

## **Girls' Education in South Africa: Special Consideration to Teen Mothers as Learners**

**Agnes Chigona**, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

**Rajendra Chetty**, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

*Teenage pregnancy has militated against the educational success of girls in South Africa. Statistics show that four out of ten girls become pregnant overall at least once before age 20. Education is important for these girls in order to break the poverty cycle in which most of them are trapped. Though the girls are allowed to return to school after becoming mothers, they face many challenges in trying to balance motherhood and the demands of schooling. The aim of this study was to find out how teen mothers cope with schooling, hence how much support is rendered to them. A qualitative research approach was used to understand the social phenomena of teenage mothers as learners. The result of the research showed that teen mothers in Cape Town receive insufficient support (physically and emotionally) and the consequence is that many quit school or do not succeed with schooling.*

**Keywords:** *Teen Mothers, Schooling, Challenge, Support*

### INTRODUCTION

In sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries, girls and women are losing the battle for equal access to secondary education. In South Africa, 61 percent of the uneducated adult population are women (James et al, 2000, pg. 18). In many developing countries, teenage pregnancy has been one of the major hindrances to the educational success of girls. Pregnancy among school girls is reaching crisis proportions in some South African schools. A recent report detailed the case of one school that had 144 pregnant pupils in 2006 (*Sunday Times*, 2007). Recent research in South Africa has shown that by the age of 18 more than 30 percent of teens have given birth at least once (NRC-IOM 2005). It is evident that teenage pregnancy is becoming more and more a barrier to girls' education.

In a study about the battle for equal access to education, Meena (2001) blames governments of the sub-Saharan countries for making little effort to eliminate the discrepancies in the area of access to secondary education for girls. One way girls are denied access is when they fall

pregnant and when they become teen mothers (Meena, 2001). Wolpe et al (1997) states that there are some schools that do not allow pregnant girls and young mothers to attend classes. In some cases where teen mothers continue schooling, they are often “described and assumed to be poor or incapable students” (Pillow, 2004:111). In addition, Shultz (2001, pg. 584) asserts that “too often, pregnancy during high school is a signal for school personnel and families to abandon young women, designating them as school failures”. Thus, educators and parents often give up on them. Nonetheless, teen mothers and their children are two particularly vulnerable groups in our society whose long term life chances are interconnected. They are both at critical points in their lives, where their courses may be shaped towards healthy development, stability and productivity or towards poverty and dependency. Without support for teen mothers to complete their education, many will struggle with poverty and its effects (Stephens et al 1999; Kunio and Sono, 1996; Mogotlane, 1993).

Our larger research project aims at finding out how young teen mothers cope with schooling challenges, how the challenges come about and how the challenges are being dealt with. It also aims at finding out if the authorities and policy makers in education are aware of the challenges teen mothers go through in their struggle to complete their education; and what measures are put in place and/or what can be done in order to lessen the young teen mothers’ challenges, so that they are able to complete their education and become self reliant. This article is largely motivated by the fact that teen mothers are in a crucial phase of their lives, because as teenagers they are experiencing the integration of “earlier identifications, abilities and opportunities offered by society” (Gouws and Kruger, 1994: 83). As teenagers they are at a time of heightened psychological risk (Brown and Gillgan, 1992). Another motivation for doing this research arose out of a concern expressed by various scholars and community based organizations that gender issues in many sectors including education have been largely neglected in the process of transformation in South Africa (Gaganakis, 2003). The African National Congress’ Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994), The National Gender Summit (2001) and several women’s organizations have all shown concern for gender inequalities.

The theoretical framework for this research draws on both the international and local literature. Internationally, it draws particularly on Chevalier and Viitanen (2001) who argue that teenage motherhood is prone to conflict with human capital investment that typically takes place during adolescence by raising the opportunity costs of time spent in education. Early childbearing is likely to reduce labour force participation because of the low compatibility of employment and child rearing. The negative effect of early childbearing on adult wages is both direct and indirect as the wages of teenage mothers are negatively affected by their reduced education and work experience.

According to Chevalier and Viitanen, teenage motherhood reduces the chances of post-compulsory schooling by 12% to 24%. Chevalier and Viitanen conclude that teenage motherhood seems to impose long-term consequences on the career development of young mothers and hence is likely to lead to transmitting poverty from generation to generation. It would thus appear that policies preventing the long-term consequences of teenage motherhood should be focused on helping teenage mothers to succeed in their secondary school education (Chevalier and Viitanen, 2001). Locally, both the ANC’s Policy Framework for Education and

Training (1994) and The National Gender Summit (2001) have prioritized the need for research into gender inequalities in education.

