

Adolescents' Perceptions of Communication with Parents About Sexuality

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Abstract. This study aimed to explore the topics adolescents discuss with their parents, how frequently these conversations occur, and how important adolescents perceive them to be. The participants were 331 middle school students aged 12–16 years (53.8% girls, 46.2% boys), selected through convenience sampling. Data were gathered using a questionnaire covering four domains of sexual communication: developmental and social issues, sexual safety, sexual experiences, and sexual activities. We applied Friedman test on data from a related sample, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing independent groups, and Spearman rank correlation. Results revealed that communication patterns differ between mothers and fathers. Mothers were more likely to discuss developmental and social issues, while fathers more often addressed sexual experiences. The findings highlight the need to enhance parent-adolescent communication about sexual matters.

Keywords: Sexual safety, Sexual experience, Sexual activities, Sexual communication.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional period in which individuals seek to assert their independence from their parents while also navigating their desire for autonomy (Hedge et al., 2022). In relation to sexuality, adolescents often exhibit risky sexual behaviors (Hedge et al., 2022). A study conducted in France revealed that the pregnancy rate among girls under 18 years old is 2.4%, with an abortion risk of 0.9% (Moore, 2000). A 2024 French mixed-methods study of girls aged 13–17 found that the median age of first sexual intercourse is about 17 years, and fewer than 2 % of mothers are under 20, with a 2021 abortion rate of approximately 5 per 1,000 for under-18s (Cosquer et al., 2024). A 2003 survey in the United States, though dated, highlighted concerning findings (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003), showing that the average age of first sexual intercourse is 16.9 years for boys and 17.4 years for girls. In the U.S., global health reviews show early sexual initiation before age 14 dropped from 6 % in 2002 to 4 % in 2022 . U.S. middle-school data indicate 7.5% of 11–14-year-olds engaged in sexual activity, with 56 % condom use during last intercourse (Költő et al., 2025; Lesinskienė et al., 2025; Reynaud et al., 2024; Zafra-Agea et al., 2024). This

raises concerns about the potential for adolescents to contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

A similar situation exists in Indonesia, where tens of thousands of underage girls experience premarital pregnancies each year. According to data from BKKBN (National Population and Family Planning Board), early marriage and adolescent pregnancy remain critical issues in several regions, particularly in regions like West Java (BKKBN, 2018). The Marriage Law, Article 7, Paragraph 1 of Law No. 16/2019 explicitly states, "Marriage is only permitted when both men and women have reached the age of 19." According to data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), nearly 80% of adolescents seeking marriage dispensations have reportedly been involved in premarital pregnancies (CNN Indonesia, 2023).

Recent evidence shows that peer discussions are a leading source of sexual health information for adolescents. Most adolescents prefer discussing sexual health with peers—but these discussions are often influenced by limited knowledge, cultural stigma, and communication barriers experienced at home. A 2024 systematic review of 48 studies highlights family and school as major sources, but peers remain key when teenagers seek anonymity and trust (Wahyuningsih et al., 2024). In Ethiopia, 27.9% of adolescents talked

about STIs/HIV with friends, compared to only 20.8% with their mothers; meanwhile, 66.3% reported no such discussions with parents (Mekonen et al., 2018). A study in Nigeria shows that mothers discuss all sexual and reproductive health issues with their adolescents and better than fathers. Girls only discuss limited topics with parents, and sexual behaviors are the least discussed (Aliyu & Aransiola, 2023). Communication with parents about sexual and reproductive health issues was significantly associated with increased pregnancy knowledge among girls (Sievwright et al., 2024).

Research in Indonesia indicates that communication between parents and adolescents can help prevent premarital sexual behaviors (Wanufika et al., 2017). Lestari (2019) outlines a model for parents to communicate sexual education to their adolescents, emphasizing that (1) parents should understand sexuality, encompassing biological, psychological, cultural, moral, and social dimensions; (2) sexual education topics should include gender differences, social ethics, responsibilities, and sexual diseases; (3) communication can occur naturally without designated time, leveraging everyday moments to foster closeness; and (4) adolescents respond positively to parental communication styles in conducive environments. Madjid et al. (2009) stated that mothers' educational background have great influences on their attitude toward sex education, which is the higher the education those mothers had, the more positive they felt toward sex education. A study in Indonesia revealed the effectiveness of sexuality training to increase knowledge and sexual assertiveness in adolescents aged 11-20 (Farisandy & Surjaningrum, 2019), it is expected to prevent adolescents from engaging in premarital sexual behavior.

