



## The Role of Socio-cultural Factors and Parenting Practices on the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores the role of socio-cultural factors and parenting practices on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The qualitative approach was used to conduct the study. Purposive and snowball sampling methods and procedure were used to recruit participants. The participants were pregnant girls, parents of pregnant girls, teenage mothers, community leaders, and high school staff. Content data analysis was used to analyse the data and responses were grouped in accordance with their themes. The findings suggest that the teenage girls' social and cultural beliefs and norms and values on parenting practices negatively impacted on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The findings led to the conclusion that the prevention of teenage pregnancy is not prioritized in the parenting practices of the teenage girls. Therefore, pregnant girls and teenage mothers were products of their upbringing.

### INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy befalls girls who live under sub-optimal parenting practices. The development of teenage girls is mainly affected by the very social and cultural factors inherent in parenting processes. It is an empirical fact that social and cultural norms, beliefs, and values shape the parenting practices that framed the critical conditions responsible for behavioural development (Bornstein 2012). Parenting plays an active role in the building of teenage girls' behavioural trait. Bassey (2018) noted that the complexity associated with the unhealthy development of most girls in Vhembe District is due to the social and cultural factors surrounding their parenting practices. A young girl in the district experiences various forms of parenting arrangements, including early separation from her biological parents. Consequently, the social behavioural problems associated with teenage girls originate from the experience of having to grow up in unfavourable conditions.

However, the parenting situation is not only peculiar in Vhembe District, the Republic of South Africa shares typical features, particularly in provinces which are predominantly Black (Ro-

man et al. 2016). There is a number of exceptional circumstances that affect parenting practices arising from the socio-economic deprivation of blacks during the apartheid regime (Holborn and Eddy 2011; Roman et al. 2016). Apartheid legacy greatly affects black family life, particularly in rural areas, specifically their ability to provide quality parenting for their children, which subsequently places an additional burden, especially on a growing girl-child facing a lack of parental care and adequate social welfare.

For instance, the current report from Statistics South Africa Household Survey estimated South Africa's total population to be 56.5 million. Approximately half (51%), which is 28.9 million of the population, is female, and children comprise 38 per cent of the total population (Statistics South Africa 2017). About half of these children live and are raised in only 3 of the 9 provinces: namely, Eastern Cape (15%), Kwa-Zulu-Natal (23%), and Limpopo (12%) (Statistics South Africa 2017). These three provinces have the most rural-dominated black population, with very few employment opportunities (Roman et al. 2016). Hence, it is not uncommon for the teenage girls in Vhembe District being raised separately from their biological parents as result of the migrant labour system and parenting practices involving extended family systems.

The dissemination of children across the rural populated provinces is to some extent different from that of adults, who are mostly parents. The greater proportion of adults from the rural populated provinces predominantly live in the metropolitan provinces. This is evident in Gauteng Province. Despite it represent the smallest province in the country, Gauteng accommodates nearly a quarter (24%) of all adults, and 25 percent of households, but only 17 percent of the children (Statistics South African 2010). This is due to the large number of adult-only households in the province, most of which are migrant parents from the rural provinces without their children. Mulaudzi and Peu (2013) noted the lack of primary parents in Vhembe District due to the experience of migratory parents and poor livelihood in single-parent households. Thus, the main concern for parenting practices in Vhembe District is that a typical teenage girl lives in a single-parent home with her mother or grandmother (Bassey 2018). As a result, the parenting experience becomes a major factor in the exhibition of early pregnancy behaviour.

Parenting institutions negotiate the social and cultural factors to form the basis of their practices and the practices develop the behavioural trait of the children (Bornstein 2012; Bornstein and Lansford 2010). However, the absence of a parent or both parents in a girl's life as well as her development, have a substantial impact on her attitude toward sexual relationships (Gould and Ward 2015). This is similar to the problematic context in Vhembe District, where girls are raised in unfavourable conditions due to the prevailing socio-cultural factors. The aim of this paper is to explore the role of socio-cultural factors and parenting practices on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. An understanding of socio-cultural factors on parenting practices and the impact on teenage pregnancy can be well guided within the theoretical framework of social learning theory and the theory of the social 'self', which focuses on the cultural context, and emphasises reciprocal interaction between cognitive, environmental, and behavioural determinants. Bandura's (1977) advocacy of social learning assimilates behaviour and cognitive process that proceeds in a social context. The social learning theory is based on principles that work together to form the social competence of life reality. Mead's (1913) theory of the social

'self' offered an explanation of dialogue that pregnant teenage girls have with themselves, consciously or unconsciously.

### Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of socio-cultural factors on parenting practices and the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhembe District.

### METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was an inductive qualitative approach. The researchers used an exploratory design, then focused only on the primary data. The study site and field work were Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Vhembe District comprises four local municipalities; namely, Musina, Collins Chabane, Thulamela and Makhado Municipality. The district is largely rural and the households are mostly female-headed (South Africa Social Security Agency 2011). Vhembe District is also a legendary cultural hub, with a total population of 1,302,113, of which 53.3 percent are females and 46.7 percent are males (Community Survey 2012).

This research site was chosen purposively for the study mainly because of the prevalence of teenage pregnancy characteristics. The participants were recruited through the abiding principle of snowball and purposive sampling procedure. The snowball sampling procedure was used to recruit 19 parents of pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers. A total of 13 pregnant teenage girls and 11 teenage mothers were selected from the field study. The purposive sampling procedure was used to recruit 4 high school principals, 7 high school life orientation teachers and 6 community leaders. The purposive sampling procedure was used because of its appropriateness in selecting unique participants that are especially informative. Key informant interview sessions were held, that enabled the researchers gathered responses from the high school staff members and community leaders. Then, unstructured interviews were used to obtain responses from parents of the pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers, as well as the pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers. The research question was, what is the impact of socio-cultural factors on parenting practices and the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhem-

be District? Data collection started in January 2015 and ended in September 2015. The thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews and responses were grouped in accordance with their themes.

## RESULTS

The interview data was subsequently transcribed by the researchers. These transcripts were read and then reread, to categorize commonly shared words, expressions and perceptions. These were coded. The shared codes produced the patterns, which were categorized under themes and sub-themes. The theme revolved around information pertaining to the social and cultural backgrounds on parenting experiences of girls and their families, which could explain the prevalence of teenage pregnancies in Vhembe District population.

The results that emerged from the study suggest that the socio-economic and cultural factors on the parenting of teenage girls in Vhembe District lead to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Evidence of these factors included the parenting patterns of teenage girls, the predominant practice of teenage girls' sexual taboos, peer pressure and influence, the experience of teenage motherhood, traditional practices, and sexual beliefs and practices. Table 1 tabulates the theme and explains the emergent sub-themes on the parenting practices and the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

The results in Table 1 indicate that the parenting pattern and practices of the teenage girls were unfavourable for healthy development.

Consequently, the parenting imperfections develop and shape risky sexual behaviours responsible for the likelihood of teenage pregnancy. The predominant evidence of teenage girls' sexual taboos practices in Vhembe District was another factor behind the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Under the sexual taboos practices, teenage girls are rendered sexually naïve (lack sexual awareness) and vulnerable to sexual exploitation by men. The results further revealed that peer pressure is a contributing factor in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy arising from alcohol/ substance abuse and the teenage girl's socialization patterns. The lack of adequate social welfare was indicative of the pressure for planned pregnancies as survival means. Evidence of recurrence of teenage pregnancy from the parenting experiences of teenage motherhood shows a tolerance of teenage pregnancy by daughters and younger siblings in the district. Traditional practices and sexual beliefs contribute to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy through non-condom use and traditional transitional rites. These factors collectively contribute to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, through the impact of socio-economic backgrounds and cultural factors on parenting practices.

