

Post-Millennial Filipinos: Renewed Hope vs Risks

Further Studies of the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study

*Gender
Differentials
in the
Premarital
Sexual
Initiation
of Zamboanga
Peninsula
Youth*



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Rosalyn R. Echem and Maria Paz N. Marquez

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Commission on Population
Welfareville Compound, Mandaluyong City
TELEPHONE: 531-6805
FAX: 533-5122
URL: www.popcom.gov.ph
EMAIL: mainmail@popcom.gov.ph
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/commissiononpopulation

Message from the Executive Director

Since the turn of the century over fifteen years ago, the Philippines has seen the rise of the millennial generation of young Filipinos who are currently shaping the political landscape in late 2016 as they take a committed stand on the issues of the day.

It is appropriate for those concerned with Philippine development work to now start looking at the next generation of Filipinos and the Commission on Population has had a tradition of producing studies concerning young people.

“Post-Millennial Filipinos: Renewed Hope vs Risks” compiles 17 regional papers based on the dataset of the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study. These studies explore and discuss the emerging issues and concerns of the youth that need appropriate policy and program responses.



The latest YAFS comes more than a decade after the 2002 YAFS. The 2002 YAFS showed the concerns of the millennial Filipino much like the latest YAFS of 2013 marks the rise of the Filipinos born around the turn of the century and could foretell the shape of things to come for the 21st century young Filipino.

The post-millennial Filipino is focused on screens (smart phone, tablet and monitor) and the media is full of “hashtag-worthy” statements of 140 words.

The studies we are presenting continue to note and update matters such as sexual risk behaviors, early sexual involvement, teen pregnancy, reproductive health problems including sexually-transmitted infections as well as non-sexual risk behaviors such as smoking, alcohol abuse and drug use as well as suicide ideation and lifestyle.

We invite you to tune in to the latest findings about the post-millennial Filipino. It can only result in a more informed thread of interaction with the shapers of our country’s future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juan Antonio A. Perez III'.

Juan Antonio A. Perez III, MD, MPH

Executive Director

Commission on Population

Background

The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study is the fourth installment of a series of nationally representative cross-sectional surveys on Filipino youth aged 15-24 (for YAFS 1 and 2 and 15-27 for YAFS 3). The YAFS has yielded valuable information about young people's sexual and non-sexual behavior, education, labor force participation, family relationships, attitudes and values regarding certain issues concerning them, personal characteristics like self-esteem, and adverse conditions like suicidal ideation and depression symptoms, all of which are of pertinence to one's understanding of this significant sector of society. The 2013 YAFS or YAFS 4 in particular was a response to the need of updating information on the situation of today's young people. From YAFS 3 in 2002, there have been many important new developments in the environment where young people are situated that need to be studied as these affect not just their sexual and non-sexual risk taking behaviors but also their total well-being. For instance, the changes in communication and information technology such as the prevalent use of cellular phones and the internet and the new forms of communication that these have produced like social networking were not explored in the previous YAFS. The foregoing expansion in technology is presumed to have resulted to notable changes in the patterns and topographies of courtship, dating and relationships among young people. The upsurge in the incidence of HIV infection primarily among men who have sex with other men (MSMs) requires more recent reliable data on male sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors which is currently not available because regular survey rounds like the National Demographic and Health Surveys conducted every five years does not routinely include men. Moreover, with YAFS 4, core behaviors that have been monitored over time in YAFS 1, 2 and 3 were also updated. Among these are the sexual risky behaviors, such as the prevalence of early sexual involvement, teen pregnancy and reproductive health problems including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as non-sexual risk behavior like smoking, drinking and drug use.

With the wealth of information yielded by the YAFS 4, the Commission on Population (POPCOM) in partnership with the Demographic Research and Development Foundation, Inc. (DRDF) came up with seventeen (17) regional papers (Regions 1-13, 4B, CAR, NCR and ARMM) that explore and discuss the emerging issues and concerns of the young people that need appropriate policy and program responses.

Gender Differentials in the Premarital Sexual Initiation of Zamboanga Peninsula Youth

Rosalyn R. Echem¹ and Maria Paz N. Marquez²

Abstract

The dramatic increase in the level of premarital sex among the youth in Zamboanga Peninsula calls for a deeper understanding of the context surrounding their premarital sexual initiation. To address this need, this study examined the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS4) data for Region IX consisting of 1,118 respondents aged 15–24. Results show that males in the region started engaging in premarital sex one year earlier than females, with a median age at sexual initiation of 17.0 and 18.0 years, respectively. While most youth were engaged in productive activities during their first premarital sex, a substantial proportion were neither studying nor working. Most males' first sexual partners were younger than them, while the opposite was true for female youth. The majority of the youth's first sexual partners were those they were in a romantic relationship with. Most of them, particularly among females, engaged in sex again with the same partner. The reasons for sexual initiation varied widely, but a notable gender differential was evident in that females were more motivated by emotions while males were motivated by the physical reason of sexual gratification. The most common venue of the first sexual act was the youth's own home or their partner's home, suggesting the absence of supervision from parents or other adults in the home. The majority of females' sexual debuts were unplanned, with a notable proportion forced into sexual intercourse. Nearly all youth in the region did not use any form of protection during their first sexual act. The results clearly establish that sexual behavior is gendered and that sexuality is an important gender issue, especially among the young females in the region.