Communication between parents and their adolescents regarding sexuality has the potential to be an effective form of sexual education (Mullis et al., 2021). Several studies indicate that sexual communication between parents and adolescents is beneficial (Mullis et al., 2021; Widman et al., 2019), and this trend is also observed in Indonesia (Banowo & Maulana, 2021; Maulida & Safrida, 2020). Through communication with their parents, adolescents feel heard and acknowledged (Borualogo, 2021).

Adolescents often express that they face barriers to discussing sexual topics (Aprilia, 2023). However, during adolescence, the need for information about sexuality is particularly high. Adolescents seek information on bodily changes, menstruation, wet dreams, romantic relationships with the opposite sex, and STDs. They require this information from their parents, while parents often perceive discussions on sexual topics as taboo (Aprilia, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, communication about sexuality is often constrained by cultural and religious norms that position sex-related discussions as taboo (Saparini et al., 2024; Solehati et al., 2022; Sutanto et al., 2023). Parents may avoid such topics due to feelings of shame, fear of encouraging promiscuity, or lack of knowledge about how to approach them effectively (Kaestle et al., 2021; Widman et al., 2021). Islamic values, which are deeply embedded in many communities, often promote modesty and discourage open discussions about sexual matters, particularly with adolescents (Tohit & Haque, 2024). These cultural expectations can create a communication gap, where parents feel unprepared or uncomfortable discussing sexuality, and adolescents, in turn, perceive such conversations as inappropriate or embarrassing. As a result, many rely on peers or the internet for sexual information, which may be inaccurate or incomplete (Widman et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding communication about sexuality in Indonesia requires not only a psychological lens focused on individual development but also a sociocultural perspective that considers the broader moral, religious, and societal frameworks shaping family dynamics.

The current study focuses on the communication between parents and their adolescents regarding sexuality, as reported by the adolescents themselves. The aim of the study is to identify the topics discussed between adolescents and their parents, as well as the frequency and importance of these communications. Based on our review of existing research on sexual communication between parents and adolescents in Indonesia, the frequency and significance of such discussions have not been previously investigated.

The study employs the approach of Rosenthal and Feldman (1999), who examined various sexual topics, including menstruation, body changes, abortion, pregnancy, homosexuality, premarital sex, STDs, HIV/AIDS, dating relationships, sexual desire, choice of partner, peer influence, masturbation, and wet dreams. These topics are categorized into four domains: (1) developmental and societal concerns, (2) sexual safety, (3) sexual experiences, and (4) sexual activities (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999). The developmental and societal concerns domain includes menstruation, body changes, abortion, pregnancy, homosexuality, and premarital sex. The sexual safety domain encompasses STDs and HIV/AIDS. The sexual experiences domain includes dating relationships, sexual desire, choice of partner, and peer influence, while the sexual activity domain covers masturbation and wet dreams.

This research aims to enhance understanding of how frequently and importantly parents communicate with their adolescents about sexuality. The findings are

expected to contribute to parents' ability to engage in discussions about sexual topics with their adolescents.

Methods

The cross-sectional and survey method were used in this study.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical principles for research with minors. Consent was obtained from school authorities and the parents/guardians of all participants. Students participated voluntarily, and responses were collected anonymously to protect confidentiality.

Sampling Technique and Research Participants

The sampling technique employed was convenient sampling. The participants in this study were middle school students from West Bandung Regency, West Java ($N = 331$, 53.8% girls, 46.2% boys), aged 12 to 16 years. West Java is noted for having the highest rate of early marriage (between ages 15-19) in Indonesia, recorded at 29.7% (BKKBN, 2023). West Bandung Regency, in particular, continues to face pronounced early marriage and adolescent pregnancy issues (BKKBN, 2023).

Procedure

Data collection took place in February 2024. The data were gathered in a classroom setting using paper and pencil instruments, with two enumerators present at the front of the class. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their communication about sexuality with their mothers and fathers, as well as their own sexual behaviors.

The collected data were entered into SPSS 25 for analysis. Data cleaning involved the removal of 10 participants who provided incomplete responses or had more than three missing values, following the recommendations of Casas (2016). Remaining missing values were addressed through multiple imputation using regression techniques.

Measurement Instruments

Demographic data were collected based on participants' gender and age, as well as the education level and age of their parents, and the family's socioeconomic status.

