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Rita H. Mataragnon

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Sex and the Filipino Adolescent: A Review

RITA H. MATARAGNON

The Philippines is generally known to have a young population. About 65 percent are below twenty-four years old with 11.8 percent between fifteen and nineteen.¹ While the First Interhemispheric Conference on Adolescent Fertility (1976) reported the disturbing statistic that close to 13 million of the 60 million women who became mothers in 1975 were adolescent, Philippine demographic survey and census data also revealed similar grounds for concern: (1) 9 percent of all live births occurs to women below age twenty.² Considering the tendency towards high infant mortality among this age group, many more pregnancies may have actually occurred. (2) This same age group (women below twenty) accounts for 18 percent of all illegitimate births. While this group ranks fifth in the total number of all live births, it claims the highest percentage of illegitimacy (7.4 percent).³ (3) Even as of 1973, 20 percent of births to married women were premaritally conceived.⁴ As the mean age of puberty continues to decrease,⁵ and the mean age of marriage continues to increase,⁶ the likelihood of premarital sexual activity during adolescence or early adulthood becomes greater, with obviously greater risks on the part of adolescents.

Demographically, there is much to be said in favor of delaying first births or in curbing adolescent births. Delaying first births is

Grateful acknowledgement is due to the Program Development Division of the Population Center Foundation for making available several unpublished reports of its Adolescent Fertility Program.

For abbreviations used in the footnotes, see p.334.

1. *Philippine Yearbook*, 1978; Census for 1 May 1975.
2. National Census and Statistics Office, 1974.
3. Ibid.
4. National Demographic Survey, 1973.
5. Zelda Zablan, *Adolescent Pregnancy and Fertility: Their Demographic and Social Implications* (University of the Philippines, Population Institute, 1978).
6. Republic of the Philippines Fertility Survey, 1978, p. 66.

seen as a major controlling factor in lowering overall fertility rates because it lengthens the period between generations and decreases cumulative frequency by means of a shortened reproductive period. On the other hand, early childbearing is often associated with high parity, short birth intervals, and large completed families. As one population report has suggested, the decisions on marriage and childbearing made by an estimated one billion people of marriageable age in developing countries will surely determine the pace of population growth for years to come.⁷

Demographic reasons aside, there are important humanistic reasons for attending to the adolescent fertility problem. Medical, socioeconomic and psychological risks are graver for adolescent pregnancies than for older pregnancies, and especially so for premarital and/or illegitimate adolescent pregnancies. Morbidity and mortality risks are reportedly greater for adolescent mothers and their infants than for those above twenty. Infants born to adolescents are more prone to be premature and to have low birth-weight.⁸ The socioeconomic prospects are likewise dim. Pregnancy and childbirth are likely to interrupt if not totally disrupt educational and career opportunities. Psychologically, the adolescent is subjected to intense societal and psychological pressures at a time when he is still grappling his way to emotional maturity.

Obviously, adolescent fertility cannot simply be understood by compiling statistics of births from census yearbooks. Adolescent fertility does not just happen. It is related to adolescent sex practices, which in turn are related to adolescents' attitudes and knowledge about sex. Moreover in any stage of development, sex is never just a simple biological characteristic or function. What one feels and thinks about oneself as a sexual being, as well as predispositions toward specific codes of sexual conduct, constitute the broader development of sexuality.

Not very much is known about sex and the Filipino adolescent. Parents pay little attention to adolescent sexuality because in their minds sex and adolescents are not supposed to mix. Similarly, population and public health policies are frequently silent on

7. Age at Marriage and Fertility Population Reports, Series M: 4: November 1979, p. 105.

8. Amanda V. Valenzuela et al., *Teenage Deliveries in Selected Hospitals in Metro Manila* (University of the Philippines, Institute of Public Health, 1980), pp. 23-25.

adolescents, working on the unrealistic assumption that adolescents should not, and therefore do not, have anything to do with sex. On the other hand, researchers who have ventured into this area have provided us with data analogous to parts of the blind men's elephant. Findings in the area of sex and the Filipino adolescent are fraught with considerable discrepancy and inconsistency, although with patience and organization some trends and patterns can be discerned.

The present review is an attempt to classify and summarize the information available from past and present studies, to assess their implications for policies and programs, and to suggest problems in methodology and gaps in knowledge on which future efforts in this area should be focused. Although the focus of interest is the Filipino adolescent, the state of the art remains such that more studies from Metro Manila are represented. Finally, while the exploration of ethical/religious motivations behind sexual attitudes and practices is a legitimate and interesting concern, the present review has chanced upon few inclusions of such variables in the literature. This being a basically descriptive review, no ethical/religious position will be taken.

FINDINGS

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge about sex. Contrary to common expectations about the "advanced" and "enlightened" youth of today, almost all studies in which a measure of knowledge is included conclude the average Filipino adolescent to be deficient in scientific knowledge about sex.

