

# The impact of teen pregnancy on adolescents



Parenthood is defined as the state of being a parent or the responsibilities involved in it. Children as young as 12 years old are able to become parents if they are sexually active and this is known as adolescent pregnancy.

Adolescent pregnancy can impact both the mother and the offspring in various ways. Children of adolescent mothers are more likely to exhibit high involvement in alcohol and drug abuse and other mental health issues.

Adolescent mothers are also exposed to various mental health issues and usually find it difficult to cope with the pregnancy. However, if they follow the right path, adolescent mothers are able to ricochet back and lead a normal and healthy lifestyle.

With every new generation and era that emerges, new ideas are formed, new machines are invented and everything changes. There was a time when men wrote on cave walls, and women were meant to be housewives.

However, these perceptions have changed and it has somehow negatively impacted this current generation. Similar to that, parenthood was once considered to be something special and when one heard the word parents, one would immediately have a mental representation of a male or female who are old and mature enough to be parents. However, the mental representation attached to parenthood has differed largely. These days the transition into parenthood can occur to anyone between the ages of 13 - 17 years of age who are sexual active.

Parenthood as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is the state of being a parent and the responsibilities involved in it. As many of us are familiar to it, parenthood is not an easy breezy task. It involves a lot of physical, mental and emotional strength. Parents and children are very tightly bounded to

each other, whereby, the behaviour of the father or mother can affect the child and vice-versa. Erickson had defined the 6 different stages of life, which are prenatal, infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescents, young adulthood, middle adulthood and late adulthood. Adolescents will be the point of focus due to the structure of the essay that speaks about teenage parenthood.

Humans between 11 - 20 years of age are considered as adolescents, or in layman terms, teenager. This period is when an individual sexually matures, otherwise known as puberty. When this occurs, children tend to be curious of many different things. Similar to the term 'curiosity killed the cat', an adolescent individual are highly prone to commit certain acts that may endanger them such as sexual acts, drug intakes, alcohol intakes and others.

### Adolescent Pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancy is defined as an individual under the age of 19 who is pregnant. This can occur when a male and female who are sexually active have sexual intercourse. Statistics have showed that the rates of adolescent pregnancy have drastically decreased in the past few years. The reason behind this change could be due to the presence of contraceptive methods such as condoms, diaphragms and others.

However, BBC news published another article stating that the likelihood of pregnancy amongst adolescent girls might increase if they watch TV shows that portray high sexual matter. Such a result could be due to the immaturity of teenage girls in understanding the situation. Majority of girls might think

that engaging in sexual acts at such a tender age is something acceptable. Little do these girls know that there are serious consequences.

It has also been identified that adolescents who engage in dating may be more prone to early pregnancy as they are more likely to have sexual intercourse during their relationship period (Meade, Kershaw & Ickovics, 2008).

### Effects on the offspring

A child born to an adolescent mother and a child born to an older mother may seem physically same. But they are mentally and emotionally different. The effects of adolescent pregnancy on an offspring are very vast and have been proven time and time again by researchers conducting studies on these particular groups of individuals. Majority of us understand that the younger the mother, the more healthier their child will turn out to be mentally, physically and emotionally. However, there is a contradiction when adolescent pregnancy is the focus point.

A study conducted by Harden, Lynch, Turkheimer, Emery, D'Onofrio, Slutske, Waldron, Heath, Statham and Martin (2007) that involved a sample of 1368 children from Australia, concluded that greater quantity of mental health issues were detected in children who were born to teenage mothers as compared to the delayed birth of their sibling and first cousins. The reason behind this conclusion can be explained by inspecting the mother.

Adolescent mothers usually lack in certain areas, such as deciding between what is wrong and what is right. Older mothers are more experienced in areas such as child care, child development and so on so forth. This could be

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a reason why lesser mental health issues were present in children born to older mothers as opposed to adolescent mothers.

