

**Is urbanization a reliable antecedent of adolescent sexual and risk behavior?  
Comparisons in Northern Mindanao Region, Philippines<sup>1</sup>**

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**INTRODUCTION**

**From Agricultural to Built-up: Urbanization in Northern Mindanao**

The administrative jurisdiction of Northern Mindanao Region in southern Philippines covers five provinces: Misamis Oriental in the north, Bukidnon in the south, Camiguin in the northeast, and Lanao del Norte and Misamis Occidental in the west. The demographic and economic growth in the region is largely propelled by its eight cities, namely: Cagayan de Oro (also the regional administrative center), Gingoog, Iligan, Malaybalay, Valencia, Ozamiz, Oroquieta, and Tangub. In addition to these cities, Northern Mindanao has 85 municipalities and 2,020 *barangays* (villages) occupying a total land area of 21,242.8 square kilometers.

Northern Mindanao is generally considered the gateway to resource-rich Mindanao island and the link to Visayas and Luzon through its modern seaports, airports, and an extensive arterial road network. Its geographic profile is characterized by a combination of plains, mountains, rolling hills, and coastal areas. The region lies outside the typhoon belt and enjoys a climate that is favorable to agricultural and industrial activities. Like in the rest of Mindanao, domestic agricultural production is led by rice, corn, sugarcane, pineapple, and banana; other leading commodities are poultry, cattle, swine, and

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<sup>1</sup> This regional study is part of the 2002 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS3) survey, which is the third in a series of nationwide surveys in adolescent sexuality, fertility, and reproductive health. YAFS3 covered all 16 regions of the Philippines and surveyed males and females aged 15-27 years old. In order to determine a nationally representative sample of this age group, the survey used a two-stage self-weighting design with regions as main domains and large provinces as separate domains.

aquaculture products such as seaweed and prawns. While Northern Mindanao remains largely agricultural, the region has vibrant manufacturing and trade sectors and is a major agri-industrial export producer. Its agricultural crop processing facilities, engineering and metalworking shops, construction and infrastructure firms, and several heavy industries such as the steel and wood processing plants in the 3,000-hectare Phividec Industrial estate are supported by an abundant hydro-electric power supply in an area that constitutes the bulk of power in the Mindanao grid.

In 2000, Northern Mindanao had a total population of 2,747,585, composed of 1,397,684 males and 1,349,901 females, resulting in a sex ratio of 103.5. Its average annual population growth rate for 1995-2000 was 2.19 percent. Given this growth rate, the population of the region is expected to double in 32 years, or in 2032. The doubling of the population, without doubt, depends on the sexual behavior of the 273,762 males and 267,154 females that make up the adolescent population of Northern Mindanao, accounting for about 20 percent of its total population.

In 2001, Lanao del Norte Province and Iligan City were annexed to Northern Mindanao, expanding the regional population to 3,505,558.

Northern Mindanao is an economically progressive region comprising both urban and rural areas. Its territory consists of pockets of highly industrialized centers interspersed with rural areas along the coast or in the uplands. The urban population, posted at 40.5 percent of the regional population according to the 2000 Census, is spread out in 292 urban *barangays*. There are, however, more rural

than urban *barangays* in Northern Mindanao: four of every five (80.7 %) of the *barangays* are classified rural.

The youth are found in both urban and rural areas, although as is true in the rest of the Philippines and in Asia, many of them are attracted to and migrating to urban areas, which are historically the centers of education and commerce. Cagayan de Oro City, for instance, which is the regional capital of Northern Mindanao, continues to draw in the young adult population from outlying municipalities, particularly those seeking tertiary and vocational-technical education as well as gainful employment. Moreover, Northern Mindanao is an important transshipment hub in Mindanao; its modern ports facilitate the transfer of cargo as well as the migration of people.

At the same time that the urban centers attract migrants, the outlying rural areas are themselves rapidly urbanizing, which is a compelling reason to study whether urbanization is a force strong enough to affect the sexual and risk behavior of adolescents.

## **RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

The Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality 3 (YAFS3) monograph on *Youth Sex and Risk Behaviors* portrays the youth as tending to “gravitate towards regions with metropolitan centers, which could be due to the pull of schools and employment opportunities that are mostly concentrated in the urban areas” (Berja and Ogena 2004, 16). Urbanization is also said to bring with it greater exposure to novel, modern ideas and accessibility to socio-economic institutions, such as schools, businesses, and

industries. Thus, for various reasons the youth are drawn towards urban areas, and, in turn, their young lives are shaped by the urban social and institutional environments.

This analysis takes this observation further by taking independent variables related to the urbanization such as urban exposure, urban social environment, and urban infrastructure, and relating them to adolescent sexual and risk behavior.

The study presents data either supporting or refuting commonly held observations about the effects of urbanization on the behavior of adolescents, such as, for instance, that urban youth are more “liberal” in their sexual attitudes and behavior than the rural youth. The greater accessibility of the young to the different forms of mass media in urban areas has been described as positively related to their tolerance of premarital sex (Ventura and Cabigon 2004, 125).

