

A Critical Review of Unwanted Pregnancy and Secondary School Female Students' Education in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

Unwanted pregnancy is observed to be a factor for setback in education and a socio-economic challenge, likewise a serious health problem among senior secondary school female students in Ilorin, Nigeria. It seems that many teenagers experience sex at experimental level and that shows that students may have been exposed to contraceptives while they are at school. And for many female students, sexual intercourse results in unwanted pregnancies. In respect of this statement, this study critically reviewed unwanted pregnancy and secondary school female students' education in Ilorin, Nigeria. The design used in this research work is a descriptive survey. The population of the study consists of all teachers and female students in all the seventy-seven senior secondary schools in Ilorin, Nigeria, while the target sample comprised teachers and female students from the twenty-eight (28) selected senior secondary schools in Ilorin. Meanwhile, five (5) teachers and fifteen (15) female students were randomly selected from each of the twenty-eight (28) selected senior secondary schools in Ilorin which totaled one hundred and forty (140) teachers and four hundred and twenty (420) female students. Simple random sampling techniques was adopted to make the sample. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The descriptive statistics of mean was used to answer the three (3) research questions generated in the study. The findings revealed that incorrect information obtained from peers/friends and media ranked 1st, while low socio-economic status (e.g. poverty and unemployment), lack of knowledge about sexuality, peer pressure (e.g. engaging in sexual activities to be accepted, examples portrayed by the media (e.g. sexual conduct of movies stars on TV) and risk-taking behaviour (e.g. drug use promotes irresponsible sex activities) ranked 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th respectively. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that parents and teachers should make home and school environments protective enough to save the children from exposure to negative societal influences. Also, the government should provide enabling environment for the students who are victims of unwanted pregnancy to further their studies through distance learning. Based on the findings and recommendations, it is suggested that further studies be carried out in other parts of the country, especially in the rural areas as the locale of this study was a city. If this is done, it will confirm or refute the findings.

Key Words: Critical review, Education, Female students, Unwanted pregnancy.

INTRODUCTION

Education is central to the development of a nation, especially through the education of young people as it prepares them for the world of work and life. As young people spend longer periods on education, as part of the natural course of development, their sexual development and by extension due to maturity at a period which coincide with secondary schooling (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod, & Letsoalo, 2009) deserve serious attention. For many teenagers, sex occurs at experimental level, and that shows that students may have been exposed to contraceptive while they are at school. However, for many female students, it results in unwanted pregnancies, HIV or other Sexually Transmitted Infections (Mwaba, 2000). Being a pregnant student or a mother has implications for continued educational opportunities and Nigeria is confronted with escalating incidence of female student pregnancies. Increasing female students' unwanted pregnancies constitute a significant social construct and as such represents one of several indicators of burgeoning female students' delinquency, sexual permissiveness and moral decay (Chigona & Chetty, 2007). Similarly, unwanted pregnancy is a socio-economic challenge and a critical health problem for many communities in Nigeria. It is a reflection of irresponsible sexual behaviour and inconsistent use of contraceptive. Oni, Prinsloo, Nortje, & Joubert (2005) opined that female students unwanted pregnancy may precipitate health risks such as complications during pregnancy or delivery and secondary infertility if an abortion is done.

Moreso, Devenish, Funnell & Greathead, (2004) submitted that female students' unwanted pregnancy is considered to be a disaster by most people. Yet, female students' unwanted pregnancies are increasing in number each year and are occurring at younger ages. Although, Devenish, et.al. (2004) added that this trend is noticeable all over the world, the problem is greater in developing countries such as Nigeria.

Karra and Lee (2012) found that most female students perceive falling pregnant while still at school as a negative event with consequences such as difficulty at school or dropping out, unemployment, guilt feelings, alienation from family members and friends and loss of a boyfriend. Mazibuko (2002) pointed to the fact that a baby changes its mother's life in many ways and a pregnant female student has to consider her future and the things she may not be able to do once the child is born.

