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## Challenges in the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancies and Child Marriages in Zambia: A Case Study of Kabwe District

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**ABSTRACT**

*The number of girls falling pregnant in schools is a source of concern in many developing countries including Zambia; as such peoples education is likely to be cut short following this problem. This study was designed to investigate the causes of teenage pregnancies and challenges faced by parents and adolescents in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages. A sample of 206 participants was selected using purposive sampling. 130 participants were children and adolescents aged between 11 and 25 years from 3 selected basic schools and 3 secondary schools. In addition, 32 parents and 42 key informants were selected using purposive sampling. The participants responded to the scheduled interview and questionnaires on teenage pregnancy and child marriages. The study used both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data was analysed through thematic approach while Quantitative data was analysed through SPSS using percentages and pie charts. The results obtained showed that school drop outs (74%) peer pressure (72%), and poverty (64%) are the leading causes of teenage pregnancy. The main challenges cited by parents in the prevention of teenage pregnancy in schools and communities, include declining morals among children (57%), financial problems (17%) and peer pressure and inadequate sex education (8.6% respectively). The children cited the main challenges in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages as including peer pressure (25%) poverty (20%) lack of educational support (19% and declining Morals (12%). Based on these findings, the study provides recommendations on effective mitigation strategies against the problem of early marriages and teenage pregnancy in society.*

**Introduction**

The problem of teenage pregnancy and early marriages is a source of concern in many developing countries. For instance, in the southern African region, Zambia is among the countries with the highest rate of child marriages despite the policy of promoting girl child education. Additionally, there is a gap on most aspects of early marriage research as few studies have examined challenges related to teenage pregnancy and early marriage in relation to mental health, human rights, and vocational adjustment. The purpose of this study is to investigate challenges related to the prevention of teenage pregnancies and early marriages among adolescents and youth. The study also suggests effective strategies for addressing teenage pregnancy and early marriages in order to enhance the participation of adolescent and youth in national development.

*Prevalence of child marriages*

According to the 2013 – 2014 Zambia Demographic Health Survey child marriages are more common among girls than boys. About 17% of girls aged 15 to 19 are married compared to 1% of boys of the same age range. These trends are triggered by several factors such as traditional ceremony, poverty, inadequate female teachers and role models (Times of Zambia, October, 2017 P.4). In most cultures, it is assumed that marriage is a sign of maturity. Once a girl becomes married then she ceases to be a child and is regarded as an adult even if she is 12 years old. Child marriage or early marriage can take many different forms and can be caused by a variety of factors which this study seeks to investigate.

The theory of Demographic Translation has governed population policies since 1970s. This theory assumes that societies eventually abandon the strategy of high fertility when mortality declines due to health improvements (UNICEF 2005). This could be a possible explanation for increase in teenage pregnancy and early marriages. The Non – Governmental Organisations Coordinating Council (NGOCC) has advocated for enacting more laws to increase efforts in the fight against ending child marriages. Child marriage is a violation of human rights. Free and full consent to a marriage is recognized as a fundamental human right according to the Universal declaration of Human rights (Information Bulletin, 2003).

### *Statement of the problem*

Researches on early marriages have examined early marriages in terms of demographic trends, fertility and educational attainment. But very few studies have examined early marriage and teenage pregnancy with respect to mental health, human rights, vocational adjustment effects on families and challenges related to teenage pregnancies. Above all, teenage pregnancy and early marriages are high in Zambia. For instance, situation reports by the Ministry of General Education in Central Province Zambia, indicates higher levels of teenage pregnancy recorded in secondary schools compared to primary schools during the period from 2014 to 2015.

### *Trend of teenage pregnancy in schools : central province*

The number of adolescent girls falling pregnant at primary and secondary school was higher in secondary schools (GRZ, 2017). However, teenage pregnancy reduced slightly from 609 to 536 for primary schools, and from 1224 to 1067 for secondary school adolescents during the year 2013 to 2017. Early marriages and teenage pregnancy affect the social wellbeing of girls who go through child bearing early or forced into marriage. This can deny them the right to enjoy their childhood, education and higher vocational aspirations or status. It is in this regard that this study seeks to investigate challenges associated with the prevention of teenage pregnancies and early marriages.

