

CULTURE, TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND THE CURTAILING OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN EJURA SEKYEDUMASE MUNICIPAL

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ABSTRACT

The first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah legislated the 1961 Act (Act 87) for free universal primary education for all in Ghana. The Pre-Tertiary Education Act of 2020 consolidated this right of free compulsory universal basic education. These legislations have led to the enrolment of 87% of children in school. Despite the efforts, enormous challenge of girls' dropouts from school still prevails. Many studies blamed the anomaly on socio-economic factors alone ignoring the role culture/religion might play in this challenge. Thus, this current study fills the knowledge gap by finding out what role culture/religion plays in the cause of teenage pregnancy that limits girls' education in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal. The study used the mixed methods with the random sampling technique in the selection of respondents. A descriptive statistical method helped in analysing the quantitative data producing frequencies, cross-tabulations, simple percentages, mean and standard deviations of variables in the presentation of results. The qualitative data, on the other hand, was thematically analysed. The findings revealed that many teenagers in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal are aware of availability of contraceptives and yet fail to use them because of convergence of cultural /religious beliefs that discourage their use.

Keywords: *Teenage, teenage pregnancy, culture, education, Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 1961 Act (Act 87) was introduced for free universal primary education by the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah soon after independence. This law mandates compulsory and cost-free education for all children in Ghana. The Pre-Tertiary Education Act of 2020 has guaranteed the right of free compulsory universal basic education to every child in Ghana (Botchway, 2018; Holden, 2014). Commitment to this law and related policies have led to the enrolment of 87% of Ghanaian children in school. Despite the gains, there are enormous challenges particularly with girls' dropouts from school. For example, the Africa Education Watch (2022) identified over 192,500 school dropouts presently in Ghana, and over 102,000 girls as victims. The Africa Education Watch (2022) attributed 30% school dropouts of girls to teenage pregnancy. The literature attributed the phenomenon to socio-economic factors alone, ignoring the role culture/religion might play in this challenge. Thus, this paper fills the knowledge gap by finding out what role culture, with its major constituent, religion, plays in the cause of teenage pregnancy that limits girls' education using Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal as a case study. The question this study therefore seeks to address is: What role does culture/religion play in the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy that limits girls' education in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal? The study is important because, among other things, it has highlighted the fact that culture/religion as a tool of development, can also function at times as a retrogressive instrument.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal is located in the northern part of Ashanti Region with Ejura as its district capital. This district has a serious challenge of its girls involving in teenage pregnancy and dropping out of school, which warrants its selection for the present research. Below is the map of the study area.

