

# Assessing Reproductive Health Literacy: Terms of Sex Genital among Caregivers in Semarang City

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

**Assessing Reproductive Health Literacy:  
Terms of Sex Genital among Caregivers in Semarang city**

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Taboos, filth, and shame are moral values resulting from cultural construction that limit names, leading to inappropriate sexuality. These values will impact the practice of caregivers in communicating reproductive health to their children. This study aims to describe the terms used for the names of reproductive organs and examine the connotations built in the marking of these names.

**Methods:** The research design was a case report study. The sample comprised 224 caregivers to early childhood who were selected by stratified random sampling in the city of Semarang. Data analysis was carried out by description and basic quantification.

**Results:** Researchers found 27 language terms for the names of male and female genital organs. The name's connotation was built because of inheritance, similarity to certain animals, and texture of the organs.

**Conclusion:** The use of the connotation of reproductive organs in communicating to children will continue to reduce the culture of taboo and shame continuously. It is necessary to increase the ability of parents to say the correct name for the genital organs.

**Keywords:** *health literacy, reproductive health, sex education, term of sex organs.*

**Conflicts of interest:** None declared.

**Ethical approval:** This research has received ethical approval from the Faculty of Public Health, the University of Diponegoro, number 223/EA/KEPK-FKM/2020.

## Background

In the last five years, the number of cases of children in conflict with the law (ABH) as victims of sexual violence has shown an increase in Indonesia. Currently, in the last year alone, the number has shown a sharp increase from 190 cases (2019) to 419 patients (2020) (1). Some of the causes of sexual violence against children are the attraction of adult sexual orientation to children (pedophilia), the influence of mass media porn, and children's lack of understanding of sexuality issues (2). Children's lack of understanding of sexual problems is due to communication between parents and their children. Communication between parents and their children is essential for children's development (3). Poor parenting practices can be one of the causes of reproductive health problems in adolescents (4). Parents' experiences in obtaining information about reproductive health (sex education) and sexual experiences experienced as adults influence them in teaching reproductive health (sex education) to their children. They consider it too medical, and there are difficulties delivering sex education to children (5). Health literacy is "the degree to which individuals can

obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions" (6). This study aimed to find the terms used for naming genital organs. It was known that mothers' knowledge of the names of genital organs would impact their practice in providing sex education (reproductive health) to their children.

## Methods

The qualitative research design was conducted in the city of Semarang. The research sample was 224 early childhood caregivers selected by stratified random sampling. The data was collected by filling out the male and female genital names and discussing the argument. Data analysis was carried out descriptively to classify the terms of sex organs.

## Results

From the survey results on questions about male and female genitalia names, the terms in Tables 1 and 2 appeared. Each caregiver wrote down a genital name that they usually use when communicating with their child. Most of them can explain the reasons for the term, but some cannot because they got it from generation to generation.

**Table 1. Terminology of the male genitalia**

Terms of male sex genital	N	%
<i>Penis</i>	134	59.8
Titit (a local term for penis)	45	20.1
Burung (bird)	23	10.3
Sontong/sotong (cuttlefish)	4	1.8
<i>Don't know</i>	4	1.8
Gajah (elephant)	3	1.3
Alat kelaminlaki-laki (male sex genital)	2	0.9
<i>Testis</i>	2	0.9
<i>Male</i>	1	0.5
Nanuk/manuk (local term for bird)	1	0.5
Seli (N/A)	1	0.5
Sombosamalase (N/A)	1	0.5
Totot (a local term for penis, bigger than female's)	1	0.5
Untuk pipis (for pee)	1	0.5
<i>Vagina</i>	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that the respondents expressed language by eleven terms of the male genitalia (others are marked italic). Most of them have correctly said that 'Penis' is the correct name of the male genitalia (59.8%). The research found the most widely used local language expressions are: "titit" (a local term for sex

genital), "Burung" (bird), "Sotong or sontong" (cuttlefish), and "Gajah" (elephant).

In Table 2 are listed sixteen linguistic expressions to describe the female genitalia as indicated in the survey, although most respondents said that 'Vagina' is the correct name (68.3%).

