

Abstract

Introduction : Substance use and risky sexual behaviours are identified as priority health problems that manifest during the period of youth. They account for a major portion of premature morbidity and mortality among youth. Youth in the Galle coastal region are known to be at higher risk of adopting such behaviour because of the well established tourism industry in this area.

The objectives of this research were to determine the prevalence and to describe the pattern of sexual behaviours and substance usage of youth between the ages of 18 to 24 years in the coastal region of the Galle district and to describe HIV/AIDS related knowledge, and to identify some risk factors of risky sexual behaviours.

Methods : The study consisted of 2 components. The first component was a community based descriptive cross sectional survey. A sample of 812 youth were drawn from the Galle coastal region using multistage stratified cluster sampling with probability proportionate to size. The second component was a case control study consisting of 67 young boys as cases and 134 young boys as controls selected from the survey sample.

A self administered anonymous questionnaire was used to collect data for both the survey and the case control study. The prevalence of different substance use was determined using percentages. Bivariate analysis was carried out as an initial step to identify risk factors in the case control study. Subsequently unconditional logistic regression was applied to get the adjusted odds ratios for those identified risk factors.

Results : The survey estimated the prevalence of current smoking among the study group of youth to be 42.3% for males and 0.5% for females with a total prevalence of 22%. Age of initiation of smoking is 17.5 ± 2.4 years. Among smokers 36% smoked more than 20 cigarettes per day.

The total estimated prevalence for current alcohol use in the study group is 16% and the mean age of initiation of alcohol is 18.1 ± 1.9 years. Among the current alcohol users, 3.8% have consumed alcohol more than 20 days.

Cannabis is the commonest illicit addictive substance used by the respondents with an estimated current prevalence of 9.7%. The percentages for current use of heroin, cocaine, hashish and MDMA are 1.7%, 0.6%, 0.5% and 0.4% respectively. Usage of all the substances including cigarettes and alcohol is highly gender specific predominantly in males.

Among the study group of youths 30.3% of respondents are sexually experienced and out of them 90.4% are currently sexually active. Among unmarried youth 20.9% have reported of ever having vaginal intercourse. The mean age of first sexual intercourse among the study group is $18.5 \pm .3$ years. Only young boys were found to be having casual sex either with a commercial sex worker or with a non paid casual partner. The prevalence of having had casual sex among boys within past 12 months is 10.2%. Condom usage during last casual sex was 46.3% with a non paid casual partner and 90% with a commercial partner among those who has had casual sex. Eight percent of sexually active youth have had sex with more than one partner during the previous 12 months. The estimated prevalence of ever having homosexual relationships among males is 11.1%. Among homosexuals boys 57.1% reported that they have not used a condom during the last recent anal intercourse.

Out of all respondents 50.2% of female youth and 25.1 % of male youth have never seen a condom and the difference is significant ($p < 0.001$).

In the case control study, logistic regression analysis identified 6 risk factors for risky sexual behaviours of youth in the Galle coastal region. Age more than 22 years (OR, 9.018, 95% CI 2.74 -29.64) , lower social class (OR, 5.57, 95% CI, 1.571-19.775), usage of other illicit substances (cannabis, heroin, hashish, MGDMA, and cocaine) (OR, 3.737, 95% CI 1.188-11.763), low level of information on reproductive health received from school (OR, 16.404, 95% CI 4.523-59.494), possession of a mobile phone (OR, 8.318,

95% CI 2.507-27.599) and regular exposure to porn sites in the web(OR, 4.599, 95% CI 1.465-14.440) were emerged as risk for risky sexual behaviours.

Conclusions and recommendations : Smoking is a significant health problem among youth in the Galle coastal region. Though a significant proportion of male youth in the Galle coastal region engage in sexual activity, practice of condom use remains poor with casual sex. Findings of the case control study suggest following interventional areas to improve reproductive health of youth: more in depth reproductive health education in schools giving special emphasis to HIV/AIDS, improving communication skills of parents and teachers, prevention of usage of all types of substances, close monitoring of young children's mobile phone and internet usage and teaching values and ethics in schools to develop healthy attitudes among youth.