

Adolescent Sexual Ideology and Sexuality

TAN SOON AUN & SITI NOR YAACOB

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality in Butterworth, Penang. Respondents were 241 students within age range of 13 - 18 years old from three selected secondary schools. Respondents were selected through convenience sampling method. Self-administered questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Sexual Ideology Scale (WHO 2004), Sexual Knowledge Scale, Sexual Attitude Scale and Sexual Behavior Assessment (Yaacob, Baharudin, Juhari, Mansor, Talib and Wong 2009) were used to measure sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality. Findings showed significant relationships between sexual ideology with sexual knowledge ($r=.283, p<0.01$) and sexual behavior ($r=.278, p<0.01$). Sexual ideology have been denote to be related to adolescent sexual knowledge and sexual behavior but not related to adolescent sexual attitude. Findings from this study support the importance of sexual education to create better understanding about sexuality among adolescents.

Keywords: *Sexual Ideology, Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Attitude, Sexual Behavior, Adolescent*

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti perkaitan antara ideologi seksual dan seksualiti remaja di Butterworth, Pulau Pinang. Responden kajian adalah 241 orang pelajar yang berumur antara 13 -18 tahun daripada 3 buah sekolah yang dipilih. Kaedah persampelan mudah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Borang soal selidik digunakan sebagai alat pengumpulan data. Sexual Ideology Scale (WHO 2004), Sexual Knowledge Scale, Sexual Attitude Scale dan Sexual Behavior Assessment (Yaacob, Baharudin, Juhari, Mansor, Talib and Wong 2009) masing-masing digunakan untuk mengukur ideologi seksual dan seksualiti remaja. Hasil kajian menunjukkan perkaitan signifikan antara ideologi seksual dengan pengetahuan seksual ($r=.283, p<0.01$) dan tingkahlaku seksual

($r=.278, p<0.01$). Ideologi seksual telah menunjukkan perkaitan dengan pengetahuan dan tingkahlaku seksual remaja tetapi tiada perkaitan dengan sikap seksual remaja. Dapatan kajian ini menyokong kepentingan pendidikan seksual untuk mendapat kefahaman tentang seksualiti dalam kalangan remaja.

Kata Kunci: *Ideologi seksual, Pengetahuan seksual, Sikap seksual, Tingkahlaku seksual, Remaja*

INTRODUCTION

Humans go through a series of changes in their daily lives including changes in experiences, relationships, biological, social and sexuality. As defined by Aron and Aron (1991), sexuality refers to the feelings, thoughts, emotions and cognitions that an individual links with sexual arousal that will lead to sexual desire and sexual behavior. Adolescents aged from 13 to 19 years are in the stage of transition especially in their sexuality and biological changes. Ng and Fadzil (2006) described adolescence as a period during which individual seeks interpersonal relationship and many of these relationships involve sexual activity. The term sexuality includes sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, body image and gender roles (WHO 2005). Human sexuality is the way in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual being (Rathus, Nevid, & Fichner-Rathus 2000). Sexuality also includes the awareness of ourselves as males and females towards the capacity we have for erotic experiences and responses. Adolescent sexuality is interplay of biological, personality, demographic, psychosocial and cultural factors that influence the adolescent's behavior (Low, Ng, Ang, & Fadzil 2007; Raffaelli, & Green 2003).

Intimate relationship is one of the most important courses of event as we reach the stage of adulthood. Meier, Hull, and Ortyl (2009) highlighted the influences of west industrialization on adolescents' attitudes about close relationships including changes in ideologies and attitude concerning sexuality and gender behaviors. The study by Kerrigan, Andrinopoulos, Chung, Glass, and Ellen (2008), reported that gender or the "widely shared expectations and norms within a society about appropriate male and female behavior, characteristics, and roles" is becoming widely known

as one of the important social factor influencing vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Gender ideologies or belief about what a man or a woman should be across cultural context has their impact on sexual practices, mostly among young people (Kerrigan et al. 2008).

There are differences in beliefs or gender-related norms between a boy and a girl towards pre-marital sex, coercion/violence and protection mechanisms. According to Hilton, Harris, and Rice (2003), unwanted sexual behavior and also unsafe sexual practices could be reduced by improving adolescents' perception and understanding concerning sexual aggression and ideology. In line with the above brief overview, the present study aims to examine the relationship between sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality (sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior). In addition, the study also determines gender differences in sexual ideology, knowledge, attitude and behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Harrison (2008), the integration of complex historical, cultural and religious context will be reflected on young people's sexuality. Harrison (2008) defined sexual ideology as the perception or views toward a particular sexual activity whether it is appropriate or wrong. Although young adolescents have a clear understanding of their own sexual ideology, Harrison noted that their approach to relationships and preventions were common with paradoxes and contradictions. A study by Meier, Hull, and Ortyl (2009) on young adult relationship values at the intersection of gender and sexuality showed that social experiences during earlier life stages shaped adolescent sexual ideology.

