

An Overview of Adolescents' Sexual Behavior in Taiwan

Lee-Lan Yen¹ and Edwin Han-Wen Yen²

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A socioeconomic transformation in Taiwan has resulted in people's openness and diversity in sexual relationships. Research in the past twenty years could be summarized as follows: Most teenagers experienced their first masturbation during the age of 13-15. Among the senior high school students, 80% of the males and 30% of the females reported having masturbation. Male adolescents' and female adolescents' attitudes toward premarital sex were getting closer, no longer showing double standards in premarital chastity. Among the graduating students of junior colleges in Taipei City, intercourse rates increased from 20.7% in 1979 to 35.2% in 1988 for males and from 4.0% to 6.9% for females, both having an increase of nearly 70%. Of the vocational high school students having intercourse, 69.6% of them used contraception such as condoms (79.6%), oral pills (24.1%), rhythm method (53.3%) and coitus interruptus (40.2%). Drugstores (71.5%) and supermarkets (41.6%) are the main sources of contraceptives. Neither students nor teachers/nurses have sufficient sex knowledge. Their sex knowledge test results were below 65% and 80% respectively. Only 23% of high school students reported that their teachers taught sex education courses in detail. Only 1-5% of the 9th graders and 12.4% of the vocational school students have ever discussed sex issues with their parents. Pornographic magazines (61.1% of the 9th grade boys and 29.1% of the 9th grade girls) and erotic videos (18.5% high school boys and 9.3% high school girls) are main sources of sex information. 70-96% of the respondents agreed that sexuality education was imperative and should be carried out in school.

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Introduction

In the past years, talking about sex was a taboo. For Chinese people, sex is something they feel embarrassed and unwilling to talk about in public. The importance of female chastity before marriage has long been stressed in Chinese culture. Traditionally, marriage were arranged by families, and young couples did not expect to see each other until the day of the wedding. As a result of rapid socio-economic transformation and cultural change in the last four decades, Taiwan has become an urban and industrial society with widespread education and extensive contacts with the outside world. The traditional concept of dating, courtship, and premarital sex are changing. Many non-familial ideas and values have added to the pre-existing Chinese familial ideas.

In the recent years, pornographic entertainment materials such as risqué videos and magazines have been flooding Taiwan. The excessive exposure of pornography to the general public has led to some unhealthy ideas, particularly among the youth. Sexual relationships have been turning into more diverse and complicated, and some women groups and academics have been vocalizing for sexual liberation.

An island-wide survey on people's knowledge, attitude, and practice toward fertility and family planning in Taiwan was conducted in 1986 (Chang, 1986). A random sample of 5000 ever-married women aged 20 to 49 were interviewed. It was found that the percentage of women who dated their husbands without parental permission increase from 7.6% for the birth cohort of 1936-1940 to 28.0% for that of 1956-1960. The incidence of premarital sexual intercourse had substantially increased overall from 9.5% for the birth cohort of 1936-1940 to 38% for the birth cohort of 1956-1960.

Currently, the increasing rates of sex problems such as premarital pregnancy, abortion, sexual harass-

ment, sexually transmitted disease, rape and prostitution may cause negative impacts on the growing adolescents. In order to understand the status of adolescents' sexual behaviors in Taiwan, a literature review of selected papers related to sexuality in the last 20 years has been done. Although the researches in sexuality education and sexology in Taiwan are limited, many changes can still be found.

Adolescents' Sexual Behaviors

The rates of masturbation reported by adolescents were shown in various studies (Lin, 1978; Su, 1985; Chin, 1987; Jen, 1992; Wei, 1993). According to Table 1, for the ninth graders, the rates of 1985 are higher than that of 1978 regardless of sex. For the 10th to 12th graders, the rates of having masturbation were around 80% for males and 30% for females in 1992 and 1993. However, the rates of having masturbation increased with age. Wei's study (1993) indicated that there were 45.1% of males and 14.1% of females in 1993 reported having first masturbation during the age of 13-15. Only 5.6% of males and 4.6% of females reported having it earlier than the age of 10.

Historically speaking, men in Chinese culture have always had more sexual freedom than women. The number of men who want a virgin bride exceeds far more the number of women who desire a virgin groom. Cernade's study (1986) indicated that 22.8% of the students agreed on a un-married woman having sex with her fiance while 22.9% of the students agreed on a un-married man having sex with his fiancée (Table 2). The data showed that the double-standard no longer exists. However, males' higher rates than females' indicated that males' attitudes toward premarital sex were more open than females.

