



Premarital Sexuality and Gender in Morocco

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Abstract

The rise in the average age of marriage calls into question the sexual activity of young Moroccans. This study investigates the attitudes toward premarital sex and its practice among young Moroccans. Data was collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed based on gender. The results show that 40.2% of unmarried, young Moroccans, mostly men, have premarital sex. The analysis shows how cultural biases result in significant gender differences in practice and attitudes toward premarital sex. These gender differences signal a double standard that results in a dysfunctional Moroccan society.

Keywords: *Gender; Morocco; Premarital Sex; Virginity; Women*

Introduction

The discourse around sexuality in Morocco is limited within the context of heterosexual marriages. Historically, families have always made sure to marry their children off at a very young age. However, since the 1950s, Morocco has seen a steady increase in the average age of marriage. According to the latest HCP (2014) data, the age of first marriage has increased to 25.7 for women and 31.3 for men. This results in increased premarital sexual activity which is both religiously and legally prohibited in Morocco. The practice is more widespread in urban environments and big cities as there are more opportunities for young Moroccans to meet and be in relationships with one another. This means that a significant percentage of the population is knowingly breaking a law that suppresses their individual freedom. Those who come from higher classes of society can afford to pay for hotel rooms or rent in expensive areas where neighbors do not mind. Young people from low-income families have to risk being caught, shamed, arrested, and even put in jail every time they attempt to have consensual relationships.

While the phenomenon of premarital sexuality gets attention in the western world, Moroccan sociologists, with a handful of exceptions, have largely avoided it. This neglect stems from two facts: first, the taboo nature of premarital sexuality makes the research difficult; second, there is fear from academics that research in sexuality would limit one's career in its early stages. The lack of references in this area leaves a large room for uncertainty. Studying the attitudes toward premarital sex can help understand the changes in Moroccan society and its morals. Filling this gap in research is also likely to encourage younger researchers to take upon bigger challenges in dealing with sexuality-related questions. Breaking the academic taboo as well as revealing the widespread practice and attitudes toward it can help make the Moroccan society become more aware of the issues lurking in the dark as young citizens feel oppressed.

Literature Review

An important term to define for this article is “premarital sex”. Wiederman (2010) shows that the term has different meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. Twentieth-century researchers often used the term to refer to sex between two individuals who were due to become married. As the age of marriage increased, the term was taken to refer to sex between any two individuals regardless of whether or not they intended to get married. Wiederman (2010) suggests that “*youthful sex* might be a more accurate description, or *adolescent sex* or *young-adult sex*, depending on the age of the individuals involved (p.663)”. Another problem with the definition stems from whether “premarital sex” refers to only vaginal intercourse or whether non-penetrative sex and other sexual activities are also included. These considerations are all up to the researcher and the context of their work. For the purposes of this article, “premarital sex” is used in its most straightforward meaning to refer to sexual activity between two individuals without specifying the nature of such activity. Such a definition is used due to the taboo nature of any sexual topic within the context of Morocco and also for fear that any description of the term that is more specific would instantly turn off respondents and make it impossible to research the issue.

Studies regarding topics of sexuality in Morocco are scarce. There are only a handful of large quantitative studies that consider sexuality as an issue. These studies usually lack deep analysis and only scratch the surface. One of the latest attempts to quantify sexuality in Morocco comes as part of a national study conducted by l'Economiste/Sunergia (2011). According to the report, about 85% claimed to have had their first sexual relationship between the ages of 14 and 19. It is worth noting that while the study had a total of 1046 respondents, only 554 answered this question. It is also significant that 439 of them were males while only 115 were females. The report also indicates that those who abstained from answering the question did not do so because they had not had sex yet. Instead, their reluctance reflects the taboo nature of the topic. However, it is hard to draw any conclusions other than that a large group of young Moroccans is embarrassed to discuss their first sexual relationship. Lack of anonymity (face-to-face interviews) could influence the respondents to lie in order to save face (for females) or appear virile (for males).

