

# INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TEENAGE MOTHERS RESILIENCY IN OVERCOMING ADVERSITIES IN PREGNANCY AND EARLY MOTHERHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

*The phenomenon of teenage motherhood is a major concern worldwide. The teenage mothers endure many challenges that could affect their academic goals and successes if there is insufficient support. However, some teenage mothers manage to develop certain forms of flexibility to manage these adversities. This study explored the teenage mothers' resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood at a rural high school in South Africa. Within the Interpretative Phenomenological qualitative paradigm, an exploratory case study research design was adopted. 10 participants (N=10) were selected from a rural high school district using a purposive sampling technique. The study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data. The findings demonstrated that teenage mothers were resilient to continuing and completing their schooling by adopting self-motivation and school and family support. This study suggested that the South African Department of Education should develop a training programme for teenage mothers on psychosocial adjustment mechanisms to help them cope with their situations.*

**Keywords:** *interpretative phenomenological analysis, rural high school, teenage motherhood, teenage mother resiliency, teenage pregnancy*

## Introduction

The phenomenon of teenage motherhood is a major concern to nations all over the world. Developing countries continue to experience the surge of teenage mothers in schools, even though several preventative and educative mechanisms exist in various dimensions. South Africa is not left out in this predicament as schools continue to experience increasing teenage mothers between the ages of 13 and 18 (Sibeko, 2012). It is reported that two-thirds of the unintended pregnancies among teenagers in South Africa end in childbirth, and the rest results in unsafe abortions (Bankole & Malarcher, 2010). There have been policies and laws enacted in the South Africa and Education Act to support teenage mothers' return to school. According to Panday, et al. (2009), the Life Orientation Curriculum Assessment Policy for South African schools was developed to facilitate learners' holistic development by teaching learners' knowledge on sexual behaviours and how to reduce unwanted pregnancies and other associated health risks.

Moreover, the Education White Paper 6 encourages returning to school for teenage mothers at South African schools (DoE, 2001). It emphasises a need to provide support, respect, and acceptance to learners, which can be realised through education and training. Furthermore, the South African government provides financial support to all teenage mothers through child support grants (Squires, 2011). In addition, there is a policy that advocates for teenage mothers in South Africa to return to schools, and that schools are supposed to adopt inclusive practices for them as well (Chandra-Mouli, et al., 2015). However, the number of teen mothers continues to rise in South African schools, mostly through unplanned pregnancy (Adeniyi, et al., 2018). Due to multiple responsibilities that hinder concentration on schooling, the teenage mothers continue to experience adverse effects on school attendance and academic performance. Despite the challenge of teenage motherhood, one of the main psychological constructs determining their school success is resiliency.

Resilience is a complex concept, and it has various meanings. Ledesma (2014) defined resilience as bouncing back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune. Allenby and Fink (2005) reiterated that resilience is the capability of maintaining a system that functions and structures in the face of internal and external change. Resilience is also defined as a process that links a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation thereafter (Norris, et al., 2008). Moreover, Longstaff, et al. (2010) also defined resilience as a system's capacity to absorb disturbances, changes, and retain the same functions, structures, identities, and feedback. From the definitions mentioned above, Rutter (2013) concluded that resilience occurs when an individual has a relatively good outcome despite having experienced severe stresses or adversities. In this study, resilience can be considered as a biopsychosocial phenomenon, which involves a dynamic transitional process of individual environment exchanges that encompasses an adaptation process of the goodness of fit (Green, 2002). Rutter (2013) further noted that individual differences create differences in how different persons respond to risk and protective factors. Therefore, it is important to assess individual needs about particular circumstances, rather than assume that all risk and protective factors have similar effects in all people (Rutter, 2013). Rutter suggested that individuals who possess these mental features have both control and success at changing events and are therefore regarded as resilient.

