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Factors Contributing to Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa: The Case of Matjitjileng Village

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ABSTRACT Teenage pregnancy in South Africa is growing rapidly among school-going pupils and it leads to school drop-out as the teenage mothers have to leave school to care for their babies. Teenage mothers add to the number of women who are illiterate. In Matjitjileng village, pregnancy among young people has reached pandemic heights. It seems lack of communication between parents and their children exacerbates the problem. The residents of this village still have the misconception that it is taboo to talk about sex with young people. This research investigated the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy in Matjitjileng Village, a sub-rural area situated in the Mogalakwena Municipality in Waterberg District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study found that most of the teenagers fell pregnant at the age of 16 and 19 years. Almost all of them fall pregnant because of lack of parental guidance and role models in the village. Most of them were influenced by their peers who fell pregnant at an early age and were ignorant about contraceptives. The study suggested radical programs that are aimed at the reduction of teenage pregnancy and the holding of workshops that encourage abstinence and preventative measures against this scourge.

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that approximately one million teenagers fall pregnant each year. About 30 000 of them fall pregnant before they reach the age of 18 years. It is also estimated that 75 percent of the world population, younger than 15 years has no access to information regarding sexuality and reproduction (Bezuidenhout 2008). The rate of teenage pregnancies across South Africa in respect to the provinces show that currently high pregnancy rates in schools include the Eastern Cape with 68.81 percent (pregnant pupils per 1 000 registered), KwaZulu Natal with 62.24 and Limpopo with 60.36 percent.Teenage pregnancy has been identified as one of the primary causes of poverty because teenagers do not plan for themselves, let alone their children before giving birth and perhaps are not getting support from their communities. Approximately, 13 million children in the world are born to women under the age of 20, more than 90 percent in the developing countries. Complications of pregnancy are the leading causes of mortality among women between the age of 15 and 19 in such areas. The highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the world is in sub-Saharan Africa, where women tend to marry at an early age. In Niger, it was found that 87 percent of women married at an early age wherein 53 percent had given birth to a child before the age of 18 (Therese 2000). The teen birth in the United States Of America (USA) is the highest in the developed countries, and abortion among teenagers is also high. However, in January 2010, a study released by the Guttmatcher Institute revealed that the pregnancy rate in the adolescents aged 15-19 increased by 3 percent between 2006 and 2008. Worldwide, the rates of teenage pregnancy range from 143 per 1000 in sub-Saharan countries in Africa to 2.9 per 1000 in South Korea. African countries have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy.

Background and Brief Literature on Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy may result from many factors such as rape and/or sexual assault, human trafficking with the aim of opening a sex industry, and cultural beliefs. Often young sexual assault victims stay silent to avoid social stigma and shame (Devenish et al. 2000). With these factors an individual victim may be exposed to the risk of being infected with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV and unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. Another reason is the peer pressure to become sexually active before one is comfortable. It has been found that the number of pregnancies among girls aged 15 and 19 years peaked in 2001 seven

years after the transition to a democratic South Africa, but years after the child support grant was introduced, teenage pregnancies peaked (Sapin 2009). The high rate of pregnancy does not necessarily correlate with child grants, but much with the political independency of South Africa, even though there are speculations that teenage pregnancy has a huge link to the social grant system (Sapin 2009). In the Waterberg district, research has established the same forms of problems as it will be shown from the data that was analyzed. Teenage pregnancy may result from many ill factors such as social chaos; family dysfunctionalism and the contribution of external influence such as the media. Social factors may include parents who either have little or no time for their children and/or talk with them about sex and sexuality and to discuss the usage of contraceptives. Poverty as a factor can also lead young people who are trapped in it to end up being victims of sexual trafficking. Lack of information among young people about sex education is still a problem in the country because parents do not have enough time to sit with their children and talk about sex. Sex is still a taboo to be spoken about in most of the villages in the country. This is encouraged or supported by African cultures because there is a huge gap of communication about sexual issues between parents and their children. Teenagers, especially girls, who experience body changes, find it difficult to discuss these changes with their parents (Bezuidenhout 2008).

