and the extent and nature of parental supervision including communication on sensitive matters. Household socio-economic conditions are represented by ownership of consumer goods and maternal education.

### ***Individual level***

Aside from the schooling and work profiles described earlier, individual level factors include attitudes and components of autonomy.

#### *Indicators of autonomy among young people*

The literature on autonomy focuses largely on adults and on women; however it is evident that many of the components that are relevant to adult women may also be of relevance to youth, whose lives are, to different degrees, also circumscribed. From the literature, we glean several separate but inter-dependent elements of autonomy. These include the autonomy conferred by decision-making authority or the extent to which youth have a say in decisions concerning their own lives and well-being; physical autonomy in interacting with the outside world or the extent to which they are free of constraints on their physical mobility; self-efficacy or the extent to which youth express confidence in their ability to express opinions, communicate with others or make their preferences known; and economic and social autonomy and self-reliance, namely the extent to which they have access to resources whether their own earnings or savings (see, for example, Mason, 1984; Caldwell, 1979; Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1982; Jejeebhoy, 1995). In order to assess these components of autonomy, youth in this survey were asked a battery of questions concerning their autonomy and ability to have a voice in determining their own lives. From these responses, four dimensions of autonomy have been selected, and indices for each created: (a) self-efficacy; (b) decision making; (c) mobility; and (d) access to resources.

Self-efficacy: is measured by responses to a number of questions intended to elicit young people's self confidence, in matters relating to ease of building new relationships, expressing opinions and perceiving respect from others for one's views. The index sums the number of four statements (see Table 6 and Appendix 1) and thus ranges from 0 to 4.

Decision-making: is represented by information on the participation of youth in four decisions, selected to capture a range of decisions, small and large purchases, selection of friends, health related decision making and decisions on outings etc. Again, the index sums the number of these five decisions in which the respondent participates, and ranges from 0 to 5.

Mobility: The mobility index sums the number of five places – a local shop, a friend's home, a film or mela, a temple or mosque, and anywhere outside the neighbourhood -- to which the young person can go without obtaining permission. The idea was to select a range of places, both within and outside the neighbourhood, both easy and more difficult to access. The index ranges from 0 if the young person required permission to visit every place, to 5 if she or he can move about without permission to every place.

Access to economic resources: is measured by a single question and a dichotomous indicator relating to whether the respondent has savings, whether through wages earned or other sources.

Findings presented in Table 5 suggest that both young males and young females display considerable self-efficacy and decision making; as expected, young males do display higher levels of both than do young females, and in some instances, gender disparities are wide. For example, on the self-efficacy indicator, while

almost 75% of young males report a positive response on all four indicators, only 39% of young females did so. Wide disparities are observed in the case of mobility: young females are significantly more constrained than young males. This lack of mobility is corroborated in qualitative findings:

Finally, although fewer females work for cash, they are more likely than young males to report savings.

#### *Indicators of gender role attitudes and sexual norms*

Several studies have observed that youth who hold attitudes that accept pre-marital relationships and sexual contact are also more likely than others to have experienced such relationships; likewise, those who hold gender egalitarian norms may be more likely than others to exercise choice in terms of selecting partners, interacting with peers and generally deviating from traditional role expectations.

While gender double standards are expressed by many, findings presented in Table 6 suggest that it is young females rather than young males who hold gender egalitarian attitudes – they are, for example, much more likely to agree that women do not need their husbands’ permissions for everything or that girls should not marry early. Although we have no direct evidence, we hypothesise that with increasing levels of schooling and exposure to the modern world, girls are increasingly likely to rebel against the imposition of traditional gender double standards and limits on their own opportunities for development. In contrast, while pre-marital relations are unacceptable to both young females and males, female respondents are significantly less likely to report that pre-marital relationships are acceptable. Two in five males compared to just one in ten females favour pre-marital relations in at least one situation. It appears that repercussions of deviation from traditional gender double standards in sexual matters are far more formidable for young females than are other gender norms. The reason is obvious:

*“Because it is the girl's life that gets spoiled and not the boy's. The girl's life (jat?) is like a glass vessel which once broken or cracked cannot be joined again. The girl should take lots of care.”*  
(FGD, unmarried males, passed Class 10, out of school).

Two indices have been constructed. The first addresses gender role attitudes; it comprises responses to a set of nine statements about gender roles, and ranges from 0 for those who did not report egalitarian attitudes on any to 9 for those who reported egalitarian attitudes on all statements. The second addresses four attitudes to pre-marital sex and consists of an index ranging from 0 for those who consider pre-marital sex unacceptable in all four situations to 4 for those who consider it acceptable in all 4.

#### *Exposure to other risks*

In addition, we explore such risky behaviours, often undertaken with peers, as alcohol or drug use and exposure to pornographic materials (blue films). As expected and reported in Table 7, young males are far more likely than young females to be exposed to alcohol and drugs as well as to pornographic materials.