The De la Salle Review,⁹ bringing together fifty-seven studies on adolescent sexuality, pointed out that while adolescents are familiar with the basic anatomy of sex, they are inadequate in exploring technical and medical aspects of phenomena such as ovulation, menstruation and fertilization. On the other hand, such basic anatomical knowledge was not even conceded in a study by the Communication Foundation of Asia on high school students aged fourteen to eighteen. The study recommended that pictures

9. Salazar and Ramos, *Life at Sixteen*.

and drawings be used for sex education materials because the entire group surveyed reportedly knew very little about sex anatomical terms. There is hope, however, for the printed medium because the same study reported reading to be a favorite past-time.¹⁰

In preparation for an MEC-PCF action program designed to improve adolescent sexuality-related counseling, a pretest was given to 660 high school students and college freshmen from eleven schools (mostly public) to assess their baseline level of knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) with regards to sex.¹¹ Of interest is the apparent incongruity between knowledge on the one hand and attitude and practice on the other hand. While students veered slightly towards non-traditional attitudes and 20 percent professed sexual experience, their knowledge level of fundamental facts about sex and conception was surprisingly low. On a questionnaire of true and false statements followed by five-point scales ranging from certainly false to certainly true, wrong answers and uncertainties were rampant.

Similar results were obtained for another population in a pretest using the same instrument, this time a group of 201 young industrial workers from three companies.¹² Furthermore it was seen that the subgroups which had more permissive attitudes were not necessarily the ones with higher knowledge scores, although the analysis precluded a conclusion about correlation.

The generally low level of knowledge in the two KAP surveys mentioned is not without consequence. Closer investigation of items in the knowledge section suggests that many of these misconceptions could easily mislead the adolescent into reckless and imprudent sexual behavior. For example, many adolescents believe that a girl could not get pregnant if it is her first time to have sex, or that she could be safe on the very day she takes the pill, etc.

This dangerous combination of near-liberal attitudes and practices but poor knowledge characterizes a generation of young people who, though bombarded with sex messages from mass media, still find it difficult to get straight knowledge about sex.

10. *Today's Youth on Sex: A KAP Survey*, Communication Foundation of Asia, 1976.

11. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, p. 9.

12. PCF & PADC, *Preliminary KAP Survey*, pp. 27-28.

Thus, while being continually aroused and stimulated by the proliferation of sensational sex-related material, young people are armed with little knowledge with which they could make sound decisions and/or protect themselves.

Knowledge About Family Planning. Even the ubiquitous dissemination of family planning (FP) information – 99 percent of 400 college students in a KKFI claimed to have received FP information¹³ – does not seem to guarantee knowledge about FP methods. The same KKFI study concluded that the respondents' knowledge of FP methods was "not clear." Most had heard of the various methods but were vague about the manner of usage and effect. In another survey done by De la Salle, it was found that one out of four who claimed knowledge of a method did not know exactly how to use it.¹⁴ The fact that among sexually active respondents, a majority who use FP methods intend to use it "only once in a while" or "after a pregnancy scare" serves to indicate the level of knowledge about FP methods.

A recently concluded Metro Manila Adolescent Profile reports better FP knowledge than previous studies. Among 524 respondents, a substantial majority had a "more or less functional knowledge of how most FP methods are used."¹⁵ Perhaps FP information dissemination is catching up. A cautious interpretation is necessary, however, since responses are limited to only the first method mentioned by the respondent and to the most basic use of the method (e.g., pill taken orally everyday), knowledge of which is not incompatible with other misconceptions about the same method. Most misconceptions revolved around sterilization and the pill. Despite the frequent mention of the pill, more than 34 percent still reported various erroneous ways of using it.¹⁶

Sources of Information. Perhaps the quality of sex-related knowledge among adolescents can be more understandable if one considers the sources of their information. This topic was present in quite a number of studies. In most cases, personal sources, especially best friends, are preferred. Given such limited sources, a situation of the blind leading the blind is possible. Although sex

13. KKFI, *Students' Views*.

14. Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*, p. 30.

15. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 3, pp. 14-15.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

education (integrated into some subjects in school) has been positively evaluated by most adolescents,¹⁷ it appears that it could be made more practical and more personal, with a view towards correcting dangerous misconceptions.

ATTITUDES

Attitudes Toward Sex Education. The De la Salle Review concluded that the Filipino adolescent has a positive attitude toward sex and sex education.¹⁸ Attitudes toward different possible sources of sex information/consultation vary. Regalado found that friends were most preferred, followed by people at home (parents, older siblings) and the least preferred were people in school.¹⁹ One has to point out, however, that if sex education in school has been positively evaluated, teachers cannot be that bad as information sources. In fact, one very surprising finding from the Metro Manila Adolescent Profile was that teachers were rated as most helpful in one's acquisition of knowledge about sex by the highest percentage of respondents.²⁰ The curious position of this item — right after items regarding sex education in school — could have biased the respondent momentarily. "Helpful" also does not have to mean "preferred," which is the term many other surveys have used. Perhaps teachers make good lecturers about sex; but approaching them on a personal level is something else.

Unfortunately teachers and counselors in school frequently feel obliged to take a judgmental and disciplinary role which make it difficult for adolescents to share personal sex-related problems and questions with them. There is, of course, also the generation gap teachers and counselors have to contend with. Adolescents typically feel embarrassed talking with older people about sexual matters, and even parents, who are a preferred source, are not an actual source. On the other hand, the peer group in general and best friends or same-sexed friends in particular are a preferred and actual source of information and consultation about sex.²¹

17. Ibid.

18. Salazar and Ramos, *Life at Sixteen*.

19. Mercy Belgado Regalado, "A Study of Adolescents' Sex and Teachers' Perceptions of These Sex Attitudes" (M.A. thesis, Centro Escolar University, 1972).

20. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 3, p. 10.

