

## Teen Pregnancy in Canada: An Important Public Health Issue

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Teenage pregnancy is a serious social issue worldwide. The definition of teen pregnancy is a pregnancy that happens to someone under 20 years old. People may have an image that teen pregnancy is only an issue in developing countries. However, it is also a significant issue in North America. According to Statistics Canada, the teen pregnancy rate was 27.9 per 1000 women in 2006. In 1996, it was 44.2 per 1000 women. The number of abortions under twenty years old was 15,217 and under fifteen years old was 267 in 2006. One of the reasons of declining teen pregnancy rate is the decreasing rate of experience of sexual intercourse. According to Michelle Rotermann, mentioned in Statistics Canada, the percentage of girls who are fifteen to nineteen years old had sexual intercourse was fifty-one in 1996, and forty-three in 2006 (2). Another reason for the decline is the use of condoms has become more common. According to Kelly Martin and Zheng Wu's survey, in 1995, 12.6 percent of women who are eighteen to twenty-four years old uses condoms to prevent conception (66). In 2005, according to Michelle Rotermann,

seventy percent of sexually active females aged at fifteen to nineteen used condoms when they had intercourse last time (4). This data is not the same prerequisites of survey, but it is clear that using condoms has become common among young women. Using condoms is an effective way not only to prevent conception, but also sexually transmitted infection. Adolescence is a significant time in becoming mature physically and mentally, so being a pregnant teen can have significant negative affects. According to Susan Clark, a sociologist at University of British Columbia, eighty percent of girls in high school said their pregnancy were not on purpose (14). Although the number of teen pregnancies is declining, there are three kinds of risks associated with teen pregnancy: physical risks for mothers and their children, economical risks, and psychological risks. This essay will discuss these risks, the support systems for teenage mothers and sex education for adolescent students in Canada.

Between 1950-1970, unmarried young mothers were viewed as pitiable and considered to have shamed their families. Moreover, abortion was not allowed by law until 1988. According to Historical Statistics, in 1960, the percentage of illegitimate births was 4.3 per cent. In 1970, the rate had increased to 9.6 per cent. According to Susan Clark, thirteen percent of babies were born from unmarried mothers in 1980 and in 1992, twenty-five percent of birth s were to unwed mothers. 19,161 unwed teens got pregnant in 1990 (12). However, data from Statistics Canada shows that almost six hundred thousand children were born to unwed women and recorded as "Illegitimate births" from

1945 to 1971. According to Art Eggleton, "The vast majority of unmarried women were coerced into surrendering their babies for adoption to "traditional" couples wanting to expand their families" (Policy Options Politiques). "In a society that attempts to mitigate the undesirable consequences of accidents and especially on those who are innocent of blame - the children - then, public support should be available when families are living in difficult circumstances and the children are not developing appropriately" (Clark 11). This phenomenon indicates that unmarried mothers were not accepted in Canadian society between the post war period until the early 1970s. While teenagers who become pregnant are less stigmatized today, it is still considered a serious social and public health issue.

Teenage pregnancy has negative physical effects for mothers and babies. The bodies of teen mother are not mature, so there are many physical risks compared with more mature mothers. For example, anemia is a serious problem for teen mothers. "Anemia is the most prevalent nutritional deficiency during pregnancy" (Nazirah Jusoh, Tengku Alina Tengku Ismail, Aizh Daud). M. S. Chahande, belonging to Government Medical College and Hospital, Nagpur informed that 72.6 percent of teenage pregnant women were anemic (108). According to Stuart R Dalziel, Varsha Parag, Anthony Rodgers and Jane E Harding, the possibility of premature birth, babies born before thirty-seven weeks, is fourteen percent higher compared with those aged twenty to twenty-four (International Journal of Epidemiology, Cardiovascular risk factors at age 30 following preterm

birth. 909). Another study by Dr. Ali Khashan, from University College Cork, in Ireland found that under seventeen year-old mothers are twenty-one percent more liable to have premature babies for their first pregnancy, and for their second pregnancy, ninety-three percent more likely to have. Moreover, they say that babies born from teen mothers are vulnerable to sudden infant death syndrome (Revere Health). Mothers and their babies are more likely to have physical issues, such as anemia, premature babies, and sudden infant death syndrome because mother's bodies are not mature.

