

Unwanted Pregnancy among Adolescents: Educating Parent

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Abstract

Unwanted pregnancy among adolescent has been considered as a social problem in Malaysia. Moreover, pregnancy in this stage is associated with the high-risk pregnancy. Adolescent and parent involved in this issue are facing hard time and it is challenging to deal with. Recent statistics from the Malaysia's Ministry of Health has stated there are around 4,000 teenage girls under the age of 18 were reported pregnant annually. This alarming number of cases were due to the lack of education and information about reproductive and sexual health, lack of access ways to prevent pregnancy, adolescent sexual behavior, and other factors. Hence, this study will focus on how parents can play their roles in helping their child faced this hard time, because the parents tend to feel shock, anger, and disappointed when they found that their young children are pregnant. A feeling of regret was also experienced where these parents' thought that they did not do enough prevention for this issue. Moreover, the perceptions from extended family members, friends and people at school and the community at larger on this matter usually make parents shameful. This paper gathered the data information through library readings including references from books, theses and related journal articles to assist the determination of the content. This paper intends to give an overview on what parents can do to help their children facing this stage of an unwanted pregnancy. This paper will also explain on the Islamic approach to educate the parents and the implication for practitioner.

Keywords: Unwanted Pregnancy, Adolescents, Parent and Family, Educate and Islamic Approach

Introduction

Unwanted pregnancy among adolescents is a global social issue that has been discussed worldwide. This issue becomes prominent due to the increasing number of cases. Recent statistics from Malaysian's Ministry of Health there are 79,302 pregnancies among girls under 18 who were found to be pregnant out-of-wedlock and it was reported from 2012 to 2016. As a matter of fact, when the adolescents are pregnant out of wedlock, their parents also need to be officially involved due to the parent-child relationships. The relationship is specific

in nature and due to the degree of intimacy, parent-child relationship differs from all other kinds of relationships such as partners, family and friends (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015). According to Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, (1983), the relationship between parents and their child can be defined as the psychological closeness, trust and communication between parents and children. Due to this strong relationship, the parents are encouraged to help the adolescents in order to face this phenomenon of unwanted pregnancy wisely.

Generally, pregnancy is the best moment for all mothers, parents and family, but it is different for adolescents with unwanted pregnancy. It is due to the challenging and stressful events such as academic disruption, lack of preparation for motherhood, and also family conflict because of the pregnancy (Geller, 2004). It is pertinent for parents to help their child during this critical time. It is normal for parents to express their anger, shock and disappointment when they found their child is pregnant. As a matter of fact, they are mostly fear of their child's future. Past reviews have indicated that parents do not know what they need to do (Azmawaty Mohamad Nor, 2017) when their child was found pregnant and they tend to be afraid and ashamed of what others may think of them as a family.

Literature Review

Unwanted Pregnancy

Unwanted pregnancy can be defined as pregnancy among girls age range from 13 to 19 years old which is not the suitable age for legal adulthood, and it is different across the world (UNICEF, 2008). A woman who has an unwanted pregnancy is in depressing and debilitating situation, putting a woman in a dilemma, the woman may not be mentally, physically, socially and psychologically fit to bear the child. Normally unwanted pregnancy among adolescents are always being assumed as negative consequences and outcomes like insufficient amount of education needed to compete in the economy (Sawhill, 2000) frequently directing to poverty (Tripp & Viner, 2005) and having psychological distress. (Heubeck & Neill, 2000). Moreover, teenage pregnancy is very high in risk which can lead to major problems related to her own body, and degree of both physical and emotional development achieved during the pubertal process. Moreover, the worse obstetrical outcomes will occur when the incomplete development of genital tract and the musculoskeletal system of pregnant adolescents are put at risk to them (Chedraui, Kravitz, Salazar-pousada, & Hidalgo, 2011)

Unwanted pregnancy among adolescents lead to the high rates of spontaneous abortion, preterm delivery and low birth weight as compared to older women aged from 20 to 29. Furthermore, to compare the complications of pregnancy, the adolescent pregnancy leads to twice as many deaths among adolescents compared to adult women. In addition, the extension of maternal mortality rates and pregnancy can cause tremendous psychological stress among the adolescents, especially with unwanted pregnancy (Papri, 2016).