21. Salazar and Ramos, *Life at Sixteen*, p. 5.

To the extent that teachers have been labeled as most helpful in one's knowledge about sex and parents have been cited as a preferred source, it would seem that the prognosis for adult-adolescent communication is favorable if only adults can take the initiative of bridging the communication gap. Training and action programs such as the one provided by the Population Center Foundation for school counselors can focus specifically on counseling adolescents on sex-related problems.²²

Attitudes Toward Virginity and Pre-marital Sex. There is no doubt that times have changed and that adolescents today have different attitudes about sex from their parents, which is why it may take some effort for both parties to learn to talk to each other. Sanchez' study done as early as 1974 confirmed the predicted generation gap between students and their parents. Students held more liberal attitudes towards sex than their parents did.²³

However, just how different are Filipino adolescents of today? Some reports have tended to exaggerate the new attitudes and the new morality, but a more accurate statement is that Filipino adolescents are caught in a period of transition where the concept of virginity is not really passé but neither is the idea of premarital sex with a person one loves "too far out" to consider. There is also apparently little awareness of the inconsistency between espousing virginity at marriage and at the same time accepting premarital sex for love's sake.

Several studies have consistently shown that virginity is still generally valued,²⁴ though not in the absolute way it was a generation ago. Female virginity is still more highly valued than male virginity, suggesting the endurance of the double standard. One third of the female respondents in a large secular university studied by Vergara did not expect their husband to be a virgin.²⁵ The belief that one should be a virgin at marriage does not seem to

22. Population Center Foundation and Ministry of Education, *A Training Program on Adolescent Sexuality Counseling for School Counselors*.

23. Custodiosa Sanchez, *Generation Gap: Attitudes of Students of Selected Colleges and their Parents toward Sexual Behavior* 29 (C.E.U. Graduate and Faculty Studies, 1979): 107-18.

24. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 5, p. 9; PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*; PCF & PADC, *Preliminary KAP Survey*.

25. Vergara, "Survey of Attitudes."

have much bearing on one's attitude toward premarital sex. The acceptability of premarital sex depends on the relationship between partners. Adolescents who accept premarital sex feel that it is justified if the partners are in love and even more so if they intend to marry.²⁶ Another analysis of conditions for premarital sex shows that most conditions can be classified as "maturity" conditions (one is mature enough and prepared to handle consequences) and "security" conditions (love has been established to be strong enough to bind partners, there is trust that one partner will not desert the other, or marriage plans have been set).²⁷

As in many cases of adolescent sexuality research, there is considerable inconsistency among research findings with regard to percentage of adolescents who accept premarital sex, even though most of these surveys are confined within Metro Manila. The recently concluded Metro Manila Adolescent Profile found a surprisingly large group of adolescents – 64 percent – who would personally consider premarital sex with a partner under one circumstance or another; only 36 percent mentioned "marriage with the person" as their "top-of-mind" factor for considering sex.²⁸ Still on urban adolescents, a survey of middle and upper-middle class schools by Gotera et al. reported that 55 percent intended to engage in premarital sex if they were in love.²⁹ In the urban and rural sample of the De la Salle survey, 25 percent (169 male and 26 female) of the sample reported that they would engage in premarital sex with a partner.³⁰ KAP pretests on students of Metro Manila offer more diverse figures, as well as evidence that percentages of premarital sex acceptors vary depending on how the question of premarital sex is asked.³¹ Thus, it was found that:

56 percent agreed that "sexual intercourse between two people is all right as long as they love each other";

45 percent disagreed that "engaging in sex is wrong for unmarried people";

38 percent disagreed that "sex between two people is wrong if they do not intend to marry"; and

26. Salazar and Ramos, *Life at Sixteen*; PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, p. 4, appendix A, pp. 3-7.

27. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 5, pp. 1-5.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

29. Suzanne Gotera et al., *Survey on the Relevance of an Adolescent Center in Metro Manila* (Unpublished Manuscript, Dept. of Psychology, Ateneo, 1979).

30. Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*, p. 33.

31. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, appendix A, pp. 3-5.

25 percent agreed that "if I become deeply in love with a person, I would want to have sex with him even before marriage" (note similarity in phrasing and in outcome with the De la Salle data).

Attitudes Toward Family Planning. Attitude toward family planning (FP) methods appear to be very open, in the sense that there are no qualms about discussion on the topic. The KKFI survey showed that 81.5 percent of adolescents with sweethearts or steadies have discussed FP methods with each other, with rhythm emerging as the most favored method.³² The NMPC study reported 61 percent of adolescents with sweethearts or steadies to have discussed FP methods.³³ Preference was expressed for rhythm, followed by the pill, the condom and the IUD.³⁴ Discussion of FP methods, however, does not necessarily mean endorsement or usage. Respondents reportedly favor open discussion but expressed ambivalence about present usage.³⁵

In general, the Metro Manila Adolescent Profile found a favorable attitude toward the idea of family planning (FP) with 54 percent citing economic and child-care advantages and 30 percent citing the control of rapid population growth.³⁶ This is, of course, on a very rational level and may not be very predictive of future behavior. The KAP surveys on young industrial workers and on students corroborate the favorable attitude of adolescents toward FP. Fifty-nine percent agreed that people in love should safeguard each other's future by using contraceptives; the same number disagreed that contraceptives take away romance. Despite this, the majority were against making contraceptives available to teenagers; only 31 percent endorsed such a move.³⁷

Some misgivings about family planning (FP) were voiced by the rural and urban respondents of the De la Salle survey. Coming from families with a modal size of seven children, the respondents revealed some attitudes which did not favor eventual FP practice. There were five out of ten who agreed, and three out of ten who were uncertain, that FP takes away healthy relationships in marriage. A majority either agreed with or were uncertain about FP

32. KKFI, *Students' Views*.

33. NMPC, "Family Planning."

34. KKFI, *Students' Views*.

35. NMPC, "Family Planning."

36. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 3, pp. 6-7.

