

Bold risk behavior and involvement in commercial sex among adolescents: Systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Background: The prevalence of adolescent involvement in prostitution has grown in the millennial era, often driven by lifestyle demands, economic pressures, and environmental influences. Despite various preventive and repressive government efforts, the phenomenon persists, affecting adolescents' physical and mental health and posing significant risks to future generations.

Objectives: This study aims to explore the factors contributing to risky behaviors and adolescent involvement in commercial sex, highlighting the roles of external environments, media, alcohol, education, and financial pressures.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted using the PEOs framework, analyzing articles from databases like PubMed. Inclusion criteria included original peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024 in English or Indonesian, focusing on risky behaviors and adolescent involvement in commercial sex. Exclusion criteria eliminated grey literature and non-research-based articles. Eleven articles were rigorously selected for critical appraisal and numerical assessment.

Results: Findings reveal that family dysfunction, peer pressure, and media influences significantly shape adolescent behavior. Alcohol consumption impairs decision-making, increasing vulnerability to exploitation. Educational attainment correlates with risk, as adolescents with limited education are more prone to engage in risky behaviors. Financial pressures further drive adolescents toward commercial sex as a perceived solution to economic challenges.

Conclusions: Adolescent involvement in commercial sex results from a confluence of external and internal factors, emphasizing the need for holistic interventions. Addressing family dynamics, enhancing educational opportunities, monitoring media exposure, and providing economic support can mitigate these risks. Comprehensive, multidisciplinary strategies are critical to protecting adolescent well-being and reducing the prevalence of risky behaviors.

KEYWORD: commercial sex; education; risky behavior; teenagers

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INTRODUCTION

Entering the millennial era, the prevalence of prostitution has become increasingly widespread, even extending into the education sector, with adolescents as its participants (1). Various factors, including lifestyle, economic pressures, and others, influence adolescents involved in prostitution. A hedonistic lifestyle, unbalanced by adequate economic conditions, often drives students to justify any means to fulfill their desired lifestyle (2). Every individual adopts different lifestyles to attain happiness. Lifestyle refers to a way of life encompassing habits, viewpoints, and response patterns to life developed to achieve specific goals (3). Adolescents, characterized by instability, susceptibility to influence, and a strong obsession with attaining their desires, are particularly vulnerable.

The shifting social and cultural paradigms adolescents face reflect the dynamics of modern society (4). Lifestyle and environmental influences have become central to discussions, as they are integral to the formation of personal and social identity among adolescents (5). One critical aspect requiring deeper understanding is adolescents' decision to engage in commercial sexual behavior (6). Commercial sexual activity refers to a profession where individuals offer sexual acts to the public in exchange for payment. In addition to earning wages, these transactions often aim to satisfy lifestyle needs or a sense of pride

in acquiring desired possessions (1). Despite having high intellectual capabilities, adolescents are usually lured into prostitution due to lifestyle demands, economic pressures, environmental influences, and other factors. This involvement significantly impacts reproductive health and diminishes the quality of future generations (7). Adolescent involvement in prostitution also increases the risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, AIDS, syphilis, and other venereal diseases. Moreover, adolescents who become sex workers may encourage their peers to follow their path, luring them with promises of luxury and easy rewards (8).

Additionally, commercial sexual behavior adversely affects adolescents' mental and emotional health. They often experience heightened sensitivity, anger, and, in severe cases, cognitive disorders such as self-injury or feelings of worthlessness, which may lead to suicidal ideation. These issues compromise the productivity and well-being of the nation's future generation (9). The phenomenon of prostitution or commercial sex work has become increasingly rampant. Despite numerous preventive and repressive measures by the government, prostitution remains an unresolved issue. The absence of an integrated government program to address prostitution has allowed the problem to persist, evidenced by the growing number of female sex workers each year (10). This study aims to examine risky

