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“Because their feet also used to be swollen... For those people their feet don't use to fit in the shoes, so they used to tease them.”

- A qualitative study on the experience of being a pregnant teenager and young mother in Rundu, Namibia.

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Supervisor: Elsebeth Fog

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## ABSTRACT

Title: “Because their feet also use to be swollen... For those people their feet don’t use to fit in the shoes, so they used to tease them” - A qualitative study on the experience of being a pregnant teenager and young mother in Rundu, Namibia.

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Namibia, as most countries on the African continent, is facing a high rate of teenage pregnancies. It is one of the biggest social issues challenging contemporary society, contributing to social problems such as illegal abortions, baby dumping and suicide attempts. The aim of this bachelor thesis is to focus on young women and their experiences of being pregnant teenagers and young mothers. During this research process young mothers have elaborated on their own life situation discussing ideas that could have helped them during the pregnancy. They also give ideas on what could be helpful for them today. The research also pays attention to the attitudes that the young mothers face in their communities. The town where this research was carried out, Rundu, is situated in the Kavango region, which has the far highest rate of teenage pregnancies in the country. This is a qualitative research and data was collected through daily observations, conversations and semi-structured interviews. In the understanding of my results, I have used gender theory, social exclusion, social construction, stigmatisation and an intersectional perspective.

According to the results six of my seven respondents were struggling during pregnancy and still do today. They struggle/struggled mainly due to lack of resources and money as well as not having enough people helping them taking care of the baby. Most of the young women left school at an early stage of the pregnancy. This either because school policies would not let them proceed or because school uniforms and shoes were getting too small. Attitudes present and the discourse on pregnant teenagers among young and old people in Rundu prevented some of the pregnant girls from taking part of a social life. They got blamed for falling pregnant. Some of them were feeling very ashamed over their condition and started living more isolated lives, not going in to town anymore and thereby missing health controls at the hospital.

**Key words:** Namibia, teenage pregnancy, teenage mothers, social exclusion, stigma, intersectionality, peer pressure

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Jonna Samuelsson  
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Concordia farm, Namibia

*Stop the cry, speak up and make yourself heard  
create in your mind  
the biggest world  
live your life, the greatest jewel*

- Jacqueline Smit  
From *The choice*, p. 47





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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### **THE INTERVIEW FORMULA**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The north-eastern Kavango region has by far the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Namibia (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008). This is not a new social issue for the region, research on teenage pregnancy and school drop-outs in Kavango can be found dated already 1993 (Nilsson, 1993). Girls from ten to nineteen years old are found in the statistics but the majority of the girls who fall pregnant are between fifteen and nineteen years old. According to hospital data from the region a total of 6 213 girls have fallen pregnant since 2010 (The Villager: 23-29 July 2012). The 2012 first term showed 978 female dropouts due to pregnancy between January and April (New Era: 2012-07-16) of which 936 were between the ages of fifteen to nineteen and 42 under fifteen years. This equals 34% of the national teenage pregnancies total figure (The Villager: 23-29 July 2012). Among peer pressure, lack of proper sexual education and adult guidance, so called sugar daddies and sexual relationships between female learners and male teachers, containing unequal power structures, are contributing factors to teenage pregnancy. Young women fail to negotiate safe sex and the usage of contraceptives either because they lack the knowledge or because they are oppressed in the situation where sex occurs. Available research fails to pinpoint reasons for the high rates in Kavango and pregnant teenagers remains an unsolved social issue for the region contributing to suicide attempts, self made abortions and baby dumping (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008). A high rate of teenage pregnancies also means a lot of young mothers. This study will focus on young mothers and their experiences of being pregnant and having children at a young age. I will bring forward ideas on how communities can support young mothers and prevent social exclusion by looking at the challenges pregnant teenagers were facing in their past during pregnancy as well as today as young mothers. I will especially focus on the young women's perception on the attitudes of other community members and whether that affects their image of themselves as individuals as well as mothers.

## **2. AIM AND PURPOSE**

This study focuses on experiences of being a pregnant teenager and young mother in Rundu, Namibia. By letting seven young mothers look back and elaborate on the pregnancy and their situation today, I hope to be able to map out what challenges these young women are facing in these two different phases. I will also focus on the young mothers perceptions of the attitudes of other community members. Do they have an impact on how the young women view themselves and their future possibilities? The aim of this research process is to understand how social exclusion could be prevented. Based on my findings I will present ideas on how the community can support pregnant girls and young mothers as well as how to fight against social problems that arise from their situation.

### **2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What challenges are pregnant girls in Rundu facing?
- What challenges are young mothers in Rundu facing?
- How do pregnant girls and teenage mothers experience and perceive attitudes from the community in Rundu?
- In what ways do they feel that the attitudes are affecting them in the way they perceive themselves as individuals and young mothers?
- What kind of support could have helped them during their time of pregnancy and what support do they need today?

### **2.2. RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY IN SWEDEN**

15 million teenage girls are giving birth every year worldwide. England is the country with the far high rate of teen pregnancies in the world. Sweden has a low rate with 2 % of all teenage births (Hertfelt, Wahn & Nissen in Tryggvason, 2006). This might be because abort is every woman's right in Sweden and it is also free of charge for women under twenty years (UMO, 2012). This study is relevant for the field of social work and social pedagogy because young mothers and their children are and have historically been considered a group at risk. Social reports in Sweden state that children to young mothers have a lower life quality than other children and that they are a group exposed to poverty, which is affecting them negatively in a number of ways. Further on, pregnant teenagers are in danger of developing drug abuse, mental illness or commit suicide (Tryggvason, 2006). They are also more likely to experience difficult life situations than others later in life (Olausson in Tryggvason, 2006).

Knowledge on how different cultures view social problems is important for the field of social work. Sweden is a country with 9,3 million people and 20 % of the population is born to non-ethnic Swedish parents (Hallerstedt, 2009). This means that social workers in Sweden have clients from a range of different countries representing different cultures. Perspectives on social problems are crucial in the understanding of our clients that come from elsewhere.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1. PERSONAL RELATION TO NAMIBIA AND INTEREST IN THE TOPIC TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

During my time of studies on the social pedagogy program at University West I was accepted to participate in a student exchange between the University West in Sweden and the University of Namibia (UNAM) in Namibia. This is an exchange program sponsored by the Swedish Linneus Palme foundation. I was enrolled at UNAM the spring semester of 2011 and came to study with the third year social work class. After the exchange semester I stayed in Namibia for 15 weeks of internship that are a part of my bachelor program. During this time I was based at the Namibia Red Cross Society (NRCS) in Rundu, Kavango region. The experiences that I have had during my ten months in Namibia have given me a perception on how things work in the country. I have learned about cultures and languages, I have come to know a lot of people. This has been valuable for this research. I became interested in the topic teenage pregnancy during my stay in Namibia. In the social work class at UNAM we used to discuss it as one of the big social issues challenging contemporary society and the field of social work and the Kavango region was always mentioned as the region with the highest rate. With time I realised that many of my fellow students also had children and that most of them got them at a young age. But only when I came to Rundu did I get exposed to the real picture and realised what impact the pregnancies had on the teenage girls, many of them struggling in order to make ends meet. I witnessed how young women got blamed for taking risks, also in NGO:s where contributing factors to teenage pregnancies are well known. I started to wonder how these kind of attitudes were perceived by the young women themselves and to what extent they were affecting them. I wanted to listen to the young mothers perspective.

#### **3.2. NAMIBIA: A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE COUNTRY**

Namibia is a rather big country with an area of 825 418 square kilometres (almost twice the size of Sweden). The country is situated in the south of Africa along the western coast and borders to the Republic of South Africa in the south, Botswana in the east, Zambia in the northeast, and Angola in the north. Namibia consists out of thirteen (13) regions. The population measured just over 2,2 million people in 2010. An approximate of 37 percent lives in the cities, while the vast majority stays on the countrysides. The capital city, Windhoek, is situated in the middle of the country and had an estimated population size of 316 000 people in 2010 (Landguiden, 2012). The Namibian population consists out of many different ethnic

groups, traditionally populating different regions of the country (Malan, 2004). Due to urbanisation and unemployment, however, people are nowadays relocating a lot and people from all the different ethnic groups, or tribes, can be found in most of the regions. The biggest ethnic group is the Owambo<sup>1</sup>, which accounts for 49,8% of the population. The area in the far north called Ovamboland is the homeland for the Owambo people. The Owambo consists out of eight (8) tribes, all with their own spoken dialects of oshiwambo (Malan, 2004). The Owambo are followed by the people of the Kavango, measuring 9,3% of the population. The Kavangos are divided into five (5) different tribes. The rest of the Namibian ethnic groups are Damara (7,5%), Herero (7,5%), Whites (6,4%), Nama (4,8%), Coloureds (4,1%), Caprivians (3,7%), San (2,9%), Rehoboth Basters (2,5%), Tswana (0,6%) and Other (0,9%) (Malan, 2004). The different tribes all have their own languages, cultural beliefs as well as practices and norms that are shaping Namibia into a country rich of cultural diversity. Namibia has good resource of minerals and fish, which together with large-scale cattle breeding is making up the base of the country's economy, exporting a great deal. Namibia is internationally classified as a middle-income country. At the same time, the income distribution within the country is considered the most unequal in the world, with the vast majority of the population not being at all part of the formal economy. Most of the people make a living out of subsistence farming. Unemployment rates are very high in Namibia and constitute one of the countries biggest social and economical problems with an estimate of half the countries manpower being unemployed in 2010 (Landguiden, 2012). The far biggest challenge for the country however is the high HIV/AIDS rate; currently every fifth adult is carrying the virus (Sveriges Ambassad, 2012).

### **3.3. THE KAVANGO REGION AND RUNDU**

The Kavango region is situated in the north-eastern part of Namibia and borders with Angola in the north. The Kavango is 43 417 square kilometres in extent and is characterised by a very flat land, with the Kavango river being the dominant physical feature of the region. The people of the Kavango consist out of five politically distinct tribal groups, all having their own language and traditional cultural customs and beliefs. These are the Kwangali, Mbukushu, Gciriku, Shambiu and Mbunza. The people of the Kavango are originally riverine people, living along the banks of the river where they practice a subsistence economy,

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<sup>1</sup> In the result chapter, I will use the term *vambo*, which is the common name for the people of this tribe and also how they call themselves. The same applies for Ovamboland, which is better known as *Vamboland*.

cultivating, hunting and fishing (Malan, 2004). Rundu is the biggest town in the Kavango Region and is considered the capital. Population wise it is the second biggest city in Namibia following the capital city Windhoek. Long periods of civil war in the bordering country Angola in the north has resulted in an increase in the population (Rundu City, 2012) measuring about 81 500 people in 2010 (Landguiden, 2012). The Kavango is the fourth poorest region in Namibia (New Era: 2012-04-12) and after the far eastern Caprivi region it has the second highest HIV/AIDS rate in the country with an estimated 23,2% infected (The Villager: 23-29 July 2012).