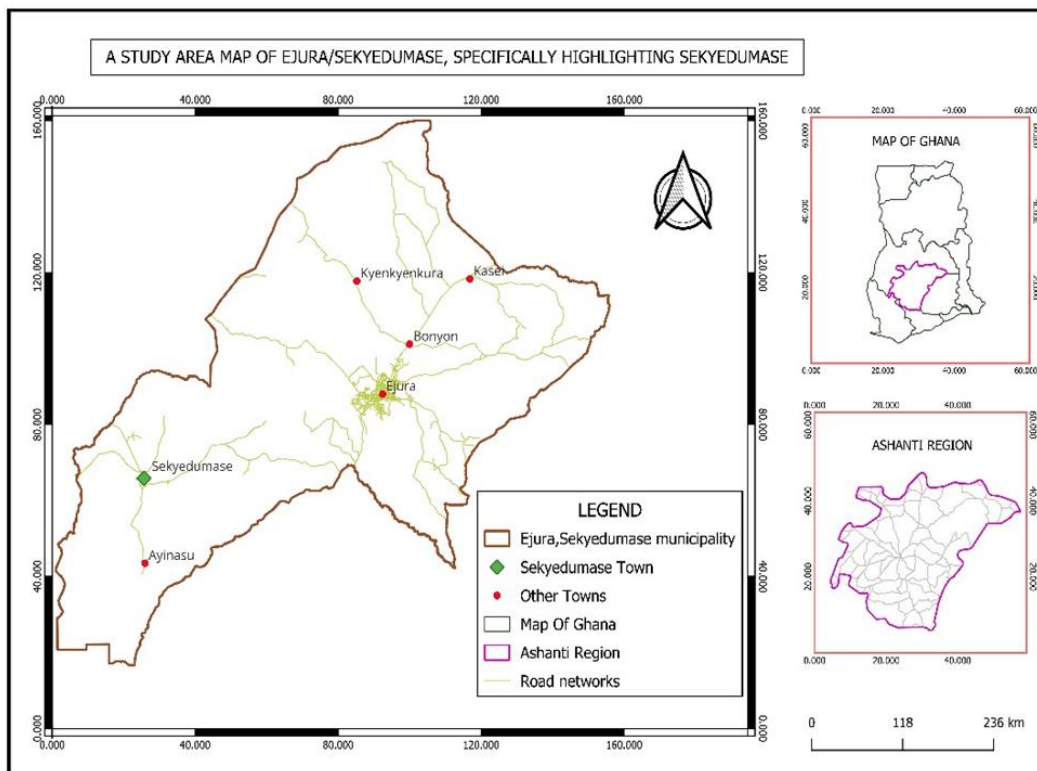


Fig. 1. A map illustrating Ejura-Sekyedumase Municipal with surrounding towns
(Authors' Construct, 2024)

A girl between the ages of 13 and 19 is considered a teenager. If such a girl becomes pregnant, the pregnancy is described as a teenage pregnancy because she has not yet attained the legal adulthood for pregnancy (Jabolina, 2022). In Ghana, the allowable legal age for marriage is 18 years even though

girls at this age are still teenagers. Atta and Wilson (2002) argue that most teenage pregnancies are unwanted and that it is not uncommon to find young girls between the ages of 11 and 12 pregnant. It is, however, worse among girls between the ages of 15 and 19. For Aboagye (1994), adolescent pregnancy relates to only girls between the ages of 13 to 19 years since that age is very critical to them. He further explains that girls are exposed early to sexual intercourse, marriage, and parenthood during the teenage years. These life events are difficult to avoid by many young women. Thus, while the age at puberty is falling, the age at marriage is rising. In other words, the amount of time young people spend between puberty and first marriage has decreased. World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) indicated the critical nature of the stage of teenage in human development. It is critical because the body at this stage changes physiologically, psychologically, and socially. During this period, adolescents are vulnerable and exposed to a variety of adventures and health-causing risks. It is reported that a large number of teenage girls die during this stage and the causes of their deaths are most preventable through proper education on sexual and reproductive issues (WHO, 2020). The health-causing risks either terminate their lives or education.

Education, according to Verma et al (2023: 1-2), 'is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through various forms of learning. It is the systematic and intentional process of facilitating learning and development, typically through formal institutions ... and informal channels' which enables individuals to easily navigate through life in general. Unfortunately, teenage pregnancy seems to curtail this. This is a very problematic phenomenon of public health with well-defined health risks; and socio-economic and cultural consequences to the individuals, families, communities, and society at large (WHO, 2020). In Ghana, a survey report revealed that 30% of births recorded came from adolescents and that 14% of young women aged between 15 and 19 years had already begun childbearing (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). Neal et al. (2018) also indicated that an estimated number of 2.5 million adolescent girls below the age of 16 give birth in Ghana every year.

Teenage pregnancy continues to be a major issue that affects girls' education globally, particularly in rural communities like Ejura Sekyedumasi Municipal in Ghana. Through the initiative of successive governments, several interventions have been made to incentivize girls' education. For example, as indicated, the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, soon after independence, introduced the 1961 Act (Act 87) which provided a fee-free education from primary to middle school (Botchway, 2018; Holden, 2014). The Pre-Tertiary Education Act of 2020 of Ghana has further provided an added guarantee to the right of all children in the country to a free compulsory universal basic education. Ghana's commitment to the law and related policies led to the net enrolment of 87% of children at the primary school. Despite the laudable gains, there are still remarkable challenges regarding school dropouts.

