

Chastity and Curiosity: Attitudes and Behaviour of Young People in Medan Regarding Virginity and Premarital Sex

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Abstract: This study focuses on single young Indonesian's attitude and behaviour regarding virginity and premarital sex. The transition from a traditional to a modern society has raised concern about changes in Indonesian young people's lives and values, in particular regarding premarital sex. Data used in this paper are based on the survey among 875 single young people age 15-24, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted over a period of seven months (July 1997-January 1998) in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Results suggest that young people in Medan are increasingly tolerant of premarital sex. Although for most of them a woman's virginity is a great concern, it is no longer seen as the most important factor in choosing a future spouse. The demise of parental arrangement of marriage and the growing opportunity to know the future spouse long before marriage mean that the potential wife's personality is now of more significance than her virginity. Losing virginity does not necessarily losing respectability. Of 875 unmarried young people being studied, nine percent of women and 27 percent of men reported having had sex; these figures doubled for those who approved of premarital sex.

Keywords: virginity; premarital sex; young people; sexual behaviour; adolescent reproductive health; Medan; Indonesia.

1. Introduction and Objectives

Young people today confront demands and expectations as well as risks and temptations that seem more numerous and more complex than any facing youth in their parents' generation. They often face a dilemma between conservative norms, which value chastity highly, and modern norms, which are more tolerant toward premarital sex. By nature, they are eager to experiment with new things, especially related to 'adult lives', including premarital sex and pornography in the belief that these will take them effectively into adulthood. Traditional expectation that young people remain virgins until marriage is incompatible with the

realities of today's lives. At the same time, because of socio-cultural and political concerns, unmarried young people in many developing countries, including Indonesia, receive limited parental guidance as well as community, and government support.

The provision of access to and information about sexual and reproductive health services for young single people remains controversial in Indonesia. The program of Action of the 1994 International Conference for Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and the Platform of the Fourth International Conference on women in Beijing suggested that governments should 'protect and promote the rights of adolescent to sexual and reproductive health information and services they need' (United Nations 1995). Nevertheless these suggestions meet many obstacles to implementation. Many governments still regard young people as non-sexual beings who do not need information and services regarding reproductive health. According to the Indonesian Family Welfare Law (UU No. 10/1992), family planning programs are only available to married couples or families. Sex education is rarely found in the school curricula. Only few private schools, mostly Catholic school in big cities, provide sex education for their students. Many studies have shown that young people's risky sexual behaviour is associated with ignorance of reproduction, contraception and disease prevention as well as lack of access to family planning services (Gorgen et al. 1993; Amazigo et al. 1997; Hiller et al. 1998; Zabin and Kiragu 1998).

This study aims to examine young people's attitudes and experiences related to premarital sex and virginity. These include the meaning of virginity to young people, factors affecting young people's attitudes and behaviour regarding premarital sex and gender differences related to young people's views on virginity and premarital sex.

2. Methodology

Considering the type of research questions and the study objective, this study utilised both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Information obtained from each approach are complementing to one another. Employing a relatively large-scale survey, the quantitative approach provides numerical results that can be used to see the patterns of the issues being studied. On the other hand, the qualitative approach using selective informants allows the researcher to probe into sensitive issues as well as attitudes, values and beliefs (Scrimshaw 1991) and the collection of information on issues that are difficult to obtain from a quantitative survey.

The main quantitative data in this study are mainly derived from Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Study, conducted from July 1997 to January 1998. A total of 875 unmarried young people aged 15-24 years completed self-administered questionnaires. Respondents were chosen purposively, including those who were at school and those who were out of school. The school respondents were high school and university students; the out-of-school respondents were those who were working, including young people who were either working in the streets or unemployed. Data obtained from the survey were analysed through descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentage distribution and bivariate analyses including cross-tabulations and chi-square test.

The qualitative data collection involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). In-depth interviews elicit information that people find too private to talk about in a group (Bernard 1988), while focus groups provide a suitable approach for getting people to express a range of different opinion about an issue (Murphy *et al.* 1992). For my study, the combination of both methods is particularly good because it allows me to obtain information on group norms as well as information about the more private aspects of sexual and reproductive health.

A total of 48 in-depth interviews were conducted involving married and unmarried young people, parents, experts, representatives of NGOs interested in adolescent problems, and policy makers. The FGDs were grouped with respect to gender, activity and marital status. Eight FGDs were conducted: two groups of high school students (males and females), two groups of university students (males and females), one group of working youth (mixed males and females), one group of street youth (males) and two groups of married young people (males and females). Both in-depth interviews and focus groups were guided by an interview guide, which was developed during the fieldwork. The respondents for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were selected in various ways: mostly from recommendations of other respondents, research assistants, local researchers, NGOs and other people that I met during my field work.

3. The Setting

Medan is the capital city of North Sumatra province of Indonesia. With a population of 1.9 million in 2000 (CBS 2001), it is the largest city outside Java, or the third largest city in Indonesia after Jakarta and Surabaya. As the capital city and the centre of development of North Sumatra, Medan is the most developed region and has much better facilities compared to other regions of North Sumatra. Besides schools and

universities, this city also has several facilities for youth entertainment such as movies, discotheques, nightclubs, shopping malls, sport centres, parks and other interesting places. Most young people in North Sumatra come to Medan for study or work. In addition, Medan is located close to Singapore and Malaysia and has an international airport as well as a harbour. As a consequence many illegal goods that are prohibited in Indonesia, such as drugs, alcohol, pornographic books and pornographic videocassettes and VCDs (video compact disks) can be found easily in Medan.

In terms of socio-economic and cultural characteristics, compared to other regions, people of Medan are much more heterogeneous. There is no dominant culture in Medan. As a heterogeneous society, the daily life of Medan's people is influenced by a mixed culture of at least four ethnic groups, Malay, Batak, Javanese and Chinese. For some young people it might threaten their traditional culture and make them critical of their parents' norms and values, at the same time strengthening their link to their ethnic societies. In Medan many youth organisations are based on ethnic identity or place of origin.

