

SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PREGNANCY IN UNMARRIED TEEN-AGERS*

by

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Introduction

Since the introduction of M.T.P. Act in 1972, due to sexual freedom unmarried teenagers are coming in larger number for termination (Konar and Lahiri, 1974). The recent trend towards liberalisation of abortion offers an opportunity to these unmarried girls to avert the tragic sequelae attendant upon many of these pregnancies. No doubt many of such lives are being saved by institutional efficient abortion service instead of being lost in the hands of the quacks. But nobody can deny that this may encourage sexual promiscuity particularly in the permissive society.

A great deal of attention has been directed towards methodology for procuring abortion safely. But little attention has been directed towards the sociological problems involved in such pregnancies in unmarried teenagers. Still less emphasis has been given so far for prevention of such occurrences.

Material and Method

The present study consists of probing

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of some of the sociological problems involved in such unwanted pregnancies. A critical analysis has been made in 66 pregnancies in random unmarried teenagers attending the M.T.P. Clinic, Eden Hospital, Calcutta during the period 1976-77. The data were collected by questions being put to the girls to bring out following informations: age, family size, socio-economic status, educational standard, knowledge of sex and contraception, religion, residential status, occupation, relationship, approval of pregnancy and abortion and duration of pregnancy. Statistical analysis was done on all available data and efforts were made to find out correlation between different variants.

Analysis of Data

Table I shows the correlation between age of boys and girls involved.

TABLE I
Correlation Between Age of Boys and Girls

No. of boys and girls:	56 (whose ages are known)
Mean age of boys:	26.34
Standard deviation:	7.5552
Mean age of girls:	19.41
Standard deviation:	2.7372
Correlation coefficients:	0.4682

The above Table shows that the girls were definitely younger age group (real

teenagers), mean age being 19.41 in comparison to the boys whose mean age was 26.34 years—not worth calling them boys actually.

Out of 64 girls whose family size is known, the mean family size was 6.3438, maximum being 30 in 1 case.

The residential status of the study group was temporary in maximum number of cases both amongst boys and girls—28 and 39 respectively—the girls having preponderance on this aspect over the boys. Next to that was permanent residential status—23 in the boys and 26 in the girls.

that more boys were occupied (34) than the girls, (17), whereas the number of unoccupied persons were more amongst the girls (47) than the boys (22). It may be assumed from the above finding that the boys were comparatively in privileged position than the girls and the former took full advantage of that over the latter.

The maximum number of cases were Hindu (boys 56 and girls 63), whereas Muslims were only 2 (boys—2 and girls—2). In about 6 cases coital relationship was established between Hindu girls and Muslim boys ending in pregnancy.

TABLE II
Educational Status of the Boys and Girls

Girls/Boys	Illiterate	Literate	Primary	High School	College	University	Unknown	Total
Illiterate	14	—	—	4	—	—	3	21
Literate	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
Primary	—	—	2	5	—	—	4	11
High School	2	—	—	15	6	2	4	29
College	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	3
Total	16	—	2	25	6	3	14	66

TABLE III
Relationship Between Boys and Girls and Their Willingness

Willingness	Relation	No Relation	Friend	Distant Relation	Nearest Relation	Unknown	Others	Total
Willingly		12	30	5	3	1	—	51
Unwillingly		2	5	—	—	—	—	7
By force		1	2	—	—	4	—	7
Unknown		1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Total		16	37	5	3	5	—	66

From the above Table it was evident that the maximum number of pregnancies occurred in high school educated boys and girls (boys—25 and girls—29). In 3 cases both girls and boys had university education. Next to high school standard the maximum number of cases were illiterate (boys—16 and girls—21).

It is apparent from the present series

that in 51 out of 66 cases coital relationship was established willingly; only in 7 cases it was done unwillingly and in 7 cases by force. In 37 cases there was friendship between these young boys and girls, 5 had distant relationship and 3 were closely related (1 had to accept coital relationship with her father and in

2 cases with first cousin brothers).

It is evident from the present study that the vast majority of the girls (63 out of 66) did not approve this illegal pregnancy but most of them had no objection in accepting M.T.P. (50 out of 63 cases).

buted among 16 to 20 weeks (27 and 20 cases respectively). The reason for this late detection of pregnancy and seeking medical help at later date might be due to ignorance, shyness, deliberate concealment of facts and fear of punishment.