Teenage pregnancy can be a result of poverty because some are involved sexually with older men in relationships where gifts such as money, clothes, and other goods are exchanged for sexual favors. Teenagers who are born and have grown up into the circle of poverty may end up into prostitution as a way of compensating the salaries of their parents. This may lead to lack of schooling and decrease in employment opportunity. People who are mostly recognized in the labor force, are those who are educated and having relevant skills. Poverty increases the opportunities for sexual abuses where women and children may suffer sexual abuse and unequal power relations if a man is a breadwinner. Individuals may be forced to drop-out of school at a young age to help the family with the income because of poverty. To earn an income they leave their homes to earn a living on the streets as prostitutes. This fuels the high rate of teenage pregnancies and STIs. Cultural beliefs about fertility and religious norms can also be seen as factors that contribute in the pregnancy. In some cultures it is important for young girls to fall pregnant at an early age to prove their fertility prior to marriage. In African cultures it is believed that a boy must go to initiation school to be given lessons about manhood. These lessons may have an unintended purpose to lead them into early sexual activities. Another worrying factor is that of religion. In some churches, sexual education is regarded as taboo. Religious beliefs may perpetuate ignorance on issues relating to sexuality and public disclosure on sex is severely restricted by some religious and social norms (Makiwane 2010).

Family disorganization may prompt family members to engage in deviant acts. When the family is dysfunctional, there is little or no love offered to the offsprings in such households. Youth tend to seek love and affection elsewhere (UNDPA 2013). Teenage pregnancy can also be influenced by the rejection of children by their parents. Parents who fail to provide their children also do contribute to the situation of teenagers falling pregnant at an early age. In this context teenagers may try to attain a sense of self-worth by coming involved in sexual relationship at an early age because this is where they feel loved. Parents play an important role in the lives of their children. A lack of parental support and monitoring is cited as a correlation of adolescent substance abuse and criminal activities as well as engaging in sexual activities at an early age by young people.

The media can also be a contributing factor in early sexual relationships amongst the teenagers from an early age the child is inundated with abundant sex information without the accompanying norms and values (Van Rooyen 1994). Recent reports in 2014 exhibited that television screens display 26 percent percent of explicit sex scenes. This means that young people are exposed to television programs which display too much sex scenes.

It is documented that the teenagers that fall pregnant under the age of 18 are unlikely to return to school because they must look after their babies and then return when the child is old. Teenage pregnancy may lead to illiteracy as this compels the teenage mothers to drop out of school (UNFPA 2013).

Some teenagers may resort to abortion after finding out that they are pregnant. In many cas-

es, teenagers may perform an abortion illegally which may cause medical problems of the pelvic infection, breast cancer and infertility. Illegal abortion does come with complications leading to mortality among young people. Abortion should be available to all pregnant teenagers aged 16 and younger because they are not matured enough to handle responsibilities relating to giving birth. In South Africa, abortion is allowed mostly in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape. However, in many cases, poor black families are unable to follow the required processes for the sanctioning of the abortion.

Statement of the Problem

Teenage pregnancy countrywide is growing rapidly among school-going pupils, and it leads to teenagers dropping out of school to care for their babies. Those who may be unlucky to find someone to look after their babies are likely to leave school forever. Pregnancy among young people in the Matjitjileng village is presently assuming uncontrolled proportions. It seems lack of communication between parents and their children exacerbates this scourge. The residents of this village still have the misconception that it is taboo to talk about sex with young people.

Study Objectives

Based on the problems above, the objectives of the study were set out to determine the following**:**

- The relationship between teenage pregnancy and the child support grants in Matjitjileng village.
- The true extend of unplanned pregnancies among teenagers within the village.
- Strategies that are suitable in the reinforcement of communication between parents and their teenage children in connection with sexual issues including unplanned pregnancy.
- Some of the ways that can be used to prevent teenage pregnancies.

Study Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study revolves around the following:

- The ability to conceive is proof of fertility and a sign of virility in cultures, thus, cultural stereotypes contribute to the high rate of pregnancy.
- Lack of communication between parents and their children about sexual matters lead to unplanned pregnancies.
- Child support grants and young people's rights, contribute to the high incidence of pregnancies among young people
- Having a child makes one to gain respect and a way of seeking a place of belonging among peers.
- Pregnancy is the result of lack of information about contraceptives to the youth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study embarked on a qualitative research method and was exploratory. It sought to gain a deeper insight and/or more information about the problem studied (Bless et al. 2006). The aim of the study was to explore and compare views, attitudes and perceptions of the participants who were attached to teenage pregnancies.

Study Location

The study was conducted in Matjitjileng village. The population of the study comprised of at least 20 young parents. Those young parents were still at school in any level of study as well as those who have dropped out and/or are at home residing in the village.

Sampling

The sample was made out of 20 young parents (both male and female). Two types of sampling procedures such as judgmental and snowball sampling were used (see de Vos et al. 2005).

Biographical Information of the Teenage Mothers

The respondents in this study are unmarried teenage mothers living in Matjitjileng village in Mogalakwena Municipality in the Waterberg District of Limpopo province.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The narratives below present findings from teenage mothers aged between 13 and 19 years from Matjijtileng village.

