



**TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND ITS EFFECT ON THE
EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN THE BAWKU WEST DISTRICT OF
THE UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA**

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the International Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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List of Acronyms

GES	Ghana Education Service
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
GHS	Ghana Health Service
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
CHRAJ	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
NCCE	National Commission on Civic Education
AEW	African Education Watch
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
GoG	Government of Ghana
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
MoE	Ministry of Education
ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
MoGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
HRW	Human Rights Watch
WVI	World Vision International
WB	World Bank
ISD	Information Service Department

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Abstract

While the Ghanaian government has made considerable efforts towards child education, teenage pregnancy remains one of the main factors hampering continued education for girls across various communities in the country. The main objective of this study was to examine the causes of teenage pregnancy and its effect on girls' education in the Bawku West district in the Upper East Region of Ghana. A qualitative research methods were employed. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit the study participants. A total of 13 participants were selected including 5 pregnant student girls, 3 teen mothers, 2 non-pregnant student girls, one opinion leader (an assembly man) one girl child officer and one teacher. The findings revealed that occurrence of teenage pregnancy among school girls in the Bawku West district is caused by various factors such as poverty, early marriage, poor parental guidance and support, inadequate information and knowledge about sexual issues, peer influence and unequal gender norms and cultural practices. Furthermore, it was observed that school dropout, poor school performance and limited personal development are major negative effects of teenage pregnancy on girls' education. Therefore, the study suggested that sex education should be given due consideration within the school curriculum to enhance the knowledge and understanding of Ghanaian school children in the study area and the country as a whole about sexual and reproductive health issues.

Relevance to Development Studies

One of the major issues confronting educational development in Ghana today is early pregnancy and child birth among school girls. It was on this basis that the study sought to examine the causes of teenage pregnancy and its effect on girls' education. This study is of significant importance to development studies based on the following. The study contributes to existing literature regarding the relationship between teenage pregnancy and educational development of girls of school going age. The study findings will further help government and policy makers, NGOs and other key stakeholders within the educational sector to design and implement effective policies and programmes to prevent and reduce harmful practices against children and also address teenage pregnancy and its related challenges.

Keywords

Teenage Pregnancy; School Dropout; Early marriage; Education; and Re-entry Policy

CHAPTER ONE: INTROUCTION

1.1: Background of the Study

Teen pregnancy and child bearing are seen to be among most critical problems facing many communities across the world today, especially in developing countries (World Vision International, 2019). Mathebula et al. (2022) posit that “teenage pregnancy and teen motherhood are among the major societal problems which impact negatively on the educational participation and outcomes of women, especially in developing nations” (Mathebula, et al. 2022, p. 593). It has been revealed that across developing countries, about 21 million girls within aged 15 and 19 years get pregnant and about 12 million of them give birth every year (World Health Organisation, 2024).

Also, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that teen pregnancy and early childbearing account for 70,000 deaths in developing countries annually (UNFPA, 2013). Were (2007) revealed that early pregnancies and childbearing are more pronounced among Sub-Saharan African countries (SSA), facing high poverty rates. In addition, Kons et al. (2022) revealed that in the sub-Saharan African region, many girls are at a greater risk of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy due to persistent poverty, low educational attainment, and patriarchal gendered norms.

Like most other parts of the developing world, Ghana, the sub-Saharan African country is also grabbling with teenage pregnancy and early child bearing among young women and school girls. For instance, it has been reported that 69.4% of unintended pregnancies occur among young Ghanaian girls (Bain et al., 2020). Also, the most recent 2022 *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey* (2022 GDHS) revealed that 15% of Ghanaian young women and girls’ women aged 15 and 19 years were found to have ever been pregnant, 11% have had a live birth, and that of 2% were found to be pregnant during the time of the survey (GSS, 2024). It was also reported that about 109,888 school girls in Ghana got pregnant during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (ActionAid, 2022). The same report also disclosed that the number of girls who got pregnant during the period were far more that those infected by the virus (ActionAid, 2022). Further, according to the Ghana Education Service (2018), early pregnancy among school girls is one of the gender related barriers preventing girls from completing their education.

The underlying causes of teenage pregnancy in Ghana include poor parental guidance and support, sexual abuse and violence, broken homes or family dissolution, inadequate knowledge about sexual and reproductive health (Awusabo et al., 2006). A 2017 MoGCSP report states that gender roles and stereotypes also contribute in affecting the girls educational progress and economic empowerment making them more liable to early marriage and early pregnancies. Similarly, Dery et al. (2022) assert that gender inequality norms play a major role in Ghanaian young women and girls vulnerability to early pregnancy and teen motherhood. The authors added that among the Konkomba and Nanumba ethnic groups in northern Ghana, young and adolescent girls are particularly at high risk of early pregnancy and child birth, as the patriarchal and culture norms of these groups see men as superior and more dominant than women, resulting in situations where young women in sexual relationships with men have less power to resist sex activity.

Furthermore, in order to address teenage pregnancy and enhance schooling among teenage school girls, over the last two decades' several policy interventions have been made by the Ghanaian government and one of these notable measure that is the school Re-entry policy. According to ActionAid (2022), the re-entry policy was launched to prevent pregnancy among schoolgirls and to ensure that schoolgirls who fall pregnant are given the chance to return to school during pregnancy and after childbirth. In spite of considerable efforts made by the Government of Ghana to reduce early pregnancy and child among young women and school girls, teenage pregnancy is still seen to be a major challenge thwarting the Ghanaian government effort to promote the education of girl child (Dubik et al., 2022).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Pregnancy among young women and girls especially those of school going age is found to be increasing in the Bawku West district. Donkor and Lariba (2017) noted that teenage pregnancy is rapidly increasing in the area due to the engagement in premarital sexual activities by young and teenage girls. Similarly, Akudugu and Akum (2019) state that unsafe abortion among adolescents is a leading cause of maternal morbidity and mortality in the district. Also, a media report stated that in the first quarter of 2023, the Bawku West district recorded 177 cases of teenage pregnancy out of 1,252 cases of teenage pregnancy recorded in Upper East region) and this was considered to be the highest in the region (Azebire, 2023). In addition, UNICEF 2018 study found that child marriage is more pronounced in Bawku West and the

main underlying cause is teenage pregnancy. Against this background, although tremendous effort and attention has been given to adolescent pregnancies and teen motherhood in Ghana, few studies (Gyan 2013; Gyesaw and Ankomah, 2013; Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) have been focused on the educational consequences of teenage schoolgirl pregnancy. Therefore, this study primary aim was to gain in-depth information from participants with regards to the causes of teenage pregnancy and its effect on the education of girls in the Bawku West district.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the underlying causes of teenage pregnancy among school going girls in Bawku West district?
2. What are the consequences of teenage pregnancy on girls' education?
3. To what extent is the School Re-Entry Policy addressing the challenges of pregnant school girls and teenage mothers' in the Bawku West district?

1.4 Relevance and Justification

Like many other developing countries, adopting ways to promote education and wellbeing of the citizenry has been a key policy priority of the Ghanaian government. According to 2013 report of the Ministry of Education, since Ghana attainment of independence both past and present governments have recognized the critical contribute which education makes towards socio-economic development. Based on this, various measures have been and continue to be employed so as to promote education at all levels (MoE, 2013). Some of the major interventions include the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) which was intended to bring about equal access to basic education by all citizens regardless of geographical location, gender, ethnic or religious background (Salifu et al., 2018).

However, today one major issue that poses serious challenge and hinder the Ghanaian government effort is early pregnancy and child bearing among female students. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the causes of teenage pregnancy and its effect on girls' education in the Bawku West district. The findings of this study will help government and policy makers to be fully aware of the social cultural and economic factors contributing to teenage pregnancy so as to be able to design more effective policies and programmes to address teenage pregnancy and its related challenges. Also, it will help the Ministry of Education and Ghana

Education Service to come up with measures in addition the re-entry policy to minimised school dropout in the study area and Ghana as a whole. Further, it will also help parents and guardians to know how to handle situations pertaining to teenage school girls who fall pregnant and teen mothers to enable them progress with their education without cutting it short.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher focuses on detailed analyses of related works carried out locally and internationally on the subject.

