The Prevalence and Determinants of Premarital Sex among Youth in Afghanistan

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Background

❑ *Research problem*: As in many Muslim societies, premarital sex is normatively unacceptable in Afghanistan, yet the country's rapid social and cultural transformation may be changing these traditional norms.

❑ *Theoretical framework:* Changes and variations in sexual attitudes and behaviors are explained and situated within two main theoretical perspectives -- the *structural perspective* and the *ideational change perspective*

❑ *Research questions*: How are individual factors, family characteristics and relationships, and social ties association with…

  (1) Attitudes toward premarital sex among unmarried Afghan youth?

  (2) Experience of premarital sex among unmarried Afghan youth?

Data & Method

❑ *Data* come from the "*The Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors of Youth in Afghanistan*", 2017

❑ *The setting & sampling*: The survey used multistage cluster sampling of never married young people aged 15-34 residing in ten Afghan cities of varied size

❑ Our *analytic sample* is limited to 1256 respondents aged 15-29.

❑ The *dependent variables:*

  (1) "*Liberal attitudes toward premarital sex*" are measured by an 8-item scale (α=0.76).

  (2) "*Experience of premarital sexual activity*" is defined as having ever engaged in sexual activity with a person of the opposite sex. This outcome is operationalized as the three-level ordinal scale: none; only foreplay; and intercourse.

❑ The *independent variables* are of three categories;

  1) "*Individual socio-demographic characteristics*": gender, education, religiosity, and ethnicity.

  2) "*Family characteristics and relationships*": perceived socioeconomic status (SES) of the family, co-residence with parents, perceived quality of relationship with parents, and frequency of talking about sexual matters with parents.

  3) "*Social ties and interactions*": presumed/known sexual experience of close friends, and social media exposure.

❑ We fit *OLS and ordinal logit regression models* to test our hypotheses on attitudes toward premarital sex and premarital sexual experience, respectively. All models control for age and city of residence.

Conclusion

❑ The results show that respondents, on average, have moderately liberal attitudes toward premarital sex and that almost a quarter of them have engaged in either sexual foreplay or penetrative intercourse.

❑ Multivariable results indicate that premarital sexual attitudes and behavior are significantly associated with several individual-level characteristics, family and intergenerational relationships, and social ties and interactions. At the same time, instructive gendered variations emerge.

❑ The findings illustrate the dynamics of premarital sexual relations in this and similar contexts where such relations are traditionally stigmatized but multifaceted societal changes increasingly challenge this stigma.

Results

Figure 1. The mean score of liberal attitudes toward premarital sex among respondents who had no sexual intercourse, by predictors

Figure 2. Experience of premarital sexual activity, by predictors (%)
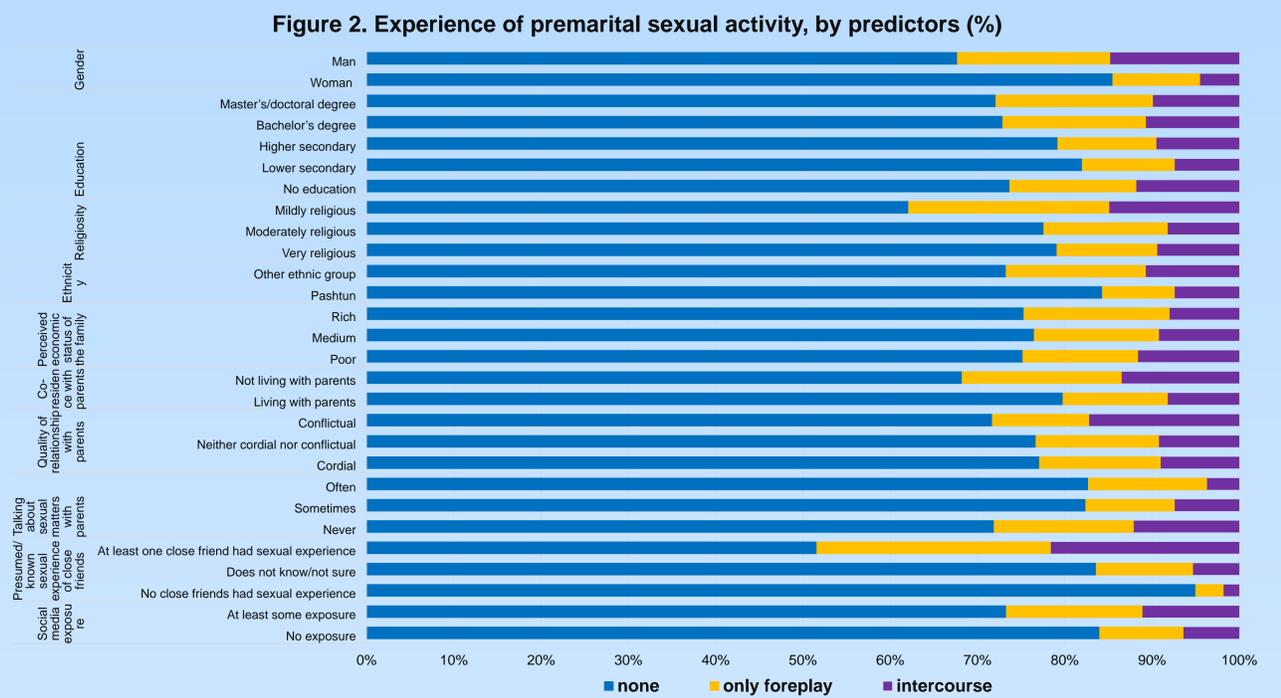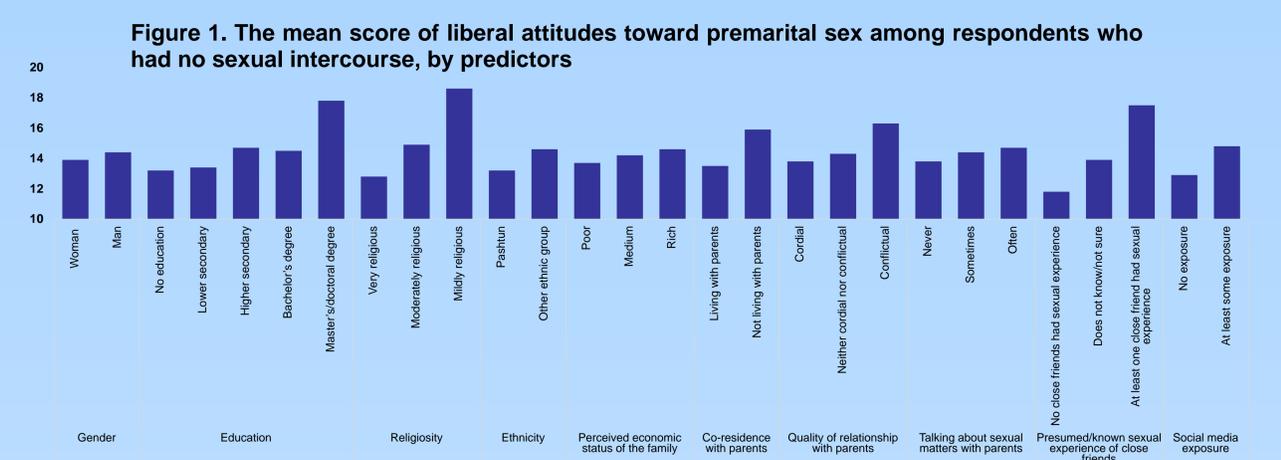
Table 1. Multivariate results

