

ADOLESCENTS AND PREMARITAL SEX: PERSPECTIVES FROM FAMILY ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Sex is a universally developmental process in any society throughout the world. Recently, the numbers of reported cases of social problem specifically related to sexuality issues among adolescent keep on increasing yearly. In Malaysian context, issue of premarital sex become a growing public concern especially with the alarming of social issue problems. Premarital sex is considered as sexual intercourse between a man and woman who are not married to each other. The increasing trend of premarital sex experience specifically among the Muslim young girls needed a serious attention especially within the Muslim majority population country since the prevalence and incidence of premarital sex become a norm by young generation. Early initiations of sexual intercourse are among the key indicators that influence the onset of premarital sexual engagement. Based on the Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, human interaction within their environment will reflect their types of behaviour. In this conceptual paper, the discussion will give better understanding towards issues of premarital sex involvement by not simply highlight on the onset factors but rather helping to understand more clearly by focusing on the protective factors, particularly from the family ecological context in understanding the issues of premarital sex. It is shows that those adolescents who resided within nuclear two parent families had significantly lower rates of premarital sexual intercourse. Consistency in parental communication as well as closely monitoring towards adolescents daily life practice contribute significantly positive development in young generation. Since the issues of premarital sex are alarming especially involving adolescents, therefore a serious intervention need to come into place and closely monitored.

Keywords: Adolescent, Ecological Theory, Premarital Sex, Protective Factors, Sexual Intercourse,

1.0 Introduction

Globally, adolescents' sexuality issue has become a recent concern in much research. In particular to pre-marital sex issues, its prevalence among Malaysian adolescents is increasing tremendously. The involvement of these adolescents becomes serious where it leads to other problems of social ills such as unwanted pregnancy and teenage pregnancies. In addition, this sexual risk taking behavior also can lead to contracting with other diseases such as HIV and AIDS as well as suffering from Chlamydia diseases. In recent years, issues regards to teen pregnancy worldwide has increased and become a major health issue for both developing and developed countries. In regards to Malaysian context, issue related to adolescents' pregnancy is alarming due to involvement of sexual activities among teenage which contributed to the rise of teen pregnancy rate. As reported by Tan et al (2012) in a cross sectional studies, about 63% of the respondents are pregnant due to premarital consensual sexual activity. Besides, based on statistic from National Registration Department, in 2013, it is recorded that about 53,000 of 510462 births are registered under illegitimate child status or child born out of wedlock (New Straits Times, 2011).

Moreover, the alarming cases of premarital sex become a worrying trend of non-marital childbearing where a statistic from 2005 until June 2011 revealed that a total number of 472 baby-dumping cases reported in Malaysia, which 258 were dead and 214 were still alive (Lee, 2012). Besides, about 5.8 percent of 5088 adolescents male and female aged between 13 to 24 years involved in sex offences (Berita Harian, 2015). Furthermore, in many developing countries, the elements of cultural taboo has hinder a young generation especially the adolescents to discuss about sexuality with their parents. Most of them gain knowledge from external influence such as from friends, internet access, as well as from magazine. Without proper intervention, this issue also will lead to another social problem such as pre-marital pregnancy, unwed mother, childbearing issues and the worst is

babies dumping. Since number of adolescents, keep on increasingly year-by-year, therefore issues of premarital sex need to take into an account in order to prevent it in developing other social ills.

In this conceptual paper, the premarital sex issue becomes a center of discussion, which is focus on family ecological context. Discussion starts with defining the term premarital sex, continued with onset and factors contributed to premarital sex as well as some theoretical background of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological perspectives. The discussion then followed by discussing on the aspect of religious and sexual behavior and end with the conclusion specifically discussing on the limitation and suggestion aspects.

2.0 Premarital Sex

According to Alo & Akinde (2010), they summarize that the premarital sex is associated with the phenomenon of teenage and unintended pregnancies, abortion, the spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Besides, French & Dishion (2003), defined premarital sexual behavior is all forms of sexual behavior that comes from sexual desire in the opposite sex by adolescents before marriage This act could be either from performing the less intimate relationships to performing sexual intercourse (kissing, necking, petting, and intercourse). Furthermore, Petersen & Donnenwerth (1997), defined premarital sex activities in a simple and concise manner: sexual behaviour before marriage. As reported by UNICEFF (2012), about 2.2 million adolescents worldwide are suffered with HIV. More than half of these numbers are females adolescent.

