

*Exploring the Challenges in Parenting Style That Contribute to Adolescent Sexual Behavior*

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**Abstract**

The growing concerns surrounding sexual education in Malaysia are underscored by a rise in ethical and moral challenges, including premarital sex, issues related to LGBT, and pornography addiction among teenagers, reflecting a worrisome trend. Sexuality remains a sensitive and often taboo topic in society, resulting in limited discourse on related issues. Consequently, this study seeks to explore the gaps and challenges in parenting practices that contribute to adolescent sexual behavior and related concerns. This study adopts a qualitative approach by conducting interviews with five teenagers and five parents, complemented by library research. The results reveal several aspects where parental strategies may fall short in managing adolescent sexual challenges: a) monitoring of gadget and teenage activities, b) parenting style, c) family communication, d) religious education, and e) family time. Effective parental coping strategies are essential for providing appropriate sexual guidance to teenagers. The findings of this study can assist parents in better addressing adolescent sexual issues while offering valuable insights to the Social Welfare Department (JKM) for enhancing training programs, community services, and guidance initiatives.

Keywords: Premarital Sex, Sexuality, Adolescent, Parenting, Coping, Pornography

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## **Introduction**

The National Family Policy (Dasar Keluarga Negara) was established to enhance the well-being of families and communities, aligning with the vision of 'Keluarga Malaysia.' However, various contemporary challenges, such as moral decline, including issues like premarital sex, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) concerns, and pornography addiction among Malaysian teenagers, have become increasingly alarming. For example, a 2015 report by the Malaysian Ministry of Health (KKM) documented 13,831 cases of premarital pregnancies involving individuals aged 10 to 19. One significant factor contributing to these adolescent sexual issues is ineffective parenting, which often results in adolescents losing trust in their parents, especially regarding discussions about sexuality. Furthermore, societal taboos surrounding sexuality exacerbate the lack of open conversations on the topic.

Effective parenting plays a vital role in providing adolescents with proper sexual guidance. A study conducted by the USM Institute of Public Health involving teenagers aged 13 to 17 revealed that nearly 50% of those who had engaged in sexual activities did so before the age of 14. The study highlighted that adolescents involved in such behaviours were often influenced by insufficient parental supervision in enforcing social boundaries. Additionally, these teenagers were found to lack regular prayer practices and tended to act impulsively without considering the negative consequences (Abd Hamid et al., 2018). Similarly, a study by Talib et al. (2012) examining respondents' perceptions of sex education in Malaysian schools reported that 90% of respondents believed sex education was inadequately addressed. Respondents also noted that the informal information provided by many teachers was vague and failed to meet the objective of educating students on this topic. Consequently, this study seeks to explore whether shortcomings in parental coping mechanisms contribute to teenage sexual issues.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study applies Baumrind's theory, developed by Diana Baumrind, which identifies three primary parenting styles and their associated outcomes: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1971). According to this theory, the parenting style adopted by parents significantly influences teenagers' development. Parenting styles and education are essential components in shaping the psychological, intellectual, and emotional growth of adolescents (Baumrind, 1991). Additionally, the Islamic perspective on parental coping mechanisms is rooted in character education models, encompassing upbringing, education, knowledge, personality, attitudes, values, and environment. Al-Ghazali (2007) emphasizes that childhood is the most critical period for shaping and developing an individual's character. A child raised with proper guidance will grow accustomed to a virtuous way of life, ultimately attaining happiness in both this world and the hereafter. Similarly, Al-Miskawayh (1968) asserts that character is formed through upbringing and the natural conditions in which an individual is nurtured. Upbringing involves training, education, learning, and social interaction, while natural conditions refer to inherent temperament or attitudes. These theories serve as the foundation for examining effective parental coping strategies in the context of guiding adolescents on matters of sexuality (refer to figure 1):

