

Premarital Sexual Behavior, Sexual Assertiveness, and Sex Guilt Among College Students

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Abstract. The phenomenon of premarital sexual behavior in college students is a moral problem demanding serious attention. A key determinant in reducing this behavior is the interplay between sexual assertiveness and sex guilt. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effect of sexual assertiveness and sex guilt on premarital sexual behavior. A quantitative approach is used with multiple linear regression analysis techniques. The participant consists of 153 students residing in Bandung City, aged 18-24 years, who are presently or have been in a relationship and are unmarried. The results show that sexual assertiveness and sex guilt have negative significant effect on premarital sexual behavior both simultaneously and partially with contribution of 35.9%. In conclusion, these variables are crucial for students as they can prevent them from engaging in premarital sexual behavior ranging from mild to severe risks.

Keywords: Sexual assertiveness, sex guilt, premarital sexual behavior, students

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Introduction

Premarital sexual behavior is a social phenomenon easily found in today's society and has become a moral issue among the younger generation. The current occurrence is attributed to a shift in norms, blurring the lines between right and wrong. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014 on global morality showed that premarital sexual behavior is highly unacceptable in various Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, Palestine, and Turkey, with disapproval rates exceeding 90%. According to Indonesian Demographic and Health Survey (IDHS) in 2017 among adolescents aged 15-24, 59% and 74% of females and males admitted to engaging in sexual intercourse for the first time, with approximately 11% experiencing unwanted pregnancies (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2017).

Umaroh et al. (2017), in a study including 19,882 adolescent respondents aged 15-24, reported that the group with the highest percentage engaging in premarital sexual behavior was 21-24 years old at 89.2%. Furthermore, adolescents with higher education backgrounds confessed to engaging in premarital sexual behavior, with a percentage of 86.4% (Umaroh et al., 2017).

The two factors driving adolescents to engage in premarital sexual behavior are low expectations of marriage at a young age (around 20 years old), and the increasing influence of information technology (Mahmudah et al., 2016). Sexual desires become one of the factors showing adolescents' engagement in premarital sexual behavior. This behavior also poses risks of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and the occurrence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS (Salih et al., 2015).

According to Abrori (2014), there are 8 stages of premarital sexual behavior, ranging from low to high risk. These include 1) Holding hands, 2) Hugging, 3) Light kissing, such as cheek-to-cheek or lip-to-cheek contact, 4) Wet kissing when lips touch, 5) Touching sensitive body parts such as the penis, vagina, or breasts, 6) Petting comprising various stages leading up to genital contact without penetration, 7) Oral sex, and 8) Sexual intercourse. A preliminary study conducted in 2022 included 97 respondents who were college students in the Bandung region of West Java, engaged in a heterosexual romantic relationship, unmarried, and aged 18-23. The results showed that 75.3%, 51.5%, 38.1% and 24.7% of students had held hands, hugged, engaged in light kissing, and experienced wet kissing, respectively. The most common locations for engaging

in premarital sexual behavior were reported to be houses, boarding houses, and parks, showing the prevalence of such behavior. In this context, students are expected to determine their attitude and make decisions according to personal desires without self-imposed limitations (Falah, 2009). Tatus (2018) stated that contemporary students often show hesitancy in articulating their feelings and thoughts, indicating reluctance during conflict. This stems from a perceived difficulty in refusing others, driven by an apprehension of potential non-acceptance within social circles.

Assertive behavior, defined as the ability to express opinions or act according to the will of an individual is crucial. In the context of sexuality, this concept is known as sexual assertiveness where individuals can recognize signs related to sexual behavior, assert rights, and possess the skills to express or reject firmly (East & Adams, 2002). Furthermore, Morokoff et al. (1997) provided a detailed overview of sexual assertiveness, including the ability to reject unwanted sexual contact as well as prevent pregnancies and STIs (Morokoff et al., 1997).

Tholense and Rahardjo (2013) stated that sexual assertiveness had a significant negative correlation with all forms of premarital sexual behavior. This is consistent with Susilawati (2016) reporting a negative correlation between assertiveness and premarital sexual behavior at -0.269 . Therefore, higher levels of sexual assertiveness correspond to lower levels of premarital sexual behavior. Sexual assertiveness is not gender-biased, allowing both men and women equal opportunities to be assertive. The cultivation thrives when individuals can consciously and openly communicate their desires, feelings, and thoughts while respecting the rights of others (Setiana, 2019).

