

## PEER CULTURE AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LOVE AND SEX IN A SAMPLE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA

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### Introduction

Besides challenges posed by the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, a variety of ongoing social and demographic changes in Sri Lanka makes it necessary to address problems of sexual health among youth as a national priority<sup>1</sup>. Early initiation into sex and progressive increase in the age at marriage are worldwide processes affecting youth in both developed and developing societies. Sri Lanka has experienced a notable increase in the age at marriage in recent years particularly among females. The average age at marriage among females increased from 20.9 years in 1953 to 24.7 in 1981. This, in turn, may be attributed to increased educational levels, delays associated with the educational system, long waiting periods for employment, increased labour force participation of women and the inability to find acceptable matching marriage partners (Caldwell 1996, Caldwell *et al.* 1989). The rising age at marriage necessitates explicit recognition of premarital sex despite strong cultural barriers against open discussion about the subject. University students are particularly affected by the phenomenon of "*extended adolescence*" in view of their participation in the higher education system and resulting delays in setting up married life. The problems created by the extended adolescence are by no means restricted to the domain of sexuality: youth are spearheading social protest and anti-establishment campaigns in Sri Lanka and various other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

With educational expansion, establishment of free trade zones characterized by a concentration of unmarried young female workers, ongoing civil war and resulting military mobilization and social displacement, more and more young people move out of parental supervision and into greater contact with same sex and / or opposite sex peers. Once again the university students are clearly affected by

this trend. Often the students who enter universities in Sri Lanka move from boys' or girls' schools to a coeducational setup in the university campuses. This, in turn, creates an environment conducive to free male-female interaction as well as enhanced opportunities for premarital sex.

The "sexual risks" encountered by young people in Sri Lanka are multifaceted. The risk of contracting sexually transmitted disease (STD), including HIV/AIDS, is the one that calls for immediate attention to changing attitudes, lifestyle and practices of youth. However, from the angle of the youth themselves risk of losing marriageability, risk of unwanted pregnancy, risk of encountering social stigma, loss of face and even related suicidal risk are equally if not more important. The last aspect is particularly significant in view of the upsurge in youth suicide in Sri Lanka in recent years, with problems associated with love and sex being a major factor in the rise of youth suicide at the national level (Silva & Pushpakumara 1996). The prevailing concern about youth unrest in Sri Lanka has paid primary attention to educational, employment and social justice concerns of youth to the relative neglect of their emotional and sexual needs (Government of Sri Lanka 1990, Hettige 1992).

There is a growing body of literature on youth and sexuality in Sri Lanka. Most of this literature contains results of quantitative surveys on knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) relating to "reproductive health". A nationwide survey covering a randomly drawn sample of 2466 unmarried youth aged 16 to 24 carried out by the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka (FPASL) in 1986 is the most comprehensive of the studies undertaken so far. It found that roughly about one-third approved of love marriage as against arranged marriage, another one-third preferred arranged marriage to love marriage and the remaining one-third had no fixed views saying that they would either accept a good partner proposed by their parents or find a love partner acceptable to the respondents as well as to the parents (Basnayake 1986, 1988). As regards premarital sex, only 15% of boys and 6.3% of girls approved premarital sex between love partners. A total of 76.3% of the males considered that it is important for a bride to be a virgin at marriage. The knowledge about anatomy,

physiology and conception was found to be inadequate. For instance, 50 % of the sample were not aware that a woman had a fertile period. On the other hand, 22.4% believed that a woman could get pregnant by wearing clothing used by a man. This study was strong on sexual knowledge and attitudes but weak on data regarding sexual practices. While it was found that 66% of males and nearly 5% of females practised masturbation, vital areas of male-to-male or male-to-female sex and the number or nature of any sex partners were not covered. Age of onset of sexual activity and its progression over time were not investigated. It is possible that collecting reliable data on sexual practices by interviewing a nationwide sample proved to be difficult.

