

Peer Influence, Self-Esteem and Parental Occupation as Determinants of Attitude to Teenage Pregnancy Among Secondary Schools Adolescents in Lagos State

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Abstract

Teenage pregnancy remains a significant public health concern, particularly in developing regions such as Nigeria, where it is associated with adverse health, educational, and socioeconomic outcomes. Adolescents' attitudes towards teenage pregnancy play a crucial role in shaping their reproductive behaviors and choices. This study examines peer influence, self-esteem, and parental occupation as key determinants of attitudes towards teenage pregnancy among 250 secondary school adolescents (ages 13-16) in Lagos State, Nigeria. Hinged on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Precaution Adoption Process Model (PAPM). A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted using structured questionnaires measuring peer influence, self-esteem, parental occupation, and attitudes towards teenage pregnancy (assessed on a 4-point Likert scale). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that adolescents with high peer influence had more permissive attitudes towards teenage pregnancy compared to those with low peer influence ($F = 4.21, p = 0.018$), while those with low self-esteem were more likely to view teenage pregnancy as acceptable, compared to those with high self-esteem ($F = 6.02, p = 0.011$). Furthermore, the findings revealed that Parental occupation significantly influenced attitudes, since adolescents from low-income families were more likely to hold positive attitudes towards teenage pregnancy compared to those from higher-income families ($F = 5.31, p = 0.023$). The findings suggest that social and psychological factors significantly shape adolescents' perceptions of teenage pregnancy. Interventions should focus on reducing peer-driven acceptance of teenage pregnancy, promoting self-esteem development, and addressing socioeconomic disparities to reshape adolescents' attitude to teenage pregnancy. The study contributes to adolescent health research by highlighting the importance of social norms and self-perception in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviors. The study recommends peer-led education programs, self-esteem development interventions, and targeted socioeconomic support programs to mitigate teenage pregnancy risks.

Keywords Teenage Pregnancy, Peer Influence, Self-Esteem, Parental Occupation, Theory of Planned Behavior, Precaution Adoption Process Model

Introduction

Adolescence being the transition between childhood and adulthood from ages 10-19 years old is believed to be a critical period when immense physical, social, psychological, and reproductive changes take place. During this period, adolescents typically experience sexual initiation and begin exploring sexual activities as a natural part of reaching sexual and reproductive maturity. Therefore, there is a risk of possibly having the adverse effects of early and unprotected sexual activity, usually due to inadequate reproductive

health information about sexuality and skills to maintain sexual abstinence which might lead to unwanted pregnancies (Kassa, Arowojolu, Odukogbe & Yalew, 2018). The challenges during the teenage years appear universal and can be traumatic. Adolescents face multiple challenges, including biological, psychological, social, sexual, and physical maturity, as well as societal pressures. Consequently, some teenage girls engage in risky health behaviors, such as early and unprotected sex, which can lead to devastating consequences, including sexually transmitted infections and unwanted teenage pregnancy (Adeniyi, Olufemi-Adeniyi & Raheem, 2018).

According to World Health Organization [(WHO) (2020)] report, teenage pregnancy is defined as pregnancy occurring in girls aged 13 to 19 years old. Teenage pregnancy remains a pressing public health and social issue globally and in Nigeria. Adolescence is a period of significant physical and psychosocial change, during which adolescents may be vulnerable to risky sexual behaviors including early sexual debut. According to Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, NDHS (2018) about one in five adolescent girls (ages 15–19) in Nigeria, has begun childbearing either already a mother or currently pregnant (NDHS, 2018; WHO, 2020). This high prevalence of adolescent pregnancy is a concern due to its associated adverse outcomes for young mothers, such as health complications, interruption of education, and socioeconomic hardships (Kassa, Arowojolu, Odukogbe & Yalew, 2018). Prior studies indicate that multiple factors contribute to teenage pregnancy, including peer group influence, individual self-esteem, and family socioeconomic background (Adeniyi, Olufemi-Adeniyi & Raheem, 2018; Abiy, Teketel, & Aklilu, 2018; Agba, Agba, & Ndubisi, 2022).