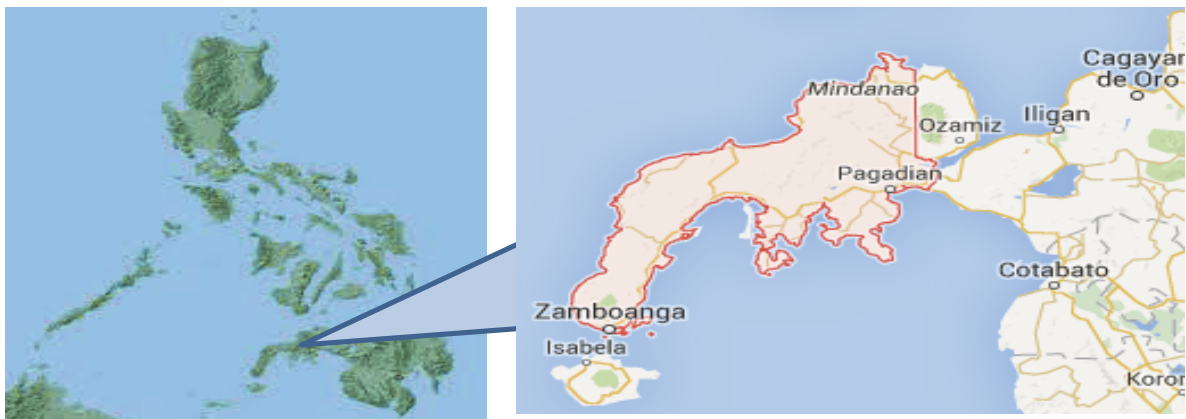
Keywords: premarital sex, sexual initiation, gender, Zamboanga Peninsula, youth

¹ Director, Gender Research and Resource Center, Associate Professor, College of Liberal Arts, Western Mindanao State University (rosalynchem@yahoo.com)

² Associate Professor, Population Institute, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman

Background and context

Region IX or the Zamboanga Peninsula (previously called Western Mindanao) is located in the northwestern section of Mindanao in the Philippines (see Figure 1). It extends toward the southwest part of the Sulu archipelago and Borneo, covering a total land area of roughly 18,730 square kilometers. The region is composed of three provinces (Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga Sibugay), five cities, and 67 municipalities. The five cities located in this region are Zamboanga, Dipolog, Dapitan, Pagadian, and Isabela (geographically located in the Basilan mainland).



Source: Philippine Google Satellite Map

Figure 1. Map of Zamboanga Peninsula

Zamboanga Peninsula is largely agricultural. In 2013, the region contributed 2 percent to the country's gross domestic product, and the gross regional domestic product expanded by 4.3 percent. The agriculture, hunting, forestry, and fishing sector, with its 21.7 percent share of the regional economy, grew by 0.74 percent (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2013). Based on the 2010 census, the region is home to 3,407,353 residents, with an annual population growth rate estimated at 2 percent from 1990–2010, which is slightly lower than the national rate of 2.1 percent for the same period.

According to the 2010 census, the region has a young population with a median age of 23.4 years, which approximates the national figure (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). The youth aged 15–24 years, totaling 686,024, constitute about 20.1 percent of the total household population. Males outnumber the females in this segment of the population (51.1% vs. 48.9%, respectively). Males and females aged 15–19 make up 11.3 percent of the total household population, while individuals aged 20–24 account for about 8.9 percent.

In the past 20 years, the prevalence of premarital sex among young Filipinos 15–24 years old has nearly doubled from 17.8 percent in 1994 to 32.2 percent in 2013 (Demographic Research and Development Foundation & UP Population Institute, 2014). In Zamboanga Peninsula, the rate of increase is even more staggering; the level of premarital sex among Region IX youth rose from 19.3 percent in 2002 to 34.2 percent in 2013.³ The increase among females is even higher, as the level of premarital sex nearly tripled from 11.9 percent to 31.6 percent over the same period.

In addition to premarital sex, recent findings from the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS4) also revealed that risky sexual behaviors have become more common among Region IX youth in the last 10 years. Two in five young people in the region have already engaged in sex, and the age at sexual initiation is getting younger over the years (Marquez, 2016). The region also recorded the highest incidence of unprotected first premarital sexual activity at 91.9 percent (Marquez, 2016). It therefore comes as no surprise that teenage pregnancy is also rising (Natividad & Marquez, 2016). What is more alarming is that reports from the City Health Office of Zamboanga City show that all six new HIV cases recorded in 2014 are in the ages of 15–24 (Locsin, 2014). It appears that despite the various programs and initiatives being implemented by the Commission on Population, the Department of Health, and various non-government organizations on adolescent sexuality and reproductive health (ASRH), the young people of the region continue to engage in risky sexual behaviors.

