

Perceived Challenges Faced by Mothers of Pregnant Teenagers who are Attending a Particular School in Mopani District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Teenage pregnancy is a global problem in both developed and underdeveloped countries. This is evidenced by the high rates of pregnant teenagers in South African schools. The study sought to explore the perceived challenges faced by mothers of pregnant teenagers who are attending a particular schools Mopani district. A qualitative explorative and descriptive approach was used. The population comprised of all mothers of pregnant teenagers who were waiting at the school gate. A non-probability, convenient sampling method was used to sample 11 participants. In-depth individual interview guided by one central question directed the interview which was: "what challenges do you experience as you are expected to wait at the school gate for your pregnant teenager?" Open coding method was used to analyse the data. Three themes emerged namely: Socio-economic implications to parents; Emotional implications to parents and to the pregnant learner. The study recommended that school should be provided with basics medical equipments to use should there be a need for delivery at the school. Teachers should be empowered on conduction of emergency delivery. Ethical and trustworthiness were ensured. It was concluded that mothers waiting at the gate for their pregnant teenagers are psychologically, socially and economically affected.

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa there is high rate of teenage pregnancy in schools which is about 61 percent. Panday et al. (2009) pointed that provincial trends shows a concentration of learner pregnancies in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo Provinces. During the period 2004-2008, Limpopo Province was having 12848 (60.36%) teenage pregnancy rate (Panday et al. 2009; Matlala et al. 2014). Whereas, according to Department of Education (2011) the records shows that over 70 000 termination of pregnancies were reported in South African public health facilities during the year 2003, representing a 200 percent increase in terminations since 1997 (Makiwane 2009). About 30 percent of terminations were among women aged 15 to 19 Panday et al. (2009) indicated that there is a national decline in teenage fertility which may be accounted for by an increase in termination of pregnancy rather than a decline in teenage pregnancy.

In 2007, the Department of Education released *Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy*. Not without controversy, the measures continue to advocate for the rights of pregnant girls to remain in school, but suggest an up to two year waiting period before girls can return to school in the interest of the rights of the child. However, according to the Bill of Rights as contained in the Constitu-

tion of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108/1996, Section 29, it is indicated that everybody has the right to Basic Education. Therefore, it may be improper to deny teen mothers to continue their schooling when they are ready to do so. In 2000 the Gender Commission on Gender Equity reported to the South African Ministry of Education that they had received a number of complaints from teen mother learners concerning the manner in which their schools had treated them. The teen mothers complained that their schools had not allowed them to attend classes because they were mothers (Ministry of Education 2000; Matlala et al. 2014).

The South African Human Rights Commission (2000) revealed that the actions of the schools are violating the following provisions which seek to protect the learners' ability to enjoy her right of access to education. The Free State Provincial Department of Education circular number MG 18 of 2010 reiterated measures for the prevention and management of learner pregnancy in school. The purpose of this policy was to ensure that learners should not be expelled from school due to pregnancy. Section a (3) of the Constitution which provides that unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly including race, gender, sex, and pregnancy. The school being an organ of the state should not discriminate. Section a (1) of South African School Act, provides that the only way in which a learner

can be involuntary excluded from attending class is misconducts as stipulated in the code of conducts.

Pillow (2004) argued that “teens most impacted by teen pregnancy are young women who are already living in impoverished conditions prior to becoming pregnant”. Parents are working class households who are too poor to provide for their children’s education and the indirect costs of sending them to school (Swainson et al. 1998; Matlala et al. 2014). The costs of school uniforms and fees and babysitting for grandchildren, for example, have been argued by several studies to deter parents from sending girls to school. In the context of this study, it was assumed that the poor parents are expected to stop going to work and to wait/stay at the school gate, with the aim to assist the girl when she can fall into labour while in class. The parents may probably experience a wide range of emotions, from shock and disappointment to grief and worry about the future (Krishna 2008; McLelland et al. 2013). Some mothers felt a sense of guilt, thinking that if they have done more to protect their child this wouldn’t have happened and they became embarrassed by their teens’ pregnancy and worried about how family and friends and neighbors will react (White 2008).

