

Factors Affecting Premarital Sex among Male College Students of Kathmandu, Nepal

Ramesh Adhikari*
Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tribhuwan University
Kathmandu Nepal

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* Mr. Ramesh Adhikari is a Lecturer of Geography and Population Department, Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tribhuwan University, Kathmandu, Nepal. E-mail: rameshipsr@gmail.com

Abstract

In Nepal, as in other Asian countries, the issue on sexuality still remains a taboo. Despite this, there are increasing numbers of sexual activities reported among Nepalese students. Due to sensitivity of this issue, youth receive inadequate education, guidance and services on reproductive health. The main objective of this paper is to determine the prevalence and investigate the influencing factors of premarital sexual intercourse among male college students. A self-administered questionnaire was filled by the students. Association between premarital sex and the explanatory variables were first assessed in bivariate analysis then further explored using multivariate logistic analysis. The study found that individual, family and peer characteristics such as alcohol consumption, smoking habits, attitude towards virginity, parents' education, parents' status (whether having single or both) and peers' sexual behavior had main effects on premarital sex among male students. School/college based sex education could benefit to prevent from risky sexual behavior.

Background

Studies indicate that Asian societies are currently found at the stage of the demographic and youth transition. Thus the youth bulge is an important political and policy issue in Asia (Xenos and Kabamalan, 2002). In the past, due to the early age at marriage the duration between puberty and marriage was short. Now in the context of fallen age of menarche and increasing tradition of later marriage the traditional attitude has been changing. Declining influence of family, increasing urbanization, migration and the exposure to the mass media collectively contributed to major changes in adolescent social and sexual behavior (World Health Organization, 1989). Because of the social restrictions, premarital sexual activity is found to be rare however the incidence and prevalence of premarital sex is increasing in

Asian societies (Gubhaju, 2001). This change in adolescent social and sexual behavior poses them in to different problems.

In Nepal, as among other Asian countries, the topic on sexuality has largely remained a taboo. Despite this, there are increasing numbers of sexual activities reported among Nepalese youth. As most acts of premarital sexual intercourse are unprotected, sexually active adolescents are increasingly at risk of sexually transmitted disease (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. Sexually experienced adolescents and youths are typically unaware of the consequences of unprotected sexual intercourse and are poorly informed of their sexuality and means of protecting themselves often leading to unwanted pregnancy and abortion (Gubhaju, 2002). Increasing premarital sex and its consequences are the issues of global concern and related to broad social, economic and health issues.

Nepal population Census figure indicates that the percentage of never married is increasing over time in Nepal. Widening gap between age at menarche and age at marriage may increases the possibility of premarital sexual activities among young people. Only limited information is available about premarital sex in Nepal. According to Gubhaju (2001), 20 percent of Nepalese young people were engaged in premarital sex in 1991(Gubhaju, 2001). Similarly, study from the UNICEF found that almost one in five boys (22%) and nearly one in 10 girls interviewed had had a premarital sexual experience (UNICEF, 2001). These figures suggest the urgent need of further research and detailed information on premarital sexual behavior among young people in Nepal.

Many literatures suggest that the individual, family and peer variables have influence on the sexual behavior of adolescent and youth. However so far it is one of the least researched issues in Nepal. To fill the gap, it is thus desirable to study the influencing factors on the initiation of sex before marriage in the context of Nepal so that it would be helpful to

the policy makers and planners to set intervention programs to prevent high risk sexual behavior.

The objectives of the study are to determine the prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse and investigate the factors affecting premarital sexual intercourse. More specifically, it is hypothesized that those students who have liberal attitude towards premarital sex, those who resides far from their parents, those who are from broken family and those who have unmarried closed friend with sexual experience are associated with premarital sexual experience. This study population is selected due to two reasons. First, as discussed above, these populations are unaware about the consequences of unprotected premarital sex and vulnerable to STIs. Second, the result could be useful to design appropriate education based intervention in school and college.

Data source and analytical approach

A cross sectional study was carried out in April-May 2006. Self-administrated structured questionnaires were used to obtain reliable information due to sensitive nature of the study. Two stages of random sampling technique were used in the study. At the first stage 12 colleges located in Kathmandu district were selected randomly. Then at the second stage, from each sampled college, two classes were selected randomly. All the students in the sampled class who were presented in the date of interview were requested to participate in the study. The survey collected information from 573 boys successfully.