Consequently, Rutter (2013) proposed that an individual's mental features and social relationships affect how they handle life's challenges and adversities. Rutter (2013) reiterated that an individual could be protected against emotional and behavioural disturbances through maternal warmth, sibling warmth, and a positive family atmosphere. It is important to know that resilience may operate through various factors and influences across different levels, such as individual, family, school, and community. Therefore, an individual's reactions might influence their resilience when they are exposed to adversities. Previous studies have reported resilience among adolescents and youth (Gerber, et al., 2013; Punjani & Mevawala, 2019; Steyn, 2006); however, few have explored resilience among teenage mothers in schools. Some studies indicated that teenage resilience is characterised by social support and positive relationship development with their bodies. For example, van Zyl, et al. (2015) reported one of the significant supportive factors, which affects the well-being of children and provides them with comfort, is the parent-child relationships. In exploring the understanding of adolescent girls' resilience in early motherhood, Pfeiffer, et al. (2017) indicated that young mothers report competence and manage to deal with health problems that affect them and their babies. It has also been reported that teenage mothers receive the support required from elders and develop support networks and knowledge of resources in response to their situation (Pfeiffer, et al., 2017). Bermea, et al. (2018) reiterated that teenage mothers receive social support from other adolescent mothers, enhancing their resilience change to motherhood. Singh and Naicker (2019) also showed that teenage mothers demonstrate resilience in prevailing adverse conditions despite the negative outcomes of poverty within the rural community. Pfeiffer, et al. (2017)

emphasised that adolescent mothers try to mobilise resources actively to secure their health and that of their child. Singh and Naicker (2019) reiterated that some teenage mothers demonstrated their resilience by accepting differences, disrupting taboos, harnessing support, and becoming brave agents.

It is relevant to note that support could play a significant role in teenage mother resilience in early motherhood. For example, Josephine (2019) showed that teenage mothers in South Africa receive support mostly from their mothers, maternal grandmother, and other family members. The perceived supports could contribute to completing their education and career advancement (Josephine, 2019). Chigona and Chetty (2008) argued that insufficient parental support, which is categorised by parent attitudes towards teenage mothers, might affect teenage mothers' success in their schooling. Moletsane and Theron (2017) argued that through their interpersonal relationships with significant others in their families, teenage mothers can develop resilience in their situations. Mantovani and Thomas (2015) reported that, despite lacking a 'secure base', teenage mothers develop their resilience by adopting a sense of moral identity and self-directedness, all of which enable them to overcome their circumstances.

Several mechanisms enable the resilience of teenage mothers in early motherhood at schools. Scholars have reported that South African schools' peer attitudes positively influence teenage mothers' resiliency. For example, Devey and Morrell (2012) argued that most teenage mothers get social support from other peers to take responsibility and continue with their schoolings at childcare and motherhood levels. It has also been reported that some teenage mothers have strongly adopted self-motivation, which has enabled them to complete their schooling. Other scholars agree that the high levels of teenage mothers' motivation and aspirations could reflect academic results (Chohan, 2010; Chohan & Langa, 2011). Some teenage mothers excelled above their peers at schools (Chohan, 2010; Chohan & Langa, 2011). Marteleto and Lam (2008) argued that most teenage mothers have returned to school to complete their education due to increased support mechanisms.

Previous studies have also reported that teachers support is important in helping teenage mothers to continue schooling and to return to school after childbirth. For example, Bhana, et al. (2010) and Chohan, (2010) agreed that teachers' support is desirable as this encourages teenage mothers to return to school and complete their education. Bhana, et al. (2010) reiterated that teachers' caring and nurturing attitudes are also crucial in assisting pregnant teenagers and mothers in handling the stigma, embarrassment, and shame that they might experience at schools. However, Bhana, et al. (2010) recommended that teachers be trained for structural support to help teenage mothers feel pregnant. This kind of structural support, however, helps them deal with the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy.

Literature indicates that family support for teenage mothers is significant, and the immediate family members play a significant role in doing this. Scholars found that mothers' support makes teen mothers return to and remain at schools to continue with their education (Chohan, 2010; Morrell, et al., 2012). Chohan (2010) emphasised that family support helps teenage mothers return to school and complete their education to pursue their goals. It is also reported that extended family members could assist the teenage mother with childcare (Shefer, et al., 2012; Willan, 2013). This support could sometimes be observed by paternal grandmothers, who provided support, making the teenage mothers return to school (Shefer, et al., 2012). Beyond the support of other families as mentioned above, the child's father or extended family members might play a similar role in helping the teenage mother return to school (Chohan, 2010; Shefer, et al., 2012). Moore (2013) also reflected that mothers' current generation had changed their father; however, many are called for more involvement in caring for their babies, not caring about' their babies.

