



# Curbing teenage pregnancy through Religious Education: South African teachers speak out

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how governmental policies, such as South Africa's Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (PPMLPS), could be integrated with faith-based curricula in a way that respects religious beliefs and effectively prevents pregnancies. This paper is couched from the Social Conflict Theory (SCT), which argues that disagreements that lead to compromises that deviate from the initial circumstances are what ultimately cause societal change, rather than a process of changing values to effect change. The paper adopted a qualitative research design where qualitative Content Analysis was used as an approach to collect data. A focus group discussion was conducted with 3 teachers in two different schools in Bloemfontein, Mangaung Metro Municipality, South Africa. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants. Thematic Analysis (TA) was used as an instrument to analyse data. The study found that religious education played a significant role in curbing teenage pregnancy through its teachings on moral values and abstinence from sexual conduct rather than prevention. Also, teachers see religious education as a potential moral compass that can foster self-respect, discipline, and value for life. In light of the findings, the study recommends that religious education should be reintroduced as part of the curriculum. Also, societal ideas, moral education, and faith-based values should interact with initiatives to encourage appropriate learners' sexual conduct. This paper contributes to the growing body of research by emphasises how moral instruction, communal attitudes, and faith-based values interact to shape learners' sexual behaviour.

**Keywords:** Religious education, teenage pregnancy, abstinence, early motherhood, school dropout

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is a concern about the rise of teenage pregnancy, especially among girls of school-going age. Irrespective of the family's socio-economic situation, many societies are battling to curb this phenomenon. This notion is supported by Stanley, who argued that teenage pregnancy is a worldwide issue that affects nations with high, middle, and low incomes.<sup>1</sup> The authors further added that pregnancy outside of wedlock

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<sup>1</sup> Selwyn Stanley, "Social Problems: Exploring the Landscape," in *Contemporary Social Problems in the UK* (Routledge, 2022), 1–14.

was frequently viewed as shameful and disgraceful for the woman, child, and their family because sexual activity was primarily restricted to married people. This view persists to this day in many cultures.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, this paper advocates for the inclusion of religious education in schools irrespective of the religious affiliation of learners, which will foster values, morality, intellectual, as well as spiritual development. This notion was prompted by high rates of teenage pregnancy in schools. According to Islamic law, sexual intercourse before marriage is prohibited.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the study made by Theuri reflects that in the United States of America (USA), 194,377 infants were born to women between the ages of 15 and 19 and concluded that this necessitates ecologically transformative social change to strengthen the policies implemented to reduce teenage pregnancy and its related repercussions.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the efforts made by the education department and health department to mitigate teenage pregnancy, the phenomenon is still on the rise. In another study, made by Sekopa, Risenga, and Mboweni, they argue that the Department of Health offers a variety of programs in the Sekhukhune region of the province of Limpopo to protect youth against STIs and unwanted pregnancies.<sup>5</sup> Access to various programs is provided to the community, such as campaigns to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS transmission and Love Life. These initiatives include HIV counselling and testing services, as well as free condoms and contraceptive distribution. The data from the Fetakgomo Tubatse Local Municipality clinics, however, show higher than average rates of teenage pregnancy and STIs despite these efforts.

Another study worth mentioning was done by Otumo and Umoh, which suggests that Pregnancy among teenagers frequently causes delays in completing schooling.<sup>6</sup> It may be necessary for young moms to drop out of school, which will limit the possibilities for the future and possible professional routes.<sup>7</sup> This educational setback has the potential to prolong the poverty cycle because people with inferior educational backgrounds frequently have difficulty finding steady work and becoming financially independent.<sup>8</sup> Another study done by Tituaña et al. argues that the high rate of teenage pregnancy in many nations may be attributed to inadequate sexual and reproductive health care and education.<sup>9</sup> One of the regions with the highest rates of adolescent pregnancies worldwide is Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where there are 59 pregnancies for every 1,000 teenage women (15–19 years old). Tituaña et al. further say that in Ecuador, treating an unwanted pregnancy costs more than five times as much as avoiding one.<sup>10</sup> According to research conducted in Ecuador among 6,487 young women (ages 15 to 19), dropping out of school because of adolescent pregnancy costs \$317 million in lost future earnings. Although comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was recommended several years ago based on research, Ecuador is still in the process of integrating it into the curriculum, and the number of pregnancies is continuously rising.<sup>11</sup>

While the above studies have made contributions to the study of teenage pregnancy, none of the studies have focused on curbing this phenomenon by reintroducing religious education into schools, especially in South Africa. This study is unique in the sense that it argues for the reintroduction of religious education into the curriculum in South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley, "Social Problems: Exploring the Landscape."