However, the available numbers and statistics related to social issues related to sexual activity justify the need for a more open conversation. A study (2010) conducted by INSAF found that in 2009, 17,680 single mothers gave birth to their firstborn. Shockingly, 61% of the single mothers were below the age of 26. Even more troubling is that the association estimates the existence of 210,434 single mothers between 2003 and 2009, which is a four-times increase in comparison to the period 1996-2002 (Association INSAF, 2010). These numbers are not conclusive also because single mothers often resort to homebirths or illegal abortions to avoid social stigma. While it is not possible to give exact numbers, many estimate that there are between 200 and 800 illegal abortions in Morocco every day (Moroccan Family Planning Association; Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, 2016). Another social issue, which should be particularly disturbing to a patriarchal society that emphasizes morality, is the rise in the number of sex workers. The increasing numbers are justified mostly by economic and

financial problems that adult females who have lost their virginity face. In fact, UNAIDS (2016) estimated up to 75,000 sex workers in Morocco. For comparison, UNAIDS estimated only 25,000 sex workers in Tunisia and 23,000 in Egypt. These numbers should be horrifying to a mostly Muslim country that has long emphasized its traditional values. UNAIDS (2018) estimates that in 2017, approximately 20,000 Moroccans were living with HIV, 12,000 of whom were men. Ouairdirhi of AlBayane Press (2017) reports that during the 17th edition of the IUSTI World Congress that took place in May 2016 in Marrakesh, the data presented showed that 440,000 were affected by at least one sexually transmitted disease, 70% of whom were women. The statistics and raw numbers presented above show that, regardless of whether it is admitted or not, premarital sex is prevalent among young Moroccans and gives rise to many problems.

One of the earliest studies that researched sexuality in Morocco was conducted by Naamane-Guessous in the 1980s and published in *Au-delà de toute pudeur* (2007). She collected 200 surveys between October 1981 and August 1984. Her sample was exclusively made of females living in Casablanca and who were from different age groups, socioeconomic classes, different family statuses, and varying educational levels. She had two surveys: one for young women with 100 questions and the other for married women with 150 questions. Regarding premarital sexuality, Naamane-Guessous reported that two out of five married women surveyed had one or more sexual experiences before marriage. Contrary to what one would assume, Guessous shows that even in the 1980s, individuals were transgressing social norms, at least with regard to sexuality.

Other studies conducted in Morocco stay within the realm of qualitative interviews which usually follow a snowballing effect. Slimani's *Sexe et mensonges* (2017) is not a sociological study per se, but it is a series of interviews with females across Morocco. Each interviewee reveals a hidden aspect of sexuality that continues to be repressed. While no conclusion is to be drawn from these interviews, a tendency to repress one's sexuality cannot be denied. El Aji's doctoral thesis (2017), later published as a book, also interviewed Moroccans about their sexual experience. She confirmed that while she was conducting interviews, she never came across a Moroccan who "has not done anything". El Aji conducted a series of forty-five, semi-structured interviews with single and heterosexual males and females. Contrary to Slimani's participants who volunteered their stories, El Aji had to convince the participants to open up gradually while continually reassuring them of her commitment to keeping the interviews anonymous.

Research Objectives and Hypothesis

This study tackles premarital sexuality with a slightly different approach. While previous studies either dealt with sexuality as a minor part of a larger study or included attitudes from different age groups, this research deals with the population mostly concerned with the question of premarital sexuality. It explores the attitudes toward the premarital sexual activity of young Moroccans and investigates gender differences in these attitudes. The article analyzes and interprets these differences by reference to the Moroccan cultural and social context and relies on previous analyses to support its arguments. Therefore, the study's approach and sampling allow for a more focused analysis.