Apart from that, from the Islamic perspectives, the discussions about religious concern on the matters of sexuality are divided into two parts, which are legitimate sexual intercourse as well as illegitimate sexual intercourse. According to Musso, Fanget, & Cherabi, (2002), “Nikah” is referring to Legitimate Sexual Intercourse whereas “Zina” is referring to Illegitimate Sexual Intercourse. That means, if sexual intercourse happened outside marriage (Zina) such as “premarital sex”, it is considered as prohibited. Those couple who did practice the illegitimate sexual relationship are seen as “haram” (sin). Besides premarital sex issues, sexual behaviour such as masturbation, homosexuality, abortion as well as inter-religious relationship are considered haram in the practice of Islamic religion (Smerecnik et al., 2010).

Although Malaysia has a strong and stringent of Islamic foundation and Islamic Law, but currently the number of adolescents practices and engaged in premarital sex activity found to be alarming and occurring at an early age resulting in unwed pregnancy and abortion. Malaysian consists of three major ethnic groups such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and many more ethnics in Sabah and Sarawak. Malay is the Malaysia’s largest ethnic group amounting to half of the total population. As a Muslim, Malays are prohibited towards certain things under the rules of Islamic Laws especially in the area of sexual behaviour and practices through the clear guidance of what is acceptable and unacceptable. In regards to the issues of pre-marital sex, recently numbers of cases are alarming especially involving the young Malays. The relationship between husband and wife is the only accepted form of sexual relation in Islam.

Apart from that, the previous research in the Malaysian context reported that within the aged of 13 to 15 years old, the adolescents started to have dates and also started to experienced kissing at the age of 16 years old (Jas Laile Suzana Jaafar, 2005). A study by Halpern & Haydon (2012) also indicated that three quarters of young people specifically by the age of 18 years had experienced with vaginal intercourse and another (67%) reported to engaged in oral sex. This is in line with the report by World Health Organization, reported that the adolescents in the age bracket of 10 to 19 years of age accounted for 11% of worldwide birth (WHO, 2013).

Table 2.1
fact and figures of premarital sex cases in Malaysia

DATA	SOURCES
about 5.8 percent of 5088 adolescents male and female aged between 13 to 24 years involved in sex offences.	Berita Harian, 1 Feb 2015
more than 300 young Malay aged 13 and 25 years were found to have been involved in sexual offences and random sexual activities resulting in pregnancy and abortion.	Samon et al., 2012
from 2005 until June 2011, a total number of 472 baby dumping cases were reported in Malaysia which 258 were dead and 214 were still alive	Lee, 2012
120 female adolescents staying at rehabilitation centre across the country waiting for the giving birth process	Utusan Malaysia, 25 Jan 2011
from 2006 to 2009, around 234,647 illegitimate infants were born out of 2 million births. In a day, an average of 83 illegitimate infants was born in Malaysia.	Berita Harian, 21 March 2011
2260 respondents from 5016 admit that they had involved in sex before marriage - research by Institute of Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES),	Berita Harian, 1 Oct 2011

As we can see on the above table (Table 2.1), it is illustrate that number of illegitimate sexual intercourse in Malaysia become serious especially with the alarming of premarital sex activity among adolescents specifically young Malay adolescents. Samon et al., 2012 reported that more than 300 young Malay aged 13 and 25 years found to have been involved in sexual offences and random sexual activities. This is also resulting in pregnancy and abortion. Apart from that, from 2006 to 2009, around 234,647 illegitimate infants were born out of 2 million births. In a day, an average of 83 illegitimate infants was born in Malaysia (Berita Harian, 21 March 2011). Moreover, research conducted by Institute of Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES) revealed that out of 5016 respondents, 2260 admit that they had involved in sex before marriage (Berita Harian, 1 Oct 2011). Since the involvement of these adolescents becomes serious where it leads to other problems of social ills, therefore, the issues of pre-marital sex need to be addressed early; especially focusing on the high-risk group of adolescents.

