

The Emerging Adult's Perception on Sexual Relationships

Marital, Live-in and Extra-marital

ALKA PANDEY AND K. MAYURI

This exploratory study was part of a larger study undertaken in Hyderabad. Self developed questionnaires were used to collect data from 30 unmarried male and 30 unmarried female respondents in the age group of 20-25 years. The main purpose of the study was to understand emerging perceptions on sexual relationships among unmarried adults.

Alka Pandey is a Ph.D. Student; and K. Mayuri is Professor and Head, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Home Science, ANGRAU, Hyderabad.

INTRODUCTION

Human sexuality is how people experience the erotic and express themselves as sexual beings; the awareness of themselves as males or females; and the capacity they have for erotic experiences and responses. Human sexuality can be described as the way someone is sexually attracted to another person of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), to the same sex (homosexuality), to both sexes (bisexuality), or attracted to no sexes in a sexual way. Emerging adulthood has been characterised, in part, as a time to explore sexuality and to gain sexual experience (Gilmartin, 2006). Part of this sexual exploration may involve experimenting with casual sex behaviour. Biologically, young people between ages 18–29 years are mature adults. Socially, however, emerging adults are not quite “full” adults. They are completing their education, gaining entry-level work experience, and slowly attaining financial and personal independence.

In short, most are not prepared for married life with a consistent and socially sanctioned sexual partner whose companionship their parents or grandparents might have enjoyed at the same age.

A survey conducted by India Today (2011) found that 60 percent of working couples depend on visual stimulus to get turned on, 27 percent prefer watching others having sex, 13 percent fantasize about orgies, and 8 percent about threesomes. Experts blame this boredom on endless distractions. The relentless pursuit of fatter paychecks and promotions, and round-the-clock intrusion of BlackBerrys and the internet has left couples with no quality time inside the bedroom. Emotional absenteeism has set couples on the dangerous trajectory of detached sex. Instead of finding ways to reignite the passion in their marriages, most couples are seeking options outside. Sixty-six percent husbands watch porn, 28 percent of them are open to one-night stands, 23 percent admit having extramarital affairs and 16 percent say they would not mind swapping their wives. Also, 10 percent men admit to having had threesomes (*India Today*, 2011).

Among a sample of undergraduates, the antecedents to casual sex have been found to vary according to gender. Men with lower levels of depression are more likely to be classified as having casual sex. Interestingly, the opposite is true for women. Women with a greater number of depressive symptoms are more likely to report having casual sex (Grello and others, 2006)

Oswalt and others (2005) conducted a study for exploring sexual regret and surveyed students about sexual health issues. They noted that among the sexually active, 72 percent reported regret in at least one sexual liaison. Moral concerns were among some of the main reasons cited for such regret. The stable predictor of regret was number of partners—the more partners they had, the more likely they were to report sexual regrets.

About 24 percent of Indian men have indulged in sexual violence at some point in their lives, and 20 percent of them admittedly forced their wives or partners to fulfill their sexual needs (*Times of India*, March 2011).

Women are not far behind, as 34 percent regularly watch porn, 24 percent have had one-night stands, orgies and even paid sex, and three percent have had threesomes (*India Today*, 2011).

The objectives of the study were: (i) to study the emerging adults perception on marital, live-in, extra marital sexual relationships; and (ii) to study the gender differences in the perception of marital, live-in, extra marital sexual relationships.

Rationale for the study

Very few studies are available on perceptions about sex and sexual relationships in India. Psychiatrists have pointed out to sexual incompatibility along with premarital and extramarital relationships as underlying causes of marital conflicts among couples. Most couples are busy fulfilling their career oriented goals at the cost of their married life. While there is a lot of literature available in the West on sexual relationships, such data is very limited in India. Most Indians still harbour conservative views on sex, sexuality, premarital and extra marital relationships. The present study seeks to look at the complex factors that impact sexual relationships of individuals.

METHODOLOGY

The exploratory research design was used to investigate the present study. The sample for the study was selected from the educated middle class and the upper middle class groups of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. A total of 60 respondents comprising 30 males and 30 females belonging to the age group of 20–25 years were selected through purposive sampling technique (only persons who were willing to fill the questionnaire were included for the study).

The authors developed a questionnaire comprising 16 questions, which was divided into three sections to understand the perception of emerging adults on marital, live-in, and extramarital sexual relationships.

ANALYSIS

Frequency percentages in graphs were used along with weighted scores for ranked items. For ranked scores, weighted scores were calculated by giving each rank a score in descending order of the ranks. For example, if there were 12 options for ranking, Rank 1 would get a score of 12. For each item, the weighted scores were calculated as follows:

Rank 1 x Number of Respondents giving that rank x Score + Rank 2 c
Number of Respondents giving that rank x Score = Final Score

Items were then placed in descending order of the final scores.

Operational definition of variables

Emerging Adults: Phase of life span between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood.

Perception: The act or faculty of apprehending by using the senses or of the mind, cognition, and understanding.

