

The Underlying Reasons for the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy: A Shared Experience of Senior High School Dropouts at the Birim Central Municipality

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Abstract - The aim of this study was to gain some insights into the lived experiences of Senior High School Dropouts at the Birim Central Municipality. A case study of twenty pregnant teenagers who had dropped out of school due to their pregnancy was used for the study. This research was undertaken to listen to the experiences of young women through individual interviews. The analysis of qualitative material obtained from the field and also informed by a narrative research perspective, found that girls get pregnant due to the lack of sex education, no/less knowledge in the use of contraceptives, poverty, abuse, neglect and substance misuse were major reasons for the prevalence of teen pregnancy in the study area. It is recommended that policy makers, the Ministry of Education, teachers, and parents should give far more comprehensive information about how to avoid unintended pregnancy and STDs. Teachers should motivate and give more attention to girls. Parents should provide the basic needs for school, at home and for their general up keep. Educational funds should be raised in the district to help needy children especially girls.

I. INTRODUCTION

The average marriage age differs by country, and in countries where teenage marriages are common, one can expect to also experience higher levels of teenage pregnancies. In the Indian subcontinent, early marriage and pregnancy is more common in traditional rural communities compared to the rate in cities. The lack of education on safe sex, whether it is from parents, schools, or otherwise, is a cause of teenage pregnancy. Many teenagers are not taught about methods of birth control and how to deal with peers who pressure them into having sex before they are ready. Many pregnant teenagers do not have any cognition of the central facts of sexuality. Some teenage girls have said to be pressured into having sex with their boyfriends at a young age, and yet no one taught teens how to deal with this pressure or to say

‘no’. According to Banerjee, Pandey, Dutt, Sengupta, Mondal and Deb (2009), in some societies, early marriage and traditional gender roles are important factors in the rate of teenage pregnancy. For example, in some Sub-Saharan African countries, early pregnancy is often seen as a blessing because it is proof of the young woman's fertility. In societies where adolescent marriage is less common, such as many developed countries, young age at first intercourse and lack of use of contraceptive methods (or their inconsistent and/or incorrect use; the use of a method with a high failure rate is also a problem) may be factors in teen pregnancy.

Most teenage pregnancies in the developed world appear to be unplanned. In an attempt to reverse the increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies, governments in many Western countries have instituted sex education programs, the main objective of which is to reduce such pregnancies and STIs. Countries with low levels of teenagers giving birth accept sexual relationships among teenagers and provide comprehensive and balanced information about sexuality.

Teenage pregnancy is an issue of great concern worldwide. However, its impact are felt more in the developing countries especially in Sub-Sahara Africa, where the prevalence of this phenomenon in the rural and peri-urban areas of Africa. The Birim Central Municipal, the area of study, consists of many rural-poverties stricken communities, with the major economic activities being farming, timber-harvesting and marketing, small-scale mining and petty trading. The illegal mining in particular draws many young men to the community, who flushed money from their illegal activities lure the teen girls into sexual activities which eventually lead into teenage pregnancy.

As a result of the global popular culture promoted largely by the internet and other social media, the level of promiscuity among young people across Africa is considered to be increasing by the day (Frimpong, 2010). Many teenagers are sexually active without fully appreciating the consequences of their actions. Besides, many parents have lost the ability to regulate their children's sexuality and bring to bear traditional practices and traditions that promote abstinence or self-control (Shtarkshall, Santelli, and Hirsch 2007). Though less advantaged teen girls are more likely to conceive and bear children and to drop out of school, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood have dramatic independent effects on girls with diverse backgrounds who drop out of school.

The prevalence of teenage pregnancy has become very common in the Ghanaian society, especially among youth who are at the Primary and Junior High School (JHS) levels of education (Kunateh, 2009). Providing education for girls has been less successful in the Birim Central Municipality. For example, according to the Girl-Child Coordinator in 2011, the drop-out rate for secondary schools was 15.2% of which 87.5% was due to teenage pregnancy (Ghana Education Service, 2011). This places the Municipality as one of the endemic areas as far as the problem in the country is concerned, thus engendering an interest and the research.

A. *Statement of the Problem*

The association of early sexual activity with teenage pregnancy has been a societal concern for decades. For females, teenage pregnancy can complicate adolescent development and contribute to a troublesome transition to young adulthood, which involves a potential future as a single parent with limited educational and economic opportunities. Since the 1990s the overall teenage pregnancy rate has declined, though, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, four out of ten girls still get pregnant before their twentieth birthday.