This stressful situation gives a big impact on the adolescents' decision making about the unwanted pregnancy and may lead to short and irrelevant thoughts which are influenced by her own opinion as well as the people around her at that moment. During that time, they seek for medical attention she has already made her mind and most of the time is to terminate the pregnancy (Baginski, 2007). Thus, because they feel ashamed by the unwed pregnancy, they will tend to hide baby either encouraged to marry the father of the baby (usually her boyfriend), undergo an abortion, give up the baby for adoption or is sent to a shelter home (Rains, 2009; Saim, Dufâker, Eriksson, & Ghazinour, 2013)

Parents and Family: The Factors

According to scholars, parent-child relationship could be one of the biggest factors that affect the likelihood of sexual initiation, substance use, and depression among adolescents (Lezin et al., 2004; Silk & Romero, 2014). The significant key of unwanted pregnancy among teenagers are associated with the conflict from child-parents' interaction/relation, submissive parenting style, lacking of parental support, control and supervision, and parents' permissive values toward sexual behaviors (Ah, Omar, & Azam, 2017). Benson, (2004) indicates the findings from his study of parent-child communication, on the contributing factors of the pregnancy among adolescents are the poor communication or communication breakdown of the family members, especially between child and parents; unstable family relationship, conflict family environment and negative style of parenting.

Moreover, many researchers found the relationship between adolescents' sexual behavior and family variables such as parental warmth, support, parent/ child closeness, and child attachment to parents (Miller, Benson, & Galbraith, 2001). Several studies concluded that the influence of peers on adolescent sexual activity which can lead to unwanted pregnancy is due to the lack of closeness in the parent/teen relationship (Feldman & Brown (1993); Whitbeck et al. 1992, 1993).

In addition, a few studies showed that family without the presence of the father is related to the risk factor for pregnancy cases among the adolescents due to disrupted family structure, while a close relationship and connectedness of the family can be proved as protective factor against teen pregnancy especially the close relationship with the mother (Panova, Kulikov, Berchtold, & Suris, 2016).

Regarding the characteristics of the family, previous studies showed that majority of adolescents who experienced maternity or paternity are suffered from the absence of a maternal or paternal figure, which resulted to the lack of attention in the family. The results indicated there was stronger and more consistent evidence of effects of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2009). Their findings noted that girls whose life without a father figure before they reach the age of five, showed higher rates of early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy. Recent study stated, mostly all the participants said they were seeking love outside the family, which revealed a scenario of limited communication and unsatisfactory relations within the family. (Samano et al., 2017).

Parents and Family: Social Support

Even though parents and family can be the factors of the mentioned issue, but we cannot deny that this relationship also can be the best support system to the adolescents. Social support is a key factor when young mothers and their children succeed in spite of major challenges.

Family, partners, and friends are the crucial sources of support for the adolescent parents, and stable partners may be particularly important. Incorporating partners are more directly into interventions may help to reduce attrition; a relationship between instability of the mother-partner relationship and attrition has been reported (Letourneau, 2001).

Given the typical enrolled in the group of mothers of teenage pregnancy, the experiences of families faced with teenage pregnancy are needed to be learned because they may be essential to allow the line between care provided by health professionals and the needs of adolescents and their families. In this regard, the practice of nursing must be taken into account as the expectations, relationships and family contexts to support the care of adolescents and their families.

According to Hupcey,(1998) social support is a multi-faceted concept that theoreticians and researchers have rarely been successful in conceptualizing, defining or measuring. Cobb (1976) defined social support as the aid, comfort and confirmation provided by several resources, such as family, friends, co-workers and significant others that help one to feel that she or he is cared for, loved, being esteemed and part of a network of friends. Social support could be categorized into three entities; tangible, appraisal and emotional support (Cohen & McKay, 1984). Family and friends are often seen as the main resources of social support for teenagers (Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Similarly, unmarried young mothers also perceive their interpersonal relationship, especially from their family, as part of the important support they expect to receive (Panzarine, 1986; Panzarine, Slater, & Sharps, 1995).

