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The Preventive Measures, Main Challenges and The Effectiveness of The Programs Developed in Dealing with Out-Of-Wedlock Pregnancies Among Adolescents and Youths in Malaysia

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Abstract

The rise of out-of-wedlock pregnancies in Malaysia has become an alarming concern, posing significant socio-cultural and economic challenges for the country. Given the country's conservative cultural norms and the potential for an increase in single-parent households, the issue not only affects the individuals directly involved, but also has broader implications for society. This study thus aims to explore the preventive measures, main challenges and the effectiveness of the programs developed for the out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth in Selangor, Malaysia. In the study, a qualitative case study approach, interviews, and document research were used, and six informants were selected to offer perspectives from the viewpoint of an expert panel. The findings suggested that the preventive measures can be implemented through top-down and bottom-up processes. The main challenges are poor knowledge among married or soon-to-be-married couples, parental busyness, and the environment. The findings also explained that the existing laws in Malaysia are insufficient or ineffective in raising awareness among teenagers and youth. The study's implications suggest improving and refining micro and macro-level programs to achieve a comprehensive approach to reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

Keywords: Out-of-wedlock Pregnancy, Youth, Programs, Expert Panel, Challenges

The Rise of Out-Of-Wedlock Pregnancies in Malaysia

The rise in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths in Malaysia is a complex issue that requires multifaceted solutions. Addressing the problem involves not just providing adequate sex education and access to contraception, but also challenging cultural norms and societal attitudes towards teenage sexuality. Data from the Malaysian Ministry of Health indicates 18,465 recorded teen pregnancies out of wedlock from 2014 to 2018, with an average of 300 cases per month in 2017. The National Registration Department reported

159,725 registered births to unwed parents from 2013 to 2016. The numbers rose from 53,492 in 2013 to a peak of 54,614 in 2014, indicating an increasing trend in fatherless children. The Royal Malaysia Police recorded an average of 10 monthly child abandonment cases from 2018 to 2021, often attributed to unexpected pregnancies from premarital sex, with the figures ranging from 86 to 128 cases per year over this period (PDRM, 2021).

Despite comprehensive sexual education in schools and efforts to promote family planning, Malaysia has seen a rise in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths in recent years. A variety of factors have contributed to this trend. One key issue has been the increased exposure to sexual content through various forms of media and the internet which may encourage sexual activity among teenagers (Siti-Haidah et al., 2017). Additionally, the taboo nature of sex education in traditional Malaysian society may result in teenagers having inaccurate information about contraception and safe sex (Zulkifli & Low, 2000).

Secondly, social issues such as poverty and lack of education are also contributing factors. In low-income communities, adolescents may not have access to proper sex education or contraceptive methods (Saim et al., 2019). This lack of information and resources leaves them vulnerable to unintended pregnancies. Furthermore, gender inequality remains an issue in many parts of Malaysia. Many young girls may not have the autonomy to make decisions about their bodies, including the use of contraception, which can result in unexpected pregnancies (Najafi-Sharjabad, 2013).

Government initiatives and NGO efforts to tackle this issue have been in place, but they have struggled to counteract these deeply entrenched societal factors. Programs such as sex education in schools, distribution of contraceptives, and counselling services for pregnant teenagers are ongoing. However, these efforts often face resistance from conservative groups that view these initiatives as promoting promiscuity rather than preventing unwanted pregnancies (Saim et al., 2013). This resistance highlights the need for a broader societal shift in attitudes towards teenage sexuality and pregnancy.

Hence, the surge in pregnancies outside of wedlock among teenagers and youth is a pressing issue in the nation. As per the Allan Guttmacher Institute (2008), teenage pregnancy is an undesirable occurrence. It's imperative for all stakeholders to respond prudently to this issue, preventing its further spread in society and enhancing understanding through context. Therefore, the present study aims to comprehensively investigate the causes, impacts, and possible prevention strategies for the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and youth, leveraging the insights of an expert panel in Selangor, Malaysia.

The challenges in dealing with out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths in Malaysia

In Malaysia, out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and young adults present a complex set of challenges. According to the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN), there were about 18,000 cases of teenage pregnancies in Malaysia in 2019, with about 1,000 of those being out-of-wedlock pregnancies. This high incidence points to a multifaceted problem that requires urgent attention.

