

Discovery of Knowledge and Perception among the Indigenous People Related to Teenage Pregnancy and Sexual Education

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ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji tentang pengetahuan dan persepsi pendidikan seksual dan kehamilan remaja di kalangan Orang Asli di Pekan, Malaysia. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani kadar kehamilan remaja yang tinggi, terutama di kalangan remaja yang belum berkahwin di negara ini. Melalui kaedah kualitatif, termasuk wawancara separa berstruktur dengan peserta Orang Asli, beberapa tema telah muncul. Tema-tema ini merangkumi sumber-sumber pendidikan seksual, seperti saluran formal dan tidak formal, pengalaman seksual pertama, kepercayaan seks selamat dan kepentingan pendidikan seksual untuk anak-anak. Kajian ini juga meneroka persepsi kehamilan remaja, mengenal pasti faktor-faktor seperti perkahwinan muda dan temu janji pranikah. Para peserta berkongsi tentang pandangan mereka mengenai keibuan pranikah di antara mereka yang berumur di bawah 20 tahun, serta penerimaan dan tindak balas ibu bapa dan tanggungjawab bapa bayi. Kajian ini menunjukkan komplikasi kehamilan remaja untuk bayi dan ibu. Hasil kajian menunjukkan kurangnya pengetahuan pendidikan seksual di kalangan peserta Orang Asli yang disebabkan oleh akses terhad kepada kemudahan seperti telefon bimbit dan interaksi terhad dengan orang luar. Kajian ini mengesyorkan penyelidikan lebih lanjut, penyebaran kesedaran dan pengetahuan mengenai pendidikan seksual, terutama melalui kempen dan usaha jangkauan kepada masyarakat Orang Asli, sambil menekankan keperluan untuk mengkaji semula keberkesanan inisiatif ini.

Kata kunci: Kehamilan remaja; Orang Asli; pendidikan seksual

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the knowledge and perceptions of sexual education and teenage pregnancy among Indigenous people in Pekan, Malaysia. The research aimed to address the high rates of teenage pregnancy, particularly among unmarried teenagers, in the country. Through qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with Indigenous participants, several themes emerged. These themes included the sources of sexual education, such as formal and informal channels, first sexual experiences, safe-sex beliefs, and the importance of sexual education for children. The study also explored perceptions of teenage pregnancy, identifying factors like young marriage and premarital dating. Participants shared their views on premarital motherhood among those under 20 years old, as well as the acceptance and responses of parents and the responsibility of the baby's father. The study highlighted the complications of teenage pregnancy for both the baby and mother. The findings revealed a lack of sexual education knowledge among Indigenous participants, attributed to limited access to facilities like mobile phones and limited interaction with outsiders. The study recommends further research and the dissemination of awareness and knowledge about sexual education, particularly through campaigns and outreach efforts to Indigenous communities, while also emphasise the need to review the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Keywords: Indigenous people; sexual education; teenage pregnancy

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy or adolescent pregnancy is defined as the occurrence of pregnancy among girls aged below 19 years old. Recently, the number of teenage pregnancies has increased in worldwide. Globally, the rate of teenage pregnancy recorded in 2018 showed that Sub-Saharan Africa had the highest rate of teenage pregnancy as they were encouraging young marriage and followed by second-highest rate of pregnancy was Latin America and the Caribbean. Meanwhile, Malaysia marked more than 18,000 cases of teenage pregnancy and 22% of them were unmarried in 2018. The marriage

at young age is one of the factors that contributes to teenage pregnancy. However, there is the law of restrictions on teen marriage conducted in Malaysia, which is the teenager who below 18 years must have parental consent while for Muslim girls below 16 years can get married with the permission of Sharia authorities. Besides, the average age of Indigenous mother was 2.9 years younger than non-Indigenous mothers and they had more teenage pregnancies. This was due to the culture and environment that they were living.

Teenage mother would experience several impacts during pregnancy and delivery which can affect both mother

and the baby as well. There are a few implications of teenage pregnancy such as premature rupture of membranes, cephalopelvic disproportion and low weight birth (Madjid et al. 2014). The premature birth can affect the baby's condition as it can develop other diseases such as heart disease. The body of teenage mother is not ready and not suitable yet to get pregnant. Besides, Indigenous babies were born with the average of 1.6 weeks earlier than non-Indigenous babies and more likely to be born premature which is three times compared to non-Indigenous (Ford et al. 2018).

