
Attitude of Secondary School Students' Towards Teenage Pregnancy

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Abstract

This paper study examined the attitude of secondary school students' towards teenage pregnancy. Nigeria culture no longer has a grip on the secondary school student as our society seems to be plagued with decayed moral codes and values and so the sense of right and wrong is eroded. Specifically, the paper examined the concept of teenage pregnancy, the causes or factors that contribute to teenage pregnancy and the effects of teenage pregnancy. It further looked at the approaches to solving problem of teenage pregnancy which include education, health education, moral and religious upbringing, recreational activities and societal restraints. In view of the effects of teenage pregnancy on the society, it is hereby recommended that secondary school students' should be encouraged to develop skills to help them ward off peers who may intimidate or lure them into wrong sexual practices, parents should be awake to their responsibilities and teach certain aspects of sexuality at home so that their children will be prepared for family life and school counsellors should try new strategies such as counselling on proper gender role perception and from sexual activities to help secondary school students' stay away from sex until they are ready.

The Nigeria society today has to grapple with many attitudinal or behavioural problems. Such problems include truancy, disobedience, drug offences, assault, insult, robbery, stealing, violent demonstrations, vandalism, examination malpractices, kidnapping and secret cult activities (Ogundade, 1997). Apart from these widely publicised behavioural problems, heterosexual activities are also listed among types of behavioural problems prevalent in Nigeria secondary schools. These are variously named as sexual abuse, sex offences, sexual misconducts, sexual immorality, sexual promiscuity, and sexual maladjustment.

Secondary school students' sexual activities are on the increase with a trend towards earlier on set. According to Nicholas (1996), nine of every ten males and females students have had intercourse and most have had their first intercourse between age ten and sixteen years. Ihejiamaizu and Etuk (2001) regarding the attitude of secondary school students toward teenage pregnancy, opined that teenagers begin menstruation at early age. This early age of menarche results in early intercourse. They went on to assert that peer group influence determines secondary school students' attitude towards sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy. Simon (1996) observed that most secondary school students' do not approve of teenage parenthood, thus, most teenagers believed teenage pregnancy is wrong.

Ogbah (2006) stated that in some cultures, teenage pregnancy among secondary school students' is accepted. In other words, the attitude of secondary school students' towards teenage pregnancy is positive. There is nothing wrong with it. This is because it is encouraged as result of early marriage, e.g. Northern Nigeria. Effah (2001) stated that teenage pregnancy is a welcome development in the northern part of Nigeria but not outside marriage. Some other cultures do not frown at unmarried girls getting pregnant. Durojaiye (2002) observed that in most African homes, parents are not fully equipped to answer questions on sexual matters usefully. Even those who try, pass on faulty information to their children. The whole subject thus becomes surrounded by secrecy and children now become too embarrassed to discuss this matter with their parents. Three decades after, the situation is hardly different as studies have shown that children (secondary school students inclusive) rarely receive information on sexual matters from their parents (Okonkwo and Eze, 2000). This situation leaves the secondary school students curious and ill prepared to contend with their blossoming interest in sexuality, sex and teenage pregnancy and leads them to seek information from their peers. Consequently, parent-child discussion on sexual matters is be-clouded by parental inhibitions and inter-generational tensions. Most Nigerian parents shy away from such discussion because it is generally believed that it will make the adolescent or student attempt to experiment on what they have been told ((Ogunjimi, 1997).

Nnachi (2003) observed that in terms of behavioural problems, sex abuse appeared to be one of the most serious offences committed by children and secondary school students. Obiekezie (2003) supported this view when he asserted that many

thirteen years. OROJINWO and EZE (2000) observed that today's situation shows a sharp contrast to the traditional Nigerian societal context in which girls avoided pre-marital sexual experiences for fear of social punishments usually meted out to girls who lost their virginity before marriage.

The social change blowing across Sub-Sahara Africa and the assertiveness of the young people in sexual matters has swept away old valued of moral purity as a virtue. Each passing day witnesses appreciation in teenagers' free and open approach to sex. The genesis of this free and open approach to sex among teenagers is linked with the period during and immediately after the civil war (1967-1970) when the oil boom and corresponding Udoji salary award to parents ushered in a changed social condition that provided an increased curiosity among adolescents for sex (Chike, 2001). Observers blame this state of affairs on parents. Basically, the task of educating the children, especially teenagers, about sex is seen as the responsibility of parents. A study carried out by Iseingedighi (2000) revealed that teenagers saw sex as being very necessary and sometimes necessary. Also, sexual active male student' had their fellow secondary school mates as sex partners. He concluded that the curiosity of the adolescents or teenagers to find out what sex is like, their exposure to modernity, peer group influence, permissiveness of parents and the fast eroding social morality are contributory factors to teenage pregnancy among secondary school students.

