A magnifying glass and a fine-tooth comb: understanding girls’ and young women’s sexual vulnerability

Mzikazi Nduna
Series Editor: Christi Kruger
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2020

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Foreword

I first heard Prof. Nduna speak at an HSRC seminar on fatherhood in South Africa. I was struck by how many assumptions she challenged about the nature of fatherhood, including my own beliefs. We then worked together on planning for a South African national AIDS conference. As track chair she brought the same scepticism and challenging of taken-for-granted beliefs to the construction of the track, with fascinating results.

In this monograph many of our tried-and-untested beliefs about young people, gender, sex and sexuality are challenged. Running through this monograph is a critique of what it means to keep young girls ‘safe’ and what they are being kept ‘safe’ from. Is it from not finishing school, from the lure of consumerism, from the dangers of sex and sexual experience, from older men or even from the restrictive ways in which young women are socialised and taught to behave in the links of discipline between the family, churches and schools?

This work was first presented by Prof. Nduna to NGO representatives who met for a partner forum in Zimbabwe under the auspices of the CSA&G. Almost all forum participants grappled with these issues: how does the modern world affect young women, and how does modernity clash with some of the more difficult parts of our shared histories? Colonialism, racism, apartheid, culture, faith and belief are all deep undercurrents in our society. As she shows, we need to be thorough in assessing the competing threads that make up the tapestry of young people’s lives. We require a magnifying glass and a fine-tooth...
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comb to see how stitches are made and where the tangles are, and we need to distinguish reality from fiction.

How do we understand how reality is glossed over by the fictions about how young women should and could behave? How do the fictions that have arisen around culture and beliefs affect how young women navigate their lives?

With critical scepticism Prof. Nduna questions assumptions about the delay of sexual gratification, the need to delay consumption, transactional sex, romantic constraint, and the tension between public and private spaces. She interrogates whether or not keeping young girls in school offers any real educational benefit. She allows us to rethink sexual risk and vulnerability, and transgenerational issues, and to reconsider how over years we have described, identified, infantilised and marginalised young women through a narrative that calls for protection, security, safety, control, and a reduction of risk and pleasure.

While it is imperative that young women are safe in all aspects of society and have full equality, this monographs questions how best to understand what young women need, and how we categorise and describe them. It suggests a new critical way of understanding the lives and ambitions of the young women whose lives we apparently wish to control so firmly.

Mary Crewe
Director: Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender
University of Pretoria

Preface

Research with regard to the sexuality of adolescent girls and young women continues to suggest new approaches for understanding the sexual risks experienced by girls and young women in Southern Africa. Whilst this knowledge base reveals that young women’s life conditions and experiences are sub-optimal, some sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) interventions are designed and delivered with unchecked assumptions. This monograph addresses some of the assumptions underpinning adolescent girls’ and young women’s vulnerability that could be considered when designing and delivering SRHR interventions. The discussion first looks back to historical eras that contributed to current gender inequalities in Southern Africa. This history locates women’s sexual vulnerability in the context of failed capitalist economies, tailor-made education systems and religious and moral influences that inform women’s lived realities of gender and racial inequality. The main discussion introduces and examines five assumptions that appear to underpin sequential model interventions aimed at protecting adolescent girls and young women (AG&YW) against negative outcomes such as early and unwanted pregnancy and HIV infection. The discussion concludes with an invitation to the reader to examine interventions with a fine-tooth comb, to reveal and interrogate underlying assumptions, and to intervene at the level of root causes of the problems that adolescents and young women face. The monograph should be useful for researchers, interventionists, policymakers and funders of SRHR interventions.

Prof. Mzikazi Nduna
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mary Crewe for believing in me and suggesting that I write this debut monograph. Mary’s invitation to write this piece followed a series of meetings and workshops that gave birth to the title of this work. I would also like to acknowledge all those who I have had the honour of working with in various professional engagements. I especially thank Melanie Pleaner, Linda Richter, Rachel Jewkes and Deborah Ewing for gently introducing me to various aspects of this work.

I thank my colleagues and collaborators at the Perinatal HIV Research Unit; the AIDS Foundation of South Africa; Accountability International; the Africa Gender Institute; the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender; and the South African Judiciary Education Institute. Interactions with various communities across the length and breadth of Southern Africa through these, and other organisations that I could not mention, have helped shape ideas for this monograph.

Furthermore, I would like to thank all the research assistants, field workers and research participants with whom I have had the honour to work closely, and, in particular, Tidimalo Padi, Vuyani Pambo, Esmeralda Vilancous, Thandeka Prudence Mdletshe, Andile Mthombeni and Matamela Makongoza, for humbling me and from whom I learnt to be unassuming.

