

IMPACT OF PRE-MARITAL SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS ON THE LIFE ASPECTS OF YOUNG INDIVIDUALS

A. M. D. P. Abeykoon¹ and N. C. S. F. Warnakulasuriya²

¹Department of Indigenous Social Sciences; Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine;

²Department of Anthropology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

dushaabeykoon@gmail.com

Abstract

Pre-marital sex is the engagement of sexual intercourse before the marital vows which is accepted by a particular society. This research focused on the impacts of pre-marital sexual relationships on the lives of young individuals in Sri Lanka. Which investigated causes, consequences, and gender specific impacts of pre-marital sexual relationships and the prevalence of these issues in contemporary Sri Lankan society. Purposive sampling method was instrumented to determine the sample size which was 20. A mixed method which included data collecting methods such as, observations, participant observations, interviews, case studies and questionnaires were used to gather data. All 20 respondents were considered as 20 different case studies to gather in-depth data. The study revealed various mental, behavioral, educational, professional, and post-marital impacts. In conclusion female individuals experienced more pronounced negative impacts due to the socio-cultural context in Sri Lanka. The findings highlighted the importance of addressing and understanding the complexities related to pre-marital sex for the holistic well-being of young individuals in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Marital Vow, Pre-marital, Post-marital, socio-cultural context, Young Individuals

Introduction

Pre-marital sex has become a most discussed topic in the modern socio-cultural context. Pre-marital sex is known as the involvement of sexual activities before enrolling in the marriage institute. Pre-marital sex was historically considered a taboo or a sin by traditional societies. But during the latter half of the 20th century, pre-marital sex became more prominent among young individuals as an indicator of their sexual freedom as a main activity in couple formation in romantic relationships. Research conducted in the United States has revealed that 85% of Americans had sexual activities before marriage (Busby et al., 2010).

Young individuals tend to explore new experiences. Such as experiences in their sexual life. Young individuals' urge to experience sexual pleasure is supported by various modern aspects of society. As a result of that, the socio-cultural norms related to pre-marital sex have changed with time. At present young individuals engage in pre-marital sex in the contexts of both committed and non-committed romantic relationships based on various personal and other socially originated reasons. In addition, modern digital and social media have normalized sexual activities. Generalization of pre-marital sex through various media platforms within a globalized society has become an extra motivating factor for young individuals.

Pre-marital sexual relationships are not accepted within the socio-cultural context of Sri Lanka, which strictly believes that marriage provides the legitimate right for sexual activities. This condition of the society is supported by the multiple religions of Sri Lanka. Thus, without a doubt, young people who are engaged in pre-marital sex are directly impacted by the socio-cultural pressure in Sri Lankan society. Apart from that, numerous problems associated with pre-marital sexual relationships have directly and indirectly impacted the different life aspects of young individuals, including physical, mental, behavioral, educational, professional, and post-marital impacts. The impacts derived from pre-marital sex can be viewed based on the gender as well.

Pre-marital sex and the tendency of Sri Lankan young people to get involved in various problems have arisen in recent times. Numerous problems related to pre-marital sex and its consequences are discussed in Sri Lankan society. Thus, the main purpose of this study was to identify the impact of pre-marital sexual relationships on Sri Lankan young individuals and their life aspects with a holistic approach.

Literature Review

Pre-marital sex and youngsters

‘Pre-marital sex’ is a commonly discussed topic in recent times. Pre-marital sex is considered as an acceptable behavior by the modern young society (Ogunsola, 2012). Pre-marital sex is known as non-marital sex, youthful sex, young-adult sex, and adolescent sex. When it comes to the definition of pre-marital sex it can be stated as, “Pre-marital sex is the involvement in sexual intercourse by persons who have not engaged in marital vow or culturally recognized as having been enrolled in marriage institution” (Temitope et al., 2021, p. 289).

As emphasized in the above definition, marriage is the legitimate requirement which gives permission for pre-marital sexual activities in most of the societies. But despite having socio-cultural norms, pre-marital sex has become a major part of couple formation in most of the societies. Recently young adults who experience committed or non-committed romantic relationships have a tendency of engage in sexual activities before the marriage (Claxton & Van Dulmen, 2013).

Research conducted in the United States has revealed that, nearly 85% of Americans had sexual activities prior to the marriage, which was common among both men and women (Busby et al., 2010). Another research which focused on the secondary data analysis of data of the project R.E.A.D.Y (Researching Emerging Adults Development Years) which have collected data from multiple university students of the United States has indicated that, there is a trend of having pre-marital sexual relationships among young adults. 60.7% of the university students have engaged in sexual intercourse at some point of their lives (Brian et al., 2009).