All these statistics call for a deeper understanding of the factors that place Region IX youth at risk for unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) through a study that will provide valuable inputs into the design of effective interventions to stem these portentous trends. Hence, this study seeks to describe the nature and context of premarital sexual initiation, specifically gender differentials in the characteristics of the youth and their first sexual partner, the circumstances of sexual initiation, and the contraceptive practices during sexual initiation. Based on the findings, the study also aims to provide appropriate recommendations for planners and implementers of ASRH programs and services in the region.

Data and methods

The study utilized the YAFS4 data for Region IX. YAFS4 is a nationwide survey of 19,178 Filipino youth aged 15–24 years. It is the fourth in a series of nationally and regionally representative surveys on the youth conducted by the Demographic Research

³ Based on special tabulations of the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study data.

and Development Foundation and the University of the Philippines Population Institute. The survey elicited information on various sexual and non-sexual risky behaviors and their determinants. The Western Mindanao State University undertook the data collection in the region from January to March 2013.

A total of 1,118 respondents were interviewed from 65 barangays and 974 households in Region IX. Of the total respondents, 552 are males and 566 are females. Unweighted data were used in the analysis.

The study is descriptive in nature. The focus of the paper is on premarital sexual initiation, as the information collected by the survey on marital sexual initiation was not as extensive. For the profile of the respondents, frequency and percentage distributions were presented. The bivariate analysis examined gender differences in various circumstances surrounding premarital sex. Crosstabulations were employed to examine gender differentials in the pattern of sexual initiation, while chi-square tests and t-tests were used to determine statistically significant differentials. For the analysis of the timing of sexual initiation, survival analysis was utilized. Survival analysis is considered the most appropriate statistical technique when examining censored observations such as the age at first sex of this sample of young people aged 15–24. This method allows information on young people who did not yet have sexual experience at the time of the interview to be incorporated into the analysis.

Results

Profile of the youth

Table 1 presents the distribution of male and female youth according to selected socio-demographic characteristics. Most of the youth are teenagers 15–19 years old (61.1% among males and 53.2% among females). A great majority, nearly nine in ten, live in rural areas. Two thirds of the youth are Catholics, while one fifth are adherents of other Christian religions. A substantial one tenth of the Region IX youth profess the Muslim faith.

Region IX is a melting pot of different ethnic groups. Two thirds of the youth are Cebuano or Bisaya, with the proportion slightly higher for males than for females. Another 11.1 percent of both sexes are Zamboangeños, and 7.2 percent identified themselves as Subanen. Ethnic groups such as Tausug, Sama, Maguindanaoan, and Maranao constitute 15.4 percent of the youth in the region.

Table 1. Percent distribution of the youth according to their socio-demographic characteristics by sex

Characteristics	Male	Female	Both sexes
Age			
15–19	61.1	53.2	57.1
20–24	38.9	46.8	42.9
Place of residence			
Urban	11.2	13.8	12.5
Rural	88.8	86.2	87.5
Religion			
Catholic	68.1	68.9	68.5
Other Christian	21.2	21.0	21.1
Muslim	10.5	9.9	10.2
None	0.2	0.2	0.2
Ethnicity			
Cebuano/Bisaya	68.1	64.7	66.2
Zamboangeño	10.7	11.5	11.1
Subanen	6.9	7.4	7.2
Others	14.3	16.4	15.4
Highest educational attainment			
Elementary undergraduate	14.9	8.1	11.4
Elementary graduate	9.2	4.6	6.9
High school undergraduate	38.6	38.5	38.6
High school graduate	11.8	18.2	15.0
Vocational	5.1	5.5	5.3
College undergraduate	15.9	20.7	18.3
College graduate	4.0	4.4	4.2
Post-college	0.5	0.0	0.3
Main activity			
Studying	37.0	37.3	37.1
Working	38.9	10.2	24.4
Doing housework	5.1	36.9	21.2
Neither studying nor working	19.0	15.5	17.3
Socio-economic status (wealth index)			
Poorest	36.1	32.9	34.4
Second	25.2	23.7	24.4
Middle	17.0	17.3	17.2
Fourth	12.5	15.0	13.8
Richest	9.2	11.1	10.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	552	566	1,118

By highest educational attainment, more than one third of the youth are high school undergraduates (38.6%), and another 15 percent were able to complete high school. Five percent have some vocational schooling. Nearly one fourth (22.8%) went to college, but only 4.2 percent were able to earn a college degree. Filipino females' predominance in education over males is also apparent among Region IX youth. More females finished high school and reached the tertiary level compared with males.

The proportion of the youth in the region who are "idle" is quite substantial, especially among females, more than half of whom were neither studying nor working at the time of the interview. This is because a considerable proportion (36.9%) of female youth is engaged in housework. Similar proportions of male and female youth are studying, but males dominate the working youth (38.9% for males vs. 10.2% for females).

