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Exploring the Experiences and Perceptions of Expert Panels on The Rise of Out-Of-Wedlock Pregnancies among Adolescents and Youths in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to identify factors and effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth in Selangor, Malaysia. Using a qualitative case study, interviews, and document research, six informants were selected for expert panel perspectives. The findings highlight the environment, including individuals, families, the internet, and social media, as the most significant factor. These pregnancies bear significant long-term implications, causing social difficulties, governmental strains, and challenges for the child's future, spanning welfare, emotional stability, marriage, and their own offspring. Based on the findings, it is recommended to implement comprehensive sexual education in schools, emphasizing the potential long-term effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancies. By addressing the identified environmental factors and mitigating the potential effects, there is hope to reverse this trend and better support the individuals involved. However, it is clear that a multi-pronged approach involving educational institutions, parents, the online community, and governmental bodies will be necessary to achieve significant changes.

Keywords: Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancy, Youth, Malaysia, Expert Panel, Prevention

Out-Of-Wedlock Pregnancies: Malaysian Perspective

The prevalence of pregnancies among unmarried young women and teenagers represents a significant societal challenge that calls for intervention from diverse stakeholders. This pattern is not new, rather it has been a persistent issue, evolving into a societal malaise over time. Pregnancy outside of marriage denotes sexual activity without the sanction of lawful wedlock. If a woman is discovered to be pregnant without being legally married, it is a clear sign that she has breached religious norms. However, there are multiple factors, such as rape and incest, that can lead to pregnancies outside of marriage (Tohid, et al., 2016). Adibah and

Siti Zubaidah (2017) noted that pregnancies could be the result of rape, which necessitates substantial evidence to prove the assault.

In Islamic beliefs, pregnancy outside of wedlock is equated to adultery, a grave sin strictly forbidden. It's not only a serious transgression but can also serve as a gateway to more harmful behavior. All religions highlight the issue of pregnancies outside of marriage because premarital sexual activity can lead to a range of social problems, including child abandonment, unemployment, and others. In the context of Malaysian culture, the stigma associated with pregnancies outside of wedlock is seen as a source of family shame and dishonour. This perspective is corroborated by Butt and Munro (2007); Rahman (2009); Saim and Fatimah (2011); Whittaker (2010), who assert that pregnancies outside of marriage disrupt societal norms and bring disrepute to families and kin. Moreover, Ong and Green (2003) describe such pregnancies as repugnant and sinful. Parents who fail to manage their daughters are deemed careless and dysfunctional (Nik Yaacob, 2007). Society perceives this as a detrimental act impacting both the mother and her unborn child.

Generally, the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage can be attributed to a lack of understanding about premarital sex, which may stem from unrestricted socialization between young males and females. As Pakianathan (2016) points out, humans are susceptible to harmful influences, leading adolescents and young adults to engage in antisocial activities such as premarital sex. Turner and Helms (2003) suggest that adolescence typically spans from age 13 to 19. According to the World Health Organization - WHO (2007), adolescence occurs between the ages of 10 and 19, coinciding with the emergence of secondary sexual traits. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health categorizes teenagers as individuals aged 10 to 19, while youth refer to those between 15 and 30. These young people are our future leaders who require constant familial love (Ahmad & Dahlan, 2017). Therefore, during their journey of self-discovery, these individuals are susceptible to social problems like drug addiction, bullying, premarital sex, gangsterism, and other issues that could jeopardize their future (Ahmad & Dahlan, 2017; Tharshini & Ibrahim, 2018). Unfortunately, contemporary social problems have led many young people towards perilous paths.

According to statistics from the Malaysian Ministry of Health, there were 18,465 reported instances of pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers over a span of five years from 2014 to 2018. Specifically, in 2017, there were 3,694 cases, averaging about 300 cases monthly. The National Registration Department (JPN) disclosed that between 2013 and 2016, there were 159,725 registered births of children conceived out of wedlock. In 2013, there were 53,492 such births, and the following year saw the highest number at 54,614, 672 more than the prior year. Thus, the number of fatherless children registered has shown an upward trend. Regarding child abandonment, the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) statistics revealed an average of 10 reported cases monthly from 2018 to 2021. The total number of these cases in 2018 was 128, followed by 125 cases (2019), 104 cases (2020), and 86 cases in 2021. The PDRM asserts that these cases are often the result of pregnancies outside of marriage, where individuals engaged in premarital sex find themselves unprepared to care for a child (PDRM, 2021).

