PERSPECTIVES OF PRINCIPAL AND EDUCATORS REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF PREGNANT LEARNERS IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

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Abstract

Section 29 (1) (a) of the Republic of South Africa Constitution (108 of 1996) states that everyone has a right to basic education. Section (9) points out that everyone has the right to be protected against unfair discrimination. This does not leave anyone out, whether pregnant or not. Furthermore, the Screening Identification, Assessment and Support policy (RSA 2014) also indicates that parents and educators are critical to the support for all the learners who require additional support that encourage their participation and inclusion in school. This qualitative case study investigated the perspectives of a high school principal and educators regarding the inclusion of pregnant learners in mainstream education. A purposive sample of 1 principal and 4 educators was selected from one high school in the central Free State province of South Africa. Semi-structured interviews with the sample were conducted with each individual. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the audio taped data after it were transcribed from the interviews. The results showed that, educators expressed misgivings regarding pregnant learners' attitude and behaviours after falling pregnant. Some learners sought to hide pregnancy from school authorities to avoid the bureaucratic process and protocols that followed especially being regularly accompanied to school by parents. The principal and educators feel that educators are not adequately equipped to deal with pregnant learners' issues especially in cases where the pregnancy is concealed. The study recommends that teachers should be offered appropriate support in terms of knowledge and skills through periodic training to enable them to offer social and psychological support to pregnant learners. Moreover, we recommend that all girl learners, be educated before and during pregnancy regarding official pregnancy policy and guidelines. Such strategies will hopefully create a conducive environment where girl learners will talk freely about their status before getting appropriate support or considering dropping out of school.

Keywords: Girl learner, inclusion, management, mainstream, South Africa, teenage pregnancy

1. INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a global concern as it negatively impacts the lives of a teenage girls (Reddy, Sewpaul & Jonas 2016). Ramalepa, Mosala-Chokwe and Ramakumba (2020) report that teenage pregnancy is elevated by teenagers' sexual behaviours and their involvement in sexual activities, especially unsafe sex at a young age. According to (Human Rights Watch 2018; Undie, Mackenzie, Birungi, Barongo, Ahindukha and Omondi 2015; WHO, 2014; Runhare & Vandeyer, 2011; Chigona & Chetty, 2008) teenage pregnancy during adolescence is associated with interruption of education preventing teenage girls' development and success. Pregnancy continues to become a barrier to girls' keeping up with their studies, often it becomes a consequence of girls' drop out (Naong 2011; WHO, 2014, Runhare & Vandeyer, 2011; Chigona & Chetty,
2008; Salvi, 2018, Grant & Hallman, 2008. Grant and Hallman (2008) postulated that, in many cases the birth of a child from a teenage mother marks the end of schooling for teen mothers.

Mutua, Mariki and Mogeni (2019) add that parenting adolescents find it difficult to go back to school after giving birth. Inability to complete education therefore curtail their chances of occupying meaningful employment statuses in their adulthood and eventually achieving socio economic freedom. Although there is such a high rate of teenage pregnancies in the Sub-Saharan Africa, unsupportive policies make it difficult for teenage mothers to go back to school after giving birth (Salvi, 2018; Naong, 2011). Human Rights Watch (2018); Undie, et al., (2015), are of the view that the most dominating factor is deficient knowledge regarding re-entry policies among communities, girls, teachers, and school officials that girls can and should go back to school during pregnancy or after giving birth.

According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2019:9), “the rate of learner pregnancy in South Africa has become a major challenge for both national development and the basic education system. DBE (2019) furthermore explained that learner pregnancy becomes a very serious issue to be taken into consideration as it affects the lives of thousands of young people in South Africa, that hinders their personal growth, the pursuit of satisfying careers, which becomes a burden to South African's socio-economic scenery. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA,2017) reports that parenting teenagers are more likely to experience terrible pregnancy outcomes and are constrained in their ability to pursue educational opportunities than young girls their age who delay having kids.

