

Control and Teenage Pregnancy: A Phenomenological Exploratory study of Chipete Village, Chembe District.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy in Chipete Village, Chembe District as a Phenomenological Exploratory study. The following objective guided the study; to establish the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy in Chipete Village, Chembe District. A qualitative Phenomenology design was used. The data was collected using interview guides and focus group discussion guide, while thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The study revealed that some of the roles of parents in controlling teenage pregnancy included; providing basic needs, offering spiritual and emotional support, education on sex and relationships and protection against bad company. The study recommended; Traditional leaders to stiffen punishment for teenage pregnancy in Chipete chiefdom to discourage would be perpetrators, existing Non-Governmental Organisation such as Natwampane to be more proactive on teenage pregnancy advocacy. Comprehensive Sexuality Education to be prioritised and integrated into existing subjects and taught as a cross-cutting issue to the pupils.

Key words: Teenage Pregnancy, Parental Control, Culture, Peer Pressure, Contraceptives

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a global public health concern with profound social and economic implications. Teenage pregnancy is a multifaceted phenomenon, mostly refers to the occurrence of pregnancy among individuals aged 19 years and below. According to the World Health Organization (2022), an estimated 21 million girls aged 15 to 19 years in developing countries become pregnant each year. From a global perspective, teenage pregnancy is a widespread and complex issue that varies across regions and cultures. Teenage pregnancy has a prevalence rate of more than 25% in 24 African countries, a rate that reaches as high as 48% in Niger, 44% in Chad, and 43% in Equatorial Guinea (Santelli, 2006). It is estimated that one in every five adolescent girls in Africa becomes pregnant before reaching the age of 19 (AU, 2022). Teenage pregnancy affects girls of all backgrounds and in every part of the world; but girls from African countries are at a greater risk due to factors such as poverty, low levels of education, economic status, family and community attitudes, and lack of access to reproductive health services and information (Raj and Boehmer, 2013). The Sub-Saharan region has the highest rate of pregnancies with 143 pregnancies per 1000 teenagers. The highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Sub-Saharan Africa can be attributed to many girls who tend to marry at an early age.

In Zambia, like in many developing countries, teenage pregnancy rates have been a persistent challenge. A Survey by Africa Union (2022) revealed that Zambia has strong regional differences in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, with the highest rates recorded in the Western and North Western provinces, followed by the Eastern and Southern provinces. Further, UNFPA (2020) recorded that Zambia has experienced increase in teenage pregnancies, which attributed to adverse outcomes from teenage mothers and their children. The cultural and socio-economic landscape of Zambia plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards sexual and reproductive health among teenagers. Early sexual initiation, limited access to comprehensive sex education,

and lack of awareness about contraception contribute to the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies in the country (Vinogradova et al., 2015).

In trying to curb this, many African countries, aware of the gravity of the problem of teenage pregnancy, have taken steps at the legal, policy and administrative levels to prevent it and to ensure that pregnant girls and young mothers have access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services and can continue with their education (CSO, 2019). Amidst these interventions, parental control emerges as a crucial factor influencing the sexual behaviour and reproductive choices of teenagers. Parental control involves the guidance, monitoring, and support provided by parents to their adolescent children in navigating the complexities of adolescence. A study by Kohler et al., (2020) guides that effective parental control can serve as a protective factor against early pregnancies. Despite the valuable insights on government policies, and parental control focusing on teenage pregnancy, Zambia still has an increase in teenage pregnancy. The figures below shows one of selected case of Chipete village in Chembe District. Hence, it is from this background that this study explored the role of parental control in preventing teenage pregnancies in Chipete Village considering cultural nuances, socio-economic factors, and the effectiveness of existing interventions.

