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The Role of Family Communication and Peer Groups in Adolescent Sexual Attitudes: A Phenomenological Study on the Friends with Benefits (FWB) Phenomenon in Jakarta

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Abstract

This study examines how family communication patterns and peer group dynamics shape adolescents' and emerging adults' engagement in Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships in an urban Indonesian context. Using a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven informants aged 18–24 years, consisting of six female and one male participant from diverse family structures, including intact and broken-home backgrounds. Data were analyzed using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, informed by Family Communication Patterns Theory and Social Learning Theory. The findings indicate that limited open family communication and strong conformity-oriented expectations restrict discussions of sexuality within the family, positioning peer groups as primary sources of relational norms and sexual meaning-making. Peer interactions normalized FWB relationships through shared narratives and social validation, particularly when parental communication about sexuality was constrained. While some informants framed FWB involvement as autonomy-driven and linked to identity exploration, others engaged in such relationships in response to unmet emotional needs, especially within disrupted family contexts. Family-based sexual education was largely prevention-focused, emphasizing pregnancy avoidance while giving limited attention to emotional and relational dimensions of intimacy. The findings demonstrate that involvement in FWB relationships is shaped by interconnected communicative constraints, emotional vulnerabilities, and peer-based social learning processes rather than individual sexual choice alone. This study contributes to broader debates on family-based sexuality education by clarifying how early family communication patterns influence adolescents' later sexual decision-making and is relevant beyond Indonesia for collectivist and religious societies with similar communicative constraints.

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Introduction

ECasual sexual behavior among adolescents and young adults has become increasingly visible in urban settings, including Jakarta. National reports from Indonesia indicate that a high proportion of children and adolescents are exposed to sexually explicit content online, with KPAI reporting widespread exposure to pornography among internet-using youth (Aminatussyadiah & Wardani, 2025; Asia Pacific Solidarity Network, 2010; KPAI, 2014). While these data demonstrate the scale of the phenomenon, they do not sufficiently explain the relational and social mechanisms through which such practices are learned, negotiated, and normalized within specific family and cultural contexts.

Adolescence and emerging adulthood represent critical transitional periods characterized by increasing autonomy and heightened vulnerability to risk-taking behaviors (Kemenkes RI, 2017; Sawyer et al., 2018; Steinberg, 2014). In this case, sex education for young children must take into account comprehensive education for parents, ensuring that they understand the appropriate boundaries and materials (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013). Within this

transition, one increasingly common form of casual sexual relationship is Friends with Benefits (FWB), defined as a sexual relationship between friends without romantic commitment (Fuatuerosida et al., 2025; Garcia et al., 2012; Maciocha et al., 2024). FWB combines emotional familiarity with physical intimacy while explicitly rejecting long-term relational obligations, positioning it as a distinct form of non-committed intimacy within contemporary youth culture (Furman & Shaffer, 2010; Prameswari et al., 2023).

Empirical studies indicate that Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships are prevalent among college students and young adults in urban environments, with reported participation rates ranging from approximately 33% to 60%, depending on definitional and contextual differences (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Owen et al., 2010). Similar patterns have been observed in Indonesian urban contexts, including among female university students engaging in sexual relationships without emotional or romantic commitment (Fuatuerosida et al., 2025; Leandro, 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024; Rahma et al., 2024; Rifai et al., 2022). However, existing studies have largely focused on prevalence and emotional outcomes, offering limited insight into the social and familial processes through which such relationships are normalized.

This condition presents a central empirical paradox. On the one hand, Indonesian society is characterized by collectivist family values, strong parental authority, and religious norms emphasizing sexual restraint (Kagitcibasi, 2017; Parker & Nilan, 2013; Riany et al., 2017; Triandis, 1995). Adolescents and young adults increasingly engage in relationship practices that prioritize autonomy, emotional detachment, and non-commitment (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013). This tension raises a critical question regarding how young people negotiate intimacy within family environments that often discourage open discussion of sexuality while simultaneously being embedded in peer cultures that normalize casual sexual relationships. potentially creating an urgent need for integrated policies that address economic, educational, and social factors to support family well-being (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013; Suratman et al., 2024).

