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Public Perception and Attitude of Parents towards Teenage Pregnancy in Itigidi Community, Abi Local Government Area Cross River State, Nigeria

Elizabeth U. Ashiwhobe¹, Vincent I. Enya², Aji J. James³, Okwo S. Ottoh⁴, Clifford U. Eghong⁵, Gladys Felix⁶ & Evelyn Odumusor⁷

^{1,6,7}Department of Midwifery, Cross River State College of Nursing Sciences, Itigidi

^{3,4,5}Department of Nursing, Cross River State College of Nursing Sciences, Itigidi

²Department of General Studies, Cross River State College of Nursing Sciences, Itigidi

ABSTRACT

Teenage pregnancy is a social menace and common public health problem. It is detrimental to both mother and child. Teenage mother is not physically, psychologically and economically ready to bear a child. This phenomenon has multiple adverse consequences on maternal health, child health and overall well-being of the society. This study investigated the public perception and parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community, Abi Local Government Area (LGA), Cross River State. Descriptive Survey was used and data was collected through self administered questionnaire to a sample size of 120 respondents selected through purposive sampling technique. Tables and simple percentages were used for data analysis. The findings showed that 73% of the respondents portrayed negative attitudes and claimed that teenage pregnancy is social deviant. 27% of the respondents showed positive attitudes and characterized the incidence of teenage pregnancy as a mistake, and still offer full support to their teenage pregnant girls. 68% of parents (respondents) also considered teenage pregnancy as an embarrassment to the family, their responses showed that teenage pregnant girl has already destroyed her future, while 32% of the respondents indicated a positive attitudes. Their responses showed love and support for their teenage pregnant girls and that, they can still send their pregnant daughter back to school and provide adequate assistance after giving birth. Conclusion was made that gaps exist in public perception and parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. Therefore, It is recommended that parents should reappraise and strengthen their obligation towards their adolescent/teenage daughters to enable them achieve their full potentials through prevention of teenage pregnancies.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy, Public perception, Adolescent, Adult, Attitude, Population

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a common occurrence globally. World Health Organization (WHO) statistics show that about sixteen million adolescents aged 15-19 years give birth each year and most of these births occur in the developing countries (WHO, 2014). The trend seems to be increasing. Teenage pregnancy accounted for 40% of maternal deaths in Sierra Leone where early marriage is supported by traditional practice (Interpress Service, 2011). Some authors have defined teenage pregnancy as that which occurs in the young girl between the age of 13 and 19 years when the reproductive organs and system are not fully developed (Spencer, 2011). This phenomenon is described as a social problem in which adult practice and functions such as sexual intercourse, reproduction and mothering are undertaken by a person who owing to her and developmental

status is not yet an adult (Macleod, 2011). Teenage pregnancy contributes a public health problem and has been identified as a problem for teenagers, family and society at large. It is a major contemporary social problem confronting countries in the world. In developed and developing countries, teenage pregnancy continues to receive increasing attention. This is because the early age at which adolescents engaged with sexual activity with the result of unplanned pregnancy and the likely complications (Marnach, Forrest and Goldman, 2013). Such pregnancies are risk to both mother and baby (National Population Commission and ICF, 2013). Risks to baby include; prematurity, low birth weight and birth injuries. The mother may suffer morbidities, such as obstructed labour, obstetrics fistula and eclampsia (Marnach et.al, 2013). Also, early motherhood results with the adolescent lacking adequate information, education and communication on reproductive health matters. Some social and psychological problems are also associated with teenage pregnancy such as dropping out of school, social discrimination and stigmatization. The pregnant teenage might become depressed and thus, at risk of committing suicide (Marnach, 2013). Many factors have been associated with the occurrence of teenage pregnancy. These include poor parental supervision as a result of broken homes and inadequate or absence of contraceptives (Meddinus and Johnson, 2021), exposure to pornographic films and lack of sex education (Mitchell, 2019). In response to the problem of teenage pregnancy, World Health Organization in 2011 adopted a resolutions which urged member states to accelerate actions to improve the health of young people through the following measures: I) reviewing and revising policies to protect young people from early child bearing II) providing access to contraceptives and reproductive health care services and III) promoting access to accurate health information on sexual and reproductive health (WHO, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Health and social problems are associated with teenage pregnancy. To advert these, strategies already mentioned were resolved by WHO (2016) aimed at improving the reproductive health of young people including adolescents. Consequence on these strategies, intervention by public and private organizations have been undertaken to reduce the problems. Despite these interventions, which induces access to reproductive health services, it observed globally that teenage pregnancy still remains a public health challenge (Salaman, 2015). In Nigeria, statistics from the National Population Commission (NPC) shows that the population of teenage pregnancy has remained at 23% between 2008 and 2013 (NPC & ICF, 2013, NPC & ICF, 2009). Although in Nigeria, the highest population are found in the North 36% and Northeast 34% parts of the country, in the South with relatively lower population. The rate of teenage pregnancy is highest in Cross River State 17% as compared with other Southern States. It was further documented that the rate of teenage pregnancy is above 32% in the rural areas and 10% in the urban areas. This study is in rural community and many teenage girls are already mothers. To the best of my knowledge, the perspective of parents on teenage pregnancy in the study area have been explored. Based on these gaps, the researcher decided to study the public perception and attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi community.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess public perception and parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community, ABI Local Government Area, Cross River State. The specific objectives are:

1. To assess public perception towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA.
2. To examine attitudes of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA.
3. To assess the influence of educational states of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA
4. To identify factors influencing teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community
2. What is the attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA
3. What is the influence of educational states of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA.
4. What are the factors influencing teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi LGA.

Significance of the Study

Through this study, data will be generated on the public perception and parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community. Furthermore, the findings of this research will stimulate further studies on teenage pregnancy. The findings are expected to influence policy on teenage/adolescent reproductive health as well as provide information on this subject to parents of teenage girls in the study community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy: The news of teenage daughter's pregnancy is unpleasant to parents. Some authors found out that mothers describe their feelings resulting from the discovery of the pregnancy of their teenage daughters as devastating. The news was difficult to believe, welcome or accept. Many demonstrated that they had not like receiving such news. Some added that it took them a long time to accept the reality. Some other mothers described the situation as a fearful and shocking one that cause discontent (Fernandes et al, 2016). While parents would grief and worry about the future of such girl (Nava, 2013). Some father's were also equally disappointed and expressed their difficulty in accepting the pregnancy and the arrival of the new baby, while some acknowledged it as a mistake (Fernandes et al 2016). Some other parents will feel a sense of guilt at the thought that they had failed in their responsibility and could have done more to protect their teenage girl from this predicament. On the one hand, some parents felt embarrassed by their teen's pregnancy and worried about how family, friends and neighbours would react. This position was consistent with that of Nava (2013) who found teen's parents were gossip about and the affected teen seen as bad influence. On the other hand, others were happy about the news of a soon to-be grandmother especially if the teen is older and in a mature relationship. They may also respect a great deal pleasure from their new grandchild (Health Direct, 2012). A study showed that mothers of pregnant adolescent were more understanding of the problems experienced by their daughters. Such mothers also expressed that they accept the situation and their daughters the required support (Health Direct, 2012). It has been identified that pregnancy in adolescent brings significant changes in behaviour of families, with the mother figure being highlighted as a source of support and maintenance of the family structure. The importance of emotional support, affection and information throughout the gestational process has also been recognized. These factors are considered to be decisive for the adjustment to pregnancy and the maternal role by the affected adolescent (Fernandes, 2016).

Public Perception Towards Teenage Pregnancy: Teenage Pregnancy continues to be significant social issue as it pose various challenges for the individual involved, as well as their families and communities. Public perception towards teenage pregnancy can influence the way in which the issue is addressed and the support provided to pregnant teenagers. Several studies have explored public perception towards teenage pregnancy, highlighting the complexity of attitudes and beliefs surrounding this issue. Research has shown that public often perceive negative, with many individuals viewing it as a problem that need to be prevented or addressed through education and support services. One study conducted by East et al, (2016) found that public attitudes towards teenage pregnancy in the United States were influence by factors such as age, gender, education

and personal experiences. The study revealed that younger individual and those with higher educational level were more likely to view it as a normal or exceptional occurrence.

Another study by Minaet al, (2018) examine public perception towards teenage pregnancy in the United Kingdom and found that attitudes varied depending on cultural background and socioeconomic status. The study found that individuals from lower socioeconomic background were more likely to have negative perception, while those from higher socioeconomic background were more likely to view it as a social issue that requires support and intervention. The overall public perception towards teenage pregnancy can be shaped by a range of factors, including personal experiences, cultural beliefs and socioeconomic status. Understanding this perception is important for developing effective interventions and support services for pregnant teenagers and their families in particular and community at large. By addressing negative attitudes and stereotypes, it is possible to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for teenage mothers and their babies.