Textual data confirm that young people are not only exposed to pornographic materials but also make the link between viewing these materials and sexual activity or thoughts. For example:

*due to TV and cassettes, the way they see also change and also their thinking and automatically people's mind change* (Focus group discussion, unmarried males, Class 10 and out of school)

*People bring CDs home. TV channels show new movies. We see those movies like bandit queens, kamasutra and then, these thoughts come even in dreams (swapnadosh) it happens. Or the person gets attracted to those things... Such things increase due to media. Thoughts change. It affects the thinking and even thinking patterns gets spoilt. Attitude towards others changes..... If we see short skirts in the movies then we remember it afterwards.* (Focus group discussion, unmarried males).

### ***Peer networks and interaction***

Gender disparities in peer networks among young people in India has been noted repeatedly (see for example, Abraham, 1999; Sebastian et al. 2004). We measure the frequency and content of peer interactions – both same and opposite sex -- through the following indicators:

Group membership: is measured by a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not the young person was a member of a group or mandal.

Peer contact: drawing upon the question on frequency of interaction with peers, our index ranges from 0 (indicating never) to 3 (indicating regularly).

Peer interaction index: youth were asked with whom (among a range of options including parents and other gatekeepers) they would be most likely to discuss a range of life matters; we have summed the number of these 6 items on which peers were identified as the most likely confidantes; the index ranges from 0 if peers were not identified as a confidante on any matter to 6 if they were identified as the confidante on all 6 matters.

Findings reported in Table 8 reiterate the limited peer networks of young females compared to young males: They are clearly less free to join groups, meet peers less often and are less likely than young males to confide in their peers, a pattern consistent with socialisation patterns that grant greater freedom to sons than to daughters.

### ***Parental connections: Parent-child interaction and family support***

Parent-child interaction as well as parental supervision and supportiveness have been identified as critical in enabling a safe transition to sexual behaviour. These issues are explored through the following indicators and reported in Table 9:

Socialisation patterns: are measured by (a) young people's assessment of the extent to which their socialisation was strict, restrictions imposed or closely supervised; and (b) how much time the mother spent away from the home each day to proxy for the extent to which youth might have been unsupervised.

Strictness and supervision: One quarter of all males and two fifths of all females reported a restrictive, strict family environment, reiterating the greater permissiveness with which young males are socialised. Textual data also confirm that young females in particular perceive themselves to be closely supervised by parents:

*If we make friendship with boy if he meet us anywhere and if our parents see us talking somewhere then something might come in their mind. So we are scared and we think whether we should do friendship with boys.... some parents are really very strict. They don't like us talking with boys, they also don't like the friendships with boys. Then if we do friendship behind parent's back ( nakalat) they don't like it. Because our parents do not trust us (focus group discussion, unmarried girls, Class 11).*

Data suggest however that young females and males are typically left alone, without an adult presence within the home, for an average of 2-3 hours each day. Qualitative data lend support to the argument that despite strict supervision, parental absence provides an opportunity for the development of partnerships, including sexual partnerships:

*When no one was there in our houses, we used to meet. Happened like this. Parents went for work and brother went to school. (in-depth interview, married male aged 21, passed Class 9, driver).*

*the parents leave very early for work, they work in the markets etc. the children are at home alone till they go to school at 12PM. At that time the boy comes to her house.*(Key informant, doctor, practicing in the area for 22 years).

*“Here in almost every house both the mother and the father work to earn money. They have to go otherwise what they will eat is their main problem. So how they can see what their children do in their absence. They eat tobacco in the form of "Goa" guthaka. It is very common. They don't give any type of value or respect to their parents”* (FGD, mothers of youth aged 15-24).

Communication on sexual and reproductive health matters: youth were asked whether their parents had ever discussed some four sexual and reproductive health matters with them; these have been summed into an index ranging from 0 if no matters were discussed to 4 if all were discussed. Findings confirm that communication about sexual matters is extremely rare, irrespective of the sex of the parent or child. Yet, as is evident from the following, young people in focus group discussions did express a preference for communicating with parents about intimate matters but are constrained by perceptions of parental mistrust:

*Parents should talk. Instead of us asking the parents, it is better that parents talk with us. Otherwise we will ask some thing and parents will think something else (misunderstand if we ask for information)* (Focus group discussion, unmarried out of college males).

*“The mother should talk to the girl and the father should talk to the boy. They do not. They do not have the time and they do not even know themselves. Even if the children ask any questions, they just shoo them away saying “what are you asking?” So what will the children do when they want to know something? They ask their friends. One thing leads to another and they start having relationships like that.”* (key informant interview, female volunteer working in a Government scheme).

Parental interaction index: As described in the description of the peer interaction index, youth were asked with whom they would be most likely to discuss a range of life matters; as in the peer interaction index, we have summed the number of these 6 items on which the mother or father was identified as the most likely confidante; the index ranges from 0 if the parent was not identified as a confidante on any matter to 6 if the parents was identified as the confidante on all 6 matters. In general findings suggest that supportive interaction is limited. Of the six life matters indicated, the mother was the leading confidante for 1.7 among young males and 3.8 among young females; fathers, in contrast were rarely cited as a confidante among both females and males. Indeed, the following observation suggests that young people themselves make the link between parental support and partnership formation. For example:

*Why does a boy or a girl go out, it is when there is no one in the home who understands him/her. They start feeling that there is no one who understands them. Then with whom should we share our problems? When he faces this problem, then he starts searching for a solution [opposite sex friend] in his surroundings* (Focus group discussion, unmarried males, educated till Class 10).

