

UNDERSTANDING THE FEELINGS OF ADOLESCENT INVOLVED WITH ABORTION: A CASE STUDY IN JOHOR BHARU

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Abstract. Many adolescents get pregnant which eventually causes them to choose to have an abortion of the unborn baby. There will be times when they will be overwhelmed with feelings of sadness and guilt over what they have done. Not all teenagers who choose to have an abortion do so willingly yet they have no other choice when stuck in such a situation. The pressure around makes them decide out of their sanity to abort the baby. Non-probability sampling was used for the purpose of selecting samples for this study. The sampling used in this study was conducted using snowball sampling technique. Face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 respondents. Eight themes emerged from the research. Adolescents who had undergone abortion feel frustrated when their surroundings judge and discourage them. The feelings of adolescents who had undergo abortion show that involving in abortion is not easy. It demands a great deal of sacrifice and patients.

Keywords: *adolescents, abortion, feelings frustrated*

Introduction

Adolescence is a very special phase for an individual because they are no longer children yet they are not yet adults. Adolescents will go through physical, intellectual and social changes in their journey into adulthood. In their journey towards freedom, these groups tend to do something new by experimentation and testing their own weaknesses. They can be exposed to or commit risky acts such as smoking, drinking alcohol, drug addiction and free sex. Such acts can also leave them vulnerable to reproductive health problems.

World Health Organization (WHO) statistics have revealed that about 16 million adolescent girls give birth every year. Approximately 14 in every 1,000 underage Malaysian girls, or 18,000 overall, become pregnant each year. The Malaysia Welfare Department reported that approximately 111 unmarried young girls were pregnant and that the recorded rate was 6 births per 1000 women aged 15-19 years. As for Malaysia's civil law (Section 312, Penal code), abortion is permitted if the pregnancy poses a threat to the mother's life. As such, pregnant teenagers are not able to perform abortions legally.

The act of abortion is a medical method to remove or remove the contents that are still in the form of embryos from the mother's uterus. While every woman actually has the right to do so, they need to think for a moment because this method will have a significant impact on their physical and mental health in the future. Women who have had an abortion are also at higher risk of having an ectopic pregnancy in the future. In some cases, complications of abortion can also be fatal.

Studies show that many teenagers below 16 become pregnant as a result of premarital consensual sexual activity. The attachment theory which affirms that the bond between the child and the caregiver will determines their future relationship. Attachment is an emotional bond with another person. The earliest bonds formed by

children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life (Bernama, 2019).

The incidence of Caesarean section was higher in teenage mothers. This is because the pelvic bones do not reach their maximum size until the age of 18, hence the pelvis of the teenage mother may not have grown enough to allow vaginal delivery of a normal-size baby. The risk of postpartum depression was also higher among teenage mothers, noting that with poor support from the family, the depression could get worse (Said, 2019).

Adolescent pregnancy can also have negative social and economic effects on girls, their families and communities. Unmarried pregnant adolescents may face stigma or rejection by parents and peers as well as threats of violence. Girls who become pregnant before age 18 are also more likely to experience violence within a marriage or partnership (Plan International, 2021).

Pregnancy at a young age or before marriage will affect the mentality and emotions of adolescents in several ways. Adolescent pregnancy involves both the pregnant adolescent and her partner. Pregnant teens can experience mental health conditions such as: (1) Depression: Depression not only comes from pregnancy but also how the person reacts to the pregnancy; (2) Self-esteem issues: Due to the social stigma that befalls them, they feel insecure and useless as an individual; (3) Extreme anxiety: They do not want to talk to others or go out in public for fear of discrimination; and (4) Anger: Anger felt towards the man who caused them to become pregnant, the unborn baby, family members, friends and society for destroying his future. About 2 or 4 weeks after the abortion, the teen will suffer from several physical complications including: (1) bleeding from the vagina; (2) nausea and vomiting; (3) diarrhea; (4) Pain in the abdomen; and (5) fever. After having an abortion, most teens tend to feel negative and experience stress over the decisions that have been made. Among the negative emotions experienced are: (1) guilt; (2) shame; (3) regret; (4) anxiety disorder; (5) insomnia; (6) feeling angry; (7) eating disorders; (8) hate men; (9) loss of sexual desire; and (10) the desire to commit suicide.

Materials and Methods

The structure of this study is a phenomenological research using semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face to get feedback and information from respondents on the subject matter being studied. Qualitative phenomenological analysis explores concepts and provides additional insights into the subject matter studied that may not be possible through quantitative studies. Meanwhile, the use of semi-structured interviews is intended to facilitate the development of research and research of the group. As a result, during the interview, researcher was able to understand the feelings of adolescents involved with abortion. In this study, data are classified according to the theme based on the topics studied.

Research design

A qualitative research design was used in this research to understand the feeling of adolescents involved with abortion. This research is concerned with the in-depth examination of each of the participants' personal lived experience. It aims to understand how the participants eventually make sense of their experience in their personal and social world.

Participant

Purposive sampling method was used to gather 20 Malay Muslim adolescents between the ages 15 to 19 years old. The sampling used in this study was conducted using snowball sampling technique. This technique involved finding some of the key respondents who easily met the criteria set out to participate in the study and then asked the respondents to introduce researcher with other individuals who were potential respondents in the study. Pseudonyms are used to maintain participants' confidentiality.