Given the socio-economic and cultural background of Medan's people, the characteristics of respondents in this study are diverse (Table 1). More than 60 percent of respondents are adolescents aged 15-19, the proportion of males and females is about equal, and more than a half (57 percent) are Moslems. The respondents come from various ethnic groups and they represent the main ethnic groups of Medan (Javanese, Batak, Malay and Chinese). Most of the respondents had completed secondary school and high school and 76 percent of them were still students. Of those who are working, 37 percent are working in informal sector such as street vendors, shoe shiners, civil security (*preman, tukang parkir*) and others.

Table 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS IN THE SURVEY

	Number of respondents N=875	Percentage
Age		
15-17	362	41
18-20	232	27
21-24	281	32
Sex		
Male	463	53
Female	412	47

(Continued)

(Continuation - Table 1)

	Number of respondents N=875	Percentage
Religion		
Moslem	502	57
Protestant	210	24
Catholic	57	6
Hindu	4	1
Buddhist	102	12
Ethnicity		
Javanese	168	19
Toba Batak	166	19
Mandailing Batak	114	13
Karo and other Bataks	88	10
Malay	109	13
Chinese	150	17
Others	88	9
Education completed		
Primary school	19	2
Junior high school	471	54
Senior high School	355	41
Academy/university	30	3
Respondents' main activity		
Study	666	76
Working	153	18
Unemployed	56	6
Level of students' education	N=666	
High school	410	62
Academy/university	256	38
Occupations of respondents	N=153	
Labourer	34	22
Public service	4	3
Employee	58	37
Trader	10	7
Street vendors, shoe shiners	26	17
<i>Premen</i> ('informal security')	3	2
Informal parking person, becak driver, city bus driver, city bus co-driver (<i>kenek</i>)	18	12
Odd jobs (<i>mocok-mocok</i>)	2	1
Living arrangement		
With parents	569	65
With either mother or father	67	8
With sibling	60	7
Other relative	43	5
Boarding house	136	16
Parental marital status		
Parents 'complete'	737	85
Father dead	97	11
Mother dead	19	2
Parent dead	3	0
Parents divorced	19	2

Source: Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey, 1997-1998.

4. Chastity: maintaining purity

Previous studies have indicated that socio-cultural factors play a major role in how young people express sexual arousal (Serbin and Sprafkin 1987; Brooks-Gunn and Reiter 1990). One indicator of the strength of societal control on sexual behaviour, especially for women is virginity (Carael 1995; Silva *et al* 2000). Traditionally the concept of virginity is an ethical concept arising from the assumption that a woman's hymen possesses a quality of peculiar high moral value (Ploss *et al.* 1935). The intact hymen is commonly believed to be the sole and definitive mark of virginity. It is considered as a symbol of purity, family honour and also fertility (Ploss *et al.* 1935; Schneider 1971; Schlegel 1991; Renne 1993). Women are expected to be 'pure' and remain chaste until marriage; and an intact hymen is evidence of this. Men in contrast are commonly given more sexual freedom than women (Hassan 1980; Silva *et al.* 2000) and are not burdened by questions of honour and purity if they have any physical evidence of sexual experience.

In Indonesia, the high value of virginity was introduced after the coming of modern religions such as Islam and Christianity (Nemecek 1958; Reid 1988; Utomo 1997). Reid (1988) noted that before Islam was introduced to the Malays and the Javanese, premarital sex was regarded indulgently and virginity at marriage was not expected. Nemecek (1958) wrote that, about the year 1840, premarital sexual activity for both sexes among the Batak in North Sumatra was generally accepted. Reviewing the literature and historical studies on sexual behaviour in Indonesia, Utomo (1997) reported that sexuality was open among many societies, then it changed after the coming of Islam and the influence of Dutch-formulated marriage regulations.

Since the introduction of Islam and Christianity, most Indonesian societies have come to value virginity highly. Studies of the Malays and Chinese in the early 1900s indicated that some Malay and Chinese families practised a virginity test at the time of marriage consummation (Alwi 1962; Yusuf 1966; Hassan 1980). Virginity was very important in a marriage. Failure to prove virginity (usually by the traces of blood on the marital bed) could cause the break up of the marriage. Vergouwen's (1964) study in Samosir Island in the 1930s found that the Toba Batak girls were very sensitive about their virginity status. He wrote: 'should people talk about a girl, she will not hesitate to be examined by a doctor and, armed with a declaration of her virginity, will turn to authority complaining of slander' (Vergouwen 1964). More recently Bovill's study amongst the Toba Batak in Medan indicated that apart from religion and

ethnicity, virginity was the most important consideration for a woman to be a potential spouse (Bovill 1986).

However, recent studies indicate that for many Indonesian young people, virginity is no longer seen as an important factor in arranging a marriage (YKB 1993; Singarimbun 1996). Virginity tests are no longer practised. A study among never married young people aged 15-24 years in Medan in 1993 revealed that more than half of respondents (60 percent of 301) disagreed that virginity is something important or special. The study also reported that only 18 percent of all respondents agreed that virginity is an indicator of being a respectable woman (*citra wanita baik-baik*) (YKB 1993). Another study among unmarried men aged 17-24 years in Yogyakarta and Bali reported that 48 percent out of 181 respondents in urban Bali and 50 percent of 185 respondents in urban Yogyakarta disagreed that a woman has to preserve her virginity until married (Singarimbun 1996).

