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Cultural Integration in Adolescent Reproductive Health Promotion Initiatives: Insights from Tengger, Indonesia

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A B S T R A C T

Context significantly influences the effectiveness of adolescent reproductive health (ARH) promotion—initiatives to improve adolescents' reproductive health through culturally sensitive approaches. Successful efforts often neglect broader environmental factors, where local contexts are crucial. This study explored ARH promotion based on the local knowledge of the Tengger people using a case study approach. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders (n=2), parents (n=2), and adolescents (n=2). Results revealed that cultural and religious values are deeply integrated into ARH promotion through four foundations: cultural identity, social control, harmony, and full participation. Cultural identity focuses on preserving traditions and values. Social control includes formal rules and unwritten norms guiding behavior. Harmony emphasizes balance and collective well-being. Full participation engages adolescents in community activities, fostering belonging and responsibility. These findings underscore the importance of aligning ARH initiatives with local cultural values to enhance program acceptance and sustainability. In the Tengger context, incorporating these cultural elements into ARH promotion not only respects community practices but also ensures better outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of socio-cultural factors in health promotion is undeniable. These elements are crucial in shaping health behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions within a community. Cultural beliefs and practices influence how individuals perceive illness, treatment options, and preventive measures. By understanding and integrating these factors, health promotion programs can become more effective and culturally sensitive (Islam et al., 2019; Riemenschneider et al., 2016). For instance, community leaders and traditional healers can be engaged to endorse health initiatives, significantly boosting their acceptance among the population (Chimatiro, Hajison, & Muula, 2020). Additionally, addressing social determinants such as education, income, and social support can enhance the overall impact of health interventions (Patiro, Tantri, Batti, & Wijanarko, 2022). Crafting messages that fit the cultural

context ensures better communication and engagement, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes. Recognizing the diversity within populations and respecting cultural norms fosters trust and cooperation, making health promotion efforts more successful and sustainable (Buchari, 2021; Rupita, 2020).

Studies have examined the promotion of adolescent reproductive health through various programs within the contexts of families, schools, and communities. Programs implemented in schools were often seen as tasks rather than essential skills for daily life (Id et al., 2024; Lewis, Takai-Kawakami, Kawakami, & Sullivan, 2010). The role of family on ARH significantly influenced by the characteristics of the parent-child communication (Usonwu, Ahmad, & Curtis-Tyler, 2021), parental knowledge (Singh et al., 2023) and the timing of communication (Zevallos-Roberts, Cunningham, Adhikari, Thapa, & Sear, 2022). Families and other institutions play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment that promotes protective functions for

adolescent reproductive health (Kenny, Hoban, Pors, & Williams, 2019). This environment fosters mutual trust and solidarity among members, which, in turn, encourages shared behaviors aligned with societal norms and values to enhance adolescent reproductive health (Kenny et al., 2019; Manzoor, Azam, & Pervaiz, 2019).

Probolinggo District, located in East Java Province-Indonesia, has some of the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality. One contributing factor to these high rates is early marriage. National economic surveys conducted from 2008 to 2012 and the 2010 population census revealed that Probolinggo District had a 35% prevalence of young female marriages between the ages of 15 and 19 (East Java Health Department, 2015), compared to the national prevalence rate of 20% (Danasari & Wibowo, 2017). These early marriages are associated with psychological issues, including emotional and mental disorders.

Early marriage has been a reproductive health issue among the *Tenggerese*, especially before 2011. The *Tenggerese*, a tribe in East Java, Indonesia, reside in the foothills of Mount Bromo, at altitudes ranging from 650 to 1800 meters above sea level. The term "Tengger" signifies nobility, reflecting the community's emphasis on noble values in daily life (Sutarto, 2008). Unlike other tribes in Probolinggo Regency, the Tengger people have a robust social organization and adhere firmly to their cultural traditions. Since 2011, they have implemented a unique initiative to manage adolescent reproductive health called *Pethek'en*. This activity involves pregnancy examinations for female adolescents and widows conducted by both midwives and traditional midwives. As a cultural product, *Pethek'en* represents the collective and interdependent interactions within the Tengger community (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

