

**Original Article****Lived Experiences and Motivating Factors of Online Commercial Sex Work Among Adolescents: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study**Qori Ila Saidah<sup>1</sup>, Puji Hastuti<sup>1</sup>, Elma Aulia Irnanda<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Keperawatan Hang Tuah Surabaya, Surabaya, East Java Indonesia**ARTICLE INFO****Article History**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Online commercial sexual activity among adolescents is an emerging public health concern in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), increasing risks of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancy, and psychosocial harm. This issue is highly relevant to nursing and community health practice, particularly in prevention and early identification efforts. However, the psychosocial and environmental factors driving adolescents to engage in online commercial sex remain insufficiently explored, especially within LMIC contexts. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the factors influencing adolescents' involvement in online commercial sexual activities.

**Methods:** This is a phenomenology research. The population in this study were adolescents and young age who made online worker of commercial sex in Surabaya region. The sample was five teenager with inclusion criteria aged 18-23 years old, using platform to offering sexual commercial and agree to share their experience selected with purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and recording and use data analyze with Colaizi's approach. Research team, study design, analysis and finding are stricly align with Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) standards.

**Results:** There are five themes have been founded in this study. Most paticipantss engaged in online commercial sex due to economic and lifestyle factors. The income earned through online commercial sex was considered sufficient to support their lifestyle. This led to addiction, both economically and for pleasure, leading to continued online commercial sex activity.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights three key factors influencing online commercial sex activity among adolescents. Economic incentives emerged as the primary driver, particularly in fulfilling lifestyle-related needs, while perceived enjoyment also motivated engagement. These findings underscore the need for targeted prevention strategies that address adolescents' economic vulnerability, strengthen family communication, and develop digital-based health promotion and policy interventions to mitigate online sexual risk behaviors.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; Sex Work; Sexual Behavior; Reproductive Health; Internet

### Implications for Practice:

- The findings support the integration of reproductive health services with mental health counseling and socioeconomic support to address the underlying economic and psychological factors influencing adolescents' engagement in online commercial sex.
- Healthcare providers should incorporate routine psychosocial and economic risk assessments when caring for adolescents, enabling early identification of at-risk individuals and more targeted, holistic interventions.
- The study underscores the need for multisectoral policies that link health services with social welfare, education, and digital regulation to prevent adolescent involvement in online commercial sex and mitigate its long-term health impacts.

### Introduction

Reproductive health problems among adolescents remain a significant global concern. Young people aged 15–24 years account for a substantial proportion of new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) worldwide, and the rapid expansion of digital technology has reshaped adolescent sexual behaviors. Increasing internet access, particularly in Southeast Asia and other Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), has facilitated exposure to online sexual content and transactional sexual activities. However, empirical evidence on adolescents' involvement in online commercial sex—especially in LMIC and conservative sociocultural contexts—remains limited compared to studies from high-income countries.

Unlike high-income settings where digital literacy and regulatory systems are relatively stronger, LMIC contexts are often characterized by economic inequality, limited sexual health education, and sociocultural taboos that hinder open discussion of sexuality. These structural vulnerabilities may increase adolescents' susceptibility to online commercial sexual activities.

Guided by the Social Ecological Model, this study conceptualizes adolescent involvement in online commercial sex as the result of interacting factors at multiple levels. Economic pressure may drive adolescents to seek financial resources to sustain lifestyle aspirations shaped by social media exposure. At the same time, pleasure-seeking motives and the need for social acceptance may reinforce engagement, particularly when family communication and emotional support are limited. These interconnected influences suggest that online commercial sexual behavior is not driven by a single factor but by the interaction between structural, social, and psychosocial conditions.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how economic pressures, lifestyle aspirations, pleasure-seeking motives, and family context interact to influence adolescents' involvement in online commercial sex. The findings are expected to inform nursing practice, adolescent health promotion, and policy development targeting digital sexual risk behaviors in LMIC settings.

Risky sexual behavior among adolescents is influenced by multiple factors. Environmental and peer influences play a substantial role in shaping premarital sexual behavior. In addition, sexual content frequently displayed on social media and other digital platforms significantly affects adolescents' attitudes and behaviors. This study shows that intensive social media use and peer influence are significantly associated with increased risky sexual behavior in adolescents. Social media facilitates the exchange of information and personal communication that can encourage risky behavior, while emotional dependence on peers reinforces this influence. Parental supervision and the role of the family are important factors in prevention ([Hastuti et al., 2020](#)).



Lifestyles are rapidly disseminated through the internet and are widely perceived as trendy. As adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, young people are particularly susceptible to adopting online trends. Shifts in premarital behavioral norms influence adolescents' perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The widespread circulation of romantic and intimate content on social media further normalizes such behaviors and encourages imitation. The pursuit of pleasure also contributes to the continuation of premarital sexual practices among adolescents.