There are direct and indirect contributing factors that can cause teenage pregnancy. The indirect factors are poor religiosity and domestic violence while curiosity about sex, perceived sex as stress reliever and peer pressure are the direct factors leading to teenage pregnancy (Nik Farid et al. 2015). These contributing factors will lead to sexual activity and with low knowledge of contraception will lead to unwanted pregnancy among the teenagers. In order to prevent the pregnancy among the teenagers, sexual education is needed to create awareness and provide appropriate sexual education among them. Sexual education is learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspect of sexuality. The sexual education includes responsibilities, human sexual anatomy, sexual activity, reproductive health, safe sex, birth control and sexual abstinence. The sexual education can be received either formally or informally. Formal means it is taught in

schools and other organisations while informal means the information is from parents, relatives and friends.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This was a qualitative research study which the participants were interviewed. This study conducted to discover the knowledge and the perception about teenage pregnancy and sexual education among the Indigenous people.

Instrument Development

A semi-structured interview guide was prepared and used for interviews. The interview was conducted through a phone call and conducted in Bahasa Melayu. The questions related to sexual activity, teenage pregnancy and knowledge and perception about sexual education were asked to the participants within 45 minutes of each interview session.

Study Setting

The study conducted among the Indigenous people in Pekan, Pahang which located on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

Participants and Inclusion Criteria

The participants who participated in this study were six Indigenous women and able to understand and can communicate in Bahasa Melayu and willing to participate in this study.

Sampling, Data Collection and Processing

The method used in this study was purposive sampling. It is also known as judgmental and selective method as the researcher able to obtain representative samples through the inclusion of groups. The sampling was done until the saturation of data. Data saturation is a research process when there is no new information gained from next participant. The data will be redundant from few participants and it is the sign of saturated data. Data collection method that used in this study was by phone call interview due to pandemic situation. Individual interviews were conducted using semi-structured format which also called focused interview. Open-ended nature of questions was asked to draw the participants' interest and knowledge on sexual related issues. The researcher explained briefly about the questions in order to ensure the participants understand the question and able to answer it. The interview was audio taped to maintain accurate accounts of information given. Early of the interview, the researcher asked simple and easy questions and followed by more sensitive topics.

RESULTS

The participants of the study were Indigenous people who live in Pekan, Pahang. Six Indigenous women were selected who fulfilled the inclusion criteria took part in this study. The demographic profiles of the participants were detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants

Participants	Age	Gender
1	22	Female
2	27	Female
3	32	Female
4	30	Female
5	32	Female
6	24	Female

The transcribed interview was analysed and few themes were developed.

Theme 1: The Knowledge about Sexual Education

There were several subthemes with the categories identified based on the interview done which were source of sexual education, sexual activity, safe-sex belief and importance of sexual education.

Source of Sexual Education

The participants mentioned a few sources of knowledge about sexual education throughout the interview.

"I learnt about reproductive in science at school.... In Tasawuf Islam or Pendidikan Islam also teach about the process" (Participant 2)

"I know condom...read in magazine...explain about condom and contraceptive pills..." (Participant 2)

"I know about sexuality from my friends" (Participant 3)

Sexual Activity

The participants expressed the

experience of first sexual activity after married.

"I don't know how sexual intercourse is done during my first night" (Participant 1)

"I don't know what to do during intercourse but I just follow my husband" (Participant 2)

Safe-sex Belief

In order to explain the safe-sex belief, the participants were describing about safe-sex practices based on their knowledge as quoted below:

"I know condom.... people said it is for contraception" (Participant 1)

"I know what is condom but do not how to use...heard that it is for not to get pregnant" (Participant 4)

There were a few participants mentioned about not allow the husbands sleeping with other women as below:

"My husband cannot sleep with other girl" (Participant 4)

"If me, I will not allow my husband to sleep with other girl... but if he does secretly, then I do not know" (Participant 2)

Importance of Sexual Education

Some of the participants verbalised that the sexual education was important but not all of them agreed to tell and shared about it to their children. They quoted:

"I think important for my child to know...I need to tell my daughter to teach her before get married" (Participant 2)

"She cannot pregnant before has a husband...don't burden the parent... the baby could be given to other people..." (Participant 2)

"Important but I don't know how to tell my children" (Participant 3)

"I don't know if it is important...I do not want to tell my children about this" (Participant 1)

"Important but let my child to know by her about sexual intercourse" (Participant 6)

Theme 2: The Perception of Teenage Pregnancy

There were several subthemes with the categories identified based on the interview done which were contributing factors of teenage pregnancy, premarital mother, acceptance and response of premarital teenage pregnancy and complication of teenage pregnancy.