Sexual Education at Schools

Almost 100 percent of teenagers have lessons about sex at school and 30 percent of these teenage mothers admitted most of the lessons contributed to teenage pregnancy while 70 percent said that the lessons did not have any bearing on their pregnancy. There is substantial support for those girls who have clear educational goals. Those who are achieving well in schools are most likely than their less achieving counterparts, to use effective contraceptives.

Influence from the Media

All of the teenage mothers interviewed said they have access to adult shows on Television. No one is strictly supervising them about which channels to watch. About 80 percent of the teenage mothers said that they were influenced by the media. They resorted to practice what they saw on TV. Only 20 percent indicated that the media does not influence teenage pregnancy. The majority are of the opinion that the media does influence teenage pregnancy because teenagers spend most of their time watching programs containing pornographic material.

Peer Pressure as an Influence on Teenage Pregnancy

About 100 percent of the respondents do have friends who play an important part in their lives. About 80 percent of them indicated that their friends did influence them to have children. Close to 20 percent did not agree with this; saying that it was their decision to have children. Peer pressure can be seen as the main factor that influences teenage pregnancy because most of the teenagers are having friends who may be sexually active. Gows et al. (2008) viewed that, peer pressure is often seen as one of the most influential factors affecting the teenager's sexual decision. Peers take a major and active role in each other's sex education followed by media.

Usage of Contraceptives

Almost 100 percent of the interviewed teenage mothers indicated that they have knowledge about contraceptives. About 80 percent stated that they have been using condoms to prevent pregnancy but they did not continue with this practice because of peer pressure. Some of these interviewees believed that their pregnancies just occurred accidentally while others blamed it on their ignorance. With regard to contraceptives it was found that 80 percent of the teenagers are sexually active and had used contraceptives during their first sexual encounter. This is in line with the argument made by Rathus (2006) who stated that the adolescent stage can be a confusing period in the life of a teenager who is sometimes ignorant and rebellious. This ignorance makes him/her susceptible to many blunders in life.

Parental Guidance as an Influence on Teenage Pregnancy

About 90 percent of teenage mothers indicated that they stay with their parents while 70 percent of them indicated that they did not discuss any sexual matters with their parents. The majority of the respondents (70%) agreed that their parents were very disappointed about them falling pregnant at the early age. Lack of parental guidance does have a major impact on teenage pregnancy because most of the parents do not have time to discuss sexual matters with their children. They have a misconception that topics on sex and relationships are a taboo and should not be discussed with children. Only 30 percent of teenagers have spoken to their parents on issues relating to sexuality, contraception and teenage pregnancy. This is illustrated by Irin (2007) who indicated that most of the teenagers receive limited counseling and guidance on their personal development and behavior from their parental homes.

Overview of the Findings

This research established that the majority of teenage mothers in the study were not able to cope with motherhood and they were depending on their parents to raise their children. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents are having difficulties in coping with motherhood. It also revealed that teenage mothers get help from their mothers and from child support grants to raise their children. The majority of the respondents were not able to provide for their children's needs. The findings confirm the analysis by Lee (2004) who indicated that teenage mothers often had lower earnings, as well as

more social problems throughout their life. The findings further revealed that the majority of teenage mothers are maltreated by the society. Most of them end up friendless and lonely. Nebbitt et al. (2007) confirm that teenage mothers feel they are unsupported in their attempt to cope with child rearing and coping with vicissitudes of life.

Newitt et al.(2000) further indicated that in some cases teenage mothers who do not have chance to go back to school are most likely to get jobs that demand an individual to work hard and earn little income at the end of the month. These jobs usually entail waitressing, domestic work, farm work, and street vending, to mention just but a few.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the data show that there is a correlation between contraceptive use and peer pressure. Teenagers are influenced by their peers and are likely to take advices and information about sex from them rather than from their parents. Lack of parental guidance and family dysfunctionalism also influences teenage pregnancy because most of the parents are reluctant to discuss sexual matters with their children as it is regarded as taboo, while some are absent in the adolescent stage of their children to serve as role models. Teenagers have too much knowledge on contraceptives. It is just that they are ignorant or have no one to encourage them to use contraceptives to prevent unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Workshops should be conducted in communities to support teenage mothers. Such workshops will enable them to express their feelings when raising their children and to talk openly about the challenges that they are facing as teenage mothers. Future research on the comparisons between rural and urban teenage mothers should be done to understand the differences and similaries in as far as teenage motherhood is concerned. Parents play an important role in discussing sexuality with their children as this shows responsibility and love. If parents do not become responsible, children will undoubtedly seek advice somewhere. In most cases, this advice will come from their peers who also need to be nurtured on pertinent issues revolving around sexuality. It,therefore, behooves upon us as adults, to continue offering guidance and some light to our young so that they can grow into responsible citizens and contributors to the socio-economic development in our various communities.

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