One of the primary challenges is the social stigma associated with out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Despite changing societal norms, these pregnancies are often viewed negatively,

leading to shame and isolation for the pregnant teenagers. It can result in adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation. A study by the Zaiden and Mastura (2020) showed that 15.5% of pregnant teenagers experienced moderate to severe depression.

Out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths present numerous challenges for individuals, families, and society as a whole. One of the primary concerns is the potential negative impact on the educational and economic prospects of young parents. Teenage parents often face difficulties in completing their education, which can limit their career opportunities and perpetuate a cycle of poverty. According to a study by Hendrick and Maslowsky (2019), teenage mothers are less likely to finish high school and pursue higher education compared to their peers. This educational disadvantage can have long-term consequences for both the parent and the child, affecting their economic well-being and overall quality of life.

Another significant challenge is the emotional and psychological well-being of young parents. Teenagers and youths who become pregnant outside of marriage may experience increased stress, anxiety, and depression due to the social stigma and societal judgment associated with their situation (Salina & Hidayah, 2020). These emotional burdens can have a detrimental effect on their mental health and may hinder their ability to provide adequate care and support for their child (Butt & Munro, 2007). Moreover, the lack of emotional maturity and coping skills among young parents can further exacerbate these challenges, making it more difficult for them to navigate the demands of parenthood effectively (Hodgkinson et al., 2013).

Access to healthcare and proper prenatal care is another critical challenge for teenagers and youths facing out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Due to their age and often limited financial resources, young parents may encounter barriers in accessing comprehensive healthcare services. This can lead to inadequate prenatal care, which increases the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth (Tohid et al., 2021). Lack of prenatal care can also result in adverse health outcomes for both the mother and the baby, including preterm birth, low birth weight, and developmental issues (Bovier, Chamot, & Perneger, 2004). Efforts to improve access to reproductive healthcare and provide comprehensive support services tailored to the unique needs of young parents are essential in addressing this challenge.

Social support and the involvement of family and community play a crucial role in addressing the challenges of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths (Bovier et al., 2004; Saim et al., 2017). The lack of support systems and resources can significantly impact the well-being of young parents and their ability to provide a nurturing environment for their child (Abadi et al., 2012). Initiatives such as parenting programs, mentorship opportunities, and community-based support groups can help young parents develop essential parenting skills, receive guidance, and find a sense of belonging. Research has shown that positive family and community involvement can mitigate the negative consequences of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and contribute to better outcomes for both the parent and the child (Dippel et al., 2017).

Lastly, the lack of access to reproductive health services and supports for these young mothers is a challenge (Salina & Hidayah, 2020). While Malaysia has made strides in improving access to healthcare, these services often do not extend to unmarried pregnant teenagers due to societal stigma and legal barriers. According to a 2023 report by the World Health Organization, only 20% of unmarried pregnant teenagers in Malaysia had access to prenatal care. As such, addressing out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and young adults in Malaysia requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that involves addressing societal norms, improving sexual education, providing economic support, and ensuring access to reproductive health services.

This study, undertaken in Selangor, thus aimed to gather insights from a panel of experts on the increasing trend of non-marital pregnancies among adolescents and young adults. This is supported by the State Health Department's Teenage Pregnancy Statistics from 2012 to 2015, which showed Sarawak, Johor, and Selangor as the states with the most cases of pregnancies among teenagers aged 10 to 19. In 2016, the Malaysian Ministry of Health also reported that Selangor had one of the highest numbers of teenage pregnancies. This pattern underscores the escalating number of non-marital pregnancies in Selangor, the state with the highest rate in peninsular Malaysia. Past research seldom included expert opinions, mainly focusing on aspects such as teenage involvement in premarital sex, the consequences and factors of pregnancy, and facilities for pregnant teens. As such, this study aims to delve into the expert panel's perspectives on the main challenges and programs to address the rise in non-marital pregnancies among teenagers and young adults. The panel consists of experts well-acquainted with issues pertaining to non-marital pregnancies.

There are several problem statements related to this study, and the following are some of the questions that this study aims to address

1. How do teenagers and youths in Malaysia perceive and understand the preventive measures implemented to address out-of-wedlock pregnancies?
2. What experiences and challenges do stakeholders face in trying to address the increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth in Malaysia?
3. How do various stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of programs implemented to address the issue of out-of-wedlock pregnancies? What are their experiences with these programs?

