

# Participation of Fathers in the prevention of Teenage Pregnancy: A case study on fathers & daughters who are teen mothers in Botswana.

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**Abstract-** Research on father- daughter relationship, active fathering and open communication on sexuality issues show that, participation of fathers in active caregiving is critical for the sexual development of children especially girls. This study explored father- daughter relationship benefits in relation with the prevention of teenage pregnancy. Eight in- depth one-on- one interviews were conducted with teenage mothers and two groups of focus groups of discussions were conducted with male caregivers to the teenage mothers in Mochudi. Several themes emerged; contemporary fathers are keen to actively participate in caregiving; mothers are still perceived to be the right people to educate children on sexuality issue. Fathers' involvement in their children's early stage of life is fundamental in having safe intimate and respectful relationship with the opposite sex. The study concludes that active participation of fathers in caring for their children especially daughters can translate into a protective layer that reduces daughter's vulnerability.

**Index Terms:** father- daughter relationship, participation, teenage mothers, teenage pregnancy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Botswana is currently faced with escalating rates of teenage pregnancy. This gives a picture that teenagers or adolescents continue to engage in early sexual activities under different circumstances. As a result, adolescent girls are exposed to many health challenges including sexually transmitted disease, HIV and cervical cancer among others (Republic of Botswana, 2016). In addition, this leads to girls dropping out of school leading to poor quality of life. The decline on the quality of life for children and high levels of vulnerability especially of girls has been linked to lack of positive male role models. In situations where fathers (biological and or social father) have warm and loving relationship and open communication on issues of sexuality with their children, children tend to have safe intimate and respectful relationships with the opposite sex (Maundeni, 2000, Beardshaw, 2006, Bowling, Werner-Wilson, 2009). Literature indicates that majority of children engaging in early sexual activities are found to be from absent father households (Mendle, et al, 2010). Botswana has been found to have an alarming rate of children who are raised without their fathers, worse, not knowing and having any meaningful relationship with their biological fathers (Maundeni & Nnyepi, 2012). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2012 report revealed that in Botswana over two-thirds of children aged 7- 17 years do not live with their biological fathers. Considering that many behavioral change strategies have been implemented in

Botswana to curb teenage pregnancy, this study explored the participation of fathers in sexuality education and prevention of teenage pregnancy in Mochudi. To establish the link between the level of fathers' participation in sexuality education and the prevention of teenage pregnancy, the following questions were addressed; to what extent do fathers discuss sexuality topics with their daughters? What are the benefits of participation of fathers in prevention of teenage pregnancy?

## Background

The traditional and cultural expectations of the male parent are woven together into the historical expectations of the definition and role of the father in holistic family life including raising children. Historically, the meaning of the word "father" was primarily socially constructed with societal expectations for fathers' role. From observations growing up, Fathers worked very hard to provide material needs for their families. They were expected to be disciplinarians who demanded respect and obedience from their children and submission from their wives. Generally, fathers invested little or gave no attention in building close, safe, intimate open and honest relationship with their children. The mother was expected to empower and teach the female children on how to be a woman while the father was responsible for the boy child.

For instance, in Kenya, traditionally fathers encouraged their sons to learn about successful manhood from them and other male elders in the community. According to Lasser, Fite & Wadende, 2011) "Among the Kikuyu, the Kenyan father socializes the son in his craft or role in the community and consequently fathers have a more direct influence on the lives of their sons than daughters", (p. 51). This trend was also evident in most Botswana cultures such as the Xhosa in Bikwe, Manyana and Bakgatla ba ga Kgafela in Mochudi, through the traditional schools (initiation schools) boys and girls were separately grouped and taken for a camp and taught how to be a responsible man and a woman in a family and society. During those days, initiation schools were the pre-requisite to adulthood and marriage. For the boys, this went as further as circumcision, a permanent sign of manhood or a "real man" (Gungqisa, 2010).

