

ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

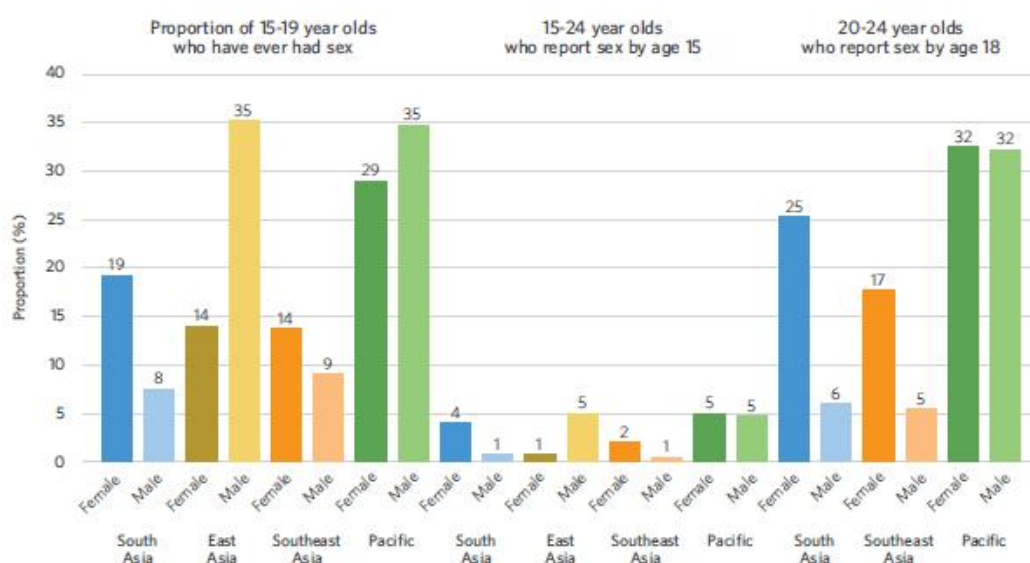
Adolescent sexuality is a normal part of human development. The formation of romantic relationships, development of sexual identity, and the onset of sexual activity are common during adolescence. With access to comprehensive education, information and services, the skills to negotiate safe and consensual sex, and the freedom to make choices without discrimination, stigma and violence, young people can positively navigate this developmental stage while reducing risks of poor health outcomes.

In this region, around 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 10 boys aged 15-19 years have ever had sex, and between 18-32% of girls and 5-32% of boys have had sex by the age of 18 (figure 5). For girls in particular, the onset of sexual activity has traditionally coincided with marriage, and in countries with high rates of child marriage girls

40 million adolescents
aged **15-19 years** in Asia
and the Pacific have ever had sex.

1 in 3 young people
in the Pacific
have had sex by the age of 18.

FIGURE 5. PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EVER HAD SEX AND HAD SEX BY AGE 15 AND 18

