The Relationship between Instrumental Social Support and Life Satisfaction among Teenage Mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda: A Cross-Sectional Study

Prudence Hategekimana[1], Elijah Macharia Ndung'u[2], Elisabeth Gichimu[3]

Department of Counselling Psychology, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Teenage mothers increasingly experience healthcare challenges, which may undermine significantly both their mental health and life satisfaction. Although social support is theorized to buffer this relationship. This study examined the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda.The study sought to answer the question: What is the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District?A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 263 teenage mothers from five selected sectors of Gasabo districtusing multi-stage and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected using validated scales for social support (MSPSS) and life satisfaction (SWLS). The data was analysed using Pearson's correlation. The findings revealed a statistically significant negative relationship ($r = -0.238$, $p = .000 < .001$) between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers of Gasabo District, Rwanda.The study recommended that the government of Rwanda and non-governmental organisationsshould implement support interventions that foster the holistic well-being of teenage mothers in order to enhance their overall quality of life and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Teenage mothers, instrumental support, wellbeing, life satisfaction, social support

INTRODUCTION

The term "instrumental" originates from the Latin word *instrumentum,* meaning "a tool or implement", and the literal meaning from the breakdown of the word parts is "to build". In English, "instrumental" has been described as important in achieving a result or goal (Venes, 2021). A review of literature indicates that the concept of instrumental support introduced by behavioural scientists was used to describe a subcategory of social support in addition to other terms that focus on the social needs of individuals (Schultz et al., 2022). Other terms used interchangeably with instrumental support include tangible, functional, informal, practical, enacted, and task support. This type of support is crucial during times of crisis because it can alleviate stressors that an individual is facing (Baney et al., 2022). In essence, a consistent theme found in its description is the idea of bringing about change or the process of transformation.

Instrumental support among people experiencing crisis and hardship has long been a source of concern for researchers all around the globe.Baneyet al. (2022) explored how pregnant and parenting teenagers perceived and experienced social support from their communities in two rural counties in a Midwestern state in the United State of America, using House's (1981) social support framework.This social support framework included instrumental support components involving providing tangibles services that supported teenagers during pregnancy and parenting.Tangible assistance, practical actions, involved a private place on-site for breastfeeding and flexibility with completing school assignments.The study used thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews from a sample of 26 participants with current and former pregnant and/or parenting teenagers from selected counties in a Midwestern state. The participants reported experiencing both positive and negative social

support. This meant that the population benefited from instrumental support, but support was often insufficient. Thus, insufficient instrumental support my may not increase life satisfaction among teenage mothers.

In Poland, Batanda-Batdyga et al. (2022) carried out a study on the relationship between instrumental support and teenage girls' attitudes toward their pregnancy and childbirth in 8 selected hospitals. A sample of 308 adolescent mothers was selected to participate in the study using a convenience sampling technique. A demographic questionnaire and social support scale (SSS) were used to collect data. The result of the study showed a significant correlation between instrumental support received and attitudestowards pregnancy(χ^2=1.94; p =0.38, weak positive correlation) and towards childbirth (χ^2 =0.39; p=0.82, strong positive correlation). This means that instrumental support helped teenage mothers form more positive views about their pregnancy and delivery experiences. An increase in instrumental support meant an increase in positive attitudes towards their motherhood experiences and life satisfaction. However, the convenience sampling technique used may limit the generalisation of the study.

In Indonesia, Puspasari et al. (2018) carried out a cross-sectional study to investigate the relationship between family instrumental support and maternal self-efficacy among adolescent mothers living in South Bangka District. The study had a sample of 100 participants aged 15-18 years was selected using the consecutive sampling technique. Instruments used were structured questionnaires, including a demographic questionnaire, Maternal Efficacy Questionnaire (MEQ), Postpartum Support System, Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), and Infant Characteristic Questionnaire (ICD). The correlation between family instrumental support and maternal self-efficacy was analysed using Chi-square and logistic regression. The results of the study indicated a weak positive correlation between family instrumental support and maternal self-efficacy of adolescent mothers with a p-value of 0.001. This meant that strong family instrumental support positively influenced teenage mothers' well-being and their infants' life satisfaction. Low levels of instrumental support are associated with reduced life satisfaction among teenage mothers.This study used a cross-sectional design which could not establish causation between instrumental support from family and maternal self-efficacy.

