

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF TEENAGE FATHERHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA

Matlakala Frans Koketso

ABSTRACT

Teenage fatherhood is a serious problem globally and South Africa is not an exception. The challenge with teenage fatherhood is that it is under-represented and wrongly portrayed in media. It is mainly assumed that teenage fathers tend to deny their children at birth and that they are difficult to locate and study. This study was intended at exploring contributing factors of teenage fatherhood in South Africa. The author reviewed and analysed literature as a research design. The study adopted Psychosocial theory because of its ability to explain human development. This theory was ideal to explain the influence of environment in relation to teenage fatherhood. The literature showcases that teenagers engage in reckless sexual activities and disregard the use of contraceptives which is linked to conduct disorder. Moreover, teenagers engage in sexual intercourse in order to make an impression to their peers to prove that they are man enough. However, they are challenged by financial dependency and the role that comes with caring for their children. In conclusion, this paper demonstrated that teenage fathers are not studied by scholars because they are seen as a minority group. Be as it may, teenage fathers should not be confused with teenage mothers and researchers need to also acknowledge the environment when assessing the contributing factors of teenage fatherhood. Thus, this study recommends that teenage fathers should receive equal attention from scholars as their counterparts – teenage mothers.

Keywords: Teenage fathers, Pregnancy, Parenthood, Peer pressure, Sexual intercourse.

INTRODUCTION

Teenage fathers are under-represented in research on experiences and contributing factors of teenage fatherhood and they have been portrayed negatively in the media. In corroboration, Smith (2006) propound that teenage motherhood receives more attention from researchers as compared to teenage fatherhood. On the same wavelength, Morrell (2007) and Futris and Schoppe-Sullivan (2007) have documented that contributing factors of teenage fatherhood have been studied using teenage mothers' lenses. This has resulted in teenage fathers not only becoming at risk of marginalisation but also an invisible and vulnerable group (Fatherhood Institute, 2013). Earlier, Sheldrake (2010) reported that studies that are conducted on the phenomenon of teenage fatherhood used quantitative approach instead of qualitative approach. This is a shortfall because the statistical data does not show clear contributing factors of teenage fatherhood as compared to phenomenological studies which are qualitative in nature. Over and above, it is of late that researchers have devoted research on teenage fathers using qualitative research approach (Xie, Cairns & Cairns, 2001; Glickman, 2004; Smith, 2006; Shaldrake, 2010; Amoo, 2012; Chideya & Williams, 2013; Matlakala, Mashilo & Makhubele, 2018; Matlakala, 2019). This paper sought to add to the dearth of research on contributing factors of teenage fatherhood in South Africa.

Amoo (2012) reported that male teenagers become teenage fathers because of the stereotypical thinking and patriarchal system in Sub-Saharan region. In South Africa, in some of the cultures a child symbolises masculinity. As such, some teenagers become fathers in order to affirm their status in their community. However, an earlier study by Xie et al. (2001) and Glickman (2004) enunciated that due to stereotypical thinking and patriarchal system in a community, teenage fathers are likely to experience stress of becoming a parent at a young age much like their counterparts – teenage mothers. Moreover, teenage fathers often lack social support from their communities and families even though some become teenage fathers to please their peers and family. In most cases, teenage fathers are still in school and lack the capacity to work and whenever they get employment to support their children, they are underpaid. On the same wavelength, Dallas (2009) avers that teenage fathers lack resources to care for their children and as a result they are more likely to drop out of school in pursuit of employment. Again, Amoo (2012) avers that low wages expose teenagers to the inability to fulfil their social-cultural responsibilities. This is a burden as teenage fathers must transition from teenage years to adulthood while they are still in an adolescent stage. This study was intended at exploring contributing factors of teenage fatherhood in South Africa.

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Teenage parents are identified by the government as a population that is vulnerable and at risk of becoming uneducated and unemployed due to lack of training (Sheldrake, 2010). In addition, Ayoola, Gates and Taylor (2010) in their study reported that factors contributing to teenage fathers are slightly different to those of teenage mothers. For instance, teenage fathers are propelled by feelings of pride, shame, guilt and lack of belonging to parenthood. These feelings are mainly influenced by the reaction from peers on their new role of being a parent and how they perceived their ability to provide for their children (Chideya & Williams, 2013). However, in most instance, teenage fathers are misled by their peers to parenthood role as teenage fathers are more likely to face unemployment and lack access to health-care services.

