

EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY: TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS IN IGBO LAND BY MARIAGORATHY UKAMAKA ONYENWOSA.

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Introduction

This research explores the complex challenges related to teenage pregnancy in Igbo land, Nigeria, emphasizing the interplay between cultural variables. The objective of the study is to examine how the Igbo community's experiences and perspectives of teenage pregnancy are shaped by the intersections of multiple factors, including socioeconomic position and traditional beliefs. The research aims to offer important insights into the cultural processes that affect the occurrence and outcomes of teenage pregnancy in this particular cultural environment by comprehending the complexities of these intersections. Teenage pregnancy has become a problem for the society as a whole as Nigerians in the southeast have a culturally ingrained perspective on this occurrence that stigmatizes the victim and causes them to become isolated. Children find it challenging to move from childhood to adolescence during the adolescent years because they must deal with peer pressure, criticism from parents, and disapproval. Whatever the reason, teenage mother's deal with societal issues that significantly affect their life. These issues include dropping out of school, having an unsafe abortion, being impoverished, being cut off from friends and family, and having a greater propensity to turn to crime in order to support themselves and their unborn child. In a thematic order, this research built from the diversity of the Nigerian people to clarifications of the concept, "teenage pregnancy" to enable a vivid understanding of the key variable from the researchers stand point. It further buttressed the cultural perception of the Igbo's regarding teenage pregnancy and listed some basic factors that contributes to teenage pregnancy to include poverty, sexual violence, and lack of sex education among others. This research would employ the phenomenological approach as its methodology in order to aid an in - depth understanding of the lived experiences of its participants and also adopt the snow ball sampling technique, where those who met the inclusion criteria as participants would be asked to refer young adults with similar experience. The data collection would strictly be done through phone interview using a zoom cloud meeting application. The interview would be recorded and transcribed for referencing. Each interview would last approximately 55 minutes. Socio – economic background of a teenage mother has a vital role to play in determining the future of the teenager with regards to continuing her education and getting married to a desired suitor whereas the poor is bounded by the cultural norms of the Igbo community. Also, the researcher explained the effects of teenage pregnancy like school drop, health risk for both the mother and the baby, psychological and emotional stigma etc and adopted intersectionality theory by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw for analyzing this study since this work dealt more on the socio – economic class of the pregnant teenagers and also the cultural identity. The Nigerian government have in one way or the other intervened regarding this social problem but it wasn't significant which

was also elaborated in this study. In conclusion, the researcher took her stand in this work about the cultural constructivism on the minds of the Igbo's and, proffered some recommendations like implementing policies that enables the girl child to go back to school after delivery, sensitization programmes to educate the populace on the impact of teenage pregnancies to enable them avoid it rather than shying away from the discussion and endanger the teenagers future and health.

The Diversity of Nigerian people

In 2023, there were about 223.8 million people living in the nation making population of Nigeria the largest in Africa. (Statista, 2023). Nigeria is a multiethnic and culturally varied country that shares borders with Niger to the north, Chad and Cameroon to the east, the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean to the south, and Benin to the west (Ajayi, 2019). Teenagers make up a sizable portion of the population in Nigeria. According to national statistics, 43 million people, or almost 23% of the total population, are between the ages of 13 and 19 (Oluseye, 2021). All Nigerian households follow a patrilineal structure. Strong ties to one's family, patriarchy, and strong religious (Christianity and Islam) and cultural overtones are further characteristics of Nigeria. Nigeria has historically adopted an extended family structure, with married couples and their offspring residing in a home or compound, as well as generations of close-knit relatives (grandparents, uncles, and aunts) (Otite, 1991) as cited by (Oluseye, 2021) in her thesis.

