

Students' Attitude and Perception on Premarital Sex: Basis for a Sex Education Program

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Abstract – This research determined the students' perception on premarital sex towards the development of an appropriate sex education program. Utilising descriptive-correlational research design through the survey method, the study was participated by 189 students from Western Colleges, Inc. Majority of the participants are young adult females, BS Criminology students, and members of the Roman Catholic Church. They have slightly positive attitude towards premarital sex but have low perception on it, specifically in terms susceptibility and self-efficacy. The participants' age, sex, program enrolled, and attitude were found to be associated with how they perceive premarital sex. This study clearly suggests that there is indeed a need to initiate a sex education program to inform students of the consequences of engaging in premarital sex. In designing such, it has to be ensured that the means of its implementation are age-appropriate, gender sensitive, and leaning towards behaviour modification.

Keywords – Family Planning, Premarital Sex, Reproductive Health, Responsible Parenthood, Sex Education

INTRODUCTION

Premarital sex or PMS refers to the act of engaging in any sexual activity with another person, of the same or opposite sex, before starting a married life. Wong [1] mentioned that it is actually a practice commonly done by people in their adolescent years. At present, PMS has been one of the reproductive health problems in great need of attention. This has been considered problematic because of the health risks that it can cause among those engaging in it. According to Hindin and Fatusi [2], early sexual activities, which include premarital sex, are often unprotected. Berhane et al. [3] added that such has been heavily linked to major consequences such as unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion, which can lead to death not only of the unborn child but also of the young mother. Aside from unwanted pregnancies, Lucero and Lucero [4] reported that increase in sexually transmitted infection cases has been linked to premarital sex practices.

According to Sherman et al. [5], among the reasons why premarital sex is becoming common among young people is their low and varying perception on it. Research regarding adolescent perception and practices as they relate to PMS has previously documented various sexually risky behaviors among adolescents. Aside from inconsistent condom use, multiple sexual partners and higher risks of earlier onset of sexual activities are prevalent among adolescents. Masumari et al. [6] said

that the risks are even higher among vocational school adolescents. According to Tangmunkongvorakula [7], against one in three for boys and one in seven for girls of general school adolescents have had premarital sex; they are also significantly more likely to have multiple sexual partners and not to use condoms consistently. Therefore, with this increasing acceptance of PMS among adolescents, it is imperative to assess and understand their knowledge, attitude and perception toward PMS.

Western Colleges, Inc. is a higher education institution located in Naic, Cavite. As an academic institution vying to train young professionals, it has catered its services to diverse breeds of student population coming from different towns adjacent to the municipality of Naic. It is noteworthy that a number of its students are single parents. Furthermore, personal interview with many students in the college reveal that they already have already been engaged in premarital sex practices in their early teenage years.

Considering the aforementioned facts, the researchers realized that an ideal sex education program for the students of WCI is necessary in order to manage, if not prevent, the emergence of problems cause by PMS practices among them. Nevertheless, an empirical finding is necessary to craft the sex education program suitable for them. Hence, this study is carefully designed to augment to existing data and information that may be

helpful in the realization of an ideal sex education program for the WCI students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to determine the WCI students' knowledge and attitude on pre-marital sex so that an appropriate sex education program can be recommended as part of the school's student services.

Likewise, the study specifically aimed to describe the demographic profile of the participants in terms age, sex, academic program, and religion; assess the participants' attitude towards premarital sex; measure the participants' perception on premarital sex in terms of susceptibility, severity, and self-efficacy; determine the significant relationship between the participants' demographic profile and their perception towards premarital sex; determine the significant relationship between the participants' attitude and perception towards premarital sex; and develop a sex education program for the WCI students to address issues on premarital sex.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study utilized descriptive-correlational research design to serve as the foundation of the study. Quantitative approach was used to describe the demographic profile and assess the attitude and perception on premarital sex of the participants. The relationship of the participant's profile and attitude on premarital sex to their perception on premarital sex was likewise determined in this research. It is expected that by utilizing this research design, a sex education program applicable for the WCI students would be formulated.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Western Colleges, Inc., a private community college in Naic, Cavite. As per observation, a number of its students are single parents who have already been engaged in premarital sex practices in their early teenage years. This is the major reason why this study is conceptualized. It is hoped that through this study, a sex education program ideal for the students would be conceived as part of the school's student and extension services.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were the students of Western Colleges, Inc. who were enrolled during the School Year 2020-2021. Simple random sampling was done to select the samples from the entire student population of the College. There were 310 students enrolled at WCI. Applying Slovin's formula, a total of 169 samples were extracted from the total population to

serve as the participants of the study. In doing so, all of the names of the currently enrolled students were put in an online roulette. From there, the identity of the target participants were continuously selected until the desired sample size was attained.