4.1 Concept of virginity for young people: is it a biological or social matter?

For today's young people, an intact hymen does not necessarily indicate female virginity as it was in the past. Information obtained from the focus groups in my study revealed that there were two definitions of female virginity. One opinion argued that regardless of the cause, once a woman's hymen tore, she was no longer a virgin. The other opinion stated that woman's virginity is more about behaviour, whether she has ever had penetrative sexual intercourse. Below are some young people's definitions about female virginity¹:

"In my opinion a woman is a virgin if her hymen is still intact, that is why she is called 'anak dara' (a hymen girl)" (Inong, 22-year-old, working woman, Javanese).

"If the hymen ruptures because of a fall, in a way (istilah halusnya) she is a virgin, but actually I think she is not a virgin" (Yopin, female, high school, 17-year-old, Batak).

"In my opinion, virginity means never having had sex, because if someone has had sexual intercourse, where a penis ('itunya' laki-laki) entered a vagina, but because of the elasticity of her hymen, it did not tear, for me she is no longer a virgin" (Lina, female, high school, 17-year-old, Chinese).

"I once watched a movie on TV. A woman fell off her bike, then her virginity 'disappeared' (hilang), in my opinion; she is still a virgin" (Sakri, male, university student, 22-year-old, Javanese).

The biological and social meanings of virginity also appear in the Indonesian language associated with female virginity namely *anak dara*, *keperawanan*, *kegadisan* and *kesucian*. Literally, the meaning of *anak dara*, *keperawanan*, *kegadisan* is having a hymen, whereas *kesucian* (purity) is more related to the condition of being 'pure'. Unlike female virginity there is only one term that is usually related to male virginity: *perjaka* or *keperjakaan*. The definition of male virginity is also simple: never having had vaginal intercourse. In my study, all the respondents that I interviewed personally and the focus group participants agreed to this definition.

In the past when people were referring to unmarried people in general they used the terms *perjaka* for men and *gadis*, *perawan*, or *anak dara* for women. However, nowadays these terms are rarely used, especially among young people. One respondent, a university student, stated that those were old-fashioned words and no one used them any more. He noted that if one of his friends used those expressions, the others would tease him or her: 'Are you sure? How do you know?' According to him, this is because premarital sex is so common among young people that a virgin bride or groom might be difficult to find.

4.2 Young people's opinion of virginity

To explore values and attitudes of young people related to virginity, respondents in the study were asked several questions such as; "Do you think a woman needs to preserve her virginity until marriage? And how about a man? What do you think the most important factor for choosing a future spouse? What would you do if you found out that your future spouse was no longer a virgin?"ⁱⁱ

As shown in Table 2 the survey indicates that almost all respondents (92 percent) agreed that chastity was necessary for a woman, and 74 percent agreed it was necessary for a man. Nevertheless, only few of them agreed that it was the most important factor in a marriage. Only 32 percent of the respondents stated that virginity was the most important factor in choosing a wife or husband, while more than a half (59 percent) of the respondents said that there was no problem if they found out that their fiancée was no longer virgins.

Despite respondents' general opinions about the need for chastity, when asked what was the most important factor in choosing a future spouse, only 32 percent of all the respondents said virginity. Many respondents (47 percent female and 44 percent male) believed that

personality was more important than virginity. Interestingly, family background including ethnicity and religious affiliation seemed to be more important for young women than for young men. More than a quarter (27 percent) of female respondents said family background was the most important factor in choosing a future spouse while only 18 percent of the male respondents gave a similar answer.

Table 2
RESPONDENTS' OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT VIRGINITY

	Male % N=463	Female % N=412	Male+Female % N=875
Chastity is necessary for a woman	92	92	92
Chastity is necessary for a man	65	85	74
Most important factor in choosing spouse			
Virginity	38	26	32
Personality regardless of virginity	44	47	45
Family background	18	27	23
Attitude if future spouse is no longer a virgin			
Break the engagement	28	27	28
No problem	59	59	59
Reconsider the engagement	12	14	13
Other	1	1	1

Source: Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey, 1997-1998.

The patterns of respondents' opinions on the most important factor for choosing a future spouse were consistent with the pattern of respondents' attitudes if they found out later that their future spouse was not a virgin. Many respondents (59 percent) said they would not mind if their spouse was not a virgin, 28 percent stated that they would break up, and 13 percent stated that they would reconsider their plans. There was no significant difference between men's and women's attitudes if they found out later that their intended spouse was not a virgin. Some of those who answered that they would reconsider their plans said that it depended on how their intended future spouse lost his or her virginity. They mentioned that if it was not because of sexual relationship or if it was because of rape, they would not object. Some females also gave this reasoning. One of the female respondents in high school answered that she would not mind if her boy friend 'had lost his virginity because of accidents such as fall or riding a bike'. This raises a lot of questions about her understanding of virginity.

Table 3 shows the percentage of men and women of different socio-demographic characteristics who said that virginity was the most important factor in choosing future spouses. The differences by age and

main activity were statistically significant for both sexes. The patterns for both sexes are also similar. As expected, those in the older group (aged 21-24 years) and out of school (working and unemployed) are more likely to accept non-virgin spouse than students aged 18-20 years and those aged 15-17 years. Differences were not statistically significant by living arrangement, or ethnic, religious and parental backgrounds of respondents, though these might have been expected to be important determinants of sexual attitudes.

