

PERCEPTION ON PREMARITAL SEX AS CORRELATE TO ADOLESCENTS' CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE

Golda Aira V. Crisostomo
Ronel O. Jimenez

Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to determine if perception on premarital sex is correlated with adolescents' concept of marriage. It also aimed to find out opinion of young individuals on reasons adolescents engage in premarital sex and cohabitation. A survey instrument designed specifically for this study was administered to randomly selected students of one institution in Metro Manila enrolled in the Summer of School Year 2008-2009. Student t-test and One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences on the perception on premarital sex and cohabitation when grouped according to demographic variables while Chi-square test for dependence showed concept of marriage was correlated with attitude on premarital sex but not with cohabitation.

Introduction

It is a poignant fact that unplanned pregnancy is prevalent among adolescents. A tremendous increase in the number of pregnancy cases among the young population is very much evident in every community. Kids with children of their own can be seen everywhere and it continues to be a predicament that is faced by the society not only in the country but also across the world.

In an article written by Garcia (2003), it was found out that almost 10% of Filipino women aged 15-19 have already given birth (NDHS, 2003) and adolescent girls comprise 30 out of 100 pregnant women (SPPR, 2004). In the United States, data from 2002 survey revealed that 77% of Americans had had sex before reaching the age of 20 (Finer, 2007). These statistics clearly indicates an alarming issue that needs to be addressed by the government to control the

rapidly inflating population. Incidence of premarital sex is continuously increasing in spite of health education in high school and tertiary students on sexuality and family planning. Finer expressed that the more adolescents learn about sex, the more they engage into sex.

Although prohibited by the Catholic Church, there is an observed tolerance of premarital sex practice in the country. Survey shows that more than 30% of the population approve of young men to have sex before marriage while 22% think it is all right for young women to engage into premarital sex (SPPR02, 2003). In the article of Rebecca Singson in the *Inquirer* (2008), it was mentioned that 28% of the Filipino youth aged 15-25 have had premarital sex and 38% are already in a live-in engagement according to the 2002 University of the Philippines Population Institute and the Demographic Research and Development Foundation while the National Demographic and Health Survey reported that 5.1% of the entire population of women aged 15-19 are already living together with their partners and 3.9% are married (2003). One can just imagine the growth in number from 5 years ago.

Educational institutions share in the problem of adolescent childbearing (McGrew & Shore, 1991). Secondary and tertiary schools cannot reject the incidence of teenage pregnancies among some of its students. Students who are caught up in the situation often drop out of school and graduate at a later time or, in some unfortunate cases, do not finish their education at all. Although a disgrace, as considered in the Philippine custom, parents are mostly left with no choice but to accept the condition and extend support to their child's child as a confirmation to the close family ties among Filipinos. Even catholic institutions cannot escape from this veracity in spite of extensive theology courses as a part of program curriculum. Its religious teachings which include preparation of its students for a married life with the values and moral of a practicing catholic is threatened by forces to destroy its foundation such as separation of sex from love or sex from its life-dimension (Lana et.al., 2004); as a probable result, pre-marital sex, unplanned pregnancy and worse, abortion.

Young people continue to look positively on marriage (POPCOM, 2003). In a foreign study by Martin, et. al. (2003), the majority of adolescents expressed accepting attitude toward marriage, however felt unprepared for marriage. Majority of youngsters consider

marriage as the union of two souls in love but some see it as an escape from the consequence of untoward sexual behavior. Whatever the case may be, it is important for two individuals not to be only emotionally but spiritually, socially, mentally, and economically prepared as well before contracting to marriage and is united with the blessings of the church and under the terms of the law.

The objective of this study is to establish the sensitivity of the collegiate students on the issue by determining their concept of marriage as influenced by their perception toward premarital sex that will serve as a venue for institutions to create a program for students to strengthen their belief in the sacrament of and prepare them for marriage and hopefully to minimize if not possible to eliminate incidence of student pregnancy among teens.

Review of Related Studies

Premarital Sex Among Adolescents

GMA Network (2008) stated in the news that the Philippines is among the top 10 countries with high cases of teen pregnancy according to a recent World Bank report. Other nations with high teenage motherhood cases are Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, Peru and Zimbabwe.