### **3.4. NAMIBIA: PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE AND TRADITION**

South West Africa (later Namibia) was colonised by Germany in 1885. In 1904 as people tried to protest against the colonisers the Herero and Nama tribes mainly were faced with a brutal genocide. After World War II Namibia became a South African protectorate. During the apartheid era in South Africa apartheid laws were also implemented in Namibia, creating an every day reality with different rights for blacks, whites and coloured<sup>2</sup>. After a long struggle for freedom by the resistance movement SWAPO (the South West Africa People's Organization), Namibia gained independence in 1990, as the last African country (Landguiden, 2012). Culture is defined as learned behaviour in any given society, big or small. Culture includes beliefs, habits, norms, values and ideas. These are being transferred from one generation to the next usually within family settings. In Namibia, historical processes including the time of colonisation, the apartheid era, and Independence have resulted in the creation of a hybrid society. After independence people had to negotiate between local and global in the creation of norms and values representing the new Namibia. Exile Namibians brought back new ways and migrants from other parts of the world also contributed to changes in the Namibian society (Hailonga-van Dijk in Lafont & Hubbard, 2007). At the same time, traditional cultural beliefs and customs within the different ethnic groups were and still are strongly integrated into everyday life of the people. They remain crucial and important (Lafont in Lafont and Hubbard, 2007). In the globalised world of today with economics being the over all important factor, the flows of goods, labour markets and information is bringing American and European cultural values into Namibian society, creating a new situation whereby culture again has to be negotiated between local and global

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<sup>2</sup> In Namibia the terms *black*, *white* and *coloured* are frequently used in an informal manner in order to describe the skin colour of people.

in an ongoing process. Hailonga-van Dijk concludes that a hybridised tradition has developed in Namibia, containing elements of indigenous, colonial, Christian and foreign cultures (Hailonga van Dijk in Lafont and Hubbard, 2007). My own observations during my time of study with the social work program at the University of Namibia gave me an understanding of this hybridised society that Hailonga-van Dijk is referring to. While many of my fellow students were living modern student lives and being quiet liberal in their views, the often very conservative norms and values from the village, their *culture*, were always present and had to be negotiated somehow. Also when they were making fun of their culture and claiming it to be backwards, I understood that somehow deep down at least some of them found it hard to actually go against culture. Culture and cultural beliefs were ever present in classroom discussions and as I perceived it many of my fellow students were parts of two worlds; the modern student life in the capital city and the more primitive and traditional life back in the village. These two worlds however were seldom compared or put against each other. Instead they exist side by side being different parts of life. Lafont describes a similar situation, claiming that human rights discourse is often in conflict with the 'new' Namibian national identity and morality. There is a desire especially among young people to be modern, politically correct and Namibian, but at times it has not been easy to settle these values and integrate them within national identity and statehood. The idea that human rights include gender equality and sexual rights conflict with some perceptions of Namibian 'traditional' values (Lafont in Lafont and Hubbard, 2007).

#### **4. GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN A NAMIBIAN CONTEXT**

This chapter presents some previous Namibian research on the topics *gender* and *sexuality*.

While a person's sex is fixed, gender is not. Several authors argue that gender is socially constructed and further emphasise that gender is not mainly forming identities but that it also becomes a powerful factor in social relations and interaction between people (e.g. Ipinge, Phiri & Njabili, 2000). To understand how gender and sexuality is constructed in Namibia and in Rundu it is necessary to look at historical processes and the impact of traditional cultural norms and values. At the same time Namibia is a diverse country and while traditional culture and norms no longer seem to play major roles in the lives of those living in bigger cities, it still remains important and crucial for life in the villages on the countryside. When it comes to gender and sexuality there are three major dimensions, which has taken big part in shaping the conditions of the Namibian people of today. These are *colonisation*, *Christianity* and *culture* (various local ideologies and customs) (Lafont in Lafont & Hubbard: 2007). Colonialism had a huge impact on forming Namibian gender and sexual relations. In pre-colonial Namibia gender was not marking status among the people and it was common for women to hold high positions in society. During colonial rule however female leaders were not recognized as colonial officers promoted Western patriarchy. During this era women were classified as minors and could not legally vote or own land. They also needed permission from their husbands in order to enter legal contracts. It was only with the passing of the Married Persons Equality Act in 1996 that women became legally equal with their husbands. The 'marital power' of the man now legally belonged to the history although in practice the power structures are still in the power of changing. Through this however post-independence Namibian Women Movements had reached a final goal (Becker in Lafont & Hubbard). The introduction of Christianity in Namibia, primary by British missionaries in 1806 later followed by German and Finnish, (Landguiden, 2012) also had a great impact on shaping gender and sexuality. Many missionaries looked at African sexuality as something wild that needed to be controlled and a new moral order was promoted in order to achieve this. Gender and sexuality became something that should be silenced. Conservative Christian moral and values are still present and continues to play a huge roll when it comes to perceptions and practices about gender and sexuality in Namibia. Cultural traditional customs and beliefs survived both eras of colonisation as well as the Christian mission and are still important and present in forming everyday life. The cultural diversity and different ethnic groups however

represent different beliefs and traditions, making it impossible to talk about any national culture (Lafont in Lafont & Hubbard. 2007).

Studies on sexuality and sexual behaviour over time carried out in the northern regions of Namibia by Philippe Talavera, shows that sexuality use to be a taboo subject that would not be discussed within the family. Girls and boys would only find out about sex as they reached puberty and their body started to grow and desire. At the same time sexual games have traditionally been present during childhood for children in many of the different ethnic groups. In these games children could freely explore their sexuality. Once puberty was reached however these games would no longer be allowed as they could then result in pregnancy. Talavera's studies show that although sex was a taboo young people were well informed due to traditional customs taking place. In the north-eastern cultures of Kavango and Caprivi for example girls and young women would be introduced to adult life as their first menstruation took place, through the so called *menstruation ceremony*. They would get to stay with the grandmother for the whole period and she would start guiding the girl into the adult world of sex and marriage. In the trustful relation that would be established between the girl and the grandmother, information would pass from one generation to another and there would be opportunities for the girl to ask questions about sex (Talavera in Lafont & Hubbard, 2007).

Writings by Namibian women (IKhaxas, 2005) reveal an everyday struggle against culture, picturing the legitimacy for men to abuse women in a range of ways – in the name of culture. Most of these traditions and customs are very old but still in practice within certain groups and areas. A cultural practice that might be abusive to women is among others the *lobola*. The lobola is paid to the girl's family by the future husband and can consist out of twenty kettles, money or something else of value. It literally means that the man is buying his wife and therefore he also owns her. He is now the one who will make all decisions regarding her life, she belongs to him and her family has no say anymore (Amwaama in IKhaxas, 2005; Sister Namibia, 2010). Lobola is common in all Namibians tribes although the practice does not mean a lot to everyone anymore. For some it is just an ancient tradition that seems to live on in a more symbolic way. Conservative and unequal gender roles oppressing women within the marriage used to be the norm and although women are treated better these days, there is still a lot to wish for (Iyambo in IKhaxas, 2005). While many women of today are empowered, busy fighting for their rights and the creation of new cultures in which women will not remain

silent about abuse and oppressive treatment (!Hoakhaos and Kaunapawa Iihuhwa in IKhaxas, 2005), the patriarchal structures within most Namibian tribes remain strong and are not easy to change (Platt in IKhaxas, 2005). At the same time culture and tradition is said to be changeable, not timeless, coherent and bounded as people often may think (Becker in Lafont & Hubbard, 2007).

Panduleni Hailonga-van Dijk has explored how young Namibians perceive and form sexuality living on the edge between the “traditional” and the “modern”. She argues that young people of today are caught between these two worlds. Everyday life is exposing them to straightforward sexual norms and messages from the West and these collide with traditional norms and values that are taught by parents and the community. She shows that young people of today are considered to be well informed when it comes to sex and sexuality, taken into account the flow of information available in the globalised world. However this seems not to be the case. Discussions on sex continue to be taboo within many families in contemporary Namibian society and Hailonga-van Dijk found the sexual education in Namibian schools to be very poor if even existing (Hailonga-van Dijk in Lafont & Hubbard, 2007). My own observations however shows that there are also schools where sexual education is taking place and where special girls clubs are organised in order to empower and support female learners so that they do not end up taking risks. At the same time the fact remains that young people are sexual active (some even at a very young age) and thereby put to risk of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) especially HIV/AIDS. While customs such as the menstruation ceremony are no longer practiced because they belong to the past, some young people are left without any guidance into adulthood. The social structures that provided sexual education no longer exists (Hailonga-van Dijk in Lafont & Hubbard, 2007).

Hailonga-van Dijk further argues that according to society standards being a “good girl” equals not knowing anything about sex and to remain a virgin until you marry. Girls should not be in control of their own sexuality but rather remain passive. If the girl loses her virginity before she marries, family members see this as something very bad and she is referred to as a slut. At the same time young men are expected to be in charge of their own sexuality and having a lot of sexual partners is not seen as something bad. On the contrary, they are learning how to become experienced lovers so that they will be able to please their future wives (Hailonga-van Dijk in Sister Namibia, 2006). These findings from Hailonga-van Dijk shows that there is a wide gap between cultural expectations on girls and the actual reality for many

Namibian girls. Statistics from 2005 shows that 39 % of the 19-year olds are mothers already (Hailonga-van Dijk in Lafont and Hubbard, 2007), most of them probably not being in a relationship with the father of the child.

#### **4.1. PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN KAVANGO CULTURE**

In Kavango cultures the woman is traditionally mostly recognised through her reproductive role, she *is* a *mother*. The woman is therefore referred to as *Ngongokadi* (literally a seed bearing nut), *Sihete* (grain storage) and *Nkombe* (a traditional bag used for collecting wild fruit), all symbols of female reproduction. The task for the women is to look after the household. This means to cook and clean, fetch water, collect firewood, plough, plant and harvest. Furthermore women are expected to help out contributing to the household economy by doing craftwork, clay pots, baskets and so on. Women are responsible for making decisions in the domestic area; this could be matters regarding food or the harvest from her crop field (Kakukuru in Iipinge, Phiri & Njabili, 2000).

## **5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework for this study consists out of the following theories/concepts/perspectives: *gender theory*, *social constructions*, *social exclusion*, *stigmatisation*, and *an intersectional perspective*. These ideas are all helpful and crucial in understanding the young women's' situations. Gender theories are important because expectations on young women and young men differ a lot in Rundu. The social construction of the teenage girl, the young woman and the young mother all shape the conditions for the respondents. Stigmatising processes take place as some of the young women are being socially excluded from important institutions within society due to the fact that they are pregnant. With an intersectional perspective it becomes clear that my respondents' current situation is created due to them being inferior in different power hierarchies, such as being young women (not young men), poor (not rich), and, young (not old).

### **5.1. GENDER THEORY**

Gender has been defined in many ways and there are many theories available on the making of gender and what impact it has on the life of men and women. There are different schools of feminism, traditionally battling against each other. I have chosen to define gender the way feminist Joan Scott does: *Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes [...] gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power* (Scott in Carlsson Wetterberg, 1992, p.37). The oppression, both historical and present, of women in different societies in our world is explained through patriarchal structures and perceptions of men and women being very different (Carlsson Wetterberg, 1992).

### **5.2. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS**

We construct our reality so that it will be easier for us to understand it. When we give names to behaviour and situations we create concepts. These concepts later help us to discuss what is going on, what is happening in our lives. Ian Hacking defines *social constructions* as the idea of the concept, the idea of x, not x itself but the conception of x (Hacking, 1999). Social constructions are all the time present because everything we put a name to also contains conceptions and ideas. Further on the way we construct people and situations, what concepts we attach to them, affects the individuals involved. It will affect the conditions for these

groups through the way we perceive them but it will also affect how the individuals perceive themselves. Sooner or later they are going to join the public perception of themselves.

### **5.3. SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

John Pierson (2010) has written a book on perspectives on social exclusion and how to tackle it. To define social exclusion is controversial and it has been debated over and over. The Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion defines social exclusion as follows: *An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society, (b) he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to so participate, but is prevented from doing so by factors beyond his or her control* (ibid, p.11). They further state that individuals cannot exclude themselves. Pierson himself defines social exclusion as *a process that deprives individuals and families, groups and neighbourhoods of the resources required for participation in the social, economic and political activity of society as a whole. This process is primarily a consequence of poverty and low income, but other factors such as discrimination, low educational attainment and depleted living environment also underpin it. Through this process people are cut off for a significant period in their lives from institutions and services, social networks and developmental opportunities that the great of the majority of a society enjoys* (ibid, p.12). I agree with and will use both definitions. Depending on the of the individual's view, the society and factors that affect the individual in the society, there are different elements to blame for the occurrence of social exclusion. Ruth Levitas has identified three different discourses, which are currently present in social exclusion discussions in Great Britain. These are the redistributionist discourse (RED), the moral underclass discourse (MUD) and the social integrationist discourse (SID). RED argues that extreme inequalities in Great Britain are responsible for social exclusion and that the only way to prevent citizens from being excluded is to redistribute the wealth within society. Services needs to be available for the ones in need and through taxation this will be achieved. The RED discourse further criticise the discussion that attitudes, moral or culture of the individual plays any role in the process of being excluded from society, unlike the MUD discourse, which argues somewhat the opposite. According to the MUD discourse the excluded have themselves to blame, being engaged in antisocial behaviour such as drug abuse, crime and having children out of wedlock. Usually whole neighbourhoods or social groups are accused of this antisocial behaviour. The SID discourse focuses on paid work and the entrance to the labour market

arguing that being a part of the labour market is a way to be included into society. This discourse agrees with RED that support should be available for individuals who are training or searching for work. However they usually equal social exclusion with exclusion from the labour market (Levitas in Pierson, 2010).