2.2 Factors Contributing to Teenage Pregnancy

A recent WHO (2024) report has stated that inadequate access to contraceptives, adolescents' lack of financial resources to purchase contraceptives, poor knowledge of adolescents about sexual reproductive health issues, and widespread sexual violence are contributing to teenage pregnancy. According to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC, 2022) in Africa, one of the most significant determinants of teenage pregnancy is girls' level of education and that girls with lower educational levels are mostly at higher risk of pregnancy compared to those with primary and secondary education. This is partly a result of their limited knowledge regarding sexual reproductive matters and services (ACERWC, 2022).

Manzi et al. (2018) state that one major cause of teenage pregnancy is a lack of guidance due on failure of parents and guardians to educate teenagers about sexual reproductive issues thereby leaving them not properly trained or guided during their adolescent stage of development. In addition, substance use such as alcohol and drugs has been noted as a major factor contributing to the practice of unsafe sex among teenagers and teenage pregnancy (Jonas et al. 2016). Furthermore, Thobejane (2015) states that in several parts of sub-Saharan Africa, cultural beliefs about fertility and religious norms are major contributory factors. The author further noted that in some societies it is demanded that young girls get pregnant early to prove their fertility before they go into marriage. For instance, it was found that in Niger, 87% of women married at an early age, and 53% had given birth to a child before attaining 18 years (Therese 2000 cited in Thobejane, 2015).

2.3 The Relationship between Teenage Pregnancy and Girls Education

According to a 2021 UNICEF report, young girls who get pregnant are often forced to abandon school and this affect not only their dignity but also their future educational and

job prospects. Were (2007) asserted that early pregnancy and childbearing deny young girls the chance to progress with their education and gain requisite human capital skills for gainful employment and to have a say in decision-making on key development issues. Also, Maharaj (2022) claimed that girls who attained higher educational levels are more likely to delay in entering marriage and sexual relations and are also more informed about their reproductive health rights, timing of marriage and pregnancy.

On the other hand, World Bank 2018 report states that teenage school girls who stop schooling early are more likely to marry or give birth early, before they may be physically and emotionally prepare to become wives and mothers and this can affect their own health and children (Wodon et al., 2018). Added to this, Gyan (2013) reported that girls who dropout of school early are more likely to involve premarital sex activity thereby resulting in teenage pregnancy. In their study, Kons et al. (2022) found that teenage pregnancy has a major impact on the female child's educational success and has resulted in the majority of pregnant school-girls dropping out of school. Further, the 2014 GDHS data has shown that teenage girls with no education (23%) are almost four times as likely to have started giving birth compared to those with secondary or higher education (6%) (GSS, GHS, and ICF International, 2015).

2.4 The School Re-Entry Policy in Ghana

Like most other countries across Africa, in recent times, the Ghanaian government has put in place policy measures directly focused on dealing with situations involving pregnant and parenting girls in schools. One of these policy measures is the school re-entry policy. Before the policy coming into being, across Ghanaian schools, it was a common practice that girl who became pregnant was dismissed (to serve as a deterrent to other students) from school. However, the dismissing or expulsion of pregnant girls was identified be rather perpetuating the vulnerability of the girl child because often times when a girl is out of school, the girl had no other option than to involve in early marriage as source of survival.

Therefore, having identified early pregnancy and child bearing as a critical barrier to ensuring equal opportunities among Ghanaian school children in their learning process, the Government of Ghana through the Ghana Education Service developed the Girls Education Re-entry Policy. African Education Watch (2022) revealed that the GES Re-entry Policy which has been in implementation since 2018, aims to ensure that pregnant girls and school mothers return and stay in school to continue with their education. According to the Ghana Education Service (2018), the policy seeks to “adopt measures that seek to prevent

pregnancy among school girls; and facilitate the re-entry of adolescent mothers to school after childbirth” (GES, 2018, p.10). Also, Carmona et al. (2018) state that the process of re-entry of girls “involves the use of the girls’ old school admission number for re-admission, ensuring girls remain in school once they are readmitted, offering counselling services to girls, and ensuring that the girls feel accepted and free from stigmatisation” (Carmona et al., 2018, p.21). Furthermore, the policy guidelines provide that any girl who fall pregnant:

- I. stays in school to continue with her studies unless health wise the pregnancy does not allow her to do so, or she takes maternity leave for a period of three months
- II. resumes school after the leave of child birth
- III. A female student who is pregnant should present a formal confirmation note of pregnancy from a recognised health facility
- IV. Once, the pregnancy has been registered by school authorities, they must inform parents/guardians of the guidelines.
- V. In school, teachers should be oriented to accept pregnant girls without abusing, stigmatising, or using unpalatable words on them
- VI. pregnant girl’s peers and classmates to should be encouraged to support her

2.5 Sexual and Reproductive Rights

The need to promote adolescent and youth development, particularly in terms of their sexual and reproductive health, is a critical global issue (Godswill, 2014). Ensuring sexual and reproductive health rights of adolescents and young people are captured in human rights frameworks and policies that have been signed and ratified by individual countries worldwide (Tallarico et al., 2021). This is against the background that promoting adolescents sexual and reproductive health rights is critical in making young people fully develop their potential which will allow them to be able to contribute effectively to society's development (Tallarico et al., 2021).

Also, Crichton et al. (2008) add that sexual and reproductive rights are crucial for the enhancement of the physical and mental well-being of the individual, ensuring healthy pregnancies and childbearing, and avoiding the contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Van Eerdewijk (2001) defines sexual and reproductive rights as the right of both men and women, to make decisions and take control over their own sexuality, procre-

ation, and bodies. Like other sub-Saharan African countries and the world in general, promoting access to sexual and reproductive health services has been a key policy priority of the Ghanaian government. As noted by Akazili et al. (2020), since the attainment of independence, Ghana has been a signatory to several United Nations conventions regarding the rights of girls or children.

Likewise, Awusabo-Asare et al. (2008) revealed that since the adoption of the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992, Ghanaian government has passed several laws and acts all aimed at promoting sexual and reproductive rights and ensuring well-being of the population. Despite the existence of varied policy frameworks, sexual and reproductive health issues persist to be a key concern. According to MoGCSP 2017 report,

“adolescents and young people in Ghana continue to have challenges accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services due to provider biases and unfriendly attitudes towards young people in SRH programming and service delivery in the country” (MoGCSP, p.2017, p.9).

Similarly, Ehiawey et al. (2024) state that despite the increased sexual activity among Ghanaian youth, sexual and reproductive health services are not fully utilized, as a result of stigma about premarital sex and inadequate knowledge and information about SRH. Consequently, every year, an estimated 750,000 Ghanaian young girls get pregnant (Aninanya et al., 2015).

Furthermore, a 2022 UNICEF report states that one of the major issues which constitute as a barrier making it difficult for Ghanaian adolescent girls to have an equal chance in life is due to several abuses of their sexual and reproductive rights such as sexual abuse and violence in early pregnancy and child marriage. In line with this, the 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey revealed that child marriage is more pronounced among females than males: 21% of women aged 20-24 years were reported to have been married by the age of 18 years compared to only 2% of men in the same age group (GSS, 2006). Also a previous survey titled *“Violence against women: The Ghanaian case”* conducted in 2005 revealed that generally in Ghana,

“girls marry at an earlier age than boys and that parents and other close relations were more likely to decide and choose partners for the girl-child than the boy-child. About 40% of the females reported that they married before the age of 20 years as compared to only 8% of the males. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the married females stated that their parents decided for them as compared to

12% of the males. In addition, 30% of the females reported that their parents and other closer relatives chose their partners for them as compared to 16% of the males” (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2005, p.9).

2.6 Gender Dominant Norms and Sexuality in Ghana

In Ghana, some traditional practices and customs deprive women of having control over their sexual life. Addo and Berchie (2021) stated like many parts of the world especially in the global south, accepted cultural norms and traditional practices hinder the ability of women and girls to protect and enhance their sexual and reproductive health and survival. The same authors further stated that *“multiple sexual partners and increased sexual activity encouraged by male ideologies promote beliefs that lead to negative use of condoms and inconsistent use of condoms”* (Addo and Berchie, 2021, p.199). Similarly, in Ghana *“pervasive gendered inequities and norms regarding the subordination of women give Ghanaian men disproportionately more power than women, particularly in relation to sex”* (Crissman et al. (2012, p.201).