behaviors and adolescent involvement in commercial sex.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a systematic review that utilizes the PEOs framework, as adapted from the Colorado State's University library. PEOs stands for Population, Exposure, and Outcomes. The inclusion criteria for this systematic review include articles discussing risky behaviors and adolescent involvement in commercial sex, articles indexed in Scopus Q1-Q4 for international journals, and at least Sinta 3 for national journals. The selected articles were published in English or Indonesian between 2014 and 2024, and only original, peer-

reviewed, full-text journal articles were considered. The exclusion criteria include grey literature such as conference papers, proceedings, reports, theses, or dissertations, as well as other forms of grey literature. Additionally, opinion-based articles, commentaries, reports, review articles, book reviews, and newspaper articles were excluded. The database used for this systematic review was PubMed. Keywords for the search included Commercial, Commercial Sex, Sex Industries, Industries Sex, Sex Industry, Sex Work, Prostitution, Young Adult, Pubescent, and Teenage. The eligibility assessment stage applied the inclusion criteria rigorously by conducting a full-text review of

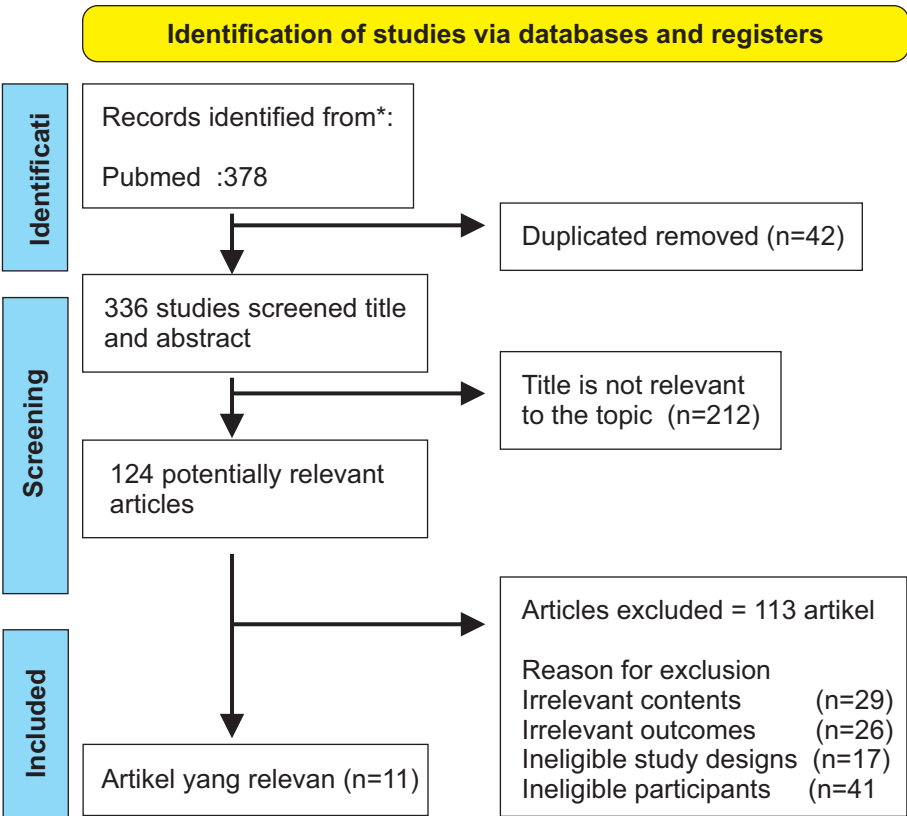


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram of the research

articles. At this stage, 42 articles were excluded due to duplication, 112 articles were deemed irrelevant based on their titles or topics, and 113 articles were excluded for not meeting the criteria. A total of 11 articles passed the selection process and underwent further evaluation through critical appraisal and numerical assessment conducted in collaboration with the supervisors. All selected articles (n=11) were thoroughly reviewed, supplemented with essential comments of appraisal, and subsequently subjected to numerical evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This systematic review identifies 11 articles from various countries, including two from Ethiopia, one from the United States, one from Semarang/Indonesia, one from Kenya, two from Africa, and four from

