

Teenage Pregnancy and Education in Nigeria: A Philo-Sociological Management Strategy

Ekeng Nyong Ekefre, PhD

*Department Of Educational Foundations And Administration
Faculty Of Education, Cross River University Of Technology, Calabaar – Nigeria*

Samuel Asuquo Ekanem, PhD, LLB (Hons), BI

*Department Of Educational Foundations And Administration
Faculty Of Education, Cross River University Of Technology, Calabaar – Nigeria
EMail: samaekanam@yahoo.co.uk*

Esien, Obia Ekpenyong E., PhD

*Department Of Educational Foundations And Administration
Faculty Of Education, Cross River University Of Technology, Calabaar – Nigeria*

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Abstract

The focus of the 2013 World Population Day on July 11, was on “Adolescent Pregnancy”. This indicates that teenage pregnancy has global effects and implications. It has become a global problem that need be tackled through multi-sectoral approach. However, in Nigeria statistics reveals that this is a serious problem to our development as a country. This is because the relationship between teenage pregnancy and education goes in both directions. Teenagers who become pregnant are more likely to drop out of school and the teenagers that drop out of school are more likely to become pregnant. Again, the children of teen mothers are less likely to graduate from tertiary institutions (post-secondary institutions) than the children of those whose parents were older as at the time of childbearing. However, education in several ways can assist in the reduction of teenage pregnancy. This argument is anchored on the logic that education can confront and curb the various socio-economic problems that produce the fertile social conditions that aid teenage pregnancy. The paper advocates that a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach should be adopted in tackling this social and ethical menace that have the potentials to disrupt and distort the nation’s developmental frameworks.

1. Introduction

To become a parent, at any given age have the capacity of generating a life – altering experience. Irrespective of race, education and socio-economic status motherhood and fatherhood both places high demands on one’s life that were not there before the birth of a child. Indeed, becoming a parent comes with several responsibilities, and when people of school ages (students) become parents, the new responsibilities can be very over-helming and daunting. And for teenage parents that lack the support of their own parent, this experience can be more challenging and horrifying as they crave and seek support in adult –oriented systems in which even the older parents may find rather difficult to cope.

Teenage parents or students with children, as they are usually referred to in some literature, are parents that fall within the age bracket of thirteen (13) and nineteen (19). More often, these students drop out of school due mostly to pressures they experience, which include stigmatization that is limited with early parenting; isolation from their peers; and lack of the necessary support from their family, friends, schools, social service agencies and other organizations. These factors emerge because of the cultural and normative values that teenage pregnancy tends to breach. According to the latest statistics, Nigeria has the highest teenage birth rate in Africa and the Niger Delta region seem to be the highest in the country (Channels Television, 15th July, 2013). To find research materials on this topic, we employed two basic methods which are Education are textbooks and Internet (using the Google search).A variety of terms were used either alone or in combination, and these include teenage parents, teenage pregnancy, student parents, school –age parents, adolescent parents, school-based child care, pregnancy, student achievement, drop-outs, and graduation. The literature showed through these searches focus more and basically on the educational attainment of adolescent mothers and the means through which the negative consequences of early parenthood can be curbed or reduced. There was no prevalent

on adolescent fathers in the literature. This suggests that the negative consequences of early parenthood have more impact on the teenage mothers. Also, the African factor of male chauvinism could be inferred here.

Teenage pregnancies have become a public health issue due to the observed negative impacts on prenatal outcomes and long term morbidity. Also, the unfriendly and uncaring dispositions of nurses and those in the medical institutions and facilities who are supposed to provide care create additional horror and hurdles to the teenage mothers.

Furthermore, there are several other socio-economic factors that determine the rate of teenage pregnancies in different countries of the world. In Nigeria and other developing countries, poverty, illiteracy and lack of sex and sexuality education tend to be glaring indicators that determine the rate of teenage pregnancies. In this paper therefore, effort is made to show that there are social and ethical variables that could help provide solution to the problem of teenage pregnancy.

