

Research Paper

## The Value of Virginity, Prevalence of Premarital Sex, and Vulnerability to Reproductive Health Risks among Young People in Wolaita Sodo town

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### Abstract

This research investigates the value of virginity, prevalence of premarital sexual practices, and vulnerability to reproductive health risks among the youth in Wolaita Sodo town. Youth learning both in the primary schools (382) and higher education institution (384) were selected using probability proportionate to size sampling technique. Institutional-based descriptive and explanatory research designs were used in the study. Using a survey method, quantitative data were collected by structured questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyze and present data. Young people in Wolaita Sodo town were found to have a high value to virginity. It is also found that 18.2% of primary school students reported that they engaged in premarital sexual practice which is lower than the rate found among the University students (33.2%). Out of the respondents who reported to have had premarital sex, 38% of primary school students and 59.8% of University students disclosed that they have sexual relationships only with a single partner whereas 20% of primary school students and 19.5% of University students reported that they have five and above life-time sex partners. In addition, primary school students have been found to be better in terms of engaging in less risky premarital sexual practices compared to their University students counterparts (59.8% to 62% in regular condom use; 56% to 55.2% in undertaking HIV testing before engaging in sexual practices, respectively). While being female ( $r=.181$ ,  $P<.01$ ), never married ( $r=.174$ ,  $P<.01$ ), and coming from an urban area ( $r=.187$ ,  $P<.01$ ) are positively associated to value of virginity, being female is negatively associated to premarital sexual experience ( $r=-.429$ ,  $P<.01$ ). With relatively low level of premarital sexual practices, regular condom use, and better experience of undergoing voluntary HIV testing before sexual intercourse, youth in Wolaita Sodo town are less vulnerable to reproductive health risks. But, the finding regarding the presence of more than one life-time sexual partners among the respondents may enhance their vulnerability to various reproductive health risks.

### 1. Introduction

Young people are highly affected by sexual related problems and exposed to early onset of sexual practices (Laumann, 2006). Some youth may engage in premarital sexual practices with many sexual partners. Therefore, they may have high number of lifetime sexual partners that could be liable to acquire sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including Human Immunodeficiency

Virus (HIV) (Vos, 2004). In every society, the first time a young person has sex with a partner is seen as a major social and sexual transition constituting part of the irreversible journey from childhood to adult life (Muuss, 1970). Virginity loss is defined as the first time a man or woman engages in vaginal-penile intercourse (Jessor and Jessor, 1975).

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According to Goody (1976), restrictiveness is a way of avoiding inappropriate marriages: by controlling a girl's sexuality, her family can better control her marriage choice since the loss of virginity may diminish a girl's honor and reduce her marriage chances. Virginity is valued in those societies in which young men may seek to better their chances in life by allying themselves through marriage to a wealthy or powerful family. In preserving a daughter's virginity, a family is protecting her from seduction, impregnation, and paternity claims on her child. This is most critical when certain kinds of property transactions are involved. In societies in which dowry is given or daughters inherit properties; it would be attractive to seduce a dowered daughter or heiress, demanding her as wife along with her property (Schlegel, 1991).

Feminization of sexuality means young people's choices regarding sexual activities are influenced by cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity located in gendered power relations. Girls bear more responsibility for premarital virginity loss (Matswetu and Bhana, 2018). Patriarchal values produce sexual double standards whereby virginity has greater significance for females compared to males (Palit and Allen, 2016). As a result, unmarried young men have the freedom to engage in sexual liaisons without any adverse repercussion on their social standing; virginity is thus an element of normative patriarchal restrictions on women's sexuality (Bhana, 2018). Carpenter (2002) argued that the relationship between gender and virginity loss is complex and that the importance of gender as a determinant of sexual meanings and experiences may be diminishing.

Some researchers (e.g. Brumberg, 1997; Rubin, 1990) found that a growing number of young women perceive virginity as neither desirable nor undesirable, and a minority of women even approaching virginity loss with eagerness and curiosity, expressing desire to "get it over with," or seeing virginity as embarrassing or constraining. The decline in abstinence, sexual freedom, laxity and promiscuity, unprotected sex, limited use of contraceptives, female child marriage, female child rape and violence account for the high rate of teenage pregnancy in Africa (Nnazor and Robinson, 2016).

