

## Perceptions of Online Newspapers on Adolescent Pregnancy in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** Adolescent pregnancy is an essential social and health issues in Malaysia. Local online newspapers have published substantial articles on this phenomenon. However, little scholarly discussion on how and what has been presented by online newspaper articles to the public about adolescent pregnancy. This study aimed to describe the perspective of online newspapers on adolescent pregnancy. Data were retrieved from 8 local online newspapers. The selection criteria include any articles, such as highlights, commentary, opinion, letter, report or photo that described the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy in Malaysia. Article published from January 2000 to October 2020 were included. The articles were retrieved, discussed and analysed using framework analysis. Matrices of emergent themes were developed following the questions guide. Online newspapers might misrepresent the actual occurrence of adolescent pregnancy in Malaysia. The contributing factors to adolescent pregnancy in this country include misuse of media and information technology, poor parenting and family support, lack of knowledge on sexuality, poor accessibility for contraception and association of adolescent pregnancy with sexual violence against girls. The main consequences were physical and psychological problems, social exclusion and infant abandonment. Interventions include proper parenting style, sexuality education and implementation of special programs to address adolescent pregnancy. The public can learn much knowledge about adolescent pregnancy from online newspapers which function as a beneficial medium for dissemination of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Online newspaper, media, adolescent pregnancy, teenage pregnancy

## 1. Introduction

Adolescent pregnancy is defined by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2018 as any pregnancy occurring in an adolescent girl aged 19 or younger, usually between the ages of 13-19 [1]. In recent decades the number of adolescent pregnancy has increased and become a major health issue for both developing and developed countries [2]. Among developed nations, the highest adolescent pregnancy rates are in the USA (57 pregnancies per 1,000 females), and the lowest was in Switzerland [2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in developing countries the rates are much higher; about 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 and some 1 million girls under 15 give birth every year, most in low- and middle-income countries [3]. In Malaysia, using data from the National Obstetrics Registry collecting data from 14 general hospitals in the country, in 2010 a total of 7077 cases of adolescent pregnancy were reported; about 5% of total deliveries or 50 per 1000 deliveries in Malaysia [4]. Because the global population of adolescents continues to grow, projections indicate the number of adolescent pregnancies will increase globally by 2030, with the greatest proportional increases in West and Central Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa [3].

Local studies suggested many factors contributing to adolescent pregnancies. Key risk factors identified for adolescent pregnancy include poverty, rape, sexual abuse, inadequate parental supervision, low educational expectations, and peer influence [4]. The surveys on Malaysian adolescent knowledge of reproductive health consistently show barely adequate levels of knowledge. Malaysian schools don't teach about the sex act per se and highlight the pros and cons. The eventuality of not knowing the consequences of having unsafe sex deceives the girl into pregnancy and enduring the problems thereafter. The incidence of sexual activity among the young people has risen dramatically from 2.3% for 13- to 17-years-old in 2014 to 7.3% in 2017 [5]. According to a 2015 survey backed by the Ministry of Health Malaysia, 35% of Malaysian female youths believed that having sex for the first time will not lead to pregnancy, and one in five Malaysians believed that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) could be transmitted by mosquitoes – which is an alarming interpretation. Parents are to blame for not filling the gaps in their children's understanding of the birds and the bees, noting that this was often due to cultural taboos and upbringing [5].

The WHO report 2018 found that in developing countries adolescents face barriers to accessing contraception including restrictive laws and policies regarding the provision of contraceptive based on age or marital status, health worker bias and/or lack of willingness to acknowledge adolescents' sexual health needs, and adolescents' own inability to access contraceptives because of knowledge, transportation, and financial constraints [3]. Besides, in other developing countries, poverty has been shown to be the key that associate with increased rates of adolescent pregnancy [3]. Poverty also has been the prominent factor for adolescent pregnancy in the developed country such as the United Kingdom; about one-half of all adolescent pregnancies occur in the 30% most deprived families while 4% occur among the least deprived [1].

The effects of adolescent pregnancies are numerous, which includes affecting the mother's physical and mental health and also the baby's health. Many times adolescents do not seek adequate medical care during their pregnancy, which can result in moderate to severe complications. The more common medical complications that may occur during adolescent pregnancy include anaemia, toxemia, high blood pressure, placenta previa and premature birth of the baby [6]. Pregnancy may impact the baby's growth and development over time. There may be delays in intellectual and motor development, and more ongoing medical and behavioural issues in babies born to teen mothers. Ongoing medical care is crucial to prevent these complications from threatening the pregnancy and the mother's wellbeing [6].

