

**Love Matters:
Romantic and Sexual Relationships among Youth of Slum of Mumbai Metropolitan**

**by
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Context

Romantic and sexual relationships are central to the lives of adolescent and youth. Further, the development and negotiation of romantic relationships is considered an important and normative developmental task of growing up with the emergence of, and experimentation with, sexual behaviors which are integrated into romantic relationships as age develops. Sex is part of a healthy life, and developing an interest in sex is natural as younger teens undergo hormonal and other physical changes and older teens begin to take on young adult roles. Although there is no clear age at which sexual activity becomes appropriate, it is clear that for some youth, intercourse initiation happens too soon often with little knowledge about the risk involved.

The Indian Scenario

Premarital partnerships among youth, including those not involving sexual intercourse, are widely discouraged in India; yet, despite strict sanctions, including parental violence, loss of reputation and swiftly arranged marriages to someone other than the romantic partner, up to 10% of young women and 15–30% of young men form such partnerships. A review of the literature suggests that little is known about the nature of these relationships, such as whether they are romantic or casual. Recent studies of sexuality in India show that pre-marital sex is not as rare as generally believed to be and that young people often lack adequate information in order to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections. The youth do not constitute a homogenous category and that the sexual attitude, experiences, experimentation and extent of vulnerability differ within this group.

Why youth in low income communities needs focus?

According to social cognitive theory people learn how to perform new behaviors by observing others and will imitate the behaviors they have observed insofar as those behaviors are perceived to have functional value. Sexuality in Indian society is seen as a cultural construct, which differs with age, social class and gender, division of labor, freedom of social life & moment and kinship arrangements. Further, in low income communities in metropolitan cities, there is a mix of traditional and modern values, norms and practices regarding sexuality and sexual behavior, especially among youth. The low income communities in metropolitan areas are also known for overcrowded living conditions resulting in relaxation of restrictive social norms and sexual segregation. The metropolitan context also exposes some young people to liberal sexual culture, offers varied avenues for sexual experiences through its vast sex industry, and provides anonymity that greatly enhances the opportunity for sexual liaisons. In addition, opportunity structures of low income slums in metropolitan cities, where youth are having easy access to erotic literature influences their articulation of their sexuality and enhanced indulgence with different type of sexual partners in continuously expanding sexual networks. With modernization and the influence of mass media, the socio-cultural milieu has

been changed significantly and adolescents and youth are now often tempted to have sex even before marriage.

Objectives: The present study aims to study the romantic and sexual relationships among youth. It aims to access the attitude towards romantic and emotional relationships; sex and sexuality conduct among and changing norms shaping these behaviors among unmarried, low-income metropolitan youth.

Data and Methods

Findings are based on triangulation of data from 54 in depth interviews and sample 1239 of young men age 18 to 29 selected from three low income slums communities adopting randomized clustered sampling technique under a NIAAA sponsored project entitled "*Alcohol use and risky sexual behavior among migrants in low income slum areas of Mumbai, India*" conducted under the auspices of IIPS, Mumbai with ICR and UCHC, Connecticut, USA as partners. This study was conducted in three slum areas of Mumbai, where low-income families are staying. The reference period of the four years study was Sept 2005 to August 2009. The study collected comprehensive information on different dimensions of youth behavior including their perception about sex and sexuality, intimate relationships and premarital sex, masculinity, alcohol use and sex and its linkages with different types of risk taking have been collected through triangulated efforts by integrating ethnographic, qualitative and quantitative techniques. The findings are substantiated using narrative from the respondents. These narratives clearly bring out the nature of relationship with their girlfriend among youth in low income slum communities. Further, as an attempt to capture various dimensions of relational satisfaction, a number of psychological scales have been used, where information on different components of those scales were collected on five point scale as part of quantitative survey. Guttman's scale was developed by merging a series of statements about concerning indicator after testing of reliability. The brief explanation of these scales is given in results section.

