

Teenage Pregnancy: The Bane of Girl Child Education

John Ishaku & Sabina Anthony Dingba

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Kaduna State University

Department of Home Economics, College of Education, Akwanga,

Email:johnishaku73@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: John Ishaku

ABSTRACT

The girl child needs education in order to prepare her in life on how to keep herself clean and to be discipline by giving respect to him who respect is due. Also, the girl child needs the western education in order to acquire knowledge and skills and that will make her to help herself, her children and her husband, and to contribute so greatly to the development of her nation socially, politically, economically and morally, but one of the factors that have challenged the effect of the girl child education negatively is the teenage pregnancy which can lead to the girl child's withdrawal from her studies which has adverse effects on her life.

INTRODUCTION

Every child needs education in order to develop his or her mental ability to acquire skills and knowledge. The girl child is not an exception even though people limit the girl child education to bearing children, which ending in the kitchen but as popularly believed that "if you educate a man, you educate a single person but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation." The girl child has a role to play when she acquires education in the development of her nation socially, politically, economically and morally but she needs to be guided because once she is not guided she may grow up without developing her potential as a result of factors such as teenage pregnancy which may lead to her withdrawal from the school.

In this paper, the writer will focus on the concept of girl child education, teenage pregnancy, which is at risk of teenage pregnancy, precision around a pregnancy and the baby, causes of teenage pregnancy and the effects of teenage pregnancy.

Girl Child Education – Key to National Development

“When you educate a man, you educate an individual and when you educate a woman, you educate an entire family.” This declaration is multi-faceted—an educated woman has the self-confidence, skills as well as intelligence to understand the need to be a better daughter, sister, wife and mother and make a progressive family. Education is the only tool with which a girl or a woman can empower herself and eventually her family. India holds a strong determination in educating all children, especially the girl child. By declaring education as a fundamental right, India ensures constitutional provisions for free and compulsory education to all the children between 6 to 14 years of age. This provision is widely known as the “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.”

Even after declaring education as a fundamental right, there are numerous hurdles that prohibit a girl child from actually getting education. The biggest hurdle is the prejudice that families have about girls—like girls are slow learners, they are not rational; they are to be confined inside the domestic household, and why bother about educating them. Only a handful of people have actually realized the importance of educating a girl. Though not a direct cause, the infamous dowry system is also another barrier in girl child education. Families often think of a girl as a burden and often want to save the money for their dowry rather than spend it on her education.

Egbo (2011), noted that, a girl is no less than a boy; if anything, they are all the more diligent, hardworking and consistent in their effort towards anything. A girl should be educated in order to ensure a better life for herself. If she is empowered she would be in a condition to add to the income of the family, and raise the living condition of her family.

As goes the saying from the Rig Veda, “the home has, verily, its foundation in the wife.” An educated mother can give better care to her children. Since she is the first teacher of the child, she ought to be well versed to inculcate a better value system in the child. An ignorant mother would not understand the idea of proper hygiene and sanitation leading to lack of proper care of the child—malnourishment is a living example of this problem. The government of India has initiated various programs and policies to ensure that a girl does not miss out any opportunity of getting education. After independence, the government set up a National Committee on Women’s Education in 1958, and it recommended that female education should be at par with male education. In the year 1964, the Education Commission was set up,

which largely talked about focusing on educating the girl child. The government came up with 'New Education Policy' in the year 1968, which focused on the overall education of the girl child at both rural and urban areas.

Mahila Samakhya Program is a program that comes under the New Education Policy and was formed in the year 1988. This particular program focuses on the empowerment of the women who belong to the marginalized group.

National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) was started in 2003 to ensure access to education to girls who could not benefit from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Under this scheme model schools have been set up and it covers 24 states.

Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme was launched in 2004 in order to provide primary level education to girls. The scheme was especially designed for the underprivileged girls in the rural areas. Even after so many programs and policies of the government, we are still lagging behind in providing education to the girl child. The problem here is not in implementation but in the level of commitment of people in general. Until we create awareness amongst people about the benefits of women education, all these programs would not bring about the desired result. We fail to understand that men and women are two sides of the same coin—a girl is as much a part of the society as is a boy. They are both futures of tomorrow. They both need to be given equal opportunities for the wholesome growth of the nation.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage pregnancy is generally defined as a pregnancy in a woman who is 19 years of age or less. Teenage pregnancies in Australia have decreased considerably over the last four decades. This drop is due to increased availability of contraception, access to abortion and a change in educational and career opportunities for women. Internationally, Australia's teenage fertility rate is substantially less than the United States of America and the United Kingdom but more than European countries like Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Banerjue (2009) noted that, it is often assumed that all teenage pregnancies are accidental but this is not always the case. Some teenagers actively plan to become pregnant or don't use contraception's, knowing that pregnancy is a real possibility.

Who is at Risk of Teenage Pregnancy

There are a number of risk factors of teenage pregnancy. They include:

- i. Family situations with regular conflict between members
- ii. Violence and sexual abuse in childhood
- iii. Unstable housing arrangements
- iv. Poor school performance
- v. Poor school attendance
- vi. Low socio-economic background
- vii. Family history of teenage pregnancies
- viii. Low maternal education
- ix. Father's absence
- x. Low self-esteem
- xi. Relationship with an older partner
- xii. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- xiii. Living in rural and remote areas

Decisions around a Pregnancy

Sanchez (1997), indicated that, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of teenage pregnancies that are terminated as Medicare figures do not include all abortions. However, it is generally considered that slightly more teenagers have an abortion than continue with a pregnancy. In addition, only a few teenagers choose to have the baby and give it up for adoption. It is important that young women are given adequate information about all their pregnancy options before they make a decision. Unfortunately, many teenagers delay seeking advice when they are pregnant, perhaps hoping that it is not true. For those who choose to continue with the pregnancy these delays can mean missing out on important antenatal care. For those who choose an abortion, a delay in confirming the pregnancy can impact on the type of termination available (i.e., medical abortion, where available, is only performed for pregnancies of less than 9 weeks).

Health Implications on Teenage Mothers

Makinson (1985), claimed that, teenagers have higher complication rates both during pregnancy and delivery. In teenagers under 15 years of age, these complications can be caused by biological immaturity. At this age girls have an underdeveloped pelvis which can cause difficulties during childbirth. Teenage

mothers often delay finding out if they are pregnant and, therefore, often do not receive adequate antenatal care. Poor antenatal care is a major contributing factor to pregnancy and birth complications. For example, during pregnancy, women are screened for a number of conditions such as high blood pressure. Screening for these conditions means they can be addressed early, limiting their impact. If women are screened late into their pregnancy or not at all, it can lead to complications for both mother and baby.

Poor eating habits (skipping meals, dieting and eating more fast food) common in teenage girls can place them at risk of nutritional deficiencies due to the added dietary requirements during pregnancy. Teenage mothers have a higher risk of post-natal depression than older women. This is most likely due to a number of factors including a lack of support, isolation from peers and/or family, financial pressures and societal attitudes.

Socio-economic Implications on Teenage Mothers

One of the most important long term implications on teenage mothers is not completing their education. This lack of education can result in long term unemployment or job options that are poorly paid for and insecure. Being dependent on welfare or on a poorly paid job can place teenage mothers under great financial pressure. In addition to the emotional stress that not having enough money brings, a low income often means living in poor housing and being unable to afford adequate health care or even basic necessities.

Teenage mothers may also experience alienation from their peers and family. In addition, a pregnancy can place a great deal of strain on young relationships. Consequently, 60% of young mothers do not have a male partner when their baby is born. Loneliness and financial dependence can make teenage mothers vulnerable to becoming involved in unhealthy relationships (e.g., domestic violence situation). Unfortunately, there is also still a stigma in society attached to being a teenage mother. This stigma can affect the way a teenage mother feels about her parenting abilities, motherhood in general and even herself as a person. Negative attitudes towards young mothers can erode their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

Implications on the Baby

As discussed above, inadequate antenatal care and/or exposure to tobacco smoke, alcohol and drugs can all have impact on the unborn baby.

Miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight and birth defects can occur as a result. Children born to teenage mothers are also more vulnerable to neglect. This is due to a range of factors including poverty, parenting inexperience, social isolation and being in an unhealthy relationship (e.g., domestic violence situation). They are also more likely to become teenage parents themselves.