A further study carried out by the FPASL investigated the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) relating to sexual health in a sample of 75 Free Trade Zone (FTZ) female workers (ages 18 to 45) in Katunayaka ( de Silva, Botejue & Subasinghe n.d.). The procedure used for collection of information was similar to that of the previous study. However, the data generated in the two studies are not comparable as the second study covered married (20% of the sample) as well as unmarried (80%) female workers and the issues covered were different. The FTZ study found that 42% of unmarried female workers had boy friends with whom they often maintained daily or weekly contact. This study primarily investigated knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to family planning and sexually transmitted disease. Even though many of the respondents had participated in IEC programmes on STD and AIDS, several gaps in their knowledge in these areas were identified. Many respondents were aware of other girls involved in casual sex with multiple partners. They were also aware of others who got into trouble (loss of virginity, illegitimate pregnancy or even suicide) because of love affairs with unreliable partners. This study pointed to the relevance of certain contextual factors for understanding love and sex among female FTZ workers, such as isolation from their families, loneliness, lack of security, peer pressure and compulsion to find potential marriage partners and poor income (see also Hettiarachchy 1991). A full scale analysis of the relevance of these contextual factors for understanding emerging patterns of love and sex associated with new economic processes was

not made largely due to limitations imposed by the conventional quantitative methodology characteristic of KAP studies.

There are two previous studies relating to sexuality of university students in Sri Lanka. One was a KAP study covering a sample of 860 new entrants to the University of Colombo (Peiris n.d.). In this study the students responded to a self-administered questionnaire. It found that knowledge about sexuality and STD was greater among males compared to females, medical and science students compared to arts and law students and urban students compared to rural students. The data on sexual practices were of limited value as only 19% of boys and 16.4% of girls answered the relevant questions in the questionnaire. Only 3.5% of the male students and less than 1% of the female students reported any sexual intercourse with a love partner of the opposite sex. A similar study was undertaken by Goonaratna and Kodagoda (1983) in a sample of 441 new entrant male medical students in the University of Colombo. According to that study, 68.3% of the male students had their first ejaculation between 14 and 16 years, 93.6% first masturbated between 12 and 19 years, 17.5 had practised mutual masturbation with another male, 37.9% had practised interfemoral sex with another male, and 26.5, 19.7 and 26.1% had performed mutual masturbation, interfemoral sex and vaginal sex respectively with a female.

Based on a multi-disciplinary research and intervention programme carried out from 1995 to 1997 by the Centre for Intersectoral Community Health Studies (CICHS) in Kandy in collaboration with the University of Peradeniya and the University of Connecticut Health Center in USA, this paper seeks to identify patterns of love and sex among university students in the light of their knowledge, attitudes and peer relations. The present study seeks to add to the prevailing knowledge about youth sexuality in Sri Lanka by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative procedures for data collection, further exploring the relevance of contextual factors such as delayed marriage, absence of parental supervision, influence of peer culture, increased opportunities for male-female contact, gender and socio-economic background, examining the meaning of love and sex for undergraduates

and by identifying the sexual script (pattern of progression from one type of sexual conduct to another with a given encounter and within the life cycle) among the relevant youth.

## Methodology

The data reported here are based on a larger research and intervention programme seeking to identify risk behaviours and develop a pilot intervention for reduction of sexual risk among selected youth (ages 16-29) in Sri Lanka (for details see Silva *et al.* 1998). The research programme was carried out among youth drawn from two contrasting populations: an urban low-income community (to be referred to as community) in Kandy and students at University of Peradeniya (to be referred to as university). A pilot intervention seeking to facilitate communication and peer interaction relating to themes of love and sex was carried out in the community with the participation of selected students from the university and under guidance of a team of experts representing medicine, psychology and social sciences. This paper utilizes data relating to university students only.

In view of the sensitive nature of the topic a combination of methods was used.

1. Key informant interviews were conducted with health officials, service providers and selected youth from the two study locations. These interviews helped the research team to identify the nature of contact between the students and the service providers, the nature of male-female relations within the student community, the terminology used to describe relationships and sexual practices and perception of sexual risk among the students.
2. Open-ended structured interviews were conducted with a total of 158 purposively selected youth representing gender and ethnic differences in the populations studied. Trained peer researchers usually of the same gender as the respondents conducted these interviews. The resulting textual data were recorded and analysed using the ethnograph. The relevant information added to the understanding gained from key informant interviews and

indicated patterns of social relations, communications, sex behaviour, knowledge and attitudes among the students.

