

## Original Article

# Puberty Knowledge and Communication among Adolescent Sexual Offenders in Indonesia: A Qualitative Study

Emi kosvianti<sup>1</sup>, Emy Susanti<sup>2\*</sup>, Windhu Purnomo<sup>3</sup> and Agung Suhadi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctor Candidate, Public Health Department, Universitas Airlangga/Lecturer, Public Health Study Program of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Sociology Department, Universitas Airlangga

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Faculty of Public Health, Universitas Airlangga

<sup>4</sup>English Department, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, Bengkulu

\*Corresponding author email id: emi.kosvianti-2016@fkm.unair.ac.id

Received: 15-01-2020; Accepted: 04-02-2020

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Rape against women, as one of sexual assaults now has been become a serious issue throughout the world in social and public health. It is a gross violation of women's human rights, which can not be accepted from any perspectives. In the latest cases, the perpetrators of rape are conducted by adolescent or minor. These often occur and develop massively in many countries without any serious recovery on the victims. As a result, the rape assault has a profound impact on the victim personally and socially as well. **Purpose:** This article presents the study of the young sexual offenders' knowledge on puberty and their sexual communication. **Method:** This research was qualitative toward 28 sexual perpetrators, all informants are undergoing sentences in Correctional Institutions of Bengkulu province, Indonesia. The informants were all child convicts, (aged less than 18 years) at four correctional institutions in Bengkulu province. All informants were male and aged between 16-18 years. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with informants based on interview guidelines. **Results of the study:** The perpetrators of sexual assault were middle adolescents who were in-between 16 to 18 years. Based on the results of analysis, it was found that there were ineffective sexual communication patterns among perpetrators, both informants, communication parents, friends, teachers and couples. Moreover, this study found inadequate puberty knowledge among sexual offenders. **Research limitations:** This article only describes sexual communication and knowledge on puberty, while other individual factors and social aspects are not discussed at all in this article. **Originality:** Based on the various results of previous studies, there are no researches have been found that specifically examines the behavior of sexual violence by minors in Bengkulu province.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, Communication, Knowledge, Puberty, Sex offenders

## BACKGROUND

Sexual health is an important element for realizing the goals of reproductive goals. Glaciers *et al.* (2006) defines sexual health as the welfare state of physical, emotional,

mental and social in relation to sexuality, it is not only the absence of disease, dysfunction or weakness. Sexual health requires a positive approach and respects for sexuality and sexual relations; the possibility of pleasant sexual experience, safety, free of coercion, discrimination

and violence. Therefore, sexual health must be achieved and maintained, and all people's sexual rights must be respected, protected, and fulfilled. Women and men implicitly have the same rights to achieve a healthy sexual status without violating others sexual rights or outrage the law.

Some researches, the sexual harrassments such as rape against women is a serious problem that demands massive cost consequences due to depressive events, unwanted pregnancy and HIV/AIDS virus <sup>[1]</sup>. Many of health problems are caused by the sexual violence, these are not only a concern on criminal law throughout the world, but also the field of public health <sup>[2]</sup>.

The sexual aggression like rape is rampant by perpetrators under age group 18 years as an illustration of the low quality of sexual health understanding among young adolescent. It is because the sexual behavior plays important role in producing mental and social health outcomes. But, now there has not been found a theoretical or conceptual model that is fully able to explain the relationship between sexual behavior and various aspects of health <sup>[3]</sup>.

## **METHODS**

### **Design and participants**

This research used qualitative method toward male adolescent less than 18 years who were the perpetrators of rape. All respondents were 30 young males who are being sentenced at four Correctional Institutions of Bengkulu province, Indonesia.

### **Data Collection**

The data obtained through semi-structured interviews. This model conducted an in-depth interview (face to face interview) toward each of the respondents. This approach will be a bridge for exploring various experiences and places within more specific context. This interview model allow the respondents (perpetrators) to re-construct their experience in more detail. The main focus of the interview to explore sexual communication and knowledge on puberty.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis and theoretical interpretation refer to the formulation of research problems namely (1) how the forms of communication are conducted by the perpetrators (2) how the knowledge of informants on puberty. Analysis and interpretation of the data in this study was carried out by providing interpretation and production process of meaning of the text of the interview with the informant and comparing it with various studies and previous studies.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The ethical for data collection has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Nursing, Airlangga University, as stated on ethical approval numbers 1278-NREC. In this research, informants were given their rights to be participants and not allowed to continue their participations if they are not comfortable within the interview.