Research Methodology

This study aimed to investigate the preventive strategies, main challenges, and the effectiveness of programs developed for out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth, from the viewpoint of expert panels in Selangor, Malaysia. The researcher utilized a qualitative research methodology to gather pertinent data and details. Qualitative research involved studying circumstances and individuals to acquire in-depth and comprehensive information.

Informants

The study's informants comprise expert panels distinguished by their specific areas of expertise located in Selangor, Malaysia. These panels have been chosen based on their knowledge concerning the rise in pregnancies outside of marriage among teenagers and young adults in Selangor. Six informants involved in this study by using purposive sampling as

the preferred method. Purposive sampling is a technique where the researcher uses their discretion to select members of the population for participation in the study.

Instrument

The interview questions are designed based on the study objectives. The interview questions consist of two main components:

Part 1 – Contains demographic information of the informants, such as age, level of education, state of origin, ethnicity, and religion.

Part 2 - Structuring the Interview Protocol.

Data Collection

In the study, the researcher used a semi-structured interview method for data gathering, blending components from both structured and unstructured interviews. The structured interview involved a predetermined series of questions, which all participants answered in the same order. Conversely, during the unstructured interview, the researcher engaged in a question-and-answer conversation to probe further into the participants' feelings or thoughts, utilizing open-ended questions. Additional questions were introduced during the interview to elucidate and expand the insights derived from the participants.

Preventive measures of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth from the perspective of expert panels

The Role of Institutions

Institution is a structure or mechanism of social order that regulates the behavior of a group of individuals. The term institution is commonly used to refer to customs and patterns of behavior that are important to society as well as specific formal organizations of government and public services. As a structure and mechanism of social order among humans, institutions are one of the main objects of study in the social sciences including sociology, political science, and economics. In fact, institutions are part of the social construction of a community and they determine how we interact with each other in society. Every community has certain institutions that bind members of the community together. These institutions serve as the basis for formal or informal culture, values, expectations, objectives, hierarchy, goals, policies, constitution, unwritten laws or codes of behavior. Whether the community is a family, school, sports or social group, cultural or religious group, community center, hostel, or nursing home, it requires a structure that defines the group.

Family

According to the informant, in these challenging times, social support from family members, especially parents, needs to be given to children so that they do not feel isolated and unloved. Previous studies, such as Zakiyah et al (2015), have stated that teenagers and youth who become pregnant outside of marriage face various difficulties that require social support. Wan Fadhilah (2011) also stated that the lack of social support from family and society can lead them to loneliness, depression, making inappropriate decisions, and various other problems. This is because they are afraid to tell and ask for help from their own families about their pregnancy and take a self-isolation approach. Therefore, Wel et al (2002) suggest the importance of the parental role. They state that parents can influence and develop aspects of

well-being among teenagers, including positive self-image, identity development, life satisfaction, social competence, emotional problems, and problem behavior.

"If we don't fix the family, the family institution itself will cause it to become a big problem because if parents don't control their children, their children will befriend and influence other people's children. So that circle will become bigger and bigger. If we don't control the surrounding factors - starting with the parents - then sooner or later, the consequences will be that circle will expand." (Tuan Syazmee)

"So the steps to address this problem go back to the family. We need to create awareness." (Ustazah Fathiyah)

"The second thing is that the role of each institution is important, especially starting from the family up to the community. So this role needs to be taken seriously." (Encik Ayub)

Furthermore, the informant also stated that family counseling plays a crucial role in helping the family members of unmarried pregnant women understand the emotions and feelings of pregnant women towards the problems they face. In addition, family counseling can foster empathy within family members so that they can provide physical and emotional support to the pregnant woman.

"But actually, the main thing that can really make them change is family. That's why the role of family counseling needs to be emphasized so that parents won't overlook it." (Puan Sakinah)

Moreover, the informant stated that proper sex education needs to be provided to their children from an early age. This is because the importance of sexual education from home can prevent children from getting involved in out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Inadequate sex education from home has caused teenagers and youth to seek information about sex from people outside their family circle. Therefore, they are at high risk of being exploited by those who want to take advantage of them and are irresponsible.