Previous studies (e.g. Geremew Kindie et al., 2017; Tomas Benti et al., 2015; Bayisa Abdissa et al., 2017;

Addisu Shunu and Abdulbasit Musa, 2014; Daba Bane, 2006; Netsanet Habte et al., 2018) undertaken in Ethiopia regarding youth sexual behavior revealed the high prevalence of premarital sexual practices in various areas of Ethiopia. Being male, having pocket money, failure to discuss sexual issues with intimate friends, and peer pressure were found to be associated factors for the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among adolescent students (Geremew Kindie et al., 2017). Tomas Benti et al. (2014) found alcohol use, educational level, and discussion about sexuality to be the factors significantly associated to premarital sexual intercourse among undergraduate students of Madawalabu University. Another study conducted on out-school youth in Yabello town of southern Ethiopia by Addisu Shunu and Abdulbasit Musa (2014) found being employed and having sexually experienced peers to contribute to the start of premarital sex. Mitike Yemane and Lindtjorn (2008) found that youth who did not believe in the traditional value of preserving virginity until marriage were twice as likely to initiate sex before marriage. In addition, those in older age group, khat chewers, alcohol drinkers, and those who have completed primary education and above were more likely to have premarital sex. Premarital sexual practice among high school students was strongly associated with being lower age groups and having boy/girlfriends (Netsanet Habte et al., 2018). The issue of virginity value among Ethiopian youth in general and students learning in various hierarchies in particular, however, has not been adequately addressed by previous studies.

Mitike Yemane and Lindtjorn (2008) found that maintaining virginity is still a way of securing marriage for girls living in rural areas of Ethiopia. Having undertaken the research in nine rural and one urban area, the authors also found that rural youth were three times more likely to believe in the traditional norm of remaining virgin until marriage, as far as comparison of urban and rural youth is concerned. A related study by Meles Yohannes et al. (2016), on the other hand, found poor value of virginity and high prevalence of early sexual practices among youth in Mekelle town, Ethiopia. On top of such contradicting findings about the subject, other published studies can hardly be found in Ethiopia regarding youth virginity value and its relationship to both prevalence of premarital sexual

intercourse and exposure of youth to various sexually transmitted infections. The present research, therefore, aimed at assessing young peoples' value toward virginity, their engagements in premarital sexual practices, and vulnerability to reproductive health risks in Wolaita Sodo town. It is also important to compare virginity values between youth learning in various levels of schools, especially between those learning at the elementary and University levels. Such analysis helps to empirically test whether virginity value among youth declines as their academic level increases. Furthermore, it is commonly assumed that University students are more prone to engage in premarital sex than elementary students due to lenient parental control and absence of close supervision.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

Institutional-based descriptive and explanatory research designs were used in the study. The research involved the collection of quantitative data to find out the extent of virginity values, the prevalence of premarital sexual practices, and factors associated to virginity values among the students. Survey research method was used to collect quantitative data regarding virginity values, the magnitude of premarital sexual practices, and vulnerability of respondents to various reproductive health risks.

### 2.2. Research Design

The study was carried out in Wolaita Sodo town, Southern Ethiopia. The source population was young people learning at various levels of education in Ethiopia during the time of the survey. Youth who were learning both at the primary schools of Wolaita Sodo town and similar survey population attending undergraduate courses at a higher education institution in the area, particularly Wolaita Sodo University, were considered in the current study. From the primary schools (grade 1-8) available in the town during the time of survey, four schools (two private and two public) were randomly selected. Survey respondents from the primary schools were grade eight students who can better understand the questions that appear on the questionnaire. First, the researchers gathered secondary data from Wolaita Sodo town's education bureau and from offices of principals in the respective selected four

schools regarding the total number of students. Wolaita Sodo University is clustered in to 3 campuses, six colleges. Three colleges (college of social science and humanity, college of business and economics and school of engineering and informatics) were randomly selected with the aim of enhancing the representativeness. Because the survey population size was already known, the researchers used Yemane's formula to calculate the total sample size, according to equation 1 and 2 for university and primary school students, respectively.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N \times (e)^2} = \frac{9,582}{1+9,582 \times (0.05)^2} = 384 \quad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N \times (e)^2} = \frac{8,643}{1+8,643 \times (0.05)^2} = 382 \quad (2)$$

Where,  $n$  - the sample size,  $N$  - the population size,  $e$  - the acceptable sampling error, 95% confidence level and  $p = 0.05$  is assumed. Probability proportionate to size sampling technique was used to determine the sample size both for students learning in the University and primary school levels. From the total questionnaires distributed, 274 of primary school students (72% response rate) and 262 of University students (68.2% response rate) have properly filled and completed.

### 2.3. Research Method and Source of Data

Primary data were gathered mainly through the use of survey research method. A self-administered questionnaire was prepared in English, translated in to Amharic language to create a better understanding of the questionnaire items among the respondents. The items in the questionnaire were partly taken from Mitike Yemane and Lindtjorn (2008) and adopted to fit in to the context of the current study. Then, data collectors, 2 possessing a bachelor degree and one graduating class of sociology department, were trained about the items in the questionnaire and all the things to be done in the process of data collection. Following this, a permission letter was secured from the concerned body of Wolaita Sodo University. Next, a pilot test was undertaken to prove compatibility of the questionnaire on few selected students (30 from the University and 30 from the primary school students). The same questionnaire, having similar items, was duplicated according to the sample size of students learning in primary schools and University. In addition, a 5% addition of questionnaire copies was duplicated to substitute potential losses