## **RESULTS**

Based on the semi-structured interview manner toward child sexual offenders, our analysis has narrowed down into two issues on sexual coercion by child offenders are knowledge on puberty and sexual communication. The cases above are not spontaneous, but as a combination of problems that are being experienced by perpetrators, family background and external influences as well from their peers or environment. As a prepubescent group, most of their attitudes are still unstable and fragile, as a result these trigger their sexual offending like rape or other sexual harrassment forms.

### **Knowledge on Puberty**

Regarding reproductive health, puberty knowledge is very useful and important for sexual education amongst young adolescents. Majority informants usually got the knowledge in terms of puberty from schools; through biology subjects and counseling programs by health workers. Moreover, they also admitted due to the peers and older friends. Their knowledge were the puberty

signs between men and women; they mentioned several signs of puberty in men, such as wet dream, Adam's apple, mustache and beard. In women, it is usually marked by the arrival of the menstrual period and enlarge breast size. However, they have wrong understanding on puberty signs; enlargement of breast size on women due to the factors often touched by opposite of sex. This reflects that sexual health of informants in terms of puberty is still low. In addition, they do not know what to do when they are at puberty. The low understanding of puberty is due to there being no program that more specific about puberty education for both males and females. As a result of this, young adolescents have not ready yet to undergo pre-puberty and puberty period as well. Indirectly, these have an impact on sexual behavior and quality of health reproductive after puberty and beyond.

One of the main reasons why many of young adolescents have deviant sexual behavior, for instance rape, it is due to the influence of peers, because peers can activate the 'reward system' in adolescents' brain. The change of brain function creates psychological vulnerabilities, which can contribute to behaviors that endanger health and enhance emotions. At the same time, brain plasticity combined with social and cognitive change make adolescents' thinking and false behavior which further have significant implications for the future of health and welfare. Thus, this is considered able to create an intervention opportunity<sup>[4]</sup>.

Meanwhile, in adolescents puberty, there is a change in the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) system, which makes adolescents more vulnerable to get stress<sup>[5]</sup>. It also has a profound effect on their vulnerability to get depression and serious health problems in the future<sup>[6]</sup>. Physical, emotional, and social changes in puberty can cause them to become stressed, especially when they feel misunderstood or have inadequate coping skills. This condition is one of the reasons the role of adults is needed to reduce stress related to puberty and help adolescents learn how to find healthy ways for managing stress.

Adults, within puberty period need to explain the problems of puberty, emotional change and the importance of peers as part of puberty education, all are aimed at normalizing change, reducing stress, ensuring healthy choices,<sup>[7]</sup>. At this time, puberty rises faster than before, for instance, breast enlargement in females was at the age of 8 or 9 years, while the development of genital organs on males began at the age of 9 or 10 years<sup>[8]</sup>.

The cases above indicate the necessity a puberty education system based on the stages of child development. At pre-puberty, teens need enough information to face several changes during puberty. While adolescents who have experienced puberty, they need more information and strategies for facing these changes. In addition, those who are immature mentally but have passed in puberty, this needs to select the type of information that they absorb<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, it is very important to recognize the extent to which a child's development phase can be given knowledges as needed.

## **Sexual Communication**

### ***Communication with parents***

The sexual communication practice is still rarely done openly within the family of informants; either parents or other family members. The patterns of communication are quite monotonous and in one-way communication toward older and younger persons. The talks model are between parents and informants were only shortly and allowed to discuss about general things, such as taking a bath order (Islamic belief), dating prohibition and having sex with a couple. Informants were only prohibited without being accompanied by discussion and explanation why this should be done or prohibited. This communication form allegedly rises the causative factor of deviant sexual practices among informants, for instance rape. Some previous researches have pointed out that open sexual communication between parents and young adolescents can be a significant protective factor to reduce the risks of sexual behaviors by putting off intimate relationships

and increase the frequency of contraception and condom use<sup>[9]</sup>. This finding is reinforced by the results of a meta-analysis of 50 studies that confirm that parent-teen sexual communication is positively associated with safer sex behavior. Thus emphasizing the importance of understanding parental communication as a possible predictor that contributes to teenage sexual decision making<sup>[10]</sup>.

Sexual communication between parents and children has an important role to realize sex education on children. This can be executed through dialogue between family members. Previous research has shown that adolescents relationships with their parents influence interactions with peers. This is because the quality of adolescent relationships with friends that develops in early life as the result of socializing experiences within family<sup>[11]</sup>. Adolescents who have supportive values and warm relationship are more socially competent and report/tell more positive friendships<sup>[12]</sup>.