In the other side, parent-child relationship will affect sexual activity among adolescents in several way. Strong social support from parents plays a vital role in providing information and promoting safe sexual behavior ([Hastuti et al., 2023](#)). Adolescents involved in the sale of sex services tend to experience poorer parent-child relationships in childhood and have a more limited emotional support network for sharing problems and concerns. Over time, changes have been particularly evident in the increasing role of the internet as a means of contact and the influence of immigrant backgrounds ([Fredlund et al., 2013](#)).

Premarital sex is influenced by religiosity, peer influence, exposure to pornography, parental supervision, and substance use, with religiosity and family communication acting as protective factors, while pornography exposure and peer pressure increase risk ([Latuheru et al., 2026](#)). The widespread availability of pornographic content has expanded its consumer base. Easy access has led some individuals to develop addictive behaviors, contributing to the growth of online commercial sex platforms. Commercial sexual activities are often conducted openly through these platforms, where access to pornography for both consumers and

workers is frequently unrestricted, allowing online prostitution to proliferate.

Perceptions of a sophisticated and modern lifestyle also influence adolescent behavior. The desire to obtain fashionable goods and maintain a modern lifestyle often requires adequate economic support. When combined with other social and technological factors, these pressures may lead some adolescents to engage in online commercial sex. Therefore, in-depth research is needed to examine the factors influencing adolescents' involvement in online commercial sexual behavior. This study aims to explore the factors that drive adolescents to become involved in online commercial sex work.

## Methods

### Study Design

This research uses a phenomenological design where this research focuses on exploring experiences based on individual perspectives ([Tenny S, Brannan JM, 2022](#)). Collaizi's approach were used in this research design to analyze, interpret, and synthesize the lived experiences of individuals into a meaningful, fundamental structure ([Kumar et al., 2023](#)). Collaizi's explains seven steps to provide an accurate analysis of observed experiences ([Morrow, Rosie, Rodriguez, Alison and King, 2015](#)). This study uses the Collaizi's approach because it focuses on analysis and interpretation as well as synthesizing the experiences of participants who are commercial sex workers. Methodological rigor and transparency were maintained by applying the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist. COREQ consists of a 32-item checklist designed to assist researchers in clearly reporting essential aspects of the research team, study methods, research context, results, analysis, and interpretation ([Tong et al., 2007](#)). The selection of COREQ

is the most appropriate for this research to ensure data rigor.

### **Research Team and Reflexivity**

The research team consists of maternity and pediatric nursing lecturers at STIKES Hang Tuah Surabaya with extensive experience in reproductive health and adolescent and young adult health. The researchers are female academics whose professional backgrounds in nursing and reproductive health may shape their perspectives toward adolescent sexual behavior. Acknowledging this positionality, the researchers were aware of their assumptions related to vulnerability, health risks, and protective factors in adolescent populations, and actively sought to bracket these preconceptions during data collection and analysis.

None of the researchers had any prior relationship with the participants. To enhance reflexivity, the researchers maintained reflexive journals throughout the research process to document personal reflections, assumptions, emotional responses, and analytical decisions. Memo-writing was conducted after each interview to capture emerging insights and monitor potential biases. Peer debriefing was carried out among colleagues to critically review interpretations, and data were cross-checked to ensure transparency, credibility, and accurate representation of participants' lived experiences.

### **Participants**

The population in this study were teenage online sex workers in Surabaya, selected using purposive sampling. Participants selection was based on location accessibility and the possibility of meeting them in person. Purposive sampling also allowed researchers to specifically determine the characteristics of participants in the study, thus aligning them with the data and experiences to be

explored. Inclusion criteria in this study were online commercial sex workers aged 17-23, who could communicate well and were willing to share their experiences. The sample in this study were sex workers who offered commercial sex directly through WhatsApp and miChat, platforms where sex workers offered sex online. Exclusion criteria are online commercial sex worker who do commercial sexual activities in online or streaming sexual activities. All participants engaged in sexual activity only offline, not live online. The number of participants involved in this study was five, given the sensitive nature of the topic, so not all online commercial sex workers were willing to participate. 3 participants refuse to participate in this research because this is sensitive topic. The selection of participants took into account the ease of digital technology and the impact of urban living, so the selection of the Surabaya area was considered appropriate to this character. Participants recruitment was obtained by contacting the participants' contact persons, explaining the purpose of the research verbally over the phone, and then interviewing those who agreed to participate at an agreed time and place. All participants who agreed to participate in the study volunteered and signed an informed consent. Participants who agreed to be interviewed received gifts and financial compensation from the researcher. Participants' personal data will remain confidential and will not be disseminated.