The Conceptual clarification

According to Majesty Enaworoke Alukagberie et al. (2023) Pregnancy among girls between the ages of 10 and 19 who conceive before reaching their full somatic development is referred to as adolescent pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy is seen to be the most undesirable result of teenage sexual engagement and is often unintended. Tolulope et al (2021), believes that adolescent pregnancy occurs when a woman between the ages of 13 and 19 becomes pregnant. Regardless of the stage of life, becoming pregnant can be a transformative experience that transcends racial, educational, and socioeconomic constraints. Adebayo (2014) asserts that while it's considered a roadblock to adolescent girls' advancement in some situations, young motherhood is accepted in others. There appears to be a gender bias in the effects of adolescent pregnancy when male teenagers impregnate female teenagers. However, the reverse may not be true.

Cultural traditions and the perceptions of teenage pregnancy in Igbo land

The south eastern part of Nigeria is mostly dominated by the Igbo's which comprises of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and some parts of Delta state. It has a rich cultural tapestry that guides its day to day life including teenage pregnancy. Before colonization, early marriage and betrothal system were practiced in Igbo land hence, little of adolescent pregnancy occurred. With time, the betrothal system started to fade away but The Igbo people of Nigeria were identified to be lovers of children and therefore accommodates a child out of wed lock as a member of the teenage mother's immediate family when the unborn father denies or refuses

to marry the girl he impregnated. The child after delivered traditionally is adopted by the girl's family as the child bears the girl's immediate family's name and is recognized as a member of her family. Hence, if the teenage mother gets married to a different person other than the father of the child, she will not take the child along with her to her husband's house as the child now stays in her (teenage mother's) father's house as her sibling traditionally rather than son and therefore the child has an inheritance power in her father's house where he was born. With the advent and introduction of western education, Christianity etc by the British, the practice of betrothal and early marriage dwindled to the barest minimum in the south eastern society with everybody craving education. Every family was willing to produce an educated person for reference sake and bringing good name to the family. Oluseye (2021) in her thesis "Exploring the Lived Experiences of Unmarried Young Mother's in South Western Nigeria" observed that Yoruba indigenous people place a high importance on education because, as was previously mentioned in Igbo country, they see it as a direct path to financial success. Consequently, anything that deviates from the objective of obtaining an education that will ultimately result in a prosperous life is viewed as abnormal behavior. In the current Igbo society, teenage pregnancy is considered a deviant conduct because it results in humiliation, a terrible reputation, and unfavorable models for other children instead of respect and good name for the family. According to Babátúndé et al. (2018), Balogun (2013), and Case (2016), as referenced by Oluseye (2021), the collective Case (2016) cited by Oluseye (2021), noted, The sociocultural implications around female sexuality and unwed pregnancy have a negative impact on society. Teenage pregnancy causes delay in getting married for the teenage mother as she is stigmatized by the phrase "ka anuchagodu umuagbogho tupu achoba ndi mugoro nwa n'ulo". Literally, meaning that, let suitors exhaust marrying the single ladies before they talk about the one that has a child at her father's house. This phrase has impacted so much on the mentality of the Igbo indigenes that no one wants be the reason why her family is ridiculed both from the side of the teenager mother and on the side of the suitor, as no suitor would want to be ridiculed of marrying "a second hand" wife as it is tagged. The cultural norms of the Igbo's regarding teenage pregnancy is that of discrimination, shame, ridicule and isolation which leaves the victim emotionally stigmatized and most times wanting to take their lives. The would be grandmother's do not go for post - partum care for the adolescent mothers like they do whenever a child is born for reasons of the shame bought upon the family and so, the teenage mother who is not experienced in any form is left to nurture her child all by herself which deprives her the opportunity of being in school with her mates after delivery. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) practices and cultural norms govern how much autonomy people have over their sexual and reproductive health. The Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba people follow Christianity and Islam, which encourage abstinence before marriage. As a result, female virginity is highly valued and frequently used as a tool to regulate women's sexuality. This has resulted in the Yoruba's high bride price and the Hausa's (the majority ethnic group in the North) acceptance of underage or child marriage, but the Igbo people experience prejudice from their peers and family as well as difficulties finding an acceptable spouse. In most of the Nigerian cultures, particularly the Igbo's, being pregnant and becoming a mother within the