<sup>3</sup> Nuraan Davids and Yusuf Waghid, "Teenage Pregnancy and the South African Schools Act: Is Religion a Justifiable Reason for Exclusion?," *Journal of Education*, no. 58 (2014): 142.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Theuri, "The Influence of Government and Faith-Based Interventions on the Management of Teenage Pregnancy in Mombasa County, Kenya," *African Quarterly Social Science Review* 1, no. 2 (2024): 38.

<sup>5</sup> Ragoosebo P Sekopa, Patrone R Risenga, and Sheillah H Mboweni, "Factors Contributing to Rise in Teenage Pregnancy in Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province," *Curationis* 47, no. 1 (2024): 2482.

<sup>6</sup> Otumo Etini and Umoh Glory Gabriel, "The Issues and the Challenges of Teenage Pregnancy Investigating the Counseling Implications of the Speedy Remedial and Strategies for Sustainable Development," *International Journal of Integrative and Modern Medicine* 2, no. 3 (2024): 25.

<sup>7</sup> Etini and Glory Gabriel, "The Issues and the Challenges of Teenage Pregnancy Investigating the Counseling Implications of the Speedy Remedial and Strategies for Sustainable Development."25.

<sup>8</sup> Etini and Glory Gabriel, "The Issues and the Challenges of Teenage Pregnancy Investigating the Counseling Implications of the Speedy Remedial and Strategies for Sustainable Development."25.

<sup>9</sup> Allpa Tituaña et al., "How to Decrease Teenage Pregnancy: Rural Perspectives in Ecuador," *Frontiers in Public Health* 12 (2024): 1370507.

<sup>10</sup> Tituaña et al., "How to Decrease Teenage Pregnancy: Rural Perspectives in Ecuador."2.

<sup>11</sup> Tituaña et al., "How to Decrease Teenage Pregnancy: Rural Perspectives in Ecuador."2.

Considering this, the aim of the study is to *discuss the challenges faced by schools due to teenage pregnancy and how religious education can be used to mitigate this problem.*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Global perspectives on teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy remains a major global problem that has an impact on social interactions, education, mental health, and financial security.<sup>12</sup> The author further argues that many teenage parents find it difficult to juggle their academic obligations and child-rearing duties, which results in high dropout rates and few chances for personal development. Holness highlights the fact that 16 million of the nearly 300 million teenage girls in the world give birth each year, making up 11% of all births globally.<sup>13</sup> Sully et al. argue that of the 21 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 who become pregnant in developing countries, an estimated 12 million give birth.<sup>14</sup> According to Mutasingwa and Mwaipopo, Kenya's high rates of childbirth and school dropout prevent girls from finishing their education and developing human capital skills, which results in gender disparities for young girls in participation or decision-making.<sup>15</sup> In the Republic of the Philippine teenage girls under the age of 15 gave birth in 3135 cases in 2022, up 35.13% from 2320 cases in 2021.<sup>16</sup>

### Religious Education and Moral Development

Teenage life is one of the crucial stages of a growing person. It is a stage where a person decides on his or her life based on what is happening at that time. Dehshiri agrees that during human development, being a teenager is a time of ups and downs.<sup>17</sup> During this stage of life, teenagers experience moral and social crises. According to Przygoda et al., numerous sociological data show that young people's morality is currently undergoing dynamic changes, particularly with regard to morality in the area of sexuality, especially during the teenage stage.<sup>18</sup> Education greatly contributes to a people's moral development, wealth, and even advancement.<sup>19</sup> According to Muharrom et. al., morality serves as a yardstick for judging whether human attitudes and behaviours are acceptable or incorrect when seen from the positive and negative aspects of being human rather than as performers of certain roles.<sup>20</sup> Thus, children who are raised with knowledge and involvement in programs that prevent early sexual engagement are more likely to put off having their first sexual experience, which will reduce their risk of being victims of teenage pregnancies.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, moral education can be influenced by family, school and community because it can mould and construct behaviour of teenagers as it embeds religious beliefs and ethics.<sup>22</sup> According to Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis,

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<sup>12</sup> Gio Miguel L Baldo et al., "Turning a Blind Eye: A Systematic Literature Review on Spreading Awareness of Teenage Pregnancy," *International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies* 2, no. 04 (2025): 201–21.

