

College Youth and the Prevalence of Responsible Sexual Relationships: A Mixed Mode Study of the Development, Challenges and Prospects of Youth Sexual Behaviour in the Colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan

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Abstract

Bhutan's development policy lays huge emphasis on health and education. However, rapidly growing urban culture and changing sexual trends have raised the HIV/AIDS potential in the country. With more than half of the country's population (56%), under the age of 25, these have become disturbing issues of concern. In spite of such facts, research on sexual attitudes and behavior of the youth of the colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) is limited both in terms of scope and depth. Hence the aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of responsible sexual behavior amongst the youth of the colleges of the RUB. The research explored the prevalence of responsible sexual behavior in all the eight existing colleges of the RUB. Survey using stratified random sampling and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were employed to collect comprehensive data on sexual activity and relationship. The sample size was 645 (545 for the survey and 100 Focus Group participants).

In the first phase, a quantitative survey was employed to measure three constructs, (knowledge on responsible sexual behaviour, perception on sexual practice, and factors leading to irresponsible sexual behaviour) from 545 university students using stratified random sampling. Findings from this first phase were further explored using in depth focus group discussion.

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Results of the survey found that almost half of the sample study participants experienced sexual events at a relatively young age (before high school). The percentage is high among male respondents than female. By the time the students joined the colleges there is a slight increase in female respondents engaging in sexual experiences. Further high- risk sexual behaviours were noticed among those who had engaged in sexual events. 33.8% of the study sample either do not use or insist on their partners to use condoms during sexual activity. Of those who reportedly used condoms during sexual activity, 52.1 % used it to prevent or avoid pregnancy. In-depth focus group interviews revealed a silent culture of ‘sugar daddies, ‘sugar mummies’ and ‘sex buddies’ highly prevalent among college students. A visible gap was also noticed with regard to students’ knowledge and practice of sexual activity in connection to responsible sexual behaviour. Findings also reveal that participants have been involved in extra-marital affairs and abortion, and interestingly a higher percentage of men in the colleges reported on being sexually abused.

The study recommends the need for all the major stakeholders to take a comprehensive approach to solving issues related to youth sex and sexuality. The study also recommends Sex education and interventions that are focused on behavioral change in all the colleges of the RUB. Effective regulation and supervision of both academic and social life of youth in the university is needed most urgently. In addition, putting in place developmentally and culturally sensitive advocacy strategies right from the primary school levels to the college years are some of the recommendations of the study. Future research prospects are also discussed.

Section I: Background

According to the National Statistics Bureau (NSB, 2015), the population of young Bhutanese people (age 10-24) constitute about 56% of the total population, and while young people in Bhutan are emphasized as the most important priority at all levels of the society for a sustainable future, studies confirm the status of youth to be quite adverse. A study by the NSB

found that “despite the fact that legally marriageable age is set at 18 years, roughly 24% of young people (15-24 years) reported they were ‘currently married’...close to 30% of young females reported they were married while 15.9% of young males reported the same.” (NSB, 2015, p.2). The study concluded that “early-age marriages are more common among females than males.” In another report the World Bank (2006) reported that one fifth of all married people have engaged in extramarital sex in the last year, and 14% of unmarried people had sex in the last year. Rates were considerably higher among urban males (43% had extramarital affairs last year, and 42% of urban single men had premarital sex in the last year). The same report also highlighted that Bhutan had “less stringent sexual norms for both men and women as compared to other South Asian countries”. The Population Perspective Plan (2010,p.9) reports that “early marriage, teenage pregnancy, the low use of contraception, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS are reported to be increasing among adolescents.” Further, the same report highlights that adolescent fertility is considerably high, accounting for 11 percent of all births in 2005. Studies conducted on adolescent health (2008) found that “in comparison to other Asian countries, the Bhutanese society has a relatively open approach to sex and sexuality with less stringent practices and views about sexuality for both men and women. Premarital sex is not taboo in many rural communities with an early onset of sexual activity (especially in rural areas) occurring for some boys and girls increasing their risk of sexually transmitted diseases.”(National Youth Policy 2010; Adolescent Health and development – a Country profile 2008). A recent study conducted by the National Statistics Bureau (2015) reported an increasing number of young people engaged in sexual relationship with 38.24% of young males and 15% of young females (surveyed) as having sexual relationships. Further, a recent study conducted by Norbu et al (2013) which assessed local knowledge on STIs and sexual risk behaviour in two rural districts of Bhutan: Gasa and Zhemgang found that “one in three persons practiced risky sexual behaviour, higher in men. Condom use was low. There was no reduction of risky sexual behaviour with increasing level of knowledge indicating that increasing level of knowledge does

not necessarily reduce risky sexual behaviour.” In addition, the National STIs and HIV/AIDS control programme (NACP) of the Department of Health (2012) states that, “sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV present a serious challenge to the health and well being of Bhutan.” The report further states that “while HIV prevalence remains low, STI prevalence and incidence are worryingly and unacceptably high”. The Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey’s (BMIS 2010) and the Health Thematic Analysis (HTA, 2012), found the use of contraceptives was particularly low among young, unmarried women.

In the higher education context in Bhutan, research on sexual behaviour of college youth is very limited both in scope and depth. While few studies have been carried about youth and adolescent sexuality in general (for example, see Dorji, 2015), none of the studies have focussed completely on college youth sexual behaviour of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). Hence this research seeks to answer the following question.

Research question

What is the prevalence of responsible sexual behaviour amongst the youth of the colleges of RUB?

Research aim

The aim of the study was to assess the attitude, sexual practices and risk perception of STIs and other risky sexual behavior amongst the youth of the colleges of the RUB.

Significance of the study

- This study is intended to understand the prevalence of responsible sexual behavior amongst the youth of the colleges of the RUB.
- Research focussed entirely on attitudes and behaviour of college youth on responsible sexual behavior has not been carried out till date in Bhutan. Hence the results of the study are intended to help policy makers and RUB stakeholders identify the prevalence of irresponsible sexual relationships, in order to help informing and strengthening

proper strategies to curb risky behaviour.

- The results of the study is also intended to inform parents, lecturers, college students and the wider audience of the development in the patterns of youth sexual behaviour in order to understand the challenges faced by the college youth in maintaining responsible sexual relationships.

Section II: Literature review

Definition of responsible sexual behaviour

The World Health Organization report (2006) defines responsible sexual behavior as a

State of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; It is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

Coleman (2002) defined sexually responsible behavior as “understanding and having an awareness of one’s sexuality and sexual development, respect for one’s self and partner, ensuring that pregnancy occurs only when welcomed, and the ability to make appropriate sexual and reproductive health choices.” Lottes (2000) also expressed sexual health as “the ability of men and women to enjoy and express their sexuality and do so free from risk of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, coercion, violence and discrimination.” He further stressed that “In order to be sexually healthy, one must be able to have informed, enjoyable and safe sex, based on self-esteem, a positive approach to human sexuality, and mutual respect in sexual relations. Sexually healthy experiences enhance life quality and pleasure, personal relationships and communication, and the expression of one’s identity.” While complexity with regards to the definition of responsible sexual relationship is evident

in the various papers, most of the existing definitions have common themes outlined in the WHO definition. Hence, for this research, sexually responsible relationship was defined as that relationship which promotes and respects the different aspects outlined in the WHO definition of sexual health. Sexual health thus is achieved by making informed decisions regarding sexual and reproductive behavior, within the framework of personal and societal ethics.

