

**THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSLIM COUNSELLORS WHO
COUNSEL UNWED MUSLIM PREGNANT TEENAGERS
IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the experience and role of counsellors in handling premarital pregnancy cases among Malay girls in Klang Valley Area. Seven counsellors and four young unwed mothers have been interviewed in this study. Data have been triangulated from interviews, observations and field notes. The findings indicate that counsellors have a significant role in helping young mothers struggling with issues in their life. They are too young and need guidance from their parents and other individuals, where each individual in society can play his/her role as a responsible citizen to create an awareness of healthy sexual knowledge. A comprehensive education and religious approaches should be implemented in the school syllabus and also being guided by parents at home. Sexuality has been seen as a taboo subject which is unfortunately an important aspect for children to understand with respect for their self-knowledge and empowerment. Counsellors who are reported to have used conventional techniques, theories and therapies in their counselling session combined with the Islamic approach has demonstrated to have a positive impact on the young unwed mothers' knowledge of sexuality, self-conduct and self-healing. Most participants agreed that the use of the REBT and the Islamic approach, based on Al-Quran and Sunah combined with the counsellors' unconditional acceptance towards the clients have opened up more room for focusing on emotional condition and healing. The young unwed mothers reportedly made good progress after the counselling sessions with a combination of conventional techniques and Islamic approach. The findings are limited to certain themes which can be explored further for academic and theoretical purposes by other counsellors, policymakers and educators as well as NGO's in helping this vulnerable group of young people who are part of our next generation.

خلاصة البحث

استكشفت هذه الدراسة النوعية تجربة ودور المستشارين النفسيين في التعامل مع حالات الحمل قبل الزواج بين الفتيات الملايويات في منطقة وادي كلانج. وتم إجراء سبع مقابلات شخصية مع مستشارين و أربع مقابلات شخصية مع أمهات صغيرات غير متزوجات في هذه الدراسة. وتم جمع البيانات عن طريق التثليث؛ المقابلات والملاحظات والمذكرات المدونة. وأشارت النتائج إلى أن المستشارين يلعبون دورًا مهمًا في مساعدة الأمهات الشابات اللائي كن يكافحن لمواجهة مثل هذه المشكلة في حياتهن. إنهن صغيرات جدا ويحتجن إلى إرشادات من الآباء والأمهات والمحيطين بهن ، بحيث يتمكن كل فرد في المجتمع من لعب دوره كمواطن مسؤول لإيجاد وعي بالمعرفة الجنسية الصحية. يجب تطبيق منهج تعليمي وديني شامل في المنهج المدرسي وأيضاً تعليمه في المنزل من قبل أولياء الأمور ، للحاجة إليه على المدى القصير والطويل مع تطورهن. النشاط الجنسي يُنظر إليه على أنه من المحرمات ، وهو أمر مهم لفهمه بين الأطفال فيما يتعلق بمعرفة الذات وتمكينهم. وأظهرالمستشارون أنهم يستخدمون تقنيات تقليدية ونظرية والعلاج النفسي في جلسة الاستشارة مع مزيج من النهج الإسلامي الذي أثبت أنه يعطي تأثيراً إيجابياً نحو معرفة جيدة بالجنس والسلوك الذاتي والشفاء الذاتي. وافق معظم المستشارين على استخدام طريقة العلاج السلوكي العاطفي العقلاني REBT مع النهج الإسلامي مع قبول المستشارين غير المشروط تجاه العميل ، مما أتاح مجالاً للتركيز على الحالة العاطفية والشفاء. كما اتضح أن الأمهات الصغيرات غير المتزوجات يحرزن تقدماً جيداً بعد جلسات الإرشاد مع تقنيات ومهارات متنوعة من الأساليب التقليدية والنهج الروحي مع مختلف التقنيات والمهارات من قبل المستشارين المختصين على أساس القرآن والسنة. وتقتصر النتائج على بعض الموضوعات التي يمكن أن يضيف استكشافها للأغراض الأكاديمية والخدمية من قبل زملاء آخرين من المستشارين وصانعي السياسات والمربين وكذلك المنظمات غير الحكومية في مساعدة هذه المجموعة من الشباب المستضعفين الذين سيصبحون جيلنا القادم.