"But if we look at it from bottom to top, as a family, we need to educate our children well. That means we need to educate them with the proper approach to sex." (Encik Hanif)

Society

Each society has its own unique culture that is formed from the close relationships among its members since the society's inception. Research findings have shown that society plays an important role in addressing out-of-wedlock pregnancies. According to the informant, being concerned about other people's children is important in promoting a healthy and prosperous life. This is because the concept of being concerned about other people's children is not just about minding other people's business, but it helps to monitor and prevent these children from engaging in immoral activities. Today, the attitude of being concerned about other people's children is not emphasized enough because it is considered not their responsibility to care as these children still have families to watch over them. However, if this thinking

persists in society, out-of-wedlock pregnancies will continue to be prevalent. Therefore, if society practices being concerned, various social problems can be reduced and prevented early on.

"In our society, we are raised with the culture of minding our own business. 'Do whatever you want as long as it's not my child.' But we also need to think, if we don't pay attention to other people's children or don't know what's going on in our environment, eventually, the things in that environment can influence us as a family and our children. And yes, we can't change the whole world, but we can change what's in front of us, what's in our community." (Encik Hanif)

The informant also stated that the current societal stigma needs to be corrected. This is because most people still look down upon those who have made mistakes and become pregnant out of wedlock. For them, this action is a shameful act that can bring negative elements to their families. Even the child born out of wedlock is hated and shunned by society because of their parents' actions. Therefore, society's perception of this issue needs to be addressed because society is one of the agents that can shape and help these teenagers and youth to change for the better. If society does not play this role, individuals who engage in sexual activities without marriage will feel unworthy of change, and the percentage of them committing the same mistake is high.

"The third thing is the perception of society. The perception of society about this issue needs to be corrected. It means not looking at the individual. As far as possible, we need to help them. It's true that they made a mistake, but on the other hand, we need to bring them back to the right path so that they can change, especially the innocent child." (Encik Ayub)

"But we can raise awareness among society to think about the future of these children." (Prof Khadijah)

The challenge in addressing the increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youth.

Busy Parents

Parents are the primary protectors in shaping the character and identity of their children. However, the busy schedule of parents often causes them to neglect their responsibilities, resulting in their children becoming distant from them. According to Mariam et al (2019); Hizlinda et al (2021), family institution problems, busy parents, and neglect of religion are among the contributing factors to the increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Today, parents are seen as too busy earning a living that they forget their responsibilities, leaving their children exposed to external factors that influence their lives. The busyness of parents can affect the relationship and cause various problems that affect the well-being of the family. When this happens, children tend to skip school, socialize freely, wander at night, loiter, and so on. According to the informant, some parents are too busy working that they provide inadequate supervision to their children. Ultimately, this can lead to children daring to do things that they shouldn't.

"There's no time to take care of them. If the child gets pregnant, whether married or not, there is no time to take care of them. Isn't that true? This is the challenge they face." (Prof Khadijah)

"Secondly, in terms of the family. So, in today's society, we also need to consider the socio-economic aspects of the family. In the current situation, both parents have to work to support, provide education, send them to school, and so on. In today's situation, both parents have to work." (Encik Hanif)

Lack of knowledge among the parents

Knowledge is defined as the meaning within a person that drives them to seek meaning for themselves, life, and their surroundings. Human understanding of something allows them to interact and engage with others to make good decisions. Thus, a knowledgeable person is someone who feels the arrival of meaning within themselves, allowing them to recognize, distinguish, and evaluate things within their environment.

"So what are the main challenges, how do we educate on religious knowledge, household knowledge, sharia law to these parents?" (Tuan Syazmee)

"Perhaps the challenge is with families where there is no knowledge, how to educate children, and the education should emphasize aspects of interaction and modesty." (Ustazah Fathiyah)

Through interviews with informants, the challenge seen in addressing the increase in teenage pregnancy is related to knowledge. According to the informant, knowledge of household management is the foundation for every couple who wants to get married or who are already married. Every couple who wants to get married or become parents needs to learn household management knowledge, such as religious knowledge, parenting knowledge, sharia law, and so on. This is because, today, even couples who are married and have children still do not understand their responsibilities and are indifferent to the duties they need to fulfill as a wife, mother, father, and husband. According to the informant, many couples got married during the lockdown period and divorced during the lockdown period as well. This happens because most of these couples do not know about their responsibilities and lack knowledge of household management. Therefore, it is essential to prepare a married couple who are truly ready to live a married life according to Islamic law. With knowledge and preparation, the family can undoubtedly build a harmonious and prosperous household.