Previous research suggests that ineffective family communication and limited parental involvement are associated with higher engagement in unsafe sexual behavior, as adolescents tend to seek guidance and validation from peers when family dialogue is restrictive (Kahn et al., 2015; Maulida Haura et al., 2025; Secor-Turner et al., 2013; Shahraki-Sanavi et al., 2018; Sutan & Mahat, 2017). These findings indicate that family communication operates not merely as a background condition but as an emotional and symbolic context that shapes adolescents' interpretations of intimacy, autonomy, and relational boundaries (Rohinah, 2017; Salamah & Supriadi, 2021).

Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT) provides a systematic analytical framework for examining these dynamics through two key orientations, such as conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Conversation orientation reflects the extent to which families encourage open dialogue and emotional expression, whereas conformity orientation emphasizes obedience, uniformity of values, and hierarchical authority (Horstman et al., 2018). These orientations shape adolescents' subjective experiences of emotional security, autonomy, and self-expression, which in turn influence how they interpret and negotiate sexual decision-making, including engagement in non-committed intimacy (Nakhaee et al., 2017; Schrodt et al., 2008).

At the same time, peer groups constitute a central socialization context during adolescence (Sari et al., 2020). Social Learning Theory (SLT) explains how sexual attitudes and behaviors are acquired through processes of observation, imitation, and reinforcement within peer environments (Bandura, 1978). When FWB practices are repeatedly observed, discussed, and socially validated within peer groups, they may become normalized and perceived as acceptable relational options (Bandura, 1977; Bisson & Levine, 2009; Brown & Larson, 2009; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). This peer-driven normalization process is particularly influential when family communication about sexuality is limited, allowing peer-based learning to function as a primary reference for sexual meaning-making (Brown & Larson, 2009; Khozin et al., 2024; Laili et al., 2024). Although prior studies have examined family communication, peer influence, and

FWB relationships separately, there remains limited empirical understanding of how these dimensions interact to shape adolescents' engagement in FWB relationships, particularly within collectivist and religious urban societies such as Indonesia (Leandro, 2023; Owen et al., 2010). This lack of integrative analysis limits the explanatory capacity of existing theories, which have largely been developed and tested in Western contexts.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how family communication patterns and peer influence jointly shape adolescents' involvement in Friends with Benefits relationships in Jakarta. By integrating Family Communication Patterns Theory and Social Learning Theory within a phenomenological framework, this research uses these theories not merely as conceptual backgrounds but as analytical lenses guiding the interpretation of adolescents' lived experiences. In doing so, the study seeks to extend the applicability of FCPT and SLT to a non-Western, collectivist, and religious context, offering a more contextually grounded understanding of how non-committed intimacy is learned, negotiated, and normalized among urban Indonesian adolescents.

Methods

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive phenomenological approach grounded in Husserlian phenomenology, following the analytic procedures proposed by Giorgi (2009). This design was chosen to capture adolescents' lived experiences and subjective meaning-making related to involvement in Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships, particularly as these experiences are shaped by family communication patterns and peer group dynamics. In line with descriptive phenomenology, the study aimed to describe participants' experiences as they are lived, rather than to interpret them through a pre-existing theoretical lens (Giorgi, 2009; Jackson et al., 2018).

Jakarta was selected as the research setting due to its position as Indonesia's largest metropolitan area, characterized by rapid urbanization, high digital connectivity, and increasing exposure to globalized youth cultures. At the same time, Jakarta remains embedded in collectivistic family norms and strong religious values, where open discussion of sexuality within families is often constrained. This combination makes Jakarta a particularly relevant context for examining how adolescents negotiate intimacy in environments marked by tension between traditional family authority and peer-driven normalization of casual sexual relationships.

Previous national and local studies have reported a higher prevalence of risky sexual behaviors among urban adolescents compared to their rural counterparts, highlighting the role of urban social environments in shaping sexual attitudes and practices (Afrida & Febrianti, 2023; Syam & Muryono, 2023). Within this context, Jakarta provides a critical empirical setting for exploring how family communication patterns and peer influence interact as social and emotional mechanisms, rather than treating adolescent sexual behavior as an individual or purely attitudinal phenomenon.

