

# Rethinking Female Student Vulnerability in Teenage Pregnancy: A conceptual analysis

Bukola Olusola Elemide<sup>1</sup>, Ezekiel Olusegun Babatunde<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria,

dadabukielemeide@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

babatundeezekiel11@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Re-evaluating the vulnerability associated with teenage pregnancy is a critical issue that extends beyond superficial representations and fosters a more contemporary understanding of the experiences encountered by female teenagers. Many studies have examined teenage pregnancy and its impact on their education and lifestyle; however, the recent overestimation of female teen pregnancies is alarming, since it introduces more complications to their behaviour and health. This study examines the conceptual factors that enhance teenagers' susceptibility, leading to unwanted pregnancies and forced maturity. The paper espoused factors like uncensored social media exposure, inadequate awareness about health complications underlying such pregnancy, family structure and early sexuality, cultural and social expectations, and peer influence as they play critical roles in their vulnerability. Consequently, targeting social factors, such as communities, the healthcare sector, and supportive environments, were suggested because of their advantages in reducing teen pregnancy rates by fostering quality education and supporting healthy sexual behaviours.*

**Keywords—**vulnerability; female teenager; pregnancy; social media; sexual behaviour

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is frequently regarded as a problem that affects society, and female students are held to a disproportionately high level of culpability for this issue. [1] claim that teenage pregnancies predominantly pertain to pregnancies occurring in females aged 13 to 19. Conventional narratives portray them as helpless victims, rendered weak by their age, gender, and subordinate standing within patriarchal societies, while traditional narratives also portray them as being powerless. [2] defines teenage pregnancy as a condition where a schoolgirl falls pregnant, potentially devastating her ambitions and aspirations and irrevocably altering her life trajectory. She may be compelled to leave school due to the pressure she has encountered, particularly the stigma predominantly associated with early schooling.

Teenage pregnancy is one of the socio-economic challenges confronting this millennium because the teenagers of recent times are exposed to premarital sexual experiences such as kissing, giving and receiving gifts, which can serve as bait, exchanging love notes, showing affection, and romancing with one another from various avenues, especially social media, and paying less attention to the consequences of such sex lives or behaviours [3]. [4] assert that “pregnant teens in Africa endure a litany of ills that compromise not only their survival and development but that of their babies.” They are often stigmatised, rejected or subjected to violence by partners, parents and friends, while healthcare and education service providers shun them as an embodiment of sexual immorality or as a living contradiction of a child bearing a child.

Cultural practices, educational qualifications, and socioeconomic conditions are major determinants of teenage pregnancy. As societal norms evolve and access to education and healthcare varies, the vulnerability associated with teenage pregnancy continues to raise concerns. However, theories that are overly simplistic, linear, and deficit-orientated hinder the understanding of vulnerability. In many communities, traditional beliefs and limited access to resources have exacerbated the challenges faced by teenagers' vulnerability, leading to a cycle of disadvantage that can affect both mother and child as well as her academic pursuit.

According to [5], teenagers are classified as secondary school students with sexual characteristics that appear between the ages of 13 and 19 and are fully mature. Likewise, [6] described the period of exhibiting sexual characteristics between ages 10 and 19 years old, regarding it as an important and sensitive stage of life. This is also referred to as the second genital stage of human psychological development. Most of the time, female teenagers feel pressured to prioritise romantic relationships or to conform to unhealthy relationship dynamics due to fears of social ostracisation, which leads to early sexual activity, unhealthy dependence, or tolerance of disrespectful treatment in relationships. However, the consequences of sexual exposure, including the risks of dying from medical complications, post-neonatal morbidity and mortality, negative future productivity, social stigma, and forced marriage leading to domestic violence, are not yet a concern for these teens, who take precautions to avoid early sexual activities.

By rethinking the vulnerability of teenage pregnancy, it is vital to conduct a considerable conceptual analysis to move beyond superficial representations and obtain a more intricate knowledge of the experiences that pregnant female teens go

through in their lives and the underlying causes and develop more effective strategies to support them, while ultimately fostering a more informed and compassionate response to their needs and circumstances, especially in this era where social media influences the younger generation. [7] define vulnerability as a condition inherent to the human being, which is characterised as the state of being in danger or exposed to potential damage due to a fragility linked to individual existence. However, individuals who are vulnerable may possess or receive support to develop the necessary capacities to alter their circumstances.