Research Instrument

A research instrument adapted from the study of Yau et al. [8] was used to gather the necessary data for the study. Constructed and designed using Google forms, the said instrument was divided into four parts: informed consent, demographic profile of the participants, attitude on premarital sex, and perception towards premarital sex.

The first part sought the participants' approval to participate in the study. This part explained how the participant can participate in the study, the risks involved in participating, and the assurance for data confidentiality.

The second part, which is the demographic profile, was where the participants would provide the following personal information: age, sex, program, religion, and socio-economic status.

The third part measured the participants' attitude towards premarital sex. In here, the participants were asked to rate their level of agreement through a four-point Likert scale on the 10 statements presented in the questionnaire. The findings herein were obtained by computing for the mean score in reference to their answers in the prepared 20 statements. Then, the result was further categorized into 'very positive' if the mean range was 3.25-4.00; 'positive' if the mean range was 2.50-3.24; 'slightly positive' if the mean range was 1.75-2.49; and 'not positive' if the mean range was 1.00-1.74.

The fourth part of the research instrument aimed to measure the participants' perception on premarital sex. Utilizing the principles of Health Behaviour Model as cited in the article of Champion and Skinner [9], ten statements for perceived susceptibility, six for perceived severity, and eight for perceived self-efficacy were prepared for the participants to rate according to their level of agreement using a four-point Likert scale. Their responses were interpreted using the following equivalent scale: 'highly perceived' if the mean range was 3.25-4.00; 'fairly perceived' if the mean range was 2.50-3.24; 'slightly perceived' if the mean range was 1.75-2.49; and 'not perceived' if the mean range was 1.00-1.74.

Before the devised research instrument was utilized in the data gathering phase, it was subjected to validation and pilot testing to ensure that it was accurate and reliable enough in obtaining the desired findings in the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the actual data gathering procedure, permission to gather data was sought from the school administration office. A consent had then been secured from the participants before they were allowed to accomplish the questionnaire. It was ensured that before the actual data gathering, the target participants were oriented of the objectives and importance of conducting this kind of study. They were also assured that their responses would be kept with utmost confidentiality. Since the questionnaire was developed via Google forms, a link was generated to be sent out to the participants. This link was disseminated among the participants by sending it via Facebook Messenger, SMS, and other messaging platforms available. The data gathering was set to transpire in one week after the link had been sent out. As soon as the participants' responses had been retrieved and collected, these were arranged and tabulated in a carefully designed data sheet for analysis.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Appropriate statistical tools and tests were used to analyze the data gathered in the study. Frequency and percentage were used to show the distribution of the participants in terms of their demographic profile. Likewise, in terms of determining the participants' overall attitude and perception towards premarital sex, the mean response and its standard deviation were computed.

Inferential statistical tests were also done to determine the relationship of the independent variables to the dependent variable. Chi-square test for independence was used to test the significant relationship of the participants' academic program, sex, and religion to their perception towards premarital sex. On the other hand, Spearman's rank order correlation was done to test the correlation of the participants' age, socio-economic status and attitude on premarital sex to their perception towards premarital sex.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' Demographic Profile

The participants of the study were the students of Western Colleges, Inc. during the second semester of Academic Year 2020-2021. Using Slovin's formula, 169 out of 310 students were expected to participate in the study. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 1, 189 students were able to participate thereby serving as sources of data for this study. For clear description of the participants of the study, they are categorized in terms of age, sex, program, and religion.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the Participants(n=189)

Characteristic	f	%
Age		
Adolescent (13-21)	76	40
Early Adult (22-39)	110	58
Middle Adult (40-65)	3	2
Sex		
Male	84	44
Female	105	56
Program		
BSEd	54	29
BEEEd	17	9
BSBA	29	15
BSPA	4	2
BSCrim	85	45
Religion		
Roman Catholic	141	75
Iglesia ni Cristo	18	10
Protestant	30	16

Age. The participants' ages are clustered following the age group of the developmental stages according to Erikson's Psychosocial Theory. In this way, a theoretical explanation can be drawn to describe the participants under each age group.