The socio-economic status of the youth in the region depicts a dismal picture. The results show that a substantial proportion of the youth are living in poverty, with 36.1 percent of males and 32.9 percent of females belonging to the poorest quintile.

With regard to marital status, about three fourths of the youth are not married, with more single males than single females (85.0% vs. 61.5%, respectively; Table 2). A good proportion of the female youth are already in union, either through formal marriage (16.8%) or a living-in arrangement (20.0%).

Table 2 also reveals that 41.6 percent of the youth have sexual experience and a little more than a third (34.2%) have premarital sexual experience. Slightly more males have premarital sex experience than females (36.8% vs. 31.6%, respectively). However, the reverse is true in overall sexual experience; 40 percent of males and 43.1 percent of females have engaged in sexual intercourse. Based on the data, it can be surmised that most sexual initiations of both male and female youth in the region transpire outside marital unions.

Table 2. Percent distribution of the youth according to their marital status and sexual experience by sex

Characteristics	Male	Female	Both sexes
Marital status			
Never married	85.0	61.5	73.1
Formally married	6.0	16.8	11.4
Living in	8.9	20.0	14.5
Separated	0.2	1.8	1.0
Experience of sex			
With sexual experience	40.0	43.1	41.6
Without sexual experience	60.0	56.9	58.4
Experience of premarital sex			
With premarital sex experience	36.8	31.6	34.2
Without premarital sex experience	63.2	68.4	65.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	552	566	1,118

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

The timing of sexual initiation

When it comes to the timing of the first sexual activity, on average, males engage in sexual intercourse at a much younger age than females. This is evident in the lower mean and median ages at sexual initiation and first premarital sex. Looking at the median ages, males engage in premarital sex one year earlier than females (17.0 vs. 18.0 years, respectively; Table 3). For the overall sexual initiation, the median age at first sex among males is 17.8 years, lower than the females' 18.1 years.

Table 3. Summary statistics of the age at first sex and age at first premarital sex by sex of youth

Summary statistics	First sex			First premarital sex		
	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes
Minimum	12	5	5	12	5	5
Maximum	24	24	24	24	23	24
Mean	17.9	18.0	17.9	17.3	17.6	17.4
Median	17.8	18.1	18.0	17.0	18.0	17.0
Std. dev.	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.5	2.3
N of cases	213	188	401	195	123	318

Figure 2 shows the cumulative percentage of Region IX youth who have initiated premarital sex and initiated sexual intercourse (both marital and premarital) by age at initiation. Overall, the figure shows a contrasting gender pattern in the age at sexual initiation and age at first premarital sex. For the latter, the figure reveals that at any given age, the cumulative proportions who have engaged in premarital sex are higher for males compared with females. For instance, by age 18, 39.9 percent of males and 35.5 percent of females have engaged in premarital sex.

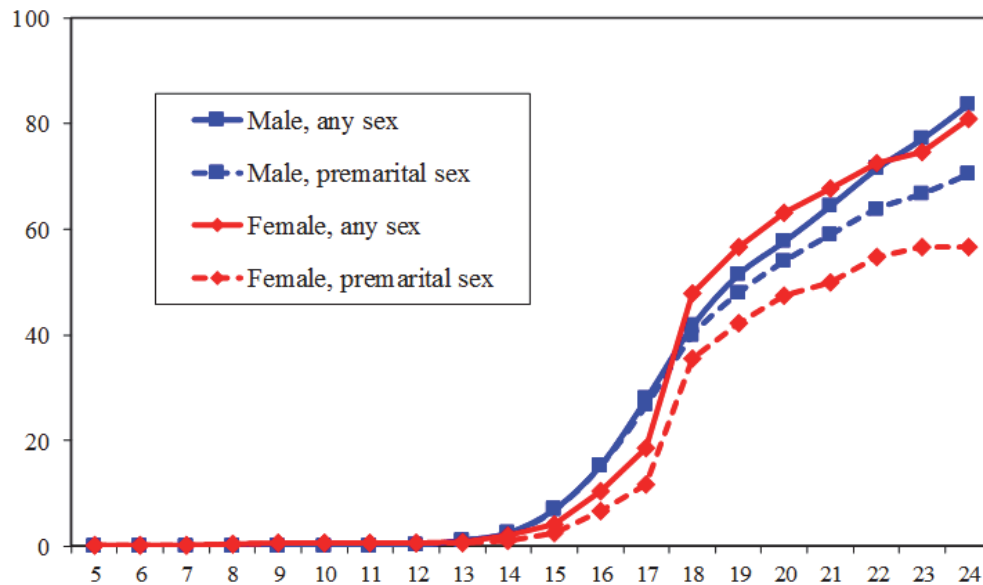


Figure 2. Cumulative percentage of male and female youth by age at first sex and age at first premarital sex

However, for the combined marital and premarital sexual initiation, the proportions for males are higher except for ages 18 to 21 years, where females dominated the males. For instance, by age 17, 28 percent of males and 18.5 percent of females have engaged in sexual intercourse. The females' sexual experience accelerates faster after this age so that by age 18, 47.9 percent of females have sexual experience, surpassing the level of males at 41.7 percent.