37. PCF & PADC, *Preliminary KAP Survey*, pp. 31-32.

giving women too much freedom, increasing their sex drive, and interfering with the work of God. Also, 56 percent agreed that children are proof of a man's masculinity. On the other hand, premarital contraception seemed to be a different issue. Among the 25 percent sexually active respondents, 87 percent intended to use a contraception method (albeit irregularly) while the rest planned to do so only after a "pregnancy scare."³⁸

Attitudes Toward Masturbation, Homosexuality, Abortion. Attitudes toward masturbation (57 percent see nothing wrong) and towards homosexuality (38 percent agree two persons of the same sex can have sex together if that is what they want) have become more permissive than they were in yesteryears.³⁹ Attitudes toward abortion remain elusive since many studies have avoided this topic. In one survey an item asked respondents who had been in an accidental pregnancy to cite what they thought of doing and what they actually did. Among those with such a history, only 19 percent obliged with an answer: 8 percent had thought of, and actually went through, an abortion. It was in fact, the most frequent reaction. Among those without a history of accidental pregnancy, 12 percent said they would go for abortion if confronted with accidental pregnancy.⁴⁰ Indirect data which come from three adolescent health centers (PCF-MCH project) suggest that abortion does enter the minds of adolescents who are in a desperate situation. Often they tentatively ask the counselor if there are no methods by which a pregnancy can be terminated, e.g., drugs to take, etc., but do not insist when alternative options of coping with their problem are shown to them.⁴¹

Attitudes Toward Marriage and "Live-in". Getting married, of course, is the next most frequent solution the adolescent thinks of when faced with accidental pregnancy, but surprisingly it is a thought which is not usually pushed through in action.⁴² This may be because more and more adolescents associate marriage with responsibility, especially financial responsibility. The ideal age for marriage is between twenty-one to twenty-five, provided one has

38. Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*, pp. 32-36.

39. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, appendix A, p. 3; PCF & PADC, *Preliminary KAP Survey*.

40. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 5, p. 10.

41. Gotera, "Survey."

42. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 6, p. 7.

a job.⁴³ It should be noted that most adolescents do not plan to get married in their teens (only 4 percent do) and that therefore many teenage marriages are either impulsive or rushed as "a matter of necessity" due to accidental pregnancy. The acceptable age for going steady is nineteen.⁴⁴

The "live-in" is still an unpopular idea among Filipino adolescents. Unfavorable attitudes were expressed by 73 percent of the Metro Manila Adolescent Profile respondents. Common reasons against it included the degradation of family honor, the insecurity that one's partner could easily leave when tired of the relationship, and the fact that living-in is against Christian morality. Of the scant 15 percent who favored the "live-in" arrangement, most cited the need to test compatibility before marriage.⁴⁵

PRACTICES

While many studies have dealt with sex-related attitudes and intentions, not as many have explored sex-related practices among adolescents, especially actual incidence of premarital sex.

Sex Discussion and Consultation. Vicarious activities such as talking about or reading about sex, watching openly sexual films or live performances, are understandably easier to explore in a survey than actual personal sex experiences. Among senior high school students in a study done in Bulacan, discussions about sex tended to center on sexual intercourse, birth control, petting and necking while least discussed were venereal diseases, abortions and sexual aberrations.⁴⁶

The majority of adolescent students confided their love problems to their friends but this tendency was more characteristic of males than of females. Female adolescents were somewhat more inclined than male adolescents to confide in parents. Generally, each sex tended to confide more in a parent of the same sex, i.e., mother for females and father for males. As a whole, however, the father was the least popular confidant in the family.⁴⁷ Although almost half claimed to have talked openly to either parent about

43. Ibid.

44. Vergara, "A Survey of Attitudes."

45. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 5, pp. 9-10.

46. Mariano, "Knowledge, Attitudes and Sources."

47. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

sex, most tell their parents only what the latter would approve of; only a small minority tell their parents everything.⁴⁸

Pornography and Fantasy. A majority of 63 percent from the 660 respondents of the KAP survey for Metro Manila high schools have read or looked at sexy books or magazines. Out of every ten readers, six were males and four were females. On the other hand, 34 percent have reportedly seen an x-rated or openly sexual movie or a sex performance. Out of every four show-watchers, three were males and one was female. Pornography and romantic stories were reportedly popular among 73.56 percent of males and 43.01 percent of females. Daydreaming about kissing and necking was also common.⁴⁹

Masturbation. For the relief of sexual tensions, masturbation was reported to be common among males (77.74 percent) but either less common or under-reported among females (5.40 percent).⁵⁰ In another survey, one-third of adolescent respondents reported that they had masturbated, at a mean age of 13 years. Of these 82 percent were males and 18 percent females.⁵¹

Crushes and Sweethearts. Adolescent crushes, as expected, were very common. Teachers, classmates, basketball and movie stars made likely targets. Males had a tendency to choose nearer, more possible targets such as teachers and classmates while females more often chose safe, distant targets such as basketball and movie stars.⁵²

Approximately half of all adolescents had current sweethearts or steadies (46.8 percent – KKFI survey;⁵³ 54 percent NMPC survey;⁵⁴ 58 percent for KAP – adolescent students;⁵⁵ 64 percent for Metro Manila Adolescent Profile).⁵⁶ These statistics, though far from uniform, are important because adolescents with sweethearts or steadies constitute in one sense a high-risk group for premarital sex, inasmuch as “being in love” is the single most frequent reason for premarital sex.⁵⁷

48. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, p. 8.

