

## SEXUALITY AMONG MILITARY PERSONNEL

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### Introduction

Couples balance their sex lives, their sex goals, and each partner's health and safety in selecting contraceptive options. However, search for a choice that satisfies all three objectives and the awareness about such methods is a major challenge for women and men throughout the world. The connection between contraceptive knowledge and sexual behavior has been studied widely in an effort to address ineffective patterns of contraceptive use and risky sexual behavior among youth population. This study inspected sources of sex education of adult males and evaluated relationships among sexual behavior, sex education, knowledge about contraception and reproduction, and contraceptive use.

The study area is selected as the Sri Lanka Air Force - Hingurakkoda Base. Sri Lanka Air Force is considered as one of the most disciplined military services in Sri Lanka. However STD's, sexual behavior related problems and relationship problems are frequently reported, and the authorities are anxious about the psychological impact that it may have on military personnel and its effect on the efficiency of their work which makes this problem an important area of concern.

### Objectives

- To understand the nature of sexual behavior among young male military personnel

- To Study contraceptive knowledge, attitudes and practices among Airmen
- To understand the prevalent risky behavior among Airmen

### Methodology

This study was based on a random sample of 60 Airmen below 25 years of age drawn from the Hingurakkoda Air Force Base. Questionnaires, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and case studies were used to collect data in this study.

### Research Problem

What propagates risky sexual behavior among military personnel?

### Results and Discussion

All men in the sample have had some form of sexual experience ranging from holding hands to kissing, hugging, and penetrative vaginal sex. Risky sexual behavior such as oral sex and anal sex seemed to be common, with nearly half the respondents claiming to have experienced such practices. Intercrural sex followed closely after, with 40% of the respondents engaging in it to avoid pregnancy. It is significant that 65% of the respondents engaged in lonely masturbation and 80% of the sample view masturbation as a normal and a very masculine act.

Only a handful of soldiers have found lovers from the opposite sex in the camp. Contact between male and female soldiers are minimal due to the

tight duty schedule and strict rules of separation. However, despite the fact that homosexuality is a punishable offence in the armed forces, 10% of the sample claimed to have homosexual partners living in the same camp. Having multiple partners was a common scenario and thus 40% of the sample testified that they have had sexual contact with their lovers as well as any other interested party. 30% pay regular visits to commercial sex workers. Most of them met their partners on buses or women residing close to the camp. It is significant that these relationships were not lasting and contacts were made only to meet sexual needs. Only half of the respondents were firm in their decision to marry their current sexual partner. 45% were not sure if they were having a committed relationship.

Knowledge about contraceptives was satisfactory, with 100% of the respondents claiming to know about condoms, 60% were aware of the oral contraceptive pill and emergency contraceptive pill, and 55% knowledgeable about withdrawal. Respondents prioritized condoms, withdrawal and emergency contraceptive pill as the most reliable contraceptive methods for unmarried couples. 95% correctly identified the condom as the only method protecting them from STD's. However in practice, only 80% of the airmen used condoms in their sexual encounters and only 40% of the sample always used a contraceptive method. 60% were irregular in their use of a contraceptive method; they either used a method sometimes, rarely or never. 15% of the respondents have never used any method.

It was noticeable that all airmen engaged in what they refer to as "Phone Sex". Despite the fact that mobile phones have to be switched off during duty hours, airmen manage to keep them switched on and engage in long sexually explicit telephone conversations with women.

It is significant that 80% of the airmen have gained knowledge about sex from friends. Pornography is the second most important source of information with 50% of respondents claiming to have gained knowledge through pornography. Exposure to pornography is mainly through video clips saved in mobile phones since other sources such as DVD players and internet are not accessible at the camp.

### **Conclusion**

According to key informants, the rate of soldiers visiting commercial sex workers had been higher during the war period when their monthly leave turns were delayed. The high prevalence of 'Phone Sex' is also due to the stressful working conditions and unmet need for sex.

It is significant to note that that 75% of Airmen confessed that their wives have to be virgins at the time of marriage, signifying a clear gender discrimination and female subordination in sexual behavior. The problem could be intensified due to the misconceptions they hold about virginity.

Their increasing rate of risky behavior and the number of unprotected sexual engagements could lead to high prevalence of STD's and HIV infection. Their sexual behavior is mainly guided by pornography which

had given them the current 'ecstatic' outlook to sex and laxity towards their partners. Embarrassment was recognized as the main factor that keeps Airmen from getting professional advice and help regarding sexual health and contraceptive methods. The organizational enterprise to distribute free condoms is not very fruitful since the dispensers are not refilled regularly. Programmes should therefore focus on changing attitudes and promoting safe sex among military personnel.

### References

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