This study is based upon three assumptions:

- Teen mothers face many challenges in trying to complete their schooling because over and above their academic work, just like their peers, they are mothers first. The challenges may be exacerbated because as teenagers the girls are in a crucial phase of their lives as they are experiencing the integration of their personal identifications, abilities and opportunities available in society (Gouws and Kruger, 1994).
- Counseling and child care facilities to the young teen mothers on their return to school may lessen their challenges and therefore, being able to concentrate and perform well in their academic work.
- There are no strong policies to deal with any mockery, teasing or marginalizing of the young teen mothers in schools. These remarks may affect the comfort of the teen mothers and may force them to drop out of school.

## GENDER AND EDUCATION

Although literature exists on the effects of race and class on youth in South Africa, research into gender and education, and in particular the challenges young teen mothers go through when they go back to school, and how to address the challenges so that the girls are able to finish their schooling, remain limited. Examples of the few authors in this subject include Thody and Kaabwe (2000) who have highlighted the critical role of education and gender in Africa, and Leo-Rhynie (1999) who provided tools and sector-specific guidelines for gender mainstreaming.

While the situation concerning teenage pregnancy and schooling problems is less accounted for locally, it is widely accounted for globally (Pillow, 2004; Lutrell, 2003; Chevalier and Viitanen, 2001; Ornstein and Levine, 1997; McGurk et al, 1993; Creatsas, 1993; Helge, 1989; Olivier, 1996). According to Mokgalabone (1999) the situation relating to pregnancy and schooling disturbances in South Africa are inevitably associated with societal problems. These problems range from ignorance and moral collapse (Helge, 1989) to the sexual abuse of powerless female adolescents (McGurk et al, 1993), and lastly public ignorance about early menarche (De Villiers, 1991; Creatsas, 1993).

Mothering, peer pressure and school environment negatively affect teen mothers in coping with schooling. Research by Kaufman et al (2001) shows that both pregnancy and parenting are the leading reasons girls give for dropping out of school. According to Theron and Dunn (2006) adolescent childbearing is especially disruptive to the educational process of girls and, as a consequence, many teen mothers leave school and never return. In the USA, Arlington Public School (2004) further reinforces the predicament of the girls:

Teen parents face an overwhelming number of difficulties. Parental and peer pressures are far more common than support and understanding. Mature, adult decisions are required of emotionally pressured adolescents. Managing to care for an infant and

devoting adequate time to school work is a great challenge for these parenting teens (Arlington Public School, 2004).

In South Africa, Grant and Hallman (2006) have shown that in most cases the birth of a baby marks the end of schooling for the teen mothers. There are factors that influence whether or not a teen mother is able to continue schooling after the birth of the baby. Most of the factors depend on the girls' ability to manage logistics and finances associated with mothering and schooling simultaneously (Kaufman et al. 2001).

In the 2000 Commission on Gender Equity report to the South African Ministry of Education, it was stated that a number of complaints had been received from pregnant learners concerning the manner in which their schools had been treating them. Some forms of discrimination which included suspension from class were reported (Ministry of Education, 2000). Although it may be illegal to refuse pregnant girls an opportunity to complete their schooling, since education is their human right (UNESCO 2003), authors like Wolpe et al (1997) have lamented that some school committees in South Africa are often unwilling to allow the girls to continue attending classes for fear that they may 'contaminate' other girls and encourage them to become pregnant. The unwillingness is still practised in many public schools<sup>1</sup>.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has worked since 1992 to promote *Education for Women* through advocacy, concrete actions and policy reforms. In the mid-nineties, the Forum successfully lobbied the ministries of education in several African countries to change policies that excluded pregnant girls from re-entering school. In South Africa, a policy formalised in 1996 allows pregnant girls and mothering teens to continue schooling logistically and financially (Grant and Hallman, 2006).

While pregnancy and teen mothering are major causes of secondary school drop out for girls, social, economic and cultural issues also make girls' school attendance a complex decision for the girls' parents. Some parents may not send girls to school because they consider the benefits of education for girls to be limited and the cost of sending them to school to be unnecessary for the family (Swainson et al 1998; Lloyd and Mensch, 1999).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Description of the Population under Study

This study investigated the challenges teen mothers face in trying to complete their secondary schooling. The teen mothers formed the target population in the project; girls that have babies before completing their secondary school and return to school after the birth of their babies, that is, if they temporarily dropped out school due to pregnancy. The sample population was between the ages of 14 and 18, and is currently in grades between 8 and 12.