As shown by the results, the participants are dominated by early adults (22 to 39 years old) while the minority are middle adults 40 to 65 years old. Almost half of them, however, fall under the adolescent age group. Looking at Erikson's theory, the majority of the participants are in the midst of finding intimacy against being in an isolated relationship. According to Cherry [10], the major conflict at this stage of life centers on forming intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success at this stage leads to fulfilling relationships. Struggling at this stage, on the other hand, can result in feelings of loneliness and isolation. Furman and Schaffer [11] cited that people under this age group engage in sexual activities not only for pleasure but also to show their love and affection to their partner. Some adults, especially those who are single, engage in casual sex to alleviate that feeling of loneliness in their lives.

Sex. Results show that more than half of the participants (56%) are females while the remaining are males. Rangel and Garcia [12] stated that males and females express their sexuality differently and behave differently when engaging in high-risk sexual practices. More specifically, young men tend to become sexually active earlier. They also have a higher number of casual partners than young women according to Garcia-Vega et al. [13]. In contrast, Petersen and Hyde [14] cited that females usually have sexual relations within the context of a stable committed relationship, which is associated

with love and trust. They seem to feel a greater need of a stable partner to have sexual relations and tend to place a greater value on his/her faithfulness. Mate and Acarin [15] described women to value affection and social position, whereas for men, physical attractiveness is important. In the same line, Larrañaga et al. [16] found that university students have gender-based sexual attitudes that make them reluctant to use contraceptive methods, particularly condoms. An increase in macho as well as romantic attitudes in young people appears to contribute to the rejection of preventive measures in sexual relations.

Program. The distribution of the participants in terms of the degree program where they are enrolled was also included in this study. As shown by the result, almost half of the participants are taking up BS Criminology while the least are pursuing a bachelor's degree in public administration. It can be inferred, as well, that majority of the programs where the participants are enrolled in fall under the humanities and social science (HUMSS) field. While career choice is not proven to have association with the sexual behavior of an individual, Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh [17] stated sexual behavior among college students could vary according to their degree program because of the varying personal interests among the students, amount and intensity of coursework, and the nature and type of information that they study in their respective programs.

Religion. Many research endeavors have been done to establish the link of religion to the sexual behavior of an individual. Finke and Adamczyk [18] found out that Muslims and Hindus tend to have more conservative sex-related attitudes than do Christians. Likewise, in the studies Hayward [19] that survey people of different religions within the same nation, Muslims appear less likely than Christians to have premarital sex. Adamczyk and Hayes [20] have also found that Jews tend to have more liberal sex-related attitudes than do Christians.

In this study where the distribution of the participants according to their religion is also shown, finding reveal that all of the participants are profess Christianity. They, however, vary in terms of the denomination. Majority of them are Roman Catholics. Some are Protestants while the least are believers of the Iglesia ni Cristo. No matter what religion a person believes in, researchers have found that individuals who believe religion is important and are religiously active are more likely to delay first sex.

Attitude towards Premarital Sex

The participants' attitude towards pre-marital sex was also determined in the study.

Table 2. Participants' attitude on premarital sex

Statement	Mean	SD	I
It is normal for teenagers to have sex at school age.	1.67	0.76	NP
Having sex at school age can strengthen lovers' bond.	1.68	0.75	NP
Having sex at school age can be done because my peers do it.	1.77	0.77	SP
Having sex at school age can be done because it is common.	1.71	0.73	NP
Having sex at school age is personal and does not affect anyone.	1.87	0.85	SP
Having sex at school age is fine although it is the age a student should study for the future.	2.33	1.08	SP
Having sex at school age is a suitable behavior.	2.46	0.94	SP
Having sex at school age is OK even if it might lead to pregnancy and/or infection.	2.34	1.25	SP
Having sex at school age is OK even if it leads to loss of virginity.	2.31	1.04	SP
Having sex at school age is OK even if it hurts parents.	2.37	1.29	SP
General Mean	2.05	0.33	SP

Scale: 1.00 – 1.74: Not Positive. (NP) 1.75 – 2.49: Slightly Positive (SP) 2.50 – 3.24: Positive (P) 3.25 – 4.00: Very Positive (VP)

As shown in Table 2, the participants generally have a slightly positive attitude towards pre-marital sex. That could mean that they welcome the idea that pre-marital sex does exist and occur in their environment but engaging in it is something not ideal. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that among the statements presented in the table, the participants really find it not positive for teenagers to have sex at school age; people to view having sex as a way of strengthening lovers' bond, and students to have sex at school age because it is common.