2. Factors that Necessitate Teenage Pregnancy

It is estimated that about 16 million adolescent girls give birth every year mostly in low and middle income countries. In addition to this, an estimated three (3) million girls aged 15-19 engage in unsafe abortions every year. Also, in most developing countries there are complications from pregnancies that lead to the death of most girls aged 15-19 years of age. Still births and new born deaths amount to about 50% higher among infants of adolescent mothers than among infants of women aged 20-29 years. There is also the issue of low birth weight of infants of adolescent mothers.

These facts based on available statistics are anchored on certain socio-economic factors. For instance, in many societies, girls are often under intense pressure to marry and bear children early and this may be due to the fact that they have limited educational and employment prospects (Beutel, 2000).

Also, there is the issue of poverty as a major factor as can be seen in low and middle income countries where over thirty (30%) percent of girls marry before they are eighteen (18) years of age, and fourteen (14%) percent before they are fifteen (15) years. Moreover, these married adolescents are expected to become pregnant and give birth according to social and cultural norms. So, there is a clear link between poverty and early pregnancy (Wikipedia, 2013).

However, education according to Brosh and Evans (2007) on the other hand, can be a major protective factor for early pregnancy as the more years of schooling will imply fewer early pregnancies. It is a fact that birth rates among women with low education are higher than those with secondary or tertiary education.

Another factor that increases early pregnancies is the fact that most adolescents do not know how to avoid getting pregnant, or are unable to obtain contraceptives. Even where contraceptives are widely available sexually active adolescents, hardly and rarely use contraceptives than adults. The reason for this is because adolescents can hardly afford the cost of contraceptives. It is due to the indices of poverty that made it possible for adolescents who are married or in partnerships in Latin America, Europe and Asia who use contraceptives to be only 42 – 68%, while in Africa the rate is between 3-49%. This statistical disparity shows clearly the role of poverty (Mollborn, 2007 and Melhodo 2007).

Again, there is the issue of lack of sex and sexuality education in several countries especially in Nigeria. Most parents in Nigeria due to cultural and traditional norms find it difficult to engage or involve their children who are of adolescent age in sex and sexuality education. These cultural and traditional norms are so strong that the children may not be able to know the proper names of their sex or reproductive organs. This lack of proper knowledge is due to cultural inhibitions whereby the parents use the word "pepe" to refer to male and female sex organs. Often times, the knowledge of the children about the utility of their sex organs is limited to urination. This assertion is graphically captured by Kohler, Manhart and Laffety (2008) when they opine that "A global coverage measure related to sexuality education estimates that only 36% of young men and 24% of young women aged 15 – 24 in low and middle income countries have comprehensive and correct knowledge of how to prevent HIV"

In certain situations, adolescent girls may not be able to resist or refuse sex. This is due to the widespread of sexual violence, and this mostly affects adolescent girls in Nigeria. There have been cases of rape which is becoming very rampant. This is further compounded by the involvement of some fathers and advanced adults in the inducement of adolescent girls where the "baby factory" in Imo, Enugu and Anambra states illustrates the weakness of the adolescent girls to refuse sex (Channels Television, 15th July, 2013). Indeed, about one third of girls in some countries testify that their first sexual encounter was through coercion (Elfenbein and Felice, 2011).

Wikipedia reports that teenage pregnancies are usually linked with several issues that include "lower educational levels, higher rates of poverty and other poorer life outcome in children of teenage mothers". It is also argued that teenage pregnancy in developed countries is often outside of marriage and this comes with certain social stigma in many communities and cultures (Wikipedia, 2013)

There is equally the role drugs and alcohol use play in the increase of teenage pregnancy. Drugs and alcohol that removes inhibition can easily trigger and encourage unintended sexual activity. It has not been empirically and comprehensively established that the drugs themselves directly influence teenager to indulge in risky behavior, or whether is it true that teenager that engage in drugs use are more likely to indulge in sexual activity. This is premised on the logic that correlation does not imply causation. The drugs that have the strongest evidence linkage with teenage pregnancy include "alcohol, ecstasy, cannabis, and amphetamines." The drugs that have the least evidence to established early linkage with pregnancy are "opiods, like heroin, morphine, and oxycodone" and it is known to have the capacity to reduce libido (Abalkhail 1995).