The rate of teenage pregnancy is higher in developing countries. Ghana, for example, has a high teenage pregnancy rate of 10% with girls between the ages 15 and 19. The 1993 demographic and health survey in Ghana has shown that over one-fifth (22%) of all teenage girls aged 15 and 19 years had started childbearing (Twum, 2003). Additionally, a survey conducted by the UN Regional Institute for Population Studies (UNRIPS) reported that one out of three girls aged between 15 and 19 living in Ghana's Central Region has had a child; and with a fertility rate at 5.6%, compared to the national rate of 5.5% (Xinhua News Agency 1996). Further, nearly one-third of childbirths recorded in public hospitals in Ghana were by women less than 19 years of age. In Kumasi, according to a 1993 study, over 75% of teenagers were pregnant and yet unmarried (Ellis 2006). Even though recent survey report has shown that teenage motherhood has experienced decline since 1988, from 19% to 11% in 2022 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022), this decline seems not to be uniform.

In Brong Ahafo (now Bono) Region, there were 778 teenage pregnancies during the 2016–2017 school year, with 144 occurring in primary schools; 573 in junior high schools; and 91 in senior high schools. Two hundred and fifty-nine (259) adolescent pregnancies were registered in the Sunyani

West District of the Brong Ahafo (Bono) Region alone between January and June of 2021 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). Moreover, in the Shama District of the Western Region, there were records of 572 teenage pregnancies, and a mass failure of female candidates who took the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in that area (Selby, 2012). Additionally, pregnancy prevented over thirty-three (33) female students from taking the BECE in the Manya Krobo Municipality in Ghana's Eastern Region (Odu and Ayodele, 2007). Compounding the challenge is the Ghana Ministry of Health's reports that indicated the incidents of "555,575 teenage pregnancies between 2016 and 2020, with 109,865 teenage pregnancies in 2020 alone" (Africa Education Watch 2022: 1). Many of these girls stay out of school and enter into early sexual relationships, most of which are exploitative. In rural areas, the situation is explosive due to poverty or family financial exigencies and social customs.

The intersection of poverty and the socio-economic vulnerability of young girls remains a long-standing explanation for teenage motherhood (Gyan, 2017). Farley's (1995) study revealed that teenage pregnancy and childbirth are disproportionately common among poor people of all races; and that in poor communities, people experience less control over many aspects of their lives than the non-poor. Teenagers in the poor communities, feel less control over their getting pregnant; and are less likely to try to prevent the pregnancies (Anderson, 1991). Some impoverished teenage girls may even consider childbirth as a rare source of self-esteem - a sign of growing up; while sexual conquest brings a feeling of accomplishment to teenage boys to whom legitimate opportunities may be blocked (Farley, 1995).

Furthermore, differences in adolescent sexual activity and contraceptive use also account for teenage pregnancy (Scott et al., 2020). The author argues that teenage girls probably have no idea of the traditional methods of preventing pregnancy (such as virginity testing, non-penetrative thigh sex, and physical maturity examination). The main reason behind this ignorance is that teenage girls are either too embarrassed or fear seeking information about it. Atta and Wilson (2002) also reported that ignorance due to the lack of sex education in schools and homes accounts for the high teenage pregnancy in our time since most parents prohibit their children from talking about sex. Moreover, sometimes, when sex-related issues are raised, parents turn to keep children from talking about them or provide false information and discourage their children from engaging in informative discussion about sex and its related activities. Thus, most adolescents tend to have little knowledge about their reproductive health just because neither their parents nor their teachers feel committed to imparting the needed knowledge (Twum 2003). Also, exposure to sexual content in the media, including television, and online platforms like pornographic websites and chat groups, may contribute to teenagers engaging in sexual behaviours (L'Engle et al., 2006).

