

SOME ASPECTS OF SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF LOCAL WOMEN RESULTS OF A SURVEY IV PREMARITAL COITUS

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SYNOPSIS

This fourth article discusses premarital coitus.

277 of 1012 ie. 27.4 percent of the sample admitted to premarital coitus.

171 were married women and constituted 18.8 percent of the married women surveyed.

106 were unmarried at the time of interview and most of the data are derived from these women.

The majority had had premarital coitus with their spouse to be or with some close companion with whom their relationship had terminated.

66 percent were from the better educated group and had had at least 10 years of schooling.

6.9 percent (19 women) had had multiple partners.

59 percent had indulged in premarital coitus for a period of a year or so.

57.8 percent did not use any contraception at all.

55.7 percent had coitus less often than once per fortnight while 25.5 per cent did so once per week.

88.7 percent used the male superior position at coitus frequently.

20.7 percent had never experienced any orgasm at all while 11.3 percent experienced this at every encounter.

15.1 percent claimed that they did not enjoy premarital coitus.

A discussion about premarital coitus and its significance follows.

INTRODUCTION

In nearly every cultures some premarital coitus does occur. Restrictions are placed as to with whom such activity can occur.

In some cultures (eg Muslim, Mediterranean) male premarital activity is accepted but restrictions are placed on female premarital activity, especially, on those from higher social groups and consequently males from these groups tend to develop relationships with females of the lower social groups or seek prostitutes for sexual outlet.

In Scandinavian countries, premarital coital activity is accepted somewhat for all social levels and both sexes.

An attempt is made to study premarital coital activity locally and a general discussion follows.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

1012 females, who were the patients of the Obstetric and Gynaecological Unit of Toa Payoh Hospital were interviewed personally by the author with regard to their premarital experiences.

RESULTS

Table I gives the breakdown of the answers obtained.

Table I Premarital Experiences

| Experience | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
| Nil | 184 | 18.1 |
| Kissing/Petting | 551 | 54.5 |
| Coitus | 277 | 27.4 |
| Total | 1012 | 100 |

27.4 percent of the total sample had had premarital coitus. Leaving out the unmarried females in the sample, of those who were married, 171 had had premarital coitus ie 18.8 percent of the married women of 90 percent. This activity was mainly with their spouses to be or with some other companions, with whom they had terminated their relationship after some time.

Table II shows the educational status of those who had indulged in premarital coitus.

Table II Educational Status of Those with Premarital Experience

| Educational Level | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Primary VI | 15 | 5.4 |
| Secondary I | 16 | 5.8 |
| Secondary II | 33 | 12.0 |
| Secondary III | 30 | 10.8 |
| Secondary IV | 158 | 57.0 |
| HSC | 22 | 18.0 |
| University | 3 | 1.0 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

66 percent of those who had had premarital coitus, form the better educational group ie had had at least 10 years or more of educational level.

Table III shows the duration of premarital coitus engaged in by those who had premarital coitus.

Table III Duration of Premarital Coitus

| Duration (up to) | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 6 months | 98 | 35.3 |
| 1 year | 66 | 23.8 |
| 1½ year | 16 | 5.8 |
| 2 years | 44 | 15.9 |
| 3 years | 20 | 7.2 |
| 4 years | 17 | 6.1 |
| 5 years | 6 | 2.2 |
| 6 years | 5 | 1.8 |
| 7 years | 2 | 0.7 |
| 8 years | 1 | 0.4 |
| 9 years | 1 | 0.4 |
| 110 years | 1 | 0.4 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

59 percent of those who had engaged in premarital coitus had indulged in it for up to a year or less. 6.9 percent (19 women) had had multiple coital partners. They were mainly from the group who had had coital experience for over two years. One had had four partners within 2 years. One had engaged in group sex (2 females and a male).

One was raped by her stepfather at the age of 10 years, but started to have sexual intercourse two years prior to her marriage. One said her cousin molested her when she was 18 years old. Another had coitus whenever opportunity allowed and when a suitable partner came by. Another had carried on with heavy petting for 2 years with the partner ejaculating outside on her genitals.