Hence, the surge in pregnancies outside of wedlock among teenagers and youth is a pressing issue in the nation. As per the Allan Guttmacher Institute (2008), teenage pregnancy is an

undesirable occurrence. It's imperative for all stakeholders to respond prudently to this issue, preventing its further spread in society and enhancing understanding through context. Therefore, the present study aims to comprehensively investigate the causes, impacts, and possible prevention strategies for the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and youth, leveraging the insights of an expert panel in Selangor, Malaysia.

Out-Of-Wedlock Pregnancies Issues

The challenge of pregnancies outside of marriage is a disturbing social issue in the contemporary world. Mariani and Hamidah (2008) agree that premarital sex has been starting at an earlier age and is on the rise. Bahori and Ismail (2018) argue that pregnancies outside of marriage are a breach of social norms as they often involve underage individuals engaging in sexual activity. Hence, the escalating rate of pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and young adults in Malaysia is a significant concern. The problem of these pregnancies in these demographic needs swift and effective action to prevent exacerbation. As per the World Health Organization's (WHO) records from 2005 to 2011, Malaysia was ranked fourth among 10 countries for teenage pregnancies between ages 15 and 19. The Department of Social Welfare's (JKM) data indicates that Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor, Johor, and Pahang have comparatively higher rates of pregnancies outside of marriage.

Considering the age group detailed in the Royal Malaysia Police's (PDRM) data, teenagers and young adults are most likely to abandon children resulting from premarital sex. Adolescents aged 10 to 19 typically lack maturity and rational thought. They often fail to grasp the potential consequences of engaging in premarital sex, unlike the more mature 18 to 30 age group. Abdul Ghani and Abd Aziz (2013) suggest that pregnant teenagers outside of wedlock are often unsure about their life trajectory and the future of their unborn child. Their unprepared mental condition, along with societal stigma, may lead to various mental health risks such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Hodgkinson et al., 2010). However, the issue of pregnancies outside of marriage is not confined to teenagers; this group also significantly contributes to child abandonment and abortion.

This research was conducted in Selangor to explore the views of an expert panel on the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and young adults. This is based on the Teenage Pregnancy Statistics of the State Health Department from 2012 to 2015, which listed Sarawak (5,246 cases), Johor (2,427 cases), and Selangor (1,603 cases) as the states with the highest number of pregnant teenagers aged 10 to 19. In 2016, the Malaysian Ministry of Health noted the top five states with the most teenage pregnancy cases: Sabah with 3,084 cases, followed by Sarawak (2,910), Selangor (1,461), Johor (1,319), and Pahang with 940 cases. This trend highlights the rising number of pregnancies in Selangor, the state with the highest rate in peninsular Malaysia, recording a high percentage of pregnancies outside of marriage. Moreover, previous research rarely incorporates the views of expert panels. Most past studies have primarily focused on teenage involvement in premarital sex, the factors and impacts of pregnancy, and shelters for pregnant teenagers. Hence, this study seeks to delve deeper into the viewpoints of the informants regarding the causes, impacts, and potential solutions to curb the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and young adults. The informants in this study comprise an expert panel well-versed in issues related to pregnancies outside of marriage. As such, this study intends to explore the factors and effects

of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth from the perspective of expert panels in Selangor, Malaysia.

Research Methodology

This study aims to explore the knowledge of factors, effects, and preventive measures for the increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth from the perspective of expert panels in Selangor, Malaysia. The researcher used a qualitative research approach to obtain relevant data and information. Qualitative research is a study of a situation and individuals to obtain detailed and in-depth information.

Informants

The study's informants comprise expert panels distinguished by their specific areas of expertise located in Selangor, Malaysia. These panels have been chosen based on their knowledge concerning the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and young adults in Selangor. Six informants involved in this study by using purposive sampling as the preferred method. Purposive sampling is a technique where the researcher uses their discretion to select members of the population for participation in the study.

Instrument

The interview questions are designed based on the study objectives. The interview questions consist of two main components:

Part 1 – Contains demographic information of the informants, such as age, level of education, state of origin, ethnicity, and religion.

