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Life Orientation and Adolescent Pregnancy in Selected Secondary Schools in Blue Crane Route Municipality, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Adolescent pregnancy among the students has become a growing concern for the communities and a life orientation was instituted by the Department of Education as a preventive measure. The aim of the study was to explore the relation between life orientation and adolescent pregnancies in the selected secondary schools in the Blue Crane Route Municipality. Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted with the students, social workers and the life orientation educators. The data were analysed thematically using content analytic techniques. The findings revealed that life orientation did not reduce adolescent pregnancies in the Blue Crane Route Municipality. Furthermore, the majority of the youth within this municipality lived in extreme poverty and opt falling pregnant at an early age to receive a social grant (child support grant) as a means of income for the household. Also, despite being educated on contraception as the means of pregnancy prevention, the students did not use the contraception especially condoms because of the peer-pressure. Therefore, massive unemployment in this Municipality led to the poverty stricken households with its many ramifications. It is recommended that it would be beneficial to this Municipality to request health care practitioners to visit the high schools at least once per month to avail contraception to the female students.

INTRODUCTION

Life Orientation acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of the human being, it is aimed at developing and engaging the learners in personal, psychological, Neuro-cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural and the socio-economic areas, so that they can achieve their full potential in the new democracy of South Africa (Department of Education 2013). This learning area is furthermore intended to promote social justice, human rights, and inclusiveness, as well as a healthy environment (Department of Education 2013). Life orientation plays a very significant role in the lives of the adolescents, the subject forms part of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement it aims at equipping the students with skills on sexual and emotional development (Green and Condy 2016). The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement identifies students at the greatest risk of getting pregnant includes those students repeating grades, those frequently absent from school, those with a history of childhood sexual or physical abuse, those engaging in a substance abuse and those living under conditions of extreme poverty. According to Clark et al. (2012), sexual activity by woman before marriage is increasing commonly due to westernization in the rural areas. Furthermore, Berhan and Berhan (2015) explained that the consequence of adolescence sexual behaviour was a challenge for every generation and would probably continue to persist in the future due to the high percentages of at risk youth in the rural areas. This is no different within the Blue Crane Route Municipality; students have ample opportunities to intermingle with the opposite sex at school functions with limited adult supervision. Adeboye et al. (2016) found that whilst conducting their research of risky sexual behaviour in the Eastern Cape 55.2 percent of the female respondents had sexual intimacy before the age of nineteen years. From a total of two-hundred-and-thirteen respondents both male and female students in the secondary school 72.8 percent of the students reported not using any form of contraception (condoms, the pill or an injection).

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There are two overwhelmed factors that perpetuate unsafe sexual behaviour in adolescents and include self-esteem and peer pressure. Research has shown that low self-esteem is associated with an earlier commencement of sexual activity and having more sexual partners. It has been suggested that people having a low self-esteem and females in particular, may rely on others for affirmation, which may encourage them to search for external affirmation through multiple sexual encounters. Research has also indicated that the young people with a low self-esteem may be more concerned about how they may be perceived by their partners, and more prone to anxieties concerning incurring the displeasure of their partners, or being rejected by them, than more self-confident and self-reliant people might be. Females having a low self-esteem are more likely to think condoms may be offensive to their partners and that their partners may perceive them as dirty (Varga 2009).

Problem Statement

Adolescent pregnancy is a global phenomenon destroying the lives of the young people across the globe worldwide. According to Boult and Cunningham (1996), early childbearing has negative socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences for adolescents and life orientation studies can promote awareness of this. Life orientation forms a part of the new curriculum at the schools, it is a compulsory subject for learners from 4 up till grade 12. Sex education forms a major part of Life orientation and it was formulated with the aim of decreasing the numbers of adolescent pregnancies nationwide (Kirby 2002). Since life orientation was introduced to schools in the year 2000 rates of adolescent pregnancies has increased by 12 percent annually (Annual report 2012/2013). The research questions that helped in achieving the goal of the study were: How adequate was the course content of Life orientation in helping the adolescents in their sexual life? What factors enhance pregnancies in the municipality?