Quinlivan and Condon (2005) underscore that teenage fathers are excluded from research as most researchers assume that teenage girls are impregnated by older men. The assumption has resulted in the phenomenon, teenage fatherhood, unexplored. On the same vein, Mollborn and Lovegrove (2011) as well as Weber (2012) underscore that teenage fatherhood is unreported because researchers have stereotypical mentality that teenage fathers tend to deny their children at birth and making it difficult to be located and studied. Moreover, Madiba and Nsiki (2017) asserted that in Sub Sahara Africa, more specifically South Africa, the phenomenon teenage fatherhood is a challenge. In corroboration, Matlakala et al. (2018) pointed out that teenage fatherhood is an enormous challenge and it receives less attention and scrutiny as compared to teenage motherhood in South Africa. In order to address this mammoth challenge, contributing factors of teenage fatherhood need to be explored, however, the researcher has observed that there is a dearth of research on contributing factors of teenage fatherhood. Again, the foregoing observation of the author is that contributing factors of teenage fatherhood have been studied using female teenagers' lens. Over and above, the author believes that this poses a challenge because contributing factors of teenage fatherhood are likely not be similar to those of teenage motherhood. Thus, the author is of the notion that understanding contributing factors of teenage fatherhood can assist to develop interventions to address this phenomenon – teenage fatherhood.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desktop literature review as a methodology. The author used several sources from journals, academic books and his observation in the community to draw relevant information in exploring contributing factors of teenage fatherhood. The author used different search engines such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate to draw a precise picture on the contributing factors of teenage fatherhood. Content Thematic Analysis was used, and the following themes emerged; teenagers unprotected sexual intercourse, history of conduct disorder, poverty, peer pressure and culture..

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychosocial Theory

Erick Erikson developed a psychosocial theory to explain human development. Erikson (1968) avers that individuals go through eight stages of development. Moreover, Erikson (1968) believed that human development is best understood as an interaction of three systems, namely: the somatic system (all those biological processes necessary for the functioning of the individual), ego system (includes those process central to thinking and reasoning) and societal system (process by which a person becomes integrated into their society). For this study, adolescence stage was explored with its crises, as it is a time of experimentation with sexual behaviour. It is during this stage that teenagers are faced with identity versus role confusion stage; with the inclusion of parenthood, they may not successfully complete this stage, hence be stagnated on role confusion.

Kroger (2006) avers that the psychosocial theory seeks to dissect and provide understanding of the interplay between the individual biology, psychology, and social recognition and response within an historical context. In other words, this theory asserts that the contributing factors of teenage pregnancy should be traced back to the historical background. Using this theory, the author recognises that in many cultural settings boys are not physically or emotionally close to their male role models. As such, the distance between teenagers and their role models, teenage fathers are without the much-needed support to see them through their transition from being a teenager to becoming a father as a teenager (Chideya & Williams, 2013:211). Lack of support leads teenage fathers to feel isolated and since they have to juggle two stages, that is, teenager and fatherhood, they end up resorting to what is known as identity crisis. To Erickson (1968:156), identity crisis is “a critical turning point in the life history of an individual, in which development can only move forward by taking a new directional course”. Moreover, Tatala (2009) avers that identity crisis reveals the conflict between identity and role confusion. At this stage, a teenage father starts to wonder what his role in the society is now that he is a father and what are his expectations from the community. The inability of a teenage father to clearly distinguish his role in the society, results in a teenage father being unable to transition from the adolescence stage to fatherhood role.

Furthermore, teenage fathers’ failure to transition from one stage to another role results in the development of ego identity. According to Erickson (1968), ego identity is the awareness of an individual’s uniqueness and the unconscious desire for continuity of experience. To that end, teenage fathers find themselves in an instance where they perceive themselves as unique individuals for having a child as teenagers while the community perceive them as deviant children. However, that does not stop them from experimenting

with their lives as they seek for employment in order to provide for their children. These teenage fathers, unconsciously due to the failure to secure employment, experiment with alcohol as a coping mechanism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Contributing to Teenage Fatherhood

There are various aspects that contribute to teenage fatherhood that remain understudied. In African counties, there has been one sign visible and that is high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. In support, the British Council Nigeria & Harvard School of Public Health (2010) and Population Reference Bureau (PRB) (2010) both wrote that teenagers in developing countries make up two-thirds of the world population. This reaffirms the earlier findings by Rudatsikira, Ogwell, Siziya and Muula (2007) as well as Amoo (2012) who pointed out that there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy in some sub-Saharan African countries. Moreover, Rudatsikira et al. (2007) assert that teenagers under the age of 15 years in developing countries are more likely to engage in sexual intercourse. In corroboration, Ojo (2007) and Adeyemi and Amoo (2010) propound that due to lack of resources in developing countries, teenagers engage in sexual activities with lack of information about sexuality and contraceptives and later become teen parents. The above findings showcase that teenage pregnancy tends to be high in rural areas as compared to urban settlements or rather developed countries at large. This in turn shows that, developing and undeveloped countries are faced with high teenage fatherhood rates with lack of resources to educate teenage fathers on fatherhood.

