

TEENAGE PREGNANCY & SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN SOUTH AFRICA:

facts, figures and
possible interventions



prepared by social surveys

INTRODUCTION

This fact sheet is designed for educators, concerned community and parent organisations, as well as education officials. It provides facts and figures on teenage pregnancy in South Africa, and offers suggestions for reducing the number of girl learners who fall pregnant, and as well as suggestions for getting young mothers back into school.

This fact sheet, the third in a series of five, is based on the HSRC’s 2009 Teenage Pregnancy Report and the Access to Education study, which was undertaken by Social Surveys and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs). The study focuses on the barriers children and youth aged 7 to 18 face, entering and completing school. It began with in-depth conversations with educators, caregivers and youth in urban and rural communities on the difficulties youth face in remaining in school. In late 2007 Social Surveys travelled across all the provinces in South Africa, conducting a nationally representative household survey with caregivers in 4400 households. Youth in these households who were aged 16 to 18 were also interviewed. Questions focused on the reasons children aged 7 to 18 were out of school. Both caregivers and youth identified teenage pregnancy as the number one reason for drop-out of girl learners.

FACTS

- 15 % of teenage girls aged 15 to 19 have been pregnant (*The 2003 Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit Survey: Pettifor et. al. 2004*).
- The average age a youth first has sex is between 16 and 17. By 20, half of all young women have given birth (*The 2003 Status of the Youth Survey: Richter et. al. 2005*).
- Pregnancy is the main reason that girl learners drop out of school (*2007 Social Surveys-CALS Access to Education Survey*).
- Only about a third of teenage mothers return to school (*Panday et. al. 2009*).
- If a boy learner has dropped out of school, his chances of becoming a father at a young age almost double (*Panday et. al. 2009*).

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT TEENAGE PREGNANCY

WHO IS MOST VULNERABLE?	WHY?
<p>Young women between the ages of 14 and 19 who drop out of school are ten times more likely to become pregnant than those who are still in school (<i>Hargreaves et al. 2007</i>).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth who leave school are more likely to engage in risky social & sexual behaviour which might lead to pregnancy and contracting HIV (<i>Lloyd et al 2008, RHRU 2003, Hargreaves et al 2007</i>).
<p>Girl learners who are disengaged from their schooling or who are struggling academically.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When young women’s relationship with school is weak – because they dislike school (<i>Imamura et al., 2007</i>) or because they are not performing well academically (<i>Cassell 2002</i>) or because they have little hope of being able to further their education (<i>Imamura et al. 2007</i>) they are more likely to become pregnant.
<p>Young women learners between the ages of 17 and 19 (<i>Harrison 2008</i>). Note: ‘Teenagers’ refers to young people between the ages of 15 and 19 – learner pregnancy might be higher after the age of 19.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At this age, learners are more vulnerable to engage in risky social and sexual behaviour. There is greater peer pressure to have sex, greater freedom and independence, accompanied by more sexual opportunities, as well as physical maturity.



<p>Black and coloured girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black and coloured youth are less likely to access quality education and good health services and information about contraception, and more likely to experience harsher socio-economic living conditions, than white and Indian youth. Different social ideas around pregnancy play a role, as do power relationships between young women and men.
<p>Girl learners in poorly resourced schools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners who have access to a good education, and feel engaged with their education are less likely to practise risky sexual behaviour.
<p>Girl living in poverty-stricken households.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls in poorer households, in poor communities usually have inadequate access to good and adolescent-friendly health care advice and facilities. Poverty might lead to transactional sexual activities (in exchange for money or goods) in which there is little opportunity to negotiate safe sex.

FACTS

- Adolescent fertility rate (also known as teenage fertility rate or teenage birth rate) is the number of live births per 1000 by women aged 15 to 19 years.
- Teenage fertility rates of black (71%) and coloured (60%) teenage girls were much higher than for white (14%) and Indian (22%) teenage girls in 2001 (Moultrie & McGrath 2007).

- *Reasons for teenage pregnancy among young women who have been pregnant:*

66% - *I was not using any contraception.*

28% - *I wanted to have a baby.*

8% - *I would show that I'm a fertile/mature woman.*

6% - *It would make people respect me.*

5% - *It would make my boyfriend want to marry me.*

3% - *I was forced to have sex against my will.*

2% - *I wanted to get the Child Support Grant.*

Source: Kaiser/SABC 2007.



