THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY PREGNANT TEENAGE LEARNERS IN THE HHOHHO REGION, SWAZILAND

By

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the psycho-social challenges of pregnant teenage learners in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. This was prompted by the escalating number of pregnant teenagers in Hhohho region and a significant number of the affected learners are thrown out of the school system. The researchers felt that such experiences negatively impacted on the lives of these pregnant teenage learners hence the need to investigate the psycho-social challenges that are faced by these pregnant teenage learners. A phenomenological research design was adopted to solicit the psycho-social challenges they go through due to pregnancy and this was done within their environments. Qualitative methods of collecting data were used. These were the individual interviews and the focus group discussions. Twenty five (25) pregnant teenagers and five non pregnant adolescent learners in the Hhohho region of Swaziland were purposefully selected to participate in the study. The results of the study showed that pregnant teenage learners are often stigmatised and marginalised as a result. Consequently, these expecting teenage mothers feel unwanted in both the home and the society and hence some attempt committing suicide or abortion. Those who succeeded to abort or commit suicide are not part of this study. The study recommends that collaborative efforts are needed amongst stakeholders in revising the root causes of teenage pregnancy in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. In addition to that society should offer the much needed support to these pregnant teenage learners so that they do not think of engaging in malpractices such as drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, abortion or suicide. The study further recommends that parents should guide teenagers in making more informed decisions on sexual matters. Further research could be done on the experiences of teenage fatherhood experiences of school going teenage fathers.
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Key words: teenage, psycho-social, challenge, learner, focus group, phenomenological

INTRODUCTION

This study explored the psycho-social challenges of pregnant teenage learners in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. Although the government of Swaziland declared that education is a fundamental human right for all citizens and other people living in Swaziland, other learners are thrown out of the school system due pregnancy and teenage motherhood. In an endeavour to combat this problem, the government of Swaziland has introduced the re-entry policy to cater for such pupils who would be re-admitted into the school system after having given birth. In spite of this effort, the young women seem to be losing the battle for equal access to education because the effect of irresponsible teenage sex is suffered by the teenage girl more than it is suffered by her male counterpart. This is because eventually, it is the girl child who becomes pregnant and has to bear the burden of carrying

the pregnancy for nine months and look after the baby thereafter. Thus, it was imperative for the researchers to carry out a study on the psycho-social challenges facing pregnant teenage learners in the Swazi schools. The purpose of this study therefore, was to investigate the psycho-social challenges facing pregnant teenage learners in the Hhohho high schools of Swaziland in order to generate information that will assist the affected learners, administrators, parents, educators and school counsellors in understanding the plight of these pregnant teenage learners. This, it is hoped, will assist in offering the necessary assistance to see the young mother sail through her educational endeavour.

Background and setting of the study

Teenage pregnancy is increasingly becoming a social concern the world over. In England for instance, Holgate, Evans and Yuen (2006) stated that in a year, there are 90 000 teenage conceptions particularly to girls under the age of sixteen (16). This means that these girls, at some stage are disturbed in their academic progression. A study by Sawhill (2000) showed that 40% of all girls in the United States of America (USA) became pregnant before the age of twenty. Sawhill (2000) also observed that, as a result, seventy six per cent (76%) of early child bearing occurred outside of marriage and most out of wedlock child bearing started in teenage years. A study done by Adams-Taylor and Pitman (2006) on adolescent pregnancy in the United States of America revealed that teenage pregnancy is a societal problem. These researchers foresee that with the changing times, teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood result in loss of many academic years and teenagers' failure to be productive workers in adulthood. Thus globally, Loaiza and Liang (2013) see teenage pregnancy as contributing in undermining the achievement of the millennium development goals of achieving education for all. Studies reveal that it is common practice the world over that pregnant teenagers are taken out of school to assume motherhood duties and this limits their potential to progress academically.

In the sub-Saharan Africa; and South Africa to be specific, Godding (2008) conducted a study in Soweto, and found out that 23% of pregnancies carried by 13-16 year old young women ended in abortion. Similarly, in 2003, 70 000 termination of pregnancies were reported in South African public health facilities and a significant number of these came from teenage school going girls (Mendes, 2011). Some of whom died in the process. According to Mendes (2011) one of the leading causes of death among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa is pregnancy and child birth.

This study also observed that in Swaziland, pregnant teenage learners are faced with a number of psycho-social challenges which are not adequately addressed yet they affect their academic progression. A teenage girl who drops out of school because of pregnancy reduces her chances of her employability in adult life. In a country with such high levels of poverty such as Swaziland, this means this child is prone to live in abject poverty as she joins the poverty cycle. Society also pays a heavy price for pregnant teenagers. There are serious consequences on the expecting mother such as the emotional distress, psychological and gynaecological problems and other pregnancy related complications. Some complications result in death (mortality). It is therefore, not surprising that many cases of child dumping, mostly by very young mothers are reported (Katayamoyo, 2010). In Swaziland cases of teenage pregnancy are escalating at an alarming rate and this has a bearing on the number of school drop - out.

According to the Annual Education Census report (AEC) (2012), three hundred and thirty eight (338) primary school girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy (Annual Education Census report (AEC), 2012). In a number of high schools in Swaziland, the numbers of teenage learners who fall pregnant are increasing at a frightening rate and this has been cited as one of the main factors hampering the progression of high school graduates to tertiary institutions. According to media reports, at Mabuzani High school (pseudonym) eleven (11) pupils fell pregnant between 2015 and 2016 (Times of Swaziland, 1 July 2016). Eight (8) pregnant pupils dropped-out at Cain High School (pseudonym) in year 2015 and two got married through customary law (*kuteka*). The Cain High School principal, Kateko (pseudonym) lamented that the most devastating part was that the pupils

were impregnated by unemployed individuals or those who work in sugar cane fields (Times of Swaziland, 18 September, 2015). During a speech and prize giving day, Mr Sipho (pseudonym), the head teacher of Take High school reported that fourteen (14) girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy (Times of Swaziland, 23 September 2016). To worsen the matter, the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland recommends that the boys who impregnate girls should also leave the institution and would only be re-admitted when the teenage girl had delivered. Therefore, this doubles the number of school dropouts due to pregnancy. Minister Phineas Magagula was quoted as saying, "*The Constitution does not allow the boys to be chaotic at school. So they can't be allowed to continue to impregnate others while they attend school*" (Swazi News, 2 December, 2017). Thus, the researchers observe that teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood is a major concern in Swaziland and the psychosocial challenges facing these teenagers attracted the attention of the researchers.

