

THE KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
ON REPRODUCTIVE PHYSIOLOGY AND FAMILY PLANNING

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ÖZET: Lise Öğrencilerinin Doğurganlık Fizyolojisi ve Aile Planlaması konusundaki Bilgi ve Tutumları.

Lise öğrencilerinin doğurganlık fizyolojisi ve Aile Planlaması ile ilgili konulardaki bilgi düzeylerini ve tutumlarını belirlemek üzere analitik, kesitsel bir çalışma yapıldı.

ABSTRACT: An analytic, cross-sectional study on high school students was conducted to determine the level of the knowledge and attitude of young adults on reproductive physiology and family planning related issues and it was aimed to describe the extent of the problem in order to reach some solutions.

Anahtar sözcükler: Ergenlik, Doğurganlık fizyolojisi, Aile planlaması
Key words: Adolescence, Reproductive Physiology, Family Planning

INTRODUCTION: With the onset of puberty the production of sex hormones results in the development of secondary sex characteristics including growth of the reproductive organs, of body hair, and of the adult body configuration. These biological changes combine with the psychosocial environment to produce a rapid increase in sexual interest and sexual behaviour.

To prepare young people for these changes it is necessary to educate them on what is going on in their bodies and on the social significance of these changes.

It is a common perception that adolescence in industrialized or modernizing countries may be an uneasy time psychologically. In these countries adolescents are expected to make responsible decisions about

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sexual behaviour, on the other hand they cannot make these decisions freely because of the control which their elders exercise over their lives. However in many developing countries as a result of the traditional conceptions, we have not adequate data about the problem. For that reason, some of the scientists have a perception that in pre-industrialized countries, the problem is only the early pregnancies and their medical complications.

The social morals and traditions of Turkish people and attitudes of the parents limit the discussion between parents and children about reproductive physiology, sexual problems and family planning related issues. These subjects are assumed as prohibited and shameful and consequently become social taboos.

Therefore, it is important and necessary, 1. to determine the level of the knowledge and attitude of young adults on reproductive physiology and family planning related issues, 2. to describe the extent of the problem in order to reach some solutions.

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY: This is an analytic cross-sectional study. The aim of the study is to find out the knowledge of the high school students on reproductive physiology and family planning methods and their attitudes towards these subjects.

Coverage

The survey covered all of the students of Narlıdere, Urla, and Seferihisar high schools. In Alaçatı there is not a high school, the students go to a near town, Çeşme's high school. The survey also covered all of the high school students of Alaçatı town.

The necessary permission is obtained from the local administrators of the Education and Health authorities, and the data is collected in 1986.

Field and Office Work

The principal investigators and 11 intern of Dokuz Eylül Medical School formed the study team. A precoded questionnaire is prepared. The questionnaire is completed named by all of the students under the supervision of the members of the study team.

The pre-test was carried out among ten high school students of some other senior high schools of Izmir. After a one day training program the study team have collected data from the students. For easy understanding, the students from Alaçatı town are named in the survey as the students of Alaçatı high school.

The Variables and Data Analysis

The main variables used in this study are the "knowledge" and "attitude" of the senior high school students on reproductive physiology and family planning related issues. The background variables used in this survey are age, sex, educational levels of the fathers and the mothers of the students, professions of the student's fathers and mothers, and number of children in the student's family.

The data obtained by this survey are analyzed by means of marginal and cross-tables. The tabulation of the data is performed by hand. The coded data is transferred to a form specially designed for hand sorting. The coded information is edited. The marginal and the cross-tabulation tables are completed. The comparisons and the relationships have been researched, chi square analysis have been performed.

FINDINGS

Socioeconomic Characteristics

Among the 566 students interviewed in four high schools, 54.6% were female and 45.4% were male. The mean age of the students was 16.4 years and they were between the ages of 14 and 20. Considering the fact that children in Turkey start elementary school at the age of 6 or 7, the mean age 16.4 is consistent with the student's grades.

