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The influence of peers on premarital sexual behavior in high school students in Central Maluku Regency

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Abstract

Purpose: Adolescent sexual behavior has become an increasingly concerning issue, as a growing number of young people engage in premarital sexual relations. This reflects the vulnerability of adolescents in managing their sexual lives. The ongoing sexual revolution presents a serious challenge for the nation, which necessitates proactive measures to prevent its potential negative consequences. Among the contributing factors, peer influence plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' engagement in premarital sexual behavior. This study focuses on the persuasive influence of peers on premarital sexual behavior among high school students in Central Maluku Regency. **Methods:** This analytical research employed a cross-sectional design with quantitative methods. Primary data were collected using questionnaires. The study population comprised high school students from SMA Negeri 2 Masohi in Central Maluku Regency. We conducted bivariate analyses using the chi-square test and multivariable analyses using logistic regression in STATA version 13. **Results:** Bivariate analysis revealed significant associations between peer influence, gender, communication with parents, and exposure to pornography and premarital sexual behavior. In contrast, parental occupation did not significantly affect premarital sexual behavior. Multivariable analysis indicated that adolescents with peers exerting a negative influence were 5.6 times more likely to engage in premarital sexual behavior compared to those with peers exerting a positive influence (PR = 5.6; 95% CI: 3.23–9.99). **Conclusion:** Teenagers who have peers with a negative influence are more likely to engage in premarital sexual behavior.

Keywords: peer group; premarital sexual behavior

INTRODUCTION

Romantic relationships among adolescents have increasingly deviated from social norms, as they are often accompanied by sexual activities that may lead to premarital sexual intercourse. This situation highlights serious concerns regarding the sexual lives of adolescents. Entering the transitional stage of adolescence without adequate knowledge about sexuality and without clear parental supervision can create internal conflicts within adolescents. This is partly because parents often consider discussions about sexual matters to be taboo, resulting in distant parent–child relationships. Consequently, adolescents may turn to alternative sources of information, particularly peers, which are often inaccurate [1].

In many developing countries, adolescents have become increasingly vulnerable to engaging in risky sexual behaviors, such as early sexual initiation. Quantitative and qualitative studies have revealed that a considerable number of boys and girls in many developing countries engage in sexual intercourse before the age of 15 years [2]. Adolescent sexual

behavior is now a major concern, as reflected by the rising incidence of cases such as abortion, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS [3]. In 2017, the adolescent population in Indonesia (aged 10–24 years) reached 68 million (25.8% of the total population), indicating that health risks among this age group will significantly impact the future health of the Indonesian population [4].

One of the driving factors for adolescents to engage in premarital sexual behavior is peer influence. Peer influence plays a substantial role in shaping adolescents' sexual behavior, with peers' dating styles often serving as a model or reference for other adolescents in their own relationships [5]. In fact, 48.2% of adolescents reported that peers were the first individuals they consulted about sexuality-related matters [6]. In 2015, the number of HIV/AIDS cases among individuals aged 15–24 years in Maluku Province was recorded at 48, consisting of 25 HIV cases, 19 AIDS cases, and 4 deaths due to AIDS. Meanwhile, the number of STI cases among adolescents aged 15–24 years was 540 in 2011, increasing to 673 in 2012, and rising further to 803 in 2013 [7].

The percentage of women who had been married before the age of 18 in Maluku Province was 30.96%, indicating that the province faces a critical situation regarding child marriage [8]. In Central Maluku Regency in 2017, there were 7 cases of childbirth among girls aged 10–14 years and 78 cases among those aged 15–19 years [9]. Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to determine the influence of peer relationships on premarital sexual behavior among senior high school students.

METHODS

This analytical study employed a cross-sectional, quantitative design and was conducted in Central Maluku Regency. Primary data were collected through questionnaires. The independent variable in this study was peer influence, while the dependent variable was premarital sexual behavior. The external variables considered included gender, parental occupation, parent–child communication, and exposure to pornography. The study subjects were high school students who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 170 respondents were selected using simple random sampling. Data analysis consisted of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses. Bivariate analysis was performed using the chi-square test, while multivariate analysis was conducted using logistic regression with a p-value < 0.05 and a 95% confidence level, utilizing STATA version 13.

RESULTS

Univariable analysis

The number of female respondents was higher, with 98 individuals (57.65%), compared to 72 males (42.35%). The majority of respondents were 15–16 years old, totaling 112 individuals (65.88%). Most respondents lived with their parents (119 individuals; 70%), while the fewest lived alone in boarding or rented housing (10 individuals; 5.88%). The highest level of education attained by fathers was high school (81 individuals; 47.65%), while mothers' highest level of education was also high school (76 individuals; 44.71%). Regarding occupation, the most common type of work among fathers was entrepreneurship (79 individuals; 46.47%), whereas the largest proportion of mothers was unemployed (76 individuals; 44.71%).

