

**Changing attitudes toward premarital sex in Vietnam:
evidence from a national survey**

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ABSTRACT

Despite concerns of increasingly relaxed sexual culture in Vietnam, evidence of changing sexuality norms remains scarce. This study documents differential attitudes toward premarital sex by gender, age and marital status with data from 7,289 women and 6,707 men aged 15-49 in the Vietnam Population and AIDS Indicator Survey 2005. Attitudes toward premarital sex remained conservative, although men were more permissive than women. A double-standard for women existed: among both genders, acceptance of men's premarital sex was significantly higher than that of women's. Unmarried respondents were more open than married. Only among the married did we find increasing premarital sex acceptance with younger age; among the unmarried, the evidence was unclear. Additionally, the poorest and least educated were most open toward premarital sex. The study indicates a continuing struggle between traditional values and a growing openness toward sexuality that should be taken into account in programs aimed to target sexual behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Economic development and the increasingly open society during the last few decades in Vietnam have raised concerns of increasingly relaxed sexual culture, which may result in less emphasis on traditional expectations of gender roles, particularly on women to maintain their chastity until marriage. Coupled with delays in age of marriage, changing social perceptions and expectations of sexuality may affect sexual behavior of a large segment of the population – young people 15-29 account for 25% of the Vietnamese population (Committee for Population , Family and Children and ORC Macro, 2003). Concerns of increasing premarital sex¹ have attracted much attention from policy makers, social researchers, parents and the public in general. Changes in premarital sexual behavior and attitudes have important implications to the prevention and management of sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS), unintended pregnancy and induced abortions.

Despite many concerns, evidence of increasing premarital sexual practice and relaxed social norms with regard to sexual behavior remains scarce. There have been only a few studies that examined changes in premarital sexual behavior over time. Using survey data from the Red River Delta in the north and Ho Chi Minh city and surrounding areas in the south, one recent study found an increasing trend of premarital sex among three cohorts of married men and women between the 1960s and the 1990s (Ghuman, Loi, Huy et al., 2006). Premarital sex among men was consistently higher than among women; for example, among those who were married in the 1990s, 31% of men reported premarital sex, compared to less than 10% of women (Ghuman, Loi, Huy et al., 2006). Imbalanced gender expectations of sexuality remains: it is generally assumed by both men and women that men have a need for sexual enjoyment, while it is not

¹ Premarital sex in this study is broadly defined as any sexual intercourses prior to marriage, whether it is with a future spouse, a stable or casual partner, or a commercial sex worker.

appropriate for women to have such a need, or to express it (Efroymson et al., 1997; Go et al., 2002; Pham, 1999). Considered traditionally less permissive of premarital sex than the south because of laws designed to discourage such practices, influences of Confucianism and the lack of relatively long-time presence of the French and American, the same study reported a much lower prevalence of premarital sex in the north than in the south among the earlier cohorts of married men; such prevalence, however, increased markedly in later cohorts and equaled that of the south in the 1990s (Ghuman, Loi, Huy et al., 2006). Another study employed an ethnographic approach to describe emerging sexual culture among urban youth in Hanoi (Nguyen, 2007). The author found that a continuation of traditional gender roles and an emergence of increasingly permissiveness of young people with regard to premarital sexual experiences coexisted. The author argued that such changes were reflective of rapid changes in the society as a result of market reforms (Nguyen, 2007), which is similar to arguments for rises in pregnancies among the unmarried and in condom use in the 1990s by other authors (see, for example, Goodkind, 1994 and Goodkind and Anh, 1997). Both of these studies, however, indicated that premarital sex, while increasing, was still not widespread. Likewise, a study using 1999 survey data of unmarried 15-19-year-olds found that only 6% of boys and 2% of girls reported ever having sex (Mensch et al., 2003). Realizing that it was a sensitive question, a recent survey of a nationally representative sample of youth 15-24 (i.e. Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth SAVY) incorporated a self-administered portion of the questionnaire, yet still found low levels of sexual behavior reported: among the 22-24 year olds surveyed, only 33% of men and 4% of women in urban and 26% of men and 3% of women in rural reported premarital sex (MOH, 2005).

