



INVESTIGATION OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND ITS EFFECTS AMONG FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Cite this article:

Adisa O. I., Oladimeji O. A., Adeyemi-Gidado S. A., Akomolafe A. A., Ogunbanwo S. T., Adeniran A. A. (2024), Investigation of Teenage Pregnancy and its Effects among Female Secondary School Students. British Journal of Education, Learning and Development Psychology 7(3), 92-101. DOI: 10.52589/BJELDP-FC14W7AG

Manuscript History

Received: 4 May 2024

Accepted: 2 Jul 2024

Published: 9 Aug 2024

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ABSTRACT: *Teenage pregnancy remains a prevalent concern, particularly among young females facing educational and economic disadvantages. This can be attributed to factors such as illiteracy, societal practices, and poverty encouraging girls to enter into sexual relationships at an early age. In Nigeria, more than 23% of females aged between 15-19 years are bearing children. In Nigeria, as in numerous other countries, there is a noticeable increase in teenage sexual activity. The case of underage girls, usually between the ages of thirteen to nineteen years, becoming pregnant is a serious problem that has eaten deep into the fabric of our societies, inhibiting growth in this contemporary period. This study focused on the menace of this act among the teenagers in our society, using a descriptive method to identify basic factors and their effects using primary data. Some of the root causes identified are poverty, peer pressure and media influence while the effects include school drop-out, inadequate care for the child born by teenage mother, health problems and a host of other vices. The study suggested adequate parental care, eradication of street hawking, and inculcation of moral values through religious bodies as ways of reducing teenage pregnancy in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Poverty, Teenage pregnancy, School dropouts, Sexual relationships, Sexually transmitted disease.

INTRODUCTION



Teenage pregnancy remains a prevalent concern, particularly among young females facing educational and economic disadvantages. Across many nations, the issue of teenage pregnancy persists as a pressing challenge. Understanding the complex array of factors contributing to this phenomenon is essential for effective intervention and prevention efforts. In Nigeria, as in numerous other countries, there is a noticeable increase in teenage sexual activity, as documented by Nwosu (2012). This surge in sexual activity among adolescents has led to a rise in out-of-wedlock pregnancies, often resulting in difficult decisions regarding abortion, childbirth, or even tragic outcomes like maternal mortality.

Pregnancy, irrespective of age, profoundly alters one's life trajectory, transcending factors like race, education, and socioeconomic status, as noted by Kost, Henshaw and Carlin (2010). For adolescent girls, pregnancy disrupts not only their present but also jeopardizes their future aspirations and opportunities. While pregnancy is typically welcomed within the context of marriage and maturity, it poses significant challenges when it occurs outside these bounds, particularly during the formative adolescent years. Various factors contribute to the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy, including poverty, exposure to pornography, influence from mass media, and peer pressure, as identified by researchers like Audu (2011), World Health Organisation (2011), and Onuzulike (2010). Peer influence, in particular, holds considerable sway during adolescence, as emphasized by Gyan (2013) and evidenced by studies in Ghana and Kenya (Donatien, 2013). Moreover, the influence of peer behavior, including early motherhood among friends, significantly impacts an individual's likelihood of experiencing teenage pregnancy, as observed in research by Balbo (2014) and Kabiru (2014).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the socio-economic and demographic factors contributing to teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students in Akure South Local Government of Ondo State;
2. To assess the level of awareness and access to comprehensive sex education and reproductive health information among adolescent girls in the study area;
3. To explore the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of teenage girls towards sexual activity, contraception, and pregnancy prevention;
4. To examine the psychosocial and educational consequences of teenage pregnancy on adolescent mothers, their families, and the wider community;
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing support systems, interventions, and policies aimed at addressing teenage pregnancy within Akure South Local Government; and
6. To provide recommendations for the development and implementation of evidence-based strategies, educational programs, and policy initiatives to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and mitigate its adverse effects in the study area.

By achieving these objectives, this study aims to generate valuable insights into the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy in Akure South Local Government, thereby informing targeted interventions and policy recommendations to address this significant public health and social issue.



