


**PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF INITIATION  
SCHOOLS IN DEALING WITH UNPLANNED  
TEENAGE PREGNANCIES IN THOHOYANDOU**

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submitted for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the Department of Psychology,  
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**University of Venda for Science and Technology**

03 September 2004



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Perception of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou by Ramabulana Alipfali Victoria submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the subject of Psychology at the University of Venda

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I, *Ramabulana Alipfali Victoria*, hereby declare that the dissertation for the Master of Arts in Psychology degree at the University of Venda for Science and Technology hereby submitted by me has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that this is my own work in design and in execution and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### DECLARATION

I Alipfali Victoria Ramabulana hereby declare that the dissertation for the Master of Arts in Psychology degree at the University of Venda For Science and technology hereby submitted by me has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that this is my own work in design and in execution and that all reference material contained there has been duly acknowledged.

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*08/09/2004*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the 22 initiates (females and males) who volunteered to talk to me about their experiences regarding the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou. I feel a deep sense of respect and gratitude to all of them.

To my supervisor and mentor, Professor Norman Duncan, for his unfailing support, encouragement, patience and guidance.

To my family, especially my guardians, Vho-Masithulela and Vho-Joyce Nesengani, my son Tshifhiwa and my friend Victor, for their love and support.

To Professor L.M. Miti and Mrs P.Kaburise, for their support, encouragement, and for their assistance with proofreading.

To Vho-Anna and Vho-Christopher Tshivhase and Mareza Botes, for their friendly assistance and kind words of encouragement.

To The National Research Foundation, for the financial support that made this study possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS **ABSTRACT**

There is lack of research which looks at the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in South Africa. This study focused on how initiates, both female and male, experienced initiation schools by exploring how initiates construct and give meaning to their experiences within the context of their traditional cultural practices. Interviews (focus group and semi-structured) were conducted with 22 initiates who volunteered participation in response to my request. The interviews covered issues such as, perceptions of the role of initiation schools in preventing or encouraging unplanned teenage pregnancies, the social lessons learnt there and the schools' effect on the initiates. The interviews lasted for forty-five minutes to an hour and were tape recorded and transcribed. The interview data were analyzed within Thompson's depth hermeneutics'. One major finding of this study is that initiation schools were reported to be abusive physically, sexually and emotionally and gender imbalanced, and have few positive lessons in terms of preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Some participants also reported that initiation schools might encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study, which focuses on perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou. This study was conducted in the Limpopo Province. The chapter includes various aspects such as, the motivation for the study, the study objectives, the value of the study nationally, a brief literature review, and the research methods and ethical considerations followed in this study.

### RATIONALE/ MOTIVATION

Unplanned teenage pregnancies could have a negative effect on teenage mothers and their children in general and on teenage mothers in rural communities in particular (Ramabulana, 2000). Initiation schools were and are seen as places where teenagers were and are taught traditional methods of preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Presently, there is a debate whether such schools should be recognized or discontinued. Some see the schools as an invasion of initiates' privacy, particularly as they make themselves guilty of various invasive practices, such as virginity testing.

### THE AIM OF THE STUDY NATIONALLY:

This study explores perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies.

The value of this study is that it attempts to contribute new insights into current debates on whether or not traditional schools should be officially recognized or be discontinued. Secondly, it attempts to identify values

learnt at these schools, which can help to contribute to the prevention of unplanned teenage pregnancies. Thirdly, it challenges procedures and values that need to be revised. Fourthly, it attempts to deepen social scientists' understanding of the role traditional cultural practices play in preventing or encouraging unplanned teenage pregnancies. Lastly, it attempts to champion the views of teenage mothers who most frequently are shunned in their societies.

### **BACKGROUND**

This part briefly reviews the history and functions of traditional schools, and the causes and consequences of unplanned teenage pregnancies. In a recent study (Ramabulana 2000), some participants indicated that initiation schools are no longer effective in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies. However, other participants argued that initiation schools are still effective in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies and that the reason why teenage pregnancies are on the increase is that initiation schools are no longer held in some of the villages. This study also explores some of the issues, which may cause unplanned teenage pregnancies such as health workers' attitudes, and issues relating to the consequences of unplanned teenage pregnancies such as relationship difficulties after the pregnancy is known to parents, partner and friends.

Mlangeni (2003) reported that the love-life sex education organization says statistics show that teenage pregnancies continue to be a major problem in South Africa, with one in three girls falling pregnant before 18 years.

According to Thohoyandou Municipality statistics, teenage pregnancy is still a problem (Thohoyandou Malamulele Annual Statistics, 2001). For example September 2001 had the highest number of reported unplanned teenage pregnancies. Initiation schools are usually held during the June and December school holidays. The increased number of unplanned teenage pregnancies may be influenced by initiation schools' teachings. The sexual teachings may indirectly encourage sexual activities among teenagers. (See the Table 1 below).

**Table 1: THOHOYANDOU MALAMULELE ANNUAL STATISTICS OF DELIVERY TO WOMEN UNDER THE AGE OF 18 YEARS (2001)**

Months	Number	Percentages	Average
January	18	8%	100%/ 12=8,33
February	16	7%	
March	31	14%	
April	31	14%	
May	14	6%	
June	09	4%	
July	18	8%	
August	15	7%	
September	41	18%	
October	13	6%	
November	08	4%	
December	09	4%	
	N=223	N=100%	

### CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCIES OF UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCIES

Unplanned teenage pregnancies may have a range of consequences. They include the disruption of schooling and socio-economic disadvantages, difficult obstetric outcomes and inadequate mothering and relationship difficulties (Macleod, 1999a).

Unplanned teenage pregnancies may be caused by a range of factors, including reproductive ignorance, risk-taking behaviour, traditional values, psychological problems, dysfunctional family patterns, poor health services, physiological maturity, socio-economic status, the breakdown of cultural traditions and the cultural value placed on children (Macleod, 1999b). Due to space constraints, only a few of these factors are discussed in chapter 2.

#### PREVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to explore the history, function and the role of 'musevhetho', 'vhusha', and 'domba', 'vhutamba vhutuka' and 'murundu' in terms of preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. In Venda culture, boys and girls have to attend initiation schools when they reach puberty. Girls attend the 'musevhetho', 'vhusha' and 'domba' ceremonies. Boys attend 'vhutamba vhutuka' and 'murundu' ceremonies.

#### METHODOLOGY

Twenty-two participants (fifteen females and seven males) took part in this study. I used snowball sampling to recruit participants. I used interviews to collect data. Semi-structured and focus group interviews were useful methods of collecting data from participants. This study is qualitative in nature. A qualitative research method was a suitable approach since the aim of the study was to explore the meanings initiates give to initiation schools in terms of prevention of unplanned teenage pregnancies. The recorded data were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Thematic method of analysis was used to analyze the data (Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Shaw, 1995).

## **ETHICS**

Participants were informed about the process of research. They were also informed from the start that their participation is voluntary. They were further informed that they were free to withdraw from the study if they wished to. Information divulged during interviews was not divulged to any other person before the participants gave their permission. Participants' anonymity was preserved.

## **PREVIEW OF THE STUDY**

In this work, chapter one introduces the study. Chapter two discusses literature reviewed which is relevant for this study. Chapter three presents research methodologies used in the present study. Chapters four and five present and discuss the findings of this study. Lastly chapter six looks at recommendations and conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores issues about initiation schools and teenage pregnancies. In the first part of the chapter I discuss different theories of adolescent development. A discussion of causes and consequences of unplanned teenage pregnancies follows this. In the third part of this chapter I present issues about the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies. I conclude the chapter by arguing that both initiation schools and unplanned teenage pregnancies are interrelated and the role of initiation schools is questionable in preventing teenage pregnancies, which are in most cases unplanned.

#### DEVELOPMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE

In this section I will examine the key concepts that are central to the study. These are definitions of identity development and sexual maturity.

#### PROBLEMS WITH DEFINITION.

There is no common definition of identity development. In this study I have attempted to present formal definitions of identity development.

#### IDENTITY

Identity development can be defined by examining the meaning of personal development which refers to a sense of sameness or continuity of the self despite environmental changes and individual growth (Corsin, 1984).

Harrocks (1976) defines identity as selecting, testing and integrating self image derived from childhood emotional crises into adolescent's ideological climate.

Identity is defined as a quest for a self-image, continuity in life and congruence between self-image and the role expectation of society as a search for identity or ego-identity (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1997).

The present study assumes Meyer's definition of identity. Initiates assume a new identity after initiation schools, which may help them to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies as expected from them by their seniors.

### **SEXUAL MATURITY**

An important developmental task of the adolescent is to satisfy his or her sexual needs in a socially acceptable way so that it contributes positively to the development of his or her identity (Louw, 1996; Papalia & Olds, 1995; Ryckman, 1993). His or her newly developed sexuality must also be integrated with his or her identity and interpersonal relationships. The sexual relationships that begin during adolescence offer adolescents an opportunity to achieve a certain amount of sexual satisfaction and also the opportunity to develop their identity as a sexual being (Lerner, 1976; Louw, 1996).

Culture is a major influence in the adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviour. In this case, traditional practices at initiation schools about sexuality may prevent or encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies. Cultural norms prescribe to a large extent, the age at which the

adolescent may start dating and establish relationships with the opposite sex (Ewen, 1988; Louw, 1996).

According to Mathabane (1994), because in Venda culture parents view speaking about sex with their children as taboo, they send them to initiation schools where they receive sexual instruction. This may help them to find out who they are sexually. This study attempts to find out if the sexual teachings at initiation schools prevent or encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies.

### **CAUSES OF UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

Many factors are associated with unplanned teenage pregnancies. They include reproductive ignorance, risk taking behaviour, traditional values, psychological problems, dysfunctional family patterns, poor health services, physiological maturity, socio-economic status, and the breakdown of cultural traditions and the cultural value placed on children. Due to space constraints, only a few of these are discussed below.

### **PARENTAL ATTITUDES**

According to Clarke-Stewart, Friedman & Kock (1985), in some societies traditional values are still in force. Trying to find out about contraceptives is particularly a taboo. Some of the causes of unplanned teenage pregnancies include the fact that parents do not discuss the mechanisms of sex by the time their children reach the age of ten or the fifth grade. Some teenagers do not use birth control because they are afraid their parents will find out they are having sex.

Lusunzi (1997) reported that lack of supervision from parents and grandparents may contribute toward unplanned teenage pregnancies. Clemens-Stone, Eigsti and McGuire (1987) argue that some teenagers find it difficult to obtain contraceptive services, or feel it is morally wrong to use birth control measures.

Goosen and Kungman (1996) argue that many young people are afraid to discuss contraception with their parents, who often mistakenly believe that information about contraception will lead to their children's sleeping around. The adolescents' parents' attitudes of not discussing sexual matters with them could be influenced by their traditional cultural beliefs. For instance, according to traditional cultural practices, Venda parents were and are still forbidden to discuss sexual matters with their children. It is taboo. They (Venda parents) send their adolescent children to initiation schools where they receive instruction on issues pertaining to sexuality. Macleod (1999b) reports that the traditional cultural practices that controlled sexual behaviour amongst adolescents have broken down.

Jeannerat (1997) reported that elders who run initiation schools feel that for example 'vhusha' is not having its desired results in contemporary society, that young people are not adopting the teachings given at vhusha and are consequently, not behaving properly. Ramabulana (2000) reported that initiation schools are no longer held in some villages. The mass media (radio, television, magazines and newspapers), church and school have replaced the function of initiation schools in teaching teenagers how to handle

their sexuality and they seem to be less effective. Another reason may be that some of the 'vhusha' practices are perceived by some as abusive and have to be revisited to fit in the contemporary society.

### **PHYSIOLOGICAL MATURITY**

Haas (1987) and Papalia and Olds (1988) posit that the chief cause of teenage pregnancies is teenage sexual maturity. They argue that teenage intercourse and pregnancy are not signs of decadence but rather that those teenagers are biologically ready for sex, as they always have been. Society, by refusing to recognize this development has made it a problem.

Clarke-Stewart et al. (1985) and Hurlock (1980) argue that adults seem to deny that adolescents are sexually active and they often deny them information about sex.

### **EMOTIONAL NEEDS**

Adolescent pregnancy may also be the outcome of hidden emotional needs. What appears to be an accident may actually be an act motivated by unarticulated needs and desires. Although she may not be aware of it, a girl may think of pregnancy as a way of striking back and as a way to show off her maturity. Craig (1989) maintains that some teenage mothers want to have and keep their own children because of their own need to be loved. These young mothers have usually been deprived of affection and expect children to supply what they have missed.

Mott, Fazekas and James (1985) argue that for some adolescents pregnancy is sought as a means of escape from

an intolerable family situation, as an unconscious wish to prove adulthood or punish parents for unmet needs, or as compensation for feelings of rejection and insecurity (de la Rey & Carolissen, 1999).

Lauer and Lauer (1994) found that teenage mothers who have been sexually abused, or who as children felt isolated and alone often believe that having a baby is the one way to find someone to love. They found that some teenagers might use pregnancy to get attention, and to assert their independence from their parents.

### **SOCIETAL CHANGE**

Dacey and Kenny (1994) and Louw (1996) argue that currently engagement in sexual activities, getting married and bearing children are less closely linked than they were 25 years ago. In the past, boys were much more likely to have sex earlier than girls were. As the belief that one should wait until marriage to have sex has lost its appeal, girls are having sex earlier as well. As a result, many more teenagers are becoming pregnant without planning it.

