



## Formation of partnerships among young women and men in Pune district, Maharashtra

This report is the result of a collaborative study between the KEM Hospital Research Centre (KEMHRC), Pune and the Population Council, New Delhi, with support from the Hewlett and MacArthur Foundations.

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The KEM Hospital Research Centre (KEMHRC) is part of KEM Hospital, a tertiary care teaching hospital located in Pune. KEMHRC has been working for the past 30 years on issues relating to vulnerable sections of the community, including women, adolescents and children. Its work focuses on applied, problem oriented and problem solving research and intervention projects in rural and urban areas around Pune.

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## Executive summary

Aside from their educational attainment, economic activity levels and age at marriage, little is known about the lives of young people in India, and especially the extent to which and the contexts in which they form romantic, marital and other partnerships or the nature of these partnerships. At a time when India's Youth Policy and its Reproductive and Child Health and National AIDS Control Programmes have acknowledged the need to focus on youth, it is central that these gaps in understanding are filled.

The KEM Hospital Research Centre and the Population Council conducted a study in Pune district, Maharashtra in 2003–05, one of the first exercises in India of obtaining information on romantic and sexual partnership formation and sexual activity among young people, through a large-scale community-based survey and related textual data gathering. The study focused on exploring the situation of unmarried and married young women and men aged 15–24 in rural and urban slum settings. While the intention was to focus on the formation of partnerships — including romantic and casual, pre-marital and marital, with and without physical and sexual contact — the study also provided insights into the lives of young people, including their decision-making and mobility, perceptions of self worth, their awareness of sexual and reproductive matters and their gender role attitudes. It also explored their family connections, peer and social networks and marriage processes and experiences. This report describes findings of the study. Information is presented on young people in eight subgroups, divided by sex (male, female), marital status (unmarried, married) and residence (rural and urban slum).

The study design included both qualitative and survey phases: a pre-survey qualitative phase that explored norms and experiences; a survey of 8,595 young people between the ages of 15 and 24; and a post-survey qualitative phase in which survey respondents reporting romantic partnerships and non-romantic relationships were interviewed in depth to better understand their experiences.

Findings confirm that while gender disparities in schooling patterns are narrowing in these settings, young people's lives continue to be defined by their sex, and to a lesser extent their area of residence and marital status. At the individual level, young men appear to have far more control over their own lives than young women do; young women however are systematically more likely to report egalitarian gender role attitudes. Awareness of sexual and reproductive health matters is far from universal, and although gender differences are narrower, young men are clearly more likely to be aware of condoms than are young women. Gender differences in such lifestyle indicators as substance use and exposure to pornographic films are, as expected wide, with young men far more likely than young women to report them. Evidence on parental connections and social networks suggests that many young people perceive their upbringing to be strict and family life to be characterised by little or no discussion of sexual and reproductive matters, domestic violence and paternal alcohol use. In contrast, the peer network plays a significant supportive role with regard to personal matters.

Opportunities for the formation of romantic and sexual partnerships do exist in this outwardly traditional setting. Significant minorities of young men and women report involvement in a romantic partnership, despite close parental supervision. Patterns of pre-marital romantic partnerships suggest that where partnerships occur, they are initiated at an early age and where young couples spend time together, it is usually clandestinely. There is moreover, a clear progression in the courting process and among those who do initiate sexual relations, first sex occurs within a month of partnership formation for a significant minority. As expected, gender differences in reporting of romantic experiences are considerable. While sex with a romantic partner characterises the lives of the majority of the sexually experienced, findings suggest that young men, but not young women, also engage in sexual relations in other contexts, largely with sex workers. In total, some one in five young men and fewer than one in twenty young women have engaged in pre-marital sex. Multiple partner sex and inconsistent condom use are reported by many and unwanted sex characterise the relations of notable minorities.

Notwithstanding the fact that pre-marital relationships are not unknown, for the large majority of young women and men, partnerships are formed within the context of marriage. Large proportions of all married women (and few married men) were married before the age of 18, the legal minimum age at marriage for females; however large proportions of young men too are married before the legal minimum age at marriage (21 for males). The overwhelming majority of marriages are arranged and few young people, and especially young women, are effectively involved in decisions about when and whom to marry; few had even met their future spouse prior to marriage. While most young people are ultimately satisfied with these arranged unions, many also feel they were married at too young an age. Adjusting to new marriages is especially difficult for young women, who must cope with a new family environment and role. These married young women report low levels of communication with their spouse and marital family early in marriage and limited control over material resources and family decision-making; a disturbing minority also report the experience of sexual coercion and domestic violence. Exercise of choice in the area of contraception and childbearing is also limited — for both young women and men — underscoring the strong social norms that demand a pregnancy as soon as possible after marriage and that link fertility with a woman's security in her marital home. Pregnancy follows close on the heels of marriage and while significant minorities of young women and men wanted to delay the first pregnancy, no more than a small minority succeeded in practising contraception to postpone the first birth.

In brief, findings reiterate that young people are at a crossroads, confronted by new opportunities on the one hand and traditional social norms and expectations on the other. Findings argue that it is time to shed traditional misconceptions about the rarity of pre-marital partnership formation or sexual activity among young people. Significant and multiple steps are needed. Sexuality education must be universalised; attention must be paid to build skills and agency among young women and promote new concepts of masculinity and femininity among youth more generally; and programmes must be developed that address parental inhibitions and encourage greater openness and interaction between parents and children. Equally important is the need for India's reproductive health programmes to be inclusive of unmarried young people and recognise their right to information and services on the one hand, and recognise the unique needs of newly married young couples, on the other. In sum, findings argue strongly for services and programmes that enable both unmarried and married youth to make their partnerships safe, wanted and informed.

## Introduction

Young people in India face traditional age- and sex-stratified norms that espouse gender double standards. Pre-marital partnerships, including those that may not involve sexual intercourse, are taboo and anecdotal evidence suggests that in many settings in India, the hint of a romantic relationship or even social interaction between young girls and boys is sufficient to damage a family's reputation and/or result in accelerated arranged marriage, particularly for the girl. While there is a prevailing perception at the community level that in these circumstances, pre-marital partnerships are rare, there is a small and unrepresentative body of literature that suggests that despite the sanctions enforced, such partnerships are indeed formed and sexual relations experienced, among, typically, fewer than 10 percent of young women and 15–30 percent of young men (see for example, Abraham and Kumar, 1999; Awasthi, Nichter and Pande, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004). At the same time, little is known — aside from educational attainment, economic activity levels and age at marriage — about the lives of young people and the contexts in which they form romantic, marital and other partnerships. At a time when India's Youth Policy and its Reproductive and Child Health and National AIDS Control Programmes have acknowledged the need to focus on youth, it is imperative that these gaps in understanding are filled (Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004; Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2004).

This report describes the situation of young unmarried and married women and men aged 15–24 in rural and urban slum settings in India, namely Pune district, Maharashtra. While the intention is to

focus on the formation of partnerships — including romantic and casual, pre-marital and marital, with and without physical and sexual contact — the report also provides insights into the lives of young people, including their agency, awareness of sexual and reproductive matters and gender role attitudes, and their family connections and social networks. Findings provide community-based evidence regarding the nature of partnership formation, and argue for services and programmes that enable both unmarried and married youth to make these partnerships safe, wanted and informed.

### Background

Evidence from large surveys, such as the National Family Health Survey-2 (NFHS), indicates that while a large proportion of sexually active young men in India are unmarried, the vast majority of sexually active young women are married — about half of all women aged 20–24, for example, were married by age 18 and about one quarter by age 15 (IIPS and ORC-Macro, 2000). Less is known about the nature of their sexual lives. We know that pregnancy follows closely on the heels of marriage, that contraception is rarely practised and unmet need for contraception is reported by approximately 25 percent of women aged 15–24 years (IIPS and ORC-Macro, 2000). There is emerging evidence on the coercive nature of early marital sexual experiences (see for example, George and Jaswal, 1995; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004; Khan et al., 1997; Ram et al., 2006; Santhya and Jejeebhoy, 2005; Sodhi and Verma, 2002). However, few studies explore these issues in depth, provide information on the extent to which married young women have a say

in their lives, or describe their marital sexual experiences and experiences of conflict within marriage.

Information on the nature of partnerships, both pre-marital and marital, is sparse, coming, for example, from small case studies, usually among urban rather than rural youth, and from schools and universities rather than communities more generally (for a review see Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004). What is known is therefore instructive but not representative. Findings suggest, for example, that pre-marital onset of sexual activity is not unheard of and is clearly more common among men than women, although some difference may reflect over-reporting among males and under-reporting among females (e.g. Abraham and Kumar, 1999; Awasthi, Nichter and Pande, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004).

Evidence is likewise sparse with regard to the context in which young people live and form partnerships. We know that 62 percent and 51 percent of young women and men aged 15–19 are out-of-school and that at least 25 percent and 39 percent respectively, are working (RGI, 2001), but few studies have explored their individual capabilities and gender role attitudes, their family connections or their social networks — all factors assumed to influence the timing and pattern of partnership formation (see for example, Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004; NRC and Institute of Medicine, 2005). Available studies underscore the limited decision-making power, access to resources and mobility of young women (see for example, Levitt-Dayal et al., 2003; Ram et al., 2006; Sebastian, Grant and Mensch, 2004). There is also evidence from India and elsewhere of adherence to unequal gender norms among the young, and of the extent to which unequal norms influence young people's ability to negotiate contraceptive use and safe sexual activity (Brown et al., 2001).

What evidence is available also highlights significant gender differences in socialisation patterns: for example, concern for the sexual security and chastity of daughters dominates parental relationships with adolescents and results in close supervision of the activities of daughters but not sons. Family relationships are reportedly characterised by limited communication, interaction and supportiveness, particularly with regard to matters relating to sex and reproduction; issues that remain taboo subjects within families. In many cases, parents believe that talking to adolescents about these matters would imply approval of sexual activity (Masilamani, 2003). Available studies suggest, however, a positive relationship between the strictness or authoritativeness of parent–child relations, lack of perceived parent–child communication and support, and adolescent sexual experience (Abraham and Kumar, 1999; Mehra, Savithri and Coutinho, 2002; Patel and Andrews, 2001).

Social networks also play an important role in young people's lives; peers are, for all young people, a leading source of information about sexual matters (Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004; Mehra, Savithri and Coutinho, 2002). Evidence suggests that among young women, peer networks shrink following marriage; it also suggests that young men have significantly larger peer networks than do young women and that opportunities for social interaction are significantly greater among young men than among young women (Abraham and Kumar, 1999; Ram et al., 2006).

## Study objectives

The main objective of the study was to examine the formation of romantic and sexual partnerships among young women and men aged 15–24, both those that take place before marriage and those that take place within the context of marriage. The study

aimed to assess experiences of different types of partnerships among youth — romantic and casual, pre-marital and marital, with and without physical and sexual contact. In order to better understand the context in which young people live, the study explored young people's own capabilities, notably their decision-making authority, perceptions of self-worth, mobility, gender role attitudes and awareness about sexual and reproductive matters, as well as their family relations and social networks.

### Study setting

Data were collected from two sites, a rural and an urban slum setting, in Pune district, Maharashtra. Maharashtra is one of the most developed states in India in terms of social and economic indicators; it is also a state in which HIV prevalence is high, including among its youth (Government of Maharashtra, 2006; NACO, 2002). Of the 35 districts of Maharashtra, Pune is one of the most economically and socially developed. The 2001 census recorded a total population of 7.2 million in the district, of whom some 58 percent reside in Pune city. The district lies in

close proximity to the state capital, Mumbai, has considerable opportunities for non-agricultural employment, a well-established educational infrastructure, and relatively easy access to modern consumer goods (Government of Maharashtra, 2006). Literacy rates are high. Of the total population, some 10.5 percent belong to scheduled castes and 3.6 percent to scheduled tribes (RGI, 2001). Pune is one of six high HIV prevalence districts in the state (NACO, 2002). In short, youth in Pune district are assumed to have greater access to education, employment opportunities and modern lifestyles than those in most other districts of the state. Table 1.1 presents comparative demographic and socio-economic indicators of the rural and urban study settings, Pune district and Maharashtra state.

Due to the sensitive nature of the survey, areas were selected in which the community could be approached through an active and credible local service organisation. In the rural setting, the KEM Hospital Research Centre (KEMHRC) provides outreach services to the population residing in the areas served by three primary health centres (PHCs)

**Table 1.1:**

#### Profile of the study settings, Pune district and Maharashtra

Characteristics	Rural Pune district	Urban Pune district	Total Pune district	Maharashtra state
Population <sup>1</sup>	3,031,718	4,200,837	7,232,555	96,878,627
Sex ratio <sup>1,*</sup>	947	899	919	922
Child sex ratio (0–6 years) <sup>1,*</sup>	904	900	902	913
Male literacy (%) <sup>1,†</sup>	83.6	91.6	88.3	86.0
Female literacy (%) <sup>1,†</sup>	60.7	80.0	71.9	67.0
Male work participation (%) <sup>1</sup>	55.5	52.1	53.5	53.3
Female work participation (%) <sup>1</sup>	44.2	14.4	27.1	30.8
Population, ages 15–24 (%) <sup>2</sup>	18.7	19.8	19.2	—
Average age at marriage, male (years) <sup>2</sup>	24.9	25.1	25.0	24.6
Average age at marriage, female (years) <sup>2</sup>	18.6	23.0	20.5	19.1

\* Sex ratio: number of females per 1,000 males; † Of the population aged 6 years and above. Sources: <sup>1</sup> RGI, 2001; <sup>2</sup> IIPS and ORC-Macro, 2002.

in Mawal taluka, Pune district. KEMHRC has been serving the 87,000 people in the 90 villages surrounding the selected PHCs for 30 years. In the urban site, a slum community of approximately 100,000 in Pune, the Community Aid Sponsorship Programme (CASP), with whom KEMHRC collaborated, implements youth development and reproductive health programmes and has had a presence in the area for over 10 years.

## Study design

A cross-sectional study, utilising both quantitative and qualitative elements, was conducted amongst four population subgroups — married/unmarried, male/female— aged 15–24 in both the rural and urban study sites (see Table 1.2 for details).

Research was conducted in three phases between 2003 and 2005.

### *Pre-survey qualitative phase*

Key informant interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted to inform the development of the quantitative survey instrument and gain insight into the sexual experiences of young women and men.

### *Community-based survey*

The questionnaire drew from a number of existing instruments relating to young people's sexual behaviours, awareness, gender role attitudes and agency (Cleland, 2001; Ganatra, 1995; IIPS and Population Council, 2002; Patel, 2002; Sebastian et al., 2003). It also drew on insights from the pre-survey qualitative phase described above, particularly in terms of appropriate terminology, meeting venues, extent of physical contact, and interpersonal dynamics in platonic, romantic and sexual relationships. The wording of questions was adapted for relevance amongst the four sub-samples and the instrument was translated into the local language, Marathi. In addition to questions on socio-economic matters, the survey contained a broad range of questions relating to school, work and leisure activities, personal characteristics, pre-marital social interaction and partnership formation, and marriage and marriage-related decision-making. For married respondents, two distinct sets of questions were asked about pre-marital and marital experiences.

Recognising the reluctance of respondents to disclose sexual experience in a survey situation, at the

Table 1.2:

### Study samples by phase of study

Component	No. conducted			
	Men		Women	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Pre-survey qualitative phase				
Key informant interviews	3	2	8	8
In-depth interviews*	1	2	4	8
Focus group discussions*	1	5	4	3
Community-based survey*	1,431	1,275	2,951	2,938
Post-survey in-depth interviews*	51	50	25	23

\* Among young women and men ages 15–24.

conclusion of the interview, respondents who did not report pre-marital sex in the course of the survey were asked a single question ("Have you ever engaged in sexual relations?" or "Before you were married, did you ever engage in pre-marital relations with anyone, including your husband?") and asked to mark a blank sheet of paper with a tick or cross, place the sheet in an envelope, seal it and return it to the interviewer. Respondents were informed that the envelope would not be opened in the field, and that only the principal investigators would be able to link the information provided in the envelope with other parts of the questionnaire.

