INTRODUCTION

Historically, adolescent sexual behavior has been viewed through one of two fairly limited approaches: the theory of biological unfoldment or the social-learning paradigm. The theory of biological unfoldment views adolescent sexuality through a physiological and developmental lens, explaining sexual behaviour in terms of bio-chemical drives, hormonal urges, and pubertal stages (Udry, Talbert, & Morris, 1986). The social-learning perspective, on the other hand, sees sexual behaviour as learned through influences such as cultural indoctrination and parental modelling (Werner-Wilson, 1998). Each of these paradigms tends to take one side of the classic nature vs. nurture debate.

But the ecological approach considers factors from both biological and environmental realms to form a more complete picture of adolescent behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Schweiger & O’Brien, 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) Ecological Systems Theory, risk factors that contribute to increased likelihood of maladaptive outcomes can come from many places in a child’s environment, both proximal and distal. The most specific and proximal level of environmental influence is that of the microsystem, or the factors present in an individual, both physically and psychologically. Examples of microsystem influences include personal beliefs and cognitions, or physical conditions. The next system level is the mesosystem which involves immediate contextual factors present in the individual’s environment and includes examples such as parental levels of education, growing up in a single-parent or two-parent home, and peer influence and educational aspirations. The most distal level is the macrosystem, which includes the most broad-reaching factors, such as cultural practices and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, et.al., 1989). Examples of macrosystem variables include socio-economic status, the nation in which one lives, and cultural views on violence. Grasping these multiple environmental risk factors can help to provide more comprehensive understanding of youth sexual behaviour. Thus the present study is an attempt to unfold the ecological correlates of adolescent sexual behaviour.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Adolescent sexuality has always been and still is, to a large extent, a problem for both parents and professionals world-wide. Irrespective of cultural assumptions, great effort is put into defining the limits of normal sexuality in childhood compared with deviant/problematic behaviour. The solutions vary depending both on family norms and the prevailing social and cultural context (Heiman, 1998). Everyone has an attitude to sexuality and the way this is expressed. We may be negative, positive, possibly reluctant or embarrassed but never entirely indifferent. In particular, expressions of sexual desire, curiosity and behaviour in children have aroused many feelings in adults.

Though it has taken several years to arrive, the sexual revolution is taking its scrupulous progression in India. It shudders the traditional notions about sex. The scripts of sexual behavior are most powerful during adolescence as they are first learning to be sexual. On this very fact, many of the adolescents are victims of sexual abuse. The Impact of modernization, the access to Internet and predisposed media culture tend to make the adolescents less bothered about the taboos of parents and religion. Augment in homosexuality, lesbianism, masturbation, pornographic exposures and sexual deviations are very much visible among them. The access to the media is enormous. The advertisement world is characterized by the promotion of sexuality and erotic feelings. The portrayal of sex in today’s fiction and movies in the mask of being ‘sociable’ persuade the attraction of the self-centered sensualists. Those sensualists revert the sex life in to the laws of the jungle and in fact that turns to make antisocial behavior in adolescent’s sexuality.
The formation of sexual natures of the young men and women are enormously similar. But the expression of their sexual need is diverse. Many children, especially adolescents ends up in sexual abuse by the elders because, curiosity makes adolescents vulnerable for the experiments with sex. The sexual abuse would have manipulation on the sexual behavior of the adolescents. There may be an influence of life setting in the sexual behavior of the adolescents. The sexual life in a city may differ significantly from the village. It is important for the young people growing through adolescence towards adult maturity and towards marriage, to develop gradually a healthy sexual identity. They need to understand and accept the reality, the nature and the purpose of the sexuality. They must not develop a distorted sexual behavior. They must be assisted to have self-confidence and a firm positive sexual behavior. Keeping these things in the milieu, a study on the ecological correlates of sexual behavior in adolescence is intended to find out the real nature of sexuality among the adolescents in the concerned locale.

