

School persistence and dropout among teenage mothers in Ghana

Understanding the influential factors

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School persistence and dropout among teenage mothers: An exploration of the influential factors

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Abstract

The transition to motherhood as a teenager may not only elevate the status of the teenage mother to adulthood, but also impose on her responsibilities which might weigh on her ability to continue schooling. This makes teenage mothers a unique group whose needs have influence on their ability to be in school. Although vast studies have researched the causes of dropout in general, not much is known about the determinants of dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers.

Using a qualitative method, this study explores the factors that determine dropout and school persistence from the perspectives of teenage mothers. Seeking to provide a holistic understanding of the determinants, the study adopts the possible selves' theory, the resiliency theory and the ecological systems theory of human development as the theoretical frameworks within which informants' opinions are analysed.

It is revealed that the resiliency of teenage mothers, their past and present experiences impact their possible selves and influence decisions on schooling. In addition, the elements of the immediate environment which contain them; thus peers, school, teachers, parents, churches, and relationships between these elements play important roles in determining dropout and school persistence. Furthermore, events unfolding at the macro level; namely social norms, beliefs, and discriminatory gender practices are found to be of significance. Of equal significance are the effects of government's educational policies, school rules, and practices, socio-economic conditions relating to family size, income, health status and the influence of change and consistency on these factors relating to elements within the environment.

I recommend an inclusive approach which targets improving the conditions within the environment that hosts the teenage mother, and one that focuses on enhancing the development of positive possible selves of teenage mothers to encourage school persistence.

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Acronyms/Abbreviations

Camfed	Campaign for Female Education
COCOBOD	Ghana Cocoa Board
EFA	Education for All
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalist
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
FTI (CF)	Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund
GEU	Girls' Education Unit
GES	Ghana Education Service
MoE	Ministry of Education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFP	School Feeding Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WASSSCE	West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In Ghana and other developing countries the ability of teenage mothers to be in school may not require the same amount of effort. Some teenage mothers may only need to make that conscious decision to be in school. For others, a lot of other determinants such as the ability to pay for schooling, the need for social support from family, peers, teachers, and existing norms and beliefs play significant roles in schooling decisions. Consider the scenario of that young mother of a toddler who gets no support for childcare, yet cannot take her baby along to the basic school because it is an unacceptable practice which invites stigmatization from the immediate social environment which is expected to offer social support. Can such an exposure and experience enhance psychological and social well-being necessarily for this mother to be in school? Such could be the experience of the teenage mother who drops out of school in Ghana.

The issue of schooling among teenage mothers is one that merits research in wake of the demand for education for all. The World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in 1990 renewed calls for an inclusive education. The quest to achieving universal primary education and to reducing gender disparities in enrolment as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contributes also to drawing focus towards the need to bridge the gender disparity gaps in education. A core objective is to increase international efforts and commitments to enhancing enrolment, retention, completion. From a global perspective, countries within Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have been identified to reporting the greater rates of gender disparities in education compared with other regions (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). This reflects a pattern whereby a higher rate of males than females is recorded with regards to retention, and completion. This suggests that greater efforts aimed at promoting enrolment, retention, and completion especially among females by governments of countries in these regions would be a step in the right direction. In other words, there is the need to tackle the problem of dropout among girls if gender parity in education can be achieved.

Dropout could be the result of a series of individual and interrelated factors. Meanwhile, dropout resulting from pregnancy has been identified as one of the most significant factors that mitigates against girls' education (Ananga, 2011). Dropout has been found to have a causal and a reciprocal relationship with pregnancy (Samantha, 2013) and the impact of pregnancy on schooling has been well researched. Teenage pregnancy has adverse impacts on attendance,

performance, retention and achievement (Ananga, 2011; Amadi, Role & Makewa, 2013). While this finding is valid for a significant number of Sub-Saharan African countries, the Ghanaian context particularly reveals a staggering case (Gyesaw & Ankomah, 2013). The report on pregnancy-related dropouts reveals an increasing trend. Between the years 2010 and 2012, a total of 7,256 girls representing barely six of the ten regions in Ghana dropped out of school because of pregnancy, while 13,520 pregnant girls between the ages 12-15 were reported to have dropped out in 2014 (The Ghana Statistical Service, 2014).

1.2 Statement of the problem

With an aim to achieving the SDG goal on reducing gender inequality in education, the Ghana Education Unit (GEU) on behalf of the government issued a directive to allow re-entry and retention of pregnant students in school. Although statistics reveal some improvements in enrolment, and completion following the issuance of this directive, regional disparities continue to persist (GES, 2015). A study on re-entry of teenage mothers into school conducted by the GEU across some districts in the country revealed a low re-entry figure, suggesting that a greater proportion of dropped-out teenage mothers did not re-enter school. It is interesting to know that although the government's directive is intended to promote re-entry of teenage mothers, it does not make explicit the procedures and guidelines necessary to ensure re-entry and retention. Furthermore, there is an absence of a policy framework necessary to promote the agenda on teenage mothers' education. A report by Federation of African Women Educationalists in Ghana (FAWE, 2015) revealed that Ghana lacks a comprehensive national policy specifically oriented towards ensuring re-entry and integration of teenage mothers into school.

While it is acknowledged that teenage pregnancy impacts negatively on girls' educational attainment and contribute to dropout among them (UNESCO, 2003), little is known about the factors that spearhead the dropout process and those that mitigate against these factors. More specifically, research has revealed higher pregnancy-related dropouts in the rural compared to the urban areas (Imoro, 2009) suggesting that socio-economic factors play a significant role. Yet interventions targeting pregnancy-related dropouts have been uniform for both rural and urban areas. Besides, not much is known about the experiences of these teenage mothers. From a much broader perspective, individual, and institutional factors relating to the family, school, and community have been identified as important for understanding dropout and school

persistence. However, there is a dearth of knowledge on the interrelatedness of these factors and how they influence schooling decisions of teenage mothers.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study seeks to identify the factors which influence dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers and the interrelatedness among these factors. To understand why teenage mothers may drop out or persist with schooling, this study will seek evidence by dwelling on the accounts and experiences of teenage mothers who are in school and those out of school. The purpose is to contribute to a better understanding of the association between pregnancy, teenage motherhood, school persistence and dropout. It is hoped that the finding could also inform policy design and implementation of interventions directed to addressing the problem of dropout and to promoting school persistence among teenage mothers.

1.4 Research question

The research poses the question:

- ❖ What factors influence dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers?

1.5 Limitation of the study

To tackle the issue of dropout from a broader perspective, it might be interesting to also acquire evidence on teenage fatherhood and its relationship with schooling. The study is however limited to the views of teenage mothers. Including that of parents, peers and perhaps teachers could have revealed different opinions that could contribute to acquiring a holistic perspective on the issue. Besides the use of the qualitative method for this study could limit external validity and generalization of the finding to populations outside the study. Nonetheless, the approach was thought through and the researcher purposely concluded on focusing on the views of teenage mothers so as to enhance the significance of their views to understanding the research problem. Besides, this study has the strength of providing an in-depth understanding of the core informants who are the teenage mothers.

1.6 Policy and legal frameworks for promoting education in Ghana

In this section, I explore some of the policies and programs that the government of Ghana has introduced with the purpose of improving enrolment, retention, completion and achievement generally, but also specifically to bear on girls' education. One of these policies is the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), introduced in 1992 as mandated by Article (25) of the 1992 Constitution. The FCUBE grants all persons equal rights to free basic education and the opportunities for the realization of these rights. In practice however, limitations such as inequalities in the distribution of educational infrastructure and accessibility issues limits the realization of these rights by all (Camfed, 2012). In 2003, the Ghanaian government introduced the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) as a framework that would guide the governments' education promotion strategies between the periods 2003-2015. The ESP focused on four main areas; science and technology, equity in access, quality in education and education management (Camfed, 2012). The ESP introduced reforms into the educational sector. These included the expansion of basic education to two years of pre-school, three years of junior secondary school, six years of primary school and senior secondary school to four years. While the basic school system has enjoyed relative stability, the secondary school system has been a tool for political manipulation as it has seen another restructuring to a period of three years after a change of government in 2008.

The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is another initiative for promoting girls' education introduced and endorsed by parliament between the periods 2003-2004. This initiative mandated the establishment of a fund known as the FTI Catalytic Fund (CF). This fund was purported to finance free textbooks distribution to public basic schools, improve the conditions of teaching and teacher remunerations and support supervision and monitoring activities. Furthermore, the government introduced The Capitation Grant in 2004 as an initiative to cut down on the cost of basic schooling born by parents. This grant made available per pupil per term funding of between GHC3-GHC4, which is less than a dollar. Although this initiative is somehow commendable, the study reviewed by Camfed (2012) notes that attrition rates for girls had not improved a year after the introduction of The Capitation Grant. This suggested that the flat rates could have less impact for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds than for other groups of students.

Decentralization of education is another strategy the government has introduced with the aim of improving efficiency in education management, efficiency and service delivery that is more

responsive to the differential needs of the various districts, communities, and regions within the country. Although the intention is laudable, Aikman & Unterhalter (2005) note that the ESP tasked to facilitate this process lacks strategies specifically oriented to tackling contextualised girls' education challenges such as those resulting from regional disparities. Other social programs expected to impact positively on education have been introduced by the government. These include The School Feeding Program which provides pupils in selected basic public schools a hot meal a day, The Livelihood Empowerment Program that provides cash transfers to vulnerable households and The National Health Insurance Scheme which aims at providing affordable healthcare to all Ghanaians.

1.7 Policy and legal issues affecting girls' education

Teacher training, recruitment, placement and attendance are argued to have impacts on girls' education. According to a report by Camfed (2012), teacher absenteeism in Ghanaian was around 27 percent representing about 80 days of work out of a 127 days of a school year. This has been identified to have a negative impact on the quality of education offered. Besides, the report points to an inadequate government budgetary allocation to promoting girls' education. As revealed in the 2010 FTI report, the effective implementation of the ESP is undermined due to inadequate financing. This has been blamed partly on the structural organisation of the education sector. For instance the GEU is situated within the Basic Education Sector which is under the Ministry of Education. Though the ESP is expected to ensure a continuum between basic and secondary education, there are no modalities that ensure that a separate allocation is made within government's budget for this purpose.

Another issue noted to be affecting government's efforts to promote girls' education in Ghana is the limited focus on linking learning to careers and livelihoods. The report by Camfed (2012) notes that emphasis on education continues to lie on literacy and qualifications rather than on relevance and on the acquisition of usable skills within particular contexts. Moreover, the study identifies that reforms are made without consultations between grassroots and youth organisations. As a result, educational reforms fail to address livelihood challenges of the students involved and have minimal positive impacts. This can be viewed as one of the major setbacks in the efforts to promoting education. Aikman & Unterhelther (2005) argue that the success of policies for promoting girls' education is contingent on other gender-sensitive policies which lie outside the education sector such as those that provide fair working conditions and opportunities for all. Meanwhile, the report by Camfed (2012) points out that

women continue to encounter resistance in entering non-traditional fields and that the majority of women are employed in less-paid jobs that lie outside the formal sectors.

Corporal punishment in schools is one practice that has been identified to be contributing to dropout among girls in Ghana (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). A legal document by the GES and a handbook issued by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2005 stated that corporal punishment in school is legal but restricted. This was a rather unclear statement because the document did not make explicit the extent of limitation. Besides, there are no mechanisms in place to monitor, regulate and limit corporal punishments. Attempts to prohibit the practice began in 2006 but have been unsuccessful. In addition, child labour has been identified to contribute to dropout (Ananga, 2011). Although The Ghana Labour Decree introduced in 1967 prohibits the engagement of children under 15 years in work, it permits undefined *light work*. Consequently, a survey by the Ghana Statistical Service on child labour in 2003 revealed that based on age 1, 27 million children representing 67 percent of children out of school were engaged in child labour. Child labour is also found to be gendered, varies by region and linked to poverty.

1.8 Chapter outline

The *first chapter* of this thesis introduces the study topic and highlights some of the factors which influence schooling decisions among teenage mothers. It then proceeds by pointing out the significance of tackling pregnancy-related dropout to meeting the SDGs on achieving gender parity and education for all. Further, the problem situation relating to pregnancy, dropout and school persistence in the Ghanaian context is presented. Next, I introduce the research question and some limitations of the study. The chapter ends with a presentation of an overview of some of the major policies, interventions and legal frameworks for promoting education in Ghana, and also those legal frameworks affecting girls' education.

Chapter two explores and reviews some existing literature on factors which explain dropout in general, and dropout among teenage mothers. In this chapter, gaps found in the reviewed literature are also highlighted. Furthermore, the theories used for analysing the findings of this study are also presented.

Chapter three is a section on methodology. In this chapter, I take readers through the research process, the research design, the research method, the method used for data collection, method of data analysis, procedures employed to ensure rigor of the research and how I adhered to

ethical principles. I point out some of the challenges I faced in the process of collecting my data, what decisions I made and make justifications for what informed those decisions. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the theoretical frameworks used for analysing the data collected.

Chapter four presents and analyses the findings from the data collected from the study site. In the process, I employ the theories presented in chapter three by relating and linking themes which emerged from the data to the concepts within the theories.

Chapter five is the concluding chapter. In this chapter, I discuss and summarize my findings from the study. I also make recommendations that in my view can contribute to addressing the study problem.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This section presents a review of existing literature on the causes of school dropout in general and dropout among teenage mothers. While the causes of school dropout in general may offer useful explanations to school dropout among both boys and girls, Samantha (2013) and Macloed (1999) note that teenage pregnancy is a stressful condition which exacerbates the risk of dropping out of school particularly for girls.

In this chapter, I present a broader overview of the explanatory factors in order to enhance readers' understanding of the study. First, the study introduces the concept of dropout with emphasis on pull, push and falling out factors as well as individual and institutional factors which are the most dominant categorizations used in the study of school dropout (Malik, 2000; Hunt, 2008; Jordan, Lara & McPartland, 1996). It then touches on examples from different geographies and regions, and then proceeds to examining dropout among teenage mothers. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the analytical frameworks for the study.

2.2 The concept of dropout

Dropping out has been identified as a process (Kneppers, 2015; Hunt, 2008) marred by a series of "interrelated factors which act in complex ways" (Ananga, 2011, P. 4). These factors could be classified as push, pull, or falling out (Doll, Eslami & Walters, 2013) and are influenced by social, economic, cultural, school and individual factors (Ahikre and Madanda, 2011) within particular contexts. Ananga (2011) argues that a child might have suspended schooling briefly without necessarily stepping completely out of the school system. Issues like these make any definition of the term based on the duration of withdrawal from school difficult, especially because of the interrelatedness of the causative factors. Identifying the various stages of this process, as well as deciding on its final phase could add to the complexities of settling on a single definition.

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) suggests a definition based on *early-school-leaving* describing a dropout as a student who exits formal education system without completing a cycle that was started. This definition shares similarity with that of the Organisation of Economic Corporation for Development (OECD, 2002) which

defines dropout with emphasis on withdrawal from school without first achieving the appropriate qualification.

The above definitions are but two of the different existing definitions for the term. For clarity and comprehensiveness purpose, Ananga's definition will be employed for this study. Ananga defines dropouts as "children who had initial access but attended intermittently, sometimes stopping completely with the possibility of returning" (2011, p. 375).

2.2.1 Pull, push and falling out

Ananga (2011) defines push factors as those factors within the school that have consequences for attendance and discipline. Jordan, Lara & Mcpartland (2014) identify students' inability to keep pace with academic work, truancy, inability to comply by disciplinary policies and the consequences of poor behaviour as some of the push factors.

In addition to school factors, Watt & Roessingh (1994) identify individual- related issues and demands outside the school such as illness, financial worries, family demands, out-of-school employment and family change such as marriage and childbirth as some of the pull factors that explain dropout. A third factor for school dropout, *falling out* has been identified by Doll, Eslami, & Walters as "a process whereby the student increasingly engages in behaviours of disengagement in the school without being pushed or lured by out-of-school conditions such that the student eventually falls out or disappears from the school system" (2013, p. 2). For example, a student could fall out as a result of sheer dislike for the school or as a result of residential relocation.

Doll et al. (2013) argue that it is agency that distinguishes push from pull factors. The authors argue further that with push factors the school acts as an agent that excludes the student, whereas with pull factors the student is the agent who gets attracted by factors outside the school environment. Ananga (2011) adds to the debate arguing that neither the school nor the student is the agent with regards to falling out factors, but rather there exists circumstances which neither the school nor the student can remediate, thereby resulting in diminishing interest of the student in school.

2.3 Individual factors

Rumberger (2011) identifies two main factors in his study of dropout, namely; individual factors and institutional factors. In this section, I present a discussion of how individual factors contribute to school dropout. The individual factors are those factors which relate to the students themselves such as students' behaviours and attitudes, school performance and prior experience. For brevity purpose, only the factors deemed most significant to the study are reviewed.

2.3.1 Academic performance and dropout

Students' performance in school could have significance for their attendance, progression and their interest in schooling in general. Poor academic performance has been identified in some studies (Ananga, 2011; Imoro, 2009; Rumberger, 2011) as one of the major causes of school dropout. The implication is that poorly performing students are more likely to drop out of school than well-performing students. Rumberger (2011) argues that poor academic performance can partly be linked to poor attitudes and irresponsible behaviours such as misbehaviour, low educational and occupational aspirations and truancy exhibited by the student.

In his study of dropout in a rural district in Ghana, Imoro (2009) identified that parents had higher expectations of their wards to perform exceptionally in school, progress to higher levels of education and then find well-paid jobs. Parents viewed the support for their wards' education as a form of investment which they expected to yield results. Where students could not meet these expectations, or performed poorly in school, parents doubted the relevance of the investments and thus redrew their support.

Closely linked to academic performance, Imoro (2009) has identified poor quality of education which manifests itself in the form of poor examination results as a cause of dropout. In this same study, the author found out that parents had lost confidence in the educational system following the poor performance of their wards' schools in the Basic Education Certificate Examinations. The poor performance meant that students could not progress to the next level of the educational ladder. Owing to this, parents saw no need to support their children in school.

Within school practice, poor academic performance often prompted the decision on grade repetition, a practice which has also been identified by Ananga (2011) as a cause of dropout.

In this study, schools were unwilling to promote poorly performing students, especially where these students exhibited irresponsible student behaviours such as absenteeism or truancy. Meanwhile, Scottie and Awusu (2011) found that grade repetition encourages negative change in attitude among students by triggering or worsening already-existing irresponsible student behaviour because the practice of repetition exposes these students to stigmatisation. Repeated students could be tagged as truants and absentees, as a result of which they eventually drop out.

Poor attitude of teachers towards academically-weak students has also been identified as a practice which carries the potential to diminish students' interest in schooling. In their study on dropout in Ghana, Scottie and Awusu (2011, p. 130) identified that teachers often showed interest and affection towards academically strong students. They developed good relationships with these students and often showered praises on them. This encouraged the students to stay in school. The academically weak students on the other hand felt humiliated as they were often reprimanded publicly for non-performance and teased by their peers. The outcome of such a practice was that these students dropped out for lack of motivation.

The authors further noted that teaching methods and classroom practices often contributed to the problem of poor academic performance. For instance, academically weak and strong students are lumped together. The same teaching methods were used regardless of the differences in students' academic strengths. In addition, there were no measures for assisting weak students. Besides, poor quality of school with regards to infrastructure, inadequate teaching and learning materials and poor school practices such as corporal punishment for poorly performing students were identified as contributing to dropout.

From the above evidence, it can be deduced that although poor academic performance is an individually-related factor, it is anchored in the disabilities of the school as an institution, suggesting that both the individual and institutional factors have reciprocal influences. As identified by Rumberger (2011), the individual factors are shaped by the institutional settings where children live. A dysfunctional educational system for instance provides an impetus to dropout. Policies which aim to tackle dropout should therefore adopt a holistic approach to solving the challenges from the individual and institutional perspectives.

2.3.2 Economic engagement and school disengagement

According to the Ghana Child Labour Survey, one of the most common reasons for dropout in Ghana is child labour (GSS, 2003). Child labour is closely linked to economic conditions

within the family such as poverty. A child from a low income family may be forced to work by her caretakers. Others voluntarily opt to work to support their families. Ananga (2011) identified that children dropped out of school especially when their caretakers were unable to afford their school fees. They either abandoned schooling completely or temporary, pending a solution such as waiting for harvest time when parents could sell their produce and make money to cover up the cost of their fees. In their study of dropout in Ethiopia, Colclough et al. (2000) argue that engagement of children in labour often leads to their disengagement from school because child labour exerts pressure on schooling time. The authors found that children enrolled in school during the planting season but dropped out during the harvest season because of the demand for their labour on the farms. The seasonality of the agricultural work which these children engaged in led to high incidence of lateness and seasonal withdrawal, but often to a permanent departure from school. Ananga, (2011, p. 377) notes that the pressure to leave school for work is much intensified especially in settings where children can easily acquire informal jobs.

Hashim (2005) has identified seasonal migration for the purpose of job search among children as another factor which boosts the process of economic engagement and disengagement from school among children. It is reported that by age 13, children from economically poor households in the Northern part of Ghana migrate to viable market areas where they can find jobs, as a result of which they drop out of school (Ananga, 2011). Among children who have diminished interest in schooling, the availability of informal jobs such as petty trading and farm labour enhanced the development of attitudes and interest in “money-making”. For some students from poor economic households, working alongside schooling is a coping strategy. For others, it is an escape route to a quicker way of making money (Scottie and Awusu, 2011). Such students drop out and rarely return to school.

2.4 Institutional factors

Rumberger (2011) argues that the setting or the context in which children live, that is their families, schools and communities shape their attitudes, behaviours and experiences which in effect influence educational outcomes and thus decisions about schooling. Similarly, Evans (2004) argues that the environment or context presents both opportunities and challenges which affect educational outcomes. These challenges include poverty, difficulties in accessing schools, negligence of parental responsibility, and poor school conditions. The opportunities include parental and family support, easy accessibility to school and quality teaching and

learning environments. Below, I review how the family, school and community as agents and institutions within a child's environment influence dropout among children.

2.4.1 The ecology of the family and dropout

The family is identified by Rumberger (2011) as the most critical contextual factor with regards to schooling and success in school among children. In addition, the author has identified socio-economic background of the family; namely parental education and family or household income as the most important predictors of school achievement and dropout decisions. Parental income determines the ability to provide the needed resources to support children's education such as learning aids at home, access to quality schools and summer programs. Parental education is also said to have influence on parental willingness to support children through school (Scottie and Awusu, 2011). Rumberger (2011) argues that educated parents place a higher value on education than uneducated parents, as a result of which educated parents offer their support in various areas such as providing assistance with homework, regulating and monitoring their children's behaviour, while encouraging independent thinking among them. The author argues that such practices positively influence students' aspirations for higher achievement.

Dropout has been found to be higher among children who lack parental guidance and care, and children who have lost their parents (Rumberger, 2011). Children from broken homes, those living with single parents and foster parents may lack the love, parental motivation and guidance which are found to encourage a positive attitude to schooling (Evans, 2004).

Closely linked to socioeconomic conditions within the family, Ananga (2011) has identified gender, family size and the health of family members as factors which impact on dropout. The author posits that family composition has implications for the cost involved in keeping the family, arguing that a large family of indisposed members increases the expenses of family upkeep, usually at the compromise of covering the cost of schooling for its members. Gender has significance for dropout particularly in societies where gender discriminatory practices, such as prioritising education for boys over girls, reserving house chores exclusively for girls and the practice of marrying off girls before they become adults are prominent. These practices add up to the pressures which pull girls away from school.

In his analysis of the effect of family structure and composition on dropout, Lund (2009) identified that children living in single-parent households, step-parent and female-headed

households are more likely to drop out of school than those in a two-parent family. The explanation offered for this hypothesis is that separation in the marriage of a child's parents often results in a decline of the disposable household income which affects the income available for catering for the child's education. The decline in income according to Pong and Ju (2000) results from the practice of each parent keeping a separate bank account and assuming lesser responsibility for the children following a divorce. Parents may disagree on shared responsibilities for their children, often shifting blames on one another.

Besides, children from divorced families may lack the parental guidance and motivation necessary for higher achievements in their academic work. Lund (2009) argues that divorce often weakens the parent-child relationship; thus parents spend less time with their children. The children may not get parental assistance with homework. The lack of motivation and parental interest in the child's studies results in the child developing less interest for studies and schooling. Another factor noted by Lund (2009) as contributing to poor academic performance and dropout among children of divorced parents is the absence of connectedness and the lack of a thriving parent-child relationship. This results in children falling victims to negative peer influences which drive illicit behaviours like drug abuse, truancy and unprotected pre-marital sex that can result in teenage pregnancy and eventually increase the risk for dropout. The argument put forward by Lund (2009) suggests that disconnection between parents and their children drives disconnection between the school and children.