In an endeavour to curb the negative consequences associated with teenage pregnancy, the contest on school teenage pregnancy policies in the world has been on-going. Countries; Swaziland included, evaluated, revised and reformed their policies and practices to allow pregnant school girls to return to school after delivery. According to the Swaziland Principals Association (SWAPA) represented by its Deputy President Welcome Mhlanga, every child , irrespective of their life circumstances (fathers to be and children against the law) have to be reintegrated into the institution to which that child was attending before (Swazi News, 2 December, 2017). Most countries are moving towards policies which make it easier for teenage mothers to continue with their education. For example, Botswana has pioneered a pilot project to support teenage mothers to continue with education. In Madagascar, teenage mothers are lithe to return to school promptly after delivery. Pregnant teenage learners in Cameroon have the right to negotiate the period of their maternity leave with their school management, and can make arrangements for extra classes so that they can make up for the lost time (Runhare, 2010).

In Kenya there is a re-entry policy allowing teenage mothers to schools after giving birth (Nyambura, 2007). The government of Malawi has the same policy where re-admission of pregnant school girls after delivery is allowed (UNESCO, 2003). In South Africa, the 1996 policy granted financial support to pregnant and mothering teenagers to continue with schooling. In Swaziland there is the re-entry policy to cater for such pupils after they have delivered their babies. Therefore, teenage pregnancy and re-entry policies are a well-documented issue the world over. However, literature on the psycho-social challenges facing these pregnant teenagers and teenage school going mothers in Swaziland remain scanty. Hence this study was carried out to cover that gap.

Literature Review

In this study, the reviewed literature took a global perspective. However, the study started off by discussing the theoretical framework which informed this study and finally, a review of empirical studies on literature related to the topic being investigated.

Theoretical framework

In this study Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2002) Ecological Systems Theory was adopted to inform this study. In his theory, Bronfenbrenner (2002) argues that human development is influenced by five main different types of environmental systems. These are; the microsystem, the meso-system, the exo-system, the macro-system and the chromo-system (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). Berk (2011) believed that a person can be compelled by the environment to adapt to its conditions and restrictions. This theory is relevant as a theoretical framework for this study in that it explains the directional impact of the different environmental systems

in any given society. The Swazi society is also applicable and pregnant teenage learners form part of this wider society. This theory was used to explain how pregnant teenage learners are affected by their social relationships and the world around them as well as explaining how the different environmental systems are affecting them. Bronfenbrenner (2002) theorised that a person's development was affected by everything in his/her surroundings. In the authors' opinion, the application of this theory illuminates the understanding of the psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenage learners as well as the impact it has in their social relationships. According to this theory, whatever behaviour is exhibited by pregnant teenage learners in particular and teenagers in general are a result of the impact of different environmental systems. In turn this behaviour also has an influence on the environmental system. The impact is thus bi-directional.

The review of empirical studies

In the USA, California to be specific, pregnant teenagers face a variety of difficult decisions. They have to decide whether to give birth or terminate the pregnancy (Ehler, 2008). In a conference in Nairobi, it was revealed that out of the 42 million children who do not attend schools in Africa; about 60% are girls who have dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy. Teenagers, who normally conceive under the age of sixteen, are in most countries expelled from school by school authorities. This disrupts their educational progression and in turn, their perceived after school careers (Hosie, 2012). A study done by Chigona and Chetty, (2008) showed that in South Africa pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers experienced stigma from friends, peers and the community. Quite a number reported that this was a barrier to them remaining in school while pregnant and re-entering school after childbirth.

A study carried out by Ziyane (2003) in Swaziland showed that teenagers find it hard to accept the fact that they have fallen pregnant. They are usually scared to death about how others will react to the discovery. They react badly and tell themselves a million times how stupid and irresponsible they have been. No matter how close a teenager may be to their parents, there is always concern about how their initial reaction will be to the news of the pregnancy. It is one thing for your parents to discover that you are having sex and knowing that you are pregnant is another. This is more so if pre-marital sex is completely against their values and beliefs (Ziyane, 2003).

Research methodology and research design

This study used the phenomenological research design which is qualitative in nature. The phenomenological research design gave an opportunity to pregnant teenage learners to describe in detail what is it takes to be pregnant while one is still a school going child. This study was interested in investigating the psychosocial challenges pregnant teenage mothers go through. Therefore, the researchers noted that the qualitative research method was an apt way to gain deeper insights and complexity inherent in the psychosocial challenges these pregnant teenagers go through as a result of pregnancy. The qualitative approach was most appropriate in providing subtle details of the research problem as it occurred in its natural setting since the study was done in the participants' natural setting.

Participants and setting

The participants in this study comprised of high school pregnant teenage girl drop outs of the ages 13–19, drawn from Form 1 to Form 5. Also included in the study, were the classmates of the affected learners who were still categorized as adolescents, both girls and boys. The study was conducted in five high schools in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. One school was in a semi-urban area while the other four were rural.

Sampling size

In total, there are 65 high schools in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. These schools are grouped into urban, semi-urban and rural. Thus, to select both the schools and the human participants, a critical case purposive sampling method was adopted to select five high schools and thirty (30) participants. This method targeted those schools that make headlines in teenage pregnancy and school drop outs.

Sampling procedure

As said above the sampling procedure for this study was the critical case purposive sampling method which helped in targeting those schools which had a high prevalence in teenage pregnancy. The researchers chose the top five schools in Hhohho region with the highest rate of school drop outs as indicated by recent statistics from the Ministry of Education. Snowball sampling was used to select actual pregnant teenage learner participants who participated in the study since these were no longer in the schools. Systematic sampling was employed to select non pregnant adolescent learner-participants.

