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Negotiating Multiple Forms of Risk Behavior among Adolescents in Cirebon

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Adolescent risk behavior has become increasingly complex as adolescents navigate interconnected offline, digital, and interpersonal environments. While previous studies have predominantly examined specific forms of risk behavior using quantitative approaches, limited attention has been given to how adolescents themselves experience and negotiate multiple forms of risk within their everyday lives, particularly in Indonesian socio-cultural settings. This qualitative descriptive study explored how adolescents in Cirebon negotiate multiple forms of risk behavior across their daily experiences. Participants aged 12–18 years were purposively selected from diverse educational backgrounds, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document review. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through inductive thematic analysis, with credibility enhanced through methodological triangulation and member checking. The findings revealed three interconnected forms of adolescent risk behavior: offline and school-based misconduct, digitally mediated risk behavior, and sensation-seeking interpersonal behavior. Rather than perceiving these behaviors as isolated acts of deviance, participants described them as context-dependent responses negotiated through peer relationships, school interactions, and everyday digital engagement. The findings further demonstrated that offline and digital risk behaviors were closely intertwined, reflecting the continuity of adolescents' social experiences across physical and virtual environments. This study contributes to the literature by extending existing understandings of adolescent risk behavior beyond conventional delinquency frameworks, highlighting digitally mediated risk behavior as an integral dimension of adolescents' lived experiences. Situated within the socio-cultural context of Cirebon, the findings provide a culturally grounded perspective on adolescent risk behavior and offer implications for developing more contextually responsive school-, family-, and community-based prevention strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is widely recognized as a developmental period characterized by increased exploration, identity formation, and heightened sensitivity to social influence. While moderate risk-taking contributes to identity development and autonomy, maladaptive risk behaviors remain a major public health concern because they are associated with educational disruption, mental health problems, violence, and long-term psychosocial consequences [1], [2], [3].

Contemporary adolescent risk behavior is increasingly embedded within digital environments. Social media, smartphones, and online communities simultaneously provide opportunities for learning, identity exploration, and social connection while also exposing adolescents to cyberbullying, compulsive media use, impulsive online consumption, and other digitally mediated risks [4], [5], [6]. Consequently, adolescent risk behavior can no longer be understood solely through conventional offline perspectives.

Existing scholarship conceptualizes adolescent risk behavior primarily through typologies developed before the widespread digitization of everyday life. Jensen's classification remains influential for understanding physical aggression, property-related offenses, victimless delinquency, and norm-defying behavior. However, contemporary adolescent experiences increasingly blur the distinction between offline and online behavior, raising questions about whether existing typologies adequately capture emerging forms of digitally mediated risk. Problem Behavior Theory likewise explains why multiple risk behaviors tend to cluster, yet offers limited insight into how adolescents themselves experience these interconnected behaviors within contemporary digital environments.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated associations between self-control and specific forms of adolescent risk behavior, including aggressive driving, impulsive buying, social media addiction, aggression, and premarital sexual behavior [6], [7], [8], [9]. Nevertheless, these studies have predominantly adopted quantitative cross-sectional designs that examine individual behaviors separately, providing limited understanding of how adolescents negotiate multiple forms of risk simultaneously in their everyday lives. More importantly, existing literature continues to treat offline and digital risk behaviors as analytically distinct domains despite adolescents' increasing movement across physical and virtual social spaces. Consequently, relatively little is known about how adolescents themselves interpret the relationships among school-based misconduct, digitally mediated behavior, and sensation-seeking within their daily experiences. This conceptual limitation is particularly evident in Indonesian research, where qualitative investigations into adolescents' lived experiences of multiple risk behaviors remain scarce.

Recent scholarship suggests that adolescent risk behavior should also be understood as relational and context-dependent rather than exclusively as an individual deficit in self-regulation. Peer relationships, perceived social norms, family environments, and opportunities for social participation can influence whether adolescents initiate, sustain, or disengage from risky practices [10], [11]. Digital platforms further complicate these processes because peer influence can persist beyond face-to-face interaction, while online visibility, social comparison, and the pursuit of recognition may intensify adolescents' engagement with particular behaviors [12], [13]. Risk, therefore, may acquire different

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meanings across contexts: an action perceived as inappropriate at school may be normalized within a peer group, while behavior initially performed online may subsequently affect interpersonal relationships offline. This perspective shifts analytical attention from asking why an adolescent engages in a particular risky behavior toward examining how risk is interpreted, negotiated, and embedded within everyday social relations.

