The Social Effects on Pregnant Teenagers in Na Mom district, Songkhla Province

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate social effects of teenage pregnancy on adolescents in Na Mom district, Songkhla Province. The data of this qualitative study were collected through in-depth interviews from 13 pregnant teenagers under 20 years old in Na Mom district who were not ready to be pregnant and were still in school but chose to proceed their pregnancy to the delivery, and three mothers of those pregnant teenagers. A descriptive analysis was carried out.

The results of the study revealed that most of the pregnant teenagers were not married and their parents of the dyad teenagers did not accept the pregnancy at the beginning even though they accepted it after some time passed. Parents unusually solved the problem by arranging marriages for the dyad teenagers to maintain reputation of their families. As a result, the teen couples had to drop out of school and made a living to earn income for family expenses which eventually led to their stress, conflict and divorces finally.

Keywords: female teenagers, teenage pregnancy, effects, Na Mom District
Background

Nowadays, society is in the age of globalization with advancement in technology and communications that have rapidly caused social, cultural, traditional changes as well as changes in social values and thoughts (Piyawon, 2003). As a result, extended families have been changed to nuclear families in which parents have to work hard outside the home in order to respond to the economy in the age of globalization (Chamnong et al., 2004). Children have to stay home with the elderly or baby sitters or in a nursery from the time when they are infants. Consequently, their parents have less time to be close to them in order to teach and train or socialize them which affects the overall society. Presently, there are many teenage problems, especially those related to sexual relationship. Premature sex is the cause of teenage pregnancies and the problem is solved by marriages and female teens have to be responsible for raising their children and suffer an unprepared family life which leads to quarrels (Nanthawan & Rut, 2001).

“Pregnancy” in the teenage years is worrisome because it affects health of both mother and child as the mother is not ready psychologically and physically. Pregnant teenagers have mood swings and cannot adapt themselves to being pregnant very well so they become moody and can hurt themselves (Somaphat, 1990). Pregnant teenagers are not prepared to be pregnant so it is possible that some of them may choose abortion as a solution to the problem. An abortion survey in Thailand in 1999 revealed that 45,990 women were admitted to 787 government hospitals due to abortion complications. 28.5 percent of these women had illegal abortions and 30 percent were teenagers under 20 years old (Reproductive Health Division, 1999). If teenage pregnancies are allowed to proceed to the delivery, there will be problems of abandoned infants and child abuse. Furthermore, if teenage pregnancies are allowed to proceed to the delivery, there will also be problems of immature mothers who are not ready to raise children which can lead to family violence. Another important problem associated with teenage pregnancy is that both male and female teenagers have to drop out of school and become cheap labor or without occupation. They may also have to get a divorce leading to problems caused by broken homes, bringing up children the wrong way, abandoned children, and these become social problems and creating a cycle in which the problems continue (Somsak, 2011).

While in Na Mom District, Songkhla Province had teenage pregnancy rate in 2007 about 22.7 percentages, 2008 about 22 percentages and 43.59 percentages in 2009. which, be upland rate more than the rate of the World Health Organization at 10 percentages.

The objective of this article is to present how teenage pregnancies in Na Mom district, Songkhla Province affect teenagers’ lives because teenagers nowadays have to go to school and they are still emotionally immature; they are physically and psychologically not ready for pregnancies and for bringing up children to be good-quality people as expected by society. Moreover, adolescent pregnancy and premarital pregnancy are not socially accepted. Most teenage pregnancy problems are solved incorrectly and inappropriately and with effects on teenagers themselves, their families, and society as a whole.

Research Methodology
The data of this qualitative study were collected from in-depth interviews with two main groups of informants: a group of 13 pregnant teenagers under 20 years old who proceeded with their pregnancy to the delivery, and a group of three women who were mothers of the pregnant teenagers. The researcher had in-depth interviewed to the main informants in order to exchange experience in addition to talking about their life and living conditions. As the researcher is an officer responsible for providing services to pregnant teenagers, she had good opportunities in getting acquainted and building good relationships with the informants. Before each interview, the researcher always asked the informant for permission to record the conversation.

