

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF PREGNANT UNMARRIED WOMEN: A CASE STUDY

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### Abstract

At the beginning of the incident, women who experience pregnancy outside of marriage have poor self-acceptance. This is due to the negative stigma from the surrounding environment and the response of parental disappointment, especially if the partner does not want to take responsibility. This research is qualitative research using a case study approach. The results showed that participants eventually had good self-acceptance. This is because participants get support from their family and close friends. The religiosity factor was also found in participants, which helped them have hope.

**Keywords:** unmarried pregnant women, psychological well-being, case study

### Introduction

In Indonesia, pregnancy among unmarried women is misjudged by society; this is because Indonesian society has moral norms that consider pregnancy among unmarried women a disgrace. (Laksono et al., 2023). A pregnancy that occurs outside of marriage is a form of sexual behavior carried out by women before an official bond from religion and government (Akad), so this pregnancy is categorized as free sex or adultery. (Mucybbah & Sadewo, 2019).

The phenomenon of pregnancy outside of marriage is found in many female students. Based on data from BKKBN, it is stated that the case of female students who experience pregnancy outside of marriage increases every year (Kurniawati & Ambarwati, 2019). The Office of Women's Empowerment, Child Protection, and Population Control (DP3AP2) in D.I. Yogyakarta recorded cases of early marriage that occurred in 2022, reaching 632 cases. Of these, as many as 84% of cases were caused by pregnancy outside of marriage or unwanted pregnancy. (Kemenpppa.go.id, 2023).

Tjolly & Soetjiningsih (2023) Explains the psychological impact of adolescents who become pregnant outside of marriage and are not married by their partners. The psychological impact experienced by participants included feeling very depressed, anxious, feeling ashamed, stressed, and experiencing emotional instability. Internal factors and external factors influence the psychological effects experienced. Internal factors include depressed feelings that come from within, namely fear of disappointing parents, fear of irresponsible partners, anxiety about the future, namely changes in roles and responsibilities, and participants still find it challenging to accept pregnancy. As for external factors, namely the pressure from the family and society, the family did not take

responsibility for the partner, became a byword in the community, and received harsh words and treatment, crying and contemplating everything that had already happened.

Lack of psychological and physiological preparation in women who experience pregnancy outside of marriage will affect the condition of their psychological well-being. (Astari & Laksmiwati, 2021). Psychological well-being is the ability of a person to make peace with himself and accept his past, which is part of the process of self-development to achieve well-being. Psychological well-being has six aspects, namely (1) self-acceptance, (2) positive relationships with others, (3) independence, (4) environmental control, (5) having life goals, and (6) personal growth. (Astari & Laksmiwati, 2021)

Psychological well-being is essential for a person, including women who experience pregnancy outside of marriage. Psychological well-being can be an indicator of someone having a positive life. Someone with high psychological well-being will be able to accept themselves positively, grow and develop from time to time, believe that life has meaning and purpose, have positive relationships with others, manage their environment effectively, and control their actions. (Creswell, 1998).

Kurniawati & Ambarwati (2019) explain that women who become pregnant before marriage experience an increase in psychological problems that are quite complex, such as low self-acceptance, positive relationships with the environment that are not good, and life goals. Based on initial interviews conducted by researchers with participants, it was found that when she found out she was pregnant outside of marriage, she felt disbelief and did not accept the fact that, at that time, she was still studying in semester 4. She blamed herself. This indicates that her self-acceptance is low. Her relationship with her parents also became tense and no longer harmonious; she often gets angry and scolded until now, not to mention insinuations and ridicule from the surrounding environment. She felt lost and didn't know what would happen to her, especially after her boyfriend went missing, was irresponsible, and no news until now. But one of the big decisions she finally made was not to abort her pregnancy after she felt the movement of the fetus in her stomach.

The above is also in line with Astari & Laksmiwati's research (2021) entitled "Psychological Well-Being of Middle Adolescents Who Experience Pregnancy Outside of Marriage." This study explains that middle adolescents who experience pregnancy outside of marriage have poor self-acceptance when they first find out about pregnancy. This is due to the negative stigma obtained by the surrounding people. The main factor that causes adolescents to have sexual intercourse before marriage is promiscuity. Some of the negative impacts experienced by participants include dropping out of school, becoming the talk of the surrounding community, and also experiencing physical and psychological problems during pregnancy. Participants also felt depressed about their situation. However, participants received social support from family and closest friends so that they were able to rise from adversity and adapt to their current condition. Participants also began to gain self-acceptance.

