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SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS FROM THE HIP HOP CULTURE

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ABSTRACT: This is a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive study, conducted in two consecutive series in 2007 (S1) and 2008 (S2), comprised of 350 people between 15 and 29 years of age, with the aim to understand the profile of adolescents and young adults from the hip hop culture of Seville, Spain, and to detect risky sexual behavior in their everyday lives. Data were obtained by means of a self-administered questionnaire followed by a statistical analysis, corresponding to a sexually active population (91%), who initiated their sexual experiences before 16.5 years of age. Most state they are heterosexual and use contraception. In conclusion, the image of this group is tied to virile masculine stereotypes, constituting the imaginary of this body of people. Direct interventions are needed to promote health and disease prevention, before adolescence, involving health services, families and schools, which address sexual education and love, taking into account the social construct and everyday life.

DESCRIPTORS: Adolescent. Sexuality. Sexually transmitted diseases. Activities of daily living.

COMPORTAMENTO SEXUAL NO COTIDIANO DE ADOLESCENTES E JOVENS DA CULTURA HIP HOP

RESUMO: Estudo quantitativo descritivo transversal, realizado em duas séries consecutivas, correspondendo a 2007 (S1) e 2008 (S2), abrangendo 350 pessoas, entre 15-29 anos, com objetivo de conhecer o perfil dos adolescentes e jovens da cultura hip hop em Sevilha, Espanha, detectando comportamentos sexuais de risco no cotidiano. Coletou-se dados através de questionário autoadministrado, com análise estatística. A população é sexualmente ativa (91%), iniciando suas experiências sexuais antes dos 16,5 anos. A maioria relata heterossexualidade e usa métodos contraceptivos. Conclui-se que a imagem deste coletivo liga-se a estereótipos masculinos viris, constituindo o imaginário e cotidiano do grupo. Faz-se necessário dirigir intervenções para promoção da saúde e prevenção de agravos, antes da adolescência, nos serviços de saúde, na família e escola, envolvendo educação sexual e amorosa, considerando o imaginário social e o cotidiano.

DESCRIPTORES: Adolescente. Sexualidade. Doenças sexualmente transmissíveis.

CONDUCTAS SEXUALES EN EL COTIDIANO DE ADOLESCENTES Y JÓVENES DE LA CULTURA HIP HOP

RESUMEN: Estudio cuantitativo de corte transversal realizado en dos series consecutivas, correspondientes a 2007 (S1) y 2008 (S2), que comprende 350 personas, entre 15-29 años, con objetivo de conocer el perfil de los adolescentes y jóvenes en la cultura hip hop de Sevilla, España, detectar comportamientos sexuales de riesgo en la vida cotidiana. Los datos fueron recogidos a través de cuestionario autoaplicado con análisis estadístico. Población sexualmente activa (91%), iniciando sus experiencias sexuales antes de 16,5 años. La mayoría reportes heterossexualidad, usa anticonceptivos. Se concluye que la imagen de este colectivo se une a los estereotipos masculinos viriles, constituyendo el imaginario diario del grupo. Es necesario intervenciones directas para la promoción de la salud y prevención de enfermedades, antes de la adolescencia, de servicios de salud, la familia y la escuela, que implica la educación sexual y el amor, teniendo en cuenta el imaginario social y lo cotidiano.

DESCRIPTORES: Adolescente. Sexualidad. Enfermedades de transmisión sexual. Actividades cotidianas.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the symbolic and identificatory function of sexuality in the everyday life of teens and young adults who listen to rap music within the hip hop culture of the city of Seville, Spain. Risk behavior was analyzed in relation to the sexual practices of this age group. Everyday life is understood as “the way of life of human beings as manifested in their day-to-day, through their interactions, beliefs, values, meanings, culture and symbols. And which keep on mapping out their process of living, in a movement toward health or sickness, within their vital cycle”.^{1,24}

There is a consensus in a great number of social researches which places sexuality at the intersection between nature, social structure and culture. Gender, sexuality and relationships are the central themes in the exploration and construction of identity at this stage, and it is at this time of life when shared relationships and sexual practices centering on intercourse and penetration are initiated.²