It can be interpreted from the results that the participants are in unison at viewing sex as something that should be done by matured adults only and not by people of school age. While the practice of premarital sex is becoming common at this age, the participants believe that this should not be a determinant on how much a couple loves each other.

Perception on Premarital Sex

The participants' perception on premarital sex was also determined in this study. In here, their concept and insight on the different aspects of premarital sex, susceptibility, severity, and self-efficacy, to be specific, were determined and described.

Table 3. *Participants' perception on premarital sex*

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Susceptibility	2.07	0.995	Slightly Perceived
Severity	3.51	0.635	Highly Perceived
Self-efficacy	2.22	0.998	Slightly Perceived

Scale: 1.00 – 1.74: Not Positive (NP) 1.75 – 2.49: Slightly Positive (SP) 2.50 – 3.24: Positive (P) 3.25 – 4.00: Very Positive (VP)

Results (Table 3) show that the participants have high perception on premarital sex in terms of severity but have slight perception on the same in terms of susceptibility and self-efficacy. Such findings reveal that the participants are indeed aware of the seriousness of the problems and consequences by engagement in premarital sex. Specifically, they strongly perceive the severity of unsafe abortion, teenage pregnancy, and the financial consequence of premarital sex practices. Nevertheless, they are not that knowledgeable on the probability and concept that even they themselves could actually engage in premarital sex and on how they could prevent themselves from getting engaged in premarital sexual activities. According to Yau et al. [8], adolescents with slight perception on premarital sex susceptibility do not likely consider situations such as being in isolation with the opposite sex, dressing in a sexually offensive manner, having a boy/girlfriend, alcohol drinking, watching pornography, and drug use to be potentially leading to premarital sex practices. Meanwhile, those who have slight perception on premarital sex in terms of self-efficacy are not that capable of declining boy/girlfriend's invitation to nightclubs; as well as rebuking obscenity from their boy/girlfriends and forbearing boy/girlfriends' invitation to visit their home alone. They also demonstrate having difficulty to resist touch, hugs or kisses from boy/girlfriend; refuse sexual conversations with boy/girlfriend; and avoid an opportunity to be alone with boy/girlfriends.

Relationship between the Participants' Demographic Profile and Their Perception on Premarital Sex

The significant relationship of the participants' demographic profile to their perception on premarital sex was determined in this study. This was done to find out if each participant's characteristic serves as a determinant of their perception on the social issue being tackled in this research.

Table 4. *Relationship between the participants' age and perception on premarital sex*

Variable	R Value	P Value*	Decision
Age	0.5	1.96x10 ⁻¹³	Reject H ₀

*significant if ≤ 0.05

Table 4 shows that the participants' age has a significant relationship on their perception on premarital sex. With a p-value that is apparently less than five percent, it is signified that age has something to do with how knowledgeable and familiar a participant is on premarital sex. The R-value (0.5) implies a positive correlation between the two variables. This just means that higher perception on premarital sex can be observed among older participants than those who are younger. The same result was obtained by Behulu et al. [21]. According to them, younger individuals such as the adolescents tend to be more welcoming on the idea of engaging in premarital sex activities because they are in still in the process of discovering themselves and experimenting with others. Also, reiterating the notion of Furman and Schaffer [11], younger adults engage in sexual activities not only for pleasure but also to show their love and affection to their partner. Some adults, especially those who are single, engage in casual sex to alleviate that feeling of loneliness in their lives.

Table 5. *Relationship of the participants' sex, program, and religion to their perception on premarital sex*

Variable	X ² Value	P Value*	Decision
Sex	157.91	0.0001	Reject H ₀
Program	11.8	0.02	Reject H ₀
Religion	2.87	0.58	Accept H ₀

*significant if ≤ 0.05

Aside from age, the other variables that relate with one's perception on premarital sex are the participants' sex and the program enrolled (Table 5). Siramaneerat, et al [22] agree with this finding upon having mentioned that compared to females, males show more accepting attitudes toward premarital sex. The male-female differential in attitude toward sexual activity can be attributed to the double-standard of norms in terms of sexual initiation. Meanwhile, the significant relationship that exists between the participants' program enrolled and perception on premarital sex can be attributed to the varying personal interests among the students, amount and intensity of coursework, and the nature and type of information that they study in their respective programs, as claimed by Lyu, et al [17]. Those who are more relaxed schedule could be more likely engaged in premarital sex than those who have heavy academic workload due to their respective programs enrolled.