Loaiza and Liang (2013:4) add that when young girls get pregnant, they are also at the risk of getting sexually transmitted infections, and not just HIV. HIV and STIs (Mnyipika, 2014) are widespread among teenagers owing to ignorance and peer pressure, among other factors. Meda and Makura (2016) concluded that some girls get involved in pre-mature sexual activities because of surrendering to peer pressure. They further discovered that girls claim that they indulge in sexual activities because of a desire to belong, to appear ‘to be cool’ in the eyes of their peers. This is rather shocking as other girls claim to have sex without any protection to satisfy their curiosity. Thus, they are at risk of not only contracting HIV/AIDS, but they are also exposed to juvenile pregnancy.

1.1. The Statement of the Research Problem

The societal expectation is that educators must deal with pregnant learners. Those who become mothers while still studying in a way that accommodates their special needs. The underlying assumption of inclusion is the belief that all students are part of, or belong in the general education classroom (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2016). However pregnant learners and teen mothers in South Africa, have own exceptionalities which may become barriers to effective participation in the classroom in comparison to their peers. For these reasons, they need to be given appropriate support. The peers of pregnant learners may feel neglected with all the attention being put on the pregnant ones.

1.2. The purpose of the study

The aim of this paper was to enlist the perspectives of a selected high school principal and educators on inclusion of pregnant learners in mainstream education in a South African school. The data presented herein is part of a larger study on the inclusion of pregnant girl learners in mainstream education.

1.3. Research objectives

The objective of this study was:

To investigate a principal and subordinate teachers’ perceptions regarding the inclusion of pregnant learners and pregnant mothers into the basic education system in South Africa.

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Theoretical framework

This paper adopted Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development. “This theory looks at a child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment (Ryan 2001). Bronfenbrenner’s theory defines complex ‘layers’ of environment, each influencing a child’s development.
2.2. Inclusion of Pregnant Learners and Parenting Teenagers into Mainstream Education

Teenage girls cross the African continent are faced with challenges relating to unaccomplished educational goals due to the systematic gender inequalities (Naong 2011). Even though governments have put so much effort in ensuring that there are equal opportunities in the education system, there are still significant gender gaps in learning and skills achievement. South Africa as a democratic state is reported to be handling that matter with caution, in preparation to addressing barriers to learning in the education system, it has adopted an inclusive education policy (Mashishi & Makoelle 2014). Human rights watch (2018) reports that the girls' barriers to education are wide-ranging and interconnected. In mitigation, African governments have addressed the key factors that lead to millions of girls leaving school. Among others are: School distance, poor infrastructure, inadequate water and toilets, lack of running water to take care of menstrual periods, harmful gender norms and stereotypes that do not support education of girls and women, discrimination and cultural practices such as early marriage (Shahidul & Karim 2015). However, teenage pregnancy still becomes a significant cause of school drop out for teenage girls in South African schools. Salvi (2018); Mashishi and Makoelle (2014) posit, that when teenagers become pregnant lives changes rarely for better and therefore badly affecting their future.

A report by the Minister of Basic Education in South Africa, Angie Motshega (The Department of Basic Education (DoE) (2009:3) indicates that adolescent pregnancy undermines the Department's effort to ensure that adolescent girls remain in school to contribute to quality life for all and to drive them away from situations that normally lead to poverty. The World Health Organization, [WHO] (2014) reports that a girl who has a child before the age of 18 hardly complete high school education and, that makes it difficult for teen mothers to have a college qualification. Salvi (2018) concurs that teenage pregnancy is associated with the interruption of education and training hindering development and success of teenage girls into the basic education system.

After having realised that the right to education for girls and women is unfulfilled human right, the United Nations (UN) made a convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDEW). The convention focused on the rights of a child (CRC) and the principle of gender equality with regards to educational access and completion that were supposed to be fulfilled by 2015 (Runhare & Vandeyar, 2011). United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2012), developed an agenda with a focus of Human Right Watch (2018), also states that number of studies have illustrated that girls’ involvement in education prevents them from getting married as children or getting high pregnancy rates.