While young people also encounter pressures related to sexuality, personal and group identity, value formulation, lifestyles, career plans, personal relationships, and new social roles, female teenagers often experience anxiety and depression linked to their perceived ability to meet societal standards. Recently, social media has exacerbated these conditions, as constant comparisons to peers can intensify feelings of inadequacy since vulnerabilities in female teens may arise from being raised in disadvantaged environments, such as substance-abusing families, abusive or violent settings, or families with mental illness, as well as from individual characteristics like an aggressive temperament. These circumstances jeopardise their health and existence, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and marginalisation. Although several studies have been conducted on teenage pregnancy and related topics in Nigeria, there are still limitations in discussing recent reviews that address the understanding and perception of pregnancy among teenage girls in a comprehensive manner.

## 2. Vulnerability and its impact on Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy remains a significant issue that poses essential social and health challenges for young females globally. In simple terms, vulnerability refers to the condition of being exposed to potential physical or emotional harm, and teenagers are vulnerable because their bodies, minds, and emotions are growing quickly while the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed yet. The development makes them more likely to feel strong emotions, give in to peer pressure, and engage in risky behaviours like using drugs or having unsafe sex, which raises the risk of mental health problems (like depression and anxiety), physical harm, and exploitation.

Vulnerability significantly influences the prevalence and outcomes of teenagers' pregnancy. It functions as a multifaceted condition arising from the interplay of social, economic, cultural, institutional, and individual factors that limit teens' ability to make informed and independent reproductive decisions. Despite the comprehensive study on teenage pregnancy and its impact on the female counterpart's education, [8] argue that the African continent still lacks a comprehensive report that identifies Africa-wide patterns and serves to provide comparative cross-country evidence. Usually, teens do not always act in their own best interests,

even as they define them. They overestimate their risks, even of surviving to adulthood, and sometimes they underestimate the risks of certain actions or behaviours while engaging in risky behaviour because they feel invulnerable.

It should be understandably addressed that teenagers' exposure to sexual activities is the reason why we have unexpected pregnancy, knowing that their reproductive anatomy is so fragile and prone to medical and mental implications; therefore, it reacts too quickly as a test ground at the peak of development. According to [9], teenage sexual activity in Nigeria is on the increase, and a major consequence of this increased sexual activity among teenagers is out-of-wedlock pregnancies that may result in abortion, childbirth or even death. [10] asserts that teenage pregnancy is caused by a variety of factors, and the most recent factor is the social media reality they escape into, learning uncensored trends from agencies that promote sexual activities. Teenage pregnancy negatively influences the future productive ability of a teen, resulting in lifelong poverty. Teenage girls suffer psychological challenges resulting from social stigma and encounter physical and domestic violence as they struggle to cope with the demands of pregnancy and motherhood. There is a high probability of these girls dropping out of school, with little chance of returning. These undesirable outcomes persist throughout the entire life of a teenage girl, with a sustained generational consequence.

[3] suggests that some social and psychological variables have been consistently prominent within the campaign exercises worldwide, yet the statistics of vulnerable female teens are still high, especially among secondary school students. Therefore, the current situation necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of the factors contributing to teenage pregnancy to enhance understanding of its root causes and to create effective interventions, noting that it promotes healthier outcomes for young adults and focusing on the stable development of infants that are already trapped in such a cycle. This will ultimately foster heightened awareness and empathetic responses from society regarding their circumstances and modern interpretations that have failed to be effectively encompassed. In the complexities of pregnant female students' experiences, especially the interconnected effects of gender norms, economic constraints, and institutional barriers, a conceptual change is essential to reconceptualise vulnerability as socially constructed and context-dependent; hence, promoting comprehensive research and the creation of holistic, empowerment-focused solutions.