All households in the two study areas were listed and eligible respondents identified. Separate lists of each of the four subgroups — married/unmarried, male/female — were compiled, from which the sample was randomly selected. Listing occurred about one month prior to survey implementation.

In view of the expected differences in pre-marital experience between young men and women and in sexual behaviour of unmarried and married women, allowing for possible non-response and adjusting for design effect, our sampling strategy called for a sample of 2,150 and 1,350 unmarried and married women and 950 unmarried and married men each from rural and urban sites.

In cases in which both a woman and her husband were eligible, only one was interviewed. Given that just 6 percent of males aged 15–19 are married, selection of young men was made first, their wives were removed from the list of married women, and the required number of married women was randomly selected from among those remaining. Moreover, if one household contained more than one eligible respondent in each category (married/unmarried, female/male), only one from each

category was selected randomly. No replacement was permitted. In addition to the consent of the respondent, parental consent was obtained for all unmarried respondents below the age of 18.

Over 80 percent of the expected sample size was reached for three of the four groups — unmarried women, married women and unmarried men — in both the rural and urban sites. Interviews were held with a total of 1,799 unmarried and 1,152 married young women in rural areas; 1,784 and 1,154, respectively, in urban areas; and 870 and 817 unmarried young men in rural and urban areas respectively — that is, close to the required sample sizes indicated above. However, married young men were difficult to reach due to long work hours as well as work-related mobility; thus, we were able to conduct the survey with only 561 and 458 married men in the rural and urban sites respectively. Refusal rates remained below 5 percent overall and did not vary by sex of respondent or by whether parental consent was required.

#### ***Post-survey in-depth interviews***

In-depth interviews were conducted with a select group of respondents who reported any form of romantic partnership or sexual relationship in the survey. Using a list of pre-set case criteria, investigator teams were responsible for identifying respondents eligible for post-survey in-depth interview. Criteria, for example, included those cases in which a pre-marital sexual partnership, non-consensual sex or sex worker relations, a love marriage, etc., were reported. In all, 28 in-depth interviews were conducted with unmarried females (14 each with rural and urban respondents), 20 with married females (11 rural; 9 urban), 45 with unmarried men (19 rural; 26 urban) and 56 with married men (32 rural; 24 urban).

As one of the first community-based studies to explore these sensitive subjects amongst young people in India, several strategies were employed to address field-level challenges in implementation. For one, it was necessary to overcome negative community sentiments. Before fieldwork was initiated and in the course of fieldwork, investigators ensured that key community members, gatekeepers and youth themselves were apprised of the study and its rationale; and were kept informed of its progress. Second, in order to ensure that respondents would be comfortable with the interview situation, interviewers were selected who were no more than 5–6 years older than the respondents; training moreover ensured that interviewers shed any awkwardness about asking questions about sexual matters; and survey questions were phrased to reflect youth vocabularies. Third, ensuring privacy during interviews was essential: to do so, for those who consented, interviews were arranged in secure locations outside the home that

guaranteed complete privacy. In cases in which the interview had to be conducted within the home, arrangements were made for a second interviewer to hold a parallel group discussion with others present. These parallel discussions not only helped to ensure privacy but also served to address family members' curiosity about the study. We acknowledge that despite these precautions, the home setting may not have been conducive at times for the revelation of intimate experiences. Fourth, we ensured that no more than one individual from each group (selected randomly) was interviewed and that both a woman and her husband were never interviewed so as to minimise any possibility of conflict arising from the content of the questionnaire.

Investigators recognised the need to respond to young respondents' questions and health concerns. As such, health camps were established in each village or urban block to provide services — including consultations, provision of medication, counselling

Table 1.3:

**Socio-demographic profile of households in which unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 reside, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Characteristic	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
% Hindu	91.5	85.2	88.5	82.7	91.1	84.4	91.2	85.2
% households with own toilet	21.3	6.7	27.0	7.9	14.6	4.6	18.8	7.9
% households with electricity	87.4	98.3	88.3	98.0	83.4	95.4	87.5	96.3
% households cooking with gas/electricity	45.2	79.8	51.5	86.2	33.2	64.0	47.2	72.7
% households with own water facilities	35.2	68.7	38.3	87.5	31.0	63.1	32.5	77.1
Mean number of consumer goods owned <sup>a</sup>	2.8	3.3	2.7	3.3	2.4	2.9	2.4	3.0
Mean years of schooling, father <sup>b</sup>	4.8	5.2	5.5	5.7	3.3	3.7	4.0	4.4
Mean years of schooling, mother <sup>b</sup>	1.9	2.5	2.4	3.1	0.9	1.1	1.5	1.7
Average household size	5.8	5.0	6.4	5.5	6.2	5.6	6.2	5.5

<sup>a</sup> Seven consumer goods are considered (TV, telephone, pressure cooker, mobile phone, motorcycle/car, bicycle, CD player).

<sup>b</sup> Excludes those reporting "Don't know".

and referral — free of charge to respondents and their communities. These camps were well attended and had the additional advantage of strengthening linkages and trust with the community. Sessions were also held with young people on sexual and reproductive health matters and related concerns that they expressed.

### Characteristics of respondents' households

Table 1.3 presents a profile of the households in which young people reside. The large majority of respondents in both the urban and rural samples were Hindu. Among the Hindus, the urban sample was much more likely to contain those from scheduled castes or other backward castes (OBCs) than was the rural sample. By and large, youth from urban slums were more likely to have access to household amenities than rural youth; family's economic status, as measured by consumer goods owned, varied similarly. Findings on parental education suggest that, as expected, fathers were, on average, better educated than mothers, that parents of the married were less

educated than those of the unmarried, and that parents of urban youth tended to be better educated than those of rural youth. Households comprised an average of approximately six members for rural families and five for urban families.

### Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 examines young people's individual capabilities and characteristics, that is, their education and economic activity levels as well as their agency, gender role attitudes, sexual and reproductive health awareness and the extent to which they were exposed to alcohol, drugs and pornographic films. Chapter 3 focuses on family relations and social networks. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe, respectively, the formation of pre-marital romantic partnerships; pre-marital sexual experience with romantic and non-romantic partners; and marriage formation patterns and early marital experiences. Chapter 7 summarises the main findings of the study and offers recommendations for programmes and research.

## Individual characteristics, capabilities and behaviours

This chapter presents individual characteristics, capabilities and behaviours measured in terms of education, economic activity and co-residence patterns reported by respondents as well as such factors as their self-confidence, mobility and decision-making. In addition, respondents' sexual and reproductive health awareness, gender role attitudes, attitudes towards marital violence and attitudes regarding the acceptability of pre-marital sexual relations are described. Finally, such behaviours as alcohol and drug use and exposure to pornographic films are discussed.

### Socio-demographic profile

Age profiles suggest that in both the rural and urban setting, unmarried young women are, on average, 1–2 years younger than unmarried young men; age differences among the married are somewhat narrower, with married women being just one year younger than married men, on average. Age differences are obviously influenced by marriage patterns in which females are much more likely than males to be married in adolescence. Survey findings confirm that the majority of unmarried young men and women and married young men live with one or both parents. As expected, married young women most often co-reside with their parents-in-law (Table 2.1).

Schooling profiles vary by sex, residence and marital status. Clearly, married young men and especially women are far less educated than other groups, both in rural and urban areas. Among the unmarried, gender differences have virtually disappeared and about three in four in each group have completed at least eight years of education.

Economic activity profiles also show wide differences between the eight groups. As expected, young men are considerably more likely than young women to be currently engaged in wage-earning activities; and rural youth are more likely than urban youth to be involved in unpaid work on the family farm or business. Findings suggest that far larger percentages of young women, notably the married (30% and 78% unmarried and married urban women, respectively; 24% and 42% unmarried and married rural women, respectively), than men (10% and 4% unmarried and married urban men, respectively; 10% and 2% unmarried and married rural men, respectively) are neither in school nor engaged in wage-earning activities or unpaid work on the family farm or business, and likely reflects the fact that young women are largely engaged in housework.

### Self-confidence, mobility and decision-making

Measures of self-confidence, mobility and decision-making autonomy have been largely used to measure the power that adolescent girls and young women exercise in their own lives (see for example, Levitt-Dayal et al., 2003; Ram et al., 2006; Sebastian, Grant and Mensch, 2004). Here we explore these measures for both young women and young men, recognising that the lives of unmarried young men may also be somewhat circumscribed.

#### *Self-confidence*

Self-confidence is measured by responses to statements relating to three issues: ability to convince

Table 2.1:

**Socio-demographic profile of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Characteristic	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Age								
Mean age	19.1	19.0	17.1	17.4	22.6	22.5	21.3	21.3
Residence patterns (%)								
Co-resides with both parents	82.9	74.5	88.7	82.9	65.2	53.3	0.9	1.9
Co-resides with one or both parents	94.4	91.0	97.2	96.5	81.5	73.2	1.8	5.5
Co-resides with mother-/father-in-law (married)	—	—	—	—	0.4	0.4	68.9	51.8
Education status (%)								
Ever enrolled in school	98.6	98.9	97.1	98.6	93.2	92.8	79.4	84.1
Currently in school	30.6	33.9	28.0	41.9	0.5	1.5	0.7	1.6
Completed 8/+ years of school	80.7	80.0	72.8	81.0	55.1	57.5	39.5	44.0
Work history and current activity status (%)								
Unpaid work on family farm or business in last 12 months	31.6	5.6	45.5	5.1	30.8	6.1	46.2	3.9
Paid work in last 12 months	63.6	67.0	27.0	34.2	94.1	96.5	23.2	18.7
Not in school and not engaged in wage work or unpaid work on family farm or business	9.7	10.3	24.2	30.3	1.8	3.5	41.8	77.9

others of one's views, ease of building new friendships and perceptions that family members respect the respondent's opinions. Findings are reported in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 for the unmarried and married, respectively.

Young people, irrespective of sex, residence or marital status, report considerable self-confidence. Gender differences are, however, clear. Young women report moderately lower levels of self-confidence than do young men, irrespective of residence, on all three measures of self-confidence. They are less likely to believe they can make new friendships easily and less likely to report that their parents respect their opinions; less of a sex-based difference was apparent

in young people's perceptions of whether they could convince others of their beliefs. Gender differences are, moreover, wider among the married than the unmarried. In particular, married young women are far less likely than married young men to report that their opinions are respected by elders — now including their in-laws — in their families. Likewise, they are less likely than married young men to find it easy to build new friendships.

### **Mobility**

Mobility is measured by whether respondents reported that they needed permission to visit five different places — a local shop, a nearby friend's

Figure 2.1:

**Perceived self-confidence: Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 reporting selected characteristics, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

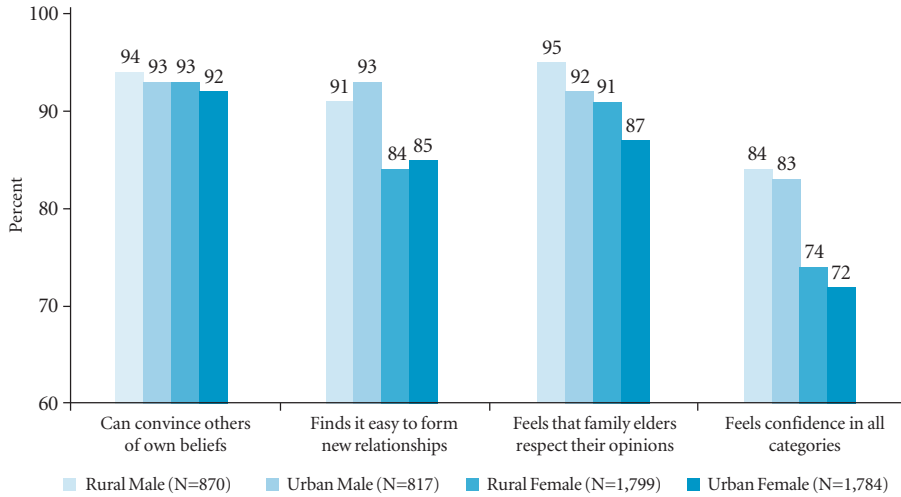
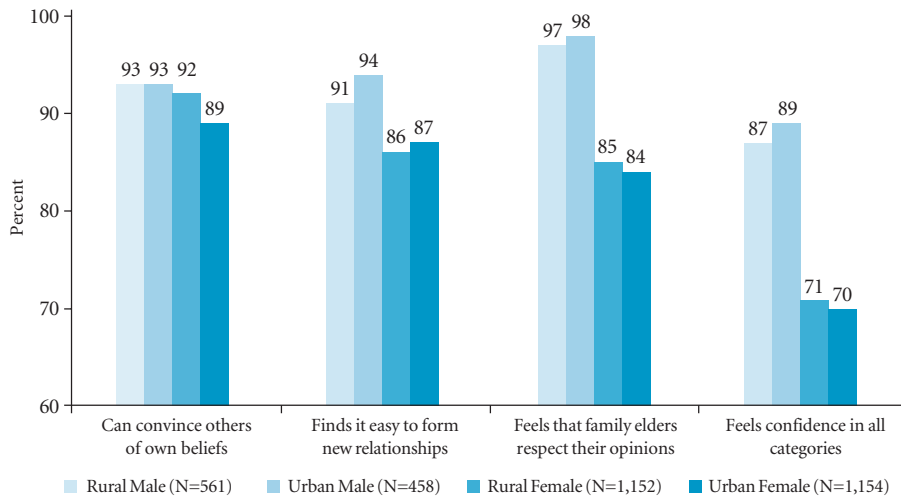


Figure 2.2:

**Perceived self-confidence: Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting selected characteristics, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**



house, a film or *mela* (fair), a place of worship, and anywhere outside the village (rural) or neighbourhood (urban slum). Mobility was not measured for married men since they generally face few relevant restrictions.

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 present levels of mobility experienced by unmarried youth and married women respectively. Findings suggest, as expected, wide gender differences. Unmarried young men are much more likely to report freedom of movement than young women, irrespective of their marital status. The average number of places (out of five designated, not shown in tabular form) to which young men were allowed to go without permission (3.0 and 3.2 for rural and urban, respectively) was nearly double that of young women in both the rural (1.8 and 1.7 for married and unmarried, respectively) and urban (1.7 and 1.6 for married and unmarried, respectively) settings. And while almost one quarter of unmarried young men faced no restrictions on visiting any of the five sites, hardly any young women (1–2%) had the

same freedom. Also notable is the finding that among young women, restrictions on mobility are faced by both the unmarried and the married; indeed, there is no evidence that unmarried young women in our sites are any freer within their natal homes than are married young women in their marital homes.

### Decision-making

Decision-making was quantified using four measures focused on social, economic and health-related decision-making. A dichotomous measure was used to indicate whether or not the respondents felt they had personal control within each decision-making scenario.