TABLE IV
Father's Occupation of Boys and Girls

Girls/Boys	Business	Farmer	Labourer	Other occupation	Unemployed	Unknown	Dead	Total
Business	2	1	—	1	—	5	3	12
Farmer	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	3
Labourer	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	4
Other Occupation	—	—	—	3	1	7	1	12
Unemployed	—	1	—	2	3	7	2	15
Unknown	1	—	1	—	—	3	—	5
Dead	1	1	—	1	1	9	2	15
Total	4	4	1	7	5	36	9	66

The above Table shows that the boys were in better position in comparison to the girls where father's occupations was concerned. In 15 cases girls' fathers were unemployed, whereas only in 5 cases boys' fathers were unemployed. Sometimes death of the girls' fathers gave opportunity to this unauthorised coital relationship—in 15 cases girls' fathers were dead—the corresponding figures for the boys being 9.

Discussion

The annual number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, in general, and adolescent out-of-wedlock pregnancies, in specific, has steadily risen, in recent years, the adolescent rise has proportionately been somewhat greater than the overall rise (Osofsky, 1970). The increase in sexual promiscuity must have some relation with liberalisation of abortion and easy

TABLE V
Period of Present Pregnancy and Condition of Health

Health/Period	8 weeks	12 weeks	16 weeks	20 weeks	Unknown	Total
Well	8	1	24	15	3	51
Average	1	1	2	5	1	10
Ill	—	—	—	—	1	1
Unknown	—	—	1	—	3	4
Total	9	2	27	20	8	66

It is apparent from the above Table that there was no pregnancy in the present series below 8 weeks of gestation. Maximum number of cases were distri-

availability of the abortion service since the introduction of M.T.P. Act. Previously most abortions in this group would have been illegal, and as a result, their

overall incidence could not be accurately estimated. But recently after utilisation of abortion service available under the M.T.P. Act the institutional, legalised and well-supervised abortion rates among the unmarried pregnant teenagers have obviously increased (Kinsey and Colde-rone, 1958).

The girls in the present study came from different needs. As a result, more attention was given to studying the girls and their families, in addition to study of the boys' surroundings. It was felt in the present communication that there should be more pragmatic and practical approach to the girls' need—physical, psychological and social.

Although teenagers pregnant out of wedlock came from all segments of society, collected data showed that more came from the lower socioeconomic group, low educational standard, poor residential status with very little knowledge of reproductive biology and contraceptive practice (Vincent, 1961).

The teen age girls who became pregnant in the present series were grossly uninformed about the human body and sexual relations. They knew little about signs of pregnancy and the need for medical advice. Most lived with their parents in joint family, who had difficulty in giving sex informations. The girls tried to conceal their pregnancies mostly to keep from confronting their parents. As a result most of the cases in the present study came for abortion service between 16 to 20 weeks (47 out of 66). Frustan-berg *et al* (1969) found that most of the teenagers did not have adequate knowl- edge or access to birth control informa- tion, and when made aware of this service they were interested and could make use of contraceptives. Throughout the his- tory of birth control movement, those

who need it the most are the least able to find such help. Thus, the poor, the very young and the unmarried teenagers continue to contribute disproportionately to the problems of unintended and un- welcome pregnancy. Very little has been written and done about the special prob- lems of fertility control for this large and important fraction of the population (Perkin, 1968).

Proper sex education imparted to those teenagers would be a real solution of such unwanted pregnancies and sex prob- lems. The woeful lack of knowledge concerning human sexual and reproduc- tive behaviour will continue to account for the largest number of tragedies ob- served among the unwed pregnant teen- agers. The recent furor over whether or not sex education is a suitable topic for the class room, how much of sex know- ledge to be imparted at what age and educational standard is but another indi- cation of the "narrow mindedness" of some adults. Such knowledge may be started to be imparted first by the parents by directing the initial educational pro- cess. Subsequent family planning educa- tion may be given by the obstetricians, paediatricians as well as general practi- tioners (Family Physician) as regards family awareness, reproductive aware- ness, and contraceptive awareness.

In spite of available established con- traceptive methods e.g. pills, intrauterine device and diaphragm, misguided and in- fective methods are so often practised by unmarried teenagers.

Conclusion

Coupled with enlightened sex education programmes, providing fertility regula- tion to adolescents in properly selected cases in a congenial atmosphere provides

an intelligent alternative to the denial and neglect that this group of patients has encountered so long.

Summary

1. The incidence of pregnancies in unmarried teenagers is definitely on the increase in these days of permissive society particularly so after the introduction of M.T.P. Act.

2. Sixty-six cases of pregnancy in unmarried teenagers have been critically analysed on various sociological aspects involving both the boys and girls affected, namely, age, family size, socioeconomic status, educational standard, knowledge of sex and contraception, occupation, relationship, approval of pregnancy and abortion and duration of pregnancy.

3. Apart from improvement of socioeconomic status, educational standard and correction of other sociological aspects; a plea has been made to impart proper sex education and provide fertility regulation methods to adolescents particularly belonging to the high risk group.

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