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The lived experiences of single teen mothers during the transition from adolescence to motherhood

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ABSTRACT

Teen motherhood is still a public health problem globally, and this happens in different corners of Rwanda. The study explores factors contributing to teen motherhood and its consequences for the lives of single teen mothers in Gicumbi District in northern Rwanda. The theoretical frameworks that guided this study were Ubuntu philosophy and motherism. Using qualitative research methods, data were collected through life story interviews with 10 single teen mothers, semi-structured interviews with six mothers of teen mothers, and 14 professional service providers. Processed data from all these participants indicated several factors leading to single teen motherhood, such as elements of breakdown in communication, parents' maladaptive behaviour, adolescent autonomy-seeking conflict, manipulation and intimidation of older men, and lack of trust. Multifaceted hardships associated with single teen motherhood include sleeplessness, energy loss, inadequate diet, self-defeating emotions, aimlessness, inadequacy, and limited social support networks. Solving these challenges requires the coordinated efforts of different actors, including social workers, other professionals, family members, and agents in governmental and non-governmental agencies, who can thus provide empowering interventions to teenagers and their families.

KEY TERMS: adolescence, life story interviews, lived experience, single teen motherhood, multiple factors, multifaceted hardships, Rwanda

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from adolescence to single teen motherhood is attached to multifactorial determinants, which present a unique and complex situation for single teen mothers and their families. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of single teen mothers, focusing on the multiple factors that lead to single teen motherhood and the related hardships in Gicumbi District, northern Rwanda. The processed data from 10 life story interviews and 20 semi-structured interviews provide insights into multifaceted factors and complex difficulties faced by single teen mothers. Understanding them in a specific socio-cultural context can inform policies and interventions to prevent issues and support the well-being of teen mothers and their babies. This paper comprises an introduction, background, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusion, recommendations, and implications for social work.

BACKGROUND

Teen motherhood affects approximately 12 million girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide each year (United Nations Population Fund, 2023). In their research conducted in the southern province of Rwanda, Sebananwa and Semuhoza (2021) found that, in addition to peer and social pressure, teen motherhood is caused by the careless attitude of parents and unprotected sex. Furthermore, Wood & Jewkes (2006) found that some young girls in South Africa avoid using contraception as they think they will be judged as prostitutes. Negative societal attitudes towards the use of contraceptives in Africa can deter teenagers from accessing and employing contraception, while in many Western societies, young girls are encouraged to use them (Manlove, Ryan & Franzetta, 2004). According to Wamoyi et al. (2019), young girls in Tanzania engage in sexual intercourse in exchange for gifts. Moreover, teenage motherhood is associated with socio-economic deprivation, which affects young people's educational and employment dreams, and consequently, their future opportunities will be impaired (Govender et al., 2020).

In Rwanda, the accepted context for childbearing is marriage. Rwandan society strongly encourages formal marriage as the essential context for family stability, honour, and socialisation of children to avoid child marriage (Gasirabo, 2022). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, a woman was respected if she married and gave birth to extend her husband's patrilineal line (Kantengwa, 2014). With the Rwanda law N°71/2018 of 31/08/2018 relating to the protection of the child, with the support of the youth Association for Human Rights Promotion and Development (AJPRODHO-JIJUKIRWA), created in 1997, unmarried girls who give birth are entitled to protection, while historically, they were ostracised and exiled to an isolated location.

Despite improvements in education and healthcare access, a changing economic situation, and increased awareness (Ndahiro et al., 2022), single teen motherhood rates continue to rise, along with the challenges they present (Mukashema & Sapsford, 2013). Challenges such as poverty, rejection, school dropout, and family conflicts are intertwined and affect single teen mothers in one way or another. While other studies on teen motherhood exist (Twagirayezu et al, 2024; Umumamarungu & Bazubagira, 2023), this study seeks to build on the extant knowledge by further identifying the unique factors of single teen motherhood and the related challenges in Gicumbi District, northern Rwanda. As part of a PhD project, this study aims to inform stakeholders about sustainable interventions for eradicating single teen motherhood. More specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What are the unique factors that contribute to the continued prevalence of single teen motherhood in the study area? (2) How do single teen mothers' hardships manifest in the lives of targeted single teen mothers?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was inspired by the Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasises collective responsibility, social solidarity, and care in addressing challenges (Twikirize et al., 2023; Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). The status of single teen motherhood is related to the quality of social networks that young mothers hold within either the family or the community. The practice of Ubuntu at micro, mezzo, and macro levels could arguably prevent early motherhood and equip young girls with knowledge to make healthy decisions.

