

Exploring the Link Between Self-Control and Risky Sexual Behavior in University Students

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Abstract: This literature review investigates the association between self-control and engagement in risky sexual behaviors among university students. Risky sexual practices such as engaging in unprotected sex, having multiple sexual partners, and initiating sexual activity at an early age have been shown to correlate with a range of adverse consequences, including increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies. Self-control, conceptualized as an individual's capacity to manage impulses, emotions, and behaviors in alignment with long-term objectives, serves as a crucial psychological buffer against such risk-taking behaviors. Drawing upon a synthesis of empirical findings and relevant theoretical models, this review highlights a recurring pattern: students with diminished self-control are more likely to partake in high-risk sexual behavior. Furthermore, the review considers the influence of situational and environmental variables such as peer dynamics, substance use, and digital media exposure as potential moderators. The evidence underscores the significance of cultivating self-regulation skills in promoting safer sexual behavior and advocates for the integration of self-control development within health education programs targeted at university populations. The method employed was a literature review, with a total of 10 articles included based on the screening process. The findings indicate that premarital sexual behavior among university students is influenced by various internal and external factors. Furthermore, self-control plays an important role in preventing students' involvement in premarital sexual behavior.

Keywords: Sexual Behavior, Self-Control, Students, University

1 INTRODUCTION

The increasing prevalence of premarital sexual behavior among adolescents has become a serious issue influenced by a lack of parental supervision and inadequate understanding of healthy sexuality. When family control weakens, adolescents become more vulnerable to external influences, particularly from media and permissive peer environments (Puji & Okta, 2020). A study conducted by the Kesuma Buana Foundation revealed that, among 3,594 adolescents in 12 major cities in Indonesia, 10.3% had engaged in premarital sexual intercourse, and 20–30% admitted to having done so at least once. Data from the Indonesian Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey (SKRRI) in 2020 further supports this finding, showing that 33.2% of male adolescents and 9.1% of female adolescents had engaged in physical stimulation with a partner; 53.8% of male adolescents and 36.7% of female adolescents had kissed; while 85.4% of males and 78.1% of females had held hands. These high percentages highlight the urgent need for active involvement from families, schools, and communities in providing comprehensive sexual education while reinforcing religious values and self-control in adolescents (Puji & Okta, 2020).

The rise in premarital sexual behavior among adolescents poses significant threats not only to reproductive health, but also to their psychological, social, and moral well-being. The primary contributing factors include insufficient parental monitoring and limited knowledge about healthy sexual practices. The weakening of family oversight increases adolescents' susceptibility to media and peer group influences, hindering the development of strong self-control in navigating social pressures. Therefore, collaborative efforts among families, schools, and communities are essential in equipping adolescents with proper education, sufficient supervision, and the internalization of positive values and self-regulation. These efforts aim to ensure that adolescents grow into individuals who are physically, mentally, and morally healthy.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a literature review method to explore a deeper understanding of self-control and premarital sexual behavior. Data collection was conducted by accessing international literature through the Google Scholar database over a four-year period, from 2017 to 2022. Keywords such as sexual behavior yielded approximately 16,400 articles, while self-control produced around 454,000 results. A combined keyword search using sexual behavior and self-control resulted in 18,700 articles. To narrow the scope, the selection was limited to studies involving university student participants. This age group was chosen due to the relevance of self-control development during the university years. A total of 10 articles that met the criteria and were deemed relevant were included in this literature review.

3 RESULTS

Based on the search conducted via Google Scholar, 10 articles were found that were relevant to the research topic.

Table 1. Data Extraction Results

No.	Author, year	Sample	Another Variable	Results
1.	Dewi, N. L. P. R., & Wirakusuma, I. B. (2017).	The population of this study consisted of students from Amarawati Senior High School and Trisakti Tourism Vocational School, specifically targeting 12th-grade students.	Knowledge, Reproductive Health	These results indicate a positive correlation between the level of knowledge and adolescents' sexual behavior, and highlight the fact that most adolescents possess inadequate knowledge and engage in risky sexual behavior.
2.	Apsari, A. R., & Purnamasari, S. E. (2017).	The subjects in this study were male and female adolescents aged 15–18 years who were in a dating relationship. The total number of subjects in this study was 60.	Conformity	Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between conformity and premarital sexual behavior among adolescents.
3.	Rahardjo, W., Citra, A. F., Saputra, M., Damariyanti, M., Ayuningsih, A. M., & Siahay, M. M. (2017).	This study involved 287 university students as participants. The participants were students enrolled at University X, located in the areas of Jakarta, Bekasi, Cengkareng, Karawaci, and Depok.	Self-Esteem, Relationship Commitment	Premarital sexual behavior among university students is primarily influenced by their positive attitudes toward the behavior and the level of relationship commitment. Meanwhile, the variable of self-esteem does not have a significant effect on this behavior.
4.	Magnusson, B. M., Crandall, A., & Evans, K. (2019).	Data for 3032 female and 2702 male participants from three waves of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult (Add) Health were used for this study	Sexual Debut, Sexual Initiation	The results of the study indicate that, for both males and females, early sexual debut and low self-control play a significant role in predicting risky sexual behavior in young adulthood.
5.	Ikhwaningrum, D. U., & Harsanti, T. D. (2020).	The research sample in this article consisted of first-semester students at Wisnuwardhana University, Malang.	Sex Education, Premarital Sex	The results of the study show that the sex education socialization activities conducted at Wisnuwardhana University Malang had a positive impact on students' understanding of

