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May 20, 1974

THERAPEUTIC ASPECTS OF COUNSELING IN SUPPORT
OF PREGNANT UNWED TEEN-AGED GIRLS

by

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A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

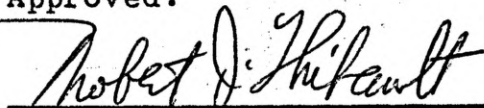
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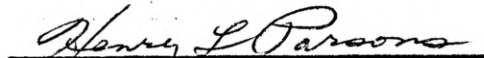
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No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.

The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

Kahlil Gibran

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the study of therapeutic aspects of counseling in support of pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls. Consideration was given to the physical, emotional, and social stresses experienced by these teen-agers.

The study was done for the purpose of determining whether or not counseling could be beneficial to pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls.

The literature was surveyed from the Montana State University Library and arranged in the following sections: the uniqueness of unwed pregnant teen-aged girls; the physical, emotional, and social stresses they experienced; and the effect of counseling in relieving these stresses.

Practitioners in the counseling field who worked with pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls were interviewed to determine if counseling was an effective approach in relieving these physical, emotional, and social stresses.

A comparison was made between the opinions of the interviewees and the ideas presented in the review of literature in an attempt to discover the commonalities and differences in these two bodies of data.

The writer reached the following conclusions:

1. Physical stress was not more prevalent in unmarried pregnant teen-agers than in expectant mothers in general.
2. Unmarried pregnant teen-agers exhibited symptoms of emotional stress exceeding those of married pregnant women.
3. The attitudes of society toward unwed, pregnant, teen-aged girls resulted in high stress being placed on them.
4. Counseling was generally helpful in relieving the physical, emotional, and social stresses experienced by pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls.
5. In certain instances, the effects of counseling enabled the unmarried mother-to-be to accept her pregnancy as a positive and enhancing experience.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Pertinent statistics published for the years 1964-1966 indicated that of all girls aged fifteen through nineteen who gave legitimate first births, forty-two percent had been married for less than eight months when this first child was born (U.S. Dept. H.E.W.:1966). The statistics for this same time period also indicated that nineteen percent of all births for girls in this same age range were illegitimate (U.S. Dept. H.E.W.:1966).

Still another statistic for the same time period showed that 1.65 percent of all girls in this age group had had an illegitimate birth (U.S. Dept. H.E.W.:1966). More recent statistics published by the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare concerning premarital conceptions and illegitimate births have indicated that these rates have either remained the same or have increased in the ensuing years (1970). A conclusion might be drawn from these statistics, namely, that the number of unwed teen-aged girls who have experienced pregnancy is of such a magnitude as to warrent serious consideration by legislators and individuals responsible for administering physical and mental health care programs.

Statement of the Problem

The writer was of the opinion that unwed, pregnant, teen-aged girls experienced physical, social, and emotional stresses to a greater degree than teen-agers who were either not pregnant or else were pregnant and married. In addition, it was felt that counseling may be useful in helping to relieve young, unwed, pregnant girls of their emotional and social stresses.

The problem of this study was two-fold. First, an attempt was made to demonstrate that teen-aged girls who were unmarried and pregnant suffered unusual and extraordinary stresses, both physical and social, as well as emotional. Second, an attempt was made to show that counseling could be helpful to these girls in bringing relief from this physical, emotional, and social stress situation which they experienced.

Purpose of the Study

According to the statistics cited above, there was a substantial number of teen-aged girls in the United States who were pregnant and unmarried. A significant social problem of the 1970's seemed to be demonstrated by these facts. If some sort of relief and assistance is to be

offered to these girls, it was felt that studies should be conducted to determine the nature and type of assistance which would benefit the teen-agers to the greatest extent.

This study will attempt to provide information which might help to further recognize the possible difficulties encountered by pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls and thus may lead to greater emphasis on counseling services.

General Questions Which Were Answered

To determine whether counseling could be beneficial to pregnant, unmarried teen-agers, the following general questions were considered:

1. Do teen-aged unwed girls who are pregnant suffer from unusual physical, emotional, and social stresses? This question considered each of the three above factors in turn as to their effects as stress producing agents.

2. Is the physical, emotional, or social stress which is brought about by pregnancy in unmarried teen-agers a cause of discomfort and unpleasantness? This question concerned itself with establishing whether or not pregnant unwed teen-agers were physically and emotionally uncomfortable because of these stresses.

3. Can counseling be an effective means of relieving the physical, emotional, and social stresses which may be present in unmarried, pregnant, teen-aged girls? This question was addressed to the problem of the effectiveness of counseling as a viable therapeutic procedure in relieving the stresses which may be experienced by pregnant unwed teen-agers.

General Procedures

The procedures which were followed in attempting to answer the general questions posed above were to first review the literature which pertained to these considerations. Next, practitioners in the field of counseling who worked with pregnant, unwed teen-agers were interviewed, with emphasis placed on their views concerning the general questions posed above. Finally, the information gained from the review of the literature was compared and contrasted with the data which were derived from the interviews. All data and information were presented as a descriptive narration.

Limitations and/or Delimitations

This study was restricted to an investigation which

dealt with girls nineteen years of age or less and who were pregnant and unmarried. A delimitation set by the writer was to exclude any direct questioning or interviewing of girls pregnant and unmarried. This delimitation was set because of the writer's opinion that contact by a non-professional individual would represent an infringement on the girls' right to privacy as well as being a possible contaminating factor in the data gathering process.

