



Examining the state of Psychological Well-Being of young Unwed Mothers: Implications for extension education

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Abstract

This study intends to examine the state of psychological well-being among the young unwed pregnant women who were placed in KEWAJA shelter home. Adolescence pregnancy is a social phenomenon and has impact on psychological health, socio-cultural and environmental challenges to individual and future communities. It could also contribute to the total burden of disability in the community. However, the result of the study showed the level of psychological well-being of the respondents was generally high. This finding has practical implications to extension agents and community development programs. Thus, a multi-pronged community driven programs are needed to reduce risk behavior among these young adults

Keyword: psychological well-being; single mother; extension programs; environmental challenge.

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1.0 Introduction

One of the significant demographic changes in many societies throughout the globe has been an increase in the number of families headed by single mothers. This is due mainly to an increased rate of marital separation, divorce and mothers without partners (Avison, 1997). The Globe Newspaper (2008) reported that 45 percent of all pregnancies in the US are among women who were not married. The report also mentioned that 77 % of the births in 2006 were among unmarried women in their 20s and older. Nevertheless, alarming reports on out-of-wedlock pregnancies among youngsters in Malaysia are also on the rise. Local media (Berita- Harian on line, 2010) highlighted that child-out-of wedlock birth rate is rapidly increasing where from 2007 to 2009, there were about 17303 illegitimate children cases reported. The Malaysian Welfare Department has reported that from January 2010 to April 2010, hundred and eleven (111) unmarried young girls were pregnant (Nazni Nordin et al, 2012).

Literature evident that adolescence pregnancy imposed negative consequences and outcomes, such as, unable to attain sufficient education needed to compete in the economy, often leading to poverty and having psychological distress Tripp and Viner 2005). Logan et al (2007) stated in his study that an unintended birth can have negative consequences for a mother's mental well-being and demonstrate lower levels of general psychological well-being during pregnancy. Parallel to that, Avison, (1997) suggested that the adverse effects of being a single mother are associated with an increased risk for affective disorder and with increased rates of mental health service utilization. Furthermore, studies done by Nguyen et al (2005) suggested that adolescents have higher prevalence rates of mental disorders compared to other age groups. In fact, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005 (as cited in Dowle, 2006) reported that the rates of depressive and anxiety related disorders are higher than any other mental or behavioural problem within the 15 to 24 year age group.

Negovan (2010) reviewed in his study that there were two main approaches that conceptualized the term psychological well being. Firstly, the hedonic approach defines well-being as happiness and of the presence of pleasure and absence of pain and is reflected in the stream of research on subjective well-being (Bradburn, 1969). Secondly, the eudaimonic approach suggested that well-being is a result of a person's optimal functioning in life (Diener, 1984). Subsequently, Ryff and Keyes (1995) assert that the study of psychological well-being has been guided by two primary conceptions of positive functioning. The first one came from the work of Bradburn (1969) who had distinguished between the positive and negative affective. Bradburn (1969) claimed that happiness could be able to balance between the two affective domains. The second primary conception emphasized on life satisfaction as the key indicator of well-being. In a study done by Dowle (2006), reviewed that psychological well-being is also composed of general positive affect and emotional ties. General positive affect consists of feelings of happiness, light heartedness and feeling relaxed, whilst emotional ties involve feeling loved and wanted and an absence of loneliness (Veit & Ware, 1983). On the other hand, Ryff (1989) suggested that a multidimensional model of psychological well being that emphasizes wellness rather than illness. She claimed that psychological well-being consists of six dimensions such as personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and autonomy and positive relations with others. Thus, one who

exhibits strength in each of the dimension would reflect good psychological well-being and vice-versa.

Nevertheless, being young unmarried mothers can be tough on their emotions, finances, health and psychological well being. More importantly, the issues of adolescents pregnancies is an endemic social concern with damaging health consequences and thus could contribute to total burden of disability in the population (Latiffah et. al, 2005). Given this juncture, perhaps, one of the ways to alleviate the effects of psychological distress is through providing social support and designing extension program. Etzon (1984) defined social support as an informal social network that provides individuals with expressions of emotional concerns or empathy, practical assistance or appraisal. While, extension involves the conscious use of communication of information through educational program to help people form sound opinions and make good decisions (Van den Ban and Hawkins , 2002). In the Malaysian contexts, a few non-government or private organizations have provided shelter homes for these young unwed mothers. The KEWAJA shelter home is one of the many types of shelter homes provided by the Malaysian communities. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the state of psychological well-being among young unwed mothers in KEWAJA shelters home.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were two folds, namely (a) to determine the level of psychological well-being among the pregnant unwed women; (b) examine significant differences between psychological well-being and demographic variables namely age, place of hometown and educational level.

2.0 Methodology

This study was based on conceptual framework that was adapted from Veit & Ware (1983). It utilized a survey method and descriptive in nature. Psychological well being questionnaire was adapted from Heubeck & Neill (2000) and Veit & Ware (1983). The 10 items instrument was used to measure the positive and negative indicators of psychological well-being. The items asked the respondents to rate on a five point scale how they had been feeling during the past months. The reliability of coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.883. The samples were drawn from the KEWAJA Shelter Home, in Kuala Lumpur. Fifty (50) pregnant young unwed women who were placed temporary in the shelter home participated in this study. The age distributions of the respondents were between 15 to 40 years old.

