

## **Teenage Pregnancy and Poverty**

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Teenage pregnancy is one of the major causes of poverty among women in Ghana. Poverty has become a global crisis where many people are unable to afford basic human needs like food, shelter, healthcare, and education. There are numerous variations in the society that leads to the generational cycle of poverty in Ghana. However, the cause of poverty among most women in Ghana results from teenage pregnancy. Unplanned pregnancy among young girls consequently induces dropping out of school, stigmatization, and substandard quality of life for both mother and child.

In Ghana, unmarried girls are forced to abandon their education because of the stigma and ridicule that follows their pregnancy. Many schools or vocational institutes require pregnant girls to drop out of school; this requirement serves as a deterrent to students. These girls are coerced into isolation by the mockery of society. There is a large population of women who are poor in most third world countries like Ghana because they have very little to no formal education. While most of these women cannot afford to go to school, the few that can drop out due to pregnancy.

School dropouts who later get the opportunity to continue their education after childbirth eventually quit going to school because of the shame and stigma attached to a young unmarried girl with a child; families of such girls entice them into early marriages. Due to inadequate or the lack of fundamental education, most women are not able to pursue higher education. Without education, they cannot acquire necessary skills and qualifications to thrive in the competitive job markets for leadership positions in government, business or careers that could eventually cause their economic situation to experience upward social mobility. For example, a woman

who dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy now hawks on the streets with her five children. She is unable to get a decent job because of her low level of education, her economic situation does not improve, and she continues to live in poverty with her children. On the other hand, she could have gone back to school after childbirth to obtain a higher education or learn a vocation that could increase her chances of getting a decent job with a good salary to improve and sustain her quality of life. Either way, continuing with her education can cause an elevation in her social mobility and economic growth, instead of being stagnant in the cycle of poverty. Using a student's pregnancy as a deterrent to others may create an awareness of teenage pregnancy and enforce the consequences of being pregnant while in school. However, this action eventually contributes to the underlying causes of the prevalent poverty rates among women in Ghanaian society.

Ghanaian Girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy become vulnerable to early marriages or conceive more children. To restore their image and respect, families and some religious groups entice pregnant girls to marry the men who impregnated them. In some situations, girls who refuse such marriages are abandoned by their family. Those who agree to such marriages eventually run away from their spouse due to the domestic violence at home and the mistreatment by the spouse's family. Escaping from such abuse often renders these girls homeless, so they end up on the streets, become squatters or live in the slums. In a desperate attempt to survive extreme poverty, some women rely on other men for financial support. Most men who financially support these women tend to exploit them sexually. Poor women with very little to no education tend to have more children in Ghana because they are more vulnerable to men who exploit women for sex and housekeeping needs. These men often lure unsuspecting women with the promise of a better life;

instead, these women are only left with more children to care for. According to Thomas Malthus's "An Essay on the Principle of Population," assistance given to poor people by the government encourages them to have more children which cause human population and poverty to increase. Malthus states "Politicians argued that government aid allowed those who could not support children to have them anyway and increase the population, and therefore poverty, even further" (552). For people in third world countries like Ghana, this claim may not necessarily be true. Some developing countries like Ghana lack social welfare systems that support the old, needy, children, and disabled people in the country. In the United States, there are welfare systems that provide money, food, housing, medical, and social services to poor and low-income households. However, in Ghana, such welfare systems by the government do not exist. One must rely on family, friends, and religious organizations for support.

Pregnancy is a part of a woman and should not be used to hinder women from achieving their fullest potential and contributing to the social and economic growth of the country. Teenage mothers and women who dropped out of school because of pregnancy should be equipped with the appropriate resources and empowered with the necessary education to increase their chances at a better-quality life; this will curb the high rate of poverty among women in Ghana and other parts of the world. In Garrett Hardin's "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case against Helping the Poor," he suggests that developed and affluent countries should stop assisting underdeveloped ones because it only encourages them to reproduce and increase. Hardin states, "Food banks, international aid programs, and unrestricted immigration do not solve this problem, he insisted; they merely allow the number of people who suffer from it to increase" (583). In a country like Ghana, poverty results in a rapid increase in population,

despite the high infant mortality rate. A significant number of women with no formal education rely on the misconception that finding a good man will improve their quality of life; this false hope consequently leads these poor women into having more children.

Many people from developed countries believe that food is the solution to poverty in most third world countries, but that may not be necessarily true. There is an abundance of food in many third world countries like Ghana. Instead, the inadequate transportation system to transport these foods to be supplied to the rest of the country is what contributes to the shortage and inflated cost of food. Also, the lack of food preservation facilities in these countries leads to the scarcity of food because a huge amount of food harvested from small-scale farmers rots and go to waste. Some international aid programs provide immunizations to children in developing countries; however, that only helps a handful of children. Many others eventually perish, and the recurring cycle of poverty continues. Such aids do not target the cause of poverty; Garrett Hardin further argues “We must ask if such [programs would] do more good than harm, not momentarily but also in the long run” (587). Teenage pregnancy is a cause, and a consequence of poverty among women in most third world countries and yet is the most overlooked regarding aid and support. Curbing the high population rate in developing countries means women should be empowered and equipped with better options to attain a quality standard of living instead of depending on men for financial benefits. Necessary resources, education, and skills to improve their standard of living and quality of life should be made accessible to all. Also, for international aids to be effective and efficient in combating the global poverty crises, it must be tailored to meet the needs of the specific population it intends to support.

There are various measures worldwide used to prevent teenage pregnancy like sex education and abstinence. For abstinence and sex education to be effective in eradicating or curbing the rate of teenage pregnancy in many developing countries like Ghana, some misconceptions about teenagers who indulge in sexual activities must first be eradicated. Most people assume that all teenage pregnancies are a result of a romantic or sexual relationship. According to an article by Yurieff Kaya, “Students are told to abstain from sex until marriage and are not taught about different contraceptive methods” (Kaya). Not all teenage girls get pregnant out of courtship, most of them are victims because of their extreme financial situations. The high rates of teenage pregnancy in Ghana is a result of poverty and inadequate sex and birth control education. These girls fall victim to various schemes by perpetrators who pretend to offer them financial help. Teaching students’ abstinence is applaudable, but all women and girls should have access to comprehensive sex education to equip them with the knowledge and resources to prevent unplanned pregnancies. Comprehensive education on birth control measures should be accessible to all women because potential victims of teenage pregnancy may all not be in the classrooms to benefit from such knowledge; there are many who still roam the villages uneducated. According to an article by Amy Yee, “Nearly 120 million girls do not attend primary school, and 15 million girls under 18 marry each year, often under duress, ending their schooling and putting them at risk for domestic violence and health complications” (337). Marriage should not be the solution to pregnant teenagers; Instead, they should be provided with the necessary resources and encouragement to continue their education after childbirth. The society must be educated on the benefits of equally investing in educating both men and women because it takes both for a nation to prosper.

To eradicate poverty effectively and efficiently, there is a pressing need to invest in long term solutions that will break the cycle of poverty. Teenage pregnancy is both a cause and a consequence of poverty, so it is essential to educate and empower women and girls to end poverty among women in third world countries like Ghana.

### References

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