Family structure and discord: is measured by the following dichotomous indicators: (a) whether the respondent resided in a two-parent household; (b) whether the father beat the mother; (b) whether the respondent was beaten by a family member; and (c) whether the father used alcohol or drugs.

Family dynamics, reflected in Table 9, do not bode well for a supportive parent-child relationship. In one in five homes, young people witnessed their fathers beating their mothers. In over two-fifths, fathers were reported to consume/abuse alcohol or drugs. Substantial proportions of young people -- one third and one sixth of all males and females -- had experienced violence within the family. Qualitative data corroborate this profile of family discord and an extreme case describes her experience:

*My father wanted more and more money and that is why he did not want us to study. He wanted us to work and bring money for him to drink.... one night my father came home and started fighting with my mother. Beating her. He was not happy with the vegetable she had made. I interfered and told my father that the vegetable was good and all of us had eaten it. He got angry. He asked me whose side I was on. Why I was taking mother's side, etc, beat me up, poured kerosene on me (In depth interview, married female, aged 24, Class 8, eloped).*

### **Partnership progression: Correlates**

We now explore the extent to which the range of individual and family level indicators discussed above influence the formation and progression of partnerships among unmarried youth. Table 10 presents the results of several logistic regression analyses, conducted separately for females and males. Dependent variables include (a) whether the respondent had an opposite sex friendship or *love-ship* relationship; (b) whether a respondent who reported such a relationship had experienced physical intimacy, namely holding hands, hugging, kissing on the lips; and (c) whether a male who reported such a relationship had engaged in sexual relations with the partner (conducted only for males in view of the small number of females reporting a sexual relationship with a romantic partner). Not unexpectedly, as seen in Table 10, the pattern of correlates differs by sex of the respondent and according to the dependent measure under study.

#### *Experience of a friendship/love-ship relationship*

Correlates of a love-ship experience are relatively similar for both young females and young males. Findings confirm the importance of peer and family relations for both, but highlight the fact that on balance, family relations are more likely to be central for females, while peer contacts are more likely to be central for young males.

Among individual level indicators, it is wage work and attitudes regarding the acceptability of pre-marital sex that are key correlates for both females and males. Clearly, wage work enables the young person the freedom, both in terms of physical mobility and in terms of access to economic resources, to pursue relationships. Youth reporting the acceptability of pre-marital sex are, moreover, more likely to report a partnership than others. Finally, as others have observed, exposure to other risky influences, namely alcohol and pornographic films are significantly associated with love-ship for males. What is notable is the uniform lack of significance of schooling levels, gender role attitudes and every autonomy indicator for both females and males. Clearly, whether or not the young person is permitted physical mobility aside from that associated with wage work, makes his or her own life decisions, has access to savings or reports self-confidence are unrelated to whether or not she or he has a love-ship partnership.

Peer networks and relations clearly play a powerful role in determining whether a young respondent has experienced a love-ship relationship. Of the three indicators, two each are significant for females and males respectively. Among males, belonging to a social group and the frequency of peer contact are significantly associated with reporting a love-ship relationship; for females, the frequency and especially the content of peer interaction are significant.

Especially notable are findings relating to family relations. For one, the socio-economic situation of the household and maternal education levels are consistently unrelated to whether the young person reports a love-ship relationship, possibly a result of the relative homogeneity in these indicators reported in this slum setting. Second, sex-specific findings appear to be far more important for young females than for young males. What is consistent – if somewhat counter-intuitive – is the finding that those reporting that their upbringing has been strict are significantly more likely than others to report a love-ship relationship, clearly dispelling any suggestion that close supervision will deter youth from seeking romantic partnerships (although the possibility of reverse causation cannot be ignored). At the same time, there is the more expected positive association

between the number of hours daily that a mother spends away from the home and the formation of a love-ship relationship among young females but not young males. Moreover, an unstable family environment, namely witnessing domestic violence against the mother is significantly associated with partnership formation for both young females and males; in addition, girls who have themselves experienced violence from family members are more likely than others to have reported a love-ship relationship.

Certain parental level factors also appear to have an inhibiting effect. Close parent-daughter communication on intimate matters plays a significant role in deterring love-ship relations – parent-son communication, in contrast, is unrelated to partnership formation. And among males, those residing with both parents appear significantly less likely to have experienced love-ship than others.

#### *Any physical intimacy*

Among those reporting a love-ship relationship, fewer indicators appear to be associated with experience of physical intimacy (holding hands, hugging, kissing). What is notable now is the finding that not a single peer or family level indicator remains significant. Among both females and males, it is, rather, an array of individual factors that appear to be associated with whether intimacy is experienced. Again, the pattern of indicators varies by sex of respondent. Among females, three indicators are significant: wage work, self-efficacy and attitudes that favour pre-marital sex. Among males, in contrast, the last of these is the only indicator in common; other significant factors include decision making as well as substance use and exposure to pornographic materials.

