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**PREMARITAL SEX AMONG SCHOOL-GOING MALAY
FEMALE TEENS: A CASE STUDY IN SELANGOR**

BY

SALMI AHMAD SUDAN

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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FEMALE TEENS: A CASE STUDY IN SELANGOR

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of school-going Malay teens are engaging in premarital sex despite strong opposition of both the Malay culture and religion (Islam) against sex outside marriage. The main purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Malay female teens on the reasons for their involvement in premarital sex. The study also examined the experiences of the teens with religion, particularly their religious upbringing, their attitudes toward religion and the role of religion in their involvement with premarital sex. Using the case study qualitative research method, two occasions of in-depth interviews were conducted with five Malay female teens who have been pregnant while attending school as a result of their engagement in consensual premarital sex. Results showed that there were several interrelated reasons for the involvement of Malay female teens in premarital sex which are teens own attitudes and personal characteristics (seeking worldly enjoyment, curiosity, rebellious, and strong desire for sex), parenting style and family characteristics (harsh parenting, lack of parental warmth and affection, poor parent-child communication, and lack of parental supervision), peer influence, romantic relationship, romantic partner influence, pornography, and lack of religious conviction. Clearly seen in the teens' accounts of the reasons for their involvement in premarital sex are the combination factors of environmental and the teens' own attitudes and personal characteristics. The findings also revealed that the teens' parents laid high emphasis on religion in their homes, the participants received good religious education, and they possess reasonable religious knowledge particularly on the commands and the prohibitions of the religion. Nevertheless despite all these, the teens exhibited poor attitudes toward religion whereby they did not obey much of the religious teachings and rarely performed the obligatory prayer though stressed by their parents. Hence, as far as religion is concerned the study's findings demonstrated that religion was not an integral part of the lives of the Malay female teens who had had involved in premarital sex whereby religious matters did not rule their lives significantly. Based on the findings of the study, Islamic measures in dealing with teens' premarital sex were proposed.

ملخص البحث

تزايد أعداد المراهقين الملا؛ المتمدرسين المنحدرين في ممارسة الجنس قبل الزواج رغم عارضة الشديدة كل من ثقافة الملاية والدين الإسلامي لجنس خارج إطار الزواج. والغرض الرئيس من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف تجارب المراهقات الملايات أسباب مشاركة في ممارسة الجنس قبل الزواج. كما تبحث الدراسة أيضاً تجارب المراهقات مع الدين، وخاصة التنشئة الدينية، مواقف تجاه الدين أثر في تجنبهن تورط في الجنس قبل الزواج من عدمه. باستخدام المنهج النوعي لدراسة هذا الظاهر، أجريت خلال مناسبتين مقابلات تم فيها حوار مع خمس مراهقات ملايات أثناء تدرسهن نتيجة مشاركة في ممارسة الجنس بالتراضي قبل الزواج. وأظهرت النتائج أن هناك عدة أسباب متشابكة لإشراك المراهقات الملايات في ممارسة الجنس قبل الزواج والتي هي: المواقف الخاصة والخصائص الشخصية للمراهقات السعي نحو المتع الديوية، الفضول، الشخصية المتمر، رغبة قوية لممارسة الجنس، وأسلوب تربية وخصائص الأسرة الوالدية القاسية، الافتقار إلى دفء وعطف الوالدين، ضعف التواصل بين الوالدين والطفل، الافتقار إلى إشراف الوالدين، تأثير الأقران، علاقات رومانسية، تأثير شريك الرومانس، المواد الإباحية، وعدم وجود قناعة دينية. يرى بوضوح من خلال الأسباب المذكورة لتورط في ممارسة الجنس قبل الزواج أنها مزيج من عوامل عدة المواقف الخاصة والصفات الشخصية لهؤلاء المراهقات. وكشفت النتائج أيضاً أن الوالدين كان لهما اهتمام كبير الدين في بيوتهم، كما أن المشاركات تعليمياً جيداً، وأن لديهن معرفة دينية قبول ولا سيما ما يتعلق بالأوامر والنواهي الدينية. مع ذلك ورغم كل هذا، أظهرت المراهقات تجارباً ضعيفاً تجاه الدين حيث أن لم يضعن كثير من التعاليم الدينية، ونادراً ما كن يؤمن الفريضة رغم تأكيد والدين. ومن هنا، بقدر تعلق الدين بهذا الأمر، أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الدين لم يكن جزءاً لا يتجزأ من حياة المراهقات الملايات المتورطات في ممارسة الجنس قبل الزواج. حيث أن التعاليم الدينية لم يكن لها وقع على حين بشكل كبير. واستناداً إلى نتائج الدراسة، تم اقتراح تدابير إسلامية لتعامل مع ممارسة المراهقين لجنس قبل الزواج.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis of Salmi Ahmad Sudan has been approved by the following:

Nik Ahmad Hisham b. Ismail
Main Supervisor

Ismail b. Sheikh Ahmad
Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Radwan Jamal Yousef Elatrash
Chairperson

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the finding of my own investigations, except where otherwise states. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Salmi Ahmad Sudan

Signature

Date

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FEMALE TEENS: A CASE STUDY IN SELANGOR**

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Affirmed by Salmi Ahmad Sudan

.....
Signature

.....
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To my beloved parents...

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The growing numbers of school-going teens engaging in premarital sex has caused great concern in Malaysia during recent years particularly because of its implications with problems for the individuals, families and society. One of the major concerns of teens' premarital sex is the increasing incidence of unwanted out of wedlock pregnancies which in some cases resulted in baby abandonment and killing. A government hospital in Selangor reported that about 14% of the 12,000 babies delivered annually at the hospital were by teenage mothers with many of them unwed (The Star, 22nd September, 2012). It was also revealed that in most cases the girls became pregnant because they were in relationships and had consensual premarital sex. If in 2009, the Welfare Department of the Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development reported handling 131 cases of teenage pregnancies, in 2010, only by April, the department has already received 111 pregnant girls at its rehabilitation centre for out of wedlock pregnant adolescents (The Star, June 26, 2010). According to police reports, 517 babies had been abandoned between 2005 and January 2011 and most of the cases involved teenage mothers (The Sun, 2nd November 2011).

There is a growing trend that Malaysian teens are becoming more open in matters pertaining to sexuality, following the trend of the western countries (Mudassir et al., 2010, Abdullah, 2010, Low, 2009, Lee et al, 2006). In the western countries, there is much freedom for teenagers to decide for themselves regarding sexuality including when they will engage in sexual activity. Majority of the western people

regard out of wedlock teens sex as common and a part of the growing up process. A survey conducted in the United States in 2002 in which 7,643 women and 4,928 men in the age range of 15 years to 44 years were interviewed, showed that by age 20, 77% of respondents had had sex, 75% had had premarital sex, and 12% had married (Finer, 2007). The results thus indicate that premarital sex is highly normative behavior in the United States. Besides, as a matter of fact, the largest changes in adolescent premarital sexual intercourse have occurred for females, especially among the Whites, who as a group showed about a 50% increase in premarital sexual intercourse between 1971 and 1982 (Dusek, 1996).

The present situation in the western nations is the gradual outcome of the “sexual revolution” that took place in the 1960’s. The ‘sexual revolution’ of the 1960s and 1970s, which was characterized by more permissive attitudes towards sexuality and greater concern for personal fulfillment, brought with it a lessening of the prohibition on premarital sex (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006, p. 108). This development has also brought changes in social norms that have contributed to a more permissible attitude in adolescents’ sexuality expression. There seems to be a new trend emerging in the 1970s in sexual expression which is called “permissiveness with affection”. According to this new norm, premarital sex is viewed as permissible for both men and women if it occurs in the context of a stable, committed, and loving relationship (Feldman, 2008, p. 283). Even in countries where premarital sex has long been forbidden and discussions about sexuality taboo, there have been significant changes in the past few decades (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). The most observable change is premarital sex among adolescents is increasing in numbers in these countries.