Influence of educational states of parents: Teenage Pregnancy is a complex issue influenced by various factors, including the educational states of parents. Educational states of parents refer to their level of education and its impact on their parenting and decision made within the family environment.

The following factors can be attributed to the educational states of the parents.

i). **Parental communication:** parents with higher levels of education may have different communication patterns with lower education levels. Effective communication between parents and teenage play a crucial role in educating them about reproductive health, contraception and responsible sexual behaviour. Parents with higher educational level may be more equipped to have open and honest conversation with their children about these topics, leading to better-informed decision-making and reduced risk of teenage pregnancy.

ii). **Role Modeling:** Parents serve as role models for their children, and educational states can influence their aspiration and attitudes of teenage girls towards education and further goals. Parents with higher educational level are more likely to emphasize the importance of education and Career aspirations which can positively impact their children's academic achievements and future prospect. Children from educated families may be focused on pursuing higher education and personal development, which in turn decreases the likelihood of early pregnancies.

III). **Knowledge and awareness:** parental education is associated with higher levels of knowledge about reproductive health, contraception strategies. Educated parents are more likely to be aware of the risks and consequences of teenage pregnancy and can provide accurate information and guidance to their children. Overall, the educational states of parents play a significant role in shaping the attitude, behaviour and outcomes related to teenage pregnancy. By understanding how parental education influences adolescent decision-making and family dynamics, policymakers and practitioners can develop targeted intervention and support mechanisms to promote positive parental involvement, education and communication that contribute to reducing teenage pregnancy rates.

Theoretical Framework

There are several theoretical perspectives that help inform our understanding of public perception and parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. The following theories are used through which this research study is based.

1) Theory of Social Constructionism: According to Rickel Amol, (2010), public perception of teenage pregnancy are shaped by cultural norms, values and media portrayal of young parents. The theory is also by Michael Evans (2015), the theory of exploring public perception of teenage pregnancy.

2) Social Cognitive Theory: This theory emphasizes the role of individual beliefs, according to Sarah Johnson (2012), understanding cultural influences on parental attitude towards teenage pregnancy. Attitudes and experiences shaping usually come from the parents. Parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy may be influenced by their experiences, values and beliefs about parenting and family dynamics.

3) Theory of Feminist: Feminist perspective can provide insight into the ways in which gender and power dynamics influence public perception and attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy. For example, societal expectation around gender roles and sexual norms may contribute to stigmatization of young mothers. Feminist theory also highlights the importance of considering intersectional factors, such as race, class and sexuality, in understanding how teenage pregnancy is perceived and experienced.

Empirical Review

Public perception of teenage pregnancy according to Papageno, W. and Severens, J. associated teenage pregnancy with public opinion often viewing teenage mothers as irresponsible. However, it is important to note attitudes can vary based on cultural religious and socioeconomic factors. Research also shows that parents often have strong opinions on teenage pregnancy, with many expressing concern about the impact on the teeger's future opportunities and well-being. Some parents may also fear the societal judgement and challenges their teenage girl may faceas a result of becoming pregnant.

Summary of Literature Review

Practical evidence suggests that negative perception and attitude towards teenage pregnancy persist, but there is also evidence of growing awareness and support for program initiatives aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy and provide support to teenage parents. It is important for policymakers, educators and healthcare professionals to consider these attitudes and perceptions when developing interventions and strategies to address teenage pregnancy.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive non-experimental survey design was used for this study to examine public perception and the attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy. The setting for the study was *Itigidi Community*, located in Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State. Itigidi is a rural community situated in the Central Senatorial District of the state and centrally positioned within the local government area. It is bounded to the north by Ekureku Community, to the south by Ediba Community, to the east by Afikpo in Ebonyi State, and to the west by Adadama Community. The people are hospitable and peaceful, governed by a Paramount Ruler. Their primary occupation is agriculture. Itigidi serves as the headquarters of Abi LGA and has a population of about 5,000 people, comprising five (5) clans. The area consists of both literate and illiterate individuals. The inhabitants speak the Legbo dialect and English Language. The target population for this study includes men and women aged 35 years and above who are parents and residents of the Itigidi community, Abi LGA. A sample size of 120 parents who met the inclusion criteria was selected for the study, representing 17% of the total population. Yamane's formula (1967) was used to determine the sample size. Purposive sampling was adopted to recruit participants with the specific characteristics required for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections: Section A: Demographic information of the respondents, Section B: Questions on public perception of teenage pregnancy, Section C: Questions on the attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy. Data were analyzed using tables and simple percentages.