Drawing from the same perspective WHO (2014); Runhare and Vandeyar (2011); Chigona and Chetty, (2008); Salvi (2018); and Grant and Hallman (2008) report that parenthood and teenage pregnancy are the leading causes of dropping out of school among girls, especially in developing and African countries. One of the reasons in this regard lack of support that the learners are experiencing from both their parents and educators, and sometimes the humiliation and prejudice from their peers. Adhering to the Bill of Rights Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act no. 108 of 1996 regarding the children’s right to education, the Department of Basic Education (DBE 2017) saw a need to mainstreaming pregnant learners and teenage mothers into the basic education system.

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2009) posit that, when a girl who returns to school after pregnancy re-enrolls, just as any other student with a specific learning need. She needs to be provided with special help and support if she is to progress at school. It becomes a problem that educators must integrate pregnant learners and parenting teenagers in a way that accommodates their special needs. “The underlying assumption of inclusion is the belief that all students are part of or belong in the general education classroom” (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2016). However pregnant learners and teen mothers have own exceptionalities which may become barriers to effective participation in the classroom in comparison to their non-pregnant peers. For that reason, they need to be given appropriate support. Segalo (2020), however believes that peers of pregnant learners may feel neglected with all the attention being put on the pregnant ones.

Research question

Data collection was carried out with the support of a structured open-ended question. The objective was to assess the viewpoints of both the educators and the principal regarding pregnant learners mainstreamed in basic education. The following question was explored:

Research question: How do teachers manage unplanned pregnancies of learners in schools. A central
question was posed during the structured interviews “If there are both pregnant and non-pregnant learners in your class, do you address them the same?”

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Methodology is described by Trainor and Graue (2010:13) as an action plan that every researcher has to consider when designing their work as well as giving justification for choosing certain methods. Methodology deals with the question of how valid knowledge can be acquired (Aliyu, Singhry, Adamu & Abubakar, 2015). This segment presents the study techniques used to collect data from the field, outlining aspects such as; the research paradigm, the research design, the study population and sample size, the sampling procedure, the research instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis technique and ethical issues.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The paper is framed with the interpretivist paradigm. Aliyu et al. (2015) explain that the researcher comes to understand the behaviours and the meanings associated with them through the interactions with the study participants. They explain that reality is perceived as being subjective. Thus, what people think, feel and see is important, as people experience reality in different ways. Hence the researchers opted for face-to-face survey as a data collection method. That enabled the objective of this study to be fulfilled. A qualitative approach grounded in an interpretivism paradigm enabled participants to freely express their views about the view and perceptions that they have regarding the inclusion of pregnant learners in mainstream education.

3.3. Research Design

This study used the survey research design. This design was appropriate for the study because surveys allow for triangulation. Although the surveys are usually conducted using questionnaires, information can be obtained in other different ways such as, through interviews, tape recording and observations (Maree, 2010). For this study, interviews were utilised to obtain data. Interviews were opted to obtain rich descriptive data that helps an interviewer to understand the participants’ construction of knowledge and social reality (Maree, 2010:87,91).

3.4. The Sample and Sampling

The sample comprised a school principal and four educators (3 females and 1 male) who have encountered pregnant learners in their school. The sample was arrived on based on non-probability and purposive or convenience sampling. The selection in this regard was based on the idea that in purposive sampling, participants are selected because of what Maree (2010: 5) describes as “some defining characteristic that make them holders of the data needed for the study”. The participants are considered information rich because they interact directly with pregnant learners on day-to-day basis. Maree (2010:5) and Yin (2016:93) further explain that decision on sampling is reached for the explicit purpose of obtaining riches possible source of information to answer the research question. The selection was based on the sample’s availability and willingness to partake in the interviews. This was done in advance for the participants to allocate free time or free periods based on their timetables.