3. A quantitative survey covered a sample of 615 youth comprising of 312 university students and 303 community youth. The youth in the sample completed a self-administered questionnaire in small same-sex groups of 8-30 after being briefed by the research team. Anonymity and confidentiality of the data so collected were ensured throughout this study. The university students covered by the survey consisted of all third year medical students and all third-year special degree students in the Faculty of Arts at University of Peradeniya during 1995/96. All students in the relevant study programmes who were willing to participate in the study responded to the questionnaire. The participants in the survey were recruited by peer researchers representing the relevant batches and were rewarded with a nominal payment. About 5% of the students in the relevant courses did not participate in the study due to non-availability, concern for privacy or certain other factors. A replacement sample of 40 fourth-year special arts students was later added to the sample in order to ensure proportionate representation of arts and medical students.
4. Process evaluation of a month-long peer intervention in the community. (For details see Nastasi *et al.* 1999). These data are not utilized in the present paper as they do not directly relate to the university students covered by the present paper.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Selected data relating to university students are presented below with a view to assess their patterns of love and sex.

### ***Demographic Profile***

The mean ages for male and female undergraduates in the sample were 25.4 and 24.9 years respectively. The average medical student (mean age 25.9) was older than the average arts student (mean age 24.9)

( $p < .01$ ), reflecting the typically longer effort needed to enter the medical faculty. Asked to specify the age at which they expected to marry, the mean age at which they expected to marry varied from 29.3 for male arts students to 29.6 for male medical students ( $p > .05$ ) and from 27.6 for female arts students to 28.96 for female medical students ( $p > .01$ ). In the open-ended interviews with female medical students one of the recurring themes was their concern about “aging” and its possible impact on marriageability.

The socio-economic status measured in terms of availability of a list of specified household items was better for medical students (mean 5.4) compared to arts students (mean 4.0) ( $p > .01$ ).

### ***The University Campus as a Venue for Selecting Love Partners***

The universities are a prime place for mate selection among those joining the higher education system in Sri Lanka. Similar pattern has been reported in studies on “dating” in American colleges and universities (Winch 1970, Deora 1970). In spite of whatever other objectives the higher education system in Sri Lanka has failed to achieve, its role in facilitating mate selection has continued since its establishment. As elaborated elsewhere (Silva, Sivayoganathan & Ratnayake 1998), the phenomenon of ragging is utilized by males in senior batches to identify and establish initial contacts with potential female love partners from among the new entrants (referred to as a new “shipment of goodies” [*badu nawa*]). In some instances ragging also involved male freshmen being asked by their seniors to carry out sex acts like masturbation or display their sex organs in front of male audiences as a part of their initiation into sex life on the campus. The concept of “hitching” formalizes the beginning of love relations between boys and girls within the peer culture of students. The “hitch party” given by the new couple is inevitably followed by “ponding” or “bucketing” of the boy and occasionally the girl by their same sex peers in a public acknowledgement of the newly established love relationship, somewhat similar to “going out” in dating behaviour on American campuses. The University of Peradeniya, being a residential campus having limited interaction with surrounding communities, provides greater opportunities for close male-female

interaction outside of the class room. For instance, designated physical locations such as “Lovers’ Lane”, “Kissing Bend” and “Sperm Bank” reflect a peer culture and a socially-constructed spatial framework promotive of love and physical intimacies.

Based on self-reports, data regarding current love affairs in the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 : % With Current Love Affairs by Gender & Faculty**

Faculty	Gender		Total	N
	Male	Female		
Arts	49.1	57.4	53.2	231
Medical	14.9	20.6	17.3	81
Total	39.3	49.0	43.9	
N	163	149	312	

On the whole nearly 44% of the students in the sample reported having current love affairs within or outside the campus. This is consistent with a broader shift from parental intervention in the selection of potential marriage partners to one where interpersonal attraction and love are increasingly becoming the basis of partner selection (Caldwell 1996, Silva & Pushpakumara 1996, Silva, Sivayoganathan & Lewis 1998). Interestingly % of persons with love affairs was much greater in the community (57.1), contrary to the expected pattern given the higher age, relative freedom and absence of parental supervision in the university. Among the students females reported a higher proportion currently involved in love affairs compared to males ( $p > .01$ ), and arts students a substantially greater involvement in love compared to medical students ( $p > .01$ ). The reasons for variation in the incidence of love affairs were not investigated. The medical students’ lesser involvement in love may be at least partly due to their more demanding academic schedules and the resulting time, social and emotional constraints.