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Weekend Argus* (2007) reported that the principal of a secondary school in the Western Cape barred a 17 year-old pregnant and married girl from returning to the institution at the beginning of the 2007 school year.

### Sampling and Data Collection

The research was conducted using mainly a qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is defined as “the use of qualitative data such as interviews, documents and participant observation data to understand and explain social phenomena” (Myers, 1997). Participants were drawn from five randomly selected high schools which are within the radius of 20 kilometres from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town where the authors of this paper are based.

The sampling of the schools was done randomly and the sample consisted of three schools located in the townships and two in the suburbs. One of the two suburban schools is 100% black while the other is 80% white with the remaining 20% made up of blacks and coloureds. Two of the schools in the townships have a large majority of coloured students, the minority being black; the third school is 100% black. The participants were sampled by choosing an equal number of names from the list of teen mother students provided by the principals of the schools. Although race is not the focus of this survey, the majority-black schools had longer lists of names compared to the coloured dominated schools. The principal of the white dominated school reported that there were no teen mothers at the school this year, although this could not be verified due to regulatory constraints.

Interview participants were included in this survey through purposive sampling. Girls who were teen mothers were invited to be interviewed individually, with the aim that the information to be gathered should be informative and rich in description. School heads were also interviewed. Fourteen teen mothers and four school heads were individually interviewed. From each list of names provided, we randomly selected four girls from each of the four schools resulting in a sample of 16 girls. Those who agreed were given letters to their parents seeking consent to participate in the project. Fifteen parents gave consent for their daughters to be interviewed as part of the project. During the interview process, one girl withdrew from participating in the project resulting in fourteen respondents that were interviewed.

In order to supplement the interview data, a questionnaire was also administered to 40 students (20 boys and 20 girls) and 15 teachers in the selected schools to find out how they accept and relate with the teen mothers. The questionnaire respondents were drawn from classes where at least one of the learners is a teen mother so that their responses are based on their observations and experiences as they are in contact with their teen mother classmate(s) on a daily basis. The teachers who responded to the questionnaire were those that come into contact with at least one teen mother in any of their classes.

The response rate for the questionnaires from the students was surprisingly high i.e. out of 40 questionnaires 37 were handed back with a response rate of 92.5%. An explanation to this could be the fact that the questionnaires were administered to the respondents in classroom situations. Similarly, the response rate of questionnaires to teachers was 73.3%. The reason for the high rate could be that questionnaires were handed to teachers personally and fetched when they were completed.

## Data Analysis and Description

All the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the respondents and then transcribed. The responses to the questionnaires were scanned and cleaned manually and collated for analysis. The data was analysed by means of a descriptive analytical approach. The process of organizing data and data reduction was done by means of bracketing. This was done until prominent themes could be identified and described. The relatively small sample ensured that the data could be analysed manually.

## Ethical Measures

The sensitive nature of the study raised salient ethical issues which had to be carefully considered during the research process. Consideration was taken to adhere strictly to ethical measures as outlined in the faculty ethics regulations. In order to ensure the safety and rights of the participants, they were informed about the prevailing ethical consideration, for instance, informed consent of the Education Department, the participants and their parents, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality (Berg, 1995).

## RESULTS

From the transcription and analysis of the interviews it became clear that there are a number of challenges teen mothers face within the school environment and sometimes at home when it is time to study or do homework. While most challenges experienced by teen mothers in this study are quite similar to what is reported about young mothers in the USA, there are differences between the two groups. Some findings as portrayed by Pillow (2004) and Lutrell (2003) are that teen mothers in the USA may have a chance of attending separate schools and counselling may be readily available to the schooling young mothers. South Africa does not have separate schools for teen mothers and they may only continue schooling in normal schools. Furthermore, access to counselling for the girls is marginal. Whether a teen mother would be able to return to school or not depends on the resources available in the girl's family (Kaufman et al, 2001; Hallman and Grant, 2006). According to the teen mothers in this study, there were common challenges. These are discussed below.

### Lack of Time to Study and Do Homework

All the girls interviewed expressed that they do not have enough time to complete their homework and to study at home. When they return from school, their relatives who take care of the children want to be free of the child-care chores. The babies also want the attention from their mother when they return from school. The respondents commented as follows:

“Being a mother and schooling is hard. When sometimes I want to do school work I don't have time... so it is hard to find time and have the energy.”