before distribution. Finally, the actual data collection activity was held from February 19-28, 2020 under the supervision of the principal and co-investigators. During data gathering, data collectors have been clearly instructing respondents about how to fill the questionnaire. A close follow-up was made by both data collectors and supervisors. Respondents, especially in the elementary schools were told to freely raise any question that is unclear to them, including on how to respond to the questions. Because the questionnaire included some very private questions that may shame the respondents, data collectors have been controlling and informing respondents to maintain the physical distance between them. The reliability of the instrument was checked through internal consistency of the response items using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  while both content and face validity measures were used to maintain its validity.

#### 2.4. Instrument

In order to assess the value attached to virginity by the respective society/social group to which the students belong, the respondents were asked "To what extent remaining virgin until marriage is valued by the society you come from?" and the response categories being 1) valued/encouraged, 2) discouraged/not valued, 3) do not know. Students' belief of remaining virgin until marriage was measured by asking them: "Do you believe that a person should remain virgin until marriage?" and the response categories were: 1) Yes, 2) No. Furthermore, beliefs about girls' and boys' virginity were evaluated by the following two questions: "Do you believe in the traditional norm that girls should remain virgin until marriage?" and "Do you believe in the traditional norm that boys should remain virgin until marriage?" the response categories for both questions being "Yes" and "No". Both boys and girls who choose "yes" about belief in virginity, they were again asked to provide reasons, which include: prevention of HIV, because it is a precondition for marriage, religious prescription, others also customarily doing it, and the need to ensure trustworthiness. Furthermore, respondents' attitude toward virginity was measured on a five point Likert scale where 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree with six statements prepared for this purpose.

In addition, intention of marrying a virgin for the never married was assessed by the question: "Do you want to marry a virgin in the future?" and the response categories were "Yes", "No", and "Indifferent". Above all, the prevalence of premarital sex was examined by asking respondents: "Have you ever had vaginal sexual intercourse?" with response categories of "Yes" and "Never". Those who have replied "Yes" were again asked "Who initiated the first sexual initiation?" and were provided response categories: "personal desire", "partner influence", "peer influence", "rape", "influenced by drugs". Finally, for those who reported to have had sexual intercourse, the number of sexual partners were evaluated by asking: "With how many persons have you had sexual intercourse?" and the response categories being "one", "Two", "three", "four", "Five and above".

#### 2.5. Method of Data Analysis

The questionnaires returned from the respondents were first checked against completeness. The correctly completed ones were then inserted in to software known as Statistical package for social sciences. Data generated from the software were presented using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Virginity values and prevalence of premarital sex, including reproductive health behaviors of respondents were analyzed through descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency distributions, tables, and percentages. Moreover, data regarding respondents' attitude toward virginity was analyzed and presented using measures of central tendencies, such as mean, median, and standard deviation. In addition, comparison of virginity values and prevalence of premarital sex between the two categories of students was made by comparing frequency distributions of cases in both categories. Furthermore, analysis of factors associated to virginity values was made by both Pearson's correlation and linear regression coefficients. Using 95% confidence interval, independent variables for which significance levels were below 0.05 were considered as significantly associated to virginity values, engagements in to premarital sex, and patterns of regular condom use.

### 3. Results

The aim of the present study was to assess the value of virginity among the youth in Wolaita Sodo town, prevalence of premarital sexual practices, and their

vulnerability to reproductive health risks. Quantitative data were collected, sorted, and entered in to SPSS version 20 for analysis. In this section, the processed data are presented with an interpretation to make the necessary assertions.

### 3.1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the socio-demographic characteristics of survey participants. While most (77%) of respondents in the primary level of education are 11-15 years old, majority (79.4%) of respondents in the University are found to be 21-25 years of age. Moreover, sex disparity between the two groups of respondents has also been observed. Whereas female respondents (58%) constituted relatively the larger proportion of students in the primary schools, the percentage of males (55.7%) is greater in case of respondents in the University. As far as marital status is concerned, most of the respondents

in both groups (85.4% in primary, 86.6% in University) have never married. Furthermore, while majority (63%) of respondents in the University disclosed to be followers of Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism dominated the religious faith among the primary students (56.2%). The residential background of respondents has been found to be urban (81.4%) for the larger proportion of primary students while respondents who reported to come from rural areas dominated the proportion of University students (59.2%). This variation might have happened due to the fact that most of the students in most Ethiopian primary schools in general, and the study area in particular, are from the nearby areas surrounding the schools. Above all, the current marital status of parents of respondents shows that most (81% among primary students, 81.7% among University students) of the parents in both groups are reported to be still in wedlock.

