

**EFFECT OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY ON THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERSERVED FEMALES IN FCT, NIGERIA**

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## ABSTRACT

*Teenage pregnancy in the society is growing at alarming rate due to lack of parental care and guidance, corrupt society, demand for sexual gratifications, lack of sustainable menstrual products, inadequate information on sex education, youth's rapid physical development and environmental challenges. However, the effects of these factors on teenagers were left out. This study therefore assessed the perceived effect of teenage pregnancy on socio-psychological development of female rural youths in Federal Capital Territory (FCT) during our Project Education and Reproductive Health implemented across the 6 Area Councils In FCT Nigeria funded by NextWorldNow Community Investment by assessing their awareness, knowledge and causes of teenage pregnancy.*

*Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 243 respondents from the selected 12 underserved and internally displaced persons camps reached during the project. Data collected were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics at 0.05 level of significant.*

*Findings indicated that majority (44.1%) of the respondents were between 13-17 years of age, Christians (52.4%) and came from a nuclear family (49.0%). Also, rape, pressure from friends, poor educational status, urge to have sex, access to pornographic films and pictures and poor parental guidance were major causes of teenage pregnancy. The study further showed that majority of the participants indicated not having knowledge about their fertility window period (71.3%), knowing at least two preventive methods of teenage pregnancy (53.8%) and have never used contraceptive (70.6%).*

*The study concludes that significant relationship exists between perceived effect of teenage pregnancy on Psycho-social development of female youth and their age, religion and level of awareness on teenage pregnancy.*

*The study recommended that the inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum, proper knowledge and use of contraceptives, enactment of strict laws against teenage abuse (home and public), establishment of recreational facilities and vocational studies centres, better support for teenage mothers and healthy group activities should be promoted in schools and other social settings.*

**Key words:** Teenage, pregnancy, social, psychological, development

**Word count:** 31

## Introduction

A substantial proportion of the members of every society in the developmental stage is termed “adolescents” or otherwise called teenagers. It is a transitional period between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood or maturity. Occurring roughly between the ages of 13-19, it is a period in every person's life when all seems to be confused, when nothing is good in the eyes of the perceiving adolescent; when for a girl, she is on “means” land (Ani 2014), when roles are not clearly defined and a period when a girl starts to menstruate.

According to Ude (2014), he describes this period as a period of

body contour and stature resembling that of an adult mate while adults customarily refer to them as children. The Nigerian adolescents now insist on being treated as adults while parents may dismiss them as being too young to live alone. The teenager is therefore caught in a field of overlapping forces and expectation all of which constitute the real test for individual identity. Pregnancy that happens at such frail age is predominantly, due to lack of sex education therefore leading to teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy is defined as an unintended pregnancy during adolescence. According to Olotu (2006), adolescent marks the onset of sexual maturity. It is period for them to show interest to the opposite sex and curiosity about the

much topics of sex. Irresponsible and careless approach of mass media has also contributed in sex occurrence among teenagers. Kassa et al., (2018) opines that unrestricted interaction with the opposite sex ignite the sparks of lust in teenagers very easily, especially when alcohol and drugs are involved. Also, high rate of teenage pregnancy is usually associated with such conditions of under education, low income levels and childhood environment, because of negligence towards birth control. Sexual abuse of teenage girls is also one of the most disgraceful causes of teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy is a serious issue that many countries are facing today. The rate of teenage mother is seriously increasing. There are also factors that surely increase the issue of teenage pregnancy. During the project Education and Reproductive Health girls from the communities and internally displaced persons camp visited had a high rate and prevalence of teenage pregnancy, while some had already had multiple children, so was pregnant during our visit and project implementation. Teenage mothers are not mature to meet emotional and social needs of children. They may feel isolated and deserted by their friends who continued with their education, contributing to psychological blinks. According to Ani (2014), teenage pregnancy could lead to incomplete education, unemployment and other numerous emotional traumas. Early motherhood had been linked to affect the psychological development of the child adversely. Aside psychological effects, physical risks cannot be ignored. Teenage girls' body is not as developed as adult women in term of childbearing. Thus, they often face certain complications during pregnancy.

