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Cultural Ramifications on the Educability of Pregnant and Parenting Learners at Four South African High Schools

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Abstract. The study investigated how the socio-cultural and traditional practices of school-based education duty-bearers influenced the educational access and participation of pregnant and parenting learners (PPLs) who chose to continue with schooling after falling pregnant. Using a qualitative case study research design, four high schools with high rates of girl pregnancy from one South African education district were purposively selected. The participants included 8 school governing body (SGB), 8 school management team (SMT), 8 pregnant-monitoring teachers (PMT), 8 class teachers, 8 PPLs and 8 mainstream learners who schooled with PPLs. Data were collected through individual interviews for PPLs for their confidentiality, and focus group interviews for all the other participants. Study results indicated that due to cultural, traditional perceptions and practices, the South African national education policy measures on the prevention and management of learner pregnancy which allows schoolgirls to return to school after giving birth was loosely observed and implemented at the schools. The reasons for these are; a) Negative attitudes of teachers and mainstream to PPLs; b) Domestication of motherhood and childrearing by community; c) Mythological discernment of PPLs by mainstream learners; d) Character contamination; and e) Femininity as a negative label on PPLs in a formal school setting. Thus, from the findings, it is recommended that school-based duty bearers be trained on democratic education policy frameworks and their implementation strategies, to benefit the vulnerable children such as PPLs, among others.

Keywords: pregnant learners; parenting learners; cultural practices; policy duty bearers; teen motherhood

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1. Background of the study

There is interwoven relationship between traditionalism, conservatism, and patriarchy in most cultures, that socialise and perpetuate gender stereotyping, gender bias, gender discrimination and gender inequality. All these socio-cultural factors influence the educational access, participation and outcomes of girls who choose to continue with schooling after falling pregnant and giving birth (Runhare, 2010; Hussain, Naz, Khan, Daraz, & Khan, 2015; Mutekwe & Modiba, 2012: Runhare, Kanaga-Majanga, & Mathebula, 2021). Since culture is part of the hidden school curriculum, we undertook this study with the assumption that pregnant and parental learners experience schooling differently from other learners because of how culture and traditional practices on pregnancy and childbearing in the South African societal context affects them as learners. Like in many culturally conservative societies in Africa, schools in South Africa are agents of gender socialisation which promote the notion that childbearing and care are domestic chores that are reserved for girls and women (Ossai, 2017; Vineetha, 2017). In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, it is noted that South Africa is one country with the high rate of teenage pregnancy (Runhare & Hwami,2014). However, as a mitigation measure, the country has since democratised educational access to allow PPLs to continue with schooling before and after giving birth (Department of Education, 2007). This has resulted in many schools, especially in rural South Africa recording high population of enrolled PPLs, who must cope with the difficulties of being both parents and learners (Runhare, Kanag-Majanga & Mathebula, 2021; Chigona & Chetty, 2008). This study was therefore undertaken with the concern that giving basic access to schooling for PPLs without addressing challenges to educational participation and outcomes is not an adequate intervention to their educational needs and aspirations.

2. Theoretical and Literature Study

2.1 Theoretical Landscape

The study was underpinned on liberal feminist theory, which Giddens (2001, p. 692), defines as "a theory which believes that gender inequality is produced by reduced access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment". Mohajan (2022) adds that liberal feminism works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women to make society more responsive to women rights. Liberal feminism recognises that agencies of socialisation such as family, the education system and the mass media socialise women into subordinate roles and men into dominant roles (Stromquist, 2005). In this study we regarded the school as an important agent of gender socialisation on how PPLs are perceived and treated in a way that negatively impacted on their educational opportunity and life chances. The liberal feminists emphasise on the limitations in women`s life opportunities resulting from gender socialisation and stereotypes (Zhang & Rios, 2022), which this study investigated. Zhang and Rios (2021), posit that liberal feminists aim for gradual change in the political, economic, and social systems of societies by providing more rights to women in all spheres of life.