The literature reviewed was restricted to the books, journals, and periodicals available in the Montana State University library during fall quarter of 1973 and the winter quarter of 1974. The interviews were restricted to practitioners who worked in a counseling capacity in Helena, Montana in 1973-1974 who dealt with pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls. The interviews were restricted to individuals who worked in Helena, Montana for two reasons. The time and expense necessary to interview in more than one city was prohibitive. The institutions located in Helena, such as the Florence Crittendon Home and the various state health care agencies offered more potential interviewees than any other city in Montana.

Definition of Terms

Counselor: An individual trained in one of the fields of psychotherapy, e.g. counseling, clinical psychology, psychiatric social work, and who is receiving financial compensation for therapeutic work in mental health.

Legitimate birth: A baby born to a woman legally married at the time of the birth.

Stress: Any condition, biological or psychological, that taxes the coping capacities of an individual.

Summary

The problem of this study was to determine whether counseling could be an effective means of relieving physical, emotional, and social stresses in pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls. The purpose of the study was to provide more information toward alleviating problems and difficulties faced by teen-agers both unmarried and pregnant.

Before any conclusions could be reached concerning the effectiveness of counseling, three general questions were posed: Do pregnant unwed teen-agers suffer unusual physical, emotional, and social stresses? Would the elimination of these stresses bring comfort and relief to them?

Can counseling help to alleviate the stresses which they are experiencing and have experienced?

In order to answer these questions, the literature was selectively reviewed, interviews with practitioners in the counseling field were conducted, and these two data sources were compared. A discussion of the limitations and/or delimitations was presented, followed by a brief definition of the terms used in this study.

A partial selected review of the literature pertaining to teen-aged out-of-wedlock pregnancies follows.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review represented a partial sample from the numerous journals, periodicals, and books available in the Montana State University library during the fall quarter of 1973 and the winter quarter of 1974. The review was organized around the following topics.

As an introduction, the unique status of pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls in society of the 1970's was reviewed. Then the physical changes and stress resulting from pregnancy were examined. Special attention was paid to the effects which pregnancy created in the physiology of teen-agers. This was followed by an examination of the literature which reported the psychological and emotional concerns and symptoms of unwed, pregnant, teen-aged girls.

Following this, a review was made of the strain which has been exerted on unwed pregnant teen-agers by social groups, particularly parents, schools, and peer-groups. Finally, an examination was made of the literature which discussed the possibility that mental health services such as counseling can be of help to pregnant unwed teen-agers in bringing about relief and alleviation from physical,

emotional, and social pressures.

Uniqueness of Unwed, Pregnant, Teen-aged Girls in
American Society of the 1970's

The very fact that a woman is pregnant represents a unique experience in her life. As Callahan (1970:52) said: "...pregnancy represents a personal crisis for a woman, bringing about a special interaction of mind and body, self and society". Callahan went on to say that this experience of pregnancy has an effect upon the manner in which the woman views herself (1970).

...it is important to see that a woman's evaluation of herself as a person and of herself as a woman will be vitally affected by pregnancy (Callahan, 1970:52-3).

Brown also said that the experience of childbirth can have a profound effect on the mother.

Childbirth is unique among expected life events in its physiological and psychological impact. Out of 1,000 women undergoing childbirth, it is commonly estimated that one or two will develop a psychotic disorder in the postpartum period. An untold number of others suffer from incapacitating but less dramatic disturbances which often go unrecognized. The potential effects of these disorders on the woman and her infant pose an important problem in preventive mental health (Brown, 1972:157).

When this unique experience of pregnancy takes place in a teen-ager, the situation becomes more complex because

the expectant mother may not have reached the developmental stage of adulthood.

Whereas adolescence has been described as a time of moratorium which our culture permits teen-agers before they are required to make lasting commitments about their lives, the pregnant teen-ager is often precipitated into commitments without consciously having chosen her options (Birdwhistle, 1971:458).

According to an article, "Pregnant Teenagers" in Today's Education (1970:27):

...the school-age pregnant girl, whether married or not, must face three life crises at once - the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the acceptance of her role as a mother or as a wife and mother, and the physical changes and the emotional upheaval accompanying pregnancy.

A girl may be physically and emotionally ready to be a mother, but she may not yet have the ability to assume the role of parent.

Thus we have a puzzling phenomenon of girls who have become mothers and accept the mothering role and responsibility and do a reasonably good job of it - while not yet having mastered certain developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood which we ordinarily assume must be mastered before an individual is ready for the psychosocial role of parent (Aug, 1970:590).

When the above conditions are combined with the fact that the expectant mother is not married, the difficulties are compounded.

...out-of-wedlock pregnancy constitutes an extended emotional and social crisis that results when the biologic and psychologic stresses of pregnancy are intensified by the social stress of the out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Bernstein, 1971:16).

In addition to the personal stresses brought about by this situation, the family of the girl may also be disrupted. "For all families an illegitimate pregnancy represents a crisis that disrupts the family structure" (Papademetriou, 1971:85). The educational process of pregnant teen-agers may also be interrupted or terminated. According to Shanas, "pregnancy is the major known cause of drop-outs among secondary school girls in this country" (1971:91). It may also be noted that there could be some underlying problems which may have precipitated the reason for the pregnancy.