Pong and Ju (2009) argue that female-headed households are worse-off with regards to family income because females earn lower than males. The authors emphasize that the nurturing and mothering roles played by females in traditional societies limit their income-earning abilities. Females in traditional societies are often the keepers of the home and are expected to take care of house chores, a practice which reduces their income-earning capacity and their ability to take care of their children's education.

In addition to family structure, Lund (2009) has identified household shocks which lead to structural changes in the family as having a causal effect on dropout. Household shocks are unexpected events which have undesirable consequences for household income. Such events include sickness of the household-head, death and job loss. As Lund (2009) points out, poor health translates into an increase in household expenses which reduces the income available for taking care of its members. Pong and Ju (2009) reveal that children whose caretakers are indisposed for work and yet receive no financial support may be preoccupied with thoughts of

adopting survival strategies such as finding work to do rather than being in school. Health problems such as mental and physical disabilities may hinder a child's education by impeding the child's cognitive abilities, thereby hindering his success in school. As discussed earlier, poor academic achievement can result in dropout. Job-loss and joblessness have similar effect. In addition, a larger family size skews income distribution among its members. In the face of financial difficulties in the family, families are compelled to prioritize the most basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter over education for its young ones.

2.4.2 The ecology of the school and dropout

The school is identified by Rumberger (2001) to exert both direct and indirect influence on dropout rates and on school achievement. The direct influences are those explicit and conscious policies in response to misbehaviour and poor attendance such as retention, suspension and expulsion which lead to students forcibly or voluntarily redrawing from school. The indirect influence refers to conditions in the school which influence students' engagement and withdrawal from school such as boredom and low achievement (Rumberger, 2011). For the author, the characteristics of the school which matter most with regards to dropout are (1) the school composition; thus socio-economic conditions of the students, (2) the structural characteristics of the school such as its size, location and control, (3) the resources of the school such as funding, availability of teaching materials and teacher quality and (4) policies and practices such as the academic and social climate.

Gamoron (1992) refers to social characteristics of students as making up the social composition of the school which they attend. The social characteristics referred to include gender and ethnicity, and are said to have considerable impacts on school achievement both at the aggregate and individual level as well as on school dropout rates. The assertion put forward by the author is that a school comprising of students belonging to ethnic groups which hold dear discriminatory practices that keep girls away from school will have a high dropout rate among girls. Similarly dropout is higher among students from disadvantaged ethnic minority groups grappling with poverty and discrimination. In their study of dropout among culturally, ethnically and linguistically distinct groups in the united States of America, Chavez, Belkin, Hornback and Adams (2007) find that culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct students drop out at a higher percentage rate than non-minority and Euro-American students for reasons of inequalities in income distribution, high incidence of poverty, low performance, difficulties with comprehension of the language of instruction, low level of parental education and

mismatch between home and school culture. Although Rumberger (2001) makes explicit that individual factors may influence the effect of social composition on dropout, Bryk, and Thum (1989) argue that social background of a school predicts dropout rates when individual factors are controlled.

School resources include the student-teacher ratio which impacts on the quality of teaching and learning, the school infrastructure, and teaching materials and other forms of capital investment. In their study of *dropout and turnover rates among rural and urban areas*, Rumberger and Thomas (2000) identify that resources influence dropout. Students may drop out of school due to lack of classroom space, large student-teacher ratio and lack of teaching materials. Resource inadequacy at school can drive the process of dropout. For instance, the student who studies under a leaking roof in a classroom of about 50 students with inadequate chairs may not only feel uncomfortable being at school but also may not have adequate attention and supervision from teachers. With time, the student will lose interest in attending school and drop out.

Walters, Cross and Runions (2009) contribute to the literature on the school's influence on dropout and retention by bringing to the fore the concept of connectedness. The authors define connectedness as "the extent to which students feel that they are part of the school they attend and their belief that adults in the school care about their learning" (2009, p. 517). The underlying argument is that a higher sense of connectedness reduces the risk of dropout, while a lower sense of connectedness increases the risk of dropout. Connectedness is said to be influenced by the existing school climate which is also a product of organizational leadership and functionality as based on the values, attitudes and norms that are embedded within the disciplinary culture of the school (Walters et al. 2009). The authors argue further that students' involvement in decision-making, clarity and fairness in the application of school rules contribute to the development of students' connectedness.

2.4.3 The ecology of neighbourhood/community and dropout

Peers, opinion leaders and role models who exert influence on the adolescent's behaviour can be found within the community and neighbourhood. Crowder and South (2003) found that adolescent attitude, behaviours, norms and aspirations are influenced by the interaction between them and their non-adult peers. This suggests that the adolescent who has peers indulging in behaviours that contravenes established norms stands a risk of being influenced to behave like the peers. The student who has peers who have dropped out of school stands a risk

of dropping out, and the teenage girl whose peers are teenage mothers has a higher risk of becoming a teenage mother. Neighbourhoods present individuals with both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities include availability of job avenues and residential safety (Rumberger, 2001). These opportunities enhance the adoption of positive behaviours, while restraints such as lack of jobs and high incidence of poverty encourage negative behaviours. The *restraints or neighbourhood distress factors* as Crowder and South (2003) term them are found to increase dropout. On the influence of job availability, Rumberger (2001) posits that the availability of favourable employment opportunities for high school dropouts in neighbourhoods with available job avenues increase the likelihood of dropout whereas neighbourhoods which have favourable job opportunities which increase the economic returns to graduating reduces dropout. Rumberger (2001) argue that communities or neighbourhoods may influence dropout rates through the following means. (1) Poor neighbourhoods may influence child and adolescent development through the absence of resources (such as playing parks and centres for after-school programs) and enhance negative peer influence. (2) Students who live in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to have dropouts as friends and this increases the likelihood that they also drop out of school.

2.5 Factors influencing dropout among teenage mothers

Mothering teenagers and pregnant schoolgirls have been identified as an educationally vulnerable group (Pillow, 2004; Vincent, 2016) that stands a higher risk of dropping out of school due to lack of resources, rigid and inflexible school policies and local practice. Although context-specific conditions could result in differing impacts of pregnancy and childbirth for teenage mothers' schooling, existing literature from differing contexts (Pillow, 2004; Smith, 2002; Suri, 1994) to a large extent reveal that teenage pregnancy impacts negatively on school attendance, attainment and completion.

2.5.1 The linkage between teenage motherhood, school attendance, attainment and completion

Evidence from studies (Hofferth, Reid, & Moth, 2001; Suri, 1994) suggests that early childbirth causes young women who otherwise could complete school to drop out. Teenage mothers complete fewer years of schooling compared to their counterparts who are not mothers (Kane, Morgen, Harris & Guilkey, 2013). The explanation given is that childcare takes time from academic work, leisure and other extra curricula activities (Hofferth et al. 2001). The authors

argue further that teenage mothers could find it more challenging dealing with the demands of childrearing as they may be financially incapable of meeting these demands. The demands for childrearing weigh on academic efforts resulting in low achievement, low motivation and lack of success in school.

2.5.2 The culture of stigmatization, norms surrounding pregnancy and dropout

Teenage mothers could be excluded from mainstream formal schooling as a result of bullying and stigmatization (Dawson & Hosie, 2005; Osler & Vincent, 2003). Samantha (2013) posits that the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy has links with cultural norms; thus what society considers as acceptable or otherwise to an extent determines how teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers are received within any community. Teenage mothers are stigmatised in school and in their communities and are usually perceived as a homogenous group of immature, singles, irresponsible, benefit-dependents, and unfit parents who deviate from the norms of motherhood (Chigona and Chetty, 2008; Yardley, 2008; Champion, 2005).

Although norms might have changed such that the pressure on pregnant teenagers to marry, drop out or conceal pregnancy has diminished in developed countries such as the United States of America, Hofferth et al. (2001) argue that non-marital childbearing is still unacceptable to the majority of the population. In analysing the factors which contribute to stigmatisation it is important to consider not only the community cultures and norms in general, but also the significance of socio-economic background and teenage mothers' views about early motherhood.

In his study of *young mothers' views about teenage pregnancy*, Turner (2004) identified that young women from disadvantaged backgrounds may intentionally enter motherhood, viewing it as a route to economic independence as they could benefit from social benefits. These women are also less likely to accept abortion compared to their counterparts from well-to-do backgrounds. Turners' arguments presuppose that early motherhood could have a higher acceptance rate among young mothers from deprived backgrounds, and thus a lower level of stigmatization. Research from both developed regions which have instituted social support programs for teenage mothers (Smith, 2002) as well as developing regions where the family is the institution for the provision of social support out of its limited resources (Bhana, et al. 2008; Chigona and Chetty 2008), however, reveal a low acceptance for teenage pregnancy in general and subsequently high stigmatization. These issues coupled with the increasing financial

pressure childbirth exerts on the family's resources contribute to pulling the teenage mother out of school.

Furthermore, the changing social status of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers, as well as the norms surrounding pregnancy and childbirth may serve as pull factors that contribute to dropout. In their study of *teenage mothers' experience of teenage motherhood* in South Africa, Chohan and Langa (2011) found that childbirth was considered as a rite of passage to womanhood in which case teenage mothers were perceived as adults and expected to take up the responsibility of adulthood. They might be required to move into their boyfriends' homes and perform their duties as mothers and wives. On the other hand, they could be perceived as children expected to carry out the responsibilities of a child towards the parents. This could affect their position as students.

2.5.3 Poverty and dropout

The effect of poverty on schooling among teenage mothers can be envisaged in different ways. Poverty and its impact on education has been identified (Suri, 1994) as both a cause and a consequence of unwed adolescent parenthood. The pressure to drop out is exacerbated among girls from low income households, those who have many siblings (Hofferth, Reid, & Moth, 2001) households which have suffered income shocks, girls from families with lower levels of education, and families headed by a single female breadwinner (Hunt, 2008). Suri (1994) argues that many adolescent mothers have parents who failed to complete high school. These adolescents prior to pregnancy have financial and intellectual difficulties with school and that these challenges persist during and after pregnancy resulting in a dropout. This according to Suri (1994) begins another cycle of poverty and the dropout process.

Ahikre and Madanda (2011) argue that poverty of parents and their inability to shoulder the educational needs of their pregnant daughters or teenage mothers might pull them out of school since pregnancy and childbirth increases the financial strains of the teenage mother. In situations where parents are unwilling to shoulder these financial responsibilities, teenage mothers may need to pull out of school to work to meet their own demands. The studies by Ahikre and Madanda (2011) and Suri, (1994) make sound arguments for the cause of poverty, its impact on education and the role pregnancy plays to exacerbate it. However, they do not show the links between the numbers of teenage childbirths, poverty and education although the number of children could further skew resource distribution and impact resource availability

for schooling. This study would therefore take a further step to considering the role the number of unwed teenage births plays in dropout among teenage mothers.

2.5.4 Lack of family support

Dropout among teenage mothers is also influenced by the lack of family support during and after pregnancy. Teenage mothers are more likely to return to school when their families and adult caregivers support them to care for their children than when they solely carry the responsibility for their babies (Samantha, 2013). The support from mothers and grandparents has been found to be particularly important (Bhana, Clowes, Morrell and Shefer, 2008). Family support to teenage mothers can take many forms and encompass acts such as providing care for the teenage mother and her baby, financial support, encouragement and the provision of emotional support. In the absence of family support, teenage mothers may have to carry out the dual responsibility of a caregiver and a student. This usually exerts undue pressure on them and contributes to poor performance that later affects their decision to drop out (Morrell and Devey, 2012). Chigona and Chetty (2008) argue that more often than not teenage mothers do not receive family support because of disapproval of non-marital childbearing. The study by Edin and Kafalas (2005) however give contradictory evidence, identifying that although early childbearing is not necessarily desirable, once a teenager becomes pregnant or put to birth, the family begins to increase its support for her and her baby.

The aforementioned studies relate particularly to the support of the family. Meanwhile, there exists a gap in knowledge regarding the role of adolescent and adult fathers towards the babies of teenage mothers, and their significance to the schooling of teenage mothers. For instance, it is not known if they add weight to the financial pressures or provide relief. This study would seek to solicit views of teenage mothers on the role of their babies' fathers in their schooling.

2.5.5 School policy and practice

In his study of dropout among teenage mothers, Vincent (2016) found school policy and practice to be significant to dropout. These factors were found to be due to inflexibilities within school policies and practices such that the teenage mother's needs were not catered for. The author identified that policies of mainstream schools were often not inclusive, rigid and lacked clarity thereby leaving local practice open to differing interpretations and variability. Often than not, mainstream education rarely made sufficient provisions in policy to meet the needs

of young mothering students, as a result of which dropout rate was found to be high. The author argues that on-campus nursery for babies of teenage mothers, vocational-oriented programs, flexible policies which accommodate and make provisions for the needs of teenage mothers could encourage schooling among teenage mothers. The study by Vincent (2016) demonstrates that alternative schools specifically oriented to serving the needs of teenage mothers by offering convenience and flexibility promotes interest for schooling. Alternative schools for teenage mothers provide avenues where young mothers identify common grounds for improving social contact, coping with stigmatization, sharing experiences, advice and receiving inspiration and motivation to persevere and propel themselves for higher achievements.

Having pointed out the significance of pre-schools for the children of teenage mothers, it should also be mentioned that affordability could be a determining factor for utilization and patronage of these services, and the extent to which positive effects for teenage mothers' schooling could be realized. To this effect, Bhana et al. (2008) identify that policies which provide financial support to the children of teenage mothers and the mothers achieve greater desirable impacts. Another issue which comes to the fore is the conduciveness of the school environment for the teenage mother. Schools which do not make provisions such as rooms for breastfeeding, baby feeding and changing rooms for babies for instance might appeal less to teenage mothers whose children have such needs. Another study (Samantha, 2013) has revealed significant successes of government policies which specifically target promoting re-entry of teenage mothers into mainstream education. In this study, the author found that favourable re-entry policies like the Child Support Grant in South Africa, and the Re-entry Policy of Kenya have encouraged the retention and re-entry of pregnant and teenage mothers.

The issue of school policy and practice is closely related to the role of teachers and peers in affecting the interest for schooling among teenage mothers. As identified by Morrell and Devey (2012), peer motivation and encouragement may influence pregnant and teenage mothers' decision to continue schooling. Teacher support and motivation is also identified to have similar effect. Vincent (2016) identifies that encouragement and social contact could go a longer way to counteract the negative effect of stigmatization on the education of the teenage mother. Teacher support in the form of encouragement, helping pregnant teenagers and mothering teenage students to deal with stigma and feel comfortable are particularly important. While this might have positive effects on the interest for schooling, Chohan (2010) argues that teacher support is not always critical in the decision on staying and re-entering. As revealed in this study, lack of teacher support and motivation does not always influence the decision of

teenage mothers to drop out from school. A teenage mother who is self-motivated may have the same or higher level of willingness to be in school even when teacher-motivation is absent.

2.5.6 Health issues/risk and dropout

Vincent (2016) argues that pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers may be strongly discouraged to continue schooling for health and safety reasons. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2004) reveals that adolescent births significantly increase the health risk of both the mother and child. The study identifies poverty as the cause and consequence of health risks such as malnutrition of babies, inability of the pregnant and teenage mothers to access pre and post-maternal health services which results often in poor health, infant and maternal death. Poor health of the teenager and her baby carries the potential to disrupt the teenage mother's education since she would have to channel time and limited resources otherwise meant for education into seeking recovery from ailments.

Finkel and Thompson (1997) argue that teenage pregnancy creates for the teenager a multifaceted chain of problems that the teenage mother is often ill-equipped to handle. One of such problems is the psychological stress that accompanies the demands for childcare, especially when the teenager is resource handicapped. Such stress has negative consequences for education, affecting cognitive ability and academic performance. In the absence of supportive social programs for the teenage mother and the toddler, she is compelled to drop out of school. The study by Chohan and Langa (2011) provide rather contradictory evidence which reveal that teenage mothers persevere with schooling because of their determination to become responsible mothers to their babies although they may be faced with challenges which may include poor health. "They are also devoted to doing well academically as a way of investing for their future and that of their babies (Chohan and Langa, 2011, p. 89)".

2.5.7 Academic performance prior to pregnancy

Grant and Hallman (2008) argue that previous academic performance and grade at the time of falling pregnant are indicators of whether pregnant and teenage mothers would drop out or continue their education. The authors assert that highly motivated students who had higher grades prior to pregnancy are more likely to remain or return to school. Furthermore, teenage mothers who ever drop out or withdraw temporarily prior to pregnancy and childbearing are less likely to stay or re-enter school. From this point of view, it is argued that among girls

within similar socio-economic background, prior educational achievement and attendance are better indicators for explaining dropout, retention and re-entry among teenage mothers. Meanwhile, the assertion by Gant and Hallman (2008) is arguable since teenage pregnancy and motherhood can be both a cause and a consequence of poor academic performance (Finkel and Thompson, 1997). Where pregnancy is the cause of poor academic performance, it presupposes that a teenager might be academically good prior to pregnancy or motherhood. Teenage mothers could also perform better in school when they receive academic assistance and financial support which provides relief from psychological stress.

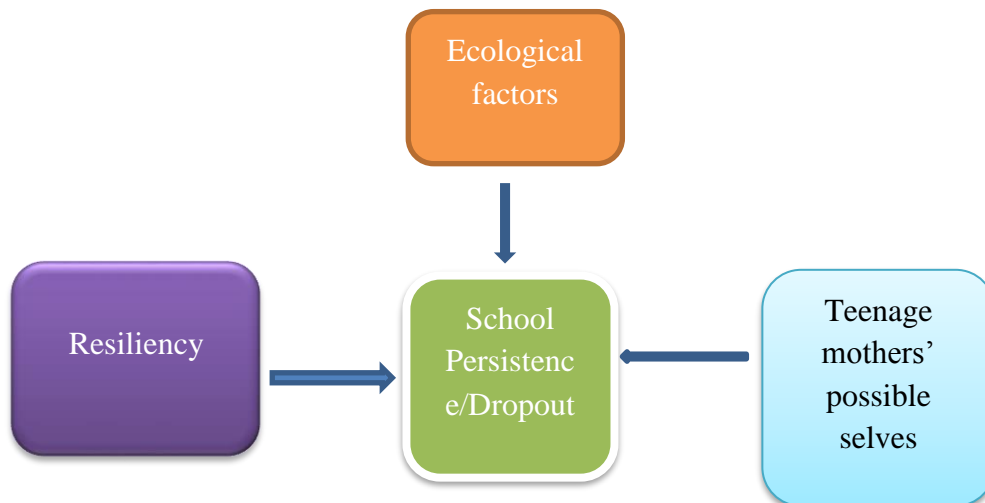
2.6 Theoretical framework

In this section, I present the theories used as the analytical lenses for the study, namely the possible selves' theory, the ecological systems theory of human development and the resiliency theory. The choice of these theories stems from the understanding that each contributes a unique set of assumptions and body of knowledge, and that they are mutually complementary as a result of which they contribute to a holistic understanding of the issues of dropout and school persistence. For instance, the possible selves theory reveals how the future identity of the individual is shaped by the past experiences and present actions, and how the possible selves regulate behaviour. The resiliency theory can be used to analyse and understand why individuals experiencing or exposed to a similar kind of stressful situations such as teenage pregnancy may respond or act differently.

Rumberger (2011) argues that resiliency could be the most important factor that accounts for differences in reactions of individuals faced with similar stressful events. More significantly to this study, this theory would contribute to an understanding of why some teenage mothers continue schooling while others drop out. The ecological development theory brings to the fore the role of context; thus the role of social capital, socio-cultural, economic and the political environment in the process of a child's development. In effect, this theory is useful in examining what influence the teenage mother's setting brings to bear on her and how it contributes to her relationship with schooling.

Although these theories are treated differently, none is independently sufficient enough for explaining teenage mothers' decisions regarding schooling because according to Markus and Nurius (1986) human behaviour is influenced by a complexity of factors which are anchored both in the individual and his setting or context. As the authors point out, the possible selves

of individuals derive from the socio-cultural and historical environments in which they live. In order words, it is believed that the complementarity feature and interrelatedness of these theories offer the merit of a holistic analysis and understanding, a reason which has informed the choice of these theories.



2.6.1 Figure 1: A diagram showing the three theories that explain dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers

Source: Author's construct

2.7 The possible selves' theory

The possible selves' theory is an aspect of the self-concept theory with emphasis on the expected future. Oyserman and Lee (2012, p. 1) define possible selves as “representations of both the positive images of a person’s future goals as well as the negative images of one’s self-failing goals”. The American psychologists Markus and Nurius refer to possible selves as “the representations of the self in the past and in the future; manifestations of goals, hopes, fears and aspirations” (1986, p. 231). The fears of the individual could be failure, unemployment, poverty and unwanted pregnancy. While the future aspect is usually an imagery which is abstract and unknown, the past selves represent real life experiences; that is what one has experienced or has been some time past. For instance, a person presently in school could have been out of school some time ago. Future goals and aspirations may include the aspirations for a well-paid job, an aspiration to become a responsible parent and a respectable being in the

society. For Markus and Nurius (1986), the past and future selves are different and separable from the present selves, yet they are connected. This suggests that individuals' current selves are shaped by the images about the future and the experiences of the past.

Possible selves are individualized, meaning that they are the results of the individual's personal actions and behaviours, yet they are also social because individuals act in accordance to the established societal norms and order, and in contrast or comparison with that of others within the society (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Thus, individuals may aspire to become or avoid becoming like others in the society. Another issue worth noting is the significance of contextual factors, mainly socio-cultural and historical on the individuals' possible selves. While there exists the freedom for choice from a pool of possible selves, Markus and Nurius (1986, p. 954) argue that this pool derives from "the categories made salient by the individual's socio-cultural and historical context and from the models, images and symbols provided by the media and by the individuals' immediate social experiences". As Frazier and Hooker identify, "possible selves are grounded within developmental, interpersonal and socio-historical contexts. They are embedded within ecology, reflecting both intra and inter-personal influences and the interaction among the self, family, community, socio-cultural and global and historical forces" (2006, p. 42). This suggests that the possible self can be well understood when studied within rather than out of context. For instance, the teenage mother who stays in school because she hopes for a better job which would make her a responsible parent may only achieve academic success if she finds support and motivation from her family, school and community.

2.7.1 Future selves and present identity

Strahan and Wilson (2006) posit that possible selves are hypothetical images of one's future and that the ability to achieve the aspirations and goals for the future can be measured by the present behaviours, decisions and actions. This assertion is in confirmation with the argument put forward by Frazier and Hooker (2006) that future selves are important motivational forces and regulators of current behaviour. For instance, a teenage girl who envisages herself as a university lecturer in the future will aim at the highest level of education and work hard to excel in her academic work, bearing in mind that the acquisition of the highest degree is a requirement for her future aspiration to becoming a lecturer. She might avoid acts which would have dire consequences that would distract her from making progress in her academics and eventually jeopardize her future aspirations.

Another issue worth noting is that individuals may encounter restraints and changing opportunities during development in which case they are compelled to adjust behaviour to meet the future goals. In their study of *possible selves in adult development*, Frazier and Hooker (2006) postulate that individuals adapt their developmental goals to changing opportunities and restraints presented by their unique developmental trajectories. The possible selves' theory provides therefore an insight into the understanding of the process of continuity and change across lifespan. The above assertion is therefore in conformity with Markus and Nurius' (1986) assertion that the "self" is malleable or susceptible to change.

Moreover, the future self is found to be useful in distinguishing between well-adjusted youth and delinquent youth. Oyserman and Markus (1990) argue that well-adjusted youth have a wide array of possible selves. They often choose positive possible selves such as becoming graduate, a brilliant student or a good parent. On the other hand, the delinquent youth often embrace the negative possible selves, believing that negative terms like "irresponsible" "alone" may describe them.

