



**Factors promoting the education of pregnant high school students and adolescent mothers: A qualitative comparative study in Argentina and South Africa**

**Adriana Alvarez (ALVADR001)**

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**Research Supervisor: Lauren-Jayne van Niekerk**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Adolescent pregnancy represents a significant challenge in Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa, often leading to girls dropping out of school, limiting their future opportunities. This study explored positive factors on the school retention of high school pregnant learners and adolescent mothers in Argentina and South Africa, focusing on school and NGO strategies relevant to development contexts.

This study used a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design and employed purposive sampling techniques. Five NGO staff in Argentina and four in South Africa, as well as four school staff in Argentina and four in South Africa, participated in semi-structured interviews. Data analysis followed Tesch's steps for organising unstructured qualitative data, where transcripts were reviewed to identify and categorise themes by frequency, relevance, and connections, and then compared across both countries.

The research findings revealed that structural issues, such as poverty and lack of access to social services, increase dropout risks for adolescent mothers, along with inadequate support from school and their broader environments.

Prevention strategies in both countries include sexual reproductive education, raising awareness, and support networks. In South Africa, additional efforts emphasise providing information and parenting skills, while in Argentina, the focus is on early identification of learners' needs and the school provision of accommodations.

Finally, the study found that positive experiences were determined by a support network, and customised and comprehensive support. In South Africa, fostering a sense of purpose emerged as a significant factor, and in Argentina, the flexibility in re-entry policies results in educational engagement.

Recommendations provided were for schools, NGOs, and policymakers to create strong support networks, and adapt schools' systems to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. Future research should focus on the needs of adolescent fathers, flexible approaches in schools, and strategies for academic success of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

In summary, this research study has provided insight into the determinants that facilitate the schooling of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the problem that motivated this study and its underlying rationale. It also includes the research topic, research questions and research objectives, followed by the main assumptions driving the study and clarification of terms relevant to the understanding of the study.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Due to its social, political and economic consequences, adolescent pregnancy remains a major challenge in Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2020), as well as in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where adolescent birth rates are highest (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2021).

In developing countries, early pregnancy may exacerbate structural problems, such as poverty and unemployment. For example, early pregnancy is higher among women in vulnerable contexts (De León & Leivi, 2020), such as in situations of poverty and exclusion. These conditions reduce opportunities for them and their children (UNFPA, 2020) and leads to the intergenerational transmission of poverty (De León & Leivi, 2020).

Notably, pregnant adolescents face short-term challenges, for example when they are denied their rights to health and education (UNFPA, 2020); as a result of pregnancy, many girls are pressured or forced to drop out of school. To address this issue, Governments in African countries have created or updated policies to ensure adolescent mothers' right to education (Birchall, 2018; Leave No Girl Behind in Africa, 2018). In contrast, many LAC countries focus on gender equality and early childhood education, however lack policies specifically aimed at protecting the educational rights of pregnant and young mothers (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], UNICEF & ECLAC, 2022).

Nevertheless, positive actions are being implemented in development contexts that might favour school retention among adolescent mothers (Boyle 2021; De León & Leivi, 2020; Ginestra, 2020; Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022; UNESCO, UNICEF & ECLAC, 2022; Vale, 2021). However, it is necessary to explore the determinants within these strategies, as well as more comprehensive strategies that prove to

have a positive influence on the school retention of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers. Understanding the success factors in these strategies can aid in adapting and scaling them within public policies across similar development contexts.

To address this gap, this study focused on exploring government policies and laws aimed at protecting the right to education of adolescent girls, as well as programmes, strategies and interventions implemented in two developing countries: Argentina and South Africa.

### **1.1.1 The Argentinian Context**

In Argentina, approximately 80,000 adolescents have a child every year (Ministerio de Salud, 2022:2). Adolescent pregnancy is even higher in indigenous communities (Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia, 2019) and according to De León & Leivi (2020) also in populations living in poverty.

Data from 2013 indicate that adolescent parenthood is the fourth leading cause of school dropout among adolescents aged 15-17 (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019). Furthermore, studies show that for every 10 pregnant adolescents who attend school, 6 of them drop out (De León & Leivi, 2020:10).

In Argentina 72% of learners attend public schools (Steinberg et al., 2023). Although studies do not explicitly indicate the prevalence of pregnancy among adolescent learners in private versus public high schools, statistics show highest rates of pregnancy occur among women aged 15 to 19, particularly within economically disadvantaged populations (Steinberg et al., 2023). This suggests that pregnancy rates may also be higher among learners in public schools.

Significantly, adolescent pregnancy and early childbearing jeopardise Argentina's economic potential brought about by the current "demographic dividend", which is when the proportion of the working-age population is greater than the dependent population (Rodríguez & Tobar, 2020:11).

### **1.1.2 The South African Context**

Research conducted in South Africa also shows that pregnancy is a barrier to girls' attendance in schools. Data from 2019 shows that in that year, 1.8% of girls between 7 and 15 years old

did not attend school because of pregnancy (General Household Survey, 2021:25). In the 16-18 age group, 4.5% of adolescents reported being out of school because of pregnancy (General Household Survey, 2021:25). In total in 2019, 3,144 (3.2%) learners reported being pregnant (General Household Survey, 2021:29).

Despite the available data, the Department of Basic Education in South Africa notes that it is difficult to know the actual number of pregnant learners. The report suggests that this number may be underrepresented because not all cases of pregnancy are reported. Additionally, that until that year principals were not aware of all cases of pregnancy occurring in their schools (General Household Survey, 2021).

Similar to Argentina, early childbearing in South Africa is more prevalent in communities characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment, and among black African and coloured populations (Amod, Halana & Smith, 2019).

Data shown for both Argentina and South Africa were taken before the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that the number of adolescent pregnancies and adolescent girls dropping out of school for this reason may be higher. It is believed that adolescent pregnancies increased as a result of school closures, which in turn may have affected their continuation in school (Eaton, 2021).

In recent years, global efforts have been made to enable pregnant and parenting adolescents to return to school and complete their education (WHO, 2020). In this research, the researcher sought to identify the efforts implemented by the Argentinian and South African governments, schools and NGOs that contribute to pregnant and adolescent mothers being able to stay in school and perform well academically. Several studies agree on the need for more research on programmes that address this issue and to identify factors that contribute to pregnant students and mothers staying in school (Amod, Halana & Smith, 2019; CAF-Development Bank of Latin America, 2018; Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Matlala, 2017; WHO 2020). This study contributed to filling this research gap.

## **1.2 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Women's access to education plays an important role in ensuring gender equality, which in turn has many benefits for a country's development (The World Bank, 2022). A study from the World Bank (2022) states that better-educated women are more likely to participate in the

formal labour market and earn higher incomes, these factors contribute to the ability of communities and countries to overcome poverty.

Adolescent pregnancy is a major problem in developing regions, where every year an estimated 21 million girls aged 15–19 years become pregnant and approximately 12 million of them give birth (WHO, 2020). Data from 2015 to 2020 shows that the higher rates of adolescent pregnancy are found in SSA (103 births per 1000 girls aged 15-19), West and Central Africa (115 births per 1000 girls aged 15-19), Eastern and Southern Africa (92 births per 1000 girls aged 15-19), and LAC (63 births per 1000 girls aged 15-19) (UNICEF, 2021).

This study compared practices that encourage pregnant and adolescent mothers to stay in school by comparing two countries from these regions; South Africa in SSA and Argentina in LAC. The countries were selected based on the Human Development Index (HDI) and high rates of adolescent pregnancy. The HDI is a metric used by the United Nations to define developing countries, taking into account factors such as economic growth, life expectancy, health, education and quality of life (World Population Review, 2022). Between 2015 and 2020 South Africa indicated that the annual birth rate per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15-19 was 68, while in Argentina the annual birth rate was 63 per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15-19 (UNICEF, 2021). It is clear that the rates of adolescent pregnancy are extremely similar between these countries.

In addition, both Argentina and South Africa have advanced policies aimed at protecting and promoting the education of adolescent mothers and fathers (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019; Department of Education, 2007; Department of Basic Education, 2021; Fainsod, 2021; Ginestra, 2020; Gobierno de la República Argentina, 2003; Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022; Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017). These similarities made for an interesting and beneficial comparison,

Identifying public policies and interventions that positively impact the retention and performance of adolescent mothers can reveal effective practices to be integrated into existing programmes within schools and NGOs. While most research focus on the challenges and barriers faced by pregnant learners, or on the strategies to encourage their school continuation (Amod, Halana & Smith, 2019; Birchall, 2018; Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Vale, 2021), there is a gap in identifying which practices yield the best results. Focusing on

what works, can uncover existing opportunities and resources, making them easier to manage and replicate in similar contexts.

Moreover, understanding these successful strategies can guide policymakers in bridging the gap between policy guidelines and their practical implementation, ensuring more consistent and effective support for adolescent mothers.

### **1.3 Research Topic**

The research topic is an exploration of positive factors within interventions and strategies implemented by schools and NGOs that support pregnant learners and adolescent mothers in completing their education and achieving academic success, in Argentina and South Africa.

### **1.4 Main Research Questions**

What factors, found in programmes and policies targeting pregnant learners and mother learners, influence these students to complete school and achieve positive educational outcomes?

Sub-questions

1. What kind of strategies are being applied to prevent pregnant learners and mother learners from dropping out of school?
2. What are the main challenges faced by pregnant learners and mother learners?
3. What experiences are reported to be successful in helping pregnant learners and mother learners stay and succeed in school?

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The main research objectives in this study were:

1. To explore the implementation of government policies that aim to protect the right to education of pregnant learners and mother learners.
2. To ascertain the strategies implemented to prevent pregnant learners and mother learners from dropping out of school.
3. To determine the challenges that pregnant learners and mother learners face.
4. To discover the positive experiences of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers who have stayed and succeeded in school.

## 1.6 Main Assumptions

The assumptions driving this study were:

1. There may be a gap between government policies that protect the right to education of pregnant learners and mother learners and the implementation thereof in schools. Studies have highlighted shortcomings in the execution and monitoring of policies aimed at protecting the rights of adolescents in South Africa (Shung-King *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, in Argentina research studies indicate that few policies specifically address young parents' needs (Ginestra, 2020) and the implementation of these policies may be inefficient (Boyle, 2021).
2. There may exist some interventions that enable pregnant learners and mother learners to stay in school. Several studies suggest that the implementation of adequate support may encourage and enable adolescent mothers to remain in school (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).
3. Pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers face several difficulties that prevent them from staying in school. It is argued that these challenges condition the ability of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to continue in school, as suggested in studies conducted in both Argentina (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019; De León & Leivi, 2020) and South Africa (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Vale, 2021).
4. In development contexts, there may be strategies that show a positive impact in enabling pregnant learners and mother learners to complete school and can be adapted and applied to other similar contexts. Efforts to ensure the education of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers within developing countries have been documented (WHO, 2020), indicating the potential existence of strategies and evidence of positive impact in these two developing countries.

## 1.7 Clarification of Terms

The main concepts that were used in this study are explained below:

*Academic success:* Or 'academic achievement' represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which an individual has achieved specific goals in school. Criteria indicating academic performance include knowledge acquired in the education system,

grades or performance in an educational achievement test and educational degrees and certificates. Academic achievement, therefore, defines whether one can participate in higher education and influences one's career after education (Steinmayr, *et.al.*, 2015).

*Adolescents:* In Argentina, they were minors between 13 and 18 years of age (Gobierno de la República Argentina, n.d.). In South Africa, they are people between 10 to 19 years old (Department of Basic Education, 2021). This study focused on adolescents in high school, therefore the age range considered was 13 to 19 years old. For the purpose of this study, the terms “adolescents” and “teenagers” are used interchangeably.

*Early childbearing:* These are young women who give birth before the age of 19 (UNICEF, 2021).

*Early pregnancy or adolescent pregnancy:* Is pregnancy in women aged 19 and younger (Chuang, Soren & Santelli, 2011). In this study, the term “learner pregnancy” and “student pregnancy” are used interchangeably to describe adolescent pregnancies specifically among school-going adolescents (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

*Adolescent mothers:* These are women between the ages of 11 and 19 who become pregnant and parent their children (Cosden, 2011).

*Compulsory education:* In Argentina, schooling is compulsory from the age of four and lasts 12 years, including primary and secondary school (Gobierno de la República Argentina, n.d.). In South Africa, according to the Schools Act, school is compulsory from the age of seven until the age of 15 or the ninth grade (South African Schools Act, 1996).

*School dropout:* Or early ‘withdrawal’ is leaving the schooling system without obtaining a minimum credential (Vale, 2021).

## **1.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. As quoted in Madushani (2016:26) “Research ethics refers to a complex set of values, standards and institutional schemes that help constitute and regulate scientific activity”. In addition, ethical clearance from the University of Cape Town’s Department of Social Work and Social Development was obtained before addressing participants (see Appendix 1).

The ethical considerations taken into account for this study were as follows:

### **1.8.1 Informed Consent**

Informed consent is one of the most relevant principles to Ethics Committees according to Madushani (2016:31) because it ensures that participants have a comprehensive understanding of what the study comprises, how their participation in the study will add value to the results, as well as ensure that they understand their rights to confidentiality and anonymity.

In this study, the researcher asked participants to give written informed consent prior to the interview and after having clarified all their doubts. Participants were given an Informed Consent Form (Appendix 2) to read and sign, the Informed Consent Form included the purpose of the study, the purpose of their participation and how their responses were going to be used after data collection. To ensure full understanding, the written consent was translated into Spanish for Argentinian respondents (Appendix 3).

### **1.8.2 Autonomy and Voluntary Participation**

Sen & Nagwanshee (2016 as cited in Vilma, 2018:22) define autonomy as the right to choose to participate based on an informed decision on what the research is about and what is required of their participation.

Participation in the interviews was voluntary, participants were informed that they could choose to participate or not at any time without consequence, they could ask questions to clarify any doubts related to the study, and could choose to answer or not to answer the interviewer's questions.

### **1.8.3 Confidentiality**

Information is considered confidential when the researcher can identify a person through their responses, however, the researcher guarantees not to reveal their names publicly (Babbie, Beiting-Lipps, & Kindstrom, 2015). This study ensured the confidentiality of information, the names of the participants and their organisations were kept confidential and were not published in the study report, nor were their responses linked to their identity. Participants are

referred to in transcripts and the report by the order of the interview, whether they belong to a school or an NGO and the country: e.g. 'P1-NGO-SA'.

#### **1.8.4 Violation of Privacy**

Individual privacy is a person's ability to control who accesses their information (Israel, 2015 cited in Nortjé, Visagie & Wessels, 2019). The study through the Informed Consent Form ensured respect for and protection of the privacy of respondents, who were informed that in this study their personal information was accessible only to the researcher and the research's supervisor. Participants consented to the recording of the interview and were reminded at the beginning of the interview.

In addition, the researcher ensured a private place for the interviews where the screen could not be seen and the conversation heard through the use of headphones, as well as a place free of distractions. Similarly, before the day of the interview, participants were asked to find a space in the same conditions to ensure their privacy. However, if any interruption occurred during the interview, it was paused until privacy could be guaranteed and was only resumed with the consent of the participants.

#### **1.8.5 Anonymity**

Anonymity is when the researcher removes or conceals the identity of the participants in all elements or documents of the study accessible to others (Nortjé, Visagie & Wessels, 2019). No personal or identifiable information about participants was used in the study report, transcript, or recordings. Therefore, the identity of the participants and their organisations is not identifiable in any way.

#### **1.8.6 Need for Cultural Sensitivity**

According to Mollet (2011), cultural sensitivities are very important when conducting research in developing countries with pluralistic societies. For this study, cultural, religious, political and behavioural practices specific to each country and context were respected and participants were treated fairly. To maintain cultural sensitivity, the researcher initially engaged in a thorough literature review to comprehend the cultural norms and values of the study contexts. Furthermore, during interviews, open-ended questions were posed to participants, enabling them to freely express their experiences.

### **1.8.7 No Deception of Respondents**

In this study, participants were fully informed of the process and purpose of their participation and no form of deception was applied. Deception arises when participants are provided with inaccurate information regarding the research procedures, with the intent of obtaining authentic responses from them, under the assumption that such responses would manifest if they were unaware of being subjects in the study (Engel & Schutt, 2005).

### **1.9 Summary**

This chapter introduced the statement of the problem, rationale and significance of the study by providing an overview of both contexts of study: Argentina and South Africa. It specified the topic, followed by research questions, objectives, and assumptions. Furthermore, it clarified key terms within the study and addressed ethical considerations.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter literature relevant to the research question was explored. It covered factors that contribute to encouraging pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to stay in school. It also reviewed government policies in South Africa and Argentina aimed at protecting these girls' rights to education, and interventions implemented by schools and NGOs that showed a positive impact on school retention. The Systems Theory, the theoretical framework grounding this study, was outlined and its relevance to understanding how learners' environments can influence their decisions and behaviour was demonstrated.

### **2.2 Review of Literature**

The first section reviews the literature on factors that positively influence pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to stay in school.

#### **2.2.1 Factors of Positive Influence**

Bracchi & Del Bono (2019) argue that dropping out of school due to early pregnancy is the result of the experiences that these adolescents have before and throughout pregnancy, since adolescent pregnancy can exacerbate pre-existing situations of vulnerability. Recent studies show that to prevent adolescent pregnancies, it is necessary to include a multidimensional approach that addresses the social, cultural, economic and health conditions of adolescent girls (Fainsod, 2021). Considering the above, it could be argued that a multidimensional approach is also necessary to provide pregnant students and adolescent mothers with the tools that favour their permanence in school.

#### ***Comprehensive Support System***

Bracchi & Del Bono (2019) suggest that it is important for school institutions to work in coordination with other institutions in charge of guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents, such as Health, Protection and Welfare in order to form a Comprehensive Protection System. This is critical given the multiple factors in which pregnancy can affect adolescents' lives and hinder their continuation in school.

Additionally, evidence shows that adequate social support from the adolescent mesosystem: family, school, partner, and other close community settings, can encourage pregnant and mother students to stay in school (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021) and build resiliency (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). In the same way, research shows that family support has a significant impact on adolescent mothers' lives and their decision and ability to stay in school, as in many cases it is the family that supports them with childcare while they attend school (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

Interestingly, Vale (2021) describes school not simply as a space for learning, but also as a safe place for adolescents, where they can feel free, socialise and create community, all of which are factors that might contribute to reducing school dropout.