### **Literature review**

#### *Causes of early marriages*

Early marriage or child marriage is a problem in Africa. Child marriage or early marriage is defined as any legal or customary union involving a boy or girl below the age of 18 (UNICEF 2014). Early marriage is most common in Central Africa and West Africa affecting 40% and 49% respectively for girls under 19 years compared to 27% in East Africa and 20% in North and Southern Africa (Digest No.7 – March 2001).

In Nigeria, one study on determinants and effects of girl child marriages noted that most marriages among girls are forceful marriage, and other factors leading to child marriages are poor education level of parents, poverty and place of residence. The girls who married among them report health challenges, and education backwardness. Poverty and poor education are the underlying cause of child marriages (Envuladu et al., 2016).

In Ethiopia a study was conducted to elicit evidence that would form a basis for program development to promote the lives of women by ensuring that they attend school, earn income and make responsible decisions for their families. The study proceeded by administering questionnaires to 2,072 girls and women between 12 and 49 years of Amhara region. Qualitative data analysis was made on the basis of 20 focus group discussion involving men and women and unmarried adolescents. The results showed that the most common reasons cited for early marriage among the rural and urban sample in Ethiopia was tradition (81% respectively), strengthening relationships (40% and 45% respectively) and for prestige (36% and 39% respectively). Other reasons cited among rural and urban samples were difficult to get married if older (25% and 29% respectively), avoiding being victim of gossip (24%, and 29% respectively) and for dowry (19% and 21% respectively).

In southern Africa, child marriages is thought to result from high poverty levels, gender inequality, traditional beliefs, religion, limited educational opportunities for girls and forced marriages. Research on the factors that contribute to child marriages and consequences (UNICEF 2005, 2014) suggest that social and cultural norms influence the age at which a girl is expected to marry. Other factors include social economic status; educational level and community context. Poorest countries have the highest child marriage rates. Child marriages are most common among the poor who have fewer resources and opportunities to invest in alternative options for girls.

Due to poverty, many parents withdraw their children from school to offer them for marriage to older men in exchange for payment of *lobola* (a bride price). Parents may assess the cost and benefits of marriage and decide to marry their daughters if they are perceived to be an economic burden. But less is known about the context in which girls themselves make the decision to marry (Persons et al., 2015)

#### *Child Rights*

Plan Zambia report (2015) indicators show the effects of deprivation of the rights of children and youth. From poverty, health care, education to protection, the situation calls for more efforts to realize the rights of children in Zambia. The challenges regarding the children and youth include inadequate allocation of government resources to health, education and other social service delivery systems, poor quality services to children, their families, youth and communities. As a result, over 60% of the population in Zambia live in poverty, with the situation pronounced higher in rural areas (77.9%) compared to 27.5% in urban areas (2010 census Report). More than 422,000 representing 26% of children aged between 7 and 13 are not in school. Youth Unemployment rate is 16.7% youth the urban rate higher at 22% and rural rate at 7.5% (2010 Census Report). Children suffer from sexual, early marriages and other abuses in communities. Most of such cases are not reported and the perpetrators are not punished (Plan Zambia 2015).

Child marriages are more prominent in rural areas compared to urban areas. Bi -laws have been launched to end child marriages, teenage pregnancies and child labour following reports on the problem on child marriages in Zambia. For instance, the Zambia Daily Mail, reported that in 2016, over 200 girls aged between 13 and 19 in one chiefdom dropped out of school due to early marriage and pregnancy. The bi – laws include registering marriages, ascertaining the age of couples, producing a birth certificate to the village headman to determine whether the girl has reached a rightful age to marry. The legal age for marriage under the statutory law in Zambia is 18 for females and 21 for males. However, some children leave school in preference for marriage.