Shearer, Hosterman, Gillen and Lefkowitz (2005) examined the relationship between gender role attitude and risky sexual behavior and condom-related beliefs among 220 college students in the Northeastern United States. This study found that traditional gender roles placed men and women with unequal distribution of power. Power was defined as having the ability to influence other people of their sexual decision (Wingood & Diclemente 2000). Besides that, individuals who endorsed traditional gender role attitudes may influence their risky sexual behavior. Studies by

Shearer et al. (2005) and Wingood and Diclemente (2000) viewed traditional masculine roles as general gender roles attitude. Traditional masculine role emphasizes more on status, toughness, anti-feminist and also the reflection on how men should behave in general. Besides, these researches (Shearer et al. 2005; Wingood & Diclemente 2000) also addressed that gender role attitude are complicated and vary from domain to domain and will also reflect how men and women should behave in global views or general ideas. Gender role attitudes were found to be related to sexual behavior and condom-related beliefs (Shearer et al. 2005).

A cross-sectional survey conducted by Manji, Pena and Dubrow (2007) among 246 Latin America adolescents showed that sexual attitudes and practices are rooted in the ideology of machismo. The machismo ideology is about male sexual dominance and female subordination. Findings by Manji et al. (2007) showed that males are expected to initiate sexual activity earlier and to have multiple sexual partners both before and after marriage, while females are expected to refrain from sexual activity before marriage. These sexual attitude and practices are believed to be the main barrier to HIV/STI prevention.

Cheng, Yang, and Lou (2007) explored genders differences in knowledge and attitude towards menstruation among Taiwanese adolescents. The findings of the study revealed that adolescents with more liberal sexual ideology were more open to discuss and accept knowledge related to sexual topics and expressed more positive attitude regarding particular sexual activity. Cheng et al. (2007) also noted that cultural differences will contribute to positive and negative attitude or feeling towards sexual practice. Those who view sexual issues as a taboo topic to explore will limit their access to particular knowledge.

Smiler (2008) and Ward and Merriwether (2006) asserted that masculinity ideology has an implication on adolescent sexual behavior. In their findings, adolescent boys who scored higher in masculinity ideology were reported to have a greater number of sexual partners and, greater experience and higher involvement in particular sexual behavior. In expressing adolescent sexuality, males have been proven to be active rather than passive (Lp et al. 2001). According to Harrison (2008), gender beliefs are norms or attitudes about gender roles strongly influence adolescent's socialization and the development of social norms surrounding sexuality.

In conclusion, literatures that have been briefly discussed show that sexual ideology has certain influence on adolescent sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present quantitative research study utilized correlation research design to examine the relationships between sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality. In this study, convenience sampling method was used. A total sample size of 241 respondents took part in this study. For the convenience of respondents, the questionnaire was designed to be tri-lingual, which is Malay, Chinese and English. The questionnaire requested respondents to fill in their general personal characteristic questions such as age, gender, their family background and source of sexual related information. Besides, the questionnaire also enquired on adolescent sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality (sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior). Students were approached in classrooms. All students were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured of confidentiality. Besides that, they were also informed to answer the question according to their own knowledge and understanding. Consent to participate in the study was assumed if the students complete and return the questionnaire.

Assessment on adolescent sexual ideology was adopted from the questionnaire by World Health Organization (2004). For the rating of these questionnaire, 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly Agree) was used in the present study. The scale consisted of 21 items that are related to sexual permissiveness, peer influences, gender, coercion and abortion. The total score ranged from 21 to 105, where higher scores corresponded to a liberal sexual ideology and lower scores refer to more traditional sexual ideology.

The sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior of the respondents were assessed by the items on sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior (KAB), developed by Yaacob, Baharudin, Juhari, Mansor, Talib, and Wong (2009). Sexual knowledge consisted of 34 items related to the function of sexual reproduction system for female and male, puberty, pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted infection/disease and abortion. For items on knowledge, respondent has to indicate whether the item is true

(1), false (0) or not sure (8). In the data analysis, 'not sure' is considered as false (0). Each correct answer receives one point, and each incorrect or "don't know" response receives no point. Total knowledge scores range from 0 (none of the items correct) to 34 points (all items correct).