### ***Empowerment Through Information and Support***

Furthermore, access to information on pregnancy and motherhood from caregivers and their environment may prevent school withdrawal since it is perceived as social support (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021). When adolescents are familiar with protective policies and their rights, this might reduce the risk of being forced to leave school or being discriminated against due to pregnancy (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

### ***Promoting Gender Equity***

A supportive environment should also challenge established gender stereotypes (Fainsod, 2021). For instance, as argued in several reports, strategies need to involve both fathers and mothers, and encourage and facilitate father's responsibility in childcare (Mukuna & Aloka 2021; Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia, 2019; Vale, 2021). This may also contribute to reducing the burden of care work on women and increase their opportunities for educational development.

In addition, to promote gender equity, schools must integrate gender-oriented policies and programmes that address gender-based discrimination and violence and respond to the specific needs of students. These include zero tolerance of discrimination against pregnant girls at school, as well as providing resources to support girls during their periods and during pregnancy (Vale, 2021).

### ***Academic Engagement***

Interestingly, recent studies highlight that when school motivates and promotes the academic success of adolescent mothers, the school is an important factor in their decision not to drop out (Fainsod, 2021; Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Vale, 2021).

Additionally, literature suggests that when adolescent mothers have high motivation and aspirations these may reflect academic outcomes (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021) and may also favour positive parenting (Amod, Halana & Smith, 2019). Evidence shows that when adolescents see education as a gateway to the labour market and thus a path to a better future for their children, parenthood could become an incentive to return to school (Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia 2019).

Research also shows that girls who were struggling in school before pregnancy are more likely to leave school as a result of pregnancy (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021). Conversely, studies show that the factors that normally trigger dropout may not trigger it in the case where students are progressing well in school (Department of Basic Education, 2021). Furthermore, higher educational levels help to prevent rapid repeated pregnancies among adolescents (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

### ***School Support; Teacher and Peer Support***

Teachers must be trained in gender-related issues and learner pregnancy and should be integrated into their curricula. Research shows that support from teachers and principals through motivation and accommodations can help adolescent mothers stay in school, address challenges such as stigma and discrimination, build resilience and pursue academic goals (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). Fainsod (2021) reports the positive impact on the schooling of mother learners when the educational curriculum integrates adolescent pregnancy and parenthood and promotes receptive spaces for reflection and accompaniment in these situations.

According to Mukuna & Aloka (2021:112), ‘The school support is about the availability of support systems in school from teachers, peers, and other students for adolescent mothers. To achieve support for students in their diverse experiences, schools must provide integrated strategies. The Zero Dropout report, for instance, suggests strategies such as the availability of special in-school support for students who are struggling to feel engaged, being able to

refer them to available state and community services, having a school staff member that students can approach for support, monitoring the result of interventions, having a written leave of absence with a return plan and school follow up to contribute to the early return of adolescent mothers (Vale, 2021). For instance, policies and programmes should support learner mothers to return to school after childbirth since research shows that the earlier these mothers return to school the lower the risk of them dropping out (Vale, 2021).

Peer support should also be encouraged through targeted programmes at school. Research suggests that interaction of adolescents with other girls who experienced early motherhood but nevertheless stayed in school and succeeded, can help build resilience and motivate them to stay in school (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

### ***School-based Services***

School-based services is another form of support to adolescent mothers. Shung-King *et al.* (2019) highlight that when schools offer healthcare services, it increases the possibility of reaching the most vulnerable adolescents. Notably, evidence shows that schools that offer health services are more effective in supporting pregnant and adolescent mothers.

Additionally, Ramalepa, Ramukumba & Masala-Chokwe (2020) recommend that teachers have a system for referring pregnant students to nurses and thus be able to monitor their health. They also claim that teachers need support from the Department of Health and the Department of Education to manage cases of student pregnancy. This may help students feel safe at school and at the same time, it provides teachers with the tools to support pregnant students.

Additionally, Jochim, Cluver & Meinck (2021) findings suggest that expanding school-based services through social workers, school nurses, or learner support agents may help to identify what makes pregnant girls more vulnerable to school dropouts, in order to provide them with better support.

### ***Childcare services***

Research in Argentina shows that childcare services at or near the school are one of the most successful drivers for young parents to stay in school (Ginestra, 2020). De León & Leivi (2020) argue that schools should provide accommodations, such as childcare services, to enable parenting students to attend school.

### ***Cash transfer Programmes***

Cash transfer programmes are a strategy usually implemented to help mothers cope with financial hardship. However, Jochim, Cluver & Meinck (2021) suggest that while these programmes may help reduce vulnerabilities, they alone do not prove to help prevent school dropout.

### ***Integrated Support Programmes***

A study from Mzantsi Wakho, cited in Shung-King *et al.* (2019), suggests that integrating child-focused cash transfer programmes with parenting programmes and safe schools promotes school progression. The study highlights the superiority of integrated programmes over those offering only one service, as adolescents receiving comprehensive support exhibit more positive outcomes.

Shung-King *et al.* (2019) argue that the social protection of adolescents requires a multidimensional approach, addressing all factors affecting their health, including social and economic vulnerabilities, and need interventions at the individual, family, school and community levels. Again, comprehensive strategies are needed to provide better support to adolescent mothers.

## **2.2.2 Context within Argentina**

This section of the Literature Review explores the scope of the problem in Argentina.

### **2.2.2.1 Challenges for Pregnant Learners and Adolescent Mothers in Argentina**

According to Ginestra (2020), the Argentinian government has developed policies and programmes to promote re-entry and completion of schooling for adolescents and adults, nevertheless, few of these policies target young parents and do not consider their specific needs. Moreover, implementation of the existing policies and laws remains weak. Boyle (2021) provides examples of neglect and lack of support for pregnant learners, such as forcing them to attend school in the same conditions as other students and denying them certain accommodations such as online learning or attending school with their children.

Boyle (2021) suggests that this happens due to a lack of training of school staff; who are not always aware of existing laws and policies, lack of monitoring of policy implementation, and schools not having a support system in place for pregnant and parenting students.

In addition, Boyle (2021) argues that there is no coordination between the different state institutions that offer programmes to address the needs of adolescents.

On the other hand, De León & Leivi (2020) argue that the most crucial challenges in education are under-supply in early childhood development, quality of learning, and secondary school drop-out. Furthermore, they argue that the shortage of early childhood services, such as kindergartens and ECD centres, impacts the time mothers devote to childcare, which often leads to repeated absences and jeopardises their continuity in school, fostering gender inequalities (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019).

Access to healthcare services also represents a challenge for many pregnant adolescents, especially for girls living in rural areas and girls with at-risk pregnancies (Ginestra, 2020). School-based health services could be a beneficial support for pregnant adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, and may be an effective strategy to encourage school attendance.

In addition, research shows other reasons given by girls who dropped out of school, such as: not wanting to continue studying, fear of discrimination, embarrassment and pressure from their families to devote themselves exclusively to childcare (Ginestra, 2020). Traditional gender norms, lack of support at school in the form of academic encouragement from teachers, lack of peer support and stigma are strong drivers of pregnant learners dropping out.

#### **2.2.2.2 Government Policies in Argentina**

National and departmental laws and policies are in place to promote and protect the right to education and other rights of pregnant adolescents:

The National Constitution of Argentina 1994 establishes the obligation of Congress to promote measures and laws that guarantee equal opportunities and human rights for children and women (Ginestra, 2020). In 2000, Law 25.273 created a Special Regime for pregnancy-related absences for female students; such as breastfeeding or any matter related to the health

care of the mother and child in establishments of national, provincial or municipal jurisdiction (Fainsod, 2021; Ginestra, 2020).

Argentina eventually adopted a more protective measure specifically addressing the right of pregnant learners to education. Since 2002, Law 25.584 prohibits any institutional action that prevents pregnant learners, adolescent mothers and fathers from entering school or continuing their education (Ginestra, 2020). In addition to its amendment; Law 25.808 prohibits principals or heads of official public and private educational institutions, in all modalities, from adopting institutional actions that prevent pregnant learners, mother students and father students from continuing their education, as well as to guarantee access to the leave of absence they may require (Gobierno de la República Argentina, 2003). These laws represent a significant step forward in ensuring the education of adolescent mothers.

Likewise, Law 26.061 on the Integral Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents 2005, prohibits public and private educational institutions from discriminating or applying sanctions based on pregnancy, maternity or paternity. It emphasises that the State must adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the protection of the rights of children and adolescents (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019).

Equally important, since 2006, Law 26.206 on National Education established compulsory secondary education and the responsibility of the State to guarantee it (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019). In addition to guaranteeing the entry, progression and completion of schooling for pregnant students during and after pregnancy, by providing accommodations such as breastfeeding rooms, distance learning, special regimes for absences, flexibility with exams and the possibility of attending classes with their child, as well as reintegration programmes for out-of-school children (Ginestra, 2020). The law also ensures articulations of schools with other institutions to provide psychological support services to learners who need it (Gobierno de la República Argentina, 2006). While the accommodations outlined in these policies may provide essential support for adolescent mothers and pregnant learners, the literature reveals a significant gap in their implementation at the national level (Boyle, 2021).

Also, it is worth highlighting the right of students to receive comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education for students in public and private establishments guaranteed through Law 26.150 on National Programme for Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive

Health Education 2006 (Fainsod, 2021). And the creation of Law 26.485/09 on the Integral Protection of Women 2009 against violence (Fainsod, 2021).

In Buenos Aires pregnant and parenting students have a Special Regime for justified absences in school through Law 5945, a maximum of 45 days for pregnant learners and 30 days for parent students. In addition to the possibility to withdraw early to ensure childcare, a reduced schedule for breastfeeding in the first year and mechanisms for class recovery. The period is extended in case of risky pregnancy, health complications, and for parents of children under four years of age (Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, no date). Argentina also regulates home and hospital education modalities for students for health reasons, including students with at-risk pregnancies and parent students due to their child's illness. It also establishes the obligation of institutions to guarantee their education through linkages with the health sector and through access to home and hospital education, when necessary, with all available means (e-mail, study guides, practical work, virtual platforms) (Educación Domiciliaria y Hospitalaria, 2022).

Unfortunately, access to certain accommodations, such as healthcare services, remains challenging for pregnant adolescents, particularly those in rural areas, where policies may not ensure a comprehensive range of support services (Ginestra, 2020).

Argentina has a federal form of organisation, due to the decentralisation of the education system, provinces can adhere to these laws or add them to their provincial education laws (Ginestra, 2020).

In Argentina since 1994, international human rights treaties have had higher legal status than ordinary laws. The country committed to the 1995 Beijing Declaration's goal of eliminating all barriers to access to formal education for pregnant adolescents and young mothers (Ginestra, 2020). The country also acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which obliges States to take measures to develop family planning education and services, protect children and adolescents against all forms of discrimination and ensure their access to information and tools to promote their well-being. The country also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Plan Nacional de Prevención del Embarazo no Intencional en la Adolescencia 2017-2019, 2017).

### **2.2.2.3 Interventions in Argentina**

This section explores programmes implemented in Argentina to promote the schooling of adolescents, pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

#### ***Identification of At-risk Students***

Programmes aimed at early identification of at-risk students are being implemented in select regions in Argentina. These initiatives aim to prevent adolescents from dropping out of school by monitoring attendance and providing support and follow-up interventions to students through social promoters and prevention networks (Ministerio de Educación, 2021).

#### ***Comprehensive Sexual Health and Counselling***

To prevent unintended pregnancies in adolescents, the National Plan 'ENIA' seeks to strengthen adolescents' informed decision-making on comprehensive sexual health through community counselling and comprehensive sexuality education in schools, offering supportive and prejudice-free spaces (Ministerio de Salud, 2022).

#### ***Financial Aid***

Pregnant and adolescent mothers may also access financial assistance from the government to help overcome economic constraints. This assistance target mothers of children and pregnant women in conditions of vulnerability (Administración Nacional de la Seguridad Social, n.d.). Research on the impact of this programme on the schooling of adolescent mothers has shown a few cases of adolescent mothers returning to school, as well as limited cases where the school intervened so that a student mother could access this support (Perczyk et al., 2011). Unfortunately, there are no recent reports on the impact of these programmes on school attendance of pregnant and adolescent mothers.

Several local governments have instituted grant programmes targeting adolescent pregnant girls and young mothers to allow them to complete their education. One such programme works in coordination with schools, integrating: awareness-raising activities, psychological and legal support. Evaluation results from this programme indicate that 'more than 50% of girls continued their education as a result of the programme's actions' (MR, 2011, cited in Ginestra, 2020:25).

### ***Childcare Facilities***

To support the education of adolescent mothers a province in Argentina along with NGOs implements a programme that offers childcare facilities in or near schools. This programme aims to provide low-income mothers with free nursery and education facilities for their children while they work or study. (GPC, 2020 cited in Ginestra, 2020:23). Early results of the programme evaluation show that community-based childcare services help mothers to be able to study or work as opposed to exclusively childcare and household chores (Ginestra, 2020).

Additionally, the City of Buenos Aires implements a programme which provides childcare facilities in schools, enabling young and adolescent parents to attend school while their children are in childcare, young parents also receive in-school support from counsellors. Programme results show an increase in the retention rate ‘from 70.7% in 2005 to 87% in 2019’ (Ginestra, 2020:24).

### ***Comprehensive Programmes***

Comprehensive programmes for the retention of pregnant learners, mothers and fathers are being implemented in high schools in Buenos Aires City to promote and protect their right to education. These programmes train teachers and mentors, and provide spaces for support to adolescent parents. Furthermore, they work in coordination with other sectors such as health and rights to support students in need, as well as it coordinates with early childhood programmes to facilitate access for students’ children in schools or in nearby nurseries (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019; Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, no date). One of the programmes’ evaluations highlights an increase in school retention, higher completion rates, and positive changes in the attitudes of adolescents towards school (Ginestra, 2020).

## **2.2.3 Context within South Africa**

This section of the Literature Review explores the scope of the problem in South Africa.

### **2.2.3.1 Challenges for Pregnant Learners and Adolescent Mothers in South Africa**

Failures in policy implementation in South Africa leave learners unprotected and at the mercy of institutional decisions. According to Shung-King *et al.* (2019) public policies are not

effective in providing protection to adolescents due to a lack of implementation plans, budget and adequate monitoring. In addition, Vale (2021) argues that policies are not implemented on a national level, since there are cases where some provinces and schools do not follow policy guidelines or are not aware of policy changes.

Amod, Halana & Smith (2019) and Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo (2022) argue that there is a gap between policies created within the macrosystem - the government and state departments - and implementation within the microsystem - the schools. Schools' lack of compliance with current policies jeopardises the continuity of pregnant adolescents in school. For instance, reports show discriminatory measures applied in schools against pregnant adolescents, such as requiring parental accompaniment to attend school (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022; Vale, 2021; Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017), suspending or expelling pregnant learners, preventing them from returning to school within a year after having their child (Vale, 2021) failing to provide accommodations so that they can keep up with lessons, or requiring the payment of a fee (Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017).

Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson (2017) argue convincingly that the 2007 National Policy on Measures for the Management and Prevention of Learner Pregnancy encouraged discriminatory actions towards pregnant learners. Jochim, Cluver & Meinck (2021), provide an example where the previous policy allowed institutions to expel unhealthy pregnant learners rather than providing accommodations to facilitate continuation of their studies. Policies can sometimes act against the interests they claim to defend, as the aim of the policy should be to facilitate the continuity of these girls in school by providing the necessary adaptations for their specific needs and not to add obstacles to their return to school.

Pregnant learners may also face discriminatory attitudes from teachers, school staff and peers (Vale, 2021). Often, teachers lack information on how to manage cases of students' pregnancy; for example, research shows cases where they are unaware of the number of sick days that pregnant learners are entitled to (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo 2022). In addition, teachers' lack of training and preparation on how to deal with unexpected problems that a pregnant student may experience makes them reluctant to have pregnant learners in school (Ramalepa, Ramukumba & Masala-Chokwe, 2020). Research also shows that pregnant and adolescent mothers do not have information on what their rights are (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022).

In addition, reports from South Africa suggest that economic constraints, lack of support from caregivers, poor school performance and lack of commitment to school are also factors affecting school dropout among pregnant adolescents (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021). Also, poor school conditions in terms of educational quality and facilities, such as failure to provide health services, baby changing spaces or childcare, prevent girls from returning to school despite their desire to do so (Vale, 2021).

In South Africa school health services are provided by multidisciplinary school health teams based at primary health care (PHC) facilities, who visit schools on designated dates (Matlala, 2017). Nevertheless, some schools do not have a physical space to provide health care, and/or the health services provided by schools do not include special care for pregnant learners, such as antenatal care, or there is no referral to Primary Health Care clinics where they can access antenatal care. In order to attend these services, pregnant learners are often forced to risk missing classes, especially when Primary Health Care clinics are far from schools (Matlala, 2017).

Moreover, distance from schools, overcrowded classrooms, lack of safety, lack of water and sanitation, as well as buildings that are physically demanding for learners and do not cater to special needs (Matlala, 2017) also represent barriers to school attendance for pregnant girls.

Fortunately, South Africa gazetted a Policy on the Prevention and Management of Student Pregnancy in Schools in 2021, which may represent a new opportunity to protect and guarantee the right to education of pregnant adolescents. The new policy, for example, allows mother learners to return to school after giving birth and aims to ensure that pregnant learners and mothers have access to health and social services available in schools or through referral to providers. In addition, the policy states that critical partnerships will be addressed to ensure a supportive environment for pregnant learners (Department of Basic Education, 2021). The current policy certainly shows improvements in favour of the right to education for pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

### **2.2.3.2 Government Policies in South Africa**

National and departmental laws and policies are in place to promote and protect the right to education and other rights of pregnant adolescents in South Africa:

The South African Constitution, through the 1996 Bill of Rights, states that the State and no person shall discriminate on the basis of gender, sex, pregnancy and marital status (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022; Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017). In addition, the Bill of Rights as well as The Children's Act of 2005 state that the best interests of children (persons under 18 years old) are paramount and guarantees the right to basic education for everyone (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017).

The Schools Act of the same year also states that public schools must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Equally important The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000 prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of gender, such as pregnancy discrimination, limiting women's access to social services such as education and unfairly excluding learners from schools and denying social assistance or not providing facilities adapted to the needs of learners with special needs (Republic of South Africa, 2000).

In 2007, the Department of Education established measures for the prevention and management of learner pregnancy, with the aim of preventing schools from taking discriminatory measures against pregnant students and providing information to students on reproductive health and rights, preventing early pregnancies and HIV, and protecting pregnant students' rights to education by providing them with a support system that includes parents, teachers, students, the community, NGOs, the Departments of Education, Health, Social Development and the Police (Department of Education, 2007).

Despite the existence of national acts and measures, studies have found that pregnant students and adolescent mothers report experiencing discrimination at school (Vale, 2021). This suggests a failure in follow-up by state departments to ensure that schools uphold fair treatment for these students.