Ethical considerations

Creswell (2011) says that ethics are rules of right conduct and practices when carrying out a research. They intend to ensure that no harm is inflicted on participants and research sites. Before the study was carried out, the researchers sought permission from the education authorities of the Hhohho region and school principals. Participants were informed that participation in this study was voluntary; hence their consent was well informed. For participants under the age of 18 years, parental consent was obtained since these children were now in their homes. Parents were given adequate information on both the possible risks and potential benefits of their daughters' participation in the study. The researchers ensured that participants' names have been kept confidential, with each participant's name being changed to a pseudonym. Participants in focus group discussions were identified by assigned numbers.

Data collection methods

In this study, the researchers used individual interviews and focus group discussions to collect data.

Individual interviews

Because of the nature of the phenomenon investigated, individual interviews were used because they allowed the researchers to observe even some of the body language and facial expressions during the process. Where the participant was deeply touched by certain behaviour, it was easy to get it from the interviews because the participant could give very rich explanations of what was challenging them and it also allowed the researchers to probe further until they got what they wanted. This was also augmented by body language which was quite difficult to hide. For example, it was difficult for the participants to hide issues such as embarrassment, annoyance, tears, amusement or laughter. The other advantage of the individual interview was that the response rate was guaranteed and high. Those participants who needed counselling were identified and received the service from professional counsellors thereafter.

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were also used to collect data in this study. These led to the collection of extensive and high quality data since there was a consented effort from all group members to discuss their challenges. The responses of the participants were discussed and agreed upon; therefore, they reflected the consensus of the group. The focus group discussions also encouraged those participants who did not want to open up during individual group discussions to open up. They realised that they were not

the only ones who had challenges in life. In a way, it worked as a healing process (the talking therapy). Thus, participation was high. The researchers chaired the discussions and ensured that each member had an equal opportunity to air his or her views and opinions on the topic under discussion and to share with the group her personal experiences.

Ensuring trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers argue that there are different standards for judging the trustworthiness and quality of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) for instance, proposed four criteria which are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Golafshani, 2006). In this study, the researchers posit that establishing trustworthiness gives assurance that the research instruments were capable of providing accurate and meaningful answers to the research questions and the study accurately represents the experiences of the participants (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). In an endeavour to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researchers adhered to the aforementioned proposed criteria.

Credibility

Credibility means how well the results of the study represent a sound conceptual interpretation of data collected from the participants (Hoffman, 2010). In this study, credibility was ensured by the use of more than one data collection instrument. Instruments complemented each other. This was meant to eliminate biases which normally arise due to the use of one instrument for data collection. In addition to that, member checking was also done by going back to the participants who were interviewed in order to ascertain the meaning of certain unclear phrases to correct the flaws to the responses and to check the accuracy of the responses. However, anonymity was still ensured.

Transferability

This is the potential of the findings of the study to be transferred to other similar settings. Before the study, the instruments were piloted in other similar settings and contexts. Thick descriptions of contexts and characteristics of participants were done. This was done to ensure that it can be comparable and applicable in other similar settings and contexts.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings of the study really occurred as reported by the researcher (Van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006). According to Neuman (2003), there can be no credibility in the absence of in the absence of dependability. To ensure dependability of the results, quality assessment of the collective processes with data collection, analysis and theory production was ascertained by ensuring that the results of the study were easily traceable to their original sources by making it a point that the interpretations and recommendations were as reliable as possible. However, anonymity and confidentiality of the sources was guaranteed.

Conformability

The researchers declared their own personal biases and prejudices at the beginning of the study. To increase the objectivity of the investigation, the researchers documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. One researcher confirmed the results and then documented it while the other one was asked to audit the data after the study to examine data collection and analysis procedures and then make judgements about the potential for biases and distortions. The researchers then distanced themselves from the beliefs of the participants and suspended judgements based on social issues while conducting the study. Data was then checked with the respondents to ensure that it had the same meaning with their respondents. By so doing, the findings of the study were supported by the collected data.

Data analysis procedure

Since this study was qualitative, all the data collected in this study were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. In this study, in order to make sense of the data, the researchers adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six (6) phases of thematic analysis which are; becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

Findings and discussions

Data were presented and analyzed in line with the stated objectives and the imaging themes which were as follows:
1. To find out from pregnant teenage learners the experience of being pregnant while at school.
2. To discover adolescent learners' perceptions of teenage pregnancy
3. To establish the contributory factors for teenage pregnancy
4. To ascertain the psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenagers
5. To suggest strategies that could be used to assist pregnant teenage learners cope with their situation.

Data were checked for commonalities to come up with the themes per objective.

In the first research objective, the researchers wanted to find out from pregnant teenage learners the experience of being pregnant while at school. The following themes were generated from data collected from individual interviews and were categorized as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: *Themes on experiences of pregnant teenage learners.*

Themes	Categories
1. Attempted suicide	• Escaping negative consequences of pregnancy. • Shocked • Having no idea of what to do with the baby • The challenge of reporting the pregnancy to parents • Being pushed by desperation • Going from shop to shop looking for weevil tablets.
2. Abortion	• Did not want to disappoint parents • Unwilling to quit school • Scared of accepting motherhood • Making arrangements to terminate the pregnancy • Approaching traditional doctors to negotiate for the termination of the pregnancy • Preparing abortion concoction
3. Being deserted	• Being lonely • Having no one to support them • Not in communication terms with parents • Chased from home • Gossiped by peers and community members • Parent being harsh and giving extra duties • Boyfriends denying responsibility

Participants reported that being a pregnant teenage learner is one the most horrifying experiences. Day and night one keeps on thinking about how other people, more especially parents are going to react to the emergent condition. As a result, the participants thought of suicide, abortion and other antisocial behaviour to try and ease the tension.

Attempting suicide

Under this theme, the participants reported having been so much overwhelmed by the pain of being pregnant to an extent that they felt that the only way out was to kill themselves to escape all the negative consequences they are facing them as a result of pregnancy. The participants revealed that it was a shock of their lives when they discovered that they were pregnant. They had no

idea on what to do with the baby at such a tender age. The first challenge was how they were going to report that issue to their parents. Such confusion, fear and desperation then pushed them to look for ways of terminating their lives. One participant had this to say:

> *I got the shock of my life after getting to know that I was pregnant. I knew very well that once my parents find out, they will 'kill' me. I remember attempting to drink paraffin in an endeavour to kill myself. Before the pregnancy, my parents used to threaten me that if I can dare get pregnant, they would 'kill' me.* (Nkosingiphile, 19 years, F4, School E).

