

# A study on prevalence of premarital sex among adolescent students.

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**Background:** This is the base line study conducted among adolescent students of District Chitwan to correlate between the knowledge of students about HIV/AIDS and prevalence of premarital sex along with some other epidemiological variables.

**Methods:** The present study is a cross sectional base line study conducted among adolescent students of randomly selected twelve higher secondary schools of Chitwan district in January 2005.

**Results:** Despite the satisfactory knowledge about HIV/AIDS, prevalence of premarital sex was quite high (18.32%). It was more common among boys (25.8%) than girls (9.2%) and it was consistently increasing with increase in age. It was most common among Hindus adolescents (19.0%) and least among Christians. Parent's education played very important role in reducing the practice of premarital sex as it was revealed in this study 81.76% of the adolescents had practiced safe sex and used condom and 22.32% of them properly disposed of it after use.

**Conclusion:** It was satisfying that most of the adolescents who practiced sex, were protected by using condom but the correct disposal was not known to majority that's why they disposed it indiscriminately by throwing on the road or the left ground.

**Key words:-** Adolescents, Premarital sex, Condom.

## Introduction

Sex is a natural phenomenon and is an essential component of procreation. As the child grows old and reaches the adolescence, physical changes occurring in the body under the influence of hormone make them physically strong, mentally mature and sexually active. Adolescence is a period of great physical, mental and emotional turmoil and teenagers in curiosity to prove their sexuality start experimenting with sex<sup>1</sup>. At the individual level, physical maturity is found to be associated with a desire to engage in risk taking behavior. Premarital sex during adolescence is often unprotected against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and as a consequence, often results in adverse social, economic and health consequences. The grievous part of it is a large number of sexually transmitted infections including deadly disease AIDS.

Due to social and cultural taboos and inhibitions, sexual health research in Nepal remains restricted to a small number of studies; for young people, especially those who are unmarried. Further, much of the hitherto limited research with young people remains unpublished<sup>9</sup>. A study on substance use and premarital sex indicate that the prevalence of this risk-taking behavior among adolescents is increasing in Asian countries. In order to formulate and implement

effective adolescent health policies and programmes, it is essential that the prevalence of adolescent's risk taking behavior ie premarital sex and the factors associated with it are identified<sup>2</sup>. Keeping it in mind, the present study was conducted among adolescent students of district Chitwan to access prevalence of premarital sex, practices of condom during sex, their knowledge about HIV/AIDS and other different epidemiological factors associated with it.

## Material and Methods

The present study is a cross sectional base line study conducted among adolescent students of randomly selected twelve higher secondary schools of Chitwan district in January 2005. First of all, the purpose of this study survey was explained to them and their verbal consent was taken collectively. Then a pre-designed and pre-tested proforma/questionnaire, which was in English language, was provided to them and all the terms were explained to them with the help of their teachers. Under the supervision of researchers, all the students were made to sit in their classroom itself in examination condition and requested to fill the questionnaire correctly. The filled proforma were folded and collected in the box maintaining strict confidentiality and anonymity. The data thus collected was compiled, analyzed and interpreted using EPI info 6 software.

## Results

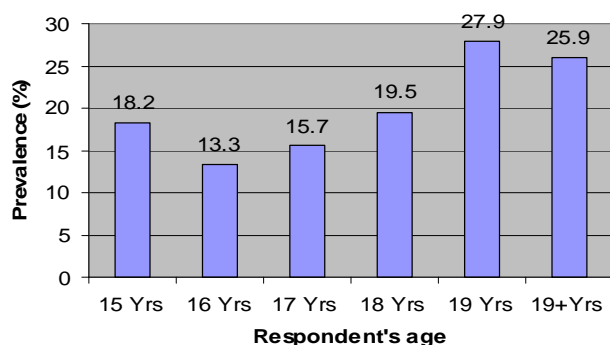
It is highly satisfying to note that 100% of the respondents had heard about the disease HIV/AIDS and 95.3% knew its viral aetiology. Quite high proportions of adolescents (77.3%) were aware about the correct modes of transmission of infection and high -risk behavior as well. Safe sexual practices as a preventive measures were known to 81.2% (Table-1).