Furthermore, based on a study conducted by Institut Sosial Malaysia (ISM) in 2011 towards 379 respondents (adolescents) staying at 12 governments and non-governmental rehabilitation centre, most of the respondents' friends did involve in several sex offences. As referring to the Table 2.2 below, sex out of wedlock are among the listed offences and this shows that friends are one of the major sources that influenced adolescent's attitude towards premarital sex (Siti Nor Yaacob et al., 2012).

Table 2.2
Most listed sexual offences reported by adolescents at 12 government and non-governmental rehabilitation centre

LIST OF SEXUAL OFFENCES	NUMBER OF PERSON INVOLVED
Used of obscene words	227
Foreplay	196
Sex out of wedlock	184
Seclusion	172
Brings sex material to school	137
Write/draw sex words & pictures	128
Molesting	113
Stalking female students	95

Source: Institut Sosial Malaysia (ISM) 2012

Moreover, by looking at the statistical aspect, trends and behaviour of premarital sex among Malaysian adolescents are alarming year by year. In 2014, it has reported that adolescents in the bracket age of 10 to 19 years, which is amounting to 16,528, are pregnant out of wedlock (Utusan Online, 1 Dec 2015). Moreover, an average of 18,000 teenagers in Malaysia gets pregnant each year, which is 25 per cent, or about 4,500 cases involved out-of-wedlock pregnancy (The Star Online, 29 October 2015). This is also in line with the statistic from National Registration Department, reported that recently number of illegitimate child are alarming (refer Table 2.3).

Table 2.3
Illegitimate Child in Malaysia 2013-2015

Year	Fact & Figure
2013	53,492
2014	54,614
2015	51,169

Source: National Registration Department

3.0 The Onset And Contributing Factors Of Premarital Sex

In many studies, research indicates that ages at first sexual intercourse are varying according to demographic and socioeconomic factors between the youth (Makenzius & Larsson, 2013; Farahani et.al, 2012). In Hong Kong, mean age at first sexual intercourse was to be 18 years as reported by Yip et al. (2013) in his study. Besides, in many developing countries age at first sexual debut among boys and girls engaged in sexual intercourse was before their 15th birthdays (Mueller, 2009).

To date, not much study knowing about the real reason of why the adolescents engaged in early sexual activities such as premarital sex. Previous studies about youth have identified that there are three major factors associated with the early onset of sexual activity among youth. These includes; individual sociodemographic, interpersonal and thirdly, family structure and parental involvement (Symons, Vermeersch & Van Houtte ,2014). Besides, a study by Standfort, Orr, Hirsch, and Santelli (2008) reported that the early initiation of adolescents' sexual intercourse was associated with various risk factors namely increased in number of partners as well as being under the influence of alcohol.

In term of factors contributed towards an early sexual activity among adolescents, elements of intimacy as well as closeness were highlight in relation to first sex (Symons, Vermeersch & Van Houtte ,2014). Besides, a study by Salasiah et.al (2012), found that the personal factor are the main contributing factors of Premarital Sex activity among Muslim adolescents that lead to premarital pregnancy out of wedlock. It is relate to the lack of religiosity and ignorance of Islamic rules and regulation.

Apart from that, many problematic outcomes during adolescent also related with antisocial and deviant peers as reported by many studies. This includes high level of aggression, police arrestment and other forms of antisocial behaviour (Benson, M. J., & Buehler, C. 2012). Another study on 3,400 of Swedish youth also found that the sexual initiation or sexual debut among age 14 was closely associated with antisocial behaviour such as violence against teachers, stealing, bullying, victimization of physical abuse as well as running away from home Kastbom, Sydsjo, Bladh, Priebe, and Svedin (2014). Most of these antisocial behaviour happened because they have a poor self-control that the result leads an individual to make a negative decision in their life such as involvement in premarital sex activity.

In term of gender differences, compared to female adolescents, the male are much more influence from the pornographic material whereas female adolescents reported to have sex at an early aged because of too believe towards their love relationship (O'Hara, Gibbons, Gerrard, Li, & Sargent, 2012). Therefore, this attitude encourages them not to regret to sacrifice of their virginity and engaged in sex out of marriage. Besides, their biological system especially during the puberty period, make them more excited to know about sex.

