

ABTRACT

Background Adolescent pregnancy in Thailand has been associated with educational and financial disadvantages, and unfavourable health outcomes for mothers and infants. Pregnant adolescents have been shown to demonstrate little or no control in their decision-making regarding pregnancy, practicing healthy behaviours, preparation for parenting and future employment. This study sought to explore the role of agency in adolescents' ability to exercise influence over events that affect their lives in a range of social and cultural contexts.

Design Within a critical framework, this ethnographic study was conducted in an antenatal clinic and 15 villages in Mahasarakham Province, Thailand. Data was collected over a 6 month period from 15 pregnant adolescents and 15 caregivers. Methods of data collection included semi-structured interviews, photo elicited interview, and participant observation.

Findings Four themes emerged from thematic analysis including social stigma, support and support systems, cultural heritage, and self-care. Feminist theoretical analysis of these themes identified that gender inequity, fear, and spirituality were key factors in shaping the agency of pregnant adolescents in Thailand.

Conclusion Gender inequity predominantly impeded agentic behaviour. Some adolescents however resisted the prevailing social forces of inequity, thereby acting agentially. Fear was a pervasive force that impeded agentic behaviour. Spirituality presented as a paradox where it both enabled and impeded agency. Agency and the sociocultural factors that shape adolescent behaviour must be essential considerations for the care and wellbeing of pregnant adolescents in Thailand.