Nartey et al. (2023) asserted that although there has been remarkable progress toward ensuring the well-being of women and girls in many parts of the world, gender inequalities persist in Ghana due to cultural gender norms that work in favor of men and place women in subordinate and subservient roles. Furthermore, Awusabo-Asare et al. (1993) noted that women's roles in Ghana are primarily constrained by tradition, and women are often forced to enter a relationship or marriage over which they may have little or no control concerning the sexual behaviour of their partners. Bastine (2010) argues that traditional practices such as the trokosi still persist and which discriminate against women and children. According to Bastine,

“Trokosi is a traditional religious system that oppresses women and children in Ghana. The practice, among the Ewes, requires parents to offer their virgin daughters to a fetish shrine to atone for the sins of their ancestors” (Bastine, 2010, p.81).

Another study in Ghana revealed that about 38.2% of women aged 15–19 years reported to have been sexually abused by an intimate partner (IDS, GSS, and Associates, 2016).

2.7 Theoretical Framework

There are various theoretical frameworks often used to examine social issues such as poverty and poor education faced by women, girls and other vulnerable populations. In this study,

the African feminist theory was drawn upon. Mianda (2019) stated that “African feminism aims at changing gender relations to eliminate the child marriage, genital mutilation, violence against women, to recognize the effective role of women in the economy, and in political arena” (Mianda, 2019, p.19). Mshweshwe (2020) revealed that the African feminist theory is one of the postcolonial theoretical approaches that provide deep insight into the realities of black people's that are often not properly examined by Western feminist scholars. Also, the central concern of African feminists is to expose the various forms of oppression that women are subjected to (Nkealah, 2006).

Similarly, Aniekwu (2006) point out that unlike Western feminists who are concerned about “the female body, sexuality, autonomies and sexual rights”, the newly emerging African feminism is “distinctly heterosexual, pro-natal” and African feminists largely are concerned about socio-cultural, economic and political empowerment of women, girls and other vulnerable populations (Aniekwu, 2006, p.6).

Furthermore, Jaiyeola and Adeyeye (2021) identified two different categories of African feminism, which are “intellectual and popular African feminisms” (Jaiyeola and Adeyeye (2021, p.2). Popular feminism:

“is rooted in culture and lived experiences of African women. Here, the foundation of feminism lies in the importance of women in traditional African society in terms of food production as well as women”'s role in the liberation struggle against colonialism” (Olatokun, 2017, p.216).

On the other hand, intellectual feminism demand for “an active voice for women against the taboos of gender hierarchy and the ancillary status of women” (Jaiyeola and Adeyeye, 2021, p.2). This group of feminist oppose socio-cultural practices affecting women such as female genital mutilations(FGM), child marriage and child bearing, poor education, and subordinate roles often assigned to women (Jaiyeola and Adeyeye, 2021). Therefore, they advocate for the protection of women rights and the adoption policies that will empower women and make them become active participants in the socio-economic and political systems. Karik-Namiji (2016) note that in several parts of Africa, culture and traditional practices and religion are primarily used to keep women under continuous control by men. In addition, the African feminist scholar, Tamale (2015) offers a justification for the use of African theoretical approach indicating that it provides the lens by which one can use to critically examine and understand how patriarchy and gender inequality norms are affecting women life choices in Africa. It is on this premise that the African feminist theory was chosen by the study to examine the causes of teenage pregnancy in the Bawku West district.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion focuses on the methodology used in conducting the study. It therefore covers various issues such as the research design, sources of data, sampling approach used in the selection of participants, study area, procedure for data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and challenges of the study.

3.2 Research Design

In pursuit of the objective of obtaining a deep understanding of the causes of teenage pregnancy and its effect on girls' education in the Bawku West district, the study was carried out engaging mainly qualitative research methods. According to Kaplan and Maxwell (2005) "qualitative research typically involves systematic and detailed study of individuals in natural settings, instead of in settings contrived by the researcher, often using open-ended interviews intended to elicit detailed, in-depth accounts of the interviewee's experiences and perspectives on specific issues, situations, or events" (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005, p.32).

3.3 Sampling Approach and Source of Data

Purposive and snowball sampling procedures were used to select 13 participants which include, 5 pregnant school girls, 3 school mothers, 2 non-pregnant school girls, 1 opinion leader (assembly man), 1 girl child officer and 1 teacher. Initially, 15 participants were targeted but I could not get the consent of the parents of two girls (a pregnant and a teen mother) so I had to leave them out. The girl child officer was selected because she is responsible for monitoring of girls' education and welfare in the district; the opinion leader (assembly man) was included because assemble members represent the communities and are mandated by the local government act ACT 462 of 1993 to work in conjunction with the district chief executive to address communities' challenges and enhance district development (Government of Ghana, 1993). One teacher was also chosen because teachers are responsible for teaching, monitoring and guiding pregnant and teen mothers in school. I used snowball sampling to select pregnant, teen mothers, and non-pregnant students who were willing to par-

take, as the study centred on some sensitive aspects of the participants' life experiences (Cohen and Arieli, 2011). The first participant (a pregnant school girl) was recruited with the help of a friend whom I had discussed the purpose of the study with. After, recruiting the first participant, she was asked to recommend another pregnant or teen mother who could accept to participate in the study.

Furthermore, participants were eligible to take part in study if they were:

- I. Pregnant or parenting girl in school or dropout from school
- II. within the age brackets of 15-19 years
- III. Living or residing in the study area for 10 or more years

In addition to primary data, secondary data was obtained by reviewing relevant reports, academic journals and documents such as the 2021 Ghana population and housing census, Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) 2014, 2022, District Analytical Report (Bawku West district) and reports from the Education office in Bawku West district.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Mwita (2022) defined "data collection as a systematic process of gathering information needed to answer research questions, solve a particular research problem or/and provide a basis for accepting or rejecting research hypotheses" (Mwita (2022, p.1). There are three primary key ways of collecting qualitative research data and these approaches according to (Barrett and Twycross, 2018) include observation, interviews and focus group. For this study, data was collected using one-on-one in-depth interviews. This approach was used because it allowed the recruited participants to deeply share their experiences and knowledge about teenage pregnancy. The one-on-one interviews with pregnant, non-pregnant, teen mothers and the opinion leader (Assembly man) took place in their homes because it was considered to be convenient for them. Also, interviews with both the girl child officer and the teacher took place in their offices. In addition, interviews were conducted in English because all the participants could express themselves well. Further, individual interviews ranged between 30 and 45 minutes and were audio-recorded after permission was granted.

3.6 Data Analytical Approach

Qualitative data which was collected from participants was analysed using thematic analysis procedure. The thematic analysis has been described as “a technique used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns (themes) within qualitative data” (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p.1)

In line with this, after conducting my interviews, I transcribed all interviewees recorded responses verbatim (in their original form), without making any corrections to the original language to maintain the oral nature of the speech of the respondents (Alahmad et al., 2015). This was followed by coding of the participants’ responses. Creswell (2015 cited in Elliott, 2018, p.2850) described coding as “the process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way.” I manually coded the texts of the 13 interviews. Data (responses of participants) were searched carefully for re-occurring words, which later constituted code words, and these words were then categorised into themes guided by the interview structure. Coding allowed me to be able to simplify and concentrate on specific characteristics of data gathered (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.7 Study Area

This study was carried out in the Bawku West district (in Tili and Sapeliga communities). The district which is situated in the Northeastern part of the Upper East Region of Ghana with Zebilla as its administrative capital was created in 1988 (GSS, 2014). It occupies an area of approximately 1,070 square kilometres and shares boundaries with Binduri district to the east, Talensi district and Nabdam district to the west, and the East Mamprusi district to the south (GSS, 2014).