On the other hand, failing to uphold Ubuntu philosophy may weaken social support systems and be one contributing factor to the increase in single teen motherhood. One could argue that Ubuntu would enable single teen mothers to develop a stronger sense of responsibility and self-confidence to assume new roles as mothers, as well as a sense of self as adolescents, through the support of different role players in their social networks. This understanding of Ubuntu is related to another theoretical concept informing this study, motherism. Reflecting the foundation of African womanhood, rooted in cooperation, complementarity, and safeguarding of lives (Acholonu, 1995), the notion of motherism offers an Afrocentric alternative to Western feminist ideals and identities. Early motherhood is related not only to biological roles, but also to spiritual and social dimensions that embody a particular femininity in which love, perseverance, resilience, selfhood and the process of nurturing life are at the centre (Ashaolun, 2021). This suggests that the transition from adolescence to motherhood is not merely a personal challenge but a process involving interdependent factors that incorporate ubuntu values.

METHODOLOGY

The data in this study draws on qualitative research conducted in Byumba, Cyumba, Kageyo, Manyagi, Rukomo, Rutare, and Shangasha Sectors of the study area. Authorised by the Directorate of Research and Innovation with ethical clearance number 13/CASS-DRI/2023, along with an introduction letter to conduct field research number 168/PO/2023 and authorisation for data collection from the Mayor of the target district, number 950/07/04/05/01, a four-month field work started. All participants signed clear and comprehensive informed consent forms. We used purposive sampling to intentionally select 10 single teen mothers, six mothers of single teen mothers and 14 professional service providers to achieve data saturation. Finally, the findings were shared with the participants in person or by phone to get direct feedback for the final report. Life story interviews were conducted with single teen mothers, and semi-structured interviews were held with mothers and professional service providers. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. After completing the interviews recorded in Kinyarwanda, we coded the data across transcription and translation in English. We reviewed the data to analyse it using thematic analysis, sorting out the content and categorising themes and patterns that required further attention. Afterwards, similar ideas were grouped under the main themes and subthemes for clarification. We then explored the relationships between themes concerning the factors and effects of teen motherhood. Additionally, we employed narratives in data reporting, capturing and interpreting direct quotes from participants. To reinforce anonymity, we used pseudonyms for all participants. We used Rita, Keza, Kwini, Rwiru, Bella, Sheja, Marie, Briella, Shenge and Bazizane for single teen mothers; Ansille, Bavugirije, Beatrice, Donata, Kankwanzi, and Mukarubibi for mothers of single teen mothers. For service providers, we used Agnes, Berthe, Haguma, Helene, Hirwa, Celestin, Janvier, Kamali, Karangwa, Mukankwaya, Mukankwiro, Ntuyenabo, Pascal, and Pricille.

FINDINGS

Two themes emerged during the data analysis. The first theme is named “factors of single teen motherhood. It comprises six subthemes, such as communication breakdown, parental misconduct, adolescent autonomy-seeking, power imbalance relationships, manipulation and intimidation of older men, and lack of trust. The second theme, named challenges of single teen motherhood, comprises six subthemes: sleeplessness and energy loss, inadequate diet, limited social support networks, feelings of aimlessness, self-defeating, and inadequacy.

Findings from life story interviews

The findings from single teen mothers are presented under two themes: conditions leading to early motherhood and the transition to motherhood, both supported by narratives.

Factors of single teen motherhood

Teen motherhood results from various factors. The ten single teen mothers involved in life story interviews presented aggressive communication at home, misconduct of parents, liberty misuse, manipulation and intimidation of older men, and lack of trust as conditions that led them to early motherhood. In fact, all these factors are intertwined and can influence teen mothers in various ways. Some teen mothers’ families live in tensions where domestic violence and alcohol abuse create stressful home environments that push young girls to look for refuge and affection outside. For instance, Bazizane, who was 16 years old during delivery, stressed this:

My father is always drunk, even when we do not have at least beans or potatoes at home. ...He does not care...It is a war when he arrives at home. If I have this baby, it is because of him, who refused to give me shoes, and Peter [not his real name], who used to provide me with some money, finally induced me to sin (Bazizane).

Some adolescent girls are seduced, coerced or intimidated by mature men (sugar daddies) who make promises, and in the end, they feel betrayed after giving birth. These are older men who are wealthy enough to provide financial or material support or other gifts to young girls in exchange for sex (Hoss & Blokland, 2018). Alternatively, when a young girl has sexually active peers, they can induce her into intimate relationships as they can with relatives adopted into their family.