Adekanle (2014) viewed unwanted pregnancy as a pregnancy that is either unwanted or mistimed and it is a pregnancy that has occurred without the wish of woman, or after a woman has reached her desired family size and does not want any more children.

However, in relation to the common symptoms of early pregnancy, Bless & Higson-Smith, (2000) stated the following symptoms; nausea, vomiting, swollen

or painful breasts, fatigue, headaches, mood swings, and even a light or missed period. They added that these signs can also be caused by other things that have nothing to do with pregnancy. Bhana, Morrel, Shafer & Ngabaza (2010) found that the presence of a pregnant girl(s) in a classroom is not only a threat to their own academic achievement but also to the collective academic performance of the class as well as the classroom harmony. In particular, most pregnant school girls are not able to cope with the school's academic demands.

In another development, female student's sexuality refers to sexual feelings, behaviours and development in female students and is an aspect of human sexuality (WHO 2003). Sexuality and sexual desire usually begin to intensify along with the onset of puberty. The expression of sexual desire among female students (or anyone, for that matter), might be influenced by family values and the culture and religion they have grown up in (or as a backlash to such), social engineering, social control, taboos and other kinds of social mores. In the contemporary society, female students also face some risks as their sexuality begins to transform. Whilst some of these, such as emotional distress (fear of abuse or exploitation) and sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS) may not necessarily be inherent to adolescence, such as pregnancy (through failure or non-use of contraceptives) are seen as social problems in most western societies. In terms of sexual identity, all sexual orientations found in adults are also represented among female students (Bhana *et al.*, 2004).

Female students' unwanted pregnancy has been associated with frequent sex without reliable or no contraception, sexual coercion, inadequate sexual communication between partners, pressure to prove one's fertility, poor socio-economic conditions and promiscuity (Kanku & Mash, 2010). The perception that most of your friends have been pregnant, liberal attitudes towards casual sex, the use of alcohol or drugs, fear of hormonal contraceptives and poor school-based sexuality education can also be associated with female students' unwanted pregnancies (Oni, Prinsloo, Nortje & Joubert, 2005).

Oni, et al. (2005) stated that the following reasons culminate in occurrence of female students' unwanted pregnancy:

- (i) Knowledge about sexuality
- (ii) Peer pressure
- (iii) Independence
- (iv) Media
- (v) Early menarche.
- (vi) Beliefs about fertility
- (vii) Availability of contraceptives
- (viii) Poor socioeconomic conditions
- (ix) Risk-taking behaviour
- (x) Role models

Marston and King (2006) established that lack of authentic knowledge about sexuality issues seemed to be one of the major causes of unwanted pregnancies

amongst female students. Adequate knowledge about sexuality can be obtained by education and the family milieu and parents are regarded as the most suitable to inform the child about sexuality issues (Bezuidenhout, 2004). Newman (2009) stated that mothers often fail to communicate the 'facts of life' to their daughters and information about menarche is acquired from an elder sister, peers or nurses from health departments who visit schools.

In a study conducted by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) in 2008 concerning sexuality and reproductive issues, it was found that parents are reluctant to discuss these issues with their children (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod & Letsoalo, 2009). The study focused on children in the age group 12-17 years and the respondents indicated that they obtain most of their information about sexuality and reproduction from their friends at school. It was discovered also that friends very seldom have the correct or complete information about these issues.

Similarly, Varga (2003) stated that after the family, the peer group is the most important socialisation agent. Jewkes (2007) submitted that not only is the peer group a primary source of information on sexuality issues but they also create an environment in which peer pressure is exerted on the teenager to indulge in sex because "everyone does it" or because they do not want to "feel left out".

Moreover, female students share a great deal of their lives with the peer groups; they go to school with them, participate in sport with them, spend leisure time with them and sleep over at their homes (Gouws & Kruger, 1994). Matters that cannot be discussed with parents in some instances are freely discussed with the peers, for example personal problems, educators, parents, clothing, the future, sex, contraceptives, drugs, alcohol, among others. Meanwhile, the sexual information that peers have is not always authentic. Thus, incorrect information received about sex from the peer group, peer pressure or the need of the teenager to be like his peers all contribute to the cause of unwanted pregnancies (Bezuidenhout, 2008).