As reported in a study in Scotland and England, found that those teen who did involve with premarital sex at age 13 or younger reported that they did as a result of pressure from partners (Wight, Parkes, Strange, Allen, Bonell & Henderson; 2008). Besides, several past studies also indicate that the problem behaviour was another characteristic that link adolescents' engagement with premarital sex (Sandfort et.al,2008; Chiao et.al,2011). According to Mason et.al (2012), the higher intake of alcohol use and smoking habit will correlates with highly involvement with sexual risk. Besides, they also found to experience the substance use such as alcohol, tobacco and other drugs compared to their peers (Makenzius & Larsson, 2013).

Moreover, Casey, Getz and Galvin (2008) found that the reason why adolescents are more inclined towards risk taking behaviour such as premarital sex activity is related to adolescents level of maturity. At this young ages, their brains are not fully mature where some areas of the brains function (cerebral cortex and the hyphothalamus) are only mature when they reach twenty five. Besides, adolescents also does not concern on the consequences of their decision while engaging with sexual intercourse because the have a problems with self control, delay of gratification as well as risk analysis. Furthermore, empirical research primarily from developed countries, indicates that the timing of sexual debut among adolescents is influenced by a broad range of factors including: age, gender, poverty, family structure, educational level, pubertal timing, socio-economic status, self-efficacy, peer influences, religiosity, knowledge and perceived risk of sexually transmitted infections, parenting practices and parental supervision, community, media and health inequalities (Lammers et al., 2000; Santelli et al., 2004).

In discussing about Malaysian context, Salasiah et.al.(2012) highlighted that parents, peer-influence, mass media and personal issue are among personal factors contributing towards pre-marital sex issue. It is also inline with an earlier survey by by Mohammad Shatar (2009) which highlighted that about 80 percent of Malaysian adolescents aged between 13 to 25 years old are exposed to sexual problem specifically pre-marital sex because of peers influence (Utusan Malaysia, 9 Jan 2011).

4.0 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Context: Protective Factors

"Ecological System Theory" or also known as "Human Ecological Theory" is work of Urie Bronfenbrenner. According to this theory, it is suggested that person or individual development interacts with the surrounding of the ecological environment around them either positively or negatively. These two situations will guide them whether to get involved or stay away from the negative outcomes of such behaviour. In relation to this, it is stated that there are four different level of environment that influence child development namely; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

A system that is closest to the child is "microsystem" and more related to the immediate environment we have in our life. It is related to family members, friends, teachers, peers, classmates, neighbours and those who have direct contact. As suggested by the Ecological System Theory, human development takes place through the complex reciprocal interaction between an active evolving individual and his/her immediate, intermediate such as their family and school as well as in a large social environment such as through their culture. This means that in discussing about parenting behaviour, there is a different practice from one to another since it is embedded in culturally based meaning systems (Crockett, Veed, & Russell, 2010).

As referring to Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory, the first layer (Microsystem) will give more influences towards child development. Since, it is the closest system within the environment; therefore variables at this level will give the big influences towards child involvement with the premarital sex activity especially the element of family factor. The instability in the first layer gives the biggest influence towards the child (adolescents) engagement with the issues of premarital sex since it is the closest system to the individual development.

Most of the researcher agreed that by having protective factors, it helps in reducing the effect of problem behaviour even though in the event where there are no risks present (Rutter M. 2003; Luthar SS, Cicchetti D, Becker B.; 2000; Dekovic M; 1999). It is suggested that in discussing about family context as a protective factors in preventing the early sexual intercourse, there are four elements need to be considered such as social economic status, family structure, parental monitoring/supervision as well as parents and child communication. If the family influences are positives, it help the adolescents to gain a clear guidance especially related to sexual development in which it help them to delay sexual debut.

(i) Economic Status

Research shows that parent’s education background has a close relationship with teen behaviour to be sexually active at the early age. The higher level of parent’s education, there is a less chances of teen to be involved with antisocial behaviour. The more educated the parents, the more knowledgeable they are. Therefore, they can guide their children more effectively.

