

P3.7. Awareness of Youth Living in Lahore Regarding Reproductive Health - Mariam Zahid Malik, Contech International Health Consultants; **Amanullah Khan**, Contech International Health Consultants
E-mail: bijayancert@gmail.com

Background/Significance: Pakistan currently has one of largest cohorts of young people in its history, with approximately 25 million people between ages 15-24 years, however data on youth's awareness regarding reproductive health in Pakistan is paltry and often anecdotal. We, in past have generalized youth in all parts of country, whereas it is felt that gap exists in knowledge, awareness, attitude and behaviors of female & male youth separately about SRH in a metropolitan city. This particular study opens up issues and differences in perceptions regarding RH amongst both genders giving us an opportunity to treat them as separate entities and not as whole, as previously done.

Methodology: A Literature review was conducted. The study was conducted in Lahore city, Punjab province of Pakistan. Focus Group Discussions and in-depth interviews were used for eliciting views of major stakeholders such as Parents/Teachers of youth, Government Officials, Service providers, NGOs/CBOs officials working for youth and Youth (15-24 years). Qualitative methodologies were used for in-depth understanding of youth and to verify role of stakeholders in manipulating perceptions/beliefs of youth. Customized instruments and guides were developed for achieving set objectives. Two-days training was conducted to train interviewers/facilitators. Tools were field-tested and modified. This study formed its basis in combining two techniques: Dynamic Contextual Analyses (DCA) and Formative research.

Findings: Hypothesis set for research was proven as it was found that cultural and social dimensions do effect very differently on sexual and reproductive health of both males and females separately. Findings were divided into following sub-themes;

- General well being and problems of youth
- Youth's participation in school/college, work and activities
- Health and sexuality
- Influences on youth: Parents/media/peers
- Relationships and marriage
- Knowledge regarding sexuality, sex and reproductive health, family planning, STIs, HIV/AIDS etc (The discussion touched upon tabooed issues like sex before marriage, prostitution, homosexuality and use of contraceptives).
- Health seeking behaviours
- Opinion about sex education
- Media's role in raising knowledge and awareness regarding SRH
- Sexual experiences and feelings, pressures and issues of S&RH

Some of the key findings are as follows:

- It was seen that male youth were quite comfortable discussing sexual issues with their peers and friends only while urban female youth were quite open and frank with their siblings or cousins. Peri-urban girls however were shy.
- Most females mentioned married friends or elder sisters and in a few cases media as sources of information.
- Misconceptions are being spread and concocted by hakims and quacks.
- All respondents unanimously said that sex-education/reproductive health education should be given at both school/college levels while they also appealed that youth-specific healthcare facilities should be established where both male and female doctors should be placed. But they were all apprehensive about reaction it would have by religious minded population.
- Impact of media campaign of HIV/AIDS prevention was evident and vast majority of youth knew and understood the disease however their concepts on mode of spread were not very clear.
- While talking about premarital sex, most girls said it should be avoided while males were alright with the notion.
- Acceptance of traditional practices of arranged marriages were prominent amongst youth, however parents were also open about option of love marriages.

Knowledge Contribution: Study provided an in-depth insight into lives and thinking of youth living in Lahore. Due to dearth of knowledge earlier, it was expected that topic of sexual health would be difficult and sensitive to talk about however, during the study; it was heartening to see that youth are very open in talking about sex, sexuality and RH. Study aimed at bringing youth's voice into policy making and intervention planning.