Volume : 2 | Issue : 7 | July 2013 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper Sociology

Religiosity, Sexual Behaviors & Attitudes among Youth

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ABSTRACT *The study aimed to find out associations between religiosity and attitudes towards sexual behaviors among young adolescents belonging to different religions i.e. Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. 100 young adolescents having different socio-cultural context were selected from five cities of Punjab. A five point Likert Scale was developed to record opinion of participants. Differences were found between religious faith and sexual attitudes across religions.*

KEYWORDS: Religiosity, Sexuality, Young Adolescents

The research conducted in the recent years has suggested that the young people in the age range of 18 to 25 years are more interested in exploring themselves and their identities (Arnett, 2000). This is an age when they experience living away from home for the first time, or get involved in many social, political, religious, and interest related activities. The areas of utmost importance and curiosity in particular are religiosity and sexuality during this period of maturation (CDC, 2000; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993; Yankelovich, 1974). As individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood, their commitment to religion and religious beliefs become more deep-down, irrespective of their actual religious practices (De Haan & Schulenberg, 1997; Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1995; Kotesky, Walker, & Johnson, 1990).

Religiosity and sexuality are closely related to each other, as religion potentially influences a lot of sex-related decisions like dating, pre-marital sex, masturbation, birth control, abortion etc. A number of studies have also examined associations between religiosity and sexuality (Crockett, Bingham, Chopak, & Vicary, 1996; Sheeran, Abrams, Abraham, & Spears, 1993; Studer & Thornton, 1987; Jessor & Jessor, 1975; Samuels, 1997). Almost all major religions in the world have developed moral codes covering issues of sexuality, morality, ethics etc. Individuals belonging to different religious ethnicities differ in their own beliefs and practices of sex and sexuality. The current study examines associations between religiosity and attitudes towards sexual behaviors among young adolescents belonging to different religions. It seeks to explore young peoples' understanding of their religious teachings and its impact on their daily life sexual activities. The study is based on the Reference Group Theory which describes the associations between religiosity and sexual behaviors and attitudes (Bock, Beeghley, & Mixon, 1983; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). The theory underlines that individuals follow the teachings of their religion when determining their own sexual behaviors and attitudes. However, differences in religiosity may lead to differences in sexual behaviors and attitudes. Based on both reference group theory and prior empirical findings, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Awareness about sex and sexuality concepts among youth;
2. Perceptions of youth regarding religiosity and sexuality;
3. Strategies defined by youth to re-visit the roles of various stakeholders in giving awareness about religiosity and sexuality.

Research Methodology

Sample: The sample consisted of 100 young adolescents in the age range of 18 to 25 years (M = 20.5, SD = 1.7). The data was collected from five cities of Punjab (Pakistan) namely Lahore, Rawalpindi, Rawat, Khewra and Mandibahaddin. The young people were contacted through flyers displayed in big Malls of the selected cities. The flyer described the purpose of the study and requested the young people to become part of the study and also to pass on the information to other youth in their surroundings. The young people read and signed consent forms before completing the questionnaires. There were 44% females in the sample. Further the sample consisted of 47% Muslims, 41% Christians and 12% Hindus. The participants had diverse educational qualifications. Fifteen percent of participants were illiterate, 11% had primary education (Grade 5), 37% had passed High School, 12% had earned a 2-year college degree, and 19% got a graduate degree. Participants with University degrees were 6%. Among the sample, 82% were unmarried and the rest 18% were married. It is clear that the sample was varied in terms of a number of factors, including religion, education, residential location and sexual identity. The experiences of religiosity and sexuality may differ depending on these personal characteristics.

Research Tool: The researcher developed a five point Likert Scale to record the opinion of participants. The participants were asked to give their views on the measure starting from Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Reliability was adequate ([alpha] = .64-.74).

Results

Awareness about Sex and Sexuality Concepts among Youth

In all domains of knowledge about sex and sexuality concepts, almost all participants belonging to different religions are at the same level. Findings reveal that accept in few areas, significant differences were not found among the three religions (Details given in Table 1).

Insert Table 1

Perceptions of Youth regarding Religiosity & Sexuality

The study found significant differences towards sexual attitudes and behaviors among youth belonging to different religions. Religious faith and sexuality assumed different meanings for the participants. Further, they faced challenges to meaningfully live out their religious faith and sexuality in connection to each other within the context of religious community and mainstream society. The socialization process has made young people very conscious of religious teachings and they usually take support of religion in case of any guilty feelings. Interestingly, more than half of the participants don't think of masturbation as an incorrect sexual activity but very few participants were in support of having sexual dreams or nocturnal ejaculation (see Table 2 for details).

