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## Psychological Well-being of Unwed Mothers.

Monsy Edward<sup>1\*</sup>, and Santhosh AJ<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Dept of Psychology Prajyoti Niketan College, Pudukkad, Thrissur, Kerala, India.

<sup>2</sup>MSc Clinical Psychology, Prajyoti Niketan College, Pudukkad, Thrissur, Kerala, India.

### ABSTRACT

An unwed mother is a girl or woman who is not legally married to a man by whom she has conceived a child. Research indicates that single mothers experience excessive stress and that the stress is a result of various factors like of social isolation, lack of family support, the need to provide financially for the family. The purpose of this study was to assess the psychological wellbeing of unwed mothers in comparison with wed mothers. The first objective was to find out the level of depression among wed and unwed mothers. The study is also aimed to find out the different dimensions of social support of wed and unwed mothers and the relationship among the level of depression, and social support in wed and unwed mothers. The sample for the present study consisted of two groups: wed mothers and unwed mothers. The wed and unwed mothers are comprised of 30 each between the ages of 20-35 years. Tools used were Beck depression inventory (BDI-II) and the multidimensional scale of perceived social support. To know the difference between the wed and unwed t-test was administered. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was administered to know the correlation between the depression level and different dimensions of social support. Result reveals that there is much higher depression level in the unwed mothers. 36.66% of the unwed mothers were found to have severe depression where as none of the wed mothers had the same. Social support from the significant other, family and friends were found to be lower in the unwed mothers compared to wed mothers. The result shows that a very high negative correlation is obtained in different dimensions of social support and depression, indicating that when the social support decreases the level of depression increases.

**Keywords:** Unwed mothers, Depression, Social support

*\*Corresponding author*

## INTRODUCTION

An unwed mother is a girl or woman (13-35 years) who is not legally married to a man by whom she has conceived a child. She may be pregnant or has already delivered a child and is living presently in any one of the licensed institutions. Research indicates that single mothers experience excessive stress and that the stress is a result of various factors like of social isolation, lack of family support, the need to provide financially for the family concurrently with caring for the home in ways traditionally handled by men and women, acquiring new skills, and parenting.[1] Teenage pregnancy and unwed motherhood can cause immense psychological pressure on an adolescent girl. [2] Lack of social support could lead to development of depression in the unwed mothers. Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity that can affect a person's thoughts, behaviour, feelings and sense of well-being. Similarly, social support is defined as the feeling of being an important person in the eye of others, cared and loved, respected as a human being, and having someone to help and listen to when needed.[3] The present study aims at an in-depth analysis of the problem of unwanted pregnancies and consequent psychological state, role of social support in wellbeing. This study will also be beneficial to promote the professional help to improve the quality of life of unwed mothers and thus can reduce the risk of mental disorders.

### Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to understand the conditions of unwed mothers in comparison with wed mothers with the following specific objectives:

- To find out the level depression among wed and unwed mothers.
- To find out the different dimensions of social support of wed and unwed mothers.
- To find out the relationship between the level of depression, and social support in wed and unwed mothers.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

### Aim

The aim of this study was to find out the subjective wellbeing, depression and social support among wed and unwed mothers.

### Sample

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

### Tools Used For Assessment

#### Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II)

The Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition (BDI-II) is a 21-item self-report instrument for measuring the severity of depression in adults and adolescents aged 13 years and older developed by Dr. Aaron T. Beck.

#### The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

Gregory D. Zimet, Nancy W. Dahlem, Sara G. Zimet, & Gordon K. Farley (1988) have formed the multidimensional scale of perceived social support. [4]

### Procedure and statistical analysis

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the concerned institutions and persons. Voluntary consent was obtained after sharing the objectives of the study and reassuring the participants about

their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they were providing. All the questionnaires and personal data sheet were bound together and given to the subjects after establishing rapport with them. The subjects took nearly 30 minutes to fill the questionnaire. They were given the opportunities to clear the doubts. Scoring is done as per given in the manual.

This research study employed a descriptive statistical design which was used to investigate the demographic variables. Frequencies and percentages were generated for the responses provided in the personal data sheet. Subscale scores on the subjective wellbeing, beck's depression inventory and multidimensional scale of perceived social support were considered separately. In analyzing data, statistical procedures such as student 't' test and Karl Pearson's product moment correlation was employed. In the present study 't' test is used to find out the significant difference between wed and unwed mothers depression and social support and Karl Pearson's correlation *r* is used to check the correlation between depression and social support.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the level of depression among wed and unwed mothers. 83.33% of the wed mothers had minimal level of depression and 13.33% had mild depression.[1] But 36.66 % of the unwed mothers had severe depression, 20 % had moderate depression and 40 % had mild depression. This result shows that unwed mothers have higher level of depression than wed mothers.