Figures 2.5 and 2.6 report, for unmarried and married youth respectively, decision-making with regard to each statement, as well as a summary measure of the percentage of respondents who reported decision-making in all four situations. While the majority of both unmarried and married females and males in both study settings responded positively to items measuring decision-making autonomy (50%

**Figure 2.3:**  
**Mobility: Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 not requiring permission to visit selected sites, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

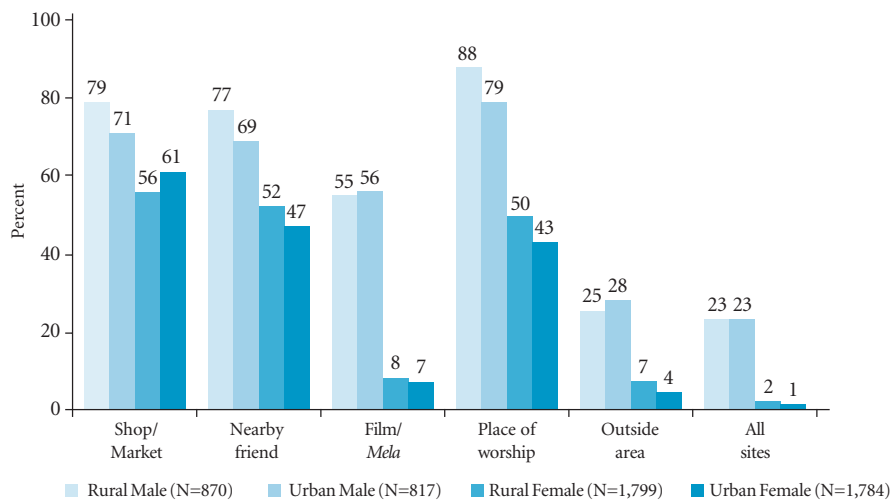


Figure 2.4:

**Mobility: Percentage of married young women ages 15–24 not requiring permission to visit selected sites, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

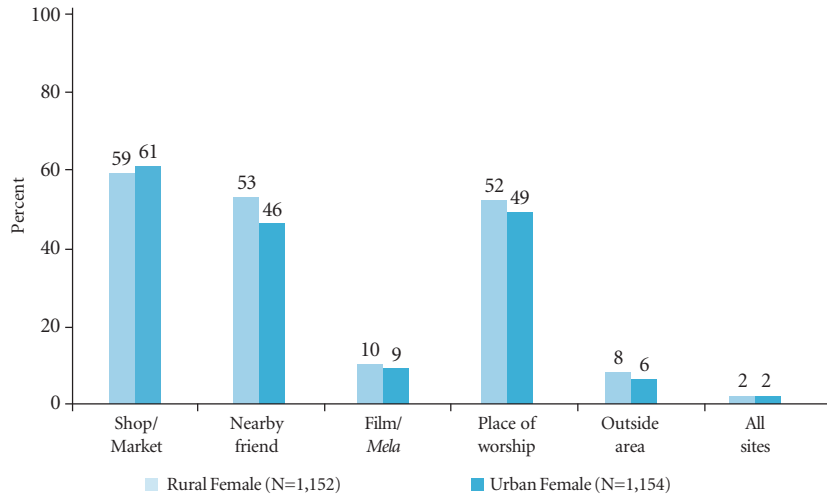


Figure 2.5:

**Decision-making: Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 reporting decision-making on selected matters, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

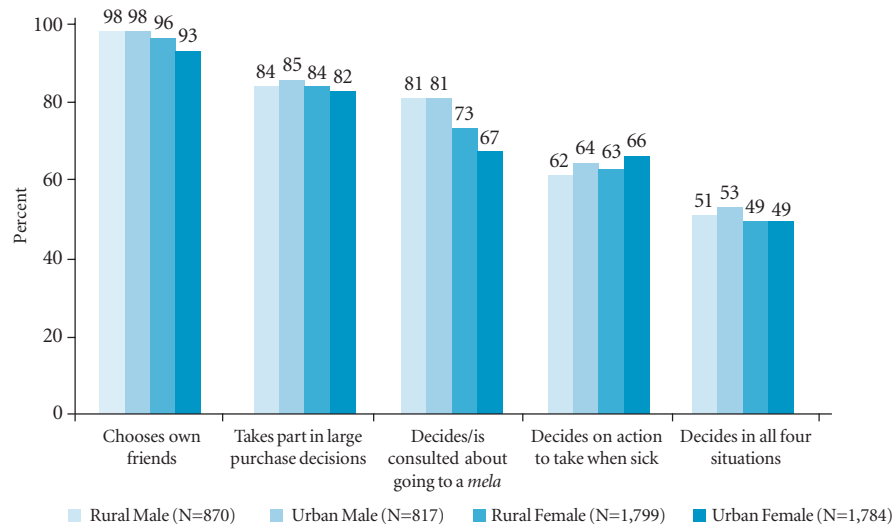
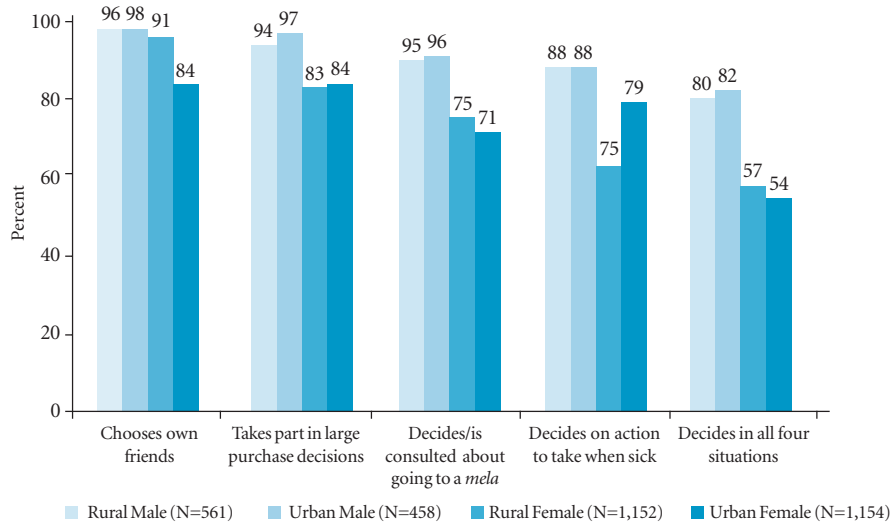


Figure 2.6:

### Decision-making: Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting decision-making on selected matters, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district



or more for all items), differences in responses by marital status of the respondent were evident. Among the unmarried, gender differences are fairly narrow except in the case of decisions regarding going out to a fair or *mela*; nevertheless, only about half of unmarried young women and men, irrespective of area of residence, took part in all four decisions. In contrast, the situation among the married shows far stronger gender differentials; married young men are considerably more likely than women to take part in every decision, irrespective of residence. Indeed, while some four fifths of married young men took part in all four decisions, just over half of married young women reported the same level of decision-making autonomy.

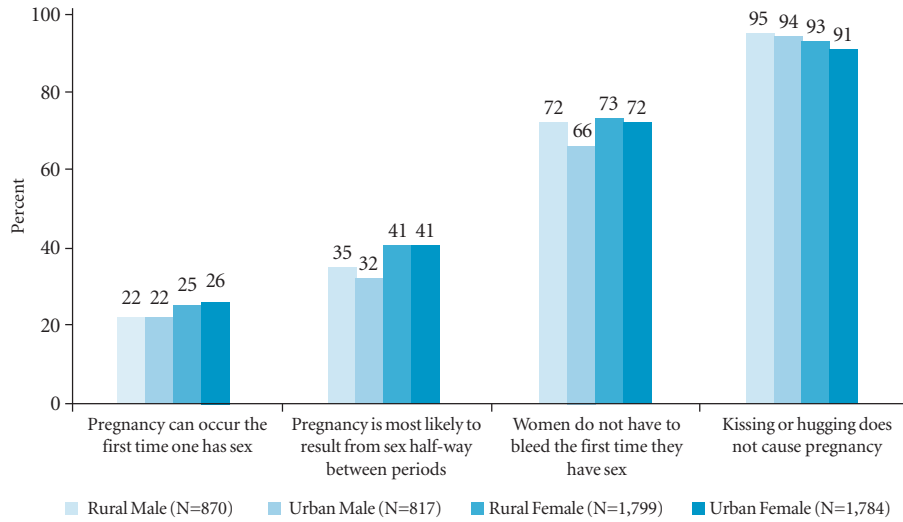
### Sexual and reproductive health awareness

Sexual and reproductive health awareness focused on (a) misconceptions about sex and pregnancy; (b) contraceptive awareness, including about how

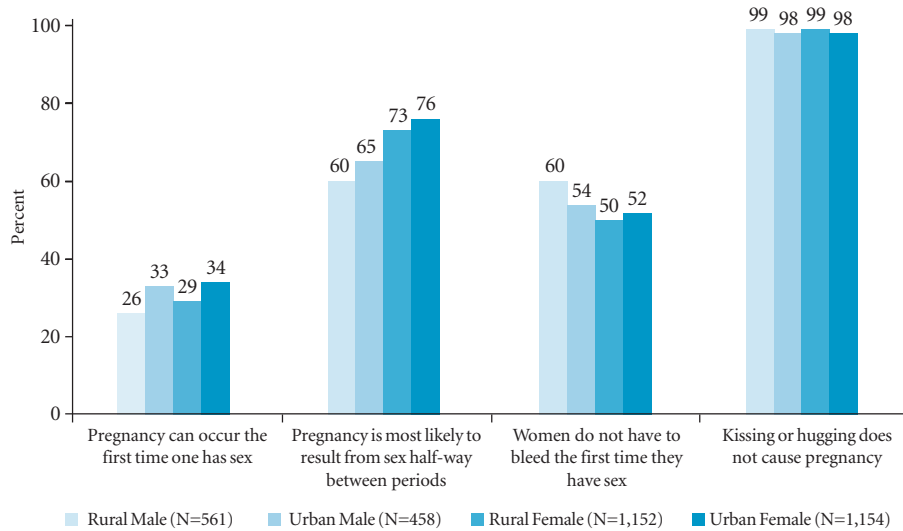
various methods work; and (c) awareness of HIV and its transmission. Clearly, misconceptions about sex and pregnancy are widespread, more so among the unmarried than the married as evident from Figures 2.7 and 2.8. While knowledge that hugging and kissing do not result in pregnancy is virtually universal, at best only one in three youth knew that a woman can get pregnant the very first time she has sex. Even knowledge of the fertile period is limited: two fifths or fewer of the unmarried and between three fifths and three quarters of the married reported correct awareness.

Contraceptive awareness varies by marital status, sex of respondent and type of method, as seen in Figures 2.9 and 2.10. Among young women, awareness of female sterilisation was virtually universal; awareness of oral contraceptive pills was reported by well over 85 percent of all groups; awareness of condoms was reported by far fewer (55–70%). Among young men in contrast, leading methods were condoms and oral contraceptive pills:

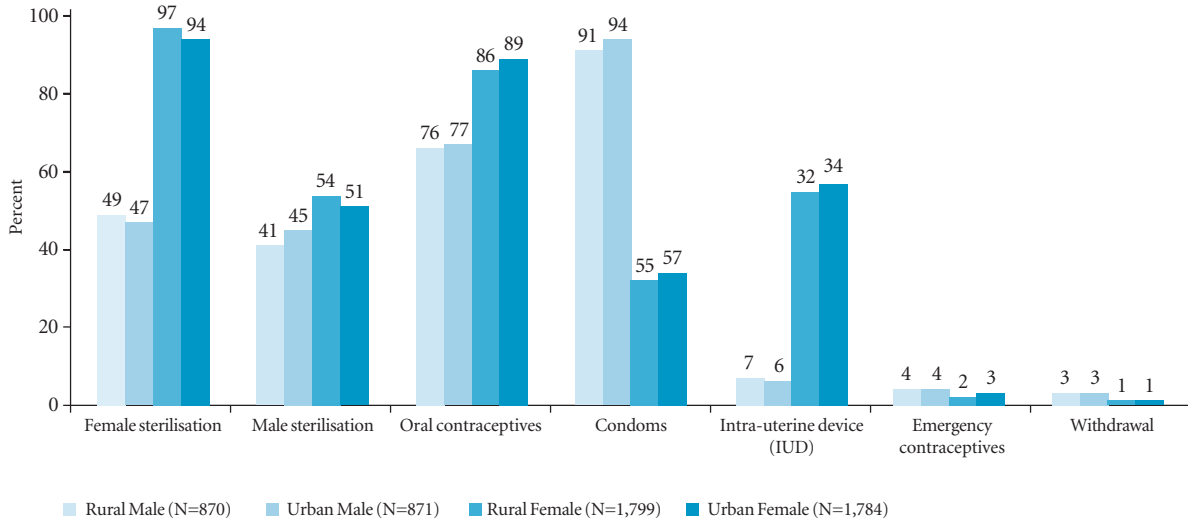
**Figure 2.7:**  
**Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 aware of sexual and reproductive matters, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**



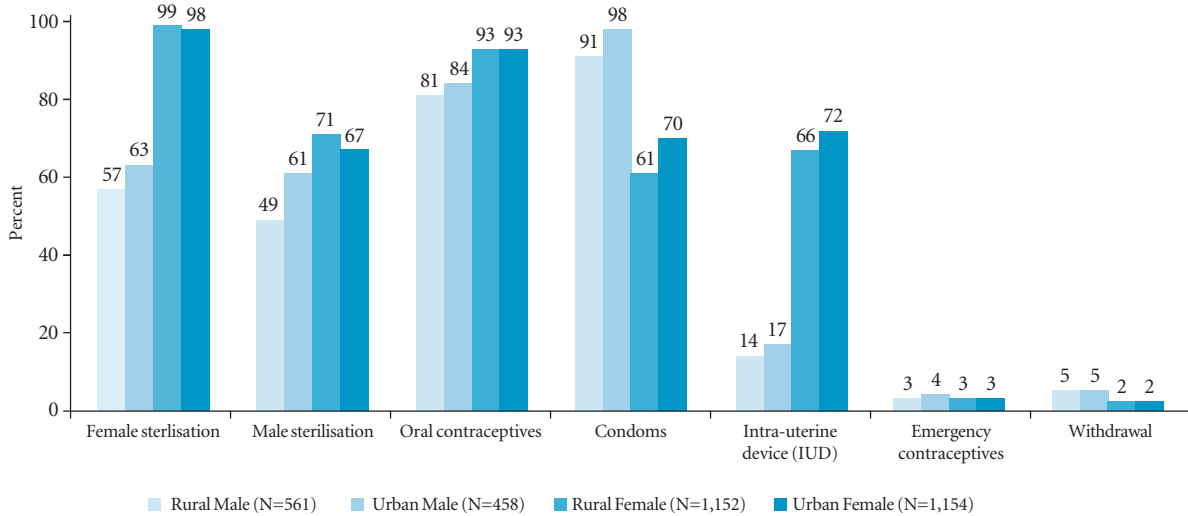
**Figure 2.8:**  
**Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 aware of sexual and reproductive matters, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**



**Figure 2.9:**  
**Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 aware of contraceptive methods, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**



**Figure 2.10:**  
**Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 aware of contraceptive methods, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**



over 90 percent reported condom awareness and 76–84 percent were aware of oral contraceptive pills. By and large, married young women and men tended to be somewhat more likely to report awareness than their unmarried counterparts. Of note also is the finding that small percentages of all respondents (5% or less) were aware of emergency contraception or withdrawal.

Awareness of HIV is high in our study settings among all groups (Table 2.2). The least awareness was however, apparent amongst one of the most vulnerable groups — married women; 9 and 10 percent of married women in the urban and rural setting, respectively, were unaware of HIV. Among those aware of HIV, transmission of HIV through unsafe sexual contact was widely acknowledged, with over 96 percent of those aware of HIV in all groups reporting awareness of this transmission pathway. Misconceptions are, however, prevalent: large proportions were not aware that a healthy looking person could be infected with HIV, ranging from 11

percent of married men in the urban slum setting to 23 percent of married women in the same setting. Likewise, of concern is the finding that among those aware of condoms, knowledge of its correct use is far from universal: for example, only between 84 percent and 94 percent of young men, about half of married young women and fewer than 25 percent of unmarried young women reported such awareness.

## Attitudes

The survey explored young people's gender role attitudes, attitudes towards the acceptability of wife-beating and the acceptability of pre-marital sexual relations.