The population of the district based on the most recent census, 2021 Population and Housing Census stands at 144,189, with male population constituting 49.1% and that of female population 50.9% (GSS, 2021). The Kusasi is the dominant ethnic group in the district but also there are other groups such as the Frafras, Moshies, Busangas, Kasenas, Mamprusis, and Fulanis who have migrated from others into the district for agriculture and other purposes.

Politically, the Bawku West District Assembly is the highest administrative body, serving as the political and planning authority headed by the District Chief Executive (DCE). In addition, the local economy is largely driven by agriculture, about 80 percent of the rural population engages in subsistence agriculture mainly in crop farming, livestock,

and fishing (GSS, 2014). However, like most rural areas in Ghana, poverty remains a considerable challenge in the district. The latest multidimensional poverty report published by the Ghana Statistical Service for instance revealed that 47.6% of the district population live in multidimensional poverty, with an average intensity of 47.2% (GSS, 2024).

3.8 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

3.8.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in any research within the social sciences are critical and for instance, as Arifin (2018) argued, in qualitative research ethical considerations play a key role due to the in-depth nature of the study process and that the concern of ethical issues becomes more critical when performing out one-on-one interview with vulnerable participants. For this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the International Institute of Social Studies before data collection. Prior to the start of the interviews, consent was obtained. For the interviews with the pregnant and non-pregnant school girls and teen mothers, consent was sought from their parents and it was granted. Also, I clearly explained to parents and their girls about the aim and scope of the study. I made them fully aware that participation of their girls was not obligatory and it was their right to decide whether to participate or not. Also, to ensure confidentiality, participants names were not used rather pseudonyms were assigned to them in the collected data. Individual interviews were audio recorded after permission was sought for and was granted. Further, during the conduct of the interviews, I also made it a point to frequently ask the participants (school girls) whether they were stressed out and needed a break or have any issue to clarify or better still wanted to discontinue with the research. In addition, being a counsellor myself and having been working on the field for the past ten years doing sensitisation programmes with students, it really helped me to prepare well for the field research and was able to successfully carry out the interviews with less difficulty.

3.8.2 Positionality

I am a citizen of Ghana and I come from the northern part of the country, in a town called Sandema in the Upper East region. My interest in this area stems from my work experience

as an investigator and a human rights advocate. Having been with this institution for close to a decade, I have had the opportunity to pay a working visit to several communities and schools to sensitize children on their fundamental human rights. During my working visit, one major issue that has come to my notice is the increasing dropout of girls from school as a result of early pregnancy. In addition, I have had several reports from parents about their young girls being impregnated by young and older men in the community thereby forcing these girls to abandon school. Also, myself being a mother and schooling at the same time, although am so much aware of challenges that comes with pregnancy and childbearing, I did not allow my own experiences and emotions to influence my interaction with the girls and analysis of the situation of teenage pregnancy in the study area.

3.9. Limitations and challenges

In conducting qualitative research in the social sciences, the researcher is bound to be confronted by various challenges and this study is no exception. There are some limitations associated with this study. First, this study was conducted mainly covering 2 communities out of 151 in Bawku West district, therefore the analysis causes and effect of teenage pregnancy on girls' education of girls, is limited to these particular communities. In short the study findings cannot be used to draw a conclusion as a general situation of district. In addition, another challenge faced is that, my initial plan was conduct in-depth interviews with a total of 15 participants but this was not attained because I could not obtain the consent of two girls parents and because of that they were not included.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data obtained through the interviews participants on causes of teenage pregnancy and its effect on girls' education, and, the chapter presents and analysis data collected from participants on the school re-entry policy.

4.2 Factors Contributing to Teenage Pregnancy Among School Girls in Bawku West District.

During the in-depth interviews, one of the most important issues that was raised to be driving teenage pregnancy in the study area is poverty. Participants said that poverty is the cause of the inability of most parents to support and ensure proper upbringing of their children especially their daughters. According to them, in most families' girls are rather the ones who go out to work to care for themselves and also support their parents and often times this lead them into engaging in early sex and falling pregnant. One participant for example narrated that:

“my mother is a single mum and she is not working. So any time I come back from school, I go to work as a dishwasher in a restaurant to get money to support her take care of my siblings and also for school (Non-pregnant school girl, Junior High School Form one, Interview)

Panday et al. (2009) asserted that when girls grow up in families where poverty is endemic, they stand the risk of getting pregnant early. Also Thobejane (2015) opine that “teenagers who are born and have grown up into the circle of poverty may end up into prostitution as a way of compensating the salaries of their parents” (Thobejane, 2015, p.274).

Another student participant said *“there is this guy who has been giving me money, and we became lovers and I got pregnant but when I told him about it, he left the community and travelled to the city since then I have not heard from him”* (Pregnant school girl, Junior High School form three, Interview).

In addition, the opinion (assembly man) during the interviews shared a similar view that *“poverty is what is contributing girls engaging in premarital sex and getting pregnant in this community because most parents push their daughters out to work to survive because they cannot provide their needs and guys and older males are taking advantage of the girls sexually using money”* (Assembly Man, Interview).

From the above revelations, it implies that the involvement of school girls in early sex and early childbearing can be attributed largely to poor status of parents which is making it difficult for them to provide support and also ensure proper control of their children. This finding is also shared by a study conducted by Gyan (2013) to examine the “effects of teenage pregnancy on the educational attainment of the girl child in Chorkor”, a suburb of Accra, Ghana” which also notes that there is a strong link between poverty and teen pregnancy. The study found that majority of participants (94%) identified poverty to be the main cause of teenage pregnancy among female students (Gyan, 2013, p.). Similarly, another study conducted in Busia District in Kenya, revealed that poverty was disclosed by the study participants as the major factor accountable for early pregnancy among young and adolescent girls. The study also revealed that participants reported that due to pervasive poverty, *“parents and guardians could not afford to provide adolescent girls with all the school requirements, a fact that led to adolescent girls dropping out of school thereby becoming idle, joining bad groups and engaging in sex”* (Sekiwunga and Whyte, 2009, p.119). These findings support the theoretical underpinnings of this study, because the findings clearly demonstrate that young women and girls are the ones who often bear the most consequences whenever families are faced with difficult challenges due to patriarchy and gender power inequalities across societies that make women and girls to hold less power when it comes to decision making about their own wellbeing.

Another key factor that was identified to be responsible for teenage pregnancy among school girls in the area under study is a lack of parental guidance and support. Participants revealed that most parents do not care about the wellbeing of their children and this normally allows teenage boys and girls to involve in various activities such as the use of alcohol, drug abuse and premarital sex resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

One participant for example narrated that:

“My father doesn’t do anything for me, any time I ask him for money he gets annoyed and start to insult me. I only get support from my senior brother from time to time” (Non-pregnant teenager Junior High School form two, interview).

Also, one other participant narrated that:

“I am pregnant for a guy who is doing mason work. My father and mother are not together, and I get no support from them.” (Pregnant teen girl, Junior High School form two, Interview)

As indicated in the responses, it suggests that poor parental support and guidance is compounding the vulnerability of girls thereby leading most girls into engaging in early sexual acts and other bad behaviours. Panday et al. (2009) assert that the kind of relationship shared

between a teenage girl and her parent can have a serious influence on the decisions that she makes about sex and that girls who do not get much support, and love from their parent are more likely to involve in premarital sex and social vices. Skosana et al. (2020) also opine that when parents fail to build cordial relationship with their teenage daughters and provide them the needed support, they are more likely to be influenced by their peers and face the risk of engaging in early sex which can lead to pregnancy. Similarly, a 2022 ACERWC report states that girls who come from families whereby domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse are more pronounced are at higher risk of teenage pregnancy (ACERWC). This finding further corroborates World Vision (2019) study in Ghana on child marriage. The study reported that child brides interviewed blamed their parents for neglect and irresponsibility resulting to their early marriage. They also blamed their parents for their inability to take proper care of them during childhood and adolescence.