Table 3
PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THAT VIRGINITY
WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN CHOOSING A SPOUSE BY SOCIO
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

	Males (N=463)		Females (N=412)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Age group		*		**
15-17 years	196	45	166	36
18-20 years	98	37	134	19
21-24 years	169	31	112	19
Main activity		*		*
Study	335	43	331	28
Working	103	27	50	12
Unemployment	25	20	31	19
Religion				
Moslem	278	39	224	26
Christian	144	40	123	26
Buddhist/Hindu	41	32	65	23
Ethnicity				
Javanese	91	36	77	27
Toba Batak	102	46	64	33
Mandailing Batak	67	46	47	26
Other Batak	52	31	36	25
Malay	57	39	52	25
Chinese	53	28	97	22
Other	41	32	39	23
Living arrangement				
With both or one parent	329	40	307	26
With sibling or other relative	61	39	42	21
Boarding house	73	32	63	27
Mother's education				
Part/finished elementary	105	42	66	26
Finished JHS	89	33	84	20
Finished SHS	189	37	181	24
University/academy	80	35	81	35

(Continued)

(Continuation - Table 1)

	Males (N=463)		Females (N=412)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Father's education				
Part/finished elementary	64	34	40	35
Finished JHS	78	35	59	19
Finished SHS	165	38	167	22
University/academy	156	42	146	30
Mother's occupation				
Public servant/retired	68	28	62	26
Employee/labourer	23	5	17	6
Trader	123	53	82	24
Not employed	210	79	196	28
Others	39	31	55	27
Father's occupation				
Public servant/retired	206	41	161	26
Employee/labourer	101	38	87	29
Trader	87	37	89	26
Not employed	13	15	9	11
Others	56	38	66	23

Notes: * = Significant at $p < 0.05$
 ** = Significant at $p < 0.001$

Source: Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey, 1997-1998.

In-depth interviews with young men revealed that there were many reasons why they would accept non-virgin girls as wives. Among these were the way young people defined virginity and the chance to know their future spouses more closely. Those who defined virginity as an intact hymen said that virginity was not important in choosing a spouse because they believed that the rupture of the hymen was not necessarily resulting from sexual intercourse. According to Adri, a 21-year-old Javanese man, who was unemployed:

"For me it does not matter whether she is still a virgin or not, because non-virgin does not always mean no longer 'pure' (enggak suci lagi). For example, she might have lost her virginity not because she has done something negative but because of an accident when she was a child, for me it does not matter, the important thing is she loves me."

Other young people argued that the chance to know their future spouses closely before marriage caused virginity status to become less important. Unlike in parentally arranged marriages as practised in the past, most young people have time to know their partner personally before they decide to get married. As a consequence in many cases personality is more

important than virginity. In in-depth interviews, Martin, a 20 year-old Toba Batak man who was studying at a university, said:

"Virginity is an important thing. However before marriage, there is a dating period, isn't there? ('kan ada proses berpacaran), if during this period my girlfriend confessed that she was not a virgin, then that depends, if we do like each other, it won't matter too much (tidak masalah sekali), if she has everything I like. But if I don't really like her, why would I put up with her? (untuk apa perempuan yang kayak gitu?)."

4.3 Why is virginity important for a woman but not for a man?

As revealed from the survey, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, a woman's virginity was more important than a man's virginity. While an unmarried woman is expected to be 'pure' and preserve her virginity for her husband, some young men believed that a man is expected to have premarital sex experience. In addition, the fact that there is no physical proof of males' virginity also affects young people's attitudes toward it.

Many young men in my study believed that a man needed 'an experience' before marriage. In contrast, a woman has to keep her 'purity' intact. Although many respondents said that virginity was not important in a marriage, all male focus group participants said they preferred to have a virgin woman for a wife. Focus group participants among male university students when asked if a man needs to be a virgin before marriage, give arguments as follows:

"In my opinion, it is better for a man not to be a virgin (perjaka), because if he is still a virgin when married, there is a possibility that he would not know how to 'do it', and that would be very embarrassing" (Jojon).

"In my opinion, like me, if I want a virgin wife, I think a woman wants a virgin man as well but how can I say, for men it's rare, most of my friends were not virgins when they got married. Personally, I want to be still a virgin when I marry, but if one day when I am dating, I am tempted, well, 'mana ada buaya nolak bangkai' (no crocodile refuses a carcass)" (Martin).

"Ehm, my opinion is the same as Jojon's [a man] needs an experience isn't it Jon? A man needs to learn from experiences to know how to do it so he won't feel gauche (canggung)" (Rony).

"I prefer both to be the same, the woman is a virgin and so is the man. I agree a man needs to know how to do it, but I don't think we have to experience it. I believe we would find it out eventually (itu pengalaman nggak dapat dari siapa-siapa, tahu sendiri), I reckon the way to do it is just the same". (Sukir)

"Well, how can I say? Basically I agree with Jojon, but premarital sex is commonly associated with sin. For me it's fine to be afraid to have sin, but sometime you just cannot avoid it. As many people said they do not plan to have it. But it happens accidentally" (Mahmud).

Other young people in my study also raised similar arguments. Young men often expressed the need for sexual experience before marriage. An informant, a lecturer at North Sumatra University, mentioned that in the past, there was a common rumour among the Malays that a groom usually 'practised' sexual intercourse before his wedding with his *mak andam*ⁱⁱⁱ (usually a middle-aged woman). Culturally a man is expected to know about sexual intercourse before marriage. A study by Kiem (1993) among young people in a Moluccan town found that premarital sex among young men is encouraged and considered necessary for success in the male sex role.

Young women in my study also regarded male virginity as unimportant. Most of them stated they preferred to have a virgin husband, but they would not mind having a non-virgin husband. They believed that in these days a virgin male is rare, so they have to accept a non-virgin. Moreover, the fact that it is very difficult to tell whether a man is a virgin or not influences their attitude. One female respondent stated her opinion clearly:

"Actually in my opinion male virginity is also important, because if a woman has to be virgin, why not a man? But the problem is we do not know how to tell whether a man is virgin or not. There is no sign for male virginity. . So I think it is better not to think about it too much. Just accept it (pasrah aja)" (Esti, single, 21- year-old, Toba Batak female university student).

The reasons for the importance of female virginity were different between young men and young women in my study. For women, keeping their virginity was more related to morality and purity and also as a 'gift' for their husbands. Many of them believed that their husband might blame them if they had had sex with another man. Two respondents, one single and one married, stated:

"It is very important for a woman to keep her virginity, because it means she keeps her purity for her husband, and I believe it is the

most important gift for him" (Esti, single, 21-year-old, Batak female university student.).

