

The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India

Lintu Joseph^{1*}, Lucila O Bance²

ABSTRACT

Motherhood is claimed as a desirable role that all women want and are willing to sacrifice for it. However, the value and dignity of motherhood depend on specific ethical and social norms and structures, like marriage and, thereby, maternity. Indian society places a high value on fertility and motherhood in marriage, but it entirely rejects and stigmatizes the unmarried woman and child born out of wedlock, forcing the mother to give her child for adoption. This study examined the prevalence of depression in unwed mothers, staying in shelter homes in Kerala, India. The Beck Depression Inventory was administered. The results showed that a moderate level of depression is high (58%).

Keywords: *Depression, unwed mothers, Shelter homes and BDI*

Several studies on unwed mothers in India have identified the family rejections, social discrimination, and economic instability that have direct effects on their psychosocial lives leading to stress, depression and anxiety, and other mental disorders, (Behera and Behera, 2018; George, 2012; Jose et al., 2011; P. Sharma and Khan, 2020); as a result, their life was made so miserable that many were forced to commit suicide (Jose et al., 2011). Both earlier and current studies have shown clearly that mental health problem among unwed mothers is more prevalent than others (Cairney et al., 1999; Davies et al., 1997; Gudina, 2020). Stressful life events that are often faced by unwed mothers, such as unemployment, housing issues, inadequate income, social stigma, and relationship dysfunction, may lead to the comparatively greater prevalence of mental health problems in this group (Jana et al., 2016; Jo et al., 2018). Similarly, the study further explores the perceptions of discrimination of unwed mothers in different life areas, such as family, job, children's educational institutions faced in giving birth, and raising children. This can cause mental issues (Kim and Gerber, 2012).

Indian studies have shown that 60% of unwed mothers were suffering from psychological distress (Powathil and Parthasarathy, 2017); many have low self-concept (P. Sharma and Khan, 2020), depression, and anxiety (Gwon et al., 2019). In unwed mothers, significant depressive symptoms (12.5%), dysthymia (6.3%), and bipolar psychiatric disorder (12.5%)

¹Department of Clinical psychology Graduate School University of Santa Thomas Manila Phillipines

²Department of Clinical psychology Graduate School University of Santa Thomas Manila Phillipines

*Corresponding Author

Received: January 29, 2022; Revision Received: June 28, 2022; Accepted: June 30, 2022

The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India

were significantly more prevalent than in the general female population (Jo et al., 2018). Furthermore, poor unmarried mothers in the community are around twice as likely to develop major depression as in the general population (Belle and Doucet, 2003). This study found that more than one-fifth of mothers met diagnostic criteria for major depression in their research. Furthermore, the struggle to live in dire conditions raises the risk of depression (2003). Higher depression rates among unwed mothers than women in the general population suggest that their environments have contributed to these conditions (George, 2012).

Some studies were conducted to investigate the leading causes of unwed pregnancy, and they are as follows:

- i. Love affairs: A relationship that starts in a phase of sexually active time (McCloskey, 2016). There are many cases where a relationship that begins as a joke is later cheated on by the perpetrators when it reaches pregnancy. Such severe betrayal would make her even more miserable (Jose et al., 2011). Both the unexpected pregnancy and the partner's cheating result in severe mental conflicts among women (Garthus-Niegel et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2019; Peel et al., 2018) and their unborn child as well (Schaffir, 2018).
- ii. Rape: After going through a traumatic incident such as rape or sexual assault, when a woman gets pregnant (N.F.A and Fitriani, 2019), it adversely affects her physical, psychological and social life and then consequently, mental disruption, remorse, and fear trauma (Herisasono et al., 2020; Mukamana et al., 2018), and also depression (Bhuptani et al., 2019; Mgoqi-Mbalo et al., 2017).
- iii. Sexual assaults in the family: Many young girls are sexually assaulted by their family members, including uncles, cousins, and even fathers (Greydanus, and Joav Merrick, M. D., 2017). They are forced to abort if they get pregnant or be at risk of being killed because of social stigma in the particular context of India. Depression and other psychological problems also arise from this threat and compulsion (George, 2012).

The current study was conducted in three shelter homes Idukki, Kottayam, and Ernakulam with around 150 residents.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the 120 Research Participants

1. Age	Mean	SD
18-35	21.2	2.9
2. Education		
Junior School	12	10.00
High School	36	30.9
Senior High School	51	42.5
Diploma	21	17.5
3. Identity of perpetrator		
Family member or Relative	51	42.5
Lover	42	35.00
Neighbor/Stranger	21	17.5
Rape	6	5.00

The participants' ages range from 18 to 35, with a mean age of 21.22 (SD 2.9). Among the 40 participants, the majority (42.5%) had completed the senior higher secondary level, while

The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India

30% were either high school or completed high school. Another 17.5% had finished their diploma courses after their senior higher secondary school, and 10% completed their junior level. Direct family members and relatives of the perpetrators were questioned about their identities (42.5 %). The lovers were (35%), neighbors were (17.5%), and rape was (5%).

