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Experiences of teenage pregnancy and motherhood among generations of teenage mothers

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2017

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/23790

Masuko, Ottilia Diemo (2017) Experiences of teenage pregnancy and motherhood among generations of teenage mothers, , University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/23790>

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of teenage pregnancy and motherhood among two generations of mothers living in Johannesburg, South Africa. This engagement with gendered subjectivity took the form of ethnographic fieldwork conducted with three older women (35 to 42 years old) who gave birth between the ages of 16 and 18; as well as five young women aged 18-19 who became mothers during their teenage years. Using a social constructionist framework, the study explores the gendered nature of teenage pregnancy by discussing the narratives of women before and after having their first child. It argues that gendered experiences of teenage pregnancy play a crucial role in local understandings and practices of good motherhood. In particular, being a good mother for the older women in the study meant doing their best as parents to prevent teenage pregnancy in the younger generation. The women saw this as the best way to safeguard their daughters' social reputations and educational futures in a context that considers teenage pregnancy to be unacceptable. When their attempts at preventing pregnancy proved unsuccessful, the older women were cast as inadequate parents who were partly to blame for their daughters' pregnancies.