# Premarital Teen Pregnancy as Influenced by Substance Use

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Premarital teen pregnancy is an ongoing issue that has countless contributing factors. The United States has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the developed world, leading the reported number of adolescent pregnancies compared to Great Britain, Canada, France, and Sweeden by 7% (Darroch, Singh, et al 244). Popular examinations of this problem include sexual health education in schools, adolescent contraceptive use, and religious teachings such as abstinence only and what effect it has on teenage sexual activity. An influence on unintended teen pregnancy that is less researched involves marrying it with another intense issue among teenagers: drug use. Correlations between drug use in teens and unintended pregnancy as well as abortion due to an unintended pregnancy are beginning to be further researched.

Without a large amount of research or data on the correlations between unintended teen pregnancy and teen substance use, researchers Martino, Collins, et al. sought out to conduct a study that would provide an explanation as to whether there is any link between drug use in middle and high schoolers and unintended pregnancy up until age 29. Additionally, the researchers were interested in whether a decrease in drug use could result in a lower rate of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

Martino, Collins, et al. specifically examined the likelihood of abortion in participants who unintentionally got pregnant and whether or not they engaged in use of any variety of drugs. The researchers used event history analysis that followed 1,224 women from adolescence to age twenty-nine and looked at whether or not drug use in teenage years increased the likelihood of abortion by age twenty-nine. The variables used in the study were race, parental education, whether the participant grew up in a two-parent household, and drug use. Each variable was individually tracked within the path model, showing its relationship to unplanned pregnancy and abortion, respectively.

The highlighted variable in the study was the role of what the authors named "unconventionality," the idea that people who were engaged with family institutions like school and church at a young age were less likely to stray from those values, therefore taking the "conventional" path. Those who were not socialized with these family values hold them less sacred, increasing their likelihood for rebellious or risky behaviors like drug and alcohol use and unprotected sex. Explaining their hypothesis about how a substance user with unconventional personality traits could relate to having an abortion at a young age, the researchers say, "Because they are less engaged with these [conventional] institutions and their norms, substance users may be more likely than nonusers to obtain an abortion when they have an unplanned pregnancy" (Martino, Collins, et al. 66). This idea is complemented by the data gathered from the study, explaining that increased rebelliousness, a lack of or a low dedication to religion in a woman at grade twelve was found to have a positive correlation with them choosing to get an abortion when dealing with an unplanned pregnancy.

At the conclusion of the study, it was confirmed that there was a positive correlation

between substance use and abortion within the participants. This idea was expanded on and explained using assumptions based on which drug was in question. For example, researchers hypothesized that marijuana users may have chosen to terminate their unplanned pregnancy due to potential effects marijuana may have on fetal development (Martino, Collins, et al. 72). All links between substance use and abortion were caviatted by the idea that the abortion in question was a decision made because of an unplanned pregnancy specifically, which could be explained by a a drug user's inherit lack of judgement or self respect due to their choice to use said drugs. In the end, the study did not conclude that a reduction in substance use alone would result in a decrease in abortion or unplanned pregnancy.

A 1992 study done by Barbara Mensch and Denise B. Kandel examines a similar link to the previous study. The authors of "Drug Use as a Risk Factor for Premarital Teen Pregnancy and Abortion in a National Sample of Young White Women" sought out to discover the correlation between two mysterious statistics of the United States: teen pregnancy and drug use, respectively, are disproportionally high in the United States when compared to other developed countries (Mensch, Kandel 410). In hopes of discovering the common denominator of these two issues, the researchers set up a study that used an event history model following women from the age of first sexual encounter and tracked the rate of pregnancy up until age nineteen. Event history models indicate the likelihood of an event occurring with the influence of an independent variable. In this case, the event is adolescent pregnancy and the independent variable is drug use. The researchers created categories of analysis for each respective drug being tracked in the study: no drugs, only cigarettes and/or alcohol, marijuana, and any other illicit drugs. This separation of categories was done to better understand the impact that each type of substance exclusive-

ly may have. Other variables such as lifestyle choices and family background were also included in the study.

The study concluded that the risk of experiencing an unplanned teenage pregnancy is four times greater for those who had used drugs that did not include marijuana than those that had not engaged with any substance. The researchers found that in each type of involvement with substances they tracked in their event history analysis, a quarter or more of the women from each category would later have an unintended teen pregnancy. Twenty-five percent of both marijuana users and alcohol or cigarette users would experience an unintended pregnancy and thirty-eight percent of users of illicit drugs would, compared to the fifteen percent of women who experienced an unplanned pregnancy and did not use any substances (Mensch, Kandel 418).