#### **5.4. STIGMATISATION**

The original meaning of stigmatisation refers to the activity in ancient Greece whereby a person was marked with burns or scars in order for everyone to know that he or she had bad morals. To *stigmatise* means that we in our conscious label a person by looking at him or her as an outcast, negatively categorised. The categorisation is always a social construction attached with coded words, which constructs the individual in a certain way, as a certain kind of person. Stigmatisation is a mechanism of power that is dividing people into different groups depending on how well they meet expectations from society. Through stigmatising processes we can conclude if individuals should be seen as outcasts or normal. This way of differentiating between people is opening ways for discrimination (Avrahami, 2007).

#### **5.5. INTERSECTIONALITY**

The concept *intersectionality* is used within feminist theory in order to analyse how sociocultural hierarchies and power structures interact and create inclusion/exclusion around discursive and institutional constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation and nationality. Feminists who use the intersectional perspective argue that it is not enough to look at gender in the understanding of women's' situations, because it is not gender alone that is shaping realities for women (Lykke in Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift, 2005). The intersectional perspective stresses that power hierarchies will emerge within these different categories whereby there is always a superior and an inferior, depending on context (Lykke in Åberg, 2006). For example in most contexts the man is superior and the woman inferior, the rich is superior and the poor is inferior. If an individual is both woman and poor this means that she is inferior in two different hierarchies, which in many contexts will lead to her facing double discrimination/exclusion. The rich man, on the other hand, usually finds himself in a better position, being the holder of two superiors. These categories therefore should not be looked at isolated from one another. By using an intersectional perspective we can understand how an individual who is oppressed is facing challenges in a range of ways due to a combination of circumstances he or she cannot affect.

The concept arose from a mix of feminist theory, postcolonial theory and Black Feminism (Crenshaw 1995; Collins 1998).

## **6. TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

### **6.1. TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN AFRICA AND NAMIBIA**

Alarming rates of teenage pregnancy are present in most African countries and together with early marriage the biggest reason for school dropouts for girls and young women throughout the continent. South Africa is the country with by far highest rates of teenage pregnancy being reason for school dropouts in Africa (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008). For most Namibian teenagers, sexual activity starts early. National health statistics shows that half of girls in the ages 15-19 are sexually active. For boys in the same age group about two-thirds are sexually active. When school dropouts were analysed, pregnancy showed to be a strong factor starting from grade 5 (ibid).

### **6.2. WHY DO SO MANY YOUNG WOMEN FALL PREGNANT IN KAVANGO AND RUNDU?**

According to hospital data from the region, a total of 6 213 girls have fallen pregnant since 2010 (The Villager: 23-29 July 2012). The 2012 first term showed a number of 978 female dropouts due to pregnancy between January and April (New Era: 2012-07-16). Factors contributing to early pregnancy are peer pressure, lack of sexual guidance from parents, lack of arenas to discuss sex, relationships with so-called sugar daddies (intergenerational relationships) and other men with authority and power, lack of recreational activities for youth and alcohol abuse (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008). Sugar daddies are older men that provide for and “take care of” young women by buying them stuff and taking them out for dinners and drinks. Later on as the young women will be asked to have sex with the men, it might be hard for them to say no considering all the items and other favours they have received. Intergenerational relationships are associated with higher levels of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and it puts young women at risk when it comes to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many of these so-called sugar daddies are HIV positive (The Namibian: 2012-07-06). An article could be found in the national newspaper the New Era on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2011, stressing the fact that many Rundu female learners from grades 8-12 were frequently out partying and drinking alcohol accompanied by their sugar daddies. Concerns about the high rate of teenage pregnancies in relation to the occurrence of sugar daddies were raised in the same article. It was stated that although the majority of these young women come from broken homes, many of them are also pretty well off and attend the top schools in Rundu. In the case with the poorer young women it was stated that some parents were actually well

informed about the ongoing situation. In some cases arrangements had been done including an exchange of money or other valuables (New Era: 2011-10-28). This means that poverty is a big contributing factor to teenage pregnancies. Why sugar daddy relationships are so common in Rundu might be because many men are working and have money to spend. At the same time there is a culture among women in Rundu to sit and wait for a man to come and provide for her. This unlike in other regions where you will find women trying to earn their own bread by for example selling food or small things in the streets. Kavango women do not seem to be empowered and independent in the same way. In Rundu the women selling in the streets are mostly Angolan. Further on, studies on girls' education in Rundu found that the school hostels are not a safe place for young women and that they are part in contributing to teenage pregnancy. The hostels lack safety precautions such as proper lockers and adult supervision. Female learners are in a vulnerable position and it is not rare to find schoolgirls being involved in relationships with male teachers. These relationships are built on power dimensions that are very unequal and although the young women are often accused of "seducing their teachers" in order to achieve higher grades or other favours, they are definitely the ones being victims in such relationships. They are minors and can easily end up getting abused by their teachers, exposing them to risky sexual behaviour. Because of the inequality in such relationships young women might find it very difficult to negotiate for condom use and avoid to fall pregnant. Further on to report to anyone what is going on might not be an option since they might suffer in terms of unjust treatment later on. Between 1995 and 2002 the Ministry of Basic Education expelled 114 male teachers for having impregnated female learners. The issue of relationships between male teachers and female learners probably exists to a larger extent than what is known. A study conducted in Rundu on girls education in 2002 showed that parents, learners and school officials all were concerned about the alcohol use of teachers claiming it to contribute to sexual acts taking place between male teachers and female learners. Statistics from the police shows that teenage pregnancies are often a result of forced sex and reportedly one third of all cases of rape or attempted rape are under age 18 (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008).

Norms and values present in neighbourhoods and communities play important roles in creating conditions for girls living in the areas. Children imitate and want to be like the grown-ups surrounding them. When children grow up in neighbourhoods where it is acceptable for young people to bear children and become young mothers the tendency might be that patterns of teenage pregnancies develop (Hailonga-van Dijk in Lafont & Hubbard,

2007). In some areas of Rundu you will find five year olds who gladly demonstrates the sexy dances that are being performed night time at the local shebeens (bars). They know the right moves and how to use their bodies in a sexy way to attract attention. They are increasingly aware of the adult world and regard this as knowledge to be proud of, expecting compliments after finishing the dancing. People will then agree that this child is going to fall pregnant early, it is doomed to happen!

### **6.3. CONSEQUENCES**

Early childbearing puts young women at risk in many ways. Finding out about an unwanted pregnancy will put most young women in a traumatic state of confusion and fear, especially if the father is no longer in the picture. Parental and family support will then play a crucial role in the wellbeing of the girl who all of a sudden has to deal with a lot of stress at a young age. If the pregnant girl is left all alone and not receiving any support from either family members or friends, she might get depressed and end up hurting herself and/or her unborn baby (Bezuidenhout, 2008). Further on, young women are in danger during delivery. Due to the young age they might suffer from complications, which can result in mortality both for themselves and the baby. The high proportions of teenage pregnancy and young Namibian mothers are resulting in a lot of young women not completing their basic schooling or at least being less likely to do so. With an unfinished education young mothers are left with few options as how to create a good life for themselves and their children (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008).

### **6.4. SCHOOL POLICIES**

Policies on pregnant learners in Namibian schools differ. While in some schools pregnant learners are required to leave school as soon as the pregnancy is visible; others allow them to continue their studies until the day of delivery. And while at some schools learners are allowed to return only after spending one year at home with the child, if they can prove that they have someone who is looking after the baby, others let them return whenever it is possible (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008). The biggest reason for young women not being allowed to proceed with their studies in some schools until after they give birth is because they might influence other learners to also fall pregnant. A pregnant teenager strongly represents teenage sexuality in Namibia and because sex and sexuality is taboo and in general

cannot be discussed openly in contemporary Namibian society it is better for the girls to leave the public, in this case school (Legal Assistance Centre, 2008).

#### **6.5. KNOWLEDGE ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND CONTRACEPTIVES**

Due to the high HIV/AIDS rate in the country, most young people have knowledge on how to protect themselves and where to access condoms. Condoms are available for free in hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and other public places. Reproductive health is taught in life science in Namibian schools. The quality of the life science education however differ a lot from one school to another.

#### **6.6. ABORTIONS**

To make an abortion is a criminal act in Namibia. Only under very strict circumstances can abortion be legalised, this after getting permission from the government. Getting this permission however is usually a very long process. While wealthier women can travel to South Africa to have safe and legal abortions, poorer ones end up having illegal abortions. These abortions are not safe and contribute to a high maternal mortality rate in Namibia. While institutions such as the ministry of Gender, Equality and Child Welfare see the need for a reform; the church and pro-life groups are putting pressure in every discussion that comes up, making it very hard to improve the situation for women (Lafont in LaFont & Hubbard, 2007).

## **7. METHOD**

With my study I wanted to focus on the young mothers perspective. I wanted to take part of their stories in order to get at better understanding of their situation. This is why I chose to use the qualitative method. I gathered my information through a combination of semi-structured interviews, every day observations, every day conversations and class discussions at UNAM. In addition I also carried out a literature study.

### **7.1. SCIENTIFIC VIEW**

The qualitative method is mostly found within the social sciences and means that one study the social reality with the objective to describe and analyse culture and behaviour within individuals and groups. With this method the base is always the individuals that are being studied (Bryman, 2010).

### **7.2. INTERVIEWS**

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) conclude that no other method is as effective when the researcher is aiming to fully *understand* people than to observe and listen to what they have to say. They argue that the interview as a method is especially suitable when you already know what you want to research on and when you know what you want to know or know more about. Further on they state that interviews are very suitable when the researcher has a limited time frame for conducting the research. Since I wanted to know how the young mothers themselves experience their situation and how they reason about it, interviews were an obvious choice. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) argue that using interviews as a method when conducting research is a moral dilemma containing ethical and moral questions that have to be considered by the researcher. For my own research I found it important to think about and consider what values I was representing and how I was representing them during the interview session. Also that I tried to build relations that would overbridge images about white and West. I thought a lot about the dimensions of power, which are impossible to eliminate due to the nature of the research setting, where the researcher is the one looking for something and the respondents the ones giving it. These ethical questions are more important to consider as I was conducting my research in a foreign setting, especially a developing country and I have been aware of this throughout my research.

I have used semi-structured interviews to collect most of my data. My interview formula was divided into a number of blocks such as *childhood, boyfriends, the pregnancy, motherhood* and *the future*. All blocks contained questions. I interviewed every respondent once and the interviews usually lasted between one and two hours depending on how much the respondents had to say. The interview however never ended until I felt that all my questions had been answered. I always asked my respondents where they would prefer the interview to take place: in the room I was renting, which was situated very close to the city centre, at their home or at any other place they could think of. Some of the interviews were conducted at a common friends place. For me it was very important that the young women would feel comfortable and free during the interview. I would usually prepare a small meal that we would eat while chatting, this to de-dramatise the formal scenario. I used a tape recorder to record the interviews in all interviews except one, as one of my respondents did not agree to being recorded. During her interview I took notes. All respondents were informed prior to the interview about their rights: they would remain anonymous, they could decide not to fulfil the interview at any time and they only had to answer the questions they wanted. When the interview was finished I told the respondents that they were welcome to contact me if they would want to change or add anything. They all knew where they could find me.

