

Perceptions of Premarital Sex among Students at a Faith-Based University

Hansel Teo Sze Yong¹ and Amanda Simon, Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand

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Abstract

In this study, the relationship between moral development activities and perceptions of premarital sex was investigated among students at a faith-based university. Information was gathered using survey questionnaires, distributed through the university intranet, and the data were analyzed using a statistical software package. Undergraduate students ($N = 103$) took part in the study. Most university students were against sex before marriage. Moral development activities taught them to abstain from premarital sex. Responses showed that the factor that most affected perceptions of premarital sex was the Internet. Movie/television viewing was also found to be an important factor that shaped perceptions of premarital sex. Moral development activities and perceptions of premarital sex were shown to be weakly related ($r = .03$). Further improvement of moral development activities is needed to help students understand the value of sex. Future research in this area could use qualitative approaches to examine the factors that influence perceptions of premarital sex.

Keywords: *Moral development, morality, premarital sex, sexual activity*

Introduction

Empirical studies (e.g., Chiao & Yi, 2011; Christopher & Frandsen, 1990; Gyan, 2018) have focused on strategies to reduce premarital sex, but not many have incorporated the impact of religious moral development on such behavior. This study addressed this knowledge gap. The prevalence of premarital sex has increased over the years. In 2002, 34% of American women aged 18–24 years were involved in sexual activity, and this figure increased to 41% from 2006–2010 (Abma & Martinez, 2017; Abma, Martinez, Mosher, & Dawson, 2004; Martinez, Copen, & Abma, 2011). According to Finer and Zolna (2016), 75% of unintended pregnancies occurred among American girls 15 to 19 years old, and adolescent pregnancies accounted for about 15% of all unintended pregnancies worldwide due to premarital sex.

According to Focus on the Family (1999), factors associated with premarital sex among American adolescent were alcohol and drug use; limited parental monitoring; frequent family relocations; only one parent in the household; early steady relationships among adolescents; and peer pressure. Peer pressure influences how young people dress, the kind of music they listen to, and the types of behavior they engage in, including sexual activity (Wells, 2020). Often young people are challenged by strong social, peer, and cultural pressure to engage in premarital sex (Chekole, Gebrehana, & Terefe, 2017; Sieving, Eisenberg, Pettingell, & Skay, 2006).

Sexual practices displayed on the Internet or in the media influence the behavior of young people, as do social media such as adult videos and pictures of nude people (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter, & Miu 2004). Asekun-Olarinmoye, Asekun-Olarinmoye, Adebimpe, and Omisore (2014) found that media portrayals of sexual attitudes and expectations made to young people at a critical developmental stage influenced them to normalize or take part in such behaviors. These results are also supported by other studies. Adolescents were more permissive towards sex because of Internet access, exposure to Sexually Explicit Media (SEM), and pornography or nudity on the web (Arulogun, Ogbu, & Dipeolu, 2016; Bragg & Buckingham, 2002; Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012).

¹ Corresponding author's email address: Hanselt86@gmail.com

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Despite the powerful influence of peers, the media, and the Internet, Tant (2011) suggested that religious moral development could reshape the behavior and attitudes of young people towards premarital sex. Moral development focuses on emergence, change, and understanding of morality from adolescence to adulthood. Moral development is influenced by an individual's experiences and responses when faced with moral issues. It concerns an individual's growing sense of what is right and wrong (Homiak, 2019). Moral development is a process through which appropriate attitudes and behaviors towards other people in society are developed, based on social and cultural norms, rules, and laws (Wells, 2020). Teaching institutions could be effective resources in implanting moral values in young people if moral development and sex education topics were integrated into curricula (Kanzal, Subikshalakshmi, & Goswami, 2016). Lamb supports this perspective, suggesting that behavior and attitudes among young people towards premarital sex could be modified, and a respectful attitude towards others could be developed, to the benefit of society (Lamb, 1997).

This study was conducted in a private university in Thailand that emphasizes the importance of religious moral principles. The Christian belief is that sex before marriage is a sinful act towards God; thus, the University is against premarital sex, and only supports sex within marriage. This context includes strict rules governing student relationships and physical contact—such as holding hands, hugging, and kissing on and off campus—as an aid to maintaining its Christian ethos.