### **LACK OF KNOWLEDGE, IGNORANCE AND UNPREPAREDNESS**

Louw (1996) reports that adolescents are often informed about sexual matters too late or the information that they have at their disposal is faulty. According to Muuss (1996) and Papalia and Olds (1988), many young girls become pregnant because they are reluctant to accept the fact that they are sexually active. They prefer to think of themselves as having been swept away in a moment of passion (forgivable) rather than having expected to engage in intercourse (immoral). They are not ready to think of

themselves as sexually mature and responsible. Therefore they do not plan to prevent conception. Clemens-Stone et al. (1991) reported similar results.

Few adolescents, who do have choices regarding the use of contraceptives, feel that the sex information they receive from parents is inadequate. Consequently, they take advantage of whatever sources of information are available to them such as guidance classes in school, or discussions with their friends, books on sex, or experimentation through masturbation, petting, or intercourse (Clemens-Stone et al., 1991, Haas, 1987; Hurlock, 1980).

Some adolescents also believe that they cannot fall pregnant because they are too young, they are having intercourse for the first time or because they are having intercourse standing up (Clemens-Stone et al., 1991; Muuss, 1996).

Some adolescent girls mistakenly think, for instance, that they can only fall pregnant if they want a baby, or that they have sexual intercourse too irregularly to fall pregnant (Clemens-Stone et al., 1991; Muus, 1996). Goosen and Kungman (1996) write that because so few teenagers have adequate and accurate information about how their bodies work, they may believe they will not get pregnant when they have sex.

Haas (1987) argues that adolescents are at a biological peak of energy, enthusiasm and adventure. Stern adult warnings intended to control these qualities and the sexuality that accompanies them do not ordinarily succeed.

Educational programmes, psychological and physical or even religious threats, seem to have limited effectiveness in promoting abstinence. Most parents do not discuss intercourse, contraception, abortion, menstruation or erotic dreams with their children.

Haas (1987), Lauer et al. (1994) and Papalia and Olds (1988) report that many adolescents who fall pregnant do not know about contraceptives. Young people are sexually active earlier and often lack information about the consequences of, and necessary precautions against pregnancy (Mott, Fazekas & James, 1985).

Goosen and Kungman (1996) posit that a young woman might simply not anticipate having sex. The common sad story is often that unplanned sex "just happened". Drinking and drugs make this more likely to happen. In these cases, young girls often do not know about "morning after" contraception. They further state that most young women are not assertive enough or are too shy to insist that their partners use condoms, and many young men feel that by refusing to wear condoms, they are proving their manhood. Some teenagers believe that the use of contraceptives interferes with the pleasures of sex, and that it may be dangerous (Clemens-Stone et al., 1991).

Lauer et al. (1994) report that the younger the age at which sexual activity begins, the more likely the adolescent girl is to become pregnant. Lauer further argues that the first experience of sexual intercourse may be an unplanned response to strong emotions, making it unlikely that any plans for birth control have been made. Fewer than

one out of six females use some method of birth control the first time they have sexual intercourse. Teenage sex occurs at a time in life when the sex drive is the strongest among males and impulsiveness and the inability to defer gratification is strong among both males and females (Lauer et al. 1994).

### **HEALTH WORKERS' SERVICES**

The attitudes of health workers towards sexually active teenagers are a major problem. Those who should help are often disapproving or even rude to young people who approach them. As a result, young people avoid seeking help with contraception (Goosen & Kungman, 1996).

Also, a young person may be living in a community where contraception is disapproved of, or even withheld without parental permission. Where the law gives teenagers the right to get contraceptives from a clinic, some young people complain that health workers are disapproving and unhelpful (Goosen & Kingman, 1996).

### **CONSEQUENCES OF UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

Unplanned teenage pregnancy may have various consequences, including the disruption of schooling and socio-economic disadvantage, difficult obstetric outcomes, and inadequate mothering and relationship difficulties.

### **THE DISRUPTION OF SCHOOLING AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGES**

The disruption of schooling that potentially accompanies teenage pregnancies, usually is seen as detrimental to the teenage mother as it limits her future career prospects,

and therefore leads to a lower socio-economic status for her and her child (Berger, 1988; Clemens-Stone, Eigsti & McGuire 1991; Craig, 1989; Goosen & Kingman, 1996; Lauer 1994 et al.; Macleod, 1999a; Papalia; Olds, 1992; Stanhope, Bridges, Black & Laucaster, & Stanford, 1990). Goosen and Kungman (1996) report that every year thousands of teenagers are expelled from school because they get pregnant (although the Department of Education is now challenging this practice). Macleod (1999a) states that although some adolescents resume their education later in life, they generally do not catch up with women who postpone childbearing. Most teenage mothers get no chance to finish their education after the baby is born. Macleod further mentions that few teenagers have money to support a family. Unplanned teenage pregnancy perpetuates the cycle of female poverty and powerlessness.

If she tries to return to school, she may experience problems with the care of her child, especially if she is from a disadvantaged community. This could mean frequent absence from school.

Macleod (1999a) in addition elucidates on some of the reasons cited by teenagers for their difficulty in returning to school. These were financial constraints, marriage and doubting their academic capabilities. Clemens-Stone, Eigsti and McGuire (1991) posit that child-bearing and child-rearing can also lead to social isolation from peers. The younger the mother at the time of birth, the greater the likelihood that she will live in poverty and subsist on long-term public assistance.

Schiamberg (1985) maintains that many of the developmental tasks of adolescence are omitted in order for the teenage mother to fulfill adult or parental responsibilities. For instance, there is often a failure to remain in school, a failure to develop what is considered as a stable family, and a failure to enter a vocation and become relatively self-supporting.

Macleod (1995a) and Papalia and Olds (1981) found that Schiamberg (1985) further mentions that there is little doubt that these failures result in heavy psychological burdens for both the adolescent and her family. These failures at the tasks of adolescence represent the closing of doors that typically serve as the transition from childhood to adulthood independence. Frequently, if these transitional tasks are not successfully managed during the adolescent years, the frustrations of being a teenage parent may prevent their completion at a later time.

Babies who are more likely to die in their first year of

### **DIFFICULT OBSTETRIC OUTCOMES**

Adolescent parenting presents multiple problems for the child and the mother. Papalia and Olds (1981, 1988, 1995) posit that most teenage mothers aged 17 years and younger tend to give birth to infants with a low birth weight. Betz, Hunsberger and Wright (1994), Clark-Stewart, Friedman and Koch (1985), Ferguson (1998), Louw (1996), Macleod (1999a), Papalia and Olds (1995), Santrock (1993) and Vasta, Haith and Miller (1999) reported similar results.

Betz et al. (1994) report that cephalopelvic disproportion

Vasta et al. (1999) report that low birth-weight in the offspring of teenagers appears to be related broadly to socio-demographic factors and to inadequate nutrition and other unsound health practices. Low socio-economic status

may account for inadequate nutrition in that the long-term diet of adolescents in this group is often missing essential nutrients because of a lack of resources. Betz et al. (1994), Vasta, et al. (1999) and Papalia and Olds (1995) report that being a child of a child has numerous risks.

MacLeod (1999a) and Papalia and Olds (1981) found that complications of unplanned teenage pregnancy include hypertension, premature labour and anemia. Papalia and Olds (1995) posit that anemia during pregnancy may result from inadequate nutritional and caloric intake. MacLeod further indicates that infant mortality in the case of adolescent mothers is twice that for women in their twenties. Betz et al. (1994), Clark-Stewart et al. (1985), De Visser and le Roux (1996), Johnson (1973) and Louw (1996) also reported that teenage mothers are more likely to give birth to babies who are more likely to die in their first year of their life.

Mott, Fazekas and James (1985) report that infants born to adolescent parents are often preterm, small for gestational age and face risks both during and after birth. Ausubel, Montemayor and Sajian (1977) and Papalia and Olds (1981) posit that adolescent pregnancy complications include toxemia.

Betz et al. (1994) report that cephalopelvic disproportion is more common in young adolescents than in older women. This results in an increased rate of anesthesia and caesarean births for this age group with the associated risks of major surgery.

Johnson (1973) posits that adolescent mothers are poorly prepared to deal with parenthood. The younger the parents, the greater the risks to their children. He further argues that pregnancy interrupts the mothers' normal developmental process of resolving issues of self-esteem. The normal changes in body image that occur during pregnancy can have ill effects on the teenager who is unsure of her self-image.

### **INADEQUATE PARENTING**

Some teenage mothers (Macleod, 1999a) find mothering to be difficult. After interviewing pregnant teenagers attending a parental clinic at a provincial hospital, Macleod (1999a) concluded that the teenagers generally lacked adequate parenting skills. She further found that they had a fair knowledge concerning the physical care of the baby, but their knowledge concerning the baby's emotional needs and their acceptance of parental responsibilities were limited. Alloy, Accocela and Bootzin (1996) reported that teenage mothers are rarely equipped to raise children. Dacey and Kenny (1994) and Santrock (1993) also argue that teenage mothers have less desirable child rearing practices.

More specifically, Macleod (1999a) and Alloy et al. (1996) indicated that teenage mothers vocalize less often to their young children and they do not provide opportunities for affectional exchange. Instead, they share emotions inconsistently, leading to an increased risk of developmental problems in the child. They display higher levels of parenting stress and are less responsive in interactions with their infants than more mature mothers.

In modern society adolescence often is a stressful time in life and the demands of being an adolescent and those of being a mother are often divergent (De Visser et al., 1996). The young mother who tries to be both at the same time may compromise one or the other or fail at both. If she tries to return to school, she may experience problems with the care of her child, especially if she is from a disadvantaged community.

Johnson (1973) argues that the repercussions of child

Alloy et al. (1996) indicated that most teenage mothers are unmarried and therefore, attempt to bear the burdens of parenthood alone and, when they fail, they ask for assistance from their parents (frequently their mothers). Haas (1987) found similar results that teenage mothers get help from their parents to raise their babies.

Many authors such as Macleod (1999a), Parakh and de la Rey

Mott et al. (1985) believe that for most young women adolescents, the change from adolescent to parent is overwhelming. Most adolescent parents are faced with uncertainty, self-doubt, and inexperience, which are compounded by their immaturity. Mott et al. (1985) believe that if an adolescent parent comes from a dysfunctional family, the risks for successful parenting are compounded.

(Mampela & Preston Whyte and Louw in Macleod, 1999a:

Betz et al. (1994) found that, in comparison with children of older mothers, children of adolescent mothers perform less well academically and had to repeat a school grade more frequently. Others have also noted that behaviour problem, school problems, low-intellectual attainment and lower overall lifetime income are more common in children of adolescent parents (Betz et al., 1994).

The frequency of drug abuse among these teenagers also has devastating effects on their offspring. The incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome, newborn drug addiction and congenital STD is more common among adolescent mothers than in other age groups. Although child abuse appears more frequently with adolescent parents, the relationship of one to the other is unclear (Betz et al, 1994).

Johnson (1973) argues that the repercussions of child bearing on the life of adolescent parents are serious and lasting. Mothers under 18 years of age are found less likely to remain with their children or to be interested in their child's progress.

#### **RELATIONSHIP DIFFICULTIES**

Many authors such as Macleod (1999a), Parekh and de la Rey (1999) and Sodi (1999) found that unplanned teenage pregnancies result in difficulties in relationships between the teenage mothers and their parents, the fathers of their babies and their friends.

##### **(a) Relationship with parents**

The majority of parents react negatively with anger and disappointment to the news of unplanned teenage pregnancy (Ntombela & Preston Whyte and Louw in Macleod, 1999a; Parekh & de la Rey 1999; Ramabulana, 2000).

Schiamberg (1985) maintains that sometimes, particularly other family members might view a pregnant teenager as the individual who has caused a permanent crisis or strain in the family system. Parents may at first be angry and later

accepting. This anger is one mechanism of crisis management. Parekh and de la Rey (1999) reported that unplanned teenage pregnancy is often accompanied by a strong sense of shame and guilt. Pregnancy is viewed as the symbol of failed aspirations for the whole family.

Parekh and de la Rey (1999), Ramabulana (2000) and Sodi (1999) found that parents feel ashamed of their teenagers' unplanned teenage pregnancies. The view of pregnancy as a pervasive failure may provoke guilt as well as questions within the adolescent's parents themselves regarding any role they may have played that might have inadvertently contributed to the occurrence of this problem (Schiamberg, 1985).

The total picture of familial response to such pregnancies spans the full range of positive and negative attitudes, but ultimately the situation is viewed as a potential crisis. The teenage mother's family might voice disapproval or anger and restrict her activities by refusing to assist in child care, creating emotional detachment that serves to reinforce her feelings of unworthiness (Mott et al., 1985).

Johnson (1973) argues that if the adolescent is unmarried, she may have to continue to rely on the family of origin for emotional and economic support. This dependency is in direct opposition to the normal developmental task of breaking away and becoming independent which should commence at this point in the adolescents' life.

**(b) Relationship with partner.**

Lauer et al. (1994) reported that many teenagers give birth to children who are unwanted at the time of conception, in particular because of the mother being unmarried. A minority of teenage mothers marry the father of their children. More of the teenage mothers never see the fathers again. Some see the father but do not marry him and may get little or no support from him. Mott et al. (1985) report similar results.

Mott et al. (1985) mention that at a time when the new mother needs the most emotional support, she often gets the least. Her boyfriend might be frightened of the awesome responsibility and turn away from her.

Clemens-Stone, Eigst and McGuire (1991) stated that if these mothers marry, they are at increased risk of experiencing separation and divorce. Johnson (1973) found similar results. He argues that, although many adolescent parents do not marry, those who do marry tend to have difficult marriages. There is evidence to suggest that the interruption of normal developmental tasks may explain the higher divorce rate. Kibell and Wagstaff (1991) mentioned that during and after pregnancy, the teenage mother needs a great deal of assistance and support.

