

Teenage pregnancy

More than 50 percent of African women in South Africa give birth before the age of 20. Rosalee Telela takes a look at the pain and suffering caused by unwanted pregnancies

South Africa has a high rate of teenage pregnancies. Why is this? Poverty, low levels of education and unemployment are some of the major reasons. Other factors are a lack of information about sex and contraception, a desire to be accepted by people of the same age and not being able to get a legal abortion.

Thelma Malepe of the Planned Parenthood

Association (PPA), says, "Teenagers give different reasons why they have sex. They say it proves they are women/men, it is a way of expressing love, pressure from partners and friends, going against parents or simply because there is nothing else to do."

Malepe believes one of the biggest problems is that parents do not talk to their children

about sex. Many teenagers get the wrong information.

"Sometimes young people believe that if you drink coca-cola, epsom salt and vinegar before and after sex, it will prevent pregnancy," says Malepe.

"The way society portrays women puts pressure on young women to have sex at an early age. Often they feel they have to give in to their boyfriends' demands for sex. Sometimes they see themselves simply as wives and mothers, and do not believe that they have any potential outside these roles."

Thandi had a child at 17. She told SPEAK her story. "When I was in Standard nine, I fell in love with a boy in my class. After we had gone out for a while, he started insisting that we have sex. He said I should not be afraid because none of his former girlfriends had fallen pregnant. In the end I agreed.

"It was only when I started getting sick in the mornings that I realised I was pregnant. When I told my boyfriend, he said it was not his child and accused me of sleeping around. When I told my mother, she was very angry.

"She asked me how I was



Photos: Elmond Iiyane



Teenage pregnancies cause quarrels and unhappiness in families

Family planning clinics and centres give free guidance and advice on sex, contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases.

Here are some of the places you can go to:

PLANNED PARENTHOOD ASSOCIATION (PPA)

PPA NATIONAL OFFICE
13th Floor, Auckland House
Corner Smit & Biccard Streets
Braamfontein 2001
Telephone: (011) 339 1361/2

PPA JOHANNESBURG
3rd Floor, Marlborough House
60 Eloff Street
Johannesburg 2001
Telephone: (011) 331 2695/6/7

going to raise a child when I was a child myself. I had to leave school and find a job. My mother could not afford to feed me and my two brothers and a small baby. I did not want to have an abortion because I heard women sometimes bleed to death when they have an abortion.

"I left school and had the

PPA CAPE TOWN
Unit 8A, The Waverley
Dane Street
Mowbray 7700
Telephone: (021) 448 7312

PPA DURBAN
Suite 318
320 West Street
Durban 4001
Telephone: (031) 305 2588

PPA PORT ELIZABETH
39 Fettes Road
North End
Port Elizabeth 6001
Telephone: (041) 34 3003

There are also government family planning clinics. Look in the telephone book for the address or telephone number of a clinic near you.

child, but I never found a job. Sometimes I earn money washing other people's clothes, but my mother pays for most things. Next year I will go back to school because my aunt said she would take care of my son."

Margaret, fell pregnant when she was 16 and in Standard eight.

"My parents were very upset but agreed to look after the baby so that I could complete my schooling. It was a very difficult time. My parents struggled to support me and my baby, and I felt strange with my friends at school because they did not understand what was going on in my life.

"When I finished school, I married the father of my child and we are very happy. But I lost out on my childhood. My warning to young women is: understand what you are doing when you have sex at a young age, and use contraception if you do."

The health of teenagers who fall pregnant is also an issue of concern. Women under 20 often have problems with pregnancy and giving birth. There are often problems during childbirth because teenagers' bodies may be too small to deliver a baby safely.

Another problem is that pregnant teenagers often try to hide it and therefore do not seek proper medical advice and care. This means their babies have a greater chance of dying or having a low weight at birth.

The high rate of teenage pregnancies in South Africa is cause for great concern. Steps must be taken to deal with the problem. Parents need to be encouraged to speak more openly to their children about sex and sex education should be made compulsory in schools. The media — newspapers, magazines, radio and television — have a responsibility to give teenagers proper information about sex. ☛