Purpose of the Study

This study's purpose was to describe, analyze, and evaluate perceptions of premarital sex at a faith-based university. More specifically, student perceptions about premarital sex, the extent to which moral development activities on campus influenced these perceptions, and major factors contributing to perceptions of premarital sex were investigated. The study posed the following research questions:

1. What are the perception levels of students pertaining to premarital sex?
2. How often do students attend moral development activities on campus?
3. To what extent have student perceptions of premarital sex been influenced by the moral development activities on campus?
4. What are the key factors that have impacted student perceptions of premarital sex?

Literature Review

Prevalence of Premarital Sex amongst Young People

In many countries, premarital sex is a common practice among young people (e.g., Finer, 2007; Podhisita, Xenos, & Varangrat, 2004; Wang, Li, Stanton, Kamali, Naar-king, Shah, & Thomas, 2007). For example, in the Indian slums of Delhi and Lucknow, it was discovered that 75.3% of young people engaged in premarital sexual activity, while in Malaysia, 47.2% of the young girls aged 12 to 14 years old engage in premarital sex (Ghani, Abdullah, Akil, & Nordin, 2014). Peltzer and Pengid (2015) found that 76.7% of adolescents reported engaging in premarital sex in the region of Central America. The reasons for the prevalence of premarital sex among young people are their attitudes towards sex, such as a desire for sex, and the seeming appropriateness of it in their societies (Bhatta, Koirala, & Jha, 2013; Yip, Zhang, Lam, Lam, Lee, Chan, & Fan, 2013).

Factors that Impact Premarital Sexual Activity

There are a number of factors that impact the prevalence of premarital sex across different countries. Wong, Chan, Koh, Tan, Lim, Emmanuel, and Bishop (2009) showed that the major factors that influenced premarital sexual activity among young people in Malaysia were peer pressure and permissiveness regarding sex. Chi, Yu, and Winter (2012) found that the major factors of premarital sexual behavior among young people in China were watching pornography, spending time on the Internet, and talking with friends about sex. In Cambodia, the factors that influence premarital sex are associated with family, peers, school, and community. Premarital sexual behavior in both males and females was influenced by drug use and peer pressure (Yi, Poudel, Yasuoka, Palmer, Yi, & Jimba, 2010).

In Ethiopia, Hurissa, Tebeje, and Megersa (2014) found that 39.7% of young people between 15–19 years old were engaged in premarital sex. They discovered that falling in love, peer pressure, desire, and alcohol were all factors that contributed to premarital sex.

Exposure and accessibility to SEM has also been found to be a major contributor to the prevalence of premarital sexual behaviour (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Kraus & Russell, 2008). Findings from Lou, Cheng, Gao, Zuo, Emerson, and Zahin (2012) suggested that young people learnt mainly about sex from the Internet and media. These authors stated that higher levels of premarital sexual behavior were found among young people who viewed SEM, and that young people learn about sex when they see it on the Internet and are encouraged to engage in such behavior.

The family environment, such as levels of family connectedness, also are related to premarital sex attitudes among youth (e.g. Markham, Tortolero, Escobar-Chaves, Parcel, Harrist, & Addy, 2003; Henrich, Brookemeyer, Shrier, & Shahar 2006; Manlove, Wildsmith, Ikramullah, Terry-Humen, & Schelar, 2012.) Dittus, Michael, Becasen, Gioppen, McCarthy, and Guilamo-Ramos, 2005 found that students who perceived high levels of family connectedness were less likely to engage in premarital sexual activity. Other studies by Donenberg, Wilson, Emerson, and Bryant (2002), Mehrotra, Zimmerman, Noar, and Dumenci (2013), and Suwarni, Ismail, Prabandari, and Adiyanti (2015) suggest that those who experienced lower parental monitoring were more likely to engage in premarital sex.

The Interrelation of Moral Development and Religious Values

Moral development consists of creating an appropriate environment for incorporation of components of social morality into the student's personality structure, which leads to the implementation of proper moral conduct. Moral development and religious values are related because religious values strengthen moral knowledge and action (Manea, 2014). According to Kuar (2015), moral development and religion have similar concepts about influencing thinking, feeling, and acting regarding issues of right and wrong. Historically, moral teachings have been central to Christianity, and the Bible—a book of ethical guidance—is at its core (Noelliste, 2020). Moral development is therefore associated with religion.