Some participants further confirmed the state of confusion they went through as a result of the pregnancy. The major concern was the fear of how their parents were going to react to the news of the pregnancy. One participant said that she was too scared of her parents to the extent that she went from shop to shop looking for weevil tablets in order to take away her life. The participant said:

> *The first thing that came to my mind after getting to know that I was pregnant was my parents. Day and night I could not stop thinking of how they will react to my pregnancy. I was very scared and I knew that they will be disappointed. To escape such a state of confusion, I went from shop to shop looking for weevil tablets to kill myself. I was so determined, but luckily I failed to get them. Had I got them, I know that by now I could be history.* (Nozibusiso, 18yrs, F4, School A).

The above participants reported on how they attempted to kill themselves after failing to bear the negative consequences of being pregnant. In particular, they were scared of their parents' reactions which they suspected would be negative.

Attempting abortion

Some participants revealed having attempted to terminate the pregnancy for they feared the wrath of their parents who earlier on threatened to kill them if they happened to get pregnant while at school. The reality of having to quit school and become a mother worsened the tension and confusion. One of the participants reported having arranged everything for an abortion in South Africa with her boyfriend who earlier on was reluctant on the idea. However, her elder sister intervened and took her for counselling. The participant said:

> *I knew that my life would no longer be the same now that I am pregnant, I will have to quit school, face the wrath of my parents and bear a lot of other negative consequences. So I insisted for an abortion. At first my boyfriend was reluctant but later on he agreed. We made arrangements for the abortion to take place in South Africa. However my elder sister got to know about that through the phone when she read my whatsapp messages. She then talked to me, and then refereed me to a counsellor.* (Zodwa, 19 years, F5, School A).

In this study, the participants were cognisant of the challenges they will have to face as a result of being pregnant hence the endeavour to terminate the pregnancy. In spite of having fallen pregnant, the informants expressed their unwillingness to quit school as well as the idea of disappointing their parents who had earlier on threatened to kill them if they got pregnant. The participants reported having gone to traditional doctors and used some concoctions to terminate the pregnancy. However, this did not work due to the intervention of family members. In one school, an informant confirmed having gone to see a traditional doctor who was well known for assisting people abort. However, the traditional doctor could not help her because the student did not have enough money. That kind of service attracted five hundreds Emalangeni. The participant expressed herself as follows:

> *Through the grapevine, I heard that there was a traditional healer in my community who could assist people with the termination of pregnancies. I went there with the intention of terminating mine. Unfortunately I was expected to pay five hundreds Emalangeni which I didn't have. I was really scared of losing my education and disappointing my parents.* (Loveness, 17 years, F4, School D).

Another participant disclosed having attempted using a concoction to terminate her pregnancy. This was as a result of her fear to lose her education as well as disappointing her parents with the pregnancy. She reiterated the idea of attempted abortion by saying:

I just don't want to lie, the first day I was confirmed pregnant; I just told myself that I will abort. I literally prepared a concoction but each time I tried to drink it, I became scared of losing my life. Before, I've been told by my friends of several stories of people who died while attempting to abort. I was scared of death. My elder sister became my pillar of strength. She helped me a lot in keeping the pregnancy and accepting myself. (Nono, 16 years, F2, School E).

The above participants confessed how they attempted abortion by preparing a concoction and approaching traditional healers. However, this did not work. Nono was scared to drink the concoction because of the previous stories she had heard about people who died during the process. The intervention of the elder sister in the situation averted the situation. On the other hand, Loveless could not abort because she did not have money to pay for the abortion services.

The participants from the focus group discussion also echoed the same experiences. They disclosed having failed to stand the shame they would bring to themselves as well as their families hence the decision to either abort or commit suicide. The tendency of being rejected both at school and at home made pregnant teenage learners to feel like outcasts and that life for them has come to an end. To illustrate this point one participant said:

*I could not stand the shame I have bought to myself and family so I just wanted to either commit suicide or to abort. On top of that people don't accept you if you are pregnant both at school and at home, so you feel like everything about you have come to an end. In such moments you either think of abortion or suicide. (*Participant#6, School E).

The participant could not stand the shame she had brought to herself and family so she wanted to either abort or else commit suicide. Her situation was further acerbated by the fact that she was not accepted both at home and at school. This information still serves to reiterate the information gathered from individual interviews that pregnant teenagers are scared to face the negative consequences associated with pregnancy, hence the decision to either terminate the pregnancy or commit suicide. Soon after the confirmation of the pregnancy, participants had to battle with the question of how to break the news to their parents whom they know very well that their attitude will be negative.

Being deserted

Participants also felt that they were deserted by their parents, boyfriends, peers as well as the entire community members. Dealing with such a situation alone, subjected them to severe and unbearable stress. They reported having to deal with the situation alone, with no one to support them. After knowing about the pregnancy, parents got agitated to an extent that they stopped communicating to their daughters. Some parents even chased their daughters from home. To worsen the situation, boyfriends denied responsibility of the pregnancy while peers and community members went around gossiping them. The participants said that such a scenario was very hurtful. It broke their hearts beyond description. One participant said:

*As I am talking to you right now, at home they have clearly told me to leave. My parents are not communicating with me. They just don't want to see me anymore. I have refused to go for I have no idea where to go to and my life is a living hell. Life is so hard to an extent that they even hide food for me. I've now reached a point where I am thinking that it is better for me to die than to live such life. To make matters worse, even my boyfriend has denied responsibility of the pregnancy. I am just a laughing stock. My peers as well are running away from me. The entire community is gossiping about me. (*Nokuphumula, 16yrs, F2, School A).

The above participant is expressing the agony she is going through as a result of the pregnancy. She had been chased away from home and the parents are not communicating with her. She is just all by herself.