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

No.	Variable	Categories of responses	Frequency (%) of elementary students N=274	Frequency (%) of University students N=262
1.	Age	11-15	211 (77%)	1 (0.4%)
		16-20	62 (22.6%)	42 (16%)
		21-25	1 (0.4%)	208 (79.4%)
		26-30	-	8 (3.1%)
		31-35	-	2 (0.8%)
		36-40	-	1 (0.4%)
2.	Sex	Female	159 (58%)	116 (44.3%)
		Male	115 (42%)	146 (55.7%)
3.	Marital status	Married	24 (8.8%)	30 (11.5%)
		Never married	234 (85.4%)	227 (86.6%)
		Divorced	14 (5.1%)	4 (1.5%)
		Widowed	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.4%)
4.	Religion	Orthodox Christian	70 (25.5%)	165 (63%)
		Muslim	29 (10.6%)	29 (11.1%)
		Protestant	154 (56.2%)	61 (23.3%)
		Catholic	6 (2.2%)	3 (1.1%)
		Joba	2 (0.7%)	-
		Atheist	-	2 (0.8%)
5.	Residential background	Rural	51 (19.6%)	155 (59.2%)
		Urban	223 (81.4%)	107 (40.8%)
6.	Parents' current marital status	Still in wedlock	222 (81%)	214 (81.7%)
		Divorced	26 (9.5%)	21 (8%)
		Widowed	18 (6.6%)	21 (8%)
		Separated	8 (2.9%)	6 (2.3%)

### 3.2. The Value of Virginity in Mate Selection

Table 2 presents frequency distribution of responses regarding the place of virginity in the value system of respondents leading the personal relationships they intend to create with other persons in the opposite sex. According to the data in Table 2, virginity has generally been found to be valued by the respective societies which respondents are a member. Relatively speaking, the value of virginity was higher in the society from which University students come (82.4%) than the case in the primary school students (59.9%). Moreover, higher proportion of primary school students reported to give an emphasis on the value of staying virgin until marriage (91.2%) compared to their University students counterparts (87%).

The main reason for primary level students to believe in the importance of remaining virgin until marriage has been found to be its contribution to protect oneself from various sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (43.4%), followed by religious prescription (20.1%), and the need to ensure the trustworthiness of a spouse (19.7%). The issue being a religious prescription was reported to be the main reason (56.5%), followed

by the need to ensure trustworthiness (16.4%) and consideration of virginity as a precondition for marital relationships (13.4%), in case of University students.

Most male respondents both in the primary schools (32.5%) as well as in University (42.7%) believe in the traditional norm that girls should remain virgin until marriage. Similarly, majority of females in both groups of respondents (52.9% of primary, 35.5% of University students) believe in the norm that boys should remain virgin until marriage. From the data, it can be understood that girls place a relatively higher value to boys' virginity than boys do among students in the primary school students (52.9% females need boys to remain virgin compared to 32.5% of boys who reported to value girls' virginity) while the reverse is true in case of University students (42.7% of boys reported to value girls' virginity compared to 35.5% girls who replied to value boys' virginity). Data also reveals a high need of marrying a virgin spouse in the future among the respondents of both groups (78.1% primary school students, 71% of University students).

**Table 2:** The frequency distribution of value of virginity among the respondents

No.	Variable/Question	Categories of responses	Frequency (%) of primary school students N=274	Frequency (%) of University students N=262
1.	The extent to which virginity is valued by the society respondents come from	Virginity is valued	164 (59.9%)	216 (82.4%)
		Not valued	21 (7.7%)	23 (8.8%)
		Do not know	89 (32.5%)	23 (8.8%)
2.	Belief in remaining virgin until marriage	Yes	250 (91.2%)	228 (87%)
		No	24 (8.8%)	34 (13%)
3.	Reasons to believe in virginity	To protect oneself from STIs	119 (43.4%)	23 (8.8%)
		Considering it as a precondition for marriage	28 (10.2%)	35 (13.4%)
		It is prescribed by my religion	55 (20.1%)	148 (56.5%)
		To ensure trustworthiness	54 (19.7%)	43 (16.4%)
		Others also customarily believe so	5 (1.8%)	9 (3.4%)
		No reason	10 (3.6%)	4 (1.5%)
		Missing	3 (1.1%)	-
4.	Boys' belief towards the norm that girls should remain virgin	Yes	89 (32.5%)	112 (42.7%)
		No	30 (10.9%)	33 (12.6%)
		Missing	155 (56.6%)	117 (44.7%)
5.	Girls' belief towards the norm that boys should remain virgin	Yes	145 (52.9%)	93 (35.5%)
		No	17 (6.2%)	25 (9.5%)
		Missing	112 (40.9%)	144 (55%)
6.	The need to marry a virgin in the future (for the never married)	Yes	214 (78.1%)	186 (71%)
		No	18 (6.6%)	15 (5.7%)
		Indifferent	39 (14.3%)	61 (23.3%)
		Missing	3 (1.1%)	-

Data presented in Table 3 and Figure 1 are attempts of assessing the value of virginity among the respondents measured using Likert scale. Specifically, data in Table 3 is about a comparative distribution of virginity value between respondents of the two groups on the basis of the various measures of central tendency. Accordingly, it is found that the respondents in both groups have positive attitude toward virginity and its role to create and maintain spousal relationships has been pronounced. For instance, majority of the respondents expressed that they consider virginity as the main criterion to engage in love or marital relationships (Mean=4.17 for primary school students, 3.94 for University students). Similar to the above finding, respondents in the primary schools have shown a relatively higher positive attitude towards virginity.