3.5. The Research Instrument

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, researchers opted for a semi-structured interview. Face to face open-ended interview was employed to interview both educators and the principal. Maree (2010:158) argues that face to face survey is considered the method with the highest response rate, and that one advantage is that the interviewer can assist participants with issues that are not clear to them.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Kawnlich (1999:2) defines data analysis technique as the process that is used by the researcher to reduce data to a suitable and well interpreted story that is easy to understand. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse data. This method was chosen among others as it is defined as a powerful yet flexible method for analysing qualitative data (Kiger & Varpio,2020). Clarke and Braun (2017); Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017) and Kiger & Varpio (2020) are of opinion that thematic analysis is a suitable first analytical method for qualitative researchers due to its flexibility and accessibility.

3.7. Ethical issues

Research ethics were observed. Initially a researcher requested permission to collect data from the
Department of Education. The permission (Ethical clearance D.FRIC.19.03.11) was granted from Central University of Technology, and from the Department of Education on the 27th of August 2021. It was specified that the permission was granted from the time that the letter was signed to the end on the 3rd term (30th September 2021). The department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term of the academic year. The school, therefore, arranged for the time that was convenient to them since they were in the middle of the 3rd term assessments. Interviews were conducted after 2pm when teachers no longer had classes to take care of.

Considering the ethical issues, the researcher’s responsibility was to ensure privacy and confidentiality of the participants. For the participants to feel at ease, the researchers had made them aware of the important part of the research ethics, which is confidentiality, as explained by Harding (2013:3) confidentiality is considered a key ethical requirement of any research project. In a case where the respondents’ responses include names for the purpose of anonymity, pseudonyms were used in state of the real names of those referred to including participants themselves.

The issue of anonymity was negotiated with the research participants before the interviews started. F was used to represent females and M was used to represent the male participants. The school was given letters S. The principal was identified as just a principal. So female educators from school S are identified as SF1, SF2 and SF3. While a male educator was identified as SM1.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Research Question Posed

How do teachers manage unplanned pregnancies of learners in schools? The research question was directed to both the male and the female participants from the school. From the participants’ responses, we immerged the following themes; Concealed pregnancy cases and pregnant girls are treated differently where necessary.

4.1.1. Concealed Pregnancy Cases

In most of the educators’ experiences the learners did not volunteer to inform the educators about their pregnancy status. It is stipulated under the guiding principles (DBE, 2021) 5.8 that every pregnant learner in the basic education system has the right, to protection of her dignity, privacy and confidentiality regarding her pregnancy and related health. It is further stated that, “no person within the basic education system, regardless of their position or role, will disclose information relating to a pregnant learner without their written consent or, if they are under the age of 12 years old, the written consent of their parents or guardians.” Educators’ perception is that pregnant learners hide pregnancy from them, so that makes it difficult to work harmoniously with them. Unless educators hear it from other learners they don’t know when students are pregnant, so that makes it difficult to manage.

The pregnancy cases which the educators discovered without hearing any rumors are already at their advanced stages. So, educators responding to how they manage unplanned pregnancies of learners in their school is that it is difficult to identify pregnant learners because learners never disclose their pregnancy status to them. In their view, what makes it more difficult is that sometimes the learners themselves don’t even realise that they are pregnant. The participants in particular SF1, expressed her point of view, that it is not easy to say whether they give pregnant learners appropriate assistance because, in most instances the pregnancy is concealed. SF1 explains her experiences, “Sometimes the pregnancy is concealed, I don’t even notice that the learner is pregnant until another teachers talks about that particular learner’s pregnancy status.

SF2 explains her experiences just to add on what is said by SF1, “Sometimes the pregnancy is concealed, I don’t even notice that the learner is pregnant until another teachers talks about that particular learner’s pregnancy status.” But if I know I don’t treat them the same…. because they need special consideration in terms of space…. like seating plan. Pregnant girls need to be considered when arranging desks, they should have a comfortable space. Likewise, SM1 explains,” If its somehow not able to be seen by anyone else, I address them as they are…. the same, but if it’s close to 9 months or more, no … we call the parents. Even if it’s difficult sometimes we just tell them to go home ehh… SF3, “I address them the same especially when we engage in teaching and learning. However, when I was teaching Live Orientation there were some activities they could not do like, running, jumping and throwing balls. When we do strenuous activities, we could only let them watch.”
4.1.2. Pregnant Leaners Are Treated Differently Where Necessary