Adolescents' perceptions regarding sexual communication with their parents were assessed using a scale developed by Rosenthal and Feldman (1999). This instrument evaluates adolescent perceptions both the frequency and importance of communication with mothers and fathers on sexual topics. Four domains of sexual topics were identified: developmental and societal concerns (6 items), sexual safety (2 items), sexual experiences (4 items), and sexual activities (2

items), all items are positively worded (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999). The developmental and societal concerns domain includes topics such as menstruation, body changes, abortion, pregnancy, homosexuality, and premarital sex. The sexual safety domain covers STDs and HIV/AIDS. The sexual experiences domain addresses dating relationships, sexual desire, choice of partner, and role of peer group in sexual decision-making. Lastly, the sexual activities domain includes masturbation and wet dreams.

The instrument used in this study was adapted from Rosenthal and Feldman (1999). The original instrument, developed in English, was translated into Bahasa Indonesia using a forward and backward translation procedure. The translation was reviewed by three bilingual experts in adolescent psychology to ensure semantic and conceptual equivalence. A pilot test was conducted with 331 middle school students to evaluate clarity and comprehension (Borualogo, 2024).

The psychometric properties of the adapted scale were assessed using Pearson and Cronbach's alpha to determine validity and internal consistency. The validity coefficients for the four domains ranged from $p = 529$ to $p = 819$ ($p < .01$), indicating the items were valid. The reliability coefficients for the four domains ranged from $\alpha = .767$ to $\alpha = .899$, indicating acceptable to good internal consistency. These results suggest that the Indonesian version of the instrument is both valid and reliable for assessing adolescents' perceptions of sexual communication with their parents (Borualogo, 2024).

We asked adolescents about two distinct dimensions of communication regarding sexuality-related issues: frequency and importance of discussions. For frequency questions, participants were asked, "How often does your mother discuss this topic?" or "How often does your father discuss this topic?" Response options ranged from never (1) to often (4). For importance questions, participants were asked, "How important is it to you that your mother discusses this topic with you?" or "How important is it to you that your father discusses this topic with you?" Response options varied from not important at all (1) to very important (4).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted to assess the frequency and importance of discussions regarding sexuality, as well as the mean values for these discussions. ANOVA was employed to determine whether there were significant differences in perceptions between girls and boys who participated in this study.

Given the non-normal distribution of the data, non-parametric statistical methods were utilized. We applied Friedman test on data from a related sample,

Table 1

Participant characteristics

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Girls	178	53.8
Boys	153	46.2
Age		
12 years-old	30	9.1
13 years-old	127	38.4
14 years-old	110	33.2
15 years-old	50	15.1
16 years-old	14	4.2
Mother's age		
20-30 years-old	19	5.8
31-40 years-old	127	38.4
41-50 years-old	105	31.7
51-60 years-old	18	5.4
61-70 years-old	1	0.3
Do not know	61	18.4
Father's age		
20-30 years-old	5	1.5
31-40 years-old	85	25.7
41-50 years-old	123	37.2
51-60 years-old	48	14.5
61-70 years-old	3	0.9
Do not know	67	20.2
Mother's education	3	
Did not graduate elementary school	3	0.9
Elementary school	44	13.3
Middle school	103	31.1
High school	158	47.7
Bachelor degree	12	3.6
Master degree	2	0.6
Do not know	9	2.7
Father's education		
Did not graduate elementary school	9	2.7
Elementary school	36	10.9
Middle school	83	25.1
High school	162	48.9
Bachelor degree	20	6.0
Master degree	8	2.4
Do not know	13	3.9
Family socio-economic status		
Low	7	2.1
Middle	315	95.2
High	9	2.7

the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing independent groups, and Spearman rank correlation. Data analyses were performed using SPSS 25.

Results and Discussion

Participant Characteristics

Information regarding the study participants is presented in Table 1. The sample size is $N = 331$ (53.8% girls, 46.2% boys), with ages ranging from 12 to 16 years. Generally, 95.2% of the participants come from families with a middle socio-economic status. The educational attainment of the mothers (47.7%) and

fathers (48.9%) is predominantly at the high school level.

Frequency of Communication Between Mothers and Fathers on Topics Related to Sexuality

To examine whether certain domains were communicated more frequently than others, we conducted a non-parametric Friedman test on data from a related sample, yielding chi-square values. Analyses were performed separately for maternal and paternal data. The frequency of communication regarding sexuality differed between mothers and fathers based on the specific domains discussed.