The Integrated School Health Policy 2012 also protects the right to education by promoting the health of schoolchildren by addressing health barriers to learning in order to promote school retention, completion and achievement. The policy states that all students should receive sexual and reproductive health counselling and that adolescent pregnancy should be addressed through Life Orientation in addition to co-curricular activities. A trained

professional nurse should be able to provide individual assessment that includes sexual, reproductive and mental health services and therefore can help identify at-risk students. Schools that are unable to provide the required services must find strategies to connect students with service providers (Department of Basic Education & Department of Health, 2012). Despite the policy guidelines, research indicates that certain schools fail to provide healthcare services specifically designed to support pregnant and adolescent mothers, either within the school or through referrals (Matlala, 2017). Notably, the implementation of these policies continues to present a significant challenge in social policy.

In 2021, the Department of Basic Education launched the National Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools which aims to reduce the incidence of adolescent pregnancy through prevention strategies such as comprehensive sexuality education and health services, as well as to ensure the rights of pregnant and mother students to basic education and to protect them from discrimination. Pregnant students have the right to remain in school during their pregnancy and to return after childbirth as soon as possible when there is no risk to their health or the health of the child, schools are prohibited from expelling or excluding pregnant students, instead, they are obliged to reasonably accommodate students by compensating for absences, ensuring their place after childbirth, and addressing their health and maternal needs through access to health and social services available in schools or by connecting them with other providers. The policy involves all members of the education system, learners, service providers and NGOs and establishes strategic partnerships between the National Education, Health, Social Development, and Justice Departments (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

While the policy adopts a holistic approach that addresses many of the factors preventing pregnant learners and adolescent mothers from continuing their education, it lacks a robust support system for schools to ensure effective implementation.

The National Youth Development Policy 2020-2030 aims to enhance the capabilities of young people, the policy also seeks to address gender inequalities and it states that there should be opportunities to facilitate the completion and return to educational institutions for young people and encourages access to new forms of learning such as online and distance learning. Equally important, the policy encourages access to health services and information about sexual and reproductive health and rights for adolescents (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2019).

South Africa has the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide 2020-2030 that seeks to eliminate gender-based violence by strengthening the capacity of institutions, such as schools, to develop gender-based violence prevention programmes and interventions (Government of South Africa, 2020).

Similarly to Argentina, South Africa has also signed and ratified international treaties that protect girls' right to education, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Union, 2003) that requires all African member states to take measures to promote keeping girls in schools, The African Youth Charter and The African Charter on the Rights and the Welfare of the Child that require states to eliminate discrimination against girls and to ensure that the education system enables pregnant learners to attend school (Department of Basic Education, 2021; Veriava, Thom & Fish Hodgson, 2017). South Africa is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has committed to take measures to encourage regular school attendance and the reduction of school dropout rates (UNCRC, 1989 cited in Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022).

### **2.2.3.3 Interventions in South Africa**

This section explores programmes implemented in South Africa to promote the schooling of adolescents, pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

#### ***Financial Aid for Mothers***

As in Argentina, the South African government provides financial assistance to caregivers for lower-income households to support children under the age of 18. Currently, a monthly grant of 530 Rands is provided per child, with this amount adjusted annually (Department of Social Development, 2022). However, a study from Makiwane et al. (2006) indicates that the percentage of adolescent mothers who are beneficiaries of this grant is low, instead, older family members often receive the grant on behalf of the children, as they tend to assume responsibilities for the care of children born to adolescent mothers. Research suggests that child support grants can be positive to reducing household financial stress and keeping adolescents in school (Shung-King *et al.*, 2019).

Additionally, the Department of Education offers a School Fee Exemption to enable children of parents with financial difficulties to access quality education (Department of Basic

Education, 2021). Access to this programme may also help relieve the economic burden on adolescent mothers and their families.

### ***School Support and Monitoring***

In some rural schools, teachers are responsible for supervising and supporting pregnant and parenting girls and integrating them into school, ensuring inclusion, school completion and access to better educational opportunities (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022). Recent study suggests that when the implementation of pregnancy-monitoring teachers is adequate, it can show benefits in protecting the right to education of young mothers (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022).

A recent study found that within the interventions, teachers who had a monitoring role of pregnant learners were crucial in the inclusion and school continuation of these learners (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022). Nevertheless, the study also identified gaps between policy guidelines and the implementation in schools, including inconsistent approaches and mismanagement (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022).

### ***Comprehensive Programmes***

In Cape Town, the Department of Health implements school-based support groups for pregnant and parenting students. The groups are run by health promotion officers from community health facilities with the support of the school health team. The programme focuses on the needs of the young mother and her child, addressing issues such as parenting and the rights of pregnant and parenting students. The programme connects students who need assistance with health services as well as other services in their area; for example, in cases where adolescent mothers have difficulty returning to school after childbirth. Shung-King *et al.* (2019) argue that this programme promotes the health of pregnant and parenting adolescents and their right to education, as well as helps to reduce stigma and discrimination in schools.

### ***Support through Parenting Workshops***

A local NGO provides a developmental support programme for students who are parents, that includes sessions on parenting skills with the aim of helping them cope with parenthood while pursuing their academic and developmental challenges. The NGO argues that the programme has benefits such as improving early childhood development and increasing

school attendance of adolescent parents as well as fostering their academic achievement (The Parent Centre, n.d). During the years 2020 and 2021, the programme achieved a 97 per cent pass rate among young parents (The Parent Centre, n.d:17).

### ***School-Based Clinics***

School-based health clinics aim to support adolescent mothers through sexual and reproductive health education and services. Existing research indicates that school-based health clinics are an effective strategy to reach adolescents since can help overcome barriers such as distance to health facilities and shortages of community services, as well as influence behaviour change (Mason-Jones *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, school-based health clinics may also help improve school attendance (Mason-Jones *et al.*, 2012).

### ***Adolescent and Youth friendly Health Services***

The Department of Health developed a policy to improve adolescent and youth health by providing youth-friendly healthcare services through primary healthcare facilities and hospitals, including sexual reproductive health services, contraception and health education (Department of Health, 2017). Noticeably, although pregnant adolescents can attend facilities that offer services of antenatal care, recent research suggests that many pregnant adolescents seeking antenatal care in Cape Town experience discrimination, stigmatization, mistreatment, and inadequate information. By contrast, some report respectful treatment, though these cases are in the minority (Sewpaul *et al.*, 2021). These findings suggest that youth friendly health services targeted at adolescent mothers may need to be improved in the implementation.

### ***Identification of At-risk Students and Support Provision***

To prevent school dropout, a programme trains Learners Support Agents who act as mentors to at-risk students in schools. The Learners Support Agents support pregnant learners by monitoring their progress in school, as well as their medical needs, to ensure that they do not fall behind and that schools can facilitate their return after childbirth, they also maintain contact with pregnant girls and conduct home visits to assess the girl's support environment and connect learners with necessary service providers (Vale, 2021).

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

Systems Theory: The Ecology of Human Development, was used as a Theoretical Framework to ground and guide this study.

Bronfenbrenner (1977:514) defines the Ecology of Human Development as:

The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the lifespan, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded.

From this perspective, to understand a social problem affecting a specific population, we must also address the systems in which this population interacts or which might influence their behaviour, since these structures and interactions are interdependent.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes the structure of this system in four main interconnected systems, each of which is contained in the next:

A **microsystem** is the immediate environment of the individual or target population, in the case of pregnant learners or mother learners, usually represented by their families (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

A **mesosystem** is a broader environment that contains the population at a particular time in their lives, is a system of the microsystems of which these students are a part and the interrelations between these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For pregnant learners or mother learners, it is usually the interactions between their family, school, church or other settings they are part of within their community.

An **exosystem** is not constituted by the settings in which the population develops or interacts directly, but by systems that influence or have an effect on the settings in which they do so (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This could be represented by government agencies, early childhood development centres or facilities and public services such as public transport, healthcare facilities and medical professionals, as well as NGOs that provide services to pregnant and adolescent mothers.

A **macrosystem** is the economic, social, educational, legal and political system that sets out the patterns of functioning of all the different structures of a society (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These may integrate the laws, regulations, national policies, education policies or school policies. As well as customs and traditions inherent to a society.

For the purpose of this study, three settings that influence the continuity of pregnant learners and mother learners in school, and their interrelations, will be studied. As well as how these settings become more relevant during the transition to pregnancy or motherhood.

These settings are embedded in three systems within the system structure:

**Schools** as part of the mesosystem: Schools play a crucial role, studies show that when pregnant or mother learners encounter teachers at school who do not understand their situations, who resort to punishment and humiliation if they are behind in classes or childcare is not available, the risk of dropping out of school increases (Birchall, 2018). On the contrary, if schools and teachers provide support to pregnant learners, show empathy, and provide certain facilities to continue their studies during pregnancy, this may increase the chances that these students will continue school (Birchall, 2018).

**NGOs** developing programmes to protect the education rights of pregnant and mother adolescents as part of the exosystem: In countries where policies fail to be implemented and cannot reach the entire population, NGOs play an important role in reaching vulnerable sectors through their programmes and interventions, since these organisations can influence communities and often work in coordination with schools, in addition to promoting public policies. For the purpose of this study, NGOs that are implementing interventions that help pregnant learners and mother learners to continue their education will be addressed.

**National and educational policies** as part of the macrosystem: Policies are important for setting the actions of other institutions such as schools. In addition, public policies are crucial to addressing interventions that provide solutions to national social problems and guarantee rights and equality. For instance, studies show that in countries where there are no specific policies or legislation on pregnancy and education, decisions about the future of pregnant students or mothers are left to the schools (Birchall, 2018). As the literature review shows, when policies have gaps or are not adequately implemented, and therefore decisions are left to the discretion of schools, they can adopt discriminatory measures that jeopardise the future of pregnant and parenting students.

## **2.4 Summary**

This literature review presented relevant research and reports on factors influencing the retention of adolescent mothers and pregnant adolescents in school. As well as the normative framework that protects the right to education of these students in both Argentina and South Africa, and the gap that exists in the implementation of policies in these countries by the setting most influential in their mesosystem: the schools.

In addition, this section presented the programmes that have been implemented to promote the retention of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers in schools in Argentina and South Africa, at the macrosystem level through government policies, and the mesosystem level through school-based interventions as well as school and community-based interventions implemented by NGOs.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlined the research approach and design, as well as the population and sampling technique. It also detailed the processes for data collection, management, analysis and verification. In addition, the study's reflexivity was discussed at the end.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

The research design is the plan that enables the researcher to identify exactly what they want to ascertain and the process needed to achieve it (Babbie, Beiting-Lipps, & Kindstrom, 2015). For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Qualitative research is when the researcher gets closer to the phenomenon under study in order to gain understanding and make new distinctions through an iterative process (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A qualitative research approach was the most appropriate for this study, as the study aimed to better understand the problems faced by pregnant learners and adolescent mothers, in order to find new distinctions such as positive factors that influence their permanence in school, through an iterative process and by approaching the participants who were part of the environments that influence the development of these adolescents.

#### **3.2.1 Research Design**

An exploratory research design was used. Exploratory research is useful to provide a better understanding of a topic that has not been fully explored (Babbie, Beiting-Lipps, & Kindstrom, 2015). Exploratory research design also makes it possible to approach a topic from a different perspective and gain new insights (Leavy, 2017). This design allowed the researcher to explore the issue of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers from a different perspective, addressing in this study the factors that are shown to positively influence this population of adolescents to stay in school.

### **3.3 Population and Sampling**

This section addresses the study population and sampling technique, characteristics, size and characteristics and sampling procedure.

### **3.3.1 Study Population**

The population is the group that includes specific elements of interest to the study (Babbie, Beiting-Lipps, & Kindstrom, 2015).

The study was based on factors found in programmes implemented in two developing countries: Argentina and South Africa.

To answer the research questions, and compare the reality of the two countries, two distinct populations were studied in each country. The study population in Argentina was composed of: Class Teachers and Programme Referents of public high schools and Programme Managers / Officers of NGOs implementing programmes to protect girls' educational rights. The study population in South Africa was composed of: Principals and Class Teachers of public high schools and Programme Managers and Social Workers of NGOs implementing programmes to protect girls' educational rights.

Public high school Principals and Class Teachers were selected to be interviewed because they should have the best knowledge of educational policies and the management of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers in schools. In addition, public schools have been obliged to comply with laws and public policies regarding the management of pregnant students, while private schools have operated with greater autonomy in previous years. Additionally, Programme Managers / Officers and Social Workers were selected due to their experience in the implementation of programmes that show a positive impact on preventing pregnant learners and adolescent mothers from dropping out of school.

This study focused on factors within the settings of the community of pregnant learners and adolescent mother that support and facilitate their education. Consequently, participants were selected from high schools and NGOs, while pregnant learners and adolescent mothers were excluded from the sample. However, the literature review incorporated data from studies involving pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

### **3.3.2 Sampling Technique**

A non-probability, purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. Purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgement in choosing the sample based on the relevance of the observed sample to the research objective (Babbie, Beiting-Lipps, & Kindstrom, 2015).

Non-probability sampling techniques were most important to this research study because of the impossibility of reaching all organisations working with pregnant or mother learners and schools that have had pregnant or mother learners in Argentina and South Africa.

### **3.3.3 Sample Size and Characteristics**

The sample comprised 17 participants:

1. Eight participants from public high schools:
  - 1.1. Three Class Teachers from Tucuman province, Mendoza and Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  - 1.2. One Programme Referent from schools in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
  - 1.3. Two School Principals from Cape Town, South Africa.
  - 1.4. Two Class Teachers from Cape Town, South Africa.

Selection criteria required a minimum of five years of experience in their respective roles and in dealing with cases of pregnancies in school.

2. Nine participants were from NGOs implementing programmes to protect girls' educational rights:
  - 2.1. Four Programme Managers from Buenos Aires province, Argentina.
  - 2.2. One Programme Officer from Traslasierra province, Argentina.
  - 2.3. Two Programme Managers from Cape Town, South Africa.
  - 2.4. One Programme Manager from Sandton, South Africa.
  - 2.5. One Social Worker from Cape Town, South Africa.

Selection criteria required Programme Managers / Officers and Social Workers to have a minimum of two years of experience in their position and to be engaged in programmes targeting pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers.

### **3.3.4 Sampling Procedure**

After obtaining ethical clearance to include human participants, participants in both Argentina and South Africa were first contacted through the local NGOs working with pregnant and adolescent mothers. The NGOs were contacted through the public email address available on their websites, the researcher sent an email including information about the

researcher, the purpose of the study, the criteria that participants from NGOs required to meet and an invitation letter to participate in the interview to eligible Programme Managers / Officers and Social Workers, as well as the contact details of the researcher. Once the interest of participants was confirmed, and prior to the interview, the researcher requested an email address or WhatsApp, if preferred, to provide the participants with the Informed Consent Form, which included specifications on confidentiality and privacy protection. Prior to the interview, participants had time to ask for further clarification. The interviews were held with the prior oral and written consent of the participants.

Through the same local organisations, support was obtained to identify public high schools that could be part of the study, considering that these organisations implement programmes in the community and/or in collaboration with schools. The recommended schools in Cape Town, South Africa were contacted through links from one NGO participant, after obtaining approval from the Western Cape Education Department (see Appendix 4). In Argentina, schools were contacted through referrals from NGO participants and referents of programmes working with adolescent mothers. In the first contact, the researcher provided her personal information, the purpose of the study as well as the interest in interviewing a school referent, if the school participant expressed interest, the researcher asked for a school email address or preferred means to send the invitation letter to participate in the study, the criteria required for participation and the Informed Consent Form. Prior to the interview, participants had time to ask for further clarification. Interviews were conducted with the prior oral and written consent of the participants.

Participants were required to use an electronic device such as: a computer, smartphone or tablet and access to the internet through data or Wi-Fi to access the interviews.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

For this study firstly document analysis was conducted. Document analysis entails reviewing and analysing different types of documents (Morgan, 2022). Public policies, national and departmental laws, plans and programme of implementation were reviewed and analysed for this study.

Secondly semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews have many advantages in that they can be planned in advance, and they are a form of communication through which

people can recount their experiences and attribute meaning to them (Leavy, 2017). The researcher established questions through an interview guide; one for NGO participants (Appendix 5), one for school participants (Appendix 6). Questions were open-ended; participants could use their own language and provide long and detailed responses eliciting rich and meaningful information (Leavy, 2017).

The interviews were conducted using a communication platform, Zoom and WhatsApp depending on the interviewees' preference, and were recorded using the platform functionality or a voice recording app. The use of video call platforms offers some advantages: it can resemble a face-to-face interview, it is cost-effective, it offers a solution for interviewing people who are geographically distant or dispersed and the interview can be fully recorded (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Participants therefore needed to have access to the Internet at their own expense. This requirement was included in the participation request letter sent to participants.

### **3.4.1 Translations**

For interviews with participants from Argentina, questions were translated into Spanish and the interviews were conducted in Spanish (Appendix 7 and 8), the transcriptions were translated into English thereafter. The interviewee's answers were conveyed with accuracy of literal meaning and took into account the context, leaving aside the researcher's personal observations (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is described in Tesch (1990), using Bogdan and Taylors' (1975) definition as a process that attempts to identify themes and construct hypotheses that are supported by the data. For the purposes of this research, voice and/or video recordings of interviews were transcribed into written digital documents and the written documents were analysed.

To analyse the transcribed data, the steps for organising unstructured qualitative data presented by Tesch (1990) were implemented, they are summarised below:

1. The researcher read all the transcripts of the interviews to get a general understanding of all the information available. The researcher also took notes on the main ideas.

2. The researcher then read the transcripts one by one and began to identify the themes in the interviewees' responses.
3. Once the second step was completed, the researcher reviewed the identified themes and, after identifying connections, repeated or similar patterns, as well as redundancies, created a list of all themes for each country: Argentina and South Africa. To conclude this step, themes were regrouped by frequency of occurrence, common themes that emerged in both countries' data and country-specific themes, the themes were then regrouped according to relevance to the research and themes that were not relevant at this stage.
4. Codes were created for the themes and the analysed interview segments were reviewed to ensure that the codes fit the segments, which helped the researcher to explore whether new themes needed to be created.
5. Based on the research questions the researcher refined the themes and categorised them into main and subcategories according to the connection among the different themes.
6. The researcher reviewed the codes and themes for the last time to choose those most representative of the data and connected them to the research questions.
7. For each country separately, the researcher analysed the data by interpreting the content of the interviews within each category and connecting them to the research questions to identify what was relevant for the purpose of this study. The researcher then made a comparison of the two countries in two sections: one of the similarities found based on the common themes identified and the other with the particularities of each context based on the unique themes that emerged from the interviews.
8. The researcher completed the data review and used the structure to guide the writing of the research report.