In a previous study by (Blum, Beuhring, Shew, Bearinger, Sieving, & Resnick, 2000), they reported that lower frequency and delay of sexual intercourses and sexual activity were correlated with higher level of income. Statistically, it is found that those adolescents who raised by single parents as well as adolescents from low-income family are more prone to have sex at an early aged.

(ii) Family Structure

As reported by Salasiah et.al (2012), most of the adolescents who did perform such act come from broken family, having criminal records and delinquency issues or be friend with peers who did such problem, as well as having a bad character. Besides, intimate partner violence between adults in the home is another episode related to the onset of sexual intercourse (Whitney, Renner, & Herrenkohl, 2010). Students perception towards their parents behaviour also can influence their behaviour in school as well as their grades achievement (Berzin, 2010; Bowen, Hopson, Rose, & Glennie, 2012; Bowen, Rose, Powers, & Glennie, 2008). Those who live with their natural parents and come from small family structure are less likely involved with the premarital sex issues (Miller et al.,2003). This shows that the chances of being an antisocial can be avoid if the elements of protective factors are highly compared to risk factors.

Apart from that, the positive living environment such as family stabilization, parental supervision as well as child early socialization are the three major areas reported to lessen the likelihood of adolescents engagement with sex activity especially sex out of marriage (Tsla et al., 2011;Peltzer et al., 2011).

(iii) Parental Monitoring / Supervision

According to Dishion and McMahon (1998), parental monitoring is define as “a set of correlated parenting behaviors involving attention to and tracking of the child’s whereabouts, activities, and adaptations”. Based on many literature in previous research, they have concluded that parenting monitoring is more associated with combination of adolescents’ perceived parental knowledge of their social activities, along with the amount of unsupervised time that adolescents have (Crosby, DiClemente, Wingood, Lang, & Harrington, 2003; Benthin, Slovic, & Severson, 1993; Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, when there is lower level of parental monitoring, the adolescents will more likely to involved with many problem of health risk behaviour including the early initiation of sexual intercourse.

An individual who is having closed parental supervision, closed relationship with friends and peer, parental connectedness have observed to be less risky (Lee et al.,2006;Wong et al.,2009). Lack of family management or poor family monitoring such as minimal parental supervision, also lead the social problems among adolescents to be occurs. (Fagan, Van Horn, Antaramian, & Hawkins, 2011). Other studies also in line with what reported by Miller et al., (2003), where those individual with less locus of control, has been found strongly associated with adolescents early sexual intercourse activity (Blum et al.,2004). An individual who is having closed parental supervision, closed relationship with friends and peer, parental connectedness have observed to be less risky (Lee et al.,2006;Wong et al.,2009)

Furthermore, Farahani et.al (2011) reported that by strengthening the relationship between parents and child as well as moderate parental control also helps in reducing the likelihood of adolescents’ engagement in premarital sex activity.

Table 4.1
Styles of Parenting

PARENTING STYLES	DESCRIPTION	SOURCES
1. Permissive	parenting generally lacks specific consequences for deviant actions and is centered on the belief that parents should be accepting of their adolescents’ desires and actions.	Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995; Crosby, DiClemente, Wingood, Lang, & Harrington, 2003; Rai, et al., 2003
2. Authoritarian	parenting is much more punitive, with an emphasis on the importance of child obedience and parental molding of children’s behavior and attitudes	
3. Authoritative	emphasize supervision and rule-making along with involvement, support and affection	

As referring to the above table (Table 4.1), it is illustrate that there are three types of parenting styles. Among these three styles, "authoritative parenting" has been perceived as the most important aspect of parental monitoring. This is in line with what Crosby et al.(2003) has defined authoritative parenting as combination of parenting behavior. This related to the communication with parents, encouraging autonomy, setting and enforcing clear standards as well as being involved and supportive adolescents activities.

(iv) Parent and Child Communication

A study conducted by Sharif and Roslan (2011), also reported that the element of self-identity is another important element during the adolescents development. This element at the end will contribute towards the engagement in delinquency. Therefore, through the support and role of the family, parents can help in playing positive role in the adolescent's lives. Various studies claimed that, teacher and parents need to practice a good communication as a channel to increase home and school partnership as well as build sense of community between the these two entities (Harris and Goodall 2008, Webber and Mulford 2007, Shirvani 2007, Epstein and Sanders 2006, Graham-Clay 2005, Epstein 2001).