The principal explains that according to the policy they are not supposed to chase the pregnant girls out of the school, rather they must come up with some supporting measures. He clarifies, “clearly the support measure is a joined venture that requires parental involvement. Parents have to avail themselves every day to support the learner so that in case there is an emergency, we can work together to see how they can both assist each other in that regard.” The principal explained that parents accompanying learners to school is the first option, “When the learner must go to the exam room, the parent must also be around in case there is an emergency we are able to act immediately.”

The principal further explains, “second option is that the parent can be advised that the learner can just stay at home so that the following year she can return back to school maybe to finish the grade that the learner is in.” he goes on explaining that most of the time the parent takes this task of accompanying the learner to school. This shows that learners in the selected school are getting support from their parents to make sure that they continue with their education. But then this takes us to the issue mentioned by Morifi (2018) and Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod, and Letsoalo (2009), that pregnancy in most cases happens to teenage girls in poor and struggling small towns or villages. That tends to become a vicious cycle because parents are already struggling, those who avail themselves are in most cases unemployed hence they will be available to accompany the pregnant learner to school on daily basis.

The principal further explains, “that becomes more of a challenge where you find that a parent is not even working, she survives by social grant. So, a child having a child is going to make things worse because now the parent has a doubled responsibility or burden, taking care of both a parenting teenager and her baby.”

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Concealed Pregnancy

The discovery made from data revealed that there have been reported cases of pregnancy among teenage schoolgirls in the selected school. The principal and the educators indicated that there had been cases of pregnancy among schoolgirls. However, they both pointed out that it is difficult to identify such learners because learners hide the pregnancy, especially at an early stage. Although they struggle to know about the girls’ pregnancy status, it is evident that they are guided by the principles found on the policy on prevention and management of learner pregnancy in schools. DOE (2021:9) provides clear information on the importance of the policy that is planned at providing guidance on how to reduce unintended pregnancies, manage its pre and post-natal consequences, try to limit stigma and discrimination experienced by pregnant adolescents, and to reserve and re-enroll affected learners back in schools. As stated by Swearer & Hymel, (2015:506), “school contexts are important contributing factors to environments that either foster or inhibit bullying and discrimination behaviors.”

It also shows that the school principals as well as teachers are sensitive towards compliance with the guidelines provided by the DBE’s policy on prevention and management of learner pregnancy, (DBE 2021) which is referred to as policy. Referring from the data gathered from the interviews with teachers and the principals, it was discovered that the participants were aware that learners should not be deprived the opportunity to continue studying while pregnant. In that particular school, the learner is allowed to continue studying but the parent especially the mother has to accompany the pregnant girl learner to school on daily basis from the time when her pregnancy status has been discovered.

The policy under 6.1.6 which talks about elimination of discrimination and abuse indicates that, “no educator, school stuff member or fellow learners may discriminate against, humiliate and abuse a learner physically, emotionally or psychologically based on pregnancy or post pregnancy status” (RSA DBE: 2021). Section 29 (1) (a) of the Republic of SA Constitution (108 of 1996) pointed out that everyone has a right to basic education. No student whether pregnant or not should be left out instead, everyone has the right to be protected against unfair discrimination (section 9). Hence the principal indicates that they would not deny any pregnant learner an opportunity to continue studying during and post pregnancy because that will be a violation of her rights to education. It is also important to refer to The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 as is also against the discrimination of girls in schools on the basis of pregnancy (DOE, 2007).

