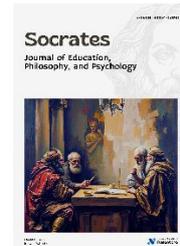




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Dynamics Psychology of Premarital Sexual Behavior Among Students: A Phenomenological Study

Raisah Zettira Hermawan¹, Budi Sarasati², Yomima Viena Yuliana³

¹Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia, 202210515155@ubharajaya.ac.id

²Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia,
budi.sarasatiubj@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

³Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia,
yomima.viena@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

Corresponding Author: 202210515155@ubharajaya.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study explores the psychological dynamics of premarital sexual behavior among female university students within romantic relationships, using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The research aims to understand how participants experience, interpret, and assign meaning to their involvement in premarital sexual behavior. Two female undergraduate students who had direct experiences with premarital sexual behavior participated in the study, supported by close informants to strengthen data credibility. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that premarital sexual behavior emerged from complex interactions between emotional intimacy, trust in partners, curiosity, environmental normalization, and expectations of long-term commitment. Sexual involvement was interpreted as a form of expressing love, emotional validation, and an effort to maintain romantic relationships. However, an imbalance between high intimacy and passion with unstable commitment generated emotional vulnerability, particularly when participants' expectations of reciprocity and seriousness were unmet. Feelings of confusion, insecurity, fear of abandonment, and self-doubt were prominent psychological consequences following sexual involvement. This study concludes that premarital sexual behavior among female students cannot be understood merely as risky behavior, but rather as a meaningful psychological experience shaped by emotional needs, relational contexts, and sociocultural influences. A contextual and holistic understanding is essential for developing more empathetic educational and psychological interventions related to sexuality among young adults.

Keywords: Premarital Sexual Behavior, Dynamics of Love, College Students

INTRODUCTION

Premarital sexual behavior is a phenomenon that is gaining increasing attention in the context of student life in Indonesia. Student involvement in romantic relationships encompasses not only emotional aspects but also sexual behaviors manifested in various forms of individual experiences and attachments. Research conducted by Aini et al. (2025) shows that students

engage in premarital sexual behavior in various forms influenced by both personal and relational factors. In romantic relationships during early adulthood, such as college, individuals tend to have a strong need for intimacy and acceptance from their partners. Complex relationship dynamics influence how students interpret experiences of affection and closeness, including engagement in premarital sexual behavior, which often occurs as part of intense relationship interactions.

College students' involvement in premarital sexual behavior is also inseparable from the commitment aspect in romantic relationships. Research conducted by Rahardjo et al. (2017) shows that the level of relationship commitment and individual attitudes toward premarital sexual behavior significantly influence student involvement in the practice. Relationship commitment is an important psychological factor in romantic relationships, as it reflects the seriousness, sense of responsibility, and trust between partners. Relationship commitment is correlated with premarital sexual behavior, where the level of commitment and individual attitudes toward the behavior can play a role in strengthening or suppressing premarital sexual involvement.

In addition to commitment and attitudes, premarital sexual behavior in college students is also influenced by various other factors, such as lifestyle, emotional needs, and interpersonal interaction patterns within romantic relationships. These factors interact with each other and shape relationship dynamics that encourage individuals to engage in premarital sexual behavior (Zadri, 2020). Romantic relationships in college students generally develop through an intense search for intimacy. Students tend to seek a sense of love, acceptance, and understanding as part of fulfilling their affective needs. This condition aligns with the concept of intimacy in Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love, which emphasizes intimacy as a key component in forming meaningful romantic relationships.

In addition to intimacy, passion also plays a crucial role in students' romantic relationships. The emotional closeness that develops can spark sexual desire and urges, especially in private situations involving two-person interactions. These emotional and situational factors can strengthen an individual's motivation to engage in premarital sexual behavior. Romantic relationship dynamics do not always develop linearly. Premarital sexual involvement, initially interpreted as a demonstration of love or commitment, can turn into a complex experience if it is not accompanied by a balanced emotional response and commitment from the partner (Rahardjo et al., 2017).