Therefore, since extant studies have investigated teenage pregnancy from different approaches and disciplines, some notable researches, such as [1], [11] and [12] has associated teenage pregnancy with obstetrics and significant health issues as well as socioeconomic and psychosocial consequences for the baby, the teenage mother, and the society in general. These include, but are not limited to, low birth weight, preterm birth, high peri-neonatal and post-

neonatal morbidity and mortality, as well as poverty, delayed prenatal care, and unsafe abortion. One of the many reasons to rethink the vulnerability of female teens to pregnancy is its negative impact on their participation in motherhood, which can lead to poor economic outcomes, the raising of dysfunctional children who may become imbalanced adults, and increased risks to their mental health.

In this unique stage of their human development, awareness must constantly be raised to encourage them about the danger a teen pregnancy brings to their physical, cognitive, and psychological growth. One significant reason to reconsider the vulnerabilities surrounding teenage pregnancies is the detrimental impact on their involvement in motherhood. This situation can lead to poor economic outcomes, the raising of dysfunctional children, and heightened risks to their mental health. During this critical stage of development, it is essential to continuously promote awareness about the dangers that teen pregnancy poses. These dangers can adversely affect their physical, cognitive, and psychological growth.

[7] further asserted that the context of vulnerability is expressed through various factors, including territorial organisation, socioeconomic conditions, resource fragility, and public policy frameworks, all of which significantly affect adolescents' susceptibility to social and programmatic vulnerability. Addressing these factors requires a multifaceted approach that involves education, community support, and effective policy interventions. By fostering a supportive environment, we can empower young individuals to make informed choices and reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancies. The study emphasises the relationship between poverty, inadequate access to essential services, and health deficiencies resulting from socioeconomic factors. It emphasises that problems such as drug trafficking and familial alcoholism intensify vulnerabilities, resulting in outcomes such as early pregnancies and violence.

There is a demand for coordinated efforts among teenagers, families, and professionals to enhance social connections, coupled with advancements in health and education policies that cater to the distinct needs of teenagers and ensure they are prepared to use services that foster their development and reduce vulnerability. Such collaborative approaches can empower young people to make informed choices, ultimately breaking the cycle of disadvantage. By addressing these interconnected issues comprehensively, communities can create a more supportive environment that nurtures the potential of every adolescent. The impact of vulnerability on female teenagers can be profound, affecting their mental health and social development. Families and professionals must play a crucial role in enhancing social connections, which can help mitigate these vulnerabilities. Improvement in health and education policies specifically designed for the specific needs of teenagers is important. These policies should de-emphasise collaborative strategies that empower teenagers to make informed decisions, thereby disrupting the cycle of vulnerability. Communities can create a supportive

environment that helps every teen reach their greatest potential by completely addressing these interconnected issues. Consequently, this approach will make teenagers feel that their involvement is important.

### 3. Drivers of Female Student Vulnerability to Pregnancy

To understand the complex issues surrounding teenage pregnancy among females, it is essential to re-examine the factors that contribute to their vulnerability, such as early engagement in sexual activities and uncensored social media content exposure. Additionally, it is important to consider the impact that such pregnancies have on their educational progress and future opportunities. However, this article explores the following factors:

**Structural norms:** The impact of structural factors, particularly the lack of comprehensive sex education and limited access to reproductive health services, significantly emphasises the vulnerability of female teenagers. This vulnerability manifests in various ways, influencing both their health and emotional well-being. Without comprehensive sex education, many female teens face a steep learning curve regarding their bodies and sexual health. Many grow up in environments where discussions about these topics are stigmatised or absent altogether. As a result, they often enter puberty and become sexually active without the knowledge needed to navigate these crucial changes safely. The anxiety stemming from uncertainty about menstruation, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be quite intense, leading to stress and feelings of inadequacy. This lack of preparedness can also make them targets for misinformation, resulting in poor health outcomes. Psychologically, female teens are at a critical stage of identity formation.

The interplay of their evolving cognitive abilities and their experiences with sexual health can create a disconnect that leaves them feeling confused and overwhelmed. As they grapple with their emerging identities and the societal pressures surrounding sexuality, the absence of appropriate educational resources can hinder their capacity to make informed decisions. This can lead to risky behaviours, ultimately affecting their physical and emotional health. Moreover, when healthcare systems do not provide equitable access to reproductive health services, the situation becomes even more dire. Female teens may be deterred from seeking necessary medical care due to financial constraints, lack of transportation, or fear of judgement. This limited access can prevent them from receiving timely information and services related to contraception, STI testing, and other critical health needs. Ultimately, addressing these structural gaps is essential for reducing the vulnerability of female teens. By advocating for comprehensive sex education and improving access to reproductive health services, we can empower them with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions and foster a healthier approach to their sexual and reproductive health.