3.0 Findings

Table 1 below, displays the state of psychological well-being among the pregnancy unwed young mothers. The finding showed that majority or about 54% (27) of the respondents felt moderate level of psychological well-being. However, about 30% (15) of these pregnancies unwed mothers felt high level of psychological well-being. On the other hands, about 16% (8) of these pregnancies unwed mothers felt low psychological well-being. Hence, this result

suggests that majority of these pregnancies unwed mothers who were placed at the KEWAJA shelter home were psychological stable in terms of their mental health, happiness, and social-ability.

Table 1: The Levels of psychological well-being among the pregnancies unwed mothers

Level	Frequency (n=50)	Percentage %
Low	8	16
Moderate	27	54
High	15	30
Total	50	100

Mean= 2.26, Std Deviation= 0.6703

Based on the independent t-test shown in table 2, there was no significant differences in psychological well-being base on respondents' place of hometown; where $t = -.641$, $p = 0.435$. Therefore, the result indicates that the hometown, i.e. whether the respondents lived in the city or rural areas do not show any significant effect on the psychological well-being of these pregnancies unwed mothers.

Table 2: Independent t-test result for psychological well-being based on place of hometown

	N	Mean	std dev	t	df	p
Urban	38	3.118	.91618	-.641	28.31	.435
Rural	12	3.300	.60453			

In table 3 below, displays ANOVA analysis on the psychological well-beings and education levels of the respondents. Based on the One-Way ANOVA test, the results showed, there were no significant differences in the psychological well-being of the pregnancies unwed mothers based on their educational levels ($F = 0.550$; $p = 0.700$). This finding indicated that education levels of the respondents do not have any effect on their psychological well-beings.

Table 3: one –way ANOVA result on psychological well-being based on education levels

	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	1.650	4	.412	.550	.700
Within groups	33.728	45	.750		
Total	35.378	49			

Table 4 below, indicates ANOVA analysis on the psychological well-being and age of the respondent. Based on the One-Way ANOVA test, the results showed, there were no significant differences in the psychological well-being of the pregnancies unwed mothers based on their age ($F = 1.627$; $p = 0.207$). This finding indicated that the age of the respondents do not have any effect on their psychological well-beings.

Table 4: One –way ANOVA result on psychological well-being based on age

SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	2.291	2	1.145	1.627
Within groups	33.087	47	.704	.207
Total	35.378	49		

4.0 Implications and Conclusions

This study was intended to examine the state of psychological well-being of the young unwed pregnant women, who were temporary placed in KEWAJA shelter home. Generally, the findings revealed that 84% of the unwed mothers were experiencing a moderate to high level of psychological well-being, indicating stabilizes emotional feelings. The possible explanation to this finding suggests that the availability of social support and the extension services provided by KEWAJA shelter home might have minimise problems faced those young pregnancy women. The unique program carried out by KEWAJA may have affected the psychological state of well-being among these unwed women. Perhaps, these young unwed women felt there are a lot more sense of security and stability when seeking voluntarily to stay in this type of shelter home. Therefore, social support group provides an outlet for feelings fears and questions among these young mothers. In addition, in a study done by Chung et al (2000) stated that facilities – concerned, personal support for unwed mothers and a program promoting support and hope from families, friends and unwed father are necessary to promote hope and health in unwed mothers.

The results also showed that significant difference between psychological well-being and place of hometown (rural or urban area), education level and age. This study supports with the study done by Sodi (2009). What this implies in other word is that regardless of age, place of stay or hometown and education level, the phenomenon of unwed mothers may occur across demographic factors. This then is not a phenomenon limited specifically to one type or section of the community but apparently anywhere and anyone becomes a breeding ground for it. The phenomenon of unwed mothers cut across all the demographic factors and as such what type of strategies are suited and more appropriate to be developed then needed to be examined in the actual context or situation where these phenomenon is happening.

This finding has practical implications to extension agents and community development program in their effort to establish intervention strategies. The information gain from this study could help the extension agents to understand the problems related to an endemic social concern with damaging health and psychological well- being consequences. Thus, establishing intervention strategies and extension and community programs is pertinent in order to safe guard the well being of the future community and also reducing environmental challenges. In responding to young unwed pregnancy women issues, extension programs need a broad perspective, including strategies that develop family strengths and enhance parenting skills, and provide information about reproduction and contraceptive services. Besides, sex education program should not only be taught at school level but also at

community level. This approach is needed in order to provide awareness and understanding about reproductive system and health at community level. Apart from this, there is a need to build spiritual and psychological well-being program at the community level. Research shows that spiritual well-being is positively correlated with many aspects of health (Syed Iman et al., 2009). Studies have also provided support for spirituality and religiousness as a buffer against risk behaviour and a support for positive attitudes and actions among youth (Wagener et al., 2000). In this sense, the extension agents should work closely with community members to offer assistance, guidance, advice, consultation and counselling. Besides, local universities should also provide avenue and expertise in doing research particularly on the risk behaviour among young youth and their related problems and ways to reduce risk behaviour. However, according to Domenico and Jones (2007) programs aimed at preventing unwed pregnancy women must be a long term and comprehensive, while incorporating important components such as early interventions, sexuality education, counselling, health service, adolescent domestic violence and youth development.

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