Four women had had premarital coitus only once, five twice and one thrice prior to the interview or their marriages.

Table IV shows the type of contraception used by those who engaged in premarital coitus.

Table IV Contraception used Premaritally

| Type | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Nil | 160 | 57.8 |
| Condom | 79 | 28.5 |
| ORAL Contraceptives | 5 | 1.8 |
| Withdrawal | 22 | (7.9 |
| Safe Period | 11 | (4.0 |
| Total | 277 | 100 |

57.8 percent did not use any contraception at all and about 12.0 percent used unreliable methods (withdrawal and safe periods).

One resorted to allowing the partner to ejaculate outside on her genitals but denied any penetration whatsoever.

Table V shows the coital frequency for the 106 unmarried women in the sample.

Table V Coital Frequency of Unmarried Women

| Frequency per week | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Once | 27 | 25.5 |
| Twice | 10 | 9.4 |
| Thrice | 7 | 6.6 |
| Four | 1 | 0.9 |
| Seven | 2 | 1.9 |
| Once per 2 weeks | 27 | 25.5 |
| Once per month | 14 | 13.2 |
| Infrequent | 18 | 17.0 |
| Total | 106 | 100 |

Once only 2 persons
Twice only 1 person
Thrice only 1 person

The unmarried because of their peculiar situation tended to occupy the lower levels of frequency and (55.7 percent) have coitus once in two weeks or less. 41.5 percent of them had coitus from one to three times per week of which over a half had coitus once per week.

Table VI shows the most frequently used coital positions used in premarital coitus by the unmarried women.

Table VI Frequent Coital Position Premaritally

| Position | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Male superior | 94 | 88.7 |
| Female superior | 7 | 6.6 |
| Rear Entry | 2 | 1.9 |
| Variable (No fixed position) | 3 | 2.8 |
| Total | 106 | 100 |

24 of the women (22.6 percent) used only the male superior position without any variation whatsoever. Either they were unaware of the possibilities of other possible positions or were still uninitiated into newer practices.

The vast majority (88.7 percent) of the females used the male superior position for coitus.

The women were asked whether they experienced any orgasm in premarital coitus. The replies from the 106 unmarried women are given.

Table VII Orgasm During Coitus

| Frequency of Orgasm | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Less than half the time | 36 | 34.0 |
| More than half the time | 36 | 34.0 |
| Always or nearly always | 12 | 11.3 |
| None at all | 22 | 20.7 |
| Total | 106 | 100 |

20.7 percent of the women had not experienced any orgasm at all in premarital coitus, while 11.3 percent experienced it at every encounter. Another 34.0 percent experienced it less than 50 percent of the time they had coitus.

Table VIII shows the response to the question of whether they enjoyed coitus premaritally.

Table VIII Enjoyment of Coitus

| Enjoyment | Number of Persons | Percentage |
|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| Yes | 90 | 84.9 |
| No | 16 | 15.1 |
| Total | 106 | 100 |

15.1 percent said they did not enjoy premarital coitus. This was either from guilt, pain, fear of pregnancy or being unable to reach orgasm (felt nothing).

DISCUSSION

Premarital coitus is condemned on moral and legal grounds. It is hard to get any objective evaluation of the activity in relation to an individual's sexual needs and to society's intrinsic interests (1).

The individual's participation in increasingly more intimate behaviour develops over a period of several years of socialization and is influenced by biological factors (2).

Social changes have influenced many patterns of life including premarital sexual beliefs and behaviour. Values have changed and more females accept premarital coitus if they are emotionally involved with the partner and if the partner gives some commitment of marriage in the future. This is evidenced by the high rate of premarital coitus during engagement (3). This is seen to be true too in this study.

Though the double standard has changed for most individuals, females still require more emotional intimacy than males to participate in intimate sexual behaviour. A large majority will accept coitus under conditions of love

and affection. Thus there has been an increase in female permissiveness. The quality of the emotional intimacy of the relationship is an important determinant of premarital sexual activity. The longer a relationship exists the more intimate the behaviour (2, 3).

