

# Adolescent Sexual Behavior in China: Evaluating the Impact of a Sex Education and Reproductive Health Service Program in Suburban Shanghai

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## Short Abstract:

This paper evaluates the impact of a sex education and reproductive health service program, the first of its kind to be implemented in China, on the behavioral patterns of unmarried youth aged 15-24 in suburban Shanghai. The program provided sex-related knowledge and contraceptive services through six types of intervention measures. We employ chi-square tests and logistic regression to compare the results of surveys conducted among intervention and control groups both prior to and after the completion of the 20-month program. Results indicate that while the intervention did not postpone all groups of adolescents from initiating sexual activity, it was effective in delaying the onset of premarital sexual activity among participants still remained in high school at the time of the post-intervention survey. The intervention was successful in decreasing rates of sexual coercion and increasing the likelihood of consistent contraceptive use among youth who engage in sexual behavior. Furthermore, the program appears to have had some deterrent effect on premarital pregnancy. These results underscore the potential for programs of this kind to influence adolescent sexual behavior in China.

## Abstract:

**Objective:** To evaluate the impact of a community-based sex education and reproductive health service program in altering sexual behavior and contraceptive use among unmarried youth.

**Subjects & Method:** A community-based intervention study was carried out in two comparable towns in the Songjiang district of Shanghai, China. Participants in the first town, the intervention group, received sex education and reproductive health services over a period of 20 months. Participants in the second town, the control group, were surveyed in the absence of any such program. In all, 2227 youths aged 15-24 years were recruited for the project, with 1220 in the intervention group and 1007 in the control group. Subjects in the intervention group were provided six types of intervention measures, including educational reading material, videos, lectures, group discussions, contraceptive services and counseling. In order to evaluate the success of the project, comparisons are made between the intervention and control groups both prior to and after the intervention period in the prevalence of premarital sexual activity, sexual coercion, contraceptive use and pregnancy.

**Results:** The intervention did not postpone all groups of adolescents from initiating sexual activity, it was effective in delaying the onset of premarital sexual activity among participants still remained in high school at the time of the post-intervention survey. The intervention succeeded in reducing rates of sexual coercion, increasing contraceptive use and decreasing risk of pregnancy among unmarried youth. According to the baseline survey, 9.7% of youth in the intervention group and 11.0% of youth in the control had sexual experience prior to the commencement of the study. Following the intervention, the reported rates of premarital sex for the two groups were 30.8% and 33.1%

respectively, with no statistically significant difference between them. However, stratified analysis reveals that the intervention did delay the onset of premarital sex among high school students in the intervention group. 1.4% of these students reported having initiated sexual intercourse during the intervention period, which is significantly lower compared with high school students in the control group (4.1%). Among those who were sexually experienced at the outset of the program, 2.8% of subjects in the intervention group said they had forced their partners to have sex during the period of intervention, which is substantially lower than that of the control group (8.5%). The adjusted odds ratio from the logistic regression for sexual coercion is 0.34. According to the baseline survey, 34.6% of subjects in the intervention group and 40.8% in the control used contraceptives every time or frequently. After the intervention, the proportions were 89.0% and 44.6% for the two respective groups with an adjusted odds ratio from ordered logistic regression of 6.20. Furthermore, the intervention appears to have had some effect on preventing premarital pregnancy. 18.6% subjects in the intervention group who were sexually active reported having conceived or impregnated his partner, which is statistically significant lower than that of the control (25.7%).

**Conclusion:** Many sexually active unmarried youths in China are at risk for unwanted pregnancy and STI/HIV infection and fail to take measures to mitigate these risks. Community-level interventions may be an effective way to reach large numbers of youths, to promote healthy sexual negotiation and to change their contraceptive-use behaviors.

**Key words:** sex education, reproductive health services, intervention, premarital sex, sex coercion, contraceptive use, pregnancy, China