Problem of Teenage Pregnancy and Family Instability: A Case Study of Calabar South Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Traditional African values have been affected by foreign influence and acculturation making the Nigerian population more susceptible to the threat of teenage pregnancy than any other population. This cultural flux has brought the issue of teenage pregnancy into prominence, pervasive and complex transcending personal tragedy and affecting the stability of families in Nigerian society. The prevalence of teenage pregnancy continues to constitute a social problem inspite of government effort to curb its occurrence. The problem may be rooted in negligence on the part of different institutions such as family, the schools or even the individuals (teenagers) themselves. This paper is set to examine the causes of the teenage pregnancies and their implication in Calabar South, Cross River State, Nigeria. Hypotheses were tested to expose the facts about teenage pregnancy as a social problem. Questionnaire approach complemented with in-depth interview was applied to find out the socio-economic problem that contributes to teenage pregnancies. Recommendations were made as to how to tackle the problems of teenage pregnancies in the society, one of the greatest problems in Africa today. However, to curb teenage pregnancies, sex education should be included in the secondary school curriculum and also parents especially mothers should spend more time with children and the family.

Key words: Teenagers, pregnancy, family.

Introduction

The term teenage pregnancy is not a very recent social ill in our contemporary society, the government and various voluntary organizations (N.G.O) example (G.P.I) Girls Power Initiative, have over the years created awareness to the youth on the consequences of teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy is said to occur when a girl aged between eleven (11) and nineteen (19) years becomes pregnant. It constitutes socio-medical problems in both developed and developing countries, but especially so in the sub – Saharan Africa where they are not only commoners, but occur against the back drop of poor socio-economic infrastructures, poor knowledge and availability and use of contraceptive (Briggs, 2011). Also early marriage and social permissiveness favour early exposure to sexual activities and probably responsible for the increase teenage pregnancies in our societies. Teenage pregnancies, even when desired often occur in illiterate girls of poor socio-economic status who undertake to marry at an early age before acquiring an appreciable level of education. In a few cases, teenage pregnancy is not desired but the teenager who is pregnant either conceals the apparent changes in her body or does not realize she is pregnant. Candles (1990) posited that some girls believe that pregnancy might force the male partner to be committed to the relationship, leading to nasty union, which is characterized, by turbulent marriage, disharmony, wretched lives and even death.

In Kenya and other African societies, studies have been conducted on the phenomenon of “teenage pregnancy” (Population reports, 2001). Findings from these studies have formed the basis for strategic intervention activities such as peer education on sexuality and reproductive behaviours. Inspite of these studies, it is important to research into the sociological and psychological factors that predispose young teens to unplanned pregnancies.
In many instances, teenage pregnancy has been blamed on various sources such as the breakdown of moral values, family disorganization and even modernization. Renowned scholars, Esere (2006); Asiubel and Akintamobi (2007 ) have cautioned that with a youthful population the Nigerian population is more susceptible to the threat of teenage pregnancy than any other population. Against this background, it has become necessary to ask the following questions: what are the implications of teenage pregnancy on family in the community? And what could be done to curb this problem in the society?

**Conceptual analysis and overview**

Teenage pregnancy is an issue that is rampant in the society today. It is the premature pregnancy of female child that are yet to attain the maturity and ripe age for marriage. Several factors are influencing this menace in the Nigerian society. Among the factors is lack of proper moral upbringing of female children by their parents, there is no doubt that parents occupy significant position in the laying of a solid foundation for their children. When they fail to discharge their responsibilities in this regards, particularly in the area of training of their children the dangers inherent in premature sex. Poverty of parents /guardians further encourages teenage pregnancy. Many of the pregnant female children in the society today are from poor homes who cannot afford the basic needs of life like food and shelter as a result are easily lured into premature sexual intercourse which most times leads to unwanted pregnancies. The undermining of the social and economic fabric of the Nigerian community is reflected in the destabilization of families. Single-parent families, teenage pregnancy, child abuse and neglect, and homelessness in Nigeria are at alarming levels. Unfortunately, most Nigerian families have failed to enhance proper socialization of their wards because it is fragmentated and unbalanced. For example, families who are female-headed, poor and on insufficient income, represent a majority of Nigerian families. This "deficit" condition usually attributes the dysfunctioning of families.

The issue of teenage pregnancy has several consequences. It increases the population growth rate in the society, many babies born through it which cannot be catered for by the available resources. Encourages dropping out of schools of many female children, thus undermining governments’ effort toward ensuring education for all and the millennium development goal of education in the nearest future. Due to poverty, many of those involved in teenage pregnancy die off prematurely because of lack of proper medical attention. It has become imperative that the menace of teenage pregnancy be eradicated or controlled in the society in view of its negative consequences.

Adeninkka, Oladimeji and Adekanbi (2010) support the idea that poverty on the part of the parent is also one of the causes of teenage pregnancy on their financial insufficiency which characteristically compels their children to live free life styles when he argues that girls from families with low socio-economic background often fall victim to the factors since the poverty of their parents disturbs them from getting the necessary needs. Esere (2006) observes that the parental headship style has contributed to occurrence of teenage pregnancy. He states that parents who have rigid authoritarian control over their children deprive their teenage daughters the opportunities to learn how to control their behaviours, the result is that such teenagers exploit the only opportunity at their disposal and try to have those experience they thought they have been deprived of by their parents.

Peer groups influence has been observed to be a determinant of teenage pregnancy. Singh and Wulf (1990) in agreement with this state that; peer group establishes the norms of high standard and behaviour to be followed by its members and these standard bind them together. He further observed that teenagers who have sexual habits are inclined to persuade their friends to use them as roles models. The innocent ones who do not want to be stigmatized for deviancy comply without hesitation, in order for them to live up to expectation and uphold the peer value of sexual promiscuity. They may be involved in many odd acts including sex to obtain approval of their peers, which often result in pregnancy.