The South African law forbids excluding pregnant teenagers from school and permits young parents to continue with their schooling. However, the existence of progressive policy and law does not by itself ensure that pregnant teenagers and young parents remain in school or experience as little disruption to their studies as possible. The Department of Education (2007) stated that parents and guardians may not be absolved from their responsibilities regarding their pregnant child, and they should take the lead in working with the school to support and monitor their child health and progress. The schools are not given midwives to deal with unexpected deliveries or minor ailments nor given the vehicles to transport the pregnant pupils to the clinics. It is on this backdrop that the School Governing Bodies and teachers at one particular village, in Mopani district established the internal policy which mandated all mothers of the pregnant teenager should wait at the school gate so that should there be an emergency related to their kids pregnancy they should assist the school in arranging for transfer to the

clinic’ The purpose of the study was to explore the perceived challenges experienced by mothers of pregnant teenagers who attended school at a particular village of Mopani district, Limpopo Province. The study sought to answer the question “what do mothers of pregnant teenagers say are challenges regarding waiting at the school gates as a way of taking care of their children?”

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual design was used to gain insight into the perceived challenges experienced by parents of pregnant teenagers who are waiting outside the school gate for their pregnant teenagers at one particular school of one village in Mopani District of Limpopo Province. The population included all mothers of pregnant teenagers who were waiting at school gate at one village, in Mopani district. A non-probability, purposive and convenient sample of 11 participants was selected (De Vos et al. 2011; Brink 2006). These were parents found at the gate on the days for data collection.

Data were collected by researchers from the selected participants, who agreed to participate. Data were collected through in-depth individual interview at the school gate (moved away from the whole group). The unstructured interview was used. The following question translated into XiTsonga by a language expected directed the interview: “*what challenges do you experience as you are expected to stay at the school gate for your pregnant teenager?*” The question was followed by probing as a communication skill which ensured that more sufficient data were provided by the participants, as postulated by Babbie and Mouton (2001) and De Vos et al. (2011).

The voice recorder was used to capture more information and the field notes and observational notes were recorded. Data from each individual interview was collected until theoretical saturation of each new category was reached (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The narrative data from the un-structured interview was analysed qualitatively by means of the open-coding method. Tesch’s procedure cited in Creswell (2009) was used as the method of choice for data analysis. The researcher carefully read through all the transcripts in order to get a sense of the all the data.

The lists of all similar topics were compiled. Data were grouped according to main categories and sub-categories. Field notes were also coded and categorised.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was sought from the University of Venda Higher Degree Committee. Permission to access the village was obtained from the Headman of Malavani Village. Informed consent was obtained from the purposively selected participants. Participants were provided with sufficient and understandable information about participation in the study. The right to self-determination was ensured by obtaining informed consent from the participants. Permission to use a voice recorder was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by protecting participants' identity, privacy, worth and dignity. No victimisation of participants who refused to participate in the research took place.

Trustworthiness

The criteria for ensuring trustworthiness as outlined in Lincoln and Guba (1985), De Vos et al. (2011) and Babbie and Mouton (2001) were observed. Credibility was ensured by prolonged engagement in order to build trusting relationships with the participants. The researchers had contact with participants, during the session of making appointment, information session and during data collection. Referential adequacy was achieved by taking notes to record findings that provided a suitable record and the use of voice recorder. Transferability was ensured by thick description of research methodology. Member check was also conducted in order to validate the truth and to confirm the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings presented in Table 1 outline the themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis from eleven parents of pregnant teenagers who are waiting outside the school gate. Their ages ranged between 40 and 65 and interviews lasted for about 45 to 1 hour on average. From the transcription and analysis of the interviews it became clear that there are number of challenges that parents face when their teen children are pregnant and attending