In addition, we have studied a group with a specific musical affiliation (rap), because music, at this stage, is not only a process of personal preference, but an important part of the social and identity construction in the everyday life of adolescents.^{3,4} We could characterize young people from hip hop culture in their daily lives as belonging to an urban tribe, according to the conceptualization that Maffesoli attributes to a human group that shares common ethics and aesthetics that differentiate them from others.⁵ This membership leads them, as a group, to engage in actions that identify and set them apart from other distinct groups, while at the same time making them visible to the rest of society, as manifested in a number of expressions in their daily lives such as dress, language, music (rap), specific dances (break dancing) and symbolic territorial occupation, through graffiti.⁶ It also entails a group assumption of risk behaviors. For some time now, Western industrialized societies have been emphasizing risk behaviors in the everyday life of adolescents and young adults related to the consumption of toxic substances, sex or violence.⁷⁻⁹ Nevertheless, few studies have sought to find a meaning for these in the context of this changing society.

Understanding the everyday life, motivations and meanings that a group assigns to cer-

tain behaviors in their daily life is of the utmost importance when crafting strategies, policies and preventive measures for such behaviors.¹⁰⁻¹² Analyzing and reflecting upon the symbolic and identificatory function that sex has in the lives of young people may allow to understand risk behaviors, which from an adult perspective would be unnecessary behaviors in the current moment. In order to promote the health of these groups, it is necessary to have a type of evidence that allows us to approach their particular world in terms of everyday life and subjectivity.¹³

The objective of this study was to understand the profile of adolescents and young adults who are affiliated with hip hop culture in Seville, Spain, and detect sexual risk behaviors in their everyday lives, in order to take measures to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive study was conducted in two consecutive series, corresponding to 2007 and 2008 (Series 1: 2007, Series 2: 2008).

The procedure for collecting data was developed using a self-administered questionnaire to the hip hop population in a leisurely setting: a hip hop concert within the program “Territorios Sevilla, an international music festival of different people”, in the city of Seville, Spain. Since it took place outside the boundaries of more institutionalized spheres – such as schools, institutes, universities and workplaces can be – as well as beyond parental or institutional control, this provided a more relaxed and favorable setting for responding to certain questions related to sex, sexual orientation and sexually transmitted diseases, and thus promoted spontaneity and candor among those surveyed.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were informed verbally and in writing at the top of the questionnaire about the purpose of the study and the institution endorsing it – in this case the University of Seville – and they were asked for their consent. They were notified about the confidentiality of the information and were thanked for their collaboration.

A questionnaire with open and closed questions was administered. This questionnaire had been previously tested on some members of a

reference rap group and later on with a group of nursing students.

The population under study was comprised of adolescents and young adults from ages 15 to 29, who said that they engaged in some focal activity related to hip hop. To establish a good rapport with the young participants, an effort was made to select interviewers from the same age group (19 to 29) who were connected to the hip hop culture. Once selected, they received training in order to be familiar with the study, both in terms of interview techniques and aspects related to the research objectives. Demographic variables involving age, gender, educational level and socioeconomic characteristics were collected. The sample was segmented according to gender and age: adolescents from ages 15-19 and young adults from 20-29.

A descriptive analysis was performed to obtain the frequency and bivariate distribution through contingency tables, the Chi-square test and Fisher's exact test, and a means comparison was done for independent samples using Student's t-test. The data collected were analyzed with the statistical program (SPSS-14) Statistical Product and Service Solutions, used in social sciences for the analysis of statistical studies.

RESULTS

The population of young people studied entailed 191 cases in 2007 (S1 or series 1) and 159 in 2008 (S2 or series 2).

In comparing the mean age from both series, using T-tests for independent samples, no significant differences were found between the two samples, since both series are comparable in terms of age and gender distribution.