Depression in Unwed Mothers

According to DSM-5, depression is characterized by at least five or more depressive symptoms; those suffering from depression lack enthusiasm in almost all activities, have significant weight loss, insomnia or hypersomnia, fatigue and tiredness, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, constant restlessness, decreased ability to think and decide, and recurrent thoughts of suicidal ideas (American Psychiatric Association, 2015). Persons with depressed moods are unfortunate, anxious, hopeless, helpless, and even restless, which lasts for at least two weeks.

Depression in women is more prevalent than in men (Albert, 2015; Avalos et al., 2020; Benatar et al., 2020; Freedman et al., 2020; Matei and Ionescu, 2020; Romero et al., 2020). Multiple triggers are associated with maternal depression, such as financial difficulties, non-arranged marriage, unwed pregnancy, marital dispute, male child preference, past miscarriage, stillbirth, children with special needs, domestic violence, and alcohol-dependent partner, but these differ based on local and cultural factors (GK Kannan, 2020; Jokinen et al., 2020). All of them suffer from many internal problems, particularly unwed mothers (Corcoran, 2016).

There are many causes of unwed mothers' internal conflicts, such as embarrassment, anxiety, and remorse that contribute to depression. Shame has also been linked to unmarried parenthood. (Adams, 2017; Faudzi et al., 2019). Williams (2018) explains the evolving negative emotions by reflecting on shame after being pregnant; the critical emotions are anxiety and fear of the future and the consequences they have to face in the family and society. Consequently, they may have guilt and regression, and they blame themselves for such abundant internal tension that leads to depression (Samsuddin and Masroom, 2019). Other external factors, such as social stigma, family rejection, and unemployment, may increase the risk of depression (Moseson et al., 2019; Shahbani and Fuziah, 2020).

METHOD, PROCEDURE AND DATA COLLECTION

The researcher contacted 130 unwed mothers and administered BDI- II . Among them, 120 unwed mothers completed the tests. The following tables indicate the depression experienced by unwed mothers as measured by BDI- II .

Table 2. Prevalence of depression in BDI

Psychological depression	N	%
Normal	5	4.16
Mild	16	13.3
Moderate	69	58
Severe	25	21
Extremely severe	5	4.16
Total	120	100

Beck= *Depression*

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Table 2 shows the prevalence of depression of unwed mothers, measured by BDI- II . The results revealed that depression was relatively high, and many factors were associated with this higher level of depression among unwed mothers. A total of 70 unwed mothers scored 21 to 30 on BDI- II , suggesting a 58.3 % prevalence rate of moderate depression among unwed mothers. Recent researches support the findings that depression remains a significant risk factor for unwed pregnancy (Assari et al., 2020; Cook & Cameron, 2020; Khan, 2015; Mann et al., 2020; Matei & Ionescu, 2020; Vafai et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). The unwed mothers' traumatic experiences and subsequent depression have been documented in this research, suggesting the need for psychological therapy to improve their quality of life and well-being and reduce depression. Recent researches depict that depression remains a significant risk factor for young unwed pregnancy (Assari et al., 2020; Cook & Cameron, 2020; Khan, 2015; Mann et al., 2020; Matei & Ionescu, 2020; Vafai et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020). Furthermore, the timing of the first depressive episode, relative to age, at first sexual intercourse plays a critical role in determining the risk of young girls' pregnancy (Wan et al., 2020). It is evident that 48% of the sample had clinically high levels of depressive symptoms (Niyonsenga and Mutabaruka, 2020).

In unwed mothers, Major Depressive Disorder (M.D.D.) has been reported as a widespread, but often under-detected, characteristic in this population. Depending on the survey features and method used to measure depressive symptoms, prevalence rates vary from 13% to 30% (Coelho et al., 2015). In pregnancy, risk factors for depression include socio-demographic features and neonatal variables. According to some research, previous episodes of depression, intimate violence, and the degree of perceived social support tend to be the most critical risk factors (Benatar et al., 2020; Romero et al., 2020). These variables can help define risk factors and guide strategies to avoid adverse effects. There is a significant correlation between antenatal depression and postpartum depression. Many researchers have identified the factors associated with M.D.D. They found that during pregnancy in adolescent mothers seems crucial (Matei and Ionescu, 2020; Niyonsenga and Mutabaruka, 2020; Osok, 2016).

