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# Adolescent Pregnancy among Minor Girls: A Secondary Data Analysis

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**Abstract**

It is commonly known that early pregnancy amongst girls is a significant issue both in health perspectives and developmental perspectives. Many strategies have been developed by the international organizations but even so, there are a lot of girls who give birth before they reach the age of 18 and this is particularly true for the developing countries. Different factors cause adolescent pregnancies and they include poverty, gender inequality, child marriages, ignorance of the parents about sexual education and family planning, sexual abuse and limited access to family planning services.

The problem of adolescent pregnancy is becoming more realistic as it has a great impact on the health of the girls. Therefore, the study analyzes the reasons of early pregnancies and some measures that can be adopted in order to prevent them by means of the analysis of the secondary data.

The secondary data for the current research has been obtained from literature review, governmental documents, articles of highly regarded journals, WHO publications, UNICEF publications, UNFPA publications and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and many other sources. Qualitative content analysis has been utilized in the study.

This article posits that one must view teenage pregnancy as a social issue regarding all societal elements; thus, one must handle it with different measures. However, what people must do to resolve this issue involves many aspects, including organizing comprehensive sex education, making healthcare services more adolescent-friendly, prohibiting underage marriage, encouraging girls' education, implementing the legal protection of adolescent parents, and engaging society.

The conclusion of the research is that reducing teenage pregnancy may achieve good medical results for mothers and babies, improve sex equality, increase human capital, and achieve social sustainability.

**Keywords**: Adolescent pregnancy, minor girls, child marriage, reproductive health, secondary data, gender inequality, prevention, India.

## 1. Introduction

During adolescence, young individuals undergo the process of becoming adults, during which important physiological, psychological, and social processes occur. According to the World Health Organization (WHO 2024), the period of adolescence refers to the age from 10 to 19 years old. During adolescence, individuals become more skilled at adult behaviors, knowledge, experiences, and skills required for adulthood. However, this issue of adolescent pregnancy has implications for education, society, economics, and health. It is also viewed as a significant problem for the public health system, educational institutions, and welfare organizations. (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024)

"Adolescent pregnancy is considered a complex socio-economic issue, yet still a public health problem. It is the result of such factors as poverty, unequal gender roles, ignorance, and lack of access to medical care. Owing to their age, girls might encounter certain health issues. Teenage pregnancy has consequences, including lack of proper education and cycles of poverty as well as increased inequalities between genders". (WHO, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; Solar & Irwin, 2010)

Globally, teenage pregnancies are still an alarming public health concern, even with the advancements in the healthcare sector. According to the World Health Organization (2024), around 21 million girls aged 15 to 19 get pregnant each year, and nearly all of these pregnancies are unplanned, which tends to happen more often in developing nations. There are 12 million adolescent girls with reported cases of motherhood every year, as well as a significant number of girls undergoing unsafe abortions or suffering from other health problems or mental issues connected with their pregnancies. The above statistics raises the need for urgent implementation of preventive measures with respect to the increasing death rates among young mothers as a result of pregnancy and childbirth. (WHO, 2024)

Teenage pregnancies generally occur in developing countries, often because of poverty, lack of education, early marriages, and inadequate health services. As stated by UNICEF (2023), adolescent girls from low-income families have much higher chances of becoming pregnant than those originating from wealthy families. (UNICEF, 2023; WHO, 2024)

Living in rural areas, parental educational levels, the possibility of getting a job for the family and the idea of gender roles are among the factors that make girls susceptible to adolescent pregnancy. Thus, we may conclude that the problem of teen pregnancy is health-related yet socially unfair. (UNICEF, 2023; IIPS & ICF, 2021)

Learning about the situation in India, it should be emphasized that the percentage of adolescents is much higher when compared with other countries. Over the last twenty years, the country has managed to decrease the level of teen fertility; however, the problem still affects thousands of girls each year. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 6.8% of women aged 15–19 had begun childbearing during 2019–2021 (IIPS & ICF, 2021). The majority of adolescent pregnancies occur in rural areas or among the poorest strata of the population, lacking education and living in the regions where child marriage is accepted as normal.