Ethical Clearance

This study was conducted in accordance with established research ethics principles. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, participants' identities were protected by using initials and withholding any personally identifiable information. Data collection was carried out through direct interviews after participants had been fully informed about the purpose of the study and had provided their voluntary and informed consent. All data obtained were used solely for academic purposes.

Participants and Sampling

In this study, participants were defined as adults based on established legal, ethical, and developmental standards. According to the World Health Organization (2014), individuals aged 18 years and older are legally classified as adults and are therefore eligible to provide independent informed consent for research participation. Consistent with this definition, all

participants in the present study were aged 18–24 years at the time of data collection, and no minors were involved. Consequently, parental or guardian consent was not required, and informed consent was obtained directly from all participants. Developmental research conceptualizes late adolescence and emerging adulthood as transitional phases in which individuals actively negotiate personal values, relational boundaries, and self-concept, while simultaneously experiencing reduced parental control and increased peer influence (Arnett, 2000; Sawyer et al., 2018).

Individuals aged 18–24 years are situated within the transitional period between late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Arnett (2000), conceptualized emerging adulthood (approximately ages 18–25) as a distinct developmental phase marked by increasing autonomy, identity exploration, and heightened experimentation in intimate and relational domains. This developmental framing is theoretically relevant to the present study, as individuals within this age range actively negotiate intimacy, autonomy, and commitment, including participation in non-committed relationships such as Friends with Benefits. Such vulnerability is further intensified in contexts where open family communication about sexuality is limited, positioning peers as primary sources of relational norms and sexual meaning-making (White et al., 2023; Wilson & Taylor, 2022). Accordingly, the 18–24 age range captures individuals who are no longer in early adolescence yet remain embedded in family and peer systems that continue to exert a strong influence on sexual decision-making (Peçi, 2017).

The inclusion of seven participants was considered appropriate within a phenomenological research framework, as the primary objective of the study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences rather than to achieve statistical generalization. Data collection was conducted iteratively and continued until information power and thematic saturation were achieved, as indicated by the recurrence of experiential patterns and the absence of substantively new meanings in the final interviews. To enhance methodological transparency, a table of participant characteristics was included, detailing participant codes, age, gender, educational status, family structure, and duration of involvement in FWB relationships (see Table 1). This table provides contextual clarity regarding the social and demographic background of the informants and supports the credibility of the findings.

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants

Code	Age	Gender	Occupation	Family Structure	Involvement in FWB
AB	23	Female	Freelance & Business Owner	Divorced / broken home	Current involvement
HS	23	Female	International Relations (Graduate)	Divorced / broken home	Prior involvement
SB	24	Female	Administration Staff	Intact family	Prior involvement
ZH	23	Female	Human Resources Staff	Intact family	Current involvement
WL	22	Female	Undergraduate Student	Intact family	Current involvement
MG	24	Female	Undergraduate Student	Intact family	Ongoing involvement
WK	24	Male	Graduate / Business owner	Intact family	Prior involvement (discontinued)

The information presented in this table is derived from participants' self-reported demographic data and family backgrounds obtained during the interview process and informed consent documentation. The table is intended to provide contextual clarity for interpreting informants' narratives rather than to enable statistical comparison.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, with each participant completing one face-to-face interview session lasting approximately 45–60 minutes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews were conducted in private and confidential settings, either in participants' residences or other mutually agreed locations within Jakarta. The interview guide was developed to reflect the study's theoretical framework. Questions related to Family

Communication Patterns Theory explored participants' experiences of openness, emotional expression, parental authority, and conformity within the family context. Questions informed by Social Learning Theory focused on peer interactions, observation of peers' relationship practices, and perceived normalization of FWB behaviors. Examples of guiding questions included: "How do your parents usually talk about relationships or sexuality?" and "How do your friends influence your views on casual relationships?" Probing questions were used flexibly to deepen participants' descriptions and clarify emerging meanings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method, beginning with repeated immersion in the interview transcripts to achieve a holistic understanding of participants' accounts. Meaning units relevant to the research question were then identified and carefully delineated, after which these units were transformed into psychologically sensitive descriptions that captured the essential features of participants' lived experiences. The transformed meaning units were subsequently synthesized into coherent thematic structures representing the core experiential patterns across participants. During the analytical process, researchers used epoché (bracketing) to suspend previous assumptions and minimize theoretical influences, thereby ensuring that findings remained rooted in the meanings experienced by participants. The Family Communication Pattern Theory and Social Learning Theory were not used to determine analytical categories in advance, but were applied at the thematic articulation stage to contextualize and clarify the structure of emerging experiences, while maintaining consistency with the descriptive phenomenological position.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through multiple strategies aligned with qualitative research standards (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Flick, 2020). Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants reviewed interview summaries for accuracy. Dependability and confirmability were supported through peer debriefing with two independent qualitative researchers and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting analytic decisions. Transferability was strengthened by providing thick descriptions of participants' contexts and experiences. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, confidentiality was maintained through anonymization, and the study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving late adolescents and young adults.