### **7.3. OBSERVATIONS**

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state that in order for observations to be successful the researcher has to spend a fair amount of time in the field where the research is carried out. My observations are gathered from my everyday life in Namibia ten months last year and three months this year. They are experiences I have had/made during this time – at the University of Namibia in the capital city, at the Red Cross office in the northern town Rundu, where I rented my room in Rundu and everywhere else where I have been. During this time I have developed a good knowledge on how people interact and communicate especially in Rundu, my area of research. Taylor and Bogdan stresses the importance of understanding the ways of communication, the local jargon, in order for the researcher to get as much as possible out of the observation. The observations are based on conversations I have had with students, lectures, social workers, staff at some different ministries, young and old friends and everyone else who has been part of my life in Namibia. A process of reflection has been ongoing throughout this time where I have basically witnessed or heard something, started thinking about it and then talked to many people about it, asking many questions, or mainly two: *why*

*is it like this? or how come these people are reacting and doing like this?* Through this process I have learned about how different people feel or think about different topics such as expectations on men and women, on motherhood and fatherhood and teen pregnancies. This has given me a good picture on the reality for young women in contemporary Namibian society and served as an important foundation for me as I carried out my interviews and later also as I analysed my findings. Without this knowledge it would have been hard to fulfil this study in a fair and just way. However it is also important to remember that in my understanding of different aspects of Namibian society, my own cultural values were all the time present and influenced how I perceived what I saw. Further on, the every day observations and conversations added a wider perspective to my research. In Rundu my closets friends were young men and through the interaction with them on a daily basis for several months, I came to develop an understanding for how it is to be a girl or young woman in that same context. Through our daily conversations and also by being a passive listener from time to time, I discovered how young men talk about young women and what expectations they have on them. This knowledge helped me a lot later on when I started conducting the interviews.

#### **7.4. LITERATURE STUDY**

To understand how the daily life of Namibian women today is constructed I needed to look into historical and present processes. I therefore decided to carry out a small literature study. By doing so I also wanted to give the reader a better picture of the situation for Namibian women. I have mainly been reading Namibian literature and focused on the concepts *gender*, *sexuality* and *culture*.

#### **7.5. REFLECTIONS ON THE CHOSEN METHODS**

There are advantages and disadvantages with the use of every method and hence it is important to reflect on the choice of methods. I have earlier explained in which ways the different methods have been helpful for me in carrying out this research but it is also important that I reflect on risks with the different methods and what other methods could have been used. I chose to use observations and daily conversations as part of my empirical material. I also decided to use respondents that I already had a prior relationship to and who most of them lived in the same area as I did. These decisions make it necessary to raise the question of bias. Did I live too close to my respondents and did the environment influence me

in a way that made me lose my sense of objectivity? Kvale (2010) states that total objectivity does not exist. To try to ensure objectivity however, I frequently discussed my findings and analysis with other students within the same field, both Namibian and non-Namibian and also with both Namibian and Swedish friends. These conversations usually gave me a lot of perspectives. Most of these people know me well and they used to indicate if I was about to “get lost in my research”. Further on I also trusted the judgement of my supervisor and counted on her telling me if she perceived my texts as biased. When reflecting on what other methods could have been used in the process of collecting data for this thesis, there are several options. As I started the research process I had thoughts about conducting a survey in a high school class to find out more about attitudes towards pregnant learners and I also thought about conducting a group interview with my selected respondents. Later on however I reasoned that since my aim was to focus on the young women’s perspective including other peoples perspectives would make the research too wide. I cancelled my plans of conducting a group interview with my respondents because when I was done with the individual interviews I felt that I was set with the empirical material I needed already.

#### **7.6. SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS**

In my search for respondents I thought about different aspects that would impact on the outcome of my research. I wanted my respondents to feel free in the interaction with me, especially due to the personal topic. Being a white student from far does not always create a free setting, I was already well aware of that. In order for me to create a good atmosphere for the interviews it would help if I had some kind of prior relationship to the young women. Since my time of research was limited however it was not possible for me to create these kinds of relationships with unknown respondents. I therefore decided to interview respondents who already knew me somehow. During my stay in Rundu last year I came to meet many people, both at the Red Cross office and at home. Most of the respondents who are part of my research live close to where I stayed in Rundu. They have seen me around for quite some time; they are familiar with my face. As I started conducting my interviews I realised very fast that the prior relationship that I had to the young women was actually helping. Not only because we could both feel free in the situation but also because we were used of having conversations. In a setting where none of us has English as a mother tongue, misunderstandings can easily occur. For me it was of great value that I had already lived in the area of my research for four months. I knew the way in which people talk and I knew how

to express myself in order for the respondents to understand me correctly. Most of my respondents used to be very shy as I came to Rundu last year and it took some time before they got used to me and started approaching me so that we talked. I don't think that these young women would have participated in my research if they had not known me the way they do. They would probably not have dared to do it.

It is important to stress the fact that the young women, most of them staying in the same location or nearby locations that are very similar, represent a certain group of individuals. They do not come from homes that are well off and hence my study does not cover and does not intend to cover or describe Rundu as a whole. I am describing how *some* young women experienced falling pregnant at a young age and how they experience to be young mothers today. Every young woman is unique and so are her experiences. I am positive however that other young women are sharing somewhat similar experiences and life situations as my respondents. At the same time my respondents are also different from one another, representing different backgrounds. Some are orphans who have struggled a lot growing up; others are coming from more stable, although not well off, homes. Some of them were growing up in a city setting surrounded by mother, father and siblings while others grew up at the village at the auntie's place together with the extended family. Some started school early and others started school late.

### **7.7. ETHICAL REFLECTIONS**

When going abroad to conduct a research there are always more ethical aspects to consider than it would have been at home in the home setting. Magnus Berg, who has written a book on racism, nationalism and the multicultural society in Namibia – and Sweden (2004), shares his views on doing research in a country far away from home and make important points. He argues that it is typical for western travellers, explorers, scientist and missionaries to travel the world, fall in love with what they find and later consider themselves as experts on the given area – the country. As they return home they will also be considered experts and they will stand to represent the place where they have been, this after that they have been exposed to only fragments and aspects of the country. Berg decides upon arrival in Namibia that he will not be part of repeating history but that he will be very conscious about the fact that his eight weeks in the country won't make him an expert on anything. Instead he clarifies already that his stay in Namibia will result in nothing else than a restricted amount of pictures, voices and

testimonials. I find this approach very conscious and good and I have kept it in mind throughout my time of research. I have been battling with my emotions of conducting my research in a developing country. It makes me part of the tradition of Europeans going to countries in the south, putting theories on people and places. Especially when I was in the process of writing the conclusion part did I find it hard to deal with what I was doing. I was aware already when applying for the scholarship that it would be hard for me to deal with these feelings. Yet I decided to apply and this was because I believe that it is important that stories are being told from one reality to another. My respondents have all been given new names in order to reduce the risk of their identity being revealed. Other facts that might reveal their identity have been used with caution.

### **7.8. ANALYSIS**

According to Kvale (2010) analysis and interpretation is taking place during the whole research period and process. Already when conducting the interviews the researcher starts analysing what is being said. I also experienced this. Later during the transcribing process I started analysing the findings more thoroughly. The transcribing of the interviews was usually done within 24 hours while I still had the interviews fresh in mind. When done transcribing I went through the interviews several times. As I transcribed every new interview I compared it with the previous ones and so topics and themes emerged, such as the behaviour of the boyfriends and the struggle with school uniforms and shoes. The findings that I made were leading way to which theories could be used in understanding my material. However, I had some theories such as social construction, social exclusion and stigmatisation in mind already.

### **7.9. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

*Validity* means that the study is carried out the way it was intended to, that the results correlate with aim and research questions (Kvale and Brinkman, 2010). By constructing my interview formula so that it would give me answers to my research questions and by focusing on my research questions throughout the research period, I made sure that I did not get lost in my research and that it actually came out as intended to. However when trying to catch the young mothers perspective, it is hard to say whether they expressed their own views and opinions consistently. There are a lot of factors that might have influenced the young women in the way they told me their stories. I recognised that when they spoke about teenage pregnancy in general terms, they also shared their own stories.

*Reliability* aims to examine the trustworthiness of the result (ibid). Since my aim was to let the young women elaborate on their experiences and to focus on their stories, I decided to make use of their quotes in order to increase reliability. My results are close to previous findings however I also found some differences, for example when it comes to the fathers of the children, often referred to as sugar daddies in previous research. In the case with my respondents, all the baby fathers were young men; usually in the same age my respondents. In the interview session I tried my best to remain neutral and to not at any point influence my respondents or ask them leading questions. The reliability of my study is further ensured by this chapter, where ethical dilemmas and other reflections have been brought into light.

## **8. RESULTS**

### **8.1. THE RESPONDENTS**

Seven young mothers were interviewed for this thesis. They were all staying in Rundu at the time of my research although they were not all originally from there.

**Jenny** is 21 years old. She is a mix between a vambo mother and a rukwangali dad. She grew up at Vamboland and came to Rundu when she was thirteen years old. Jenny fell pregnant at the age of eighteen and dropped out of grade 11. The father of her child was her first boyfriend. They broke up after she found out she was pregnant because her feelings for him changed. He is currently supporting the child although his family does not approve. Jenny finished up her grade 11 at Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) and is currently studying for a diploma at a college in Rundu. Her child is three years old.

**KC-girl** is 18 years old. She is originally from Kavango, but grew up in a town in the south. KC-girl fell pregnant at the age of seventeen and dropped out of grade 11. The father of her child was her first boyfriend and they are still together. His family is helping to provide for the child. KC-girl just went back to school as it re-opened end of June this year. Her mom will help out to take care of the child while she is in school. Her child is four months old.

**Vision** is 19 years old. She is originally from Kavango and lives in Rundu. Vision fell pregnant at the age of seventeen and dropped out of grade 11. The father of her child was her first boyfriend. He left her as he found out that she was pregnant. His family is helping to provide for the child. Vision is back in school, completing her grade 11. A baby sitter is taking care of the baby while she is in school. Her child is one year old.

**Sunday** is 27 years old. She is a vambo and grew up at Vamboland. She came to Rundu some years ago to look for work because she has a sister who lives in Rundu. Sunday fell pregnant at the age of seventeen and dropped out of grade 11. It was her first boyfriend who impregnated her and they are still together. He is supporting the child. Sunday never had the possibility to go back to school to finish grade 11. She is struggling to find a job in Rundu and is dependent on her boyfriend and siblings that support her. Her child is ten years old and stays with the grandparents in their village at Vamboland.

**Maria** is 23 years old. She grew up with her grandmother at a village some 100 kilometres out of Rundu. Both her parents have passed away. Maria fell pregnant at the age of eighteen and had to drop out of grade 7. After two years at home she went back to school. When she was in grade 10 her grandmother passed away and so she had to drop out of school again due to lack of funds to pay school fees and because there was no one to help her take care of her child. Maria came to live in Rundu after her grandmother passed away. She is currently struggling to find a job and experiencing a tough time. The father of her child was her first boyfriend. They are still together and he is supporting the child. The child is five years old.

**Neliny** is 17 years old. She grew up with her grandmother at a village outside of Rundu and came to Rundu when she was eight years old to start school. Neliny fell pregnant at the age of sixteen and had to drop out of grade 9. The father of her child was her boyfriend at the time she fell pregnant. He left her shortly after she gave birth. He is supporting the child sometimes but not continuously. Neliny is currently at home taking care of her baby and looking for a job. She will go back to complete school next year as her baby turns one year old. Her baby is now three months old.

**Theresa** is 22 years old. She grew up with her mother and sister at a village outside of Rundu. Theresa came to live in Rundu when she was nine years old. Her mother passed away shortly after that and she became an orphan. She did not start school until she was thirteen years old, that is when she started grade 3. Theresa fell pregnant at the age of seventeen and had to drop out of grade 7. Her boyfriend broke up with her during the pregnancy and due to conflicts between her older brother and the family of the boyfriend they did not help out very much. Theresa stayed at home for two years before she finally went back to school encouraged by a former teacher. Her child is currently staying with the father and she is back in school doing her grade 10. Theresa is struggling to put food on the table.

## **8.2. THE CHILDHOOD DREAMS**

Most of my respondents grew up with grandmothers or aunties at the village while their mothers were staying in town working. This is a normal scenario in Namibia where the extended family plays an important role and naturally takes part in the process of bringing up children. At the village life is different from life in town and many of my respondents were helping out with farming activities as they grew up. They were looking after the goats,

ploughing the fields and pounding mahangu (a millet which is staple food in most Namibian households). Most of my respondents grew up together with lots of kids and had many friends, either at home or in school. The ones who were staying at the village had a lot of responsibilities and tasks already at a young age but still they always made time to play. They all seem to have had a decent childhood although some had to struggle more than others. My respondents had plenty of dreams and wishes for the future, mainly including finishing up school, going for further studies and to get a job. They were dreaming of becoming nurses, teachers and doctors. Already at a young age however they were well aware that finishing school is crucial in achieving what you want in life and they all liked school already from the start. KC- girl puts it like this:

I always liked school! I never use to be absent at school and I never use to come late at school... I was always the first one at school and if there is maybe something wrong with me, maybe I'm sick or something that make me bored, and maybe my parents ask me not to go to school, I refuse and start crying, crying a lot until they will let me go to school. I like school a lot.