Findings from the first round of analysis of YAFS3 (quick results database) show that Metro Manila or the National Capital Region, which is 100 percent urban, is “among the regions with the highest prevalence of adolescent risk behaviors, particularly engaging in premarital sex and drinking alcohol. Metro Manila youth, on account of their exposure to a more complex environment, also have the highest experiences of depression and hopelessness. Perhaps this is also part of the reason why they have a wider range of non-traditional and emerging behaviors, like acceptance of homosexuals and having multiple sex partners” (Raymundo 2004, 154).

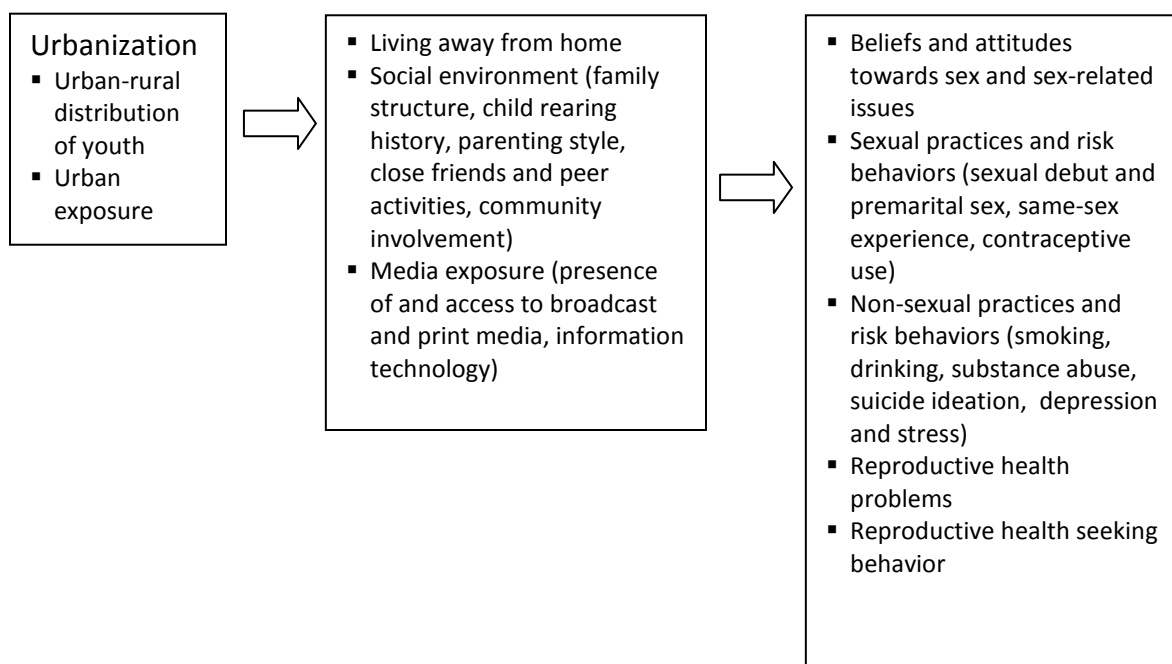
However, there are persistent variations across the regions. For instance, while Metro Manila has high approval rates for premarital sex, Eastern Visayas Region, which is largely rural, bucks the trend as its youth show high approval for premarital sex. This leads us to question whether urbanization is, indeed, the only factor shaping the sexual and risk behavior of Filipino youth.

### **Objectives of the analysis**

This analysis aims to answer whether urbanization is a reliable antecedent of the following dependent variables:

- Beliefs and attitudes towards sex and sex-related issues
- Sexual practices and risk behaviors (sexual debut and premarital sex, same-sex experience, contraceptive use)
- Non-sexual practices and risk behaviors (smoking, drinking, substance abuse, suicide ideation, depression and stress)
- Reproductive health problems
- Reproductive health seeking behavior

### Conceptual Framework



## METHODOLOGY

This study makes use of intra-regional comparisons between youth in urban areas and youth in rural areas in Northern Mindanao region. Doing inter-area comparisons in one region is intended to minimize the effects of extraneous variables when comparisons between regions are made. The resulting urban-rural differences in Northern Mindanao, if there are any, are subsequently tested for significance, particularly using chi-square and t-test.

In summarizing the relevant findings, a final section identifies elements of urbanization that influence the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of the youth, especially those related to sex, risk behavior, and reproductive health.

### How urbanization is defined

All *barangays* in the Philippines are classified by the National Statistics Office (NSO) as either urban or rural, based on certain criteria listed in its 1970 definition of urban areas<sup>2</sup>. Given the NSO definition of an urban area and the subsequent classification of the YAFS3 respondents as residents of either urban

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<sup>2</sup> The NSO classifies the following as urban areas: (1) In their entirety, all cities and municipalities which have a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square kilometer (2) Poblaciones or central districts of municipalities and cities which have a population density of at least 500 persons / sq km (3) Poblaciones or central districts, regardless of population size which have the following characteristics:

3.1 Street pattern, that is, network of streets in either parallel or right angle orientation;

3.2 At least 6 establishments, either commercial, manufacturing, recreational &/or personal services;

3.3 At least three of the following:

- A town hall, church or chapel with religious services at least once a month;
- A public place, park or cemetery;
- A market place or building where trading activities are carried on at least once a week;
- A public building like a school, hospital, puericulture or health center or library.

