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The Dynamics of Adolescent Relationships and the Disintegration of Moral Regulation: A Study on Teenage Pregnancy in Paremono, Magelang

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Abstract

Unplanned pregnancies among teenagers are often perceived merely as a lapse in individual selfdiscipline. Nevertheless, in Paremono Village, located in Magelang Regency, a community that upholds strong Islamic values, this issue reveals a sociological contradiction. This research seeks to understand why the moral regulations associated with religion fail in deterring risky sexual activities among young people. Employing a qualitative case study method, data were gathered through comprehensive interviews with 20 participants: 10 adolescent girls who are pregnant, 5 parents, and 5 religious leaders. The study's results indicate a breakdown in informal social control structures. Cultural and religious stigmas surrounding sexuality create obstacles to communication within families, resulting in a "reproduction of ignorance." Consequently, adolescents experience cognitive dissonance: they have theological awareness about what constitutes "sin," yet lack meaningful moral support to withstand external pressures. Viewed through the framework of Social Learning Theory, the absence of parental and religious guidance is compensated for by peer groups that normalize a liberal dating environment and digital pornography. This research concludes that an abundance of religious symbols does not guarantee moral internalization without engaging in and facilitating open educational discussions. This study suggests enhancing the involvement of religious leaders to reduce the stigma surrounding reproductive health education and to transition the teaching approach from a rigid to a more conversational style.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy; religious moral regulation; social control; cognitive dissonance; Paremono Village

Introduction

Unintended pregnancy is a complex intersection of health, social, and moral issues that persist globally and nationally. According to the World Health Organization, the high rate of teenage pregnancy indicates a failure of social control mechanisms over adolescent reproductive behavior (WHO & UNICEF, 2022). From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon is not merely a statistical anomaly but rather a reflection of a shift in society's moral landscape. In Indonesia, a country deeply rooted in religious values, the birth rate among adolescents aged 15-19 has increased from 20.49 to 26.64 per 1,000 live births (BKKBN, 2021). presents a serious challenge to the effectiveness of traditional moral regulation.

Theoretically, adolescence is a critical period characterized by identity formation and risk-taking behavior. Adolescents are often torn between adherence to religious taboos regarding premarital sexuality and the pressures of modern dating culture. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains that adolescents adopt deviant behaviors, such as risky dating, through peer observation

and media exposure, which often override the normative values instilled by family and religious institutions (Qomariah, 2020; Deswinda et al., 2020). Previous studies confirm that peer influence and deviant dating styles (such as petting and intercourse) are dominant predictors of teenage pregnancy (Deswinda et al., 2020, and Haq, 2020).

Furthermore, international literature highlights the complexity of the often paradoxical relationship between religiosity and adolescent sexual behavior. Although a meta-analysis by (Hayward, 2019) confirming that religiosity generally functions as a protective factor against early sexual behavior, its effectiveness depends mainly on how these values are internalized, not just external rituals (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003) warns of the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, where adolescents who grow up in strict religious environments often experience intense inner conflict when violating norms. However, guilt is not always an effective deterrent against risky behavior if adequate self-regulation skills are lacking. In a specific sociocultural context like Indonesia, (Astuti et al., 2020) discovered that religious norms often intersect with rigid cultural taboos, creating barriers to communication between parents and adolescents. Consequently, religious symbols, which should function as moral guides, instead become sources of social pressure that stifle discussions about reproductive health, leaving adolescents to seek answers in misguided directions.

On the other hand, strengthening social control from family and community institutions is a vital protective element in stemming the influence of peers (Budiharjo et al., 2018), which confirms a significant relationship between parental knowledge and role and adolescent pregnancy, underscoring the family's role as the primary socializing agent in shaping reproductive health decisions. However, interventions should not be confined to the family level; structural factors also play a role. Phiri et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of implementing strategies to retain adolescent girls in school and providing comprehensive interventions to address economic vulnerability. At the community level, Zulu et al. (2022) found that community dialogue was effective in reconstructing sociocultural norms, thereby opening up a healthier communication space between parents and children. This approach was supported by a literature review (Plesons et al., 2020), which emphasizes the importance of holistic collaboration involving religious leaders, the government, and families. The involvement of religious leaders is sociologically strategic, given their authority to instill moral values that should protect adolescents from risky behavior.

