Teenage childbearing and dropout from school in South Africa:
Evidence from a household panel

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Abstract: This paper examines the determinants and consequences of teenage childbearing in South Africa using nationally-representative data from the National Income Dynamics Study. It focuses on the outcomes by 2010 of a panel of 673 girls who in 2008 were aged 15–18, enrolled in school, and childless. Girls who subsequently gave birth had 4.1 times the odds of other girls of dropping out of school by 2010 and 2.3 times the odds of failing to matriculate from the two final grades. Girls from the highest income 20 per cent of households were relatively unlikely to give birth but, otherwise, socioeconomic status played little role in determining who became a mother or failed to finish school successfully. The most important risk factor for giving birth by 2010 was being behind the appropriate grade for one's year of birth in 2008. Girls who became mothers were more likely to be enrolled in 2010 if they lived with their own mother or had a well-educated mother. Children born to teenagers were more likely than other children to live in extremely poor households. Thus, poor educational attainment, teenage motherhood and poverty in early adulthood are an interrelated cluster of social and economic problems in South Africa. Equally, avoiding early motherhood and limiting the disruption that it causes to girls' schooling play a role in the intergenerational reproduction of high socioeconomic status. It may be too late by their mid teens to motivate girls who are doing poorly at school to avoid becoming teenage mothers.

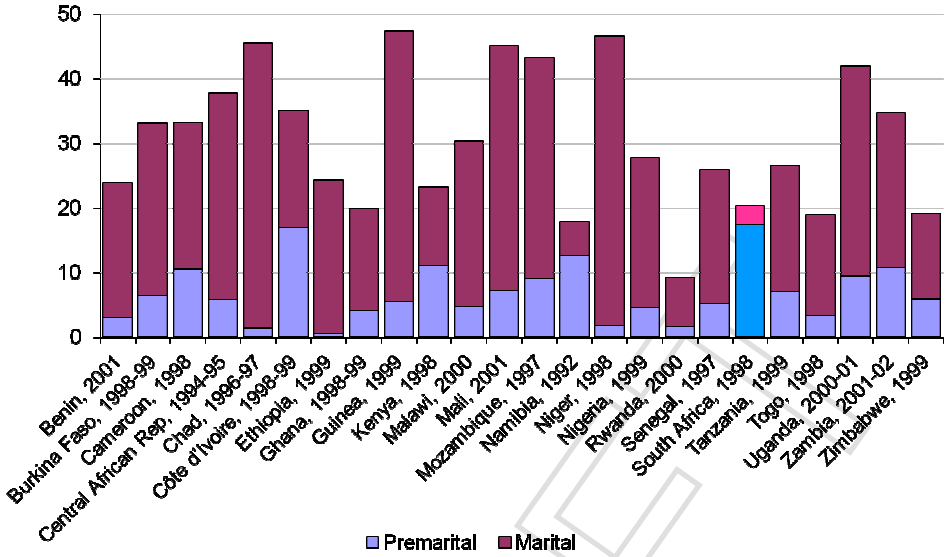
Introduction

This paper examines the determinants and consequences of teenage childbearing in South Africa using nationally-representative household panel data from the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS). Adolescent fertility is lower in South Africa than most sub-Saharan African countries (Figure 1) and has gradually become less common in recent years (Branson et al. 2013). However, whereas elsewhere in the region most teenage mothers are married, in South Africa they are not. This reflects the development of the country. Development drives and is driven by the expansion of mass secondary schooling. It requires young people to stay in formal education for a period that extends well beyond puberty. Thus, in South Africa, NIDS shows that by 2008 nearly all children aged 7–15 years old were enrolled in school, and that no significant differences existed between boys and girls in enrolment (Timæus et al. 2013). However, being in school is inconsistent with marrying and fulfilling the adult roles associated with marriage (Furstenberg 1998). Equally, prolonged schooling and Westernization encourage the development of a distinct youth culture and social world in which premarital sexual activity can be legitimized. Together these trends tend to produce an increase in premarital childbearing by girls who are still at school. Moreover, in South Africa, as elsewhere, teenage childbearing has increasingly been seen as problematic because of its potential consequences for girls' education and for both their and their children's future welfare (Jewkes et al. 2009; Panday et al. 2009).