Phenomenology as a qualitative research orientation in nursing is rooted in continental philosophy, particularly the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. According to Husserl, phenomenology aims to uncover the essential structure of lived experience as it is consciously lived by individuals. Husserl's tradition emphasizes descriptive phenomenology, in which the researcher



practices epoché or *bracketing*, suspending preconceptions and assumptions, to attend solely to participants' reported experiences and to describe their essential meaning. This philosophical stance posits that the core of human experience can be accessed through careful description of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness, without pre-interpretive explanation or theory (Aflah & Murhayati, 2025).

In nursing research, this distinction has important methodological implications. A purely Husserlian approach calls for strict descriptive analysis of lived experiences focusing on essential structures, while a Heideggerian approach supports hermeneutic interpretation of how phenomena are understood within contextual lifeworld's. Aligning the philosophical grounding with methodological choices ensures coherence between the research question, data collection, and analysis, which is crucial for the interpretive validity of phenomenological inquiry in nursing (Al-Sheikh Hassan, 2023).

### Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews rather than telephone interviews. Upon obtaining participants' consent, interview appointments were scheduled at mutually agreed times and locations. Interviews were generally conducted in cafés with designated discussion areas as private area to minimize environmental distractions and maintain confidentiality. The study was carried out from January to March 2025, with interviews lasting approximately 60–90 minutes on average. The interview guide use question such as "Can you explain the initial reasons why you engaged in commercial sex?" and "How much do you earn from serving one customer and how many customers do you get per day?". The

interview was conducted using audio recording, and the participants's voice was altered to protect confidentiality. Data saturation was achieved when subsequent interviews no longer yielded new information in the form of codes or themes. In this study, saturation was reached after the fifth participant. Participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm their responses after the recording was completed. Field notes were also used to capture non-verbal responses.

### Data Analysis

This research use Colaizzi's data analysis. The researcher conducted data analysis using seven steps. The seven steps applied in this study include:

1. Familiarization

Researchers read the interview results multiple times to familiarize themselves with the data. Each participant's answer was read three to four times until they fully understood the results.

2. Identification for significant statement

Researchers identified statements relevant to the research topic. This identification was conducted directly, enabling them to detect the responses of the five participants. This was crucial for highlighting relevant statements, making it easier to focus on the data being studied.

3. Formulating meaning

Researchers identify meanings that are relevant to the phenomenon and carefully examine the statements that emerge. At this stage, it is essential for researchers to bracket their preconceptions. Statements expressing similar meanings are then identified, and terms that differ slightly but convey the same meaning are thoughtfully selected, particularly those that are most relevant to the data under analysis.

4. Clustering themes

Researchers grouped the identified meanings into themes that emerged in the participants' responses. At this stage, the researchers' preconceptions remained limited, focusing on the meaning of the participants' statements and grouping them into themes.

5. Developing an exhausting description

Researchers present a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes identified in the fourth stage. At this stage, researchers provide a clear description of the phenomena they have discovered and structure it so that it is easy to understand.

6. Producing the fundamental structure

At this stage, the researcher reduces the comprehensive description into a concise statement by retaining the key elements that represent the structure of the phenomenon.

7. Seeking verification of the fundamental structure

The researcher confirmed the statements included in the fundamental structure to all participants to assess their suitability with their experiences of the things that drive participants to engage in commercial sex, this is also important in making adjustments to the previous stages of analysis based on feedback obtained from participants.

triangulation. The researchers engaged in prolonged engagement with participants during in-depth interviews to build trust, encourage openness, and obtain rich, detailed descriptions of their lived experiences.

In addition, thick and verbatim quotations from participants were incorporated in the findings to provide direct evidence of the analytic interpretations and to allow readers to assess the authenticity of the data. Peer debriefing with colleagues in the same field was also undertaken to critically examine emerging themes and interpretations, thereby strengthening the overall rigor and credibility of the study.

Dependability in this study was ensured by recording, documenting, and coding the entire research process. The researchers also conducted debriefings with other researchers before and after data collection. Each participants was assigned a separate code to ensure the entire process ran correctly.

The confirmability of this study refers to the data, not assumptions and biases. To ensure confirmability, the researchers conducted an audit trail, documenting all steps in the research and data analysis. They also engaged in reflexivity through discussions with other researchers to minimize biases and assumptions.

Transferability in this study was achieved through thick description, explaining participant characteristics, and providing comprehensive documentation. Thick description was achieved by selecting an appropriate research setting, selecting appropriate participants, and providing a clear research context.