Nevertheless there are certain quarters of people in the west particularly religious groups as well as the moralists that view sex outside marriage is wrong. As

the moralists argued: “sexual passion is one of the most powerful and disruptive forces we even encounter, one capable of inducing irrationality and self-delusion on an epic scale; and that it takes great effort, by individuals and societies, to channel anarchic lusts into civilized patterns of living” (Immel, 2002, p. 47). Those who support the moralists’ ideation also viewed that the selfish sexual gratification has damaged American culture by neglecting the importance of chastity, lasting commitments, respect, and trust (Williams, 2000). These people regard sexual liberation that propagates “sex without commitment” as destructive especially to a woman’s life; it has jeopardized everything that gives a woman confidence in her sexual feelings: love, commitment, marriage, and the family. Studies conducted in the United States have supported this view when they found that majority of women who involved in a non-committed sexual intercourse felt regret, ambivalent and/or distress (Williams, 2000, Moore & Rosenthal, 2006)

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Although there is not much reliable data on premarital sex of school-age adolescents in Malaysia, especially data by ethnic group, there are a few data from several studies on adolescents’ premarital sex which demonstrate that Malaysian is experiencing a growing incidence of premarital sex among its school-age population, as well as increasing number of students having their sexual debut at a younger age. In a cross-sectional study on students’ sexual behavior and their awareness on sexually transmitted infections (STIs) carried out in 2010 in which 1139 students aged between 15 to 20 years (Form Four to Form Six) took part showed that approximately 12.6% of the participants claimed to have sexual experience of which 75.7% had their sexual

debut at 15-19 years and 38.2% were having more than 3 partners (Mudassir et al., 2010).

In another study on premarital sexual intercourse among young adolescents in Malaysia in 2005, in which 4,500 secondary school students aged 12 to 19 years were involved, it was found that 5.4 percent of the total sample reported to have had sexual intercourse, with the mean age at first sexual intercourse was 15 years (Lee et al., 2006). What is interesting is that some 17.8% of the respondents reported they had been pregnant or had made his partner pregnant. Since sexual intercourse is the antecedent of pregnancy, basing on the findings of this study, we can conclude that the percentage of the participants who had engaged in sexual intercourse is far higher than the reported 5.4 percent. Another similar interesting finding is found in the National Study on Reproductive Health and Sexuality 1994/1995 carried out by the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB). In the study, a survey among secondary school students demonstrated that although only 2.4% admitted to have had sex, 20.7% of the respondents said they know of friends who have had premarital sex, 21.2% know of friends who have had illegitimate pregnancies and 10% have friends who have undergone abortions (Low, 2009).

A study by Zulkifli SN et al. (1995) exhibited that 9% of the 1181 unmarried participants, aged 15-21 years, have had sexual intercourse. Among the 521 adolescents who had experienced dating, 20% have experienced sexual intercourse, 44% have kissed and necked, and 35% have experienced petting, while only 24% have had no physical intimacies. These results thus suggest that there are significant numbers of school-aged students engaging in premarital sex. Low (2009) suggests the wide variance among several studies on adolescents' premarital sex is because of the low level of reliability in getting the accurate responses since this subject matter is

also influenced by social and cultural sensitivity. Sex is still a very much taboo subject in Malaysian society; people rarely discuss sex publicly, for that matter even privately (Wong et al., 2008, Nurullah et al., 2009)). Taking into account that it is not the norms of the Malaysian cultures to talk about sexual matters, we can expect that the figures on adolescents premarital sex found in the above studies are way below the actual numbers. For instance 65% of the participants in the study by A Maha et al. (2010) did not think sex should be discussed in depth, and they did not speak to parents, teachers, religious teachers, counselors, relatives, doctors or nurses, but speak only to friends regarding sex.

With regard to the involvement of Malay school-age adolescents in sexual activities, a study in 2010 conducted by Universiti Putra Malaysia showed the prevalence of Malay school students' engagement in sexual activities. Out of the 400 Malay respondents aged 13 to 25 years (majority were Form One to Form Five students) that the study employed, more than 300 admitted to having had sex, with 85% stating that they did not regret their actions and found sex very enjoyable (The Sunday Star, July 11th 2010). Given that sexual intercourse is the antecedent of pregnancy, listening to the experiences of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that run shelter homes for unwed Malay pregnant ladies gives us further assertion that the occurrence of premarital sex among Malay young adolescents is on the rise. Founder of one of the homes reported that it deals with averagely 191 out of wedlock babies a year or 16 babies a month. (Harian Metro, 18th October, 2009). What is more worrying according to the founder is that "when the number of cases keeps increasing, the age of the pregnant girls is decreasing, some as young as fifteen years".

