

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2024.09.25.12>

How to cite: Mbongwa, L., Mpanza, S., & Mlambo, V. H. (2024). The Teenage Pregnancy Crisis in South Africa Among High School Students, Causes, Implications and Possible Solutions: A Literature Review. *Futurity Education*, 4(3). 200-216. <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2024.09.25.12>

The Teenage Pregnancy Crisis in South Africa Among High School Students, Causes, Implications and Possible Solutions: A Literature Review

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Received: February 21, 2024 | **Accepted:** June 22, 2024 | **Available online:** July 8, 2024

Abstract: The objective of this paper was to examine the causes, implications, and possible solutions to the teenage pregnancy crisis in South African high schools. The paper employed a qualitative literature review using secondary data in order to answer the objective of this paper. The paper employed the Ecological Systems The theory proposed explanation for the high rate of teen pregnancy among south African high school students. The paper found that there may be a variety of ramifications from the rising incidence of teenage pregnancy among South African high school pupils. They are interrupted from progressing with their education; they may also experience health- and psychological-related risks and social distress. The paper suggested that making contraceptives more accessible should also involve providing thorough contraception counselling for young high school girls,

allowing them to make informed choices. Finally, the Department of Education should consider revising subject policies to accommodate the necessary changes, such as comprehensive sex education in schools.

Keywords: Education, South Africa, Pregnancy, High School.

Introduction

With nearly a quarter of young girls becoming pregnant before the age of 20, South Africa boasts one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies globally. The data from Statistics South Africa shows that a total of 90,037 girls between the ages of ten and nineteen gave birth in the nine provinces from March 2021 to April 2022 (Stats SA) (Pikoli, 2023). The report also showed that 660 of the approximately 34,000 teenage pregnancies in 2020 involved girls younger than 13 years old. The Eastern Cape (15,348), Limpopo (15,365), and KwaZulu-Natal (26,296) had the most of these pregnancies. Limpopo had recorded the highest number of terminations (Pikoli, 2023). The Mpumalanga provincial department stated that the rate of learner pregnancy in South Africa was concerning and had grown to be a significant problem in schools, impacting thousands of young people's lives and frequently impeding their ability to pursue fulfilling careers and personal development (Moichela, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issue of teenage pregnancy in South Africa, particularly in the province of Gauteng, the most populous province in the country. Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a 60% increase in the number of children born to adolescent mothers in Gauteng. This trend underscores the need for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services targeting adolescents to address the increasing rates of teenage pregnancy in the region during times of crisis (Barron et al., 2022). According to data from the Gauteng Department of Health, between April 2020 and March 2021, over 23,000 girls under 18 gave birth, with 934 babies under the age of 14. This contrasts with the 14,577 girls under 19 who gave birth during the same period the previous year (Mapenzauswa, 2021).

This cycle perpetuates systemic issues of inequality and limited opportunities for these young women, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and limited options for their future. It is essential for comprehensive support systems to be in place to address the complex challenges faced by young mothers in South Africa and provide them with the resources and opportunities they need to break free from this cycle and create a better future for themselves and their children (Save the Children, 2021). In addition, it raises the possibility of maternal problems, which lowers baby survival rates, and it pushes many girls to assume adult roles before they are emotionally or physically ready. The social and economic costs of this are enormous. Furthermore, a significant cause of the risks to adolescents' sexual and reproductive health in South Africa is their inability to obtain Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and reasonably priced, suitable medical care. Teenage pregnancy is still a significant problem among South African youth, especially those in high school (Save the Children, 2021). Over time, there have been growing calls for more action by different stakeholders to stop this ongoing crisis in the country's educational system (Gwala, 2022).

Whether it be through improved youth education and awareness on sexual behavior, stricter legal consequences for those engaging in sexual activity with minors, ensuring teenagers in South Africa have access to reproductive rights, or the responsibility of educators to safeguard the rights of teenagers in the basic education sector (Gwala, 2022). More concerningly, 30% of teenage girls between the ages of 10 and 19 become pregnant, and 65% of these pregnancies are unplanned. Lastly, 33% of girls, or one in three, do not return to school after becoming pregnant. Every week, roughly 1300 adolescent girls