#### *Sexual experience among young males*

Finally, we explore the correlates of sexual experience in a love-ship relationship. We restrict this analysis to males because of the small proportions of females reporting a penetrative sexual experience. As above, we find that family level measures play no role in whether or not a love-ship relationship involves sex. Rather, young males who report positive attitudes to pre-marital sex, decision-making authority and mobility are significantly more likely than others to have engaged in sex. So too are those who report alcohol use. What is somewhat difficult to interpret is the opposing influences of two peer relations indicators: while close interaction with peers is positively associated with sexual experience, belonging to a youth or other formal organisation appears to have an inhibiting effect.

#### **Any sexual experience among young males**

We finally explore, among all young males (irrespective of love-ship experience) correlates of any penetrative sexual experience. Findings suggest that only a few indicators are significantly associated with pre-marital experiences among young males: at individual level, positive attitudes to pre-marital sex, substance use and exposure to pornographic materials and current wage work are significantly associated with the likelihood of a penetrative sexual experience. Better educated young males however are less likely than others to have engaged in any penetrative sex. At family level, while witnessing domestic violence against mothers is a risk factor, close parental ties, in terms of confiding in parents about important life events, are significant deterrents to sexual relations. Peer influences are, surprisingly, no longer significant although such significant correlates as substance use and exposure to pornographic films are frequently a peer group activity and may reflect powerful peer influences.

#### **Discussion**

The objectives of this paper were to shed light on the extent of pre-marital partnerships among young people residing in urban slums of Pune, and on factors at individual, peer and family levels that are associated with this experience. At the outset, we acknowledge that the slum environment itself, notably the considerable presence of alcohol, sex work and violence, may play an important underlying role in precipitating early formation of sexual partnerships. Acknowledging this contextual factor, our study aimed to explore the context of partnership formation and gender disparities in partnership formation. It also aimed to shed light on the

extent to which indicators of partnership formation and progression are in fact explained by commonly available measures such as education, and economic activity, as well as a number of specific measures highlighted in the literature on youth risk behaviours such as individual autonomy levels, exposure to pornographic materials and interaction at family level. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study, some very clear, and others tentative and suggestive.

First, findings confirm that even in this outwardly traditional setting, opportunities do exist for the formation of pre-marital partnerships. We may speculate, moreover, that as young people remain longer in school, are engaged in wage work, even more opportunities for partnership formation will present themselves. Indeed, over 30% of young males and unmarried females have received or made a proposal for love-ship or friendship, and one quarter or more young males and one tenth unmarried young females have reported a love-ship experience. Findings also suggest that despite perceptions of close supervision by parents, young people do find opportunities to mix with friends and spend time alone with partners. Parental absence from the home affords additional opportunities for unsupervised time although this was associated with partnership formation only among young females.

Second, findings suggest a clear continuum of experiences in the courting experience and wide gender differences in reporting of experiences along this continuum (see also D'Silva et al., 1995). Among the unmarried for example, an approximately equal proportion of young females and males report that they have made or received a proposal of love-ship. Far more males than females report however that the offer was accepted or that they had ever engaged in a love-ship relationship. And among those who experienced love-ship, as expected, there is a steady drop-off in reports of such behaviours as handholding and hugging, kissing on the lips and sexual experience – again the drop-off is much steeper for females than for males. For example, among unmarried males reporting a love-ship relationship, 80% reported hugging and holding hands, over three quarters reported kissing on the mouth and two in five reported sex. Among females, while levels are lower, the pattern is similar, declining from 62% to 35% to 6%, correspondingly.

Third, experience of sexual relations, while likely to be under-reported, is reported by almost one in five young males and fewer than two percent of young females. Sexual relations are most likely to be experienced, especially among females, within the context of a committed partnership; however, among males, casual relations are also reported. For the most part, sexual relationships are almost always unsafe.

Fourth, the evidence suggests that individual, peer and family level factors influence partnership formation. By and large, few individual level factors are important -- Wage work, reflecting freedom of movement, access to resources and exposure to the outside world, attitudes that accept pre-marital sex and exposure to substances and pornographic films are consistently associated with formation of love-ship relationships; in contrast, neither schooling levels nor a single direct measure of autonomy has any influence on the formation of a love-ship relationship. Evidence however confirms the findings of the literature suggesting that peer influences and family level interaction and supportiveness play a significant role in encouraging and inhibiting the formation of partnerships. Peer influences, for the most part, appear to encourage partnership formation; family level measures exercise both positive and inverse influences: such measures as witnessing or experiencing violence in the family are positively associated with partnership formation, while such factors as close parent-child relations and two-parent households appear to be inversely associated. Of note is the consistent finding that strict family upbringing and witnessing of parental violence encourages partnership formation among both young females and males.

Fifth, findings also suggest significant gender differences in patterns of influences on partnership formation. On balance, and given the more extensive peer networks of males, peer influences are stronger among males than among females. Conversely, parent and family level factors are generally stronger among females: of the

nine family level measures, six are significant among females, and three among males. For example, like strict family upbringing, experience of violence appears to encourage young females but not young males to seek love-ship relations; likewise, close interaction with fathers and/or mothers appears to deter females but not males from forming these relationships. Among males in contrast, residence in a two-parent family appears to inhibit the formation of love-ship relations. What is notable, moreover, is that among those who report a love-ship relationship, whether or not physical intimacy is experienced is shaped significantly by individual rather than peer or parental level factors.