Sociodemographic profile and work/study activities

The mean age in S1 was 20.6 years, ranging from 15 to 28 and with a standard deviation of 3.3. Men accounted for 66.5% and 33.5% were women. In S2, the mean age was 20.3 years, with a range from 15 to 28 and a standard deviation of 3.4. Men accounted for 72.3% and 27.7% were women. The figures reflect the unequal proportion according to gender which attended the

concert in both 2007 and 2008. Those who study are 69.7% from S1 and 74.6% from S2. Of these, 29.9% and 26.2% from series 1 and 2 have either completed higher education or are currently in college. Those who work are 29.9% and 26.8% in series 1 and 2, respectively.

Sex

Beginning of full sexual relations

Among all participants, an average of 90.7% in series 1 and 91% in series 2 claimed to have already had full sexual relations. In analyzing the differences by gender and age, there were no significant differences in relation to gender, but there were in relation to age in series 1 and 2, with greater frequency in the group aged 20 to 28. In S1: 34.3% of adolescents and 65.7 % in the 20-28 age range ($p < 0.0005$). In S2: 43.7% of adolescents and 56.3% in the 20-28 age range ($p = 0.003$). The age of the first sexual intercourse was 16.32 years in S1 and 16.19 in S2, with a range of 10-21 years and a standard deviation of 1.9 in both series.

Type of partner

The participants were asked about their type of sexual partner, with three possible options: a stable partner, different partners and casual sexual contacts (Figure 1). In comparing the stable partner option with the other types (different partners and sporadic sexual contacts), there were significant differences according to gender in series 1, with 47% among men as opposed to 73.6% among women ($p = 0.002$). This significant difference in terms of gender was not found in series 2, where 69.8% of men and 80% of women opt for relations with a stable partner. As far as different partners, it accounted for 27% among the men surveyed in series 1, and dropped to 18.6% in series 2. In turn, we found 18.6% among the women surveyed in series 1, and 17.5% in series 2. Regarding casual sexual contacts or relations with strangers, it was 16% among men in series 1 and dropped to 11.6% in series 2, whereas it was 11.6% among the women surveyed in series 1, dropping to 2.5% in series 2.

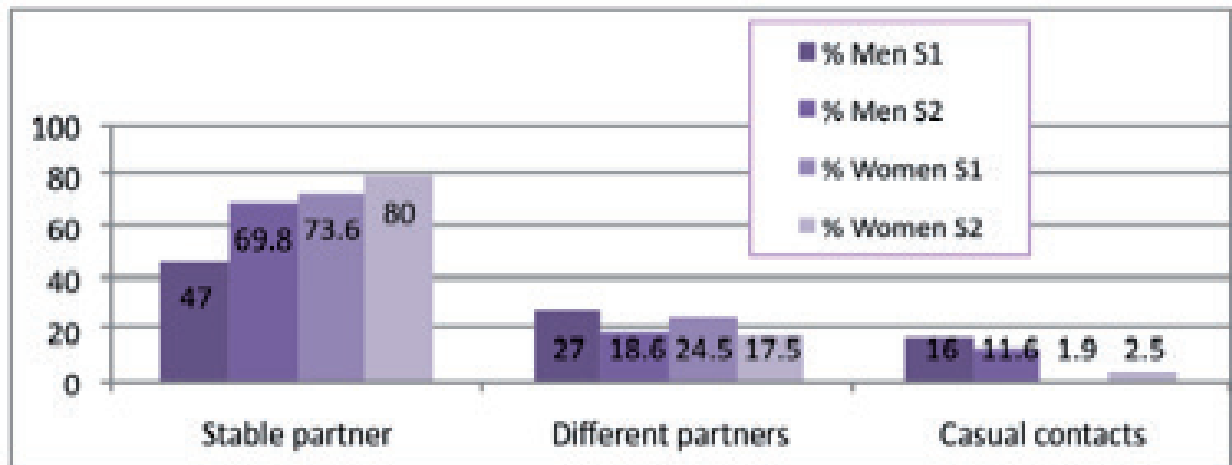


Figure 1 - Type of sexual partner by gender

Sexual orientation

The participants were asked about their sexual orientation and given three possible options: heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual (Figure 2). The percentage of men who engage in sexual relations with the opposite sex was 92.7% in series 1 and 89.5% in series 2, whereas for women, it was 89.5% in series 1 and 94.6% in series 2. As far as same-sex relations, the per-

centage of men was 5.5% in series 1 and 5.3% in series 2, whereas for women, it was 7% in series 1 and 2.7% in series 2. As far as relations with both sexes, the percentage of men was 1.8% in series 1 and 3.5% in series 2, whereas for women, it was 3.5% in series 1 and 2.7% in series 2. There were no significant differences in terms of gender or age group in either of the series or options inquired about.