Liberal feminists regard the goal of feminism as the achievement of formal gender equality under international and national law. This is imbodied in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Bill of Rights Section 9(3), which provides that the state must not discriminate against any person based on aspects such as gender, sex, pregnancy, and marital status (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Liberal feminists advocate for fair allocation of resources so that women can access equal rights and freedom to political, economic, and socio-cultural opportunities in society (Samkange, 2015; Zhang & Rios, 2022). Accordingly, (Stromquist, 2005, p. 10) posits that liberal feminists seek to "protect the equal rationality of the sexes by strongly emphasising the significance of structuring the social, family, and sexual roles in ways that endorse women`s independent self-fulfilment". In line with the liberal feminism theory, for this study we regarded the school-based education stakeholders that participated in the study as important socialisation agents on the PPLs' realisation and their fulfilment of their educational aspirations.

Since culture is part of and has influence on school curriculum, the main objective of our study was to investigate the impact of cultural and traditional practices on the teaching and learning of pregnant and parenting learners within a formal or conventional school setting at four South African high schools that faced the problem of high school girl pregnancy.

2.2 The impact of gender inequality in education on PPLs

The social facts that influence the attitudes and treatment of teenage motherhood are culturally embedded gender socialization, gender bias and gender stereotyping (Hussain, Naz, Khan, Daraz, & Khan, 2015). We therefore argue and illustrate how girls who fall pregnant while at school and childbirth outside marriage are culturally stigmatised in traditionally conservative social systems within African socio-cultural setting. Currently, South Africa has a scourge of gender-based violence (Mile, 2020; Enaifoghe, Dlelana, Durokifa & Dlamini, 2021), which in our view is founded on the cultural and patriarchal perceptions and treatment of women as subordinates within the patriarchal socio-cultural setting. Gender-based violence (GBV) starts with non-violent aspects that are socially and culturally transmitted from childhood by institutions of society such as the family, the peer-group, and the formal school system. In the formal school setting, teachers and classmates can be influential in socialising culturally embedded gender stereotypes, gender bias, gender inequality and gender discrimination against their PPL counterparts. Using narratives from study participants, we therefore illustrate how these gender-based conceptualisations influenced the perceptions and treatment of PPLs by school-based education stakeholders within the formal school setting. Hussain et al, (2015) posit that gender stereotyping and gender socialisation are socio-culturally correlated constructs, which are developed and indoctrinated to members of a society in the institutional social frameworks and networks such as the family, peer-group, and the school during social interaction. Gender stereotyping, which is the acting towards someone based on a biased perception and judgement of a person's physiological nature and gender attributes associated to one's sex in a particular social group (Agars, 2004; Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). In most societies,

patriarchy continues to influence the subordination of femininity to masculinity in both the private and public spheres, and to reduce women to domesticity and family care. In the same vein, our study seeks to illustrate that pregnant and parenting learners who choose to continue with schooling are perceived by some of the school-based education stakeholders to be unwelcome in a formal school setup.

2.3 Influence of gender socialisation on PPLs

Socialisation in any society is the powerful means of sustaining the social fabric and continued existence of that society. However, within the scope of socialisation is gender socialisation, namely how children of different sexes are taught appropriate behaviour that align them into their respective gender roles in a particular social group (Hamieh & Usta, 2011). It is through gender socialisation that gender stereotyping is manifested whereby boys and men are expected to perform outdoor and productive activities while girls and women are expected to perform domestic chores (Runhare, 2003; Kambarami, 2006; Zinyemba, 2013). It is patriarchal socialisation that restrain women to participate equally with men in the public spheres of life (Zinyemba, 2013). In the patriarchal social system, masculinity and femininity are positive and negative gender labels respectively. It is through gender socialisation that a girl or boy learns to behave appropriately through rewards and punishment for the socially and culturally approved behaviour. Similarly, the negative perceptions and treatment of girls who fall pregnant while at school is viewed as appropriate in a formal school system (Runhare, 2010; Runhare & Vandeyar, 2012; Runhare, Kanaga-Majanga & Mathebula, 2021). This could imply that formal schools may be an unfriendly and insensitive environment to PPLs.

Infused in the conservative societal plight of girls who fall pregnant while at school is gender bias, which is the different portrayal and treatment of men and women which differentiate their socio-economic opportunities (Reeves & Baden, 2000; Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta & Bhukuvhani, 2012). Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (2015) posit that gender socialisation perpetuates gender bias by defining and assigning masculine roles as superior to feminine roles. It is in this regard that socialisation institutions, key among them, the family and the school are instrumental passing on norms and practices that foster and contribute to men domination and women subordination in patriarchal societies. The school environment is therefore gendered and biased in favour of males in its structure and functioning and there is invisible advocacy for democratic rights for girls who are teen mothers to exercise their educational rights (Runhare & Vandeyar, 2012). Gender bias is therefore embedded in the school culture and could be responsible for limiting PPLs' educational access and participation within a formal school system.