**(c) Relationship with peers**

Betz et al. (1994) reported that pregnancy could lead to social isolation which is either self-imposed or a result of peer rejection, leaving the teenage mother without the support of friends. This emotional void is in itself a crisis and often in sharp contrast to the adolescent's

fantasies in which the infant provides love and affection to erase the confusion and conflicts of adolescence (Johnson, 1973).

Being isolated from peers not only retards the development of interpersonal social skills but also reduces the opportunities to discuss important issues in the process of value clarification. Rejection by peers can lead to a decreased sense of self-worth, which in turn may lead to poor life style choices. This can have long-term negative effects on the adult life of the adolescent. Thus, regardless of the cause, it hinders normal psychological development.

Most unplanned teenage pregnancies are difficult and painful experiences. Knowledge about sexuality and the use of effective contraceptives is the best way to avoid unplanned teenage pregnancy (Lauer et al., 1994).

### **RESILIENCY FACTORS**

While acknowledging the potentially damaging effects of unplanned teenage pregnancies on the development of teenage mothers, it is important to note that there is no direct causal relationship between the external occurrence of unplanned teenage pregnancies and subsequent pathological reactions of teenage mothers.

Most of the leading social scientists such as Macleod, (1999a) and Parekh and de la Rey, (1999), working in this field agree that the impact of unplanned teenage pregnancies on teenage mothers is influenced by the interaction of a number of intra-individual and situational

factors. These factors include physical, social and material consequences of unplanned teenage pregnancy, socio-economic status of the teenage mother and availability of quality support.

It should be stressed that while the above mentioned factors may in some cases improve teenage mothers' reactions to unplanned teenage pregnancies in the short term, they may obviously not completely eliminate the potential damage of such pregnancies.

Traditionally the Venda-speaking people regarded initiation schools as an institution which could assist boys and girls in managing the changes of adolescence, particularly their sexual development. As such, it has always been believed to play a key role in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies.

#### **NATURE, FUNCTION AND ROLE OF INITIATION SCHOOLS IN DEALING WITH UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCIES.**

In Venda culture, boys and girls have to attend initiation schools when they reach puberty. Girls attend 'musevhetho', 'vhusha' and 'domba'. Boys attend 'thondo', 'vhutamba vhutuka' and 'murundu' ceremonies. In all these initiation schools, boys and girls are taught how to respect adults and also how to conduct themselves sexually. Blacking (1998), Hammond-Tooke (1993), Mathabane (1994), Schapera (1937), Stayt (1931) and Van Warmelo (1933), report that parents were and are not expected to discuss sexual matters with their children. It is taboo. When children reach puberty, they are admitted to initiation schools where, by means of a number of ceremonies, they leave their youth

behind them, and enter the phase of adulthood. However in a recent study (Ramabulana, 2000) some participants indicated that initiation schools are no longer effective in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies.

## **INITIATION SCHOOLS FOR MALES**

### **VHUTAMBA VHUTUKA (the washing away of boyhood)**

When a Venda boy reaches puberty, he goes through the 'vhutamba vhutuka' ceremony that takes place in winter. When a Venda boy becomes aware of his first nocturnal emission, informs one of the older boys at his village (never one of his brothers). The boy who is informed, informs the 'mukoma' (the chief's helper). When there are a number of boys ready, the 'mukoma' orders the boys to be initiated to prepare a large quantity of snuff. The 'mukoma' will have some portion for himself and will send some portion of snuff to the father of each of the boys. In doing so, he informs the father that now his son is a young man (Stayt, 1931).

A day is arranged for the boys to attend a meeting at 'khoroni' (chief's kraal and only attended by men) of the district chief. The boys join the 'matangwa' dance for two or three nights. On the third morning, the initiates must collect a large pile of firewood at the riverside and obtain goats and fowls, which they hide near the pile of fire-wood. The instructors at 'vhutamba vhutuka' are called 'midabe' (those who have been initiated previously). The initiates are forced into icy water, where they remain squatting for three hours, while the 'midabe' kindle a fire and feast on the animals that were procured by the initiates (Stayt, 1931).

On the slightest pretext, the 'midabe' punish them with the 'tshipata', an instrument of torture, made from four small sticks, which are placed between the fingers of the delinquent and pressed tightly together, causing the initiate acute pain. Today this practice can be considered as physical abuse and is punishable by law. Cold and utterly miserable, they are finally allowed to emerge from the river and to warm themselves at the fire, before proceeding to the 'khoru' again to dance the 'matangwa'. All day after this ordeal, the 'midabe' keep a constant watch to prevent the initiates from falling asleep (Stayt, 1931).

During the day, the initiates collect more wood and animals for use by their 'midabe' on the following morning, when the exercise in the river is repeated. This continues for six days, and in addition to the physical hardening engendered by the exercise of endurance in the river, the boys are given sexual instruction and taught many of the tribal rules of etiquette and the mode of life. At the end of the ceremony, they are considered to have passed the first stage in their journey towards manhood, and are encouraged to indulge in playful intimate interaction with girls, something which had previously been strictly forbidden (Stayt, 1931). Playful sexual activities with girls can include practices such as playing on the thighs or penetrating but the boy is expected to ejaculate outside. This practice not only put the girl on the risk of falling pregnant, but also of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as the life threatening AIDS.

However most of the practices at 'vhutamba vhutuka' are no longer practiced (Stayt, 1931).

#### **MURUNDU (see appendix 7)**

Venda people consider 'murundu' as the main ritual marking the attainment of adult status by males. 'Murundu' takes place in winter (Magubane, 1998). Among the Venda-speaking people, the age of this circumcision school is in the teens. A father would decide that the time had come to circumcise his son and would typically arrange with other homestead heads in the sub-ward with sons of about the same age, to establish a lodge and engage a specialist circumciser to perform the operation (see appendix 7). Permission from the chief or headman always has to be obtained. About three to twenty boys might be circumcised together. The initiator of the circumcision (see appendix 7) is termed the father of the lodge and it is he who acts as programme director throughout the seclusion period accompanying 'murundu'.

On the day of the commencement of the rites, the boys gather together at the home of the father of the lodge, where sacrifices are made of an uncastrated bull or ram, to inform the ancestors of what is taking place (Stayt, 1931). Older men address the initiates on how to conduct themselves and to put away all childish things. They must henceforth speak and act with the dignity of men. Their old clothes are taken away from them and they go naked. They are then accompanied down to the river where they wash and are circumcised (See appendix 7) (Stayt, 1931).

The operation (see appendix 7) has to be endured with stoicism. To cry out is a disgrace. Finally, the boys are smeared from head to foot with white clay, symbolically expressing their marginal status (Stayt, 1931).

After the boy has passed through the tribal school, he is regarded as a young man ('muthannga'). Although he does not have a special status, he joins the ranks of the adults and is allowed to marry (Stayt, 1931). Today young boys, even before they are 10 years old, can be sent to 'murundu'. Medical doctors also circumcise boys at hospitals. Most parents seem to trust medical doctors more than the initiator ('madala') in the mountain. This could be due to the high death rate at the mountains.

At the first sign of menstruation, the girl will inform one

#### **INITIATION SCHOOLS FOR FEMALES**

##### **MUSEVHETHO**

Girls usually attend 'musevhetho' but boys can attend the school if they desire. 'Musevhetho' is held at a chosen isolated part of a village and is attended by girls before menstruation, between six and twelve years of age. Parents are the ones to decide to send their daughters to be initiated. It is important to note that small girls younger than six years can also attend the schools. Senior women can also attend these schools to be initiated, if they want, and if they did not attend the school before. In the past, initiates attended for weeks but today it lasts for days only. After 'musevhetho' girls attend 'vhusha'.

##### **VHUSHA (see appendix 4)**

A Venda girl, at her first menses, is considered to have reached the stage in life when she must discard childish excluded, and throughout the ceremony, it is strictly

practices and become a responsible member of her community. The 'vhusha' initiation school marks the passage from childhood to adolescence (Blacking, 1998; Butterworth & Harris, 1994; Jeannerat, 1997; Mathabane, 1994). This hut is their headquarters throughout the ceremony, which continues before this, a Venda girl is called 'musidzana' (small girl), and afterwards she is always referred to as 'musidzana wa khomba' meaning 'dangerous', implying that sexual intercourse may now result in pregnancy. Pregnancy is a boy's and a girl's responsibility. In essence, when their reproductive organs mature, they can reproduce. Sometimes, the term 'khomba' is used as an alternative to 'vhusha' in referring to the ceremony (Stayt, 1931). At the first sign of menstruation, the girl will inform one of her stepmothers, or one of the elder women of the village, of its occurrence. This person will tell the girl's mother who will then tell the father. Traditional social rules forbid the direct approach of the parent by the child in matters of intimacy, especially in affairs connected to sex. The vhusha is held at the chief's place, in the 'tshivhambo', a public hut with two doorless entrances. The ceremony is often postponed until at least two or three girls are ready to participate in it. After sundown, on the day that has been fixed for the proceedings, all the women living within reasonable distance come into the chief's kraal in groups (Stayt, 1931). A fire is lit in the 'khoru', an open place at the chief's place where male elders meet for solving disputes. Men are excluded, and throughout the ceremony, it is strictly

forbidden for any man to come anywhere near. If a man is caught in the vicinity, he may be brought to the chief and fined for this transgression. The initiates remain at the kraal in the public hut, the 'tshivhambo'. This hut is their headquarters throughout the ceremony, which continues for six days. The instructresses are those who have been initiated. The initiates are always naked except for the 'shedo' (see appendix 4 and 5) (a g-string-like garment but with pieces of cloth hanging on the front and back) (Stayt, 1931; Van Warmelo, 1933).

The initiates are escorted to the riverside each morning in single file, led by one of the instructresses, who beats the drum as a warning that the party is approaching. At the river bank, the fire is lit and the initiates receive dancing instructions, although most of this takes place at night. A great deal of time is given to sexual teaching. Initiates are warned against losing their virginity before marriage, and are taught how to have sexual intercourse without this occurring (Blacking, 1964; Magubane, 1998).

Young girls are often shown, by a female elder of their village, how to stretch the labia minora. Supposedly to help in the dilation, a 'nyamulemalema' bat is killed and cooked, the resulting concoction being rubbed on the genitals. It is believed that, as the bat has a curtain across the legs, so will the initiates. Often a stone is tied to the girl's genitals to hasten the process. This manipulation results in the formation of two aprons a few inches in length (Stayt, 1931). The labia minora become enlarged. This is called 'u kwevha' (stretching the labia minora). Among the Venda people, there is a popular belief

that the girl's enlarged labia minora makes intercourse more pleasurable. After the 'vhusha' ceremony, Venda girls participate in the 'domba' ceremony (see appendix 6). Boys are allowed to attend this ceremony.

of adequate supplies of food and beer, the regular attendance of the participants

**DOMBA (Python dance) (see appendix 6)**

The 'domba' does not take place annually like 'vhusha', which usually takes place during winter every year. A good harvest and a big number of participants determine its occurrence. 'Domba' participants have to be supplied with enough food. The 'domba' takes place at the 'khoru'.

away from the school and must always be held in his hands while

In the past, it usually lasted about three months, but was often protracted to eight or nine months and sometimes continued for a whole year. Nowadays it lasts for less than a month, usually during school holidays. Girls usually attend at the first opportunity after the 'vhusha' ceremony. Sometimes, if there is no prospect of a school being held near home, girls may go long distances in order to attend one at the village of some neighbouring chief (Steyt, 1931). Parents' duty is to supply a quantity of food and beer for 'domba' participants.

and young, including the 'midabe' and the 'whatel', assemble in the 'khoru' and

The 'domba' prepares boys and girls for marriage. Boys and girls, who are usually separated, are brought together, and are taught to understand the true significance of marriage and childbirth. They are also warned of the pitfalls and dangers that they are likely to encounter during the course of their lives (Steyt, 1931).

and scooping it into their mouths with their hands (Steyt, 1931).

The management of the 'domba' is in the hands of a man called 'nyamungozwa' or 'mme a domba' (the mother of the

'domba'). He is chosen for his vocal ability. He is assisted by a woman called 'nyamatei' (the mother of the initiates). These two persons are programme directors and are responsible for the provision of adequate supplies of food and beer, the regular attendance of the participants and their proper instruction, as well as for the general supervision of the whole institution (Stayt, 1931).

Throughout the initiation, the 'mme a domba' has charge of three sticks, which have been treated with protective medicine. These sticks are believed to keep the evil away from the school and must always be held in his hands while dancing is in progress. At intervals, he may place them on the drums but in no other place. The initiates, the 'vhatei' (see appendix 5), are supervised and instructed by the young people who were initiated at the previous 'domba' and are now 'midabe'. Before the 'domba' proper starts, Venda girls must take part in two inaugural ceremonies, the 'vhusha' and 'tshikanda' (Magubane, 1998). The 'tshikanda' means, 'little skin' (Van Warmelo, 1933).

At the 'tshikanda', all the women, old and young, including the 'midabe' and the 'vhatei', assemble in the 'khoru' and then proceed to the 'tshivhambo', led by the 'nyamatei'. The 'midabe' remove their clothing except the 'shedo' (see appendix 5), and having stripped the vhatei, rub them over with red ochre and ashes. Porridge is cooked for the initiates and placed on the earth and they are ordered to eat it, lying flat on the ground and scooping it into their mouths with their hands (Stayt, 1931).