Other than the physical risks, it also leads to other social implications like abandoned babies, unsafe abortion, school dropouts, and emotional challenges due to a shocking change in lifestyle [3]. They may be banished from home because of the social stigma attached to adolescent pregnancy. With neither skills nor qualifications to get a job, they are likely to grow within the low economic and

social position. According to the WHO, complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second cause of death for 15-19-year-old girls globally [3]. Every year, some 3 million girls aged 15 to 19 undergo unsafe abortions. Babies born to adolescent mothers face a substantially higher risk of dying than those born to women aged 20 to 24 [3].

In this recent era of advance in technology, media has become a widely used resource for information, providing both beneficial and damaging effect on the users. Often, researchers focused more on the negative effect of the media. Hence creating awareness on ways of how to depict matters related to adolescent pregnancy is essential. Through mainstream and popular media, journalists or writers could help by portraying matters related to adolescent pregnancy in particular about sexuality in a more productive manner. Online media can play an important role in increasing the knowledge and awareness of the public on adolescent pregnancy. In Malaysia, there are substantial articles in media such as online newspapers which highlight stories and matters related to sexuality and adolescent pregnancy. However, no scholarly discussion has been published to evaluate the presentation of media on this issue. Hence, this study aimed to examine the content and perception of online newspaper on adolescent pregnancy in this country and through thematic analysis highlights what knowledge can be gathered from the published articles.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Study Design

This is qualitative research of data gathered from the online archives of local newspapers. The framework analysis was used to analyse the data.

### 2.2 Data Collection

Data gathered from local newspapers; the Star or Star Online, Utusan Malaysia or Utusan Online, New Straits Times, Berita Harian, Harian Metro or MyMetro, Kosmo, Sinar Harian, and Malay Mail. All these online newspapers publish new articles on their respective online websites every day. Online newspaper archives were chosen because they were readily available and accessible for reviews compared to printed newspapers. In order to retrieve data from the online archives, terms used is 'teen pregnancy', 'teenage pregnancy' or 'adolescent pregnancy', and for *Bahasa Malaysia* newspapers, the term used was '*remaja mengandung*' or '*remaja hamil*' or '*kehamilan remaja*'. The selection criteria included any articles, such as highlights, commentary, opinion, letter or report that described the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy in Malaysia. It was not restricted to written articles only; photos that were published together with the articles were also retrieved. Article published from January 2000 to October 2020 were included.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Prior to data retrieval, a workshop was carried out to train the research assistants to ensure consistencies in the procedure of collecting and analyzing data. The process of data retrieval and data analysis was supervised by a consultant psychiatrist who is also an expert in qualitative research. Research assistants were grouped into eight groups according to the published newspapers. We adapted the fundamental strategy of framework analysis to analyse data [7, 8]. Refer to Table 1 of the summary of the steps taken for data analysis. We carried out main steps of framework analysis including familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation [7,8]. Each time an article was retrieved, the article was copied, pasted, saved and compiled in the form of a word document.

A set of questions was developed as a guide for analysis; i) What is the statistics of adolescent pregnancy in this country? ii) What are the possible contributing factors for adolescent pregnancy? iii) What are the consequences of adolescent pregnancy? And iv) What are the interventions for adolescent pregnancy?

**Table 1: The steps taken for data analysis**

Step	Analysis of the articles
1	Training for consistencies in data retrieval and analysis
2	Grouping of research assistants according to 8 newspapers which published articles from January 2000 until October 2020
3	Searching for articles using specific terms related to adolescent pregnancy
4	Articles and pictures were copied, pasted, saved and compiled in words document
5	For familiarization of data, iterative reading, line by line of the written articles and pictures
6	Matrices using excel form were developed following the questions guide for mapping and charting process
7	Analysis of emergent subthemes and themes using thematic analysis
8	Emergent themes and the chosen paragraphs of the scripts were tabulated in the excel matrices (Refer Table 2)

The process of data analysis carried out which involved repetitive reading and careful line-by-line analysis on the content and themes of each article which may be the answer for the questions. The content portrayed by the photos was also analysed. All themes emerged from thematic analysis which answered the question guide were charted in the developed matrices saved in excel form. Discussions were done between team members over any disagreement with the themes or content of the articles. Appropriate sentences that represented the themes were chosen to be included in the result. In order to maximise the anonymity, any names of the person and place that related to adolescent pregnancy published by the newspapers were anonymous. Refer to Table 2 of the matrices developed to summarize of the emergent themes according to the question guide.