Whether a person had ever engaged in sexual intercourse is strongly influenced by his or her standards. This is the result of two sets of influence viz. parental and religions on one hand and peer and partner on the other. It can be concluded that the dominant standard is permissiveness with affection (2, 3).

Women are less permissive than men and the shift towards greater permissiveness among women is most marked in recent years. While previously most women held a standard of abstinence over time women have increasingly come to accept premarital intercourse (2).

There is evidence of a marked increase in the incidence of premarital coitus especially among females and this parallels the increase in permissiveness in women's premarital standards (2). The source for this increase in permissiveness of standards is an increase in the autonomy of young people or a relative decline in the influence of parents, religion and other such social institutions.

Being non-virgin at the time of marriage is not an indication of extensive premarital sexual experience with a variety of partners. Only 6.9 percent admitted to having had multiple partners and the majority had coitus with their spouse to be only. Premarital coitus for women depends on a strong emotional commitment and plans for marriage (3).

Kinsey (1) found that over fifty percent of females in his study had coitus only with men whom they eventually married. Also he found that twenty-two percent of those who had no premarital sexual intercourse did abstain because of lack of opportunity for such activity. A similar trend was seen in this study too.

Premarital coitus had provided 27.4 percent of the sample and 18.8 percent of the married women with sexual outlet prior to marriage.

Little data exists to show what effects, if any, premarital coitus may have on the females' subsequent marital adjustments.

Heterosexual coitus is the most socially acceptable and desirable type of sexual activity. However premarital coital activity is condemned and there are restrictions placed on it. These condemnations and restrictions must definitely have an effect on the psychological development of youth and adjustment in marriage. These restrictions may tend to encourage homosexual activity (1).

Society tends to believe that because of its condemnations and restrictions premarital coitus occurs rarely in local youth. However, from the figures shown, this is one of the things people tend to believe in while what actually goes on is far from the truth. Making allowance for with-holding information, the true incidence of premarital coitus must be higher than stated above.

Relation to Age

27.4 percent of the sample had had coitus prior to marriage (18.8 percent of the married women).

A considerable portion of premarital coital activity had occurred for a period of a year or so and was mainly confined to one partner only ie. the fiancée or spouse to be.

6.9 percent had had coitus with more than one partner and one had even partaken in group sex involving two

females and a male (Triolism).

Whether early coital experience leads to early marriage or whether the prospect of the forthcoming marriage leads to an acceptance of premarital coitus is debatable (1). Premarital coitus was rare in the early teens, probably due to the fact that only a few of the younger girls are sexually responsive.

Ten women (3.6 percent) had experience in coitus only on occasions varying from one to three times only prior to their marriage or at the time of interview.

Frequency of Coitus

Coitus was less frequent than marital coitus for obvious reasons eg. difficulty in getting a partner, or place for such activity. Coital frequency varied from an occasional encounter to regular coitus when both the partners lived together.

59 percent had had coitus for a period of up to a year. Those who had had premarital coitus for a longer duration (upwards of 2 years) tended to have had experiences with many different partners due to opportunity over the years or because their relationship with some males had been discontinued.

Coitus between engaged couples may be a factor in fixing an early date for marriage. They may have wanted more complete sexual relationships with less stress and strain than what premarital coitus would have offered them.

Number of Partners

Because of social taboo, lack of opportunity and other factors, the vast majority (over 90 percent) had had coitus with one partner only eg. their fiancée or the man they married subsequently.

However, 6.9 percent had had multiple partners. This maybe an understatement because of the subjects wanting to give a more socially acceptable picture of themselves. With more opportunities available more females may be having coitus with multiple partners.

There was some inclination to giving allowance for premarital coitus with the subsequent spouse to be. This too accounts for the high percentage of females who did not use any contraception (57.8 percent) or used unreliable methods (12.0 percent).

The more educated are more likely to indulge in premarital coitus. 60 percent of those who had indulged in premarital coitus had had education of 10 years or over.