APPROVAL PAGE

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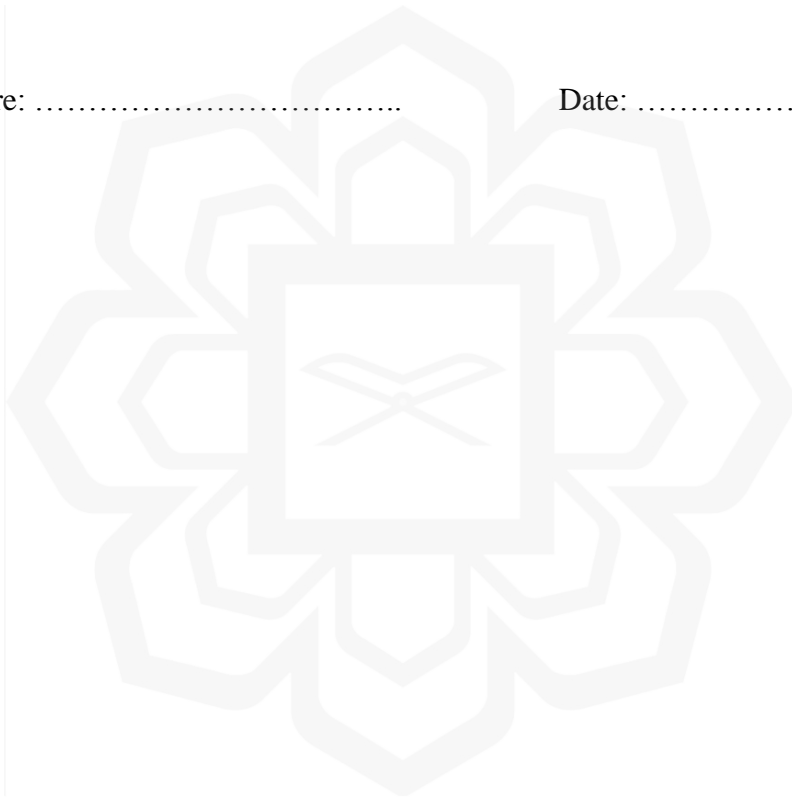
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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My life is no longer a masquerade...

To my family...

To my beloved ones...

This is a gift...

For all of you

and myself...

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In the name of Allah the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful...

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a renowned multicultural Asian country where different races live together in a highly traditional and unique cultural heritage that shapes their social life while still keeping up with the modern lifestyle. However, its society is experiencing the issue of moral decadence and it is increasing throughout the years with various kinds of social illnesses causing a harmful condition and environment for the future generation of Malaysians (Md Sham, Shafi'e & Abu Zahrin, 2015). Social illness in society such as free sex, molestation, and incest contribute to moral decadence that can lead to rape and unwanted pregnancy cases which can gradually create a society with dysfunctional family institutions, i.e. without any fathers and husbands (Kauthar, 2005). It is even no longer alarming to hear in Malaysia about the increasing number of young unwed mothers who became pregnant due to ignorance, negligence, or as a result of their misconducts and involvement in high-risk behaviours. Therefore, sexual education is an important solution to teach children from the grass-root level about relationships and sexuality because such knowledge is a part of natural human practice in marriage. In the perspective of the researcher, if a child grows up with the knowledge on how to manage his or her life morally, he or she would know about what is allowed and what is forbidden in accordance to his or her religion and culture.

