

Perceptions of teenage boys on teenage fatherhood at Tshino village of Vhembe district, Thulamela municipality, Limpopo province

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Abstract: Becoming a teenage father can lead to negative consequences both to the young father and his offspring. It is important to understand the process that leads some young men into fatherhood while others delay it until they are developmentally ready. One possibility is that becoming a teen father is part of a more general deviant lifestyle. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of teenage boys on fatherhood. Qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual approaches were used. The researchers used one main question as a take-off point that is: 'What are your perceptions on teenage fatherhood?' More questions emerged from the discussion. Ten teenage fathers participated in the study. A snowballing sampling was used to collect data through one-to-one interview. The researchers strived to adhere to the principles of trustworthiness by adopting Guba's model. Open coding method was used to analyze the data and an independent coder confirmed the themes that emerged. The results indicated that most of the teenagers were embarrassed and confused about being teenage fathers although they gained knowledge and responsibility of being teenage fathers. The study recommends that parents, teachers and health workers should teach the teenage boys about safe sex. The Department of Health must formulate relevant policy on teenage fatherhood and health workers must provide contraception for the teenage boys.

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1. Introduction and background

The issue of teenage fatherhood is a very disturbing problem in South Africa since the majority of them are still minors and not ready for fatherhood. It is one of the most difficult experience that a young person might ever face when it interrupt school and other plan (Foster, 2004). Vinnerljung, Franzen and Danielsson (2007) found that teenage parenthood is associated with high risks for a number of negative outcomes for both parents and children.

A teenage boy can become a father because of various reasons or situations such as drug abuse, violence, peer pressure and engaging early sexual activities (James, 2012; Rhein, Ginsburg, Schwarz, Pinto-Martin, Zhao, Morgan & Slap., 1997). Young boys who experience early fatherhood are often distinguished by the fact that they are attracted by the girls and may sometimes be of high status within their communities, while their background are disadvantaged. Some of them they find themselves in

these situations because of pressure from their friends (Foster, 2004).

There are different perceptions concerning teenage fatherhood especially from teenagers themselves (Herrmann, 2008). It is traditionally accepted that a teen parent should refers to teen pregnancy and teen mothers. The society over the years has programmed people to think that way when they hear the word teen parent. People interchangeable use teen parent to mean the teenage girls because teen pregnancy is usually seen as a girl's problem with disregard of teenage fathers (Herrmann, 2008).

It is widely understood that early fatherhood can be associated with poor educational achievement, poor physical and mental health, social isolation, poverty and related factors. There is also a growing recognition that socioeconomic disadvantages can cause and has consequences of teenage fatherhood (Dillard, 2002; Vinnerljung, Franzén & Danielsson, 2007; Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Research findings on teenage fathers' backgrounds is mostly consistent

with what is known of adolescent boys coming from socio-economic poor homes, often with a history of welfare dependency and familial teenage parenting (Vinnerljung, et al., 2007).

Young boys with below average achievement have also been found to be at significant higher risk of becoming teenage fathers. Most delighted by fatherhood where involvement with their child is ongoing, as well as protecting them from involvement in a range of negative activities (Roach, 2005). When young fathers experience disinterest, this is mainly associated with financial insecurity or confusion about how to take care of the baby (Rhein, et al., 1997). Despite the fact that young fathers rarely receive support from professionals or wider society, early fatherhood can trigger maturity and promote personal growth and social responsibility (Herrmann, 2008).

All too often, it is assumed that young boys do not want to be involved in their child's life. This perception can prevent young fathers from being involved in decision making regarding the young boy's baby. Literature assert that most teen fathers do want to be involved in their children's lives and are concerned about their child's future; they just need to be given a chance to grow in the role as a father (Rhein, et al., 1997).

Boys who become teenage fathers are also likely to engage in other problem behavior such as school disruptive behavior and drug use. This link between teenage fatherhood and other problem behavior has been established by past researchers but until now there has been no clear comprehensive evidence of the factor that put a boy at risk of becoming a father while he is still a teenager. Teenagers who engage in problem behavior put themselves at risk and those around them (Steven, 2009).

2. Problem statement

It became apparent that, although a large volume of academic research dealt with teenage pregnancy, but only a small portion dealt with teenage fatherhood and many studies did not mention teenage fathers at all, even though most sexual activity is male initiated and most sexual behavior is male influenced, it become clear that there will be no resolution of the problem without directing greater attention to boys (Smit, Beksinka, Ramkison, Kunene & Penn-Kekana, 2005). Dellmann (2004) states that most of the research on father's experience of childbirth has been carried out on adult fathers and little is known about how teenage fathers experience pregnancy and childbirth.