## DISCUSSION

The socio-economic backgrounds and cultural factors shape the parenting practices of teenage girls and their behavioural development. The effect of social and cultural factors on the parenting practices of teenage girls was revealed

**Table 1: Social and cultural factors on parenting practices and teenage pregnancy**

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-themes/ recurring phrases</i>	<i>Recurring phrases indicative of thematic aspects/ description</i>
Socio-economic and cultural factors	Parenting patterns and practices	Parenting ignorance was cited as the reasons behind teenage pregnancy
	Teenage girls' sexual taboos	Cultural taboos on sex education among parents and teachers was mentioned as a reason for teenage pregnancy
	Peer pressure and influence	Alcohol and substance abuse among teenagers as well as the teenage girl's socialization patterns were cited as the reason for teenage pregnancy
	Teenage motherhood experience	Imitating maternal standard could be cited as a reason for early pregnancy
	Traditional practices	Transitional rites practices were cited on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy
	Sexual beliefs and practices	Sexual beliefs and practices were cited on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy

as the critical drivers for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhembe District. The sub-themes which emerged subsequently explained in detail the parenting practices and the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

### ***Parenting Pattern and Practices***

The parenting pattern and practices in Vhembe District play a role in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy among girls. The parenting experiences of teenage girls shape the critical factors that exposed them to teenage pregnancy. The study's empirical evidence was indicative that teenage girls' parents lack parental supervision and monitoring, which impacts on their behaviours, thus creating room for them to engage in sexual activities that led to pregnancy. This conclusion/ findings emerged as a common factor during the interviews, as stated by an informant: *"teenagers raised by their parents, you would find that nowadays parents are so loose in monitoring their children properly. Parents don't actually know when their girls come home or when they go out. They know nothing about their social life and that is exactly the reason why so many of them fall pregnant"* (high school principal [3]).

The point of view of the participant suggests that the pregnant teenage girls were raised by parents who were incapable of supervising and monitoring their behaviour. However, it is a grief impact on the prevalence of pregnancy if teenage girls are raised without basic parenting supervision and monitoring of their social behavioural activities. The preceding evidence also showed the ignorance feature in the parenting obligations of the teenage girls, which is undoubtedly a contributory factor in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

The findings further showed tolerant and/or permissive parenting practices, with a clear lack of parental involvement in the most basic aspects of teenage girls' development. Experts on parenting practices associate the nature of this type of parenting to permissive and uninvolved parenting methods. Permissive parenting typically maintains or enforces fewer, if at all any, household rules. Consequently, the children habitually display lack of self-control and are often associated with behavioural problems (Davids et al. 2015). In addition, they are vulnerable to drugs and alcohol and engaging in risky

sexual activities. Jewkes et al. (2009) and Panday et al. (2009) associated the prevalence of teenage pregnancy to the behavioural outcome of the experience of permissive parenting. The characteristics of uninvolved parenting also have similar consequences. However, it is the worst parenting aspect, owing to the fact that parents sometimes neglect their children or reject them completely (Roman et al. 2016). These parents characteristically have a weak emotional attachment to their children because they are not involved in their lives. As a result, if they provide supervision and monitoring, they are often inconsistent. Uninvolved parents exhibit few or no expectations or demands for their children's behaviours (Cherry 2017). These are fundamentally the parenting pattern of teenage girls that contributory to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

Nonetheless, lack of devoted parenting commitment of teenage girls played a role in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The fact that the teenage girls' parents lack awareness and concern for their sexual activities was another factor contributing to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Empirical evidence of the parenting practices of teenage girls typically demonstrates silent reactions on their early sexual debut and activities. This is evident in the following excerpt: *"I hardly knew she was dating a man. But even if I did, it would have made no difference at home now, not really (prompts). She should have known that there is pregnant before she started to sleep with boys"* (biological mother [2]). Another respondent answered as follows: *"She did not tell me about her pregnancy, but somehow I already knew. I went to the store and bought a pregnancy test and gave it to her to take. It came back positive and I got so upset with her. Why would she start sleeping with a man at her age? She is just 16. Her mother, my daughter, waited until she was married (grandmother [3])."*