**Trustworthiness and Rigor**

The credibility of the data was ensured through multiple strategies to enhance trustworthiness. Although source triangulation was conducted by comparing accounts across participants who were involved in online commercial sex activities, credibility did not rely solely on

**Ethical Consideration**

This research addressed a highly sensitive topic involving human participants and therefore required strict ethical safeguards. Ethical approval was

obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of STIKES Hang Tuah Surabaya (No: PE/58/II/2025/KEP/SHT). Participants were given full autonomy to decide whether to participate or refuse without any consequences. Recruitment was conducted by contacting potential participants through the relevant platform or WhatsApp. The researcher provided a clear explanation of the study purpose and procedures and asked about their willingness to participate. Those who declined were not further contacted. For those who verbally agreed during the initial phone contact, an interview appointment was arranged at a time convenient for the participant. Prior to the in-depth interview, the researcher re-explained the study and obtained written informed consent.

To ensure confidentiality and data security, all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission.

Audio files were immediately transferred to a password-protected, encrypted computer accessible only to the research team. Files were anonymized using codes rather than real names. Transcripts were stored separately from consent forms in encrypted digital folders, and any printed materials were kept in a locked cabinet. Data will be securely retained for five years after publication in accordance with institutional guidelines, after which all digital files will be permanently deleted and hard copies securely destroyed.

## Results

Demographic data of the participants including age, marital status, educational background and also job status. This demographic data was chosen as those effect in online worker for commercial sex.

**Tabel 1.** Illustration Data Demography Remaja yang menjadi online commercial sex worker

No	Code	Age	Marital Status	Education Background	Job Status
1.	R1	19	Unmarried	High School	Unemployed
2.	R2	17	Unmarried	Junior High School	Unemployed
3.	R3	23	Unmarried	Bachelor Degre	Waiters
4.	R4	21	Unmarried	Bachelor Degre	Unemployed
5.	R5	23	Unmarried	Bachelor Degre	Beauty Salon Employe

### *Thematic Relationship*

Some of the themes are interconnected. Economic factor including the salary, treated to buy necessities, costs for purchasing cosmetics and goods and costs to meet lifestyle needs. Lifestyle including make up, glamorous things and branded things. Pleasure, such as feeling pampered by having one's needs met, actions that bring comfort and actions that bring pleasure.

### *Conceptual Framework of Adolescent Involvement in Online Commercial Sex*

Findings from this study indicate that adolescents' involvement in online commercial sex is shaped by the interaction of economic, lifestyle, pleasure-oriented, and psychosocial factors. Economic factors emerged as the central driving force, while lifestyle and pleasure motives functioned as reinforcing elements. Psychosocial conditions formed the underlying context that increased adolescents' vulnerability and susceptibility to engagement.

Economic factors were identified as the primary determinant. Participants

described financial needs, dependency on partners, higher income compared to formal employment, and family-related responsibilities as core motivations. Economic pressure created a pragmatic justification for participation, particularly when commercial sex provided faster and greater financial returns than other available work opportunities.

Lifestyle factors acted as precipitating influences. Participants expressed a desire to align with peers' consumption patterns, purchase branded or expensive items, and participate in nightlife activities such as clubbing. Even when basic needs were met, perceived social comparison and aspirational lifestyles intensified their involvement. In several cases, exposure to social environments where transactional relationships were normalized contributed to engagement.

Pleasure-oriented motives functioned as reinforcing factors. Some participants reported enjoyment of nightlife, social interaction, and thrill-seeking experiences. Commercial sex was not always pre-planned; rather, it sometimes occurred opportunistically when financial incentives aligned with leisure activities.

Psychosocial factors provided the contextual background influencing decision-making. Limited parental presence, emotional distance within the family, and a desire for validation or attention were described as contributing conditions. Family instability and unmet emotional needs appeared to lower resistance and increase openness to economic and lifestyle-driven motivations.

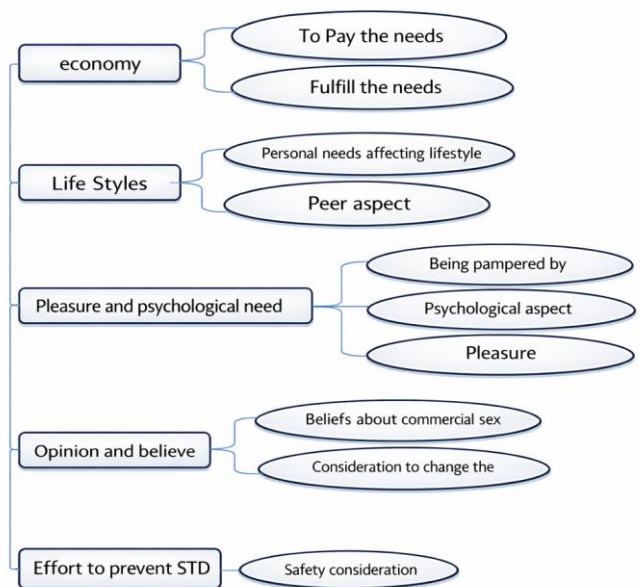
Together, these findings suggest a multidimensional framework in which:

- Economic factors serve as the primary driving force.
- Lifestyle factors act as social and aspirational triggers.
- Pleasure motives reinforce continued involvement.

