



Sexual behavior among students of a public university

Comportamento sexual entre acadêmicos de uma universidade pública

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Objective: to analyze the sexual behavior among students and their relation to sex. **Methods:** an analytical study with 154 students accomplished through a form containing socioeconomic and sexuality issues. **Results:** most of the participants were female, aged between 18 and 30 years old, and initiated sexual life before 18 years old. Participants reported finding necessary information about sexuality especially in conversations with friends and on the internet and found to have satisfactory knowledge. **Conclusion:** the student's present vulnerabilities, such as early onset of sexual practices and barrier with the family dialogue.

Descriptors: Sexuality; Knowledge; Students.

Objetivo: analisar o comportamento sexual entre acadêmicos segundo o sexo. **Métodos:** estudo analítico com 154 acadêmicos, realizado por meio de um formulário contendo questões socioeconômicas e sobre sexualidade. **Resultados:** a maioria era do sexo feminino, com idades entre 18 e 30 anos, e vida sexual iniciada antes dos 18 anos de idade. participantes referiram encontrar informações necessárias sobre sexualidade principalmente em conversas com os amigos e na *internet*, e consideraram possuir conhecimento satisfatório. **Conclusão:** os estudantes apresentam vulnerabilidades, como início prematuro das práticas sexuais e barreira no diálogo com familiares.

Descritores: Sexualidade; Conhecimento; Estudantes.

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Introduction

Young adults that are those between 15 and 30 years old, experience a stage of life characterized by late adolescence or early adulthood, with all their biological and psychosocial changes, being a period that usually coincides with entering into the university⁽¹⁾.

Associated with the characteristics of this stage of life, the transition to higher education brings a series of changes and adjustments in the life of these young people, as a result of new social and subjective relationships that they should live, making it a vulnerable period of exposure to situations to health risk factors, especially those related to lifestyle, such as the use of toxic substances and unsafe sexual practices⁽²⁻⁵⁾.

Entering the university environment has been reported as a driving factor for the expression of sexuality since the young people are exposed to new experiences, such as the use of alcohol and other drugs, and they experience numerous influences being open to new situations previously prohibited or hindered by family proximity. Freshmen students are showed as the most vulnerable to the choice of safer sex practices as a result of not having contact with the subject in academic education, not acquiring the specific knowledge or experience care promotion situations and prevention related to the topic^(3,6-7).

From the understanding that sexual habits persist throughout the existence, there is the importance of safe behavior and formal information about sexuality, such as prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, given that such an understanding can contribute to the creation of specific actions in higher education institutions⁽⁸⁻¹⁰⁾.

There is a need to recognize the sexual behavior of the students to provide subsidies to reduce vulnerability and exposure to risk in sexual practices in the academic environment. Thus, this study aimed to analyze the sexual behavior between academics and their relationship with sex.

Methods

This study is an analytical type held at a public university located in the city of Picos-PI, Brazil. Its population constituted to 450 students of both genders duly enrolled in undergraduate courses in History, Business Administration, Arts, Education, Nursing, Nutrition, Management, Information Systems and Mathematics.

The sample consisted of 154 students stratified by the mentioned courses, including individuals aged 18 years old or older, enrolled in the institution in the first-course period.

Data were collected after the students approach in the classroom and consent to participation in the months of October and November 2014, through a semi-structured form, which addressed the following topics: socioeconomic data, gender, sexuality, knowledge of the sexually transmitted infections and contraception.

The socioeconomic variables evaluated the age, race, employment status, family income, economic class, and aspects of housing and religion. About sexuality and its knowledge, there was the question: what does the young consider as sexuality? Who clarifies doubts about sex? If you have had sexual intercourse, what was the age of the first intercourse? How many partners? Which is the knowledge about contraceptive methods? Have you already used contraceptives? Which one? Moreover, Which is the knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases, treatment, and prevention?

For processing and analysis of data, the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used. Pearson's chi-square test with the significance of 5.0% was applied to verify the association between variables.

The study complied with the formal requirements contained in the national and international regulatory standards of research involving human beings.