There have also been a few attempts to look at attitudes toward premarital sex among certain target groups. One of them is a quantitative analysis of attitudes concerning sexual

relations outside of marriage, including sex before marriage, among married people in a northern province, 60 km east of Hanoi (Ghuman, 2005). The study indicated a declining trend in strong opposition to premarital sex across marriage cohorts of men and women; nevertheless, among those who got married in the 1990s, 70% of women and 40% of men surveyed still strongly opposed the idea of having premarital sex with their future spouse. Those who lived in urban were more open to the idea than those in rural. Only 12% of married men and 2% of married women in the study reported having premarital sex – mostly with their future spouse (Ghuman, 2005). A study with university students aged 17-26 in Hanoi found that 38% of them thought it was bad for females to have premarital sex and 24% thought it was bad for males to have premarital sex (Pham, 2004). This study was consistent with Nguyen (2007) in its finding of the coexistence of traditional and cultural influences and growing acceptance of premarital sex among youth. Another study examined the attitudes of midwifery students - all were females, young and most were unmarried – toward adolescent sexuality and abortion (Klingberg-Allvin et al., 2007). The authors found a general disapproval of premarital sex among the students surveyed and that gender-imbalance in sexual relationships was among the students' concerns. Earlier studies in the 1990s in urban areas also reported disapproval of premarital sex among the majority (70-75%) of men and the overwhelmingly majority (93-98%) of women under the age of 25 (Anh et al., 1999; Nhan and Hang, 1996). Although there has been no systematic examination of trends in changing attitudes toward premarital sex, the general consensus among policy makers and researchers is that older generations are more likely to disapprove of premarital sex, while young people are more open (Hong, 1998).

These studies, while showing increasing practice of and openness toward premarital sex, were all based on data from a few non-representative groups of population selected based on

their age groups, marital status and geographical region, with the exception of the SAVY, which focused on 15-24-year-olds. There has been no examination using nationally representative data that systematically documents the practice of or attitudes toward premarital sex and its differences across gender, age groups, and marital statuses. The present study, therefore, serves the following purposes: 1) to document current attitudes toward sex before marriage in Vietnam using nationally representative data; and 2) to assess the differences in attitudes toward premarital sex by individual characteristics, including gender, age, and marital status.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data

This study employs data from the Vietnam Population and AIDS Indicator Survey 2005, which was designed to obtain indicators of knowledge, attitudes and sexual behavior related to HIV/AIDS among a sample of men and women aged 15-49. Two-stage cluster sampling was employed based on a sampling frame provided by the 1999 Population and Housing Census to yield a nationally representative sample. A more detailed description of sampling procedures can be found elsewhere (General Statistical Office (GSO) & National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology (NIHE), 2006). The final sample included 7,289 women and 6,707 men aged 15-49 in 251 clusters throughout the country.

Household and Individual Questionnaires were administered to selected households and eligible men and women. The Household Questionnaire covered basic demographic information of household members, while the Individual Questionnaire collected information on reproduction, marriage and sexual activity, knowledge and attitudes toward HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted

diseases and other health issues. Both questionnaires were administered in face-to-face interviews.

Independent variables

Since evidence from the literature has indicated that married people may regard premarital sex differently than unmarried people (Ghuman, 2005; Mensch et al., 2003; MOH, 2005), the sample was stratified and analysis was carried out separately for unmarried and married people. Independent variables included those at individual- and community-level that were hypothesized to be associated with individual attitudes toward premarital sex. At the individual level, they included age, household wealth, education, religion, ethnicity, exposure to the media, and intention to postpone sex until marriage. In the unmarried sample, who were generally young, age was dichotomized at 25. In the married sample, age was categorized into three groups: 15-24, 25-39 and 40 and above. These groups are reflective of three generations: those 15-24-year-olds who were born and grew up during the mid-1980s and later (when the economy already started growing and thus, they were most likely to be affected by the market economy), those who were born and grew up during the Vietnam war and before economic reform was started (mid-1960s till mid-1980s) and those who already grew up and might directly experience the war and its consequences. The stratification allowed an examination of attitudes of different generations with quite distinct social and economic conditions.