I will never forgive Kami [not his real name], who initiated me into sexual intercourse, promising to marry me when I grew up. He used to tell me [tears in her eye]: “I am ready to change your life; I will even build a house for your mother and make you a happy and wealthy woman” (Briella).

The baby’s father is my uncle, who lived at home. He initiated me into sex and told me he would kill me when I revealed it (Rita).

Others engage in sexual intercourse as an attempt to assert their independence in response to authoritarian or neglectful parents. Furthermore, single teen mothers recognise the consequences of disobeying their parents’ advice and guidance. Their desire for liberty leaves them vulnerable to engaging in sexual activities, which results in early motherhood.

I have seen the consequences of disobeying my mom. She used to tell me to stop the relationship with Kabera [not his real name] in vain. I loved him so much. One day, she told me: “*What you will bring here will be carried with two arms*”. After delivery, I remembered that and realised I was stupid (Kwini).

Some girls may lack trust in their parents, law enforcers, school officials, or other authorities to handle their cases sensitively and effectively, as reported by single teen mothers. In the Rwandan context, some community members avoid sexual talk and marginalise a young girl who reports sexual violence. This makes girls fearful of disclosing sexual problems on time. They keep them secret until their pregnancy is discovered, or they start to get sick very often and are then taken to the health centre for treatment. In addition, in the case of consensual intercourse, young girls decide to hide their experiences, fearing that their personal information will not be kept confidential and, once known, they will be shamed and stop their studies. Furthermore, they did not know whom to approach first or how to report, mainly due to the reasons mentioned above. The lack of trust in social support structures puts teens mothers at risk without the necessary protection and guidance because of their secrecy and fear of disclosing perpetrators and eventual difficulties.

...I did not know that they could give me drugs to avoid pregnancy... (Keza).

...how could I face my mom and tell her I did it? I remember I kept silent when taken to the health centre... (Rita)

...My father could kill me. I tried to hide my pregnancy, but finally it was discovered (Marie).

Challenges of single teen motherhood

The single teen mothers pointed out a range of physical challenges they face, highlighting how early pregnancy and childbirth bring inherent physical changes in young girlhood. This brings them to the point of how those changes increase complications during motherhood because their bodies are not yet fully developed, and this may cause medical issues such as disrupted sleep during breastfeeding, energy loss, and inadequate diet. In the following quotes, single teen mothers express sleep deprivation leading to physical exhaustion, which affects day-to-day activities. Again, the physical decline is linked to their inability to eat when hungry.

...my child cried the whole night and slept from morning to evening. He was disturbing. I became sleepy during the day, and my mother started to nag at me, saying I must avoid laziness (Rwiru).

I felt hungry at midnight but could not get out to eat as I could no longer help my mother cultivate. I am telling you.....I lost weight because of sleepless nights and my baby's crying. (Shenge).

Single teen mothers clarified that the journey of single teen motherhood is not only a physical challenge but also significantly impacts psychological and emotional struggles. They illuminated the feelings of aimlessness, self-defeat, and inadequacy as unique stressors and emotional difficulties associated with the premature parenting responsibilities and the ongoing developmental changes. Moreover, they felt judged by their peers, family, and community, which led to low self-confidence. In addition, an unexpected transition to parenthood caused feelings of stress and overwhelm, as they may not have had the opportunity to develop coping mechanisms or a solid sense of self-identity before assuming the role of a parent.

I made a mistake. My sin has impaired my future. I could say no, but I did not. I failed to remain strong. I caused shame to my parents. I felt that it was the end of my life, yet I was still alive (Bella).

I realized that my life would never be enjoyable. Hanging out with my friends gradually stopped; ...it was shameful to meet the person I knew. I no longer belonged to their world... (Sheja).

Based on the factors and challenges highlighted by single teen mothers, this study addresses research questions.

Findings from semi-structured interviews

Theme one: Single teen motherhood factors

This theme is discussed in the following subthemes:

Subtheme 1: Communication breakdown

In this study context, communication breakdown means that single teen mothers missed a safe place for their comfort and informative discussions about changes occurring in adolescence, sexuality, contraception and good relationships. As reported by professional service providers, some parents have limited time to converse with their children or may become aggressive toward their daughters when they reach adolescence. Similarly, instead of taking responsibility for and caring for their teenage daughters, some fathers consider older daughters to be wives who must leave their families. This is evident in the following statements:

A man said he did not want two wives at home when his daughter was 16. When drunk, he used to chase out his wife and his older daughter at midnight, shouting that he was not polygamous to have two wives (Janvier).