### *Gender role attitudes*

Respondents' attitudes regarding gender roles give a sense of the extent to which youth themselves adhere to cultural expectations of behaviour for young women and men, likely affecting the nature of their partnerships and sexual relations. Multiple aspects of gender role

Table 2.2:

**Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 aware of HIV and related protective behaviour, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Item	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
% who have heard of HIV	95.5	96.0	93.8	95.1	95.0	97.6	89.6	90.6
% of those aware of HIV who agree:								
Having unsafe sex can give you HIV	98.0	96.6	96.3	96.1	98.5	99.1	97.3	97.6
A healthy looking person can have HIV	83.8	82.7	85.8	84.1	83.1	89.3	81.2	76.7
% aware of condoms	90.9	93.8	55.0	57.1	90.9	97.6	61.3	70.3
% of those aware of condoms who agree:								
A condom can be used for just one act of sexual intercourse	84.4	88.6	23.2	24.8	85.9	94.1	41.0	50.9

attitudes were measured using 10 questionnaire items eliciting agreement/ disagreement with statements regarding women's education, work participation, autonomy and marriage. Five statements reflected positive opinions of women's agency and five contained negative messages (see Table 2.3).

Self-reported beliefs regarding gender roles vary somewhat between the urban and rural settings, but exhibit greater variation between sex and marital status groups. In general, the unmarried were more likely than the married and women more likely than men to have egalitarian views of women's role in society. The average number of gender egalitarian responses (out of 10) ranged from 5.8 for urban

married males to 8.1 for rural unmarried females; young women consistently reported 1–2 more gender-egalitarian attitudes than did young men (not shown in table). Of note is that of the 10 statements, the two that elicited gender inequalitarian responses from large percentages included: "A woman needs her husband's permission for most things" (with 52% to 88% agreeing) and "Women should decide when they want to have children" (with about two thirds disagreeing).

#### *Attitudes toward marital violence*

Another indication of gender power differentials are attitudes towards marital violence or wife-beating. To measure these attitudes, respondents were asked

Table 2.3:

#### Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 agreeing with gender equal and unequal statements, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

Gender role attitudes statements	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
% agreeing with the following gender unequal statements:								
A woman needs her husband's permission for most things	82.5	86.3	52.3	57.4	84.5	87.8	64.3	71.3
Men should head the household	61.2	67.8	21.8	26.9	66.3	70.3	33.1	39.1
Men and women have different work	32.2	36.8	16.1	15.6	37.6	40.8	17.5	21.3
Early marriage is the best thing for girls	16.9	20.6	5.1	8.2	23.4	25.6	7.6	16.4
Boys' education should be given priority	16.8	17.8	4.3	2.9	22.6	18.6	6.2	5.1
% agreeing with the following gender equal statements:								
Girls should be educated up to Class X	96.0	97.6	99.7	99.3	96.4	98.5	99.2	99.6
Women should be able to work before marriage	77.6	79.0	95.1	96.4	69.2	71.4	92.2	91.7
Women should be able to work after marriage	78.2	75.2	93.9	93.3	71.5	56.8	92.5	89.8
Girls should decide when to marry	72.9	73.3	86.8	88.2	71.8	74.0	84.5	82.4
Women should decide when they want to have children	32.6	32.6	32.3	38.1	28.7	29.7	28.9	28.4

whether they agreed that wife-beating is justified under four different scenarios: (1) when a wife is suspected of being unfaithful; (2) when a wife goes out without telling her husband; (3) when a wife disagrees with her husband's opinion; and (4) when a wife

refuses to have sexual relations with her husband. Findings are presented in Figures 2.11 and 2.12.

Gender differences are once again apparent. Young men in all four situations are far more likely to have justified wife-beating than young women. Key

Figure 2.11:

Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 agreeing with justifications for wife-beating, rural and urban settings, Pune district

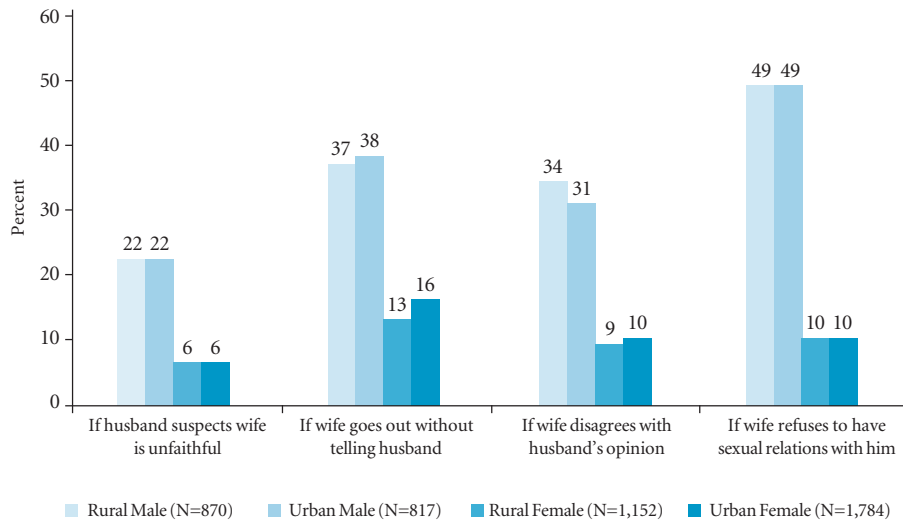
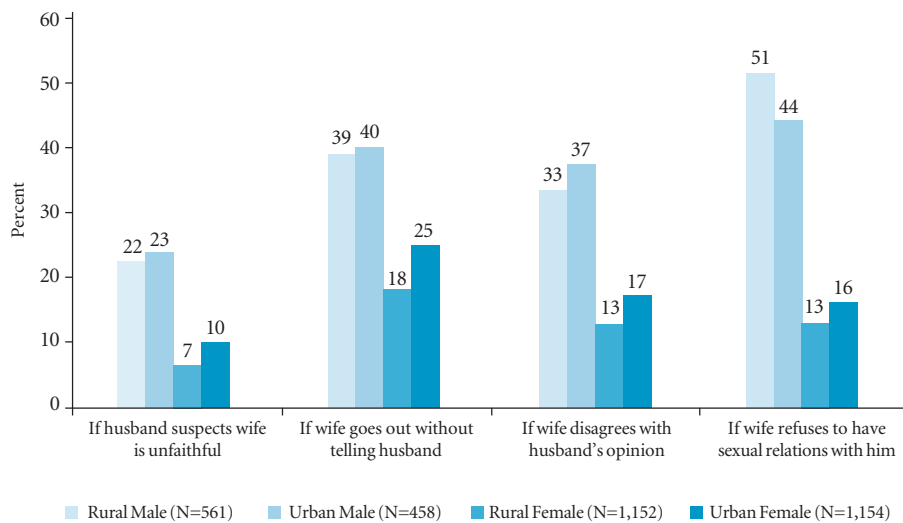


Figure 2.12:

Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 agreeing with justifications for wife-beating, rural and urban settings, Pune district



situations justifying wife-beating also vary by sex but not rural–urban residence or marital status. The leading situation justifying wife-beating among young men was if a wife refuses to have sexual relations with her husband, with nearly half of all young men agreeing with that scenario; wife-beating was justified in each of the other scenarios by at least 20 percent or more young men. Among young women in contrast, the leading reason justifying wife-beating was if a woman goes out without telling her husband; even so, no more than 13–25 percent of young women felt wife-beating was justified in this situation.

#### ***Acceptability of pre-marital sexual activity***

Several studies have observed that youth who hold attitudes that accept pre-marital relationships and sexual contact may be more likely than others to have experienced such relationships (see, for example, Abraham and Kumar, 1999). Our study measured attitudes on whether pre-marital kissing, hugging or touching are acceptable, whether pre-marital sex is

acceptable for those who are engaged to be married, and whether pre-marital sex is acceptable, more generally, for males and females, respectively. Figures 2.13 and 2.14 present the percentage of youth who perceived pre-marital sex to be acceptable in each of these four situations. Results indicate that attitudes towards pre-marital sex are generally negative. Even so, gender differences were wide. Young men of both residence and marital status groups were far more likely than young women to approve pre-marital kissing, hugging and touching as well as pre-marital sexual activity. Urban slum residents were somewhat more likely to report liberal attitudes to pre-marital sex than rural respondents; attitudes did not, however, differ by marital status.

#### **Alcohol and drug use and exposure to pornographic films**

Several studies, including those in India, have noted such lifestyle factors among youth as alcohol and drug use and exposure to pornographic materials.

**Figure 2.13:**

**Attitudes towards pre-marital sex: Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 reporting acceptability of pre-marital sex in various scenarios, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

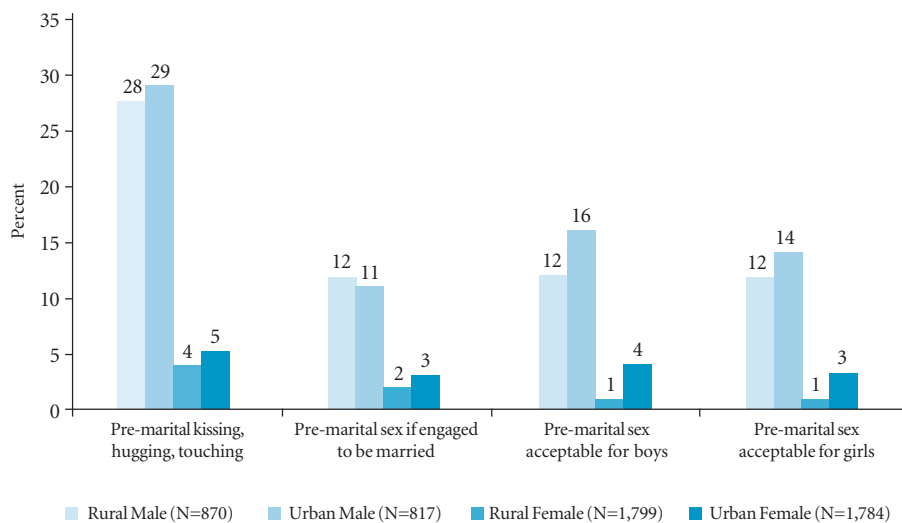
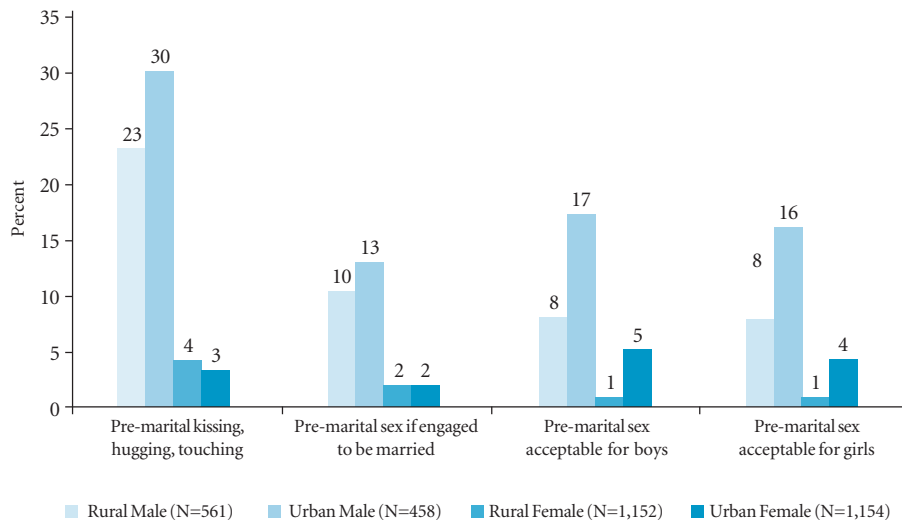


Figure 2.14:

**Attitudes towards pre-marital sex: Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting acceptability of pre-marital sex in various scenarios, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**



Studies have also linked these behaviours to sexual experience (see for example, Abraham and Kumar, 1999). These behaviours were explored in our survey and, to a lesser extent, in our qualitative investigation. Survey findings are presented in Figures 2.15 and 2.16. With regard to young people's exposure to alcohol and drugs, while negligible percentages of young women reported substance use, use among young men was far more common (largely alcohol, few report drug use). Among young men, moreover, the married were far more likely than the unmarried, and urban residents more likely than rural to report alcohol use. Of those that reported alcohol use, the majority (63–68%) reported that they did so only "once or twice a month".

Exposure to pornographic films is similarly reported by few young women but large proportions of young men. Over half of urban males and 40 percent of rural males in the sample had been exposed to pornographic films, the majority (66–77%) of

whom reported seeing them only once in a while. Qualitative data suggest that pornographic films are usually viewed in the home, rather than in video parlours or other outside venues:

*Yes [youngsters see blue films]. They get the cassettes and sit at home and watch when there is no one in the house. (Key informant interview, male urban doctor, practising for 22 years)*

*Boys watch CDs. Some watch cassettes. They bring them on rent...Some parents go to work. So the boys go to these houses and watch. (Key informant interview, male urban youth group member, age 23)*

*They [pornographic magazines] are sold in a few shops. ... They don't give them to young children. The young boys still get them, though. Elders bring them and from there, they slowly get passed to the young boys. (Key informant interview, male urban youth group member, age 23)*

Figure 2.15:

Percentage of unmarried young men and women ages 15–24 reporting substance use and exposure to pornographic films, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

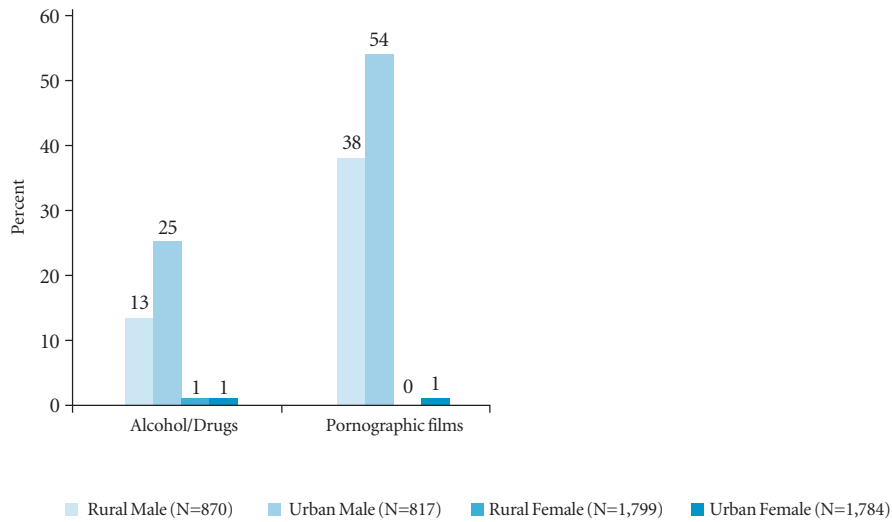
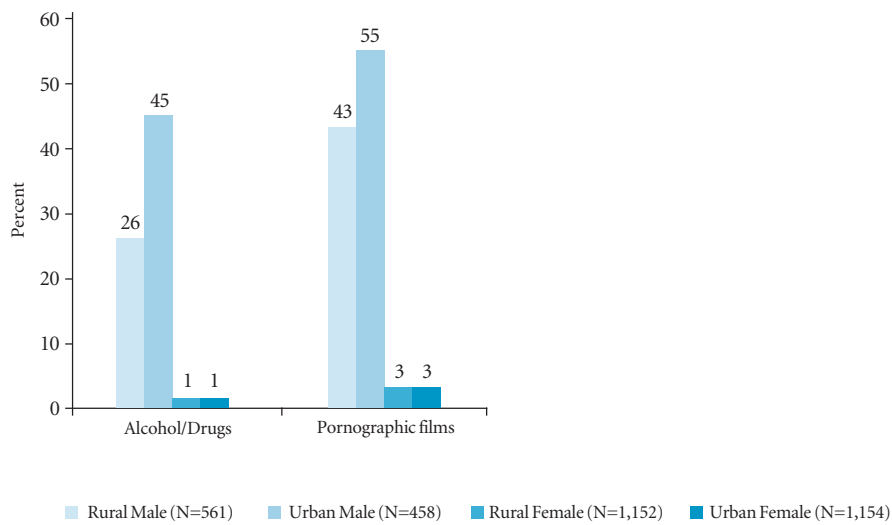


Figure 2.16:

Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting substance use and exposure to pornographic films, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district



## Family connections and social networks

Family connections and social networks are key in young people's lives. Young people's interactions with family and peers and their support are assumed to play an important role in influencing how young people perceive themselves, their behaviours, as well as in the development of romantic or sexual partnerships. Moreover, social isolation from the family and peer networks is argued to define early married life for many young women (see Ram et al., 2006). In this chapter, we explore the nature of family connections and peer interactions in Pune, and the extent to which patterns vary by sex, marital status and rural–urban residence.