Despite the progress that South Africa has made in improving children's access to and enrolment in school, the country still faces serious challenges with regard to the effectiveness of its schooling system. In particular, only about 45 per cent of children complete the final year of secondary school (Grade 12), and pass the senior certificate examination ("matriculate" in everyday parlance, although strictly only students who pass with high enough marks to qualify

them for admission to university should be described as matriculating) and this proportion hardly rose at all during the decade leading up to 2008 (Timæus et al. 2013).

Figure 1: *Percentage of women aged 20–24 who had a birth before age 18 by whether the birth occurred before first marriage, selected African countries*



Source: Author's calculations from tables of Demographic and Health Survey data in Lloyd (2005)

In principle, South Africa espouses progressive policies that encourage pregnant girls to remain in school and young mothers to return to school after giving birth. Implementation of these principles varies between provinces and from school to school. At the extreme, some schools ignore them and expel girls who become pregnant. More often, based on a 2007 government policy document that aimed to balance the interests of the mother and her infant, young mothers are debarred from returning to school in the year in which they give birth. (This was ruled unconstitutional in July 2013 as it conflicts with the girls' right to an education). While other schools have more liberal policies on attendance, few schools have facilities for nursing and baby changing and some teachers are hostile to having pregnant girls and young mothers in school, while others feel unable to offer girls additional support to assist them to return to school successfully (Bhana et al. 2010; Morell et al. 2012). Thus, one far-reaching consequence of teenage childbearing is that it interrupts, and often terminates, girls' schooling.

Concern about teenage motherhood is also prevalent in high-income countries. The issue has been of particular concern in the United States and Britain where rates of teenage childbearing are relatively high. Much of the literature emphasizes the adverse effects of teenage childbearing on the welfare of the mothers (and sometimes fathers) and on the welfare of their children. However, while at one time the research evidence from the USA and elsewhere appeared to support Campbell's (1968) conclusion that 'the girl who has an illegitimate child at the age of 16 suddenly has 90 percent of her life's script written for her', more recent research has tended to suggest that the poor outcomes of teenage mothers and their children result to a considerable degree from the confounding of adolescent childbearing with pre-existing personal and familial disadvantages that are hard to measure and control for explicitly (Hoffman 1998). Thus, Furstenberg (1998) suggests that the conclusion that should be drawn from the more recent research literature is that 'by the time a 16-year-old girl has a child, 70 percent of her life's script is already written for her'.

However, while concerns about teenage motherhood in South Africa mirror those found in developed countries, the context is very different. First, economic inequality in South Africa is more extreme than almost anywhere else in the world and the prevalence of absolute material deprivation remains high. Second, one enduring consequence of the Apartheid system and the resulting system of labour migration between rural areas and places of employment was to disrupt gender relationships and family life. Thus, an unusually high proportion of children do not live with their parents and, in particular, with their father.

Third, another key component of the Apartheid system in South Africa was the segregated educational system. Separate schooling systems were established for each population group (i.e. African, Coloured, White and Asian, to use the terminology now favoured in South Africa). Moreover, different systems existed in the core of the country and the so-called 'homelands' and 'independent states'. Although education has been among the priorities of government since the collapse of apartheid regime and accounts for about 20 per cent of public sector expenditure, the school system remains inadequate in many respects. A broad consensus exists among educationalists and education researchers in South Africa that, although the democratically-elected government rapidly established a colour-blind schooling system and eliminated gross inequalities in the allocation of resources in the 1990s, the quality of many children's schooling in South Africa has remained low and progress toward securing more equitable outcomes has been limited.