School seems to be an important social factor for respondents coming from less privileged homes. Maria who is an orphan and had to drop out of grade 10 due to insufficient funds explains why she liked school:

Because that time, ne, if you grow up and you will feel like you are suffering... if you go to school you will see that there are many different people you will get there. Because you like school. If you drop the school it is not good. You will be suffering. When you have the school, your life ne, you *"Oh I'm happy now that I'm in school, my friend is here..."* Yes... many things you learn in school. Not just to sit home and do nothing... because you will make a what, your life ne, especially my life now ne... its different...bad. You stay bored in the house, you do nothing. Its not good mukwetu (my friend).

Most of my respondents came to Rundu when it was time for them to start kinder or primary school or some of them at the age of thirteen to start secondary school.

### **8.3. THE FIRST BOYFRIENDS AND SEXUAL ACTIVITY – FALLING PREGNANT**

My respondents all had their first boyfriends when they were fifteen, sixteen or seventeen years old. At the time when they got their first boyfriends most of them did not really know what a boyfriend was and they were not interested in boys in that way. In all the cases the boys were the ones who proposed the girls and the girls accepted. Jenny explains how she got her first boyfriend:

The day when he proposed me I didn't even know what is the meaning for love... cause it was even at a letter, that time we were not having cellphones. He just wrote a piece of paper "*I love you... from this one*", then he gave the letter to his cousin... then she brought the letter. I was even there and my mother saw the letter, cause the letter was sprayed. And my mother was asking; "*What does that smelling come from, is it from that paper? Can I read it?*" then I was running in the toilet, I went in the toilet with the cousin, then she told me... then I was like "*Explain to me this word – love.*" "*No, love means the person feels like this and this for you.*" Ok, I also went back, took the paper and the pen... I also stole my mothers perfume and also sprayed the paper, and wrote the letters again back... the same word. Yes we started just like that. It's just funny.

Vision got her first boyfriend at the age of seventeen, influenced by friends:

Really... I was not interested in boys. When I was going in town, ne, I use to be locked up... I don't club, I don't drink... now when I go to the village I go out with my friends: "*Ahh lets go have a drink... what-what.*" They always talk about boys, and I was influenced, they say kama (apparently) I must have a boyfriend, I am from town but I am not aware, I don't know the things of dating what-what... now I was also influenced, I ended up now having a boyfriend.

For four of my seven respondents the first boyfriend is the one who is the father of their child. Most of them did not want to have sex but were forced to by the boyfriends. Vision explains how it was for her:

It's a difficult situation... something like... I did not really like it, I did not really want to do it... but it was like forced... I was being forced to doing it... and then I became used to it...

Two of my respondents fell pregnant the first time they had sex and at that time they did not know much about sex or pregnancies. One of them was still in grade 7 and had not yet learned about sex in life science at school. Since they were not well aware of the fact that they could fall pregnant they also did not know about contraceptives and were not able to protect themselves from either pregnancy or HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD). The rest of my respondents had already learned about sex in school, some even from lower primary. They were informed. At the time they fell pregnant however none of them were using protection and they say that they did not think that they would fall pregnant. Jenny explains:

**Jo:** Did you use any contraceptives when you fell pregnant?

**Je:** At first we used to use condoms. But there were some days which we didn't use, but I never fall pregnant... so when we did it I thought I won't.

When asked about the sexual education obtained in school Jenny explains the following:

**Je:** Yes we learn in school. Because before I got pregnant I learned those things in life science.

**Jo:** So did you also know about contraceptives?

**Je:** Yes

Jenny knew how a woman falls pregnant, she knew about contraceptives and she knew about the disadvantage of teenage pregnancy. At the same time, she says she did not think she would fall pregnant when she had unprotected sex. Several of my respondents are telling similar stories. KC-girl who had an “agreement” with her boyfriend and went for HIV testing together with him before having unprotected sex says like this:

**J:** So why did you decide to have unprotected sex, or was it because you didn’t have a condom?

**K:** Not really actually... just because every time we used to sleep together we used to have a condom... so that night we decided, both of us, we make an agreement, because we went to HIV testing both of us, and we are negative, so that night we put an agreement... we have to have unprotected sex, so we did it. Because my... the father of my child, I was his first girlfriend and he was my first boyfriend.

**J:** So did you not think you would fall pregnant?

**K:** Ahh nooo! That things were not in my mind... I just recognised it, ohh it was too late.

It seems that KC-girl was focusing on protecting herself from HIV/AIDS hence the HIV testing she went through together with her boyfriend. Neliny also has a similar story:

**J:** But I mean, before you had unprotected sex with your boyfriend, did you both go for HIV testing?

**N:** Yes we did.

**J:** Because it seems to me that people think that “*OK we are negative, then we can have unprotected sex.*” But they don’t think that you can also fall pregnant. It’s more like people forget maybe...

**N:** Yeah...

**J:** Or you did not think you could fall pregnant, you did not think about that...

**N:** I was not...

Looking at the girls’ stories it seems that they, while being well aware of how to get impregnated, do not actually link this information with what is happening at the time they fall pregnant. Jenny’s statement that she did not think she would fall pregnant because she did not fall pregnant when they used to have unprotected sex sometimes does not fit with her stated knowledge on how to fall pregnant. The same applies for KC-girl who was well informed about how to fall pregnant but at the time when she got impregnated very focused on having unprotected sex with her boyfriend, claiming to not even be thinking about if she would fall

pregnant or not. In the Namibian context where the HIV/AIDS rate is very high, having unprotected sex with your partner is common as a sign of trust; a way of showing that you yourself is not having sex with other people and that at the same time you trust that your partner is also not. It is not rare for especially guys to have a lot of girlfriends. Because of the high HIV/AIDS rate in the country young people are getting exposed to loads of information on how to protect themselves from catching the virus. It might be that the focus on protecting yourself from HIV/AIDS and the condom being the symbol for this puts awareness of the risk of falling pregnant in the dark. However what seems to have the biggest impact on teenage pregnancies, and this cannot be overstated, is the fact that young men do not want to use condoms. Some of my respondents said that their boyfriends were refusing to use condoms, which put them in a pressured situation with seemingly no other choice than to have unprotected sex. Neliny explains:

Because if you are doing with a condom, the boy will tell you that he don't like me. I don't know why, but he doesn't want and then he doesn't like me. He will just tell me to go back home. Then you will just do it [have unprotected sex].

Vision has a similar story:

**J:** And did you know about condoms and other contraceptives you could use?

**V:** Yes... cause sometimes we use a condom, but the other times he would refuse, he won't allow it, he didn't want... it makes you... saying bad things about the condoms...

**J:** Why do you think he didn't want to use the condoms?

**V:** He told me, kama (apparently) the condom is not sweet, what-what... having sex with a condom is like eating a sweet with a plastic on, what-what... just something like that...

Theresia who at first told me that she and her boyfriend never used condoms but that she used to count her days after menstruation and only have sex in the "safe days", later revealed another story as we were talking about teenage pregnancies in a more general way:

**J:** But is it also like maybe the guys are pressuring the girls to having unprotected sex?

**T:** Yes, because the problem again, the guy could come, impregnate the girl. But the girl, even they will go out... the girl will say that: "*Can we use a condom?*" but the guy will say that: "*If you don't love me... maybe you will not use it, maybe you don't love me.*" And the girl should not have anything to say, "*No if you will not use the condom I will not sleep with you.*" She will just sleep because she love the guy.

**J:** So was it like that for you also?

**T:** Yes

Not all my respondents told me stories like these ones and I do not conclude that scenarios like these ones are the causes of all teenage pregnancies. However it seems to be a very common behaviour among young men to refuse condom use. My respondents who experienced this talked about it like it was the norm. Also when young women end up falling pregnant despite knowledge and access to contraceptives, there must be other factors playing important roles. When they are forced to have sex and not allowed to use a condom it does not really matter if they have knowledge on how to fall pregnant. In the situation where they are oppressed there is little they can do to hinder it anyways. When I was discussing these findings with an education officer from the Ministry of Education, stressing that it is not easy for young women to negotiate for condom use in situations where they are oppressed by their boyfriends, he viewed the scenario differently. He claimed that it is a bad excuse to blame the young men for not wanting to use condoms because young women can also protect themselves with female contraceptives such as monthly hormone injections or the pill. He said the behaviour of the young women is ignorant and rather blamed them than the young men. For young women however it might be difficult to access female contraceptives. They have to visit a clinic or the hospital and this might require a lot of courage especially since sexual activity among youth is still somewhat a taboo in Namibia.

#### **8.4. THE PREGNANCY: HOW DID YOU FEEL?**

All of my respondents experienced a very hard time, feeling emotionally very bad when they found out that they were pregnant. Vision explains how it was for her:

I was feeling very bad. I didn't know how to tell my parents... I just thought of killing myself, something like that... taking abortion... most of the friends I was having they were just bad friends... they were telling me kama (apparently) I must go take abortion now. So... but I just had to accept it. There is nothing I can do, I cannot take abortion, I have to accept the situation.

Most of my respondents were worried about how they were going to tell their parents and how the parents would react. Sunday thought her parents would chase her out of the house and KC-girl had similar thoughts:

Oh! I blamed myself for being naughty and I thought my parents would be angry with me, that they would chase me out of the house...

They were also worried about how they were going to support their child and if the father of the child would take responsibility or not. Maria who is an orphan had these thoughts as she found out that she was pregnant:

Ahh ayee (no), but I was thinking now maybe he [the boyfriend] will no give me a support... but if he would give support, then I like. Because for that kid, ne, my mother is not here, my father is not here. But I will be struggling myself; if I will get that kid I struggle with my own hands... to give my child all the things.

KC-girl as she found out got very confused and sad:

Ya I was like... for the first time I was just like bored. I was almost crying in my room, I locked myself in the room... maybe for one week... I didn't even drink water or eat.

Neliny puts it this way:

Oh I was just feeling bad, like I am alone in the world.

Some of my respondents were feeling very ashamed of their pregnancy, blaming themselves, while others accepted and say they did not care about what other people would say or think. Vision was feeling very ashamed over the fact that people could see that she was pregnant. She felt like everyone was laughing at her and explains that it was shameful because it is not good to be pregnant while you are still a child. These feelings prevented her from going into town and from attending regular check-ups at the hospital. During the whole pregnancy she only went for a planned visit to the hospital once, for HIV testing. The next time she went there, except for a few times when she was admitted, was for delivery. Jenny on the other hand says she did not care what people would say because her parents did not say anything about it.

Some of the girls experienced physically very tough pregnancies as well, being sick a lot and feeling weak. Vision explains:

**J:** And for you how was the whole pregnancy?

**V:** Very bad... the worst part is I was always sick; I was always in bad condition... I was admitted in the hospital two times... just being sick because of the pregnancy. Later on when I gave birth there was also a problem... at first they wanted to operate me, now the doctor said: no, they can't operate me, I'm too young...

Neliny had a similar experience:

I was just sick and I was very thin...

## 8.5. THE PREGNANCY: REACTIONS FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS - SOMEONE TO TALK TO

While some parents and relatives got very angry when they found out about the young women being pregnant, others accepted the situation just as it was. My respondents all expected the worst but only one was actually chased out of the house. Most of the parents however started treating their daughters differently from that day on, more like adults. Neliny did not tell her mom that she was pregnant. She was staying at the school hostel away from home at the time and her mother only found out after talking to the principal of the school:

**J:** So what did she say to you?

**N:** Ya was angry, was calling my uncle! My uncle was quarrelling with the family of my boyfriend. Like: how can he take her while I am still in school... I don't know how to stay with a child, or to know what... how can you be a mother?

Jenny did not experience any anger as she told her mother. Only later after she gave birth did the mother express her feelings. I have recognised that relatives in some cases tend to stay quiet until the baby is born, this to prevent the young women from making risky self-made abortions.