I would like to thank members of the Palesa Book Club for their engagement with and critical review of an earlier draft of this monograph. I am grateful to current and former members for your insights.

List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFSA</td>
<td>AIDS Foundation of South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>AG&amp;YW</td>
<td>Adolescent Girls and Young Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSA&amp;G</td>
<td>Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender</td>
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<td>GBV&amp;F</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence (including femicide)</td>
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<td>GYW</td>
<td>Girls and Young Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>IPV</td>
<td>Intimate Partner Violence</td>
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<td>KGS</td>
<td>Keeping Girls in School</td>
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<td>NEET</td>
<td>Not in Employment, Education or Training</td>
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<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
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<td>SRHR</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</td>
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<td>UAGs</td>
<td>Unmarried Adolescent Girls</td>
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<td>VAW</td>
<td>Violence Against Women</td>
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Definitions

adolescence: the period of time in a person’s life when they transition and develop into an adult.

African: belonging or relating to Africa or its people, especially black people from Africa.

black: the term black is used to describe persons who are perceived as dark-skinned compared to other populations. It is mostly used for the people of sub-Saharan African descent and the indigenous peoples of Oceania, South-East Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

cisgender: a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

colonialism: the policy or practice of acquiring partial or full political control of another country, including occupation of the country by imported settlers and economic exploitation.

demographic dividend: the growth in an economy that is the result of a change in the age structure of a country’s population

family: a group of people related by blood or marriage, or people sharing ancestors.

gender: the cultural and social construction of being a man or woman.

gender inequality: different value allocated to men and women because of their gender.

girl: a female child, especially one who is still at school.

heteronormative: denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.

modernisation: the process of adapting to modern needs or habits.

patriarchy: a social system in which men wield power and women are largely excluded from it.

sex: refers to the biological body, usually male or female.

sexual violence: sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence or coercion, acts to traffic a person or acts directed against a person’s sexuality.

sexual vulnerability: susceptible to being hurt or wounded sexually.

young women: females in early stages of life. Also see gender.

youth: a period of life when one is young, the state of being young.

youth bulge: when a country has a higher proportion of young people than of other age groups.
Chapter 1: Introduction – the context

For twenty-five years I have been involved in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). During these years I worked as an educator, trainer and researcher. From time to time I would recall earlier in my life how anxious my mother had been about me being at risk of teenage pregnancy. Her anxiety increased when I started high school. Her anxiety was shared by other mothers who raised girls in the township in Butterworth where I grew up. My mother had three children, all born within a marriage. However, this was not the norm in the township: other women, including my aunts, were single parents. Although single motherhood was the norm, adult women in my community regularly cautioned adolescent girls not to get pregnant before finishing school and certainly not before getting married. The two – education and marriage (without giving birth prior to marriage) – were presented as inseparable outcomes of good behaviour.

Three decades later, adolescent girls’ sexuality and reproductive choices remain topics of interest for families, schools, policy-makers, professionals and researchers alike (Cooper, De Lannoy, & Rule, 2015; Odimegwu & Mkwananzi, 2016; Wekwete, Rusakaniko, & Zimbizi, 2016). Adolescent girls are still chastised for falling pregnant. Since the late 1980s, girls are also warned about the risks of HIV infection.
This monograph reflects on some underlying assumptions behind SRHR interventions aimed at girls and young women for preventing early pregnancy and reducing the risk of HIV infection by encouraging ‘sequencing’.

This chapter begins the conversation by locating modern-day challenges regarding sexual and reproductive health prevention interventions for adolescent girls and young women in the historical contexts of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. This background includes discussion regarding government and economic systems that inform women’s value and vulnerability today.

Ten countries make up the southernmost region of sub-Saharan Africa: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. There are differences within and between these countries in terms of what a ‘child’ is permitted or not permitted to do. Across Southern Africa a person under the age of 18 years is regarded as a minor and generally assumed to be in school. The premise and modalities of interventions directed at bringing down the incidence of early pregnancy and reducing the risk of HIV acquisition promote ‘keeping girls in school’ so that they may sequence their needs; the monograph reflects on the assumptions behind these interventions. In 1997, more than two decades ago, when South Africa had experienced only three years post-democracy, about 47% of black women with children gave birth to their first child whilst still in school (Morrell, Bhana, & Shefer, 2012b). This provides evidence that early, out-of-wedlock and learner pregnancies are not a new phenomenon in Southern Africa. The term ‘out-of-wedlock’ is commonly used in this field, although we should be mindful that it normalises marriage, against evidence that marriage is a choice and that it is not normative in some societies, including South Africa. Recent research conducted in Zimbabwe suggests that about 17% of adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 years have ever been pregnant (Wekwete et al., 2016). Whilst some of these teenage pregnancies could have been prevented, there are reports that at the time of conception some teenagers desire a child, suggesting that pregnancy at a young age is not always unplanned (Wekwete et al., 2016). Alongside early sexual experience and pregnancy, communities value education as a “saviour and producer of good” for young women (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006, p. 203). The value of education is seen to extend beyond material benefits associated with employability, and to include opportunities to adopt modern values that are essential for coping in contemporary society.