According to Krishnan, Lazim and Yusof (2010), young Malaysians specifically students, suffer from a disproportionate amount of sexual and reproductive illnesses because they have not received adequate guidance on sexuality. This ignorance leaves them vulnerable to coercion, abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancy, and sexually-

transmitted infections diseases including Human Immunodeficiency viruses (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The finding is supported by another study by Bolton, Mckay and Schneider (2010) which suggests that young women in a dating relationship and are sexually active were not aware of contraception and sexually-transmitted infections due to the lack of education in the area, leading to issues related to trust, intimacy and pleasurable experience with a partner. This phenomenon needs to be taken seriously especially by parents as their teenage children might be feeling left out and lacking their affection and attention. Consequently, they will seek out partners of the other gender to overcome their loneliness and their need for affection and attention. In a Sunday Star interview (<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/08/04/pregnant-but-we-only-did-it-once/?jwsourc=cl>) with Shahida Musa, the manager of the Petaling Jaya non-profit foundation OrphanCare, an organisation that helps young girls who are pregnant out-of-wedlock, mentioned that many girls said they were not aware of what they have done as they claimed that they ‘only did it once.’ These girls came to them being aware they are pregnant, only realising it after they have delivered the baby and then wondered what to do next.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is reported that at the Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital, Klang, about 14 per cent of the 12,000 babies delivered annually are by teenage mothers, many of whom are unwed and are either being raped or sexually abused. The youngest mother to give birth at the hospital was 12 years old (Soon, 2012). In 2015, Malaysia Ministry of Health’s statistics revealed that 3,980 teenagers between 10 to 19 years old became pregnant out of wedlock. The main factor that could cause an increasing number of teenage

pregnancy in this country is the lack of education regarding sexual reproductive health.

(<https://www.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/3-980-remaja-hamil-anak-luar-nikah-1.380841>)

This development negatively affects the family institution as there is no legal and registered birth father. Unwed young mothers who deliver their babies without a father can experience struggle emotionally, physically, and mentally. The researcher believes that there is a need for a constructive action and appropriate support from their loved ones especially their parents and family members, friends, as well as institutions such as rehabilitation centres, psycho-social support, and individual and group counselling with close monitoring from qualified counsellors and therapists. These parties can help create awareness and preparedness among the unwed mothers regarding their psychological needs and knowledge. Clear and accurate information should be provided to help-seekers to increase their knowledge. The baby hatch care-taking service can help decrease the rate of unwed pregnancies among the young such as OrphanCare in Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

There is certainly a need to create and raise awareness about unwanted pregnancies, considering the increasing number of babies being abandoned in places such as waste dumps, bushes, drains, and public toilets. Alternative or preventive measures, such as baby hatches and orphan care interventions, are also crucial (Ndempavali & Justus, 2016). 102 cases of abandoned baby incidents were officially reported in Malaysia for the year 2008, compared to 90 cases in 2014. Abandonment of babies or baby dumping is a serious crime and is subject to punishment (Termizi, Abdullah, Mohd Jaafar, Tagaranao & Mohd Safian, 2014). Termizi et al. (2014) define baby dumping as discarding or leaving alone, for an extended period, a child younger than 12 months of age in a public or private setting with the intent to dispose of the

child. In 2010, OrphanCare introduced a baby hatch, with the objective to provide hope for abandoned babies through the provision of a safe shelter in which the babies can be properly looked after (Cochrane & Ming, 2013). Razali, Kirkman, Ahmad and Fisher (2014) discovered that from 1999 to 2011, there were 1096 cases of illegal infant abandonment with 224 identified suspects. Out of the number of identified suspects, 110 were between 18 to 25 years old and 39 were below 18 years old, with the majority being Malay Muslims.

Constitutionally, Islam is the official religion in Malaysia (Fernando, 2006; Mohd Nor, 2011) and the majority of Malaysians are Muslims. However, most of the cases of adolescent unwed pregnancies involved Muslims, occurrences which are opposite of the values taught by the religion. The values taught in Islamic teachings and upbringing should serve as a holistic preventive barrier from the illicit purposes and practices. Hamjah, Rasit, Samuri, Sham, Ismail and Kasrin (2014) found that unwed pregnancy among Muslim adolescents is caused by the failure of the parents to control their daughters' behaviour as well as the communication problem between parents and the daughter. The authors claim that the solution lies in the parents playing a more exemplary role, adequate religious education, monitoring of the children's behaviours, getting advisory and guidance services from family and religious counsellors in educating their children, and creating a closer relationship between the parents and the children.

