

## INEFFECTIVENESS OF PARENTAL RESPONSES IN ADDRESSING ADOLESCENT SEXUAL PROBLEMS

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**Abstract:** Current challenges such as the decline in ethics and morals, including premarital sex, LGBT issues, and pornography addiction among teenagers in Malaysia, are becoming increasingly concerning, with numbers on the rise. Sexuality remains a taboo subject in society, leading to limited discussions on these issues. Consequently, this paper aims to identify the shortcomings in parental coping mechanisms that contribute to adolescent sexual issues. This research employs a qualitative methodology by interviewing two teenagers and three parents, as well as conducting library research. The findings highlight several areas where parental coping mechanisms may fail in addressing adolescent sexual issues: (a) monitoring of gadgets and activities, (b) parenting styles, (c) family communication, (d) religious education, and (e) insufficient family time. The need for effective parental coping strategies is crucial in providing proper sexual guidance to teenagers. The implications of this study can help parents become more effective in addressing adolescent sexuality issues and offer valuable input to the Social Welfare Department (JKM), National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing training, services, and guidance for the community.

**Keywords:** premarital sex, sexual education, adolescent, parenting style, parental coping

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Family Policy (Dasar Keluarga Negara) was introduced to improve family and community well-being, in line with the objective of realizing 'Keluarga Malaysia'. However, current challenges, such as moral decline, including premarital sex, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) issues, and pornography addiction among teenagers in Malaysia,

are becoming increasingly critical. For instance, a 2015 statistical report by the Malaysian Ministry of Health (KKM) recorded 13,831 cases of premarital pregnancies among individuals aged 10 to 19. One of the main contributing factors to adolescent sexual issues is ineffective parenting, which causes adolescents to lose confidence in their parents, particularly when it comes to discussing sexuality. Based on data from the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH), a total of 44,263 cases of adolescent pregnancy were recorded in the country over the past five years (Kawi, 2024). Of this number, 17,646 adolescents were unmarried at the time of pregnancy.

Sexuality remains a taboo subject in society, which further limits these discussions. There are several negative stigmas surrounding sexuality guidance, which perceive discussions on sexuality as taboo, shameful to talk about, culturally inappropriate, and potentially leading to embarrassing experiences. Sexuality is also often defined as a secret, a disgrace, a sin, and something forbidden, which becomes a barrier for mothers in providing sexuality guidance (Abd Manaf et al., 2013; Said, 2017). Therefore, the need for effective parenting is crucial in providing sexual guidance to adolescents.

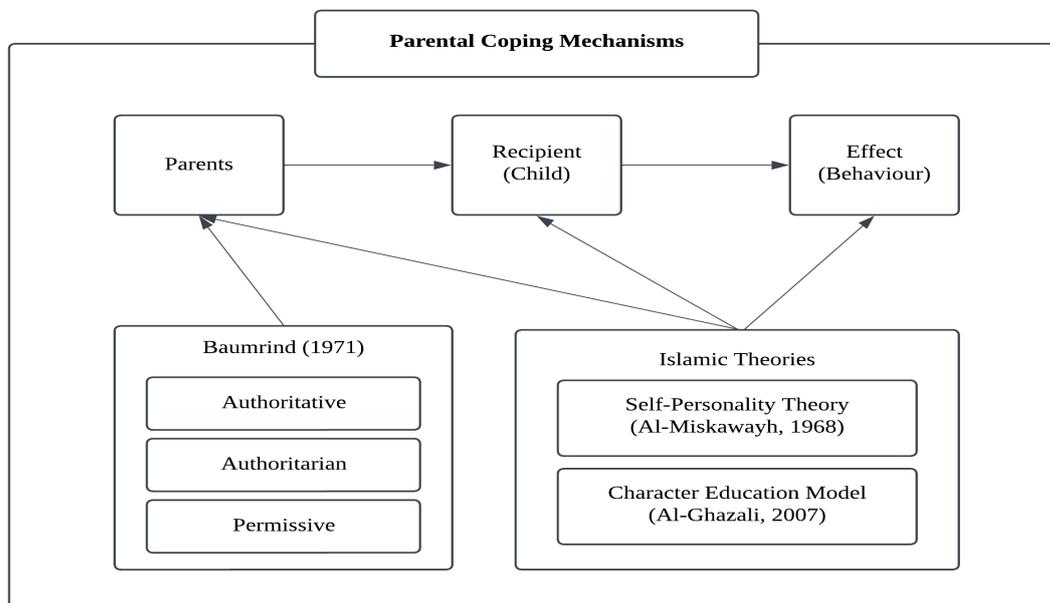
A study by the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Institute of Public Health involving teenagers aged 13 to 17 found that nearly 50 percent of those who had engaged in sexual relationships did so before the age of 14. According to this study, teenagers involved in immoral activities were influenced by the lack of parental supervision in maintaining social boundaries. Additionally, these teenagers did not perform prayers regularly and tended to act impulsively without considering the negative consequences (Abd Hamid et al., 2018). Meanwhile, a study by Talib et al. (2012); perceptions of sex education in Malaysian schools found that 90% of respondents agreed that sex education is not adequately taught in schools. Furthermore, respondents indicated that the informal information provided by most teachers was unclear, thereby failing to meet the objective of educating students on this issue. Therefore, this study aims to identify whether the failures in parental coping mechanisms contribute to teenage sexual issues.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study utilizes Baumrind's theory, pioneered by Diana Baumrind, who identified three main types of parenting styles and the behaviors resulting from each: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1971). According to Baumrind's theory, the parenting styles adopted by parents will have different impacts on teenagers. Parenting styles and education are crucial elements in the psychological, intellectual, and emotional development of adolescents (Baumrind, 1991).