2.4 Equity versus equality on educational access by gender

One of the United Nations (UN) goals that has evaded the international organisation over the years is bridging the gender inequality between men and women in basic education by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015 (Runhare & Hwami, 2014). This implies the need for promotion of gender equity or fair

treatment of men and women taking into consideration their historical and social contexts that may result in advantages or disadvantages in access to and participation in education and other socio-economic opportunities in the public spheres of life (Reeves & Baden, 2000). Gender equality cannot be achieved without gender equity, and in this regard, the extent to which PPLs are perceived and treated for accessing and participating in formal schooling need serious consideration and review by education stakeholders. Gender equality is the socio-economic condition in which men and women share the same opportunities, rights, power, status, and participation in both the private and public spheres (Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta & Bhukuvhani, 2012). When girls who may fall pregnant during their schooling are not given equal access to formal schooling, gender inequality in education could be prevalent, and this is common in poor communities. The need for legal frameworks and strategies that uphold the democratise formal schooling for teenagers who may fall pregnant while at school and wish to continue with their education have emerged in most African countries (Runhare & Hwami, 2014). It is in this regard that Rolleri (2013) calls for the need to rethink and recheck about policy alignment to programmes that promote equality of men and women in sharing life opportunities in the public socio-economic sectors. Gender inequality in maths, science and technology is one area of concern, especially in developing nations where boys still have an urge over girls and the extent to which PPLs who continue with their schooling leave school with positive learning outcomes is still another area of concern.

Added to the negative aspects of gender is gender discrimination, which is different and unfavourable treatment of individuals based on their gender, resulting in denial of basic rights, opportunities, or resources (Obiunu, 2013). It is during day-to-day interaction that gender discrimination is constructed and reinforced as a social fact of a given social group. In the case of PPLs, the way they are perceived and treated by other school stakeholders determines their decision to continue or drop out of school. Thus, gender discrimination or unfair and unfavourable treatment of PPLs can be socialised and reinforced by the socialisation agents such as the family, media, school, and peers during daily interaction (Hussain, et al, 2015). In terms of teachers' attitudes on gender differences and school performance in mathematics and science, it is observed that teachers generally tend to favour boys compared to girls (Lindner, Makarova, Bernhard, & Brovelli, 2022; Badjanova, Pipere, & Iliko, 2017).

Available literature points that the school as a sub-system and socialisation agent of society can play a pivotal role in influencing the educational future of PPLs by the way they are perceived and treated within the formal school setting (Kangethe, Lyria, & Nyamanga, 2014). It is through interaction in the school that certain culturally engendered stereotypes may be socially constructed, repeated, supported, and reinforced on PPLs. This paper discusses observations from gathered data on how cultural facts disadvantaged the educational access, participation, and outcomes of PPLs at four South Africa schools affected by high teenage pregnancy.

3. Methodology

The study employed qualitative research method, which Creswell (2010:47), defines "as an approach that is naturalistic and endeavours to comprehend phenomena in context or the real-world setting". The qualitative research approach was suitable for this study because we wanted to investigate the impact of cultural and traditional practices on the teaching and learning of pregnant and parenting learners within a formal school setting at four South African high schools.

3.1 Research design

Since this study sought to examine the impact of cultural and traditional attitudes and practices on the teaching and learning of PPLs, we chose the qualitative case study research design to gather data which responded to the main research objective. Creswell (2010) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a current entity in the context in which it resides and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Consequently, our study employed multiple and bounded case study sites of four secondary schools that were selected from only one South Africa education district. Therefore, while the study results give an insight into the cultural and traditional perceptions that influenced the treatment and educational opportunity of PPLs, these results should be understood in the context of the four schools and not be taken as the general picture of all South African schools.