Some parents are aggressive and addicted to alcohol, which causes family dysfunction. In this situation, the victims can experience risks, especially young girls who can go away or look for affection elsewhere at the expense of teen motherhood (Karangwa).

Parents are busy looking for survival means; others are in conflict and they are not able to give time to family members for assertive communication (Hirwa).

Subtheme 2: Parental maladaptive behaviour

Professional service providers explained that parents' irresponsibility, neglect, and misbehaviour constitute significant causes of teen motherhood. They emphasised that some parents fail to care for their children, who feel rejected and neglected by one or both parents. The factors behind this are alcohol addiction, neglecting children's needs or creating stressful living conditions at home. In addition, when parents misbehave, and young girls are aware of family members (mothers, grandmothers, aunts, siblings, and cousins) who experienced out-of-wedlock birth, they can be easily and quickly attempted.

Drunkness affects many families here. Some parents cannot leave alcohol for at least one day. When it is a father, sometimes he chases out family members at midnight (Agnes).

...teen motherhood used to occur in families that cannot set life goals and where planning for the future had been compromised by unhealthy relationships (Haguma).

Based on his 11 years of experience working with families, Haguma stressed that when parents misbehave or mismanage family properties, their daughters are more likely to give birth early. Furthermore, some young girls exposed to misbehaving parents or relatives lack proper discipline and guidance, which induces them to unhealthy behaviours and perceptions. Again, when family members such as mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, and siblings have experienced early childbearing, young girls may perceive the situation as normal or inevitable and then find themselves in similar situations. The following quotes testify to this:

...I cannot blame my daughter. Since childhood, she used to ask me to introduce her to her father, but he has another wife... I kept quiet (Mukarubibi).

... It is like inheritance. In this sector, there is a family whose three daughters became single mothers while still at school. Their mother is a drunkard, and she refused to change (Pricille).

Subtheme 3: Adolescent autonomy-seeking conflict

Professional service providers indicated that some teen mothers disobey their parents, believing they have the right to enjoy their lives, and ultimately become mothers. Most of the time, they struggle to assert independence and make their choices by seeking life experiences. Their desire for liberty leaves them vulnerable to engaging in sexual activities, which has resulted in early motherhood. In addition, mothers of single teen mothers highlighted that adolescent girls who fail to accept their family's poor conditions and who are not equipped with refusal skills are likely to accept advice and manipulation from adult men, hoping to have their conditions improved. This vulnerability can lead them to risky behaviours in various ways, ultimately resulting in teen motherhood.

This girl was too challenging to handle. She was engaged with her friends, day and night and could not even fetch water. I saw her in a car with a young man I did not know, and when I asked her about him and where she got money for transport, she stayed silent. He is the one who impregnated her (Beatrice).

...managing adolescents is not easy. They are challenging, and parents end up opposing them instead of guiding them...(Pascal).

...I have a daughter of 16 years old; I know how it cost me to reach a consensus...(Helene)

Sub-theme 4: Manipulation and intimidation of older men

Professional service providers stressed that teenage girls in relationships with experienced or older partners may feel uncomfortable discussing sexual issues or become manipulated emotionally, thinking that having sex will keep their relationship intact. Older partners are also able to dominate the discussion in the case of teenage girls negotiating safe sex or using condoms, mainly when they used to offer them some gifts or force them to have sex. This makes teenage girls vulnerable to the manipulation and intimidation of older men and relatives, leading to early teen motherhood.

Teen mothers are still young and vulnerable to men in romantic relationships with them. Sometimes, they have sex unwillingly because they are neither able to make decisions about safe sex nor refuse categorically (Kamali).

One girl told me how the older man intimidated her into doing it the first time, and then, after that, he offered her some money to buy new clothes. Finally, she got pregnant, and she was denied disclosing the man who impregnated her, fearing he could kill her (Mukankwiro).

It is beyond my understanding. My own brother to impregnate my daughter [shaking the head] ... Preventing my daughter from telling me. I would do something... (Bavugirije).

Theme 2: Experienced hardships

The discussion above highlights the multiple factors contributing to single teen motherhood, which are unique to this study. Consequently, participants demonstrated how premature parenthood causes unique challenges to single teen mothers due to the heavy responsibilities during a formative age. In addition to challenges identified by previous researchers, this study found sleeplessness, energy loss, and limited social support networks.