Marital sexual relationship: Sexual relationship between married couples (wife and husband).

Live-in relationship: A living arrangement in which an unmarried couple lives together in a long-term relationship that resembles a marriage.

Extra marital sexual relationship: Sexual relationship between married person and someone other than his or her spouse.

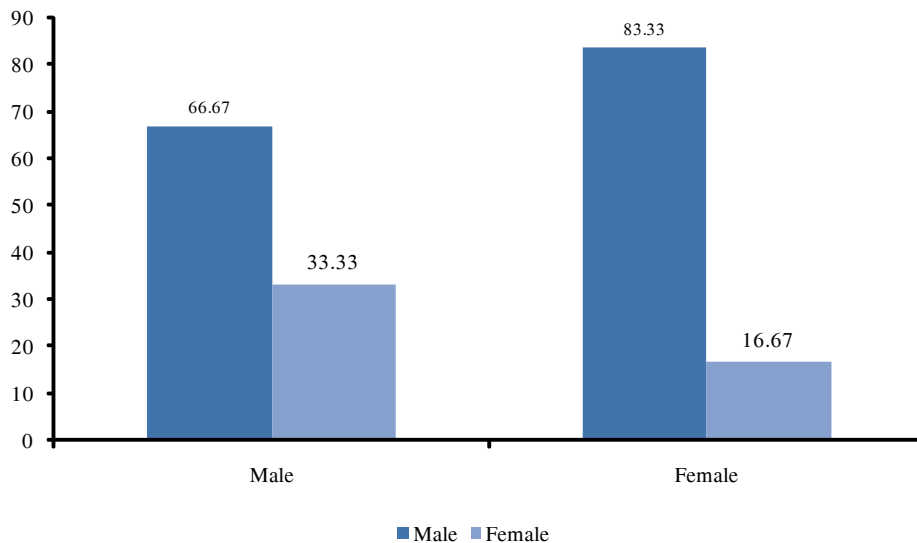
Marital discord: Lack of concord or harmony between married persons.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emerging Adults Perception on Marital Sexual Relationships

Figure 1.1 shows that most of the respondents (66.67 percent males and 83.33 percent females) expressed that men generally initiate sex. Most of them also said that they should have sex as frequently as they feel the need (Figure 1.5).

FIGURE 1.1: Perception on Initiation of Marital Sexual Act



Most of the respondents, both male (66.67 percent) and female (80 percent), perceived that females are generally responsible for contraception (Figure 1.2). It was surprising to note that even among the well educated, contraception is still perceived to be the responsibility of women.

FIGURE 1.2: Perception on Responsibility for Contraception Use

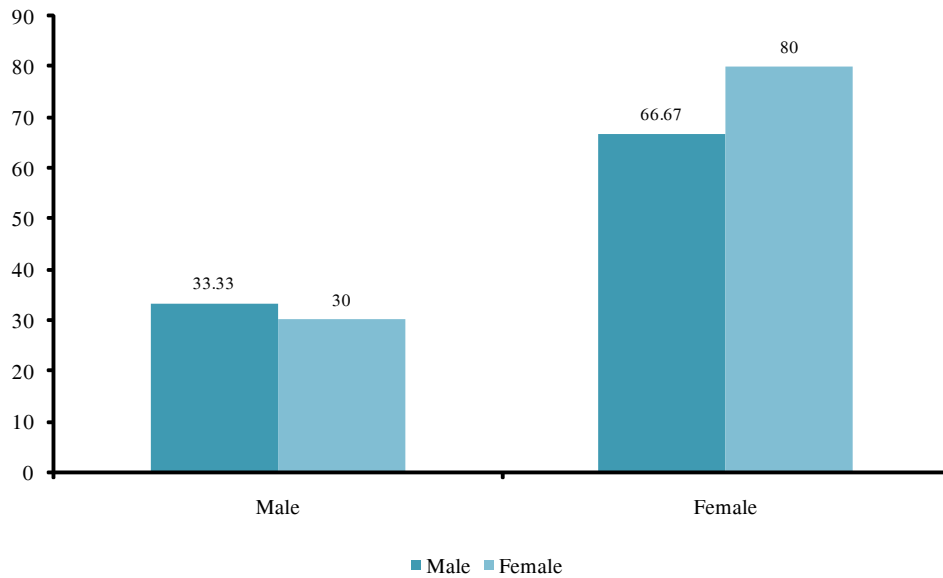


Figure 1.3 depicts that 73.33 percent male and 66.67 percent female respondents perceived that sexual dissatisfaction is the most important cause of marital discord and it is on the rise at present. Eighty percent males and 76.67 percent females said that husbands generally express more dissatisfaction in sexual relationships (Figure 1.4).