Very few sexuality-related studies deal with premarital sexual activity. The purpose of this study is to fill a gap in the literature regarding premarital sexuality in Morocco. This study, therefore, aims at providing more supporting evidence for the prevalence of premarital sexual activity among young Moroccans. It relies on recent data collected through an online questionnaire that targeted the young-adult population aged between 18 and 25 years old. It also intends to show how Moroccan cultural biases result in significant gender differences in practice and attitudes toward premarital sex. Based on the literature review, a hypothesis is put forward and tested in the following study: Moroccan men are more likely to report positive attitudes toward premarital sex compared to Moroccan women. This may be due to

cultural and social expectations for men to be sexually active and for women to be passive. This gender difference in reporting premarital sexual activity would indicate a double standard in Moroccan culture that results in a dysfunctional Moroccan society. It creates an unsafe and uncomfortable environment whereby Moroccans are not sure how to treat and engage with one another.

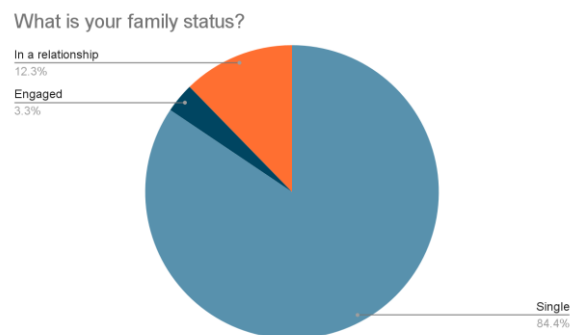
Data Collection

This study relies on quantitative data collected via an online questionnaire. The survey was shared on Facebook through its Groups feature as well as sponsored advertising. Data collection took two weeks, starting from March 4th to 18th, 2019. The participants all volunteered to answer the questionnaire with no incentives. The data collected is totally anonymous, in compliance with the ethics of research, but also because of the taboo nature of the topic.

Several reasons justify the use of an online survey in Arabic. The online option allows the survey to reach, otherwise inaccessible, participants from different Moroccan cities. It also ensures the anonymity of the participants, thus avoiding previous researchers' failure to find participants. Additionally, the use of social media facilitates reaching the target age group (18 to 24) as they are avid social media users. The questionnaire was administered in Arabic to allow non-English speakers to participate. A survey in English would have implied the possibility of the participants having a Western bias.

Sampling & Sample Description

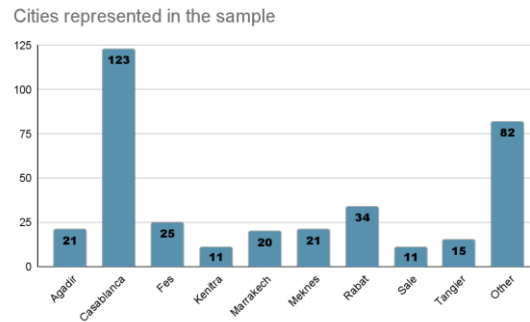
Figure 1. Respondents' family status



Source: Questionnaire administered by the authors - March 2019

Only 366 (out of 578) questionnaires are used for the data analysis as the rest of the respondents did not fit the criteria set for sampling (age outside the range 18-24, and/or family status currently or previously married, living outside of Morocco). The sample includes 186 females (50.8%) and 180 males (49.2%). Answers received, illustrated in Figure 1 above, were mostly from single Moroccans (84.4%), a low number of individuals engaged (3.3%), and those in a relationship but not married (12.3%). The majority, 77.3%, of the respondents were students. The respondents were from various cities in Morocco at varying frequencies. Respondents from Casablanca represented 34.4% of the answers. Rabat was the second most represented city with 9.3%, while Marrakesh (5.5%), Agadir (5.7%), Fes (6.8%), and Meknes (5.7%), were relatively close to one another. Other cities represented in the data included Tangier, Sale, Kenitra, and others (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cities represented in the sample



Source: Questionnaire administered by the authors - March 2019

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section included 11 items designed to profile the participants. The second section was only accessible to respondents who answered “single”, “engaged”, or “in a relationship” in item 6 of Section I. Section II included 23 items; all but one were organized on a 4-point Likert scale (completely disagree, disagree, agree, completely agree). The 22 items on the Likert scale were based on a 2017 study that aimed to develop a reliable survey to answer questions related to premarital sex among young people in Malaysia (Muhammad, Shamsuddin, Amin, Omar, & Thurasamy, 2017). The original survey had 20 items and was tested in Malaysia and passed the relevant reliability tests. For this research, the survey was translated into Arabic and the wording of item 18 was changed to adapt to familiar cultural practices. Item 19 had been added to investigate an issue (Urfi marriage) that is culturally relevant to Morocco¹, while item 30 had been added to investigate the extent to which Moroccans agree with the current penal laws.