People, as agents of change, express their identities to the community through social expectations aimed at fostering prosocial behavior as a common goal. Identity formation is closely linked to the dynamics of the relationship between the individual and culture (Kühnen & Kitayama, 2024). The sociocultural context shapes the self through the values and practices upheld within the family, school, and community. Social control, as an embodiment of people's identities, provides guidelines on expected behaviors and how to externalize them. This process cultivates a specific perspective and perception in each individual, aligned with the community's collective identity (Mackenbach, 2014; Petkova, 2015). Furthermore, social control is influenced by the extent to which the community can achieve their goals as collective objectives rather than individual or group goals (collective efficacy). Collective efficacy reflects the level of trust, solidarity, and shared values within the community and has high social expectations for prosocial behaviors (Browning, Soller, & Jackson, 2015; Matsueda & Drakulich, 2016; Prince et al., 2019). In a sociocultural context, individual identity and social control play pivotal roles in fostering prosocial behavior as part of society's collective goals. This study explores how social control and collective efficacy within the Tengger community shape adolescent reproductive health practices through shared social values and expectations.

METHOD

Type of the Research. This study employed qualitative research to explore adolescent reproductive health in Tengger society. (Creswell, 2007; Simons, 2014). Research Location. This research was conducted in Ngadisari Village, Sukapura District, Probolinggo Regency. The location was chosen because *Pethek'en* activities were first initiated in this village in 2011.

Participants. The research involved two adolescents aged 15 to 20 years old and females (A1 and A2), with educational backgrounds ranging from vocational high school to university. The researcher aimed to understand their views on the *Pethek'an* activity, which is specifically targeted at female adolescents. Additionally, the study included two parents aged 38 to 40 years old (P1 and P2) to gain insights into their perspectives on adolescent reproductive health, child-parent communication, and the *Pethek'en* activity. Traditional and spiritual leaders, as well as health workers, specifically midwives, were also involved due to their significant roles in the village. The traditional leader oversees village activities and Tengger customary ceremonies, while the health workers conduct examinations during *Pethek'an*.

Method of Collecting Data. The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews aimed at exploring specific elements of the Tengger ethnic community's social structure, such as kinship relations, value systems, social roles, and mechanisms of social control. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including community leaders, parents, and adolescents, to gather diverse insights on how these social structures influence adolescent reproductive health. To complement the interviews and enhance data validity, additional methods such as observations and document analysis were also employed. Observations focused on community rituals and everyday interactions, providing contextual understanding of the application of social structures in practice. Document analysis involved reviewing local regulations, traditional guidelines, and relevant written materials to triangulate findings. This combination of methods ensures a robust and comprehensive exploration of the social dynamics within the Tengger community.

Method of Data Analysis. The researcher used inductive analysis to identify themes. The steps taken were as follows: (1) reviewing and familiarizing with the collected data; (2) identifying meaningful data relevant to the research questions; (3) coding the relevant data; (4) clustering interconnected data to build patterns; and (5) reviewing the patterns to identify the possibility of new patterns. The established patterns were the themes that represented each subject (Simons, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined how cultural and social structures within the Tengger community influence adolescent reproductive health practices. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, capturing diverse perspectives from adolescents, parents, community leaders, and healthcare providers.

The findings highlight the interplay between traditional values, collective identity, and modern health initiatives in shaping behaviors and attitudes related to reproductive health.

The results are presented in two main themes: formal social control mechanisms, such as the *Pethek'an* program, and informal practices rooted in cultural and religious traditions. These themes illustrate how the Tengger community integrates social norms and collective expectations into daily life, fostering adherence to values that prioritize community harmony and well-being.