Furthermore, Figure 1 compares the aggregate mean of attitude held towards the value of virginity by both primary school and University students. The aggregate mean for both groups of research participants is found to be above 3 which imply the presence of positive attitude towards the value of necessity of remaining virgin until marriage. Comparing the mean of the two groups, it is indicated that the mean of attitude for primary school students is 3.45 while in case of University students, it is found to be 3.01. It suggests that primary school students hold more favorable attitude towards maintaining virginity than their University students counter parts.

### 3.3. Premarital Sexual Practices and Vulnerability to Reproductive Health Risks

Data presented in Table 4 shows the frequency distribution of respondents in terms of experiences of engaging in premarital sex and related practices that may expose them to various reproductive health risks. It is found that 18.2% of primary school students reported to have engaged in premarital sexual practice which is lower than the rate we found among the University students (33.2%). Furthermore, while partner influence makes the highest percentage share (36%) of reasons to start premarital sex among primary school students followed by self-initiation (32%), most (42.5%) of such a practice was initiated by the respondents themselves followed by partner influence (29.9%) among University students.

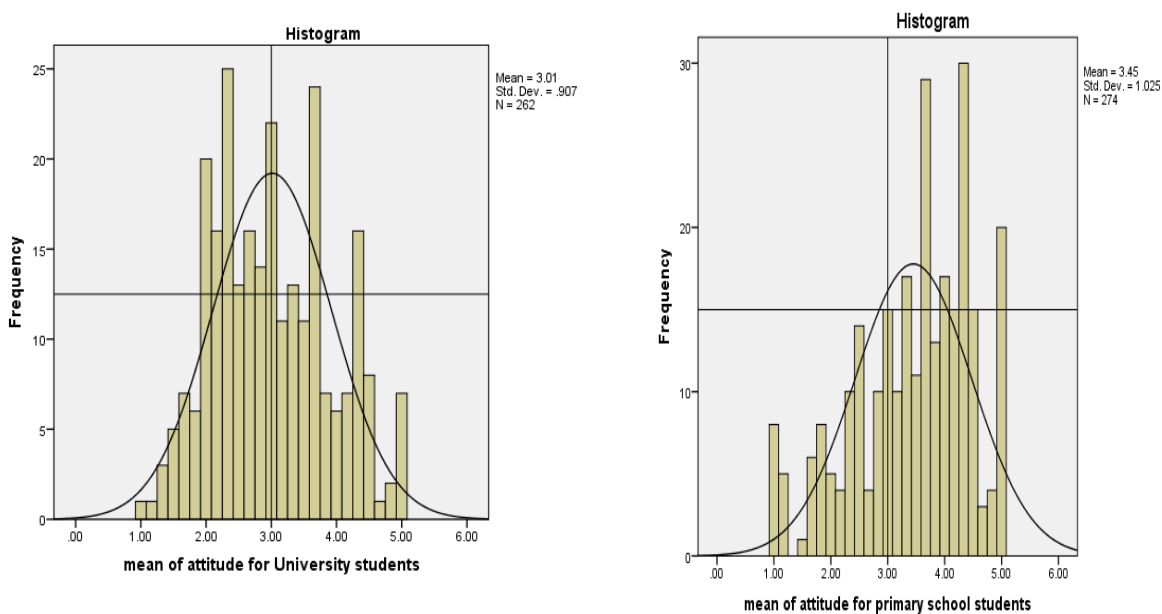
Out of the respondents who reported to have had premarital sexual practices, 19 (38%) of primary school students and 52 (59.8%) of University students disclosed to have sexual relationships only with a single partner, though experiences of having more than one life-time sexual partners have also been found, as presented in Table 5. For instance, 20% of primary school students and 19.5% of University students reported to have sexual intercourse with five and more persons.