The participants explained that, in both the present and previous cases that they had at their school, there is not even a single girl who volunteered to tell the educators or the principal about their pregnancy status. In most cases teachers would hear it from the non-pregnant learners or if they are lucky, they would hear from those teachers that are gifted at identifying pregnancy women at an early stage. The pregnancies in most cases are hidden and that makes it difficult to identify. Matshotyana (2010:19) believes that the adolescent
girls sometimes hide their pregnancy status due to pressure coming from their parents. She explains that some parents would force the pregnant girl to leave home as they would be embarrassed to have their daughter pregnant at that young age. The students hide it so well that at times when teachers notice, it is already on its late stage of five to seven months.

This clearly indicates that it is difficult for the educators and other stakeholders to offer necessary support to pregnant learners if a pregnant girl decides not to disclose her pregnancy status to educators. Even to the peers who in most cases are reported to be the ones who rather inform the educators about the status of their fellow learners who are pregnant. It is wrong and regarded a violation of pregnant learners’ right to dignity, privacy and confidentiality because the pregnant girl did not give a consent to it. (As stipulated on the guiding principle Table 2a) “this policy will ensure the rights of every pregnant learner in the basic education to protection of their dignity, privacy and confidentiality regarding their pregnancy and related health. It states that no person will disclose information relating to a pregnant learner without their consent” (DBE, 2019)

It is regarded a responsibility of the parent to inform the school officials when their child is pregnant though some learners sought to hide pregnancy from school authorities to avoid the bureaucratic procedures that should be followed. One most import procedure is that a pregnant learner will be asked to bring a clinic card so that it can be linked to the learner’s file at school. However, learning from data collected in the school, pregnant learners are also expected to be accompanied by their parents for in case the pregnant learner experiences challenges relating to pregnancy. Matshotyana (2010:18) recommended that the family of the pregnant girl intervenes and provides support if pregnant girl encounters a problem during pregnancy.

Teachers fear that won’t be able to assist a learner if anything happens that might either be caused by her pregnancy status or that causes a thread to the unborn child. Reddy et al. (2016) state that teenage pregnancy is not just common in South Africa, but it also carries a great deal of high risk for both a teenage mother and the child. Educators are afraid that if something happens to the pregnant teenage girl or her unborn baby, the school will be held accountable. That is why is advisable to have a parent at the school for her to assist.

The clinic card helps to identify the stage at which a learner is at. The member of SBST who is responsible for the pregnant learner and everything that happens to her, is followed still considering the guiding principles. (DBE: 2019) It is about the dignity and constitutional rights of every learner, despite pregnancy status, should not be prejudiced including rights to education, equality and privacy. Data revealed that parental involvement is needed more in an instance where a learner gets pregnant while still at school. It has been discovered that parents do support their pregnant kids especially in the school where the parents are expected to accompany the learner to school. To my surprise the SASA Act 84 of 1996 points to a different perspective of parental involvement. It states that parents’ obligation is to see to it that they send their children to school as soon as they turn four and half.” This portrays a contradiction to the practices found in the selected school and compared to what is found in the literature. The issue of compliance must be taken into consideration, or maybe the gap in the literature whereby it must be specified that pregnant learners have to be accompanied by parents on daily basis, and that it has to be specific as to how it should be carried out.

The school, however, sometimes gets disappointed where parents encourage their pregnant girls to hide their pregnancy status because they want their children to continue attending school as normal. They also pointed out that in some instances parents are also in the dark about their young girl being pregnant. The SASA act of 1996 defines a parent as a person legally entitled to custody of a learner or a person who undertakes to fulfill the obligations of parent or guardian of a learner towards the learners’ education at school. Amongst the obligations of parents to school as stipulated by the SASA Act of 1996, there is nowhere stated that a parent should accompany the child to school under any circumstance. Hence the act of in loco parentis that is entitled on an educator.

It sounds so unusual to discover the parents at selected school are expected to attend school accompanying their pregnant girls, and that in state of working as a supporting stimulus, it becomes a burden to the school system. Parental involvement should lift teachers’ (Maluleke 2014) but the principal and educators are worried that parents of pregnant learners spending so much time at school invades the privacy that the school has, as well as compromising other learners’ right to privacy. They are also of a view that, pregnancy becomes a burden to the parents as well, because parents have to leave everything they are doing at home and start accompanying the pregnant girl to school on daily basis. So the learner from this kind of a social status getting pregnant add more to poverty and underdevelopment.