Impact of Moral Development Activities on Premarital Sex

Researchers have found that religion has significant correlations with premarital sex (Ghaffari, Gharghani, & Rakshanderou, 2015; Opayemi, 2011; Penhollow, Young, & Bailey, 2007). Penhollow et al. (2007) discovered that regular religious service attendance and a positive religious feeling associated with religious exercises were associated with lesser premarital sexual activity among college students. Religious involvement is also a protective factor from premarital sexual behavior among young people (Ghaffari et al., 2015; Helm, McBride, Knox, & Zusman, 2009; McCree, Wingood, DiClemente, Davies, & Harrington, 2003; Penhollow et al., 2007; Regnerus, 2005).

According to the research featured in this section, factors such as peer pressure, exposure to sexually explicit media, and family environment are important factors that influence young people's perceptions of premarital sex. The literature also suggested that religious moral development is related to premarital sexual attitudes among young people.

Methodology

In this research, religious moral development activities were used to promote the Christian ethos of the university where this study was conducted. These included certain forms of collective worship. Collective worship is where people are given an opportunity to worship God within a particular faith, as in Christianity or Islam (Humanists UK, 2019). Collective worship such as dorm worship, morning worship, and assembly were part of the moral development activities on campus.

A quantitative design was used to examine students' perceptions of premarital sex and to investigate any correlations between their involvement in moral development activities and perceptions of premarital sex. Opinions were collected via a quantitative online, self-completed questionnaire. Student anonymity was preserved throughout. This was particularly significant, given

the sensitive nature of the research topic. No time limitations were placed on completion of the survey. The data were analyzed using a statistical software package.

The null hypothesis adopted was that: "There is no relationship between moral development activities attendance and perceptions of premarital sex among international students".

Sampling

Students studying in the international program were surveyed ($N = 400$). The sample size needed for the study was calculated using the equation devised by Yamane (1957), $n =$ calculated sample size, $N =$ total number of population, and $e =$ allowable error. In this research, the margin of error was 8% of the sample size. Hence, the sample size was 110.

$$n = \frac{400}{1 \times 400(0.08)^2} = 110$$

The sample was drawn from the population by convenience sampling. The online survey was distributed through the university intranet to all students in the international program. Students could then choose whether to take part or not. The reason that this sampling technique was chosen was because it eliminated bias by giving all members of the population an equal chance to participate. A total of 103 students responded to the survey.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into five sections: demographic data, perceptions toward premarital sex, participation in religious moral development activities, impact of religious moral development activities on perceptions of premarital sex, and the factors that influenced perception of premarital sex. Apart from the demographic data, each of the aforementioned sections contained a series of statements to which participants responded by choosing one of the options on a five-point Likert scale. The final section asked participants about the factors that influenced their perceptions of premarital sex. This section contained an open-ended question so that participants could write their personal opinions. Responses given within this section gave further insights into the key influencers of student perceptions, and the means by which these perceptions were shaped.

Validity and Reliability

The section of the questionnaire that focused on perceptions of premarital sex was adopted from Adhikari and Adhikari (2017). The original questionnaire was reviewed by experts. Modifications were made according to their feedback. Validity was calculated using Cronbach Alpha coefficient (a score of .70 was obtained).

The sections of the questionnaire that focused on moral development activities participation and the impact of moral development activities on premarital sex perception were self-constructed. Measurement was in the form of responses such as Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The Item-Objective Congruence index, devised by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977), was used to test the validity of these questions. It was given to five experts within the University, and amendments were made according to their feedback. These experts assessed each item, and overall the questionnaire was given a validity coefficient score of more than .50.

Data Collection

A link to the survey was sent to all undergraduate students within the international program through the university intranet. During the process of completing of the questionnaire, participants had no contact with the researcher or anyone else involved with the research.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a statistical software package. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the factors that affected premarital sex among students. Thematic analysis is a widely-used, foundational method for analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Demographic data are given in Table 1. The chart shows that the vast majority (90.3%) of the participants were from Asia. Most participants were unmarried, 73.8% were single (not in a dating relationship), and 20.4% were dating. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 16 and 24; half were aged between 21–24 years old. Most respondents (85.4%) classified themselves as Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) or ‘other Christian.’ The rest of this section focuses on responses to research questions.

