

Nonconsensual Sexual Experiences of Filipino Youth

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Anecdotal data reveal the apparent rise in the number of reported rape, pedophilia and related forms of sexual abuse among the younger sector of the Philippine population. Latest statistics from the Department of Social Work and Development (DSWD) show that it has provided services to almost three thousand children less than 18 years old for various forms of sexual abuse, exploitation and child trafficking during the first two quarters of the current year. Most of these victims are young females except for the victims of pedophilia who are more likely to be males (DSWD, 2004). While the reported numbers may be small, it may represent just the tip of the iceberg particularly when viewed in the context of the growing number of local broadcast and print media reports attesting that sexual abuses are no longer uncommon among the young. This is also consistent with the reported upsurge in the predisposing circumstances of forced sex in the country including widespread poverty, drug abuse and alcohol consumption. Recent studies attest to the rising level of drug abuse and exposure to alcohol use (Cruz and Berja, 2003) as well as sex practices including commercial sex and sex with the same sex (Marquez, 2004) among Filipino adolescents in the recent years. Studies likewise demonstrate the dangerous interrelationships between risky non-sexual and sexual practices among the young (Raymundo and Cruz, 2004; Marquez and Galban, 2004) suggesting a scenario of increased sexual risk practices among the young Filipinos in general.

Perhaps the most glaring recognition of the rising incidence of nonconsensual sex experience in the country is the policy response directed at increasing protection of victims of sexual abuse. Particularly, the enactment of Republic Act 8353 better known as the Anti-Rape Law in 1997 is a laudable response not only for broadening the protection for victims of sexual abuse but also for increasing penalty for the perpetrators of such crimes.

Within this context, this study aims to provide national estimates of the level, nature and context of nonconsensual sex occurring among Filipino adolescents 15-24 years old. The paper highlights particular nuances in the experience including gender differences and the possible factors such as early marriage and early age at sexual initiation of the victims as possible conditions and situations within which such sexual abuse are likely to be experienced. The study also aims to determine the context in which nonconsensual sexual activities transpire among the young including the characteristics of the young persons (victims) and their sexual partners (perpetrators), the sequence of events and the responses of the young victims to such experience. Some of the precipitating factors of such behavior particularly in the context of marriage will also be examined as well as some possible correlates including feelings of depression, self-

esteem and other risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking and drug use and experience of physical violence.

The study makes use of available data provided by the 2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS3) conducted by the University of the Philippines Population Institute and the Demographic Research and Development Foundation. YAFS3 is a nationally-representative survey of nearly 20,000 Filipino males and females 15-27 years old. The analysis, however, is confined to the sample of some 16,000 adolescents in the ages 15-24.

Literature shows that nonconsensual sexual relations are multi-faceted. For the purposes of the study, four dimensions of nonconsensual sex that can be derived from the data are examined. These are: (1) Coercive premarital sex (first premarital sex that took place against their will and/or sex without full consent during first date); (2) Unwanted sexual initiation (first sex was something that the young person either did not want to happen but went along with or did not plan to happen but happened anyway); (3) Coercive sex within marriage (sex with their husband without their full consent); and (4) Commercial or transactional sex (sex in exchange for money or other favor). Sexual coercion occurring with males as victims and those that are homosexual in nature are highlighted in the discussion.

Data reveal that 58 percent of Filipino youth have experienced some form of nonconsensual sexual activity. Two percent of such sexual encounters happened against their will and are considered coercive while 56 percent can be characterized as unwanted. Females appear to be more vulnerable to such sexual experiences.

Of the reported two percent with coercive sex experience, eighty percent occurred during their sexual initiation while the remainder transpired during their first single date. Most sexual coercion which occurred during the first date is of heterosexual nature and a great majority happened during the victim's teen years. Females are more likely to be coerced into sex by a *barkada* or friend while among males, majority of the perpetrators are reportedly their girlfriend or steady partner. Gender variation also exists when it comes to the setting with most males reporting such encounters taking place in a park or a farm while the dates of most females which culminated in coercive sexual contacts commenced in a shopping mall. Comparatively more males reported the incident to someone else while females are more likely to keep quiet. Regardless of sex, all of those who related the incident to another person confided to nobody else but their close friends.