Research involving adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexuality continues to advance the ways in which adolescent girls’ and young women’s choices, behaviours and experiences with regard to their sexuality are understood (Naved & Khan, 2019; Wekwete et al., 2016). This understanding confirms that social perceptions, attitudes and expectations regarding the behaviour of adolescent girls and young women remain gendered and influenced by patriarchal values. These gendered constructions of adolescent girls and young women persist, despite progressive 21st century changes in social and economic circumstances which have reshaped gender roles and practices. Shifts, even in Southern Africa, result in young women staying longer in the education system, after which they may enter the labour market and play a significant role in the community outside the home (see, Devey & Morrell, 2012a, p. 108; see, Wielenga, 2018b). These shifts are positive outcomes of gender equity advocacy work. However, prospects of advancing women are accompanied by the risk of sexual exploitation of some young women,
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sometimes as an integral component of their retention in school, or in the course of securing and retaining employment. This monograph weaves an exploration of how young women’s gendered identities and experiences allow them to benefit from these gender role shifts (or preclude them from benefitting).

This monograph uses a magnifying glass to examine concepts such as ‘choice’, ‘behaviour’ and ‘experience’ (Wekwete et al., 2016), which often (mis)inform assumptions made during interventions targeted at adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In using the concept of a magnifying glass, I mean looking closely at, and shining a spotlight on, aspects of these interventions that may have been taken for granted. The magnifying glass brings into focus the often-assumed agency or lack thereof that underlies interventions and that presume that choice is at the disposal of girls and young women. Once these assumptions are made apparent using a magnifying glass, I then suggest separating out each strand of the five assumptions with a fine-tooth comb.

Choice and behaviour are understood as self-directed and may be intentional or unintentional. However, as this monograph shows, not all risks and vulnerabilities that adolescent girls and young women face, at least in terms of sexual and reproductive ill health, and their experiences of sexual prejudice, stigma and violence, are a result of purported agency and volition (Musizvingoza & Wekwete, 2018). Given such an understanding, the reader is invited to examine the constructs of choice behaviour and experience with caution, lest adolescent girls and young women are unfairly blamed for poor outcomes involving sexual health with no attention paid to the dynamics of personal agency. This caution does not absolve adolescent girls

and young women of individual responsibility; however, individual agency is located and exercised within structural constraints borne of social, historical, cultural, economic and political contexts. The use of a fine-tooth comb allows an examination of each of the five assumptions that the magnifying glass brings to our attention, so as to explicate the influence of structural conditions.

In order to develop an understanding of Southern African adolescent girls’ and young women’s choices, behaviour and experiences, this monograph begins with historical references to slavery, the colonial experience, and, in the case of South Africa and Namibia, to apartheid. However, the attempt to historicise adolescent girls’ and young women’s context is constrained by the erasure of women’s narratives in his-story (Bradford, 1996). One of the important aspects that this historical context brings to the fore is that the limited agency of young black women predates the emancipation of slaves in the 19th century. Slavery exhibited features of racial and gender domination, in terms of which some girls and young women could not practise their sexuality freely owing to the shackles of their enslavement. During this time, Africans, including African females, endured gruesome humiliation at the hands of Europeans through a system that dislocated and displaced many (Noyoo, 2015). Sexual exploitation of slave women by slave masters is discussed in the limited history of slave women (Bradford, 1996). In Chapter 2 of her book entitled Rape: A South African Nightmare, Pumla Gqola (2015) describes the phenomenon of sexual violence in the context of slavery. Her account highlights several important points, including that the link between slavery and control exercised through sex was universally experienced by societies affected by slavery. Thus, an examination of adolescent girls’ and young women’s vulnerability to sexual violence as if it were a purely
modern phenomenon erases historical experiences that are critical in providing a trans-generational lens through which girls’ and women’s sexual vulnerability can be viewed. There is evidence that sexual values have changed over time. The horrific experiences of African women historically altered choices and behaviours of girls and young women and influenced outcomes for generations. For instance, in the early 1800s in South Africa, African women were conferred with an adult status following childbirth (rather than following marriage), suggesting that premarital sex was less problematised and pregnancy outside of marriage was permissible during that period (White, 1983).