Peer influence is one of the most important factors revealed to be contributing to young school girls' involvement in early and unprotected sex leading to pregnancies. The participants said that most girls depend on school mates and peers for information and also copy their lifestyle of friends leading to early sex and resulting in unwanted pregnancies. One participant said:

“Copying the life style of friends and mates is a reason many girls are doing bad things such as getting pregnant in this area. Normally, some girls don’t go home straight, they go about with their friends and doing unnecessary things” (Non-pregnant teen school girl, Junior High School form one, interview).

Also, another interviewee shared her experienced that

“Am pregnant now because of the influence of one girl I picked as a friend when we entered JSS 2. Before meeting this girl, I was that shy person who doesn’t like talking. But when a became a friend to this girl, and any time we are together, she tells me about her boy and the things they do together. So, one day her boyfriend also introduced his friend to me and we also started dating and the result is this pregnancy am carrying.” (Pregnant school girl, Junior High School form two, interview)

Also, the assembly man interviewed expressed that:

“teenage pregnancy is a major worrying issue to us here and it is because of bad company, what I mean is that most girls engage in early sexual activities because of bad friends that they associate with.” (Assembly man, in-depth interview).

The assertions made by the respondents imply that many girls are influenced into involving in social vices such as early sexual activities because of the kind of information they obtain by their association with some friends and peers. This affirms Kirby (2001) assertion that *“if adolescents have friends who have become pregnant or are teenage mothers, then they themselves are more likely to become pregnant and bear children”* (Kirby, 2001, p.277). Otegbayoe et al. (2023) also opine that a young girl who keeps friends who involve in risky sexual health and behaviours like drug abuse, alcoholism, and premarital and unprotected sex is most likely to face peer pressure because she is seeking acceptance and peers’ validation. Amoah-Saah and Akosah (2024) also found that there is a strong relationship between peer influence and teenage pregnancy. Their study found that it was agreed by the majority of the participants (92.3%) interviewed peer influence is a primary cause of early pregnancy. Also, in a Kenya study more than 50% of respondents (adolescent mothers) reported that peers influence was a major contributory factor for their involvement in premarital sex (Were, 2007).

Lack of sex education has been identified by the participants as one of the principal causes of early pregnancy. Participants pointed out that most girls lack adequate knowledge and information regarding sex and sexual issues. Apart that, they participants also indicated most parents do not discuss sexual issues with their children especially because they believe that holding such discussion with their daughters will make them to start dating early.

One participant shared for example that:

“My parents never discuss with me about sexual issues and always say children are not to talk about those issues. So, any time we are sitting together, they don’t talk about sex issues.” (Pregnant student girl, Junior High School form one, In Depth Interview)

Also, the Girl Child Officer highlighted that inadequate attention given to sex education by parents and also by teachers at the school level is what is contributing to teenage pregnancy. According to her, most parents shy away from discussing sexual issues with their children especially their daughters, and that also the school curriculum places less emphasis on sex and sexuality education. In addition, during the in-depth interviews the teacher also shared a similar view that ignorance or lack of knowledge of sexuality and reproductive education among young girls is the major factor leading to teenage pregnancy and early child birth in the study area. *“Most young girls engage in risky sexual activities because they lack critical information and knowledge about sex and contraceptives usage”* (Teacher, Junior High School, Interview).

MoGCSP (2018) revealed that sex is not an issue that is openly discussed in Ghana because the socio-cultural dynamics between parents and their children make it difficult for children to freely discuss their sexuality with older family members and due to this, many Ghanaian children get to learn about issues of sex from peers. Baku et al., (2018) observed that:

“Ghanaian culture considers sexuality as sacred; that is, it is something that should not be discussed with children and adolescents. In Ghana, teaching of sex education to children is generally seen as introducing them to early sexual intercourse and, subsequently, pregnancies. The understanding and tolerance for sex education among Ghanaian parents are nonexistent. Culture, thus, accounts for this intolerance for sex education” (Baku et al.,2018, p.2).

Amodu et al. (2022) assert that in most societies in Ghana sex and sexuality is still a taboo to be spoken about, and teaching in schools about sex is mostly focus on abstinence measures. Similarly, Donkor and Lariba (2017) revealed that in some ethnic groups in Ghana, the only time sexual issues are discussed with children and adolescents by parents and family members is when the girl child is about to get married. UNICEF Ghana study (2022) found that more than half of sexually active Ghanaian adolescent girls were not using any contraceptive method. Also, the same study report revealed that about 52% adolescent girls found to be married were not using any type of contraceptives and those found unmarried, the figure was as high as 68% (UNICEF Ghana, 2022). According to another study conducted in Busia District in Kenya found that lack of sex education was also cited as one of the major contributors of teenage pregnancy. According to the study *“8 out of every 10 female adolescent interviewed had never discussed sexuality, boy/girl relationships or family life matters with their parents. Most parents found it unethical to discuss such issues with their daughters”* (Were 2007, p.332).

Also, early marriage was found to be a major contributory factor of teenage pregnancy. Participants shared that because of financial challenges parents give out their young girls for marriage at early ages. They also said that most parents do think that if they don't marry off the girl early, she will go out and start dating and get pregnant before marriage which will bring disgrace to the family. So the only way to avoid this, is by marrying off the girl early. One participant explained that:

“In this community, parents marry off their girls early because they normally think that if they don't do that the girls will go out and get pregnant early. Some also marry them off early because of poverty.” (non-pregnant school girl, Junior High School form two)

This quote aligns with Africa Union (2015) report on the “effects of traditional and religious practices of child marriage on Africa’s socio-economic development” when it states that “*in many societies, parents are under pressure to marry off a daughter as early as possible to prevent her from becoming sexually active before marriage and bringing dishonor to her family and community. Because marriage often determines a woman’s status, parents also worry that if the girl is not married off according to social expectations, she will not be able to marry at all*” (Africa Union, 2015, p.10). Likewise, Atta (2015) point out that socio-cultural beliefs, and practices and attitudes of society have continued to promote discrimination against women and girls in Ghana.

Also another student participant shared that most parents consider the education of their daughters as waste of resources because they believe that when they spend money to educate the girl child, they are not going to benefit because someday she will get married and leave the parents, and if there is any benefit all, it will go to her husband and family (Non-pregnant school girl, Junior High School form three, Interview). Similarly, the teacher participant disclosed that most parents across various communities in the district give high priority to the education of the boy child over that of the girl child and this is often attributed to financial challenges and socio-cultural reasons. This is in line with what Atta (2015) noted when he asserted that in Ghana socio-cultural beliefs and practices in most Ghanaian societies largely work in favour of boys’ education at the expense of girls.

These statements above show that cultural and traditional practices are negatively affecting girls’ education. MoGCSP (2016) report states that patriarchy and gender inequality are significant factors driving child marriage and teenage pregnancy and that in some Ghanaian societies when families are confronted with financial challenges, it is more likely the girl than the boy will be stopped from schooling and given out for marriage. This argument is also in consonance with the African feminists’ perspective. In addition, Alabi et al. (2014) in their study found that in some parts of Nigeria, some parents often marry off their young girls with the justification that women who attain the same educational level like men are a disgrace to the community because more often than not, they will not enter into marriage and that if they do, it will be an outsider. Likewise, Leung and Zhang (2008) study conducted in China found that parents' preference for the boy child over the girl child motivates most parents to invest in their boys’ education and well-being so as to care for parents in the future. According to them further, parental gender bias investment prevails especially when parents do not have adequate income and resource, resulting to girls leaving school earlier than boys. Against this back ground, these findings are in consonance with the theory underpinning this study, because the prevailing gender inequality norms and cultural practices in the study area

is contributing to the vulnerability and involvement of girls in premarital sex and early pregnancies.

In addition to the above, from the study findings, sexual abuse has also been revealed as one of the key factors accountable for teenage pregnancy among young girls. Participants raised the issue about how girls are sexually abused resulting in unwanted pregnancies. According to them, girls who are sexual abused often do not want to report because they think it will bring disgrace to them and their families. In addition, they also mentioned that when girls are sexually abused by older males, more times they are threatened by their abusers thereby causing fear and making it difficult for them to report to their families or the appropriate authorities.

Also, an assembly man interviewed narrated that:

“As an assemble man of this community, all the time you see girls and their parents coming to me to report issues of rape and sexual abuse. But any time, I try to bring the police in, the same parents will go behind me to settle the case with the perpetrators. So, it is difficult to address the issue.” (Assemble man, in-depth interview).

