

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER CONFORMITY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN SURABAYA, INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

Negative peer relationships have many risks for youth development and their behavior, such as premarital sexual behavior and sexual risk behavior. The aim of this study was to measure the relationship between peer conformity and sexual behavior. This study used correlation analysis and cross-sectional design. As many as 106 adolescents were randomly selected from Senior High School in Surabaya. Data were collected from June to July 2021. We used simple random sampling to recruit the participants. The inclusion criteria of the participants were adolescents who agreed to join this study, class XII, and have smartphone. Adolescents who disagreed to join this study were excluded in this study. Participants are allowed to withdraw from this study after reading the questionnaires. The independent variable in this study was peer conformity. The dependent variable in this study is sexual behavior in adolescents. The statistical test used was Spearman Rho to measure the correlation between the score of peer conformity and sexual behavior. Our results support the hypothesis of this study that there was relationship between peer conformity and sexual behavior among adolescents  $p = 0.005$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). Adolescents must be selective in choosing friends so it will have a positive impact on supporting daily behavior and preventing sexual risk behavior.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Conformity, Sexual behavior, Peer conformity

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of transition from child to adult and undergoing physical, psychological, and social development. <sup>1</sup> Physical development involves such as increase in height, weight, and sexual maturity while psychological development entails abstract thinking, and social change, such as tending to join the group. <sup>1</sup> Social development in adolescents holds the risk to change their behavior, attitude, speech, and interest. It is called conformity. <sup>2</sup>

Peer conformity is defined as a peer influence process and it changes the attitude and behavior of someone in order to match with their peers. <sup>3</sup> Adolescents tend to increase their socialization with peers and they understand that norms were developed from their friends based on previous theory <sup>4</sup>, and it has an effect on intention and behavior among adolescents. <sup>3</sup> Conformity is divided into two categories, rational conformity and irrational conformity. <sup>5</sup> Rational conformity is such as studying, praying, listening to the teacher in class and tends to positive conformity. Irrational conformity is herd behavior. <sup>5</sup> It is closed to negative effects such as groups of adolescents who like to gather for dating, smoking, free sex, drinking

alcohol, or watching pornography through mobile phones. <sup>6</sup> Bad or negative peer has negative risks to the process of growth and development from children to adolescents. <sup>7</sup> Adolescents will initially exchange ideas with their peers. They feel comfortable after telling and sharing to their friends. <sup>8</sup> This can trigger adolescents to have close friends. Furthermore, adolescents compete to get a girlfriend or boyfriend. So, they start to conduct dating and attempt to adjust their life based on their peers' view and acceptance. <sup>9</sup>

A survey in Indonesia showed that most of the adolescents aged 15-17 years are in a relationship and dating. They conducted activities such as holding hands (64% women and 75% men), hugging (17% women and 33% men), kissing lips (30% women and 50% men), and touching (5% of women and 22% of men). <sup>10</sup> The motivation of these activities was peer conformity. <sup>11</sup> A negative peer conformity has many risks for youth development, <sup>12</sup> such as premarital sexual behavior and sexual risk behavior. <sup>11</sup> This activity also has the risk of causing unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases. <sup>13</sup>

Based on this background the aim of our study was to measure the relationship between conformity and sexual risk behavior. There is a previous study in Indonesia about relationship between conformity and premarital sexual behavior;<sup>14</sup> however, previous study focused on intention of premarital sexual behavior. In the current study we focused on behavior.

## METHODS

### Participants

This study uses a correlation analysis design to measure the relationship between peer conformity and premarital sexual behavior in adolescents. As many as 106 adolescents were randomly selected from one of the Senior High Schools in Surabaya. Data were collected from June to July 2021. We used simple random sampling to recruit the participants. The inclusion criteria of the participants were teenagers who agreed to join this study, class XII or 16-18 age years old, and have smartphone. Adolescents who agreed to join in this study had to sign the informed consent. Adolescents who disagreed to join in this study were excluded. Participants were allowed to withdraw from this study after reading the questionnaires.