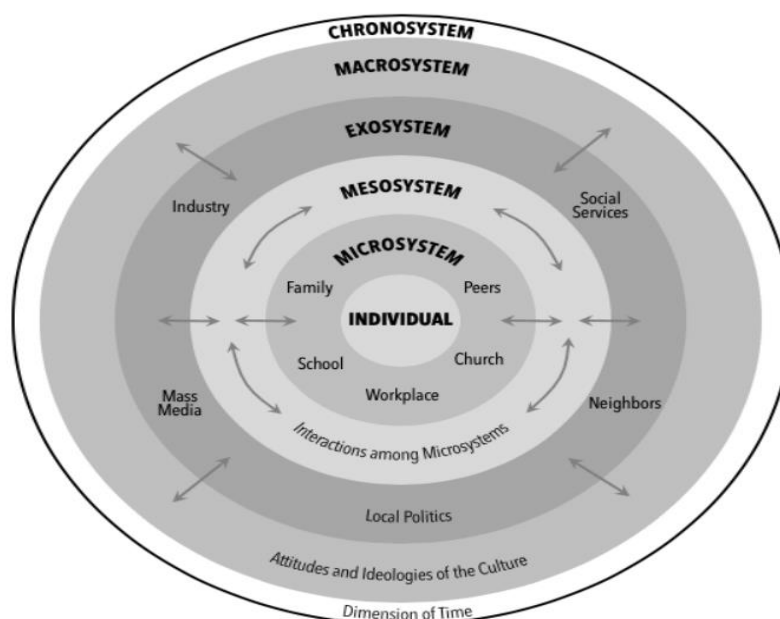
and young women in South Africa get HIV for the first time (Ngqakamba, 2021). With that in mind, this paper aims to investigate the causes, consequences, and potential solutions of South Africa's teenage pregnancy crisis among high school students.

Theoretical Support

The Ecological Systems Theory was employed in the paper in order to explain the teenage pregnancy crisis in South Africa among high school students. According to ecological systems theory, various environmental systems impact human development. The theory of Ecological Systems, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, posits that an individual's behaviour is shaped by various environments and systems in which they interact. These systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The theory suggests that individuals behave differently in different contexts as they are influenced by the relationships, structures, and norms within each system. This helps explain why individuals may exhibit different behaviours at home, work, or with their family, as they are constantly adapting to the different environments they are exposed to. The ecological systems theory consists of several interconnected systems that interact to shape their development. These systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, each of which plays a unique role in influencing an individual's behaviour. The microsystem refers to the immediate environment in which the individual operates, such as their family, school, or peer group. The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between different microsystems, while the exosystem includes external influences that indirectly impact the individual, such as government policies or media. The macrosystem represents the broader cultural context in which the individual is embedded. Through the dynamic interplay of these systems, individuals are influenced in complex ways that shape their behaviour over time. This environment comprises a set of systems that make up a concentric structure where each system surrounds the other. Bronfenbrenner was particularly interested in how an individual perceives their environment, not in the environment as it exists in objective reality. The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are some of these systems.

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Source: Davis (2023).

The microsystem: According to the Ecological Systems Theory, a child's immediate social network consists of their family, peers, and other close relationships that impact their development. Examples of these relationships include local clubs, social groups the child belongs to, and institutions like the school system. In Ecological Systems Theory, a mesosystem is the more extensive network of connections and opportunities that emerge in the interaction systems that comprise an individual's microsystem. Within ecological systems, the social structures and systems—such as the legal, financial, political, and industrial systems—are commonly understood as the predetermined backdrop to an individual's life. In Ecological Systems Theory, a macrosystem is the more extensive network of relationships and opportunities that emerge in the interaction systems that make up an individual's ecosystem, such as cultural traditions and societal values. The cumulative effects of environmental, socio-historical, and all other dynamical continuities over an individual's lifetime are referred to as a chronosystem in Ecological Systems Theory.

