

PREVENTION OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE IN 3 DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

- **Early age at first sex is associated with unhealthy behaviors** such as having unprotected sex, having multiple partners or condom misuse. **These can lead to higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and pregnancy.**
- Correct knowledge about **condoms as a risk reduction strategy** is essential for youth to make informed decisions.

OBJECTIVES

- **To assess the association between knowledge of youth from 3 developing countries about condoms effectiveness and sexual debut.**
- This research is part of an international study (**Project YOURLIFE**), on what the youth think and feel about relationships, love and sexuality.

METHODS

- **Representative samples of students, aged 14-18**, were selected through multi-stage sampling of clusters of schools in **the Philippines, El Salvador and Peru. N=8,492**
- Cross-sectional study based on a **self-administered paper-pencil questionnaire.**
- **Multiple logistic regression analysis** was used to assess the **association between believing that condoms are 100% effective against STI or pregnancies and sexual debut.**

Variables in the questionnaire:

- Socio-demographic information
- Opinions, sources of information and communication with parents about love and sex
- Influences of friends. Personal values
- Perceived messages from parents, mass media, teachers, peers about sexuality
- **Knowledge about preventive strategies for STI and unplanned pregnancies**
- Sexual relationships (reasons, regret)

RESULTS

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

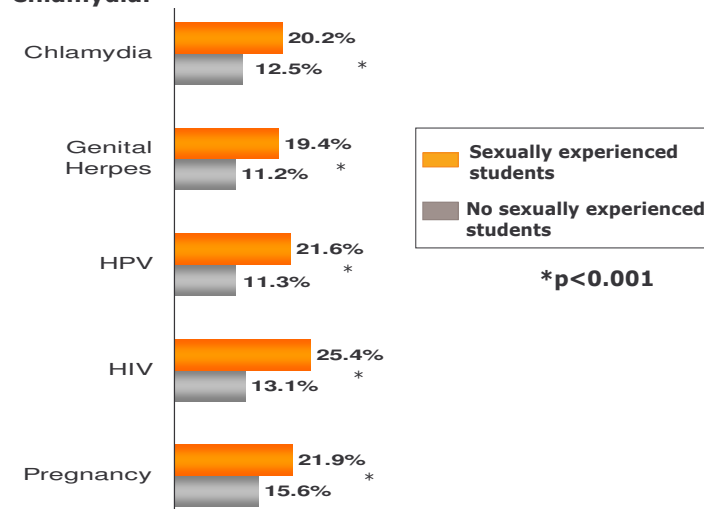
	The Philippines N=3016 %	El Salvador N=2195 %	Peru N=3284 %	Total N=8495 %
Sex				
Male	45.4	50.3	52.0	49.2
Female	54.6	49.7	48.0	50.8
School				
Public	79.7	81.4	82.9	81.4
Private	20.3	18.6	17.1	18.6
Age, years				
14-15	38.3	47.8	53.2	46.5
16-17	44.2	38.9	43.6	42.7
18	17.5	13.3	3.2	10.9
Religion				
No religion	1.9	16.4	13.2	9.9
Catholic	82.6	44.4	66.2	66.8
Other*	15.5	39.2	20.6	23.3
Economic status†				
Very low, low	15.5	20.5	17.1	17.4
Middle	78.4	67.4	71.2	72.9
High, very high	6.1	12.0	11.7	9.8
Sexually experienced‡				
No	77.2	74.5	79.5	77.4
Yes	22.8	25.5	20.5	22.6

* Protestants/Evangelic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Jews, Muslims and other religions which vary across the different countries.

† Based on the respondents' perception of family economic status.

‡ Youth who have ever had complete sexual relationships.

Percentage of youth that wrongly believe that condoms are 100% effective in preventing pregnancy, HIV, Human Papillomavirus infection (HPV), Genital Herpes and Chlamydia.



After adjusting for sex, age, economic status, religiosity and whether schools were public or private, believing that condoms are 100% effective against HIV or pregnancies was associated with having had sex (OR=1.57; 95% CI: 1.37-1.79).

CONCLUSIONS

- **Sexual debut is more prevalent among youth who wrongly believe that condoms are 100% effective in preventing pregnancy and HIV.**
- **This is consistent with the concept of "risk compensation", recognized by Public Health authorities.**
- **So called "safe sex" messages should be replaced by "safer sex" messages, that make more emphasis on the delay of first sex when addressing adolescents.**

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