Ogbah (2006) stated that more than 20% or girls in Nigeria are sexually active or have had sexual relationship at least once. Most pregnancies among secondary school students' are unwanted because, majority of them are unmarried with no financial and physical power or strength to assume such responsibilities. Most of the pregnancies were unwanted and are terminated through unsafe abortion which is injurious to the female victims health (Adefarasin, 1997).

Nigeria culture no longer has a grip on the secondary school student as our society seems to be plagued with decayed moral codes and values and so the sense of right and wrong is eroded. This seems to affect the attitude of the secondary school students' towards teenage pregnancy as this is manifested in the acceptance of sex before marriage and indecent dressing (Osisioma, 2008).

Teenage pregnancy no doubt has far-reaching consequences on the student, family and the society. Thus, the problems that go along with teenage pregnancy extend to not only the individual but to the society as a whole. Cases of teenage pregnancy are on the increase in Nigeria. Literature revealed that about one-half of unmarried adolescents or teenagers in Nigeria have been pregnant (Chike, 2001).

Concept of Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage is a time of transition during which young people are no longer *The Coconut* ing to assume roles or responsibilities of adults. A teenager as defined by the Oxford Learners' Dictionary (6th -Edition) is a person that is between the ages of 13-19 years. According to the World Health Organisation (2002), a teenager is a person within the age range of 10-19 years. Teenage is characterised by rapid physical growth and development with the attainment of secondary sexual characteristics taking place under the influence of sex hormones (Ogbah, 2006).

Teenage pregnancy according to Onyechi (2001) is a condition whereby a young girl of between the ages of 11 and 16 becomes pregnant when she is not yet married. Rohey (2008) defined teenage pregnancy as pregnancy that occurs at an early age mostly, between the ages of 13 and 18. Sareer (1998) opined that teenage pregnancy is a pregnancy by a teenager between the ages of 13-19. He stated further that it is pregnancy usually understood to occur in a teenage that has not completed her core education –secondary school, has few or no marketable skills, is financially dependent upon her parents and/or continues to live at home and is often mentally immature.

Nwamuo and Ekwe (1998) described teenage pregnancy as a parent or older sister who become pregnant or gave birth as a teen (13-19 years). Wikipedia, (2008) stated that there is a legal definition whereby a woman is considered to be a pregnant teenager if she falls pregnant before her 18th birthday. In other words, teenage pregnancy is that which occurs at 18 years and below.

The term “teenage pregnancy” in everyday speech usually refers to a woman who has not reached legal adulthood, which varies across the world, who becomes pregnant. Ibeh (2006) asserted that 19 years or younger who become pregnant. He went further to conclude that it is pregnancy of unmarried adolescents or teenager. Therefore, it is young girls who become pregnant or gave birth or becomes mothers at tender age between 13-19 years. The term teenage pregnancy is the pregnancy of a woman between the ages of 13-19 years who is either pregnant or already gave birth. It is the pregnancy of younger adolescent (Okpara, (2002). Fumi (1998) stated that teenage pregnancy implies pregnancy that occurs at an early age, mostly, between the ages of 13 and 18. It is the pregnancy at the bloom of youth. However, whatever the term or name and variation in age from the different definitions and descriptions as well as assertions, it is obvious that teenage pregnancy is pregnancy that occurs in a teenager or teen.

Causes/Contributing Factors to Teenage Pregnancy

There are lots of factors responsible for teenage pregnancy. Some of them are as follows:

1. **Poverty** Some girls engage in sexual activities for material gains. This is usually a result of inability of parents to meet their needs due to lack of money. Some parents do not live to their obligations to their children. These

attend to. There is no gain saying that some students may even get pregnant as a device to punish their parents and bring shame to the family (Onyechi, 2001).

Some of these teenagers help their parents and siblings with finance generated from this unwholesome activity. Some also hawk wares and this exposes them to sexual abuse or rape which could result in pregnancy. The present general economic depression according to Ogunjimi (1998) had forced so many teenagers into trading their bodies for money (commercial sex workers). This according to him is being done to either supplement their meagre financial resources or as a survival strategy.