context of marriage is seen as a thing of delight that calls for celebration. However, teenage pregnancy is highly stigmatized and female teenagers who get pregnant out-of-wedlock are societally considered *damaged*, *promiscuous* and *unable to control their sexualities* (Ayomide, 2021). They also carry a low social status, are considered unmarriageable, and are seen as a disgrace to their families and communities. The use of negative discourses to define a woman as “damaged” because she is no longer a virgin highlights patriarchal tones which give males domination over a female’s sexuality (Smith, 2010). This is consistent with Collins (1971) study as cited by Oluseye (2001) in her thesis titled “Exploring the Lived Experiences of Unmarried Young mothers in South Western Nigeria” which notes that *“a woman’s virginity is the property of the men around her”*. Thus, virginity serves as a tool for social control, upholding unequal power dynamics in sexual relationships that prioritize male gratification and position women as subordinates whose primary responsibility is to gratify men's wishes. Teenage pregnancy has been linked to worse socioeconomic outcomes for both the mother and the child in numerous quantitative academic texts published in Nigeria; this association has been viewed as a "cause-and-effect" by some. Adolescent mothers who become pregnant at a young age are more likely than those who wait until later in life to become parents to face socioeconomic disadvantage in a literature review by Odu et al. (2015) cited in Oluseye on teenage pregnancy and motherhood, it was stated that *“teenage pregnancy and motherhood has long time adverse socio-economic impacts on adolescent mothers... they are more likely to continue in poverty and this is capable of truncating their future and that of their children”*. While adolescent pregnancy and motherhood have been linked to disruptions in Nigerian education, out-of-school dropouts resulting from pregnancy and motherhood are typically not the consequence of the teen's decision. According to research by Leckie and Gallagher (2011), Onyeka et al. (2011), and Ekefre et al. (2014), as cited by Oluseye (2021), pregnant minors in Nigeria were discovered to be denied their right to an education by being expelled, under pressure, and forced to quit school. Because there is currently no strategy aimed at ensuring young moms return to education and the number of returning mothers is low, there is little literature on young mothers in education in Nigeria. Teenagers who are pregnant may encounter difficulties that require them to stop their education or drop out of school. It is crucial to recognize that, given Nigeria's changing socioeconomic surroundings, an individual's level of education has come to symbolize their status in society for both men and women in the nation. This shows that stigmatization and discrimination in schools may be aggravating the adverse economic outcomes that teenage mother’s face. Values and norms have a significant impact on how society perceives and assigns importance to social issues. The idea of providing sex education for female teenagers is often seen negatively because of societal perceptions on female adolescent sexuality. This is because it's thought that giving kids a thorough knowledge about sex would encourage promiscuity. Hence, sex education is believed to be best taught from the cultural and moral perspective of “just abstinence”.

Factors associated with adolescent pregnancies in Igbo land

Just as there is no cause without effect, there can never be smoke without fire. The following are the major factors that contribute to teenage pregnancy in the southeastern part of Nigeria:

Poor socio – economic background/poverty

Teenagers from low socioeconomic origins were four times more likely to become pregnant than those from high socio-economic strata, according to a cross-sectional descriptive study conducted by Oluseye (2021) to determine the characteristics associated with adolescent pregnancies. According to the 2018 NDHS data, as cited by Oluseye (2021) girls from lower socioeconomic origins are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers (33% versus 3%), compared to females from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (NPC, 2019). The large disparity in teenage pregnancy across socio-economic status may be partially attributed to findings which shows that many young women from economically deprived backgrounds are more likely to engage in transactional sex to support themselves and their families. Oluseye (2021) found that there is evidence of an intergenerational nature to the transactional connections that teenagers have with partners. Poverty is a major factor in intergenerational transactional sex since young women frequently use sex as a commoditized exchange for their financial survival.