Teenage pregnancy often causes economic difficulties. Many teenagers are students. If they get pregnant and have a child, they may not graduate from high school and this could have an important impact on their abilities to get a job in the future. Also, a lack of education causes poverty. Miriam Kaufman, a pediatrician and associate professor in University of Toronto, argues "It seems that these young women (and the odd father who sticks around) are poor because there are few job opportunities for young people with low levels of education" (28). According to Susan Clark, fifty-two percent of unmarried mother under nineteen years old were living in poverty in 1988. According to MoneySense Canada, the cost of raising one child to eighteen years old is \$243,656 in 2015. At average, it costs approximately \$13,365 per year. Susan Clark collected data that in 1987, the average income per month from unmarried mothers aged under nineteen years old was 1948 dollars. Thirty-three percent of this was spent on housing. Teen mothers under nineteen years old

can use 1316 dollars in a month (Clark 17). According to the OB/GYN Team, only about fifty percent of girls who are pregnant graduate from high school. Less than two percent of teen mothers get a college degree by thirty. Teen mothers tend to live in poverty because of lack of education and opportunity to get a job. Moreover, not only mothers but also children are likely to be poor in the future. Their children may not have enough education, so they tend to get lower-paid jobs. Poverty circulates over generations. According to Maureen Jessop Orton, a research associate at University of Toronto, "it is important to note that the majority of adolescence in low-income families do not drop out of school at age sixteen or seventeen, nor have a pregnancy. However, their higher rates of school leaving and teen pregnancy are strong reasons for governments to reduce, not increase, the incidence of poverty" (Orton 128). According to Gemma Briggs, Marni Brownell, and Noralou Roos, "early child-bearing typically jeopardizes the trajectory to adulthood by either interrupting the mother's education, or by making it difficult for high school dropout to return to school, thereby limiting her income earning potential and necessitating welfare use or low-level employment" (68). There can be economic problems for teenage mothers and it continues to impact the next generation.

Teenage pregnancy has psychological impacts on mothers. As mentioned before, eighty percent of teen pregnancies are unplanned. Therefore, teenagers are often not prepared to be mothers. According to Theresa HM Kim, Jennifer A Connolly and

Hala Tamim, teen mothers have twice the risk of postpartum depression than mature mothers (BMC Pregnancy and childbirth, the effect of social support around pregnancy on postpartum depression among Canadian teen mothers and adult mothers in the maternity experiences survey 1). According to the Journal of Pediatrics published in 2012, girls aged fifteen to nineteen years old are twice as more likely to have postpartum depression compared with mothers over twenty-five years old. Moreover, social exclusion is another risk of teen pregnancy. According to The Guardian, "the [British] government has defined social exclusion as "what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown" (The Guardian 2002). Teenage mothers are more likely to have these situations. Teen pregnancy leads easily to these problems of social exclusion because teen mother's friends are mainly students. However, according to Ban Al-Sahab, Marina Heifetz, Hala Tamim, Yvonne Bohr, and Jennifer Connolly, "teen mothers are two and a half times more likely to attend parental classes than their older-aged counterparts" (232). This data is positive for them. Creating new relationships with other adolescent mothers can help young mothers avoid feeling excluded. Mental problems are more likely to happen to girls pregnant in their teen years because they have not prepared themselves to have children.

Children born from teen mothers tend to become adolescent mothers again. According to Revere Health, girls born to teen

mothers are twenty-two percent more likely to be pregnant while they are teenagers. According to Brenda Lohman, Tina Jordahl, Cathy Curtis, and Mike Ferlazz, "Nearly 1,000 low-income families in three major cities, one in four children between the ages of 11 and 16 reported having sex, with their first sexual intercourse experience occurring at the average age of 12.77" (Iowa State University of Science and Technology, 2009). Moreover, household income is connected with the rate of first sexual intercourse. According to Maticka-Tyndale, Barrett, and Mckay's survey in 1996, 27.4 percent of men who are in the bottom forty percent of lower income household had first intercourse experiences under age of fifteen. On the other hand, 7.1 percent of men who are in the top forty percent of higher income households had their first experiences of intercourse. 15.2 percent of women who are in the bottom forty percent of lower income household had their first sexual experience under fifteen years old. 10.7 percent of women who are in the top forty percent of higher income household income family had their first intercourse experiences. As previously stated, children raised in teen parent families tend to be poor. Teenage pregnancy begets teen mothers in the next generation.

There are several systems to support teen parents in Canada. This essay will introduce two examples. The first one is Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario, which is a project organized by the Ontario Ministry of Education. It helps teenage and single parent learners to finish high school. According to Abortion in Canada, the rate of teen

pregnancy in Ontario is one of the highest among Canadian provinces. Moreover, according to Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, more than forty percent of work applicants in Ontario have not graduated high school. A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario has designed programs for each student. For instance, it concerns their location, and learning needs. This organization has set six keys to success: motivation, good relationship between students and instructors, flexible and original curriculum, community partnerships, wrap-around supports, and peer relationships. This is one example of a learner, Sky, twenty-two years old. She is a single mother. She learned fashion and she had leadership skills. Then, she would like to be in fashion industry. Secondly, The Cridge Centre for the Family is a private organization to support young parents in Victoria, British Columbia. According to its website, this organization has The Cridge Young Parent Outreach Program, which is "to give young pregnant women and young moms and dads the help and support network they need to have healthy babies and to be effective, successful parents." According to the website of the organization, this is one of The Cridge Centre for the Family's results. Eileen was nineteen years old, and pregnant her second baby. Unfortunately, she had an abusive partner. Moreover, she did not get a high school diploma or any skills to get a job. She finished an employment program and she is taking a course to graduate high school. Nicole, a staff of The Cridge Centre for the Family, supported not only educational aspect but also helped them to stay with their partners



and children. The Ontario ministry of Education and The Criddle Centre for the Family are examples to support for teen mothers. It not only supports education but also supports young parents mentally, and these programs can help to reduce difficulties for teen pregnancy.