A woman's hunger for love, a desire to remove herself from family conflicts and to have a home of her own, a longing for someone to whom she will be important, a wish to punish her parents for their overstrictness or overpermissiveness are some of the psychological factors that lead to sexual intimacies and consequent births outside of marriage (Bureau of Public Assistance, 1960:19).

The girl who becomes pregnant may be demonstrating a need for attention and affection.

Sometimes girls become terribly unhappy, perhaps at home, or at school, or at work. Not knowing what to do about it, they manage to become pregnant so that finally something has to change. In other words, sometimes a pregnancy can be a rather desperate cry for HELP! (Pierce, 1970:140).

Physical Stress and Change Experienced by Pregnant Women

Pregnancy puts many unusual stresses on an expectant mother. Pierce (1970:163) stated that having a baby will place a tremendous strain on the mother's body, due to the physiological changes that take place to accommodate the growth and development of a baby. Burnett noted that these physical changes take place not only in a mother's reproductive system, but in her entire physical structure.

During the course of pregnancy, marked changes take place in the anatomical structure and physiological processes of the mother. The most outstanding of these is the growth which occurs in the uterus, but practically all the systems of the body participate in the changes during this time (Burnett, 1963:145).

It was noted by Osofsky (1968:22) that studies support the notion that adolescent pregnant girls are high medical risks. La Barre concurred with this opinion: "Teen-aged girls are a high-risk group for complications of pregnancy and delivery, especially toxemia and prematurity"

(1972:551). The chances that complications may occur during pregnancy seem to be increased when the woman is a teenager.

Psychological Concerns and Symptoms of Unwed Pregnant Teen-agers

In a study conducted by Smith (1972), it was noted that most women experienced some emotional discomfort on learning they were pregnant, and the functioning of several was seriously impaired. Pochin also felt that pregnancy, especially in a teen-ager, may bring about emotional stress.

Young teen-agers are quite unprepared for the physical and emotional changed of impending motherhood, and when in addition to these the adult world reacts strongly to the new situation, the result can be deeply disturbing (Pochin, 1969:25).

The above opinions were given credence by a resolution passed by the American Psychiatric Association which said:

...pregnancy can constitute a grave threat to the life or mental health of certain women with emotional or mental illness or disordered emotional development and to the mental health of certain prospective mothers.

The discovery of the pregnancy may be the most significant factor in bringing about emotional stress.

In some cases the discovery of the pregnancy...precipitates an acute crisis episode of shock, stress, and anxiety, disrupting the previous adjustment and requiring the organization or development of new coping methods to deal with the trauma (LaBarre, 1972:537).

Pochin seemed to agree with LaBarre.

...the first signs of pregnancy mean dismay and panic. Many look back to the first weeks as the worst part of the whole ordeal, when certainty grows as day follows day, but no one else in the world knows about it (Pochin, 1969:16).

In many instances, the discovery by a girl that she is pregnant can have an effect which might be described as producing severe mental anguish.

For many pregnant girls, the first weeks involve almost intolerable strain, leading sometimes to thoughts of suicide. Anxiety about whom to tell, and how, is mixed with black remorse and dread of public opinion, and intelligent planning is impossible in these early stages (Pochin, 1969:17).

One of the problems which may arise when an unmarried girl finds that she is pregnant is how to tell her family.

The first, most intense emotional crisis occurs when the pregnancy is suspected or confirmed and the girl must tell her family. Many described a sense of shock, incredulity, bewilderment, embarrassment, dread and fear of telling their parents, grief and remorse for hurting and disappointing the family (LaBarre, 1972:539).

For many girls, the fear of being pregnant may be

somewhat relieved, once the pregnancy has been confirmed. If it is their first pregnancy, however, other anxieties about the future may appear.

The greatest fear about pregnancy for these girls, as indeed it is for most women of any age during their first pregnancy, is the unknown of labor and delivery (LaBarre, 1972:553).

Social Pressure Exerted on Unwed Pregnant Teen-agers

In American society of the 1970's, particularly the white Judeo-Christian segment, any woman who had a child out of wedlock was viewed by society as shameful. This view was usually conveyed to both the mother and her child by ridicule, rejection, and exclusion.

The social disapproval which makes pregnancy out of wedlock such a unique problem in our society causes incomparable panic and suffering and sometimes leads to tragedy for the woman and her child (Butcher, 1959:2).

Osofsky (1968) agreed with this concept, when he stated that in this country most all pregnant, unwed, teen-agers will probably feel some degree of shame or social stigma. This negative view of society may have a strong effect on the girl and her feelings about motherhood.

There is still another social conflict expressed in the condemnation of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy or child. This is the conflict concerning the role and functions of the family. An out-of-wedlock pregnancy or child represents a violation of the family ideal. Because there are powerful social needs to maintain the ideal, conflict becomes inevitable. The result is increased personal and social disorganization (Taylor, 1965:30).

In addition to the stigma placed on the girl and her child, society may also attempt to condemn the family of the girl. This can result in conflict between the girl and her parents or guardians.

...society sees to it that by action or by implication a woman who is having a child out of wedlock will come away from the experience with an inferior sense of herself as a mother, whether she keeps her baby or relinquishes it for adoption. This downgrading of the maternal image can do serious injury to the later maternal functioning of the woman whose perception of herself as a mother is thus impaired (Bernstein, 1971:16).

When a girl is pregnant and unmarried, she may also be rejected by her peers. If she is in school, she might feel herself deserted and alone. In cases where pregnant unmarried teen-agers were placed together in a special school, the results were both satisfying and constructive for the girls involved, due to the sharing of common feelings and experiences (LaBarre, 1972).