Data Analysis

Crosstabulation and bivariate Spearman correlations were applied to the data using SPSS. Accordingly, answers to survey questions are analyzed by reference to gender. The goal was to reveal the nature of the effects, positive or negative, gender had on individual attitudes toward premarital sex and its practice. Throughout the paper, data from previous studies were used either for comparison or as supporting evidence.

Findings

The practice of premarital sexual activity

The study found that girls were more likely *not* to report instances of premarital sex. As can be seen in Table 1, more than two-thirds of the women surveyed denied having had sexual relationships, in contrast to only 26.6% who said they had had it before. For males, the answer was almost down to the middle as 54.4% admitted having had sexual relationships while 45.6% said they had not had any. It is worth noting that the number of males (N(m)=80) who claimed to have had sex was nearly double that of females (N(f)=41). (Because answering the question was not required, 65 respondents chose not to answer.) This data shows that men are twice as likely to have had a premarital sexual relationship. The large difference in reported numbers should be investigated further.

¹ Urfi marriage, in its modern Moroccan context, refers to secret marriage between two individuals who for social and/or financial reasons cannot marry legally.

Table 1. Previous practice of premarital sex among respondents

		Have you had any sexual relationships?		Total
		No	Yes	
Gender	Female	113	41	154
		73.4%	26.6%	100.0%
	Male	67	80	147
		45.6%	54.4%	100.0%
Total		180	121	301
		59.8%	40.2%	100.0%

Source: Questionnaire administered by the authors - March 2019

Attitudes toward premarital sexuality

Men's Attitudes toward premarital sexuality

Male's attitudes toward premarital sexuality appear to be trending toward tolerance of the activity if they are not already expecting it within their own relationships. The results show that a majority of the men surveyed, 65%, agreed that they expected to have sex with their partner. In addition to that, 63.9% of men said that most of their friends did have sex before marriage. The possibility of love leading to premarital sex was also generally accepted as well. Of this study's respondents, 66.1% of males said their friends thought it was fine to have sex in the case of a love relationship. However, only 47.2% of men thought that "one-night stands" were normal. *Urfi Marriages*² received a crushing 82.8% disapproval from the participants. This may suggest that, even though men seem more in control of sex dynamics in Morocco, mid-to-long-term relationships are still the norm.

Table 2. Male's attitudes toward premarital sexual relationships

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely agree
I expect to have sex with my partner	33 18.3%	30 16.7%	70 38.9%	47 26.1%
Most of my friends are practicing sex before marriage.	22 12.2%	43 23.9%	77 42.8%	38 21.1%
Most of my friends think that you can have sex before marriage if you are in love.	23 12.8%	38 21.1%	80 44.4%	39 21.7%
I believe a sexual encounter that lasts only once (one-night-stand) is normal.	54 30.0%	41 22.8%	47 26.1%	38 21.1%
I believe that Urfi Marriages are normal	80 44.4%	64 35.6%	25 13.9%	11 6.1%

Source: Questionnaire administered by the authors - March 2019

² *Urfi Marriages* could also be considered a middle-ground between adhering to religious codes (sex is permitted only within marriage) and the wish to have sexual relationships.

Women’s Attitudes toward premarital sexuality

Women’s attitudes are generally the opposite of that of their counterparts. The results point to less tolerance and readiness to accept engaging in premarital sex. For example, only 33.9% of women surveyed expect to have premarital sex with their partners. Regarding their entourage, only 42.4% of women acknowledge that most of their friends have had a premarital sexual experience. Contrary to males, the results show that less than half of the female respondents, 42.5%, have friends who think that love is a good enough reason for premarital sex. It is not surprising, then, that only 18.8% of women think that one-night-stands are normal and even less, 14.5%, believe that Urfi marriages are acceptable.