According to the Chatterji et al. (2007), the acceptance of gifts in exchange for sex and the exploitation of financially disadvantaged teenagers by adults is also a factor that can lead to teenage pregnancy. Peer pressure is another major factor that encourages teenage boys and girls to indulge in sexual activities. Moreover, early dating starting as early as 12 years of age contributes to teen pregnancy. To reiterate, in the absence of sex education at home or school, the girl or boy would be tempted to practice sex ignorantly to satisfy his or her curiosity as s/he may fear finding out the truth from her parents or teachers (Atta and Wilson, 2002). According to Maynard and Hoffman (2008), teenage pregnancy can also stem from negative emotions like stress, dislike, malice, boredom, and unhappiness experienced by a teenage girl in her home environment. For Gaby (2012), factors like alcoholism, drug addiction, social and health issues among adolescents in addition to sexual abuse can lead to unwanted pregnancy. Furthermore, Dilworth linked risky behaviours such as drinking, smoking, and drug use to teenage pregnancy (Dilworth, 2002). Thus, in spite of the significant role socio-economic factors play in teenage pregnancy, the present study also wants to find out whether culture/religion, as "inherited conceptions and practices of a specific group of people" (Gedzi 2019: 2) can also be a contributing factor in this regard.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research philosophy adopted for the study is pragmatic research which recognizes different ways of interpreting a phenomenon. This is because no single view point can provide a holistic picture of a phenomenon under study (Saunders et al., 2015). The pragmatic approach gives different perspectives of reality and hence enabled the researchers to employ mixed methods. According to Creswell (2014), mixed methods research provides more insight on the phenomenon under investigation since it combines both the quantitative and qualitative. The use of mixed-method designs enabled the researchers to utilize the strengths of one method to compensate for the weaknesses of the other. The quantitative approach gives potential for the summary and establishment of relationships among the variables while the qualitative approach offers a detailed understanding of the causes and challenges associated with teenage pregnancy in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal.

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The descriptive studies identify and present a phenomenon's characteristics as it currently exists. This type of descriptive surveys is versatile and practical, especially for the research in that it identifies present needs (Osuala 1991). According to Rubin and Babbie (2011), the population is the untested determined aggregation of a study element where a research population relates to a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics (Opoku et al. 2016). The target population for the research comprised parents, teachers, pregnant teens, teen mothers, and girls within the Ejura-Sekyedumase Municipal.

Altogether, one hundred and one (101) respondents took part in the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the study respondents. Thus, it enabled every parent, teenage girl, and teacher in the community under study to an equal chance of being selected. Again, the sampling was done without any replacement since every individual in the community has an equal chance (1/N) of being part of the sampling. The primary data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and focused group discussions, respectively with close-ended and open-ended questions. In addition, the secondary data includes publications from both foreign and local sources like books, journals, articles, newspapers report from libraries, and online sources. These materials were used to gather extra information to address the questions outlined in the research problem. Both published and unpublished sources were examined and they formed a significant portion of the literature utilized.

Descriptive statistical methods were used in analysing the data collected through the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS). The questionnaires were edited and coded into the software. The data were captured in three well-designed templates. Frequencies, cross-tabulations, simple percentages mean, and standard deviations were computed for items and results presented in tables. The items were measured on four-point Likert scales described by Best and Kahn and weighted 1, 2, 3, and 4. The scale was coded as follows: Strongly agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly disagree = 1 for all positive items, while the reverse was the case for all negative worded items in the questionnaire. The keys for interpreting the means for positive statements were as follows: 1.00 to 1.40 – Strongly disagree, 1.50 to 2.40 – Disagree, 2.50 to 3.40 – Agree, and 3.50 to 4.00 – Strongly agree. Again, the reverse was true for all negative items. The qualitative data on the other hand was transcribed, cleaned and thematically analysed in light of the research objectives and questions. It is acknowledged that some of the citations in the study came via fieldwork.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Culture and Teenage Pregnancy and Limits of Girls' Education