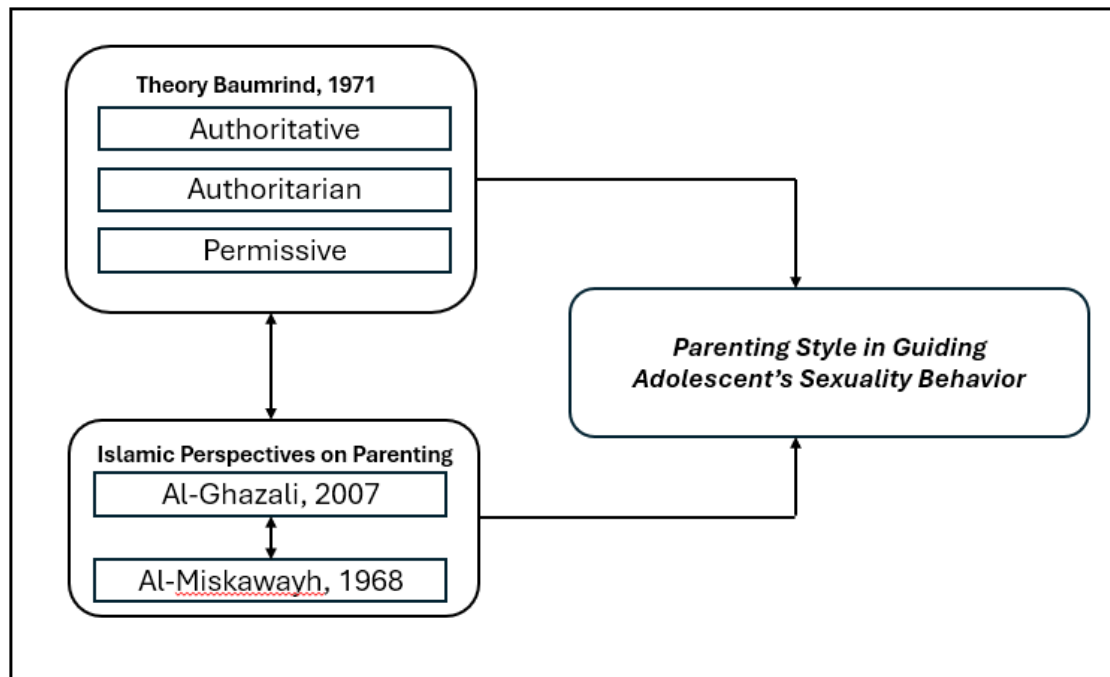


Figure 1: Framework of Parenting Style in Guiding Adolescent's Sexual Behavior: Islamic and Western Approaches

### Challenges on Adolescent Sexuality

The prevalence of premarital sexual activity has been rising in recent years. Efforts rooted in religious activities aimed at curbing adolescent sexual behaviours have shown limited effectiveness, acting only as minor deterrents and failing to prevent adolescents from yielding to their desires when these become overwhelming. This indicates that religious influences may no longer hold the same significance in the lives of today's youth (Muhammad et al., 2017). Factors contributing to moral decline and social challenges among adolescents are frequently tied to family crises, often arising from parents neglecting their responsibilities and roles (Masdin et al., 2014; Wan Sulaiman et al., 2014). The disintegration of the family unit increases adolescents' susceptibility to peer pressure, particularly in contexts of acceptance and rejection by peers. Additionally, poor communication between parents and adolescents, along with family conflicts, has been linked to low self-esteem and compromised psychological well-being in young people (Xiao et al., 2011).

Premarital sex is influenced by several factors, including exposure to pornography, inadequate religious education, curiosity, peer pressure, willingness to engage in sexual activity, lack of awareness about reproductive and sexual health, insufficient parental attention, and incidents of sexual abuse by siblings (Wan Sulaiman et al., 2014). Furthermore, ineffective communication between parents and children exacerbates deviant behaviour among adolescents. Poor communication often leads to a breakdown of trust, causing children to hesitate to share their problems with their parents (Aziz et al., 2019). Instead, adolescents tend to confide in their friends and seek stress relief through social activities. Research suggests that parents who actively engage in open and consistent communication with their children create an environment of love and security, which adolescents value greatly (Kartikasari et al., 2020; Shahrudin et al., 2017).

The 2011 Malaysian Family Well-being Index, conducted as part of the National Transformation Program 2010-2020 and updated every 10 years, highlighted various initiatives aimed at addressing adolescent issues. Programs such as the Reproductive and Social Health Education Module (PEERS) by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Self-Awareness Module by LPPKN were introduced. However, these efforts have shown limited effectiveness, as reflected by the rising number of cases. A study by LPPKN on teenagers' awareness of pregnancy prevention revealed that only 30% understood how to avoid premarital sex (Hasbullah, 2016). While approximately 80% were familiar with condoms and 60% had knowledge of birth control pills, only 30% demonstrated an understanding of strategies to prevent premarital sex. Additionally, statistics from the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development indicated that between 2008 and 2010, there were 152,182 illegitimate births recorded across Malaysia. Sabah had the highest number of cases, with 41,490 illegitimate births, followed by Selangor (18,983), Sarawak (17,570), Johor (16,298), and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur (12,095) (Hasbullah, 2016).

