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RISK FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE UNWANTED PREGNANCY AMONG UNMARRIED MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA

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Introduction: In Malaysia, reports have shown an increasing number of premarital sexual activities and birth outside marriage. However, there has been no proper study on the factors influencing pregnancy among unmarried women. This study aims to determine the sociodemographic profiles of unmarried pregnant women present in health care facilities, and the associated risk factors of unwanted pregnancy.

Methods: A prospective cohort study was carried out at 6 hospitals and 6 women's shelters in Malaysia from February 2011 to Jun 2012. Unmarried mothers were selected using a universal sampling, while married mothers were selected using systematic sampling at antenatal clinics.

Results: A total of 261 unmarried mothers and 246 married mothers were recruited. Mean age of the unmarried mothers was 19.07 years, with the majority in the adolescent group (62.8%). The majority of unmarried mothers were Malay (95.0%), practicing Islam (96.9%), from urban areas (62.8%), still studying (48.7%) and primigravida (90.8%). About 41.0% had finished upper secondary education, half of them (58.8%) from the lower socioeconomic group and 69.1% live with parents prior to pregnancy. Only 7.7% of the unmarried mothers did not know the father of their baby, while 9.2% did not disclose their pregnancy to their partner. 56% never used any contraceptive method during sexual intercourse and withdrawal was a common method used among them (23.9%). Multiple logistic regression showed that being unmarried mothers has a significant relationship with age (OR=1.46; 95% CI 1.23, 1.73), studying status (OR=53.56; 95% CI 3.49, 822.03), number of family members that finished school (OR=0.74; 95% CI 0.56, 0.98), religious belief towards sexual matters (OR=9.86; 95% CI 3.70, 35.95), smoking (OR=34.82; 95% CI 3.17, 381.93), exposed to pornographic films (OR=17.12; 95% CI 2.53, 115.80), support from significant other (OR=0.78; 95% CI 0.64, 0.95) and age of menarche (OR=1.65; 95% CI 1.05, 2.60).

Conclusion: Age, age at menarche, religious belief, social support, smoking habits and having been exposed to pornographic films strongly influenced the prevalence of unwanted pregnancy.

Keywords: unwanted pregnancy, unwed mothers, risk factors