

The educational consequences of teenage pregnancy in the Kavango Region

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Abstract

In this paper the authors discuss the pregnancy prevalence among learners in the Kavango region. The paper is an extract from a national study on dropout which collected data from three (3) regions, namely; Kavango, Kunene and Omaheke. While the dropout study was conducted in three regions with the highest dropout rate in the country, the findings on teenage pregnancy reported in this article are from the Kavango region only. The Kavango region, in addition to having higher dropout rates is also one of the regions with higher incidences of teenage pregnancy in the country.

Through interviewing dropout learners and school principals as well as focus group discussions with teachers at 58 schools in the Kavango region the study found that a high number of female learners drop out of school due to pregnancy. Out of the one hundred and thirty one (131) learners interviewed, of which seventy two (72) were female, sixty (60) dropped out because of pregnancy, which means 83% of all female dropout cases was due to pregnancy. The dynamics and reasons why these learners became pregnant were as diverse as the schools visited. Based on the findings it is recommended that a good strategy for reducing pregnancy in the region requires the collaboration of community leaders, parents and school authorities.

Introduction

Lloyd and Hewett (2009) noted that the proportion of girls enrolled in school has increased in sub-Saharan Africa. Grant and Hallman (2006) also noted the improvements in the proportion of female learners who enter and complete school which “decreased the gap between male and female educational attainment in the region” (p. 3). However, pregnancy among learners noted in many countries of the region, have come to destroy the gains that have been made over the years (Grant & Hallman, 2006). According to official reports, Namibia is among those countries where pregnancy is high among learners (Ministry of Education, 2010). However, while teenage pregnancy has been widely researched in many countries, the educational consequences of learner pregnancy have not been well studied in Namibia.

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Volume 2, Number 2, December 2013 - ISSN 2026-7215

The data on which this paper is based come from a study on, “Investigating factors that lead to school dropout in Namibia”. The study was undertaken in 2011 with the understanding that knowing the reasons why young people leave school prematurely can inform the design of policies and interventions that will improve school graduation rates.

The Ministry of Education’s Educational Management Information System (EMIS) reports of over five years (2005-2009) indicate the Kavango region as among the top three regions in the country with the highest dropout rates, with an annual dropout rate of 17% (EMIS, 2010). While conducting the dropout study the researchers noted a high number of female learners dropping out of school due to pregnancy and decided to find out reasons for the high learner pregnancy and what happens to learners who drop out due to pregnancy.

Profile of the Kavango Region

The Kavango region, with a size of 48,742 square kilometres, is located in the northeast part of Namibia along the Okavango River. According to the 2009/2010 Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES) the Kavango region is home to a total population of 283,815, with a total of 43,889 households and a literacy rate of 80.9% (NHIES, 2012). According to the 2010 EMIS report the region had 291 schools with a total of 70,397 learners, of which 33,033 were female (EMIS Report, 2010).

The majority of the region’s population lives along the Okavango River that gives life to the fauna and flora and sustains life of the people of the region. According to the Kavango Regional Council website (<http://www.kavangorc.com.na/>), the main sources of income for the region are cash crops and wages. Even though it houses 14% of Namibia’s population, the region has only two major towns, Rundu, which is the capital of the region and graded as a town council and Nkurenkuru which is graded as a village council. Both towns are located along the river, with Nkurenkuru just 130 kilometres west of Rundu. This means, the region is pretty much rural, but the majority of schools are located along the river and in semi-urban areas.

Teenage pregnancy and educational attainment

Education is one of the strongest predictors of health status; the more schooling people have the better their health is likely to be (Freudenbeg & Ruglism, 2007) and the longer the life expectancy (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). It has been noted that the general population in Africa that leaves school prematurely has shown a decrease in recent years (UNESCO, 2006, 2010, 2011), and reducing dropout is found to be “central to improving access to basic education” (Hunt, 2008, p. iv).

Nonetheless, media reports show that dropout increases at Namibian schools are mostly due to teenage pregnancy (Matali, 2011). Throughout primary grades female dropout exceeds that of boys and as from Grade 5 Kavango girls repeat more often than boys (Felton & Haihambo-Muetudhana, 2002). It is thus important to research the effects that pregnancy has on the school performance and achievement of girls and their future careers.