MoGCSP (2017) states that in Ghana girls experience more sexual abuse and gender-based violence compare to that of boys, as a result of this, it places them in more disadvantage situations when untimely pregnancies occur. The result is consistent with a domestic violence survey which found that 2016, 27.7% of young Ghanaian women have faced at least one form of domestic violence ranging from sexual violence, physical violence, economic and psychological violence (IDS, GSS, and Associates, 2016). The same survey also disclosed that, 38.2% of women within the age brackets of 15 and 19, 40.4% of women between the ages of 20 and 24, and 38.3% of women between the ages of 30 and 39 reported experiencing at least one incidence of sexual violence (Ibid, 2016). Similarly, Gyesaw and Ankomah (2013) conducted a study in some parts of Accra, Ghana and found that two of every ten participants interviewed reported of being sexually abused by people in higher position. It was also found that for such cases teachers were among those who took advantage of their positions and convinced the girls to involve in sex with them, resulting in pregnancies.

Furthermore, Mshweshwe (2020) South Africa’s study also revealed that domestic violence is not only a consequence of the desire of men to show their power over women

but that it is also as a result of the “*complex interplay of culture and the masculinity construct centrally to patriarchy*” (Mshweshwe, 2020, p.4). The study therefore recommended that to address domestic violence and sexual harassment of women, there is the need to critically understand the patriarchal gender norms that promote and sustain men dominance (Mshweshwe, 2020).

4.3 Effect of Teenage Pregnancy on Girls Education in Bawku West district

From the findings of the study, school dropout was identified to be one of the main negative consequences of teenage pregnancy. The participants said that most pregnant girls and teenage school mothers often drop from school because of difficulties that they face. One participant for example shared that:

“my friend gave birth and stopped coming to school, she told me that her mother is not home to help babysit her child for her to go to school” (Non-Pregnant school girl, Junior High School Form three, interview)

Another participant also shared that:

“I will not encourage any of my friends to get pregnant, because there are times I feel so much pain and I even think of stopping school.” (Pregnant school girl, Junior High School form two, in-depth interview)

In addition, the Girl Child Officer highlighted that teenage pregnancy is the major reason for the increasing dropout of school girls in the district because most pregnant and parenting girls often feel shy to go back to school, and it is the reason why most schools continued to record low enrolment and progress of girls. Fergusson and Woodward (2000) asserted that school girls’ who fall pregnant risked not doing well in class work, and risked not completing high school. A study by World Vision in 2017 found that nearly 80% of school girls in Tanga community in the Bawku West district could not complete basic school due to teenage pregnancy. In another survey carried out in South Africa by Nokuthula and Pretorius (2019) revealed that Educators reported school attendance as greatly affected by early pregnancy. Due to the fact that in most cases parenting girls do any one to help care for their babies so they have to struggle being at school and at the same time having also to take care of the baby, which is a very difficult task. Thus, this results in school dropout.

In addition, poor school performance was also pointed out to be a major negative effect of teenage pregnancy. Participants shared that most pregnant and parenting school girls do not perform well because they do not attend school all the time and come to school late. They further mentioned when the girls are even able to come to school they struggle to learn. One participant narrated that:

“A have a class mate who is pregnant. From form one to form three first term, this girl has always been among the best performing students in our class. But in this second term, she did not do well, and out teachers were really worried about her performance. They used to praise her so much because of her intelligence, but now, she is struggling to learn.” (Non-pregnant School girl, Junior High School form three, Interview)

Another participant shared her experience also that,

“I am struggling with this pregnancy and these days when am in school, I can’t sit even just for thirty minutes to learn without falling asleep. I am thinking of just staying home without going to school” (Pregnant school girl, Junior High School Form Two, Interview)

From the revelations above, it implies that most girls are often not able to perform well in school due to the heavy burden that comes with pregnancy and childbirth. UNESCO 2012 report states that teenage pregnancy can deeply affect a student leaning ability and performance because a pregnant girl may feel tired and lack concentration at school, and may sometimes also miss classes on medical grounds. This finding concurred with the Ghana Education Service (2018) that teenage pregnant and school mothers are likely to record poor performance in school due the double responsibilities of motherhood and schoolwork. Also, Onoshakpokaiye and Anthonia (2023) in their study revealed that majority of the participants pointed out that due to early pregnancy their school performance was negatively affected as they could not attend school regularly and missed classes.

Similarly, Gyan (2013) in his study, revealed that 62.8% of the participants were doing well before they got pregnant and 51.4% of the respondents indicated poor academic performance after pregnancy. Based on these findings, it was asserted by the study that there is strong link between early pregnancy among school girls and academic performance (Gyan, 2013).

Added to the above, the study participants further shared that when girls drop out of school due pregnancy and child birth, they turn to suffer from low self-esteem and also they are

denied the opportunity to develop their human potentials thereby limiting their chances of having a prosperous future. One participant narrated that:

“in this community some girls who dropout from school, are the ones normally seen in town working as shop attendants and dishwashers and getting poorly paid poorly” (Non-pregnant school girl, Junior High School form one, interview).

Also, the teacher interviewed revealed that:

“pregnancy and early child bearing is contributing to low education in these communities, because all the time we see girls abandoning school due pregnancy and child birth. Last year, there was this brilliant girl in form three whom we believed was going to make distinction in the Basic Education Certificate Examination. But when it was just about three months to the examination, she stopped school and when inquire from the parents we were told she got pregnant and run away to the city”

(Teacher, Junior High School, Interview).

From the above, it is evident that teenage pregnancy is greatly hindering girl education as it is cutting short the school progress of girls thereby preventing them from developing their human potentials. Baa-Poku (2019) assert that when school girls leave school due to pregnancy, it reduces their chances of attaining education that will equip and open them up for opportunities to have a better life. Similarly, Gyan, (2013) asserted that pregnant girls who abandon school have limited opportunities for themselves, and that their children are also less likely to succeed in school or careers.

4.4 School Re-Entry Policy and How it is helping to Address Pregnancy Among School Girls in Bawku West District

Since its inception, it has been documented that the policy has made some significant contributions. For instance, ActionAid (2022) report revealed that it has contributed to the return of about 10,869 out of 22,147 pregnant school girls in Ghanaian public schools between the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 academic years (ActionAid, 2022). However, a study conducted by ActionAid found that there are critical challenges confronting the policy. The study found that most parents opposed the policy on the bases that it is contrary to cultural and societal norms and rather encouraging girls to involve in premarital sexual activity, as it does not support (punishment) of girls who fall pregnant while in school.

Furthermore, in this study also when participants were asked about how the policy is helping to address teenage pregnancy, several views were shared. The Girl Child Education Officer who was interviewed revealed that even though the policy is helping to retain pregnant and parenting girls in school, but insufficient budget allocation by the central government is hindering the policy operations. She indicated that most teachers who are also used as counsellors and facilitators do complain of not getting compensated and because of that some teachers have even stopped from providing supporting services to pregnant and parenting girls. (Girl Child Officer, District Education Office, Interview).

Also, a student participant said that the “policy is good because now when a school girl get pregnant she is given a second chance to come back to school.” But that most pregnant girls do not come back because they want to hide their pregnancy. Apart from pregnant and school mothers feeling shame, she said also that some teachers contribute to the refusal of some girls to return because they normally don’t treat them well both in the class room and outside (Non- Pregnant Student, Junior High School Form One, Interview).

From the data above, one can argue that unfriendly school environment is a major barrier to the return and continuous schooling of pregnant girls and teen mothers. This finding align with Otegbayo et al. (2023) assertion that when school girls who fall pregnant return to school they are treated with hostility, and ridicule by both their peers and teachers, which discourages their stay in school and motivation to learn. Also, Tarus (2020) assert that *“some head teachers are not sympathetic enough to give the teenage mothers space in school and are viewed as mixing bad potatoes with good ones and is viewed as likely to have a negative impact on the other girls”* (Tarus, 2020, p.250). In addition, during the interviews, the teacher participant shared that the policy intentions are good but most schools in the district lack adequate infrastructure to accommodate the needs of pregnant and school mothers. The teacher mentioned that for example the dual desk furniture used in the schools is not suitable for pregnant girls and so when they come to school, they struggle to sit in class to learn. He also said some schools in the district do not have nurseries to care for babies of parenting girls to allow them get the chance to learn.