Clear gender differentials are also apparent in coercive first sex. Nearly all of forced sexual debut among females were perpetrated by the opposite sex and half were committed by their boyfriends. Eleven percent of such sexual encounters were victimized by friends and an equal proportion by someone with whom the young females have no relation. Incest is also evident as a number of such coercion was reportedly perpetrated by male relatives. Interestingly, more than half of married women who experienced coercive first sex were forced by their future husbands suggesting that the coercive sexual encounter could be a precipitating factor in the marriage.

In contrast, majority of males with coercive sexual debut reported heterosexual contact although a substantial 47 percent were initiated into sex by another male. Similar with females, most coercive sex were perpetrated by persons with whom the young male is acquainted or familiar with. The most common perpetrators identified by these young men are their girlfriends (27 percent), an acquaintance (20 percent) or someone not related to him (20 percent).

The use of physical force (51 percent) is the most common method by which women were subjected to sexual abuse followed by the use of weapons such as knives or guns (33 percent) while males were more likely to be coerced through verbal threats or intimidation including blackmail (47 percent) and through physical force (27 percent).

Four of five females and seven of ten males were coerced into sex before they turned 18 years old. For both sexes, the perpetrators were most likely to be single and someone more senior although a substantial twenty percent of coercive sex among females was committed by married males. Such sexual abuses were more likely to occur in a familiar setting. Most females were subjected to sexual coercion either in their own homes or the house of the perpetrator. Among males, a friend's house is the most common venue. All of such coercive incidents were not protected by any contraceptive method.

While only a small fraction of young Filipinos reported coercive first sex, 56 percent had experienced unwanted sexual initiation. Three of five young women and half of young men have sexual debuts that can be characterized as unwanted or unplanned. The most common reasons provided by young males for having sex the first time are "to experience something else" and "out of curiosity" while it "to express love or affection" among females. A substantial proportion of females admitted that the reason they went along with having sex although it was unwanted was because their partners wanted them to have sex.

Commercial or transactional sex which oftentimes carries a coercive aspect is also examined. The level of commercial sex activity is not substantial. Two percent of young Filipinos reported ever receiving payment in exchange for sexual favors while three percent have ever paid for sex. A moderate level of condom use during such encounters is noted.

Coercive sex within marriage is more prevalent as data indicate that a full half of all married women had experienced sexual relations with their husbands without their full consent, with 41 percent reporting occasional occurrence and nine percent regular occurrence. Owing to paucity of cases in other dimensions of nonconsensual sex, multivariate analyses focused on marital coercive sex only. Logistic regression analyses indicate that early age at marriage, early initiation to sexual activity, multiple premarital sex partners and previous history of sexual abuse are predictive factors for coercive marital sex while educational attainment did not emerge as a factor.

Women who have experienced forced sex within marriage are also more likely to report greater frequency of quarrel with their husbands and are less likely to trust their spouses and to have experienced the following during the past three months: low self-esteem, high levels of depression, feelings of being unsafe or threatened and having been physically injured. The study also found significant although weaker associations between coercive marital sex experience with suicide ideation and current drinking behavior. Current drug use and smoking behavior are not significantly associated with coercive marital sex among young women.

To gain a fuller understanding of the context as well as the consequences of forced sex, the survey data will be complemented by information from in-depth interviews of victims of nonconsensual sex. At least three in-depth interviews will be undertaken including those experienced in the following situations/circumstances: (1) within marriage; (2) young single male and (3) young single female. The interviews will focus on the timing and circumstances leading to the sexual coercion and the characteristics of the perpetrators of the abuse. It will likewise attempt to understand the process of disclosure. Particularly, it is interesting to determine who are usually approached by the victims of sexual abuse and to determine the specific kinds of support provided. The interview will also try to understand some of the reasons for non-disclosure and its possible effects on the victims. An initial in-depth interview of a 17-year old girl who was raped at age 14 by a *barkada* (peer group) revealed fear of the adverse family reactions prevented her from revealing the experience to her family members.

This study is a trailblazing exploration of the nonconsensual sex experiences among Filipino adolescents 15-24 years old. It was conceived as a response to an apparent information gap in Philippine adolescent research which shows very little systematic study on this issue despite more than two decades of adolescent study capitalizing on three national surveys.

The findings of the study will hopefully provide the knowledge necessary in designing more informed interventions for the victims and in installing mechanisms to reduce the occurrence of similar practices in the future.