Table 3. Women's attitudes toward premarital sexual relationships

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Agree	Completely agree
I expect to have sex with my partner	78	45	36	27
	41.9%	24.2%	19.4%	14.5%
Most of my friends are practicing sex before marriage.	57	50	57	22
	30.6%	26.9%	30.6%	11.8%
Most of my friends think that you can have sex before marriage if you are in love.	59	48	52	27
	31.7%	25.8%	28.0%	14.5%
I believe a sexual encounter that lasts only once (one-night-stand) is normal.	119	32	19	16
	64.0%	17.2%	10.2%	8.6%
I believe that Urfi Marriages are normal	121	38	24	3
	65.1%	20.4%	12.9%	1.6%

Source: Questionnaire administered by the authors - March 2019

Importance of Virginity

Virginity and premarital sexuality are closely related. The survey included two statements to gauge respondents' perception of the importance of a girl’s virginity in Moroccan society. The statements were intended to gauge whether the entourage of respondents believes a girl’s virginity is important. The responses were, then, stratified by gender and further by whether or not respondents have had premarital sexual experience. The findings showed that 78.7% of respondents (80.6% of females and 76.6% of males) disagreed with the statement “most of my friends think it is NOT important for girls to protect their virginity”. In fact, as seen in Table 4, the majority of those who claimed to have had sex before also disagreed with the statement, which suggests that women’s attitudes toward consensual premarital sex were still negative. In response to another statement, the overwhelming majority of the survey respondents, almost 84%, admitted that the absence of blood during first intercourse did not necessarily mean that the girl was not a virgin.

Table 4. Importance of protecting virginity ³

				Most of my friends think it is NOT important for girls to protect their virginity.							
				Completely disagree		Disagree		Agree		Completely agree	
Gender	Female	Premarital sex?	No	66	58.4%	32	28.3%	9	8.0%	6	5.3%
			Yes	12	29.3%	17	41.5%	11	26.8%	1	2.4%
	Male	Premarital sex?	No	30	44.8%	26	38.8%	10	14.9%	1	1.5%
			Yes	23	28.7%	34	42.5%	15	18.8%	8	10.0%

Source: Questionnaire administered by the authors - March 2019

Discussion

Premarital Sexual Activity

Many sociologists suggest that men are more likely to have premarital sex than females. They are also more likely to have many partners before settling down for marriage. These assumptions are confirmed in this study. At first glance, one could assume that society allows men more freedom to transgress than it does women. Such interpretation of data ignores the complex culture around sexuality in an Arab and patriarchal country like Morocco. In fact, as El Aji (2017) points out, society puts pressure on both genders but in different directions. On the one hand, men would more likely prefer women who have had no sexual experience before and who are thus satisfied with their future husbands. Females are supposed to stay pure and chaste until they marry. On the other hand, women interviewed by El Aji (2017) laughed at the suggestion of marrying a virgin man. Interestingly, the idea was rejected *not* because virgin men do not exist, but because women want their husbands to have had enough sex before marriage. They argue that having premarital sex with other women would ensure that men will not cheat on them. Men are encouraged, then, to have multiple sex partners as soon as they hit puberty. Glacier (2017) states that “Boys learn early on, on the streets and elsewhere, that sexuality is their domain and that its field of deployment is women’s bodies (p.24)”. Such views are so prevalent in society as to be part of common sense. Women are virgins until marriage, men are not.

It is no surprise, then, to find that men surveyed in this study lean more toward sex-positive attitudes in comparison to women. As for women’s attitudes, it is not fair to try and justify their lack of openness as being traditional. As Glacier puts it,

asking women about their positions vis-à-vis virginity and pre-marital sex is like asking them if they are ready to become sexual objects to be consumed and disposed of like a stained and dirty rag. Who wants to be a dirty rag? The answer is no one. (Glacier, 2017, p. 48)

Indeed, women’s reluctance to be more open regarding premarital sex cannot be immediately linked to their traditional values, but rather to the realization that society is not friendly to “second-hand”

³ The sample includes only those who have answered the question “have you had any sexual relationship?”. (N=301)

women. While they may themselves hold more modern values, they fear that society will not accept them. This is evidenced by the high number of single mothers in Morocco who live in shelters, are disowned by their families, and are unable to find places to live or even work. Prostitution becomes a financial escape rather than a choice (Naamane-Guessous & Guessous, 2011).

