

# First year students pregnant

**Discreet: First year students are dropping like flies and no one is the wiser.**

The students look cool and relaxed as they wait for their classes in the warm sun. Most of them look very young and sport T-shirts with slogans such as "Born to be Wild" or "Forced to Work, Born to Drink." A chat to ten of these young ones reveal they know a total of 14 girls who fell pregnant in their first year. Although official statistics are hard to come by, word on the Polytechnic campus is that girls have been and still are 'dropping' like flies.

Most of these girls had been from rural Namibia and had come to Windhoek on their own for the first time. When asked why they thought first year pregnancies are so prevalent, students got to the heart of the issue: Many of these young women do not have solid sex education from high school or are too embarrassed to put into action some of the birth-control solutions they were informed of. "They give each other wrong advice," says one fourth-year student, who knew three girls who fell pregnant when he was in his first year. A second year student in Journalism, Desiree Christian, says a lot of the times the advice students give each other is based on myths that continue to circulate despite the numerous sex education campaigns students are exposed to on campus and in the media.

A few examples of these misconceptions include:

- ❖ Pee immediately after sex
- ❖ Lie on your stomach until semen is pushed out
- ❖ Shower soon after sex
- ❖ A girl can't conceive the first time she has sex

Although these may seem completely absurd to an educated and literate mind, this is what some young Namibian girls still believe. Now before anyone is tempted to shake

their head in disbelief or disgust, ponder on Maya Angelo's words: "Always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy." In this case, illiteracy takes on the meaning of a lack of understanding and courage.

In the book "We must choose life" a book containing short fictional and true stories of Namibian women and their sexuality - the Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia says "Our cultures do not allow women and girls, men and boys to talk openly about sex and sexuality". This was six years ago. Today this still holds true among tertiary students. When asked, one second-year girl said even if her parents were to ask her, she would not talk to them about her sexual activity. "My father already told me "if you get pregnant you are out" she says with a laugh. One of her friends says if she needs to know anything about birth control or sex, she will just Google it. Her two friends laugh and nod their heads in agreement. Parents, and especially fathers are difficult figures to approach with such matters. And although Google would probably answer most questions, it would not be able to offer the same emotional advice in a personal and cultural context.

So what happens to these girls? Five out of the mentioned 14 returned to campus. Upon further investigation, a surprising number of girls in fact do come back to school. However, it is not always clear what happens to the babies. Some students have said at times family members understand and show support. A Journalism student at the Polytechnic, Ruth Sichombe, says, although she doesn't consider her pregnancy a first year pregnancy, she had her baby at quite a young age. Her family is supportive and accepting



<http://healthadministration.biz/teen-p>

of her child, "They treat her as an extension of the family." She has been fortunate that the child's father is also a part of the toddler's life. How many are this fortunate is not known, and with the male attitude at times seemingly immature, one can only wonder. In a random survey one male student says he would never leave school even if impregnated a girl. He didn't mention looking for a part-time job; instead he claimed he would ask his parents to help in supporting the baby. These are the same parents he would never speak

to about his sexual activity.

# WORSE?

TELLING HIM YOU'RE  
LATE

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# SEQUENCES

pregnancy-poster

Adoption in Namibia is not common and abortion is still very much illegal but rife - that and baby dumping are social issues that have received numerous coverage in the media. Last year, according to The Namibian in an article that appeared on the eighth of August, Nampa reported that at least 40 babies were being dumped or flushed down the toilet every month. Just a simple search on Facebook and one can find adverts for abortion clinics that claim they can ship painless free abortion pills from South Africa to Namibia. The Namibian reported that the

danger with some of these pills is an incomplete abortion, which will result in a "healthy birth" but the baby will most likely be stillborn or even deformed.

One may start to think that it's not every girl who becomes pregnant willingly. With late night classes and library hours that go up to 10 pm, how secure are young women who have to go home or walk to the hostels at such hours? Often in classes and on campus, ladies are encouraged to take taxis in groups. Although there is plenty of potential danger for those who return home using public transport, it also seems there is plenty of seemingly unnoticed dangers for those who live within the safety of security guards on campus. According to Adrie Hendricks, an SRC student at the University of Namibia, security on the campus is at a maximum. Room inspections are conducted on a regular basis and there is a housing committee that is set up to deal with any issues that may arise within the hostels. Security guards posted at the entrances of the hostel keep an eye on the students. Condoms are available for those wanting to engage in sexual relations.

However, this version of security differs from what students say actually happens. One fourth-year student who does not want to be named, says when she fell pregnant in her second year, no one knew that she was sneaking in her boyfriend. The Bachelor of Social Work student says, "My boyfriend used to come sleep over for weekends at times... no one realised I was keeping a man in my room. We know when the Superintendent will come to check who is in and who is out". Students at the Polytechnic hostels reiterate the same stories. Students are aware of each other's sexual activities. Even though there is security barring entry into the girls' hostels at night, girls somehow manage to sneak their boyfriends in. Perhaps not surprising is the fact that at times it is the girls who choose to sleep over in a

boyfriend's room on campus. Such activity makes it difficult for girls to claim rape when they've been known to frequent a boy's room. At times girls convince themselves it is not rape or that a guy has the right to have sex with you if he wants to. Silvia who is an off-campus student at times, sleeps over in her boyfriend's hostel room. She says, "if you are in bed with a guy and he wants to have sex with you, even if you don't want to do it, you do it." Such a worrying mentality is compounded with the attitude that it is the guy's responsibility to have a condom as girls carrying condoms will be considered loose. Although many young girls will claim the phrase "No condom no cookies" it is hard to believe that a girl won't give in once she's been persuaded a few times. An emotional attachment mixed with the rush of sensual arousal is not a cocktail to be underestimated by anybody.

The information is there, posters are everywhere, and condom containers are visible - although often empty, leaving students with the option of either asking at the school clinic or buying their own personal supply. Counsellors and the school nurses are available on campuses. Christian societies even offer their advice through student organised workshops. So what is the problem? As mentioned earlier in this article, cultures in this country do not allow for open, honest and non-judgmental conversation between parents/guardians and young people. Perhaps it comes down to choice; students need to take seriously and with a sense of responsibility whatever education they are given. There is a need to be aware of the consequences of each decision and every action. In turn, young men and women need to be assured that they can openly seek advice on the physical and emotional aspects of sex from those who are responsible for the other components of their social well-being.

**By Gift Munyana**