FIGURE 1.3: Sexual Dissatisfaction as the Main Reason for Marital Discord

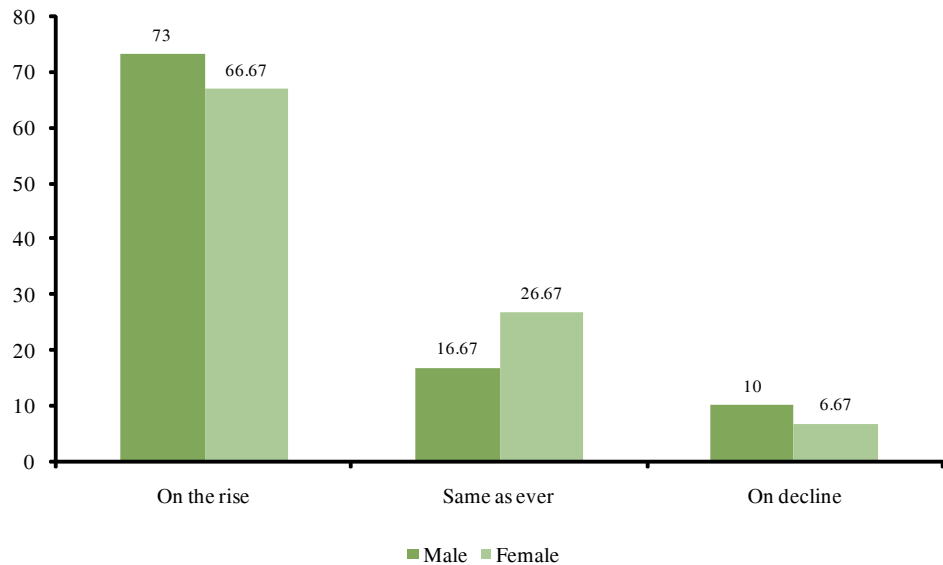


FIGURE 1.4: Partners who Express More Dissatisfaction in Sexual Relationships

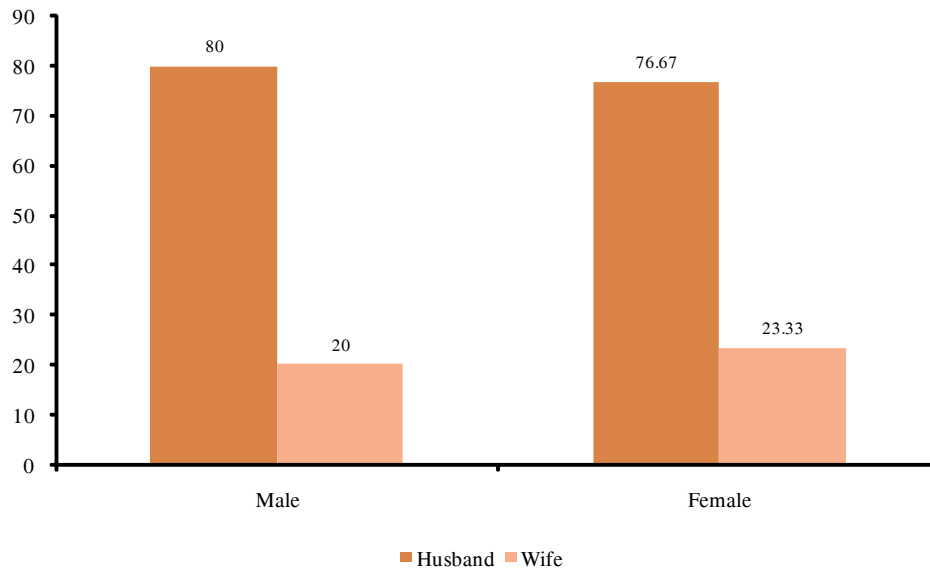


FIGURE 1.5: Perception on Regularity of Sexual Intercourse

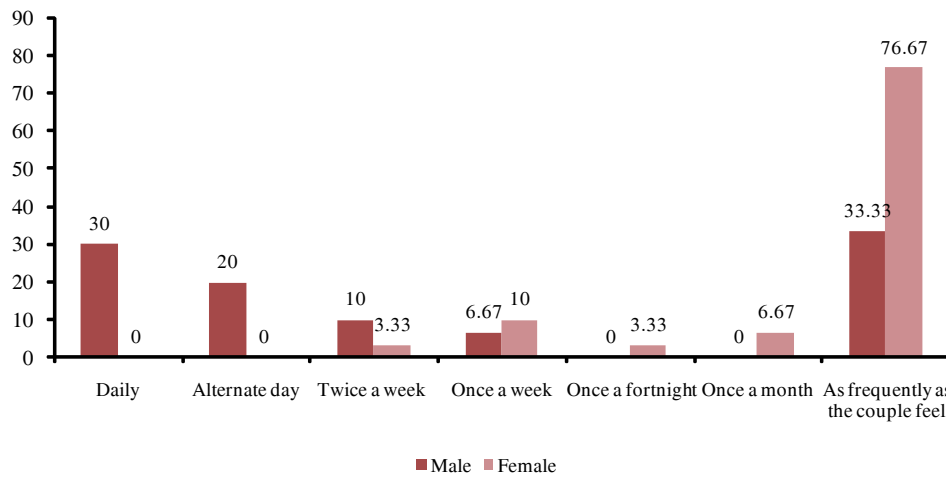


Figure 1.6 shows that most of the male and female respondents agree that couples need the help of counsellors to revitalise their sexual and interpersonal relationships. It is quite possible that due to work load and busy schedules young adults/couples are unable to give time to each other, thus affecting their sexual and interpersonal relationships.