**Agency:** The impact of sexual enhancement products on teenagers is a complex issue that intertwines marketing, psychology, and social dynamics, making it essential for parents, educators, policymakers, health professionals, and researchers to understand. Agencies that promote these products often target younger demographics, which can significantly contribute to teenagers' vulnerability regarding their sexual experiences. The marketing strategies employed by these companies often include alluring advertisements that promise heightened sexual performance or desirability. Research indicates that teenagers are particularly susceptible to such messages, which can perpetuate unrealistic expectations and foster a culture of peer comparison [13]. Similarly, [14] found that exposure to sexualised media content can lead to an increase in sexual objectification among teenagers, adversely affecting their self-esteem and body image.

Moreover, the availability of sexual enhancers in stores and online platforms normalises the notion that sexual satisfaction is closely tied to product usage, which can lead to risky behaviours. According to a report by [15], early exposure to sexual enhancement products correlates with increased experimentation with sex among teenagers. Social media marketing agencies can inadvertently induce vulnerability in teenage pregnancies by promoting sexualised media content, which often leads to sexual objectification. This exposure adversely affects teens' self-esteem and body image, making them more susceptible to risky behaviours. Furthermore, the ready availability of sexual enhancers in both physical stores and online platforms normalises the idea that sexual satisfaction is dependent on product usage. Such messaging can encourage teenagers to experiment with their sexuality at an early age, increasing the likelihood of unintended pregnancies. Consequently, the influence of marketing strategies fosters a culture that undervalues sexual risks, thereby intensifying the problem of teenage pregnancies. Vulnerable teenagers, often lacking comprehensive sexual education, may misinterpret these products as quick fixes to enhance their sexual experiences, leading to health risks and potential psychological distress. This highlights the importance of educational initiatives aimed at providing accurate information and fostering informed decision-making among teenagers.

Additionally, the social media landscape has further amplified this issue. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok frequently feature influencers promoting sexual health products without adequate context regarding their risks or age-appropriateness. A study by [16] highlighted that teenagers often look up to these influencers for relationship advice, which can lead to misguided perceptions about healthy sexual experiences. Many teenagers also look up to these influencers as their role models without critically evaluating their influences before making decisions [17].

**Institutional/societal norms:** This plays a significant role in teen pregnancy vulnerability, as they shape the behaviours

and decisions of teenagers through societal standards, values, and expectations. These norms encompass beliefs surrounding sexuality, family structure, education, and economic stability. One critical factor is the provision of comprehensive sexual education, which is often lacking in communities that prioritise abstinence due to cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding sexual health discussions.

According to [18], effective sexual education programmes have been shown to reduce teenage pregnancy rates significantly by delivering essential information on sexual activities among teenagers. This highlights the importance of empowering young people through accurate and comprehensive sexual education, which can combat stigma and improve sexual health outcomes. Educators and policymakers must develop strategies that respect cultural traditions while promoting health and knowledge. This issue highlights the importance of providing accurate and comprehensive sexual education to empower young people and promote their well-being. By fostering a more informed approach, communities can combat stigma and improve sexual health outcomes. Recognising that cultural beliefs can hamper effective education, educators and policymakers must develop strategies that respect traditions while promoting health and knowledge.

**Cultural and Sociocultural Expectations:** Cultural and sociocultural expectations significantly shape institutional arrangements and individual behaviours. Culture encompasses the ideas, values, and beliefs that define a way of life and are passed down through generations. Individuals internalise these beliefs, which subsequently influence their attitudes and actions. Therefore, the cultural context predominantly influences institutional operations and interpersonal interactions of individuals[19].

