

**Pregnant Girls and Young Mothers in
South African Schools: Special
Consideration on Management and
Support.**

By

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Introduction

The HSRC report of July 2009 indicates that the teenage fertility has declined from 78/1000 in 1996 to 51/1000 in 2008. However it is still very high to cause much concern as it has negative effect on the girl's educational attainment. During pregnancy and at post birth, it is the mother who carries and looks after the baby and this could have a huge impact on young mother's schooling. Therefore, in order to realise their equal educational opportunities, these pregnant girls and young mothers need care and support from both the school managers and educators.

Policies

- The South African Schools Act of 46 of 1996 formally prohibits discrimination by protecting pregnant girls' exclusion from school and promotes the inclusion of young mothers at post birth.
- The Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 protect the rights to education of pregnant learners and teenage mothers.
- In July 2000, the Council of Education Ministers issued a statement indicating that pregnant learners may not be expelled from school.

The Context of the Study

- Three secondary schools in the northern part of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.
- Within the radius of 38 kilometres.
- Located in a poor neighbourhood poorly resourced i.e. largely informal settlement area.
- With high rate of pregnancy – in 2007 and 2008 records: School A – 21/551 in 2007 & 17/565 in 2008
- School B – 32/501 in 2007 & 28/487 in 2008
- School C – 27/302 in 2007 & 32/298 in 2008

Research Design

- Qualitative method of inquiry in aiming to understand how the schools were responding to the policy that prohibits the exclusion of pregnant girls and supports the inclusion of young mother back into the schooling system.
- One session of in-depth individual interviews with the three principals.
- Review of records and school policy on teenage pregnancy.

Findings

- It was found that the attitude of the management (positive or negative) was a critical influence in helping pregnant learners and young mothers meet the academic demands of being in school while also going through dramatic physical changes and becoming mothers with dependent young infants.
- The research found that there was uneven support of pregnant girls /young mothers in school.
- Some principals are caring, supportive and sensitive to the challenges faced by these girls.
- Some displayed a complete negativity on the support of pregnant girls in school and blaming the girls that they brought these challenges to themselves.

Caring Principal

- There is a school policy on how to manage teenage pregnancy.
- School guidance teacher provide counselling for the pregnant girl.
- The girl is provided with full information about services available for her in her area (abortion/adoption/ante-natal clinic).
- Parents are invited to discuss on how best they can help to support the learner with her school work.
- Catch-up programme is arranged for missed lessons.
- Young mothers are advised of how to access child support grant.

Tolerant Principal

- The school operates without any policy at school level.
- The school tolerates the pregnant learners because of the SASA which is against the expulsion of pregnant learners, otherwise they are embarrassment to the school.
- Pregnant learners were not prohibited but there is no support provided for them.
- Parents were responsible for fetching and submitting school work if their daughter was absent from school.
- There was a complaint of lack of support from the parents and the school could only give care and support to learners who are at schools.

Insensitive Principal

- No policy on teenage pregnancy.
- He goes against SASA by prohibiting pregnant learners from attending school until they give birth.
- He complains that they negatively affect the performance of the school as they absent themselves a lot from school.
- He is very insensitive to the experiences of pregnant girls because he views them as frustrating the ideal educational path (Heilbron et al, 2007).
- He resents giving support to the pregnant girls

Conclusion

- Policies exist, but the big challenge is implementation.
- There is still a difference between what is in the policy and what is actually happening in schools.
- Family context is often critical in determining what happens to the pregnant girls at school, however educators and school management have a critical role to play.
- Pregnant girls are still largely marginalized as they receive less or no care and support from educators.
- Some principals are still much concerned about protecting the image of the school at the expense of the educational opportunity of pregnant girls.