Preliminary Results of the Study

Brief Profile of the Sexual and Emotional Relationships of the Respondent

Forty percent men reported to ever had sex with a girlfriend. This highlights the high prevalence of premarital sex in this group which is based on the emotional relationships. Nonetheless, if we see the recent sex behavior, 22 percent men reported to have girlfriend currently. Interestingly, 80 percent of these relationships reported to result in sex. Further, ten percent of these men reported sex with more than two girlfriends in last one year. The analysis of the type of relationship with this sexual partner who was termed as girlfriend, it was noted that there is further typology in this relationship which also decides the emotional and sexual intentions of the relations. Out of all these men who reported sex with girlfriend in last one year, one fourth of these relationships were with relatives, neighbor or with a co-worker. Such relationships had no emotional thread attached to it. They were largely for sexual benefits. One of the respondent reported, "*I did penetrative sex first time at the age of 17 with a girl who was working in my factory and that was my first sexual experience.*"

Partnerships and Sexual Relations

Results of this study reveal that three out of four romantic relationships are resulting into sexual intercourses. The narratives show that the emotional quotient in these relationships is not the basis for sex. One of the respondents who reported to have sex with girl friend in second meeting quoted *"She was looking very sexy but she was dark complexion. I thought that sex doesn't see the color".* Another respondent said, *"my first penetrative sexual experience happened at the age of 18 years and it happened with a girl who was staying adjutant to my house... I asked her for friendship but my friends always said what is just friendship, do sex with her and one day in the village fields I did, first time with her... now she is married and stays in other city...".* Another important finding that substantiates the wide prevalence of casual sex is that 22 percent of the reported "girlfriend" by these men was married and living with husband. But in these respondents the sex with the women was steady without any intensions of future commitment, based more or less on the recent phenomenon of "friends with benefits". A narrative showing such relationship was reported by a 21 years old man. He said, *"There is a married woman in my neighborhood. She always use to stare me..... one day when I saw that she was alone in her house then I went to her house and started talking to her for first time. I immediately held her and said that I love you very much and I kissed her. She also told me that she also love me very much and said to me that she want to have sex with me as her husband does not satisfy her and fulfill her sexual needs."* Another respondent reported, *"I had sex with my second girl friend and not with the first. Although, I intended to have sexual intercourse with my first girl friend and she also wanted to have the sexual pleasure as was evident during our interactions up to touching and kissing. But we did not get opportunity. At that time, one day my second girl friend informed me that her parents went out for whole day and were likely to return only in the late evening. Though I did not have any intension to have sex with her when I met her and was not at all prepared for sex but after listening that her parents are not in the house from her I got prepared and we has sexual intercourse in her house."*

Perceived relational satisfaction

In order to capture various dimensions of relational satisfaction, a number of psychological scales have been used, where information on different components of those scales were collected on five point scale as part of quantitative survey by mixing direction of those statements as an strategy to minimize stereotype. Subsequently, those items have been converted in scales after changing direction of various statements and testing their reliability based on intra-class correlation coefficients. A brief description of these variable and scales is presented below. All these were computed by recoding a continuous Guttman's scale created by merging statements concerning exposure to the variable of interest canvassed on X point scale after testing of reliability and normalizing the scale

- *Condom Attitudes:* It is computed by recoding a continuous Guttman's scale developed by merging a series of statements.
- *Self assessment as a sexual partner:* Computed by recoding a continuous Guttman's scale created by merging seven statements concerning exposure to different forms of sexual stimuli
- *Communication relationship with girl friend:* Computed by recoding a continuous Guttman's scale created by merging six statements concerning communication relationship with girl friend
- *Relationship satisfaction with girl friend:* Computed by recoding a continuous Guttman's scale created by merging seven statements concerning relationship with girl friend

The table below shows the effect of perceived relational satisfaction from GF as well as self assessment as a sexual partner on three core indicators of sexual association viz. condom use attitude, sexual partners in last 12 months and coercive sex in last 6 months. The main highlights from the table reveals that more satisfaction with girlfriend is translating into better sexual behaviors in terms of multi partner, less coercive sex but at the same time it is showing negative impact on condom use behavior. The better communication with girlfriend is affecting condom use and multi partner positively as more open relationship is resulting into more positive attitude for condom use whereas coercive sex is moving in the opposite direction. Interestingly, moderate open relationships are best performing in term of all three indicators. A persons self assessment as sexual partners can also have strong bearing on the way he behaves. This is evident from the table below where number of sexual partners and coercive sex is severely affected by this. Being satisfied by self is resulting in reduced multi partner and also less cohesive sex. This may be result of better confidence and so less need of sexual experimentation that may be responsible for pushing these men to go to partners of unknown identity and thus resulting in multi partner.