**Table 2. Terms of female genitalia**

Terms of Female Sex Genital	N	%
<i>Vagina</i>	153	68.3
Gembus (one of the typical dishes in Java)	16	7.1
Memek (whining)	12	5.4
Nunuk (javanese term for vagina)	11	4.9
Sempuk (javanese term for vagina)	11	4.9
<i>Don't know</i>	6	2.7
Pepik/pipik/pipit (Sumatra term for pee)	2	0.9
Untuk pipis (for pee)	2	0.9
Bebek (duck)	1	0.5
<i>Female</i>	1	0.5
Kupu-kupu (butterfly)	1	0.5
Mentul (soft and supple)	1	0.5
Pipis (pee)	1	0.5
saru (taboo)	1	0.5
Senuk (female sex worker)	1	0.5
Sombolase (N/A)	1	0.5
Tempe (one of the typical dishes in Java)	1	0.5
Titit (local term for vagina, smaller than male's)	1	0.5
Zeweh (N/A)	1	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100</b>

Based on the respondents' arguments, the team of researchers classified the terms in Table 3

by paying attention to the reasons for mentioning the specific names

**Table 3. Classification and connotation of language expressions**

Classification (based on the argument)	Connotation	Language Expression
Scientific context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Penis</li> <li>▪ "Titit" (a local term for penis)</li> <li>▪ Alat kelaminlaki-laki (male sex genital)</li> <li>▪ Testis (testicle)</li> <li>▪ Male</li> <li>▪ Vagina</li> </ul>	terms for sex genital

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Nunuk” (javanese term for vagina)</li> <li>▪ “Sempuk” (javanese term for vagina)</li> <li>▪ Female</li> </ul>	
The resemblance to animal shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Burung (bird)</li> <li>▪ Sontong/sotong (cuttlefish)</li> <li>▪ Gajah (elephant)</li> <li>▪ Nanuk/manuk (local term for bird)</li> <li>▪ Bebek (duck)</li> <li>▪ Kupu-kupu (butterfly)</li> </ul>	terms for genitals that are similar to specific shapes and characteristics of animals
Referring to the function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pepek/pipik/pipit (Sumatra term for pee)</li> <li>▪ Untuk pipis (for pee)</li> <li>▪ Pipis (pee)</li> </ul>	terms of the genitals according to their function
Refer to size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Totot (a local term for penis, bigger than female’s)</li> <li>▪ Titit (local term for vagina, smaller than male’s)</li> </ul>	terms of genitals based on size
The resemblance to the shape of the food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gembus (one of the typical dishes in Java)</li> <li>▪ Tempe (one of the typical dishes in Java)</li> </ul>	The term for female genitalia is similar to the shape and texture of local food
Referring to the character	memek (whining)	The term genitals according to character in women
Referring to texture	Mentul (soft and supple) Nunuk (stand out)	The term genitalia according to its soft shape and texture
Refers to the type of work	Senuk (female sex worker)	A term that refers to a particular profession
Blur interpretation	saru (taboo)	A term that indirectly refers to the genitals

### Discussion

The respondents named language terms for the genital organs due to consideration of animal-like shape/function/size, resemblance to the shape of food, character, texture, type of work, and blur interpretation. Respondents remembered that when they were taught the correct names of the genitals, they were ashamed and considered it taboo to mention penis and vagina to their children. They argued that the teacher at the school should convey the information. A taboo is still the opinion of most people and parents regarding sex. They

think that sex will always be associated with pornographic, dirty, perverted, and the like. In contrast, sex education is an effort to raise awareness and explain sex, instinct, and marriage (7). Meilani et al (8) describes that most mothers have not been able to provide sexual education properly, where 66.3% have not communicated openly about sexuality, 52.2% use other terms in mentioning reproductive organs, and 83.3% have a perception of feeling inadequate to provide sexual education. They think that saying the correct name of the genitals is taboo, dirty, has



no morals, and is uneducated. This may be why things that refer to sexuality are inappropriate (9-11). Parental fears and cultural taboos will hinder effective parent-child communication regarding sexual health (12). They forbid children to ask questions, consider sexual education unnecessary, and feel uncomfortable (taboo) when mentioning penis and vagina (13) and assume children will know by themselves (13) - thus making it difficult for them to communicate with their children, the next generation (14). Appropriate sex education involves getting information and forming positive beliefs, values, and attitudes (15).

### Conclusions

Our results show that reproductive health literacy in early childhood is still hindered by shame and cultural taboos in mentioning the name of the genitals. This will affect decision-making in providing reproductive health education to children who are repeating themselves like their parents. The use of the connotation of reproductive organs in communicating to children will continue to reduce the culture of taboo and shame continuously. It is necessary to increase the ability of parents to say the correct name for the genital organs. The readiness of parents to provide open-minded reproductive health education for their children will help protect children from becoming victims of sexual violence. The lack of accurate knowledge about the risks and indicators of child sexual abuse will negatively influence prevention and detection (16).

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