

# ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY, PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

(A Prospective study of 100  
Adolescent Pregnancy Terminations)

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## SUMMARY

A prospective study of 100 adolescent pregnancy terminations is presented. The study was conducted in collaboration with social workers and each adolescent was interviewed in detail to study marital, educational and occupation status, circumstances culminating in pregnancy, contraceptive usage, outlook of the adolescents and parents towards pregnancy etc.

The magnitude of the problem of adolescent sexuality, pregnancy and abortions, and the steps to be taken to minimize the social and diagnostic consequences are outlined.

## Introduction

Adolescents comprise 10% of the population and with increasing birth rate they will continue to form a large part of the society. Further teenage girls account for a large share of illegitimate births and abortions. Earlier sexual maturity, later marriages and greater opportunities for urban lifestyle suggest that a developing country like India, will be increasingly confronted with problems of adolescent sexuality, pregnancies and terminations.

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## Material and Methods

We are presenting herewith a prospective study of 100 consecutive adolescent pregnancies at L.T.M.M. College and L.T.M.G. Hospital, Sion, Bombay 400 022, India.

The study was conducted in collaboration with Social Medicine Department of the hospital and the interviews of these girls were jointly conducted by the authors personally alongwith medical social workers.

The aim of the study was to study the incidence of the adolescent pregnancy in relation to marital status, education and occupation of the girl. A social effort was

made to study the circumstances culminating in pregnancy, outlook of adolescents and parents towards M.T.P. contraceptive usage and complications during M.T.P.

**Observations and Analysis**

**Age Distribution and Marital Status:** Out of 100 girls studied, age distribution and marital status is as shown in Table I. The majority were unmarried (91%). A large group (44%) were below the age of 16 years. This demonstrates clear shift in the indulgence of sexual activity at younger age. Of the 9 married girls, 3 were below 16 years indicating problems of child marriage even today in our country.

**TABLE - I**  
**AGE DISTRIBUTION AND INCIDENCE**

Age	Unmarried Patients (%)	Married Patients (%)	Total (%)
11 - 13	9 (100%)	-	9
14 - 16	32 (91.4%)	3 (8.6%)	35
17 - 19	50 (89.3%)	6 (10.7%)	56
Total	91	9	100 (100%)

**Occupation, Educational Background:** Of the 100 girls, 69 had no specific occupation, most of whom were drop out from the schools, 15 were employed either as part time house servant (5); sweeper (4); factory workers (6) 7 were still studying in the schools. Nine who were married were housewives. This analysis clearly indicates problems faced by child labourers and the exploitation, especially among factory workers, house servants etc. Majority of them were having meagre income of Rs.200-300 per month only. High incidence in unmarried unoccupied adolescents can be explained on the basis of less

structured leisure time, more association with peer groups, intimacy with neighbours and more time for experimentation with heterogenous sexual relationship and unprotected coitus.

Most of them were illiterate viz. 40, 53 were in schools. Only 6 were in college and 1 was pursuing higher studies. Low level of education explains poor knowledge of biology and consequences of unprotected coitus, and less cautiousness amongst heterosexual relations.

As regards knowledge of contraception and reproductive biology few i.e. 12 were aware of contraceptive use especially oral pills and condoms. Of these 7 couples had used condoms occasionally.

**TABLE - II**  
**REASONS FOR RELATIONSHIP**

Reasons	No. of cases
Promise of marriage	52
Insisted on by boyfriend	9
Received gifts, money	18
Lack of knowledge about sex	13
To please the man	10
Living together with the man	7
Total	100

In this study, majority of the adolescent girls conceived following willed coitus. Reasons included promise of marriage, gifts, insistence by boyfriend, to please the man etc. Of 13 who did not have adequate sex knowledge, 3 were in fact raped, but no complaint was lodged due to fear of social discrimination. This shows that most of the conceptions occurred in willed coitus which was unprotected.

**Attitude of the adolescent and parents towards Pregnancy, Abortion and Marriage :** 27% had positive attitude towards pregnancy. They expressed desire to con-

tinue and unwillingness to terminate pregnancy. All the terminations took place due to parental insistence or social consequences. 45% had negative attitude and expressed the view to get rid of pregnancy and were not emotionally disturbed over abortion. 23 were indifferent. Rest (5) were uncertain inspite of proper counselling and could not make up their mind whether to continue or not. They underwent abortion for parental insistence.

As regards parents reaction towards pregnancy in unmarried adolescents, 20 did not approve of the conduct and disowned their daughter, who was brought by a relative. Another 30 were indifferent and brought their daughter as though to treat a medical condition. Only 10 were concerned about their daughter and emotionally supported her. 31 did not inform their parents and had come with their boyfriends.

Majority of unmarried came late in the 2nd trimester increasing the risk of termination.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Adolescents comprise 10% of the population and account for a large share of illegitimate births and abortions. A crude measure of sexual activity among adolescents are the pregnancy rate which is only the tip of iceberg. Our study has confirmed the trend of adolescent sexuality in Indian population where high moral and ethical codes are exercised by society and family. This trend may be explained by influence of entertainment medias, liberalisation of standards and influence of western customs on our adolescents.

In studies made in western world, it is observed that their adolescents have some knowledge although inadequate about birth control (Aznar and Bennet

TABLE - III  
MODES OF TERMINATION

	MR	Suction	EAEI	Intraamniotic H/S	Total
Unmarried	7	9	70	5	91
Married	2	6	1	-	9
	9	15	71	5	100

All the pregnancies in single adolescents were terminated because they were out of wedlock, foremost fear being of social scandal. In 9 married adolescents, the reasons for the termination included desertion by the husband (6), and out of wedlock pregnancy (3).

76 were terminated by Emcredil, 2 intraamniotic saline. Only 24 were by menstrual regulations (9) and suction evacuation (15).

1961, Mussio 1962, Hassan and Falls 1964, Osofsky et al 1968). Adolescents here in India are ignorant of birth control or even normal reproduction physiology. They have lower level of education, from low socio economic strata and have no specific occupation. Our findings were similar to those of other Indian authors (Purandare et al 1979, Datta et al 1979) and confirm their observation that adolescents seek abortion when pregnancy is advanced

increasing the risk of abortion. The cause for seeking abortion has been same as others i.e. out of wedlock pregnancy, parental insistence, desertion by the father etc. However, in our study some of the mature girls wanted to continue pregnancy, although majority had negative attitude towards pregnancy. There were no psychiatric illnesses before or after abortion.

To conclude, after taking into consideration the magnitude of the problem of adolescent sexuality pregnancy and abortion and its epidemiological factors and social demographic and medical consequences; steps must be taken to minimize

it by sex education programmes covering not only the school/college going, but also non-school going.

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