



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH – QUALITATIVE

# Iranian pregnant teenage women tell the story of “fast development”: A phenomenological study



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Teenage pregnancy is a major health problem significantly associated with negative impacts on the health of both teenage mothers and their newborn. However, little is known about teenage pregnancy from teenager's perspective, particularly in developing countries including Iran.

**Aim:** This study aimed to explore the experience of pregnancy in Iranian teenage women.

**Methods:** An interpretive phenomenological study was used as a suitable research design to conduct this research. Data were collected through individual, semi structured and in-depth interview with 11 married teenage women aged between 15 and 19 years old, primigravida with singleton pregnancy. Data were analysed through thematic analysis approach.

**Findings:** “Fast development” was the main theme that emerged from the participants' experiences. It refers to the unexpected development process that occurs simultaneously with other important development events. Fast development consists of three themes, ‘unexpected development’, ‘development within development’, and ‘struggle with development’.

**Conclusion:** Teenage pregnant women simultaneously encounter multiple developmental challenges related to adolescence period, marriage, pregnancy, and mothering responsibilities. According to the results, fast development concept should be considered by healthcare providers in order to offer comprehensive and age-appropriate health services to pregnant teenage women for successful transition from the multiple developmental stages. Moreover, this concept will help health care providers, especially midwives, to understand how to deal with pregnant teenagers.

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## 1. Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is one of the most important health problems in the 21st century<sup>1</sup> and is identified as the number one killer in girls aged 15–19 years old.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 16 million girls aged 15–19 and one million girls under 15 years old give birth every year and 95% of these births occur in low and middle income countries.<sup>3</sup> Unintended pregnancy is common among adolescents. According to National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), 77% of

pregnancies among adolescent girls were unintended in the United States during the period 2006–2010.<sup>4</sup>

Globally, teenage pregnancy has been considered as a negative phenomenon because it is associated with considerable individual, social, economic, and health consequences. These consequences not only have an impact on teenage mothers and their babies, but it also impacts on societies.<sup>5</sup> Teenage mothers are prone to many complications such as obstructed labour, eclampsia, unsafe abortions, anxiety, and postpartum depression.<sup>6</sup> Teenage pregnancy also affects women's abilities to pursue employment and educational opportunities, leading to increased rate of subsequent poverty for mothers and higher risk for behavioural problems, and lower educational attainment for children.<sup>7</sup> Babies born to teenage mothers are more likely to die than those that are born to adult mothers due to low birth weight and prematurity.<sup>8</sup>

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Islamic Republic of Iran has a high rate of young population and the age specific fertility rate in adolescents was increased from 25 to 35 per 1000 adolescents between 2010 and 2011.<sup>9</sup> Based on the Government Strategy Plan, Iran has invested heavily to increase the population rate in the next decade.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is expected that the fertility rate among young Iranian population will increase significantly by 2025. Considering Iranian girls become pregnant in a short period after marriage,<sup>11</sup> they are faced with concurrent events such as marriage, pregnancy and mothering in transition to adulthood.

Most studies have revealed that teenage pregnancy not only has significant negative effects on young girls and their families, but it is also a considerable challenge for public care systems in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. However, recent studies argue that pregnancy has some positive effects on the life of pregnant teenage girls.<sup>5</sup> Perceived benefits to teenage pregnancy include creating connections to parents and family, happiness, fulfilling gender roles,<sup>12</sup> feelings of responsibility, maturity<sup>5</sup> and independency.<sup>13</sup> For some pregnant teenagers, having a child gives them a meaningful life and it can help them to facilitate the resolution of normal developmental changes in puberty through consolidation of self-esteem.<sup>13,14</sup>

Since many teenage girls have mixed feelings about pregnancy, their perceptions about pregnancy must be assessed with special focus on the role of ambivalence towards teenage childbearing and the socio-cultural factors influencing adolescents' feelings and choices.<sup>15</sup> However, less is known about the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy in different contexts and the experiences of pregnant teenage girls has not been fully understood from their own perspectives, especially those that take into account the teenager's life world. It underscores the need for deep exploration of the experiences of pregnant teenagers in general and Iranian pregnant teenage girls in particular in order to address the challenges related to teenage pregnancy and provide appropriate health care to this high risk group. Thus, given the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy in the context of time and place, we aimed to explore the lived experiences of pregnant teenage women in Iran.