This finding is consistent with Africa Education Watch (2022) study which found that about 98% of government schools do not have nurseries where school mothers can put their babies in and for them to have the chance study when they come to school. Also, the report disclosed that currently only 2% of nurseries are owned by the government, and most of them are found in urban areas (Africa Education Watch, 2022). Similarly, the assembly man

during the interviews said that one thing that is making the return or continue schooling of pregnant girls difficult is that most schools are located far away from the communities. Due to this, it prevents them from going back to school as they cannot walk longer distance due to their situation and do not also have money to pay for transportation daily (Assembly man, Interview). The narratives above showed that despite the implementation of school re-entry policy, the return of pregnant and parenting mothers to school is still hindered by various socio-cultural and economic issues and therefore, in order to be able to address these challenges, collective efforts are required from parents and community members, policy makers, and all stakeholders.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Early pregnancy among school girls remain one of the most critical social problems facing the Ghanaian government. This phenomenon continues to pose major hindrance on the Ghanaian government effort to promote and sustain educational development of the Ghanaian girl child. In view of this, this study sought to examine and understand the causes of teenage pregnancy among school girls and its effect on the education of girls in the Bawku West district. In addition, the study sought to examine how the school re-entry policy was helping to address teenage pregnancy. In the study, qualitative data was collected on the causes of teenage pregnancy, and its effect on education. Information was collected from thirteen (13) participants using face to face interviews, while that of secondary was obtained through the review of various documents such as Ghana demographic survey reports (2014; 2017; 2022) and Multidimensional Poverty Report (Bawku West district) by the Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Education Service reports (on the Re-entry policy), and Reports produced by World Bank, ActionAid and World Vision.

The study findings have shown that teenage pregnancy is a considerable problem to low development of education among girls of school going age and hampering the general wellbeing of girls. In terms of the issues identified as underlying causes of teenage pregnancy among girls of school going age included persistence poverty, peer influence, early marriage,

limited knowledge and understanding of sexual and reproductive issues among young women and school, poor parental guidance and support, and inequality gender norms and cultural practices.

Furthermore, teenage pregnancy was also found to be posing serious devastating effects on girls' education and among these negative effects included school dropout, poor academic performance and low or poor acquisition of relevant skills and human development potentials. In addition, the study revealed that gender inequality norms and cultural practices are major barriers hindering the return of pregnant and teenage mothers to school.

5.2: Recommendations

Providing and ensuring that all citizens have equal access to quality education is one that will allow a country to have access to people with the requisite skills and knowledge to drive the country's growth. This study has shown how devastating teenage pregnancy is to the wellbeing of the Ghanaian school girl in the Bawku West district. Therefore, to address the menace of teenage pregnancy in the district and the country as a whole the following recommendations should be considered:

One intervention that can be adopted to tackle teenage pregnancy is by passing by-laws that will empower traditional leaders and community opinion leaders to be able fine and give other stiffer punishment to boys and older males who impregnate school girls. Relating to this, the setting up of school clubs, and the imposition of sanctions and bans on various activities such as video and dance centres and other events often engaged by school children will help to reduce the prevalence of unwanted pregnancies. In addition, Government providing adequate budgetary allocations to GES, and other agencies such as ISD, and NCCE to intensify education and awareness creation within the communities will help also go a long way to address teenage pregnancy and social vices that commonly engaged in by young and adolescent boys and girls.

The study also recommends that there is the need for effective collaboration among state bodies such as NCCE, GES, CHRAJ and other major stakeholders to institute a more strategic child welfare and protection programming plan that can ensure school children remain in school, so as to prevent and reduce teenage pregnancy and other harmful practices that children are often exposed to.

It is a recommendation of this study that, sex education should also be incorporated in the school curriculum by policy makers in the educational sector as a full subject which will help

to provide the Ghanaian school children with adequate information and knowledge about reproductive health issues such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS, the health implications of teenage pregnancy, and the different types of contraceptives and their usage. More so, guidance and counselling departments should also be set up in the various schools to ensure that students have access to counselling services which will help to retain pregnant and parenting girls in school. Also, provisions should also be made within the school system to allow for regular visit to schools by health personnel to further sensitize students on their health issues.

Furthermore, government and policy makers should also ensure that legal frameworks that are designed to protect children and vulnerable populations are always effectively enforced. This will help reduce the increasing incidence of sexual abuse and harmful practices that children especially girls are always exposed to. This is because in most communities, it is common to see older males who are found to involve in rape and other sexual abuse cases with teenage girls using money and their influence in society to bribe their way out without prosecution.

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Appendices

Appendix: 1. Interview Questions for Pregnant and Parenting Girls in The Bawku West district

This research study is being carried out by the researcher to fulfil the requirements for the award of a master's degree at International Institute of social Studies (Erasmus University). The main purpose of this interview is to investigate the causes and effect of teenage pregnancy on girls' education in the Bawku West district. This research study will duly consider the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Thank you for accepting to partake in this research.

1. Do you live with your parents? Yes/no
If no, why not
2. How did your family receive your pregnancy?
3. When did you start dating? And is your boyfriend schooling?
4. What influenced you to start dating?
5. Could you share with me more about your boyfriend(partner)
6. How has pregnancy affected your life/ school?
7. What kind of support did you get from your parents during and after the pregnancy?
8. What kind of support did you get from school authorities during and after the pregnancy?
9. What in your opinion is causing teenage pregnancy in this area?
10. What can be done to prevent teenage pregnancy among schoolgirls in this area?
11. Do you and other girls who are pregnant get any support from the government to keep you in school? Yes/no

If yes, what kind of support

Appendix 2: Interview Questions for Non-Pregnant School Girls

1. Have you been pregnant before or have a friend who is pregnant?
2. Do you think teenage pregnancy is a problem in this area?
3. What do you think is causing teenage pregnancy among schoolgirls in this area?

4. What can be done to prevent teenage pregnancy?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions for Teacher

1. How long have been teaching in this school?
2. What do you have to say about teenage pregnancy in this area?
3. Do you think there is a rise in teenage pregnancy in this area?
4. What in your opinion are the underlying factors for teenage pregnancy in this area?
5. What can say about the academic performance of female students during and after pregnancy?
6. What measures are put in place by the school to handle girls during and after the pregnancy?
7. What measures do you think need to be put in place to tackle teenage pregnancy among schoolgirls in the area?
8. Could you share with me what you know about the national gender policy?
9. How is this policy working to address teenage pregnancy?
10. In your opinion, do you think the policy is effectively working to tackle teenage pregnancy

Appendix 4: Interview Questions for Opinion Leader (Assembly Man)

1. How long have you been serving as an assembly member in this community?
2. What are the challenges facing students especially girls in this area?
3. Do you think teenage pregnancy is being a problem in this area? Yes/no
4. If yes, why?
5. In your opinion, what are the factors contributing to teenage pregnancy among female students in this area?
6. How is teenage pregnancy affecting female students in this area?
7. As community leaders, what efforts are being made to address early pregnancy among schoolgirls in this area?

Appendix 5: Interview Questions for Girl child officer

1. How long have you been working in this area?
2. Could you describe your work and responsibility as a girl child officer in this area?
3. Do you think teenage pregnancy is a major problem facing girls in this community?
4. What in your opinion are the underlying factors for teenage pregnancy in this area?
5. Could you share with me what you know about the national gender policy?

6. In your opinion, is the national gender policy working effectively to tackle teenage pregnancy in this area?
7. What else do you think can be done to tackle the menace of teenage pregnancy in this community?

Appendix 6: Ethics Review Form

ISS Research Ethics Review Form for RP research carried out by MA students¹

Aim:

This Form aims to help you identify research ethics issues which may come up in the design and delivery of your Research Paper (RP). It builds on the session on Research Ethics session in course 3105 and subsequent discussions with your peers and RP supervisor/reader. We hope the form encourages you to reflect on the ethics issues which may arise.

