

Transition to Adulthood:

The Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors of Youth in Afghanistan

Background: Transition to adulthood is usually defined as taking responsibilities of adulthood, but the types and process of transition to adulthood are different between societies. In the path of transition to adulthood, youth face many opportunities and challenges. Such paradoxical situation of opportunity and threat necessitates a thorough scientific understanding of issues and needs of youth in various areas, including sexual and marriage issues.

Transition to adulthood involves enormous changes of identity and social roles in different aspects of youth life such as education, employment, sexual behaviors, marriage and family formation. This research is focused on sexual dimension of transition to adulthood. Sexual system is subject to change as a result of structural and cultural changes. In the case of Afghanistan, regarding social and political changes, media development, and transnational relations over the post-Taliban period, it seems that sexual attitudes and behaviors of Afghan youth have changed. In this context, the question arises as to what image can be drawn from the attitudes and patterns of sexual behaviors of youth in Afghanistan?. In detail, the main questions of this research are as following:

- 1- What are the important components of sexual transition to adulthood?
- 2- Which problems do youth face in the process of sexual transition?
- 3- What are sexual attitudes and behaviors of Afghan youth?
- 4- What are the effects of socio-demographic determinants on sexual attitudes and behaviors?

Data and Methods: To answer these questions, the research project "*The Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors of Youth in Afghanistan*" has been designed by the Afghan Institute of Strategic Studies (AISS) in collaboration with University of Tehran. This research is conducted within the framework of mixed methods research (qualitative and quantitative methods). The population in this study consists of Afghan single youth 15-34 years old, both males and females, living in 10 big and small cities. The sample size in qualitative phase is 52 people and for quantitative phase 1350 people.

In summary, this research attempts to examine the meanings and concepts of sexual relations among young people, as well as, an overview of the sexual attitudes and behaviors of youth in Afghanistan and its related factors. Thus, we are seeking an overall image of sexual attitudes and behaviors of youth.

Results: The results of study have presented in three areas including; sexual transition and its types, sexual health, and sexual education.

Sexual transition and its types: One third of the respondents have control on their sexual desires; however, there is a gender difference in this case (for males 22 % and for females 45%). Almost, 57% of the youth (70% of males and 42% of females) have used pornographic contents. Using

the 10 items, we construct attitude to friendship with the opposite sex. The results showed that 46 % of respondents have positive attitudes, 21 % have negative attitudes, and about 33 % were in intermediate situation. The main reason of making friendship with the opposite sex was marriage. Regarding tendency to make friendship with the opposite sex, the results showed that 34% of respondents have unwillingness or low tendency, 30 % have somewhat and 36 % (47% for males and 24% for males) have high tendency to make friendship with the opposite sex.

The results showed the half of respondents have experienced boy/ or girlfriend relationship. But, in the time of survey, 38 % of respondents (44.5 % for males and 32 % for females), have boy/ or girlfriend. Most of them believed this relations end to marriage. Based on the results, 22 % of respondents (24 % for males and 19 % for females) have positive attitudes and 19 % have high tendency (30 % for males and 7 % for females) toward sexual relations outside the marriage. During the last month before the survey, 11% of the young people had a physical contact experience with opposite sex and 3.5% of the sexual intercourse experience.

The analysis indicated demographic and social factors, including gender, education, religiosity, migration experience, media, internet and social networks, friends and family backgrounds significantly have influenced on sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Sexual health: The analysis showed about 64 percent of respondents knew about the transmission of HIV (HIV) through insecure sexual relationships. In contrast, 36% have no information. The most important sources of information and awareness about HIV/AIDS are television (23%), satellite (19%), Internet (12%), friends (10%), teachers and professors (9%). However, only 20% of the respondents are aware of the method they use to have healthy and safe sexual intercourse. A remarkable point is that about three quarters of people who have been informed know that they are well aware of the use of condoms. Hence, the awareness of having a healthy sexual relationship is low for young people. Even half of those involved in sexual relations outside the marriage have not been informed about the healthy sexual relationship and the use of preventive methods.

Sexual education: Young people have been looking for their sexual intercourse in their various ways. These items generally include internet resources, educational books, friends, and in some cases parents. According to the results, the most important source of sexual information and the answers to the sexual questions of the young people examined is talking with friends (38%). After that, the search on the Internet (31%) is important. For girls, in addition to these two sources, talking with the mother (22%). Among respondents, 11% said they did not need to be educated at all, 33% needed it at a low level, and 22% felt somewhat likely to have sex education for the youth. Finally, one third of respondents (33%) said that it is essential for young people to have sexual education before going to marriage. This need and necessity was high among girls (38%) than boys (28%).