Assessment on adolescent sexual attitude consists of 17 items that covers attitude towards puberty, pregnancy, contraception, sexually transmitted infection/disease, abortion, premarital sex and source of information. Respondents were asked to respond to each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. The attitude scale is to measures respondent's sexual attitude on a continuum from negative to positive attitude towards sexuality. Positive sexuality attitude is consistent with religious, moral and cultural values and norms factor. In contrast, negative attitude refers to liberal sexual attitude and inconsistent with cultural norm. Total sexual attitude scores range from 17 (indicating low acceptance of persons with sexual attitude) to 85 points (indicating high acceptance of persons with sexual attitude).

Sexual behavior of the respondents was measured by using 19-items that tap information on the frequency of the respondents being involved with particular sexual behavior within the last 12 months. Each respondent was asked how often he/she had experience holding hands, kissing, touching, committing sexual intercourse with a casual partner and masturbating. The response categories were 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (most of the time) and 4 (always). A higher score means the more frequent involvement of the respondents in sexual behavior.

The results of the study were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Window (SPSS). Data analysis for the study was done by using two statistical measures which are descriptive analysis and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive analyses were used to describe the distributional characteristics of the variables in the study, such as personal and family characteristics, source of sexual related information, adolescent sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality (knowledge, attitude and behavior). Pearson Correlation was used to determine the magnitude and direction of relationship between the independent dependent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The personal characteristics included in the study are gender, age, race, religion. The distribution of the respondents by age is described in Table 1. The mean age of the respondents was 15.65 years with a standard deviation of 1.356. Respondents of the study aged between 14 to 18 years old. More than half of the respondents were male [51.5%]. Most of respondents were Malay with a percentage of 53.9%, followed by Chinese (34%), Indian (10.8%). Majority (53.9%) of the respondents were Muslim followed by Buddhist (33.6%), Hindu (9.5%) and Christian (2.5%).

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Personal Information (n=241)

Variable Max.	n (%)	Mean	S.D.	Min.
Age		15.65	1.356	14
18				
14	80 (33.2)			
15	24 (10.0)			
16	52 (21.6)			
17	71 (29.5)			
18	14 (5.8)			
Gender				
Male	124 (51.5)			
Female	117 (48.5)			
Race				
Malay	130 (53.9)			
Chinese	82 (34.0)			
Indian	26 (10.8)			
Others (Punjabi, Serani, Siamese)	3 (1.2)			
Religion				
Muslim	130 (53.9)			
Buddha	81 (33.6)			
Hindu	23 (9.5)			
Christian	6 (2.5)			
Others (Sikh)	1 (0.4)			

Note: S. D. = Standard Deviation

Min. = Minimum

Max. = Maximum

The family characteristic discussed include parents' age, parents' occupation, parents' education level and parents' income of respondents as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. Group age was range between 30 – 61 years old. The mean age for the fathers of the respondents was 47.97 years with a standard deviation of 6.16. The mean age for the mothers of the respondents was 44.35 years with a standard deviation of 5.62.

Table 2: Family Background Information (n=241)

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Age				
Father	47.97	6.16	32	73
Mother	44.35	5.62	30	61
Family income (RM)	2283.46	1809.62	500	11000

Note: S. D. = Standard Deviation Min. = Minimum
 Max. = Maximum

Referring to Table 3, mean family income of respondents is RM2283.46 with a standard deviation of RM1809.62. Besides, majority of the fathers (67.7%) and mothers (65.6%) had at least secondary school education. Average respondents (43%) of the fathers worked in private sectors followed by business (20.3%) and government sectors (12.7%). Majority (67.6%) of the mothers are full-time housewives. The rest of the mothers work with private companies (10.6%), personal business (7.4%) and government servants (3.7%).

Table 3: Family Background Information (N=241)

Variable	Father	Mother
	n (%)	n (%)
PhD	2 (0.8)	7 (2.9)
	23 (9.5)	33 (13.7)
	54 (22.4)	44 (18.3)
	91 (37.8)	93 (38.6)
	18 (7.5)	21 (8.7)
	11 (4.6)	10 (4.1)
	9 (3.7)	4 (1.7)
	5 (2.1)	1 (0.4)
	1 (0.4)	1 (0.4)

Occupation		
Government	30 (12.2)	9 (4.1)
Private	104 (43.0)	26 (12.0)
Personal	49 (20.3)	18 (8.3)
Housewife	-----	163 (75.1)
Retired	11 (4.5)	1 (0.5)