In the researcher's own experience interacting with school counselors, teachers, school administrators and school students over the last one decade, she have found that the involvement of Malay students in premarital sexual activity is increasing, much without the knowledge of their parents. In addition, many of the counseling interns that the researcher supervises at the government secondary schools in the past three years encounter with cases of Malay students who involve in sexual activities, including sexual intercourse. The problems that the students shared with regard to their involvement in sexual activities ranging from feeling of regret, feeling guilty and dirty, feeling stupid, fearing for God's punishment, and feeling sorry for their parents and families. Some also disclosed their problem of not being able to control their sexual urges, and they want help to refrain themselves from continuously engaging in sexual activities. Nevertheless there were few who perceived their involvement in sexual activities as "no big deal"; normally this group of students belongs to the peer groups who are also, as they informed, engaged in sexual activity.

In Malaysia, the Malay population is defined by Article 160 of the Malaysian Constitution as someone born to a Malaysian citizen who professes to be a Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, and adheres to Malay customs (Malaysian Constitution cited in Kling, 1995). Thus, the Malays in Malaysia profess Islam as their religion. Both the religion and the culture of the Malays oppose premarital sex. As far as the Malay culture is concerned, sex before marriage is considered as a disgraceful immoral act that brings dishonor to the family. It is even worse if Malay girls become pregnant as a result of premarital sex; it is common for the families to hide the pregnancy due to embarrassment and humiliation, or in some cases disown their daughters who they regard have tarnished the honor of the family.

Islam recognizes the sexual needs of human for the purpose of both procreation and pleasure. Therefore, the fulfillment of sexual needs in Islam must be made in a responsible manner that is within the lawful framework of marriage. Islam is against the concept of free sex and it also prohibits sex out of marriage or adultery (or *zina* in the Quranic term) because of the disastrous consequences it will bring to human lives which include destroying the family institution, opening the door to unrestricted fulfillment of lusts and self gratifications, the spread of venereal diseases, the problems of unwanted pregnancy and killing of fetus through abortion. Thus, those who committed *zina* are committing one of the greatest sins in Islam. The Holy Qur'an says:

“And those who do not invoke with Allah another deity or kill the soul which Allah has forbidden [to be killed], except by right, and do not commit unlawful sexual intercourse. And whoever should do that will meet a penalty” (Qur'an, 25: 28).

With both the Malay culture and religion strongly oppose premarital sex one may wonder why there is a rising trend in the involvement of Malay teens particularly Malay girls in premarital sex. What are the causes of this increasing trend? Why are the Malay teens especially the girls seem to increasingly uplifting the religious and cultural restrictions imposed upon them concerning close mingling with the opposite sex? Is religion losing its significance in the lives of the Malays particularly the youngsters as seen in a more permissive attitude of Malay adolescents toward premarital sexual relationships? These are the issues that this study examined with the aim to shed light to those who intended to deal with the phenomenon of premarital sex among Malay Muslim teens particularly the Malay girls.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Premarital sex among the Malay school-age girls is detrimental to the well being of the affected youngsters, the society, and the future generation. It is against the harmonious societal and family life recognized by Islam as it ruins the family and persons' religiosity, dignity, honor and genealogy. It opens door to massive social problems such as the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted out of wedlock pregnancy, abortion, killing of newborns, and baby abandonment. With these disastrous consequences of premarital sex and unregulated sexual practices, Islam does not only prohibit *zina*, it also forbids all the roads, networks, mechanisms and attitudes which lead to this great sin, when Allah says:

“Nor come nigh to adultery: For it is an indecent (deed), and an evil way” (Al-Quran, 17:32).

Besides from the growing problem of baby abandonment among teenage mothers as previously mentioned, some teens resort to illegal abortion to terminate their unwanted pregnancy resulted from out of wedlock sexual intercourse. Even though there is no concrete data on teen abortion in Malaysia, qualitative studies have indicated that pregnant adolescents are familiar with abortion, with places they cited for abortion included clinics and sites of practice of traditional healers such as the *bomoh* or the Chinese *sinseh*, and among the abortifacients they had cited were Panadol, malaria pills and insertion of objects (Lee, 1999). These unsafe and dismal methods of abortion are most likely to cause severe health consequences or even death among the adolescents.

In addition, unwanted teen pregnancy resulted from premarital sex is associated with a variety of adverse living conditions. Pregnant teens were more likely to be poor, undereducated, single, and had a higher likelihood of never receiving

prenatal care (East & Felice, 1996 cited in Borkowski, p. 40). In Malaysia, even though there is no rules prohibiting pregnant students from attending school, in the knowledge of the researcher, there is no case thus far of pregnant students continue schooling during the term of their pregnancy. Families with unwed pregnant adolescents may not want the adolescents to continue school because of embarrassment, and on the other hand, it is not likely for schools to accept pregnant students as it may tarnish the reputation of the school as well as it may set bad example for other students.