For this paper, premarital sex was measured from two separate questions for unmarried and married respondents. For the unmarried respondents, we asked 'Have you ever had sexual experience?' and for the married respondents, 'Have you ever had sexual experience before you got married?'

The questionnaires were first developed in English and then translated into Nepali language. The questionnaires were pre-tested among college students in a non-selected college and later refined as required. Most of the questions were closed, although a few open ended question were used.

All completed questionnaire were entered into database immediately after they were manually coded and validated. In case of open-ended questions, coding was done after the completion of fieldwork. Data entry and validity checks were performed for all the questionnaires by using computer software dBase IV. After cleaning, the data was transferred into the SPSS for further processing and analysis.

Verbal informed consent was obtained from the participants before they were enrolled in the study. Consent form was written in the local language stating the study objective, nature of the participant's involvement, risk and benefits and confidentiality of the data. Students were requested to read consent form carefully. They were given clear options on whether to participate or not. It was also made clear that they could refuse to answer any questions during the interview and terminate the interview at any time they desire. No student refused to participate the study.

Confidentiality of information was ensured by removing personal identifiers from questionnaire. The names of sampled college are not made public and it is not possible for anyone outside the research team to trace reported incidents of sexual behavior. In these ways, respondents are protected against any possible adverse repercussions of the study.

Both bivariate and multivariate techniques were applied to identify the factors associated with the likelihood of having premarital sexual intercourse. Chi-square test was used to test an association between the variables. The variables that were significant at the bivariate level were re-examined in the multivariate analysis (Binary logistic regression) in

order to identify the significant predictors after controlling other variables. During the process of analysis, multicollinearity among the variables was assessed and the least important variables were removed from logistic model.

Results

Overall, almost two-thirds of the boys (64%) were aged 20 and above. A large majority of the boys (88%) were unmarried and 91 percent of sample students were from outside of the Kathmandu valley. Students covered in this study were from 67 districts out of 75 districts of the country. Three-fifths of the boys were living either with friends or alone in Kathmandu. More than a quarter of boys had consumed alcohol (33%) and ever smoked cigarette (24%).

[\[Figure 1 is about here\]](#)

The study found that more than one third of students (39%) had premarital sex (figure 1). Prevalence of premarital sex was varied with different settings. As expected, a slightly higher proportion of boys in the age group 20 and above had premarital sex compared with younger boys (below 20 yrs). Students who had higher education level had higher sexual experience. For example, only around one third of boys who were studying in intermediate level (35%) while more than two-fifths among who were studying masters degree (43%) had premarital sexual experience. Regarding marital status, higher proportion of unmarried boys (40%) had premarital sex compared with currently married (33%) boys. Similarly, level of premarital sex is higher among those students whose permanent residence was outside the Kathmandu valley (40%) compared with those who resided in Kathmandu permanently (32%).

Regarding living arrangement, those students who lived alone were more experienced of premarital sex compared to others. For example, more than two-fifths of those boys who lived alone (43%) had premarital sex while the percentage is less than two-fifths for those who live with family (37%).

In regard to substance use, those students who had ever smoked, ever consumed alcohol and ever taken drug were more likely to have sexual experience before marriage compared with their counterparts who never used substance. It is found that the higher proportion of boys (55%) who have consumed alcohol had sexual experience compared with their counterparts (31%). Similarly, higher proportion of boys (53% vs. 35%) who had ever smoked had sexual experience. Furthermore, two-thirds of boys (66%) who had ever taken drugs had sexual experience which was low for those who have never taken drug (36%).

Similarly, those students who have liberal attitude towards premarital sex have more experience of premarital sex compared to those who have conservative attitude. For example nearly half (46%) of the boys who have liberal attitude (disagreed for the statement ‘women should be virgin at marriage’) towards female virginity had premarital sex. The similar response was found for the attitude towards male virginity too (Table 1).

Although prevalence of premarital sex varied with all the individual characteristics, only some variables such as alcohol consumption, smoking habits, drug use, and attitude towards female and male virginity had significant relation with experience of premarital sex. This means that who had higher level of education, who had ever consumed alcohol, smoked cigarette and have ever taken drug were significantly higher level of premarital sex compared to their counterparts. Similarly, those who have liberal attitude towards female and male virginity had statistically significant high level of premarital sex compared with those who had conservative attitude towards it (Table 1).