“Sometimes I do not have time to do my homework. I try to take my baby to my boyfriend’s mother to do the school work but the baby always wants to be with me so I just ignore the school work because I can’t do homework when I am with the baby.”

“Due to having a baby at home... I don’t have time to do most of the school work.”

South African researchers have emphasised that returning to school after giving birth, is not easy for teen mothers, because of the hardship in organizing time for both studying and parenthood (Kaufman et al 2001). A similar sentiment was echoed in the United States, where it was argued that managing to take care of a child and devoting adequate time to school work is not an easy task for teen mothers (Arlington Public Schools, 2004)

### Missing Classes Due to Motherhood

In most case when the child falls sick the teen mother has to take the baby to hospital; and if the child has to be admitted in the hospital for a period of time, the teen mother has to miss classes. However, teachers are not willing to go through the missed lessons with just one or two students. On this point, one of the teen mothers said:

“Sometimes you need to be a student, sometimes a mother and to balance the two is a bit hard. But the mothering takes much of you because like when the child is sick you have to think about the child all the time and for me it is hard to keep the baby at the back of my mind when I am at school. So it is really much more difficult just to break away from my child.”

Such challenges were captured during interviews with School heads:

“All I say to her is ...ask other learners what we have done and try to do your best... They must see to it that they do whatever they are supposed to do if they are left behind. They chose to have a kid, so why should the school now make any arrangements?”

“There is nothing arranged for them...For the time they have been absent and for them to look after their young ones, there is no such arrangement. So even if the girl was with her baby in hospital for some days, she doesn’t get any help as to catch up with the rest of the class.”

It is evident that the lack of support from the head of school may influence the attitudes of teachers and other learners towards the teen mothers. The exclusionary approach by schools is cause for concern, especially within the context of enabling national policy. Teen motherhood is one of the major factors inhibiting school advancement of females (Hallman, and Grant, 2004).

### Lack of Professional Counselling

Most of the teen mothers return to school without going through any counselling on how they can be prepared to deal with the stigma, issues around parenting and meeting the demands of the

school. The consequence is that teen mothers get overwhelmed with their situation in school and many fail to cope resulting in school dropout. All the teen mothers interviewed expressed that nobody offered them counselling on how to get themselves ready to face their new situation:

“Nobody offered counselling to me and even the teachers did not counsel me when I came back to school.”

“There was no counselling and I don’t know anybody who could do that. No not even from the community or the school.”

“I don’t know anything about counselling.”

According to the heads of schools, there is no provision of professional counselling to the teen mothers when they return to school.

### Fear and Loneliness at School

Sometimes teen mothers have fear participating in class discussions for instance during “Life Orientation” programmes. For example, when topics like ‘teenage pregnancy’ arose, the teen mothers became particularly uncomfortable that everybody was talking about their situation. A teen mother commented on her experience when she returned to school after the birth of her baby:

“It was a shock because first I was afraid other students [would] be laughing at me.”

“Sometimes people talk things behind your back... and laugh at you because you have got a baby.”

“Sometimes I feel left out but there is nothing I can do.”

In addition, based on observations on the teen mothers at school, one of the heads of schools said:

“I feel they don’t feel free when other girls are chatting, looking at her. And maybe when she tries to join them they stop talking and so she just thinks they have been talking and laughing about her because she has got a baby. So they are generally not happy at school and they feel isolated.”

Researchers explain that fear and loneliness can lead to social isolation from others and this may lead to regression to an earlier phase of life where the teenager would feel secure (Taylor, 1997)

### Lack of Acceptance by Some Teachers and Students

Some teen mothers feel teachers do not understand their situation and they are expected to perform and behave just like any other student in their respective classes. For instance, teen mothers are sometimes ridiculed in front of classmates whenever they haven't satisfied the class requirements. And when a teen mother quarrels with another student, the other students usually pick on the teen mother's situation.

“Because my baby is crying all the time she doesn't want to go to anybody. I don't have time to do my homework. Teachers are nagging. I come to school the next morning sleepy ...I wake up at night because he is crying constantly. Teachers are nagging all the time. Sometimes you feel like you have got all the world on your shoulders.”

“What happened the first days I was coming back to school was that some students would be talking to one another laughing and looking at me. But when I came close to them they would stop talking so I knew they were talking about me because I have a baby. ...so sometimes I feel left out but there is nothing I can do.”

“There was one girl who was, like, bothering me at school because I have a baby. I told her it's none of her business.”

