

## Shyness and Its Association with Knowledge about Sex among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Sexuality is a crucial aspect of human development, impacting physical, emotional, and social well-being. However, shyness can significantly impede young adults' access to accurate and comprehensive sexual knowledge. This study investigates the relationship between shyness and knowledge about sex among young adults in India. For the present study a sample of 400 unmarried young adults aged 18-25 were recruited from in and around Mysore City, Karnataka, India. Shyness was measured using the Shyness Assessment Test (SAT) by Lancy D'souza (2006), and knowledge about sex was assessed using the Sexual Knowledge and Attitude Test (SKAT) by William Fullard and Lawrence M. Scheier (2005). Data were analyzed using Pearson's product moment correlations and regression analysis. Results revealed that, overall association between shyness and knowledge about sex was limited, specific aspects of knowledge, such as sexual initiation and virginity, significantly predicted shyness, particularly in female respondents. Gender did not significantly influence shyness levels, but urban young adults demonstrated higher knowledge about various sexual topics compared to their rural counterparts. The findings highlight the complex interplay between shyness and specific areas of knowledge about sex. While some areas may exacerbate anxiety, others can be empowering. Integrating comprehensive education about sexuality within educational institutions and utilizing life skills frameworks can help young adults navigate sexual situations confidently and respectfully. And the study's scope was limited by its geographical focus and exclusion of certain age groups and marital status.

**Keywords:** *Shyness, Knowledge about Sex and Young Adults*

Sexuality is essential to human development and well-being, influencing physical, emotional, and social health. Young adults navigate this complex domain through various sources, including formal sex education, informal conversations with peers and family, and media exposure (O'Sullivan et al., 2018). However, factors like shyness can significantly impact their access to accurate and comprehensive sexual knowledge. Shyness, characterized by social anxiety and discomfort in interpersonal interactions, can hinder young adults from seeking information about sex and participating in open discussions on the topic (Cacioppo & Hawley, 2009).

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Shyness has been identified as a significant factor influencing communication and social interaction (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Shy individuals experience heightened anxiety in social situations, leading to avoidance behaviors and difficulty initiating conversations (Asendorpf et al., 1998). This translates to problems discussing sensitive topics like sex, potentially limiting their access to accurate information and fostering misconceptions or misinformation (Snell et al., 1995). Previous research has established a link between shyness and limited sexual knowledge. A study by Luster, et al. (2013) found that shy young women reported having lower levels of sexual knowledge and comfort discussing sexual topics compared to their less shy counterparts.

Moreover, the association between shyness and sexual knowledge may be mediated by several factors. Social support networks play a crucial role in providing young adults with access to information and fostering healthy sexual attitudes (Brown et al., 2015). However, shy individuals may have fewer close relationships, limiting their opportunities to receive information and support from peers and confidantes (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Additionally, cultural norms and family dynamics can influence shyness and access to sexual knowledge (Schalet et al., 2008). Restrictive family environments and conservative cultural values can discourage open communication about sex, further hindering shy individuals' access to accurate information.

### **METHOD**

#### *Research Aims and Objectives*

This study aims to investigate the relationship between shyness and knowledge about sex among young adults. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Examine the association between shyness and overall knowledge about sex.
2. Identify specific areas of knowledge about sex where shyness plays a significant role.
3. Explore potential predictors of shyness based on factors related to knowledge about sex.

#### *Sample*

A sample of 400 young adults aged 18 to 25 were recruited from in and around Mysore City, Karnataka, India. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure a representative sample. And the study employed a survey design with correlational analysis. Participation for the study was purely voluntarily, the participants were informed about the confidentiality of the responses provided and responses were collected without revealing the identity of the participants.

#### *The following research tools were used:*

1. **Socio-demographic Profile:** A semi-structured questionnaire collected information on age, gender, area background, educational level, occupation, and participation in sexual awareness programs (to exclude the data) and with informed consent of participating in the study.
2. **Sexual Knowledge and Attitude Test (SKAT) by William Fullard and Lawrence M. Scheier (2005):** The Sexual Knowledge and Attitude Test for Adolescents (SKAT) is a developmentally appropriate, paper and pencil self-report questionnaire for assessing subjective evaluations and knowledge proficiency regarding sexual behavior and sexual experience for adolescents (Fullard, Scheier & Lief, 2005). The SKAT includes 41 trichotomously scored knowledge items (True, False, and Not Sure) and slight modification in items will be made. Reliabilities for the knowledge items are as follows: internal consistency 0.75; test-retest stability over a 2-week period was .85.