Regardless of the fact that parents disapprove of teenage girls' sexuality, their silence and failure to act on it in a decisive manner subjected the girls to the susceptibilities to teenage pregnancy. This indicates that the fundamental factor responsible for teenage girls' uninformed decisions on sexual activities that lead to teenage pregnancy begins with their parents' lack of commitment and willingness to provide sex education. This empirical evidence calls for a rejoinder

der and refocuses on the sensitization of teenage sexuality, to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, starting with parents. Jewkes et al. (2009) noted that reducing teenage pregnancy requires a devoted focus on teenage girls' sexuality and the terms and conditions under which they have sex. On the contrary, the study by Flanagan et al. (2013) called for the recognition of teenage girls' sexuality. Therefore, instead of being stigmatized or condemned, teenage sexuality should rather gain a more recognized status as a stage of their sexual discovery and be supported to ensure teenagers are making the right sex-decisions. The lack of recognition of teenage sexuality in the parenting practices of teenage girls in Vhembe District effectively plays a role in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

Some of the teenage girls were exposed to teenage pregnancy through parental recklessness. This was indicative of the fact that the teenage girls' parents knew about the teenager's sexual activities, but did not act to prevent the prevalence of pregnancy; rather, they merely expected the girls not to fall pregnant. Due to this thoughtlessness, teenage girls were prone to teenage pregnancy. This fact emerged during the interviews: *"Yes. I used to suspect that my daughter was doing things. She went out without permission and returned when she felt like it. But I did not know she had a boyfriend and was involved in sex, but my younger daughter used to report to me that she saw her standing with a boy and I warned her to stop seeing boys"* (biological mother [1]). Other opinions shared by the respondents were as follows: *"No, I just noticed that she was three (3) months pregnant"* (grandmother [6]). Another respondent stated the following: *"Her pregnancy was a surprise to me. But I knew before the pregnancy about her activities with boys"* (grandmother [9]).

Lack of parent-child communication and trust issues regarding the sex subject basically led to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. This evidence is typical of authoritarian parenting approach and practices that foster very little or no communication with their children. Roman et al. (2016) explained that children who are under authoritarian parenting get scared of their parents and lack the freedom to communicate freely on issues that affect them directly. The effect of this parenting pattern basically lacks sex education for teenage girls, as largely indicated in the

results. This thus contributes to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

Teenage girls who were raised by their grandmothers were commonly involved in teenage pregnancy due to the parenting pattern. Their parenting practices virtually indicated that the teenage girls lived unsupervised under their grandparents, due to lack of awareness of the girls' social activities. The findings also revealed that the girls habitually faked school activities during weekends and holidays, to enable them to hang out with friends and male partners, consume alcohol and other substances, and engage in sexual activities. An informant explained the following during the interviews: *"Teenagers living with grannies is like staying on their own, they give excuses such as having extra classes on weekends whilst they have their own agendas. A lot of them get pregnant or are even mothers now. Most of the girls who are consuming alcohol in the stress mainly live with their grandmothers"* (life orientation teacher [2]).

The teenage girls under the supervision of grandmothers enjoy a created freedom that enables them to freely engage in sexual practices that placed them as victims of early pregnancy. The evidence revealed feckless parenting patterns and the negative consequences of grandparenthood on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Dunifon and Bajracharya (2012) noted the negative renderings of grandparenthood experience on children social competences, which are classified under inactive parenthood. Therefore, grandmotherhood parenting patterns placed teenage girls at risk of early pregnancy.

Similarly, grandmotherhood's forbearance values play a role in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. They squat too much tolerance on teenage girls and accept whatever the girls decide on, which often swayed young girls to choose grandparents over their biological parents. This fact emerged from the interview: *"In our own culture, grandmothers are too tolerant and over-pet their grandchildren, so some of the teenagers prefer living with their grandmothers, instead of their biological parents ... so teenagers living with grannies get pregnant often because they are over-pet to do anything they like"* (life orientation teacher [3]).