OBJECTIVES

The study was undertaken with an aim to investigate the ecological correlates of sexual behavior in adolescence. In order to accomplish this aim, the following specific objectives were framed:

1. To identify the nature of sexual behavior in adolescents.
2. To find out the relationship between the urban and rural life setting in the sexual behavior of adolescents.
3. To find out the relationship between the male and female adolescents in their sexual behavior.
4. To find out the relationship between occupation of parents and sexual behavior of adolescents.
5. To find out the relationship between education of father and sexual behaviour of adolescents.
6. To find out the relationship between education of mother and sexual behaviour of adolescents.
7. To find out the Correlation of sexual abuse in childhood with sexual behavior in adolescence.
8. To find out the Correlation of religious adherence with sexual behavior in adolescence.
9. To find out the Correlation of parenting style with sexual behavior in adolescence.
10. To find out the Correlation of exposure to media with sexual behavior in adolescence.
11. To find out the correlation of academic interest with sexual behavior in adolescence.
12. To find out the Correlation of peer influence with sexual behavior in adolescence.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the review of literature, design and objective of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant difference between the male and female adolescents in their four measures of sexual behavior.
2. There is no significant difference between the urban and rural adolescents in their four measures of sexual behavior.
3. There is no significant relation between education of father and sexual behaviour in adolescence.
4. There is no significant relation between education of mother and sexual behaviour in adolescence.
5. There is no significant relation between occupation of parents and sexual behaviour in adolescence.

6. There is no significant correlation between academic interest and sexual behaviour in adolescence.

7. There is no significant correlation between sexual abuse in childhood and sexual behaviour in adolescence.

8. There is no significant correlation between parenting style and sexual behavior in adolescence.

9. There is no significant correlation between religious adherence and sexual behavior in adolescence.

10. There is no significant correlation between the exposure to media and sexual behavior in adolescents.

11. There is no significant correlation between the peer influence and sexual behavior in adolescents.

SAMPLE

In view of accomplishing the objectives of the study, the investigator selected the descriptive method. Among the different approaches that may be used in descriptive research, the survey method was selected for the present study. The target population of the study consisted of adolescents from three districts of Kerala namely Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha. The study focussed on boys and girls of high schools and higher secondary classes in the government and private institutions of urban and rural areas in Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts of Kerala. Stratified sampling technique was utilised to draw sample units for the study.

Before embarking on the major study, a preliminary study was undertaken to help formulate the main study. The pilot study was designed to assess the feasibility and to test the logistics of the study in terms of measuring sexual behaviour and its correlates. It was also expected to reveal deficiencies if any in the proposed study. The pilot study was done on 100 adolescents from three schools randomly selected from Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts.

It has often been noted that schools comprise of a sample of children who are representatives of the student population of the state. Hence, the most feasible approach to conduct the survey within the available time and resources was to approach the schools, which ensured representation with respect to age, gender, socio-economic status, level of education, etc. Stringent precautions were taken to conduct the survey effectively. Careful planning had to be done before the study was brought to the field in order to avoid or minimise loss of data due to non-response, misinterpretation of the purpose of the study, or falsification of data. As the first step, a list of schools to be included in the study was prepared. Then, the investigator approached the Heads of institutions to secure permission to conduct the study among the children. The investigator took special care to give sufficient explanations regarding the purpose of the study to the Heads of the schools. As the next stage, the investigator approached the class teachers and briefed them, in their staff rooms. Conscious effort was taken to create rapport and to convince the teachers of their role in making the survey a success. To obtain maximum and valid information with minimum effort and time, the investigator exploited the strong influence of the class teachers upon their students. The Information Schedule was shown to them and clarifications were given, whenever needed.
The survey was conducted among 45 schools in central Travancore namely Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Alleppezha. Out of these, 25 schools were situated in municipalities/corporations and the rest in panchayats. In effect, the sample for the survey consisted of 1500 children of age group ranging from 13-19, drawn from 18 government schools and 27 management schools. Out of total number of 45 schools, 18 schools had Malayalam, the regional language of the state, 20 schools had English and 7 schools had both the languages, as the medium of instruction.

TEST MATERIALS

One major problem encountered in the planning stage of the study was the selection of tools, best suited for the purpose of the study. Review of literature provided information regarding few scales that could be used to measure some of the variables of the present study. However, a number of reasons prevented the use of these tests in the current study. The scales standardised in other cultures could not yield valid results in our culture. For a test to be a reliable and valid one, its items must be suited to the contexts familiar to the subjects who respond to them. The non-availability of adequate and valid tools to measure the variables included in the study prompted the investigator to go in for the construction of tools.

The conceptualisation, item generation, tryout, item selection, reliability and validity of each scale were done in discussion with the experts in the field and also under the supervision of the guide. The following are the different psychological measuring devices developed and used in the present study.

1. **Socio demographic information schedule. (SDIS):**
   This was primarily to collect the information on the gender of the adolescents, the locality of their residence, education of their father and mother, and occupation of their parents.