Similarly in Indonesia,Syahradesi et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between family instrumental support and mental readiness among pregnant women during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was conducted in KampungMelayu, BabussalamSub district, Aceh Tenggara Regency using a sample of 82 pregnant women. A descriptive correlational analytic study with a cross-sectional approach was used to examine the association between instrumental support from family support and pregnant mothers' readiness.Family instrumental support and mental readiness questionnaires were used to collect data. Data analysis comprised of univariate and bivariate analysis. The results of the Chi-square t-test showed that p-value was 0.00 (0.05) which means that there was a weak positive relationship between instrumentalsupport from family and the mental readiness, including satisfaction withtheir pregnancy.This study revealed that pregnant women who received stronger instrumental support such as practical help, assistance with daily tasks from family improved mental readiness and psychological preparedness as well as satisfaction with their pregnancy. Thus, this would mean that an increase of instrumental support among this population of pregnant mothers meant an increase as well in life satisfaction. Stronger instrumental support may increase teenage mothers' life Satisfaction.

In South Africa, Coert et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between parental efficacy and social support systems of single teenage mothers across different family forms in low socioeconomic communities through the University of Western Cape. The study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional comparative correlation design with 160 single teenage mothers residing with a family in a low socio-economic community. A self-report questionnaire that comprised of the Social Provisions Scale and the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were utilized to analyse data.The results of the study indicated a significant positive correlation between overall social support and parental efficacy among participants. When comparing different family forms, single teenage mothersresiding with one parent responded greater levels of parental efficacy while teenage mothers residing with 2 parents reported higher levels of social support under the subscales: guide, reliable and nurture.

The reliable alliance subscale which aligns with instrumental support involving tangible assistance or reliable resources, the one-way ANOVA showed a statistically difference between family forms. Instrumental support/ Reliable alliance: F (4, 155) = 2.572, p=0.040) indicated a weak positive correlation. This suggested that the degree of perceived reliable/ instrumental support varied significantly depending on the family form in which a teenage mother resided. The quality of support appears especially reliable/instrumental support to be linked to teenage mothers' confidence in their parenting role and life satisfaction.Thus, the quality of support, rather than merely availability, is crucial in increasing life satisfaction among teenage mothers. This study used self-reported questionnaire which may be subjected to personal bias.

In Rwanda, there was dearth of studies addressing directly the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers. Nsanzabera and colleagues (2024) assessed the role of family and community support systems in shaping adolescent mothers attempting schools after pregnancy in three selected districts of Rwanda, namely Bugesera, Ngoma, and Nyanza. The study adopted a concurrent mixed methods approach. The quantitative component assessed the relationship between community support and educational outcomes. A sample of 1,635 participated in the quantitative survey. Structured questionnaires including demographic characteristics were used to collect quantitative data which were analyzed using SPSS software. The results of the study showed that parental engagement emerged as a major influence of positive education outcomes, with 97.1 % of adolescent mothers reporting the importance of family support, followed by 68.3 % of adolescent reporting assistance from significant others, and 65% from school networks. This study revealed that instrumental support from family significantly influence positives outcomes. This support involved financial assistance and childcare services. Thus, this means that high level of instrumental support correlates with better education outcomes among teenage mothers increasing their life satisfaction. The study used a cross-sectional design which could not prove causation between community support and positive education outcomes.

Mizero and colleagues (2024)conducted a study to explore the experiences, challenges and barriers faced by teenage mothers in accessing healthcare services during and after pregnancy in Rwanda. The study was conducted at NyampingaUshoboye, a no profit organisation in Rwanda supporting teenage mothers. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods was used to select participants. The target population was women who were 18 years old and above, and had experienced pregnancy and delivered their first child before the age of 18 years. Twenty-three women who had delivered their first child before the age of 18 years were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide.The results of the study highlighted the gap in providing instrumental support, financial support,to teenage mothers as part of a comprehensive health services. The study reveals that teenage mothers face financial difficult in accessing healthcare support services due to financial hardship. Thus, it is noted that instrumental support which plays a crucial role in the well-being and life satisfaction of teenage mothers was missing. This implies that reinforcing instrumental support services, in healthcare, may improve teenage mothers' life satisfaction and well-being due to access to healthcare. However, the qualitative nature of the study may limit its generalisation to all teenage mothers in Rwanda.