"Adolescent pregnancy is a complicated issue and should not be viewed solely as a biological phenomenon; it should be examined in terms of the social and economic factors connected with it. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory states that teenage behavior is influenced simultaneously by family relations, systems of education, networks among peers, community standards, and broader social policies". (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Solar & Irwin, 2010)

Teenage mothers experience negative effects on their health that go beyond their motherhood. Teenage pregnancies force girls to quit school, and the stigma leads them to become dependent on social assistance. The children of teenage mothers are more likely to be born in a worse state of health; they have lower weight, more likely to live in poverty, and less likely to get a good education compared to children born to non-teenage mothers. Thus, solving the problem of adolescent pregnancy will result in healthier mothers, better educational opportunities for women, and gender equality. (WHO, 2024; Patton et al., 2016)

Organizations like WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, and the World Bank highlight the importance of working together in fighting against adolescent pregnancy through sex education, access to health services, combating child marriage, providing legal protection to children and raising awareness in the

civil society. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals focus on the importance of Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality and Reduction of Inequalities. (WHO, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; UNFPA, 2022; UNESCO, 2021; United Nations, 2015)

The present study aims to investigate the problem of teenage pregnancy among young women through the use of secondary data sources. The study reviews literature by international organizations, governmental bodies and peer-reviewed journal articles. The aim of this study is to determine the reasons for teenage pregnancies, provide a general overview of the consequences of this problem, analyze the ways of preventing it and give recommendations to authorities, institutions, doctors and social workers. The result of the analysis allows better understanding of the teenage pregnancies issue in social development since it needs integrated approach from the society.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite being a matter of serious concern that many governments and other organizations try to solve and eliminate, teenage pregnancy occurs in today's society and puts many teenagers into serious trouble. Teenage pregnancy may interrupt schooling, decrease job opportunities for girls, put them in a vulnerable position from both physical and psychological perspectives, as well as make them exposed to various risks during delivery. Besides, girls may experience discrimination from society. Most low-income girls become pregnant because of poverty, child marriage, gender inequality, and lack of medical care. (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2022)

Various national and international initiatives aimed at dealing with the problem of teenage pregnancies have been developed. However, large social gaps remain among territory and consequent social and economic groups.

"Available evidence indicates that it is impossible to solve the problem of teenage pregnancy solely with healthcare activities and this issue has to be approached from social, educational, economic, and other perspectives". (WHO, 2024; UNESCO, 2018; UNFPA, 2022)

**Significance of the Study**

This research paper is important for the reasons that adolescent pregnancy is a significant health and social issue affecting girls and women in terms of education, health, future opportunities, equality between male and female population, and national development. Although most studies concentrate on medical aspects, this study takes a systematic and complex approach and analyzes sociological, educational, economic, psychological, and public health aspects by means of secondary data. (WHO, 2024; Patton et al., 2016; United Nations, 2015)

The results can be beneficial for policy-makers developing multifaceted policies promoting education, medicine, children's rights observance, and fighting poverty and gender inequality. Since such problem can be solved only with the involvement of all stakeholders, cooperation of families, education spots, medical organizations, community, and law enforcement authorities is needed. Sometimes solving the problem of adolescent pregnancy can help in improving maternal health, getting an education, finding a job for women, poverty improvement, and gender equality.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To evaluate the reasons why minor girls become pregnant as adolescents.

2. To determine the factors that have a hand in causing adolescent pregnancy including social, economic, cultural, educational, and health factors.
3. To assess the consequences of adolescent pregnancy on the social, economic, educational, psychological, and physical aspects.
4. To examine the policies and programs established within the country to deal with problems of adolescent pregnancy.
5. To give recommendations for preventing adolescent pregnancy and improvement of adolescent sexual health.