In Islam, sexuality is not shunned upon. As a natural desire and tendency, it should be channelled in a religiously legal manner, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah:

“The Believers are those who protect their sexual organs except from their spouse’s... Therefore, whosoever seeks more beyond that in sexual gratification, then they are the transgressors.” (23: 5-6)

Islam discusses this issue broadly in The Quran and As-Sunnah, encompassing matters such as the human being's natural needs to be inclined towards the opposite gender, their sexual roles, rights and responsibilities, and fulfilling the cycle of the reproductive system for human survival. Based on the above, it is viewed that if a person is hardly able to keep his or her desire, then marriage is the solution. If however, one cannot afford marriage, then lowering the gaze and fasting can keep the desire under control (Abdurrahman, 2010), as Rasulullah SAW reminded young people,

'O young people! Whoever among you is able to marry, should marry, for that will help him lower his gaze and guard his modesty (i.e. his private parts from committing illegal sexual intercourse etc.). And whoever is not able to marry, is recommended to observe fast as fasting will diminish his sexual power.'

Thus, the wisdom behind marriage is to morally maintain the wellbeing of one's self and his or her religious belief and practices, by confining sexual acts to only with one's lawful spouse. Marriage is made via the *aqad* or solemnization that religiously legalises the relationship, along with the obligation to fulfil each other's needs, including sexual desires (Ekram & Beshir, 2005). The act of marriage unites a couple by having the mutual rights and responsibilities that are psychologically, physically, and spiritually complementary, and in building a family institution by giving birth and bringing up children together. Education and the children's development should primarily be provided by parents. From the age of puberty, parents should teach girls to observe for the occurrence of the menstrual blood and boys to be mindful of the secretion of semen, which are signs that the children are ready to assume their role as an adult (Tuskan & Al-Madani, 2013).

Furthermore, the responsibility for sex education at school fall upon the teachers, as well as the by government and non-governmental organisations. Rehabilitation centres in Malaysia play a role in giving support morally,

psychologically and spiritually to the young unwed mothers during their pregnancy and to assist them with their scheduled medical check-ups, as well as to teach practical, professional skills such as cooking, I.T., and sewing (Tajudin, 2011., Azim, 2011., Sudan, 2013., Razak, 2014). However, there is very little evidence to suggest that the girls would not become pregnant again through extra-marital sex after leaving the rehabilitation centres. Men and young boys should also be taught to behave responsibly. In one study (Jamaluddin, Abu Bakar, & Wan Abdullah, 2013), it was found that apart from family problems, in premarital sex and substance abuse were found to be the leading causes behind adolescent pregnancies. At-risk girls are also exposed to free intermingling with peers and boyfriends and became engaged in sex with several men to the extent that some even admitted to have undergone illegal abortions (Jamaluddin, Abu Bakar, & Wan Abdullah, 2013).

Moreover, the responsibility for sex education at school fall upon the teachers, as well as the by government and non-governmental organisations. From the researcher's reading, rehabilitation centres that have been established by the government and non-governmental organisations offer help to young unwed and expecting mothers, who have struggles and needs physically, emotionally and mentally. These centres provide services such as counselling service, medical support such as monthly check-up, productive activities, living skill, religious classes during the pregnancy until the expected delivery date. This research studied how far the counsellors play an effective role in giving adequate support to the young mothers who face a possible risk of developing mental health problems, which are explained through three themes: secrecy, repression, and rejection (Saim, Dufaker & Ghazinour, 2014). It is important to find steps to be taken carefully in terms of psychosocial support for the

mothers on how they perceive themselves in their situation and in planning for their future.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Malaysia as a country is affected by multi-cultural and multi-religious developments in many aspects, including education. The country also saw more than 19,000 teenage mothers giving birth between 2009 and 2011. Adolescent fertility rates show that every 6 births per 1000 women begin between the age of 15–19 years in 2013 (Suan, Ismail & Ghazali, 2015). The Malaysian Royal Police Force reported a total of 517 cases of abandoned babies from 2005 till February 2011, while the cases of incest, rape, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexually-transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS rates are rapidly increasing (Tajuddin, 2011). At present, births from unwed pregnancies account for 1.99 percent of total deliveries.

