

## Factors associated with sexual engagement among schooling adolescents in Sarawak, East Malaysia

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### Abstract

This study examined the factors of sexual behaviours among schooling adolescents in Sarawak. Respondents for the study were adolescents aged 13 to 19 years from 16 secondary schools in Sarawak using self-administered questionnaire. Information on socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge on and attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health, involvement in risky lifestyle and sexual activities, family relationships, school attachment and religious beliefs were obtained. Chi-square tests and logistic regression analysis were performed to examine factors associated with sexual intercourse. A total of 1,462 students participated in the study, with 60.1% female respondents, mean age  $15.6 \pm 1.72$  years old. The prevalence of sex engagement was 3.6%, majority aged 16-17 years (58.5%). Mean age at first sexual intercourse was  $16.8 \pm 1.27$  years, with a minimum age of 14 years. Age of respondents, knowledge on SRH, risky behaviours, peers' risky behaviours, negative self-evaluation, cognitive inefficiency, perceived lack of motivation, religious belief and family support were significantly associated with sexual engagement. Logistic regression showed that age, respondents' risky behaviour and peers' involvement in sexual intercourse were significant risk factors of sexual engagement while a strong religious belief was a significant protective factor. Although the prevalence of sexual engagement was quite low compared to many other countries, there is a need to strengthen comprehensive sexual health education both at the school and community levels. It is important for adolescents to make informed decisions on their risky sexual behaviours as there are serious consequences of such behaviours on their current and future life.

**Keywords:** Schooling adolescents, sexual and reproductive health, sexual engagement, logistic regression

### Introduction

Adolescence is a period of self-discovery when young boys and girls experience biological, psychological, social and economic changes in their life. During this critical transition to develop self-regulatory capa-

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