

**F-08 Sexual awareness, attitudes and exposure to sexual activities of female factory workers**

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There has been a noted increase in public concern about the consequences of female factory workers' sexuality in Sri Lanka. The objective of this study was to increase our understanding on the nature of sexual awareness, attitudes and exposure to sexual activities of female factory workers in Sri Lanka. The project was undertaken in 1996-97 by University of Ruhuna in collaboration with National Coordinating Committee on Reproductive Health in Sri Lanka.

A sample of 233 female workers in 3 garment factories in Koggala Free Trade Zone was studied using interviewer administered questionnaire, focussing on the following issues: social, economic and demographic characteristics; family relationships and sources of support; attitudes on abortion and sexual relationships; awareness of sex, STDs and family planning; exposure to sexual activities and possible interventions.

Over 75% of the workers are unmarried, aged 20-34, passed GCE O/L or above and had a monthly income of Rs. 2000/= to Rs. 3000/=.

The results indicate that the relatively low relationship a female factory worker maintains with her family and significantly high relationship with her peer group may determine to a large extent her premarital sexual experience. The results also show that having premarital sexual intercourse, unwanted pregnancies and induced abortion may exist to some extent among the female factory workers. Although the premarital sexual experiences among female workers are evident, the results, however, do not suggest a strong and a stable relationship with a boy friend.

It can be concluded that factory workers' awareness and attitudes on sexual matters may be considered as important predictors of their sexual relationships. Furthermore, the loosening family control over female factory workers' sexual behaviour and increased inter-sex interaction at workplaces may increase unsafe sex. The evidence also suggests the possible changes in sexual lifestyle of factory workers.

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