Sixth, correlates of pre-marital sex among young males suggest again a positive link with wage work, exposure to substance and pornographic materials and exposure to family violence and attitudes that accept pre-marital sex. However, protective influences are also observed: young males who have completed secondary school (Class 10) and those who confide important life matters to parents are significantly less likely than others to have experienced pre-marital sex.

Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of our study. In this traditional setting governed by powerful norms inhibiting any friendship – whether platonic, romantic or sexual – among young people, relations are carried out secretly and youth are clearly unwilling to disclose such a partnership. Hence, notwithstanding the significant rapport built between the study team and communities, under-reporting of pre-marital partnerships cannot be ruled out. Young females have more to lose than young males and it is evident from both the wide discrepancy between reports of females and males with regard to partnership formation and from our qualitative data drawn from key informant interviews and in-depth interviews with selected young people that young females have under-reported these experiences. Likewise, it is clear to us that while young males may have been more forthcoming than young females in reporting love-ship relations, they may well have under-reported their sexual partnerships – particularly same-sex relations, relations with older married women and sex worker relations. Finally, we must acknowledge that our inability to reach our sample of married males may have biased our findings with regard to partnerships.

### **Implications**

Our findings confirm that in this urban slum setting, large proportions of young people are enrolled in school and that gender disparities in educational attainment have disappeared; they also suggest that large proportions of unmarried young people, including females, are engaged in wage earning activities. At the same time, youth are increasingly exposed, through media and greater contact with the world around them, to new ideas and there is clear evidence of peer group interaction and mixing among them. For all of these reasons, it is fair to assume that opportunities for social mixing and partnership formation among young females and males will increasingly present themselves. In this context, it is critical that policies and programmes for youth in this urban and similar slum settings, work towards ensuring that in forming partnerships, youth are fully informed and equipped to make safe choices. Our findings suggest at least two areas for intervention.

For one, evidence that suggests that youth have few reliable sources of information about sex and relationship matters. Communication on sexual matters with parents is limited; young people rarely confide relationship issues to their parents. In contrast, over half of all young males' views on sex are shaped by the pornographic films to which they are exposed. And peer influences are considerable; evidence suggests that youth may turn to peers not only for social interaction but also for support in confidential matters, including sexual. These kinds of findings suggest that it is likely that young people are poorly informed about safe sex and relationship matters. Clearly, there is an urgent need for sexuality education among young people that highlights for young people issues of relationships, consent and safety; in other words, programmes that counter the kinds of unreliable messages conveyed by the popular media and/or peers.

Second, evidence calls for programmes that address parents and encourage parent-child connections. For example, findings suggest that parents themselves may be reluctant, uncomfortable or poorly informed about



discussing sexual matters with their adolescent children. Programmes are needed that not only inform parents about sexual matters and enable them to overcome their embarrassment about discussing these with their adolescent children. In addition, programmes must focus on encouraging close interaction between youth and their mothers and fathers, enabling parents and youth to forge closer relationships, apprising parents of the futility of attempts to prohibit or penalise youth relationships and raising awareness of the fact that close and strict supervision of daughters and provision of relative freedom to sons may actually promote unsafe behaviours among both.

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**Table 1: Household profile by youth group**

	Unmarried males	Married males	Unmarried females	Married females
Number	817	458	1784	1154
Mean years of schooling, father*	5.3	3.7	5.7	4.4
Mean years of schooling, mother**	2.6	1.1	3.2	1.7
Mean number of consumer goods owned	3.3	2.9	3.3	3.0
HH has own toilet	6.7	4.6	7.9	7.9
HH has electricity	98.3	95.4	98.0	96.3
HH cooks with gas/electricity	79.7	64.0	86.1	72.0
HH has own water	68.7	63.1	87.4	77.1
Religion				
Hindu	85.2	84.5	82.6	85.3
Muslim	9.4	6.6	7.0	6.8
Christian	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2
Buddhist	5.0	8.5	10.2	7.8

\*N=4148; \*\*N=4195 because of missing values

**Table 2: Socio-demographic profile of youth by group**

	Unmarried males	Married males	Unmarried females	Married females
Number	817	458	1784	1154
<b>Age and age at marriage</b>				
Mean age	19.0	22.6	17.4	21.3
% aged <20	60.3	3.7	84.5	19.3
% married at <18	----	5.7	----	54.5
<b>Residence patterns</b>				
Co-resides with both parents	74.2	53.5	82.9	1.9
Co-resides with one parent	91.1	73.4	96.5	5.5
Co-resides with mother/father in-law	----	0.4	----	51.8
Co-resides with any in-laws	11.4	15.3	9.5	60.4
<b>Education status</b>				
Ever enrolled in school	98.9	92.8	98.5	84.1
Currently in school	33.9	1.5	41.8	1.6
Mean years of schooling*	9.3	7.4	9.5	6.7
Completed 8+ years of school	80.1	57.6	80.9	44.1
Passed last exam**	64.2	53.9	75.5	68.0
<b>Work history and current activity</b>				
<b>Status</b>				
Ever engaged in unpaid work	9.2	15.3	7.5	19.1
Unpaid work in last 12 m	5.6	6.1	5.1	3.9
Ever engaged in paid work	70.5	98.0	39.5	40.1
Paid work in last 12m	67.1	96.5	34.1	18.6
Currently working and in school	12.3	1.5	9.0	0.6
No work or school	10.3	3.5	30.3	77.9
Leisure time: number of hours daily	2.4	1.3	2.4	2.8