Nigeria. The research methods used include nine articles employing cross-sectional methods and three using qualitative methods. In terms of journal indexing, 10 articles are indexed in Scopus, while one is indexed in Sinta 2. Based on quality scores and numerical assessments, five articles received the maximum score, while six others scored in the A range. The top articles, such as A2, A3, A4, A8, and A10, are of high quality due to their detailed explanation of research methods, research questions, data collection, methodological appropriateness, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data analysis, respondents, ethical approval, and interpretation and conclusions. These articles were published between 2014 and 2024, although research specifically on risky behaviors and adolescent involvement in commercial sex during this period remains limited (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Systematic review article analysis

Kode & Indeks	Author/Year/Title	Country	Aim of Study	Type of research	Data Collection	Participants/Sampel Size	Result
A1 Q3	Negeri (2014) Assessment of risky sexual behaviors and risk perception among youths in Western Ethiopia: the influences of family and peers: a comparative cross-sectional study (11)	This research was conducted in Ethiopia	This study aimed to assess the risk of sexual behavior.	Scoss-Sectional	Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires.	600 teenagers dropped out of school	The results of this study indicate that more than 41.4% of teenagers have premarital sex. It is said that the causes of risky behavior and involvement of teenagers in premarital sex are due to parental factors and peer influence.

A2 Q1	Wakasa et al. (2021) Risky sexual behavior and associated factors among sexual experiences high school students in Guduru, Ethiopia (12)	Research conducted in Ethiopia was to determine the risk factors for commercial sexual behavior among students.	The purpose of this study was to determine the risk factors for commercial sexual behavior among students.	This research method is cross-sectional	Data was collected by distributing questionnaires.	The sample in the study was 1236 teenagers.	The results of this State's that the school environment is the cause of students engaging in free sexual behavior, which will later have an impact on commercial sexual behavior.
A3 Q1	Reed et al. (2019) Friends, family, and boyfriends: An analysis of relationship pathways into commercial sexual exploitation (13)	This research was conducted in the Nevada, United States.	This study aimed to determine causes of adolescents being involved in commercial sexual behavior.	This research method is qualitative	Data collection was carried out by interview	The informants used in this study were 26 teenagers who were commercial sex workers.	The results of this study indicate that the causes of teenagers falling into commercial sex behavior are due to three factors: friends, family, and boyfriends. Friends are the most common/most influential cause of teenagers becoming commercial sex workers.
A4 Sinta 2	Madjid et al. (2019) Student as Online Prostitution Crime Offender (Study in Semarang City) (14)	This research was conducted in Semarang	This study aims to find out how teenagers can become commercial sex workers and what the causal factors are.	The research method used in this study is qualitative	Data collection was carried out through interviews	The informants used in this study were 3 teenagers.	The results of the research that has been done found that the causes of teenagers involved in commercial sex are economic factors, socializing, being far from parents, and having easy media to offer themselves. These conditions cause someone to fall into commercial sex behavior and find it difficult to stop the work they do.
A5 Q1	Wakoli (2018) Relationship between	The research was	This study aimed to determine	The research method used in	Data collection was carried out by	The sample used in this study was 337	The results of the research that has been conducted show that the

	exposure to mass media and adolescent students' irresponsible sexual behavior in secondary schools (15)	conducted in Kenya	the relationship between exposure to mass media and deviant sexual behavior in students.	this study is quantitative with a cross-sectional design.	distributing questionnaires.	secondary schools.	influence of social media causes the emergence of deviant sexual behavior among teenagers. Social media has a negative emotional impact on teenagers. This condition causes teenagers to engage in deviant behavior. The contents on social media make teenagers think that commercial sex and free sex are normal things to do.
A7 Q1	Sserwanja et al. (2023) Prevalence and factors Associated with Risky sexual behaviors among sexually active female adolescents in Zambia (16)	This research was conducted in Zambia, South Africa.	This study aimed to explore the prevalence and factors associated with risky sexual behavior among adolescents.	The method used in this research is quantitative using a cross-sectional design.	Data was collected through a questionnaire.	The sample used in this study was 3000 teenagers.	The results of this study showed that socializing, alcohol use and education cause teenagers to fall into risky behavior and free sex.
A8 Q3	Omojonle and Veronica (2023) Risky sexual behavior and associated factors among in-school adolescents: a school-based, cross-sectional study (17)	Research conducted in Nigeria	This study aimed to determine risky behavior in adolescents and the factors that cause risky behavior.	The research method used in this study is quantitative with a cross-sectional design.	Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires.	The sample used in this study was 200 teenagers.	The results of this study indicate that peer influence, self-esteem, and family structure influence risky sexual behavior in adolescents.

