

Adolescents' Sexual Behaviors in Morocco



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Abbreviations: HIV: Human immunodeficiency viruses; STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection

Introduction

Sexual behavior develops through sexual socialization, a process by which individuals acquire values, norms, and attitudes related to sexuality through interactions with socializing agents [1]. In Morocco, in matters of sexuality, strict social, religious, and penal norms of chastity are imposed on unmarried individuals. Nevertheless, empirical observations have highlighted a form of "sexual transition," with premarital sexuality becoming both visible and hidden [2-4]. Mass education and gender-mixed classrooms contribute to the emergence of romantic relationships within schools Bozon 2018 [4]. However, the risks associated with adolescent sexuality remain significant, sexually transmitted infections pose health threats, while unmarried pregnancy is a profound source of social stigma [5]. In Arab-Muslim contexts, an unwanted pregnancy outside marriage can lead to partner abandonment, school dropout, loss of future employment opportunities, dishonor for the family, health risks, and even exposure to honor-related violence [6]. According to the Moroccan Ministry of Health, 21,500 cases of people living with HIV, and approximately 450,000 new cases of STIs recorded each year, with 40% of affected aged between 15 and 29 years [7]. Considering these tensions and specific challenges within the context, it is essential to gain a better understanding of Moroccan adolescents' sexual behavior profiles.

Methods

Five focus groups were conducted with 69 secondary school students aged between 15 and 19 years in the Rabat-Kenitra-Salé region of Morocco. Each Session was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. To maintain ethical standards, authorization was obtained from the ministry of education, then informed consent was obtained from

all participants and, when required, from their legal guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed throughout the research process [8].

Results

Adolescents' Sexual behavior is marked by strategies to circumvent social norms and a diversification of behaviors, with the main aim of have a sexual pleasure with avoiding overt transgression of chastity norms of girls' "virginity = intact hymen". Nevertheless, a segment of adolescents engages in risky sexual behaviors, often linked to delinquent conduct as drugs and alcohol consumption. The choice of practice type is strongly influenced by the girl's status. If the hymen is intact (commonly referred to among adolescents as "a virgin girl"), non-penetrative sex, oral or anal intercourse are usually preferred to preserve "virginity". In this context, the study identified three distinct sexual profiles among adolescents. The (Table 1) below summarizes the three adolescents' sexual profiles and their characteristics:

Conclusion

The identification of distinct sexual behavior profiles among adolescents highlights the complex interplay between sociocultural norms, individual agency, and perceived risk. These profiles reflect varying levels of internalization of religious, familial, and societal expectations as well as differentiated access to knowledge and autonomy in sexual decision-making. Understanding these typologies, contribute to develop targeted, culturally sensitive, and developmentally appropriate sexual health interventions that address both protective factors and vulnerabilities within adolescent populations. Also, in this context, the Comprehensive Sexually Education emerges as a critical lever for action. By pro-

viding young people with accurate, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive information. It can help demystify sexuality, promote well-being and respect for human rights.

Table 1: Identification of Adolescents' Sexual Behavior Profiles and their Characteristics.

Adolescents' Sexual profiles	Characteristics
<i>"Abstinent-normative"</i>	Some Adolescents views abstinence and adherence to social norms of chastity and abstinence is the unique rule: <i>"we must live without violating the "Sharia" (the classical Islamic law)."</i>
<i>"A reserved and cautious exploratory"</i>	This group explore their sexuality but do so carefully, secret and with restraint. They experiment with non-penetrative sexual practices, masturbation, or oral sex. The purpose is to preserve intact hymen for the girl. This cluster is conscious by the risks of sexuality: medically, legally, and socially; <i>"...I cannot abstain from emotional and sexual relationships, but at the same time, I cannot openly display my sexual behavior in society or within the family...it's important to preserve hymen intact there's no question of dragging her into situations that could endanger her future marriage"</i>
<i>"Experienced at-risk"</i>	This profile includes adolescents who have more sexual experience and engage in higher-risk behaviors, such as unprotected sex or multiple partners. They may face greater vulnerabilities related to sexual health, social stigma, or emotional consequences: <i>"...There is a category of adolescents who allow themselves everything and put themselves at risk..."; "... They engage in explicit sexual activity, change partners without keeping track, and try out what they see on pornographic websites...; They show no concern for protection, and these sexual behaviors are often associated with alcohol and drug use."</i>

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