Environment and Culture

Culture is a way of life that develops and is shared by a group of people and is passed down from generation to generation. According to Taylor (1974), culture is a complex that includes knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, customs, and any other abilities and habits acquired by humans as members of a society. Endraswara (2006) states that culture is the life of humans who constantly maintain and carry out various actions that can produce cultural actions.

"Okay, the main challenge is the environmental factor. Our culture. That's why Islam emphasizes the environment, the surroundings... because we cannot develop someone from the inside." (Encik Ayub)

"Our main challenge is that we are moving towards a borderless world where many things have been normalized in our lives. We think this is normal. So that's the main challenge for me." (Encik Hanif)

Based on the transcript of the interview above, the culture today has shown that many things that have happened have become a habit to the entire society. According to the informant, in looking at the borderless world today, it is undeniable that the influence of external influences that have entered the minds of young people has influenced them to do things that are not appropriate. The challenges of modern times that afflict our society today, such as the influence of print and electronic media and the progress of science and technology in the era of a borderless world, have worsened the situation because they have caused some members of our society to lose their identity. For example, western cultural elements that have entered our country have been a debate for some time. In terms of ideology, entertainment, and so on, it has seeped into the minds of teenagers and young people with the sophistication of technology available today. Many negative actions or elements are imitated by them and become a common thing done among them.

According to Bandura (1997), children and adolescents learn a lot through imitation. He stated that adolescent behavior is the result of childhood upbringing experiences. Therefore, most adolescent behavior follows the wishes of parents and society. Deviant behavior is the result of imperfect upbringing and socialization processes. Changes in society have resulted in changes in perception of society. Based on adolescents learning through imitation, adolescents will experience social problems where they are trapped with negative imitative elements such as smoking, drug use, and other negative cultures. However, there are a few of our own society who do not care about what is happening and there are even those who support and allow this to happen. The thinking ingrained in them regards it as a habit without thinking about the long-term effects. Therefore, if it is not seriously addressed, it becomes a challenge for all parties if this issue is ignored in addressing this issue.

The effectiveness of the programs and measures implemented by stakeholders regarding the issue of out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

Ineffective

The programs implemented to address the issue of teenage pregnancy are intensive efforts by various parties to achieve the goal of reducing the problem. Medical practitioners, psychologists, counselors, social support groups, and community development programs including development agents act to improve the quality of life for the public as one of the main objectives in addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy (Vazquez et al, 2009). Therefore, the provision of social support and the design of programs is one way to reduce the problem of unmarried pregnant women. However, these programs are seen to have shortcomings and are considered ineffective in addressing the increase in teenage pregnancy. Through this study, researchers found that the programs and measures taken by stakeholders on the issue of teenage pregnancy are less effective due to incomplete goals and financial issues.

The program objectives are not comprehensive.

When examining the existing programs, it cannot be denied that various efforts have been made by the government and NGOs to address the phenomenon of unmarried pregnant women by organizing campaigns and programs at various levels. In Malaysia, there are various

intervention programs such as the "Baby Hatch," Parenting @ Work Program, School Reproductive Health Module (PEKERTI), and so on. However, the findings of the study indicate that most of these programs are ineffective and have incomplete targets. This is because, according to the informant, prevention programs need to consider various aspects by taking into account the needs of the target group, namely teenagers and young adults. Furthermore, the programs did not reach the intended participants comprehensively.

"Okay, we can't deny that there are programs organized by the government and NGOs. Actually, during the school holidays, there will be a lot of programs. However, in my opinion, we can't say that they are ineffective, but there is a possibility that certain programs are not achieved. The targets are not comprehensive enough." (Ustazah Fathiyah)

In addition, the informant states that the campaigns or programs are not entirely problematic, but their implementation is one-off. According to her, the programs or campaigns carried out must be clear and practical, and they need to be done continuously rather than done occasionally. Therefore, the intervention programs must be intensive enough to enable behavioral changes and cover the majority of the target group with an effective economic cost.