A8 Q4	Chikovore and Sooryamoorthy (2024) Sexual Practices and Risky Behaviour (18)	This research was conducted in South Africa	This study aimed to determine sexual practices and risky behavior in adolescents.	This research method is quantitative	Data collection was carried out through this questionnaire	The respondents used in this study were 120 teenagers.	The results of this study indicate that economic factors and family and parental communication cause sexual practices and risky behaviors carried out by adolescents. These three factors cause adolescents to fall into dangerous behavior.
A9 Q2	Arasi and Ajuwon (2020) Use of sachet alcohol and sexual behaviour among adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria (19)	This research was conducted in Nigeria	The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of alcohol use sachets and sexual behavior among adolescents.	This research method is quantitative with a cross sectional study design.	Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire	The sample used in this study was 390 teenagers.	The results of the research that has been done show that more than 50% consume alcohol, 41% of teenagers drop out of school, and more than 63% of teenagers are involved in risky behavior. And the things that make teenagers do risky behavior and fall into commercial sex behavior are alcohol consumption and dropping out of school.
A10 Q3	Ulo (2024) Family Pressure, Peer Influence, and Teenagers Involvement in Prostitution (20)	The research was conducted in Nigeria	The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of family, friends, and peers on	This research method is quantitative with a cross sectional study design.	Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire	The sample used was 120 teenagers who were in several brothels.	The results of the research that has been done show that peer factors are the biggest influence on teenagers to get involved in prostitution. In addition, economics is also a factor that causes teenagers to work as commercial sex workers. In addition, economic factors also cause parents to let their children go to the

						city to find work; conditions cause teenagers to look for shortcuts to get money quickly, and many so that they can lighten the burden on their parents.
A11 Q4	Ori et al. (2020) Perceived Factors Influencing Practice of Prostitution among Female Undergraduates of Tertiary Institutions in Owerri Municipal, Imo State (21)	The research was conducted in Nigeria.	The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence prostitution practices among female students.	The research method used is quantitative with a descriptive Cross-Sectional survey design.	Data collection was carried out by filling out a questionnaire from two universities in Owerri.	The sample used in this study was 400 female students from two high schools in Owerri. The results of this study indicate that cases of prostitution that occur in students are very high. Factors that cause this behavior include poverty, peer pressure, neglect of the role of parents, uncontrolled freedom and freedom in school and academic support and prostitution practices among female students. It was found that, on average, students involved in prostitution practices have poor academic grades.

DISCUSSION

External environments also play a significant role in influencing adolescent behavior. For instance, family plays a key role in shaping the values and norms adopted by adolescents (22). Adolescents who grow up in dysfunctional families or experience domestic violence often seek escape outside the home, including through risky relationships (23). The lack of attention and support from family, as well as family

separation, makes adolescents feel worthless and broken, and in some cases, they seek recognition or affection elsewhere, often in unhealthy ways.

In addition to the family, several articles highlight that social environments and peer relationships also heavily influence adolescent behavior (24). Peer pressure or the desire to be accepted by a certain group can push adolescents to engage in behaviors that conflict with their

values (25). In the context of commercial sex, adolescents may get involved due to the negative influence of peers who have already engaged in it or because they see it as a way to gain recognition. Media plays an important role in shaping adolescent behavior, including their involvement in risky behaviors and commercial sex. During adolescence, individuals are in the process of finding their identity, making them more susceptible to influences from what they see and consume, especially through various media platforms (26). Whether it is television, movies, music, or social media, these often promote a lifestyle that glorifies sexuality, luxury, and social status without showing the risks or negative consequences that may follow (27).