Literature also provides the support mechanisms for teenage mothers in the school environment. In South Africa, in 2007, the Department of Education (DoE) provides a

framework that supports pregnant and teenage mothers while in school. The policy indicates that no girl should be expelled from school if they become pregnant because all learners have equal rights to education irrespective of their status. Schools are to adopt an inclusive approach to education for such learners. The policy also advocates for a return to school among teenage mothers to continue with their education. Secondly, there are school Clinic-Based Approaches that are aimed to educate teenage mothers on how to manage their sexual behaviours (MacLeod & Tracey, 2009). In addition, the South African government also introduced Child support grants for teenage mothers in 1998, which is meant to give them financial empowerment to be able to take care of their children (Jordan et al., 2014) and offer protection so that they can fulfil their duties of being caregivers (Wright, et al., 2015). From the reviewed studies, it is important to note that literature provides support mechanisms that teenage mothers have received in other study contexts. Besides, the literature indicates that there are mixed results of experiences of resilience and support factors. Other studies were quantitative, and they lacked in-depth findings on teenage mothers' experiences of resilience. The present study explored resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood at a rural high school in Thabo Mofutsanyana District in South Africa.

### *The Present Research*

The present research explored teenage mothers' resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood at a rural high school in Thabo Mofutsanyana District in South Africa. The research question was stated as follows:

Which mechanisms do the teenage mothers use to enhance resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood?

## **Research Methodology**

### *Approach and Design*

The present study adopted an interpretive qualitative research approach. According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), the interpretive paradigm is a particular way of viewing the world, guided by your way of thinking like a researcher. It is set as beliefs or worldview that guide research action or an investigation meaning and gives a researcher a worldview or lens that guide the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The interpretivism paradigm views the world subjectively, meaning that it depends on how you look at it (Fouché, et al., 2017). In addition, the paradigm argues that the researcher and participants construct knowledge, and that the social world is not understood from one standpoint, and that reality is socially constructed (Fouché, et al., 2017). This study employed an exploratory case study research design, which helps to look at a specific case in detail better to understand a social phenomenon (Maree, 2016). As a social phenomenon, the researcher should be flexible in looking for data and open-minded about where to find data; thus, this design will build a new understanding of the phenomena (Maree, 2016). The exploratory case study design was adopted in this study because it allows exploration of the phenomena, where the intervention is being evaluated as no single set of research time.

### *Participants*

The population consisted of teenage mothers at a rural high school in Thabo Mofutsanyana District in South Africa. The purposive samplings technique was used to select ten ( $N=10$ ) participants at a rural school within the population. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling is useful in identifying possible participants who understand the research problem and are at the centre of the phenomenon. However, the sample size of 10 participants for this study was considered appropriate as recommended by Mason in Aloka (2012) that for qualitative studies with a high level of homogeneity among the population, a minimum of interviews with five participants is sufficient to enable the development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations. Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2015) agreed that a minimum of six participants for interviews would provide sufficient data to lead to adequate data. This study considered the inclusive criteria for selecting only teenage mothers between the ages of 16 and 20. The participants are all unmarried and had returned to school after giving childbirth. All the 10 participants were teenage mothers enrolled at a selected rural school and lived within the Thabo Mofutsanyana District in the Free State Province.

### *Data Collection Instruments*

The Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Interviews aim to collect rich collective data that help a researcher in exploring the social phenomena. In Semi-structured interviews, the researcher prepares in detail the questions in advance (Maree, 2016). The interviewee receives a set of questions in the same sequence (Fouché, et al., 2017). Data generated from the interview are recorded digitally but with the participant's permission, while the interviewer also takes notes as the process goes on (Fouché, et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness is an important part of qualitative research. Maree (2016) proposed that certain criteria should be followed by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to pursue trustworthy research. Credibility refers to confidence in how well data and analysis processes address the social phenomenon (Fouché, et al., 2017). Transferability is whereby the data is being extended to other settings (Maree, 2016) while dependability relates to how reliable the collected results are. On the other hand, confirmability refers to how the degree to which other independent parties can confirm the findings (Fouché, et al., 2017). The researchers' checking technique, detailed description of the methodological procedure, and prolonged engagement with the study participants, ensured the data's trustworthiness.