The effectiveness of communication between parents and adolescents is strongly linked to the enhancement of psychosocial attributes, such as improved sexual health knowledge, better interpersonal skills for resisting sexual advances, and increased self-esteem in young people (Sutan et al., 2017). A study by Shahrudin et al. (2018), which surveyed 130 unmarried pregnant teenage girls aged 14 to 19, found a notable level of closeness between parents and their teenage daughters. Conversely, another study indicated that nearly 50 percent of adolescents in Malaysia had engaged in sexual relationships before the age of 14, largely due to parental neglect in setting boundaries for social interactions. This highlights the urgent need for intervention programs to address the growing issue of unwed pregnancies (Ismail & Abd Hamid, 2016). As a result, counselling through psycho-educational strategies, particularly in family-based interventions, is essential to strengthen family support, teach effective coping skills, and improve communication through training, problem-solving, and crisis management techniques (Faudzi et al., 2020). These factors are crucial in shaping family intervention approaches to ensure effective parenting practices and improve the family's ability to manage adolescent challenges (Abdul Rahman, 2020). The failure of parents to fulfill their roles and responsibilities often triggers the breakdown of the family unit (Wan Sulaiman et al., 2014), which in turn contributes to the increasing rates of premarital sex among adolescents (Faudzi et al., 2020).

Moreover, factors such as parental neglect of their duties, particularly in providing religious education, parental divorce, and poor communication between parents and children, often push adolescents to seek guidance and support from peers or external sources (Shahrudin et al., 2017, 2018). Adolescents facing social issues are frequently those who are seeking attention and support from their families and parents (Masdin et al., 2014). However, obstacles like a lack of confidence among teachers and parents, along with the absence of suitable educational materials, prevent the effective implementation of sex education programs (Tin, 2014). Additionally, cultural and religious sensitivities compound these challenges, leading to a shortage of education, guidance, and services concerning sexuality (Bashir et al., 2017). Sexuality and reproductive health topics remain taboo in many families, even though adolescents have a strong need for trustworthy and open sources of information (Faswita et al., 2018; Ismail et al., 2016).

Effective parental coping has a significant influence on adolescent behaviour. The strategies parents use in coping and their involvement in parenting play a vital role in either preventing or rehabilitating adolescent behavior. Abd Hamid et al. (2018) emphasize that effective

parenting is crucial, as adults can guide adolescents through their challenging "storm and stress" phase. Therefore, the importance of parental involvement in addressing sexuality issues among adolescents must be highlighted, especially since knowledge about sexuality remains limited among Malaysian adolescents (Masdin et al., 2014). Research also indicates that peers often exert more influence over adolescents than family members (Abd Manaf et al., 2013). A study by Jatmikowati et al. (2015), which developed a model for addressing adolescent sexual abuse, highlighted the pivotal roles that family and the surrounding environment play in guiding sexuality. Moreover, Faudzi et al. (2020) argue that sexuality education is instrumental in preventing and reducing the risks of teenage pregnancies, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections. Consequently, it is essential for parents to develop effective parenting techniques and coping strategies to address the sexual health challenges their adolescents may face (Abdullah et al., 2020).

### **The Importance of Sexuality Guidance in Sexuality Education**

Sexuality guidance is a lifelong process of gaining knowledge and shaping attitudes, beliefs, and values concerning identity, relationships, and intimacy (Faudzi et al., 2020). It includes a broad range of topics such as sexual development, human reproduction, health, interpersonal relationships, love, intimacy, body language, and gender roles (Tin, 2014). From an Islamic viewpoint, sexuality guidance involves introducing and educating children about matters related to sex and sexuality in an open and honest manner from the age of understanding (Ulwan, 1988). In Islam, sexuality guidance is viewed as crucial and should begin early, in alignment with Islamic teachings, to instil moral, social, and religious values throughout the child's developmental stages. This responsibility falls under the domain of education (Oktarina et al., 2020). Such guidance also includes understanding the objectives of Shariah, particularly the protection of progeny, as curiosity may prompt children and adolescents to seek sexual information from various sources, which may not always be reliable. Knowledge about sexuality is not exclusively gained from parents; adolescents may also obtain information from schools, peers, mass media, and the Internet (Faswita et al., 2018).