1. Formal Social Control

Tenggerese society has a strong elite structure consisting of a traditional leader and a village officer, each with clearly defined roles. The traditional and religious leader is responsible for maintaining customary values and overseeing religious ceremonies, while the village officer manages village programs in accordance with regency government policies. Among these roles, the village officer is the most influential in developing programs to address issues. In previous years, the primary issue was early marriage. To reduce the incidence of early marriages, the village implemented a 12-year compulsory education program. This initiative received appreciation from the central government and a national-level award for communal work in 2013.

... we necessitate 12-year schooling, exceeding the central government's 9-year policy. When the minister asked about funding, we explained that it comes from our own resources (Village Officer)

Pethek'an has become part of the integrated service post-program for adolescents, ensuring it is conducted regularly. In addition to reducing the number of early marriages, it aims to control and supervise teen socialization.

... Yes, Pethek'an is my initiative since I became the village head in 2011. It is designed to monitor teenagers' behaviors. It is conducted once every three months, with both a midwife and a traditional midwife examining the girls to check for pregnancies. Previously, we had many early marriages among adolescent (Village Officer)

2. *Pethek'an* Ritualized as Informal Social Control

The willingness of adolescents to participate in *Pethek'an* and other religious celebrations reflects their adherence to custom and religion. Through *Pethek'an*, adolescents are encouraged to get closer to God, build good relationships with family and neighbors, and preserve *Tenggerese* customs. This activity is conducted outdoors, and prior to implementation, announcements are made to the youth and their parents. Monitoring of these activities is carried out by *posyandu* cadres, with particular emphasis on the presence of adolescents. Additionally, *Pethek'an* is considered a traditional and religious activity as it has

been endorsed by the traditional and spiritual leaders in Ngadisari village

If they do not attend, the posyandu workers will ask both the adolescents and their mothers why they were absent. Consequently, they must attend the next Pethek'an, which is typically held on a day off, usually Sunday. As parents, we remind each other about Pethek'an to ensure no one forgets. This mutual reminder helps us maintain good relationships (P1)

3. Abstinence as Collective Pride

The ability of adolescents to practice abstinence and avoid premarital sex is a source of pride, aligning with parental and community expectations to uphold the values of chastity. *Pethek'an* also serves as a platform for teenagers to remind each other to maintain appropriate social interactions with the opposite sex. It is a matter of pride for teenagers when test results confirm their virginity, demonstrating their success in upholding the values of chastity.

...it is important for teenagers to behave appropriately. Parents want them to complete their education first and hope they listen. Whether it's a boy or girl, it's the same. We still have a long time ahead, and it would be unfortunate for them to have a child at such a young age. So, if they can finish school, we are happy and proud (P2)

We are proud when our expectations are met and nothing unexpected happens. Yes, that is how it should be, personally (A1)

... My friends and I always share and remind each other to avoid such behaviors. We encourage them to take care of themselves to be successful (A2)

4. Schools are important institutions for sexual education and promoting age-appropriate pregnancy readiness

Schools have a mandate to implement the 12-year compulsory education program as part of the village's strategic initiatives. This includes promotional activities coordinated by the Probolinggo District Health Office through the Puskesmas at the sub-district level, involving village midwives. The primary focus of the material provided is on sexually transmitted diseases.

...from the Puskesmas, we visit secondary schools and high schools once every three to six months for educational sessions. We have specialist officers and also bring the village midwife to provide information on health issues such as reproductive health and infectious diseases. Now, Pethek'an is conducted once every three months. It serves as a time for sharing, questions and answers, and has become a form of group counseling ..(Village Officer)

Pethek'an is a culturally rooted initiative established in 2011 by the village leader to address adolescent reproductive health issues, particularly early marriage and premarital sexual behavior. This program involves regular pregnancy checks for female adolescents

conducted by both midwives and traditional birth attendants, fostering collaboration between modern healthcare practices and traditional values. Beyond its medical function, *Pethek'an* serves as a platform for community engagement, offering group counseling sessions that include discussions, sharing experiences, and addressing questions about reproductive health.

