

# **SCHOOL DROPOUT DUE TO PREGNANCY AND PARENT PRESENCE IN THE HOUSEHOLD IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **Background**

South Africa is in the late stages of the fertility transition (Swartz, 2000; Rossouw, 2012). Fertility has decreased dramatically since 1960 lowering from seven children per woman in the late 1950's to 3.5 in 1996 to the current total fertility rate of 2.4 children per woman (Statistics South Africa, 2011; Rossouw et al, 2012).

South African women (18+ years) report lack of knowledge, sexual violence and inadequate access to services as factors hindering independent control over reproductive health (Ramkissoon, 2010). In addition to this the consequences associated with adolescent reproductive behaviour have emphasised the need to study this area more intensely (Mahy, 2002). More than 20% of women in developing countries have their first birth before the age of 18 years (Speizer, 2009). In South Africa there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy with 30% of teenagers being pregnant before the age of 19 years (Willan, 2013). Teenage pregnancy in South Africa decreased from 7.8% in 1996 to 5.4% in 2007 and 2.3% in 2012 (Statistics South Africa, 2008; Partners in Population and Development, 2013).

Teenage pregnancies in South Africa remain largely unintended either being mistimed or unwanted (Flanagan et al, 2013). Factors contributing to teen pregnancy in the country include gender inequality, forced sexual initiation, gender-based violence, poor access to contraceptives and termination of pregnancies, negative attitudes of health care workers, inconsistent and incorrect use of contraceptives, poverty, larger household size, poor sex education, not living with the biological father, talking openly about sex with a boyfriend, perceiving most friends to be pregnant (Vundule et al, 2001; Willan 2013). The implications of teen pregnancy are non-completion of secondary school, poverty and exposure of adolescent girls to higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV infection (Mchunu, 2012; Willan, 2013). In

addition to this children born to teenage mothers are at higher risk of adverse morbidity and mortality (Pinzon et al, 2012). Teenage pregnancy therefore remains an important health and social concern nationally.

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa the level of primary school enrollment and completion for girls has increased during the past 20 years. South Africa's school enrollment levels are one of the highest on the continent with 85% males and 75% females enrolled in school (Grant et al, 2006). Additionally the Department of Education in 2011 reported that although South Africa's drop-out rates were lower than those of other developing countries such as Brazil and Bolivia, they were still concerningly high. Primary drop-out rates were estimated to be 2%, but high school drop-out rates averaged 8% and increased as the grade increased as well (Department of Education, 2011). These statistics further prove the unacceptably high levels of illiteracy and under-education amongst the youth in South Africa.

Factors contributing to the school drop-out of South African youth are single-parent families, family conflict, lack of parental support, emotional difficulties due to domestic situation, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy and socio-economic issues (Inglis, 2009). These causes of school drop-out are closely associated with the consequences of the phenomenon as well showing the vicious cycle of poverty associated with school drop-out. The consequences of school drop-out and under-education are unemployment, socio-economic disadvantage, unwanted pregnancy, substance abuse, criminal activity, low self-esteem and other associated social ills (Inglis, 2009).

This paper aims to examine the association between school dropout due to pregnancy among adolescent girls and parent presence within the household in South Africa. The study will particularly assess the socioeconomic characteristics associated with school drop-out due to pregnancy in 2010 in order to suggest measures to curb these phenomena in South Africa.

## **Methods**

The data used in this cross-sectional study came from a national survey: the Survey of Activities of Young People completed in 2010 in South Africa. The nationally representative survey was designed to study the education, leisure, employment and social dynamics of young people in South Africa. The original

data was collected by Statistics South Africa. The target population for this study is seven to seventeen year old females who cited pregnancy as their reason for leaving school which totalled 29 721 girls. STATA 11 was used for data analysis. This paper uses frequency distributions, cross-tabulations and logistic regression to analyse the relationships between pregnancy, school drop-out and other predictor variables viz. age, province, race, economic activity and parent presence in the household (father absent, mother absent, both absent, father not alive, mother not alive, both not alive).