Ethical Consideration

Approval for the study was obtained from the Itigidi community Leader. Consent was also obtained from the individual respondents prior to administration of the questionnaires. The respondents were also assured of confidentiality of the data and anonymity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section represents the research results and analysis of statistical data based on one hundred and twenty (120) distributed questionnaires which were correctly filled and returned.

Table1: Distribution of respondents by demographic characterization.

Sex	No. of Respondents	%
Male	0	0
Female	110	100
Total	110	100
Age (Years)	No. of Respondents	%
18-25	7	6
26-30	18	17
31-35	42	38
36-40	21	19
41 and above	22	20
Total	110	100
Religion	No. of Respondents	%
Christianity	98	89
Islam	12	11
Others	0	0
Total	110	100
Marital Status	No. of Respondents	%
Single	34	31
Married	76	69
Total	110	100
Educational qualifications	No of respondents	%
FSLC	35	32
SSC	43	39
Bsc.	20	18
Others	12	11
Total	110	100
Occupation	No. of Respondents	%
Civil Servant	25	23
Self employed	52	47
Unemployed	33	30
Total	110	100

Section B:

Table 5: Showing Respondents view on public perception on teenage pregnancy.

Questionnaire: Section B, item 1-9	Option	No. Of Respondents	%
What is the perception of the public towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community?	Negative perception	88	73
	Positive perception	32	27
Total		120	100

Table 5 above shows that good number of the public, portrayed negative perception towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community.

Table 6: Showing Respondents view on the attitudes of parents towards teenage pregnancy.

Questionnaire: Section C, item 10-21	Option	No. Of Respondents	%
What is the attitudes of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community?	Negative attitudes	82	68
	Positive attitudes	38	32
Total		120	100

The responses in table 5 and 6 were broadly classified into negative and positive attitudes. Also, a good number of respondents portrayed negative attitudes towards teenage pregnancy, meanwhile, some respondents characterized the incident as a mistake and still offer full support to their teenage pregnant girls.

This section of the study concerns itself with the following sub-headings:

- ✓Discussion of findings
- ✓Relationship with other studies/literature review
- ✓Implication of findings to nursing
- ✓Limitation of the study
- ✓Summary
- ✓Conclusion
- ✓Recommendations

Discussion of Findings

From the study, findings have shown that 21 respondents representing 25% are male, as shown in table 1, while female respondents are 99 representing 75%. In all, female are more concerned in this study than male in the community. The respondents ranged from 56 years and above were 51 and representing 43% which is the highest percentage as shown in table 2. The age range of 35 years to 40 years has two (2) respondents representing 1%. This results indicate that the age bracket of 56 and above have been somewhat influenced by teenage pregnancy in the study area. See table 2 above. In table 3, findings show that at the time this survey was carried out, only Christians were available at the various clans visited and questionnaires were administered to them.

In table 4, ninety eight (98) respondents representing 82% are married while twenty two (22) representing 18% were single. This indicates that married people were influenced significantly in terms of their relationship, finances, future plans and social interaction when teenage pregnancy is experienced in their homes.

Research Question: What is the perception of the public towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community?

Table 5 shows that eighty eight (88) representing 73% negative perception towards teenage pregnancy in the study area, while thirty two (32) representing 27% showed positive perception towards teenage pregnancy in the community. These negative perceptions include the various ways in which the public reacted towards teenage pregnancy. Most people reaction include sending the girl away from home in anger and stopping her from continuing in school. This findings support that of Fernandes et al (2012), which states that some fathers sent their teenage pregnant daughters away and broke contact with them. Critically analysing this stance of some fathers, it appears to portray a negative reaction to an already bad situation as this may plunge the girl into further psychological trauma.

Research Question: What is the attitude of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community.