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3. **Shyness Assessment Test (SAT) by Lancy D'souza (2006):** This 54-item test measured shyness across three domains: physiological, cognitive/affective, and action-oriented. Participants indicated their response by marking "Yes," "No," or "Can't Say." The SAT has been validated with Indian adolescents and young adults, demonstrating high internal consistency and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.735). Further, the scale had sufficient high validity. The domains of shyness are physiological, cognitive, affective, and action-oriented. SAT was developed exclusively for Indian adolescents and young adults by D'Souza (2006). The reliability index ascertained by the split-half (odd-even) method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale were 0.735 and 0.812, respectively. The reliability indices of the three domains were also calculated by the split-half method. For the Cognitive/Affective Domain is 0.826. The Physiological Domain is 0.792, and for Action Oriented Domains, it is 0.725.

### *Data Analysis*

Once data collection was complete, they were scrutinised and checked for completeness. Later, they were scored according to the manuals provided and a master chart was prepared for statistical calculations. In the present study, predictive and inferential statistics were employed to examine the relationships between variables.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

**Table 01: Relationship between Factors of Knowledge about Sex and Domains of Shyness: Results of Pearson's product moment correlations between factors of knowledge about sex and domains of shyness**

Factors of Knowledge about Sex		Domains of Shyness			
		Cognitive/ Affective	Physiological	Action Oriented	Total Shyness
Knowledge of Pregnancy	Correlation	.013	.080	-.021	.023
	P value	.800	.109	.675	.651
Knowledge of Transmission	Correlation	.026	-.061	-.076	-.020
	P value	.605	.223	.127	.688
Knowledge of Sexual Initiation and Virginity	Correlation	.135	.123	.110	.142
	P value	.007	.014	.027	.004
Knowledge about Orgasm Erection	Correlation	.036	.109	.039	.060
	P value	.472	.029	.442	.232
Knowledge about Masturbation	Correlation	-.070	.031	-.042	-.046
	P value	.160	.531	.405	.363
Knowledge about Negative Consequences Rape	Correlation	-.017	.035	.020	.004
	P value	.732	.480	.689	.936
Knowledge of Homosexuality	Correlation	-.019	.064	-.068	-.013
	P value	.700	.205	.174	.788
Knowledge of Abortion and Education	Correlation	-.106	-.077	-.135	-.119
	P value	.035	.126	.007	.017
Total Scores	Correlation	-.006	.069	-.034	.005
	P value	.908	.167	.500	.916

Note: N = 400; df = 398

**Cognitive/affective domain of shyness and factors of knowledge about sex:** Cognitive/affective domain of shyness was found to be significantly and negatively related to knowledge of abortion and education ( $r=-.106$ ;  $p=.035$ ) and positively related to knowledge of

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sexual initiation and virginity ( $r=.135$ ;  $p=.007$ ). However, the rest of the factors of the knowledge about sex were not significantly related to the cognitive/affective domain of shyness.

**Physiological domain of shyness and factors of knowledge about sex:** Pearson's product moment between the physiological domain of shyness was found to be significantly and positively related to knowledge of sexual initiation and virginity ( $r=.123$ ;  $p=.014$ ) and knowledge about orgasm erection ( $r=.109$ ;  $p=.029$ ). However, the rest of the factors of the knowledge about sex were not significantly related to the physiological domain of shyness.

**Action-oriented domain of shyness and factors of knowledge about sex:** The action-oriented domain of shyness was found to be significantly and negatively related to knowledge of abortion and education ( $r=-.135$ ;  $p=.007$ ). The action-oriented domain of shyness was found to be significantly and positively related to knowledge of sexual initiation and virginity ( $r=.110$ ;  $p=.027$ ). However, correlation coefficients between the rest of the factors of the knowledge about sex scale and the action-oriented domain of shyness were not significant.

**Total scores on shyness and factors of knowledge about sex:** Total shyness scores were found to be significantly related to a few of the factors of knowledge about sex, either positively or negatively. Significant and positive correlation coefficients were found between total scores on shyness and knowledge of sexual initiation and virginity ( $r=.142$ ;  $p=.004$ ), and negative correlation coefficients were found between total scores on shyness and knowledge of abortion and education ( $r=-.119$ ;  $p=.017$ ). However, the rest of the factors of the knowledge about sex were not significantly related to total scores on shyness.