In addition, the Islamic theory applied to parental coping mechanisms is based on character education models, which include upbringing, education, knowledge, personality, attitude, values, and environment. Al-Ghazali (2007) argues that childhood is the most critical stage for the formation and development of one's character. If a child is raised with proper upbringing, they will become accustomed to a good way of life, ultimately achieving happiness in this world and the hereafter. Similarly, Al-Miskawayh (1968) emphasizes that character is shaped through upbringing and the natural conditions in which an individual is

raised. This upbringing involves training, education, learning, and social interaction, while natural conditions refer to inherent temperament or attitudes. Therefore, these theories will guide the study of effective parental coping strategies in the context of providing adolescent sexuality guidance.



[Figure 1: Theoretical Framework would appear here]

## ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY ISSUES

The causes of premarital sex include watching pornography, lack of religious education, curiosity, peer influence, willingness to engage in sexual relationships, lack of knowledge about reproductive and sexual health, lack of parental attention, and sexual assault by siblings (Wan Sulaiman & Latif, 2014). Additionally, poor communication between parents and children contributes to deviant adolescent behaviours. Children lose trust in their parents and hesitate to share problems due to conflicts in communication (Aziz et al., 2019). Adolescents are more comfortable sharing their issues with friends and relieving stress through social activities. Adolescents believe that parents who take the time to communicate with their children foster a sense of love and protection (Kartikasari & Setiawati, 2020; Shahrudin et al., 2017).

According to the 2011 Malaysian Family Well-being Index, conducted every 10 years as part of the National Transformation Program 2010-2020, various modules and approaches have been implemented, such as the Reproductive and Social Health Education Module (PEERS) by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Self-Awareness Module by LPPKN. However, these initiatives have been less effective in practice, as evidenced by the increasing number of cases. A study by LPPKN on teenagers' knowledge about pregnancy prevention found that only 30 percent were aware of how to prevent premarital sex (Hasbullah, 2016). The study revealed that around 80 percent knew about condoms, 60 percent were aware of birth control pills, but only about 30 percent understood how to

prevent premarital sex. According to the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, between 2008 and 2010, there were 152,182 illegitimate births across Malaysia. The state of Sabah recorded the highest number of illegitimate births with 41,490 cases, followed by Selangor (18,983), Sarawak (17,570), Johor (16,298), and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (12,095) (Hasbullah, 2016).

## **EFFECTIVE PARENTING STRATEGIES IN ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

The phenomenon of premarital sexual activity has been increasing in recent years. Religious activities aimed at preventing sexual activity among adolescents have proven ineffective or serve only as minor protective factors, unable to prevent adolescents from engaging in sexual activities when their urges and desires become overwhelming. This suggests that religious factors are no longer as significant in the lives of today's younger generation (Muhammad et al., 2017). The factors contributing to moral decay and social issues among adolescents are often linked to family crises, which stem from parents failing to fulfil their trust, duties, and responsibilities (Masdin & Rathakrishnan, 2014; Wan Sulaiman & Latif, 2014).

The breakdown of the family unit exposes adolescents to peer influence, particularly in situations of peer acceptance and rejection. Quality communication between adolescents and their parents, as well as family conflicts, are associated with low self-esteem and poor psychological well-being among adolescents (Xiao et al., 2011). The effectiveness of parental communication with adolescents is closely related to the improvement of psychosocial traits, such as increased knowledge of sexual health, stronger interpersonal communication skills for rejecting sexual advances, and higher self-esteem among adolescents (Sutan & Mahat, 2017).

A study by Shahrudin et al. (2018) involving 130 unmarried teenage mothers in Peninsular Malaysia found a significant negative relationship between peer influence and sexual behavioral attitudes. This indicates that higher peer influence is associated with more negative attitudes toward sexual behaviours. Additionally, the study found a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and sexual behavioural attitudes, suggesting that adolescents with higher self-esteem tend to have more positive attitudes toward sexual behaviours, which helps them avoid premarital sexual activities.