school as they expected to wait at the school gate and sometimes had to miss work. Almost all of the parents perceived this practice as a form of punishment. Some of the parents who were working lost their jobs and experiencing economic challenges. Most of them explained how they are emotionally affected by the practice. One of the participants explained how this practice was affecting the pregnant learner as well. This supported by the excerpt from one of the participant who said *'I think this is a form of punishment to the parents. I don't know why we are punished because we did not encourage these children to fall pregnant. We stay here the whole day and we should even bring food to eat and the whole day there is nothing that we do it is frustrating and I think my child is also affected by my coming to school with her.'* The following themes emerged from data: socio-economic implications to parents, Emotional implications to parents, Implications on the pregnant learner. In discussing the themes and sub-themes, quotations and relevant literature was used to emphasise the results.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Socio-economic implications to parents	1.1. Waiting at school gate result to loss of employment 1.2. Unattended household chores while waiting at school gate
2. Emotional to implications parents	2.1. Blaming and disappointed 2.2. Conflict within the family and between the two families
3. Implications on the pregnant learner	3.1 Possibility of being excluded from attending school

Theme 1: Socio-economic Implications To Parents

Most of the participants indicated how waiting at the gate have interfered with their work which led to their dismissal and loss of salary. They looked sad when they explained how they were now unable to support their families financially let alone preparing for the coming grandchild. All participants indicated how their day is spent without doing anything and when they get home they start attending to their everyday

household chores. This is confirmed by the following excerpts *'I need to provide food on the table for my children I am not married and now I depend on my two children grant for survival. This is frustrating Pause!!! We stay at the gate the whole day and nobody is carrying out the household chores and when we go home you must do the chores up to late at night.'* The following sub-themes emerged from data: Waiting at the school gate resulted in loss of employment and unattended household chores while waiting at school gate

Sub-theme 1.1: Waiting at School Gate Result to Loss of Employment

Almost 50 percent of participant described how they have lost employment because they were expected to wait at the gate for their pregnant children. Most of them said that they were breadwinner and loss of employment has affected the whole family. The participants felt that it was important for them to leave employment as education was more important in their children's life. The participants felt that when their children are educated it might change their low economic conditions. One mother participant who was self-employed said: *"It irritates me because in my house there is no man and I am the bread winner. I collect woods for people then they pay me but when I am going to wait at the school gate it means I will no longer going get that money. How am I going to survive its tough?"* Another participant who was working far from home said: *"It affects me because at school they want someone who will wait at the gate and I am working far so I have to hire a person to go and wait at the gate on my behalf and my salary income is not enough for maintaining my family and to pay the person I have hired. It's very hard."*

This is evident from the results that loss of employment and income result in economic hardship for the family and this could lead to psychological stress on both the teenager and the parents. Taylor et al. (2014) were of the opinion that financial pressure was positively associated with mothers' depressive symptoms and negatively related to mothers' optimism about the future. Negative option about the future may affect the relationship between the teenager and the parent and also care given to the born child. Authors further quoted the Family Stress Mod-

el (FSM) model as suggesting that economic hardship (for example low income, negative financial events) increases the likelihood of economic pressure in families including, having unmet material needs, unpaid debts, or having to make difficult economic cutbacks. Economic pressure, and its related stressors, in turn, is positively linked to parents' psychological distress (McLelland et al. 2013).

Sub-theme 1.2: Unattended Household Chores While Waiting at School Gate

Data indicated that most of the parents felt that waiting at the gate was wasting their time as they were not doing anything for half of the day. They expressed how difficult it is to start household chores in the afternoon where they are expected to continue until late at night. This was said to be tiring as they do not get enough sleep to rest. Almost all of them indicated that they do not have money to hire somebody to do the work on their behalf. This is what one mother said *"Eish.... (Showing being annoyed) waiting at the school gate is very disturbing because I am not working, I am taking care of the household chores and you see now I must go and wait at the school gate. I don't have money to pay a person to do the household chores"*. Another participant said *"I just think they are punishing us by this behavior. I am not working; I am the one who is doing washing for everybody at home. When waiting here I find lot of washing for my children.....they don't have enough uniform...this is a real punishment."*

Pillow (2004) has argued that "teens most impacted by teen pregnancy are young women who are already living in impoverished conditions prior to becoming pregnant". Parents are working class households who are too poor to provide for their children's education and the indirect costs of sending them to school. This was further supported by Jarrett et al. (2010) and Dominguez and Watkins (2003) when indicating that individuals living in that context often lack access to social and institutional supports, making it more challenging for care givers to carry out domestic tasks and establish predictable patterns of family life.

