Contraceptive use and sexual behaviour among unmarried young adults in Indonesia

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Introduction

The Indonesian law on Population and Family Welfare (no. 52/2009) states that family planning and reproductive health services are only intended for individuals who are legally married.

This policy means that reproductive health needs of unmarried young sexually active adults are being ignored by government services. Such people face a number of risks among which unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS have far reaching consequences to the young people’s education and careers.

To date little is known about the sexual behaviour and contraceptive use of young unmarried Indonesians. We aim to shed some light on this issue, using data from two recent surveys of young adults.

Data

Data source: 1. 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adultlife Survey (GJTAS) - Representative sample of young adults aged 15-24 (N=3,006) living in Jakarta, Tangerang and Bekasi.

In addition to a range of questions collected through face-to-face interview, information about more sensitive topics including current and past sexual experience was collected via a self-completion questionnaire.

In 2011, 81 respondents were also reinterviewed and further information, including about sexual behaviour and contraceptive use, was collected through in-depth interviews.

Data source: 2. 2007 Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) - Youth Module Sample of 15-24 year olds who were never married, were on range of questions asked on current and past sexual activity, as well as contraceptive use and knowledge.

For comparability the analytical sample in each survey is limited to 20-24 year olds who were never married.

Although the young people in our sample are not married many of them have been in, or are currently in, dating relationships (berasapran). For example the percentage of young men aged 20-24 who were currently dating was 48%. According to both the DHS and GJTAS while for young women the comparable numbers were 33% and 54%.

Methodology

We use descriptive as well as multivariate logistic regression to model sexual activity, contraceptive use, and knowledge. All data is weighted before use.

Table 2: Variables used in logistic regression models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual activity</td>
<td>Have ever had sex (0=No, 1=Yes)</td>
<td>Sex, age, highest (current) education level, place of residence, religion</td>
<td>GJTAS &amp; DHS2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraceptive use</td>
<td>Used contraception at the time of first sexual intercourse (0=No, 1=Yes)</td>
<td>Sex, age at first intercourse, highest (current) education level, place of residence, religion, relationship to sexual partner (DHS only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnancy understanding/knowledge</td>
<td>Know that pregnancy can result from a single act of sexual intercourse (0=No, 1=Yes)</td>
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Percentage of unmarried youth that have had sex

Due to the sensitivity of the topic of pre-marital sex, it is difficult to collect reliable estimates of the proportion of young adults engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage.

According to the DHS survey, 11% of young males aged 20-24 had sexual intercourse, compared to only about 1% of women.

Restricting the DHS sample to just Jakarta the proportions are even lower.

However the figures from the GJTAS survey for Jakarta are higher, especially for females.

This is likely to be due to the difference in survey methods. GJTAS 2007 was conducted via face-to-face interviews while the GJTAS 2010 sexual activity was collected via self-completion questionnaire.

However, even for GJTAS survey the proportions are likely to be underestimates of the real proportion of young unmarried adults who have had sex.

When we asked married people aged 20-34, 33% of men said they had sex with their wife before marriage, but only 5.9% of women stated that they had had sex with their husband before marriage.

Furthermore among the 95% of women who did not remit to prenatal sex, about 1 in 10 had conceived their first child before the month of marriage.

A similar pattern was found in the DHS 2007 survey of ever married women (aged 20-34).

Difficulty in obtaining accurate estimates

Timing and determinants of premarital sex

The predictors of having had sex were similar for both young men and women in the DHS 2007:

- Young adults aged 20-24 were more likely to have had sex if they:
  - Had lower levels of education
  - Were Muslim

There was no significant difference in the likelihood of having had sex by urban/rural place of residence.

In the vast majority of cases the first sexual partner was in a regular dating relationship and referred to as boyfriend/girlfriend.

Age at first sexual intercourse (DHS)

Table 1: Sample sizes in GJTAS 2010 and DHS2007 (age 20-24)

<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
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<th>DHS2007</th>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>4,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>2,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>6,971</td>
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Contraceptive use at time of first intercourse

According to DHS2007, the percentage of young adults who reported using some form of contraception at the time of first sex was:

- 23% for males (N=695)
- 36% for females (N=462)

In the GJTAS the comparable figures were:

- 35% for males (N=56)
- 30% for females (N=24)

For males contraceptive use at first sex was significant higher among:

- Urban dwellers
- Those who were older at the time of first sex
- Those with higher (current) education

Level of knowledge about sex & contraception

Overall current levels of knowledge about contraception and safe sex were relatively low:

In the GJTAS 20% of males (N=95) stated that they had enough knowledge about contraception at the time of first intercourse.

Similarly in the DHS, current level of knowledge was also lacking for many young adults.

For example about 4 out of 10 young men and women (20-24) did not know that pregnancy can result from a single act of sexual intercourse.

Conclusion

In Indonesia, access to formal family planning and reproductive health services is currently restricted to married couples.

However, a significant proportion of young people are having sex before marriage, in most cases with a person they were dating. At the time of first sexual intercourse, the vast majority of young people did not use any form of contraception. Contraceptive use was higher among those who had currently attended higher levels of schooling.

In part, the low levels of contraceptive use is due to ignorance of the consequences of unprotected sex.

In 2003 the Ministry of Health, with support from the USAID, initiated a pilot project known as Awareness Health Services for Adolescent (Pelayanan Kesehatan Pendidikan Remaja/PPKR) aimed at providing young adults with information and services and sexually transmitted diseases in government health clinics. To date this program has only been implemented in select provinces.

More needs to be done to provide young people knowledge about reproductive health, and access to contraception to avoid the potentially negative consequences of unprotected sex.