## 2. Method

A hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was used to conduct this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on the lived experience of individuals to uncover the world as experienced by the individuals via their life world stories. Hermeneutic phenomenology provides detailed aspects within experience that appear to be taken for granted in our lives, with the aim of creating

meaning and achieving a sense of understanding.<sup>16</sup> In order to understand the experience of pregnancy in teenage women, it is essential to enter the world in which they live. This study intended to reexamine these taken for granted experiences and uncover new meanings.

The six methodical activities which are outlined by van Manen (1990) were applied to provide the guidelines for the research method. These activities include (a) turning to the nature of the lived experience; (b) investigating the experience as we live it; (c) reflecting on the essential themes; (d) hermeneutic phenomenological writing; (e) maintaining a strong and orientated relation to lived experience and (f) balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole,<sup>17</sup> as shown in Table 1.

### 2.1. Participants and setting

In this study, participants were recruited from three Primary Health Care Centres (PHCs) in Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan province. Ahvaz is located in the southwest of Iran. According to the last Bureau Statistics, the number of dwellers in Ahvaz was 1,395,184 persons covered by 20 PHCs. In PHCs, all health services are free of charge to the public. The main tasks of educated midwives in these centres are pre-conception counselling, prenatal and postnatal care. Pregnant teenage women who had been registered in the antenatal clinics and referred for prenatal care were recruited through the purposeful sampling method. For this purpose, the principle author was approaching to the potential participants. If the potential participants had inclusion criteria, the principle author was providing information about the research and encouraging them to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria were married women, aged between 15 and 19 years old, primigravida with singleton pregnancy, living in Ahvaz geographical border and willing to participate in this study. The participants who had fetuses with congenital malformation or medical and obstetrical problem were excluded. The recruitment of participants was from October 2013 to July 2014. The demographic characteristics of participants are shown in Table 2.

### 2.2. Data collection and analysis

The main technique of data collection was interview. Interviews were conducted by a single researcher who was a PhD candidate of sexual and reproductive health (the corresponding author) in Nursing and Midwifery School of Tehran University of Medical Sciences. She has over 25 years of educational and clinical experience in maternal child health. The data was collected from 13 semi-structured, in-depth and face to face interviews with

**Table 1**  
Summary of van Manen's six methodical activities in the research process.

Six methodical activities proposed by van Manen (1990)	The researchers' activities
Turning to the nature of lived experience	Our activities were directed towards thinking, understanding, interpretation and discoursing with teenage married women who become pregnant, formulating the phenomenological question: What is it like to be pregnant as a teenager?
Investigating experience as we live it	We collected experiential data through a variety of activities including: observation, descriptions of others' experiences, protocol writing, journals, phenomenological literature and conducting in-depth interviews with participants and prolonged engagement with pregnant teenage women.
Reflecting on essential themes	Emerging themes that characterise the phenomenon through prolonged engagement with the descriptions of lived experience of teenage pregnant women, immersing in data by listening to the audio recordings, read and read all of transcripts, and conducting thematic analysis using holistic, selective approaches.
Hermeneutic phenomenological writing	Writing the transcripts, writing about concepts, sub-themes and themes, writing to create a phenomenological text by describing the teenage pregnancy phenomenon in the art of writing and rewriting.
Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to lived experience	Discussing the themes in relation to caring and health science and keeping orientated relation upon the experience of teenage pregnancy.
Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole	Moving between transcripts, meaning units, concepts, sub-themes and themes in relation to maternal and child health science to understand the experience of teenage pregnancy.

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