Furthermore, the heads of schools commented on their observations in school:

“Girls quarrel, picking on the teen mother's situation.”

“Particularly when girls get into a fight, like petty arguments, and if one girl knows the other has got a baby, sometimes [she] would use that to hurt the girl. Other girls would make points, remarks. We have had already these cases in the past.”

“The teen mothers are shy to talk about their situation even the parents have never come to complain about the bullying or mockery. But, yeah other people do mock them but they cannot complain to this office.”

Kaufman et al (2001) concluded that educational support is a regular source of tension for teen mothers and many of them fall behind in school, because they are teased by fellow students and teachers. Lees (1987) reported that pregnant students are at best ignored or at worst ridiculed. Boys and girls often verbally abuse these girls, making their participation in class to seem unwelcome. Peer pressures are believed to be more common than support and understanding. These emotionally pressured teens require mature, adult decisions if they are to cope.

### Lack of Skills to Handle Teen Mothers' Situation

According to observations by the heads of schools in this project, teen mothers may be disadvantaged at school because their teachers do not know how to handle them and their

situation when they are at school. The following is what one principal, who also teaches regularly, had to say regarding this:

“She has a baby ... She could stay home for a week... She could come back and say, “Sorry, I was with my baby in Red-Cross hospital so I couldn’t come to school.” I would not say alright then, we did this last week so... No! No! It’s her own business. All I say to her is, ‘Listen we have done a lot the past week when you were not here, so ask other learners what we have done and try to do your best’...Nothing is put in place.”

“When the pregnant girls are dozing during class the teacher cannot do anything. We just leave them like that ... because these kids are very touchy. Once you say something she will report that you are harassing her because she is that way. So we are trying to avoid those things...We also fear for our lives...You just ignore her and continue with the lesson.”

Jones (1988) indicated that by giving less attention to some girls in class, the teacher ultimately penalizes these girls in that it contributes to their failing to master curriculum knowledge. Furthermore, Bloem (2000) argues that teachers may need professionals to come and inform them about handling teen mothers and their situation. In-service training is one method that would allow teachers to keep pace with societal and public health changes. The assumption is that teachers should help teens under such circumstances; unfortunately, some teachers consider the teen mothers’ situation a private matter and none of their concern (Olivier, 2000).

### Poverty

Due to poverty many teen mothers cannot afford to take their babies to crèche or to hire a babysitter so they can have time to study and do their homework. Sometimes as girls they have to do household chores when they return from school and the only time they can do their homework is at night. Unfortunately, some come from families where the house is just too small for the family such that all the family members share limited space. In informal settlements, this space can be a single room. This situation makes it hard for the girls to study or do their homework at night, as they cannot have the lights on whilst other people are sleeping. One of the teen mothers and one head of school had the following to say respectively:

“[There] are a number of us in my family but we all live in just one room so it is also hard for me to do my homework at night but during the day I am also busy with the household work.”

“Obviously some teen mothers do not have anybody to look after their babies. For them, life becomes really tough. It is hard for them to cope. They can’t even afford a babysitter.”

Hallman and Grant (2006) concluded that the resources available within the family- both economic and social play a role in determining whether or not a teen mother can resume schooling following childbirth. Kaufman et al (2001) argued that while most families try to provide for the newborn child, many are born into conditions of limited resources with uncertainties to a larger kin network that might be expected to contribute to healthcare, clothing, or education. Hallman, and Grant (2004) showed that higher rates of pregnancy are observed

among poor young women, indicating that poverty inhibits the schooling of the girls both directly and indirectly.

### Irregular Class Attendance

Most of the teen mothers interviewed do not attend classes regularly. Their academic performance is usually below average resulting in very few succeeding in their matric (final school examinations). The heads of schools commented as follows:

“I would say the success rate is not very high because they seem to lose the motivation. With the baby around they can’t really cope. They really can’t get down to study, so you find out that the success rate is low because most of them are not really ready for the exams.”

“The time they fall pregnant they have to miss some classes. For sometime when they come back it will be a lot for them to deal with...And it is quite involving to be a mother and at the same time [go to school]. It is quite a big challenge.”

Theron and Dunn (2006) argued that teenage childbearing may be associated with a syndrome of failure – failure to remain in school; since teen motherhood is disruptive when it comes to school attendance.