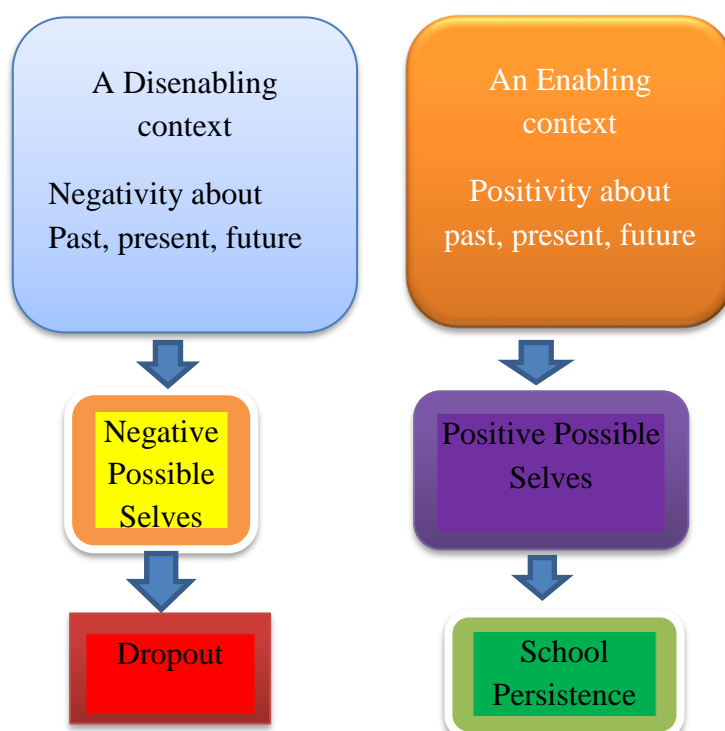
2.7.2 Past selves and present identity

The present self of an individual is also a product of personal memories, and memories are the mental recollections and reminiscences of past experiences and events (Strahan and Wilson, 2006). The authors note that generally, recalling of pleasant personal experiences enhances life satisfaction and have direct positive effect on present behaviour. Unpleasant memories on the other hand are found to have distressing effects on present identity. The authors also identify a two-way effect for both unpleasant memories. In other words, an unpleasant memory can have desirable effects on present identity. For instance, a teenage mother who has been a victim of humiliations because of her past pregnancy could be determined to complete school and secure a good job so that she would command respect in her community. The scenario of a teenage mother who has stopped schooling because she suffered stigmatization in her school can be used as an illustration of how unpleasant memories can have undesirable effects on present identity. The thoughts of the unpleasant experience of stigmatization and of the possibility of reoccurrence may be so distressing that the teenage mother would not show interest in schooling. Sometimes, the past is contrasted with the present identity and this may produce a direct (that is the expected effect) or a contrast (unwanted) effect on current identity. It is for this reason that Strahan and Wilson (2006) argue that it is *how* (seeing the present as better or worse-off because of the past episodes) people remember formal life events and *what* (the

aspects they recall) they remember that determines what kind of impact memories will have on their present identity.

2.7.3 Past selves and future identity

Markus and Nurius (1986) speculate that individuals' past do not only influence their present self but also impact on who they think they would become in the future. This implies that the past can define what the individual would become in the future. Strahan and Wilson (2006) add to the above assertion by arguing that past memories have relevance for the future self when the individual re-experiences the emotions attached to the past self. When the re-experienced past is thought to be relevant, the individual is convinced about her future potential and of the possibility of achieving again what was achieved in the past. The past self is also said to be relevant for the individual's future when it is recognized as an aspect of the person's identity. Applying this theory to practice, it could be argued that the teenage mother who used to perform well in school prior to pregnancy might see herself as a brilliant student who can achieve academic success in school if she returns to school. On the other hand, the student who performed poorly and was made to repeat a grade prior to dropping out may consider herself as not able to succeed in school, for which reason she could be discouraged from returning to school.



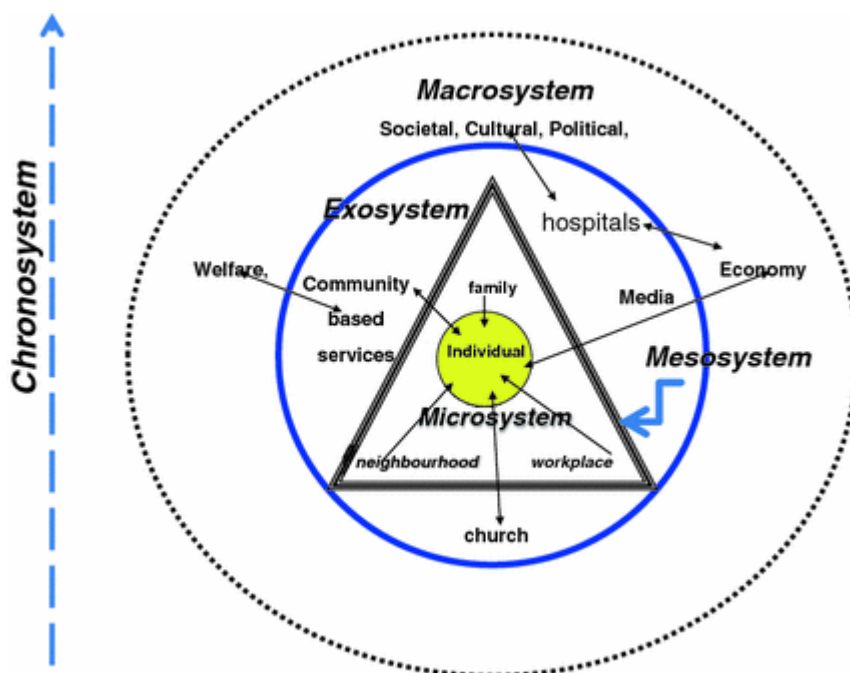
2.7.4 Figure 2: A model showing the relationship between Possible Selves, school persistence and dropout. Source: Author's construct

2.8 The ecological systems theory of human development

I adopt Urie Bronfenbrenner's definition of human development for this study.

Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content. (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 27)

The underlying assumption of the theory is that human development is influenced by the environment in which the human lives. In effect, the behaviour and life course of the individual is determined by the components and the influence of the environment. The environment referred to in the definition is said to be a nested arrangement of structures where each successive structure is contained within the next. Bronfenbrenner (1976) identifies different components of the environment; the microsystem, the macrosystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the chronosystem. Below is a figure showing the structural components of environment, their interactions and influence on the human within the environment.



2.8.1 Figure 3: A model showing the components of the ecological system, their interactions and influence on the individual

Source; Boon, Cottrell, King, Stevenson & Millar (2012)

2.8.2 *Microsystem*

The microsystem is said to represent the interrelated and complex relations between a person who is developing and the immediate setting of the person (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). The immediate setting of a developing person includes the home or family, the school, place of work and the community. As pointed out by the theorist, the setting as a place possesses physical features which confer on the participants particular roles such as being the child, the parent, the bread-winner or the teacher within particular periods of time. The roles conferred on participants have the strength to influence the activity or behaviour of the participants. It can also be argued that a disruption in a role of any of the participants can have a direct effect on the person within the setting since the person's development is dependent on the functioning of the elements within the setting. Applying this theory to the study, it can be deduced that a child from a broken home where parents have abandoned their responsibilities could also adopt irresponsible student behaviours such as absenteeism, sexual misconduct and bullying.

2.8.3 *The mesosystem*

The ecological systems theory posits that interrelations also exist among the elements of the setting containing the developing person. Thus, the school, family workplace, church and peer-groups for instance have significance for the development of the person. For example, a student might be well-behaved in school due to the influence of good peers, good teachers and good parental upbringing and care. These interrelated set comprise the mesosystem. A student might excel in academic work in school when parents show their interest in the student's studies and devote their time to assisting the student with homework. Similarly, a good teacher-parent relationship can contribute to an identification of the most appropriate methods which can ensure the success of students in school. A poor parent-child relationship can also translate into poor student performance (Lund, 2009). The underlying argument requires an understanding of the relationships that exist among the elements within the setting which exerts an influence on the person's development in order to understand the person within the setting.

2.8.4 The exosystem

As defined by Bronfenbrenner,

The exosystem refers to those formal and informal social structures which do not themselves contain the developing person, but rather encircle the immediate setting in which the person resides, thereby exerting influences and delimitations, as a result of which they contribute to determining what happens within the setting and eventually influence the developmental process of the person (1976, p. 516).

The local, regional and national institutions of government, the neighbourhoods, and the world of work, informal social networks, and income distribution within regions, distribution of goods and services, transportation and communication facilities are examples of the elements within the exosystem. Linking this theory to the study, an argument can be made that rural-urban inequalities in the distribution of social amenities such as schools and hospitals would translate into educational and health inequalities. More explicitly, rural schools as the one found in this study would have lower enrolment for teenage mothers as compared to urban schools due to limited accessibility and lower incomes of parents which reduce the ability of parents to pay for the expenses of their children's education. Since the poverty of parents compel children to adopt survival strategies like working to supplement household income (Ananga, 2011), children from poor families would be compelled to drop out of school. In this sense, the child's development is influenced by forces (example, government policies) operating outside her immediate environment yet exerting influences on the immediate setting.

2.8.5 The macrosystem

The macrosystem according to Bronfenbrenner (1976) refers not to the specific setting that exerts influences on the life of the person within the setting but to "general prototypes existing in the culture or subculture and activities occurring at the concrete level" (1977, 515). The author further explains that within the macrosystem, activities are regulated by blueprints such that institutions within this system have common ways of doing things. For example common rules, laws and regulations applied in the governing of public schools will result in the different schools functioning similarly. Bronfenbrenner (1976) argue that the blueprints do not only exist in formal texts but also in informal and implicit forms carried in the minds of societies' members as ideologies and beliefs manifested through customs and practices. An illustration is the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy and how it encourages dropout among pregnant

teenagers. Michelle and Fatusi (2009) identify that in most developing countries and especially in rural settings where premarital sex is a forbidden act, sexual activity and teenage pregnancy may provoke negative responses from teachers, adversely affect school performance and lead to dropout. School policies in many developing countries are unfriendly to pregnant adolescents (Michelle and Fatusi, 2009) to the extent that these students may face expulsion from school.

2.8.6 *The chronosystem*

Events unfolding within the setting of the individual are susceptible to changes overtime. Family structure, family size, accessibility to school and income levels for instance may not remain the same over the years. The stabilities and changes which occur within the setting which have influence on the developing person is what Bronfenbrenner (1976) term as the chronosystem. In his study of *environmental stability and change on the child's development*, Pitkanen-Pulkkinen (1980) identified that children who became exposed to stressful events such as poverty, family instability, changes in day-care arrangement, parental absences and altered conditions of maternal employment throughout their life courses were associated with aggressiveness, anxiety, and misbehaviour in their adulthood. The chronosystem is applicable to this study because it throws light on the need to consider the aspect of stability and change when examining the influence of context on the teenage mother who returns to school or drop out. Changes or stability of events within the family, school or neighbourhood for instance could provide useful insights to understanding how teenage mothers relate to schooling.

2.9 **The Resiliency theory**

A couple of definitions have been put forward for the term *resilience*. Boon et al. define resilience as the “ability of an ecosystem to absorb and adapt to change while maintaining its existing state of functioning” (2012, p. 382). Resiliency has also been defined by Prince-Embury as “the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity” (2008, p. 4). The various definitions put forward incorporate the concept of a stressor, adaptation and the return to pre-stressor state (Boon et al., 2012). The tenets or underlying concepts of the resiliency theory are risk factors, protective factors, and the individual and contextual factors.

The resiliency theory provides a framework that identifies the strengths and risk factors which contribute to an understanding of why individuals exposed to similar stress respond differently and why some overcome the stress while others do not. A stress can be any form of distress

experienced in the course of life such as an unplanned teenage pregnancy, loss of job, and a sudden death. Strengths are the positive traits (assets) of the individual faced by a stressful life event, as well as the supportive systems and resources made available by the context of the individual which enhance the individual's ability to adapt to the change and yet maintain his state of functioning. The positive traits or protective factors as they are called by Zimmermann (2013) also include self-efficacy, determination, self-esteem and positive contextual factors such as having a supportive family, adult mentors, and youth support programs. For Robertson and Cooper (2011) four important factors that contribute to personal resiliency are social support, adaptability, purposefulness and confidence of the individual. The resiliency theory shares similarity with the ecological and the possible selves' theory by emphasizing that context plays a role in resiliency. In other words, the interaction between the individual and the context in which the individual resides can either enhance the ability to overcome stress or to be overcome by the stress. A critical analysis of the resiliency theory reveals that the individual placed in the centre of the setting plays an active role in influencing the development process and outcome rather than remaining passive and solely susceptible to influence from the setting. This can be identified as a feature that distinguishes both theories.

The question of why some teenage mothers defy the odds even when challenges persist reveals again the significance of resiliency, self-motivation and determination to an understanding of school persistence among teenage mothers. The determination to complete education has been linked to the desire of the teenage mother for a better future. As identified by Chigona and Chetty (2007), self-motivation could be the most important explanatory factor for retention and re-entry where poverty is rife, and self-determination is strong among teenagers who place a higher value on education. Teenage mothers could also be inspired by other previous teenage mothers who defied the odds, completed higher level education and attained reputable positions within their communities and beyond to continue schooling. Positive accounts have been given about the influence of role models on the future self of the teenage mothers. Oyserman and Gant (1995) identified that the presence of role models could also be an external factor that stimulates motivation and determination for schooling among teenage mothers.



2.9.1 Figure 4: A Model of the factors (strengths) that enhance personal resilience

Source: Robertson & Cooper (2011)

2.10 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have taken readers through the existing literature and theoretical perspectives applicable to the study of dropout. The chapter commenced with a clarification of the term “dropout” as used in this study. Elaborations were made on the various factors used for explaining dropout in reviewed literatures; namely pull, push, falling out factors. Furthermore, individual and contextual factors which have significance for understanding dropout were also highlighted. Factors which contribute to dropout in general as well as those specifically related to teenage mothers have also been discussed. It is important to stress that these factors can be categorised as individually or institutionally related. The chapter concluded with a presentation of three theories which are applied in the analysis of data for this study namely, the possible

selves' theory, the ecological systems theory of human development and the resiliency theory. Together, these bodies of knowledge would be used as a comprehensive framework to study and understand school persistence and dropout among teenage mothers in this study.

3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology of a research outlines how the research was conducted and gives insights into the research process, methods, techniques and tools for collecting data with the aim of seeking answers to the research questions driving the focus of the research. The chapter begins with a highlight of the qualitative research strategy which was used for the study. I take readers through the reasons that informed the choice of the qualitative over other strategies. Next, I discuss the research process throwing emphasis on the preparation stage, the choice of the study site, gaining access to the study site and recruiting of informants. I subsequently discuss the choice of interviewing as a data collection tool and the ethical issues which were taken into consideration. Further, I discuss the units and levels of comparison adopted in the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion on issues relating to trustworthiness of the research. In my discussions of the methodology, I highlight some of the challenges I encountered on the field and what informed the decisions I took in order to overcome these challenges.

3.2 Qualitative research

According to Bryman (2012, p. 380) qualitative research “stresses on an understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants”. The qualitative method also concentrates on elucidating human environments; thus the social structures which affect human behavior and vice versa, and the experiences of human within these environments (Hay, 2010, p. 5). The qualitative research is argued to be flexible and searches for variations in meanings rather than focusing on trends, standardized methods, regularities and patterns (Cloke et al. 2004). From the above definitions, there is a general consensus that the qualitative research strategy is preoccupied with humans, their interpretations and experiences within their social environment. It does not limit itself to measurable variables. Neither does it imposes on its subjects a structure and predetermined notions (Bryman, 2012). The awareness of these orientations of the qualitative study was one of the reasons that informed my choice of the qualitative research strategy.

Before I proceed, I should point out that the most important consideration for me was the issue of “suitability and appropriateness”. In other words, I was particularly looking for a strategy that was most suitable for answering my research questions. With my objective focusing on

the experiences of teenage mothers I realized that the qualitative strategy would make possible a better understanding of the lived experiences of the subjects of the study. In addition, my desire to employ a method that makes possible the collection of varied responses by purposefully selecting informants for the study also informed my choice of the qualitative research strategy. Although I was interested in studying teenage mothers' relationship to schooling in general, my motive was to find varied responses spreading across different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds until a point of saturation in responses was reached. This I believe the qualitative research strategy was rightfully suited to achieving.

3.3 The research process

3.3.1 The preparation stage

I should point out that this research is not one that followed a straight path. Although the initial preparation such as establishing contacts on the supposed study sites and deciding on the number of informants had been done prior to the research, I had to make modifications and adapt to the realities on the ground while on the field. I kept going back and forth in the process of the research, making adjustments depending on the resources at my disposal and the assistance I obtained and also taking into consideration the time factor at any given point in time.

Before I finally got to the study site, I had a lot of uncertainties. Issues that aroused my fears included the fact that I had chosen a study site which I had read about as reporting increasing cases of pregnancy-related dropouts but had never visited personally. Considering the fact that I was carrying out a comparative study of teenage mothers in school and those out of school constantly increased the feeling of uncertainty in me. What if I could not find teenage mothers in school? Would there be enough time at my disposal to change my study site or possibly the objective? Although these thoughts remained, I knew that I could not compromise on conducting a research which was a true reflection of the realities on the ground. Since one could never be certain of a future experience I decided to be prepared for all kinds of eventualities even if it meant spending additional days on the study site, extending my working hours or changing my objective. Flexibility was therefore my guiding principle. My own strategy for allaying my fears and uncertainties was to read extensively literature on teenage mothers and schooling. To be abreast with developments in trends of dropout among teenage mothers in Ghana I resorted to reading reports by the Ghana Education Service and the Ghana Statistical

Service. Although these reports revealed dropout numbers across the 10 regions in Ghana, they gave limited information on re-entry. Within the same region, it was difficult to point out which towns and villages had the highest dropout rates. Meanwhile, I knew that my study was one of a limited scope, not focused on studying trends, regional variations or numbers, something which gave the assurance that the success of the study would contribute new knowledge and reveal areas for further research on policy recommendations.

3.3.2 Establishing contacts

To reduce time wastage on the study site, I established contacts with people who I deemed could be of assistance. These included a person from the chosen study site who knew most of my potential primary informants (teenage mothers). I was introduced to this person by a friend through a phone call and we established contact. Through continuous communication, I got the opportunity to talk to seven teenage mothers who hailed and lived in the study site prior to my field work. Luckily for me, they all agreed to be participants of the study. I also established phone contact with the headmaster of the public basic school in the study town. Having arrived on the field, my first point of contact was the headmaster at the basic school. My reason for contacting him first was not only to officially introduce myself but also to have the opportunity to observe the conditions prevailing in the school, daily activities within the school and perhaps get introduced to some teachers and students who could contribute useful information to enrich my data. I knew that I could possibly get to meet some teenage mothers who could be willing to be participants of the study in the school.

To establish a formal contact with my informants while on the field, I handed over an official introductory letter which I had obtained from the Faculty of Educational Sciences. Although the letter made explicit my status as a student researcher from the University of Oslo, I made it a point to reintroduce myself and reiterate the purpose of my study to all my participants. During my first week on the study site I engaged many natives of the town in informal conversations touching generally on economic activities, education, schooling, teenage pregnancy and the perceptions revolving around these issues.

3.3.3 Choosing the research site

Settling on the choice of a study site was a difficult decision from the onset. As stated earlier, I had read about reports of increasing dropout rates in the Brong Ahafo Region, but had little

knowledge about specific towns and villages which had recorded higher dropout rates. My choice of the study site was influenced by my desire to limit the challenges which could be associated with conducting a research in an entirely different environment such as one which consists of a population with many dialects and unfamiliar culture. Although I had already established contacts in Mayera, I decided to assess the town's suitability for my study once I had arrived on the field.

Having arrived at the intended research site, I was curious to know beforehand if the site would offer interesting and varied responses sought after or maybe a different site within the study district would reveal a more interesting finding. I consulted the district office of the Ghana Education Service with the intention of finding reports on areas of high dropout rates, low female enrolment and dropouts related to pregnancy. This in my view could help me acquire knowledge about the prevailing trends of dropout and gain further insights into enrolment, as well as provide a justification for my choice of the study site. To my dismay, I was handed over a cumulative report showing the overall enrolment figures for the district as recorded between 2005 and 2015. Besides, the report showed an aggregate dropout figure for both boys and girls, something which in my view was of less significance to my study. Upon being told that District Education Service did not have records on pregnancy related dropout rates of individual towns I realized that I had to adopt a different approach.

Through informal conversations with some employees at the Jaman North District Education Office I got to know that pregnancy related dropouts were higher in those towns within the district that were identified as popular cocoa and cashew production and marketing centres, and those that served as marketing centres for the surrounding villages. Some of these towns were Wamfie, Mayera, Sampa and Suma. Contrary to my previous assumption that the most deprived settlements might record the highest rates of dropouts among teenage mothers, I gathered that most teenage mothers could be found also in the more cosmopolitan and commercial centres within the district. I should also point out that this finding did not lend evidence to the existence of an opposite situation in the villages. I gathered that the villages have a more homogenous population with regards to culture, social organisation and economic activities compared to the towns.

Being mindful of my interest in finding varied responses and opinions of both teenage mothers in school and those out of school, I thought it important to choose a site with a more diverse population with regards to ethnic composition, religion, culture and economic activities. I

contacted the office of the Jaman North District Assembly where I obtained a profile of the district giving me further idea of the resource-endowed and resource constrained areas within the district. I visited some of the towns to observe for myself the accessibility to social amenities such as schools, hospitals and commercial centres which in my view could impact on schooling among teenage mothers. Following the visit, I realised that some of the towns that had been suggested as being among the commercialised and more cosmopolitan had underdeveloped infrastructure such as bad roads which made accessibility difficult, especially whenever it rained heavily.

In as much as I was eager to select an area or areas that could offer interesting findings, I encountered some challenges which limited my ability to do so. Bad road network made it impossible to embark on a return trip to some of the towns. Besides, time was of essence and the limited time at my disposal made it impossible to conduct the research in different areas at a time. Having realized that the places I had visited shared similarities in terms of constraints, opportunities, cultures, ethnic composition, social and economic activities, I concluded that choosing Mayera would reveal a finding similar to what other towns which were not chosen would have revealed. Thus, there is no evidence that those areas that I did not choose would have brought entirely new findings.

3.3.4 Gaining access to the research site

Gaining access or negotiating entry to the research site is an important step necessary to bringing the researcher closer to the respondents who are the custodians of the right information the researcher seeks. The process of gaining access might not be a smooth one as the researcher may encounter barriers such as encountering gate-keepers, unfamiliarity with the language, the geographical setting and the culture of the people being studied. Success in entry negotiation is therefore dependent on a number of factors. First, the researcher should draw on the resources such as social networks and the information at his disposal. Secondly, having a considerable knowledge about the social organisation and structure of the people the researcher wishes to study and understanding the theoretical concepts underpinning the research are identified by Hammersley and Atkinson as vital to a successful entry.

In many ways, gaining access is a practical matter... It involves drawing on the intra and inter-personal resources and strategies that we all tend to develop in dealing with everyday life. But achieving access is not merely a practical concern. Not only does its achievement

depend upon theoretical understanding, often disguised as ‘native wit’, but also the discovery of obstacles to access and perhaps of effective means itself provides insights into the social organisation of the setting or the orientations of the people being researched (2007, p. 41).

Although it is possible to anticipate challenges pending entry to the research site, the perceived challenges may either be different or similar to what the researcher perceives. Besides, challenges could evolve at different stages or processes from finding informants through to data collection. In my case, I had perceived I could encounter the challenge of adapting to the research setting since I did not hail from the study town. On the contrary, my ability to speak the twi dialect; a dialect which belonged to the same language group as the dialect spoken by the people in the study site worked to my advantage. Since the people could understand my dialect just as I understood theirs there was no need for an interpreter. Moreover, the larger proportion of the town’s population had a culture similar to that of the people from my own hometown. It was therefore easy for me to relate to the people in the study site.

Prior to recruiting my informants for the study I decided to conduct a pilot study in the town to identify what challenges could be encountered and what adjustments were necessary with regards to the structure and wording of my questions. I started off by holding informal conversations with some teenage girls I chanced upon selling by the road side. They were carrying babies on their backs and I presumed they could as well be in school. Although I introduced myself and the purpose of my research to them, they were not willing to disclose information and I could sense uneasiness on their faces, perhaps because they did not trust my identity. On another occasion I went together with the native of the town whom I had contacted prior to my arrival in the town. I discovered that this person was well-known in the town and the people were willing to be interviewed after he had introduced me to them. It was after I had had a similar experience upon my visit to the basic school in the town that I discovered that the initial contact with gate-keepers was necessary to ease my research.

3.3.5 Gate-keepers and the challenges involved in working with them

Seeking the approval of gate-keepers is usually a norm when the research is conducted in an official setting. Hammersley and Aktinson (2007) refer to gate-keepers as the people who can grant or withhold access to the research setting and informants. They may include chiefs and government officials. While gate-keepers may be helpful in gaining access, Hammersley and

Atkinson argue that gate-keepers may bring their personal interest to bear on the research, something which may contradict the researcher's interest. Secondly, gate-keepers may direct the research focus such that it puts them in a favourable light as well as paint a good picture about them. The responsibility therefore rests on the researcher to maximise the advantages of working with gate-keepers while at the same time limiting their influence on the research.