"It is very important for a woman to keep her virginity, because when she marries, and her husband gets 'nothing', then one day when they have an argument, he will bring that up, there will always be a regret for him! Even if he said it was OK. Later on the wife will have no say in her husband's behaviour" (Anggi, married, housewife, 23-year-old, Minangkabau).

These responses suggest that women's views on female virginity are more conservative than men's views. Among men virginity is not always related to morality or purity. Some young men in my study stated they would not mind having a non-virgin wife, as long as she told him about it before they got married. Those who said they would mind having a non-virgin wife believed that a woman would never forget a man who took her virginity. The reasons for refusing a non-virgin woman are more related to jealousy and lack of self-confidence. Below are some answers of male respondents when I asked 'What would you do if you found out that your future wife was not a virgin (had had sex with another man) before she had a relationship with you?':

"I would break off the engagement. I don't want to marry such a woman. I don't want 'second-hand goods' (barang bekas), there is a possibility that she will compare me with the man who took her virginity. A woman can't forget that" (Iwan, 17-year-old, high school student, Malay).

"I need to know the status of her former boyfriend, how long their relationship lasted. If her virginity was taken by someone who is richer and more handsome than me, I would back off, because she might still have some feeling for her former boyfriend, but if I am better than him, it is all right, she might regret her past" (Jojon, 21-year-old, university student, Malay).

"Maybe for most men, virginity is vital, but in this era, for me virginity is number two, because I have already tasted a virgin, so for me now virginity is number two, the most important thing is that she can understand me" (Luther, 20 year-old, Toba Batak male university student).

Those who did not mind if they found out that their future spouse was no longer a virgin argued that trust and honesty is very important in a marriage. As long as their future spouse was honest and told them about it before they got married and expressed regret for her past, it would be fine. Men would not feel cheated. Nevertheless, most men said it was not necessary for a man to tell his future wife about his sexual life in the past. They argued that a woman would not notice it, so why make her upset?

4.4 Myths related to virginity

The importance of female virginity is also indicated by many myths related to the signs of a woman's virginity. Most young people in Medan have heard that signs of virginity are apparent in a woman's hips, breasts, calves, knees or the way she walks. Some young people believed such notions; some did not but most were unsure about these stories. When asked how to tell whether a woman was still a virgin, the issue of whether it can be detected from the body was always raised by young people in my study. Below are some of their arguments:

"You can tell it from her face and from her body. People told me about that, my friend herself told me about it, she told me that a woman who has had sex, her breasts will droop a bit then her hips will be a bit flabby, also the way she walks will be different" (Izul, working man in a mixed Focus Group Discussion).

"I heard from a friend of mine who often has relationships with bondon^{iv}, that he could differentiate. He told me, this bondon is still a virgin, is still good or that bondon had ever had 'that' (sex). According to him if a woman has had sex, her body will be flabby. But I know some women because of their work might have flabby posture but still virgin. My mother told me virginity could be seen from a woman's calves, they will be flabby if she is not virgin. But I know a bondon who had sex and still has a tight calf. So I am not sure how to tell whether a woman is a virgin or not. Because I also was told that some women will bleed at the first sexual intercourse but some will not, especially if they are fully aroused" (Jony, unmarried, university male Focus Group Discussant).

"I don't really believe that virginity can be indicated from the body appearance, we can't be sure about that. But because I have had sex with several women, I know the difference. Usually a virgin woman cries [at the first sexual intercourse] and I also can tell from her expression and the way she acts. To be honest, in the past I've 'used' not only one woman (bukan hanya satu perempuan aja yang saya pakai dulu)" (Bambang, married male Focus Group Discussant).

The issue of whether virginity can be detected by body appearances was also raised in a seminar for adolescents I attended during my fieldwork in November 1997. The seminar topic was '*Bebas bergaul tanpa sex* (Free mixing without sex)', organized by the local Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association (PKBI) youth centre, Citra Mita Remaja, an NGO interested in adolescent reproductive health. Many participants asked questions related to virginity, such as what can cause a hymen to

tear, how to tell whether a man is a virgin or not, and whether it is true that virginity can be detected by body appearances. Whatever people might say about the 'necessity' of premarital chastity, it is clear that they are curious (and confused) about the meaning of appearances. Whatever people might say about the 'necessity' of premarital chastity, it is clear that they are curious (and confused) about the meaning of virginity.

Although many women in my study did not believe in the myths about virginity, but because many of their male friends did, the women could not be completely sure of what they should think. One female respondent expressed her worries about this situation:

"It is very difficult for us as women, especially for a woman like me. I am a karate instructor. Because of my activities my breasts might be a bit droopy, and because of heredity, my hips are big. Many people believe that those are the signs of a person who has already lost her virginity. That is not fair. Although I know these ideas are not true, because a lot of men still believe them, I am a bit concerned".

This suggests that virginity is still a significant issue for some young adults in Medan. However the intact hymen was no longer seen as the sole symbol of morality. Contemporary young people understand that rupture of a hymen does not necessarily mean the loss of 'purity'.

5. Curiosity: Young people's attitudes and experiences of premarital sex

Like other young people in most cities in developing countries, young people in Medan also are experiencing rapid socio-cultural and demographic changes (Situmorang 2001). The exposure toward global information including Western liberal sexual norms to some extent influences young people's sexual attitude and behaviour. Previous studies indicate that despite the strict traditional and religious values regarding virginity in the society, premarital sex among Medan's young people is not uncommon (YKB 1993; Saifuddin and Hidayana 1999).

