

Teenage Pregnancy and its Influence on Female Education in Nigeria

Tolulope Funmilola OJO¹, Olasupo Augustine IJABADENIYI; PhD²

¹Department of Public Health, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti.

²Department of Social Justice, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti

Abstract: The incidence of teenage pregnancy increases rapidly in today's society and this has become a serious social issue in Nigeria. This despicable situation leads to several problems such as dropping out of school, health problems like high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, pressure on the health sector, increased mortality, social and economic consequences among a host of other vices. The study therefore examines the influence of teenage pregnancy on female education in Nigeria. A review of empirical studies through literature search was carried out. The findings show that teenage pregnancy has significant influence on female education in Nigeria. In conclusion, the study shows that proper parental care and support, sensitization programs on sex education and contraceptive usage, provision of jobs and other basic amenities for families could reduce teenage pregnancy among females in Nigeria.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy, Nigeria, education, school

I. INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy has become a global challenge which occurs mostly in marginalized communities characterized by illiteracy, poverty and lack of employment opportunities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2017, around 194,000 babies were born to American girls between the ages of 15 to 19. However, Franjic (2018) opined that adolescent pregnancy is a serious social problem. Teenage pregnancy occurs when girls are not allowed the right to make their sexual life and reproductive health choices. They also face the problems of non-access to contraceptive usage through restrictive laws and policies on the provision based on age or marital status, discrimination by health workers, inability to acknowledge teenagers' sexual health needs and inaccessibility to contraceptives because of their ignorance, transportation or financial constraints. At least 10 million unintended pregnancies occur each year among teenage girls aged 15-19 years in the developing world (WHO, 2020). Teenage pregnancy therefore, can be described as the pregnancy by an adolescent or under-aged female between the ages of thirteen to nineteen years (Alabi & Oni, 2017). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014), about 16 million girls between 15 and 19 years of age and about one million girls younger than 15 years give birth every year. As such, it can be explained as the situation where an under aged girl undergoes physical and psychological functions usually reserved for adults (Amadi, 2019). Pregnancy at whatever stage in life can be a life changing experience that cuts across boundaries of race, educational

attainment and socio-economic status (Kost, Henshaw, & Carlin, 2010). In some instances, unintended pregnancy may be caused by sexual violence where teenage girls may not be able to resist or refuse coerced sex. Sexual violence is widespread and particularly affects adolescent girls: about 20% of girls around the world experience sexual abuse as children and adolescents. (Franjic, 2018). The negative impact of teen pregnancy on the health and economic wellness of teen mothers and their children are vast (Coley & Aronson, 2013).

Continuous rise in sexual activities among teenagers will lead to several consequences such as school drop-out or interrupted schooling, falling victim of criminal activity, abortion, child neglect or even death. Briggs (2001) identified several complications associated with teenage pregnancy which include; high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia, eclampsia, malnutrition, vesico vaginal fistula, recto vaginal fistula and death. He further explained that when high blood pressure is accompanied by proteinuria, the teenager's condition can worsen to eclampsia, which if not controlled could progress to extreme hypertension, seizures, convulsion and cerebral hemorrhage. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2014), complications during pregnancy or childbirth are the leading cause of death globally for girls ages 15 to 19 years. Besides these several health challenges of teenage pregnancy, the educational attainment of the teenage parents are hindered. Teenage mothers face several challenges relating to educational attainment which makes them to become burden to the society. Brown (2001) emphasized this when he explained that many of the teenage pregnant girls end up as school dropouts. According to Action Health Incorporated (2004), teenage pregnancy remains a major cause of school dropout among girls. They maintained that the pattern of pregnancies among young unmarried adolescents has assumed an alarming proportion, which if unchecked could result in undesirable consequences (Alabi & Oni, 2017). All over the globe, societal challenges such as corruption, stigmatization, tribalism, social inequality, public health challenges to mention but a few continue to impede the development of nations. One of significant societal challenges generating debates amongst researchers and plaguing developing and developed societies is the teenage pregnancy as its impact on societal advancement, mortality rate, educational enrollment/attainment as well as child and psychological development has reached alarming levels

globally (Alabi & Oni, 2017; Gyan, 2013; Gueorguieva, Carter, Ariet, Roth, Mahan, & Resnick, 2001).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for the purpose of this study is the Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). This approach has been among the most influential approaches to predicting and understanding intentional behavior (Hagger, 2019).

