

Why University Students are engaging in risky sexual behavior? A qualitative study by the application of Socio-Ecological Model

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Background: Students of higher institutions are hoped to be the backbone of development on which the future fate of any nation is relying. However, they are found to be exposed to many risky sexual behaviors that predispose them to HIV infection. Though sufficient data are available on the existence of risky sexual behavior, the reasons why they engage in this risky behavior is not well explored. Thus, this study tried to explore these factors at different levels by applying the Socio-ecological model.

Methods: This study was conducted in 2009 in Jimma University. It involved 17 in-depth interviews and 10 FGDs. Purposively selected key informants included University Officials, students' clubs representatives, service providers, local Governmental and NGO representatives and local public service providers like night club and Khat house owners. The FGD participants were purposively selected students from both sexes. The data were analyzed thematically based on the constructs of the model.

Results: A total of 103 individuals participated (53 males and 50 females). The participants identified various reasons that expose students to risky sexual behaviors. **Individual factors:** Most participants explained that the age itself, wrong expectation and substance use (alcohol, kaht, & 'Shisha') were among the major drivers. **Interpersonal factors:** Concurrent sexual networks, peer pressure and lack of parental control were also among the major factors reported. **Organizational factors:** lack of supportive policy and lack of student-friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services were raised by majority. **Community factors:** enabling conditions in the surrounding environment were emphasized as major factors. The existence of night clubs, video houses showing pornography and khat houses in front of the university gate were among the top list. **Societal and public policy:** the existence of poverty in the country was also raised as a factor.

Conclusion and recommendations: This study revealed that biological (puberty), substance use, sexual networks, peer pressure, lack of parental control, lack of supportive policy, unavailability of SRH services, university's external environment and poverty were reasons for why students engage in risky sexual practice. Appropriate behavior change interventions, life skill trainings and substance use policy should be in place. The university should avail student-friendly SRH services and work together with the surrounding community.