The high incidence of girls of school going-age who are now young mothers has been of great concern to the researcher, national and local education authorities as well as parents within the Birim Central Municipality. Statistics from the District Education

Office shows that premarital sexual activity is common, with about a quarter of teenagers engaging in the practice. The incidence of teenage pregnancy in the Birim Central Municipality is therefore generally considered to be at a peak of approximately 17% of all pregnancies recorded in 2011 (Ghana Health Service, 2012). This prevalence has become a major concern of well-meaning inhabitants, education and health providers in the Municipality largely because of its implications on human capital formation, and the future quality of life of the young girls caught in that web. However, a greater proportion of the research in teenage pregnancy in the country have focused districts and municipalities other than Birim Central Municipal. It is this gap that the study seeks to address.

B. *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study was to investigate the underlying reasons for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy from the experiences of teenage girls that dropout of Senior High School as a result of getting pregnant.

C. *Objective of the Study*

The objective of the study was to determine the underlying reasons for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the community.

D. *Research Question*

What are the underlying reasons for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the community?

II. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design was employed for this study. The population for the study consists of teenage pregnant girls in Senior High School who had dropped out of school due to the pregnancy at Birim Central Municipality. The sampling size was 20 teenage pregnant girls who had dropped out of school.

Purposive sampling methods were used to select 20 pregnant girls. The purposive sampling is an accurate or near to accurate representation of the population, it aids in getting an accurate result, it is less time consuming and less expensive as it involves lesser search costs. The teenage pregnant girls that gave themselves to be interviewed were more than the

number needed; as a result, simple random sampling was employed as an alternative to solve the issue. The selection was done at all the four research sites. At each site, the researcher selected 5 teen pregnant girls, totaling 20 teenage pregnant girls for the study.

During the study, the researcher used an interview schedule which comprise of close-ended questions and open-ended questions.

III. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Reasons for the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy in the Community

This research question is devoted to respondents' views on the circumstances that led to the girls becoming pregnant. It is important to note that these factors are not independent of each other; rather, they often exert their influences concurrently, and an understanding of the relative importance of such factors in affecting the girl's decisions can only be obtained if they are studied simultaneously. All names, locations and descriptive features are pseudonyms.

From the responses of the interview one of the reasons is the lack of knowledge and use of contraceptives. Joseph, (2008) revealed that adolescents may lack knowledge of, or access to conventional methods of preventing pregnancy as they may be too embarrassed or frightened to seek such information. According to the literature, more than 80 per cent of teen pregnancies are unintended. Over half of unintended pregnancies were to women not using contraceptives. Aminatu aged seventeen, who was four months pregnant at the time of the interview had this to say;

"I have been in a relationship for a year and living with my boyfriend. The pregnancy was unplanned, in that I had been on the pill but forgotten to take it regularly."

Rita was asked if she had had sex education and her response was "yes! But when it is time for our teacher to have it, our teacher will say we are bad students and for that matter will not teach us. She sometimes says what we are seeing; they (the teachers) have not seen them before. The education I had on sex was not enough. About contraceptives, I know of condoms but

do not know how to use it. Yes, I know STIs one gets it through sex. Yes, I know of one place where they do family planning and I have been there once."

This is what Ama had to say

"I became pregnant at the age of fifteen about to go to SHS one. I had an affair with my school boyfriend when we had our leavers night jams after our last BECE, and that was my first ever time of me making love. It was just for fun since most of them were having fun and we did not use protection".

Dokuah

"I got pregnant when we went to our end of junior secondary school jams. In school I was having a boyfriend and to show him I love him and that am going to be there for him I gave myself to him and that was my first-time having sex without a condom. Our result came and I went to senior high school not knowing am almost three months pregnant. I started getting sick and when I went to the hospital it was confirm that I was pregnant".

Aframeah who is seventeen years old and started having sex just last year and now pregnant had this to say;

"my pregnancy is three to four months old. It was not a planned pregnancy. I had enough sex education in school. We were taught not to have unprotected sex if we cannot abstain from sex. But my teacher also told us that even condoms do not give full protection. My boyfriend is a trader staying in America. We met not long ago. We became friends and later lovers. I intend to give birth".

Abarm is seventeen and with her second pregnancy and this is her story;

"I was in junior high school two when I gave birth to my first child but I was so fortunate my elder sister adopted my child. I was sent back to school to

continue my education and I am now in senior high school form one. I got to know I was pregnant when my sister took me to the hospital for a pregnancy test. To my surprise I was confirmed pregnant. I remember I went to my child's father for money and he said I look nice so before he will give the money to me he needs to sleep with me. I did not want to do it but I needed the money most and on top he promised to increase the money if I agree. I just had one sex with him without protection and I am pregnant. Nobody talks to me at home, they would not even ask of the one who impregnated me. Am left alone and I don't know what to do."