Many newspapers reported about the sexual lives of young girls who might have had sex just for fun (*Media Indonesia, Suara Pembaruan, Kompas, Republika*). One of Indonesia's newspapers, *Media Indonesia*, published special reports regarding teenagers involved in sexual activities for fun or for money in several cities in Indonesia including Medan (*Media Indonesia*, 2-26 August 1999). Although the percentage of young girls engaging in this activity may be very small and would not represent the image of the majority of Indonesian young people, these reports

suggested that teenage prostitution is not only a big-city phenomenon but may also be found in small towns such as Tasikmalaya and Tegal. Each place, however, has a local term to refer to the girls involved in this activity. In Jakarta they are commonly called *perek* (experimental women), in Medan and Bandung they are called *bondon*, in Surabaya, *cilik'an*, and in Tasikmalaya, *anyanyah*.

To investigate the views and practices related to premarital sexual intercourse^v of Medan's young people, in the survey, the respondents were asked questions such as: What is your opinion about premarital sex? Have you ever had sex? With whom did you have sex? What was your reason for having sex? and What were your reactions when you had sex for the first time?

Table 4 shows that in contrast to common conservative beliefs, young people in Medan were relatively tolerant toward premarital sex. Eighteen percent of all respondents (nine percent among females and 27 percent among males) reported ever having sex. The proportions of those who conditionally agreed with premarital sex, such as if it is based on mutual attraction (*suka sama suka*), within a steady relationship (*pacar*) or to get experience (*pengalaman*), were even higher (18 percent among females and 45 percent among males).

Table 4
RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES AND REPORTED EXPERIENCES REGARDING
PREMARITAL SEX AND PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS BY GENDER

	Male N=463	Female N=412	Male+female N=875
	%	%	%
Ever had premarital sex	27	9	18
Ever had a steady relationship (<i>pacaran</i>)	76	73	74
Attitude toward premarital sex			
Agree if it is based on mutual willingness	20	9	14
Agree if it is in a steady relationship	12	7	10
Agree to obtain an experience	13	2	8
Do not agree	55	82	68
Attitude if best friend involved in premarital sex			
Advised him/her to stop	47	64	55
No problem, not my business	42	24	33
Keep some distance from her/him	8	9	9
Other	3	3	3
Partner in sexual intercourse ^a	N=123	N=36	N=159
Steady boy/girl friend (<i>pacar</i>)	16	76	30
Casual friend (including <i>bondon</i>)	10	3	8
Prostitute	39	0	30
Combination of regular partner, Casual friend and prostitute	35	21	32

(Continued)

(Continuation - Table 4)

	Male N=463 %	Female N=412 %	Male+female N=875 %
Feeling after the first intercourse	N=123	N=36	N=159
Nothing special	47	14	40
Sinful and then stop	16	44	22
Sinful but still continue	30	36	31
Other (satisfied and 'become addicted')	7	6	7
Reason for sexual intercourse^a	N=123	N=36	N=159
Mutual attraction	17	43	23
Curiosity (<i>ingin coba-coba</i>)	22	3	18
Stimulation from pornography	10	0	8
Combination of mutual willingness, Curiosity and pornography	51	54	51
Exposure to printed pornographic materials			
Have read	88	45	67
Never read	12	55	33
Exposure toward visual pornographic materials			
Have watched	89	39	66
Never watch	11	61	34

Note: ^a = Multiple responses possible.

Source: Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey, 1997-1998.

Women seem more involved emotionally than men when having sexual relationships. Seventy six percent of sexually active women reported having sex only with a steady partner, compared with only 16 percent of sexually active men. The majority of young men have sex with more than one partner as indicated by the type of partner for sexual intercourse: casual friends including *bondon* (10 percent), prostitutes (39 percent) and combination of regular partner, casual friends and prostitutes (35 percent).

Data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews confirmed these patterns. Many male participants stated they preferred to go to a *bondon* or prostitute when they wanted to have sex. The reason for this is that they believe having sex with a girl friend (*pacar*) demands more responsibility. Some of them expressed their opinions as follows:

"It's better to have sex with a prostitute, because with a girl friend if later on you break up [before marriage], it means you 'destroy' some-one's daughter (merusak anak gadis orang)" (Ahan, working, male, Chinese).

"I prefer to have 'an experience' with a bondon. Because with a bondon it is more fun, no responsibility; a bondon does not demand a lot. They just want to have fun, be happy for today. It is

different with a girl friend. If I have taken her virginity, automatically I have to take responsibility, if not her family may be after me, it is hard" (Joni, university student, male, Malay).

The reasons to engage in premarital sex were also different for men and women. Of those women who reported having had sex, 43 percent stated they had it solely because of mutual attraction, while only 16 percent of men cited this reason for having sex. In contrast, the percentages of men who reported having had sex because of curiosity and stimulation from pornography were much higher than those of women. Twenty two percent of men stated they had sex solely because of curiosity and 10 percent said because of stimulation from pornography, whereas only three percent of women reported having sex solely because of curiosity and none of them said it was solely because of stimulation from pornography. A majority of both sexually active young men and girls said that they had more than one reason for being involved in premarital sex.

Men and women also reported different reactions to their first experience of sexual intercourse. Compared to the men, the young women in Medan were more conservative. Eighty percent of sexually active women reported feeling sinful the first time they had sex and 44 percent of them reported stopping afterward. Less than half of sexually active men reported a feeling of sinfulness the first time they had sex and few of them reported being dissuaded from repeating the experience (Table 4).

5.1 Factors affecting young people's attitudes toward premarital sex

Table 5 shows the socio-demographic factors associated with respondents' acceptance of premarital sex. For both sexes, significant differences were observed by main activity and religious affiliation, while differences by age, ethnicity, parents' education and father's occupation were only significant among men. In contrast, the differences by mother's occupation were only significant for young women. Differences by living arrangement were statistically insignificant for both sexes.

The out-of-school respondents were much more tolerant toward premarital sex than were students. More than three-quarters of working men and 44 percent of unemployed men agreed with premarital sex, compared to only 34 percent of young male students. The pattern was slightly different among women, with 30 percent of working women and 36 percent of unemployed women agreed with premarital sex, compared to 14 percent of those who were students.