To prevent adolescents from receiving inaccurate information, it is crucial to address the issue proactively and take responsibility for providing accurate sexual education (Kartikasari et al., 2020; Said, 2017). Parents must take preventive measures to educate their children about sexual matters, as emphasized by Aziz (2014), helping them differentiate between what is permissible and what is not in the real world by offering clear explanations, guidance, and expectations. This approach aims to prevent teenagers from engaging in risky social behaviours. Therefore, in the context of this research, sexuality guidance is understood as a lifelong learning process that encompasses multiple dimensions of sexuality: offering accurate information, instilling values, developing interpersonal skills, and nurturing responsible self-concepts (Wazakili, 2010).

### **Research Methodology**

The study utilizes a semi-structured interview method, involving five teenagers and five parents whose children are involved in premarital sex issues (refer to Table 1). Individual interview sessions are conducted to maintain sensitivity and encourage open, transparent communication from both parents and teenagers. This approach is designed to minimize any potential risks to the participants. The aim of the interviews is to identify shortcomings in parental interventions that contribute to adolescent sexuality issues. The semi-structured format allows for the collection of more in-depth, detailed data. The research is conducted in

teenage shelters under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare (JKM), specifically the Bayt Al-Rahmah Pregnancy Guidance Center and the Muallim District Shelter Home. The qualitative data gathered from the interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves processes such as coding, creating nodes, and ultimately developing several key themes.

Table 1: Background of Study Respondent

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status</b>
RA/1	17	Student
RA/2	16	Student
RA/3	17	Student
RA/4	17	Student
RA/5	16	Student
RIB/1	45	Parent
RIB/2	40	Parent
RIB/3	46	Parent
RIB/4	52	Parent
RIB/5	48	Parent
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 Respondents</b>	

### **Research Findings**

The analysis and discussion of this study are based on qualitative data gathered through interviews. The findings indicate that factors such as parenting styles, religious education, family time, monitoring of gadgets and teenage activities and family communication contribute to adolescent sexual behavior (refer to Figure 2).

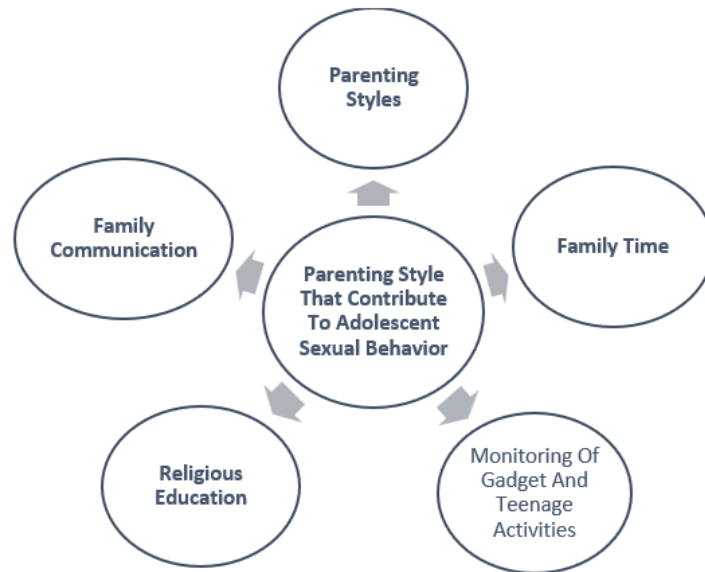


Figure 2: Parenting Styles That Contribute to Adolescent Sexual Behavior

### ***Monitoring of Gadget and Teenage Activities***

The study found that oversight of gadget used and teenage activities, therefore parental monitoring plays a crucial role in addressing teenage sexuality issues. When parents fail to take action, it can have a negative impact on teenagers. All respondents emphasized the importance of parental supervision in preventing involvement in sexual matters. One teenager specifically mentioned that the lack of oversight regarding gadgets and internet usage, especially on social media and exposure to pornography, contributed to their behaviour.

