

Teenagers Attitudes and Practices of Dating in Morocco: Fez City as a Case Study a Pilot Study

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Abstract: Dating is a far-flung practice among younger populations. Regardless of its religious and cultural incrimination in Arab and Muslim countries, dating represents a fertile arena to study the various discourses governing male female relationships in Morocco. In this regard, a pilot study was conducted among a sample of 100 adolescents in Fez city. An anonymous self-administered questionnaire was used to illicit teenagers' attitudes and practices of dating. The mean age of the participants was 16, 62 ± 2 , 24. Most participants belonged to low-income families (64,4%) and lived with both parents (83,2%). The findings revealed that most participants (60,6%) had a dating experience, which lasted at least a month (58.2% for males, and 41.8% for females), with a significance ($p=10^{-2}$, $OR=0.49$). Meanwhile, less males than females agreed that their religiosity hampered them from the practice of dating (41% versus 59%, $p=10^{-2}$). Concerning daters' attitudes, more males expressed their refusal to marry a partner who had a previous dating experience (65.2%) with a significance of $p=10^{-3}$. Multi-variate analyses showed that Participants educational level and religiosity were indeed protective factors for Moroccan males and females teenagers. Holding negative attitudes towards female daters however proved a risk factor endangering teen dating relationships. Overall, most teenagers' practices and attitudes reflected their conflicting perceptions of modernity, religion, and patriarchy.

Keywords: Teenagers' attitudes and practices_ Dating _ Morocco (Fez city).

1. Background

Dating prevails in adolescence as teens look up to gratify their sexual desires using the pretext of friendships or love relationships. From adults' angle, adolescents' dating may not be viewed as a serious bounding; meanwhile, studies proved that early dating experiences have a pivotal role in shaping youth long-term understanding of personal relationships [1]. Generally speaking, much of the existing literature on dating focused on adolescent sexual behaviour and overlooked important aspects of teen dating and their effects on adults relationships. Lately, there is a growing tendency towards studying the quality of adolescents 'relationships and partners socio-demographic characteristics. In western countries, researchers 'attentions have even shifted towards the examination of relationships models outside the heterosexual paradigm [2].

In Arab and Muslims societies, little is known about teen dating. In fact, dating relationships are not welcome practices in Morocco as they disturb the traditional role of females that is reproduction. Daters especially females are placed at higher risks of defamation in case of virginity loss because of Moroccans' obsession over physical chastity [3]. In fact, understanding teenagers' attitudes and practices of dating in Morocco may help experts assess relationships quality and find the associations between gender hostility attitudes and dating violence. Unfortunately, research on this field of study is so limited regarding the sensitive nature of this issue. Therefore, the present study came to fill this gap and explore Moroccan daters' attitudes and practices while shedding the light on the multiple ideologies adopted by younger generations.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Sites

The study was carried out from June to July 2015 in two public secondary schools (a middle and a high school). The middle school was located in a poor district within Fez city (Fez Jdid); whereas, the high school was 21.7 km away from the city. The schools, in which the process of data collection took place, were randomly selected.

2.2. Procedures

The questionnaire collected information on participants' socio-demographic characteristics, (mainly sex, age, participants as well as parents' education, parents' marital status, and family income). Data on participants' lifetime dating experience, dating status, and dating attitudes were also included. The anonymous self-administered questionnaires were distributed in the classrooms during a regular class period, and were filled by participants in the absence of teachers. The Participation was voluntary and students stated their oral consent before filling the forms. The Researchers and investigators in charge of questionnaires distribution indeed provided explanations on the filling instructions and to the participants when needed. Almost all questions on dating practices were of a dichotomous response type (yes-no); while, the attitudes required agreement or disagreement expressions.

2.3. Statistical analysis

The data entry stage started immediately after data collection. Data were entered into MS Windows Excel in the form of codes, and transferred to the Statistical Package for EPI INFO software version 7 (free downloaded from internet). Data analysis involved descriptive as well as inferential statistics. A simple descriptive analysis was done for the variables of interest. Odds ratios, along with 95% confidence intervals, were calculated. Differences in proportions were assessed by the Chi-square test. P values of <0.05 were considered as statistically significant. Variables with significant p values were entered into a regressive logistic model to predict the quality of dating relationships among the studied population.