**Table 2: The matrices of themes and examples of scripts from the articles**

Themes	Examples of scripts retrieved from the articles
<b>What is the number or statistic of adolescent pregnancy in this country?</b>	
Numbers or rates	"An average 18,000 teen girls in Malaysia get pregnant each year."
Trends or patterns	"Among the adolescent pregnancies recorded in the state, 1,445 cases (50%) involves youths aged 15 to 17 while 1,342 cases (46%) involved those aged 18 to 19."
<b>What are the possible contributing factors of adolescent pregnancy?</b>	
Misuse of media and information technology	"Easy access to pornography which is shared on social media... leads teens to experiment what they watch with strangers they meet on social media."
Poor parenting and family support factors	"Neglect by parents, as well as unlimited internet access, are also contributing to the rise in adolescent pregnancies."
Lack of knowledge of sexuality	"Knowledge about contraceptive methods was limited with less than 50% being aware of condoms, pills, or the rhythm procedure."
Accessibility for Contraception	"Information and access to contraception remain very limited among adolescents in Malaysia."
Sexual violence against girls	"The four men, all farmers... a teenage pregnancy involving a 19-year-old is one of the victims."
<b>What are the consequences of adolescent pregnancy?</b>	
Infant abandonment	"Stress made adolescent girls, who were pregnant out of wedlock, do something beyond sanity that sometimes end in death, unsafe abortion and baby dumping."
Physical and psychological problem.	"Pre-term labour, foetal growth retardation and delay in infant development are among some of the adverse outcomes."

Social exclusion	“[parents] want their daughter to be out of the school because they fear their children will face stigmatization.”
<b>What are the interventions for adolescent pregnancy?</b>	
Enhancement of policies	“To implement the widest range of health and social policy solutions to reduce unintended adolescent pregnancies in Malaysia.”
Proper parenting style	“Most importantly, it is the parents’ responsibility to bring up their children according to principles that will guide them on what is right and wrong.
Sexuality education.	It would also be beneficial to strengthen these knowledge-building programs to ensure that they delve deeper into the subject.
Special programs	Another program called One-Stop Teenage Pregnancy Committee (OSTPC) at the hospital was suggested.

### 3. Results

There were 165 articles gathered from data collection; the Star or Star Online (n=44), Utusan Malaysia or Utusan Online (n=20), New Straits Times (n=32), Berita Harian (n=22), Harian Metro or MyMetro (n=12), Kosmo (n=12), Sinar Harian (n=12) and Malay Mail (n=11).

#### 3.1 Number or statistics of Adolescent Pregnancy

Most reviewed online newspaper articles described the occurrence of adolescent pregnancy in Malaysia by providing numbers or rates, trends or patterns of cases. For example, it was highlighted in one of the articles that,

“an average 18,000 teen girls in Malaysia get pregnant each year and seek medical attention at government health clinics; according to Health Minister...of the total, 25% or approximately 4,500 cases involved out-of-wedlock pregnancy” (New Straits Times, 29 October 2015) [9].

The trend of adolescent pregnancy seems to be fluctuated. Earlier articles described increasing trend, and the number seems to be reduced from 1,500 monthly documented in 2015 (The Star Online 29 October 2015) [10] to 300 cases monthly in 2017 as reported in one of the articles (Sinar Harian, 4 March 2019)[11].

A description was also given on the background of adolescents. The highest group of adolescents who were pregnant was at their upper secondary level of education or as described by one of the articles,

“Among the adolescent pregnancies recorded in the state, 1,445 cases (50%) involves youths aged 15 to 17 while 1,342 cases (46%) involved those aged 18 to 19” (The Star Online, 16 March 2016)[12].

The youngest pregnancy was described by one article; an isolated case in which an 11-year-old adolescent who lived in a rural area was found pregnant (Malay Mail 16 October 2016a)[13].

#### 3.2 Possible Contributing Factors

Of the total reviewed articles, more than three-quarter of the newspaper articles described the possible contributing factors to adolescent pregnancy. The subthemes emerged from the analysis include misuse of media and information technology, poor parenting and family support factors, low education and poor knowledge on sexuality, poor service accessibility, and sexual violence against girls and young people.