Marital vows were viewed as sacred by 53.33 percent males and 56.67 percent females and therefore fulfilling sexual needs of one's partner was important; however, 46.67 percent males and 43.33 percent females felt that it was not always possible or necessary to give sex much importance in marriage as there are other marital duties to be fulfilled also (Figure 1.7).

FIGURE 1.6: Perception of Couples on the Need for Counsellors to Revitalise their Sexual and Inter Personal Relationships

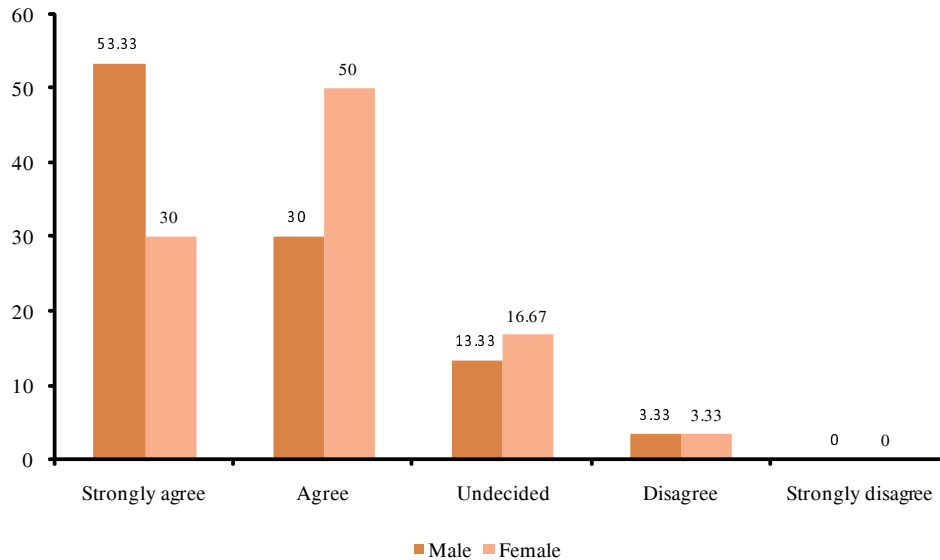
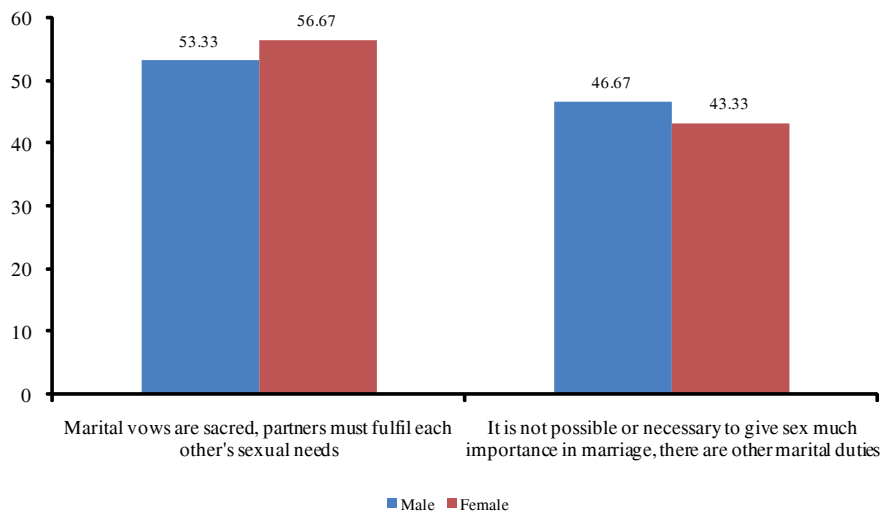


FIGURE 1.7: Perception on Importance of Sexual Need Fulfillment in Marriage



When asked about the importance of sex in marriage, interestingly 50 percent of both male and female respondents said that it is the most important marital responsibility of partners; therefore, divorce is justified if there is lack of sexual satisfaction even if other marital functions/responsibilities are carried out satisfactorily. However, 76.67 percent females said that partners should make adjustments in sexual relationships and not give up on their marriage. This statement reinforces the traditional and stereotypical views held by women; however, only 23.33 percent male respondents agreed on this point (Figure 1.9).