A holistic approach is required to address teenage pregnancy. This means not only focusing on changing the behaviour of girls but also addressing the underlying reasons of adolescent pregnancy (poverty, gender inequality, social pressures and coercion) and its resultant effects on teenage girls. It is in light of the foregoing that the study was carried out to examine the perceived effects of teenage pregnancy on psycho-social development of female youths specifically in FCT, Nigeria. In an attempt to provide answer to the research problem, the study posed the following research questions:

#### **Research Questions**

- i. What are the personal characteristics of the youths in the study area?
- ii. What are the causes of teenage pregnancy?
- ii. What is the level of awareness on teenage pregnancy among youths?
- v. How did the youth perceived their parents/ teachers to be knowledgeable about sex education
- v. What are the perceived solutions to teenage pregnancy?

## **Causes of Teenage Pregnancy**

### **Poor sex education**

Participants indicated the lack of adequate knowledge about the functioning of their bodies, handling of emotions and managing of the relationships. The lack of sex education whether in schools or by parents or otherwise causes teen pregnancy. Teenagers who are uneducated about sex are more likely to have an unintended pregnancy. Some teenagers do not fully understand the biological and emotional aspects associated with having sex. These teenagers may get incorrect information from their friends, sitcom and/or movies. Many times, they don't have the knowledge needed to make informed and responsible decision about whether or not to engage in sexual activity that can alter their life. Ignorance is the chief cause of teenage pregnancy.

### **Family structure**

Family structure is considered a major factor contributing to the adolescent pregnancy; Darroch (2016) found out that most of the adolescent females lived in fairly unstable family situations and as such many became sexually intimate for a sense of comfort. Parental rejection or a lack of warmth, affection or love; which also lead to an adolescent to seek relationships outside the family to improve their self-esteem. The relation between the family structure and youth sexual behavior has been attributed to divorced parents or single parents more permissive sexual attitudes and values, inadequate parental supervision and monitoring and the parent's own dating behavior.

**Peer pressure:** During teenage age, teenagers often feel pressure to make friends and fit in their peers. Many times, these teenagers let their friends influence their decision about having sex even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. Some teenagers have sex as a way to appear cool and sophisticated. Most times, peer group pressure tends to make the teenage girls to see themselves as been less than a woman and a fool, if they are yet to have a boyfriend. Some young girls have been deceived to believe that is healthy for them to get pregnant before marriage, and that if teenage girls get pregnant at the age of 12-14 years, it would make their womb open for more pregnancies later in future regrettably, the reverse has always been the case.

**Lack of Parental guidance and supervision:** Another major cause of teenage pregnancy is lack of communication between a child and her parents. teenage 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 concerning sex. Therefore, parents should be forthcoming and open with their children about sex. According to the website parent dish, when a teenager does not feel that she can talk to her parents about sex either because they are not around, she will more likely turn to her friends for directions on whether or not to have sex resulting in misinformation and possible teenage pregnancy.

**Poor economic background:** Teenage girls who belong to the poor families are more likely to become pregnant. Researchers have found that even in the developed countries, teenage pregnancy occurs most commonly among the deprived sections. The flair for material wealth encourages teenagers from poor families to associate themselves with men who are able to provide their basic needs and fashionable dresses. Sometimes young girls are forced to engage with sex as a means of paying debts which parents borrow from and promise to pay back or give their daughters which are under thirteen or fourteen years to marriage in most cases this is done without the consent of the child, while some girls because of lack of sustainable menstrual products. Some parents are so poor that they cannot afford to pay for the education of their children. These teenagers are sometimes encouraged by their parents to engage in such unholy acts spending their early life with man because of the economic level of the family. It is uncommon to see these young teenagers desert their homes for men only to get unpleasant consequences such as unplanned and unwanted pregnancy and rejection of these teenagers by these men after impregnating them.

**Pornographic films and pictures:** Teenagers who are exposed to pornographic films are more likely to try out what they have heard and seen without knowing the consequence. These teenagers are surrounded by sexual images and messages which imply that sexual activity is a norm, they are exposed to all kinds of permissive behaviours, they lack knowledge about contraception STD/HIV'S, they are uncertain of what to expect from a relationship, but because they have access to pornographic films and pictures they practice what they see.

**Sexual abuse:** Females who were sexually abused as children were more likely to become pregnant during their teen years and usually become pregnant at an early age. During our project Education and Reproductive Health 60% of the girls met were pregnant or have had multiple children before the age of 20 years, this was associated with things like gang activity, coercion, and substance abuse. It is further indicated that 40% of the girls in FCT said that their first sexual experience was forced or under threat of force. During our interview session it was revealed that the median age of the very first intercourse was 16 years among the participants.