- Psychosocial vulnerabilities function as underlying predisposing conditions.

This integrated pattern demonstrates that adolescent involvement in online commercial sex is not attributable to a single factor but emerges from the dynamic interaction between structural, social, emotional, and individual-level influences.

*Themes*



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework of Motivating Factors of Online Commercial Sex Work Among Adolescents”

*Themes identified*

*Theme 1 : Economic Factor.*

Economic factors emerged as the most influential determinant driving adolescents to engage in commercial sex. Participants reported that their involvement was primarily motivated by the need to fulfill daily and personal necessities. One participant stated, “My boyfriend always provides me with many of my needs” (R1). The same participant also explained, “Whenever someone asks me out, I agree, but only if I receive payment, because I have



become dependent on being able to buy my necessities from my dating partners” (R1).

Another statement highlighted family-related responsibilities: *“I am an only child, so I have to make my mother happy as well, because my father rarely comes home—sometimes only once every two or three months, and even then only briefly”* (R1).

Similar experiences were expressed by other participants. One noted, *“My expenses while living in Surabaya exceed my budget, and eventually the income from commercial sex was much higher than what I earned as a waiter, so I decided to try open BO”* (R3). Another participant simply stated, *“I have many needs”* (R5).

Lifestyle factors also played a role as precipitating influences on adolescents’

involvement in commercial sex. One participant explained, *“At first, I wanted to buy nice and expensive things like my friends. In fact, my basic needs were actually met by my parents, but it still felt insufficient”* (R2).

Another participant reported that engaging in commercial sex was not her primary intention. However, when an offer with a high payment was presented, she was willing to participate. Thus, financial compensation functioned as a reinforcing factor in her involvement. She stated, *“I’m actually more into clubbing, not going out with the intention of doing open BO. But if there’s a guy who wants to and the price is right, then I’ll do it”* (R4).

**Table 2.** Theme, Category, and Quote

Themes	Category	Quote
Economic Factor	To Pay the needs	<i>“Yes, I’m addicted to getting money, I feel sorry for my mother, sometimes she has debts from her neighbors just selling fried food, my father actually works but it’s far away, like working with other people as a construction worker.”</i> (R1)
		<i>“The economic pressure is causing more spending”</i> (R3)
		<i>“I don’t have any income, most of it is from my parents and open booking online for sex. I’m currently still in college but I also want to earn an income.”</i> (R4)
Life styles	Fulfill the needs	<i>“My boyfriend always provides me with many of my needs”</i> (R1) <i>“The first is to make a boarding house while going to college”</i> (R3) <i>“My needs are not being met, just adapting to my environment, there is no other particular reason.”</i> (R5)
	Personal needs affecting lifestyle	<i>“At first, I wanted to buy nice and expensive things like my friends. In fact, my basic needs were actually met by my parents, but it still felt insufficient”</i> (R2) <i>“To buy skincare, sometimes to eat, watch movies, it’s normal for young people nowadays to hang out.”</i> (R4) <i>“I use it to go to the mall, cafe, and then upload it to social media.”</i> (R2)
		Peer aspect
Pleasure and psychological need	Being pempered by someone	<i>“I just want to be free, especially since I live in a quiet boarding house with no friends.”</i> (R3) <i>“Even so, I like this uncle, but I like sharing stories.”</i> (R4)
	Psychological aspect	<i>“I’m from a broken home, so I actually have a family, but it seems like they don’t play a role, there’s no such thing as a lack of communication, lack of affection. I’m looking for pleasure outside, actually, open booking out is like wanting to but not wanting to, you know what I mean.”</i> (R4)