Sexual activity and college youth

The review of literature related to the prevalence of responsible sexual behaviour amongst youth in the universities yielded some fascinating but disturbing results. In the international context, several studies done (Berne and Huberman, 1999; Cross and Morgan, n.d ; Omoteso, 2006; Abdullahi and Umar, 2013; Thompson and Johnson, n.d.;) hinted to the fact that there was a high prevalence of free sex and sexual activities particularly in the context of higher learning institutes like the universities. Surveys conducted have found that the age of first sexual intercourse is declining throughout the world. Table 1 below demonstrate the worldwide age of first intercourse.

Nation	Average Age at First Intercourse
United States	15.8
Netherlands	17.7
Germany	16.2
France	16.8

Source: Berne and Huberman (1999)

In another study by Cross and Morgan (n.d.) only 15 percent of college students chose to remain virgins throughout their college experience. Similar findings were reported by Elliott and Brantley (1997) in the largest and most comprehensive study on college student sexuality to date. Cross and Morgan (n.d.) writes “even more shocking is the age at which teenagers are now

losing their virginity. A third of all freshmen, primarily 14 and 15 year olds-have had sex. By senior year, that number swells to nearly two-thirds". As a result, many students are coming to college with pre-established sexual behaviors."

In Nigeria, one study states that "sex before marriage is seen as normal and a pleasurable satisfaction which young adults experience." (Abdullahi and Umar, 2013). The study states that, "the university environment allows freer sexual activities and this is against moral values of the community. It is for this perhaps that the University is witnessing the prevalence of pre-marital sex, homosexuals, rape, STIs and incidences of abortion in the campus." (Warner cited in Abdullahi and Umar, 2013, p. 41). In the same study, an observation is made about the consequences of irresponsible sexual behaviours which constitute enormous problems. The study states that "once in school, college or universities, students are cut off from family's restriction and support" and that "college life neither understands nor supports the value of chastity". Hence for the students in higher learning institutions "sex is reduced to an easy source of pleasure and totally divorced from love and marriage." On the other hand, Omoteso (2006) states family background has a significant influence on young people's sexual behavior. He cites several studies that have found that "in many countries, young women lacking opportunities and from poor family background seek support from men trading sex and thus risk HIV infection and other STI's for security. Young women sometimes enter into sexual behaviour with older men called "sugardaddies" in sub-Saharan Africa who pay their school fees, buy them gifts and offer inducements". In another study, Cooper (2000) highlights that "college life, with its greatly expanded opportunities for self-governance and independence, provides an important new context in which young people learn to manage their sexual relationships and their sexuality." This means that college students need to know how to manage one's own sexuality as well as balance academic and social life. However, college years and the environment according to Cooper (2010) tend to be "sporadic, furtive and poorly managed".

Sexual behaviour in higher education institutes in Bhutan

While there is a lack of concrete research concerning youth sexual relationship especially in the context of higher educational institutes in Bhutan, increasing evidences suggest growing incidences of irresponsible sexual behavior amongst young people, resulting in unplanned pregnancies, abortion, behaviour conflict, STIs, emotional and psychological stress and sometimes suicide (BMIS 2010; World Bank Report; NACP 2012). One of the major findings from one study conducted by the National Statistic Bureau (2015, p 127) was:

that young people look at sexual affair as a source of fun, pleasure, enjoyment, and of course, a biological necessity rather than as a serious matter needing more proper conduct to avoid adverse consequences. This view may be due to inadequate understanding of the negative consequences of early sexual intercourse and unprotected sex.

The same study further states that “young people look at sex as their natural rights rather than as a complex process of emotional, cognitive, social and moral development.” In addition, a GNHC report (2010) asserts that risky sexual behavior (low use of contraception, teenage pregnancy, and mistimed pregnancy) and the spread of STDs, including HIV/AIDS among adolescents and youth are increasing in the country. Additional reports from the National Health Survey (NHS, 2012), states that, the level of sexual activity among young people in general is high. According to the report, one fourth of the women in the age group (15-19) years had reported that their first pregnancy occurred at ages between 18-19 years. The mean age of the reported first pregnancy among women aged 15-49 was 20.35 in 2012 with standard deviation 3.54 (NHS, 2012). Dorji (2015) posits that early age pregnancy is common in Bhutan. Findings from these studies are important in terms of understanding young people’s (including college youth) views and acknowledgement of sex and sexuality, though each of the above studies were not completely focused on college youth, and therefore had varying samples.

In 2015, a study (Gurung and Tshomo, 2015) was conducted at the Paro College of Education which aimed to find out the prevalence of responsible sexual behaviour in the college. The study found that though student teachers' perception about the information and knowledge on STI was very high (95% and 88%), the percentage decreased as it moved towards responsible sexual practices (condom usage-75.3%, worries about getting STIs after sexual activity-59%, and prefer having sex rather than avoiding it due to the unavailability of condom- 32.6%). In addition, the study also found that sex was not seen as a casual activity by respondents. (Involvement in sexual activity is a casual thing for me 17.9%. For me sexual activity can occur only in a serious relationship -62.2%). Further, while 62.2% of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that extra marital affairs were one of the most prevalent reasons for divorce and domestic violence, a good percentage had been led to sexual activity due to one or the other reasons (money-9.3%, care and affection-27.9%, promises of marriage-42.3 %), all of which could trigger extra-marital affairs or irresponsible sexual behaviour. Attitude towards casual sex was also very relaxed with 58.5% claiming that they did not see anything wrong in casual sexual behaviour as long as there was mutual consent. The study concluded that more than half the percentage (53%) of the sample student population had been involved in sexual activity at least once in their life.

Section III: Methodology

Description of the research study

This study employed sequential mixed method approach which is “an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 230). One of the main reasons for employing mixed methods paradigm is its complementarities- i.e., seeking elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with results from the other method”. Accordingly, findings from quantitative data gathered

from a larger sample were explored through interviews with a smaller number of focus group participants.

Data Gathering Process

The section below details out the data gathering procedures that were followed in the research process.

Quantitative phase

For the purpose of quantitative analysis, a structured survey questionnaire was used to collect the data from the undergrad university students currently studying in the colleges of the RUB. All the respondents were full-time RUB students, aged between 16 and 30 years. The part-time, in-service and distance program students, were not part of this study.