Theme 2: Emotional Implications to Parents

It was found that most mothers felt embarrassed and disappointed because of their teen-

agers' pregnancy as they were expecting a lot from them and some of the mothers are blaming themselves because they think they did not do enough to protect their children. Almost all mothers felt that this was depressing to them as they blamed themselves and their daughters for the pregnancy. Most respondents indicated that they did not expect what happened. This is what one of the participant said *'this is draining me, I cry a lot about this. They are punishing us not the child. When I think of coming here every morning I ask myself why God is punishing me. They should also punish the boy who impregnated my child, I feel the mothers to the boys should also come and wait at the gate as well. I lost my job and don't have money to support my family. The mother of this boy is working and they are not suffering they also look down on us as if we are stupid.'*

Taylor et al. (2014) were in support in the Family Stress Model; indicate that parents experiencing economic pressure may be more susceptible to emotional distress including depression or anxiety. Emotional distress is disruptive to relations in the family and as a result, marital or interpersonal conflict is more likely and parents are prone to be harsh and inconsistent in their parenting. Finally, interpersonal conflict and harsh, inconsistent parenting increase the likelihood that children and adolescents will display emotional and behavioural problems and lower competence. Under this theme, the following themes emerged; blaming and disappointed; conflict within the family and between the two families.

Sub-theme 2.1: Blaming and Disappointed

Some mothers were blaming themselves for their children's pregnancy because they felt they were not there for their children. Where else, Majority of mother participants felt disappointed because they were expecting much from their children other than being pregnant and now they reject them. Some of the participants put the blame on the type of friends that their children are associating with. One participant indicated that almost all her child's friends have children and she think the child could have been pressured to fall pregnant in order to gain that sense of belonging. A mother of a grade 9 pregnant learner said *"Heei..... I will just say I don't know but may be is because I was not there for her, as I was working far from home and there was no one to tell her that what you are doing is wrong"*.

Another participant said this in voicing her disappointment *'Yoo man I am soo!! Disappointed (pausing and wiping tears) I thought this child will get educated and get this family out of poverty. Hey! I now we are back to square one. What bothers me is that that boy will further his studies and go on to marry an educated wife sign!! This is frustrating.'*

A mother to a grade 10 learner from FDG 1 said *"as a parent I had plans for her but since she is pregnant I am no longer continuing with the plans. Look now, I am waiting at this gate for her"*. A mother to a grade 11 pregnant learner said: *"She is here, I am staying with her and there is no one who is going to support her"*. I was so shocked to know that she was pregnant and embarrassed that my daughter got pregnant at such a very young age." Findings were supported by Krishna (2008) when indicating that if the mother had just learned that her teen is going to have a baby, she may probably experience a wide range of emotions, from shock and disappointment to grief and worry about the future. Some mothers felt a sense of guilt, thinking that if they have done more to protect their child this wouldn't have happened and they became embarrassed by their teens' pregnancy and worried about how family and friends and neighbors will react (White 2008). Chigona and Chetty (2008) were also in support when stating that parents sometimes distanced themselves from the girl, they felt ashamed that the community would look down upon the family because of their child's action.

Sub-theme 2.2: Conflict within the Family and Between the Two Families

Findings showed that mothers were very much affected and their marriages were shaking because the fathers were blaming mothers for what happened. It also indicated that most of those pregnant teenagers would be in a premature or forced marriage because of the conflicts between them and their parents, between parents and between the two families. Conflicts arose between the two families, the family of the pregnant teenager and the family of the boy who impregnated that girl. This is confirmed by statements from participants who indicated that families from the boy side were less involved and a boy continues with their studies without interruptions.

The following were quotes from two mother participants and this is what they said *"Her fa-*

ther said it is better for her to go and stay at her boyfriend's home because he is not going to support her. When she refused, her father accompanied her to her boyfriend's family so that they can be able to take care of her because it is not his responsibility". I told her to go and tell her in-laws to wait for her at the school gate because for me to wake up and go to stay at the gate waiting for someone who is going to repeat the same mistake, no I refused and told her to see what she can do. Yaaa... I told her boyfriend's parents to go and wait for her at the school gate, they said they will not do that they denied and they are putting pressure to us the parents of the girls because we want our children to further their studies."