Of male students reporting love affairs only 59.4% had informed their families about their affairs as compared to 80.8% of female students. That a student has not taken the step of informing his or her family about a love affair, in turn, may indicate either a lack of seriousness about an affair or potential difficulties in communicating with parents about this sensitive subject.

Of the male students having love affairs on the campus, 51.2% reported that they first met their girl friends through ragging (a process by which new comers to the university student population are subjected to humiliating treatment by senior students in the university), as compared to 25% of female students who admitted meeting their boy friends during ragging. This confirms that ragging is more important for males in finding suitable partners from junior batches as explained in a previous publication (Silva, Sivayoganathan and Ratnayake 1998). Of the male respondents 46.8% agreed with the statement "I like to rag newcomers to the university". On the other hand, only 38.0% of male respondents agreed to the statement "I liked being ragged when I was a fresher". The pattern among females was reverse with 21.8% agreeing with the former statement and a slightly higher % (22.6) agreeing with the latter statement. On the whole arts students had a more favourable attitude towards ragging compared to medical students.

Asked to specify how far they depend on their love partners for various forms of support and intimacies, among the boys sexual gratification (82.6%), love (63.6%) and help in problem solving (59.1%) were the most frequently mentioned responses, whereas girls gave highest priority to protection (96.3%), followed by love (95.3%), help in problem solving (85.2%), care (81.5%) and help in studies (63.3%). Only 26.1% of the girls mentioned that they turned to boy friends for sexual gratification. This indicates that except for the need for love and mutual support in problem solving, the expectations of the love partners are different, with boy friends attaching greater importance to sexual gratification and girl friends mainly expecting protection, care and help in studies from their love partners. This, in turn, suggests that motivation for love may be different and even inconsistent for male and female partners in love relationships.

The university students relate to each other in a spirit of comradeship, which, however, recognizes hierarchy based on faculty of study, seniority and gender. The senior students are always addressed as older brother (*ayya*) or older sister (*akka*) depending on gender. Similarly those of junior batches are addressed as younger brother (*malli*) or younger sister (*nangi*). The students of the same batch are addressed by first name, nick name (sometimes called “card”) or in other forms signifying equal status.

**Table 2: Batch of the Love Partner on the Campus by Gender of the Respondent (% Distribution)**

Batch of Love Partner	Gender of Respondent		Total
	Male	Female	
Same	34.9	32.6	33.7
Junior	55.8	8.7	31.5
Senior	2.3	41.3	22.5
No response	7.0	17.4	12.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	43	46	89

Campus love affairs usually conform to a hierarchical pattern where the boy friend of a female undergraduate usually comes from a parallel or a senior batch while a male undergraduate looks for a female partner from a parallel or a junior batch with a marked preference for the latter (see Table 2). An instance where a male undergraduate has a girl friend from a senior batch is as unconventional as a man with low educational qualifications seeking a female partner with superior educational qualifications in the society at large. Where love affairs occur between students of different faculties, a male undergraduate of a higher status faculty always looks for a female partner of an appropriate batch from a lower

status faculty. In contrast, instances of a female partner of higher status faculty having an affair with a boy of a lower status faculty are almost non-existent. Thus ragging reinforces a broader cultural pattern, in which, if a man and a woman were to enter a more or less permanent relationship it has to be an asymmetrical one where the man is always in a superior position (senior batch, higher status faculty, higher in age, taller in height) in relation to his female partner. For instance, in the Hindu caste system while an upper caste man can have a mistress or even a marriage partner from a lower caste (referred to as an "*anuloma*" union in the Hindu society), the reverse (*pratiloma* union between a higher caste woman and a lower caste man) is not possible. In a highly original analysis of relation between caste, race and gender, Andre Beteille saw this pattern as common to both caste and race pointing to common structural mechanisms that reinforce gender inequality cross culturally (Beteille 1991).

This pattern of hierarchical partner selection gives rise to a particularly unfavourable situation for females in the Medical Faculty and males in the Arts Faculty, both of whom expressed resentment regarding their position in the qualitative interviews. The female medical students probably overcome this problem by adopting a professional career orientation. The more favourable attitude towards ragging among senior male arts students as well as their greater inclination towards radical politics may be in part attributed to their marginal position within the status hierarchy and resulting implications for partner selection. The way ragging and other practices among the students contribute to unequal gender relations between love partners and among the students in general have been analyzed elsewhere (Silva, Sivayoganathan & Ratnayake 1998).

