

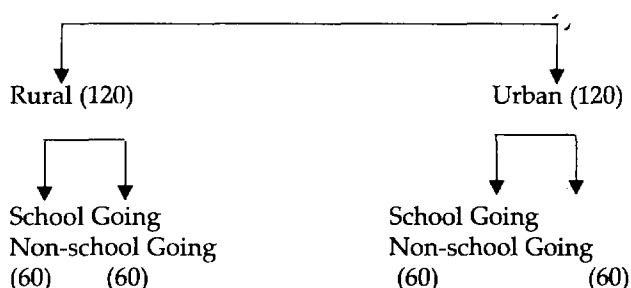
Knowledge Regarding Human Sexuality Among Adolescent Girls

Sir,

The adolescents' rising interest and curiosity about sex is a motivating factor to acquire information about it. Clashing face to face with the urge to explore sexuality are the preset social norms and taboos. This leads to many conceptions and misinformation resulting in some daring girls trying to experiment and even become pregnant or bear the brunt of sexually transmitted diseases (STD). In this context, a study was undertaken to assess the knowledge regarding human sexuality among a cross section of rural and urban adolescent girls and to study the impact of school going nature on it. With this view, rural area abounding Doddabalapura (Bangalore rural district) and slum areas around Chamrajpet in Bangalore urban district were selected. Study population included 240 girls in the age group 12 to 18 years equally representing urban and rural areas and also equally representing school and non-school going in each of the areas.

The sample is depicted in the following way.

Adolescent Girls



Of the 240 girls, only 76.3% were informed about sex, 2.9% did not have any information about sex. More number of urban girls (CR Value 3.49 $p < .01$), even the urban non-school going girls were well informed about sex when compared to their rural counterparts. This could be because of greater exposure of urban adolescent girls to the outside world or it might be that rural girls did not want to admit their knowledge openly on account of the closed society they lived in. TV/Films were the major source of information for more number of rural girls where as for urban girls it was only one of the sources. Friends seemed to be major pool of information for urbanites as there is more scope for social gatherings for them that facilitate peer group interactions. It is surprising that some urban girls claimed their mothers to be the source of information. This can be attributed to the higher literacy status of urban mothers and also the intimacy of their relationship in spite of most of them being working mothers.

Freedom to communicate with adolescent boys was restricted for the girls irrespective of the location and school going activity. Significantly more number of urban girls (CR 5.32 $p < .01$) admitted that they were open to friends regarding this issue. The reason for others not discussing may be because the subject of sexuality in itself is considered an 'adult issue' and a taboo or it may be that some respondents were wary of revealing such personal information. When asked about their knowledge of STD/HIV/AIDS, more number of urbanites were informed (CR 3.63 $p < .01$) which could be explained by the accessibility factor in the urban environment. And also significantly higher number of rural girls were ignorant as they were less open and bound by social taboos.

With the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS and STDs, all the state governments are targeting the younger generation by introducing Information Education and Communication (IEC) activities in the schools since the past few years. Our study reflects that very little has been achieved in this direction. And the question remains, what about the non-school goers? It is time, we gear up and plan some focused attention on them. Studies based on such results should strengthen the programme strategies that are targeted at promoting understanding about positive sexual behavior both in the schools and in the community. The dearth in the knowledge regarding different aspects of sexuality could be attributed to the problems faced in introducing sex education in schools.

This study created a base for the authors to start a variety of training programmes in this direction at NIPCCD (National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development).

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