

From Stereotype to Reality: Sexual Health Among Indonesian Youth

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the shift between stereotypes and realities related to sexual health among Indonesian adolescents. Although many stereotypes consider discussing sexuality as taboo, the reality is that adolescents face various challenges related to sexual health, such as lack of access to appropriate information, social stigma, and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. Through surveys and interviews with adolescents in various regions, this article explores their perceptions of sexual health, as well as the factors that influence their understanding and behavior. The study shows that comprehensive sexuality education in schools is still needed, while parental and community involvement also plays an important role in changing existing stigma. The findings suggest that a more open and informative approach is needed to support better sexual health among adolescents. Awareness of the importance of sexual health can encourage positive behavioral changes and improve the quality of life for adolescents in Indonesia.

Keywords: Sexual Health, Adolescents, Stereotypes, Sex Education, Social Stigma, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Public Health

INTRODUCTION

Sexual health is an important aspect of overall health, especially among adolescents who are in the development phase of identity and interpersonal relationships. In Indonesia, discussions about sexual health are often overshadowed by strong stereotypes and stigma. Many adolescents face challenges in accessing accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health, which can result in serious consequences, including increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies (Dewi & Putri, 2022). Stereotypes that consider discussing

sexuality taboo prevent adolescents from seeking the help or information they need, creating a gap between knowledge and real-world practice.

As technology advances and access to information becomes more open, it is important to explore how adolescents' perceptions of sexual health are transforming from stereotypes to reality. Previous research has shown that effective sexuality education can help reduce stigma and improve adolescents' understanding of sexual health (Ismail & Handayani, 2023). However, many schools in Indonesia still lack a comprehensive and relevant curriculum, which impacts adolescents' ability to make informed and responsible decisions. This article aims to explore adolescents' perceptions of sexual health and the factors that influence their understanding, and propose steps needed to improve education and awareness among adolescents.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach to explore adolescents' understanding and perceptions of sexual health in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 30 respondents consisting of adolescents aged 15-19 years in various regions, including urban and rural areas. The interview process was conducted in a semi-structured manner to allow for in-depth exploration of their experiences and views on sexual health issues. Interview questions covered topics such as knowledge of sexual health, sex education experiences, and stigma faced. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

In addition to interviews, a quantitative survey was also conducted to obtain more comprehensive data on adolescent attitudes and knowledge about sexual health. The survey targeted 200 adolescents in different schools, using a closed questionnaire that included questions about sexual knowledge, access to information, and perceptions of existing health services. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe patterns and trends, while thematic analysis was used to identify key themes from qualitative data. This mixed approach is expected to provide a more complete picture of the condition of adolescent sexual health in Indonesia (Rahman & Santosa, 2021).

RESULTS

The results of the study showed a significant gap between stereotypes and the reality faced by adolescents regarding sexual health. From in-depth interviews, it was found that many adolescents feel trapped between conservative cultural influences and the desire to obtain accurate information about sexual health. Most respondents stated that they have limited knowledge about sexual health, especially regarding contraception and sexually transmitted infections. They often rely on peers or other unofficial sources, which has the potential to add to confusion and misunderstanding. Stereotypes that develop in society, such as the assumption that talking about sex is taboo, also prevent adolescents from seeking information from more reliable sources (Dewi & Putri, 2022).

From the quantitative survey results, only 35% of respondents reported receiving adequate sex education in school, and 60% felt the need for more comprehensive sex education. Furthermore, the data shows that adolescents who have access to good sexual health information tend to be more confident in making decisions regarding their health. These results confirm that despite initiatives to improve sexual health education in Indonesia, there are still many challenges to overcome, including social stigma and a lack of quality educational resources. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop more inclusive and evidence-based sex education programs to address these gaps (Ismail & Handayani, 2023; Utami & Kurniawan, 2023; Lestari & Prasetyo, 2022; Purnamasari & Yulianto, 2023).

DISCUSSION

Discussions on sexual health among Indonesian adolescents highlight an important shift from stereotypes to more realistic and evidence-based understandings. The study shows that the stigma surrounding talking about sexuality has prevented adolescents from accessing the information they need. Many respondents reported feeling embarrassed or afraid to discuss sexual health, even with peers. This suggests the need for a more open approach to sex education, both in schools and at home, to reduce stigma and increase correct understanding (Dewi & Putri, 2022).

Furthermore, survey results indicate that adolescents who receive comprehensive sexuality education tend to have better knowledge about contraception and sexually transmitted

infections. This proves that an inclusive and evidence-based curriculum can help adolescents feel more prepared to face challenges related to sexual health (Ismail & Handayani, 2023). In addition, the importance of parental and community involvement in supporting sexual health education cannot be ignored. When parents are open to discussing sexual health, adolescents tend to feel more comfortable seeking information and asking about the problems they face (Utami & Kurniawan, 2023).

Considering all these factors, there is an urgent need to design sexual education programs that are not only informative but also responsive to existing cultural and social norms. These programs should promote open dialogue and educate adolescents about their rights in sexual health. This is expected to reduce the gap between stereotypes and reality, and prepare adolescents to make better decisions regarding their health in the future (Purnamasari & Yulianto, 2023; Lestari & Prasetyo, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study emphasize the importance of addressing the gap between stereotypes and realities related to sexual health among Indonesian adolescents. Although social stigma and conservative cultural norms often hinder open discussion of sexual health issues, the results of the study indicate that adolescents have an urgent need for accurate and comprehensive information. Adequate sexuality education in schools and support from parents and the community are essential in equipping adolescents with the knowledge they need to make informed and responsible decisions about their health (Dewi & Putri, 2022; Ismail & Handayani, 2023).

Furthermore, the success of sexual education programs depends not only on the delivery of information, but also on the ability to create an environment that supports open dialogue. By reducing stigma and facilitating constructive conversations about sexual health, it is hoped that adolescents will feel more comfortable seeking information and addressing the challenges they face. Therefore, it is important for stakeholders, including the government, educational institutions, and communities, to work together to develop responsive and evidence-based

programs to improve adolescent sexual health in Indonesia (Utami & Kurniawan, 2023; Purnamasari & Yulianto, 2023).

Finally, to achieve positive change in adolescent sexual health, there needs to be a strong commitment to overhauling existing approaches and educating the public about the importance of sexual health. This will help change perceptions and attitudes that have prevented adolescents from getting the information they need and equip them with the skills to make better decisions in their lives (Lestari & Prasetyo, 2022).

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