Another injurious effect of teen premarital sex is the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases especially HIV and AIDS, Chlamydia, genital herpes, Gonorrhea and syphilis among the teens. Among all, AIDS is the deadliest infection, and is one of the leading causes of death among young people. AIDS which is spread primarily through sexual contact has no cure, and although it can be treatable with a “cocktail” of powerful drugs, the death toll from the disease is significant (Feldman, 2008, p. 300). In Malaysia, cases of HIV and AIDS have risen significantly since 1986. The statistics in 2004 demonstrated that nearly 65,000 Malaysians had been diagnosed with HIV or AIDS, with an average of 19 new cases reported every day. It is estimated that more than half of all new HIV infections occur before the age of 25, especially the age group of 15-19, and most are acquired through unprotected sexual intercourse (UNAIDS Report on the Global Aids Epidemic, 2012). Short of abstinence, there is no certain way to avoid AIDS (Feldman, 2008, p. 300)

Premarital sex also brings many negative emotional and psychological effects to the adolescents, especially the females. Many young girls who have engaged in premarital sex express feelings of guilt, embarrassment, distrust, resentment, lack of respect, regret, depress and stress (Kirby 1999, Corcoran, 2000, cited in Rink 2006). It

was also found in a study that adolescents who experienced early, middle, and late sexual debut exhibited distinct developmental trajectories, with those who initiated sex early showing a longitudinal pattern of poorer adjustment in multiple domains, including academic achievement, family relationships, and misconduct (Berzonsky & Blackwell, 2006, pg 380). A survey in the United States investigating on the emotional state of adolescents who have engaged in premarital sex found that sex leaves adolescents, especially girls, with high levels of stress and depression (Notare & McCord, 2012).

Hence, it is the responsibility of all Muslims to curb premarital sex or *zina*. Every concerned Muslim in Malaysia should play their role in their own capacity and ability to resolve this problem so that this social disease will not further spread until it becomes untreatable. The phenomenon of premarital sex is a large issue affecting the Muslims in Malaysia. The increasing permissiveness towards premarital sex among the young Malay girls is worrying. If this trend continues, it is likely that Malaysia will be in the same situation as the western societies in which adolescent sexuality is rather free and open, and there is little or no restrictions attached to sexuality. We need to rectify this problem by first looking at the root of the problem that is to find the reasons of the involvement of Malay adolescents in premarital sex, and secondly to look into the role of religion in the lives of these adolescents who had engaged in premarital sex. Findings of this study may enlighten concerned parties in their effort to look for effective solutions to the problem of premarital sex among the Malay adolescents particularly the Malay girls.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the reasons for the engagement of school-age Malay female adolescents' in premarital sex from the perspective of the adolescents themselves who had had experienced consensual premarital sex. It is fundamental to identify the possible causes of Malay adolescents' engagement in premarital sex to enable concerned parties particularly counselors and social health workers to formulate and implement appropriate measures to tackle the problem of

premarital sex among female Malay adolescents effectively. The identification of the factors that lead to Malay teens engaged in premarital sex has important implications for programs designed to prevent and remedy premarital sex among the Malay teens. The study also seeks to examine the religious lives of the Malay adolescents with the areas in focus are the adolescents' religious upbringing, their attitudes toward religion as well as the role of religion in their sexual behavior. Finally, based on the results of this study, the study also aims at discussing the Islamic approach in dealing with teens' premarital sex. It particularly aims at enlightening those who intended to deal with the phenomenon of premarital sex among the Malay Muslims teens which include parents, educators, counselors, and policy makers using the approach of the Islamic religion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The first research question for this study investigates the reasons for the Malay female teens' involvement in premarital sex:

1. What do the female Malay teens say about the reasons for their involvement in premarital sex?

The second research question seeks to examine the religious lives of the Malay female teens who had engaged in premarital sex:

2. What do the female Malay teens say about the role of religion in their involvement in premarital sex?
 - a. What do the female Malay teens say about their religious upbringing?
 - b. What do the female Malay teens say about their attitudes toward religion?