

TRENDS IN PREMARITAL SEXUAL EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN IN PARAGUAY, 1987- 2004

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Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS) in Paraguay in 1987, 1995, 1998 and 2004 have all included special young adult modules that obtained information from females 15-44 years of age regarding their first sexual experience, current sexual activity and knowledge of reproductive health topics. These data over a 19 year period provide the longest series of trend data for sexual experience and use of contraception by adolescents and young adults of any country in Latin America. Each survey was conducted by the Paraguayan Center for Populations Studies (CEPEP) with technical assistance provided by the Division of Reproductive Health of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (DRH/CDC). The surveys were probability household based studies with face to face interviews. The surveys included 875, 2136, 1351 and 2973 young adult women, respectively, in the four surveys from 1987 until 2004. Since one woman was selected at random in each household in the sample, no mothers were interviewed in the households with sample selection of young adult women.

More than one-half (56%) of adolescents and young adult women 15-24 years of age reported that they have had sexual relations and 54% of them had premarital sex at the time of their first sexual experience (prior to first marriage or consensual union); 91% of sexually experienced young adults had their first sexual experience before 20 years of age. The proportion of sexually experienced sexually experienced young adults have had a significant increase in premarital sexual experience increasing from 35% in 1987 to 54% in 2004. Premarital sexual experience is higher in urban areas (58%) than in rural areas (45%). Young women reporting premarital sexual experience have had their sexual debut at a younger age than women reporting sexual debut at marriage: 33% before 16 years of age and 35% at 16-17 years of age.

The proportion of young women (or their partner) using contraception at their first premarital sexual experience increased by almost 10 percentage points in the first three surveys between 1987 and 1998. In the last six years, the proportion using contraception at first premarital sex increased by more than 20 percentage points, from 33% in 1998 to 58% in 2004. Condoms are the principal method used.

About 80% of young adult women report receiving a lecture or course on sex education in or out of the school environment representing an important increase over previous surveys, increasing from 52% in 1995 to 61% in 1998 to 80% in 2004.

Multivariate analysis to study determinants of first sexual experience and use of contraception will include variables related to marital status at first intercourse, educational attainment, age at first intercourse, residence, relationship to first partner, the length of time they were “dating” their first partner, age of first partner, discussions with first partner about contraception, sex education and topics included and if the first sexual relation was consensual or the partner convinced or forced her at the time of the first relation.