(4) *Barangays*, having at least 1,000 inhabitants, which meet the conditions set forth in 3 above and in which the occupation of the inhabitants is predominantly non-farming / fishing .

or rural areas, urbanization is measured in this analysis as **urban-rural residence**. Urbanization as a process is studied in the Philippines at the *barangay* level, as the lowest unit of analysis. Notwithstanding the limitations of urban-rural residence to measure the concept of urbanization, this phenomenon is captured in observing how rural *barangays* become urban, that is, in the eventual reclassification of rural *barangays* into urban. Urbanization as a process is considered in this research in terms of comparing a rural area with an urban area, that is, indirectly comparing a rural area before it becomes urban, a transition that is likely given the rapid urbanization in Mindanao and in the rest of the Philippines.

In fact, the Philippines has one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world, with the urban population growing at an annual rate of 5.14 percent (Asian Development Bank 2003). At the same time, more rural *barangays* are reclassified urban, based on the NSO urban area requirements.

Comparing youth respondents from urban and rural *barangays* in Northern Mindanao is intended to determine whether urban-rural residence is associated with differences in their sexual and risk behavior.

Since the concept of “urbanization” is not completely captured by the respondent’s current urban-rural residence, **urban exposure** is added in this analysis as a possible factor affecting youth behavior. For this study, urban exposure is defined as current rural residence plus residence in a *poblacion* (town center) or city for at least one year, starting at age 13 years old. This research assumes that a minimum of one year of urban exposure for young rural dwellers is enough to create an effect on their

behavior, especially when they are exposed to an urban area at ages 13-24, when exploration about puberty and sex is most prevalent.

Thus, at the macro level, urbanization as an independent variable is measured as the urban-rural classification of the *barangay* based on its spatial and population characteristics. At the micro level, the urban residential history of the individual young adult as well as the corresponding changes that urban exposure introduces are analyzed in relation to his or her sexual and risk behavior. While these two processes occur at different levels, it is nonetheless evident that the individual is affected by the processes in the urban environment, and that the urban set-up is a collective reflection of the individual urban experiences of its residents.

As a complement to the NSO definition, this analysis considers additional elements of urbanization that have a bearing on the knowledge, attitude and behavior of the youth, such as social institutions and the unique interpersonal dynamics in an urban setting. These variables, not captured in the 1970 NSO definition, are considered in elucidating the relationship between urbanization and youth behavior.



## RESULTS

### **Socio-demographic profile of the Northern Mindanao respondents**

Females outnumber the males (females, 55% and males, 45%) among the 844 respondents aged 15-24 in Northern Mindanao. The mean age of the respondents is 18.7 years old, with the females slightly older at 18.8 than the males at 18.5 years old. Given these young ages, it is not surprising that 83 percent of the respondents are never married, while 17 percent are married. About three-fourths are Roman Catholic, and the rest are members of Protestant sects, Born Again Christians, and Muslims.

Moreover, being mostly of school-going ages, 49.4 percent of the Northern Mindanao respondents were in school from January to March 2002, while the rest were not in school but have previously been in school. This proportion of school-going respondents is observed among both urban and the rural youth. There is, however, a huge difference in the type of school they attended: while 44.5 percent of urban adolescents studied in private schools, only 26 percent of their rural counterparts did so, a difference that is statistically significant at  $\alpha = .001$ .

Another remarkable difference between the urban and rural groups is the level of schooling as of March 2002. More than three-fourths of the rural adolescents were in elementary or high school, higher than the 72 percent of urban adolescents in the same levels. Nearly 28 percent of urban youth were in college, compared to only 22 percent among the rural youth.

Of the young respondents that are currently not in school (50.5% of the Northern Mindanao sample), there seems to be less inclination among rural adolescents to resume schooling, compared to their

urban peers. Only half of the rural youth have plans of going back to school, compared to 62.4 percent of the urban adolescents.

Thus, in comparison with the urban adolescents, rural youth are likely to study in public schools, be enrolled in lower school levels, and for those not in school, be less inclined to resume schooling.

One of five young adults is working. The proportion is slightly higher among urban adolescents (22.7%) than among rural adolescents (20.6%). This disparity could be due to the difficulty of finding opportunities for formal work in rural areas, where 22 percent of the youth also claimed to be doing housework, compared to only 16 percent of urban youth. Doing housework is unfortunately still not valued in the Philippines as an economic activity, and is therefore not considered an economically valuable type of work by the respondents and by most surveys.

The current place of residence for majority (96.9%) of the young men and women are either a private abode or an apartment, with about three percent living in their employer's residence, possibly doing domestic work.

### **Urban exposure and living away from home**

While 64 percent of the young respondents from Northern Mindanao presently reside in a rural area (compared to the 36% urban residents), there are clear indications of a substantial exposure to an urban setting. For instance, 44 percent of the young men and women were born in either a city or a *poblacion*.

More importantly, 12.4 percent of the total sample are currently rural residents who have lived in a city or a *poblacion* for at least a year, during the ages 13-24. More women (59%) than men (41%) have had urban exposure. Their primary reasons for moving to a city or *poblacion* were to work or to look for work, to study, and to join kin or relatives in the city or *poblacion*. Altogether these rural youth have been exposed to an urban area for 3.5 years on average, longer for the males (4 years) than for the females (3.2 years).