- *Misuse of media and information technology*

In most of the reviewed articles, misuse of social media and information technology have been suggested to increase in the number of adolescent pregnancy mediated by an increase in inappropriate sexual behaviours among adolescents, “Easy access to pornography which is shared on social media... leads teens to experiment what they watch with strangers they meet on social media” (Malay Mail 16 October 2016b)[14]. Further, it was highlighted in one of the articles that media might disseminate negative values to the public which could lead to adolescent pregnancy,

“Western films have a tendency to normalise children born out wedlock, living together before marriage as well as atheism, which is not suited to our culture and norms,” (The Star Online, 27 November 2017)[15].

- *Poor parenting and family support*

Among the fundamental factors that had been discussed in the online newspaper articles were poor parenting and lack of family support. Lack of attention and quality time between parents and their children were described by several articles. For example, one article stated that,

"Some girls have problems with their parents. They end up being lonely and frustrated. The lack of parental attention is the biggest cause of adolescent sexual relations and pregnancies. When parents neglect their role as guardians and custodians, their young daughters search for love and attention outside the home. Some girls have sex to rebel against their parents. These girls become easy prey for sexual predators. Mobile apps allow them to meet people." (New Straits Times, 10 January 2016) [16].

Parents were also blamed for allowing adolescents to be exposed to influences from social media or unlimited internet services. As one of the articles stated, “Neglect by parents, as well as unlimited internet access, are also contributing to the rise in adolescent pregnancies” (The Star Online, 24 November 2014) [17]

- *Lack of knowledge on sexuality*

Acting in concert with the lack of parental involvement is knowledge of sexuality. Most of the articles highlighted that inadequacy of sexual education among adolescents contributed to the high incidence of adolescent pregnancy,

“It’s hard for them to get the information they want from their families because talking about sex or sexuality is taboo. Then there are those parents who are too busy with their work or business to even have the time to talk to their children about these matters.” (Malay Mail, 17 July 2016) [18].

Without knowledge, adolescents are not well informed to make a decision about their sexuality. One of the articles described this matter,

"A nationwide survey on Malaysian Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) reveals that a shocking 34 per cent of respondents seem to think that sexual consent is not important. Only 60 per cent are aware of the fact that consent is required... The survey, which involves 1,071 respondents between the ages of 18 and 29, focuses on five key areas — the source of SRH education, pregnancy knowledge, STIs awareness, contraception knowledge, gender and relationships. It reveals startling and widespread misconceptions about pregnancy, sexual violence and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It also shows that 79 per cent of Malaysian youth have received some information on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) [however] more than half believe that it is not sufficient to help them make responsible decisions” (New Straits Times, 28 August 2016) [19].

According to another article,

“Basic sexual and reproductive health knowledge was at best mediocre even in age groups of up to 24 years old. Knowledge about contraceptive methods was limited with less than 50% being aware of condoms, pills, or the rhythm procedure” (The Star Online, 27 Sep 2017)[20].

Further, adolescent pregnancy was prominent among those who failed to get an adequate general education. For example, it was described in one of the articles,

"Adolescents who do attend school were recorded to have the highest rates of sexual relationship experiences or 39 per cent compared with colleagues studying at universities and schools.-translated." (The Star Online, 27 November 2017) [15].

- *Accessibility for Contraception*

Another important topic highlighted by many articles is the lack of contraceptive use. Apart from a lack of knowledge regarding contraceptive use, lack of accessibility to services that provide contraception to adolescents was another important contributing factor. As stated by one of the articles,

"...Therefore, it is not surprising that there has been a rise in adolescent pregnancies over the past several years...because young adults lacked access to and knowledge of contraception, they ended up having unprotected sex"(New Straits Times, 10 January 2016)[16].

The inaccessibility of contraceptive use such as oral pills or condoms to adolescents as described by one of the articles could lead to other negative consequences,

“Government policies on family planning that only allow contraceptives to be given to married couples have contributed to the country’s decline in maternal health and a rise in teen pregnancies...This service is not available to unmarried girls who are sexually active. Hence, they either go to private clinics or are more likely to have unprotected or unsafe sex resulting in unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortions, STIs or HIV and AIDS (Malay Mail, 6 May 2015) [21].