Part 2 - Structuring the Interview Protocol.

Data Collection

In this study, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview technique for data collection, which incorporated elements from both structured and unstructured interviews. The structured interview was composed of a prearranged set of questions that were responded to by all informants in the same sequence during the interview. Moreover, in the unstructured interview, the researcher carried out a question-and-answer dialogue to delve deeper into the informants' thoughts or emotions using open-ended questions. Extra questions were posed during the interview to clarify and broaden the insights gained from the informants.

Results and Discussion

Factors contributing to the increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth from the perspective of expert panels

Environment

The conducted study revealed several factors contributing to the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and young adults, as viewed by expert panels. These factors were extensively explored across various platforms to pinpoint the root causes. Among these factors are elements of the environment, focusing on individual, familial, and media aspects. The environment plays a pivotal role in personal development, significantly influencing an individual's inherent characteristics. This is attributed to the environment's impact on how an individual matures, potentially leading to either positive or negative outcomes.

In the context of this study, the environmental influence was bifurcated, impacting both the personality and behaviour of individuals in either positive or negative ways, contingent on influencing factors like family, individual characteristics, and media. Furthermore, environmental impact comprised two components, physical and psychosocial. Thus, the environment emerged as a significant contributor to the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and youth. This study primarily focused on individuals, families, and media as contributing factors to this increasing trend among teenagers and young adults.

Individual

The study conducted unveiled multiple factors contributing to the escalation in pregnancies outside marriage among teenagers and young adults, as discerned from the viewpoint of expert panels. These factors have been thoroughly discussed across numerous channels to determine the authentic reasons. Among these factors, environmental aspects focusing on the individual, family, and media play a critical role. The environment significantly moulds an individual's inherent traits during their personal growth phase. This stems from the environment's role in shaping an individual's development, leading to either positive or negative outcomes.

In the context of this research, the environment's influence was seen as dual-faceted, affecting both an individual's personality and behavior in potentially positive or negative ways, subject to influences from the family, personal characteristics, and media. Additionally, the environmental influence encompassed two elements, namely physical and psychosocial. Consequently, the environment emerged as a key factor contributing to the surge in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth. This research primarily concentrated on the individual, family, and media as key contributing elements to this growing trend among teenagers and youth.

The role of individuals in developing their own personalities is a fundamental aspect of being human. The findings of the study revealed that individuals themselves significantly contribute to the rise in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth. It was discovered that those involved in pregnancies outside of marriage are often driven by feelings of love or infatuation, leading them to engage in premarital sex. From the interviews with informants, it was stated that shared feelings of affection among teenagers and young adults further propel them towards inappropriate behavior. As per Rafidah (2001), this desire among teenagers and young adults is a natural phenomenon, fuelled by their inherent desires and passions. Prior research has indicated that most instances of teenage pregnancy, particularly between the ages of 15 and 17, occur due to sexual relationships with friends or boyfriends (Abdullah et al., 2014).

"As for what I can share, if there are 100 cases, 95% of them involve mutual feelings of affection. So, it's the factor of love." (Puan Sakinah)

"So, when it comes to sex, it's an action. There are two factors that lead to an action. Why do we do it? The first is due to emotions. Emotions such as love, affection, pity, sympathy, or fear." (Encik Hanif)

According to a study conducted by the Bayt Al-Rahmah Shelter Home from 2018 to 2021, it was found that 72.1 percent of residents in the shelter were there due to mutual feelings of affection among individuals in romantic relationships. According to the informant, these young people are not aware of or lack clear information about reproductive sexual education. Many of them still believe that having sex for the first time will not result in pregnancy and that it is just a myth. According to a previous study by Rafidah (2001), these young people enjoy being in love to the point that it leads them to engage in sexual activity. As a result, they are not aware that they have a high potential for pregnancy even if it is their first time engaging in sex.

Family

From an anthropological perspective, a family is defined as a unit or group consisting of members who are related to each other by kinship. The family is the most important part of every child's life and serves as the first place for a person to start their life. Moreover, the family forms a close relationship between children and parents. However, if the family institution cannot function properly, it can affect the upbringing of children, especially teenagers and youth. According to Norhasmah et al (2015), the family is the cause of teenagers' involvement in sexual misconduct resulting in out-of-wedlock pregnancies. This can be seen through the study's findings from interviews conducted with informants regarding the family factors that contribute to the increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth.