The failure of the social control function above has severe multidimensional impacts. Tamalla & Azinar (2022) recorded the risk of health complications such as premature birth and maternal-infant mortality, while Denty & Devy (2022) highlight the impact on education, where pregnancy often leads to school dropout and lost future opportunities. This phenomenon is clearly reflected in Magelang Regency, where data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) (2023) show that marriage dispensation requests increased in Mungkid District, reaching 406 cases in 2023, with the majority involving teenagers under 18 years old. The research site in Paremono Village embodies a sociological paradox. Despite the community's firm adherence to religious norms, initial observations reveal a notable incidence of teenage pregnancies occurring outside of marriage. This discrepancy suggests a disconnect between the religious values upheld by the community and the actual dating behaviors of adolescents, warranting a thorough investigation into the underlying social dynamics.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the dynamics of dating and its impact on teenage pregnancy in Paremono Village through the lens of the Sociology of Religion. To achieve this goal, the study employed a qualitative method with a single-case study approach. This approach was chosen based on Creswell & Poth (2018), which emphasizes the urgency of

qualitative methods in exploring the meanings that individuals construct regarding complex social problems. More specifically, a single case study design was adopted based on the argument (Yin, 2018), which states that this design has analytical advantages to answer "how" and "why" questions in real-life contexts where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly visible, as is the case with the paradox of adolescent behavior in the Paremono religious environment. The research participants consisted of 20 informants selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, including 10 pregnant teenage girls, 5 parents, and 5 local religious leaders. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Data analysis refers to Miles' interactive model (Miles et al., 2019), which focuses on sociological interpretations of how religious values are negotiated or compromised in the daily social interactions of adolescents.

Literature Review

Global Discussion: From Health to Social Norms

The global discourse surrounding teenage pregnancy has experienced a notable transformation. Initially regarded primarily as a public health concern, recent literature has positioned the issue within a broader framework of social and cultural norms. Phiri et al. (2023) highlighted in their study that health interventions must be complemented by addressing the underlying causes of economic inequality and enhancing educational access for women. As noted by Zulu et al. (2022), current trends in the global literature indicate that the most effective strategy is community-based intervention, particularly through community dialogue. This study underscores the idea that social norms are not fixed but can be reshaped through intergenerational conversations. Nevertheless, these studies often take a generalized view of communities and frequently overlook the specific role of religious authority as a moral gatekeeper in traditional societies.

Psychological and Behavioral Perspectives in National Context

Zooming into the Indonesian context, research trends are dominated by psychological and behavioral approaches. Qomariah (2020) defines adolescence as a vulnerable transitional phase due to emotional instability and high curiosity. Within this framework, risky dating behavior is often explained through peer influence theory. (Deswinda et al., 2020) and (Haq, 2020) provide strong empirical evidence that deviant dating styles (such as petting and intercourse) are the result of peer pressures that override self-control. Meanwhile, from an external perspective, literature focuses mainly on the role of the family. (Budiharjo et al., 2018) as well as (Denty & Devy, 2022) agreed that low parental knowledge and dropping out of school are the main determinants.

However, a notable limitation of this national study trend is its tendency to depict adolescents as individuals who are devoid of values, influenced solely by their peers or parents. Existing literature often overlooks the fact that adolescents in Indonesia are raised within a rich socio-religious context. These studies seldom investigate how adolescents navigate doctrines of sin and religious taboos when involved in dating behavior.

The Missing Link: Religious Moral Regulation

A criticism of previous studies is the lack of analysis of the institutional role of religion in preventing risky sexual behavior. Plesons et al. (2020) offer a notable contribution with their argument regarding the importance of holistic collaboration involving religious leaders. However,

in much of the sociology of religion literature, the role of religious leaders is often portrayed as limited to providing normative advice, rather than as central actors shaping village social structures.

What is "forgotten" from the current literature is the analysis of cognitive and social dissonance in religious areas. Why is it that in areas with a high density of religious symbols (such as Islamic boarding schools and mosques) and strict social control, risky dating behaviors thrive? This research aims to fill this gap by shifting the focus from merely psychological causal factors to an analysis of the dynamics of value negotiation within the framework of the Sociology of Religion.

Results and Discussion

Understanding the dynamics of teenage pregnancy in Paremono Village requires more than a purely biological perspective; it is fundamentally a reflection of the shortcomings in social and religious systems that are meant to guide adolescent sexual behavior. The research findings indicate that teenage pregnancy arises from a complex interplay of weakened family dynamics, the influence of peer culture, and the disconnect between religious rituals and moral conduct. The following section provides a detailed discussion organized around four key sociological dimensions.