2. **Culture** There are some cultures which encourage teenage pregnancy because of their early marriage practices. Ibeh (2001) pointed out that teen pregnancy is a welcome development in Northern Nigeria, though not outside marriage as that would be an abomination and could deny the teenage mother some rights in the community as regards women affairs. Some other cultures do not frown at or disapprove unmarried girls getting pregnant and so in such places, teenage pregnancy rates can be very high. Okonofua (2001) in support of this opinion asserted that in some cultures, it is a common practice for young girls to be given out early in marriage, usually before or immediate after menarche. He further stated that some of them get pregnant with their first menstruation; such pregnancies are however welcome since they take place in the context of marriage.
3. **Peer Group Influence** Most teenagers, in an attempt to want to be like their mates in areas such as dressing, hair-do and other material things get a lot of wrong information about sex activity. Some teenagers are deceived by their peers to engage in sexual intercourse and get its taste. In some cases, they are being urged into doing that by their peers or friends who often ask them to accompany them on an errand where illicit sexual activity are carried out (Onyechi, 2001). Rohey (2008) reported that most girls who are not involved in love relationship are usually influenced by their peers into this act. Eruesegbefe (2005) stated that education about responsible sexual behaviour and specific clear information about the danger of sexual intercourse and teenage pregnancy are frequently not offered. Thus, much of the sex education that teenagers received and information about sex are through uninformed peers.
4. **Sexual Coercion** This implies the act of forcing or attempting to force another individual- through violence, threats, verbal insistence, deception to carryout any sexual activity against the person's will (Okonofua, 2001). Sexual coercion is a continuum of behaviours ranging from unwanted touch, verbal intimidation, or any device that requires girls to sexually service men against their will. Much sexual intercourse that occurred through coercion or force can actually lead to pregnancy.

The Coconut

5. **Exposure to Pornographic Films and the Mass-media** The influence of videos, films, Television, and pornographic films and magazines cannot be washed away. Adegboyega (1986) pointed out that teenage girls had always been influenced by what they had seen on television and cinema screens or read about on the pages of romance and other pornographic materials. Of the factors influencing teenagers attitude towards sexual practices, exposure to pornographic materials and the mass media exert great influence (Omotunde, 2008). Teenagers are naturally open to the normal sex drive while this drive is incensed by the impact of permissive Western culture transmitted through the sexual stimuli conveyed by the mass-media. Adedipe (2000) opined that teenagers today are growing up in a culture in which television and movies; music and magazines transmit. The use of pornographic materials as well as knowledge and the use of contraceptives, especially the condom that has been excessively advertised, has contributed immensely to the involvement of teenagers in sexual practices thereby resulting to pregnancy (Onuzulike, 2002)
6. **Ignorance** Most teenage girls know little about adolescent growth, fertility and the consequences of early pregnancy. Some teenagers lack information or are misinformed about sex and the joy derived from it. Many teenagers do not know when and how pregnancy occurs or corrects information about safe periods. The child would then depend on information from peers, books and magazines, which may not be the best. Most girls are not aware of the dangers, effects and risks involved in this ungodly act, whereas others who fall as victims of teenage pregnancy regret its (Trefor, 1998).
7. **Industrialization and Urbanization** Increased in the number of industries in the urban areas, leads to migration of a lot of people into urban cities in search of jobs. Some of the males according to Nzewi and Onwurah (2008), with a lot of money to throw around, entice or attract teenage girls. Due to urbanisation and westernisation that is going on, most parents are missing their priorities and forgetting some of the original African values and norms. These have led to the increased promiscuity among teenagers and the consequent pregnancy that goes with It.
8. **Lack of Supervision and Low Moral Upbringing by Parents** Most working class mothers do not have time for their children especially the girls hence they learn wrong things from their peers. Adolescents are supposed to have first hand authentic information from their mothers as regards womanhood but many parents do not do this. Some parents also do not teach their children moral behaviour and are themselves promiscuous and therefore, they cannot discipline their daughters. Most parents shy away from the discussion of sexual issues for they generally believed that it will make the teenager attempt to experiment on what they have been told (Eze 2001).

Effects of Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy has far-reaching effects. It has considerable, long-term effects. The following are the effects of teenage pregnancy:

- 1. Reproductive Health Effect** Teenagers could employ both traditional and Western methods in trying to get rid of unwanted pregnancy. Aludo (1997) reported that concoctions used included potash, mixed with water, spirits such as lemon mixed with salt, gin, etc. This method can lead to inflammation of the reproductive system with resultant infertility in the future. There could be perforation of the uterus, haemorrhage and sepsis due to use of unsterile instrument. Unsafe abortion and contraction of sexually transmitted infections, sexually transmitted diseases, and so on, may lead to infertility. Bello (2006) observed that the infections rate of some teenagers is as high as 25%, resulting from lost abortion or post partum infections. He went further to point out that if fertility has been impaired through high-risk sexual behaviour in teenage; this often becomes apparent during childbearing.
- 2. Social Effect** The United Nation (1998) admitted that becoming a mother at early age tends to generate poverty by blocking a woman's means avenue for social advancement. It truncates her education and reduces her employment prospects. The growth rate of Nigeria population is conservatively put at 3.2% per annum. This growth rate is very alarming because it is not being matched with a corresponding increase in the provision of basic social, economic, and health facilities (FMOH, 2007). Teenage pregnancy also brings about over-population that leads to unemployment which leads to increased crime wave and a number of other social vices (Ikwaako, 2001).
- 3. Psychological Effects** Psychological effects of teenage pregnancy ranges from fear of being rejected, low self esteem, fear of the unknown, compromised marriage prospects, emotional stress and so on. Married teenager is also psychologically affected because, for they are not physically and mentally mature to care for a child and also keep a home. It has been discovered that most teenagers especially the unmarried pregnant ones express self-doubt, loneliness, uncertainty and helplessness than their peers (Conger, 1998). The would-be-fathers become guilty and show instability. They lack emotional support from adult members of the society which is a major source of depression.
- 4. Child Abandonment:** Child abandonment or dumping happens most times when teenagers feel that these children will hinder their future ambition or due to fear of being rejected by parents. Most of these babies are found in bushes, gutters, and pit latrines. Some are abandoned in hospitals and churches. Teen girls who get impregnated some times try to carryout abortion, while others dump their babies after giving birth (Akingba, 1991).

