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# The Effect of Teenage Pregnancy on Academic Performance: A Study of Selected Public Schools in Kabwe District, Zambia

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***Abstract:*** This study investigates the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance in Kabwe District, Zambia. The objectives include determining the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in selected public schools, examining its influence on academic performance, identifying socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to this phenomenon, assessing existing support systems, and proposing evidence-based interventions. The research involved a sample of 72 participants, with 12 in the qualitative segment and 60 in the quantitative segment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 school heads and 6 guidance teachers, while questionnaires were administered to 60 classroom teachers. Employing a convergent parallel design, the study integrated qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings highlight a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Kabwe District's public schools, reflecting patterns observed in other developing nations. Teenage pregnancy has a significant detrimental effect on academic performance, resulting in school dropouts and diminished class focus. Socio-economic and cultural factors, notably poverty, emerged as key contributors to teenage pregnancy. Effective support systems for pregnant teenagers and young mothers were identified, including counseling, health services, academic assistance, peer support groups, childcare facilities, and financial aid. The study recommends various interventions such as tailored academic support, enhanced access to prenatal care and counseling, fostering a supportive school environment, and addressing socio-economic determinants. Integrating these approaches with community and parental engagement can bolster the support network for pregnant teenagers, leading to improved educational outcomes and a decrease in teenage pregnancy rates. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to formulate targeted strategies supporting young mothers in their educational endeavors.

***IndexTerms:*** **Teenage pregnancy, academic performance, socio-economic factors, cultural factors, educational attrition, Kabwe District.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research on teenage pregnancy has a long tradition, particularly in the context of its effect on various aspects of society. For decades, one of the most prominent ideas in public health and educational literature had been the notion that teenage pregnancy significantly affects academic performance. Recent theoretical developments revealed that the consequences of teenage pregnancy are multifaceted, extending beyond immediate health concerns to broader societal impacts, including education.

In the past several decades, scholars and practitioners alike increasingly focused on the intersection of teenage pregnancy and educational outcomes. This is the field of study that deals with understanding how early childbearing influences the academic trajectories of young mothers. Despite the long-standing interest in this area, most of the existing theories and research concentrated on explaining the social and medical implications of teenage pregnancy, with relatively less emphasis on its educational impact.

This research constituted a relatively new area of inquiry that emerged from a growing recognition of the need to address educational outcomes in the context of teenage pregnancy. The field gradually broadened as researchers sought to understand not only the direct effects of teenage pregnancy on academic performance but also the underlying factors that contribute to these outcomes.

Within Zambia, teenage pregnancy remained a critical public health challenge, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the country experiences alarmingly high rates of adolescent births. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Zambia had one of the highest adolescent birth rates globally, with approximately 33% of girls aged 15 to 19 having given birth (UNFPA, 2018). The Kabwe District, in particular, faced an especially high teenage pregnancy rate, with about 40% of adolescents affected, as reported by the Ministry of Health in 2016.

The consequences of teenage pregnancy extended beyond individual experiences, impacting families and communities at large. Research indicated that teenage pregnancy adversely affected various domains, including education, employment, and health (Hawkins et al., 2015; Baird et al., 2011). Specifically, it had been shown to negatively influence academic performance, thereby limiting opportunities for further education and future career prospects (Hawkins et al., 2015; Cleland et al., 2011).

Despite the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Zambia and its clear repercussions on academic performance, there remained a significant research gap, particularly within Kabwe District. Most existing studies focused on the medical and social dimensions of teenage pregnancy, with limited exploration of its impact on education. This study sought to address this gap by examining the complex relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance specifically within Kabwe District.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, this research integrated both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive exploration of this relationship. By investigating not only the direct effects of teenage pregnancy on academic performance but also the contributing factors influencing this dynamic, the study aimed to offer valuable insights for policy formulation and intervention strategies. These insights were intended to mitigate the effects of teenage pregnancy on educational outcomes in Kabwe District, Zambia.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teenage pregnancy is a significant issue in Zambia, profoundly affecting the academic performance of adolescent mothers. This seems to be a common problem in many parts of the country, including Kabwe District, where the teenage pregnancy rate is alarmingly high, estimated at approximately 40% (Ministry of Health, 2016). The main problem is that despite the increasing rates of teenage pregnancy and its well-documented effects on educational outcomes, there remains a notable research gap specifically in Kabwe District.