Household wealth was constructed based on ownership of household items and materials of the house; individuals then were grouped into quintiles according to the wealth score of their households. Because the numbers of people surveyed who belonged to specific religious groups (Buddhist, Catholic, etc.) were too small, the sample was divided into two groups: no religion or any religion. Similarly, ethnicity was dichotomized to the major Vietnamese (Kinh) group versus

any ethnic minority group. Exposure to the media was hypothesized to be associated with premarital sex permissiveness because it has been suggested in a number of studies that exposure to Western culture, predominantly through television, radio, newspapers and magazines, is one of the main reasons for rising sexual activities among the unmarried (Goodkind, 1994; Goodkind and Anh, 1997; Pham, 2004; Thin, 1997). Intention to postpone sex until marriage among the unmarried was hypothesized to be positively associated with disapproval of premarital sex.

At the community level, as suggested in the literature, there may be significant variations in attitudes toward sex before marriage between geographical regions and between urban and rural. The concentration of unmarried people who intended to postpone sex until marriage was hypothesized to be associated with individual's openness to premarital sex: if one lived in a community where most people intended to wait until marriage to have sex, s/he would be more likely to disagree with premarital sex. This variable was aggregated from the individual- to the community-level, excluding the index individual to avoid problems associated with correlation, and then dichotomized at median.

Finally, because of apparent evidence of differential sexual behavior and attitudes between men and women, as well as indication of imbalance gender relationships with regard to sexuality, most of the analyses were carried out for men and women separately.

Dependent variables

Outcome of interest is acceptance of sex before marriage and came directly from responses to questions "Do you believe that young men/women should wait until they are married to have sexual intercourse?" Two separate questions were asked about attitudes regarding premarital sex behavior among young men and women.

Statistical procedures

We used mainly descriptive analyses to document attitudes toward premarital sex and differences by individual characteristics. Weighted percentages were reported. Bivariate logistic regression was employed with the survey set of commands in Stata version 10/Special Edition to examine the statistical significance of an association (StataCorp, 2008). The use of the survey set of commands allowed us to take into account the fact that individuals were not independently sampled; instead, they were selected within chosen clusters. Not taking into account the cluster sampling design of the survey would likely result in imprecise estimates of standard errors. Finally, multivariate regressions were employed, also with the survey set of commands, to assess the associations of individual's and community's characteristics with the outcome in the presence of potentially confounding factors.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the distribution of the unmarried and married men and women in the sample. Overall, married respondents were significantly older than unmarried respondents: the vast majority of married respondents were 25 years of age or older, while more than 83% of unmarried respondents were younger than 25. There were no differences between men and women within each marital status group. The sample was equally distributed between household wealth groups, although there were slightly more unmarried men and women in the richest group than in the poorest group. The majority of both married and unmarried respondents had secondary schooling, but the proportion of the married sample who had attended no more than primary school was nearly twice that of the unmarried sample. There were no differences in religion, ethnicity and exposure to the media between men and women, married and unmarried.

Among those who were unmarried, three quarters of men and the vast majority of women (93%) reported an intention to wait until marriage before they would have sex.

Table 1 about here

At the community level, both the married and unmarried samples were equally distributed between geographical regions. Between three-quarters and 80% of respondents lived in rural areas. About three in five respondents lived in a community where intention not to have premarital sex was a norm, regardless of their gender and marital status.

1. Acceptance of premarital sex among unmarried men and women:

Table 2 shows the proportion of unmarried respondents who stated that it was not necessary for unmarried men and women to wait until they were married to have sex. Overall, attitudes toward premarital sex remained conservative (only between 6% and 18% of unmarried respondents approved of it): the acceptance was consistently higher toward men's behavior than women's, and also higher among unmarried men than among unmarried women, reflecting clear gender divisions in attitudes. With regards to men's having premarital sex, 18% of unmarried men and 11% of unmarried women reported acceptance. The proportion was significantly lower if it was an unmarried woman who had premarital sex: only 13% of young men and 6% of young women would accept it.