### **3.6 Data Verification**

In qualitative research, Nowell et al. (2017:2) argue that it is "the researcher's responsibility to ensure rigour and trustworthiness" in data analysis processes. Lincoln & Guba (1985) cited in Nowell et al. (2017:3) use four criteria to define the concept of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; which are the criteria used in this study to verify the data.

## **Credibility**

Credibility is determined by the researcher's accurate representation of the participants' experience (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, each interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed into written transcriptions, special attention was given to translations from Spanish to English to ensure accurate representation of the interviewee's responses, also preliminary findings and interpretations were checked against the raw data.

## **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the generalisation of findings. Lincoln & Guba (1985 as cited in Nowell et al., 2017) state that the researcher is responsible for providing detailed descriptions of the research site, so that others may accurately judge the transferability of the findings. For this reason, this study provided detailed descriptions of the context of both research sites, identifying the differences specific to each site, as well as the criteria that guided the selection of the sites compared, in addition, this study adopted a purposive sampling approach.

## **Dependability**

Dependability can be achieved by providing a reliable research process that is 'logical, traceable, and clearly documented' (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as cited in Nowell et al., 2017:3). The entire research process was documented in detail to show consistency of the results and the process in both Argentina and South Africa.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability is to ensure and demonstrate that the researcher's interpretations, findings and conclusions are drawn from the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, the accuracy of data collected from the interviews and analysis was ensured by checking findings against data from recordings and transcripts.

## **3.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is crucial and is recommended that researchers record and be self-critical of the research process, and of their internal process that integrates their personal values and interests (Nowell et al., 2017).

As a native of Latin America, I am more familiar with the Latin American context. However, to avoid bias in comparison, I committed to conducting ethical and reliable research and to self-reflect throughout the process by reading the literature and providing detailed descriptions of the Argentinian and South African realities; choosing my research methodology; conducting the interviews, as well as iterating by revising my research methodology and analysing the data to draw conclusions. I also sought continuous advice throughout the process from my research supervisor.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter covered the research approach, design and methodology, data collection, analysis and verification as well as specifications around the sample.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings that emerged from the data collected, with discussions based on the comprehensive review of the literature and theoretical framework underpinning this study. To introduce the findings a participant profile is provided along with the framework for analysis used. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings.

### 4.2 Participants Profile

The following tables display the profile of the participants per country and area. The first table depicts the profile of NGO participants, while the second table shows the profile of school participants.

Table 1: Profile of NGO Participants.

Participant	Gender	Title/Position	Country
NGO1	Female	Programme Manager	Argentina
NGO2	Female	Programme Manager	Argentina
NGO3	Female	Programme Manager	Argentina
NGO4	Female	Programme Manager	Argentina
NGO5	Female	Programme Officer	Argentina
NGO6	Female	Programme Manager	South Africa
NGO7	Female	Social Worker	South Africa
NGO8	Male	Programme Manager	South Africa
NGO9	Male	Programme Manager	South Africa

Table 2: Profile of School Participants.

Participant	Gender	Title/Position	Country
S1	Female	Class Teacher	Argentina
S2	Female	Programme Referent	Argentina
S3	Female	Class Teacher	Argentina
S4	Female	Class Teacher	Argentina
S5	Male	School Principal	South Africa
S6	Male	Class Teacher	South Africa
S7	Female	Class Teacher	South Africa
S8	Male	School Principal	South Africa

The sample comprised 17 participants: five participants were from NGOs in Argentina and four participants were from NGOs in South Africa. Additionally, four participants worked in schools in Argentina and four who worked in schools in South Africa.

Of the participants in Argentina: the five participants from the NGOs were female; three were Programme Managers, one was a Programme Officer and one was a Social Worker. The four participants from the high schools were female; three were Class Teachers and one was a Programme Referent who is part of an educational department programme for the retention of students who are mothers.

The years of experience of the participants from NGOs working with programmes aimed at adolescent mothers ranged between two to 21 years, and from five to 19 years for school-based participants.

Of the participants in South Africa: two of the participants from the NGOs were female and two were male. Three were Programme Managers and one was a Social Worker. Three participants from the high schools were male and one was female; two were Class Teachers and two were School Principals.

The years of experience of the participants from NGOs working with programmes aimed at adolescent mothers ranged between two to 14 years, and from five to 10 years for school participants.

### **4.3 Framework for Analysis of Findings**

The researcher identified from the data three main themes that address the research questions: Prevention strategies; Challenges; and Successful experiences. The Framework for Analysis, presented in Tables 3 (NGOs) and 4 (Schools), summarises by sample group, these themes that were identified during the data analysis. Moreover, within each theme, principal categories emerged and are discussed, with certain categories further subdivided into subcategories. Each table initially demonstrates the similarities between South Africa and Argentina, subsequently highlighting the particularities identified for each country. By comparing the two tables, the study aims to illustrate the nuances in the experiences of each respective sample group.

#### **4.3.1 Comparative Analysis Framework for NGOs and Schools**

The following tables depict the themes, categories and subcategories identified among the two samples of participants: staff from NGOs and staff from Schools. Each table was further divided into sections highlighting the Similarities observed between Argentina and South Africa, as well as the unique attributes identified within each country.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis Framework for NGOs.

<b>4.4.1 Similarities between Argentina and South Africa</b>		
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>
4.4.1.1 Prevention Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sexual Reproductive Health Education</li> </ul>	- Prevention of Second Pregnancies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Awareness Raising of Learner's Motherhood</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Network of Support</li> </ul>	
4.4.1.2 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Need for Intersectional Policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unequal Access to Policies</li> <li>- Complex Structural Challenges</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of a Support Network</li> </ul>	- Culture and Gender issues
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Challenges in Access to Healthcare</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Non-supportive School Environment and Academic System</li> </ul>	
4.4.1.3 Successful Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Customised and Empathetic Support</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Network of Support</li> </ul>	
<b>4.4.2 Particularities of Argentina</b>		
4.4.2.1 Prevention Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Early Identification of Learner's Context and Needs</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Guarantee Child Care Structure</li> </ul>	
4.4.2.2 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of Monitoring of Policies and Support for Schools</li> </ul>	
4.4.2.3 Successful Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Flexibility and Tailored Support</li> </ul>	
<b>4.4.3 Particularities of South Africa</b>		
4.4.3.1 Prevention Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Access to Information for Pregnant Learners and Adolescent Mothers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parenting Skills</li> <li>- Awareness of Pregnancy and Learners' Rights</li> </ul>
4.4.3.2 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of Information and Awareness</li> </ul>	

Table 4: Comparative Analysis Framework for Schools.

4.4.1 Similarities between Argentina and South Africa		
Themes	Categories	Subcategories
4.4.1.1 Prevention Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sexual Reproductive Health Education</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Awareness Raising of Learner's Motherhood</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School Policies and Support</li> </ul>	- Support During Pregnancy and After Childbirth
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support Schools Receive from the Department of Education</li> </ul>	
4.4.1.2 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Need for Intersectional Policies</li> </ul>	- Complex Structural Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of a Support Network</li> </ul>	- Culture and Gender Issues
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Challenges in Access to Healthcare</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Non-supportive School Environment and Academic System</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers' Lack of Training to Manage Learners' Pregnancy</li> <li>- Lack of Facilities from School After Childbirth</li> </ul>
4.4.1.3 Successful Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Customised and Empathetic Support</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Network of Support</li> </ul>	
4.4.2 Particularities of Argentina		
4.4.2.1 Prevention Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tailored Approach and Flexibility in the Support to Pregnant and Adolescent mothers</li> </ul>	
4.4.2.2 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School System Outdated and Discouraging</li> </ul>	
4.4.2.3 Successful Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Flexibility and Tailored Support</li> </ul>	- Facilities from School After Childbirth
4.4.3 Particularities of South Africa		
4.4.3.1 Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of Information and Awareness</li> </ul>	
4.4.3.3 Successful Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Foster Learners' Engagement with School</li> </ul>	

## **4.4 Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

This section presents and discusses in-depth the themes, categories and subcategories from the frameworks of analysis illustrated in Tables 3 (NGOs) and 4 (Schools). Initially, the shared similarities between both countries, as reported by participants from NGOs and Schools (Tables 3 and 4 respectively) are delineated within each Theme. Subsequently, the particularities observed in Argentina and, finally, in South Africa, as reported by participants from both NGOs and Schools (Tables 3 and 4), are presented. The shared similarities and particularities form an integral part of the overarching structure of the chapter.

### **4.4.1 Similarities between Argentina and South Africa**

For both groups of participants interviewed in Argentina and in South Africa, similar themes, categories and subcategories emerged. Notably, Sexual Reproductive Health Education, the visibility of adolescent mothers, as well as school and network support emerged as common strategies in the prevention of school dropout of adolescent mothers in both contexts. Challenges faced by adolescent mothers in both countries stemmed from vulnerabilities inherent to their socioeconomic circumstances and limited access to essential services and school support. Moreover, having a network of support and empathy were identified as key factors in successful experiences reported in both contexts. These findings are discussed below.

#### **4.4.1.1 Theme One: Prevention Strategies**

To ensure that learners do not drop out of school, it is important to be able to act before this happens, as the earlier these mothers return to school the lower the risk of them dropping out (Vale, 2021). NGO and school participants in Argentina and South Africa highlighted their efforts to act swiftly.

**P1-NGO-A:** This is why the aim is to try to reach them as soon as possible, because the sooner you reach them, the more rights you can guarantee. It is about accompanying those who are vulnerable, while also having a preventive impact on potential future vulnerabilities. Being there, being very attentive to the context in which the pregnancy occurs, providing support and ensuring that school dropout does not happen.

**P3-NGO-SA:** We give support to the young children, young beneficiaries, so that they can stay in school and they can see that they are not alone on their journey... we have a variety of almost 27 interventions and we are working with a team who assist those young girls or women in our community. It is a great job to keep young children in school so they don't need to drop out.

**P1-S-A:** That is why we try to prevent and not act after she (adolescent mother) has stopped coming to school. There is constant monitoring that we do with teachers, keeping the link with the adolescents and identifying if there is any challenge they are facing. When we see that a student is in a very vulnerable situation, we articulate with our network so that one of these organisations can support them.

The timely implementation of interventions as highlighted by Vale (2021), together with social support, has a significant role in preventing the dropout of adolescent mothers. The literature suggests that adequate social support from the adolescent mesosystem encourages pregnant and mother students to stay in school (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

#### **4.4.1.1.1 Sexual Reproductive Health Education**

School participants in Argentina highlighted that having Sexual Reproductive Health Education in school curricula has helped in the prevention of pregnancies, which could have an impact on school retention. Sexual Reproductive Health Education became law in Argentina in 2006 (Fainsod, 2021). Additionally, participants in schools in both Argentina and South Africa implement Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) education to support pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

**P4-S-A:** I am struck by the fact that we no longer have so many cases of adolescent pregnancies. This is because they have more access to health centres, and to many awareness campaigns that have to do, not only with care and preventing unintended pregnancies, but also the implementation of 'Educación Sexual Integral' (Comprehensive Sex Education). This is being advocated and intensively implemented in schools.

**P3-S-SA:** The learners get educated about adolescent pregnancies and they get a specific learning area that deals with these issues called Life Orientation. They are told about such things, also by the counsellors from NGOs.

**P4-S-SA:** the NGOs have come into the school to teach about sexual education, because as teachers some of us don't feel comfortable talking about sex life with the learners.

Moreover, participants from NGOs in South Africa accentuated the significance of integrating sexual reproductive health education into school curricula, as in their experience adolescents do not receive enough information in schools. Many NGOs address this educational need by offering support to schools through their programmes.

**P4-NGO-SA:** To try to help these girls to understand what it means to be pregnant, the impact that will have on their lives, so sexual reproduction education can be introduced to schools, so they can understand the implications of being pregnant and the responsibility that comes with that ... those should be carried out at school. I think they can't get them out of school.

**P2-NGO-SA:** They could get SRH education at school through life orientation classes but I don't think it is enough and I don't think they have enough information there. When they have SRH education at school they approach adolescent pregnancy, but there is minimum information that they are receiving from school.

In both Argentina and South Africa, SRH education is recognized as a tool to support pregnant and adolescent mothers. Interestingly, in Argentina SRH education implementation appears to align with established policies and regulations (Fainsod, 2021; Ministerio de Salud, 2022). However, in South Africa, while schools provide support through Life Orientation, participants report that this support is often insufficient. Schools may need support from NGOs to address issues related to adolescent pregnancy, as the information provided in schools may not sufficiently cover this topic. Notably, the literature underscores the need for schools to collaborate with diverse institutions to ensure comprehensive support for adolescent girls (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019).

#### ***4.4.1.1.1 Prevention of Second Pregnancies***

Some participants from NGOs in both countries, discussing strategies for the prevention of school dropout rates in adolescent mothers, highlighted the significance of preventing subsequent pregnancies; by providing information and comprehensive support to adolescent mothers and promoting their education.

**P3-NGO-A:** Our next step with these teenagers, beyond accompanying them in the upbringing of their children, is to ensure that there is no second pregnancy and to be able to accompany this process. The right to access information, and above all, the support network is critical. If there is no support network, they will surely become pregnant again.

**P2-NGO-A:** SRH education is key to preventing unintended pregnancies. We work hard to prevent unintended second pregnancies.

**P1-NGO-SA:** ... the only thing that you can do is to help this child to move forward, to know that this is not the end of their life. We motivate them by saying “You can still do more, you can still break the cycle, if you are pregnant, you don't have to have another child. You just have to raise this one and then go to school, learn, go to the university, start working and do something with yourself”.

Evidence suggests that as adolescent mothers advance in their educational development, the likelihood of rapid repeat pregnancies decreases (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

Addressing the risk of subsequent pregnancies is intended to reduce the difficulties that childcare poses for adolescent mothers and that jeopardises their continuation in school (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019).

#### **4.4.1.1.2 Awareness Raising of Learner's Motherhood**

Participants from both schools and NGOs in Argentina and South Africa implement awareness-raising and destigmatisation of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood as a preventive strategy. This strategy extends beyond mere information, encompassing awareness-raising initiatives regarding the experiential circumstances of adolescents among their peers, schools, and the community. Consequently, to foster in them the motivation to continue studying. Additionally, participants emphasised that adolescent mothers have the right to experience their adolescence on equal grounds as their peers.

**P1-NGO-A:** It has to do not only with public policies, that is why we put a lot of effort into raising awareness in the community about these issues, and we are talking about something experiential ... not only informative. Much of the work with schools has to do with raising awareness among adolescents (classmates) who are accompanying these adolescents, and making visible the position of adolescents who are parents.

**P1-NGO-SA:** In terms of school attendance, it is about giving them (adolescent mothers) space to talk about their challenges. We (the NGO through their programme) give them space, we support them. I think they really need space to talk because if you don't talk about something then you can't move on..., these are still children, they still need to play... but this mistake (the pregnancy) has happened and the only thing that you can do is to help this child to move forward.

Raising awareness of adolescent motherhood, within the community where the learners' mothers engage, aims to create a supportive environment. This approach acknowledges that these settings influence the behaviour of these adolescent mothers and their determination to stay in school, which is aligned with the Systems Theory framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

#### **4.4.1.1.3 Network of Support**

NGO participants in South Africa and Argentina emphasised the need to involve the parents of adolescent girls, supporting them, and creating awareness to ensure their active and effective support for their children to continue studying despite pregnancy. Moreover, both in Argentina and South Africa, schools and NGOs establish a supportive network among various institutions within the community to tackle the multifaceted needs of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers, thereby preventing school dropout. For instance, schools collaborate with families, local NGOs, health clinics, the Department of Education, the Department of Social Development, and other groups within the adolescents' setting to create a comprehensive support system.

**P4-S-A:** In all schools, there has to be a pedagogical department that is in charge of working with the teachers, but also with the children in case we have a pregnant student... Since the pandemic, a lot of work has been done on networking the school with institutions close to the community so that learners have greater access (to support).

**P3-NGO-SA:** There are a lot of organisations around our area that we partner with. So, we look at the problem and we see what are the organisations that can assist us in this specific problem, in this area, that's what we normally do. So, for example someone comes here and needs access to a grant, we need to refer them to social development and someone wants to go to school... so we just refer, if there are services we don't have, to the organisations that provide the services.

The collaborative engagement of schools with other relevant institutions can help address a wide range of challenges faced by mother learners, and that are not within the purview of schools, as recommended by Bracchi & Del Bono (2019). In South Africa, the establishment of a support system of organisations is highlighted in the National Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools to ensure the needs of adolescent mothers and pregnant students are addressed (Department of Education, 2021).

#### **4.4.1.1.4 School Policies and Support**

The support schools provide to learners during pregnancy and after childbirth is paramount in fostering their continuity in school (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). In both countries, certain schools have adopted a protocol or mechanisms designed to ensure alignment with the existing national policies aimed at supporting learners who are mothers. In addition, part of the institutions interviewed have an area or a person within the school designated to provide the facilities and resources these learners need.

School participants in Argentina underscored their schools' commitment to ensuring the integration of adolescent mothers, in alignment with policies and laws aimed at safeguarding the rights of pregnant students and mothers, for instance by facilitating their access to school and supporting them to catch up on missed coursework during pregnancy and after childbirth (Ginestra, 2020; Gobierno de la República Argentina, 2003).

Similarly, in South Africa, participants also emphasised the importance of guaranteeing the inclusion of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers within their institutions, ensuring provisions for leave of absence and their reintegration after childbirth, as established in relevant National Laws and Policies (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Department of Basic Education, 2021; Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017).

In South Africa, the School Management Team or Life Orientation are the designated areas that ensure the well-being of these learners, as indicated by study participants. Some of these designated areas work in collaboration with other organisations within the community as well as with their families and peers to provide support and refer pregnant learners or mothers to access supplementary support services.

In Argentina, school participants indicated that awareness-raising among all school personnel was an initial step to support these students and guarantee their right to education. Furthermore, specific schools in the region benefit from having a referral within the school from the programme implemented in Buenos Aires aimed at retaining learners who are pregnant, mothers and fathers. This designated referral is responsible for ensuring learners receive support, as well as for providing training to school staff to accompany and assist these learners. Some schools also work in collaboration with families, NGOs, health clinics and other community centres to support learners.

The supportive measures implemented by schools in Argentina and South Africa also encompass an emotional dimension, manifesting through the provision of empathetic listening spaces, efforts to boost their self-esteem and motivation, as well as the provision of ongoing accompaniment for learners. Research shows that this form of support from teachers and principals can help build resiliency and contribute to the ability of adolescent mothers to stay in school (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

#### ***4.4.1.1.4.1 Support During Pregnancy and After Childbirth***

During pregnancy and on maternity leave, the majority of participants from South African schools indicated the following prevention strategies to support learner mothers during pregnancy and after birth: firstly, alignment with parents and learners to formulate a plan addressing anticipated absences related to prenatal care and the due date. Secondly, the facilitation of school homework and provision of materials through peers, teachers or family to ensure the learners' continuity with the curricula. Additionally, certain participants highlighted the implementation of special considerations in the assessment process of girls who were absent due to pregnancy.