The negative impact of premarital sexual behavior has physiological and psychological consequences such as unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and STIs. According to Wirawan (2010), psychological consequences for adolescents include feelings of fear, anger, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and guilt. Lontolawa (2016) stated that students who engaged in premarital sexual behavior expressed guilt and regret. Amalia (2017) reported that respondents felt intense guilt and sin for engaging in this behavior resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

Guilt in sexual context is referred to as sex guilt. Murray et al. (2007) defined sex guilt as representing emotional reactions causing shame and anxiety when individuals' behavior conflicts with beliefs and moral values (Murray et al., 2007). According to Mosher (2013), this variable is the guilt and shame in individuals' consciousness when moral standards are violated regarding sexual behavior (Mosher, 2013). Hackathorn et al. (2015) stated that unmarried individuals with high levels of sex guilt cited moral

convictions as their reasons for abstaining from premarital sexual behavior (Hackathorn et al., 2015). Therefore, individuals with high levels of sex guilt are less included in behavior.

Based on various previous results, the focus of this study is to examine the effect of sexual assertiveness and sex guilt on premarital sexual behavior. These three variables are selected because some previous studies only use 2 variables, either premarital sexual behavior and assertiveness or premarital sexual behavior and sex guilt. In Indonesia, there is no specific study using the sex guilt variable and most results focus on guilty feeling variable.

Methods

This study uses a quantitative correlational approach and the sample consists of 153 students in Bandung aged 18-24 years in a heterosexual romantic relationship, and unmarried. Due to the unknown exact number of students in a relationship, the Lemeshow formula (1990) is used because the target population is large and constantly changing, resulting in a minimum sample size of 96 respondents. The non-probability and accidental samplings are used to find respondents who fulfill the criteria.

A total of three instruments used in this study were pre-tested on 80 respondents different from the main 153 but with the same criteria. Firstly, Sexual Assertiveness Scale (SAS) by Morokoff et al. (1997) consists of 3 dimensions, namely initiation, rejection, and prevention of pregnancy and STIs. This scale comprises 18 questions divided into 3 subscales, with 6 questions in each subscale. The results show that 14 items have good discriminating power ($>.3$) with a range of $.344$ to $.816$. Furthermore, the construct validity test for the SAS scale obtains initiation $.599$, rejection $.780$, and prevention of pregnancy $.676$. The reliability test shows initiation $.641$, rejection $.762$, and prevention of pregnancy $.778$. The Likert scale is used for the response options in sexual assertiveness and sex guilt instrument, with 5 categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is "I will not allow my partner to touch my genitals even when my partner insists."

The Brief Mosher Sex-Guilt Scale is a shortened version of the Mosher Sex Guilt Inventory in 1998. Initially, the scale had 50 questions, but Janda and Bazemore (2011) developed a shortened version for efficiency, comprising 10 questions related to sex guilt. The results show that 8 items have a good discriminating power ($>.3$) with a range of $.396$ to $.735$. Furthermore, the reliability test yields a value of $.814$ and the sex guilt instrument uses a 7-category Likert scale, namely 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Somewhat disagree), 4 (Neutral), 5 (Somewhat agree), 6 (Agree), and 7 (Strongly agree). An example item is

"In my opinion, engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage is good."

Premarital Sexual Behavior Scale developed by Yulianto (2020) is constructed using the Guttman scale based on the stages of premarital sexual behavior outlined by Walker (Alfiyah et al., 2018). This scale comprises 11 statements describing premarital sexual behavior from low to high levels of intimacy. The results show that all items have a good discriminating power ($> .3$) with a range of .374 to .811. In this context, the reliability test obtains a value of .906 and premarital sexual behavior instrument uses the Guttman scale, where 1= Yes and 0= No. An example item is "I engage in sexual intercourse with my partner."

Data analysis adopts the multiple linear regression test to examine the effect of independent variables on dependent variable and determine the strength of the effect.

Results and Discussion

Results

Descriptive Analysis Results

Based on demographic data in Table 1, 63% and 37% of respondents are female and male. In the age category, the highest number is 20 years old with a total of 34 individuals (22%), while the fewest are 18 years old (3%). The dominant living place for respondents is boarding houses with 102 individuals (67%), while the remaining 51 (33%) live in houses with their parents. The highest frequency of dating experience is 1-3 times with 71 individuals (46%), followed by >5 times with 43 (28%), and 4-5 times with 39 (25%).