Moreover, better prospects of regular condom use during sex have been observed among the respondents in both groups. While 62% of primary school students reported to regularly use condom during sex, 56% of them disclosed to have the experience of undertaking voluntary HIV testing before doing sexual intercourse. In addition,

**Table 3:** Frequency distribution of the value of virginity among respondents as measured on a Likert scale

Variable/ Statements on the Likert scale	Measures of central tendency									
	Mean		Median		Std. deviation		Variance		Sum	
	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.
Virginity is my major criterion to engage in love or marital relationships	4.17	3.94	5.00	5.00	1.449	1.336	2.099	1.786	1143	1033
I am not willing to start a relationship with non-virgin person	3.44	3.11	4.00	3.00	1.666	1.507	2.775	2.270	943	816
I don't mind about the virginity status of a person when intend to start a relationship	2.72	2.68	2.00	2.00	1.657	1.446	2.745	2.090	745	701
I will never marry a person that is not a virgin	3.37	2.73	4.00	2.00	1.606	1.472	2.579	2.168	924	715
Someone is a virgin means that s/he is trustworthy for marital relationship	3.72	2.99	5.00	2.50	1.578	1.519	2.490	2.306	1018	784
I will never start love or marital relationships unless I get a virgin	3.28	2.63	3.00	2.00	1.648	1.477	2.716	2.181	899	688

Note: PSt. = Primary School students, USt. = University students



**Figure 1:** Comparison of mean of attitudes towards value of virginity for both categories of students.

primary school students have been found to be better in terms of engaging in less risky premarital sexual practices compared to their University students counterparts (59.8% to 62% in regular condom use; 56% to 55.2% in undertaking HIV testing before engaging in

sexual practices, respectively). Finally, most respondents in both groups (76% of primary school students, 67.8% of University students) have reported to care for pregnancy than other sexually transmitted infections, which might expose them to various reproductive health risks.

**Table 4:** Frequency distribution of respondents in terms of experiences in premarital sex

No.	Variable	Categories of responses	Frequency (%) of primary school students N=274	Frequency (%) of University students N=262
1.	Experiences of sexual intercourse	Yes	50 (18.2%)	87 (33.2%)
		Never	224 (81.8%)	175 (66.8%)
2.	What/who initiated first sexual intercourse	Self/Personal desire	16 (32%)	37 (42.5%)
		Partner influence	18 (36%)	26 (29.9%)
		Peer pressure	10 (20%)	11 (12.6%)
		Rape	2 (4%)	5 (5.7%)
		Influenced by drug/s	3 (6%)	6 (6.9%)
		Others	1 (2%)	2 (2.3%)
		Total	50 (100%)	87(100%)
3.	Number of sexual partners	1	19 (38%)	52 (59.8%)
		2	17 (34%)	12 (13.8%)
		3	3 (6%)	5 (5.7%)
		4	1 (2%)	1 (1.1%)
		5 & above	10 (20%)	17 (19.5%)
		Total	50 (100%)	87(100%)
4.	Experiences of regular condom use	Yes	31 (62%)	52 (59.8%)
		No	19 (38%)	35 (40.2%)
		Total	50 (100%)	87(100%)
5.	Ever had sex without undertaking HIV testing	Yes	22 (44%)	39 (44.8%)
		No	28 (56%)	48 (55.2%)
		Total	50 (100%)	87(100%)
6.	During sex, I care not to conceive than I care for HIV/AIDS.	Yes	38 (76%)	59 (67.8%)
		No	12 (24%)	28 (32.2%)
		Total	50 (100%)	87(100%)



### 3.4. Factors Associated to Value of Virginity, Premarital Sex, and Condom Use

In the following sub-section, an attempt has been made to analyze the association between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, religion, marital status, residential background, and parents' current marital status) and their value to virginity, engagements in premarital sex, and experiences of regular condom use. The association was tested using both correlation and regression coefficients as presented in Table 5 and 6.

It is found that primary school students' value of virginity was found to be positively associated to the sex ( $r(274) = .181, P < .01$ ) and marital status ( $r(274) = .174, P < .01$ ) of respondents, i.e. being female and never married, and a higher value to virginity are positively associated. In addition, University students' virginity value is associated to their residential background ( $r(262) = .187, P < .01$ ), i.e. coming from an urban area and a higher value to virginity are positively associated. Furthermore, respondents' experience of engaging in premarital sexual practices is associated to the sex of respondents for both groups alike ( $r(274) = -.429, P < .01, df = n1 + n2 - 2 = 536$  among the primary school students and  $r(262) = .237, P < .01$  for University students), i.e. being female is negatively associated to experience of premarital sex or more males have reported to have engaged in premarital sex than their female counterparts. Above all, respondents' experience of regular condom use has been found to be positively associated to the sex ( $r(274) = .217, P < .05$ ) of respondents in case of primary school students. In other words, being male and the experience of regular condom use are positively associated. As shown in Table 5, the

level of association for all sex, marital status, and residential background is significant.