49. CYCC, “Sex Practices.”

50. *Ibid.*

51. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*.

52. CYCC, “Sex Practices.”

53. KKFI, *Students' Views*.

54. NMPC, “Family Planning.”

55. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, p. 5.

56. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 6, p. 1.

57. *Ibid.*

Dating and Pre-marital Sex. Approximately half of all adolescent students in the CYRC survey had gone dating. More males (57.20 percent) dated than females (42.7 percent) and more frequently. The males who did not date cited lack of money as main reason, while females cited parental disapproval and effect of dating on studies as reasons for not dating.⁵⁸

The most favorite dating places were movies, parties, parks, restaurants, discos, motels, resthouses and hotels in that order.⁵⁹ Common forms of intimacies on dates include kissing, necking, petting and premarital sex.⁶⁰ Statistics vary widely for all these various activities, partly due to sampling and methodological differences to be discussed under "Assessment." Consider for example the following figures for premarital sex:

Study	Location	Sample Size	Sex of Sample	Reported Premarital Sex
Metro Manila Adolescent Profile ⁶¹	Metro Manila	n=479	M/F	14 percent
KAP – Adolescent students ⁶²	” ”	n=660	M/F	20 percent
Sr. Rimondo’s study ⁶³	Baguio and Mt. Province	not known	F	21 percent
Palacio’s study ⁶⁴	U.P.	“ ”	F	22 percent
De la Salle Survey ⁶⁵	Manila & Pagbilao, Quezon	n=749	M/F	25 percent
CYRC Survey ⁶⁶	Metro Manila & 9 linguistic regions	n=5348	M/F	33 percent

58. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.; PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*; Mataragnon, *Counseling of Sex-Related Problems*.

61. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*.

62. Ibid.

63. Rimando, "Disposition of Female Adolescents."

64. Aurora Palacio, *Sex and the Teenage Filipina* (Testing and Research Department, Division of Counseling and Guidance, University of the Philippines, Diliman, 1977).

65. Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*.

66. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

Gotera et al. study ⁶⁷	Metro Manila	n=250	M/F	45 percent
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Although at least one-third of those who engage in premarital sex feel either worried or guilty about it, almost all adolescents who have had experienced sex repeat it a few weeks or months later. A little more than half claim that it is accidental rather than planned. Locations include motels, moviehouses, parks, cars, houses, massage clinics and beaches, in that order.⁶⁸ Among the sexually active, more than half reported that they use contraceptives; (52 percent, Gotera et al.; 57 percent, Metro Manila Adolescent Profile). Most commonly used is the condom, followed by the rhythm method and the pill.⁶⁹

Post hoc reasons for premarital sex mostly center around the expression of love, with test for compatibility following a far second. However, individual characteristics of self and partner apparently enhance the likelihood of premarital sex, e.g., "the girl was so trusting; the boy was so insistent." Social pressures such as the need to prove masculinity/femininity or to be in with the group are also mentioned. Finally, adolescents, especially males, simply reason that sex happens because "the opportunity to do it arises."⁷⁰ Group dating can deter sex, though not kissing and petting, according to one report.⁷¹

D I F F E R E N T I A L S

What demographic, social and personality factors affect the sexual attitudes and practices of adolescents? Not very much is known of this area partly because few studies have embarked beyond descriptive profiles and the ones that have attempted to look for differentials have not found many significant trends. Demographic differences are, needless to say, somewhat easier to establish than social and personality differences.

Residence. Some demographic antecedents which have shown fairly stable and predictable influences are residence, sex and age.

67. Gotera, "Survey."

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.; PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*.

70. Gotera, "Survey."

71. Vergara, "A Survey of Attitudes."

Rural adolescents typically report more conservative attitudes and practices than urban adolescents.⁷² Whether this is due to early marriage in the rural areas, lessened anonymity, reduced media impact, greater religiosity, unquestioning adherence to traditional virtues or all of these, no one can say for sure.

Gender. Female adolescents are consistently more conservative than males,⁷³ and are more inclined to rely on parents and teachers for sex-related information and consultation,⁷⁴ although males and females are equally unknowledgeable in KAP tests.⁷⁵ In citing reasons for premarital sex, females are more likely than males to think above love and males are more likely than females to think of "opportunity to do it."⁷⁶ In choosing marriage partners, factors which tend to be differentiated between sexes are age, education, employment and virginity. Females emphasize a higher priority for the first three criteria for their male partners than vice-versa but males are more likely to put priority on the virginity of their female partners than vice-versa.⁷⁷ For those going steady, it is the female partners who are more serious about marrying their steady.⁷⁸

Age. As expected, younger adolescents are more limited as yet with regard to sex exploration than older adolescents. Although the effect of age within the adolescent range has not been systematically studied, studies which deal with college teenagers generally yield more liberal attitudes and practices than those dealing with high school teenagers or overall adolescent samples. One can also expect the acceptance and incidence of premarital sex to escalate as adolescents step out of their teens, partly because one is that much nearer to a job and to marriage plans, the latter of which is a "security" factor cited for premarital sex. The case studies of sexually active single Filipinas by Gilandas⁷⁹ and

72. Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*; Paz Policarpio Mendez and Landa Jocano, *The Filipino Adolescent in a Rural and an Urban Setting: A Study in Culture and Education* (Central Escolar University Research and Development Center, 1979).

73. Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*, p. 41; PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*.

74. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

75. PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*, p. 9.

76. Mataragnon, *Counseling of Sex-Related Problems*.

77. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 5, pp. 7-9.

78. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

79. Alex Gilandas et al., "Sex and the Single Filipina: A Holistic Approach" (PSSC Social Science Information, April-June 1978), pp. 6-10.

by Jocano⁸⁰ both dealt with a selected sample above twenty years of age, although their samples can hardly be considered representative.

Social Factors. Social factors have been very much neglected in the study of adolescent sex-related knowledge, attitudes and behavior. School environment, at least in terms of religious orientation, shows no apparent effect. One study found no difference between students from Catholic schools and those from nonsectarian and public schools.⁸¹ Another, however, found that male and female students from exclusive Catholic schools (typically high socioeconomic status) dated more frequently than students from other groups.⁸² Religious devoutness was not found to influence the extent of participation in premarital sex.⁸³ Family influences have hardly been explored except for questions concerning parents and siblings as source of knowledge and consultation about sex-related problems. Strictness vs. permissiveness of parental discipline, correlation of sex-related attitudes and behavior with those of parents – these are interesting and promising areas of exploration which have received little research attention. A forthcoming nationwide survey intends to focus on family influences as one major class of antecedent variables.

Personality Correlates. The identification of personality correlates has also proved elusive. The CYRC study was rare in its attempt to relate personality traits to sex problems, but most of its findings along this line were insignificant and vague in interpretation.⁸⁴ The 16 Personality Factor Test was used to measure personality traits, while a modified form of the Mooney Problem Check List pertaining to sex was used to determine sex problems. The study concluded that adolescent students with premarital sexual experience did not seem to show any marked difference in their personality profile from those with no premarital sexual experience. Although not statistically significant, there was some

80. F. Landa Jocano, "Socio-Cultural Aspects of Adolescent Sexual Behavior" (Paper presented at the IPPF Seminar/Workshop on Adolescent Sexuality, 1978).

81. Mariano, "Knowledge, Attitudes and Sources."

82. Concepcion Molina Cheng, "A Comparative Study of Heterosexual Adjustments of Fourth Year Boys and Girls from Selected High Schools in Manila" (M.A. thesis, University of Santo Tomas, 1970).

83. Rimando, "Disposition of Female Adolescents."

84. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

slight tendency for the group with premarital sexual experience toward a more apprehensive, worrying, depressive or guilt-prone type of personality. In some, compulsive control is offset with inner urgencies which favor a Bohemian life style that is careless of practical details. Adolescents prone to heavy masturbation were slightly weaker in ego strength and more affected by their feelings, but again the difference was not significant. Adolescent students with homosexual tendencies were markedly lower in scholastic mental capacity, also more aggressive and stubborn. In relating personality traits to sexual tendencies, it is well to remember that the personality traits could be either antecedent, consequent or only indirectly related to individual sexual tendencies. In any case, there is need for more unequivocal data based on different personality measures.

PROBLEMS

Transition and Adjustment. Adolescence is a period marked by rapid physical, social and emotional changes. Physically the event of puberty can hardly be ignored and the adolescent finds himself living with a somewhat new and strange body. Socially there is a shift of interests from the family cocoon to the peer group outside and eventually to strong heterosexual attractions. This increased desire to conform to one's peers and to struggle for autonomy from home is often accompanied by much conflict, stress and guilt. Emotionally this is a vulnerable period, characterized by a search for one's identity and direction in life, rendering the adolescent ultrasensitive to any threat to his or her personal freedom.

Accompanying these changes are sex-related problems of varying degrees. This is not to imply that all adolescents get into trouble or that problems brought to counseling centers are typical of all adolescents. For many adolescents in this culture, devotion to family and smooth interpersonal relations still carry the day. Jocano has suggested that the impression people have of adolescents has been overly affected by the western idea of a "storm and stress" period⁸⁵ and by deviant adolescents who get all the sensationalized attention. Despite this, however, there is no doubt that

85. Mataragnon, *Counseling of Sex-Related Problems*, p. 2.

adolescence is a period of transition which requires considerable adjustment in any culture where adult status is usually achieved or conferred years later after physical maturity. For some, the problem may simply be a nagging doubt about their own normality and a curiosity about sex that still has to be answered. For others, this curiosity is translated into more active experimentation, especially in cases where a strong emotional attachment is also involved.

Problems Brought to Centers. The most frequent problems brought to PCF-MOH managed adolescent centers in 1980 were, in order of frequency:⁸⁶ (1) boy-girl emotional problems (e.g., lovers' quarrels, obstacles, how to choose between partners); (2) social and physical development (e.g., to date or not, how to attract opposite sex, am I normal?); (3) actual pregnancy for singles; (4) possible pregnancy for singles; (5) sex information; (6) contraception; (7) questions about abortion; (8) sex with married men. When both actual and possible pregnancies are taken together, they constitute the most frequent reason for approaching an adolescent center in which medical services are also available.