Harden et. al (2007) also discovered that, substance abuse issues present in mothers is also a great forecaster of parallel issues in their child. It is known to majority of us that the background or environment of a developing child plays a major part in predicting the child's future. Therefore, if a child is brought up in an environment where the parents practice substance abuse and other negative acts, the child will eventually grow up and turn out to be an exact replica of the parents. This can be depicted in a show conducted By Oprah Winfrey, where reporter Lisa Ling interviewed the Hawk family, where every single member was addicted to Heroin except their 13 month year old baby. This clearly depicts that even if the mother delays the pregnancy, external factors still affect the development of their child.

Another effect that adolescent pregnancy has on a child is that, the female offspring of adolescent mothers have higher inner fondness to be an adolescent mother as well (Meade et. al, 2008). This study involved 1430 participants from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 in United Sates. Every child has a predisposed thought that their relationship with their family will be on good terms. Therefore, children to adolescents mother believe that even though they were born to adolescent mother, that all is well. When this happens, the daughters will be motivated to have children of their own at an early age as they feel that it is the right choice.

Meade et. al (2008) concluded that daughters of adolescent mothers who received mediocre or negative parenting involvement might lead to an

involvement in acts that are aimed towards teenage parenthood. A vital part in the development of a child is parenting involvement. Parents who practice uninvolved parenting styles usually mould their children into very rebellious and attention-seeking humans as they do not get sufficient attention from their loved ones. Due to this, the children tend to look for other ways and commit other acts in the hopes that it will gain their parents attention. Therefore, acts such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse and engaging in sexual intercourse are few ways that help them get identified in the eyes of their parents.

Other than that, researchers Hardy, Astone, Brooks-Gunn, Shapiro and Miller, (1998) conducted a study on 3, 006 second generation children whose mothers had registered for pregnancy foster. It was reported that adolescent mother's offspring coped incompetently as adults as compared to the offspring of those who delayed pregnancy. The main reason behind these results could be due to adolescent mothers being less experienced and incapable of handling a young child, which would directly affect their teaching styles. Due to their age, adolescents usually assume that all their actions are right and would tend to raise their offspring along that line.

Offspring of adolescent mothers are usually not level headed as they have been brought up by someone inexperienced. When this occurs, the behaviour of the child is disrupted. Hardy et al. (1998) implied that advanced sexual activity, detention, recurrence of education levels, and flat IQ scores were exhibited in children who were born to adolescent parents. This could be due to the element of observation, as every child assumes that what they

observe is right, therefore they observe what their mother is going through and assumes that it is the right path.

Adding to that is another study conducted by Coley and Chase-Lansdale, (1998) that established the fact that kindergarten going children who are born to adolescent mothers has a tendency of portraying negative conduct such as decreased stimulus control and elevated levels of aggression.

Children who have been brought up by older mothers, are taught to be submissive and not exhibit their anger as it is a negative factor. However, children who have been brought up teenage mothers, do not receive appropriate parenting involvement or monitoring, therefore, they have not been taught to control their emotions and behaviours which is why, most children of adolescent mothers usually engage in aggressive behaviours.

#### Effects on pregnant adolescent

Teenage pregnancy is similar to shooting a gun. You may think, how is that possible? When you are planning on firing a gun, you need to have proper training in handling the gun in order to hit your target and to safe yourself from getting your shoulder dislocated when the gun recoils. If you handle the gun the wrong way, you may get affected. Similar to teenage pregnancy, when an adolescent gets pregnant, it not only affects the offspring, but the bearer as well, if the bearer is not experienced.

A study conducted by Moore and Florsheim, (2001) analyzed the interpersonal and psychological functioning of expectant and nonexpectant adolescent couples. It was concluded that decreased frequency of positive interpersonal development and increased frequency of negative

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interpersonal development were manifested in expectant adolescent couples (Moore & Florsheim, 2001). Positive interpersonal development means that an individual is very open, warm and friendly and prefers to engage in any type of communication, whereas negative interpersonal development means that an individual is more close-minded, cold and rude and would prefer to not engage in any type of communication. Such a result was reached because most adolescents would be ashamed of themselves. This is not the appropriate age to be carrying a child, therefore, they would tend to distance themselves from the public in order to avoid being scrutinized or criticized.