Ecological Systems Theory and Teenage Pregnancy

According to the ecological perspective, an individual's behaviour always occurs in a specific environment. Today's adolescents face a plethora of obstacles that could be debilitating, and their inadequate coping mechanisms might make it impossible for them to handle trying circumstances. These adolescents may feel compelled to engage in risky sexual behaviour in order to stay afloat. The ecosystem viewpoint further indicates that the choices of each person and each collective have far-reaching consequences on all members of our society. This may be related to adolescent pregnancies in that it affects not just the individual experiencing the pregnancy but also society at large and taxpayers. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory concerns the nature and circumstances of a child's surroundings. According to the author, a child's interactions in these settings get increasingly complicated as they grow. The most profound system is the microsystem or immediate surroundings directly impacting a person. It is defined as a "pattern of roles, activities, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing individual in a specific environment with specific material and physical characteristics." This system includes family, friends, school, and peer groups, where one participates in face-to-face interactions. It additionally includes daily activities, roles, and relationships. Research has shown that the support and encouragement from these individuals can help teenage mothers feel better about themselves and their situation, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both themselves and their children. According to Bhana et al. (2010), 85% of pregnant women said their families favoured their pregnancy. According to their research, this could eventually lead to family strife and undermine the confidence and self-worth of teenage moms. Individuals enter the mesosystem, the following system, when they leave their immediate surroundings and enter a new one. Interactions at the mesosystemic level may impact teenage moms because this is where parents and educators may work together to plan their children's education. Young mothers, lacking support from their parents, often turn to older boys for resources, leading to some becoming pregnant and subsequently dropping out of school (Damons, 2023).

The Department of Education's measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy emphasise that parents or other caregivers must collaborate with teachers to give a pregnant learner the best support possible.

The exosystem is larger than the previous systems because it includes a person's community, health systems, government decisions, school board decisions, the distribution of goods and services, communication, and transportation facilities. It as well ensures the learner can continue with their work during pregnancy-related absences from school. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25), "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant" make up this system.

Each of these environments influences a teenage mother's decisions. The adolescent mother may face discrimination or support from the community. The Health systems can make an impact in several ways, including by educating teenagers about sexuality, giving them access to contraception, and helping young mothers who visit clinics get help with their pregnancies. Cultural beliefs and principles play a significant role in shaping the social landscape of the macrosystem (Donald et al., 2002). It is the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes. Cultures, values, and traditions influence the prevailing negative perception of teenage mothers. The chronosystem encompasses all aspects of time, including environmental events, environmental changes, an individual's socio-historical context, shifting family structures, cultural shifts, and more (Hook, 2002). By understanding one's relationship to their environment, individuals can identify opportunities for growth and change, and contribute positively to their surroundings. This process of self-reflection and engagement with one's context can lead to a deeper understanding of systemic dynamics and ultimately drive personal and societal progress (Donald et al., 2002). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also highlights "ecological transitions" in a person's development. This is the point at which their role, setting, or both shift within their environment (Hook, 2002). Teenage moms can relate to this as they have a new social identity as young mothers. As a result, they experience changes in their self-perception, behaviours, treatment, actions, thoughts, and emotions.

Problem Statement

Teenage pregnancy rates in South Africa are alarming because they indicate instances of unprotected sex, which puts teenagers at risk for HIV and other STIs. In a study conducted by Evans et al. (2004), it was found that young women in age-disparate relationships were more likely to be HIV positive compared to their peers in relationships with similar age partners. The transmission of HIV in these relationships can be attributed to various factors such as unequal power dynamics, lack of negotiation for safe sex practices, and potentially higher viral loads in older partners. Pregnancy among schoolgirls has an impact on the academic performance of most teenage girls in South Africa. Even though a schoolgirl is permitted to return to school after the birth of her child, many pregnant girls drop out of school and perpetuate the cycle of poverty because they find it challenging to balance the demands of motherhood and education at the same time (Sibeko, 2012). According to research, becoming pregnant and a mother has a significant negative influence on both the mother and the child. It limits the mother's ability to pursue further education and maintain financial stability and increases her risk of becoming a single parent. In South Africa, there appears to be a general understanding that teenage pregnancy and pregnancy-related school dropouts are social issues that require attention (Commission for Gender Equality, 2023). The cause of adolescent pregnancies appears to be a topic of never-ending discussion, with some societal segments placing the blame on older men and others on distant parents. Some attribute the fault to teenage girls, characterising them as promiscuous (Commission for Gender Equality, 2023). It is problematic to blame teenage girls and think they are promiscuous because these notions seem to ignore the problems in South Africa that provide an environment that is conducive to pregnancies which result in subsequent school dropouts. These consist of child abuse, rape, and poverty (Commission for Gender Equality, 2023).

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this paper was to examine the causes, implications, and possible solutions to the teenage pregnancy crisis in South African high schools.