Table 5
PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS WHO AGREED WITH
PREMARITAL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC
CHARACTERISTICS

	Males (N=463)		Females (N=412)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Age group		**		
15-17 years	196	34	166	13
18-20 years	98	49	134	20
21-24 years	169	54	112	21
Main activity		**		**
Study	335	34	331	14
Working	103	80	50	30
Unemployment	25	40	31	36
Religion		*		*
Moslem	278	37	224	14
Christian	144	54	123	18
Buddhism/Hindu	41	59	65	29
Ethnicity		*		
Javanese	91	33	77	18
Toba Batak	102	53	64	14
Mandailing Batak	67	40	47	13
Other Batak	52	52	36	22
Malay	57	42	52	15
Chinese	53	55	97	25
Other	41	37	39	8
Living arrangement				
With both or one parent	329	44	307	17
With sibling or other relative	61	43	42	17
Boarding house	73	47	63	19
Mother's education		**		
Part/finished elementary	105	60	66	24
Finished JHS	89	51	84	20
Finished SHS	189	41	181	16
University/academy	80	26	81	12
Father's education		*		
Part/finished elementary	64	55	40	18
Finished JHS	78	56	59	24
Finished SHS	165	44	167	20
University/academy	156	35	146	12
Mother's occupation				*
Public servant/retired	68	35	62	13
Employee/labourer	23	52	17	41
Trader	123	53	82	21
Not employed	210	44	196	15
Others	39	33	55	20
Father's occupation		*		
Public servant/retired	206	41	161	17
Employee/labourer	101	39	87	15
Trader	87	53	89	24
Not employed	13	85	9	11
Others	56	45	66	15

Notes: * = Significant at $p < 0.05$ ** = Significant at $p < 0.001$

Source: Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey, 1997-1998.

Respondents' religious affiliation was also found to be a significant factor in affecting attitudes towards premarital sex for both genders. Compared to young people from other religious affiliations, those who were Buddhists or Hindus were more likely to agree with premarital sex, followed by Christians and Moslems. Fifty nine percent of all Buddhist and Hindu young men and 54 percent of Christian young men agreed with premarital sex, compared to 37 percent of Moslem young men. Although the proportions for all religious groups were much lower, the pattern of differentials was the same among young women.

Interestingly, while respondents' age and mother's education are strongly and significantly related to young men's attitude toward premarital sex, they appeared to be statistically insignificant in explaining young women's attitude. Among male respondents, those aged 21-24 years whose mothers had only primary education were more likely to agree to premarital sex than the men of younger age groups whose mothers had a higher level of education. Of all men aged 21-24 years, over half agreed with premarital sex, while a third of young men aged 15-17 years agreed with it. More than a half of men whose mothers had only primary education agreed with premarital sex, compared to only about a quarter percent of men whose mothers had academy or university education.

The backgrounds of respondents' fathers were more related to young men's premarital sex attitude than they were to young women. Both fathers' education and occupation were significantly associated with young men's attitude toward premarital sex but they were insignificant in explaining girls' attitudes. Among young men, those whose fathers had less than senior high school education and those whose fathers were not employed were more likely to agree with premarital sex than those whose fathers had higher education and whose fathers were in the labour force. Among young women, only mother's occupation appeared to be significantly associated with attitudes toward premarital sex. Young women whose mothers worked as labourers were more tolerant toward premarital sex than those whose mothers worked as public servants, traders or others.

Ethnicity was significantly associated with young men's attitude toward premarital sex. Compared to other ethnic groups (Javanese, all Bataks, Malay and others), Chinese young men were more likely to agree with premarital sex. However, ethnicity was not a significant determinant of attitude among women.

In addition, data from focus groups and in-depth interviews revealed that young people's attitude toward premarital sex were also

influenced by their peers' sexual experiences. The fact that many of their friends had a premarital pregnancy affected their attitude toward premarital sex. These attitudes were shown from answers given by women when asked whether they agreed with premarital sex or not:

"For me, it's better to avoid sex [before marriage]. But nowadays it's like that it's common. Sometime after seven or six month's pregnancy they get married, it's acceptable now (udah lumrah gitu). Often today's young people say dating without sex is not enjoyable (kalau pacaran enggak 'gituan', enggak enak)" (Rima, 23 years, married, house wife).

"Maybe it [premarital sex] is the trend. Most married people already had it" (Tari, 20 years, married, housewife).

"For men I think it's OK, because most men have done 'it'" (Silvi, female, 20 years, single, university student).

"Actually it's wrong, but what can we do, many people have done 'it'" (Erna, female, 20 years, single, university student).

"Whether I agree or not? Well, basically I think there is no one who would agree with such things. But often in a relationship when the couple has been very close, they cannot avoid it" (Inong, single, working).

In most focus group discussions especially among young men, issues about religious reasons were rarely raised. When one participant gave a religious reason for not agreeing with premarital sex, others who agreed with premarital sex would say, "I do not want to be a hypocrite here, I prefer to talk about reality (*saya enggak mau munafik, kita bicara fakta ajalah*)". This suggests that many respondents in my study believed that religious teaching is not always applicable or relevant in the daily life.

5.2 Factors affecting young people's behaviour regarding premarital sex

Table 6 presents the variables found to be significantly associated at the bivariat level with male and female respondents' reported sexual intercourse. Factors such as respondents' age, main activity, parents' education were significantly associated with reported sexual experience for both genders. Living arrangement, whether they live with parents or not, was only significantly related to young women's reported sexual experience. Parents' occupation was only significant for young men's reported sexual experience. In contrast with respondents' attitude

toward premarital sex, respondents' religious affiliation was not related to either women's or men's reported sexual experiences. Ethnicity also appeared to be insignificant in explaining young people's premarital sexual behaviour for both genders.