### *Ethical Consideration*

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the University of Free State's Research and Ethics Committee. Thereafter, the Department of Education granted the research authorization to access the selected high schools in Thabo Mofutsanyane District in South Africa. A rural high school was identified purposively due to its easy accessibility to teenage mothers. The researchers contacted the selected school principal for a meeting to seek permission to access the participants. The researchers invited teenage mothers to the meeting and requested them to contribute to their knowledge development. Participants were informed of their contribution to the research and the right to participate and/or withdraw at any time voluntarily. The teenage mothers expressed their interest, availability, and willingness to be interviewed in this study. After that, the participants were given consent forms to present their parents for their approval since they were still under parental care. Finally, the participants and their parents or guardians, for ethical considerations, signed all the consent forms. On the day of data collection, the interview processes were conducted after school hours in the school

boardroom and took approximately thirty minutes. The interview process took an average of 30 minutes for each respondent. An audio-recorder was used with the permission of participants, and pseudonyms were also used to conceal the identity of the participants in this study.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis helps the researchers establish how to make meaning of a social phenomenon by looking at their perception and attitude towards the social phenomena, understanding, and knowledge about social phenomena, values, feelings, and experience about the social phenomena (Maree, 2016). The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews were organised, transcribed, and then coded in readiness for thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis is a process where data is identified, classified, and patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun, et al., 2016). This type of analysis allows the researchers to make sense of the collected and shared data, identifying uniqueness, idiosyncratic meanings, and experiences (Braun, et al., 2016). The thematic analysis allowed the researchers to determine what is familiar with the data and make sense of the data collected.

### **Research Results**

The findings indicated that the teenage mothers had critical reflection to transit motherhood to find constructive coping ways with their situations. The critical reflections happened when the teenage mothers made a transition from being dependent children into mothers responsible for taking care of their babies. The teenage mothers developed feelings of autonomy to gain control over their future decision and made plans to succeed in their education and create positive results for their children's future.

#### *Role of Teachers as Enablers for Continued Schooling*

The findings demonstrated that teachers assisted the teenage mothers' resiliency in managing their negative emotions and finding constructive ways to continue their schooling, despite negative societal perceptions. Some teenage mothers reported that their Life-Orientation teachers fought to be at schools when the school management ejected them from school during pregnancy and advised them to return the following year after giving childbirth. One participant declared this.

*"I gave birth on Friday at the hospital the following Monday I came to school as the June started so I could not walk properly; one of the teachers who was invigilating saw me, and she called me to ask me if I am not feeling well and I told her the truth so she reported the matter to the management of the school so two days later the management called my parents and my father came to the school, and he was told that I must stay at home and come back next year when my baby is grown up, the following day I stayed at home while the English paper was written and a day later my Life-Orientation came to my home and talk to my parents and told me to prepare myself for the Life-Orientation which was to be written on the following Tuesday and Monday my father got a call from the school that on Tuesday I must come to write" (Participant, 1)*

Another participant mentioned the following:

*"When I was about to start with my grade 11 final exam, I was seven months pregnant I was called to principal's office almost every day where I was told to stay at home and come back the following after giving birth, so my Life-Orientation became aware that I was interrogated she then called me and I told her the whole story she then advised me to ask my mother to bring a medical report*

*to the school, and my mother did it so since then management stopped interrogating me I wrote my exam, and I passed. I gave on January two days before schools reopened my mother came to school to report to the principal that I come to school a week later he then agreed"* (Participant, 2)

From the interview excerpts, it can be concluded that teenage mothers got encouragement from teachers, which made them to resume their studies. The perceived expert knowledge of the Life orientation teachers helped enhance the teenage mothers' resilience in overcoming early motherhood challenges.

### *Developing Self-Motivation*

The findings demonstrated that developing self-motivation could make teenage mothers more resilient, which helped them manage their negative emotions in difficult times. The participants mentioned that self-motivation helped them to find a positive meaning of themselves with determination and accomplishment of their life goals. In addition, teenage mothers found out that developing self-motivation helped to respond to multiple responsibilities as pregnant teenagers. The teenage mothers emphasised "never giving up on their goals", and they kept their heads high during hard times. The teenage mothers were self-motivated and encouraged to use available support systems to overcome adversities. Some of the interview excerpts that indicated that the teenage mothers' development of self-motivation techniques are as follows:

*"I decided to move on with my life and collect all the stones that are being thrown into you to build your empire"* (Participant 6).