It is important to ask and answer with whom Moroccan men have premarital sex if only 26.6% of females are willing to admit it. This question reveals more troubling sociocultural dynamics of power relations. According to L'Economiste/Sunergia (2011), 52% of young Moroccans (31% females and 66% males) admit to having had their first sexual relationship with a love partner. However, almost half of Moroccans have their first time with someone else. Indeed, 12% of men say they had it with a professional sex worker. The rest is what constitutes a dangerous realization; those who choose not to reveal with whom they have had their first sexual relationship are hiding more than a premarital sex sin. A majority of 62% of women declined to answer the question, which could be interpreted, in the best-case scenario, that it was a consensual relationship with an accomplice she does not want to name because of the immorality (a cousin?) or the unprofessionalism (teacher or employer?) of the act. In the worst-case scenario, it was not at all consensual, such as in the cases of unreported rape and incest. For men, only 15% abstained from answering the question. This implies that they are not proud of how they coerced their partner to have sex, which could be interpreted as either an unpleasant memory (profiting from a young housemaid) or a homosexual experience.

Virginity

According to Naamane-Guessous and Guessous (2011), “honor is determined by virginity”, more specifically, women’s virginity. This study found that survey respondents still considered virginity the ultimate proof of honor. Honor and female virginity were still strongly correlated as the latter represented a family’s social status, especially that of its men as protectors. Even more so, Dialmy (2005) argues that

Virginity is the basis of family honor, and interference with it constitutes interference with the family honor, especially the honor of its men who failed to protect it, since the sexual penetration of a girl before marriage means, patriarchally, the sexual penetration by the penetrator of all the males of the sexually penetrated woman. (p. 19)

This explains why virginity is important for women to keep until marriage, especially when they adhere to the traditional values that are handed down from generation to generation. It is worth remembering that more than 70% of Moroccans think tradition is important (Inglehart, 2014).

Women who have had previous sexual experience go to great lengths to make sure they appear virgins on their wedding night. The association of virginity and honor with vaginal blood has led to an increase in hymen reconstruction surgeries in Morocco and the rest of the Arab world (Naamane-Guessous, 2007). The surgical operation, known medically as hymenoplasty, is fairly simple, and takes about thirty minutes, with a 90% success rate. There are two types of “fake virginity” operations offered. First is a “virginity for the short term” and is usually done the night before the wedding, thus ensuring a “successful” defloration. This operation costs anywhere between 2,000 and 4,000 dirhams. The second offer is for the long term and it starts at 8,000 dirhams. The price of social shame and exclusion trumps that of a fake hymen.

This is not the only middle ground found between premarital sexuality and honor. According to Dialmy (2005), “the pre-marital practice of sex does not always mean full and complete intercourse, as the wish to retain the hymen intact leads to alternative sexual practices: non-penetrative, anal, and oral (p.24)”. It is for this reason that Dialmy (2002) argues for differentiation between two modes of “virginity”. “Koranic Virginity” and “Consensual Virginity”. The first refers to abstention from sexuality. This is the traditional assumption of virginity which goes along with religious, societal, and legal

prohibitions of premarital sex in all its forms. This tradition is slowly disappearing, leaving room for the second mode, “Consensual Virginity,” which refers to girls who protect their hymen while enjoying their sexual lives as “freely” as they can. Making this distinction in further research could reveal even higher percentages of premarital sex among young women. What is clear now is that virginity is not the warrant of honor as it was in the past.