The intent of being raised by their grandmothers for the purpose of being unsupervised and unmonitored merely suggests that grandmotherhood maintains zero established house-



hold rules for their grandchildren. The lack of household rules, control, monitoring, supervision, and the freedom to behave on the teenage girls' terms exposed the teenage girls to teenage pregnancy. Typical of the grandmothers' parenting pattern and practices there is excessive permissiveness. Permissive parenting displays excessive freedom of children's behaviours (Agadoni 2014). *The* parenting pattern also indicated inappropriate parenting experience owing to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

The prevalence of teenage pregnancy has not yet been considered a livelihood problem by teenage girls' parents. The silence and carelessness of parents on teenage pregnancy was a factor that contributes to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. For example, parents were not bothered by the possibility of the girls falling pregnant out of their social activities, even if they were sexually related. This is an indication that some parents directly raised and placed teenage girls at risk of teenage pregnancy. The respondents stated the following during the interviews: *"No no no, I don't want to labour myself. What for?... I have two boys and one girl. She is the first to be pregnant, but I don't mind, I want her to make a baby child after all"* (grandmother [9]). Another respondent also stated: *These days no matter what you do, any girl who wants to get pregnant will get pregnant. It is not up to us again, like in our days, when our parents would punish us for not obeying instructions"* (biological [1]).

Despite the parents' silence and carelessness, they embraced the pregnancy. This shows that parents are not doing enough to prevent teenage pregnancy by focusing on measures and creating awareness necessary to prevent pregnancy befalling their girls. A South African Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), reported that among teenage learners who had ever had sex, 16.4 per cent were involved in a pregnancy and the prevalence increases in every subsequent year from its initial count (Reddy et al. 2013). The concern remains that, increasing rates of teenage pregnancy hint on ongoing rates of unprotected sexual behaviour among teenage girls; a tendency that can be avoided with parents' educative involvement. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy rates should rather target the factors associated with preventing early sexual debuts among teenage girls. This can be achieved through parental

control, sex education awareness and expertise to negotiate safer sex with their partners, as well as creating an early social norm of responsible womanhood so that girls perceive getting pregnant as unfavourable to their future progress.

### Cultural Taboos on Teenage Sexuality

Sexual taboos play a role in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Lack of sexual awareness among teenage girls is a factor contributing to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy due to the prohibition surrounding the subject of teenage sexuality. This cultural practice prohibits sex education and further constitutes a parenting norm for teenage girls, with the concern that sex education is an inappropriate parenting practice. The respondents stated the following during the interviews: *"No, it does not seem right to discuss such matters with your children"* (biological mother [3]). Another respondent stated: *I did not hear such topics being discussed by my parents either"* (grandmothers [7]). On the other hand, some parents' opinion indicates that abstinence from sex practices was more appropriate. As in the following: *"No, but I tried a lot of times to stop her from seeing boys"* (biological mother [1]). *"It is not right to even discuss that with your girls, talk less your grandchildren; it is not good for them"* (grandmothers [3]).

The consideration of the teenage girls' parents leads to the submission that sexual health concerns and education have not gained its promotion and relevance in their parenting practices. On the contrary, the present parenting pattern with the practice of sexual taboos was helping to promote teenage pregnancy, with the preferred measures to enforce abstinence or discontinue relationship assumed to be sexual with male partners, instead of safeguarding them to avoid pregnancy. The perception of sexual taboos on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy validates the belief that sexual abstinence was favoured over sex education. This is despite the fact that sexually active girls continue falling pregnant as a result of lack of sexual awareness.

The prevalence of teenage pregnancy is blamed primarily on a lack of knowledge about sex and contraception or inadequate skills in negotiating safer sexual relationships (Arai 2009; Macvarish and Billings 2010), despite evidence of other social and economic factors. The con-

cern for teenage girls' falling pregnant under parents' purview intensified the preconceptions that their parents are incompetent and ignorant of the teenagers' basic needs. Parenting practices that fail to promote healthy sexual practices or incorporate risk-avoidance practices qualify to be viewed as feckless or unreliable. Not only are such parenting practices unwise, but they are more and more viewed as sub-optimal for the healthy development of girls. The study by Dodds (2009) noted that the people who are most often deemed as being 'at risk' are described as suffering from 'learned helplessness' and this assumes that those 'at risk' are, on at least some occasions, unable to act in their own best interests, despite the evident danger. This fact represents the true situation of parenting practices and the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhembe District.