*"Never stop dreaming because the moment you do, your future does, and the future of that poor soul you brought into this world"* (Participant 7).

*"I have chosen to pursue life positively. Remember, an attitude, not aptitude, will determine your altitude"* (Participant 4).

*"To fall is not a mistake but to fall and lie down then becomes a mistake"* (Participant 5).

From the interview excerpts, it can be deduced that teenage mothers developed internal resilience through self-motivation, which made them overcome the challenge of early pregnancy and early motherhood. The respondents set up their goals and developed mechanisms of pursuing their set goals despite being teenage mothers. This finding indicates that the respondents were not negatively affected by their teenage motherhoods, but instead, they chose to pursue their goals in life due to self-motivation.

### *Listening to Role Models*

The findings indicated that teenage mothers also had role models who experienced similar teenage pregnancy predicaments but chose to complete their schooling. The results showed that listening to role models played an essential role in teenage motherhood as it assisted them to develop resilience for completing their schoolings during life adversities. Furthermore, teenage mothers mentioned that they could not consider themselves disadvantaged victims. Still, they carefully listened to the wisdom from their role models who already overcome the same adversities. The respondents stated that they could not confront trouble without looking to role models, but their ugly experiences more substantial in mind and spirit. All of them acknowledged being inspired by role models in their communities. The extract of one participant may describe this.

*"My mum's friend her daughter also fell pregnant at a young age, and she continued with her studies, and she is now studying medicine she is on her fifth year at the University of the Free State, her mother also told me that I can still be able to achieve my goal"* (Participant 10).

From the statement mentioned above, teenage mothers acknowledged receiving valuable advice from role models during their life's tough time. They started to approach them like a tower of strength to continue their studies and achieve their academic goals. The teenage mothers further recognised the motivation of their Life Orientation Teachers as reported from the interview excerpts below:

*"Yes, I do. The people who motivated me are a friend of my mum as she also has a daughter who fell pregnant at a young age, and she is studying medicine at the UFS Bloemfontein campus. She is now in the 5th year. Her mother told me that I could also achieve my goals even if I fell pregnant"* (Participant 7)

*"The other person who motivated me is my L.O. teacher who even told me that to "fall is not a mistake but to fall and lie down then becomes a mistake" she further even told me about her life experience. She told me that also she got pregnant when she was at school at the very same grade I that I am currently doing"* (Participant 9)

From the interview excerpts, it can be deduced that the teenage mothers looked up to the role models who had undergone through early motherhood and the teachers who gave them positive experiences of other students who underwent the same but were successful. From this analysis, one can conclude that the positive experiences shared by role models and the success stories that the teenage mothers got from teachers made them develop positive attitudes towards themselves and life altogether. Therefore, the positive experiences from role models and teachers made the teenage mothers plan academic goals to reflect on other teenagers' experiences.

### *Receiving Support Systems*

This study indicated that support systems played a crucial role in teenage mothers' educational success and positive outcomes. The support systems for teenage mothers included family (baby's father, paternal grandparents, and maternal grandmothers), school, and communities.

### *Family Support*

The findings revealed that most teenage mothers had family support, which contributed to overcoming their early motherhood stigma. The participants' responses revealed that the teenagers received a support system from their family, including parents, siblings who assisted them before and after childbirth. Some of the interview excerpts indicating family support from various family members are:

*"I got all the support I needed, my family from the moment they became aware that I was pregnant until today. I have received lots of material and moral support from several members of my family, which has helped me adjust to my new status of being a young mother"* (Participant 3).

*"My family gave me a lot of support since they provided material support like clothes, nappies for the baby, and bought food for and for the baby"* (Participant 8).



However, one participant sadly explained that she could not preview any support from her mother while pregnant, even after delivering the baby.

*"...my mother could not offer me support just like any other mother who is supporting their daughters, even here at school, when they realised that I was pregnant..."* (Participant, 5).