It should finally be noted that not only is a pregnant, unwed girl ostracized by society, but also that the pregnancy itself may have resulted from her inability to form satisfactory social relationships.

Girls who become pregnant out of wedlock, from whatever stratum of society they come, have in common one factor: They are nearly always emotionally immature and frustrated personalities who have failed to form satisfactory social, personal, and family relationships (Shearer, 1966:7).

Use of Mental Health Services in Bringing Relief to Pregnant, Unwed Teen-agers

Mental health services for pregnant, unwed girls have been inadequate in the past; and for many teen-agers, the experience has ended their ambitions, goals, and plans for the future (Osofsky, 1968). In order to remedy this inadequacy, Osofsky called for changes: "More adequate counseling must be made available for all pregnant teen-agers; they must also be made aware of the existence of counseling" (1968:59). Semmens agreed that counseling should be made available to pregnant, unwed girls if they are to reasonably sort out their thoughts and make those decisions which are best for them.

Too often parents and those who counsel teen-agers fail to consider that it is the teen-ager who is pregnant and who has the final word on what decisions are to be made regarding her pregnancy. She is the one who needs counseling and information and support so that she can make a reasonable decision (Semmens, 1968:16).

Pierce saw the counseling experience as an opportunity for growth and enhancement.

Counseling and psychotherapy can be helpful to many girls who would not necessarily think to pursue it on their own. An unexpected pregnancy in the life of a single woman can bring to the surface all kinds of problems that she never has had to deal with before. Competent professional help may enable her to confront her difficulties (and herself) for the first time, and to experience the pregnancy as the beginning of a more rich and meaningful life (Pierce, 1970:151).

In discussing an approach to counseling with unwed pregnant teen-agers, Semmens stressed the need to be client-centered, rather than problem-centered.

Whether he (the physician) is talking to a young girl seeking pre-marital advice or a teen-ager who is already pregnant and confronted with the problems of early marriage and unplanned pregnancy, he must convey familiarity and compassion for the situation. There must be more than a simple understanding. The patient must feel that her doctor-counselor understands her emotions and appreciates the many complexities of her problems (Semmens, 1968:52).

Pierce (1970) believed that counseling should be directed at clarifying how the girl feels and at what she wants. Pierce warned against counselors who would take it upon themselves to make decisions for their clients. Butcher felt that this client-centered attitude may bring relief to the girl.

Frequently, the pregnant girl or woman has told no one about her pregnancy. Sometimes she has been subjected to too much advice and pressure from parents or friends. It comes as a great relief to most girls to have someone to talk to who isn't deeply involved and who, in addition, has experience and resourcefulness (Butcher, 1959:16).

According to views expressed in a symposium on pregnancy in the high schools (Governor's Conference on Health, 1973), many who counsel pregnant, unwed girls felt that when working with them, it was important for counselors to examine their own feelings and values and to verbally express them to someone else. LaBarre (1972) has noted that she worked in programs in which "the social workers focused their interviews on helping girls cope with crises by encouraging them to express feelings" (1972:545). The results of these programs, LaBarre felt, were beneficial to the girls. Pierce also believed that expression of feelings was necessary for the attainment of mental well-being.

You are bound to experience many mixed emotions. A professional person can help you to recognize and express some of these feelings. As long as you keep them buried inside of you, you are likely to feel anxious and uncomfortable; but if you allow them to come to the surface, you can see them for what they are, and they will not trouble you as much (Pierce, 1970:143).

Pochin expressed the belief that verbalizing this experience of pregnancy can be helpful for many girls.

It may be harmful for the psychotic girl to re-live her past experiences, but for the more normal ones it is often an inexpressible relief to talk freely about matters which have been too long bottled up inside them (Pochin, 1969:93).

Mace stressed that the goal of counseling should be to "encourage and help the woman to take responsibility for her own life and act as a free, autonomous person in accordance with her own values" (1972:118). This assumption of responsibility can make the entire experience a positive one for the girl.

The woman who is helped to a successful experience in responsible decision making is likely to emerge from unwed motherhood with increased confidence and an enhanced sense of herself (Bernstein, 1971:30).

In the case of a girl's schooling, which may be interrupted by the pregnancy, counseling may be helpful in encouraging her to return after she has had her baby. In

a study by Birdwhistle and Bears (1971:453-458), it was established that pregnant unwed teen-agers who dropped out of school were much more likely to re-enroll if they had talked with the school counselor before they left.

In summation, the counseling and educational processes can be enhancingly employed in order to promote better understanding of and attitudes towards the experience of being pregnant and unmarried.

Our ultimate goal should be to make family life education and marital counseling such an integral part of our society that sex, marriage, and child rearing are discussed and taught objectively rather than passed on by rumor, humor, and default (Semmens, 1968:18).

Summary

In this chapter, the literature was reviewed pertaining to some of the aspects of the pregnancy of unwed, teen-aged girls. First, consideration was given to the concept that pregnant, unwed teen-agers constituted a unique segment of the society of the 1970's. This was followed by an examination of the physical stress which a pregnancy exerted on a woman's body. Next, the psychological and emotional stresses which unwed, pregnant teen-aged girls may experience was discussed.

The social pressure and condemnation which may be directed toward unmarried girls who are pregnant was then examined. In conclusion, a literary survey was made of the manner in which mental health services might benefit teen-aged girls who are pregnant but not married.