The research questions of this paper were as follows:

1. What are the reasons behind the increase in high school girls falling pregnant in South Africa?

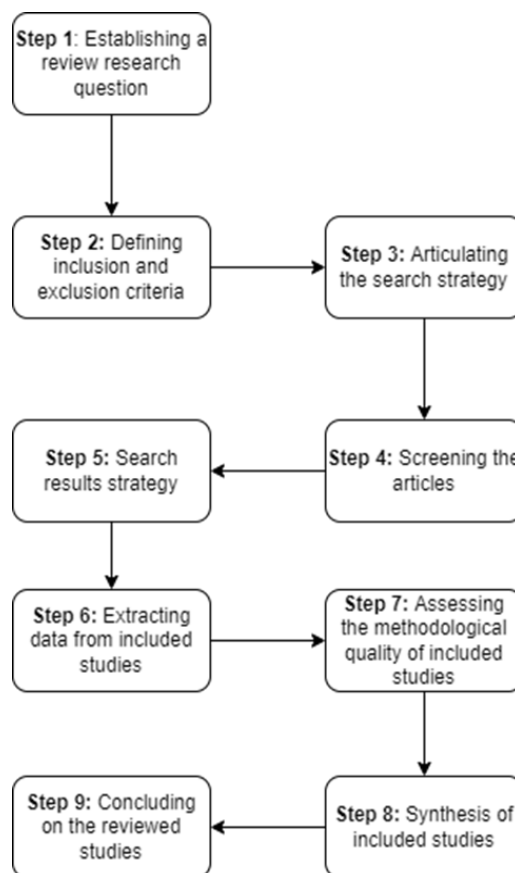
2. What are the implications of increasing pregnancy rates among high school girls in South Africa?
3. What are the possible solutions from a policy to address this growing societal issue?

Materials and Methods

The methodology employed in this study involved the implementation of a systematic literature review research strategy. This approach involved the meticulous identification and selection of relevant articles, as well as the exclusion of those that did not meet the predetermined inclusion criteria. The detailed process of article retrieval, inclusion, and exclusion is elaborated upon in this section. According to Davis et al. (2014), referenced in Snyder (2019), conducting reviews transparently and reproducibly is what the systematic literature review as a research method aims to achieve. Above all, it enables the selection of articles to incorporate or omit from this paper (Snyder, 2019). Unlike the other review strategies, this research strategy allowed for critically evaluating the information gathered from the included articles. During the process, reliable conclusions can be reached (Moher et al., 2009), as cited in (Snyder, 2019). Furthermore, Gough (2007) nine phases of systematic review cited in Bearman et al. (2012) were employed in the implementation of this research methodological strategy. These phases included the following: formulating a review question, specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, formulating a search strategy, screening articles, disclosing the search strategy's outcomes, extracting pertinent data from included studies, evaluating the methodological quality of included studies, synthesising included studies, and formulating conclusions from a critical review of the included studies.

Figure 2

Systematic Review Steps



Source: David Gough (2007) cited in Bearman et al. (2012), figure authors' computation.

This paper adhered to the following criteria appropriate to the systematic literature review process. Knowledgeable and strict inclusion and exclusion criteria of studies in its undertaking:

1. The databases Scopus, JSTOR, Science Direct, Ebscohost, Elsevier, and Web of Science were searched, and articles were chosen.
2. Papers published in peer-reviewed journals between September 2023 and the year 2000 were chosen.
3. Non-English articles from the study were excluded and only research articles published in English were included.
4. The following search terms in the aforementioned databases to find articles to include (phase 3) were used. "Teenage pregnancy, High School, South Africa, Sex education among youth" "role of teachers in preventing teenage pregnancy in high schools". Furthermore, the articles needed to discuss teenage pregnancy from the perspective of high schools.
5. A thorough review of the abstracts and titles of selected articles to ensure they specifically addressed the topic of teen pregnancy from a high school perspective were conducted.
6. Conference articles and working papers were not included.
7. Nevertheless, the authors also used reliable online news websites to obtain information because there is a dearth of scholarly research on teenage pregnancy from a high school perspective in South Africa.

After highlighting the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the authors ensured that the included studies originated from various contexts.

Research Results

Causes of Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa Among High School Students

Teenage pregnancy prevents young girls from completing school on schedule, ultimately preventing them from pursuing their dream of attending a higher education institution. Several studies have been conducted around the issues of young schoolgirls who go into having sex with older men because of the gifts they receive from old men. These funds are often used to purchase luxury items such as designer clothes and high-end hair care products, as well as self-care services. Unfortunately, this dynamic often results in negative outcomes, as it puts young schoolgirls at a heightened risk of engaging in unprotected sexual acts. In these situations, the girls may feel powerless to discuss and negotiate condom use with their partners prior to engaging in sexual activity (Ntini et al., 2023).