Young men and women from rural areas are more likely to have lived away from home, and at younger ages, compared to their urban counterparts. The rural youth leave their home at 15.7 years old, slightly earlier than the urban youth who start their independence at 16 years old. The place of destination for these movers was invariably an urban area, where they could work or seek work (21.8 %), study (22 %), or join relatives (9.7 %).

One of five adolescents has lived in a dormitory or boarding house, mainly for reasons related to schooling. These young men and women stay in such rented dwellings for an average of 1.8 years.

### **The family environment**

There is often the question of whether urban-rural residence creates differences in family relations and parenting style. While 86 percent of the respondents were raised by both parents, there are those who were raised by other persons (5.6%) and by one parent only (5.2%). Young adults raised by one parent are likely to have been raised by the mother, especially in rural areas; the father seems to be absent in such single parent situations.

Majority of the parents in both urban and rural areas are reported to get along with each other. Likewise, most young respondents claim to get along well with their father and mother. Parental approval for the young to participate in social activities appears to be higher in the rural areas, at least according to the respondents. For instance, approval rates are slightly higher among rural respondents to go to a party at a short notice, go to excursions of picnics with friends, stay overnight at a friend's house, live away from home, and marry at an early age. Only in two activities did more urban youth report parental approval: going out on a date unchaperoned and joining clubs or organizations either in school or in the community. While this can be interpreted as lax parenting among rural folks, it is largely indicative of the misperceptions of the young rural respondents regarding parental control and approval; parents might have views different from their sons' and daughters,' which can easily be misconstrued by the adolescents as parental approval for their activities.

Sex remains a sensitive topic, as only 19 percent of the young adults reported having discussed sex at home while they were growing up, slightly higher among rural (19.6%) than among urban respondents (17.6%). In such few occasions, sex was discussed with the mother for four of 10 respondents.

### **Close friends and peer activities**

Nearly 98 percent of the young have had a peer group or *barkada*, and nine of ten respondents, whether urban or rural, still do. Urban dwellers have a wider network of friends as indicated by a slightly higher mean number of sets of friends (1.82) compared to that of the rural dwellers (1.59). Urban youth also have more friends: they have 13.5 members in their peer group, significantly higher than the 10.2 *barkada* among the rural youth.

The most common peer group activities are hanging out/chatting/listening to the radio, smoking together (27%); playing sports (13.8%); and strolling/attending fiestas (12.9%). Strolling and joining fiestas appears to be a favored activity among the rural youth (14.9%) than among their urban peers (9.6%).

While membership in certain types of extra-curricular organizations is largely determined by sex (for example, the male adolescents are likely to be affiliated with sports clubs and fraternities while females are predominantly in dance, theater, choral groups and religious organizations), a distinct pattern can be found in the club membership choices of urban and rural youth. There are evidently more rural than urban youth members, for instance, in sports clubs, student government bodies, and socio-political organizations, all statistically significant differences that defy commonly held stereotypes of rural adolescents as uninvolved in such types of school-related activities.

### **Defining a community**

In general, both urban and rural adolescents consider the *barangay* their primary community, although there are particular differences in the community facilities they identify and their frequency of use of such facilities. A greater number of urban youth report the presence of parks and playgrounds, movie houses, videoke shops, billiard halls, internet and computer game shops, discos, karaokes and night clubs in their community. Among the rural youth, the sports gym or basketball court is often cited, remarkably the only facility cited by more rural than urban adolescents, although the urban-rural difference is insignificant.

The mean number of facilities identified by the urban residents is 3.4, compared to the 2.7 facilities identified by the rural respondents, a significant difference. Whatever meager facilities that are available in the rural area are more frequently used by its young, even those which they have fewer of than those in the urban area, such as billiard halls, discos, karaokes and night clubs, and even internet and computer game shops. Thus, on one hand, there are more community amenities in the urban area, but, on the other hand, rural youth use their (limited) facilities more frequently.

Notwithstanding these opportunities for socialization and extra-curricular involvement, today's Filipino adolescents, whether residents of urban or rural *barangays*, do not appear obliged to participate in any activity initiated by community leaders or members. Only one of five youth, who is likely a male, reported being involved in an activity initiated by such leaders. There is more than half the chance that such activity is sports-related.

Almost a third of the Northern Mindanao respondents (30.4%) are members of youth organizations in their locality, mainly of church or religious-oriented groups and organizations with political or socio-civic causes. Moreover, it appears that a greater proportion of rural adolescents are involved in such youth organizations than their urban peers (33.5% vs. 24.7%). This leads one to speculate whether rural youth are easier to recruit to youth organizations because they have fewer modern preoccupations (that is, fewer recreation facilities) and therefore more free time compared to urban youth. Or are urban young adults perhaps blasé about involvement in youth organizations?

In general, both urban and rural youth in Northern Mindanao perceive a better economic situation in their community compared to the previous year. Consistent with national findings, male adolescents in Northern Mindanao have a positive view of their economic situation. This appreciation has led more males than females, regardless of urban-rural residence, to participate in activities addressing community problems, although the proportion of socially involved adolescents remains small at 11.9 percent.