This relational perspective is particularly important when adolescents engage in multiple forms of risk rather than a single isolated behavior. Risk behaviors may coexist, reinforce one another, or emerge sequentially as adolescents move between different social settings. Peer pressure, emotional responses, sensation-seeking, and the search for belonging may connect school-based misconduct with online experimentation or other interpersonal risks, although these relationships cannot be assumed to be uniform across individuals. Developmental research emphasizes that adolescent behavior emerges from interactions between individual characteristics and multiple ecological contexts rather than from a single causal factor [10], [11]. A qualitative examination is consequently valuable because it can capture the meanings adolescents attach to these behaviors and the situational processes through which they justify, resist, conceal, or normalize them. Such an approach may reveal forms of risk negotiation that remain invisible when behaviors are measured only as separate variables.

These limitations become especially relevant in Cirebon, a rapidly developing secondary city characterized by strong collectivist traditions, Islamic cultural values, and expanding digital connectivity. Unlike metropolitan settings, adolescents in Cirebon negotiate risk behavior within overlapping family, school, religious, and community environments that may shape behavioral decisions differently from those reported in existing international studies. Understanding these experiences therefore provides an opportunity not only to document local patterns of adolescent risk behavior but also to examine how cultural and digital contexts interact in shaping contemporary adolescent development.

Responding to these conceptual and contextual gaps, this qualitative study explores how adolescents in Cirebon negotiate multiple forms of risk behavior across offline, digital, and interpersonal contexts. Rather than treating predefined categories of risk behavior as fixed, the study adopts an inductive thematic approach to understand adolescents' lived experiences while using existing typologies as sensitizing concepts. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute a more contextually grounded understanding of adolescent risk behavior within contemporary Indonesian society. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How do adolescents in Cirebon negotiate multiple forms of risk behavior across their everyday offline, digital, and interpersonal experiences?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how adolescents in Cirebon experience and negotiate multiple forms of risk behavior in their everyday lives. A

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qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' lived experiences, meanings, and social interactions rather than measure the prevalence or causal relationships of specific risk behaviors [14], [15].

2.2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Cirebon, Indonesia, involving adolescents aged 12–18 years. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to capture diverse experiences across gender, age, school backgrounds (public, private, and pesantren-affiliated schools), and residential settings within Cirebon. Eligible participants were adolescents who actively used digital media and were willing to share their experiences regarding everyday risk behavior. Recruitment continued until thematic saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which additional interviews no longer generated new conceptual categories.

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document review. Interviews explored adolescents' experiences of offline, digitally mediated, and interpersonal risk behaviors, including the situations in which these behaviors occurred and the meanings participants attributed to them. Observations focused on adolescents' interactions within naturally occurring school and community settings, while documentary materials, including relevant school records where permission was granted, were used to corroborate participants' accounts. The combination of these three sources enabled data triangulation and a richer understanding of adolescents' lived experiences.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification [16]. Analysis followed an inductive thematic approach. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were coded iteratively to identify recurring patterns of adolescent risk behavior. Initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories and refined into themes through constant comparison across participants and data sources. Throughout the analysis, discrepant and negative cases were retained to challenge emerging interpretations and strengthen analytical rigor.

2.5. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The credibility of the findings was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentary data. Member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review summaries of the researchers' interpretations, while peer debriefing among the research team was undertaken throughout the analytical process to strengthen analytical consistency and minimize interpretive bias. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee before data collection commenced. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal

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guardians, and assent was obtained from all adolescent participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was removed during transcription, and pseudonyms were used throughout the reporting of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

Thematic analysis revealed that adolescents in Cirebon negotiated multiple forms of risk behavior across their daily interactions within school, family, peer, and digital environments. Rather than existing as isolated acts, risk behaviors were shaped by the continuous interplay between individual decision-making and the social contexts in which adolescents lived. Participants described engaging in behaviors that ranged from conventional school-related misconduct to emerging forms of digitally mediated risk, while also acknowledging that many of these behaviors were motivated by the desire for peer acceptance, excitement, or social recognition. Across the data, three interrelated subthemes emerged: offline and school-based risk behavior, digitally mediated risk behavior, and sensation-seeking and interpersonal risk behavior.