To avoid unplanned teen pregnancy, sex education is one of the most effective strategies. According to Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, PhD of University Windsor fifty percent of fifteen-year old boys and over thirty percent of fifteen-year old girls have experience of sexual intercourse (9). In 1996, Maticka-Tyndale's survey reported thirty-one percent of males aged fifteen to seventeen years and twenty-four percent of females aged fifteen to seventeen years have one partner of sexual intercourse (13). Moreover, thirty-eight of males aged eighteen and nineteen and twenty-four females aged eighteen and nineteen do so (13). Council of Ministers of Education, Canada reported in 2003, eight percent of girls in grade 11 and six percent of girls in grade 9 had been pregnant. According to Council of Ministers of Education, in 1989, 20.7 percent of girls who were in grade 11 and have experience of sexual intercourse said they "often" have sex. However, in 2002, 27.1 percent of girls in grade 11 said they often have sex. Other information from Council of Ministers of Education suggest that over one-third of students in grade 9 and over fifty percent of students in grade 11 said that they have experience of oral sex more than once. According to Rottermann, in 2009/2010, 25.7 percent of people who are fifteen to twenty-four years old had sexual intercourse before seventeen years old

said that they had first intercourse at age sixteen or seventeen. It is necessary to educate them to treasure their bodies.

Ontario's sex education is a current topic in Canada. Alex Mackey, a member of Sex Information and Education Council of Canada said Ontario's sex education renewed in 2015 is "will be the most up-to-date curriculum in the country" (CBC NEWS). A previous update was done in 1998. Previous curriculum was suppressive to student's interest and curious about sexual activity. For example, contents of masturbation and consent of sexual activity were not mentioned. Also, teachers did not use concrete names of genitalia. Ontario admitted same sex marriage in 2003. Introducing gender identity became a content that should be in one of curriculums of sex education. Meanwhile, Internet and social media have been widespread among children to catch sexual item in this period. Recently, one of serious issue is sexting among children. According to Merriam Webster, the definition of sexting is "the sending of sexually explicit messages or images by cell phone". CNN reported ten percent of tweens and teens experienced sexting in 2011. In the new curriculum started in 2015, students in Grade 5 learn that sexting is absolutely illegal. Also, sexual harassment on the Internet is mentioned clearly. In Ontario, children in grade 4 (9-10 years old) learn about puberty and personal hygiene cares. Children in grade 5 (10-11 years old) learn reproductive system and menstruation, sperm production. Sexually transmitted infections and contraception are in curriculum of Grade 7 (12-13 years old). Junior high school students start to learn concrete contents of intimacy. The Govern-

ment of Ontario's opinion is that "teaching about sexual health and development does not increase sexual behavior, and can actually prevent risky activity." (Ontario.ca) Decision-making is important for students. In Ontario's curriculum, students in grade 6 (11-12 years old) starts to learn decision-making in relationships. Students can be responsible in their relationships. Also, people tend to talk and study about teen girls. However, teen boys also have a responsible in sexual activity and pregnancy, Kaufman says. Boys do not get pregnant, but have a possibility to get sexually transmitted diseases. According to Miriam Kaufman, "Bringing up boys to believe that they are better than half the population inhibits their own development and stands in the way of equal and satisfying relationships with women" (31). Educating about sexual health effectively prevents children both girls and boys from engaging in dangerous sexual behavior. Educating both boys and girls can help prevent unwanted teenage pregnancy.

In conclusion, physical, economical, and mental problems are more likely to have negative impacts on adolescent mothers compared with adult mothers. Physical aspects, teen mothers more likely to be anemic and have a premature baby especially their first child. Because of lack of education and low skills of getting job, teen mothers tend to live in poverty. Teen mothers are more likely to happen on postpartum depression. In the post war, unmarried women and illegitimate babies are treated as a shame. This is judgement has lessened. In Canada, teenage pregnancy rates are declining. However, 27.9 per 1000 women have some

risks. Ontario and The Cridge Centre for the Family organize educational support for teen mothers. Sex education is a significant element to decrease children facing difficulties caused by pregnancy. Ontario's sex education is evaluated the most modern by Sex Information and Education Council of Canada. Interim curriculum was not to give teenagers stimulation about sexual things, however the new version is to make students grow responsibility and independence of their sexual behavior. "Adolescence is an important period for human to be mature physically and socially. Teen children should spend to be ready to become adult. It is hopeful that teen pregnancy rate decrease and more support is available to teen mothers and their babies who have some difficulties. (2874 words)

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