Place of Coitus

Coitus was often had in the male's or female's home, hotels, rented room, cars, parks or any suitable place out of doors. The large majority was carried out in homes. The general inference is that premarital coitus is practised under inadequate or unsuitable conditions and as such the experience is traumatic or unsatisfactory.

Positions in Coitus

Usually these were restricted to some extent depending on where and how hurried coitus was had and also because of inexperience or lack of knowledge.

The male superior position was used most often (88.7 percent). Other positions used were the female superior, side to side or sitting position. Less often rear entry was

practised. Sitting in car backseats or standing positions were used if the relationships were more hurried.

Significance of Premarital Coitus (1)

Many arguments have been offered for and against premarital coitus.

Arguments Against

Moralists and marriage manuals emphasize the undesirability of premarital coitus on the grounds of damage it does to the individual, her partner and to society in general.

The danger of an unwanted pregnancy, abortion, regret and venereal disease is ever present.

Guilt feelings tend to develop if premarital coitus, as often had, is had in an unfavourable atmosphere or circumstance. There is guilt at the loss of virginity and its effects on future marriage ability.

Some males may lose respect for the female and refuse to marry her even though they may have been a partner to her indulging in premarital sex.

There is fear of public disapproval of the activity with all its social and legal implications.

If the female and her partner derive satisfaction from premarital coitus, marriage may be postponed or gone through with because of a sense of obligation.

The relationship may be terminated because of a sense of guilt and grief.

Only the physical aspects of marriage are emphasized by premarital coitus. A tendency to extramarital infidelities may develop and these factors may make an individual less responsive later on in marital coitus.

In general, premarital coitus is considered morally wrong and by not indulging in it an individual will tend to develop will power and be better off in the future without any of the repercussions mentioned above.

Arguments For

Premarital coitus satisfies a physiological need for an outlet and gives physical and physiological satisfaction. If no guilt feelings are encountered, the individual may function better in other fields of activity as well.

The individual learns to make emotional adjustments with other persons. The training in the physical techniques used in marital coitus is obtained and thereby sexual adjustments after marriage are easier. In case of failure in adjustment prior to marriage, the relationship can be terminated without much consequence whereas after marriage, divorce with all its legal and social implications results.

Heterosexual relationships prevent a tendency to develop homosexual patterns of behaviour. Further peer group standing is enhanced by her fitting to their patterns of behaviour.

Psychologically premarital coitus dispels fear of the unknown ie. types of sexual activity that are possible and what coitus entails.

Many factors determine whether an individual will continue with premarital coitus. Moral pressures, pregnancy fears, public opinion and fear of venereal disease

influence the decision. Further the effect of social, emotional and situational factors or sexual responsiveness play a part.

Regret is least if coitus is had with the spouse to be. Religious and moral codes may be a source for regret.

If the activity gives psychological satisfaction, the individual may continue with premarital coitus. The only danger is pregnancy, venereal disease or physical injury.

Premarital coitus is unacceptable to many social groups and in general females are inclined to be less expectant that their husbands be virgins at the time of marriage.

Socially, premarital pregnancy publicity and also publicity of venereal disease has to be considered.

A large majority (over 57 percent) had premarital coitus without any contraception whatsoever because of the easy availability of abortion and also because the partner was often the spouse to be.

Inhibitions acquired due to various restrictions imposed by society may damage an individual's capacity to respond sexually. Premarital coitus seems to get rid of these inhibitions.

A positive correlation exists between orgasm prior to marriage and the ability to have orgasm after marriage. In this study 20.7 percent had never had orgasm at premarital coitus while 11.3 percent had been orgasmic always.

There is considerable emotional effects on the individual when he or she engages in any type of socially taboo behaviour. 84.9 percent of the unmarried women said they enjoyed the coital act. Also the damage due to premarital coital activity has to be considered.

The problem of premarital coitus can only be resolved by recognising the biological, psychological, moral and social patterns involved and to reach a compromise between the biological urge for coitus and society's insistence on premarital chastity and the effect of such abstinence or premarital experience on the ultimate success of a marriage.

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