A study conducted in Malesia to understand unwed mothers' mental issues revealed that they feel sad, uninterested in any activities, tired, and lethargic. There is a chance of worthlessness and excessive fear. Unwed pregnancy may cause a diminished ability to think or concentrate and recurrent thoughts of death, and decreased participation or enjoyment in all activities most of the day (Nasir et al., 2016).

Researcher tried to estimate the prevalence of depression in sheltered unwed mothers. The study excluded from other unwed mothers those who are staying in their own home and facing many social stigmas. Such unwed mothers have a greater risk of developing depressive episodes, and this could be a limitation in the shelter home-based study. Hence future focusing on a wider population and detailed evaluation in high-risk groups can add valuable evidence to formulate management guidelines and policies in unwed mothers.

REFERENCES

- Adams, H. B. (2017). Rhetorics of Unwed Motherhood and Shame. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40(1), 91–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1247401>
- Albert, P. (2015). Why is depression more prevalent in women? *Journal of Psychiatry & Neuroscience*, 40(4), 219–221. <https://doi.org/10.1503/jpn.150205>

The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India

- American Psychiatric Association. (2015). *Depressive Disorders: DSM-5® Selections*. American Psychiatric Pub.
- Assari, S., Boyce, S., Bazargan, M., & Caldwell, C. H. (2020). A Dream Deferred: African American Women's Diminished Socioeconomic Returns of Postponing Childbearing from Teenage to Adulthood. *Reproductive Medicine, 1*(2), 62–76. <https://doi.org/10.3390/reprodmed1020005>
- Avalos, L. A., Caan, B., Nance, N., Zhu, Y., Li, D.-K., Quesenberry, C., Hyde, R. J., & Hedderson, M. M. (2020). Prenatal Depression and Diet Quality During Pregnancy. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.
- Benatar, S., Cross-Barnet, C., Johnston, E., & Hill, I. (2020). Prenatal depression: Assessment and outcomes among medicaid participants. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research, 1*–15.
- Bhuptani, Prachi, Kaufman, J. S, Messman-, M., & Moore. (2019). *Rape Disclosure and Depression Among Community Women: The Mediating Roles of Shame and Experiential Avoidance*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801218811683>
- Coelho, F. M. da C., Pinheiro, R. T., Silva, R. A., Quevedo, L. de Á., Souza, L. D. de M., Castelli, R. D., Matos, M. B. de, & Pinheiro, K. A. T. (2015). Major Depressive Disorder during Teenage Pregnancy: Socio-demographic, Obstetric and Psychosocial Correlates. *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria, 35*(1), 51–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbp.2012.03.006>
- Cook, S. MC., & Cameron, S. T. (2020). Social issues of teenage pregnancy. *Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Reproductive Medicine, S1751721420301329*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ogrm.2020.07.006>
- Corcoran, J. (2016). Teenage Pregnancy and Mental Health. *Societies, 6*(3), 21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc6030021>
- Faudzi, N. M., Nor, A. M., & Sumari, M. (2019). Unwanted Pregnancy among Adolescents: Educating Parent. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 9*(5), 12.
- Freedman, R., Hunter, S. K., Noonan, K., Wyrwa, A., Christians, U., Law, A. J., & Hoffman, M. C. (2020). Maternal Prenatal Depression in Pregnancies with Female and Male Fetuses and Developmental Associations with C-reactive Protein and Cortisol. *Biological Psychiatry: Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging*.
- Garthus-Niegel, S., Horsch, A., Handtke, E., von Soest, T., Ayers, S., Weidner, K., & Eberhard-Gran, M. (2018). The Impact of Postpartum Posttraumatic Stress and Depression Symptoms on Couples' Relationship Satisfaction: A Population-Based Prospective Study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01728>
- George, G. (2012). *A study on Unwed Mothers residing in the Licensed Homes in Kerala*.
- GK Kannan. (2020). *Antenatal Depression and Generalized Anxiety Disorder in a Tertiary Hospital in South India* -. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0253717620928440>
- Greydanus, D., & Joav Merrick, M. D. (2017). *Incest: Child sexual abuse within the family - ProQuest*. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1992204503?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Herisasono, A., Warka, M., & Yudianto, O. (2020). The Concept of Psychological Impact Compensation for Rape Victims. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding, 7*(3), 268–272. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v7i3.1589>