Peer influence is commonly defined as the extent to which peers exert influence on the attitudes, thoughts, and actions of an individual within similar age range (Teketel, & Aklilu, 2018). Peer influence also enhances the developing personality of individuals and also plays a vital role in the thought processing and sharing, for the growth of self-worth, self-esteem and sexual behaviour. Adolescents communicate in a better way with their peers at this stage more than their parents especially where there is little or no communication between them and their parents. Peer influence, and the need to be famous and accepted are contributing factors to why adolescents spend more time with their friends. Peer pressure was a common reason given by most adolescents for engaging in sex, most mentioned that they were influenced by their friends to initiate sex to show they were matured and catching up with what friends were doing (Envuladu, Van de Kwaak, Zwanikken, & Zoakah, 2017; Sharma, & Harsora, 2022). Adolescents as a way to quickly satisfy their needs for social, emotional, and sometimes financial gratification, yet without adequate life-skills or self-control, may bow easily to peer influence, seek out romantic relationships as a way to boost their self-worth, which may lead to early sexual activity, risky sexual behaviour and an increased risk of unintended or unwanted pregnancy. In order to rescue adolescents from social and psychological pressures that may predispose them to wrong decisions, there is need for preventive programmes to reduce the positive attitude to teenage Pregnancy.

According to Ilegbusi and Adenuga (2024), primary causes of teenage pregnancy include a lack of sex education, followed by peer pressure, poverty, and low self-esteem, stating that other associated factors include a lack of self-control, a lack of parenting, and poverty.

Self-esteem, the individuals' opinion of their self-worth or their ability to feel positive about themselves has also been identified as one of the factors that have the potential to influence sexual behaviors. High self-esteem is expected to reflect and predict good adjustment and behaviors valued by the society. An adolescent with high self-esteem is believed to be assertive enough to avoid risky sexual Behaviours, hence have a negative attitude towards teenage pregnancy (Olorunsola,*et al.*, 2021).

Parental occupation is believed to be a factor that may influence the values, attitudes, and life opportunities available for adolescents. Parental occupation may influence the time parents stay at home with their wards, the financial stability they provide, and the attitudes they instill about education, health, and family life. As such, understanding how parental occupation interacts with other factors, such as decision-making and negotiation skills, can offer valuable insights for developing targeted preventive programmes aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy rates (Makinde, Ahimie, & Idowu, 2013; Folahan,2016).

This study focuses on three key determinants: peer influence, self-esteem, and parental occupation (as an indicator of income level), in the context of secondary school adolescents in Lagos State. Understanding how these factors interplay to influence attitude to teenage pregnancy is crucial for designing effective interventions.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Precaution Adoption Process Model (PAPM). The TPB provides a framework for understanding how an individual's attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape their intentions and behaviors (Ajzen,1991). In the context of adolescent pregnancy, TPB suggests that a teenager's attitude toward pregnancy (e.g. viewing it as negative for her education), the subjective norms (e.g. perceived peer approval of contraception use or sexual abstinence), and perceived control or self-efficacy (e.g. confidence in refusing unwanted sex or obtaining contraceptives) will together influence her intentions and actual behavior regarding sexual activity and pregnancy prevention. For instance, an adolescent who believes that using contraception is beneficial, feels her friends/family support its use, and is confident in accessing and using contraceptives is more likely to practice safe sex to avoid pregnancy.

Complementing the TPB, the Precaution Adoption Process Model is a stage-based theory that describes how people adopt health-protective behaviors through a sequence of steps from ignorance to action (Weinstein & Sandmand,2002). Progression through these stages can be influenced by factors like perceived susceptibility, perceived benefits of action, and self-efficacy. For example, a girl with high self-esteem and good knowledge might move from merely knowing about the consequences of teenage pregnancy to

deciding to prevent getting pregnant it, whereas strong peer pressure might keep another adolescent “stuck” in a stage of inaction despite awareness.

Statement of the Problem

Despite global and local efforts to reduce adolescent pregnancy, it continues to pose serious challenges in Nigeria. Teenage pregnancy in secondary schools often leads to school dropout, curtailed future opportunities, and health risks for both the young mother and child. Lagos is believed to be one of the states in Nigeria with large adolescent population, those from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities or unstable family backgrounds may still experience higher rates of early pregnancy.

Observations from school counselors and community health workers in Lagos suggest that many teenagers face intense peer pressure regarding relationships and sexual behavior. Adolescents often desire social acceptance, and they may engage in sexual activity due to encouragement from friends or to emulate peers, sometimes under the misconception that “everyone is doing it.” This peer influence can normalize risky behaviors and uphold positive attitude to teenage pregnancy. At the same time, low self-esteem among adolescents potentially stemming from academic struggles, family issues, parental occupation or social media pressures may make them more susceptible to peer influence and less confident in negotiating safe sexual practices. A teenager who lacks self-worth might seek validation through sexual attention or feel unable to insist on condom use, increasing the risk of unintended pregnancy. Furthermore, parental occupation and income level play a role in adolescent reproductive behavior. Teens from low-income families may receive less supervision or sex education at home, either because parents work long hours or because of limited parental awareness about sexual health. Economic hardship can also indirectly drive teenage pregnancy; for instance, some girls from impoverished backgrounds may engage in transactional sex or consider early childbearing a viable life path due to limited educational and career prospects.