Existing studies have largely concentrated on the medical and social dimensions of teenage pregnancy, with insufficient focus on its educational consequences (Baird, Garcia, & Wodon, 2011; Cleland et al., 2011; Hawkins, Ortega, & Kulik, 2015). This is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive understanding of how teenage pregnancy disrupts young mothers' educational progress. One of the primary problems with current research is that it has not adequately explored how teenage pregnancy directly effects academic performance, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of this issue.

The disruption caused by teenage pregnancy often severely hampers young mothers' educational progress, restricting their opportunities for further education and future career advancement. This problem has attracted substantial interest in the broader field of public health, yet it remains an open problem in the context of Kabwe District. The lack of specific research into the relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance in this area highlights a crucial gap in addressing the educational challenges faced by teenage mothers.

Examining how teenage pregnancy influences educational outcomes is vital for developing effective interventions and support systems aimed at mitigating its negative effects on young mothers' academic achievements. This study sought to address this gap by investigating the interplay between teenage pregnancy and academic performance in selected public schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. The insights gained from this research are intended to inform evidence-based interventions and policy decisions to effectively address this pressing issue.

## III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance in selected government schools in Kabwe District, Zambia.

### 3.1. Research Objectives

- To determine the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in selected public schools
- To examine the effect of teenage pregnancy on the academic performance of students in selected public schools.
- To identify the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy in selected public schools.
- To assess the support systems available to pregnant teenagers and young mothers in public schools.
- To propose evidence-based interventions to reduce teenage pregnancy and improve academic performance in public schools.

## VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was informed by several key theories and frameworks relevant to the research objectives. These include Social Learning Theory, Human Capital Theory, the Social Determinants of Health Framework, and Feminist Theory.

To determine the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in selected public schools, the study drew on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes the role of observational learning and modeling in shaping behavior. This theory was used to understand the behavior patterns and social norms contributing to teenage pregnancy, as well as the potential role of influential models in shaping adolescent behavior in the context of Kabwe District.

To examine the effect of teenage pregnancy on the academic performance of students in selected public schools, the study employed Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which highlights the role of education in shaping an individual's earning potential and life opportunities. The study sought to understand how teenage pregnancy might affect long-term educational outcomes and future employment prospects, thus drawing connections between early childbearing and academic underperformance.

To identify the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy in selected public schools, the Social Determinants of Health Framework (WHO, 2003) was utilized. This framework emphasizes the role of socio-economic and cultural factors in shaping health and educational outcomes. The study aimed to explore the broader social and structural issues driving teenage pregnancy rates in Kabwe District, providing a comprehensive understanding of the contributing factors.

To assess the support systems available to pregnant teenagers and young mothers in public schools, the study was guided by Feminist Theory, which underscores the role of gender inequality in shaping teenage pregnancy and academic outcomes (Mensch et al., 2003). This theory was critical in understanding the potential barriers to education and identifying the resources needed to support pregnant teenagers and young mothers in achieving their academic goals.

To propose evidence-based interventions aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy and improving academic performance in public schools, the study integrated insights from Social Learning Theory, Human Capital Theory, the Social Determinants of Health Framework, and Feminist Theory. This combination of theoretical perspectives and empirical research provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance. The study aimed to propose interventions that address both the individual and structural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy and academic underperformance.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework for this study was shaped by a range of theoretical perspectives and empirical research, applied specifically to the context of Kabwe District, Zambia. By integrating these frameworks, the study aimed to contribute to the knowledge base of the area of study and propose evidence-based interventions that could reduce teenage pregnancy rates and improve academic performance in public schools.

## V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant as it sought to deepen the understanding of the complex relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance in Kabwe District, Zambia. Despite the high rates of teenage pregnancy in the region and the anticipated negative effects on young mothers' educational trajectories, there has been a notable lack of research addressing this critical issue within Kabwe District.

The findings from this study have provided valuable insights into how teenage pregnancy affects academic performance, forming a foundation for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at supporting and empowering young mothers in their educational pursuits. By exploring the underlying factors that affect the relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance, the study intended to offer guidance to educators and policymakers, equipping them with the necessary knowledge to address the unique challenges faced by pregnant students and young mothers in Kabwe District.

The adoption of a mixed-methods approach in this research enhanced its potential to provide a nuanced and holistic understanding of the intricate dynamics between teenage pregnancy and academic performance. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data illuminated the multifaceted nature of this relationship, revealing both individual and systemic factors that contribute to the adverse effects of teenage pregnancy on educational outcomes.