Table 1. Demographic Description of the Sample of University Students

Gender	Male	Female			
	57 (55.3%)	46 (44.7%)			
Nationality	Africa	Asia	Australia	Europe	South America
	6 (5.8%)	93 (90.3%)	1 (1%)	2 (1.9%)	1 (1%)
Status	Dating	Married	Single		
	21 (20.4%)	6 (5.8%)	76 (73.8%)		
Age	16–20	21–24	25–29	30 above	
	30 (29.1%)	53 (51.5%)	14 (13.6%)	6 (5.8%)	
Religion	Buddhist	SDA & Other	Others	No religion	
	12 (11.7%)	Christian	1 (1%)	2 (1.9%)	
		88 (85.4%)			

1. What are the perceptions of surveyed students on premarital sex?

In terms of students’ perceptions of premarital sex, most students were against sex before marriage (Table 2). The results of the first four questions indicate that students generally “Agreed” (mean range 3.26–4.00), which shows that they were largely against premarital sex. Scores also showed that students mostly “Disagreed” that premarital sex is acceptable for relation purposes such as selecting an ideal spouse, if a couple practiced safe sex, and if he/she had only one sexual partner.

Table 2. Perceptions of Premarital Sex among Students

Perception	Mean
PM 1 A woman should be virgin at marriage.	3.80
PM 2 A man should be virgin at marriage.	3.70
PM 3 Neither a man nor woman should have premarital sex.	3.63
PM 4 Premarital sexual relationships should be absolutely prohibited.	3.62
PM 5 Sexual relations before marriage is a normal phenomenon because it is a kind of biological need.	2.70
PM 6 Premarital sexual relationships should be acceptable because they can help to select an ideal wife/husband.	2.27
PM 7 Pre-marital sexual relations are acceptable if a “couple” fall in love.	2.26
PM 8 Premarital sexual relations are acceptable if a “couple” practice safe sex.	2.48
PM 9 Premarital sexual relations are acceptable if he/she has only one sexual partner.	2.50
PM 10 Premarital sexual relations are acceptable if the “couple” plan to marry in the future.	2.71

Legend: 1.00–1.75 = Strongly Disagree; 1.76–2.50 = Disagree; 2.51–3.25 = Neutral; 3.26–4.00 = Agree; 4.01+ = Strongly Agree

However, in regards to the statement that premarital sexual relations are acceptable “if [a] couple plan to marry in the future,” scores reflected some neutrality amongst students (mean range 2.51–3.25). Notable numbers of students remained “Neutral” for every statement, with no “Strongly Agree” (4.01 or more) nor “Strongly Disagree” (1.00–1.75) scores; perhaps this was due to the topic’s sensitivity.

2. How often do students attend moral development activities on campus?

The findings (Table 3) suggest that most students “Often” (mean score 3.26–4.00) or “Always” (mean score 4.01 or more) attended Moral Development Activities. Dorm worships, family groups, and AY programs were the least-well attended activities; many “Never” attended AY programs. Chapel was the best-attended moral development activity, with most students “Always” attending.

Table 3. Attendance at Moral Development Activities on Campus

Activities on Campus	Mean
10 Days of Prayer	3.56
Adventist Youth (AY) Program	2.21
Assembly	4.17
Chapel	4.60
Church Service	4.03
Dorm Worship	3.35
Family Group	3.24
Festival of Faith	4.08
Sabbath School	3.66
Vespers	4.08

Legend 1.00–1.75 = Never; 1.76–2.50 = Occasionally; 2.51–3.25 = Sometimes; 3.26–4.00 = Often; 4.01 or more = Always

3. To what extent have students’ perceptions of premarital sex been influenced by the moral development activities on campus?

Participants assessed the extent to which participation in moral development activities had influenced their perceptions of premarital sex. The data are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The Impact of Moral Development Activities on Perceptions of Premarital Sex

Moral development activities have taught me...	Mean
To view sex as sacred to marriage.	3.67
To value sexual abstinence before marriage.	3.79
I should respect my body and keep it pure for marriage.	4.02
I should respect others and help them keep their bodies pure.	3.99
I should control my sexual desires until marriage.	3.90
Sex is important and that of should not be taken lightly.	3.95
The importance of controlling sexual thoughts.	3.90
Sex is not only about physical intimacy but also spiritual and emotional.	3.90
To avoid sexual activity with a partner in a relationship.	3.85
Premarital sex is unholy.	3.87
Sex is God’s gift to be used in marriage, not before marriage.	3.98
Premarital sex is a sinful in a sight of God.	3.91

Legend: 1.00–1.75 = Strongly Disagree; 1.76–2.50 = Disagree; 2.51–3.25 = Neutral; 3.26–4.00 = Agree; 4.01+ = Strongly Agree

The results indicate that students generally “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” (mean score 3.26–4.25) that they have been taught not to have sex before marriage in moral development activities, a minority of students remained “Neutral”. A small number of students “Disagreed” with the statements, indicating that they have not been taught to abstain from premarital sex in the moral development activities. Maybe this is because students did not regularly attend any of the moral development activities.