The following chapter will deal with personal interviews of practitioners in the counseling field who have been active in the area of unwed, teen-aged, and pregnant girls.

Chapter 3

PROCEDURES AND FINDINGS

Before determining the value, if any, of mental health services for pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls, consideration seemed necessary to determine the points of view of people who work professionally as counselors with these girls. In order to ascertain what these points of view might be, the writer carried out personal interviews with selected practitioners in the field. The interviews with these counselors were summarized and organized in a descriptive narrative form which follows below.

Population Description and Sampling Procedure

The population which was studied was restricted to individuals who worked full time in the field of mental health and who, as part of their duties, engaged in the counseling of pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls. Rather than sampling this population, it was necessary to interview counselors who were geographically accessible to the writer and who consented to be interviewed. Thus no actual sampling of the population was carried out.

Investigation - Definition of Categories

The population studied was not divided in any way.

This was due to the fact that all individuals interviewed had direct counseling contact with unwed, pregnant, teen-aged girls. Eight individuals were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to gain knowledge from the counselors who had direct contact. It was felt that information gained from individuals who worked in any other capacity would not meet this study's requirements.

Due to the fact that all persons interviewed worked directly with pregnant unwed teen-agers, in the capacity of counselor, it was deemed by the writer that all information gained was valid and relevant. There was no need to delete any data as being invalid, impertinent, or distorted.

Method of Collecting Data

All data were collected in personal interviews at the interviewee's place of work. All interviews were made by the writer and were recorded in the form of handwritten notes which were taken by the interviewer.

Method of Organizing Data

After each interview had been completed, the notes which had been made were used to write a more formalized

summary of the salient points which the interviewee had made. These data were divided into three general categories.

First, the data which described the interviewee's opinion as to the condition of pregnant, unwed teen-agers were organized into three groups - physical, emotional, and social. Next, the data which described the counselors' feelings as to the effect which the counseling process had on the client were compiled. Finally, any other information from the interview which was pertinent to this study was placed together.

Analysis of Data

All data gathered from the interviews was analyzed by the writer as to commonalities and divergencies regarding the opinions and observations on similar topics.

Responses from Interviewees

The responses of the interviewees concerning the general questions in this study were as follows:

Concerning the physical condition of pregnant, unwed teenagers. All individuals who were interviewed agreed that the girls which they worked with experienced physical stress

and change as a result of being pregnant. Two of the interviewees felt, as a result of their observations, that the physical stress of these individuals was greater than that of married pregnant women with whom they had had contact. The other interviewees stated that their lack of experience outside the field of unwed, teen-aged pregnancies precluded them from making any comparative judgments concerning married and unmarried pregnant girls.

All interviewees were in agreement on the concept that any pregnancy brings about changes in the body which result in discomfort and occasionally in physical complications. Four of the interviewees, all of whom had contact with the girls through the time of their delivery, did not feel that the actual birth was more difficult or carried any greater risk than would be expected for girls of a similar age group who were married. The other counselors felt that their contacts and observations with girls during delivery were insufficient to judge fairly.

Concerning the emotional condition of pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls. All people interviewed agreed that

the girls with whom they worked were all experiencing high degrees of emotional anxiety and mental stress. Every interviewee stated that the most notable characteristic of a girl, when she first came to the individual or the institution for help, was that she was very noticeably upset and behaved in a confused, anxious, and nervous manner.

When the girls talked to the counselors, they expressed feelings of anger, guilt, loneliness, shame, rejection, disgust, and hate. The interviewees all stressed the fact that nearly all girls with whom they had contact exhibited primarily negative feelings. Only rarely would a girl who was pregnant and unmarried show any signs of having positive feelings about herself and her condition. Two interviewees noted that some girls, by becoming pregnant, gained a certain amount of attention from others, and this attention was a positive emotional experience for them.

Concerning the social relationships experienced by unwed pregnant teen-agers. Every interviewee stated that the relationship which the girl had with her family was exceedingly strained. Three of the interviewees noted that the girls expressed feelings of self-guilt for having "let

their parents down", for not living up to the expectations of their parents, or bringing disgrace to the family.

Four of the interviewees stated that some girls had expressed a desire to "get back" at their parents and felt that the pregnancy was an act of rebellion against parental authority.

The interviewees felt that the girls exhibited diverse attitudes towards the prospective fathers of the baby. All of the interviewees spoke of observing attitudes ranging from a desire to marry, indifference toward the boy, to a genuine dislike for him. One interviewee told of girls who wanted to become pregnant but could have cared less about the young man who had fulfilled their desire.

Another area in which most of those people interviewed had observed strained and stressful social relationships dealt with the attitudes of the girls' peer groups. The counselors noted that when a girl's pregnancy became noticable, she would most usually be ostracized to one degree or another by being snubbed and excluded by her former friends. Reasons for this isolation varied according to the interviewees, but some felt that the school

authority's attitudes may have been at the root of this problem. They told of instances where pregnant girls were not allowed to take part in any school activities or to attend any social or athletic events sponsored by the school. In some instances, the girls were even asked to leave school. With this discontinuance of any contact outside of class with their peers, the girls had very little chance for social relationships.

Other interviewees felt that pregnant unwed girls were spurned by their peers for the reason that society in this country condemned pregnancy out-of-wedlock and to associate with a person so condemned was degrading to one's own social status. It was agreed upon by all interviewees that the most significant factor in a pregnant unwed girl's social relationships was a general tendency for her parents, friends, school, and community to be ashamed of her. All interviewees stated that in most cases, friends of the unwed teen-agers exhibited a feeling of contempt towards the girl whereas they had only recently been close companions.