Result

Family Communication Dynamics

Family communication emerged as a central emotional context shaping adolescents' interpretations of intimacy and autonomy in Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships. Variations in conversation orientation and conformity orientation, as conceptualized in Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT), structured adolescents' emotional security and their reliance on peer relationships. Participants SB and ZH, both from intact families characterized by low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation, described family environments dominated by parental authority and limited dialogue. These protective communication patterns constrained emotional expression and reduced opportunities for adolescents to articulate personal concerns.

"Parents dominate the decisions; sometimes I just follow along without saying much."
(SB, intact family, protective communication pattern)

"Communication is limited; my parents give more orders than listen to my opinions."
(ZH, intact family, protective communication pattern)

Analytically, these statements reflect a communicative environment in which conformity is prioritized over dialogue (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Within FCPT, such protective patterns restrict adolescents' communicative agency, increasing unmet emotional needs and

encouraging adolescents to seek validation and relational affirmation outside the family, including through non-committed intimacy such as FWB.

In contrast, participant P3 experienced a consensual communication pattern, marked by open discussion combined with sustained parental guidance. This balance allowed emotional expression while maintaining family norms.

"We often discuss things, but there is still control from my parents that I respect." (WL, intact family, consensual communication pattern)

This communicative balance appeared to mitigate emotional uncertainty, suggesting that adolescents from consensual families engage in FWB relationships with greater reflexivity rather than as responses to emotional deprivation.

Participants MG and WK described family contexts consistent with pluralistic communication patterns, characterized by openness and low conformity demands. Supportive extended family figures played a key role in facilitating emotional dialogue and autonomy.

"I am more comfortable talking to my aunt; she is more open." (MG, intact family, pluralistic communication pattern)

"My parents are more flexible, but they still monitor me." (WK, intact family, pluralistic communication pattern)

These environments fostered emotional confidence and self-expression. While FWB involvement still occurred, it was less associated with emotional vulnerability and more aligned with identity exploration.

A distinct emotional trajectory emerged among participants from broken home family structures (AB and HS), particularly when combined with protective communication patterns. Limited dialogue and ongoing parental control intensified feelings of emotional distance and insecurity.

"I was closed off at first, but I became open after some conflicts with my parents." (AB, broken home, protective communication pattern)

"I don't talk much, and the family's decisions remain the most important." (HS, broken home, protective communication pattern)

Here, family structure functioned as an emotional amplifier rather than a neutral background variable (Owen et al., 2010). The combination of family breakdown and restricted communication heightened adolescents' vulnerability to seeking emotional fulfillment through FWB relationships.

Peer Normalization of FWB Through Social Learning Processes

Peers emerged as the primary social agents through which FWB was introduced and normalized. Consistent with Social Learning Theory (SLT), adolescents learned about FWB through observation, repeated discussion, and peer validation (Bandura, 1977).

"I learned about FWB from my friends, they explained it to me and involved me in conversations about it. At first, I didn't really understand what it was, but they told me that it was just a casual thing that people do. They said it's fine as long as both people agree, so I just went along with it. It felt like everyone was doing it, so it didn't seem like a big deal." (SB)

This statement illustrates SLT's processes of attention and retention, where adolescents internalize peer-endorsed meanings of intimacy. Repeated peer discourse reframed FWB as a socially acceptable practice rather than a morally questionable one.