The mother is still expected today to empower and support her daughter into adulthood, motherhood and marriage. In Botswana, when a girl falls pregnant for example, women are expected to be at the center of taking care of the expectant mother, including engaging her to find out who impregnated her and report to the uncles so that they can report the pregnancy to the men's parents. Most men do not feel nor believe that it is their role to socialize

their daughters and empower them on issues of sexuality. In many ways, this could explain why some men do not find anything wrong with being involved in intergenerational sex with young girls the same age as their biological daughters.

The family structure in Botswana has changed considerably since independence in 1966. The traditional nuclear and or extended family structures have been gradually replaced to a significant extent, by single parent families. Gaesie, (2002) described the new family structure as the 'zero-couple' or single-parent family or household type which constitutes about 70 per cent of the households in Botswana and 90 per cent of these are headed by females (p.1). These alarming numbers of female headed household statistics calls for research in understanding the role and benefits of a father in raising children. This includes the biological (residing and non-residing) and social fathers. Many social problems experienced by youth today are linked to the generational gap that exists between parents and their children which sometimes results in lack of parental guidance and communication on issues of life in general and of sexuality in particular. In addition, young people's vulnerability has increased mostly because of risky behavior such as engaging in early sexual activities with older men, drugs and alcohol abuse and dropping out of school, all these factors put together contribute to the circle of sexual abuse and poverty (Botswana Daily News, 2014).

The social and gender research field has for a long time experienced a gap in the investigation of the significant role of the father in raising children. Greene & Biddlecom (1997) observed that in turn, there is a depiction of fatherhood oppositional to and in conflict a "deficit" model of fatherhood (p.36). Viewed from such as vantage point men are either providers, disciplinarians, absent, and irresponsible fathers (Fox, 1999). However, just recently there has been a turn over to study fatherhood in a positive light. A new kind of father is emerging. This father still plays a major breadwinner role but is also more involved in domestic tasks and caring for children.

### Methods

The participation of fathers in prevention of teenage pregnancy in Mochudi was investigated using qualitative research method. The method facilitated the researcher's flow in capturing and understanding authenticity of the human stories in their raw status and by so doing "achieving an accurate accountancy of the meaning informants attributed to those events that participants would agree is accurate" (Holmes- Walker, 2010, p. 37). In addition, the chosen design has been described to be appropriate when the subject of the study is relatively new and unstudied (Rubin & Babbie, 2008, Holmes- Walker, 2010). Throughout literature review, it is evident that many studies have been done on teenage pregnancy but very few of them explored the phenomenon with a focus on the father's involvement in issues of sexuality education and healthy relations.

Two data collection methods were used for the investigation of the study, these were; the in-depth semi structured one on one interviews and the focused group discussions. The selected methods are aligned with the qualitative approach described above and Holmes- Walker's (2010) explains that "qualitative interviewing begins from the assumption that it is possible to investigate elements of the world by asking people to talk, and

construct knowledge by listening to and interpreting what they say and how they say it" (p.37).

### Sampling

The determined population for the study was in two categories. Group one was the out of school teenage mothers who were pregnant or had been pregnant and had father figures in their lives, not necessarily residing with them, however, it was necessary that participants had an ongoing relationship. The father may be the biological, legal guardian, or social father (teacher, uncle, brother or pastor). The reason that motivated the researchers to include social fathers is the fact that collective fatherhood is still evident in Botswana. Teachers and Pastors for example, play a significant role in grooming adolescents. In addition, with the high numbers to single parent households in Botswana, we find elder brothers and uncles taking roles in collective fatherhood in their extended families. Literature indicates several benefits of collective fatherhood even though it is viewed to be fading. Lesejane (2006) observed that, the advantages of collective fatherhood also not only enhanced the economic status of the family but also the child's social capital. Social capital in this context means the number to interactions the child is exposed to within the family. These interactions contribute to the child's emotional, cognitive, education and social development which the current nuclear family structures mostly female headed fail to provide to children. In particular the girl child seems to be mostly disadvantaged compared to the boy child because their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and early sexual activities is higher to that of their male counterpart. A total number of 15 teenage mothers and 15 fathers participated in the study.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit teenage mothers based on the common particular characteristics which are of interest in the study. For instance: the selected female informants must have been pregnant or were pregnant at teenage age (13- 19) years and have a relationship with their fathers. On the other hand, male informants were recruited through snowballing sampling. The researcher was introduced to the fathers by the teenage mothers after interview and this technique enabled the researcher to build rapport in preparation of the father's focus group discussions with other fathers with similar attributes (caregivers for teenage mothers).