<sup>13</sup> Nola Holness, "A Global Perspective on Adolescent Pregnancy," *International Journal of Nursing Practice* 21, no. 5 (2015): 677–81.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth A Sully et al., "Adding It up: Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2019," 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Lilian Victor Mutasingwa and Rosemarie Mwaipopo, "Gender-Based Violence and Its Impact to Secondary School Students' Education Participation, Retention and Performance," *Tanzania Journal of Development Studies* 20, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>16</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, "Teenage Pregnancy Declined from 8.6 Percent in 2017 to 5.4 Percent in 2022," *Philippine Statistics Authority*, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> A.S.H. Dehshiri, "Moral Education of Adolescents Based on Religious Teachings," *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Pure Life (IMJPL)* 9, no. 32 (2022): 99–145.

<sup>18</sup> Wiesław Przygoda, Kazimierz Świąż, and Piotr Rozpędowski, "Sexual Morality of Young Poles as a Challenge for Religious Education," *Religions* 14, no. 2 (2023): 277.

<sup>19</sup> Bucky Wibawa Karya Guna and Sri Endah Yuwantiningrum, "Building Morality and Ethics Through Islamic Religious Education In Schools," *IJGIE (International Journal of Graduate of Islamic Education)* 5, no. 1 (2024): 14–24.

<sup>20</sup> Muharrom Muharrom, Aslan Aslan, and Jaelani Jaelani, "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Pada Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Smk Pusat Keunggulan Smk Muhammadiyah Sintang," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Kearifan Lokal* 3, no. 1 (2023): 1–13.

<sup>21</sup> Itonga Silas Murithi, "Role of Church Leadership in Addressing Teenage Pregnancies among High School Girls in Tigania Central, Meru County, Kenya" (KeMU, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Nurul Dwi Tsoraya, Okeh Primalaini, and Masduki Asbari, "The Role of Islamic Religious Education on The Development Youths' Attitudes," *Journal of Information Systems and Management (JISMA)* 1, no. 1 (2022): 12–18.

research indicates that when religious education is given its proper place in the educational system, it gives an opportunity for moral ideals to be imparted.<sup>23</sup>

### **Educational responses to teenage pregnancy in South Africa**

Teenage females who become pregnant while in school frequently face a variety of physical, social, and financial challenges.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, some teenagers drop out of school and are unable to re-enter the educational system after giving birth due to the difficulties associated with pregnancy.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, affected teenagers, especially those without assistance at home, are sometimes compelled to drop out of school before completing the highest grade.<sup>26</sup> The Department of Education came up with strategies to deal with teenage pregnancy, which evolved over time, like Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), School-Based Support Systems, Peer Education Programmes, Community and NGO Interventions, and School Reintegration Efforts.<sup>27</sup> These policies or strategies were based on the following premises.

- Prevent teenage pregnancies through education and awareness.
- Support pregnant learners to remain in school during and after pregnancy.
- Reduce stigma and discrimination against pregnant learners.
- Promote comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools.

Despite all these efforts, teenage pregnancy still remains a challenge in the education sector. In the African context, a study by Bhana et al. in secondary schools in Durban and Cape Town (South Africa) revealed that teachers disregarded pregnant students.<sup>28</sup> Some teachers opposed the program that supports the reintegration of pregnant and teenage mothers into the educational system because they believed that teenage pregnancy was a sexual disgrace. In a similar vein, a different study conducted in Cape Town discovered that secondary school teachers and students did not support teenage mothers.<sup>29</sup> Based on an argument raised by Maphati, Tladi, and Kgole, they assert that after giving birth, many teenage mothers struggled academically, which was mostly caused by their regular absences from school, which prevented them from learning important lessons.<sup>30</sup> However, it is challenging for teenage mothers to muster the confidence to return to school for readmission in the absence of strong support networks, such as current and encouraging carers and instructors, and it is as challenging for the readmitted to handle the responsibilities of schoolwork.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Albertina Maitumeleng Ntho-Ntho and Jan Nieuwenhuis, "Religion in Education Policy in South Africa: A Challenge of Change," *British Journal of Religious Education* 38, no. 3 (2016): 236–48.

<sup>24</sup> Hlologelo Malatji et al., "Coping Strategies and Support Provided by Educational Centres to Teenage Mothers Re-Engaging with Education Post-Pregnancy: A Case Study of A Township School in South Africa.," *E-BANGI Journal* 20, no. 3 (2023).