Mothers more frequently addressed developmental and societal concerns ($\chi^2 = 274.553$; $p < .001$), while fathers predominantly discussed topics related to sexual experiences ($\chi^2 = 645.640$; $p < .001$). Subsequently, we employed the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to compare each domain against the others. The analysis for mothers revealed that developmental and societal concerns were discussed more frequently than any other subjects ($M = 1.55$), followed by sexual experiences ($M = 1.48$), sexual activities ($M = 1.25$), and sexual safety ($M = 1.17$). Conversely, the results for fathers indicated that sexual experience topics ($M = 1.42$) were discussed more frequently than other subjects, followed by developmental and societal concerns ($M = 1.22$), sexual safety ($M = 1.14$), and sexual activities ($M = 1.13$). All comparisons were statistically significant, except for the topic of sexual safety. The results are presented in the following [Table 2](#).

Despite the very low scores for communication frequency (ranging from $M = 1.13$ to $M = 1.55$, where 1 = never and 4 = often), there was a substantial main effect of parents across all four domains. Among these domains, adolescents reported that mothers communicated about sexual topics more frequently than fathers, a trend observed in both girls and boys ([Table 3](#)).

[Table 3](#) illustrates differences based on the gender of adolescents and parents, indicating that communication about sex most frequently occurs between mothers and their daughters. Discussions about sexual activities are most common between mothers and sons ($M = 1.36$). Communication regarding sexual topics between fathers and their daughters is more frequent concerning sexual experiences ($M = 1.56$), which is similarly reflected in interactions with sons ($M = 1.24$). Mothers engage in more frequent discussions about developmental and societal concerns ($M = 1.39$) with their sons, whereas fathers more often discuss sexual experiences, including dating relationships and sexual desires, with their sons ($M = 1.24$).

To examine the frequency of communication with parents in greater detail, we present the percentage of parents who never discuss specific topics ([Table 4](#)). Girls reported that both mothers (52.3%) and fathers (52.6%) never discussed masturbation. This percentage is lower among boys' perceptions regarding their mothers (42.9%) and fathers (44.4%). Girls also noted that 50.2% of fathers never discussed wet dreams and 51.4% never discussed abortion. Overall, the percentage of parents who never addressed specific topics ranges from 4.8% to 52.6% according to girls, and from 9.7% to 44.7% according to boys.

[Table 4](#) further indicates that parental communication about sexual topics was relatively rare,

with most topics being discussed never or only once. Mothers communicated more frequently than fathers, as evidenced by lower percentages of mothers compared to fathers. Mothers were more likely to communicate with their daughters than with their sons on gender-related topics, such as menstruation. Both mothers and fathers engaged significantly in discussions about dating and partner selection with both girls and boys, although communication with mothers occurred relatively more often than with fathers.

The Spearman rank correlation between the frequency of communication from mothers and fathers was moderate across the domains, ranging from .324 to .612 for girls, and .317 to .477 for boys. Girls' rating of the frequency of communication from mothers and fathers in the developmental and societal concerns domain yielded a low correlation of .180.

In a series of analyses parallel to the frequency scores, we found that the importance of communication regarding sexuality varied by domain. The average importance scores for each domain are presented in [Table 2](#). From the adolescents' perspective, the most important domains to discuss with mothers are developmental and societal concerns ($M = 1.68$), sexual experiences ($M = 1.64$), sexual safety ($M = 1.53$), and sexual activities ($M = 1.39$). In contrast, the most significant topics for discussion with fathers are sexual experiences ($M = 1.48$), developmental and societal concerns ($M = 1.36$), sexual safety ($M = 1.35$), and sexual activities ($M = 1.25$). Each domain in [Table 2](#) differs significantly from the others (Wilcoxon test, $p < .001$).

The importance of sexual communication, as assessed by adolescents, varies between mothers and fathers, as well as between girls and boys. Adolescents perceived communication about sexuality with mothers as more important than with fathers, as indicated by the higher average scores for mothers ([Table 3](#)). Furthermore, girls regarded sexual communication as more important than boys.

Girls rated the importance of sexual communication with their mothers on topics such as developmental and societal concerns ($M = 1.89$), sexual experiences ($M = 1.85$), and sexual safety ($M = 1.63$) as more critical than boys did. For boys, communication with mothers regarding sexual activities ($M = 1.40$) was considered important compared to girls, although this difference is not statistically significant.