The reason for that is that they fear being brutalised, and the consequences of becoming pregnant are high and contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV/AIDS. One could argue that the limited availability of reproductive health services is a contributing factor to the rise in teenage pregnancies among young schoolgirls. One could state that young girls always seek to be able to access sexual and reproductive health knowledge and treatments without facing stigma from the public. Peer pressure is another element that contributes to teenage pregnancy, where young girls feel pressure from friends to do things they do not want to do. Several studies state that inequality and poverty are the main drivers of teenage pregnancy. One may argue that young girls fall in love with older people because they seek financial support and to meet their basic needs. Govender et al. (2019) established that teenage pregnancy is a severe matter that South Africa faces, and it is young girls who are between the ages of 10 and 19 years who are becoming more affected. Therefore, young girls who are not well educated about the dangers of being in a relationship at an early stage are those who could become

pregnant at a young age. One may argue that teenage pregnancy is related to multifactor such as lack of information, lack of parental guidance, and sexual abuse. One could state that all factors need to be addressed, from social and structural factors to individual behaviours. Therefore, disseminating the information can play a critical role in preventing the proliferation of teenage pregnancy, and health literacy may curtail the number of teenagers. The issue of teenage pregnancy affects young girls who are living in poverty and in areas where there is rampant unemployment and very few job opportunities. Govender et al. (2019) ascertained that parental guidance could play a significant role in ensuring that teenagers are well-educated and get full access to information about teenage pregnancy. It can mitigate the pregnancy of teenagers in South Africa. Many young girls do not have sufficient information about contraceptives as many believe contraceptives are not suitable for the body based on myths and misinformation, as some believe contraceptives don't work at all.

Implication for Increasing Rates of Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa Among High School Students

According to Shuro and Waggie (2024), teenage pregnancy is a pressing issue affecting societies worldwide. South Africa faces significant challenges concerning the increasing rates of teenage pregnancy, particularly among high school students. Teenage pregnancy often leads to social consequences that can have long-lasting effects on young parents and their families. Jochim et al. (2021) stated that, firstly, societal judgment and stigmatisation are prevalent, placing immense psychological pressure on teenage mothers. Such judgment and stigma can lead to feelings of shame, isolation, and low self-esteem among these young individuals, impacting their overall mental wellbeing. The high rate of teenage pregnancy in South Africa is often attributed to peer pressure and poverty. As a result, many young girls find themselves pregnant while still in high school, leading to difficulties in continuing their formal education (Jochim et al., 2021). Arguably, the desire many young girls have to live expensive lives, such as attending nightclubs, wearing expensive clothes, and living beyond their means, makes them not realize the consequences of their actions. As a result of these desires, young girls cannot negotiate safe sex (with those funding their expensive lives) because they will be under the influence of alcohol and would prefer to take the chance and have sex without a condom. However, school teachers have also been implicated in various incidences of sleeping with vulnerable young schoolgirls. Recently, the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education has found out that teachers are asking for sexual favours with schoolgirls (Mashuhlane et al., 2023). The scourge of teenage pregnancy in South African schools is cause for concern as it tarnishes the image of the country's school system. Instances of teachers engaging in sexual relationships with schoolgirls are more prevalent in rural schools, where parents may accept bribes in the form of groceries from teachers due to economic hardship stemming from poverty and unemployment (Mchunu et al., 2012). Mashuhlane et al. (2023) ascertain that it is the teacher's prerogative right to take care of the learners once a child steps into the schoolyard, and they should be responsible for the wellbeing of learners in school.

Implication for Increasing Rates of Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa Among High School Students

According to Jochim et al. (2023) and Briggs et al. (2007), there may be a variety of ramifications from the rising incidence of teenage pregnancy among South African high school pupils. They are interrupted education, health-related risks, socio-economic impact, psychological ramifications, and social distress.

Interrupted Education. According to Ardington et al. (2015), Panday et al. (2009), and Lephaka (2022) cited in Jochim et al. (2023), found that teenage pregnancy is a major risk factor for school dropout among adolescents, leading to limited educational and career prospects in the future. Nkosi and Pretorius (2019) argue that adolescent pregnancy has significantly impeded female students' academic

progress worldwide. However, Nkosi and Pretorius (2019) also revealed that teenage pregnancy negatively affects not only the learner but other learners, the school, the family, the community and as well as society. Furthermore, Santos (2012) and Almeida et al. (2006) added that teachers believe that teen pregnancy has a significant impact on student's attendance at school. This is because, in many situations, teenagers are left to care for their children independently, which strains them as they balance attending school and taking care of the child.