The theory stated that individual performing a given behavior mainly depends on the person's intention to perform the behavior which could also be determined by the outcomes of such behavior expected by the individual. Teenagers' attitudes, values, intentions and beliefs about sex are the most intriguing factors related to their sexual health and behavior. This theory also explains that teen's behavioral intentions to engage in early sexual intercourse are determined by attitudinal factors such as beliefs, values, attitudes and subjective norms and influence from their peers. As pointed out by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) attitudes are made up of the belief or evaluative reaction that a person accumulates over the years which may either be favorable or unfavorable dispositions towards teenage sexual behavior. Attitudes are the beliefs and feelings about certain behaviors and the values (positive or negative) attached to the outcome of that behavior (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Subjective norms on the other hand are the perceptions of social norms, including a belief about whether referent individuals approve or disapprove of a behavior and the individual's motivation to comply with these normative beliefs (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Finally, Theory of Reasoned Action explains the anticipated outcome an individual will consider before engaging in a certain behavior which can lead to premarital sex or teenage pregnancy.

Factors Responsible for Teenage Pregnancy

There are several factors that contribute to the rise in teenage pregnancy, some of which are outlined below:

Poor Socio-Economic Background

Pregnant girls often come from families of poor socio economic status who do not have the necessary resources to cater for a child. Yampolskaya, Brown and Greenbaum (2002) observed that approximately 60% of adolescent mothers live in poverty at the time of the birth of their babies and "approximately 73% go on welfare within 5 years of giving birth". These children grow up to have little or no interest in educational goals and successes because of the inability of their parents to be involved. Therefore, the socio-economic status of parents often affects the wellbeing and educational interest of teenagers. In some cases, teenagers are compelled to fend by doing menial jobs or hawking to meet the needs of the whole family. These in turn expose them to sexual violence by people who are more financially buoyant and may want to exploit them sexually which exposes them to

unintended pregnancy. According to Mangatu and Kisimbii (2019), teenage females from poor family background have a higher probability of being pregnant.

Absence of Adequate Care and Supervision by Parents/Guardian

In today's society, parents/guardians do not necessarily care for the emotional stability of the girl child. They are either too busy or lenient in their upbringing thereby neglecting their responsibilities. Teenagers especially girls go through challenging situations in which they need parental guide and support as they grow. In situations where they lack the supervision and control from their parents, they tend to fall into "wrong hands" who eventually takes advantage of them while they end up with a pregnancy. Also, parents who seem to avoid sex talk with their teens may lead to the child turning to friends for direction which may result into misinformation leading to unintended pregnancy.

Peer Influence

Peer pressure has also been shown to be one of the most common causative factors of teenage pregnancy. Hashmi (2013) explains that peer pressure continues to destroy teenagers all over the world. According to Chiazor, Ozoya, Idowu, Udume, & Osagide (2017), friends are critical instruments of socialization and establish standards of behavior while serving as role models hence altering the sexual behavior and beliefs of the teenagers. Children as they grow to become teenagers experience increased pressure to fit into certain peer groups which corresponds to feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. They begin to form new social groups and may become subjected to beliefs and values other than their parental values (Makanjuola, Daramola & Obembe, 2015). The peers may then lure the girl into having sexual intercourse with the opposite sex in order to fit properly into the group thereby leading to unintended pregnancy of such teenager. In most cases they allow their decisions regarding sex be influenced by their peers (Widman, Choukas-Bradley, Helms & Prinstein, 2016).

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence has been observed as an important predictor of teenage pregnancy. Sexual violence is widespread and particularly affects adolescent girls: about 20% of girls around the world experience sexual abuse as children and adolescents (Franjic, 2018). There are situations where teenage girls may be unable to refuse sexual harassment. According to (WHO, 2014) more than one third of girls in some countries report that their first sexual encounter was coerced. In a study conducted by Ajayi and Ezegebe (2020), they discovered that unintended pregnancy was higher among survivors of sexual violence compared to those who never experienced sexual abuse. Studies have also found that between eleven and twenty percent of pregnancies in teenagers were as a result of rape, while about sixty percent of teenage mothers had unwanted sexual experiences (abuse) preceding their

pregnancy (Alabi & Oni, 2017). Substance use and abuse, drugs or alcohol, poor mental health among other risk factors have also been found to be factors leading to sexual violence and teens' pregnancy.

