

Silent Struggles: Evaluating Sexual Coercion Levels among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Sexual coercion in adolescents refers to situations where an individual compels or forces a young person into sexual behaviors without their consent. This coercion can manifest through verbal pressure, physical assault, substance abuse, or peer pressure. Acknowledging the need to measure and comprehend the extent of sexual coercion among teenagers, a dedicated scale was developed, providing a crucial tool to address this often overlooked issue. In the study, students from classes IX to XII in Chennai schools were randomly selected, and 252 correctly completed questionnaires were included for analysis. The findings robustly support the scale's internal consistency and reliability in measuring sexual coercion, validated by a confidence interval demonstrating an adequate range for the true Cronbach Alpha score. The data, categorized into Low, Moderate, and High levels, reveals that 20.63% reported a Low level, 48.02% experienced a Moderate level, and 31.35% indicated a High level of sexual coercion. The study concludes that a valid and reliable tool for assessing adolescents' sexual coercion has been successfully developed, suggesting a moderate prevalence of this issue among adolescents. To address the identified awareness gap, it emphasizes the crucial need for advocating a comprehensive and age-appropriate curriculum for sexuality education in schools.

Keywords: *Sexual Coercion, Adolescents, Sexuality Education, Sexual Health Education*

Adolescence, the journey from childhood to adulthood, is a complex phase marked by puberty's physical changes. It shapes both psychological and physical aspects, with hormonal surges leading to emotional changes and a desire for autonomy. Peer interactions gain significance, influencing choices, while recognizing diverse experiences is crucial. Sexual health education on topics like STIs and contraception is essential to empower teenagers with knowledge and awareness.

Sexual coercion in adolescents occurs when one person presses, manipulates, or forces an adolescent into sexual behaviours without their permission. Coercion can take many forms, including verbal pressure, physical assault, substance abuse, and peer pressure. Individuals under the age of consent cannot legally grant consent for sexual conduct, and engaging in such actions with them is considered statutory rape.

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Sexual coercion can have serious effects, such as physical damage, STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and emotional anguish. Perpetrators may face criminal charges, thus prevention via comprehensive sex education and victim assistance is essential. Adolescent safety depends on encouraging the reporting of these instances.

BACKGROUND

In Mexico, approximately 23,000 adolescents aged 12 to 17 experience sexual coercion annually, with a high birth rate of 77 per 1,000 adolescents. A study involving 37 Mexican girls aged 13 to 19 reveals distressing rates of sexual coercion, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases, emphasizing the significant link between sexual coercion and adverse reproductive health outcomes in adolescents. (Acharya & Martinez-Sanchez, 2022)

Sexual coercion is a concern among rural high school students (Katz et al., 2019). Reproductive coercion and relationship abuse had limited impact on care-seeking but correlated with seeking STI testing in sexually active female students (Hill et al., 2019). Offline sexual coercion was linked to sexting in diverse female adolescents (Choi et al., 2016). Positive-sexuality messages influenced sexual self-efficacy in young men (Levin et al., 2012). A survey in Nigeria showed that 55% of adolescents experienced sexual coercion (Ajuwon et al., 2001).

In 2012, Furman and Jones studied sexual coercion's impact on adolescents, using a sample of 110 teens. They found post-coercion increases in externalizing symptoms, sexual activity, and substance use, suggesting a reinforcing feedback loop. Additionally, in 2012, Martín et al. conducted a study on a sexual coercion prevention program for adolescents, resulting in significant positive outcomes, including reduced stereotypical beliefs and decreased engagement in coercive behaviors. These findings underscore the importance of such programs in addressing the issue and improving future implementation.

Researchers responded to the critical issue of teenagers' limited understanding of sexual abuse and coercion by conducting a literature review. These reviews highlighted the necessity of establishing a systematic method to measure and comprehend the extent of sexual coercion among teenagers. Consequently, a scale for assessing sexual coercion among teenagers was developed, providing a crucial tool for addressing this often overlooked issue.

METHODOLOGY

After an extensive review of the literature, a questionnaire with 16 items was methodically designed to assess the prevalence of sexual coercion among adolescents. A three-point Likert scale was strategically used to standardise and facilitate responses. This questionnaire was administered in strict accordance with established research ethics norms, assuring the highest ethical standards throughout the research the process.

