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## Premarital sexual practices and its predictors among in-school youths of Shendi town, West Gojjam zone, North Western Ethiopia

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**Background:** Youth who begin early pre-marital sexual activity are more likely to be engaged in unsafe sex. Early sexual debut puts them at increased risk for acquiring or transmitting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; and makes them highly vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and its consequences. This study was conducted to assess premarital sexual practices and its predictors among in-school youths in North West Ethiopia.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was carried among 826 in school youths from December; 2011 to January; 2012 in Shendi town. A multistage sampling technique was used to select the study participants. Binary and multiple logistic regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship between premarital sexual practices and selected exposure variables.

**Results:** Nearly one fifth 157 (19%) of the participants reported having had premarital sexual intercourse, of which 91 (22.7%) were males and 66 (15.5%) were females. The mean (SD) age at first sexual intercourse was 16.48 (1.59) for males and 15.89 (1.68) for females. More than three - fourth of sexually active in-school youths engaged in premarital sexual relationship before celebrating their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Being greater than 20 years (AOR=3.67; 95% CI=1.98, 6.82), living with friends or relatives (AOR=2.47; 95% CI=1.46, 4.16), living alone (without parental control (AOR=2.51; 95% CI=1.38, 4.55) and watching pornographic movies (AOR=1.73; 95% CI=1.18, 2.53) were found to be significantly associated with premarital sexual practices.

**Conclusion:** A significant number of in-school youths had started premarital sexual activity that might predispose them to different sexual and reproductive health risks. Therefore, various efforts need to be initiated through school-based information, education, and behavioral change communication, interventions, such as life skills education and negotiation.

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