Besides, Family interaction with the neighbourhood also plays a major role in shaping the positive attitude of their child. By having a frequent interaction with the neighbour and neighbourhood institutions, the child received social, educational service, health, safety, sense of cultural practices as well as expectations of others (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). All these act as protective factors to prevent the child in engaging in the antisocial behaviour such as in premarital sex activity. A parental tie has reported been an important source of social control over adolescents. If this tie shows the negative relationship, therefore level of adolescents' delinquency become higher since they have weaker ties among parents in the community as well as less adolescents' commitment to social norms. Based on this interaction, the adolescents gain lot of opportunity that can help them in preventing from exposed to deviant peer group influences (Dishion & McMahon, 1998).

5.0 Religion And Sexual Behaviour

Previously, many studies had identified that there are relationship between religion's influences on sexual behaviour (Meier 2003; Rostosky et al. 2004). Most of the researchers also found that those with highly religiously active individual as well as those who believe that religion is an important context in their life are likely to delay their sexual intercourse specifically delay their first sex until marriage (Chamrathirong et al. 2010; Gilbert 2008; Shirazi and Morowatisharifabad 2009). Besides, religious also has play as one of the motivating factors in decision-making process (Barnett, Jackson, Smith, & Gibson, 2010) as well as protective factor especially to abstain from sex (Gold, Sheftel, Chiappetta, Young, Zuckoff, DiClemente & Primack, 2010).

Finke and Adamczyk (2008), reported that although majority of the religions are prohibit about premarital and extramarital sex, Muslim community are more place higher concern on virginity until marriage. The social interaction between Muslims with other Muslims needs to be guided by religiously inspired norms so that the premarital sex could be discouraged. This is also can discourage and limiting the young generation's interest in having sex before marriage. A part from that, for Muslims, opportunities in having premarital sex can be drastically controlled and reduced by disallowed the teenage Muslims boys and girls from interact privately to each other. Besides Islam, Hindu communities also practice same values by discourage their young generation to interact privately to each other. In this community, they encourage their children to marry at early ages as a protection against premarital sex. Some of the parents also play roles in arranging their children's marriages. (Agha, 2009, Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008).

A part from that, much research in most Christian groups also indicates that they condemn the practice of both premarital sex and delinquency. It is reported that religious adolescents incline to delay their first sex especially at the early age. Mostly, those adolescents who did frequent visit and actively participate towards church attendance will received religious messages relating to premarital sex,. Through this institutional teaching, it shows that the adolescents indicate their religious involvement. Generally, it shows that religion sustain moral order as well as sustain moral behaviour through providing moral guidelines .(Stark, 2001)

6.0 Conclusion

To date based on the reviewed of the literature; family factor has shown to be the importance factors to curb the problem of risk taking behavior among adolescents especially the issue of premarital sex. Furthermore, consistency in parental monitoring as well as closely monitoring towards adolescents daily life practice have been proof to contribute significantly towards positive development in young generation. The link between parental monitoring and family connectedness indicates the need for interpersonal prevention program. Both entities such as parents and child should be exposed this prevention program. Since the adolescents involvement in such act specifically related to early initiation of sexual intercourse are still under age, therefore, it is importance to intervene extremely and prompt intervention should be implementing seriously to protect their developmental process. A module of health counselling should be visible to the group of adolescents at the early stage so that much information related to sexual knowledge shall tailor to them. In general, all parties such as caregivers, teachers as well as community members need to play their roles by offering encouragement. This can help in preventing or reducing low self-esteem among the group of adolescent. Moreover, another approach to consider is by involving the family / parents in early religious and moral education, which is based on religion and culture.

As been referring to Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological perspectives, the Microsystem plays the major impact towards the child development since this is the system that is closest to the child and more related to the immediate environment that they have in their life. Furthermore, the instability in the first layer gives the biggest influence towards the child (adolescents) engagement with the issues of premarital sex. Since family factors can acts as a protective factor in adolescents premarital sex issues, therefore, more interventions programs related to adolescents need to includes parents monitoring skill and develop other necessary parenting skills that can help them to shield the negative influences.

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