Although my research was not conducted in a purely official setting, I realised that the officials at the District Education Office, the headmaster of the basic public school in the research site and the native of the town whom I had previously contacted could contribute to easing access to information and informants for the study. In the course of working with these people some challenges which could possibly influence the research evolved. For instance the employees at the District Education Office had suggested some towns which according to them had recorded higher rates of dropout. I found out that the district had received a directive from the Regional Education Office to embark on a study into low enrolment into these towns. In essence, their suggestion was influenced by their own interest but had little significance for my own study. I did not perceive that those areas would offer the most interesting findings.

Another issue had to do with the pressure to disclose how many informants I wanted so that they could assist me to find the exact number of informants. Although numbers affect how much information could be acquired, my interest was rather to finding varied responses until I got to a point of saturation. Since I was not sure of getting a balanced number representing my two groups of informants I kept to my grounds that I wanted as many informants as was possible.

In addition, I figured that these gate-keepers could direct me to those people they knew or were friendly with and not to others they had bitter relationships with. The personal qualities they carry could also influence the kind of relationship I build with the informants and in this way affect the quality of information I obtained. This could be the case especially when the gate-keeper chose the informants. My own method adopted for overcoming this challenge was to find the leeway between choosing the informants myself and allowing people to choose for me. What I did was to pay head to gate-keepers regarding general suggestions on areas where I could possibly meet with teenage mothers. Afterwards, I approached potential informants alone and carried out informant selection on my own. The market place for instance was identified as a popular site where teenage mothers out of school could be easily found on market days. The evenings were appropriate periods when teenage mothers could be found in the homes.

The basic school was also a common place where some teenage mothers in school could be found during school hours. Having identified my informants, I introduced myself with an official introductory letter after establishing a warm relationship through an informal conversation touching on education in general. I did not conduct any of my interviews in the presence of a gate-keeper in order to give my informants an assurance of the confidentiality of the information they provided.

3.3.6 Selection of informants

In quantitative research, sampling is often used to refer to the method the researcher uses to get respondents for his study. As Bryman (2012) points out, probability sampling is the commonest sampling technique used in quantitative research. This implies that the main preoccupation of the quantitative researcher is not to find respondents with desirable attributes and qualities. The quantitative researcher may rather be more concerned about employing a standardised method, establishing trends and obtaining a representative sample for his study such that the study can be generalised to a larger population. Owing to this, the researcher could pick respondents randomly. Although probability sampling may be used in qualitative research Bryman (2012, p. 416) notes that it is more likely to be employed in interview-based rather than ethnographic qualitative studies because ethnographic research entails an aim of generalizing to a wider population.

In qualitative research, discussions revolve around purposive rather than probability sampling. As Hay (2010) points out, a major tenet underlying qualitative research is that it aims at including the “right people” in the study. These are the people who have the experiences, attributes, and knowledge pertaining to the research interest and research question. The reason as pointed out by Bryman (2012, p. 416) is to gain access to “a wide range of individuals relevant to the research as possible, so that different perspectives and ranges of activity are the focus of attention.”

From the above discussions it can be argued that the qualitative researcher ought to select his informants purposively rather than choose randomly. In doing so, emphasis should be placed on attributes, experiences, identities and personalities the informants have and how relevant these are to the research question. As stated earlier, since the priority is to get the right people willing to share their experiences and perspectives, the number of informants may be of less importance. In recruiting informants for my study, I was guided by the above principle. I kept

referring to my research objective which is to find out why some teenage mothers dropped out of school and why others stayed in school. I figured out two groups of informants who could provide the relevant information necessary for answering my research question. These were teenage mothers in school and teenage mothers who had dropped out of school.

In choosing my informants, I decided to follow formal procedures where necessary but to a large extent employed informal techniques such as holding casual chats with people on the streets, homes, and public places such as the market centre and the community's health centre. I usually sought permission from people in authority in cases where I located informants in places manned by government officials. For instance I had to seek permission to conduct interviews in the basic school and the health centre.

With an interest of finding varied responses to my questions, I set out to select informants who in my view had the characteristics which would contribute diverse views. I paid attention to characteristics such as age, type of settlement or housing, spoken dialect, religion. With regards to age, my interest was to select teenage mothers between the ages of 13 and 19. I decided to use this age group as my target population for the study having being convinced that this age group was most significant after my own observations and through informal chats with potential informants. In most cases, I made guesses about the age of the informant prior to approaching a potential informant, but also confirmed the age from the informant before negotiating an interview. Where I selected an informant in the home, I took advantage of the opportunity to observe for myself the housing, living conditions in the home, the family size and relationship between the informant, parents and others within the home. Being familiar with the Bono dialect which is the dominant dialect in the community, it was easy for me to identify informants who spoke other dialect as well as those who had migrated to the study site or belonged to migrant families. To my advantage, informants belonging to minor groups could also speak the Bono dialect and so there was no need for an interpreter. In most communities in Ghana, it is common to find different religious and ethnic groups segregated or confined to particular spaces within the community. For instance, the *Zongos* are popular minority settlements for Muslims. These people could also speak the Bono dialect. Through informal conversations with some people in the study site, I got to know that the social organisation of the people shared similarity with the existing trend in many other parts of Ghana I had visited. This knowledge also aided me in the selection of the right informants for my study.

In addition, I employed snowball sampling in the selection of my informants. This is a sampling technique whereby the researcher identifies a chain of informants through others known to him and those who have participated in the study (Hay, 2010). In the course of my interviews, some of my informants suggested to me other teenage mothers whom they knew to be interviewed. This method has the advantage of saving the researcher the time he would otherwise spend on finding informants. However, the use of the snowball sampling method is equally saddled with some challenges which can lead to the researcher missing out on interesting and varied opinions. This is because the people suggested to the researcher may have similar experiences, traits or attributes as those who suggested them. Similarly, relying on informants who select themselves to be interviewed may contribute to the acquisition of a misleading data. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 104) point out this inherent weakness of the snowball sampling technique in an explicit manner as below:

While often welcoming self-selection and perhaps even selection by others, the ethnographer must try to retain the leeway to choose people for interview. Otherwise there is a grave danger that the data collected will be misleading in important respects, and the researcher will be unable to engage in the strategic search for data that is essential to a reflexive approach.

In order to overcome the above challenge my own approach was to assess the suitability of each potential informant who was suggested by others and chose to include in my data collection those informants who had varied characteristics with regards to ethnic and religious affiliation, economic background, family size among others.

3.4 Data collection strategy

3.4.1 The interview process/ technique

Bryman (2012) stresses the importance of the interview technique as a useful data collection tool in qualitative research. An interview has been defined as ‘a face-to-face verbal interchange, telephone or computer-mediated communication in which the interviewer attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons (Hay 2010, p. 101)’. Hay (2013) argues that although an interview is a form of chat, it goes beyond a mere chat as it is one with a purpose of eliciting information vital to the objective(s) of the researcher.

Hay (2010, p. 102) outlines the strengths of the qualitative interview technique over other techniques. Firstly, it has been identified as a technique that aids the researcher to collect a diversity of meaning, opinion and experiences as well as provide insights into differing opinions within a group while revealing consensus on some issues. Secondly, it is a suitable technique for studying complex behaviours and motivation. It is a technique that offers informants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, clarify events in their own words and to find out more about the project to which they are contributing (Hay, 2010, p. 102). In this sense, interview empowers the informants compared to other methods such as survey and observation. Through interviewing, the researcher is able to identify what is relevant to the informant (Hay, 2010). In addition, the interview technique provides the opportunity to researchers to fill a gap in knowledge where other methods such as use of existing data and surveys are unable to reveal adequate information. The outlined attributes largely informed my choice of the interview technique. Moreover, since my research objective is inclined towards gaining in-depth insight into the experiences and opinions of teenage mothers I realised that the interview technique was the best tool for my data collection.

Three types of interviewing have been identified; structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Bryman, 2012, p. 189). Hay (2010) argues that the three types can be placed in a continuum where the structured and unstructured types are found at the extreme ends of the continuum with the semi-structured type falling in between. The structured interview “is a standardized interview whereby the interviewer schedules and administers the interview employing the same stimulus with regards to the context for the interview, the manner in which questions are asked and the ordering of questions being asked” (Bryman 2010, p. 210). The questions are often close-ended, closed coded, pre-coded usually very specific and offer a fixed range of answers or fixed choice with the goal of ensuring that responses can be aggregated (Bryman, 2010). Since the interview schedule used in structured interviews are carefully-worded and ordered, Hay (2010) stresses the importance and necessity of a pre-test prior to a structured interview.

Unstructured interview on the other hand employs a larger degree of flexibility and does not follow predetermined standards. Often it focuses on personal perceptions and life histories. Although the unstructured interview shares similarity with a normal conversation, Hay (2010) identifies that the effective use of this technique requires that the researcher keeps abreast with past events, people and places being studied. This might be time consuming and inconvenient where time is limited. Moreover, the interviewee can easily lose control over directing the focus

of the interview since the interview is directed by the informant rather than the set of questions being asked.

Hay (2010) describes the semi-structured interview as one which has some degree of predetermined order, yet permits flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant. The questions asked in a semi-structured interview are described by Hay (2010) as content-focused in the sense that they touch on issues which are deemed by the researcher as relevant to the research question(s). The researcher redirects the focus of the conversation and ensures that informants do not move far away from the topic of interest. By so doing, time-wastage in the interviewing is minimized or avoided. I chose the semi-structured interview method due to the inherent strengths, some of which have been highlighted above. In addition, I realized that the semi-structured interview was more suitable for my study. Reiterating the suitability of the method, “the semi-structured interview is suitable for collection of qualitative data when the researcher is interested in exploring people’s behaviors, experiences, understandings and how and why they understand and experience the social world the way they do” (Matthews and Ross 2010, p. 221).

I realized that the requirement of the structured interview for a pre-test and the use of a standardized stimulus were less suited to meeting the objective of my research. I knew that a certain degree of flexibility was required as I wished to elicit adequate and in-depth information which were not limited to that required by my interview guide. Employing the unstructured interview was also not the best option for me as I had limited time at my disposal and was not fully abreast with the past life events of the people I wanted to interview. I deemed the semi-structured interview as possessing the advantage which would offer me the opportunity to follow interesting leads in the course of the interview due to the degree of flexibility it offers and also help me keep to time because it ensures that there is a form of order.

I spent a period of two months on the study site. My interviews were however conducted within the last five weeks of my stay on the research site. The first three weeks were used for the initial preparation prior to the interviews. During the first three weeks, I was occupied with gathering information vital to deciding on the most appropriate site for the study, establishing contact and identifying potential informants, securing and negotiating interview schedules. Although the time spent on preparation towards the interview reduced the amount of time I had at my disposal for the conduct of my interviews, I

realised that it was a helpful exercise as it helped me to acquire adequate information to approach my informants well-informed about the topic of discussion. In addition, it helped me to create a reciprocal relationship with my informants. This refers to an interview relationship whereby there is a balanced power relationship between the informants and the interviewer with regards to control over the flow of information. On the negative side, the limited time did not permit me to transcribe my interview data while on the field. The ability to do this in my view would have enabled me to identify interesting issues which could be included in the interview guide and make possible the acquisition of an enriched data in my subsequent interviews. Despite this short-coming I found consolation in the fact that my interviews were recorded and so I could review at a later period.

3.4.2 Building rapport with my informants

Hay (2010) describes rapport as an understanding of the model of the world of the person(s) with whom the interviewer is communicating with. These models of the world include language, speech patterns, pitch, speed, tone, pitch and overall posture of the informants. Hay (2010) stresses on the act of achieving and maintaining rapport as critical to the success of every interview. The author argues that rapport is important especially when there is a need for a repeated session of an interview with the informant.

My own approach to enhancing rapport was first to be sure that language was not a barrier to communication with an informant. Being assured of a meaningful communication with the informant, I often negotiated permission for interviews only after I had divulged adequate information about myself and my research to the informant. If an informant was suggested by another person, I revealed to him how I obtained his contact or address so as to avoid suspicions and mistrust. I also outlined to my informants the significance of my research and explained to them why their shared experiences and views were valued.

Hesselberg (2013) posits that impression management prior to, during and after an interview has great significance for the success of every interview. The physical appearance of the interviewer and his approach to eliciting information from the interviewee for instance can affect the type of information the interviewer receives. As Hesselberg (2013) points out, a researcher who “dresses up” instead of “dressing down” may create a negative impression about his personality and could be seen by his interviewees as more powerful. Such an

impression encourages the informants to give information which does not reflect their true life experiences or situations but that which sounds culturally acceptable. Hay (2013) adds to the debate on the desired interviewee-interviewer relationship by positing that the creation of a reciprocal or a power-balanced relationship is the key to acquiring insightful information through an interview.

Being aware of this, I set out to establish a power-balanced relationship with my informants by choosing carefully the dresses I used during my meetings with my interviewees and minding how I presented myself to them. For instance, I wore casual dresses when I interviewed informants in their homes, on the streets, the health centre and the market places, while I put on formal attire during my visitations to the District Education Office and the headmaster's office. I spoke the Twi dialect often because I realised that most of my informants could express themselves more comfortably in the local dialect than in English Language. This also enhanced rapport creation. Nonetheless, I gave my informants the option to choose a preferred Language for the interview. I also acquainted myself with the cultural context of the people in the study setting and tried my best to adopt some of their practices which were useful in establishing rapport such as shaking hands with the informants prior to the beginning of our conversations, accepting a seat or water from the informant when offered and avoiding offensive words and sensitive words which arouse intense emotions.

In addition, the interviewee and interviewer should be at ease with each other to facilitate information flow. This according to Hay (2013) can be done through the use of warm-up techniques. To maintain rapport with my informants, I employed a range of warm-up techniques such as engaging the informant in small talks and chit chats hovering around the challenges teenage girls face in the community and the extent of family support. I realised that such discussions activated their mood and encouraged them to provide insightful information once we delved into the main topic of interest. I also knew that being attentive yet playing an active role as the one directing the focus of the interview was necessary for maintaining rapport. As such, I was focused on the information being divulged by my informants. However, I used clues and responses such as nodding and prompts and asked for clarifications on unclear information. I also paid attention to verbal and non-verbal clues such as observing facial expressions and mood since they could also add meaning to the verbal information the informants provided. Hay (2013) observes that silence on the part of an interviewee may either imply that the question asked is not understood or that it upsets or stirs emotions. Whenever an informant remained silent in the course of the interview I rephrased my question to make them

easy to understand. Sometimes I paused or interrupted the interview and returned to that issue later in the interview. I often delayed interrupting a silence as it often gave the interviewee time to reflect over her experiences thereby providing insightful information. Nonetheless, I was mindful of my wording in order to avoid stirring up emotions unnecessarily.

In closing my interviews, I was mindful of avoiding rush. I closed my interviews with remarks of gratitude, summarizing and confirming with the informant the information provided and asking the informants if there were any additional comments or information they wanted to make known, probably something which was not covered in the interview. I also prioritized maintaining rapport and often created a sense of continuity asking the informant if he could be contacted a second time should it become necessary.

3.4.3 The interview setting

I knew that the ability to choose appropriate settings was of significance to the success of my interviews. In as much as I had a preference for conducting my interviews in places which presented the least of obstructions, I gave my informants the opportunity to make the choice for a place for the interview. This in my view would grant them the opportunity to choose the most convenient venues where they would feel relaxed and comfortable to express their views, secured and willing to disclose information. Some of the settings chosen by the informants granted me access to additional information which contributed to enriching my data. My interviews with the headmaster of the basic school for instance took place in his office. Owing to this he was able to verify the information he disclosed to me by referring to archives and documented information kept in his office. I conducted some interviews in informal settings such as the informants' homes, in the streets, in the market places and health the town's centre.

Overall, my interviews were not devoid of space-related challenges although I tried to minimise them. The interviews conducted in the public places for instance were saddled with interruptions, distractions and noise from passer-bys, shoppers, and traders among others. In the homes, the cry of babies and interruptions from children often slowed the pace of the interview and affected the quality of recording. When this happened, I permitted the informants to keep the children under control by halting the interview and allowing them to attend to their babies. In addition, there was a challenge with neighbours trooping into the interview. Where the interviews were conducted in compound houses some neighbours whom I had not introduced myself to were inquisitive and suspicious of my identity. They often interrupted by

questioning my identity and purpose of visit. After two successive experiences I realised that it was necessary for me to introduce myself to an entire members of a household when the interview was scheduled to take place in the informant's home in order to avoid interruptions and suspicions. Although this practice proved useful, it was time consuming. Nonetheless, conducting the interviews in the informants' homes offered me the opportunity to observe closely the housing and living conditions, household assets, relationships between the informants and their household members, and the type and volume of household chores among others. Similarly, interviews conducted in the school gave me the opportunity to observe the school's physical environment, infrastructure, and nearness to the places of settlement, and students and teacher relationships among others.

3.4.4 Timing of the interviews

Prior to my interviews I disclosed to my informants that my interviews were expected to last between 45 minutes to an hour. I offered my informants the opportunity to decide on the appropriate time for the conduct of the interview. Some of my informants who were students opted for break-hours during school periods whereas others preferred to be interviewed at home after school. Most of the interviews with the teenage mothers who had dropped out of school took place in their homes, at the market place where some traded and at the health centre where they often had appointments. Even though the timing was thought to be suitable for myself and the interviewees, there were several occasions when I could not meet up with the informants at agreed times because they had to attend to matters which were not originally expected.

Other challenges that emerged in the course of the interview which affected precision with regards to timing of the interviews were linked to unfavourable weather conditions. Although the interviews were not conducted during the peak of the rainy season, intermittent heavy rains were common. Whenever it rained heavily on a day an interview had been scheduled, it was either I or the interviewee was at the agreed setting for the interview late. Sometimes the interview had to be postponed. To make up for the time wasted, I had to conduct some interviews during periods which were originally not planned for such as weekends and the evenings when the interviewees were at home. A couple of my interviewees were also contacted again later after the interview for clarification on some answers which they provided during the interview. This became necessary after I had discovered some hitches on the audio records which resulted in portions of the records becoming inaudible.

3.4.5 Question ordering

The order of questions in an interview guide is said to be of significance to building rapport (Hay, 2013, p. 106). Two types or structures of question ordering; the pyramid and funnel type have been identified (Hay, 2013). An interview guide with the pyramid structure is one which starts with easy-to-answer questions about the informant and their involvement in an issue and then moves on to the more abstract and general questions towards the end. On the opposite side is the funnel structure which begins rather with the more abstract and general questions before moving to the particular and simple questions. Questions could also be classified as primary or secondary. The primary questions are said to be used in initiating an interview while the secondary questions are used as prompts which enhance expansion on issues informants have talked about.

I opted for the pyramid type of an interview guide since it has the advantage of allowing the interviewees to become accustomed to the interview and the topic to be discussed before moving on to questions which required deeper reflection. For instance my interviews began with questions about why the teenage mother was in school or out of school. I realised that this prepared the minds of the interviewees for questions which required deeper reflection which were asked towards the later parts of the interviews. In addition, I structured my questions using a blend of both primary and secondary questions. The secondary questions were carefully nested within the primary ones and served as prompts which facilitated further elaboration on the informants' views.

3.4.6 Recording the interviews

Recording an interview is an important part of gathering data as it represents evidence of informants' opinions which present the researcher the opportunity to make reflections, interpretations and analysis in order to draw meaningful conclusions. Owing to this, I believe that accuracy in recording informants' responses is of utmost significance to providing valid findings in any research. Common techniques employed in face-to-face and telephone interviews are note-taking and audio recording. Hay (2013) elaborates on some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with both note-taking and audio-recording. "Audio recording helps to compile the fullest recording of an interview. It also allows for a natural conversation between the interviewee and the interviewer since the interviewer is not preoccupied with note-taking" (Hay 2013, p. 119). Due to this, the interviewer is able to focus

well on the interview process, listen attentively, and reorder questions and prompts such that the conversation is kept natural.

On the gloomy side, the mere presence of an audio recorder could sometimes obstruct or inhibit responses from the interviewer by creating a tensed atmosphere whereby the recorder serves as a constant reminder of the formal situation of the interview (Hay, 2013). Informants may not be forthcoming with information if they have concerns that their voices could be recognised if the recordings are made public. Besides, technical failures may occur and this could result in the loss of vital information from the field.

Note-taking is useful for capturing the gist of informant's responses and also non-verbal responses such as gestures and body language which cannot be captured on an audio recorder. On the other hand, note-taking may inhibit the creation of a natural conversation in an interview. Hay (2013) points out that the interviewer engrossed in note-taking loses focus on maintaining rapport between himself and the interviewee. In addition, lengthy note-taking requires that the interviewer has shot-hand writing skills to ensure an accurate and a complete recording.

Having in mind the opportunities and the challenges presented by these two recording techniques, I set out to combine the two. I recorded my interviews fully with an audio recorder but took short notes where necessary, especially those that were observations, descriptions and gestures which could not be captured on the audio device. I took short rather than lengthy notes to avoid mental wandering and to be able to keep my focus on the interview relationship. To avoid technical failures, I often tested the recorder prior to any of my interviews and made sure that the batteries were charged enough to last throughout the interview. To avoid creating a tensed atmosphere during my interviews and also keep my conversations natural, I placed my recorder such that it was not easily visible. Notwithstanding this, I made sure not to compromise on the quality of the audio recording. I usually replayed my recordings before subsequent interviews. This practice helped me to make changes to question formation, question ordering and wording where necessary in order to maximise efficiency in my data gathering.

3.4.7 Transcribing the data

Transcription refers to the act of converting verbal audio records and non-verbal responses to text (Hay, 2013). Transcribing interviews shortly after recording, for example transcribing the

same day of recording is said to improve the breadth and depth of coverage (Hay, 2013, p. 120). Due to limited time, I was unable to transcribe each interview immediately after recording. However, replaying the interviews prior to subsequent interviews helped me to have responses fresh in my memory. As a result, I became familiar with the responses, I was able to relate well to the data and to connect taken-notes, verbal and non-responses together and transform them to text during the transcription stage. Emoticons which I had used to represent emotions during my note-taking process were converted to text. I assigned anonymous names to my transcripts for each of my informants' responses for the purpose of confidentiality.

To avoid time-wastage and also reduce the volume of information which in my view was of little significance to the focus of the research, I prioritized transcribing responses which I believed were directly related to my research objective and those useful to answering my research questions. Information excluded from the transcript included for example exchange of pleasantries, repeated responses, and information that focused on building rapport rather than gathering data. Direct quotations by my informants were put in quotation marks, and paraphrased words are also referenced.

3.4.8 Analysing and presenting the interview data

I began the analysis process by assembling my field notes, and by reflecting on the interview practice and content. After I had transcribed my data, I wrote annotations in the margins of the transcript sheets. These annotations were grouped under three main headings namely; personal log, analytical log and transcript file. Under the transcript file, I wrote down my observations of non-audible data and reflections on the content and practice of the interview. The personal log contained comments on the questions asked, wording, ethical concerns, and the appropriateness of the informant and generally on the method employed during the interview. The analytical log contained information on the substantive matters that became evident in the interview. Under this topic, I identified the themes which emerged in the interview.

Having done this, I set out to analyse my data by further finding sub-themes and grouping them under the major themes. Here, I tried to reduce the volume of information and to make the text easy to work with by coding. Coding has been defined as “the act of reviewing transcripts and field notes and assigning labels to component parts that seem to be of potential theoretical significance to the social worlds of those being studied” (Bryman 2012, p. 568). Throughout

my analysis, I referred to the concepts within my analytical and theoretical framework as my reference point. I employed a narrative style in the presentation of my findings.

3.4.9 Units and level of analysis

A comparative study often has a focus on finding similarities and differences between the objects of study and how these attributes contribute to answering the research questions. The units and levels of comparison provide a clear definition for the confines or extent of the comparative study such that similarities and differences are easily identifiable. Comparison can be done at the global, national, regional, local level and between institutions of similar level such as basic schools among others. The units of analysis are often subjects or participants of the comparative study and this may include for example students, teachers and parents. As pointed out by Bray, Adamson & Mason (2007) the traditional style of comparison has over the years focused on geographical settings and entities such as rural versus urban. The authors however presented a comparative study of cases involving several units and levels of comparison which suggests that various levels of comparisons can be made in recent times. For instance it is possible to compare different units within a similar level such as a comparative study of boys and girls within a particular class or grade.

In this study teenage mothers who have dropped out of school and those who are in school represent the units of comparison. The choice of these units was informed by my understanding that the units to be compared and contrasted should have a common identifiable feature that provides the ground for comparison. For instance these two groups of teenagers in the study can all be identified as teenage mothers.