Effect of the counseling process on pregnant, unwed teen-aged girls. There was unanimous agreement among the counselors interviewed that the counseling process was

beneficial to the pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls with whom they worked. The benefits were described as relief from physical, emotional, and/or social stresses to which the girls had been subjected.

Relative to physical stress, two of the individuals felt that as part of the counseling process, they were able to advise their clients as to better diets, exercise programs, and improved personal hygiene, all of which might improve the girls' physical well-being. Another interviewee felt that the relationship between the physical and mental well-being of an individual was intertwined and that by bringing about emotional relief, the individual would simultaneously experience some degree of physical relief. The other individuals interviewed felt that they had little effect on relieving their clients' physical symptoms.

Concerning mental and emotional stress, all individuals agreed that the work they did with pregnant unwed teen-agers brought about relief. All felt that the anxiety and tensions were substantially reduced by the simple act of telling someone what was felt and experienced. The interviewees expressed the opinion that the girls were relieved of some of their feelings of rejection when the

counselors were able to demonstrate acceptance toward them.

Another positive factor was the ability of clients to sort out their true feelings and make rational decisions based on their clarified feelings. The general state of confusion which had existed prior to counseling lessened.

Four of the interviewees noted that girls with whom they worked expressed feelings of genuine affection and less loneliness as a result of the counseling relationship. Two of the counselors said that some of the girls had actually come to look on their experience of pregnancy as a positive one in which they could feel a sense of love for the child as well as a fulfillment of motherhood. All interviewees felt that the counseling experience helped their clients assume a more positive self-image.

Five of the interviewees noted that the girls were usually able to establish better relationships with their families once they were relieved of some of their own anxieties and tensions. In four of the interviews, it was noted that there were instances where the fathers of the baby had come to counseling sessions and were able to express some of their feelings. Although this did not

necessarily result in a proposal of marriage, it did help to establish a more congruent feeling on the part of the girl towards the boy.

Two interviewees said that their aim in counseling was to make the pregnancy a positive thing, from which the girl could benefit by experiencing the event. They also felt that this positive approach would serve the girl well if at some later time she should marry and have another child. One counselor said that she felt it important for the clients to gain a sense of strength and independence. All interviewees agreed on the importance of gaining a better self-concept and felt that the counseling experience helped to promote these improved self-images.

Other interview information which the writer felt to be of interest to this study. Two of the counselors observed that their experiences had shown that girls who do not emotionally experience their pregnancy and its termination are more likely to become pregnant again. That is, if they do not recognize and understand their reasons for behaving in such a way, they are apt to repeat the behavior.

Another point made during an interview was the importance of counselor knowledge concerning the options

which are available to unwed pregnant women. One of the counselors said that she felt that it was important for counselors to know exactly how they felt concerning the various facets of unwed pregnancies in order that these personal feelings would not interfere with the feelings of the girls with whom they were working.

Finally, all interviewees stated that it was necessary, although at times difficult, to accept the fact that as a helping person, they could not govern the lives of the girls with whom they worked; and that in nearly all cases, their assistance was only for the duration of the pregnancy.

Summary

In this chapter, the writer has described the population which was studied and the manner in which this population was selected. Next, the categories into which the interview data were placed were described.

There followed a description of the method which was employed for the collection of the data. Next, the method which was used to organize the interview data was discussed. Finally, an analysis of the data gathered in the interviews was presented in narrative style. This

analysis covered physical, emotional, and social stresses experienced by teen-aged girls who were unmarried and pregnant, the counselors' perceptions of the effect of counseling on these girls regarding relief of their stresses, and other data which were considered pertinent to this study.

The following chapter will deal with various selected comparisons between facts found in the reviewed literature and the personal interviews described in the above chapter.

Chapter 4

LITERATURE REVIEWED AND PERSONAL INTERVIEWS - COMPARISONS

In this chapter, the writer has compared the statements of the authors presented in the review of literature with the observations and opinions of the practicing counselors as presented in chapter three in an attempt to determine the existing commonalities and differences which were found in the two sets of data.

This comparison of two bodies of information was made first on the subject of physical symptoms which are found, uniquely, in pregnant women. Next, the data concerning emotional stress experienced by unwed, pregnant, teen-aged girls was contrasted. This was followed by an examination of the two sets of information on social pressures to which these pregnant, unwed teen-agers are subjected. Finally, the effect which counseling had on these individuals was compared, dealing with the statements of those people who were reviewed in the literature and the opinions of the counselors who were interviewed.

Physical Symptoms Exhibited in Pregnant Teen-agers

The literature reviewed was unanimous in its conclusion that pregnancy brings about changes in the physical

make-up of an expectant mother. These changes were described as alterations in the physiological functioning which took place in order to allow for the growth and development of the fetus. These changes, in turn, exerted stress on the girls' physical make-up and functioning.

Having a baby places a tremendous strain on your system. When you first become pregnant, your body gradually undergoes the changes that are necessary to accommodate the growth of a baby (Pierce, 1970:163).

The counselors interviewed verified this position with their observations of the girls with whom they dealt. In describing physical behaviors, the counselors used such words as: tired, listless, pimply-faced, overweight, anemic, sallow complexioned, and down-at-the-heels to convey their observations.