This section first presents the demographical statistical analyses of research and then discusses the role of culture in teenage pregnancy and limit of girls' education.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Examining the background demographic characteristics of respondents was crucial to enable the researchers to understand how the socio-demographics lead to teenage pregnancy. The background

factors assessed comprised gender, age, ethnicity, religion, education level, and marital status. Table 1 below illustrates age groups of respondents:

Table 1: Age Group of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
13-19	69	68.3
20-25	13	12.9
26-30	9	8.9
31-35	5	5.0
36-40	2	2.0
41 and above	3	3.0
Total	101	100.0

Source: (Field Survey: July 2024)

The result indicated that the majority of the respondents (68.3%) were aged between 13-19 years. It further indicated that 12.9% of respondents aged between 20-25 years, while 8.9% aged between 26-30 years. The results showed that (5.0%) of respondents aged between 31-35 years; 2.0% of them aged between 36-40 years while the remaining 3.0% aged above 41 years. It is important to note that the dynamics of age disparities were highly influenced by the researchers' target study population. Notwithstanding this, the result resonates with the recent 2022 Population and Housing Census demographics of the Ejura Sekyedumasi municipal (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022), which forms the unit of analysis of the present study Table 2 below also illustrates ethnicity of respondents:

Table 2: Ethnicity of Respondents

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Asante	63	62.4			
Other Akan groups	9	8.9			
Northerner	21	20.8			
Ewe	6	5.9			
Other specify	2	2.0			
Total	101	100.0	1.76	1.00	1.097

Source: (Field Survey: July 2024)

The result on the ethnicity of the respondents showed that the majority of respondents identified themselves as Asante (62.4%), followed by Northerner (20.8%), Other Akan groups (8.9%), and a small proportion came from Ewe (5.9%). The mean ethnicity score is 1.76, with a median of 1.00, indicating that Asante¹ is the most common ethnicity among the respondents. The standard deviation of 1.097 suggests a moderate level of diversity in the ethnic backgrounds of the sample. This distribution underscores a strong predominance of Asante respondents, while the representation of other ethnic groups is comparatively limited.

According to the 2021 city population census on Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal by the Ghana Statistical Service (2022), Akan groups have a population of 32,767, the Ewe 1, 332, and Northerners 45,156. The 2021 city population census also indicated that Northerners predominated the population in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal. Nevertheless, our present survey shows that most respondents are

¹ The researchers collected separate information on the Asante, subgroup of the umbrella ethnic group, Akan in Ghana. This was done because they formed the majority group within Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal which formed the unit of the present study.

Asante. The study found out that the complex heterogeneous inhabitants in the study area may also be a factor in the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. In other words, the multiple cultures and traditions and norms of the ethnic groups appear to create a convergence of influences on social issues such as early marriage, pregnancy and reluctance in the use of contraceptives by the teenagers and women in general. Table 3 discusses religious background of the respondents.

Table 3: Cultural/Religious Background of Respondents

Religion	Frequency	Valid Percent	Mean	Median	Median
Christian	70	69.3			
Muslim	22	21.8			
African Trad. Religion (ATR)	9	8.9			
Total	101	100.0	1.40	1.00	.649

Source: Field Survey: July 2024

The results on religion reveal that a significant majority of respondents identify themselves as Christians (69.3%), with Muslims making up of 21.8% and a small percentage identifying themselves as adherents of ATR (8.9%). The mean religion score is 1.40, with a median of 1.00, indicating that Christianity predominates other religions. The standard deviation of 0.649 reflects a relatively low level of variability, highlighting a strong concentration of Christian respondents compared to the other religious affiliations.

