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## **HANOI ADOLESCENT STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF SOME ASPECTS RELATED TO PUBERTY AND LOVE**

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### **ABSTRACT :**

Nowadays, adolescent students encounter numerous challenges concerning safe sexual practices. The prevalence of risky behaviors among adolescents is on the rise, while their protective factors are diminishing. A subset of teenagers still demonstrate a limited grasp of essential life skills, engaging in behaviors that pose significant risks to their physical and mental well-being, as well as the overall quality of life for themselves and their families. Insufficient knowledge about certain aspects of puberty and misconceptions about love can result in various actions and lifestyles that have moral and personality implications, potentially impacting their future career prospects. Hence, the primary objective of this article is to examine the comprehension of adolescent students regarding various aspects of puberty and their perspectives on love. Building upon this, several influential factors will be assessed to suggest potential measures for enhancing awareness among adolescent students regarding reproductive health care.

Keywords: adolescents, high school students, reproductive health

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### **1. INTRODUCTION :**

Adolescent students are currently facing many "risks" related to adolescent reproductive health safety. Knowledge of some aspects related to reproductive health is limited, especially among young people in rural and remote areas. Today's adolescents argue that sex is not necessarily tied to marriage as traditionally conceived. Adolescents do not have skills in safe sex.... Therefore, through the current state of understanding of adolescent students in some aspects related to love and sexuality, there will be some forecasts proposing solutions to improve adolescents' understanding in the field of reproductive healthcare.

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### **2. THEORETICAL BASES :**

Latin for adolescence means "growing up" or "growing to maturity. Adolescence serves as the transitional phase between infancy and adulthood. It is a crucial period of transformation that necessitates personal growth and adaptation. In 1998, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) jointly defined adolescents as individuals aged between 10 and 19 years. Consequently, adolescents are categorized into three age groups: (i) Early adolescents, aged 10-14 years, (ii) Middle adolescents, aged 15-17 years, and (iii) Late adolescents, aged 18-19 years.

The concept of reproductive health: In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo (Egypt) initiated a new program of action in 1994, shifting from a narrow focus on family planning services to a broader emphasis on the requirements of human reproductive health. At this conference, the notion of "reproductive health" was formally declared and spread to nations worldwide. Reproductive health encompasses the physical, mental, and social well-being related to the functioning of the reproductive system, going beyond the mere absence of disease or disability. It emphasizes the importance of individuals, both men and women, having fulfilling and safe sexual lives, the ability to make informed decisions about reproduction, access to healthcare services, and the right to choose safe and effective family planning methods, including abortion when legal. This comprehensive approach aims to ensure safe pregnancies and childbirth, ultimately giving couples the opportunity to have healthy children.

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### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The research sample consists of 400 adolescent students (aged 15-17), who are presently enrolled in schools in Hanoi in the year 2023. The sample includes one school from an urban area and one school from a rural area. The author employed a random sampling method to determine the number of students required for data collection. However, the selection was based on the gender distribution of students in both schools to ensure the utmost accuracy in information gathering.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS:

### 4.1. Adolescent students' understanding/knowledge of puberty

Puberty is recognized as the stage when both boys and girls reach biological maturity. It is a time of physical growth and rapid alterations in body proportions. These changes are not only visible externally but also occur internally within each individual's psyche. The onset of menstruation in girls and the nocturnal emission in boys are significant milestones that signify crucial physical and psychological transformations in adolescent males and females. These events indicate that both men and women have reached reproductive capability.

**Table 1 : Average age of puberty of adolescent boys and girls (Unit: %)**

	Average Age of Puberty	SAVY 2
<b>Boys</b>	15,13	15,52
<i>Rural</i>	15,16	15,58
<i>Urban</i>	14,61	15,31
<b>Girls</b>	13,65	14,21
<i>Rural</i>	14,48	14,35
<i>Urban</i>	12,76	13,38

Source: Team's Survey Results 2023

In the survey sample, the average age of puberty for adolescent boys was recorded as 15.13 years, whereas for girls it was 13.65 years. Among the participants, 31.9% were boys and 71.8% were girls who had already experienced puberty. Hence, overall, the adolescent students possessed fundamental understandings of the signs puberty in both males and females. The percentage of adolescents who accurately identified the signs of male puberty was 76.2%, while for female puberty it was 85%. Interestingly, 68.5% of female adolescents correctly identified male puberty signs, whereas 67.1% of male adolescents accurately recognized female puberty signs. These findings suggest that perceptions of this issue may be influenced by individuals' own gender experiences.