The interview excerpts deduced that there are families with good support systems for their children with challenges, which supports enhanced resilience among teenage mothers. The family's physical and material support made the teenage mothers develop positive attitudes and self-belief, which eventually contributed to their strides in coping with and adjusting to teenage motherhood. However, teenage mothers never had family support, which could have helped them overcome the challenges of coping with teenage motherhood. This created feelings of hopelessness and increased anxiety.

### *School Support*

The school support is about the availability of support systems in school from teachers, peers, and other students for teenage mothers. The findings from the participants' interviews indicated that teenage mothers received school support while pregnant. Some participants recognised that they were motivated by their Life-Orientation teachers to become resilient in pursuing their studies even after being declared pregnant. Some teenage mothers reported that the school environment was supportive, making them adjust to being teenage mothers adequately. Some interview excerpts from the interview transcripts are reported as follows:

*"The other person who inspired me is my Life-Orientation teacher who also told me about her life experience"* (Participant 4).

*"Even here at school, I was never harassed like other girls who fell pregnant. I also thank almighty for bringing my Life- Orientation teacher to our school because she is giving hope to hopeless"* (Participant 3).

*".... teacher who is teaching Life-Orientation in grade 11 is my mentor. She is checking my progress report at the end of every term"* (Participant 5).

*"....the only teacher who supported me is my Life-Orientation teacher who even goes to the extent of convincing management of the school not to expel me as they intended to"* (Participant 4).

The findings also indicated that school principals played a significant role in the motivation and support of teenage mothers' in their challenges. Some principals provided an accommodative school environment for teenage mothers, which enabled them to return to school after delivery. This made the teenage mothers resilient to pursue their academic goals during pregnancy and early motherhood after childbirth.

*"When I returned to school beginning of this year after giving birth Principal called me to his office and said to me 'I got the second chance in life so I must grab it into two clean hands, and if I can use this second chance, I got I can turn the situation around at home'"* (Participants 6).

However, one of the participants reported a lack of support from the members of the school community. The teenage mother reported that she was expelled from school because of having a baby while still a student. The interview excerpts from the participant are presented as follows:

*"The school expelled me, and they told me that I should come the following year because the hostel is not a maternity ward, and other teachers did not support me at all..."* (Participant 2).

From the interview excerpts, one can say that schools that did not provide accommodative environments for teenage mothers, despite the Department of Education policy for the schooling of teenage mothers. However, in most schools, the principals were regarded to support the teenage mothers' plight of coping with schoolwork and adjusting to teenage motherhood. The findings also indicate that life orientation teachers had lots of information about teenage motherhood and supported teenage mothers.

### *Support from The Baby's Fathers*

This is concerned with the support that the teenage mothers received from the males responsible for their pregnancies. The findings indicated that some of the babies' fathers played a motivational role in supporting teenage mothers to achieve their academic goals despite hardships. The teenage mothers were thus motivated to attend schools until they gave childbirth, which made them complete their studies.

*"Baby daddy, when we find out that I was pregnant, he told me that I should never give up on my dream, his mother also told me that falling pregnant should not mean the end of my dream, but it must mean putting more effort to my studies"* (Participant 7).

*"Baby father supported me in the first two trimesters of my pregnancy. He offered me words of encouragement, which gave me confidence"* (Participant 2).

However, some teenage mothers reported that the babies' fathers did not support them at all. Two participants stated that there was no support from the babies' fathers during teenage pregnancy. The interview excerpts from the respondents are presented below:

*"...the Baby's father was not there at all. I never got any support from him..."* (Participant 1).

*"I did not get any support except from my baby daddy and his family....."* (Participant 9)

From the interview excerpts, it can be concluded that there were mixed findings regarding support that teenage mothers received from the babies' fathers. There was support from some babies' fathers, while others did not support teenage mothers. This could mean that some of the males responsible for the teenage pregnancies were non-supportive, irresponsible, or had no adequate financial support mechanism to give to teenage mothers. Some of the males responsible for the pregnancies were caring and provided sufficient material and emotional support to teenage mothers. It could be concluded that the differences in the type of support provided by the males responsible for the pregnancies brought different coping mechanisms among teenage mothers.

