

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TEENAGE PREGNANCIES IN SRI LANKA: A STUDY OF THE COLOMBO MUNICIPAL COUNCIL**

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Abstract: The main objective of this study is to examine the factors associated with teenage pregnancies in the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) area of Sri Lanka. Overall, teenage pregnancy rates in Sri Lanka are declining; however, in the CMC area and a few other districts it remain high. Hence, a study was conducted using a sample of 150 teenage mothers from three antenatal clinics in the CMC. The Muslim concentration in the sample was emphasized with two key factors associated with teenage pregnancies including lower education level with insufficient knowledge of reproduction and mothers' unavailability. Moreover, lower socio-economic background, influential sources on sex, pre-marital/early sexual relationships, influence of negative social trends, and poor relationship with parents were also identified. Findings suggest a need for formal sexual education as a major part of secondary school curricula, and increasing the minimum legal marriage age for Muslims. Additionally, stronger relationships between parents and teen girls will help minimize the prevalence of teenage pregnancies.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy, Adolescent child bearing, Colombo Municipal Council (CMC)

Introduction

Teenage pregnancy has often been considered a social problem with serious implications for maternal and child health. In Sri Lanka, the Age Specific Fertility Rates for teenagers have been declining for several decades, from 35 per 1,000 in 1993 to 14 per 1,000 in 2000 (De Silva et al., 2003). About 7.7 per cent of total pregnancies belonged to teenage mothers by the year 2007. Showing a continuous downward trend, the percentage of teenage births was 6.7 in 2008 and 6.5 in 2009 and 2010 (FHB, 2010). Thus, existing data demonstrates a long-term downward trend of teenage birth rates in Sri Lanka.

Conversely, there are some disadvantaged areas and specific groups with high prevalence of teenage pregnancies in the country. For instance, teenage pregnancies remain prevalent in Northern and Eastern provinces, and it is not surprising. This may be due to the war and the low socio-economic status of the area. Aside from these provinces, there are some districts and areas such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Moneragala, Ratnapura, Matale and Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) which show higher levels of teenage pregnancies in 2010 (FHB, 2010). The CMC area continuously reports high (8.1%) teenage pregnancy rates until the year 2012, whilst

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** This paper is based on a part of my Master's thesis, "Determinants and Consequences of Teenage Pregnancy: A study of Colombo Municipal Council of Sri Lanka", Department of Demography, University of Colombo.

Acknowledgement: I gratefully acknowledge my supervisor Prof. Indralal De Silva, and all the lecturers of the Masters in Demography program. A special thanks goes to Prof. Satomi Kurosu and Associate Prof. Andrew MacNaughton for giving their extraordinary support.