Sampling

A stratified random sampling method was used to obtain the sampling unit from the undergrad university students of the Royal University of Bhutan. All students were first categorized by gender, and then an equal number of subjects were randomly selected from each gender. The sample was stratified into gender to ensure proportionally equal representative of male and female student in each of the colleges. The total required sample size was estimated to be 546 at 95% confidence level with 5% margin of errors, out of the total university population of around 15000 students. The sample size was estimated based on the following statistical formulation suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

Where

$$s = \frac{x^2 * N * P(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + x^2 * P(1 - P)}$$

s = required sample size

x^2 = the table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom at the desired confidence level

N = the population size

P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

Instrument

The Survey questionnaire included items that measured three constructs, i.e. knowledge, practice and factors leading to irresponsible sexual behaviours and attitudes among full-time Royal University student population. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items each on students' knowledge and practice; and 12 items on other factors leading to irresponsible sexual behavior. All the items had five-level Likert-type response scales, except the items on demographic information which consisted of either binary or other categorical data. The variable which used five-point likert scale was coded as 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=neither Agree nor Disagree, 2=Disagree and 1=strongly Disagree. Pilot study of the questionnaire confirmed that each participant took about 15 minutes to answer all the questions. Anonymity of the research participants was maintained. Responses to individual questions by each student was recorded and entered into a computer database and analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Qualitative phase

Participants

After analysing data from the survey, five colleges were identified for qualitative study. The main criteria for these selections were based on the highest and the lowest percentage in prevalence of sexual activity, proximity to the urban centres or highways, and curriculum diversity. Each of the colleges was codified as 'college A'...to 'college I'. Subsequently, the research participants were selected using purposive sampling from each of these five colleges. All the colleges were asked to select twenty participants on a voluntary basis, ten female and ten male, making up 100 participants from five selected colleges. The participants covered all levels of students (1st year to final year) and also included the student leaders. The interview was a focused group interview, conducted separately for both genders so as to avoid any kind of inhibitions. In total, ten Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted from the five colleges. Each FGD had 10 members.

The interview time ranged from one hour thirty minutes to two hours.

Qualitative data analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the tape-recorded data was transcribed. Each set of data identifying each of the colleges were first codified to maintain anonymity. Then each participant was codified as 'P1, P2' from each of the college. Once the colleges and the participants were codified, and the whole data transcribed, the data was coded using colour coding to generate categories and themes. As each set of data was analysed soon after the interview, new understandings emerged which directed the researchers to adapt and change (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p.161) in the following interviews. The researchers stopped the interviews upon data saturation (Glaser and Strauss in 1967). Data was analysed using the Template strategy (Crabtree and Miller, 1992) in which researchers "apply sets of codes to the data that may undergo revision as the analysis proceeds" Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 155). The sets of codes were taken out from the quantitative findings. Then themes were analysed using colour coding and determining keywords and phrases that were common amongst interviewees. Throughout each coding method, commonalities developed. We made note of the patterns and themes occurring in the data for later reference. Once codes were categorized, they were compared to one another. Thus a detailed data analysis procedure was used to analyse data. Finally the researchers went over all the data sets again to see if there was anything that was left out. To conclude, a Triangulation of the patterns and themes was conducted to create new levels of understanding the existing knowledge by reviewing the interviews in a comparative analysis with the previous two levels of coding (Saldaña, 2009).

Seeking consent and gaining access

The proposal was first presented in one of the seminar series which was led by the Dean of Research and Industrial linkages and the Director General of the Paro college of Education. Feedback and suggestions were voiced out by the members present in the meeting and changes were incorporated. Later

a full proposal was developed to apply for the college grant as well as to meet the ethical standards set by the college research committee (CRC). Once the proposal was accepted, all the colleges of the RUB were sent consent letters to sign with the aim and the objectives of the research outlined in the consent letters.

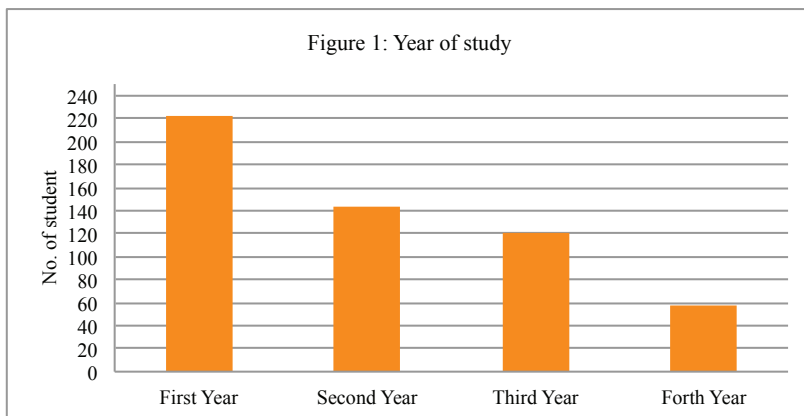
Section IV: Data findings, analysis and discussion

General characteristics

In all, 545 young adults between the ages of 15-30 years old participated in this baseline survey (see Table 2). The participants were full time undergraduate Royal University students and came from different community background. Descriptive analyses revealed that 13.7% (31) of enrolled participants were 15-20 years old male and 6.2% (14) were 26-30 years old, with the majority 80.2%(182) being between 21-26 years of age. Similarly, 20.6% (64) of the participants were 15-20 years old female, with majority 74.5% (231) falling in the age range of 21-26 years and rest 4.8% (15) being in the age of 26-30years.

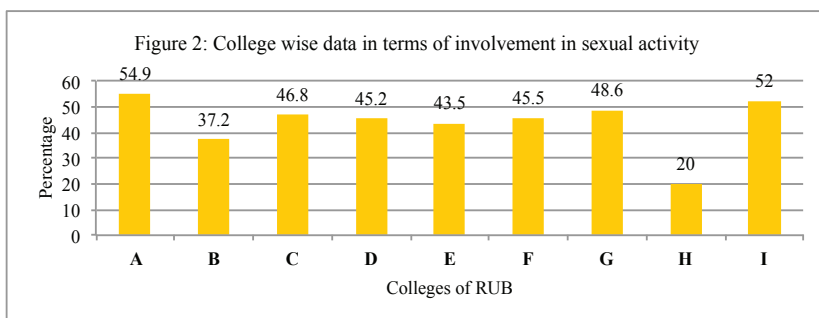
	Age in years					
	15-20		21-26		26-30	
	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Gender Male	31	13.7%	182	80.2%	14	6.2%
Female	64	20.6%	231	74.5%	15	4.8%

At the time of survey administration, 40.7% (222) of enrolled participants were reportedly in first year, 26.2% (143) were second year student, another 22% (120) in third year while 10.6% (58) were final year graduating students, respectively (see Figure 1).