This research is essential because, based on data and facts in the field, the number of cases of women who have children out of wedlock is getting higher. In Indonesia, a woman who becomes pregnant and has a child without marriage is still considered taboo and has a negative social stigma. It is still regarded as unnatural and violates community norms and religious values. The social stigma they receive and the pressures they feel make them reluctant to share their stories, let alone ask for help from others (Mandak et al., 2021)

This research can provide a more in-depth picture of their life experiences. It can help reveal the realities often hidden behind the pressure and long-term psychological impacts they experience. Some previous researchers have focused on showing the psychological well-being of women who are pregnant outside of marriage. Still, in the

end, the participants are married to their partners and can take care of their children, as in research conducted by Ardianti et al. (2016), Astari & Laksmiwati (2021), and Ahadiningrum (2023).

In contrast to this study, the participants were women who experienced pregnancy outside of marriage, were not married to their partners, could not take care of their children, and hid their identity as biological mothers even though they lived at home with their children. Research on psychological well-being with the criteria of participants as above is still minimal and has not been done much. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the picture of psychological well-being and to find out what factors influence women who are pregnant outside of marriage to be able to achieve psychological well-being despite experiencing severe life trials.

## Method

This research is qualitative. Qualitative research aims to understand meaning and uniqueness, construct phenomena, and find hypotheses. (Sugiyono, 2024). The research approach uses a case study approach. The case study approach is research to obtain in-depth information on a particular phenomenon or case at a specific time and collect information using specific collection procedures in detail and in-depth (Creswell, 1998). This study used purposive sampling, which uses specific considerations or criteria (Sugiyono, 2024).

There is only one participant in this case study research, namely a late adult woman, unmarried, who has experienced pregnancy outside of marriage, is not married to her partner, chooses to give birth to her child, lives at home with her child, and family, but hides her identity as a mother.

In this study, researchers will use data collection methods through semi-structured interviews and observation. Researchers chose semi-structured interviews because they are more flexible in exploring in-depth information, making the data obtained more complete. (Sugiyono, 2012). Researchers will create an interview guide using Ryff's psychological well-being theory, namely (1) self-acceptance, (2) positive relationships with others, (3) independence, (4) environmental control, (5) having a life purpose, and (6) personal growth. The interview was conducted once.

To maintain the credibility of the data, the interview results obtained will be tested for validity through the member check method. Member check involves re-examining the results of the data obtained from the subject to determine how accurate the information received is with the information provided by the subject. (Sugiyono, 2012). Member check will be carried out in a way, namely (1) after the interview ends, the researcher will directly confirm the conclusions and results of the interview with the participants, and (2) the researcher will confirm with the participants via WhatsApp to clarify information that is not clear during the data analysis process.

After the data is collected, the researcher will analyze it. Data analysis is an activity that gives meaning or interprets data by organizing, sorting, classifying, coding, and categorizing it into a specific pattern and description unit to obtain findings on formulating the problems posed. (Rahardjo, 2017) The data analysis in this study will be carried out qualitatively. The researcher will repeatedly read the transcript of the researcher's interview results with participants to find and understand meaningful categories of statements. The analysis will be conducted using Ryff's theoretical framework of psychological well-being. After the data analysis process is completed, the researcher will draw research conclusions.

## Result and Discussion

Based on the data obtained by researchers through interviews and observations with participants in October 2024, the study's results were obtained as a description of psychological well-being. They found factors that support participants in obtaining psychological well-being. The results of further research will be explained as follows:

### 1. Description of psychological well-being

Psychological well-being is the ability to feel happy, have life satisfaction, and not experience depression symptoms. (Sari & Desiningrum, 2016). The results of the study regarding the description of well-being will be explained in the following sub-themes:

#### a. Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance is the core of a psychological well-being condition characterized by maturity and acceptance of self and the life that has passed (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). At the beginning of finding out she was pregnant, the participant did not have good self-acceptance, which was characterized by feeling worried and afraid and locking herself in the room. This was exacerbated because her partner did not want to take responsibility. But now, participants can forgive themselves, accept reality, take lessons, and continue to improve themselves.

*"Ee... what happened was that they (parents) accepted and forgave me, right? Then... I think, what if, for example, I don't forgive myself and continue to be down and blame myself? I think I'm already like that, making a disgrace to them so well, and I'm also down and down... I think if I don't add sin. I mean, they might feel like my child is already like this, and it's getting worse. Especially until God forbid you commit suicide, for example. I don't know if my parents will feel like a failure. So I don't want to be like that; I must get up and improve myself." (07/39-42)*

#### b. Positive relationships with others

Positive relationships with others can be interpreted as whether or not the participant's ability to foster warmth and trusting relationships with others, have strong empathy, love deeply, and be friendly. The results showed that since finding out she was pregnant, participants were still able to socialize with their friends on campus, participants were also able to establish romantic relationships with other people after having children despite having the experience of being betrayed by a previous partner, participants were also able to develop relationships with other people in terms of undergoing a career.

