Abstract

Objective. To understand how the social construction and expression of masculinity among male adolescents and young adults are related to sexual health and reproductive risks. Material and Methods. The study was carried out in an underserved and a popular area of Mexico City. Eighteen focal groups and 18 individual interviews were applied to a sample of males from three age groups: 10 to 14, 15 to 19, and 20 to 24 years. Data analysis was performed inductively through open codification of the verbal transcriptions. These were used to create more abstract concepts and search for relationships among them. Results. This paper centers on interpretations of masculinity as expressed by the youngsters themselves. Our research sheds light on what youngsters do and say to be men. Their ideas and practices produce different forms of masculinity through which risk behavior is manifested, as well as specific speech and dressing styles, and ways of courting and going steady. These behaviors and their meanings are associated with sexual and reproductive health risk taking. Conclusions. The traditional model of masculinity characteristic of both social settings involves poor communication about sexuality in couple relationships, which results in infrequent protection and exposure to Sexually Transmitted Infections and unwanted pregnancies. On the other hand, their economic living conditions prevent them from fully practicing central elements of their own concept of masculinity, such as being a hard worker, a provider, and a responsible person. These unmet needs may cause frustration, aggression, and domestic violence.

Keywords

masculinity; sexual health; reproductive health;
young males; adolescent males; Mexico.