Table 6 presents regression coefficient data regarding the nature and extent of association between the dependent and independent variables. The coefficients of regression confirm the findings obtained by using correlation coefficients indicated in Table 5. Once again, while sex, marital status, and residential background were found to be significantly associated to respondents' virginity values, engagements in premarital sex, and experience of regular condom use, age, religious affiliation, and parents' current marital status have no significant association. Looking in to both the standardized and the unstandardized coefficients in the table, we find that sex, marital status, and residential background are positive significant predictors of respondents' value of virginity while and sex is a negative predictor for engagement in premarital sexual intercourse. In other words, a one point increase in sex differences among the respondents results in a 0.97 increase in the value of virginity. In addition, a one point increase in respondents' residential background differences brings about a 0.135 increase in their value of virginity. Moreover, every one point increase in the marital status results in a 0.113 increase in their value toward virginity. On the other hand, every additional difference in the sex of respondents decreases their experience of premarital sex by  $-.333$ . Generally, whereas being female ( $0.97, P < .05$ ), coming from an urban area ( $R = .135, P < .05$ ), and being never married ( $R = .133, P < .05$ ) are positive predictors of value toward virginity, being female ( $R = -.333, P < .05$ ) is found to be a negative predictor of young people's experience of premarital sexual practices.

**Table 5:** Frequency distribution of respondents in terms of experiences in premarital sex

Dependent variable/s	Correlation coefficients	Independent variables											
		Age		Sex		Marital status		Religion		Residence		Parents' Marital Status	
		PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.
Virginity Value	Pearson Correlation	-.048	.062	.181**	.047	.174**	-.089	-.083	.015	.082	.187**	-.063	.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.428	.320	.003	.449	.004	.152	.169	.812	.177	.002	.298	.372
premarital Sex	Pearson Correlation	-.024	-.042	-.429**	.237**	-.026	.066	.099	-.088	.084	.042	-.078	.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.697	.500	.000	.000	.673	.284	.103	.154	.163	.501	.199	.371
Condom use	Pearson Correlation	.057	.207	.045	.217*	.177	.056	-.092	-.170	-.042	-.072	.093	-.175
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.694	.053	.756	.043	.220	.604	.526	.114	.770	.507	.521	.104

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 6:** Linear Regression coefficients

Dependent variable/s	Regression coefficients	Independent variables											
		Age		Sex		Marital status		Religion		Residence		Parents' Marital Status	
		PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.	PSt.	USt.
Virginity Value	B	-.012	.043	.097	.041	.113	-.087	-.012	-.003	.073	.135	-.035	.020
	St. error	.039	.043	.034	.044	.042	.056	.013	.020	.044	.043	.023	.029
	Beta	-.019	.065	.169	.061	.163	-.095	-.056	-.011	.100	.198	-.090	.043
	Sig.	.752	.316	<b>.005</b>	.355	<b>.007</b>	.122	.352	.863	.097	<b>.002</b>	.136	.489
Premarital Sex	B	.008	.018	-.333	-.220	.045	.068	.016	-.033	.051	.011	-.021	.017
	St. error	.051	.060	.044	.062	.054	.078	.016	.027	.056	.059	.030	.041
	Beta	.008	.019	-.422	-.232	.047	.053	.054	-.075	.051	.012	-.039	.026
	Sig.	.881	.763	<b>.000</b>	<b>.000</b>	.407	.387	.333	.224	.364	.852	.482	.670
Condom Use	B	.104	.135	-.067	.145	.134	.039	-.045	-.052	-.087	-.072	.047	-.059
	St. error	.156	.136	.217	.131	.106	.142	.071	.047	.180	.110	.081	.084
	Beta	.106	.119	-.053	.133	.202	.029	-.109	-.119	-.077	-.071	.086	-.079
	Sig.	.506	.324	.758	.269	.212	.787	.527	.275	.631	.512	.570	.487

Note: PSt. = Primary school students, USt. = University students

#### 4. Discussion

The loss of one's virginity is mostly understood as a remarkable event in the life of both boys and girls (Solin, 1996). In fact, Parental monitoring during pre-adolescence affects the age at which adolescents start and begin sexual activity (Ajidahun, 2013). The literature is full of contradictory findings about the value of virginity among young people in various societies across the world. While the traditional value of virginity still remains unchanged in most societies, it is declining in some others. For instance, according to Ajidahun (2013), modern civilization and sexual revolution have affected Nigeria's traditional norms and values to the extent that nobody values virginity as it used to be in the past. Mitike Molla et al. (2008), on the other hand, found that maintaining virginity is still a way of securing marriage for girls living in rural areas of Ethiopia. Even in the same society- Ethiopia- other researchers (Meles, et al., 2016), found poor value of virginity and high prevalence of early sexual practices among youth.

It was in this context that the present research was conducted with the aim of understanding if the value of virginity still persists among young people in Ethiopia. Accordingly, it was found that youth in Ethiopia highly value virginity (91.2% among youth learning in the primary schools and 87% among those studying in a University). Furthermore, research participants not only disclosed to value virginity, but also reported that virginity is valued among the respective societies they come from (59.9%; 82.4%) as shown in Table 2.