Insert Table 2

Strategies defined by youth to re-visit the roles of various stakeholders

Majority of the participants had consensus that there must be synergy between the religious leaders and health providers to have updated and accurate knowledge about various sexual activities in the daily lives. The religious leaders because of their ignorance give wrong information to the young people. Further, youth friendly easily accessible literature must be available and youth should be encouraged to read such literature.

Conclusions

The topic of the study is very sensitive and in a conventional society like Pakistan, it's not a general practice to talk openly about religiosity and sexuality. The young adolescents desire to have greater discussion and openness to discuss religiosity and sexuality within their places of worship and religious communities. This should not be perceived as a threat, rather, open and honest dialogue should be held where young people's voices are heard and respected. Most of research has revealed that sexuality is indeed a sensitive and often inadequately addressed issue within religious communities (Browne et al., 2010; Regnerus, 2007). Yet, in an increasingly changing modern culture, particularly among young people, sexuality is a vital issue that they want to be addressed in their efforts to construct their identities and trying to establish a firm footing in a fast-paced society (Johansson, 2007). On the whole, just

over half of the participants thought that their religions were positive towards sexuality issues. While a small majority of the participants considered their priests or religious leaders knowledgeable about sexuality. Some differences were found based on religious identity. Muslims reported more conservative sexual attitudes followed by Christians and Hindus. This finding of group differences in conservative attitudes also is supported by the literature (Sheeran et al., 1993). Findings also suggest that sexuality and religiosity continue to be associated with each other during the young adolescent age. In future studies, it will be important to examine these multiple dimensions of religiosity and sexuality in other cultures and religious groups.

Table 1: Awareness of Youth about Sex & Sexuality Concepts by Religion

Awareness about Sex & Sexuality	Islam (%)	Christianity (%)	Hinduism (%)	χ^2 Value
Sexuality means love	74.5	87.8	66.7	6.64
Sex is pleasure	59.6	53.7	58.3	9.98*
Sex & Sexuality are same	40.4	36.6	25.0	3.82
Marriage as part of sexuality	95.7	87.8	83.3	5.53
Masturbation as part of sexuality	59.2	63.4	58.3	13.55**
Sexual Needs of Boys & Girls are different	66.0	63.4	66.7	9.10*
Sexual desire as part of sexuality	78.7	80.5	75.0	4.33
Sexual pleasure as part of sexuality	74.5	82.9	66.7	7.09
Condom as source of safe sex	31.9	68.3	33.3	15.11**
Knowledge about: ▪ Menstruation cycles	78.7	82.9	75.0	1.29
▪ Intercourse	78.7	65.9	75.0	2.52
▪ Vaginal sex	55.3	65.9	75.0	14.81**
▪ Anal sex	48.9	46.3	83.6	10.95*
▪ Oral sex	53.2	65.9	83.3	5.26
▪ Homosexuality	74.5	61.0	75.0	4.16
▪ Heterosexuality	93.6	80.5	100.0	6.37
▪ Bisexuality	48.9	53.7	75.0	3.47
▪ Getting STDs	87.2	80.5	91.7	3.27
▪ Male body organs	76.6	73.2	66.7	11.38*
▪ Female body organs	78.7	78.0	75.0	4.36

* p<.005 **p<.001

Table 2: Perceptions of Youth about Religiosity & Sexuality

Perceptions about Religiosity & Sexuality	Islam (%)	Christianity (%)	Hinduism (%)	χ^2 Value
Religious leaders as Competent Authorities in giving sexual knowledge	48.9	22.0	25.0	8.35*
Religion controls sexuality	80.9	63.4	100.0	8.29*
Reading Religious books helps in controlling sexual desires	70.2	41.5	66.7	8.53*
Frequent visits to Religious institutions controls sexual behaviors	46.8	29.3	33.3	5.48
Religious bans on sexuality makes life frustrated	10.6	22.0	33.3	7.92*
Religious teachings helps in reducing guilty feelings (if any)	78.7	78.0	83.3	0.36
Religion allows: ▪ Pre-marital sex	44.7	29.3	50.0	8.44*
▪ Getting self -sexual satisfaction	68.1	56.1	41.7	12.83*
▪ Getting knowledge about sex & sexuality	38.3	24.4	41.7	4.25
Masturbation is a sin	61.7	51.2	58.3	7.87*
Having sexual dreams is a sin	10.6	7.3	16.7	1.44
Nocturnal ejaculation is a sin	2.1	17.1	16.7	6.22

*p<.005

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