The level of comprehension of high school students regarding puberty signs was evaluated by presenting a series of questions that described various characteristics of puberty (some of which were true and others false) and categorized into three levels: those who correctly answered only one option were considered to have a low level of understanding, those who answered 2-3 options correctly were deemed to have an average understanding, and those who answered 3 or more options correctly were classified as having a high level of understanding. The outcomes of the assessment are presented below:

**Table 2: Level of understanding of puberty signs according to some characteristics of adolescent students (%)**

Characteristics of adolescent students		Level of understanding		
		Low	Normal	High
Gender	Male	12.3	33.6	54.1
	Female	10.1	45.8	44.1
Age	15	19.2	42.3	38.5
	16	9.6	39.8	50.6
	17	8.3	40.9	50.8
Area	Rural	17.8	43.2	39.0
	Urban	3.1	39.5	57.4
Family education	Educated	7.6	28.5	63.9
	Uneducated	13.0	53.7	33.3
School education	Educated about reproductive health	9.8	39.9	50.3
	Uneducated about reproductive health	11.3	42.0	46.7
Need to learn	Acquired knowledge in reproductive health.	7.7	39.9	52.4
	Not acquired knowledge in reproductive health.	31.2	53.1	15.7

Source: Team's Survey Results 2023

In general, adolescent students correctly answered some characteristics that manifested puberty, but to varying degrees. For adolescent girls, the average level of understanding (answering 2-3 options correctly) was the highest (45.8%). As for adolescent boys, the proportion in the highly knowledgeable group is the majority (54.1%).

There was no statistically significant correlation found between age and comprehension of puberty traits ( $p > 0.05$ ). Nevertheless, most 15-year-olds exhibited low to moderate understanding. In contrast, the 16 and 17 age groups demonstrated a higher level of knowledge regarding puberty characteristics (50.6% for 16-year-olds and 50.8% for 17-year-olds).

There were disparities in the comprehension of puberty characteristics among adolescent students residing in rural and urban areas. Notably, individuals in urban areas exhibited a significantly higher level of understanding, with up to an 18.0% disparity in their comprehension of puberty signs. Specifically, 57.4% of adolescents in urban areas correctly identified three or more signs of puberty, whereas only 17.8% of rural adolescents possessed

a similar level of understanding. Interestingly, a mere 3.1% of urban students fell into this category. This contrast can be attributed, in part, to the tendency of adolescents in rural areas to mistakenly associate physiological changes with social behaviors. For instance, they may erroneously link signs of male puberty with the initiation of smoking or alcohol consumption, or have friendships with individuals of the opposite gender, etc.

Adolescents who received education from their families regarding puberty exhibited a greater comprehension of this phenomenon compared to those who did not engage in discussions with their family members (63.9% and 33.3% respectively). This conclusion is firmly supported by empirical evidence. A significant majority of adolescent students (77.1%) responded affirmatively when asked if they had spoken to anyone about their first experience of puberty. Notably, family members were the primary sources of information chosen by minors, with 4.6% consulting their fathers, 64.4% confiding in their mothers, 7.1% seeking guidance from siblings, and 16.7% turning to friends.

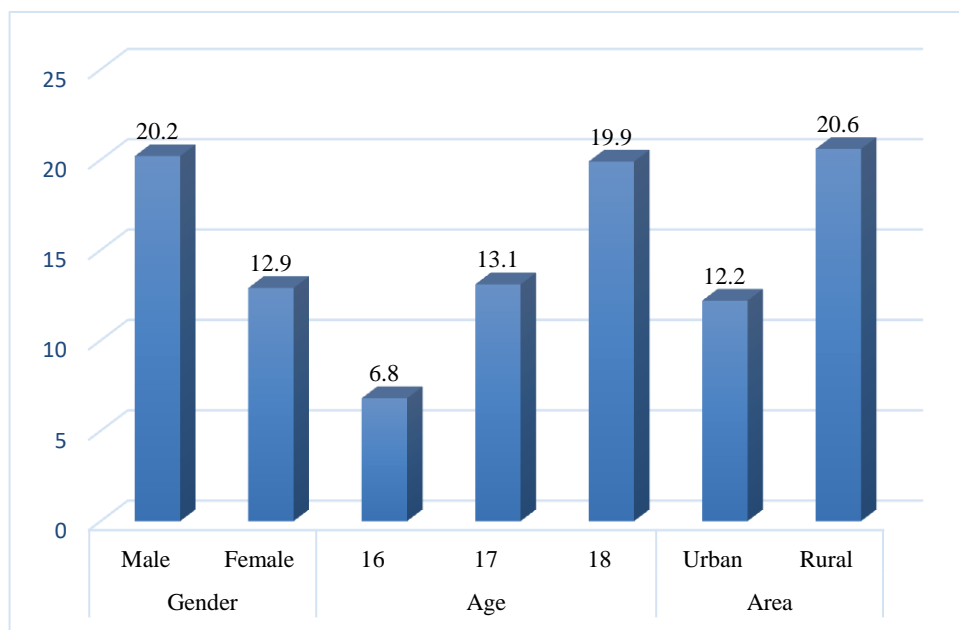
Thus, the majority of adolescent students possess a certain level of knowledge about the physiological changes that occur during puberty in males and females. Urban adolescents tend to answer questions about this topic more accurately than their rural counterparts. Additionally, older students in higher grades demonstrate a greater understanding of puberty manifestations in both males and females. Factors such as education within the family, schooling, and the importance of acquiring knowledge about the various aspects of puberty significantly influence adolescent students' comprehension of this subject.