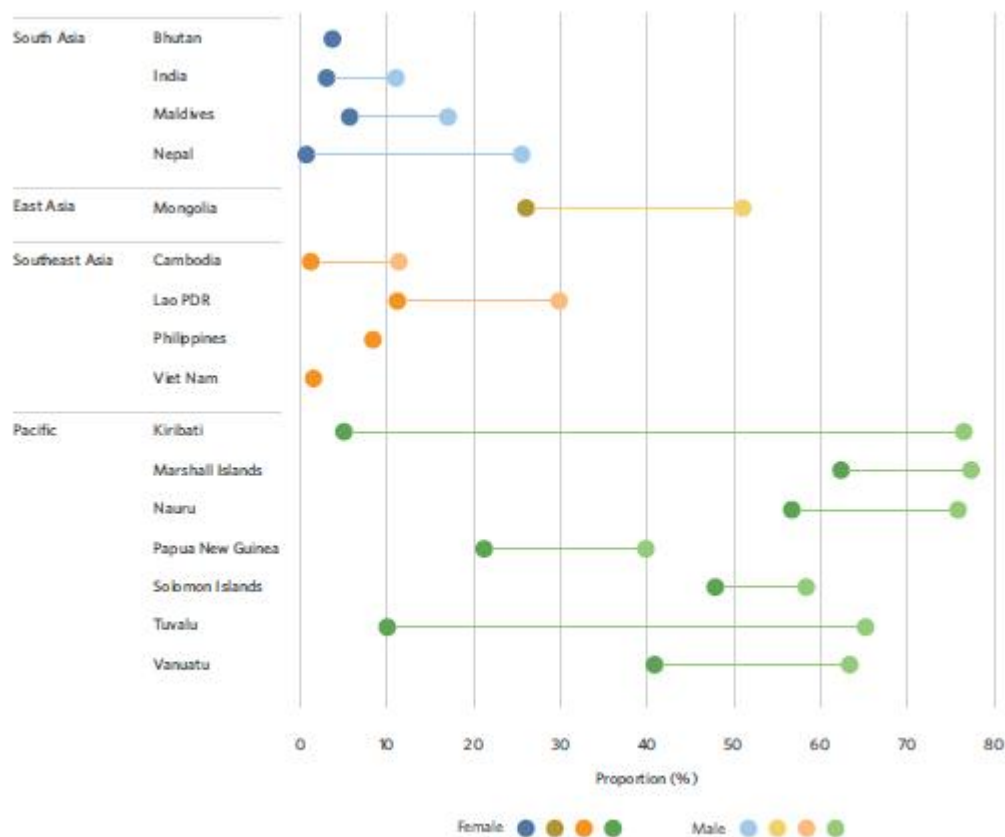


Note: East Asia estimate is for Mongolia only
Source: DHS and MICS

Despite conservative community and sociocultural attitudes towards sex before marriage, a significant number of unmarried young people in this region have had sex. Rates of premarital sex vary considerably between countries, and between boys and girls (figure 6). In all countries with data, boys are more likely to report sex before marriage, reflecting the substantial gendered disparities in norms and attitudes towards adolescent sexuality across the region. Trend data for premarital sex in this region are very limited; however, smaller studies have suggested that young people are increasingly engaging in sexual relationships before marriage, particularly in Southeast Asia, in the context of changing norms and attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

In the Pacific, around **22%** of never-married girls aged **15-24 years** and **41%** of never-married boys have ever had sex.