Family Norms and the Weakening of Social Control

In a religious rural community such as Paremono, the family serves as the "first madrasah," acting as a primary socialization agent responsible for imparting fundamental values and religious morality. However, the findings of this study present a contrasting reality: there is considerable dysfunction in the family's ability to protect adolescents from engaging in risky sexual behavior. Confirming these findings (Girsang, 2021), this study found that weak parental supervision is a crucial determinant of teenage pregnancy. However, in Paremono, this weak supervision is not solely due to economic preoccupation or physical neglect but instead is rooted in a culture of passive parenting. Parents tend to feel "safe enough" in the village's perceived religious environment, thereby reducing their awareness of the dynamics of their children's social interactions in private spaces. However, as emphasized in a global study by Tumale et al. (2025), negligence in monitoring internal dynamics, even though it occurs in a seemingly intact family structure, can create a "blueprint" for deviant behavior, due to the loss of the substantive control function, which should be the primary filter for adolescent behavior.

The fundamental problem found was a communication failure caused by the perpetuation of a "sexuality taboo" culture. In line with the study by Budiharjo et al. (2018), which emphasizes the importance of parents' role in transferring knowledge, the field data actually indicate a breakdown in dialogue. Most parents in Paremono hold firmly to the belief that discussing reproductive health or sexuality with unmarried children is taboo and ethically and religiously inappropriate. It results in a value transmission failure. Parents expect their children to develop moral awareness automatically (taken for granted), but without clear verbal education, children lack concrete guidance in interpreting religious values when confronted with biological urges. Parents' inability to initiate this conversation creates a thick wall separating the world of children from that of parents.

This phenomenon can be analyzed in detail using Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory, specifically in terms of the loss of attachment and involvement. In the case of pregnant teenagers in Paremono, the emotional bond with their parents proved fragile. Even though they lived in the same house, there was no psychological openness between them. Teenagers were reluctant to talk about the opposite sex for fear of being scolded or being considered to have violated norms of

decency. When this attachment is weak, the internalization of norms fails; teenagers do not feel "supervised" by their own conscience when away from their parents. The validity of this perspective is strengthened by recent research (Hoffmann, 2023), which found that low levels of attachment and parental quality were far stronger predictors of juvenile delinquency than family structure itself. This finding confirms that without strong emotional bonds, social control becomes ineffective. Furthermore, the involvement dimension is also problematic; parents are often only involved in the formal aspects of their children's lives (such as sending them to school or reciting the Koran) but are absent from supporting adolescents through their emotional struggles and search for identity.

This situation is further complicated by a "false sense of security." Paremono is recognized as a center for Islamic boarding school students (santri), offering numerous religious activities, which leads parents to believe that the village's social structure—comprising religious study groups and neighborhood oversight—is adequate for safeguarding their children. However, the reality of teenage dating has evolved, now occurring in environments that extend beyond traditional social controls, such as digital platforms and secluded locations that escape community scrutiny. As a result, when cultural taboos hinder a family's internal control mechanisms, and the community's external oversight fails to respect adolescents' privacy, a gap in moral regulation emerges, creating a significant opportunity for out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

Shifts in Teenage Social Life and the Influence of Peers

When the internal control function within the family weakens due to taboo communication barriers, the social space of adolescents in Paremono experiences a vacuum of authority that peer groups quickly fill. The findings of this study consistently show that peers are not merely complementary social interactions but have transformed into a new reference for moral authority that rivals the role of parents and teachers. Confirming the study of Deswinda et al. (2020), this study found that peer influence was the most dominant determinant of adolescent sexual decisions. However, a deeper analysis revealed that this mechanism of influence does not always operate through direct coercion, but rather through a gradual process of normalizing behavior in everyday interactions.

This dynamic can be precisely explained through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, in which adolescents model the behavior of their peers, who are considered to represent modernity. It is reinforced by studies (Widman et al., 2016), who found that adolescents' vulnerability to peer sexual influence often goes unnoticed due to group norms that validate such activities as a normal part of socialization, thus lowering individual risk perceptions. In Paremono Village, field data indicate the emergence of a youth subculture with its own set of rules. Risky dating behaviors such as being alone in dark places, holding hands, and even further sexual activity are often no longer seen as deviance within their friendship circles, but rather as a standard of normality to be recognized. As highlighted by Haq (2020), today's teenage dating styles have shifted to a very permissive style. In Paremono, this shift creates strong peer pressure; teenagers fear being ostracized or perceived as "uncool" and "pretentious" if they refuse their friends' invitations to go on dates.