Table 1

Respondents' Demographic Data

Category	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	57	37%
Female	96	63%
Age		
18 years	4	3%
19 years	10	7%
20 years	34	22%
21 years	33	22%
22 years	28	18%
23 years	30	20%
24 years	14	9%
Residence		
Houses	51	33%
Boarding houses	102	67%
Dating Experience		
1-3 times	71	46%
4-5 times	39	25%
>5 times	43	28%

Table 2

Variable Categorization

Variable	Category	
	High	Low
Sexual Assertiveness	84 (55%)	69 (45%)
Sex Guilt	69 (45%)	84 (55%)
Premarital Sexual Behavior	71 (46%)	82 (54%)

Table 3

Normality Test Results

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov			
Test	N	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Sexual Assertiveness	153	.090	
Sex Guilt	153	.200	
Premarital Sex Behavior	153	.200	

Table 4

Linearity Test Results

Variable	Linearity	Sig. Deviation from Linearity
Premarital Sex Behavior	.000	.239
*Sexual Assertiveness		
Premarital Sex Behavior	.000	.271
*Sex Guilt		

Table 5

Multiple Linear Regression Test Results (Partial T-test)

	B	t	Sig.
(Constant)	15.275	1.088	.000
Sexual Assertiveness (X1)	-.204	14.036	.000
Sex Guilt (X2)	-.142	-5.037	.000

Table 6

Multiple Linear Regression Test Results (Simultaneous F-Test)

	df	F	Sig.
Regression	2	42.086	.000b
Residual	150		
Total	152		

According to the variable categorization in Table 2, 69 (45%) and 84 (55%) individuals fall into the low and high sexual assertiveness category. For sex guilt categorization, 84 (55%) and 69 (45%) individuals are in the low and high category. Meanwhile, for premarital sexual behavior categorization, 82 (54%) and 71 (46%) individuals are in the low and high category.

Inferential Analysis Results

Based on Table 3, the normality test yields significance values of .090 for sexual assertiveness, as well as .200 for sex guilt and premarital sexual behavior. The significance values are greater than $> .05$, showing that the data in this study is considered normally distributed.

According to [Table 4](#), the linearity test between assertiveness and premarital sexual behavior obtains a significance value of $.239 > .05$, suggesting a linear relationship between the variables. Similarly, the linearity test between sex guilt and premarital sexual behavior yields a significance value of $.271 > .05$, showing a linear relationship.

The multicollinearity test, based on the SPSS calculation, the VIF (X1) for sexual assertiveness is $1.223 < 10.00$ with a tolerance value of $.817 > .100$. Similarly, the VIF and tolerance values for sex guilt (X2) are $1.223 < 10.00$ and $.817 > .100$ since there is no multicollinearity. The heteroskedasticity test using the Glesjer test for sexual assertiveness (X1) and sex guilt (X2) obtains a significance value of $1.000 > .05$, hence there is no heteroskedasticity.

According to [Table 5](#), the independent variables, sexual assertiveness (X1) and sex guilt (X2), have a significance value of $.000 < .5$. Therefore, the variables partially have a significant influence on premarital sexual behavior (Y). Based on column B, variables X1 and X2 have negative signs, showing that sexual assertiveness and sex guilt have a negative influence. This shows an inverse relationship between variables X1 and X2 against Y. Higher levels of assertiveness and sex guilt among students are associated with a decrease in premarital sexual behavior. Therefore, low sexual assertiveness and sex guilt among students increase their inclusion in premarital sexual behavior.

According to [Table 6](#), the independent variables, sexual assertiveness (X1) and sex guilt (X2), have a significance value of $.000 < .05$. Therefore, the variables simultaneously have a significant influence on premarital sexual behavior (Y). The coefficient of determination or R Square obtained is $.359$. This means that sexual assertiveness and sex guilt simultaneously contribute 35.9% to premarital sexual behavior.

Discussion

The multiple linear regression test shows that there is a negative influence between assertiveness and premarital sexual behavior. This suggests that when students have a high level of sexual assertiveness, the likelihood of engaging in premarital sexual behavior will be low. According to [Tholense and Rahardjo \(2013\)](#), sexual assertiveness has a significant negative correlation with various forms of premarital behavior. Another study also showed that assertiveness significantly influenced premarital sexual behavior, with assertive individuals being capable of saying "no" to various forms of behavior ([Karniyanti et al., 2018](#)).

Based on secondary data, the majority of respondents are capable of asserting sexual rights and expressing opinions to reject invitations leading to premarital sexual behavior. This could be influenced by the age factor since most respondents with high sexual

assertiveness are in the age range of 21 to 23 years. Individuals become more self-controlled with age, including being assertive in sexual behavior. This is supported by [Margaretha \(2015\)](#) that mature individuals tend to have higher levels of assertiveness.

The majority of respondents residing in boarding houses have a higher level of sexual assertiveness compared to those with the parents. Students residing in boarding houses face an increased demand for personal responsibility, considering their separation from parental supervision. This circumstance necessitates an increased level of self-control, particularly in reducing negative behavior such as premarital sexual activities. Therefore, these students tend to exercise greater caution in social interactions and show an understanding of the significance of self-discipline ([Tehuayo, 2021](#)).

