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SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (Niš, Serbia)

SUMMARY

The aim of the study was to establish better understanding of students' sexual behavior and their attitudes toward sex.

A total of 2.235 students were asked to anonymously complete a 22-item questionnaire referring to their attitudes towards sex and sexual behavior.

In this study, 87% of male students and 77% of female students indicated that they expected to have sexual intercourse before marriage, while 22% of male students and 13% of female students approved extramarital sexual intercourse ($\chi^2=38.431$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$ and $\chi^2=30.134$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$, retrospectively). Out of the total number of investigated students, 78% of them reported that they had had sexual experience. A statistically significant difference was found between male (83%) and female (72%) students ($\chi^2=38.404$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). It was also found that 58% of both male and female sexually active students had had their first sexual experience with a permanent partner. In addition, 41% of sexually active students reported that they had used condom during their first sexual intercourse, while 47% reported having used condom during the last sexual intercourse.

The number of students who used condom is small, although it is constantly rising. Since students are more prone to have sexual intercourse with casual partners, much more effort is needed to promote safe sex practice among university students.

Key words: students, sexual behavior, condoms

INTRODUCTION

During the first half of the twentieth century all sociologists shared the same belief emphasizing sexual and social dichotomy: in order to preserve integrity of family system, society restrained sexual impulse by setting norms. This belief also contained Froyd's conception of sexuality as a natural impulse that had its own essential and organic integrity, different from its social form and that had to be 'controlled' by social norms.

In the second half of the twentieth century, new theories became predominant suggesting that

people with their active role in society might shift the borders imposed by society. According to this paradigm, there was no natural sexual impulse that had to be suppressed in order for society to function normally. This also implied that culture was dominant over nature. Hence, an individual was assigned a greater role in shaping sexual behavior.

Due to focusing on mutual relationship between structure and practice, further social and similar studies established that individuals constituted social relationships that structured entities. Therefore, new and diverse models of sexuality were found.

In accordance with this, Gagnon and Simon claimed that sexuality had to be observed in three analytically separate levels: cultural scenario (social norms), interpersonal scenario (in which social norms and individual desires are met) and interpsychic scenario (individual desires) (1). However, the origin of cultural scenarios and the way in which they are chosen by individuals still represent an enigma in the scientific world.

Nowadays, human sexual behavior is believed to be influenced by individuals' idea about sex, and their attitudes to sex. Therefore, it is necessary to have insight into sexual behavior and attitudes of the young, which would enable designing of effective educational programmes for the improvement of the sexual health of the young. Increased popularization of sexuality makes this aim even more important.

Sexual health includes reproductive choice and sexual relationships (intercourses) without the fear of pregnancy, illness, abusing and unsafe abortus. It is the part of a wider context of reproductive health.

Sexual behavior of people is influenced by the level of being informed and knowledge gained (cognitive component of their attitude), but emotional and conative (willing one) components are very important too, which often have crucial influence on behavior and sexual practice.

AIMS

The aim of this study was to collect and analyze the data which will better explain the knowledge, attitudes and practice in the area of sexual health of university students in Niš, but also to form a data base which will serve as an axis (start point) in developing effective educational programmes with the final aim furthermore to improve the sexual health of youth.

questionnaire consisted of 22 questions referring to students' attitudes to sexual behavior, condom use, sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, as well as the use of different psychostimulative substances. General data (sex, age, study year and marital status) were also investigated. The questionnaire was anonymous and on voluntary basis.

The total number of investigated students was 2.235. The investigation was performed by 20 Student's Association members, who had undergone special training held by the authors of this study at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Niš. The investigation was carried out from March to May 2008 at students' clubs at the Faculties of Medicine, Law, Economics, Philosophy and Technical Engineering of the Niš University, as well as at students' dormitories near the faculties of Medicine, Law and Electronics.

Computer analysis and data processing were done by the authors themselves. It was a team work (two persons working together). After each analysis the teams changed their results with the aim to check previously processed data and make possible corrections.