**Table 1: The level of depression between wed and unwed mothers**

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

**Table 2: Mean, Standard deviation and 't' value of depression among wed and unwed mothers**

| 't' value | Wed Mothers (N=30) |      | Unwed Mothers (N=30) |       | Dimensions |
|-----------|--------------------|------|----------------------|-------|------------|
|           | SD                 | Mean | SD                   | Mean  |            |
| 8.060**   | 5.437              | 8.40 | 10.142               | 25.33 | Depression |

\*\*significant at 0.01 level

The mean value and standard deviation of depression among unwed mothers are 25.33 and 10.142 respectively and that of the wed mothers are 8.40 and 5.437 respectively.[2] The 't' value is 8.060 which is significant at 0.01 level. Studies show that unwed mothers appear to be at greater risk for both physical and mental health disorders as compared to married mothers. Psychiatric disorders, in particular depression, have been shown to be more prevalent in single mothers than married mothers. Single mothers had significantly higher odds of having mood disorders as compared to married mothers A study by Subramaniam et al (2014) identifies young, single mothers as a vulnerable group associated with mental illnesses. [1] Single mothers had significantly higher odds of having mood disorders as compared to married mothers. Onset was also more likely to follow such an event when women had poor self-esteem and lack of support, both of which were more common among single mothers.

Social support can only be of help when it conforms to the coping strategies that are most adequate in the stressful situation. The results show that unwed mothers have lower social support than the wed mothers while we compare the mean values.[3] The mean value and standard deviation of the support from significant others among unwed mothers are 2.67 and 1.24 respectively and that of the wed mothers are 5.47 and 1.30 respectively. The t value is 8.51 which is significant at 0.01 level. Similarly , The mean value and standard deviation of the support from family among unwed mothers are 2.77 and 1.35 respectively and that of the wed mothers are 5.07 and 1.50 respectively. The t value is 6.51 which is significant at 0.01 level. In

addition, the t value between the groups for support from friends is 10.52 which is significant at 0.01 level. Thus the total social support of unwed mothers are lower (mean 2.70, & standard deviation 1.05) than that of wed mothers (mean 5.40 & standard deviation 1.13) with a t value of 9.55 which is significant at 0.01 level. Social support can only be of help when it conforms to the coping strategies that are most adequate in the stressful situation.[6] The prevalence of moderate to severe mental disability was significantly more pronounced among single mothers compared with partnered mothers. Single mothers are more likely to experience poor mental health than partnered mothers, and the primary factors associated with this are the presence of financial hardship in particular, as well as perceived lack of social support. [7]

**Table 3: Means, Standard deviations and ‘t’ value of social support among wed and unwed mothers**

| ‘t’ value | Wed Mothers (N=30) |      | Unwed Mothers (N=30) |      | Dimensions                     |
|-----------|--------------------|------|----------------------|------|--------------------------------|
|           | SD                 | Mean | SD                   | Mean |                                |
| 8.51**    | 1.30               | 5.47 | 1.24                 | 2.67 | Support from significant other |
| 6.21**    | 1.50               | 5.07 | 1.35                 | 2.77 | Support from family            |
| 10.52**   | 1.10               | 5.6  | 1.27                 | 2.37 | Support from friends           |
| 9.55**    | 1.13               | 5.40 | 1.05                 | 2.70 | MSPSS-Total                    |

\*\*significant at 0.01 level

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

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

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Regarding the correlation between different dimensions of social support and depression among wed and unwed mothers, The result shows that a very high negative correlation is obtained in different dimensions of social support( significant other: -.863, family support: -.857, friends support: -.797 & total support: -.887) and depression, indicating that when the social support decreases the level of depression increases. [4] This finding is similar to the study conducted by Grav et al., which found that there is significant association between perceived support and hospital anxiety and depression. [8] In addition, a study done by Cairney et al. also indicates that, compared to married mothers, single mothers were more likely to have suffered an episode of depression (12-month prevalence), to report higher levels of chronic stress, more recent life events and a greater number of childhood adversities. [9]

**CONCLUSION**

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

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