### Family and parent interaction

In measuring family life and parent–child connections, we explore the nature of relations with parents and family. For some questions, married respondents were asked to recall experiences from their pre-marital life in their natal home, while the unmarried reported on the current situation. These questions included whether or not the respondent observed parental violence while growing up, whether the respondent experienced family violence while growing up, alcohol and substance use by the respondent's father, and the perceived strictness of parental supervision. Finally, respondents were asked about whether their parents had ever discussed such sexual and reproductive matters with them as physiological changes during adolescence, pregnancy and the reproductive system, contraception, sexual relations, and menstruation or nocturnal emission.

For other questions, married respondents were asked about their current relationship with their

parents; similar questions were posed to the unmarried. For example, all young people were asked whom they were currently most likely to confide in about a number of life matters, including physical health problems, work, education, boy–girl relationships, menstruation (young women) or nocturnal emission (young men) and family matters. Here we measure the extent to which parents were reported as leading confidantes on these matters for both the unmarried and the married.

Findings presented in Table 3.1 suggest that parent–adolescent relations may be somewhat hierarchical, as evident from reports of parental strictness and experience of violence perpetrated by a family member against the young respondent, and that communication on sensitive matters is rare. A sizeable proportion of respondents depict family life as involving violence: 12–15 percent of rural youth and 18–19 percent of urban youth reported witnessing their fathers beating their mothers, and many more reported paternal substance use (largely alcohol). Between 16 percent and 32 percent of young males compared to between 8 percent and 15 percent of young females reported being the victim of violence perpetrated by a family member. Qualitative data corroborate this profile of family discord and an extreme case describes her experience:

*My father wanted more and more money and that is why he did not want us to study. He wanted us to work and bring money for him to drink... One night my father came home and started fighting with my mother. Beating her. He was not happy with the vegetable she had made. I interfered and*

*told my father that the vegetable was good and all of us had eaten it. He got angry. He asked me whose side I was on; why was I taking my mother's side. He beat me up, poured kerosene on me.* (In-depth interview, married urban female, age 24)

Also of importance is young respondents' assessment of the strictness of their socialisation: 40 percent of unmarried young women and 35–36 percent of married young women, irrespective of residence, reported a strict family environment.

Reiterating the greater permissiveness with which young males are socialised, fewer males — 25–32 percent — reported a strict upbringing.

Findings presented in Table 3.1 suggest, moreover, that parent–child communication rarely includes reproductive and sexual health matters. No more than 1 percent of young men, irrespective of residence and marital status, had discussed any of these topics with a parent. Among young women, in contrast, while few (3% or less) had discussed

**Table 3.1:**

**Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting experiences of family violence, alcohol and drug use and communication with parents, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Characteristic	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
% whose father beat mother	13.3	18.6	11.8	18.7	15.0	19.0	15.2	19.2
% whose father drank alcohol/used drugs	31.8	44.1	27.5	44.7	34.4	45.2	34.4	46.5
% respondents beaten by family member	22.3	31.5	8.4	15.2	15.7	25.6	10.2	14.6
% whose parents are/were strict	31.8	27.5	40.3	41.2	27.6	24.5	34.7	36.1
Communication with parents on SRH issues: % who have discussed the following items with father or mother (ever)								
Physiological changes	0.9	0.9	15.0	16.1	1.3	0.4	9.6	9.5
Reproductive system/pregnancy	0.6	0.2	2.2	2.0	0.0	0.4	3.0	1.5
Contraception	0.2	0.4	1.1	0.7	0.0	0.4	1.3	0.9
Sexual relations	0.2	0.2	1.4	1.5	0.2	0.4	2.3	1.2
Menstruation (females)/nocturnal emission (males)	0.3	0.6	75.7	82.0	0.2	0.2	67.5	73.0
Current communication with parents on life matters:								
% more likely to discuss following issues with a parent than anyone else								
Physical health problems	79.7	78.6	88.3	87.2	49.0	34.7	1.9	5.9
Work	44.7	52.5	58.2	64.4	54.2	43.2	1.5	2.8
Education	28.7	31.5	56.0	60.9	14.6	16.8	1.3	3.9
Boy-girl relationships	20.0	16.2	22.9	26.5	2.3	3.7	1.0	2.1
Menstruation/nocturnal emission	19.3	14.4	81.4	82.2	0.2	0.2	5.0	12.0
Family matters	72.5	71.2	71.8	78.0	56.5	43.2	2.5	6.8

SRH=Sexual and reproductive health

contraception, sexual relations or how pregnancy occurs with a parent, between 10 percent and 16 percent reported having discussed physiological changes and over two thirds had discussed menstruation with a parent, almost always the mother. However, as others have noted, such discussion between mothers and daughters may well involve the kinds of restrictions placed on girls' movement and behaviours brought on by the onset of puberty (see for example, Bhende, 1995; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004).

Yet, as is evident from the following, young people expressed a preference for communicating with parents on intimate matters but were constrained by perceptions of parental mistrust:

*Parents should talk [about sexual matters to children]. Instead of us asking the parents, it is better that parents tell us. Otherwise we will ask something [about sexual matters] and parents will think something else [will suspect that we have engaged in sex].* (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban males)

Finally, we explore the extent to which parents are reported as leading confidantes on life matters for unmarried and married respondents at the time of interview. Clearly the married are less likely to confided in parents on any of these matters than are the unmarried, perhaps as a result of lack of physical proximity in the case of young women on the one hand, and the presence of a spouse in whom to confide, on the other. Among the unmarried however, parent-child communication on key life issues is also far from universal. The topics most likely to be discussed with parents — physical health problems, and in the case of young women, menstrual problems — are discussed by no more than 81–88 percent of young women and about 80 percent of young men. As expected, few young

people would confide in parents about boy-girl relations: 23–27 percent of young women and 16–20 percent of young men; few young men likewise would discuss nocturnal emission with a parent.

## Peer connections and influence

We measure peer influences and connections through: (a) the size of the same-sex peer network and frequency of peer contact — currently for the unmarried and before marriage for the married; (b) current membership in a social group or mandal (a dichotomous indicator); and (c) the strength of the current peer support system. Frequency of interaction with peers is measured using a scale ranging from 0 if there was no interaction to 5 if daily interaction was reported. Current peer support is measured by six items which assess the extent to which the respondent identifies a peer as the leading confidante on various life matters.

Wide gender differences are evident in terms of the size of young people's peer networks. While over 90 percent of all groups reported same-sex friendships (prior to marriage in the case of the married), across residence groups young women consistently report having a far smaller group of general friends (an average of 5 friends compared to 17; not shown in table) and close friends (an average of 1.6 versus 3–4; see Table 3.2). Moreover, the frequency of contact with peers tends to be much greater among young men than women: mean scores on the index ranged from 1.3–1.8 for young men to 0.6–0.8 for young women (see Table 3.2). Both the size of the peer network and the regularity of contact with peers appear to be about the same for the unmarried and the married in their pre-marriage days.

Major gender differences are noted in both current membership in social groups and the extent to

Table 3.2:

Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting characteristics of peer networks, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

Characteristic	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Mean number of self-reported close friends (pre-marital)	3.3	3.7	1.6	1.6	2.6	3.7	1.6	1.5
Peer contact: Average score on index ranging from 0 to 5 (0=never, 5=daily) on extent of regularity of contact with peers (pre-marital)	1.7	1.8	0.7	0.8	1.3	1.5	0.7	0.6
Group membership: % member of at least one group (current)	44.3	56.2	5.2	4.3	42.6	47.4	15.9	8.8
Peer interaction: Average number of life matters (0-6) on which respondent would confide in a friend (current)	1.6	1.7	0.7	0.8	1.1	1.2	0.2	0.2

which youth would confide in their peers on a set of life matters. Young men are far more likely than young women to report membership in a group — over 40 percent of young men compared to 4–16 percent of young women. Differences are also evident by marital status: married young women are more likely than the unmarried to report group membership but are less likely than the unmarried to confide life matters in their peers. Among young men on the contrary, unmarried rural young men are about as likely as — and unmarried urban young men more likely than — the married to report group membership; like young women, they are more likely than the married to confide on life matters with a peer.

Clearly then, not only do young women have smaller peer networks, but they are also less likely to

report peer support than are young males.

Nevertheless, as our qualitative data confirm, peer interactions play an important supportive role in young people's lives:

*Some friendships are good. We have friends with whom we discuss everything. About anything... And having such friendships is necessary since we discuss such things amongst friends only. We never discuss such things with family members. (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban males)*

*Suppose a friend has an affair with a girl, then he discusses it with us in the friends circle. Then we tell the friend what to do and what not to do. Discussion is important. (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban males)*

## Pre-marital romantic partnerships

Despite perceptions to the contrary, interaction between young women and men in both rural and urban settings were not rare; in the study, 25–40 percent of young men and 14–17 percent of young women reported friends of the opposite sex (not shown in tabular form). This chapter focuses on young people's romantic partnerships with an opposite-sex partner and explores the ways in which interactions between young people progress from friendship to more intimate relationships. Although the study also tried to capture same-sex romantic partnerships, such experiences were reported by fewer than 0.5 percent of respondents and are therefore not discussed here.

### Meeting and courtship

During the pre-survey qualitative phase, it became clear that young people employed a distinct set of terms to define romantic partnerships; for example, "to propose" meant an offer of romantic partnership, and "loveship" described romantic partnerships, including or excluding sexual relations, with or without marriage in mind. "Romantic partnerships" were what might be termed dating or girlfriend–boyfriend relationships in other contexts. Narratives highlighted young people's familiarity with these behaviours as well as their experiences of initiating or receiving these proposals.

*There are mixed groups in 12th standard...Boys in the group have proposed to girls in the group for loveship.* (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban females)

*She starts giving "line" [signs of liking the boy]...Then they smile, talk. Then he goes up directly and proposes loveship.* (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban males)

In our survey, we inquired about whether proposals had been made or received for opposite-sex and same-sex partnerships. As Table 4.1 shows, in total, about one quarter of rural young men and over one third of young men from urban slums reported either receiving or making a proposal of romantic partnership. In contrast, 13 percent of married young women and 26 percent and 31 percent of unmarried young women residing in rural and urban slum areas, respectively, reported receiving or making such a proposal (few young women — less than 2% — reported proposing but many more reported receiving proposals). What is important is that a substantial proportion of young people, irrespective of residence or sex, have indeed received or made a proposal. In-depth interviews with survey respondents who reported a proposal suggest that proposals are made in several ways. While many young men would seek an opportunity to declare affection directly, in 4 of 14 in-depth interviews held with unmarried rural young women, the boy had reportedly handed the girl a letter declaring his love or proposing a romantic partnership. For example:

*The next day I told her directly that I liked her, at that time she was alone. She did not say anything. In this way, over one month I proposed to her forty-five times...I would tell her whenever she was alone...After a month, when I met her alone and proposed, she said yes.* (In-depth interview, unmarried urban male, age 17)

Table 4.1:

**Pre-marital partnership formation process: Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting experience, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Characteristic	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Proposals made or received								
% who ever made or received a proposal	26.4	36.0	25.8	30.8	23.0	37.3	13.3	13.1
% using mediator in proposals	8.4	9.7	9.1	11.0	6.1	9.9	4.9	4.7
% ever had a romantic partner	17.0	24.2	4.7	8.0	16.4	31.0	5.8	8.4
Partnerships by age: % ever had romantic partner								
Age 15–19	12.3	22.5	4.9	7.6	12.5	23.5	6.3	13.5
Age 20–24	24.3	27.0	3.7	10.1	16.5	31.2	5.7	7.2
Among all youth, life table probability of experiencing a first partnership by age 16*	.07	.11	.04	.06	.05	.07	.04	.06

\* Of those aged 16 or older

*He gave me a letter...I took the letter but I didn't know how to react...He wrote, "I like you a lot. I love you very much and I am waiting for a positive answer. If you say no I will feel very bad." I did not reply. After a month, on my birthday he sent me a greeting [card]. Then I said yes. I also wrote a letter to him. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural female, age 18)*

Given the clandestine nature of partnership formation, proposals are often made through intermediaries. A focus group discussion with unmarried urban girls reported that other girls may help a boy convey his interest to a girl, perhaps by phoning or sending her chits or letters on his behalf, or trying to convince her to be interested in him. Survey findings corroborate this pattern. As reflected in Table 4.1, a total of 5–11 percent of all groups or about a quarter to a third of young men and women who reported making or receiving a proposal also reported an intermediary. Post-survey in-depth

interviews highlight that intermediaries were typically friends, younger siblings or other children in the community:

*I looked after [convinced to act as intermediaries] two or three small boys...gave them chocolates... I would send chits through them. (In-depth interview, married urban male, age 21)*

*Yes, he proposed to me for love. He told my friend to tell me that he liked me a lot, and to ask me if I would love him. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural female, age 15)*

### Forming a romantic partnership

In total, 16–17 percent of unmarried and married young men residing in rural areas and even more — 24 percent and 31 percent respectively — of those residing in urban areas reported having a pre-marital opposite-sex romantic partner. Far fewer young women (about 5–8%) reported such an experience,

again more from urban than rural areas. While proportions are relatively small, they reflect a considerable proportion of all those who made or received a proposal. Gender-based inconsistencies in reporting of romantic partnerships are clear and reflect the social norms that make it unacceptable for young women to engage in — or report — pre-marital romantic partnerships, although the possibility that some young men may exaggerate their experiences cannot be discounted. Although those aged 20–24 are more likely to report a romantic partnership than are 15–19-year-olds, these differences are not considerable, especially among the females.

In order to examine ages at partnership formation, we explored through life table analysis, the probability of having a first date by age 16 among all respondents. Kaplan-Meier estimates, presented in Table 4.1, suggest gender differences: 5–11 percent of young men had an opposite-sex romantic partner by age 16, compared to 4–6 percent of young women. Of note also is the finding that those who were unmarried were about as likely as those married to report a pre-marital partnership by age 16. Thus, our concern that unmarried youth might be less willing to disclose partnerships to avoid jeopardising their marriage prospects was unfounded.

### Characteristics of pre-marital partnerships

Respondents who reported one or more opposite-sex romantic partners were asked a series of questions about the characteristics of their partners, age at first relationship and awareness of parents and peers of the relationship. In-depth interviews with survey respondents reporting pre-marital partnerships probed further into the nature and progress of these partnerships.

A range of types of partners was reported (Table 4.2). Partners were largely from the same neighbourhood. Other partners reported vary by sex and residence of the respondent. For example, young men were more likely than young women to report a fellow student or colleague as the first partner; between one fifth and one seventh of all respondents reported that the first partner was an acquaintance (usually someone the respondent met at the bus stop, on the way to college or work, or at a wedding or other function). Rural young women were much more likely than urban young women to report a relative as their first partner, and conversely less likely to report a classmate or fellow student. This finding reflects the extent to which rural young women's lack of mobility and opportunity limited their access to young men outside the family or neighbourhood, both in comparison to their urban female counterparts and young men. Young women were typically younger than their male partners, with over 70 percent reporting that the partner was at least two years older than them.