Colonialism was a political system that dominated societies in Africa and other parts of the global South. Western European colonial states assumed administrative and bureaucratic control of African countries (Noyoo, 2015). The brutal colonial experience altered ways of life for people in the global South as its “main mission was to destroy all the existing indigenous forms of governance and knowledge systems” (Noyoo, 2015, p. 56). In agreement with Noyoo, Maldonado-Torres asserts that colonialism sought to kill the essence of being black through the introduction of Western modernity (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Some of the ways in which colonial laws and land dispossession changed people’s lives are captured in a recent discussion of women’s roles in the context of justice in Southern Africa (Wielenga, 2018b). Murumbadoro takes the reader down memory lane in her depiction of the arrival of the British settlers in Zimbabwe, the erosion of customary laws, land dispossession and the introduction of migrant wage labour (Murumbadoro, 2018). Writers in Women in the Context of Justice refer to various pieces of legislation introduced by colonial governments across the Southern African region to restrict ownership of land and property for natives, and, in particular, for black women (Bae, 2018). The introduction of colonial laws had a great impact on women, lowering their social status and limiting their access to justice, which is still reported many years later (Mungwari & Stofile, 2019). Land was taken from widows and given to traditional male authorities and the impact of such gender-biased treatment of women, and in particular of single unmarried women and widows, is reported in contemporary research (Mungwari & Stofile, 2019). Colonialism introduced laws to harmonise practice in the colonies with that in the colonial heartland in the global North. Under colonial rule, nuclear families were introduced to African society and patrifocal and patrilineal families became the norm. Women’s roles within and outside of the home shifted to the margins of society (Bae, Dahlmanns, Wielenga, & Matshaka, 2018; Eisenstadt, 1965; Shefer & Fouten, 2012). These changes had a lasting and negative impact on the position of girls and young women in society. It is against this backdrop that women function today, with ethnic practices modified and modernised through cultural imperialism (Bae et al., 2018; Eisenstadt, 1965; Shefer & Fouten, 2012). In the second of ten theses, Maldonado-Torres describes the dehumanising effect of colonialism and colonisation on African society. Such domination reproduced the inequalities that were a feature of slavery, resulting in what Maldonado-Torres refers to as the zone of being human (for whites) and the zone of being sub-human (for the colonised) (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Modernity was reflected in Africans’ adoption of their colonial masters’ culture and values. Yet Africans were not educated, and hence they were disempowered and were poorly equipped to completely embrace Western forms of modernity. Formal education was used to advance Western modernity. Therefore, the small numbers of girls and young women who passed through these educational systems emerged with modern Western values, and aspired to achieve modernity, as
introduced to them through education. Whilst colonialism coincided with Western modernisation, colonial rule was based on racism and did not acknowledge a need to educate Africans. Hence, for example, at Zambia’s attainment of independence in 1964, just over 100 Zambians were university graduates (Noyoo, 2015). As a legacy of racial education policies in South Africa, the 2011 General Household Survey reported that up to 88% of white and 83% of Indian youth achieved a matriculation pass, compared with just 44% of African learners (Spaull, 2015). White women had access to education prior to 1994, but were directed to enrol for subjects such as domestic science, so that they could become governesses or double up as home-helps (Driver, 1988). Spaull depicts the legacy of these historical practices in terms of racial and gender inequality in a description of how poorer black African children, who make up the majority in South Africa, “are starting behind and staying behind” (p. 36), and as a result make up the majority of the low-skilled labour force and of the unemployed (Spaull, 2015). And yet today formal education is utilised as the basis of sexual and reproductive health and rights sequencing interventions.

Apartheid supported the capitalist economic system, and enforced racism, racial segregation, patriarchy and sexism in South Africa and Namibia. Labour systems such as single-male labour migration (which dislocated families) were supported during this era (Shefer & Fouten, 2012). Extreme inequalities in Namibia and South Africa were driven by such historical racial segregation and “Namibian colonial and apartheid history have woven a complex tapestry regarding social roles” (Bae et al., 2018, p. 37). The racialised capitalist system bred inequality, the legacy of which is still visible today in most Southern African societies (Murambadoro, 2018; Shefer & Fouten, 2012). Post-apartheid women are still excluded from power and from land ownership, and the roles they play in community matters, both within and outside their families, have been curtailed (Mungwari & Stofile, 2019). This background informs intergenerational transmission of agentic intentions (or the lack thereof) amongst girls and young women.

Violence against women is traceable from the period of slavery and continued during colonialism. During apartheid violence intensified and was transposed so that it occurred within black African communities. In response to apartheid’s brutality, racial segregation and economic dispossession, in some pockets of the fight against the system, sexual warfare emerged in gang-related violence, with women caught in crossfire (Van Lennep, 2019). Such violent circumstances inform girls’ and young women’s experiences in black communities (Grootboom, 2016), which well-intended SRHR interventions need to take cognisance of when promoting healthy choices. It was only after 1994 that women in South Africa were able to enjoy equal citizenship and human rights. Some of these rights are yet to be realised by women in broader society as lived realities fail to give expression to such rights. Throughout the colonial and postcolonial eras, patriarchy has been dominant, reinforced by systems such as capitalism and Western religion, which are discussed below.