The mean number of love affairs held consecutively or concurrently by the students was 1.7. It ranged from 1.3 for girls to 2.0 for boys. A total of 48.6 % of the students (58.4% of boys and 37.9% of girls) mentioned they had experienced a break up of a love affair in the past.

### *Attitude Towards Premarital Sex*

In this study attitude towards premarital sex was explored by obtaining the respondents' level of agreement to a series of 22 statements using a five-point Likert Scale.

**Table 3 : Statement: "A man should have sexual experience before he marries"**

Response	Score	% of Responses		
		Male	Female	Total
Strongly agree	1	23.0	4.7	14.2
Agree	2	31.1	12.2	22.0
No opinion	3	13.0	11.5	12.3
Disagree	4	19.9	20.9	20.0
Strongly disagree	5	13.0	50.7	31.4

Thus a total of 36.2% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "a man should have sexual experience before he marries". The results indicate that a majority of students (51.4%) do not consider it appropriate for males to engage in premarital sex. However there is a gender difference in the response in that while most males (54.1%) consider it acceptable for males to engage in premarital sex, most females (51.5%) considered otherwise ( $p > .01$ ). This shows that there is considerable disagreement between males and females regarding the appropriateness of premarital sex. Arts students were significantly more tolerant of premarital sex for males compared to medical students ( $p > .01$ ).

On the other hand, there was a considerable concern for preserving female virginity (understood in terms of preserving an intact hymen until the first wedding night) among both male and female students.

**Table 4 :** Statement given to male students: "I expect to marry a woman who is a virgin"  
Statement given to female students "I expect to be a virgin at marriage"

Response	Score	% of Responses		
		Male	Female	Total
Strongly agree	1	28.6	70.3	47.8
Agree	2	28.0	10.2	22.1
No opinion	3	19.3	8.2	14.4
Disagree	4	18.0	1.4	10.4
Strongly disagree	5	6.2	4.3	5.4

Thus a total of 69.9% would like to conform to the customary requirement of maintaining an intact hymen of the female partner until the time of marriage. The expected conformity to this custom is greater among female respondents (mean score 1.5) compared to male respondents (mean score 2.4), indicating a more cautious approach to premarital sex among female students ( $p > .01$ ). There was no statistically significant difference between arts and medical students regarding response to this question.

In order to ascertain the attitude towards forms of sexual activities not harmful for female virginity, responses to the statement "It is OK for a man to have sex with a woman before marriage as long as it does not lead to loss of virginity" were examined. A total of 27.6% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The agreement for this sexual compromise was greater among male students (mean score 3.0) compared to female students (mean score 4.2) ( $p < .01$ ). No statistically significant difference in this regard was found between arts and medical students.

On the whole the data indicate that there is a relatively conservative attitude towards premarital sex among the undergraduates. This is consistent with the findings of other research among youth in Sri Lanka (Basnayake 1986, 1988). In general there is a more permissive attitude towards males. The gender differences in the responses indicate that there is considerable scope for disagreement between males and females regarding how far and in what ways they should be sexually active prior to marriage. It also implies that where males would like to have penetrative sex they must normally obtain it outside the framework of love relations within the campus. This in turn has implications for sexual risks of both male and female students.

### ***Sexual Knowledge***

In this study knowledge of students regarding reproductive health, sexuality, STDs and risk reduction was assessed using a series of questions. Medical students had a much higher knowledge compared to arts students in all these areas. There was a complex vocabulary for describing various sex acts among students but this vocabulary was more firmly established among male students compared to female students. A total of 86.4% of the students knew about interfemoral sex (male achieving climax by inserting the penis between the partner's thighs), but they showed reluctance to use the relevant colloquial term "*galkapanawa*" in public and in the presence of girls in particular. Some 41% believed that, by menstruating women flush their body of dirty substances once a month. Among the respondents 14.4%, most of whom were arts students, believed that eating unripe pineapple is an effective remedy for eliminating conception (see for comparison Basnayake 1986, 1988). A total of 93.2% in the sample had heard about HIV and 97.4% had heard about AIDS. In the sample 69.6% had seen a condom, 74.4% knew where to obtain condoms, 14.5% had purchased a condom and 14.9% had used it at least once. However, only 41.2% of female respondents had ever seen a condom, 49.3% knew where to obtain them, only 1.5% had ever purchased one and 4.5% had ever used it. It is interesting that even among the female medical students only 57.5% had ever seen a condom.