Age discrepancy in relationship according to *Family Research Council* is a vital factor in teenage pregnancy. Teenage girls in relationship with older boys, and specifically with Adult men are mostly to become pregnant than the teenage girls in relationships with boys that are of the same age with them, this group of teenage girls are likely to carry the baby to terms instead of having abortion. This fact is confirmed by the review carried out in California's 1999 Vital Statistic, which showed that men older than high school age fathered 77% of all births to high school aged girls (16-18), and 51% of birth to junior high school aged girls (15 and younger) (William and Sadler, 2001). It is also discovered that men over 25 years fathered twice as many children of teenage mother than boys that are under the age of 18. Men who are over 20 years fathered five times as many children of junior high school-aged girls as did junior high school-aged boys (Wikipedia, 2013)

Furthermore, in 1992 Washington State study of 353 adolescent mothers showed that 62% of these mothers have the history of being raped or sexually molested or abused by men who aged average 27 years. The same study revealed that, comparatively non-abused mothers and abused adolescent mothers initiated sex earlier and had sex with much older men (partners) and also engaged in riskier, more frequent, and promiscuous sex. The Population Reference Bureau and the Nation Center for Health Statistics revealed that about two-third of children that are born to teenage girls in the United States are fathered by Adult men that are 20 years and older (Saewyc, Magee and Pettingel, 2004 and Wikipedia, 2013). It can be argued rightly that this statistics is not significantly different in Nigeria but that the age bracket here could be said to be between 25-42 years.

There is a strong link between sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy. This can be seen in studies in South Africa that indicated that 11-20% of pregnancies in teenagers are direct consequences of rape, while about 66% of teenage mothers had unwanted sexual experience before pregnancy. It has been established that at 15, most of the first-time sexual experience among females are reported to be non-voluntary, as can be seen in the Guttmacher Institute Study that found that 60% of girls that had sex before they are 15 did so through coercion by male that were averagely 6 years older than the girls (Wikipedia 2013 and Rosen; 2004).

The environment in which the child grows up is considered to be a factor that contributes to teenage pregnancy. Women and girls that are often expose to abuse, domestic violence and family strife are most likely to become pregnant as teenagers, and the risk of getting pregnant as a teenager increases with several adverse childhood experiences. (Seitz and Apfel, 1999).

Studies have shown that one-third of teenage pregnancies would have been prevented through the elimination of exposure of the teenage girls to abuse, violence and family strife. This is because "family dysfunction has enduring and unfavourable health consequences for women during the adolescent years, the child bearing and beyond". It has been argued that when the family environment does not include adverse childhood experiences, becoming pregnant as an adolescent does not appear to raise the likelihood of long-term, negative psychological consequence (Dietz and Marks, 2001; Elis, 2003 and Quigley, 2003).

Studies have been carried out to show that girls whose fathers abandoned the family early in their lives had the highest rate of early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy. Girls that the father left them in a later age had a lower rate of sexual activity, and the lowest rates are found among girls whose fathers were with them throughout their childhood (Elis, 2003 and Quigley, 2003).

There is also the influence of media as a factor for teenage pregnancy. This is so because adolescent based on 2006 study, whose were exposed to sexuality in the media are also likely to engage in sexual activity themselves. This findings is collaborated by **Time** when it reports that "teens exposed to the most sexual content on TV are twice as likely as teens watching less of this material to become pregnant before they reach age 20" (Engle, Brown, and Kenneary, 2006 and Park, November 3, 2006). It can be added here that the Internet has contributed enormously to the exposure of teenage girls to sexual activity through pornographic sites such as the playboy and hard core pornography.