It is essential to note that teenage mothers' commonalities became resilient, although they had early motherhood challenges. In addition, the teenage mothers at a selected rural school overcame life obstacles mentioned above, contributing to societal expectations. Therefore, despite the challenge of early motherhood, the study concludes that becoming teenage mothers at a young age contributed to strengthening them in fighting against all the odds.

## **Discussion**

The study explored teenage mothers' resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood at a rural high school in South Africa. The results demonstrate that

teenage mothers developed resilience, which helped them complete schooling in the face of difficulties constructively. The teenage mothers received teachers' support, developed self-motivation, listened to role models, and received support systems from their families. This finding is consistent with the results of the previous studies, which all confirmed that self-motivation helped to develop teenage mother resiliency among teenage mothers in schools (Chigona & Cherry, 2008; Chohan & Langa, 2011; Chohan, 2010; Grant & Hallman, 2008; Marteleto & Lam, 2008). Similarly, the finding regarding support for teenage mothers was similar to that of Neenan (2009), which reported that support and advice could significantly reduce the duration of struggling to overcome adversities. Neenan (2009) added that celebrities could succeed over their grim circumstances with the cognitive behaviours approach, as they adopted positive attitudes. Neenan (2018) reiterated that teenage mothers should adopt positive attitudes to understand how well they can cope with adversity in new conditions. The cognitive behaviours approach can help individuals deal with their current problems and encourage them to develop a view of themselves as a stable and capable person who can overcome hard times and pursue important goals.

The findings reported that teenage mothers received initial shock disappointment from their family members. However, the teenage mothers acknowledged receiving support systems, which originated from different sources such as family, schools, fathers' babies, and role models. These findings corroborate with the previous studies (Akella & Jordan, 2014; Chigona & Chetty, 2007; Chigona & Chetty, 2008; DoE, 2003; Pillow, 2004), which all agreed that teenage mothers need academic support, parenting support, childcare support helping them to continue and complete their studies. The findings also indicated that South African schools' peer attitudes positively influenced teenage mothers' care support. Devey and Morrell (2012) supported this finding by highlighting that most pregnant teenagers get support from their peers to continue their education and take care of their children. The findings implied that, as girls develop their sexual activity, parents should take responsibility for preventing pregnancy by advising their daughters instead of leaving them to figure out and seek help for guidance from their peers, which most get incorrect information about contraception. The limitations are related to methodology and findings. This study used non-probability sampling and involved a small sample of participants. Thus, the findings could not reflect the entire South African population of teenage mothers. However, more research should be conducted through probability sampling for teenage mother samples, and various approaches for dependable conclusions.

## Conclusions and Implications

The study explored teenage mothers' resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood at a rural high school in South Africa. The study concluded that even though the teenage mothers demonstrated some reasonable level of resilience in adjusting to teenage motherhood, they are overwhelmed with their early motherhood conditions. Thus, they need adequate support to overcome the challenges associated with their conditions. The support mechanisms available for teenage mothers from their families indicate that most parents and siblings are willing to provide moral, financial, and social support to teenage mothers to ensure that they complete their education. The support from life orientation teachers in school implies that schools in South Africa are safe places for teenage mothers to realise their dreams despite their predicaments. However, some teachers' negative attitudes towards teenage mothers imply that there is still a need for more sensitization on better ways of assisting teenage mothers to complete their education with minima stress. The support from other role models who were initially teenage mothers indicates reduction in stigma on teenage motherhood and that learners are meant to view themselves positively when they find themselves in such situations.

The results are quite significant because they bring to fore the plight of teenage mothers in schools and develop comprehensive support systems at home, school, and with the communities to help teenage mothers cope with their situation. Therefore, this study recommends that the South African Department of Education develop a training programme for teenage mothers on psychosocial adjustment mechanisms to help them cope with their situations. The school counsellors should adopt a cognitive behavioural therapy approach for teenage mothers to develop strong internal coping mechanisms with early motherhood. The Department of Education should develop job skills programme for teenage mothers to make them independent during their early motherhood. Lastly, the school counsellors should develop a programme in collaboration with the role models for teenage mothers to empower them on their schooling and motherhood adjustment roles.

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Robert Kananga MUKUNA, Peter J. O. ALOKA. Interpretative phenomenological analysis of teenage mothers resiliency in overcoming adversities in pregnancy and early motherhood in South Africa

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