This paper is framed around the importance of completing basic education for

female learners. Even though Grant and Hallman (2006) noted that there are a few studies which have “focused on the educational consequences of schoolgirl pregnancy” (p. 3), this study has benefited from conclusions of studies carried out elsewhere in the world, on pregnancy, health and education (Moore & Waite, 1977; Klepinger, Lundberg, & Plotnick, 1995; Freudenbeg & Ruglism, 2007; Hunt, 2008; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012) and on family, parenting style, learner support and dropout (Reddy & Sinha, 2010; Ananga, 2011).

Klepinger, Lundberg and Plotnick (1995) in their longitudinal study of high school students found that “early childbearing lowers the educational attainment of young women” (p.23). They also found that women who became parents as teenagers were at a greater risk of social and economic disadvantage throughout their lives (Klepinger, Lundberg, & Plotnick, 1995). There is also conclusive evidence that the less the schooling people have, the higher their levels of risky health behaviours such as smoking, being overweight, having low level of physical activity, abusing alcohol and practicing unsafe sex (Freudenbeg & Ruglism 2007). It has further been established that early childbearing is associated with decreased educational attainment (Moore & Waite, 1977; Fergusson & Woodward, 2004).

Methodology

The dropout study was conducted among grades 1–10 learners. The plan was to also interview parents of all dropout learners but they could not be located, the majority of learners either lived by themselves or with relatives near the school, while their parents lived far away from the schools. Moreover, the researchers only managed to interview learners who dropped out and came back and not those who were currently pregnant and out of school or those who stayed away after giving birth.

The researchers visited fifty eight (58) schools and interviewed a total of one hundred and thirty one (131) dropout learners (59 male and 72 female), one hundred and thirty eight (138) teachers (including 7 heads of department), forty one (41) principals and two (2) parents. Of all the learners interviewed for the dropout study, 46% dropped out due to pregnancy (a total of 60 learners), 20% due to economic and poverty related factors, 17% due to system factors, 12% due to lack of parental involvement and 5% due to cultural factors. Figure 1 summarises the findings:



Figure 1: Factors that influence school dropout among female learners in Kavango region in Namibia

The 60 learners, who dropped out because of pregnancy, included 58 female learners and 2 male learners (who were dismissed from school because they made a girl pregnant). Data for this article was gathered by means of in-depth interviews with learners who dropped out due to pregnancy. Using the constructivist paradigm the researchers critically looked at the lived experiences of pregnant learners and teenage mothers. The analysis presented here is the researchers' interpretations of these experiences as reported by learners themselves.

Discussion of findings on school dropout due to pregnancy

During the interview pregnant learners and teenage mothers explained in great detail how they got pregnant, either in their houses while the parents were sleeping, or were tricked into sleeping with government officials and/or community members, or were impregnated by other learners. Based on data collected three major categories of analysis were conducted, namely; (1) the dynamics of learner pregnancy in schools, (2) schools' efforts in dealing with learner pregnancy; and (3) pregnant learner's academic performance and achievement.

The dynamics of learner pregnancy in schools

The study found that there were five (5) factors that led to pregnancy while in school, which are described below:

Money, gifts and bribes

Of the 60 learners who dropped out due to pregnancy, 68% of learners were impregnated by somebody outside the school system, usually working adults. Many a time, this happens at schools with community hostels and learner-headed households, with learners being offered presents and gifts of all sorts (e.g. sweets, cell phones, money and even clothing items). Twenty (20) learners reported that they sneaked out of their parents' or guardians' homes to go and sleep with married men in return for gifts. According to teachers, young people are to blame for wearing miniskirts and wanting money and other gifts, as one teacher put, "sometimes I am amazed by parents who allow their kids to wear so short skirts. They are exposing their female children to danger".

However, learners reported that while they are promised the world during the brief courtships, many of such promises are not usually fulfilled after the learner becomes pregnant. Many a time learners are told never to contact or mention the name of the person responsible for the pregnancy. One learner mother related her experiences to the researchers, stating, "I was shocked when I informed the guy that I was carrying his baby and he said to me, 'if I hear you utter another word about this I will deal with you'".

Community hostels and learner headed households

Inland schools (schools located far away from the Okavango River) as well as some schools along the river with no hostels but with a large number of their learners travelling long distances try to build community hostels and provide accommodation for such learners. These community hostels are manned by learners themselves, with no matrons or guardians to ensure learner safety. The pictures below show the two types of community hostels found at rural schools in the Kavango region.