**Protecting the informants**: An in-depth information. The key informants do not want to disclose. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and data collection, including the useful to gained in the study. There is any question that do not want to answer they can be done and to ensure that there has been no disclosure.

**Findings**

Some of the pregnant teenagers came from families with family problems and with divorced parents some of them had to live with their grandparents who are old and could not earn enough to send them to school. Some of them came from a family in which their parents lived together but with domestic violence. These teenagers, therefore, tried to go out in order to avoid family stress. As a result, they had premature sexual involvement leading to teenage pregnancy.

Most female teenagers were shocked when they confirm that they were pregnant. They did not want anyone in their families to know about it for fear that they might be upset or angry and might punish them. Some pregnant teenagers had to drop out of school and get married even though some still wanted to continue to school. They had to save family reputation because of gossips that they were pregnant by still don't marry.

The pregnant teenagers faced the problems on their daily lives that had been changed; they had to drop out of school to stay home raising their babies and working to earn income. They also were gossiped about their making mistakes and being pregnant by still don't marry. Some pregnant teenagers chose to terminate their pregnancy to avoid blame from neighbor because the pregnancy made them embarrassed and stressed.

From the results of this study, the social effects on pregnant teenagers could be classified into four main issues as follows:

1. **Not being accepted by their own families and boyfriends**

Most teenage pregnancy were unintentional and the pregnant teenagers were unprepared mentally and physically. Their parents were also shocked, sorry, disappointed, and unhappy. They blamed each other and could not accept each other as shown in the following interviews.
“...When I was pregnant, my boyfriend did not want the baby and told me to have an abortion. He blamed it on me; he asked why I did not use any birth control. I felt sorry for my baby so I did not have an abortion. We often quarreled...”

(Wi, a 17-year-old first time pregnant teenager)

“...my boyfriend’s parents didn’t like me so only a few months after being married we got a divorce because I could not live with his parents and he had to do what they wanted him to do...”

(Nut, a 15-year-old first time pregnant teenager)

Teenagers were not accepted by their boyfriends’ parents, especially when they had to live in with the male’s parents. The parents’ influence over the teenagers’ married life and their unpreparedness. There were caused stress and sometimes family problems.

2. Insufficient income

Most pregnant teenagers had earn to raise their family; most of them chose to do labor work or did agricultural work that their parents did. As a result, they could not earn enough money for the family expenses. Their parents could not help them much financially. But for some of them, the girls’ parents helped because they thought that when their children had a family they wanted their children to carry on well with their married life. They also knew very well that their children could not earn enough to raise their family.

“...I have two children and stayed home raising them; I didn’t have a job. My husband helped his family tapping rubber latex and sometimes during the day he was hired to carry wood. His income was around 5,000-6,000 baht a month and when our children were small, it was hardly enough to buy milk for them. So I advise my daughter to go out to work and so that she can help her family but she wants to wait till her baby is old enough to go to kindergarten. Now I help her family and will help them until they can help themselves. I used to say to her that if she could finish her study she would have a good job but she got pregnant before getting married...”

(Sa, mother of a pregnant teenager)

“I live with my boyfriend’s parents and I have no job. My boyfriend helps his mother tapping rubber latex and the pay is up to his mother which is around 4,000-5,000 baht a month. My mother visits me almost every month and she gives me some money when I ask for it but she gives me less than she did when I was a student. I know that I have much less money for use than when I lived with my mother...”

(Wi, a 17-year-old first time pregnant teenager)
When facing financial problems, conflicts began and they quarreled. Some male teenagers seized the opportunity to go out in order to avoid the problems. Some went out and hung around like they used to do before having a family. Society did not blame male teenagers who hung out and was not responsible for their family because they thought domestic chores were the female teenagers’ responsibility. This resulted in family violence and divorces because they were emotionally and physically immature and could not maintain their family life.