Sampling

For the study, 400 students from classes IX to XII in Chennai schools were selected by random sampling. Following a brief introduction, consenting students were handed questionnaires. However, the study only contained 252 correctly completed questionnaires; the remaining ones were either insufficient or unsuitable. Following data collection, the questionnaire's reliability was assessed, and the findings are displayed in the table below.

Table 1 shows the Overall Cronbach Alpha and Related Statistics sexual coercion

| Metric | Value |
|------------------------|-------|
| Raw Alpha | 0.82 |
| Standardized Alpha | 0.84 |
| G6 (smc) | 0.89 |
| Average R | 0.25 |
| Signal-to-Noise Ratio | 5.3 |
| Average Standard Error | 0.015 |
| Mean | 1.4 |
| Standard Deviation | 0.35 |
| Median R | 0.23 |

Lower Bound: 0.79

Upper Bound: 0.85

Table 1 contains an analysis of data from a sexual coercion measuring scale. Cronbach Alpha (0.82) and Standardised Alpha (0.84) show internal consistency, confirming its reliability. Guttman's Lambda 6 (0.89) proves reliability even further. The average item correlation ($R = 0.25$) is within acceptable limits. Data quality is shown by the signal-to-noise ratio ($S/N = 5.3$) and the ASE (0.015). The mean (1.4), standard deviation (0.35), and median R (0.23) all provide information on central tendency and variability. The confidence interval in the table backs up the reliability evaluation. Lower bound (0.79) and upper bound (0.85) in a 95% confidence interval for Cronbach Alpha indicate the range where the true value of the coefficient is likely to lie, expressing the level of confidence in the estimation.

Finally, the findings provide strong support for the scale's internal consistency and reliability in measuring sexual coercion. Furthermore, the table's confidence interval supports the reliability evaluation by showing an adequate range for the true Cronbach Alpha score.

Exploratory factor analysis

In the exploratory factor analysis, the Scree test was employed to ascertain the number of factors in the dataset. Factors with loadings above 0.5 were deemed significant and retained. Fourteen items related to sexual coercion were retained. The table below presents the factor loadings, Eigen values, and variance explained for the factor.

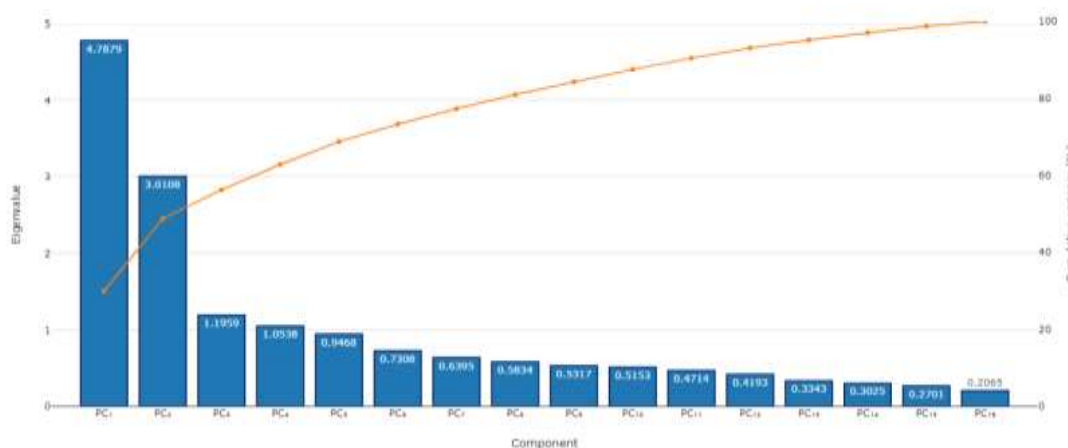


Fig. 1 shows the scree plot graph of Sexual Coercion

Table 2 shows the Factor analysis results Sexual Coercion

| S. No. | Dimensions | Eigen Value | Variance |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|----------|
| 1. | Sexual Coercion | 4.78 | 4.7879 |

Table 2 displays the outcome of the factor analysis focused on Sexual Coercion. The singular dimension, "Sexual Coercion," stands out with a robust Eigen value of 4.78, emphasizing its considerable explanatory power in the dataset. The corresponding variance value of 4.7879 solidifies the importance of this factor, highlighting its significant role in elucidating patterns within the data.

Quartile deviation.