In this study, there was a paucity of studies addressing directly the correlation between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers, despite the knownpsychosocial challenges they face. Globally, studies overlook the direct correlation between tangible assistance and the subjective well-being of teenage mothers, focusing onthe relationship between family instrumental support and the mental readiness of pregnant teenage mothers (Syahradesi et al. 2020); or look at how instrumental support affects the bonding attachment of adolescent mothers and their infants (Puspasari et al. 2023). This gap is mirrored regionally across sub-Sahara Africa where studies about teenage mothers are concerned with parenting efficacy and social support (Coert et al. 2021). At local level in Gasabo District there is a dearth of empirical studies exploring how existing tangible resources relate to teenage mothers life satisfaction (Mizero et al.2024).

Statement of the Problem

Teenage pregnancy is a major health concern because of its association with higher morbidity and mortality

for both the mother and the child. Providing instrumental support to these young mothers may increase their wellbeing andprevent adverse birth outcomes. For example, childbearing during adolescence is known to have adverse social consequences, particularly concerning educational attainment, as teenage mothers are more likely to drop out of school. However, studies report limited access to social support systems, which are critical for the psychological, social, and economic well-being of young mothers despite the overwhelming challenges they face as adolescent mothers.

Teenage pregnancy is not only a health problem in Rwanda; it is also a socio-economic problem and a development concern. Its population was estimated at 13 million people in 2022, with 51.5% female, 26.01% at reproductive age, and 11.3% were female teenagers (NISR, 2023). According to the recent Rwanda Demographic Health Survey (RDHS, 2022), 5% of women aged 15-19 have begun childbearing; 4% have given birth, and 1% are pregnant with their first child, Gasabo District ranking first in Kigali City. Also, despite the government's efforts to improve access to healthcare services, including sexual reproductive health (SRH), adolescent mothers still lack adequate resources and support. Furthermore, previous studies, including those conducted in Rwanda, have investigated prevalence, determinants and prevention of teenage pregnancy. Apparently, there are no studies supporting and enhancing the mothering capability of teenage mothers who choose to keep their babies. This study sought to investigate how instrumental support related to and enhanced these young mothers' life satisfaction in Rwanda, with a special focus on Gasabo District.

Research Question

The study sought to answer the following question:

What is the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District?

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as a cross-sectional study, collecting data at a single point in time. A sample of 263 teenage mothers was selected from Gasabo District employing multi-stage and snowball sampling techniques. The socio-demographic questionnaire collected data on teenage mothers' information such as age, religion, occupation, level of education and source of income. After distributing 281 questionnaires, only 273 were returned, of which 8 were invalid, thus ending up with 263, which represented 94% of the valid questionnaires which were considered for the analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting; a rate of 60% is good and a response rate of 70% or over is excellent. Therefore, this study had an excellent response rate.The social support received questionnaire was used to assess social support received. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener et al. (1985) containing 5 items was used to assess teenage mothers' life satisfaction, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988) containing 12 items measured perceived social support.

Further, the reliability analysis of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were validated and findings revealed a Cronbach Alpha (α) = .8and (α).9 respectively. Therefore, the scales were good and acceptable to be used inthis study.

With regard to ethical considerations,the researcher was authorized to collect data form the department of counselling psychology, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. Also, the researcher obtained permission from the National Council for Science and Technology in Rwanda. Further, the researcher acquired research authorization from Gasabo district. In addition, the privacy of the participants was upheld. Informed consent was obtained from parents and guardians, and informed assent from teenage mothers was obtained. The respondents had the freedom to participate or not to participate in the study or withdraw at any point. The principle of confidentiality and anonymity were assured.The researcher ensured that the exercise was neither detrimental nor harmful to the psychological well-being of the respondents by building trust at the onset of data collection.

