

Adolescent Romantic Relationships in a Rapidly Changing Social Environment

Hilal ÖZCEBE¹, Sutay YAVUZ,² Ahmet Sinan TÜKYILMAZ³

Context:

In the life course of an individual adolescence period has a special importance: Adolescent men and women are confronted with various life transitions and they have to make decisions about their future lives. As young people move from early to late adolescence romantic relationships become increasingly significant in their social lives. The experience of emotional relationships is important in terms of psychosocial and sexual development of a young people. Also in certain social contexts such relationships may also have greater influence; they may bring to an end to educational career and bring about an early entrance to marriage.

During the last decades Turkey has undergone significant social, economic and political changes that have a profound impact on its young people's lives. Changes in its social life appear in areas such as extension of a free market economy, volatile economic growth during 1990s, continuing internal migration and urbanization, the liberation of social and political life, attempts of accession to the European Union, and globalization with its new social and cultural dimensions. This rapidly changing social environment brings about substantial difficulties and uncertainties as well as it provides new opportunities to young people.

Research Questions:

This study aims to learn about the experiences of adolescences related to having a boyfriend/girlfriend in Turkey. The study intends to investigate variations of romantic relationship experience among adolescents in the context that characterized by intensive socioeconomic, cultural and political changes over the past decades. We intend to examine how the variations of having a romantic relationship experience between the different groups of adolescents are conditioned by their individual level socioeconomic, characteristics and having more "liberal" (or "conservative") attitudes.

Methodology:

The data we use to analyze stem from the 2007 Turkey Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Survey (2007 TYSRHS), conducted with the collaboration of the Population Association and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Survey sample is designed to measure sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of 15-24 years old youth. It is a sex based sample and designed to have a statistical significance across Turkey (at the levels of 15-19 and 20-24 years age groups).

In Turkey there is not abundant national data on the youth's emotional relationships. At first the methodological difficulties of data collection process on these topics will be discussed. Descriptive part of the study begins to provide information on distribution of adolescents by background

¹ Hacettepe University, Faculty of Medicine, Department of Public Health

² Ankara University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Social Work

³ Hacettepe University, Institute of Population Studies

characteristics. The empirical part is based on logistic regression models that predict the probability that the dependent variable event will occur given a subject's scores on the independent variables. In this study the dependent binary variable Y is defined as whether the adolescent have a boyfriend/girlfriend (Y=1, yes) or not (Y=0, No).

Independent variables thought to affect are as in the following (The levels selected as reference category are indicated with bold characters):

Individual and Contextual Level Characteristics:

Age: **15**, 16, 17, 18, 19

Sex: *Male*, ***Female***

Residence: *Urban*, ***Rural***

Educational Status: ***No educ./First level pri. incom.***, *First level primary*, *Second level primary*, *High school and higher*

Household welfare level: ***Lowest***, *Low*, *Middle*, *High*, *Highest*

Opinions and attitudes that enable adolescents to categorize them as more “liberal” or “conservative” as depend upon approval or **disapproval** of:

Premarital sexual intercourse, Contraceptive usage, having a homosexual friend, having a friend who has already experienced sexual relationship

Summary of Preliminary Descriptive Findings:

Some of the findings of analysis can be briefly stated as in the following.

- 68,9 percent of the youth stated that they have had a boyfriend/girlfriend. This proportion is 60,2 percent among female respondents while it is higher (77,6 percent) among male respondents. Males have this experience at younger ages than females.
- The overall proportion of currently having a boyfriend/girlfriend is 52,3 percent. It is 52,0 percent among female respondents, and 52,5 percent among male respondents.
- Sharing the issue of current boyfriend/girlfriend with someone is more common among female respondents (94,3 percent) compared to male respondents (79,4 percent).
- Female youth share the issue of current boyfriend/girlfriend with their mothers (58,0 percent), sisters (36,0 percent), female relatives (27,5 percent), and fathers (24,8 percent).
- Again, mothers are the prominent figures with whom males share the issue (42,0 percent). Following figures are the ones from their immediate social environment, such as fathers (34,0 percent), brothers (18,3 percent), sisters (16,4 percent), and female relatives (13,5 percent). Proportion of sharing the issue with male friends is 75,2 percent, and that of sharing with female friends is 34,7 percent among male respondents.

The findings of analysis will be discussed in relation to ongoing changes in social environments of adolescents in Turkey.