Figure 2: The hut on the far left is the boys' hostel and the one on the right is the girls' hostel, with no provision for a matron or security. © Haaveshe Nekongo-Nielsen



Figure 3: This is another type of community built hostel for a group of boys or girls with a fire place beside it that serves as a communal kitchen for learners (boys and girls). © Haaveshe Nekongo-Nielsen

These types of community built-hostels are common in the region, and when a learner's homestead is located far away from the school, the learner has to sacrifice the comfort of a good home by staying in such places in order to get an education. Female learners reported that in these community hostels they experienced

sexual harassment, usually by members of the surrounding communities. A unison voice of a group of learners at one of these schools reported that, “when evening comes you will see some shadows in the dark then when you are all fast asleep you feel hands touching you. When we scream, they run away and then it is hard to go back to sleep again, we get really scared”.

There is also a higher percentage of learner-headed households at some schools in the region, with children taking care of themselves where parents are far away from schools. Out of the 58 schools visited 34 learners interviewed at 31 schools were found to be heading households during school terms. Parents simply construct a hut structure at an unmarked land near a school, if there is any, or at someone else’s Mahangu field, to accommodate their school going children. The number of huts constructed is determined by the sex of the children, one hut if there are only boys or girls and two huts if there are boys and girls, one hut for each sex.

Where there is more than one child the older learner is usually made the head of the household to take care of her/his siblings. Many a time this is a 12 year old taking care of children as young as 7 years old. That ‘taking care’ means providing food, security and when the younger sibling gets sick taking her/him to the clinic/hospital. The security and safety of that older learner is then in her/his own hands. Such a learner is given that huge responsibility at a young age and deprived of enjoying a normal childhood.

While there are few of these learners with no living parents, 63% of such learners had parents, but parents were busy at their farms. Most learners prefer to live by themselves rather than living with relatives because, according to learners, relatives tend to abuse them. These were some of the instances reported by a number of learners during the interviews:

“I am the only one who does home chores, even on school nights. Whenever my aunt sees me studying she tells me that books do not put food on the table I should go and join others in the field”. “My uncle even told me that I should plan to miss at least one day of school per week and assist the boys in taking care of the goats”. I was beaten by my uncle last week because I was studying during the day. He said studying is for night time, but then, I do not have candles to be able to study at night”.

The above statements by learners are indicative of the amount of domestic work that female learners living with relatives had to do. These, in addition to cooking, babysitting, collecting water and firewood as well as running errands interfered greatly with their homework and study time.

Learners heading households reported that many times food is also hard to come by, even though they do get offers from ‘good Samaritans’, adult members of the surrounding communities. Through interviewing learners the researchers discovered that some of the food offers had strings attached for the female child. At five (5) of the 58 schools visited cases were reported where older males in the community made themselves guardians of female learners heading households. One young male adult the researchers spoke to had this to say, “parents are not serious you know, they just allow their kids to stay here by themselves. So I decided to watch over them, especially at night”.

The school principals were aware that these guardianships were not healthy for learners, but they are unable to communicate their concerns to the parents. Teachers reported that some members of the community become very antagonistic if teachers or school authorities raised their concerns towards these self-appointed guardians. Teachers were told that, “*you are here to teach and not to police us*”. Of course, in such cases schools do not want to interfere, as one principal put it, “*you do not know if those arrangements were agreed with the learners’ parents*”.

Since the schools management and boards have no control over what happens to learners in community hostels or in learner-headed households such learners are left to the mercies of their surrounding communities, which include many shebeens in proximity of the schools and learner residences. As compared to community hostels however, learner headed households are the most unsafe accommodation for a female learner. Learners are of the opinion that at least in community hostels, “*you live in groups with other learners*” serving as a shield of protection against intruders at night.

The practice of parents living far away from school also poses challenges to schools’ effort to address many issues that impact on the learning and academic performances of children. For instance, because learners do not live with their parents, parents tend not to show up at school meetings. Parents simply ignore meeting invitations, even when they are called regarding their children’s behaviour. Hence, while schools have plans to organize teacher-parent meetings every term these meetings are not well attended.

There were also a number of schools located along the Okavango River where the majority of the learners lived with their parents and commuted to school on a daily basis. These schools had high pregnancy cases as compared to inland schools and schools with government supported hostels. Forty three (43) of the 60 pregnancy cases were found at 30 schools located along the Okavango River and 17 of these schools had community hostels. Schools with government supported hostels had lower incidences of pregnancy. The principals attributed the low cases of teenage pregnancy to strictly enforcing hostel rules of curfew and punishing offenders.