The Tengger community widely accepts and supports this initiative due to its alignment with their cultural and religious values, such as maintaining harmony, collective well-being, and social responsibility. By integrating *Pethek'an* into existing community rituals and religious practices, it has become an essential part of Tengger identity, reinforcing values of chastity, discipline, and mutual respect. This acceptance reflects the community's trust in combining traditional practices with modern health education to achieve shared goals for adolescent health and societal harmony.

Based on the research findings, social control over adolescent reproductive health in Tengger is conducted through both formal and informal means. Formally, *Pethek'an* has been institutionalized as an official village program funded by the village budget, which obligates community participation. Informally, it is integrated into customary and religious activities, serving to preserve *Tenggerese* values and beliefs. These values and beliefs are implicitly conveyed through the *Pethek'an* activity. Although primarily a pregnancy test, it represents much more, reflecting the community's collective effort based on trust and solidarity. This program fosters a sense of community and strong collective capability among adolescents, parents, health workers, traditional leaders, and spiritual leaders.

Social relations among adolescents in their environment are more interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). In an interdependent framework, behavior is influenced by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others within the relationship. The adolescents' pride in choosing abstinence is a part of *Tenggerese* culture. This interaction fosters a strong attachment and connection to *Tenggerese* values. Cultural tasks guide these interactions, involving the perspectives of others, understanding their expectations, adapting to them, and using them as behavioral references.

Discussion

Cultural practices and rituals in a community are continuously carried out from generation to generation, showcasing the values and identity of that community. These rituals typically have several aspects: 1) repetition in content, form, and timing, 2) planned and organized as public ceremonies held outdoors, 3) displaying typical behaviors, 4) being attention-drawing, and 5) aiming for collective goals. In his book "Rites of Passage," Van Gennep mentions that rituals in traditional societies not only build social consensus but also establish a social structure that highlights the different roles of its members. Microanalysis in this context prepares certain groups of people for life crises such as marriage, adolescence, or death (Assegaf, 2012; Kühnen & Kitayama, 2024). *Pethek'an* for *Tenggerese* adolescents is a cultural heritage with distinct characteristics that preserve traditional rituals while incorporating modern aspects by involving health

workers to address contemporary reproductive health issues. The open implementation of *Pethek'an* strengthens community consensus on the importance of preventing premarital sex, reflecting the Tengger community's concern in preparing adolescents to face identity-related crises.

Adolescents' attachment to significant others, willingness to participate in traditional ceremonies or activities, and belief in the moral values conveyed in these activities lead them to embrace their messages and values. This involvement includes participation with the *dhukun pandhita*, the spiritual leader of the *Tenggerese* people, imbuing the activities with spiritual significance and perceived benefits for local adolescents and the community. Adolescents consider the consequences of violating prevailing values and norms, thinking about social sanctions before acting. Conversely, enthusiastic participation in traditional rituals and social activities brings them a sense of value and honor within the community (Özbay & Özcan, 2015).

The results show that *Pethek'an* serves as a form of social control over adolescent sexual behavior outside of marriage. Social control refers to the regulation of behavior to maintain expected conduct or change undesirable behavior in line with societal expectations (Cepeda, Saint Onge, Nowotny, & Valdez, 2015). The uniqueness of social control within the *Tengger* community lies in the village government's success in integrating various institutions into the community's social structure. These institutions include spiritual leaders (*dhukun pandhita*) representing the religious aspect, customary leaders representing the cultural aspect, village midwives representing the health aspect, and school principals representing the formal education aspect. Each institution fulfills its role to achieve collective goals.

Control of sexual behavior outside of marriage is enforced through routine pregnancy tests conducted by midwives and traditional birth attendants. These tests not only determine the virginity status of adolescents but also provide an opportunity for them to discuss their reproductive health concerns. Furthermore, reproductive health is linked to the maturation of marriage age. The village head of Ngadisari successfully launched a 12-year compulsory education program, prohibiting marriage for residents who have not graduated from high school. Schools implement this program for their students and regularly allocate time for the Probolinggo District Health Office to promote reproductive health.

Religious ceremonies and regular meetings for parents and youth, led by spiritual leaders, further reinforce the importance of maintaining adolescent reproductive health. The harmony in implementing these policies is achieved through the collective contributions and agreements of all societal elements.