This weak social involvement among the youth is unfortunate, because they themselves are aware of the problems in their community, such as poverty/lack of jobs/livelihood (39%); drug addiction and alcohol addiction (17%); and burglary/theft (8.5%). The lack of jobs and incidence of theft are often cited by rural residents, while drug and alcohol addiction are observed by the urban residents.

### **Exposure to mass media**

Among urban residents, 56 percent watched movies at least once in the three months preceding the survey, higher than the 44 percent of rural residents who did. The reach of television, meanwhile, is far and wide: nearly 98 percent of the Northern Mindanao respondents watched TV at least once in the last three months. Even the rural youth are fascinated with the medium: 97 percent watched TV, only slightly lower than the 99 percent of the urban youth. Watching MTV is also popular, according to 7 of 10 respondents, higher among urban youth. Listening to the radio is the second most favored mass medium, after TV. Ninety percent listened to the radio, also higher among urban than rural residents.

The youth in Northern Mindanao prefer reading newspapers (57%) than magazines (49.7%), comics (43.4%) and tabloids (40.2%). Except for reading comics, the urban youth lead their rural peers in these activities.

Watching sexually explicit movies or videos is not new to more than half of the adolescents. Males are consistently more experienced than females in watching x-rated movies or videos, including on the internet. Urban young adults outnumber their rural peers in this regard, possibly because they have easier access to movies, videos or the internet.

Like watching videos, reading pornographic books or magazines has been tried by the young adults, 35.6 percent of them, particularly the males. Exploring these materials starts before 18 years old. Exposure to pornographic materials occurs earlier for the males than for the females, and earlier for the rural youth, in spite of the fewer numbers among them exposed to such publications.

It appears that male adolescents watched x-rated movies more frequently than their female peers. Rural youth were also more active in this activity than urban youth, again in spite of their apparent lesser accessibility to these sexually explicit materials.

### **Mother knows best: sources of information on puberty and sex**

Who do the youth consult regarding puberty and sex? As expected, same-sex relatives are preferred by the young: boys tend to consult their father or brother, while girls prefer asking their mother or sister. The mother is a favored source of information about puberty, cited by 63.6 percent of all



respondents. Friends are consulted next, but by a huge margin, reported by only 37.3 percent of the boys and girls. While this is generally the case, it is also evident that more urban youth could name persons that they could consult regarding adolescence. Fewer rural youth cited persons who could help them in seeking knowledge. This perceived lack of credible sources of information on sex and puberty is likely reflective of the rural teens themselves, that is, they are less likely to ask other persons, including family members and relatives, and are probably more timid or embarrassed about such matters. On the other hand, urban youth are perhaps more open about such topics and are not shy about asking sex-related questions from anyone.

Aside from learning from family and relatives, the youth today take recourse to other sources of information about puberty and sex. The general picture shows more urban youth seeking other sources of information, particularly books, magazines, television, and movies. The rural youth, meanwhile, rely on a limited number of sources, such as the radio, family planning materials, and school charts and films. The internet, while popular among the urban youth, is a source of information for only 1.5 percent of the Northern Mindanao adolescents. An important finding is that slightly more than one in 10 adolescents in the region have no other source of information regarding puberty, and the situation is worse for rural adolescents, of whom 14.4 percent have no other sources, compared to only 6.4 percent of urban boys and girls.

## **Are urban young adults more liberal than rural young adults? Beliefs and attitudes towards sex and sex-related issues**

One of four young adults in Northern Mindanao conditionally or unconditionally approves of a woman having premarital sex, and this tolerance becomes higher (38%) if it is a man who engages in PMS. In both cases, urban young adults are more tolerant of PMS than rural young adults.

The approval rating for PMS increases even further when presented with certain conditions. Half of the respondents approve of PMS if the couple has mutually agreed to have sex; if the couple loves each other; if the couple is planning to marry; and if the couple is “mature and knows exactly what they are doing.” Fewer of them (39%) approve of PMS if no child results from it. Given these conditions, the urban youth consistently shower greater acceptance of premarital sex than their rural peers.

Nearly 88 percent, especially the rural young adults, still subscribe to the idea that a woman should be a virgin until she gets married. Seven of 10 respondents, whether urban or rural, think today’s men still consider the virginity of a woman important in the choice of a wife. Their own preferences follow the same direction, with 83% considering virginity important in the choice of their spouse.

The times, however, are changing. More than 70% of the adolescents believe that a young, unmarried mother will be accepted by society in general, as well as by people in their neighborhood and by their male and female friends, dipping slightly (65%) when it comes to their own family’s acceptance. In all cases, urban youth report greater tolerance for a young, unmarried mother.

About 45 percent of the Northern Mindanao respondents would marry or live with their boyfriend/girlfriend even if their parents opposed the marriage, especially if they are financially independent and “they love each other.”

The current attitude toward abortion is that of general disapproval (94%), even if the woman is single or if the couple is too young to handle parental responsibilities. However, if the life of the woman is threatened by the pregnancy, half of the respondents would approve of abortion. Other conditions (child may be born with deformities; pregnancy was a result of rape or incest; the father of the child is married; the couple is not married to each other) hardly make a dent on the young adults’ disapproval of abortion. While this is the general picture, the data also show that rural youth seem more tolerant of abortion than are urban youth, especially when confronted with extraordinary circumstances such as those mentioned above.