Subtheme 1: Sleeplessness and energy loss

The mothers of single teen mothers pointed out a range of physical challenges single teen mothers face, highlighting how childbirth brings inherent physical changes in young girlhood. This brings them to the point of how those changes increase complications during parenting because their body is not yet fully developed, and this may cause health issues such as disrupted sleep during night breastfeeding, and energy loss. Sleep deprivation leads to physical exhaustion, which affects day-to-day activities. Again, the physical decline is linked to her inability to eat when hungry because of food shortage.

My daughter became lazy; she stayed in bed, and I went to cultivate alone, which made me angry (Ansille).

Feeding 10 people daily without being a government employee is difficult. Crops are no longer enough. Things have changed... (Kankwanzi).

These quotes corroborate the views of professional service providers who said that, in some cases, teen mothers suffer from an inadequate diet due to family poverty. They are given some support, which is not enough to cater for all the family's needs. Therefore, they appear weak and have lost weight.

Sub-theme 2: Limited social support networks

Participants confirmed that single teen mothers face limited social support networks, which can sometimes lead to family conflicts. It became difficult for single teen mothers to keep social connections due to negative perceptions about early motherhood and social expectations in Rwandan society. The biggest issue is that this problem extends to their relationships with peers, family, and romantic partners, often leading to strained or broken connections when they need support in this challenging time. On the other hand, they are not yet able to form new, strong connections with different stakeholders due to their immaturity and self-stigma. The following quotes testify how they suffer from different people's adverse reactions to their surroundings:

Teen mothers are rejected by their relatives and friends. Negative attitudes towards them can lead to isolation, limiting their future opportunities... (Celestin).

Teen mothers are vulnerable. They are still young, and coping with their status becomes difficult. Relying on public assistance for most of their lives is not sufficient (Berthe).

My daughter refused to participate in youth meetings. She refused to attend Kamili's wedding, her cousin ... (Donata).

Some teen mothers did not return to school and are involved in agricultural activities to survive. A better future is not granted if not supported (Ntuyenabo).

Triangulation of findings

Perspectives from single teen mothers, their mothers and professional service providers indicated how a lack of positive communication at home is the leading cause of single teen motherhood. Coupled with parental misconduct, adolescent autonomy-seeking, and the sugar daddy phenomenon, they make teen mothers vulnerable to forced or risky sexual intercourse. Single teen mothers described the parents' misbehaviours, such as domestic violence, alcohol addiction, neglect and irresponsibility, as conditions that induced them to accept men's manipulation and exploitation at the expense of early motherhood. They also regret the misuse of their liberty for disobeying their parents' orders. The unique factor for single teen mothers is a lack of trust, preventing them from seeking guidance and relief in time. Their mothers and service providers expressed the same factors, but pointed out the lack of role models, as some parents or relatives had had childbirth out of wedlock.

Consequently, all participants agreed on sleeplessness, energy loss, and inadequate diet as challenges associated with single teen motherhood. In addition to this, single teen mothers highlighted feelings of aimlessness, self-defeating and inadequacy, which repeatedly came to mind. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviewees pointed out limited social networks due to some people who distance themselves from teen mothers or have negative attitudes towards them. In contrast, single teen mothers often become or remain shy and strain their social networks to prevent everyone from knowing their status.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the factors and hardships of single teen mothers in Gicumbi District of Rwanda. The overarching themes that emerged from the data include factors and challenges of single teen motherhood. The first theme comprises subthemes, such as communication breakdown, parental misconduct, adolescent autonomy-seeking, manipulation and intimidation of older men, and lack of trust. The second theme comprises sleeplessness and energy loss, limited social support networks, feelings of aimlessness and self-defeating.

The findings revealed that the factors and challenges of single teen motherhood are intertwined and mutually influence each other. Even if single teen mothers do not experience them to the same extent, they confirmed having endured all of the hardships, despite different causes. The reality behind this situation aligns with Kuronen et al. (2021), who recognised that vulnerability is not static but contextual, multidimensional, and adaptable over time and place.

One of the key findings about factors of single teen motherhood identified by all participants is communication breakdown based mainly on the maladaptive behaviour of one or both parents. For instance, single teen mothers accused mainly their fathers of spending money in bars to the detriment of providing them with family necessities. Based on this, family communication suffers, and some parents do not provide proper supervision and guidance to their teens, who become vulnerable to early sexual intercourse, leading to teen motherhood. This demonstrates that the practice of Ubuntu values (responsibility, compassion, respect, sharing, forgiveness, and justice) may be affected while one's wellness depends on the quality of others' involvement (Chitando et al., 2025).