Historically, it has been vital for fathers to be responsible for and particularly to be able to provide for the needs of their children. Chideya and Williams (2013:209) underscore that the dissimilarities in the socio-economic background of teenagers mean that there are diverse limitations for them in creating a significant definition of fatherhood. This means that teenagers compared to men who earn a low income face a unique challenge in building a feasible identity as a father. This kind of reasoning is based on the ideology that, culturally, a father is responsible for the maintenance of his child or children. However, an earlier study by Forste, Bartkowski and Jackson (2009) highlighted that the idea of the breadwinner is no longer as central as it was before, its historical impact may lead low-income fathers to view themselves as insufficient providers for their children. Moreover, Sheldrake (2010) asserts that teenagers are often seen as being sexually reckless. This may be a suitable explanation behind an enormous number of teenage pregnancies in South Africa. As such, there are several factors that play a vital role in increasing the risk of teenagers becoming teenage fathers. The following points of focus are contributing factors to teenage fatherhood, namely: culture, family factors, peer pressure, history of conduct disorder, and practicing unprotected sex.

Culture

Growing up in a patriarchal society means that emphasis is on the importance of the provider role in fatherhood. Fulfilling this expectation is the greatest impediment that teenage fathers experience. In support, Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana (2010) reported that teenagers are pushed by their cultural backgrounds to have children at a young age to prove that they are fertile. This shows how society has played an important role in defining what fatherhood

entails for the participants, as their thoughts on this topic are in line with societal expectations. Teenage fathers in patriarchal societies are expected to assume the role of the man. In such societies, a man must provide socio-economic support to his child (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2003; Amoo, 2011). In addition, Amoo (2012) discovered that in the Sub-Saharan region a father is seen as the breadwinner for their family (their child and teenage mother). Furthermore, Masilo (2018) asserts that fathers play a significant role in the family system since they are the ones who instigates families. In patriarchal societies a father is expected to pay damages and care for the child financially. Since most teenage fathers are unemployed, they are excluded in the upbringing of their children.

Jacobs and Marais (2013) state that cultural practices such as paying damages and discussing the rearrangement regarding child-care have an impact on teenage fathers. For the fact that a teenager is unemployed he fails to pay damages and end up being excluded in the upbringing of his child. Over and above, Jacobs and Marais (2013) discovered that teenagers have children at a young age because of alcohol use, reckless sexual intercourse without condoms, lack of information on the usage of contraceptives, lack of trust in contraceptives and the desire to be a parent to steam authority for his masculinity. To that end, due to their reckless drinking, teenagers tend to make irrational decisions including engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse not bearing the consequences thereof.

Family Factors

Several authors have reported that most teenage fathers are characterised as having low self-esteem, come from unstable families, have antisocial behaviour and living in poverty (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor, & Dickson, 2001; Xie, Cairns & Cairns, 2001; Eaton, Flisher, & Aarø 2003; Glickman, 2004). Moreover, Martínez, García and Yubero (2007) found that teenagers under the age of 15 years without a guardian or parent(s) are more likely to have an earlier sexual intercourse debut than their counterparts who reside with their parents. On the same wavelength, Shannon and Abrams (2007) pointed out that having a single parent in a household and coming from a low socioeconomic background contribute to teenage fatherhood for most teenagers. In other words, as parents leave their children in rural areas to seek for jobs in urban areas, a vacuum is created for teenagers to utilise their homes as a place to indulge in risky sexual behaviours. It could be deduced that permissive parenting has a direct contribution to teenage fatherhood. Teenagers need their parents to discipline them when they are showing deviate behaviour but given their status quo, that is, lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, they tend to leave their children unattended in pursuit of employment.

Peer Pressure

Davies et al. (2004) who found that most teenagers become teenage fathers at an early age in order to impress their friends. On the same wavelength, Chideya and Williams (2013:212) posit that, unlike teenage mothers, teenage fathers might long to become parents for reasons that are self-serving such as gaining status among their peers. Thus, the peer group begins to take over the influential role the family has been playing since childhood. Other teenagers impregnate their partners because their peers have children. In rural communities, the author has observed that teenagers believe that a child commemorates their manhood status in the community, others go to the extent of impregnating multiple partners.

Forste et al. (2009) aver that fathers in general replicate the positive fathering they received and then try to rework the negative models of fathering with which they were raised. In contrast, Swartz and Bhana (2009) argue that teenage fathers use the absence of their parents in their lives as motivation for being intentionally present for their own children. In other words, other teenage fathers impregnate their partners in order to rectify the wrong that was committed by their absent fathers. They have the mentality that providing for their children will ease their pain and resolve their unresolved questions that their fathers never loved them.