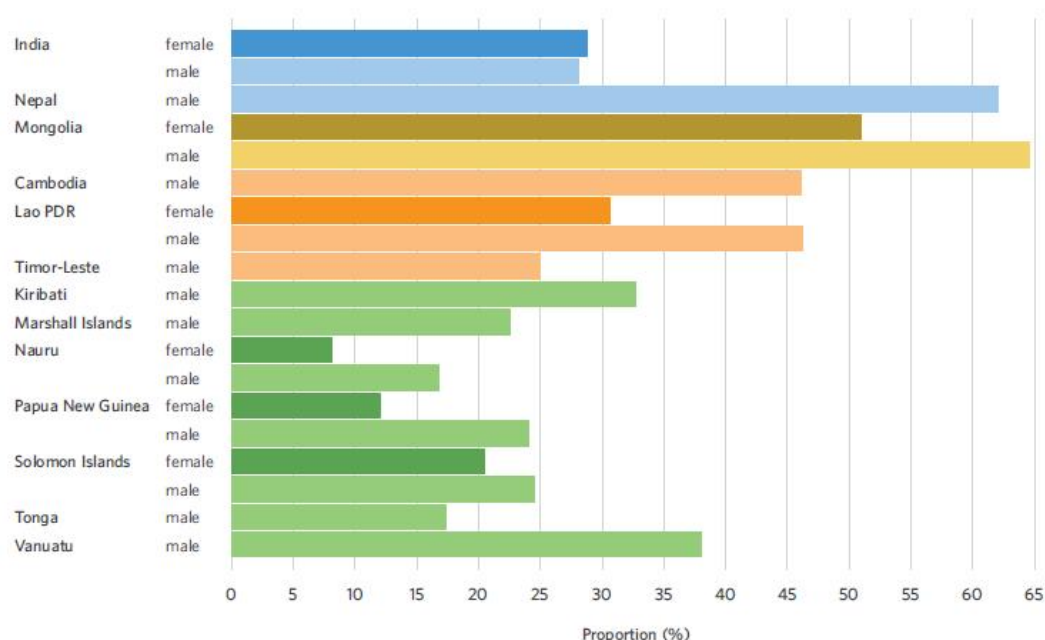
FIGURE 6. PROPORTION OF NEVER-MARRIED 15-24 YEAR OLDS WHO HAVE EVER HAD SEX



Source: DHS and MICS (country estimates provided in appendix)

Girls are more likely to report risk behaviours such as the onset of sexual activity before the age of 15 years, and sex with a partner who is 10 or more years older, most commonly in the context of traditional or arranged child marriage (appendix). However, a greater proportion of boys in this region report having ever paid for sex, and/or sex with multiple partners, particularly in the Pacific where up to half of young men who have ever had sex report two or more partners in the last 12 months (appendix). Boys are more likely to report risky sexual behaviour (more than 2 partners in 12 months); however, they are also more likely to report using a condom at last sex than girls (figure 7). Condom use is low across all countries: with the exception of Mongolia and Nepal, less than half of young people reporting multiple partners used a condom at last sex.

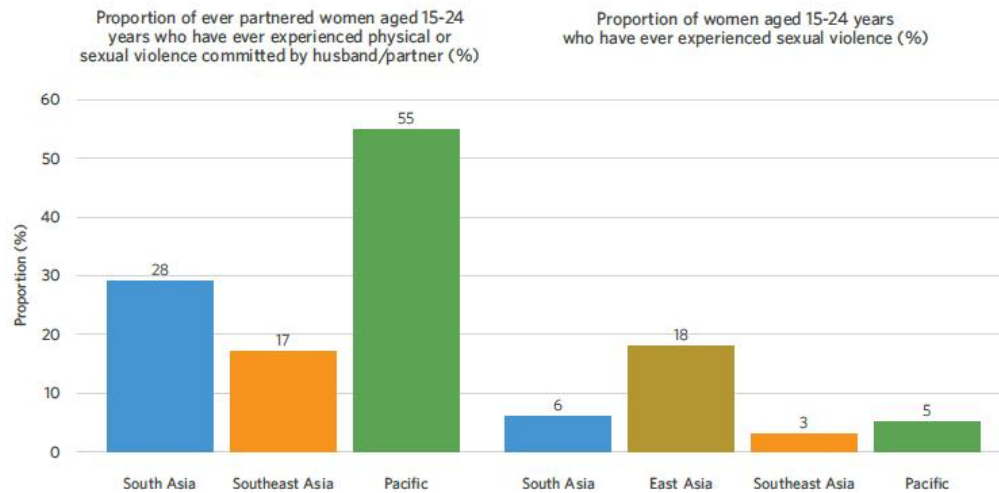
FIGURE 7. CONDOM USE AT LAST SEX AMONG 15-24 YEAR OLDS WHO REPORT TWO OR MORE PARTNERS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Source: DHS and MICS (country estimates provided in appendix)

A substantial proportion of girls have experienced intimate partner or sexual violence (figure 8). More than a third of 15-24-year-old women in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu who have ever been partnered have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner, and more than 10% of adolescent and young women have experienced sexual violence in Bangladesh, China, DPR Korea, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu (appendix). Smaller studies from the region indicate that young women living with a disability, young people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, and young people who sell sex experience high rates of both intimate partner and non-partner sexual violence.

FIGURE 8. INTIMATE PARTNER AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Source: DHS and MICS, GBD

Most data related to adolescent sexual activity in this region only measure vaginal intercourse, and there is very little comparable data about broader sexual behaviours of young people, including dating behaviours, oral or anal sex, and very limited data about non-heterosexual sex. Additionally, there is little information about the SRH knowledge, behaviours or outcomes among young adolescents aged 10-14 years.



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