FINDINGS

Demographic Information of the Respondents

The respondents were asked to identify their age group, gender, marital status, educational level, occupation, level of income and religious affiliation as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Social Demographics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
11 to 13	3	1.10
14 – 16	63	24.00
17 – 19	197	74.90
Religion		
Christianity	246	93.50
Islam	11	4.20
Others	6	2.30
Current Occupation		
School	13	4.90
Work	8	3.00
Neither School nor Work	242	92.00
Main Source of Income		
Father of the Child	17	6.50
Parents	121	46.00
Work	118	44.90
Other	7	2.70
Education Level		
Primary School	177	67.30
Secondary	69	26.20
Vocational School	12	4.60
Higher Education	5	1.90

As indicated in Table 1, the age distribution showed that the frequency of respondents aged 17-19 years was highest (n = 197, 74.90%), compared with 14-16 years (n = 63, 24.00%) and 10–13 years (n = 3, 1.1%). Regarding religious affiliation, Christianity had the highest number of participants, 243 (93.5%), followed by Islam, 11 (4.2%), and others, 6 (2.30%). Concerning current occupation, the data showed that those who had neither school nor work were the highest at 92% (n = 242), followed by those still in school at 4.9% (n = 13), and only 3% (n = 8) were working. Concerning the main source of income, 46% (n = 121) received financial help from their parents, 44.9% (n = 118) earned income from their work, 6.5% (n = 17) received financial help from the child's father, and 2.7% (n = 7) had income from other undisclosed sources. With regard to level of education, 117 (67.3%) had only primary education, 69 (26.2%) had completed secondary school, 12 (4.6%) had completed vocational school, and 5 (1.9%) had completed higher education.

Relationship between Instrumental Support and Life Satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District

The objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between instrumental support and the life

satisfaction among teenage mothers of Gasabo District, Rwanda. Instrumental support was measured on the social support questionnaire, which had seven items used to determine the practical help one receives. thus, the scatter plot was used in an endeavour to see the spread of data in order to determine the relationship between the two variables. The result obtained from scatter plot is shown in Figure 1.

