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The Effects of Teenage Pregnancy On A Teen Mother’s Socio-Emotional Development and Processes



Abstract

For this poster, I will be focusing on the topic of Teen Pregnancy and its Effects on a Teen Mother’s Socio-Emotional Development. There is a wealth of information on how teen pregnancy can affect the socio-emotional development of the child of a teen parent, however, there is significantly less research on the mother. This topic relates to human development by exploring the socio-emotional effects of teen pregnancy. Considering social-emotional development is an area of child development, I think if teen pregnancy does have a significant effect on that area, then teen pregnancy shapes what a child/teen could become. The teen pregnancy rate has been significantly dropping since 2014 and this is due to increased education on teen pregnancy and its effects on the body and the brain. This study is meant to showcase these effects in order to educate the public on teen pregnancy from the mother’s perspective. The “Background” section is meant to provide key foundational information in order to understand the other sections of this poster to the fullest. The “Method” section is meant to describe how this information was obtained.

Background

Socio-Emotional Development is defined as “the child’s experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others” (Social-Emotional). Significant trauma or experiences can have a serious negative effect on this domain of development. Children with socio-developmental problems typically suffer from conditions like PTSD and severe Anxiety or Depression. Suffering from these conditions can often make an adolescent feel isolated and could result in low self-esteem, a feeling of hopelessness, and even suicidal ideation. Teenagers who are teen mothers are at a higher risk of these conditions. When a teenager has a child, they open themselves up to a new life of responsibility, balancing a lack of sleep, scheduling doctor’s appointments, and arranging child care all while trying to finish high school. Given that 77% of teen pregnancy is unplanned, there is no time for preparation for this life changing event. Teen mothers are twice as likely to develop postpartum depression. This can result in difficulty bonding with their baby, anxiety, hopelessness, panic attacks, no motivation, and even thoughts of harming themselves or their baby (Nall). Teen mothers are often “unrealistic about child development” and could lead to a very inattentive parenting style that is inconsistent and effects the child negatively (McDevitt). Teen mothers are also more likely to be looked down on by society. It is very common for these women to be judged by bosses, coworkers, classmates, teachers, friends, and family which leads to a sense of alienation. All of these factors shape a person’s socio-emotional development and who the person becomes, especially if the mother struggling with these factors is an adolescent who is already trying to juggle “normal” adolescent development.

Method

Research Question: What is the effect of teen pregnancy on a teen mother’s socio-emotional processes and development?
Hypothesis: IF a teenager becomes pregnant THEN that teen will most likely struggle with postpartum depression and other mental health diagnosis’. Causes of those conditions could be a feeling of alienation, a feeling of judgement, economic burdens, etc.
Interview Questions:
-When you found out you were pregnant, what was your first reaction?
-Were your family/friends supportive of you? How did they react?
-Do you think people’s view of you changed once they found out you were pregnant/had a baby as a teen?
-What were your feelings about having this huge responsibility on your shoulders?
-How do you think that this pregnancy has shaped who you are today?

Procedure: Interview a teen mother and support interview findings by educational articles.

Articles Used: “What Are the Effects Of Teenage Pregnancy?” (Healthline), “About Teen Pregnancy” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention), “Social-Emotional Development Domain” (California Department of Education), “Psychosocial Effects of Teenage Pregnancy: Systematic Analysis” (Science Publishing Group), “Exploring the Challenges of Adolescent Mothers From Their Life Experiences in the Transition to Motherhood: A Qualitative Study” (US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health), “The Socioemotional Outcomes of Young Children of Teenage Mothers by Paternal Coresidence” (US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health)

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Results

Q1: “When you found out you were pregnant, what was your first reaction?”

A1 Summary: The interviewee explained that she felt terrified. She described the events of the day and said that she broke down and cried in her room but didn’t tell anyone. She explained that she was confused and overwhelmed and had some of the worst anxiety she has ever had. She explained that this continued until she told her family and the father of the child.

Q2: “Were your family/friends supportive of you? How did they react?”

A2 Summary: The interviewee explained that her family was shocked and disappointed. She said that her mother was the most disappointed and threatened to disown her from the family which only added to the interviewee’s stress about the situation. She explained that when she told her best friend about her unexpected pregnancy, they were shocked but supportive. She said that her family eventually came around and were more supportive however, she could tell that there was a constant “tension in the air”.

Q3: “Do you think people’s view of you changed once they found out you were pregnant/had a baby as a teen?”

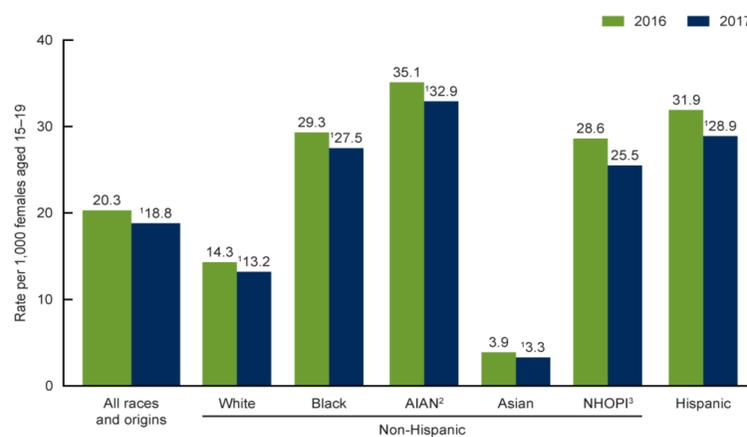
A3 Summary: The interviewee expressed that people began to look at her differently in stores and at school once she started showing. She said that she felt like she was constantly being watched and was never taken seriously by teachers or other adults she interacted with outside of school (ex. grocery store, work, events, etc.). She noticed that many of her friends stopped inviting her to things and distanced themselves from her so they “wouldn’t be associated” with her. She said that nobody was outwardly rude to her, but she could always tell that people were judging her and making assumptions.