The figures in Chipete Village's on adolescent pregnancies from 2019 to 2023 reveals both a steady increase trend and some noticeable swings. The community reported 47 instances in 2019, however by 2020, that number had drastically decreased to 35 cases. Temporary community initiatives or the restricting movement during the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to this drop by lowering teenage social contacts. But starting in 2021, the pattern shifted, with a rapid increase in adolescent pregnancies, reaching 57 cases in 2021 and 59 in 2022 before reaching a peak of 65 in 2023. This consistent rise indicates that the underlying reasons of adolescent pregnancies such as inadequate parental control, restricted access to reproductive health care, and cultural barriers to candid conversations about sexuality have not been adequately addressed by current preventive strategies. Although there was a brief decrease in 2020, the descriptive information shows that the overall trend over the five years' points to a developing issue. Unchecked, this trend may continue to worsen, creating more problems including early marriages, a rise in school dropouts, and poor maternal health outcomes among Chipete Village's teenagers.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescents in rural areas like Chipete Village, Chembe District, should ideally grow up in supportive surroundings where cultural values, family structures, and social institutions effectively lead young people towards responsible behaviour. Strong parental control, easy access to reproductive health information, and well-coordinated community-based activities would all help to prevent teenage pregnancy. Schools, health centres, and policy frameworks would collaborate to ensure that adolescents delay childbearing until they are physically, emotionally, and economically prepared, lowering health risks, school dropouts, and poverty cycles (UNFPA, 2019; WHO, 2020).

Despite current national policies such as the Adolescent Health Strategy (MoH, 2017) and activities encouraging comprehensive sexuality education, Chipete Village and other rural communities in Zambia continue to have high rates of adolescent pregnancy. According to the 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS), 29% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 had already begun childbearing, with rural areas having higher rates than urban areas (ZDHS, 2019). Teenagers are exposed to risky sexual behaviours due to poverty, limited access to reproductive health services, inadequate parental supervision, and peer influence (Central Statistical Office, 2019). Furthermore, cultural taboos frequently prohibit open discussions about sexuality, leaving adolescents without enough information or advice (UNICEF, 2021).

Despite efforts to improve reproductive health and education, Chipete village in Chembe District continues to suffer high rates of adolescent pregnancies, which have a negative impact on the well-being of young mothers and children. With 47 teen pregnancies in 2019, 35 in 2020, 57 in 2021, 59 in 2022, and 65 in 2023 (Chipete Village Health Facility, 2024). One of the key reasons contributing to this problem is a lack of effective parental control and direction in the community. Parents in Chipete Village frequently struggle to have open and constructive discussions with their teenagers about sex, reproductive health, and responsible behaviour. Teenagers who lack communication are more exposed to misinformation, peer pressure, and early sexual

activity, increasing their chance of unwanted pregnancy. Furthermore, societal conventions and cultural barriers may prevent parents from discussing sensitive issues such as sexuality and reproductive health with their children, aggravating the problem.

The purpose of the study

This study provides an insight in understanding the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy in Chipete Village of Chembe District, Zambia.

Theoretical Framework

Hirschi's Social Bond Theory (1969), which looks at how weaker social ties make teenagers more susceptible to adolescent pregnancy, offers a framework for comprehending this problem. The framework distinguished four components of social bonds: belief, involvement, commitment, and attachment. In Chipete Village, cultural taboos around sexuality often lead to a lack of closeness to parents and guardians, which makes teenagers turn to their friends or older partners for intimacy and direction. This is against Munakampe, et al., (2021) study that revealed social cost of early pregnancy decreases when teenagers believe they have little to lose. The case of Chipete village have little access to safe recreational areas, extracurricular activities, or youth clubs, which leaves them with free time and raises their risk of entering into risky relationships. This theory brings to this study parental-teenage attachment. The emotional connection between parents and teenagers. Strong attachment can lead to better communication, trust, and guidance, reducing the likelihood of risky behaviors like unprotected sex.

Another facet from this theory is parental commitment to teenage pregnancy prevention. The extent to which teenagers are invested in conventional activities and goals, such as education. Parental control can encourage commitment by setting expectations and providing support. In Chipete village, mutual involvement into the welfare of girl-child has far reaching benefits. Participation in conventional activities, like school or extracurricular activities, which can reduce opportunities for deviant behavior. This theory provides modernization of cultural belief which are based on strict adherence to societal norms and values. Parental control can shape teenagers' beliefs about relationships, sex, and responsibility.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach to get the depth of informants on parental control on teenage pregnancy through interpretivism research paradigm. Interpretivism emphasizes understanding of the subjective meanings and interpretations individuals attach to a social phenomenon. It focuses on uncovering the complexities of human experiences, meaning and perspectives on a social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Through Phenomenology research design, the study focused on exploring and understanding the lived experiences of 37 participants whose composition was school administrators, teachers, parents, teenage girls and members from Non-Governmental Organisation on parental control on teenagy pregnancy in Chipete Village of Chembe District. These were selected through stratified sampling to collect data using interview guides. Collected data was analysed thematically. For fear of victimisation, pseudo names are used to represent participants.