The percentages of sexual behaviors among high school students were shown in Table 3. Among the 9th grade boys and girls, in Taipei City in 1978, 13.9%

Table 1 Age and Percentage of High School Students' First Masturbation

		Percentage of Having Masturbation			
		9th grade	10th grade	11th grade	12th grade
Lin YY, 1978	Male	25 0	-	-	-
	Female	3 9	-	-	-
Su CF, 1985	Male	35 2	-	-	-
	Female	14 4	-	-	-
Chin YM, 1978	Male	-	-	-	70 9
	Female	-	-	-	17 1
Jen WC, 1992	Male	-	(80 0)
	Female	-	(30 0)
Wei HM, 1993	Male	-	(78 2)
	Female	-	(29 1)
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		Age at First Masturbation			
		<10	10-12	13-15	16-18
Wei HM, 1993	Male	5 6	13 5	45 1	14 0
	Female	4 6	5 7	14 1	4 7

@ Referring to the references

Table 2 Percentages of Supporting Pre-marital Sex among Students of Senior High and Vocational Schools, and Junior Colleges

	Male n=4330	Female n=3501	Total n=7831
Toward un-married females			
Having sex with casual dates	3 3	0 5	2 0
Having sex with the person she likes	7 9	1 1	4 9
Having sex with the person she loves	18 5	2 8	11 5
Having sex with the fiance	36 2	6 2	22 8
Toward un-married males			
Having sex with casual dates	3 5	0 4	2 1
Having sex with the person he likes	9 1	0 9	5 5
Having sex with the person he loves	18 9	2 7	11 7
Having sex with the fiancée	36 8	5 5	22 9

Source Cernade GP, Chang MC, Lin HS, Sun TH Adolescent Sexuality and Behavior in Taiwan International Area Studies Program University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1986

Table 3 A Contrast of Sexual Behaviors between Male and Female High School Students in Various Studies

	Lin YY, 1978		Chin YM, 1987		Wei HM, 1993	
	9th Graders		12th Graders		10th&11th Graders	
	Junior High in Taipei		Vocational High in Taipei		Senior High in Kaohsiung	
Physical Intimacy	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Holding hands,						
shoulder and waist-----	13.9	6.5	-	-	-	-
Kissing-----	3.2	1.6	38.5	24.6	37.2	29.1
Caressing-----	1.1	0.8	-	-	-	-
Caressing above waist-----	-	-	31.9	11.7	10.8	7.0
Caressing below waist-----	-	-	19.4	8.5	9.3	6.4
Intercourse-----	1.6	0.0	17.0	5.4	3.8	1.0

Sources: 1. Lin YY: A study of sex attitude, knowledge and behavior among the 9th graders. *School Health* 1978; 3: 1-17.

2. Chin YM: An Investigation on Sexual Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors of the 9th graders in Vocational Schools. Master's Thesis of National Taiwan Normal University, 1987.

3. Wei HM: An Investigation on Personal Characteristics and Sex Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors. Master's Thesis of National Kaohsiung Normal University, 1993.

of boys and 6.5% of girls reported to have held hands, shoulder and waist with their dates (Lin, 1978); however, the rates of kissing, caressing and having intercourse were fairly low. For the students of senior high schools, the percentages of sexual behaviors of the 12th graders of vocational schools in Taipei City (Chin, 1987) were higher than that of the 10th and 11th graders of senior high schools in Kaohsiung (Wei, 1993). However, it is inadequate for the researcher to make any comparison between these two studies since the target populations and years of studying are different.

Two studies focusing on the same target population by similar sampling procedures (Wang, 1979; Kuo, 1988) were available in learning the trend of sexual behaviors among the graduating students of junior colleges in Taipei (Table 4). The rates of males'

having intercourse with their dates were 20.7% in 1979 and 35.2% in 1988 while those of females with their dates, 4.0% in 1979, and 6.9% in 1988. Both males and females showed 70% increase within 9 years. The rates of all the sexual behaviors mentioned above males had were higher than those females did. For example, the rates of males having intercourse with their dates in 1988 and females' with their dates were 35.2% and 6.9%, respectively. With whom and with how many partners did the male students had sex? It was found that 14.6% of males had more than one sexual partner. In 1990, Taipei Sexual Disease Prevention Center reported that almost one-third of the male patients had their first sexual experience with prostitutes, and the rest of them with friends, classmates, and colleagues.

