



Depression & Social Support Among Wed & Unwed Mothers

KEYWORDS

Depression, Social support, Unwed mothers

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ABSTRACT

Unwed mother is a person who is pregnant or has a dependent child or dependent children, out of wedlock. The present study aims at the problem of unwanted pregnancies and consequent psychological state, and the role of social support in influencing the levels of depression. Sample consisted of the wed and unwed mothers. Tools used were Beck depression inventory (BDI-II) and the multidimensional scale of perceived social support. Result reveals that there is much higher depression level in the unwed mothers. Social support from the significant other, family and friends were found to be lower in the unwed mothers compared to wed mothers. The result shows that a negative correlation is obtained between different dimensions of social support and depression, indicating that when the social support decreases the level of depression increases.

INTRODUCTION

Unwed motherhood can cause immense psychological pressure on a woman (Singh & Singh, 1982). However, it is even difficult to have a correct estimate of the number of unmarried mothers in India because such incidences are always kept as a family secret, and seldom come to the public notice and hence the research done in the area also is limited. Unplanned childbirth leaves the single mother vulnerable to a wide range of psychological issues of depression and disruption of subjective well-being. Research indicates that single mothers experience excessive stress and that the stress is a result of various factors like of social isolation, lack of family support, the need to provide financially for the family concurrently with caring for the home in ways traditionally handled by men and women, acquiring new skills, and parenting (Subramaniam et al., 2014).

Unwed mother is a person who is pregnant or has a dependent child or dependent children, out of wedlock. Teenage pregnancy and unwed motherhood can cause immense psychological pressure on an adolescent girl (Singh & Singh, 1982). The age of menarche among Indian girls, which is reported to be declining, ranges from 11.5–14.5 years, with the current average age being 13.5 years. This has resulted in earlier onset of puberty and secondary sex characteristics, and increased reproductive exposure (Bhatia, 1993). With sexual maturation taking place earlier and the age of marriage delayed, the period of non-marital fertility, is increased, exposing more people to more years at risk of an unwanted, premarital pregnancy. An estimated eight million induced abortions are performed in India, (FPAI, 2004) and anecdotal evidence suggests that a fairly large proportion of them are performed for adolescent mothers and unmarried teenage girls. The present study aims at an in-depth analysis of the problem of unwanted pregnancies and consequent psychological state, and the role of social support in influencing the levels of depression.

Objectives

1. To find out the differences between the wed and unwed mothers in levels of depression and social support.

2. To find out the relationship between the level of depression, and social support among wed and unwed mothers.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the wed and unwed mothers in levels of depression and social support.
3. There is no significant relationship between the level of depression, and social support among wed and unwed mothers.

Method

Participants

The sample for the present study consisted of two groups: wed mothers and unwed mothers. The wed and unwed mothers are comprised of 30 each between the ages of 20-35 years. Random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the present study

Instruments

1. **The Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition:** The Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition (BDI-II) is a 21-item self-report instrument for measuring the severity of depression in adults and adolescents aged 13 years and older developed by Dr. Aaron T. Beck. The test-retest correlation of 0.93 was significant ($p < 0.001$) and the correlation between BDI-IA and BDI-II was .93 ($p < 0.001$).
2. **The multidimensional scale of perceived social support:** Gregory D. Zimet, Nancy W. Dahlem, Sara G. Zimet, & Gordon K. Farley (1988) have formed the multidimensional scale of perceived social support. The Cronbach's alpha for total MSPSS was .91; for the family, friends, and significant others subscales the values of coefficient alphas were .90, .94, and .95, respectively. The scales have demonstrated strong test-retest reliability over a 2- to 3-month interval ($r = .72$ to $.85$).
3. **The personal data sheet:** Information such as age, religion, socioeconomic status, type of family relationship, type of abusers and other relevant information were collected using this instrument.

Results and discussions

Table 1: Distribution of samples based on socio-economic status, type of family relationship, alcoholic or non-alcoholic father, sexual abuse, type of abuser and education.

Sl no	Variables	Type	Unwed Mothers (N=30)		Wed Mothers (N=30)	
			frequency	percentage	frequency	Percentage
1	Socio-economic status	high	2	6.70	2	6.70
		medium	6	20.0	6	20.0
		low	22	73.3	22	73.3
2	Type of family relationship	Indifferent	21	70	15	50.0
		Hatred	2	6.7	2	6.7
		Loveable	7	23.3	13	43.33
3	The presence of alcohol dependent father	Alcoholic father	22	73.3	9	30
		Non-alcoholic father	8	26.7	21	70
4	Sexual abuse	Sexually abused	30	100	5	16.7
		Sexually not abused	0	0	25	83.3
5	Type of abuser	Relatives	10	33.3	2	6.7
		Neighbors	20	66.7	3	10
6	Education	Below 10th	24	80	24	80
		Above 10th	6	20	6	20