### Lack of Support to Deal with Stigma Attached to Teen Motherhood

Because these girls have become mothers whilst young and still in school they are stigmatised and tend to have low self-esteem. Addressing this requires support, particularly proper counselling. Without going through proper counselling to deal with their stigma and schooling they usually get overwhelmed and eventually stop attending school as they fail to cope with the situation. Regarding this issue, the heads of schools had the following to say:

“We don’t have any counseling for these teen mothers, and at home the parents are too busy to look for a counselor. They are busy trying to stop the rumor from spreading. And when the child is ready to be back [at] school they will just send her to school...So the child is expected to adjust to her new state on her own.”

“It becomes difficult for them to cope. I say more would not even be able to reach to Matric level as they drop off before this level... Like a girl [who] has a baby while in grade 9 or 10 or something like that, [it is] unlikely that they will get through to Matric level.”

According to Kenway (1990) low self-esteem is a problem for certain individuals, as it prevents them making the best of their schooling and their lives. Psychologists like Lerner (1985) perceive low self esteem as a significant cause of low academic performance. As such it is important that mechanisms should be put in place to deal with low self-esteem among teen mothers. Some factors that seem to influence more female dropouts than men include: having a large number of children, educational level of their mothers, their own low academic achievements and low self-esteem (U.S. Department of Education, 1992; Chevalier and Viitanen, 2001). However, some countries like the US have a number of support groups for the girls in

this situation (Taylor, 1997). A teenager who receives caring and support would be able to handle her situation with ease.

According to the questionnaire, which was administered to boys, girls and teachers in order to find out how they feel, relate and accept teen mothers in their schools, the following was found:

- While more than three quarters of the boys indicated that they feel at ease associating with teen mothers, a quarter of the girls expressed that they feel uneasy associating with the teen mothers in their classes.
- While 80% of the girls indicate that they feel sorry for the teen mothers, only 50% of the boys do so.
- Frequently boys attack teen mothers verbally while girls often disassociate themselves from the teen mothers.
- Teachers, boys and girls feel that teen mothers have a lot of fear participating in class discussions and are usually rejected by their families, which also contributes to their poor performance at school.
- All teachers expressed that in most cases, teen mothers' performance is below average. More than half of the teachers indicated that they are not sure how to handle the teen mothers in the classroom.

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of the survey, only allowing teen mothers back to school does not help them succeed in their secondary education. There is a need for support to prepare teen mothers for schooling and mothering before they return to school. As teen mothers, they are expected to be mother and student simultaneously. This is a big responsibility for a teenager who is still developing psychologically (Theron and Dunn, 2006; Nathanson, 1990). In addition Pearton (1999) argues that adolescents are mostly too young and emotionally immature when they first fall pregnant. Therefore, if these girls are to succeed academically it is important to provide adequate support.

In most cases teen mothers cannot afford child-care facilities and their families do not offer much help in taking care of the babies. Consequently, as parents, teen mothers do not have enough time to do their school work. This is worsened when the teen mothers have to miss classes due to the illness of their babies. Unfortunately, their teachers do not know how to handle these girls' situation; and they do not have the means to help the mothers catch up with missed lessons. As such most teen mothers usually lag behind in their school work and this results in their failure to succeed with their secondary school education.

Lack of proper counselling for teen mothers as indicated by the heads of schools is a serious problem for these girls. Teen mothers need to be counselled regarding their stigma and schooling. That is, because they have become mothers before completing school and while they are still young, they are stigmatised and their peers and society judge and view them as girls with low morals. Nevertheless, providing counselling on how teen mothers can deal with this stigma

and cope simultaneously with mothering and schooling may prepare them emotionally for their new situation.

According to the survey, teen mothers are usually alienated by their fellow students and sometimes by their teachers. This negatively affects them by their feeling out of place, resulting in poor school performance. Through counselling teen mothers would be ready to face the reactions of their fellow students and teachers without being emotionally hurt and becoming overwhelmed with the situation.

The survey also found that some teachers expressed that they are not sure how to handle teen mothers at school. This is unfortunate as it is assumed that the teachers would support and encourage the teen mothers to deal with their situation which makes them 'learners with special needs'. In addition, some teachers see teen motherhood as a private issue and none of their concern and concede that they should treat teen mothers like any other student. Teachers themselves might need guidance with respect to how teen mothers can be encouraged and supported academically. That is, teachers may need training on how to encourage teen mothers so that they do not make these students' lives worse because of insensitivity.

Looking at the results of this survey and the literature, one can easily see that teen mothers need much support if they are to complete schooling successfully. The results and literature show that there is a need for parents and teachers to equip teenagers with life skills which would enable them to handle their problems and challenges (Olivier, 2000). Bloem (2000) also emphasises that teachers need to be knowledgeable regarding the problems teens face, including teenage motherhood.