### ***Sex Behaviour***

Data on male-female sex behaviour were obtained by asking respondents to identify sex behaviours that they have ever engaged in from among a properly pretested list of twenty four sex behaviours identified through the qualitative phase of the study (For details see Schensul & de Silva 1999). This included any sex behaviour with love partners as well as those with other partners of the opposite sex, including any casual sex partners.

It is evident that there is a wide range of male-female sex behaviour among the university students (see Table 5). It ranges from initial sexual intimacies to full penetrative sex. These responses may be seen as manifestations of the "sexual script" (Simon & Gagnon 1984) in the Sri Lankan youth culture. Sex behaviour mostly reported are those that avoid direct genital contact. Penetrative sex is reported by less than 10% of the sample. Male insertion was achieved mainly through interfemoral sex (items 17 to 20) which may be seen as a strategy for preserving female virginity. It may be seen as a culturally acceptable risk reduction strategy important in premarital sex (both male to female and male to male) but risk associated with this sex behavior could be considerable where it is practised high between female thighs especially with underwear off. Further, the level of satisfaction females derived from this practice is unknown.

Female students have consistently reported lesser involvement in each sex behaviour compared to males. The gap between reported sex behaviour between males and females is lower in relation to initial intimacies and greater when it comes to direct genital contact and penetration. This indicates either under reporting by females relative to males or male students obtaining at least part of their sexual satisfaction from persons other than their university girl friends. The first possibility cannot be completely ruled out due to cultural values relating to the preservation of female virginity and its implications for possible under reporting of penetrative sex by females. However, we are inclined to think that it is more likely that the male students seek penetrative sex from persons other than their girl friends in order

to avoid complications resulting from perceived loss of virginity and/or unwanted pregnancy and come to terms with refusals by girl friends to have genital contact or penetration.

This may indicate a pattern of sexual behaviour where boys turn to their girl friends for stimulation and emotional needs and to other partners who are mostly of a casual nature for any penetrative sex. Asked to specify their sex partners during the past six months, 39.2% of the male students mentioned their girl friends, 6.6% mentioned older women, 2.3% (only three males) mentioned sex workers and 2.3% mentioned married women. Interestingly a majority of those reporting sex with older females were those currently having love affairs within the campus.

A total of 58.5% of the respondents admitted having resorted to masturbation at least once. This varied from 94.2% for males to 12.6% for females (see for comparison Goonaratna & Kodagoda 1983, Peiris n.d.). The reported high prevalence of masturbation among males, in turn, may be an outcome of limited opportunities for penetrative or genital sex with their female love partners.

Only 15% of the male students reported any male-to-male sex experience. In contrast, less than 5% of the female students reported any female-to-female sex experience. The key informant and open-ended interviews indicated that there was considerable social stigma attached to any instances of female-to-female and, to a lesser extent, male-to-male sex relations within the student community.

**Table 5: Reported Male-female Sex Behaviour by Gender of Respondent**

Behaviour	% Reporting		
	Male	Female	All
01. Sitting close	98.7	86.0	92.7
02. Boys head on girl's shoulder	75.8	52.1	64.5
03. Boys head on girl's lap	69.6	42.3	56.7
04. Hugging	70.7	40.7	56.6
05. Love talk	81.5	62.5	72.4
06. Hold hands	82.8	60.0	71.8
07. Kissing	75.3	49.3	63.1
08. Touch female genitals with clothes on	63.1	12.9	39.5
09. Fondling breast	66.0	20.2	43.7
10. Kissing breast	58.7	16.7	38.9
11. Touch vagina with underwear on	50.6	10.9	32.0
12. Put boys tongue into girl's vagina	17.3	4.3	11.2
13. Rub penis between her breasts	17.6	2.9	10.6
14. Girl strokes his penis	41.2	10.9	26.9
15. Girl rubs the penis until ejaculation	31.2	6.5	19.7
16. Girl takes penis into her mouth	18.8	2.9	11.3
17. Insert penis low between her thighs with underwear on	39.7	17.3	25.6
18. Insert penis low between her thighs with underwear off	34.2	7.4	21.6
19. Insert penis high between her thighs with underwear on	33.5	5.9	20.6
20. Insert penis high between her thighs with underwear off	32.1	5.2	20.6
21. Put the penis partially into vagina	16.0	0.7	8.8
22. Put the penis in her anus	4.5	0.7	2.7
23. Full vaginal penetration/withdrawal	10.3	0.7	5.8
24. Full vaginal penetration/ejaculation	9.0	2.2	5.8
N =	149	163	312