Characteristics of youth and their first premarital sex partner

Table 4 describes the characteristics of the youth and their partners during premarital sexual initiation. The table shows no significant difference in the ages at sexual initiation between males and females. It should be noted, though, that almost half of the males (49.2%) started sexual activity between the ages of 15 and 17, while the majority (56.1%) of females started their premarital sexual activity at the age of majority (18 years old) or higher.

Table 4. Percent distribution of the youth according to their own and their partner's characteristics during premarital sexual initiation by sex

Characteristics at the time of premarital sexual initiation	Male	Female	Both sexes
Age of respondent (in years)			
Below 15	6.7	4.9	6.0
15–17	49.2	39.0	45.3
18–19	30.8	38.2	33.6
20–24	13.3	17.9	15.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	195	123	318
Main activity of respondent**			
Studying	15.3	34.2	22.6
Working	55.1	41.5	49.8
Neither studying nor working	29.6	24.4	27.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	196	123	319
Age of sexual partner (in years)**			
Below 15	6.4	0.8	4.2
15–17	47.9	7.4	31.9
18–19	30.3	18.0	25.5
20–24	12.2	49.2	26.8
25 and over	3.2	24.6	11.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean	17.6	22.2	19.4
N of cases	188	122	310
Age difference between partner and respondent**			
Partner older than respondent	38.3	86.8	57.3
Partner's age same as respondent	26.6	7.4	19.1
Partner younger than respondent	35.1	5.8	23.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean	0.2	4.5	1.9
N of cases	188	121	309

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4. Percent distribution of the youth according to their own and their partner's characteristics during premarital sexual initiation by sex (con't)

Characteristics at the time of premarital sexual initiation	Male	Female	Both sexes
Marital status of partner*			
Never married	99.0	93.5	96.8
Formally married	0.5	3.3	1.6
Living in	0.0	3.3	1.3
Separated	0.5	0.0	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	193	123	316
Relationship with partner**			
Fiancé/fiancée/boyfriend/girlfriend	77.9	97.6	85.6
Friend	14.9	0.0	9.1
Textmate	0.5	0.0	0.3
Relative	0.0	1.6	0.6
Acquaintance	2.6	0.8	1.9
Stranger	4.1	0.0	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	195	124	319
% who had sex with first partner again**			
	44.3	68.3	52.8
N of cases	183	101	284
% whose sexual partner became their spouse (among ever-married youth)**			
	31.0	89.9	68.2
N of cases	58	99	157

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The main activity of the youth at the time of their first sex is significantly different for males and females. The largest disparity can be found in the proportion of youth who are studying. Fifteen percent of male youth were still students at the time of their first sex, half of the proportion among females. It is worth noting that a substantial proportion of the youth in the region, 29.6 percent among males and 24.4 percent among

females, were “idle” (i.e., neither studying nor working) at the time of their first premarital sexual activity.

The age of the first sexual partner is also significantly different between sexes. More than eight in ten (84.6%) of the males had sexual partners younger than 20 years old, mostly in the ages of 15–17. In contrast, most females had partners who were in their twenties when they had their first premarital sex.

There is also a significant gender disparity in the age difference between the respondents and their sexual partners. A great majority (86.8%) of women’s first premarital sexual partners were older than them, whereas there are no marked differences in the age gap between males and their partners. On average, the first sexual partner of females is 4.5 years older than them, while there is only a 0.2-year difference between the ages of the males and their partners.

The marital status of the first premarital sexual partner also varies between sexes. Nearly all (99.0%) of the males’ partners were unmarried, while a substantial 6.6 percent of females’ partners were either formally married or in a living-in arrangement with someone else.

The respondents’ relationship with their first sexual partner reveals interesting findings. Almost all the females identified their first sexual partner as their boyfriend or fiancé, while only three fourths of the males reported their first sexual partner as their girlfriend or fiancée. Some of the male respondents said that they had their first premarital sex with a friend or a textmate (15.4%), while a few admitted to having sex with an acquaintance or a stranger (6.7%).

The premarital sexual activity of the youth in Region IX did not end with the first sexual encounter. More than half of the youth (52.8%) shared that they had engaged in sex again with their first sexual partner. This is particularly pronounced among females, with 68.3 percent having sex again with their first partner compared with only 44.3 percent among males. This is not unexpected given the earlier finding that a substantial proportion of females have partners with whom they have a romantic attachment.

Among the ever-married females, nine in ten eventually married their first sexual partner. In contrast, less than one third of the males ended up marrying their first partner. This is generally expected in the conservative multi-ethnic communities of the region, where a double standard in sexuality still prevails; premarital sexual activities are generally frowned upon among women but generally encouraged among men under the guise of machismo.