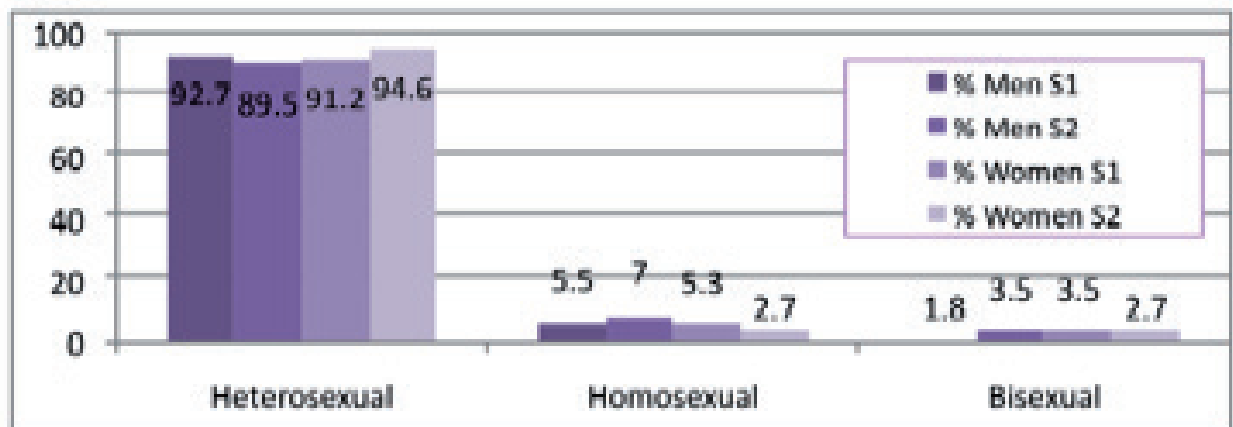


Figure 2 - Sexual orientation by gender

Types of contraception

In both series, a high percentage used some form of contraception (86.2% in series 1 and 89.2% in series 2). The highest percentage of use corresponds to barrier methods (88.4% in series 1 and 84.8% in series 2), whereas a minority use hormonal methods ("the pill": 9.1% in series 1 and 9.5% in series 2; "hormonal ring":

2.5% in series 1 and 4.8% in series 2). 87.8% say they take precautions to avoid STDs, whereas 12.2% do not.

DISCUSSION

The beginning of sexual relations: our study notes higher numbers of young people who claim to have had full sexual relations (S1: 90.4% and S2:

91%), with a difference of 13.2 points compared with a broader national study on young people which reported 77.5%.¹⁴

The age of first sexual intercourse is in early adolescence (16.2 years). Our data coincides with the results of other studies conducted among adolescents in high schools, where it is 16.4 years of age.¹⁵ This is one year earlier than the mean for the Spanish population which is 17.1 years.¹⁴ As far as the age groups, there were significant differences in both series, with a higher proportion among the young adult group than among the adolescent group, in terms of having initiated full sexual relations.

