

Socio-cultural Predictors of Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa: Comparing the Rural and Urban Experience

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Abstract

South Africa remains a nation affected by teenage pregnancy with health, economic and social consequences. Consequently, pregnancy among adolescent girls remains high. This study aimed to investigate the residential-specific socio-cultural predictors of teenage pregnancy in South Africa.

The study used data from the 2016 Community Survey. Methods included univariate and bivariate analysis as well as logistic regression to establish the association between socio-cultural factors and teenage pregnancy while controlling for demographic and socio-economic variables, separately for rural and urban adolescent women.

Of the 336244 adolescent women constituting the sample, 4% reported being pregnant. Bivariate analysis revealed significant differences across all variable categories at $p < 0.05$. Furthermore, socio-cultural factors associated with teenage pregnancy were religion [no religious belief odds ratio (OR) = 1.27; p -value < 0.01], and ethnicity (English-speaking young women OR = 0.39; p -value < 0.01), age (OR = 1.59; p -value < 0.01). Control predictors were education attainment (Primary OR = 1.51 and Tertiary OR = 0.62; p -value < 0.05), marital status (Never married OR = 0.31; p -value < 0.01) and province of residence (Northern Cape OR = 1.51, Free State OR = 1.34, North West OR = 1.36; p -value < 0.01) in urban areas. In rural areas religion (no religious belief OR = 1.14; p -value < 0.001) was the only socio-cultural predictor of teen pregnancy, while age (OR = 1.61; p -value < 0.01), marital status (Cohabiting

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OR=1.22; p-value<0.05 and Never married OR= 0.55; p-value<0.01) and province of residence (Gauteng OR=0.58; p-value<0.10), were control variables that predicted teenage pregnancy.

This study shows that teenage pregnancy in South Africa was higher in rural areas at 4.57% while it occurred at 3.43% in urban areas (χ^2 p-value=0.000). Additionally, the influence of ethnicity and religion played a crucial role more so in urban areas than in rural areas. These results can be useful in designing programmes to prevent teenage pregnancy to specifically target groups at higher risk expediently. Therefore, there is need to promote residential-specific community-based awareness in order to prevent teenage pregnancy in urban and rural areas, if sexual and reproductive health among adolescent girls is to improve in South Africa.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy, Adolescents, culture, Socio-cultural factors, religion, ethnicity.