The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India

- Jokinen, T., Alexander, E. C., Manikam, L., Huq, T., Patil, P., Benjumea, D., Das, I., & Davidson, L. L. (2020). A Systematic Review of Household and Family Alcohol Use and Adolescent Behavioural Outcomes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-020-01038-w>
- Jose, J. P., Vinod, C. V., & Sabu, K. U. (2011). *Tribal unwed motherhood in South India: The causes, process and consequences in perspective*. VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.
- Kaphagawani, N. C., & Kalipeni, E. (2017). Sociocultural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy in Zomba district, Malawi. *Global Public Health*, 12(6), 694–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2016.1229354>
- Khan. (2015). *Factors and Consequences Leading to Teenage Pregnancy in Women Visiting Tertiary Care Hospital of Peshawar*.
- KHAN, M. A. (n.d.). *Factors and Consequences Leading to Teenage Pregnancy in Women Visiting Tertiary Care Hospital of Peshawar*.
- Liang, L. A., Berger, U., & Brand, C. (2019). Psychosocial factors associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress among single mothers with young children: A population-based study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 242, 255–264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.08.013>
- Mann, L., Bateson, D., & Black, K. I. (2020). Teenage pregnancy. *Australian Journal of General Practice*, 49(6), 310.
- Matei, A., & Ionescu, C. A. (2020). Pregnancy in Adolescence: A Hallmark of Forthcoming Perinatal Depression? In *Selected Topics in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. IntechOpen.
- Mgoqi-Mbalo, N., Zhang, M., & Ntuli, S. (2017). Risk factors for PTSD and depression in female survivors of rape. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 9(3), 301–308. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000228>
- Moseson, H., Mahanaimy, M., Dehlendorf, C., & Gerdtts, C. (2019). "...Society is, at the end of the day, still going to stigmatize you no matter which way": A qualitative study of the impact of stigma on social support during unintended pregnancy in early adulthood. *PLOS ONE*, 14(5), e0217308. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0217308>
- Mukamana, D., Brysiewicz, P., Collins, A., & Rosa, W. (2018). Genocide Rape Trauma Management. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 41(1), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0000000000000177>
- Nasir, R., Zamani, Z. A., Khairudin, R., Sulaiman, W. S. W., Norahim, M., Sani, M., & Amin, A. S. (2016). Depression, Loneliness and Cognitive Distortion among Young Unwed Pregnant Women in Malaysia: Counseling Implications. *Asian Social Science*, 12(8).
- N.F.A, P., & Fitriani. (2019). *Causes and Impact of Unwanted Pregnancy in Adolescents*.
- Niyonsenga, J., & Mutabaruka, J. (2020). Factors of postpartum depression among teen mothers in Rwanda: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 0(0), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0167482X.2020.1735340>
- Nyangarika, A., Nombo, N. M., & Mtani, M. (2020). Teen Pregnancies Among Day Government Secondary School Students in Ruvuma Region Tanzania. *International Journal of Advance Research and Innovative Ideas in Education*, 6(4), 157–166.
- Osok, J. O. (2016). *Depression and Psycho-social Risk Factors Associated With Pregnant Adolescents* [Thesis, University of Nairobi]. <http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/100217>
- Peel, R., Caltabiano, N., Buckby, B., & McBain, K. (2018). Mental health diagnoses and relationship breakdown: Which is the chicken and which the egg? *International Journal of Innovation*, 4(3), 19.

The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India

- Romero, G., Huth-Bocks, A., Puro-Gallagher, E., & Riggs, J. (2020). Maternal prenatal depression, PTSD, and problematic parenting: The mediating role of maternal perceptions of infant emotion. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 1–15.
- Samsuddin, S. N. A., & Masroom, M. N. (2019). *Mental Health of Muslim Unwed Pregnant Teenagers*. 8.
- Schaffir, J. (2018). Consequences of Antepartum Depression. *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 61(3), 533–543. <https://doi.org/10.1097/GRF.0000000000000374>
- Shahbani, & Fuziah. (2020). *View of Preliminary study of Unmarried pregnant female adolescents*. <http://majmuah.com/journal/index.php/bij/article/view/41/19>
- Sharma, P., & Khan, A. (2020). Unwed Mother: A Socio-Legal Study. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 11(2), 175–179.
- Vafai, Y., Thoma, M. E., & Steinberg, J. R. (2020). Association Between First Depressive Episode in the Same Year as Sexual Debut and Teenage Pregnancy. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 67(2), 239–244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.02.001>
- Wan, S., Ancar, F., Tewari, H., & Kaushal, D. (2020). Impact of Depression in Teenage Pregnancy [17K]. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 135, 118S.
- WHO. (2016). *Causes of death among adolescents*. WHO; World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/data/causes-death-adolescents/en/
- Wong, S. P., Twynstra, J., Gilliland, J. A., Cook, J. L., & Seabrook, J. A. (2020). Risk factors and birth outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy: A Canadian sample. *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, 33(2), 153–159.

Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Joseph L. & Bance L. O. (2022). The Prevalence of Depression among Unwed Mothers in Kerala India. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(2), 1230-1236. DIP:18.01.123.20221002, DOI:10.25215/1002.123