The literature also presented the fact that young girls represented a higher medical risk during pregnancy and delivery than do mothers as a whole. According to Osofsky (1968:22), "studies do indeed support the notion that adolescent pregnant females are a high risk".

No interviewees felt they had sufficient experience or statistical information to concur with this concept, but all agreed that it could be very likely true.

Emotional Stress Experienced by Pregnant, Unwed
Teen-aged Girls

In the review of literature, numerous examples were cited stating that pregnant, unwed teen-aged girls exhibited various degrees of emotional stress. Smith (1972) observed that most of the subjects in a study made with pregnant, unwed teen-agers exhibited some emotional discomfort, while LaBarre described the unwed pregnancy as precipitating, in some cases, an "acute crisis episode of shock, stress, and anxiety" (1972: 537). Taylor (1965) stated that feelings of guilt may also be manifested in unmarried expectant mothers.

The counselors interviewed agreed with the statements made in the literature concerning emotional stress. Interviewees observed that the girls felt the following emotions: guilty, ashamed, confused, worthless, lonely, rejected, nervous, and under stress. There was unanimous agreement among the interviewees that their clients were experiencing acute feelings of loneliness, shame, and guilt. Although the narrations of the counselors were of a descriptive nature, as opposed to the analytical presentations found in the literature, these descriptions

seemed to convey the condition of emotional stress.

Social Pressures Exerted on Pregnant Unwed Teen-agers

The literature supported the idea that any woman or girl who is pregnant and unmarried will be subjected to varying degrees of social ostracization.

There is little evidence to suggest that ...in this country, pregnant unwed teen-agers, regardless of race and socioeconomic class, do not feel some degree of shame or social stigma (Osofsky, 1968:33).

This concept was verified by the counselors. They cited the fact that in many school systems, pregnant unwed girls were either asked to leave school or were barred from attending or participating in any school functions or activities. They also noted that in numerous instances, the families of the girls would reject them because of shame and condemnation which the community directed toward the family. These counselors also said that in many instances, the father of the baby would reject the girl because of his own feelings of disrespect toward the girl, his fear of punishment or reprisal by the girl, her family, or authorities, and his desire to avoid any legal or financial responsibility for the child.

Another factor presented in the literature dealt

with the problems pregnant unmarried teen-agers had had in establishing satisfactory social relationships with family and peers before they became pregnant.

There is a popular conception that the very young girl may easily have sexual relations with a resultant pregnancy out of either ignorance or lack of adult self-control. There would seem to be no logical reason why this could not happen, and very possibly, it sometimes does. But experience with young unmarried mothers does not bear this out. In every case observed, the girl has had unhappiness and problems in her life which have led directly to this action (Young, 1954:21).

The above quotation implies that a pregnancy which has occurred out of wedlock may be the result of poor social relationships. The counselors interviewed concurred with this concept, noting that some girls had told them that their pregnancy was an intentional attempt to resolve some social conflict which they were experiencing with their boy friend, family, and/or peers.

The Effect of Counseling with Pregnant Unwed Teen-agers

The review of literature concerned with the need for counseling by teen-aged girls, pregnant and unmarried, was very positive in describing the need for such a service. This point was well made in a statement by Pierce which was directly addressed to pregnant unwed girls.

Ideally counseling or therapy should be directed at clarifying how you feel and what you want. A good counselor or therapist will help you to know from within yourself what is best for you. He should never take it upon himself to make a decision for you, although you may find that some will try (1970:138).

The counselors interviewed said that they felt every girl with whom they worked could benefit from counseling. There seemed to be agreement that the counseling experience was beneficial to pregnant unwed teen-agers.

The literature stated that one of the most important aspects of the counseling relationship is the girl's ability to accept not only the pregnancy but all of the conjoint aspects and consequences of the experience.

When working with the pregnant teen-ager it should be remembered that she is largely unable to understand, much less verbally express, all that she perceives, hopes, and fears. She must learn to accept not only the pregnancy but all that it means to her and to the important persons in her life (Semmens, 1968:14).

The counselors interviewed made observations which corroborated this idea. One interviewee stated that she had seen girls who had never accepted the fact of pregnancy and thus rejected the whole experience. She felt that as the pregnancy progressed, these girls would be subject to greater stress and mental anguish than those girls who had accepted

their condition and situation.

Two of the counselors interviewed had observed instances in which the girls who did not accept their pregnancies would terminate, either by adoption or abortion, and then return in a few months, pregnant.

The literature made numerous claims to the success of counseling in bringing relief to the emotional strain from which pregnant unwed teen-agers may be suffering, helping the girls to have more beneficial and rewarding social relationships, and, as the result of the two above improvements, to be less subject to physical stress. Concerning the emotional change, Roulet (1969:106) said: "It is also possible to observe changes during the course of therapeutic sessions and to relate these changes to immediate events of the therapy". While claims such as this must be subjected to close scrutiny, as should all counselor reports of the benefits of therapy, nowhere in the literature was it stated that counseling might have a deleterious effect on pregnant unwed teen-agers, assuming that counseling was being carried out by trained, qualified individuals who gave priority to the well-being of their clients.

All of the reports of interviewees, concerning the beneficial effects of counseling with unwed teen-agers who were pregnant were positive. They noted relief from emotional distress, feelings of guilt and shame, and dismissal of loneliness. There were reports that these teen-agers gained improved self-images, more positive self-concepts, better relationships with their families, relief from boredom and loneliness, and a more positive attitude toward the experience of motherhood.