Gouws & Kruger (1994) maintained that relationships with peers and peer pressure play an important role during adolescence. They spend a lot of time together in groups and the individual has to conform in order to be accepted by the group. The implication is that conformity is either implicitly or explicitly enforced and female students often engage in sexual activities to be accepted in their peer groups despite the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy (Vundule, Maforah, Jewkes, & Jordan, 2001).

Furthermore, the mass media with its sexualised content is also a contributing factor that perpetuates female students' unwanted pregnancies as it gives teenagers easy access to pornographic and adult television programmes (Oni et al., 2005). Pornographic materials and sexuality information are freely accessible via devices such as computers and cell phones. In her research, Rangiah (2012) established that adolescent females who were more exposed to sexuality in the media were also more likely to engage in sexual activities. According to Panday *et al.* (2009), there is no question that television also contributes to sexual activities amongst school

children. Devenish, Gillian and Greathead (2004) pointed out that teenagers today have access to books, films, videos and magazines that are explicit in describing sex acts. Many are factually incorrect, creating unrealistic expectations from teenagers and increasing the myths about sexuality issues.

More importantly, a survey conducted by Oni *et al.* (2005) found that some female students knew almost nothing about contraceptives. Most of the females that partook in the survey said that they had been provided with at most very little and vague information about sexual matters and contraception by their mothers, other relatives or educators. Some females said friends gave them information about contraceptive methods or they occasionally visit clinics in small groups for information and advice.

Moreso, Rule (2004) stated that some people believe that teaching teenager about contraception encourages sexual activity and that if contraception was not available, sexual activity would be prevented. However, research shows that the majority of teenagers are already sexually active between six months and one year before attending a family planning clinic (MRC, 2009). Fear of unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases does not always deter teenagers from sexual intercourse. The reality is that each unwanted pregnancy is a tragedy because the situation is preventable (Devenish, Funnell & Greathead, 2004).

In addition, poverty has been identified by researchers as one of a major contributor to female students' unwanted pregnancies (Rangiah, 2012). Female students from families with a low socio-economic status often engage in unprotected sexual activities to fall pregnant hoping to receive money from the father or child grant to improve their circumstances (Karra & Lee, 2012). According to Mwaba (2000), poverty could be an important factor influencing decisions on whether or not to use contraceptives.

Kanku and Mash (2010) found that there are also female students who fall pregnant while intoxicated because their judgment is impaired and they are less careful. When an under-aged female student requests an older boyfriend to buy alcohol for her in a tavern, it may be as a way of asking for or agreeing to sex (Hughes, 2002).

In her research on risk-taking behaviour among adolescents, Dietrich (2003) established that alcohol and drug consumption prior to sexual activity occurred mostly among older adolescents. She also discovered a link between no condom usage and drug abuse in the sexual activity among sexually active adolescents.

Panday *et al.* (2009) recognised parental values as a vital factor that influences the adolescent's sex debut. Adolescents whose parents are clear about the value of delaying sex are less likely to engage in sexual activities at an early age. This study is therefore aimed at reviewing critically unwanted pregnancy and secondary school female students' education in Ilorin, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It seems that female students in senior secondary schools lack knowledge about

sexuality and another problem is wrong information about sexuality they receive from their peers. It is also observed that low socio-economic family background necessitates female students to fend for themselves. All these reasons and others might lead female students into unwanted pregnancy which may lead them to drop out and become liability in the society.

In this respect, many studies have been carried out on effect of unwanted pregnancy on girl child education. These include Masemola (2008) who studied teenage pregnancy as a trend, also Mngoma, (2018) carried out research on how schools deal with pregnancies. Makmba and Moola (2012) wrote on pupils fall pregnant in Kwazulu-Watal. Hence, this study focused on a critical review of unwanted pregnancy and secondary school female students' education in Ilorin, Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to critically review the unwanted pregnancy and secondary school female students' education in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Specifically, it finds out the:

- (i) causes of unwanted pregnancy among the female students
- (ii) effect of unwanted pregnancy on education of the female students
- (iii) nature of the support available for an unwanted pregnancy among the female students.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions.