Table 3 shows the Quartile deviation of Sexual coercion

| S.No. | Variables | Percentile 25(Q1) | Median(Q2) | Percentile 75(Q3) |
|-------|-----------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Sexual coercion | 15 | 16 | 21 |

Table 3 showcases the Quartile Deviation for Sexual Coercion. The classification of variables is determined by percentiles: values below the first quartile (Q1) are denoted as "low," those falling between the first quartile (Q1) and the third quartile (Q3) are labeled as "moderate," and values surpassing the third quartile (Q3) are identified as "high." Specifically, for Sexual Coercion, the Quartile Deviation values are as follows: 15 (Q1), 16 (Q2 or median), and 21 (Q3). These values offer a framework for interpreting questionnaire responses, allowing for a nuanced classification as "low," "medium," or "high" based on the established quartile criteria.

Table 4 Frequency Distribution of Level of Sexual Coercion

| S.No. | Level | Sexual Coercion | |
|-------|----------|-----------------|------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage |
| 1 | Low | 52 | 20.63 |
| 2 | Moderate | 121 | 48.02 |
| 3 | High | 79 | 31.35 |
| 4 | Total | 252 | 100 |

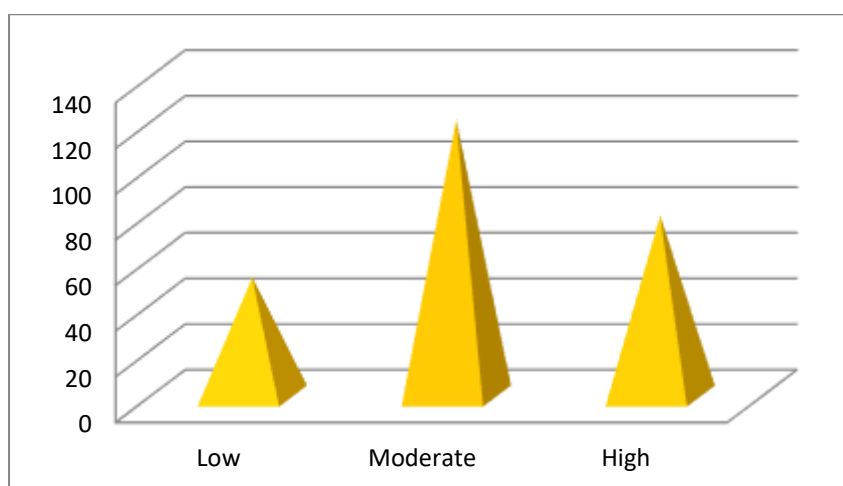


Fig. 2 Frequency Distribution of Level of Sexual Coercion

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Table 4 provides a clear snapshot of the distribution of sexual coercion levels among 252 school going adolescents. The data is segmented into three categories: Low, Moderate, and High. Specifically, 20.63% of respondents reported a Low level, 48.02% experienced a Moderate level, and 31.35% indicated a high level of sexual coercion. This table succinctly communicates the prevalence of sexual coercion across different levels, offering a concise overview of its distribution within the surveyed population. The study by Chacko, et.al.2022) show that about 49% of respondents experienced some form of sexual abuse, mainly inappropriate touching. The victims were commonly 12–14-year-old girls preyed on by strangers (42.7%), but friends (36.6%) and family members (20.6%) were implicated as well. This clearly indicates the need for intervention and awareness programs among adolescents.

CONCLUSION

A valid and reliable tool for assessing adolescents' sexual coercion has been successfully developed. The research findings suggest that the prevalence of sexual coercion among adolescents is at a moderate level. To effectively address this concern, there is a pressing need for the development of a targeted curriculum for sexuality education. This curriculum is designed to elevate awareness among adolescents, fostering a deeper understanding of respectful boundaries and responsible behavior within relationships. By implementing such educational initiatives, we can contribute to the prevention of sexual coercion among adolescents and create a safer and more informed community.

Limitations

Parents, teachers, and school authorities exhibited reluctance to grant permission for their children's participation, significantly impacting the overall participation rate. Resource constraints further impeded the feasibility of obtaining a more extensive sample size, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. It is noteworthy that the study exclusively concentrated on students enrolled in schools, potentially excluding perspectives from adolescents not attending formal educational institutions.

Furthermore, the study missed the opportunity to explore the influence of cultural context on attitudes and behaviors related to sexual coercion.

Suggestions

To address the awareness gap regarding sexual coercion identified in this study, it is crucial to advocate for the development and implementation of a comprehensive and age-appropriate curriculum for sexuality education in schools. This curriculum should cover a diverse range of topics, including sexual health, relationships, consent, and reproductive health.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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