2. **The sexual behaviour inventory for the adolescents. (SBI):**
   The scale was designed to measure the sexual behaviour of adolescents. The sexual behaviour was considered in four measures such as: **measure 1:** Engaging in sexual feelings by reading pornographic books, watching pornographic television programmes and frequent visit to the internet sex sites, **measure 2:** Behaviour of masturbation, **measure 3:** Behaviour of engaging in sexual feelings by talking sex with the opposite sex, touching and fondling the sexual organs of the opposite sex, **measure 4:** Behaviour of engaging in sex by intercourse with the same sex people and with the opposite sex.

3. **Parenting style inventory for the adolescents. (PSI):**
   This scale was designed to measure the style of parenting the adolescents experience at present. There were three measures included in the scale such as **measure 1:** Autocratic style of parenting, **measure 2:** Balanced style of parenting and **measure 3:** Permissive style of parenting.

4. **Academic interest inventory for the adolescents. (AII):**
   This scale was designed to measure the interest towards academics among adolescents.

5. **Religious adherence inventory for the adolescents. (RAI):**
   This scale was designed to measure the religious interest of the adolescents.

6. **Media exposure inventory for the adolescents. (MEI):**
   This scale was designed to measure the adolescent’s intensity of exposure to media.
7. Peer influence inventory for the adolescents. (PII):
   This scale was designed to measure the intensity of peer influence among adolescents.

8. Sexual abuse inventory for the adolescents. (SAI):
   This scale was designed to measure the experiences of various aspects of sexual abuse in childhood.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES

After the consolidation, coding, and scoring of the data collected from the sample of children and their parents, they were subjected to various statistical techniques to enable testing of the various hypotheses formulated. These statistical procedures included: (1) Reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha) (2) t-test (3) Pearson’s correlation test, and (4) Chi-square test.

RESULTS AND THE TENABILITY OF HYPOTHESES.

Gender Difference and sexual behavior:
   It is found from the study that the male adolescents have higher frequency of engaging in sexual behaviour while they are compared to the female adolescents when all the four measures of sexual behaviour are taken into consideration together. The frequency of engaging in sexual behaviour is significantly high in male adolescents as they are compared to the female adolescents while all the four measures are taken one by one as well. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Locality and sexual behavior:
   The study proved that the adolescents living in urban life setting have higher frequency in engaging in sexual behaviour while they are compared to the adolescents living in rural life setting when all the four measures of sexual behaviour are taken together. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.
   When the sexual behaviour measures are taken separately, adolescents living in rural set up has high frequency in engaging in sexual behaviour measure one, that is the behaviour of engaging in sexual feelings by reading pornographic books, watching pornographic television programmes and frequent visit to the internet sex sites. While it is found that the adolescents living in urban life setting has higher frequency in engaging in the sexual behaviour measure two and three, that is the behaviour of masturbation and the behaviour of engaging in sexual feelings by talking sex with the opposite sex, touching and fondling the sexual organs of the opposite sex. Regarding the measure four of the sexual behaviour, that is the behaviour of engaging in sex by intercourse with the same sex people and with the opposite sex, the difference among the urban and rural adolescents is not statistically significant.

Education of father and sexual behavior
   The study found that when the sexual behaviour is taken inclusive of all the four measures, the adolescent children of fathers who are more educated involve more frequently in the sexual behaviours than the adolescents whose fathers are less educated. The result is same when the measures of sexual behaviour are taken separately as well. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Education of mother and sexual behavior
   It is found in the study that there is no significant relation between the education level of the mother and the sexual behaviour of adolescents, when all the measures of sexual behaviour are taken together. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted.
While the four measures of sexual behaviour are taken separately, it is found that there is significant relation between education of mother and sexual behaviour of adolescents in certain aspects of sexual behaviour. Regarding the measure 2 and 4 of the sexual behaviour, it is found that the adolescents of mothers who have the education level of +2 or degree showed significantly high frequency. Regarding measure 1 of the sexual behaviour, it is found that the frequency of involving in that behaviour increases in accordance with the increase of the education of mother. But the study also reveals that it is not significant when the measure 3 of the sexual behaviour is considered.

**Occupation of parents and sexual behavior**

The study found that the occupation of parents is not significantly related to the sexual behaviour of adolescents when all the four measures are taken together. Therefore the null hypothesis accepted.

But on the other hand, the occupation of parents is significantly related to the measure 1 and 4 of the sexual behaviour. However the measure 2 and 3 of the sexual behaviour, are not significantly related to the occupation of parents.

**Academic interest and sexual behavior:**

It is found that the academic interest is negatively correlated to the sexual behavior when the sexual behavior is taken together inclusive of all the four measures. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

However, academic interest is negatively correlated to the first three measures of sexual behaviour and there is no significant correlation between academic interest and the measure four of the sexual behaviour.

