

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF YOUTHS IN HONG KONG

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Background information

The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong carries out Youth Sexuality Study (YSS) at every 5 yearly basis since 1981 to understand the changes in the knowledge, attitude and behaviour toward sex of youths in Hong Kong. The latest survey in 2006 comprises of in-school survey of students from Form 1 to Form 7 and household survey on youths aged between 18 and 27.

Sexual knowledge

There was a slight improvement in knowledge on conception in the recent YSS study as compared with previous studies. However, more than half of the secondary school students still had misconception about pregnancy. They were generally more knowledgeable about sexually transmitted illnesses but their awareness of the risk factors for human immunodeficiency virus transmission was lower than that of their counterparts ten years ago.

Around two-third of the respondents in the latest survey were satisfied with the sex education they had received as compared to just half of them ten years ago.

Sexual attitude

Youths in Hong Kong tend to be more open towards sex. They revealed more acceptance towards "public intimacy between two sexes", "premarital sex" and "cohabitation". However, the acceptance of other people having "multiple dating partners", "multiple sexual partners" and "induced abortion" had declined.

Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that they would get married in the future. Among them, there was an increasing trend of cohabitation before marriage.

The mean ideal parity had steadily dropped from 1.8-1.9 children in 1991 to 1.5-1.6 children in 2006. The mean ideal age of having children was 28.3 for female and 30.2 for male respondents.

Sexual behaviour

Dating experience

The percentage of students who had dating experience had significantly increased among both boys and girls, reaching 46% for Form 1-2 students and 60-63% for Form 3-7 students. The main reason for dating was because "dating is common". The prevalence of dating behaviours such as "holding hands", "embracing" and "kissing" had risen significantly.

Sexual intercourse experience

The prevalence of youths who had sexual intercourse experience continued to rise, reaching 11% overall. In 2006, 13.2% of male respondents had experienced sexual intercourse, representing an increase of more than 50% from 8.7% in 2001. For female respondents, 8.2% experienced sexual intercourse, representing an increase of nearly 60% from 5.2% in 2001. 4.7% of girls and 6.8% of boys reflected that they had their first sexual intercourse when they were below age 15. Both percentages had doubled in the last ten years. The most common reason for girls to have their first sex was to accommodate the request of their partners while the most common reason for boys was to satisfy their sexual desire.

Around 40% of in-school students did not practice contraception while only 6-7% of house hold survey group did the same. Male condom was the most commonly used contraceptive method amongst the youths in Hong Kong. Majority of them had not sought contraceptive advice.

Pregnancy

The pregnancy rate among 18-27 year-old female respondents dropped from 16% in 1991 to 10% in 2006. 28% of the pregnancies resulted in birth of the baby and 50% were terminated by abortion; whereas in 1991, 56% of the pregnancy had resulted in birth of baby while 32% were aborted.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that our local figures were still relatively conservative when compared to most western developed countries, they reflected that the youths in Hong Kong had a tendency towards increased openness in sexual attitude and activity, without a clear improvement in sexual knowledge amongst them. This can lead to devastating consequences like unintended pregnancy and transmission of sexually related infection that can in turn lead to physical and psychological morbidities.

Sexuality education is a lifelong process and is best initiated at an early age by parents in the family. Although sexuality education is widely accepted among local Hong Kong parents, many of them still feel embarrassed or inadequate to talk openly with their child about sex. In schools, sexuality education is not incorporated as a mandatory subject in the curriculum. Many schools still place low priority on sexuality education in the face of a tightly scheduled examination-oriented system. The Education Division of the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong is one of the leading providers of sexuality education and training in Hong Kong. Targeting on the deficiencies identified in the YSS and the inherent

problems of sex education in Hong Kong, our strategy has been focused on four major areas, namely, (1) frontline school programs, (2) programs for trainers, (3) resources backup and (4) youth volunteer scheme. We aim at providing comprehensive sexuality education on four basic objectives: Information, Attitudes, Skills, and Responsibility.

The Youth Health Care Centres of the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong are unique centers that provide integrated medical and counseling service in sexual and reproductive health for unmarried youths under the age of 26 in Hong Kong. Our service comprises of health checkup including screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, contraceptive counseling including provision of emergency contraception, pregnancy counseling including abortion service, individual sexuality counseling including dating workshop. We aim not only to equip our youths with the positive attitudes and correct information about sexuality but also practical skills and backup to allow them to enjoy a healthy and responsible relationship with the opposite sex.

Government support is crucial in the continue improvement and development of sexuality education and study in Hong Kong. We hope the Government can dedicate more resources and provide co-ordination in supporting youth sexuality education and services in Hong Kong, so as to deliver the best to our futures.