Research on the determinants and consequences of teenage childbearing in less developed countries has been held back by the shortage of suitable longitudinal datasets. These are essential if one is to distinguish the girls' circumstances before giving birth from their current circumstances, which will have been influenced by their becoming a mother. Moreover, most previous research on schooling outcomes in South Africa has analysed school-based datasets and surveys. Thus, it remains unclear to what extent girls' progress at school in South Africa is held back by their family circumstances and household poverty and to what extent by teenage pregnancy and childbearing and how these factors relate to each other and the inadequacies of the schooling system. Using NIDS, one can begin to untangle these factors. In addition, one can study for the first time the attainment at leaving school of cohorts of children who experienced their entire schooling in the post-apartheid era.

Data, outcomes, and methods

NIDS is the first nationally-representative household panel study to be mounted in South Africa. It is funded by the South African Presidency in order to monitor and investigate poverty in the country and run by the Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit at the University of Cape Town. The baseline wave of NIDS in 2008 conducted interviews on 7305 households and collected data on more than 28,000 people (Leibbrandt et al. 2009). A second wave of data collection took place in 2010.

The study collects basic demographic data on all household members; information on their dwelling and access to utilities; information on the consumer durables owned by the household; and itemised income and expenditure data. Thus, it generates more detailed information on households' socioeconomic status than most demographic inquiries. It also collects information on social grants, demographic events in the households, household members' health, and other topics. In particular, it collects detailed data on the enrolment in school, progress and outcomes of school-age children and adults aged less than 30. Thus, NIDS is a new and important resource

for the study of inequalities in child welfare and the determinants of children's educational attainment in South Africa.

Longitudinal studies such as NIDS allow one to distinguish young mothers' circumstances before giving birth from their current circumstances, which will have been influenced by their becoming a mother. The analyses presented here focused on the cohort of young women aged 15–18 in 2008 who at the time had not matriculated, were enrolled in school and had not yet had a baby. Attrition of the sample is an issue in any panel study. The 2010 wave of NIDS successfully interviewed 77 per cent of the surviving girls identified as cohort members in 2008 (a proxy respondent completed a shorter questionnaire on an additional 7 per cent of them but these respondents were not included in the analysis). Most children in South Africa today now remain enrolled in school until the legal school leaving age (Anderson et al. 2001; Motala et al. 2007; Republic of South Africa 2013). Thus, the final cohort of 673 girls represents 78 per cent of the female population aged 15–18, but 92 per cent of 15- and 16-year old girls.

The outcome measures that were investigated are whether, by the time of their interview in 2010, those girls who had not matriculated remained enrolled in school and whether girls who were in Grades 11 and 12 had matriculated successfully from school. Thus, girls' educational outcomes are deemed unsatisfactory either if they left school without matriculating or if they were still in school in 2010 when they should have matriculated because they had been held back from taking the examination or because they failed it and returned to school to repeat Grade 12.

All the educational outcomes examined here are binary variables and have been modelled using logistic regression. Both the descriptive tables and the regression coefficients and their standard errors have been adjusted for the fact that NIDS uses a weighted, stratified, and clustered sample design. The information collected from each household about the construction of their dwelling, its water supply and toilet was combined by means of a principal components analysis (PCA) into a single index of housing quality (Timæus et al. 2013). This index fails to discriminate between the 30 per cent of the girls in the cohort who live in modern, well-constructed, fully-serviced dwellings. Similarly, PCA was used to construct a single consumer durables score for each household based on the ownership of nine different assets (Timæus et al. 2013). This index does not discriminate among the 18 per cent of the girls living in households that own none of these assets. No information was available on the highest educational attainment of the mothers of 5 per cent of the girls. As earlier research has suggested that this characteristic is an important determinant of aspects of educational attainment in South Africa and is highly confounded with socioeconomic status, these missing values were imputed by predicting the odds that the mother was in each educational category using an ordered logistic regression model that included the variables used in the subsequent analysis, race, and province of residence in 2008 (Timæus et al. 2013).