Health Related Risks. Teenage pregnancy, often associated with inadequate prenatal care and increased risks during labour, can negatively impact the health of both the mother and the child (Diabelková, 2023; Paranjothy et al., 2009). Vieira Martins et al. (2023) opine that teenage mothers also engage in substance abuse while pregnant. This is a significant concern and contributes to the risks involved during and after pregnancy.

Socio-Economic Impact. This can further exacerbate the financial strain on young mothers, making it even more difficult for them to break out of the cycle of poverty. Additionally, the lack of stable childcare options can also impact the well-being and development of the children of young mothers, potentially perpetuating the cycle of poverty into the next generation (Bhana & Nkani, 2016; Briggs et al., 2007; Chigona & Chetty, 2008). Young mothers often struggle to find stable employment due to lower educational attainment and limited work experience. This can increase the reliance on social welfare systems, leading to economic disparities and reduced financial independence (Achiasa, 2023; Bazubagira & Umumararungu, 2023). To lessen this socio-economic impact, interventions should prioritize offering holistic support to teenage mothers. This includes providing access to education, vocational training, job opportunities, childcare assistance, and programs aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty in impacted communities. Additionally, efforts to prevent early pregnancies through education and access to reproductive health services are crucial in reducing these socio-economic burdens.

Psychological Ramifications. Due to the stress of becoming parents at a young age, teenage mothers may experience mental health issues that could negatively impact their well-being. Onoshakpokaiye and Eloho Anthonia (2023) maintain that teenage mothers experience significant levels of stress and anxiety, potentially impacting their ability to effectively handle the responsibilities that come with pregnancy and raising a child at a young age. According to Obonyo et al. (2023), the difficulty of coping with new challenges could hurt their mental health. Teenage mothers could also be depressed, struggle with low self-esteem, and relationship strains, which could lead to isolation and loneliness due to a lack of social support. Addressing these psychological effects involves providing comprehensive support systems, including mental health services, counselling, and community programs aimed at assisting teenage mothers in coping with the emotional challenges of early parenthood (Mabila et al., 2023; Stentzel, 2023).

Social Distress. Teenage pregnancy may have a social stigma that affects the young mother's relationships and social life. Social distress caused by teenage pregnancy encompasses a variety of issues resulting from societal norms, stigma, and strained interpersonal connections. According to Kazmierski et al. (2023), judgment from peers, family, and the community can lead to feelings of shame and isolation for young mothers. Teenage mothers may find it challenging to engage in social activities or maintain friendships with peers who are not in a similar situation. This isolation can impact their mental health and well-being.

Moreover, within a school setting, teenage pregnancy can lead to ostracization or discrimination, affecting the young mother's comfort and participation in educational activities. Societal perceptions about teenage mothers may limit their opportunities for social inclusion, employment, or participation

in certain community activities, exacerbating feelings of exclusion. In order to prevent teen pregnancies and provide assistance to pregnant teenagers, it is important to implement a range of initiatives that encompass education, community engagement, support systems, and access to reproductive healthcare (Mabila et al., 2023).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the number of children born to teen mothers in Gauteng, the most populous province in South Africa, has increased by 60%. Save the Children is concerned for the health of both mothers and babies in this situation. More than 23,000 girls under 18 gave birth between April 2020 and March 2021, of which 934 were under the age of 14, according to new data from the Gauteng Department of Health. This contrasts with 14,577 girls under 19 who gave birth in the same period the previous year (Save the Children, 2021). More than 15 million people, or 25% of South Africa's total population, live in Gauteng, also home to Pretoria, the nation's administrative capital, and Johannesburg, the largest city. Many girls in South Africa are compelled by early pregnancy and motherhood to abandon their education, become impoverished and reliant on government support, and face social stigma for becoming teenage mothers or being forced into young marriages (Save the Children, 2021). In addition, it raises the possibility of maternal problems, which lowers baby survival rates, and it pushes a lot of girls to assume adult responsibilities before they are emotionally or physically ready. This has devastating social and financial consequences (Save the Children, 2021).