3. Education to the Recue

Biblically, it is established that the people perished for lack of knowledge, but Socrates in order to help humanity escape this calamity, inspires men to strive for knowledge, since according to him "knowledge is a virtue, while ignorance is a vice". It is on the basis of this that education can be seen as a veritable tool towards curbing the menace of teenage pregnancy.

Strategically, education occupies the minds of the teenage girls as it makes them busy. It has been shown through studies that teenage girls who are in school rarely get pregnant. The teenage girls who are prone to early pregnancies and sexual experiences are those who are not in school. This is because an idle mind is the devil's workshop.

Education also assists in exposing the teenage girls to the reproductive system. This helps them to know how their body functions and why they should not get involve in sexual activity.

It is through education that the teenage girls can be exposed to sex and sexuality education. Knowledge of sex and sexuality education can help prevent early pregnancy among the teenage girls. This is because, the school in a way provides the requisite knowledge for the teenage girls to make an informed decision about sexual experience. With their knowledge of sex and sexuality they become aware of the advantages and disadvantages of indulging in sexual activities.

Education as a process of the transmission of mores and cultural norms of the people from one generation to the other can become an effective strategy of inculcating in our teenage girls the value of sexual chastity.

Also, a comprehensive sex and sexuality education can be planned and implemented within the school system. This can be achieved through the study of biology, social studies and moral education.

Through the educative process, the teenage girls can be exposed to the use of contraceptives and other natural processes like the Billing Method advocated by the Catholic Church.

Again, education can equip the teenage girl's mind for developmental activities that transcend a sex symbol mentality that will end up getting married, pregnant and cook for the men in the kitchen as propagated by some cultures.

Furthermore, education can expose the teenage girls to their rights as citizens, which the law is there to protect. So, the educative process can embolden them to expose and report any form of sexual abuse, molestation and rape to the appropriate authority for remedial steps to stop, prevent and protect the teenage girls from any of this social dangers.

4. Revelations of Literature

There are several findings from literature and these include:

1. Adolescent parents and their children are both at very critical points in their lives when their life courses can be shaped and organized toward development that is healthy, stable and productive or toward abject poverty and dependence. So, every effort must be made to salvage these young families through the provision of positive services of support that can engineer their growth in life (Stephen, Wolf and Balten, 2003).
2. When teenage parents cannot get the support and resources they require, there could be several detrimental consequences. In 2002, it was discovered in the United States that only 10% of mothers between the ages of 15 and 17 graduated from high school on time, and rough estimates showed that 67% of teenage mothers never graduated (Brosh, Weigel and Eweis 2007). However, Nigeria, and several African countries do not have this data and this hampers developmental plans.
3. The focus of research traditionally has been on socio-economic outcomes as these relate to teenage parents. Very often, the finding has been a kind of negative impact on employment and earnings (Bental, 2000). However, education can assist to mitigate these negative outcomes. In the United States statistics show that in 2008, workers that possessed a high school diploma or its equivalent earned averagely 44% (\$10,000) more per annum than those that dropped out of high school (*INFO PLEASE*, 2011). Nigeria and other African countries lacked this data or statistics, but it shows that it is better to stay in school and graduate even for the economic reason.
4. The challenge to keep teenage mothers in school has been successfully met through school based programmes (Seitz and Apfel, 1999). So, it is suggested that school based programmes be established to help have teenage mothers in schools. This can be achieved through counseling, health care, health teaching and education about child development to teenage parents. These can assist to ameliorate the several problems associated with adolescent pregnancy and parenting (Williams, and Sadler 2001 and Brown son, 2009).