Similarly, ZH described how peer reassurance diminished initial hesitation:

"At first, I was hesitant, but my friends made it seem normal. They talked about it so casually, and at some point, I thought it was just how things were supposed to be. It wasn't really a big deal to them, so it didn't seem like a problem to me anymore. They kept reassuring me that it was all fine as long as there was mutual agreement, and there were no expectations, so I started to think, 'Why not?' It didn't feel like something that could cause harm because it was just another type of relationship, and they acted like it was completely normal." (ZH)

Analytically, peer normalization operated not only as behavioral modeling but also as a mechanism for social belonging. Importantly, peer influence was strongest among adolescents from families with low conversation orientation, indicating an interaction between family communication and social learning processes.

Sexual Education Gaps as a Mediating Mechanism

Participants consistently reported limited family-based sexual education, primarily focused on pregnancy prevention rather than emotional or psychological consequences.

"The sexual education I received from my family was limited to avoiding pregnancy, but it never really covered the other risks, like sexually transmitted diseases. They always told me to avoid getting pregnant but didn't explain the risks of STDs or emotional consequences. I never got the feeling that my parents thought about the emotional side of sex, like how it could affect me mentally. It was more about what could happen physically, like getting pregnant." (ZH)

This narrow view leaves adolescents unprepared to deal with the emotional complexities of FWB relationships. As a result, peers become the primary source of sexual knowledge, reinforcing normalized interpretations and emotional detachment in FWB relationships.

Several participants later described feelings of confusion and emotional emptiness following FWB involvement, highlighting the mediating role of inadequate sexual communication in amplifying peer influence.

Motivations for Engagement in FWB Relationships

Motivations for engaging in FWB reflected layered emotional and social dynamics. Participants from intact but restrictive families emphasized curiosity and peer conformity:

"I feel influenced by my friends, and it's also a strong biological urge. It just seemed natural to follow along with what others were doing, and my curiosity led me into it." (SB)

Participants from pluralistic families framed involvement as exploration and autonomy:

"I felt like I needed to prove something to myself and others. It was about asserting my independence and identity, showing that I could have these kinds of relationships without being tied down." (WK)

In contrast, participants from broken homes consistently described motivations rooted in emotional deprivation:

"I was looking for emotional connection and validation, something to make me feel important and wanted. It was a way to fill the emotional gaps in my life." (AB)

"It wasn't about sex alone, but about needing to feel recognized, cared for, and validated. It was about someone showing me attention." (HS)

These findings indicate that FWB functioned as a compensatory emotional strategy for some adolescents, while for others it served exploratory or socially motivated purposes.

Family Structure as an Emotional Context

Family structure significantly shaped adolescents' emotional needs and vulnerability to FWB normalization. Adolescents from intact families generally reported greater emotional stability, even when communication was restrictive. Conversely, those from broken homes experienced intensified emotional insecurity.

"With my parents not being together, I've had to rely more on friends and people around me for support. I don't get as much emotional support from home." (AB)

Analytically, family structure interacted with communication patterns to shape how adolescents interpreted FWB—either as situational experimentation or as a means of emotional repair.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that engagement in Friends with Benefits relationships is produced through the interaction of family communication patterns, peer-driven social learning, sexual education gaps, and emotionally formative family structures. To consolidate these patterns, the key findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Synthesis of Key Findings and Analytical Interpretations

Theme	Key Finding	Analytical focus
Family Communication Dynamics	Adolescents experienced limited emotional dialogue and dominant parental authority, leading to emotional distance from the family.	Restrictive communication reduced emotional expression and increased adolescents' reliance on external validation, heightening vulnerability to non-committed intimacy such as FWB (FCPT).
	Open discussions were present alongside parental guidance, allowing adolescents to feel heard while respecting family norms.	Balanced communication fostered emotional security and reflexivity, reducing the likelihood of FWB as a compensatory emotional strategy.
	Adolescents reported autonomy, emotional openness, and support from family or extended family figures.	Open communication reshaped the meaning of FWB from emotional compensation to identity exploration, indicating higher emotional resilience.
Peer Normalization of FWB	Adolescents learned about FWB through repeated peer conversations that framed it as normal and consensual.	Peer groups functioned as primary social learning agents, legitimizing FWB through observation, reinforcement, and social approval (SLT).
Sexual Education Gaps	Sexual education within families focused mainly on pregnancy prevention, neglecting emotional and psychological consequences.	These gaps mediated the influence of peers, positioning peer discourse as the dominant source of sexual meaning-making and normalization of FWB.
Motivations for FWB Engagement	Some adolescents engaged in FWB to avoid social exclusion and align with peer norms.	Motivation was externally driven, reflecting the interaction between peer pressure and limited familial dialogue.
	Adolescents from broken homes sought affection, recognition, and emotional connection through FWB.	FWB functioned as a compensatory relational strategy addressing unmet emotional needs rather than purely sexual desire.
Family Structure as Emotional Context	Adolescents from broken homes reported greater emotional insecurity and reliance on peers for support.	Family structure operated as an emotionally formative context that amplified vulnerability to peer normalization and non-committed intimacy.