It has been reported (DBE 1997:12) that “for the learners, the most obvious result of poverty, often caused
by unemployment and other economic inequalities, is the inability of families to meet the basic needs.” It clearly shows that changing economic status of such a place is difficult to fulfil, because the future of every community to build a stronger generation and a brighter future depends mostly on the youth. Although teenage pregnancy may be seen as a temporary barrier to learning and development, it is likely to cause permanent damage both emotionally and physically. Consequences of learner pregnancy may even escalate to affecting future endeavour of the baby born from a teenage mother.

The male participants raised a concern that being males makes it difficult to know how it feels to be pregnant, although they noticed that it becomes difficult for learners to come back to school immediately after giving birth. The principal suspects that the learners do not heal completely before coming back to school. His concern was that learners come back to school soon giving birth, while female educators spend four months on a maternity leave. Teenage girls as young and vulnerable are recommended to come back to school soon after having a baby appeared very worrisome. This shows that even though the concern regarding educational achievement of such a child, the concern is more on the health status of such a learner. WHO (2019) believes that it is important to improve maternal health through identifying and addressing barriers that limit availability and access to quality maternal health services at all levels of the health system.

The principal mentioned that, if it was in his power, he would not allow the young mother to come back to school immediately after birth. but as he says the policy stipulates that learners should come back to school soon after giving birth to finish the grade they left before completing (DBE, 2021). The question arising from this is, what is the use of her coming back to school if she is not coping? That will clearly affect her both physically and emotionally and end up becoming a barrier to their progress and success.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper concludes that the issue regarding pregnancy of learners in the selected school puts forwards the interests and right of the learner in the decision made. The interests of the principal and educators was to see that all learners progress from grade to grade and that they become good citizens who will contribute to the Development of their small town. The only difference is in the way the it is handled. In both schools when they discover that the girl is pregnant, the management through the responsible office will require the learner to bring the clinic card that shows how far the pregnancy is. The difference will be that Pregnant girl in the school situated in town is allowed to attend as normal, while the pregnant girl in the school located in the location would be required to be accompanied by her parent on daily basis from the time her pregnancy is discovered.

The perspectives of principals and educators have been documented in the findings of this study. There are stated problems in this study which need a serious consideration of policy makers, the School Based Support Team, and school management. To discover issues concerning stakeholders in the school environment who may be affected by learner pregnancy and inclusion of pregnant learners in mainstream education, there are number of recommendations. It is therefore recommended that number of strategies be deployed to prevent such barriers adolescent pregnancy from causing learning breakdown. Such strategies are as follows: The school should establish conducive environment and services that will be user friendly for teenage girls to feel free to engage and open-up. A place where they will be able to talk about their pregnancy status and challenges they encounter during pregnancy, particularly those which hinder their education progress.

That learners should be encouraged to disclose their status as soon as they discover that they are pregnant. That will enable educators to offer them necessary support. That will also help educators to inform them about processes to follow and people to consult when they encounter pregnancy related complications. For educator to assist them (using SBST) to assist with the necessary support learners have to meet them halfway by trusting them to be able to consult and connect them with the right people who will then be made available by the school management.

The school could encourage the establishment of peer support groups to also support their pregnant peers. Peer educators can help in different ways such as, assisting their pregnant and parenting peers to cope with the pressure of work missed during their absence from classes. They could also help them partake in project work missed due to possible complications they encounter during pregnancy. Such strategies would encourage pregnant girls to continue with education during pregnancy and after giving birth. The community especially parents and guardians as well as peers of pregnant girls could be encouraged to offer socio-psychological support to pregnant learners to mitigate potential forms of discrimination associated with teenage pregnancy. The propensity of girls dropping out of school would potentially curtailed. Ultimately,
discrimination, in all its forms, and with its negative implications on the lives of pregnant teenagers, will be nipped in the bud; albeit, in some instances.

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