

Exploring the Effectiveness of Emotional Regulation and Psychological Support for Unmarried Pregnant Adolescents

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Abstract

This study investigates the emotional challenges faced by unmarried pregnant adolescents, focusing on the effectiveness of emotional regulation techniques and psychological support strategies, including counseling and Islamic guidance (da'wah). These adolescents often experience high emotional distress, including confusion, anger, disappointment, and hopelessness, influenced by both pregnancy and societal stigma. The study evaluates coping strategies, emphasizing the significance of problem-solving, social support, and emotional expression. The effectiveness of psychological support, particularly through Islamic counseling and motivational guidance, is examined as a key factor in improving emotional well-being. This research contributes to understanding how targeted emotional regulation and psychological interventions can alleviate distress and improve coping mechanisms in unmarried pregnant adolescents.

Keywords: Emotional Regulation, Psychological Support, Unmarried Pregnant Adolescents, Counseling, Coping Strategies

Introduction

Adolescent pregnancy, especially among unmarried teenagers, often results in significant emotional distress. This distress manifests in various forms, such as confusion, anger, disappointment, and a sense of hopelessness. As adolescents face not only the challenges of pregnancy but also the stigma associated with being unmarried, their emotional well-being can be severely impacted. This study explores the role of emotional regulation techniques and psychological support in helping these adolescents navigate their emotional struggles and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

Previous studies have shown that unmarried pregnant adolescents are more likely to experience negative emotional states, including anxiety, depression, and confusion (Siti Aisyah & Sidar Nasrun, 2016). The emotional turbulence of adolescence is compounded by the societal stigma surrounding unmarried pregnancy, leading to heightened emotional distress.

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in a healthy and adaptive manner (Gross, 2002). In the context of unmarried pregnant adolescents, emotional regulation is critical in reducing the risk of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of psychological support, including counseling and guidance, in improving emotional outcomes for adolescents facing significant life challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Counseling, especially from a culturally appropriate or faith-based perspective, can help individuals gain better emotional control, reduce stress, and find meaning in their circumstances.

The motivation behind this study stems from the increasing need to address the emotional challenges faced by unmarried pregnant adolescents, a group that is often marginalized and stigmatized in society. These adolescents face unique emotional difficulties, including confusion, anger, disappointment, and hopelessness, which can significantly impact their well-being. With limited access to appropriate psychological support, especially culturally sensitive approaches, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring the effectiveness of emotional regulation techniques and psychological support strategies, such as Islamic counseling.

This research contributes to existing literature by not only identifying the emotional states and coping strategies of unmarried pregnant adolescents but also evaluating the effectiveness of psychological interventions designed specifically for this group. It highlights the potential of integrating Islamic guidance with psychological support, offering a culturally relevant framework for addressing emotional distress. By doing so, the study provides valuable insights into how targeted emotional regulation and psychological support can improve the emotional well-being of these adolescents and help them develop healthier coping mechanisms in the face of societal stigma and personal challenges. This research also underscores the importance of developing holistic, non-judgmental support systems for unmarried pregnant adolescents, ensuring their emotional and psychological needs are met in a comprehensive manner.

Literature Review

Recent studies have highlighted the significant mental health challenges faced by unmarried pregnant adolescents, including emotional dysregulation, depression, anxiety, and social stigma. These adolescents often experience a range of emotional difficulties compounded by societal rejection and limited access to psychological and healthcare support. Emotional dysregulation, a common issue in this group, increases the risk of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Gross, 2019). Emotional regulation interventions, such as mindfulness and coping strategies, have been found effective in helping adolescents manage stress and emotional challenges associated with pregnancy (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2021).

Psychological support services, including counseling and peer support groups, play an essential role in reducing isolation and fostering resilience among unmarried pregnant adolescents (Wade, 2020). These interventions help mitigate feelings of loneliness and empower adolescents to cope with the complexities of their situation. However, existing support systems are often insufficient in addressing the comprehensive needs of unmarried pregnant adolescents, highlighting the necessity for integrated services that combine emotional, psychological, and practical support (Hughes & Nunn, 2022). Healthcare providers need to be trained to offer empathetic, culturally sensitive care to reduce stigma and encourage adolescents to seek help (Wade, 2020). To improve mental health outcomes for unmarried pregnant adolescents, a holistic approach is essential. This approach should integrate emotional regulation with accessible, comprehensive, and non-judgmental support systems that cater to the unique needs of this demographic (Gross, 2019). By addressing both emotional and practical challenges, such an approach can support unmarried pregnant adolescents in navigating their pregnancies and ultimately promote their overall well-being. However, existing support structures often fall short in addressing the comprehensive needs of unmarried pregnant adolescents. There is a need for integrated services that combine emotional, psychological, and practical support. Healthcare providers and policymakers must collaborate to develop and implement programs that are accessible, non-judgmental, and tailored to the specific needs of this demographic. Training healthcare professionals to offer empathetic and culturally sensitive care is also essential to reduce stigma and encourage adolescents to seek help.