Historically pre-marital sex was considered as a taboo in different cultures and religions. But the last half of the 20th century, or to be more specific, the young individuals’ ideas on the pre-marital sex became more liberal from mid-1960 and most importantly during the early 1970’s (Balgu & Abdu, 2019).

Causes of engaging in pre-marital sex

When it comes to the causes of engaging in pre-marital sex, demographic trends of young individuals’ life style have changed because of the reasons such as delayed marriage and considerably increased attention towards secondary education. These reasons have paved the way to develop a new development period in young people, known by the scholars as

“emerging adulthood”. During this period, young people tend to explore and experiment new experiences in their lives. Such as experiencing romantic relationships which are also includes sexual relationships. As a result of that, the socio-cultural norms related to pre-marital sex have changed (Brian et al., 2009). Thus, over the past few decades, the attitudes of young people have changed into the level of accepting the pre-marital sexual connections in both committed and non-committed relationships.

Scholars have recognized several causes for young people to engage in sexual relationships which have expanded in different causes based contexts. When it comes to the individualistic causes, research has revealed that young peoples’ desire to intimacy has led individuals for risky sexual relationships. On the other hand, individuals are having pre-marital sex due to the fear of losing their partner.

In addition, in the traditional approach young people could not make decisions directly about their sexual life. Their parents had the control over them. But at present, youth has liberty to choose close intimacy in their committed and non-committed relationships. When youth is not emotionally balanced to control their urge to sexual pleasure and fun they engage in pre-marital sex (Ogunsola, 2012). Apart from the above-mentioned traits, educational levels of the individuals, substance use, alcohol use are considered as other causes. In addition peer pressure which normalizes the pre-marital sex is another cause which is mostly impacted on males.

Apart from that, the development of digital media and social media has also played a major role in urging youth towards pre-marital sex. At present, romance and sex are mostly on television, internet, radio, smart phones, video games, music, comics, pornography movies etc.,

in these platforms pre-marital sex has been normalized. As an example, South Korean entertainment industry and its celebrities generally announce their marriages when their female partner becomes pregnant, which has normalized the pre-marital sex and pre-marital pregnancy (Kim, 2022).

Consequences of pre-marital sex

When it comes to the consequences of pre-marital sex, it has direct and indirect impacts on physical, mental, behavioral and socio-demographic aspects of young individuals (Ajiboye et al., 2014). Mental and psychological impacts are the mostly recognized impacts of pre-marital sexual relationships. Feelings of regret, guilt, shame, anger, lower self-esteem and feeling used are the common emotions which are present among individuals which have led to depression, anxiety and acute stress levels. A study which was conducted among college students has revealed that the pre-marital sexual activities outside the committed affairs have led to psychological distress (Fielder & Carey, 2009).

When it comes to the potential negative psychological outcomes of pre-marital sex, gender plays a main role. Research have demonstrated that the negative psychological outcomes are more pronounced for females than males. It is because men tend to report more pleasure and less guilt and regret after engage in pre-marital sex than females. But pre-marital sex may enable sexual victimization and feelings of used for women. When it comes to the physical impacts, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases can be identified.

Pre-marital sex and marital instability

It has recognized that the pre-marital sexual relationships have often found as a risk factor for marital instability and disruption. It has recognized that the factors such as age of sexual debut and number of pre-marital sexual partners

have functioned as a negative factor towards the quality of marriage life.

Research conducted in Nigeria by involving 3824 married people has revealed that the respondents who had pre-marital sex did not experience the same quality in marital bonds. Because it has revealed that those who did not have pre-marital sex had a more stable marital connection than those who had pre-marital sex (Ogunsola, 2012).

The reason was pre-marital sex leads to a sexual comparison with one or more individuals whom they had sex with. In addition, pre-marital sex causes sense of guilt due to the cultural context which does not support pre-marital sex. Because it is a behavior which is unacceptable in societies where the marriage is the legitimate requirement of sex. Throughout the history, sexual behaviors of people have been guided by cultural and religious norms. As an example Buddhism has viewed pre-marital sex as inappropriate behavior. In Bible it is declared as a sin. Islam religion has condemned the sex outside the marriage, even though they allow marrying multiple wives. In this situation individuals tend to hide their pre-marital sexual relationships. As a result of socio-cultural norms, it could also result in lack of openness in marriage, because of the fear to reveal the past.

With considering above factors, pre-marital sexual relationships can be introduced as an important factor which has impacted on individuals’ lives in various life aspects, which includes mental, physical, social, and cultural aspects.

Methodology

This study can be categorized under descriptive research type. The population of this study were the young individuals who have engaged in pre-marital sex at least once in their lifetime. Thus, purposive sampling method was used to gather data from respondents who were compatible with

the research objectives. The sample size was 20. Which was determined under the purposive sampling method. When it comes to the data collecting method, a mixed method was used to gather data, including questionnaire method, observation method, participant observation method, half structural interview method, and case studies. In order to gather in-depth data, all 20 respondents of the study were considered as 20 different case studies, which included 11 unmarried and 9 married respondents.

