
Teenage Sexual Health And Importance Of Safe Sexual Practices

Young adolescent sexual and reproductive health is an essential issue. Pregnancy, childbirth and sexually transmitted infections are significant contributors to morbidity in the young adolescent age group. Adolescents are undergoing developing processes that may influence them to undertake risky sexual behaviors. Throughout the time of development, some teenagers tend to engage in behaviors that come as a desire to experiment with the seeking of peer approval. The relatively short relationships and unrealistic expectations of the likely consequences of teenage pregnancy also become prevalent in this period of drastic change. This essay aims to discuss how sexual health in teenagers influences both physical and emotional health and well-being whilst also the importance of the health professionals' role within the healthcare system.

As adolescents delay seeking prescription contraception, it is not surprising that half of the adolescent pregnancies occur within six months of sexual activity (Breuner & Mattson, 2016). The importance of education is integral to ensuring adolescent youth are aware of the risk factors and their own well-being physically, mentally, and emotionally (Breuner & Mattson, 2016). Children and adolescents should be shown how to develop a safe and positive view of sexual health and sexuality (Breuner & Mattson, 2016). Sexual health education can be disseminated through three learning domains which allow more consideration when engaging in sexual activity or risky behaviors (Advocates for Youth, 2012). Cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains educate youth on the information around sexual activity, feelings, values, and attitudes associated, as well as behavioral decision making, and communication skills needed to engage safely (Breuner & Mattson, 2016). Sexual health is more than the anatomy and physiology of biological sex and reproduction systems (Breuner & Mattson, 2016). Developing healthy sexuality is a key developmental milestone for youth that depends on acquiring adequate information on values about consent, attitudes, and beliefs, sexual orientation gender identity, and intimacy (Health Direct, 2018). All children and adolescents need to receive accurate education about sexual health to understand ultimately how to practice healthy sexual behavior (Breuner & Mattson, 2016).

Sexual health information messages are received by adolescents through social media, schools, family peers, parents or guardians, and partners, although the quality of these messages differs (Breuner & Mattson, 2016). The need for health practitioners to enforce this information will assist in educating individuals on the importance of engaging in safe sexual practices (Breuner & Mattson, 2016).

The stigma associated with youth pregnancy has become well-known. Negative stereotypes continue to dominate understandings of teenage pregnancy which affects young mothers' emotional and physical well-being (Smith, 2013). It is important to understand that the continuation of stigmatization towards teenage mothers affects the lives of young mothers and their children through emotionally damaging feelings (Smith, 2013). Young mothers report feeling fear, shame, resentment, anger, distress, and lack of confidence due to the idea of young teenage mothers who have "failed to make the right choices" (Baker, 2010). Baker (2010) further discusses that the stigma of teenage pregnancy leads to a "social death". The

result of social isolation and exclusion has a negative impact on the overall health of young females.

Young mothers have poor health (Patel & Sen, 2012). A study conducted by Patel & Sen (2012) further supports this as it was found that teenage mothers had the poorest physical health of all women studied including those that engaged in unprotected sex. The reasoning for this is that teenage mothers may neglect their physical health while carrying and caring for their babies. According to the National Institutes of Health (2018), pregnant teens are more likely to develop pregnancy-related high blood pressure and anemia resulting in preterm labor and delivery than older women. Age can contribute to these physical factors with preeclampsia also being at risk for young teen mothers as a result of high blood pressure. Education around sexually transmitted infections is further becoming alarming during teen pregnancies as many young mothers are unaware that they carry these infections with the potential to cause harm with the pregnancy and during labor (National Institute of Health, 2018).

During the perinatal period, many teen women experience a mixture of physiological and psychological factors that put them at an increased risk of developing perinatal depression. These factors can include past or present mental health disorders, pregnancy and birth complications, being a single parent with limited social supports, and life stressors such as financial issues or relationship difficulties (Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, 2014). Along with the mental health conditions that are prevalent with teenage pregnancies, the majority will experience panic attacks, anxiety, difficulty bonding with the baby, and overwhelming fatigue. The reasoning stems from factors such as low education levels, history of child abuse, limited social networks, low socio-economic status and living in chaotic, unstable home environments (Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, 2014).

Early motherhood is commonly associated with low education, reduced employment participation, and poverty (Pitso, Kheswa, Nekhwevha, & Sibanda, 2014). The more women know about pregnancy and preventing teenage pregnancy is vital in ensuring their health and wellbeing are sustained suitable to their age. The limited knowledge leads to some pre-natal and post-natal challenges that as a result influence their psychosocial wellbeing (Health Direct, 2018). Not to mention, the lack of knowledge around safe sexual practices and the use of protection is another key factor in teen pregnancy prevalence. This limited knowledge also influences a teenager's decision to access health care services (Health Direct, 2018). This delay in seeking advice results in a high prevalence of teenage pregnancies which in the long-term can lead to missed important antenatal care (Health Direct, 2018). Many teenagers and first-time mums especially are at higher risk of complications with the delivery, but also developing post-natal depression. General Health Practitioners can introduce issues of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development with individuals in early childhood and continue these discussions throughout schooling, adolescence, and young adulthood (Queensland Health, 2016). Sharing this information can assist young adults in overcoming barriers to being open and discussing sexual health in order to improve screening for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STIs), pregnancy, and partner domestic violence.

Good sexual and reproductive health is fundamental to our overall health and wellbeing, as it is one of the foundations upon which society relies to exist and is an integral element in having successful human relationships (Queensland Health, 2016). Health clinics are uniquely positioned to meet young people's needs for confidential, low-cost family planning, Human

Immunodeficiency Virus, and Sexually Transmitted Infection prevention services (Breuner & Mattson, 2016).

Health practitioners can offer their services and accommodate for factors influencing access to healthcare such as self-esteem, confidence, and trust within their practice. The autonomy to make decisions is one aspect that should be considered when health professionals are working with people in general, but specifically young vulnerable teenagers (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). This can be done by providing information and services available to young women but also allowing for decisions to be made in conjunction with the individual's own personal values and beliefs (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). To ensure this population is receiving the best possible healthcare, health professionals should become aware that their personal beliefs and values do not pose as a barrier to the service they deliver (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). It is integral for practitioners to create a safe environment by addressing the nature of confidentiality to ensure the individual is safe asking questions and discussing their personal information and concerns (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). In many instances, health professionals may be the only form of care that teen mothers receive and can contribute a great amount to their well-being throughout pregnancy and motherhood.

As a health professional, there is a critical role played to ensure the current information is delivered along with reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy through delivering appropriate service access to young adolescent patients (Centre for Disease Control & Prevention, 2018). One focus towards providing appropriate care for young parents is to develop an understanding of the biological, psychological, and social development of young adolescents. This provides a framework for professionals to refer to in order to grasp some of the underlying behaviors and presentations (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010).

Another initiative to consider is the social stigma surrounding teenage pregnancy, teenagers respond best to practitioners who are non-judgemental, understanding and accept the realities of young parenting (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). Adopting a strengths-based approach to youth pregnancy can be beneficial in ensuring the best health outcome is achieved for both mother and baby (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2010). Adopting a shift in perception from seeing young parents like those at risk to those facing challenges but with the right support can achieve positive age outcomes, will support young parents to identify their own strengths and work towards positive personal outcomes.

Teenage pregnancy can influence the physical and emotional manifestations of young women. It is important for health professionals to consider these physical and emotional aspects in order for teenagers to receive the best support possible with the best possible health outcomes and educate them around the importance of safe sexual practices.