Finally, more urban respondents (37.5%) would support a bill to legalize divorce in the Philippines, while only 30.2 percent of rural youth would do so. This difference is statistically significant at  $\alpha = .001$ .

### **Sexual practices and risk behaviors**

Nine of ten male and female adolescents in Northern Mindanao have gone out on a date, whether singly or in a group. Group dates begin in late high school, at 15.5 years old for the males and 15.7 years old for the females. The urban-rural differential is likewise slim: the mean age at the first group date is 15.7 for the urban youth and 15.5 for the rural youth.

On the other hand, 63.4 percent of all respondents have gone out on a single date, more among the urban adolescents (67.2%) than among the rural cohort (60.9%). Females started dating singly at 16.9 years old, while the males dated earlier at 16.5 years old. There is almost no difference in the mean age at first single date between urban (16.72 y.o.) and rural (16.74) adolescents. Like group dates, single dates occur towards the end of high school.

As for what happens during these single dates, nine of ten adolescents “just talked,” 59 percent held hands, 31 percent kissed, 12 percent engaged in petting, and 3 percent “went all the way.” Males apparently have more bravado in describing their dating actions, as more of them admitted to these acts, except in “holding hands,” which is reported by more females. On the other hand, more rural youth reported holding hands, kissing, and going all the way.

The favored dating places for the urban dwellers are parks, open spaces in town, shopping malls, and movie houses. Rural dwellers prefer dating in parks, open spaces in town or on the farm, in school, or on the beach. Rural youth seem to have more dating venue options: a good number of them also cited discos, sing-along joints or pubhouses, restaurants, and church or religious fellowships.

Three of four adolescents in Northern Mindanao have had a boyfriend/girlfriend. An unexpected finding is that girls report having more boyfriends (mean: 5.13) than boys reporting girlfriends (mean 5.06). Moreover, the girls start having boyfriends slightly earlier than the boys, at 16.01 years old, compared to the boys’ 16.07.

The results set straight the misconception that rural adolescents are inexperienced in boy-girl relationships: they actually have more boyfriends/girlfriends on the average (5.39 rural vs. 4.61 urban), and start relationships younger (15.92 y.o. rural vs. 16.23 y.o. urban). However, caution is applied in interpreting the mean number of boyfriends/girlfriends, as the standard deviation for the rural group is higher (7.17) than the urban group (4.53).

About 21 percent of the young Northern Mindanaoans have had sexual intercourse while single. There is twice the percentage of males than females reporting sexual experience. Urban-rural residence does not appear to be a factor in the number of young adults having had premarital sex. However, rural youth engage in premarital sex slightly earlier (at 17.3 years old) than urban youth (17.7 years old).

As for the venue of the first sexual experience, urban adolescents commonly had their sexual debut at a friend's house, at a motel/hotel, at the park or on beach, and in the boarding house or dormitory. Rural adolescents, meanwhile, had their first sex at home, at their partner's house, at a relative's house, at a motel/hotel, and in school.

During the adolescents' sexual debut, only 14.3 percent reported using contraception, significantly higher among the males than among the females. This may lead to the speculation that the boys are apparently "more prepared" for sex than the girls. Could girls have been caught unguarded, such that there was no chance to plan on using contraceptives? That boys appear more prepared for sex needs to be qualified: the most common method for preventing pregnancy during first sex was withdrawal, which is certainly a male-oriented method.

Another remarkable finding about the first sexual experience is that more rural youth (19%) actually used contraception during the first sex than the urban youth (8%), a difference that is significant at  $\alpha = .05$ . However, the most common contraceptive method used, both for urban and rural respondents, was withdrawal (55%), followed by condom (30%), and pills (15%).

Nearly 16 percent of the sexually active respondents admitted that they have had sexual contact with another girl/boy, and this proportion is slightly higher among rural youth (17%) than among urban youth (12%).

Three of 10 young adults in the region have been sexually active in the 12 months preceding the survey, slightly higher for the rural dwellers (31.4%) than for the urban dwellers (27.7%). The sexually active youth in the rural areas appear to be more safe and cautious than the urban youth because there are more of them who currently use a family planning method (89% rural vs 76% urban), particularly the pill and the condom. However, the use of traditional methods such as rhythm and withdrawal is prevalent among both urban and rural youth. Sexually active urban dwellers prefer withdrawal, pill, IUD, and female sterilization. About nine percent of the sample use the DMPA injectable.

Religion has some nominal influence on the use of contraception by the young men and women of Northern Mindanao, that is, the respondents are aware of the prescriptions of their religion on contraceptive use and acknowledge its influence on their future use of contraception. This is particularly true among the rural youth, of whom 37 percent consider the use of the condom as against

their religion, compared to 24 percent of their urban peers. Moreover, about 31 percent of rural youth, higher than the 21 percent of urban young adults, state that their future use of contraception will be affected by their religion.

While they believe this is so, it is also true that the use of contraception among sexually active rural adolescents is higher than among their urban peers. Thus, there is an apparent divergence in what the rural young adults profess regarding the influence of their religion and what they actually do as regards delaying or preventing pregnancy.

