



GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SEXUAL ATTITUDES AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study was intended to assess sexual attitudes among adolescents and to investigate whether there exists significant differences in sexual attitudes among adolescents with regard to the gender. The study was conducted on a sample of 100 adolescents – 50 of whom were males and 50 were females. The tools used included the Sexual Attitude Scales (S.A.S.) - by Amit Abraham. The obtained raw scores were analyzed using t-test. As hypothesized, significant differences were observed in sexual attitudes and its dimensions among adolescents with regard to gender.

KEYWORDS : Sexual Attitude, Adolescents, Gender

Introduction

Adolescence is a period that brings about revolutionary changes in an individual's physical, mental, moral, spiritual, sex, and social outlook. The issue of human sexuality gains great attention during the phase of adolescence. The period of adolescence presents many conflicting messages about sex as adolescents are virtually bombarded by sexual suggestiveness in the media, while parents provide warnings about and restrictions against sexual behavior. The threat of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as historical shifts in social attitudes, makes the situation volatile and confusing.

Sexual attitudes refer to how accepting people are of sexual activity for themselves or for others (Sprecher 1989). Research indicates that early adolescence is crucial in the development of attitudinal gender differences regarding the acceptability of casual sex (Chara & Kuennen, 1994). Thus, adolescence marks an important time to examine both sexual behaviors and attitudes. Also, attitudes towards premarital relationships, homosexuality, pornography, heterosexuality, polygamy, lesbianism, are drastically changing in the Indian Society. One can thus see the importance that these areas of sexuality play in today's world. But, it is indeed ironical that while sex is an integral part of one's life, parents and elders, including teachers in India hardly play any significant role in providing scientific knowledge about sexuality (Kumar, 1995).

Savara and Sridhar (1992) have noted that parents and teachers generally avoid any mention of sex in their day today relationships with their children/students and this is because it is treated as a taboo subject in the Indian society, and secondly as they themselves lack scientific knowledge about it. The result is that most of adolescents learn about sex in an almost clandestine manner thereby the attitude towards sex is distorted eventually ruining the whole picture and generating many problems in adult life.

Objectives of the study:

- To investigate whether there exists significant differences in sexual attitudes among adolescents with regard to gender.

Hypotheses:

- Significant differences exist in sexual attitudes and its dimensions among adolescents with regard to gender.

Participants:

Purposive sampling method was used and 100 adolescents were selected – 50 of whom were males and 50 were females. The adolescents were selected from various schools across the North and South districts of Goa.

Tools:

- Personal data sheet** that included questions pertaining to socio-demographic information.
- Sexual Attitude Scales (S.A.S.)** - by Amit Abraham has been developed for the exclusive purpose of research work in the area of human sexuality. The S.A.S. provides measures of attitude in five areas of human sexuality viz., Attitude Towards Premarital Sex, Attitude Towards Polygamy, Attitude Towards Pornography, Attitude Towards Lesbianism - for Women only, and Attitude towards Homosexuality - for Men only. It has 70 items which are rated against a 5-point scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Procedure:

Permission to conduct the study was sought from schools from the North and South districts of Goa. The adolescents were then approached personally and informed consent was sought and confidentiality was assured following which the data collection tools were administered. The responses of the participants were scored and then subjected to statistical analysis.

Statistical Technique:

- t-test was used to study the significant difference in the sample sub groups.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores and t-values for sexual attitudes and its dimensions among adolescents with regard to gender.

DIMENSIONS	GENDER	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	t-VALUE
Premarital Sex	Male	24.00	8.308	1.85
	Female	20.98	7.133	
Polygamy	Male	24.11	8.776	2.42*
	Female	20.62	4.807	
Pornography	Male	28.97	6.140	2.72**
	Female	24.67	8.203	
Lesbianism	Male	25.76	6.578	1.70
	Female	23.35	6.703	
Homosexuality	Male	20.95	5.061	0.87
	Female	19.98	5.297	
Overall Sexual Attitude	Male	123.74	21.465	2.92**
	Female	109.35	24.161	

**P<0.01: Highly Significant

*P<0.05: Significant

As seen in table 1, for overall sexual attitudes, the mean for male and female adolescents was found to be 123.74 and 109.35 respectively, with corresponding standard deviations of 21.47 and 24.16 respectively. The 't' value was computed to be 2.92 ($P < 0.05$). Comparing the mean scores, it is observed that males have higher favorable sexual attitudes than females. A probable reason for this finding could be that sexual behavior for males as stated by Kalmuss (2003) is a normative rite of passage and girls tend to be labelled and stigmatized and are often blamed for sexual encounters that result in sexually transmitted infection or pregnancy (Davies et al., 2004). Also, research (E.g. Feldman et al., 1999) indicates that gender differences with regard to sexual attitudes may stem from early experiences and learned gender roles. Females are socialized to be more concerned with interpersonal relationships and relationship status. Thus, females are more conservative in their sexual attitudes preferring the intercourse to take place in context of a committed relationship versus a non-committed setting (Feldman et al., 1999). Women were more likely to be motivated to have sexual intercourse because of emotional value for their partner and were more likely to comply with unwanted. Previous research has shown that men have more permissive attitudes towards sex (Chara & Kuennen, 1994) and desire more sex partners (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Also, family and social upbringing which has a lot to do with this as we live in a society which does not accept such deviant behaviors and women are mostly forced to follow the harsh code of conduct laid down by the moral arbitrators of the society. This finding is further supported by numerous studies like that of Belgrave et al., (2000), Gilbert and Kieth (1970), Roebuck and McGee (1977), O'Donnell et al., (2003), etc.