4. What are the key factors that have impacted student’s perceptions of premarital sex?

The findings shown on Table 5 were generated from the final section of the questionnaire where participants were asked to select the key factors that had influenced their perceptions of premarital sex. The table shows the percentage of participants who selected the various factors listed.

Table 5. Factors that Impacted Student’s Perception of Premarital Sex

Internet	33.0%
Movies/Television	28.2%
Other	28.2%
Influence from Friends	7.8%
Drugs/Alcohol	2.9%

The key factor that influenced students’ perceptions of premarital sex was the Internet. The following most significant factors were “Movies/Television” and “Other”—such as family, church, desire, Western culture, and community influence mention by the participants, being both at 28.2%. The results also indicate that “Influence from friends” and “Drugs/Alcohol were the least impacting factors on perception of premarital sex.

In the final section of the survey, respondents choose to give a more detailed explanation of how specific factors influenced their personal perception of premarital sex. Only 46% of participants completed this section and most of these participants gave general responses that were not related to their own personal opinions or experiences. The qualitative statements of participants will be discussed later.

5. Correlation between attendance at moral development activities and perceptions of premarital sex

Table 6 shows correlation coefficients between the overall attendance score for each moral development activity and the overall scores for each of 10 statement pertaining to students’ perceptions of premarital sex (please see statements in Table 2, PM 1 to PM 10).

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients - Moral Development Activities and Perceptions of Premarital Sex (n = 103)

Program	PM1	PM2	PM3	PM4	PM5	PM6	PM7	PM8	PM9	PM10
Ten Days Prayer	.19	.30**	.21*	.36**	-.25**	-.15	-.35**	-.40**	-.39**	-.40**
AY Program	.19	.16	.12	.30**	-.05	-.17	-.30**	-.25*	-.33**	-.34**
Assembly	.28**	.32**	.14	.14	-.05	-.03	-.04	-.10	-.12	-.12
Chapel	.23*	.27**	.12	.16	.07	.06	.03	-.12	.03	-.15
Church Service	.22*	.33**	.18	.26**	-.16	-.12	-.29**	-.30**	-.29**	-.37**
Dorm Worship	.20*	.24*	.08	.29**	-.12	-.09	-.35**	-.25*	-.22*	-.23*
Family Group	.17	.15	.17	.24*	-.10	.01	-.21*	-.19	-.26**	-.32**
Fest. of Faith	.32**	.32**	.20*	.34**	-.08	-.15	-.21*	-.29**	-.18	-.30**
Sabbath School	.30**	.31**	.22*	.30**	-.19	-.09	-.25*	-.31**	-.20*	-.30**
Vespers	.28**	.31**	.16	.24*	-.18	-.15	-.25*	-.32**	-.26**	-.37**

The correlation analysis indicated that for the first four statements, a positive correlation was found between moral development activities attendance and perceptions of premarital sex. For the last six statements, a negative correlation was found between moral development activities and

perceptions of premarital sex. However, for the statement that a premarital sexual relationship is acceptable because it could help to select an ideal wife/husband, no correlation was found between it and any moral development activities. Overall, moral development activities and perceptions of premarital sex were weakly correlated.

Discussion

The findings suggested that the majority of students' were against sex before marriage. This could be because the vast majority of students attended most moral development activities, or it could also be because almost 90% of participants were Christian, and so they were generally against premarital sexual activity. According to Podhisita et al. (2004), most Thai young people have permissive attitudes towards sex, but this study was not conducted in a religious-based context.

The findings suggest that students' perceptions of premarital sex could be influenced by moral development activities. Most students had been taught not to engage in premarital sex in moral development activities. This could be one reason that most students were less permissive towards sex before marriage, or perhaps they were inspired to follow the university's principles and values due to their frequent attendance at the moral development activities in which these were promoted (Helm et al., 2009). At least 30% had a neutral stance towards premarital sex. This might be because these students did not regularly attend moral development activities, or disagreed with the values and principles of the university. It could also be the case that there was not sufficient discussion on premarital sex in moral development activities. In previous research, it was found that students who regularly attended religious moral development activities and had more discussions about sex were influenced in their perceptions (Burdette & Hill, 2009; Ghaffari et al., 2015; Opayemi, 2011; Regnerus, 2005). In this study, the findings suggest that there was a weak correlation between moral development activities attendance and perceptions of premarital sex, indicating that these activities may have had a small impact on students' perceptions.