FIGURE 1.8: Perception on Importance of Sex in Marriage

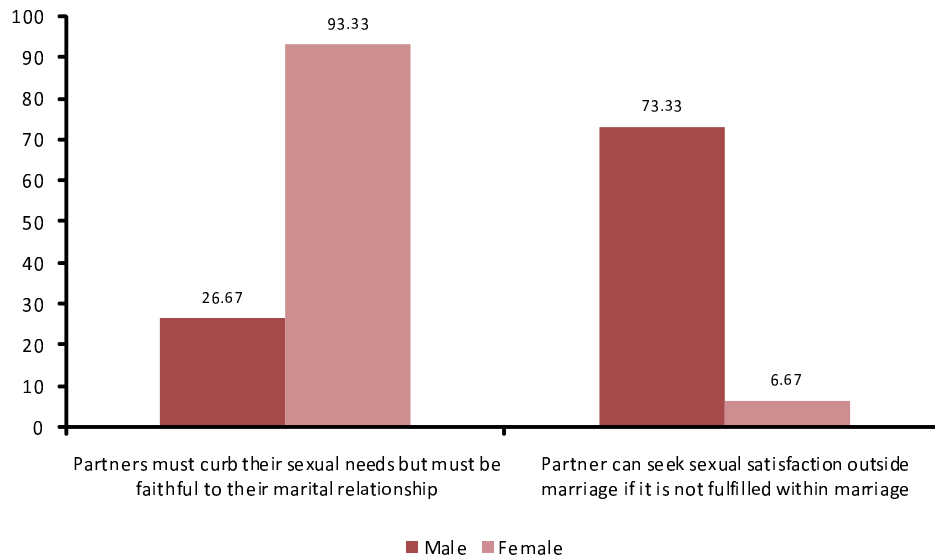


FIGURE 1.9: Importance of Sex in Marriage

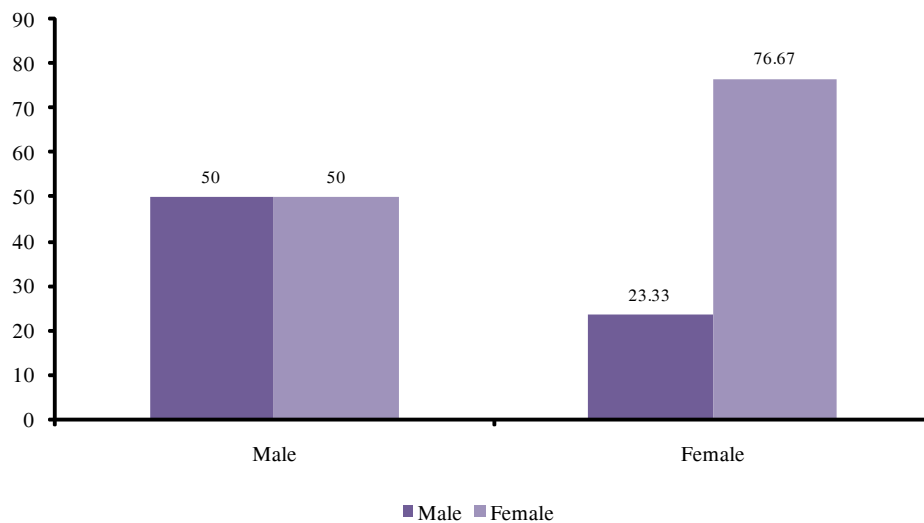


Figure 1.8 depicts that 73.33 percent females and 26.67 percent males said that partners must curb their sexual needs and remain faithful to their marital relationship, whereas 93.33 percent males and 6.67 percent females said that partners can seek sexual satisfaction outside the marriage if it is not fulfilled within a marital relationship. This indicates that women seek to be more faithful in their marital relationship as compared to men. While women do not attach much significance to sex in a marital relationship, men are not averse to seeking satisfaction outside of their marriage.

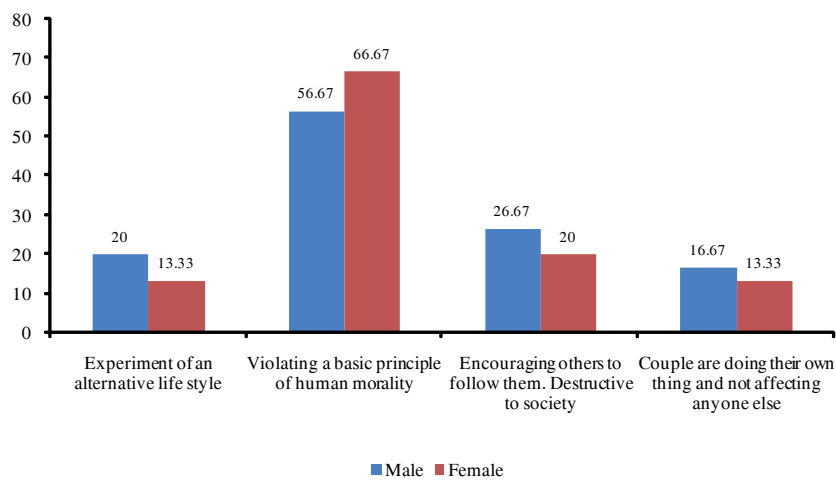
TABLE 1.1 : Reasons for a Satisfying Marital Sexual Relationship