Results

In all, 41 per cent of South Africa women aged 25–34 in 2010 had borne their first child before their 20th birthday and only 48 per cent of women aged 20–34 had matriculated from school successfully. While only 33 percent of women aged 20–34 who had their first birth as a teenager had matriculated, 57 per cent of the other women in this age group had done so. As Table 1 shows, substantial differentials in both teenage childbearing and educational attainment existed in 2010 between different demographic and socioeconomic groups in South Africa.

Table 1: *Differentials in early childbearing and completing school (matriculating) in South Africa, 2010*

Sub-group	Median age at 1st birth of women aged 25–34	% 15–19 old women who have given birth	% 20–34 old women who have matriculated	Sub-group	Median age at 1st birth of women aged 25–34	% 15–19 old women who have given birth	% 20–34 old women who have matriculated
Total	20.6	11	48	*c) Quintile of household expenditure*			
a) Population group				Poorest	20.1	15	34
African	20.4	11	47	20-40%	20.2	9	41
Coloured	21.2	9	41	40-60%	21.2	5	56
White	22.6	2	71	60-80%	21.1	8	65
Asian	25.4	0	70	Best off	23.5	2	80
b) Residence				*d) Co-residence with mother*			
Urban	21.0	9	52	Resident	20.9	10	47
Rural	20.0	12	42	Absent	20.9	10	51
				Dead	19.6	17	44

Source: National Income Dynamics Study

One fifth of girls aged 15-18 who were enrolled and childless in 2008 gave birth by 2010. Their odds of giving birth were largely unrelated to their home circumstances (Table 2). Only in the top fifth of the income distribution (which in South Africa corresponds approximately to the middle class) was there a substantial reduction in the incidence of motherhood. One very important influence on their fertility was whether the girls were behind at school relative to their expected grade for their year of birth. Controlling for age, the odds of giving birth of girls who were behind at school were 2.6 times those of girls who had enrolled at age 6 and progressed through school without repeating a grade. The net effects of the other factors hardly change when the indicator of being behind at school in 2008 is omitted from the model. Thus, it is more than just a mechanism through which socio-economic background was making itself felt. Instead, academically successful girls from all backgrounds largely avoided early childbearing.

Table 2: *Odds of giving birth between 2008 and 2010, girls aged 15–18 in 2008 who were enrolled and childless at that time, controlling for grade in 2008*

Characteristics in 2008	Odds ratio	95% C.I.	Odds ratio	95% C.I.
1+ grades behind at school	2.6	1.4 – 4.9		
Urban compared with rural residence	1.3	0.7 – 2.2	1.3	0.8 – 2.3
Housing quality score	1.0	0.9 – 1.2	1.0	0.9 – 1.2
Consumer durables score	0.9	0.6 – 1.3	0.8	0.6 – 1.3
Household expenditure per head in top 20%	0.2	0.0 – 0.8	0.2	0.0 – 0.8
Mother resident in household	1		1	
Mother not resident in household	0.8	0.4 – 1.6	0.8	0.4 – 1.5
Mother is dead	1.2	0.5 – 2.8	1.2	0.5 – 2.8

Source: National Income Dynamics Study

By 2010, 25 per cent of the enrolled, childless girls aged 15-18 in 2008 had matriculated successfully and 15 per cent had left school without matriculating. The rest of them were still enrolled, although nearly a quarter of this group were in Grade 11 or 12 in 2008 and so should have matriculated before 2010. As one would expect, having a baby was a severe obstacle to girls continuing at school (Table 3). Girls who gave birth during the two years had 4.1 times the odds of other girls of dropping out and 2.3 times the odds of failing to matriculate from Grade 11 or 12. Girls who were behind at school in 2008 were less likely to matriculate than other girls. Some of them will have already taken the exam unsuccessfully before 2008. They were probably also more likely to drop out (p = 0.08). Leaving the measure of being behind at school out of the

model increases the odds of both dropout and failure to matriculate associated with giving birth; omitting the measure of whether girls gave birth increases the odds associated with being behind at school for both outcomes. Thus, the association between having a baby and the final outcome of girls' schooling results in part from confounding with being behind at school and being behind influences girls' final outcomes in part because it leads to early childbearing. Girls who did not live with their mother were more likely to drop out and to either not enter or fail the senior certificate examination than other girls. Girls from better-off households, as measured by the asset score, were less likely than other girls to drop out of school, but none of the measures of the girls' socioeconomic background were significantly related to their odds of matriculating successfully. Girls who were enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 at no-fees schools (which in 2008-10 were the 40 per cent of schools located in the poorest areas) may have been less likely to matriculate than other girls ($p = 0.19$).