In the early hours of the morning, the 'vhatei' are sent to the 'khoru' in single file, hopping behind one another in imitation of frogs. There, they receive their first lesson in the python dance (see appendix 6). On the second night of the 'domba', the initiates are taught about the meanings of marriage, signs of pregnancy and childbirth, and are warned that they are now nearly fully grown and will soon have to give up playing at life and their 'u davhula'. The practice of 'u davhula' is when girls and boys after 'vhusha', 'domba' and 'murundu' are allowed to indulge in non-penetrative sexual play (Stayt, 1931).

Magubane (1998) indicated that the initiates are taught dances and secret songs, exposed to secret objects and watch and participate in the teaching of the mimes, and receive sexual education.

As the morning dawns, each girl is examined by the 'nyamatei' to see whether she is still a virgin. Any girl who is found to have lost her virginity is roughly handled by the 'midabe', who pinch and beat her and torture her with the 'tshipata'. The whole assembly of women abuses her. This can be regarded as emotional physical abuse and if reported to the police is punishable by law. Today the South African constitution guarantees its citizens, including women, the right to dignity. This practice is also indicative of gender discrimination, as there is no initiation school that inspects boy's virginity. Both boys and girls should be held responsible for their sexuality. The 'domba' completes the transitional period and supplements the teachings of the 'vhutamba vhutuka' and

'vhusha'. Today's 'domba' is very different from the previous decades' 'domba'.

Schapera (1937) argues that the abolition of the old initiation ceremonies has considerably weakened Venda-speaking people's values as educational and disciplinary institutions. He argues that institutions such as the church and schools do not and cannot provide as comprehensive and thorough a training as the African child received under purely African conditions. In addition, individual responsibility, which these other institutions stress, are in conflict with the traditional conception of group solidarity. Schapera also posits that there has consequently been a development of youthful independence and irresponsibility which old forms of authority are no longer able to control, and which the new influences seem unable to check. The young people no longer look to their parents for guidance in everything, but are tending more and more to do as they please.

The question is what is the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancy? If unplanned teenage pregnancies are on the increase, is it because the institutions like the family and initiation schools have lost their role? What is not in place that needs to be put back in place? Which old practices need to be adjusted to help curb the high rate of unplanned teenage pregnancies?

However Mathabane (1994) argues that the chief purpose of initiation schools is to kill a young girl's self-will. Girls could be remolded into a mature and complete woman, self-sacrificing, obedient, and capable of assuming the

role of wife. This makes them appealing to men as the perfect complement to their desires, wishes and whims.

Mathabane does not conscientise us about the fact that a better society needs both boys and girls to be remolded into mature human beings, and not only girls. He raises the question: Is initiation schools' chief purpose meant to equip boys and girls to be responsible young adults sexually or is it to serve the other partner (a male)?' One wonders if it is only boys' desires, wishes and whims which matter and also if initiation schools are meant to enhance the lives of both boys and girls. Better societies need mutual responsibility from both boys and girls.

This study examines knowledge and practices at initiation schools, which prevent or encourage unplanned teenage pregnancy. It is argued that initiation schools are ineffective in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancy in contemporary society (Ramabulana, 2000). This study tests the validity of this argument.

The present study has also been influenced by the fact that no other study that specifically looks at perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies has been conducted before. It is important to note that this study specifically looked at perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies at Thohoyandou though there are other initiation schools among Tsonga, Sotho, and Zulu speaking people which may play an important role in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in South Africa.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of the present study was to explore perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies at Thohoyandou.

#### RATIONALE / MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

Unplanned teenage pregnancy has a negative effect on teenage mothers and their children in general and on teenage mothers in rural communities in particular (Ramabulana, 2000). Initiation schools are seen as places where teenagers were and are taught traditional methods of preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Currently, there is a debate about whether such schools should be recognized or discontinued. Some see the schools as an invasion of initiates' privacy. Specifically, some argue that such schools make themselves guilty of various invasive practices such as virginity testing, which can be perceived as abusive

#### THE VALUE OF THE STUDY NATIONALLY

This study endeavoured to:

- i) Contribute new insights into the current debates on whether or not traditional schools should be officially recognized or discontinued;
- ii) Identify values learnt at these schools which can help to contribute to the prevention of unplanned teenage pregnancies;

- iii) Challenge procedures and values that are abusive and which need to be revised;
- iv) Deepen social scientists' understanding of the role and traditional cultural practices play in preventing or encouraging unplanned teenage pregnancies; and
- v) Champion the views of teenage mothers who most frequently, are shunned in their societies.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

I used a qualitative research approach to collect data. According to Leedy (2000) qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of social phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from research participants' point of view. Dyer (1995) argues that by using a qualitative approach, a researcher can capture information which it might otherwise be difficult, or impossible, to capture or express by quantitative means, such as perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies.

Four young males were interviewed using semi-structured A qualitative research method was a suitable method of data collection since the aim of the study was to explore the meaning initiates and other key informants give to traditional schools.

schools were interviewed on three occasions (see Table 3).

According to Mouton and Marais (1992), Mouton (1996) and Straus and Corbin (1996) a major distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is the fact that the researcher attempts to understand people in terms of the definition of their own world. Seedat, Duncan and Lazarus (2001) argue that the qualitative research focus is on the

meaning that people attach to their lives and experiences, which is the focus of present study.

A qualitative design also stresses the value of context and setting, and searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of certain phenomena (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

## **PARTICIPANTS**

In this study, four teenage mothers who have been teenage mothers for at least two years, who fell pregnant before they passed Grade 12, and had attended 'vhusha' initiation schools, were interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews (see Table 2). A group of three teenage mothers were interviewed collectively about their perceptions of the role of 'musevhetho' in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies (see Table 2). Participants were 18 years old or younger and still at school when they fell pregnant.

Four young males were interviewed using semi-structured interviews about their perceptions of the role of 'murundu' initiation school in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies (see Table 5). A group of five senior women who had attended 'musevhetho', 'vhusha' and 'domba' initiation schools were interviewed on three occasions (see Table 3). They were interviewed on different occasions about the three different initiation schools, namely, 'musevhetho', 'vhusha' and 'domba'. Another group of three senior women was interviewed once about their perceptions of the role of 'vhusha' in dealing

with unplanned teenage pregnancies (see Table 4). I also interviewed a group of three senior men about their perceptions of the history, role and function of 'tshitambo' initiation school in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies (see Table 6).

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from all teenage male and female participants except one group of three female teenage mothers who were available as a group (see Appendix 3). These teenagers were interviewed about their perceptions of the role of 'musevhetho' in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies.

All senior male and female participants were interviewed in focus groups (see Appendix 3). The senior females were interviewed as a group during their lunchtime because that was the most convenient time for them. The senior males were assembled at the headman's kraal at a convenient time for the group interview.

According to Kruger (1989) participants who are selected for participation in a study of this nature should have had experiences related to the phenomenon to be studied, which was the case in this study. Kruger further posits that participants should also be verbally fluent and able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the studied phenomenon. Participants should also have the same home language as the researcher (since this will obviate the possible loss of subtle semantic nuances owing to the need to translate from one language to another), and should express a willingness to be open with

the researcher. All the participants in this study spoke the same language as the researcher. schools still exist (see Table 4). Four male participants were also recruited from Participants were unfamiliar with the psychological theories of teenage sexuality and parenthood. Hence reducing the possibility of interference from such theories (cf. Kruger, 1989). rural villages where the 'shitambo' initiation school still exists (see Table 5). Pseudonyms

### Selection technique

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants. The term 'snowball' derives from the analogy of a snowball, which begins small but becomes bigger as it rolls downhill. Bailey (1987), Garbers (1996), Huysamen (1993) and Rubin and Babbie (1993) indicate that in snowball sampling, in the first stage, a few persons who have the requisite characteristics are identified and interviewed. These persons are then used as informants to identify others who qualify for inclusion in the sample. The second stage involves interviewing these persons, who in turn identify more persons who are also interviewed.

Name	Age	Marital status	Gender	Language	Education
I contacted teenage mothers who had been teenage mothers for more than two years. I then requested their assistance in identifying other teenage mothers who would be willing to participate in the study (Baker 1988). I recruited seven teenage mother participants from the student body at the University because most of them come from rural villages, where traditional schools still exist (see Table 2). I also recruited five senior female workers at the University of Venda who come from rural villages where initiation schools still exist (see Table 3). A third group of three initiated women who fitted the study criteria and who did not have					

babies before marriage were recruited from rural villages in Thohoyandou where initiation schools still exist (see Table 4). Four male participants were also recruited from the University of Venda because most of them come from rural villages where initiation schools still exist (see Table 5). Three senior males who participated in this study were recruited from villages where the 'tshitambo' initiation school still exists (see Table 6). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants. Participation in the study was completely voluntary.

## DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS TABLE

**TABLE 2: TEENAGE MOTHERS (MUSEVHETHO AND VHUSHA)**

Names	Age then	Age now	Marital status	No/Age of children	Gender	Language	Education
Muofhe	17 yrs	20 yrs	Single	1/4 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	B SW
Irene	15 yrs	21 yrs	Single	1/6 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	LL B
Mashudu	17 yrs	22 yrs	Single	1/5 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	B Sc
Avheani	16 yrs	22 yrs	Single	1/6 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	B Admin
Masindi	13 yrs	18 yrs	Single	1/3 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	B A
Phophi	13 yrs	19 yrs	Single	1/4 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	BA YID
Muhali	12 yrs	19 yrs	Single	1/5 yrs	Female	Tshivenda	BA Law

**TABLE 3: SENIOR FEMALES (VHUSHA)**

Names	Age Now	Marital status	Gender	Language	Education
Vho-Masindi	55 yrs	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 3
Vho-Makhadzi	55 yrs	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 5
Vho-Khakhu	57 yrs	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 2
Vhonyadzanga	56 yrs	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 3
Vho-Luvhengo	58 yrs	Married	Female	Tshivenda	Std 3

**TABLE 4: YOUNG MARRIED FEMALES (VHUSHA)**

Names	Age Then	Age Now	Marital status	Language	Education
Vho-Mashudu	10 yrs	36 yrs	Married	Tshivenda	Std 8
Vho-Ndiafhi	9 yrs	34 yrs	Married	Tshivenda	Std 9
Vho-Mukondi	9 yrs	33 yrs	Married	Tshivenda	Std 6

**TABLE 5: MALE TEENAGERS PARTICIPANTS (MURUNDU)**

Names	Age then	Age Now	Marital status	Gender	Language	Education
Ndanduleni	15 yrs	29 yrs	Single	Male	Tshivenda	BA
Rendani	15 yrs	28 yrs	Single with a son	Male	Tshivenda	BA
Thanyani	14 yrs	28 yrs	Single	Male	Tshivenda	BA Law
Mmbambadzeni	13 yrs	27 yrs	Single	Male	Tshivenda	BA Law

**TABLE 6: SENIOR MALES (TSHITAMBO)**

Names	Age Then	Age Now	Marital status	Gender	Language	Education
Vho-Jim	9 yrs	72 yrs	Married	Male	Tshivenda	None
Vho-Thomas	9 yrs	70 yrs	Married	Male	Tshivenda	Std 4
Vho-Joseph	8 yrs	69 yrs	Married	Male	Tshivenda	Std 2

## PROCEDURE / DATA COLLECTION

### INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

I used individual and focus group interviews to collect data. Kvale (1996) and Newman (2000) argue that interviews are powerful tools for obtaining knowledge about human behaviour. They further maintain that a qualitative interview is a uniquely sensitive method for capturing the experiences and the lived meanings of research participants' everyday world. Interviews allow research participants to convey to others their situation from their own perspective and in their own words. Qualitative interviews were important and relevant for this study because they allow the researcher to go beyond the surface meaning of the participants' views on their experiences.

Smith (1995) and Smith, Hanrre and Langenhove (1995) argue that one of the advantages of interviews is that they provide an occasion where a relatively standard range of topics can be explored with each of the participants.

The interviews and groups that I conducted assumed a semi-structured format. In a semi-structured interview participants are asked few questions to get them talking (Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Shaw 1995). I, as the interviewer, encouraged my research participants to talk, to use their own words and to express themselves in their own unique ways. In this study, interviews were conducted in Tshivenda, which is the participants and researcher's home-language. Interviews were audiotape recorded. The data collected were transcribed from Tshivenda to English.

Semi-structured were considered suitable because as a researcher, I was able to get more opportunities to ask questions, to make sure that all points are covered. Another advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that participants were able to provide information in answer to questions, which they would otherwise have withheld (Berg, 1995; Huysamen, 1993). Semi-structured interviews are advantageous because they facilitate rapport, empathy, allow greater flexibility of coverage and enable the interview to enter novel areas, which allows for richer data (Smith, 1995). Shaughnessy and Zechmeistere (1994) point out that in personal interviews the participants can obtain clarification of unclear questions and the interviewer can pursue incomplete or ambiguous answers to open-ended questions.

Participants were asked about how they have benefited from attending initiation schools. They were also questioned about what the schools' teachings were based on, and which procedures and values need to be revisited at traditional schools concerning the prevention and management of

unplanned teenage pregnancy. This helped them to voice their worst as well as their most positive experiences during initiation schools.

This study is sensitive in nature, as it is about sexuality. However, the use of specialized interview techniques enabled me to communicate with teenage mothers and to obtain quite sensitive information. I gave them my attention and listened attentively to their views about initiation schools. Teenage mothers in particular felt empowered that somebody was interested and concerned about their experiences. The recorded data were translated into English for data analysis.

#### **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Researchers using interviews as a research tool often find that they collect an enormous amount of information and then do not know how to interpret it. In this study discourse analysis was used to analyze the data.

