

“Substance use and risky sexual behavior among the middle and late adolescent migrant college students in Shillong: A study in North-east, India”

Overview: Annually, thousands of students in the middle and late adolescent age group come to Shillong for pursuing their under graduate level studies from various parts of north-eastern states of India because the head quarter of North Eastern Hill University is located in Shillong. Moreover, many schools and colleges which were established by British and Irish missionaries since the 19th century stands like beacons even today after hundreds of years. The “adolescence migrant college students” if they can be so called, contribute to lot to the local economy, but they also bring with them certain behavioral ills and cultural trends which has a negative impact on their students life. These adolescence migrant college students come from societies where drinking of alcohol and consumption of betel nut with tobacco is a part of their tradition, folklore and culture, but conversely their states are “dry states” where selling of alcohol and tobacco is banned by law with pressure from the church and other socio-religious organizations. This “contradiction” has its bearing on them the moment they come to Shillong which is a “wet state” where alcohol, tobacco of various brands is available every nook and corner which offers a veritable attraction, may be even cultural shock to the adolescence. Coupled with the fact that most of these adolescence migrant college students stays in hostel or rented house or as paying guest far from their prying eyes of their parents and have easy access to any substances and girls, in a society where mixing between the two sexes is not considered a taboo and “dating is a fun thing to do” and often encouraged by peers and elders. The lethal brew of unhindered and unrestrained access to substances and women is such a heady concoction that pre-marital sex is a natural progression, often with disastrous consequences.

Objective: To examine the substance use and risky sexual behavior among the middle and late adolescent migrant college students in Shillong.

Data: This present research paper comes from my PhD primary data sources collected over a period of five months from October 2008-February 2009. Self-administered questionnaire were distributed and obtained with a sample of 457 male and female adolescents migrant college students from ethnically diverse backgrounds of 3 states from north-east of India who were presented in the class room on that particular day in 15 colleges out of 26 colleges in Shillong. The gender breakdown of the sample was 59 percent female and 41 percent male. All the selected colleges were within the city limits. The sample was ethnically diverse with *Nagas* making up 56 percent of the sample and *Mizos, kukis and others* comprising 26, 12 and 4 percent of the sample respectively. Most of the students were in the age of 20 and 19 (62 percent), studying second year in arts stream and were using any substance (45 percent), dating or having steady realtionship (34 percent) and had pre-marital sex (6 percent). Most of the students were staying in hostel (72 percent), rented house (19 percent) and paying guest (8 percent).

Methods: Questionnaires using semi-structured and open-ended techniques were designed to gather information about the substance use and pre-marital sexual activity. Demographic and background data were also obtained through close ended questions. After taking the permission from the respective college authorities, the researcher took the help from the class teachers from the respective colleges and briefed about the questionnaire for 20 minutes and finally distributed the questionnaire. They were also informed about the information collected would be used only

for research purpose and their identity will be kept confidential. A student was selected from each stream; each year of graduation and from each college was given the charge for collecting the distributed questionnaires. These students' residing addresses and their cell phone numbers were asked in order to keep track for updating the progress of collecting the questionnaire and the finals were collected once it was ready from his/her side.

Data analysis: The data were analyzed using an inductive approach using the SPSS software.

Key findings: Out of 457 samples of middle and late adolescent migrant college students, about 45 percent reported ever use of substance (Table 1) such as *chewing betel nut with tobacco*, *gutka* and *zarda pan*, alcohol and drug use at the time of the survey where more males used as compared to their female counterparts. The predictors for indulging in these substances at the place of destinations are if they are staying in rented house/flats and having a steady relationship; having an overnight sensations and the most overall powerful predictors is if they are exposed to pornographic movies and reading materials. Further, a spearman rank correlation between parents substance use and children substance use was deployed if there was a correlation and found that the correlation is positive and statistically significant ($\rho=.210$, $p<0.00$). This means that as parents substances use increases, so do their children substance use increases. This interpretation in no way implies causality-that parents substances use increases children substance use. The significance merely indicates that the two variables covary (Table 2).