**Peer influence and sexual behavior:**

It is found that there is a positive correlation between the peer influence and the sexual behaviour of adolescents. The frequency of engaging in the sexual behaviour is high as the peer influence become high. The same is found when the sexual behaviour is taken together inclusive of all the measures and also when the measures are taken separate as well. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Religious adherence and sexual behavior:**

The findings prove that there is a significant negative correlation between the religious adherence and the sexual behavior while the sexual behavior is taken inclusive of all the four measures together. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is negative correlation between religious adherence and sexual behaviour measure 1, 2, and 3. However, it is found on the other hand that there is no significant correlation between measure 4 of the sexual behaviour and religious adherence.

**Exposure to media and sexual behavior:**

It is found from the study that there is a significant positive correlation between the media exposure and the sexual behaviour. The result is same while the sexual behaviour is taken inclusive of all the four measures, and also while the sexual behaviour is taken as separate measures as well. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Sexual abuse and sexual behavior:**

There is a significant positive correlation between the sexual abuse and sexual behaviour in adolescence. The result is same while the sexual behaviour is taken inclusive of all the measures and also while the measures of sexual behaviour are taken separately as well. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.
Parenting style and sexual behavior:

The study reveals that the frequency of involving in sexual behaviour (when it is taken generally) is significantly varied in relation to the styles of parenting. There is more frequency of sexual behaviour in the balanced type of parenting (13.58%) and less in the permissive style (8.36%) of parenting and statistically nil in the autocratic parenting style. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is statistically significant difference between the parenting styles as it is related to the sexual behaviour measure 1 of adolescents. When the behaviour of engaging in sexual feelings by reading pornographic books, watching pornographic television programmes and frequent visit to the internet sex sites is considered, there is a higher frequency (52.94 %) among the adolescents who experience autocratic parenting style. The frequency of engaging in this behaviour is less in balanced parenting style (21.94%) when it is compared to autocratic and permissive (25.52%) parenting styles.

There is a significant difference in the sexual behaviour measure 2 as it is related to the styles of parenting. There is absence of this behaviour when there is autocratic parenting style. The behaviour of masturbation is less in permissive parenting style (9.62%) as well as it is compared to the balanced style (10.93%) of parenting.

The study also reveals that there is no statistically significant difference between the parenting styles as it is related to the sexual behaviour measure 3 and 4. Measures mentioned here denotes the behavior of engaging in sexual feelings by talking sex with the opposite sex, touching and fondling the sexual organs of the opposite sex, and the behaviour of engaging in sex by intercourse with the same sex people and with the opposite sex.

IMPLICATIONS

The question of adolescent sexual behaviour has become increasingly relevant in recent years due to the attention paid to the sexual exploitation and sexual deviant behaviours. Many professional groups working with adolescents are faced with situations where they are expected to be able to assess the behaviour of adolescents and take the action necessary. It is therefore important to seek to reduce the uncertainty in interpreting behaviour, by increasing awareness of the psychosexual development of adolescents.

From a constructivist point of view, sexuality is a relational and contextual concept, in which social processes are assumed to control as well as construct sexuality. A modified form of the constructivist approach accepts that the child has a biological body with the opportunity to react to physiological sensations, but still sees social processes as the most important element in the child’s development into a member of society. The impact of media and the peer influence carries a great amount of significant in the formation and development of sexual behaviour and the finding of the present study substantiates the same. The impact of the media and the peer group influence is thus a valuable contribution to the field of adolescent behaviour studies.

The standard of living depends on the education of parents and also on the financial wellness of the parents and the present study reveals that there is significant impact of the locality where the adolescents stay and the education of father upon the sexual behaviour of adolescents. The reactions of parents to children’s sexual behaviour often depend on the level of education, socio-economic status, ethnicity and culture and personal experience of the parents.
The experiences of child abuse especially sexual abuse leave a long lasting impact upon the children. The present study reveals that there is a significant relation between the sexual abuse and the sexual behaviour of adolescents. Each society constructs and shapes a suitable and rewarding sexuality for its own society. The sexuality of adolescents develops on this basis in interplay with their surroundings, in accordance with society’s expectations and assumptions. They are part of the society in which they grow up and thus internalise its norms and values concerning sexual behaviour.