According to Breakwell et al. (1995) language in the form of discourses is seen as constituting the building blocks of 'social reality'. Breakwell et al. continue to emphasize that the analysis of this type of discourse emphasizes how social reality is linguistically constructed and aims to offer 'a better understanding of social life and social interaction from the study of social texts'. Discourse analysis focuses on the language itself and examines how people use language to construct versions of their world. In this study I focused on how participants initiated used language to construct and present their perceptions and beliefs regarding the value of traditional schools.

Smith, Hanrre and Langenhove (1995) argue that the goal of discourse analysis is to make a contribution to our understanding of issues such as identity, the nature of the mind, constructions of self, the other, the world, the conceptualization of social action and interaction, and in this particular case, perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou. Discourse analysis therefore is concerned with how discourse is constructed to perform social actions; it is concerned with how people assemble versions of the world in the course of their interaction.

### **The method of analysis**

The present study was exploratory in nature. Consequently, a thematic discursive analysis based on Breakwell et al. (1995) to analyze data was used.

Breakwell et al.'s method for analyzing data is based on a method for analyzing qualitative data. The method provided the researcher with a broad framework within which to conduct the qualitative thematic analyses to make sense of the textual data.

The method is deductive in nature. Breakwell's approach is particularly suited to research which aims at foregrounding the discourses of research participants, rather than the views or opinions of the researcher. Thus, when participants' discourses on the perceptions of the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies were analyzed by the social researcher, the latter in effect produced a reinterpretation of that which

has already been interpreted. Breakwell et al. (1995) thematic analysis used was guided by the following steps mentioned below.

The interview transcripts and field notes were read thoroughly and repeatedly until the researcher understood what was being said. Secondly, the data was then coded, re-read slowly underlying words, phrases, units and sentences relevant to the research questions. Thirdly, the underlined words, phrases, units and sentences were coded, written separately. Fourthly, the coded words, phrases, units and sentences were grouped according to themes. The relationships among the themes were looked at to check contradictions, whether one theme led to the other and if the story could be retold through the use of themes. Finally a thorough discussion of the data was done wherein a story was retold through the use of themes.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In this study, ethics were taken into consideration: Permission, privacy, freedom of choice, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. All participants in this study volunteered and gave their permission. Made-up names were used to protect the identity of the participants. All participants were informed about the aim and the process of the study and agreed to participate. The research data and the identity of the participant is kept in confidence from the public in the sense that no information is going to be released in a way that permits linking specific individuals to specific responses. The findings of this study was presented in the form of verbatim and made-up names were used (Neuman, 2000.)

Teenage mothers and vhasidzana (see appendix 3) who were interviewed about 'musevhetho' and 'vhusha' gave their permission to be interviewed after I recruited one of them whom I knew she was an initiate.

Vho-Mazwale 1 (see appendix 3), three women from a village who were interviewed about the role of 'vhusha' in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies agreed to participate in this study without hesitating after I told them I am an initiate and informed them about the process the whole study. The focus group interview took place at the village inside one of the participants' hut. There were no interruptions during interview. All three participants were free to express themselves. The name Vho-Mazwale 1 was used to hide their identity.

Vho-Mazwale a,b,c (see appendix 3), five senior women who were interviewed thrice about 'musevhetho', 'vhusha' and 'domba' were recruited from University of Venda. They allowed me to interview them after I have disclosed to them that I am an initiate. They also asked me to collect marula fruits to make marula beer as a way to get permission to interview them. All participants were free to express themselves as a group and the interview took place one of the participants office where there was no interruptions. Vho-Mazwale a, was used as their pseudonym instead of their real names.

Vho-Mazwale d (see appendix 3), three senior men who were interviewed about their perceptions of the role of 'tshitambo' in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies. Thohoyandou were interviewed in the presence of a senior

female who firstly asked me if I am initiated and tell her what happens at female initiation schools. I had to inform them also about the process and the aim of the study. I think this was done to confirm that I am initiated as speaking about initiation schools matters with the uninitiated is considered as taboo. Interview took place at the village headman's home inside the hut. The interview went well as there were no interruptions during interview. Vho-Mazwale d (see appendix 3) was used as their pseudonyms instead of their real names.

One young male whom I knew went to "murundu" who volunteered to participate in this study helped me to recruit other young males participants who attended 'murundu'. All participants were informed from the start that their participation was voluntary. They were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study if they wished to. Elms, Kantowitz and Roedige (1981) argue that the researcher has to respect the participants' freedom to participate in the research or to discontinue participation at any time.

They were also assured that information provided during the interviews would not be made available to any other person before they have given their permission. According to Elms et al. (1981) and Christensen (1997) information obtained about research participants during the course of a study is confidential. When the possibility exists that others may obtain access to such information, ethical research practice requires that this possibility, together with plans for protecting confidentiality, be explained to the

participants as a part of the procedure for obtaining informed consent. You so much want to discuss these matters with your mother but traditional cultural practices forbid Oskowitz and Meulenberg-Buskens (1997) argue that sensitive moments may occur frequently and it is important that researchers are prepared to handle this interpersonal aspect of qualitative research with sensitivity and skill. In cases where it was required, interviewees were referred to the Counselling Bureau at the University of Venda. Participants' anonymity was preserved. During the interviews pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' real names. Participants' real names were also not revealed after information had been gathered.

#### **REFLEXIVITY**

Reflexivity refers to the explicit recognition and examination of the researchers' processes, including the assumptions that inform their identification and dis-identification and their possible influence on the research process (Durrheim, 1999).

I am a Venda speaking black woman, who was born and who grew up in rural villages in the Limpopo region. I attended the 'vhusa' and 'domba' initiation schools. The present study reminds me of how menarche is treated in rural villages in the Limpopo region, among the Venda speaking people. You see blood on your underwear. You do not know what is happening in your body. You feel shocked and want so much to tell somebody like your mother. Though your mother may realize that you are menstruating, she dares not discuss the matter with you. She has to observe the taboo that forbids parent-child discussion about sexual matters.

You are only allowed to discuss the matter with your aunt or grandmother. You so much want to discuss these matters with your mother but traditional cultural practices forbid you to. You just look at each other. You get mixed messages from friends, magazines, tv, radio, school teachers and churches about menstruation and sex and end up having not only unplanned pregnancies but also contacting sexually transmitted infection.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Securing appointments for interview with most participants in this study was not easy, given the fact that the topic is sensitive and due to the secrecy associated with the institutions studied. Senior female participants interviewed were reluctant to be interviewed individually. I then arranged to interview them as a group during their tea- and lunchtime. Before I interviewed them they asked me to collect marula fruits for them to make marula beer, which they drank during lunchtime. They asked me to tell them what I know about the initiation schools. I think that was meant to confirm to them that they are not speaking to an uninitiated person. At the beginning of interview, they refused to be recorded and told me that they do not trust researchers as it may be reported to police that they were the ones who divulged the traditional practices. They also told me that they are scared they might hear themselves over the radio speaking about secret matters. I had to assure them that the information divulged during interviews was for academic purposes, and not to expose them over the radio. I did not wear trousers but skirts and dresses during interviews, as a sign of respect for them. I also bought them lunch and drinks.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Most of the senior male participants with whom I made appointments for interviews were reluctant to be interviewed. They refused to be interviewed. They all thought that I was presumptuous to ask them about males' institutions while I am a female. Those who agreed to be interviewed were three senior males who were interviewed in the presence of a senior female for the first few minutes of the interview. This was possible only after I had told them that I had been initiated and that my research would accurately reflect their perceptions about the initiation schools. It is also of importance to note that direct quotes from participants were used when presenting findings of this study to ensure trustworthiness of the data.

Initiation school issues are secretive and confidential. Senior people who participated in the study repeatedly stated that these matters are confidential and that might have influenced them to withhold some of the information. It is important though to note that I had been initiated and this was an advantage when conducting the study.

such as ejaculating on the thighs, virginity tests and discouraging boys and girls from playing together.

"Tshitambo" could prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies. Some of the male participants in this study claimed that male teenagers were not discouraged from engaging in sexual acts with girls but were taught to avoid unplanned teenage pregnancies. Senior males reported that to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies, males at 'tshitambo' were

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS: INITIATES DISCOURSES

The present chapter presents the analyses of initiates' discourses about the role of initiation schools in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou. According to Neuman (2000) the interpretation of data has to consider the findings of the study, similar results found by other researchers and findings that contradict other researchers' findings on the same topic.

The current study explores the meanings that participants gave of their perception of the role that initiation schools play in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou. Four key themes emerged from the data analysed. These are presented below.

#### **THEME ONE: INITIATION SCHOOLS COULD PREVENT UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCIES.**

In this study several traditional methods were reported to be effective in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies, such as ejaculating on the thighs, virginity tests and discouraging boys and girls from playing together.

#### **"Tshitambo" could prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies**

Some of the male participants in this study claimed that male teenagers were not discouraged from engaging in sexual acts with girls but were taught to avoid unplanned teenage pregnancies. Senior males reported that to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies, males at 'tshitambo' were

taught to avoid ejaculating inside the girls' genitals but on her thighs.

*Yes, yes, you play but you do not ejaculate inside the vagina. Ja. You must not sperm inside vagina. That "tshitambo" teachings used to help when a boy and a girl are sexually playing a boy would go back a little and sperm outside on a girl's thighs (Vho-Mazwale d).*

However, this method may not be the answer to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies as it involves unprotected sex. In such situations teenagers are not only in danger of unplanned teenage pregnancies but also of contracting the lethal HIV /AIDS.

### **'Musevhetho' could prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies**

All female participants in this study reported that they were scared of sleeping with boys. Girls who are not virgins are humiliated at 'musevhetho' initiation schools.

This study found that 'musevhetho' is believed to play an important role in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Young girls at 'musevhetho' are discouraged to play with boys to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies. This argument is confirmed by the following extract:

*'Musevhetho' can indirectly discourage unplanned teenage pregnancies. Girls are discouraged to play with boys which can lead to sleeping together and have unplanned teenage pregnancies.*

*(Vhasidzana).*

From the above extract, it is however important to note that though boys and girls from 'musevhetho' are

discouraged from playing together to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies the message may be vague and ineffective in the sense that initiates might think they were told not to play together but not specifically to avoid sexual intercourse. On that note one can suggest that the message that boys and girls must not play together be explained to the initiates. Especially, they must be told that it means they must not engage in sexual intercourse to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies.

### **'Vhusha' and 'domba' could prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies**

'Vhusha' and 'domba' initiation schools are believed to play an important role in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. At these schools young girls' virginity status is checked. The practice is believed to help in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies, as it is believed to encourage girls to abstain from sex. From the extracts below, it can be also argued that 'vhusha' and 'domba' may play an important role in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Checking girls' virginity status during the ceremony could be a way of discouraging girls from engaging in sexual activities.

*'Vhakegulu' [senior women] check us if we have already slept with boys. (Avheani).*

*We were checked every month if we are still virgin.*

*Our grandmothers did not only check us at 'vhushani' but also at home (Vhomazwale 1).*

Girls are discouraged to lose their virginity before marriage. At the end of 'domba' they are all checked if they are still virgin. (Vhomazwale c).

Blacking (1964) reported similar findings that girls at 'vhusha' are checked if they are still virgins and warned against losing their virginity before marriage. It is interesting to note that no virginity tests are conducted at males' initiation schools. This is unfair and biased. Both boys and girls need to be exposed to similar treatment as a male and a female jointly create pregnancy.

All people have the right to privacy. The argument is that unclothing girls and publicly checking whether they are still virgins at 'vhusha' is humiliating, taking away their pride and dignity and invading their privacy which has to be respected.

From the above extracts, it may be argued that initiates are indirectly taught about prevention of unplanned teenage pregnancies. It may be further argued, however, that the information that initiates get at the schools about prevention of unplanned teenage pregnancies may be considered ineffective and insufficient to address the challenges faced by teenagers today in respect of sex and sexuality.

Contrary to the above finding, Clarke-Stewart et al. (1985) and Clemens-Stone et al. (1991) report that in some societies teachings about contraceptive use is a taboo, especially if it involves parents. In this study initiates were taught about traditional methods of birth control to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies at initiation

schools. However some of the traditional birth control method may expose initiates to HIV/AIDS.

## **THEME TWO: INITIATION SCHOOLS ENCOURAGE UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCIES**

### **Murundu could encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies**

However, all male participants reported that 'murundu' encourages unplanned teenage pregnancies. Male initiates reported that initiation school practices encourage them to engage in sexual activities, as they have been circumcised. The extracts below confirm the above argument:

*I think 'murundu' encourages unplanned teenage pregnancies. They do not tell you about preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies but tell you now your penis is cut, you do not have foreskin after circumcision school you enjoy sex a lot. 'Murundu' does not prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies, it encourages it (**Thanyani**).*

*To be honest with you, I do not see any aim and purpose of 'murundu' having anything to do with preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Honestly speaking, 'murundu' encourages boys to have sexual intercourse. We are told about making love. I only learnt that when I see a woman I have to feel at least this person (a woman) honestly to have sexual intercourse. I look at her thinking how can I make love to her, looking also at her body (**Nndanduleni**).*

*They will always encourage young men to go out to prove their fertility with their swords. You have a sword. You can go on and sleep with women. But to be honest I do not*

remember a particular and specific element which have been said to help you that you must avoid sleeping with girls, like you must use a condom to avoid this problems of today when it comes to sexuality issues. So there are no constructive ideas about preventing it. I think parents still have to speak to their children. We would not rely much on the role and purposes of 'murundu' (**Mmbambadzeni**).