Lack of parenting and legal guardianship

As reported above the absence of correct parenting (bringing up and guiding children correctly as well as participating in the education of the child) was one of the most pressing issues in the Kavango region. This lack of parental involvement in the education of their children has contributed to high pregnancy rates. The study found that 12% of 131 learners who dropped out due to lack of parental involvement were either living alone or with people other than their biological or legal guardians and 59% of the 12% dropped out because of pregnancy. Teachers also reported that learners who lived alone or with relatives tended to exhibit indiscipline behaviours, which sometimes led to pregnancy and/or dropout. During a focus group discussion with teachers at over 10 schools with children headed households the following comments were made:

“The 11 year old boy I chased out of class last week lives alone in his single hut, of course he is his own man. Our principal was almost attacked by the boy who lives in that hut (pointing) with his young siblings”. “That 14

year old girl lives with her young brother, and the girl does not even cook for the boy, who I think is only 8. Last week, after school I tried to talk to her about it and she replied that I should worry about her not doing my home work and not about her brother because it is her brother. I thought she was so rude”.

Teachers impregnating learners

Contrary to what has been reported in the media that teachers are the culprits in learner pregnancy cases this study found that 75% of pregnancy cases were not by teachers. There have been media reports of the tendency by male teachers to bribe parents with money and cattle after impregnating their school-going children (Matali, 2011). The reports stated that often parents of pregnant learners are approached by male teachers who face the possibility of dismissal, with monetary pay-offs and promises of taking care of the baby and mother in exchange of their silence (Matali, 2011). While the researchers note these exaggerations, the majority of learners (about 60%) interviewed were impregnated by somebody outside the school system. Fifteen per cent (15%) were impregnated by other learners and the rest by unknown perpetrators as learners interviewed did not want to mention them, this probably included teachers. The researchers however noted that where teachers were involved it was easy to identify them than somebody outside the school system.

Nonetheless, as table 1 shows, schools near army bases, police stations and government offices recorded high pregnancies and names of officials from these ministries have been mentioned by pregnant learners and teachers alike.

Location of the school	Number of schools with high pregnancy cases
Army Base	6
Police Station	9
Government Office (including irrigation schemes offices)	16
Total	31

Table 1: *The location of schools with high pregnancy cases*

Since the design of this study was not to consult people outside of the school system except dropout learners’ parents, the researchers did not interview any of the government officials to confirm these allegations. It would however be good for schools to also record the identity of perpetrators when recording dropout due to pregnancy to ensure that increases of pregnancy are correctly addressed. There is conclusive evidence that where perpetrators are involved in coming up with strategies and/or solutions, learner pregnancy cases have been reduced (Moore & Waite, 1977; Fergusson & Woodward, 2004).

Cultural and traditional practices

While cultural and traditional influences are important and play a critical role in the moral upbringing of the child, when not done correctly they are detrimental to the education of the children, especially the girl child. Cultural and traditional

practices that are still very strong among some of the communities in the Kavango region were found to influence learners' decision to become pregnant and to drop out of school. For a female learner these traditional practices include arranged marriages, becoming pregnant because the learner has reached the "the right age", taking care of the sick and/or old parents, babysitting of young siblings and being asked to leave school to help the family in times of difficulties.

Teachers reported cases where learners took a break from school for such activities, and many returned to school pregnant or dropped out permanently. This was reported at list by 28 of the 58 schools visited. In such cases, teachers only heard from other learners that a specific learner was married or was having a baby. There were learners (reported by 15 school principals) who became pregnant on the advice of parents, as per custom learners should get married and have children at the 'right productive age', usually after the first menses. When the 'right age' arrives it makes no difference whether the learner is in school, she must have children.

According to the school authorities, only a few female learners come back to school after these marriages. As a result of these traditional practices, one 18 years old teenager, in Grade 5, was struggling to complete at least her primary education and at the same time bringing up two (2) children with a third on the way. She had this to say about her experiences: "I really want to complete school but now with two children and this pregnancy, it is difficult. My husband is working in the wood carving business and he has no time to help with the children". Her experiences enunciate one of the negative effects of traditional practices on the education of girls in the Kavango region.

Schools' efforts in dealing with the learner pregnancy issue

One of the schools visited was found to have broken windows because the principal tried to discipline a male learner who was reported to have a habit of making sexual advances towards female learners at the school. The punishment of cleaning the school yard was meted out for this learner. When the learner reported this to his parents at a nearby shebeen, the parents mobilised community members who came and threw stones at the school, because the 'school is there to educate their kids and not to make them work the school yard'. With incidents like these, the teachers are afraid to advise on sexual practices of their learners and as a result schools are not ready to deal with the learner pregnancy challenge. Some of the indications of schools inability in dealing with pregnancy issues are discussed below:

Lack of support programmes and services to address pregnancy at schools
None of the 58 schools visited had support programmes or services provided to pregnant learners or teenage mothers who re-enrolled to ensure their proper integration into the school community. Pregnant learners do not receive counselling of any sort, either before or after the birth of the baby. Usually, this is because by the time the school counsellors and/or life skills teachers receive the message from fellow learners the pregnant learner would have already left the school.