[\[Table 1 is about here\]](#)

Among sexually active boys, those who have either single or no parents had experienced very high level of premarital sex (60%) as compared with those who have both father and mother (38%). The analysis found that there is positive association between parents' education and boys' sexual behavior. Similarly, prevalence of premarital sex was varied with religion. For example, a higher proportion of boys whose religion affiliation was Hindu (40%) had premarital sexual experience as compared with non-Hindu boys (20%). All the family variables except family structure used in this paper had significant association with prevalence of premarital sex (Table2).

[\[Table 2 is about here\]](#)

It is also found that peers behavior has positive effect on prevalence of premarital sex. Those students, whose close friends smoke cigarette, consume alcohol and had premarital sexual experience had also very high level of premarital sex. For example, nearly half of the boys whose peer smoked (46%) and consumed alcohol (47%) had premarital sex while the proportion was only about a third for those whose peer did not smoke and did not consume alcohol. Regarding peer sexual behavior, prevalence of premarital sex is far higher for those who had close unmarried friends with sexual experience (60% vs. 15%). All the peer characteristics found significant association with prevalence of premarital sex among (Table 3).

[\[Table 3 is about here\]](#)

Logistic regression analysis was used to measure the strength of the association between various individual, family, peer's characteristics and the probabilities of being sexually active before marriage among boys. Three models had been used in the analysis. In the first model, individual factors were incorporated. In the second model, family characteristics were added and in the third model, which is the final model, we added peer characteristics. After assessing multicollinearity in the variables, it was found that 'attitude towards male virginity' and 'female virginity at marriages' were highly correlated. Similarly, parental status and fathers' education were highly correlated ($r > .60$). So the variables, attitude towards female virginity and fathers' education were not entered in the logistic model.

In the first model, it was found that the variables such as alcohol consumption, drug use and attitude towards male virginity have positive and significant impact on having had premarital sex after controlling other individual characteristics. Boys who had ever consumed alcohol were two times more likely to have had premarital sex compared to their counterparts. Similarly, those who had ever taken drug had almost two times more likely to be sexually active compared with those who had never taken drug. The result also found that boys who have liberal attitude (boys shouldn't be virgin at marriage) towards male virginity at marriage were about two times more likely to have premarital sexual experience compared to those who have conservative attitude towards male virginity at marriage.

Among these three significant variables in the first model, only two variables (alcohol consumption and attitude towards male virginity) retained their significance even after inclusion of family characteristics in the second model. The reduction of odd ratio of drug use after inclusion of family characteristics indicated that the family characteristics were also important predictors of being sexually active among unmarried boys. Model 2 further

explained that those students who have both father and mother were about 77 percent less likely to have premarital sex compared with those who have either single or no parents. Furthermore, the positive and significant association was observed in level of mother's education and being sexually active. For example, those boys who have mother with primary and secondary or above education were 1.8 times and 2.1 times respectively more likely to be sexually active compared with those who had mother with no education keeping all other variables constant in the model.

Model three presents the final results after adding peer characteristics. Even after inclusion of the peer characteristics in the third model, the two individual variables and two family-level variables were still statistically significant. However the slightly reduction of odd ratio of these variables indicated that the peer characteristics were also important predictors of having premarital sex. Furthermore, out of three peer related variables, one variable 'have close unmarried friends with premarital sex' had statistically significant effect on experience of premarital sexual relation after controlling other variables. Those boys who had close unmarried friends with premarital sexual experience were almost eight times more likely to be sexually active compared with those who do not have unmarried friend with experience of sex (Table 4).

[\[Table 4 is about here\]](#)

Discussions and conclusion

This study is first of its kind in Nepal that attempted to investigate the influencing factors on premarital sex among college boys. Although premarital sex is socially unacceptable in Nepal, the study has shown the proportions of sexually experienced students before marriage

are quite high. The increase in premarital sexual activity among boys who are attending school/college may be due to greater independence (not living with family) from their families and sexual access to young women.

The prevalence of premarital sex is varied with different settings. The bivariate analysis showed that many of the individual characteristics, family variables and peer characteristics had significant association with experience of premarital sex. Individual characteristics such as alcohol consumption, smoking habits, drug use, attitude towards male and female virginity, family characteristics such as parental status, father's and mother's educational status, religion and sources of family income and peer characteristics such as peer smoking and drinking habits, peer sexual behavior have significant association with experience of premarital sex of the boys. The multivariate analysis supported some of the findings of the bivariate analysis. In the multivariate analysis, alcohol consumption, attitude towards male virginity, parent's status, mothers' educational level, and peer sexual behavior were found to have statistically significant influence on experience of premarital sex after controlling other variables.