"But, one problem with these campaigns is not the problem itself, but the implementation is one-off. So, it's good to educate people about reproductive organs and so on. But this thing is not continuous." (Encik Hanif)

"I think the help available now is only 40%. The other 60% is pushing people to do indecent things. Understand...we're stuffing them with indecent things now. So, this 40% will also affect the other 60%. TV, making dramas, but if we make dramas about good things, people don't want to watch..." (Tuan Syazmee)

Program Expenses

In carrying out programs in Malaysia, it has become a norm for costs to be involved in every activity that is to be conducted. Every program involves expenses that need to be paid for obtaining, spending, and maintaining project affairs, usually in the form of money, time, and energy. The cost estimate starts from the beginning of project development until the end of the program and it is a critical component in project management. Based on the interviews conducted, the informants stated that every intervention or prevention program carried out by both the government and the private sector needs to involve a lot of expenses to accommodate every activity or participant involved in the program. The parties involved in implementing these programs need to incur large financial expenses to accommodate every program's journey.

"That's it, sometimes pregnancy can happen in the blink of an eye. I want to say that all the programs held are costs. Okay, to me, all of this is a cost." (Prof Khadijah)

"Ok... From the government's point of view... well, they have a strong control, but it's like this... Nowadays, everything is about money, everything is about money."

TV shows, I take them lightly. The government can control the TV, but the issue is all about money. Look at the drama at 7 o'clock, what is it about?" (Tuan Syazmee)

Another finding is that the existing programs already have strong controls in terms of their implementation. However, most programs that are presented to the public usually involve interference from external parties to gain benefits. For example, the informant stated that the government has control over television programs, but most of them have shortcomings in terms of ineffective control due to financial reasons. Therefore, it becomes a challenge to see the effectiveness of the programs carried out to address the increase in premarital pregnancy among adolescents and young people.

The Implications of the Study

The implication of this study is to focus on the factors, effects, and preventive measures of the increasing rate of premarital pregnancies among teenagers and youth from the perspective of expert panels. In this study, informants shared their opinions on the issue of premarital pregnancies among teenagers and youth. According to the informants, the phenomenon of premarital pregnancies is becoming increasingly widespread and needs to be addressed with the cooperation of all parties. With modernization and advanced technology, it poses a challenge that requires high efforts from individuals, parents, society, government, and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, the issue of premarital pregnancies needs to be assessed in terms of the effectiveness of the programs implemented and by looking at specific indicators appropriate for implementation, taking into account cultural, religious, and social aspects for at-risk individuals.

Therefore, the impact of this study on institutions such as government and non-governmental organizations is to focus on their efforts towards the recovery and development of the young generation to help them manage the effects they experience. For individuals, it is by providing preparation for teenagers and youth to deal with and avoid negative sexual behaviors that may have negative consequences in the future. For communities, it is by raising awareness among society about the importance of taking a holistic view of the factors, effects, and preventive measures in addressing premarital pregnancies among teenagers and youth. In summary, the phenomenon of unwed mothers in countries like Malaysia is a challenge that comes with globalization and modernization that will come regardless of race, ethnicity, and religion. It goes without saying that this is a social phenomenon that needs to be recognized and given proper attention and strategies in the future.

Comprehensive sex education and access to contraception are vital in preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers and youths. By providing accurate information about reproductive health, contraception methods, and responsible decision-making, comprehensive sex education can empower young individuals to make informed choices and reduce the incidence of unplanned pregnancies. Accessible and affordable contraceptive methods, including long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) and emergency contraception, are essential components of comprehensive reproductive healthcare services. Efforts to ensure widespread availability of sex education and contraception can contribute to reducing the rates of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and promote the overall well-being of teenagers and youths.

Conclusion

The effects of out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers in Malaysia are far-reaching, impacting individuals, families, and society at large. The educational, health, and economic consequences for the young parents, the social and financial strain on their families, and the societal issues of child abandonment and increased state expenditure on welfare services together create a complex and challenging situation. These cumulative effects highlight the need for robust, multifaceted interventions to support these young parents, their families, and children, while also working towards preventive measures to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancies outside marriage.

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