**Barriers to Adolescent Contraception Use:** According WHO (2020) teenagers are reluctant to visit clinics for contraception because their anonymity is not guaranteed; a common concern is that they cannot visit family planning because they may come across their relatives. Also, transport remains a hurdle to the accessibility of the health and youth centers. Also, nurse's attitudes were a major barrier to teenagers getting hold of the contraception; the nurses are uncomfortable providing teenagers with contraception as they feel that they should not be having sex. They respond to contraception request by teenagers in a manner that is judgmental and unhelpful. The study also found out that there are social pressures that prevent young women from using contraception; as such girls felt that they would only be accepted as women once they have proved their fertility.

**Cultural factors:** Some African societies are pressured to have children. There is an element of importance placed on fertility and procreation such that young women may be labeled barren if they do not give birth. Child of birth is regarded as a rite of passage as such raises the status of a young woman.

**Competition (I want to be like others):** In this case the girls want everything that her friend has. Every reigning thing she wants to have and if her parents can't afford all, she runs out to a boy that can afford all that she needs and before she knows it she is pregnant (backyard pregnancy).

**Poor Understanding of the Menstrual Cycle and Lack of Sustainable Menstrual Products:** A girl with irregular menstrual cycle cannot identify her "free and unfree" periods even regular ovulation period could be naturally be detected to certain degree. Also, some of the girls indicated that they sometimes get involved with sex for pads, so they can afford menstrual products and be able to avoid getting stained.

**Indecent Dressing:** Indecent dressing that leads to teenage pregnancy is about 10% since any boy who comes across your way want to have sex with them because of the passion of sex they have whenever they see them. And immediately they take advantage of them, they sometimes run away or gossip about them around their community.

**Exploitation by older Men:** This is another major factor that contributes to pregnancy among the teenagers. Those girls who date older men were more likely to become pregnant they attain womanhood. Rape, sexual exploitations etc. also takes place that leads to unwanted pregnancy among teenage girls.

**Advertisement:** Spontaneous curiosity towards sex and a desire to taste it in the proximity of some boys exhibit the teenage pregnancy. Freedom to interact with boys and sleep with them for several hours in private houses has got to result into teenage pregnancy.

**Some girls use it to hold down the man they love to marry.**

### **Family types that influence teenage pregnancy**

The home offers the first opportunity for the child to be good or bad. That is to say that the training of the individual depends on the family. Anywhere the child may go, the society knows the type of family the child comes from through his behaviour and character because it is the family that makes up the society. But it is sad to say today that the family is changing, not for better.

### **The society's attitude towards teenage pregnancy**

In Nigeria, as in other countries the issue of sexuality still remains a taboo. Despite this, there are increasing numbers of sexual activities reported among teenagers. Teenage pregnancy is been viewed by some persons in the society as a sign of fruitfulness but some other persons based on their position in the society or their religion (Christianity) see it as image depreciating to their personality and the family name in general. Globally people regard teenager's pregnancy as a social and moral problem which often results in shame and distress to the teenager, discrimination against her illegitimate child and added responsibility and expenses to the teenager's family and society in general. It is usually frowned at by members of the society and it normally result into indifferent attitude form the society to the pregnancy person in question but also make pregnancy an unhappy thing for an unmarried girl.

### **Interventions to Reduce Teenage Fertility**

Ezugwu (2014) indicate that several studies on teenage pregnancy suggest that there is no universal effective intervention; each community should customize their own interventions according to their circumstances and environment. A broad intersectoral strategy is needed to prevent teenage pregnancy and is crucial that all governments departments think health when developing the policy that may impact on teenage pregnancy. Support of the idea by pointing out that the prevention strategies need to be multifaceted and multisectoral including family, government, non-governmental organization, business, community, and education interventions. Messages need to be contextualized for age and culture and use all media and platforms without apportion judgment.

### **Education is fundamental**

The Medical Research Council proposes the introduction of sex education at schools before the age of 14 when young people become sexually active; which include information for teenagers

about avoiding sexually transmitted infections, in depth information on contraception and related side effects, management thereof and training of nurses so that they can deal with teenagers who need contraception with compassion and provide information and education campaigns necessary to remove the stigma of the teenage sexuality so that girls are able to ask for the contraception (IRIN Africa, 2014).

Sully (2020) argues that better sex education, family planning and access to contraception alone will not remedy the adolescent pregnancy, particularly high-risk adolescents. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a rights-based approach that seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitude and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality, physically and emotionally, individually and in relationship.

Shiffman (2018) point out that two reproductive health NGO – Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria and the Society for Family Health, conducted outreach on sexuality education topics in schools.