3.5 Ethical principles

The conduct of research right from the choice of topic, the method to be used, through to the selection of participants and the techniques for data collection revolves around ethics. Hay (2013) refers to ethics as the conduct of researchers, their duties and responsibilities to the participants of the research such as sponsors, informants and the general public. The main ethical issues of concern in research often revolve around considerations about harm and safety of the research participants, privacy and confidentiality, informed consent and deception. In this section, I take readers through my approach to addressing the above mentioned ethical issues.

3.5.1 Protection of informants from harm

Bryman (2012) highlights on the forms that harm to research participants can take; physical harm which could be related to the research setting, loss of self-esteem, and stress as a direct result of inducing research subjects to perform reprehensible acts. In sum, it can be argued that the researcher has a responsibility to evaluate the possible consequences of his research and avoid the subjection of participants to possible disturbing experiences. Although it is agreed that research can cause harm to participants, it is often difficult to determine beforehand the sort of harm that could be caused, especially in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 135). More often than not, the harm that can be caused is not easily observable or predictable since it is likely to unfold in the process of the research. For instance, the questions asked during an interview may trigger psychological and emotional trauma and arouse uneasy feelings. Protection of informants also has an aspect of confidentiality which implies that the researcher protects the identities and information provided by research participants such that they are not identifiable by such information.

Bearing in mind the need to protect my participants from harm, I was careful about the wording of my questions, the tone I used in asking my questions and the settings for my interviews. I made sure that my interview settings were those which offered utmost safety and comfort for my informants such that they could freely express their opinions. As stated previously, I allowed my informants to choose the venues for their interviews. Throughout my interviews, I was watchful not to hitch on issues which were likely to arouse uneasy feelings and those that were deemed potentially psychologically damaging. I rephrased my questions in order to give them a refreshing tone whenever I realised that an informant's mood had been affected in an unpleasant manner as a result of a question asked.

3.5.2 Informed consent

Matthew and Ross (2010) argue that consent should go beyond mere acceptance or refusal of the informants to become participants of a research. The principle of informed consent entails that research participants are fully informed about the research process, thus; the purpose of the research, why the participants' views are sought, the methods to be used and if possible involving participants in the confirmation and cross-checking of the findings of the research. The principle also entails that informants can opt out of a research at any point they desire to

do so. This suggests that the acceptance of research participants to be part of a research does not necessary bind them to the entire research process.

Prior to my interviews, I sought the consent of all my informants. Before the onset of each of my interviews, I introduced myself as a student researcher both verbally and with an introductory letter from the Faculty of Education at the University of Oslo. I took my informants briefly through the issues to be discussed, gave them the estimated period for the interview, explained the purpose of the research, what was expected of them and asked for their consent for recording the interview. My informants were assured of their liberty to opt out of the interview at any point in time should they desire to do so.

3.5.3 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

Research ethics require that researchers uphold the confidentiality and anonymity of the information and identity of their informants. The researcher also has a responsibility to safeguard and avoid the misuse of the information provided by informants. Since the qualitative research approach involves intrusion into the private lives and personal experiences of participants, qualitative researchers could be confronted with the dilemma of having to keep secret or reveal information pertaining to illegal and criminal acts.

In order to adhere to the ethical principle of ensuring informants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, Bryman (2012) advocates the avoidance of covert methods whereby participants receive insufficient information about the status and identity of the researcher such that they divulge information which they would have otherwise withheld from the researcher. My approach to upholding the above ethical principle included the adoption of pseudonyms in my transcripts and in my analysis so as to keep the identity of my informants secret. I also restricted access to my data by storing my interview tapes, field notes and transcripts in a safe place. I should point out that there were some challenges with regards to adhering strictly to this principle of anonymity in instances where I conducted interviews with teenage mothers who attended the only public basic school in the study area since the school could be easily identified. To overcome this challenge, I altered specific personal information which could make these participants easily identifiable such as information relating to their names and the school they attended. Nonetheless, I was careful not to alter the meaning of the participants' words.

3.5.4 Avoidance of deception

Deception occurs when researchers present their work as something which is different from the reality. This suggests that any attempt by researchers to limit participants' understanding of what their research is about could be classified as deception (Bryman, 2012, p.143). This could relate to the research purpose, methods and data gathering techniques. Bearing this mind, I made it a point to explain the purpose of my research, my methods and also reveal my identity to all my research participants without withholding any vital information which in my view could contribute to misunderstanding of the research and why their participation was solicited. I also avoided using the data collected for any other purpose other than the purpose made known to my informants; thus except for the purpose of the research.

3.6 Ensuring rigour in the research

Research revolves around investigating, interpreting and sharing the experiences of participants. Owing to this, it is of utmost importance that the researcher's interpretation and presentation of data reflects the reality of the people being studied. Researchers have a responsibility towards their interpretative communities; subjects, readers and the general public to ensure that their findings are not based on their own assumptions but rather are the true reflections of their participants (Hay, 2010). Rigour in qualitative research has been defined as "the means of establishing trustworthiness of the research work and a process which requires the incorporation of a number of strategies" (Hay, 2010, p. 77). One of these strategies has been named as *the hermeneutic circle* which means that the research starts with the interpretative, participant community and researchers themselves and then returns to the interpretative community for assessment in the final stage. This ensures that the participants and interpretative communities which include supervisors, colleagues and researchers assist with cross-checking to ensure credibility and good practice. Another strategy outlined for ensuring trustworthiness is to incorporate appropriate checking procedures right from the onset from the selection of a research area and topic, the choice of a method and research design, data collection tools and methods of analysis. The author recommends the need to document each stage of the research such that the interpretative community can cross-check and scrutinize the research work.

The terms *objectivity*, *validity*, *generalization* and *reliability* are concepts employed for ensuring trustworthiness in quantitative research. Bryman defines reliability as "the

consistency of a measure of a concept, whereas validity has to do with whether a measure of concept really measures that concept” (2012, p. 169). Generalization of a research suggests that the findings of the research can be extended beyond the study population and yet hold valid. Closely related to the concept of generalization is replication which refers to the ability to reproduce the same findings as the original when similar methods are employed. Objectivity in research means absolute independence of the researcher from the study participants or object of study.

Although these concepts have been adopted into qualitative research, Bryman (2012) argues that the differences between the two methods imply that the application of these terms differ significantly in approach and methods and that it may be difficult to apply the same principles across methods. In qualitative studies, the terms *conformability*, *transferability*, *credibility* and *dependability* are often used. Dependability refers to how consistent the research process has been, and the extent to which the findings are free from biases. Credibility refers to the extent to which the research findings reflect the true opinions and expressions of the research participants. Conformability bears a similar meaning with replication; thus refers to the extent to which the same findings can be reproduced within the study context if similar methods and techniques were used. Transferability on the other hand carries a similar meaning as generalization (Bryman, 2012). Although findings from a case study might be transferrable to a wider population, the issue has been argued over due to the context-specific nature of qualitative research. Hay (2010) advises that researchers exercise precaution when transferring findings and suggests that researchers define the limits and the extent to which findings are transferrable.

While achieving objectivity might be less of a challenge in quantitative research Atkinson and Hammersly (2007) argue that it is more difficult achieving objectivity in qualitative research since this method requires interactions between the researcher and participants, a process which might result in both researchers and participants bringing their personal perspectives to bear on the research thereby making the findings subjective. In qualitative research inter-subjectivity which refers to the interpretations and the meanings that researchers assign to the language and actions of the study participants is said to be of significance to ensuring rigour.

The arguments outlined above seem to put quantitative method in a favourable light with regards to ensuring rigour while portraying qualitative research as one that has lesser possibilities to eliminating personal biases. However, Hay (2010) argues that qualitative

researchers' awareness of the possibility of biases and their ability to incorporate measures to minimize biases can be a useful strategy for dealing with the challenge of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Dealing with this challenge also requires that the researcher is critically reflexive; thus thinks through each process of the research and reflects on how his conduct might have influenced the findings.

Having taken readers through the processes and concepts involved in ensuring rigour in research I outline what strategies I employed and how I went about achieving rigour in this study in the subsequent paragraphs. Before I proceed, it is important to point out that following strictly the above outlined standards for achieving trustworthiness cannot be assured. For instance, time limitation did not permit a revisit to the research participants for cross-checking of the final write-up of my analysis. Nonetheless, I tried as much as possible to incorporate necessary strategies which could equally yield the expected result. First, I carefully considered and assessed the suitability of the research design for the research topic prior to the research. To limit biases in my research, I selected my informants purposively using my research objective as a guide. I was particular about the meaning and interpretations I assigned to the utterances and actions of my research participants. Bearing in mind that there was a risk of bringing my own opinions and experiences to bear on the research, I adopted the strategy of taking my informants through their interview responses to confirm and cross-check so as to agree on the interpretations and understanding emerging from their responses. This practice in my view served a similar purpose as that which the interpretative community would have served if I had reported back the final write-up to them.

Secondly, the use of the semi-structured interview in my view offered my informants the desired flexibility such that their views rather than mine were enhanced and prioritized. I performed a pilot interview prior to my actual interview. Through this exercise, I was able to detect aspects of my interview guide which required modifications and adjustments with regards to wording and question ordering. This in my view ensured that my questions were coherent, free of ambiguity, and easy to understand by my informants such that they would provide the rightful answers. I also incorporated follow-up questions to encourage informants to clarify and expand on their responses. This strategy helped to minimise dishonesty and the possibility that informants provided incoherent responses. Another strategy I used was to observe closely my informants' actions and the interview setting in the course of my interviews and to assess if my observations could be useful to inferring meaning from the informants' responses or if the observations contradicted the verbal expressions.

Furthermore, I employed the strategy of critical reflexivity in my research. I kept a field diary in which I recorded issues relating to my own conduct while on the field. Often after a day's interview, I took some time off to think through the interview process, scrutinized my actions, my relationship with my research subjects and my reactions and assessed how these might have altered or affected the responses I obtained from my informants. I also thought through the interview process to assess if the perceptions and opinions I held prior to the onset of the research had been modified or changed after my field work, and also find out what could have contributed to these modifications or change.

3.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have made an argument for the choice and suitability of the qualitative research design for the study, pointing out that it offers the utmost flexibility needed to explore the lived experiences of the subjects being studied. I have taken readers through the research process, how I adhered to the ethical principles of research and highlighted some of the challenges I encountered in the course of the research, as well as what informed the decisions I made in overcoming these challenges. In all, I have argued that the objective of my research directed my focus throughout the process. To mitigate challenges to ensuring trustworthiness of my research, I incorporated checking procedures in my research design. In addition, I employed the use of critical reflexivity such that I could be conscious of and limit biases emanating from my relationship with my informants.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: FACTORS INFLUENCING SCHOOL PERSISTENCE AND DROPOUT AMONG TEENAGE MOTHERS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an analysis of the factors which influence dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers as revealed from the study. First, I use the Possible Selves theory to examine and to understand how the possible self of the teenage mother contributes to an understanding of her decisions with regards to schooling. Using the Ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1972), the study also examines the extent to which the teenage mother's environment contributes to the understanding of dropout and school persistence. The resiliency theory has also been used intermittently to explain the strategies employed by teenage mothers to cope with schooling. Although some teachers and educational officers were interviewed, I have decided to present the views of only teenage mothers interviewed since their views are deemed most relevant to answering my research questions. Nonetheless, other interviewees contributed to a better understanding of the research topic and of the study context.

4.2 The influence of possible selves on school persistence and dropout

4.2.1 The linkage between teenage motherhood, possible selves, dropout and school persistence

Oyserman and Lee (2012, p. 1) define possible selves as “representations of both the positive images of a person's future goals as well as the negative images of one's self failing goals”. They are the future-oriented aspects of identity, thus what one wants to become as well as what one wishes to avoid (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The underlying assumption is that the individual's positive possible self improves the ability to self-control. Possible self regulates behaviour, improves optimism about the future and help the individual to focus on goals and lessens the influences of distractions in the social world. However, the possible self is again influenced by the past and contextual factors (Oyserman and Lee, 2012, p. 2; Oyserman and Gant, 1995) and it is argued to regulate past and current behaviour. This suggests that the past, present and the future are interrelated components. How then does the status of motherhood and the past and present experiences of the teenage mother contribute to her present decisions to drop out or persist with schooling? Below, I examine how the underlying assumptions of the

possible theory outlined above contribute to an understanding of why teenage mothers drop out or persist with schooling, and how those who persist do so.

4.2.2 Experience of stigmatisation, relationship with dropout and school persistence

Stigmatisation of the teenage mother was found to assume different forms including ex-communication, abandonment, and expulsion from examinations, verbal and physical abuse. The teenage mother could be subjected to humiliation in the midst of peers and this contributed to a feeling of shame, self-worthlessness and propelled disassociation between the teenage mother and the school. Bearing similarity with the study by Bhana, et al. (2008) and Chigona and Chetty (2008) this research found out that an experience of stigmatisation contributed to redefining the future possible self of the teenage mother and influenced the decision to drop out. Teenage mothers who dropped out were also seen as bad-nuts within the family and equally subjected to rejection especially from family. More often than not, the effect was a reduction in the interest for schooling.

The study revealed that pregnancy out of wedlock was frowned upon, especially when it involved a teenager. Similarly, pregnancy which occurred while the female was schooling was less acceptable. The existing norms within the study area according to an informant called Lydia required that a woman completed school, got a job and married before she got pregnant. A pregnant teenager was often seen as a social deviant. These norms spelt out by the society in a way normalised stigmatisation as a form of a punishment or a corrective measure for the teenage mother. For instance, the teenage mother could be thrown out of her home by the parents as a way of teaching her a lesson.

The case of Lydia exemplifies how stigmatisation could compel the teenage mother to drop out of school. Lydia who became pregnant at age 15 abandoned the home after her mother discovered her pregnancy and threatened to poison her. She had also been maltreated by the mother because according to her, the mother said she had brought shame upon the family. She also narrated how teasing by her schoolmates and teachers became unbearable for her to the extent that she decided to drop out of school later. She said:

I went to stay with a friend who also had a child. I was always scared of going out as well as going to school because I knew people will scorn me. My classmates and the teachers used to tease me because I was often tired and dosed off in class. I could also bump into my parents, or someone might have seen me and inform them and so I dropped out of

school...I do not think I will go back to the school again because of those mates and teachers.

Lydia's decision not to go back to school due to the previous experience with stigmatisation reveals that teenage mothers often lived with the aftermath effects of stigmatisation and that the effect could be long lasting. In the case of Lydia, changing her school could have offered her a possibility to leave behind the past experience with stigmatisation, and perhaps build a new social network and social environment. Meanwhile, the community had only one basic school. With such a limitation in her environment, she had few protective resources which could be utilized to adapt to the stress of teenage pregnancy and to be resilient and thus continue with schooling. She had limited strategies which could be utilized to put behind the undesirable past and reconstruct a positive self as a student.

Another issue worth outlining is that the sparse population of the community; about 1300 people, made it easier for members to identify with one another, acquaint and abreast themselves with one another's life events and histories. According to Lydia, once she became pregnant, the news spread fast within the community such that people whom she did not know could approach her to confirm if she was the pregnant 'Lydia' they had heard about.

On the other hand, the study also found that teenage mothers in school can have experiences with stigmatisation, yet remain resilient by devising strategies for coping with stigmatization. As discussed in the previous section, resiliency of teenage mothers in school could be the most significant factor which differentiates them from those not in school, all other things being equal. The term 'coping strategies' is used in this study to refer to the various ways, activities as well as the mechanisms which teenage mothers adopt in order to overcome or accommodate the challenges they face, and to achieve success with schooling. In coping with the stigmatisation and low level of acceptance for teenage motherhood, teenage mothers in the study are found to draw on their own both internal and external resources. The internal resources include the inward qualities such as being self-determined to succeed. The external resources are used to refer to support drawn from the social network such as family and friends.

I just look over insults and offensive comments from some teachers and friends. It is usual and I have learnt to live with it. I admit I got pregnant because I was recalcitrant. What else can I do? I know that one day when I am done with schooling and I am employed, teenage motherhood will play no role as a tag on me. I will surely overcome.

I do not make friends with everybody in the school. I choose friendship with those who respect me for who I am and those who are willing to help me in any way they can.

The above statements made by Joyce, Cynthia and Bema who were teenage mothers in school reveal the adoption of strategies such as being accommodative to all manner of persons, and choosing association with supportive friends as important mechanisms for coping with stigmatisation.

4.2.3 Teenage motherhood reshapes the future self and influences future goals and dropout

The responses of some teenage mothers out of school revealed that prior to pregnancy they had aspirations for higher achievements, and goals. However, the financial and time demands for childcare contributed significantly to re-shaping and recreating their future aspirations and thoughts such that they had to abandon their once cherished dreams of completing any level of schooling. The case of Afia, a 17 year old teenage mother throws more light on how the possible self of the teenage mother can be affected negatively following pregnancy and childbirth. Afia was the third of her siblings. She was the only sibling out of school and her parents were cocoa farmers. She had the dream of becoming a nurse in future but had to stop schooling as a result of her concerns about providing care for her baby who was battling with sickle cell disease. She described how she had to suspend her schooling because her child's condition could worsen at any time. She said:

Sometimes I had to spend weeks at home or at the hospital because my child is often hospitalised so I decided to suspend my schooling for now and take care of her. My parents could have helped but they cannot abandon their farming because of her (the child). You know the farm is their only source of income.

When asked if she was holding on to her dream of becoming a nurse in future, she burst into tears, replying that she may consider a trade if she got the needed capital so that she could take care of her child in the present condition rather than wait until the future "because the child might not live to see that future." Afia's case reveals that having a sick child may result in the teenage mother making compromises on her schooling and aspirations for the future. She might drop out of school in an effort to exhibit her sense of responsibility towards her child, especially when family support is insufficient or not forth-coming. It is also important to stress that she had a positive view of her possible self-prior to pregnancy and childbirth. She had wanted to complete school and become a registered nurse in future. However, childbirth had contributed

to redefining this positive possible self. She had to drop out of school which meant that becoming what she wished for herself could be difficult to realize.

In another case it is revealed that the decision to drop out of school does not necessarily suggest that one has a negative possible self. However, the desire for a more flexible alternative to finding a future career and the solution to finding a source of livelihood for some teenage mothers might simply lie outside the formal school system. This finding adds a different twist to the understanding of possible selves and its relationship with teenage mothers' positions regarding schooling. An example is offered by the case of Lizzy. Lizzy was 17 years, out of school and had one child. She dropped out during her pregnancy. She revealed her ambitions to become a business woman. Her father was a civil servant in the Ghana Education Service (GES) and her mother was a basic school leaver and a business woman dealing in local fabrics. She narrated how the mother took care of her baby whenever she went to assist her in the shop. She preferred helping her mother in the shop to going to school because she had thoughts of taking over her mother's business someday. According to her, this had not been her initial plan but upon giving birth, she realised that it would be less stressful doing business than going to school. When questioned if the mother could take care of the child while she went to school she replied:

It will be difficult for me to sell goods and take care of the child at the same time. Although education is good, doing business is also not bad either. I think the most important thing about education is having literacy and numeracy skills, and then having a stable source of income in the future. I have the said skills and I am now working towards having a stable source of income in future.

Lizzy's statements above demonstrates her belief that staying out of school does not necessarily fuel the formation of a negative possible self. To her, one does not need to complete school or in effect acquire knowledge and skills specifically oriented to doing business from the school before one can become a successful business person. Lizzy's case again reveals that socio-economic context has the potential to 'remould' what Oyserman and Gant (1995) term as the malleable possible self.

Several factors could have motivated the formation of Lizzy's possible self. Firstly, her mother is already established in the business and it can be argued that she was doing well in her business, thereby served as a role model of a sort. This goes to confirm the assumption by Markus and Nurius (1986) that role models influence the possible selves of individuals. Again,

she did not need to require formal certification through the formal school system in order to qualify to take over her mother's business. Another issue is that she is not confronted with the challenge of having to think about initial business capital because she wants to take over her mother's business. Lastly, she is at liberty to make her own decisions and according to her the parents are not opposed to the choices she makes.

While a supportive family is identified to reduce the rate of school dropout among children (Rumberger, 2001), this finding reveals that parents could also support their children's decision to stay out of school. As revealed in Lydia's case, mother's level of education and occupation could have a greater impact on a teenage mother's decision to drop out of school. The engagement of the mother with low level of education in informal occupations could motivate the teenage mother who look up to the mother as a role model to also drop out of school. In addition, the case reveals that the decision of the teenage mother to be out of school can be a conscious one. She weighs the opportunities, possible alternatives and challenges in her environment in making the decision to drop out.

4.2.4 Future goals influence school persistence

Teenage mothers could also have positive possible selves. In this case they could be self-motivated to persist with schooling in order to realise their future goals. These goals may also relate to being gainfully employed and better equipped to cater for their children, finding a future career, the desire for a better life, the desire to attain a higher social status and the desire for higher achievements. The case of Adisa, a 14 year old teenage mother is a typical example which illustrates how future goals can motivate teenage mothers to persist with schooling. Adisa stopped schooling while pregnant because she was stigmatised but returned after giving birth. She had lost the father and was staying with her grandmother. The grandmother who was a cocoa farmer was her primary caregiver. According to Adisa, the grandmother was not earning enough to sponsor her through her basic and tertiary education. The father of her child had also refused responsibility for her child and that she depended solely on the money she got from her grandmother for her sustenance and that of her baby. Despite the financial constraints she faced, she was determined to continue schooling through to tertiary level. Having been questioned about why she was so determined to be in school she said:

I went back to school because I want to become a medical doctor in future. In this way I will earn a lot of money so that I will be able to take care of myself, my grandmother and

my baby too. I know if I stay focused on my studies and I do not get pregnant again, the child's father will regret refusing responsibility for the child one day and it will be my way of taking revenge on him.

Adisa's statements contribute to an understanding of how possible selves contribute to school persistence. Her future goal of wanting to become a doctor and "shaming" the supposed father of her child is her source of motivation for persisting with schooling. Although she is confronted by the challenge of limited financial resource, she is not discouraged. In order to achieve her goals, she sets strategies such as staying focused and avoiding another pregnancy. It can be argued that although her past experience with stigmatisation during pregnancy is undesirable and expected to discourage her, it is rather guiding her behaviour and has informed her choice of the strategy to remain focused and avoid another pregnancy. The present financial challenges she is facing and her desire for a better life for her grandmother and child have also influenced her future goals and her persistence with schooling.

A linkage is also found between career choice and school persistence. To become a medical doctor, one has to pass through the formal schooling system. In effect, it can be argued that those teenage mothers who aspire for professions which require formal education and certification acquired through the formal school system are more likely to go back to school than those who aspire for less formalised and informal jobs. The statements of Addisa also revealed that acquisition of higher education which elevates social status as a tool for future vengeance in itself might be a motivation for schooling for a teenage mother.

4.2.5 Fears, uncertainties about the future and its relationship with dropout

Fears about the future represent the unwanted possible self and are regulate current actions and future behaviour (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Oyserman and Gant, 1995; Oyserman and Lee, 1995). In this study, the fears about becoming what one does not wish for is seen to also encourage schooling among teenage mothers. For instance the teenage mother's fear could be the experience of another pregnancy. The research revealed that the teenage mother's fears about her possible self could inform her decision to drop out of school. The case of Abba who was 16 years old exemplifies the situation where childbirth deepens the teenage mother's fear of academic failure in the future thereby withholding her from schooling.

Aba got pregnant in class six and stopped schooling as a result. She admitted that she had also not been punctual and consistent with schooling prior to her pregnancy. Sometimes she missed

classes because she went to see her boyfriend. At other times she accompanied the mother to the farm. Her child was three years old and she had earlier considered going back to school but changed her mind. She gave two main reasons as to why she had not gone to school. Firstly, her schoolmates had gone ahead of her and she feared that she might be put in a class where she might be the eldest student. According to her, it will be humiliating for her to be in class with “younger children” who might tease her and disrespect her. Moreover, she had no influence with regards to decisions over the class she would be placed in. Secondly, she feared that she might not be able to cope with the demands of academic work. Her parents had left her to her fate and she was also unsure about receiving parental support if she went back to school. She feared she would not be able to combine both academic work and caring for her child. She said:

I know many people my age who have completed basic school so me I cannot go and now start from class six with those children. It will take too long to complete...Although I was not performing too badly in class, now I do not know what will happen if I go back to school. Maybe it will be difficult to cope and those children (classmates) they will laugh at me. I am not sure if my parents will support me like they used to. I may have to drop out again in the end. That is why I am not trying (going back to school).