3.2 Participants of the study

We employed both purposive and snowball sampling to select relevant informants for the topic under study (Maree, 2011). The four high schools were selected because they experienced a high rate of learner pregnancy and had PPLs who were enrolled. The purposively sampled school-based education stakeholders comprised of 20 SGBs members, 4 SMT, 8 PMTs, 8 class teachers and 20 mainstream learners from the four schools where the study was conducted. The reason for selecting these participants was that all of them experienced interacting with PPLs within a formal school setting. As PPLs needed to be protected on their privacy snowball sampling was used to select the 8 PPLs who volunteered participate and help identify other PPLs who could volunteer to participate (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

3.3 Data collection

In line with the qualitative research approach, the study employed a combination of focus group and individual face-to-face interviews to gather narrative data which are presented verbatim in the form of quotations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). To preserve the confidentiality of PPLs, individual interviews were conducted with them as the issues about study were considered sensitive to them.

We used focus group interviews of eight per group to collect narrative data from SGB members, all categories of educators and mainstream learners as they were not directly affected by the negative effects of teenage pregnancy within a school setting (Robson et al, 2001). In both individualised and focus group interviews, semi-structured questions were used to allow the interviewer flexibility to probe

for details or discuss issues and for new questions to be brought up during the interview (Maree, 2011). The interviews were audio-taped with the full consent of all the participants. The major focus of the interview protocol questions was for participants to express how culture influenced their interaction with PPLs within a formal school setting.

3.4 Ethical quality measures

Since this study involved human subjects, procedures were followed to obtain ethical clearance for their participation from the district and circuit education managers and principals of the four high schools where the study was conducted. The consent of the adult participants, that is; SGB members, SMT members, PMTs and class teachers were also obtained. Informed consent of parents or guardians of the selected PPLs and mainstream learners was similarly granted before we conducted interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Voluntary participation thus entailed informed consent and freedom to withdraw from participation at any stage of the data collection process (Bertram, 2004). Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were upheld by ensuring that study participants and study sites remained anonymous. Accordingly, the four rural high schools were code-named as School A, School B, School C and School D, as well as the participants.

3.5 Data analysis

In research the purpose of data analysis is to present and critique the data, identify what is typical and atypical in the data, bring to light differences, relationships and other patterns existing in the data, and ultimately respond to the research objectives (Creswell, 2002). Inductive analysis of qualitative data was used as it is based on an interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining the meaning and symbolic of the content of the narrative qualitative data, in relation to the study objectives (Patton, 2002). Guided by emerging themes from the narrative interview data, we present verbatim descriptions of how cultural artefacts influenced the perceptions, treatment, and educational participation of PPLs who were enrolled in school at the time of data gathering.

4. Results and Discussion

The study investigated how the socio-cultural and traditional practices influenced the attitudes and treatment of school-based education duty-bearers and the intended learner-beneficiaries on the educational access and participation of PPLs who chose to continue with schooling after falling pregnant. We arranged the gathered data in themes that emerged from the conversations we had with the school-based stakeholders at four rural schools that had a high rate of schoolgirl pregnancy. From the data four themes emerged as follows:

Theme 1: Negative attitudes of teachers and mainstream learners to PPLs
Theme 2: Domestication of motherhood and childrearing for PPLs
Theme 3: Mythological discernment of PPLs by mainstream learners
Theme 4: Character contamination: Bad apples should not mix with good ones.
Theme 5: Femininity as a negative label on PPLs in a formal school setting

4.1 Negative attitudes of teachers and mainstream learners to PPLs

Based on the narrative data collected from the School Management Team (SMTs) members, Pregnancy Monitoring Teachers (PMTs) and class teachers, the study revealed that there some teachers who harboured harmful attitudes towards learning needs of PPLs. The negative attitudes of teachers towards PPLs contradict with South African Council of Educators (SACE) Act 31 of 2000 which states that the conduct of educator is to acknowledge the uniqueness, individuality, and specific needs of each learner, and that teachers must encourage and guide individual learners to recognise their academic and life skills potentials (SACE, 2000). Teachers are a frame of reference or the significant others for learners, their negative labels are most likely to stick on the PPLs. To begin with, the PPLs themselves expressed that they were labelled with terms like, laughing-stock, disgrace to the school and families and failures with no future ahead of them.