Male			Female		
Preferences	Weighted Score	Rank	Preferences	Weighted Score	Rank
Romantic love	241	1	Good communication	275	1
Cooperation on other aspects of marriage	239	2	Have children	264	2
Partners are attractive to each other	225	3	Talk about sexual needs of each other and comply	262	3
Good communication	201	4	Cook food that is satisfying	234	4
Have less stress regarding financial matters	192	5	Engage in sex frequently	197	5
Engage in sex frequently	189	6	Have jobs they are happy to be in	197	6
Have children	159	7	Have less stress regarding financial matters	191	7
Have jobs they are happy to be in	155	8	Partners are attractive to each other	161	8
Cook food that is satisfying	141	9	Romantic love	117	9
Talk about sexual needs of each other and comply	130	10	Cooperation on other aspects of marriage	114	10
Do not have children	106	11	Do not have children	101	11

Data revealed that men perceived romantic love, cooperation, partners being attractive to each other and good communication between couples as important for a satisfying marriage (Table 1.1). Women, however, perceived good communication, having children, talking about sexual needs to each other and cooking good food as more important. Men perceived that marital sex was dissatisfying when there was lack of understanding regarding each other's needs, frequent requests for sex by a partner, and night shifts at work places. Female respondents perceived financial troubles, anxiety, depression and other psychological stressors as the main reasons for unsatisfactory marital sexual relationships (Table 1.2).

Live-in Relationships

FIGURE 2.1: Perception of Emerging Adults on Unmarried Men and Women Living Together



When emerging adults were asked to give their perception on unmarried men and women living together, 46.67 percent men and 66.67 percent women said that they are violating a basic principle of human morality. Twenty percent men and 13.33 percent women felt that they were experimenting with an alternative lifestyle. Some (26.67 percent men and 20 percent women) said that this could be detrimental to society as it would encourage others to emulate such behaviour, and about 16.67 percent men and 13.33 percent women felt that couples are doing their own thing and this will not affect others. The India Today study supports the present research finding which states that live-in relationships are still not acceptable to 61 percent Indians, and 23 percent feel it is not acceptable to their families (*India Today* –Nielsen Sex Survey 2011).

TABLE 1.2: Reasons of Unsatisfactory Marital Sexual Relationships

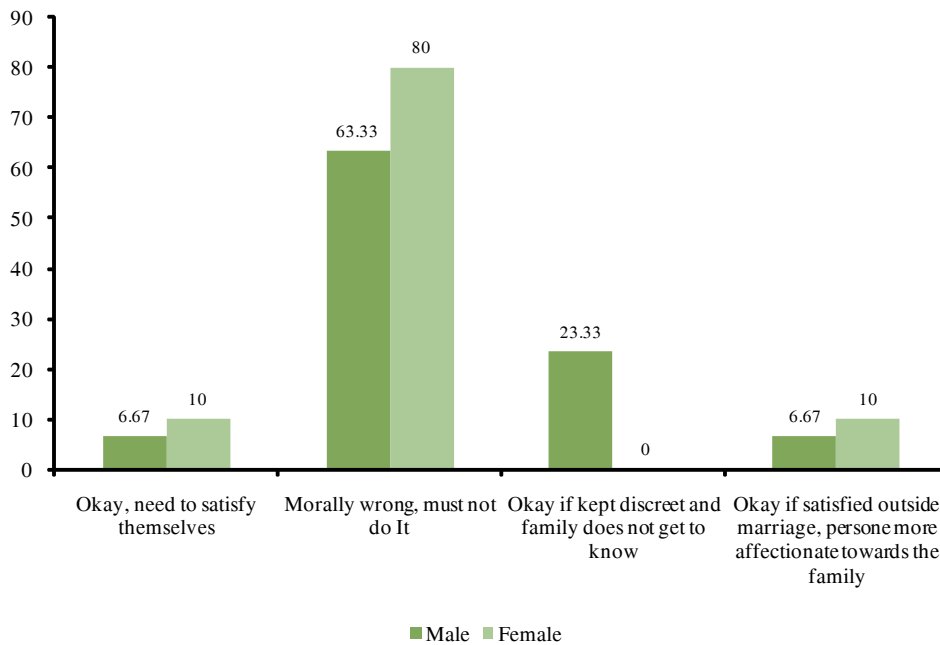
<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Lack of understanding for each other's needs	466	1	Financial troubles	588	1
Frequent requests for sex by partners	445	2	Poor quality food at home	522	2
Night shifts at work	429	3	Anxiety, depression and other psychological reasons	514	3
Frequent arguments	421	4	General fatigue	464	4
Fear of unwanted pregnancy	413	5	Absence of children	450	5
Loss of interest in partner	410	6	Untidy house	449	6
Too much job related stress	403	7	Partner untidy (lost interest in dressing up)	419	7
Partner no longer attractive (gained weight)	374	8	Health problems of partner	400	8
Long hours at job	355	9	Presence of other members in the house	385	9
Presence of children	354	10	Long hours at job	361	10
Uninterested in sex by one partner	349	11	Presence of children	343	11
Other preoccupations	348	12	No privacy	342	12
No privacy	344	13	Partner no longer attractive (gained weight)	335	13
Untidy house	331	14	Uninterested in sex by one partner	334	14
Presence of other members in the house	313	15	Night shifts at work	326	15