Gender differences are evident with regard to the number of partners reported; while only a small proportion of young women (7% or fewer) who had had a romantic partner reported more than one partner, about 25 percent of young men, irrespective of residence, reported that they had had more than one romantic partner.

#### *Parental and peer awareness of the partnership*

Textual and survey data repeatedly highlight young people's reluctance to confide in parents about a partnership, but a greater willingness to confide in their peers (see Mehra, Savithri and Coutinho, 2002; Sodhi, Verma and Schensul, 2004 for similar findings). In several focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, young people reported that they feared their parents' disapproval:

Table 4.2:

Characteristics of pre-marital partnerships among youth reporting a romantic partner: Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

Characteristic	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=148)	Urban (N=198)	Rural (N=85)	Urban (N=142)	Rural (N=92)	Urban (N=141)	Rural (N=67)	Urban (N=97)
Relationship of first partner to respondent (%)								
Someone from the neighbourhood	37.2	38.4	31.8	43.7	33.7	42.6	29.9	42.3
Classmate or colleague	24.3	33.8	5.9	16.2	20.7	27.0	3.0	8.3
Acquaintance, employee, other	20.9	16.2	21.2	17.6	15.2	14.2	17.9	19.6
Relative	12.2	6.6	29.4	16.9	23.9	11.3	40.3	18.6
Teacher, employer	0.7	2.0	4.7	2.1	0.0	1.4	4.5	2.1
Family friend	0.0	1.0	5.9	2.1	2.2	2.1	3.0	5.2
Age difference with partner (%)								
Partner younger (2–6 years)	41.1	40.9	0.0	0.8	48.9	61.3	0.0	1.1
Partner about the same age (1 year older or younger)	56.2	55.4	18.3	21.8	47.8	37.2	4.8	7.6
Partner older (2–6 years)	2.7	3.6	79.3	73.7	3.3	1.5	73.0	75.0
Partner much older (7+ years)	0.0	0.0	2.4	3.8	0.0	0.0	22.2	16.3
% reporting more than one romantic partner	28.4	22.2	4.5	7.0	26.1	23.4	1.5	2.1
Parental and peer awareness of respondents' partnership								
% whose peers aware	83.1	82.3	82.4	84.5	77.2	75.2	85.1	82.5
% whose parents aware	29.7	38.4	37.6	49.3	45.7	44.7	62.7	68.0

*If we start a friendship with a boy, if he meets us somewhere and if our parents see us talking, then something might come to their minds. So we are scared and we wonder whether we should have friendships with boys... Some parents are really very strict. They don't like us talking with boys, they also don't like friendships with boys... If we have such friendships behind our parents' back, they don't like it.* (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban females)

*Who would take on the tension [of telling parents of the friendship]? My parents would have beaten me. No one knew in my house or in her house.*

(In-depth interview, unmarried urban male, age 19)

In-depth interviews with youth, especially young women, who reported a romantic partnership regularly highlight the elaborate false alibis that young people created for their parents in order to cover up a meeting with a romantic partner (for example, using the excuse of extra classes in school, a function at the temple, visiting a friend, etc.). Findings suggest, however, that while efforts are often made to conduct partnerships clandestinely, in many instances parents do become aware of their children's partnerships, as seen in Table 4.2. Patterns vary across groups; young men are more successful in

hiding a relationship from their parents than are young women, perhaps because their greater mobility enables them to forge partnerships without arousing parental suspicion. Likewise, rural youth appear to be significantly more successful than urban youth in concealing a partnership from their parents. Of note is the finding that parents of the currently married are somewhat more likely than those of the unmarried to have been aware of the partnership (63–68% and 38–49% respectively in the case of married and unmarried young women, and 45–46% and 30–38% respectively in the case of married and unmarried young men), a finding we explain by: first, particularly in the case of young women, parental awareness may itself have precipitated marriage to the partner concerned or to someone else; second, particularly in the case of young men who wish to marry the girl concerned, the man himself may have disclosed the partnership to his parents.

Young people are clearly more open about their partnerships with their peers than with their parents. As Table 4.2 shows, three quarters or more of all respondents who experienced partnerships reported that their peers were aware of them. Unlike parental awareness, moreover, there is little variation by sex, marital status or rural–urban residence in peer awareness. In-depth interviews similarly reflect this openness:

*My friends knew about it. My close friend... knew about it as I would tell him everything; he too would tell me everything about his girlfriend.* (In-depth interview, unmarried urban male, age 19)

*Yes [I told my friends about kissing her]. I tell everything to my friends.* (In-depth interview, unmarried rural male, age 17)

### **Meeting sites**

The study explored young people's opportunities to meet in private in such sites as a park, temple, bazaar, cinema or tourist spot and in public transport (in a bus, rickshaw) that were reported as typical places in which partnerships were pursued in the pre-survey qualitative phase. As reported in Table 4.3, not all of those reporting a romantic partnership have met their partners alone in any of these locations. Gender differences are apparent: between one half and three quarters of young men reporting a partnership had met their partners in one of these sites compared to between one third and two thirds of young women. Urban youth likewise were significantly more likely than rural youth to have met in any of these locations. Qualitative findings suggest that meetings tended to be sporadic and opportunistic and frequently took place at the home of the girl or boy when other household members were absent. For example:

*When no one was there in our houses, we used to meet. It happened like this: Parents went for work and brother went to school.* (In-depth interview, married urban male, age 21)

*Then they start meeting each other...in parks, on the terrace of school, in college, on the road. When school is over, the boy comes to the gate to pick up the girl. They walk back together and separate when they approach their homes.* (Focus group discussion, unmarried urban females)

Qualitative data also indicate that despite strict supervision, sexual encounters, in particular, took place during parental absence:

*I told her that whatever they do after marriage I wanted to do it only once. In the beginning she did*

Table 4.3:

**Patterns of pre-marital partnerships among youth reporting a romantic partnership: Percentage of unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting behaviours and expectations, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Experience	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=148)	Urban (N=198)	Rural (N=85)	Urban (N=142)	Rural (N=92)	Urban (N=141)	Rural (N=67)	Urban (N=97)
Meeting sites								
Ever been alone in a park, to cinema, etc. with a romantic partner (%)	48.0	66.7	32.9	54.2	51.1	73.8	34.3	62.9
Ever been alone in a bus/rickshaw/public transport with a romantic partner (%)	51.4	65.2	36.5	54.9	60.9	67.4	37.3	63.9
Experience of physical intimacy								
% never engaged in any physical intimacy	15.5	14.6	42.2	36.6	10.9	14.2	35.8	34.0
% ever held hands with a romantic partner	84.5	84.8	57.6	62.0	89.1	84.4	64.2	64.9
% ever kissed a romantic partner	75.7	76.3	40.0	34.5	82.6	78.7	44.8	36.1
% ever had sex with a romantic partner	49.3	37.4	12.9	6.3	56.5	45.4	28.4	18.6
Among youth reporting a romantic partnership, life table probability of experiencing first sex by duration of partnership								
Month 1 of partnership	.24	.15	.07	.02	.29	.17	.12	.07
Month 6 of partnership	.42	.26	.08	.02	.47	.38	.16	.15
Partnership expectations and current status								
% expected to marry partner	66.9	61.1	87.1	78.9	82.6	72.3	97.1	94.8
% married partner <sup>a</sup>	–	–	–	–	32.6	31.2	65.7	87.6
% partnerships discontinued	61.5	51.0	34.1	32.4	67.4	68.8	34.3	12.4

<sup>a</sup> Among married respondents.

– Not applicable to unmarried respondents.

*not agree but afterwards she told me that on Saturday afternoon the people in her house were going to Kamsheth. She told me that she would be in the house. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural male, age 20)*

*[I had sex with her for the third time] in her house. All the people in her house had gone to the farm for work. I went to her house, in five minutes I had sex and then I went away. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural male, age 21)*

### **Experience of physical intimacy**

Although social norms dictate that unmarried young women and men must not mix or meet in public or private, and prohibit physical intimacy before marriage, young couples do find opportunities to meet privately and to engage in physical intimacy, as findings reported in Table 4.3 suggest. Respondents were asked about whether or not they had engaged in a range of intimate behaviours, from hand holding to kissing on the lips to sexual relations with the romantic partner. As expected,

among those who reported at least one romantic partner, wide differences in reporting are evident by sex of the respondent and type of behaviour. Some 15 percent of young men compared to more than one in three young women who reported a partnership reported no physical intimacy at all.

Young women are not only far less likely than young men to report any of these experiences, but also there is a steady decline in reporting of experiences with increasing forms of intimacy, with some 58–65 percent reporting hand holding, 35–45 percent reporting kissing and 6–28 percent reporting sexual relations. The trend among young men is not as steep and it would appear that hand holding and kissing were about as likely to have been experienced by young men (84–89% and 76–83% respectively) while sexual relations were reported by far fewer (37–57%). Narratives suggest a progression from establishing the romantic partnership to engaging in physical intimacy, including sexual intercourse for some:

*[We started a romantic partnership] after 20 days. No [I was not alone]. My friends were also there. After two months I met him alone. We chatted for some time... We used to talk about my friends... [smiles]. Yes, he held my hand and kissed me also... After one or one and a half months [we had sex].* (In-depth interview, unmarried urban female, age 20)

While gender differences in reporting of sexual relations are wide, also notable is the finding that although fewer rural than urban residents report a romantic partnership, rural residents — both females and males — are more likely to report sex with the romantic partner than are urban residents, a finding we speculate may be associated with the greater opportunities for privacy in rural areas. Finally, we note that married youth are more likely to report

having engaged in sex with a romantic partner before marriage than are the unmarried, reflecting perhaps the huge need among the unmarried to preserve their reputations prior to marriage and conversely less need for discretion among the married whose pre-marital partner was, in many cases, the husband.

#### ***Time from partnership formation to first sex***

Among youth reporting a romantic partner, we explored through life table analysis, the probability of reporting first sex by duration of partnership, using Kaplan-Meier estimates of probabilities of engaging in first sex within one and six months of initiating a partnership (Table 4.3). Findings suggest wide gender differences in reporting. Probabilities can be interpreted to suggest that among young men who reported a pre-marital romantic partnership, 25 percent or more of those in rural settings and about one seventh of those in urban slum settings reported engaging in sexual relations within the first month of the partnership; this increased to between 26 percent (unmarried urban young men) to almost 50 percent (married rural young men) within six months of initiation of the partnership. Among young women, 2–12 percent engaged in sexual relations with a romantic partner within a month of initiating the partnership and between 2–16 percent within six months of initiation.

#### ***Expectations of marriage and current status***

All respondents who reported a romantic partner were asked whether, in the course of the partnership, they had expected to marry this partner. While the majority in each group reported that they had expected to marry the romantic partner, young women were systematically more likely than young men in the same marital status–residence group to hold this expectation. Among young women for example, marriage expectations were almost

universally reported (79–97%), compared to 61–83 percent among young men.

In in-depth interviews, while the majority of young men did indeed report a desire to marry their romantic partner, several reported that they had no such intention:

*She wanted to get married to me but I did not want to marry her... My family would have shouted at me.* (In-depth interview, unmarried rural male, age 17)

*No, not at all [I did not want to marry her]. I got friendly with her for time-pass [just for fun].* (In-depth interview, unmarried urban male, age 19)

*I had sex with her, but I did not like her like that [lasting relationship]. No. At that time I could not control myself that's why I did it... I did not like her much. It was not possible for me to accept her as my wife.* (In-depth interview, unmarried urban male, age 20)

Expectations do not, however, correspond to reality. Indeed, a look at the four unmarried groups shows that despite the large percentages expecting to marry the romantic partner, the partnership had ended for about one third of young women and half or more of young men. Likewise, among married youth, only one third of young men had married a romantic partner; in contrast, considerably more young women reported marrying a romantic partner.

### Sexual relations with a romantic partner: Communication, condom use and consent

We now focus exclusively on those who reported sexual relations with a romantic partner. Our study explored inter-partner communication on sex, condom use and consensuality of sex in a romantic

partnership. Table 4.4 presents evidence on the extent to which young people who engaged in sex in a romantic partnership communicated about sexual and contraceptive matters prior to engaging in sex, their use of contraception at first sex and thereafter, and the extent to which first sexual intercourse was consensual. Numbers are particularly small among young women and we have therefore combined data for groups of young women. We thus acknowledge that findings for young women are only suggestive, but have included them to reflect the extent to which sexual partnerships among young people may involve considerable risk.

#### **Communication on sex and contraception**

Findings highlight limited communication on sexual matters. Indeed, sexual relations appear to be undertaken spontaneously, without prior communication about engaging in sex or whether and what type of protection to use. At best, about half of sexually active young men and women reported discussing sex and about one third of young men and 19 percent of young women reported discussing contraception with their partners prior to first sex. In-depth interviews suggest, moreover that even where discussion had taken place, it may not have been well informed nor did the female partner participate actively in the discussion.

#### **Condom use**

Condom use is also far from universal. Among young men, for example, condoms were used by 31 percent and 43 percent of married and unmarried respondents, respectively, at first sex. Only 23 percent and 28 percent of married and unmarried young men reported regular condom use with a romantic partner (or partners, if more than one). Among young women, reported condom use is much rarer (in fact,

Table 4.4:

**Nature of sexual relations: Percentage of young men (unmarried and married) and women (all) ages 15–24 reporting sexual relations with an opposite-sex romantic partner, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Characteristics	Rural and urban young men		Rural and urban young women
	Unmarried (N=147)	Married (N=116)	All (N=57)
Communication			
% who discussed sex before first sexual intercourse	44.2	55.2	52.6
% who discussed contraception before first sexual intercourse	29.3	32.8	19.3
Condom use			
% who used condom at first sexual intercourse with romantic partner	42.9	31.0	17.5
% who regularly use condoms with romantic partner/s	27.9	23.3	5.8
Consensuality of first sex (% reporting)			
Consensual	87.1	82.8	60.7
Respondent was forced	0.0	0.0	8.9
Respondent was persuaded	0.7	1.7	30.4
Respondent persuaded partner	8.8	11.2	0.0
Respondent forced partner	3.4	4.3	0.0

pre-marital use of any contraceptive method was rare; only six married young women reported using oral contraceptives and two married men reported withdrawal, data not shown in table). In in-depth interviews, it became clear that while sexually experienced young men were familiar with condoms and had indeed used them, condoms were only rarely used at first sex; leading reasons for non-use at first sex were lack of awareness and the unexpected or unplanned nature of first sex.