Summary

In this chapter, an examination was made of the literature reviewed in chapter two and the counselor interviews presented in chapter three, the purpose being to compare and contrast the two bodies of information. The comparison of these two sets of data was made in four areas. The first area of examination concerned the physical symptoms exhibited by pregnant, unwed, teen-aged girls. Next, this same population was considered with respect to the emotional stresses which they were subjected to. This was followed by an examination of the social pressures exerted on pregnant teen-aged girls who were unmarried.

Finally, this chapter compared the effect that counseling had on girls who were pregnant and not married as reported in the review of literature and in the interviews which were held with counselors who worked with unmarried pregnant teen-agers.

The last chapter in this paper, which follows below, will summarize the first four chapters of the study and offer the writer's conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has dealt with the question of whether counseling of pregnant, unwed teen-aged girls could bring relief from physical, emotional, and social stresses which these girls might experience. A sub-problem dealt with in this paper was whether these teen-agers suffer from physical, emotional, and social stresses to a greater degree than their peers who were not unwed and pregnant.

In order to determine the answers to these questions, the writer felt that it was necessary to survey the literature concerned with this situation and to interview practitioners in the field of counseling who had worked with unmarried pregnant teen-agers.

The interviews were conducted by the writer with individuals who were working in the capacity of counselors and who dealt primarily or partially with unmarried, pregnant girls in state and local health agencies, in family planning units, in private pregnancy care homes, and in private counseling service facilities. All interviews took place at the location in which these counselors worked in Helena, Montana.

Both the literature surveyed and the data gained

from the interviewees were grouped into two areas. First, consideration was given to the question of whether unwed pregnant teen-agers experience abnormally high degrees of physical, emotional, and social stress. Then the question of whether counseling could be used as an approach in relieving these stresses was considered.

The findings of the literature surveyed and the interview data were compared and contrasted on a point by point basis in order to find differences, similarities, and common themes. The results of the comparisons were presented descriptively in a narrative fashion.

The findings of this investigation were generalized as follows:

1. Any woman who experiences a pregnancy is subject to physical change which places abnormal and unusual stress on her body. The amount of physical stress is not necessarily greater for unwed girls than for those who are married, although, in some cases, it may be excessive for a woman who is experiencing her first pregnancy, which is the circumstance for most unmarried teen-agers.

2. Emotional stress is nearly always present in girls who are pregnant and unwed. This stress is brought

about by the strained situation of being a potential mother outside of the normal family structure of mother, father, and child. The emotions which brought about this stress were loneliness, guilt, anxiety, shame, anger, and disgust.

Another consideration given to the advent of emotional stress was the decision the girl had to make concerning her child; that is, should she marry, have an abortion performed, have the baby and keep it, or have the baby and give it up for adoption.

3. Social stress was generated by the girls' family, peer group, and community, the potential father and his parents. The general attitude of all toward the unmarried pregnant girl ranged from reluctant acceptance to rejection.

4. In the opinions of writers and practitioners in the field of counseling who had worked with pregnant unwed teen-agers, it was generally agreed that counseling, if carried out in a spirit of genuine concern for the well-being of the client, could be useful in helping to alleviate the stresses which they were experiencing.

Conclusions

As a result of this study, the writer reached the

following conclusions:

1. Pregnant women are subject to unusual physical stress. This physical stress does not necessarily seem to be more prevalent in unmarried women or in teen-aged girls than in expectant mothers in general.

2. Unmarried pregnant teen-agers exhibit symptoms of emotional stress which exceed those found in pregnant women who are married.

3. The social disapproval and castigation exhibited toward unmarried pregnant teen-agers exists in all facets of society and results in extraordinary stress being placed on the girl.

4. Counseling by a person who is knowledgeable in the areas of physiology and nutrition can help pregnant women to alleviate some of the unusual physical stress being placed on their body through recommendations of proper diets, directed physical activity, and improved health care in general.

5. Counseling can help unwed girls who are pregnant to relieve some of their emotional stress which has resulted from feelings of anger, guilt, loneliness, and shame.

6. In certain instances, the effects of counseling may enable the unmarried mother-to-be to accept her pregnancy as a positive and enhancing experience.

7. Social relationships between unwed pregnant teen-agers and their parents, boy friends, and peer group members were improved, and in some instances, strengthened as a direct result of their exposure to counseling.

8. People who work as counselors with pregnant, unmarried, teen-aged girls believe that their efforts are directly responsible in helping to alleviate the physical, emotional, and social stress experienced by these girls.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the writer has made the following recommendations:

1. Further studies should be initiated to determine the physical effects of pregnancy on the emotional well-being of an unmarried expectant mother.

2. Steps should be taken to provide counselors who work with unwed pregnant teen-agers with information on procedures which can be taken to relieve physical symptoms of pregnancy and to improve the general state of health.

3. Programs should be implemented to train all

people who might, in the course of their work, come in contact with unmarried pregnant teen-agers in ways whereby they might better deal with the emotional stress that is found in these girls.

4. Efforts should be made to improve the policies and attitudes of school systems toward girls who are pregnant and unwed.

5. Counseling should be offered in an encouraging manner to the parents and the boy friends of pregnant girls.

6. The possibility of inaugurating follow-up programs should be explored for the purpose of offering counseling to girls after they have delivered a baby or had an abortion. The purpose of the follow-up counseling should be to help the individuals toward better mental health in view of their experience and to aid them in making decisions concerning pregnancy which will not be self-defeating.

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