Based on Thanyani's statement, it may be argued that 'murundu' may encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies. The fact that boys are told that now that their foreskins have been removed they may enjoy sex without fear of sexually transmitted diseases may be very dangerous in the sense that they do not only risk impregnating girls but also may contract sexually transmitted diseases such as the deadly HIV.

From Nndanduleni, Rendani and Mmbambadzeni's extracts, it may also be argued that 'murundu' may encourage boys to engage in unprotected sexual intercourse, leading to unplanned teenage pregnancies. It may also be argued that 'murundu' makes boys think about sex when they see females when they come back from the school.

It does not only encourage boys to think of sex when they see females but also make males think that women are there to satisfy them sexually whenever they want sex. This may be another reason why there are unplanned teenage pregnancies resulting from sexual assault, for example when brothers rape their sisters, step-fathers rape their step-

daughters. Our society, through 'murundu', encourages boys to engage in sexual intercourse. Apparently, this may be one of the roles which 'murundu' plays. This destroys our society especially females and it must be discouraged. Such sexual abuses do not only lead to unplanned teenage pregnancies but also leave traumatic scars in the teenage mothers' lives.

Haviland (1996) argues that culture is dynamic. The same may be said about horrific traditional cultural practices and values. They can be changed for the psychological wellness of all human beings. The traditional cultural practices that socialize and view women as sex objects to satisfy men whenever they feel the need must be changed. Motsei (2002) argues that empowering women and changing men's attitudes may help in stopping violence against women.

As Mmbambadzeni argues in the above extract, parents must take responsibility for educating their teenagers about safe sex. He further suggests that parents must not rely only on initiation schools to equip their children about sex matters and methods of preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. This may suggest to us that the 'murundu' lesson about sexuality is inadequate in helping initiates to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies. Clemens-Stone et al. (1991), Goosen and Kingman (1996) and Muuss (1996) posit that adolescents do not have adequate information about their bodies and may believe that they will not fall pregnant when they have unprotected sexual intercourse.

Maqubela (2002) also argues that boys at 'murundu' are encouraged to regard females as their sexual objects. She mentions that after boys have been circumcized, elders tell them that ('ro ni vhadela pfumo') they have sharpened 'the spear' ('spear' refers to circumcised penis) and with the spear they will be able to strike the 'thulo' (animal/girl). Females are not treated as human beings that deserve human dignity but as 'animals'. This may lead to gender based violence for example rape resulting in unplanned teenage pregnancies. Participants in Ramabulana's (2000) study on unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou reported that some of the issues faced by teenage women were related to forced sexual intercourse resulting in unplanned teenage pregnancies.

According to Dederen (2002) the picture of a lion drawn on a 'tshirivha' (garment like a skirt worn by young girls at the end of 'vhusha') represents a male, searching for pleasure (sexual pleasure). The symbolism shows that women must guard themselves against dangerous lions (men) because men are dangerous. If boys and girls are playing together it will cause unplanned teenage pregnancies. This is unjust as it encourages males' sexual violence and unfairly leaves the responsibility of preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies on females only. This enforcing of gender imbalance must not be tolerated in contemporary society.

However, it may also be argued that when boys are told at 'murundu' that the elders have sharpened their 'swords' or 'spears' for them and they must go and 'stab' (have sexual intercourse) it might be a way of preparing initiates for

the future when they will have to engage in sexual intercourse with their wives when they are married. Initiates (boys) may not understand the message as referring to the future but may engage in immediate sexual intercourse after they have been circumcised.

#### Sexual abuse

#### **'Vhusha' could encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies**

Some of the teenage mothers and senior women also argued that 'vhusha' encourages unplanned teenage pregnancies. At 'vhusha' girl initiates are asked who their boyfriends are and this may encourage girl initiates to look for a male partner and engage in unprotected sex which then results in unplanned pregnancies. Below Irene, Muofhe, Mashudu and Vhomazwale 1 confirm the above argument.

Below Vhusha, Vhusha and Vhomazwale

*Other girls will also ask you who is your boyfriend and you have to mention his name. And you tell them even if you do not have a boyfriend, you will just tell them somebody they do not know as long as he is a boy (Irene).*

she wants to have sex now. She will hide

*Senior girls can just ask you who is your boyfriend and if you say you do not have a boyfriend they laugh at you and say you are stupid because you do not have a boyfriend. (Muofhe).*

*Then she is instructed to inform the assembled people who is her boyfriend (Vhomazwale 1).*

age because they have long children (Vhusha).

The fact that at 'vhusha' girls are questioned and forced to tell who their boyfriends are, may encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies as girls who do not have boyfriends may

take it as a license to have one and engage in unprotected sexual intercourse. In that sense 'vhusha' may encourage girls who did not engage in sexual activities before attending the ceremony to start doing so.

### **Sexual abuse**

Sexual abuse is considered to be any unwanted physical invasion of an individual's body which is sexual in nature and may include acts such as unwanted touching, kissing and forced sexual acts (Vetten, in Boonzaier, 2001).

One of the findings of this study is that initiation practices may perpetuate sexual violence of men over women. This sexual abuse may result in unplanned teenage pregnancies. Below Vhasidzana, Rendani and Vhomazwale confirm the above argument.

*There in the bush ('murundu') teach you that a lady cannot tell you that now I really want to have sex with you now, that she wants to have sex with now. She will hide and deny but on the other hand she would like to have sex with you. But she cannot tell you straight. So which means when you tell a lady that I want to have sex with you. She will not agree and you will not think that way that she does not want (Rendani).*

*There are many disadvantages of musevhetho. We hear of boys who rape senior women who can be of their mothers' age because they have long clitoris (Vhasidzana).*

### **Physical abuse**

*They know if you fall pregnant the boy has done it, he forced himself inside the girl (Vhomazwale d).*

In contemporary society, with its modern legal system, rape is viewed in a very serious light by the courts. It is against this background that violence (particularly against women and children) shall never be tolerated. Sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent is a crime.

Motsei (2002) in her article titled "Abused by Men who Profess to Love them" reports that abuse such as rape reflects the position of women in our society. She further posits that rape represents an act rooted in the power imbalances between women and men that violate women's lives, bodies and integrity. To challenge the abuse, women have to be empowered and men must change their attitudes. This may be difficult if traditional schools encourage men to treat women as their sexual objects to gratify their need. To counteract this, the institution of initiation is faced with the challenge of empowering women with life skills, which may teach girl initiates bravery as is taught at male institutions.

### **THEME THREE: THE IMPACT OF INITIATION SCHOOLS' TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES ON THE LIVES OF INITIATES.**

This study found that initiation schools' practices abused the young people physically, sexually, psychologically and may put initiates' life at risk. All female and male participants reported gruesome acts of abuse at initiation schools. A few of these sub-themes will be discussed below.

#### **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse is considered to be any deliberate physical assault on an individual's body that harms the recipient in any way (Vetten, in Boonzaier, 2001).

Most of the participants at one time or another experienced physical abuse from senior girls or women at initiation schools. Initiates reported that they were pinched, and some were pricked on the thighs and the girls had their clitoris cut. The initiates' experiences include being forcibly immersed in cold rivers, forced to lie on stones and crawl on their tummies like snakes, having their fingers squeezed with sticks, being smeared with velvet itching beans ('vhulada') and having sharp sticks like tooth picks put between their tongue and lower jaws or upper jaws and between their thighs. The following extracts provide some of the vivid, shocking details of the physical abuse initiates experienced at the hands of senior females and males at both female and male initiation schools:

*They burn her clitoris using a little stick red by fire.*

*The girls are also smeared with 'vhulada' and wash it in the water. You are also taught of stretching of labia minora (Vhomazwale a).*

*They [senior females or males] open up their [initiates] fingers so that certain sticks would be pressed in between their fingers and they would be pressed in between their fingers and they call that 'u mamaisa' (Mmbambadzeni).*

*They put a clay pot with red embers in between your legs and pour 'lunonya' which cracks when put on red embers like popcorns and burn your thighs so that even a single day you will never sleep with a boy. You will be scared of what happened at 'vhusha' (Vhomazwale 1).*

The genital mutilation described above is a practice which is also common in other parts of the world such as in Nigeria, where women's genitals may either be sewed up or cut. However, it is important to note that it seems that the practice of elongating the labia minora to make sex more pleasurable for men is a practice common only among the Vendas, Sothos, and Shangaans. The extracts do not only prove to us how girls are encouraged to prepare themselves to satisfy boys sexually but also illustrates the sexual control, abuse and torture girls may be faced with in the name of culture.

One of the cultural practices at 'vhusha' is burning girls' thighs with 'lunonya', as mentioned by Vhomazwale above. These practices may be a way of cautioning girls about the danger of engaging in sexual intercourse, which can lead to unplanned teenage pregnancies.

However, it must be stated clearly that this action is a gross violation of human rights, particularly women's rights. It is important to note also that most of the physical abuses mentioned by initiates above are perpetrated against women. This prompts the question: Who is responsible for unplanned teenage pregnancies: is it the girl or the boy or both? Most of this humiliation and abuses are done to women in order to control their sexuality. We have to remember that for a better society, we need both boys and girls to be taught responsibility for their sexuality. We need to be fair and stop torturing only girls, because when we are partial and treat one sex unfairly, we perpetuate not only violence against women but

also violence against humanity. We also create an unsafe society for ourselves.

Takalo (1996) argues that black women are more oppressed than many other groups. They are not only subjugated because they are black women, but also because of cruel traditional cultural practices which keep them powerless and voiceless. Senior women, in these schools are used to instill fear and powerlessness among the girls.

The psychological, traumatic impact of the above physical abuse is enormous in the sense that initiates may be disempowered. Initiates may consider the world as an unsafe place in which to live and be indoctrinated into a feeling of powerlessness. It is crucial to emphasize that all human beings have a need to feel safe for their psychological wellness.

One must note that within the context of traditional cultural practices, hardships at initiation schools are meant to train youth to endure pain so that they can face hardship with bravery in their future lives as adults. In the past this was not regarded as abuse, in the sense that contemporary society views the practice.

The psychological effects of female genital mutilation are more difficult to investigate scientifically than the physical ones. A small number of clinical cases of psychological illness related to genital mutilation have been reported. Despite the lack of scientific evidence, personal accounts of mutilation reveal feelings of anxiety, terror, humiliation and betrayal, all of which are likely

to have long-term negative effects. Some experts suggest that the shock and trauma of the operation may contribute to the behaviour described as "calmer" and "docile", considered positive in societies that practise female genital mutilation (Errata, 1997).

According to Errata (1997) festivities, presents and special attention at the time of mutilation may mitigate some of the trauma experienced, but the most important psychological effect on a woman who has survived is the feeling that she is acceptable to her society, having upheld the traditions of her culture and made herself eligible for marriage, often the only role available to her. It is possible that a woman who did not undergo genital mutilation could suffer psychological problems as a result of rejection by her community. Where the female genital mutilation-practicing community is in a minority, women are thought to be particularly vulnerable to psychological problems, caught as they are between the social norms of their own community and those of the majority culture. In some cultures, there is a belief that a woman's genitals can grow and become unwieldy, hanging down between her legs, unless the clitoris is excised (Errata, 1997). Motsei (2002) posits that when females are brutally and physically hurt, they may internalize the message that they are responsible for the violence.

**Life-threatening Hiv/Aids (risk initiates lives)**

'Murundu' initiates (boys) reported that they are encouraged to penetrate when making love and withdraw the penis from the vagina before ejaculation to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies. This method may cause

HIV/AIDS, as there is no use of condoms, and unprotected sex practice leads to HIV /AIDS. Most of the initiates ('murundu', 'musevhetho') argued that at initiation schools the same razor blades were used for circumcision, which is one of the ways through which HIV/Aids is spread. If one boy is circumcised and is HIV/Aids positive, all other boys who are circumcised after him using the same razor can be infected. Extracts that confirm the above practice follow below:

*Today boys at 'murundu' are dying in large numbers. Cutting utensils at the 'murundu' is not okay (Nndanduleni).*

*So there was nothing like AIDS it was in 1985. We never thought of such things because you will find that one man will cut more than 100 boys using one knife. So there was no problem by then. But the way I see it, it was not safe and it was not enough to use dettol to sterilize the knife (Thanyani).*

*The cutting of clitoris can be very dangerous as it may result in the spreading of sexually transmitted disease such as life threatening AIDS. I think we need to improve conditions like use individual razor blade for cutting clitoris to prevent sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS (Vhasidzana).*

From the above extracts the use of dettol to sterilize razor blades, shows that 'madala' was aware of health issues of the initiates. Dettol may be used effectively to kill germs though it may not be effective against AIDS. It is not sufficient to use traditional razor blades. The

seniors must use individual razor blades to discourage the spread of sexually transmitted disease such as HIV/AIDS. From 'vhasidzana' extracts, it may be claimed that when girls' clitoris are cut and their thighs pierced using the same traditional razor blades this may risk the initiates' lives as they can contract HIV AIDS.

Louw and Edwards (1997:507) reported that there are serious risks associated with using unsterilized instruments.

### **Stigmatization and labelling of females as immoral**

In this study, most females from 'vhusha' reported that they were considered as immoral when they were found not to be virgins. These females were denied praises and gifts, were humiliated, jeered at, insulted, mocked, labeled as sinners ('khomba musadzi') (girl woman) and ostracized. In cases such as 'domba', when a girl was found to be a non-virgin she would be decorated with black beads whereas those who were found to be virgins were decorated with white beads symbolizing purity. When a girl gets married, her virginity status matters most as her in-laws will first have to see her menses, which proves that she did not come pregnant. Once that is established, she will be sent to sleep at her partner's hut. Early the next morning the young bride has to show her mother-in-law the bed covers which should be blood-stained to prove to her mother in-law that she came as a virgin. If this does not occur the young bride is labeled immoral. The above practice may scare girls from engaging in penetration sexual practices and falling pregnant unplanned. The above practices are illustrated by the extracts below:

If they find you have slept with boys they can insult you, mock you and jeer at you (**Irene**).