"So, for me, I believe the strongest factor is the environment. In other words, in terms of family. I don't deny that divorces, parents fighting." (Tuan Syazmee)

"What I can say is that 70% of these trainees' families are still married. As far as I presented last year, 70% involved families who are still married. But we have to understand that even if they are married, there are still conflicts within the family. So, that's what contributes to the issue as well." (Puan Sakinah)

"Okay, based on my experience in counseling sessions with students, the biggest factor is mostly family breakdown. Firstly, the failure of household functions where parents are separated, and secondly, thin religious education." (Encik Ayob)

"When parents are busy working and have no time.. it's pitiful that they are lost." (Puan Sakinah)

"The first factor of the family situation is when the teenager is in a busy family environment. Maybe they go out early and come back late. Maybe some families are very busy working to meet daily needs. So, the children do not receive the proper monitoring and supervision. So, they let the children go on their own." (Ustazah Fathiyah)

"There are parents who are busy working. They leave their children with their grandmother. In the end, they fall into things like that." (Encik Ayub)

Based on the findings of this study, the failure of household functions starting from the parents has led to the collapse of values within the children who seek affection from them. Parents are the closest family members to their children to receive love, but the gap that occurs towards them makes children feel distant and unloved. The study shows that most teenagers and youth involved in premarital sex come from broken families such as fighting and divorce. According to Salina and Hidayah (2020), the majority of studies show that women who become pregnant out of wedlock are caused by ongoing conflicts between parents and children. This clearly shows that children are affected by the situation around them when they often see things that should not happen at their young age. Moreover, the busyness of parents also becomes the cause of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth when parents do not take care of their children.

Media

Media is a medium widely used in any communication channels. In this modern era, media is a reflection of our society and it depicts what and how society functions today. Print, electronic or web media are the only mediums that can help the public to always obtain information. Social media has become one of the most popular and accessed communication media today. Furthermore, social media has brought people from different geographical areas onto one platform where they can share feelings, ideas, emotions, information, and much more. Social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google, and many more have opened doors to sharing ideas, views, and thoughts on the same platform.

With the advancement of science and technology, the world has become closer to each other. The daily news and views found by social media users cover various topics. These topics or subjects are related to events around us. Therefore, social media acts as an umbrella that shapes various interesting features that make human life easier. However, the widespread use of media without monitoring by guardians, i.e., parents towards children can make unwanted things happen. A borderless world has caused teenagers and young people to access media like the internet easily without the need for permission from any party.

*“Secondly, it is the internet, the ease of the internet, which is good in Selangor.”
(Prof Khadijah)*

“The second thing, for me, what factor is this media? It's the internet that we talk about. Where we say that teenagers can access pornographic materials easily. So those videos, films without censorship are easily accessible to teenagers.” (Ustazah Fathiyah)

*“Moreover, the issue of high internet usage, pornography, and so on is on the rise.”
(Puan Sakinah)*

“Most of my sessions, when I interview them, porn is a common factor. It's a very common thing. In my session with clients, it's usually porn. Of course.” (Encik Ayub)

From the findings of the study, informants expressed their concerns about today's media which is threatening the thinking of young people such as teenagers and young people

towards excessive use. With the development of modern technology today, such as accessing information quickly, easily and limitlessly, it has made it easy for teenagers to get entertainment that is not suitable for them. This is because the easy access has led teenagers and young people to access things that are not appropriate, such as viewing pornographic videos and pictures, pornography, and others. Watching videos such as pornography in the form of movies or videos can affect the nature and behavior of teenagers and young people when they have the urge to watch and imitate what they see in the video. This is a worrying matter if it is not handled properly. The positive effects of technological development cannot be denied, but the misuse of the internet by accessing pornography, pornographic videos, and so on must be quickly tackled so that teenagers and young people do not get trapped into inappropriate things.

The Effects of the Increase in Out-of-Wedlock Pregnancies among Teenagers and Youth from the Perspective of Expert Panels

Long term

Through this study, the researcher found that the long-term effects of the increasing trend of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths today have significant impacts on the government, the children born out of wedlock, and other social issues. This is because every action taken by individuals has implications on society and the country as a whole. It is undeniable that out-of-wedlock pregnancies have had negative consequences on individuals, society, and the country if not addressed promptly.