Q4: “What were your feelings about having this huge responsibility on your shoulders?”

A4 Summary: The interviewee expressed that she was constantly anxious and depressed during her pregnancy and after the baby was born. She said the constant worry of not knowing what to do once the baby was born was always there. She said that over the period of nine months she felt entirely alone. The father of the child wanted nothing to do with her, her parents were supportive but only to the bare minimum, and her best friend was incredibly supportive but her best friend’s parents began to think the interviewee was a bad influence on their daughter.

Q5: “How do you think that this pregnancy has shaped who you are today?”

A5 Summary: The interviewee said that she felt that she has grown to be very independent and has learned to rely on herself more than she did before. She also said that with that came “trust issues” and clinical depression. She explained that the lack of support shown by her community and family has made it difficult for her to have meaningful and trusting relationships. She explained that she has a constant fear of the people around her leaving her or her new relationships deteriorating because of her situation.



¹Significant decline from 2016 ($p < 0.05$).
²AIAN is American Indian or Alaska Native.
³NHOPI is Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
NOTES: Race groups are single race. Access data table for Figure 2 at: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db318_table.pdf#2.
SOURCE: NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, Natality.

The graph below is from my first article and it depicts the rates of teenage pregnancy among different races. This is important when looking at economic and racial trends.(About)



Discussion

The first article, “About Teen Pregnancy”, discusses the rates of teenage pregnancy among a variety of races and offers statistics on how many teen mothers graduate high school. It offers the graph to the left to display the rates of teen pregnancy among races and the article talks about how women with a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to become teen moms. The article offers a brief amount of information on the effects of teen pregnancy on the child as well. It states that children of teen parents are “more likely to have lower school achievement and to drop out of high school, have more health problems, be incarcerated at some time during adolescence, give birth as a teenager, and face unemployment as a young adult” (About).

The second article, “Psychosocial Effects of Teenage Pregnancy: Systematic Analysis”, discusses the effects of teenage pregnancy on society, the child, and the mother’s general well-being. The article explains that only 50% of teenage mothers finish high school by the age of 22 and because of this, their children are less likely to take school seriously. The article states that it is typical that women from a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience teenage pregnancy and will continue to struggle economically throughout the pregnancy and well after the birth of the child. The stresses caused by economic struggle can lead to clinical and postpartum depression which negatively effects the child. The mother is less likely to take adequate care of their child and due to a lack of life experiences, may have trouble aligning with an appropriate parenting style. Teen mothers are also less likely to take adequate care of themselves during the pregnancy which can cause severe birth defects. Lack of guidance for the child could lead to the child leading a life of poor academic performance, incarceration, and even teenage pregnancy themselves. Women who experience teenage pregnancy are apt to feel alienated and disliked by society (Gselamu).

The third article, “Exploring the Challenges of Adolescent Mothers from Their Life Experiences in the Transition to Motherhood: A Qualitative Study”, focuses on the experiences of the mother during pregnancy and after the birth of the child. The article explains that many girls are unable to cope with all of the responsibility of being a mother and a lack of support from family and the community does not help. “Many adolescents when encountering various responsibilities of motherhood feel restricted, imprisoned and unable to fulfill self-desires” (Mangeli). Not being able to express themselves and enjoy life as a teenager is a huge contributor to clinical depression and a deficit in emotional maturity/development.

The fourth article, “Effects of Teenage Pregnancy: Mental Health”, describes the risk of teenage mothers developing postpartum depression, clinical depression, and even PTSD. The article explains that teen mothers, ages 15-19, are twice as likely to develop postpartum depression. The article states that these girls are also more likely to come from situations that are already at a higher rate of mental illness risk. Examples would be “having parents with low education levels, a history of child abuse, limited social networks, living in chaotic and unstable home environments, and living in low-income communities” (Nall). All of these factors lead to emotional instability, immaturity, and stress. These stresses lead teen moms to a higher rate of suicide ideation than girls of the same age without children. The article goes on to explain the financial struggles as well as the physical effects of teen pregnancy. The article briefly touches on the effects on the baby/child which includes “greater risk for lower birth weight and infant mortality, less prepared to enter kindergarten, rely more heavily on publicly funded health care, are more likely to be incarcerated at some time during adolescence, are more likely to drop out of high school, and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed as a young adult” (Nall).

The fifth and final article, “Social-Emotional Development Domain”, provides explanations of typical trends of socio-emotional development. The article speaks on the importance of relationships and interactions with different groups of people, the development of personal identity and ability, empathy, the ability to express emotion, the development of impulse control, and many more. This article was important because it offered a “control group” to compare the experiences/development of teen mothers to (Social-Emotional).

Recommendations & Future Directions

In the future, I think it is important that we educate children thoroughly on the effects of teen pregnancy, not only on the child, but on the mother as well. I think describing teen pregnancy from a teen parent’s perspective could be much more relatable to a middle school aged child who has never been exposed to a teenage pregnancy situation. Often times it is easy to only be concerned for child and their well being in a teen pregnancy situation and the mother is always labeled as “irresponsible”, “immature”, and a “burden”. We must remind ourselves that the mother is also a child and requires just as much love, support, support, and concern as the baby does. Having open conversations on this topic with young people is key.

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