- *Sexual violence against girls*

One of the important causes of adolescent pregnancy is sexual violence against adolescents and young people; rape and incest. In one of the article, a minister stated that the incidence of rape contributed to adolescent pregnancy was small, but agreed that statutory rape was prevalent as evidenced by his statement,

“ The Global School-based Student Health Survey carried out by the ministry in 2012 which involved teenagers from the age of 13 to 17 across the country revealed that 50.4 per cent of the respondents admitted having had sex for the first time before reaching the age of 14” (The Star Online, 29 October 2015)[10].

Often the offender was someone familiar or known to the victim such as her boyfriend or schoolmate, the most trusted person of the victim,

"They trust their friends and get tricked into having sex. The next day, they realise that they were raped. Some are misled by boyfriends into believing that having sex is okay and they won't get pregnant. These are everyday occurrences” (New Straits Times, 10 January 2016) [16].

One example was the case involving a 17-year-old girl who was pregnant after being raped by nine soldiers; one of them was the victim's boyfriend (My Metro, 25 Februari 2018)[22]. A month later, a story of a 15-year-old girl who was raped by four of her schoolmates became the highlight of local newspapers (New Straits Times, 16 March 2018) [23].

In a few cases, the offender was the male family member such as brother, father, grandfather or uncle. One of the examples includes the story of a girl who was raped by several members of her family as described below,

“The four men, all farmers, were sought for allegedly raping two family members. The victims are granddaughters, daughters and nieces to the suspects... a teenage pregnancy involving a 19-year-old is one of the victims. The teenager went to check her bulging stomach at a health clinic ..., only to be told she was 25 weeks pregnant. She then confided to doctors her predicament that started since she was 13, a year before she stopped schooling” (New Straits Times, 16 August 2017)[24].

The victim may not only be the indexed case, but often there are other girls in the family who became the victims too.

### 3.3 Consequences of Adolescent Pregnancy

Online newspaper articles have described several consequences of adolescent pregnancy. The common subtheme emerged were social exclusion, infant abandonment or baby dumping and physical as well as psychological problems.

- *Infant abandonment*

Infant abandonment or baby dumping was the most cited by online newspapers as a consequence of adolescent pregnancy. As described by one of the articles,

“In Malaysia, research has shown that an average of 18,000 teenage girls get pregnant each year. The majority of adolescent pregnancies were unplanned and about 50% may end up in abortions. Unfortunately, Malaysia does not have any data on abortions. Baby dumping cases have been averaging at about 100 annually for more than a decade. This equates to approximately one case every three days, and majority of the babies are found dead” (The Star Online, 12 July 2019) [5].

It was believed that the issue of infant abandonment has a relationship with social stigmatization and shame felt by family and parents of having an ex-nuptial baby. Most of the adolescent pregnancy was an unintended pregnancy which made them stressful and took inappropriate decision to reduce the stress as described by one of the articles,

“Stress made adolescent girls, who were pregnant out of wedlock, do something beyond sanity that sometimes end in death, unsafe abortion and baby dumping” (The Star Online, 29 October 2015)[10].

- *Physical and Psychological Problems*

The most common physical consequences mentioned in the articles were having contracted with HIV /AIDS and Sexual Transmitted Disease (STD). Perhaps, it was related to the sexual behaviour rather than pregnancy itself as described by an article, "An early sexual intercourse and unprotected or unsafe sex also have the consequence of getting the sexually transmitted disease, HIV and AIDS" (The Star Online, 23 Sep 2012)[25]. Only a few articles mentioned about the obstetric complication of adolescent pregnancy such as,

"Adolescent pregnancies, which are mainly unintended, are shown to be associated with poorer outcomes for both the mother and baby. Pre-term labour, foetal growth retardation and delay in infant development are among some of the adverse outcomes. Unsafe abortion with its associated and, on occasion, life-threatening dangers to the mother is another adverse consequence of unintended pregnancies" (The Star Online, 27 Sep 2017)[20].



Other consequences include severe complications which can lead to death as described by another article,

“Additionally, pregnancy at a young age will also expose teenagers to various health problems such as toxemia, anaemia, prolonged delivery pain and miscarriage. In fact, those who are pregnant at the age of 15 to 19 also face the risk of death two times higher than older women. – translated” (Utusan Online, 10 June 2003)[26].

Moreover, adolescent pregnancy could also give rise to several psychological problems as described by one of the articles,

“... unwanted teen pregnancies are giving rise to more cases of suicide, depression, family problems, health problems and also financial problems affecting the young mothers and their babies” (The Star Online, 17 Feb 2015) [27].