In conclusion, while emotional regulation and psychological support are crucial for unmarried pregnant adolescents, the effectiveness of these interventions hinges on their accessibility, comprehensiveness, and cultural sensitivity. A holistic approach that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by these adolescents is necessary to improve their mental health and overall well-being.

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative survey design that aims to identify predictions and relationships between the "Psychological Approach to Da'wah and its Relationship with Action Strategies for Dealing with the Emotions of Unmarried Pregnant Teenagers (RHTN). The design of this study was chosen through a survey study which is a quantitative method by using a questionnaire as a research instrument to obtain information about RHTN living in Sekolah Harapan, Jasin, Melaka, Darul Wardah Shelter House, Muar, Johor and Johor Women's Refuge House, Johor Bahru, Johor .This study employed quantitative research design with a survey

conducted among 105 unmarried pregnant adolescents from six different protection centers. The survey included sections on emotional states, coping strategies, and psychological support approaches. Emotional states were measured using a five-point Likert scale across five key emotions: romantic, confused, angry, disappointed, and hopeless. Coping strategies were assessed using items on problem-solving, social support, emotional expression, and avoidance. Psychological support strategies were measured by the perceived effectiveness of Islamic counseling, tazkiyat al-nafs (spiritual purification), and motivational guidance.

Results

Demographics of Respondents

Table 1, show a total of 105 teenagers who are pregnant out of wedlock were the respondents in this study which involved six (6) RHTN shelter centers namely at Sekolah Harapan, Jasin Melaka, Baitus Solehah, Johor Bahru, Johor, Rumah Perlindungan Wanita, Johor State Islamic Religious Council (MAINJ)), Johor, Raudhatus Sakinah Rawang Branch, Selangor, Raudhatus Sakinah Melaka Branch and Rumah Singgah Kita, Ipoh, Perak. All these shelters are under the control of the Malaysian Social Welfare Department (JKM). The JKM will monitor from all angles such as administrative management, accommodation facilities, adoption and so on in all these welfare centers. The year teenagers started living in shelters is shown in Table 4.6 which shows a total of 52 teenagers (49.5%) started living in shelters in 2019, while 49 teenagers (46.7%) started living in shelter in 2018. Three teenagers (2.9%) started living there in 2018 and only one teenager (1%) stayed there since 2016.

Descriptive Statistic

Table 1

Emotional States and Coping Strategies Among Adolescents

Emotional State	Prevalence (%)	Intensity
Romantic emotions	58.1	High
Confusion	54.3	High
Disappointment	65.7	High
Coping Strategy	Mean (M)	Frequency
Problem-solving	4.49	High
Social support	4.01	Moderate
Emotional expression	3.93	Moderate
Avoidance	3.84	Moderate

The results presented in Table 1 suggest that adolescents in the study primarily experience emotional states of *romantic emotions*, *confusion*, and *disappointment*, with the latter being the most prevalent at 65.7%. The high intensity of these emotional states indicates that adolescents are navigating significant emotional challenges, which aligns with previous studies suggesting that adolescence is a period of heightened emotional reactivity (Lambie & Sias, 2015). Romantic emotions, confusion, and disappointment often signal developmental stressors that can be influenced by personal relationships, academic pressures, and social expectations (Nelson & Robinson, 2019).

The high intensity scores of these emotions (as indicated by the "high" intensity categorization) point to the fact that these emotional experiences are not transient but may have long-lasting impacts on adolescent well-being. According to *Erikson's psychosocial development theory* (Erikson, 1968), adolescence is a stage marked by identity formation and emotional turmoil, which may contribute to these heightened emotional states. The significant prevalence of disappointment (65.7%) further indicates that unmet expectations or perceived failures are central emotional struggles for adolescents, reinforcing the importance of addressing such feelings during this developmental stage.