- (i) What are the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female students?
- (ii) What is the effect of unwanted pregnancy on the education of female students?
- (iii) What is the nature of the support available for an unwanted pregnancy of female students?

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive survey. Descriptive survey design is seen as an available means for developing a representative picture of the attitude and characteristics of a larger population. Colorado State University (CSU, 2014) described survey research as a chosen method of data collection among educationalist. Descriptive survey involves a systematic attempt to describe the characteristics of a given population or area of interest factually to ensure meaningful description of situation. The population of this study consists of all teachers and female students in all the senior secondary schools in Ilorin, Nigeria, while the target population was teachers and female students from the twenty-eight (28) selected senior secondary schools in Ilorin. Meanwhile, five (5) teachers and fifteen (15) female students were randomly selected from each of the twenty-eight (28) selected senior secondary schools in

Ilorin which totaled one hundred and forty (140) teachers and four hundred and twenty (420) female students. Simple random sampling techniques was adopted to select the sample. The instrument used in this research work to collect data from the respondents was a questionnaire. The questionnaire is in three sections. Section A items were used to answer Research Question 1: What are the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female students? While Section B items were used to answer the Research Question 2: What is the effect of unwanted pregnancy on the education of female students? Section C items were used to answer Research Question 3: What is the nature of the support available for an unwanted pregnancy of female students?

The validity of the instrument was ascertained by giving a drafted copy of the questionnaire to experts in educational research, for content validation. Reliability of the instrument was ascertained by conducting pilot study among teachers and female students in Ilorin senior secondary schools which were not part of the main sample using Test-retest approach within an interval of two weeks. The results obtained at both administrations were then correlated using Pearson's' Product Moment Correlation. The results indicated that the instrument is reliable for the study.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female students?

Table 1: Showing the Causes of Unwanted Pregnancy among Female Students

S/N	Statement	A	D	X	Rank
1	Lack of knowledge about sexuality	496 (87.9%)	64 (12.1%)	3.75	3 rd
2	Incorrect information obtained from peers/friends and media	512 (97.2%)	48 (2.8%)	3.94	1 st
3	Peer pressure (e.g. engaging in sexual activities to be accepted/conform	424 (75.2%)	136 (24.8%)	3.50	4 th
4	Examples portrayed by the media (e.g. sexual conduct of movie/soapie stars on TV)	252 (44.7%)	308 (55.3%)	2.89	5 th
5	Low socioeconomic status (e.g. poverty and unemployment)	500 (88.7%)	60 (11.3%)	3.77	2 nd
6	Risk-taking behaviour (e.g. drug use promotes irresponsible sex activities)	424 (75.2%)	136 (24.8%)	2.10	6 th

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 1 shows the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female students. The table further revealed that incorrect information obtained from peers/friends and media are ranked 1st, while low socio-economic status (e.g. poverty and unemployment), lack of knowledge about sexuality, peer pressure (e.g. engaging in sexual activities to be accepted/conform, examples portrayed by the media (e.g. sexual conduct

of movie/soaps stars on TV) and risk-taking behaviour (e.g. drug use promotes irresponsible sex activities) were ranked 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th respectively.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of unwanted pregnancy on education of female students?

Table 2: Showing Effect of Unwanted Pregnancy

S/N	Statement	A	D	X	Rank
1	They are often absent from school (e.g. to visit clinic, doctor or not feeling well)	448 (79.4%)	112 (20.6%)	3.58	5 th
2	Poor performance in school work (e.g. homework not done, absence from tests/assessments)	500 (88.7%)	60 (13.3%)	3.77	2 nd
3	Discrimination by learners (e.g. learners avoid them and call them names)	480 (85.1%)	80 (14.9%)	3.78	3 rd
4	Drop out of school (e.g. leaving school to take care of the baby)	476 (84.4%)	84 (15.6%)	3.68	4 th
5	An unsecured future perspective (e.g. lack of proper education and thus limited or no job opportunity)	532 (94.3%)	28 (5.7%)	3.88	1 st

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 2 indicates that an obscured future perspective (e.g. lack of proper education and thus limited or no job opportunity) are ranked 1st, while poor performance in school work (e.g. homework not done, absence from tests/assessments, discrimination by learners (e.g. learners avoid them and call them names), drop out of school (e.g. leaving school to take care of the baby) and they are often absent from school (e.g. to visit clinic, doctor or not feeling well) were ranked 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th respectively.