Taken together, the synthesized findings indicate that Friends with Benefits relationships among adolescents are not merely expressions of individual sexual choice but are shaped by emotionally structured family communication environments, peer-driven social learning processes, and gaps in sexual education. Family communication patterns and family structure jointly influence adolescents' emotional security, which in turn conditions the extent to which peer norms are internalized and enacted. These results highlight FWB as a relational outcome emerging from the interaction between communicative constraints, emotional needs, and socially learned meanings of intimacy.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that adolescents' engagement in Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships in Jakarta emerges from the dynamic interaction between family communication patterns, peer-driven social learning processes, gaps in family-based sexual education, and emotionally formative family structures. Rather than treating FWB as an isolated behavioral choice or a purely moral concern, the findings situate adolescents' involvement in non-committed intimacy within broader communicative and socialization contexts characteristic of

collectivistic and religious societies. In doing so, this study responds directly to calls in the literature to move beyond prevalence-focused accounts and examine the relational mechanisms through which casual intimacy is learned, negotiated, and normalized.

Drawing on Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT), the findings indicate that families characterized by low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation create emotionally restrictive environments that limit adolescents' opportunities to articulate curiosity, emotional needs, and concerns related to intimacy. Consistent with prior FCPT research, such protective communication patterns emphasize obedience and value uniformity while discouraging open dialogue, thereby reducing adolescents' communicative agency (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006; Schrot et al., 2008). However, the present findings extend FCPT by showing that in collectivistic and religious contexts such as Jakarta, restrictive family communication does not suppress adolescents' sexual agency. Instead, it redirects that agency toward peer groups as alternative spaces for negotiating intimacy and relational meaning. This finding challenges assumptions embedded in moralistic models of family control and aligns with research suggesting that communicative silence within families may unintentionally intensify adolescents' reliance on external reference groups for identity and relational guidance.

Conversely, adolescents from consensual and pluralistic family communication patterns characterized by higher conversation orientation, who reported greater emotional security and reflexivity in navigating intimate relationships. These findings are consistent with FCPT-based studies demonstrating that open family dialogue fosters emotional regulation, autonomy, and critical reflection. Within this communicative context, FWB involvement was more likely to be framed as situational exploration rather than as compensation for emotional deprivation. This suggests that conversation-oriented family environments function as emotional buffers, moderating adolescents' susceptibility to peer norms without necessarily eliminating engagement in non-committed intimacy. Thus, FCPT operates not as a deterministic model of behavior but as a framework explaining variability in adolescents' emotional vulnerability and interpretive capacity.

At the same time, the findings highlight the central role of peer influence as conceptualized by Social Learning Theory (SLT). Adolescents consistently described learning about FWB through observation, repeated peer discourse, and social validation, processes that correspond directly to Bandura's mechanisms of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In line with prior research on adolescent sexual socialization (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Brown & Larson, 2009), peer groups functioned as epistemic communities that normalized FWB as consensual and socially acceptable. Importantly, the influence of peers was not uniform across participants but was amplified in contexts where family communication about sexuality was limited. This interaction demonstrates that SLT does not operate independently of family dynamics; rather, peer-based learning gains explanatory power precisely when familial communicative support is constrained.