Table 2 about here

Attitudes toward premarital sex varied widely by most individual characteristics, except religion. Unmarried men and women with no more than primary schooling and who belonged to an ethnic minority group seemed more open to the idea than those who were more educated and who were Kinh ($p < .001$ in both cases). Twice as many unmarried men who had less than secondary schooling indicated that it was acceptable for men to have premarital sex as those who

had secondary or higher schooling (32% vs. 16% and 17%, respectively). Among unmarried women, the differences by educational level were even more dramatic: 27% of those who had less than secondary schooling, compared to 8% of those who had secondary schooling or higher, reported an acceptance of premarital sex among men. Men and women of minority groups were also much more accepting of men's premarital sex than those of Kinh group (31% vs. 17% of men and 17 vs. 10% of women, respectively). Differences between household wealth quintiles did not show a clear pattern: acceptance of men's having sex prior to marriage was highest among men and women of the poorest group; it declined significantly among middle wealth quintiles and went up slightly again among the richest quintile. Surprisingly, unmarried men and women aged 25 or older were more permissive of premarital sex among men than those who were 15-24 years of age: 22% of men aged 25 or older versus 18% of men aged 15-24 and 15% of women aged 25 or older versus 10% of women aged 15-24 reported that unmarried men did not need to wait until they were married to have sex ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively). Also in contrast to common beliefs among many researchers, unmarried men and women who had daily exposure to the media were significantly less accepting of men's having sex before marriage than those who had less frequent media exposure. Among those who were daily exposed to the media, only 15% of men and a mere 7% of women accepted men's premarital sex, compared to 20% of men and 13% of women who had less than daily exposure to the media ($p < .05$ and $p < .01$, respectively). Unmarried men and women who intended to postpone sex until marriage themselves were also much more conservative than the others: less than 10% of them accepted men's premarital sex compared to a third of those who did not intend to wait until marriage to have sex ($p < .001$).

Geographically, unmarried men and women in the south were markedly more permissive of men's premarital sex than their counterparts in the centre and the north. Nearly a quarter of unmarried men and 15% of unmarried women in the south accepted premarital sex among men – nearly twice as much among the unmarried in the north and also significantly higher than that among the unmarried in the centre ($p < .001$). Urban unmarried were also significantly more accepting of men's premarital sex than their rural counterparts: 22% of urban men versus 17% of rural men and 14% of urban women versus 10% of rural women stated that it was not necessary for men to wait until marriage to have sex ($p < .05$ in both cases). Individual acceptance of men's premarital sex was also associated with normative attitude in the community: people who lived in communities where it was not normative for people to wait until marriage to have sex were more than twice as likely as those who lived elsewhere to accept premarital sex among men ($p < .001$ among both men and women).

While there seemed to be a clear distinction in respondent's attitudes toward men's and women's premarital sex, there were many similarities in terms of individual- and community-level factors associated with individual's attitudes. There was no association between acceptance of women's premarital sex and religion. Patterns in variations in the acceptance of women's premarital sex by household wealth quintile, education, ethnicity, exposure to the media and individual intention to postpone sex until marriage were similar to the acceptance of men's premarital sex. Unmarried who were in the poorest quintile, the least educated group, belonged to a minority group, with no daily exposure to the media and did not intend to wait until marriage to have sex were significantly more likely to accept premarital sex among women than those who were less poor, more educated, Kinh, with daily exposure to the media and those who intended to postpone sex until marriage themselves. The differences by intention to postpone sex,

household wealth, and education were most striking. While more than a quarter of unmarried women who did not intend to wait until marriage to have sex indicated an acceptance of premarital sex among women, only 4% of those who intended to wait did so ($p < .001$). The former is also the only group where acceptance of women's premarital sex was somewhat higher among women than among men. Dramatic declines in the openness to women's premarital sex were observed from men and women in the poorest group (acceptance of 23% of men and 15% of women, respectively) to those in the second poorest group (by about 50%), and the other less poor groups. Similarly dramatic declines were observed between men, and particularly women, of different education levels ($p < .001$ in both cases). Differences in attitudes toward women's premarital sex between age groups were not statistically significant.

Among community-level factors, the concentration of unmarried people who intended to postpone sex until marriage was the only factor associated with both men's and women's acceptance of women's premarital sex. Only 9% of unmarried men who lived in communities where it was normative for unmarried people to wait until marriage before they had sex would accept women's premarital sex, compared with 15% of those who lived elsewhere ($p < .001$). Similarly, unmarried women in communities with high percentage of unmarried who intended to postpone sex until marriage were more conservative than unmarried women elsewhere with regard to women's premarital sex (3% vs. 8% acceptance, $p < .001$). Region and residence were associated only with men's acceptance of women's premarital sex; and patterns of variations were also similar to those with regard to men's premarital sex. Unmarried men in the south and in urban areas were much more likely than unmarried men elsewhere to accept premarital sex among women ($p < .001$ and $p < .01$, respectively). No differences were observed in the acceptance

of women's premarital sex between women in different regions or between rural and urban women.