Lack of Education

Lack of education remains one of the main factors causing a rise in teen pregnancy. Moreover, more schooling or higher level of educational attainment is a protective factor against teen pregnancy (Sahoo, 2011; Gupta & Mahy, 2003;). Research studies have shown that decrease in the level of female literacy will lead to an increasing rate of teen pregnancy. Education increases teens' knowledge about contraceptive use and allow girls to understand sex education. Schools help to ensure a perfect environment and also combat teen pregnancy. At school, students spend a lot of their time with trusted teachers in a regulated and supportive learning environment. (Huang, 2017).

Effects of Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy can result into negative social and economic consequences on girls. Unmarried pregnant girls face stigma, unacceptability and discrimination, violence by partner or parents which can make them feel isolated or depressed. This often leads to non-attainment of their academic goals by dropping out of school which may jeopardize their future ambition and employment opportunities. It also leads to low educational level of the teenage girl, low income or poverty and single parenting. Pregnant teenagers who drop out of school may also be forced to go into early marriage which may be a direct cause of violence from partners.

Similarly, girls who become pregnant before age 18 are more likely to experience violence within marriage or partnership (Franjic, 2018). Based on their inability to attain higher educational standards, they may have fewer skills and lack opportunities for employment which results into poverty or poor life styles; Nationally, this can have economic consequences in countries where the annual income that young women would have earned in their lifetimes if they had not been involved in early pregnancies.

According to Marnach, Forrest, and Goldman (2013) medically, teenage pregnancy maternal and prenatal health is of particular concern among teens that are pregnant or parenting. Pregnant teenage girls are more likely to experience unsafe abortions than adults. An estimated three million unsafe abortions occur globally every year among girls age 15-19 years (WHO, 2014). This is a serious health problem which causes maternal death. Another major problem encountered during teenage pregnancy is an obstetric fistula or vesico-vaginal fistula (vvh), which is caused by a prolonged, obstructed labor. The vagina often tears when a pregnant girl is in labor or gives birth and this pose serious complication and challenge to the underage mother. Teens also tend to be at a higher risk of other pregnancy-related

complications and general health risks such as pre-eclampsia (pregnancy induced high blood pressure), incidence of premature birth and low-birth weight, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, death and other risk factors which serve as a serious public health challenge.

III. CONCLUSION

As teenage pregnancy now increases in Africa at an alarming rate; it has also become a global concern as it not only affects the teenager but her family and the society at large. It is a serious problem bedeviling our country today as teen parents find it difficult to complete their education and more likely to live in poverty. Ajayi & Oni (2017) noted that teenage pregnancy has a detrimental effect on the education and future plans of teenagers; this is because the teenage mothers attend school irregularly and sometimes drop out of school. However, an increase in teenage pregnancy eventually leads to increase in the poverty rate of children (most especially females) as well as devaluation of their well-being.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

To reduce the rise in the incidence of teenage pregnancy, the following recommendations have been made:

- i. Parents should give adequate attention to their children in terms of proper upbringing and inculcation of moral values as this helps to build their self-esteem, self-worth, confidence and identity.
- ii. The home and school environments should be made conducive and protective enough by parents and teachers against negative exposure and influences that may jeopardize the well-being and future of the girl child.
- iii. Free and compulsory basic education should be encouraged by the government to children at the basic educational level. This will help to reduce the risk of sexual violence experienced by some children especially girls from poor homes who could not afford the payment of school fees.
- iv. Relevant bodies should create awareness and sensitization programs to the entire populace on the knowledge and consequences of teenage pregnancy
- v. Comprehensive sex education through provision of school-based curriculum should be encouraged by the government.
- vi. Contraceptive services and better health care services in general should also be made accessible and affordable by both government and non-governmental organizations
- vii. School-based day care facilities, emotional and psychological support should be made available to soon to be/already teenage parents to be able to continue and complete their education
- viii. Government should strengthen families by providing jobs in order to be able to provide the needs of their members including the adolescent girls.

- ix. Skills acquisition programmes should be established at the local government level in order to help adolescents who could not complete their formal education. This will help them to be dependent.
- x. Religious leaders should help to inculcate moral values and emphasize the hazardous effect of teenage pregnancy by giving moral instructions in churches and mosques
- xi. Funding should be made by government and social welfare agencies to support pregnant girls in completing their education.
- xii. Programme providers should address several issues facing teens and enlightenment on its devastating effect.

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