*"I can't guess, but for me, the amazement in my life is there if you want to ask, and I have friends who are positive. I mean not friends who talk behind my back" (17/161-186)*

#### c. Autonomous/independence

How well can participants direct themselves, be independent, evaluate themselves, and decide and choose life goals after experiencing a challenging life path? The research results show that participants have been able to direct

themselves and evaluate themselves, but in terms of financial independence, participants feel they still need it. Starting from the debts paid off by their parents, food and shelter are still borne by their parents; he has no savings, and his salary is only enough to buy gasoline, eat out, and self-care.

*“Hee’e.. there .. I opened there when I was in debt; then, I opened a business and fruit, and I opened Angkringan, now in Pathuk, near Galeria. That was for my previous place of business; I had a debt of 120 million, imagine, and who helped me, my parents again (16/155).*

d. Environmental Control

The extent to which participants can take advantage of opportunities and choose situations that match their talents and interests. Based on the research, the participants could take advantage of opportunities and situations such as building relationships with customers in their coffee shop who eventually became business partners and one of the closest people who supported each other.

*“Yes. For example, when I met a friend of mine who said something that had a profound meaning to me, at first, it was just that he wanted to ask me about the SOP of the cafe, and he wanted to open a cafe until we got close and shared. Until we got close and shared. One day, I met him, and he asked me how it was going... What are you doing now? Like this... I’m not tired of running all the time... And really... I said there were many meetings where I also found great people. Their lives were great. If you want to say... Maybe... It had a great influence on me. I understand that not all my friends are good... But what I understand... Friends are... I don’t know about you right now... But friends are divided into things like... Just friends or sincere friends...” (‘29/307-308)*

e. Having a Life Purpose

Life purpose reveals whether the participants have a purpose and direction in life. Although they once had no direction or purpose in life, participants now have a reason to get up and have a purpose in life.

*“Hmmm... I dreamed of having my own business because, in my previous experience, I also had a business and was a cafe manager for a long time. My current goal is to prepare myself, especially financially, because I feel I can’t rely on my parents forever; they are getting older, too. We, then I also have the desire to marry Mbak, to have someone (35/387)*

f. Personal growth

A person’s ability to develop their potential sustainably emphasizes how they view themselves and realize their potential. In terms of personal growth, there were times when participants saw themselves still failing many times, from starting to build a business that failed several times to failing to have a romantic

relationship. However, all those participants still saw themselves positively and continued to realize their potential.

*“Right now I’m still a person who ... gets emotional easily; I’m a very reactive person.” (‘22/225)*

*“That’s my bad, yes, but if you want to ask the description, I am a person who has been disappointed, which I know, but I am a person who has never been discouraged ... that I know, because for me ... I believe that the name of the effort does not betray the results ... Where I said the fact that so far I have been looking for a job has never been rejected even though I am already at this age, it means that we just want it or not prestigious or not ... that’s the logic mbak” (‘22/235)*

## 2. Factors that support the achievement of psychological well-being

### a. Social support

The subject felt that her parents, especially her father, were the figures on whom she depended when the subject experienced an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Although initially, the reaction of his parents was angry and disappointed, the subject’s parents were the ones who cared the most. The subject was also surrounded by close friends who could accept her situation of being pregnant outside of marriage, even though the subject was still in college when she was pregnant. Her close friends did not stay away from the subject and still cared about listening to the subject’s complaints.

*“With them, no, during the pregnancy, it was me that they silenced me. I often cry too, well ... but my father loves me, he means. I remember very well that, even on the day of birth. I didn’t come out for 4 days, I’ve been paced, I’ve been paced, I didn’t come out right. My father came without telling me to walk. I was told to walk because I was opening I all the time, right? I couldn’t, I couldn’t take the pain. ... well, the name of the baby that wants to come out hurts. I remember my father still pushing me, playing with me, joking with me on this what .. wheelchair. So, my father escorted me around the hospital. There I felt that it was true that ee ... parents, especially men ee ... male parents mean like what, fathers, fathers are very important for our growth and development, our mentality .. because I’m sure if at that time I didn’t have them, even my brother who was a boy also didn’t support me so well ... I don’t know what I would become. Where my friends at that time also, well, did not judge me .. my college environment” (09/43)*

*Hee’e.. that’s right, which I finally left home after that. I felt that every time there was a problem ... my family again, my family was there for me” (16/142).*

### b. Religiosity

Participants’ religiosity can give meaning to a difficult journey when a pregnancy is out of wedlock. They could interpret this event as part of God’s plan, which ultimately helped them accept the situation more calmly.