Results and Discussion

Age Groups of the respondents

Table 01 refers to the age groups of the respondents. 20 respondents of the study belonged to 3 main age categories as stated in the table 01.

Table 1: Age Categories of the Respondents

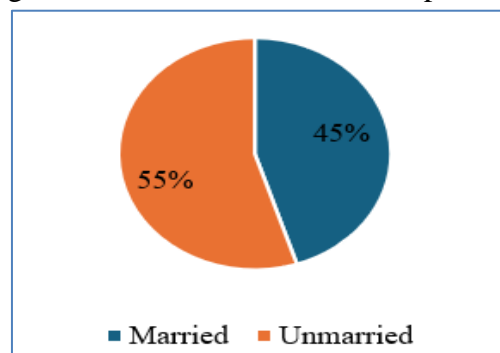
Age Category	Number of Respondents
20-25	4
25-30	14
30-35	2

The majority of the respondents belonged to the 25-30 age category. While the least number of respondents were included in the 30-35 age category.

Gender of the Respondents

80% of the respondents were female individuals and 20% of the respondents were male individuals.

Figure 1: Marital Status of the Respondents



As depicted in figure 01, 55% of the respondents which marked the majority were unmarried and 45% of the respondents were married.

The employment status of the respondents

50% of the respondents were employed in both government and private sectors. 25% of the respondents were unemployed. 25% of the respondents were undergraduates in both government, semi-government, and private universities

Reasons behind engaging in pre-marital sexual relationships

Since the sample was determined through the purposive sampling method, all 20 respondents had pre-marital sexual relationships. There were two main reasons recognized for the reasons for the encouragement towards pre-marital sexual relationships. The main reason where 85% of the respondents initiated pre-marital sexual relationships was to enhance their existing romantic relationships with their respective partners, to make the bond stronger and established. All these respondents started the sexual relationships with their consent. This tendency was recognized in previous research as well (Ogunsola, 2012). Young individuals started pre-marital sexual relationships because of the fear of losing their partners. Female individuals were the most common category to start sexual relationships due to the fear of their partners.

When it comes to the second recognized reason to initiate sexual relationships was to obtain sexual pleasure through the freedom of sexual life. 20% of the respondents belonged to this category who were male respondents. This 20% of respondents were not intending to experience serious and actual long-term relationships. The main purpose of these individuals seeking sexual connections was to get rid of the workaholic and personal stress with the sexual pleasure they gathered from intimate relationships. As

recognized by previous studies of the scholars most of the males were motivated by peer pressure to begin pre-marital sexual relationships than females. This tendency was recognized in this research as well.

Mental and behavioral status related impacts

All the mental and behavioral impacts that have negatively impacted the respondents started because of the end of sexual relationships along with the romantic relationships where the respondents continued with their respective partners. In addition during the conflict periods in the well-functioning relationships with sexual relationships, respondents have experienced mental stress. Different types of mental and behavioral impacts were recognized.

Table 2: Mental and Behavioral impacts after the end of pre-marital sexual relationships

Impact	Number of Respondents
Uncontrollable Stress	35%
Sleeping Difficulties	40%
Hospitalization	15%

35% of the respondents stated that they were stressed due to the end of their sexual relationships. Most importantly all these stressed respondents are females. None of the male respondents experienced mental stress. 20% of the above-mentioned stressed respondents sought the help of counselors and 15% of the individuals consulted psychiatrists to reduce the distress that occurred from the end of intimate affairs since they could not manage the stress levels on their own. In addition, 25% of the female respondents who are currently experiencing love relationships with sexual connections have also experienced highly stressed conditions during the fights and conflicts in their relationships due to the fear of breakup

and the fear of encountering society after having an intimate connection with a male.

When exploring more about the reasons behind the stress after the end of a sexual relationship or the fear of breaking up with the closely associated sexual partner, it was evident that this stress was mainly prevailing among female individuals. Female individuals were worried about their future relationships and marriage-related conditions because of the socio-cultural context of Sri Lankan society. Since virginity is still considered as a main indicator of the purity of Sri Lankan women, these respondents were worried and concerned about that socio-cultural condition and tarnishing the reputation and respect of the family and parents. The same situation was recognized through the research conducted in the traditional societies which considered marriage as the legitimate requirement for sex.

In addition, the respondents who experienced stress had feelings of regret and self-hatred which occurred because of the decisions that they had taken regarding initiating sexual relationships.

