

The determination of health school students' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors on the matter of sexual health in Eastern Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine health school students' level of sexual knowledge, sources of information, attitudes and behaviors on the matter of sexuality.

The research was carried out among the students of Yuzuncu Yil University School of Health, Van, Eastern Turkey. The research was descriptive and cross-sectional. The survey form used for data collection includes questions on socio-demographic features, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of students on sexual health. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS v.18.

It was found that 8% of girls, 35.1% of boys had sexual activity and 10.6% of the girls, 24.7% of the boys had incomplete sexual activity. Analysis reveal that there were significant differences between men and women about their report premarital sexuality, premarital sexual activity of boys and girls (in the past), know the meaning of masturbation, thoughts and feelings about masturbation, beliefs related with the obligatory obedience of the sexual demands and expectation of virginity from spouse when married.

We have concluded that health school students' sexual knowledge is insufficient, their behaviors and attitudes are influenced by traditional approaches and understanding of sexuality differs between two genders.

Key Words: Students, sexuality, knowledge, premarital sexuality, expectation of virginity

Introduction

Sexual behavior is learned and shaped by physiological, psychological and cultural influences. During childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, individuals built their opinions about who they are and how they should act. However the lack of knowledge and avoidance of discussions on sexual matters in families in Turkey retain them from supporting their children (1-4).

Turkey has close connections to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. For this reason, Turkish society experiences mixed views regarding sexual beliefs and behaviors. Besides liberal sexual lifestyles, conservative values are evident in Turkey. Premarital sexual intercourse has been prohibited by the Islamic religion, which is widespread in the country (5).

According to Çok et al. (6) in general, premarital sexual intercourse for men is tolerated in Turkey, whereas women are expected to have no sexual experience before marriage. Rademakers et al. (7)

stated that this dilemma about virginity caused young Muslim girls to have virginity certificates or even hymen reconstruction.

Sexuality is still seen as a taboo in Turkey and that is why sexual education, services and research are limited. Furthermore, there is a lack of institutionalized sexual education at school and sexuality is not discussed within families. This leads young people to get information on sexuality from hidden, insufficient and deceptive resources. Additionally, it is known that parents who are expected to give the first sexual education do not have sufficient knowledge themselves (8-13).

Sexual education is a life-long process of developing knowledge, attitude, belief and values. Contrary to the situation in Turkey, in developed countries sexual education starts within families and is supported by the schools (14).

It was seen that social values and attitudes affected young people's sexual preferences and reproductive health. Cultural and social background shape health staff's understanding,

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attitudes and practices. Health staff have to be aware of young people's attitudes and moral values concerning sexuality and its consequences (15,16).

Material and methods

This study aims to determine university students' level of sexual knowledge, sources of information, attitudes and behaviors on the matter of sexuality. This research was conducted in 2014-2015 as a descriptive and cross-sectional study. The research was carried out among the students of Yuzuncu Yil University School of Health, Van, Eastern Turkey.

Sample characteristics: The sample was comprised of 319 students from the 1st and 4th year classes who agreed to participate in the research. Of these, 310 responded to the questionnaire (response rate was 97.18%).

The questionnaire was prepared by the researchers after review of the relevant literature, and finalized following a pilot application prior to data collection. The form included 31 questions that allowed students to choose more than one option. The survey form was not prepared in likert type. The form includes questions on students' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors on sexuality. The questions in the form were prepared to capture demographic features (age, sex, marital status, family's residence, grade, living conditions), sexual matters (sources of information, family's attitude, level of intimacy with the opposite sex, premarital sexual intercourse, expectation of virginity from spouse, personal opinion on relation between virginity and morality, sexual preference, thoughts about masturbation, thoughts about homosexuals) and sexual behavior (relationship status, age of the first romantic relationship).

Data collection: Following written permissions received from Directorate of School of Health the survey forms were distributed. Before the distribution of the forms, the objective of the research was explained to the participants. We also explained that identification was not necessary and the data would not be used outside the scope of the research. The forms were completed by the students within 15 min. approximately.

Data analysis: Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS v.18. Descriptive analyses accomplished. Chi square test was used for comparisons. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical consideration: Medical school of Yuzuncu Yil University Research Ethics

Committee approved the study. All participants gave written consent prior to interview.