Teenage pregnancy remains a pressing issue among South African youth, particularly high school students. In order to address this persistent crisis in our education system, there have been increasing demands from stakeholders for stronger interventions. These calls encompass initiatives such as providing comprehensive sex education, enforcing harsher penalties for those engaging in sexual activities with minors, empowering teenagers to make informed decisions in a South African cultural context, and emphasizing the responsibility of educators in protecting the rights of teenagers in primary education (Gwala, 2022).

A response to a parliamentary question has revealed that between 2014 and 2016, over 190 students in Grades 3–4 and 5 became pregnant. Additional data from the parliamentary reply indicates that 18 357 students became pregnant in 2014, 15 504 in 2015, and 8 732 in 2016 (Cowan, 2017). In South Africa, girls are still getting pregnant at unacceptably high rates. In SA, adolescent sexual activity has somewhat declined. However, the prevalence of pregnancy has increased among those who are sexually active. Furthermore, this is considering the high rates of HIV and other STIs (Jonas et al., 2016). Teenage pregnancy in South Africa is linked to several health-risky behaviours, including substance abuse, which must be addressed in addition to adolescents' sexual and reproductive health.

Discussion

Since 1994, South Africa has come a long way toward attaining gender parity in primary education. To the extent that girls currently make up the majority of enrolments in secondary schools (Panday et al., 2009). Pregnancy, particularly during teenage years, poses a significant threat to the advancements achieved in public education. In order to ensure a future of prosperity and opportunities for all, it is crucial for young girls to remain in school and avoid the challenges brought on by early pregnancies (Pillay, 2023). In South Africa, teenage girls give birth to over 100,000 babies annually. Between 2019 and 2022, between 12 and 14% of facility births were adolescents. In particular, from 129,223 in 2019 to 139,361 in 2022, the number of births attended by teenagers between the ages of 10 and 19 in South Africa's public health facilities increased. Compared to the little progress made in reducing the rate of teenage pregnancies between 1998 and 2016, this rise in births is a setback (Pillay, 2023). While girls in South Africa are legally allowed to finish their education both before and after becoming pregnant,

Unplanned pregnancies have an impact on young women's futures in terms of education, health, socialization, and employment. It may prevent them from finishing their education and pursuing additional training and education.

According to Panday et al. (2009), teenage pregnancy is a common occurrence in South Africa that is accepted by society despite not being expected. The government's attitude towards pregnant girls seems to be one of support, as they see the social grant as a supplementary source of funding. However, this leniency can unintentionally reinforce negative behaviour. The current law ensures that pregnant girls receive social grants and are not expelled from school, but this has led to adverse consequences. In contrast, neighbouring countries with stricter laws have lower rates of teenage pregnancy. In Zimbabwe, young female students were at risk of expulsion for getting pregnant while in college or university until recently. Teenage pregnancy typically occurs outside of marriage, and Moganedi and Mudau (2023) point out that because of the stigma and complications associated with it, particularly in African culture, it is disastrous for both the young girl and society. Therefore, Kail and Cavanaugh (2004) stress that education for young girls is necessary before they fall into the trap of getting pregnant and subsequently contracting HIV. Adolescents are naturally curious, experiment, and succumb to peer pressure without considering the long-term effects of their actions. According to Hashmi and Fayyaz (2022), children want to learn about, explore, and bring out their feelings regarding behaviour and how they relate to those around them as they get older and into adolescence. Before they reach adulthood and can distinguish between good and wrong, they are interested and eager to experience life.

Additionally, African schoolgirls face unique pressures, particularly when it comes to childcare responsibilities. In many cases, these girls are burdened with caring for younger siblings due to broken family structures where parents are absent or working in cities. Schools often do not provide support for childcare, contributing to the challenges faced by these girls. This lack of parental supervision may increase the risk of teenage pregnancy. Bana et al. (2010) also note that school principals often lack the skills and resources to properly support pregnant learners, leading them to simply encourage these girls to return to school after giving birth. Despite efforts by the government, particularly the Department of Education, the number of pregnant teenagers attending school continues to rise annually.