3. Purpose of the study

The overall purpose of the study was to explore and describe the perceptions of teenage boys on teenage fatherhood at Tshinovillage of Vhembe district, Limpopo Province. The research question

sought to answer "how do teenage boys perceive their fatherhood?"

4. Materials and methods

A qualitative, descriptive and contextual approach was used for this study. Participants were studied in their setting in order to discover the social world of cultures and languages by observing and talking to them (Burns & Grove, 2001). The researchers used one main question as a point of departure which was 'What is your perception of teenage fatherhood' and more questions emanated from the discussion. Participants explained their perception and these experience were reflected in words and quotations used to emphasize various aspects that were described (Burns & Grove, 2001).

All teenage fathers aged 15-19 years who resided at Tshino village comprised the population of the study. One village in the district was visited by the researchers. The sampling method which was used is snowballing sampling. From the village ten teenage boys were sampled using snow balling technique based on set criteria (Burns & Grove, 2001). The selection process of participant was done fairly as each participant fitting the criteria had a chance of being selected and all participants were protected against emotional harm.

The researchers collected data from Tshivenda speaking teenage fathers through one-to-one interview. Ten teenagers were interviewed and data saturation was reached. Data were audio recorded and observational notes were also taken. The central question that directed the interview was: 'how do you feel about being a teenage father', and probing questions were used and included, 'what are your experience on teenage fatherhood, what are the problem encountered during fatherhood, 'what do you think should be done to reduce teenage fatherhood?'. The main question was formulated in English and translated into Tshivenda, the local language while the probing questions were formulated in Tshivenda for the participants to understand.

Data analysis was done concurrently with data collection. Data were transcribed and then translated into English by the researchers. The recorded information was also compared with the transcribed data to avoid omissions. Analysis was done according to Tesch's open coding method (Creswell, 1994) involving eight steps of analysis. A final decision on abbreviation for each category was made and the code was alphabetized. The data that belong to each category were assembled in one place, preliminary analysis was performed and recording was done.

In this study trustworthiness was ensured by credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability of the findings according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). Activities to ensure credibility included

member checking, prolonged engagement, reflexivity and peer review. Transferability was obtained by using snow balling sampling method, working contextually and dense description of the methodology. Dependability was achieved by dense description of the methods and conformability by auditing the research process.

Ethical consideration included obtaining permission from the University of Venda Ethics committee and the chief of the village. The participants were informed that participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from participants after providing the information leaflet to them. Only those who volunteered to give information participated. Use of tape recorder was explained to the participants and permission obtained to tape record the interviews. Participant's private information was not shared without the individual's knowledge or against

their will. The researchers insure that the participant did not lose their dignity. Confidentiality was ensured by not allowing people outside the research team to raw data. Participant's names were kept anonymous by using code names during interview and filling the raw data.

5. Results and discussion

Ten teenage fathers aged 15-19 years at Tshino village participated in the study. They were still attending secondary school ranging from grades 8 to 12.

Table 1. Themes and sub-themes

The following themes emerged during data analysis: The feelings of being a teenage father, Experiences of being a teenage father, Problems encountered during fatherhood and measures which can be used to prevent teenage fatherhood. The themes are then discussed with the results of the study.

Themes	Subthemes
1. Teenage fathers experienced both positive and negative feelings of being a father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embarrassed about being a teenage father • Excited knowing that I can give birth • Confused about being a father at an early age • No choice but to accept that I am a father
2. Teenage fathers expressed the benefits of being a father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge gained during teenage fatherhood • Be a responsible father
3. Expression of the perceived challenges of early fatherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of money to support the baby • Disruption of relationship between teenagers and parents
4. Measures which can be used to prevent teenage fatherhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about safe sex • Initiation of the youth clinics • Using contraception • Abstinence from sex

Teenage fathers experienced both positive and negative feelings of being a father

All the participants indicated that being a father for the first time has a unique feeling that evokes both unpleasant and pleasant emotions. The majority of the participants expressed more positive than negative feelings such as *"it was scary but I learnt to love my child, though I see him in hiding"* laughing. Dellmann (2004) found that about one third of men experienced birth distressing as well as exciting and wonderful. About 80% of men found it emotional, with many reporting crying at the moment of birth. However most of the literature focuses on the negative experiences perhaps in an attempt to find way to deal with the negative emotions (Dellmann, 2004; Bäckström & Wahn., 2011).