From the perspective of Sociology of Religion, this phenomenon indicates a decline in religious authority at the grassroots level. While these adolescents are physically situated in a *santri* village environment, intellectually they exist in a "bubble" of secular, value-neutral peer relationships. The solidarity they find within their peer groups has proven to be more emotionally

compelling than their ties to the community or adherence to religious norms. Consequently, moral guidance from religious leaders or parents often falls flat, as it is perceived as irrelevant to the "real world" of their social interactions. These adolescents grapple with divided loyalties: on one hand, they fear sin and the implications of religious values, while on the other, the prospect of social exclusion from their peers—enforced by social sanctions—feels far more immediate and daunting in their everyday lives. From the perspective of the Sociology of Religion, this phenomenon indicates a decline in religious authority at the grassroots level. While these adolescents are physically situated in a *santri* village environment, intellectually they exist in a "bubble" of secular, value-neutral peer relationships. The solidarity they find within their peer groups has proven to be more emotionally compelling than their ties to the community or adherence to religious norms. Consequently, moral guidance from religious leaders or parents often falls flat, as it is perceived as irrelevant to the "real world" of their social interactions. These adolescents grapple with divided loyalties: on one hand, they fear sin and the implications of religious values, while on the other, the prospect of social exclusion from their peers—enforced by social sanctions—feels far more immediate and daunting in their everyday lives.

Religiosity and Morality in Sexual Behavior

The most crucial and paradoxical finding in this study lies in the dimension of religiosity. Contrary to the common assumption that premarital pregnancies only occur among secular or religiously distant adolescents, the data in Paremono show the opposite. The majority of informants who experienced pregnancies were adolescents with a sufficient Islamic educational background, some of whom were even active in youth mosque activities. This phenomenon presents a sociological paradox: how is it possible that individuals living in an environment with a high density of religious symbols and possessing theological knowledge that adultery is a major sin still fall into premarital sexual behavior? In-depth analysis shows that the problem is not a lack of religious knowledge, but rather a failure to internalize religious values into concrete behavioral guidelines (moral conduct).

The psychological dynamics that occur among adolescents in Paremono can be explained through the concept of Cognitive Dissonance. Interview data revealed that adolescents actually experience a fierce internal struggle between biological-emotional drives and the religious norms they believe in. They are fully aware that premarital sexual activity is a serious violation of God's law. However, in the private and intense situation of dating, this cognitive knowledge fails to transform into a self-restraint mechanism. This finding aligns with a systematic review by Alfita et al. (2021), which concluded that while religiosity is often considered a protective factor, its effectiveness is highly variable and inconsistent; the study confirmed that religious identity alone frequently fails to prevent sexual behavior if it is not accompanied by strong self-control and consistent environmental monitoring. Consequently, religious values appear to hold less sway than the immediate emotional gratification provided by romantic partners. This indicates that adolescent religiosity tends to be more normative and rote than substantive and introspective. Religion is frequently perceived as merely a compilation of prohibitions and commands, lacking the depth needed to cultivate a character capable of resisting situational pressures.

Furthermore, a sociological analysis of religion reveals the phenomenon of value compartmentalization in the lives of Paremono adolescents. Adolescents tend to separate their lives into distinct compartments: a "ritual" compartment (such as prayer and fasting) and a "social" compartment (including dating and friendships). They may be very devout in the ritual aspects of

worship but feel they have full autonomy to violate religious rules in social interactions. Religion is seen as a vertical matter with God that can be resolved through later repentance, while dating is seen as a pressing existential need of youth. This permissive attitude arises from the absence of a bridge of understanding connecting theology with the biological reality of adolescents. Religion presents itself as a rigid dogma, rather than as a relevant solution to the turmoil of puberty.

This failure of religious function is also inseparable from the role of local religious institutions. As criticized by Plesons et al. (2020), religious education often fails due to a non-holistic approach. In Paremono, religious figures hold the highest moral authority; however, the narratives presented in religious studies or sermons are typically one-sided (top-down) and dogmatic in nature. Sexuality is portrayed solely as a frightening realm of sin and hell, without creating a space for adolescents to engage in healthy discussions about their sexual curiosity or urges. Consequently, adolescents often lack the skills to manage their sexual desires while adhering to religious values. When the looming threat of hell, as emphasized by religious teachers, no longer resonates with adolescents in love, their last moral defenses may break down, resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

The Misconstruction of Reproductive Knowledge

The family's role in sexuality education and the transmission of religious values have not been effective, leading to information disorientation among adolescents in Paremono. They develop a strong biological curiosity but often lack access to reliable knowledge sources. The findings of this study reinforce those of other studies by Retni & Lihu (2014), which identified low sexual literacy as a fundamental factor leading adolescents to unwanted pregnancies. However, a more critical analysis shows that the problem is not simply a lack of knowledge, but rather a process of profane and distorted knowledge construction.