1) Offline and School-Based Risk Behavior

Offline and school-based risk behavior emerged as the most frequently reported form of adolescent risk behavior. Participants described engaging in behaviors such as skipping classes, arriving late at school, violating school regulations, smoking, verbal disputes, and physical confrontations. Although these behaviors were generally recognized as inappropriate, participants often portrayed them as situational responses rather than deliberate attempts to challenge authority. Many explained that their decisions were strongly influenced by immediate social circumstances, including invitations from friends, emotional reactions, or academic stress.

One participant explained:

"Sometimes we skip the last class because everyone in the group decides to leave together. I know it is wrong, but refusing makes me feel excluded from my friends." (P04, male, 16 years, interview)

Another participant described how emotional reactions contributed to aggressive behavior:

"I didn't plan to fight. It happened because I became angry after being repeatedly teased. At that moment I wasn't thinking about the consequences." (P11, male, 15 years, interview)

These interview accounts were supported by classroom and school observations. Field notes documented that disciplinary incidents frequently occurred during group interactions rather than involving isolated individuals. Teachers also reported that students who generally demonstrated appropriate behavior sometimes participated in rule violations when accompanied by close peers. This convergence between interview and observational

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data suggests that offline risk behavior was closely embedded within adolescents' everyday social relationships.

2) Digitally Mediated Risk Behavior

The second subtheme highlighted the growing influence of digital environments on adolescent risk behavior. Participants frequently referred to excessive smartphone use, prolonged engagement with social media, online gaming, cyberbullying, impulsive online purchasing, and exposure to inappropriate online content. Unlike traditional forms of misconduct, these behaviors were often described as gradually developing through everyday routines rather than through conscious risk-taking.

One participant stated:

"I usually open social media just for a few minutes, but then I keep scrolling without realizing that several hours have passed." (P08, female, 15 years, interview)

Another participant reflected on online consumer behavior:

"Sometimes I buy things because I see everyone talking about them online. Later I realize I didn't actually need them." (P15, female, 17 years, interview)

Observation data reinforced these narratives. During school breaks, many students remained engaged with their smartphones even when opportunities for direct social interaction were available. Field observations also showed that conversations among peers frequently revolved around viral online content, digital games, and social media trends, indicating that digital experiences had become deeply integrated into adolescents' offline social lives. Rather than functioning independently, digital and offline risk behaviors frequently reinforced one another, creating new patterns of adolescent risk-taking.

3) Sensation-Seeking and Interpersonal Risk Behavior

The third subtheme reflected adolescents' tendency to seek excitement, novelty, and social acceptance through interpersonal interactions. Participants acknowledged that they occasionally engaged in risky activities not because they intended to cause harm, but because they wished to experience something new, avoid social exclusion, or demonstrate courage in front of their peers. Risk-taking was therefore often interpreted as a means of maintaining friendships and social identity.

One participant explained:

"If my friends are trying something exciting, I usually join them because I don't want to be the only one who refuses." (P03, male, 16 years, interview)

Another participant described how peer expectations influenced personal decisions:

"Sometimes I do things just to show that I'm brave. If I say no, my friends might think I'm afraid." (P09, male, 15 years, interview)

These findings were corroborated through observations conducted during extracurricular and informal school activities. Field notes indicated that adolescents demonstrated greater willingness to participate in potentially risky behaviors when surrounded by peer groups than when acting individually. Observers also noted that encouragement from peers frequently preceded spontaneous decisions that participants later described as impulsive or unnecessary. Such observations reinforce the view that

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sensation-seeking behavior was socially negotiated rather than purely driven by individual personality traits.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that adolescent risk behavior in Cirebon extends beyond conventional forms of school misconduct to encompass increasingly complex digital and interpersonal dimensions. Across all three subthemes, participants consistently portrayed risk behavior as context-dependent, emerging through ongoing interactions with peers, digital media, and immediate social environments. These findings suggest that adolescent risk behavior is best understood not as a series of isolated individual actions but as a dynamic social process negotiated across multiple settings and relationships.