This mismatch between emotional expectations and the reality of the relationship has the potential to create psychological conflict that impacts individual well-being. When romantic relationships are dominated by emotional dependence without the support of strong commitment, students can experience confusion, anxiety, and stress in understanding the role of the relationship in their lives. Based on this description, research using a qualitative phenomenological approach is needed to explore in-depth how students interpret romantic relationship experiences involving premarital sexual behavior. This approach is expected to more comprehensively reveal the dynamics of intimacy, passion, and commitment within the context of students' romantic relationships.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive phenomenology to understand the subjective experiences of the research subjects. The research subjects consisted of two female students who had experience engaging in premarital sexual behavior in the context of a romantic relationship. The determination of subjects was carried out through a purposive sampling technique, considering predetermined criteria in accordance with the research objectives. The data collection process was carried out through in-depth interviews conducted three times with each subject. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to allow the researcher to explore the subjects' experiences in more depth and flexibly, and the entire interview process was recorded with the subjects' consent. Data analysis was

carried out through several stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusions. To maintain the validity of the data, the researcher applied time triangulation, source triangulation, and member checking techniques, so that the research results are expected to have a good level of credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, Subject DRO's experience of engaging in premarital sexual behavior demonstrates a complex and gradual psychological dynamic. This experience did not emerge suddenly, but rather through a process of emotional closeness, the formation of trust, and the understanding of the romantic relationship as a serious, long-term one. Subject DRO's involvement began with the formation of a romantic relationship accompanied by intense communication and strong emotional closeness. DRO described the relationship as beginning with a slow approach, sharing personal stories, and feeling understood by their partner. This fostered a deep sense of trust in their partner. This trust became the primary foundation for DRO in lowering personal boundaries. DRO interpreted trust as evidence of the seriousness of the relationship, so that when in situations conducive to physical intimacy, DRO felt emotionally safe to engage in premarital sexual behavior. In addition to trust, DRO also revealed that her social environment played a role in shaping her permissive attitude toward premarital sexual behavior. The environment that normalizes this behavior leads DRO to view premarital sex as a normal part of a relationship that is considered mature and serious.

DRO subjects have clear expectations for their romantic relationships. DRO expressed a strong desire for a stable and sustainable long-term relationship. This relationship is not interpreted as a temporary affair, but rather as an emotional bond aimed at a shared future. Furthermore, DRO also hopes to progress to marriage. This hope leads DRO to view sexual involvement as part of the relationship's maturation process. DRO believes that by providing emotional and physical intimacy, couples will grow closer and demonstrate a more tangible commitment to the relationship. In relationships involving premarital sexual behavior, DRO experiences intense and ambivalent emotional dynamics. On the one hand, DRO feels a strong urge to feel loved, cared for, and fully accepted by their partner. Sexual behavior is interpreted as a means of gaining emotional validation and reassurance of love. However, on the other hand, following this engagement, DRO also experiences emotional confusion and anxiety. DRO began to question the meaning of the love she received, whether it was based on genuine feelings or simply fulfilling her partner's desires. This situation created an inner conflict that left DRO in an emotionally vulnerable position.

DRO's subjects revealed that the emotional closeness they developed with their partners triggered increased sexual arousal and desire. Intense interactions, the partner's attention, and shared situations intensified their sexual urges. In DRO's experience, sexual desire often coexisted with an emotional need to feel loved. This made it difficult for DRO to distinguish between biological urges and affective needs. As a result, the decision to engage in premarital sexual behavior was driven more by feelings than rational considerations. After engaging in premarital sexual behavior, DRO noticed a change in her partner's attitude. These changes were characterized by reduced attention, less intense communication, and decreased emotional warmth. DRO also felt a decrease in their partner's commitment to the relationship. Expectations for a long-term relationship and marriage were not fully realized. This situation led to disappointment and emotional insecurity, and reinforced DRO's psychological vulnerability in the relationship.

Researchers describe the psychological dynamics of DRO according to the schematic diagram below:

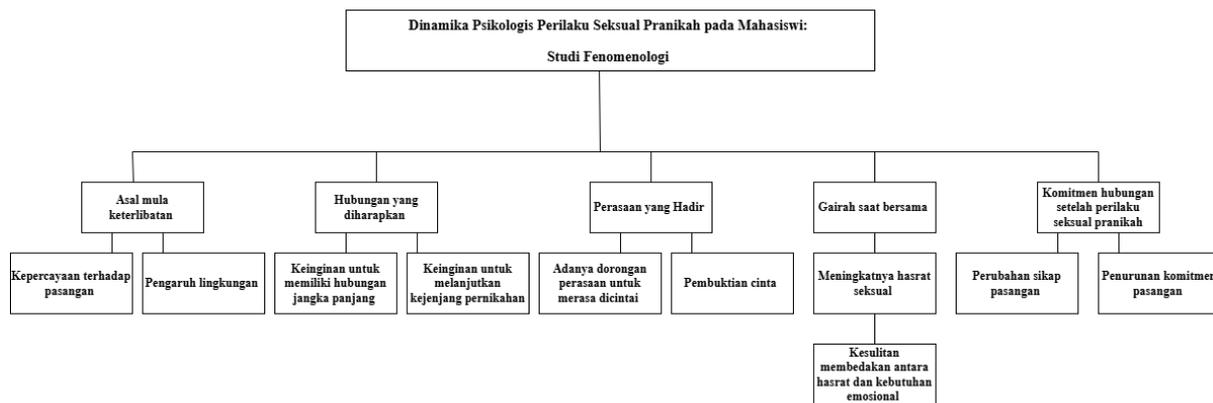


Figure 1. Psychological dynamics of DRO

Based on the psychological dynamics chart of Subject DRO, involvement in premarital sexual behavior begins with the formation of strong trust in the partner, which develops through emotional closeness and intense interactions in a romantic relationship. This trust is reinforced by the influence of a social environment that normalizes premarital sexual behavior, so that DRO views such behavior as normal and acceptable in the context of a dating relationship. In this relationship, DRO has hopes of establishing a serious, long-term relationship that will lead to marriage, so that premarital sexual behavior is interpreted as part of the relationship's maturation process. Emotionally, DRO feels a strong urge to feel loved and fully accepted by his partner, and interprets sexual relations as a form of proof of love. Intense closeness gives rise to increased sexual desire, but at the same time DRO has difficulty distinguishing between sexual urges and emotional needs. After engaging in premarital sexual behavior, DRO experiences changes in the partner's attitude, characterized by a decrease in attention and emotional warmth, which is then followed by a decrease in the partner's commitment to the relationship. This condition creates emotional uncertainty and shows an imbalance between expectations of commitment and the reality of the relationship experienced by DRO.

Subject NSP's experience of engaging in premarital sexual behavior exhibited a different dynamic than Subject DRO's. NSP interpreted this experience as the result of a struggle between curiosity, emotional urges, and conflicting moral values. Subject NSP's involvement began with curiosity about sexual experiences that arose within a long-standing romantic relationship. NSP described the relationship as initially built on emotional closeness and mutual trust. Curiosity was the dominant factor driving NSP to engage in premarital sexual behavior. This urge emerged gradually and was not fully planned. NSP recognized that the increasingly close relationship and the pressure from her partner made it difficult to restrain herself, even though it conflicted with her moral values. Subject NSP also had hopes for the sustainability of her relationship. NSP desired a stable and long-term relationship. This hope led NSP to strive to maintain the relationship by meeting her partner's emotional needs. However, unlike DRO, NSP's expectations for marriage were not explicitly expressed as a primary goal, but rather as a possibility that was hoped to be realized over time. Sexual intercourse was perceived as an effort to maintain closeness and prevent the loss of a partner.

In NSP's experience, premarital sexual behavior gave rise to conflicting feelings. NSP felt an emotional drive to feel loved and accepted by their partner. However, after engaging in this activity, NSP also felt disappointment and the realization that the love they received did not fully align with their expectations. NSP expressed feelings of being used emotionally, where their partner's attention was focused more on fulfilling their physical desires than on their emotional needs as individuals. NSP subjects experienced the emergence of sexual passion and attraction as part of the emotional closeness in the relationship. NSP described feelings of excitement and excitement when with their partner, but at the same time, they struggled to restrain themselves from exceeding their moral values.

NSP also experienced difficulty distinguishing between sexual desire and emotional needs. The drive to maintain the relationship often led NSP to ignore signals of personal discomfort in order to maintain closeness with their partner. After engaging in premarital sexual behavior, NSP noticed a significant change in their partner's attitude. These changes are characterized by a decrease in emotional attention and a lack of certainty about the direction of the relationship. The NSP also experiences a decrease in their partner's commitment, which makes them feel insecure and doubtful about the relationship's sustainability. This experience prompts deep reflection in the NSP about the meaning of love, commitment, and boundaries in romantic relationships.