Variables		Liberal attitude toward premarital sex scale Beta (OLS)			Experience of premarital sex Odds ratio (Ordinal Logit)		
		All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Individual characteristics							
Gender	Woman®						
	Man	0.02			2.28***		
Education	No education®						
	Lower secondary	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.65	1.01	0.41
	Higher secondary	0.06	0.09*	0.02	0.73	0.88	0.52
	Bachelor's degree	**0.08***	**0.12***	0.04	0.75	0.99	**0.43***
	Master's/doctoral degree	**0.11***	**0.19***	0.06	**0.49***	**0.54***	**0.32***
Religiosity	Very religious®						
	Moderately religious	**0.12***	**0.13***	**0.10***	1.01	1.04	0.99
	Mildly religious	**0.22***	**0.30***	**0.14***	**1.36***	1.24	**1.47***
Ethnicity	Pashtun®						
	Other ethnic group	**0.07***	**0.11***	0.03	**1.97***	**2.76***	1.02
Family and intergenerational ties							
Perceived economic status of the family	Poor®						
	Medium	0.01	0.01	0.02	1.06	1.32	0.77
	Rich	0.03	0.04	0.05	1.27	**1.73***	**0.64***
Co-residence with parents	Living with parents®						
	Not living with parents	**0.08***	0.03	**0.11***	1.03	0.98	1.10
Quality of relationship with parents	Cordial®						
	Neither cordial nor conflictual	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.97	1.12	0.87
	Conflictual	**0.08***	**0.13***	0.04	**1.33***	**2.08***	0.83
Talking about sexual matters with parents	Never®						
	Sometimes	0.06	0.03	**0.10***	**0.71***	1.02	**0.46***
	Often	0.03	0.06	0.01	**0.62***	1.01	**0.57***
Social ties and interactions							
Presumed/known sexual experience of close friends	No close friends had sexual experience®						
	Does not know/not sure	**0.14***	**0.08***	**0.17***	**3.46***	**2.69***	**4.86***
	At least one close friend had sexual experience	**0.35***	**0.33***	**0.34***	**14.78***	**14.94***	**17.33***
Social media exposure	No exposure®						
	At least some exposure	**0.07***	0.04	**0.09***	1.23	0.88	**1.47***
Control variables							
Age group	15-19®						
	20-24	-0.05	-0.05	-0.04	0.83	1.29	**0.45***
	25-29	0.02	0.02	0.02	1.17	**2.11***	0.69
City of residence	Other city®						
	Kabul	0.05	0.06	0.02	**1.95***	**1.62***	**3.87***
R² for OLS, Pseudo R² for Logit		22.9	31.6	19.5	33.7	34.8	32.3
Model fit (F-test for OLS, Chi-square for Logit)		14.95***	11.64***	6.51***	344.2***	198.2***	132.7***
Number of cases		1134	541	593	1256	635	621

* p<.05;** p<.01;***p<.001