In Islam, sexuality education is categorized as '*fardu kifayah*' (collective obligation) because parents bear the primary responsibility to ensure that their children receive comprehensive sexuality education (Abdullah et al., 2020). Parents, especially mothers, play a crucial role in guiding their children's development. The importance of mothers in child development lies in their central role within the family institution. Mothers are typically viewed as role models who can instill moral values and train children in good character (Faudzi et al., 2020).

According to Salleh and Yunus (2021), the method of raising children in Islam is believed to directly contribute to shaping children's character. Abdullah Nashih Ulwan views the process of raising children as a comprehensive responsibility, involving the roles of parents, educators, and the community, in developing children's potential across physical,

intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (Atabik & Burhanuddin, 2015; Ulwan, 1988). Based on Table 1, several parental coping strategies that are effective in addressing adolescent sexuality issues have been identified.

[Table 1: Effective Parenting Strategies would appear here]

Study Participants	The age of first involvement	Status	Living together during the incident
<i>Adolescents</i>			
RA/1	21	Student	Parents
RA/2	22	Student	Parents
<i>Parents</i>			
Study Participants	The age at which the child was first involved	Child's status	The child lived together during the incident
RIB/1	16	Student	Parents
RIB/2	17	Student	Parents
RIB/3	17	Student	Parents

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach by conducting interviews with two teenagers who have been involved in sexual activities and three parents who have children engaged in such behaviours. The participants are from various family backgrounds, providing diverse perspectives on parental coping strategies. Through content analysis of interview data and a comprehensive literature review, this study synthesizes findings to identify key factors influencing the ineffectiveness of parental responses in addressing adolescent sexual problems. The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent from all participants.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal several critical areas where parental coping mechanisms fail to adequately address adolescent sexual issues. These findings are organized thematically based on the key areas identified through the interview data and literature review.

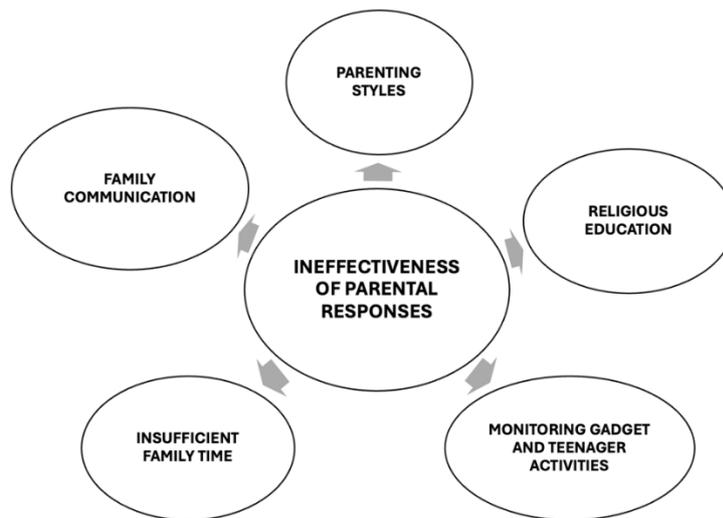


Figure 2: Ineffectiveness of Parental Responses on Addressing Adolescent Sexual Problems

### Monitoring of Gadgets and Activities

The study found that parental monitoring is crucial in addressing teenage sexuality issues. If parents fail to act, it can negatively impact teenagers. All respondents emphasized that parental supervision is essential to prevent teenagers from becoming involved in sexual issues. One teenager mentioned that the lack of parental supervision over gadgets and internet usage, particularly social media and pornography, contributed to their behaviour. As stated by RA 5:

"But, when I grew older, there was even less monitoring because maybe I was already older, right? So, in terms of the phone, it started with the phone—there was no monitoring" (RA/5/40).

Respondent RA/5 also admitted:

"Adolescents will stay awake until midnight like that. Because parents usually go to bed early (RA/5/372). So, they are okay with chatting."

This statement indicates that adolescents engage in watching pornography and inappropriate activities on social media late at night while their parents and other family members are asleep. Therefore, parents need to monitor and ensure the proper use of gadgets and the internet. Monitoring should not only cover gadgets and internet use but also the daily activities of their teenage children. According to one respondent, the mother's busy daily routine caused her to overlook her children's activities:

"I don't really monitor her daily activities because of work, you know" (RIB/2/32).

Additionally, placing too much trust in their children is another contributing factor. One respondent admitted:

"That was my mistake. Too trusting. That friend of hers" (RIB/4/217).