DISPELLING MYTHS ABOUT TEENAGE PREGNANCY

- While teenage pregnancy is now more visible than in the past (because many young women who fall pregnant now continue to attend school) (Wiemann *et al* 2005), in actual fact teenage fertility has decreased in South Africa (Panday & Mabunda 2009, Stats SA 2008).
- Drop-out often precedes pregnancy: more teenage girls fall pregnant after leaving school.
- Access to the Child Support Grant is very seldom a reason for teenagers falling pregnant. In fact, studies have shown that access to the Child Support Grant is related to higher school enrollment (which reduces learners' chances of falling pregnant) and better nutrition of children.
- The majority of pregnant learners who drop-out do not return to school: only about one third of teen mothers return to school. This may be related to poor academic performance and disengagement from their school before they fell pregnant, poor support from partners (if any), family, peers and school (including lack of child care facilities). For every year that teen mothers are out of school, their chances of returning decrease.

FACTS

- *Unequal power relationships between young men and women, the lack of skills/opportunity to negotiate safe sex and sexual violence are central issues related to early (unwanted) pregnancy.*
- *Young women who are the main caregivers to their children are far more likely to leave school than women who share childcare responsibilities. Young women who live with an adult female are more likely to return to school following pregnancy related drop out (Grant & Hallman 2006).*

WHAT MIGHT HELP TO REDUCE THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF HOUSEHOLD POVERTY ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND LEARNING?

While there are no simple solutions to reducing the number of young learners who drop out of school due to pregnancy, there are supporting interventions that can be provided within the school environment and at home/in the community that would improve learners' chances of not falling pregnant – as well as helping young mothers to return to school.

What can government do?

- Improve the quality of education, especially the quality of teaching and the curriculum to make school more relevant and engaging for young adults, and to address poor school performance.
- There is a need for a clearly communicated policy statement from all Provincial Education Departments on how schools should treat pregnant learners and young mothers. Our Constitution, as well as the Schools Act and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, state that pregnant learners should not be discriminated against.
- Improve sex education, and in particular, improve the skills of educators to provide appropriate sex education.
- Increase learners' access to social workers and counsellors.

What can principals and educators do?

- Focus on providing sex education that is informative, accessible and empowering for young men and women. Sex education can be a difficult subject to teach for many educators. Organisations such as the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPASA) provide training for teachers on sex education.
- Ensure that both boy and girls learners know where they can access family planning advice and contraception in their local community.
- Provide an accepting and judgment free environment for pregnant learners and learners who are mothers and fathers to talk openly about their anxieties and experiences. When they feel supported they are more likely to make the right choices for themselves, the child and their families.
- Encourage learners to continue with their education while they are pregnant and after delivery of their baby.
- Offer support to pregnant girls and young mothers, such as assisting with child support grant applications, and finding out where pregnant learners and young parents can go to receive support and advice on parenting (such as social workers or NGOs in the community).

What can parents and caregivers do?

- Many caregivers find it very hard to talk about sex with their children, but open and judgement free communication between caregivers and teenagers about sex, and about contraception, will decrease teenagers' chances of becoming pregnant and thus becoming mothers and fathers themselves.

What other initiatives are needed which can be supported by community organisations, NGOs and CSI initiatives?

- Provide drop-in centres after school to support learners with homework, tutoring programmes and extracurricular activities. When learners feel a connection with their education, a sense of belonging and are successful in school, they are less likely to fall pregnant (Kirby 2002).
- Support young parents (and their caregivers, such as grandparents) by providing parenting programmes and child-care facilities.



- Provide programmes that improve the skills of educators to talk about sex.
- Have campaigns, put up posters and use the media to address the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy. A sense of shame and fear often prevents pregnant teenagers and young mothers and fathers from supporting each other and from accessing available health and other services. (Richter, L., Norris, S.A., & Ginsburg, C. The silent truth of teenage pregnancies: Birth to Twenty Cohort's ext Generation. In South African Medical Journal, 96(2), September 2006).

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF STAYING IN SCHOOL?

- Leaving school before completion reduces the opportunities to access better-paid jobs.
- Children who leave school are more likely to engage in high risk social behaviour such as substance abuse, engagement in crime, or sexual activity which leads to pregnancy (*Palmary 2002, RHRU 2003, Hargreaves et al 2007*).
- Staying in school has a protective effect on youth in South Africa (*Lloyd et al 2008*).



REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING ORGANISATIONS

The Parent Centre:
www.theparentcentre.org.za

The Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa:
www.ppasa.org.za

Soul City:
www.soulcity.org.za

The **HSRC** kindly provided permission for Social Surveys to draw extensively from the following report:
 Panday, S., Makiwane, M., Ranchod, C. & Letsoalo, T. Teenage pregnancy in South Africa with a specific focus on school-going learners, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, 2009.

RELATED LINKS

Social Surveys:
www.socialsurveys.co.za

Department of Basic Education:
www.education.gov.za

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Knowledge is power. But understanding is everything.