College wise data in terms of involvement in sexual activity

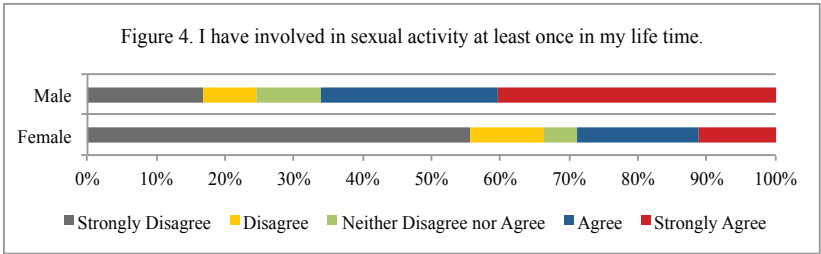
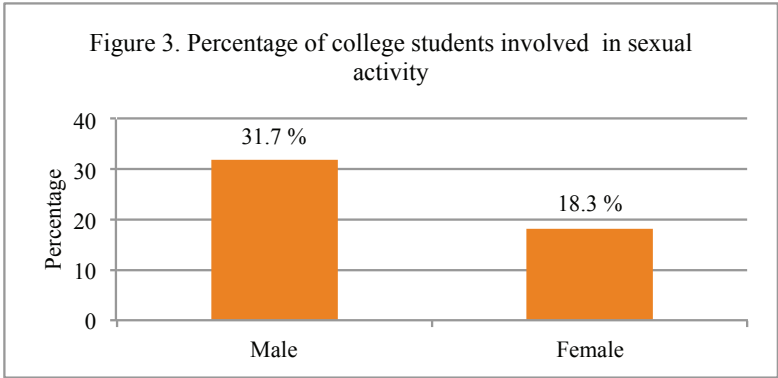
The students experiencing sexual event at least once in their life time is more or less consistent across all the RUB colleges. 54.9 % of respondents at college A reporting the highest, followed by 52% at college I and College G with 48.6%. The lowest was reported at college H with only 20% of the respondent agreeing or strongly agreeing to having sexual experience at least once in their life time (see Figure 2).



High prevalence of sexual behaviour

At the time of survey administration, 50% of sample population had been involved in sexual activity. The percentage was higher among boys (31.7%) then in girls (18.3%). However, there was

also a good number, (around 55.7%) of the female respondents who said that they disagree or strongly disagree to the statement “I have involved in sexual activity at least once in my lifetime” compared to only 25.2% of the male respondents.



FGDs from the present study not only confirmed the prevalence of sexual activity in the colleges, but pointed to the fact that the percentage of prevalence could be higher than what the survey had revealed. While in FGDs, when asked to point out the range in percentage in terms of the students’ involvement in sexual activity, the participants’ response across the colleges ranged from 50% to 70%. Questions were asked to probe deeper to confirm the numbers such as “In a day how many couples do you see in the college campus?” and the answers were “more than 20 couples who we know are sexual partners.” Students could give several examples of the prevalence ranging from simple boyfriend/girlfriend topics to complex extra-marital affairs, abortion, and risky sexual behaviours such as indulging

in sexual activity for money, self-esteem and want of the latest trends such as the 3 Cs- “*cash, car and cell phone*”. The participants were of the opinion that sexual activity amongst youth is normal and that it does exist rampantly. “Sex is fashion and you must have it”. (CI, P4). Some participants shared some common dialogues they use in their everyday conversations such as “being a virgin is not a dignity but a loss of opportunity”. Another male participant shared “It is good to have sex... by the time one is in college, we are adults and it is time to really know the adult life and explore...” (CI, P8).

Considering the fact that at the time of the survey administration, most of the participants were first year students followed subsequently by senior students; it is highly possible that the actual number of sexual prevalence is higher than what the present data indicates, as it is highly likely that the students would be more inhibited and discreet in their first years. During the FGDs, as more senior members occupied the discussions, strong evidences of the prevalence of sexual relationship came up powerfully. Earlier finding (see Dorji, 2015, p.23) on youth sexual activity has found that among the “male youth of 20-24 years, 80.97% reported that they had sexual intercourse while 18.56% of female respondents reported the same”. This study, therefore, strongly asserts that there is a huge prevalence of sexual relationship and that the prevalence is much higher than what the present data has indicated.

So who are the sexual partners of college students?

Though the survey questions did not ask this particular item, interviews with students clearly revealed several categories of sexual partners that students often got involved with. The following table 3 below is a list of the sexual partners of the college students as stated in different interviews.

Table 3. List of sexual partners

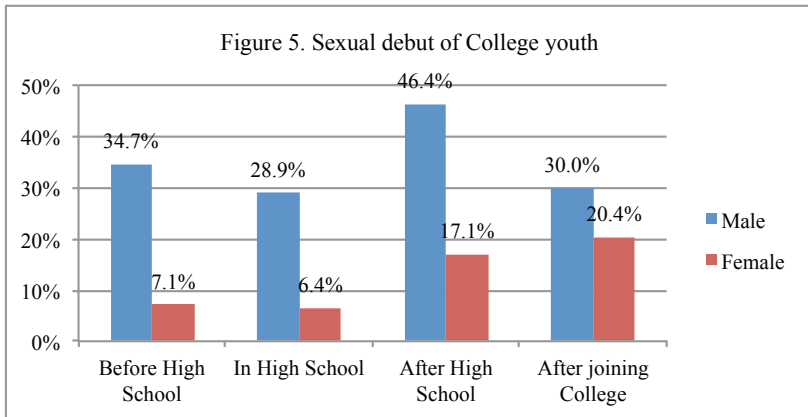
Sexual partners of college girls	Sexual partners of college boys
Tourist guides, Business men, Truck drivers, Taxi drivers, College students, Indian workers from nearby projects offices, Contractors, School dropouts, Civil servants, Party goers, Strangers, Sex buddies, army officers, policemen/officers, Corporate officials.	Married women (Aums), shopkeepers and hoteliers, college students, Party goers, civil servants, Strangers, Sex buddies, girls working in resort, school girls, Drayang girls.

What is important for the stakeholders to know and address is the unhealthy consequences of involving with some of the categories of the students sexual partners. During the interviews, it was quite evident that most of these relationships did not last long and depended on mutual transaction of sex for money, love for attention, and to fulfil basic necessities of life like food, clothing and shelter. As one responded, “Mostly girls get involved in such activities because of money...When you don’t have income from the parents and here you have to be with equal with others... there is less facilities at the hostels... and as day scholars, they need to buy stuff and on top of that they have to pay rent. So that’s why I think is the reason why they get involved in such activities.” (P4, CA).

Sexual debut

Study participants reported experiencing sexual events at relatively young ages. Analyses of the data revealed that around 34.7% (16.9% + 17.8%) of the enrolled male respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement “My first sexual encounter was before high school”. This means they had experienced sexual activities by the age of 14 years old or younger. This incidence is reported high amongst the male respondents than the female respondents. Only around 7.1% of female respondents agreed to this statement (see figure 5). By the time the students have

joined the college there is slight increase in the incidence of the female respondents engaging in sexual experience. Around 20.4% of the female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced their first sexual intercourse after joining the college, while there is not much difference in case of male respondents (see figure 5). This finding validates earlier findings from the National Health Survey where it was found that a good percentage of 10-19 years male respondents reported that they ever had sex while 9.7% female adolescents reported the same. The percentage increased as the years went up with 80.97% male and 18.56% female 20-24 years old claiming that they ever had sex. The percentage of the first sexual debut of college youth is represented in the figure below (see figure 5).