We also examined the rankings of the importance of communication about sexuality with parents. [Table 5](#) presents the percentages of adolescents who reported that communication with parents on sexual topics is "important" or "very important."

Table 2

Adolescents' ratings of the frequency and importance of sexual communication with father and mother

Domains	Mean		Significance	Effect size Cohen's d
	Mother	Father		
Frequency				
Developmental and societal concerns	1.55	1.22	.000***	.95
Sexual safety	1.17	1.14	.327 ^{ns}	.07
Sexual experiences	1.48	1.42	.024*	.11
Sexual activities	1.25	1.13	.000***	.32
Importance				
Developmental and societal concerns	1.68	1.36	.000***	.57
Sexual safety	1.53	1.35	.000***	.24
Sexual experiences	1.64	1.48	.000***	.25
Sexual activities	1.39	1.25	.000***	.24

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$; ns = non-significant

Table 3

Adolescents' ratings of frequency and importance of sexual communication by gender of parent and gender of participant

Domain	Mothers' sex communication				Fathers' sex communication			
	Rating by girls	Rating by boys	p	Effect size (d)	Ratings by girls	Rating by boys	p	Effect size (d)
Frequency								
Development and societal concern	1.68	1.39	.000***	.79	1.22	1.21	.816 ^{ns}	.03
Sexual safety	1.21	1.12	.055 ^{ns}	.21	1.15	1.13	.702 ^{ns}	.05
Sexual experiences	1.58	1.36	.000***	.41	1.56	1.24	.000***	.65
Sexual activities	1.15	1.36	.000***	-.55	1.07	1.21	.000***	-.39
Importance								
Development and societal concerns	1.89	1.44	.000***	.81	1.41	1.29	.052 ^{ns}	.24
Sexual safety	1.63	1.40	.009**	.29	1.39	1.30	.220 ^{ns}	.13
Sexual experiences	1.85	1.38	.000***	.74	1.63	1.30	.000***	.59
Sexual activities	1.38	1.40	.729 ^{ns}	-.03	1.21	1.30	.151 ^{ns}	-.17

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$; ns = non-significant

None of the topics were rated as important for discussion by the majority of both girls and boys.

The topics deemed least important include sexual experiences (e.g., dating relationships and sexual desires) and sexual activities (e.g., masturbation), particularly among male adolescents. For girls, it was important for mothers to discuss topics such as menstruation, body changes, pregnancy, dating relationships, and partner selection; however, the percentage of those who consider these discussions important was very low, remaining below 50%.

The Spearman rank correlation between the importance ratings of communication from mothers and fathers was relatively high across the domains, ranging from .489 to .763 for girls and from .611 to .710 for boys.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the topics communicated by adolescents with their parents, as well as the frequency and importance of such discussions. The

findings yielded several new insights while also confirming previous research.

Adolescents reported that their parents rarely communicate about sexual topics, particularly regarding sexual safety (e.g., STDs) and sexual activities (e.g., masturbation). This aligns with findings from research conducted in the United States, which noted that parents infrequently discuss sexual topics with their teenagers (Evans et al., 2020). Parents do not address the four domains of sexuality with equal frequency. Overall, there is a correlation between the importance of communication and its frequency with parents. When there is a mismatch between perceived importance and frequency, adolescents often express a need for more information on those topics.

When adolescents do communicate with their parents about sexual topics, discussions often revolve around developmental and societal concerns (e.g., body changes) and sexual experiences (e.g., dating relationships). Personal topics, such as masturbation, are rarely discussed. This is consistent with Evans et al. (2020) research, which found that only about 38%

Table 4

Percentage of adolescents who report their parents never talk about topic

Topic	Girls		Boys	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Developmental and societal concerns				
Menstruation	4.8	42.0	39.0	44.1
Physical development	11.2	35.0	9.7	21.5
Abortion	49.2	51.4	42.3	44.7
Pregnancy	39.9	48.9	37.2	44.4
Homosexuality	48.9	49.8	44.1	44.4
Sex before marriage	47.7	48.0	42.9	43.2
Sexual safety				
STDs	44.1	47.7	42.6	41.4
HIV/AIDS	46.5	48.3	42.3	41.1
Sexual experiences				
Dating/romantic relationships	23.9	25.1	28.1	32.9
Sexual desire	49.2	48.0	39.6	42.9
Choice of partner	26.9	27.2	32.9	33.5
Role of peer group in sexual decision-making	43.2	42.9	41.1	42.3
Sexual activities				
Masturbation	52.3	52.6	42.9	44.4
Wet dreams	42.6	50.2	25.1	34.1

of adolescent engage in discussions about highly personal topics, such as sexual satisfaction or activities. Similarly, [Whitaker and Miller \(2000\)](#) found that adolescents are reluctant to discuss condom use with their parents.