Abba's statements also reveal that her position regarding schooling is influenced by her perceptions about the associations between motherhood, age and school achievement. She was aware of the meaning attached to motherhood in her community and the shame associated with “grown-ups in school». According to Chohan and Langa (2011) motherhood elevates the teenager to a perceived adulthood status. Similarly in this study, it is found that there exists a perception whereby parenthood is equated to adulthood and schooling not perceived as something for adults. On the other hand, once a student gave birth, she was perceived to have transited into adulthood regardless of how old she may be. This then translated into low level of acceptance for student-parents in the school. Abba referred to those she expected to be in class with as “children” not only because she perceived herself to be older but also because she was compelled by the existing social norms to embrace the new status of adulthood associated with motherhood.

As pointed out by Leach, Dunne and Salvi (2014, p. 4) age confers differences in status, privileges and responsibilities and creates hierarchies in the school providing a basis which regulates relations between teachers and students and among students. While the formal school system in Ghana has no formally enshrined moral obligations binding on younger students,

moral obligations such as the demand for respect from younger ones is an important aspect of the Ghanaian culture inferring from these existing norms, it can be argued that the teenage mother would stop schooling in order to preserve her dignity when she perceives that she stands a risk of losing respect from "younger" school mates.

It is important to point out that the age for commencement of school varies among children and that age is not a prerequisite for class categorizations, class progression and school completion in Ghanaian basic schools. Although Abba expected to have completed school at her age, it can be argued that truancy and pregnancy could have contributed to impeding her academic progress and reducing her interest for schooling. As identified by Oyserman and Lee (2012) dropping temporarily out of school, especially as early as basic level could reduce interest and enthusiasm for schooling such that students redraw efforts. This finding is also consistent with the study by Grant and Hallman (2008) which reveals that teenage mothers who drop out temporarily prior to pregnancy are less likely to return to school after pregnancy.

4.2.6 Fears, uncertainties about the future and its relationship with school persistence

While the challenges of coping with academic work highlighted above as perceived by Abba may be encountered, it should also be stressed that teenage mothers may exhibit differing degrees of resilience by adopting effective strategies such as seeking help with academic work, in which case they could be successful in school. It can be argued that achieving success in the midst of the uncertainties about the future is possible among daring and persevering teenage mothers. Those who foresee these challenges but continue schooling although assistance could be lacking are the determined and self-motivated teenage mothers, qualities which Chigona and Chetty (2007) identify as differentiating teenage mothers in school from those out of school.

The study revealed that teenage mothers in school who had perceived to encounter challenges with academic work employed different strategies. The statements below were made by Adisa who was a teenage mother in school.

I usually ask my teacher to give me additional exercises and assignments aside the one for all students in my class. She (teacher) is always ready with explanations to questions anytime I approach her. This helps me to get along well with my academics. I do not feel like I am lagging behind. I do not attend entertainment programmes organised in the school. I use the time for my personal studies.

My friends are very helpful. I have made friends with some of the brilliant students in my class. Although some of them are younger than me, I do not care much. It is their knowledge that I want to benefit from. We sometimes organise study groups where I get the opportunity to tap into their intelligence, you know. It has helped me a lot to improve on my academics. They are always urging me on to pursue further to greater heights. I think it is a lovely feeling.

Sometimes I need someone to take me through what was previously taught in school because either I was absent, forgot what was taught or do not understand. I have a lot on my mind, family, child, you know. But still I have to excel in order to progress.

The above statements reveal the strategy whereby teenage mothers sought warm and favourable relationships with their class teachers and brilliant classmates in order to get help with academic work. Adopting the above mentioned strategy was based on the realisation, recognition and presumption of the teenage mother that to make progress with schooling, there was the need to also make progress with academic work. It was also based on the teenage mother's recognition that the transition to motherhood and its associated responsibilities present challenges which could significantly affect her academic progress and being prepared to overcome these challenges. These challenges ranged from insufficient time for academic work due to the demands for childcare to cognitive difficulties for comprehending what they were taught in school because their minds could be preoccupied with so much at the same time.

The case of Kukua who was a 15 years old teenage mother is also an example where fears, uncertainties about the future and the desire to avoid an unwanted future-self encouraged school persistence. According her, her parents were separated and none of them was taking responsibility for her education. Her uncle was the one who used to take care of her financial needs until she got pregnant. Since she got pregnant her uncle decided not to support her financially any longer. The mother of the boy who impregnated her assumed parental responsibility since the boy was unemployed. She revealed that the financial support she received was not enough for both her baby and herself. Yet, she had gone back to school. She sold sachet water whenever she was back from school as a way of accumulating additional money for her upkeep. She revealed that she was determined to go to school because she wanted to avoid a second pregnancy which would put her in a similar situation of shame in future. She also wanted to be respected by her schoolmates and people in her community. She said:

Being in school will make me focused and occupied. In this way I will stay away from acts which can bring about another pregnancy. ..You know these days if you do not go to school, nobody respects you. Just imagine if I do not go to school and get a formal job but remain a petty trader by the roadside in future. I think about how I will feel in such a situation if my formal schoolmate who may be a “big person” approaches me in his car to buy something. I will feel shy and humiliated. That is why I also have to be in school.

These statements by Kukua reveal that the teenage mother in school might not only be motivated by her goals, but also her fears and the desire to avoid becoming what she does not wish for. Her strategy to avoid pregnancy is to be in school and remain focused on her studies. An argument can be made that schooling contributes to the avoidance of early pregnancies and to achieving future goals. However, the strategy of schooling as a tool for avoiding pregnancy yields the desired result only when the teenage mother herself is the initiator who takes the conscious decision. The desire of the teenage mother to be respected by others reveals further that education can be used as a tool for commanding respect.

A similar case which reveals that the fears about the future can encourage schooling among teenage mothers is the case of Abena. Abena was 19 years old, had two children and had gone back to school. Her cohabiting partner was 30 years old and a Bachelor of Science degree holder who worked with a private company. She obtained financial assistance for schooling from her co-habiting partner. The partner also helped with taking care of their child. He usually took the child to school and from school, paid the child’s school fees and feeding fee. Abena did not have to work in order to support herself and child. However, her greatest motivation for going back to school was to avoid losing her partner. She said:

I want to also upgrade myself to match his educational status. I have to also ascend higher so that another lady who has a degree does not snatch her from me someday. Men can change their minds at any time and go after other women, especially if they (the women) have a better social class.

Teenage mothers who draw associations between the attainment of a higher social class and a higher level of formal education are more likely to continue schooling. The statements above also reveal that the partners of the teenage mothers could be a source of motivation for schooling. The role they play as partners, their level of education,

employment and income are important factors. All things being equal, the more supportive a partner is, the more likely the teenage mother is to be in school. Similarly, the higher the level of education attained by the partner, the higher the likelihood that the teenage mother is motivated to be in school. More importantly, having a partner who is gainfully employed may enhance the level of income obtained thereby reducing the threat posed to schooling by financial restraints.

4.3 The role of ecological factors: The microsystem

4.3.1 Absence of family support and dropout among teenage mothers

According to Bronfenbrenner (1986) the family is part of the microsystem of the child's environment and has an influence on the child's development. This influence can be positive or negative. A supportive family is more likely to impact positively on the teenage mother's development by assisting her in every meaningful way to keep her in school. Family support for the teenage mother may be in the form of financial assistance, motivation, encouragement and support for childcare. Family support could be provided by the teenage mother's parents, grandparents, boyfriend or partner and other members of the extended family. Samantha (2013) points out parental support especially that of mothers as most vital for schooling among teenage mothers and points out the absence of family support as the main cause of dropout among teenage mothers.

The case of Asibi is an example of how the refusals of parents to continue their parental responsibilities towards their teenage daughters who become mothers drove the process of dropout. Asibi was 17 years old and had two children. She lived with her parents prior to giving birth. However, upon becoming pregnant, she was thrown out of the home by her parents and so she moved into her boyfriend's house. She gave birth to her second born after she had moved to live with him. The boyfriend was unemployed and relied on the little support he got from Asibi to support himself and their children. Asibi worked as a dish-washer in one restaurant in a nearby town in order to fend for herself and her children. She narrated the stressful experiences of having to wake up at dawn every day to prepare for work while the boyfriend took care of the children. Besides, the working hours coincided with schooling hours and she had to make a choice between school and work. She expressed that her desire was not to work and abandon school, yet she had been compelled do so because her parents no longer cared about her. She said:

My pregnancy was a mistake but I am left to my fate. If only my parents were willing to help me take care of my children or allow me to stay with them, I could have at least survived without working like I am doing now. I could have attended a government school which is free of charge, but now that I am forced to live with my boyfriend, I have to perform the duties of a wife. You know it is difficult to combine all these responsibilities with schooling.

The statements of Asibi reveal the common practice whereby parents neglected or abandoned their responsibility towards their teenage daughters once they became pregnant or gave birth. Although teenage mothers may not necessarily be willing to embrace a family life following pregnancy, absence of parental support could force them into it. The changing status of the teenage mother in the modern Ghanaian society places the teenage mother in a category of dual roles as both an adult and a child at the same time. As noted by Chohan and Langa (2011, p. 88) childbirth may be considered as a rite of passage to womanhood in which case teenage mothers are perceived as adults and expected to take up the responsibility of adulthood. They may be required to move into their boyfriends' homes and perform their duties as mothers and wives. On the other hand, they could be perceived as children in which case they are expected to carry out the responsibilities of a child towards the parents. Living with the boyfriend may not only increase the financial burden and the responsibility of the teenage mother to fully exercise her role as a mother and a wife, but also increases the risk of a multiple birth. Although informal support networks from kin and family constitute an integral part of the Ghanaian society, the absence of extensive government social protection policies contributes to increasing reliance on family support, thereby limiting the extent of support which could be offered.

Furthermore, this study reveals an association between multiple birth and a diminishing level of interest for schooling and an increasing reluctance in the parents' desire to offer support to the teenage mother. The declining interest in schooling can be explained in several ways. One reason is that the financial and parental responsibilities for childcare increases following a second or many births. Another is that the time for resuming schooling might be prolonged, especially when the mother is conscious about waiting until the child comes off age before she resumes schooling. A third factor is that it might become more difficult to relate well to previously acquired knowledge in school, or comprehend what is being taught upon return to school. Having one child makes a difference from having two, three or more. In the words of a teenage mother called Amina "having one child might be seen as a pardonable mistake, in

which case the teenage mother will get over the experience of parental neglect with time”. On the other hand, having two or more gives an impression that the teenage mother is recalcitrant and deserves to face the consequences of her actions.

In another case, it was found that parental support as a factor which affected schooling among teenage mothers was significant in relationship to the age of the teenage mother's baby. In other words, the younger the baby the more significant parental support for child care was. “My child is too young and I cannot abandon her for school”. “I may consider going back when she is of age... Kindergarten is quite expensive here.” These were the words of Lucy, a 17 year old teenage mother whose child was a year old. She lived with her parents, but according to her the parents usually went to their farms during weekdays. Since the farm was several kilometres away, it was inconvenient to take the child along. She was usually at home with her child. Sometimes she took her along to the market to sell some produce from her parents' farm.

The care for a baby demands resources in the form of time and money. Motherly care required for infants such as the need for breastfeeding results in a situation whereby the teenage mother would have to spend much time with her baby. The teenage mother in school may have to combine academic work and the responsibility for her child. She might be relieved of some of the time required for childcare when the child is of age and starts schooling. This implies that the younger the child of the teenage mother, the more difficult it is for the teenage mother to go to school.

4.3.2 Presence of family support and school persistence among teenage mothers

The presence of supportive parents, especially the teenage mother's mother was found to enhance the likelihood of the teenage mother being in school. The case of Joyce demonstrates the significance of parental support for schooling. Joyce, a teenage mother who was 16 years got pregnant at age 15 and her child was only 3 months old when she returned to school. She lived with both parents. Joyce's father worked as a civil servant with the District Assembly and the mother was a teacher in a private school. Joyce's mother often took her baby along to school. Due to the help she obtained, she could go to school without worrying about whom to take care of her child. She explained that given the support she received, she had no reason to stay out of school. While Joyce had access to scholarship, she expressed that it was particularly the child support and care of her mother for her baby which made it possible for her to go back to school barely three months after she gave birth.

The study finds that the presence of supportive partners or boyfriends could also encourage schooling among teenage mothers. The case of Cynthia is an example of the significant roles boyfriends could play. Cynthia was 19 and had two children. She had returned to school and was living with the boyfriend. The boyfriend was 30 years old, a bachelor degree holder and a teacher in the secondary school Cynthia attended. According to Cynthia, it was the boyfriend who catered for the financial expenses of her schooling. “I would not have been in school if my boyfriend had not paid my fees. My parents were even struggling to pay my fees when I had not given birth and was staying with them,” she said.

Cynthia’s case throws light on the significance of boyfriend’s educational level, age and career and their influence on the teenage mother’s schooling. Age is significant because it could relate positively with maturity and achievement. Having a partner with a comparatively higher level of educational qualification can positively affect the teenage mother’s relationship with schooling. An argument can also be made that the higher the educational qualification of the partner, the more meaningful education could be to him, and hence the strong likelihood that he would be supportive towards the teenage mother’s schooling. Higher educational qualification could also relate positively to the likelihood of securing a more lucrative job thereby enhancing the partner’s ability to financially support the teenage mother’s schooling. The challenge posed by baby’s age on the teenage mother’s schooling may also be less when family support and affordable day-care centres are available. Where the above named services are available, the teenage mother’s willingness to embrace them could be the most significant factor.

4.3.3 The Ecology of the school

Bronfenbrenner (1986) points out that the school as part of the ecological system plays a role in the development of a child. Applying the theory to the study, the research revealed that school environment has significance for the decision of teenage mothers to drop out or persist with schooling. The factors in the school include the school’s physical environment; both enablers and hindrances in the environment, school rules and regulations as well as relationship between teachers and teenage mothers, teenage mothers and peers.

4.3.4 Unconducive physical environment and restrictive school policies influence dropout

I observed that the government owned school which existed in the study community was not designed to cater for the needs of teenage mothers. In conformity with the study by Ananga (2011) this research reveals that the absence of an accommodating and a conducive school environment for teenage mothers, especially those breastfeeding their babies was a factor which contributed to dropout among them. In addition to lack of appropriate infrastructure and physical space for students with children, restrictive school rules, regulations and policies were found to contribute to dropout among teenage mothers. Nancy, a teenage mother out of school gave accounts of how she had to give up on her decisions to resume school two months after she put to birth. She was in her final year at the basic school when she gave birth. The West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) was only four months away and she was determined to go back to school, prepare and write the exams. However, concerns about the limited space for breastfeeding on the school's compound, as well as the unfavourable school rules and policies made her to resign from this decision, at least wait until the following year when her baby would have been weaned. She said:

My parents were willing to take care of my financial needs if I went back to school because they wanted me to write the final exams. However, I knew it was not permissible to take my child along to school or breastfeed her in between break periods. Two months old baby too is too vulnerable, I cannot leave her behind like that. Unfortunately, I have to wait until maybe next year. Sometimes extra curricula activities like entertainment and sporting are compulsory for all but I would not have time for that because of my baby.

It is important to note that the Ghanaian school regulations do not explicitly ban students from bringing their children along to school, yet there is an implicit restriction. Infrastructural designs do not take the need for convenient spaces for breastfeeding into consideration, and school authorities define their own rules and set restrictions. Teachers do not permit students and their babies in class. The length and time for break periods are the same for all students. In the secondary schools, extra curricula activities may be compulsory for all students. Students also had regulated periods for all school activities. Nancy recounted instances where pregnant students have been barred from writing final school examinations, a situation she dropped out in order to avoid. It should be emphasised that while no laws explicitly require that pregnant girls are exempted from examinations, the practice is common in Ghanaian schools. Teachers who perpetuate such acts rarely get punished as a result of which the act is increasingly becoming common.

4.3.5 Peer support and school persistence

The teenage mother's friends, schoolmates, age mates and those she associates herself with constitute her peers. Peers are also part of the teenage mother's social environment and may either support, encourage or serve as role models who arouse her interest in schooling. They may also discourage her from schooling. The research found that associating and maintaining contact with peers in school increased the possibility that the teenage mother would be in school and vice versa. Peer support for the teenage mother was seen in various ways, and varied from assisting each other with academic work, home visits and organisation of extra curricula activities.

My friends are all in the school's football team. They usually travel to participate in regional and district sporting activities. Whenever they came and told me about the experience with the game, they said they would have done better if I was in the team. So I said ok, I know you guys (the friends) want me around so I will come back to school so that was why I went back.

The above statements are from Kukua, a teenage mother. The statements throw further light on the role played by peers which could influence the teenage mother to go back to school. Kukua's friends at school aroused her interest in schooling. She was active in sport and was part of her school's female football team before she got pregnant. Six months after giving birth she went back to school. She narrated how helpful the friends had been for her. Sometimes, one of her friend's parents took care of her baby if her mother had to go to the farm and could not take the baby along. According to her, it was the companionship she enjoyed from her mates which gave her the assurance that she could make it in school despite being a mother. To her, this was the most important motivating factor that got her back to school.

"My younger siblings who are supposed to emulate me are in school so I have to also be in school else. I have to complete school, else I will lose their respect." These were the words of Linda, a teenage mother. The statements reveal that having younger siblings in school could also motivate teenage mothers to continue their schooling, especially when financial support is available and accessible.

4.3.6 The role of churches

The study reveals that churches play some significantly motivating roles which encourage schooling among teenage mothers. This finding is interesting because it has not been highlighted in any of the reviewed literature. Although a sizeable number of mission schools

were established in Ghana during the colonial era, the management and control of most of these schools have been taken over by the government, thereby limiting their influence on school curricula and practices. In the traditional Ghanaian society, the church is viewed as an institution which stands for moral uprightness. Its influence is expected to help curb immorality like promiscuity and the subsequent consequences such as teenage pregnancy. Embracing pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers, let alone assisting is a rare practice to find in the church. However, an evidence of such a practice is found to enhance schooling in the study.

My church has created a fund to help brilliant but needy members. It is like a sort of a welfare. I stopped schooling along the line because of difficulties with finance and caring for the baby. Some of the church members visited me at home and having heard my concerns they told me the fund would support me through school so I decided to go back to school.

Our pastor's wife sew my school uniform free of charge. She said she did not want me to stay out of school. She advised my parents not to abandon their parental responsibilities because of my disobedience. She comes around to look for me whenever I miss church service on Sunday.

They (church leaders) keep preaching about the benefits of schooling all the time. If I don't go to school, I would be seen as aimless and recalcitrant. I just must go (to school).

The above statements from Linda lend evidence to the different supportive roles played by the church. The statements reveal that the church can play more comprehensive roles which facilitate schooling. One role is that the church mediates between parents and children to restore ill-relationships resulting from 'waywardness and disobedience' of children. Churches can provide material support derived from collective contributions. In this way, the church sought after the welfare of its members. On individual basis, some members in leadership positions saw the need to help others as both a social and a religious responsibility. Lastly, the church contributed to awareness creation about the usefulness of education, thereby encouraging teenage mothers to go to school, and parents to support their wards through school.

In addition, the church provided a common ground where teenage mothers could share experiences, discuss issues of common interest as well as find the motivation and develop the interest for schooling. Akosua, a teenage mother and a member of one of the churches in the study area gave an insight into how inclusive social activities organised by the youth assembly within her church propelled her to "come out of her shell." Excursions and bible quizzes, youth

camps, singing competitions among others were often organised by her church for the youth. Since some of those who participated were of her age and some had given birth but were students, she felt they had some common traits. She said:

Since some are also mothers like myself, we can discuss a lot of issues of common interest together. I learnt a lot about how they were able to gather the courage to go back to school. They inspired me a lot. This made me overcome my shame and fears, and subsequently developed the desire to start schooling.

Membership in a supportive church increased the probability that the teenage mother would be in school, where as the opposite situation increased the likelihood of dropping out.

4.4 The Macrosystem

4.4.1 Gender, ethnicity and dropout

Gender refers to the assigned roles of males and females. Leach et al. (2014, p. 4) assert that gender interacts with age and authority to provide a powerful form of control and that those who cannot accept these norms of institutional hierarchy often risk exclusion, discrimination and victimisation. Among traditional Ghanaian families, younger ones are expected to respect and serve the elderly ones in the family. It is usual for the parent to punish the child, and the elder sibling to punish the younger ones when they disobey. Similarly, women and girls are expected to take care of the house chores and children and keep the home while the males pursue education or work to bring in income with which to cater for the family. Subsequently, girls between 15 to 18 years in Ghana are estimated to spend about 52 hours a week on house activities, and about 17 to 18 hours daily (Stephens, 2000). It is revealed that house chores are usually performed manually, thereby making them time-consuming. An insight into a typical day of Jamila, a teenage dropout who was 16 years lends support to the above assertion. She was supported both in cash and in kind by her mother, but this support received was at the cost of her schooling.

I fetch water from the pipe stand in the town centre (about 2km away from her house. I have to fill the water tank to the brim each morning because we wash (she and the mother) a lot of used napkins for my baby. I collect firewood from the farm, at least three times in a week so that we have enough for cooking. I also help my mother to prepare palm-oil for sale. Sometimes I sell it for her in the market.

As the above statements reveal, house chores may not necessarily be confined to the home. The limits may stretch beyond the house. To receive family assistance with childcare the teenage mother might be expected to contribute her quota to income-generating activities to help relieve the family of the additional financial responsibilities which accompany motherhood. Undoubtedly, being engaged by house chores means that she is occupied most of the day and would have less time at her disposal for school.

In addition, there is more talk about teenage motherhood in the Ghanaian context, and less about teenage fatherhood. This is because the female gender is not only perceived to be more vulnerable to early parenthood, but also bear a greater part of the challenges posed by early parenthood. Unlike teenage girls, boys who impregnate teenagers may face less or no impediments at all with regards to their schooling. Teenage boys are not the primary caregivers for babies they give birth to. In some cases, boys who impregnate teenagers refuse responsibility for the pregnancy and they face no prosecution. The teenage mother is held responsible for the consequences of pre-marital sex and less attention is devoted to chastising the male counterparts who are mainly the initiators and perpetrators of sexual misconduct. As identified by Leach et al., (2014) these inherent meanings attached to the female gender form part of the mental orientation of the growing teenage mother and contribute to moulding her adulthood and redefine her identity.

In addition, the study found ethnicity as a driver of gender discriminatory practices which contributed to dropout. Ethnicity in the context of this study is used to refer to a group that shares a common and a distinctive culture, religion and language. Stephens (2000, p. 31) asserts that culture is concerned with two things: “the knowledge and ideas that give meaning to the beliefs and actions of individuals and societies; and the ‘meaning-making’ set of tools used to describe and evaluate that action”. Three main ethnic groups were found in the study area. The two major groups were the Brongs and the Asantes. These groups belonged to the Akan tribe as a result of which they shared some similarities in spoken dialect and culture. A third group consisted of several minority groups such as the Mossi, Gonja and Dagombas who had migrated into the study area from the Northern Region. These three ethnic groups found in the study area are differentiated by the different languages they speak, their culture and ancestral origin.

As argued by Oyserman and Grant (1995), connectedness and belongingness have healthy impacts on possible self and school persistence. However, this study finds that the values of

the group one is connected to rather than mere affiliation has more significance for shaping the teenage mother's possible self and also determines her relationship with schooling. It again finds that affiliation to a group which holds dear discriminatory gender values does not guarantee all the said benefit of connectedness. More specifically, affiliation to a group committed to practices and beliefs which favour boys' education to the detriment of girls' education was found to discourage schooling of teenage mothers.

The study identified a common practice among migrant families whereby teenage mothers are encouraged to work as head-porters in nearby commercial towns as a means to support themselves. Being a teenage mother of migrant parents was found to increase the probability of the teenage mother being forced to work as a head-porter, thereby staying out of school. The statements of a teenage mother called Amina lends support to this finding. Amina was 16 years old and had one child. She stopped schooling having fallen victim to this popular practice backed by the popular belief among her tribe that girls who had children were not worth educating. She said:

Males from our tribe are perceived to be more worth educating than females, especially teenage mothers. The boys usually go to school while the girls help parents with income-generating activities. They say that once a girl gets pregnant or gives birth, she is likely to give birth again. So why educate her? My parents have made me to understand that my brothers' education ought to be prioritised before mine because they will not become pregnant and stop schooling. They can also work harder to support the family when they have jobs than I can do. Then they will also help to take care of my child.

The implication is that females are perceived to be weaker, lower achievers and stand a higher risk of delayed and interrupted education due to the risk of early pregnancies. Amina's conception about her capabilities as a female had also been influenced by the pro-males education practice common among her tribe. As a young mother who continued to depend on her parents' support, she expressed that going contrary to the demands of her parents would not be a better option. While her decision was not to be out of school, she was compelled by such popular beliefs about the inferiority of girls' education to resign to the notion that she could not be in school.