Table 4 shows distribution of respondents for selected items concerning sexual ideology. About 40% of respondents agree with the statement “I think that sometimes a boy has to force a girl to have sex if he loves her”, while 44% of respondents disagree with “A boy will not respect a girl who agree to have sex with him” and nearly 65% of respondents agree that “It is sometimes justifiable for a boy to hit his girlfriend”. The frequency distribution for the mentioned items shows pattern of distribution of power between male and female. Results indicated that male have more power than female regarding the sexual matters. About 82.2% and 72.2% of the respondents respectively, disagree with the items “I believe that girls should remain virgins until they marry” and “I believe that boys should remain virgins until they marry”. The response to these item indicated that adolescents in the study have liberal sexual ideology.

Table 5 presents the level of sexual ideology among the adolescent respondents. The mean score of sexual ideology was 55.93 (standard deviation = 8.56). Majority (73.4%) of the respondents obtained moderate sexual ideology scores. Based on the findings from the present study, it can be concluded that high score in sexual ideology, means one is more liberal and open to receive sexual information. The result is consistent with earlier research conducted in Taiwan, which concluded that individuals with higher more liberal sexual ideology have higher acceptance towards sexual knowledge (Cheng et al. 2007). In contrast, traditional sexual ideology will limit adolescent to access the knowledge. Similar outcome was obtained by a local study, where perception of sex among adolescent have high influence on adolescent sexual knowledge (Low et al., 2007).

Table 4: Frequency Distribution Selected Item Concerning of Sexual Ideology (N=241)

Variables	n (%)		
	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
I think that sometimes a boy has to force a girl to have sex if he loves her.	51 (21.2)	95 (39.4)	95 (39.4)
A boy will not respect a girl who agrees to have sex with him.	106 (44.0)	105 (43.6)	30 (12.4)
Most girls who have sex before marriage regret it afterwards.	25 (10.4)	119 (49.4)	97 (40.2)
Most boys who have sex before marriage regret it afterwards.	91 (37.7)	121 (50.2)	29 (12.0)
I believe that girls should remain virgins until they marry.	198 (82.2)	37 (15.3)	5 (2.5)
I believe that boys should remain virgins until they marry.	174 (72.2)	56 (23.2)	11 (4.6)
It is sometimes justifiable for a boy to hit his girlfriend.	18 (7.4)	67 (27.8)	156 (64.7)

Adolescents' level of sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior are presented in Table 5. The overall mean and standard deviation of this variable was 16.45 and 6.96. Majority (60.6%) of respondents had moderate score in sexual knowledge. There were 44 respondents (18.3%) who obtained lower score in their sexual knowledge. Only 17.4% of the respondents obtained high score (score 24 - 34). The mean score of sexual attitude was 95.90 with standard deviation 9.63. More than half (52.3%) of respondents obtained low sexual attitude score indicating more liberal sexual attitude and inconsistent with cultural norm. The mean and standard deviation values for sexual behavior were 7.29 and 2.77. Majority (77.6%) of the respondents reported low score for sexual behavior. This indicates that respondents have low sexual engagement. Furthermore, there were only 22.4% of respondents scored high in sexual behavior.

As demonstrated in Table 6, males have higher score (58.03) in sexual ideology than females (53.70). Results of t-test showed that there is a significant difference in sexual ideology between male and female

($t=4.035$, $p=.000$). Male adolescents have a more liberal sexual ideology compared to female adolescents (Shearer et al. 2005; Wingood & Diclemente 2000). It proved that male have more liberal sexual ideology, whereas female are more traditional in their sexual ideology.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondent by Categories of Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	n(%)	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Sexual ideology (N = 239)		55.93	8.56	34	82
Low score (34 – 47)	34 (14.2)				
Moderate score (48 – 65)	177 (74.1)				
High score (66 – 82)	28 (11.7)				
Sexual knowledge (N = 232)		16.45	6.96	0	31
Low score (0 – 9)	44 (19.0)				
Moderate score (10 – 23)	146 (62.9)				
High score (24 - 34)	42 (18.1)				
Sexual attitude (N = 240)		95.90	9.63	61	120
Low score (61 - 96)	126 (52.5)				
High score (97 – 120)	114 (47.5)				
Sexual behavior (N = 241)		7.29	2.77	6	24
Low score (6 – 7)	187 (77.6)				
High score (7 – 24)	54 (22.4)				

Note: S. D. = Standard Deviation

Min. = Minimum

Max. = Maximum

The result also showed that female adolescents obtained significantly higher sexual attitude scores compared to male adolescents ($t=-5.258$, $p=.000$). The finding indicates that female adolescents' sexual attitude are more consistent with religion, moral and cultural values.