<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Health problems of partner	281	16	Loss of interest in partner	320	16
Partner untidy (lost interest in dressing up)	276	17	Other preoccupations	313	17
General fatigue	262	18	Frequent requests for sex by partner	270	18
Poor quality food at home	256	19	Too much job related stress	244	19
Absence of children	255	20	Fear of unwanted pregnancy	228	20
Financial troubles	243	21	Frequent arguments	228	21
Anxiety, depression and other psychological reasons	233	22	Lack of understanding for each other's needs	177	22

Extramarital Relationships

When respondents were asked about their perception on individuals seeking pleasure outside their marriage when relationships between couples started failing, 63.33 percent men and 80 percent women said that it was morally wrong. However, 23.33 percent men expressed that it was okay if the whole episode was kept discreet and the family did not get to know. Only 6.67 percent males and 10 percent females said that extramarital relationships were okay as people need to satisfy their sexual needs (Figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1: Perception of Couples having Extramarital Relationships



According to Figure 3.2, most of the respondents (60 percent male and 66.67 percent female) said that extramarital affairs were on the rise. However, 33.33 percent male and 23.33 percent female respondents perceived no change, but had instead become more visible. A few respondents said that extramarital affairs were on the decline. According to an *India Today* survey, 23 percent men and 8 percent women have indulged in extramarital affairs in India. Of these, 37 percent women said that their husbands knew about their extramarital affairs, while 69 percent men said that their wives do not know about their extramarital affairs. However, this was not acceptable to 69 percent women and 50 percent men (*India Today*—Nielsen Sex Survey 2011).

FIGURE 3.2: Perception on Present Status of Extramarital Affairs in Society

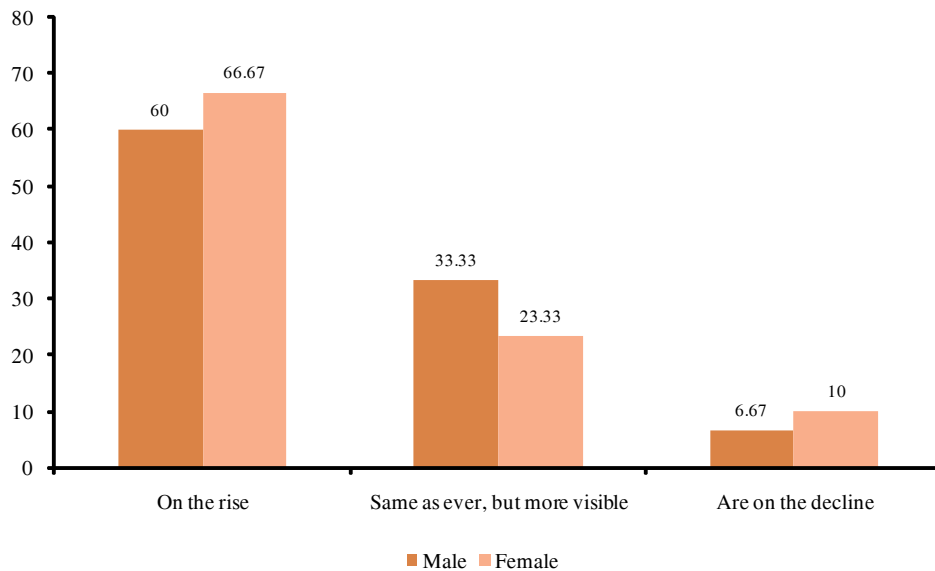
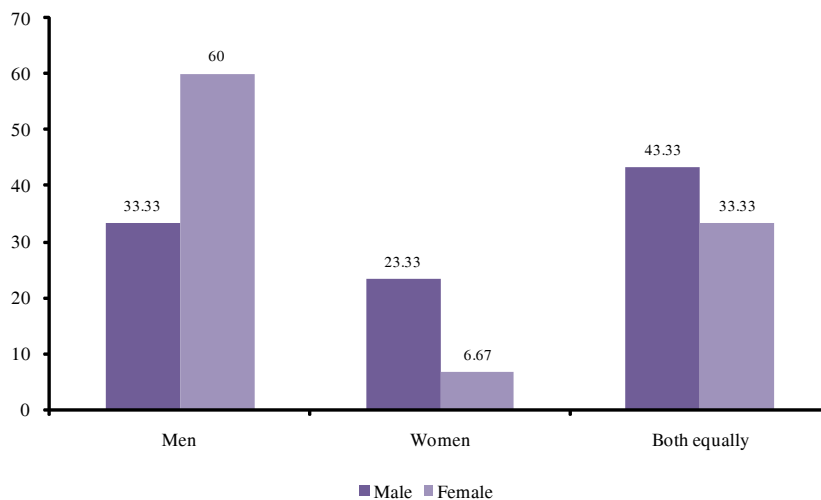


FIGURE 3.3: Partner Indulges More in Extramarital Affairs



Whereas most of the women perceived that males generally indulge in extramarital affairs. Figure 3.3 shows that most men perceived females to indulge in extramarital affairs. Around 43.33 percent males and 33.33 percent females said that both sexes were equally involved in extramarital affairs.