Support for Teenage Mothers and their Babies

Milder (2006) observed that, ensuring that young women receive adequate antenatal care is a very important step in improving the health of teenage girls and their babies. If they enter antenatal care in the early stages of their pregnancy they can be properly monitored and any health issues addressed. Although educational policies are aimed at ensuring that pregnant students and young parents are not disadvantaged, in reality many girls do not feel supported by the school environment and so stop attending. Some schools, however, have devised special programs that actively support teenage mothers to continue their education. In Queensland, these include Mabel Park State High School and Burnside High School and in New South Wales, Plumpton High School, which was also the subject of an ABC documentary. There are also a range of community-based organizations that provide support to young mothers.

Preventing Teenage Pregnancies

Research suggests that knowledge about reproductive matters (ie. sex education) and access to contraception, including emergency contraception are vital in preventing teenage pregnancies. Teenage girls often use contraception sporadically. While this can be due to a lack of understanding about the chances of pregnancy, it is also due to a lack of skills to successfully negotiate safe sex, particularly with a new and/or older partner, as evidenced by the risk factors of teenage pregnancy. It is clear, however, that broader issues than just sex education and contraception are required to prevent teenage pregnancies. Protection from violence and abuse, family support, affordable housing, improved school retention, building self-esteem and better educational and vocational opportunities are all required.

CAUSES OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Schou (1994), said that, teenage pregnancy is defined as an unintended pregnancy during adolescence. Approximately 750,000 of 15- to 19-year-olds become pregnant each year, according to The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, though many teenagers do not believe that they will get pregnant if they engage in sexual activity.

Peer Pressure: During adolescence, teenagers often feel pressured to make friends and fit in with their peers. Many times, these teens let their friends influence their decision not to have sex even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. Teenagers have sex as a way to appear cool and sophisticated, but in some cases the end result is an unplanned teenage pregnancy. The Kaiser Family Foundation states that more than 29 percent of pregnant teens reported that they felt pressured to have sex, and 33 percent of pregnant teens stated that they felt that they were not ready for a sexual relationship, but proceeded anyway because they feared ridicule or rejection.

Absent Parents: Teen girls are more likely to get pregnant if they have limited or no guidance from their parents. Many parents have busy lives that prevent them from providing the guidance and support that their young teenagers need to make good decisions on issues such as sex, according to the website Parent Dish. When a teen does not feel that she can talk to her parents about sex either because they forbid sex talk or because they are not around, she will more than likely turn to friends for direction on whether or not to have sex, resulting in misinformation and possible teenage pregnancy.

Glamorization of Pregnancy: The movie industry and the media contribute to teenage pregnancy by glamorizing it in news stories and movies. Movies that depict teenage pregnancy as something to be desired encourage teens to engage in reckless sexual activity, according to ABC's "Good Morning America." During adolescence, teens become more focused on their appearance and how their peers perceive them. They want to be seen as part of the group, so if teenage pregnancy is viewed as acceptable in their school or amongst their friends, they may seek to become pregnant as a way of gaining social acceptance.

Lack of Knowledge: Teenagers who are uneducated about sex are more likely to have an unintended pregnancy. Some teens do not fully understand the biological and emotional aspects associated with having sex, according to DailyRecord.co.uk. These teens may get incorrect information from friends, videos, sitcoms and/or movies. Many times, teens do not have the knowledge needed to make informed and responsible decisions about whether or not to engage in sexual activity that can alter their lives.

Sexual Abuse or Rape: Teens can become pregnant as a result of sexual abuse or rape. The Guttmacher Institute states that between 43 and 62 percent of teens acknowledge that they were impregnated by an adult male, and two-thirds report that their babies' fathers are as old as 27. Approximately 5 percent of all teen births are as a result of rape.

Teenage Drinking: This can cause an unexpected pregnancy, according to the website Love to Know. Many teens experiment with drugs and alcohol. Drinking lowers a teen's ability to control his or her impulses, contributing to 75 percent of pregnancies that occur between the ages of 14 and 21. Approximately 91 percent of pregnant teens reported that although they were drinking at the time, they did not originally plan to have sex when they conceived.