#### ***Consensual sexual experiences***

Findings suggest, moreover, that sexual experiences are not always consensual. When asked whether first sex with any partner was forced, persuaded or consensual, the majority said it was consensual. However, gender differences are again marked. Young

women were far less likely than young men to report that sex was consensual. While numbers are small, 9 percent of young women reported that they had been forced and 30 percent that they had been persuaded, i.e. refused at first but then agreed, to have sex the first time with at least one partner. In contrast, 3–4 percent of young men admitted that they had forced their romantic partner to engage in sex for the first time and 9–11 percent that they had persuaded her. Several descriptions from in-depth interviews with respondents who reported pre-marital sex suggest that young women were forced. For example:

*I shouted when he began to remove my clothes. He put his hand over my mouth and told me not to shout. He said that my voice should not be heard outside the door. I kept quiet as I was*

*scared... Then he put it inside twice. (In-depth interview, unmarried urban female, age 19)*

*Once he called me to the hills and told me to come to meet him... I went to meet him... and told him that I did not like all this and not to be after me. He made me sit down and caught hold of me tightly and told me that he would not let go of me... He kissed me on the lips, made me lie on the ground and then had sex with me. I could not do anything because he had caught hold of me tightly. My hands started to hurt... It was against my wish. Then I had a lot of problems. I got a swelling there, I was bleeding and for three days I had a lot of pain. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural female, age 15)*

Other women acquiesced, not wanting to hurt the partner's feelings or fearing that refusing sex would hurt their chances of marrying their partner. Most young women did not perceive these incidents as force or pressure. For example:

*Initially I said no. But later I agreed... When I said no, he felt bad. Then he said that as we love each other, it is ok if we do it. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural female, age 15)*

*He told me that he wanted our child. Then I realised what he wanted. First I said no. He made a face, and I felt bad. Then I agreed. I did not want to hurt him. (In-depth interview, unmarried urban female, age 18)*

*I told her that if she really loved me then she should have [sex] with me at least once. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural male, age 20)*

*He told me that we should have sexual relations. I told him that I was not willing to before marriage. I was not ready. I thought that after I said "no" he must have felt hurt. ... Yes, I did not want to hurt him... . He wanted to marry me, he wouldn't have got married then [if I refused sex]. I loved him a lot. (In-depth interview, unmarried rural female, age 16)*

## Overall pre-marital sexual experiences, romantic and non-romantic

Thus far, our focus has been on the nature of romantic partnerships. In this chapter we focus exclusively on sexual experience in any context, that is, both romantic and non-romantic. In pre-survey focus group discussions and key informant interviews, it was clear that young people in Pune district were familiar with an array of sexual partners. Young women rarely reported same-sex, forced, paid or casual sex (that is, with partners who they did not define as opposite-sex romantic partners), although they were familiar with forced sexual encounters. Young men were familiar with same-sex relations, sex worker and casual relations, as well as relations with older married women, and forced sexual experiences in which they were the victims or perpetrators.

Correspondingly, once information on romantic partnerships had been probed, the survey inquired about each of these different types of partnerships. As mentioned earlier, acknowledging the possibility of under-reporting in a face-to-face interview, at the end of the interview respondents who had not reported pre-marital sex in the interview were asked to report any pre-marital sexual experience themselves on a sheet of paper and return it to the interviewer in a sealed envelope (as described in Chapter 1, Study Design).

Table 5.1 shows the percentages of all respondents reporting sex in any of these situations. We suspect that youth have under-reported sexual experience in all scenarios indicated. Youth who had engaged in sexual relations with a romantic partner

represented between 8 percent and 14 percent of the four male groups. The corresponding range among the female groups is narrower, between 0.5 percent and 1.7 percent. Sex with spouse before marriage was reported by 1–3 percent of young men and women. Forced sex was reported by no more than 1 percent of any group and appears particularly under-reported among young women. Same-sex relations were reported by only 1–2 percent of urban males and under 1 percent of rural males. Pre-marital sex worker relations were reported by 7 percent and 3 percent of urban and rural married males and 6 percent and 2 percent of unmarried urban and rural males. Few young men reported sex with an older married woman (1–2%). Finally, an additional 2 percent and 5 percent of young men, and up to 2 percent of young women reported sexual relations through the sealed envelope mode of data collection. While the sealed envelope technique did succeed in increasing reported sexual experience considerably in each group, overall levels of reported pre-marital sex may still be under-reported.

The overall prevalence of any pre-marital sexual activity — including with opposite-sex romantic partners and as well as those listed above — is presented in Table 5.1 for each of the eight study groups. Findings suggest that while place of residence and marital status do have some effect on the experience of overall pre-marital sex amongst respondents, gender differences are most prominent. Overall, more young men in each of the four groups

Table 5.1:

Percentage of all unmarried and married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting types of pre-marital sexual experience, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

Pre-marital sexual experience	Unmarried				Married			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Rural (N=870)	Urban (N=817)	Rural (N=1,799)	Urban (N=1,784)	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Type of PM sexual experience								
Sex with an opposite-sex romantic partner	8.4	9.1	0.6	0.5	9.3	14.0	1.7	1.6
Sex with spouse	--	--	--	--	2.3	2.6	2.3	1.3
Was forced to have sex	0.5	1.0	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.1
Forced someone to have sex	0.0	0.4	--	--	0.2	0.2	--	--
Sex with same-sex partner	0.2	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.5	1.1	0.0	0.0
Sex worker relations	2.0	6.4	0.0	0.0	3.4	7.2	0.0	0.0
Sex with older married woman	1.0	2.2	--	--	1.6	1.3	--	--
Face-to-face reporting of any PM sex	10.7	14.9	0.7	0.6	11.4	20.3	2.9	1.7
Envelope reporting of PM sex	4.8	2.6	1.5	0.8	4.0	2.0	1.4	0.1
Any PM sex	15.5	17.5	2.2	1.4	15.3	22.3	4.3	1.8
% of sexually experienced young women and men reporting:								
More than one PM sexual partner	19.3	25.9	0.0	0.0	23.3	26.5	6.1	4.8
Using condoms in all types of PM sexual relations	29.6	47.9	5.0	13.0	34.9	44.1	4.1	19.1

PM=Pre-marital sex

-- Question not applicable

had experienced any sort of pre-marital sex, with urban males being up to 12 times more likely than their female counterparts to have experienced any pre-marital sexual contact. Amongst males, prevalence ranged between 15 percent for rural married males to 22 percent for urban married males. Amongst women, in contrast, prevalence ranged from just 1.4 percent for the urban unmarried to 4.3 percent for the rural married.

Although findings fall within the ranges observed in a variety of small case studies (15–30% for males and fewer than 10% for females; Jejeebhoy and Sebastian, 2004), impressions from the qualitative findings and from the insights of investigators suggest

that these may be under-reported, particularly in the case of reporting by young women, and in the reporting of forced, same-sex partner or sex worker relations by young men. What is clear, however, is that despite strong social sanctions against pre-marital sexual activity, sexual partnerships — consensual and forced, romantic and casual — are indeed experienced by young women and men.

While numbers are small, data enable us to explore risky sexual experiences as well. Our measures of risk — multiple partner sex and use of condoms — are not precise but give an indication of the extent of risky pre-marital behaviours in which young people engage. For example, while we do not have an estimate

for the total number of partners with whom a respondent had sex, we do not know whether sex was experienced with more than one partner. Likewise, we do not know the number of respondents who always used condoms with every partner, but we know the percentage who reported some use with all their partners (that is, with romantic partners and each type of non-romantic partner).

Findings suggest that large proportions of young people have indeed engaged in risky sexual

behaviour. Multiple partner relations are reported for example, by 19–27 percent of young men, but few young women (5–6% of the married and none of the unmarried). Condom use is far from universal. While 44–48 percent of urban young men have used condoms with each of the different types of sexual partners reported, only 30–35 percent of rural youth reported condom use. As expected, few young women reported condom use (13–19% among urban women and 4–5% among rural).

## Partnership formation in the context of marriage

In contrast with pre-marital relationships between young men and women, partnership formation within marriage is subject to a completely different set of norms of interaction. Sexual relationships are accepted in this context, yet many young men and women may face difficulty in navigating communication with a previously unknown partner and marital family as well as assuming gender roles that acquire new salience with the act of marriage.

### Age at first marriage and spousal characteristics

As shown in Table 6.1, median age at first marriage varies greatly by sex of respondent, with young men in both residential settings reporting a median age at marriage of 21 years compared to 17 among young women. Over half of all married women aged 18 and older were married before they reached the age of 18,

the legal minimum age at marriage in India. While fewer than 10 percent of young men had married before they were 18, 40 percent and 31 percent of young men aged 21 or older in the rural and urban slum setting respectively had married before they were 21, the legal minimum age at marriage for males. Of note is the widespread perception amongst respondents that he/she had married too early; 44 percent of rural married females and 47 percent of urban married females reported feeling that they should have been married later. Fewer, but still more than one third, of both urban and rural married males reported a similar opinion. Young women, moreover, are more likely to report having discontinued school due to a forthcoming engagement or marriage. A look at educational attainment levels of spouses reconfirms that married young women are less educated than married young men. The mean

**Table 6.1:**

**Marriage age and characteristics of spouse amongst married young men and women ages 15–24, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Item	Married young men		Married young women	
	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Median age at marriage (years)	21	21	17	17
% married below legal age at marriage <sup>a</sup>	40.1	31.4	51.7	52.7
% married at below 18 years	8.0	5.7	51.7	52.7
% believe he/she married too early	37.3	35.0	43.6	47.0
% citing engagement/marriage as reason for discontinuing studies <sup>b</sup>	0.7	0.7	10.5	18.9
Mean years of spouse's education	6.4	6.5	8.1	8.2
Mean age difference between spouses (years)	3.4	3.2	5.5	5.6

<sup>a</sup> Of young women aged 18 and young men aged 21.

<sup>b</sup> Calculated amongst those who have ever enrolled in school.

Table 6.2:

Processes leading up to marriage: Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting experiences, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

Process	Married young men		Married young women	
	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Arranged or love marriage:				
% arranged marriage	94.3	88.4	95.9	92.3
% love marriage, parents agreed	4.1	7.2	3.2	4.9
% love marriage, eloped	1.6	4.4	0.9	2.8
Of those reporting an arranged marriage:				
% consulted in marriage process	94.7	94.6	87.2	81.7
% approved of partner before marriage	83.0	82.0	97.3	94.4
% ever met future spouse before marriage	14.0	16.8	11.4	13.1
% who report dowry taken/given	31.2	22.4	55.0	42.7
% who exchanged cash <sup>a</sup>	21.1	68.6	32.0	76.2
% who exchanged jewellery <sup>a</sup>	88.6	70.6	91.3	63.6

<sup>a</sup>Out of those who reported giving/taking dowry.

spousal age difference was 5.5 years as reported by women and 3.3 as reported by men.

### Selection of spouse and marriage-related decision-making

The overwhelming majority of marriages for all four groups are arranged by parents and other relatives (see Table 6.2). While urban residents were more likely to report love marriages than rural, and in each setting young men were more likely to report love marriages than young women, differences are relatively moderate as evident from Table 6.2. A small percentage — 3–4 percent of young women and men in the urban slum setting and 1–2 percent in the rural setting — reported eloping.

Among those reporting arranged marriages, although large proportions of young women (82–87%) and especially young men (95%) were consulted in the marriage process and although 90 percent of young women and over 80 percent of young men

reported that they approved the choice of partner, it is clear from our qualitative data that for many, participation in marriage-related decisions, especially for young women, meant no more than endorsing decisions made by parents and other family elders, for example:

*If we don't like the boy and even if we say so, they [parents] still do what they want to do. Here it is like this ... Everything depends on their [parents] opinion.* (Focus group discussion, married rural females)

*It is the parents alone who decide [about the marriage partner]... If they ask us at all, we say that if you have agreed then we will also agree... Mostly parents don't ask. Mainly it depends on them ... What they do is correct... Yes, because parents will never want anything bad for their daughters.* (Focus group discussion, married rural females)

*Parents' decision is final. Sometimes the boy's decision can be final but not the girl's.* (Focus group discussion, married urban females)

Evidence presented in Table 6.2 showing that fewer than 20 percent of individuals in any of the four groups — and fewer young women — had met their future spouse before marriage underscores the extent to which young people are excluded from decisions regarding the choice of their spouse. Qualitative data support this finding:

*They [parents] had taken me to see the girl but I did not see/meet her. I thought that whichever girl my parents chose would be nice. That's why I agreed.* (In-depth interview, married rural male, age 24)

*I did not even see him properly before marriage. When the marriage took place, it was only at that time that I saw him.* (In-depth interview, married rural female, age 20)

Indeed, in-depth interviews reiterate that not a single married woman who had an arranged marriage reported more than a nominal say in when and whom she married. Despite this, as shown below, focus group discussions suggest that norms with regard to youth participation in marriage-related decision-making may be changing and that young women, particularly those who are economically independent, may be increasingly involved in marriage-related decisions:

*Now girls from villages also don't listen to their parents. They have also started speaking out... If the daughter likes the boy, only then is the marriage fixed. This change is seen nowadays... During our time what parents said was final. Nowadays they [parents] listen to their daughters. ... if the girl doesn't pass [approve of] the boy, then the marriage is not fixed.* (Focus group discussion, married rural females)

*If the girl is standing on her own two feet, and is earning... then she can say something... Yes, [parents listen to girls who are independent]. They trust their daughters.* (Focus group discussion, married urban females)

To ascertain the prevalence of dowry, respondents were asked whether any cash, jewellery, property, furniture or large consumer goods were given to or received by the groom's family. It is notable that the prevalence of dowry as part of the marriage process is reportedly much higher among women — 43 percent and 55 percent for urban and rural young women, respectively, compared to 22 percent and 31 percent of urban and rural young men, respectively (see Table 6.2). As the practice of dowry is illegal, this may reflect reluctance on the part of married young males to admit having demanded or accepted material or monetary payments at the time of marriage. Of those who either gave or received dowry, the item most often given/taken was jewellery. Rural respondents were much less likely than urban respondents to report giving/taking cash as well. Qualitative data illuminate the role that dowry can play in marriage arrangements and decisions:

*Then they talk about dowry. Marriages can be broken due to dowry. If the people from the boy's side ask for more money and the girl's parents can't afford to give that much, then the marriage breaks off.* (Focus group discussion, married urban females)

*[My] mother told them [the boy's family] that they could take the girl if they wanted, but no dowry. They [in-laws] were not happy about that. But my husband insisted. So they had to agree... They used to say [after marriage], "What did you bring from your mother? What did your parents give you?" ...and so on. She [mother-in-law] used to find fault with everything I did.* (In-depth interview, married urban female, age 24)

## Young women's social interaction and spousal intimacy within new marriages

With marriage come significant changes for young women, including leaving natal kin, shifting to a different home as well as adopting the new roles of wife and daughter-in-law in an unfamiliar family. The survey explored women's levels of social isolation early in marriage and intimacy between spouses at the time of interview.

Social interaction in the first six months following marriage was measured by the degree of contact maintained with the bride's natal family, freedom of movement outside the home and degree of interaction with marital relatives. Findings presented in Table 6.3 suggest that at least during the first six months of marriage, contact is generally maintained with the young woman's family, with the vast majority of young women returning to visit the natal home within the first six months of marriage. 36 percent of urban and 49 percent of rural married women, respectively, did so at a frequency of at least once a month.

Less communication was apparent within the marital home during this initial marriage period, with 20 and 16 percent of young women, urban and rural, reporting that they spoke to no one in their marital home during the first six months of marriage. Talking freely with their husband, parents-in-law or other in-laws during this period was reported by 36 percent or less of all young women in both residential categories, though rural women were more likely to communicate with their husband or mother-/father-in law than were urban women. Finally, while most young women reported going out with their husbands in the first six months of marriage, it is notable that 14 percent of urban women and 24 percent of rural women did not go out with their husband even once during the first six months of marriage.

In order to explore spousal relations at the time of interview, questions were asked about whether or not the respondent and her/his spouse "speak together about things that concern you", notably whether and when to have children, money matters and love. In addition they were asked whether they had been out with their wives to a film, festival, picnic or on other outings. Finally, they were asked about their experiences of domestic violence, that is, whether wife-beating had been experienced.

The majority — three quarters or more — of both young men and women reported speaking with their spouse about all three issues, that is, whether/when to have children, money matters and love. Gender and rural–urban differences in reporting were marginal. In contrast, far fewer reported having gone on an outing with their spouses in the six months preceding the interview. Just half of urban married men and 44 percent of rural married men reported having gone on an outing/tour/picnic in the last six months; fewer young people, with the exception of urban men, reported having gone to a film. Women, both urban and rural, were much less likely to report such activities with their spouse as outings or movies; just 14 and 25 percent of rural and urban women, respectively, had gone to see a movie and 35 and 37 percent respectively, reported going on a tour or picnic or some other outing in the last six months.