As stated by RA 5: *"But, when I grew older, there was even less monitoring because maybe I was already older, right? So, in terms of the phone, it started with the phone—there was no monitoring"* (RA/5/40). Respondent RA/5 also admitted: *"Adolescents will stay awake until midnight like that. Because parents usually go to bed early (RA/5/372). So they are okay with chatting."*

This statement suggests that adolescents may engage in watching pornography and participating in inappropriate activities on social media late at night, when their parents and other family members are asleep. As a result, it is essential for parents to monitor and ensure that gadgets and the internet are used appropriately. Parental monitoring should not be limited to just gadgets and internet usage but should also extend to overseeing the daily activities of their teenage children. According to one respondent, the mother's busy daily routine caused her to overlook her children's activities: *"I don't really monitor her daily activities because of work, you know"* (RIB/2/32).

Additionally, placing too much trust in their children is another contributing factor. One respondent admitted: *"That was my mistake. Too trusting. That friend of hers"* (RIB/4/217). Parents who recognize that they have placed too much trust in their child may find that their child becomes difficult to control in friendships and begins to cross boundaries. This statement underscores the importance of knowing who their children's friends are in order to prevent inappropriate associations and boundary-crossing behaviours. This view is supported by Atabik et al. (2015) who argue that effective child education must involve an element of

monitoring and control, including overseeing their activities outside the home as well as their use of gadgets and the internet.

### ***Religious Education***

Religion plays a central role in the family dynamic. Parents who neglect religious education can have a profound impact on their children's upbringing, potentially leading to gaps in moral guidance and values that are crucial for their development. This was acknowledged by a respondent, a father, who stated: *"I have never been an imam in my own home because I am the mosque's muezzin"* (RIB/2/258-260). The respondent further expressed: *"Firstly, parents must emphasize matters of religion from a young age"* (RA/4/352). This statement emphasizes the importance of instilling religious education in children from an early age, as this is the period when they are most impressionable. These findings are supported by studies (Atabik et al., 2015; Salleh et al., 2021; Sumari et al., 2019), which suggest that parents must lead by example and that religious upbringing and education should start at home.

### ***Parenting Styles***

Parenting style is a significant factor influencing children's involvement in premarital sex. The findings suggest that adolescents engaged in premarital sex often come from families where parents use violence as a disciplinary method. One respondent, who admitted to using violence against their child, stated that, *"Back then, during my time, even with my husband, yeah, you know, young blood, made a few mistakes, ended up hitting the child, so the child became a victim"* (RIB/3/335). The respondent added: *"My husband didn't really hit much. It was me. I was the one who liked to hit"* (RIB/3/337). As a result of this violence, children may rebel and seek attention from external sources. Additionally, the role of the family is vital; all family members must fulfill their responsibilities for the family to function effectively and provide the necessary support for everyone.

### ***Family Communication***

Communication is a fundamental aspect of family dynamics. Poor communication between parents and children can be a significant factor influencing children's involvement in premarital sex. One respondent, a teenage father, shared that his failure to inquire about his daughter's menstrual cycle resulted in him not knowing she was pregnant out of wedlock until the day she gave birth. He explained that the lack of communication on sexuality-related issues played a role in his daughter's involvement in premarital sex, *"I stopped asking about whether she had her period or not because she was grown up, and I thought my wife could handle it. It turns out I failed in 2019, around that time"* (RIB/2/28). He added, *"Even up until she was about to give birth, I still didn't know"* (RIB/2/56). The lack of communication within the family makes it easier for teenagers to seek external sources that may be misleading. RIB/3 emphasized: *"Most of their children learn about sexuality not from their parents but from influencers. And the way they obtain that information is also incorrect because they learn from pornographic videos"* (RIB3/1).

### ***Family Time***

A lack of communication between parents and children, coupled with insufficient family time, can significantly contribute to parental responsiveness failures. When families don't spend quality time together, it becomes harder for parents to understand their children's



emotional, social, and developmental needs. This lack of connection can lead to missed cues, misunderstandings, and a reduced ability for parents to respond effectively to their children's needs. In today's fast-paced world, with work, extracurricular activities, and other responsibilities, it's easy for family time to take a back seat. However, when parents are physically present but emotionally disengaged, children can feel neglected or misunderstood, which can impact their emotional well-being and development. Creating opportunities for open communication and making time for shared activities can help foster better understanding and responsiveness within the family. Whether through regular family meals, shared hobbies, or simply setting aside time to talk, these efforts can strengthen the bond and improve overall parental responsiveness. As one respondent stated: *"I'm not trying to criticize, but I ask my children: 'Dad? Hmm, Dad?' I wake up, and Dad's not there. Dad's gone. No family time activities, no communication with the children"* (RIB/4/716). Family time is crucial, and according to the respondent, the lack of it led to the family being neglected. The respondent further explained: *"My ex-husband, he was the type that just worked. Sometimes, even on his days off, he would take overtime or something. And with the kids, he wasn't really that involved. Rarely"* (RIB/3/553).