The styles of parenting such as autocratic, balanced and permissive styles are found to be influencing the sexual behaviour of the adolescents significantly. Our assumptions on sexuality also form the basis for the way in which we address children’s sexual behaviour and their socialisation in becoming women and men which is consciously or unconsciously part of our child-rearing. Adolescents learn the rules of sexuality in the same way as they learn everything else, by picking up hints from their parents.

The present study also gives a significant contribution towards the impact of mass media in the sexual behaviour. The incidents of sexual behaviour are found to be increasing in accordance with the increase of the impact of mass media. Adolescents in today’s society are exposed to a great deal of influence from the mass media and thus see sexual scenes and attitudes on the television, on video or on the Internet which they then recreate. This may in turn be associated with adolescents lacking adequate adult supervision.

Large studies on child sexual behaviour have long been conspicuous by their absence, possibly partly due to cultural and social difficulties in directly observing such behaviour. Very few studies on children and sexuality were carried out in the subsequent decades. Those studies which do exist have primarily investigated the teenage pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted deease. Studies on the sexual behaviour and the ecological correlates of sexual behaviour in adolescents will definitely enlighten the professionals and parents in helping the adolescent in developing a healthy sexuality.

SUGGESTIONS

Sexuality is not something given once and for all; it changes over time, place, generation, culture and society. What is considered normal sexual behaviour in children can vary from one period to another. Therefore it is important to build up an up-to-date knowledge base on adolescents and the conditions in which adolescents in our country live. Empirical research as well as tried and tested experience in the field is important pieces of the jigsaw.

It is important that both adolescent boys and girls have the chance to learn the nature of their sexuality. It is also important to respect the stage of transformation of the adolescents as they are learning to be sexual and carefully deal with questions concerning sexuality. The absence of knowledge about one’s own body and its physical and emotional sensations may help to make the adolescent more vulnerable and encourage secrecy should an adolescent be the victim of some form of abuse. At the same time sexuality is an area for privacy and intimacy, which makes talking about it charged and sometimes not even desirable. The confusion in the adult world surrounding sexuality can, however, mean that children are often left to attempt to decipher what is acceptable or not themselves.
As the study revealed that parental styles are intimately related to sexual behaviour of adolescents, an intervention strategy for the management of sexual behaviour shall include programmed efforts at attitudinal change, which may bring about desirable changes in parental behaviours and also in the sexual behaviour of adolescents. Since parent attitudes are found to be more critical than their behaviours in the genesis of behavioural problems, attitudinal change is an important remedial step in modifying adolescent problem behaviours attributable to parenting.

The identification of family variables such as the education and occupation of parents as important correlates of sexual behaviour has direct implications for the identification as well as management of sexual behaviour in adolescents. The aspect of communication and the time and effort spent for sexual education at home carries a great importance in helping adolescents grow in healthy sexual behaviour.

It is furthermore of crucial importance that professional groups who come into contact with adolescents in their work are aware of how the sexual behaviour of girls and boys respectively may be expressed to be able to determine both what is natural psychosexual development and which behaviours indicate that an adolescent behaviour deviates from the norm. Professionals in the field who deal with children and sexuality need arenas in which they can meet to be able to communicate their own knowledge and to create and maintain a broad perspective.

The results of the present study also indicate that adolescents who underwent sexual abuse have higher frequency in involving in sexual behaviour than the other adolescents. Hence, early identification of such predisposed or high-risk children may enable one to take some precautionary measures like giving proper advice to the parents on how to deal with children who had the sexual abuse experiences, how and to what extent parents can play a positive role in improving the sexual health of the adolescents, etc.

Professional groups who in some way came into contact with questions of sexual behaviour are: 1) medical students attending a human sexuality program, 2) social workers, psychologists, and nurses who were facilitating the human sexuality program, 3) therapists involved in a sexual behaviour training program and 4) sexual abuse experts. The insights drawn from the present study will work as a useful database for these groups in determining behaviour needing modifications and developing strategies to intervene.

THE FRAME OF THE STUDY

There are five chapters in the study. The first chapter is introduction. It deals with the context and need of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, definitions, hypotheses, scope, limitation and format of the report. The second chapter is the review of literature. It brings into light the previous researches and studies done in the related fields. The third chapter is designed to deal with the methodology in which the design of the study, locale, sampling procedure, tools and the administration of tools, scoring and processing of the data, statistical techniques, etc will be dealt elaborately. Fourth chapter is the analysis of the data collected and the discussions. The plan of analysis, results etc are described with adequate figures and tables. The last chapter is the summary and conclusions in which the summary of the findings and tenability of the hypotheses are dealt with. The observations, important conclusions, suggestions etc also are discussed in the last chapter.