A capitalist economic system developed, based on the assumption that male-bodied adults should work and should be supportive heads of families. Patriarchal values were intrinsic throughout this economic system. Throughout Southern Africa, capitalism failed to create prosperous economies. Multiple factors contributed to the failure of capitalism in Southern Africa, including, amongst others, tribalism, ethnicity, corruption, tyranny, a changing global
climate, political instability and unequal terms of trade between Africa and Europe (Noyoo, 2015). The failure of capitalism to create jobs affected family formations and gender roles within and outside of the family. Following the failure of capitalism, the promise of sustained growth and continuous development of African economies as they slowly evolved into modern societies were not kept (Eisenstadt, 1965). Such disappointment is linked to high levels of unemployment across the Southern Africa region, with the bulk of the poor concentrated in the less-skilled labour force (Spaull, 2015).

During the colonial era capitalism and Christianity were introduced to Southern Africa. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the relevance of these systems for understanding adolescent girls and young women (AG&YW). Modernity, introduced through colonial imperialism, resulted in an infusion of norms, values and cultures to create the experiences of young women today (Bae, 2018; Gender at Work, 2010). For example, it would appear that the pendulum swung during the colonial era, so that marriage, rather than childbirth, became the rite of passage to adulthood, which accorded with the morality of Christianity. Even for white women, to marry was to find purpose in life: it meant having something meaningful to do, i.e. being useful. White British women who were considered ‘surplus’ to Britain were sent to the colonies as governesses and contractual wives (Driver, 1988). It would seem that Christian morality has also failed in terms of policing sexuality. Failed employment prospects for able-bodied men means that not all children are raised in two-parent families with a father as the gainfully employed head of the household; grandmothers and others are central in the lives of children and young people (Musizvingoza & Wekwete, 2018). In Southern Africa, the phenomenon of single mothers in the absence of male employed heads of households is common in narratives of young women (Gender at Work, 2010). This is all too familiar to me as a woman who grew up in the care of a single-parent mother who received intermittent support from my employed father.

Even when women enter the labour force their earning power lags far behind that of men. Against the backdrop of a gendered economic system which still largely favours men, single motherhood leaves girls who grow up with unemployed or low-paid single mothers destitute. Although interventions that target girls and young women may aim at empowerment, and there is evidence of certain changes in the labour market in favour of women, young women's aspirations continue to reflect the nostalgia of an imagined partnered future with a male breadwinner. The failed capitalist economic system continues to influence young women's aspirations for modernity. These aspirations for modernity determine the impact of SRHR interventions involving AG&YW and should not be ignored.

Modernity in this context is understood as the establishment of a new modern order (Eisenstadt, 1965). This implies a change in form from the old to the new: from traditional to modern lifestyles. An important element of modernisation is social mobilisation: a process in which “major clusters of the old social order, economic and psychological commitments are eroded and broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behaviour” (Eisenstadt, 1965, p. 455). For women, old and young, modernity means that sexual socialisation, in terms of their expression of sexuality as daughters, partners, wives, mothers and workers changes form. In the colonial project of modernity, the need to remain feminine and obedient to the tenets of patriarchy was introduced and was well
internalised across racial and cultural groups (Driver, 1988; Van der Westhuizen, 2017). Colonial values of feminine obedience foregrounded the adoption of healthy choices and sexual behaviour as introduced in SRHR interventions today. Where safer choices and behaviours are seen to contradict the accomplishment of modernity, they may be abandoned and SRHR interventions appear to have failed.

In formal education the main indices of social mobilisation and modernisation are exposure to media, including in the 21st century social media, changes in residence from rural to urban areas (with the challenges that this shift brings), and entrance into the formal industrial employment sector with literacy as an important commodity (Eisenstadt, 1965). Modernisation presents a backdrop against which education for adolescent girls and young women is valued more highly. A recent study of female university students refers to the gains of education in terms that appear congruent with the concept of modernity. Participants in the study saw university as a vehicle to modernity, and said:

“I know that after completing my studies I will be faced with a bright future.”
“I will be independent and responsible.”
“At school I learn about equal rights for women and gender equity.”

(Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006, pp. 203-204)

These are the values that are shown in Chapters 3 and 4 to underpin the SRHR interventions aimed at keeping girls at school. Yet these same aspirations and values may appear incongruent with feminine obedience as a sign of modernity. It is this nexus between feminine obedience and women empowerment as signs of modernity that seems to create a paradox for SRHR interventionists.