The result in table 6 shows that eighty two (82) respondents representing 68% showed negative attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. This was observed in their various reactions as they responded to the questionnaire given to them. Many of the parents claimed that any teenage girl who is pregnant while not married is a social deviant and that, such girl has no future. Also, teenage pregnancy has a devastating effect on the girl's parents, it is a sign of parental failure in their responsibilities. Some parents even go further to disowned their teenage pregnant girl. This is also a negative attitude in the side of the par6. And such teenage girl is already disadvantaged socioeconomically because of dependence on parents or guardians for subsistence. This scenario may further be aggravated if the man or boy responsible for the pregnancy does not have any mean of livelihood and cannot provide for her. On the other hand, thirty eight (38) representing 32% of the parents portrayed attitude towards teenage pregnancy in the community. Most parents still see the need to send their teenage girl back to school after giving birth and also provide all the necessary assistance needed by the girl.

Research Question: What is the influence of educational states of parents towards teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community.

In the study area, it was found that education has a significant influence parents attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. This is because education broadens people understanding and reasoning unlike less educated individuals with shallow understanding and reasoning. This is supported by Mpaza (2006) who also found that educat6has a positive influence on one's attitudes. In this study, findings show that educated parents sent their teenage daughters back to school after giving birth while parents with less educated maintained that teenage mothers should remain at home.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER STUDIES/LITERATURE REVIEW

These findings corroborated those of some other authors (Fernandes et al, 2012; Peteu, 2011). Teenage Pregnancy has also described by some parents in this study as an ugly consequence of Western education. This view is supported by some other authors (Fernandes et al, 2012), Health Direct, (2012). On the contrary Ekefre, Ekaenemand Esien (2014), described education as veritable tool towards curbing teenage pregnancy because it is source of knowledge to ward off ignorance that might promote a lifestyle that is inimical to adolescent reproductive well-being. It has also be remarked that changing cultures due to urbanization, globalization, media influence including the internet as well as breakdown of traditional mechanism for coping with and regulating adolescent sexuality and norms of chastity before marriage are predisposing factors to early sexual debut in adolescents (Ekefre, et al, 2014), FMOH (2015). Some authors observed a link between teenage

pregnancy and early sexualization of female adolescents (Goicotea, Wuff, Oh man and Sebastian, 2009).

Implication of Findings oo Nursing

Parental attitude towards teenage pregnancy can have a significant impact of the well-being of young mothers and their babies. Nurses who work with pregnant teenagers must be sensitive to parents reactions and beliefs in order to provide appropriate care and support. These negative attitudes can also influence a teenager's decision making process when it comes to deciding whether to continue a pregnancy or not. Nurses need to be aware of these attitudes in order to provide unbiased information and support to help teenager make informed choices. Educational level of parents has a positive influence on teenage pregnancy. Parents who are supportive and understanding can help reduce the stigma and shame often associated with teenage pregnancy, which can improve outcomes for both the mother and the baby. Nurses can work with parents to help create a supportive environment for teenage pregnant girls.

Limitation of The Study

This research study is delimited to teenage pregnancy in Itigidi Community Abi Local Government Area, Cross River State. There are five clans visited, namely

1. Agba Clan, Itigidi
2. Eminebol Clan Itigidi
3. Lekpachiel Clan Itigidi
4. Levachiel Clan Itigidi and
5. Ikamine Clan Itigidi.

It is hoped that the findings made in these areas would serve as a useful pointer to what occurs in other parts of the country knowing fully well that teenage girls encounter different environmental constraints.

Conclusion

Teenage Pregnancy is an important public health concern that requires parents, government and other relevant agencies to collaborate in the effort to prevent its occurrence. This study shows that there gaps in public perceptions and parental attitudes towards teenage pregnant girls. Based on this findings, the public showed high negative perceptions towards teenage pregnancy as well as parental attitudes. Therefore, it is important that parents should reappraise and strengthen their obligation towards their children particularly the adolescent /teenage girls to enable them achieve their full potentials through prevention of teenage pregnancies.

Recommendations

1. Teenage Pregnancy is one reason females do not realize their full potentials, therefore, parents should make use of resources within their disposal to support the girl child to prevent its occurrence.
2. Parents should create a home environment that foster communication, understanding and support towards their daughters to ensure the inculcation of normal values to prevent coerced sex, thus reduce teenage pregnancy.
3. Sexuality education should be undertaken at both family and formal school levels to create good knowledge of the structure and functions of the girls reproductive system.

4. In the advent of teenage pregnancy, parents and public should create a mean to accommodating to help their teenagers go through the crises situation successfully and therefore support them to achieve their full potentials.

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