They give the virgin girls gifts like blankets and money. You who slept with a boy do not get even a single gift. (**Vhomazwale c**).

If you are found to have slept with a boy they do not ululate for you. They call you 'khomba musadzi' (a girl woman) (**Muofhe**).

This is a clear indication that only women's virginity status mattered. Malaka (2001) who argued that culture plays an important role in encouraging teenagers to remain virgins until marriage supports this argument.

No male initiates reported having their virginity status checked. Virginity tests do not only promote violence against women but also humiliate females in the process. Britten (1995) wrote about girls who are born without hymen or whose hymen was broken through athletic activities and not necessarily through sexual intercourse. Therefore it may be claimed that the test is not only dehumanizing and degrading but it may also be invalid.

Malaka (2001) also confirms the stigmatization of females if they are found not to be virgins. She reports that

traditional cultural societies focus on virginity and encourage teenagers to remain virgins until marriage. In these societies, sex is considered as taboo, an unspoken about topic in public.

Teenagers are not encouraged to use contraceptives but to abstain until marriage. This may be one of the contributing factors to unsafe sex among teenagers who then end up with unplanned teenage pregnancies.

Though initiation schools should not necessarily be abolished, strict measures should be taken to regulate them to make sure that initiates are treated with dignity and their self-esteem is enhanced, not threatened. Despite the above negative issues about initiation schools, initiates also reported positive aspects of the schools such as lessons about discipline, self-respect, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, preparing youth for marriage, tolerance and adulthood and helping in establishing one's identity.

#### **THEME FOUR: POSITIVE LESSONS LEARNT AT INITIATION SCHOOLS.**

##### **Socialisation of discipline and respect**

Most of the participants in this study reported that they were taught respect at initiation schools. Both male and female participants were taught to respect their in-laws. Boys were taught how to respect their seniors. Mashudu and Irene reported that:

He is also inspected if he is arrogant or not. He can be punished by stripes if he is disrespectful. They test if he is really arrogant and they can discipline him if he is disrespectful. He is beaten with a whip if he does not cooperate (**Vhomazwale d**).

They tell you that senior girls are not supposed to be insulted (**Vhomazwale 1**).

They send you to 'musevhetho' so that you grow up well, with respect. At 'musevhetho' they teach 'u losha' meaning to salute senior people (**Vhasidzana**).

It may appear that the roles of 'musevhetho', 'vhusha', 'domba', and 'tshitambo' are to teach teenagers respect as mentioned in the above extracts. Stayt (1931) reported that at the institutions youth are taught respect for adults.

### **Prevention of sexually transmitted diseases**

Male participants reported that initiation schools are believed to be helpful in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Thanyani, Rendani and Mmbambadzeni reported that:

Now you are free from sexually transmitted diseases they have cut your foreskin as the foreskin carries diseases (**Thanyani**).

Only to take out the foreskin and to let you free because we were told that this foreskin causes diseases and it has to be removed (**Rendani**).

The purpose of 'murundu' is to cut the foreskin of boys, in order to avoid accumulation of sexual fluids, which can lead to sexually transmitted disease (*Mmbambadzeni*).

Louw and Edwards (1997:p507) writing about circumcision posit that it is a wide-spread practice which in regions like Europe and Africa is performed on new-born boys in hospitals for health reasons, such as to prevent infections from developing under the foreskin. For Venda-speaking boys, circumcision is not only an important traditional practice of hygiene but also forms an important part of identity establishment.

### **Initiation schools as a source of solidarity, unity and identity among the initiates**

Besides the above-mentioned perceived advantages of traditional cultural practices at initiation schools (for example prevention of unplanned teenage pregnancies, lessons in discipline and respect, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases) initiation schools also serve as a source of identity, unity and solidarity among the initiates.

Although some initiation schools have a negative impact on initiates' lives in terms of their psychological well being and health, such schools, to a certain extent, influence the spirit of 'ubuntu' amongst the initiates.

The graduates (initiates) of initiation schools seem to show a high degree of solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood and unity toward each other, showing love and respect not only to their seniors but also for themselves.

The graduates accept and treat each other with respect. Respect should be understood as comprising a spirit of 'ubuntu' and humanity towards each other in respect of their particular schools. That is, the graduates from 'musevhetho', 'vhusha', 'domba' and 'vhutamba vhutuka' and 'murundu' relate humanely to each other after they realise that they have gone through the same experience. Those who choose not to attend those schools are viewed as outcasts and unacceptable ('shuvhuru').

### **Socialization of youth to be tolerant**

Some participants in this study argued that initiation school practices teach them tolerance:

*'Vhusha' also taught us tolerance. Senior girls at 'vhushani' they used to let you dance 'lunya' [you join your hands at the back and together dance. That was very painful. If they [hands] get loose senior girls they will let you repeat again. That was painful but it taught us tolerance (MuoFhe).*

*A girl is inserted inside the water ('u kama') to teach her tolerance as one day she will be a mother and it is a big task, which needs tolerance, discipline and responsibility (Vhomazwale 1).*

*It teaches boys tolerance of pain, that we must accept painful and difficult things, spiritually and physically (Nndanduleni).*

From the above extracts, this study found that the pain and hardships initiates encounter at 'Musevhetho', 'Vhusha' and

'murundu' prepares them for challenges that they may encounter as adults.

### **Passage to adulthood.**

Initiates in these studies reported that initiation schools were used as a transition from childhood to adulthood. Louw and Edwards (1997:p507) mention that initiation schools traditional practices are rituals associated with adult life.

*And it helps boys to have access to the elders as well.*

*It is a passage to adulthood (Nndanduleni).*

It may be argued from the above extract that 'murundu' for instance may be a way of gaining access to adulthood. This finding was also reported by Louw and Edwards (1997:p507). He reports that initiation schools are regarded as a bridge to manhood.

### **Conclusion**

Most of the practices at initiation schools need to be revisited, specifically issues of abuse. Things have changed. The abuses cannot be tolerated and allowed to continue. Initiation schools' traditional practices undermine initiates' self-esteem and perpetuate violence against women. Hence, they are gross violations of human rights. Furthermore, they do not only encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies but also put initiates' lives at risk.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS: CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AND FEMINITY

This chapter explores the construction of masculinity and femininity learnt at initiation schools and their role in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies. Teachings at initiation schools were reported to be very abusive and perpetuated unplanned teenage pregnancies.

#### GENDER IDENTITY

##### Defining sexual maturity

Female participants reported menarche as a sign of being sexually matured. Boys reported the growth of pubic hair as a sign of sexual maturity. Female participants below stated that:

*The time when a girl has to be sent to 'khombani' is, when a girl is grown up. When one day a girl finds blood at her panty and becomes scared, frightened and goes to her aunt or else to her granny or any other older person and tells her what is happening to her body, changes in her body.*  
**(Irene)**.

*A girl goes to 'vhusha' when she starts menstruating*  
**(Muofhe)**.

*When you go to 'vhusha' is when you are matured such that you are menstruating* **(Mashudu)**.

Louw (1996), Papalia and Olds (1988), Hurlock (1968) and Stayt (1931) note that menstruation is a sign of sexual maturity among girls. Huffman, Vernoy and Vernoy, (1994) confirmed that the development of the primary sexual characteristics and secondary sexual characteristics such as the beard growth and the development of breasts symbolise sexual maturity and ability to reproduce among boys. Rendani confirmed that:

*You know in our tradition as vhavenda people, mainly when a boy is about to graduate or to move from boyhood to manhood, immediately, I the boy realise that I secrete something from my penis, liquid like, that's when I realise that I am about to become a man but is so much different from that of a woman. It is surprising for a woman to see blood coming out from her private parts (Rendani).*

He later said:

*For a man you start your irregular erections and which surprises you that hey man its surprising you see yourself abnormally erecting and when you check you see breasts developing but not exactly like women's. When you press (breast) it you find that some liquid comes out which is like saliva that is when you are about to develop and become a man. So its all about growing of pubic hair next to your penis and scrotum like that, so its all about when you are about to become man (Rendani).*

This study found that for Venda-speaking boys and girls sexual maturity is associated with being sent to initiation schools, as boys are able to impregnate and girls can fall pregnant. At initiation schools they receive lessons about sexuality to avoid unplanned teenage pregnancies.

However these initiation school ceremonies have been found to be insufficient to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies. In addition virginity tests with their questionable validity and other traditional practices have been found to be very abusive.

Contrary to Clark-Stewart et al. (1985), Haas (1987), Hurlock (1980) and Papalia and Olds (1988) who posit that the chief cause of unplanned teenage pregnancies is that society is reluctant to recognize the biological readiness of adolescents, the present study found that the Venda speaking society acknowledges that adolescents are matured biologically but they give them insufficient sexual knowledge which can help in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies.

#### **BODY AS A SITE OF POWER RELATIONS**

Most participants in this study reported that girls are taught to stretch their labia minora. The practice is believed to make sexual intercourse enjoyable. Females reported that the practice of cutting the clitoris (clitoridectomy) is done to avoid embarrassment of long clitoris. It is believed that it can look like a penis if not cut. Below follows the extracts, which confirm the above argument:

You know about stretching labia minora, this is done also at the river. Stretching labia minora is done so that when you are married one day you can play well in the bed with your husband (**Vhomazwale b**).

The advantage of cutting the clitoris is to avoid embarrassment when you are in a group of other girls whose clitoris have been cut because yours will look like a small penis. You remember that girl who has a long clitoris because she did not go to 'musevhetho' (**Vhasidzana**).

I heard that if you did not stretch your labia minora sex is not as sweet as when you have stretched your labia minora (**Vhomazwale 1**).

Similar findings about 'u kwevha' that girls elongate their labia minora were also reported by Stayt (1931). It is noteworthy that all the practices mentioned above are about women's genitals being elongated for the satisfaction of males or cut to avoid them looking like men. In this study, initiates mentioned nothing about men's genitals being elongated for their female partner's satisfaction. Therefore, the initiates' discourses in this study is about controlling women's bodies in order to meet the needs of men.

Feminists argue that traditional practices and the beliefs that surround them, are just some of the many ways men have used patriarchal ideology to reduce women's freedom and

maintain control over them. Feminists further argue that many beliefs are deliberately continued to keep women under male control (Louw & Edwards, 1997:p508).

The above extracts confirm that females are treated unfairly. They are taught to serve males sexually whereas there is no traditional practice at initiation schools which prepares males to serve females sexually. This may be the reason why males force themselves sexually on females because they see women as sexual objects to satisfy them whenever they feel the urge. This may also be the reason why there is a high rate of unplanned teenage pregnancies conceived through forced sex. This is a violation of human rights and a very traumatic experience that has to come to an end.

According to Louw and Edwards (1997:p507) female genital mutilation can also be referred to as female circumcision. Female genital mutilation may be in the form of the surgical removal of the clitoris called clitoridectomy. This is practised on girls and is associated with rituals of initiation into adulthood.

#### **TRADITION AND SECRECY**

Initiates reported that initiation schools are secret ceremonies and the knowledge is not supposed to be shared with the uninitiated and outside initiation premises. Some mentioned that initiation school practices are supposed to be followed as they are because they have been like that in the past.

*The traditional practices at 'dombani' are not to be spoken about anywhere except at 'dombani' because it is*

taboo to speak about 'dzingoma' the traditional practices from outside 'dombani' (Vhomazwale c).

There is a strange language and words at 'mula' (murundu). But people are not allowed to use this language at home (Mmbambadzeni).

The overwhelming experience of women in a society like ours, dominated by men, is that of being silenced (Takalo, 1996). From the above extract, it may seem the silencing of women from divulging traditional practices at initiation schools is because it is known that such practices are atrocious and if initiates are informed before hand, the initiates will not dare to attend the schools.

This may be one of the reasons females violently raped by their brothers, uncles and cousins remain silent. Their silences may be rooted in the tradition of secrecy into which they are socialized at traditional institutions. The silencing of women needs to be challenged. Silencing girls about abuse robs our country of women needed for our country's development. The fact that initiation schools issues are shrouded in secrecy may perpetuate abuse.

### **CONTRADICTIONS**

Female participants reported that they were checked to see if they were still virgins at 'vhusha' and 'domba' whereas boys did not report such a cultural practice during their initiation.

At the end of 'domba' girls are all checked if they are still virgins (Vhomazwale 1).

From the above extract it may be argued that initiation schools' cultural practices are unfair and biased. It seems only girls are discouraged from engaging in sexual activities to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies. Ideally both boys and girls must go through cultural practices that teach them to be responsible about their sexual behaviour, that is, to practise safe sex or to abstain to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies.

#### **FUTURE OF INITIATION SCHOOLS**

#### **RESISTANCE**

In this study it has been shown that initiates attempted to resist some of the traditional cultural practices. For example senior people reported that some initiates refused to take the virginity test. Senior women also reported that some mothers of the initiates refused to have their daughters checked about their virginity status.

*Today 'vhakegulu' senior women no longer check the virginity status. The parents of girls or the girls themselves will not allow them (Vhomazwale a).*

*Today mothers do not agree, they refused to give permission for their daughters to be checked. The girls themselves also do not agree for their virginity status to be checked. (Vhomazwale c).*

*Some parents today they do not send their children to 'musevhetho' because they do not trust the 'musevhetho' people who circumcise the girls (Vhasidzana).*

It is clear from the above extracts that culture is dynamic, that cultural practices can be changed as parents and initiates questioned the continuation of virginity tests. This may in a way also suggest that most of the practices at initiation ceremonies can be challenged and revised.