The major contributing factor to perceptions of premarital sex was the Internet, a finding similar to that found by Brown and L'Engle (2009), as well as Habesha, Aderaw, and Lakew (2015). The findings also suggest that movies/television were an important factor that contributes to perceptions of premarital sex, which agrees with Ward and Friendman (2006). Interestingly, other findings (Markham et al., 2003; Henrich et al., 2006; Suwarni et al., 2015; Romer et al., 1999) indicated that family environment is an important factor affecting perception of premarital sex. This study did not look at the role played by family environment in shaping perception of premarital sex. However, it was mentioned by participants in the "Other" category.

In the open-ended question, there were five factor categories: 1) Internet; 2) movies/television; 3) drugs and alcohol; 4) influence from friends; and 5) other. In the category "Other," participants mentioned factors that impacted their perception of premarital sex, such as family, church and cultural factors, but only a few shared their personal opinions. The following analysis only focused on Internet and movie/ television factors, because many participants shared comments that related to these factors in particular.

Within the responses related to the Internet, the theme of 'power' was predominant. The participants suggested that the Internet had power to cause individuals to think and act in certain ways. This is shown in the following statements:

Participant 2: "The Internet has a wide variety of information that causes one's mind to be influenced by world's perception."

Participant 19: "Internet is the most influential. People nowadays believe in everything the Internet says specifically Google. And if the Internet says it's normal to have sex, then people will assume it's normal, since everyone on the Internet is doing it."

Participant statements suggested that the Internet had power to change perceptions of premarital sex because it is influential and it is able to normalize certain forms of sexual behavior. These responses correspond with findings from a study conducted by Habesha et al. (2015), who

implied that there is much information regarding sex on the web, which has the power to change the mindset of young people about sex. Participants in this study had very little discussion about sexual behavior with parents or in school, which led them to search for sexual information online. Furthermore, another participant mentioned that the wide availability of adult content, such as pornography, causes young people to assume that premarital sex is normal.

Participants also suggested that the Internet has a wealth of information that is open and available to everyone, which also connects to the issue of the Internet being very powerful:

Participant 27: “the Internet is the major reason that leads to all other existing factors. Since everything can be searched for, people usually have a tendency to find interesting things that could satisfy their physical and emotional needs. Also, all the facts and video about sex can be found on the Internet.”

This participant’s statement is similar to the findings of Kraus and Russell (2008) who found that because of accessibility to the Internet, young people can view SEM, such as pornographic videos and information related to sexual activity, and that the Internet promotes and sells SEM, which causes young people to change their attitudes towards premarital sex.

In the analysis of respondents’ comments, movies/television were shown to be the second most influential factor. The key theme within this category was the normalizing of sexual activity. Analyzing the statements, it seems that frequency and openness of sexual activity in movies and on television contributes to premarital sexual activity among young people.

Respondent 1: “often the movies will show the scenes of a couple is having premarital sex before marry, and the couple later on still have a blessed marriage. Since it is shown by the TV, then the audience who are watching will have a mindset that premarital sex is fine.”

Respondent 2: “Movies or dramas seem to have no problem with sexual relationships, so it could influence people.”

Respondent 4: “Dramas, movies are showing too much of romantic scene that only should be done after marriage.”

The respondents’ comments suggest that there is an openness and frequency of sexual activity in the media, which may convince young people that premarital sex is normal, a finding supported by the research of Ward and Friedman (2006).

Conclusion

The majority of participants were against sex before marriage. Most of the students had been taught to value sex within marriage. Moral development activities might have a small impact on students’ perceptions of premarital sex, because the findings suggest that moral development activities and perceptions of premarital sex were related. The Internet is a major factor that contributed to perceptions of premarital sex, and the results indicated that movies/television were also an important factor that influenced participants’ perceptions.

Implications

There is a need for improvement of moral development activities so that students would want to participate regularly. Moral development activities might incorporate more discussions about sex before marriage that could help students to understand the value of sex. The university might also take note of factors that influence perceptions of premarital sex, and these factors could be incorporated into discussions within moral development activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could investigate how religious moral development activities influence perceptions of premarital sex among young people using regression analysis; this would be beneficial for investigating the extent to which religious moral development influences perceptions of premarital

sex. Qualitative research would also be helpful in conducting detailed examination of the factors that influence perceptions of premarital sex, because it may give a deeper understanding of the context of these factors, and how religious moral development activities can affect perceptions about premarital sex.

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