• Embarrassed and Confused about being a teenage father

Some of the participants said that being a father at an early age is so embarrassing towards friends, relatives and community. A 19 years old participant

stated that *"My parents wanted to withdraw me from school mentioning that I am an adult, I must go and look for a job to maintain my family. I was so embarrassed because of my age still doing grade 11 and being irresponsible"*. The other one of 15 years old said, *"When relatives came to visit, my mom will come out with the story and tell them everything hey! It's so embarrassing, pause and he continued to say, wish did not happen"*. Of the 10 participants six sincerely regretted about early fatherhood and felt that they shamed the family and mostly their parents. One of them said, *"I am worried about my education, I'm not that 'dom' implying slow learner, what about being called 'Papa Vuyo'?"* not the real name.

Most of the participants mentioned confusion as the first feeling that occurs when they heard that their girlfriends are pregnant. One participant recalled *"When she told me that she is pregnant, I was confused and scared. I did not think straight because my father is very stubborn. I told the girl that if you are really pregnant, let's goes to the hospital to*

terminate this pregnancy, the girl refuses. I was confused, knowing I am only 16 and of my brothers are not yet married". He explained that he found it difficult knowing what he would do with the pregnancy and the child.

- **Excited knowing that I can give birth and a feeling of acceptance**

Only three participants indicated that they were very excited to be fathers. One participant of 17 years old said, *"I am very happy to be father because now I know that I can give birth"*. Another one, 19 years old said, *"My parents are so supportive and they are happy about having a grandchild and this makes me feel happy"*. Contrast to the 17 years old participant who said, *"When my girl friend told me that she is pregnant, at first I told her that, you know the owner of this pregnancy"* pointing a finger at the interviewer, with facial expression of modeling the incidence. *It gave me sleepless nights, I did not tell anyone about the situation"*. *"Yaa! it happened like that"* he paused and continued to say, *"A week after she told me, her parents came with her at home. I have realized that I do not have any choice because the girl is pointing at me. I accepted the damage because my parents now know about the pregnancy"*. When asked about his present feelings about the child and the mother he said, *"It is a matter of time that I pass my matric to go and look for a job. I want to be a responsible father and one day--! You will see mom!"* pointing a finger at the researcher with a smile. The study conducted by Meek (2011), in England and Wales revealed that young fathers aged 18-20 years in prison related to parenting was found to be a prominent theme despite the fact that they have been separated from their children as a result of their incarceration. This could conclude that parenthood became the key component of the representations of present and future identity of young fathers in prison (Meek, 2011). Evidence suggests that possible selves can motivate and direct change but that individuals may need assistance and reinforcement to change the behaviour (Meek, 2011).

- **Teenage fathers expressed the benefits of being a father**

- **Knowledge gained during teenage fatherhood**

The participants mentioned that teenage fatherhood taught them lot of things, such as, to be fathers and they have gained a lot of knowledge and skills to accept the consequences of any actions that they do. One participant said *"I know that I am still a teenager, but I know what it means to be a father and I will try to act in the best interest of my child."* He added *"Now I have knowledge of taking care of somebody, being responsible for my own actions."* Most of the teenagers indicated that teenage fatherhood has taught them to be responsible as they are taking responsibility

for their own actions. One participant said, *"I no longer think or be responsible for myself only; I have to do by all means to take care of the baby and the mother."* Two participants expressed their feelings of supporting their girlfriends during labour. They indicated that their girlfriends started labour when they were together at a secret place. They accompanied the girls to the nearby clinic. One participant said, *"I did not know how to support her. At first I thought she is making it a joke but I realised that she was in labour. I found it difficult to continue supporting her. Mmm! Pause! It was scary"*. The participant further explained how nurses at the clinic instead of providing support they scolded at him because he was youth. In the study conducted by Bäckström & Wahn (2011) the fathers explained that they felt safe interacting with midwives and knowing that they could support their wives continuously during labour. The authors concluded that fathers wanted to be involved so that they could have a good connection with their partner during labour. In the study a participant expressed his feeling as, *"I felt good when midwives involved me, then I continued to encourage her and said push, push...like the midwife"* (Bäckström & Wahn, 2011).

