



EFFECT OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT ON PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN BANGLADESH

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
(POPULATION AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
RESEARCH)
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY**

2000

ISBN

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Page 62
2000

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4238526 PRRH/M: MAJOR: POPULATION AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RESEARCH; M.A. (POPULATION AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RESEARCH).

KEY WORDS: ADOLESCENTS/PREMARITAL SEX/WOMEN'S ROLE/FAMILY ENVIRONMENT/REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH.

SADIA DILSHAD PARVEEN: EFFECT OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT ON PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN BANGLADESH. THESIS ADVISOR: ALAN NOEL GRAY PhD, CHURNRURTAI KANCHANACHITRA, PhD. 85p. ISBN .

Little is known about the reproductive and sexual health status of adolescents in Bangladesh. Only recently, in the post-ICPD period, has this group received attention and recognition as being vulnerable regarding their reproductive health status. It is therefore important to identify the different factors influencing adolescents' sexual behavior at different levels, to design strategies appropriate for each. This study aimed to assess the effect of the family environment on the sexual behavior of adolescents.

The study used secondary data from the 1996 Adolescent Survey of Population Council, Bangladesh. Life tables and Cox's regression models were used to assess the extent of premarital sex prevailing in the study population and factors related to this.

A total of 1,860 respondents were interviewed, of whom one third were urban and two-thirds, rural. Among them, 33.5 per cent were married female adolescents aged 15 to 19 years and 32.2 per cent were their husbands. The unmarried male and female adolescents comprised 16.1 and 18.2 per cent of the survey population. The mean age of both male and female adolescents was 17 years, while that of the husbands of married adolescents was 26 years. More than one-third of respondents stated that they had had premarital sex. This included almost half of the male adolescents and one-tenth of the females.

The probability of having premarital sex gradually increased with age. It was highest at age 15 years for both sexes. The proportion of males and females that survived having premarital sex up to age 20 years was 41 and 83 per cent respectively. The median survival time for having premarital sex was 18 and 20 years for the males and females respectively.

Knowledge about reproductive health issues, area of residence and women's status in the family were significantly related with adolescents' likelihood of having premarital sex. In general, respondents with higher knowledge about STD and RTI were more likely to have reported having had premarital sex, as were those living in urban areas and those who lived in households where women's status was low.

The findings strongly indicate the need for design and implementation of appropriate reproductive and sexual health programs and strategies focusing on adolescents and involving the community, school, as well as adolescents to convey the correct information to them in this regard. The study also identified the need for improving women's status at all levels which, in turn, is expected to improve the reproductive and sexual health status and behavior of adolescents.

Future research needs to be focused towards an in-depth exploration of the exact role of women's status in adolescents' sexual behavior. Also, further research is needed to explore the level of contraceptive use among adolescents in Bangladesh and the associated factors.