Data collection

At the very outset of the research, permission, informed consent and assents were collected from the Social Welfare Department, General Hospital, parents, participants and relevant authorities. The data were collected using in-depth interviews conducted over two months. In-depth interviews use the semi-structured format consisting of a few key questions. Key questions are the ones used to elicit the most valuable information for the research (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Each interview session took approximately 2 hours. All respondents were expected to provide information, feedback and ideas to the questions asked. To facilitate the interview session and data collection, voice recorders were also used and transcribed verbatim. Most of the interview questions were open ended.

In addition, observations were conducted to get a better understanding of the studied phenomenon (Dixon, 2012). Participants' body language and nonverbal indications were observed and recorded. This is done to examine if their narrative descriptions are in congruence with their body language (Nor et al., 2019).

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are divided into three sections namely the demographics of the respondents, the dissertation information and the responses provided by the respondents based on the semi-structured interviews conducted on the respondents. These research findings were based on the feeling of adolescents involved in abortion. Eight themes emerged: (1) feeling guilty; (2) keep remembering the sin done; (3) mother's instincts; (4) health problem; (5) worried if having difficulty getting pregnant again; (6) worried if future husband get to know; (7) family acceptance; (8) society acceptance (*Table 1*). Each of the themes will be discussed separately as interpreted by direct quotations from the transcripts.

Table 1. *Thematic table.*

Issue	Respondents																			
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Feeling guilty	/	/	/	/		/		/	/			/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Keep remembering the sin done	/		/				/		/					/		/	/	/	/	/
Mother's instincts			/						/	/	/			/		/	/	/	/	/
Health problem				/							/	/			/	/	/	/	/	/
Worried if having difficulty getting pregnant again		/				/	/		/		/		/	/	/		/	/	/	/
Worried if future husband get to know	/			/					/	/	/		/	/	/					/
Family acceptance	/	/					/		/			/		/		/	/	/	/	/

Adolescents who had undergone abortion sometimes describe feeling ‘overwhelmed, guilty, confused, and angry or depressed’. Frustration is a common emotion. They may feel frustrated when their surroundings judge and discourage them.

Theme 1: Feeling guilty

Majority of the respondents were feeling guilty for what they have done. They felt a blend of emotions. They mentioned that the guilt feelings came from within their heart and it is natural to feel so for what they have done.

Theme 2: Keeping remembering the sin done

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country that allows the freedom of religion with Islam being predominantly professed. Under the Islamic teachings, abortion is not permitted as the unborn child has the right to live (Mohd and Alkali, 2015). There are rising number of adolescent pregnancies as a result of sex before marriage (Shagar, 2017). Some of the respondents have no other option but have to abort the baby. They said it is natural for them to keep remembering the sin they have done.

Theme 3: Mother’s instincts

It was found that some of the respondents experienced the mother’s instinct after they abort their baby. Sometimes they felt that the baby is actually a blessing rather than a curse. They said the motherly feelings came from within their heart and they missed their baby that they had aborted.

Theme 4: Health problem

Six of the respondents revealed that they faced health problem after they have undergo abortion. They felt back pain, muscle cramp and bleeding. One of the respondents said she faced infection of the uterus one week after she undergoes abortion. Another respondent said she faced uterine perforation after the abortion.

Theme 5: Worried if being difficulty getting pregnant again

Respondents said they are worried if the abortion they done now will have long term side effect such as weakening of the cervix which will make them difficult getting pregnant again later after they have been married.

Theme 6: Worried if future husband get to know

The respondents were skeptical of what the future holds. Being married someday and having their own family are sometimes on their mind but they are worried if their future husband will get to know about their past and abandon them.

Theme 7: Family acceptance

The pregnant adolescent came to realise that family support is lacking. Some of them disclosed that they felt very lonely and were unsure of what to feel because they were abandoned by their family. Their family members were ashamed by what had happened.

Theme 8: Society acceptance

Majority of the respondents said society nowadays is becoming more and more modern in terms of technology and everyday life. But in terms of thinking, there are still some of them who are trapped in ancient thought. They still see adolescent involved with abortion as a burden or a nuisance in society.

The objective of this study is to understand the feelings of adolescent involved with abortion. All of the respondents hope to be given a chance to be acceptable in the family and society, helping them to gain responsibility in order to make good life decisions. They also hope to have a positive and happy life. This research has implications to psychologists and the relevant bodies who can also gain insight on how to give help by understanding the feelings of these adolescents from their own perspectives.

Conclusion

In summary, adolescents who had undergo abortion show that involving in abortion is not easy. It demands a great deal of sacrifice and patients. For example, adolescents have to deal with inner guilt feelings, negative surroundings and a negative mind set. If they are not controllable, it can lead to depression. Adolescents involved with abortion also need the support and understanding of the surrounding community. It's not just stopping the word sarcasm, but hopefully the community can accept adolescents who had undergo abortion as well as other normal children. A caring and tolerant society should provide some relief to these adolescents. In addition, governments, private organizations and related bodies need to hold more awareness programs on abortion so that knowledge about abortions can be disseminated. The public needs to be exposed to the true information about abortion so that the false myths can be stopped. Exposure to real information can also reduce misunderstandings aimed at adolescents who had involved in abortion. Concerns from all sides can ease the burden and sadness that these adolescents face.

Providing awareness towards the society on accepting adolescents who had undergo abortion is very important in order to empower them with strenght and courage to live among the society in harmony.

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Conflict of interest

The author confirms that there are no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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