Early Marriage and Pregnancy

Celestina Francis

Early Marriage is when the husband and wife are about twenty or younger. Early marriages are common in India. These marriages are arranged by the parents in majority. In rural India, the traditional practice of early marriages of girls still continues inspite of raising the age of marriage for girls to 18 years by legislation. The custom became very prevalent during the reign of Muslim rulers. From the point of historical background, the custom of early marriages was not prevalent during the Vedic period.

Causes of Early Marriage
- Backwardness in women's status
- Poverty
- Social cultural customs and beliefs
- Ignorance
- Custom of dowry
- Marriages within castes
- Joint family systems

Risk Factors Related to Teenage Pregnancy

Pre-term & Small for gestational age births
Because of lower socio-economic status, poor nutritional habits and lower pre-pregnancy weights and delays in receiving prenatal care. Risks of premature and perinatal death are higher in mothers (15 years of age and younger) and their infants, compared to those of women in their twenties. They are two to three times more likely to die during their first year of life.

Teenage mothers who have subsequent pregnancies are also at risk for delivery of a premature infant or one who will die during the perinatal period.

Pre-Eclampsia and Spontaneous Abortion
Much common in the 15 year old and younger mothers. This imposes slow cognitive development for the infant and increases perinatal mortality. The incidence in general population is 5% while in pregnancy teenage mother it is 7% to 24%.

Infections and Sexually Transmitted Diseases
Including chlamydia and trichomonas, which may play a part in premature birth. Teenagers between 15-19 years, have the second highest rate of gonorrhea in United States. Infections that are present late in pregnancy and are present when membranes rupture which may contribute to chorioamnionitis, postpartum endometritis and neonatal sepsis.

Anemia
The fetal period and adolescent are the two most rapid periods of human growth and are associated with the highest iron requirements and lack of it represents the greater risk of Iron deficiency anemia.

Family Implications
Teenage pregnancy is also associated with other long-term psychosocial factors that may have lasting effects on the health and later on the development of both mother and baby.

Single Motherhood
The high rate of single motherhood may be associated with later marital disharmony.

Obstacle in Higher Education
The limitations early child bearing has on educational attainment usually result in less skilled lower paying jobs. Stress caused by these two factors may result in higher rates of child abuse.

High Divorce Rates
Teenage fathers also experience considerable stress from their premature parenthood. They tend to experience same types of psychosocial risks and lower educational achievements. An earlier entry into the work force and lower paying jobs and increased family stress is evidenced by the divorce rate 2-4 times higher than the rate for men who delay, marriage and child bearing.

Negative Reactions
The teen age parents are often regarded as guilty and may encounter extremely negative reactions from others. They may feel responsible for the situation but may be left without supportive services. They may be denied contact with each other and eventually with the child also.

Psychosocial Risk
The extent of psychosocial risk to the pregnant teenage depends on such factors as availability of care, family support and socio-economic status as well as the teenagers' own development status.

The young teenager (14 years and younger) is incapable of con-
sistent conceptual or abstract thinking and has difficulty in anticipating the consequences of action and in problem solving. She is not prepared for the responsibility of the decision making associated with pregnancy and parenthood and she doesn’t bother about the future. She had little time to adjust to the normal physical maturation that occurs at her age and now must also adjust to the changes due to pregnancy. She cannot provide for herself or her own baby, because in many ways she is herself still a child.

The middle teenage (15 to 16 years) mother is more likely to use logic and abstract thinking and can prepare for future more effectively.

The older teenage (17 years and older) is much more like an adult in her response to pregnancy. Her future employment opportunities will be extremely limited and she will have to rely on support from her mate or her own family.

Disadvantages of Early Marriage

- Death of women at an early age. Because of co-habitation at an early age, the health of the couple is not very good. That is why the rate of death of women during delivery is very high in India.
- No control of population can be kept. Early marriages increase population.
- Obstacle in higher education.
- Increase in diseases in women.
- Increase in large number of child widows.
- Weak and unhealthy children.
- Lack of wisdom and irresponsible marriage.
- Early marriage is against individual freedom.

Problem and considerations

- The early marriage over-emphasises on sex and physical attraction.
- Is the couple ready to have children?
- Is the couple prepared to maintain an acceptable standard of living?
- Have young persons had adequate time to make wise choice of marriage partner?
- Will the couple have ample opportunity for social development before accepting the responsibilities of home and possible family?

References

1. May A. Kathaeyn & Laura A. Mah Insicter, comprehensive Maternity Nursing. 2nd edition, J.B. Lippponcott Company, Philadelphia, Pp244-246