Review of Literature

Life orientation focuses specifically on comprehensive Sex Education. Comprehensive sex education programs that start in pre-school classes and continue through to Grade 12. These programs offer medically accurate information on a broad set of topics related to sexuality, including human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception and disease prevention, and this information is presented in a manner that is appropriate to the age and the developmental stage of the learners to whom it is given. These programs provide students with the opportunities for acquiring and sharing accurate information with the peers (Chavez and Wickerman 2013). For an effective implementation of Life orientation the Department of Education introduced the following criteria to reduce the adolescent pregnancies: Adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses both abstinence and safe-sex practices, rather than an abstinence-only focus. The focus of the program (abstinence or safe-sex) should be dependent on the stage of development or the age of the learner, rather than on the grade. This would ensure that learners who are old for their grade owing to have repeated several grades, an acknowledged factor increasing the risk of both dropping out of school and pregnancy, would receive the message in a form appropriate to their stage of development (Kirby 2009). Furthermore, focusing on both the biological and social risk factors, such as gender power relations, poverty and dropping out of school early, which influence the rates of early pregnancy (Kirby et al. 2007).

Causes and Implications of Adolescent Pregnancy

Chavez and Wickerman (2013) list a number of risk factors that contribute to conception before the age of 18. These factors include unsafe sexual activity, insufficient use of contraception, multiple sexual partners, substance and drug abuse, insufficient access to accurate information, poor attendance and bad performance at school, dropping out of school, low family income and single parent families. Adolescent pregnancy is a most important concern for every health care system, for the simple reason that an early pregnancy can have harmful implications for girls' physical and psychological conditions and economic and social status. It has been found that adolescent mothers often receive poor antenatal care as they tend not to keep their antenatal appointments (Planned Parent Association of South Africa 2008). They tend to

deliver low birth-weight babies, premature babies and babies who die within the first year of their lives. In addition, the infant mortality and morbidity rates are higher for infants delivered by adolescent mothers than those for infants delivered by the older women (Planned Parent Association of South Africa 2008). It is also more likely that these children will be raised in single parent families and live in poverty with a high probability of these living conditions being aggravated by the mother repeatedly falling pregnant; this causes an escalation of juvenile delinquency amongst the youth (Lopez et al. 2016). Studies have shown (Chavez and Wickerman 2013) that an early motherhood is associated with the low educational achievement, long term dependence on grants and benefits, low or no income, low occupational status or unemployment, a terminally disastrous state of affairs for the adolescent girl falling victim to these circumstances. There are various problems associated with adolescent pregnancy the two main issues are: Educational problems associated with adolescent pregnancies and psycho-social problems associated with adolescent pregnancy.

Educational Problems Associated with Adolescent Pregnancies

Globally, around fifteen million women under the age of 20 give birth, representing up to one-fifth of all the births and 529,000 young women (students) die due to the pregnancy and childbirth related complications every year (Dev Raj et al. 2012). Bridges and Alford (2013: 21) maintained that though students who were involved in adolescent pregnancy experienced difficulties or challenges such as STIs or HIV as major obstacles to their academic success, schools had the opportunity to help students avoid these barriers to success. They further stated that on the one hand, comprehensive sex education can help students protect their sexual health, promote academic performance and help them avoid negative outcomes while on the other hand, adolescent pregnancy has a profound effect on the school performance in that a higher percentage of adolescent mothers fail to complete school than adolescents who do not have children, for example, "less than one-third of teens who begin families before age 18 ever complete high school."

The potential for educational achievement is severely compromised by an early child bearing for both the teen parent and the child. Children born to teen mothers are also more likely to have lower test scores in mathematics and reading, and are more likely required to repeat grades at the school (Kirby 2002). Unfortunately, it has also been found that the low level of education achieved by the mother is correlated positively with the tendency to engage in negative and destructive behaviours, such as involvement in gangs and drug use (Kirby 2002). Although it is possible to ensure that teen mothers continue their education after childbearing in order to reduce these tendencies, research shows that adolescent parents do not achieve educational goals if their achievements are compared with those of their childless peers (Kirby et al. 2007). Teen fathers drop out of high school at a greater rate than their male peers do (Klein 2008). Although some adolescent fathers are not involved in the rearing of their children, many do attempt to play an active role in parenting and providing financial support for their children, which may constitute part of the reason for fathers having similar rates of dropping out of school to those of the mothers (Kirby 2002). The interruption of schooling that may accompany the 'adolescent pregnancy' is seen as problematic both internationally and in South Africa as it may limit the young mother's future career prospects, thereby contributing to a lower socio-economic status for her and her child (Klein 2008).