3. Results

3.1. The Socio-demographic Characteristics:

The study was conducted in summer 2015 among 100 secondary school students aged 14-20 years. The mean age of the participants was $16, 62 \pm 2, 24$. The sample was equally divided between males and females (50% were males and 50% were females). Equally important, all participants were Muslims. Regarding education, about 53% of participants were high schoolers; whereas, 47% were middle school students. Moreover, as many as 43% of students' fathers completed a primary level; while, 42% of mothers were illiterate. Most participants' parents 86, 9 % were married, and 83,2 % lived with both parents. All the same, 64,4% belonged to low-income families.

3.2. Dating Attitudes

3.2.1. Religiosity and Dating:

TABLE I: Religiosity as an Obstacle to Dating

	My Religiosity is an Obstacle to Dating			
	Males	Females	P	OR
I agree	41%	59%	10^{-2}	0,15
I Disagree	81.8%	18.2%		

As indicated by the table (1) findings, about 59% of females considered religiosity as an obstacle to dating, contrasted to 41 % of males. A large number of males (81.8%) on the other hand disagreed with the above-statement. The expressed attitudes reveal that the notion of conservatism was positively associated with the female gender ($p=10^{-2}$, OR= 0.15).

3.2.2. Attitudes About Male and Female Daters

TABLE II: Female Daters and Respect

Female daters are unrespectable				
	Males	Females	p	OR
I agree	52.9%	47.1%	0.3	1.27
I disagree	46.9%	53.1%		

Table (2) showed that 52.9% of male participants had a negative impression of female daters, compared to 47.1% of females. Almost 53.1% of females however reported their disagreement. Overall, p values were not significant because the opinions of male and female participants were so close.

TABLE III: Male Daters and Virility

Males who date many girls are virile				
	Males	Females	P	OR
I agree	61.9%	38.1%	0,1	1.84
I disagree	46.8%	53.2%		

In response to “whether males who date several girls are virile”, a large number of male participants (61.9%) agreed. Contrariwise, 53.2% of females disagreed. No association was found; nevertheless, the high percentage of males adopting such an attitude hints on their problematic perception of virility and manhood.

TABLE IV: Female Daters and Marriage

Female daters are unmarriageable				
	Males	Females	P	OR
I agree	65.2%	34.8%	10^{-3}	3.35
I disagree	35.8%	64.2%		

As displayed in Table (4), many male participants (65.2%) agreed that female daters are unmarriageable, contrasted with 35.8 % of male opponents. Moreover, 64.2% of females stated their disapproval. In fact, the statement was highly associated with the male gender ($p= 10^{-3}$), which reflected males' denigration to female daters.

TABLE V: Relationships and male pleasing

Dating relationships work best when girls please boys				
	Males	Females	P	OR
I agree	65.2%	34.8%	10^{-3}	3.18
I disagree	37%	63%		

In response to whether dating works best when girls please boys, a large number of males (65.2%) adopted favourable attitudes. About 63% of females expressed their opposition. Such an attitude was positively associated with male participants and the inverse for females ($p= 10^{-3}$, OR= 3.18).

3.3. Dating Practices

3.3.1. Relationship status

TABLE VI: Lifetime dating experience

Have you ever dated somebody?				
	Males	Females	p	OR
Yes	58.2%	41.8%	10^{-2}	0.49
No	40.9%	59.1%		

The above findings showed that the dating practice remained relatively higher in males (58.2%) than in females (41.8%). Concerning the participants who denied being in a dating relationship before, the percentage of

females exceeded that of males, (59.1% vs. 40.9%). In fact, the lifetime dating experience was positively associated with males and negatively associated with females ($p=10^{-2}$; OR=0.49).

TABLE VII: Current Dating Experience for at least 1 Month

	I am currently in a dating relationship for at least 1 Month			
	Males	Females	p	OR
Yes	48.9%	51.1%		
No	54.3%	45.7%	0.4	1.24

The table indicated that the number of female middle schoolers who admitted being currently in a dating relationship for at least 1 month exceeded the number of their male classmates (51.1% vs. 48.9%). Equally important, about 54.3% of male secondary school students said they were not in a recent relationship for at least 1 month. No association was detected.