- **Problems encountered during fatherhood**

- **Lack of money to support the baby**

It was mentioned by the participants that money is the main problem because they are not working and now they have to support the child. The participants indicated that they are still dependent on their parents for their needs including money. This means that their child should also depend on their parents. One of the participant of 16 years of age said, *"It is very difficult when you do not have money to support your own child; it means that my parents carried the burden of supporting me and my child"*. Another participant of 18 years of age said, *"Money is an issue because I do not work and my parents are not working and sometimes I even think about dropping out of school and look for job"*. Another participant said *"Money is a big problem because when my parents give me money for something else, I have to sacrifice and buy clothes for my son and this makes my life very difficult"*. Literature reports that adolescent fathers are likely to drop out of school and face limited employment opportunities (Lee & Guterman, 2010). Three of the participants were considering dropping out and looking for jobs in Gauteng Province, where it was perceived to be a wealth of job opportunities. The young fathers in the study by Rhein, et al. (1997) were more likely to provide infrequent support.

Disruption of relationship between teenagers and parents was eminent because it was noted that adolescent parenting was a complex family process. Research indicatethat it is important to consider young

father's parenting behaviour such as aggression and harsh parenting behaviour (Lee & Guterman, 2010). The participants indicated that the relationship between them and their parents were disrupted because of being father at an early age. The participants mentioned that trust between them was no longer there because their parents said they just go and impregnated girls. One participant said, *"My parents no longer want to hear anything I said, if I said something or ask anything they will said what about your child"*. Other participants stated that *"They hate me so much because they are forcing me to go and hunt for a job because I have to take care of child and the wife"*. Several studies have shown that the involvement of young father in child rearing is influenced by the parents who may encourage or restrict paternal contact with the child (Rhein, et al., 1997). In this context, the young father requires support himself in order to accept the young mother and the child.

Measures which can be used to prevent teenage fatherhood

- **Learning about safe sex and condom use.**

Teenagers require knowledge about safe sex from different sources such as parents, teachers and other healthcare workers. It was noted that parents are not mentioned as the main sources of information about safe sex. The participants reported that they learn safe sex at the school when there is awareness from TVEP (Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programmers). One of the participant said that *"My mother never talk with me about sex and I think this is the main cause of teenage fatherhood"*. Another said *"I think if my parents told me the consequences of unsafe sex, I would not be a father at an early age"*. The participants mentioned contraception as the main measure to prevent teenage fatherhood. Another teenage father said *"I think most of teenagers misused condoms and we do not know how to use them"*. He added *"Just like me I used condom but I was surprised when my girlfriend told me that she is pregnant, I think if health education were given to all youth on how to use condoms"*. Abstinence from sex was also mentioned as the preventive measure to reduce teenage fatherhood. An 18 years teenager stated that *"If we abstain from practicing unsafe sex, this increased number of teenage fatherhood will decrease"*. Vinnerljung et al (2007) found that antisocial youth of both sexes tend to have a behavioural pattern of risk sexual behaviour. The study showed that almost many boys admitted to having made a girl pregnant. Reddy, James, Sewpaul, Koopman, Funani, Sifunda, Josie, Masuka, Kambaran & Omardien (2010) also found that 15.5% of male learners made someone pregnant.

The participants mentioned that *"If there is enough talk about safe sexual behaviour among youth,*

teenage fatherhood can be reduced". However some indicated that their parents talked with them about sex at home before they heard it from Television, Films or viewed the pornography. Another participants added that *"If the government initiate youth clinics that can offer information such as counseling services on family planning, because teenagers especially boys shy to collect condoms at the local clinics the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy among South African adolescents may be reduced"*. The HIV/AIDS household study done in 2001 also shows that most of the young South Africans continue to participate in unprotected sexual activity (McLean & Hiles, 2005; Lesch & Kruger, 2005).

Conclusion

Based on the data collected from the teenage boys it was noted, with concern, that most of the teenage boys do not have the necessary knowledge with regard to safe sex as a preventive major to teenage fatherhood. According to the findings of the study, various youth support systems such as child care agencies, youth support groups and educational programmes should be provided so that both female and male youth could make informed choices about their future lives.

Recommendation

School health services should develop educational programmes that focus on improving reproductive health and life skills among youth. Demonstrations and role plays are most powerful methodologies to enhance learning. For example, demonstration of use of condoms both for male and female is fundamental rather than giving a lecture.

There is a need to involve parent in teaching the teenage boys about safe sex. This can also prevent the teenage boys from getting conflicting information from parents and peers. The discussion should start early at home and parents should play primary role of educating teenagers about safe sex.

Parents and teachers need more information about safe sex so that they can educate teenagers sufficiently and be able to address question that may arise. This can be done through workshop that will help to empower them about ways in which they can teach the teenagers.

The department of health should supply material needed to teach about safe sex by health care workers, should also formulate the relevant policy with regard to teenage fatherhood and should initiate youth clinics where the teenage boys can get contraception.

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