Table 6
PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED HAVING HAD PREMARITAL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

	Males (N=463)		Females (n=412)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Age group		**		*
15-17 years	196	12	166	3
18-20 years	98	30	134	11
21-24 years	169	42	112	14
Main activity		**		**
Study	335	13	331	6
Working	103	66	50	12
Unemployed	25	48	31	29
Religion				
Moslem	278	25	224	8
Christian	144	30	123	9
Buddhist/Hindu	41	25	65	12
Ethnicity				
Javanese	91	22	77	14
Toba Batak	102	31	64	6
Mandailing Batak	67	25	47	0
Other Batak	52	37	36	14
Malay	57	32	52	8
Chinese	53	21	97	13
Other	41	15	39	3
Living arrangement				*
With both or one parent	329	24	307	7
With sibling or other relative	61	38	42	17
Boarding house	73	30	63	14
Mother's education		**		**
Part/finished elementary	105	40	66	12
Finished JHS	89	28	84	19
Finished SHS	189	24	181	5
University/academy	80	30	81	4
Father's education		*		**
Part/finished elementary	64	27	40	8
Finished JHS	78	36	59	24
Finished SHS	165	30	167	8
University/academy	156	18	146	4
Mother's occupation		*		
Public servant/retired	68	24	62	5
Employee/laborer	23	48	17	24
Trader	123	36	82	10
Not employed	210	22	196	8
Others	39	15	55	11

(Continued)

(Continuation - Table 6)

	Males (N=463)		Females (n=412)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Father's occupation		*		
Public servant/retired	206	26	161	8
Employee/laborer	101	27	87	12
Trader	87	30	89	9
Not employed	13	62	9	22
Others	56	14	66	6

Notes: * = Significant at $p < 0.05$

** = Significant at $p < 0.001$

Source: Medan Adolescent Reproductive Health Survey, 1997-1998.

There was a strong positive relationship between the age of respondents and reported premarital sexual intercourse for both genders. As their age increased, respondents' reported experience of premarital sex also increased, as expected. Almost half of the young men aged 21-24 and more than a quarter of those aged 18-20 reported having had sex, compared to only 12 percent of boys aged 15-17 years. The pattern also appeared among young women, though the proportion of those reported having had sex are much lower than the proportion among men.

Respondents' main activity also has a strong relation with reported sexual experience for both genders. Young people who were out of school were significantly more likely to report having sexual intercourse than those who were students. Almost two-thirds of working young men and 48 percent of those who were unemployed reported having had sex, compared to only 13 percent of those who were studying. The trend was slightly different among young women. Those who were unemployed were more likely to have had sex than those who were working or studying.

Parents' education was significantly associated with reported experience of sexual intercourse for both genders, but parents' occupation was significantly related to reported sexual experience only among young men. As with attitudes toward premarital sex, respondents who had relatively well educated parents were less likely to report having had sex than those whose parents had less education. Among men, those whose fathers were in the labour force while their mothers were not employed were less likely to report having had sex.

The influence of whether or not they lived with one or both parents on the likelihood of reporting sexual experience was significant among women but insignificant among men. Young women who had left their parents' house were more likely to report sexual experience than

those who still lived with their parents. Seventeen percent of girls who lived with their siblings or other relatives and 14 percent of those who lived in boarding houses reported having had sex, compared to seven percent of those who lived with one or both parents. However, this may be related to respondents' age. Women who had left their parents' house were likely to be older than those who still lived with their parents.

Although religious affiliation and ethnicity appeared to be significantly related to respondents' attitude toward premarital sex, there was no significant relation of these factors with reported sexual experience for either male or female respondents. This means that despite the strong link of many Medan young people to their own ethnic-religious societies, there was no significant difference among ethnic groups regarding their reported premarital sexual experience. This may be a reflection of the common weakening of ethnic-religious moral control over young people's sexual behaviour.

6. Conclusion

Young people in Medan are increasingly tolerant of premarital sex. Although the majority of them said that chastity was necessary for both men and women, they also believe that for many young people premarital sex is often unavoidable. With this attitude, virginity has become less important in considering a partner for marriage. The demise of the parent-arranged marriage and the opportunity to know their future spouse before marriage mean that a potential spouse's personality is more important than his or her virginity. Furthermore, the concept of female virginity itself varies among young people. Some people associate it with an intact hymen while others associate it with whether a woman has ever had sexual intercourse. However, few young people consider virginity as the sole symbol of morality. Losing virginity does not necessarily mean losing respectability. With this attitude, many single young people are engaging in sexual activity. In addition, as would be expected, as their age increases, the tendency of young people to report having had sex also increases.

The findings of this study suggest that both young people and parents today face different and more complicated problems regarding sex than young people and parents in the past. Apart from the increasing age at first marriage, economic and technological developments have enabled today's young people to receive information that often encourages them to engage in risky sexual behaviour. As some of them are just out of childhood, these young people certainly need help in dealing with the challenges they face. Most parents were raised according to cultural

traditions in which sex was regarded as a secret domain, not to be discussed publicly; many of them find it awkward to talk to their unmarried children about sex and reproductive health. Increasingly, unmarried young adults are in higher education or in industrial employment; they do not live with their parents but in boarding houses while they study or work. This increases their opportunities for sexual contact and experimentation, while they receive less parental supervision.

Notes

1. All the names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.
2. In the questionnaire I did not provide a technical definition of virginity, so the respondents' answer to these questions are based on their own concepts and definitions.
3. A mak andam is a person who helps a bride or groom for the wedding ceremonies.
4. Bondon is a term used among young people in Medan for an adolescent girl who is willing to accompany a man just to have fun. Usually aged between 14 and 19 years, most are still in high school or junior high school. A bondon service does not always culminate in sexual intercourse. Sometimes she is only willing to go to a movie, discotheque or restaurant.
5. In the questionnaire I used the term 'hubungan kelamin/bersenggama' for sex, which has the sole meaning of vaginal penetration.

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