FGDs confirmed the prevalence of early sexual debut among both boys and girls. This finding from the survey was confirmed when respondents in FGDs strongly claimed that there were incidences of female students in primary schools (friends or students) suddenly dropping school. When inquired, there were reports of pregnancy and child birth, and for some even suicide. Some respondents shared experiences of talking with their male friends who were seen buying condoms, when asked if it was with their girlfriend or wife, they would deny and instead share secrets of having “relationships” with girls from junior high schools. Respondents agreed that young girls had very high

image of college boys.

One of the important points to be noted here, based on the above finding is the fact that the most vulnerable period for students to indulge in sexual activity is “After High school”. The number almost triples for girls from (6.4% getting involved in sexual activity in high school to a sudden jump of 17.1% of them involving after high school). There is also a significant increase for boys from 28.9% to 46.4% after high school. This must move the relevant stakeholders (Youth Agencies like the DYCS, MoE, MoH, RUB, Parents, teachers and lecturers) towards coming up with significant measures to address these issues. Long school breaks after passing out from high school and before joining the college/getting a job, absence of meaningful activities involving youth on holidays (especially after high school) could be some of the reasons for this sudden surge of sexual activities.

Prevalence of very risky sexual behaviours

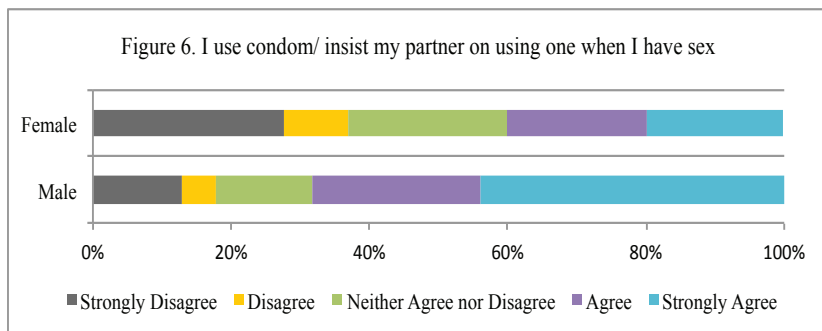
Limited condom use, excessive use of I-Pills and the prevalence of STIs

High-risk sexual behaviours were noticeably observed amongst those respondents who had engaged in a sexual event. First, 44.8% (238) of study sample had reportedly engaged in sexual activities, of which 33.8% (161) either do not use or insist on their partner using condom when they have sex. This finding is validated by the qualitative data. The participants’ response to the question on the use of condom was astounding. Participant 4, a female from college A commented on the attitude of girls on the use of condom, “They usually say that there is no fun in using it. There is no pleasure in it.” While a male participant (P8) from college A said, “Girls are really shy ... they cannot ask... maybe they cannot ask their boyfriends to use it. Could be that our girls are quite shy and Bhutanese girls are quite shy when it comes to intimate things for that reason.” A male participant (P1) from college I said, “Sometimes when we go for a drink or parties we are not prepared and when we meet with unknown person/strangers we engage in sexual activity without condoms. Same thing happens with the girls as well.” A female participant

(P4) from college G said, the preference is I-Pill “because they really can’t go looking for condoms, especially when they are in the moment.”

Second, of those who had reportedly used condoms during sexual event, over half of them (52.1%) used it to prevent or avoid unwanted pregnancy and not for the fear of STIs. This finding is substantiated by the qualitative data when participants said the youth preferred i-pills to condom. A female participant (P1) from college I commented, “They don’t fear STIs but they fear pregnancy because they probably think that they won’t get it or may be the symptoms come much later where as pregnancy is a fast result...there is a stigma attached to it” Another female participant (P4) from college H said, “We usually spot i-pills in the drawers.” A male participant (P7) from the same college also said, “When we go to town, our friends and seniors call you and ask us to get them i-pills.”

Also, looking at Figure 6, it is quite interesting to note that there were more number of female than male respondents who do not insist or use condom during the sexual event. Around 42.1% of the female respondents disagree or strongly disagree, while only about 22.6% of the male respondents do not insist or use condom during their sexual event. This finding from the quantitative data is confirmed by the qualitative findings where, mostly the girls opted not to use condoms. A female participant (P5) from college A said, “Some boys share that they do use condom during sexual intercourse. But some say, girls themselves do not allow them to use it.” Another female participant (P4) from college I commented, “They say they don’t get satisfaction. This is whether it is our girls or girls from outside that we don’t know. But we do hear boys say this. ‘Even if we insist on using condom, girls themselves do not allow us’.”



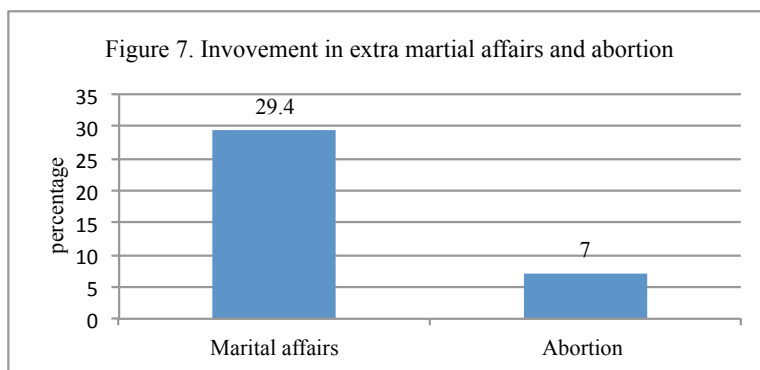
Sexual exploitation - A risky culture of sugar daddies, sugar mummies and extra-marital affairs

Another disturbing finding of this study is that there seems to be a hidden, risky culture of sugar daddies and sugar mummies. FGDs revealed that these incidences were reported in most of the sample colleges, though the numbers of incidences varied. A female participant (P1) from college (D) said, “Some they do like that...they make sugar daddy and all...they go and have sex with them...and they say like I need this one...I need this much money and they give.” Another female participant (P7) from college G again commented, “They actually need money... even their college fees are paid by them.” The involvement in sexual activity for money is not only prevalent with the girls but the boys also get involved for the same reasons. Participant 1 (female) from college I said, “I have heard like boys...when we ask them do you have a girlfriend...yes I am dating *alugiaai* (mother of a child) ...really good in bed...they say like this ... *Teru ya jingmey* (they fund us) ...go to parties...we just need to take a car and then fuel up *ya bey jung mey* (will even fuel up the car)...they also sponsor us...but the sad thing is no body actually speaks of love...they only speak of money and that also associate with sugar mummies and daddies...they are mostly for money and do not actually love the person.” Another female participant (P5) from the college C said, “Actually if you look, out of 100 about 90% of them are like that. If it is boys I have heard two to three of my own friends say this. That *Aums* give them money, while their husbands are away during day time they go

and have behaviour with those *aums*.” A female participant (P2) from college A said “I have heard some but only few, one or two in whole of our college like they belong to very poor family but they are renting a house worth Nu. 5000 or 6000 and we have heard our friends coming from that area saying that every day a big new car is in front of that house”. A female participant (P4) from the same college reasoned that, “May be they run out of bucks...they need some pocket money.”