2. Acceptance of premarital sex among unmarried men and women:

First, it is important to note that overall, attitudes toward premarital sex was much more conservative among married respondents than among unmarried respondents, regardless of respondent's gender and whether it was toward men's or women's premarital sex. A smaller proportion of respondents in any married group expressed acceptance of premarital sex than in unmarried groups. Second, similarly to unmarried respondents, acceptance of men's premarital sex among married men and women was twice as high as that of women's premarital sex. And third, in the married sample, men were more permissive of premarital sex than women – a pattern also observed in the unmarried sample.

There were many similarities between the married and unmarried samples in the associations between attitudes toward premarital sex and individual's characteristics. Religion was not associated with attitudes toward premarital sex, while household wealth, education, and ethnicity were associated with married men's and women's acceptance of both men's and women's premarital sex. The patterns of variations were also similar to those observed in the unmarried sample. Married men and women who were in the poorest quintile, least educated and belonged to a minority group were significantly more likely than those who were less poor, more educated and Kinh to accept men's or women's premarital sex.

Variations in attitudes toward premarital sex by age group among married men and women were the opposite of what were observed among unmarried respondents. Married men and women who were 15-24 years of age were significantly more likely than those in the older age groups to accept men's or women's premarital sex. Between the youngest and the oldest

group, acceptance of premarital sex dropped by nearly 50% among married men, and by up to two-thirds among married women. Another difference from the unmarried sample was that exposure to the media was not related to attitudes toward premarital sex among married men. Among married women, those who were daily exposed to the media were significantly less likely to accept premarital sex by men (5% vs. 8%) and by women (2% vs. 4%) ($p < .01$ in both cases).

Similarly to the unmarried sample, community's concentration of unmarried people who intended to postpone sex until marriage was associated with acceptance of both men's and women's premarital sex among both genders. A very small proportion (10% or less) of married people who lived in communities where normative behavior was to postpone sex until marriage indicated acceptance of men's or women's premarital sex. For people who lived in other communities, the likelihood that they would accept premarital sex nearly doubled ($p < .001$). There was little evidence of associations of region and residence with the openness to premarital sex. Married men who lived in urban were significantly more open than those in rural with regard to premarital sex (17% vs. 13%, $p < .05$). For attitudes of married women toward women's premarital sex, the trends were different from that of the unmarried sample. Married women in the north and the centre and in rural areas seemed more likely to accept premarital sex among unmarried women than those in the south and urban ($p < .01$ and $p < .05$, respectively).

Results from multivariate analyses were largely consistent with descriptive observations (see Appendix). Males and people of 15-24 years of age were significantly more likely to accept premarital sex among both men and women than females and those who were 25 or above. People in the poorest quintile and least educated were also most open toward premarital sex than those who were less poor and more educated. Kinh people were less likely than ethnic minorities

to report acceptance; unmarried people who intended to wait until marriage to have sex were also significantly less permissive of premarital sex. There was also evidence that unmarried who were daily exposed to the media were less likely than those who were less frequently exposed to the media to accept men's and women's sex before marriage. At the community level, the concentration of unmarried people who intended to postpone sex until marriage and urban residence were significantly associated with increased likelihood of men's and women's acceptance of premarital sex, whether they were married or not. Evidence of the differences between regions, however, was not as strong as in the bivariate analyses: the only significant regional difference was that unmarried people in the centre were less likely than unmarried elsewhere to accept men's premarital sex.

DISCUSSION

The present study is the first one in Vietnam that employs nationally representative data to examine attitudes toward premarital sex across genders, age groups, and marital status. Findings are largely consistent with previous, smaller-scaled studies: general attitudes toward premarital sex remained conservative in all groups. There remained a clear gender division and a double standard for females: acceptance of premarital sex was consistently higher, regardless of their marital status, if it was a man who had premarital sex as opposed to a woman. Even among women, the openness toward premarital sex among men was significantly more than that among women. There seemed to remain a perception that although not necessarily encouraged, it was perhaps acceptable for men to have premarital sex. Women, on the other hand, should remain chaste and “guardians of traditional moral values” (Gammeltoft, 2002, p.487). The study,

however, has several findings that are different from those of previous studies and common beliefs.