The table 1 gives the various socio-demographic details of the unwed and wed group. When we compare the socioeconomic status, 73.3 % (22) of unwed and wed mothers are belonged to lower Socio-economic Status. The comparison between unwed and wed mothers on type of family relationship, we can see 70 % (21) of unwed mothers had indifferent relationship in their family, but its counterpart had 50 % (15) of indifferent type. 73.3 % (22) of the unwed mothers had alcohol dependent fathers. But it was just 30 % (9) of alcohol dependent fathers for the wed mothers. 100 % (30) of the unwed mothers had sexual abuse. But only 16.7 % of wed mothers had sexual abuse. 66.7 % (20) of the unwed mothers were abused by neighbors or friends and 33.3 % (10) by the relatives like paternal or maternal uncles and cousins. 80 % (24) of the unwed and wed mothers had the education of below 10th class. But 20 % (20) of the unwed and wed mothers had the education of above 10th class. Thus we can see that the socioeconomic status, education, and type of family relationship are more or less similar in unwed and wed mothers. But the difference is found among unwed and wed mothers are the presence or absence of alcohol de-

pendent father, sexual abuse, and type of abuser.

Table 2: The level of depression between wed and unwed mothers

Level of Depression	Wed Mothers		Unwed Mothers	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Minimal	25	83.33	1	3.33
Mild	4	13.33	12	40
Moderate	1	3.33	6	20
Severe	0	0	11	36.66

The table 2 gives the level of depression among wed and unwed mothers. 83.33% of the wed mothers had minimal level of depression and 13.33% had mild depression. But 36.66 % of the unwed mothers had severe depression, 20 % had moderate depression and 40 % had mild depression. This result shows that unwed mothers have higher level of depression than wed mothers.

Table 3: Mean, SD and 't' value of depression and social support among wed and unwed mothers.

Dimensions	Unwed Mothers (N=30)		Wed Mothers (N=30)		't' value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Depression	25.33	10.142	8.40	5.437	8.060**
Support from significant other	2.67	1.24	5.47	1.30	8.51**
Support from family	2.77	1.35	5.07	1.50	6.21**
Support from friends	2.37	1.27	5.6	1.10	10.52**
Total	2.70	1.05	5.40	1.13	9.55**

** p<0.01

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and 't' values between the wed and unwed mothers in depression and social support. From table 3, it is clear that the mean and SD of depression among unwed mothers (25.33 & 10.142) is significantly higher (t=8.060) than the wed mothers (mean= 8.40 & SD= 5.47). This finding is similar to many studies which shows unwed mothers appear to be at greater risk for both physical and mental health disorders as compared to wed mothers. Psychiatric disorders, in particular depression, have been shown to be more prevalent in single mothers than married mothers (Subramaniam et al 2010, Brown & Moran, 1997).

Table 3 shows that there is significant difference between the wed and unwed mothers in social support and the

mean value of unwed mothers are lesser than that of wed mothers. Low scores suggest the absence of social support and consequently the disruption of wellbeing. Social support can only be of help when it conforms to the coping strategies that are most adequate in the stressful situation (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Single mothers are more likely to experience poor mental health than partnered mothers, and the primary factors associated with this are the presence of financial hardship in particular, as well as perceived lack of social support (Crosier, Butterworth & Rodgers, 2007).

Table 4: Coefficient of Correlation obtained between Different Dimensions of social support and depression among Wed and Unwed Mothers

Dimension	Significant Other	Family Support	Friends Support	MSPSS-Total
Depression	-.863**	-.857**	-.797**	-.887**

** p < 0 .01

Table 4 shows correlation between different dimensions of social support and depression among wed and unwed mothers. The result shows that a very high negative correlation is obtained in different dimensions of social support and depression, indicating that when the social support decreases the level of depression increases. This finding is similar to the study conducted by Cairney et al. (2003) and Grav et al. (2012), which found that there is significant association between perceived support and hospital anxiety and depression. Compared to married mothers, single mothers were more likely to have suffered an episode of depression (12-month prevalence), to report higher levels of chronic stress, more recent life events and a greater number of childhood adversities.

The study implies that the unwed mothers are at great disadvantage in different dimensions of depression and social support when compared to wed mothers. The unwed mothers are in need of rebuilding of their tragic life with proper social support and care from the significant people, and family members. The present study will help to prevent unwed motherhood in the future and an in-depth analysis of the problem of unwanted pregnancies and consequent psychological state, role of social support in wellbeing will also be beneficial to promote the professional help to improve the quality of life of unwed mothers and thus can reduce the risk of mental disorders.

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