

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE MOTION TABLED BY HON. ELMA
DIENDA
ON THE HIGH RATE OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN NAMIBIA**

By: Honourable Clara //Gowases

27 September 2017

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Members

I rise to make a contribution to the Motion on the High Rate of Teenage Pregnancy in Namibia tabled by Honourable Elma Dienda.

Let me first begin by thanking Hon. Dienda for such a well-researched, insightful and informative motion. The situation around teenage pregnancy has changed its form and shape. With the slow and gradual disappearance of moral values in our society, the way our families and communities react to teen pregnancies today is completely different from the way it was handled in the past.

Teenage Pregnancy is not a new ^{phenomenon} phenomenon. Even in our days as young girls, this ^{phenomenon} phenomenon was common and you could even say expected, because back then we did not easily have access to sex education nor could we easily access hospitals and clinics to receive sexual health reproductive services.

Fortunately, during the time of our youth, the dangers associated with teenage pregnancy were confined to treatable sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Today, however, many young people indulge in unprotected sex which puts them at risks of not only falling pregnant and contracting treatable STI's but also HIV/AIDS. The sad part is that those impregnating our young girls are not only their peers, but older men too (teachers, neighbours and relatives etc.). Those who are now impregnating young girls are much older community members...community members who in the past had provided a safe haven for our young girls. This is why I say the face of teenage pregnancy and our society has changed. The protectors of old are now preying on our adolescent girls, further compounding this problem.

These grown men entice these young girls with money and gifts and even offer them monetary rewards for their parents. It is truly sad that there are parents who have also become ^{or} accomplices in this scourge. We have heard of and read reports of adolescent girls, as young as 12 years old, being violated impregnated by men as old as 70 years. Men who their parents had left them with, mistakenly believing that their daughters were safe in the company of community elders. Yes, teenage girls and boys must also take responsibility for impregnating each other; but there are also too many cases of grown men using money or violence to prey on young girls.

Many cases of this nature, which are criminal acts that may amount to statutory rape, have gone unreported because either parents are offered monetary compensation or are completely not aware of their rights to report such cases to the relevant law enforcement agencies. Shame on these men, who continue to take advantage of young girls and destroy their future in the process!!

Honourable Speaker

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Today's young people, unlike us during our era, have access to much more information on sexual reproductive health. Most of our young people, through their cell phones, school curriculums, peers and health facilities have information and are able to access almost any information pertaining to all the different contraceptive methods. When you look through some of the school text books on life science and life skills these subjects are covered extensively. The problem is therefore not access to information on sexual health or getting hold of condoms, which are freely distributed in schools and hospitals. Yet, why do our young people continue to fall pregnant at such a high rate? This must surely tell us that there is a much more sinister and bigger problem which needs to be identified and addressed urgently. It is fundamental that we get to the crux of the problem, because as long as we continue to treat the symptoms and not the causes, like Hon. Dienda said, the problem of teenage pregnancies will persist and even get worse.

The impacts of Teen Pregnancy are that the:

- Burden of care for the baby rests on mothers, aunties, grandmothers and care takers, and not the mother;

- The mother loses touch with her friends and peers, she becomes more and more isolated;
- Many times the baby's father disappears, leaving the teen girl to be a single mother from day 1;
- The teen mom's ability to gain an education is severely reduced; and
- It is very difficult for the teen mom to provide a safe and stable home environment for the child.

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In as far as the impact of the "Revised Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy": whilst I agree that learners who fall pregnant need to be supported to go back to school, I will also agree with the principle that the policy (maybe accidentally) encourages teenage girls to fall pregnant.

Back when I was young, it was a shame to fall pregnant whilst in school. When you became pregnant you were ashamed and you felt it - you disappointed your parents and society.

But today there is no shame at all. Young pregnant girls parade themselves freely in the school halls and others feel there is nothing morally wrong with falling pregnant in school.

Times have changed and the problems facing our young girls are enormous. As a nation we have to do some introspection in an effort to uncover the roots causes fueling the high Teenage Pregnancy rate in our Country. With these few words, I wholeheartedly support this Motion.

I thank you.