This research found the reasons of sexual assault including rape, because it was influenced by friends and could not control the lust. This finding illustrates the inability of informants to choose or make decisions and emotional control. Similarly, Reeb who explained sexual behavior generally occurs when adolescents begin to have romantic relationships. During this time, parents may be able to influence lifestyle choices positively or negatively by discussing their behavior<sup>[13]</sup>. Parents are expected to be able to play an important role for transmitting reproductive health information and skills on adolescents to ensure they can grow and achieve reproductive and safe sexual lifestyles<sup>[14]</sup>.

### ***Sexual communication with friends***

During the transition period of adolescence, children tend to spend more time to be alone and with friends, on the other hand, time with parents will decrease significantly<sup>[15]</sup>. This research found that sexual communication that occurs between informants and friends is more directed to the topic of sexual relations, pregnancy and pregnancy

prevention. This is similar to the notions that adolescents can learn about sex through communication with their friends. At the developmental stage as early adolescents, they are usually more open to friends than parents to discuss topics relating to sex<sup>[9]</sup>.

The negative impact found in communication between informants and friends, there were wrong understanding among informants related to sexuality issues, related to some information obtained from friends. Some of these myths, among others: sexual intercourse will certainly cause a pregnant woman, it is not possible to only have sex once can cause the victim to become pregnant. Besides being related to the process of pregnancy also found myths of female reproductive organ development, especially the size of the breast with sexual behavior. Another myth related to pregnancy termination efforts, is by consuming foods such as pineapple or coffee mixed with soft drinks.

This is possible because according to Prinstein and Dodge (2008), friends can be an increasingly important source of information and become a critical social reference for adolescents<sup>[9]</sup>. This condition can become a problem when friends who are partners within discussion also have an inadequate level of knowledge, so that it can provide wrong knowledge and understanding. These believed myths can eventually influence their decision to commit certain behaviors, such as rape.

### ***Sexual communication with teachers at school***

This research found that sexual communication was not specifically carried out but only became part of the subject matter at schools such as Biology and Islamic Religious Education. Information on sexuality was only obtained by informants when they are at the second and third grade of high school. The conditions revealed the contradictory results as mentioned by Butler 'school-based sexuality education' is believed to be the ideal context for teaching sexual communication skills on children and adolescents in the context of developing

and practicing the use of these abilities. For example, from sexual education at schools, students can get training and instruction on how to communicate with parents regarding sexual issues <sup>[16]</sup>.

Regarding the right time to start sexual communication, this study found that new informants obtained information related to sexuality, such as puberty, fertilization and infectious diseases when they were at second and third grade high school, while sexual behavior was formed earlier when they are at primary school. These conditions, it is necessary to provide sexual communication services that are tailored to the stage of child development. As stated by Crockett *et al.* (2019). Pre-puberty teenagers need enough information to deal with the various changes they will face when puberty comes, while in puberty teenagers, they need more in-depth information and strategies to be able to adapt to these changes <sup>[4]</sup>.

### ***Sexual communication with girlfriend***

Sexual communication of informants with their romantic partner are done *face to face* and through social media. Their conversation usually leads to the theme of sex. In some cases, sexual communication has become one of the triggers for sexual relations and rape by informants. According to Greene (2003) as cited in Widman (2006), openness within sexual communication with couples are influenced by their habits of communicating outside of dating relationships. Widman further mentioned three factors that influence the openness of early adolescent sexual communication with a couple namely length of relationship, relationship satisfaction and commitment <sup>[17]</sup>. Another phenomenon as seen from this research, the habit of having sexual communication with couples through social media Whatsapp and *Facebook*. This finding is similar to Jeff Temple' idea on *Sex and Chatting*, which are often used by adolescents, it is well-known 'Sexting'. Sexting in adolescents is an important issue of public health because it can have negative psychological and legal consequences <sup>[18]</sup>. Such behavior is consistently related to adolescent sexual behavior <sup>[19]</sup>. Other

researchers mentioned adolescents who have sexting have the possibility to have sex 7 times more when compared to those who are not abusers <sup>[20]</sup>. In addition, sexting also depicts adolescent sexual behavior in daily life <sup>[18]</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

The communication practice in term of sexuality is still rarely done openly between parents' informants. Communication that occurs between informants with friends, more leads to the theme of sexual relations. Communication with teachers is not done specifically but only becomes part of the material in one of the subjects at schools such as Biology and religious education. While, the informant's communication with a girlfriend is done directly or through social media. Their conversation was more about the theme of sex and in some cases became one of the triggers for rape. It is due to informants' knowledge on puberty signs is still limited. Informants mentioned several signs of puberty in men such as wet dreams, Adam's apple, mustache and beard. Women are marked by the arrival of menstruation and enlarged breast size.