3. Family violence

When two people live together as a family, they have to adapt themselves to each other and plan their lives together; prepare for raising the child who is about to be born so that the child will be a socially desirable person. However, a pre-marriage pregnancy is a teenage pregnancy taking place at a time in life when teenagers face changes emotionally and socially and they are confused with themselves. Therefore, when they have to have a child of their own and have to live a married life when they are not ready, they are stressed even though some of them may get help from their parents. When they see their friends who are the same age have fun and still go to school but they have to stay home raising a baby or work to earn their living, they become stressed which lead to quarrels in their family and some also have violence in their family as can be seen in the interviews.

“…we often quarrel, especially when I ask him to do something and he wouldn’t do it for me, so I scold him and he gets very angry at me and hits and kicks me. That really hurts. He even kicked me when I was still pregnant and my head hurt. I could not stand it and I was very angry because he did not help me do the work that I asked him to help. My older sister told me to get a divorce and go back home …”

Na (a made-up name), a 15-year-old first time pregnant teenager

When they had problems about family violence, most teenagers did not stay married very long and got a divorce. The child was left with either his or her maternal or paternal grandparents. Some teenagers remarried and became successful with family life while others failed repeatedly.

4. Divorces

Most pregnant teenagers chose to carry on their pregnancies to term instead of having an abortion. This was because they felt that it was a “sin” or they thought it would be “painful” or some of them thought “I don’t go to school so I should be married” anyway. However, when some of them decided to have a family life, they usually faced problems of not understanding each other; could not adapt themselves to each other and often quarreled. When they could not stand the situation any longer, they decided to get a divorce.

From In-depth interviewing 13 teenagers who had pre-marriage pregnancies, it was found that only 3 of them had a happy married life without quarrels and divorces. These
three couples had a happy married life because the males were not teenagers. The parents of the males also loved the girl because after they got married the girl lived with their parents-in-law because the new couple did not have stable income and as a result the man went out to hang around less. Divorces took place in families where the male teenagers still went out and hung around places just like before being married and did not pay enough attention to their wives and babies. Some even went out with some other women, and this caused stress, quarrels and violence in the family as seen in the following interviews.

“I had my first child when I was 16, and three months after that, I got pregnant again with my second child because I did not use any birth control. After that my husband’s changed from a person who never hung out to a person who went out and hung around with other girls; he drank, smoked, and gambled. I had to work alone; raising my baby alone and I could not stand that any more so I went back home with my two children to live with my parents...”

Nam (a made-up name), a 16-year-old first time pregnant teenager

“...He liked to go and hang out and never helped me taking care of our baby. I had to take all the responsibilities. Later on he went to prostitutes and hung out with girls who worked in restaurants and sometimes did not come back home. I was very angry and could not stand it and so I got a divorce...”

Kai (a made-up name), a 18-year-old first time pregnant teenager

There are marriages to save reputation and face of families because Thai society does not accept teenage pregnancies and pre-marriage pregnancies. Teenagers are not ready mentally and physically for giving births and raising babies. They are physically in the growing period during which hormonal changes take place. Therefore, being pregnant can affect their mental conditions and mood and there are also social effects as a result. Therefore, solving the problems can even cause more social problems as mentioned above.

Discussions

From the study, we can see that pregnant teenagers have to drop out of school to get married. However, they are not ready emotionally and physically. So they cannot adapt themselves and it is difficult for them to be endure enough to maintain their family lives. Nevertheless, there were only 3 out of 13 teenagers who were pregnant before marriage that had a happy marriage lives. The rest of them had problems due to the males’ behavior; they were not responsible; they did not help taking care of their babies; they enjoyed hanging out, and did not have enough income for the families, and all these led to quarrels and violence and they eventually got divorces. This is in accordance with a study which found that most pregnant teenagers affected psychologically as they are worried from concealed sexual relationship, being pregnant and giving birth. Teenage mothers have to face all the problems alone in addition to a worsened relationship with their own parents because their parents are
embarrassed and this can cause quarrels; however, as some time passes by, they turn back to taking care of their babies (Chiraporn, 1995; Kesini, 2008; Nutruedi, 2005).