Themes	Category	Quote
	Pleasure	<i>"Just for fun"(R4)</i>
Opinion and believe	Beliefs about commercial sex	<i>"This job is not good in the eyes of people" (R3)</i>
	Consideration to change the job	Wanna change job : <i>"Actually, I just want a normal job"(R1)</i> <i>"I want a decent job, sis, but it's hard." (R2)</i> <i>"If you could say that, I want to, right?"(R3)</i> <i>"In the future, I don't want to work like this anymore"(R4)</i>
		Not change : <i>"Not yet, sis, but who knows, maybe later" (R5)</i>
Effort to prevent STD	Safety consideration	Safety effort : <i>"I use a condom, sis"(R2)</i> <i>"for our health we use condoms"(R4)</i> <i>"Usually I have condoms ready, sis." (R5)</i>
		Risk for safety : <i>"I use a condom. If you don't use a condom, I'll ask for an additional 200,000 Rupiah.." (R1)</i> <i>"Use contraceptives, such as condoms. Sometimes customers don't want to use condoms. I ask for an additional 200 rupiah if they don't use condoms because the risks are dangerous." (R3)</i>

## Discussion

The results of the thematic analysis in this study found several themes related to online sex service offerings among adolescents. Some of the factors identified are economic factors, lifestyle, pleasure and the perpetrator's beliefs regarding commercial sex activities. Economic factors show a very strong influence that influences and is influenced by issues of fulfilling lifestyle, pleasure and beliefs. A variety of personal characteristics and environmental factors influence adolescent behavior, both delaying and accelerating, and generally shaping the initial stages of their sexual experiences (Caltabiano et al., 2020). Most of the responden are unmarried, didn't have any job and in range 17-23 years old. Even though traditional norm will not allowed to do premarital sexual, most of them hiding their sexual activities from their family.

The present study identified four interconnected determinants of adolescents' involvement in online commercial sex: economic factors as the primary driving force, reinforced by

lifestyle aspirations and pleasure-oriented motives, with psychosocial vulnerabilities serving as underlying predisposing conditions. Among these, economic pressure clearly dominated participants' narratives. Financial dependency, unmet material needs, and the perception of significantly higher income compared to formal employment shaped a pragmatic decision-making process. This dominance can be interpreted within a structural vulnerability framework, where limited youth employment opportunities and widening consumer expectations create a tension between economic capacity and social aspiration. Thus, engagement was not merely impulsive behavior but reflected calculated responses to perceived economic constraints and opportunities.

Sex work is often understood as part of efforts to empower women economically, politically, and socially. Empirical findings indicate that women choose to engage in sex work not only to improve their living conditions and meet family needs, but also as a strategy to escape various limitations,

such as poverty and economic dependence (Johansson & Hansen, 2024). Economic constraints were identified as the predominant motivation for participants engagement in commercial sex activities through open booking for sexual worker in online platform. Several participants indicated that the need to secure basic living necessities constituted the primary rationale for their involvement. For three participants', the income obtained was directed toward supporting parents, fulfilling household and family obligations, and financing educational needs. Collectively, these findings underscore the role of economic vulnerability as a critical precipitating factor that shapes and sustains engagement in commercial sex behaviors.

Digital transactions for sex workers are facilitated by platforms that do not restrict users from making commercial sexual offers. Studies examining the motivations, inequalities, and risks faced by sex workers involved in the creation, promotion, and exchange of sexual content reveal a complex work ecosystem. Within this ecosystem, sex workers balance potential opportunities—such as financial independence, self-expression, and activism—against significant risks, including economic insecurity, digital vulnerability, and threats to privacy (Labor, 2025). This allows commercial sex workers easy access to offer themselves without their families knowing. Furthermore, it makes it easier for consumers to find commercial sex providers. This has numerous negative impacts, particularly in controlling the spread of disease, increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases, and most importantly, increasing the number of marriage breakdowns and divorces. Crime rates are also on the rise, driven by romances involving people met through online platforms.

Women engaged in sex work for different reasons – to fend for themselves (i.e., livelihood), self-employment and others do it for pleasure (Wulifan, 2024). While some participantss engaged in sex trade to meet their living expenses or as a livelihood, there were also other reasons supporting this. Some participants' who engaged in sex trade were from lower economic status, making sex trafficking a quick way to earn money to meet their needs. This type is indicated by sentences that say to earn money to fulfill life's needs and find a date who fulfills his life's needs.

Sex workers are initially considered a group experiencing economic vulnerability, yet they proactively choose sexual activity as a source of income. This vulnerability arises because sex work carries various risks. However, sex workers typically consider and manage these risks when making decisions to meet their economic needs. By viewing sex workers not as helpless victims, but as active individuals capable of managing risks, this perspective affirms that they make conscious choices and that sex work can be understood as a form of employment (Jarvis-king, 2023). This is reinforced by the fact that other than fulfilling primary needs, these teenage sex workers also do it to fulfill their lifestyle.