Table 3: *Odds of dropping out of school or failing to matriculate between 2008 and 2010, girls aged 15–18 in 2008 who were enrolled and childless at that time, controlling for grade in 2008*

	Dropped out without matriculating		Did not matriculate from Grade 11 or 12 in 2008	
Characteristics in 2008	Odds ratio	95% C.I.	Odds ratio	95% C.I.
Gave birth 2008-2010	4.1	2.3 – 7.4	2.3	1.0 – 5.2
1+ grades behind at school	1.8	0.9 – 3.6	2.6	1.1 – 6.2
Urban compared with rural residence	1.6	0.6 – 4.3	1.0	0.3 – 2.9
Housing quality score	0.9	0.7 – 1.1	0.9	0.7 – 1.2
Consumer durables score	0.4	0.2 – 0.7	0.9	0.6 – 1.3
ln(Household income per head)	0.9	0.7 – 1.3	1.2	0.7 – 2.0
Mother resident in household	1		1	
Mother not resident in household	2.1	1.0 – 4.4	2.0	1.0 – 3.9
Mother is dead	1.6	0.7 – 3.7	1.5	0.6 – 3.5
No-fees school (lower 2 quintiles by area)	0.8	0.4 – 1.5	1.8	0.7 – 4.6

Source: National Income Dynamics Study

More than half (54 per cent) of the members of the cohort who gave birth for the first time between 2008 and 2010 were enrolled in 2010. Table 4 examines who they were. As only 133 of the girls had a baby, the odds ratios have very large confidence intervals. None of the income and wealth related indicators seems to be important and nor does the girls' attainment at school. However, the girls' own mothers matter. Girls who were living with their mothers in 2008 and girls whose mothers had progressed beyond Grade 9 at school were much more likely to be enrolled in 2010 than other girls who had given birth during the previous two years.

Table 4: *Odds of new mothers being enrolled in 2010, girls aged 15–18 in 2008 who were enrolled and childless at that time and did not matriculate by 2010, controlling for age and the year when they gave birth*

Characteristics in 2008	Odds ratio	95% C.I.
1+ grades behind at school	0.9	0.3 – 3.3
Urban compared with rural residence	0.4	0.1 – 1.9
Housing quality score	1.1	0.8 – 1.6
Consumer durables score	1.2	0.5 – 2.9
ln(Household income per head)	0.6	0.3 – 1.2
Mother resident in household	1	
Mother not resident in household	0.3	0.1 – 1.0
Mother is dead	0.3	0.1 – 1.4
Mother educated to Grade 10+	5.4	1.7 – 16.8

Source: National Income Dynamics Study

Tables 5 and 6 look at some of the consequences of being born to a teenage mother for children and young people aged less than 20. Only a minority of young people in South Africa were living with their fathers in 2010. However, if the mother gave birth to the child in question as a teenager, this proportion falls to nearly a half that for children whose mothers were older at the time of the birth (Table 5).