For female teenagers, cultural expectations can greatly impact their identities, self-esteem, and decision-making. Many societies impose specific ideals regarding femininity, behaviour, and appearance, which can lead to body image concerns and feelings of inadequacy. The media often stresses physical beauty over intelligence, encouraging young girls to prioritise appearances for acceptance. Furthermore, the emphasis on cultural roles like submission and nurturing often impedes the development of assertiveness and self-advocacy. This vulnerability can increase susceptibility to peer pressure, bullying, or abusive relationships. Moreover, cultural beliefs may stigmatise conversations about sexual health, leading to silence on these important topics. This stigma prevents open communication, leaving teenagers uninformed and potentially pushing them towards risky behaviours without a full understanding of the consequences. Recognising these influences can foster understanding and motivate supportive conversations about sexual health, ultimately aiding in the development of resilience in young women during their formative years. Effective interventions may include encouraging open dialogues, promoting diverse



representations of femininity, and creating supportive environments to empower female teenagers to thrive.

**Isolation from contemporaries:** has a profound impact on female teenagers, particularly in cultural contexts that discourage open discussions about mental health or emotional struggles. As noted by [20], the silence surrounding these issues can contribute to a significant sense of alienation. This isolation can lead to a range of negative emotional states, including anxiety and depression, which are often exacerbated when young women feel they have no one to turn to. The cycle of negative feelings often associated with isolation can impede recovery, as highlighted by [21]. When teenagers do not have access to a supportive network, they may struggle to process their emotions and experiences, leaving them trapped in a cycle of loneliness and despair. The stigma associated with mental health issues can further prevent teenagers from seeking the help they desperately need [22].

Moreover, societal norms and misconceptions about mental health can intensify feelings of isolation. Many teenagers internalise messages that discourage them from showing vulnerability, leading to an increased fear of judgement and rejection, which also prevent these young individuals from seeking help. In addition to these societal influences, the digital age presents its set of challenges. While social media can be a tool for connectivity, it can also serve as a platform for comparison and inadequacy, where teenagers may feel even more isolated in their struggles [23].

This complexity suggests the value of fostering open dialogues about mental health in various cultural settings, as supportive conversations can be crucial in mitigating feelings of isolation and promoting emotional well-being. Ultimately, understanding these interconnected factors is vital in creating interventions that foster resilience and recovery among young women. Promoting inclusive environments where open discussions about mental health are encouraged can empower female teenagers to seek help and break the cycle of isolation [24]. By addressing the systemic issues surrounding mental health stigma and building supportive communities, we can enhance the emotional well-being of young women and pave the way for their recovery.

**Insufficient support from family and friends:** significantly influences teen pregnancy rates, with teenagers from single-parent households or experiencing economic hardships being particularly vulnerable. Teens from unsupportive or abusive backgrounds may seek validation in relationships, increasing their risk of early pregnancy. The lack of parental guidance and open communication worsens this vulnerability, making it harder for teenagers to access sexual health advice [25]. Vulnerable teens from unstable home environments frequently lack the essential support, guidance, and resources to prevent early pregnancies [26]. This situation points out the importance of comprehensive educational and community programmes that provide both information and emotional support. Promoting open dialogues about relationships and sexual health can empower teenagers to

make informed decisions, ultimately leading to a reduction in unintended pregnancies. Addressing these issues is essential for enhancing the sexual health and well-being of teenagers.

#### 4. Conclusion

The conceptual analysis of vulnerability in teenage pregnancy emphasises its multilayered nature in terms of public health and social importance for a new thought. Vulnerabilities show how marketing, social media, and teenage sexuality are interconnected to increase teenage pregnancy; hence, the mental health implications warrant further considerations. These issues require multifaceted solutions, including mental health and sexual education discourse with a significant reduction in stigma, and youth development improved by creating an environment of understanding and support. In today's complex world, parents, educators, and policymakers must work together to protect teenagers from early pregnancy, a challenge that requires in-depth knowledge beyond sociocultural perspectives and that acknowledges its complexity across disciplines and cultures. Therefore, rethinking vulnerability encourages researchers, healthcare providers, and policymakers to work together to improve results. This paper provided a complete framework for researchers and professionals to strengthen their theoretical foundations and for nursing educators and clinicians to gain practical tools for informed decision-making and effective service delivery. Its focus on the application equips healthcare professionals and policymakers to improve the health services and policies for female teenagers. Communities can also reduce teen pregnancy rates by providing education, healthcare, and supportive environments that encourage healthy sexual behaviours.

#### 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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