

More casual sex, more risks

Madhavi Rajadhyaksha / TNN

Mumbai: Collegians today are more likely to have casual sex with friends, classmates, neighbours and relatives rather than visit commercial sex workers, according to a three-year study of male college students in Maharashtra.

Researcher Jayanta Kumar Basu of the Family Planning Association of India, who interviewed college students, observed that the proportion of students who had intercourse with CSWs declined from 23% in 2004 to 3% in 2008. During the same period, the percentage of students who had sex with friends and others increased from 11% in 2004 to 16% in 2008.

"Boys preferred friends to CSWs, as they had to spend less money on sex. They also perceived a much lower risk of contracting HIV with friends and others," said Basu.

The study surveyed students in leading colleges in seven districts of Maharashtra, including Mumbai, Thane and Nagpur, in 2004, 2006 and 2008. Over the years, the students seemed to be as sexually active as their seniors, and 36% of boys and 11% of girls admitted to being sexually active.

Basu considers the move towards casual sex "worrisome". Researchers learned during detailed discussions with the collegians that boys tended to disregard safety when they engaged in sex with friends and neighbours.

SEX & THE COLLEGIAN

Nearly 18% of the interviewees in 2006 and '08 admitted to being sexually active
More than 36% of male students had non-penetrative sex with women, while 23% had penetrative sex
First female partner was friend or classmate for 61% of students, neighbour for 17%, commercial sex worker for 12% and relative for 8%
Most college-going boys in the state lose their virginity at 18.5 years

'Students lack awareness on safe sex'

Mumbai: A survey of the sexual behaviour of college students has revealed that the few male students who use condoms with their girlfriends do so to avoid pregnancy, rather than to protect themselves and their partner from HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections.

Jayanta Kumar Basu of the Family Planning Association of India, who was on the research team, said, "Most students said they always used condoms while visiting commercial sex workers as they have multiple partners. However, they believed that their girlfriends or classmates didn't have multiple partners and hence were under the misconception that they didn't need protection."

The study, which was based on the 'Behaviour Surveillance Survey' of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and conducted by the Avert Society was presented at the international conference on 'Gender-Based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health' in the city on Tuesday.

Basu said the study highlights the need for colleges to introduce behavioural change communication programmes as existing programmes tend to ignore youngsters as potential high-risk groups for HIV. Independent experts highlighted the need for more awareness in colleges. "There is some awareness in colleges, but it needs to be scaled up," said Dr Balaih Donta of the National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health, Parel. A WHO official said various surveys showed that 10% to 23% of Indians indulged

in premarital sex. "But knowledge of HIV and pregnancy prevention isn't up to the mark," the official said.

Of birds and bees

Survey sample

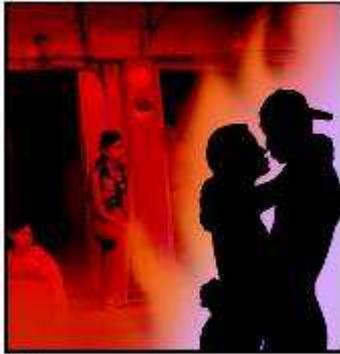
Senior college students who were never married and don't live with a partner

Years

2004, 2006, 2008

Colleges

St Xavier's, H R, and Jai Hind, among others



Ram