The literature also concurs with the unnecessary stigma attached to teenage motherhood during schooling (Olivier, 2000). Results have shown that parents are not keen to organise counselling for their daughters when they return to school as mothers because they do not want to publicise their situation to the community, and this is done at the expense of their girls. That is, parents make the decision on behalf of their pregnant child for the sake of their own status in society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of this research, the following recommendations could be adopted and put into practice so as to help teen mothers succeed in their education:

- Provide proper counselling to the teen mothers before they return to the school system;
- Make lessons and time available for teen mothers at times that are convenient to them;
- Provide teacher training on how to support teen mother students in their schools;
- Schools may consider providing crèche facilities for teen mother students.

## CONCLUSION

This research has noted that while girls are allowed to be back at school after becoming mothers, they face many challenges in trying to balance both motherhood and schooling demands. Due to parenthood, the teen mothers do not have enough time to do their school work. As a result, many teen mother students usually lag behind and this hampers their progress with secondary school education.

Lack of proper counselling for the teen mothers about their stigma and schooling seem to be one of the most serious problems these girls experience. Because many of these girls come back to the school system as mothers without any emotional preparation of their new situation, they are overwhelmed with the new expectations and this results in them not performing well academically and in many cases, dropping out of school.

*Agnes Chigona is a doctoral candidate at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Her area of research is gender, theoretical constructs of girls' education in Africa and teenage mothers as learners.*

*Rajendra Chetty is Head of Research in the Faculty of Education, Cape Peninsula University of Technology. His research interests are postcolonialism, social development and teacher education.*

## REFERENCES

- Arlington Public School (2004). Teenage Parenting Programmes.  
<http://www.apsva.us/teenageparenting> Retrieved on 15-02-06
- Berg, B.L. (1995). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bloem S. (2000). Die menings van sekondere opvoeders betreffende 'n adolescent wat 'n swangerskap laat temineer het. Ongepubliseerde MEd verhandeling. Port Elizabeth: Universiteit van Port Elizabeth.
- Brown, L. and Gilligan C. (1992). *Meeting the Crossroads: women's psychology and girls' development*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Caldwell, B., et al. (1999). Sexual Regimes and Sexual Networking: The Risk of an HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Bangladesh. *Social Science & Medicine* 48: 1103–16
- Chevalier, A. and Viitanen, T. K. (2001). *The Long-Run Labour Market Consequences of Teenage Motherhood in Britain*. London.
- Creatsas, G.K. (1993). Sexuality: sexual activity and contraception during adolescence. *Current opinion in Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 5: 774-783
- De Villiers, V.P. (1991). Sekonderring onder tieners in die Paarl. *South African Medical Journal*, 80: 231-232
- Gaganakis, M. (2003). Gender and future role choice: A study of black adolescent girls. *South African Journal of Education*, 23(4), 281 – 286
- Gouws, E. and Kruger, N. (1994). *The Adolescent: An educational perspective*. Johannesburg: Butterworth.
- Grant, M. and Hallman, K. (2006): "Pregnancy-related school dropout and prior school performance in South Africa," *Policy Research Division Working Paper* no. 212. New York: Population Council.
- Hallman, K. and M. Grant. 2004. "Poverty, Educational Attainment, and Livelihoods: How Well Do Young People Fare in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa?" Horizons Research Summary. Washington, D.C.: Population Council.
- Helge, D. (1989). *Preventing Teenage Pregnancies in Rural America*. National Rural Development Institute. Western Washington University, Bellingham WA.
- Human Rights Watch (2004). Publications. Hrw.org Defending Human Rights Worldwide. New York.
- James W. et al (2000). Values, Education and Democracy. Report of Working Group on Values in Education (South Africa).
- Kaufman, C. et al (2001). "Adolescent pregnancy and parenthood in South Africa." *Studies in Family Planning* 32(2): 147–160