Urban lifestyles significantly influence the lives of teenagers. Cultural differences play a significant role in shaping adolescents' attitudes towards luxury brands, with the need for uniqueness and susceptibility to influence having a positive impact through the mediating role of fashion innovation (Gentina et al., 2016). Modern lifestyles are often associated with trendy items, expensive, and branded goods, considered classy. Despite the emergence of slow living, which offers a more relaxed lifestyle, trendy items and even hedonism still permeate the lives of young people. Exposure to this urban lifestyle also spreads rapidly through social

media. Social media influencer also have strong impact on teenagers materialism consumption (Hanafiah, 2024.). Teenagers are a highly impressionable group. This lifestyle has economic consequences.

The indication of a relationship between sexual behavior and interest in modern goods, or modern lifestyles does not directly explain risky sexual behavior among adolescents, this is also shaped by culture and conditions of economic uncertainty (Stoebenau et al., 2013). Most participants stated that commercial sex acts were undertaken to fulfill lifestyle needs. They stated that the income earned from online open bookings for sexual purposes was used to purchase expensive, branded goods. Furthermore, a lifestyle of relaxing and hanging out in cafeterias was also common among teenagers. Participants not only purchased branded goods but also fulfilled urban lifestyle needs such as going to cafes, watching movies, purchasing skincare, and so on.

Modern lifestyles are also strongly shaped by peer influence. The presence of peers who engage in similar risky behavior is the most significant factor related to middle-aged adolescents' involvement in such risky behavior (Loke et al., 2016). Participants reported that owning branded products, participating in café culture, or purchasing high-cost items was often necessary to gain acceptance within their social circles. Some participants indicated that these behaviors were motivated by a desire to form and maintain friendships. Peer pressure thus indirectly shapes adolescents' behavior. Although parents generally meet adolescents' basic living needs, the financial demands associated with lifestyle expectations create additional economic pressures. As a result, some adolescents are driven to engage in commercial sexual activities to sustain their desired lifestyles.

Family-related issues also contribute to adolescents' involvement in open sex booking practices. Married mother-father households are the most effective in reducing risky sexual behavior in adolescents, while mother-relative households are also protective for girls. Conversely, parental divorce and separation increase the risk of risky sexual behavior, which is partially mediated by parenting styles, adolescent sexual attitudes, and peer influence. However, family structure and transitions in early childhood continue to have long-term impacts on risky sexual behavior up to age 18 (Steele et al., 2020). A family environment characterized by effective communication and harmony plays a critical role during adolescence. Participants reported that experiences of growing up in broken homes increased their likelihood of engaging in online open sex booking. Although financial motives were not the sole reason, frequenting nightclubs and nightlife venues exposed adolescents to environments that facilitated involvement in commercial sex.

Adolescents' perceptions of premarital sexuality are influenced by gender, family circumstances, parent-adolescent interactions, and peers. Female adolescents tend to have lower perceptions of premarital sexuality than male adolescents. Adolescents from broken homes, particularly those aged 12–16, exhibit a greater influence on premarital sexual perceptions because they are in puberty and require parental guidance. Family disharmony, the most common finding, is associated with poor conflict resolution and acceptance in parent-adolescent interactions, thus increasing the likelihood of premarital sexual perceptions. Good parental interactions and active supervision can reduce the likelihood of premarital sexual behavior, while conflict with peers can actually increase it. Parents and peers play an important role as social context,

behavioral models, and protective or risk factors in the development of adolescent sexual behavior ([Aini & Riany, 2023](#)).

Young people who reported online sexual behavior showed a more problematic background, rated their health as poorer, had a more sexualized life and had experienced more sexual or physical abuse ([Jonsson et al., 2015](#)). Participants stated that they engage in commercial sex for fun. Teenagers reported that even though they have family, they don't play a role, lacking communication and affection. This void causes teens to seek to fill it by engaging in commercial sexual activity. Participants stated that sexual activity is for fun, not primarily for financial gain. Affection, such as being listened to, cared for, and enjoyment, are among the reasons they engage in sexual activity.

Sexual activities also strongly influenced by beliefs of each individual. Among the determinants affecting sexual activities, family, educational institutions, and religion are the most influential, as demonstrated across national and cultural contexts. Adolescents who adhere to the norms and rules instilled by these traditional socializing agents tend to delay sexual initiation, engage in lower-risk behaviors, and follow more conventional patterns of transition to adulthood ([Caltabiano et al., 2020](#)). Almost of the respondents said that they want to change to "normal" jobs. The most reason is the community's stigma of sex commercial activities. They said that people in the community saw the activities as a negative behavior. That's why, all adolescents hide their open booking online for sexual purpose and hide from their parents and family. One participant allows her partner to come to her home and said that her partner is her boyfriend to avoid parents and community stigma. This has happened because the community still accepts boyfriend-girlfriend relationships rather than free sex or commercial sex.