4.3 Factors Responsible for Teenage Pregnancy and Limit of Girls' Education

The main question the present study wanted to find answer to was: What role does culture play in the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy and its limit of girls' education in the Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal? The field results showed that there are multiple factors that lead to teenage pregnancy in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal. For example, the majority of the respondents (42.6%) indicated peer influence as the most significant factor. Others (36.65) indicated poverty as the main cause, with (5.0%) of respondents indicating broken homes as the cause. The study furthermore revealed that 4.0% of respondents mentioned bad parenting while another 4.0% of informants indicated lack of sex education. Three percent (3.0%) of respondents were of the view that early marriage was the cause. The remaining 3.0% of respondents mentioned curiosity as the cause of teenage pregnancy in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal. The mean reason score is 3.44, with a median of 5.00, implying that the most frequently cited reasons clustered around peer influence and poor parenting. During field interviews, a teacher respondent remarked:

Peer pressure is a factor that leads to teenage pregnancy in this and other communities in the municipal. Many of our students live expensive lifestyles, which their parents cannot afford. So, it is very common to find them associating with friends who have already dropped out of school and are engaging in various social vices to make money.

During the data collection, the researchers observed that it was very common to see several teenage girls moving, eating and drinking together in clubs. Usually, these teenage girls were in the company of boys who were either their age mates or older than them. One of the teenagers who was pregnant in one of the groups remarked:

I started having sexual intercourse at the age of 13 when my friends introduced me to the boy. In this community, your friends are your main support system since our parents are farmers or unemployed. I was not always like this, but I guess what they said that '*bad company corrupts good manners*' was true after all.

Another respondent (victim of teenage pregnancy) mentioned bad parenting as a factor in Sekyedumase Municipal:

Some parents do not have time for their children and this encourages the latter to indulge in sexual relations with the opposite sex in order to survive. Some of the parents due to financial difficulties have left their responsibilities of providing basic social needs such as educational material, reproductive health care supplies, decent clothes etc. This causes girls to exchange sex for what they need. This often results in teenage pregnancies.

The standard deviation of 2.12 indicates considerable variability in responses, highlighting diverse perceptions about causes of teenage pregnancy. Overall, while peer influence and poor parenting are viewed as the predominant causes, there is a range of other factors considered less critical but still significant in the community's understanding of teenage pregnancy.

The finding from the study shows multi-faceted variables, which lead to teenage pregnancy. Indeed, while some of the factors may be contextualized within external framework, the majority of the causes are mainly individual. Nonetheless, a closer look could establish that socio-economic indicators such as lack of employment resulting in poverty is the main cause of teenage pregnancy in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal. The finding aligns with Lewis's (1959) report which indicated lack of socio-economic factors as the main causes of poverty. The study further resonates with Atta and Wilson's (2002) finding that teenage girls end up getting pregnant out of peer pressure and lack of sex education at home or at school and that teenage girls out of curiosity, engage in sex. The findings are illustrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Factors of Teenage Pregnancy in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal

	Count	Mean	Percentages	Median	Standard Deviation
Poverty	37		36.6%		
Broken home	5		5.0%		
Bad parenting	4		4.0%		
Lack of sex education	4		4.0%		
Peer influence	43		42.6%		
Ignorance and rape	2		2.0%		
Early marriage	3		3.0%		
Curiosity	3		3.0%		
Total	101	3.44	100%.	5.00	2.12

Source: (Field Survey: July 2024)

Further, the study illustrates how teenage pregnancy appears to limit the girls' education:

Table 5 Showing how Teenage Pregnancy Affects Girl Child's Education

Variable	Count	Mean	Percentage	Median	Standard Deviation
Yes	90		89.1%		
No	11		10.9%		
Total	101	1.11	100%	1.00	.31

Source: Field Survey: July 2024

Table 5 sought to examine how teenage pregnancy affects the education of girls in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal. In contemporary social environment in Ghana, educational attainment has become the criterion of measuring one's status in society. Unfortunately, teenage pregnancy in the research unit has forced many girls to either temporarily or permanently withdraw from school. In

most cases, the teenage pregnancy has led to permanent halt to girls' education and jeopardizing their career opportunities.