Results

It was determined that the average age of the students was 21.6 ± 2.201 years (minimum 17, maximum 30). The majority of the participants were female (62.4%). Distribution of the students were different grades as 49.5% in first, 50.5% in fourth class and 47.6% in department of midwifery, 52.4% in department of nursing. According to the socio-economic level of students 58% of the students were at a very low level of economic income and 5.2% of the students were high level of economic income. The accommodations of the students differed also; 48.7% of them stayed in dormitories, 20.9% lived with their families, 25.5% lived with their friends and 2.3% stayed with a relative. In terms of parental education level it was determined that 25.4% of the mothers and 30.7% of the fathers were primary school graduates, 5.1% of the mothers and 17.9% of the fathers were high school graduates, 2.3% of the mothers and 10.9% of the fathers were university graduates, 5.5% of the mothers and 14.7% of the fathers were junior high school graduates, 18.3% of the mothers and 14.1% of the fathers were only literate, 43.4% of the mothers and 11.8% of the fathers were illiterate. The 42.3% of the students reported that they talked to close friends about their sexual thoughts and problems, 11.3% of the students chose their mother, father (0.9%), siblings (3.4%), relative (0.9%), family doctor (0.6%), other healthworkers (0.9%), teacher (0.9%), nobody (38.6%) and 38.6% of them chose not to answer.

Table 1 shows the information resources of the students on sexually.

When the students were asked whether or not they were involved in romantic relationships, 40% of the girls', 54.1% of the boys', 39.7% of the first grade', 60.3% of the fourth grade' responses were positive, whereas 8.1% of the students chose not to respond, and hence it was determined that the difference between girls and boys ($p=0.014$) and between first grade and fourth grade ($p=0.001$) were statistically significant.

It was found that 8% of girls, 35.1% of boys had sexual activity and 10.6% of the girls, 24.7% of the boys had incomplete sexual activity ($p=0.000$). It was determined that the most of the students were against premarital sexual intercourse (82.6% of the girls, 49.1% of the boys), expected their spouses to be virgin (48.6% of the girls, 81.5% of

Table 1. Information Resources of the Students on Sexuality ($p=0.013$)

Source of information	Female(N=193)* n(%)	Male(N=117)* n(%)	Total(N=310) n(%)
Friends	67(34.7)	59(50.4)	126(40.6)
Internet	45(23.3)	47(40.1)	92(29.6)
The book-electronic book-CD	53(27.4)	31(26.4)	84(27)
Magazine-newspaper	28(14.5)	33(28.2)	61(19.6)
Mother	23(11.9)	1(0.8)	24(7.7)
Relatives	7(3.6)	13(11.1)	20(6.4)
TV	10(5.1)	9(7.6)	19(6.1)
Siblings	6(3.1)	4(3.4)	10(3.2)
Porn movies	0(0)	9(7.6)	9(2.9)
Father	0(0)	4(2)	4(1.2)
No answer	21(10.8)	5(4.2)	26(8.3)

* "n" is higher due to multiple answers

the boys). It was found that the differences between these parameters were statistically significant ($p=0.000$).

It was determined that the most of the students were against premarital sexual intercourse (77.8% of the first grade, 62.3% of the fourth grade) ($p=0.006$), expected their spouses to be virgin (63.1% of the first grade, 60.4% of the fourth grade) ($p=0.216$).

It was found that 75.1% of the girls, 50.4% of the boys were against premarital sexual activity of boys in the past ($p=0.000$). 85.2 % of the girls, 75.2% of the boys were against premarital sexual activity of girls in the past ($p=0.001$).

When the students were asked regarding masturbation, 34.7% of the girls and 56.6% of the boys were reported that it was natural and normal; 17.8% of girls, 23.6% of boys stated sense of guilt; 20.3% of the girls, 8.5% of the boys were worried about to be injured; 7.6% of the girls, 3.8% of the boys were embarrassed in front of family members and 19.5% of the girls, 7.5% of the boys were embarrassed in front of others. It was determined that thinking of student about sexuality education in schools, 45.3% of the girls, 42.8% of the boys ($p=0.375$), 42.2% of the first grade and 52.5% of the fourth grade ($p=0.001$) were reported should be given training in high school. 2.6% of the students reported that against education about sexuality in school.