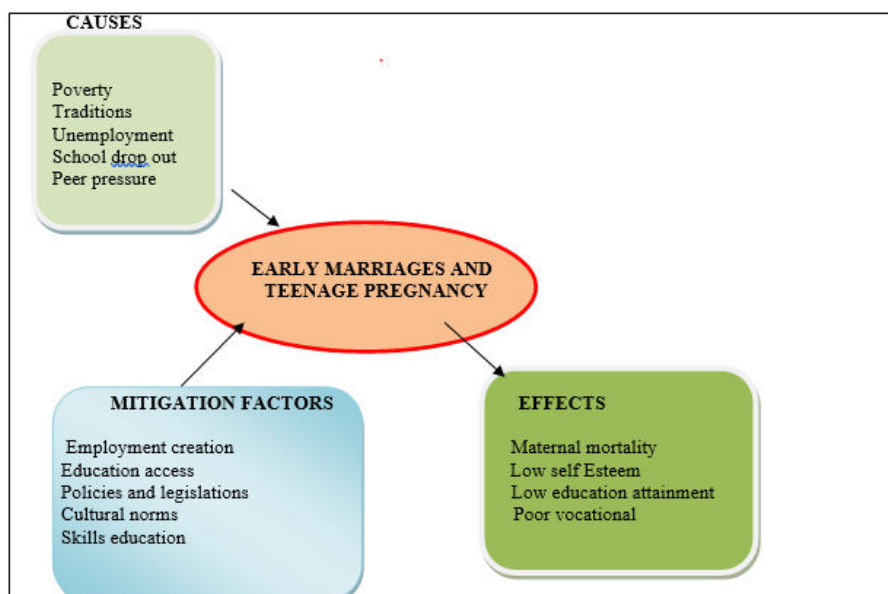
Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world. About 42% of the girls in Zambia are married before 18 years of age. The government intends to eliminate child marriages by 2030. Consequently, the Zambian government has adopted a national strategy to end child marriages.

It appears that research on the subject have not adequately addressed the following issues:

- *Perceptions and expectation of people engaged in child marriages and related psychological factors associated with child marriages.*
- *Research on protective factors that prevent child marriages.*

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Social learning theories (Albert Bandura 1977) explain teenage pregnancies and early marriage in terms of observation learning. The prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriage is likely to be reinforced by attitudes, peer pressure, traditions and values, that promote early marriages in society (Figure 1).



**Fig 1:** Theoretical Framework on the causes and effects of early marriages and teenage pregnancies

In this study, we investigate the factors associated with teenage pregnancy and early marriages and the mitigation factors against these problems.

#### **General Objective**

To investigate the causes of teenage pregnancy and early marriages among children and adolescents.

#### Specific objectives

To investigate the effects of teenage pregnancy and early marriages.

To investigate the challenges faced by children, adolescents, and parents in preventing teenage pregnancy and early marriages.

To investigate the strategies that can be used in order to mitigate the effects of child marriages and teenage pregnancy.

#### *Research Questions*

What are the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy and early marriages among adolescents?

What are the challenges being faced in preventing teenage pregnancy and early marriages?

What are the strategies that can be used to mitigate teenage pregnancy and early marriages?

#### **Methodology**

##### *Study area and Period of research*

The study was conducted in Kabwe District, located in Central Province Zambia. The period considered for study was from 2013 to 2017.

##### *Research Design*

The study used descriptive research designs. Descriptive research design was used as a complementary approach to offer a descriptive analysis of perceptions of respondents over the causes and effects of early marriages and teenage pregnancy in schools and communities. The samples were obtained from basic schools, secondary schools, and communities in Kabwe district. In terms of the approaches to the study, qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to collect, analyse and present data.

##### *Population*

The study site was Kabwe district of Central Zambia which has 39,862 households, and a total population of 202,360 people out of which 98,781 are males and 103,579 are females (Central Statistical Office, 2010). The study targeted children, adolescents and youth in schools and communities who are between 11 and 25 years. According to the Zambian Constitution, a *child* is any male

or female person below the age of 18. The *adolescent* is regarded as any person who has reached puberty which usually takes place between 11 and 19 years.