Just like participants from individual interviews, participants from focus group discussions also reported having been deserted by their parents and friends. The idea of being deserted serves to clarify the stigma associated with pregnancy outside wedlock. Clarifying how she was deserted by parents and friends. One participant had this to say:

After telling my boyfriend about the pregnancy he was surprised and told me that I am mocking him. My friends pretended as if they don't even know me. I am just alone. At home even though my parents support me, they no longer love me the same way they did before I got pregnant. At times they do not even talk to me. (Participant#7, School E).

The results of the study show that the participant's boyfriend is surprised by the news of pregnancy and he even said that she is mocking him. The friends are reported to have been pretending as if they did not know her. She reported that she is all by herself. Even though her parents are still supportive, their love is reported to be no longer the same as before the pregnancy. She reported that at times they cannot even talk to her. The study therefore, gathered that the news of pregnancy amongst teenagers is not accepted both at home and at community level. This then obliged pregnant teenagers to deal with the situation solely on their own. This is something which they find hard to do.

Adolescent learners' perceptions of teenage pregnancy

Adolescents reported having had a negative perception of teenage pregnancy. When asked why, they argue that teenage pregnancy is one of the leading causes of poverty and a barrier to economic development. Poverty, illiteracy and high crime rate were the main themes that emerged from the collected data. The collected data is further summarised in themes as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: *Themes on adolescent learners' perception of teenage pregnancy*

Themes	Categories
1. Perpetuate the cycle of poverty	• Impregnated by school going children • No money to raise the child • Financial burden to unemployed parents • Financial burden to government after testing HIV positive • Affecting the whole economic system of the country
2. Shameful behaviour, deserving to be scorned	• Disassociating themselves with pregnant teenagers • teasing • Use of derogatory terms
3. High rate of school drop outs	• Disappearing from respective schools • Delays and derails completion of one's education • Losing scholarships • Attaining lowest levels of education • Failure to sponsor the education of their own children
4. Perpetuate high crime rate	• Neglected children • Using force to get anything wanted • Stealing, rape • Full of hatred • Treating other people with cruelty

Participants from focus group discussions had a negative perception on teenage pregnancy and the emerging themes are as shown from Table 2 above. Further reiterating their negative perceptions of teenage pregnancy, adolescents stated that they perceive it as shameful and deserving to be scorned. That being the case, they ensured that within the school vicinity and home environment, they do everything possible to disassociate themselves with pregnant teenagers in an endeavour to protect their reputation. Adolescents further pointed out that they tease pregnant teenagers by calling them all sorts of derogatory terms. This can be further explained by one participant who said:

> *A pregnant teenager does not deserve even a slightest amount of dignity. She is a shame to herself, parents and community. As a result, I do everything within my powers to keep a distance from pregnant teenage learners. Even in class I tease them. For example once I know that there is someone pregnant in my class I will pretend to be slumbering then shouts that let all the two in ones go home for they are causing us to slumber in class. This will put the whole class will into stitches thereby humiliating the pregnant teenage learner.* (Participant #3, School A).

The above participant reported that pregnant teenage learners should not be accorded dignity and respect as they are a shame to themselves, parents as well as the entire community. His negative attitude towards them is shown by the ways he keeps a distance from pregnant teenage learners. He reported that he teases and humiliate them so that the whole class would laugh at them.

However there were some polarizing views amongst adolescents regarding their perceptions to teenage pregnancy. From the five focus group discussions, a small percentage of 6% said there are some positives in teenage pregnancy as it provides a cheap source of labour and increases the country's population. One of those participants was quoted saying:

> *If all people can be educated who can look at our children when we are at work? So the school dropouts are always there to help. Furthermore, there can be no balance if all people are educated. We still need people who can work for example as cleaners. In addition to that, educated people tend to delay having children and this results in a decline in population. If the country is under populated, Swaziland can be compelled to import labour from other countries.* (Participant #3, School D).

According to Participant 3 above; teenage pregnancy is a good thing because it may contribute to the development of social classes and educated people will get a source of cheap labour in the long run. These are people who will look after other people's children when they are at work. In addition to that, according to this participant, pregnant teenagers are contributing in the country's population boom, hence contributing to the provision of the Swazi labour force in the long run.

Contributory factors for teenage pregnancy

Data from individual interviews generated the following themes with regards to the contributory factors to pregnancy. Table 3 below is a summary of the themes:

Table 3: *Themes on contributory factors for teenage pregnancy*

Themes		Categories
1.	Poverty	• Not having enough pocket money from parents • Lacking stylish personal items such as All-Star tennis shoes • Asking money and clothes from boyfriends
2.	Peer pressure	• Pressured to try out everything including sexual activities • Peer pressure and the desire to fit in a peer group
3.	Sexual curiosity	• Told stories about the goodness of being in a sexual relationship • Being wise and disappearance of pimples after having sex
4.	Lack of parental love	• Compensation of parental love by being in a sexual relationship. Looking for a love figure
5.	Distant or mobile	• Left alone children • Parents being at home only on weekends and month ends

parenting	• Spending adequate time with boyfriends

When asked about contributory factors for teenage pregnancy, participants revealed the afore mentioned themes as the main reasons for teenage pregnancy. These are: Poverty, peer pressure, sexual curiosity, lack of parental love and distant or mobile phone parenting.

Poverty

Participants felt that the chief contributory factor of teenage pregnancy is poverty. Almost all participants attested that poverty caused them to be pregnant as their parents failed to give them enough pocket money as well as buying them fancy stylish items they envied from their peers such as all-star shoes which was most popular amongst youngsters. Participants further revealed that due to poverty, they found themselves obliged to have boyfriends hoping that they will buy them all the items they want and give them enough pocket money to spend at school. One participant had this to say:

> *My guardian only affords five Emalangeni as pocket money. I can't even buy a tin of coke with that amount, so I find myself forced to have a boyfriend who will give me extra cash for lunch in school*. (Zodwa, 19yrs, F4, School A).

Participants disclosed that even though their boyfriends did not force them into having sex, in a way they felt like they should give in as a way of appreciating the good things that their boyfriends do for them. They even mentioned that the more they agree to have sex with their boyfriends, the more they get whatever they ask for. This then serves to illuminate the fact that poverty is the major contributory factor to teenage pregnancy.