**Jo:** And your mom... when she found out, was she also being supportive or...

**Je:** Yes, she used to be. And she also never showed me that she was angry about it. Its only later on, as I got birth, she was asking me: *"How was it, how was the feeling when you gave birth?"* I told her already those things. *"Now you ruined your life, you are no more going back to school because there is nowhere where you can leave the kid, and you know I can't afford someone to stay with the kid, and you know me I'm a business woman, I can't stay at home..."* All those things.

**Jo:** So how did it make you feel?

**Je:** I was a little bit of... ashamed and also, yeah, it hurt me also when she was telling me about not being able to stay with my kid so that I could go back to school... because at that time my friends, my school mates, they were still going to school. And to see them in the uniform while you are at home, it was painful... but later on I just understand the situation.

Sunday's parents got very angry when they found out that she was pregnant. They told her that she wasted their money because they had been paying for her schooling and now she would not go back to school anymore. Now she would just stay at home. Vision also experienced anger from her parents:

My parents... after they found out... they were really not interested in me anymore.

All families accepted the situation sooner or later and were helping out to support the baby. When it comes to friends however some of my respondents witness that there are two kinds of friends, good and bad. KC-girl explains that while the good friends were being supportive and

giving her advice such as how to take care of herself during the pregnancy, the bad friends were encouraging her to make abortion, to drink the pills. Vision also had the same experience and they both say that it was a confusing period. They explain however that they could not imagine aborting their babies, no matter how much the bad friends were going on. KC- girl's parents knew about the bad friends and what influence they might have on their daughter. They were trying to help out by also giving her their own advice. Maria's grandmother reacted in a very supportive way:

*My grandmother she said: "Don't worry, ne, I am here. If I will die then you are suffering, but right now I am here and I will give that child anything because that child is also my kid."*

Jenny got emotional support and advice from friends who were already mothers. She also had a friend who helped her to access free beers, which she was craving for during the pregnancy:

**Je:** I was having friends who already had kids, so I use to ask them about how does it feel when you're going there, when you are getting birth... they were just telling me: "*No you won't feel pain or any of those things.*" And I was like having a friend who was having an aunty who was having a bar. So every time morning time I use to go there and she would give me a dumpy (a beer from a bottle).

**Jo:** So you would drink a beer...

**Je:** Yes. Each and every time... morning and evening. So I just asked her but she use to give me.

**Jo:** For you to feel better now or...

**Je:** Yes. Even if I drink something else, I won't... unless I have to drink [something containing alcohol].

**Jo:** How did it help you to feel better?

**Je:** Sometimes it avoid me to spit out... and even also my thirst, it satisfied my thirst. Even if I would drink water I would not satisfy.

Jenny's baby was born disabled. I cannot say whether it had something to do with her habits of having beers during the pregnancy but it might have been a contributing factor. Jenny quit drinking after she gave birth and she is not drinking today.

Most of my respondents blame themselves for falling pregnant. KC-girl explains:

Oh! I blamed myself for being that naughty [...] but actually my mom did nothing, she was just like talking many stuff but it was not that painful... but I really blame myself.

Neliny also blames herself:

**J:** How do you think, in order to fight teenage pregnancies... what has to be done, by the government or by schools, or by the community... in order to fight it...

**N:** No you will just live with that, it's your own problem.

**J:** It seems to me that you blame yourself...

**N:** Yes

**J:** But the boy, don't you blame him also?

**N:** The boy?

**J:** Yes because you were also two to make a baby, it was not only you.

**N:** (silent)

Even when Neliny earlier stated that she was more or less forced or at least very pressured to have unprotected sex with her boyfriend, she still blames herself for ending up falling pregnant.

### **8.6. THE PREGNANCY: THE FATHERS' REACTIONS**

Their boyfriends reacted differently when they found out that they were going to be fathers. While most of them tried to escape responsibility, claiming not to be the fathers, some accepted and took responsibility from the beginning. Vision experienced a tough time when her boyfriend found out that she was pregnant:

**J:** And the father now, how did he react when you told him?

**V:** The father now I did not tell him... then he told me that I am pregnant, but I said no... then he said: "*I can see it*" then he said: "*Me I am unfertile, I am not the one who impregnated you... go look for the father of the kid.*" Just a lot of stories... but to me it was him. Later on his parents they talk to me... and his grandfather also... talking to him.

**J:** So was he still your boyfriend?

**V:** After that we broke up. After he found out I was pregnant we broke up... till now.

**J:** How did you feel it when he said he is unfertile and this stuff...

**V:** Very bad, but there is nothing I can do about it... just accept it.

Maria had a similar experience. Her boyfriend was changing his mind just after she gave birth:

But now, ne, I don't feel nice. Because that guy he told me "*I give you everything*" but that time I got that child, he told me it's not his child. [...] He changed his mind. He said: "*It's not my child*" what-what... because he had someone here to make him change his mind. Then I said: "*You, you don't want this child, ne, this child should go and die.*" then I said: "*OK, it's nice of you to tell me that story, but me I don't mind because I have my hands, I will give my child everything. I planted mahangu and I will grow maize.*" [...] He changed again... because my grandmother she said, ne: "*You, you say it's not your child. You and that child are going to Windhoek (the capital city) to get the blood [DNA-test].*" Then he changed his mind...

KC-girl is the only one of my respondents whose boyfriend reacted positively to the pregnancy, stayed positive and supportive throughout the pregnancy and still is her boyfriend, supporting her and the baby today:

**J:** And your boyfriend, what did he say?

**K:** Oh my boyfriend was just like: *“Oh I’m glad, I am also a real man, I can also make babies!”*

**J:** So him he was happy...

**K:** He was happy!

Sunday fell pregnant the first time she had sex and her and boyfriend was shocked when she told him that she was expecting his child. He did not think she could just fall pregnant like that, the first time. It seems that all of my respondents, whether the boyfriends were in the picture or not, went through the pregnancy pretty much alone. They are the ones who got blamed and who also blamed themselves.

### **8.7. THE PREGNANCY: BEING PREGNANT IN SCHOOL**

Most of my respondents left school shortly after they found out that they were pregnant. Only one, KC-girl, stayed in school during the whole pregnancy. Different factors were contributing to creating situations where most of my respondents made the decision of leaving school at an early stage of the pregnancy. These were factors such as school policies, attitudes from other learners and school uniforms and shoes. Although there is a national policy promoting the importance of pregnant schoolgirls being able to stay in school for as long as possible and encouraging them to come back whenever they can after the delivery, schools differ a lot in how they tackle the actual situation with pregnant learners. While some of my respondents knew that they could stay in school, others realised that they had no other choice than to leave. Maria explains:

**J:** But were you allowed to stay as long as you wanted [in school]?

**M:** But that teacher for that school ne, that time... she said that if you are pregnant you have to go out of school. OK man, I’ll be going... I feel like I must go now...

KC-girl, who is schooling in a town in the south of Namibia, had a very different school experience compared to Maria:

**J:** And how was it to be in school and pregnant at the same time?

**K:** Oh eish man, I was not alone! There were lots of girls, we were in the same class... so it was like, I was first like I was regretting it *“Oh I’m shy or ashamed of myself, in school as a pregnant girl”*. But I realised... I heard about the principal told all of us who were pregnant not to worry, if anyone tease we must just go report that person to the principal.

For most of the young women being in school while being pregnant was not easy. Jenny explains how it was for her:

It was difficult because you can't even iron your uniform so that you can look properly. You can't even sit properly in the class, you just want to sleep. And people they are making noise. You don't know where you can spit, because you just feel like spitting each and every time and the teacher won't allow you to go out every time...

For her the issue that she could no longer look proper and wear the school uniform properly, which made her an easy target for getting teased, seems to have been one of the biggest factors contributing to her leaving school early:

**Jo:** And were you scared for people to find out... in school?

**Je:** Ya because... some of them they used to tease... some who were having big tummies. Because their feet also used to be swollen.... And they used to tease those people... because its compulsory to wear uniform in Namibia... for those people their feet don't use to fit in the shoes, so they use to tease them. And sometimes some they can't tuck in [the shirts], and sometimes those other teachers who doesn't know, like maybe they use to say: *"Tuck in!" "I can't tuck in..." "Tell me the reason"...* But you can't.

Most of my respondents have been mentioning not being able to wear the school uniform properly any longer as they got bigger and it seems that it has been a big struggle for them. Most of them are coming from financially less privileged homes, poor homes. Getting a new, bigger, school uniform was never a possibility for them. KC-girl is the only one who did not have to struggle with the uniform. On her school in the south pregnant learners are provided with school uniforms and shoes that fit when the ones they have get too small. It seems that on her school there is a plan for how to make sure pregnant learners do not drop out of school too early, on the contrary, they are actively being encouraged to stay in school. This also shows by the principals way of telling the pregnant learners to come report to him should anyone tease them. KC-girl elaborates on the reason for her school tackling teenage pregnancy differently from what my other respondents are telling me about the their schools. She concludes that it is probably due to the Karas region being financially better off than the Kavango region, which is measured to be the fourth poorest region in the country. Most of my respondents left school before the pregnancy got visible and it seems that the fear of getting teased was the main reason for most of them. Vision explains:

The only problem is that people in the class they would be complaining that I was dosing to much and what-what... but they really did not know until when I left... so that they could not have a chance to tease me because I was going out...

Theresia was also scared of getting teased:

**J:** So were you allowed to stay longer in school or...

**T:** Yes I was allowed but I was afraid to go like this [showing a big tummy].

Neliny decided to leave school so that she would not end up getting bad grades due to her condition, which made her work less focused:

**J:** How was it for you to be in school while you were pregnant at the same time?

**N:** Oh its not fine, because you will not learn, you will just feel like to sleep. Ay just like you are abnormal, ay you just feel bad. Then I was thinking I must just go home because I will not do it, do my best... I will just go at home, then next year I will come back.

**J:** And did you tell your friends at school that you were pregnant?

**N:** I was just telling my best friend that I use to work, to say secret with her. The only one.

### **8.8. THE PREGNANCY: HOPES AND FEARS**

While none of my respondents planned to get pregnant and they all experienced a hard time as they found out that they were, at some point there was nothing else to do than to just accept the situation and wait for the baby to come. Most of them had started experiencing the changed life situation as soon as they got pregnant, with parents treating them differently, making them feel all grown-up and with feelings of being somewhat on their own. They were stressed over what was going to happen when the baby would actually come and somehow doubted whether they would manage or not. At the same time however they also had hopes for how it all would work out. Apart from being scared of the delivery most of my respondents mentioned the financial situation and if someone would be there to help them out, as the biggest fears. Also if the guy would stick around and take responsibility for the child or not was a stressful question mark for most of my respondents. Theresia, after finding out that her boyfriend was having other girlfriends while she was pregnant with his child, lost all hope and tried to commit suicide:

Oh! I feel hurt. He really hurt me. I feel just I could be just dead. I even drank the pills, I wanted to kill myself. [...] No I didn't hope for anything. My hope just died because I was wasting my time. And now I have no time to do anything in my life to help myself.

For Vision the biggest stress was if someone would help her out or not:

To be a young mother is very hard... how to support the baby... Now I'm thinking about myself... if I cannot afford to buy soap for myself, what about my kid... but my sisters were helping and my best friend. It was better, not like how I thought before... I thought that maybe they were not going to give any support.

My respondents hopes on the other hand mostly had to do with the delivery – that it would all work out fine and that everything would be just OK. For Jenny, the unborn baby had already become someone she had strong feelings for:

Its just I use to feel it when the baby was crying, ne, and the only person that she use to humble or to feel good, is only when the mother come pick and when the kid suck. It says like *“the only person who will love you in this world is only your mother or your kid”* and I was also looking for the next person who will love me from my parent. I knew that he or she will love me.

KC-girl, coming from a family a bit financially better off than the rest of my respondents, had no worries or fears since she knew her boyfriend, her and his family would all help out when the baby would come. Her only hope was to give birth to a baby girl:

Just for a baby girl... I was hoping for, God must bless me so that I have a baby girl. Then... he did. God really loves me... and he always heard my prayers.

This statement shows that a class perspective needs to be used in understanding the challenges that the rest of my respondents are facing. Most of their struggles have to do with lack of resources needed for taking care of a child, they don't have enough money and it gives them a lot of stress.