Intergenerational transactional sexual relationships are common practices in many African cultures and are rooted in gender and economic inequality. In many intergenerational relationships in Nigeria, older men control and influence the behavior of their younger partners, especially when the latter are having financial difficulties. Moreover, young women may find it difficult to exercise autonomy or use sexual risk reduction techniques (such as practicing or negotiating safe sex) because of their financial reliance on their older partners. As a result, girls are more likely to get sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies as a result of the power imbalances in these interactions. Intergenerational transactional sex with young girls is viewed as exploitative globally, however because of gender norms surrounding sexual interactions, many young girls do not view these relationships as exploitative. In many African settings, gendered sexual expectations presume that males are to provide (in terms of gifts and money) while females are to reciprocate (by giving sex). Stoebe et al. (2016) found that the practice of transactional sex gives young women, in particular, access to the material items of a modern existence, so elevating their social position. Instead of being limited to necessities, the stuff of commerce includes "commodities of modernity," or products that identify their owner with affluent, globally connected youth culture. Many young people who identify as middle class are drawn to fashion in impoverished township environments, setting themselves apart from both their less fortunate rural neighbors and the squalor of the township. To set themselves apart from their less fortunate classmates, impoverished young women may choose to retain lifestyles that would otherwise be unaffordable or avoid certain peer networks. Even so, despite the fact that these transactional interactions might be voluntary, female teenagers face disadvantages due to age differences and low socioeconomic standing, which restricts their capacity to negotiate safe sexual encounters and safeguard themselves against hazards to their sexual health (Oyediran et al., 2011).

Sexual coercion and violence: About 25% of young females in Nigeria had experienced sexual coercion or violence in one form or another before the age of 18, according to the data from the

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2016. Female teenagers may be coerced into having sex by their male peers or compelled in order to satisfy the sexual cravings of men in positions of authority due to gendered socializations that promote sexual passivity for females and sexual expression and dominance for men. Rape is therefore common, particularly among adolescent girls. This is consistent with Smith's (2010) cited in Oluseye (2021) research on sexual discourses between men and women in Nigeria, where he makes reference to the fact that sexual negotiation is geared toward granting authority to men in both genders. Rape cases are not usually reported by its victim because they are frequently stigmatized as a result of the crime and blamed for their own circumstance. And so, many rape victims are typically reluctant to tell their relatives or the authorities on the events, which lets the offenders avoid punishment and legal scrutiny. Most teenagers have become pregnant for people they don't know through rape and are being traumatized the more through isolation.

Lack of sex education: Oluseye (2021) shows that most parents in Nigeria believe it is wrong to teach or have a conversation with their children about matters linked to sex since it is considered "forbidden," which causes the teenagers to be ignorant about their reproductive health. This is a result of traditional and cultural conventions. The way in which sex education is taught and negatively in Igbo land just to scare girls from getting involved makes it worse for comprehension for adolescents as they end up most times being pregnant. For example, teenagers are being told that *once a man touches them, they will become pregnant*. A video on social media platform known as tiktok posted by aproko doctor and accessed on the 5th of January, 2024 emphatically made it clear that parents should teach their children the names of their private parts and not shying away from it by giving it funny names and also make them to understand why those parts are termed "private" otherwise they are creating a mindset that encourages secrecy and any deceitful interpretation by a male counter- part, and can be bought over by the child hence, pre- marital sex which on most cases ends up as pregnancy for the teenage.

Research Design and methodology

In order to obtain a vivid knowledge of the lived experiences of adolescent pregnancy, this study would utilize a qualitative methodology and phenomenological approach. In order to comprehend their lives, circumstances, challenges, and problems, the researcher must use a qualitative approach. Through the sharing of their opinions and experiences, study participants in qualitative research are able to increase theoretical and practical knowledge and offer potential solutions for professional practices. "The object of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences ... in order to reflect on the meanings that may inhere in them" (Akella and Jordan, 2015). According to Van Maanen, (2002 P. ii) as cited by Akella and Jordan (2015) in their work "Impact of Social and Cultural Factors on Teenage Pregnancy", Phenomenological human science is an inquiry into human experiences in everyday life: "common experiences, forgotten experiences, remembered experiences, technological experiences, ineffable experiences". To them, this technique allows the researchers to step into the life world of another person "where insights, emotions, and understandings are evoked

from mere words on paper, where to read these words is to see, touch, feel, hear, and smell another's lived experience". The participants for this study would be three women aged 27, 34 and 35 respectively who already experienced adolescent pregnancy while in their teen age. They all resided in Nkpor, Idemili Local Government Area of Anambra state, Nigeria (one of the southeastern states) as at the time of their adolescent stage and pregnancy. The study would also employ a snowball sampling strategy, which involved asking research participants to recommend other young adults who fit into the study's inclusion criteria, in order to increase the sample size to five. A method of selection known as "snowball sampling" involves asking study participants to help researchers find additional potential subjects.

