

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Teenage Fertility Trends and Poverty: Implications for Adolescent Mothers in Ghana

Mavis Dako-Gyeke, PhD and Phyllis Dako-Gyeke, PhD

Description of Research Project:

Adolescent fertility has become a matter of global concern due to its socioeconomic and health consequences for nations. Previous research shows early childbearing forecloses educational opportunities for adolescent mothers and thus restricts their future opportunities for social and economic advancement. Consequently, most adolescent mothers and their children live under extreme poverty conditions. Although national fertility rates in Ghana continue to decline, disaggregated Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) data indicate flat adolescent (15-19 years) fertility rates over a ten year period (1998-2008). Regardless of the known economic consequences of adolescent fertility, the lagging teen fertility rates in Ghana have not been thoroughly examined. Using three sets of GDHS data (1998, 2003, and 2008), the researchers will focus on female adolescent fertility rates in Ghana over this period of time. This project will strategically use GDHS datasets, a nationally representative survey, to identify economic implications of early childbearing for adolescent mothers. Of particular interest is the poverty status of adolescent mothers.

Objectives:

The purpose of this study will be to describe adolescent fertility trends in Ghana from 1998 to 2008. Also, it seeks to identify possible associations between several variables that impact poverty status of adolescent mothers.

Data and Research methods:

The data from three recent Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) conducted in Ghana in 1998, 2003 and 2008 will be used. The GDHS is a nationally representative study that collects information on demographic and health characteristics of respondents including age, highest level of education, reproductive history, residential history, marital status, employment status, cash earnings and control over use of earnings. First, data from 1998, 2003 and 2008 will be used to describe trends of adolescent fertility in Ghana. Descriptive statistics will be conducted to show frequencies, proportions and percentages of early childbearing among female adolescents in Ghana from 1998 to 2008. Second, 2008 dataset will be used to examine possible associations between economic status and early childbearing in Ghana. This analysis will focus on the female questionnaire administered to women 15-49 years. Bi-variate analysis (including t-test and chi-square tests) will be conducted to identify associations between several variables that determine economic status of adolescent mothers. Variables of interest will include employment status, type of occupation, age, cash earnings, control over use of earnings, highest level of education, area of residence, and marital status.

Preliminary Results:

A comparison of 1998, 2003 and 2008 GDHS datasets indicate a lag in teenage fertility rates in Ghana. Over the past ten years there has been no substantial change in the overall percentage of female adolescents who have begun childbearing (13 percent in 2008, compared with 14 percent in 2003, and 14 percent in 1998). In addition, patterns of differentials in adolescent pregnancy across the country by background indicate possible association between adolescent pregnancy and geographical location, as well as education. Teenagers residing in rural areas and those with lower levels of education are more likely to have had children or currently pregnant compared

with adolescents in the urban areas and with higher levels of education. In addition to these findings, further analysis will be conducted to determine adolescent mothers' control over use of earnings, wealth quintile, and employment status and cash earnings.

Policy Relevance

This study has several policy implications. First, the flat adolescent fertility rates in Ghana questions the effectiveness of existing policies aimed at addressing adolescent fertility in Ghana. Questions regarding current educational and economic support provided to adolescent mothers need to be raised. In this regard, information from this proposed study can be used to evaluate and assess existing policies that seek to address educational and economic problems faced by adolescent mothers in Ghana. Second, the demographic characteristics of adolescent mothers suggest not only the need for age specific interventions, but also interventions that focus on specific areas in the country. Issues of geography (urban/rural) and age are crucial and must be addressed by policies. Through detailed analysis on background characteristics of adolescent mothers, this study can provide useful information needed for the design and implementation of such focused interventions. Third, by using data from a nationally representative sample, the study has the ability to provide details for designing a comprehensive policy intervention. Also, this study will offer the much needed attention for the issue of adolescent fertility in Ghana by engaging both academics and policy makers in Ghana.

Address correspondence to: Dr. Mavis Dako-Gyeke Email: mavisdako@yahoo.com

Author Affiliations:

Department of Social Work, University of Ghana (Dr. Mavis Dako-Gyeke)

School of Public Health, University of Ghana (Dr. Phyllis Dako-Gyeke)