Circumstances of premarital sexual initiation

As observed in Table 5, the venue of the first premarital sex does not differ significantly between males and females. Still, it is worthwhile to examine the variation in the setting of Region IX youth's first sexual activity. Most (54.5%) sexual debuts of females happened in either their own home or their partners' home, suggesting the possible absence of parental supervision when the act was committed. Many males reported the same setting, but a substantial 18 percent also reported the abode of either a friend or a relative as the place of their sexual initiation. Motels and hotels were also popular venues of the first sexual trysts of the youth in Region IX. It is quite disturbing to note, however, that boarding houses and dormitories are also the venues of the youth's first sex. The temporary independence gained by the youth from residing in such places and the possible complacency of the owner or caretaker of the boarding house or dormitory could be plausible reasons for the first premarital sexual consummation. In addition, 6.3 percent had their first sex in less private places such as beaches, parks, and fields. Even school grounds were the location for 2 percent of young men's first sexual experience. Public places such as gyms, bus or jeepney terminals, ships, and the workplace were also cited as the venue of first sex of both male and female youth.

There appears to be a universal reason why young people engage in sex for the first time. Albeit a cliché, love appears to be the primary motivation for male and female youth's sexual initiation, as gleaned from Table 5. This is observed especially among females (78.4%), who showed affection to their partners by surrendering their virginity. This is consistent with the earlier finding that most females had their sexual debut with their boyfriend or fiancé. Even though a considerable proportion of males cited love as the main reason for sexual initiation, many of them also cited other motivations. Over a third of males wanted to experience something new, while almost a quarter wanted to relieve sexual tension. A considerable proportion of males cited pressure from their partner to have sex (7.2%) and being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (7.2%) as factors for their first sexual experience.

Zamboanga youth also revealed a disturbing motive for agreeing to have sex for the first time: to get themselves or their partners pregnant. This was reported by more females (5.4%) than males (3.6%). This finding suggests that pregnancy is being used as a way to keep the partner in the relationship. Peer pressure was also cited by males as one of the reasons that provoked them to engage in sex the first time, which validates the continuous struggle to prove one's masculinity observed among Filipino men.

The wantedness status of the premarital sexual debut supports the previous discussion. More than two fifths of the youth in Region IX confirmed that the first premarital sexual activity was something that they wanted to happen; this is more evident among the males (51.0%) than the females (30.1%). Additional findings reveal that significant proportions of the youth were exposed to pressure exerted by their partner: either they did not want to engage in sex but went along with it or they did not plan the

sexual act but it happened anyway (47.3% for males and 60.9% for females). This expression of ambivalence signifies that the youth in Region IX lack the skills to negotiate their own sexuality, especially among the females. Coercive sex or possibly rape also paved the way for their first sex; this was boldly shared by 8.9 percent of females. Males are also not exempted from forced sex, as 1.5 percent reported that their first sexual intercourse happened against their will.

The main reason for engaging in sex and the wantedness of sex discussed above both display significant variation between sexes.

Table 5. Percent distribution of the youth according to the circumstances of premarital sexual initiation by sex

Circumstances of premarital sexual initiation	Male	Female	Both sexes
Venue of first premarital sex			
Own home	17.0	19.5	18.0
Partner's house	23.7	35.0	28.1
Friend/relative's house	18.0	15.4	17.0
Motel/hotel	14.4	8.9	12.3
Boarding house/dormitory	11.3	12.2	11.7
Beach/park/field	8.8	2.4	6.3
School	2.1	0.8	1.6
Elsewhere ^a	4.7	5.7	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	194	123	317
Main reason for having sex the first time**			
To express love	20.5	78.4	41.5
To experience something new/curious	35.9	7.2	25.5
To relieve sexual tension	22.6	1.8	15.0
Partner wanted me to	7.2	4.5	6.2
Under the influence of drugs/alcohol	7.2	2.7	5.6
Peer pressure	2.6	0.0	1.6
To get self/partner pregnant	3.6	5.4	4.2
"Trip lang"	0.4	0.0	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	195	111	306

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

^aIncludes workplace, apartment, nipa hut, jeepney/bus terminal, ship, and gym.

** $p < .01$.

Table 5. Percent distribution of the youth according to the circumstances of premarital sexual initiation by sex (con't)

Circumstances of premarital sexual initiation	Male	Female	Both sexes
Wantedness of sex**			
Wanted to happen at the time	51.0	30.1	42.9
Did not want to happen but went along with	20.1	14.6	18.0
Did not plan to happen but happened anyway	27.3	46.3	34.7
Happened against will/forced into doing	1.5	8.9	4.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	194	123	317

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

^aIncludes workplace, apartment, nipa hut, jeepney/bus terminal, ship, and gym.