LITERATURE REVIEW

A crucial aspect contributing to teenage pregnancy is the lack of comprehensive sex education and support systems for adolescents, as highlighted by Kinby (2010). Additionally, exposure to sexual content through various media channels, coupled with societal pressures and vulnerabilities, further exacerbates the risk of early pregnancies among teenagers (L'Eagles et al., 2011; Park, 2012). Furthermore, factors such as alcohol and substance abuse, as well as the exploitation of vulnerable adolescents by adults, play significant roles in precipitating teenage pregnancies, as recognized by the United Nations (2011). The term "teenager" is often synonymous with "puberty," a developmental stage marked by significant physical and psychological changes, as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011). Adolescence represents a critical period of transition from childhood to adulthood, characterized by both social and biological transformations, as described by Turner and Helms (2012). This transitional phase, fraught with challenges and opportunities, demands careful attention and supports to mitigate the risks associated with teenage pregnancy and facilitate healthy development into adulthood.

Various factors have been identified as contributors to teenage pregnancy, as outlined by Audu (2011). These factors encompass a range of influences, including a lack of comprehensive sexual education, exposure to dating violence, family dynamics, the pervasive influence of mass media, religious beliefs, peer pressure, alcohol consumption among teenagers, instances of sexual abuse or rape, childhood environment, and broader societal factors. Adolescents lacking adequate knowledge about sexual health are particularly vulnerable to unintended pregnancies. Often, misinformation obtained from peers, media sources, and popular culture exacerbates this risk, leaving teenagers ill-equipped to make informed and responsible decisions regarding their sexual activity (Okafor, 2010). Despite the myriad risks faced by adolescents, such as unintended pregnancies and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), there remains a notable gap in providing them with comprehensive sexual education to navigate these challenges, as noted by Nwosu (2011) and Briggs (2011). This deficiency within educational systems fosters uncertainty and misunderstanding among young people regarding sexual matters.

Moreover, familial structure plays a significant role, with research by Townsend and Worobey (2011) suggesting that adolescents from broken homes may exhibit more permissive sexual behaviors, potentially leading to teenage pregnancies. Conversely, Newcomer and Udry (2013) found that the presence of both parents confers greater protective influence. Religious affiliation also emerges as a factor influencing teenage sexual behavior, with studies by Audu (2012) indicating that a stronger religious commitment correlates with decreased likelihood of engaging in premarital sex. Additionally, Moilborn (2015) and Audu (2012) highlight the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among adolescents, often driven by financial incentives or peer pressure.

Furthermore, societal pressures to conform and belong, particularly during adolescence, can lead teenagers to engage in sexual activity to assert their maturity or social status, as observed by Kekeis (2010). Such behaviors, fueled by a desire for acceptance or perceived sophistication, heighten the risk of unintended pregnancies (Gordon, 2010).



Tragically, a significant proportion of teenage pregnancies result from sexual abuse or rape, with statistics from the Allian Guttmacher Institute (2011) indicating alarming rates of adult male involvement in these cases. The consequences of unplanned teenage pregnancies extend beyond medical risks, encompassing social and economic burdens for both young mothers and their children. Teenage mothers face numerous challenges, including disrupted education, reduced employment prospects, and financial instability, as highlighted by Furstenberg and Brooks (2012). Children born to teenage mothers also encounter adverse outcomes, including cognitive and behavioral issues, underscoring the intergenerational impact of teenage pregnancy.

The repercussions of teenage pregnancy ripple beyond the immediate health implications, affecting the educational attainment and socio-emotional development of both mothers and their children, as evidenced by research from Hoffort et al. (2012) and Kosha (2012). Addressing the multifaceted causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy is imperative to safeguarding the well-being and future prospects of young individuals and their offspring. The prevalence of teenage pregnancy poses a significant challenge within Akure South Local Government of Ondo State, reflecting a broader global trend. Despite concerted efforts by governmental bodies, educational institutions, religious organizations, and non-governmental entities, the incidence of teenage pregnancy persists and escalates unabated. The problem is particularly acute among adolescent girls aged 13 to 19 years.