Contributing Factors to Teenage Pregnancy

The participants answered the questions based on the self-experience and based on their surrounding regarding the contributing factors that lead to teenage pregnancy including young marriage as quoted below:

"I get married when I was 18" (Participant 2)

"I'm married when I was 19 years old" (Participant 4)

"We, the Indigenous people sometimes will get married during under-age" (Participant 2)

On the other hand, dating before

marriage also counted as contributing factors to teenage pregnancy as quoted below:

"I have a boyfriend before get married" (Participant 1)

"We are dating for one to two months before get married" (Participant 2)

"We hold hands and can touch each other before get married" (Participant 3)

"Follow their friends...we are human who have lust" (Participant 1)

Premarital Mother

The participants revealed that there were few cases of premarital mother in their village such as:

"She pregnant before married" (Participant 1)

"Pregnant before married...age before 20. The youngest is 14 years old" (Participant 2)

"...usually, they are in teen age when get pregnant" (Participant 5)

Acceptance and Response of Premarital Teenage Pregnancy

Many participants expressed the opinions, acceptance and response toward unwed pregnancy when they been asked if one of their family members involved in this situation. The answers as quoted below:

"If it happens, of course I will get upset because it is an indignity thing...gets pregnant before married" (Participant 4)

"I will ask who the father of the baby is" (Participant 1)

"Some of the fathers will be responsible but some of them not"

(Participant 4)

"It is wrong if she pregnant without a husband yet" (Participant 6)

The participants mentioned that the baby of unwed mother would be taken care and no abortion done, as quoted:

"...the baby is not thrown away" (Participant 3)

"Most of Indigenous people never planned to abort the child" (Participant 4)

"Even though she is pregnant without the father of the baby, she did not abort it" (Participant 2)

Complication of Teenage Pregnancy

Few participants stated that there was no difference between adult pregnancy and teenage pregnancy, such as:

"Same with adult mother, everything is good and normal" (Participant 6)

However, other participants did mention about the complications on the baby among teenage pregnancy, as quoted:

"Most of them are delivered before the due" (Participant 3)

"Most of them born before nine-month-old...some of the babies are not healthy..." (Participant 2)

DISCUSSION

Sexual education is learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspect of sexuality. The source of sexual education can be classified into two which are formal learning and informal learning. Formal education of sexual education is the teaching about the reproductive

system and the process of pregnancy takes place in school. However, people who attend the schooling only able to gain the formal sexual education. The policy regarding educational policy and opportunity for the Indigenous in Malaysia stated that Ministry of Education highly dedicated in providing to all and aiming that the Indigenous will get an equal opportunity in education same as other children (Kamaruddin et al. 2008). Our finding is similar to the study done in Canada among the teenagers who the Muslim teenagers mentioned that they received sexual education from their friends (Zain Al-Dien 2010). One of the participants did mention that she gets to know about condom as one of the protection during sexual activity to prevent pregnancy from the magazines which classified as informal sexual education. She also mentioned that the information regarding contraceptive pills also stated in the magazines as well.

Most of the participants mentioned that the first experience of sexual intercourse was at the first night after marriage but some of the participants mentioned that they did know about sexual activity done after marriage but not in detailed such as how it was started and during the intercourse. One of the reasons is due to less usage of hand phone in their community and they are not exposed to social media and websites. Besides, the cognitive level among the Indigenous is quite poor compared to non-Indigenous people as they are living in poverty, low education level of parents and micronutrients deficiency which led to

delayed in mental process (Murtaza et al. 2019).