### **8.9. BECOMING A MOTHER**

All of my respondents, except Jenny, gave birth to healthy babies. Although most of them were no sure whether they would manage financially, all of them actually got support from someone in the end, if not the boyfriend, his family or their own family or friends then some neighbours or teachers. Some of my respondents however had to struggle more than others to find someone to help them out. Becoming a mother was naturally a big change for all of the young women, a new stage in life associated with a great deal of responsibility. Vision explains with a somewhat bitter tone how her life changed when she became a mother:

My life... now I have to accept that I'm a mama. I behave like elders. Taking care of my baby, being a responsible person... everything I do I have to think about the baby... how will he be affected... what about myself? [...] I don't like what they [her family] say about me...telling me now I'm an adult what-what while I am still young... It's very bad.

Some of my respondents also noticed a big change in how people were approaching them within their communities, now being respected in a new way as *mothers*. KC-girl explains:

Yes people around our community... now there are some of them...when I was not having a baby...they doesn't respect me. *“Ay she is too small...”* what-what, but now really they respect me. They always obey what I always tell them. I was just like: *“Please they are calling there...”* But long time when I use to tell them *“they are calling you there”*, *“What ever... I won't go there because you are too small, you can't tell me that...”* Those kind of things... but now, really, they are really also respecting me, I am also a grown up.

Neliny is also having a similar experience. She feels that she understands what adults are telling her in another way now. She used to resist when grown-ups would tell her to clean or wash but now when she is also grown-up she does not refuse anymore. While Vision is the only one of my respondents who seemingly does not like her new adult role as a mother very much, it seems that most of my other respondents are somewhat proud of being regarded as *adults* and *mothers*. They are being recognised and respected in a new way and this seems to add on their confidence.

#### **8.10. LIFE AS IT IS - THE STRUGGLE**

For the young women that are part of my research, the majority of them coming from poorer homes, life has always been a struggle when it comes to money. Babies need a lot of stuff and so for most of my respondents life became harder after they had their babies, with all new expenses that followed. The situation for most of my respondents still is tough and they struggle hard to manage. They all do manage somehow. All of them, except Sunday and Theresia, stay together with their children. Sunday's child stays with her parents at their village at Vamboland while she stays in Rundu. She does not think it is good to stay so far away from her child, but has no other choice since she is looking for work and has no one to look after the child. To get someone to help her look after her child would be an expense for her and she does not have any money. Sunday never went back to school after she fell pregnant at the age of 17. She is now 27 years old and has to depend on family members and her boyfriend for survival. Finding a job is a struggle for her but she is determined to get one and to save up for NAMCOL so that she can finish up grade 11 and 12. As for now she just has to face the situation of not staying close to her child. Theresia was staying with her child until the child was two years old. Then the father took the child so that she could go back to school. It was her older brother who demanded the child's father to take responsibility so that she could finish her schooling. When she was staying alone with the child she faced a very tough time, being all alone with all the responsibilities:

**J:** What was most challenging for you...with the baby?

**T:** The most challenging... the kid could be sick, and its only me...if I would tell the father, even I would tell them, he could not do anything. Even you can call him to tell that the kid is like this, like this, he will not do anything.

**J:** And his family?

**T:** The family will not come. Even his mother, when I tell the kid is sick or I don't have a soap to wash the kid. They will not come, or they will not reply. My brother here, he

don't give anything, just the food there...bring the soap, nothing. The money to take the kid for the hospital, he don't have.

**J:** So how did you manage?

**T:** I just really, I just managed to give the kid...I just did for the kid. I just suffered myself, but I looked what can I give the kid.

Theresia's older brother (being more like her father ever since her parents passed away) does not get along with her ex-boyfriends family, which has caused her a lot of stress and problems:

**J:** How did your brothers and sisters react when they found out you are pregnant?

**T:** Oh. They chased me. Even they chased me from the house to go stay with the boyfriend. They were so angry. I went to my boyfriend's house. In April 2008 I gave birth. In July my brother wanted me to go back again [home] and them [the boyfriends family], they don't want because they want to protect the kid. There was so arguments...then my boyfriends mother told me that them, they cannot name the kid<sup>3</sup>, they cannot do what, maybe my brother can handle all the problems we will have. I left there, I went at my place. And my boyfriend gave me the blanket and the pillow. I went. Morning time the sister came and told me that I must bring back the blanket and the pillow. I gave it.

**J:** So did you break up at this point?

**T:** Yes we broke up. I was so suffered. My brother that time when I came at home, him and the wife and the kids they went in Angola, they left me in the house...

**J:** All alone?

**T:** Yes, and the kid got sick, almost dead. But there was nothing to do. I went there, to my boyfriend's mother, we took the kid to the church to have a prayer...then they prayed for him... now he's OK.

Theresia's story shows that teenage mothers, especially the ones who are orphaned and do not have other relatives to help them out, are in a very vulnerable position because they are exposed to a lot of pressure and responsibility. Although she misses her son and has not seen him for over a year, she realises that she would not be able to take good care of him, looking at her current life situation. Arguments with her older brother resulted in him cutting all support to his sisters:

But now the suffering has started again. No one to buy the food at home, no one to bring the food at home. Now we are just each and every time borrowing. Even now if I would have my son. Even I could go to school but I am feeling hungry, how could I...no.

On top of her struggle the father of her child will not let her see the boy anymore:

He [the father of her kid] came last month, April, he came. And when I went and bring the kid, he was angry. He want just the kid to be there and me I could just go back to

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<sup>3</sup> In Kavango culture it is a common custom that the grandparents, or mostly the grandfather, of the fathers side is the one to name the baby. The baby will then remain without name until the grandfather can come to name the child (own observation).

school and forget the kid. How should I! I could not! And then when I went there I did not find them, his mother told me that they went in town. When they come back I called him that: *"I want to see the kid"*, he told me that they left already, they left Rundu already (the father is working in a town 645 kilometres south of Rundu).

Most of my respondents went back to finish school eventually or are planning to do so when the child reaches the age of one year. Only Sunday and Maria never got the opportunity to go back, so far. Maria started working so that she could provide for her daughter:

**J:** So when you became a mother, how did life change?

**M:** Because now I have my child. My life is not difficult anymore. Because with my hands, ne, I work, I work for the people, ne, they give me money and I make sure what my child eats now. She don't stay in hunger no more. I go to town to make for some people, ne, they tell me you must us, they give me money...

**J:** What kind of help, is it cleaning, cooking...

**M:** This time, who says: *"Just come to help me"* you will cook, wash the dishes and clean the rooms. You will get 500 (Namibian dollars  $\approx$  425 Swedish crowns) month end.

For Jenny whose child was born disabled everyday life is a struggle:

It's difficult. My kid has always been sick and was always in hospital, admitted. And I'm missing some of my classes sometimes...

Jenny is currently studying for a diploma at a college in Rundu but it is hard for her because she misses classes every now and then. Her child is sick a lot and although they stay close to Jenny's mother, she is not always around and able to take care of the child.

Vision is now back in school and feels more like herself again:

It's better. I feel like I am back, you know... not just sitting and home, just looking out for the baby... its something for elders. It's not good for a teenager to be sitting at home looking after babies...

Although she is facing problems with the babysitter:

It's bad... cause she's [the babysitter] also having a baby... so they are two...now they are like twins. She is only washing the babies' clothes and cooking for herself...but sometimes she doesn't wash the baby, I have to wash the baby from there by myself when I come back from school.

Vision is struggling a lot to get the most basic and necessary items to take care of both herself and her baby. Even to find soap she has to struggle. Her sister is supporting her in the way she can but she is also struggling herself. For Vision, being a young mother is nothing but hard and throughout the interview she does not mention anything else.

### 8.11. BIG VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

All of my respondents, except KC-girl, are struggling in their current life situations. The ones with babies, Neliny and Vision, are struggling to get the necessary items for the babies. The ones with older children, Jenny, Sunday, Maria and Theresia, are facing tough times as a consequence of them having babies at a young age. These are consequences such as not being able to encounter work due to an unfinished schooling or not being able to focus very well on current studies due to a child who is sick all the time. However while life is a struggle right now and has been for some time for many of my respondents, this does not prevent them from looking with bright eyes on the future. Visions are big and many of the girls are convinced they would have been at University of Namibia right now if they had not fallen pregnant. Jenny elaborates:

**Je:** [...] Because I knew I could pass my grade 10 and I could also complete my grade 12 so that I can...go to the University of Namibia. Not just like here...

**Jo:** So you think that you would have been able to go to university?

**Je:** Yes because I know even some of my classmates who were down, lower than me...they are even there...so what about me, I was on top of them...I could also be there.

However now that she has her child she has given up the plans of university studies. Her wishes for the future are now mainly focused on her child and that the child develops like other children:

**Jo:** Now about the future... what are your dreams or wishes for you for the future?

**Je:** Just that my kid will start walking and talking... So that at least even when he wants something he can be able to say it... and walk so that he can start even to go to school. And for me to finish my course (Jenny is currently enrolled at a college in Rundu, studying for a degree) and get a job.

**Jo:** And do you think this can happen?

**Je:** Yes. [...] Only I have to study hard so that I can achieve my goals. I know if I will do that everything will be fine. I will start working and then I will buy everything I can afford for my kid. And I will even be able to help my mother and my father.

Theresia also elaborates on where she could have been by now if she had not fallen pregnant:

I could be in grade 12 now, and make plans for next year, where could I be... I could be in the UNAM or university, or I could work...

Sunday too:

I'm far. Today I cannot be able to do something of my own because I don't have money.

Vision does not seem to let her current situation hinder her from having big visions for the future:

**V:** I don't want to be a teacher anymore, because how can I tell kids what not to do, I already made my mistake... so now I'm planning to become a journalist.

[...]

**J:** How can you become a journalist?

**V:** I have to go to the University of Namibia... I will get a job for that.

**J:** So do you think this is possible to achieve?

**V:** Yes it will be possible... if I will be hard working.

Neliny is determined to finish up high school as soon as she stops breastfeeding and she can go back to school and she makes it clear that she is done with boys:

I'm dreaming to finish my school... I don't think about boys again. Boys is nothing, nothing. [...] I will finish my school, I am not going to play any more games.

Theresia is prepared to study hard to reach her goal:

Now just to study hard and make it to be... I want be a nurse. I just want to put more effort to school.

Sunday hopes she will soon encounter work so that she can start saving up for NAMCOL. But she also has dreams of getting her own home:

My dreams, because I am now grown-up, is I want to have my own home, then I will stay there with my husband and kids.

## **8.12. WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT THE GIRLS WOULD HAVE NEEDED/NEED**

As already mentioned my respondents struggle mainly due to their financial situation, they do not have enough money to buy necessary items for themselves and their babies. Some are struggling even to put food on the table. Therefore naturally most of my respondents mention *money* when I ask them what kind of support could have helped them, both as they were pregnant and later as they became mothers. Some of them also mention that they would need support in form of someone to look after the baby. Young mothers who do not have anyone to look after their children cannot go back to school. They get stranded at home while time passes and this might lead to them not going back to school at all. Baby sitters are not so hard to find but then again they will need you to pay a salary and if you do not have any money this is not possible.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

### **9.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL – SCHOOL AS AN INCLUDING FACTOR**

School is an extremely important social and including factor in Namibia. School is for many children and teenagers a symbol of possibilities, it is the opportunity to change family patterns and take poverty out of the house. When the pregnant girls at an early stage are required to leave school alternatively make the decision to leave school themselves due to school uniforms and shoes being too small and the fear of getting teased, they become a group socially excluded from the societal institution that school is. In the same way that the SID (social integrationist) discourse argues that paid work and the entrance to the labour market is a way to get included into society (Levitas in Pierson: 2010) being in school equals inclusion for children and teenagers. This applies especially for the ones coming from poorer families with no other activities than school taking place every day. The school uniform is an important symbol showing where you belong, which school you are part of. When my respondents no longer are able to wear the uniform properly, most of them decide not to wear it at all and the unity with other learners disappears. School uniform is compulsory in Namibian schools and if you can no longer wear a uniform this means you are not welcome to school anymore. When my respondents are out of school life becomes boring. Everyone else is in school while they are just sitting at home waiting for the baby to come. Due to attitudes among old and young people towards pregnant girls, some of my respondents start avoiding public places and live more isolated lives, not going in to town anymore. They are thereby being excluded from yet an important arena. The MUD (moral underclass) discourse argues that the excluded have themselves to blame for being excluded because of the way they behave, being engaged in antisocial behaviour and drug abuse. The same discourse is appearing in my respondents' stories and I have also had several discussions where young women are being blamed for ending up pregnant and for ruining their futures like that. In conclusion, school is an important institution and looking at the example from the one high school in the south, school could continue to be an important part of the young women's life also during their pregnancies.