The data collected from thirty informants has been categorized into emerging theme and discussed according to research questions. The demographic section of the survey indicated that interviewed teenage mothers ranged between ages of 15- 18 by the time they became pregnant while the fathers of their children ranged between 20 – 35 years of age. All fifteen teenage mothers interviewed dropped out of school due to pregnancy, 25% of them reported to have been impregnated by their male partners who were in tertiary level, 37.5% of the male partners were unemployed while the remaining 37.5% (25- 30+ years) were employed. Only 25% of the teenage mothers managed to continue with their education in local private training institutions pursuing secretariat and business administration courses. The remaining 75% of these teenage mothers did not complete high school at the time of the research.

The second group of informants (fathers; both biological and social fathers) ranged from the ages 38 to 53 years of which

62.5% of them raised their biological daughters while 37.5% were social fathers (uncles and brothers).

### Findings

To what extent do fathers discuss sexuality issue with their daughters

Interviews with teenage mothers and their fathers revealed that generally fathers do not discuss sexuality issues. Firstly, 37.5 % of teenage mothers reported that they do not have a close relationship that could allow open discussions with their male parent except that of being blood related. 60% reported having a close relationship with their fathers but advanced that it is not easy to discuss sexualities with them. This is what one of the teenage mothers said: Teen Mother 003

“Yes we do have a relationship. It is open and free because we openly talk about life. For example, we mostly talk about employment and our needs especially taking care of my children”.

Similarly, fathers noted their upbringing and culture as a barrier to easy and open communication of sexuality issues with daughters. For example, this is what one of the fathers said:

“A Motswana man has been socialized not to discuss sexuality topics with the female child. Even the educated men are unable to talk to their daughters about sexuality issues, rather women are better placed to do that. For instead, when my daughter started her menstrual periods, I had to ask my neighbour to advise her....What can I say as a man? Truly what we know is to discipline so instead men use anger and threats as strategies to instil discipline, and unfortunately it is not working. As a result, their children view them as “lions.”

Father 1’s response shows that fathers tend to relate with their daughters as disciplinarians only hence the failure to be at ease with sexuality issues. This is linked with lack of appropriate vocabulary and communication skills largely to do with culture. In addition, fathers stated that they were not taught or socialized to relate with female children to a level of talking about sexuality highlighting the fear of family suspicions of sexual abuse. The same has been observed by Werner-Wilson & Fitzharris (2009) who observed that “parents seem reluctant to discuss sexuality with their adolescent children because of a lack of knowledge and understanding of human sexuality” (p.49). Moreover, traditionally sexuality issues are regarded as secrecy and sex as “dijo tsa bagolo -the grown- ups food” that they cannot be openly discussed, (Ntshwarang & Malinga, 2011).

However, some fathers shared that once in a while they caution their daughters on sexuality issues whenever they see the need (when they notice a behaviour that the daughter may be starting to date). This is what some of the fathers shared:

“I talked to my younger sister mostly about the current calibre of boys. Most importantly I talked about strategies men use to influence girls to date them not necessarily because they love them but because they want to have sex which might result in unplanned pregnancy. They are likely to impregnate a girl and leave them. For example, some men normally use money or expensive gifts like cellphones to entice girls.”