According to a member of the Executive Council for Health and Wellness from Gauteng, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko, a transdisciplinary team effort is needed to address the social issue of teenage pregnancy. To combat this pandemic effectively, every societal segment needs to take an active part in it. Other factors, such as the fathers of their children deserting them, exacerbate the problem of teen pregnancy (Buhr, 2024). Teenagers who become pregnant while enrolled in school or another educational setting must deal with several issues that arise (Bezuidenhout, 2008, p. 40). She must choose between having an abortion and carrying the unborn child to term. If she decides to bring the unborn child to term, her education will undoubtedly be disrupted. She will find herself in a problematic situation right away, particularly when raising her child (Bezuidenhout, 2008, p. 40). Additionally, low academic achievement can lead to limited job opportunities and financial difficulties, further negatively impacting the mother and her child's quality of life in general.

A number of young mothers in sub-Saharan Africa have expressed not knowing about their own fertility or how to prevent pregnancy. They point to cultural taboos around discussing sex openly as a major factor in early pregnancies, along with the challenges of providing comprehensive sexual education to youth (Roberts & Jochim, 2023). Almost one in five girls between the ages of 15 and 19 worldwide were not enrolled in school, working, or receiving training even before the COVID-19 pandemic caused an education crisis (Roberts & Jochim, 2023). Pregnancy can serve as a trigger for early dropout rates, as many teenage moms have a history of subpar academic achievement. For

pregnant girls and adolescent mothers to have greater access to education, progressive laws and school policies must be implemented effectively. In South Africa, individual schools are responsible for overseeing the care and support provided to adolescent mothers in accordance with a national policy. These schools must be knowledgeable about the local community resources available and be able to provide targeted and effective assistance (Roberts & Jochim, 2023). Implementing policies that are based on solid evidence will be necessary to establish and advance social, health, and educational systems that are sensitive to the needs and rights of adolescent mothers and pregnant girls. Adolescent mothers' lives and future generations can only be effectively improved at that point (Gwala, 2022; Roberts & Jochim, 2023).

Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the increased susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS infections, and gender-based violence (GBV), it is apparent that girls and young women also exhibit power differentials within relationships, instances of rape, and exploitation by older males. These adversities contribute to heightened vulnerability and establish a significant association between adolescent pregnancy and GBV. According to the Department of Social Development (2023), teenage pregnancy disproportionately affects disadvantaged and marginalized populations, wherein access to high-quality, adolescent-centric health and social resources is limited.

Many pregnant students who drop out of school are often forced to abandon their education, resulting in inadequate skills and limited career opportunities. As they take on the primary responsibility of caring for their children, pregnant girls are more inclined to forgo returning to school (Department of Social Development, 2023). An increased dependence on state assistance and social protection is the consequence of poverty and the absence of financial support from the child's father or the teen's family.

This paper revealed that 65% of teenage pregnancies are unplanned, and one in three girls do not return to school after becoming pregnant. Thus, the following conclusions are being made:

1. Research shows that teenage pregnancy continues to be a significant problem in South Africa; educational institutions should normalize easy access to contraceptives for pupils to have free access to teen pregnancy prevention measures.

2. These social norms in getting contraceptives should include billboards and social campaigns involving parents, communities, and schools, as well as the collaboration of the Health Department with the Department of Education.

3. Normalising contraceptives should also include readily available comprehensive contraception counselling to young women so that they can make informed decisions. However, these counselling sessions should be done in a youth-friendly and responsible manner. This will not only assist in creating a welcoming environment but addressing misinformation, as well as holding students accountable for their actions.

4. It is also evident that young women are impregnated by not only their peers but also older men. Hence, legal repercussions for those who have sex with minors need to be implemented. This will assist in holding both parties accountable and ensuring that the reproductive rights of teenagers in South Africa, or the obligation of educators, guarantees that the rights of teenagers in the primary education sector are protected (Gwala, 2022).

5. Lastly, The Department of Education should consider revising subject policies, to accommodate the necessary changes, such as comprehensive sex education in schools. This would address the lack of sex education for pupils, which should eventually decrease the rising number of teenage pregnancies in South Africa.

Suggestion for Further Research

Future research regarding teenage pregnancy, and the impact of abstinence-only education programs on adolescents' understanding and decision-making in regards to sexual health. Additionally, examining the disparities in access to sexual health resources and education among different socioeconomic and ethnic groups could provide valuable insights for developing targeted interventions and policies to address teenage pregnancy rates (Kross et al., 2021), as well as long-term educational, economic, and health outcomes for teenage mothers and their children, including factors that contribute to negative and positive outcomes. Furthermore, the effectiveness of existing policies and programs aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy and identifying areas of progress or expansion (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998).

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Funding

The Authors received no funding for this research

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