Data collected among US school going children indicate that "learners assigned to teachers were found to deliver better educational results and were less

likely to have children as teenagers” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012, p. 24). This is an indication that school authorities in general, and specifically teachers, matter in shaping the behaviour of their learners as much as parents do, after all learners spend 30% of their time under the care of schools.

Many of the schools visited were also not providing extracurricular or extramural activities, especially the inland schools. It was only for the Rundu circuit, where there were programmes aimed at young people’s enjoyment. In rural areas learners find themselves in need of support but unable to find it. With no extramural activities at schools, it means that, after school, learners drag their feet home and on the way, to kill time, they find some mischiefs to engage themselves into.

Learner pregnancy and the learner pregnancy policy

Many, 45 schools blame the pregnancy policy as responsible for the high learner pregnancy in schools. These schools are reluctant to introduce the policy to their learners, with the fear that if they do more learners would become pregnant. One hundred and five of the 138 teachers interviewed felt that the pregnancy policy is promoting the increase of pregnancy among school-going children. Nonetheless, the study found that pregnancy has been occurring way before the pregnancy policy was introduced. There were only 33 of the 138 teachers who indicated that the pregnancy policy has helped those few learners who were brave enough to remain in school while pregnant. These learners did not have to leave school for a year or more and therefore did not become too old for the grade.

The schools (18 of them) that have successfully introduced the learner pregnancy policy, their pregnant learners remained in school until the birth of the child and came back a month or two later, after the birth of the baby. Such schools have reported enforcing the policy especially for the better performing learners who fall pregnant, and they have found that such learners do succeed with a minimum disruption to their studies.

The study however found that because policy implementation strategies are not in place, the learner pregnancy policy is more of a problem than a solution. Even the brave schools that were implementing the learner pregnancy policy have not devised strategies to counteract prejudices. Such schools are finding it a challenge to deal with slurs being targeted at pregnant learners both by the teachers and other learners.

Teachers’ attitudes towards pregnant learners and young mothers

There were teachers found to be less sympathetic to teenage mothers, making comments that were more hurtful than building confidence of such learners. While interviewing a learner, who dropped out in 2011 and just gave birth, the comment of a female teacher passing by went like this, “*those are plenty, you will find many of them*”, meaning learners who dropped out due to pregnancy. A number of learners (3 learners) reported that they dropped out of school because of the comments and slurs made by other learners and teachers.

Many examples of hurtful comments directed at pregnant learners were given. In a Geography class for instance, non-pregnant learners would point to the

pregnant learner that she is responsible for the increasing world population. In other classes non-pregnant learners would tell the teacher that they “cannot concentrate, they are dozing off because of pregnant learners in the class”. Teachers were unable to do anything about such comments even though they recognised that such teasing frustrated the pregnant learner. In such gender biased school environments pregnant learners were more likely to drop out. The pregnancy policy, with its good intentions, does not provide proper guidance in dealing with such comments and challenges.

Learners interviewed provided good information regarding the situation they found themselves in after having a baby and how difficult it was to be both a mother and a learner. They found schools unhelpful with some teachers keep suggesting that pregnant learners ‘*might as well drop out because they cannot handle both*’. Schools need to develop measures to address some of these issues otherwise more female learners will drop out and fail to complete basic education. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to note that about half of the learners came back to school after giving birth on the ‘insistence of their mothers’. “*I would have preferred to stay at home*”, one teenager mother retorted, “*but my mother insisted, I go back to school*”.

Pregnant learners’ academic performance and achievement

The study explored how pregnancy and being a mother at an early age affected learners’ school work and tried to find out which learners were likely to fall pregnant. Data collected showed that dropping out due to pregnancy did not discriminate regarding learners’ economic status or academic performance. There were learners who got pregnant even though one or both of their parents worked and their economic status were moderate. They were also high performing learners who fell pregnant.