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics (n=170)

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	72	42.35
Female	98	57.65
Age		
15-16 years old	112	65.88
17-18 years old	58	34.12
Living arrangement		
With parents	119	70.00
With guardian/family	41	24.12
Living alone (boarding/contract housing)	10	5.88
Father's educational background		
Elementary school	8	4.71
Junior high school	21	12.35
Senior high school	81	47.65
Bachelor's degree	60	3.29
Mother's educational background		
Elementary school	21	12.35
Junior high school	20	11.76
Senior high school	76	44.71
Bachelor's degree	53	31.18
Father's occupation		
Unemployed	14	8.24
Civil servant	49	28.82
Private sector employee	28	16.47
Entrepreneur	79	46.47
Mother's occupation		
Unemployed	76	44.71
Civil servant	44	25.88
Private sector employee	8	4.71
Entrepreneur	42	24.71

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents reported low-risk premarital sexual behavior (55.88%). More than half (50.59%) experienced negative peer influence. Most respondents' parents were employed (94.12%). In addition, 93 respondents (54.71%) reported poor parental communication, and more than half had low exposure to pornography (93 respondents; 54.71%).

Table 2. Distribution of peer influence, gender, parental occupation, parental communication, exposure to pornography, and premarital sexual behavior (n=170)

Variable	n	%
Premarital sexual behavior		
Not risky	95	55.88
Risky	75	44.12
Peer influence		
Positive	84	49.41
Negative	86	50.59
Parental occupation		
Employed	160	94.12
Unemployed	10	5.88
Parental communication		
Good	77	45.29
Poor	93	54.71
Exposure to pornography		
Low	93	54.71
High	77	45.29

Bivariable analysis

Table 3 shows that the proportion of adolescents with negative peer influence engaging in risky premarital sexual behavior was higher (74.42%) compared to those with positive peer influence (13.10%). The chi-square test yielded a p-value < 0.05, indicating a significant association between peer influence and premarital sexual behavior. The prevalence ratio (PR) was 5.6, suggesting that adolescents with negative peer influence were 5.6 times more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with positive peer influence (PR = 5.6; 95% CI: 3.23–9.99).

Table 4 shows a statistically significant association between gender and premarital sexual behavior (p < 0.05; PR = 0.4; 95% CI: 0.32–0.65). No significant association was found between parental occupation and premarital sexual behavior (p > 0.05; PR = 2.2; 95% CI: 0.65–7.97). Poor parental communication was significantly associated with risky premarital sexual behavior (p < 0.05; PR = 5.3; 95% CI: 2.97–9.74). In addition, exposure to pornography was also significantly associated with premarital sexual behavior (p < 0.05; PR = 5.2; 95% CI: 3.20–8.64).

Table 3. Association between peer influence and premarital sexual behavior (n=170)

Independent variable	Premarital sexual behavior (n, %)		p	PR (CI 95%)
	Risky	Not risky		
Peer influence				
Positive	11 (13.10)	73 (86.90)	0.000	5.6
Negative	64 (74.42)	22 (25.58)		(3.23–9.99)

Multivariable analysis

Table 5 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis, yielding an R^2 of 0.476. This indicates that negative peer influence, after adjusting for exposure to pornography, parental communication, gender, and parental occupation, accounts for 47.6% of the variance in risky premarital sexual behavior. Among the five models tested, Model 4 was identified as the best fit, as it had a lower AIC (132.2) than Model 5, despite both models having the same R^2.

Table 4. Association between gender, parental occupation, parental communication, and exposure to pornography and premarital sexual behavior (n=170)

Variable	Premarital sexual behavior (n, %)		p value	PR (CI 95%)
	Risky	Not risk		
Gender				
Male	46 (63.89)	26 (36.11)	0.000	0.4
Female	29 (29.59)	69 (70.41)		(0.32 – 0.65)
Parental occupation				
Employed	73 (45.63)	87 (54.37)	0.113	2.2
Unemployed	2 (20.00)	8 (80.00)		(0.65 – 7.97)
Parental communication				
Good	10 (12.99)	67 (87.01)	0.000	5.3
Poor	65 (69.89)	28 (30.11)		(2.97 - 9.74)
Exposure to pornography				
Low	14 (15.05)	79 (84.95)	0.000	5.2
High	61 (79.22)	16 (20.78)		(3.20 – 8.64)

