

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN COLOMBO DISTRICT

Gayathri Abeywickrama*

Abstract: *This study explores the knowledge and attitudes on reproductive health of secondary school children in Sri Lanka. Data for the study was obtained from 150 students who were in grade 9 and 10, representing male and female students from rural and urban schools in Colombo district. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to gather data. The findings revealed that female students had better awareness on reproductive health education than their male counterparts. Friends and peers were more influential sources for obtaining reproductive health information than school teachers and parents, irrespective of student's gender and sector. Attitudes on pre-marital sex showed that students, particularly in international schools were more likely to engage in premarital sexual relationships as a source of gaining experience irrespective of gender. Majority of students in all sectors agreed that reproductive health knowledge is vital and needs to be included as a subject in the school curriculum. These findings suggest that policies and programmes should be more focused on educating male students and awareness programmes need to be strengthened for all students to address their reproductive health issues.*

Keywords: Reproductive health (RH), Adolescents, Secondary school children, Pre-marital sex

Introduction

The changing patterns in demographic and socio-economic scenarios have contributed to many significant issues that needs immediate focus with regard to the relevant communities. Sexual and reproductive health issues have been recognized as crucial in this regard, and has been a major global concern for many years (Senanayake, Nott, & Faulkner, 2001). The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, in 1994, adopts a definition for reproductive health as “A state of physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system at all stages of life” (UNFPA, 2004). In terms of reproductive health rights, it implies that people are able to have a satisfying, safe sex life and they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often reproduction should take place. It has also emphasized the right of men and women to be informed, and to have access to safe, effective, affordable, and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, and the right to appropriate health-care services that ensures safe pregnancy and childbirth (UNFPA, 2004). Adolescent and youth reproductive health, which comes under the above general definition have been recognized as an area of key development concern today (Agampodi, Agampodi, & Piyaseeli, 2008; Bearinger, Sieving, Ferguson, & Sharma, 2007; Morris & Rushwan, 2015; Senanayake et al., 2001).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as a person between 10-19 years of age. During the first phase, i.e., 10-14 years of age, an adolescent

*Lecturer, Department of Demography, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.