<sup>25</sup> Malatji et al., "Coping Strategies and Support Provided by Educational Centres to Teenage Mothers Re-Engaging with Education Post-Pregnancy: A Case Study of A Township School in South Africa."

<sup>26</sup> Hlologelo Malatji, Nkosiya Dube, and Busisiwe Nkala-Dlamini, "'Every Time When I Make a Mistake in Class, Educators Would Say, You Baby Mama You Must Keep Quiet': Challenges Confronting Teenage Mothers When Re-Engaging with Secondary School Education in a Johannesburg Secondary School, South Africa," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 30, no. 3 (2020): 306–18.

<sup>27</sup> Susara Magdalena Beukes, "Exploring Capability Sets for Educators for the Implementation of the *Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools* (2021)," 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Deevia Bhana et al., "South African Teachers' Responses to Teenage Pregnancy and Teenage Mothers in Schools," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, no. 8 (2010): 871–83.

<sup>29</sup> Agnes Chigona and Rajendra Chetty, "Girls' Education in South Africa: Special Consideration to Teen Mothers as Learners," *Journal of Education for International Development*, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> N.M. Maphoti, Flora M. Tladi, and J.C. Kgole, "The Effects of Teenage Motherhood on Secondary School Learners in Rural Communities of Limpopo Province, South Africa," *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 20 (2014): 870–85.

<sup>31</sup> Deevia Bhana and Sithembile Judith Mcambi, "When Schoolgirls Become Mothers: Reflections from a Selected Group of Teenage Girls in Durban," *Perspectives in Education* 31, no. 1 (2013): 11–19.

## THEORETICAL FRAMINGWORK

This article adopted Social Conflict Theory (SCT). The theory is an offshoot of Critical Theory. This theory was developed by Karl Marx, Max Weber, and George Simmel. Conflict theory holds that confrontations that lead to compromises that deviate from the initial circumstances are what ultimately cause societal change, rather than a process of changing values to effect change.<sup>32</sup> This theory does not seek to examine the cause of a rule-breaking incident or the history of an individual's inappropriate behaviour, but the conflict viewpoint highlights how society is diverse and how power is unevenly distributed among its different groups.<sup>33</sup> This theory is relevant to couch this study because the conflict researchers contend that hierarchies and social systems are to blame for people's well-being. Thus, it is the government's responsibility to address teenage pregnancy in schools, which will safeguard the well-being of teenage girls. This theory was selected because societal change happens because of challenges that lead to compromises that differ from the initial circumstances, rather than by a process of changing values. Thus, the government possess the power to create laws and regulations which can change teenage pregnancy and can reinstate religious education into schools, which can be used as an instrument to curb this phenomenon.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted qualitative research residing in the Participatory Action Research (PAR). Par was chosen as the methodology because it places a strong importance on the usefulness of firsthand information to solve problems caused by unfair and destructive social structures. Teachers who are facing a challenge with teenage pregnancy will have a chance to air their views and suggest how religion can be used to mitigate the problem of pregnancy in their schools. For this study, purposive and snowball approaches were used to identify participants based on their knowledge of religious education and experience with working with pregnancy issues in their respective schools. The two techniques will help us select just those participants who meet the study's objectives, and a high-quality sample free from biases will be obtained to boost the trustworthiness and reliability of the results.<sup>34</sup> A focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to generate data. A total of 6 participants were selected from two different schools in Bloemfontein, Mangaung Metro Municipality, Free State, which included 3 former religious education teachers and 3 teachers in the School Governing Body committee. The data was collected once every two days for 2 hours per day. Content Analysis (CA) was used to analyse the generated data.

The study complied with ethical requirements. Permission was requested and approved by the Department of Education and the institutional ethics committee of the university. Informed consent, the right to withdraw, and participant identity protection were other ethical considerations that were upheld.

The Focus group discussion was based on two research questions:

*What are teachers' voices on the significance of religious education in schools, and how can religious education be implemented to curb teenage pregnancy in schools?*

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of the paper will respond to the focus group discussion with the participants based on the first question: *What challenges are faced by schools due to teenage pregnancy?*

### a. Moral Education

When considering both the positive and negative aspects of people as human beings rather than actors in specific roles, morals serve as a measure for judging whether human attitudes and behaviours are acceptable

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<sup>32</sup> Arditya Prayogi, "Social Change in Conflict Theory: A Descriptive Study," *ARRUS Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2023): 38.

