

Teenage Motherhood, a Worldwide Problem - The Strategy Needs to Change

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The challenge of landing on Mars has been achieved. The challenge to eliminating teenage pregnancy remains a distant goal. While the former needed 'intricate complex rocket science and expertise', the latter needs a much simpler 'apparatus': universal awareness, societal change in attitude, and sincere political commitment. While logistical and financial inputs to land on Mars were colossal, in comparison, those required for tackling teenage pregnancy would be vastly lower.

Somehow, we as a society seem to lack empathy towards the physical, mental and psychological trauma that a young girl suffers within and outside her family in most parts of the world, because of her teen pregnancy. Generally, it is not her fault. And often, it is her exploitation.

While adolescent pregnancy was widely prevalent historically, it is no longer acceptable in modern times. In 1457, Margaret Beaufort, gave birth to Henry VII of England when she was 13 years old. Her granddaughter Margaret Tudor gave birth to her first three children during her adolescent years, before she turned 19. Those were days when adolescent pregnancy may have been the norm in society, as were high level of maternal mortality.

In current times, an adolescent pregnancy is a function of multiple factors across family, cultural, political, and social media and entertainment dimensions. Multiple stakeholders in addition to the teenage mother have got to play their part - from parents and family to society and government to the health care system and workers.

Worldwide, the magnitude of adolescent pregnancy continues to be large. It is estimated that 15 to 19 year adolescents give birth to 11% of total births annually; Of the 16 million teenage pregnancies [1] approximately, 12 million occur every year in developing regions [2,3]. Pregnancy and its complications are the leading cause of death for 15 - 19 years old girls, globally [4-6].

Teenage pregnancy carries with it a high risk of adverse outcomes [7] high morbidity and mortality [8,9] as well as long term adverse health effects [10].

The 'trauma' is often a lifetime unforgettable event.

Teenage pregnancy in developed countries generally occurs outside marriage while in several developing countries it usually occurs within the marriage. In either case, one might argue that it is unfair to impregnate a teenager. Perhaps the first step is to drive a change in attitudes. If we can create universal moral awareness against teenage pregnancy, and reinforce the message across our families, schools, colleges, work place, movies, digital media, advertising etc. we might begin making faster progress towards tackling teenage pregnancies.

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