In the earlier project of modernity, feminine obedience was presented as a desired outcome. A thread that ran through three political eras, alongside modernisation and capitalism, was the introduction of, and emphasis on, Christian religious and ideological systems (Bae, 2018). Religion was introduced by Christian missionaries, and it supported feminine obedience through the initiation of a “dialogue regarding… decency, cleanliness and health” (Bae, 2018, p. 23). Through promotion of feminine obedience, Christian norms devalued and demoted African women in local communities (Bae et al., 2018). In so doing, Christianity appeared to oppose the empowerment of women. Yet introduction of formal schools for the select few was a major project of missionary activity in Southern Africa, albeit with the principal objective of educating men. Although more recently Christian national education has been phased out (Bhana, Shefer, & Morrell, 2012), religious ideological values regarding choices such as premarital sex, abortion and sex work continue to influence women’s decisions in relation to their sexual and reproductive lives. Religion and the belief in God’s involvement in relationships plays a significant role, including how intimate partner violence, sexual orientation and divorce are dealt with (Classen, 2010).

Capitalism, colonialism and Christianity supported one another insofar as the breadwinner role of the male head of the household was concerned. Industrialisation and the creation of the gendered labour force fashioned an artificial split between public and private lives, and between work and family. Christian morality reinforced this split by sanctioning childbearing as a component of the private realm and promoting schooling as part of public life. Today various other religious practices are practised in the Southern African community, such as Rastafarianism (Oliveira, Meyers, & Vearay, 2016, p. 37), Islam (Nunn, 2012; Wekwete et al., 2016) and African traditional religions, including
animism (Matsimbe, 2018). These too promote the private-public split which is sponsored through government policies and interventions such as the regulation of pregnancy in schools and in the workplace.

This monograph explores adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual risk in a modern world, in a post-slavery, post-colonial and post-apartheid era where women have equal rights in terms of access to education and work and are afforded greater choice than their predecessors. In this monograph it is not assumed that girls and women enjoy opportunities equal to those of boys and men. Whilst opportunities in terms of education and work have improved, sexual risk and vulnerability have not necessarily been reduced for adolescent girls and young women, owing to unequal living conditions for many AG&YW (Musizvingoza & Wekwete, 2018; Wekwete et al., 2016). Racial and gender inequalities that are the effects of slavery, colonialism and apartheid remain evident in Southern African societies and should be taken into account when programming SRHR interventions.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework

In this chapter, I introduce and begin to examine the assumptions that underlie some behavioural prevention interventions aimed at reducing the sexual vulnerability of girls and young women, i.e. sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Girls’ and young women’s ability to benefit from behaviour-change intervention strategies seem to be located in the dichotomy of the ‘sequential’ and ‘combination’ models which appear to underpin sexual prevention interventions. In the main, these behavioural interventions are concerned with adjustment in sexual behaviour to avoid pregnancy and to prevent HIV acquisition, and sometimes also to prevent the acquisition of other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Some interventions also include prevention of gender-based violence (GBV), although this is a slightly different outcome as girls and young women are usually the victims of violent male behaviour which they cannot prevent.

I came across the concept of ‘sequential’ and ‘combination’ models through the work of Mojola (2014). Mojola’s analysis of the vulnerability of girls and young women was based on ethnographic research she conducted in Kenya. Whilst Mojola’s qualitative study was based in a specific Kenyan locality, some elements in the conclusions of Mojola’s study can be transposed to the Southern African
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Mzikazi Nduna

needs to maintain certain discipline whilst in school and to wait until gainfully employed before enjoying the life of a modern woman. This message resonates with my experience as a young girl growing up in a township in South Africa. Our parents favoured sequencing. This also dominated the work in which I later became involved as a SRHR peer educator, trainer and researcher. This model requires that girls focus on school and academic success, and defer romantic sexual relationships and the consumption associated with a modern lifestyle until later (Mojola, 2014). Worries about modern consumption seem associated with the belief that such a lifestyle is inevitably supported by involvement in transactional sexual relationships, motivated by material gain. The premise of this model is that romantic relationships are risky and that the risks encountered in these relationships hinder girls and young women from achieving their life goals, i.e. avoiding pregnancy and HIV infection in the pursuit of education. However, what is unclear is when these goals are deemed to have been achieved. For example, with regard to the goal of avoiding pregnancy: until what age should girls and young women avoid falling pregnant? Until they get married? What if they do not get married? Is there an age or stage in the life of a sequencing girl when this goal becomes irrelevant? At the time of writing this monograph I approach 50 years of age: I sequenced my life’s needs by maintaining discipline at school, as did many of my peers. I avoided teenage pregnancy, as did most of my friends, although some of them became pregnant. Later I avoided childbirth as a single parent. I am an anomaly in being child-free at 47 years of age, because most women at some point give up on this goal and decide to ‘fall pregnant’. In falling pregnant, women put themselves at risk of HIV infection through unprotected sex. Although not explicitly communicated in the promotion of sequencing, a checklist of what sequencing would look like is provided in Table 1.