Participants in this study disclosed that due to poverty, parents tend to turn a blind eye when they see their daughters having a relationship with an affluent man. Mothers in particular had been reported having turned a blind eye when seeing their teenage girls being dropped by cars. They even appreciated the food packages that they have bought using the money from their boyfriends. This was reported by one of the participants who said:

> *If it happened that my mother see me being dropped by my boyfriend's car, she would pretend as if she did not see me. Even when I give her the food packages, she just said thank you without having to question me about the source of the packages*. (Participant#1 School E).

Another participant said her mother was so much accustomed to the fact that she would come with relish and food packages every Friday afternoon. If she failed to do so, her mother would question her and complain of eating porridge without relish. The participant reported that the mother would say:

> *Hey my daughters what relish have you bought today and what other food packages have you bought for me? Please help. Since morning I have been eating the porridge without relish. (Participant # 4, School E).*

The report above shows that because of poverty, at times parents influence their children to engage in misconduct activities. This then compromises the education of their daughters who eventually got pregnant and have their education interrupted. Hence the poverty cycle is perpetuated in the family.

The responses from individual interviews were also confirmed by members from the focus group discussions. When asked about the contributory factors for teenage pregnancy, participants from focus group discussions also shared the same sentiments with participants from the individual interviews.

Psycho-social challenges of pregnant teenage learners

Data collected to investigate the psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenage learners, was summarised into the following themes as indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: *Themes on psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenage learners*

Themes	Categories
1. Development of low self-esteem	• Quitting playing with friends • No longer comfortable going for break and lunch with friends • Not comfortable going to toilet in the company of friends • Going solitary • Not comfortable with exposing one's body.
2. Stigmatization	• Treated strangely by friends • Being gossiped • Teachers discouraging other pupils from associating with pregnant teenage learners
3. Forgoing meals	• Concealing one's pregnancy • Serious reduction of eating habits
4. Pregnancy related illnesses	• Feeling like vomiting • Being lazy • Sleeping a lot in class • Developing hatred for certain people and food
5. Failure to accept the pregnancy	• Continuously thinking on how to handle the situation • Crying, not knowing what to do • Unplanned pregnancy • Difficult to face the consequences • Flooded by thoughts of how parents will receive the news.
6. Being neglected	• Dealing with the situation alone • Being neglected by parents, guardians, boyfriends and community members. • Boyfriends denying pregnancy • Being gossiped by friends and community members.

Pregnant teenage learners reported having faced with a number of psycho-social challenges which included among many others: development of a low self-esteem, being stigmatised, reduction of eating habits, pregnancy related illnesses, failure to accept the pregnancy and being neglected.

Stigmatization

From the data gathered it transpired that pregnant teenagers reported being stigmatized by their peers and teachers within the school. This then subjected them to severe emotional trauma. The participants reported that even people who used to be their close friends shun and gossip them. They also reported that once the news of their pregnancy start circulating, friends treated them like strangers. As a result, they were isolated.

Worse still, even teachers discourage other pupils from associating with them on the grounds that they will be influenced to fall pregnant. Participants further revealed that, some teachers mock them that the school is not a maternity ward. The participants also reported that at times, even their classmates would sarcastically say that those pupils who had bean plants growing in their wombs should go home because they interrupt lessons. One participant said:

> *The truth of the matter is that teachers and peers are quick to note that you are pregnant. Teachers warn your friends to disassociate themselves from you because they will learn bad habits. They then begin to stigmatize and gossip you. They even laugh at you. That makes you feel uncomfortable hence you end up dropping from school.* (Sekwa, 18yrs, F 4, School E).

From the above report, it is clear that pregnant teenagers go through severe emotional torture to an extent that they even lose concentration in their studies. It is under such backgrounds that they end up dropping out. Data from the focus groups revealed the same sentiments.

Being neglected

The sentiment of being neglected by loved ones as well as the entire community members when one fell pregnant was a common concern from the focus group discussions. Participants revealed being isolated and neglected by their parents, teachers, boyfriends, friends as well as the entire community members. In class for instance, when a participant would have miss a point, the teachers mock them that it is because they are pupils by day and wives by night. In the same vein, participants disclosed that parents are disappointed by the news of pregnancy to an extent of neglecting the basic needs of the pregnant teenagers. Boyfriends were reported to be doggy too. They change their cell phone numbers in order to run away from the responsibilities and being nagged by the expectant young mothers. The participants reported that friends and community members go around gossiping and pointing fingers at them and hence, they feel isolated and lonely. One participant had this to say:

> *After being pregnant, I began to lose all the people who used to support me. Even before I knew that I was pregnant, teachers at school would suspect that I was. At home my parents are now complaining that I am wasting their food since I should go and be fed by the man who impregnated me. My boyfriend has changed his cell phone number. I am now the one looking and following after him. Friends and community members are gossiping me. This is very painful; I am just handling the situation on my own.* (Participant #7, School E).

The participant highlighted how she was neglected by all the people who used to support her after falling pregnant. Teachers at school had a negative attitude towards her as well. At home parents were no longer comfortable to consider her a child anymore now that she had fallen pregnant. As a way of running away from responsibilities, the boyfriend changed his cell phone number. Consequently, the pregnant teenager was just on her own, being ridiculed by friends and community members as they go around gossiping her.

Strategies to assist pregnant teenage learners to cope with their situation

With regard to strategies to assist pregnant teenage learners cope with their situation, from the collected data, the following themes were generated as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: *Themes on strategies to help pregnant teenage learners cope with their situation*

Themes	Categories
1. Counseling	• Alleviate the plights of pregnant teenage learners. • Averting doing harm • Assist in coming to terms with the pregnancy • Lowering the rate of attempted abortion and suicide • Opening fora for talking about bothering issues.
2. Organizations for pregnant teenagers	• Forum for discussing sex education and teenage pregnancy. • Developing long lasting solutions. • Peer education and interactive fora. • Dealing with emotional trauma and tension.
3. Parental and teacher support	• Avoid compromising the life of a pregnant teenager as well as that of the unborn baby. • Parents having a forgiving spirit.
4. More Child Friendly	• Allowed in schools during and after pregnancy.