There were clear distinctions between the married and the unmarried samples in their attitudes toward premarital sex. Unmarried respondents were much more accepting of premarital sex than married respondents, regardless of their gender and age. This is in contrast to common beliefs that people who are married are more likely than those who are not married to talk about premarital sex (Mensch et al., 2003). Differences in age are unlikely to explain because of little evidence of differences in premarital sex attitudes by age, which will be discussed later. Instead, the differences may be indicative of increasing premarital sex among the unmarried, as a result of both changing social and economic conditions and delayed marriage, as suggested by other researchers (Ghuman et al., 2006; Goodkind and Anh, 1997; Mensch et al., 2003). In fact, more than 5% of this study's unmarried respondents had sexual intercourse (not shown). A recent study with youth aged 18-29 in the city of Hai Phong found that 43.3% of them had premarital sex (Duong et al., 2007).

Only among the married did we find increasing acceptance of premarital sex with younger age. This is similar to findings from previous studies, which suggested that cohorts that got married more recently were more permissive of premarital sex. Among the unmarried, contrary to expectations, there was no clear evidence that the younger generation, who were most likely to be influenced by the economic reform and related changes in the social and cultural environment, had become more permissive of premarital sex than the older generation. In fact, the proportion of people who were open to the idea of premarital sex was significantly higher among the unmarried who were 25 years old or more than among those aged 15-24. At the same time, of the 5% of unmarried respondents who reported having sex, three-quarters of them were

15-24 years old (not shown). On the one hand, the result indicates continuing struggle between traditional cultural influences and growing acceptance of premarital sex among Vietnamese youth. On the other hand, it is possible that there is reporting bias in which younger people were more likely to report attitudes that might be perceived as more conforming to social norms.

In addition, the associations between exposure to the media and acceptance of premarital sex were in the opposite directions of expectations. People who were daily exposed to the media were less accepting of premarital sex than those who had less frequent media exposure, regardless of marital status and gender. There is, therefore, no evidence to support the common belief that Western culture influence has driven increasing trends in premarital sex. Rather, perhaps it is changing social and economic conditions that have strong influences on the awareness and perceptions toward sexuality.

Between geographical regions, only among the unmarried that men and women in the south and in urban were consistently less conservative than men and women elsewhere. Among the married, the evidence is not as strong. It is, therefore, difficult to draw conclusions about the extent to which different social and political conditions might have shaped individual perceptions of sexuality.

Another important finding is that people who were poorest and least educated were also most likely to accept premarital sex. It is possible that they were most affected by new social and economic opportunities brought about by economic reform within the last two decades. It has important policy implications. The poor and the less educated are also usually at higher risk of unsafe sex and its consequences. The willingness to be open about premarital sex suggests opportunities to promote safer sex among these groups of population.

One potential limitation of the study is the use of face-to-face interviews for these considerably sensitive questions. One concern among researchers is that people, especially young and unmarried individuals, may be reluctant to talk about sex and sexuality in face-to-face interviews. Some surveys, such as SAVY, have incorporated self-administered modules for sensitive questions. However, a recent study indicated that self-administered surveys did not necessarily result in higher reported premarital sex behavior than did face-to-face interviews, although there were certain advantages of computer-assisted interviewing techniques (Le et al., 2006). The extent of the disadvantages of face-to-face interviews with regard to premarital sex attitudes, therefore, is less certain.

The study confirms that overall attitudes toward premarital sex remain conservative and a double standard for women still exists, which may last for many more years, although changing social and economic conditions do have some effects. The degree that people reported acceptance of premarital status, regardless of their gender and age, reflects their awareness of the larger society's continuing traditional reservations toward sexual behavior among unmarried people. It suggests that many cultural obstacles in addressing safe sex among unmarried people remain. These may include confusion and stigmatism toward people who may be open or admit having premarital sex. Without the provision of accurate information about safe sex, it may result in increasing consequences of unsafe sex among unmarried people, particularly among youth.