Psycho-social Problems Associated with Adolescent Pregnancy

It has been found that for the children of adolescents the risk of being victims of child abuse is higher than it is for other children (Hallman et al. 2009). For these children there is also the increased risk of other undesirable experiences, such as poverty and incarceration as a result of juvenile delinquency. Children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to live in poverty than children born to adults, resulting in their beginning life in deprived circumstances which are very difficult to escape (Harrison 2008). When compared with boys born to adult mothers, boys born to adolescent mothers have a higher tendency towards drug use and membership of gangs, and are more likely to become fathers at a young age (Hallman et al. 2009).

Moreover, research data suggests that if adolescents were to delay the timing of their first born until they were in their 20s, the chances of their sons being incarcerated would be reduced, and it is estimated that this would in turn result in the prison population being reduced by four percent (World Health Organisation 2004). Teenage girls born to teenage mothers are more likely to have children at a younger age compared with their peers born to adult mothers (Harrison 2008). Children of adolescents are also more likely to engage in behaviours which have negative connotations for the society, such as truancy, engaging in fights at school and at work and an earlier sexual debut when compared with children of older parents (Harrison 2008). Adolescent parents have also been found to be more likely to maltreat their children than other parents (Hallman et al. 2009). This is borne out by the fact that adolescent parents are involved in a disproportionately high percentage of child abuse and child neglect cases.

Department of Education's Measures for Assisting High Risk Adolescents

In the Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (2007), a range of both prevention and management procedures were laid out. The prevention measures include:

- Educating learners about the likely outcomes of sexual activity and assisting them to make choices concerning their health and educational opportunities.
- Support and guidance to the vulnerable or troubled learners.
- An emphasis on the life skills program contained in the life orientation curriculum.
- Allocating suitable educators to the Life skills programs and introducing peer education programs.
- Encouraging the involvement of the parents and the guardians through the school's governing channels and developing the school's code of conduct, and educating parents and guardians through newsletters, circulars and meetings, workshops and community activities.

The principles guiding the management on the cases of pregnancy included:

1. Dealing with cases confidentially.
2. Adopting an inclusive approach to education.
3. Safeguarding the educational interests of the learner.

The procedures recommended when a pregnancy occurred were:

1. A learner should inform a designated educator immediately if she falls pregnant.
2. The learner should be referred to a health clinic or centre, and the learner should furnish the school with a record of showing regular attendance.
3. Learners should be made aware that the medical staff cannot handle the delivery of babies at school. Learners may be required to take a leave of absence from the school to attend to pre or post-natal health concerns and to carry out the initial childcare duties. No pre-determined time is given, but it is suggested that a period of absence of up to two years may be necessary. No learner may be re-admitted in the same year that she left school owing to a pregnancy (Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy 2007).

Theoretical Framework

This research adopted Bandura's social cognitive theory which emphasized the social origins of behaviour in addition to the cognitive thought processes that influenced the human behaviour and functioning. Bandura "states that learning can occur simply through the observation of behavioural models and in the absence of reinforcement" (Bandura 1997: 5). Sex education as a division of life orientation in the Blue Crane Route Municipality aims to assist adolescents to identify the factors and behaviours that contribute to and can result in pregnancy through literature and observation, and to teach them methods to avoid pregnancy in order to reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies. Bandura (1997: 56) stressed that reinforcement from the external environment was not the only factor influencing learning and behaviour. He described intrinsic reinforcement as a form of internal reward, which could be manifested in feelings such as pride, a sense of ability, strength, and satisfaction or of accomplishment. For the purposes of this study, this means that life orientation should equip adolescents with the knowledge needed to make independent decisions. As adolescent's progress through the various stages, they develop cognitively and acquire better decision-making skills which make

it easier to set goals. Sex education programs that take into account the developmental stages have been found to be more effective in the long term. Many state laws concerning sex education require information about sexuality to be age appropriate (Patel 2005). Therefore, the social cognitive theory also maintains that not all observed behaviours will in fact be mimicked.

Legislative Framework

Along with the theoretical framework was the legislative framework of the Children's Act, the Sexual Offences Act and the Child Justice Act form the legislative framework which protects children under the age of 18 from sexual offences. The Sexual Offences Act, No. 32 of 2007, serves to protect adolescent girls under the age of 16 who fall pregnant. The Sexual Offences Act No. 32 (15) of 2007 rules that it is an offence to engage in a sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 16 years, male or female, regardless of whether the act is consensual or non-consensual. The Act aims to protect the children against rape and indecent assault.