Other Social Problems

Social is a process of interaction that occurs between an individual and other individual in the context of society or community. Social also encompasses actions related to understanding, continuity, interdependence, and cooperation among humans. As for social problems, it is defined as a combination of objective and subjective criteria that cuts across society among individuals and groups in society as well as across historical periods. By combining these objective and subjective elements, social problems are social conditions that are seen by some members of society as dangerous to society members and need to be corrected. From the findings, the social problem resulting from the increase in unwed pregnancies is the rampant sale of children on social media such as Facebook. This issue's increase is a concern if it is not comprehensively addressed and will result in the social institution within the community further collapsing. Informants stated that this is not a new issue, and it has been happening for a long time, but it was not revealed to the public. This syndicate becomes widespread when there are no actions taken against them, and they cleverly hide behind secret identities. Additionally, the sale of children occurs when the mother of the baby who wants to sell it cannot or does not want to care for the child and uses a middleman or agent to deal indirectly with the buyer.

"And we have handled a case where the rights of the children were given to children born out of wedlock. So I was also informed that Shahira is diligent, and there is a group that sells children born out of wedlock because my client took custody of the child for adoption. He took the child from a woman in Kelantan. She was still young, around 19 years old, if I'm not mistaken. The baby was born out of wedlock. Then, he managed the adoption process and everything was settled, but

the woman asked for payment from my client, she wanted RM 3000." (Tuan Syazmee)

"Okay, I see one, when unwed pregnancies are uncontrolled, especially I see it, is baby dumping. When they don't know what to do, they feel guilty, they feel sinful." (Encik Hanif)

In addition, another social problem found from this study is the problem of baby dumping, which has become a trend when the mother or father of the baby does not want to take care of the newborn. The cruelty committed by them has caused the innocent baby to become a victim. According to Badiah and Jamil (2006), unmarried mothers who give birth to illegitimate children often abandon their babies. In Malaysia, cases of unwed pregnancies are the main cause of baby dumping. This is supported by Mohamad (2006), who stated that 90% of cases of babies born out of wedlock are the main factor in baby dumping. In Malaysia, the average number of baby dumping cases is increasing, where records released by PDRM show that the highest number of baby dumping cases is 149 cases involving ages 18 to 25 years old, while 73 cases involve those aged 25 years old and above, and 40 cases are among those under 18 years old for the period 2018 to 2021 (PDRM, 2021).

Government

In examining the effects of the increasing trend of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, findings show that the government is one of the organizations affected by this issue. According to the informant, the long-term impact on the government is the high cost of caring for the newborn babies. If these out-of-wedlock births are not addressed, they will become a burden to the government to bear all the costs of the babies. This is because the government has many other issues to address besides this issue, such as economic problems and unemployment. The informant explains that every newborn baby in a country has implications for finance, society, and economy. The government needs to take responsibility and play a role in ensuring the well-being of these newborn babies. The welfare provided will require high costs, taking into account all aspects of their lives such as education and housing. Therefore, the role of the government in this issue is very important in ensuring the well-being of these children and protecting their future so that they do not become entangled in social issues that can affect them later on.

"So the impact, ummmm, aaa, the long-term effect is that the cost of caring for newborns will increase for the government. So, for those individuals who engage in sex, they don't know. They are still young, they don't realize that their actions will have implications for the community and for the government. Who will bear the cost of their education? Because every individual born in a country has financial, social, and economic implications." (Prof Khadijah)

Child that is born

In Islam, lineage (nasab) is a very important matter. This can be seen through the inclusion of "bin" (for males) or "binti" (for females) followed by the name of the father after the child's name, which is mandated in Islam. Therefore, under Malaysian law, children born out of wedlock will not have their father's name and instead will be given the name "Abdullah." The informant stated that this will certainly have a long-term effect on the children,

psychologically, as they will be questioned by their peers or those around them, and may even be ridiculed due to having a different father's name.