** $p < .01$.

Contraceptive use during premarital sexual initiation

Considering the increasing trend in premarital sexual activity of the youth in Region IX over the past decade, it is alarming to note that most youth are engaging in sexual activity that is considered unsafe because of non-use of protection against the risk of STIs or unplanned pregnancy. The results in Table 6 show that nearly all Region IX youth did not use any form of protection during their first sex. Only a small proportion of males (10.2%) and an even smaller percentage of females (7.2%) used protection during their initial sexual activity. A comparison across the regions in the country reveals that the prevalence of unprotected premarital sexual initiation is highest among young people in Region IX and SOCCSKSARGEN (Marquez, 2016).

Among the few youths who used any form of protection, condom and withdrawal are the most popular methods. The number of respondents who used any form of protection, however, is too few to warrant more meaningful analyses.

Table 6. Percentage of youth who used protection during premarital sexual initiation and percent distribution of contraceptive method by sex

Contraceptive practice	Male	Female	Both sexes
% who had used contraceptives during first premarital sex	10.2	7.2	9.1
N of cases	195	125	320
Contraceptive method used during first premarital sex			
Condom	(60.0)	(77.8)	(65.5)
Pill	(10.0)	(0.0)	(6.9)
Calendar rhythm	(5.0)	(0.0)	(3.4)
Withdrawal	(15.0)	(22.2)	(17.2)
Condom and withdrawal	(5.0)	(0.0)	(3.4)
Withdrawal and Cortal/aspirin	(5.0)	(0.0)	(3.4)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	20	9	29
Main reason for non-use of contraceptives during first premarital sex**			
Did not expect to have sex	58.2	39.1	51.2
Partner objected	8.2	20.7	12.8
Sex is not much fun with contraceptives	12.7	5.4	10.0
Wanted to use something but couldn't under the circumstances	6.3	4.3	5.6
Did not know about contraceptives	4.4	9.8	6.4
Did not know where to get contraceptives	1.9	1.1	1.6
Believed it was wrong to use contraceptives	0.6	3.3	1.6
Believed it was dangerous to use contraceptives	0.6	2.2	1.2
Contraceptives are difficult to use	1.3	0.0	0.8
Awkward to ask partner to use contraceptives	0.0	1.1	0.4
Ashamed to buy contraceptives	0.6	0.0	0.4
Wanted to become pregnant	0.0	5.4	2.0
Personal choice	4.4	6.5	5.2
To be better	0.6	0.0	0.4
Raped	0.0	1.1	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N of cases	158	92	250

Note. Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Figures in parentheses are based on fewer than 30 cases.

** $p < .01$.

The low level of contraceptive use during the first sexual activity confirms the previous finding that most of the first sexual activity is unplanned or unintentional. This is reiterated in Table 6. Fifty-eight percent of males and 39.1 percent of females reported that they did not expect sex to happen at the time it did. This is the most commonly cited reason why the young people in the region did not use any form of protection during their first premarital sexual activity. Apart from this, several other reasons were cited by the Region IX youth. The partner's objection to the idea of contraception was mostly expressed by females (20.7%). The machismo attitude of Filipino males emerged, as 12.7 percent reported that the use of contraceptives makes sex less pleasurable. Other frequently cited reasons include the lack of knowledge about contraception, lack of access to contraceptives, and circumstances that did not warrant the use of contraceptives. Some of the youth in the region have certain beliefs regarding contraceptives, such as the belief that contraceptives are wrong or dangerous to use, that it is shameful to buy contraceptives, and that it is awkward to ask the partner to use them; these beliefs were expressed by both sexes.

Summary and recommendations

The increasing trend in the prevalence of premarital sex among the youth in Region IX as gleaned from the three YAFS studies calls for a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding premarital sex in the region. This study provided important information on the characteristics of the youth and their partners during their first sexual activity and the context in which the sexual initiation transpired. The study further documented that these characteristics and context are very different for men and women.

In terms of the timing of sexual initiation, males in Region IX start engaging in premarital sex one year earlier than females, with a median age at sexual initiation of 17.0 and 18.0 years, respectively. These figures are lower than the national averages of 17.8 for males and 18.2 for females (Marquez, 2016). The figures are comparable with those reported by youth elsewhere who generally commence sexual activities between the ages of 15 and 18 years. In Ethiopia, for instance, the median age of sexual debut is 17 years (Bizuayehu, Abyu, & Demessie, 2015). A separate study of Ethiopian students revealed a much lower figure, with a mean age at first sexual intercourse of 16.5 for males and 15.9 for females (Bogale & Seme, 2014). One study in the United States indicated that the mean age of sexual debut among American females is approximately 17.6 years (Magnusson, Nield, & Lapane, 2015), while among male college students in India, the mean age at first sex is 18 years (Prasad, Kumar, & Poovitha, 2014).