The interaction between FCPT and SLT becomes particularly visible when examining gaps in family-based sexual education. Participants reported that parental communication about sexuality focused narrowly on pregnancy prevention, with minimal attention to emotional, relational, or psychological dimensions of intimacy. This finding resonates with broader critiques of incomplete sexuality education in conservative and religious contexts, where moral injunctions often replace dialogical engagement (Claxton & van Dulmen, 2013; Shahraki-Sanavi et al., 2018). Such gaps leave adolescents emotionally unprepared to process the complexities of FWB relationships, increasing their dependence on peer narratives that normalize emotional detachment. In this sense, limited sexual communication functions as a mediating mechanism that strengthens peer-driven social learning processes.

Motivations for engaging in FWB, such as curiosity, loneliness, self-validation, and identity exploration were not abstract developmental tendencies but contextually produced emotional strategies shaped by communicative and structural conditions. Adolescents from restrictive or disrupted family environments framed FWB as a means of addressing unmet emotional needs,

echoing research linking family dysfunction to heightened vulnerability in intimate decision-making. In contrast, adolescents from more communicative families emphasized autonomy and exploration, aligning with developmental perspectives that view emerging adulthood as a period of identity experimentation (Arnett, 2000). These findings extend developmental theories by embedding motivation within lived communicative experiences rather than treating it as an individual psychological trait.

Family structure further emerged as an emotionally formative context rather than a neutral background variable. Adolescents from broken homes reported heightened emotional insecurity and greater reliance on peers for validation and support, which increased susceptibility to the normalization of FWB. This supports existing evidence that family disruption can amplify emotional needs and weaken internalized relational boundaries (Laili et al., 2024; Sutan & Mahat, 2017). Importantly, family structure interacted with communication patterns rather than operating independently, reinforcing the argument that emotional vulnerability is produced through relational configurations rather than isolated demographic factors.

Taken together, the findings indicate that adolescents' engagement in Friends with Benefits relationships in Jakarta is best understood as an outcome of interconnected communicative constraints, emotional needs, and socially learned meanings of intimacy. Restrictive family communication intensifies peer-based social learning, gaps in sexual education mediate emotional preparedness, and family structure amplifies adolescents' vulnerability or resilience. By integrating FCPT and SLT within a phenomenological framework, this study advances a relational understanding of non-committed intimacy that is sensitive to cultural, religious, and communicative contexts. These insights underscore the importance of culturally responsive family communication and sexuality education approaches that address emotional and relational dimensions of intimacy without negating prevailing moral and religious values.

Conclusion

This study offers a contextually grounded understanding of adolescents' engagement in Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships by examining how family communication patterns shape sexual decision-making within an urban Indonesian socio-cultural context. The findings demonstrate that variations in family communication—particularly levels of openness, conformity, and emotional responsiveness—play a central role in how adolescents interpret intimacy, negotiate boundaries, and normalize peer-influenced sexual practices. Rather than framing FWB solely as an individual choice or deviant behavior, this study clarifies how such relationships emerge through relational dynamics marked by limited parental dialogue, reliance on peer norms, and gaps in sexuality communication. These insights are most applicable to adolescents living in collectivist and religiously informed settings where discussions of sexuality remain constrained, yet they also resonate with broader global debates on adolescent sexual agency and risk in contexts of communicative silence.

Beyond the Indonesian context, this study contributes to international scholarship by emphasizing the importance of communication-centered and culturally responsive frameworks for understanding adolescent sexuality. By extending Family Communication Patterns Theory and Social Learning Theory into a non-Western setting, the study demonstrates that sexual decision-making is deeply embedded in everyday family interactions and social learning processes rather than isolated individual attitudes. The findings suggest that effective sexuality education and prevention strategies should move beyond informational approaches and instead prioritize emotionally supportive family communication and culturally sensitive interventions that acknowledge adolescents' lived realities. Future research is encouraged to expand this line of inquiry through multi-site and cross-cultural studies, incorporate parental and educational perspectives, and adopt longitudinal designs to better capture the evolving nature of adolescent intimacy and relational decision-making over time.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

The author solely conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, conducted data collection through in depth interviews, performed data analysis using a descriptive phenomenological approach, interpreted the findings, and wrote the original draft of the manuscript. The author also reviewed and revised the manuscript and approved the final version for submission.

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Data Availability Statement

The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interests Statement

The author declares that there are no competing interests, financial or personal, that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

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