## **Discussion and Analyses**

Diana Baumrind's theory of parenting styles (1971) provides a foundational understanding of how different parenting approaches influence children's development. Baumrind identifies three main styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. The findings closely align with this theory, as the identified parenting shortcomings—such as insufficient monitoring of gadgets and daily activities, the use of physical punishment, and limited family time—can be linked to ineffective parenting practices. A key finding is the lack of parental supervision, especially when it comes to teenagers' use of gadgets and internet access. This is related to permissive parenting, where parents have low levels of control and supervision. According to Baumrind, permissive parents grant their children excessive freedom, resulting in a lack of structure and boundaries. This mirrors the experiences of the adolescents in the study, who reported engaging in inappropriate behaviours, such as watching pornography or using social media irresponsibly, due to the absence of parental oversight. Permissive parenting fails to offer the necessary guidance and discipline, which can lead to teenagers making poor choices regarding their sexual behaviour.

Furthermore, the use of violence in parenting, as reported by some participants in the study, reflects authoritarian parenting. Baumrind characterizes authoritarian parents as highly controlling and demanding yet lacking warmth and open communication. The findings indicate that the use of violence fosters resentment and rebellion in adolescents, leading them to seek attention and validation from external sources, such as peers or unhealthy relationships. This supports Baumrind's observation that authoritarian parenting can result in low self-esteem and deviant behaviours in children, including risky sexual activities. In contrast, authoritative parenting—characterized by a balance of control, warmth, and communication—was notably absent in the families discussed in the study. Authoritative parents establish clear expectations while fostering open communication with their children, which is essential for healthy adolescent development. The absence of family time and meaningful communication observed in the study underscores the negative impact of not embracing this balanced parenting approach. According to Baumrind's theory, teenagers raised in authoritative households are more likely to develop self-discipline and make responsible decisions, including regarding their sexual behaviour.

In the context of Islamic perspectives, particularly the theories of Al-Ghazali and Al-Miskawayh, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of religious education and moral upbringing. In Islam, the family is regarded as the primary unit responsible for imparting moral and religious values to children. Al-Ghazali (2007) asserts that childhood is a crucial period for shaping character, and the absence of religious education can lead to moral decline in adulthood. The findings suggest that in families where religious education is neglected, adolescents are more likely to engage in premarital sex or other forms of sexual misconduct. One respondent in the study acknowledged that religious practices, such as leading prayers at home, were neglected due to external commitments. This neglect aligns with Islamic teachings, which emphasize the significance of early and ongoing religious education in guiding a child's moral development.

Al-Miskawayh (1968) also emphasizes that both upbringing and natural temperament contribute to character formation. When parents fail to provide a religious and morally grounded environment, adolescents are more likely to seek guidance from other, less reliable sources. From an Islamic perspective, sexuality is a sensitive but essential topic that should be addressed openly and honestly within the family. Parents who neglect to guide their children on matters of sexual morality risk allowing their children to learn about sexuality from inappropriate sources, such as peers or the internet. This failure to provide adequate religious and moral education aligns with the broader findings in the study, where teenagers who lacked proper religious guidance were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours.

## **Conclusion**

The study's findings regarding parental responsiveness failures that contribute to teenage sexuality issues include inadequate monitoring of gadget usage and teenage activities, ineffective parenting styles, lack of religious education, poor family communication, and insufficient family time. Therefore, it can be concluded that parents play a crucial role in providing sexual guidance to teenagers. Sumari et al. (2021) stated that a functional family should employ effective parenting styles, which include parenting skills and methods. Additionally, parents need to be good role models, and religious upbringing and education should begin at home (Atabik et al., 2015; Salleh et al., 2021; Sumari et al., 2019). For a family to function well, all family members must play their respective roles. This is further supported by Atabik et al. (2018) study, which emphasized the importance of monitoring and supervision in parenting, including overseeing children's activities outside the home and their use of gadgets and the internet. This highlights the need for a holistic approach to guide parents in overcoming responsiveness failures and in raising productive teenagers who contribute positively to their religion, nation, and country. Therefore, cooperation from all parties—parents, educators, and the government is crucial in educating teenagers about sexuality issues and creating a healthy environment.

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