Field respondents were asked, whether teenage pregnancy has any effect on the education of the girl child. The result showed that the majority of the respondents (89.1%) affirmed that it does; while the remaining 10.9% indicated, no. The respondents stated that it would be practically impossible to ignore the numerous consequences of teenage pregnancy and how it limits girls' education in the municipality. This strong affirmation indicates a widespread recognition of adverse effects like increased dropouts from school and disrupted academic progress by affected teenagers. The mean score of 1.11 and median of 1.00, combined with a low standard deviation of 0.31 suggest a high level of affirmation among respondents that teenage pregnancy is detrimental to girls' education, with minimal variation in opinions. As recounted by Manlove et al. (2000), teenagers who have repeated pregnancies are likely to face many obstacles to education and economic self-sufficiency.

The researchers observed that some of the teenage mothers roam the streets until late in the night. This was confirmed during a focus group discussion where participants lamented the increasing number of teenage mothers on the streets. This, in their view, has led to several cases of sexual and gender-based violence, child neglect among other social vices. Some school authorities also claimed that the rate at which teenage pregnancy is surging in the municipality has made a considerable number of girls drop out of school even before they complete their basic education:

We have been having several of our pupils dropping out of school even before they finish Junior High School. It is common to have about five girls getting pregnant before the BECE examinations, and only a few are able to stay in school and finish their papers. This has affected the number of students who are able to advance to the Senior High School.

Further, Table 6 below summarizes the multiple effects of teenage pregnancy on victims:

	Frequency	Percentages
Stigmatization	9	9
Health issues	9	9
School drop-outs	19	19
Streetism	27	26
Poverty	37	37
Total	101	100.00

The result showed that the majority (37%) of the respondents confirmed that teenage pregnancy leads to poverty while others (26%) indicated it results in "streetism". The result, additionally showed that 19% of respondents were of the view that teenage pregnancy leads to school drop-outs. Nine percent (9%) of respondents think the phenomenon leads to stigmatization and health related issues. One respondent indicated "teenage pregnancy may be responsible for streetism of many children" in the municipality. The respondent concluded that:

Teenage pregnancy has become problematic in this municipal as many of the young mothers found themselves on the streets. That is because, most of them are not natives of this town and do not have relatives they can stay with. Some of the community girls in some cases are also found on the street since they prefer free bad companies to strict disciplined home.

4.4 Culture and Teenage Pregnancy and Limit of Girls' Education

It is important to separate the analysis of the religio-cultural influence on teenage pregnancy and associated dropping out of school by girls from the other variables because we want to make a strong case out of it. This is because prevailing scholarship has not deservedly acknowledged this fact. Culture, and its major constituent, religion among the people of Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal produced a worldview that has significantly influenced decision-making by teenagers about early marriage and pregnancy. Adogu, et al. (2019) and Oke (2020) relatedly pointed out the unique religio-

cultural beliefs that serve as unifying elements in society that influence peoples' attitudes towards early marriage and teenage pregnancy. This is seen in how religio-cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours tend to influence sexual and contraceptive behaviours. In the culture/religion of Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal, for instance, sexuality and contraceptive are viewed as taboo topics and parental communication on them are discouraged (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2018). This seems also to influence the schools in the municipality when it comes to teaching sex and reproductive issues. Thus, the study showed that culture and religion played significant role in influencing teenage pregnancy. For example, peer views, lack of sex education, taboo of contraceptive use, early marriage and sometimes, the fact that parents want their children to give birth early so that they would have grandchildren who would immortalize them or their lineages are all influenced by cultural and religious values in the community.

Relatedly, there are complex and varied opinions about the role of motherhood and child-bearing among the different cultures/religions represented by the ethnic groups. For example, some of the cultures do not see anything wrong with early marriages that result in teenage pregnancies. In other words, the cultures of Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal accepts early marriage and motherhood. Thus, such girls end up as teenage mothers which limit their ability to go back to school.