### **Effect of teenage pregnancy**

A lot of problems are associated with teenage pregnancy. These problems are discussed under three broad headings namely:

- Health effects
- Social effects
- Psychological effects

### **Strategies for curbing teenage pregnancy**

**Sex Education:** This should be intensified in schools, churches, homes and other social settings. The intensification of sex education is important because the programme guides leads, protects and preserves teenagers from unhealthy or risky sexual behaviours, practices and attendant consequences. The programme also educates them on their body physiology and the gains and losses which they will experience through premarital sexual intercourse.

**Voluntarily community service:** This strategy focuses on engaging teenagers in volunteer community service and stimulating discussions that help them to appreciate the lessons they learn through volunteerism. This could be done through Teen Outreach Programme, organized by Non-Governmental Organizations like centre4teens.

**Promotion of abstinence (zip-up):** Abstinence is a self-enforced restraint from indulging in bodily activities that are widely experienced as giving pleasure such as religion centers. Most frequently, the term refers to sexual abstinence. The most effective way of preventing teenage pregnancy was by abstinence because

it has no undesirable side effects and is not expensive. The reasons for the preference of abstinence over other methods of preventing unwanted pregnancy include:

- a.) It reduces the risk of cervical cancer
- b.) It reduces the degree of emotional trauma if a relationship breaks up
- c.) It liberates one from the sense of guilt and shame which result from premarital sex.
- d.) It can enable one to become economically independent before becoming a father or mother.
- e.) It helps one to be academically focused
- f.) It shields one from ST's and STDs.

**Life Options:** This calls for the motivation of teenagers to be futuristic in their outlook. Their ability to foresee better or bright opportunities which the future holds for them will assist them to delay gratification of their sexual desires and strive for excellence and self-actualization and provide psychosocial support and counseling for teenagers at risk.

**Healthy group activities:** These should be promoted in schools and other social settings. In these settings, creative discussion and role playing should be employed to help teenagers confront sexual situations which are similar to those they will encounter in the large society. It will also help them to increase their knowledge of human behaviour especially with regard to human motivation, changes and attitudes as a result of some forces and development of social skills to implement the right direction. Also, by introducing age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education in these group activities.

**Value re-orientation programme:** This should be vigorously pursued by various institutions in the society. The aim of this programme will be to restore the good moral values of yester-years. These good and previously cherished values were responsible for the low rate of teenage pregnancy that was recorded in those good old years.

**Care and love by parents:** Parents should try as much as possible to love their children especially the adolescents so that they will not find it elsewhere. Parents should also care for their children by providing them with their basic needs so they will not be lured into sexual activities by older men because of the gift items they get from them and undermining the consequences of such unholy act.

**Law Enforcement and Policy Implementation:** Strengthen the implementation of the Child Rights Act and related policies protecting minors from sexual abuse, exploitation and forced marriage. By ensuring perpetrators of statutory rape and abuse

face justice without interference from families or cultural practices. All these interventions are to achieved the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being); goal 4 (Quality Education); goal 5 (Gender Equality); goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

### Validity of research instrument

To ensure a high level of validity, face validity was established. The project lead and monitoring and evaluation teams from Centre for Teens Health and Development (centre4teens) experts in the field were given opportunity to closely peruse the interview schedule. Their corrections (face and content validity) were considered in the drafting of the final copy of the instrument which was used for data collection.

## Results and Discussion

### Section One: Descriptive analysis

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by their personal characteristics (n=243)

<i>Selected Personal Characteristics of Participants</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age (in years; x=16)		
13 – 15	98	40.33
16 – 18	82	33.74
19 – 21	63	25.93
Religion:		
Christianity	93	38.27
Islam	99	40.74
Others	51	20.99
Household size (x=6)		
2 – 4 persons	80	32.92
5 – 7 persons	100	41.15
8 – 10 persons	62	25.51
11 – 13 persons	1	0.41
Family Structure		
Nuclear	70	28.81
Polygamous	100	41.15
Single Parenthood	73	30.04
Social Group memberships		
Yes	68	27.98
No	175	72.02

Source: Field Survey, 2025

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- a) Significant relationship exists between teenagers age, and psycho-social effects of teenage pregnancy.
- b) Specifically, significant relationship exists between the respondents religion and psycho-social effects of teenage pregnancy
- c) No relationship exists between the causes of teenage pregnancy and its psycho-social effects on rural teenagers.
- d) Specifically, significant relationship exists between level of awareness on teenage pregnancy and its psycho-social effects on rural teenagers.

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