In conclusion, this study is poised to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature on teenage pregnancy and its repercussions on academic performance. It bridged the research gap and provided actionable insights that could inform the design and implementation of effective interventions and policies. Ultimately, this research aspires to advance scholarly discourse and drive positive change in the lives of pregnant students and young mothers in Kabwe District.

## VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 6.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, specifically utilizing a convergent parallel design. This design involved the simultaneous collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, followed by the integration and analysis of these data sets to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The adoption of a mixed-methods design was justified as it facilitated a multifaceted exploration of the relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance in Kabwe District. This approach enabled the study to capture a broad spectrum of insights by incorporating both qualitative data, which offered contextual and subjective understanding from teenage mothers, teachers, and other stakeholders, and quantitative data, which provided statistical evidence on academic performance and teenage pregnancy rates (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The convergent parallel design allowed for the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings, enhancing the depth of analysis and providing a more complete picture of the factors influencing academic outcomes for teenage mothers (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This methodology supported the investigation of both the experiences and perceptions related to teenage pregnancy, as well as the measurable effect on educational performance, thus ensuring a thorough and nuanced understanding of the research problem (Bryman, 2016).

### 6.2. Study Site

The study was conducted in six public schools in Kabwe District, Zambia, chosen for their high teenage pregnancy rates and documented cases, reflecting the district's notably high incidence of teenage pregnancies at around 40%, which is well above the national average. (Ministry of Health, 2021).

### 6.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study included teachers, guidance counselors, and school heads from selected public schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. This group was chosen due to their integral roles in the educational system, with teachers and guidance counselors providing direct insights into student experiences and school heads offering broader perspectives on institutional policies. The sample consisted of 6 Heads of Schools, 6 Guidance Teachers, and 60 Regular Classroom Teachers, ensuring representation from different school stakeholders. A combination of stratified random sampling and purposeful sampling was used to select schools and participants, balancing the need for a representative sample with the inclusion of key informants who could provide in-depth perspectives on the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance. The final sample size included 72 participants, facilitating a mixed-methods approach to capture both quantitative and qualitative data.

### 6.4. Data Collection

To investigate the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance in Kabwe District, a mixed-methods approach was utilized, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Qualitative data were collected through semi-

structured interviews with six Heads of Schools and six Guidance Teachers, using an interview guide developed from a literature review and expert input. Quantitative data were gathered via questionnaires distributed to 60 Regular Classroom Teachers, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure broad representation. The questionnaires were pre-tested for clarity before administration by trained research assistants. Additionally, document analysis was conducted on relevant school reports and policy documents related to teenage pregnancy, using a coding scheme aligned with the research questions to systematically review these documents.

**6.5. Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study employed a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved transcribing interviews verbatim, coding significant data segments, grouping codes into categories, and synthesizing categories into broader themes. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking, audit trails, and intercoder reliability were used. Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics (t-tests and ANOVAs) to explore the relationship between teenage pregnancy and academic performance. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings during the interpretation phase provided a nuanced understanding of the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance in Kabwe District.

**6.6 Ethical Considerations**

This study adhered to the ethical principles established by the University Ethics Committee to ensure high standards of research conduct. Ethical approval was obtained before the study commenced, validating the research design and safeguarding participant welfare. Participants were given detailed information about the study's objectives, methods, potential benefits, and risks, allowing them to make an informed decision about their participation. Consent was obtained voluntarily, with participants informed of their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by securing permission from school administrators, assigning unique identification codes, and ensuring data were securely stored with restricted access. The study followed ethical principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, and respect for autonomy, aiming to minimize harm, maximize benefits, and respect participants' rights. These measures ensured the protection and ethical treatment of participants, maintaining the study's integrity and adherence to ethical standards.

## VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study's findings reveal significant insights into the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance in selected public schools in Kabwe District, Zambia. The research objectives aimed to determine the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, assess its effect on academic performance, identify contributing socio-economic and cultural factors, evaluate available support systems, and propose evidence-based interventions.

**7.1. Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy**

The study on teenage pregnancy and academic performance in selected public schools in Kabwe District, Zambia, reveals several crucial insights. Firstly, the findings indicate a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy, with 83.3% of respondents observing such cases in the past year. Grades 8 through 12 were particularly affected, a pattern consistent with broader regional trends observed in sub-Saharan Africa. This prevalence underscores the significant socio-economic challenges and insufficient sex education prevalent in developing regions, as highlighted by Bhana et al. (2010) and the United Nations (2015). The distribution of teenage pregnancy across these grades further reflects the heightened vulnerability of students in their mid to late teenage years, aligning with global studies on teenage pregnancy (Gwido & Fekadu, 2016; Maluwa-Banda, 2011).