Research Question 3: What is the nature of the support available for an unwanted pregnancy of female students?

Table 3: Showing Nature of the Support Available for an Unwanted Pregnancy

S/N	Statement	A	D	X	Rank
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1	A school counselor policy relating to school girl pregnancy	524 (92.9%)	36 (7.1%)	3.85	1 st
2	Workshops on sexuality education are regularly conducted for educators	448 (79.4%)	112 (20.6%)	3.58	5 th
3	A school counselor is available (e.g. help pregnant learners with emotional problems)	460 (81.6%)	100 (18.4%)	3.63	4 th
4	Sexuality education is given to all the learners (e.g. use of contraceptives)	480 (85.1%)	80 (14.9%)	3.70	3 rd
5	Special facilities for pregnant schoolgirls (e.g. to write exams)	520 (92.1%)	40 (7.8%)	3.84	2 nd

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 3 indicates the nature of the support available for an unwanted pregnancy of female students. The results shows that a school counselor policy relating to school girl pregnancy ranked 1st, while special facilities for pregnant school girls (e.g. to write exams), sexuality education is given to all the learners (e.g. use of contraceptives), a school counselor is available (e.g. help pregnant learners with emotional problems), and workshops on sexuality education are regularly conducted for educators were ranked 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th respectively.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that female students receive incorrect information from peers and media. Another cause of unwanted pregnancy is low socio-economic family status and, lack of female students' knowledge about sexuality, peer pressure, examples portrayed by the media and risk-taking behaviour. Unwanted pregnancy could lead female students to unsecured future, poor academic performance, discrimination by fellow learners, dropping out of school and frequent absence from school. In another development, there was a school counselor policy relating to school girl pregnancy, while special facilities for pregnant school girls and sexuality education are given to all the learners, a school counselor is available and workshops on sexuality education are regularly conducted for educators.

This finding is similar to the findings of Kanku & Mash (2010) that female students' unwanted pregnancy has been associated with frequent sex without reliable or no contraception, sexual coercion, inadequate sexual communication between partners, pressure to prove one's fertility, poor socio-economic conditions and promiscuity. Also, Karra and Lee (2012) stated that most female students perceive falling pregnant while still at school as a negative occurrence with consequences such as difficulty at school or drop out, unemployment, quit feelings, alienation from family members and friends and loss of a boyfriend.

The researcher is of the opinion that the major cause of unwanted pregnancy is the high level of poverty in the society where by parents find it difficult to feed their

family or paying their school fees and the government is not helping the situation. This could be linked to the previous research findings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that lack of knowledge about sex, incorrect information obtained from peers/friends and mediapeer pressure, examples portrayed by the media, low socio-economic status are some of the causes of unwanted pregnancy among the female students in senior secondary schools. Students with unwanted pregnancies are often absent from the school, perform poorly, drop out of school, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents and teachers should make home and school environments protective enough to save the children from exposure to negative societal influences,
2. Education of the girl child should be made free and compulsory. This includes free school uniform, textbooks and stationeries from the basic to secondary school education level so as to prevent low socio-economic family of female students from looking for all avenues to sponsor herself in school which can result in unwanted pregnancy.
3. Social welfare agencies (public and private) should redouble their efforts in educating, enlightening, counseling and rehabilitating victims of unwanted pregnancy. By this, many of the victims could be encouraged to continue their education or engaging in other meaningful activities to avoid being liable in the society.
4. Government should provide enabling environment for the students who are victims of unwanted pregnancy in order to further their studies in distance learning.

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