***Table 5**: Percentage of young people aged <20 living with their father in 2010*

Mother's age at birth of her child	Presence of father			
	Resident	Absent	Dead	Total
<20	22	66	13	100
20+	43	43	14	100
Total	38	48	14	100

Source: National Income Dynamics Study

Table 6 examines the relative odds of children and young people aged less than 20 living in households with an income of less than half the poverty line, for the 80 per cent of young people for which NIDS obtained information on their parents. The poverty line in South Africa is set at a little over $2 per day at current day prices. The odds of living in extreme poverty defined in this way were 1.4 times greater for children born when their mother was still a teenager than other children. This difference is only partly accounted for by the type of place of residence of these children and their population group. Moreover, while Table 6 shows that having mother who at least completed primary school and living with your father greatly reduced children's odds of growing up in poverty, controlling for these factors fails to further attenuate the increase in the odds of living in extreme poverty associated with being born to a teenage mother. Thus, neither factor is an important mechanism explaining why women who gave birth as teenagers remain at an elevated risk of living in extreme poverty throughout the period during which the child in question is growing up. Thus, it seems likely that this association is at least in part due, not to having had the child before they were 20 *per se*, but to the ongoing impact of unmeasured characteristics of the mothers that predisposed them to become pregnant as teenagers and also, in many cases, to drop behind at school.

***Table 6:** Odds of living in extreme poverty (households with monthly expenditure <R287 per head), young people aged <20 in 2010*

Characteristics in 2008		Odds ratio	95% C.I.	Odds ratio	95% C.I.	Odds ratio	95% C.I.
Mother aged < 20 at the child's birth		1.4	1.2 - 1.6	1.2	1.1 – 1.4	1.2	1.1 – 1.4
Urban compared with rural residence				0.4	0.3 – 0.5	0.4	0.4 – 0.6
African				1		1	
Coloured				0.4	0.2 – 0.7	0.4	0.2 – 0.7
Indian				0.0	0.0 – 0.2	0.1	0.0 – 0.4
White				0.0	0.0 – 0.0	0.0	0.0 – 0.0
Mother's schooling	≤ Grade 3					1	
	Grades 4 – 6					1.0	0.6 – 1.5
	Grades 7 – 9					0.6	0.4 – 0.9
	Grades 10 – 11					0.5	0.4 – 0.7
	Grade 12+					0.2	0.2 – 0.3
Father resident in household						1	
Father not resident in household						1.8	1.5 – 2.2
Father is dead						1.7	1.4 – 2.2

Source: National Income Dynamics Study

Discussion

Becoming a mother is central to the failure of many young women to matriculate. In South Africa, as well as representing a summary indicator of children's learning during their school career, the National Senior Certificate is an essential pre-condition for most forms of further education and a wide range of skilled and white-collar careers. However, this article demonstrates that selection of girls who are behind the appropriate grade for their age into teenage motherhood explains part of this association. These girls comprise a diverse group. Some enrolled in school late, a smaller number will have failed to enrol in one or more subsequent years for health, financial or other reasons, and many of them will have repeated one or more grades. Unfortunately, only two-thirds of the cohort analysed here reported their age at first enrolment, but modelling the data on this sub-group suggests that both late enrolment and having repeated grades are risk factors for giving birth as a teenager (results not shown). This accords with a study in KwaZulu-Natal that measured both factors and found that they were both risk factors for teenage pregnancy (Grant and Hallman 2008)

Neither residing with their own mother nor their mothers' characteristics did much to protect teenage girls from early motherhood. However, girls who lived with their mothers were less likely to drop out of school and more likely to matriculate than other teenage girls. Moreover, both having a co-resident mother and having a well-educated mother helped girls who did have a baby to get back into school promptly. These national data provided no evidence that living with their fathers protected teenage girls from pregnancy or improved their progress at school although fathers' were found to have a protective effect by two studies conducted at the beginning of the century in KwaZulu-Natal (Timæus and Boler 2007; Grant and Hallman 2008). It is possible that they picked up a transient association that originated in the characteristics of the households in which men died during the early stages of the AIDS epidemic in South Africa.