Urban youth believe in delaying the first birth and desire a smaller family size, compared to rural youth. The ideal age for a woman to have her first baby is 23.4 years old for the urban and 22.7 for the rural youth, while the ideal age for a man to become a father is 25.7 for the urban and 24.8 for the rural youth. The urban youth envision an average of 2.9 children, lower than the rural adolescents' desired family size of 3.4 children.

### **A stressful urban world: non-sexual practices and risk behaviors**

In general, being male or female is a stronger predictor of non-sexual practices and risk behavior than urban-rural residence. For instance, 65 percent of males have tried smoking cigarettes compared to only 24 percent of the females, with the boys starting about a year earlier (15.96 years old for the boys versus 16.92 for the girls). It is not surprising that 28 percent of the males are currently smoking, much higher than the 3 percent of the girls. Males also smoke a lot more (7.8 sticks per day) compared to the females (2 sticks).

A similar picture emerges in regard to drinking alcoholic beverages. While 7 of 10 adolescents have tried drinking, more males than females have tried drinking, and at younger ages. As expected, more males are currently drinking.

Does urban-rural residence make a difference in these behaviors? It does, but not as remarkable as the sex differentials. More urban youth have tried smoking cigarettes, at 47.1 percent compared to the rural youth at 36.8 percent, a difference that is significant at  $\alpha = .003$ . Both urban and rural youth try smoking at 15.8 years old. One of five Northern Mindanao adolescents currently smoke, with the urban youth consuming about 1.4 sticks more than the rural youth (7.82 versus 6.42 sticks).

As for drinking alcoholic beverages, more urban youth have drinking experience (73% urban versus 67% rural), and try drinking five months earlier than their rural counterparts (16.4 years old urban versus 17.0 rural). However, more rural youth in the region currently drink, at 41 percent, higher than the 36 percent of urban adolescents.

Adolescents from urban areas prefer beer and mixed drinks. Their counterparts from the rural areas favor hard drinks and *tuba*, fermented coconut wine, possibly an indicator of preference for cheaper drinks that nonetheless probably render the same, if not stronger, physical effect on them. Rural drinkers also consume more alcohol: they finish one bottle more than do urban drinkers (3 versus 2 bottles) and can take 2.5 shots of alcohol, compared to the urban group's 2.1 shots.



Nearly 15 percent of the adolescents from Northern Mindanao have tried using drugs or other addictive substances. This regional percentage of adolescents having tried drugs is higher than the YAFS national prevalence of 11 percent. Urban youth in Northern Mindanao are more daring in drug use as there are more of them (19%) who have tried drugs, compared to 12 percent of the rural youth, a significant difference at  $\alpha = .01$ . Of those who have tried drugs, 25 percent are current drug users, coming almost equally from the urban and rural groups. Marijuana and shabu are the top choices of the drug users, especially the urban youth. Cough syrup is also cited, also by the urban youth, but it is not as popular as marijuana and shabu.

In the three months preceding the survey, about half of the youth in the region have felt sad or helpless, felt hopeless about the future, and felt depressed about life in general.

One of five adolescents in the region has thought of committing suicide, clearly an indicator of something amiss in themselves or in society. The proportion is more than twice for the females (26.7%) than for the males (12.3%). Suicide ideation is higher among youth in Northern Mindanao (19.6 %) than the national average (12.4%). While slightly more rural residents consider suicide, it is the urban dwellers who are likely to attempt to end their young lives, occurring in 25.4 percent of those who have thought of doing so.

There is something about turning 18 years old that makes the boys and girls who thought about suicide actually attempt it. Does the impending transition to adulthood depress them, perhaps, that they no longer see any need to continue their young life? There is also something about living in an urban area

that despairs the young and makes them consider suicide at a younger age (16.8 years old), compared to rural adolescents who feel hopeless about life and attempt suicide at 17.7 years old.

The reported reasons for attempting to end their life are related to overwhelming family and personal problems, particularly among urban respondents. There appears to be tremendous pressure from all sides on urban families and adolescents, and they are more likely to succumb early to these stresses.

The most common methods used to in attempting to commit suicide are slashing of the wrist, hanging, and ingesting substances.

Nearly one of five young adults reported feeling unsafe or threatened in the three months preceding the survey, more among the rural adolescents (21.2%) than among the urban adolescents (16.6%).

Six percent of young adults in Northern Mindanao, particularly the rural males, carried a weapon (such as a knife, gun, or club) in the three months before the survey. Meanwhile, urban males are likely to have been suspended from school, usually at age 15, and commonly for conduct-related reasons.

### **Unique reproductive health problems**

There is a distinct urban-rural difference in the experience of a particular reproductive health problem, namely painful urination, which is reported by nearly a quarter of all adolescents in the region, but by a significantly greater proportion of rural youth. Consequently, among those with this symptom, more

rural youth consulted a doctor or health practitioner. In fact, 15.2 percent of symptomatic rural adolescents sought treatment for painful urination, while none of their urban peers did.

In addition, although the number of cases is small (nine respondents), the numbers indicate that more urban than rural adolescents consult a physician or medical practitioner for complications arising from spontaneous or induced abortion. This can be interpreted two ways: either there are more abortions occurring in urban areas or urban youth are likely to report such cases and have better health-seeking behavior.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The results for Northern Mindanao show that urban youth and rural youth manifest distinct characteristics and behavior, likely influenced by the availability and accessibility of certain amenities in their location. For instance, since there are more, and better, educational facilities in urban areas, urban residents are likely to be studying in private schools and are also in higher levels of schooling than the rural residents. Moreover, rural youth who are not in school appear to be less inclined to resume schooling, possibly because of economic pressures to help earn a living for their family or a lack of funds to complete their education.