**P2-S-SA:** There is a learner who stays nearby the one who's pregnant, then the teacher would give homework to that learner. Also, there are times when we would receive a medical certificate if the learner is absent because she was pregnant, and then according to the records there is a certain symbol which we put so that the learner cannot miss out.

In Argentinian schools, the teachers or the area designated to support these students, establish a coordinated action plan involving students, parents and teachers. This action plan covers schedules, special leave, activities, homework and assessment. Similar to schools in South Africa, teachers send homework to learners and leverage peer and family support to ensure their accessibility during absences. The majority of the participants emphasised the importance of sustaining a connection with the learners. This link is maintained through the use of WhatsApp, serving as a means for ongoing communication, academic assistance and personalised monitoring of the student's circumstances.

**P3-S-A:** It seems to me that the strategy that works best is to keep in touch on WhatsApp and contact them from time to time.

**P1-S-A:** In the city, we have a regulation where there are excused absences for the father and the adolescent mother. During the absence, each school organises a work plan for that student to receive priority content and not get lost on the school path. There are subjects more complicated than others, in that case, we try that the teacher, apart from sending the activities in the form of a booklet or homework, makes communication via video call or WhatsApp. Not every time but we try to get the teacher to reach that student.

The strategies mentioned by participants in both countries align closely with the interventions proposed in the literature (Vale, 2021), as well as with the establishment of support systems within the schools to provide pregnant learners and adolescent mothers with relevant support (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

#### **4.4.1.1.5 Support Schools Receive from the Department of Education**

In both Argentina and South Africa, school participants expressed that they receive, within their schools, some form of guidance from the education department concerning the management of pregnant and mother learners. Nevertheless, participants noted that accompaniment by government or municipal departments is limited to obtaining statistical updates on the number of mother learners, and that they do not provide tangible tools or support to schools. Consequently, it is the responsibility of schools to autonomously devise and implement effective mechanisms to support these learners.

**P3-S-SA:** The only thing that they do is they send us circulars where they need the number of learners that have fallen pregnant from grade 8 to 12, we provide them with that information and then we don't know what happens. There aren't clear tools, just verbal communication based on what their rights are but we really don't know what to do. We simply use our own mechanism.

**P1-S-A:** They look for information by using forms. These forms ask if there are female students and how many there are, if they are mothers or pregnant women, if there are father and if they finish school. In other words, it's more statistical ... it should be more humane and I realise that they need accompaniment.

Notably, a singular participant from South Africa reported that occasionally personnel from the Department of Education engage in on-site visits to monitor the provision of appropriate medical care, ensuring that pregnant learners are receiving the necessary support. These visits also serve to confirm that the learners are placed in their respective grades, though the responsibility for medical care lies with external health providers. In parallel, in Argentina the programme for the retention of students who are mothers, implemented in Buenos Aires, extends active support to both educators and student mothers, contributing to a comprehensive framework for sustained assistance.

**P2-S-SA:** So, there is a policy for pregnancy sent by the Department and we have to fill in how many learners are pregnant, sometimes we have some personnel coming to our school not just to check for the pregnant learners, but also to make sure that learners are in the grade they are supposed to be and that they are getting injections they are supposed to get.

**P2-S-A:** The programme works in the schools with a teacher designated by the school management to be a referent with whom we talk and meet ... and depending on the situation in a school there is, for example, a teacher who tells me: "there is a student who is pregnant, she is in this situation, she still does not know what she is going to do, she has not told anyone, we are having our first approaches", so that is when I go to the school ... We do continuous training, these referents have a training session with us once a month or every two months or with the team in general, but we also go to the schools, depending on the situation, every week, every 15 days, every 3 weeks, and we also have permanent communication with these referents through WhatsApp.

The experiences recounted by school participants coincide with Shung-King *et al.* (2019) findings regarding the limitations in the monitoring of policy implementation as well as in the unequal implementation of policies across schools in South Africa (Vale, 2021). Similarly, in Argentina, the experiences of participants confirm Boyle's (2021) arguments regarding insufficient policy monitoring and implementation and the failure of schools to have support systems in place.

#### **4.4.1.1.6 Theme One Summary: Prevention Strategies**

The first theme addressed the research question regarding strategies to prevent pregnant learners and mother learners from dropping out of school. Interesting findings, in relation to this theme, emerged from the interviews with participants in Argentina and South Africa.

Sexual Reproductive Health Education and the prevention of second pregnancies were identified as essential preventive strategies in both countries. Moreover, according to some school participants in Argentina, Sexual Reproductive Health Education has had an impact on decreasing pregnancy rates among learners within their schools. However, in South Africa, the SRH education provided at schools was perceived as insufficient by many NGO participants. To address this limitation, NGOs, through their programmes, provide support to schools by means of comprehensive sexuality education for their students.

Additionally, participants in both Argentina and South Africa emphasised the importance of awareness-raising on the stigmatisation of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood and creating awareness about preserving the natural aspects of adolescent girls' developmental age. Furthermore, involving parents, schools, NGOs, health clinics, and various community institutions, is highlighted, by participants in both countries, to address the multifaceted needs of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers, aimed at preventing school dropout and acting as an interconnected system of support (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Additionally, participants in both countries underscored the paramount importance of having in place support policies and resources within schools and ensuring support after childbirth to adolescent mothers. However, the majority of participants within schools in Argentina and South Africa reported a lack of support in the form of tools and resources from the Education Departments due to the lack of policy monitoring and implementation.

Participants from both countries reported remarkably similar experiences in the implementation of prevention strategies within their respective contexts.

#### **4.4.1.2 Theme Two: Challenges**

This section discusses the challenges faced by pregnant and adolescent mothers in continuing their education in Argentina and South Africa.

##### **4.4.1.2.1 Need for Intersectional Policies**

Among the challenges encountered by participants in Argentina and South Africa, a need for policies that encompass the diversity of the situations experienced by learners and are consistently implemented was accentuated.

**P1-NGO-A:** There is something intersectional in relation to mothers and fathers in adolescence - poverty, migration, situations that have to do with a population that is not privileged -that acts as an obstacle. That is why I believe that in this subject, as in others that cross gender, it should be addressed intersectionally (in policies) or it should not be addressed at all.

Participants in both countries highlighted that not everyone is able to access resources, and challenging circumstances disproportionately impact certain individuals over others.

**P4-S-SA:** Because of the inequalities in South Africa, we have two cities in Cape Town in the same country. So, imagine during the pandemic how it was, those that could afford to just stay at home didn't have to worry, they continued their studies as normal but for our learners, it was just hard.

The findings in Argentina are reflected and supported in the literature suggesting that policies tend to overlook the specific needs of young parents (Ginestra, 2020), and discuss a need to improve the scope of current policies to reach the most vulnerable. Similarly, in South Africa, findings correspond to insights suggesting the inefficacy of public policies in protecting adolescents (Shung-King *et al.*, 2019) compounded by inadequate implementation on a national level (Vale, 2021). These findings illustrate the need for policies that consider the diverse situations of learners and have a system and the resources to address the different factors that intersect in learners' experiences, to ensure inclusion in access to education.

#### ***4.4.1.2.1.1 Unequal Access to Policies***

Participants in Argentina highlighted the disparities in the implementation of policies in Buenos Aires compared to the other provinces, with the capital enjoying better tools and programmes for supporting schools and adolescent mothers. In contrast, the other provinces lack protective and monitoring policies, along with access to information, resources, and tools. Participants stressed the need for an assistance system or institution for adolescents who are denied their rights. These challenges align with the shortcomings mentioned by Boyle (2021) in policy implementation such as a lack of monitoring of policy implementation, and schools lacking a support system in place for pregnant and adolescent mothers.

**P4-NGO-A:** Therefore, public policies should come from the Ministry of Education so that all schools in the country are informed of the special regime for these adolescent mothers and fathers. The Ministry of Education has the framework laws and then each jurisdiction may or may not apply those laws. Where they are not applied, they should be applied throughout the country. And where they are applied but are not known, there must be more information work the schools, both for principals and teachers.

In South Africa, school participants expressed concerns about unequal access to policy benefits, emphasising societal inequalities. Policies, primarily focused on prevention, encounter challenges in implementation and monitoring due to resource shortages in state departments, hindering equitable and efficient policy execution.

**P4-S-SA:** The policies are okay. I live in a country where there are wonderful policies, but the implementation of the policies is a problem. Because you see that teachers are already overwhelmed, now if you are going to add also the side of the healthcare then it becomes more and more complex for some of the teachers, we say it's impossible because we don't have all the necessary resources.

Notably, participants' experiences in South Africa confirm that there is a gap between public policy guidelines and implementation at the school level, as argued in the literature (Shung-King *et al.*, 2019; Amod, Halana & Smith, 2019; Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022).

#### ***4.4.1.2.1.2 Complex Structural Challenges***

The primary challenges confronting adolescent mothers in Argentina, according to participants, are rooted in precarious living conditions, marked by factors such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, violence, neglect, substance abuse, and the distance to schools, particularly in rural areas. These factors were also seen in literature as contributing to school dropout (Fainsod, 2021).

**P2-S-A:** What usually happens is that there are other vulnerabilities, other situations that affect adolescents that go beyond motherhood ... addictions, housing problems, moving house ... Argentina is going through a complex time socially as well, so this has a big impact on schooling. And other situations of abandonment are seen, which have to do with a complex family context.

Similarly, in South Africa, NGO and school participants identified complex structural challenges affecting adolescent mothers, such as poverty, financial constraints, and unemployment, consistent with findings in the literature (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021). Participants reported instances of students dropping out of school, often driven by the need to seek employment due to economic hardships. Additionally, participants expressed concerns about cases of adolescents who have been exploited by older people in exchange for food or money, situations that might stem from their vulnerable circumstances of poverty and social isolation.

**P3-NGO-SA:** And some of them experience a huge burden of unemployment, in South Africa some of them don't have anything to eat. Sometimes they go to school and they are hungry ... And some of them also need the transport money allowance ... So that's how we support them. And moreover, when keeping girls in school we must remember that homes are not the same, some are disturbed, the others want to have access to the internet so they also come to our space.

Literature shows that these pre-existing challenges in households significantly heighten the likelihood of school dropout when adolescents become pregnant (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019).

#### **4.4.1.2.2 Lack of a Support Network**

In both South Africa and Argentina, participants highlighted the lack of a support network as one of the main constraints to adolescent mothers' continuity in school. This issue was also underscored in studies conducted in Argentina (Ginestra, 2020) and South Africa (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Vale, 2021). For instance, participants highlighted that some girls face isolation due to a lack of family support and the absence of caregivers, girls also lack support from the child's father and experience a disconnection from their peers. Additionally, participants reported cases where parents forced girls to abandon their education, either to care for their newborns, contribute to the child's upbringing through work, or as a punitive measure for the pregnancy. Many participants from NGOs in South Africa emphasised the imperative of educating parents to support their adolescent daughters and recognise the importance of continuing their education.

**P1-NGO-A:** Alienation from links with peers. Very deep situations of isolation ... and also accompaniment of the adolescents by adult referents, that makes a big difference ... In many cases of these adolescents, the adults are very absent, and not because they are not interested in their children, is because they are working 500,000 hours [hyperbole], they are dealing with other difficult situations.

**P3-NGO-SA:** Some of them didn't get enough support from their parents for the pregnancy and even then, they keep their children away from school because they say “no, she is going to become a mother now so there's no need to stay with us” so they end up dropping out of school and there's no one supporting or assisting them.

The lack of support was closely connected to school dropout of adolescent mothers according to the experiences of participants. By contrast, evidence shows that support from the adolescent mesosystem: family, school, peers and community, impacts on pregnant and mother students' decisions and ability to stay in school (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021; Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

##### ***4.4.1.2.2 .1 Culture and Gender Issues***

Cultural norms, stereotypes and societal expectations also pose a challenge to the educational development of adolescent mothers.

**P5-NGO-A:** The challenges most difficult to address are the culture of the community that tends to consider the pregnancy a problem, the families, the school that sees the pregnant girl as a problem for the institution, and the lack of support from the father of the child.

Notably, the literature on factors that enable adolescent mothers to continue school, suggests that a supportive environment should also challenge established gender stereotypes (Fainsod, 2021). Moreover, within the subcategory of Culture and Gender issues, the elements of bullying and stigma, and gender role bias emerged strongly.

Participants from Argentina and South Africa highlighted shame, discrimination, and stigma associated with adolescent pregnancy as significant barriers impeding the educational continuity of adolescents, both within schools and their respective communities.

In Argentina, the fear of discrimination, shame and pressure from their families to devote themselves exclusively to childcare also appear in the literature as reasons given by adolescent mothers for dropping out of school in Argentina (Ginestra, 2020).

**P2-S-A:** [Stigma] is a factor that increases the risk of them dropping out of school. There is something about not wanting to be exposed. There are very few situations, but there are still some because culturally they see it as a shame. Because their families do not want them to be exposed, this is more of a cultural factor that still affects some sectors and schools.

In the South African context, participants noted the prevalence of bullying and peer pressure faced by these adolescents at school, leading to dropout and to social isolation.

**P1-S-SA:** They are ashamed that they got pregnant at an early age and then there is peer pressure, bullying, the kids will say nasty things to this kid that got pregnant and the kid is not able to cope with all these things. It will affect them psychologically in terms of confidence, and will end up out of school.

Notably, these discriminatory attitudes towards adolescent mothers are highlighted in the literature as challenges that adolescent mothers may face from teachers, school staff and peers (Vale, 2021).

Additionally, NGO participants in both Argentina and South Africa underscore the ‘forced ‘adulthood’ (*P2-NGO-A*) experienced by pregnant adolescents, wherein they are treated as

adults, forced to behave as adults, and confined solely to the role of mothers. Particularly in rural areas of Argentina, NGO and school participants note the isolation of girls, relegating them to household duties and caregiving responsibilities for their children and siblings. Participants further emphasise instances where parents force girls to withdraw from school to fulfil expectations of maternal responsibilities.

**P2-NGO-A:** We use a word that characterises this population which is ‘adulthoodification’, because they are mothers everyone sees them as adults, they go from being children in need of care to being carers. Nobody takes care of these adolescents. And another common issue that we find is loneliness, many adolescents are isolated.

**P1-S-A:** Among the reasons for dropping out are that the parents are busy working and the pregnant daughter is left at home to look after the other younger siblings.

Likewise, research in Argentina highlights the family pressure that compels adolescent mothers to devote themselves exclusively to their role as mothers (Ginestra, 2020) as one of the causes of school dropout.

Similarly, in the South African context, most participants observed that these girls are left alone at home without adequate support, and in many cases, parents withdraw them from school and force them to work. Moreover, some adolescent girls in South Africa confront gender-based violence, engage in relationships with older men, and lack support from the fathers of their children.

**P4-S-SA:** Some parents will say to their daughters “No, you can't go to school because you have a child, please go and look for a job” and that's what makes them not come to school.

**P2-S-SA:** When the learner gets pregnant some of the parents of the learner struggle, they drop out because nobody is going to take care of the baby and they are supposed to work for the baby, look for a job. Sometimes when they get pregnant the boys run away, they don't want to take the responsibility, then that's when they drop out and look for a job.

Furthermore, research in South Africa also indicates a lack of support from caregivers as a reason for girls dropping out of school (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021), which is consistent with participants' reports. The societal expectations regarding the behavioural norms and

priorities imposed upon adolescent mothers appear to be rooted in gender role stereotypes, thus depriving adolescent mothers of the support needed to pursue their education.

#### **4.4.1.2.3 Challenges in Access to Health Care**

Participants from both sample groups in Argentina and South Africa highlighted the challenge of access to health care faced by pregnant learners and adolescent mothers. This challenge becomes more pronounced in cases of risky pregnancies or illnesses suffered by the child. Access to health care is reflected in the literature as a challenge for school continuation of adolescent mothers in both countries (Matlala, 2017; Ginestra, 2020). Furthermore, participants within both countries noted that pregnancy contributes to high levels of stress, anxiety and depression among adolescent mothers. Furthermore, there is a lack of mental health support services and a need for the provision of psychological care, as stressed especially by participants in Argentina.

**P1-S-A:** Within public health, it would be good to help them psychologically ... both physical and mental health are important. Perhaps for this young woman it is an awakening, a light of hope, a relief, perhaps those fears and doubts are so great. It is also important that this preparation, psychological health or mental health reaches the schools.

**P1-S-SA:** Also, the challenge of psychological problems like depression, stress, suicidal thoughts, she can think about those things ... So personally, I think those are the challenges that a young woman faces these days.

Although policies in South Africa and Argentina emphasise that learners should be provided with access to mental health care (Ley de Educación Nacional, 2006; Department of Basic Education & Department of Health, 2012), in the field it seems that mental health care services available to adolescent mothers are scarce. Again, this demonstrates the poor implementation of social policies in both countries.

#### **4.4.1.2.4 Non-supportive School Environment and Academic System**

Most NGO and school participants in Argentina contend with the challenge of having an outdated academic system that lacks compatibility with the diverse needs of learners. The outdated academic system is rigid, lacks empathy, and is based on a one-size-fits-all

approach. Furthermore, participants note that schools fail to instil a sense of purpose in students, offering only a sense of belonging.

**P2-S-A:** Clearly, it later became a universal right to guarantee secondary education for all, but it seems to me that we need to be able to see all the particular trajectories that exist, not only because of paternity and maternity. In a secondary school in the city of Buenos Aires you find a variety of situations ... because a universal education system for all is proposed, and the truth is that situations are extremely diverse and adolescents go through a lot of realities that are very difficult to fit into such a rigid system.

Many participants concurred with this stating that although there is a desire among girls to continue school, they encounter several barriers. These obstacles include the demanding academic calendar for learners who are mothers, as well as schools that expel students or deny them facilities they need, such as virtual lessons and attendance, in order to continue school. These challenges are in the same way discussed in the literature as neglect and lack of support for pregnant students (Boyle, 2021), which limit their possibilities to continue studying.

Moreover, participants noted that the school community, including teachers and peers, lacks sensitivity and tends to discriminate against these learners. There is not a trained staff member to support and accompany the developmental trajectory of these students within schools. Additionally, some schools reject students due to inadequate or unsafe infrastructure. The experiences reported by participants reflect the absence of a support system within schools which is comparably argued in the literature (Boyle, 2021).