Sexual behavior studies elsewhere and also in Nepal had shown that the use of alcohol increases likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior (Tamang et al, 1998). The results of present study support this finding. It was assumed that consumption of alcohol is considered as an activity which is mostly influenced by peers and friends. As the results revealed, drinking alcohol was a significant predictor for boys' to have premarital sex. This could be a high risk factor for early initiation of sexual behavior because of the lack of a specific reasoning process due to which young people can not protect or control themselves. Young people may use alcohol as a strategy to obtain sex; it therefore has a negative impact on judgment, inhibition and physical co-ordination and its association with reduced condom use.

This finding is consistent with research conducted in Mongolia that has pointed to alcohol consumption as a strong predictor of early sexual activity (SCF, 1998a; SCF, 1998b).

Some research has shown that young people who identify with a fundamentalist Protestant group have less permissive attitudes toward premarital sex and are less sexually active (DeLamater and MacCorquodale, 1979 adopted from Thornton and Camburn, 1987). In the present study, it was hypothesized that those students who have liberal attitudes toward premarital sex are more likely to engage in premarital sex. Our findings supported this hypothesis.

We have also hypothesized that those students who come from broken families (either one parent or no parents) were more likely to engage in premarital sex. Our results support this fact that those boys who have both parents were less likely to be sexually active compared to those who have single or no parents. Protective childhood family characteristics such as growing up with two parents, not having frequent quarrel in the family and having close relationship with parents tend to lower the probability of premarital sex (Choe and other, 2004).

Our result also showed that positive association between parents' education level and experience of premarital sex among their children. In developing countries, however, a higher level of parents' education through better economic conditions, may be associated with easy access to substances and opportunities for premarital sex, and therefore, higher prevalence of substance use and premarital sex during adolescence among their children (Choe and other, 2004).

The present study found that the effect of peer sexual behavior increases the likelihood of having experience of premarital sex. Peer role is important to change personality, attitude and behavior of persons. There is more evidence that in all societies, peer

behavior is a model for individual behavior, and this is certainly true in matters of adolescents and youths sexuality (Cernada et al. 1986). Sometimes peer pressure upon a man can provoke him to engage in sex through associated behaviors such as drinking and visiting prostitutes. A study showed that two thirds of the men felt that after drinking with friends, if they refuse to visit a brothel upon their friends request, then they get disappointed (Vanlangdingham et al. 1993). Similar study among school age adolescents in Kenya (1993) showed that males who socialized with sexually experienced peer were nearly seven times more likely to those whose peer were not sexually experienced to have had sex (Kiragu and Zabin, 1993). Sensitive issue such as sexuality is difficult to discuss among family members but it is easier to discuss among peers. So the impact of peer group plays the great role to influence views, attitude and sexual behavior of individuals.

In short, we would like to summarize that many finding from our study are in line with findings from previous studies and all our hypotheses are accepted. This paper not only provides empirical evidence on the relative importance of the individual characteristics, familial role and peer factors on premarital sexual behavior of male college students in Nepal but also point out the alarming situation which help to understand more and to get further attention from the policy makers and planners to address appropriate reproductive health program. Our findings suggest that it is necessary to reinforce reproductive and sexual health education among college students and provide them with convenient and optional services that are easily accessed. A need is felt to provide reproductive health (RH) education including STDs and HIV/AIDS in order to raise the awareness of self protection among college students in Nepal. As our interest is particularly in factors affecting the premarital

sexual behavior, we couldn't pay attention on risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS as an outcome of high risk premarital sexual behavior.