**Research Methodology**

The current research employs a qualitative descriptive research methodology and relies solely on secondary data sources. The secondary data for this research come from peer-reviewed literature articles, demographic surveys, governmental publications, and reports by international organizations. The research provides an exhaustive review of literature to better comprehend the phenomena of interest.

In the current study, the researchers gathered articles indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, PubMed, JSTOR, and Web of Science, World Health Organization publications, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO publications, World Bank publications, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) as their secondary data sources. The researchers make use of various books, policy papers, government reports, and conference papers concerning adolescent health, gender studies, sociology, and public health.

The secondary data were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis approach, which assists in identifying the patterns related to the causes, consequences, prevalence, prevention measures, and policy measures concerning adolescent pregnancy. The study conducts a comparative analysis of previous studies and presents accurate citations and references.

**Review of Literature**

Many scholarly articles have already been written concerning teenage pregnancy, as it has important implications for public health, education, equality of genders, and socioeconomic development. Researchers from psychology, sociology, public health, demography, social work, and education have conducted many studies on teenage pregnancy during the past three decades, focusing on its causes and consequences. Adolescent pregnancy rates have decreased in many regions of the world, but it remains a serious issue in developing countries (especially those suffering from poverty, early marriages, inequality of genders, and lack of proper healthcare). The literature indicates that teenage pregnancy cannot be seen only as a personal characteristic, but rather as a social problem influenced by existing inequalities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). (WHO, 2024; Patton et al., 2016)

**Worldwide Insights on Teenage Pregnancy**

International studies show that teenage pregnancy is a significant public health problem that affects young women. The World Health Organization (2024), shows that low- and middle-income countries report 21 million cases of pregnancies a year among girls between the ages of 15-19 years. This age group has a greater chance of dying during childbirth. As per the health organization, teenage pregnancy is connected with a number of health complications including anaemia, hypertensive disorders, obstructed labor, complications after childbirth, preterm delivery, and infant death. (WHO, 2024)

In another context, UNICEF (2023) explains that teenage pregnancy is both a consequence and a cause of social inequality. Teenage girls are affected by early pregnancy both in terms of their education and career development, continue to suffer from social discrimination, have lower income chances, and are vulnerable to poverty.

**Child Marriage as a Major Cause of Adolescent Pregnancy**

Studies have shown how important child marriage is concerning the rate of adolescent pregnancy. In early marriages, girls are at risk of sexual involvement at an early age and give birth before they are ready both physically and mentally. (Raj et al., 2009; Nour, 2009)

In India Raj et al. (2009) both conducted a study about adolescent pregnancy and stated that girls who marry before they reach the age of 18 often experience early pregnancy. Moreover, the girls suffer from additional problems such as repeated pregnancies, low utilization of maternal health services, and low use of contraception. Further studies have shown that child marriage is not only connected with the increase in the number of early pregnancies but also promotes unequal treatment of women because these girls are not able to get the education they require, which puts them into a situation of financial dependence.

Nour (2009) has pointed out that child marriage is a complicated problem that is connected to human rights violations just as it is a public health issue. The researcher states that girls marrying before becoming eighteen are deprived of education and work and undergo uncountable abuses.

According to a new report from UNFPA (2022) even though child marriage is going down globally, still around 12 million girls get married each year before reaching adulthood. The finding shows that eliminating child marriage can help in solving the adolescent pregnancy issue. (UNFPA, 2022)

**Poverty and Socioeconomic Disadvantage**

There exists a significant amount of literature indicating the connection between poverty and adolescent pregnancy. Poverty causes reproductive health problems due to the lack of education, unemployment, barriers in gaining access to health-care services, malnutrition and social discrimination. (Kassa et al., 2018; World Bank, 2022)

Kassa et al. (2018) provided a systematic review of adolescent pregnancy in African countries. The study shows that adolescents living in economically disadvantaged families are more prone to become pregnant than their counterparts from wealthier families. Poverty restricts their access to the means of contraception and health services, makes them quit school early, and forces them to get married at a young age, which further increases the chances of getting pregnant.