5. Research revealed that pregnancy is a major factor that limits a teenage mother's educational attainment. Zachry, (2005) observed that the reasons why these students left the school is due largely to the school policies and previous school experiences than with just being pregnant. Teenage mothers have shown negative attitudes toward education that includes lack of relevance and a negative school environment.
6. Another reason for teenage parents dropping out of school is the rigidity of administrators of schools about attendance policies. Schools do not provide leave for teen parents that could help them complete their general child care responsibility (Mangino, 2008 and Smith Battle, 2007).
7. Again, supportive and organized school environment function as inducements to teenage mothers to continue schooling after being pregnant.
8. There is the rare opportunity to inquire from pregnant and parenting adolescent the kind of resources and support they need and see as important for them to attain their desired educational goal. More support can encourage teen mothers to continue with school (Smith and Battle, 1995).
9. Another study according to Smith and Battle (2007) showed that teenage mothers usually re-evaluate their focus and educational attainment goal once they are pregnant despite their earlier attitudes towards school. The indicators in this regard include improved grades, the resolve to graduate and a new interest to further their education.
10. Having a child does reinforce the interest of teenage mothers in education and how education can be instrumental in assisting them to cater for the future of their children. This new interest they see as having to increase their employment possibilities and can help them not to depend on public institution for support and help.
11. The decision to accept any available support is anchored on the personal transformation stage or teenage parenting. This stage starts when a teenage mother realizes that success and freedom for her and the child can not come without personal drive, unselfishness, dedication and a deep commitment to succeed. Having a child does greatly alter the perspectives on both their schooling and their future (Zachry, 2005).
12. As a result of stigmatization associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood, teenage parents often times decide to "remain under the radar". Some school administrators and staff may not be aware that some of their students are parents. This invisibility often produced negative results, inappropriate intervention to address their unique developmental needs, lack of advocacy for teenage parents and insensitivity on the part of the educational system to assist parenting teens balance their education and their responsibilities as parents (Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 1999). Both school related and personal support were seen to be of great importance to teenage mothers in their effort to graduate from high school (Mangino, 2008).

5. Recommendations

From our analysis and findings from literature, it is established that teenage pregnancy is a global problem. The rate of teenage pregnancy is really high in low and medium income countries. Africa with high illiteracy rate is worst hit by this problem. Nigeria as one of the major stakeholders in Africa and with the highest population should therefore confront the problem of teenage pregnancy from diverse ways that should include multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary. It is on the basis of this that we advocate for a new national management strategy to tackle the problem. This strategy should include the following:

1. Easily accessible contraceptive services. The government should through health institutions and facilities make available to the youths and the public contraceptive services at avoidable prices and if possible should be free. Effort should be made through this scheme to make condoms freely available to people that are between the age bracket of 13 and 24.
2. The government through its agencies such as health institutions, National Population Commission (NPC) and Ministries of Health should establish youth friendly centres that will embark on massive campaign to prevent early pregnancy. These centres should also encourage teenage mothers to go back to school, since being pregnancy is not the end of the road for their aspirations to become graduates, and contributes to their personal growth, their children and the society at large.
3. Government through educational institutions, ministries and national orientation agencies should establish counseling diagnostic centres that will provide counseling services to teenagers on how to prevent early pregnancy, and how to overcome the setback of early pregnancy. Teenage mothers should be specifically catered for through counseling as to their roles as mothers and the development of their children. Education of