Efforts to mitigate this issue have been hindered by persistent barriers, including inadequate access to comprehensive sex education and reproductive health information among teenage girls in the region. The lack of sufficient knowledge regarding sexual health contributes to early sexual activity among adolescents, consequently leading to unintended pregnancies. The escalating rate of teenage pregnancies in Akure South Local Government underscores the urgent need for targeted intervention strategies. Adolescent pregnancy not only jeopardizes the immediate well-being of young mothers but also carries long-term social ramifications, impacting their educational attainment, economic prospects, and overall quality of life.

In light of these challenges, this study aims to investigate the underlying causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students in Akure South Local Government of Ondo State. By identifying the root causes and understanding the multifaceted effects of teenage pregnancy within the local context, this research seeks to inform evidence-based interventions and policy initiatives aimed at addressing this pressing issue.



METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a descriptive survey research design to investigate the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo State. The study population comprised all female students enrolled in public secondary schools within Akure South during the 2021/2022 academic session, totaling 4500 students. A sample size representing 20 percent of the population, amounting to 900 students, was randomly selected using a simple random sampling technique. However, only 800 students completed and returned the questionnaires, constituting the final sample size for analysis. To collect data, the researchers developed an instrument titled "Causes and Effects of Teenage Pregnancy Among Female Students." Prior to administration, the instrument underwent validation to ensure its suitability for the study context. Additionally, reliability testing was conducted through a test-retest method to assess the consistency of the instrument.

Data analysis was conducted using mean statistics to address the research questions, providing insights into the factors contributing to teenage pregnancy and its consequences among adolescent students in Akure South Local Government Area.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What are the causes of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Akure South Local Government?

Table 1: The Causes of Teenage Pregnancy among Females in Secondary School

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SDA	Mean	Decision
1.	Lack of information	485	295	0	0	0	4.24	Accepted
2.	Peer pressure	415	340	0	8	5	4.15	Accepted
3.	Pressure from parents/family on the young girl child...	570	210	0	2	1	4.46	Accepted
4.	Financial/economic factors	627	122	2	3	2	4.68	Accepted
Grand Mean							4.38	Accepted

From table 1 above, it was revealed that all the listed items are causes of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Akure South with financial/economic factors having the highest mean score of 4.38 while peer pressure is having least mean score of 4.15. The average mean of 4.38 was obtained this implies that all the listed items are causes of teenage pregnancies among secondary school students in Akure South Local Government.



Research Question 2

Table 2: The Effects of Teenage Pregnancy among Secondary School Students in Local Government

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SDA	Mean	Decision
5.	Retards educational attainment of teenage mothers	370	195	37	16	13	4.47	Accepted
6.	Teenage abortion/lack of experience to support the...	554	127	0	0	0	4.81	Accepted
7.	Health risk during and after childbirth	400	133	0	23	20	4.18	Accepted
8.	Isolation and rejection by parents and peers	476	178	0	16	1	4.47	Accepted
Grand Mean							4.48	Accepted

Results in table 2 above show that all the listed items are the effects of teenage pregnancy among secondary schools in Akure South with teenage abortion/lack of experience to support the child having the highest mean score of 4.81 while health risk during and after child birth has the least mean score of 4.18. The average mean of 4.48 was thus obtained; this implies that all the listed items have a strong effect on teenage pregnancies among secondary schools in Akure Local government Area.

Research Question 3

What strategies can be implemented to mitigate the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Akure South Local Government?