"Um, in terms of family lineage, I'm not sure, maybe the statistics were released in a certain year, that in Malaysia there are many cases of pregnancies out of wedlock. Okay, so in terms of marriage, lineage, and background, because their IC (identification card) does not have their father's name, it affects them. (Prof Khadijah)

"The second is the effect on the child. Children born out of wedlock...yes, from a humane perspective, they are not at fault. It is their parents' mistake. But we have to look at the long-term effects...but Islam does not degrade them, children born out of wedlock still have their rights, but in terms of lineage, they will be affected when they want to get married. So, their guardian cannot be their parents. They must use a judge as a guardian. For example, let's say the child gets married at the age of 20 or 21, so the impact will be 20 years later. If the parents feel ashamed and hide the issue, it will become a problem later. So, when they want to get married, the parents will start to worry. Why? If they become the guardian, the marriage will not be valid. This has a major impact on the child's psychology." (Mr. Ayub)

In addition, according to the informant, children will face difficulties when they want to get married later on because they will need the services of a judge as their guardian to solemnize their marriage. Some parents keep this a secret until their children are grown up. The situation becomes even more difficult when the children start to distance themselves and no longer trust their parents because they feel betrayed. Therefore, the child who will be born out of wedlock will certainly experience negative effects in the long run, in terms of lineage and psychology, as they are forced to accept a situation or circumstance that they did not choose.

Implications of out-of-wedlock pregnancies on teenagers and youths

Out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers in Malaysia have multifaceted implications, affecting the individuals involved, their families, and society at large. For the teenagers themselves, these pregnancies often result in significant educational, health, and economic consequences. Many teenagers may drop out of school due to the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy or the demands of childcare, limiting their future employment opportunities and income potential. Additionally, there are health risks for both the mother and child, as teenage mothers are more likely to experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

The families of these teenagers also face substantial impacts. They may experience social stigma and the financial strain of raising an additional child. This burden is particularly significant in low-income families, potentially trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Moreover, the responsibility of childcare often falls on the grandparents, which can put additional pressure on their resources and well-being.

Societal implications of teenage pregnancies out-of-wedlock are also extensive. These pregnancies contribute to social problems such as child abandonment, as indicated by the

Royal Malaysia Police's statistics on increasing rates of child abandonment in recent years. Furthermore, these pregnancies place an economic burden on the state, which has to allocate resources to health, welfare, and social services to support these young mothers and their children. The long-term societal costs can be substantial, as children born to teenage mothers often face educational disadvantages and are more likely to experience poverty in adulthood.

Conclusion, Limitations and Future Directions

In conclusion, the effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers in Malaysia are far-reaching, impacting individuals, families, and society at large. The educational, health, and economic consequences for the young parents, the social and financial strain on their families, and the societal issues of child abandonment and increased state expenditure on welfare services together create a complex and challenging situation. These cumulative effects highlight the need for robust, multifaceted interventions to support these young parents, their families, and children, while also working towards preventive measures to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancies outside marriage.

Despite the crucial insights gathered in this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research primarily focuses on the impacts and effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancies without fully delving into the underlying causes and contributory factors leading to this situation among teenagers in Malaysia. Understanding these root causes could significantly enhance the development of preventive measures and interventions. Second, the research largely relies on expert opinions and documented effects without directly incorporating the perspectives of the teenagers themselves, who are directly impacted by this issue. Their lived experiences and insights could offer invaluable information that could help refine strategies aimed at tackling this issue.

In terms of future direction, this study has highlighted the need for more comprehensive, multidimensional research into the causes and effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among Malaysian teenagers. Future research should consider incorporating more diverse perspectives, especially from the affected teenagers and their families, to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. Moreover, it may also be beneficial to include a comparative analysis with other societies facing similar challenges. Such comparisons could highlight unique socio-cultural aspects that may be influencing this trend and could offer insights into potential innovative solutions.

Furthermore, the conclusions drawn from this study underscore the need for robust and multifaceted interventions to address this issue. Therefore, it's important to further explore, design, and implement such interventions while simultaneously conducting evaluations to measure their effectiveness. This should be done in parallel with efforts aimed at reducing the stigma associated with out-of-wedlock pregnancies and creating a supportive environment for the affected individuals. A focus on preventative measures, including education on sexual and reproductive health, should also be part of this multi-pronged approach. This will require a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, social workers, and the broader community to bring about meaningful and sustainable change.

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