Participants highlighted the adverse consequences of students being forced to leave school, which diminish the likelihood that they will eventually return to school.

Similarly, in the South African context, NGO participants emphasised that schools do not provide all the facilities needed by adolescent mothers, as also argued by Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson (2017). Furthermore, there is a need to sensitise the school community given the lack of empathy exhibited by principals, teachers and peers towards pregnant learners. Students tend to feel misunderstood and unsupported at school, which affects their self-esteem and is one of the main causes of school dropout. This lack of support for adolescent mothers in the school environment was also noted by Vale (2021).

Moreover, the absence of a sense of purpose further diminishes the motivation for attendance among learners. Participants also noted that many schools do not have a system in place and lack information regarding the best practices in accordance with prevailing policies aimed at addressing the needs of pregnant learners. They also highlighted the absence of monitoring systems within schools to trace the educational trajectories of learners during pregnancy and maternity leave. These findings are reflected in the literature suggesting a lack of awareness about the management of student pregnancies (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo 2022) and the associated rejection of these students by schools (Ramalepa, Ramukumba & Masala-Chokwe, 2020). In this regard, participants from NGOs mentioned cases of schools that reject the reintegration of girls, who had to discontinue their education due to pregnancy or maternity and seek to return after a few years, arguing misalignment with the corresponding academic year as a basis for denial.

**P3-NGO-SA:** ... Some of them are rejected by their peers and then they don't see the need to go back to school, even the teachers themselves discriminate against that child... so they end up dropping out of school ... and they deliver the baby ... look after the child for 2 or 3 years and then they go back to school and when they go back to school they are now too old, the school would say: “you must go somewhere to study because we can't accept you, you are too old for this grade”.

Contrary to the practices exposed by participants, the literature suggests that educational curricula that consider the diversity of students' experiences have a positive impact on the schooling of adolescent mothers (Fainsod, 2021), likewise, motivating adolescent mothers, and support from the school environment positively influences their educational development and can help adolescent mothers to stay in school (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

#### ***4.4.1.2.4.1 Teachers' Lack of Training to Manage Learners' Pregnancy***

In the educational contexts of both Argentina and South Africa, participants noted teachers' lack of training to address cases of learners' pregnancies. While some teachers attempt to provide support using the resources available to them, there is a notable absence of formal training in both countries.

In the South African context, certain teachers expressed fear about the possibility of students delivering their babies in school. These fears, according to the literature, are also associated with the lack of preparation of teachers to deal with learners' pregnancies (Ramalepa, Ramukumba & Masala-Chokwe, 2020). In addition, participants reported that there is reluctance among some teachers to discuss issues related to SRH education with students due to their lack of training.

**P3-S-SA:** We don't have teachers trained on that; hence we always complain about being the educators, being the social workers, being the nurses, being everything but we are only trained to get to class and teach them. The other factors are thrown at us without us knowing what to do.

Similarly, in Argentina, participants underscore the lack of training provided to teachers in sexual education and related subjects. This limitation was also reflected in the literature as a factor impeding the provision of adequate support to adolescent mothers in Argentina (Boyle, 2021). Furthermore, participants highlighted that some teachers exhibit rejection towards cases of pregnant students. Conversely, the opposite is also observed, wherein some teachers excessively facilitate these students, potentially limiting their academic potential and fostering a feeling of indifference.

**P4-S-A:** ... And it also depends a lot on the teacher, there are teachers who are very committed to the educational community and the school and there are others who are not ... And the girls notice these differences, so I don't know if it's a lack of preparation or a lack of interest. Sometimes they facilitate it too much, and girls don't like it, they don't like it when everything is given to them too easily ... It's like they are treated as inferior or that teachers don't care about them.

Significantly, the literature underscores the lack of preparation and resources provided to teachers to handle cases of learners' pregnancies, which poses challenges to the educational continuity of adolescent mothers in both Argentina (Boyle, 2021) and South Africa (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022).

#### ***4.4.1.2.4.2 Lack of Facilities from School After Childbirth***

In both contexts, Argentinian and South African participants underscored the challenges posed to learners who are mothers following childbirth. In the South African context, school participants emphasised the prohibition of adolescents attending school with their children due to the absence of resources to accommodate them. Moreover, certain schools do not provide adolescent mothers with special attendance schedules in order to ensure breastfeeding, causing many girls to drop out to take care of their offspring. These factors collectively impact the sustained practice of breastfeeding, compelling girls to discontinue their education.

**P2-S-SA:** We don't have special permissions for breastfeeding, I cannot lie, the learner will be taken care of by the social workers, or at home they will take care of the learners. We don't give space for breastfeeding because it means we are going to encourage others to be pregnant too, so we don't do that. The children are not allowed in the school either.

In Argentina, however, some schools permit mothers to attend school with their babies, a right endorsed by Law 26.606 on National Education (Ginestra, 2020). Nevertheless, participants emphasise that it is not an ideal scenario since it prevents students from focusing on the class and hinders their educational experience.

In addition, participants in Argentina and South Africa mentioned the lack of childcare facilities nearby schools, and a lack of childcare centres accommodating adolescent mothers with schedules compatible with school hours. The lack of childcare facilities has been argued by De León & Leivi (2020) to challenge the attendance of adolescent mothers to school in Argentina. The same is experienced in South Africa, and according to Vale (2021), this is a major factor preventing adolescent mothers from returning to school after childbirth.

**P1-NGO-A:** The care structure for their children must be guaranteed. Even if the schools allow access with children, it is difficult for teenagers to pay attention to the class with the demands of a baby, it is not sustainable in the long term. In CABA [Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires] the care structure is quite solved, there are many care rooms inside high schools.

School participants in Argentina also noted that many students who are mothers transition to night school, where childcare centres are less prevalent.

As evidenced by the literature, schools in both countries that fail to provide accommodation (Veriava, Thom, & Fish Hodgson, 2017) and facilities enabling adolescent mothers to attend school after childbirth (Vale, 2021) impede the continuity of their education. A multi-sectoral collaboration between schools and organisations such as NGOs, social workers, nurses, early childhood development centres, and other relevant entities could play a crucial role in addressing these needs promptly and effectively.

#### **4.4.1.2.5 Theme Two Summary: Challenges**

The second theme addressed the research question regarding challenges faced by pregnant learners and mother learners in Argentina and South Africa.

In both countries, participants underscored the challenges confronted by adolescent mothers, including unequal access to policies, complex structural challenges and the lack of access to health care. Notably, participants in both countries highlighted the deficiency in addressing mental health care needs. In Argentina, participants emphasised the differences in the implementation of policies between the capital and the other provinces, with the latter experiencing the most difficulties. Likewise in South Africa, societal disparities result in unequal access to the benefits of policies.

Additionally, participants from both countries highlighted the lack of a support network, such as family and school support, for pregnant and adolescent mothers. Moreover, participants in South Africa and Argentina indicated that cultural and gender issues rooted in the communities pose an additional barrier to their educational development. Particularly in South Africa, many girls experience isolation and are left at home alone deprived of care and oftentimes exposed to situations of gender-based violence. Similarly in Argentina, especially in rural areas, adolescent mothers suffer from isolation and are relegated to household and caregiving duties, and forced to devote themselves exclusively to motherhood.

Significantly in Argentina, participants emphasised that the school system is rigid and does not consider the diverse reality and needs of students. Similarly in South Africa, participants noted a lack of monitoring of learners' trajectories and inadequate preparation to support adolescent mothers within the school environment.

Furthermore, participants in both countries reported the lack of resources to support adolescent mothers after childbirth and the shortage in the availability of childcare services.

In South Africa, participants noted barriers that schools impose on adolescent mothers to return to school after childbirth; such as the prohibition to attend school with their children. In Argentina, however, school participants showed more flexibility in this regard.

Significantly, the challenges outlined above cut across all of the systems within the adolescent mothers' setting and consequently impact their educational development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), as reported by participants in both countries. These findings demonstrate the influence of the three systems studied on the ability of adolescent mothers to pursue their education: schools within the mesosystem, NGOs within the exosystem and national policies within the macrosystem.

#### **4.4.1.3 Theme Three: Successful Experiences**

This section discusses the successful experiences encountered by school and NGO participants in Argentina and South Africa.

##### **4.4.1.3.1 Customised and Empathetic Support**

Participants, from both NGOs and schools in Argentina and South Africa, emphasised, from their positive experiences, the paramount importance of initially assessing the adolescents' backgrounds and adopting an approach characterised by empathy within their educational and family environments.

**P3-NGO-SA:** The best intervention is to know the background of these children... When I'm talking about the background I mean holistically, if the mother is working, if the father is working, who is working within the family, who supports her. If you get the holistic background then you'll know what action needs to be done with the children.

Participants in Argentina highlighted the necessity for tailored support. Additionally, participants in both countries underscored the positive impact of regular accompaniment and the provision of a non-judgmental space where adolescents can be listened to. They also stressed the importance of maintaining a sustained connection with the adolescents for instance with teachers and peers, fostering their agency and promoting their self-esteem.

**P1-S-A:** With openness and empathy we try to help her, to teach her how to fish, not to give her the fish, to help her, to show her the alternatives, to give her tools so that later on this young mother can realise how to succeed.

Likewise, similar research underscores the importance of schools to become a place where adolescents can feel free and that promote spaces for reflection and support for adolescent mothers to reduce the risk of school dropout (Fainsod, 2021; Vale, 2021).

Furthermore, participants in both countries reported the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at encouraging the engagement of adolescent mothers with the educational system, demonstrating to them the value of continuing their education and having a life plan. These positive results are reflected in literature, which suggests that high motivation and aspirations among adolescent mothers may correspond to enhanced academic achievements (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). Moreover, evidence in Argentina suggests that education can be seen by adolescent mothers as a gateway to providing a better future for their children and thus a motivation to return to school (Secretaría Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia 2019).

**P4-S-SA:** In my school I'm making sure that learners are protected and they know when they get pregnant, they will not be shamed, they can come to school and I encourage them to finish. I tell them "A mistake is a mistake, if someone can take care of the baby, come and continue your education, this is not the end of the world" and many of them continue and they finish their studies.

For some participants in both Argentina and South Africa, schools play a crucial role, enabling adolescent mothers to relate to their peers and enjoy aspects of adolescence beyond their roles as mothers.

**P3-S-A:** Even though they are going through a situation, which we think requires more maturity, we want them to be able to take advantage as much as possible of the school stage, in the sense that they can enjoy it. I see this girl who was a mother at a very young age and I see her having fun with her classmates in the playground. At least a certain aspect of adolescence she can enjoy.

Notably, literature shows that socialisation and the creation of a community within schools are also factors contributing to reducing the risk of school dropout (Vale, 2021).

#### 4.4.1.3.2 Network of Support

A supportive network emerged as the most efficacious strategy for addressing learners' pregnancies and ensuring the continuity of their education, as underscored by participants in both sampled populations from Argentina and South Africa. Participants assert that a network with multiple organisations within the community enhances the possibilities of addressing the diverse situations these learners face. For instance, NGO participants articulate with schools, multidisciplinary organisations, health clinics, families of the learners and other institutions within the development environment of these adolescents to provide comprehensive support.

**P4-NGO-A:** The key was to work in a network, the capacity of the institution to see how they could help the adolescents. The availability of the people working in the different institutions was also crucial, because there were people from NGOs, from a health centre who brought information to the school, this integral work is key... the accompaniment has to be integral as well.

Notably, Shung-King *et al.* (2019) argue that a comprehensive approach is required to provide social protection to adolescents.

In both countries, school participants highlighted the positive outcomes resulting from these collaborations, which created new opportunities for pregnant learners, especially the most vulnerable.

**P1-S-A:** The NGO has been a very important help to the school because it has given students opportunities that no one else has given them.

**P3-S-SA:** We work with NGOs, so whenever we need support, we get it from them.

The importance for schools to work in coordination with other institutions to form a Comprehensive Protection System and guarantee the rights of adolescents is underscored in literature (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019). Additionally, it is argued that the availability of schools to refer learners to state and community services may contribute to the early return of adolescent mothers (Vale, 2021).

#### **4.4.1.3.3 Theme Three Summary: Successful Experiences**

The third theme addressed the experiences reported to be successful in helping pregnant learners and mother learners stay and succeed in school.

In both Argentina and South Africa, participants highlighted strategies that significantly influenced the retention of adolescent mothers in school. Firstly, providing empathetic support to adolescent mothers; which entails understanding the individual reality of learners and adopting an empathetic and flexible approach. Secondly, building a network within the community, including families, health clinics, schools, NGOs, state departments and other institutions, to provide comprehensive support and guarantee the rights of adolescent mothers.

Participants from both countries concurred on the efficacy of implementing empathetic support, as well as establishing a network of organisations to assist adolescent mothers. However, it is noteworthy that only participants from Argentina emphasised the necessity for tailored support.

#### **4.4.2 Particularities of Argentina**

During the analysis of the participants interviewed in Argentina, some categories and subcategories distinct to Argentina emerged and these are discussed below.

##### **4.4.2.1 Theme One: Prevention Strategies in Argentina**

As previously discussed, participants highlighted the significance of implementing timely dropout prevention strategies. Specific prevention strategies were identified solely by participants in Argentina during the course of the interviews.

###### **4.4.2.1.1 Early Identification of Learner's Context and Needs**

In Argentina, participants from NGOs highlighted the importance of first conducting a thorough assessment of adolescents' contexts and specific needs as a prevention strategy. This approach enables a better understanding of the areas that require support. Participants underscored the paramount importance of involving various stakeholders within the adolescent's environment, and thus this perspective raises the need for collective commitment

and accountability to foster a supportive environment for adolescents' development. Conversely, certain participants from NGOs highlighted that education may not always be the most immediate priority to address at the time.

**P2-NGO-A:** We don't think that everyone has to finish school in a specific way, we do not have a standardised regimen or a recipe for each situation, we assist on a case-by-case basis... in order to access the educational system they have to solve a lot of previous things, and the truth is that many times education is not our main objective although we always have it in mind ... Because it will be of no use for her to go to school if she is not in good health. Analysing each situation on a case-by-case basis and developing specific strategies is one of the greatest achievements of our working methodology, and it delivers results.

**P2-NGO-A:** The achievement lies in recognising maternity during pregnancy as a multi-faceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach and shared responsibility. We work with the children, with the mother, with the father, and the family, as well as in the health sector, education, social action, mental health, and in the social security sector, adopting a comprehensive approach.

Similarly, research suggests that expanding school-based services may help to identify what makes pregnant girls more vulnerable to school dropouts, in order to provide them with better support (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021). Furthermore, it is suggested that collaborative efforts among institutions are imperative to achieve this goal (Bracchi & Del Bono, 2019).

#### **4.4.2.1.2 Guarantee Child Care Structure**

In Argentina, NGOs working on programmes aimed at supporting pregnant and adolescent mothers address the problem of childcare as a preventive measure. For example, participants from NGOs indicated that they have programmes through which they collaborate with families to ensure that adolescent mothers receive familial support for the care of their children while they attend school. These programmes also work on fostering early child development. Some NGOs go beyond family support by establishing child care centres and initiatives for early child development specifically tailored to assist adolescent mothers. Furthermore, certain high schools in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) also

offer childcare facilities within their premises, which plays a significant role in enabling adolescent mothers to continue their education.

**P1-NGO-A:** We offer two modalities of accompaniment. The first is what we call the complete programme, which is for adolescents with children aged 0 to 3 years who also attend to our kindergarten, as we have one within the organisation. Our programme supports both the teenagers and their children, focusing on early childhood development.

**P2-NGO-A:** There are no childcare centres within schools, but there are childcare centres nearby in some communities. However, they do not align with school hours, making them an impractical option for adolescent girls. We often create this bridge so that adolescent mothers can have access, so that the child care centres have longer opening hours, allowing them to leave their children in care and focus on their studies.

Furthermore, research conducted in Argentina highlights the positive impact of the availability of childcare services at or near schools on the ability of adolescent mothers to remain enrolled in school (Ginestra, 2020).

#### **4.4.2.1.3 Tailored Approach and Flexibility in the Support of Pregnant and Adolescent Mothers**

Participants within schools in Argentina also argued the imperative of early identification of pregnant learners, for instance by monitoring learners' attendance. Succeeded by a comprehensive assessment of their contextual circumstances and needs and involving the family and the entire school community to provide these girls with the support they need.

**P4-S-A:** In reality, teachers also have a protocol for what to do in these cases. First of all, they call the family to find out what happened, especially when they are minors. When they are older the approach becomes more complex because there are so many situations, but the first thing they do is to support the mother.

Following discernment of the student's context and needs, schools focus on creating a tailored plan along with the student and teachers. This plan takes into account factors such as the anticipated leave of absence, expected date of delivery, as well as academic and student support. The approach is flexible, seeking to accommodate students considering their unique needs. Consequently, schools provide various accommodations for students after childbirth, such as allowing students to attend school with their children in situations where no

alternative is available, planning for content recovery and alternative assessment methods, and ensuring time for breastfeeding, as delineated by Law 25.273 (Fainsod, 2021; Ginestra, 2020).

**P2-S-A:** Due to breastfeeding, during the first year of the baby's life, they are allowed one hour per day to arrive late or leave early... regarding the content recovery after many absences, we have a law that guarantees the assessment and training of students. The referring teachers inform the class teachers about the adolescent's due date, so the teachers close the grades earlier and prepare work for the student to complete it at home, there is a virtual option available.

Furthermore, literature in Argentina argues the paramount importance of schools providing accommodations to enable parenting students to attend school (De León & Leivi, 2020).

#### **4.4.2.2 Theme Two: Challenges in Argentina**

This section discusses the challenges faced by pregnant and adolescent mothers in continuing their education that were identified by participants in Argentina.

##### **4.4.2.2.1 Lack of Monitoring of Policies and Support for Schools**

In Argentina, the implementation of policies faces significant hurdles due to resource constraints, obstacles in school-institution collaboration, and a lack of monitoring. According to participants, there are policies aimed at prevention however no follow-up or support policies. Additionally, participants highlight the need of articulation between policies for the education of learners who are mothers and early childhood policies.

**P1-NGO-A:** I realise that there is a lot of prevention policies, but few support policies. While there are conditions in place, such as the programme and school promoters... There is an intersectional aspect when it comes to adolescent mothers and fathers, such as poverty, migration, situations that have to do with a disadvantaged population and that act as an obstacle.

**P4-S-A:** The only person in the school who knows about it is the supervisor... But as far as the government is concerned, they have no idea of how we work. With the girls, we have always worked with them on an individual basis. Sometimes they come asking for

statistics, but we provide them and that is it. Each school does what it can to help and support.

Insufficient monitoring of policy implementation is cited as a cause for schools failing to provide necessary accommodations to adolescent mothers (Boyle, 2021).