Participants from individual interviews pointed out that they needed counselling services, setting up organisations to teach sex education and teenage pregnancy, parental and teacher support and the promulgation adoption of a Child Friendly Education Policy to assist the girl children with or without the pregnancy.

The Child Friendly Education Policy

The participants felt that pregnant teenage learners should be allowed to continue with their education during and after the pregnancy, therefore a Child Friendly Education Policy (CFEP) was supposed to be put in place (Wright, Mannathoko, & Pasic, 2006). The participants reported that pregnancy delays educational progression. Reiterating her point, Nonhle said:

> *A policy which allows pregnant teenage girls to continue with their education can go a long way in supporting the education of pregnant teenage girls. It is so painful to see your class mates progressing with their education while you sit at home. So for me, the re-entry policy is not that much effective, it tends to delay our education, yet if we can be allowed to continue schooling during the pregnancy and after birth our education cannot be interrupted.* (Nonhle, 18yrs, F4, School D).

The participant from the above quotation is stressing the need for an education policy which allows pregnant teenage girls to continue with their education before and after delivery. According to her, it is so hurting to see her classmates continuing with their education while she is seated at home. The participant viewed the re-entry policy as not effective as it tends to delay one's education. She is therefore, appealing for a more child friendly education policy which will not interrupt the education of pregnant teenage learners.

Another participant also stated the need of an education policy which will allow pregnant school girls to exercise their basic right to education during the pregnancy and after delivery. Participants further voiced out their dissatisfaction with the re-entry policy, arguing that was unfair because as it is, re-entry into school system was rather delayed. One participant said:

> *Fine the re-entry policy is good, but somehow it hampers our access to education as it tends to delay education for pregnant teenage learners yet if they can be allowed to continue schooling during the pregnancy and after birth, their right to education can be exercised fully.* (Participant #7, School E).

The same sentiments were echoed by the participants from focus group discussions.

When asked about the strategies that could be put in place to assist pregnant teenage learners cope with their situation; the participants said that there was need for counselling services to be instituted in the schools. The participants suggested that organizations for pregnant teenage learners should be allowed to come into the schools to offer counselling services to the affected learners. In addition to that, the participants said that they needed teachers' and parental help during this trying time. According to them, a Child Friendly Education Policy should be put in place which could allow pregnant school girls to continue with their education during pregnancy and after delivery.

Discussion of the findings

The study explored the psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenage learners in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. This section discusses the research findings as they were presented in the study. The presentation structure was guided by the emerging themes and the objectives of the study.

Experiences of pregnant teenage learners

The first objectives of the study sought to find out the experiences of pregnant teenage learners. From the findings of the study, it emerged that pregnant teenage learners went through untold emotional trauma to the extent that some attempted abortion while others considered suicide because society charges a heavy price on deviants of societal values and norms. The Swazi society expects a maiden to preserve her virginity up to marriage time. Consequently, all those who fail to adhere to these expectations suffer the consequences. In this study, the participants were scared of how they were going to break the news of the pregnancy to their parents. The results of this study confirm those of Olukorede and Oluwaseun (2009) conducted in Nigeria. The results of their study showed that pregnant adolescents were driven by fear of what their parents might say regarding the pregnancy hence the decision to abort.

Adolescent learners' perception of teenage pregnancy

It emerged from this study that adolescents in general had a negative perception of teenage pregnancy and they viewed it as one of the contributory factors leading to poverty and social inequalities. This agrees with Bronfenbrenner's (2002) ecological systems theory to which is framed. The results of this study show that because the pregnant teenagers have violated the norms and values of the society, they thus find themselves in social conflict with friends, peers and the significant other. These findings are in congruent with the results of Lemos' (2009) study which was conducted in London and showed that majority of the participants had a negative attitude towards teenage pregnancy. Over 85% regarded it as wrong and they associated it with economic and educational problems.

Factors leading to teenage pregnancy

The results of this study showed that poverty is the chief contributory factor to teenage pregnancy. Most parents and care givers only afford to pay school fees and bring food on the table but cannot afford to give their children extra money as pocket money. Consequently, girl teenagers who are attracted to a lavish type of life end up falling in love with males who are financially stable inorder to get money. In turn, they pay in kind (by offering sex) resulting in unplanned pregnancy. The ecological systems theory which states that the economic environment in which a person lives has an impact on the decisions and life style led by certain individuals became relevant as a theory framing this study. A study done by Fuglesang et al (2006) in Tanzania, found out that girls in Tanzania, aged 10 – 11 years old, were lured into sexual relations with older men for chips, coca cola, transport to school, money for videos and many more extra little things. This shows that poverty plays a contributory role in luring teenagers into engaging in sexual activities.

The psycho-social challenges of pregnant teenage Learners

From the gathered data it transpired that pregnant teenagers are stigmatized by their peers and teachers at school. Parents and/or guardians also do the same at home. The results of the study showed that due stigmatization, many pregnant teenagers become emotionally depressed to an extent that they even lose concentration in their studies. The study showed that it is under such circumstances that they end up deciding quit school. Their friends also run away and start gossiping on them. The ecological systems theory which states that human beings are affected by everything within their direct environment is in agreement with this observation. In addition to that, a study by Chigona et al (2008), done in South Africa, found that pregnant teenagers experienced stigmatisation from friends, peers and the community. A number of them reported that they would opt out. In addition to that, Zane (2010) concurs with these findings and pointed out that teenage pregnancy is associated with a stigma during and after the pregnancy.

Strategies to assist pregnant teenage learners to cope with their situation

The study established that there should be an implementation of an education policy which allows pregnant school girls to continue with their education during and after the pregnancy. The participants voiced out that dropping out due to pregnancy disturbs and delays their academic progression. Manzini (2001) noted that in South Africa, the existing school policy allows pregnant girls to continue with schooling both during the pregnancy and after delivery. Pregnant teenage learners in Cameroon have the right to negotiate the period of their maternity leave with their school management, and can make arrangements for extra classes so that they can cover up the agreed period of absence from school (Katayamoyo, 2010).