1. The Relationship between Adolescents and The Community

In relation to the psychological dynamics of affirming adolescent self-identity, the study examines the relationship between adolescents as both biological and social beings and the psychological significance of socio-cultural practices. This relationship is shaped by culture

while also actively shaping its setting and context. The study of self and culture demonstrates that humans and their socio-cultural environment are inseparable and mutually constitutive (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). The relationship between self and culture involves four interconnected components:

1. **Self:** Represents the biopsychosocial processes, including perception, cognition, emotion, motivation, and action, which form the foundation of individual behavior. In the Tengger community, adolescents internalize values of harmony and chastity through their interactions with family and peers, shaping their motivation to adhere to cultural expectations.
2. **Everyday Situations and Practices:** Encompasses the environments individuals engage with daily, such as the home, school, and workplace. In Tenggerese daily life, rituals like *Pethek'an* and community gatherings serve as platforms where individuals practice and reinforce shared cultural norms, fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity.
3. **Cultural Institutions and Products:** Includes systems such as language, education, politics, media, and the legal framework that formalize and perpetuate cultural norms and values. For the Tenggerese, customary leaders and spiritual figures play a pivotal role as cultural institutions, ensuring that rituals and traditions like village cleaning are observed to maintain societal harmony and moral order.
4. **Social Factors and Pervasive Ideas:** Involves broader societal influences like ecology, economy, history, and philosophical questions about morality and individuality. The Tengger community's deep connection with their natural environment and spiritual beliefs, such as seeing natural signs as indicators of norm violations, reflects their collective worldview and shapes communal behavior.

These components are not only interrelated but also embodied in the Tenggerese value system and daily practices. For example, the *Pethek'an* ritual combines the individual's responsibility to maintain chastity (self) with collective participation (situations), supported by cultural leadership (institutions) and rooted in shared moral beliefs (social factors). Together, these practices illustrate the mutual constitution of self and culture in the Tengger context.

2. Self-Identity of Tenggerese Adolescents

Tenggerese adolescents' adherence to cultural and religious values and social consensus reflects a strong sense of self. Efforts to align oneself with societal expectations, particularly regarding behavior with the opposite sex, indicate complex psychological dynamics. These dynamics develop through interactions with all components of Tenggerese social structure, both formally and informally, influencing how adolescents assess, feel,

and regulate their behavior. The ability to self-regulate is crucial for adolescents to translate social expectations into personal actions. As active agents, adolescents also influence their peer groups. Their attitudes and values shape their interactions, encouraging them to form peer groups with similar values. Pride in successfully adhering to social expectations motivates peer groups to self-regulate according to community values and norms.

3. The Mutual Constitution Process Between Self and Culture

Adolescents' selves and culture are interrelated, with changes in cultural components leading to changes in the self and psychological functions. The implementation of the 12-year compulsory education and *Pethek'an* program, aimed at delaying marriage age and preventing premarital sex, reflects the dynamic social activities addressing high maternal and child mortality rates due to early marriage and a lack of reproductive health knowledge. Along with local government policies to tackle these issues, the Tenggerese people translate these efforts into a social context, mapping the social and cultural resources involved in addressing the problems. The village government's ability to communicate the program effectively to all societal components and integrate their respective roles fosters a sense of ownership among the people.

Families with adolescents play a crucial role in encouraging participation in programs aimed at youth. Communication primarily involves monitoring and ensuring that adolescents' behaviors align with social expectations. The transformation of values and beliefs related to prevailing norms is essential in this monitoring process. Communication between mothers and daughters is more open concerning reproductive health topics such as menstruation and hygiene of reproductive organs, whereas male adolescents tend to rely on schools or peers for information on socializing with the opposite sex and sexual development.

The Tenggerese people's perception of adolescent reproductive health shapes the self-identity of their adolescents through the meanings and practices within families, schools, and leisure activities. Culture is dynamic in terms of ideas, practices, institutions, products, and artifacts, and the self is also dynamic, changing as its environment changes. This dynamic does not negate individuality and idiosyncrasy, as each individual engages with their environment in unique ways (McAdams, 2013).