From the same perspective, causes of unwanted pregnancies highlighted by former studies (Coast et al., 2021; Kagabika & Irabona, 2021) include the age and experience of teens, poverty, adverse family relationships, ignorance in reproductive health, influence of social media, and peer pressure. Some coincide with those of this current study, even if it was conducted in different socio-economic contexts. More importantly, we note the independence of the factors associated with teen motherhood. For instance, poor living conditions can make parents very busy, as can wealth. Both can create either aggressive communication at home or an enjoyable life. therefore, single teen motherhood can occur to

In addition to the causes discussed above, adolescent autonomy-seeking conflict, manipulation and intimidation of older men, and lack of trust are factors reported by participants. Similarly, when the socialisation process and the value internalisation from essential persons in single teen mothers' social circles, such as parents, peers, adults, teachers, relatives and religious leaders, are not well done, young girls are likely to have a child early and undergo related challenges (Padilla-Walker, 2018; Leung & Lin, 2019). This corroborates findings of Mpondo et al. (2018) who observed that, in rural South African communities, parents and schools' talks about sex remain instructive rather than educational, leaving young girls with incomplete information on other factors influencing risky sexual behaviours. However, this is not always the case because teen motherhood can occur in those who benefited from adequate sexual education and parental care due to the developmental tasks in the adolescent phase (Hedo, 2020). Adolescent girls may be unable to control impulsive feelings due to

neurobiological changes and persistent peer pressure (Steinberg, 2008) and engage in sexual intercourse with peers or older men. Even if social systems, primarily the family, must meet the psychosocial and material needs of young girls to effectively practice the principles and values of Ubuntu philosophy (Erlank, 2025), this does not guarantee the prevention of early motherhood.

On the other hand, processed findings revealed that single teen motherhood is related to several hardships, including sleeplessness, energy loss, inadequate diet, self-defeating emotions, aimlessness, and limited social support networks. These challenges interact and ultimately undermine the potential of single teen mothers today and in the future (Mukashema & Sapsford, 2013; Coast et al., 2021; Kagabika & Irabona, 2020). All the factors and hardships mentioned above are intertwined, and each single teen mother experienced more than two of them. This indicates the interdependent factors within the study area, which, in turn, influence teen mothers' decisions (Govender et al., 2020). In addition, values of Ubuntu, such as mutual care, compassion, and collective responsibility, were not fully enacted by families, schools, friends, and the community in safeguarding single teen mothers from early motherhood.

Being socially constructed, early motherhood can reinforce the Ubuntu values mentioned above, enabling single teen mothers to assume related roles with the support of those around them. It can be an opportunity for some teen mothers to cultivate their strengths with engagement of social systems that reclaim and actively uphold Ubuntu-based practices to support them. Despite the anticipated challenges of early motherhood (Pillay, 2021), single teen mothers persevered in caring for their babies and accepted the responsibilities of motherhood. While others may see early motherhood as a social failure, motherism highlights teen mothers' strengths and resilience, which demonstrate the commitment, hard work, and sacrifice required of all mothers (Ngafeeson, 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Based on the findings, this study provides a basis for relevant interventions by different stakeholders. They inform the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and its stakeholders about the unique factors and consequences of single teen motherhood, enabling it to put in place preventive policies that strengthen family functioning and law enforcement against sexual exploitation. Educational institutions should reinforce youth capacity through curricula on adolescent development, reproductive health, and sexual life skills. Schools should open children's minds to their rights and responsibilities to avoid violence and manipulation by adults. Social workers should raise awareness about the causes and effects of single teen motherhood. They should design and implement strategic interventions across different levels of social work practice to achieve sustainable solutions. They can create safe environments where single teen mothers can make health decisions and take control of their destinies in light of Ubuntu values practised by everyone.

CONCLUSION

This study provides insights into the conditions contributing to the prevalence of single teen motherhood in the target district of Rwanda. It also sheds light on unique challenges that single teen mothers face in terms of health risks, negative feelings affecting their psycho-social life and limited economic means to have an enjoyable life. The findings of this study highlight that early motherhood is a shared responsibility among single teen mothers, their family members, peers, mature men, and social institutions, emphasising the need for care from Ubuntu perspective to prevent and support teenagers. Recognising the needs of young girls and responding to them with attention and full consideration would minimise the prevalence of early motherhood, ensuring long-term support outcomes for various stakeholders.

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