The dissatisfaction with their original residence is manifested in terms of ever having lived away from home. Rural young adults are likely to have left home, and at younger ages. The pull of urban areas for the rural youth is unmistakable, as the place of destination of these rural movers is invariably an urban area.

Urban areas have more parks and playgrounds, movie houses, video shops, billiard halls, internet and computer game shops, discos, karaoke bars, and night clubs. While there are certainly more community amenities and facilities in urban areas, the rural youth make up for their limited resources by using their facilities more frequently. In addition, while rural areas do not have malls or have few movie houses, the youth find alternative venues for socializing and dating, such as open spaces in the farm, on the beach, sing-along joints, and religious gatherings. Finally, while urban youth have greater access to information on puberty and sex, including sexually explicit materials, rural youth report a greater frequency of use of such materials. The bottom line is, young adults do seek information about sex and puberty and they do socialize, but in different ways for urban and rural dwellers.

Urban location or urban exposure creates differences in the social environment of the young individual, which in turn influence his or her behavior. For instance, the exposure to different media types in urban areas is expected to expose the young to liberal ideas. There are, however, conflicting results for this assumption. On one hand, urban youth appear more liberal in their beliefs and attitudes, particularly in the acceptance of premarital sex and of unorthodox situations, such as a young unmarried mother and the legalization of divorce. On the other hand, rural youth seem more tolerant of abortion and of same-sex relationships. Thus, it can be said that the pervasive influence of mass media, particularly TV, while greater in the urban areas, also reaches rural residents.

Rural youth also surprise in several ways. They are more involved in sports-related and socio-political youth activities, a hopeful sign given a background of general lackluster participation of the young in

community activities. Rural dwellers date earlier and date more; they are more sexually active, and they also tend to use contraception, although mainly traditional methods. In addition, rural residents are more conscious of their religion's prescriptions on the use of contraception, but at the same time they do use some form of family planning. It appears, then, that rural youth are exposed to sexual risks earlier than urban youth. In spite of this, rural youth are more conscientious about contraception, albeit mainly traditional methods.

Certainly there are pressures on the young adults, but these are apparently different for the rural residents and for the urban residents. Rural youth are generally preoccupied with finding means to lift themselves out of poverty and of seeking a safe and non-threatening living environment. Urban youth are affected by elements from closer circles, such as family and personal problems. All these affect their general feeling of well-being and feelings of depression. Given this state of hopelessness and lack of general well-being, coupled with peer influence, more urban dwellers take opportunities for smoking, drinking, and drug use than do their rural peers. The few urban adolescents who attempted suicide also tried to kill themselves at younger ages. It can be said that urban youth are more vulnerable to these pressures, and the positive support systems in urban areas tend to break down more easily, given these assaults.

Another remarkable finding in this study concerns urban exposure. The sexual and risk behavior of rural youth who have had at least a year's experience living in an urban area starting at age 13 resembles the behavior of urban youth. This indicates the influence of urbanization, whether measured as urban-rural residence or as urban exposure, in modifying the behavior of young adults.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Urban-rural residence and urban exposure, while not perfect measures of urbanization, do have an effect on adolescent behavior. This analysis confirmed certain assumptions about the effects of urbanization on the young, and at the same time, it has yielded surprises and contradictions.

If rural areas are considered “precursors” of urban areas, it can be said that exposure to urban elements exposes the youth to sexual and non-sexual risks. This means that rural areas can view the characteristics of urban areas and the behavior of urban youth as a picture of what they will be in the future. Given these, policymakers can learn from the particular pressures found only in the rural areas and those prevailing in urban areas. These pressures include community problems identified by the young, which can be addressed specifically for urban and rural locations. For instance, while job generation and peace and stability are needed everywhere, it makes more sense to use limited resources to directly address requirements in rural areas, where they are most needed.

An unambiguous finding is the pervasive influence of mass media, particularly television, which reaches both urban and rural areas and is watched by majority of the youth on a regular basis. This medium can be used positively. Young role models can send key messages in a form that is acceptable and credible to the young adults.

The need for correct puberty and sex-related information among adolescents crosses urban-rural boundaries. While urban families are more hesitant than rural families to talk about sex at home, sex remains a sensitive topic anywhere, whether urban or rural, and is discussed in only one of five

families. Policymakers can begin framing programs that encourage an honest, informed discussion at home of sex, especially between the mother and the adolescent. Perhaps it is also worthwhile to focus program efforts, such as IEC and skill-building, on the only person trusted by the information-hungry, confused young adults in both urban and rural areas - the mother.

The impact of urbanization on the sexual and risk behavior of adolescents is filtered through the basic social institution that is the family. After all, the young are not raised by the school, friends, the church, or mass media; they grow up in a family. Certainly the sexual views and behavior of the young will be pressured by urban attractions and distractions, but the effect of these urban elements depend on how the adolescent male or female was raised and how he or she has been trained, primarily at home, to make the right choices and actions.

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