Table: Bivariate analysis showing the effect of perceived relational satisfaction indicators on the safe sexual attitude and coercive sex

	Condom use attitude		Total no. of sexual partner in last 12 months		Coercive sex with girl friend ever in last 6 months	
	More positive	Moderately positive	1-2 partners	3 or more partners	No	Yes
Relationship satisfaction with girlfriend						
<i>Not satisfied</i>	47.6	52.4	52.4	47.6	42.9	57.1
<i>Number of sexual Satisfied</i>	26.9	73.1	76.9	23.1	61.5	38.5
Communication relationship with girlfriend						
<i>Less open</i>	33.3	66.7	33.3	66.7	33.3	66.7
<i>Moderately open</i>	25.0	75.0	70.8	29.2	62.5	37.5
<i>More open</i>	50.0	50.0	65.0	35.0	45.0	55.0
Self assessment as sexual partner						
<i>Not satisfactory</i>	40.0	60.0	40.0	60.0	33.3	66.7
<i>Somewhat satisfactory</i>	33.3	66.7	59.3	40.7	50.0	50.0
<i>Satisfactory</i>	44.4	55.6	70.4	29.6	60.0	40.0
Total	36.2	63.8	66.0	34.0	53.2	46.8

Partner Progression Correlates

As we moved from having relationship with one partner to many risk increased. Transition from one to another partner was based on the perceived relational satisfaction along with perceived risk and the concept of fun and freedom. Those respondents who reported more than one girlfriend also displayed dissimilar risk behavior with these partners. The partner were categorized as first second and third based on the perception of closeness and relationship by the respondent. A large proportion of encounters with first girlfriend were reported unprotected as 44% respondents reported never using

condom with this partner whereas only 4 percent reported every time condom use. Alcohol use was also high as 21% reported to ever had alcohol with this partner before sex and 17% reported that they usually consume alcohol before sex with this respondent. One out of every ten men reported ever have had forced sex with this partner which indicated high level of coercion in these relationships. One of the narratives portraying a form of coercive sex was reported by a respondent as *"She was studying in a college. I told her that toady she will be absent in the college.... We went in a garden I bought cold drink 'Pepsi' and mixed few tablets in it. After consuming cold drink she came closer to me and in five-ten minutes she started kissing me... I took her to a lodge in nearby area and rented room for 8 hours...she was very excited... may be because of pills...we has sex 3 times... I used condom all the time."*

The similar behavior when studied for 2nd and 3rd and 4th partners revealed that alcohol use increased to 11 to 14 percent. Coercive sex also increased from 9 to 11 percent in case of subsequent partners. Interestingly, the most crucial indicator for sexual health and STI/HIV prevention, condom use seemed to reduce a little with increasing number of partners. This can be due to risk perception and attitude towards safe sexual behaviour. With 2nd girlfriend, 54% men reported not used condom in last sex, it further increases to 56 with 3rd and 4th partner. Another interesting finding as, 22 percent of these women who were classified as girlfriend were married and were neighbor of these young men. *One of the respondent reporting more than 1 girlfriend said that he wants to enjoy life before marriage. "Enjoyment means having sex and affairs with girls" he said. There are about 8-10 girls in his area to whom he often visits and has sexual relationship with.... He said that these are faithful girls and don't have relations with other except respondent so he does not uses condom with them."*

Conclusions and Recommendations

The nature of sex and romantic relations seems to be changing. The concept of true love is fast being replaced by casual sex and friends with benefits as the premarital sex is on the rise. The risky behavior among youth is also increasing dangerously. Casual sex for fun is increasing and the partner type is varied. Peer-pressure is playing a crucial role in pushing the friendship relationship to sexual relationships. As the multi partner is increasing the condom use behavior is reducing. It is especially true for young men as they have more freedom and social power. The self assessment as sexual partner is strongly affecting the behavior and sexual liaisons. The relational satisfaction is also crucial as it has direct bearing not only on multiple partner behavior but also on coercive sex and sexual experimentations. Gone are the days when behavior could be changed through the strict societal norms and restriction in the form of cultural taboos. As also reflected in many narratives, youth today is fast changing and developing rebel to conservativeness of society. Thus, the policy makers need to put focused attentiveness on the needs and well-being of youth. The findings highlight the need for program interventions to ensure that youth are fully informed and equipped to make safe choices and negotiate wanted outcomes, while positively influencing their peer networks. Findings also highlight the importance of peer networks, which can have a positive or negative impact on the safety and wantedness of young people's relationships.

Limitations: As potential limitations of our study, sample may have underreported their romantic, physical and sexual experiences as such relationships are usually carried on secretly. Secondly, study is cross sectional. Therefore, inferring causation is not possible.