The process:

The Ethics Review process consists of answering questions in the following two checklists: B1-Low-sensitivity and B2-High-sensitivity. Depending on the answer to these questions you might need to fill section **C-Statement of Research Ethics** too.

The background document "ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA Students" provides advice and detailed information on how to complete this form.

Step 1 - Fill checklists B1 and B2

Step 2 - After answering checklists B1 and B2, the process proceeds as follows:

- **If you answer 'yes' to one or more low-sensitivity questions (checklist B1):** please discuss the issues raised with your supervisor and include an overview of the risks, and actions you can take to mitigate them, in the final design of your RP. You can refer to the ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA Students for help with this.
- **If you answer 'yes' to one or more high-sensitivity questions (checklist B2),** please complete section 'C' of the form below describing the risks you have identified and how you plan to mitigate against them. Discuss the material with your supervisor, in most cases the supervisor will provide approval for you to go ahead with your research and attach this form to the RP design when you upload it in canvas. If, after consultation with your supervisor, it is felt that additional reflection is needed, please submit this form (sections B1, B2, and C) to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) for review as follows:

When submitting your form to the REC, please send the following to researchethics@iss.nl:

- 1) the completed checklists B1 and B2 (or equivalent if dealing with an external ethics requirement)
- 2) the completed form C 'Statement of Research Ethics'
- 3) a copy of the RP design
- 4) any accompanying documentation, for example, consent forms, Data Management Plans (DMP), ethics clearances from other institutions.

Your application will be reviewed by a reviewer who is not part of your supervisory team. The REC aims to respond to ethics approval requests within a period of 15 working days.

Step 3 - Integrating the Ethics Review process into the RP:

- This Ethics Review Form needs to be added as an annex in your final RP Design document to be uploaded in the Canvas page for course 3105.

¹ This checklist and statement is adapted from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Research Ethics Committee and informed by the checklists of two Ethics Review Boards at EUR (ESHCC and ERIM) and the [EU H2020 Guidance – How to complete your ethics self-assessment](#).

ISS Research Ethics Review Form - MA Research

Project details, Checklists, and Approval Status

A) Project/Proposal details

1. Project/Proposal Title	TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND ITS EFFECT ON THE EDUCATION AND HEALTH OF GIRLS IN THE BAWKU WEST DISTRICT OF THE UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA
2. Name of MA student (applicant)	PRISCILLA ALAKAWON
3. Email address of MA student	633597PA@eur.nl
4. Name of Supervisor	DR. BILGE SAHIN
5. Email address of Supervisor	Sahin@iss.nl
6. Country/countries where research will take place	Ghana
7. Short description of the proposed research and the context in which it is carried out:	
<p>My research focus is on examining the causes of teenage pregnancy among girls of school going age and its effect on their education and health in the Bawku West district of the Upper East region of Ghana. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy are major social issues that have been seen to be confronting various communities in Ghana. The Bawku west district in particular has been chosen as the study area because statistics available indicate that it is one of the districts in the Upper East region that continue to experience higher incidence rates of early marriage and teenage pregnancy among young women in recent times. In addition, a review of the literature has shown that the few studies that have conducted have focused on other parts of the country but not the Bawku West district. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the factors contributing to pregnancy among teenagers in the Bawku West district and how it effects on education and health.</p>	

B) Research checklist

The following checklist acts as a guide to help you think through what areas of research ethics you may need to address. For explanations and guidance please refer to the background document 'ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA students'. Please complete both sections (B1 and B2)

	Please tick the appropriate box	YES	NO
B1: LOW-SENSITIVITY			
1. Does the research involve the collection and or processing of (primary or secondary) personal data (including personal data in the public domain)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does the research involve participants from whom voluntary informed consent needs to be sought?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Will financial or material incentives (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Will the research require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for access to the groups, communities or individuals to be recruited (e.g., administrator for a private Facebook group, manager of an institutions, government official)?	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the research include benefit-sharing measures for research which takes place with people who could be considered vulnerable? – please revise the background document (Guidelines) for more information.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked 'yes' to any of the above boxes (1-5), please discuss with your supervisor and include more information in your RP design describing the issue raised and how you propose to deal with it during your research.

ISS Research Ethics Review Form - MA Research

B2: HIGH SENSITIVITY	YES	NO
6. Does the research involve the collection or processing of sensitive (primary or secondary) personal data? (e.g. regarding racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, biometric data, data related to health or a person's sex life or sexual orientation)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Does the research involve participants for whom voluntary and informed consent may require special attention or who can be considered 'vulnerable'? (e.g., children (under 18), people with learning disabilities, undocumented migrants, patients, prisoners)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the research without their knowledge and consent (covert observation of people in non-public places)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Will the research be conducted in healthcare institutions, in healthcare settings, or will it involve the recruitment or study of patients or healthcare personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences for research participants, researchers, or persons and institutions connected to them?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Could the situation in one or several of the countries where research is carried out put the researcher, individuals taking part in the research, or individuals connected to the researcher, at risk? Presence of an infectious disease such as COVID-19 is considered a risk – please provide information as outlined in the background document (Guidelines).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12. Does the research require ethical approval or research permission from a local institution or body?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked 'Yes' to one of the above (5-11), please complete section 'C' below describing how you propose to mitigate the risks you have identified. After discussion with your supervisor, please submit the form to the Research Ethics Committee. In addition, if you have ticked 'Yes' to a question on any kind of personal data, please also complete the privacy questionnaire.

ISS Research Ethics Review Form - MA Research

YOU ONLY NEED TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ONE OF THE QUESTIONS IN SECTION B2 ABOVE (Questions 5-11)

C) Statement of Research Ethics

Using the background document 'ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA students', please address how you are going to deal with the ethics concern identified, including prevention measure to avoid them from manifesting, mitigation strategies to reduce their impact, and preparedness and contingency planning if the risks manifest.

Please number each point to correspond with the relevant checklist question above. Expand this section as needed and add any additional documentation which might not be included in your RP design, such as consent forms.

[TO BE COMPLETED BY MA STUDENT AND DISCUSSED WITH THE SUPERVISOR. IF THE SUPERVISOR FINDS IT NECESSARY TO SEEK FURTHER REVIEW, THE STUDENT MUST SUBMIT THE FORM TO THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE]

6. The reserach will only capture educational level of the selected respondents (girls)

7. My Research paper will focus more on children within the age bracket 15-19, about teenage Pregnancy and its Effects on Education . i will be taking this interviews in the schools, so I will first seek concern from the teenagers themselves as well as their parents or guardians before starting the interviews. Inaddition, i will also seek concern of school authorities(teachers and headmasters) of the various schools

10. I will inform them that the interview is solely for my research paper and that their privacy and confidentiality are assured. I will further tell them their names will not be in the questionnaire (anonymity) and that they can skip or withdraw if they feel uncomfortable answering any questions during the interview. As a human rights Officer and Counsellor, I have vast experience with regards to dealing with persons battling stress, therefore during the course of the interview, if any of my respondents feel stressed or traumatized, I will stop the interview and make sure I counsel the person, and then either schedule another day or cancel the interview.

I will also respect cultural differences and time and emotional support during and after the interviews. Furthermore, in my study area there are girls clubs, therefore, went I get to the schools i will simply draw my respondents from members of the clubs.

Approved by Bilge Sahin

[Signature]

19.06.2024

D) Approval from Research Ethics Committee

*To be completed by the Research Ethics Committee only if

Approved by Research Ethics Committee: _____

[Signature]

Date: 05/08/2024

Note from Ethics Committee: This application is approved on the condition that the primary data collected from the responding girls will only cover educational levels, and that the names of the respondents will not be noted so as to ensure anonymity.

Additional comments for consideration from Research Ethics Committee:

If the REC needs more information before approving, the REC secretary will be in touch with the MA student. If after requesting more information the REC still has concerns, the REC secretary will ask the supervisor to discuss these with the student. In the unlikely event that there is still no resolution, the REC will refer the application to the Institute Board.