This research is only limited to sexual communication and knowledge on puberty. For the future studies may need to be conducted on sexual health practices, such as the use of condoms to prevent unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Mathews B, Collin-vézina D. Child sexual abuse/ : Raising awareness and empathy is essential to promote new public health responses. *J Public Health Policy*. 2016;37(3):304–14.
- [2] Bonnar-kidd KK. Sexual Offender Laws and Prevention of Sexual Violence or Recidivism. 2010; 100(2): 412–9.
- [3] Vasilenko SA, Lefkowitz ES, Deborah P. Is Sexual Behavior Healthy for Adolescents? A Conceptual Framework for Research on Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Physical, Mental, and Social Health. In: *New Direction for Child and Adolescent Development* [Internet]. Willey Periodicals. Inc; 2014. pp. 3–19. Available from: [Wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://Wileyonlinelibrary.com)

- [4] Crockett LJ, Deardorff J, Johnson M, Irwin C and Petersen AC. Puberty Education in a Global Context/ : Knowledge Gaps, Opportunities, and Implications for Policy. 2019;29(1):177–95.
- [5] McCormick CM, Mathews IZ, Thomas C and Waters P. Brain and Cognition Investigations of HPA function and the enduring consequences of stressors in adolescence in animal models. *Brain Cogn.* 2010;72(1): 73–85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bandc.2009.06.003>
- [6] Dorn LD and Susman EJ. Conceptualizing Puberty as a Window of Opportunity for Impacting Health and Well-Being Across the Life Span. 2019;29(1):155–76.
- [7] Suleiman AB, Brindis CD. Adolescent School-Based Sex Education/ : Using Developmental Neuroscience to Guide New Directions for Policy and Practice. 2014;15(2): 55-75
- [8] Mendle J, Beltz AM and Carter R. Understanding Puberty and Its Measurement/ : Ideas for Research in a New Generation. 2019;29(1):82–95.
- [9] Prinstein MJ, Ph D and Hill C. NIH Public Access. 2015;51(7):731–41.
- [10] Rogers AA. Parent – Adolescent Sexual Communication and Adolescents’ Sexual Behaviors/ : A Conceptual Model and Systematic Review. *Adolesc Res Rev.* 2017;2(4):293–313.
- [11] Steinberg L. Adolescent Development. *Annual Review of Psychology.* 2001; (52):83–110.
- [12] Lieberman M, Doyle A and Markiewicz D. Developmental Patterns in Security of Attachment to Mother and Father in Late Childhood and Early Adolescence/ : Associations with Peer Relations Author (s): Melissa Lieberman, Anna-Beth Doyle and Dorothy Markiewicz Published by/ : Wiley on behalf of the. *Child Dev.* 1999;70(1):202–13.
- [13] Reeb KS. Parent-teen communication about dating behaviors and its relationship to teenage dating behaviors: From the teen’s perspective. 2012;2008.
- [14] Titiloye MA and Ajuwon AJ. Knowledge and quality of adolescents reproductive health communication between parents and their adolescents children in Ibadan, Nigeria. 2017;8(2):25-35.
- [15] Larson R and Richards MH. Daily Companionship in Late Childhood and Early Adolescence/ : Changing Developmental Contexts. *Child Dev.* 1991;62:284–300.
- [16] Butler S. Teaching communication in sex education/ : Facilitating communication skills knowledge and ease of use. 2011; <http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1093&context=etd>
- [17] Widman L, Welsh DP, McNulty JK, Little KC. Sexual communication and contraceptive use in adolescent dating couples. *Journal of Adolescent Health.* 2006; 39(6):893-9.
- [18] Walrave M, Temple JR. Adolescent Sexting. 2019;1–5. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197119300533>
- [19] Temple JR, Choi H. Longitudinal association between teen sexting and sexual behavior. *Pediatrics.* 2014;134(5) :e1287-92.
- [20] Rice AE, Rhoades H. Sexually Explicit Cell Phone Messaging Associated With Sexual Risk Among Adolescents. 2012;130(4):667–73.

**How to cite this article:** kosvianti E, Susanti E, Purnomo W and Suhadi A. Puberty Knowledge and Communication among Adolescent Sexual Offenders in Indonesia: A Qualitative Study. *Indian Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology* 2020; 18(3): 50-55.