Researchers describe the psychological dynamics of NSP according to the schematic diagram below:

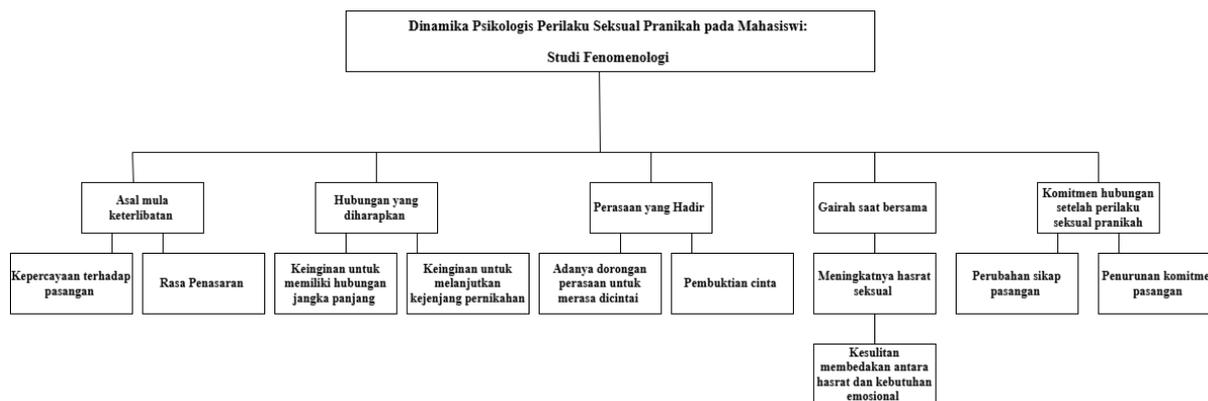


Figure 2. Psychological dynamics of NSP

Based on the psychological dynamics chart of the NSP subjects, involvement in premarital sexual behavior begins with curiosity about sexual experiences that arise within the context of a romantic relationship that has been established quite emotionally close. This curiosity develops along with the closeness of the relationship and intense interactions with the partner, thus encouraging the NSP to go beyond previously believed boundaries. In this relationship, the NSP has a desire to maintain the relationship long-term, although the hope of progressing to marriage is not always explicitly expressed. The NSP feels an emotional drive to feel loved and accepted by the partner, so that premarital sexual behavior is perceived as a form of proof of love and an effort to maintain the relationship. The closeness that is created gives rise to increased sexual desire, but the NSP has difficulty distinguishing between sexual desire and emotional needs, often ignoring personal discomfort in order to maintain closeness. After engaging in premarital sexual behavior, the NSP experiences a change in the partner's attitude, which tends to be colder and less certain of the relationship, which is then followed by a decrease in the partner's commitment. This experience gives rise to emotional insecurity and deep reflection in the NSP regarding the meaning of love, commitment, and personal boundaries in romantic relationships.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a phenomenological study of two subjects, DRO and NSP, it can be concluded that the psychological dynamics of premarital sexual behavior in female students is a complex and gradual process influenced by the interaction of emotional, cognitive, and social factors. Engagement in premarital sexual behavior in both subjects did not occur impulsively, but rather began with a romantic relationship characterized by emotional closeness, intense interaction, and trust and a sense of security toward their partner. Despite their different backgrounds, both DRO and NSP demonstrated that premarital sexual behavior was perceived as part of a meaningful relationship and not simply as fulfilling biological needs. The research findings indicate that DRO was more influenced by trust in their partner and a social environment

that normalized premarital sexual behavior, while NSP was more driven by curiosity about sexual experiences within the context of an established, close relationship. Both subjects shared hopes for the continuation of the relationship, both in the form of a desire for a long-term relationship and an implicit or explicit hope to pursue a more serious relationship. These hopes played a significant role in shaping the subjects' decisions to engage in premarital sexual behavior, which was interpreted as a form of emotional investment in the relationship. Emotionally, both subjects demonstrated a strong need to feel loved, accepted, and appreciated by their partners. Premarital sexual behavior was perceived as a form of proof of love and a means of gaining emotional validation. However, intense emotional closeness also led to increased sexual desire, ultimately making it difficult for both subjects to distinguish between sexual urges and emotional needs. This condition led to decisions being influenced more by feelings than rational considerations. After engaging in premarital sexual behavior, both DRO and NSP perceived changes in their partners' attitudes, tending toward a decrease in attention and emotional warmth. These changes were followed by a decrease in their partners' commitment to the relationship, which was inconsistent with the subjects' initial expectations. This situation created uncertainty and emotional vulnerability in both subjects and demonstrated an imbalance between intimacy, passion, and commitment in their relationships. Thus, this study concludes that premarital sexual behavior in female college students is not only related to sexual aspects but also reflects emotional needs, relational expectations, and the dynamics of commitment within romantic relationships.

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