One article described the personal experience of an adolescent about the psychological consequences of having the baby,

"I cannot avoid being cursed by people. The distress makes me have emotional disturbance until I was given a mental patient card from the hospital ... From a glance, [M] is like another girl. She is beautiful, cheerful and healthy and knows everyone around her and can manage her baby well. Only at certain times, [the emotional disturbances came] when she rekindled back the previous memories; [M] would be depressed and easily irritable - translated” (Sinar Harian, 13 Mei 2013)[28].

- *Social exclusion*

In the majority of cases, the adolescents who were pregnant out-of-wedlock received negative reactions from family and society. One of the articles described the experience of a volunteer who worked in a shelter about parents' and family's reactions,

“There are parents who are not only unwilling to accept the baby whom [their daughter] conceived but also punished their children by rejecting them from the family. This pregnant girl is out-casted from home and disowned as their child...When this happens, the girl will be under great pressure. In addition to her boyfriend who does not want to be responsible, then her family abandoned her. [Further] the attitude of the society only knew to punish without trying to help this girl for repentance - translated” (My Metro, 8 March 2017)[29].

The consequences of social exclusion are further damaging to the adolescent as described by one of the articles,

“Due to denial and fear of rejection by their families, pregnant adolescent mothers tend to skip antenatal care and, in worst case scenarios, some do not even bother to record their pregnancies” (New Straits Times, 10 January 2016)[16].

Moreover, some of them will not be able to continue schooling because of stigma as described by an article,

“[parents] want their daughter to be out of the school because they fear their children will face stigmatization... schools with teenage pregnancy cases might want them out because if they did not leave, the schools would be compelled to make police reports if there were criminal offences involved... schools were also concerned that the cases might tarnish their image or influence other students to do likewise” (The Star Online, 23 Sep 2012)[25].

### 3.4 Interventions for Adolescent Pregnancy

There are four important subthemes emerged from the articles on intervention for adolescent pregnancy; enhancement of policies, proper parenting style, sexuality education and special programs for adolescent and young people.

- *Enhancement of policies*

A few articles urged the authority to enhance the policies related to adolescent pregnancy. In a recent letter written to one of the online newspapers which was endorsed by leaders and representatives of civil society organisations, professional societies, scientific associations, faith-based organisations, government agencies and departments, private for-profit entities, non-governmental and non-profit organisations proposed seven ways to address this issue including “to implement the widest range of health and social policy solutions to reduce unintended adolescent pregnancies in Malaysia; to implement adolescent sexual and reproductive healthcare policies that are wholly based on scientific evidence and ethical considerations; and to resolve the issue of child marriage in Malaysia, in support for the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry” (The Star Online, 11 Sept 2020)[30].

- *Proper parenting style*

Parents were advised to provide proper parenting in particular related to instilling good moral and religious values as described by one of the articles,

“most importantly, it is the parents’ responsibility to bring up their children according to principles that will guide them on what is right and wrong. Students can only study what morality is about in schools, but the rest has to be done at home. Teachers can teach only so much. Parents are the ones who should be inculcating moral values in children. Parents have to nurture and guide their children to become honest, trustworthy and kind adults and upright citizens. Parents have to provide their children with spiritual and religious guidance” (New Straits Times, 6 May 2016 )[31].

Moreover, in relation to the use of media, parents were advised, “to be tech-savvy to monitor and keep track of their children’s activities on their mobile phones and the Internet” (New Straits Times, 6 March 2016)[32].

- *Sexuality education*

More than three-quarter of the articles recommended sexuality education for adolescent and young people. A few challenges to the existing sexuality education were also described. The examples include as described by one of the articles,

“One of the biggest problems... in schools here is that people tend to equate sex education with biology, when in fact, there’s a lot more to the subject... The mode of delivery in the Malaysian education system is the chief stumbling block as students are usually not encouraged to ask questions. What little sex education there is here starts too late, and things are made worse as the body is seen as a taboo subject” (The Star Online, 22 April 2010)[33].