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TABLES

Table 1. Sample distribution of unmarried and married

Characteristics	Unmarried		Married	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Individual-level				
Age				
15 – 24	82.7	83.3	6.0	12.8
25 or more	17.4	16.7	—	—
25 – 39			53.8	53.2
40 or more			40.2	34.0
Household wealth				
First (poorest)	16.4	14.5	20.2	19.4
Second	18.6	17.8	19.3	19.2
Third	21.9	22.7	19.9	20.0
Fourth	20.5	20.7	20.5	20.8
Fifth (richest)	22.6	24.4	20.1	20.7
Education completed				
None/primary school	14.3	16.7	26.1	31.5
Secondary school	74.1	70.6	65.0	60.3
Higher	11.5	12.8	8.8	8.2
Religion				
None	89.8	88.8	91.0	90.8
Any [†]	10.2	11.3	9.0	9.2
Ethnicity				
Minority group	11.9	12.0	15.2	14.9
Kinh	88.2	88.0	84.8	85.1
Everyday exposure to media				
No	71.4	74.5	65.7	79.2
Yes	28.6	25.5	34.3	20.8
Intention to postpone sex until marriage			—	—
No	24.0	7.1		
Yes	76.0	92.9		
Community-level				
Region				
North	32.6	35.1	39.5	40.3
Centre	27.2	24.7	25.1	24.7
South	40.2	40.2	35.4	35.0
Residence				
Rural	77.5	73.7	80.8	80.9
Urban	22.5	26.3	19.2	19.1
Most unmarried people in community intend to postpone sex until marriage				
No	59.5	57.6	59.3	59.8
Yes	40.5	42.4	40.7	40.2
N	2,618	2,223	4,025	4,750

[†] Any religion, including Buddhism, Catholicism or Protestantism. The number of observations is too small to further categorize to different religious groups.

Table 2. Attitudes toward premarital sex among the unmarried, by gender, Vietnam, 2005.

Characteristics	Acceptance of men's having sex before marriage		Acceptance of women's having sex before marriage	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Individual-level				
Age	(p<.05)	(p<.01)		
15 – 24	17.7	10.3	12.3	5.6
25 or more	21.7	15.3	15.6	8.2
Household wealth	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
First (poorest)	31.8	22.6	22.9	14.5
Second	18.3	12.2	11.5	7.3
Third	11.5	7.1	9.8	3.2
Fourth	13.5	7.3	8.8	3.5
Fifth (richest)	19.7	10.6	13.3	4.9
Education completed	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
None/primary school	32.3	27.2	24.6	15.2
Secondary school	15.9	7.8	11.0	4.3
Higher	16.8	8.7	10.1	3.7
Religion				
None	18.7	11.0	13.0	6.1
Any ¹	15.1	12.7	11.0	5.7
Ethnicity	(p<.001)	(p<.01)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
Minority group	30.6	17.3	25.4	12.1
Kinh	16.7	10.3	11.1	5.2
Everyday exposure to media	(p<.05)	(p<.01)	(p<.01)	(p<.01)
No	19.6	12.5	13.9	6.9
Yes	15.3	7.2	10.1	3.5
Intention to postpone sex until marriage	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
No	33.9	34.9	21.5	26.6
Yes	10.0	8.9	7.7	4.1
Community-level				
Region	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	
North	12.8	8.2	10.0	5.9
Centre	16.8	9.2	10.8	4.7
South	23.9	15.0	16.5	7.0
Residence	(p<.05)	(p<.05)	(p<.01)	
Rural	17.3	10.2	11.8	6.1
Urban	21.9	14.0	16.4	6.0
Most unmarried people in community intend to postpone sex until marriage	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
No	23.7	15.0	15.4	8.2
Yes	10.5	6.0	9.1	3.1
Total	18.4	11.2	12.8	6.0
N	2,618	2,223	2,618	2,223

¹ Any religion, including Buddhism, Catholicism or Protestantism. The number of observations is too small to further categorize to different religious groups.

Table 3. Attitudes toward premarital sex among the married, by gender, Vietnam, 2005.