According to the report prepared by the World Bank (2022), adolescent pregnancy results in economic losses for households and society. Adolescent mothers often fail to complete their education and therefore have little chance of getting a good job and making money. These factors also influence the next generation of children, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. (World Bank, 2022)

Information from NFHS-5 points out that in India, adolescent pregnancy is prevalent particularly among lower caste communities, economically disadvantaged sections and rural communities of the country (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS] & ICF, 2021). The study finds that reducing poverty and improving educational achievements are the two main solutions to prevent teenage pregnancies. (IIPS & ICF, 2021)

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2022) sees adolescent pregnancy from the human rights perspective and emphasizes on the rights of all teenage girls to education, physical independence and of making informed decisions about their reproduction. Violation of these rights like child marriage, physical abuse, coercion and lack of healthcare services are the biggest drivers of teenage pregnancies. Thus, the organization argues for the need to tackle teenage pregnancy problem from all angles starting from provision of legal help, education and gender-sensitive social policies.

**Education and Adolescent Pregnancy**

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**Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Health**

Historical evidence shows that the absence of a solid knowledge base regarding sexuality and reproductive health is one of the major factors contributing to adolescent pregnancies. Numerous researchers have noted that lack of knowledge concerning sexuality and reproduction is one of the primary causes of adolescent pregnancy. Given the stigma around sexual topics in numerous cultures, extensive discussions between parents, educators, and adolescents are prevented from happening. Consequently, many teenage girls face puberty without any understanding of their bodies, fertility, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and autonomy over their bodies. (Kirby, 2007; UNESCO, 2018)

According to Kirby (2007), it is crucial to fix the situation by introducing systemic sexuality education for youngsters, which allows children to postpone sexual initiation, which leads to better contraceptive use and lower frequency of teen pregnancies while not making them more likely to get involved in sexual activities. (Kirby, 2007)

Likewise, the data presented in UNESCO (2018) indicates that effective sexuality education can significantly enhance knowledge concerning sexual and reproductive health, thus improving the capacity of teenagers to make correct choices regarding their sexual lives. (UNESCO, 2018)

**Gender Inequality and Sexual Violence**

Various studies have shown that issues related to gender inequality are a strong cause of the incidence of teenage pregnancy that reflects limited rights of girls to choose about their education, marriage, health, and reproductive decisions. (Petroni et al., 2017; UN Women, 2022)

According to Petroni et al. (2017), gender inequality is one of the main reasons behind teenage pregnancies where girls are made pregnant. They also indicate that girls are often imprisoned by their

partners in the forms of unwanted sex and prevented from making their decisions regarding contraception. (Petroni et al., 2017)

UN Women (2022) states that countries where gender equality is present have lower levels of teenage pregnancies since girls there have greater access to educational institutions, better legal security, and greater control over their reproduction. (UN Women, 2022)

**Social and Psychological Ramifications**

Studies indicate that adolescents face several psychological problems in connection with adolescent pregnancy. Patton et al. (2016) have shown that adolescent mothers suffer from higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and social isolation than adult mothers. The social stigma of adolescent pregnancy only exacerbates these issues, particularly if a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock. (Patton et al., 2016)

In addition to the above, studies have shown that adolescent pregnancy is linked to problems such as interrupted education, loss of job opportunities, domestic violence, and prolonged financial dependence. Thus, adolescent pregnancy does not only constitute a reproductive health issue but rather a serious psychological and social issue.

**Research on Adolescent Pregnancy in India**

In India, studies on adolescent pregnancy have focused on several aspects such as child marriage, educational disparities, and reproductive health. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), adolescent pregnancy rate has been decreasing steadily over the last decades. However, this has not meant eliminating gaps across the states, income groups, and urban-rural divide. (IIPS & ICF, 2021; Raj et al., 2009)

According to the findings of the International Institute for Population Sciences, adolescent pregnancy is observed to be more common in the case of low educated, economically poor girls, and those who marry early (IIPS & ICF, 2021). Similarly, Indian researchers discussed the need for postponing marriages, keeping girls in school, and improving availability of child-friendly health services to prevent adolescent pregnancy.