Results

Of the 154 participants, the sample had a prevalence of females (60.4%), aged 18 to 30 years old (89.0%) with a mean and standard deviation of 21.5 ± 5.52 , and the mulatto race (48.0%). Most were descended from parents who have studied from first to fourth year (35.0%). Regarding economic classes, 51.3% were in the C1 and C2 classes, with an average income of R\$ $1,273.8 \pm 1259.77$; 80.0% have completed secondary education in public schools; 42.2% still lived with their parents, and 66.9% were Catholic.

About sexual behavior, 73.4% reported having had sexual intercourse and 66.2% started the practice under 18 years old; 62.28% with steady partners; 87.01% indicated the range of zero to three partners in the previous six months.

Just over half of the sample (51.3%) considered sexuality beyond sex intercourse and 42.3% sought information about sex with friends.

About sexually transmitted infections, 64.1% reported the use of condoms as prevention and 84.4% considered abnormal genital discharge. When asked about the treatment of a disease that had been transmitted sexually, 91.7% reported never having performed the treatment. In 8.3% of students who reported having performed therapy, 4.8% treated candidiasis and HIV disease, syphilis, herpes, chancroid and chlamydia treated by only one student each (Table 1).

Regarding the knowledge about contraception, there was a high prevalence of students who considered their satisfactory knowledge (81.8%), especially the use of condoms as a contraceptive method (50.9%).

Table 1 - Sexual behavior and knowledge of students about prevention of sexually transmitted infections (n=154)

Variables	n (%)
Knowledge about contraceptives	
Yes	126 (81.8)
Insufficient	23 (15.0)
No	5 (3.2)
Use of contraceptives*	
Condom	88 (50.9)
Intra uterine device	11 (6.4)
Contraceptive pill	38 (21.9)
Morning after pill	22 (12.7)
Diaphragm	2 (1.2)
Calculating	12 (6.9)
Knowledge about sexually transmitted infections	
Yes	136 (88.3)
No	18 (11.7)
Considering normal vaginal/penis discharge	
Yes	24 (15.6)
No	130 (84.4)
What do you do to prevent sexually transmitted diseases *	
Use of a condom	98 (64.1)
No sharing needle stick	20 (13.0)
Doing screening test	18 (11.8)
Looking for health care	17 (11.1)

*Multiple choice questions

By relating sexuality to gender, there was a statistically significant association with getting information on sex, the age of onset of sexual activity and some partners in the last six months. The age of onset of sexual activity ranged from under 18, especially males (85.2%), and the quantity of partners, being more frequent the number of zero to three for women (94, 6%), $p < 0.05$ (Table 2).

Table 2 - Data on sexuality and its association with sex (n=154)

Variables	Gender		p-value*
	Female n (%)	Male n (%)	
Concept			0.277
Sexual act	43 (46.2)	32 (52.4)	
Body and mind care	50 (53.8)	29 (47.6)	
Information about sex			0.001
Fiends/parents	62 (66.7)	24 (39.3)	
Health Professional/school/internet	31 (33.3)	37 (60.7)	
Had sexual intercourse			0.037
Yes	63 (67.7)	50 (81.9)	
No	30 (32.3)	11 (18.1)	
Age of the onset of sexual intercourse (years)			0.000
<18	50 (53.7)	52 (85.2)	
≥18	11 (11.8)	1 (1.6)	
Did not have	32 (34.5)	8 (13.2)	
Number of partners in the last six months			0.005
0-3	88 (94.6)	46 (75.4)	
4-6	5 (5.4)	12 (19.6)	
7-9	-	1 (1.8)	
>9	-	2 (3.2)	

*Chi-squared test

About the relationship between the variable sex and contraceptive methods they believed to be more effective, there was a significant association between the use of condoms and male (78.6%), $p < 0.05$ (Table 3).