Another reason the study found was that, abuse and neglect are risk factors for early pregnancy. From the literature, the impact of childhood neglect on later life is an under-researched area (Chase, et al, 2006). The link between abuse, neglect and teenage pregnancy is explored in several studies (Lanctot and Smith, 2001) and specifically the link between child sexual abuses (CSA) and teenage pregnancy is generally accepted (Bunting and McAuley, 1996).

Amanda who was pregnant at the age of fifteen and out of school had this to say;

"I was a very hard girl that most of the boys in my school and my community don't come closer. One night I was sent to buy credit for my dad, on my way going, I saw some people. I pass by them without a word. On my way coming no one was on the road, as I was going some boys/men pounced on me and raped me in turns. I was able to recognise one of the boys. Good Samaritans took me home and my parents took me to the hospital. We reported the case the next day to the police and they arrested the voice I was able to recognize and still on remand. Few weeks later I started falling ill and when I visited the hospital I was diagnosed pregnant. In fact I want to get rid of the pregnancy but my parents

would not let me. My parents are destroying my future".

Aba disclosed her history of sexual and physical abuse by her boyfriend from the age of eight, a man who Aba had grown up thinking was her best friend and who she was also expected to be a teacher to her.

"He has been having sex with me any time he feels like doing it. My parents suspected it, but when they asked me I denied it. I stayed with him because he was teaching me and at the same time gives me money any time I need some. When I got to know I was pregnant, it was too late to abort, because it was almost four months. Though the pregnancy was not a planned one, I am going to give birth because I am afraid of dying if I go through abortion. My family finally asked the police to pick him up. My family later asked the teacher to take care of me till I give birth and afterwards send me back to school to continue my education".

Korkor, who discovered that she was pregnant on her seventeenth birthday, three months into a new relationship had this to say;

"I have known my partner all my life but we didn't start a relationship until now. Because my father will not allow me go out. I had previously been in two-year relationship which I am glad to get away from – my previous boyfriend was controlling and brainwashing me and the relationship with him had not been very nice all because my father don't want him in his house. When I was a kid I was sexually abused by my own father and have had an abortion for him once. Because I did not want to do it with my father again and I have gotten used to having sex all the time I started clubbing. I did engage in highly risky sexual behaviour, going home with strangers I meet at clubs and having unprotected sex several nights a week".

Socio-economic factors were also found to be another cause of teen pregnancy in the study area. According to UNICEF (2001) poverty is associated with increased rates of teenage pregnancy. Poverty is associated with increased rates of teenage pregnancy (Hinders, 2003).

Adjoa at age 15 had been in an eighteen month relationship and agreed with her partner (then aged eighteen) to continue with her pregnancy. This is what she had to say

“I am living with my mum and a younger brother in a single room apartment. My mum was only there one night a week, spending most of her time with a new partner in another town. This arrangement made me go out and come home any time I want. Sometimes I don’t come home at all”.

Adjoa’s father also lives in a neighbouring town with his new wife. She continued

“My parents give us money when they have money, so when there is no money we need to find a way to feed ourselves. So I started sleeping with men for money when the need arises until I met the man that impregnated me. Since my man left this town, my parents have been supporting me though not enough I am managing. I sell ice water at night to be able to feed myself and my younger brother”.

Akosuah was eighteen at the time of the interview and is almost five months pregnant. Akosuah had been placed in foster care at the age of fifteen by her parents living abroad. She narrated

“My parents send me money every month through my foster parents. Initially they were taking very good care of me. They started treating me badly when my parents started sending money through my house mistress at school to pay my school fee and for my up-keep at school. One day on vacation my parents had not sent my foster parents so they told me they

have no money to take care of me so I should find my own food. In fact it was hard for me to go through that, since I had no money on me. The next day they told me they needed to pay for rent, water and light bills so if I don’t ask my parents to send money, they would asked me to leave their home. I left my foster parents and put up with a friend. I had the freedom going out and I got myself pregnant and am a shame of myself. My parents want me to keep the pregnancy because am their only child. They begged me not to do anything to the pregnancy, thus not to abort the pregnancy”.

Naana became pregnant at the age of seventeen, while in school. On vacation she used to work in a drinking bar to help her pay her school fee. She had this to say;

“I was living with my father and stepmother, they asked me to move out so I ended up at my mother’s house – who was having difficult time as she herself had just had a new baby, her partner had just left her two days after giving birth, and she was also caring for my grandfather”.