3.2. Discussion

The present study demonstrates that adolescent risk behavior in Cirebon is best understood as a socially negotiated and ecologically situated process rather than a collection of isolated acts of misconduct. Across offline, digital, and interpersonal settings, participants consistently described risk-taking as emerging through interactions with peers, school environments, and increasingly pervasive digital platforms. This interpretation is consistent with developmental and ecological perspectives that conceptualize adolescent behavior as emerging from interactions between individual characteristics and multiple social contexts [10], [11]. Research on peer influence further indicates that adolescents' behavioral choices are shaped not simply by direct pressure but also by processes of social identification, perceived norms, and relational adjustment within peer groups [17]. Rather than viewing adolescents as passive recipients of environmental influences or solely as autonomous decision-makers, the findings suggest that risk behavior develops through continuous negotiation between personal agency, social expectations, and contextual opportunities. This interpretation provides a more process-oriented understanding of adolescent risk behavior while extending existing ecological and developmental perspectives.

A central contribution of this study is the finding that adolescents interpreted their risk behaviors as products of everyday social negotiation rather than deliberate acts of deviance. Participants frequently described skipping classes, engaging in school misconduct, or participating in interpersonal conflicts as responses to immediate peer expectations, emotional situations, and concerns about maintaining social relationships. Such findings resonate with research showing that adolescent behavior is strongly embedded in peer relationships and that young people may adjust their behavior in response to perceived expectations and social norms within their immediate social networks [17], [18]. Digital environments further complicate these processes because peer interaction, social comparison, and identity presentation increasingly extend beyond face-to-face settings [12], [13]. These accounts indicate that risk behavior is highly contextual, with the same adolescent potentially making different behavioral decisions depending on the social environment in which they are situated.

This finding provides a richer interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory than is typically offered in studies of adolescent risk behavior. The ecological model emphasizes that development occurs through reciprocal interactions

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between individuals and the multiple environmental systems in which they participate [19], [20]. At the microsystem level, peer groups, family relationships, and classroom interactions functioned as the immediate settings in which behavioral decisions were negotiated. At the mesosystem level, participants described how relationships between school and family shaped their responses to peer pressure, particularly when parental expectations conflicted with peer norms. Although less explicitly articulated by participants, exosystem influences, including school disciplinary practices, community conditions, and parental work arrangements, formed broader contexts that structured adolescents' daily experiences. At the macrosystem level, the findings suggest that cultural values concerning group harmony, social belonging, and interpersonal expectations may shape adolescents' sensitivity to peer acceptance; however, these cultural influences should be understood as contextual resources and expectations rather than deterministic explanations of adolescent behavior. Finally, the chronosystem is reflected in adolescents' development within a period of rapid digital transformation, in which online and offline social experiences increasingly overlap [13]. Rather than operating independently, these ecological systems interacted continuously, shaping adolescents' perceptions of acceptable and risky behavior.

The findings also contribute to the literature on self-control and adolescent risk behavior by illuminating the mechanisms through which social contexts influence behavioral regulation. Previous quantitative studies have consistently reported that stronger self-control is associated with lower engagement in risk behavior [2], [3], [21], [22]. However, the present findings suggest that this relationship is not simply linear. Participants described situations in which peer expectations temporarily outweighed their intention to avoid risky behavior, while others demonstrated greater restraint when they anticipated meaningful social or familial consequences. These findings imply that self-control is dynamically deployed according to perceived social rewards and sanctions rather than functioning solely as a stable personal characteristic. In doing so, the study extends previous correlational evidence by revealing the social and psychological mechanisms through which environmental contexts shape adolescents' behavioral decisions.

Importantly, this interpretation should be understood within the Indonesian cultural context. In Cirebon, adolescents negotiate behavior within close family, peer, school, community, and religious relationships, making social belonging and peer acceptance important dimensions of everyday decision-making. Rather than portraying conformity as individual weakness, participants often described it as part of maintaining relationships and negotiating identity. This interpretation is consistent with ecological and developmental perspectives that emphasize the interaction between individual characteristics and social environments [10], [17], [20]. Thus, adolescent risk behavior is better understood as culturally and relationally situated rather than exclusively as an individual behavioral deficit.