Such commonly held stigmatising perceptions were repeatedly mentioned by the PPLs, like one of them who was bitter that; *Some teachers always scold and insult me because I have a child. When I give a wrong answer, teachers remind me about my baby. I also feel so bad when fellow learners laugh at me. I no longer raise my hand during lessons* **[PPL 2, School C].**

The statement above demonstrates the kind of verbal abuse endured by PPLs which in turn negatively influences their learning opportunities. The negative attitudes of teachers demotivated the PPLs, to the extent that they were no longer actively participating during lessons. Such utterances to PPLs in public created a feeling of unworthiness which social behavioural theory on labelling indicates that it results in self-fulfilling prophecy since the label from a teacher who is a significant other person in the life of learners. In other words, once labelled as a failure by teachers, a PPLs will most likely accept the label and become a failure indeed. Research from elsewhere indicates that teen pregnancy, premarital birth and giving birth out of wedlock are viewed as a sign of immorality in most traditional societies (Runhare, 2010; Njogu & Orchadson-Mazrui, 2015.) and therefore could be cause of the negative attitudes towards PPLs in schools.

Name-calling that is informed by traditional and cultural lenses on early marriage and breastfeeding were manifested from what PPLs expressed in their fear of being embraced and stigmatised as young mothers within a formal school setting. As an indication of this, one of the PPLs indicated that teachers discriminated, humiliated, and gave her names because she was a parenting learner. She expressed her embarrassment by revealing that "*When we write a test, when I take time to complete like other learners, they tell me that finish up, "Mama's Baby". One day I felt sick, my class teacher said that I am lying, I wanted to breastfeed my child*" **[PPL1, School D].**

During the colonial African regimes especially in apartheid South Africa, girls who fell pregnant while studying were automatically expelled permanently from school and even from higher education. These utterances were therefore not only humiliating and discriminatory but illustrated the unequal and unfair treatment of PPLs by teachers which could be founded on colonial policy and practices and

made the school environment unfavourable for them to stay and meaningfully participate in school activities.

To collaborate the evidence of misperceptions of PPLs by teachers, some of the pregnancy monitoring teachers (PMTs) and senior management team (SMT) members testified that some extreme negative attitudes of teachers towards PPLs nearly led to the loss of life of one PPL after she was publicly insulted. Precisely, the distressing effects of negative attitudes of teachers towards the PPLs which nearly caused the suicide of one PPL was raised by the SMT member from one of the schools who bemoaned that; "*Some teachers make the PPLs to feel unwanted, unworthy and that also causes psychological problems. In 2016, we had a case where a pregnant girl nearly committed suicide. She was publicly called a "useless person" by a female teacher because of her second pregnancy"* **[SMT, School A]**.

The surprising sentiment that female educators were found to be more verbally abusive and stigmatising to the PPLs than their male counterparts is reported in an earlier study (Runhare, 2010; Dlamini, 2016)). Further to the stigma attached to teem motherhood, the negative attitudes of teachers caused such life-threatening psychological problems to PPLs. In relation to an earlier study by Runhare 2012, it also emerged from this study that the attitudes, sympathy, and educational support of the male teachers to PPLs were better compared with their female counterparts.

It emerged that women are less sympathetic to teen motherhood because they felt like their gender is put into dispute by girls who fall pregnant from older men, as one female senior teacher complained that; *"Most of these girls (PPLs) are totally to blame. Instead of focusing on schooling and careers, they are busy sleeping around with married people, destroying other women's marriages"* **(PMT, School C).**

The statement indicates the traditional and conservative adulthood belief that children must delay their sexual involvement until they are past their schooling and mature enough or follow the delayed gratification approach to human development.

4.2 Domestication of motherhood and childrearing for PPLs

Apart from the negative attitudes of teachers, the study also revealed that other learners also held negative attitudes towards PPLs, and that this was informed by traditional and cultural socialisation on motherhood (Chilisa, 2002). Focus group interviews were conducted to collect narrative data from the mainstream learners who attended school with PPLs. Such learners are expected to give support to their fellow partners, classmates, or schoolmates according to the national school policy guidelines (DoE, 2007).

However, contrary to this expectation, most mainstream learners did not promote a spirit of co-existence with PPLs to benefit from each other as learners the commonly held view was that: "*They (PPLs) are no longer girls, they are mothers. They must be given their own classroom. We don`t want to learn with them"* **[ML1, School B].** From this we can say that such a perception is founded from the

traditional understanding of motherhood and childrearing which are normally home-based activities and domesticate the occupational space of women.