Table 1. The Dimensions of ARH in Tengger

Aspects	Description	Field Data Example
Attachment	Intergenerational closeness: strong relationships among adolescents, families, health workers, and local leaders	"As parents, we remind each other about <i>Pethek'an</i> to ensure no one forgets. This mutual reminder helps us maintain good relationships." (P1, Parent)
Commitment	Shared	"It is a matter of pride

	expectations: the expectation of maintaining chastity extends beyond families to the entire community.	for teenagers when test results confirm their virginity, demonstrating their success in upholding the values of chastity." (A1, Adolescent)
Involvement	Regulatory capacity: adolescents as active agents influencing their peers, not merely objects of the program.	"My friends and I always share and remind each other to avoid such behaviors. We encourage them to take care of themselves to be successful." (A2, Adolescent)
Belief	Pethek'an is an explicit and externalized belief, serving as a means to reinforce the idea that violating norms negatively impacts not only the individual but also the community and the environment.	"If they do not attend, the posyandu workers will ask both the adolescents and their mothers why they were absent." (P1, Parent)

4. Interdependence Scheme Forming Psychological Function

The interdependence scheme emphasizes the self as part of social relations, contrasting with the independence scheme, which focuses on individual attributes as behavioral references (Kitayama et al., 1997; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014; Lewis et al., 2010). In this framework, individuals align their actions with the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others, reflecting a responsibility to maintain social harmony and fulfill communal obligations (Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014; Lewis et al., 2010).

In Tenggerese culture, as in many Eastern cultures, discussing reproductive health and sexuality openly is often taboo. This cultural context makes it challenging for adolescents to seek information directly, reinforcing the importance of initiatives like *Pethek'an*, which provide culturally acceptable channels for disseminating knowledge. These initiatives respect communal values while equipping adolescents with the information necessary for informed decisions.

The interdependence scheme also underscores the significance of social context and communal relationships in shaping behavior (Kumari, Kwon, Lee, & Choi, 2020; Wang, 2017). For Tengger adolescents, adherence to shared norms and values is central to their identity and aligns with the "we-self" concept. Programs like *Pethek'an* not only serve as social control mechanisms but also reinforce collective identity by linking individual behavior to community expectations.

In such a collective culture, maintaining harmony takes precedence over personal ambitions, with trust serving as a cornerstone of social cohesion (Lu & Wan, 2018). This cultural emphasis underscores the importance of trust within society, which is considered a critical resource

(Cislaghi & Berkowitz, 2021). Violations of norms are addressed through community sanctions, such as the ritual of village cleaning, reaffirming shared values and ensuring continuity of cultural heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the integration of cultural and religious values in adolescent reproductive health (ARH) practices within the Tengger community. Key findings reveal that *Pethek'an*, as a culturally embedded initiative, serves not only as a mechanism of social control but also as a platform for reinforcing collective identity, promoting chastity, and fostering community cohesion. The four dimensions—attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief—emerged as foundational elements shaping ARH practices through shared social values and expectations.

These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how sociocultural contexts influence health promotion strategies. Specifically, this study underscores the importance of aligning health interventions with local traditions and values to enhance community acceptance and sustainability. The insights gained can inform the design of culturally sensitive ARH programs in similar contexts.

However, this study is limited by its reliance on a small sample size and the primary use of interviews, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. The inclusion of additional quantitative methods or longitudinal studies could further validate the results and provide deeper insights into the dynamics of ARH practices.

Future research should explore the perspectives of male adolescents and the long-term impact of *Pethek'an* on reproductive health outcomes. Additionally, examining the role of modern influences on traditional practices could provide valuable implications for balancing cultural preservation and innovation in health promotion.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the inseparability of culture and health in the Tengger context. The findings serve as a call for integrating local wisdom into health interventions, promoting not only individual well-being but also community harmony and resilience.

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