A male participant (P 8) from the college G commented, “Mostly girls get involved in such activities because of money. When you don’t have income from the parents and here you have to be with equal with others. Of course, we also cannot simply blame them because we have to stand equally with others. So since there is less facilities at the hostels and if they have to stay as day scholar then they need to buy stuff and on top of that they have to pay rent. So that’s why I think is the reason why they get involved in such activities.” Participants in FGDs mentioned money as a prominent factor for involvement in sexual activity and this is common in all the colleges. Late night parties and alcohol seems to be other reasons for risky sexual activities. A participant from said, “When parties get over around 1 am or 2 am, girls are in need of transport and money, so they involve in sexual activity. It might not be true if said by one or two taxi drivers but 90% of them say the same thing.”

Similarly, 82.8% of the respondents reported that they know indulging in extra-marital affairs is punishable by law, yet 29.4% have responded to have involved in extra marital affairs. This finding is substantiated by the qualitative data when a female participant (P4) from college I said, “They are already married and they have children and they have affairs with our college girls here.”



From the total respondents, 88% reported that they know abortion is punishable by law; yet again there is evidence of respondents aborting a child. 7% of respondent agreed or strongly agreed to aborting or being partner to abortion of a child. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2009, p 9 states that ‘exploitative situations’ are contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities’. Findings from this data indicate that there is a high prevalence of “exploitative situations” faced by the college youth.

Sex buddies and multiple sex partners

Another startling finding of the study was the prevalent hidden culture of “Sex Buddies”. Participant 7 of college I said, “I have heard about sex buddies, they don’t get in relationship but they have a sex buddy who...both of them...when they want to have sex, they call each other but they don’t have any relationship ... just sex buddies.. If the guys satisfy the girl, the girl will keep the guy as sex buddy but then if both of them they cannot satisfy each other then they will just change.” There were also stories of few girls (2-3 in numbers) from some of the colleges who went around freely indulging in alcohol and sexual intercourse and that in these few instances girls went about openly saying that they *get pleasure from sexual intercourse*. Boys from this

particular college shared the phone number of these girls with outsiders whom they nick-named as “sperm tank”. Discussion revealed that these girls went around indulging in sex when they were given drugs (tablets) and alcohol by their male counterpart. Similar evidences of very risky sexual behaviour also emerged from the FGDs from other colleges. One college student, (P3) from College A for example said that they share girlfriends among them “on understanding basis”. “The same girl with whom the first person started the sexual intercourse finally reaches that same first person after several exchanges with several of his friends”. When asked if these were some lone isolated cases, the participants expressed that this culture in fact has gained momentum amongst college students. They pass numbers and indulge in sexual intercourse with the same girl/s. Incidences of having sex with multiple partners was another disturbing finding. Though the present study assumes that this could be a small number and only in some of the colleges, the finding is disturbing because of the fact that college students take it very lightly. A respondent from College I proudly said “In our college, a guy having sexual relationship with two girls is called “*Threesome*” and someone having sex with one is called “*Twosome*” and the one not having sexual intercourse is called “*Handsome*” indicating masturbation while other members of the FGDs laughed. Friends who did not have a boyfriend or girlfriend were branded with several names like “Chakka, Phomen-Momen, Behenji/Choti behen, kid, Auntie ...” and were considered generally “*Abnormal*” by peers. “Sex is fashion, you must have it” as put by one of the respondents seems to be the strong shared notion amongst the youngsters.

Sexual abuse: Higher in men than women

The analysis also revealed a significant number of respondents being sexually abused. Of the total sample population, 16.6% of the respondents reported having been sexually abused once in their life time. Of these, interestingly, men were more often abused sexually than women. About 10.1% of the male respondents either agreed or strongly agreed being sexually abused compared to 6.1% of women. These differences were statistically significant. ($\chi^2 = 26.978$, $df=4$, $p=0.001$) (see table

4 and 5).

Table 4. I have been sexually abused at least once in my lifetime

	I have been sexually abused at least once in my lifetime.					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Male	92	45	38	28	19	222
Female	186	41	34	26	8	295
Total	278	86	72	54	27	517

Table 5. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.978a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	27.174	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.148	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	517		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.59.

Findings from this data, therefore, indicate that equal number of men if not more are victims of sexual abuse. This finding therefore dispels the common myth and stereotype that males are not victims of sexual abuse, and that most of the victims are females.

However, this finding was not followed up in FGDs for various reasons, chiefly because this was outside the scope of this research, and due to the limited time of the respondents. Hence it is recommended that future research could be carried out on this issue. The study could be important because of the fact that unlike the stereotypical assumption that girls are the usual victims of sexual abuse, there could be a possibility of

men abused sexually. The section below presents a brief review of related literature on male child or male sexual abuse.

Discussion on male victims of sexual abuse

Since we are sometimes compelled against our will by persons of high rank to perform the operation, by compression is thus performed: children, still of a tender age, are placed in a vessel of hot water, and then when the parts are softened in the bath, the testicles are to be squeezed with the fingers until they disappear.

Paulus Aegineta
1st Century A.D.

With this quote from Sander Breiner's book, *Slaughter of the Innocents: Child abuse through the ages and today*, Matthews (1996) in his report on "*The Invisible Boy: Revisioning the victimization of male children and teens*" builds a compelling case of the prevalence and victimization of male child and the underreported and biased viewpoint of this topic. The report strongly emphasizes on the need of a male-inclusive perspective in policies and practices. In yet another meta-analysis of literature Daniels, (n.d.), examined some of the reasons why the data on male sexual abuse is not better known and the forces that may be contributing to an undercount of male sexual assault victims and/or female sexual assault perpetrators. There are several studies that have found the sexual abuse of males in the international context. Dube et al (2005) states an alarming data by exposing that 1 in 6 men have experienced abusive sexual experiences before age 18. And this they say is probably a low estimate. Lisak, Hopper and Song's (1996) study of male university students in the Boston area reported that 18% of men were sexually abused before the age of 16.

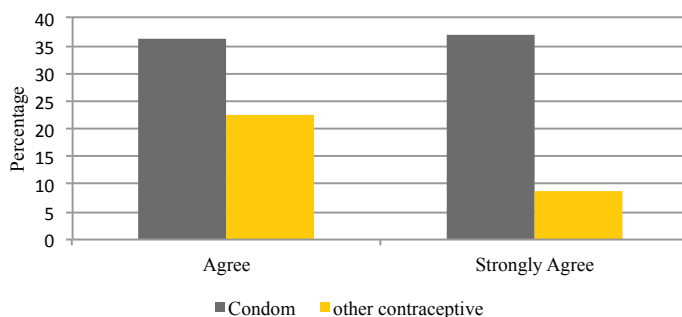
However, though there seems to be a high prevalence of male sexual abuse, present discussions of the mainstream literature seems to focus massively and unfairly only on the sexual abuse of girls and women. Researchers agree that in much of the research, data are not disaggregated for boys and girls, and

male experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse are generally underreported. For example, in a 1998 review of research reports by Holmes and Slap they contend that male childhood sexual abuse is “common, under-reported, under-recognized, and under-treated.” Sexual exploitation by female perpetrators is a strong issue as well. Daniels (n.d) critiques that “given the many forces working against seeing and confirming sexual abuse of men and/or sexual abuse by women, making our systems acknowledge and appropriately respond to these sexual abuse cases is going to be a tall order.” We would like to end this issue with the assertion taken by Health Canada (1996), “Stated simply, if we do not go looking for male victims, we will not find them.”