EFFECTS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage pregnancy is a serious issue that may seriously impact negatively on the future of a young woman. Any teenage pregnancy will be a challenge as teens typically lack skills needed to handle pregnancy and motherhood. Patience, maturity and ability to handle stress are required by pregnant mothers of all ages. A teenage pregnancy may also have an impact on the baby. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that babies born to teens may have weaker intellectual development and lower skill set scores at kindergarten. They may also have ongoing medical issues and behavioral issues.

Medical Complications: Medical complications often occur in pregnant teenagers, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent

Psychiatry. Too often, teens do not seek adequate medical care during the pregnancy. Complications that may occur during teenage pregnancy include anemia, toxemia, high blood pressure, placenta previa and premature birth of the baby. Ongoing medical care is crucial to prevent these complications from threatening the pregnancy and the mother's wellbeing.

Emotional Crisis: A teenager may suffer an emotional crisis if she becomes pregnant and does not want the baby. This crisis may lead to rash behavior such as attempting to self-abort the baby or a suicide attempt.

Worries about Future: Uncertainty about the future may arise when a teen is pregnant. A teen may feel she does not have enough knowledge to be a mother. She may also have fears about how having a baby will affect her own life and dreams for the future.

Delayed Education: Education may be put on hold when a teen becomes pregnant. Some pregnant teens may decide to leave high school. Others who were planning to attend college in the future may put off that experience after becoming pregnant. They may decide to focus on the baby or getting married rather than pursuing further education.

Smoking & Drugs: Smoking and drug use may be problematic during teenage pregnancy. A teen may not have the willpower to stop using substances that can harm the developing baby.

Exhaustion: Exhaustion may arise during pregnancy. A pregnant teen should try to exercise during the pregnancy; however, if exhaustion arises, it is important to know that this is often a normal part of pregnancy. Getting the standard 8 hours of sleep every night (or more) is important.

Depression: Depression may arise when a teenager is pregnant. The teen may fall into depression while trying to handle the emotions pregnancy creates and all of the possibly negative feedbacks about the pregnancy from friends and family. The fluctuating hormones that pregnancy causes may also prompt depression.

Neglect of Baby: Once their baby is born, teenagers may not be willing or able to give it the undivided attention it needs. A teen may not be an adequate mother because she is overwhelmed by the constant needs of the baby. She may grow annoyed at the lack of freedom to interact with her peer group due to the baby's existence.

Trouble with Finances: Financial difficulty may arise during teenage pregnancy or after the baby is born. It is expensive to raise a baby. Teens who do not have full-time employment may struggle to cover the basic expenses of life upon having a baby.

CONCLUSION

The girl child education is one of the basic needs of any country that wants to develop and maintain her status quo because when she acquires the knowledge and the skill, she will contribute to the growth of her nation socially, politically, economically for that the girl child should be well guided by her parents, school, religious body about the adverse effects of a teen pregnancy which may lead to the termination of her education.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The government has a great responsibility of educating the society on how greatly important the girl child is.
2. Parents should educate the girl child on the negative adverse effects of teenage pregnancy.
3. The school should encourage girl child education and help the girl child on healthy living.
4. The religious bodies such as the church and the mosque should also teach the adults to abstain themselves from pre-marital sex.
5. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should educate the young ones to shun any form of sex before marriage.

REFERENCES

Banerjue (2009). Teenage pregnancy: a socially inflicted health hazards. Indian journal of community medicine 34:227-23.

- Egbo (2011). Promoting female education for national development. Journal of women in colleges of education (ESCET-JOWICE) maiden education pp 109 – 144. Federal republic of Nigeria.
- Guttmanchor, T (1999). Teen sex and pregnancy. Hilder publishers, USA
- Makenson, C (1985). The health consequences of teenage fertility; family planning prospect 17(3) 132-7.
- Milder (2006). The national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy. Haris publishers, Ibadan.
- Sanchez, P (1997). Calcium ad citamin D status of pregnant teenagers. Barazie publishers, Maiduguri.
- Schou, T (1994). Prenatal care and maternal health during adolescent pregnancy: A review and meta-analysis adolescent health 15(6): 444.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: John Ishaku & Sabina Anthony Dingba (2017), Teenage Pregnancy: The Bane of Girl Child Education. *Intl J. of Social Sciences and Conflict Management*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2017, Pp. 161-171