Findings also suggest disturbingly high rates of domestic violence or wife-beating, as shown in Table 6.3. Interestingly, there is a close correspondence between men's reports of having ever beaten their wives and women's reports of being beaten by their husbands. Indeed, while about one quarter of young men, irrespective of setting, reported having beaten their wives, an equal proportion of urban women but considerably fewer rural women (17%) reported the experience of wife-beating.

Table 6.3:

**Social interaction and spousal intimacy: Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting experiences, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Indicator	Married young men		Married young women	
	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Social interaction: First 6 months of marriage:				
No visits to natal family	N/A	N/A	0.9	4.4
Made at least 6 visits to natal family in 6 months	N/A	N/A	48.7	35.9
Talked to no one in marital home	N/A	N/A	15.8	20.3
Talked freely with husband	N/A	N/A	31.2	27.7
Talked freely with in-laws (any)	N/A	N/A	35.9	31.6
Talked freely with MIL/FIL	N/A	N/A	23.9	20.1
Went out of the house (with husband)	N/A	N/A	76.1	85.5
Spousal relationship at time of interview:				
Talks about whether and when to have a child	73.6	76.3	79.8	73.6
Talks about money matters	78.1	81.1	81.0	84.3
Talks about love	83.6	89.3	81.5	80.5
Watched a film in the last 6 months	24.2	54.6	14.3	24.6
Went for a tour/picnic in the last 6 months	43.8	50.9	34.5	37.0
Wife beating (ever)*	22.7	25.5	17.3	25.0

MIL=mother-in-law; FIL=father-in-law

N/A=Not applicable.

\* Positive responses for male groups represent perpetration of violence, while positive responses for female groups represent experience of the act as a victim.

## Sexual experiences within marriage

The survey explored the consensuality of initial and lifetime sexual experiences within marriage. Findings are presented in Table 6.4. In order to explore the consensuality of first sex within marriage, respondents were asked whether they enjoyed the experience, whether the husband had insisted on engaging in sex and whether he had forced his wife to engage in sex.

In keeping with the fact that many young people did not meet their partner prior to marriage, just 1.3 percent of urban young women to 2.6 percent of urban young men reported having had sexual relations with their future spouse before their wedding night, as seen in Table 5.1. Of those who engaged in

sex with their partner only after marriage, sharp gender differences are apparent in perceptions of the respondent's first such experience. For example, almost all (94%) of men but only about half of young women reported enjoying the first sexual encounter. 61 percent of urban married females and 67 percent of rural married females report having "no idea what would happen" during first sex with their spouse. While far fewer, a significant minority — almost one in five — of young men also reported lack of awareness. While 33 percent of urban young women and 41 percent of rural young women report being told by their husbands that "it had to be done," just 12 and 11 percent of urban and rural young men report

Table 6.4:

Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting sexual experience within marriage, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district

Characteristic	Married young men		Married young women	
	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
First sexual experiences of married men and women (%) <sup>a</sup>				
Enjoyed it	94.0	93.9	51.6	53.5
Had no idea what would happen (female)/ what to do (male)	19.0	18.1	66.7	61.2
Husband said it had to be done	11.1	11.9	41.1	33.2
Husband forced	5.7	5.9	14.0	11.5
Husband ever forced wife to have sex*	9.1	7.6	15.5	14.2

<sup>a</sup> Of those who engaged in sex with their partners only after marriage.

\* Positive responses for male groups represent perpetration of violence, while positive responses for female groups represent experience of the act as a victim.

having said the same to their wife. Similarly, with regard to forced sexual relations in the consummation of marriage, while 12 and 14 percent of urban and rural young women, respectively, reported that first sex was forced by their husband, considerably fewer men (6%) reported that they had forced their wives.

Lifetime marital sexual violence, that is, forced sex perpetrated by the husband either at consummation or thereafter, is reported by 14–16 percent of young women. Husbands are much less likely to report that they forced their wives to have sex, with approximately 8–9 percent acknowledging having forced their wives to have sex at any time, including first sex. The possibility of under-reporting however, cannot be excluded; such actions are not always acknowledged as violence in settings where social norms justify a man's right to demand sex and a wife's duty to submit.

## Fertility and contraception

Although social norms dictate that all newly married couples should have a first pregnancy as soon as possible following marriage, findings suggest that significant percentages — about two fifths of all respondents, irrespective of sex or residence — want to delay the first birth as seen in Table 6.5.

Unfortunately, pressures to bear children and prove fertility, as well as a lack of access to appropriate service providers, inhibits young couples from acting on these preferences (see Ram et al., 2006), hence just 10 percent and 17 percent of rural and urban young men, respectively, and fewer than 5 percent of young women practised contraception before their first pregnancy and 32–44 percent experienced a pregnancy within six months of marriage. At the time of interview, about four in five men and about 90 percent of all women reported having at least one surviving child. Of those who had at least one birth, 94 and 90

Table 6.5:

**Social interaction and spousal intimacy: Percentage of married young men and women ages 15–24 reporting experiences, rural and urban slum settings, Pune district**

Characteristic	Married young men		Married young women	
	Rural (N=561)	Urban (N=458)	Rural (N=1,152)	Urban (N=1,154)
Wanted to delay first pregnancy	39.1	42.3	41.6	41.1
Contraception before first pregnancy	9.5	16.7	3.7	4.4
Pregnant within 6 months of marriage	35.3	31.7	36.3	43.8
% with at least one child	78.6	83.1	88.4	90.4
Number of children surviving	0.9	1.0	1.4	1.6
Better treatment after first child <sup>a</sup>	--	--	94.1	89.8
% reporting current contraceptive practise: <sup>b</sup>				
Current contraceptive use	10.7	19.9	34.1	36.1
Condoms	5.3	10.0	3.9	5.2
Oral contraceptive pills	3.1	5.8	7.5	7.1
Female sterilisation	1.6	1.6	20.3	19.6
Intra-uterine device (IUD)	0.4	1.2	2.0	3.4
Other contraceptive methods <sup>c</sup>	1.6	1.6	0.6	1.2

<sup>a</sup> Calculated for those who have had at least one child (urban married female=879 and rural married female=809).

<sup>b</sup> Excluding those reporting current pregnancy.

<sup>c</sup> Includes those reporting current use of contraceptive injection, withdrawal, safe period, male sterilisation and "others".

percent of young women in rural and urban slum settings, respectively, reported that they were better treated by their husbands' families after they had proven their fertility.

Reports of current practise of contraception vary widely by sex of respondent and rural–urban residence. While 11 and 20 percent of rural and urban young men reported contraceptive use, many more — over one in three — young women reported that they are currently practising contraception. The difference

in reporting may be explained by the fact that given differences in marital age, married young men aged up to 24 are likely to be at an earlier phase of childbearing than are young women, and therefore less likely to practise contraception. It is notable that the method most likely to be used by young women, like women in India more generally, is female sterilisation; which is used by well over half of all those reporting contraception. In contrast, the leading method reported by young men in both settings is condoms.

## Conclusion

This study represents one of the first exercises in India of obtaining information on romantic and non-romantic partnership formation and sexual activity among young people through a large-scale community-based survey and related qualitative data gathering. It is notable that despite the personal nature of questions, refusals were rare, both from respondents and from the parents or guardians of unmarried youth under 18. While under-reporting of sexual experiences cannot be discounted for young men and especially young women, it is clear that a significant interest exists among young people in learning more about sexual matters and in confiding their own experiences, even if couched in generalities, to sensitive interviewers.

### The context of young people's lives

The context in which young people in Pune grow up and form romantic and other partnerships clearly conditions the way relationships are formed and conducted. Our study confirms that while gender disparities in schooling patterns are narrowing in these settings, young people's lives continue to be defined by their sex, and to a lesser extent their area of residence and marital status. At the individual level, young men are more likely than young women to report higher self-confidence levels and freedom of movement, and to a lesser extent decision-making about their own lives. Awareness of sexual and reproductive health matters is far from universal, and although gender differences are narrower, young men are clearly more likely to be aware of condoms than are young women. What is noteworthy is the finding

that young women report systematically more egalitarian gender role attitudes than do young men, irrespective of marital status and area of residence. Gender differences in such lifestyle indicators as drug and alcohol use and exposure to pornographic films are, as expected wide, with young men far more likely than young women to report using them.

Evidence on parental connections and social networks suggests that young people typically seek information and support with regard to partnerships from their friends rather than their parents. Many young people perceive their upbringing to be strict and family life to be characterised by little or no discussion of sexual and reproductive matters, domestic violence and paternal alcohol use. Peers play a far greater supportive role but huge gender differences are observed with regard to the extent of social networks. Young women have far smaller peer networks than do young men, are less likely to be part of social groups and less likely to have regular contact with their peers.

### Formation of pre-marital romantic and casual partnerships

Findings confirm that even in this outwardly traditional setting, opportunities do exist for the formation of romantic partnerships. Indeed, significant minorities of young men and women have received or made a proposal for a romantic relationship, and noteworthy, if smaller, percentages have reported that they had been involved in a romantic partnership. These findings confirm that despite supervision by parents, young people do devise strategies to meet and communicate with

members of the opposite sex and form romantic partnerships. Indeed, few young people would confide about boy–girl relationships to a parent, and where relationships take place, they are likely to be conducted clandestinely and in fear of disclosure to parents. Patterns of pre-marital romantic partnerships suggest that where partnerships occur, they are initiated at an early age and where young couples spend time together, it is usually clandestinely. There is moreover, a clear progression in the courting process from making or receiving a proposal, to having an opposite-sex partner, to physical intimacy and sexual experience with that partner. Among those who do initiate sexual relations, first sex occurs within a month of partnership formation for a significant minority.

Gender differences in reporting of romantic experiences are considerable. While a similar percentage of young women and men report that they have made or received a proposal of romantic partnership, far more men than women had ever engaged in a romantic partnership, physical intimacy, or sex with a romantic partner or someone else. Moreover, notable disparities in expectations of a longer-term commitment emerged that show young women to be at a distinct disadvantage in partnerships. Partner communication and negotiation about sex were rare, and because sex occurred spontaneously it was unprotected for many. For a disturbing minority of young women who had engaged in sexual relations with a romantic partner, sex was not consensual.

While sex with a romantic partner characterises the lives of the majority of the sexually experienced, findings suggest that young men, but not young women, also engage in sexual relations in other contexts — mainly with sex workers, same-sex partners and older married women. In total, some

one in five young men and fewer than one in twenty young women have engaged in pre-marital sex. Indeed, gender differences are more prominent than differences by place of residence or marital status. Many of these relations are risky, taking place without condoms and for substantial minorities of sexually experienced young men, with more than one partner.

### Formation of partnerships within marriage

Notwithstanding the findings about pre-marital romantic and sexual relationships, for the large majority of young women and men, partnerships are formed within the context of marriage. Large proportions of all married women were married before the age of 18, but large proportions of young men too were married before the legal minimum age at marriage (21 for males). The overwhelming majority of marriages are arranged and few young people, especially young women, are effectively involved in decisions about when and whom to marry. Few young women or young men had even met their future spouse prior to marriage. While most young people are ultimately satisfied with these arranged unions, many also feel they were married at too young an age.

While young men, like young women, tend to marry before the legal minimum age at marriage and are unlikely to have had any contact with their wives prior to the wedding, young women are particularly disadvantaged. Adjusting to new marriages is especially difficult for young women, who must cope with a new family environment and role. Although contact with natal kin is reported, married young women tend to face considerable social isolation in their marital homes, particularly in the early days of marriage. At the same time, while many do report inter-spousal communication, engagement and

satisfying and consensual sexual relations, disturbing minorities report the experience of sexual coercion and domestic violence.

Likewise, exercise of choice in the area of contraception and childbearing is also limited — for both young women and men — underscoring the strong social norms that demand a pregnancy as soon as possible after marriage and that link fertility with a woman's security in her marital home. Pregnancy follows close on the heels of marriage and while significant minorities of young women and men wanted to delay the first pregnancy, a small minority reported that they succeeded in practising contraception to postpone the first birth.

## Implications

The findings presented in this report reiterate the need to shed traditional misconceptions about the rarity of pre-marital partnership formation or sexual activity among young people. It is fair to assume that opportunities will increasingly present themselves for social interaction and partnership formation between young women and men. Declining age at puberty combined with an increase in age at marriage create a growing window of opportunity in which to engage in sexual relations. Likewise, given trends in schooling levels, economic activity and media exposure and the strength of peer networks, we can infer that young people will remain longer in school, become increasingly engaged in paid work, have greater access to new ideas and engage in social mixing, partnership formation and self-selection of spouses.

Our findings highlight that pre-marital partnership formation usually leads to some form of physical intimacy. Findings also suggest that early sexual relations within marriage are non-consensual for disturbing minorities of young women and that

there is a large unmet need for postponing the first birth. In these circumstances, the suggestion that youth have few reliable sources of information about sex and relationship matters is of concern. It is critical that policies and programmes for youth work towards ensuring that young women and men are fully informed and equipped to make safe choices and negotiate wanted outcomes. Sexuality education must become universal and address relationships, consent and safety from an early age both in schools and other settings in which young people congregate, and address gender double standards and power imbalances that are so evident among the young. Equally, sexuality education must prepare the about-to-be-married and newlyweds for married life and make early sexual experiences more satisfying for young women.

As in other studies, findings call for attention to build skills and agency among young women, both unmarried and married. The wide gender differences in mobility, self-confidence and to a lesser extent, decision-making makes it imperative that programmes are implemented that enable young women to have an informed say in their own lives. Legitimate spaces should be identified in which young women can build social networks and find social support among peers. At the same time, findings showing that young men display far more inegalitarian gender role attitudes than young women call for programmes for young men that promote new concepts of masculinity and femininity among them.

Efforts must be made to create a supportive environment for young people; programmes need to address parental inhibitions about discussing sexual matters with their children and encourage greater openness and interaction between parents and children. Links noted elsewhere between an

unsupportive family environment and early formation of partnerships and sexual relations, moreover, make it all the more important to address parenting issues, inform parents about sexual matters and make them aware of the need to inform their children about these matters. Indeed, programmes must apprise parents of the futility of attempts to prohibit or penalise youth relationships and raise awareness of the fact that close and strict supervision may not deter partnership formation and unsafe sex. At the same time, parents must be apprised of the need to involve children in marriage-related decisions, the physical and mental health dangers of early marriage and the adverse experiences of many young women (and some young men) who were married early or who were unprepared for marriage.

Equally important is the need for programmes to be inclusive of unmarried young people and recognise their need and right to sexual and reproductive health and related information and services. Counselling and contraceptive services must be made available to them in a non-threatening, non-judgmental and confidential environment. Also essential are efforts to enhance their negotiating and life skills that will promote gender egalitarian attitudes and enable the exercise informed choices in all aspects of their lives, including with regard to sexual matters as well as the timing of marriage and choice of marriage partner.

Our findings confirm, moreover, that married young people have special needs that need to be addressed. Programmes must acknowledge and act upon the

desire of many newly married young couples to delay the first pregnancy — their need for awareness and supplies of appropriate contraceptive methods, and for developing negotiation skills that will enable them to counter social expectations with regard to proving fertility early in a new marriage; providers who are skilled in addressing the needs of young married couples must also be trained and made available. We need, moreover, to build on emerging evidence that young couples do wish to build a close relationship between themselves — evidence that calls for programmes that encourage couple participation and focus on improving communication, negotiation and conflict management skills early in marriage.

Research on sensitive behaviours is a complex and challenging task. While studies of young people's sexual risk behaviours in developing country settings are growing, few have been conducted in conservative settings in which pre-marital sexual activity is highly proscribed. This study has shown that community-based studies and surveys of sexual behaviour of young people in India are feasible. What is needed now are methodologies that enable better reporting of sensitive behaviours, and studies that will expand what is known about such poorly understood behaviours as sex without consent and exchange sex among the young on the one hand, and that highlight key factors underlying risky sexual experiences on the other.

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