In terms of sexual behavior ($t=3.056$, $p=.003$), male adolescents have significantly higher sexual behavior score compared to female adolescents.

Males have higher engagement particularly of sexual behavior compared to female adolescents.

Table 6: Differences in main Variables between Male and Female (n=241)

Variable	Male	Female		
	Mean	Mean	t	p
Sexual ideology	58.03	53.70	4.035	.000
Sexual knowledge	15.88	17.06	-1.289	.199
Sexual attitude	92.90	99.10	-5.258	.000
Sexual behavior	7.8065	6.7521	3.056	.003

Table 7 showed the results of correlation analysis between sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality. Adolescent sexual ideology was positively associated with sexual knowledge, $r = .283$ and $p \leq 0.01$. Adolescent with more liberal sexual ideology tend to report higher sexual knowledge. Result of the study also showed a significant positive correlation between sexual ideology and sexual behavior ($r = .278$, $p \leq 0.01$). Those who embraced more liberal sexual ideology have higher tendency to be more involved in sexual behavior. The finding of the present study concerning sexual ideology and sexual behavior is consistent with previous studies by Smiler (2008), Ward and Merriwether (2006) and Impett et al. (2006). However, sexual ideology has no significant influence on sexual attitude of adolescents in the study.

Table 7: Correlation between Sexual Ideology and Adolescent Sexuality

Variable	SK	SA	SB
	Pearson correlation (r)		
Sexual Ideology	.283**	-.103	.278**

SK = Sexual Knowledge

SA = Sexual Attitude

SB = Sexual Behavior

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Fundamentally, this study aimed to determine the relationships between sexual ideology and sexuality among adolescents. There were 241 respondents selected from 3 schools at the area of Butterworth, Penang.

Respondents include adolescent aged between 14 to 18 years old where male took up 51.5% and female 48.5%.

The findings of this study showed that majority of respondent have moderate to low score in their sexual ideology. This implies that in general, respondents are more traditional in sexual ideology. However, their beliefs concerning specific items such as “remain virgins until marry” are quite liberal. In terms of gender, females scored higher on sexual knowledge than males. Result also showed that females have more positive sexual attitude compared to males. Female are reported to have sexual attitude that is more consistent with moral and religious values and culturally acceptable norm. Majority of respondents have lower engagement and involvement in sexual behavior assessed in the study. Male adolescents are reported to have higher engagement in sexual behavior (kissing, touching partner’s sexual organ, sexual intercourse and masturbating) compared to female adolescents.

In terms of sexual ideology and adolescent sexuality, present study had shown a significant relationship between sexual ideology and adolescent sexual knowledge and sexual behavior. High scores in sexual ideology scale mean more liberal sexual ideology and openness toward sexual related activity. Adolescents with higher acceptance of gender-related norm towards pre-marital sex, coercion/violence and protection mechanisms are more open and have easier access to sexual related information such as function of sexual reproduction, puberty, pregnancy, contraception, STDs/STI and abortion. Liberal sexual ideologies also lead to more engagement in sexual behavior. The results is consistent with previous studies which noted that those with liberal sexual beliefs have greater experience and higher engagement in particular sexual behavior (Smiler 2008; Ward and Merriwether 2006; Impett et al. 2006). Based on the findings from the present study, liberal sexual ideologies tend to correspond to better sexual knowledge, negative sexual attitude and higher involvement in sexual behavior. Therefore, openness to sexual matters has both positive and negative influence on adolescent sexuality.

Adolescent sexuality is widely discussed because of the rise in issues related to abortion, pre-marital sex, rape, early pregnancy and unprotected or unsafe sexual practices in Malaysia. However, in the Malaysian context, there are limited information and research regarding adolescent

sexuality. The findings of this study addressed the knowledge gap in this area. The present findings also call upon policy makers and practitioners to draw effective prevention and intervention programs concerning adolescent sexuality. This is important in educating adolescent regarding appropriate sexual knowledge, attitude and behavior. Accurate knowledge and appropriate attitude may prevent adolescents from engaging in sexual behavior at young age and outside marriage.

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PROFIL PENULIS

Tan Soon Aun

Faculty of Human Ecology
University Putra Malaysia
43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor
nick_shun87@hotmail.com

Siti Nor Yaacob, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Human Ecology
University Putra Malaysia
43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor
sitinor@putra.upm.edu.my