Some teenagers are from families with a good economic status and the parents allow their pregnant teenagers to live with them and help them financially by allowing the teenagers to help either tap rubber latex or to do trading depending on how the parents earn their income. They also help the teenagers with the expenses on raising the babies and their other living expenses in the household. If this is the case, there is an opportunity that the teenage family life can be carried on. On the other hand, if the teenage couples think why they should have to work hard and raise the baby instead of enjoying their teenage life like other teenagers who don’t have to worry about how to earn money to raise a child, conflicts can take place in the teenagers’ family and sometimes there is violence in the family, too. The female teenagers have to patiently take care of the baby alone at home while the male teenagers hang out having fun with friends. They finally have to get a divorce and leave their children with the grandparents. When the children grow up, they might have problems related to broken homes leading to teenage pregnancies themselves. Some teenage parents have a new family after their divorce as found by Wira (2002), Ratchani (2004), Phatcharalak (2006), Rangwan (2008), Withita (2008), and Somsak (2011). These studies found that most pregnant teenagers had to drop out of school when they were pregnant and had their status was changed from being a student to being a teenage mother; they took a job and earn money; they were worried and thought of terminating their pregnancies by having abortions at the beginning of their pregnancies. Pregnant teenagers whose abortions failed or those whose pregnancies were accepted by their boyfriends and their parents proceeded with their pregnancies to the delivery. Giving birth to the first baby affects teenage mothers in terms of health and socio-economic conditions, and the severity of the problems depend on whether or not their pregnancies are accepted by their boyfriends and/or their parents and society. Somaphat (1990), Suchada (1998), Siriwan (2005), Apinya and Wirachat (2008), and Suriyadev (2010) claim that pregnant teenagers are affected mentally, physically, economically and socially, and the effects are also on their education. Moreover, the effects are on their children as well as on their own parents. As a result, most of them end up with abortions or divorces.

**Recommendations**

Teenage pregnancy is a problem that is increasingly more serious and many agencies have tried to solve the problem. Solving the problem by using abortions has also received attention, especially in passing a law legalizing abortion because some pregnant teenagers try to solve the problem using illegal abortion which results in a loss of property and even a loss of life. Pregnant teenagers, who are not brave enough to have an abortion, cause the problem of abandoned children. When teenagers raise their children, they lack maturity themselves and necessary skills in child care. Even though many agencies have established centers or clubs related to child care in order to provide knowledge for teenagers about sex education, birth control and sexual transmitted diseases, they cannot access all groups of teenagers.
because when a teenager walks in to consult about sex, he or she is looked at as a social defendant making teenagers think that they should seek the knowledge by themselves. Therefore, the following recommendations are made.

1. Health service centers should have a corner for teenagers. The corner may be jointly organized with inter-disciplinary teams or other agencies to provide not only sex related services but also other different kinds of services for teenagers. For example, services and advice about further education, scholarships for the poor, employment, etc. so that teenagers who visit the corner do not have to worry that people would think that they have done something wrong about sex. Moreover, teenagers outside the school system can also have access to the services. In addition, the service providers should be the same persons so that teenagers can trust them.

2. There should be organizations that provide knowledge to parents and families about sex education and how to look after their children with understanding and to be close to them so that they trust their parents and families more than other people. This type of organizations can make parents realize that the family institution is a very important socialization institution for children before the children are accidentally allowed to become pregnant teenagers whose lives change and are different from normal teenagers.

3. For teenagers who are outside the school system, there should be proactive services for them, and to provide them with knowledge emphasizing birth control and sexually transmitted diseases as well as knowledge about the way of life and the effects on pregnant teenagers.

4. For pregnant teenagers, there should be organizations or a system that provides assistance in self-care, child care, and economic assistance such as employments, etc.

References