*“Because I think that God gave me ... I don’t know, one of them is also when ee ... the religion that was instilled in my family was also deep... where indeed ee ... our god at that time, believed that it was the way ... we just accept it ... this is indeed our life. I got the essence of that. Even when I was pregnant, I felt the miracle that people said. God is cool .. imagine that I am alive; inside, there is another living and developing .. in this human being. I feel that, imagine in my pregnancy, which people say is forbidden” (11/67).*

*“There, I really believe in how it will happen to me according to my words .. in the gospel, there are those words. That’s what I believed at that time. So if you want to tell who ... I didn’t tell anyone, but I realized that it was the power given by the one above, meaning that I was honest and told him, I said... to church at that time, I still go to church often. Every time I ... here’s what’s funny about me, every time I have a big problem, it’s as if God reminds me to remember him” (13/86).*

The incidence of pregnancy outside of marriage is becoming more prevalent. However, this is still considered taboo in Indonesian society because it violates norms and religious life. The results showed that when the participant was known to be pregnant outside of marriage, the participant became the subject of shocks from the surrounding neighbors; the participant also received unflattering words from the participant’s parents, her boyfriend’s parents, and the participant’s extended family. At the beginning of hearing and accepting these responses, participants felt depressed and stressed, reduced interaction with people, and locked themselves in the room. At the beginning of her pregnancy, which at that time the participant was still studying in semester 4, the participant did not expect it because the participant admitted that she had only had sex with her lover once. The following month, the participant was immediately pregnant. In this phase, participants have not been able to accept themselves well and do not have positive relationships and trust in others because, in the end, their boyfriends do not want to take responsibility and have disappeared.

The above aligns with Astari & Laksmiawati’s research (2021); participants felt heavy pressure from their environment due to pregnancy outside marriage. As a result, participants chose to stay away from social interactions and focus more on strengthening themselves to not experience severe stress that could affect their health. In addition, other reasons for reducing interactions with others were feelings of inferiority, embarrassment, and self-consciousness when meeting people because of this situation. At the beginning of knowing about the pregnancy, the family also gave a negative response; even her lover’s parents told her to abort the pregnancy. But now, participants are much better at self-acceptance. What strengthened her the most was the support of her parents, especially her father and younger brother. Her friends also really helped her to get up and move on. Her friends did not stay away and continued to provide support and motivation.

Although the participant experienced a stressful condition accompanied by parents who were disappointed, sad, and angry with their children, the participant’s parents still accepted him and his child. His parents currently bear all his needs up to his schooling, including the needs of participants because, until now, participants admit that they do not have financial independence. (Maree & Hansen, 2011) Revealed that families

can encourage adolescents to adapt to their problems and provide motivation to rise from adversity.

Currently, participants believe that what happened to them is one of the essential lessons in their lives. Participants felt that the incident was a big mistake. Therefore, participants try to improve themselves by evaluating themselves, engaging in productive activities, reducing useless activities, being more careful when interacting with others, and avoiding making the same mistake twice.

(Ryff & Keyes, 1995) Assert that people who accept their weaknesses and shortcomings can evaluate themselves positively. Participants said their lives improved because they had clear goals, such as thinking about their children's future. Participants wanted successful jobs and businesses, so they no longer depended on their parents. People with a purpose have a directed attitude, confidence in life, and future goals to achieve (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) Participants also hope that someday they can get married to someone who can accept them and their children and tell their children that she is their biological mother.

## Conclusion

Women who experience pregnancy outside of marriage have poor self-acceptance at the beginning of the incident due to negative stigma from the surrounding environment, disappointed parental responses, and partners who do not want to take responsibility. However, in the end, participants gradually showed good self-acceptance. This is because participants get support from their family and close friends. Participants could slowly rise from adversity and adapt to their current condition.

Participants can develop a positive perspective on interpreting life, accept strengths and weaknesses, and practice good self-acceptance. They can learn lessons from severe trials. Participants believe their lives will improve after this long process, become wiser and more directed, and have life goals they must achieve.

This study also found that participants were very dependent on God. They never stopped begging and asking to be strengthened. God is the only place to return to. Believing in God's power gives participants motivation and hope for a better life.

Suggestions for individuals who experience pregnancy outside of marriage are to slowly keep trying to accept the reality that occurs, focus on something that can be done at this time, and make this event a self-learning. The hope for future researchers is to be able to research the participatory well-being picture of someone who experiences pregnancy outside of marriage but experiences rejection from his family and takes care of his child alone.

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