As mentioned previously, when it comes to the stressful behaviors that occurred due to pre-marital sexual relationships female respondents experienced more stress than male respondents. However, the female respondents who belong to the upper class with modern and westernized thoughts had lower stress levels than the female respondents who were concerned about sociocultural norms.

Impact on the future marriages and relationships-based decisions

The above-mentioned situation of female respondents has directly impacted their future marriage and relationship-based decisions, 25% of the respondents have strongly decided not to enter another relationship due to the frustration

and regret that occurred from the sexual relationships.

In contrast, male respondents did not have a fear or frustration to enter a new relationship or marriage as female respondents. Instead, the male respondents only had difficulties about recovering from the emotional bond with the previous partner. However female individuals had difficulties with recovering from both emotional bonds as well as conditions such as the loss of virginity after the sexual relationship.

Impact on Educational Life.

50% of the respondents stated that sexual relationships have negatively impacted their education. Among this 50% of respondents, 40% of the respondents were females and these individuals could not focus appropriately along with the continuation of sexual relationships. On the other hand, even after the end of the sexual relationships, difficulties of moving on from the previous status have impacted mainly on the respondents' education. Due to the stress that occurred from sexual affairs-based problems, the respondents neglected their educational priorities. Most importantly these problems which were pertaining during the advanced level period have negatively impacted the university entrance and the respondents who were undergraduates could not focus well on their semester workload and started to collapse academically. As a result of that exam stress and academic stress have increased.

According to the 5th and 6th male respondents who had multiple sexual relationships mainly based on sexual interest and pleasure stated that a considerable time duration was wasted on sexual pleasure-based attention. As a result of that the educational goals have completely collapsed.

Career Goals related Impacts

Decisions about future career paths and goals are impacted by several personal issues. As recognized, there is a considerable impact on female individuals' lives that can be done by the male individuals whom the female individuals had sexual relationships with. Most importantly, the female respondents tend to accept the suggestions and restrictions provided by the male partner related to their career goals after an intimate connection. As a result, 45% of female respondents decided to change their career goals and follow the suggestions provided by their sexual partners.

When it comes to the situation of the career change of males, respondent number 4 stated that the forced marriage in which he was forcibly entered as a result of his close sexual relationship with a female, functioned as a burden for his career goals. Thus, he has regrets about not following his career goal.

Post-marital impacts

Among the 45% of respondents who are married, 35% of respondents among them have experienced negative impacts after marriage which have occurred due to pre-marital sexual connections. The most significant issue after the marriage was the sexual dissatisfaction generated by the comparison of the current sexual life in the marriage and the previous sexual connections which have led to various conflicts in family life. In this case, female respondents who were dissatisfied with their marital sexual relationships have shifted their attention towards their children's well-being and religious activities to get rid of the sexual dissatisfaction since the majority of married women have a cultural stigma of seeking sexual pleasure from other males than their husbands.

Another main problem that has arisen because of pre-marital sexual relationships is addiction to

the multiple sexual relationships that were occurring before the marriage. The male individuals who had multiple sexual connections with different partners before the marriage were not able to change that behavior after the marriage. As a result, various problems in marriage life such as neglecting the spouse's and children's responsibilities, waste of money and time, less attention to family, and insecurities in the future of the marriage have occurred.

Conclusion

This study has recognized the impact of pre-marital sexual relationships on different life aspects of young individuals. When it comes to the causes of young individuals to engage in pre-marital sex, the reasons in Sri Lankan context was different from the other countries. While the reasons such as substance use and alcohol use were prominent reasons in different countries, Sri Lankan young individuals were urged in seeking sexual pleasure which was mainly reported among males. While females agreed for pre-marital sexual relationships to enhance their romantic relationships and the fear of upsetting the partner or losing him.

When it comes to the impact of pre-marital sexual relationships on different life aspects of young individuals, mental, behavioral, educational, career-specific, and post-marital impacts were prominent. Physical impacts were not specifically recognized.

Finally, the study proved that the negative impacts derived from pre-marital sexual relationships are higher on females than the males as reported in majority of the previous research as well. The main reason for females to have higher impacts than males was the traditional objections about pre-marital sexual relationships in Sri Lankan society. The societal and cultural pressure mainly paved the way for negative impacts on women than men. Finally,

comparing with the western countries, pre-marital sexual relationships have impacted on number of life aspects of the young individuals of Sri Lanka.

When it comes to the recommendations, it was recognized that the root-cause of most of the issues derived from pre-marital sexual relationships was the lack of knowledge and awareness on sex. Young individuals were prohibited to talk openly about sex inside the family institution, which has increased their curiosity and sexual urge. As a result, rather than having an appropriate idea on sex, young people followed social media and advices of the peers. Which clearly indicated the need of providing proper sexual education and freedom to discuss about sex in Sri Lanka.

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