### Variables

The independent variable in this study was peer conformity. In this study, peer conformity means the influence of peers on adolescents that affects sexual behavior. The dependent variable in this study is premarital sexual behavior, which refers to behaviors of adolescents with a boyfriend or girlfriend such as holding hands, kissing, cuddling, fantasizing, masturbating, and petting.

### Measures

The demographics questionnaire asked the participants about gender, age, housemate, dating, having a mobile phone, living allowance in one-month, and total number of peers. The peer conformity questionnaire is a modification of the previous study.<sup>15</sup> It consisted of 12 items. Items number 1 until 6 were favorable questions and 7 until 12 were unfavorable questions. The peer conformity questionnaire included positive peer conformity and negative peer conformity. There is a four-point scale in this questionnaire, namely always, often, rarely and never. The Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire in this study was 0.975.

The sexual behavior questionnaire was developed from previous study.<sup>16</sup> It had 11 items with negative unfavorable questions. This questionnaire also asked about sexual behavior. There are four scores

in this questionnaire, never, rarely, often, always. The Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire in this study was 0.955.

### Procedure

All procedures of this study were granted ethical clearance from STIKES Hang Tuah Surabaya, number: PE/63/VII/2021/KEPK/SHT. The data were obtained using self-report questionnaires and demographic questionnaire. Data were collected using Google Form which was shared through social media, WhatsApp, and email. We ensured the confidentiality of respondents in this study.

### Data analysis

All the data were keyed in the SPSS version. Descriptive statistics were used for all variables. Reliability analysis was used to calculate the Cronbach's alpha for each questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha > 0.7 indicates adequate internal consistency.<sup>17</sup> The statistical test used was Spearman Rho to measure correlation among the score of peer conformity and sexual behavior. Statistically significant level was used with  $p$  value < 0.05. In addition, correlation  $s$  more than 0.2 indicated satisfaction.<sup>18</sup>

## RESULTS

### Description of Demographic Characteristic

Table 1 lists the characteristics of all participants. The percentage of participants aged 17 years old was 39% and 18 years old was 64%. Most participants were female (61.9%) and live with their parents (92.4%). Most of participants had living allowance around Rp 200.000 - 500.000.

Table 2 shows that most of participants had moderate score in peer conformity (53.3%) and 90.5% participants did not conduct sexual risk behavior. In addition, 58.1% of respondents did not have a boyfriend or girlfriend; however, 94.3% respondents had close friends and 78.1% respondents received health education about sexual behavior.

Table 3 shows that peer conformity in the high score was 0% of adolescents had risky sexual behavior, and 100% of respondents had non-risk sexual behavior. The peer conformity in the moderate score was 10.7% of respondents had risky sexual behavior and in the low score (negative) had 9.4% of risky sexual behavior, and 90.6% of non-risky sexual behavior. Further, there was a relationship between peer conformity and adolescent sexual behavior ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.272$ ).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristic of Participants

Characteristic	Total Participants	
	n	%
<b>Age (years)</b>		
17	41.0	39.0
18	64.0	61.0
<b>Total</b>	105.0	100.0
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	40.0	38.1
Female	65.0	61.9
<b>Total</b>	105.0	100.0
<b>Living with</b>		
Parents	97.0	92.4
Guardians	8.0	7.6
<b>Total</b>	105.0	100.0
<b>Living allowance (Rp)</b>		
200.000-500.000	85.0	81.0
600.000-1.000.000	9.0	8.6
1.100.000-2.000.000	9.0	8.6
2.000.000-4.000.000	2.0	1.9
<b>Total</b>	105.0	100.0
<b>Having mobile phone</b>		
yes	105.0	100.0
No	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	105.0	100.0
<b>Having mobile phone since</b>		
Elementary school	11.0	10.5
Junior high school	60.0	57.1
Senior high school	34.0	32.4
<b>Total</b>	105.0	100.0