Pregnancy crises, actual or possible (unconfirmed) are usually first presented to the counselor as amenorrhea or delayed menstruation but in the course of the session the client professes fear of pregnancy and previous experience of sex. In some cases emotional problems also ensue, such as the cooling or exit of the boyfriend. Also likely to surface in the counseling session are other problems that come part and parcel with premarital pregnancy. These are fear of parents' reactions, financial problems, disrupted education and/or career, and the illegitimacy of the child to be born. In any case, it is well to remember that premarital pregnancy is usually a highly loaded "package" problem.⁸⁷ In another survey, accidental pregnancy, inadequate sex education and confusion were viewed as the most common problems faced by adolescents engaging in premarital sexual behavior. On a personal level, highest ranking concerns included worry about finding the right person to marry (both sexes) and lack of money to spend on dates (males only).⁸⁸ A survey from the perspective of school counselors show

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. CYCC, "Sex Practices."

that the most common sex-related problems confided in counselors include anxieties over kissing and petting, homosexual and lesbian relations, pregnancies, live-in secrets and affairs with married men. More homosexuality problems were encountered in the high schools (especially private) while more pregnancy and abortion problems were encountered in the colleges (especially private).⁸⁹

Adolescent Counseling Centers. The concept of an adolescent counseling center has been tested in at least two different surveys. In both cases, adolescents agree to the necessity (86 percent)⁹⁰ or favorability (94 percent)⁹¹ of adolescent centers. However, the majority apparently view sex-related counseling as crisis intervention rather than crisis prevention, as witnessed by the kind of problems for which they would avail of the center's services: venereal disease, accidental pregnancy, abortion. Menstrual problems and boy-girl relationships were among the more minor problems occasionally mentioned. Counseling skills and understanding were viewed as more important than the sex and age of the counselor, or the decor of the counseling center. In general, an adolescent center is preferred to phone counseling service.

ASSESSMENT

DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES

A majority of studies in the area of adolescent sexuality and fertility are descriptive rather than multi-variate in nature. Most findings consist of percentages of adolescents who show certain knowledge, attitudes or more seldom explored, behavior. Although occasional attempts have been made to qualify some figures, e.g., that premarital sex is favored when the partners are in love and even more so when they intend marriage, more often the figures derived from these descriptive studies are not very informative because they lack specificity. Take, for instance, one of the conclusions in the De la Salle review, that adolescents

89. Rosalinda Sanchez-Castiglioni, "A Program for School Counselors on Adolescent Sexuality: Assessment Phase" (Ateneo de Manila, Department of Psychology, 1979), pp. 13-16.

90. Gotera, "Survey," p. 4.

91. PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*, sec. 4, p. 5.

have a positive attitude toward sex and favor sex education.⁹² Sex, being part of us, is hardly something anyone can be against. What does it mean that adolescents have a positive attitude toward sex? Does it mean that they like it in the abstract, that they condone premarital sex, that they intend to engage in sex themselves when in love, that they are actually having sex now, or what? The conclusion that sex education is favored also seems not to be as useful as answers to such questions as: what do they know already? What do they not know, or need to know, or want to know?

INADEQUATE DATA ON PRACTICES

Part of the difficulty of research utilization in this area lies in this lack of specificity, and partly in the lack of consistent data regarding actual sex-related practices. Only recently have data about practices (inconsistent data at that) been trickling in. For decades the literature was dominated by studies on attitudes and occasionally on intentions, but very little on actual behavior. The gap between expressed attitudes and actual behavior is well-documented in attitude research and it is definitely unrealistic to expect policies and programs to be formulated simply on the basis of reported attitudes. With continued research on actual sex-related practices of Filipino adolescents as well as their antecedents and consequences, a clearer picture and more reliable baseline may emerge to guide future policies and programs.

The challenge of gathering data on sex-related practices brings us to the problem of sensitivity, or social desirability. The reason researchers hesitate to ask questions on actual behavior is because these are sensitive questions to which respondents' answers are likely to be motivated by social desirability. So long as the interviewer asks about opinions and beliefs, he is still on relatively safe ground. But the moment he starts asking about actual behavior or practices, he is getting too personal, and while not actually thrown out, may be virtually closed off from any further truth that the respondent could offer. Some researchers have attempted to solve the getting-too-personal problem by asking about the third person.

92. Salazar and Ramos, *Life at Sixteen*, p. 4.

For instance, the respondent is asked if he knows of someone of his age who is sexually active, or more profitably, what percentage of his friends and acquaintances are sexually active. The problem about "knowing someone" is that people from a vicinity could be referring to the same person, or the same small pool of persons who are probably famous, or infamous, for their sexual experience. In one study done on young industrial workers at the Bataan Export Processing Zone (BEPZ),⁹³ however, respondents gave a fairly wide range of different ages when asked about the age of the person they know who had a premarital pregnancy, indicating that they might be talking about different people. In any case, it is obvious that third-person, indirect data should be interpreted with caution because of the indefinite sample base that expands or contracts depending on the social networks of the respondents. Some researchers still believe that the direct approach is best, and that the problem of sensitivity can be overcome with adequate rapport and very skillful interviewing.

