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The Roles of Self-Esteem and Motivation of Having an Affair Towards The Number of Multiple Sex Partners and Sexual Intimacy among College Students Who Engage in Risky Sexual Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Background: Risky sexual behavior in college students become an interesting issue related to the spread of HIV/AIDS. **Objective:** The aim of this study is to identify the significant roles of self-esteem and motivation of having an affair towards multiple sex partners and sexual intimacy among college students who engage in risky sexual behavior. **Results:** Ninety-one college students who were in line with required inclusive criteria became participants in this study. There were three techniques used in analysing the data, namely path analysis as main technique of analysis and zero order correlation as well as t-test as additional techniques of analysis. The designed-theoretical model to identify the roles of self-esteem and motivation of having an affair towards numerous multiple sex partners and sexual intimacy among college students has well goodness of fit. The results also indicated that male students have stronger motivation of having an affair than female students. The strongest aspect regarding motivation of having an affair which correlates to numerous multiple sex partners among the participants is sex. In addition, female students have more positive self-esteem than male students. **Conclusion:** Negative self-esteem and sex are have influence in college students to engage in risky sexual behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the society has become more permissive in terms of sexual behavior and it enhances stronger reality of risky sexual behavior. Many groups, teenagers, young adults to adults, engage in risky sexual behavior, regardless of their orientation and occupational background. College students also engage in such sexual behavior. Johnson (1996) stated that freshman students experience sexual exploration without any maturity. Although at first, sexuality among teenagers and young adults is often associated with unwanted pregnancy, yet in reality, it has developed into risky sexual behavior (Brook, Adams, Balka, Whitesman, Zhang, and Sugerman, 2004).

Risky sexual behavior is labelled not only as unwanted pregnancy but also as involvement in sexual activities which have potential in getting infected with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS (Halpern, Hallfors, Bauer, Iritani, Waller, and Cho, 2004). Examples of risky sexual behavior are having sex at early age, having multiple sex partners, having inconsistency in using condom, and having sexual intimacy with strangers or with anyone whose sexual health is unknown (Binggeli, 2005; Nikula, Koponen, Haavio-Mannila, and Hemminki, 2007; Noar, Zimmerman, and Atwood, 2005). Meanwhile, having many sexual partners is indicated as risky sexual behavior as logically, it means that the sexual intimacy will be more often.

One of the suspected reasons of why someone has many sexual partners, especially multiple sex partners, is motivation of having an affair. In recent time, having an affair is common among young adults and adults, either having an affair with someone who is in steady relationship or with someone who is married (Barta and Kiene, 2005; Mattingly, Wilson, Clark, Bequette, and Weidler, 2010).

Previous studies have indicated that affair is divided into two, namely non-sexual affair which involves feeling and emotion, and sexual affair (Burchell and Ward, 2011; Carpenter 2011; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2003). Meanwhile, Barta and Kiene (2005) interpreted motivation of having an affair as not being too dichotomic, hence easier to be understood. They divided it into four aspects, namely individual dissatisfaction towards

his/her steady partner and condition between the couple, feeling of being neglected by his/her steady partner, desire to engage in new sexual experience with different partner, and emerging rage due to the fact that his/her steady partner has an affair.

Individual's perception that s/he is unworthy often becomes trigger of having an affair (Eaves and Robertson-Smith, 2007). This results in assumption that self-esteem has role towards motivation of having an affair. Individual with negative self-esteem is suspected to be emotionally more vulnerable to have an affair with unsteady partner. On the other side, low self-esteem is also suspected to encourage them into engaging in risky sexual behavior (Robinson, Holmbeck, and Paikoff, 2007). This happens because sex is perceived as one of the sources of self-esteem. Individual considers sexual achievement as a way to put him/herself psychologically worthy within him/herself as well within the society.

Based on the above elaboration, it is set that the aim of this study is to identify the roles of self-esteem and motivation of having an affair towards the number of multiple sex partners and the number of sexual intimacy among college students who engage in risky sexual behavior.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants in this study were 91 college students, consisted of 66 male students and 25 female students. The average age of the participants was 20.24 years old ($SD = 1.08$). The average age of the male students was 20.14 years old ($SD = 1.13$) and of the female students was 20.52 years old ($SD = 0.98$).

Self-esteem. Self-esteem is positive self-evaluation by an individual about him/herself (Mruk, 2006; Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2004). The way to measure self-esteem in this study was by employing Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale, which consists of 10 items. This self-esteem scale has reliability score of 0.927.

Motivation of having an affair. Motivation of having an affair is individual's drive to have emotional and sexual relationship with someone else other than his/her steady partner. This study used Berta's and Kiene's (2005) scale of motivation of having an affair, which consists of four aspects, namely (1) dissatisfaction, (2) negligence, (3) sex, and (4) rage. This scale has 16 items and has reliability score of 0.963.