The educational level of the student's fathers and mothers are detected. In general, only less than about 3% of the fathers and less than about 9% of the mothers are illiterate. Even when parents who have not finished any school is added, the percentage of illiteracy is much less than national average and probably reflects geographical differences in education. Also interesting is the low percentage of parents graduated from university. The majority of both parents were only graduates of primary schools, probably reflecting subtle differences in the class structure and wealth distribution of the country.

The professions of the student's fathers are asked. Small businessmen and public servants constitute more than 50% of the fathers profession. Farmers were about 21% of the total. Among the mothers in all four high schools more than 90% were housewives. It is inevitable that when the father is a farmer the mother also actively works in the field. However, because traditionally women who do not hold a permanent position are classified as the very high housewives percentages of women being housewives in this survey may be somewhat misleading.

Knowledge and Attitude of Students about Family Planning.

Related Issues

In order to determine the knowledge and attitude of the students about family planning related issues the following question was asked in the questionnaire: "Please define what family planning is". When the students indicated that "family planning" is a procedure to regulate the number of children in a given family according to its economic conditions or it is used to solve the population problem of a country the answer is accepted to be correct and otherwise wrong. Table 1 presents the definitions of the students about family planning.

Table 1: Definitions About Family Planning

High Schools	Correct (%)	Wrong (%)
Narlıdere (N: 125)	58.4	41.6
Alaçati (N: 72)	78.2	20.8
Urla (N : 227)	80.2	19.8
Seferihisar (No: 142)	74.6	25.4
TOTAL (N: 566)	73.5	26.5

73.5% of the students defined family planning correctly and 26.5% wrongly. The students are asked to write down the family planning methods they know. Table 2 presents the proportion of knowledge of the students about family planning.

Table 2: Knowledge of students about family planning methods

Methods	% of students				Total (N:5)
	Narlıdere (N: 125)	Alaçatı (N:72)	Urla (N:227)	E.hisar (N:142)	
Pill	80.0	73.6	66.9	77.3	73.0
IUD	28.0	26.4	35.6	34.1	32.0
Condom	8.8	16.7	10.5	4.9	9.0
Female ste- rilization	3.2	6.9	-	2.1	2.0
Rhythm	1.6	4.2	1.3	1.4	1.0
Other	8.8	7.7	4.8	-	4.0
Lack of Knowledge	-	-	11.4	21.8	10.0
No answer	4.0	20.8	11.4	-	8.0
Non applicable	1.6	-	-	-	0.0

The overwhelming majority of the student from each high school know the birth control pills. Intrauterine devices were also remembered by about 33% of the students. It is interesting to note that in two high schools, namely Urla and Seferihisar, about 11 and 22% of the students had no knowledge of birth control yet. In the other two high schools one claimed ignorance. It is also interesting to note that in Alaçatı high school about 21 % did not indicate an answer to the question possibly reflecting the taboo nature of the sex issue among students.

Table 3 presents the sources from which the students have received their knowledge about family planning and that from which they would have preferred to receive.

Table 3: Sources from which students received their knowledge about Family Planning (A) and source from which they would have preferred to receive the information (B) in four high schools.

Sources of information (%)

High Schools

	Reviews, news- papers, radio television	Friends, fami- ly, social re- lationships	Physicians, medical staff	Schools, etc.	No answer
<u>Narlıdere:</u>					
A	46.6	49.6	4.0	6.4	7.2
B	18.4	33.6	35.2	8.8	4.0
<u>Alaçatı:</u>					
A	26.4	34.7	4.2	25.0	9.7
B	9.7	18.4	44.4	15.6	12.5
<u>Urla:</u>					
A	41.8	32.1	6.3	6.2	11.4
B	10.1	25.9	34.8	4.4	24.6
<u>Seferihisar:</u>					
A	57.0	45.7	9.6	35.9	-
B	11.9	26.0	47.1	17.6	0.7
<u>Total:</u>					
A	44.5	39.7	13.9	13.6	6.2
B	11.1	26.8	39.2	9.9	12.5

Note: Data is presented as percentages which are calculated separately for each source of information.