Table 2 and 3 shows the distribution of students' approach to sexuality by sex and grade.

Discussion

In this study, it was determined that their sources of information were mostly friends (40.6%). In

Turkey friends and written and visual materials are more common among the sources of information of university students on the matter of sexuality (2-8). Studies show that as socio-economic level increases, the preferred sources of information change and written and visual materials (newspaper, magazines, and internet) is used more (17). This result is consistent with the other researches conducted in our country (18-21).

In this research, it is found that, they mostly discussed their sexual problems with their friends (42.3%). Mothers being students' second choice for communication (11.3%) is a positive sign in terms of the influence of families.

The age of sexual activity and current of sexual experience depend on cultural, economical and environmental factors. They also differ for developed and developing countries. The studies show the age of sexual activity changes from 16 to 19 and the ratio of sexual experience is between 10 and 94% (12,13,15,22-24).

Studies show that the percentage of university students having premarital sexual intercourse is about 30%, and the average age of the first sexual experience is 17 (8,19,20,25). However, in the research conducted in 2005 determined that 61.2% of the university students (14.1% of the girls, 55.0% of the boys) had sexual intercourse (2). The proportions in other countries vary according to the level of development, religious beliefs and traditions. In our study, we determined that 8% of girls, 35.1% of the boys were sexually active. According to these results the frequencies of sexual activity among both sexes are low compared to other researches. The reasons might be study areas and socio-cultural backgrounds of students.

Table 2. Distribution of students' approach to sexuality by sex and grade (N=310)

	Female		Male		p*	p**
	1st grade (n=109) n(%)	4th grade (n=84) n(%)	1st grade (n=47) n(%)	4th grade (n=70) n(%)		
Premarital sexuality					0.000	0.006
Against	86 (78.8)	65 (77.3)	29 (61.7)	28(40)		
Find it normal		11(13)	12(25.5)	30(42.8)		
No opinion	7(6.4)	5(5.9)	5(10.6)	10(14.2)		
No answer	9(8.2)	4(4.7)	1(2.1)	2(2.8)		
	7(6.4)					
Premarital sexual activity of boys (in the past)					0.000	0.002
Against	83(76.1)	53(63)	28(59.5)	30(42.8)		
Find it normal	8(7.3)	12(14.2)	15(31.9)	32(45.7)		
Premarital sexual activity of girls (in the past)					0.001	0.061
Against	90(82.5)	65(77.3)	35(74.4)	50(71.4)		
Find it normal	2(1.8)	8(9.5)	7(14.8)	14(20)		
Know the meaning of masturbation					0.000	0.000
Yes	56(51.3)	62(73.8)	39(82.9)	68(97.1)		
No	33(30.2)	8(9.5)	5(10.6)	0(0)		
Thoughts and feelings about masturbation					0.001	0.002
Natural and normal	13(11.9)	28(33.3)	20(42.5)	41(58.5)		
Sence of guilt	9(8.2)	12(14.2)	13(27.6)	12(17.1)		
Worried about to be injured	13(11.9)	8(9.5)	3(6.3)	6(8.5)		
Embarressed in front of family members	8(7.3)	2(2.3)	0(0)	3(4.2)		
Embarressed in front of others	15(13.7)	8(9.5)	6(12.7)	2(2.8)		
Did you yourself ever masturbated?					0.000	0.000
Yes	4(3.1)	13(10.2)	25(30.4)	51(62.1)		
No	64(50.3)	46(36.2)	5(6)	1(1.2)		
No Answer	41(37.6)	25(29.7)	17(36.1)	18(34.6)		

p*: p values between girls and boys

p**: p values between 1st grade and 4th grade

Tested for statistically significant differences between the groups by means of Chi-square test.