The PPLs on their part revealed that they did not receive any meaningful support from their fellow classmates after getting pregnant when they experienced some learning challenges. Most of them felt excluded and isolated from team membership on schoolwork due to their bigger bellies. One of them felt discouraged that "*My classmates, especially boys, tend to keep a distance from me, while most girls make fun out of my big belly by showing false respect and sympathy*" **[PPL2, School B].**

In African tradition, any woman who is a mother despite her age is supposed to be given due respect and first preference for service in public spheres like the market, shops, public transport, and banks. However, in this study, the PPLs felt that they were being ridiculed rather than being respected by their fellow schoolmates and classmates, as well as by teachers who should protect their well-being and social image.

4.3 Mythological discernment of PPLs by mainstream learners

African cultures and traditional philosophies have myths and riddles that support and strengthen the rationale to socially control members of society (Jaja, 2014). In this study, it was noted that learners who were in the same class with PPLs held culturally socialised beliefs on pregnancy and breastfeeding which had the effect of creating some social distancing with fellow PPLs. The social deviance theory of differential association (Sutherland, 2010) was found generally interpreted by mainstream learners to mean that playing with PPLs would lead to teen pregnancy, which is perceived as a form of deviant behaviour (Runhare, 2010). This influenced PPLs to suffer isolation by fellow schoolgirls as decried by one of the PPLs that; "*When I was pregnant, my classmates openly turned against me and loudly said that they cannot go around with me because they can also become pregnant*" **[PPL1, School D].** Such behaviour by mainstream learners of excluding PPLs from their partnership can be related to what Sutherland (2010, p. 4) indicates opines that "criminal behaviour is learned in a process of communication in intimate groups". In other words, love, and hatred of PPLs can be socially learnt.

Added to the above, disengagement between the PPLs and mainstream learners was also realised through discriminatory statements given by most male mainstream learners who blamed PPLs for turning the school into a maternity hospital, as one of them protested that; "*Our class is now like a maternity section of the school. Teachers must give parenting learners their own class because their breast milk stinks. We don`t want to learn with them"* **[ML1, School B].**

A study by Chilisa (2002) in Botswana revealed similar sentiments whereby childbirth and breastfeeding were associated with motherhood, which school-based stakeholders felt had no place in formal schooling. There was one cultural myth associated with the exclusion of PPLs within a formal school that again surfaced after the same was found out by Runhare and Vandeyar (2011; 2012). At the schools we conducted the study, most pregnant monitoring teachers (PMTs) concurred that there is a strong belief that seating next to a pregnant learner makes

one to sleep. One of the PMTs thus sympathised with PPLs that; "*During breaks, pregnant learners are left alone in the class. During afternoon studies, mainstream learners claim that they feel sleepy, and they can`t concentrate because of the pregnant learners"* **[PMT1, School C].**

4.4 Character contamination: Bad apples should not mix with good ones.
In the same vein, Chigona and Chetty (2008) and Runhare and Vandeyar (2011, 2012) describe the discourse of contamination that develops from the perception that the immorality of the teenage mothers would set a bad example to the student body at school. It was also evident that the presence of pregnant learners was used as an excuse to fall asleep by some mainstream learners, which was traceable from some African culturally driven myths on pregnancy and breastfeeding. The end results of such stereotypical notions are noted by Dlamini (2016) who observed from a related study that young mothers lost friendship and communication from pregnancy and the parenting period.

In this study, mainstream learners indicated that they did not want to learn in the same classroom with PPLs because as mothers they were adults who should have their own social space. Some mainstream learners further complained that PPLs were favoured by the government who gave them child support grants because "*what they eat during breaks, so they must stay at home and enjoy their grants. PPLs must be suspended for two years"* **[ML4, School D].**

Added to that, LO teachers were accused that they gave them marks without participating in physical education periods as one of them remarked that "*these mothers are already favoured by our LO teachers. Teachers give them marks because they cannot participate. They must also participate in sporting activities to get deserved marks*" **[ML3, School A].**

The social antagonist gap between mainstream learners and PPLs was evident in this study, and we attributed this to cultural perception to motherhood in African settings, which interfered against Department of Education policy directive of 2007 on management of schoolgirl pregnancy (Runhare & Vandeyar, 2011, 2012; Dlamini, 2016). The negative impact on PPLs educational participation and outcomes is noted by Makatu (2014) who observed that young mothers need strong support from their friends and when distance is kept by their friends, it becomes severely painful and stressful to young mothers to remain in school. An earlier study further revealed that most young mothers face educational difficulties because of undue pressure from parents, the father of the baby, peers and teachers as well as receiving inadequate support from the school, home, and the entire community (Chigona & Chetty, 2008).