				sex education. Before the program was implemented, the majority of students had limited knowledge and held misconceptions about sex and premarital sexual behavior. After participating in the activities, students demonstrated increased knowledge and understanding, and became more aware of the dangers and consequences of premarital sex, including its health and psychological risks.
6.	Puji, L. K. R., & Okta, T. (2020).	The sample size for the rapid survey was determined to be 210 students in South Tangerang.	-	The results of the study indicate a significant relationship between gender and students' attitudes with premarital sexual behavior among university students in South Tangerang.
7.	Qudsiya, M. (2020).	In this study, students of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University Malang aged 17 to 21 years constituted the population of the research.	-	The research results show a significant negative relationship between self-control and the tendency to engage in premarital sexual behavior. This means that the higher a person's level of self-control, the less likely they are to engage in sexual activity before marriage.
8.	Putri, S. P. R., & Ariana, A. D. (2021).	The participants in this study were adolescents from various areas across Surabaya (86.6% female, 31.4% male). The criteria for participation included: a) adolescents who were currently in a dating relationship; b) aged between 12 and 21 years; and c) residing in Surabaya	-	Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is a significant influence of the self-control variable on sexual behavior among dating adolescents in Surabaya. The direction of the influence shows a negative correlation, indicating that the higher the level of self-control, the lower the engagement in sexual behavior, and conversely, the lower the self-control, the higher the likelihood of such behavior.
9.	Sari, W. N. I., & Winarti, Y. (2021).	This study examined female students of Banyumas Islamic Senior High School.	Religiosity, Unwanted Pregnancy	The results indicated a relationship between religiosity and risky premarital sex leading to unwanted pregnancy among undergraduate students of the Public Health Program at Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan.

10.	Astuti, W., Muna, Z., & Julistia, R. (2021).	The sample in this study consisted of 290 individuals.	-	The results of the study on the description of self-control in preventing premarital sexual behavior among junior high school students in Lhokseumawe indicate that the majority of these students have a low level of self-control regarding premarital sexual behavior.
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4 DISCUSSIONS

Self-control plays a crucial role in preventing premarital sexual behavior among adolescents. A study conducted by Qudsiya (2020) revealed a significant negative relationship between the level of self-control and the tendency to engage in premarital sexual behavior. The findings indicate that individuals with a high level of self-control are more capable of resisting impulses and temptations to engage in sexual activity before marriage. Another study by Putri and Ariana (2021) found a negative relationship between self-control and premarital sexual behavior among adolescents. This finding is consistent with the results of Astuti, Muna, and Julistia (2021), whose study focused on junior high school students, the influence demonstrates an inverse relationship, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of self-control are less likely to engage in sexual behavior, whereas those with lower self-control are more prone to such actions. This positions self-control as a key protective factor that significantly influences one's ability to make wise and responsible decisions regarding sexual behavior. The stronger a person's ability to regulate themselves, the less likely they are to participate in sexual behavior that contradicts social norms and personal values.

The premarital sexual behavior can also be influenced by an individual's level of knowledge, where higher levels of knowledge are associated with lower engagement in premarital sexual behavior. This is consistent with the findings of Dewi and Wirakusuma (2017), which showed that limited knowledge about premarital sex was more commonly found among male adolescents. Another study by Magnusson, Crandall, & Evans (2019), highlight the influence of executive functions on sexual behavior and implies that enhancing self-control through targeted interventions could help in minimizing engagement in risky sexual activities.

Religiosity is also identified as another factor that can influence premarital sexual behavior, as supported by the findings of Sari and Winarti (2021), which revealed a relationship between religiosity and risky premarital sex leading to unwanted pregnancy among university students. The study showed that the higher the level of religiosity, the lower the risk of engaging in premarital sexual behavior. Another influencing factor is conformity. Individuals with high levels of conformity tend to have a lower risk of engaging in premarital sexual behavior. This is in line with the findings of Apsari and Purnamasari (2017), who conducted their study on adolescents aged 15 to 18 years.

The study by Rahardjo et al. (2017) indicate that a positive attitude toward premarital sexual behavior remains one of the main driving factors behind the engagement in such behavior. Relationship commitment also influences premarital sexual activity, although its impact is not as strong as that of attitudes toward the behavior. Meanwhile, self-esteem was found to have no significant effect, as it is considered a dynamic factor in relation to premarital sexual behavior. This is also consistent with the study conducted by Puji and Okta (2020), which found that attitude is one of the factors associated with risky sexual behavior among university students. Gender was also found to be a related factor.

Based on these findings, there is a need for preventive efforts to address premarital sexual behavior. According to the study by Ikhwaningrum and Harsanti (2020), Self-control is essential in premarital sexual behavior as it enables individuals to regulate impulses and delay immediate gratification, allowing them to consider risks and make wiser decisions. Low self-control often leads to impulsive actions that increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, and other psychosocial consequences, sexual education outreach programs for university students can serve as one of the preventive measures against premarital sexual behavior. These outreach activities are intended to enhance students' knowledge and understanding regarding premarital sexual behavior.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on various research findings, it can be concluded that self-control plays a crucial role in preventing premarital sexual behavior among adolescents. Other influential factors include knowledge, religiosity, conformity, attitude, and gender. However, self-esteem does not show a significant effect, as it is considered a dynamic trait. One preventive effort that can be implemented is the promotion of sexual education programs among university students. These programs serve as a strategy to enhance knowledge, shape healthy attitudes, and strengthen self-control, thereby reducing the risk of engaging in premarital sexual behavior. Self-control is essential in preventing premarital sexual behavior as it enables individuals to resist impulses and temptations, evaluate potential risks, and make wise and responsible decisions. Low self-control tends to trigger impulsive behaviors, increasing the risk of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, and other psychosocial consequences.

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