Characteristics	Acceptance of men's having sex before marriage		Acceptance of women's having sex before marriage	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Individual-level				
Age	(p<.001)	(p<.01)	(p<.01)	(p<.001)
15 – 24	21.3	9.9	10.8	6.7
25 – 39	15.1	7.7	7.6	3.5
40 or more	11.0	6.4	5.6	2.5
Household wealth	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
First (poorest)	24.2	17.7	15.4	10.5
Second	8.9	6.8	3.7	2.6
Third	10.1	3.4	3.7	1.5
Fourth	8.9	5.0	4.2	2.0
Fifth (richest)	16.8	5.4	7.8	1.7
Education completed	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
None/primary school	20.7	14.8	12.2	8.3
Secondary school	10.8	4.2	4.6	1.4
Higher	16.0	4.1	9.6	1.4
Religion				
None	13.9	7.7	7.1	3.6
Any ¹	12.7	5.9	6.1	3.5
Ethnicity	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
Minority group	29.5	22.2	19.1	13.1
Kinh	11.0	5.0	4.8	1.9
Everyday exposure to media		(p<.01)		(p<.01)
No	14.0	8.1	7.1	4.1
Yes	13.5	5.4	6.8	1.8
Community-level				
Region				(p<.01)
North	15.0	6.6	8.5	4.1
Centre	8.7	10.2	4.1	4.6
South	16.1	6.8	7.5	2.3
Residence	(p<.05)			(p<.05)
Rural	13.2	7.6	6.8	3.9
Urban	16.5	7.4	7.8	2.4
Most unmarried people in community intend to postpone sex until marriage	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)	(p<.001)
No	16.1	9.0	8.3	4.7
Yes	10.5	5.4	5.1	2.0
Total	13.8	7.5	7.0	3.6
N	4,025	4,749	4,025	4,749

¹ Any religion, including Buddhism, Catholicism or Protestantism. The number of observations is too small to further categorize to different religious groups.

Appendix. Factors associated with the acceptance of premarital sex among unmarried and married adults, Vietnam, 2005.

Characteristics	Unmarried		Married	
	Acceptance of men's having sex before marriage OR (s.e.)	Acceptance of women's having sex before marriage OR (s.e.)	Acceptance of men's having sex before marriage OR (s.e.)	Acceptance of women's having sex before marriage OR (s.e.)
Individual-level				
Gender				
Male	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Female	.87 (.10)	.63 (.09)**	.46 (.04)***	.43 (.05)***
Age				
15 – 24	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
25 or more	.70 (.11)	.74 (.14)		
25 – 39			.88 (.12)	.76 (.12)
40 or more			.68 (.10)*	.59 (.11)**
Household wealth				
First (poorest)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Second	.64 (.13)*	.61 (.14)*	1.02 (.17)	1.19 (.25)
Third	.40 (.08)***	.50 (.12)**	.65 (.11)*	.59 (.15)*
Fourth	.40 (.09)***	.43 (.11)**	.70 (.12)*	.65 (.15)
Fifth (richest)	.50 (.11)**	.50 (.14)***	.68 (.11)*	.74 (.15)
Education completed				
None/primary school	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Secondary school	.46 (.07)***	.51 (.09)***	.54 (.05)***	.42 (.06)***
Higher	.54 (.13)**	.41 (.11)***	.65 (.12)*	.75 (.16)
Religion				
None	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Any ¹	.81 (.15)	.77 (.15)	.90 (.15)	1.15 (.24)
Ethnicity				
Minority group	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Kinh	.64 (.10)**	.48 (.08)***	.32 (.04)	.31 (.04)***
Everyday exposure to media				
No	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	.69 (.10)*	.70 (.12)*	.99 (.11)	.98 (.14)
Intention to postpone sex until marriage			—	—
No	1.00	1.00		
Yes	.23 (.03)***	.27 (.04)***		
Community-level				
Region				
North	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Centre	.57 (.09)**	.75 (.13)	.85 (.10)	1.13 (.17)
South	1.24 (.18)	1.29 (.21)	1.12 (.13)	1.06 (.17)
Residence				
Rural	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Urban	1.62 (.24)**	1.64 (.30)**	1.37 (.16)**	1.24 (.20)
Most unmarried people in community intend to postpone sex until marriage				
No	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	.69 (.09)**	.95 (.14)	.70 (.07)***	.59 (.07)***
N	4,560		8,758	

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

— Not applicable