Moreover, 78% of young people learning in the primary schools and 71% of those attending undergraduate courses in the University also replied that they need to marry a virgin in the future. Above all, virginity is a major criterion for most (mean= 4.17, 3.94 for primary school and University students respectively) of the young people participated in the present research. With these in mind, the finding of this study is consistent with the finding of Mitike Molla et al. (2008) and contradicts with both Meles et al., (2016) and that of Ajidahun (2013).

Both correlation and regression coefficients presented in Table 5 and 6 of the present study reveal that sex, marital status, and residential background of respondents are significantly associated to virginity value, engagement in to premarital sex, and the use of condom at a regular basis. In addition, data from descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 show that girls place a relatively higher value to boys' virginity than boys do among students in the primary school students (52.9% females need boys to remain virgin compared to 32.5% of boys who reported to value girls' virginity) while the reverse is true in case of University students (42.7% of boys reported to value girls' virginity to 35.5% girls who replied to value boys' virginity). Consistent to this, Mitike Molla et al. (2008) emphasized the effect of residential background influencing the extent to which virginity is differently valued between rural and urban areas saying that rural youth were three times more likely to believe in the

traditional norm of remaining virgin until marriage. Carpenter (2002) observed an increasing similarity among men and women alongside persistent differences, the most disturbing of which is young women's relative disempowerment at virginity loss. Girls bear more responsibility for premarital virginity loss (Matswetu and Bhana, 2018). Patriarchal values produce sexual double standards whereby virginity has greater significance for females compared to males (Palit and Allen, 2016).

Some people may engage in premarital sexual practices with many sexual partners and therefore they may have high number of life time sexual partners that could be liable to acquire sexually transmitted infections including Human Immune Deficiency Virus (Vos, 2004). In the present research, we found a relatively low prevalence rate of premarital sex among primary school students which increases as we move to the University. Moreover, patterns of initiating first-time sex among the respondents show that sexual partner influence among primary school students and self-initiation among University students make up the highest percentage distribution as presented in Table 4. Findings of the present study contradict to the findings of most other researches previously undertaken in different areas of Ethiopia. Many of these studies (e.g. Geremew Kindie et al., 2017; Tomas Benti et al., 2015; Bayisa Abdissa et al., 2017; Addisu Shunu et al., 2014; Daba Banr 2006; Netsanet Habte et al, 2018) found a high prevalence of premarital sexual practices in various areas of Ethiopia. Ajidahun (2013), in a study conducted in Nigeria concludes: youths are so free that sexual act can even be done in open, and they are no longer ashamed to engage in such act (Ajidahun, 2013).

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusion

Youth living and learning in Wolaita Sodo town during the time of the current study have a high value to virginity in general and the importance of staying virgin until marriage in particular. Moreover, while a relatively low level of engaging in premarital sexual practices has been reported, prospects of using condoms at a regular basis are promising. It is also found that premarital sexual practice is low among primary school students and increases as we move to the University. Both

correlation and regression coefficients indicated that youths' value of virginity, their engagements in premarital sexual practices, and their experiences of using condom on a regular basis is significantly associated to their sex, marital status, and residential background. Above all, the finding that some cases of having more than one life-time sexual partners are prevalent added to the fact that most reported to care for pregnancy than the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections during sexual intercourse may enhance young peoples' vulnerability to various reproductive health risks.

The researchers believe that the use of mixed research approach better benefits the study. However, because the issue is sensitive and mostly considered as taboo, qualitative data were not collected due to the assumption that the presence of an interviewer may provoke research participants to provide socially desirable responses. Furthermore, most of the items in the questionnaire were adopted from previous researchers and some others were partly constructed by the researchers. Consequently, a standardized questionnaire was not used and that might have resulted in some validity and reliability concerns as far as measurement is concerned. Above all, although more than 95% of the distributed questionnaires were returned from both groups of respondents, some of them were incomplete and hence, were rejected that reduced the response rate. Therefore, the response rate has been 72% and 68.2% for respondents of primary school students and University students respectively which is lower than the response rate of most previous studies undertaken on related topics. Although fair, such low response rate could have affected the findings of the study and the generalizations made out of it.

### 5.2. Recommendations

It is important that continued reproductive health care trainings should be given to university students, especially females and those coming from rural areas, to refresh and enhance their awareness on risks related to engagements in unsafe premarital sexual practices and reluctance over regular use of condoms. The relatively higher freedom enjoyed among university students due to being physically located mostly far away from family networks opens the way for engaging in (risky) sexual behaviors and hence, instigates attention from

practitioners of guidance and counseling, teachers, and all other concerned stakeholders. Furthermore, similar interventions should also be geared towards both

categories of students given findings of having multiple sexual partners among both groups of respondents.

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