Data collection/analysis

The interview would be conducted in English language using a zoom cloud meeting app to connect over the phone with the participants, individually. Each interview would last approximately 55 minutes. Over all, there would be five interviews included in the study as the referred two participants would also be interviewed. The interview would be recorded and transcribed for referencing. Each study participants would be given an opportunity to express what her journey/experience was like after the researcher must have exhausted her questions. The information that would be gathered from the lived experiences of the study participants would be used to analyze the intersectionality that takes place in teenage pregnancy between the rich teenagers and teenagers from poor soico-economic background.

Effects of Teenage Pregnancy

Girls who become pregnant as teenagers may face detrimental social and economic repercussions. Pregnant women who are single must deal with stigma, prejudice, and unacceptability as well as abuse from partners or parents, which can leave them feeling hopeless or despondent. This frequently results in students dropping out of school before achieving their academic objectives, which could endanger their aspirations and career chances in the future.. This perception is in agreement with Amadi (2019) who opined that teenage pregnancy forces teenagers to engage in menial jobs to fend for their child as well as increase their reliance on their parents. Teenagers who are pregnant and drop out of school may also be pressured to get married young, which could lead to intimate partner violence. According to Franjic (2018), which Ojo and Olasupo (2021) Likewise, females who become pregnant before turning 18 have an increased risk of experiencing abuse in a marriage or other committed relationship. Individuals may become less skilled and have fewer career options as a result of not being able to meet higher education requirements; this can lead to poverty or unhealthy lifestyles; in terms of the national economy, this can affect economies where young women's lifetime earnings would have been higher if they had not become pregnant at an early age. According to Ojo and Olasupo (2021), teenage pregnancy is especially concerning from a medical standpoint for the mother and the prenatal health of those who are pregnant or parenting. Adolescent females who are expecting have a higher risk of unsafe abortions than do adults. Globally, girls between the ages

of 15 and 19 are thought to undergo three million unsafe abortions annually (WHO, 2014). This is a severe health issue that results in maternal death. Vesico-vaginal fistulas, or obstetric fistulas, are another serious issue that arises during adolescent pregnancy and are brought on by an extended, obstructed labor. Teenagers are also more likely to experience other pregnancy-related complications and general health risks, including high blood pressure brought on by pregnancy, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, low birth weight and premature birth rates, and other risk factors that pose a serious threat to one's health. Stigmatization arising from desolation and pain of being a disgrace to the family. She is most times disowned.

Theoretical framework of analysis

This study adopted the intersectionality theory to analyze the intersectionality of cultural factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and traditional beliefs which intersect to shape the experiences and perceptions of teenage pregnancy within the Igbo community. The theory of intersectionality is propounded by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in her work "Mapping the Margin". Intersectionality, according to Homan, Brown, and King (2021), is a framework and analytical tool for comprehending the effects of overlapping oppressive systems like racism, sexism, classism, and other types of inequality. Several fundamental concepts are involved in intersectional methods, such as social inequality, intersecting oppressive systems, complexity, and social context (Homan, Brown, and King, 2021). Intersectionality draws emphasis on social inequality across socially constructed groups based on race, gender, and class in a variety of areas of society, including education, economics, politics, housing, health care, and criminal justice. It also shows how these social inequality are not the result of social statuses or identities in and of themselves, but rather are the result of systems of oppression involving asymmetrical power relations (Homan, Brown, and Kind, 2021). From the structural intersectionality perspective, Kimberle (1994) determined that:

"Many women who seek protection are unemployed or underemployed, and a good number of them are poor. Where systems of race, gender and class domination coverage, as they do in the experiences of battered women, intervention strategies based on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be limited of help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles".

