Determinants of Teenage Mother’s Psychological Well-being in Kamuli District, Uganda

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the determinants of teenage mothers’ psychological well-being in Kamuli District, Uganda. Being that the rate of teenage motherhood is very high in Uganda among all African countries, this study examines how stressors and coping resources affect teenage mothers’ psychological well-being and attempts to address the social stigma and barriers underlying this problem from a community level.

Methods: The sample population is 136 young mothers aged 15-25 from the 13 sub-counties in Kamuli District and the survey was conducted during January and February of 2017 using non-probabilistic sampling methods. The collected data were analyzed by frequency analysis, t-test, analysis of variance, and hierarchical regression analysis. To deduce the underlying problems faced by young mothers, parents of teenage mothers, social welfare officers and health workers in the community were interviewed and the collected data was analyzed.

Results: The analyses show statistically significant differences in the teenage mothers’ psychological well-being according to their economic status and the age of first pregnancy. The primary determinants of the teenage mothers’ psychological well-being in the Kamuli District of Uganda are stigma and nutritional behavior. Interview data depicts that there is insufficient support available at home, and there are high barriers to economic and emotional security in place in the form of community associated social stigma.

Conclusion: In order to improve the psychological well-being of the teenage mothers in Kamuli District, it is necessary to reduce individual and systemic social stigma, as well as provide young mothers with economic and social support. For this, social interventions such as targeted education is urgently needed for different groups including teenagers as a whole, pregnant adolescents, adolescent mothers, parents of teenagers, community leaders, and opinion leaders.

Keywords: Adolescent pregnancy, Psychological health, Psychological well-being, Social stigma

Received (April 24, 2019), Revised (May 9, 2019), Accepted after revision (May 27, 2019)
I. Introduction

Adolescent pregnancy is a global concern; approximately 16 million girls from 15 to 19, and two million girls under the age of 15 become pregnant and give birth every year (Blum & Gates, 2015; Neal et al., 2012; Who, 2006). Africa has higher rates of teenage pregnancy than other continents. Sub-Saharan Africa especially has the highest prevalence of pregnancy among teenage girls (Loaiza & Liang, 2013).

Uganda, in East-Central Africa, has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy and motherhood in Africa. The Uganda Demographic Health Survey 2016 results depict that 25 percent of female adolescents age 15-19 in Uganda have gotten pregnant at least once: 19 percent of girls age 15-19 had given birth, and another 5 percent were pregnant with their first child at the time of the study.

Adolescent pregnancy and motherhood entail considerable risks. Teenage girls who become pregnant under the age of 18 have a greater risk than other age groups for maternal complications including preterm labor, placental tears, obstetric fistulae, and hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (Blum et al., 2015; Oboro, 2009; Tunick, 1996; Yasmin et al., 2014). Teenage pregnancy and motherhood have remained a major health and social concern in Uganda because of their association with higher morbidity and mortality for both the mother and infant (Atuyambe et al., 2005; Johns et al., 2011; Uganda Bureau of Statistics & ORC Macro, 2016).

However, increasing numbers of teenage girls experience unplanned pregnancy in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics & ORC Macro, 2012), which gives rise to social stigma associated with adolescent pregnancy outside formal marriage (Levandowski et al., 2012; Achoka & Njeru, 2012; Wiemann et al., 2015). Anticipated stigma may be related to demoralization which comprises low self-esteem, sadness, anxiety, as well as confused thinking (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). This is further compounded as adolescents are forced to terminate their studies and are alienated from their families (Maly et al., 2017; Wiemann et al., 2005).

Teen mothers' families are more likely to be socially and economically disadvantaged (Levandowski et al., 2012; Maly et al., 2017; Williamson, 2013), and the circumstances are aggravated as pregnancy affects the young expectant mothers' mental health (Hodgkinson et al., 2014; Kleintjes, 2010; Wadworth, 2002). The state of their psychological health is further challenged by mistreatment from their families and society, being overworked, as well as insufficient nutrition (Atuyambe et al., 2005; Parekh, & De la Rey, 1997; Panzarine et al., 1995).

The purpose of this study is firstly, to understand the social situations of teenage mothers which affect their psychological well-being in their relationships with their parents and communities. Secondly, it is to unveil the factors associated with teenage motherhood stressors and coping resources that aggravate their psychological well-being. Specifically, it is designed to examine the determinant factors of stressors and most effective coping resources influencing the psychological well-being of teenage girls with infants in the Kamuli District of Uganda.

2. Methods

1) Data collection and participants

The study was conducted in Kamuli District, one of the 112 districts in Eastern Uganda, with a population of 486,319 (District, 2017). The data was collected in January and February of 2017 from 136 respondents with infants, aged 14 - 25, who first became pregnant under the age of 20. Non-probability sampling techniques (Convenience and Purposive sampling) were used to select respondents from the 13 sub-counties in Kamuli District. Furthermore, 26 key informants (10 parents of teenage mothers, 10 social welfare officers, and 6 health workers) were interviewed individually for 1 hour with a semi-structured questionnaire as a