Social media enables adolescents to access content that normalizes risky behaviors, including casual sex or self-exploitation for popularity or financial gain. Celebrities or influencers often serve as role models for adolescents, showcasing a lavish lifestyle linked to physical beauty and sexual appeal (28). This can create pressure on adolescents to conform to these standards, ultimately leading them to engage in risky behaviors for social validation or material gain (29). Moreover, the articles also explain that social media provides a space for interactions with strangers who may exploit adolescents. Through online platforms, adolescents can connect with individuals who may manipulate or exploit them emotionally and

financially (30). For adolescents in vulnerable situations, such as those facing economic or emotional pressure, false promises of quick money through commercial sex may become a tempting offer that is difficult to resist.

Alcohol also impacts risky behavior in adolescents, including involvement in commercial sex. When adolescents consume alcohol, their ability to make rational decisions and consider long-term consequences becomes impaired (31). Alcohol can cause adolescents to lose self-control, making them more impulsive and less capable of managing risky situations. This influence can lead them to engage in dangerous actions without fully understanding the risks involved, including unsafe sexual behavior (32).

Adolescents under the influence of alcohol are more easily manipulated by others, whether peers or older individuals, into doing things they might reject while sober. In some cases, exploiters use alcohol to lower the adolescents' defenses, taking advantage of their intoxicated states to coerce them into commercial sex or other sexual activities. Alcohol also worsens decision-making, making adolescents more vulnerable to the risks of exploitation and sex trafficking (32). According to the findings presented in several articles, education also provides access to better opportunities in the future. Adolescents with adequate education are typically more optimistic about their future and tend to seek stable life

paths, such as pursuing higher education or careers with promising prospects (33). When adolescents have clear aspirations and believe they have a bright future, they are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, including commercial sex, which is often seen as a shortcut to material gain. On the other hand, adolescents who do not receive a good education or feel unsuccessful in formal education may feel hopeless and become more vulnerable to seeking shortcuts through risky behavior. Financial instability due to lack of education can also be a driving factor in their involvement in commercial sex (34). For some adolescents, commercial sex is seen as a way to earn money or meet material needs, especially if they do not see any better alternatives due to limited education.

Financial pressures significantly influence adolescent behavior, including their involvement in risky behaviors and commercial sex. Economic pressures, whether within the family or individually, often drive adolescents to seek quick ways to earn money or fulfill material needs (35). Adolescents who grow up in financially struggling families or live in poverty may feel compelled to take risky actions as a means of survival or to improve their standard of living. In many cases, commercial sex may be viewed as a quick solution to economic problems, especially if they feel they have no better options (36). Adolescents who drop out of school or lack the skills to obtain a decent job are more vulnerable to situa-

tions that force them into commercial sex for income (37). This situation can worsen if adolescents feel isolated or lack strong social support, making them perceive commercial sex as the only way to earn money quickly. Adolescents from low-income backgrounds may feel pressured to meet these standards in risky ways, including engaging in commercial sex (38). The need for social recognition and the desire to "keep up" with their peers in terms of material status often triggers dangerous actions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Various key factors, including external environments, media, alcohol, education, and financial pressures, influence adolescent risky behavior. External environments, such as family, peers, and partners, have a significant impact on shaping adolescent values and behaviors. Social media and online platforms provide easy access to risky content that can encourage adolescents to engage in unhealthy behaviors. Alcohol consumption disrupts awareness and decision-making abilities, increasing vulnerability to exploitation. The lack of proper and comprehensive education leaves adolescents with limited understanding of the consequences of their actions, while economic pressure often forces them to seek instant solutions through risky behavior, including commercial sex. A comprehensive approach through

education, media monitoring, and social support is necessary to reduce these risks.

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