Hence, several suggestions for improvement were highlighted. One of the articles described in-length about a few important matters on sexuality education and emphasized about consent before having sex,

“...the easiest way of addressing these issues is to start talking about them. Instead of turning a blind eye and brushing aside serious issues, young Malaysians must be aware of and feel comfortable to talk about [Sexuality and Reproductive Health] SRH, be it with parents, friends, doctors or counsellors. Only by talking about it, will they know the importance of consent as well as their individual rights. Towards this end, everyone — parents, schoolteachers, counsellors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private and

public sectors — has a role to play. We should work together to deepen their knowledge pool, in addition to strengthening advocacy and education efforts. By doing so, NGOs together with the private and public sectors will be able to work towards designing policies and programs that are relevant to young Malaysians. It would be also beneficial to strengthen these knowledge-building programs to ensure that they delve deeper into the subject and, at the same time, reach a wider audience... this sensitive topic effectively requires a collective effort. The NGO feels that the importance of consent must be introduced to pupils before they are sexually active to ensure the message is absorbed and understood. Sexuality education should be an independent and compulsory topic in schools. NGOs should spread the message of the importance of consent through publicity and campaigns to diffuse this message to society” (New Straits Times, 28 August 2016) [19].

Further, one of the articles also emphasized on the importance of well-prepared educators that can deliver the subject to adolescents,

“You can't implement sex education at a click of a button. You have to tackle the myths as well, and the educators need to be comfortable and savvy in teaching the subject”(The Star Online, 22 April 2010)[33].

- *Special programs*

A few programs have been implemented, and new ideas were suggested to tackle this matter in a comprehensive manner involving the collaboration of various disciplines. For example, a shelter called *Generasiku Sayang* was planned by the Ministry of Health with the aims to,

“ increase the awareness and public concern to tackle issues related to women and pregnant girls in comprehensive and collective manner which is effective to increase the health status of women, children and adolescents in this country – translated ” (My Metro, 29 October 2015)[34].

It was planned that the program would be implemented in every state in this country. Another program called One Stop Teenage Pregnancy Committee (OSTPC) at the hospital was suggested,

“OSTPC was brought up to the cabinet after suggestions from the Health Department to solve the teenage pregnancy issues, especially regarding social status, economic status, religion and education. Registration of the baby is also a challenge... the OSTPC comprises various agencies such as the Health Department, Social Welfare Department, Education Department, Registration Department, Islamic Development Department, LPPKN and non-governmental bodies” (The Star Online, 17 June 2015) [35].

Furthermore, several shelters and a special school for the adolescent girls and young women who are pregnant have been operationalised, including shelters such as *Taman Seri Puteri* (The Star Online 26 October 2013)[36] and *Sekolah Harapan* (Utusan Online 22 August 2010)[37]. The shelters would help those girls or young women to be in a safe place while reducing their contact with stigmatizing community and increase their knowledge of moral and religious aspects. The special school would allow them to continue their education while being pregnant.

A program called baby hatches have been introduced to place unwanted newborn from being discarded by his/her parent,

“The baby hatch is a box equipped with air-conditioning, mattresses and pillows, lighting, closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, including sensors to detect the body weight and trigger the alarm to alert the centre’s guard that a baby had been placed in the box...Once the baby is placed in the box, it cannot be re-opened. This serves as a security measure to prevent irresponsible parties from taking the baby. The rescued babies were returned to their respective

families following counselling. In other cases, the babies were handed over to foster families” (New Straits Times, 14 May 2016) [38].

Up until May 2016, the article described further,

“So far, a total of 759 couples have registered to adopt babies [and] 11 baby hatches had been set up nationwide...and ...since 2009 a total of 137 abandoned babies have been rescued. Of this number, 22 babies were found in the baby hatch” (New Straits Times 14 May 2016)[38].

#### **4. Discussion**

This study made it clear that substantial information could be gathered regarding adolescent pregnancy from online newspapers. However, readers should make a wise decision about the content of the articles. One of the important lessons learned from the review of newspaper articles was that misrepresentation of data may occur. Newspaper articles have highlighted adolescent pregnancy as a major social problem and the public has been reminded of its increasing trend. Such a presentation requires further careful interpretation. Often frequency of adolescent pregnancy is presented in the form of numbers without stating the exact rates, hence resulted in a perceived increase of cases. In contrary, according to annual statistics reported to the World Bank, the birth rates among adolescents in Malaysia have shown a marked reduction. From about 78 births per 1000 women ages 15-19 in 1960, the rate reduced markedly to 19 births per 1000 women ages 15-19 in 1985. Since 2000 till 2016, data from the department of statistics, published by World Bank have shown stable rates of about 13 births per 1000 women ages 15-19. Moreover, comparing to other countries such as ASEAN countries, low and middle-income countries and Muslims or Arab countries, Malaysian's rates are actually much lower and almost comparable with those in high-income countries (Refer Table 3).

