

# บทบาทของพ่อแม่ต่อพฤติกรรมการละเว้นเพศสัมพันธ์ในหญิงวัยรุ่น Parental Roles on Sexual Abstinence Behavior in Female Adolescent

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## บทคัดย่อ

พ่อแม่มีบทบาทสำคัญในการส่งเสริมให้หญิงวัยรุ่นละเว้นจากการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ ซึ่งเป็นพฤติกรรมส่งเสริมสุขภาพในช่วงที่ยังศึกษาเล่าเรียน โดยพ่อแม่มีวิธีการเลี้ยงดูที่หลากหลายในการส่งเสริมการชะลอการมีเพศสัมพันธ์และปกป้องลูกสาวจากการมีพฤติกรรมเสี่ยงทางเพศ บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอมุมมองเกี่ยวกับอิทธิพลของพ่อแม่ในการส่งเสริมการละเว้นเพศสัมพันธ์ในหญิงวัยรุ่น พยาบาลอาจใช้ข้อมูลเหล่านี้เป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาและศึกษาโปรแกรมการละเว้นเพศสัมพันธ์ในหญิงวัยรุ่น เพื่อสุขภาวะทางเพศของหญิงวัยรุ่นต่อไป

**คำสำคัญ** บทบาทของพ่อแม่ พฤติกรรมการละเว้นเพศสัมพันธ์ หญิงวัยรุ่น

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## Abstract

Parents play vital roles in encouraging female adolescents to abstain from sexual intercourse, which counts as a health-promoting behavior during school enrollment. Parents have various ways of raising their children to promote the delay of sexual intercourse to prevent them from risky sexual behavior. The purpose of this article is to present the perspectives on parental influence in promoting sexual abstinence behavior among female adolescents. Nurses may use this information as a guideline to develop and conduct research on sexual abstinence programs for female adolescents for their sexual well-being.

**Keywords:** Parental Roles, Sexual Abstinence Behavior, Female Adolescent

## Introduction

Sexual abstinence behavior is a health-promoting behavior to improve reproductive health, maintain well-being, and prevent health problems in women<sup>1</sup>. Sexual abstinence behavior is divided into primary abstinence and secondary abstinence. Primary abstinence is defined as having no previous oral or penetrative sexual intercourse, and secondary abstinence is defined as a period of no oral or penetrative sex after sexual initiation has already occurred<sup>2</sup>. Both types help maintain the reproductive health and well-being of female adolescents, including physical, mental, sexual violence, unintended pregnancy, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)<sup>3</sup>.

In Thailand, sexual abstinence behavior has been promoted as a health-promoting behavior for Thai female adolescents according to Thai culture<sup>4</sup>. Parents have an influence on sexual abstinence among Thai girls. In Thai women, the virgin would be saved for the right time, such as marriage or after graduation<sup>5</sup>. However, Thai girls engage in sexual intercourse at an early age with a remarkable increase to 40%,<sup>4,6</sup> which resulted in an unacceptably high pregnancy rate. According to the World Health Organization's reports, in 2019, adolescents aged 15–19 years in low-and middle-income countries had an estimated 21 million pregnancies each year, of which approximately

50% were unintended and which resulted in an estimated 12 million births. Globally, in 2022, females aged 10–14 years had the estimation of birth rate at 1.5 per 1000, with higher rates in sub-Saharan Africa (4.6), Latin America, and the Caribbean (2.4)<sup>7,8</sup>.

Consequences of early sexual initiation may include the risk of unintended pregnancy, STIs, psychological impact, and educational and career goals. Young individuals may be less likely to use condoms or other protective measures, putting themselves at higher risk of unintended pregnancies, which may have social, emotional, and economic implications for individuals and their families. They can be at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections. Female adolescent individuals may not be prepared for the complexity of sexual relationships, which can lead to feelings of guilt or regret. Some adolescent couples may take control, jealousy, and violence<sup>9,10</sup>. Early sexual initiation may distract female adolescents from their academic and career goals as they may have to deal with the consequences of unplanned pregnancies or STIs. In addition, societal norms and cultural values can stigmatize early sexual initiation, leading to judgment or social implications for the individuals involved.