The common pattern in the age gap between male and female sexual partners was also validated in the study. Males prefer younger sexual partners, while the opposite is true for female youth. The majority of respondents reported that their first sexual

experience happened with their boyfriend or girlfriend, and most of them engaged in sex again with the same partner, particularly among females. The different circumstances that prompted the sexual act, such as an expression of love with the sexual partner among females, the liberty from the absence of adults or parents at home, and the poor anticipation that the sex would happen, were expressed by both male and female youth. Male youth boldly articulated their pleasure-seeking attitude toward sex, as curiosity and the need to relieve tension were the primary reasons cited for engaging in sexual intercourse. This adventurous character may have led to the unprotected sexual activity by almost all males. The main reasons for young people's sexual activities are consistent with studies conducted elsewhere that show physical pleasure as most males' motivating factor in sexual relations, while emotional reasons such as the expression of love for their partner figure prominently among females (Freitas, 2007; Hamprecht, Hodzic, & Warriner, 2004).

It is worth noting that some female youth in the study experienced forced or coercive sex with their partner, as evidenced by their reports of being an unwilling sexual partner, the desire to use contraceptives but the inability to do so under the circumstances, and the actual testimony of being forced into sex. These incidents should be considered for immediate action by the authorities as possible cases of rape.

The power dynamics between sexes and the gender relations found in the study are consistent with the findings of similar studies. That the females engage in the first premarital sex with an older partner as shown in the study could limit their negotiating power for self-protection during the sexual activity, which may expose them to higher risk for unintended pregnancy and STIs. Furthermore, as love is the primary reason of most of the young women in the region for engaging in sex, this weakens the opportunity to rationalize the consequences of the behavior. On the other hand, males' adventurous nature and machismo character expose them to the same sexual health risks. The reasons mentioned above may have brought about the high level of non-use of protection during the first premarital sex.

In addition, the consummation of most young people's first sexual acts within their own abodes which imply the absence or lack of supervision from adults and parents. The Filipino value of upholding one's virginity or purity especially among women appears to be fading away. Sex has seemingly become an expected consequence of any romantic relationship to keep the relationship going, as seen in the expression of love as the main reason why women engaged in sex and the high number of females who engaged in repeated sex with their first sexual partners.

This study clearly established that sexual behavior is gendered and an important gender issue especially among the young females in Region IX. This group of youth appears to possess poor negotiation skills and is stereotyped as emotional and submissive. There could be a miscommunication of sexuality between the intimate partners, especially among the males. The demonstration of one's feelings or affection through hugs by the females could have been interpreted as a need for sex rather than a sense of affirmation or belongingness, especially if this scenario happens in the partner's home. Because young women are not expected or trained by society to assert their sexuality, their partners' desire for sexual intercourse might prevail even if it is against their will.

Given the findings of this study, a number of program and policy recommendations are put forward. First, age- and culture-appropriate sexuality and reproductive health education should be fully implemented by trained and gender-sensitive teachers and health service providers. To encourage young people to delay their sexual initiation, these education programs should address issues such as gender stereotyping, masculinity, and gender-based violence. Modules on values formation and negotiation and life skills for the youth in terms of reproductive, sexual, and health rights can assist in this endeavor. Related to this, the Commission on Population should consider revisiting their existing modules to ensure that the core messages are gender sensitive and gender responsive and that the mode of dissemination is effective.

The study shows that while the majority of youth were engaged in productive activities either in school or at work during premarital sexual initiation, a substantial proportion of youth were idle. Given this finding, special attention in education campaigns should be paid to this sector of the population. Leading agencies on ASRH should engage other stakeholders and members of the community, especially the parents, toward holistic policy and program implementation targeting the idle youth in the region. This group of young people is not only held hostage to the cycle of poverty and crime, but is also more predisposed to health and social risks such as STIs and HIV.

The study documented that nearly all sexual initiations among the region's youth are unprotected from unplanned pregnancy and STI transmission. One way to address this issue programmatically is to encourage abstinence until these young people gain the maturity and responsibility to practice safe sex. Campaigns for the promotion of abstinence and healthy and safe romantic relationships among young people should therefore be intensified. These campaigns should be a concerted effort among all sectors, to be led by youth leaders in schools, faith-based organizations, youth organizations, traditional media, and social media networks.

In addition, forums and conversations with the youth of Zamboanga Peninsula should be conducted on how gender and power relations can influence and affect their behaviors and decision making. Finally, there should be continuing education on responsible parenthood and reproductive health in schools and in the community, focusing on male involvement and responsibility in engaging in risky sexual behavior such as early sex.

Owing to sample size limitations, the study was limited to descriptive analysis. Future studies based on data with a larger sample size can provide a more in-depth examination of the factors affecting the premarital sexual initiation of the Zamboanga Peninsula youth. While the results provide policymakers and program implementers with important information on the factors that encourage young people to engage in early sex, an examination of other factors such as familial and social relationships, personal beliefs, and values that may potentially affect sexual initiation can further enhance our understanding of young people's sexual behavior. One rich area for further research is the near universal unprotected sexual initiation of Zamboanga Peninsula youth, which, at 90.9 percent, is the highest in the country. A mix of both quantitative and qualitative studies can shed light on the reasons that inhibit young people in the region from using protection during their sexual debut.

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