<sup>33</sup> Prayogi, "Social Change in Conflict Theory: A Descriptive Study."39.

<sup>34</sup> Friday Nyimbili and Leah Nyimbili, "Types of Purposive Sampling Techniques with Their Examples and Application in Qualitative Research Studies," *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies* 5, no. 1 (February 16, 2024): 90, <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.0419>.

or wrong.<sup>35</sup> Morals, then, are made up of ideals and principles that come from human integrity.<sup>36</sup> Charity begins at home. When children are taught morals from home and within their respective communities, they behave better, or they become better citizens. Guna and Yuwantiningrum agree that every person is supposed to develop positive character traits, a responsible attitude, and decent life skills through moral education.<sup>37</sup> Thus, besides the family and the community, religious education can play a pivotal role in moulding and shaping behaviour, especially for the growing minds. One former religious teacher said:

*Religion has always been part of our lives as we were growing up, and Sir, we behaved very well and had respect for our teachers and ourselves. In those days, it was a taboo to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, let alone being pregnant. I grew up in a catholic home and attended catholic school, so in our daily school periods, we had RE as a non-examinable subject, and it was taken very seriously. So, we learned a lot, especially on how to behave and respect our bodies as boys and girls. In today's democratic dispensation, really, we are experiencing more challenges, especially with our learners becoming pregnant, and we as teachers are powerless to control the situation.*

In addition to this, another former RE teacher said:

*You know my colleague is right, in those days it was not even about what teachers were saying, it was just automatic that we needed to respect them all the way. I remember our RE teacher said to us, "Your body is a temple of the Lord, you need to respect it, it's not meant for boys, be proud of your virginity". You know, Sir, from that point on I did not want anything to do with boys.... [teacher taking a pause and said I am not sure where South Africa is going. This democracy is destroying our children; they are taking away all good things that used to work in the olden days, like RE and replacing them with nothing. Look now at how rife teenage pregnancy is in our schools.*

Based on the above discussion, religious education has played a significant role in the lives of learners before the new dispensation. Children knew respect, and they lived with morals due to religious teachings from school.

The second argument made by a former SGB teacher that "religious education is a cornerstone of life"—is covered in the part that follows.

## **b. Cornerstone of life**

Religious literature contains moral and ethical lessons that are frequently emphasised in religious education.<sup>38</sup> It teaches values like empathy, compassion, honesty, and social justice, values that often rest on religious principles and assist learners in developing a strong moral compass.<sup>39</sup> It is thus the responsibility of all teachers to teach learners or to encourage moral values.<sup>40</sup> The SGB teachers said:

*Being in the SGB is not as easy as people might think. My position is that I'm on the disciplinary committee. You know, ladies and gentlemen, and you, Sir, we are faced with a huge challenge that I'm not even sure if we will win. Our learners have lost it, completely lost it [shooo...]. You know, three weeks ago, we had a child who gave birth in the girls' toilet, and she just left the child there. We, as the school we were not even aware that she was pregnant, and the situation shocked the whole school community. Thus, from that point, I just realised that things are worse than I thought.*

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<sup>35</sup> Guna and Yuwantiningrum, "Building Morality and Ethics Through Islamic Religious Education In Schools, 15"; Sello Martin Blasé Mohlaloka Mohlaloka and Leetwane Anna Ntlhare, "Analysing Teachers' Perspectives on the Significance of Religious Education to Curb Learners-on-Teacher Violence in South African Schools," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 10, no. 11 (2024): 19.

<sup>36</sup> Guna and Yuwantiningrum, "Building Morality and Ethics Through Islamic Religious Education In Schools, 15."

<sup>37</sup> Guna and Yuwantiningrum, "Building Morality and Ethics Through Islamic Religious Education In Schools, 24."

<sup>38</sup> A. Sasi Kumar and R. Indira, "Transformative Impact of Religious Education Among Students," 2023.35.

<sup>39</sup> Kumar and Indira, "Transformative Impact of Religious Education Among Students." 35.

<sup>40</sup> Mohlaloka and Ntlhare, "Analysing Teachers' Perspectives on the Significance of Religious Education to Curb Learners-on-Teacher Violence in South African Schools."21.