Men perceive that the major reasons for extramarital affairs include: not fulfilling partner's sexual needs, frequent arguments and fights, partner becoming unattractive, desire to have varied partners, and the partner does not fulfill other needs such as intellectual companionship. Female

respondents perceived that the main reason behind extramarital affairs include: partners being too busy with other activities and thus unable to give time, when partner diverts his attention towards other attractive activities, friends force, frequent arguments and fights with partner, communication with partner is not amicable, and boredom (Table 3.1).

Male respondents thought that the main repercussions of extra marital affairs are divorce, desertion, lack of warmth and affection between partners (Table 3.2). They also thought that they may lose status among friends and relatives in society, and that the deserted partner may suffer from psychological stress. Most of the female respondents thought that the main repercussion of extra marital affairs are financial problems in the family because male partners start spending money on their extramarital partners. The other results of extramarital affairs are divorce, loss of status in society, children losing faith in the parents. The deserted partners suffer from psychological stress and the couple could get separated.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The present study only includes the perception of emerging adults on sexual relationships. Therefore, future studies could include different age groups like teenagers, adolescents, adulthood, and old age people.
- After studying perception on sexual relationships across different age groups, trend analyses of different age groups could be carried out.
- Findings of the present study can be used to understand emerging adults perception on sexual relationships.
- Study findings can be used by counsellors, educators and researchers to understand emerging adult's perception on sexual relationships.

CONCLUSION

The study clearly revealed that there are gender differences among emerging adults on their perception on marital, live-in, extra marital sexual relationships. Most of the male respondents had very bold views on sexual relationships as compared to female respondents. Female respondents considered sex as the important component of marriage and do not think that people should give up their marriage because of the absence of sex. They believe that the marital relationship is the most important relationship and people should put all efforts to save their marital relationship. Majority of the male respondents considered that sex is the most important component in marital relationships and without

TABLE 3.1: Major Factors Leading to Extramarital Affairs

<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Weighted Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Partner does not satisfy sexual needs	263	1	Partner too busy with other activities	324	1
Frequent arguments and fights with partner	246	2	Find someone else attractive	317	2
Partner has become unattractive	245	3	Friends force	254	3
Partner does not fulfill other needs (intellectual companionship)	235	4	Frequent arguments and fights with partner	249	4
Desire to have varied partner	232	5	Communication with partner is not amicable	242	5
Communication with partner is not amicable	230	6	Boredom	239	6
Boredom	220	7	Partner declines to satisfy the need	234	7
Find someone else attractive	214	8	Job stress leading to seeking pleasure among colleagues	230	8
Partner declines to satisfy the need	202	9	Desire to have varied partners	190	9
Job stress leading to seeking pleasure among colleagues	197	10	Partner does not fulfill other needs (intellectual companionship)	184	10
Partner too busy with other activities	178	11	Partner has become unattractive	179	11
Friends force	145	12	Just happens once in a while with no specific reason	168	12
Just happens once in a while with no specific reason	125	13	Partner does not fulfill other needs (intellectual companionship)	113	13

TABLE 3.2: Repercussions of Extra Marital Affairs

<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Percentile</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Preferences</i>	<i>Percentile</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Divorce	209	1	Financial problem	230	1
Desertion	159	2	Divorce	220	2
Warmth and affection disappears	159	3	Loss of status in society	209	3
Frequent arguments and fights	157	4	Children lose faith in the parent	186	4
Loss of status in society	156	5	Psychological stress	158	5
Children lose faith in the parent	136	6	Desertion	156	6
Psychological stress	133	7	Warmth and affection disappears	120	7
Loss of self esteem	122	8	Frequent arguments and fights	112	8
Financial problems	115	9	Loss of self esteem	87	9

that marital relationship cannot survive. Men perceived not fulfilling partner's sexual needs, frequent arguments and fights as major reasons for extramarital affairs. Female respondents perceived that extramarital affairs happen when partners are too busy with other activities and are therefore unable to give time.

Male respondents thought that the main repercussions of extra marital affairs are divorce, desertion, lack of warmth and affection between partners, but female respondents considered financial problems as the main repercussion of extra marital affairs. Researchers and counsellors can make valuable use of the present research findings. In a conservative society like India where there is limited data available on perception of sexual relationships, the study findings will help in understanding the emerging adults thinking and knowledge on sexual relationships.

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