- the teenage mothers should be encouraged through counseling.
4. Teaching on Health Care, Reproductive Health and Health Education. The school curriculum from the secondary school to tertiary institutions should be reviewed and restructured to include the teaching of health care, reproductive health and general health education. This strategy and scheme will help to impart relevant knowledge necessary to prevent early pregnancy to all students in the secondary schools. This will go a long way to drastically reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy.
 5. Change of school policies to allow teenage pregnant mothers to remain in school. The present policies of schools to expel and asked teenage pregnant mothers to drop out of school should be abolished. There should be a legislation that allows any pregnant teenager to continue schooling without let or hindrance. Just like the National Assembly is attempting to amend the Constitution to legalize the marriage of underage girls, they should make laws that should allow the teenage adolescent who are pregnant while in school to continue with their schooling with all the rights and privileges of students and citizens. The recent effort of providing legal stamp to the abuse of underage girls by the Senate in the guise of marriage will only compound the current problem than solve it.
 6. Make education to be relevant to social needs. The current trend where education is just to prepare the children to get certificates that will give them white collar jobs should be discouraged. There is an urgent need to overhaul and restructure the curriculum contents of our school system. Nigeria education should be designed to meet the cultural and social needs of the 21st century. These social needs include being a mother, father and being able to create wealth independently. There is a high demand for entrepreneurial skills of school children right from the secondary school.
 7. Creation of the right environment in school. There is the need for legislation to compel all schools in the country to create the right environment within the school system that will be conducive both for the teenage mothers and the physically challenged students. Schools should be made to provide facilities that will aid the teenage mothers and the physically challenged to function effectively while still in school. This right environment will encourage teenage mothers to continue with their schooling. This is because they (teenage mothers) will come to the realization that the school system is designed and tailored to cater for their needs and does not discriminate against them.
 8. Attendance policies should be changed to grant leave to teenage mothers. Government and school authorities should change the current attendance policies that made it mandatory for all the students to satisfy certain percentage of attendance as qualification to write examinations and be promoted. This policy does not satisfy the needs of the teenage mothers and they may be discouraged to dropout of schools for this reason. So, the present policy should be changed and teenage mothers given the opportunity to go on leave and resume after such leave.
 9. Child care programme in schools. Government should come up with a policy and legislation that will establish child care programmes in all the schools. Such child care programmes will create the right environment within the school system to aid the teenage mother function maximally.
 10. Support to teenage mothers. There are no support services for teenage mothers in Nigeria. Where such exists, it is under the platform of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) often operated by wives of state Governors and few others for some clandestine fraudulent purpose. Government should come up with a broad based policy and a legalized framework for compulsory support services for teenage mothers that aid them to cater for their children without unnecessary interference and deprivation.
 11. Removal of all forms of stigmatization. Government should carry out massive campaign through its agencies and institutions against all forms of stigmatization as it relates to teenage pregnancy. The masses should be informed and educated that being pregnant is a natural process through which the individuals involved is blessed to fulfill the biblical injunction for man to go and "be multiplied to fill the earth".
 12. Design programmes that will aid teenage mothers achieve their developmental needs. Every individual have a specific developmental needs. Government and schools should evolve and design programmes within the schools system that will assist all teenage mothers to actualize their developmental needs. This can be achieved through skill acquisition and creative programmes that will tap from the initiative of teenage mothers.
 13. Advocacy for teenage parents. Government, school authorities and other relevant agencies should carry out advocacy programme that will promote and protect the rights of the teenage parents especially the teenage parents especially the teenage mothers. Specifically, there should be advocacy against stigmatization of teenage mothers.

14. Restructure the educational system to be sensitive to the needs of teenage parents. Presently in Nigeria, the school system does not favour teenage parents. Indeed, the present system is rather insensitive to the needs and aspirations of the teenage parents especially the teenage mothers. Government should therefore as a matter of urgency restructure the educational system to be sensitive to the needs of the teenage parents. In doing this, all legislations and policies that do not favour teenage parents should be abolished.

6. Summary and Conclusion

This paper examined the relationship between teenage pregnancy and education. It reviewed relevant literature to highlight the findings of various studies and researches. In the analysis of previous findings, certain gaps were discovered. To fill these gaps, education was identified as a major tool or social instrument that can help Nigeria tackle this global problem of teenage pregnancy.

Though education in our view is capable to tackling this global social problem, the paper advocates for multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approaches toward achieving the necessary ameliorative effects. It is our strong desire that the identifiable gaps can effectively be filled if our recommendations are systematically applied by government, relevant institutions and agencies. There is the need for all disciplines and other sectors to contribute to prevent the approaching global population explosion through sensitization of teenagers to prevent early pregnancies.

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