DATA-GATHERING METHODS

Another issue related to sensitivity lies in the methodology of data-gathering. It is conceivable that much of the variance in the research findings can be attributed to the many different methods of data-gathering. For simplicity, let us address ourselves to the two most common survey methods: the self-administered questionnaire vs. the face-to-face interview. It is plausible that anonymous self-administered questionnaires could yield different results from face-to-face interviews even if the questions asked were identical. Two of the studies reporting the highest figures of sexual experience (33 percent and 45 percent respectively, cf. practice) made use of anonymous self-administered questionnaires.⁹⁴ On the other hand, face-to-face interview methods are dependent on a reasonable amount of environmental privacy and a high degree of rapport for self-disclosure to take place. In a culture where sex is not openly discussed or considered proper for adolescents, faking is to be expected. Some interviewers have suggested that males tend to overstate and females tend to under-

93. University of the Philippines Population Institute, ongoing.

94. CYCC, "Sex Practices;" Gotera, "Survey."

state. If such is the case, the apparent sex differences in the data may be deceptive. In-depth and longitudinal case studies, though expensive, are believed to yield more revealing data. The few, however, that have been undertaken have focused on nonrepresentative (usually sexually advanced) samples to start with, making it difficult to assess the net effect of such a method.

While self-administered questionnaires have the advantage of anonymity, they are limited only to the fully literate population. In view of this limitation, most national surveys still rely on door-to-door sampling and face-to-face interviewing for comprehensive and unbiased data. Awareness of the difficulties of face-to-face interviewing should challenge the researcher towards more careful training of field interviewers employed for this type of research as well as more imaginative and less threatening sequencing and wording of the interview schedule.

It may be worthwhile to invest once and for all in a comparative research to determine how much more conservative the research data obtained from face-to-face interviews are compared with those from anonymous self-administered questionnaires. Such research would focus on the variance attributable to research method, keeping content constant. Findings could determine the validity of common speculations about the effects of these methods, and possibly offer a formula to enable researchers to estimate a margin of social desirability/conservatism and arrive at more accurate data. In the absence of such research, pretests of sex surveys should attempt two different methods, and determine, if only on a small scale, how comparable the two sets of data are. The researcher can in this way validate one set of data against the other. Should the two sets of data turn out to be incomparable, at least the researcher who chooses a specific method for his actual survey does so with the knowledge of what might have been if he were to use another method. Knowing the degree of conservatism inherent in his method could well affect his interpretation of the results obtained.

INSTRUMENTATION AND SAMPLING

Lastly, disparities and inconsistencies in the literature on premarital sex among Filipino adolescents and young adults may be

traced to the various differences not only in data-gathering approaches but also in instrumentation, in specific topics chosen for study, and in highly localized samples. An attempt at a conciliatory national study is ongoing.⁹⁵ This proposed study also seeks to identify more factors and dynamics related to premarital sexual behavior, especially factors related to the family.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the un-uniform statistical figures, however, there exists a problem. Although its magnitude is still to be accurately determined, even the most conservative percentage translates into thousands of adolescents requiring help, especially given the youthfulness of Philippine population. In a society characterized by a long gap between puberty and marriage, and where growing urbanization and changing mores continue to loosen traditional constraints, we can not afford to ignore the problem and the issues involved. We have yet to understand the problem more thoroughly and to act with compassion and wisdom. Even if change is inevitable, we can still have some say in the direction of this change.

95. University of the Philippines Population Institute and Population Center Foundation, ongoing.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CYCC, "Sex Practices." – The Child and Youth Coordinating Center, "The Sex Practices and Problems of the Adolescent Filipino Student," *Philippine Journal of Child-Youth Development*, 7, 2 (1978)
- Gotera, "Survey" – Suzanne Gotera et al., "Survey on the Relevance of an Adolescent Center in Metro Manila" (Unpublished Manuscript, Dept. of Psychology, Ateneo, 1979).
- KKFI, *Students' Views*. – Kapatiran Kaunlaran Foundation, Inc., *Students' Views on Population Education and Family Planning*, 1976.
- Mariano, "Knowledge, Attitudes and Sources." – Tomas Mariano (Rev.), "The Knowledge, Attitudes and Sources of Information of Selected Senior High School Students of Bulacan on Sex" (M.A. thesis, University of Sto. Tomas, 1971).
- Mataragnon, *Counseling of Sex-Related Problems*. – Rita Mataragnon, *Counseling of Sex-Related Problems in Three ACP Centers* (Population Center Foundation, 1980).
- NMPC, "Family Planning." – National Media Production Center, 1978, Population Education Office, 1973. Family Planning, Collegians.
- PCF & CP, *Metro Manila Adolescents*. – Population Center Foundation and Consumer Pulse, *A Profile of Metro Manila Adolescents: Their Fertility-Related Needs and Problems*.
- PCF & PADC, *Preliminary KAP Survey*. – Population Center Foundation and Psychological Assessment and Development Corporation, *Information and Counseling on Sexuality for Young Unmarried Industrial Workers – Preliminary KAP Survey*, 1981.
- PCF & SRT, *KAP Baseline Study*. – Population Center Foundation and Sinag Research Team, *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) of Adolescent Students on Sex-Related Matters: A Baseline Study*, 1981.
- Postrado and Ramos, *Teenage Views*. – Leticia Postrado and Exaltacion Ramos, *Teenage Views and Values on Fertility and Sexuality: A Survey of Filipino Adolescents in an Urban and a Rural Community* (De La Salle University, Center for Urban Studies, 1979).
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