## Results

Table 1: Percentage distribution of teenage girls who reported leaving school due to pregnancy by individual characteristics and urban or rural place of residence

	All		Urban		Rural	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,721</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10,081</b>	<b>33.92</b>	<b>19,640</b>	<b>66.08</b>
<b>Race</b>						
African/Black	26,970	90.74	7,330	72.71	19,640	100
Coloured	2,751	9.26	2,751	27.29	-	-
<b>Paid work last week</b>			10,08	100.0		
No	29,721	100.00	1	0	19,640	100
Yes	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Mother Absent from Household</b>						
Not applicable	4,090	13.76	1,613	16.00	2,477	12.61
Yes	19,391	65.24	6,331	62.80	13,060	66.50
No	6,240	21.00	2,137	21.20	4,103	20.89
<b>Father Absent from Household</b>						
Not applicable	10,939	36.81	3,306	32.79	7,633	38.87
Yes	8,321	28.00	4,163	41.30	4,158	21.17
No	10,461	35.20	2,612	25.91	7,849	39.96
<b>Mother Alive</b>						
Yes	25,631	86.24	8,468	84.00	17,163	87.39
No	4,090	13.76	1,613	16.00	2,477	12.61
<b>Father Alive</b>						
Yes	18,782	63.19	6,775	67.21	12,006	61.13
No	10,090	33.95	3,306	32.79	6,784	34.54

Don't know	849	2.86	-	-	849	4.32
<b>Both Parents Absent</b>						
Yes	4,714	15.86	1,584	15.72	3,130	15.94
No	25,007	84.14	8,497	84.28	16,510	84.06
<b>Both Parents Dead</b>						
Yes	2,352	7.91	1,037	10.28	1,316	6.70
No	27,368	92.09	9,045	89.72	18,324	93.30
<b>Province</b>						
Western Cape	577	1.94	577	5.72	-	-
Eastern Cape	9,633	32.41	1,960	19.44	7,673	39.07
Northern Cape	806	2.71	134	1.33	672	3.42
Free State	3,617	12.17	2,530	25.09	1,087	5.54
KwaZulu Natal	5,607	18.86	2,068	20.52	3,538	18.02
North West	1,308	4.40	257	2.55	1,051	5.35
Gauteng	3,506	11.79	2,555	25.35	950	4.84
Mpumalanga	2,020	6.80	-	-	2,020	10.29
Limpopo	2,647	8.91	-	-	2,647	13.48

The general characteristics of the study population are shown in Table 1 above. Column percentages are given per variable among all participants, those living in urban areas and those living in rural areas. The two (urban and rural) groups of adolescent girls largely had comparative characteristics except that there were no coloured participants living in rural areas and there were differences in distribution across provinces. Urban participants emanated from Gauteng, Free State and KwaZulu Natal mainly while rural participants were mainly from the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo.

Table 2: Logistic regression producing odds ratios, showing the likelihood that teenage girls will drop out of school by individual characteristics (Model I – bivariate; Model II – Multivariate)

	Model I			Model II		
	OR	CI		OR	CI	
<b>Race</b>						
African/Black						
Coloured	1.08	0.463	2.534	4.33	1.376	13.634
<b>Mother Absent from Household</b>						
Not applicable						
Yes	0.48	0.227	1.002	0.65	0.289	1.475
No	0.77	0.335	1.763	0.63	0.207	1.910
<b>Father Absent from</b>						

<b>Household</b>						
Not applicable						
Yes	0.54	0.272	1.058	0.79	0.166	3.777
No	0.54	0.293	1.007	0.52	0.106	2.513
<b>Mother Alive</b>						
Yes						
No	1.87	0.913	3.830			
<b>Father Alive</b>						
Yes						
No	1.86	1.047	3.317	1.05	0.237	4.646
Don't know	1.75	0.418	7.298			
<b>Both Parents Absent</b>						
Yes						
No	0.73	0.369	1.458	0.53	0.142	1.957
<b>Place of Residence</b>						
Urban						
Rural	2.32	1.297	4.148	3.78	1.747	8.159
<b>Province</b>						
Western Cape						
Eastern Cape	6.97	0.910	53.411	7.80	0.818	74.333
Northern Cape	4.75	0.492	45.815	5.14	0.521	50.650
Free State	7.39	0.922	59.235	15.80	1.598	156.232
KwaZulu Natal	3.61	0.457	28.583	4.34	0.433	43.528
North West	3.85	0.449	33.019	5.26	0.501	55.275
Gauteng	3.45	0.385	30.943	10.62	0.977	115.484
Mpumalanga	4.19	0.503	34.857	5.41	0.513	57.148
Limpopo	3.70	0.454	30.115	3.59	0.343	37.464

As seen in Table 2 bivariate logistic regression found that the participant's father's mortality status and place of residence were significantly associated with dropping out of school while pregnant. In the multivariate model the participant's race, place of residence and province were found to be significantly associated with dropping out of school while pregnant. The chances of dropping out of school due to pregnancy were four times higher amongst coloured girls compared to African girls, four times higher amongst girls living in rural areas and approximately sixteen times higher amongst girls residing in the Free State province as compared to those living in the Western Cape. No form of parent presence was found to be significantly associated with school drop-out due to pregnancy.

**Conclusion**

This research remains a work in progress with the above preliminary results being the first step towards understanding the associated factors of school drop-out among pregnant girls in South Africa.