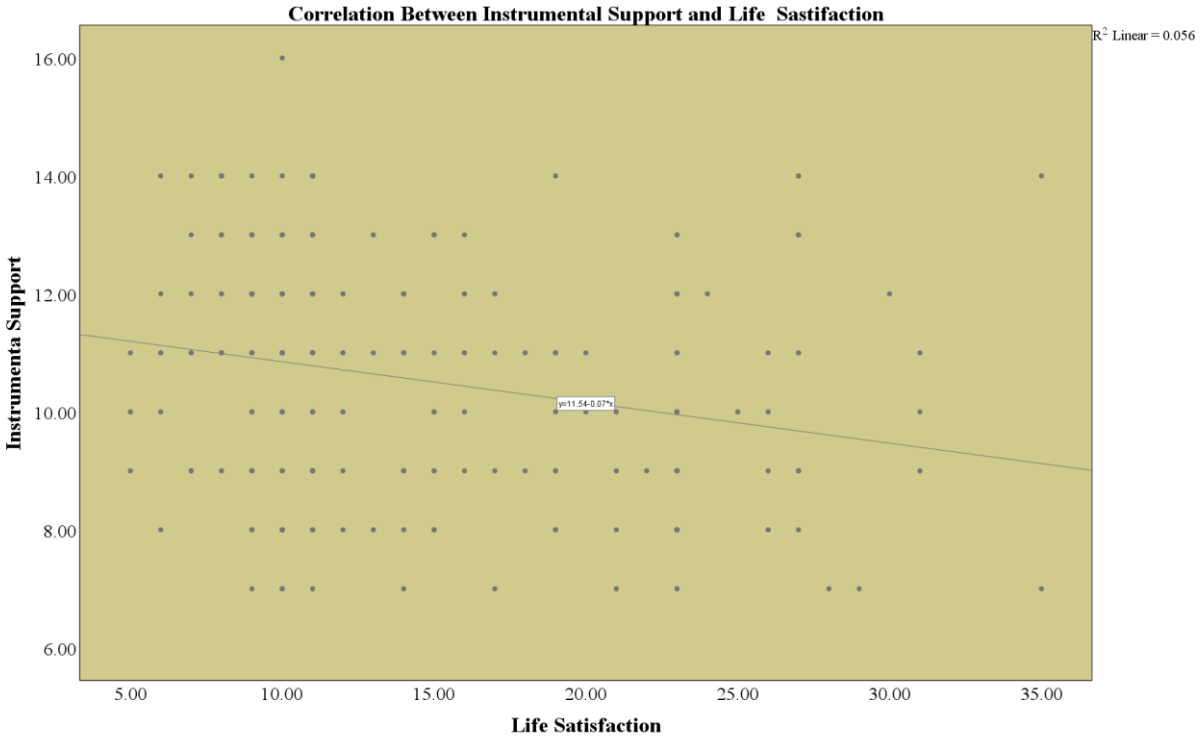

Figure 1, showed the direction of the spread of data points, which was explained to mean that the points generally trended downwards from the upper-left to the lower-right corner. This was evident by the inserted fit line at the total, which failed to cross through all the points of the graph. This meant that as the x-variable, which was instrumental support, increased, the y-variable, which was life satisfaction, tended to decrease. Additionally, the strength of the relationship between the two variables revealed that the relationship was weak since the data points were widely dispersed or loosely scattered. Moreover, a general trend of the data points was visible since the points tended to move up and down, indicating that the relationship was less consistent. The scatterplot, which was a graph or visual representation of data points, was able to a certain degree to establish visibly that the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction was a weak negative one.

To determine if there was a pattern among the data of the two variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed, and findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Relationship between Instrumental Support and Life Satisfaction

		Instrumental Support	Life Satisfaction
Instrumental Support	Pearson Correlation	1	-.238**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	263	263
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.238**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	263	263
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

As seen in Table 2, the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant negative relationship($r = -0.238$, $p = .000 < .001$) between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers

of Gasabo District, Rwanda.This outcome suggests that as instrumental support increases, life satisfaction tends to decrease slightly among the teenage mothers, or vice versa. Although the relationship is relatively weak, it is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, indicating that the observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance.The negative relationship may suggest that teenage mothers who require or receive greater instrumental support such as financial assistance, material aid, or practical help, could be experiencing greater life challenges and dependency, which may reduce their overall satisfaction with life. Conversely, those who are more self-sufficient and require less instrumental support may perceive themselves as having greater control over their circumstances, leading to higher life satisfaction. Owing the relationship is weak, it can be inferred that instrumental support alone is insufficient to explain differences in life satisfaction among teenage mothers, and that other personal, social, and contextual variables may exert a stronger influence on their overall well-being.

The findings of the present study contradicted those of most previous studies that investigated the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers. For example, a cross-sectional study conducted in Poland by Batanda-Batdyga et al. (2022) found a positive relationship between instrumental support received and attitudes towards pregnancy (χ^2=1.94; p =0.38). This means that instrumental support helped teenage mothers form more positive views about their pregnancy and delivery experiences. Though the current study is in disagreement with findings of Batanda-Batdyga et al. (2022), however, in terms of similarity, it is important to note that both studies reported weak correlation between the variables, whether it was positive or negative correlation. Thus, instrumental support alone does not significantly enhance life satisfaction among teenage mothers.

In addition, the findings of the current study were in disagreement with the findings of Puspasari et al. (2018) in Indonesia. It was found there was a weak positive correlation between family instrumental support and maternal self-efficacy of teenage mothers.The findings of the current study were not aligned with the findings of those of Coert et al. (2021) in South Africa. The study established a weak correlation between instrumental support and parental efficacy (F (4, 155) = 2.572, p=0.040). In general, the findings of the present study contradict the evidence reported in earlier global and regional studies regarding the relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers. This might mean the teenage mothers in Rwanda compared to other teenage mothers in other countries may differ in experiences which could be influenced by different realities. Due to implication of genocide in Rwanda, teenager mothers might experience indirectly traumatic experiences that they have not dealt with despite of receiving the instrumental support and could explain the weak correlation between instrumental support and life satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

This study established that there was a statistically significant negative relationship between instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda. These finding points that as levels of instrumental support increased, levels of life satisfaction tended to decrease among the teenage mothers. Although the relationship was weak, its statistical significance implies that instrumental support plays a role in shaping the well-being of teenage mothers. The negative direction of the relationship is seen to be contrary to the commonly held expectation that practical assistance, such as financial aid, childcare support, provision of necessities, and material resources, would enhance satisfaction with life.