### Sampling

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to select participants from the basic schools and secondary schools in Kabwe district. The study comprised of 206 participants. 130 adolescents and youth aged between 11 and 25 years in grades 9 to 12 were selected. Most of the participants were in school adolescents from selected schools and communities that were accessible. These areas were selected based on limited funds for the research, and costs involved in conducting the study.

Purposeful sampling procedure was also used to select a sample of 74 key informants (i.e. people with knowledge on the subject matter) which included 32 parents, 31 teachers, 3 civic leaders and 7 traditional leaders and one health worker in the community. The rationale for using purposeful sampling technique for selecting key informants was that it could facilitate access to people with information on early marriages and teenage pregnancy.

### Data Collection

Questionnaires and interview schedules were administered to the respondents to elicit their perceptions over the causes, effects and challenges related to the prevention of early marriages. Perception is regarded as the process by which we organise different stimuli in the environment in order to make meaning, judgements and decisions about the situation or event upon which our actions are based. Structured in depth interviews were also conducted with the key informants.

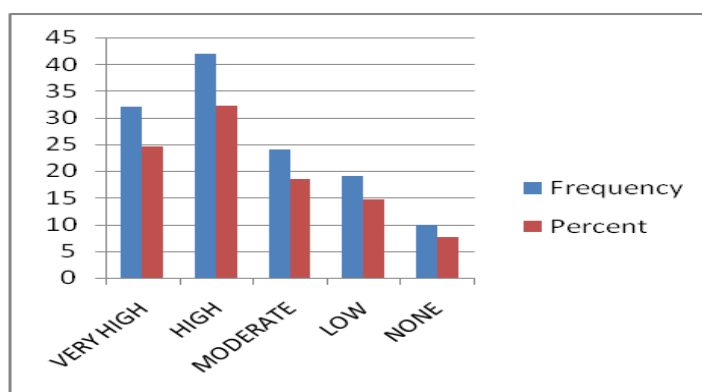
### Data Analysis

The Qualitative data generated through questionnaires was analysed using thematic analysis to group the data according to the emerging themes over the perceived challenges related to teenage pregnancy and early marriages. Quantitative data was analysed through percentages, pie charts using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Results

### Prevalence of early marriages

The respondents were asked to indicate their opinion regarding the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriages in their school or community. (Figure 2)



**Fig 2:** Rating on prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriages

Figure 2 indicates that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriages is high. 33.1 % of the respondents perceived teenage pregnancy as high.

### Causes of teenage pregnancy and early marriages

The children and adolescents (n=130) and parents (n=32), were asked to state the causes of teenage pregnancy and early marriages in their area or community. Their responses were categorized using thematic analysis. (Table1).

**Table 1:** Frequency distribution on causes of teenage pregnancy and early marriages

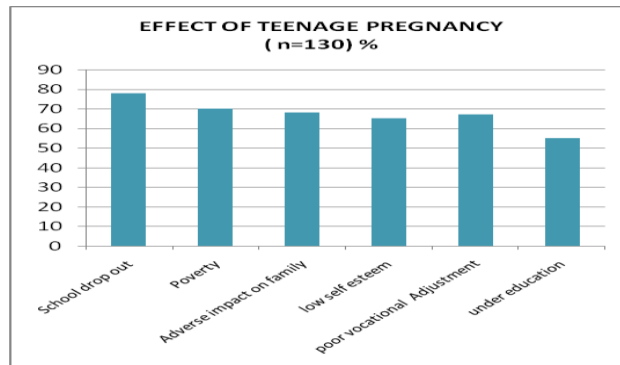
CATEGORY	CHILDREN and ADOLESCENTS (n=130)		PARENTS (n=32)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
School drop out	96	74	28	88
Peer pressure	93	72	32	100
Poverty	83	64	27	84
Sexual Abuse	81	62	23	72
Alcohol abuse	75	58	27	84
Traditions	63	48	24	75
Unemployment	63	48	26	81
Frustration	61	47	19	59
Faulty communication	42	32	28	88