#### **FUTURE OF INITIATION SCHOOLS.**

Participants in this study had different opinions about the future of initiation schools. Some argued that initiation schools should not be abolished whereas others argued that they are no longer relevant today.

*I think we should continue with 'vhusha' because if we look carefully nowadays there are many children (young people) who have babies. Youth are sick of terrible diseases at very young age of Aids, syphilis and gonorrhoea. I think we should continue with 'vhusha' virginity testing. I think we will be protected from diseases which are life threatening and also from unplanned teenage pregnancies (Mashudu).*

She later stated:

*'Vhusha' is very important we have to continue with 'vhusha' (Mashudu).*

Yes. I think we need to continue with 'domba'. Today girls are no longer disciplined like girls in our time. May be there are still girls out there that can still listen to 'milayo' at 'dombani'. Like you have to remain a virgin. The discipline at 'dombani' is still taught (**Vhomazwale 1**).

However initiates reported that there is an urgent need to revisit initiation practices as they are life risking and not relevant and effective in preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies.

'Domba' is just done for the sake of doing it (**Vhomazwale c**).

Nowadays we do not need 'vhusha' I think it can be better if a girl reaches 21 years they organize a 21<sup>st</sup> party for her. That can motivate her and it can be a good example to other girls that if you reach 21 and you are still a girl not a teenage mother you have a big party in store for you. I think that can be the best (**Muofhe**).

Today boys at 'murundu' are dying in large numbers. It is useless to continue with 'murundu' because the most important purpose of 'murundu' is circumcision, to cut their foreskins. 'Murundu' is not okay (**Thanyani**).

Participants in this study, both boys and girls, argued that initiation schools' cultural practices must be revisited, in particular the abusive practices. They furthermore indicated that the cultural practices cannot remain like they were in the past because then they may have been appropriate. They proposed that the cultural practices must be changed. However, other participants claimed that initiation schools cultural practices should

continued with because they seem to be helpful. This argument that initiation schools should be continued may be challenged, as traditional cultural practices which are abusive are against the South African Constitutional law which guarantees all human beings a right to be treated with dignity.

Initiation schools. Male power was demonstrated in a number of ways, including the exercise of physical and sexual control. Initiation school practices could be seen as reducing women's self-esteem by subjecting them to subordinate positions within their societies. This can lead to unplanned teenage pregnancies. Male participants in this study stated that they were encouraged to engage in sexual activities with females after the ceremony.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The findings of this study prove that both male and female initiation schools are often perceived as institutions that encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies. Male participants claimed that most of the traditional teachings are about sex and proving one's fertility. Female participants also claimed that there is a lot of encouragement of initiates to have a boyfriend and if one does not have a boyfriend one can be denied.

However, there were some participants, for instance, who claimed that initiation schools were and are still effective in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies. Female participants argued that initiation schools only attacked women for not remaining virgins and stigmatised them as immoral. However, male initiates are encouraged to engage in sexual activities with girls. For instance, boys are told that the 'sword has been sharpened it must go and

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Power and gender**

In this study, male power and the control of women's sexuality are at the centre of initiates' experiences at initiation schools. Male power was demonstrated in a number of ways, including the exertion of physical and sexual control. Initiation school practices could be seen as reducing women's self-esteem by subjugating them to subordinate positions within their societies. This can lead to unplanned teenage pregnancies. Male participants in this study stated that they were encouraged to engage in sexual activities with females after the ceremony.

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However, there were some participants, for instance, who claimed that initiation schools were and are still effective in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies. Female participants argued that initiation schools only attacked women for not remaining virgins and stigmatised them as immoral. However, male initiates are encouraged to engage in sexual activities with girls. For instance, boys are told that the 'sword has been sharpened it must go and

stab.' The present study found that initiation schools perpetuate violence against women to a high degree because this was seen as culturally correct in the past.

Both female and male initiates reported that initiation schools had a negative impact on their lives. They reported that it is common practice to be physically and emotionally abused at initiation schools. The practices are protected under the name of 'tradition'. The practices are claimed to be useful in teaching the youth to be disciplined, brave and tolerant. Given the physical, emotional and sexual abusive of cultural practices at the schools, it can be argued that there is an urgent need to revisit initiation schools and some of their abusive traditional practices.

The present study claims that traditional practices, such as physical and emotional abuses, need to be revisited as they not only disempower and destroy initiates' self-esteem, but also have life risks such as exposure to HIV/AIDS. The language used at initiation schools is not only grossly vulgar but also socializes male initiates to be sexually aggressive towards females. Male initiates are encouraged to go and prove their manhood by sleeping with girls whereas girls are taught to maintain their virginity. This may be regarded as gender insensitivity and should not be tolerated today. So the challenge may be, whether initiation schools are preventing unplanned teenage pregnancies and HIV/AIDS or spreading the killer disease.

The urgency of addressing the above question is strengthened by issues such as initiates falling pregnant immediately after they return from initiation schools. The use of the same traditional razor blades on all initiates

and cutting of the clitoris and thighs are not only physical abuses but are also gross violations of human rights. The Constitution of this country guarantees its citizens, both men and women, freedom from physical harm, the right to own their bodies, the right to have privacy and to be respected. Gender-based violence and insensitivity towards women cannot be tolerated. Women must be respected and treated with dignity. Initiation schools socialize boys to be brave emotionally and sexually but train girls to be vulnerable. This is unjust and unfair. Things cannot remain like this just because it was culturally correct in the past. These cultural practices of favouring males over women are discriminatory and biased. All human beings must be treated with fairness and respect.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study recommends intervention from psychologists, health workers, traditional healers, parents' adolescents and government policy makers.

#### **PSYCHOLOGISTS AND HEALTH WORKERS**

Psychologists and health workers face the challenge of enhancing people's lives, which in this case means addressing the issue of adolescent sexuality. This challenge may be addressed with parents' participation in their children's sexuality development. There is urgency for intense sex education, in which initiation schools seem to be ineffective. Initiates seem to lack a sufficient knowledge about the changes in their bodies and about contraceptives, which leave them prone to unplanned pregnancies.

## **PARENTS AND EDUCATION SYSTEM**

This predicament may be addressed if parents start to love their children enough to speak about sex and contraceptives as the love-life movement preaches today. The education system through life skills programmes at schools may be one of the ways to address the lack of knowledge about contraceptives to prevent not only unplanned teenage pregnancies but also HIV/AIDS which is killing many people today, mostly the youth who are the future of this country.

## **TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND HEALTH WORKERS**

Seniors at initiation schools and health workers must work jointly to address health issues such as hygiene, the lack of relevant and effective knowledge about sex and sexuality among the teenagers to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies HIV/AIDS. Senior people who run initiation schools must be trained in issues relating to human rights. The law today is against any form of abuse from parents or practices traditionally and culturally considered correct which destroy and rob humanity, especially females, of dignity and life in favour of the other sex. Traditional healers who run circumcision schools without certificates from health system for economic reasons should be prosecuted to protect the lives of initiates. Future research needs to focus on the role of initiation schools in dealing with HIV/AIDS.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Securing appointments for interview with most participants in this study was not easy given the fact that the topic is sensitive and due to the secrecy associated with the institutions studied. Senior female participants

interviewed were reluctant to be interviewed individually. I then arranged to interview them as a group during tea and lunch time that was more convenient for them. Before I interviewed, them they asked me to collect marula fruits for them to make marula beer which they drank during lunch time. They asked me to tell them what I know about the institution. I think that was meant to confirm to them that they were not speaking to an uninitiated person. At the beginning of the interview, they refused to be recorded and told me that they did not trust researchers as they may be reported to the police that they were the ones who divulged traditional practices. They also told me that they were scared they might hear themselves over the radio speaking about secret matters. I had to assure them that the information divulged during interviews was for academic purposes and not to expose them over the radio. I did not wear trousers but skirts and dresses during interviews to show them respect.

Most of the senior male participants with whom I made appointments for interviews were reluctant to be interviewed. They refused to be interviewed. They all thought that I was presumptuous to ask them about males' institutions while I am a female. Those who agreed to be interviewed were three senior males who were interviewed in the presence of a senior female for the first few minutes of the interview. Initiation school issues are secretive and confidential. Senior people who participated in the study repeatedly stated that these matters are secretive and that might have influenced them to withhold some information. It is important though to note that this

researcher has been initiated and that was advantageous for her when conducting the study.

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## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do the initiation schools practices discourage and encourage unplanned teenage pregnancies?
2. What future roles can initiation schools play in dealing with unplanned teenage pregnancies in Thohoyandou?

Text underlining indicates vocal emphasis

## APPENDIX 2

### TRANSCRIBING CONVENTIONS

- [...] Square brackets indicate talk omitted
- (text) participant's explanations
- [text] Transcriber's explanatory comments
- Text underlining indicates vocal emphasis

**APPENDIX 3  
INTERVIEWS SCHEDULES**

**FOCUS GROUPS**

**Vho-Mazwale 1:** Three women from a village about  
vhusha

**Vho-Mazwale a:** Five senior women about musevhetho

**Vho-Mazwale b:** Five senior women about vhusha

**Vho-Mazwale c:** Five senior women about domba

**Vho-Mazwale d:** Three senior men about tshitambo/  
vhutamba vhutuka

**Vhasidzana:** Three teenage mothers about musevhetho

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

**YOUNG MALES (MURUNDU)**

Mbambadzeni

Ndanduleni

Thanyani

Rendani

**TEENAGE MOTHERS (VHUSHA)**

Mashudu

Muofhe

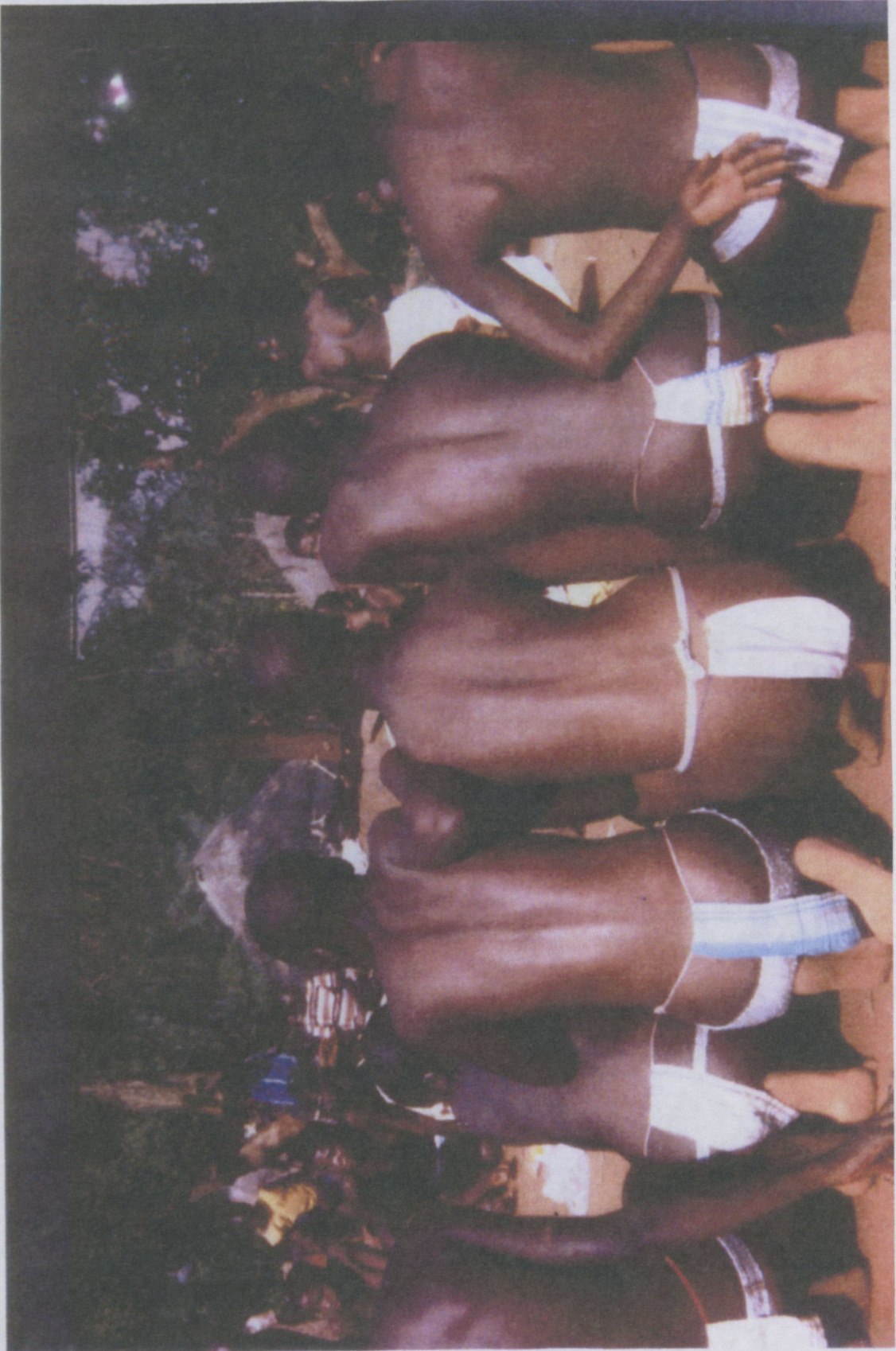
Irene

Avheani





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