4.4.2 Influence of gender and ethnicity on school persistence

In two cases involving two teenage mothers in school, gender and ethnicity are not found to be acting as pull factors. These teenage mothers also came from Mossi migrant families, a similarity they shared with Amina who had dropped out because of the influence of beliefs and gender roles peculiar among her tribe. Frema, one of the two teenage mothers in school recounted why she obtained the support of her parents to continue schooling. She said:

Both of my parents have been victims of gender discriminatory practices among our tribesmen because they became teenage parents. Having fled from our hometown, they both struggled through life, but managed however to complete tertiary education. They narrate these experiences with so much bitterness and do not want me to go through the same experience. That is why they decided to support me through school.

The other informant, Fatma also narrated why the prevailing norms within her tribe had not influenced her decisions about schooling. She said:

One of my cousins was pressured by her parents to drop out of school because she became pregnant as a teenager. She fell ill and died mysteriously few months after she was compelled to work as a head-porter in the district's commercial town. My family has learnt a lesson from it so they do not want the same to happen to me. That is why they support me in school.

From the above statements, it is evident that education and life experiences can play significant roles which then lead to cultural change or change in perceptions and attitudes such that people can do away with discriminatory practices and norms which contribute to dropout. Secondly, the study reveals that having an educated parents and a family that opposes discriminatory gender practices and norms increases the possibility that the teenage mother would persist with schooling regardless of which ethnic group she may belong to.

4.5 The Exosystem

4.5.1 Effect of distance, school rules and policies on dropout

In the case of Lucy, she had weaned her baby and they both lived with her mother. She had earlier enrolled in the nearest secondary school to her town but dropped out again. According

to Lucy, her mother was assisting a lot but she also needed to be around to show her emotional support for the baby. She said:

If only we had a secondary school here such that it is possible to commute between school and the home conveniently daily, I would have gone to school. As the case stands, I cannot abandon my child. As for the headmistresses in the boarding house, they don't care whether a student has a child or not. Once in school, they expect you to stay until vacation. You do not get permission to exit the school premises unless you are seriously ill.

In close relationship with the effect of school's physical environment, rules and regulations, distance is found to also influence the decisions teenage mothers make about schooling. The closer the distance between home and school, the more likely the teenage mother would be in school and vice versa. This was particularly significant for teenage mothers who had dropped out of the secondary school. The study area had no secondary school. The nearest secondary school was about 15 kilometres away from the study community. In theory, a choice could be made between boarding residence and off campus (day) schooling. In practice, however, the choice of a "day student" was challenging because of the problem with distance. Staying on campus came with certain restrictions which contributed to detachment of the teenage mother from her baby. For instance, permission was required before the student could exit the school campus. Such permissions were rarely granted unless it was deemed necessary. Permissions could be granted for students who needed medical attention and those who had unpaid fees to settle but rarely for students with family issues to take care of. This implied that the teenage mother who stayed on campus would be physically detached from her child for the entire period she had to be in school, something which conferred a condition of emotional difficulty on the teenage mother and contributed to most of them dropping out of school.

Moreover, tuition for boarding is generally more expensive as a result of which affordability is a major determinant of choice. This may serve as a challenge for teenage mothers who have limited ability to pay as well as those who want to maintain contact with their children. In addition, the study found the absence of an explicit re-entry policy for teenage mothers who drop out of school as a significant factor contributing to low enrolment of teenage mothers. Policies which specifically target re-entry of teenage mothers have documented positive effects on their enrolment. Samantha (2013) identifies that favourable re-entry policies such as the Child Support Grant in South Africa and the Re-entry Policy in Kenya have encouraged the re-entry and retention of pregnant and teenage mothers in schools in these countries. Ghana has

no existing policy aimed specifically at promoting re-entry of teenage mothers. There exist no regulations or arrangements for permitting leave from the basic and secondary school on grounds of pregnancy and childbirth. Due to this, the responsibility lies on the teenage mother to adapt to the existing school rules and regulations.

4.5.2 Socio-economic factors and their relationship to dropout and school persistence

In this study, a close relationship is found between the socio-economic background of the teenage mother's family, parental attitude towards teenage pregnancy, the willingness to support the teenage mother and the extent of support given. In this section, I explain further, the relationship between socio-economic factors and dropout and school persistence in general as found in the study.

Socio-economic factors are factors such as the level of household income, the family size, the level of parents' education, and the health status of the family members. Higher level of education is used in this context to refer to tertiary education of parents. I do not attempt a classification of income levels in this study. A higher level of income as used in the study suggests that there are at least two working adults with stable income sources in the family, for example a family where both parents are employed and receive monthly salaries. Such a family has all its children who are of school-going age in school. A family is said to have a higher health status where none of its members has a known chronic ailment which puts a tow on the members' time and resources such that disposable family income is reduced and the education of some of its members is compromised.

The higher the socio-economic status of the teenage mother's family, the more likely she was to receive family support and vice versa. The study finds that teenage mothers whose parents had received higher education and had reliable sources of income were more concerned about the well-being of their teenage daughters who had transited into motherhood. There was a concern over the need to avoid a situation whereby the teenager would be compelled to terminate the pregnancy through dangerous means and lose her life in the process. For this reason, it was uncommon that the teenager would be thrown out of the parents' home. For parents who threw their children out of the home, a major motive was to shift the ensuing responsibility for the unborn child and mother to the one responsible for the pregnancy.

The study found that belonging to a large-size family which depended on periodic incomes such as the income from a cocoa farm increased the likelihood that the teenage mother would

not be in school. This is because insufficient household income needed to be shared among a larger number of dependents. In such situations, basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing needed to be catered for, and less priority was given to investing in the teenage mother's schooling. This was a more likely situation where parents had no formal education.

The type of job also had significance for access to credit. Being employed in the formal sector improved income stability compared to being in the informal sector. Having a stable and a reliable source of income such as working in the civil service for instance was important because it enhanced eligibility for loan. For instance, Joyce whose parents were employed in the civil service could be earning lower incomes compared to those in informal businesses, yet, it was easier to access loan as a government worker than as an informal sector worker in Ghana because monthly deductions required for repayment could be made from the source of payment.

4.5.3 Influence of accessibility to and availability of financial support on dropout and school persistence

Basic education in Ghanaian public basic schools is free. This means that the student is not required to pay tuition fee. In an effort to boost enrolment, the government has also introduced the School Feeding Program (SFP) which provides students from selected public basic schools with a free meal a day. Although these initiatives have been commended for contributing to increasing enrolment and retention, there remain other uncovered cost such as the cost of stationary, transport and up-keeping money. These costs which are born by parents are found to contribute significantly to dropout, especially among teenage mothers from deprived households.

A common factor found to be contributing to school dropout among teenage mothers is lack of funds and the difficulty in accessing scholarship among teenage mothers who otherwise qualified to benefit from such funds. The study revealed that the financial needs of the teenage mother in school may be challenging for her to meet. Aside the educational materials which ought to be provided, the teenage mother's baby needs to be also taken care of. This increases the financial needs of the teenage mother. Often, the teenage mother may be unemployed because she is either below working age, or lacks the skills required to be employed. This shifts the responsibility for the teenage mother and her baby's education to the parents. In such

situations, it becomes necessary that the parents get external financial support to shoulder the additional responsibility.

Availability in this context is used to refer to the existence of financial support systems such as scholarship schemes or an income-generating source of livelihood which can support the teenage mothers' schooling. Access refers to the ease with which the funds can be obtained. No private pro-girls' education organisations were found to be operating or extending financial support to students in the study area. The government scholarship and that for wards of cocoa farmers (COCOBOD Scholarship) known to be accessible nationwide had been instituted by the government several years back. The selection process for beneficiaries is supposedly merit-based. However, the study revealed that it was marred by corruption which resulted in unqualified applicants benefitting while some qualified applicants were rejected.

The case of Mimi provides further evidence in support of the above assertion. Mimi was a teenage mother of 17 years. She stopped schooling because according to her the parents could not afford to pay her fees. Mimi's father had a cocoa farm. According Mimi, she had obtained more than the average score required for consideration for the COCOBOD scholarship. The requirements were that the applicant's parent produced cocoa and the ward had obtained the required pass grade prior to the application. The parents applied for the COCOBOD scholarship twice but were denied on both occasions. The explanation given for the refusal according to Mimi was that the parents' farm was not producing enough to meet the required limit for consideration for the scholarship. This explanation in a way contravenes the claim that consideration for the scholarship is merit-based and ownership of a cocoa farm. Mimi claimed that she had been treated unfairly because she knew a family which did not own a cocoa farm, yet had secured a COCOBOD scholarship for the ward.

While Mini was unsuccessful with accessing scholarship, the parents did not make enough money from their farm to support her with her secondary schooling. This reveals the double poverty trap which cocoa farmers faced, as well as the effect of structural inefficiencies in the educational support policies of Ghana on dropout among teenage mothers. The assertion on corruption implies that farmers whose cocoa farms produced enough such that they were in a better position to take care of their wards were rather considered worthier for financial support. The issue of inaccessibility of financial support from the scholarship scheme is of significance because most of the farmers within the study community were small scale cocoa and cashew farmers who depended largely on the proceeds from their farms to earn a living.

On the otherhand, being a beneficiary of a scholarship program is found to improve the probability that the teenage mother would be in school. “The scholarship has helped me a lot. My parents would not have been able to pay for my fees, let alone other expenses. I do not think I would have been in school.” These were the words of Dede, a beneficiary of the government scholarship. Scholarships were found to relieve the parents of teenage mothers of financial difficulties which would have otherwise impeded schooling among these teenage mothers.

4.6 The Mesosystem

4.6.1 Teacher-student relationships’ effect on dropout and school persistence

Bronfenbrenner (1986) identifies the school and teachers as part of the elements within microsystem. The relationships existing among these elements represent the mesosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner, the child is in close contact with these elements, as a result of which her development is influenced largely by the existing relationships within these elements. Bearing similarity with the role by peers, the study reveals that a teacher-student relationship characterised by trust, support and respect could play the most significant role which would make the teenage mother stay in school.

My teacher likes me a lot. She has never insulted me in class. My head teacher told me that she was once a teenage mother but never gave up on her studies. It has paid off because she now has a secured job.

The above statements were the utterances of Osila who was in school. According to this informant, these were the most important reasons why she had gone back to school. The statements reveal some important roles which authorities within the school environment play. They may serve as role models to teenage mothers. Teacher-parent relationship or connection forms part of the mesosystem. Through this connection, the teacher can play a mediator role whereby she can contribute to improving the relationship between the teenage mother and her parents through effective communication and also by encouraging parents to be supportive towards their teenage daughters’ schooling. By building with the teenage mother a relationship which is trustworthy and characterised by respect, the teacher creates conducive social environment at school. This enhances the interest of the teenage mother in schooling.

On the other hand, the study revealed that sour relationships between teachers and teenage mothers, as well as poor attitudes and behaviours of teachers towards teenage mothers contributed to dropout among teenage mothers. Nandi, a teenage mother who had dropped out of school recounted how she dropped out due to a humiliating ordeal she passed through in the hands of her teacher. According to her, her teacher developed resentment towards her the moment he found out that she was pregnant. Sometimes she was subjected to corporal punishment for sleeping in class. She would have gone back to school if there was the opportunity to change school. She said:

My teacher used to like me but when I got pregnant he started treating me badly. Sometimes she insulted me, said I was a bad girl and that my classmates should not emulate me. I felt dejected. He (the teacher) never called me to answer a question in class even if I raised my hands, so I felt my presence was not needed in the class that is why I stopped.

Nandi's statements above reveal that teacher-student relationship has significance for schooling among teenage mothers. A link can also be found between teacher-teenage mother relationship and stigmatisation. Teacher-relationship can either enhance stigmatisation of the teenage mother, or reduce it. The teacher's role is important in that he can either create conducive social environment in the school thereby encouraging the teenage mother to feel comfortable, loved and become attached to the school, or vice versa. The teacher can also drive the process of dropout by creating a non-accommodating social environment such that the teenage mother gradually loses interest in schooling and becomes detached from the school. A good relationship built on respect and trust is necessary for the student to be able to approach the teacher and discuss issues on plans for schooling. Since this relationship often gets sour following teenage pregnancy, it is natural that the teenage mother abandons schooling as a way of protecting and preserving her dignity.

4.6.2 Parent-teacher relationships' effect on dropout and school persistence

The study also revealed that parent-teacher relationship could either contribute to dropout or school persistence among teenage mothers.

Sometimes my teacher comes to my house to speak with my parents on issues concerning how best they can support me through school. I realised that my parents became motivated to assist me in school because of the motivation they received from my class teacher.

My parents never attended a parent-teacher meeting when I was in school. They (teachers) complained and sent them invitation letters but they never honoured any of these invitations. At a point, I realised the teachers did not care about what I did in school anymore. I felt my parents too they did not care much about my education so they cannot be bothered now that I have dropped out of school.

The above statements were made by two teenage mothers, Ruth and Martha respectively. While Ruth was in school, Martha had dropped out. The statements reveal the role parent-teacher relationships played in the schooling of these teenage mothers. A close relationship between parents and teachers ensured that both worked together to ensure that the teenage mother stayed in school. On the other hand, a loose or poor parent-teacher relationship could contribute to creating a feeling of neglect among the teenage mothers and fuel the teenage mother's disconnection from the school.

4.6.3 Parent-peer relationships' effect on dropout and school persistence

None of my friends at school wishes to be in my company. That is why I cannot be at school. My mother warned my friends never to approach me again. She said they introduced me to boyfriends and that it was their fault that I got pregnant.

My parents like some of my friends I have made at school. Sometimes, my parents invite them home so as to know them better. They ask them a lot of questions on how we are coping with academic work. Due to this, my friends are always ready to offer me assistance with academic work.

The first statements were made by Martha who was a dropout, and the second by Osila who was in school. The relationship between the peers of the teenage mother and her family is revealed to be of significance to the teenage mother's decisions on schooling. Peers both at school and those within the neighbourhood of the teenage mother may foster a close relationship with teenage mother's parents or family, thereby strengthening social support for the teenage mother both at home and at school. On the other hand, parents may perceive peers of their teenage daughters as being of bad influence and shun them as a result. This could breed mistrust and create a less receptive environment for the teenage mother, especially when she is avoided by her peers.

4.7 The chronosystem

4.7.1 Influence of change in family structure and income on dropout and school persistence

The chronosystem is found to also impact on both school persistence and dropout among teenage mothers. The case of Dorky who had to stop schooling because her father died shortly before she gave birth is an example of how changes occurring within the family structure overtime can influence dropout among teenage mothers. She said,

My father was the bread winner who catered for our needs. After he died, my mother and siblings were compelled to relocate and settle permanently in our village so that they can take care of my father's cocoa farm over there. You know the cost of living there (in the village) is not as high as this town (the study town). Although they visit occasionally, it would be difficult for me to cater for my financial needs and that of my baby if I go to school, especially now that I am left behind in this town.

In the case of Doris, change in events within her family rather yielded a positive result and contributed to her persistence with schooling. Her mother who was a teacher of a school in a nearby town had recently been promoted at work from a pupil teacher to a qualified teacher after she completed a diploma in education program. This promotion suggested that her income would be adjusted upwards. According to Doris, the mother enrolled her baby in a day care few days after her promotion because she was certain that she could afford to pay for the expenses involved. Having been relieved of the time she would have otherwise spent at home with the baby, she went back to school.

The two cases presented above reveal that change in family structure such as that caused by death and job loss can reduce the size of family income and affect available support for the teenage mother's schooling. In this case, dropout is a more likely outcome. A reduction in family income can also necessitate family relocation as a coping strategy. This would then have a negative effect on the availability of family support to the teenage mother. On the other hand, an upward adjustment in parental income which could be the result of a promotion at work for instance can improve the capacity of parents to offer financial support to their teenage daughters and their babies. In this case, the teenage mother would have a better opportunity to continue schooling.

4.8 Other coping strategies adopted by teenage mothers in school

The study revealed that the teenage mothers in school had a willingness to adapt to the new challenges accompanied by the status of being a young mother. They were confident that these challenges could be overcome if they took the initiative to seek support and had a strong sense of purpose to achieve. Resonating with the study by McDermott and Graham (2005, p. 73) the study found that teenage mothers in school developed resilient mothering practices in the face of poor and limiting socio-economic environments, adopting diverse coping strategies to reach their goals of being in school. Below I present the coping strategies revealed by the study.

4.8.1 Seeking help with childcare as a strategy for coping with restrictive school policies

To be able to persist with schooling, there was the need for care for the teenage mother's baby since school conditions and rules did not support teenage mothers taking their babies along to school. This study found the practice whereby teenage mothers sought help with childcare as an important strategy which contributed to keeping teenage mothers in school.

I sought the help of a neighbour in taking care of my baby when I decided to go to school. She sells in the market but she agreed to take my baby along with her and takes care of her until I am back from school. I am very grateful for her help.

My pastor's wife works as a teacher in a day-care centre. I approached her and told her I wanted to enrol my baby but did not have money to pay for it. She agreed to pay half of the amount for me so I pay the rest. I pay with the proceeds from my petty trading.

The above statements were respectively made by Juma and Akyaa, two teenage mothers in school. These statements reveal that although these teenage mothers who were determined to be in school encountered the challenges faced by unconducive school environment and restrictive school policies they took a conscious effort by approaching others outside their immediate families for assistance. This reveals the importance that the teenage mother makes an active effort to seek support and also draw on social support networks outside her immediate family.

4.8.2 Engaging in income generating activities

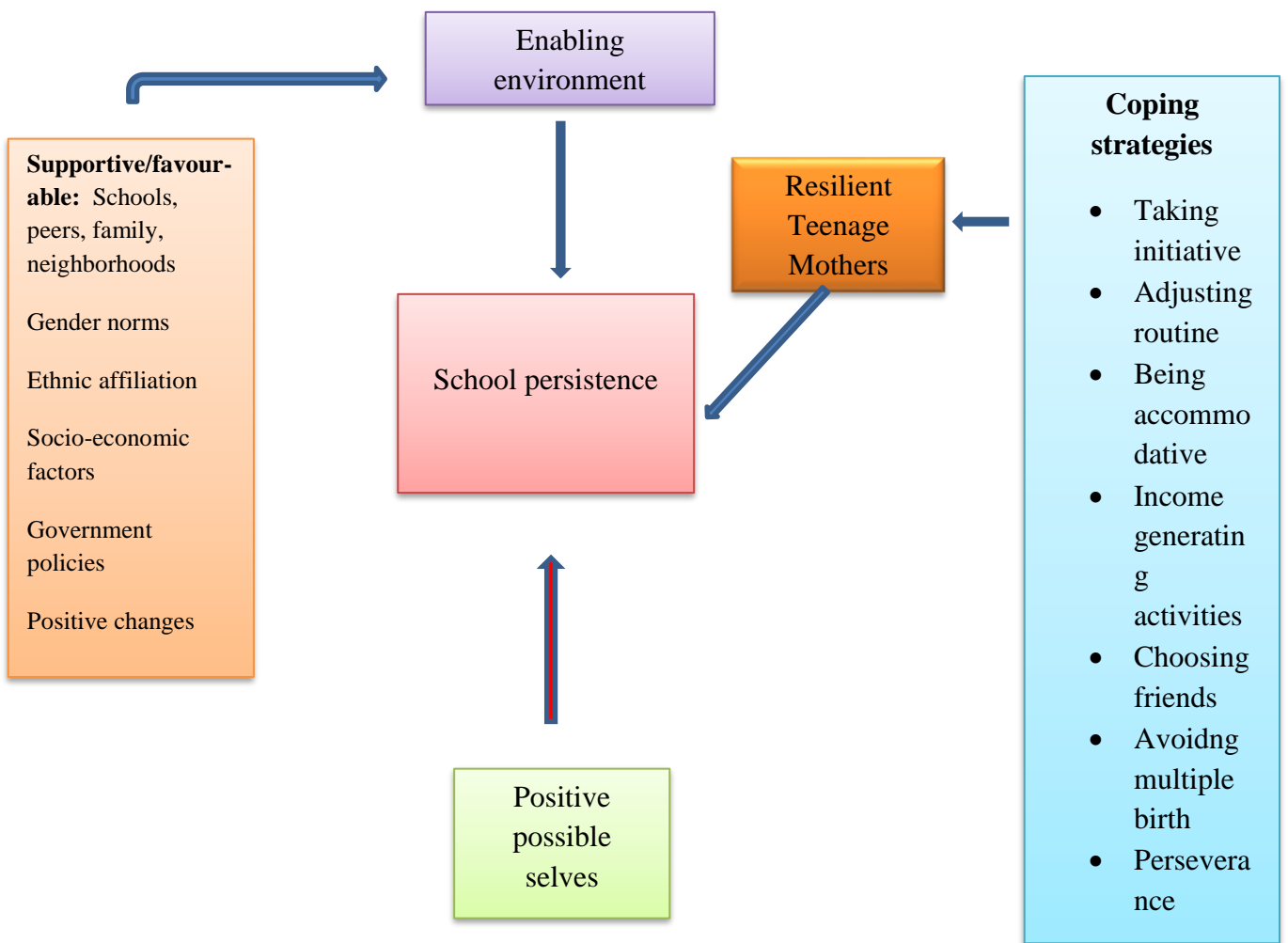
In Ghana, the absence of formal financial child support policies shifts the responsibility for childcare to the immediate parents and the extended family in general, thereby making the role

of the teenage mother's parents pivotal for schooling of teenage mothers. Where parents and family members were unwilling or unable to provide support for schooling, resilient teenage mothers were found to have adopted strategies for income-generation to support themselves.

I make these coconut toffees to sell at school. I sell during break periods so that I do not go against the rule which forbids students from selling on campus. The students buy a lot. In this way, I get some money to buy porridge when I come to school.

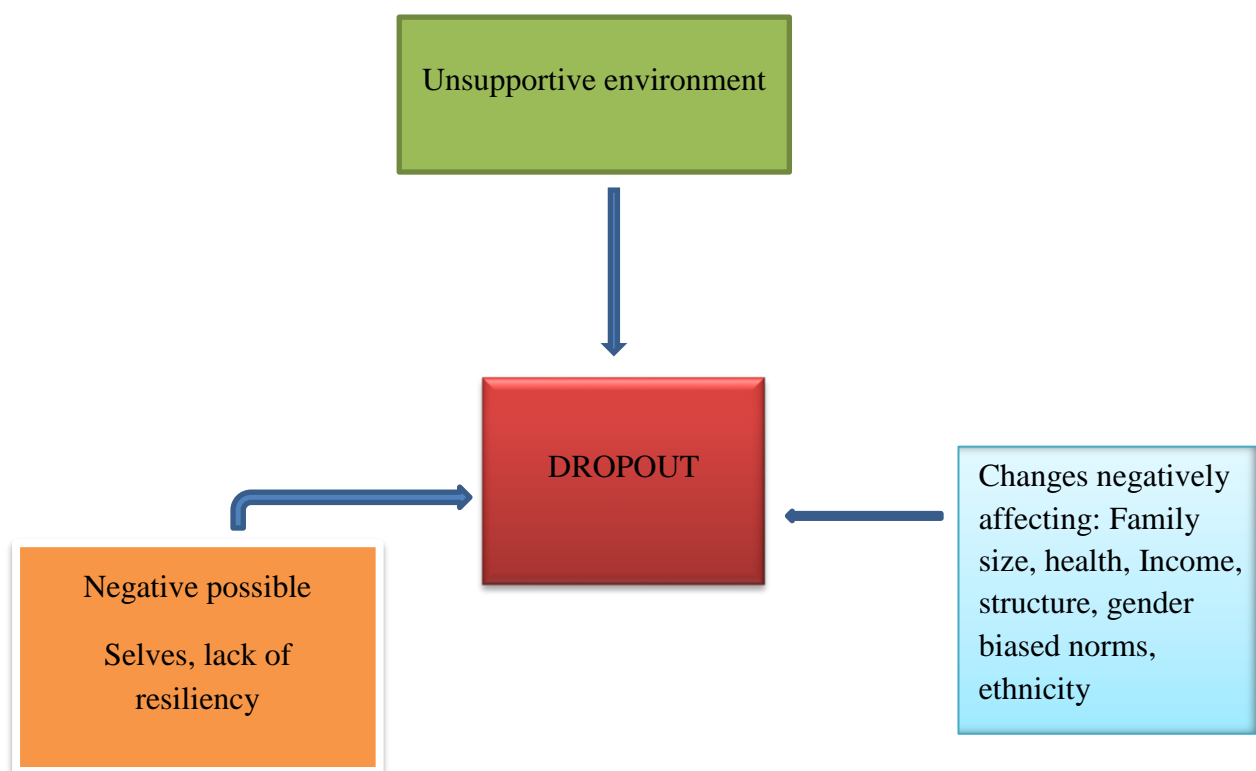
My mother has a refrigerator which we use to make ice cubes. I sell iced water and iced cubes every market day after school. It is not bad. At least the little money I earn is used to buy some books.