Table 1 shows that the main causes of teenage pregnancy and early marriages according to children and adolescents opinion are school dropout (74%), peer pressure (72%) poverty (64%) and sexual abuse (62%). On the other hand, responses from parents

suggest that the main causes of early marriages and teenage pregnancy include peer pressure (100%) school dropout and faulty communication (88% respectively), poverty and alcohol abuse (84% respectively).

*Effects of teenage pregnancy and early marriages*

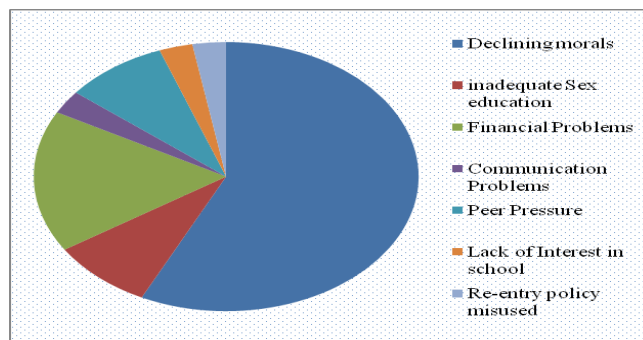
130 children and adolescents were asked to indicate their opinion regarding the effects of teenage pregnancy and early marriages. Results showed that the main effects of teenage pregnancy and early marriages were school drop outs (78.4%), poverty (70.1%), adverse impact on families, (68.8%), low self-esteem (65.3 %), poor vocational adjustment (57.7%) and under education (55.4%). (Figure 3)



**Fig 3:** Effects of teenage pregnancy and early marriages

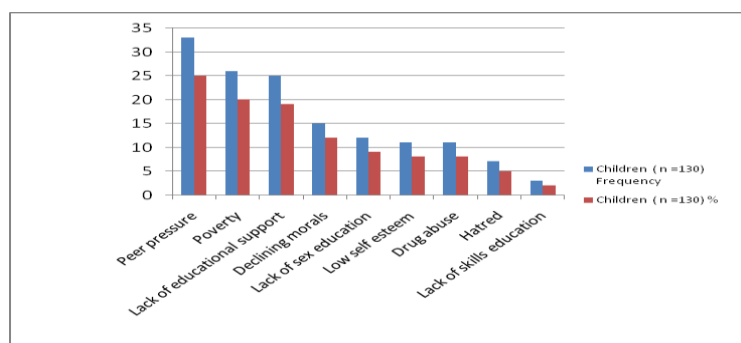
*Challenges in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages*

Seventy four participants who included 32 parents and 42 key informants (teachers, traditional leaders and officers) were asked to indicate the challenges faced in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages in their areas (Figure 4).



**Fig 4:** Distribution of Challenges faced by parents and teachers in the prevention of Teenage pregnancy and early marriages

Figure 4 indicates that the main challenges experienced by parents, teachers and leaders in the prevention of teenage pregnancy include declining morals among children (57%), financial problems (17%), peer pressure (8.6%) and inadequate sex education (8.6 %).



**Fig 5:** Frequency distribution on challenges faced by children and adolescents in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early

The children and adolescents were asked to indicate their opinion regarding the challenges faced in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages. Results showed that the leading challenges faced by adolescents in the prevention of teenage pregnancy include peer pressure (25%), poverty (20%) lack of school support (19%), declining moral values among adolescents (12%) and inadequate sex education (9%). Figure 5.

*Strategies for preventing teenage pregnancy and early marriages*

The children and adolescents were asked to suggest the strategies that could be used in order to reduce teenage pregnancies and early marriages in their areas (Table 2). The results indicate that children and adolescents mainly recommended skills education and attitude change (63% respectively), sports and recreation (62%) and intensification of sex education (60%). On the other hand,

the mitigation measures by parents include Promoting access to education and sex education (94% respectively), skills education (91%) and attitude change (90%).