The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 stated under the present justice system, a crime such as rape committed by a minor results in a charge of juvenile delinquency and, if convicted, the child is incarcerated with other minors until the age of eighteen years and then given a prison sentence. This aids in reducing the numbers of pregnancies and protecting adolescents against forceful sexual intercourse. Primarily the Children's Act 38 of 2005 clearly stipulates the rights and responsibilities of a child. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (135) stated that children have the right to contraceptives, "no person may refuse to sell condoms to a child over the age of 12 years; or to provide a child over the age of 12 years with condoms on request where such condoms are provided or distributed free of charge.

METHODOLOGY

This section of the paper briefly describes the research design; study area; population, sample and sampling strategy; instruments of data collection and methods of data analysis and the ethical issues that were considered while conducting the study.

Research Design

Based on the problem that was investigated, the research design was exploratory in nature; hence using a qualitative method of data collection was best suited for this study. Qualitative approach "is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct and methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem where the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyse words, reports, detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Srivastava and Thomson 2009).

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Blue Crane Route Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This Municipality consisted of a number of settlements: Somerset East, including Aeroville, Mnandi, New Brighton, Westview and Clevedon; cook-house including Bongweni and Newtown; and Pearston including Nelsig and Khanyiso. There were five secondary schools within this municipality from which four were public schools and one was a private school. The schools were multi-racial and the majority of the coloured and black learners came from poor socioe-conomic backgrounds and attended public schools. Adolescent pregnancies were a major problem in the schools as well as the school drop outs.

Population, Sample and Sampling Strategy

The population was made up of all adolescent girls in the secondary schools doing grade 11 in the Blue Crane Route Municipality and all life orientation educators in the municipality and the social workers provided life skills programs at the schools. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of adolescent girls. "Purposive sampling is choosing participants who reflect most of the characteristics of the general population" (Punch 2005:28). In this research, a sample of 25 grade 11 adolescent girls, were taken from four schools, participants were selected with the help of educators that implies that knowledgeable and informed students were chosen. Assistance from educators in the school was used, to select students. The grade 11 life orientation educators from all the schools within the municipality were selected. Hence, the sample

of this study were the 25 grade 11 female students, 5 Life orientation educators from the various schools and 4 social workers from the Child Welfare Somerset East. However, the sample of grade 11 adolescent was reached after there was a saturation of the ideas that were under discussion.

Instruments of Data Collection and Method of Data Analysis

The data collection instruments that were used were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The data collection methods observed the ethical principles of research and the methods of data collection, which included "talking to participants in person (interviews); discussing issues with multiple research participants at the same time in a small-group setting (focus groups discussions/interviews); and examine how research participants act in natural and structured environments (observation)" (Denzin and Lincoln 2102). The thematic approach as described by Rubin and Rubin (2012) was followed in analysing the interviews. The process involved reading the interview transcripts after transcribing the recordings and coding the descriptive concepts that emerged from the focus group interviews that were conducted. The researchers organised individual ideas into categories that shared similar concepts. This was accomplished by reading through the different interviews and identifying individual ideas that shared the same meaning and used quotations from the participants to confirm the themes identified. These ideas were grouped together into themes that were then formulated on the basis of concepts that emerged from the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

The importance of ethical considerations has been emphasized by Kumar (2008: 239) when he elucidates that "ethical issues arise from an interaction of a researcher with people and the environment, especially at the point where there is a potential or actual conflict of interests". Taking these elements into account all participants were requested to sign an informed consent form. An ethical clearance certificate was provided to the schools. Finally, the University of Fort Hare Ethics Committee approved the topic for the research and granted the researchers with a clearance certificate as a permission to conduct the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper handles the findings gathered from this study. These findings are presented thematically. The themes discussed in the course content of sex education, which is described as adequate and contraception, which plays a very important role in reducing pregnancies and adolescent pregnancies as related to the socio-economic causes.

Theme One: Course Content of Sex Education is Adequate and Contraception Plays a Very Important Role in Reducing Pregnancies

Sex education in schools across South Africa should be age-appropriate, medically accurate information on the dangers of adolescent pregnancies, discussion of topics related to sexuality, including puberty, human development, building positive relationships, decision making, contraception, and disease prevention (Haberland and Rogow 2015). The department of education found that the more information the students received in the schools, the lower the pregnancy rates of adolescents will be. Eight adolescents found sex education to be adequate to them. One of the participants explained that:

Sex education is adequate because most things that are taught in school is what happens outside that makes it easy to relate to what teachers are explaining and to participate in class discussions.