As cited in PINOYHEALTH (2006), 25% of Filipino women become mothers by age 19 and 40% in the bracket 20-24 years old have already participated in sexual activities (NDHS, 2003). In fact, sexually active adolescents had begun sexual intercourse at the age of 16 (Lacson et.al, 1997). This is how teenage sexual activity is rampant in the country as the figure pertains only to women that became mothers before reaching the age 20. This only goes to show that premarital sex is now more accepted than it was few decades ago by college age students as reported in the study of Young (1995). In addition, premarital sex is now considered a highly normative behavior that is not surprising in a generation when people settle down in their mid-to-late twenties (Finer, 2007).

Ironically, Conaco, Jimenez and Billedo (2003) discovered that more youth do not approve of sex before marriage and still value virginity. Nevertheless, the median age for both male and female who

had first sexual experience is 18. Moreover, first sexual experience among the males is found to be more impersonal than the females.

Marriage and Cohabitation

Sexual intercourse finds its proper place only within the context of marriage (Lana, et.al., 2004). Lana stated that sex is an act that is unique to married couples thus, prohibited to unmarried partners more so to teenagers who are committed in a romantic relationship. As procreation is an objective of marriage and sexual intercourse is one marital activity, childbearing is exclusive only for married compliant adults that are able and capable of raising a family.

In the 2004 statistics on marriage released by the National Statistics Office, the number of teenage brides (below age 20) has slightly decreased from the 2003 report. However, these figures were found to have grown four-folds than the number of teenage grooms which implies that more and more teenage females are marrying early. Indeed, people who engage in sexual intercourse early in life are likely predisposed to marry early, too. Marriage then is thought of as a justification to inappropriate sexual activities and is unfortunately seen as a solution to accidental pregnancies (Conaco et.al., 2003).

Virola (2008) pronounced that the nature of marriage among the youth is shifting as evident in the decline of formal marriage and the increase of cohabitation. Besides, virginity is no longer a universally expected prerequisite for the marriage covenant (Leyson, 2001). Living together outside marriage has increased dramatically. Adolescents seem to view it as a means of a trial marriage to get to know better their partner and later decide for a formal union through marriage (Martin et.al., 2003).

Instrument

A self-made instrument was designed for the use in this study. It includes demographic items such as age, gender, year level, religion, and relationship status. Comprised of 38-Item Likert type questionnaire, the concept of marriage, view on premarital sex, opinion on the reasons to engage in premarital sex, sexual experience and cohabitation were the areas of concern. A pool of theology professors handling the Theology 5: Marriage and Family course including the

Vice-Rector for Religious Affairs of Colegio de San Juan de Letran validated its content. The instrument returned a Cronbach alpha of 0.82 in its initial administration, which indicated high reliability.

Sample

Enrolled students for the Summer of School Year 2008 – 2009 in one college in Metro Manila (anonymity is to protect the image of the institution) was considered as the sample units for the study. Four hundred and eighteen (418) of the 662 enrollment were administered the questionnaire which was done by scheduled classroom visitation. The profile of the respondents is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Variable		N	%
Age	16-18	240	57.4
	19-21	144	34.4
	22-24	33	7.9
	25 & above	1	0.2
Year Level	1st	106	25.4
	2nd	100	23.9
	3rd	103	24.6
	4th	109	26.1
Gender	Male	246	58.9
	Female	172	41.1
Religion	Catholic	364	87.1
	Non-Catholic	54	12.9
Relationship Status	Single (never dated)	105	25.1
	Single (dating)	153	36.6
	In a relationship	159	38.0
	Married	2	0.5
Total		418	100.0

Results

1. Perception on Premarital Sex

Premarital sex in this generation is considered normal and acceptable. Findings conform to the research findings of *Finer (2007)* that sex before marriage has become a normative behavior. Although

admittedly there is danger in premarital sexual activities, the sexual practice among many adolescents continue as it is seen to be unavoidable.

Different forms of media introduce sex to and generate curiosity in the youth and as a result an active sexual behavior. It is also becoming a trend among college-age students driven by the pressure from peers who had already experienced sexual intercourse. Sex is a result of satisfying momentary desire among unmarried couples and is no longer a reason to maintain a relationship. Research respondents agree that premarital sex is practiced without considering its possible impacts. Fortunately, many adolescents still do not approve of premarital sex. Respondents expressed value of marriage before sexual act. Cohabitation is believed to be acceptable but is not considered as replacement to marriage. The respondents showed a strong stand to marry their partners before sharing their life together under one roof.