When enquired in detail their knowledge about condom, 100% had heard and 83.3% had seen the condoms. Among ignorant, most of them were girls. Its free and easy availability at the government health centre was known to 60.6% and on payment from private shops to 50.6%.

**Table 1** Awareness about HIV/AIDS and Condom (its availability and advantages)

Variables	Yes	
	No	%
Heard about HIV/AIDS	1735	100.0
Caused by Virus	1653	95.3
Spread by unprotected sexual intercourse	1341	77.3
High risk behavior- Sex with multiple partners/Prostitutes	1341	77.3
It can be prevented by using condoms	1409	81.2
Heard about condom	1735	100.0
Have seen condom	1445	83.3
Available free of cost at health centres	1051	60.6
Available on payment at shops	878	50.6
Helps preventing pregnancy	1735	100.0
Helpful in preventing STDs/HIV	1201	69.2
Had sexual intercourse	318	18.3

Though it is not easy to extract information regarding sexual practices among unmarried adolescents, yet it was an effort to drive information about it. The overall prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse in the present study was 18.3% and it consistently increases with advancing age. (Fig.-1).



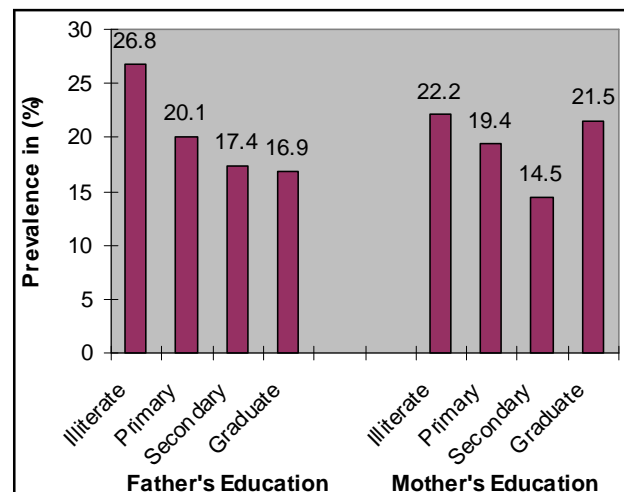
**Fig. 1.** Age-wise prevalence of premarital sex

It was more prevalent among boys than girls. Though it should not be associated with the type of school, yet it was found to be more prevalent among those students studying in Public schools (27.32%) than compared to those studying in Private Schools (18.82%). Highest prevalence is seen among Hindu adolescents (19.0%) and lowest among Christians (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Prevalence of pre-marital sex in different Epidemiological groups

Epidemiological variables		Total Population	Had sexual intercourse	
			No	Prevalence(%)
Sex*	Male	960	248	25.8
	Female	760	70	9.2
Type of Schools**	Private	966	153	15.8
	Public	769	165	21.4
Religion***	Hindus	1602	304	19.0
	Muslims	27	3	11.1
	Christians	10	1	10.0
	Buddhists	61	8	13.1

Parent's education has direct impact on the level of awareness of their children and thus in risk taking behavior. Prevalence of premarital sex decreases with increasing parental education. (Fig. 2)



**Fig. 2.** Parent's education and prevalence of premarital sex

Significantly higher proportion of the adolescents (68.55%) have had sex with only one partner either once or on many occasions. 20.4% among those who have had sex with multiple partners were boys and 7.8% girls. (Table-3)

Majority of the adolescents (81.7%) were aware about the threats of unprotected sex like pregnancy, and other sexually transmitted infections including HIV/ AIDS and used condom during sexual intercourse. Quite high proportion

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of adolescents (63.5%) were conscious and used condom by themselves without any motivation from the partner where as 16.3% used condom after being motivated from their partners. When enquired about its arrangement, 60.0% of the practicenors arranged condom themselves (partner taking initiative). Only 22.3% of the users disposed off the used condoms properly (by burying it in the ground) however quite half of those disposed indiscriminately by throwing on the road or in the bin. (Table-3)