Among vocational high school students who had sexual experiences, 69.6% of them adopted contracep-

Table 4 A Comparison of Premarital Sex Rates between the Male and Female Graduating Students of Junior Colleges (=20 yrs old) in Taipei City, 1979 and 1988

	Male		Female		Total	
	Wang HC	Kuo MH	Wang HC	Kuo MH	Wang HC	Kuo MH
	1979	1988	1979	1988	1979	1988
Physical Intimacy						
Holding hand, shoulder,						
or waist-----	56.9	73.3	45.6	56.5	51.6	64.6
Kissing-----	38.9	57.8	37.7	39.2	38.4	48.3
Caressing above waist----	33.0	54.8	15.9	25.6	25.0	39.8
Caressing under waist----	26.1	44.2	8.8	11.4	28.0	27.4
Intercourse-----	20.7	35.2	4.0	6.9	12.9	0.6
More than one sex partner-	14.6	-	0.0	-	7.8	-

Sources: 1. Wang HC: Attitudes and Experiences Related to Premarital Sex among Graduating Students of Junior Colleges in Taipei. Master's Thesis of National Taiwan Normal University, 1979. 2. Kuo MH. An Investigation of Dating Behaviors of Graduating Students of Junior Colleges in Taipei. Master's Thesis of National Taiwan Normal University, 1988.

Table 5 Contraceptive Behaviors among the Adolescents Having Intercourse

Use of		Source of	
Contraceptive Methods	%	Contraceptive Devices	%
Oral pills-----	24.1	Health station-----	4.4
IUD-----	0.7	Hospital & clinic-----	9.5
Condom-----	79.6	Drugstore-----	71.5
Spermicides-----	0.7	Supermarket-----	41.6
Diaphragms-----	0.7	Mail order-----	1.5
Rhythm method-----	53.3	Ask someone to buy -----	7.3
Coitus interruptus-----	40.2	Borrow from family member-----	5.1
Douching-----	27.7	Family planning station-----	6.6

Source: Wang JC: The Factors Related to Contraceptive Behaviors among the 12th graders in Vocational High Schools in Taipei. Master's Thesis of National Taiwan Normal University, 1992.

tion (Wang, 1992). The contraceptive methods they adopted were shown in Table 5. For those who have adopted contraception, 79.6% of them used condoms, 24.1% of them took oral pills. Other contraceptive methods used frequently but less effective were rhythm method (53.3%), coitus interruptus (40.2%),

and douching (27.7%). The main sources for them to obtain contraceptive devices were drugstores (71.5%) and supermarkets (41.6%). Few students reported getting contraceptive devices from health institutes such as hospitals, clinics, family planning station, and health station.

Table 6 Rates of Correct Answers by the Respondents to Sexual Knowledge Inventory in Various Studies

Studies@	Subjects	Correct Answer(%)
Yen HW, 1977	Senior students of Teacher College	58.3
Lin YY, 1978	9th graders of junior high schools	64.7
Yen LL, 1979	Freshmen of University	60.0
Chin YM, 1987	12th graders of vocational schools	51.6
Kao YS, 1986	Teachers of High Schools	70.0
Yen HW, 1982	Practicing nurses of Health Stations	79.7
Chen WL, 1984	Students of Nurse Schools	76.4

@ Referring to the references

Adolescents' Sexuality Knowledge

One may question that the increasing sexual behaviors among adolescents were caused by learning more about sex. Actually, many researches reveal that the rates of respondents correctly answering on sexual knowledge tests were quite low. Studies conducted during 1977 and 1992 indicated that respondents averaged to correctly answer of 65% or less (Table 6). Even for the teachers and health professionals, the rates were less than 80%.

In the school system, curricula related to sexual education provided to students are limited. Only two chapters in the Health Education textbook for the 7th graders described reproductive physiology and family planning. Cernada's study (1986) showed that half of the teachers lectured the contents of reproductive physiology and family planning very roughly (59.6% and 55.5%, respectively). Only 23% of the teachers explained these contents in detail.