The observed patterns of communication—particularly the greater involvement of mothers and the limited discussion of topics like sexual safety or masturbation—align with cultural norms in West Java, where modesty, religious values, and traditional gender roles significantly shape family interactions ([Solehati et al., 2022](#); [Tohit & Haque, 2024](#)). In many Sundanese communities of West Bandung, topics related to sexuality remain highly taboo, leading to discomfort and avoidance among parents, especially fathers.

The low frequency of communication between parents and adolescents about sexual matters may help explain the persistently high rates of early marriage in West Java, recorded at 29.7% among adolescents aged 15–19 ([BKKBN, 2023](#)). In West Bandung, where early marriage and adolescent pregnancy remain prevalent, inadequate family-based sex education may contribute to young people's limited awareness and risky decision-making.

The gender of the adolescent significantly influences the topics discussed with parents. It is not surprising that parents, particularly mothers, tend to tailor their communication based on gender. For example, mothers may choose to discuss menstruation and pregnancy with their daughters, while addressing wet dreams with their sons. Consequently, daughters receive more information on menstruation and pregnancy, while sons receive less information on

masturbation and wet dreams. This study corroborates the findings of [Angera et al. \(2008\)](#) and [Evans et al. \(2020\)](#), indicating that mothers more frequently communicate gender-specific topics with their daughters.

The gendered patterns of communication—mothers with daughters and fathers with sons—also reflect Sundanese cultural expectations around gender propriety. Discussions between cross-gender parent-child pairs (e.g., father-daughter or mother-son) may be more restricted due to perceived impropriety or embarrassment, which is common in culturally conservative areas like West Bandung ([Solehati et al., 2022](#)).

The observed differences in sexual communication between mothers and fathers, as well as between sons and daughters, are deeply rooted in Indonesia's cultural and religious norms ([Widyatuti et al., 2018](#)). As shown in [Table 3](#), mothers engage more frequently in discussions about developmental and societal concerns, particularly with daughters, while fathers are more likely to communicate about sexual experiences, especially with sons. In many Indonesian households, mothers traditionally assume caregiving and emotional roles, which may explain their higher involvement in discussing such topics. Fathers, on the other hand, may be perceived as authority figures and are less likely to engage in intimate conversations, especially about sexuality. This gendered parenting pattern reflects broader societal norms in Indonesia, where discussions about sexuality are still considered sensitive, if not taboo.

As illustrated in Table 4, the low frequency of communication, particularly on topics like masturbation or sexual safety, may stem from parents' discomfort, lack of knowledge, or fear that talking about sex will encourage experimentation. These barriers are compounded by limited formal sex education in schools, leaving many adolescents to rely on peers or digital media for information.

Overall, a notable aspect of our findings is the infrequency of communication with parents regarding sexual topics. Not only is the frequency of communication with parents very low, but adolescents also reported that certain topics are never discussed by either mother or father with sons, such as sexual activities. Although communication between mothers and daughters occurs most frequently, there are still topics, such as sexual safety, that are never addressed by mothers.

These findings are consistent with other studies that demonstrate the rarity of communication between parents and their adolescent children (Angera et al., 2008; Evans et al., 2020; Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Parents tend to communicate less with sons compared to daughters.

The very low importance attributed to sexual communication with parents does not reflect a belief among adolescents that sexual issues are unimportant to discuss. Instead, it may stem from feelings of embarrassment when discussing personal matters with their parents. Adolescents view the parents' input on private sexual areas, such as experiences and activities, as unwelcome.

Our results indicate that there is a greater alignment between the frequency of communication and the perceived importance of parental input than there is a mismatch. Most adolescents do not regard their parents as communicators about sexuality, with the possible exception of mothers discussing developmental and societal concerns.

We cannot ascertain whether the low level of parental communication arises from parents' accurate readings of adolescents' desires for limited input or from adolescents' perceptions that discussions about sexuality are not particularly important. This may be due to both parents and adolescents recognizing that many sexual topics are covered in school biology classes, such as body changes and fertilization.