“This situation made me work so hard to make money for my school fee, dresses, food and to rent a place to stay. I meet one taxi driver who promised to take care of me. He was very good to me that he started paying for my up-keep. So when he requested to sleep with me I was unable to say no to him. We started living together like husband and wife though not married. We made love almost every day. When I got pregnant I asked him for money for abortion since am a student. The next day his mother came to our house begging me to give for he (my partner) is her only child. She promised that they will see my parents and marry me and will allow me to go back to school. She will take care of my baby for me. My mother is ok with the situation but my

father is not in support of that” (personal communication, 2014).

Another respondent Oseia stated

“I used to go to the mining sight on vacation to carry sand and fetch water for the galamsey operators to make some money pay our school fee, rent a room and buy food. I did this to go through junior secondary school and still in this business. When I got senior secondary school, the money was not sufficient for my up keep, so I started sleeping with the miners to get more money to take care of myself.

I have been using condom all the time, but this one I was drunk and could not control the act and the man had me without it. When I went back to inform him of the pregnancy, the operators had been sacked by the police. So I don’t even know what to do. Am now out of school trying to make an ends meet” (personal communication, 2014).

Sherifatu, is 17 years and pregnant with her first pregnancy. This is her story

“I am the fourth wife of my husband, but still in school. I was given into marriage to my husband last year when I was sixteen but my husband promised me that he will allow me to finish my school before I start making babies but anytime I go on vacation, he forced to sleep with me. When I tried to prevent him from making love to me, he will tell me that he is going to take the money my father owe him, and since my father do not have money I have to give in and through that I got pregnant. I am now out of school waiting to give birth” (personal communication, 2014).

Substance misuse (predominantly illicit drugs and alcohol) is seen as both predictive of early pregnancy and as directly contributing to conception. For example, Allen, et al (2007) found in a large-scale

longitudinal study that those who got drunk at least once a month were statistically at increased risk of early pregnancy. The use of alcohol among teenagers has been linked with having unprotected sex (Health Education Authority, 1997), and regretting a sexual encounter (11 – 13% of girls in a UK sample – Hibell, 2000). Forty percent of fourteen- and fifteen-year olds having their first sexual experience have reported being drunk or stoned beforehand. (Wight et al, 2000).

Anoma who was sixteen and lived with her parents and her two siblings got pregnant and now live with her mother in-law. Anoma became pregnant at age sixteen after celebrating her birth day. She narrated

“fees. I was sent to a nearby school so I can be day student. My new school was a school where sexual activity was the norm among students and was regularly discussed by my peers. I was not part of those that always discuss about relationship because I am the shy type. On my sixteenth birth day, we were at the same time having inter-schools so I had the chance to go out with my friends. My friends all the time teased me that I am out of faction so I wanted to prove to them that I can also do what they are doing. We went to a nearby drinking bar and bought some alcoholic drinks. I got tipsy and the next moment I saw that I was in a nearby school with one of our school beats they say is my boyfriend. Though I saw what was going on I was not able to control myself so I had sex with him and since then it became a habit. Any time he wants to have sex with me he buys me an alcoholic drink and that is all”.

From the responses of the interview, the reason why teenage pregnancy is common in the area under study is the lack of knowledge and non-use of contraceptives. Another reason the study found was that of abuse and neglect as risk factors for early pregnancy. Socio-economic factors were also found to be another cause of teen pregnancy in the study area, and substance misuse (predominantly illicit drugs and alcohol) is seen as both predictive of early pregnancy and as directly contributing to conception.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the underlying reasons for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the Birim Central Municipal are the lack of knowledge and non-use of contraceptives, abuse, neglect and substance misuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have brought in its wake the numerous factors that cause girls to get pregnant and drop out of school. The following recommendations would help alleviate the problems:

1. This research highlights a troubling disconnect between sex education among teens. Policy makers, the Ministry of Education, teachers, and parents should give far more comprehensive information about how to avoid unintended pregnancy and STDs, and about how to become sexually healthy adults. Age appropriate sex education in schools can help to prevent issues such as unplanned pregnancies, transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, unsafe abortions and of course expose young people to sexual and reproductive information such as on cervical cancer. Women’s groups and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and the district assemblies should stretch their efforts to not only create the right environment for enhancing female education but also ensure that, girls remain in it by teaching sex education.
2. Teachers, being the ones in whose hands the children’s future lie should motivate and give more attention to girls.
3. Parents should provide the needs of the girls. The basic needs for school, at home and for their general up keep.

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