\*0 for those with no schooling

\*\*for those who had ever been to school

**Table 3: Friendship, love-ship, sex**

	Unmarried males	Married males	Unmarried females	Married females
<b>Number</b>	817	458	1784	1154
<b>Friendships</b>				
R has same sex friends	98.5	95.8	95.0	92.9
Mean number of close same sex friends	3.7	3.5	1.6	1.5
R has friends of opposite sex	38.0	30.3	23.4	9.6
<b>Respondent “proposed”</b>				
R has ever proposed love-ship, sex or marriage to someone	24.4	24.0	1.6	1.2
Mediator used	5.8	8.3	0.5	0.6
Proposal accepted	15.7	19.7	1.0	1.1
R has ever proposed love-ship to someone	23.5	22.1	1.5	0.9
Proposal accepted	15.1	18.8	1.0	0.9
<b>Respondent ever received a “proposal”</b>				
R has ever received a proposal of love-ship, sex or marriage from someone	24.7	29.9	33.1	17.2
Mediator used	5.8	8.3	11.1	5.8
Proposal accepted	14.2	19.0	7.4	7.9
R has ever received proposal of love-ship	24.4	27.1	30.6	13.0
Proposal accepted	14.0	17.7	7.0	6.2
<b>R ever made or received any proposal</b>	36.7	40.0	33.2	17.3
<b>R ever made or received love-ship proposal</b>	35.9	37.1	30.7	13.1
<b>Partnerships</b>				
Ever had a boy/girlfriend	24.2	30.8	8.0	8.4
Ever had more than one boy/girlfriend	5.4	7.2	0.6	0.2
<b>Patterns of pre-marital relations</b>				
NUMBER who reported a boy/girlfriend	198	141	142	97
Mean age at first date	16.9	18.0	16.2	16.3
% aged 16 or younger at 1 <sup>st</sup> partnership	43.4	22.7	64.2	57.7
Mean age of partner at first date	15.7	16.4	19.1	20.3
Parents came to know	38.4	44.7	49.3	68.0
Parents came to know and shouted, beat R or forbade R from seeing partner	17.7	23.4	33.1	36.1
Parents came to know and arranged R’s marriage (to partner or someone else)	2.0	5.7	7.8	32.0
Ever held hands with boy/girlfriend	84.9	84.4	62.0	65.0
Ever been alone in a park with bfgf	66.7	73.8	54.2	62.9
Ever been alone in a bus/rickshaw	65.2	67.4	54.9	63.9
Ever kissed boy/girlfriend	76.3	78.2	34.5	36.1
Ever had sex with bfgf	37.8	45.4	6.3	18.6
Of sexually experienced, condom at 1 <sup>st</sup> experience with bfgf	41.3	34.6	(33.3)	(23.5)
Of sexually experienced, regular condom used with bfgf	28.4	25.0	(11.1)	(11.1)
*bfgf=boyfriend/girlfriend				

**Table 4: Pre-marital sexual experiences**

	Unmarried males	Married males	Unmarried females	Married females
<b>Number</b>	817	458	1784	1154
<b>Premarital sexual relations</b>				
With boy/girl-friend	9.0	14.0	0.5	1.6
Had sex with spouse before marriage	----	2.6	----	1.3
Ever forced to have sex	1.0	0.7	0.1	0.1
Ever perpetrated forced sex	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0
Ever received money/gift for sex	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
Ever paid for sex	6.4	7.2	----	----
Ever had sex with older/married woman	2.2	1.3	----	----
Ever had same sex relations	2.1	1.1	0.0	0.0
Reported pre-marital sex in sealed envelope	2.8	2.0	0.8	0.1
Any pre-marital sex	17.5	22.3	1.4	1.8
Any risky pre-marital sex*	16.0	19.4	1.3	1.7

\*non-use or irregular use of condoms, sex worker relations, forced sex relations, paid sex relations

**Table 5: Contextual factors: Autonomy levels**

	Unmarried Males	Unmarried females
Number	817	1784
<b>Self-efficacy</b>		
When there is a discussion, family respects R's opinion	91.9	87.5
R can convince people of what s/he believes	93.0	91.5
R finds it easy to make new friendships	93.4	85.2
R does not find it difficult to express opinions to elders	87.4	56.4
Mean number of + statements	3.66	3.21
% reporting +ly on all 4 statements	73.9	39.4
<b>Decision-making</b>		
R decides who her/his friends will be	97.8	92.7
R involved in decisions on major purchases like TV	85.2	82.2
R decides on purchases of clothes etc	86.9	91.2
R makes decision on going to mela etc	80.8	66.9
R makes decisions on what to do when sick	64.1	65.6
Makes all 5 decisions	51.0	47.2
Mean number of decisions made	4.15	3.99
<b>Mobility: R does not need permission to visit the following</b>		
Shop	70.9	60.9
A friend	68.7	47.4
Film, mela etc	55.7	7.3
Temple/mosque	78.5	42.6
Outside the neighbourhood	28.2	4.0
Mean number of places for which no permission is needed	3.02	1.62
<b>Access to resources</b>		
R owns property	3.2	0.3
R has savings	15.9	30.3