Adolescent pregnancy is a complicated matter that occurs as a result of the interaction of many factors from the micro-level or individual level (such as adolescent) to proximal level (such as parents, family, neighbourhood) and distal level (such as society, authority, culture). The phenomenon should be seen as a whole, not merely putting the responsibility to the adolescent girl who is pregnant. For example, our study found that many blamed the pregnant girls for lacking sexuality education, but on the other hand, others have begun to recognise the various challenges experienced by parents and teachers to fulfil their responsibility of providing effective sexuality education for the adolescents. Furthermore, at the distal level, other factors such as the failure of authorities to provide culturally acceptable comprehensive sexuality education as well as to offer accessible reproductive health services to young generation have also been highlighted. This opinion supported a further argument by local researchers that effective, comprehensive sexuality education and accessible services are vital to address adolescent pregnancy and sexual behaviours among adolescent in this country [39].

Another important factor learned from the review was the importance of the relationship between violence and adolescent pregnancy. As described in the articles, a proportion of pregnant adolescents were victims of sexual assault, including statutory rape, non-statutory rape, and incestuous behaviour. Perhaps, the violent act resulted in adolescent pregnancy in cases of non-statutory rape and incest are straightforward, but not for cases of statutory rape; having sex with a girl under the age of 16 even with mutual consent is considered rape (Law of Malaysia; Act 574; Penal Code; Section 375 and 376). Literally, this indicated that cases of adolescent pregnancy (aged less than 16) are the case of pregnant girls who are the victims of statutory rape. This topic stimulates further discussion of the appropriate deterrence or punishment for the girls' boyfriends whom both have a mutual agreement for sex; whether or not the boys should be punished for 20 years imprisonment as provided by the legal provision.

**Table 3: Comparison between Malaysia Birth Rates per 1000 women ages 15-19 in 2016 and Rates of other Selected Countries**

Country	Birth Rates per 1000 women ages 15-19 in 2016
Malaysia	13
ASEAN Countries	
• Philippines	60
• Thailand	52
• Indonesia	48
• Vietnam	29
• Singapore	4
Low and middle-income countries	49
Upper-middle-income countries	30
High-income countries	16
• United States	21
• United Kingdom	14
• Australia	13
• Japan	4
OECD countries	22
European Union	10
East Asia and Pacific	21
Muslim or Arab world	47
• Saudi Arabia	8
• Qatar	10
• Pakistan	38
• Bangladesh	84

*Reference: Data from World Bank; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?locations=MY>*

Articles presented in the newspapers may also be used to stimulate discussion regarding the issue of marriage among Muslims; which allow marriage with adolescent girl less than 16 with the approval the Syariah Courts (Law of Malaysia; Act 303; Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories); Section 8). As described in the articles, girls who marry as children are less likely to achieve their full potential. They are more likely to leave education early, suffer domestic violence, contract HIV/AIDS and die due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth. This further may encourage debates on; should the Government review all relevant laws relating to child marriage? Should the legal minimum age of marriage be set to 18 for all Malaysians? This comes in line with Malaysia's commitment to end child marriages by 2030 as one of the targets set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Target 5.3). Such questions should be highlighted so that the public can gain more information through media. Moreover, other related issues yet highlighted in the newspaper articles were autonomy, mental capacity to make decision and age of giving consent to have sexual intercourse among adolescents. Adolescent marriages are more likely to suffer from mental health disorders such as depression. This impacts their decision-making capacity. Are they mentally sound? Do they understand the duties and responsibilities that are normally attached to a marriage? This further stimulated a discussion on who should be making decisions on their behalf; husband or their parents. Certainly, by reading newspapers articles, the public would be encouraged to gain more information regarding this issue.

## 5. Conclusion

Media have significant roles in educating the public on teenage pregnancy. This study is the first of its kind in this country to evaluate media role in presenting important issue such as teenage pregnancy. Through online newspaper articles regarding adolescent pregnancy, the public can learn

the positive aspects, take lessons of the negative aspects and discuss the controversial issues highlighted by the articles. The findings of this paper have to be read with limitations that the analyses were not carried out to include all newspapers in Malaysia and no investigation on hard copies of the newspapers. Journalists should be wise to choose professional and ethical ways of presenting adolescent pregnancies so that online newspapers can be used effectively as a medium to enhance knowledge of this phenomenon.

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