The results were presented in tables and graphs. The statistical analysis was made by SPSS 16.0 programme and included the application of adequate parametric and non-parametric tests. Statistical significance was assumed for $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The questionnaires were fulfilled by 1.215 male (54%) and 1.020 female students (46%). The majority of students were between 20 and 25 years of age. Average age values of males were 22.2 ± 2.8 and 21.7 ± 2.5 of girls. There were 72 (3%) married students. The average age values of the first sexual intercourse was 17.5 ± 1.8 for males, and 18.1 ± 2.5 for female students (Table 1).

Table 1. General characteristics of examined students

| | № | % | Age | Study year | Age of first sexual experience | Marital status | |
|---------|------|-----|----------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | | | | | | Single | Married |
| Males | 1215 | 54 | 23.0 ± 2.3 | 2.2 ± 2.2 | 17.5 ± 1.8 | 1172 (52.4%) | 43 (1.9%) |
| Females | 1020 | 46 | 22.7 ± 2.5 | 2.1 ± 1.8 | 18.1 ± 2.5 | 991 (44.3%) | 29 (1.3%) |
| Total | 2235 | 100 | 22.8 ± 2.8 | 2.2 ± 1.5 | 17.8 ± 2.2 | 2163 (96.4%) | 72 (3.2%) |

EXAMINEES AND METHODS

The investigation was performed by means of a questionnaire fulfilled by the students from different faculties of the Niš University. The

There were 1057 (87%) male students and 785 female students (77%) who responded that they expected to have sex before marriage. The percentage of male students was significantly higher ($\chi^2 = 38.531$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, 54% of the

male students and 28% of the female ones responded that they considered it normal to have sexual intercourse with several partners before marriage ($\chi^2=153.167$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). Extramarital sexual intercourse was approved by 22% of male students and 13% of female students ($\chi^2=30.134$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). Even 58% of male students and 18% of female students considered sex for money normal ($\chi^2=368.173$ $df=1$, $p<0.001$) (Table 2).

Out of the total number of investigated students, 1743 (78%) responded that they had had sexual experience. Statistically significant difference was determined between male (83%) and female students (72%) who had had sexual experience before this investigation ($\chi^2=38.404$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$) (Table 2).

Seventy eight percent of sexually active males and 68% of sexually active females had had more than one partner up to this investigation. Statistical significance was determined in favour of male students ($\chi^2=21.749$ $df=1$, $p<0.001$).

However, Graph 1 illustrates that females who had more than one partner did not have less partners in comparison to males ($\chi^2=3.384$ $df=3$, $p=ns$).

Sexually active female students (16%) had much more often some kind of sexually transmitted diseases in comparison to sexually active male students (11%) ($\chi^2=9.471$ $df=1$, $p<0.001$) (Table 3).

Seven percents of sexually active female students had an abortion, whereby 4% of sexually

Table 2. Sexual attitudes of students

| | Sexually active | | Expecting sex before marriage | | Approve of more sexual partners | | Approve of extramarital sex | | Approve of paid sex | |
|---------|-----------------|------|-------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Males | 1008 | 83** | 1057 | 87** | 656 | 54** | 267 | 22** | 704 | 58** |
| Females | 735 | 72 | 785 | 77 | 286 | 28 | 133 | 13 | 184 | 18 |
| Total | 1743 | 78 | 1842 | 82 | 942 | 42 | 400 | 18 | 888 | 40 |

* $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.001$.

Fifty-eight percents of sexually active students had first sexual experience with a permanent partner. During the investigation, 42% of sexually active males and 52% of females had stable relationship ($\chi^2=17.131$ $df=1$, $p<0.001$) (Table 3).

active male students wanted their girlfriends to perform an abortion (Table 3). Statistically significant difference was determined referring to the proportion of male and female students involved in the procedure of abortion ($\chi^2=7.58$ $df=1$, $p<0.01$).

Table 3. Sexual behavior of students

| | Stable relationship | | With more partners | | Some STD | | Abortion | | Paid sex | |
|---------|---------------------|------|--------------------|------|----------|-----|----------|----|----------|-----|
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Males | 423 | 42 | 786 | 78** | 111 | 11 | 40 | 4 | 81 | 8** |
| Females | 382 | 52** | 500 | 68 | 118 | 16* | 51 | 7* | 5 | 1 |
| Total | 805 | 46 | 1286 | 74 | 229 | 13 | 91 | 5 | 86 | 5 |

* $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.001$.