The World Health Organization (2010) estimated that the risk of dying due to pregnancy related causes is twice as high for teenagers aged between fifteen to nineteen years higher than for
women in their adulthood (early twenties). Rogers (2011) mentioned the consequences and problems in family instability. For example, the children would not have or enjoy good or maximum psychological growth, there will exist a serious functionality problem (structurally) in the upbringing of children born under this condition. Odu and Ayodele (2008) agree with this view when they revealed that teenage pregnancy is the major cause of educational backwardness among women, which thus affects development. According to Duenholter, (1975:49) frequent health hazard caused by pregnancy among teenagers include vesico virginal fistula (V.V.F) which is a fistula between the bladder and the vagina that makes the victim to leak urine and faeces thereby making victims live in dehumanizing conditions both at home and in hospitals.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher employed Peter Blau and George Homans social exchange theory as the theoretical framework of analysis. This theory focuses on life as a series of change that involves rewards and costs. Exchange theory is seeing social life as a series of exchange negotiations, which involves rewards and costs. The sexual activities of teenagers according to these theorists depend to a large extent on the exchange, which take place in life; the involvement of teenager in sexual activities exceeds their costs in terms of money or socio-economic gratification. Exchange theory holds that reciprocation of action will always occur in the exchange taking place between people. If a teenager feels she is receiving some form of reward or gratification in a sexual relationship she is involved in, then the activity will be reinforced and sustained. This theory stresses the social context of the individual and also perceives the source of motivation of the individual external environment.

Methodology

Survey approach was employed in this study to aid data collection in addition to the secondary sources of data comprising texts, journals and publications of governments. The survey was conducted in Calabar South. A sample population of 160 secondary school students was selected using cluster and stratified sampling techniques from 10 secondary schools (both private and public) in Calabar South. The researcher carried out in-depth interviews consisting 15 structured questions requiring ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses. Hypotheses guiding the study were analyzed using simple percentage distribution and comparison of responses.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between teenage pregnancy and poverty.

Table 1: Response distribution for hypothesis 1: Parents and guardians’ ability to provide for their children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do your parents and guardians provide you with enough money and other necessities?</td>
<td>50 (31.25%)</td>
<td>110(68.75%)</td>
<td>160 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The socio-economic standard of your parents is adequate.</td>
<td>70(43.75%)</td>
<td>90(56.25%)</td>
<td>160(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey.

The survey above shows 31.25% of teenagers who claimed their parents or guardians provide them with enough money and other necessities, while 68.75% responded in the negative that their parents do not have enough to provide for them.
Hypothesis Two:
H0: There is no strong association between family instability and teenage pregnancy.

Table 2: Response distribution showing relationship between family instability and teen pregnancy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Do your parents and guardians stay together in one household?</td>
<td>100 (62.5%)</td>
<td>60 (37.5%)</td>
<td>160 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In your opinion do you think family instability can cause teenage pregnancy</td>
<td>90 (56.25%)</td>
<td>70 (43.75%)</td>
<td>160 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children from divorced or separated marriages suffer most and become victims of early pregnancies.</td>
<td>120 (75%)</td>
<td>40 (25%)</td>
<td>160 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field survey

In the survey above, 62.5% live in the same household with their parents and 37.5% lived in separated households. While 56.25% believe that unstable family can predispose teenage girls to unwanted pregnancies, 43.75% of the respondents disagreed with this fact.

The findings of the study revealed that socioeconomic deprivation, poverty on the part of the parents and their financial insufficiency has been linked to teenage pregnancy and premature childbearing. Explanations based on stress theory suggest that stressors or changes in family life encourage children to take on adult roles prematurely (Woodward, Ferguson and Horwood 2004; Miller, 1998). Most importantly is absence or lack of high levels of parental monitoring and various methods to control adolescents behaviour by increasing parental rules and strictness. From the findings also, the profile of those at greatest risk of a teenage pregnancy (<20 years) was that of early-maturing girls who had been reared in a family environment characterized by parental instability and maternal role models of young single motherhood. As young adolescents, these girls are characterized by high rates of sexual risk-taking and deviant peer involvement exposing them to risk of an early pregnancy. This supports the opinion of Kelly and Jackson (2008) that often fatherless homes feed the cycle of illegitimacy itself. "Young women who grow up without a father in the home are more than twice as likely to bear children out of wedlock. And boys living in a single-parent family are twice as likely to father a child out of wedlock as boys from intact homes". (http://leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/broken.html)

Recommendations

The findings above call for prompt and concerted effort on several fronts in order to find ways of curbing the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy in the society. Below are some necessary recommendations that if employed by policy makers and parents, will ameliorate the high incidence of teenage pregnancy. There is an urgent need to identify appropriate strategies to sensitize and inform policy makers in particular, parents, teachers and the programme implementers about teenage pregnancy and its diverse repercussions. There is the need for parents to be more alive to their responsibilities at home setting, should strive to educate their children on the dangers that are in inherent in premature sexual intercourse which result in many cases in pre–marital pregnancies.

Secondly, fatherhood must be emphasized in families. Building strong families must include building families with fathers. Fatherlessness is one of the primary causes of social disintegration and parenting cannot be left to mothers alone (Hill 2012). Two parents are seen as necessary for stable, intact families working harmoniously to uphold the norms and values of family life and in so doing rule out the devastating consequences of illegitimacy, divorce, and other lifestyle choices. Thus, parental involvement in children’s lives is believed to be protective against the risk for teen childbearing (Kelly & Jackson 2008).


References


Briggs, J. D. (2011); Teenage pregnancy; The problem that hasn’t gone away. Chicago: American co.


