

**“THE LEGAL AGE FOR CONSENSUAL SEX WITH A MALE”:  
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON AWARENESS AMONG FEMALE SCHOOL  
CHILDREN IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCE**

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**Introduction**

Laws for age of consent are established in Sri Lanka as no one wants to see children, consisting of 36% of the total population (Department of census and statistics-Sri Lanka, 2009), being sexually exploited. Consensual sex with an underage female is considered illegal according to law. Furthermore according to Penal Code Amendment in 1995 the legally accepted age limit for a female to engage in sex was increased from 12 to 16 years of age and consensual sex with a female under 16 is now regarded as statutory rape (Penal code section 363-365 Amendment 1995).

Despite the laws, several adverse consequences of teenage sex are frequently encountered in our routine clinical work since we are involved in medical profession. Besides, many cases are brought for judicial medical examination where sexual intercourse has taken place between young teenage couples, even though the girl’s full consent and cooperation has been given, the boy still charged with rape. (Gunawardana, 2007)

Even though studies are done among several groups to assess awareness, fewer studies are done in the vulnerable age group. Additionally the lack of studies on assessment of awareness among different age categories of vulnerable group as well

as on assessment of factors which would affect awareness such as the category of school and different socio-economic levels, has inspired us to conduct this study. The objectives of our study were to ascertain the awareness regarding the “legal age for consensual sex with a male” among female school children and to determine the level of awareness according to the age of child, category of school, and socio-economic status.

**Materials and Methods**

Authorization for data collection was obtained from relevant authorities. Data was collected from 5 schools in Kandy zone. Classes from grade 9 and above were randomly selected to include 2 classes from each grade. Results were analysed according to standard statistical methods using MS Office Excel 97-2003 and statistical soft ware SPSS.

**Results**

Total study sample was 1038. Out of that 4 questionnaires were discarded due to irrelevant answering.

**Table 1. Awareness regarding Existence of an age limit**

Total	Aware	%	Not Aware	%
1034	844	81.62	190	18.3

From the group of students who were aware about existence of an age limit (844) the exact age limit was asked.

**Table 2. Answers given by the aware group**

Answer	Number	Percentage
Correct	22	2.61%
Incorrect	685	81.16%
Don't know	137	16.23%
Total	844	

Secondly, there was a statistically significant difference between awareness among Age group <16 and ≥16 years (see table 3 and explanation).

**Table 3. According to age group**

Age group	Aware	Not Aware
≥14- <16yrs	276	98
≥16 -<18yrs	216	39
≥18 -<20yrs	352	53

$\chi^2=24.5$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $P<0.001$ ,

There is a significant difference between Age group ≥14- <16yrs and other 2 groups.

The results according to the factors affecting awareness are given below (see table 4 and 5)

**Table 4. According to Category of School**

School	Aware	Not Aware
1AB	713	126
1C	110	41
2	21	23

$\chi^2=47.8$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $P<0.001$

- 1AB -With Science A/L classes
- 1C - Commerce/Arts A/L classes
- 2 - Up to O/L

There is a statistically significant difference in awareness by the category of schools.

**Table 5. Monthly Income of Parents**

MI	Aware	Not Aware
≤Rs.5000	116	30
>Rs.5000- ≤10,000	164	42
>Rs.10,000- ≤20,000	233	61
>Rs.20,000	296	41

$\chi^2=10.8$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $P=0.013$

The significant difference is only between >Rs.10,000 ≤ 20,000 group and >Rs.20000 group

When occupation was considered majority who have given correct answers were children of, unemployed mothers (34%) and teachers 31.8%

### Discussion

On analysis of our findings, 18.3% of the sample was unaware of the existence of an age limit for consensual sexual activity with a male. Furthermore, only 2.61% of the aware group had responded with correct age limit. This reflects nearly 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the sample was not aware even about existence of an age limit and only a few knew the exact age limit. Children from <16 age group had significantly lesser awareness of existence of an age limit showing the group who cannot give consent are the ones that lack awareness of it.

When considering the factors affecting the awareness: category of school had significant effect. Students from schools of 1AB category had

the highest level of awareness indicating subjects learnt at a higher category school may improve awareness of students.

In the aspect of socio-economic background, the income of the family had less effect, but majority who have given correct answers being children of teachers and non employees reflected that the time of parents' devoting for their children may play a role in children's awareness.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, awareness regarding the legal aspect of consensual sex with male partner is grossly inadequate among vulnerable age group, irrespective of the economic status, while age and the category of school play a major role as causative factors for awareness.

In the light of our study, we suggest the need to make the vulnerable age group aware of legal aspect of sexual activity. One method to do so is inclusion of it in to the school curriculum as well as conducting awareness programmes by way of professional hand along with maximum precautions after thorough review of all the aspects.

### **References**

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