**Table 3** Practice of Condom during Sexual Intercourse

Variables	Yes	%
Had sex with single partner	218	68.5
Had sex with multiple partners	90	28.3
Boys*	65	20.4
Girls*	25	7.9
Used condom		260
81.7		
Boys	224	70.4
Girls	36	11.3
Motivated for use- Self	202	63.5
- Partner	52	16.3
Procured by - Self	191	60.0
- Partner	57	17.9
Used condoms disposed off		
Properly	71	22.3
Improperly	36	11.3

\*Boys Vs Girls  $\chi^2_{(1)} = 17.77, P < 0.001$ .

## Discussion

Sex being the essential component of life, evolves automatically and adolescence being the crucial phase in the life of every individual, full of inquisitiveness to explore and see the body configuration of opposite sex and prove their capacity and performance. Our customs and traditions not allowing adolescents to discuss this matter freely amongst them and parents helplessness to explain the matters further complicates the problems.

Awareness of condoms, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) appears to be rising among the general population, mainly due to extensive media campaigns (Mehta, 1998<sup>8</sup>; NDHS 2001<sup>9</sup>). It is very exciting to note that in our study also, the level of awareness among adolescents about HIV/AIDS, Condom and its contraceptive property was Hundred percent. It is in consistence with Neopane and Nichol's<sup>5</sup> findings, 93% and 95% respectively. In contrast to Neopane and Nichol's findings where only 36% were able to cite the measures to reduce or avoid the possibility of exposure by avoiding sex with prostitutes and using condom during sex, in our study it was 77.3%

and 81.2% respectively.

In the context of a global decline in age of sexual maturation and rising age of marriage, the window of opportunity for young people to engage in premarital sexual relations is opening<sup>10</sup>. Despite very satisfactory level of awareness about the deadly infection "HIV/AIDS", prevalence of premarital sex among adolescents was also high (18.3%). This finding is in consistence with Minaj K Chao et al<sup>2</sup> 15% and Nicole Stone et al<sup>3</sup> 11% among students in Pokhara, 14% in Kathmandu and 16% in Palpa. It was more prevalent among boys (25.8%) than the girls (9.2%). It is also similar with Puri 2002 from Kasthmandu<sup>4</sup> where 20% & 12% of unmarried men and women in 14 -19 yrs age had experienced sex. This high gender difference in the prevalence of premarital sex may be due to under reporting by the girls and exaggerated reporting by the boys owing to "double standard" prevailing regarding sexual behavior; being tolerant towards young men's premarital sexual experiences and being restrictive towards young women's premarital sexual experiences<sup>8</sup>. It is also possible that only a small proportion of adolescent girls are sexually active and these girls tend to have multiple partners.

A high level of parent's education is often found to be associated with low likely hood of risk taking behavior. It is likely that parents with high level of education are better able to provide appropriate guidance for their children's behavior than other parents, resulting in lower level of risk taking among their children.<sup>2</sup> Our finding is also the same and there is consistent, being highest among the children of illiterate parents and lowest among graduates and above. A study of condom use during sex with non-regular partners by married and unmarried young men (18 to 24 years), found that just over half had used a condom during the last intercourse (Tamang *et al* 2001)<sup>7</sup>. Contrast to it, in our study it was used by 63.5% of the adolescents. It is probably due to very high level of awareness about condoms, its availability and its advantages among adolescents..

## Conclusion

It is concluded from the present study that the prevalence of premarital sex among adolescents is high and increasing with increasing age of the youths. It was more practiced among Hindus adolescents and parent's education was one of the most important predictor of premarital sex. Most of the youths had adequate knowledge of consequences of unprotected sex like pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Knowledge about contraceptive property of condom was known to hundred percent of the participants where its availability and benefits other than contraceptive were

known to majority. It was satisfying that most of the adolescents who practiced sex, were protected by using condom but the correct disposal was not known to majority that's why they disposed it indiscriminately by throwing on the road or the left ground.

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