A study by Macleod (2003) was stated that the participants felt well supported by their families, and many appeared to be in stable relationships throughout the antenatal period due to the social support needed. Past research indicated that the reciprocal exchange of support between parents and pregnant teenagers was correlated with increased mastery and life satisfaction and decreased depression and anxiety (Stevenson 1999). Due to the stressful event of pregnancy, the adolescent really need support from parent and family, it is supported by Turner, (1990) which is indicated the adolescent living with parents while pregnancy had significantly lower depression scores than those in another living situation. He also concluded social support during pregnancy is relevant to the adolescent's adaptation to becoming a mother.

Educating Parent

Health Matters

Generally, adolescent pregnancy appears to have increase risks on both mother and infant. The teenage mother may be at an increased risk of anemia, infections, eclampsia and preeclampsia, emergency cesarean delivery, postpartum depression, and inadequate breastfeeding initiation (Jeha, Usta, Ghulmiyyah, & Nassar, 2015). Due to the risks, special care is needed in order to make sure both mother and baby are healthy. In Malaysia, some of the adolescents refuse to go for antenatal checkups because of shame and guilt and it was influenced by the society, traditions and culture. Adolescents' perception about prenatal care could be based upon the influence of peers or parents, which may have an effect on their perception of its relevance, importance, or need. (Tilghman, 2008). So, because of that, the pregnant adolescents rarely go for antenatal checkups and this is supported by the finding of a study in Nepal which shows that the frequency of antenatal checkups among teenage pregnant women are poor. Compared to the mothers in their twenties, the possible reason given by the latter author for lower uptake of antenatal care facilities by pregnant teenagers is lack of physical and mental maturity (Raj et al., 2010). So, the roles of parents are needed so as to persuade and give their opinions to the adolescents about the importance and needs of the antenatal checkups in order to secure their pregnancy.

Besides, the parents need to give awareness to the adolescents about the risk of their pregnancy

because the rate of having a low birth weight infant below 2500g among adolescents is higher than the cases among adults, and the neonatal death rate (within 28 days of birth) is almost 3 times higher. The mortality rate for the mother, although is low, but the rate is twice higher than the adult pregnant women (Klein, 2005) Due to the adolescents' age, they may not have the time or financial stability to acquire higher levels of education, resulting in more cases of

poverty, poor nutrition, inadequate prenatal care, and higher incidence of smoking and drug use. All of these factors may contribute to a higher risk of obstetrical complications. The parents should know about the conditions of their teenage children, thus in helping the adolescents to face all these difficulties. They need to give support on the issues pertaining the financial, education and the nutrition that are needed for pregnant adolescents. Undoubtedly, the adolescents are not mentally prepared for pregnancy and they do not conscientious about their health and prenatal care (Jeha et al., 2015).

It is proven, comprehensive prenatal care from the outset ensures a healthier baby. Smoking, alcohol use and drug abuse should be strongly discouraged in pregnant teens. The parents need to be aware of their adolescents' activities during pregnancy to avoid the substance and unwanted issues (Papri, 2016 & Dev Raj, 2010). If the parents have and seek for some information regarding of adolescent pregnancy's health issues, it will be helpful for adolescents in facing healthy pregnancy journey.

Psychological wellbeing

Research indicates that parent-child relationship is important to influence the adolescents' well-being (Wel & Abma, 2000) Indeed, the influence of parents on adolescent's psychological well-being is sometimes found to bear more weight than peers' influence (Field, Lang, Yando, & Bendell, 1995; Greenberg, Siegal, & Leitch, 1983; Rosenberg, 1979). Furthermore, a healthy psychological outcome for the adolescent is fostered within the context of a parent-adolescent relationship that maintains a mutual attachment while tolerating the conflict necessary for the adolescents to achieve a healthy sense of autonomy. Thus, emotional closeness and parent-adolescent conflict are important aspects when characterizing the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989) They claimed that parents could influence and develop facets of well-being in adolescents that include the development of identity, positive self-image, life satisfaction, social competence, emotional problems, and problem-behaviour (Nordin, Wahab, & Yunus, 2012).