Gaps in sexual knowledge and practice: “Parroting...they know everything but they don’t practice”

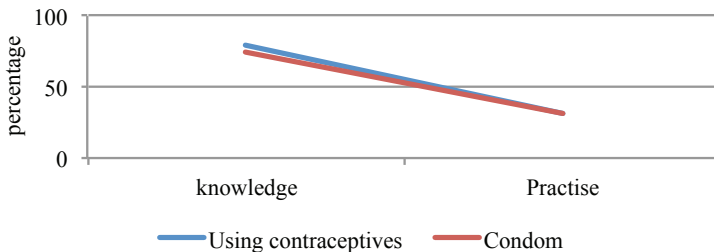
The survey items assessed participant’s effective prevention behaviour and practices in relation to their perception of irresponsible sexual behaviour. Data analysis identified that condom usage to be the preferred means of preventive measures adopted by the sexually active respondents. Of the 237 sexually active respondents 73.4% agreed or strongly agreed to condom usage as compared to 38.4 % preferring other forms of contraceptives other than condom. However, when condom is used, pregnancy avoidance is the key motivator both amongst male and female.

Figure 8. Comparison between condom and other contraceptives usage



Although, overall, knowledge in terms of responsible sexual behavior amongst students of the RUB is high, their practice however is inconsistent with their knowledge. For example, the percentage of respondents who said condom is the only way to protect against STIs is exceptionally high at 74.6% but only about 31.4% of the respondents have actually made use of condom in their sexual intercourse. 79.1% of the sample respondents agreed that using contraceptives assures them and their partner of not becoming pregnant but only 31.4 % of respondents reported using other contraceptives other than condom during their sexual intercourse (see figure 6). This finding is disturbing as a condom is the only way to protect oneself from STIs. The consequences of non-use of condom was evident when it was shared in one of the FGDs that seventeen students were detected as having STIs in one of the blood drive campaigns in one of the colleges. Respondents also shared, “we have seen and we know that boys suffer from STIs. For example we know from the kind of sickness. Today if I use one girl and I have been diagnosed as having STIs, and then the same girl is used by another boy and he has similar symptoms, then we know it is STIs.”

Figure 9. Knowledge and practise in term of condom and contraceptive usage



A simple ANOVA test was conducted to discover whether this finding was significant. The finding is presented below.

Table 6: Anova Test on the impact of knowledge on practice
ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.536	1	.536	.577	.448b
	Residual	486.903	524	.929		
	Total	487.439	525			

a. Dependent Variable: Practice_IRSR

b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge_consequences

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) found that there was no significant difference in practice to knowledge on irresponsible sexual relationship (IRSR). ($F=.577, p>.05$), therefore confirming statistically that knowledge on IRSR has no impact on practice. Earlier findings NHS (2012), BMIS (2010), Gurung and Tshomo (2015) and Norbu et al (2013) have all come to similar conclusions with regards to peoples' high knowledge about irresponsible sexual behaviour and their actual practice as being very low. This study further validates the earlier findings that increasing levels of knowledge does not necessarily reduce risky sexual behaviour even amongst the college youth. Hence, as was expressed very clearly by one of the FGD participant, "*Parrotting...they know everything but they don't practice*" is therefore proved statistically as well.

Summary of findings

The entire findings and discussions presented in the above sections have been summarized in the following key themes.

Key finding 1: Very high prevalence of irresponsible sexual behavior across all the colleges in RUB.

This findings and analysis of the present study indicate that there is a very high prevalence of irresponsible sexual behavior across all the colleges of RUB. Considering the fact that in the quantitative phase of the study, the sample was a stratified random sampling which resulted in more number of students from 1st years participating in the study, the percentage of the

prevalence of irresponsible sexual behavior should be much higher than the present finding. Literature asserts that there are inherent limitations of collecting sensitive data such as participants not being totally truthful. Though the anonymous nature of the questionnaire may have given the participants an easy format to answer the responses honestly, the fact that in some colleges, management officials (e.g. Student Affairs Deans, Administrative staff) were requested to give and collect the questionnaire from the students could have affected authentic feedback from the students. Data for some colleges appeared low in the survey yet when the FGDs were conducted, it was found that there were incidences of very risky sexual behaviour. FGDs were richer with students openly sharing their perceptions and experiences. However, of the five colleges, FGD was affected in one of the colleges in terms of its depth and detail. The answers were limited mostly to yes/no even though they were adequately prompted. The researchers assume if this group was influenced by the meeting they had with one of the important management authority just before the interview. Evidences therefore suggest a very high prevalence of irresponsible sexual behavior in the colleges of the RUB.

Key finding 2: High prevalence of risky sexual behavior

In addition to the high prevalence of sexual behavior, the study also found a high prevalence of risky sexual behavior practiced by young people. Non-preference of condom usage by both boys and girls, prevalence of STIs, exchanging sex partners which were termed as 'sex buddies' by the students themselves, multiple sex partners, extra-marital affairs, preference and frequent use of I-Pills, sex with strangers, indulging in sugar daddy and sugar mummy relationship because of monetary and other reasons were some of the risky sexual behavior observed in the youth of the colleges. Also important to note here was the casual and easy way in which students in FGDs talked about the issues related to extra-marital affairs, sex buddies, multiple sex partners, contraceptives, party culture, alcohol addiction, the greed for money, sugar daddies and mummies and so on indicating that these have become part of the college culture, at least in the world of the students.

Key finding 3: As compared to women, men are also equally sexually abused if not more, challenging the stereotypical notion that women are the sole victims of sexual abuse.

The data findings from this study indicate that men are equally abused sexually. While the existing literature in Bhutan on male sexual abuse is silent, literature in the international front are replete with examples of males as victims of sexual abuse. Review of related literature also found that the push on accepting males as victims of sexual abuse in the international front is quite alarming. Hence, it is highly possible that there is a prevalence of male sexual abuse and that future studies focusing on the existence and prevalence of male sexual abuse is highly recommended.

Key finding4: There is a visible gap between college students' knowledge on responsible sexual behavior and their actual practice, therefore validating earlier findings from other studies.

Several studies on sexuality in Bhutan conducted earlier also echoed the same theme, though these studies used varying samples other than the college students. This college wide study also concludes with the same findings, which indicate that in general, knowledge has no impact on practice in the responsible handling of issues of sex and sexuality.