Promoting sexual abstinence behavior is the primary method of preventing female

adolescents' health problems. Nurses should conduct research and apply knowledge to make the policy help reduce health problems, such as small-gestational age pregnancy, eclampsia, preterm delivery, or systemic infections. Nurses' role in promoting sexual abstinence behavior will also help minimize neonatal infection, including physical, mental, and psychological problems<sup>8,11</sup>.

Health promotion theories have been used to explain sexual abstinence,<sup>4</sup> which emphasizes interpersonal influences through family norms, social support, and role models regarding engaging in specific health behavior<sup>4</sup>. Parents use many methods in cultivating daughters to perceive sexual abstinence behavior as the desired behavioral endpoint or outcome of health decision-making and preparation for action<sup>5</sup>. In the Health Promotion Model (HPM), parental influence on sexual abstinence is defined as parents' act in raising their daughters to contribute to sexual abstinence<sup>12-14</sup>. Parents include biological parents, foster parents, guardians, or senior family members whom female adolescents trust and love. They are people who wish for female adolescents' life success. Parents help adolescents maintain sexual abstinence through support and monitoring. Previous research positioned parents to support, control, and monitor adolescents' behavior. Higher parental

monitoring has been linked to a higher likelihood of delayed sexual activity<sup>5,15,16</sup>. This article expounds on parental influence in promoting sexual abstinence, which will aid nurses and midwives in clinics, schools, and communities in utilizing information as a guide to encourage parents to be involved in promoting sexual abstinence in female adolescents.

### **Parental roles in promoting sexual abstinence behavior**

Parental roles in promoting sexual abstinence behavior include parental attitudes and beliefs, parental support, parent's discussion about sexual abstinence, parental control activity related to sex, and parental monitoring, as the following:

#### **1. Parental attitude and beliefs**

Parental attitudes about sexual abstinence behavior vary widely depending on cultural, religious, and personal beliefs. In some cultures, parents may strongly support the idea of sexual abstinence until marriage, while others may adopt a more permissive or comprehensive approach to sexual education. In terms of sexual abstinence behavior, parents or relatives hold traditional or conservative views that promote sexual abstinence until marriage as the ideal or only morally acceptable option. Literature supports that parental beliefs and religion affect attitudes about sexual abstinence behavior.

Parents believe that adolescents should wait until a certain age to have sexual intercourse<sup>17,18</sup>. Some parents emphasize the importance of saving one's virgin for religious or cultural reasons and discourage sexual activity before marriage. In addition, parents' attitudes reveal that sexual abstinence behavior is a means to maintain a family's reputation by preventing health problems. Additionally, parents try to convey their expectations of disapproval of premature sex to female adolescents<sup>19</sup>. Hence, female adolescents learn that parents would be upset when engaged in an early sexual activity.

**2. Parental support** has been defined as parental behaviors such as teaching, encouraging, and providing physical affection, which indicates the child is accepted and loved<sup>20</sup>. This support can take various forms, namely: emotion, information, and modelling of sexual abstinence behavior. These supports are essential for physical, emotional, and social development.

**2.1 Emotional Support** is the first step in the expression of love, understanding, and empathy. This is to ensure adolescent daughters that their parents love them unconditionally; working hard and sacrificing happiness, such as time, financial support, or education opportunities in raising their children<sup>13</sup>.

Parental love is one of the factors that drives female adolescents to set goals for life

security by means of sexual abstinence behavior. In some countries, the evidence has shown that parents are aware of sexual health education and support and participate in sexual health education in school<sup>5,17</sup>. Also, parents should be able to recognize when female adolescents are upset and encourage them to express their difficulties. As a consequence, female adolescents perceive parental love, listen to their judgments, understand their daily efforts, and be by their side to confront any obstacles. For these reasons, parental love makes them accept and understand what their parents do<sup>5</sup>.

In addition, promoting sexual abstinence behavior, parents and daughters must have close and optimistic relationships to form trust<sup>5</sup>. The parent-daughter relationship is the state in which parents and daughters are connected. Building a parent-daughter relationship requires time that parents spend with their daughters. Previous studies showed that by having more time with parents and families, female adolescents would likely have opportunities to gain more information and exchange ideas about sexual abstinence behavior<sup>13,21</sup>.