These social decays will lead to the degradation of morality in society and tarnishes the identity of Islam and the Malaysian society as a whole. Based on the researcher's experience as a Malay, for generations the Malay society as well Malaysian generally viewed sexuality as a taboo topic and restricted their children's social life from intermingling freely with the opposite gender. Therefore, sexual intercourse is considered a sacred act which can only take place within a marriage, which indicates the beginning of one's life as husband and wife, living together from their wedding day till the rest of their life. The discussion on sexuality was not open and discussed only with married people, especially as consultation with an elderly or an expert. Sex education and knowledge are often imparted to the children when they are in preparation for marriage. For the young ladies specifically, sex education and knowledge is a way of preserving traditions and as a means for the wife to learn how to serve her husband appropriately.

Thus, the researcher concludes knowing, learning and upholding morality is highly important as it guides children to know right from wrong and to behave within the boundary of knowledge, norms and values. In terms of actions and deeds, Islam teaches its followers to become aware of doing the wrong things by cultivating a sense of shyness. Shyness is also part of *iman* or faith and God-consciousness, the extent to which a person knows that his or her every action is being watched by the Supreme God, Allah the all-knowing, and he or she will be judged in the hereafter for those actions. Fear of the day of Judgement is a character of true believers that helps them to stay on the straight path and to avoid falling into disobedience (Utz, 2011), as mentioned by Allah SWT in surah 79 verse 40:

“But as for he who feared the position of his Lord (standing for account before his Lord) and prevented the soul from unlawful inclination...”

Adolescents are in the stage of exploration and wanting to know about lots of things. Parents-child communication is very crucial for well-being development in many aspects. Sexual and reproductive health is one topic that is supposed to be discussed appropriately so that adolescents will get receive the right information and avoid unwanted pregnancy and other problems. Unwed adolescent mothers are not only still young, but they are also in the phase of exploring their self-identity while struggling with the condition of their unwanted pregnancy along with the impact of the out-of-wedlock pregnancy are having on their psychology, physical, behaviours and socioeconomic well-being (Razak, 2014). Unwed adolescent mothers have a better chance of improving their life when their parents are supportive, as opposed to blaming the them and being non-supportive.

According to Ismail and Abd Hamid (2016), approximately 70 percent to 90 percent of Malaysian teens were found to rarely discuss issues related to sex and

reproductive health with their parents. On the other hand, they were found to be open for discussion about these matters with their parents as long as their parents would not turn them down. This problem will persist as long as there is lack of appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health caused by the attitude of parents who still think that sexuality is a taboo topic (Tesso, Fantahun & Enquesselassie, 2012; Manivasakan & Sankaran, 2014; Ismail & Abd Hamid, 2016). Moreover, early sexual promiscuity has been shown to be the result of harsh parenting, lack of parental warmth, and unsupportive parents-children communication. Teenagers often seek enjoyment outside the house due to the cold and uncaring environment within. They seek out from other people the affection and love they did not receive from the parents (Sudan, Ismail & Ssekamanya, 2016).

Among racial groups, Malays were reported as the ethnic group with the highest percentage of pregnancy without marriage, as found by Tan et al. (2012). 96.2 percent of pregnant adolescents who reside in a government shelter homes are Malay adolescents. This is in contradiction to the Islamic teaching and Malays are the majority of Muslims in Malaysia. The teachings, practices, and belief appear to have not influenced the morality of these youths, including the culprits who happen to be Muslim men. They are supposed to be responsible, have a high moral sense, and behave in accordance with the Islamic teachings which include avoiding premarital sexual intercourse. However, relatively poor reproduction and pregnancy knowledge could have led to unwed pregnancy as well (Wong, 2012). Ghaffari et al. (2014) mentioned that factors that influence adolescent, premarital sexual intercourse are individual health beliefs, religious-spiritual beliefs, and character. In the meantime, Vasudevan (2013) found a total number out of 100, 60 persons strongly agree that young people are less religiously educated which is an important factor for the occurrence of sexual crimes.