Parents who acknowledge their mistake of trusting their child too much may find that their child becomes uncontrollable in friendships, crossing boundaries. The parents' statement highlights the importance of knowing who their children's friends are to prevent inappropriate associations and boundary-crossing behaviours. This is supported by Atabik & Burhanuddin (2015), who state that in educating children, there must be an element of monitoring and control, including overseeing their activities outside the home and their use of gadgets and the internet.

### **Parenting Styles**

Parenting style is one of the factors that influence children to become involved in premarital sex. The findings indicate that adolescents involved in premarital sex often come from families where parents use violence against their children. One respondent, who admitted to using violence against their child, stated:

"Back then, during my time, even with my husband, yeah, you know, young blood, made a few mistakes, ended up hitting the child, so the child became a victim" (RIB/3/335).

The respondent added:

"My husband didn't really hit much. It was me. I was the one who liked to hit" (RIB/3/337).

As a result of this violence, children may rebel and seek attention from outsiders. Furthermore, the role of the family is crucial; all family members need to fulfil their roles for the family to function effectively.

### **Family Communication**

Communication is fundamental within a family. Poor communication between parents and children is a factor that influences children's involvement in premarital sex. One respondent, a teenage father, stated that his failure to inquire about his daughter's menstrual cycle led to him not knowing she was pregnant out of wedlock until the day she gave birth. The respondent explained that the lack of communication regarding sexuality issues contributed to his daughter's involvement in premarital sex:

“I stopped asking about whether she had her period or not because she was grown up, and I thought my wife could handle it. It turns out I failed in 2019, around that time” (RIB/2/28).

He added,

“Even up until she was about to give birth, I still didn’t know” (RIB/2/56).

### **Insufficient of Family Time**

In addition to a lack of communication between parents and children, insufficient family time also contributes to parental responsiveness failures. As one respondent stated:

"I'm not trying to criticize, but I ask my children: ‘Dad? Hmm, Dad?’ I wake up, and Dad’s not there. Dad’s gone. No family time activities, no communication with the children" (RIB/4/716).

Family time is crucial, and according to the respondent, the lack of it led to the family being neglected. The respondent further explained:

"My ex-husband, he was the type that just worked. Sometimes, even on his days off, he would take overtime or something. And with the kids, he wasn’t really that involved. Rarely" (RIB/3/553).

### **Religious Education**

Religion serves as a central pillar in the family. Parents who neglect religious education can significantly influence their children’s upbringing. This was acknowledged by a respondent, a father, who stated:

“I have never been an imam in my own home because I am the mosque's muezzin” (RIB/2/258-260).

The respondent further expressed:

“Firstly, parents must emphasize matters of religion from a young age” (RA/4/352).

This statement highlights the importance of instilling religious education in children from an early age, as this is when they are most easily shaped. These findings are supported by studies (Atabik & Burhanuddin, 2015; Salleh & Yunus, 2021; Sumari et al., 2019), which suggest that parents must set a good example and that religious upbringing and education should begin at home.

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## **IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this study have several important implications for practice and policy. First, there is a clear need for parent education programs that specifically address sexuality education and digital literacy. Organizations such as JKM, LPPKN, and relevant NGOs should develop comprehensive training modules that help parents overcome cultural taboos and build communication skills necessary for discussing sensitive topics with their children.

Second, schools should enhance their sexuality education curriculum to complement parental efforts. The current PEERS module, while valuable, requires strengthening to provide adolescents with comprehensive, age-appropriate information about sexual health and relationships. Teacher training programs should also be improved to ensure educators can deliver this content effectively and comfortably.

Third, community-based interventions should be developed to support families in creating environments conducive to open communication about sexuality. Religious leaders, counsellors, and community workers can play vital roles in normalizing these conversations within the cultural context while maintaining alignment with religious and cultural values.

Finally, policy makers should consider workplace policies that support work-life balance, enabling parents to spend quality time with their children. This could include flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies that recognize the importance of parental involvement in child development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has identified several critical areas where parental coping mechanisms fail to effectively address adolescent sexual issues in Malaysia. The ineffectiveness stems from inadequate monitoring of digital activities, inappropriate parenting styles, poor family communication, over-reliance on religious education without practical sexuality guidance,

and insufficient family time due to modern life demands. These findings underscore the complexity of addressing adolescent sexuality in contemporary Malaysian society, where cultural taboos, technological advancement, and changing family dynamics intersect.

The research highlights the urgent need for comprehensive, culturally sensitive interventions that equip parents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to guide their children through adolescent development. Effective parental coping strategies must integrate traditional values with contemporary realities, balancing religious teachings with practical sexuality education. By addressing these identified gaps, stakeholders can develop more effective programs to support parents and ultimately reduce adolescent sexual problems in Malaysia.

Future research should explore the development and evaluation of culturally adapted parent education programs and examine the long-term effectiveness of various intervention strategies. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural and religious contexts within Malaysia could provide valuable insights into tailoring approaches for diverse communities.

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