Sexual assertiveness among students with dating experience 1-3 times falls into the high category. This is because individuals with dating experience are more likely to understand the situations. For instance, when a partner starts holding hands and touching sensitive body parts, the individual should be capable of rejecting such advances to prevent engaging in high-risk sexual activities. Additionally, there is an influence from peers, where students often receive invitations to engage in premarital sexual behavior. The rejection of these invitations leads to fear of potential exclusion from the social circle. The frequency of interactions and increased openness within proximity, such as those residing in boarding houses, enhance connections. This is particularly evident in discussions related to romantic relationships. The dynamics show the substantial influence that peers wield over the behavior of students in shaping their attitudes and actions. This result is supported by [Mesra and Fauziah \(2016\)](#) who found a significant relationship between peer influence and premarital sexual behavior at 90%.

Students need to possess sexual assertiveness because permissive expression of their rights shows passivity, helplessness, and an inability to say "no". The occurrence of casual premarital sexual behavior suggests a limited ability of students to be sexually assertive. Sexual assertiveness is crucial to reduce the level of premarital sexual behavior among students.

Based on the multiple linear regression test, there is a negative influence between sex guilt and premarital sexual behavior. Therefore, the higher the level of sex guilt among students, the lower the likelihood of engaging in premarital sexual behavior. This finding is consistent with several previous studies showing that sex guilt can predict various forms of sexual behavior. [Woo et al. \(2011\)](#) reported a significant negative correlation between the variables. Individuals with high levels of sex guilt are associated with low

premarital sexual behavior (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2018).

Secondary data shows that the majority of respondents still experience guilt and shame when engaging in premarital sexual behavior. The apprehension of transgressing religious principles develops as a prominent influence, as evidenced by demographic data in the secondary analysis. In this context, a substantial proportion of respondents express a fear of violating religious rules. The persistence of fear and shame associated with engaging in morally perceived wrong behavior, such as premarital sexual activities, shows a robust level of religiosity among individuals. This commitment plays an important role in facilitating self-control, acting as a deterrent to premarital sexual behavior. This is consistent with Rakhmawati (2020) that religiosity is a protective factor because engaging in premarital behavior makes individuals feel sinful before God and induces guilt. Moreover, this study also shows that the majority of respondents residing in boarding houses possess a higher level of sex guilt compared to those with the parents. Students who partake in negative behavior in the absence of parental supervision are prone to experiencing increased feelings of guilt, primarily from a sense of betraying the trust of the parents. This is also related to the presence of social sanctions in society when individuals violate prevailing norms (Widiharto, 2020). However, not all boarding houses enforce regulations, such as curfews or restrictions on the entry of opposite-sex guests. The extent of rules and regulations vary significantly across different boarding house environments. This can be an opportunity to engage in premarital sexual behavior when not accompanied by a high level of sex guilt.

Another analysis of the secondary data shows the influence of the knowledge factor regarding premarital sexual behavior, which is low among students. The majority of students state that reasonable limits for dating include holding hands, hugging, and kissing. There is a prevailing belief among some individuals that engaging in sexual intercourse with a partner on a single occasion does not carry the risk of pregnancy outside of marriage. This perception holds potential implications for its correlation with sex guilt, which serves as a deterrent against participating in premarital sexual interactions.

Data analysis shows that sexual assertiveness and sex guilt influence premarital behavior, hence the hypothesis is accepted. The influence is negative, meaning that the higher sexual assertiveness and sex guilt, the lower the tendency to engage in premarital sexual behavior. Conversely, when assertiveness and sex guilt are low, the tendency to engage in premarital sexual behavior is high. In simplified terms, the greater the students' ability to be sexually assertive, combined

with a high level of guilt, the lower their inclusion in premarital sexual behavior. Furthermore, assertiveness and sex guilt simultaneously contribute to approximately 35.9% of the influence on premarital behavior.

Based on secondary data, specifically demographic information, a significant number of respondents lack a comprehensive understanding of the forms of premarital sexual behavior. Activities such as holding hands, hugging, and kissing are perceived as normal and not considered forms of premarital sexual behavior. Therefore, enhancing respondents' knowledge regarding various forms of this behavior is crucial. There is also a negative influence from peer or partner invitations to engage in sexual activities. According to secondary data, particularly demographic information, a considerable portion of respondents frequently receive invitations to engage in premarital sexual activities. The rejection of these invitations expresses fear of potential social exclusion within the friendship circle. Future studies are recommended to include a larger sample size, consider other relevant variables, and incorporate recent theories. Moreover, alternative analytical methods should be explored to deepen the results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sexual assertiveness and sex guilt were crucial for students to prevent inclusion in premarital sexual behavior ranging from mild to severe risks. The consequences of engaging in premarital sexual behavior should also be assessed. Furthermore, students were expected to play a significant role by setting an example of good behavior. In this context, the failure to show positive behavior could have negative consequences.

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