TABLE VIII: Relationship Duration

	I am/ was in a dating relationship for	
	males	females
1 month	47.6 %	52.4 %
from 1 to 6 months	54.5%	45.5 %
1 year	70 %	30%
2 years	25%	75 %
3 years or more	60 %	40 %

The majority of female secondary school students (75%) were in dating relationships for a period of two years, followed by 52.4% of girls who were in relationship for one month. In addition, about 70% of males were in a dating relationship for a year; while, 60% were in a dating relation for more than three years. Indeed, the table indicated that males started relationships earlier than females.

3.4. Logistic regression Analysis

Variables with significant p values were entered into a regressive logistic model to predict the quality of dating relationships among the studied population. The independent variable of sex was assessed in relation to participants' educational levels, their attitudes about dating relationships and female daters.

TABLE IX: Logistic Regression Analysis

Most Significant Variables	OR	P	95% IC	
			Inferior	Superior
Participants' Education level	0.25	10^{-3}	0.08	0.70
Dating Works best when Girls please boys	1.97	10^{-3}	1.19	3.24
Dating as an obstacle to religion	0.29	10^{-3}	0.14	0.60
Female daters are unmarriageable	1.93	10^{-2}	1.17	3.19

Multi-variate analyses showed that Participants educational level and religiosity were indeed protective factors for Moroccan males and females teenagers. Holding negative attitudes towards female daters however proved a risk factor endangering teen dating relationships. Bearing in mind that a high percentage of males adopted such negative attitudes, the assumption of male perpetration in dating relationship is possible.

4. Discussion

To recapitulate, the present study explored Moroccan teenagers' attitudes and practices of dating in Fez city. The notion of conservatism was high among females and proved a preventive factor against lifetime dating experiences. Nevertheless, more females than males stated that they were in current dating relationships, which was incompatible with their previous statements about religiosity. Males on the other hand did not consider their religiosity as an impediment to dating as exhibited in their relationships durations; despite that, they held negative and denigrating attitudes about female daters.

Females' conservatism can be explained by socialization. Moroccan females are brought up to conform with social rules and conventions. The very social construction of femininity is reinforced by religious and cultural calls for modesty and honor. In fact, female sexuality is perceived as a great menace to morality and order. Thus, it must be controlled, curbed or at least regulated. No wonder social mechanisms such as religion, politics and traditions have been exploited to achieve this task on whatever costs. This latest emblems an unravelled weapon for legitimizing culture's control over female sexuality. In other words, females opting for religion as an obstacle to dating does not necessary reflect their high degree of religiosity; It does rather hint on their full internalization of social norms. Soumaya Naamane Guessous, a Moroccan sociologists and the author of *Au Delà de Toute Pudeur* (2007) states that femininity is essentiated to a fragile membrane that girls ought to preserve till marriage if they'd like to survive respectfully.[4] Contrariwise, the social construction of masculinity does correlate between the idea of manhood and virility, as was displayed in males attitudes. To say otherwise, that the religious discourse of preserving chastity and honesty before marriage is not invoked among males.

Males' negative attitudes about female daters are actually a strong predictor of potential dating violence. Several studies found a strong relationship between tolerance of traditional gender roles and acceptance of violence [5] [6] [7] [8]. Equally important, an extensive body of literature proved that males are more likely than females to believe in attitudes promoting violence against women [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17] [18]. Nayak et al. 2003 argues that less gender attitudes result in less violence. [19] In our study, the majority of males agreed that relationships work best when girls please boys. Margolis (1998) explains that by media socialization, which has generated the belief that women ought to prioritize male requirements over their own. [20] Finally, education is a protective factor against unhealthy dating. Naved and Persson, (2005) found that less violence was detected among males who received higher education than secondary level. [21] Likewise, education beyond secondary level protects women against violence, and reduce its acceptance. [22]

5. Conclusion and Limitations

In conclusion, Moroccan daters' claims of conservatism are in conflict with their practices. Female daters are indeed disadvantaged by the practice of dating in the presence of males denigrating attitudes. At last, the small sample size, as well as the sensitivity of the topic are major limitations of the presented study; eventually, further research is required on the subject matter.

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