NIDS reveals that the children born to teenage mothers and the children of poorly educated women are more likely to grow up in extreme poverty than other children. Other research finds that they have worse health and educational outcomes (Branson et al. 2011, 2013). Thus, poor educational attainment, teenage motherhood and poverty in early adulthood are an interrelated cluster of social and economic problems in South Africa. Asset ownership and household income are related to late enrolment and grade repetition at an earlier stage in children's schooling (Timæus et al. 2013). They are shown here to protect against drop out during the second half of girls' teenage years. However, having controlled for whether they bore a child, it is striking that the home backgrounds of teenage girls played little role in determining whether those of them in Grades 11 and 12 in 2008 passed the senior certificate examination by 2010. While one would like to believe that this implies that secondary schooling in South Africa is meritocratic, other research has suggested the more depressing conclusion that it is no more than a lottery (Lam et al. 2011).

The importance of earlier educational experience plays in determining who becomes pregnant is consistent with the findings of earlier research on teenage pregnancy and child bearing in more geographically-localised South African populations (Grant and Hallman 2008; Marteleto et al. 2008). This is despite the fact that the latter paper finds that attainment is positively associated with age at sexual debut, presumably as a result of the girls mixing with more mature classmates than those who are behind at school. In addition, as in this study, Marteleto et al. (2008) find in Cape Town that coming from a higher household income does

more to protect schoolgirls from dropping out of school than from becoming pregnant. However, while Grant and Hallman (2008) again find that co-residence with their mother does nothing to protect teenage girls from pregnancy, their results differ from those presented here in that they do not find that living with their mothers plays an important role in helping young women who give birth get back into school. They do find that teenage mothers are more likely to drop out if they are their child's primary caregiver, but co-residence with the mother is unimportant even in the model that excludes this variable. Thus, perhaps in KwaZulu-Natal a wider range of family members were adopting the role of caregiver while nationally only mothers commonly do this.

As in Western countries, the association between teenage childbearing and poor educational outcomes in South Africa is in part a selection effect. In other words, the girls who are most likely to become teenage mothers include a disproportionate number of girls who are unlikely to have matriculated anyway. However, this and previous research suggests that in South Africa being behind at school plays a pivotal role in the selection process both directly and as a factor leading to teenage pregnancy. It may be that girls who are older than their classmates tend to become bored with and disengaged from school. It also seems likely that girls who expect to matriculate are more strongly motivated to avoid having a baby than girls who have come to doubt their ability to pass the senior certificate examination. The latter group, moreover, may view motherhood as an alternative route by which to make the transition to adulthood. As Jewkes et al. (2009) put it, "teenage women infrequently make a decision to get pregnant, but much more commonly take few steps to prevent it. It is impossible to escape a conclusion that part of the reason for this is that they do not see it as such a bad thing for their lives and may perceive it to be desirable or advantageous."

One important intervention to reduce teenage pregnancy would be to further improve sex and life skills education, although the obstacles to doing so effectively in a South African context should not be underestimated (Magnani et al. 2005; Ahmed et al. 2009; Jewkes et al. 2009; Mathews et al. 2012). Provision of dedicated youth-friendly family planning services, including emergency contraception, and readier access to pregnancy termination services would also enable more teenage girls to avoid becoming mothers (Jewkes et al. 2009; Willan 2013). Nevertheless, by the time they reach their mid-teens, it may be too late to motivate girls who have given up on education to practice birth control effectively and consistently. As Marteleto et al. (2008) also emphasize, interventions that address the early roots of educational failure would probably reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancies in South Africa as well as improving attainment at school.

Although girls' socioeconomic background has little direct impact on whether they eventually matriculate, it influences matriculation rates indirectly by affecting the girls' risk of becoming mothers and the consequences of this. Having a baby is equally common across the bottom 80 per cent of the income distribution, but much less common in its top quintile, which corresponds approximately to the middle class. In Western countries, teenage motherhood plays a role in the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage among the poor. In South Africa, however, the middle class behaves distinctively by either *avoiding* early motherhood by the prevention or termination of pregnancy or, as a fallback strategy, minimizing its disruptive impact by getting their daughters back into school quickly if they have a baby. Thus rather than teenage childbearing contributing to social disadvantage in South Africa, it may be more accurate to say that its absence plays a role in the reproduction of privilege.

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