Also, negative gender norms and roles, mainly defined by the culture of the people, influence the rate of teenage pregnancy and the education of the girl. This resonates with the observation made by Kanku et al (2020) that risky sexual conduct in intimate relationship is influenced by gendered attitudes, actions, and power imbalances. Men's regular dominance in family and community decisions is an example of gender power relations that turns to influence sexual and reproductive lives of teenagers. As a result, girls in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal become pregnant in an early age and also drop out of school. As remarked by Horn (1983), there are differences in perspectives by cultures on the importance of becoming a mother at a young age; the prevention of pregnancy and contraception, and the types of support systems and social networks. Both before and during pregnancies, these beliefs have an impact on them. The young women in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal are aware of availability of contraceptives and yet fail to use them because there is a convergence of cultural and religious beliefs that discourage their use. This way, many in the research unit become pregnant and drop out of school either temporarily or in most cases permanently.

It is important to reiterate that in the contemporary social environment in Ghana, educational attainment has become the yardstick with which one's status in society is measured; and as pregnancy forces one to withdraw from school, resulting in either temporary or permanent halt to education, women's career opportunities in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal are often jeopardized. Manlove et al (2000) suggest that teenagers who have repeated pregnancies are likely to face many obstacles to education and economic self-sufficiency.

From the foregone discussions, it has become abundantly clear that legislative measure alone to give the right of free compulsory education to girls is not working. Even though girls go to school in their numbers, they also drop out of school easily because of the mentioned factors. For example, the convergence of cultural and religious beliefs in the research site prevents parents from freely talking about sex and sexual issues that border on contraceptives to educate their children. So also, teachers in the community schools are affected by the same culture and they do not educate student girls on sexual issues. It is in light of this that this present study suggests parents should be more open and talk to their children at home about the issues. This is important because education first starts at the family level.

Secondly, teachers need to make it part of their responsibility to educate both boys and girls about the consequences of teenage sex, and more importantly, the use of contraceptives by girls. The measure of inculcating values in the children against engagement in early sex may help girls avoid getting pregnant, and thus, not dropping out of school. Moreover, educating girls on the proper use of contraceptives would curtail the incidents of girls dropping out of schools. Traditional authorities and religious leaders/functionaries in the community can educate girls and boys on teenage sex and also

try to review their traditions, religious beliefs and practices that seem to encourage early child marriage and other negative religio-cultural practices.

Last but not least, the central government, the District Assemblies and the Ghana Education Service need to come out with appropriate policies that are enforced concerning sexual relations in schools and in communities to curtail the incessant teenage pregnancy that makes many girls drop out of school and therefore limit their education.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study tried to find out cultural issues that might lead to teenage pregnancy, limiting girls' education in Ejura Sekyedumase Municipal in Ghana. It used the mixed methods with the random sampling technique in selecting the respondents. A descriptive statistical method was used to analyse the quantitative data producing frequencies, cross-tabulations, simple percentages mean and standard deviations of variables in the presentation of results. The qualitative data, on the other hand, was thematically analysed. The findings showed, among other things, that many teenagers in Ejura Sekyedumase municipal are aware of availability of contraceptives and yet fail to use them because there is a convergence of cultural and religious beliefs that discourage their use. There were also socio-economic factors that influence teenage pregnancy. This way, many in the research unit become pregnant and drop out of school either temporarily or permanently. Admittedly, while there have been some interventions to mitigate the effects of teenage pregnancy, there still remains a lot of work to be done. Teenage mothers need to be reintegrated back to the schooling system. This is even so in the case of teenagers who involved in repeated pregnancies since they are likely to face many obstacles to education and economic self-sufficiency. The study is important because, among other things, it has highlighted the fact that culture/religion as tools of development, can also at times function as retrogressive instruments.

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