Table 2: Descriptive statistic among study variables

Peer	Total participants	
	n	Percentage (%)
<b>Having boyfriend or girl friend</b>		
Yes	44	41.9
No	61	58.1
<b>Having close friends</b>		
Yes	99	94.3
No	6	5.7
<b>Received health education about</b>		
Yes	82	78.1
No	23	21.9
<b>Peer Conformity</b>		
High (positive)	33	31.4
Moderate	56	53.3
Low (negative)	16	15.2
<b>Sexual behavior</b>		
Risk	10	9.5
Not risk	95	90.5

**Table 3: Correlation between peer conformity and sexual behavior among adolescents**

Peer conformity	Sexual behavior						<i>ρ value</i>
	Risk		Not risk		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
High (positive)	0	0%	33	100%	33	100%	<i>ρ = 0.005*</i>
Moderate	6	10.7%	50	89.3%	56	100%	
Low (negative)	4	25%	12	75%	16	100%	
Total	10	9.4%	95	90.6%	105	100%	

\**p* < 0.05

**DISCUSSION**

This is the first study to measure the peer conformity and sexual behavior among adolescents. Our result supports the hypothesis of this study that there is relationship between peer conformity and sexual behavior among adolescents. In addition, the setting of our study was school based on religion, so it may have positive effect among adolescents.<sup>19</sup> This study considered cultural differences in the curriculum and religion education lessons among Indonesian adolescents. Previous study using systematic review showed that religion has an effect on adolescent’s life.<sup>20</sup> Further, previous study also mentioned that school has function to prevent premarital sexual behavior.<sup>21</sup>

The results of the study showed that adolescents with 100% high peer conformity (positive) had no sexual risk behavior. Items 1 and 2 showed that adolescents spend more time with their peers. These items indicated that adolescents often gather in their groups and have positive conformity. This stronger conformity had benefit among adolescents, especially in a positive environment. This study was similar with previous study which mentioned that stronger conformity had an effect on positive environment among adolescents.<sup>22</sup> In addition, previous study also mentioned that there was relationship between conformity and premarital sexual behavior intention.<sup>14</sup>

The result showed that 25% of adolescents with negative conformity had sexual risk behavior. This condition occurred due to lack of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> In addition, adolescents are close with peer groups<sup>24</sup> and it can influence their attitude and behavior or peer conformity.<sup>2</sup> Peer conformity can be classified into positive and negative.<sup>25</sup> Positive conformity had an effect on positive outcome, meanwhile negative conformity had an effect on bad attitude or behavior.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is important to select a good environment among adolescents, and it can trigger positive conformity among adolescents.<sup>19</sup> In addition, adolescents must be selective in choosing friends so it will have a positive impact on

supporting daily behavior and preventing sexual risk behavior.

The influence of peers, education from school, and the role of parents can protect adolescents from negative behavior.<sup>26, 27</sup> Peer influence is expected to increase positive friendships. Meanwhile negative peer conformity has a bad effect among adolescents, such as bad attitude and behavior.<sup>28</sup> The school should educate about reproductive health and also provide positive activities. The role of parents is also expected to be a protection for teenagers so they don't do negative things by fostering a good relationship between parents and children.

**Conclusion and limitation**

There was relationship between peer conformity and sexual behavior among adolescents. Adolescents must be selective in choosing friends so it will have positive impact in supporting daily behavior, and preventing sexual risk behavior. Religious activities, receiving information about sexual education from appropriate sources, positive activities from school and the role of parents are needed to prevent adolescents from sexual risk behavior. There were some limitations in this study which should be considered. This study used a self-report questionnaire so it depends on the truth of respondents, because sensitive questions were asked. The other limitation was further study is needed to compare the sexual behavior in school based on religion and general school.

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