For many adolescents' psychological distress is a serious problem that need to be considered but emotional distress, anxiety and depression are more common in girls (Fagg, Stansfeld, & Congdon, 2006). In contrast, psychological distress is psychological well-being which is composed of general positive effects and emotional ties. General positive effects consist of feelings of happiness, light heartedness and feeling relaxed, whilst emotional ties involve feeling loved and wanted and an absence of loneliness (Veit & Ware, 1983). Ryff (1989) also suggests a multidimensional model of psychological wellbeing that emphasizes on wellness rather than illness. She claimed that psychological well-being consists of six dimensions such as personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and autonomy and positive relations with others. Thus, one who exhibits strength in each of the dimension would reflect good psychological well-being and vice- versa. Nevertheless, being young and unmarried can be tough on the mothers' emotions, financial, health and psychological wellbeing. In many cases, families totally reject their daughters who become pregnant before marriage. More importantly, the issues of pregnancies among adolescents are an endemic social concern with damaging health consequences (Bluestein & Starling, 1994) Thus, it could contribute to total burden of disability in the population (Latiffah et. al, 2005).

Hence, the effort to understand psychological wellbeing and its cause is not new but it is an issue that has always raised interest. In fact, medical practitioners, psychologists, counsellors and social support groups and community development program, which include

extension agents, aim to increase the quality of life among the society as one of their main objectives.

Given this juncture, perhaps, by providing social supports and designing extension education programs, it will be the way to alleviate problems related to psychological wellbeing of the young adults particularly among the young unwed pregnancy mothers.

Here, the roles of parents are essential, they are needed to be optimist and positive, so the adolescents can feel that their parents care and can feel accepted by parent and family.

Islamic Approach

In the eagerness to be a developed country, people are unaware that there are many teenagers who have dropped out from school. Disruption in education flows can lead students to various social problems including sexual misconduct or pregnancy out of wedlock. So, it is essential to help the adolescents to get a better education. in order to avoid the serious social problem. In Islam the main aim of education is to produce a good man. The description of a good man can be categorized into two dimensions. The first dimension is about the relationship between man and his creator, and the second is his relationship with others. The good man in the first dimension is the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God, recognizes the power and the unity of God, and creates God-consciousness in his soul and the second dimension who is doing good and respect others (Rosila & Yaacob, 2013)

Islam is present in human's life as a guided human being in achieving the pleasure of Allah SWT. Turning away from the laws of the Shari'ah will make people fall apart from the will of religion and the purpose of life in the world. Due to failed in following the religious rules, it can be seen various problems occur likes social problem among teenagers

The study conducted by Michelle, Thomas and Sinyangwe (1989), found that perfect religion appreciation can be a good moral hold in the adolescent and thus give them direction to think wisely before doing something immoral. Here, the parent's role is needed as a model to their child in appreciation of religion. The parent can show the adolescents on how to understand and appreciate the religion, which will help them to do and think wisely. This also can make the adolescent mothers to think wisely and prevent them to abort their babies. Findings also show that the family institution can play a role in overcoming this social ill through parents as the role-models; giving their children adequate religious education, monitoring their children's movements, getting advisory and guidance services from family and religious counsellors in educating their children and getting closer to them (Hamjah, 2014). This also can help the adolescents to appreciate and grateful about themselves. The parent can show that religion is essential to a family. A study by Alimohammadi (2017) supported the matter as he stated that religion plays a central role in shaping the core values and beliefs regarding family life, and the aspects of religion can also affect the parenting styles. The findings from the present study shows that out-of-wedlock pregnancy among Muslim adolescents is caused by the failure of parents to control their daughters' behavior as well as lack of communication among the family members

Most of the adolescents face various forms of family problems like family conflict, family disruption, irresponsible parents, poverty, broken or divorced family, and these problems affect their behaviors. (Hamjah, 2014). Factors that led these adolescents to promiscuity and engaged in premarital sex. Due to lack of family's love and attention, or excessive freedom (Jamaluddin, 2013) The father or the husband is the head of the family, the focal point and

the frame of reference within the family structure. He sets up his family on a solid moral and religious pattern that places “faith” as the foundation of life. In Al-Quran Allah has stated

‘O you who believe! save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones” This advice is dedicated to all members of the family be it: The father, mother, children, and relatives (At-Tahrim, 66:6)

Here, the parents can look back on their family structure, the parent can repair the damaging structure, fill in the emptiness with faith and love together so because of this, parents can spend more time with their children in order to shape their personality and behavior, thus prevent social issues which may lead to unwanted pregnancy. They can do a lot of activities together as a family. As a result, the adolescents' lives will be positively shaped, and they can do more beneficial activities and lessen the burden about their stressful pregnancy.