Approaches of women and men towards sexual intercourse are different in Turkey. Sexuality is seen as a taboo for women and it is forbidden to them, whereas it is seen as normal for men. Due to this traditional view, opinions of women and men on premarital sex are different. The studies show these differences (3,13,15,19,20,22). This

study determined that 78.8% in 1 st grade and 77.3% in 4th of the girls and that 61.7% in 1 st grade and 40% in 4th of the boys were against premarital sexual intercourse. 46.7% in 1 st grade and 40.4% in 4th% of the girls and 76.5% in 1 st grade and 74.2% in 4th% of the boys thought a future spouse should be expected to be virgin.

These findings differ from other researchers conducted in Turkey and in developed countries; they also show that boys are more conservative and have a suppressive approach towards women. The results of this research are consistent with these findings.

In our research, it is found that they have mostly negative feelings such as guilty conscience, damage conscience, shame the family shame the community about masturbation. When we asked 'Does she have to make a married woman sexual demands of her husband even if women do not want?' nearly half of men and nearly one-quarter of girls said 'yes'. Furthermore, when we asked 'Is

it appropriate for you a woman to enjoy sexual intercourse?' a large part of the students said 'no'. The proportions in our study vary according to the level of development, traditions and religious beliefs. Also, in this study students were mostly thinking negatively about homosexuals. We could not find any research about this topics in the literature. Therefore, our data was not comperable.

The age of sexual activity is decreasing and it is becoming prevalent in developing countries, as well as in developed countries. It should be remembered that as young people live their life in a healthy manner, they will become healthier

Table 3. Distribution of students' approach to sexuality by sex and grade (N=310)

	Female		Male		p*	p**
	1st grade (n=109) n(%)	4th grade (n=84) n(%)	1st grade (n=47) n(%)	4th grade (n=70) n(%)		
Do you talk with your doctor about sexuality comfortable?					0.021	0.269
Yes	27(24.7)	34(40.4)	23(48.9)	33(47.1)		
No	82(75.2)	50(59.5)	24(51)	37(52.8)		
Is the woman have to obey her husband's sexual demands?					0.003	0.230
Yes	31(28.4)	21(25)	25(53.1)	28(40)		
No	48(44.3)	42(50)	13(27.6)	23(32.8)		
No opinion	16(14.6)	19(22.6)	5(10.6)	15(21.4)		
No answer	14(12.8)	2(2.3)	4(8.5)	4(5.7)		
Expectation of virginity from spouse when married					0.000	0.216
Yes	51(46.7)	34(40.4)	36(76.5)	52(74.2)		
No	27(24.7)	31(36.9)	2(4.2)	11(15.7)		
Is it appropriate for you a woman to enjoy sexual intercourse?					0.200	0.077
Yes	12(11)	3(3.5)	6(12.7)	10(14.2)		
No	61(55.9)	69(81.5)	31(65.9)	50(71.4)		
Ideas about homosexuality					0.091	0.338
It is a personal choice,a normal state	26(23.8)	32(38)	19(40.4)	19(27.1)		
It is a personal choice but I do not like them	25(22.9)	14(16.6)	11(23.4)	22(31.4)		
It is disease,they should be treated	32(29.3)	30(35.7)	8(17)	15(21.4)		
I want to be away from my family	1(0.9)	0(0)	0(0)	1(1.4)		
I do not want to face, I felt very uncomfortable	11(10)	3(3.5)	5(10.6)	5(7.1)		

p*: p values between girls and boys

p**: p values between 1st grade and 4th grade

Tested for statistically significant differences between the groups by means of Chi-square test.

adults. Medical personnel, especially the nurses, play an important role in this process. In the schools, hospitals and other public health centers they work, they should make sure that needs of young people are met and education and counseling services are effectively working (18).

In conclusion, it was determined that students on sexual problems were mostly discussed with friends. It was also determined that both of the genders were premarital sexual intercourse. The proportion of students having premarital sexual intercourses was lower than the findings of other researches, most of the students expected their future spouse to be virgin. They have mostly negative feelings about masurbation. Most students think that a married woman must make sexual demands of her husband even if women do not want and a woman should not enjoy sexual intercourse. It was determined that students were mostly thinking negatively about homosexuals. Starting the sexual education and counseling concerned with the needs of young people at an early stage of their lives are necessary for a healthy youth and society. It is recommended that nurses and midwives should be aware of it and play an effective role in education and counseling services.

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