Summary, conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the psychosocial challenges of pregnant teenage learners in the Hhohho region of Swaziland. The study adopted the qualitative research method and employed the phenomenological research design. Data were collected using individual interviews and focus group discussions. The interview guide for individual interviews was divided into five (5) sections; section A provided the demographic information of the pregnant learner participants, section B, explored the experiences of pregnant teenage learners, section C investigated the contributory factors for teenage pregnancy, section D sought to ascertain the of psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenage learners and section E sought to identify possible strategies that could be adopted to assist pregnant teenage learners thus helping them to cope with their situation.

The interview guide for non-pregnant adolescent learner participants examined adolescent learners' perceptions of teenage pregnancy. The collected data were analyzed thematically and excerpts from the data were used to validate what had been said by participants.

Summary of findings

In this study the summary findings of the study were presented in accordance with the study objectives.

Experiences of pregnant teenage learners

The participants in this study reported
 that because of pregnancy they attempted abortion and/or suicide. Falling pregnant was emotionally traumatising to the adolescent learners and they also feared how they would break the news to their parents because parents least expected their children to be pregnant; hence they received the news with anger and fury. These findings agree with the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner which asserts that relationships in the micro-systems are bi-directional. Teenage pregnancy therefore, also impacts negatively on parents because they had to shoulder the blame for the wrongs that have been done by their children. The participants reported that parents are so much hurt by the news of the pregnancy, hence the source of fury. Because of this the pregnant teenage learners decided to go into solitary. Ironically, this is the time where and when they would need more social support and attention than ever.

Adolescent learners' perception of teenage pregnancy

Other adolescents had a negative perception of teenage pregnancy and they reported that it leads to poverty and school drop-out. It also emerged from the study that pregnant teenagers are at high risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS since it is clear that they had unprotected sex. The researchers also noted that Swaziland is high patriarchal. On the basis of that therefore, it psychologically conditions the females to submit to a male figure even if it calls putting her life in danger. Partly, this explains

why teenage girls submit to boys when they negotiate for an unprotected sex. This agrees with the ecological systems theory which asserts that an individual's cultural values can affect his/her behaviour (Bronfenbrenner (2002).

Contributory factors for teenage pregnancy

The study also showed that poor parenting styles, poverty and peer pressure contributed to teenage pregnancy. The researchers observed that teenagers like to be loved, guided, cared for and having their needs met. If they don't get from their parents and significant other; they look for it from wrong people. Mostly, these sympathisers are usually men who will be after sex, hence the unintended pregnancies. Bronfenbrenner's (2002) ecological systems theory points out that human beings are compelled by the things happening within their environment to engage in certain behaviours. Thus, this theory was relevant in framing this study.

Psycho-social challenges faced by pregnant teenage learners

In this study, pregnant teenage learners reported that their loved ones deserted them as soon as they realised that they were pregnant. This created a state of loneliness among the pregnant learners. At school, they reported that they were stigmatized by teachers, gossiped at and teased by their peers. Teachers also tease them by tell them that they don't teach people's wives and or mothers. This kind of ridiculing, threw them out school. On the other hand, parents were never kind with them when they discovered that they were pregnant. Pregnancy can as a shock and embarrassment to the parents too. The ecological systems theory says that society pays a heavy price to deviants of the societal. Culturally, a Swazi maiden is expected to preserve her virginity up until she gets married. Therefore, anyone who falls pregnant out of wedlock pays heavily to the society.

Strategies to assist pregnant teenage learners

From the results of this study, the researchers suggest that counselling centres should be put in place in both rural and urban areas to help traumatised people which include pregnant teenage learners, to successfully manage the traumas that come with teenage pregnancy. Organizations that help the pregnant teenage girl learners should also be sought. These could provide a forum where pregnant teenage learners could come together and discuss issues that strictly pertains to them. Parents and teachers need counselling so that they could also provide a degree of support to pregnant teenage learners thereby easing the tension. Lastly, there is a need for the Kingdom of Swaziland to put in place an education policy which allows pregnant teenage learners to continue schooling during pregnancy and not to wait and come back after having given birth. This disrupts the academic progression of these learners.

From the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that pregnant teenage learners are emotionally traumatised by the pregnancy. One of the challenges they faced was that of dealing with the situation of pregnancy solely on their own since the significant other do not condone it. Their situation is exuberated by the fact that they have to deal with the stigma attached to it. This stigma stems from the Swazi culture which condemns sex before marriage and teenage pregnancy. Among the core values of the Swazi culture is that young girls should remain virgins until marriage. This agrees with the ecological systems theory which posits that culture plays an influential role in the life of an individual. According to this theory, an individual's culture has an impact in the manner in which a person makes decisions for his life and the lives of other people (Bronfenbrenner, 2002).

Implications of the findings to existing literature

The main finding of this study is that pregnant teenage learners are stigmatized. This concurs with the observations by Zane (2010) who found out that teenage pregnancy is associated with a stigma during and after the pregnancy. In the same breath, Chigona et al (2008) who conducted a study in South Africa found that pregnant teenagers experienced stigma from friends, peers and the community. Hence they go through a lot of emotional trauma during and after pregnancy.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made with the intention of improving the lives of pregnant teenage learners. The recommendations are directed to policy makers, schools, parents and the society at large:

1. Teachers and parents should educate teenagers on the dangers of having unprotected sex. This can prevent unplanned pregnancies amongst school going teenagers. On the basis of this, this study recommends that sex education should be introduced in the schools with the hope of alleviating the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the schools.
2. An education policy which allows pregnant teenage learners to continue schooling during pregnancy should be put in place.
3. To support the above recommendation, society (teachers, learners, parents and community at large) need counselling so that they could accept the pregnant teenagers in their communities. This may reduce the emotional trauma and loneliness among pregnant teenagers.
4. To curb the spread of HIV/AIDS amongst teenagers, teenagers should be encouraged to use protective measures before engaging in sexual activities. This can be achieved if sex education is introduced in schools.
5. Teachers need to be trained on how to treat a pregnant teenage learner in class and within the vicinity of the school.
6. The classmates need counselling for them to accept their pregnant peers in class.

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