4.5 Femininity as a negative label on PPLs
Most SMT members at all study sites, as part of school management, pointed out that teachers` negative perceptions had an influence on inadequate support to the teaching and learning needs of PPLs. This was found to be informed by cultural and traditional beliefs on teenage pregnancy or pregnancy out of wedlock in African cultures as explained by one educator that "*teachers have their own beliefs,*

values and religions and there is no maximum support given to PPLs due to teachers' poor perceptions towards early pregnancies" **[SMT, School C].**

The negative influence of such perceptions on PPLs was commonly exposed by most class teachers who indicated that the support given to PPLs was a sensitive matter as expressed by one class teacher that "*The academic support given to PPLs is not adequate because it is affected by the personality of the teacher. Some teachers are very sensitive when it comes to premature pregnancy"* **[CT2, School B].** PPL was viewed in this study as a label that led to discrimination and disentangled the affected girls to the extent that legal policy lost its effect to culturally and traditionally informed practices. This culture and school policy contradiction was illustrated by one education in management who pointed out that "*We were just given policy to implement by DoE, no training and teachers have different perceptions on learner pregnancy. They use their own discretions"* **[SMT, School D].**

Another contestation between culture and educational access and participation of PPLs was detected in the complaint from a parental representative in the school management committee that: *In our culture, a pregnant person must not be found all over the places for the sake of her health and that of the unborn baby. How is she going to take a nap if the unborn baby needs to rest inside the class? Pregnant learners must stay at home for the sake of the other learners* **[SGB5, School B].**

Similarly, the continued school attendance by pregnant teenagers was opposed through shared views by most SGB members, one of whom indicated that "*We have our traditional practices which we also need to observe even at schools. School is part of community. Pregnant learners are expected to stay at home until they give birth*" **[SGB2, School C].**

To indicate that allowing schoolgirls who fall pregnant to continue with schooling was too permissive and against tradition, one such sentiment was that "*Before democracy, no schoolgirl could dare consider sleeping with a boy. We were expelled from school if you fall pregnant or impregnate a girl"* **[SGB4, School A].**

The study established that the culture and tradition had a role in the negative effects on the educational freedom for PPLs even though policy allowed them educational access. Runhare and Vanderyar (2011) note that the school is a miniature of the bigger society which shows the socio-cultural patterns of how the entire society is organised and functions. PPLs were treated unfairly, and the national policy guidelines were not implemented consistently because the perceptions of the key duty bearers such as teachers and SGB members were more attentive to and influenced by culture than bureaucratic school policy. Liberal feminists posit that women must obtain equal opportunities and equal rights for a just society as opposed to gender stereotyping and discrimination whereby women access less chances in education, job opportunities and other social dimensions in society (Stromquist, 2001, 2005, 2006), as was noted in this study.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between socio-cultural and traditional social facts, perceptions on schoolgirl pregnancy and motherhood, and educability of PPLs. This study revealed that despite the existence of a well-defined policy on the inclusion of learners who choose to continue with their schooling after getting pregnant, the school-based education duty bearers who should enforce the policy and support the educational needs of the PPLs were found in this study to be violating the policy they should implement. Further, results of the study indicate that the legal right to education for PPLs as provided by the South African Schools Act and the country's Bill of Rights are subordinate or subservient to traditional and cultural practices that inform the attitudes, behaviour, and treatment of PPLs within a formal school setting to the extent that they do not reap meaningful benefits from their continued enrolment. There is confirmation from this study that indeed, pregnant teen girls, who have children and those living with HIV/AIDS are victims of shame and social stigma in schools. From the observed dichotomy between policy and practice and the interference of some harmful cultural and traditional practices into the school curriculum, we recommend that all education school-based leadership in the education district where this study was conducted, and in South Africa as a whole, should be trained to acquire policy literacy and implementation strategies on children's educational rights, as they are the key duty bearers for learners' equal right to education.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that the results of the study may not be generalised to all formal schools in South Africa since the results were based on a case study of only four schools using a limited number of study available voluntary participants. Further, although we carefully followed quality research and ethical measures in the selection of study participants and data collection, our interpretation of the study setting, and participants narratives could be subjective and based on our experiences on the hardships that PPLs face.

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