Relationship between the Participants' Attitude and Perception on Premarital Sex

This part of the study attempted to determine the possible relationship between the participants' attitude and perception on premarital sex. According to Pickens [23], perception is the general awareness (subjective) about things whereas attitude is the way of approach after a subjective assessment of how things would affect the person. Attitude is closely related to actions or behavior. In fact, it can positively or negatively affect a person's perception on something.

Table 6. Relationship between the participants' attitude and perception on premarital sex

R Value	P Value*	DECISION
-0.06	0.04	Reject H ₀

*significant if ≤ 0.05

In this study, findings (Table 6) reveal that the participants' attitude on premarital sex does have significant relationship (p-value is less than 5%) to their perception towards it. This means that the former does influence the manner on how they perceive this social

issue. Furthermore, as shown by the R-value (-0.06), there exists an inverse correlation between the two variables. This means that a person with negative attitude on premarital sex more likely has a better understanding on it and would have less tendency to engage on practices pertinent to it.

Sex Education Program for the WCI Students

In reference to the aforementioned results, the participants generally have slightly positive attitude on premarital sex, which means that they are somehow aware that this occurs; but they still believe that engaging in it is not ideal. In spite of it, the participants slightly perceive susceptibility and self-efficacy from premarital sex. Meaning, they are not that fully aware of the situations that would make them susceptible into engaging in premarital sex and the ways and means that they can do to avoid falling into that situation. Likewise, the participants' age, sex, program enrolled, and attitude are found to be associated with how they perceive premarital sex. Hence, these can serve as basis in planning for an appropriate sex education program for the students of the college.

Table 7. Proposed sex education program for WCI students

Goal	Strategy	Period	Office Involved	Success Indicator
Increase awareness on how to prevent committing premarital sex practices	Conduct of awareness seminar	Every semester	Office of Student Affairs	Number of student participants
	Distribute leaflets and flyers highlighting information on premarital sex	Whole year round	Health Services	Number of students who received the leaflets and flyers
	Incorporation of premarital sex education among the lessons in related courses	Whole year round	Office of the Dean and Faculty Members Concerned	Number of course syllabi with incorporated lessons on promoting premarital sex education Number of faculty members who incorporated premarital sex education in their class proceedings
Provide guidance for students prone to be engaged in premarital sex practices	Establishes guidance services for the students	Whole year round	Office of the Dean, Health Services, Office of Student Affairs	Number of students catered

Table 7 presents a matrix for the proposed sex education program for the WCI students. The proposed sex education program aims to increase awareness on how to prevent committing premarital sex practices and provide guidance for students prone to be engaged in premarital sex practices. The strategies planned to realize these goals are mainly health education and promotion activities which will be spearheaded by the different offices of the college. It is hoped that these efforts would cause behavior modification among the students and

subsequently decrease the incidence of premarital sex in the institution.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings gathered in order to answer the statements of the problem in this study, the following conclusions are formulated: Majority of the participants were early adults, female, members of the Roman Catholic Church, and taking up a degree in criminology. The participants generally have slightly

positive attitude towards premarital sex. Perception on premarital sex is high in terms of severity among the participants but it is found to be low when it comes to susceptibility and self-efficacy. Age, sex, program enrolled, and attitude are found to be significantly related to the participants' perception on premarital sex.

Addressing the limitations and delimitations of the study, the following are hereby recommended: In order to come up to a more comprehensive sex education program for the students, a related research can be conducted that would include the students' sexual behavior and practice among the variables of the study; Exploring other components of the participants' demographics can be done to further identify other factors that contribute to their perception on premarital sex; In the conduct of another study similar to this, the other concepts pertaining to Health Belief Model, aside from perceived severity, susceptibility, and self-efficacy, can be included among the parameters to determine perception on premarital sex; The sex education program developed in this study can be utilized in various educational institutions, provided that some modifications are taken to suit its target participants; The findings of this study can serve as related literature for other researchers who are conducting researches related to the subject of this study.

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