The problem this study addresses is the need for a clearer understanding of Peer Influence, Self-esteem, and Parental occupation specifically impact teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Lagos. While prior studies have identified these as general risk factors, there is a gap in research in Lagos quantifying their effects and examining them under robust theoretical frameworks like TPB and PAPM. Without this understanding, interventions may miss critical targets (for example, focusing solely on abstinence or biological aspects and neglecting peer group dynamics or psychological support). This study seeks to investigate these underlying factors and provide evidence-based insights to help curb adolescent pregnancy and its negative consequences.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine peer pressure, self-esteem, and parental occupation (income level) as determinants of attitudes towards teenage pregnancy among secondary school adolescents in Lagos State. Specific objectives of the study include to:

1. Investigate the influence of peer pressure on adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy among secondary school adolescents in Lagos State.
2. Assess the relationship between self-esteem and attitudes toward teenage pregnancy among secondary school adolescents in Lagos State.
3. Examine the impact of parental occupation on adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy among secondary school adolescents in Lagos State.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between peer influence and adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy.
2. There is no significant influence of self-esteem and adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy.
3. There is no significant relationship between parental occupation and adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach: The study employed a descriptive survey research design with an ex-post facto approach, as it investigated existing factors (peer influence, self-esteem, parental occupation) in relation to an existing outcome (attitude towards teenage pregnancy) without manipulating any variables. The design is cross-sectional, capturing data from respondents at one point in time. This approach is appropriate for assessing correlations and group differences in naturally occurring variables among adolescents.

Population and Sample: The target population comprised secondary school adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria, particularly those in the age range of 13 to 16 years. For the survey, a sample of 250 adolescents was selected from several secondary schools across Lagos State. The sample were female students, because the area of interest is attitude towards teenage pregnancy the analysis focused primarily on female respondents' experiences. The age range 13–16 covers early to mid-adolescence, which is a critical period for sexual debut in many adolescents.

A multi-stage sampling technique was used. The first stage entailed selecting three Education Districts out of the six Education Districts in the state. Three secondary schools were randomly selected from the three Education Districts previously selected to ensure geographic and socioeconomic diversity (including both low-income and middle-income neighborhoods). Then, within each selected school, students in the target age range were stratified by class, and simple random sampling was used to recruit participants from each stratum. Parental consent and student assent were obtained prior to data collection, given the sensitive nature of the topic and the minors involved.

Participation was voluntary and responses were kept confidential. Instrumentation: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections:

Demographic Information was gathered on background data such as age, sex, class in school, and parental occupation/income level. Parental occupation was assessed by asking students to report their father's and mother's occupation and, if known, an approximate monthly income range. Based on this information, each student was categorized into one of three socioeconomic groups: Low Income (e.g., parents in unskilled or informal jobs with low earnings), Middle Income (parents in skilled trades or lower professional jobs with moderate earnings), and High Income (parents in professional or managerial positions with high earnings).

Peer Influence Questionnaire with a set of questions measuring the degree of peer influence on the respondent's attitudes and behaviors regarding sexuality. Items were adapted from Revised peer pressure questionnaires by Sunil and Singh (2022). Example items included: "I will engage in risky sexual behaviour just to keep up with peers" and "I feel pressured by friends to date the opposite sex" Responses were on a Likert scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). A higher total score indicated greater perceived peer influence toward sexual activity. For analysis, this continuous score was also dichotomized at the median to classify respondents into High Peer Influence vs. Low Peer Influence groups for comparison.

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to assess each participant's self-esteem. This widely validated instrument includes 10 statements, "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "I feel I do not have much to be proud of" reverse-scored rated on a 4-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Scores range from 0 to 30, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. For certain analyses, participants were grouped into High Self-Esteem vs. Low Self-Esteem based on a median split of the RSES score.

Attitude Towards Teenage Pregnancy Scale This section inquired about the respondent's sexual activity and any history of pregnancy. "I will like to get pregnant before 18 " and " Pregnancy will help to prove of that I am fertile" Responses were on a Likert scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). A higher total score indicated greater perceived peer influence toward sexual activity.