**Table 02: Regression Analysis: Female Respondents: (DV=Shyness; IV = Knowledge about Sex): Results of regressional ANOVA-variables entered into the equation for female respondents**

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	Knowledge of Sexual Initiation and Virginity	.	.384	.148	.135

*Note:* Method: Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter  $\leq$  .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove  $\geq$  .100).

Out of the total 08 variables of knowledge about sex entered into the equation, only 01 variable best predicted the shyness of female respondents of the study. The variable to enter into the equation was Knowledge of Sexual Initiation and Virginity, with a correlation coefficient of .384, a squared R-value of .148, and a variance of .135. Further, the remaining variables did not predict the shyness of the respondents. It is clear from the table that one variable from knowledge about sex only best predicted the shyness of the respondents.

**Table 03: Results of regressional ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	10563.543	3	3521.181	11.327	.001
Residual	60932.212	196	310.879		
Total	71495.755	199			

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Obtained F values through regression ANOVA were found to be highly significant at .001 levels. The obtained F values of 11.327 were found to be significant, further confirming that the variables entered in the equation - Knowledge of Sexual Initiation and Virginity were the true predictors of shyness.

**Table 04: Unstandardized, standardized coefficients and 't' values for the constants and variables predicted.**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Knowledge of Sexual Initiation and Virginity	4.115	1.539	.178	2.675	.008

The beta value obtained for the predicted model, Knowledge of Sexual Initiation and Virginity, was .178. The 't' value for the constants and predicted models varied from .888 to 5.514 with the significance levels varying from .376 to .001 levels.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Knowledge about Sex and Shyness*

This study's findings reveal a complex interplay between various domains of shyness and specific factors of knowledge about sex. Consistent with previous research by Luster et al. (2013), our results demonstrate a positive association between shyness and knowledge of sexual initiation and virginity among young adults. This suggests that individuals with greater knowledge in this area might experience increased social anxiety related to these topics (Cheek & Buss, 1981). This suggests that broader knowledge in these areas might facilitate decreased anxiety and increased comfort in discussing sensitive topics (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009).

These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of the relationship between shyness and knowledge about sex. While some areas of knowledge may foster anxiety, others can be empowering and contribute to decreased shyness (Brown et al., 2015). Further research, as suggested by Cheek and Buss (1981), is needed to delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms influencing these relationships and their implications for tailoring sex education programs and interventions to better address the needs of individuals with varying levels of shyness.

### *Implications*

- **Integration of Education on Sexuality:** Mandatory inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education within educational institutions is crucial. This education should address various aspects of sexuality, including biological, psychological, social, emotional, and ethical dimensions, in a developmentally appropriate manner. Overcoming objections to such programs requires addressing concerns and providing evidence of their positive impact on young adults' well-being.
- **Life Skills Approach:** Utilising life skills frameworks and strategies within sexuality education can empower young adults to develop responsible sexual behavior. This includes fostering critical thinking, decision-making, communication, and interpersonal skills, equipping them to navigate sexual situations confidently and respectfully.

### *Limitations of the Study*

- **Geographic Scope:** Data collection was limited to in and around Mysore City, Karnataka, India potentially restricted generalizability to wider populations.



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- **Sample Characteristics:** The study focused on unmarried young adults aged 18-25, excluding potentially relevant age groups and marital statuses.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

- **Larger Sample Size:** Conducting studies with larger and more diverse samples can enhance the generalizability of findings and strengthen the validity of conclusions.
- **Comparison Groups:** Including married young adults in future research would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between shyness, knowledge about sex, and marital status.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Employing longitudinal research designs can explore the evolution of the relationship between shyness and knowledge about sex from adolescence to adulthood, providing deeper insights into developmental trajectories.
- **Cross-cultural Comparisons:** Investigating and comparing the relationship between shyness and knowledge about sex across diverse cultures can offer valuable insights into the influence of cultural norms and values on these constructs.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between shyness and knowledge about sex among young adults in India. While the overall association between shyness and knowledge about sex was limited, further analysis revealed that specific factors of knowledge, such as sexual initiation and virginity, significantly predicted shyness.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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