### **9.2. THE PREGNANCY AS A STIGMATISING PROCESS**

The pregnancy itself becomes a stigmatising process when my respondents are no longer able to take part in daily activities anymore such as school, going in town or going to church. This

either due to institutional policies or attitudes towards pregnant girls present within these forums. Like the original meaning of stigmatisation, the ritual of labelling people with burns or scares in order for everyone to know that these people had bad morals; the pregnant stomach becomes the burned sign for some of my respondents. The pregnant stomach hinder them from going in town and from going to the hospital for check-ups because they are ashamed of being pregnant at a young age. At the same time they cannot run away from their own stomachs. The young women perceive attitudes present around them such as being labelled in a negative way, constructed as certain kinds of individuals – young women who are not serious. Two of my respondents never had the opportunity to go back to school. Another one thought she would never be able to go back and was rather looking for someone to marry so that at least she would become someone's wife and stay at home. Only after encouraging words and support from a teacher did she return to finish up school. Stigmatising processes hinder people from seeing and seeking possibilities; they get stuck in the stigma, in other people's negative perceptions of them.

### **9.3. THE STRUGGLE FOR MONEY – A CLASS PERSPECTIVE**

Most of my respondents had to struggle and still do struggle a lot in order to make ends meet. They are poor and their unstable economical situation, an everyday struggle, results in them living under a lot of pressure. At the end of the day focus is on making it, there is no time for other activities. But what if the child gets sick? There is no money for transport to the hospital. Factors like these ones make everyday life tough fore these young mothers. When they do not know where they can find money to buy a soap to wash their child then it is difficult to be a mother and to live up to their own expectations on motherhood. However not all of my respondents are suffering this bad, which is why a class perspective has to be applied in order to understand the young women's situation. My one respondent who is coming from a family a bit better off than the rest of the young women, mentions the baby not wanting to sleep in the night as one if the biggest struggles. For her motherhood is not connected with all the struggles that it is for my other respondents and this has to do with the economic situation of her and her boyfriend's family.

### **9.4. A FORCED MOTHERHOOD – FROM OPPRESSED GIRL TO STRUGGLING MOTHER**

From my respondents' stories it becomes clear to me that their current situations is a result of gendered power structures. They are being oppressed in relationships with young men

particularly when it comes to sex. The young women are passive throughout the process that starts with them getting their first boyfriend and having unprotected sex against their will and ends with them falling pregnant and left alone with all responsibilities. The boyfriends, in most of the cases, claim that it is not their child. They imply that their girlfriends have been sleeping with other men meaning they are not serious. Since abortion is not legal in Namibia the young women have no other choice than to have the baby. The struggle starts when the baby is born and they have to struggle for support to be able to take care of their child. In most cases the baby fathers later on support their children somehow but only after series of arguments with parents and other relatives involved. This picture is common and well known in Namibia. At the same time current discourses in the society in Rundu is pointing out the young women as the ones to blame, *they should have known better*. This discourse is similar to one found in a research on gender in the social context of child rape in South Africa and Namibia carried out by Jewkes, Penn-Kekana and Rose-Junius (2005). Their findings show that community members in the South African as well as Namibian context condemn child rape. At the same time however men abusing girls sexually is also understandable to some extent due to gendered power structures that are present in the two South African and Namibian communities that were targeted. While men cannot control their sexual desires girls and young women should know better. They are the ones who should control the situation so that the man does not get sexually aroused. Most of my respondents have integrated this picture and they blame themselves for being “naughty”, for “playing around with boys” and for “not being serious”. The public discourse on pregnant teenagers is very similar to the young women’s thoughts about themselves. Hacking (1999) argues that the way we construct people, what concepts we attach to them, is also going to affect the individuals involved and that with time they will start viewing themselves in the same negative way that they are being constructed. Public opinions and attitudes surrounding the young women as they are pregnant affect them in negative ways as it makes them blame themselves exclusively for ending up pregnant and feeling ashamed of their situation. This is why they also do not demand the fathers of the children to take responsibility. The young mothers might also be afraid of the consequence of losing the child to the fathers’ family. Feelings of shame and of being wrong might increase the risk of pregnant girls engaging in destructive behaviour such as trying to abort the baby. Later on however as the baby is born, the situation changes and my respondents are being respected in new ways as *mothers*. With time they also start looking further than their current situation, they manage to get out of the stigma and start picturing themselves finishing up school, finding work or going for further studies. Here financial

resources and the social network surrounding the young women are crucial for what possibilities they have. If there is no one who can help taking care of the child then the mother cannot go anywhere.

#### **9.5. THE INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

My findings show that not one factor alone is contributing to the young mothers experiencing a tough time. With an intersectional perspective it becomes visible that the young women are inferior in the different categories they belong to and this makes them vulnerable. They are *women, poor* and *young*. The young men who are the fathers of the children are superior because they are men. They used their status as men to force the young women to have sex or to have unprotected sex. Findings from Hailonga-van Dijk (2006) presented earlier in this thesis shows that in Namibia young men are expected to be in charge of their own sexuality while girls and young women should remain passive. This can be related to Kakukuru's text about Kavango women in The National Gender Study (2000). Kakukuru explains that women in Kavango are traditionally mostly recognised through their reproductive role, being referred to as seed bearing nuts (ngongokadi) and grain storages (sihete). Further on the fact that my respondents are poor is the main reason for their current struggle. This becomes very clear when I compare stories from my one respondent who did not struggle with money with stories from the other young women. The fact that they are young makes them targets in the public discourse where they get blamed for not knowing better as they end up pregnant. The research on gender and child rape in South Africa and Namibia found that in many Namibian tribes children and young people are regarded as inferior individuals who do not deserve any respect from adults (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana and Rose-Junius, 2005). If my respondents had been older it might have been easier for them to oppose themselves against older peoples views and opinions about them, instead of eventually regarding them as correct.

## **10. CLOSING REMARKS AND OWN IDEAS**

The study has recognised the impact of peer pressure in the young women's lives. Peer pressure is the reason for most of them having their first boyfriends and being sexually active. The consequence is that they fall pregnant while they are still in school and they have to drop out. Some of them do not make it back to school. Peer pressure also creates situations where the young women are being encouraged to abort their babies and this is a risky procedure that can endanger their lives. Further on this study has recognised that while present discussions on teenage pregnancy in Namibia focus very much on sugar daddies and intergenerational relationships as big contributing factors, my respondents were all impregnated by their boyfriends who are young men. Most of these young men refused to use condoms. It is important to stress this fact because in order to fight teenage pregnancies young men also have to be targeted. With the results from this study I conclude that it is crucial to work with and empower young women so that they can be strong enough to refuse to have sex with their boyfriends when they do not want to use protection. From my results I also conclude that young men need to learn to respect their girlfriends when it comes to sex. Knowledge on how to fall pregnant has proved not to be so clear for all of my respondents and hence this study also shows that there is a lack of actual understanding. While information on how to protect yourself from HIV/AIDS is everywhere, information on how to protect yourself from pregnancy is not communicated as frequently. A mix of traditional culture and modern sexual norms has a confusing effect on young women (and men) who do not seem to be so sure about how to prevent pregnancy and how to fall pregnant. This study has further recognised that while most of my respondents were feeling ashamed during their pregnancy, being blamed for ending up pregnant, they later on become respected in a new way as *mothers*.

When reflecting on how the community can help prevent pregnant teenagers from getting socially excluded I think it would be helpful if schools, hospitals and other relevant institutions would work together in supporting the young women. This could be done by setting up support groups with the aim to empower pregnant learners and by creating forums where emotions can be shared and discussed. I know that social workers at Ministry of Health is currently setting up support groups for pregnant learners at at least one school in the surroundings of Rundu. It would probably help if support groups were available on every school. Further on when listening to my respondents stories, it seems that some of the teachers, health workers and other professionals needs to be trained in how to approach pregnant learners in a better and more supportive way. Also since one of the biggest issues is

where to leave the children when the young women want to go back to school, it would be helpful if any kind of day care centre would be established close to the schools.

With the current situation in Kavango region where over 6000 girls and young women has fallen pregnant over the past two years, a lot of girls and young women would be helped if Rundu schools would be influenced by school policies from that one southern school. That means mainly assisting pregnant learners with school uniforms and shoes that fit and actively work against discrimination and teasing from fellow learners. This is partly a question of the schools' economical resources. However young women could then carry on with their studies for as long as they would have the strength. This would probably contribute to them feeling better about themselves and hence decrease the risks of them engaging in destructive behaviours such as self-made abortions or thoughts about ending their own lives.

As a closing remark I would like to add that it is easy to condemn the high rate of teenage pregnancies in Rundu. In order to understand the phenomena however it is necessary to look into the cultural context and the reality for and expectations on young women and men within the society in Rundu. Only with a fair and real understanding of the issue can ways be found in how to successfully fight teenage pregnancy.

## **11. SUGGESTED FURTHER RESEARCH**

After listening to the young women's stories and with their perspective in mind it would be interesting and fair to conduct a similar research with young men who became fathers when they were teenagers. The way my respondents describe the behaviour of the young men who impregnated them makes me wonder how they viewed the whole scenario and what made them act the way they did. Why do they not want to use condoms when they do not want to be fathers anyways or do they want to have children just that they do not want to be held responsible? It would have been interesting to do a comparative study, presenting perspectives from both young mothers and young fathers. That might also serve as a good foundation for discussing the topic with young women and men.

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### 11.5. MAPS

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**Topics/questions for the separate interviews**

**Age:**

**Age when she fell pregnant:**

**Current occupation:**

- **FAMILY**  
With who did you grow up?  
Where did you grow up?  
What does your parents do?  
What does your siblings do?
- **CHILDHOOD**  
Tasks  
Games  
Friends  
Dreams
- **SCHOOL**  
When did you start school?  
Did you like school?
- **BOYFRIENDS**  
The first boyfriend  
Relations to boys
- **SEXUAL ACTIVITY**  
How did you learn about sex?  
Did you know about contraceptives and how to use them?  
First time at what age?  
Was it your own choice?
- **WOMAN CULTURE IN KAVANGO (Rundu)**  
How do you perceive womanhood in Rundu, how is it to be a woman?  
Dreams and possibilities for women in Rundu
- **THE PREGNANCY**  
How did it happen?  
Was it planned?  
Contraceptives  
For how long did you stay in school after you found out about the pregnancy?  
What was your reaction when you found out about the pregnancy?  
Did you feel support from family/friends/someone else during your pregnancy?  
How was the pregnancy?  
Fears/hopes during pregnancy  
What could have helped you during the pregnancy?

- **THE FATHER**  
 Was he your boyfriend? What kind of relationship did you have?  
 What kind of guy is he? Old/young?  
 Is he taking responsibility – is he providing for the child?  
 What kind of relationship do you have now?  
 Are you happy with your current relationship to the father? Why/why not?
- **REACTIONS ON PREGNANCY – FAMILY – SCHOOL**  
 How did your family react to the pregnancy?  
 How did people in school react?  
 What did they say?  
 What do you think about the situation for pregnant teenagers?  
 When you think back on your situation as pregnant, what was good and what was bad for you in your situation?  
 What could have improved your situation?
- **CHANGES**  
 How did your life change when you became a mother?  
 Which was the biggest change?  
 Where do you think you would have been today if you would not have fallen pregnant?
- **CURRENT SITUATION**  
 What do you do now?  
 Where does your child stay?  
 Who is supporting your child?  
 How is it to be a young mother in Rundu? Challenges?  
 Could it be different somehow?  
 What support could help you right now?
- **FUTURE**  
 Dreams/wishes for the future  
 Future reality  
 School – would you want to complete your schooling if you haven't done it?  
 Which are the obstacles for you not to finish school?

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