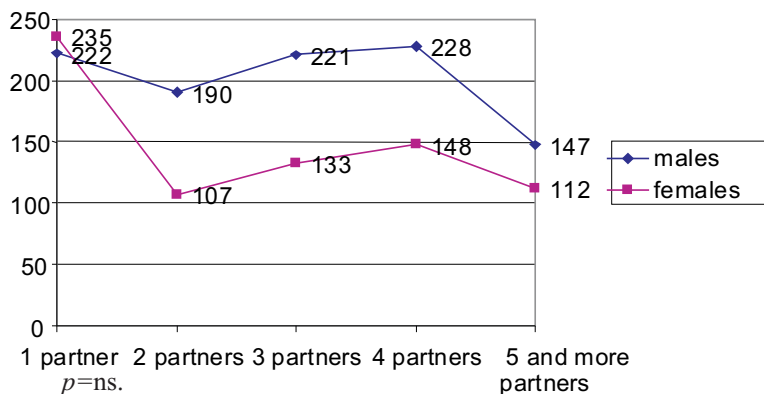


Figure 1. Number of partners with whom students have had sex

Statistical significance was determined between males and females who had had sex for money ($\chi^2=49.028$ $df=1$, $p<0.001$). Fifty-seven male students (8%), and only five female ones (1%) had sex with prostitutes.

Forty-one percents of sexually active students reported that they had used condom during the first sexual intercourse, while 47% of them used condom during the last sexual intercourse. Out of this number, 45% of the male students and 36% of the females used condom during the first sexual intercourse ($\chi^2=14.16$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$), and 47% of the males and 48% of the females during the last sexual intercourse ($\chi^2=0.172$ $df=1$, $p=ns$) (Table 4).

Table 4. Use of condoms

| | Condom used during first sex. experience | | Condom used during last sex. experience | |
|---------|--|------|---|----|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Males | 454 | 45** | 474 | 47 |
| Females | 265 | 36 | 353 | 48 |
| Total | 719 | 41 | 827 | 47 |

* $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.001$.

DISCUSSION

Majority of the students expect to have sexual intercourse before marriage (82%). The number of students who considered it normal to have sexual intercourse with a great number of partners (54% males and 28% females) or even illegitimate partners (18%) indicates that they have prominent 'sexual values' that refer them to stable relationships with one partner.

However, 78% of sexually active males and 68% of females had several sexual partners. It is interesting to note that there is the discrepancy between students' attitudes to sex and their sexual behavior, which indicates that their sexual values do not have great impact on their sexual behavior. Although the girls are more conservative about sex, the fact is that there is no difference in sexual activity between boys and girls.

The average age value of the first sexual intercourse among our students was 17.8 ± 2.2 years. Similar data were found in Spanish and South African students (2.3). The average age of the first sexual intercourse among our students is, however, higher than among the American, British, Australian and Ukrainian students. Turkish students, whose average age value is slightly higher are exception (4-8). The reason for this is that our students have to work hard in order to pass entrance exams and probably do not have enough time to find sexual partner before the enrollment in faculty.

It is interesting to notice that Turkish boys were much more against sex before marriage in comparison to girls, although they were more sexually active (61.2% males and 18.3% females) (9).

Unlike Turkish students who had much more sexual experience with prostitutes (especially the first one), only 8% of our sexually active boys and 1% active girls had sex for money, although 58% boys and 18% of the girls approved this type of sex (10). These findings may be explained from the perspective of availability of this type of services to our students in comparison to others.

Generally, boys started with sexual relations earlier and had more partners than girls. In contrast to these findings, the percentage of girls who had stable relationships was higher than that of boys. Similar findings are encountered in Spanish, American, and Ukrainian students (2-10). Women all around the world are thought to have more expressed sense of love, verbal communication, and stable relationship in comparison to men, so that these findings are in correlation with these observations.