The second major contribution concerns the integration of digital environments into adolescent risk behavior. Although participants distinguished school misconduct, interpersonal conflict, and digital behaviors during interviews, their narratives showed that these experiences were closely interconnected within everyday life. Digital platforms

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functioned simultaneously as spaces for peer interaction, emotional regulation, identity expression, and risk exposure, supporting the view that adolescents increasingly move across interconnected online and offline social worlds [12], [13]. This finding extends Jensen's conventional typology of adolescent risk behavior by suggesting that digitally mediated practices such as compulsive social media use, cyberbullying, harmful-content exposure, and impulsive online consumption represent an important contemporary dimension that is not fully captured by traditional categories.

Digitally mediated risk also differs from conventional misconduct because it may be embedded within ordinary activities and develop gradually, making its consequences less immediately visible. Participants described declining academic engagement, disrupted sleep, emotional distress, and problematic consumption as consequences that could accumulate over time. At the same time, digital environments were not experienced solely as sources of risk; adolescents also used them to maintain friendships, access educational resources, express identities, and obtain emotional support. This duality is consistent with research portraying digital media as simultaneously creating developmental opportunities and vulnerabilities [12], [13]. The findings therefore suggest that the issue is not adolescents' digital participation itself, but how individual regulation interacts with peer influence and technological affordances such as continuous connectivity, algorithmic content, and social feedback [23], [24].

Taken together, adolescent risk behavior in Cirebon is best understood through an ecological-processual framework in which individual capacities and multiple social environments continuously interact. Three interconnected processes characterize participants' experiences: social embeddedness, contextual continuity, and behavioral clustering. Behavioral decisions were negotiated within peer, family, and school relationships; offline and digital experiences functioned as extensions of one another; and different risk behaviors co-occurred through shared mechanisms such as peer conformity, emotional reactivity, impulsive decision-making, and environmental opportunities. This interpretation is consistent with Problem Behavior Theory, which explains the clustering of risk behaviors through shared psychosocial antecedents, while extending the framework by showing how contemporary clustering increasingly crosses physical and digitally mediated contexts.

The findings also broadly support the Dual Systems Model, particularly the proposition that adolescent risk-taking reflects interactions between heightened socio-emotional sensitivity and still-developing cognitive control [10], [11]. However, participants' accounts indicate that this developmental tension is not activated in isolation; it is continually shaped by peer relationships, emotional situations, and digital environments. Consequently, adolescent risk behavior should not be interpreted solely as an outcome of insufficient self-control. The interaction between developmental capacities and ecological conditions appears more consequential, particularly when digital environments provide continuous opportunities for social comparison, immediate feedback, and behavioral engagement [23].

The primary theoretical contribution of this study therefore lies not simply in confirming that adolescent risk behavior is multidimensional, but in explaining how

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multiple forms of risk become interconnected through adolescents' lived experiences. The findings identify digitally mediated risk as an emerging analytical dimension, demonstrate experiential continuity between offline and online behavior, and reveal social negotiation as a mechanism through which different forms of risk may become mutually reinforcing. This framework complements previous research linking self-control with problematic social media use and impulsive online consumption [5], [6], while shifting analytical attention from isolated behaviors toward the processes through which adolescents negotiate risk across interconnected social environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that adolescent risk behavior in Cirebon is a multidimensional and socially negotiated phenomenon rather than a series of isolated acts of misconduct. The findings identified three interconnected manifestations of risk behavior offline and school-based misconduct, digitally mediated risk behavior, and sensation-seeking interpersonal behavior that emerged through adolescents' everyday interactions across school, peer, and digital environments. Rather than perceiving these behaviors as deliberate violations of social norms, participants frequently described them as context-dependent responses shaped by immediate social relationships and situational demands. These findings suggest that contemporary adolescent risk behavior is best understood as an ecological process in which offline and digital experiences are closely intertwined within adolescents' daily lives.

The study contributes to the literature by extending existing understandings of adolescent risk behavior beyond conventional delinquency frameworks. Specifically, the findings highlight digitally mediated risk behavior as an integral dimension of adolescents' lived experiences and demonstrate how multiple forms of risk become interconnected through ongoing social negotiation. Situated within the socio-cultural context of Cirebon, the study also underscores the importance of interpreting adolescent risk behavior through locally embedded social relationships rather than universal assumptions about adolescent development. While the findings are context-specific and therefore not intended for statistical generalization, they provide a foundation for future comparative studies and for developing culturally responsive school-, family-, and community-based strategies to prevent adolescent risk behavior.

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