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

1. It is possible to obtain reliable information about sexuality from youth in countries like Sri Lanka through an appropriate mix of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Instead of going straight into large scale surveys of KAP as was initially done by agencies like WHO, it would be best to initiate the research process with qualitative techniques like key informant interviews, focus group discussions and free listing and gradually develop appropriate quantitative procedures like anonymous self-administered questionnaires (Parker 1994).
2. Even though our data indicate that a majority of youth is opposed to premarital sex and there is a possibility that attitude toward premarital sex has become more rigid in response to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and the information campaigns via powerful electronic media etc., continued differences in the attitudes of males and females, the extended adolescence, increased opportunities for free interaction between young males and females in educational and employment spheres, gradual shift from arranged marriage to love marriage as well as increased exposure to a rapidly globalizing youth culture promotive of love and sex driven by powerful electronic media and increased opportunities for free choice of partners outside of parental control, clearly point to the need to educate youth about how to protect themselves against sexual risk and provide the necessary reproductive health services, particularly in settings such as higher educational institutions, military and free trade zones.
3. It is quite clear that awareness about HIV/AIDS is quite high. The reported low condom use is understandable given the reported low level of penetrative sex. It appears that most youth opt for non-penetrative sex with their regular partners besides resorting to masturbation. Their avoidance of penetrative sex is not so much in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic but as a perceived means of preserving female virginity. In the sexual

script only a small proportion of students achieves partial or full penetration. This in turn suggests that safety of non-penetrative methods employed in both same sex and heterosexual relationships must be carefully assessed and they become an explicit focus of adolescent health education programmes in Sri Lanka. It appears that the role of non-penetrative sex is one of the distinctive characteristics of premarital sexual scripts in Sri Lanka and possibly certain other countries in the region (Khan 1989, Fongkaew 1996). On the other hand, the discrepancy between males and females in the reported prevalence of penetrative sex suggests that most of the males who reported penetrative sex in fact do it with females outside the study sample, including commercial sex workers. Following the initiation into sex, the drive for penetration among males may gradually enhance due to constant exposure to "language of penetration" (Khan 1989), blue films etc. Condom promotion is essential in the light of this drive for penetration.

4. Informed discussion about premarital sex is made difficult by lack of communication between parents and children on this tabooed subject, double standards applicable to men and women, shame and guilt typically associated with sexuality, absence of an easily communicable sexual language that meets acceptable standards of decency and the "generation-gap" between service providers including health professionals and youth in particular. The experience of interventions under the current project indicates that there are good prospects for promoting safe sex messages and informed discussions about sexual practices within same sex peer networks with appropriate participation of health professionals. This, in turn, may open opportunities for redefining of peer norms in a way that increases their opportunities and minimize risks in the context of an expanding global youth culture.
5. Problems associated with extended adolescence, continued prevalence of conventional attitudes towards premarital sex despite the advancing age at marriage, contradictory attitudes

towards male and female sexuality, inconsistent male and female expectations within a love affair, the utilization of ragging as a basis for partner selection, inconsistency in reported sex behaviour between males and females and seeking sexual gratification through non-penetrative sex all indicate that the unresolved issues relating to premarital sex may contribute to youth unrest and radicalism among youth widely prevalent in the universities and society at large. This in turn points to the need for further research on the extent of sexual repression and its possible impact on level of social discontent and political radicalism among various categories of youth in Sri Lanka. Tensions associated with premarital sex and difficulties in the domain of love may be underlying factors in a range of social problems in contemporary Sri Lanka, including the problem of youth suicide, youth insurgency, drug addiction and alcoholism.

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## Notes

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