This goes a long way in analyzing the experiences faced by teenagers from a poor socio economic background, unemployed and isolated as their experiences with that of the rich teenagers and different being that the teenagers from the rich homes return to school after their child birth and possibly into a new school where she starts a new life as she is not known in the new environment (which become she intervention strategy through her parents), thereafter actualizing her dreams and also getting married. Kimberle in her third type of intersectionality which she tagged "representational intersectionality" where she meant that cultural construction of women of color as well as their location is another

source of intersectional disempowerment. The gender constructivism in a patriarchal Igbo setting is such that has empowered the one that impregnated the girl because he won't be expelled like the girl once known which is why De Beauvoir (1949) called "He, absolute" in her work "Second Sex". She exemplified this cultural identity and class in her work where she explained that battered women were allowed an advantage of a waiver which is available for all women but inaccessible to some because of the requirements which can't be met by most immigrant women. Aligning this to our study also, the cultural construction and norms of teenage pregnancy in Igbo land indirectly has a waiver to it but only accessible by those that are socially, economically and culturally privileged which are usually those from rich homes (upper class) whereas the ones, who do not meet up to this, abide by the norms/rules of Igbo land which implies that:

- a. The teenager be married out immediately to whichever suitor that comes regardless of her age, in order to save the family from shame otherwise it becomes difficult to get married as no family wants to associate with someone that already has a child out of wedlock. Her bride price (dowry) will also reduce as she is seen as a "tokumbo", a term used to refer to "fairly used product".
- b. Quits her educational pursuit as her sponsor whether parents or relations will no longer be willing to sponsor her. To them, it implies waste of time and resources.
- c. She will become isolated and left to fend for herself and the child in any way she thinks best
- d. Lacks regards among her peers and younger ones as she is used as an example or a reference point to deviant behavior to the younger ones.
- e. Everyone gives up on them as it is believed nothing good will come out of her whether presently or in future.

Efforts made by Nigerian government

Okoli et al (2022) highlighted that the government and other stakeholders are quite concerned about the rising prevalence of adolescent pregnancies. Therefore, a sex education curriculum was implemented in Nigerian schools in 2002 in an effort to lower the number of unwanted pregnancies among schoolchildren. Unfortunately, the inability to implement this curriculum has been attributed to the bad attitudes of the teachers as well as the lack of support from parents and religious leaders. In particular, a lot of legislators, public servants, clergy, and parents worry that discussing sex with children will only promote promiscuous behavior. In actuality, the decrease in adolescent pregnancies had not been. The Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) curriculum was introduced by the Nigerian government in 2003 for

junior secondary schools. Six major themes are addressed in the curriculum: relationships, sexual behavior, society and culture, sexual health, human development, and personal skills. While it is suggested that the curriculum be taught in schools, different states implement it differently, which results in unsuccessful attempts to empower and educate youth about making informed reproductive decisions and using SRH services.

Recommendations

Due to the cultural construction of sex education as noted in this work, like encouraging the girl child to be promiscuous through the teaching that exposes them to sexual and reproductive health as well as safety measures/ contraceptives, all programmes acknowledged in this work by the government have been unable to achieve its purpose. This study therefore recommends the following:

1. That as a government-funded initiative, the Nigerian government should enact laws allowing adolescent mothers to return to school after giving birth.
2. Since they have been abandoned by their loved ones, the government should provide for school-based day care centers for adolescent mothers who are about to become teenagers or who are already teenagers in order to help them with child care while they attend school.
3. In order to lower the health risk for these youths and their unborn child, the government should offer free health services.

Conclusion

By exploring the intersectionality of teenage pregnancy and cultural perceptions in Igbo land, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by adolescents in this cultural context. Just like Kimberle Crenshaw emphasized on targeted intervention, there is need for government bodies, corporate bodies, families and the society at large to play a part in the reduction of teenage pregnancy in order to reduce health risk and increase educational enrolment that will benefit them and deconstruct cultural interpretations that limits full actualization of a girl child and reduce inequality.

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