The role of mass media and the Internet also has contributed to the increase in premarital sex. Researchers were able to find a relationship between the premarital sex activities and pornographic material which can be found from the Internet particularly (Abdul Manaf, Mohd Tahir, Sidi, Midin, Nik Jaafar, Das & Abd Malek, 2014). Furthermore, adolescences tend to be associate their emerging sexual desire and sensual feelings with the need to experiment with different ways of expressing love and affection (Ghani and Aziz 2013, cited in Ghani, Latif, Aziz & Khan, 2015).

Therefore, the teaching and learning of Islamic education related to sex education to the student, especially its implementation, should be examined for its effectiveness in relation to other factors such as family background, peer pressure, mass media, environment, the socioeconomic background that contribute to the phenomena that are, unfortunately, increasing in Malaysia.

1.4 RESEARCH GAP

There are many studies have been conducted on this topic that shown it is an issue to be addressed with intervention, among them are adolescents' pregnancy (UNICEF, 2008, Rogers, 2010, Middleton, 2011, Loaiza & Liang, 2013, East & Barber, 2014), teenage pregnancy and motherhood (Mantovani & Thomas, 2014), the causes of the teenage pregnancy (Salmi Sudan, 2011), experiences and impact of premarital pregnancy (Sodi, 2009, Hayward, 2011, Kate, 2012, Khairiah Abd.Razak, 2014), liability of unwed mothers (Mohamed & Hanim, 2014), hope strategy for improving student achievement and dissuading repeat pregnancy in pregnant and parenting adolescents (McNeill, 2010), and research studies across the globe, for instance, Listen to the Voices of Unwed Teenage Mothers in Malaysian Shelter Homes: An Explorative Study (Saim, Dufaker, Eriksson & Ghazinour, 2013), Adolescent pregnancy in Indonesia: A literature review

(Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo & Ariane Utom, 2013), Pregnancy health information use behaviour of teen expectant mothers (TEMs) in public antenatal care in Tanzania (Ruzegea, 2014) U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010: National and State Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity (Kathryn Kost & Stanley Henshaw, 2014), England Teenage pregnancy: Huge progress ... But more to do (Hadley, 2014), Factors influencing the teenage pregnancy rate in the Greater Giyani Municipality, Limpopo Province-South Africa (Mushwana, Monareng, Ritcher & Muller, 2015), Adolescent Pregnancy, Birth, and Abortion Rates Across Countries: Levels and Recent Trends (Gilda Sedgh, Lawrence B. Finer, Akinrinola Bankole, Michelle A. Eilers & Susheela Singh, 2015), and Adolescents Pregnancy Guidelines (Fleming, Odriscoll Becker & Spitzer, 2015). However, there appear to be few studies done on the role of counselling and counsellor as a professional guide and therapeutic help for this group in Malaysia. It is also found that adolescents with a lack of cognitive skills to make decisions on their own need extensive support and counselling about their pregnancy (Aruda, Waddicor, Frese, Cole & Burke, 2010).

Hence, the role of counsellors is seen to be significantly in curbing this issue in terms of factors and causes including from the Malaysian context, as shown by Suan, Ismail and Ghazali (2015) review of teenage pregnancy research in Malaysia. The authors found that the risk factors for teen pregnancy in the Malaysian population were similar to those found in studies worldwide, namely, poverty, poor academic achievement, inadequate knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, lack of parental supervision, peer influence, and premarital sexual activity. In addition, Nik Farid, Che Rus, Dahlui and Al-Sadat (2013) found the determinants of sexual intercourse initiation among incarcerated age 12 to 19 years old adolescents in Malaysia with previous sexual intercourse were the female gender, previous alcohol use, previous