2. Sexual Background

Greater proportion of respondents were reported to have had experienced passionate kissing (62.65% vs. 37.35) while considerably almost equal proportions have experienced petting (47.46% vs. 52.54) and necking (49.03% vs. 50.97%). Adolescents were found to greatly uphold purity and intend to marry a virgin. However, asked about having had experienced sexual intercourse, 401 of the 418 gave an answer and 42.89% bluntly answered they had already experienced sex.

3. Modal Age of Respondents who had First Sexual Intercourse Experience

Literatures say that the median age of premarital sexual incidents is 18 years old. Thus, this study might suggest a shift in the knowledge and exposure of adolescents to sex since results showed that the modal age of respondents who had first sexual experience is 16. Curiosity of sex and sexuality had already reached the younger group of individuals. Data also show that the youngest of the male

and females respondents who had first sexual experience is 11 and 13 years old, respectively.

4. Concept of Marriage

Marriage is still valued and greatly appreciated. Respondents showed a sturdy belief on the sacrament of marriage and everything that goes with it. A lucid understanding of its purpose is evident in the responses. Mean ratings implied that respondents have similar judgment of marriage as a sacrament, a contract, and a covenant.

5. Perception on premarital sex, reasons to engage into premarital sex, cohabitation, sexual background, concept of marriage grouped according to demographic variables

Results showed that gender perception of premarital sex, reasons to engage into premarital sex and cohabitation significantly differ at 0.01 level. Also, sexual background of male and female respondents is significantly different. In all areas, male respondents had a high mean rating than the female respondents. However, the two groups share the same concept of marriage but females had a sophisticated concept of marriage than males.

Religion on the other hand, is not a factor to vary perception on premarital sex. Catholic and Non-Catholic students share the same opinion about the reasons to engage in premarital sex and cohabitation. The two groups also have similar sexual background. Moreover, the concept of marriage between the two groups does not significantly differ.

To determine the differences in the perceptions and concept of marriage of the respondents when grouped according to age, year level, and relationship status, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. Shown in the table above, the concept of marriage of the different age groups showed no significant difference. There were found to have significant differences in their perception on premarital sex, reasons to engage in premarital sex, cohabitation and sexual background.

Grouped according to year level, both perception on premarital sex and concept of marriage were found to be significantly different

while sexual background and concept of marriage among students in the different year levels showed no significant difference.

6. Relationship between the respondents’ concept of marriage and perception on premarital sex

Table 2. Correlation of Concept of Marriage Perception with Premarital Sex, Reasons to engage in Premarital Sex, Cohabitation and Sexual Background

Perception	χ^2	sig.
Premarital Sex	33.34	0.000 **
Reasons to engage in Premarital Sex	24.46	0.004 **
Cohabitation	16.81	0.052
Sexual Background	46.80	0.000 **

** - Significant at 0.01 level

To determine the relationship of the respondents’ concept of marriage to their perception on premarital sex, reasons to engage in premarital sex, cohabitation, and sexual background, Chi-square test for dependence was used. The preceding table presents the chi-square and probability values of the association of the aforementioned areas to concept of marriage. It shows that concept of marriage of the respondents are highly dependent on their perception of premarital sex, their knowledge of the reasons why adolescents engage in premarital sex, and their sexual background whereas opinion on cohabitation does not influence concept of marriage.

Discussion

Adolescents show an intelligent knowledge of the impact and dangers of premarital sex. It is unfortunate though that despite awareness of untoward circumstances premarital sexual activities can lead to, teens see it as a normal action that can be practiced by unmarried and young couples their age. Resistance to satisfying momentary desire is easier said than done. Participants in this research revealed that involvement in such activities is greatly influenced by the environment especially exposure to different sorts of media and peer pressure. Laura Carpenter’s *Investigating Media’s Influence on*

Adolescent Sexuality (2003) quotes mass media is inciting youth to ostensibly inappropriate sexual behavior and powerfully shaping teen's sexual lives to generally deleterious effect. Effortless access to illicit materials that are available in the Internet, videos and in print significantly generate interest in exploring and engage in the action. Likewise, experienced peers intensify sex orientation. Conforming to peer norms, coercion from sexual partners were common reasons for premature and unwanted first experience of sexual intercourse (Skinner, et.al., 2009). Larson (2006) described this period of development as an additional obstacle to the obstacle course where new experience or strengthened motives such as sexual desire and the need to belong in a peer group.