As asserted by Adu et al. (2025), one possible explanation for this finding is that teenage mothers who receive greater instrumental support may be those experiencing more severe socioeconomic challenges, parenting difficulties, or emotional distress. In such situations, increased support may not necessarily reflect positive circumstances but rather a response to existing hardships. Consequently, higher levels of support may be associated with lower life satisfaction because the support is being provided to address substantial unmet needs. In similar submission, Borg et al. (2024) argues that support often increases in response to adversity rather than serving as a direct indicator of well-being. Adolescent populations have shown that social support is frequently mobilized when individuals face significant life stressors, which may partly explain the negative association observed in the present study.

Furthermore,Cosma et al. (2024) posit that teenage mothers may perceive instrumental support as creating dependency on family members, relatives, or social welfare systems. Such dependency can undermine feelings of autonomy, self-efficacy, and personal accomplishment, all of which are important components of life satisfaction. For adolescent mothers striving to establish independence, reliance on external assistance may generate feelings of inadequacy or social stigma, thereby reducing overall satisfaction with life. Qualitative evidence suggests that teenage mothers often face social judgment, financial vulnerability, and challenges in fulfilling parental responsibilities, even when support systems are available.

The finding may also reflect the complexity of support experiences among teenage mothers. Instrumental support alone may not adequately address emotional, psychological, and social needs. While practical assistance can help meet immediate material demands, life satisfaction is influenced by broader factors such as emotional support, self-esteem, educational opportunities, social acceptance, and mental health. In this stance, Mokgatle et al. (2024) established that social support was closely linked to mental health outcomes, highlighting that the quality and type of support received are important determinants of life satisfaction. Support that addresses only practical needs may therefore be insufficient to improve overall life satisfaction.

Therefore, the findings of this present study suggest that instrumental support, while necessary for meeting the practical needs of teenage mothers, may not automatically translate into greater life satisfaction. The negative relationship highlights the importance of adopting a holistic support approach that combines material assistance with emotional, psychological, educational, and empowerment interventions. Such comprehensive support programs may be more effective in enhancing the overall life satisfaction and well-being of teenage mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the above study on instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda, it is concluded that although social supportplays a significant role in enhancing the wellbeing of teenage mothers, the practical help did not bring an increase in terms of life satisfaction. However, its effectiveness depends on the perception of its availability, of being valued and understood within the lager community.The study suggests that improving the perception of support interventions and strengthening social support networks is crucial in shaping the psychological wellbeing of teenage mothers; this may increase teenage mothers' life satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the government of Rwanda, including non-governmental organizations should develop and implement policies that address the psychosocial challenges faced by teenage mothers. For example, the government should strengthen policy enforcement as well as educational reintegration policies allowing teenage mothers to return to school without stigmatisation and discrimination. Access to education will enable teenage mothers to acquire essential skills that promote their well-being and enhance their overall life satisfaction.

Counsellors and psychologists should also play a crucial role in supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of teenage mothers. Based on the findings of the study, mental health professionals should implement individual and group counselling services including parenting and life skills training to assist teenage mothers developing effective parenting skills and enhancing confidence in raising their children.

Similarly to this study on instrumental support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers globally, regionally and locally most of the studies have been conducted using the correlational research strategy. The study recommends the future studies to consider conducting longitudinal studies to examine how social support influences life satisfaction among teenage mothers'overtime, thereby providing insight on how variations in different forms of social support influence life satisfaction across different stages of teenage motherhood. A longitudinal study may follow the same teenage mothers across a period of months or years to see how life

satisfaction evolves during pregnancy, early motherhood, and later in adulthood. A correlational research strategy may miss important developmental pattern of teenage motherhood.

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