**Table 2:** Frequency Distribution on strategies for mitigation against early marriages and teenage pregnancy

CATEGORY	Children and adolescents (n=130)		Parents (n= 32)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Skills education	82	63.1	29	90.6
Attitude Change	82	63.1	29	90.7
Sports and recreation	81	62.3	24	75
Education Access	81	60.8	30	93.7
Sex Education	78	60	30	93.8
Employment creation	69	53.4	28	86.9
Self-regulation	67	51.5	23	71.4
Policies and Legislations	66	50.8	28	87.5
Multi sector response	63	48.5	27	84.4
Cultural Norms	54	41.5	21	65.6

## Discussion

### *Prevalence of early marriages and teenage pregnancy*

Early marriages and teenage pregnancy is perceived to be high in Zambia. About 33% of the respondents rated teenage pregnancy as high, whereas 25% rated the problem as very high in their area (Figure 2). However, according to the Ministry of General Education teenage pregnancy and school dropouts tend to be higher in rural parts of Central Zambia compared to urban areas (GRZ, 2017). Therefore, support on programs aimed at fighting against ending child marriages should be enhanced. In addition Stakeholder's participation in monitoring the prevalence of child marriages and efforts at discouraging teenage pregnancies and marriages should be enhanced. This can be achieved through stakeholder engagement, involvement of parents, teachers, traditional leaders and Government departments including advocacy for policy formulation against child marriages.

### *Causes of Early marriages and teenage pregnancy*

Teenage pregnancy and early marriages is common among adolescents between 16 and 20 years. This is the period when most children are expected to be in school to acquire various skills and knowledge which is essential for their lifelong learning and betterment of society. Unfortunately some children fall prey to pregnancy at school and are more likely to drop out. This study has established that the causes of teenage pregnancy include school dropouts (74%), peer pressure (72%), poverty (64%) and sexual abuse (62%). These results suggest the need for urgent attention by stakeholders in Zambia to address the problems of high levels of school drop outs, poverty, peer pressure, sexual abuse affecting adolescents in order to save the girl child from teenage pregnancy and early marriages. The findings indicate that peer pressure, school dropout, and poverty are the leading causes of teenage pregnancy (Table 2). Other causes of teenage pregnancy include as reported by parents include faulty communication (88%) poverty and alcohol (84% respectively) and unemployment (81%). Efforts at addressing these problems should involve multi sectorial responses and support especially the vulnerable children and adolescents.

### *Effects of Early marriages and teenage pregnancy*

According to the responses obtained from adolescents and youths the main effects of early marriages and teenage pregnancy are school drop outs (78.4%), poverty (70.1%), adverse impact on families, (68.8%), low self-esteem (65.3 %), poor vocational adjustment (57.7%) and under education (55.4%). This finding is in conformity with earlier findings by Parsons (2009) findings that unemployment is higher among youth due to lack of prior job experience, lack of experience to professional networks, inadequate preparedness for the world of work, education not matched to the growth sector and lack of job security. Early marriages are more likely to lead families into high poverty levels and limited educational opportunities for girls as they are forced into marriages. In Zambia, like in other southern African countries, early marriages are associated with high levels of poverty. The legal age for marriage under the statutory law in Zambia is 18 for females and 21 for males. However, although most families are aware of the statutory instrument, some children leave school in preference for marriage at the expense of their education and the wellbeing of society. Early child marriages are likely to deprive adolescents of higher education attainment due to school drop outs. They may develop low self-esteem and low educational attainment.

In order to promote retention of adolescents in the educational system, deliberate programs should be put in place in order to increase school attendance for adolescents in basic and secondary schools.