Data Presentation and Discussion

The study established four themes that emerged from data collected on the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy in Chipete Village. These include: Provision of basic needs, provision of spiritual and emotional growth, protection against bad peers and provision of sexuality education.

Provide Basic Needs

When asked about the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy, the participants indicated that one of the crucial roles of parental control on teenage pregnancy was to provide their basic needs.

One participant a pregnant teenager from the focus group discussion (FGD 1) said,

‘a teenage girl has a lot of needs such as sanitary towels, lotion, shoes etc., so if these things are not provided for, we at times end up seeking for them in wrong places and involving ourselves in sexual activities which in turn brings about unwanted pregnancy’.

One of the parents said,

‘teenage stage is a very crucial stage. It requires us parents to provide the needs and wants of our children so that they don’t seek them from wrong places. I make sure that every month I give my girl child all the necessary things to sustain her through the month, things such as sanitary towels, lotion, and money for upkeep’.

Teachers also supported the provision of socio-economic needs of the girl child as one of them advised parents that,

‘parents need to work hard for them to provide their children with basic needs. They should not be comfortable to an extent of allowing their children to provide the basic needs for the family’.

From the findings presented above, one of the roles of parental control on teenage pregnancy was the provision of basic needs for their children. Similarly, Hadley's (2018) study support this current study as it emphasis on holistic approach that highlights the importance of addressing the basic needs of adolescents. This focus is essential for creating an environment conducive to healthy decision making and reducing the incidence of early pregnancies.

It is possible to speculate that, teenagers who have little or no access to basic needs such as modern healthcare facilities, clothes, and food due to poverty are prone to pregnancies. Mmari and Magnani. (2019) in their study on the “impact of basic needs on teenage prevention” done in the United States also agreed that meeting the basic needs of teenagers is very important for controlling teenage pregnancy. They further added that economic stability within families may alleviate the pressures that lead to early sexual activity. When families are financially secure, teenagers tend to focus on their education and personal development rather than dealing with the need to seek financial support through relationships. In addition, the lack of basic needs can push teenagers towards risky behaviours as they may seek out relationships that provide material support.

Spiritual and Emotional Growth

The participants who were interviewed also indicated that parents have the role of providing spiritual and emotional growth to their children. This helps in bringing up children who are morally upright and uphold moral, spiritual and social values. One parent said;

proverbs 22: 6 says, train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it. Children should be taught the moral values when they are still young. This will help them keep away from immoral behaviours.

Another parent said;

emotional support is very important because children will be able to freely open to their parents about issues of relationships. I always try to create a conducive environment for my children for them to share their challenges without any fear.

One teacher said;

parents should be able to take a lead when it comes to spiritual support of their children, to go with them at church. These beliefs help to mould responsible behaviour in the teenagers. Emotionally, parents need to also learn to listen to their children’s emotions and teach them how to regulate those emotions, otherwise it’s sad that some parents have children with huge emotional problems because of their upbringing and didn’t have anyone to give them that support.

Spiritual and emotional support from parents, teachers and community members is crucial for building self-esteem in teenagers. Smith et al., (2023) revealed that higher self-esteem is linked to healthier sexual behaviours. Teenagers who feel valued and supported are more likely to resist peer pressure regarding sexual activity. Therefore it is possible to conclude that self-worth encourages teenagers to make informed choices about their bodies and relationships, reducing the risks of unintended pregnancies. Philibert and Lapierre (2022) found that teenagers who engage in spiritual practices often reported a stronger sense of purpose and identity. Spiritual teachings often emphasize the importance of respect, self-control, and consequences for one's actions. A study carried out by Lederman and Luk (2022) also argued that interaction between parents and children based on the religion, value system of the family and the commitment to open discussion of sexual issues are more likely to make teenagers choose abstinence or limit sexual activity.