The perception of sexual taboos on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy also gives expression on the impact of cultural values on parenting practices in Vhembe District. The impact of sexual taboos empowers men over teenage girls. Jewkes et al. (2009) explained that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy is a social occurrence whose causes and consequences are rooted in women's gendered socio-environment. Hoffman-Wanderer (2013) and Morrell and Devy (2012) noted that sexual taboos are a fundamental determinant of early pregnancy among girls. The critical drivers that placed teenage girls at heightened risk of teenage pregnancy include lack of opportunities to discuss sexuality where high levels of stigma about teenage sexuality abound (Panday et al. 2009), lack of sexual awareness; and, men making decisions about sex in situations where, for instance, teenage girls are involved in relationships of unequal power, often resulting in unprotected and coerced sex. The preceding factors are the effects of teenage sexual taboos that lead to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

The sexual taboo and naivety among teenage girls further intensified with the impediment of school teachers to deliver sex education. An informant stated the following: *"There is a subject that orientates teenagers or children called life orientation, but I believe that the teachers, due to our culture, are not honest and mostly not qualified to teach the subject. Sex education is a topic in the subject, but many teachers were not trained to teach the subject but they*

*teach it just because they have been teaching there for a while. Some of the teachers are not even experienced enough to teach life orientation but they are the teachers of the subject now. It has been raised many times that teachers are not teaching sex education in the subjects and they are not qualified to teach it"* (high school principal [4]).

The unprofessionalism involving sex education of school teachers in the district was another dimension of the cultural values which impact on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The study by Bearinger et al. (2007) noted that most basic needs of teenagers are based on accurate and complete information about their body functions, sex, safer sex, reproduction, and sexual negotiation and refusal skills. Without such information, which is easily hindered by sexual taboos, teenagers are forced to make poor and unthoughtful decisions, subjecting them to early pregnancies.

### **The Role of Peer Pressure on Teenage Pregnancy**

Peer pressure played a significant role in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers had to plan their pregnancy in order to derive some benefits. The benefits derived from being a teenage mother create pressure from peers in a similar situation to follow the same pathway. This is evident in the following excerpt: *"It is peer pressure playing a role, depending on what the previous pregnant teenager or teenage mother is benefiting from it, like buying themselves All Star sneakers with the money they receive. For instance, being given money by a person who is taking care of the child, or the child support grant. The government has been doing everything possible for teenage pregnancy, unfortunately, the agents are not doing their job or rather they are the ones misleading the government"* (life orientation teacher [3]).

The phenomenon of planned pregnancy hints on lack of future ambition by the teenage girls. However, the poverty experienced led to rationality, considering the deprived socio-economic background of the district. That notwithstanding, planned pregnancy demonstrates lack of favourable livelihood aspiration, having to settle for the benefits drives from teenage motherhood. The empirical evidence showed that the

prevalence of teenage pregnancy was more of an economic rationality and a material-value-driven factor than a parenting factor. These findings collaborate with the study by Duncan (2007), who found that the basis for planned pregnancy by teenage girls themselves (even when living with their parents), depends not on their lack of sexual restraint, but rather economic prudence. The indication that teenage girls were self-pressured to motherhood speaks poorly of themselves, even when the choice to choose a favourable future lies in their own hands.

The empirical evidence on the parenting practices of the teenage girls might have explained to a large extent the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. However, the values cultivated by the girls from their immediate surrounding also shaped teenage pregnancy. There is so much to say about the teenage girls who plan motherhood. For example, Smith Battle (2000 cited in Macvarish 2010), noted that the depravity modern teenage mothers commit through planning their pregnancy is not the sin of desire, but that of not planning and rationally choosing their future. Therefore, interventions suitable for girls who planned motherhood for some benefits required situating policies within broader development programs. These should target the concern of vulnerable girls at risk, being improved to a significant social and cultural position (Gill 2007; Guldborg 2009). Parenting subsequently becomes a central area of policy concern and a dynamic area of policy intervention (Bristow 2009). Peer pressure on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy further highlights the social vulnerabilities of teenage girls in Vhembe District.

