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Sexual Violence and Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa's Secondary Schools

Zanele Zuma, PhD^{1*}, Gabi Mkhize, PhD²

¹The College of Humanities NHISS Postdoc, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

²Gender Studies, Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

**Corresponding author*

ABSTRACT

Research shows that up to one-third of adolescent girls report forced sexual initiation, with pregnancy often occurring as a consequence of their first sexual experience. In Africa, the rates of sexual violence and teenage pregnancy are rising alarmingly, posing a significant barrier to girls' educational attainment. Most incidents of sexual violence, however, remain unreported, perpetuating a culture of silence. This paper is centred on research that utilised a qualitative methodology to investigate the link between sexual violence and teenage pregnancy among girls in secondary schools. Data was gathered through focus groups and semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. The study is anchored in nego-feminism and liberal feminist theory. Nego-feminism, emphasising an African-centered feminist approach, calls for dialogue around issues affecting girls, such as culturally embedded practices that contribute to teenage pregnancy, while encouraging male participation in these discussions. Liberal feminist theory advocates for equal power distribution between genders, thus supporting girls' rights to autonomy and education. The paper's findings highlight a strong correlation between sexual violence and teenage pregnancy, with forced sexual initiation contributing significantly to pregnancy rates. Poverty is identified as a catalyst for teenage pregnancy within rural communities, exacerbating school dropout rates and jeopardising the academic futures of affected girls. The paper thus recommends enforcing stringent educational laws to monitor girls' school attendance, as well as revisiting policies and raising awareness of sexual violence as a form of gender-based violence. These measures are critical to supporting the educational advancement of young girls and addressing the systemic barriers imposed by sexual violence and culturally specific practices.

Keywords: Education, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, motherhood

✉ info@ssmeconf.org

🌐 www.ssmeconf.org