On the dimension of premarital sex, the mean scores obtained by males and female adolescents was 24.00 and 20.98 with corresponding standard deviations of 8.31 and 7.13 respectively. The 't' value was computed to be 1.85, which was statistically insignificant. However, comparing the means, it is observed that males have high favorable attitudes towards premarital sex as compared to female adolescents. This could be attributed to the fact that in the Indian culture, family and society propagate females to be preserving their virginity until marriage. But, in the case of males, preserving or losing of virginity before marriage does not make any difference. Another reason can be the feeling of losing the essence and interest about sex if done before marriage, along with the feeling of being used by the other sex partner and being ditched away. This finding is supported by studies conducted by Rosenthal et al., (1991) and Higgins et al., (1989) who found that females showed more negative feeling towards premarital sex as compared to males.

On the dimension of polygamy, the mean scores obtained by male and female adolescents were 24.11 and 20.62 with corresponding standard deviations of 8.78 and 4.81 respectively. The 't' value was computed to be 2.42 ($P < 0.05$). Comparing the mean scores, it is observed that males have high favorable attitudes towards polygamy as compared to female adolescents. This finding is obtained probably because family and society has placed males on a higher hierarchical level than females and as a result, males assume to have more independence, power and might, and consider having many wives as a feather in their cap. Further, a reason why females have unfavorable attitudes towards polygamy could be attributed to the feeling of insecurity experienced by females as a result of a polygamous marriage. If the wife is fully dependent on her husband for her needs and if the husband has more than one wife, it definitely develops a feeling of insecurity and inferiority. This finding is substantiated by research studies conducted by Al Krenawi (2001), Amoran et al., (2004), Staffren et al., (1997) which revealed that females reported negative attitudes towards polygamy due to lack of empowerment, economic deprivation, material insecurity.

The mean scores obtained by male and female adolescents on the dimension of Pornography were 28.97 and 24.67 with corresponding standard deviations of 6.14 and 8.20 respectively. The 't' value was computed to be 2.72 ($P < 0.01$). Comparing the means, it is observed males have high favorable attitudes towards

pornography as compared to female adolescents. Pornography is associated with masturbation among males as they often use the medium of pornography to arouse themselves and attend sexual gratification. Larsen (1971) found that young males used pornographic media as a measure of arousal, which was seen less in young females. This finding is further supported by Goodson et al., (2001), Flood (2009) and Peter and Valkenburg (2006).

On the dimension of lesbianism, the mean scores obtained by male and female adolescents were 25.76 and 23.35 with corresponding standard deviations of 6.58 and 6.71 respectively. The 't' value was computed to be 1.71 ($P < 0.05$). Comparing the means, it was observed that males have high favorable attitudes towards lesbianism as compared to female adolescents. Further, one reason why as to males have higher favorable attitudes towards lesbianism could be attributed to the assumption of the males that even the females have the right to choose their own sexual orientation. Similarly, it was observed that females have unfavorable attitudes towards lesbianism as compared to males. One reason why as to females have unfavorable attitudes towards lesbianism could be the social taboo attached that only heterosexuality is the only form of total sexual pleasure, along with the religious values of believing that God has only created men and women to reproduce and procreate. This finding is supported by Kite and Whitley (1996) who conducted a study on adolescent's attitudes and behaviors towards lesbians and homosexuals and found that males have positive attitudes and behaviors towards lesbians and homosexual Persons as compared to females.

On the dimension of homosexuality, the mean scores obtained by male and female adolescents were 20.95 and 19.98 with corresponding standard deviations of 5.06 and 5.29 respectively. The 't' value was computed to be 0.87, which was statistically insignificant. Comparing the means, it was observed that males have high favorable attitudes towards homosexuality as compared to female adolescents. One reason supporting this finding could be, because family and society has placed males on a higher hierarchical level, then the females; which gives an opportunity to the males to assume that they might get away doing anything for the simple reason that they are males and that they have solely right to do as the wish. This finding is supported by Frost et al., (2007) who conducted a study on attitudes toward homosexual activity by teenagers, and the results revealed that males had more positive attitudes than females towards homosexuals. Further supporting the finding is a study by Baker et al., (1998).

Conclusion

As hypothesized, significant differences were observed in sexual attitudes and its dimensions among adolescents with regard to gender.

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