Section 5: Recommendations

Analyzing on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested.

1. Need for a Multi-sectoral Approach to address and intervene issues regarding sex and sexuality of college youth

Based on extensive data, the study concludes that there is an acute need to address the issue of the high prevalence and complication in young people's sexual life. International best practices support students to grow academically, intellectually and personally by addressing issues related to personal development. Presently some of the colleges tend to address the issue with the implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education with support from the UNFPA. However, for the

program to become successful and sustainable, the study strongly recommends the need for a multi-sectoral approach (inclusive of the Judiciary, the MoE, the RUB, the Police, the students, the parents and others) to come together to address the issue. The study found that the issue of youth sex and sexuality is like an iceberg, and the depth and danger of it is clearly evident, at different ages of young people. For example, though the present study looked only at the sexual behaviour of college youth, the more shocking news was the percentage of young people who indulged in sexual acts even before high schools. As presented in the findings section, the percentage goes on increasing for both boys and girls and as the students pass out from the high school the numbers swell. The study cautions that a segmented approach will not be effective and hence there is an urgent need to address this issue at all levels by the relevant stakeholders, taking a holistic perspective of looking into the attitudinal, behavioral and cultural aspect of the issue to come out with a sustainable, respectful and holistic solution.

2. Need for effective supervision of both academic and social life of college youth

While on field visits to some of the colleges, the researchers found that all of the sample colleges had shops surrounding the college campus. On inquiry, it was found that alcohol and other harmful substances were readily available to the students, if they wanted. Participants from different colleges cited stories of girls being dropped in the middle of the night by strangers in drunken states. Some of the colleges had rules that discouraged students to come to the hostels after 11o'clock as the main college gate got locked, and even if they were students they were not allowed to the campus, which added to risky outcomes. Hostel facilities in some of the colleges were acute concerns and participants strongly felt the need of the provision of hostel facilities to all the students. One of the sample colleges, where the prevalence was relatively lower than others, it was found that students were academically engaged and had very less time to indulge in other activities. Similarly where the prevalence was very high students complained of the need to address academic

rigor in the college. It is therefore recommended that the RUB addresses this issue by implementing effective strategies to supervise both the social and academic life of college students.

3. Need for effective advocacy and educational strategies to help youth development

Young people have been stressed as the most important population right from the monarchs to the various policies of the country. While this seems to be the intention, the strategies and skills used to support and enhance youth development do not seem to address the prevailing problems faced by the young people. Therefore, there is a need to look into the present advocacy and educational practices, whether they are grounded in thorough research or not and whether they can be contextually, culturally and developmentally effective or not. Several studies in the country have hinted on the ineffective ways in which issues related to sexuality is handled. In this study, respondents from one college for example, shared that they had an infirmary where the health officials were asked to address issues related to sexual health, while lecturers and management officials were very rigid on the discipline aspects. These health officials sometimes gave talks on sexual health but most of them irrelevant to students. Respondents suggested an initial survey could be helpful in understanding the present knowledge of the students and therefore coming up with better and relevant information. Respondents also shared, the college management in the same college should change its mindset that sexuality is just about sex and lust, and therefore it should be avoided from general discussion of “academic life”. Interestingly participants in this FGD addressed each other as “Brother” and “Sister” in the entire discussion. Towards the end, just out of curiosity, the researcher asked them, “since you all address each other as brother and sister, what do you call a person with whom you have sex?” The respondents answered with laughter, we call them “Sexter”. This hints at the hypocrisy being promoted and the obscurity that is encouraged by this particular college whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Improving the social environment to improve youth's attitude towards healthy approach to sex and sexuality

Schofield (2014, p.25) states that “Individuals and their behaviour are profoundly influenced by the social environments in which people find themselves”. Existing literature about the issues concerning sex and sexuality in Bhutan assert the existence of casual sexual norm as compared to other south Asian countries. Some of the reasons of this existence could be a culture of accepting early marriage tradition in some of the communities in rural Bhutan, as well as the invisible influx of modern trends, western pop -culture, live in relationships in urban areas. Rising divorce rates, free availability of alcohol, break-down of traditional family system, and addressing issues of youth engagement in meaningful ways during school time as well as during holidays could also be important reasons for this high prevalence of risky sexual behaviour.

Hence, while young people seem to believe that sex is their right and that young people need to indulge in sexual activities, it is deemed necessary that relevant stakeholders need to emphasize on the responsibilities aspect as well, in showing to them the universal rights of all living beings to be respected of their spaces, the need to recognize the diversity of family arrangements, the commitment of the respect of law and order, and being careful that their sexual expressions are beneficial to themselves, their partners, their families, and their society. Another aspect that should also be addressed by the stakeholders is the notion of respectful, positive relationship. William Glasser in his classic book “Choice Theory: a New Psychology of Personal Freedom” assert that, “If we are not sick, poverty stricken, or suffering the ravages of old age, the major human problems we struggle with- violence, crime, child abuse, spousal abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, the proliferation of premature and unloving sex and emotional distress- are caused by unsatisfying relationship”. (p. ix). He goes on to further remind that the four relationships that are in need of improvement are husband-wife, parent-child, teacher-student, and manager-worker relationships, and claims that if we do not improve these relationships, there will be “little success in reducing any of the problems” stated above.

It is important that policy makers, educators, parents, and other relevant stakeholders take this simple solution seriously and should intentionally try to improve the social environment.

Future research

Future studies can focus on what and where are the gaps in the implementation of sexuality education in the colleges of the RUB. What are the understanding and misunderstanding on the issues of sexuality. Research on what constitutes content and pedagogy that can help students to move towards positive behavioral change in sexual activity can be very important. Studies can also focus on effective advocacy strategies that can fit context and college culture. To achieve these goals, Action research or Participatory action research can be effective tools to discover college related problems and context suited solutions. Studies can also discuss issues related to what is meant by academic rigor in and across the colleges in the university. Related studies can also be done trying to explore the interventions used in schools and their effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study on understanding the prevalence of responsible sexual behavior of college students is a continuation of an earlier action research conducted in Paro college of Education by two of the present authors. The earlier action research study had concluded that there was a high prevalence of irresponsible sexual behavior and that “the focus of the leaders of the University and policy makers at large should be on intentional and committed creation of an enabling environment that promotes healthy, happy and motivated individuals, who are proud of their relationships, respectful of theirs and others’ sexuality and mindful of their actions” (Gurung and Tshomo, 2015, p. 17). This study on the university wide prevalence of the sexual behavior of college youth has produced very significant understanding of youth behavior and their unhealthy practices. Based on extensive evidence from this study, this research therefore concludes that there is a high prevalence of irresponsible sexual behavior that plague our young people. This should be a huge concern for all the relevant stakeholders. A country genuinely

interested in a philosophy of development as grand as the Gross National Happiness cannot afford to let its youth, the future leaders in such an environment. Therefore, this report ends with a strong plea to all the relevant stakeholders to take the findings seriously and intervene as sensitively, as immediately and as intelligently as possible to help and guide our young generation.

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