#### **4.4.2.2.2 School System Outdated and Discouraging**

Both participants within NGOs and participants within schools discuss the obsolescence of the prevailing rigid educational system. Moreover, some participants underscored that this issue became evident during the pandemic, a period when a more flexible and adaptable approach was imperative, and accommodations; such as distance learning were needed. Consequently, according to participants, educational institutions need to contemplate the diverse needs of the learner population.

**P2-S-A:** The secondary schools in the city of Buenos Aires have been under scrutiny for years, with discussions about the need for reform. In fact, the study plans are being changed and last year the 'attendance regime' was changed. Fortunately, we also learned something from the pandemic ... including new ways of working with the girls and boys, and the regularity. For years, we have been thinking that secondary school needs to be changed overall ... that it takes many years, five years of study, five times a week. There are many issues that girls and boys are not able to sustain beyond maternity.

**P1-NGO-A:** What is required of adolescent mothers and fathers is different from what is required in adulthood. The sequencing of projects for these teenagers is not much considered. If they have been away for two months, they return, and no matter how hard they've tried, the academic calendar moves at a different pace. We will need to work towards adapting the academic calendar to these situations... In Argentina, in particular, it has been widely studied that there is something outdated about the educational system, and adolescents do not find a sense of purpose in school.

The lack of motivation to pursue further education has been recognised in the literature as a significant obstacle to the schooling of adolescent mothers (Ginestra, 2020). Similarly, the absence of a supportive system within schools that offers tailored accommodations to meet the needs of adolescent mothers and fathers has been highlighted as a crucial factor (Boyle, 2021).

### **4.4.2.3 Theme Three: Successful Experiences in Argentina**

This section discusses the successful experiences identified by participants from schools and NGOs in Argentina.

#### **4.4.2.3.1 Flexibility and Tailored Support**

Particularly within the Argentine context, participants from schools and NGOs reported on the efficacy of a tailored approach, emphasising the impracticality of implementing universally applicable strategies for the multifaceted realities adolescent mothers experience. A customised approach entails a nuanced comprehension of the individual background and circumstances of each learner, followed by the implementation of targeted strategies addressing their specific needs.

**P2-S-A:** And today we see her pursuing her career while raising her children with her partner, and the truth is, these things teach you a lot. Sometimes, we expect the student to fit into the school system's 'little box', and it's not like that. The boys and girls do it as they can.

In addition, participants highlighted the positive impact of the flexibility of the school system and associated adolescent mothers' retention as a result of feeling supported by the school environment.

**P2-NGO-A:** We worked with a pregnant girl who didn't have family support. It was a family from a very vulnerable background with a complex history, her mother had mental health issues. The school she attended was not sensitive to her situation, she struggled to keep up with her studies and the school told her that she had to repeat the year. We managed to transfer her to another school, one we had connections with, where we knew she would receive better support. With our accompaniment and despite many setbacks, it took her many years, but she was able to complete her schooling.

The consideration of the diverse realities facing adolescent mothers, and therefore the implementation of interventions adjusted to their specific needs, has been argued in the literature to have a positive impact on their schooling (Fainsod, 2021).

#### ***4.4.2.3.1.1 Facilities from School After Childbirth***

Observations from participants in Argentina, especially within schools, show heightened flexibility adopted by schools and accommodations for adolescent girls following childbirth. Examples of such accommodations include; permitting learners to re-enter school when they are capable of doing so, as well as allowing them to fulfil academic requirements within a timeframe different from the one imposed by the school's academic calendar. Additionally, schools have demonstrated adaptability by allowing adolescent mothers to attend school with their children, flexibility in both school attendance and evaluation processes, and special leave for breastfeeding.

**P3-S-A:** During the first year of the baby's life, due to breastfeeding, girls can arrive later or leave earlier, and many girls take advantage of this time. Or for example, if it is at the end of the bimester or grading season and the student had to be absent for some reason, teachers delay assigning grades. This approach works really well when circumstances prevent her from attending school.

**P1-S-A:** After the adolescent mother delivers her baby, she goes back to school. Sometimes she brings the baby with her, and other times the baby is cared for at home. We don't object to them bringing their babies to school, and we have even had graduates with their 7 or 8-month-old babies. For us, this is a reality and it is normal for a student to graduate and earn her degree despite being a mother or father.

This school support and flexibility as demonstrated by Argentinian schools has been shown to help in retaining adolescent mothers in school (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). Additionally, providing timely support for learner mothers to re-enter school following childbirth reduces the risk of school dropout (Vale, 2021).

#### **4.4.2.4 Summary of Particularities in Argentina**

The chapter explored particular features in Argentina concerning the education of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

Under the theme of Prevention Strategies, participants underscored the importance of early identification within schools and tailored support for pregnant students, emphasising the involvement of family and the school community at this stage. In addition to the availability

of a child care structure that allows adolescent mothers to attend school while their children are being taken care of.

The challenges specific to Argentina included the inefficient monitoring of policies and the lack of support for schools. Resource constraints, lack of inter-organisational collaboration and insufficient follow-up contribute to obstacles in policy implementation. Additionally, the outdated and rigid school system was identified as a discouraging factor hindering the schooling of learners and, in particular, adolescent mothers.

Furthermore, NGO participants highlighted the effectiveness of empathetic support and flexibility as a strategy to enable learners who are mothers to stay in school. In addition to providing them with special facilities and considerations after childbirth.

#### **4.4.3 Particularities in South Africa**

Additionally, during the analysis of the participants interviewed in South Africa, some particular Categories and subcategories emerged and are discussed below.

##### **4.4.3.1 Theme One: Prevention Strategies in South Africa**

Specific prevention strategies were identified solely by participants in South Africa during the course of the interviews and are discussed below.

###### **4.4.3.1.1 Access to Information for Pregnant Learners and Adolescent Mothers**

Policies in South Africa that are aimed at protecting the right to education of pregnant students consider access to information as a crucial factor among the preventive measures (Department of Education, 2007; Department of Basic Education, 2021).

**P4-S-SA:** Information, because the more informed you are, the better the chances are you're going to make it, even if you get pregnant. You will know that this is not the end of the world, and if you've been informed, you will know what are the things that you can do and, when you are knowledgeable you can also make the correct decision.

Similarly, participants in South Africa emphasised the importance of providing learners with relevant information as a measure taken to enable adolescent mothers to stay in school.

#### ***4.4.3.1.1 Parenting Skills***

Participants from NGOs in South Africa emphasised the implementation of strategies aimed at providing student parents with parenting and life skills. These strategies serve as a prevention measure against school dropout and as a means to facilitate their adaptation to the challenges associated with this new stage of their lives.

**P1-NGO-SA:** We help them cope with being parents and with their academics. So, if we provide space for them to talk about the challenges which are not relevant to academics, they can be able to put that in there or we can refer them for counselling, so they can address that and now be able to focus on the academics.

Furthermore, research argues that adolescent mothers' access to information on pregnancy and motherhood can be perceived as social support and therefore prevent school dropout (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

#### ***4.4.3.1.2 Awareness of Pregnancy and Learners' Rights***

Participants from NGOs further highlighted the importance of educating pregnant learners and adolescent mothers about their rights, as well as providing them with relevant information on pregnancy and maternity. These awareness initiatives are implemented within their programmes as preventive measures.

**P1-NGO-SA:** They're coming to our teen parenting programme because we empowered them with skills as well as we give them information... so coming to our sessions can help them, because they get to know the places they can go to for assistance... at least we promise to help them by providing a space and providing information relevant to their challenges.

Moreover, research indicates that the awareness of adolescent mothers regarding their rights contributes to reducing their risk of forced school dropout (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

#### **4.4.3.2 Theme Two: Challenges in South Africa**

This section discusses the challenges faced by pregnant and adolescent mothers in continuing their education that were identified by participants in South Africa.

#### **4.4.3.2.1 Lack of Information and Awareness**

Notably, NGO participants in South Africa reported that a significant proportion of adolescent girls experiencing pregnancy are not aware of their right to education. Additionally, they highlighted that access to information regarding pregnancy is only forthcoming when a peer or themselves becomes pregnant while at school. Moreover, participants from schools and NGOs noted that learners, in such instances, lack information about pregnancy and awareness of where to seek support, beyond family, to sustain their education. In response to these challenges, NGOs, through their support programmes advocate at school on behalf of these learners.

**P3-NGO-SA:** Some of them don't know their rights, so we have to make them aware of their rights. And we have the intervention of a social worker, we act as advocates for our beneficiaries to make sure that we advocate for those who are voiceless and for their rights to be met.

**P2-NGO-SA:** They are not really aware of their rights; I think this is why we are needed as an organisation and these programmes are really needed. Because we need to equip, we need to educate these young girls, we need to give them information that they have the right to go back to school after giving birth and the right to stay in school.

In literature, it is also argued that adolescent mothers lack information on their rights (Mathebula, Runhare & Mafumo, 2022), which represents a challenge to their ability to stay in school.

#### **4.4.3.3 Theme Three: Successful Experiences in South Africa**

This section discusses the successful experiences identified by participants from NGOs and schools in South Africa.

##### **4.4.3.3.1 Foster Learners' Engagement with School**

Participants from both NGO and schools underscored the importance of fostering a sense of purpose, participants encountered that this shared factor had influenced the sustained educational engagement of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

**P2-S-SA:** We encourage them, we say this is not the last resort, that education is key so

they have to continue to be at school. We always encouraged her (a mother learner) that being pregnant is not the end of the world and that there is a lot that depends on her to pass. That is the reason why when she passed, she came back to school and came to thank us for the support we gave her.

**P4-S-SA:** I think also the class teacher played a major role because she had the student contact, she communicated with her parents and she said “look she is brilliant so allow her to go to school, I know next year she'll be in MATRIC”. When you know that you're brilliant, and then you get the support, if the school environment is supportive and if at home, they are supportive, it makes it easy for you to continue with life. I think that's what is still helping her, because she is still at school and she is going to continue.

Moreover, research provides support for the notion that fostering motivation and engagement among adolescent mothers is beneficial, as it aids in their retention in school and pursuit of academic goals (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021).

#### **4.4.3.4 Summary of Particularities in South Africa**

The chapter focused on particular prevention strategies, challenges, and successful experiences of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers emerging from interviews among South African participants. NGO participants in South Africa highlighted the importance of awareness raising on the rights of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers, as well as implementing parenting skills programmes as a measure to equip students with information and skills to prevent school dropout.

Challenges identified include the lack of awareness and information among pregnant learners about their right to education, with NGOs playing a crucial role in advocating for these learners at school. This is relevant as the literature suggests that access to information from girls' environment is perceived as social support (Jochim, Cluver & Meinck, 2021).

Successful experiences encountered by participants centre on fostering a sense of purpose, emphasising its positive impact on sustaining the educational engagement of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers. This sense of purpose has led to success stories of mother learners pursuing further education.

## **4.5 Summary**

This chapter outlined the participants' profiles and the comparative analysis framework. Subsequently, the chapter presented the study's findings thematically based on the research questions and compared the findings identified in both countries Argentina and South Africa.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter summarises the key research findings and conclusions, discusses the study's limitations and provides recommendations.

### **5.2 Main Conclusions**

The main research conclusions are presented in accordance with the research objectives as outlined in section 1.5.

#### **5.2.1 Main Conclusions Emanating from Research Objective One**

Objective one explored the implementation of government policies that aim to protect the rights to education of pregnant learners and mother learners.

In both countries, challenges in the implementation of policies were identified by participants.

In the South African context, existing inequalities impede the equitable accessibility of policies. This results in a deficit of information and awareness among learners and educators regarding the rights of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to education. Additionally, state departments often fail to monitor the implementation of the policies within schools as well as to provide the support and resources teachers and schools need to facilitate the schooling of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers during pregnancy and after childbirth. Consequently, this deficiency leaves girls with limited opportunities to pursue their education.

In Argentina, the implementation of policies exhibits disparities between the City of Buenos Aires and the provinces. Notably, Buenos Aires demonstrates a greater availability of programmes and resources for schools in comparison to the provinces. Inadequate monitoring by relevant institutions, compounded by the challenging socio-economic conditions prevailing in the country, further exacerbates deficiencies in policy implementation. This is manifested in schools' insufficient resources and the lack of training and information available to educators to support pregnant learners and adolescent mothers. Nevertheless,

participants, particularly in Buenos Aires, reported improvements subsequent to the initiation of policies and programmes aimed at ensuring the educational continuity of adolescent mothers.

### **5.2.2 Main Conclusions Emanating from Research Objective Two**

Objective two identified the challenges faced by pregnant learners and adolescent mothers that prevent them from continuing school.

In both South Africa and Argentina, the circumstances preceding pregnancy often entail challenging living conditions for adolescent girls, increasing the complexity of reconciling maternity with education. These involve structural challenges such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing conditions, abandonment and violence. Furthermore, the absence of access to critical social services, such as health care, psychological support, and childcare facilities increases the risk of adolescent mothers dropping out of school.

Additionally, in both countries, data shows a recurring pattern of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers lacking a support network with limited support within their close settings including families, peers and the fathers of their children.

Frequently pregnant learners face bullying, discrimination and stigma resulting in social isolation. Some cases involve adolescent girls devoid of familial support or caregivers and being forced by their parents to leave school to take care of their children. Furthermore, pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers are often socially perceived as adults, negating them from care and the aspects inherent to the adolescence stage.

Another critical challenge in both, Argentina and South Africa, emerges from the lack of support provided by schools. Insufficient emotional and academic support, discrimination rejection and a failure to provide the accommodations the pregnant learners and adolescent mothers need. Moreover, several participants reported learners do not find a sense of purpose.

In South Africa, the lack of information and awareness on their rights to education is also considered a barrier impeding the ability of adolescent mothers to continue their education.

Particularly in Argentina, participants reported as a challenge the unsupportive school environment, where certain schools lack the empathy and flexibility to accommodate the diverse situations experienced by learners.

### **5.2.3 Main Conclusions Emanating from Research Objective Three**

Objective three ascertained the strategies implemented to prevent pregnant learners and mother learners from dropping out of school. Both countries implement prevention strategies, with NGOs addressing challenges faced by adolescent mothers and schools creating mechanisms to comply with policies, collaborating with various institutions, families, educators and peers to create a support network.

Schools motivate pregnant learners and adolescent mothers through empathetic listening spaces and maintaining sustained connections with learners, often utilising platforms like WhatsApp.

Sexual Reproductive Education is integrated into curricula or provided through NGO programmes helping in the prevention of second pregnancies. Strategies also include raising awareness among learners, parents, peers, and teachers on the reality of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to reduce stigma.

To provide better support, schools also designate specific roles or teams to assist pregnant learners and adolescent mothers. In South Africa, participants reported that this responsibility often lies with the School Management Team or Life orientation, which may work in collaboration with other organisations. In Argentina, school participants indicated awareness-raising among all school personnel. Additionally, certain schools in Buenos Aires have a referral from the programme for the retention of learners who are pregnant, mothers and fathers. This designated referral supports and provides training to school staff to accompany and assist these learners.

During pregnancy and on maternity leave, schools within South Africa and Argentina implement strategies such as alignment with parents and learners to formulate a plan addressing absences related to prenatal care and the due date and the facilitation of school homework, provision of materials through peers, teachers or family as well as considerations in the assessment process.

In Argentina, early identification of pregnant learners and comprehensive contextual assessments are emphasised. Schools provide accommodations, allowing attendance with children and time for breastfeeding. NGOs also work with families to ensure support for the care of the adolescents' children, implement early child development programmes and certain high schools in Buenos Aires offer childcare facilities.

In South Africa, NGOs educate pregnant learners and adolescent mothers about their rights, along with the provision of relevant information regarding pregnancy, maternity and programmes for parenting and life skills.

#### **5.2.4 Main Conclusions Emanating from Research Objective Four**

Objective four explored the positive experiences of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers who have stayed and succeeded in school. Data revealed two main drivers contributing to the success stories: receiving customised and empathetic support and having a support network.

In both countries, participants from both schools and NGOs, associated cases of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers who continued their education, with a customised and empathetic approach adopted by schools. This approach involves regular accompaniment and communication, and a non-judgmental space fostering agency, self-esteem, and the recognition of educational value, and in the development of a life plan. A customised approach entails the comprehension of the individual background and needs followed by the implementation of targeted strategies.

Additionally, in both countries, school participants highlighted the positive outcomes resulting from the collaboration between schools, NGOs and other organisations, which allowed for delivering comprehensive support to students.

In Argentina, participants noted that the retention of adolescent mothers is positively influenced by the support provided within the school environment. Educational institutions demonstrate increased flexibility, allowing adolescent girls to re-enter school when they are ready or capable of doing so, as well as fulfilling academic requirements outside the standard school's academic calendar.

In South Africa, participants encountered that fostering a sense of purpose, influenced the sustained educational engagement of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

### **5.3 Main Recommendations**

This study aimed to explore practices and initiatives that exert a positive influence on, and facilitate the permanence of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers in school. The research findings serve as a basis for future research, and also as insights for the integration into the implementation programmes of public policies, Schools and NGOs. Following this study, recommendations are made to all relevant stakeholders.

#### **5.3.1 Recommendations for NGOs**

NGOs should engage in collaborative networking with diverse organisations across the community, including schools, health clinics and other institutions, to expand their reach beyond their specific expertise- especially in cases where they lack the necessary resources to address the needs of adolescent mothers. Findings revealed that such collaboration enhances the support provided to adolescent mothers, resulting in the provision of comprehensive and multidimensional support. This approach increases the possibility to address the multifaceted challenges that adolescent mothers face.

Additionally, NGOs should focus on raising awareness within communities about the rights to education of adolescent mothers. Including caregivers responsible for these adolescents in their programmes is essential to tackle issues of gender-biased cultural beliefs, which research shows have a significant influence on the decisions and ability of adolescent mothers to continue their education.

#### **5.3.2 Recommendations for Schools**

Similarly to NGOs, schools must have a strong collaborative network with diverse community organisations to facilitate the referral of adolescent mothers. This comprehensive network of support not only proves advantageous to the learners themselves but also benefits schools, which frequently lack the requisite resources to adequately address the multifaceted needs of student mothers. This network must also include the parents or tutors of these learners.

Findings from participants in Argentina evidence the need for schools' systems to be flexible, enabling them to respond to the different situations learners face. Timely intervention and the implementation of accommodations, concessions and an empathetic view towards learners

are paramount to prevent school dropout. Recognizing the individualised expectations of these students is crucial, as a uniform approach is proving inadequate in addressing the unique challenges faced by learners.

Reports from participants also show positive experiences of learners continuing school when they felt supported at school. Schools must contemplate having a person within the school that supports these adolescent mothers through active listening, providing academic support, ensuring continuous communication and demonstrating genuine concern for their emotional and overall well-being.