Moreover, the intimacy between parents and their female adolescents is important. Developing a parent-adolescent relationship requires parents to understand their daughter and listen to their daughter's needs; as such, it

will result in good outcomes. First, it will lead female adolescents to feel close to, trust, and value their parents. Female adolescents are likely to adopt traditional norms and values in sexual abstinence behavior. Because families with religious values play a central role in shaping thoughts and decisions about abstaining from sex and teaching refusal skills<sup>22</sup>. Second, female adolescents perceived parental expectation of sexual abstinence behavior and saved their virginity, respectively.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, female adolescents with poor relationships with their parents are reported to be at risk for premature sexual intercourse. Last, parental supervision is an essential factor influencing adolescent sexual behaviors. Adolescents who achieve parental supervision will delay and even avoid sexual relations during the development of adolescent stage<sup>5,13</sup>.

**2.2 Information support** includes educating and discussion about sexual abstinence behavior, comprising parental involvement in sexual abstinence education in school. Moreover, discussion about sexual abstinence behavior is related to parents' time spent with their daughter(s).

Educating about sexual abstinence behavior is frequently found in a literature. This method refers to parents providing female adolescents knowledge related to sexual abstinence behavior, which is composed of

meaning, benefits, and how to maintain sexual abstinence behavior. The sense of sexual abstinence among parents is to have sex at the right time. Parents address the right time of having sex as after school graduation, marriage, or in adulthood<sup>23</sup>. Thai parents teach their daughters that sexual abstinence behavior means achieving life goals. For the benefits of sexual abstinence behavior, parents provided that sexual abstinence can bring long-term success as academic achievement, having a job, having a proper couple<sup>24</sup>, and earning a reputation as a good woman. Also, most parents realize sexual abstinence behavior can protect female adolescents from unwanted pregnancy and STIs<sup>16,24</sup>.

Moreover, Thai parents also teach proper manners and interaction with the opposite sex. Acceptable behaviors include appropriate dressing up, such as wearing non-revealing clothes, which may drive male sexual desire, and avoiding premature sex during student life. Whenever daughters have boyfriends, they must obey adult supervision. Thai parents also believe that a man who sincerely loves a woman would not force her to have sex during student life. Many parents instruct life skills to female adolescents of saying "no" regarding having sex and refraining from risky situations leading to sexual desires-such as drinking alcohol, being touched by a male, going

out with male, or being alone with male in private place<sup>16</sup>.

In educating their daughters, parents used case examples, television programs, and social media. Parents use case examples as a method in education, such as girls in the community who are unintended pregnant from having premature sexual intercourse during school life. Consequently, they encountered financial problems, broke up with a couple, and had many difficulties in their lives and their babies. In regard to television or social media, parents use the content of wearing revealed clothes may drive sexual desire and lead to sex<sup>5,18</sup>. Parents educate their daughter-whenver possible, such as while watching television, having meal, driving, riding, or spending time together<sup>16,24</sup>.

### 2.3 Modelling of sexual abstinence

**behavior:** In Thai culture, parents are the primary source of information and modelling for their children. Female adolescents have initially learned since their childhood and gradually extend their learning as they grow-up.

**3. Parent's discussion about sexual abstinence behavior** refers to parent-child communication about sexual abstinence with female adolescents to exchange ideas till they reach decision-making on sexual abstinence behavior. The discussion between parents and female adolescents should be done in a private

place. The research provides practical discussions about sexual abstinence behavior composed of early discussion, in-depth discussion, consistency, and high frequency<sup>23</sup>.

Discussion should be in the milieu of positive and mutual participation. The content may start with what is right and wrong about sexual behaviors, the negative consequences of premarital sex, and followed by the right things to delay sex to the right time. During the discussion, parents should provide the chance for female adolescents to exchange attitudes about sexual abstinence behavior. Most parents assume that female adolescents should not have sex and should wait until their marriage<sup>21</sup>. Hopefully, female adolescents thereafter make their decision on sexual abstinence behavior.

Encouragement to sexual abstinence behavior refers to parents showing confidence and rewarding female adolescents and the belief that they will be capable of maintaining sexual abstinence behavior.<sup>23</sup> Parents consistently encourage female adolescents to sexual abstinence behavior from childhood through adulthood<sup>16</sup>.