Premarital sex and early pregnancies are common antecedents of teenage marriage and are consistent with the norms of Philippine society as observed in the study of Gultiano (2004) however not regarded as a basis to maintain relationship with partner. Research findings showed adolescents' acceptance of cohabitation but not as a replacement to marriage. Evidence in the study of Whitehead and Popenoe (1999) divulged a tremendous increase in the number of adolescents who favors cohabitation before marriage from 35% in 1975 to 59% in 1995. The State of the Philippines Population Report of 2003 confirmed the liberal attitudes of increasing number of youths favoring cohabitation but continue to look optimistically on marriage. Conversely, respondents to this study would like a formal union before living together with partners in the future.

UP Population Institute reports over four million Filipino youths are sexually active and age of first sexual intercourse is getting younger. In fact, research data shows that youngest respondents who had experienced sex are 11 and 13 years old, male and female respectively. A study by the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston supports these findings. Lead author Christine Markham and colleagues found out that middle school youth as young as 12 are already engaging in risky sexual activity. The proportion of respondents who have had experienced petting, kissing, and necking is not separated by a big disparity. There were more who had done kissing than necking and petting but differences of the figures are not significant. The desire to have a future wife, that is a virgin, correlates

with how they value sexual life before marriage for they understand the concept of and uphold purity.

Adolescents continue to have a positive look on marriage (SPPR 02 & Mathematica Research Policy, Inc.) but showed increasing interest in postponing married until later in life. Respondents in this study illustrate understanding of the whole concept of marriage. Strong approval is held on marriage as a sacrament, a contract, and a covenant, which clearly shows that Filipino youths are ideal in terms of marriage and getting married. Union and togetherness of couples are thought to have blessings of the church. Unexpectedly, respondents gave least agreement on marriage to procreate. This could possibly imply consideration in the out bursting population of the country.

Comparing the perception on premarital sex, cohabitation and sexual background of the respondents, females had more constructive attitude than did males similar to the findings of Salts, et.al. (1994). Age groups showed significant differences toward attitudes on premarital sex and cohabitation but not in the concept of marriage. Respondents of different ages share likely similar attitude on marriage. There were also found to have significant differences on the perception on premarital sex, attitude on cohabitation, sexual background, and marriage concept of respondents in the four year levels. Each year level also had a different view on the different areas of this research study. Furthermore, while relationship status had revealed significant differences on premarital sex and cohabitation, sexual background and concept of marriage are likely similar among respondents regardless whether single or committed in a romantic relationship. Evidence also consistently showed influence of religion in adolescents' behavior on premarital sex and marriage. Respondents have approved that premarital sex is becoming a normative behavior in today's generation but they still uphold purity and disapprove of cohabitation. Results also show, although difference is not significant, that Catholics illustrate a better concept of marriage than respondents of a different religion.

Parallel to past research studies, results indicated adolescents' concept of marriage were significantly associated with their attitude on premarital sex, opinion on reasons to engage into premarital sex,

and sexual background. Cohabitation on the other hand has no correlation with concept of marriage.

Conclusion

Adolescents now consider premarital sex and sexual activities as a normal behavior. It is also believed to be socially acceptable but many still do not approve and do not engage in it. However, it is a fact that a significantly increasing number of youth have already experienced sex and participated in sexual activities at an early age and with this trend we can expect a larger portion of the youth population to be engaged in non-marital sex later in the future.

Although research findings support many literatures, results may be true only for the sample considered in this research endeavor. Concept of marriage of adolescents continue to be strong as in the past years as reported in many studies however it is feared to change its trend course as incidence of premarital sex continuously to increase for there is a correlation between the concept of marriage and perception on premarital sex among the younger group of the population.

The results of this study suggest early health education, which stresses on sex and sexual practices in schools especially in the middle school where statistics on unplanned pregnancy is higher among females before the age of 18. Comprehensive sex education will likely reduce teenage pregnancy (Kohler, et.al., 2007) and delay teen intercourse (Mueller, et.al., 2008). Catholic institutions should also revisit existing religious education to reinforce belief in the sacrament of marriage and religiosity in adolescents to prevent engagement in untoward sexual behavior. Lastly, the government thru its concerned agencies must fortify its campaign against and create a law to sanction the rampant pornography in the Internet and other media.

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