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts and pre-tested on a small sample of similar age students in a school not used for the study. Necessary adjustments were made before the full administration.

Data Collection Procedure: Trained research assistants visited each selected school to administer the questionnaires. Before the survey, students attended a brief session explaining the purpose of the study and assuring them of confidentiality. The survey took about 20–30 minutes to complete. Completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed.

Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation, Frequency), ANOVA (To test for significant differences in attitude scores based on peer influence, self-esteem, and parental occupation), and Multiple Regression Analysis (To assess the predictive strength of peer influence, self-esteem, and parental occupation on attitude scores). The following results table focused on mean attitude scores towards teenage pregnancy.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Attitude towards Pregnancy across the Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Peer Influence Score	15.2	3.5
Self-Esteem Score	22.8	4.2
Attitude Toward Teenage Pregnancy	18.6	3.8

Table 2: ANOVA Results for Attitudes Toward Pregnancy Based on the Variables

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Peer Influence	238.5	1	238.5	9.65	0.002
Self-Esteem	196.3	1	196.3	8.40	0.004
Parental Occupation	182.1	1	182.1	7.88	0.006

Peer Influence ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$) Adolescents experiencing high peer pressure had significantly more accepting attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. Implication: Peer norms are a strong driver of reproductive attitudes. Interventions should target peer groups to shift norms away from normalizing teenage pregnancy.

Self-Esteem ($\beta = -0.32, p < 0.01$) Adolescents with low self-esteem were more accepting of teenage pregnancy, while adolescents with parents in professional occupations were less permissive towards teenage pregnancy. Implication: Confidence-building interventions and life-skills training can help adolescents resist negative peer influence and maintain future-oriented reproductive goals.

Parental Occupation ($\beta = -0.28, p < 0.05$) Adolescents from low-income families were more likely to have accepting attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. Implication: Socioeconomic disparities increase vulnerability. Addressing educational and financial barriers can reshape adolescent attitudes towards pregnancy.

Discussion

The study revealed that adolescents with High level of Peer Influence had positive attitudes to teenage pregnancy, which confirms that peer influence significantly impacts and plays a role adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy, The finding is in agreement with previous researches (Sharma & Harsora, 2022; Tegegne, 2022). The findings equally revealed that higher self-esteem was associated with restrictive attitudes, which was may result in showing negative attitude towards teenage pregnancy aligning with previous researches (Udigwe *et al.*, 2014; Kassa *et al.*, 2018; Tegegne, 2022). Furthermore, the findings showed that parental occupation played a vital role in shaping attitudes, supporting the socio-economic hypothesis of adolescent behavior (Makinde, Ahimie & Idowu, 2013; Duru *et al.*, 2010; Ayoade *et al.*, 2015; Tegegne,2022).

The statistical analysis shows that there is positive correlation ship between parent and peer influence and self – esteem among adolescence.

Recommendations

1. Schools and communities should strengthen peer mentorship and peer-led education programs to counter negative peer norms that encourage unprotected sex.
2. Encouraging positive peer role models and providing adolescent-friendly sexual health information can reshape adolescent attitudes to teenage pregnancy
3. Schools should integrate psychosocial interventions and self-esteem enhancement programs into counseling and extracurricular activities. As this could play a key role in teenage pregnancy prevention.
4. Adolescents should be taught sexual assertiveness and decision-making skills.
5. Government and NGOs should expand financial support, scholarships, and vocational training.
6. Parental guidance programs should be introduced to help low-income families engage in adolescent reproductive education with their wards.

Conclusion

This study provides strong evidence that peer influence, self-esteem, and parental occupation significantly shape adolescents' attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. Adolescents with high peer influence, low self-esteem, and from low-income families were more likely to have permissive attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. These findings reinforce Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which emphasizes that peer norms, self-efficacy, and perceived control over behavior influence adolescent sexual behaviour choices. The study also aligns with the Precaution Adoption Process Model (PAPM), showing that adolescents at different stages of risk perception and readiness have varying attitudes towards pregnancy.

Adolescents' attitudes towards teenage pregnancy shape their future reproductive behaviors. Addressing peer norms, self-esteem, and economic barriers is crucial for reshaping these attitudes and reducing teenage pregnancy rates in Lagos State. Interventions must be multi-dimensional, integrating education, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment to create a healthier future for adolescents.

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