Protection against bad company

Protection against bad company was one of the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy that the participants indicated. One teacher said;

one of the agents of socialisation is peers (friends). This is where most of the children learn other behaviours from their peers. Hence parents should be very observant on who interacts with their children because some peers have bad behaviours and bad influence.

One participant from the focus group discussion (fgd 2) said;

when you are around people who are always gossiping, bullying, or pressuring you into doing things you do not want to do. My parents always make sure that the company am found with is that of good behaviour.

Another parent said;

my 3rd born daughter got pregnant when she was just 17. She could sneak out at night without anyone noticing. When I realised what was happening, it was already too late, my daughter was already pregnant. Hence, one way in which I have protected my children against bad company is that, I have set boundaries on who comes at my house. By 17:00 all my children should be in doors and not moving up and down at night. This has really helped in the control of teenage pregnancy.

A teacher said;

parents should also consider changing their environment in terms of helping their children. For example, if they are living in an environment with high levels of teenage pregnancy in this scenario Chipete Village, they should reconsider to relocate, if not them at least their children should do so either take them to their relatives or take them to boarding schools which only requires them to come back home occasionally. As a school we have had learners with the potential of making it with good grades but because of the environment ended up stopping school due to teenage pregnancy.

Another parent also said;

when my teenage daughter wrote her grade 9 exams, she passed with good marks. However, I had noticed the friends she had been interacting with had a bad influence on her, we sat down as a family and decided to take her to a boarding school where she will be monitored and be able to study without any disturbances. This decision really helped us a lot because we have seen the positive changes in our daughter's behaviour.

This finding matched with the findings by Maemeko et al (2018), in their research titled the Impact of Teenage Pregnancy on Academic Performance of Grade 7 Learners at a School in the Zambezi Region which emphasised that clear rules and expectations regarding social activities help adolescents navigate peer pressure more effectively. Therefore, parents need to communicate their values to the teenagers, it creates a supportive environment and encourages teens to make safer choices. Similarly, Biddlecom et al, (2017) in their study Adolescents' views of and preferences for sexual and reproductive health services in Burkina Faso, Ghana,

Malawi, and Uganda”, argued that when parents encourage adolescents to critically evaluate their friendships, it fosters resilience against peer pressure. This empowerment helps teens make informed choices about their companions.

Sex Education

The study also revealed that the parents have a role to provide education to their children on sex, even though the majority of the participants were not comfortable discussing sex with their children. One parent stated that;

I think we need to embrace sex education and be free to talk to our about it, even though it is a heavy topic to discuss.

A teacher stated that;

while sex education can be a good avenue, it is still viewed as a taboo to discuss such topics with our children at home. Hence most of the pupils learn about sex from their peers.

This finding is consistent with McKee (2011) in his study conducted in Mississippi USA titled “Parental Survey on Sex Education” argued that children should often be talked to about sex, love and relationships at an early age. Parents ought to create a more conducive environment for their children to open up and discuss about sex. Parents need to have honest and open discussions with their children on sex. Parents should be able to listen carefully and establish what their teenagers already know and understand about sex. There is a misconception that talking to children about sex encourages them to indulge. However, discussing with children about sex does not encourage them to become sexually active but empower them with the right information to make better choices.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed the role of parental control on teenage pregnancy in Chipete Village, Chembe District. Some of the roles included; provision of basic needs, offer spiritual and moral support, education on sex and relationships and protection against bad company.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations;

- i. There is also a need for Traditional leaders (The Chief) to stiffen punishments for all parties involved in the act of teenage pregnancy so that would be offenders would learn from the mistakes
- ii. Existing Non-Governmental Organisation (Natwampane) to be more effective in the advocacy on issues to do with teenage pregnancy and improve in disseminating and raising awareness within the community.
- iii. There is need to encourage parents to be opne and discuss issues with their children on sex to reduce incidences of teenage pregnancy.

Compliance with ethical standards

Statement of ethical approval

If studies involve use of animal/human subject, authors must give appropriate statement of ethical approval. If not applicable then mention ‘The present research work does not contain any studies performed on animals/humans subjects by any of the authors’.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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