Teenagers in Paremono do not let their curiosity go unnoticed; they actively seek answers to their questions. Unfortunately, because formal information channels (parents, schools, religious teachers) are tightly closed by cultural taboos, they turn to an "alternative curriculum": the internet, social media, and peer myths. As noted by Girsang (2021), easy access to unsupervised media has become a gateway to pornography. From a sociological perspective, a phenomenon has occurred in which sexuality, which should be understood as something sacred (holy/worshipful in marriage), has been desacralized into a mere object of visual recreation. This phenomenon is validated by a comprehensive review by Peter & Valkenburg (2016), which asserts that the consumption of sexual material in digital media functions as a "super-peer" that aggressively instills biased sexual scripts; in these scripts, sex is constructed solely as a consequence-free physical activity, ignoring aspects of affection, health risks, and moral responsibility. As a result, teenagers adopt this misconception, where sex is seen as proof of love or a modern lifestyle, rather than a sacred commitment.

This study reveals a troubling emergence of logical fallacies among teenagers concerning the risks of pregnancy. Unscientific medical myths circulate widely within peer groups, including the belief that "having sex only once will not lead to pregnancy" or the notion that "drinking herbal remedies or jumping up and down after intercourse can prevent conception." Such misconceptions are perilous, as they create a false sense of security. Teenagers are inclined to engage in premarital sex not out of a desire to become pregnant, but due to their misguided belief, fueled by misinformation, that they can control the biological consequences.

This dilemma highlights a systemic institutional failure. Schools and Islamic boarding schools in Paremono often shy away from providing comprehensive reproductive health education, fearing accusations of promoting "pornography." However, this reluctance to educate leaves teenagers in a state of confusion. The stark contrast between the rapid influx of global digital information and the slow adaptation of locally oriented sexuality education creates a significant gap. As a result, the youth of Paremono become victims of their own ignorance; they possess adult bodies with active biological urges yet are guided by childhood beliefs rooted in myths and misconceptions.

Conclusion

This study reveals the emergence of logical fallacies among teenagers about pregnancy risks. Unscientific medical myths circulate widely within friendship groups, such as the belief that "having sex just once will not lead to pregnancy" or the notion that "drinking herbal medicine or jumping up and down after intercourse can prevent conception." Such misconceptions pose significant dangers by fostering a false sense of security. Teenagers often engage in premarital sex not out of a desire for pregnancy but because they genuinely believe, influenced by misinformation, that they can manage the biological consequences.

This scenario illustrates systemic institutional failure. Schools and Islamic boarding institutions in Paremono tend to shy away from providing comprehensive reproductive health education for fear of being accused of promoting "pornography." However, this lack of proper education leaves teenagers in a state of confusion. The disparity between the rapid influx of global digital information and the slow adaptation of localized, values-based sexuality education creates a critical gap. Consequently, Paremono teenagers find themselves victims of their own ignorance; they possess adult bodies with active biological urges yet are guided by childhood understandings steeped in myths and distortions.

Implications and Recommendations: The significance of these data points underscores the urgency of redefining religious education from a dogmatic to a dialogical approach. Therefore, this study proposes specific interventions based on local socio-religious structures:

- 1. Revitalization of Religious Authority: Religious figures (Kyai/Ustadz) must integrate reproductive health literacy (contextualized as Fikih Nisa/Women) into religious study circles to destignatize this issue.
- 2. Parenting Intervention: Village Governments and the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) should institutionalize a "Family Resilience Forum" to train parents in open dialogue, thereby breaking the chain of intergenerational silence.
- 3. Systemic Inclusion: Educational institutions are required to revise their dropout policies for pregnant teenagers to prevent the cycle of structural poverty.

Limitations and Future Research: This research is limited by its single-case study design within the specific context of rural Java, which makes the findings less accurate and less generalizable to all religious communities in Indonesia, given their diverse characteristics. Furthermore, the data is dominated by the perspectives of adolescent girls and parents, potentially overlooking the construction of masculinity within dating culture. Future research is recommended to address these limitations by exploring the perspectives of male partners and conducting comparative studies between religious and secular villages to gauge the effectiveness of different social control mechanisms.

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