Safe-sex belief is one of the components in sexual education which is to prevent the unwanted pregnancy. Based on the interview done, there are several participants mentioned that they have heard about condom. However, many of them did not know the function, how to use and most of them never see the condom in reality. Other than that, the usage of oral contraceptive pills is also one of the ways to prevent pregnancy and it is widely used among the Indigenous married mother. The usage of condom as contraception and for safe sexual intercourse can be introduced among them by distributing free condom and providing some information about it. A study conducted to know the level of knowledge regarding condom utilisation and perception on condom distribution among adolescents and the parents, showed that adolescents were more knowledgeable than parents regarding the condom usage and minimisation of chances of pregnancies as they are exposed to sexual curriculum during their studies (Mudonhi et al. 2019). Besides, the participants mentioned that their husbands are not allowed to sleep with other woman after marriage which indirectly can be included as safe-sex belief which is not practicing multiple sex partners. Having the knowledge regarding sexual education will ensure the people to get protected from having sexual intercourse with different partners and it also can minimise the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

Sexual education is important as it is to prevent the children involving in premarital sexual activity that can lead to unwanted pregnancy. One of the participants mentioned that she needed to tell and expose her female children about sexual education as preparation for marriage. On the other hand, other participant desired to share about it but had no idea how to explain to the children. Besides, encouraging the child for schooling is one of the ways to gain the knowledge in school as sexual education is included in the curriculum.

Based on the findings, two out of six participants married when they were 18 and 19 years old respectively and expected to have the child after the marriage on the same year. Young marriage is one of the contributing factors of teenage pregnancy and it is due to dropout from school and dating before marriage. Based on the record from Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli (JAKOA), the number of dropout cases among the Indigenous teenagers in secondary school was triple compared to actual enrolment in primary school from 2005 to 2010 (Abdullah et al. 2013). This problem indicates that high number of no continuation of Indigenous in schooling and may lead to young marriage.

Based on the findings of interview, the teenage pregnancy cases in their village involved the premarital mother and among the teenagers. The youngest age mentioned by the participant was 14 years old who falling pregnant before married. The out of wedlock pregnancy happened due to lack of knowledge regarding sexual education

which is about the contraception and the curious feeling among the teenagers. Most of the teenagers have a curiosity about sexuality which may lead them to involve in sexual activity and resulted in premarital pregnancy. Premarital teenage pregnancy is an unacceptable case in the most population in Malaysia including the Indigenous people. Commonly, the responses of the parents of unmarried pregnant teenager will get upset and disappointed because the daughter was pregnant outside the marriage. They will ask about the father of the baby and wanted him to be responsible and marry her. Even though it is an unacceptable matter, the participants stated that even though the young mother taking care of the baby alone, she will not abort it and no cases of baby dumping in their village.

The complications of teenage pregnancy happened on the baby more than to the teenage mother. The common complication on the baby is born prematurely which is during seven months of gestational age. Meanwhile, the complication on teenage mother is quite rare and most of them can deliver the baby normally like the adult mother. Generally, teenage pregnancy can increase risk of complication such as anaemia, lack of knowledge which can lead to other problems and affecting the baby such as incomplete baby growth (Mudonhi et al. 2019). In order to counter this problem, the teenage mother must be encouraged to go for antenatal check-up which will help in monitoring the pregnancy, to detect any abnormality on the foetus and provide with

education regarding maternity which can minimise the possibility of having any complications.

The researcher unable to spend a longer time to build rapport with the participants due the pandemic and making the interview quite awkward when the researcher needs to ask some questions regarding sensitive issue such as sexuality. Secondly, the Indigenous that live in their own society and do not mingle around with the outsider making limitation in collecting data which most of them have the same beliefs and the way in answering the questions. Consequently, the researcher unable to get further explanation on each of question asked.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the Indigenous people need more sexual education and the perception toward teenage pregnancy is similar to other people which are unacceptable matter. The level of knowledge about sexual education among the Indigenous is poor due to lack of facility such as hand phone with low internet coverage, living far away from other people and has limited sources of getting the education related sexuality. Nevertheless, most of them expressed that sexual education is an important matter in raising the children and preventing from unplanned and premarital pregnancy. Besides, the Indigenous have the same perception toward teenage pregnancy especially for unmarried mother which is similar to other people which consider

teenage pregnancy is an unacceptable problem in the society.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest to declare with regard to this work.

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ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Kulliyah of Nursing Postgraduate and Research Committee (KNPGRC) and IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC) at the International Islamic University Malaysia approved the study. Written consent was obtained from the participants and the data were confidential and they have right to withdraw from the study.

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