An analysis done in 1997 by Kazuo Yamaguchi and Denise Kandel sought out to identify the major causes of premarital teenage pregnancy. In "Drug Use and Other Determinants of Premarital Pregnancy and Its Outcome: A Dynamic Analysis of Competing Life Events," many determinants were tested including prior illicit drug use, using a two-step process. The sample used was a group of 706 young women, most of whom had participated in a survey when they were in high school. Nine years after that survey, they were interviewed, along with former students from the same school who did not take the survey. The interviews were conducted using time charts the participants had to track the occurrence of events monthly. Applicable participants provided their history of drug use. Event history analysis is used in this study to estimate how the occurrence of an event can be correlated to a later occurrence. The researchers found that "use of illicit drugs other than marijuana, are associated with a two- to threefold increase in the risk of a premarital pregnancy" (Yamaguchi and Kandel 257). They also learned in their analysis that

women who either used illicit drugs in the past or had at the time of the study were twice as likely to experience an unintended pregnancy, but current users had an even higher likelihood of getting pregnant before marriage. Of the severity of the risk of premarital teen pregnancy among illicit drug users, the researchers said, "the present findings underscore the importance of involvement in illicit drugs other than marajiuana as a factor that identifies a group of adolescents at especially high risk of experiencing a premarital pregnancy" (Yamaguchi and Kandel 267).

The 1992 journal article "Substance Use and Other Factors Associated with Risky Sexual Behavior among Pregnant Adolescents", published in Family Planning Perspectives analyzed the relationship between substance use and sexual behavior in 241 unmarried pregnant women who were aged twelve to seventeen. This study uses data provided by women who are already pregnant within the demographic being studied. Gilmore, Butler, et al. were seeking to develop programs that could offer warning against unintended pregnancies, especially in adolescents. To achieve this, though, they had to first identify some of the most prevalent risk factors that could be contributing to high teenage pregnancy rates. Factors such as drug and alcohol use were measured both by use at the time of a sexual encounter and not at the time of a sexual encounter. This was done to determine whether or not being under the influence of substances during sex decreased the likelyhood of preventative measures such as contraception use.

Before the study commenced, the researchers used knowledge gathered from other studies to form a foundation for their work. They identified that substance use was directly associated with teenagers who had engaged in sexual activity in high school (JD Hundleby et al.). To obtain this information, the 241 participants were interviewed over an eighteen-month period. The interviews con-

tained many questions relating to the participants' lifestyle including their use of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and other illicit drugs. Some questions asked included, "Before you were pregnant, how often were you under the influence of drugs like marijuana, cocaine, or amphetamines when you had sex?" (Gilmore, Butler, et al. 258). Similar questions were asked about alcohol consumption.

The percentage of the pregnant women who said they had used substances including alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and other illicit drugs was compared to the percentages of those who had done so from a national group of female high school seniors. It was concluded that the pregnant women who participated in the study had higher rates of use of the substances listed. To the researcher's confusion, the effect substance use had on the rate of risky sexual behavior vanished in the multivariate analysis. This implies that substance use alone did not have an impactful effect on the likelihood of risky sexual behavior when calculated alongside the other variables being tracked. Because of this blip in results, the researchers theorized that there was an underlying problem that was the driving cause of all the variables that were tested. This ties into the focus on "unconventionally" Martino, Collins, et al. studied. Although a positive correlation between substance use and premarital pregnancy was found in the study, the results were decided to be inconclusive. Because the multivariate analysis caused the effects of substance use to disappear among the effects of other factors related to risky sexual behavior (Gilmore, Butler, et al. 255), the researchers concluded that substance use could directly attributed to increased risk taking during sex.

There is sparse research on this subject, but studies ranging in the last four decades all track a similar trend of social unaccepted behaviors and circumstances regarding class and education. This focus on "unconventionality" is reflected in a 2018 journal article that examined

smoking risk in teenaged childbearing women. The authors state that teen childbearing women are often described as being at a "social disadvantage, being more likely than other adolescents to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as problematic alcohol use, marijuana use, and delinquency" (Mollborn, Woo et al. 624). It is acknowledged that in addition to the stigma of being a pregnant adolescent alone, such a presentation of a nontraditional behavior like early sexual intercourse can become coombined with other stigmas such as depression and drug use. This, in turn, can result in an attraction to or development of such behaviors, contributing to the corelation between drug use and teenage pregnancy. This is a consistent conclusion in studies regarding this corelation from the past few decades.

Across the four studies, a positive correlation between substance use, especially illicit substances, and premarital teenage pregnancy was found. It is important to consider many other contributing factors to the occurrence of these pregnancies such as education status, family life, and social life, however. On its own, it is clear that a teenaged individual's likelihood of experiencing an unintended pregnancy increases with the use of alcohol, cigarettes, marajiuana, and other illicit drugs.

## WORKS CITED

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