The teenage girls' socialization patterns that hinge on gangs and cliques further exposed their vulnerabilities to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The peculiar social standard of these gangs involved the use of expensive smartphones, wrist watches, among other gadgets, typically beyond their parents' affordability. Hence, they are enticed to involve themselves in sexual relations with men, with the view to receive benefits through planned pregnancy. The following was said during the interviews: *"Teenage mothers in this school have a habit of owning expensive things. They have big phones, nice wrist watches. In short, they are used to good things, which are all benefits of dating sugar daddies"* (high school principal [2]). A different respondent indicated that: *In*

*fact, it is not sexual desire that makes teenagers do a lot of things that lead to pregnancy, but peer pressure seeking to belong to a particular group"* (high school principal [2]). Another respondent stated the following: *"Sleeping with old men and getting money from it is a big teenage pregnancy problem. Sisters can even sleep with one man because he has money and they are both benefiting from the man. Sisters even get pregnant for the same man in this village. They are young and their parents can't say anything because the man is rich and they want his money. "Hmm, I have seen things I never imagined happening in our days. An elder sister and younger sister with one man or even cousins; they are still blood"* (community leader [1]).

The evidence of peer pressure on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy captured intergenerational sexual relations. The findings collaborate with the studies by Guttmacher Institute (2011) and WHO (2014) on the impact of intergenerational sexual relationships on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. These findings theorize that for the teenage girls it is not about the sexual desire but rather benefits. Younger siblings of teenage mothers were equally exposed to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy through the same intergenerational sexual relations, as indicated during the interviews: *"Yes, she is the second girl to get pregnant with my granddaughters"* (grandmother [6]). Another respondent indicated that: *"My first child was pregnant just too early, I think she was 15 or so. She was younger than this one. The other girl is my sister's daughter (niece), the two of them were pregnant the same year and by older men who were friends with my son in this village"* (biological mother [1]).

Siblings of teenage mothers deem to be receiving benefits regard teenage pregnancy as a behavioural influential incidence. Several studies on family and siblings' influence on the prevalence of teenage pregnancy noted that risky sexual behavioural learning among siblings shape the processes of teenage pregnancy that occur on younger siblings (Anand and Kahn 2013; Crossman 2013; Fletcher and Yakusheva 2011). The social learning theoretical framework supports the assertion that an individual's immediate contact both directly and indirectly, exposed them to acceptable behaviours as well as a variety of other behavioural models (Akers



and Sellers, 2004). An individual's immediate social circle generates behavioural codes and models, which become a source of imitating behaviour.

### **The Impact of Teenage Motherhood on Teenage Pregnancy**

Teenage motherhood impacts teenage girls' development expose them to teenage pregnancy. The evidence from the results revealed that pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers were raised in a teenage motherhood background. The respondents indicated the following: *"I was 17 years old; I was still young, though"* (biological mother [2]). *"I think I was 19 going to 20"* (biological mother [4]). *"I was 18, but 18 years old then is like 22 years old now"* (biological mother [1]).

The empirical evidence that pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers are raised in a teenage motherhood background frames the prevalence of teenage pregnancy as imitational behavioural experience from mothers as role models. The evidence concur with the study by Akella and Jordan (2015), which traced the prevalence of teenage pregnancy to parenthood experience and background. The findings on imitating mothers as role models have the theoretical backing of the social 'self'. The theory of the social 'self' upholds that it is through the processes of role attraction that an individual develops a behaviour that is a prerequisite to the 'self'. Mead's theory of the social 'self', advocates the theoretical assertion that the 'self' is not an attribute of birth, but rather it is developed over time through social experiences and activities. The theory of the social 'self' is based on the perception that the self-emerges from social interactions, such as observing and interacting with others, responding to others opinions about oneself, and internalizing both external opinions and internal feelings about oneself (Farmer and Tsakiris 2012). The ideas that drive the theory of the sociological account of 'self' are empirically based on principles that work together to form the social reality of teenage pregnancy within the impact and experience of teenage motherhood.

### **Traditional Beliefs and Practices**

Shared beliefs and practices on sexual practices also contribute to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. This is because traditional transi-

tional rites of passage, expose teenage girls to teenage pregnancy through unsafe beliefs and practices. Attendees of the tradition often fall pregnant moments after the exercise. This fact emerged during the interviews. An informant stated the following: *"There are times when girls attend traditional initiation schools, I don't know whether they are made to believe that they are mature or what, because many of these girls who attend the school often get pregnant immediately after they come back"* (life orientation teacher 1).