Regarding the discrepancy between parental communication frequency and the perceived importance of that communication, adolescents are more likely to believe that the frequency of communication with parents is insufficient, leading them to view such communication as less important. This may be because parents have limited opportunities for communication, especially fathers. The fact that our findings on gender differences in the frequency of

communication about sexual topics confirm results from other studies in different countries provides confidence that our findings are not limited to this particular sample.

From a policy perspective, this study highlights a pressing need for culturally sensitive family-based sexual education initiatives (Kaestle et al., 2021). Interventions that involve parents—especially fathers—could help reduce the stigma around discussing sexual topics and encourage healthier communication. The findings support current efforts by the Indonesian government and civil society organizations to address adolescent reproductive health and reduce rates of early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

By providing empirical data on the communication gaps and adolescents' preferences, this study can inform the development of community education programs, school curricula, and national health campaigns. Ultimately, fostering open, respectful, and gender-sensitive communication between parents and adolescents could play a critical role in promoting adolescent well-being and preventing risky sexual behaviors in Indonesia.

Taken together, these findings must be interpreted within Indonesia's unique sociocultural context—especially that of West Bandung and West Java—where sexual health education is influenced by cultural taboos, religious norms, and gender roles. Addressing these structural and cultural barriers is critical. Culturally sensitive, parent-focused interventions are needed to foster more open, informed, and gender-inclusive communication about sexuality within Indonesian families.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample does not adequately represent middle school students due to the convenience sampling method employed. A second limitation is that communication about sexuality was assessed solely from adolescents' perceptions of their parents. Future research should gather information from both parents and adolescents. Third, middle school is a period of puberty, during which adolescents may feel hesitant to discuss sexual topics with their parents. Subsequent studies should focus on measuring communication between parents and adolescents during high school years. Fourth, the study did not include data on the marital status of the parents. Future research should consider collecting this information, as it plays an important role in assessing the quality of communication between adolescents and their parents.

Conclusion

The study revealed that adolescents communicate more frequently with mothers than with fathers about sexuality-related topics, with discussions most

Table 5

Percentage of adolescents who report that discussion with parents is “important” or “very important”

	Girls				Boys			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	Important	Very important	Important	Very important	Important	Very important	Important	Very important
Development and societal concerns								
Menstruation	28.7	10.0	6.0	3.3	2.7	1.2	2.1	0
Physical development	15.1	3.9	4.5	2.4	12.1	1.8	10.9	3
Abortion	3.3	2.4	.9	1.2	3.3	.3	.9	0
Pregnancy	12.1	4.2	3.0	2.7	3.3	1.5	1.5	.6
Homosexuality	3.6	2.1	1.5	1.8	3.0	2.1	1.5	0
Sex before marriage	6.0	4.2	4.5	1.5	3.3	1.5	1.5	.6
Sexual safety								
STDs	9.4	3.6	5.7	1.8	4.5	2.4	1.8	1.8
HIV/AIDS	7.6	2.1	3.6	2.1	5.1	.9	2.7	.9
Sexual experiences								
Dating/romantic relationships	10.6	3.3	8.5	2.4	3.0	.3	1.8	0
Sexual desire	6.6	.6	3.0	1.2	2.4	.3	1.2	.3
Choice of partner	14.2	8.2	14.2	4.2	5.4	1.8	3.6	.9
Role of peer group in sexual decision-making	8.2	4.5	5.4	1.8	3.0	.6	1.8	.3
Sexual activities								
Masturbation	4.2	1.2	.9	.9	2.1	.9	2.1	0
Wet dreams	5.1	0	1.2	1.5	4.8	1.5	2.7	.9

commonly focused on developmental and societal concerns. However, conversations about sexual safety and sexual activities—such as STDs, masturbation, and wet dreams—were reported to be infrequent or entirely absent. Gender differences were evident, with girls receiving more communication overall and viewing these discussions as more important than boys did.

Communication about sexuality is reciprocal. Therefore, parents cannot impose their views on sexual topics. Parents need to consider whether adolescents are willing to engage in these discussions, particularly regarding matters deemed personal. It is essential for parents to initiate conversations about sexual topics early in their children's lives, framing sexuality as one of many appropriate subjects for discussion, such as gender differences. If this foundation is established early on, parents can create a mutual information-sharing dynamic regarding values and beliefs with their adolescents. This approach allows parents to integrate discussions about sexuality with issues of autonomy, which are crucial during adolescence.

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