Male Coercion

Men have a different experience with sexuality. As long as boys manifest “correct sexuality” as they grow up, society is more inclined to accept, and even encourage their heterosexual activity at the expense of young women as is evidenced by sexual harassment and assaults that are committed daily in public space. Accordingly, men are supposed to coerce women into having premarital sex as “these males’ manhood is evaluated according to the extent of their control over and coercion of ‘their women’” (Dialmy, 2002, p.78). Men are expected to dominate both in public and private spaces, as justified by patriarchal interpretations of Islam (Nagi, 2017).

One such example of coercion is actually nonvaginal premarital sex. This could be in the form of non-penetrative sexual activity, such as fellatio or cunnilingus, or other forms of intercourse such as sodomy. It is common that men resort to these alternative practices when they cannot achieve vaginal intercourse with their partners as women feel less likely to refuse them out of fear that their partners will lose interest in the relationship. Also, some men think “when the girl asks her partner to deflower her, it is a feminine ruse that is more destructive than any male ruse” (Dialmy, 2002, p.80). Because of this, men would refuse to engage in vaginal penetration out of fear of being obliged to marry their premarital sexual partners. Instead, they coerce their partners to rather engage in nonvaginal sexual activity. While it may sound like a compromise, Dialmy (2002) finds that no women reported pleasure from being sodomized. Therefore, as women try to protect their virginity for their future husbands and men try to avoid being tricked into marriage, both men and women prefer nonvaginal sexual activity as an alternative solution, which means that men are the only “winners” in such a deal. Women who agree to this usually do it after being coerced by their male partners.

Conclusion

The research has found a significant difference in the practice of, and attitude toward premarital sex. Females are also less likely to report engaging in premarital sex and usually have negative attitudes toward it. However, it cannot be concluded that it is their belief in religious prohibitions that stop women from experiencing their sexuality. Rather, it is more likely that social pressures, such as the emphasis on the protection of the hymen, are the obstacle. Men are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward premarital sex and to have sex before marriage. This is largely due to social pressure for them to be heterosexual and virile on their wedding night. This paradox pushing each gender in a different direction creates a social dysfunction whereby men are expected to have sex and women are forced to protect their virginity.

Working on a sex-related research topic has many limitations. Sex research is plagued with the inability to verify the data as sexual behavior is by nature private. The research, therefore, takes the answers at face value, understanding that their accuracy might be undermined. The data has shown a significant gender difference in the prevalence of premarital sex. First, it is understandable that the term may have been interpreted differently. The Arabic equivalent “*‘alāqah ġinsiyah qabla āzzawāġ*” falls within the same definition limitations on “premarital sex”, that is respondents may not have been clear on whether the question referred to only vaginal intercourse or whether non-penetrative sex and other sexual activities were also included. Further research could focus on the specific levels of premarital sex by providing options. Second, participants, depending on their ideological perspectives, may be inclined to

sway the results to their preferred status. In the context of Morocco, where Islam is the *de-facto* religion of more than 90% of the population, “it is possible that more religious people will falsely report fewer sexual partners because of guilt or shame or a general interest in providing socially desirable responses” (Barkan, 2006, p. 414).

Representativeness is also a recurrent limitation in research regarding sexual behavior in society. This study has chosen an online questionnaire as it allows an equal chance for every Moroccan with access to the internet to participate. However, it is worth noting that many young Moroccans in remote places may not have access to social media and thus not be represented in the study. Further research may require more “fieldwork” to get data on young Moroccans in remote places. The use of an online questionnaire means that the researcher has no control over who participates in the study. This has resulted in an overrepresentation of Casablanca in the sample studied, although the city is also the largest by population number. Further research should account for the equal representativeness of most inner cities.

While this study could confirm that social norms have a great effect on the individual’s decision to have premarital sex, it could not conclude that the level of education plays a role; nor could it account for socioeconomic status and the role of law as a deterrent. Further research should also deal with that which influences one’s choices and decision-making processes. This could mean a complex system that includes personal factors, such as level of education, individual religiosity, and socioeconomic status, and external factors, such as laws, customs, and social and moral values. The interaction between these factors could sway one’s attitudes to be more modern or traditional. Understanding how they interact and influence one’s behavior could be vital to raising awareness and having effective strategies to promote sexual health as well as open-mindedness and tolerance.

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