In all of the four high schools sex related information is received mainly from two separate sources, namely 1. from reviews, newspapers, radio and television and 2. from friends, family, social relationship. Although percentages are very close to each other, in Narlıdere and Alaçatı high school source 2 appears to be more significant whereas in Urla and Seferihisar source 1 is the prominent source for this information. It is almost alarming that physicians and health centres which can provide this information in a most appropriate way play an insignificant (4-10 %) role among the students surveyed. In Alaçatı high school about 25% of students receive their information from their high school which appears to be an exception rather than rule.

The students replies to the preferred sources show a number of extremely important points: First, there is a dramatic decline in the percentages of students who persist in receiving family planning related information from news media. Second, although smaller there is also a decline in the percentages of friends and families and social relationships. Third but most important, the results of this survey indicated that the students have been receiving their knowledge

regarding family planning and reproductive physiology from inform sources and there is also an overwhelming demand among students that this very fundamental information should be given by physicians & health centre's medical staff. More than that in Urdu high school about 25 % and in Alagati high school about 13% of the students did not indicate an answer, possibly reflecting the taboo nature of these issues among some students.

The attitude of the students about the "ideal number of children" is surveyed. Most of the students surveyed indicated that 2 is the ideal number of children in a family (80%).

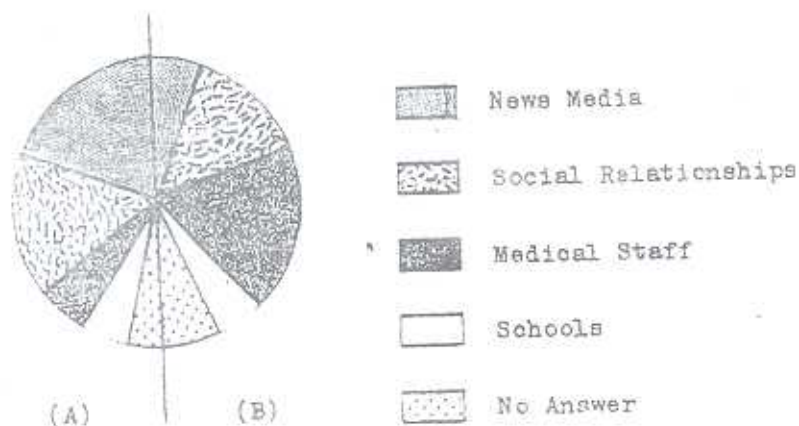


Figure 1: Sources from which students received their knowledge about Family Planning (A) and source from which they would prefer to receive the information (B) in four high schools.

The relationship between sex and family planning definition among the students of four high schools is studied. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Relationship between sex and Family Planning definition of students in four high schools.

Sex	Correct		Wrong		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	225	72.8	84	27.2	309	100
Male	193	75.1	64	24.9	257	100
Total	418	73.9	148	26.1	566	100

The 72.8% of the female and 75.1% of the male students defined family planning correctly in four high schools surveyed.

The relationship between sex and the knowledge of the students regarding effective family planning methods is examined. The results are tabulated in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 2.

Table 5: Relationship between sex and knowledge of students about effective family planning methods

Sex	Students who know at least one effective method		Students who do not know any effective method		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	225	72.8	84	27.2	309	100.0
Male	209	78.6	55	21.4	257	100.0
Total	427	75.4	139	24.6	566	100.0

Data shows that male students in four high schools are more knowledgeable about effective family planning methods than females, but statistical analysis performed on the data from four high schools does not indicate a significant relationship.