Practicing Unprotected Sex and Early Debut to Sexual Activities

A study by Sheldrake (2010) found that most teenagers who became teenage fathers reported that they have had early experimentation with sexual activities. In other words, teenagers engage in reckless sexual activity that often disregards the use of contraceptives. Their engagement, in some other cases, is perpetuated by their peers, as they try to prove to them that they are man enough. The active disregard of contraceptive use and sometimes the unavailability of those contraceptives can lead teenagers into becoming teenage fathers. The findings of Chideya and Williams (2013) showed that some teenage fathers argued that they are still not using any condoms because they are only having sex with their partner. Whilst, Chili (2013) revealed that one teenage father was aware of the contraceptives that prevent unplanned pregnancies. However, he did not prefer using them, but instead he preferred the withdrawal method. The withdrawal method refers to engaging in unprotected sex and when about to ejaculate, an individual pulls out. This method does not ensure prevention against pregnancy.

History of Conduct Disorder and Substance Abuse

Conduct disorder is associated with reckless, impulsive behaviour that disregards the morals of the society. It could be deduced that adolescence is a stage whereby experimentation with sexual activities and substance use takes place (Sheldrake, 2010). This reaffirms an earlier study by Shannon and Abrams (2007) who have observed that due to lack of activity during the day teenagers indulge in different activities such as risky sexual behaviour and alcohol abuse in order to address their boredom. Teenagers who abuse substances are likely to engage in risky sexual activities that may lead them into becoming fathers at a young age and some can even go to the extent of raping, whereby pregnancy may usually result. In support, Hendricks, Swartz and Bhana (2010) wrote that some teenagers become fathers after engaging in risky sexual intercourse when intoxicated with alcohol. When teenagers are intoxicated they do not have enough time to think of the availability of condoms and let alone the usage of contraceptives. This reaffirms earlier findings by Naimi *et al.* (2003) and Prager *et al.*, (2007) who documented that alcohol abuse is not only linked to Sexual Transmitted Diseases but also with unprotected sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancy and abortion. On that note, Adolescent Substance Use (2011) pointed out that adolescents who are sexually active and use substances have high rates of unintended pregnancies and of repeat unplanned pregnancies as compared to their counterparts who are not using substances.

The Relevance of Social Work in Teenage Fatherhood

Social workers have a mandate from International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and National Association of Social Work (NASW) to enhance the social wellbeing of individuals and communities (NASW, 1999; IFSW, 2012). In their interventions, social workers are guided by the cardinal values that are enshrined in South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). Amongst those cardinal values; social workers are mandated by SACSSP to provide service and social justice to individuals or social service recipients (SACSSP, n.d). In light with the cardinal value of service; social workers must provide service and educate male teenagers about the pressure of peers and patriarchal system with regard to teenage pregnancy. In addition, male teenagers can be educated about challenges that teenage fatherhood entails. The inclusion of male teenagers regarding parenthood, will assist social workers to meet their obligation – the value of social justice. In light of the above sentiment, Makhubele, Matlakala and Mabvurira (2018) enunciated that social workers should challenge the injustices in society and as it stands, teenage fathers' voices are marginalised and unrecognised as compared to teenage mothers. As such, social workers should assume the role of advocate to ensure that teenage fathers' voices are heard and fight the patriarchal system and peer pressure that leads students to fall victim to parenthood at a young age.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that teenage fathers are not studied by scholars because they are seen as a minority group. There is enormous information on teenage mothers and less is reported on teenage fathers. This article highlighted that there are numerous factors that contributes to teenage fatherhood which still remain to be explored further. In this study, the researcher underscored that the major factor leading to teenage fatherhood is the pressure received from cultural backgrounds. In some cultures, having a child is perceived as a mark/definition of success and demonstrates the ability of a man to bear children. Moreover, lack of adult supervision in teenagers' lives prompt teenagers to engage in reckless sexual activities. In addition, peer pressure also plays a major role in male fathers, as they will do things to impress and to belong. In order to belong some teenagers are forced to prove their manhood by engaging in sex prematurely and that leads to them to being parents at an early age. To that end, the researcher is of the view that teenage fatherhood should be given as much attention as much as teenage motherhood. Policymakers should equally weigh in on the issue of teenage fathers when addressing the issue of teenage parents. Equally, socio-environment factors should be greatly considered when dealing with teenage issues.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANS KOKETSO MATLAKALA

North-West University – Mafikeng Campus, Department of Social Work: Lifestyle Disease
Research Entity

Koketso.Matlakala@nwu.ac.za and fransmatlakala@gmail.com