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Figures and Tables

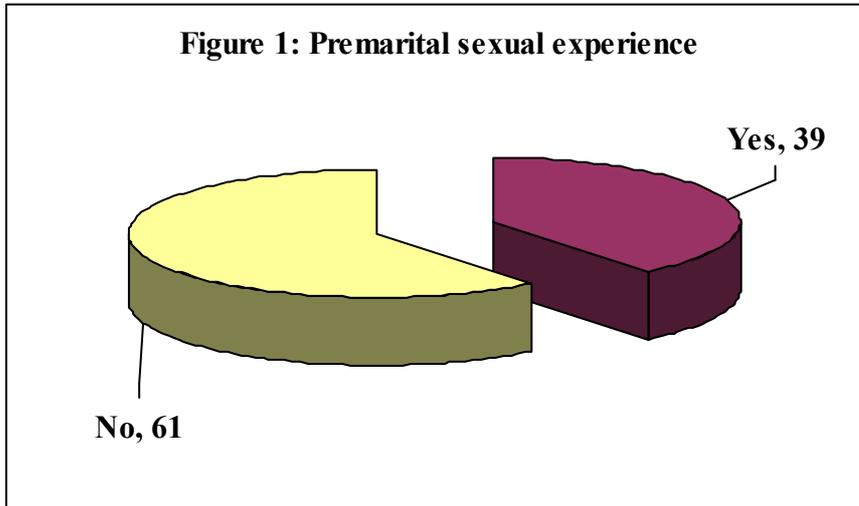


Table 1 Premarital sexual experience by individual characteristics

Individual Characteristics	Premarital sex	N
Age group		
15-19	34.6	205
20 and above	41.6	368
Level of education		
Intermediate	35.2	159
Bachelor	39.8	309
Master degree	42.9	105
Marital Status		
Married	32.8	67
Unmarried	39.9	506
District		
Outside valley	39.8	520
KTM valley	32.1	53
Living arrangement		
With family	36.6	232
Alone	43.4	106
With friends	39.6	235
Alcohol consumption***		
Never consumed alcohol	31.3	384
Ever consumed alcohol	55.0	189
Smoking habits***		
Never smoked	34.6	436
Ever smoked	53.3	137
Drug use***		
Never taken drug	36.3	520
Ever taken drug	66.0	53
Attitude towards female virginity**		
Conservative	33.4	305
Liberal	45.5	268
Attitude towards male virginity***		
Conservative	30.0	290
Liberal	48.4	283
Total	39.1	573

Note: ***= $p < .001$, **= $p < .01$

Table 2 Premarital sexual experience by family characteristics

Family Characteristics	Premarital sex	N
Family Structure		
Joint family	39.6	139
Nuclear family	38.9	434
Parental status*		
Have single/no parents	60.0	30
Have both father and mother	37.9	543
#Father's educational level**		
Illiterate	21.8	87
Primary	39.8	166
Secondary and above	41.7	300
#Mother's educational level**		
Illiterate	31.7	278
Primary	43.9	189
Secondary and above	49.5	91
Religion*		
Non-Hindu	20.0	35
Hindu	40.3	538
Total	39.1	573

Note: **= $p < .01$, *= $p < .05$, # Those students who don't have father and mother were excluded

Table 3 Premarital sexual experience by peer's characteristics

Peer's Characteristics	Premarital sex	Total N
Peer smoking habits**		
Not smoker	33.1	299
Smoker	45.6	274
Peer drinking habits**		
Not drunker	33.2	325
Drunker	46.8	248
Have unmarried friend with premarital sex experience***		
No	14.9	268
Yes	60.3	305
Total	39.1	573

Note: ***= $p < .001$, **= $p < .01$

Table 4 Estimated odds ratio for having premarital sex among college boys by selected predictors

	Model I (OR)	Model II (OR)	Model III (OR)
Individual Characteristics			
Alcohol consumption			
Never consumed alcohol (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Ever consumed alcohol	2.05**	2.13**	1.76*
Smoking habits			
Never smoked (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Ever smoked	1.3	1.35	1.59
Drug use			
Never taken drug (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Ever taken drug	1.94*	1.90	1.76
Attitude towards male virginity			
Conservative (ref)	1.0	1.0	1.0
Liberal	2.06***	1.97***	1.70*
Family characteristics			
Parental status			
Have single/no parents (ref)		1.0	1.0
Have both father and mother		0.23*	0.24*
Mother's education level			
Illiterate (ref)		1.0	1.0
Primary		1.76**	1.60**
Secondary and above		2.10**	2.05**
Religion			
Non-Hindu (ref)		1.0	1.0
Hindu		1.89	1.85
Peer characteristics			
Peer smoking habits			
Not smoker (ref)			1.0
Smoker			1.01
Peer drinking (alcohol) habits			
Does not consume alcohol (ref)			1.0
Consumes alcohol			0.99
Have close unmarried friend with premarital sex experience			
No (ref)			1.0
Yes			7.46***
Intercept	0.30	0.45	0.157
-2 log likelihood	713.5	470.8	573.5
Cox & Snell R square	0.089	0.124	0.264

Note: ***= $p < .001$, **= $p < .01$, *= $p < .05$