**Table 6: Youth attitudes: gender role and pre-marital sex**

	Unmarried males	Unmarried females
Number	817	1784
<b>Attitudes about girls' autonomy, gender egalitarian norms</b>		
Does not approve of traditional gender roles	62.3	83.9
Even if money scarce, boys should not be educated before girls	80.5	96.8
Head of household does NOT have to be male	31.0	72.7
Girls should decide their own marriage	73.3	88.2
Women should not have to get husband's permission for everything	12.9	41.4
Do not agree that best thing for girl is an early marriage	77.0	91.4
Girls should be allowed to work before marriage	79.0	96.4
Girls should be allowed to work after marriage	75.2	93.3
Girls should decide about the number of children to have	32.6	38.1
Mean number of statements in which egalitarian gender role attitudes were expressed	5.24	7.02
<b>Attitudes to pre-marital sex: % agreeing that</b>		
It is all right for boys and girls to kiss, hug and touch each other	29.0	5.1
Nothing wrong with unmarried boys and girls having sex before marriage if engaged to be married	11.0	3.3
It is all right for boys to have sex before marriage	15.5	3.6
It is all right for girls to have sex before marriage	14.0	3.1
% favouring pre marital relations on at least one of the above statements	37.3	9.0
Mean number of responses favouring pre-marital relations	0.70	0.15

**Table 7: Other risk behaviours: substance use and exposure to pornographic materials**

	Unmarried males	Unmarried females
Number	817	1784
<b>Substance use</b>		
R consumes alcohol	24.5	1.2
R consumed alcohol in last month	19.8	0.5
R takes drugs	1.8	0.2
R gambles	4.7	0.3
<b>Exposure to pornographic materials</b>		
R exposed to pornographic materials (blue films)	54.2	1.0
R watches blue films once a month or more frequently	16.5	0.1

**Table 8: Peer influences**

	Unmarried males	Unmarried females
Number	817	1784
<b>Peer networks</b>		
Group membership: is a member of at least one group (mandal)	56.2	4.3
Peer contact index (0-4)	1.8	0.8
Peer interaction index: would discuss intimate matters (0-6)	1.7	0.7

**Table 9: Parental connections**

	Unmarried males	Unmarried females
Number	817	1784
<b>Perceptions about socialisation</b>		
Parents are/were strict	27.6	41.2
Mean number of hours mother spends outside the home	2.5	3.3
<b>Communication with mother: most likely to discuss following issues with mother</b>		
Physical health problems	64.5	86.2
Work related problems	39.4	63.5
Education related problems	18.1	60.0
Boy-girl problems	2.5	25.6
Family problem	43.7	67.8
Menstruation/nocturnal emission problems	0.4	81.4
Mean number of matters discussed	1.69	3.84
<b>Communication with father: most likely to discuss following issues with father</b>		
Physical health problems	14.1	0.8
Work related problems	29.3	18.7
Education related problems	22.3	20.1
Boy-girl problems	1.5	1.2
Family problem	28.6	3.4
Menstruation/nocturnal emission problems	0.5	0.6
Mean number of matters discussed	0.96	0.45
<b>Mother has ever discussed the following:</b>		
Body changes	0.5	16.0
Reproductive systems	0.0	2.0
Contraception	0.1	0.7
Sexual relationships	0.0	1.2
Mean number of matters discussed	0.01	1.02
<b>Father has ever discussed the following:</b>		
Body changes	0.7	0.5
Reproductive systems	0.3	0.0
Contraception	0.4	0.1
Sexual relationships	0.3	0.3
Mean number of matters discussed	0.02	0.01
<b>Family structure, violence, substance abuse</b>		
Respondent resides with both parents	74.2	82.9
Father beat mother	18.7	18.7
Father drank alcohol, used drugs	43.9	44.7
Respondent beaten by family	31.5	15.3