We endeavored to understand the reasons for the increasingly early age of first sexual intercourse. The main lines of research on the issue in the Spanish population indicate that the age of first sexual intercourse appears to have been declining in recent years. From our perspective, sexual initiation is understood as a rite of passage to adulthood, and a desire on the part of adolescents to cast off childhood and enter into the adult world, rather than as a sign of promiscuity, as reflected in other studies on this subject. Since young people do not seem to assign importance to sex until they start engaging in sexual practices.¹⁴ In all societies, this rite of sexual initiation has a more collective than individual meaning, in that it is a symbol of transition to adulthood. What is common to both sexes is that "the first time" has a meaning involving a change of status in relation to oneself and the group. It represents a leap for the adolescent into the group to which they aspire to belong: that of adults or the initiated.²

For this "first time", choosing "with whom" is important and there are differences, according to gender and age that are deeply affected by elements that constitute the social imaginary. For the most part and under ideal circumstances, girls place their hopes on someone older, whereas boys on someone who is accessible.²

Most of the young people who have sex do so with stable partners, at all the age levels. There is a downward trend in casual sex, among both men and women, from the 2007 to the 2008 series, although at these ages of adolescence and youth they have still not found a definitive partner and try out different options. This trend and the evolution towards a stable partner coincides with other authors who have noted that there is less promiscuity in the generation born in the 2000s than halfway through the 1990s.¹⁶

Nevertheless, significant differences were observed between men and women in the type of partners in S1, but this statistical significance disappears in S2 where the type of partner is more homogeneous. The girls choose to have sex with stable partners to a greater extent than teen boys and young adult men if they have casual sex or with occasional partners.¹⁷

We agree with the findings of other studies in relation to gender mandates. Although men and women share the same scenarios in terms of relationships, sex, drugs, risks, etc., and although there is talk of equality which places them on the same level, girls must constantly justify their preferences or behaviors: "Girls shouldn't", "girls don't know", "girls control".¹⁸

The concept of the male role, with a more explicit and expressed hyper sexuality than girls, and with less stigma when experimenting with new sexual partners, may explain the differences in partner options between men and women in our study. This situation is understood by both sides as "natural" and not as an externally imposed norm, and denotes gender stereotypes instilled since childhood. As they reach the teen and youth age, these gender inequalities, in terms of stereotyped behaviors, are invisible for both genders. It could be said that despite their iconoclastic and counter-culture image, the more classic gender stereotypes as far as sexual partners continue to prevail in this group.

With regard to sexual orientation, this is defined as a persistent pattern of sexual attraction to people of one sex or another. In adolescents, it is still not clearly defined and one has to wait until more mature ages, such as 25, to speak with greater accuracy about sexual orientation. During this adolescent stage, there may be some homosexual experiences, a certain curiosity and even homosexual anxiety, but there is no defined homosexual orientation as in the case of adults.¹⁹ Most of the young people surveyed claim to have exclusively heterosexual relationships. It would appear that the social image of this group is closely tied to heterosexuality, both according to what the young people said and through the data obtained in the ethnographic analysis of the lyrics of songs and the images of rappers who manifest very virile male stereotypes. There is a slight expression of homosexuality in this group, but less than in other studies where it was reported that from 5 to 20% of the teenage population is insecure about their sexual orientation, regard-

less of whether they have had sexual intercourse, indicating that they may belong to another orientation that is non-heterosexual.²⁰

As far as the risks involving sexual behavior, nowadays most adolescents have had sexual experiences, and many of them engage in regular and full sexual activities, but lack of information can still be noted regarding the risks they are taking and how to protect themselves from STDs and unwanted pregnancies. During this period of life, there is a greater possibility of infection, due to the variability and instability of partners and the very physiology of adolescents (less cervical mucus barrier, changes in vaginal pH, immature columnar epithelium of the uterine cervix, first contact with STDs and total lack of immunity against them). These physiological elements render them more vulnerable to STDs. Furthermore, the number of unwanted teen pregnancies is rising. The causes of this increase, among others, are more frequent sexual relations at this age, the trend of menstruation starting at earlier ages and lack of adequate sex education which at times results in them being ignorant in matters regarding family planning and sex which would be in their interest to know about.¹⁷

If we review the use of contraceptives and condoms by the young people in this study, and compare it with other macro studies on the subject, the level of precautions taken by the young people, both male and female, insofar as avoiding the risks resulting from sexual behavior, is high. It must be borne in mind that in casual sexual encounters primarily in a youthful leisurely setting, what is being sought after is someone to satisfy a sexual drive and fulfill the rite of the sexual and symbolic encounter, "to conquer", without seeking a comprehensive interaction with the other person. Casual sexual encounters usually occur in a context of collective emotions and individual excitement, where any calm and objective reasoning about taking precautions is not prioritized especially if condoms are not available in the immediate surroundings or if they are expensive or difficult to obtain.²