In terms of coping strategies, the adolescents most frequently employed *problem-solving* ($M = 4.49$) as a strategy for managing their emotions. This indicates a proactive coping approach, suggesting that the adolescents in this study may have been empowered or motivated to deal directly with their emotional challenges. This is consistent with research showing that adolescents with strong problem-solving skills are better equipped to handle stress and emotional adversity (Compas et al., 2017). However, the fact that *avoidance* ($M = 3.84$) was also frequently used suggests that despite a tendency to engage in active problem-solving, some adolescents still resort to avoiding dealing with their emotional issues, potentially as a defense mechanism. Avoidance as a coping strategy can be adaptive in the short term but may lead to unresolved emotional issues if not addressed (Aldao et al., 2010).

Social support ($M = 4.01$) emerged as the second most common coping strategy, which underscores the importance of relationships with family, peers, or significant others in buffering emotional distress. This is supported by social support theory, which posits that emotional support from others can help reduce the psychological impact of stressors (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Given that *social support* was rated as moderately effective, it suggests that while adolescents value support from others, they may not always feel adequately supported, which could impact their emotional resilience.

Interestingly, *emotional expression* ($M = 3.93$) was also moderately used as a coping strategy. This aligns with findings that suggest that expressing emotions, especially in healthy outlets, can aid emotional regulation and contribute to psychological well-being (Gross, 2002). However, the relatively lower rating compared to problem-solving and social support indicates that emotional expression might not be the primary strategy for these adolescents, possibly due to a cultural or social stigma surrounding vulnerability or emotional disclosure (Haggerty et al., 2019).

The psychological support strategies identified by the adolescents, particularly *Islamic counseling* and *motivational guidance*, were seen as the most effective forms of emotional support. These approaches are culturally relevant and may provide a sense of comfort and stability to adolescents dealing with emotional distress. *Islamic counseling*, which integrates spiritual guidance with psychological support, appears to offer a holistic approach to emotional regulation. This form of counseling might resonate with adolescents from Islamic backgrounds who find meaning and comfort in faith-based coping mechanisms (Sulaiman et al., 2018). The inclusion of *motivational guidance* further indicates that adolescents not only require emotional support but also need encouragement to remain hopeful and determined during challenging times. These findings suggest that a tailored approach to psychological

support, which incorporates both emotional and motivational elements, can be particularly beneficial for adolescents facing emotional difficulties.

In summary, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the emotional states and coping strategies used by adolescents facing emotional challenges. The findings highlight the complexity of adolescence, characterized by intense emotional experiences and a combination of active and avoidant coping strategies. These results emphasize the need for targeted interventions that promote effective coping strategies, such as problem-solving and social support, while also addressing the potential negative impacts of avoidance. Furthermore, integrating culturally relevant psychological support strategies, like Islamic counseling, can provide meaningful and effective assistance to adolescents navigating emotional distress.

Discussion

The findings from this study emphasize the importance of emotional regulation for unmarried pregnant adolescents. The ability to manage emotions such as anger, confusion, and disappointment is essential for reducing emotional distress and improving mental well-being. Problem-solving emerged as the most effective coping strategy, suggesting that equipping adolescents with the tools to actively address and resolve their problems can significantly reduce emotional distress. Encouraging adolescents to engage in problem-solving may be a key intervention to help them regain a sense of control over their lives.

Psychological support, particularly through Islamic counseling, was found to be an effective strategy for helping unmarried pregnant adolescents cope with their emotions. This approach, which integrates faith-based guidance with practical counseling, aligns with the values and beliefs of many adolescents in the study, providing them with a sense of spiritual and emotional support. Motivational guidance, which encourages positive thinking and resilience, also played a pivotal role in helping adolescents navigate the challenges they faced. Social support from family and peers was another important factor in helping adolescents manage their emotions. Adolescents who had strong social support systems were more likely to use problem-solving strategies and express their emotions in healthy ways. This highlights the protective role that a supportive social network can play in emotional regulation. Peer support may be beneficial in creating a sense of community and belonging for unmarried pregnant adolescents.

Conclusion

The results suggest that adolescents experience significant emotional challenges, with romantic emotions, confusion, and disappointment being the most prevalent, and these emotions are often felt with high intensity. This emotional burden is further reflected in the coping strategies they employ, with problem-solving being the most frequently used approach, followed by social support, emotional expression, and avoidance. While many adolescents actively seek to address their emotional struggles through problem-solving and social support, the presence of avoidance strategies indicates a tendency towards emotional retreat, which could point to difficulty in confronting or dealing with their issues head-on. These findings highlight the complexity of emotional regulation among adolescents and the need for targeted support strategies that can help them navigate these challenging emotions more effectively.

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