The similar findings of Taylor (2011); Gutman, McLoyd and Tokoyawa (2005) were in support because they revealed that financial pressure was significantly associated with African American parents' psychological distress. Evidence also found that parents' emotional distress was significantly related to distressed interpersonal relations and negative, less adequate parenting practices.

Theme 3: Implications on the Pregnant Learner

It was found that some learners ended up dropping out of school because they didn't get support from the family member who could wait at the school gate. Dropping from school after delivery was another factor that participants felt it could affect the pregnant learners. This will be caused by poor family financial resources that will force their mothers to seek for work and again cannot afford to pay for a helper or crèche. The participants also think that these learners could be embarrassed by the fact that their mothers are waiting at the gate because of them. One participant said *'I think my daughter will be affected, we are very poor and I have to go back to work to earn an income and put food on the table. It is unfortunate that the money that I receive cannot pay for a worker to look after her child any pay for crèche, so she will have to drop out of school and look after that baby that's what she wanted. It's painful because the boy will continue with his studies.'* Chigona and Chetty (2008) were of the opinion that lack of support from the father of the child/ family of the boy financially or availability in terms of

baby-sitting (crèche) would mean she will be absent from school. In this study, this meant that the girl should stop attending the school.

Sub-theme 3.1: Possibility of Being Excluded From Attending School

Almost all participants indicated their concern about pregnant learners who did not have mothers to come and wait at the gate. It was highlighted that most of the time these are learners whose mothers had died and coming from worse poor economic conditions. The participants described the need to review these policies in order to cater for the most needy learners.' One mother participant said *"waiting at the school gate is not good, because some pregnant learners do not have people to wait for them at the school gate and they end up being expelled from school"*. Early childbearing requires strong familial support for girls to return to school. Studies in the United States of America have shown that child-rearing, lack of parental support and lack of support from peers, all contribute to high dropout rates (Cassell 2002; McLelland et al. 2013). Grant Hallman (2006) further agreed that the availability of an adult caregiver in the home was a strong determinant of whether girls in South Africa would return to school post-pregnancy.

Parental support seemed to be the most important factor determining teenage mothers' continuation with education (Cassell 2002; Matlala et al. 2014). It appears that some parents did not support their daughter's education either did not perceive this as a priority or lacked sufficient financial resources. Department of Education (2007) was in support when pointing that if parents are not involved in the schooling of the teen mother the educational environment is not created at home. The pregnant teenager may not have time to concentrate on school work at home; teachers may get annoyed with them and may thought the girl did not complete tasks which should have been done at home because they were incompetent. The teacher may label the teen mother as shirkers or depraved because they did not obey teacher's instruction such as completing homework. The teen mother could drop out of school. On the other hand, the Department of Education (2007), indicated that parents or guardians should take steps to ensure that as far as is possible their child receives her class

tasks and assignments during any period of absence from school and that all completed tasks and assignments are returned to the school for assessment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected it was noted with concern that mothers who were waiting at the school gate for their pregnant teenagers were affected psychologically and socially. Conflicts were also found to be a huge problem between the two families and the pregnant learner and her parents. Some of mothers who were waiting at the school gate had to stop working and this negatively affected the socio-economic status of the families. Drop-out and expulsion of pregnant learners who did not have parents or guardians to wait at the school gate was experienced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teenage pregnancy has complex implications to the parents, family and the learners. The following is recommended:

- ♦ Pregnancy prevention programs that involve parents and guardians should be created as a link between the school and the community it serves. This should support the community activities.
- ♦ Conduct capacity building to parents on promotion of parent-adolescent communication about sexual health.
- ♦ The boys and girls to be educated about outcomes of engaging in sexual activities, and assist them to make choices that protect their health and support their access to educational opportunities.
- ♦ Strengthening measures for pregnancy prevention and reduction as well as HIV and other STIs in order to promote learning, development and healthy lifestyle for learners. As well as psychosocial wellbeing of parents.

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