Other than that, parents can give awareness about the status of childbirth to their adolescents to make them realize and aware to ponder about their child's future and the relationship with the father of baby. According to the views of Islamic Laws; there are two opinions regarding the lineage rulings, one is the national fatwa stated every child born 6 month and two lahzah (moment) after the date of aqadnikah is permitted the nasab(lineage) to its mother's husband. The second is the state of Perlis's fatwa was permits the nasab even if the child's birth is less than 6 month from the date of aqadnikah with a condition that the father does deny his relationship to the child, however in the JPN due to their policy to register all births, so it is indifferent of the status of childbirth, but all registrations are bound by the fatwas. The syariah's approach and JPN registration ascertained that there is hope and a way out for unwed Muslims mothers to avoid abortions and abandon their babies (Jamaluddin, 2013).

In Islam, the perfect time to educate the children about sexual education need to be years before the age of puberty because when they reach puberty, they will be accountable on their deeds and sayings (Ulwan, 2003; Sudan, 2015). Sex education has its own terms, ethics, controls and mechanisms that require a lot of wisdom and premeditation, considering the fact that it's widely ramified. However, if it is ill delivered, it could have serious implications. The aim of any Muslim parents is the right and high-quality education of their youngsters, so they can develop into wise adults who are able to recognize what is right and work to seek for it, and differentiate what is wrong and try hard to avoid it (Al Ashraf, 2009; Ashraah & Gmaian, 2013).

Muslim parents must realize that children must be guided regarding matters related to sex and sensuality in a more comprehensive manner based on the Islamic perspective so that they will be on the right path and not think of sex as lust as whole. Nowadays children are surrounded by materials that lure them to involve in sexual activities since they are young. If parents fail to perform this task, the children will resort to other sources for sexual information that can mislead them from the Islamic path which then may harm the children and the society.

Parents also should provide adequate supervision on their children's activities particularly on internet usage, but it needs to be done in a moderate manner. Overprotection may make children as “prisoners in their own homes” which is detrimental to their emotional wellbeing. The children may never learn on how to take responsibility or handle situations on their own if they are lacked parents' supervision. However, parents should not imperatively do it excessively.

Parenting has long-term implications for children's developmental adaptation. Many researches have shown that the quality of parenting that the adults provide for their children is shaped by their prior interpersonal experiences with their parents. In this regard, children, whose parents have played their role more effectively, will be a successful parent in adulthood. A study was revealed that the use of positive religious coping was significant between the improvement of the parents' sense of competence, and child behavioral problems. Besides that, the positive religious coping strategies can help the parent to perform better when facing with challenging parenting situations (Weyand, Laughlin, & Bennett, 2013). So, through the Islamic approach and religious approach it will help the adolescents in facing their pregnancy journey well and then as a reminder to avoid that bad behavior will not happen again.

Implication for Practitioner

The aim of this study is to give an overview on how parents can play their roles in helping their adolescents with unwanted pregnancy. It started as family and parents are the factors and social support. The parents should be educated with special attention regarding the issue of unwanted pregnancy among adolescents.

In this sense, the counsellor and teacher can get a clear picture on the goals of educating parents about the issues of unwanted pregnant adolescents. Parents can engage with the children to help them facing their hard time during pregnancy. Counsellor can help the parents to release their anger and disappointment and then focus on helping out their children.

Furthermore, it can be helpful if the practitioner, teacher and friends are able to establish support systems in order to overcome the challenges to face the issues of unwanted pregnancy among adolescents. The practitioners are able to be responsible for collaborating with parents, families, and community to search for the effective strategies in group and professional development settings as it is their specialty to come out with a powerful strategy on building capacity and overcoming challenges.

Conclusion

Unwanted pregnancy among adolescents is a stressful and shameful phenomenon for both parents and adolescents. However, it happened because of mistakes and defaults from both parties. Parents should have knowledge of adolescents' growth and development. They also have to know the changing roles of parents in adolescent's life and they should be aware that they are the support system who are necessary to overcome the challenges in unwanted pregnancy among adolescents. Teachers, friends and community involvement must also be considered in developing and maintaining the healthy lifestyle of the adolescents.

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