No significant differences were found, whether by gender or age group, although barrier methods are more frequent among men and in the adolescent age group and hormonal contraceptives among women and in the older age group, in both series. Although in our study we found no statistically significant differences

in condom use between men and women, or related to the type of partner, we do agree¹⁴ that the condom is the most frequently used method among single individuals and for casual sexual relations and, for this reason, it is the most used method among younger adolescents in 80% of the cases. It is also a method considered masculine and used by a larger percentage of boys than girls.

Some young people still harbor reservations when it comes to taking precautions at the moment sexual intercourse is about to happen, such as using a condom, since it is considered "unromantic" and suggests that the person is taking a number of precautions against the other, as though the other partner were a source of possible infection, besides breaking the erotic mood or the preamble to the sexual act.

A gender bias exists and should be addressed in health promotion campaigns, by placing emphasis on more equal and shared images regarding its use by both parties, in addition to making its use normal and divorcing it from any particular gender, without imposing the idea that it is a form of protection incumbent upon the male partner to take, since the use of the barrier method is the only one that has proven to be effective against STDs and AIDS.

In contrast, oral contraceptives tend to be used in situations where the relationship is stable or individuals have been going out together. The number of users of this method increases from age 25 on. The rest of the hormonal methods, such as the contraceptive ring, are rarely used among young adults. As for coitus interruptus, it is scarcely used, although it is surprising that there are still men and women who use this outdated and ineffective form of contraception.

At the same time, the determining factors were analyzed that could be considered elements of risk related to sexually transmitted diseases, such as having casual sex, combined with not taking precautions against STDs.

A trend involving decreased precautions against STDs was noted. In the 2007 study, 100% of the young people who responded take precautions against STDs, whereas in 2008, 12.2% do not. Nevertheless, there is a gradual overall evolution, with statistically significant differences, toward stable partners and a decreasing trend toward having sex with different partners, which could serve as protection factors against risks associated with sex.

CONCLUSIONS

In exploring the profile of adolescents and young adults who belong to the hip hop culture in Seville, Spain, and detecting sexual risk behaviors in their everyday lives, related to taking measures to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STDs, this study revealed that this is a sexually active population (91%), with higher rates than the means of other national studies on adolescents and young adults. The age of first sexual intercourse, before 16.5 years, is lower than the rest of the reports that were consulted. It could be argued that this trend toward a lower age of first sexual intercourse stems from a desire to move into adult life and fit into the world of older young people and those who have been sexually initiated.

The most common sexual orientation is heterosexuality, with a minority reporting other options. The social image of this group is closely tied to the images of rappers with very virile male stereotypes, as well as to the elements comprising the social imaginary and the everyday life of the group, indicating the importance of these factors for health studies.²¹⁻²⁴

The highest risk group in terms of sexual behavior is the adolescent group from ages 15 to 19, since it is presumed to represent the starting age for sexual relations among both boys and girls. The percentage of young people who use contraception is high. Although no significant differences were detected, the use of different contraceptive methods is gender-related and associated with the type of partner. Barrier methods are more used among men and in the adolescent group with less stable partners and hormonal methods are more frequently used by women and the older age group, in relations with more stable partners.

The percentage of young people who say they take measures to avoid STDs is high. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that a group of adolescents and young adults (12.2% in 2008) is running unnecessary risks of contracting AIDS and other STDs and unwanted pregnancies.

As a possible limitation of the study, we accept that different authors consider self-administered questionnaires on the sexual behavior of young people from these age groups to be reliable and valid, although some male adolescents tend to overstate their sexual behavior, unlike women.

Adolescence, or even earlier ages not included in this study, is the population that should be targeted in interventions aimed at health promotion

and disease prevention, both in terms of health and education, involving health services, families and schools, on the subject of sexual education and relationships, taking into account the social imaginary, the rite, different groups, tribes and everyday life.

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