**Research Gap**

The existing literature has made significant studies in the field of adolescent pregnancies from the medical, demographic, and public health perspectives. Yet, there is a need for studies that look into the sociological, educational, psychological, economic, and political aspects of adolescent pregnancy together. Current studies often focus on separate issues, such as child marriage or access to medical care, but do not explore the interrelation between social determinants.

Moreover, latest data presented by NFHS-5 and the information about changes in post-pandemic period have not been extensively studied and correlated with adolescent reproductive health and sustainable development.

The current research seeks to fill these gaps by considering the multidimensionality of secondary data from various perspectives around the globe and India. The study analyses the reasons, effects, and preventive measures for adolescent pregnancies using different lenses, namely the sociological lens, public health lens, educational lens, gender studies lens, and social policy lens. In doing so, the study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent pregnancy.

**Government Programs and Policies in India**

In India, the Government has undertaken a range of policies and programs to improve adolescent health, eliminate child marriage, and ensure education for girls. It becomes evident from the programs that adolescent pregnancy needs a collective effort of different departments to find a way out.

"One of the key programs has been the Rashtriya Kishor SwasthyaKaryakram (RKSK), launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2014. RKSK is a comprehensive program addressing nutrition, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, drug abuse, trauma, violence and other diseases. Its aim is to enhance the understanding of adolescents about health and to enable them to live a healthy lifestyle through health clinics, peer educators, and outreach activities". (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2014)

The RMNCHA (The Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health) initiative emphasizes maternal and child health care provisions together with adolescent reproductive health issues. The program caters to maternal and child health by addressing antenatal care, family planning, nutrition, institutional delivery, and education of adolescents throughout their life span. (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2013)

The Child Marriage Prevention Act, 2006 prohibits the marriage of a girl before she clocks 18 years of age and that of boys before they reach 21 years of age, thereby protecting the girls. The act confers legal protection on the adolescent individuals, and empowers CMPOs to stop child marriages and protect the vulnerable children. However, implementation problems continue to hinder progress in many places, mostly due to poverty and social norms as well as lack of legal awareness. (Government of India, 2006)

"The POCSO act, 2012 is yet another significant piece of legislation. The act protects girls under 18 years of age from sexual crimes. The timely implementation of the POCSO act plays an important role in averting adolescent pregnancies". (Government of India, 2012)

"Educational measures have played an important role in curbing the number of teenage pregnancies. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign focuses on enhancing the status of girls through education, stopping gender skew and addressing the decreasing child sex ratio. Thus, this initiative has affected girls' lives positively in terms of achieving education and raising awareness of communities. Hence, the initiative has contributed to the prevention of early marriages and teenage pregnancies". (Government of India, 2026)

**Conclusion**

Despite the fact that there has been a lot of improvement worldwide in terms of adolescent pregnancy, it continues to be a major challenge of public health, social and developmental issues. The current research showed, based on the findings from secondary data, that adolescent pregnancy is associated with poverty, child marriage, education inequality and discrimination by sex, unavailability of reproductive health services and social isolation. Overall, adolescent pregnancy should be perceived not as an individual choice but as the overall failure of society to ensure a safe space for young women. (WHO, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; IIPS & ICF, 2021)

"Young women having an adolescent pregnancy face numerous problems, including higher chances of maternal and newborn health problems. Young women experience disruptions in education, seek for jobs". (WHO, 2024; Patton et al., 2016)

In this regard, adolescent pregnancies need comprehensive scientific interventions for the improvement of education, health care, legal protection, gender equality and community involvement. Investment in

the education and health of young girls stands for the investment in national progress, as healthy, educated and empowered young women make a positive contribution to the economy of any country. Reduction of adolescent pregnancies will require effective political will, proper allocation of resources and joint activities of all levels of governments, education and medical establishments, civil society organizations, families and communities. (WHO, 2024; UNESCO, 2018; United Nations, 2015)

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