### *Challenges in preventing early marriages and teenage pregnancy*

In view of the high levels of prevalence of teenage pregnancy in schools and communities in the Central province Zambia (Figure1), the parents and teachers were asked to state the challenges which they face in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages. Results showed that the main challenges encountered by parents, teachers and leaders in preventing teenage pregnancy and early marriages include declining morals among adolescents, financial problems, peer pressure, inadequate sex education, communication and financial problems. On the other hand the challenges identified by the adolescents in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages include peer pressure, poverty, inadequate educational support, declining morals and inadequate sex education. However, previous studies on the subject have investigated challenges to the lives of youth. The findings indicated that the challenges associated with youth livelihoods include misalignment of education, lack of entrepreneurial skills and training among other things (PLAN Zambia 2015). The youth cite a number of challenges that included poor quality education, inadequate number of schools, limited educational opportunities, lack of financial support to further education and

inadequate recreational facilities. These findings suggest the need for developing programs that would take into account these challenges in order to promote education and skills development among adolescents and youth.

#### *Strategies for Mitigating against teenage pregnancy and early marriages*

The adolescents and parents were asked to indicate their opinion regarding what should be done to mitigate against teenage pregnancy and early marriages. Adolescents suggested the following interventions in their order of preference: promoting skills education, attitude change, sports and recreation, access to education and sex education (Table 2). On the other hand, the parents advocated for promoting education access, sex education, skills education and attitude change among the adolescents. These findings suggest that the government in partnership with stakeholders should work towards developing and implementing strategies that would promote education access for children and adolescents. This could imply increasing school infrastructure at both primary and secondary levels to facilitate school retention of pupils in the educational system, and reduce school dropouts which are a recipe for teenage pregnancy and early marriages. In addition, employment creation, multispectral responses, policies awareness and should be promoted in schools and communities. According to Melgosa (2013) sexuality tends to be high among adolescents because of peer pressure, cultural values, media and lack of sex education. The current findings are in conformity with this argument. This implies that adequate guidelines need to be provided to adolescents, parents, teachers and leaders over health life styles as children reach puberty. The children should be subjected to behaviour change strategies through enhanced sex education, provided by experts through the educational system. Parents should establish mutual trust with their children and improve their communication skills in order to improve moral values and self-esteem. The declining moral values among the adolescents are a source of concern. Parents ought to improve communication over moral issues and be concerned about their children education. They should ensure that adolescents and children are not denied access to education so that they acquire lifelong skills which can help them to enhance their educational and vocational aspirations. Above all, parents, teachers, leaders and stakeholders in communities should address the high trend of teenage pregnancy to save children from forced marriages. However, the adolescents need to change their attitude through self-regulation in order to conform to acceptable cultural norms regarding sexuality to improve their participation in the development of their society.

#### **Conclusion**

Teenage pregnancy and early marriages are social problems that affect most societies. This study has revealed that teenage pregnancy is high in Zambia. Analysis of results on prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early marriage has revealed that in Zambia Central Province incidents of teenage pregnancy is high. The causes of teenage pregnancy include school dropouts, peer pressure, poverty and sexual abuse. The main challenges in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages include declining morals among children, peer pressure, poverty, lack of educational support and inadequate sexual education. However, there seems to be variations in the order of severity of the challenges as identified by the respondents. Whereas adolescents cite main challenges as involving mainly peer pressure, poverty lack of educational support, and lack of sex education, the parents teachers and leaders identify lack of conformity to morals by adolescents, lack of financial support, peer pressure, and inadequate sex education as the order of challenge faced in the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriages.

#### **Recommendation**

The study has recommended various measures to address the challenges and reduce teenage pregnancy in schools and communities such as developing deliberate strategies for promoting access to education among adolescents; enhancing sex education, promoting behaviour change among adolescents and youth through sex education, skills education and self-regulation. In addition, parents and teachers are expected enhance learning of moral values in schools and communities. These strategies are likely to reduce teenage pregnancy and early marriages in communities. There should be increased stakeholder and government engagement in supporting vulnerable children in the school system amidst the high levels of poverty being experienced in society in order to increase participation of youth and adolescents in national development.

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