Table 3 - Data on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and its association with sex (n=154)

Variables	Gender		p-value*
	Female n(%)	Male n(%)	
Condom			0.000
Yes	40 (43.0)	48 (78.6)	
No	53 (57.0)	13 (21.4)	
Intra uterine device			0.456
Yes	6 (6.4)	5 (8.1)	
No	87 (93.6)	56 (91.9)	
Contraceptive pill			0.000
Yes	35 (37.6)	3 (5.0)	
No	58 (62.4)	58 (95.0)	
Morning after pill			0.620
Yes	17 (18.2)	05 (8.1)	
No	76 (81.8)	56 (91.9)	
Diaphragm			0.637
Yes	1 (1.1)	1 (2.0)	
No	92 (98.9)	60 (98.0)	
Calculation			0.554
Yes	7 (7.6)	5 (8.1)	
No	86 (92.4)	56 (91.9)	

*Chi-squared test

Discussion

This research enabled to describe the profile of the sample: most subjects were female, aged between 18 and 30 years old, referring as mulatto, living with parents and not working, and belonged to social classes C1 or C2. These findings corroborate the latest research on socioeconomic profile of students of Brazilian federal universities of the National Association of Directors of Higher Education Federal Institutions according to which most of the Brazilian university students are young women living with parents and specifically in northeastern Brazil more than half of the students belong to classes C, D and E⁽¹¹⁾.

The university entrance has been considered an impulsive factor for the expression of sexuality characterized as a period of questions about values, beliefs and autonomy, and the establishment of limits on parental influence, favoring to experience numerous influences and openness to new experiences⁽⁶⁾, and justifying some findings about the sexual behavior and knowledge about sexuality, especially early sexual initiation and the fact that friends are the main asked about access to information on sexuality.

Of the 154 participants, 73.4% had already begun their sexual life, and about in 66.2% the onset occurred before 18 years old - in general before entering the university, especially the males, fact checked and explained from the culture established that men have sexual initiation required as a symbolic step of passage to adulthood and proof of masculinity, while women are still pressured to abstinence before marriage^(8,12).

There is a national and international standard worrying about sexual behavior with early initiation important in public health as poor habits acquired during adolescence and youth tend to persist throughout life⁽¹³⁻¹⁴⁾. Early sexual initiation brings the greater number of partners throughout life among other factors, which can facilitate greater chances of sexual disorders, antisocial behavior and unwanted pregnancies⁽¹⁵⁾.

Access to information through friends and the internet was prevalent in the sample. Lack of access to information or getting the wrong information, such as resulting from friends as well misinformed or unsafe sources, associated with weak government actions on sexual and reproductive health, and the unpreparedness of families, health professionals and others have contact and influence with this young can contribute to unsafe sexual practice without psycho-affective maturity and responsibility, imposing extreme vulnerabilities and risks to young people⁽¹⁶⁻¹⁷⁾.

On sexual behavior related to birth control, it was found that the contraceptives more used were condoms, followed by the oral contraceptive. For prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, the use of condoms had the higher percentage of men, as corroborated by other research⁽¹⁸⁻¹⁹⁾. Despite adherence to contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, there was a risk of the discontinued use of the method; youth people justify unprotected incurred due to the unpredictability of sex, interference this method to obtain pleasure during sex or confidence in the existence partner^(8,17).

Based on these findings, from the recognition of the sexual behavior of freshmen students and in line with the current literature on this subject, there is the need to strengthen education policies, including the sexuality in the University, to improve the orientation the young and the healthy sexual practices⁽¹⁹⁾.

Conclusion

Most participants of the study had already begun their sexual life before 18 years old, especially men. There was zero to three partners in the last three months. Just over half of them considered sexuality beyond the sexual act and nearly half was seeking information about sex with friends. Condom use was prevalent in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. About the relationship between the variable sex and contraception, there was a significant

association of the use of condoms by men.

The University is highlighted as a place of long-term for youth, favorable to the construction and reconstruction of knowledge and values. However, due to the plurality of groups that compose it, it favors often student's vulnerability to the health risk lifestyles such as alcohol and other drugs, unsafe practices in traffic and risky sexual practices, among others. Thus, it is possible and extremely important to build supportive environments within the university space for discussion of issues that directly interfere with their health, with emphasis on sexuality as a way to manipulate the student, knowing better the consequences of their choices and having tools for living a healthy sexuality, reducing their exposure to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and other risk factors.

Collaborations

Firmeza SNRM and Fernandes KJSS participated in the project design, analysis and interpretation of data. Santos EN, Araújo WJG, and Oliveira ESO contributed in drafting or critically review of the article for important intellectual content. Silva AR participated in the project design, analysis and interpretation of data and final approval of the version to be published.

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