Among the adolescent migrant college students, only 6.1 percent (Table 3) had reported to have had pre-marital sex at the place of destinations where males dominated the sexual scenario which were encountered only by the late adolescence (18-21) who are mostly from the *Naga* ethnic group belonging to the state of Manipur healing from small town, medium size family (3-4) and from high SLIs, male dominated siblings. These adolescents who indulged in sex had a story of school changed for more than three times and had an inter-state migration experience at the time of their schooling days, had a single room from the age 13 years on wards, majority stated their parents are not that strict towards their children. These students were mostly Christians and were studying in private co-educational colleges pursuing arts stream studying general subjects in the second year of graduations and have been living for 1-2 years and mostly residing in hostel. Majority of them had low overall academic performance in the previous examinations. Many were having a steady relationship and were exposed to reading pornographic movies and magazines. Most of them were multiple substance users. Also the spearman rank correlation indicates that adolescence students substance use and engaging in sexual activity is correlated with positive and statistically significant at $\rho=.116$, $p<0.13$ (Table 4).

Out of 28 students belonging to late adolescent who had sex, majority of their sexual partners were their steady boy friend or girl friend and 23 persons did not use condom at the time of sexual activity. The reasons being stated for not using condom at the time of their sexual activity was because sex suddenly took place and condom was not available at that time and also partners insisted not to use as it reduces pleasure while a few were not aware of condom. About 8 students had a multiple sexual partner where 5 of the students did not use condom while encountering as they were badly drunk in a social gathering. All the 8 students who had a multiple sex partner were all males belonging to late adolescent (19-21) belonging to *Naga* tribe healing from the small urban towns from the state of Nagaland and Mizoram from the Baptist and Hindu religious community who were found studying in a Catholic colleges. All of these students had an exposure to erotic magazines and blue films and were having a steady relationship at the time of the survey.

Conclusions: The appropriate authorities in the fields of both educational and public health need to wake up and help the students who engage in risky behavior. Counseling as well as de-addiction/detoxification centers should be opened up in an educational hub such as in Shillong so that the afflicted students can go and seek remedy for their problems. Since the North eastern states especially Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram are a hot bed of HIV/AIDS, students coming from these states to Shillong and also other centers of learning or in mainland India, should be counseled both in their hometown as well as in centers of distance learning, on the need for maintaining a decent non-risky behavior. States government in all the states should opened up educational counseling centers especially for students who are passing out their HSLC/ICSE/CBSE examinations, especially for those who intent to migrate to other cities for higher studies and explain to them the dangers or the consequences which lies ahead of them in big cities like Shillong.

Limitations of the study: This study is an attempt to understand the reasons of the college students for in-coming to Shillong and their risky behaviors. The present study does not take into account of the other 3 states i.e., Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh because these three states are “wet states” and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the students community were not reported by the National Aids Control Organizations (NACO).

Table 1: Types of substance use among the middle and late adolescence migrant college students

Types of substance use	%	N
Overall substance use		
No	54.7	207
Yes	45.3	250
Chewing betel nut (tobacco)		
No	72.9	333
Yes	27.1	124
Smoking		
No	65.6	300
Yes	34.4	157
Chew tobacco/gutka		
No	80.7	369
Yes	19.3	88
Zarda pan(tobacco)		
No	85.6	391
Yes	14.4	66
Alcohol		
No	70.9	324
Yes	29.1	133
Drug		
No	99.3	454
Yes	.7	3
Total	100.0	457

Table 5: Condom use who ever had sex at the place of destinations among the middle and late adolescent

Condom use who had sex	%	N
Condom Use		
Yes	1.1	5
No	5.0	23
Never had sex	93.9	429

Table 2: Spearman rank correlation between parents and children substance use

			Parents Substance Use	Children Substance Use
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>Parents Substance Use</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	1.000	.210(**)
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.000
		<i>N</i>	457	457
	<i>Children Substance Use</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	.210(**)	1.000
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.000	.
		<i>N</i>	457	457

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Ever had pre-marital sex among the middle and late adolescence migrant college students

Pre-marital sex	%	N
Ever had sex		
No	93.9	429
Yes	6.1	28
Total	100	457

Table 4: Spearman rank correlation between adolescence substance use and pre-marital sexual activity

			Adolescence substance use	Sexual activity
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	<i>Adolescence substance use</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	1.000	.116(*)
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.	.013
		<i>N</i>	457	457
	<i>Sexual activity</i>	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>	.116(*)	1.000
		<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.013	.
		<i>N</i>	457	457

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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