This is in consistence with the findings by Collins, Angera and Latty (2008) that as a result of lack of confidence by both fathers and daughters in discussing sexuality issues, fathers were reported to have been unable to actively participate in prevention of teenage pregnancy. Daughters responses resonated with their

fathers' as they reported that it is not comfortable to discuss certain issues with parents especially fathers. Some daughters also reported that they felt their fathers were probably not the best people to talk to about sexuality issues. In their words, they said;

Teen Mother 004

“Aah! How do I just talk sex with my father or even my mother! We do have a relationship but it is not close or open where I can easily talk about issues of sexuality. It is more of providing material needs such as food and toiletry.”

Interestingly, some fathers believed that they do not necessarily have to say anything rather their presence at home, not necessarily engaging with their daughters, communicates accepted and unaccepted behaviour. 50% of fathers believed that their daughters mostly have their free will to do what they like and misbehave in their absence. This suggests that mothers are accommodative of unacceptable behaviour and not instilling discipline with the same efforts fathers do. The following utterances were made by one of the fathers;

“I raised my younger sister and during the time I was staying with them there was no sign that they are dating. The time I moved from home and they were left with my mother, their behaviour was out of hand. That shows that they respected me. My presence meant something to them”.

Acknowledging that there is a gap that needs to be bridged by father’s active involvement in raising daughters and in sexuality education, fathers emphasized that it is critical for male parents to build close, safe, loving trusting relationship with their daughters from birth. This would be a firm foundation throughout stages of life would be much easy and meaningful compared to when it starts at the most vulnerable stage of teenage- hood. Teenage-hood is also a time when adolescents are battling with issues of self-identity, body image, low self-esteem; psychological transition and pressure for sense of belong among others. In addition, this is also a period when girls need attention and open communication on issues of relationship with the opposite sex, and confirmation that she is smart, beautiful and she is trusted to make good decisions in life.

“A man who raises a child with love never becomes dangerous. Men who “stay” (without health relations) and not leave with their children always behave like lions, who cannot even play with their children or express affection, are very dangerous to take care of children. I think they need counselling because most of them are full of anger. They need to be empowered to be caregivers”.

The teenage mothers concurred with the father’s utterance as they described the kind of relationship they would like to have with their male parents. Most importantly, girls wanted emotional support from their fathers. Below are the teenage mother’s wish lists for their fathers;

Teen Mother 004

“I wish my father and I had a loving relationship where I will be told how much I am loved and appreciated. I believe if I had an opportunity to enjoy my father’s love by being hugged, kissed, looked in my eyes and told that I am beautiful and intelligent, I would not have searched for attention outside home, engaged in sexual activities and consequently become pregnant at the age of

fifteen. I felt safe in my boyfriend's hand and he was the first man to kiss me and called me sunshine".

The benefits of participation of fathers in prevention of teenage pregnancy

Building a relationship from early ages is the foundation

Fathers expressed that their active participation in raising children helps build a strong foundation of a loving, respectful, safe and close relationship. Fathers further stated that such relationship can definitely reduce the girls' vulnerability to start engaging in early sexual activities and reduce cases of teenage pregnancy. They strongly believed that there are special skills and knowledge that can only be imparted by a father in a girl's life. Through the informants' experiences and observations, daughters who grew up close to their fathers are more self-disciplined compared to those who do not have father figures.

Moreover, teenage mothers also believed that their fathers play a critical role in confidently making informed life decisions including their sexual behaviour especially delaying sexual activities. It seems most informants wanted to hear fathers reinforcing their daughters' worth. They believed that close relationship with their fathers would teach them to develop safe relationships with males later in life. Bowling and Werner-Wilson (2009) results are in coherence with the current observations as the study revealed that daughters felt that fathers should empower their girls to attain independence and confidence "masculine traits" while nurturing feminine traits as well. "In particular fathers seem to significantly influence independence and autonomy in daughters and this support seemed to promote higher self-esteem and confidence." (p.17).