#### 4.2. Adolescent students' understanding of love

High school students in the current stage of development are experiencing a change in their value orientation, with traditional ideas of love giving way to more contemporary views that emphasize individuality, adaptability, and a willingness to take on challenges.

The perception of love has undergone significant transformations among today's adolescents in comparison to previous generations. Merely 16.8% of adolescent students concur with the notion that "love inevitably leads to marriage". Consequently, for high school students, love is perceived as a valuable life encounter rather than a distinctive force mandating a lifelong commitment to matrimony.

**Figure 1: Percentage of people who agree with the notion that "love inevitably leads to marriage" by the characteristics of adolescents (Unit: %)**



There exists a correlation between gender and the belief that "love inevitably leads to marriage" ( $p < 0.05$ ). The percentage of individuals, both male and female, who concur with this notion is relatively modest. Specifically, the proportion of males who endorse the perspective that "love inevitably leads to marriage" surpasses that of females (20.2% vs. 12.9%). This observation partially signifies a novel aspect in women's perception of love. Love is akin to a personal journey and not necessarily contingent upon marriage.

There is no significant correlation found between the ages of adolescent students and their perceptions and attitudes towards love ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, as age increases, there is a greater tendency to agree with this perspective. Specifically, at the age of 17, a higher percentage of students were inclined to approve of marital love compared to other age groups (6.8 percent at age 15, 13.1 percent at age 16, and 19.9 percent at age 17). It is commonly believed that early adolescence is a period when individuals have a desire for romantic love. During this time, they start to experience the emotions associated with being in love and develop a positive perception of love. Interestingly, the majority of adolescents in this age group also reported having the highest number of romantic partners compared to other age groups in the sample. Among adolescents who are in a relationship, 17-year-olds constitute the largest proportion, accounting for 53.0% of the total.

There is no observed association between the geographical location of adolescent students' residence and their perceptions and attitudes towards love ( $p > 0.05$ ). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that adolescents residing in urban areas tend to exhibit a slightly more "open" perspective compared to their counterparts in rural areas. This disparity could potentially be attributed to the influence of urban lifestyles, the acceptance of diverse values, and the amalgamation of contemporary youth lifestyles.

In families where children were educated and engaged in discussions about reproductive health, the subject of love emerged as the most frequently discussed topic, accounting for 36% of the conversations. However, when it comes to the orientation of these family exchanges with adolescents, the focus primarily lies on instructing them on how to conduct themselves in relationships with individuals of the opposite sex. Additionally, some families even impose restrictions on high school students, prohibiting them from engaging in romantic relationships. Surprisingly, the findings of the study did not indicate any significant association between family education and the attitudes of adolescent students towards love ( $\chi^2 = 8.099$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.088 > 0.05$ ).

The percentage of teenagers who have engaged in conversations with their parents regarding relationship behavior, which contradicts the notion of "*love inevitably leads to marriage*" is higher compared to those who have not been guided by their families on this matter. More specifically, within the group of adolescents who have received guidance, 13.2% supported this belief while 80.2% opposed it. On the other hand, among adolescents who did not receive any form of education from their families, 14.5% agreed with the idea while 69.5% disagreed. This trend partially indicates a shifting social landscape that is influencing adolescents' perspectives, interpretations, and attitudes towards romantic relationships.

The perception of love among adolescent students in contemporary society has evolved from that of past generations. Marriage is no longer seen as a necessary outcome of love for many adolescent students. Particularly, female students tend to believe that love does not necessarily lead to marriage. This perspective is more prevalent among urban students compared to their rural counterparts. Furthermore, individuals who are in relationships are more inclined to support the idea of love leading to marriage than those who are single. Different stages of socialization in the human life cycle bring about varying expressions of love.

Adolescents who have encountered love are inclined to hold the notion of "*love inevitably leads to marriage*" more so than their counterparts who are single. This inclination can be attributed, in part, to the psychological aspect of idealizing romantic emotions during the early stages of adolescence. Interestingly, the upbringing within a family setting does not significantly influence the perception of love among adolescent students. Instead, they view love from a practical standpoint, associating it with their living circumstances and the societal changes they witness, rather than conforming to societal norms and values. Consequently, love is not necessarily intertwined with the institution of marriage.

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## 5. CONCLUSIONS:

Adolescent students in the present day exhibit a relatively progressive mindset when it comes to the concept of love. They no longer view love as solely connected to marriage and are more inclined to embrace the idea of premarital sex. To them, love is a pragmatic experience that is intertwined with their living circumstances and the ongoing social transformations. A significant portion of adolescent students already possess a certain level of understanding regarding the physical changes that occur during male and female puberty. In comparison to their knowledge about pregnancy, contraceptives, and sexually transmitted diseases, adolescents tend to have a relatively better grasp on the subject of puberty.

Family education and school education have had some influence on the comprehension of adolescent students. Nevertheless, the precise nature and scope of this influence remain somewhat ambiguous. A small number of parents provide their children with guidance on reproductive health within the family setting. Despite the somewhat unclear role of the family in delivering reproductive health education, adolescents who receive such education from their families tend to exhibit a slightly higher level of engagement in expressing their understanding of topics related to puberty and love.

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