- Kenway J.(1990). Privileged girls. Private schools, and the culture of success. In: Kenway J. and Willis S. (eds), *Hearts and Minds: Self-esteem and the schooling of girls*. London. Falmer.
- King E.M. and Hill A.M. (1992). *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits and Policies*. World Bank.
- Kunio, K. And Sono, A. (1996). Study on the Promotion of Unwanted Teenage Pregnancies: Perspectives Drawn from the International JFPA (Japan Family Planning Association).
- Lees, S.(1987). The structure of sexual relations in school. In Arnot M and Weiner G. (eds) *Gender and the politics of schooling*. London. Hutchison.
- Leo-Rhynie, E. (1999). The Institute of Development and Labour Law, University of Cape Town, South Africa: Gender Mainstreaming in Education: A Reference Manual for Governments and Other Stakeholders. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Lloyd, C and Mensch, B. (1999): "Implications of formal schooling for girls' transitions to adulthood in developing countries." In *Critical Perspectives on Schooling and Fertility in the Developing World*. Eds. Bledsoe, C.H., Casterline, J.B., Johnson-Kuhn, J.A. and Haaga, J.G. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Luttrell, W. (2003): *Pregnant bodies, fertile minds: gender, race, and the schooling of pregnant teens*. Routledge. London.
- McGurk, S.R. et al. (1993). Utilisation of a School-Based Clinic for Identification and Treatment of Adolescent Sexual Abuse. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 14:196-201.
- Meena, R. (2001). quoted in Africa: Women are losing the battle for education in Win News: Spring 2001 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2872/is\\_2\\_27/ai\\_75099774](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2872/is_2_27/ai_75099774)  
Retrieved on 15-02-06
- Ministry of Education (2000). Summary of Decision of the Meeting of the Council of Education Ministers, 31 July.
- Mogotlane, S. (1993). Teenage Pregnancy: An Unresolved Issue. *Curationis*, 16:11-14
- Mokgalabone M.B. (1999). Socio-cultural conditions, teenage pregnancy and schooling disruption: themes from teachers and teenage mothers in "poor rural schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 19(1):55-66
- Myers, M. (1997). *Information Systems: An Emerging Discipline?* McGraw-Hill, London.
- National Gender Summit. (2001). Briefing document. Braamfontein, Johannesburg.
- National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (NRC-IOM). 2005. *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*. Ed. Cynthia B. Lloyd. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Olivier, M.A. et al (2000): Adolescents' view on termination of pregnancy. *South African Journal of Education*, 20:213-221
- Olivier, M.A. (1996). Adolescents' perception of sexuality. *South African Journal of Education*, 16:5-8

- Ornstein A. C. and Levine D.U. (1997): *Foundations of Education*. New York Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Pearson, A. (1999): Cognitive Competence of Adolescents to Termination of Pregnancy: An Ecological Perspective. Unpublished DPhil thesis. Port Elizabeth: University of Port Elizabeth.
- Pillow, W. (2004): *Unfit subjects: Educational policy and the teen mother*. RoutledgeFalmer. New York.
- Schultz, K. (2001): Constructing failure, Narrating success: Rethinking the “problem” of teen pregnancy. *Teachers College Record*. Vol.103, No.4 pp 582-607
- Sey, H. (1997): Peeking Through the Window: Classroom Observation and Participatory Learning for Action Activities (COPLAA). Prepared for USAID Africa Bureau.
- Stephens, S. A. et al (1999): Improving outcome for teen parents and their young children by strengthening school based programmes: Challenges solutions and policy implications. Centre for Assessment and Development Policy – CAPD.
- Sunday Times* (2007): School with 144 pregnant Pupils. *Sunday Times News* 20/05/07. P6.
- Swainson N. et al (1998). Promoting girls education in Africa. - The design and implementation policy intervention. Education Research Paper No. 25 (141) 1998
- Taylor, G.L. (1997). Womens’ experience of abortion: a qualitative study. Unpublished MA dissertation. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.
- Theron, L. and Dunn, N. (2006): Coping strategies for adolescent birth-mothers who return to school following adoption. *South African Journal of Education* vol. 26(4), 491-499
- Thody, A. and Kaabwe E S. M., eds. (2000). *Educating Tomorrow: Lessons from Managing Girls' Education in Africa*. Kenwyn, South Africa: Juta.
- UNESCO (2003): Education for All Information Kit: Educating Women and Girls. [http://undg.org/documents/girlseducation/UNGEIActionPlanFinal\(11-00\).doc](http://undg.org/documents/girlseducation/UNGEIActionPlanFinal(11-00).doc) Retrieved on 15-02-06.
- U.S. Department of Education (1992): Office for Civil Rights, Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Issues under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.
- Van Vuuren M. (1990). Family planning is the key to saving our planet. *Community health in South Africa*, 5:16-21
- Weekend Argus* (10-02-2007) Officials will monitor married schoolgirl. P3.
- Wolpe A., Quinlan, O. and Martinez, L. (1997). Gender Equity in Education: A Report by the Gender Task Team. Pretoria.