The number of sex partners and sexual intimacy. The number of sexual partners was known by completing a statement of "The number of sexual partners in the last 6 months is/are ... person(s)." Meanwhile, the number of sexual intimacy was known by completing a statement of "You have had sexual intimacy in the last 6 months for ... time(s)." Participants who were selected in this study were those who engaged in risky sexual behavior and it was indicated by their answers. If their answer in each statement was more than 1 (one) then they were included as participants in this study. If their answer in each statement was 1 (one) then they were excluded as participants in this study.

Time limitation of 6 months was chosen by consideration that the participants could still recall the number of their multiple sex partners and the number of their sexual intimacy. This time limitation is considered better than time limitation of 12 months which is too long or 3 to 1 month which is too short. Rahardjo's study (2013) was one of the studies which used time limitation of 6 months in investigating risky sexual behavior among its participants.

Techniques in analysing the data were adjusted with the need of this study in exploring the data. The main technique of analysis was path analysis by using model which involved the use of AMOS 6. Meanwhile, other techniques of analysis were zero order correlation and t-test to reveal other matters in this study.

Results:

The average age of having first-time sex among the participants was 18.38 years old ($SD = 1.21$). This finding is almost the same as findings from previous studies which was around 16-18 years old (Rahardjo, 2008; 2010; 2014; Rahardjo and Hermita, 2012; Rahardjo and Salve, 2014). The average number of participants' sexual partners in the last 6 months were 4.55 persons ($SD = 1.68$). Meanwhile, the average number of participants' sexual intimacy with multiple sex partners in the last 6 months were 5.35 times ($SD = 1.76$).

It can be seen in Figure 1 that the designed-theoretical model has well *goodness of fit* with *Chi-Square* = 0.383 ($p > .05$). Significantly, self-esteem has negative influence towards motivation of having an affair with the score of -0.63 ($p < .00$) and towards the number of multiple sex partners in the last 6 months with the score of -0.73 ($p < .00$). Direct influence of motivation of having an affair towards the number of multiple sex partners in the last 6 months has score of 0.23 ($p < .00$). Meanwhile, indirect influence of self-esteem towards the number of multiple sex partners through motivation of having an affair has score of -0.14 ($p < .05$). It means that direct influence of self-esteem towards the number of multiple sex partners or direct influence of motivation of having an affair towards the number of multiple sex partners is bigger than indirect influence of self-esteem towards the number of multiple sex partners through motivation of having an affair. On the other side, as suspected, the number of multiple sex partners have significant and positive influence towards the number of sexual intimacy

within the last 6 months with the score of 0.66 ($p < .00$). However, there is no significant influence of self-esteem towards the number of multiple sexual intimacy within the last 6 months.

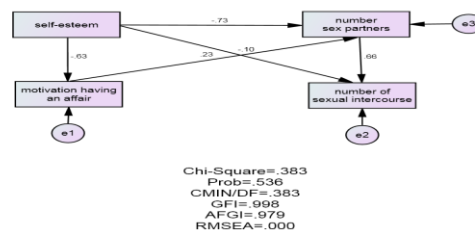


Fig. 1: The model.

Interesting results were also gained when analysing the aspects of motivation of having an affair, namely dissatisfaction, negligence, sex, and rage towards the number of multiple sex partners with self-esteem as the control variable by using zero order correlation. The results showed that the number of multiple sex partners within the last 6 months correlated to all aspects, namely dissatisfaction ($r = 0.56$, $p < .00$), negligence ($r = 0.57$, $p < .00$), sex ($r = 0.89$, $p < .00$), and rage ($r = 0.42$, $p < .00$).

Results of this study also indicated that there are significant differences in terms of motivation of having an affair, both overall and per aspect among the male and female students. Overall, based on gender, motivation of having an affair has significant differences, namely ($t = 6.305$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.55$, $p < .00$). Based on each aspect, same results were gained. The aspect of dissatisfaction ($t = 5.198$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.48$, $p < .00$); the aspect of negligence ($t = 5.124$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.47$, $p < .00$); the aspect of sex ($t = 8.015$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.64$, $p < .00$); and the aspect of rage ($t = 3.490$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.34$, $p < .00$). The overall score and score of each respective aspect of male students have higher empirical mean than female students.