Figure 2: Relationship between sex and knowledge of students about effective family planning methods

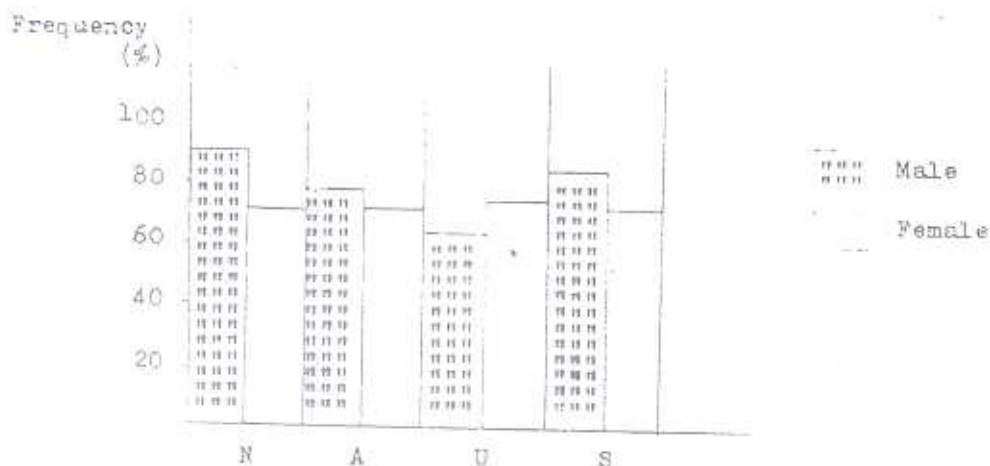


Table 6 shows the relationship between family planning definition and knowledge of students about effective family planning methods

Family Planning Definition	Students who know at least one effective method		Students who do not know any effective method		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Correct	328	78.5	90	21.5	418	100
Wrong	99	66.9	49	33.1	148	100
Total	427	75.4	139	24.6	566	100

Data shows that the students who defined family planning correct are also more knowledgeable about at least one effective family planning method. Statistical data indicates that there is a significant relationship between the two variables (D.F: 1, χ^2 : 7.864, $p < 0.01$).

Table 7 presents the relationship between sex and the attitude of students about "ideal number of children". The survey showed that about 77% of the female students indicated that the ideal number of children is 1-2, as opposed to 84% for the male students. Chi square analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between the two sexes concerning ideal number of children concerning ideal number of children (D.F: 1, χ^2 : 4.091, $p < 0.05$).

Table 7: Relationship between sex and attitude of students about "ideal number of children"

Sex	Ideal number of children					
	One-two		Three or more		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Female	226	77.1	67	22.9	293	100
Male	229	83.8	44	16.1	273	100
Total	455	80.4	111	19.6	566	100

CONCLUSION: 566 students are surveyed in four high schools to determine the level of knowledge and attitude of young adults on reproductive physiology and family planning related issues.

Data present a number of very important points:

-Most of the students defined family planning correctly. However, about 25% of the students have insufficient knowledge with respect to family planning suggesting that there is room for improvement in the system.

- The majority of the students surveyed know at least one effective family planning method.
- Most of the students received family planning related information from the news media and from social relationships. But there is an overwhelming demand among students that this very fundamental information should be given by the physicians and health centre's medical staff.
- It is interesting that some of the students didn't give any answer about family planning methods and sources of information. This may show the taboo nature of the sex issue among some students.
- There is a distinction between female and male knowledge and attitude about family planning related issues. Male students are more knowledgeable about family planning. Chi square analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between the sex of students and the number of children which is accepted as ideal.
- The data presented in this survey showed that the students who defined family planning correctly are also more knowledgeable about effective family planning methods.
- Almost all of the students want to get a systematic education in this field.

The main problem in Turkey is the lack of a scientific approach. There is not a service for adolescents which will carry out the educational and counselling duty. Teachers and physicians both are in an equally good position to influence public opinion as well as the young people with whom they come into professional contact. An education must be given also to the medical staff and teachers. The medical staff and teachers have to provide a collaborative service in this field. Education in this field should occur simultaneously with other forms of education.

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