With regard to family education, the communication between adolescents and their parents is far below satisfaction. Among the 5th to 9th graders, about 14% to 32% of them discussed dating with their parents, and about 14% to 28% of them discussed physical changes in puberty with their parents. Those issues

concerning sexual behaviors, pregnancy, and contraception were seldom discussed (Bozell Public Relations, 1995). The rates of 12th graders of vocational high schools discussing sexual issues with their parents were also unsatisfactory. Although the rates in Wang's study (1992) were higher than those in Chin's study (1987), only 65.8% of them discussed the issue of dating, 29.8% of them discussed the issue of physical changes in puberty and 12.4% of them discussed the issues of sexual behaviors, pregnancy and contraception.

When school and family fail to provide sufficient sex education, adolescents are frequently misinformed by pornographic articles and pictures in the magazines. The percentages of having read pornographic magazines among the 9th graders were 61.1% of males and 29.1% of females (Lin, 1978). Nowadays, our society is full of risqué videos which become the handy and available channel for adolescents to obtain sex information. Wu (1984) conducted a survey and found that among the junior high students, 18.5% of males and 9.3% of females watched risqué videos.

Conclusion

It is amazing that the rates of approval of sexuality

Table 7 Percentages of Approval of Sexuality Education in Various Studies

Studies@	Subjects	Approval(%)
Yen HW, 1977	Seniors of teacher colleges	91 0
Yen LL, 1979	Freshmen of university	80 0
Yen HW, 1982	Practicing nurses of health stations	92 9
Chin YM, 1987	Teachers of vocational schools	91 6
	Students of vocational schools	86 9
	Parents of vocational school students	78 9
Mao WY, 1991	Parents of preschoolers	70 0
	Teachers of preschools	96 0

@ Referring to the references

education are fairly high (Table 7) About 70% to 96% of the students, parents, teachers, and nurses agreed to conduct sexuality education for adolescents (Yen, 1977, Yen, 1979, Yen, 1982, Chin, 1987, Mao, 1991)

While sexuality curricula are being offered to the students and sexuality training programs being implemented to the teachers, a series of sexual liberation movements have been vocalized and declared by many women associations and groups The relationship between Chinese men and women are rapidly changing As for the change in concept of sexual experience in the marital contexts, greater autonomy of mate-selection and dating has been accompanied by the increasing premarital sexual intimacy for women This trend of increasing premarital sex implies that the occurrence of women's first sexual experience tends to be ahead of schedule relative to the wedding day, or sometimes even earlier than engagement ceremony (Chang, 1994) Therefore, it is expected that the rates of premarital sex among adolescents will be increasing The number of unwedded mothers and illegitimate children will also increase Under these circumstances, the prevention of premarital pregnancy and AIDS infection become an imperative task of sexuality education in Taiwan

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臺灣青少年性行為研究之回顧

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臺灣因社經結構的轉型，兩性關係趨向開放和多樣性。回顧二十年來的研究，可綜合成以下結論。多數青少年在十三至十五歲之間開始自慰；高中男生和女生有自慰的比率分別為80%和30%。青少年對男女發生婚前性行為所持的態度已趨近，過去所謂「雙重標準」的現象不復存在。以臺北市五專五年級學生為例，1979年至1988年共九年間，男生有性交經驗的比率由20.7%增至35.2%；女生則由4.0%增至6.9%；增加幅度均達70%。已有性交經驗的高職學生中，有69.6%的人採用過各種避孕方法，如保險套(79.6%)、口服避孕藥(24.1%)、安全期法(53.3%)、和性交中斷法(40.2%)。避孕器材主要來自藥房(71.5%)和超級市場(41.6%)。「學生」和「老師及護理人員」的性知識均不足夠，他們在性知識測驗上的答對率分別在65%和80%以下。僅23%的中學生表示，健康教育課程中老師曾詳細解說與性相關的內容。只有1-5%的國三學生和12.4%的高職學生表示，他們曾與父母親談論過性方面的問題。色情書刊(61.1%的國三男生及29.1%的國三女生)和色情錄影帶(18.5%的國中男生及9.3%的國中女生)是獲得性資訊的主要來源。有70.0-96.0%的人同意性教育很重要，應該在學校內實施。

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