region. Kenya’s historical context shares similarities with countries in Southern Africa, as described in Chapter 1, and hence her findings are relevant here too. Although the framework presented by Mojola was developed during a different time period, the heterosexual scripts and infrastructural underdevelopment that foreground adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual experiences and vulnerability have not changed much and are similar for AG&YW in Southern Africa. For instance, gender disparities in terms of age of sexual debut and HIV infection rate, gendered economies, absent fathers and the objectification of women that Mojola observed in her Kenyan sample are also common phenomena in Southern Africa. Cross-sectional research in Zimbabwe suggests that girls’ sexual debut occurs at about 16 years of age, a year earlier than for boys (Musizvingoza & Wekwete, 2018; Wekwete et al., 2016). Multiple partnerships and the street language developed to endorse gendered sexual scripts are transnational. Whether it is triple Cs (cash, car, cellphone) in South Africa or four Vs (villa, voiture, voyages, virement bancaire [i.e. house, car, travel and bank transfers]) in West Africa, these practices are common across Africa (Mojola, 2014; Soul City, 2008). Mojola’s study concludes that in attempting to navigate unwanted pregnancies and avoid HIV infection, adolescent girls and young women follow one of two models described briefly below.

The sequential model

The sequential model is viewed as the traditional model, in terms of which adolescent girls are expected to arrange their expectations, consumption desires and longings in a particular sequence. By consumption desires I mean the desire to be a modern woman through access to a western lifestyle (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). The expectation of a disciplined girl engaged in self-preservation is that a girl
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Table 1: Checklist for sequencing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achieved</th>
<th>Not achieved</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep focus in school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve set education goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not drop out of school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid teenage pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid single parenthood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid HIV infection</td>
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</table>

The introductory remarks in Chapter 1 suggest that preference for the sequential model existed long before the HIV pandemic threatened adolescent girls and young women. The promotion of feminine deference to the tenets of patriarchy, such as the preservation of female virginity, is an example of society’s preference for sequencing. In the era of HIV/AIDS, support for sequencing increased owing to anxiety about girls entering into sexual relationships for material gain with older, better-resourced male partners, such as those described by young female students at the University of Zimbabwe (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). In such age-disparate relationships, when condoms are not used, younger, sexually inexperienced girls become vulnerable to HIV infection. Several notions about education underlie interventions based on the sequencing model. These are briefly introduced here.

First, there is an idea that girls who stay in school will focus on their education and will not be distracted by dating. This is one form of feminine obedience wherein girls are expected to preserve their virginity. Such an expectation of feminine obedience regards puberty as a stage of sexual maturity for both boys and girls. Initiation of romantic relationships and sometimes of sexual relationships are discussed in Chapter 4 under assumption four.

Another assumption of the sequencing model is the expectation that girls kept in school will be exposed to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for a longer period of time. Yet many teachers are uncomfortable teaching about sexuality, even in designated subjects such as life orientation. Educators who are less conservative and who are willing to teach CSE are not always equipped with adequate training and teaching materials (Louw, 2017; Zulu et al., 2019). In some cases, parents interfere and prevent their children from being taught CSE at school. Religion that promotes the notion of naïve feminine obedience is one of the factors driving parental disagreement. Whilst departments of education contend with how to roll out CSE in and out of school, AG&YW have multiple sources of information regarding sex, with no clear evidence that formal classroom teaching is seen as the most reliable and most accessible source of sexuality education.

Thirdly, the sequencing model that promotes education for girls aims to keep girls in school for longer, with the hope that exposure to same-age peers will encourage peer dating and that peer sexual relationships will reduce the likelihood of age-disparate relationships. Society is anxious about age-disparate relationships for girls, as the vulnerability of a girl to sexually transmitted infections increases if there is a greater age difference and gender power differential between the girl and her older male partner. Whilst male peers may be safer partners in terms of the risks of STI and HIV infection, these sexual relationships still pose the same risk of pregnancy as relationships with older male partners. Education has numerous benefits, with the most obvious
being the introduction to modernity through educational subjects which introduce multiple value systems. Schools worldwide cultivate ‘gendered needs’ in girls and boys. Such gender-specific needs lead to girls’ desire to consume, which is not coupled with the provision of means to satisfy these consumption needs whilst still at school. Peer relationships are clearly not ideal, since they do not have the social and financial capital that forms the basis for construction of romantic relationships in modern society. Thus, girls who come from poorer families that cannot provide adequately for their modern consumerist needs are most vulnerable to age-disparate relationships with older men who have an income.