Our results about the same number of partners among boys and girls having more than one partner suggest that girls are not less sexually active than boys. Conversely, it was found that boys in Australia and America were more prone to have larger number of partners (7,11).

Around 5% of our sexually active students were involved in the procedure of abortion, which represents a very disturbing finding. In Ukraine, however, 10% of sexually active students had abortion, or were somehow connected with it (6).

Over 50% of American students never used condom, and only 17% of them used condom consistently (1,2). In Canada, only 25% of boys and 16% of girls always use condom (1,3). The fact that 41% of sexually active students in our study used condom during the first sexual intercourse and 47% of them during the last sexual intercourse indicates that the number of students using condom is larger in our study in comparison to the above mentioned examples. In Turkey, however, slightly higher percentage of students (47%) use condoms during the first sexual intercourse (9). Dominant trends of sexual behavior observed among young people in America include increased number of partners and rare use of condoms, which, consequently, increases the risk of HIV transmission (11-15).

Our results indicate that a larger number of males used condom during the first sexual intercourse, which is in accordance with the results found among American students (16). The fact that it is the boys who use condoms (while girls have to ask their partners to do this) might explain the disproportion of using condom among boys and girls. Also, it is usually believed that girls avoid

condoms due to possible leakage and prefer other types of contraception (5).

However, the encouraging is the fact that the number of boys and girls who used condom during the last sexual intercourse was the same, and this number is increasing in comparison to the number of those who used condom during the first sexual intercourse.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of this investigation, we may draw the following conclusions:

1. There is a very prominent difference between students' attitudes to sex and their sexual

behavior, indicating that students' sexual values have very low influence on their sexual behavior.

2. Students are more prone to have sexual relations with unsteady partners. Girls are not less sexually active than boys. A very disturbing fact is that the number of students who had some type of sexually transmitted diseases and the number of girls who had abortion are high.

3. Although the number of students who use condom is increasing, it is still unsatisfactory. Students who have more than one partner use condom less.

The presented results must contribute to the establishment of effective educational programmes for safe sex promotion both among students and high school children.

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SEKSUALNO PONAŠANJE STUDENATA UNIVERZITETA U NIŠU

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SAŽETAK

Usled sve veće popularizacije seksualnosti nužno je poznavati seksualno ponašanje mladih, radi izrade efektivnih obrazovnih programa.

Cilj rada bio je utvrđivanje boljeg razumevanja seksualnog ponašanja studentske omladine i njihovog odnosa prema seksu.

Ispitano je ukupno 2235 studenata Univerziteta u Nišu. Ispitivanje je obavljeno anketiranjem studenata, koji su anonimno popunjavali upitnik od 22 pitanja, koja su se ticala njihovog seksualnog ponašanja i uopšte odnosa prema seksu.

U ovom istraživanju je 87% mladića i 77% devojaka naznačilo da očekuje da ima seksualne odnose pre stupanja u brak, dok se 22% mladića i 13% devojaka izjasnilo da je u redu imati vanbračne seksualne odnose ($\chi^2=38.531$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$ i $\chi^2=30.134$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$, retrospektivno). Od ukupnog broja ispitanih studenata njih 78% odgovorilo je da su imali seksualno iskustvo. Utvrđena je statistički značajna razlika između mladića (83%) i devojaka (72%) koji su imali seksualno iskustvo ($\chi^2=38.404$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). Prvo seksualno iskustvo sa stalnim partnerom iz višemesečne veze imalo je 58% seksualno aktivnih studenata; 41% seksualno aktivnih studenata izjavilo je da je koristilo kondom tokom svog prvog seksualnog odnosa, dok je 47% koristilo kondom tokom poslednjeg odnosa.

Broj studenata koji koriste kondom relativno je mali, iako je taj broj u porastu. Pošto su studenti sve skloniji da imaju seksualne odnose sa neobaveznim partnerima, neophodni su i veći naponi da se promoviše i ustali praksa bezbednog seksa među studentima.

Ključne reči: studenti, seksualno ponašanje, kondomi