Table 5. Logistic regression analysis

Variable	Model 1 OR (95% CI)	Model 2 OR (95% CI)	Model 3 OR (95% CI)	Model 4 OR (95% CI)	Model 5 OR (95% CI)
Peer influence					
Positive	19.3***	6.3***	3.5*	7.6**	7.5**
Negative	(8.69-42.8)	(2.46-16.13)	(1.23-9.82)	(1.93-29.83)	(1.89-29.69)
Exposure to pornography					
Low		8.0***	7.4***	9.4***	9.4***
High		(3.20-20.02)	(2.73-19.98)	(3.18-27.64)	(3.18-27.55)
Parental communication					
Good			6.7***	7.4***	7.4***
Poor			(2.55-17.50)	(2.71-20.27)	(2.70-20.21)
Gender					
Male				4.1*	4.10*
Female				(1.08-15.86)	(1.06-15.79)
Parental occupation					
Employed					1.23
Unemployed					(0.09-16.50)
N	170	170	170	170	170
Pseudo R-q	0.301	0.386	0.454	0.476	0.476
AIC	167.0	149.1	135.4	132.2	134.2

DISCUSSION

Relationship between peer influence and premarital sexual behavior

The bivariate analysis shows that adolescents with negative peer influence were 5.6 times more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with positive peer influence. Similar findings have been reported in other studies, which also demonstrated a significant association between peer influence and premarital sexual behavior. One study found that adolescents influenced by peers had a 5.18 times greater likelihood of engaging in unsafe sexual behavior [10]. This can be explained by the developmental stage of adolescence, during which the need for acceptance by peer groups becomes highly important, including adopting peer behaviors. Peers often serve as role models in daily life, including sexual practices. Consequently, adolescents who are not closely monitored by their parents are more vulnerable to negative peer influences [11].

Relationship between gender and premarital sexual behavior

Bivariate analysis showed a relationship between gender and premarital sexual behavior. Further analysis indicated that female adolescents had a lower risk of premarital sexual behavior (60%) compared to male adolescents (PR= 0.4; CI: 0.32 – 0.65). This is because there are looser norms for men than for women, resulting in men having greater opportunities than women. Men tend to be freer than women. Parents are more protective of teenage girls than boys. Therefore, it can be understood that men have a greater chance of engaging in risky sexual behavior compared to women [12].

Relationship between parental occupation and premarital sexual behavior

The bivariate analysis showed a p-value > 0.05, indicating no statistically significant association between parental occupation and premarital sexual behavior among high school students (OR = 2.2; 95% CI: 0.65–7.97). The confidence interval crossing 1 further confirms the lack of significance. Consistent with this finding, other studies have also reported no association between maternal employment and adolescent dating behavior, with a chi-square test yielding a p-value of 0.74 [13].

Relationship between parental communication and premarital sexual behavior

The bivariate analysis demonstrated a significant association between parental communication and premarital sexual behavior. Further analysis showed that adolescents with poor parental communication were 5.3 times more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with good parental communication (PR = 5.3; 95% CI: 2.97–9.74). Similar findings have been reported in other studies, which found that infrequent communication between parents and children about sexuality increased the likelihood of risky premarital sexual behavior by 1.4 times compared to adolescents who communicated frequently with their parents [14]. Another study also revealed that poor parental communication was associated with a higher prevalence of risky premarital sexual behavior among adolescents compared to those who had effective communication with their parents [15].

Akers stated that many parents are unwilling to discuss sexuality with their adolescent children because they lack adequate knowledge and feel embarrassed when addressing such topics. As a result,

infrequent and ineffective communication may lead adolescents to perceive their parents as unimportant or unworthy of listening [16].

Relationship between pornography exposure and premarital sexual behavior

The statistical analysis showed a p-value < 0.05, indicating a significant association between pornography exposure and premarital sexual behavior. Further analysis revealed that adolescents with high exposure to pornography were 5.2 times more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with low exposure (PR = 5.2; 95% CI: 3.20–8.64). Consistent with this finding, other studies have also reported a strong association between pornography exposure and sexual practices, with one study showing that respondents exposed to pornography were 3.87 times more likely to engage in premarital sexual activity compared to those not exposed [17]. Both print and electronic media may contribute negatively to the premature onset of sexual behavior. Adolescents who are frequently exposed to sexual content in music videos, magazines, and television are more likely to be encouraged to engage in risky sexual activities [18].

CONCLUSION

There is a significant association between peer influence and premarital sexual behavior among senior high school students in Central Maluku District, where adolescents with negative peer influence are more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with positive peer influence. A significant relationship was also found between gender and premarital sexual behavior, with female adolescents having a lower risk than their male counterparts. In contrast, parental occupation showed no significant association with premarital sexual behavior. Furthermore, parental communication was significantly related to premarital sexual behavior, as adolescents with poor communication were more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with good communication. Finally, pornography exposure demonstrated a significant relationship with premarital sexual behavior, with adolescents who had higher exposure being more likely to engage in risky premarital sexual behavior compared to those with lower exposure.

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