Comprehensive sex education provided holistic information on the human sexuality and sexual health which was very helpful to the adolescents to assist them in dealing with the phase of the development from childhood to adulthood. Furthermore; life orientation educated students on not only pregnancy but also on issues that occurred in the everyday life which they could relate to in avoiding inequality in the relationships. Twenty adolescent participants explained that when they discuss sexuality with their peers, everyone participated in the conversation some based on experience and some based on theory. One adolescent participant went on explaining that:

Sex education plays a big role, as it can help avoid stumbling blocks in relationships and advantaged and have poor expectations with regard to either their education or the job market.

The socio-economic consequences that were identified were: Adolescent parents and their children are at an increased risk of poverty; lack of knowledge; alcohol and drug abuse; absence of biological parents; low self-esteem; peer pressure; children raising children; child support grant; poverty and crime; sexual assault; and exposure to sex through media at an early age. The skills of Life orientation educators need to be evolved as education is the key to addressing all causes relating to adolescent pregnancies. In South Africa there is a shortage of both educators and social workers. A shortage of educators and social workers hampers the learning and curtails cognitive development in the students. In order to bridge the gap the government departments associated with the specific trades need to evolve and evaluate the syllabuses related to sex education on an annual basis. In doing so educators and social workers are provided with the opportunities to enhance their expertise and students are provided with holistic information pertaining to the subjects relating to sexuality.

Theme Three: Health Risks Related to Adolescent Pregnancies

Life orientation, specifically sex education educates students of the health risks associated with childbearing at an early age. The majority of the participants were aware of the health risks involved in adolescent pregnancy. One of the adolescent participants explained that:

In our life orientation class the educator informed us what the health risks are should we fall pregnant at an early age. The risk most focussed on is low birth weight and I could relate because most young people I see whom are pregnant are extremely small built.

The literature review confirmed the findings that low birth weight is one of the health risks associated with adolescent pregnancy. Furthermore, there are various risks involved in the early conception these include anaemia, hypertension, low birth weight, premature labour, urinary infections that could lead to renal failure (Sucui et al. 2016). All these risks were mentioned to the students in the schools to prevent them from getting into a risky situation without knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of the study, some conclusions have been drawn.

When analysing the causes of adolescent pregnancies poverty is one major cause along with low self-esteem and peer pressure. The economic downturn has greatly enhanced children's dropping out of school without completing their education. Students need to be encouraged and supported by the social workers; educators and the community so that they follow their dreams to become independent. Until students are convinced to work hard on getting educated, the vicious cycle of poverty will not stop and people will continue to do low wage jobs. There is a shortage of human resources in the Blue Crane Route Municipality. This makes it difficult for the role players to play an active part in pregnancy prevention. There are still major inequalities among the students in private schools and those in government schools. The total number of students in a class is fifty plus in government schools and thirty maximum in the private schools. Also, the administration is well organized in the private school and chaotic with the shortage of educators in the government schools. Adolescent pregnancy has a repetitive history where children of adolescents become adolescent parents themselves. This increases the poverty rates in the country as adolescents have to drop out of schools and without proper education many of these adolescents live below the breadline in overpopulated households.

Sexual assault is a major cause of pregnancy and it does not get reported as it is an offence to have sexual encounters with a child under the age of 16. Students do not report instances of sexual assault because the perpetrators are not punished by the criminal justice system instead the victims are interrogated by the police officials. Adolescent participants explained that when some of their peers went to report cases of sexual assault the police officials cursed them out and told them to stop chasing money and there was no document for investigation filled. Many girls in the various schools had experienced this and lost faith in the criminal justice system which gave the perpetrators freedom to do as they pleased and not be punished for their

deeds. With the escalation of pregnancies the rates of crime would continue to increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are presented based on the findings and conclusions of the study:

- Social workers (school social workers) should be employed at schools to undertake interventions with the students experiencing social problems.
- The Department of Social Development and Special Programs along with the Department of Education should look at employing more educators skilled in Life orientation and more social workers.
- Substance abuse is a major cause of adolescent pregnancy, owners of taverns should be approached and reminded of the no alcohol for sale to persons under the age of eighteen rule. Police should actively play their role in monitoring this process along with the parents of the children visiting taverns.
- Awareness campaigns on adolescent pregnancies and the impact it has on one's life should be hosted in schools and communities continuously.
- Students should be educated on the Sexual Offences Act 32 of 2007 to bring about awareness that sexual assault is wrong and should be reported.
- Life orientation is adequate as most students found that some of the things they encounter in their everyday life, it is just not effective in reducing adolescent pregnancies.
- The curriculum of life orientation should be re-evaluated and adjusted accordingly by the Department of Education as the curriculum is implemented but the outcome remains poor.

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