Another teacher added:

*Yes, it's true what my colleague is saying, because last year, 2024, I think about 15 female learners got pregnant, and their age differences were between 15 and 17 years. Hopefully, they will be back next year. The only time we as teachers speak about sexual education is through life skills, which is not enough, but if we can be afforded an opportunity in terms of policy to educate our learners about abstinence rather than prevention, I believe this can make our situation better.*

In addition, another SGB member submitted:

*You know it's funny these days how things happen; it's like nobody cares, especially the Department of Education. They are just busy with these laws that do not protect learners, especially girls. Now we, as SGB and being a teacher at the same time we must deal with all these things because now they have given learners the right to be pregnant. But that is not how we grew up. Yes, yes... and I agree apartheid was wrong and all its principles, but, at that time, religious education protected our learners from participating in sexuality; we abstained altogether because of the sense of morality.*

Given the above sentiments, the co-researchers seem to agree that religion can make a difference in how the school and learners can view prevention or abstinence. Teenage pregnancy can have an adverse effect on the lives of young children. According to Hagues and McCarty, for women, pregnancy, whether planned or not, changes their lives.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it has the potential to put a teenage girl on a completely different path in life, sometimes leading to poverty. Bain et al. argue that more than 50% of teenage pregnancies are unplanned, and more than 50% of those result in abortion.<sup>42</sup>

### **c. Building Positive Character**

Character is one of the most important traits that shape personality and behaviour. Children who grow up with a positive character have better chances of success in life. Dewi and Kholis agree that building the nation's future generation's character is crucial, with the ultimate objective of producing responsible, autonomous, intelligent, creative, and healthy people who are also democratic citizens.<sup>43</sup> According to Rowimah et al., morality comprises the understanding of right and wrong, whereas character consists of virtues like discipline, respect, and accountability that are governed by personal aptitudes.<sup>44</sup>

One teacher said:

*In most of our South African schools, there is this thing called moral degeneration; our children have lost it, I mean, altogether. You can see that way they dress, walk and talk. No respect at all, no character "niks" (nothing). Sometimes I wonder where this world is going, what kind of future citizens we are teaching.*

Another added that:

*To be honest, I agree with my colleague here; these learners don't know what is right from wrong. They just live and do as they please. Our girls in school are involved with men who are even older than we are, and at the end, they become pregnant, and some never return; then, the future is done. At one stage, I had a talk with one learner, sorry, I will not mention her name. I was telling her about*

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<sup>41</sup> Rachel Joy Hagues and Sara Helms McCarty, "Examining Policies toward Adolescent Pregnancies across Africa: What Is the Relationship between Religion and Education Policy?," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 42, no. 1 (2023): 73.

<sup>42</sup> Luchuo Engelbert Bain, Marjolein B M Zweckhorst, and Tjard de Cock Buning, "Prevalence and Determinants of Unintended Pregnancy in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review," *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 24, no. 2 (2020): 188.

<sup>43</sup> Nurna Kurnia Dewi and Muhammad Maulana Nur Kholis, "Character Building Through Qur'anic Education: A Study of TPQ Al-Aziz in Lengkong Village, Mojoanyar," *Journal of Education and Learning Innovation* 2, no. 1 (2025): 53.

<sup>44</sup> Rowimah Rowimah, Dasuki Dasuki, and Dian Kristiawan, "Conception Of Character Education Early Childhood (AUD) According To Ratna Megawangi," in *Proceedings of International Conference on Research and Community Services*, vol. 3, 2024, 43.

*the way she is handling herself and trying to advise, you will not believe what this girl said to me. This is what she said: "This is my life, or are you jealous, or maybe 'obatla my boyfriend' [English...do you want my boyfriend]. That is the kind of life we live these days. When we had religious education, even if it was a non-examinable subject in our day, I don't even remember a single girl becoming pregnant in my school.*

#### **d. Promoting a Positive role model**

Female teachers play a very important role in school. They act in *loco parentis* to young teens in schools. Most of the young girls look up to them, and they copy positive behaviour. A role model is someone who motivates and inspires us to strive for excellence, reach our greatest potential, and recognise our own best qualities.<sup>45</sup> The author concludes by saying anybody can serve as a role model, including parents, siblings, and friends, but teachers are among the most significant and transformative role models in our lives.<sup>46</sup> Thus, teenagers frequently make choices regarding their interpersonal relationships and the roles they want to play as adults while also asking themselves why they are here.<sup>47</sup> One teacher said:

*Sir, you know what it's frustrating to see our young girl getting pregnant, and I have realised that most of our learners come from a humble beginning, so we try to mould them and to be their role model, but it's like we are failing.*

Addition from the RE teacher

*I want to agree with my colleague in the sense that when I was still at school, our female teachers played an important role in moulding us; they even went to the extent that they checked if we were wearing clean clothes. At the same time, everything they said to us was based on religious values, which is the reason we are what we are today.*

The teacher in the disciplinary committee said

*Colleagues, at times, I wish I was not part of the disciplinary committee because we have to make decisions that are very unpopular, and it's sad because some learners have to go home to give birth. What I'm saying is that we try to explain to the parent the situation we have and the capacity we have in terms of looking after their pregnant child, especially during the exam. So, when you see a parent waiting for her child to finish an exam, it's sad.*

Based on the views shared by the respondents, it is possible that morality and character can be restored by religious education. Taja et al. assert that religious values are standards of morality and ethics that are derived from religious beliefs, traditions, and writings.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Saluun and Timin agree that kindness, obedience, self-control, self-discipline, boldness, trust, generosity, respect, following religious teachings, and being receptive to correction when someone falls are some examples of these behaviours.<sup>49</sup> Thus, if this kind of teaching can be introduced back to schools through religious teachings, the moral behaviour character of learners can be restored. This study agrees with Mohlaloka and Ntlhare when they assert that "bringing back religious education in school will not only benefit teachers, but it will be for the benefit of the whole school."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Shakila Bashir, Munaza Bajwa, and Sulmaz Rana, "Teacher as a Role Model and Its Impact on the Life of Female Students," *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah* 1, no. 1 (2014): 9–20.

<sup>46</sup> Bashir, Bajwa, and Rana, "Teacher as a Role Model and Its Impact on the Life of Female Students."

<sup>47</sup> Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust* (Random House, 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Nadri Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model through Islamic Education," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 11 (2021): 132–53.

<sup>49</sup> P W Saluun and L A Timin, "Religious Ethical Values: A Sine Qua Non for a Developed Nigerian Nation," *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2020): 17–20.

<sup>50</sup> Mohlaloka and Ntlhare, "Analysing Teachers' Perspectives on the Significance of Religious Education to Curb Learners-on-Teacher Violence in South African Schools."23.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. There is a need to build a positive character. Moral education and ethical conduct play a vital role in the development of a growing mind. Thus, these traits are embedded in religious education, which can play a vital role in curbing teenage pregnancies in schools. This kind of teaching can begin from primary school to high school. Literature and the voices of teachers have highlighted the values of religion in South Africa and globally; thus, the South African government should not ignore the role that religion can play in shaping and curbing teenage pregnancy.

This study recommends that religious education should be reintroduced as part of the curriculum in South African schools. There should also be a collaborative effort between schools and faith communities, meaning that schools should partner with churches to run mentorship programmes with schools. Training of teachers and capacity building, teachers who are responsible for RE and Life Orientation should receive continuous training to capacitate them on how to deal with sensitive matters. Lastly, the study recommends that parental and community involvement be emphasised through school-based workshops to promote moral guidance and communication.

### Promoting abstinence

Promoting abstinence helps build discipline, respect for oneself, and postponing sexual activity until marriage, which aligns with many religious teachings. Sexuality education that is being taught in school does not promote abstinence but prevention, as such learners indulge in sexual activities, and most unfortunately, some become pregnant. It is therefore the responsibility of the basic education department and the government to rethink and reintroduce religion in schools. This can be done during RE periods, as well as morning devotions and assemblies.

### Social norm reinforcement

RE reinforces community and family values that uphold abstinence, creating a supportive environment for teenagers to make the right choices. Social norms like moral guidance, social order and stability can be reinforced through religious education in schools. Thus, by promoting common value systems and behaviour, religious education can assist in maintaining positive values, character, and order. Charity begins at home, and the child is raised by the community; it is therefore important to mould children while they are still young, because at a later stage it might be difficult to mould.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to explore teachers' voices concerning teenage pregnancy in their schools and how religious education can be used to mitigate this problem. Teenage pregnancy remains a concern in South African schools despite all the measures that the government has taken to curb it. The rate of pregnancy increases at an alarming rate every year. This phenomenon not only affects teenage girls but also the whole society. Most learners who fall pregnant don't make it back to school, and this increases social grants that the government pays, early motherhood and unemployment rate.

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