The above statements were made by Osila and Bema who were teenage mothers in school. Engaging in petty trading was one identified strategy which some teenage mothers in school adopted to accrue income with which they could cater for themselves in school. The teenage mother could trade independently, that is make the money for herself, or assist her caretaker or parents in their business so that they get support from them. Common petty trading teenage mothers engaged in ranged from street vending, selling in the market and at school. For some teenage mothers combining trade with school meant that they skipped school on every market day. Those who traded after school often left school either before the usual closing time, or opted for shift sessions where they could close in the afternoon or begin classes in the afternoon.



4.8.3 Figure 5: A model explaining school persistence among teenage mothers

Source: Author's construct



4.8.4 Figure 6: A model explaining school dropout among teenage mothers

Source: Author's construct

4.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have discussed factors which contribute to dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers. I have used the three theories presented to analyze the findings of the data gathered from the informants. The accounts of the teenage mothers revealed the interplay of interrelated issues touching on the possible self of the teenage mother, her social environment, political and cultural structures. Understanding why the teenage mother drops out of school, return to school or persist with schooling requires a comprehensive examination of these interrelationship between aspects of the teenage mother's possible self, her environment, the active institutions and agents within this environment and how they contribute to shaping her decisions about schooling. It is revealed that teenage mothers in school were those who dwelled in an enabling environment, had positive possible selves and adopted

strategies which made them resilient to the challenges that could fuel dropout. On the other hand, teenage mothers out of school were those whose environment presented challenges which they were insufficiently equipped to overcome. Such an environment also fuelled the formation of negative possible selves and a decline in the interest for schooling among these teenage mothers.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study have revealed several issues which need to be taken into consideration in discussions on teenage motherhood and schooling. It was found that individual differences, thus the personal attributes of the teenager and the elements of her environment interact to produce results which would either strengthen the teenage mother's level of resiliency to remain in school or otherwise. Having identified the contributing factors of dropout and school persistence among teenage mothers, I turn to a discussion of how these factors interact and what effect they could possibly have on the teenage mother's school.

As revealed by the study, the individual's possible self is modified by motherhood and this affects decision-making about schooling and career aspirations. The effect on schooling becomes significant especially in cases where those career aspirations are linked to the level of educational attainment. The stronger the link between a teenage mother's aspired career and educational attainment, the more likely she would be willing to continue schooling and vice versa. In other words, a teenage mother with reoriented possible self who perceives higher educational attainment would be more willing to take on the challenges associated with teenage motherhood, adopt strategies which would make her resilient to dropout and continue with schooling. The same can be said of the teenage mother who perceives schooling as an avenue for attaining a higher social status, overcoming stigmatization, providing a brighter future for her baby and regaining respect in the future. The attraction of teenage mothers to careers requiring lesser years of educational attainment such as petty trading has a strong correlation with dropout.

Another finding from this study is that unpleasant past experiences related to teenage pregnancy such as stigmatization may not necessarily lead to dropout among all teenage mothers in all cases as reviewed in the studies in South Africa by Bhana et al. (2010) and Marteleto & Ranchhod (2008). What could be more important to the decisions about schooling as revealed in this study could be what perceptions teenage mothers hold about schooling, to what extent individual teenage mothers are determined to cope or overcome the challenge of stigmatization and how available the resources for coping are. For instance, a teenage mother who perceives a positive link between schooling, attainment of higher education and rising social status is more likely to persist with schooling than one who finds no such associations. To be able to cope or overcome stigmatization, she could adopt strategies such as choosing friends who motivate her, or seek the support of people outside her family. It can therefore be

argued that the decision to persist with schooling or drop out can be made consciously by the teenage mother although environmental factors might be unfavourable.

In addition, the study revealed that teenage mothers' desire to overcome fear could either lead to persistence with schooling or dropout depending on what those fears are. An understanding of what constitutes the future fears of the teenage mother, what causes these fears and how they intend to overcome these fears have significant influence on their decisions about schooling. Are the fears avoidable by staying away from school or being in school? Do peers and teachers contribute to raising these fears in them? Teenage mothers are more likely to stay out of school when their fears are confined to the school since such a situation would make staying out of school an approach to overcoming those fears. The teenage mother who perceives schooling as an approach to overcoming an unwanted pregnancy in the future would be more willing to be in school compared to one who has no such perceptions.

Furthermore, the ecological setting of the teenage mother and her possible selves have reciprocal effects which influence schooling. The family contributes to shaping and reshaping the teenage mother's possible self through several ways. A peaceful coexistence between the family and the teenage mother and support from the family builds a positive possible self which could be the major source of motivation for the teenage mother to be in school. Family support is of important consideration especially where there is need for assistance for care for the teenage mother's baby such that she can be in school. Having said this, it is equally important to mention that family socio-economic factors relating to household's income level, household size, the level of education of its members, health of its members, career of parents, and cultural practices and beliefs have significant influence on the willingness to offer family support, prioritization with regards to resource allocation, and the extent of support that can be offered to the teenage mothers.

Family income is likely to be higher where both parents of the teenage mother have higher educational attainment, are in regular paid jobs, have stable sources of income, and the teenage mother has fewer siblings, and fewer number of dependents. The level of educational attainment of the teenage mother's parents is equally significant with regards to willingness to offer family support towards education. This suggests that teenage mothers who have parents with higher educational attainments than their daughters would be more willing to offer support for schooling than those who have lower educational attainments. In some cases, family members such as parents and siblings serve as motivation for schooling or dropout among

teenage mothers. As identified in the findings, parents in informal businesses may *pull their teenage daughters* along into apprenticeship with the purpose of taking over those businesses in future, in which case the teenage mother is likely to abandon school. On the contrary, siblings in school and parents employed in formal jobs linked to higher educational attainments could be role models who motivate teenage mothers to be in school. The study has revealed that the likelihood that the teenage mother would be in school decreases with increasing number of births, and multiple births is a likelihood where the teenage mother is forced to move into her boyfriend's home. Having one child makes a difference from having two, three or more. As revealed in the study, support received by the teenage mother for child care often decreases with rising number of births. This is expected because increasing number of dependents weighs on the size of family resources especially among low-income families. Structural changes that have negative effects on family income such as job loss, illness and death of the breadwinner could also decrease the chances that the teenage mother would be in school.

The study revealed that teenage mothers who obtain the support of their babies' fathers are more likely to be in school compared those who were abandoned by the supposed to be fathers of their babies. Having found that the support obtained from teenage fathers could play a vital role in the schooling of teenage mothers, it important to stress that the extent and form of support could be more significant. Thus, support that is linked to providing for the financial upkeep of the baby and the teenage mother for instance may not be enough to ensure that the teenage mother goes to school unless such a support relieves the teenage mother of the time which would be required for babysitting for instance by providing day care service for the baby, or seeking the help of other family members in this regard. In other words, unless the family support offered relieves the teenage mother of the stress of child care while making time for her schooling, it will have little or no effect on her possibility to be in school.

While family support is commended, it is revealed that the cultural orientation of the family of the teenage mother and cultural attributes such as gender discriminatory practices have consequences on schooling among teenage mothers. Affiliation to a group with common culture and beliefs can put the teenage mother either in an advantageous or a disadvantageous position with regards to the possibility to be in school depending on how the group perceives female education. Belonging to a family where female education is extolled just like that for males, and a family that gives equal opportunities for development to all its members serves as a supportive environment for the teenage mother to be in school. This suggests that although resources to support the teenage mother through schooling may be available, the decisions

about how the resources are allocated and what they should be allocated for are influenced by cultural orientation of the immediate family to which the teenage mother belongs. It can therefore be argued that the attributes and culture of a group that the teenage mother is affiliated to has more significance to her schooling than mere affiliation. In addition perceptions that the teenage mother is overaged for a particular grade in school is found to discourage schooling among teenage mothers. This could be linked to the change of status from childhood to adulthood that is associated with motherhood.

Not only does the family influence dropout and schooling decisions but also the school itself. The school can either be receptive to the teenage mother or fuel her disconnection from the school. Of significance is the role of teachers and peers. As identified in the findings, teacher-student relationship may get sour when the teenage mother becomes pregnant because of the culture of stigmatization and unacceptance for teenage pregnancy and motherhood. In cases where the teenage mother does not find a supportive social environment in her school, she is either compelled to drop out or cope with the stigma if she decides to continue schooling. The school's social environment is found to extend beyond the school in that it can improve or worsen teenage mother-family relationship, peer-teenage mother relationship, peer-family relationship and acceptance within the community in which the teenage mother lives. As identified in the findings, teachers and peers who develop good relationships with teenage mothers in school can encourage parents to throw their support behind the schooling of these teenage mothers. In such a case, teachers contribute to creating a supportive social environment also at the home for the teenage mother.

Unlike metropolitan cities and bigger towns where peers in school could be residing further away from one another, smaller towns like the study town make possible easy recognition among peers both at school and in the community as a whole. Space could therefore be of significance and carry meaning for the extent of influence and interaction between the teenage mother's social environment both at school and within her community. The implication is that support and motivation of peers at school can extend also beyond the confines of the school's social environment and into the teenage mother's community as a whole. This further suggests that the home, the school and the community interact to influence dropout or persistence with schooling among teenage mothers.

When school rules and regulations lead to consequences which are unbearable for teenage mothers, they may be compelled to drop out although they might have had an initial will to

remain in school. Restrictive school policies such as those banning breastfeeding, and those that disregard or do not make provisions for accommodating the special needs of students who have babies are disincentives for schooling. Once again, the role distance plays on dropout and persistence with schooling is evident. As revealed, the absence of a secondary school in the study area poses a greater challenge to teenage mothers who hail in the study community and desire to further their education at the secondary level. Not only do these teenage mothers require enough funding to cover boarding and tuition fees at the secondary school, but also it becomes necessary that they prepare themselves and accept to be physically and emotionally detached from their babies if they want to continue schooling. The inability of the teenage mother to meet both of these financial and emotional requirement would mean that she stays out of school.

Discriminatory practices against pregnant teenagers at school are found to have lasting effects on them and contribute to their decisions to stay out of school after they have given birth. The practice of disallowing pregnant teenagers from writing examinations inflicts a feeling of humiliation on these students and holds back potential students from enrolling or continuing with schooling as identified in the finding. This suggests that school practice have direct consequences for the teenage mothers' schooling, especially where their geography limits their ability to make choices with regards to school selection.

The study has also revealed lapses in the educational policies of the Ghana Government as reinforcing discriminatory practices and contributing to dropout among teenage mothers. Firstly, there is a lack of a policy guideline on how teenage mothers should be reintegrated into the formal school system. Discriminatory school practices against pregnant teenagers are not endorsed by the GES, yet there is no guideline on how these practices can be curtailed. In addition, perpetrators are hardly brought to book and the teenagers who fall victims as well as potential victims choose the escape route of staying out of school. While teenage mothers have needs which could be different from that of all other teenage girls, the approach to promoting girls' education in the country is a *one-size-fits all girls' approach* which does not take into account the differing needs and challenges of the different categories of girls out of school. This reveals inefficiencies in the government's policies aimed at promoting girls' education.

Another finding is the issue of corruption in the existing Government and COCOBOD Scholarship Schemes which were instituted to promote the education of wards of cocoa farmers. This study has revealed inefficiencies in the targeting approach used. The approach

results in a situation whereby low-income small-scale farmers who have the least ability to pay for the fees of their wards in the secondary schools miss out on the benefits. It can therefore be argued that these schemes are not serving the purposes for which they were introduced for. The study has revealed other areas for further studies. The impacts of teenage fatherhood on teenage mother's schooling is a potential area for further research. Besides, a study into the interventions that work best to promote education among teenage mothers and policies that can improve the ecological settings for teenage mothers are also other areas that merit further research.

5.1 Recommendations and conclusion

The study has revealed that the issue of dropout among teenage mothers can be understood through a thorough examination of the possible self of the teenage mother, the elements of her environment and their effects on her personal development, as well as the teenage mother's level of resiliency. This suggests that interventions seeking to promote school persistence among teenage mothers ought to be multifaceted, inter-sectoral, and comprehensive such that they address the various issues surrounding the problem of dropout. These interventions should focus on improving the elements within the teenage mother's environment and aim also at nurturing the teenage mother to develop a positive possible self. An improved environment and a positive possible self would reduce the stressors within the teenage mother's environment and boost her level of resiliency. These would enhance the teenage mother's ability to persist with schooling. Below, I make recommendations which can contribute to mitigating dropout among teenage mothers.

There is a saying that prevention is better than cure. First and foremost, tackling teenage pregnancy would be the surest and most effective antidote to mitigating dropout among teenage mothers. This is because teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood are in themselves causes of dropout. Strategies to combat teenage pregnancy should incorporate education on abstinence, safe-sex practices and should target both teenage boys and girls. There is also the need for sensitization of teenagers about the challenges that early parenthood pose to their schooling. In addressing teenage pregnancy, it is also imperative that parents, teachers, opinion leaders, churches and other agents of socialization are drawn into the arena to contribute their opinions on which interventions to introduce and how best they should be introduced.

Empowering parents economically to effectively discharge their parental responsibilities towards their children is another way by which the problem of financial constraints which lure teenagers into early pregnancy can be avoided. As revealed in the study, the events within the macro and mesosystems which affect socio-economic conditions such as job availability and income levels of parents indirectly affect the teenage mothers' development and chances of schooling. To this regard, the government can assist parents by implementing policies which would boost the finances of parents. This can include policies geared towards creating better opportunities for employment such that they would be able to discharge their responsibilities towards their teenage daughters, or meet the additional cost of care for their teenage daughters who become parents. To ensure that policies meant to relief parents of the financial burden for schooling of their kids achieve desired results, it is important that effective targeting is done. For instance the COCOBOD scholarship scheme can incorporate targeting of specific vulnerable groups such as teenage mothers from low-income families. The Scheme should also be extended to cover teenage mothers who are enrolled in the basic private schools. The existing selection criteria based on merit and restricted to students enrolled in public secondary schools leads to a significant number of children from low-income families missing out on the scheme. In addition, scholarships as an intervention for promoting schooling is unable to serve its purpose unless structural inefficiencies and corruption which prevents qualified students from benefiting are curbed.

As revealed in the studies by Samantha (2013), child support grants and re-entry policies introduced respectively in South Africa and Kenya have had desirable impacts on the enrollment and retention of teenage mothers. Evidence from Brazil, Malawi and Botswana show that conditional cash transfers to the families of girls for the purpose of school attendance have positive impacts (Camfed, 2010). In addition to child support grants, the study by Bhana et al. (2008) provide evidence to the potential benefits of the provision of affordable day care services at convenient locations to the children of teenage mothers. The government of Ghana can therefore adopt these policies since they could yield similar results. Besides, the formation of social support groups such as girls' clubs for teenage mothers can help serve as an arena where females who have had the experience of teenage motherhood but made it through higher education can encourage other teenage mothers to continue schooling. This would enhance self-assertiveness and impact positively on attitudes. Such groups would not only present teenage mothers with role models who would enhance their interest for schooling, but also serve as a network of a group with similar life experiences and a forum where teenage mothers

can share useful experiences which have benefits for overcoming the challenges of teenage motherhood and schooling.

Furthermore, there is the need to create a conducive social and physical school environment where the teenage mothers would feel wanted, cared for and loved. The offer of counselling services for teenage mothers in school could help to reveal what issues are important for this group of students. Addressing these issues would help to enhance and sustain their interest in schooling. School infrastructure should be designed to accommodate the needs of student-mothers. In addition, school rules and practices ought to be flexible enough to make provisions for the needs of students who have children. As revealed in the study, applying the same set of school rules and regulations to all persons or students would not be in the interest of teenage mothers. In addition, teachers have a role to play in the creation of a conducive social environment at the school. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to develop good relationships with their students who become pregnant or return to school after birth. They should also be sensitized about the effects poor student-teacher relationship have on the schooling of these students. It is also important that teachers facilitate the creation of a receptive social environment where teenage mothers would be supported academically and also relate well with their peers. In other words, teachers should be made vital agents for curbing stigmatization of teenage mothers in school. Teachers who conduct discretionary and discriminatory practices such as exempting pregnant students from examinations should be punished so that it serves as a deterrent to others. Efforts should be stepped up to abolish corporal punishments in schools.

Moreover, efforts should be made to reduce or eliminate the travel cost teenage mothers incur in accessing schools. Providing transportation allowances for those who live afar or bicycles to ease the means of transportation is one alternative. Another alternative is to construct new schools in areas with limited accessibility such as the rural areas. In this regard, areas which do not have secondary schools for example should be provided with one so as to eliminate the cost which students would have to incur should they travel to other areas. Community schools with female teachers have been found to have positive effects on the enrollment and retention of girls (Camfed, 2012). This model if adopted in the Ghanaian context could also produce similar effects. As revealed in the study by Vincent (2013), alternative schools designed to meet the needs of teenage mothers can produce the positive outcome of encouraging persistence with schooling. Such a school which specifically targets teenage mothers would limit stigmatization confined to the school as students can easily identify themselves with one

another, share their thoughts and experiences, learn from one another's experiences and feel comfortable at school. These schools should also incorporate day care services at accessible and affordable prices for the children of teenage mothers so that their utilization can be maximized.

Community engagement and sensitization is another way by which girls' education can be promoted. Activities which can be carried out include sensitization workshops with parents and community leaders on gender equity and child protection, and the engagement of traditional leaders on strategies to change traditional norms and practices that are gender-biased. Incorporating the churches and other civil society organizations into the pool of inter-sectoral and inter-professional collaborations is another intervention which could also help to promote schooling among teenage mothers. The study has revealed the importance of the church in providing support for schooling among teenage mothers. It is therefore important that the approach used to curtailing the problem of dropout among teenage mothers is not limited to government's efforts only, but rather incorporates relevant civil societies and non-governmental organizations. While some already existing non-governmental-organizations are contributing in this field, it is evident in this study that their presence is not felt in some of the smaller towns like the study town where the problem could be rife. Besides, their services are much limited. I therefore recommend a scaling up of these efforts to the deprived areas within the country. Moreover, communities should be engaged actively in the management and financing and reforms affecting schools should be made in consultation with the local community members.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

With this interview guide, I kindly request you to take part in an interview on the research topic “a comparative study of school persistence and dropout among teenage mothers.” Feel free to ask for clarification and further explanation on any question you are unclear about. The information you provide would be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

General questions

Daily life and experiences

1. Tell me about yourself. (age, number of siblings, number of children, level of education, etc)
2. How would you describe your typical day?
3. What are your experiences with schooling?
 - a. school attendance
 - b. studies
 - c. academic performance
 - d. peers
 - e. Teachers
4. How and why did you become a mother?

Teenage mothers in school

1. Why have you remained /returned to school after giving birth
2. How does it feel to be a student before and after motherhood?
3. How do you feel being a young mother in your community?
4. What would you say are your best experiences in school?

5. Tell me about your unwanted experiences in school.
6. How do you cope with them?
7. How would you compare yourself with other teenage mothers who dropped out?

Goals and motivating factors for schooling

Individual factors

1. Many teenage mothers drop out, why are you in school?
2. What are views about education?
 - a. What are your future aspirations?
 - b. How long do you think you can be in school?
 - c. What role do you think education will play in your life?
 - d. What will make continue to stay in school?
 - e. What will make you drop out?
 - f. Why have you chosen your school?
3. In what ways are your views about family life and schooling similar or different from those of your friends?

Contextual factors

4. Describe the conditions in your school.
5. Tell me about accessibility to school in your community.
6. How dynamic has accessibility to school in your community been over the years?
7. What do you know about school rules and practices affecting pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers?

8. What are your opinions about these practices and rules and how have they influenced your decisions to be in school?
9. In what similar and differing ways do the rules and practices in your school affect teenage mothers and other group of students?
10. What will make you continue to stay in school or drop out?
5. What do you know about pregnancy?
 - a. causes and prevention

General questions

Attitudes and behaviors

1. Tell me about your relationship with teachers and peers in your school before pregnancy and now.
2. Describe the attitudes and behaviors of adults within your community towards you before and after pregnancy.
3. What are your expectations from the above mentioned (1, 2) people and what is the relationship between these expectations and their attitudes towards you?
4. To what extent has motherhood influenced your behavior and attitudes.
5. How do you perceive yourself?
6. Tell me about how you associate with your peers who have children, as well as those who have not given birth.

Social context and social change

1. Who should take responsibilities for teenage pregnancy and the teenage mother?
2. What in your opinion are the general norms surrounding teenage pregnancy, teenage motherhood and schooling and how have they changed over the years?

3. How has motherhood affected your position and responsibilities at home?
4. How is your relationship with your parents and the rest of your family relatives?
5. How should parents be involved in their daughters' education?
6. Tell me about your parents' responsibility towards you before and after you gave birth.

Teenage mothers in school

Coping strategies for school persistence

How do you finance your schooling?

- a. What economic assets and resources do you have and to what extent do these meet your needs?
 - b. How is your relationship with your parents and child's father?
 - c. How are these people (b) involved in your schooling?
1. How do you combine schooling with taking care of your child/children?
 - a. What are your responsibilities towards your child/children?
 - b. In what ways are these responsibilities being met or unmet?
 2. In what ways have you been involved with external pro-girls' education organizations?
 3. In your view, what should be done to motivate teenage mothers to be in school?

Teenage mothers out of school

Individual factors

1. Why have you dropped out of school?
2. What are views about education?
3. What are your future aspirations?

4. What are your future intentions about schooling?
5. What role do you think education will play in your life?
6. What will make you go back to school?
7. In what ways are your views about family life and schooling similar or different from those of your friends?

Contextual factors

8. Describe the conditions at home.
9. Tell me about your typical day.
10. How dynamic has accessibility to school in your community been over the years?
11. What do you know about school rules and practices affecting pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers?
12. What are your opinions about these practices and rules and in what ways have they influenced your decisions to drop out?
13. In what similar and differing ways do the rules and practices in your school affect teenage mothers and other group of students?
14. What do you know about pregnancy?
 - b. causes and prevention

Appendix B

Informant (anonymous)	Age	Status	No. of children	No. of siblings	Ethnic affiliation
Adisa	14	In school	1	2	Gonja
Kukua	15	In school	1	1	Brong
Lydia	16	Dropout	1	3	Brong
Afia	17	Dropout	1	3	Brong
Abena	19	In school	2	2	Brong
Lucy	17	Dropout	1	3	Brong
Asibi	17	Dropout	2	2	Mossi
Joyce	16	In school	1	2	Brong
Cynthia	19	In school	2	2	Asante
Nancy	17	Dropout	1	1	Brong
Juma	16	In school	1	1	Gonja
Akyaa	16	In school	1	2	Brong
Linda	17	In school	1	2	Brong
Akosua	16	In school	1	2	Brong
Jamila	16	Dropout	1	3	Dagarti
Amina	16	Dropout	1	4	Mossi
Fatma	17	In school	1	3	Mossi
Frema	16	In school	1	2	Mossi
Lucy	17	Dropout	1	2	Asante
Mimi	17	Dropout	1	2	Fante
Dede	15	In school	1	2	Krobo
Osila	16	In school	1	3	Dagarti
Bema	16	In school	1	2	Brong
Nandi	15	Dropout	1	4	Brong
Martha	16	Dropout	1	3	Brong
Dorky	17	Dropout	1	3	Brong
Doris	16	In school	1	2	Brong

Appendix C

UiO: Department of Education
University of Oslo

To whom it may concern

Date: 22.09.2016

Your ref.:

Our ref.: Camilla.bakke@iped.uio.no

Letter of Support for conducting field work

I hereby confirm that Felicia Asomani, born 14th of April 1986, is a full-time student in the Master of Philosophy in Comparative and International Education master programme at the Department of Education at the University of Oslo.

In the second year our students are required to write a Master Thesis of 80 to 120 pages. The fieldwork will primarily include interviews with students and underage teenagers (14-18 years). The type of data gathered should of course be discussed with the relevant authorities. It is our hope that the work produced by this student will not only benefit her in her academic career but also be of use in the future

Ms. Asomani is planning to do her fieldwork in Mayera, Ghana during the period 25th of September until 18th of October 2016. During this time she will be collecting data for her master thesis. She will be in communication with a supervisor to help guide her during field work.

We kindly ask you to give her all possible assistance during her fieldwork.

Best regards


Camilla Bakke

Senior Executive Officer
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