

Reproductive Health Knowledge and Attitudes among Secondary School Children in Sri Lanka

Gayathri Abeywickrame
Department of Demography

For many decades researchers have paid attention to reproductive health research that explores mainly married women's reproductive health. However, less attention has been given to explore adolescent students' reproductive health issues. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the reproductive health knowledge and attitude of secondary school children in Sri Lanka. Such an investigation would help to evolve innovative solutions in advancing knowledge by employing new technologies in order to ensure healthy environment for the adolescent population in the country. Data for the study was obtained from 110 students who were in grade 11, representing rural and urban schools in the Colombo district. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to gather data.

The findings revealed that all the respondents were aware of the secondary sex characteristics irrespective of gender and sector. Urban students were more aware of reproductive health matters than rural students. Female students had better awareness than their male counterparts. Female students who were in, urban and international schools were more aware about reproductive health issues than rural female students. The knowledge and perceptions on practices during menstruation among rural female students was poor. Majority of the students had considerable knowledge about reproductive hormones, reproductive system, child sex abuse and sexually transmitted infections. Male students were more likely to be involved in love affairs for fun and to reduce stress, while many of the female students were not in favour of a love affair as it might adversely affect education. The study further revealed the attitudinal gaps that exist between urban and rural students. Furthermore, it revealed that, friends and peers were more influential sources of obtaining reproductive health information than school teachers and parents. Internet has become the main source of obtaining information on reproductive health knowledge for the international school students. Attitudes on pre-marital sex show that urban students especially, international school students tend to favor premarital sexual relationships as a source of gaining experience. Majority of students in all sectors had agreed that reproductive health knowledge is essential and that it needs to be included as a subject in the school curriculum. These findings suggest that policies and programmes should be more focused on educating rural students and also awareness programmes need to be implemented separately for male and female students to address their specific issues.

Keywords: reproductive health, secondary school children, pre-marital sex, menstruation