Responses from teenage mothers indicate that they need their fathers to engage in conversation with them rather than giving orders or instilling fear on them. Teenage mothers want to seek understanding on men and women's relationship. Below are teenage mothers' voices in seeking knowledge and understanding;

Teen Mother 002

"I want to know why men like to make girls pregnant and never care to know how the pregnancy or even the child is after birth and also never make an effort to support the new born baby"?

Teen Mother 003

"Why men fail to understand and accept that women are not always ready to have sex with them anytime they feel like. Why men mostly start abusing their partners verbally and accuse of having other partners even if they know the woman is faithful."

A fathers' relation to her daughter and mothers has been described as a "blue print or a reference point" in the future when she reaches teenage stage and start to develop interest in the opposite sex. According to Bowling and Werner- Wilson (2009) reported parent modelling of love and respect as one of the critical issues that influenced informants' beliefs that respect and commitment are prerequisite for engaging in a sexual relationship. Her vulnerability will decline as she will be armed with knowledge, images of a healthy relationship, and language of love and also comfortable in her skin because she has heard it, felt it and seen it freely given to her by her father. Below are observations from fathers:

"My experience is that love is very important in raising children. Father's love to her daughter teaches her how she must relate to her male counterparts and signs of a healthy relationship. That

also applies to how the father relates to the child's mother. Their behaviour is a reference point for the girl child in the future when she starts dating. She will look for the partner with the same behaviour and attitude like her father. In case someone does or say something contrary to what she has been exposed to at home, she will easily sense danger and apply her coping skills. As such, daughters see their fathers as their protectors and can easily share with them if they are not happy with how she was treated by any boy/man and women. Sometimes she will particularly request her male caregiver to collect her academic report because there is someone bullying her at school and wants her father to address that person. That on its own helps to build a child's confidence not to fear anything or anyone because she is sure about her protector and always gets a balanced encouragement and motivation from both the mother and father compared to a child raised by a single mother or a distant father."

Fathers were also given an opportunity to give messages for their daughters. Data reveals that fathers are capable of effectively and meaningfully discussing sexuality topic with their daughters if and when given safe spaces to do so. An outstanding feature of the messages was the presence of faith and use of the Bible as a reference point addressing sexual values. Furthermore, the responses also highlighted the authoritative attitude of parents in communicating with their daughters. On the other hand, daughter expects their fathers to engage in a conversation rather than give them warning on issues of relationship, sex and pregnancy.

### Conclusion

The study revealed that contemporary fathers are keen to actively participate in sexuality education specifically with their daughters as a strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. The study revealed very minimal discussions between fathers and daughters on sexuality matters that could help mould sexual behaviours and ultimately curbing pregnancy. The main barrier articulated by both fathers and daughters is communication skills due to cultural stereotypes as issues of sexuality are regarded as private, rendering it challenging to be a topic of discussion amongst young and olds. The observations from fathers are in agreement with life course theory that "to understand contemporary fathering is to pay close attention to personal and social change in men's lives, hence it makes sense to mark fathering by noting transitions, growth or decline" (Roy, 2014, p. 319).

In addition, fathers stated that in the current changing society where physical, verbally and sexually abuse of girls and women in general is on the rise and the alarming rate of single mother families, they strongly feel that they have to rise up and take their place to protect and empower the girls. Fathers acknowledged their inadequacy in communicating with their daughters citing that they need to firstly be empowered to break the socialization and cultural barriers that formed the bases of traditional manhood.

The study concludes that fathers have a critical role as the "daughter's first love" to build her social skills, appropriate and inappropriate relations with the opposite sex, love languages and self-respect among all. Girls wish to feel, hear and witness love from their fathers. The results strongly reveal that daughters believed that sharing values about sex with their fathers will make a difference in their sexual development and behaviour.

Furthermore, research clearly articulated that girls value attention and affection above status and possession from their fathers.

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