As a result of denial of paternity or responsibility for the child and mother, *The Coconut* other abandon their child(ren) in bushes and gutters.

5. **Economic Effect** Researches revealed that teenage mothers are disproportionately represented among the poor and down trended those who receive public assistance. They also experience or pass through difficulties finding remunerative employment with sufficient educational credentials and the costs of childcare often preclude them from becoming economically self-supporting (Iwelumor, 2006). Reluctance or inability of spouses to provide support for mothers and children, together with the non-availability of safe welfare programmes directed to correcting social disadvantages, is an important factor leading to poverty among teenage mothers (Onyechi, 2001).
6. **Unfinished Education** Usually with pregnancy, educational pursuit is disrupted either temporarily or permanently. Temporarily because, some teenagers return to school while some others are not as lucky as there is nobody willing to foot the bills or take care of the child. This either makes most of them go into early marriages, learn a trade or some end up as prostitutes. Pregnant teenage girls are expelled from school and they become dropout ((Onyechi, 2001).
7. **Unsafe Abortion** Abortions among teenagers is usually done by quacks or concoctions are used by the teenagers themselves. According to Anochie (2001), most of these teenagers are in school and getting pregnant, means disrupting their academic pursuit, and this makes them, do anything possible to terminate pregnancies usually through crooked and illegal means (abortion) which could be harmful to them or even kill them.

Approaches to Solving Problem of Teenage Pregnancy

Different approaches could be used to solve problems of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students'. Some of these measures or approaches according to Woyo (2006) are as follows:

1. **Education** women education will go a long way to increase life expectancy of women, and increase productivity. The government should allow free and compulsory primary and secondary education, to reduce the level of illiteracy, hawking, prostitution and child slavery.
2. **Health Education** It is very important to health educate these teenagers on issues pertaining to life and their health. Such health information should be given in schools, homes, churches, mass media, and so on. Where there are school clinics, the nurse should organize periodic talks on personal hygiene, menstruation, sexuality and so forth. In the absence of school clinics, public health nurses should do that periodically. These teenagers should be encouraged to ask questions and same answered as truthfully and tactfully as possible.
3. **Moral and Religious Upbringing** The onus lies mainly on the parents. These teenagers need guidance. They should be taught self conduct, proper dress code and

incinations and obligations (Christians and Moslems alike).

4. **Recreational Activities** Group activities and recreational activities such as debating, sports activities, excursion, picnics, quiz competitions, visit to amusement parks, etc should be encouraged to divert youthful exuberance to something more useful.

5. **Societal Restraints** Awareness campaign on sexuality and its implications should be made through posters, programmes, mass media jingles, hand bills, and so on. Where possible, these messages should be translated into various local languages. Teenage Marriage should be discouraged by government and policies made to that effect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teenage is a period of transition from childhood to adolescent and during which young people are no longer children but are trying to assume roles or responsibilities of adults. Secondary school students' sexual activities are on the increase. This is usually as a result of several factors, such as early onset of menstruation, changing values due to urbanization, exposure to foreign cultures through migration, tourism and the mass media, erosion of traditional norms and values and lack of parental control. In line with this, the following recommendations are made:

1. Secondary school students' should be provided with adequate and relevant information regarding sexuality, reproductive health and teenage pregnancy.
2. Secondary school students' should be encouraged to develop skills to help them ward off peers who may intimidate or lure them into wrong sexual practices.
3. Parents should be awake to their responsibilities and teach certain aspects of sexuality at home so that their children will be prepared for family life.
4. Counsellors should try new strategies such as counselling on proper gender role perception and from sexual activities to help secondary school students' stay away from sex until they are ready.
5. Teachers should also teach certain aspects of sexuality at school so that the students' will be familiar with societal expectations of their future roles as mothers and fathers.

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