**Table 10: Partnership patterns and correlates, unmarried youth aged 15-24**

	Of all unmarried youth, % who experienced		Of those reporting love-ship, % who experienced:			Of all unmarried males, % who experienced:
	Love-ship		Physical intimacy		Sex	Sex, any partner
	Female	Males	Female	Males	Males	Males
<b>Individual level</b>						
<b>a. Socio-demographic</b>						
Age	1.06	0.93	1.15	0.94	0.96	1.02
Schooling: 10+ years	0.87	1.22	0.60	0.88	0.72	0.63*
Currently wage earning	1.61**	1.75**	2.84**	0.60	1.88	1.77*
Has spare time	1.04	1.07	1.05	1.04	1.00	1.07
<b>b. Autonomy</b>						
Decision making	1.15	0.95	0.77	1.51*	1.54**	1.19
Mobility: no permission	0.92	1.00	1.05	1.27	1.28**	1.05
Self-efficacy	1.10	1.05	2.26**	0.82	0.66	0.94
Has savings	0.84	1.37	1.04	1.09	0.74	1.16
<b>c. Attitudes</b>						
Gender role	1.00	1.05	0.96	0.82	0.92	0.99
Acceptability of pre-marital sex	1.97***	1.45***	1.77**	1.54*	1.42**	1.50***
<b>d. Exposure to other risks</b>						
Alcohol, drug use	0.65	2.02***	-----	3.28*	1.96*	3.56***
Blue film index	1.74*	1.65***	-----	1.45*	1.27	1.59***
<b>Peer level</b>						
Group membership	0.92	1.55*	1.01	0.54	0.43**	0.87
Contact index	1.20*	1.22**	0.94	1.11	1.07	1.12
Interaction index	1.36***	0.97	1.14	1.37	1.41*	1.03
<b>Family level</b>						
Co-resides with both parents	0.95	0.61*	1.13	0.66	1.37	0.89
Parental strictness	1.45*	1.75***	0.49	0.59	0.70	1.38
Maternal absence from home	1.08***	0.95	1.01	1.03	0.94	1.02
Maternal communication on SRH	1.23	2.29	0.94	----	----	1.42
Paternal communication on SRH	2.08	0.60	----	----	----	0.67
Maternal interaction index	0.90*	0.94	0.88	0.97	1.09	0.85*
Paternal interaction index	0.78*	1.00	1.22	0.86	0.75	0.79**
Father beats mother	1.52*	1.54*	1.37	0.76	1.21	1.75*
Father abuses substance	1.06	0.99	0.81	0.57	0.79	0.80
R beaten by family	2.52***	1.08	2.36	0.74	0.55	0.74
Consumer goods owned	1.09	1.10	1.23	1.04	1.09	1.16
Yrs of schooling mother	1.01	0.98	0.92	1.09	0.95	1.02
Pseudo R2	.16	.22	.17	.19	.19	.25
Number	1784	817	133	195	195	817

+ with partner, same sex relationship, forced sex or, for males, paid sex or sex with older woman

Variable	Operational Definition
<b>Dependent variables</b>	
Has/had a girl/boyfriend	Dichotomous 0=no; 1=yes
Has had physical intimacy with girl/boyfriend	Dichotomous 0=no; 1=yes
Has had sexual relations with girl/boyfriend	Dichotomous 0=no; 1=yes
Has ever had pre-marital sex	Dichotomous 0=no; 1=yes if reports sex with boy/girl friend, forced sex (as victim, perpetrator), same-sex relations, paid sex, sex with older married woman
<b>Household characteristics</b>	
Consumer goods owned	7 items: pressure cooker, bicycle, telephone, tv, transport, VCR, mobile phone
Mother's education	in years
<b>Individual level</b>	
Age	in years
Schooling: Number of years	respondent has completed 10 years of school, typically completed by age 15 passed last examination (dichotomous)
Work status	Current wage work (dichotomous)
Leisure time	Average number of hours spare time daily
<i>Direct autonomy measures</i>	
▪ Decision making	Range 0-5: makes own decisions about friends, major and minor purchases, going to film, what to do when sick
▪ Mobility	range 0-5: Needs no permission to go to local shop, visit friend, film or mela, temple, outside area
▪ Self-efficacy	range 0-4: family respects R's opinion, can convince others of beliefs, finds it easy to make new relations, can express opinion to elders
▪ Savings	has savings (dichotomous)
<i>Attitudes</i>	
Gender	Range 0-9 reflecting + attitudes: work roles for women; boys' education, men as household head, girls' to decide marriage, women to obtain permission from husband, early marriage best for girls, girls should work before marriage, after marriage, women should decide when to have children
Pre-marital sex	Range 0-4: nothing wrong with kissing, pre-marital sex if engaged, pre-marital sex ok for boys, for girls
<i>Risk behaviours</i>	
▪ Substance use	Drinks alcohol or takes drugs
▪ Blue film exposure	Index range 0-5: never watched a blue film; rarely, sometimes, once a month, once a week, more than once a week
<b>Peer networks, relations</b>	
Contact index	Range 0-3: goes out with peers never (0), rarely (1), sometimes (2), regularly (3)
Interaction	Range 0-6: Would discuss problems with peers (physical health, work, education, boy-girl, sexual, family)
Group membership	Is a member of one or more groups (mandals)

[continued]

Variable	Operational Definition
<b>Family relations</b>	
Co-residence with parents	Lives with mother and father (dichotomous)
Parents strict	Parents are strict (dichotomous)
Mother away from home	Number of hours a day mother is out of the home
Communication with mother	Range 0-4: Mother has discussed SRH matters with R
Communication with father	Range 0-4: Father has discussed SRH matters with R
Confides in mother	Range 0-6: Would discuss problems with mother (physical health, work, education, boy-girl, sexual, family)
Confides in father	Range 0-6: Would discuss problems with father (as above)
Parental violence	Father beats mother (dichotomous)
Father uses substances	Father drinks, takes drugs (dichotomous)
Violence towards respondent	Respondent has been beaten by family member (dichotomous)