**4. Parental control activity related to sex** refers to parents' order, limit, or rule on female adolescents' behavior to avoid the risks of premature sexual intercourse. Thai parents agree that female adolescents may have a relationship with the opposite sex in the

condition that they must follow the rules of spending time together and neatly dressing. Some parents set that a violation of the rules causes a penalty. In some countries, parents set the rules that female adolescents must ask for permission to go out; otherwise, they will be punished.<sup>23</sup> African American parents' punishments for unintended pregnancy of female adolescents by asking them to stay on their own<sup>25</sup>.

**5. Parental monitoring** refers to tracking children's locations and activities, in that monitoring pertains to parents' knowledge of a child's status, tracking, and surveillance<sup>20</sup>. Generally, in other countries such as the USA and Asia, parental monitoring is also performed. Parents usually can identify the time of female adolescents' involvement in activity. They need to inform their parents regarding their daily activities during free time and after school (in and out of school)<sup>26</sup>. For time monitoring, female adolescents must ask permission to go out, especially in the evening. Then, they must return home at a designated time, and any change must be informed immediately by phone call or other form of information technology. In addition, parents keep waiting until they return home. Moreover, parents keep track of sites, friends, and money spent. Parents normally know most of their female

adolescents' friends as well as their friends' parents<sup>27</sup>.

In the era of advanced information technology, parents with experience in social media were more likely to monitor their children's use of social media. Because the rampant use of unfiltered social media platforms among adolescents made them easily engage in premature sexual intercourse<sup>28</sup>. Parental monitoring is mainly surveyed of social network influence regarding sexual risk behaviors<sup>29</sup>. Parents should screen the contents by tracking what they watch on their phones. Furthermore, parents are responsible for monitoring the interaction of female adolescents with both known and unknown friends on various channels<sup>30</sup>.

## Conclusion

Parents have various methods for raising their daughters to adopt sexual abstinence behavior during school life. Most parents expect their daughters to keep sexually abstinent. Then, parental roles are to support and promote sexual abstinence behavior through emotion, information, and being role models. Love and connectedness are fundamentally building an excellent parent-daughter relationship. Several studies have shown that female adolescents who perceive parental love, understanding, and connectedness with parents can maintain sexual

abstinence behavior during school life. In some cultures, parents control activity-related premature sex and monitor their daughters' daily activity life to help them successfully avoid the risks of having early sex and maintain sexual abstinence behavior.

Empirically, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to promoting sexual abstinence behavior in adolescents. The most effective approach will depend on individual family values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. What's crucial is that parents create a safe and open environment for their children to learn about sex and relationships, emphasizing mutual respect, consent, and personal responsibility whether they advocate for sexual abstinence behavior or a more comprehensive approach to sexual education.

### **Nursing implication**

Nurses can promote sexual abstinence behavior through parental involvement. Firstly, nurses may provide knowledge about adolescent physical, emotional, social, and sexual development to parents. Next, nurses can also train parents in practical communication skills to engage in open and non-judgmental discussions with their teenagers about sex and relationships. Then, nurses can assist parents in setting age-appropriate expectations for their teenagers regarding sexual

activity. Helping parents develop clear rules, boundaries, and consequences can guide their daughter's decisions. Thus, nurses may recommend valuable resources, such as books, websites, and community organizations, that offer further information and support for promoting responsible sexual behaviors among teenagers by using evidence-based information on the advantages of delaying sexual debut.

Nurses can provide emotional support to parents by recognizing the challenges and uncertainties they may encounter when discussing sex and relationships with their teenagers. Providing a non-judgmental, empathetic ear can encourage parents to be more open and involved in their daughters' lives. Besides, nurses should be aware of parental control over accessing social media and networks with sexual content among adolescents. In addition, nurses should collaborate with multi-disciplinaries in both practice and research in the future.

In summary, nurses can significantly empower parents to engage in proactive, informed, and supportive strategies for delaying teenage sexual debut and contribute to healthier outcomes for adolescents and their families by providing education, resources, and guidance. Nurses can work collaboratively with other healthcare professionals, such as paediatricians and counsellors, to ensure

comprehensive support for parents and teenagers in addressing issues related to sexual abstinence behavior.

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