Also based on gender, there are also significant differences in terms of the number of multiple sex partners ($t = 5.835$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.52$, $p < .00$) and in terms of the number of sexual intimacy within the last 6 months. ($t = 3.658$, $p < .00$; $r = 0.36$, $p < .00$). Male students have more multiple sex partners ($M = 5.09$; $SD = 1.36$) than female students ($M = 3.12$; $SD = 1.61$). Male students also have more sexual intimacy within the last 6 months with their multiple sex partners ($M = 5.74$; $SD = 1.73$) than female students ($M = 4.32$; $SD = 1.40$). Results of this study also revealed the age differences of first-time sex between male and female students ($t = -3.563$, $p < .01$; $r = 0.35$, $p < .01$). Male students had first-time sex earlier ($M = 18.12$; $SD = 1.17$) than female students ($M = 19.08$; $SD = 1.07$).

Interesting results were also gained for variable of self-esteem. There are significant differences between male and female students' self-esteem ($t = -4.633$, $p < .00$, $r = 0.44$, $p < .00$), in which female students have more positive self-esteem ($M = 39.36$; $SD = 5.33$) than male students ($M = 33.39$; $SD = 5.53$).

Discussion:

Rahardjo's study (2013) revealed a finding which was almost the same as the finding in this study regarding the number of sexual partners in the last 6 months, namely 3.44 persons. However, the finding regarding the number of sexual intimacy in this study is lower than Rahardjo's finding in 2013 which was 9.63 times.

Many studies have indicated that individual with low self-esteem tend to intend and commit an affair (Barta and Kiene, 2005; Fife, Weeks, and Gambescia, 2008). Those who have an affair deliberately admit that they do that to elevate their self-esteem drastically (Barta and Kiene, 2005; Hall and Fincham, 2008). Many findings have also affirmed that those who engage in risky sexual behavior have low self-esteem thus they engage in risky sexual behavior to elevate their self-esteem (Boden and Horwood, 2006; Robinson, Holmbeck, and Paikoff, 2007), and one of the ways is by having multiple sex partners. Having multiple sex partners is often regarded as sexual achievement and also considered as something phenomenal (Paul, McManus, and Heyes, 2000).

Results of the correlations indicate that sex is the biggest aspect that influenced participants' motivation of having an affair towards the number of multiple sex partners within the last 6 months. The other influential aspects are related to participants' perception that their steady partner has neglected them and dissatisfaction towards their steady partner about certain things and also about quality of their relationship. The aspect of rage is the last aspect that influenced participants in having multiple sex partners within the last 6 months.

Other studies also have similar results that sexuality is by-far has essential role in influencing individual in having an affair and getting engaged in risky sexual behavior with multiple sex partners (Winfield and Whaley, 2005). In addition, Mark, Janssen, and Milhausen (2011) stated that fundamentally women are more potential in having an affair because of emotional reason than men who emphasize on sexual reason. Therefore, as the

participants in this study are dominated by men then it comes as no surprise that the biggest correlation in terms of motivation of having an affair towards the number of multiple sex partners lies on the aspect of sex.

Many previous studies have stated that men are easier to have an affair than women (Drigotas and Barta, 2001; Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, and Fraser, 2012). One of the reasons is because men have more positive attitude towards an affair than women (Sharpe, Walters, and Goren, 2013). Usually, when someone has positive attitude on something then it is easier for him/her to engage on it.

It is not surprising that men have higher scores regarding risky sexual behavior and have earlier age in terms of first-time sex than women because men tend to be more sexually active than women (Dworkin and O'Sullivan, 2005). Men are also more permissive and hedonistic in terms of sexuality (Askun and Ataca, 2007; Knox, Zusman, and McNeely, 2008). Previous studies have also revealed that the age of first-time sex for men is earlier than women and the fact that men have more multiple sex partners than women. (Forney, Lombardo, and Toro, 2007; Manji, Pena, and Dubrow, 2007; Walker, Gutierrez, Torres, and Bertozzi, 2006).

The differences between male and female students' self-esteem is interested in because some studies indicated opposite results (Li, Chan, and Law, 2012; Moksnes and Espnes, 2013). However, Li's, Chan's, and Law's study (2012) also stated that self-esteem on men may be different when it is related to affair. Furthermore, it can be acknowledged that men who have an affair tend to have negative self-esteem.

Conclusions:

Based on the results, some conclusions can be taken. First, self-esteem and motivation of having an affair have influence towards the number of multiple sex partners as well as towards the number of sexual intimacy within the last 6 months. Second, male students tend to have bigger motivation of having an affair than female students. Third, sex is the strongest reason for participants in having an affair and in having many multiple sex partners.

It is suggested that further study can be carried out by including the roles of other variables such as sexual sensation seeking and sexual compulsivity in the model as it is indicated in this study that the role of sex is so significant as part of motivation of having an affair towards the number of multiple sex partners. Participants criteria may also be extended beyond college students, namely by including married participants.

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