The main motive and objective of the practice of traditional transitional rites are to teach young girls about responsible behaviour and become exemplary women as well as a representative of good wives. The evidence from the results suggests that the objective has changed to become a practice that promotes teenage pregnancy. This evidence suggests a grave concern on intervention for reducing the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, given that cultural practices perceptively made girls vulnerable to early pregnancy. Thus, the social learning theoretical assertion vehemently supports the findings, with the reliance on motivation as the reason for the occurrence and reoccurrence of teenage pregnancy through the impact of traditional practices. The social learning theory's explanation of motivation is fundamentally based on environmental and thus social factors because motivational factors are driven by the functional values and practices of behavioural occurrence. Jewkes et al. (2009) noted that cultural values and traditional practices equally drive the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The ideas that mediate cultural practices are the sole force behind creating cultural practices from thoughts, beliefs, morals, and feedbacks. Although, there was no evidence of whether the teenage girls were actually taught to value unprotected sexual practices, that notwithstanding, a study noted that cultural values mediate the sexual practices of the teenage girls (Ardington et al. 2012).

Thus, sexual beliefs also emerged as a factor in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy through the non-use of condoms sexual beliefs and attitude of the teenage girls. Pregnant teenage girls and teenage mothers were exposed to pregnancy through the practice of non-condom use cited sexual belief as a pledge and commitment of loyalty to each other. The respondents explained as follows: *"I believe your man won't sleep with you with a condom if you are not the main girlfriend"* (teenage mothers [12]). Another respon-

dent stated the following: “*Not using a condom for sex shows genuine love and... even commitment. I don't take you seriously if you always use a condom with me*” (teenage mothers [16]). “*In fact, my main boyfriend is the only person I can sleep with without using protection. But I use a condom sometimes*” (pregnant teenager [1]).

The empirical evidence of sexual belief emerged as a culturally motivated value and an indication of main girlfriend/ boyfriend in a relationship. The studies by Jewkes et al. (2009) and Panday et al. (2009) found that the incidence of teenage pregnancy is entirely a social occurrence shaped by the attitudes and actions of the teenage girls and influenced through the environment they are socialized as well as the relationships they develop. These findings are supported by Mead's theory of the social 'self', as a theoretical framework for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The fundamental concept of social 'self' is shaped by the overall view of socialization as a lifelong process in the society. The concept of social 'self' describes the sociological context revolving around the prevalence of teenage pregnancy from a 'self' introspective and retrospective standpoint.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper, we explored how teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood occurred among young girls due to the impact and experience of sub-optimal parenting practices. What was peculiar in the findings is the pattern in which parents in Vhembe District handle their parenting practices among teenage girls, as well as the role of social and cultural factors. It is clear, however, that in Vhembe District unstable parenting experience and family background are common and subject girls to the vulnerabilities of early pregnancy. Fundamental to the overall findings is the idea that teenage pregnancy does not seem to be a problem worthy of tackling through parenting practices. Basically, the parenting of a girl child has been relegated to grandmothers, despite their economic status and livelihood adversities. In conclusion, the parenting pattern and practices of teenage girls in Vhembe District provide a direct link to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what is known as the factors that drive the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in

Vhembe District, it would help if policies on supporting parents with a girl-child would help prevent the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Vhembe District. Such policies would benefit teenage girls' healthy development and broader wellbeing, and help to improve parenting as well as reduce the vulnerabilities of girls in pregnancy incidences. The policy programme should also aim to support the conditions for good parenting, taking into cognizant socio-cultural values affecting parenting and teenage pregnancy. Programmes should be developed, such as anti-poverty efforts, focused exclusively on families with a girl child, mainly to reduce stress and improve parenting quality and child development. The same should go to work-family support. In so doing, mothers would not have to abandon a newly born girl-child in Vhembe for the metropolis a few weeks after birth, resulting in the sharing of early-stage parenting responsibilities with their own mothers and others. This would call for an extension of maternity leave, to allow mothers a longer period of time at home with their new-born child, and also provide opportunities for mothers working in urban areas to relocate their new-born to the work location. This would also require ongoing input in order to identify other areas of support.

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