It is also important for schools to safeguard the rights of adolescent mothers, and uphold their developmental stage. Ensuring that schools provide a space in which student mothers are cared for and can benefit from what characterises this stage of life equal to any other adolescent.

Furthermore, schools must continue to address issues of stigma and discrimination from peers, teachers and school staff by raising awareness about the realities and specific needs of these students. Additionally, schools should work with the parents or caregivers of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to ensure they recognize the importance of keeping these girls in school and providing them with the necessary support.

### **5.3.3 Recommendations for Governments and Policymakers**

Participants in both countries have identified a gap in the implementation of policies, primarily attributed to a lack of monitoring. Participants highlighted that the efforts need to focus on guaranteeing the effective implementation of policies. The recommendation involves monitoring the different situations faced by learners and schools, identifying the challenges in providing support and ensuring alignment with what is stipulated in the policies.

The finding shows that schools are not provided with the resources needed to provide adequate support to pregnant learners and adolescent mothers. State institutions need to map existing resources within the community and foster the interconnections among these institutions to augment the breadth and effectiveness of the support mechanisms available.

## **5.4 Limitations of the Study**

The study sample encompassed participants from different regions of the selected countries: Argentina and South Africa. Due to limited availability of organisations offering programmes aimed at adolescent mothers in the same locations, the researcher enlisted support from contacted NGOs to outreach to organisations in their collaborative networks situated in a different geographical area within the respective countries. However, conducting interviews with participants from diverse regions enabled the researcher to discern discrepancies in access to policy benefits across different localities within the same country. Nevertheless, this approach may have limited the availability of comparable features.

For the interviews the same questions were used, these were open-ended questions to elicit the subjective opinions of the participants, which may have limited the possibility of having more comparable topics. In order to avoid compromising comparability, semi-structured interviews were used to guide the focus of the interviewees towards the areas of interest of this study.

During translations it is possible that certain language nuances may have been lost, although the recording and transcription processes were respected in order to represent as closely as possible what was expressed by the participants, the translation may have also limited the ability to make more accurate comparisons between the two countries.

## **5.5 Future Research**

Future research could focus on region-specific studies or adopt standardised regional sampling frameworks that account for the diversity within each country, to improve comparability across diverse areas.

Future studies on this topic could also explore the interplay between cultural norms and religious beliefs. This could enrich the understanding of barriers to policy implementation and social support systems for adolescent mothers.

Participants from both Argentina and South Africa highlighted that the reality of adolescent fathers is overlooked, it is recommended that research focuses on understanding the situation of adolescent fathers and how fatherhood impacts on their access to education.

More research is needed on how to integrate flexible approaches in schools in developing countries.

Research is needed to further identify strategies that ensure the academic success of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

## **5.6 Concluding Statement**

This chapter presented the main conclusions of the research study, recommendations for the various stakeholders, the study's limitations and recommendations for future research. This research study explored the Factors that enable pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to complete school and ensure their academic success in Argentina and South Africa. The main findings revealed that customised and empathetic support, a support network which requires collaboration between schools, NGOs, and other organisations within the community, as well as a flexible approach from schools emerged as critical drivers for success in retaining pregnant learners and adolescent mothers in school.

It is trusted that this research study has provided insight into the factors that are determinants to facilitate the schooling of pregnant learners and adolescent mothers.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Letter

#### UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



#### Department of Social Development

University of Cape Town Rondebosch 7701 South Africa

Phone: +27-21-650-3483

E-mail: [taryn.powell@uct.ac.za](mailto:taryn.powell@uct.ac.za)

30 November 2022

*Student:* **Adriana Alvarez (ALVADR001)**

*Outcome:* **ACCEPTED**

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been given by an Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your study, *Factors that enable pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to complete school and ensure their academic success: A qualitative comparative study in Argentina and South Africa*. The reference number is SWK-REC-2022-SR031.

I wish you all the best for your study.

Signed by candidate

Yours sincerely  
Dr Shanaaz Hoosain  
Senior Lecturer  
Chair: Ethics Review Committee

## Appendix 2: Consent Form in English for South African Participants



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Faculty of Humanities - Department of Social Work and Social Development

#### Informed Consent Participation Letter

Dear Participant,

I am a Masters student at the University of Cape Town, requesting voluntary participation in a research study. This is an exploratory study on ***Factors that enable pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to complete school and ensure their academic success: A qualitative comparative study in Argentina and South Africa***. The study is aimed at generating information on the factors and strategies implemented in developing countries, by influential sectors such as schools and NGOs, that have a positive impact on ensuring that pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers stay in school. I request your permission to participate in an interview which should last between 45 minutes and one hour and permission to record the interview. All information gathered will be confidential. As a participant, your responses will only be viewed by myself, as the researcher, and by the researcher's university supervisor. Your name and that of the organisation will not be used at all in the research report, and none of your personal or organisational details, nor your identity, will be linked to any of your responses. Data collected during the interviews will be transcribed and analysed and then used for the purposes of writing up findings for the Master's dissertation as well as a possible journal article thereafter. Please read the information below and ask questions/raise concerns with regards to the study. The time and platform for the interview will be negotiated with you according to your availability. There are no follow-up appointments after the interview.

#### Participant's involvement

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study, acknowledging that the nature of the study has been clearly explained to me and an opportunity provided for me to ask questions.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in the study and can decide to withdraw at any stage, in which case my information and responses will be excluded from the study and deleted.
- I agree to this interview being used for purposes of the research on condition that my privacy is respected.
- I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant's name and signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name and signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3: Consent Form in Spanish for Argentinean Participants



### FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Facultad de Humanidades - Departamento de Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Social

#### Carta de participación con Consentimiento Informado

Estimado/a participante,

Soy una estudiante de máster de la Universidad de Cape Town en Sudáfrica, y le solicito su participación voluntaria en un estudio de investigación. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio sobre **Los factores que permiten a las estudiantes embarazadas y a las madres adolescentes completar la escuela y asegurar su éxito académico: Un estudio cualitativo comparativo en Argentina y Sudáfrica**. El estudio tiene como objetivo generar información sobre los factores y las estrategias implementadas en países en desarrollo, por sectores influyentes como las escuelas y las ONG, que demuestran un impacto positivo para asegurar que las adolescentes embarazadas y las madres adolescentes permanezcan en la escuela. Le solicito que me conceda una entrevista que deberá durar entre 45 minutos y una hora, así como permiso para grabarla. Toda la información recopilada será confidencial. Como participante, sus respuestas sólo serán vistas por mí, como la investigadora y por mi supervisor universitario. Su nombre y el de la organización no se utilizarán en absoluto en el informe de la investigación, y ninguno de sus datos personales y de la organización, ni su identidad, se relacionarán con ninguna de sus respuestas. Los datos recogidos durante las entrevistas se transcribirán y analizarán, y luego se utilizarán para redactar las conclusiones de la tesis del máster, así como un posible artículo en una revista. Le rogamos que lea la información que figura a continuación y que formule preguntas en relación con el estudio. La hora y la plataforma se negociarán con usted en función de su disponibilidad. No hay citas de seguimiento posteriores.

#### Compromiso del participante

- Acepto voluntariamente participar en este estudio de investigación, reconociendo que se me ha explicado claramente la naturaleza del estudio y que se me ha dado la oportunidad de hacer cualquier pregunta que pudiera tener.
- Entiendo que no tengo ninguna obligación de participar en el estudio y que puedo decidir retirarme en cualquier momento, en cuyo caso mi información y mis respuestas serán excluidas del estudio.
- Estoy de acuerdo en que esta entrevista se utilice para los fines de la investigación, a condición de que se respete mi privacidad.
- He recibido una copia de este formulario de consentimiento.

Nombre y firma del participante: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre y firma del investigador: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4: Western Cape Education Department Approval Letter



**Directorate: Research**

[meshack.kanzi@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:meshack.kanzi@westerncape.gov.za)

Tel: +27 021 467 2350

Fax: 086 590 2282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

**REFERENCE:** 16375E04C000036-20230224

**ENQUIRIES:** Mr M Kanzi

Ms Adriana Alvarez  
16 Belle Ombre  
Tamboerskloof  
1811

**Dear Adriana Alvarez,**

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL:** FACTORS THAT ENABLE PREGNANT LEARNERS AND ADOLESCENT MOTHERS TO COMPLETE SCHOOL AND ENSURE THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE STUDY IN ARGENTINA AND SOUTH AFRICA.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **3 April 2023 till 31 March 2024**.
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Mr M Kanzi at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag X9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards,  
Meshack Kanzi  
**Directorate: Research**  
**DATE: 3 April 2023**

Signed by candidate

## **Appendix 5: Interview Schedule for NGO Participants in English**

### **Biographical Details**

1. Name of organisation:
2. Job title:
3. Number of years' experience in that position:

### **The Organisation**

1. What programmes within the organisation support the education of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers?

*Objective One: Government policies to protect the right to education of pregnant learners and mother learners.*

1. Are you familiar with the existing policies to protect the rights of pregnant learners to education? How do you see the implementation of policies in the contexts in which your organisation works?
2. In the field, what do you consider to be the knowledge of pregnant and adolescent mothers about policies and their right to continue studying?
3. What do you think needs to be changed in the policies in order to provide better support to pregnant learners and adolescent mothers?
4. Do you work in collaboration with other organisations in the implementation of your programme? How does this collaboration work to support pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to stay in school?

*Objective 2: Challenges faced by pregnant learners and mother learners.*

1. In your experience, what are the main reasons why pregnant adolescents and mothers drop out of school?
2. What do you think is needed to address the challenges pregnant learners and mothers face and reach the most vulnerable?
3. What challenges do you think are more difficult to address?

*Objective 3: Strategies to prevent pregnant learners and mother learners from dropping out of school.*

1. What strategies can be used to prevent pregnant students or adolescent mothers from dropping out of school?
2. Does your organisation offer services that these adolescent girls cannot access through school or state institutions? What are they?

*Objective 4: Positive experiences in helping pregnant learners and mother learners to stay and succeed in school.*

1. Can you report on the impact achieved in terms of school attendance of pregnant students or adolescent mothers through your programmes?
2. What actions/interventions do you think are most effective in enabling pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to stay in school?
3. Could you tell me about positive experiences of pregnant students or mothers who managed to finish school or who continue in school?

General

Is there anything else that you would like to share that would be of value for this study, or that you feel we have not covered?

Thank you again for sharing with me in this interview. Your experience is so valuable.

## **Appendix 6: Interview Schedule for School Participants in English**

### Biographical Details

1. Name of school:
2. Job title:
3. Number of years of experience in that position:

*Objective One: Government policies to protect the right to education of pregnant learners and mother learners.*

1. Are you familiar with the existing policies to protect the rights of pregnant learners to education? How do you think these policies provide schools with the necessary tools to manage pregnant learners and adolescent mothers?
2. Does the school have policies that specifically target pregnant learners and mothers? How do these policies target pregnant learners and mothers?
3. What do you think needs to be changed in order to provide better support to pregnant learners and adolescent mothers?
4. Have any state departments followed up on the school management of pregnant learners and mothers? How have they done so?

*Objective 2: Challenges faced by pregnant learners and mother learners.*

1. Have you done follow up on learners that dropped out of school due to pregnancy or maternity? If yes, what were the main reasons given?
2. What are the existing tools or strategies to address these challenges?
3. Are other members of the school setting, such as parents, students, teachers, included in the strategies? If yes, how are they included?
4. What challenges do you find more difficult to address?
5. Do you think schools are a safe environment? Can you describe how the school is or is not a safe environment for pregnant or adolescent mothers?

*Objective 3: Strategies to prevent pregnant learners and mother learners from dropping out of school.*

1. In your experience, what factors within pregnancy or motherhood increase the risk of female students dropping out of school?

2. How does the school facilitate the schooling of adolescents during pregnancy and leave of absence?
3. How does the school facilitate the schooling of adolescent mothers after childbirth?
4. How are school staff, especially teachers, prepared to manage cases of learner pregnancy and or maternity of learners?
5. Do you work with other organisations, such as state departments, NGOs, etc., to support pregnant and mother students? Can you describe how this collaboration works?

*Objective 4: Positive experiences in helping pregnant learners and mother learners to stay and succeed in school.*

1. What actions/interventions do you think are most effective in enabling pregnant learners and adolescent mothers to stay and succeed in school?
2. What characteristics or elements do these interventions have?
3. Could you tell me about positive experiences of pregnant students or mothers who managed to finish school or who continue in school with good performance?

General

Is there anything else that you would like to share that would be of value for this study, or that you feel we have not covered?

Thank you again for sharing with me in this interview. Your experience is so valuable.

## **Appendix 7: Interview Schedule for NGO Participants in Spanish**

### Datos biográficos

1. Nombre de la organización:
2. Cargo:
3. Número de años de experiencia en ese puesto:

### Organización

1. ¿Qué programas se dirigen a las adolescentes embarazadas y a las madres adolescentes?
2. ¿Cuál es el impacto de su programa?

Objetivo uno: Políticas gubernamentales para proteger el derecho a la educación de las adolescentes embarazadas y de las madres estudiantes.

1. ¿Conoce las políticas existentes para proteger el derecho a la educación de las estudiantes embarazadas? ¿Cómo ve la aplicación de las políticas en los contextos en los que trabaja su organización?
2. En el campo, ¿cuál considera que es el conocimiento de las madres embarazadas y adolescentes sobre las políticas y su derecho a seguir estudiando?
3. ¿Qué cree que hay que cambiar en las políticas para ofrecer un mejor apoyo a las estudiantes embarazadas y a las madres adolescentes?
4. ¿Trabaja usted en colaboración con otras organizaciones en la ejecución de su programa? ¿Cómo funciona esta colaboración para apoyar a las estudiantes embarazadas y a las madres adolescentes para que permanezcan en la escuela?

Objetivo 2: Desafíos a los que se enfrentan las estudiantes embarazadas y las madres estudiantes.

1. Según su experiencia, ¿cuáles son las principales razones por las que las adolescentes embarazadas y las adolescentes madres abandonan la escuela?
2. ¿Qué cree que se necesita para abordar los retos a los que se enfrentan las alumnas embarazadas y las alumnas madres y llegar a las más vulnerables?
3. ¿Qué retos crees que son más difíciles de abordar?

Objetivo 3: Estrategias para evitar que las alumnas embarazadas y las madres estudiantes abandonen la escuela.

1. ¿Qué estrategias pueden utilizarse para evitar que las estudiantes embarazadas o las madres adolescentes abandonen la escuela?
2. ¿Ofrece su organización servicios a los que estas adolescentes no pueden acceder a través de la escuela o las instituciones estatales? ¿Cuáles son?

Objetivo 4: Experiencias positivas para ayudar a las alumnas embarazadas y a las madres estudiantes a permanecer y tener éxito en la escuela.

1. ¿Qué acciones/intervenciones cree que son más eficaces para que las alumnas embarazadas y las madres adolescentes permanezcan en la escuela?
2. ¿Podría nombrar características o elementos principales que tienen estas intervenciones?
3. ¿Podría hablarme de las experiencias positivas de estudiantes embarazadas o de estudiantes madres que lograron terminar la escuela o que continúan en ella?

En general

¿Hay algo más que le gustaría compartir y que sería de valor para este estudio, o que cree que no hemos cubierto?

Gracias de nuevo por compartir conmigo esta entrevista. Su experiencia es muy valiosa.

## **Appendix 8: Interview Schedule for School Participants in Spanish**

Datos biográficos

1. Nombre de la organización:
2. Cargo:
3. Número de años de experiencia en ese puesto:

Objetivo uno: Políticas gubernamentales para proteger el derecho a la educación de las alumnas embarazadas y de las madres educadoras.

1. ¿Conoce las políticas existentes para proteger el derecho a la educación de las alumnas embarazadas? ¿Cómo cree que estas políticas proporcionan a las escuelas las herramientas necesarias para gestionar a las alumnas embarazadas y a las madres adolescentes?
2. ¿Dispone la escuela de políticas dirigidas específicamente a las alumnas embarazadas y a las alumnas madres? ¿Cómo se dirigen estas políticas a las alumnas embarazadas y a las madres?
3. ¿Qué cree que hay que cambiar en las políticas para ofrecer un mejor apoyo a las alumnas embarazadas y a las madres adolescentes?
4. ¿Ha hecho algún departamento estatal un seguimiento de la gestión escolar de las alumnas embarazadas y las madres? ¿Cómo lo han hecho?

Objetivo 2: Desafíos a los que se enfrentan las alumnas embarazadas y las madres.

1. ¿Se ha hecho un seguimiento de las alumnas que abandonaron la escuela por embarazo o maternidad? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cuáles fueron las principales razones señaladas por las adolescentes para abandonar la escuela?
2. ¿Cuáles son las herramientas o estrategias existentes para abordar esos retos?
3. ¿Se incluye en las estrategias a otros miembros del entorno escolar, como los padres, los alumnos o los profesores? En caso afirmativo, ¿cómo se les incluye?
4. ¿Qué retos le parecen más difíciles de abordar?
5. ¿Cree que la escuela es un entorno seguro para las madres embarazadas o adolescentes? ¿Puede describir cómo la escuela es o no es un entorno seguro?

Objetivo 3: Estrategias para evitar que las alumnas embarazadas y las madres estudiantes abandonen la escuela.

1. Según su experiencia, ¿qué factores del embarazo o la maternidad aumentan el riesgo de que las alumnas abandonen la escuela?
2. ¿Cómo facilita la escuela la escolarización de las adolescentes durante el embarazo y las ausencias relacionadas al embarazo?
3. ¿Cómo facilita la escuela la escolarización de las adolescentes después del parto?
4. ¿Cómo está preparado el personal de la escuela, especialmente los profesores, para gestionar los casos de embarazo y/o maternidad de las alumnas?
5. ¿Trabaja usted con otras organizaciones, como entes estatales, ONG, etc., para apoyar a las estudiantes embarazadas y madres? ¿Puede describir cómo funciona esta colaboración?

Objetivo 4: Experiencias positivas para ayudar a las alumnas embarazadas y a las madres estudiantes a permanecer y tener éxito en la escuela.

1. ¿Qué acciones/intervenciones cree usted que son más eficaces para que las alumnas embarazadas y las madres adolescentes permanezcan en la escuela y tengan éxito académico?
2. ¿Podría contarme experiencias positivas de alumnas embarazadas o madres que hayan logrado terminar la escuela o que continúen en ella con buen rendimiento?

En general

¿Hay algo más que le gustaría compartir y que sería de valor para este estudio, o que cree que no hemos cubierto?

Gracias de nuevo por compartir conmigo esta entrevista. Su participación es muy valiosa.