Table 3: Causes and Effects of Teenage Pregnancy among Secondary School Students in Akure South Local Government

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SDA	Mean	Decision
9.	Adequate information and knowledge for the teenage...	350	187	36	14	11	4.58	Accepted
10.	Provide love and support for the teenage girls	434	161	0	2	1	4.41	Accepted
11.	Eradicating under-aged marriage and teaching of sex...	418	163	12	9	4	4.62	Accepted
12.	Security and avoidance of bad friends	357	268	12	6	2	4.38	Accepted
Average Mean							4.50	Accepted

Results in table 3 above show that all the listed items are strategies to curb causes and effect of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Akure South Local government with eradicating under-aged marriage and teaching sex education having the mean of 4.62



while adequate information and knowledge for the teenage girls have the mean score of 4.58, security and avoidance of bad friends have the lowest mean score of 4.38. The average mean of 4.50 was obtained; this implies that all the listed items are strategies to curb causes and effects of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Akure South Local Government Area.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: Causes of Teenage Pregnancy

The findings from Table One indicate that the respondents accepted all listed variables as causes of teenage pregnancy. These variables include lack of information, peer pressure, family pressure, and economic factors. This aligns with the study by Audu (2011), which identifies causes of teenage pregnancy such as lack of knowledge, dating violence, family factors, mass media influence, religious beliefs, peer pressure, teenage drinking, sexual abuse or rape, childhood environment, and general factors. Additionally, Kinby (2010) emphasizes that teenage pregnancy victims often lack proper education on safe sex from parents, schools, or development agencies, leaving them unprepared to handle peer pressure leading to premature sexual activity. Carrisra et al. (2012) also corroborate these findings, highlighting lack of information, financial/economic factors, and peer pressure as significant causes of teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students.

Research Question Two: Effects of Teenage Pregnancy

The results from Table Two show that respondents acknowledged the listed items such as retarded education, teenage abortion, isolation, and rejection as effects of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students. This finding is consistent with Kosha (2012), who states that teenage pregnancy can lead to incomplete education, unemployment, and various traumas. The lack of sexual education often results in teenage abortions, as teens realize they are unprepared for parenthood and still have many aspirations. Mamach et al. (2013) highlighted that maternal and prenatal health concerns are particularly significant among teenage mothers, with higher incidences of premature birth and low birth weight. Fadeyi et al. (2012) further support these observations, noting that teenage pregnancy can lead to educational setbacks, teenage abortion, health risks during and after childbirth, and isolation and rejection by family and friends.

Research Question Three: Strategies to Curb Teenage Pregnancy

The discussion on strategies to curb teenage pregnancy among female students in secondary school aligns with Nwosu (2011), who suggests that providing adequate information and knowledge to teenage girls, offering love, support, and security, avoiding bad company, and eradicating underage marriage are effective strategies. These measures aim to address the root causes and mitigate the effects of teenage pregnancy, thereby supporting the well-being and future prospects of teenage girls.



CONCLUSION

Teenage pregnancy significantly disrupts the education and future plans of teenagers. Teenage mothers often attend school irregularly or drop out entirely, leading to lower educational attainment and limited career opportunities. This issue extends beyond individual impacts, becoming a broader social and economic concern. It contributes to higher unemployment rates, increased poverty, and psychosocial stigma, especially when the pregnancy occurs outside of wedlock. The strong correlation between early childbearing and failure to complete secondary school underscores the long-term consequences for young mothers, limiting their potential for professional and personal growth.

Educational Implications of Findings

Teachers play a crucial role in enhancing their students' understanding of self-actualization and self-discipline. By providing adequate information, teachers help students grasp the causes and consequences of teenage pregnancy. Additionally, teachers are uniquely positioned to detect and understand student behavior, often better than the students themselves. This deep understanding enables teachers to effectively communicate important information, thereby supporting students' educational attainment and future prospects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the data and the resulting evidence obtained from the research, the following recommendations are provided:

- (i) Launch sensitization initiatives by appropriate institutions to educate the population on the effects of adolescent pregnancies.
- (ii) Provide psychological assistance to secondary students to help them cope with peer pressure and social stigma.
- (iii) Implement contraceptive training programs in high schools.
- (iv) The government and non-governmental organizations should promote quality health care services for adolescents.
- (v) Make contraceptive services affordable and readily available through government and NGO efforts.
- (vi) Develop policies that allow teenage mothers to continue their high school education.



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