Another study that identified the effect of teenage parenthood on parents found that adolescent pregnancy intensifies the negative future of the already handicapped pregnant adolescent (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). When an adolescent becomes pregnant, their future would decrease rapidly as their future becomes unstable and undecided. Their levels of achievement would drop as they assume that they would be shunned by the public and that no academic institution will take them in. Due to this, many pregnant adolescents would encounter various problems. These problems might comprise of reduced frequency of completing school, increase in percentage of poverty, reduced frequency of stability in married life, and extensive frequency of issues pertaining to health (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).

As you have witnessed, majority of the studies were conducted to identify and discuss the negative effects on pregnant adolescence. However, many fail to touch on the positive effects on pregnant adolescence such as resilience. Resilience can be acquired and developed during a period of time



and is known as the capability to ricochet from difficult and harsh conditions (Carey, Ratliff & Lyle, 1998).

Carey et al. (1998) conducted a study on adolescent mothers who registered in a Texas school district parenting education event. They found that Insight, Initiative and Relationships to be the most frequent factor used to cope with adolescent pregnancy. The results of the study concluded that adolescent mothers were determined to make a stance in response to the public's pessimistic outlook towards pregnant adolescence (Carey et al., 1998). From this, it can be seen that some pregnant adolescent do not succumb to the norm of the public, but would rather act in ways that would help break that norm. By doing that, the future of the adolescent will be brighter as they have decided to not let their pregnancy be a hindrance to their academic dreams. Take for example, the movie Juno where Juno gives her baby up for adoption. This movie shows that not all pregnant teens will deteriorate. A pregnant teen should be able to make a decision that will benefit the future of them self and their unborn child.

Carey et al. (1998) also observed that the predominant resiliency described in the study was Relationship. The reason behind this conclusion could be as a result of that every one of us would always want a relationship that we can fall back to if we were to encounter any hardship. The relationship can represent any form such as, friends, family, or even a stranger. It was proven that the vital foundation to the accomplishment of these adolescents were supportive relationships with adults (Carey et al, 1998).

When a member of a family encounters a problem such as adolescent pregnancy, the rest of the members would be affected by it as well.

Therefore, adolescent pregnancy can be related not only to the development of the bearer, but the development of their siblings as well as they are an indirect target of this issue. A study conducted by East and Jacobson, (2001) observed 243 younger brothers and sister whom were siblings to pregnant teens and non pregnant teens.

It was found that the younger siblings of pregnant adolescents demonstrated a substantial elevation in school problems and reduced ambition for education as compared to younger siblings of non pregnant adolescents (East & Jacobson, 2001). Younger siblings usually turn to their elder ones as a role model. Hence, when they observe the condition of their siblings and how their siblings are faced with many issues, they tend get demotivated to perform as well as they used to.

## Conclusion

As a whole, adolescent pregnancy brings about more physical, mental and emotional issues. It can be deduced that, adolescent pregnancy affects not only the offspring, but the bearer of the child and people surrounding them. However, note that not all pregnant teens are similar. There could be various factors that contribute to their situation, be it positively or negatively.

According to a study conducted by Carey et al. (1998), it is safe to say that environmental factors do play a prominent part in deciding the outcome and future of the mother and the child.

It is also learnt that the future of the mother and child lies in the hands of the mother. For instance, if the mother is willing to take a stand and work towards improving her life, the future of her child may be brighter as compared to those teen mothers who decide to give up everything and not pursue a better lifestyle.

Adolescent pregnancy should not be taken lightly as it gives rise to various issues such as poverty, child abandonment, mental issues and many others. Therefore, always be cautious of your actions because one wrong move could change your life forever.