**7.2. Effect on Academic Performance**

In terms of academic performance, the impact of teenage pregnancy was profound and disruptive. The study identified several contributing factors, including inadequate sex education, poverty, peer pressure, and cultural beliefs. These findings are consistent with existing literature that links teenage pregnancy with increased dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and long-term socio-economic challenges (Smith et al., 2014; Baird et al., 2011). Respondents reported that pregnant students often face emotional stress and stigma, which further impedes their educational progress. This aligns with regional studies that highlight the adverse effects of teenage pregnancy on education (Grant & Hallman, 2005; Munthali et al., 2014).

**7.3. Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors**

The study also highlighted significant socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy. Key factors identified include poverty, peer pressure, lack of access to contraception, and cultural norms such as early marriage. These findings reflect those reported in the literature, which emphasizes the role of socio-economic challenges and cultural practices in driving teenage pregnancy (WHO, 2013; Chama, 2010). Inadequate parental guidance further exacerbates the issue, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions to address these socio-economic and cultural drivers (Santhya & Jejeebhoy, 2003; Chama, 2010).

**7.4. Support Systems for Pregnant Students**

Regarding support systems, the study found that counseling services, health services, and academic support were the most effective for pregnant students. Counseling provided essential emotional support, health services ensured medical care, and academic support offered flexible scheduling and tutoring. These findings align with global research emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support systems for pregnant teenagers (Smith et al., 2017; Brown & Davis, 2018). However, challenges such as limited financial resources and inconsistent parental involvement were noted, affecting the full effectiveness of these support systems.

**7.5. Proposed Interventions**

Based on the findings, several evidence-based interventions are proposed. Key recommendations include individualized academic support, improved access to prenatal care and counseling, and the creation of a supportive school environment. Expanding childcare facilities, increasing financial assistance, and enhancing community and parental involvement are also crucial. These strategies are supported by literature suggesting that a combination of educational, health, and socio-economic approaches

can effectively address teenage pregnancy and its impact on education (Smith et al., 2017; Kohler et al., 2008). Implementing these strategies will help create a more supportive educational environment for pregnant teenagers in Kabwe District and similar settings.

### 7.6. Conclusion

The study concludes that teenage pregnancy is highly prevalent in Kabwe District, with 83.3% of respondents noting cases within the past year, particularly among Grades 8 through 12. This prevalence reflects broader regional trends in sub-Saharan Africa and underscores the socio-economic challenges and lack of comprehensive sex education prevalent in developing regions. The effect on academic performance is significant, with teenage pregnancy leading to increased dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and long-term socio-economic issues. Contributing factors include inadequate sex education, poverty, peer pressure, and cultural beliefs, which align with existing literature. The study also identifies effective support systems counseling, health services, and academic support but notes limitations such as financial constraints and inconsistent parental involvement. Recommendations include implementing targeted interventions, improving support systems, and enhancing community and parental involvement to create a supportive educational environment. These measures, supported by existing research, aim to mitigate the negative effects of teenage pregnancy and improve educational outcomes for pregnant teenagers in Kabwe District.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following actions are recommended to address the effect of teenage pregnancy on academic performance in Kabwe District, Zambia:

- The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, should implement targeted interventions to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. This includes introducing comprehensive sex education programs in schools and conducting community awareness campaigns to address the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to teenage pregnancy.
- Schools in Kabwe District should enhance their support systems by providing individualized academic support, counseling services, and access to health services for pregnant teenagers and young mothers. The Ministry of Education should oversee the effective implementation and integration of these support services within schools.
- Establishing partnerships between schools and local health and social services is essential for improving the effectiveness of support systems for pregnant students and young mothers. The Ministry of Social Welfare should facilitate and coordinate these partnerships to ensure comprehensive support.
- Policies need to be developed and enforced to provide financial assistance and childcare support for pregnant students and young mothers, enabling them to continue their education. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Development should lead the implementation and monitoring of these policies.
- Future research should focus on long-term studies to assess the academic and socio-economic outcomes of teenage mothers. Additionally, evaluating the impact of various interventions over time will offer valuable insights for refining and enhancing support programs.

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