Fergusson and Woodward in the 2004 study of New Zealand’s ‘*from birth to 21 years of age cohort*’ found that pregnant teenagers or teenager mothers had lower rates of participation in tertiary education and training as compared to non-pregnant teenagers. This study found that the after pregnancy effects led many learners to lose motivation in school. There were learners who were more concerned about their babies than their own futures. Teachers also reported of learners who were high performers before pregnancy but lost concentration and did not participate as much in class after the birth of the child. Pregnant learners and teenager mothers also told the researchers that their non-pregnant peers at school put pressure on them by deriding them with comments such as “*teacher, can we go home now, some of us are mothers, we need to go home and feed our babies*”. Comments in life skills classes such as, “*hey, explain this (pointing at reproductive organs), you know how this works*”, made lessons unbearable for a pregnant learner. Such comments made them feel guilty and ‘out of place’.

This study also found that about 41% of learners who re-enrolled reported having difficulties in finding people who could take care of their babies while they were at school. This is especially difficult for learners who were orphans and whose biological parents or legal guardians resided far away from the school. The majority of young mothers reported that their parents were usually working on the farm or were involved in paid employment and it was very difficult to take care of the baby without their parents’ help. They were then required to take

care of their babies after school even when it was examinations time. As a result, principals were of the opinions that a good number of teenage mothers who re-enrolled drop out again because they either were unable to cope with their studies and taking care of the baby or because of peer pressure.

All teachers interviewed were in agreement with the learners that pregnant cases were more than non-pregnant at risk of leaving school before completion. Teachers reported the risk factors that influenced this dropping out again to include (1) psychological, where a learner finds it difficult to cope with a baby and school work; (2) lack of support at home, especially learners whose parents were not able to offer support or learners who lived with relatives that were not willing to assist teenage mothers. Learners who experienced problems with babysitting were found to be depressed and shed tears, when recounting their life stories to the researchers. They were also not doing well in school and reported that teachers at many occasions informed them that they (learners) would be better off dropping out of school altogether.

According to the teachers learners who lived alone when they got pregnant were less likely to come back to school or stay longer after re-enrolling, usually because they could not afford a babysitter. It might also be that their parents had now learned a lesson that it was not safe for that learner to be alone, and decided to keep them at home.

Conclusion and recommendations

At first glance we thought many of the learners who dropped out of school due to pregnancy should not really be called dropouts but stop-outs because most of them do return a year after having the baby (Natriello, 1987). However, deep analysis of the conversations with teachers and dropout learners themselves, showed that even though these learners do come back after the babies have been born the majority of them eventually drop out for good and become the out of school youth of Namibia. Many teenage mothers were found unable to cope with multiple roles of motherhood and being a learner at the same time. The researchers discovered that these learners ended up as dropouts either because of (1) the pressures of being a parent, (2) of wanting to be a parent to a second baby or (3) because they became too old for the grade.

Consequently, when the researchers further analysed the data, the causes of dropout for pregnant learners were not necessarily the pregnancy factors themselves but the problem also lay with the parents, adults in society, teachers and the school management who needed to create an atmosphere of safety and a learning environment where learners felt safe, protected and wanted. It is therefore, recommended that addressing the challenges of learner pregnancy in schools needs to be a concerted effort of the school management, parents as well as community leaders.

Another contributing factor to the high incidences of pregnancy in the Kavango region is the lack of parental involvement in the education of their children. While it is understandable that most parents in rural areas might not be able to assist children with school work, they do however have the responsibility to parent correctly. The researchers believe that teenage pregnancy cannot be properly addressed without first tackling issues of parental involvement and

traditional practices. According to Felton & Haihambo-Muetudhana (2002), practices that involve the production of food methods require everyone to be involved, but such activities should not be allowed to rob children of their rights to education. It is recommended that a good strategy for reducing pregnancy in the region requires the collaboration of all stakeholders and also includes better ways of enabling learners to have an education while still contributing to household activities.

Also, due to the high number of learners getting pregnant at an early age and early stages of their education, means a high number of female students do not graduate from high school on time. It is thus recommended for the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare to work with school authorities to make it a priority to reduce the number of learners who drop out of school due to pregnancy. Reducing learner pregnancy will improve school graduation rates and enable female learners to graduate on time and/or continue with tertiary education.

Finally, this research was designed with the intention that once the findings are revealed, interventions would be developed to improve high school completion rates of female learners. One of the interventions that would be useful in addressing learner pregnancy is introducing family planning in early grades for learners to claim their reproductive rights rather than depend on their parents or adults in the community. Such an intervention should involve health professionals across the region, to assist schools in educating young people on the importance and correct use of contraceptives.

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