These findings must be understood within the broader ASEAN and low- and middle-income country (LMIC) context, including Indonesia, where rapid digitalization coexists with youth underemployment, urban migration, and expanding consumer culture. In many LMIC settings, social mobility is strongly associated with visible lifestyle markers, intensifying peer comparison and aspirational consumption. The normalization of nightlife culture and transactional relationships in urban centers may further blur moral and economic boundaries. Additionally, family dynamics characterized by parental absence due to labor migration or economic strain may reduce supervision and emotional support. Within this context, psychosocial vulnerabilities do not operate independently but interact with structural inequalities and digital platform accessibility. Therefore, the phenomenon reflects a convergence of macro-level economic pressures, meso-level social norms, and micro-level emotional needs.

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating structural-economic perspectives with psychosocial and lifestyle dimensions, offering a multidimensional framework for understanding adolescent risk behavior in LMIC settings. Practically, interventions must be culturally adaptive and resource-sensitive. Prevention strategies should not rely solely on moral messaging but include youth economic empowerment programs, accessible vocational pathways, and digital literacy education. Family-based interventions should strengthen communication and emotional support within resource-constrained households, while community and school-based programs should address peer norms and aspirational consumption patterns. Given the small sample size and the sensitive nature of the topic, findings cannot be generalized to all adolescents;

however, they provide in-depth contextual insights. Future research should expand to multi-site ASEAN settings, incorporate gender and platform-specific analysis, and examine longitudinal trajectories to better inform policy and culturally grounded prevention strategies.

### Implications and limitations

This study extends understanding of adolescent involvement in online commercial sex by conceptualizing it as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of structural-economic pressures, lifestyle aspirations, pleasure reinforcement, and psychosocial vulnerability. Rather than viewing engagement solely as deviant or morally driven behavior, the findings highlight how economic rationality and social comparison processes operate within constrained opportunity structures, particularly in LMIC contexts. Conceptually, the study contributes an integrated framework that bridges structural vulnerability theory with psychosocial and behavioral perspectives, offering a more comprehensive lens for analyzing digitally mediated sexual economies among adolescents. This framework may inform future theory-building and guide the development of culturally responsive and context-sensitive interventions.

This study is limited by its small sample size and the sensitive nature of the topic, which restricted participant recruitment and may affect transferability. Many potential participants concealed their identities, limiting broader representation. While phenomenological research prioritizes depth over breadth, future studies should include larger and more diverse samples across regions, incorporate comparative LMIC contexts, and explore gender and digital platform variations to strengthen theoretical refinement and contextual generalizability.

### Relevance to Practice

The application of this research, especially in maternity nursing and reproductive health, is primarily used as a basis for reference in developing measures to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, improve adolescent reproductive health, strengthen family and peer support, and promote health that is appropriate to adolescent reproductive health.

Based on the multidimensional determinants identified, the findings should be translated into concrete policy and institutional applications. Nursing assessment tools in adolescent health services should incorporate structured screening items addressing economic vulnerability, lifestyle pressures (e.g., peer-driven consumption and nightlife exposure), digital sexual behavior, and psychosocial indicators such as family communication and emotional support. Adolescent counseling programs should integrate brief motivational interviewing, financial literacy education, and digital risk awareness modules tailored to urban LMIC contexts, particularly within school and community health settings. At the health system level, integration between school health units, primary care services, and mental health counseling should be strengthened to enable early identification, confidential referral pathways, and family-based interventions. Such coordinated, context-sensitive strategies can operationalize the study's conceptual framework into preventive and supportive services for at-risk adolescents.

### Conclusion

Economic factors emerged as the primary and most fundamental driver of adolescents' involvement in commercial sexual activities through online platforms, reflecting the strong influence of financial needs and perceived economic

opportunities. Lifestyle aspirations, shaped by peer comparison and environmental pressures, further intensified engagement by normalizing consumption patterns and nightlife culture. In addition, pleasure and social gratification functioned as reinforcing mechanisms that sustained continued participation despite potential psychological consequences. These findings underscore that adolescent involvement in online commercial sex is not attributable to a single motive but results from the interaction of structural, social, and individual-level influences. Future research should explore longitudinal patterns, gender differences, and digital platform dynamics across diverse LMIC settings to strengthen prevention strategies and inform evidence-based policy development.

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### CrediT Authorship Contributions Statement

**Qori Ila Saidah:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing - Original Draft

**Puji Hastuti:** Validation, Formal Analysis, & Writing - Review Editing

**Elma Aulia Irnanda:** Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Project Administration

### Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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