Regardless of the challenge to meet immediate needs, some adolescent girls and young women follow the sequential model. Those who follow the sequential model report that they hanker to “finish schooling, get a job… [and] all my problems will be okay” (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006, p. 208). Such hope persists despite dire employment prospects for the majority of young black women in South Africa. Whilst there seems to be a blanket push for girls to stay in school longer, analysis of the labour market shows that it is not the duration of completed schooling in itself that improves one’s job prospects, but rather the quality and content of what one has been taught (Spaull, 2015). The 2015 Child Gauge found that about 54% of children in South Africa live below the poverty line (Hall & Sambu, 2015). This means that whilst at school, income poverty is a threat to the sequential model as some families may not be able to provide for their girls (Spaull, 2015). To improve their prospects, girls need to receive quality education. Yet most adolescent girls in Southern Africa do not have access to quality education owing to the historical context (as described in Chapter 1), which has resulted in poor-quality public education. Thus many girls experience disappointment after they leave school when they find themselves unemployed. Some information about South African youth employment is given in Figure 1 below.

![Figure 1: Rates of post-matric and post-university employment](chart.png)

**The combination model**

Some girls simultaneously combine gainful relationships, school and modern consumption. The combination model seems to be less favoured by some, if not most, parents. As the term suggests, girls and young women who adopt this model continue with their schooling whilst at the same time they may become involved in sexual relationships. Such relationships may be with peers, but tend to be with older partners who are able to provide materially. Some girls may view gainful sexual relationships as a means to finance their education and to pursue higher education, while others may use them to access modernity (Mojola, 2014; Wekwete...
& Manyeruke, 2012). The first group involves girls and young women from poorer families who need financial support in order to continue with their studies and who enter into gainful relationships instrumentally. For them such relationships are substantial and necessary; they are a means to an end. They may, or may not, become lifetime partnerships. The second group involves girls and young women whose basic needs are met by their families but who enter in gainful relationships because they are sceptical about the delayed rewards of the sequential model. Disillusioned with the meagre material returns of the wait for financial success as a result of employment, they choose otherwise. In a context where youth are increasingly not in employment, education, or training (NEET) with no marketable skills, the desired lifestyle outcomes of persevering and postponing modern life consumption may appear illusive. For these young women, whilst education continues to be important, so too are relationships with financially secure men, so that the young women can simultaneously gratify themselves and enjoy being modern women.

There is a gamble involved in both the sequential and the combination models. According to Mojola, girls who follow the sequential model avoid becoming consuming women until later, and gamble that focusing on school will end up being worthwhile. They hope that their dedication to education will result in educational qualifications and skills that will lead them to find reasonably paid jobs. From a relationship perspective they gamble that rejecting male partners in the short term will pay off later, in that they will eventually secure monogamous marriages and avoid HIV infection. They also gamble that completion of school education will not result in a loss of family support as their families will expect them to be gainfully employed or married with their own families, and thus to be self-sufficient (Mojola, 2014).

This gamble is real where completion of school, with consequent unemployment or low-paid employment, limits young women’s ability to accomplish desired and long-delayed consumption. In countries like South Africa marriage rates are lower and thus the prospects of marriage may be slight (Makiwane & Chimere-Dan, 2010). Furthermore, delaying pregnancy does not guarantee a happy outcome, since for some women infertility and/or child mortality may prove to be real disappointments. Safety at a later stage is also not guaranteed as the reality of women’s exposure to sexual harassment and exploitation in the world of work reveals (Kiguwa et al., 2015). These threats to girls’ and young women’s healthy and safer choices in the sequential model are discussed in the next chapter.

It would seem in that the case of poorer adolescent girls and young women the combination model may heighten girls’ anxieties when they are in relationships. Girls who follow the combination model take a chance that they will not fall pregnant, and hence fail to complete their education and, therefore, lose a providing partner, as well as risk acquiring HIV in their simultaneous pursuit of education and consumption. Modernity, with feminine obedience as a feature, has created norms for girls and young women regarding pregnancy. From a relationship perspective, single parenthood is a concern for girls and their families, as such relationships are considered unstable. From a developmental point of view, pregnancy while in school is a concern for girls, their families and the state (Morrell et al., 2012b; Wekwete et al., 2016). Appropriate age, relationship status and education accomplishment are at the centre of pregnancy norms. In a national study of adolescent pregnancy in Zimbabwe, about 9% of girls in the age group 10-19 years reported ever having been pregnant. A regional
pattern suggests that during adolescence, the rate of pregnancy rises with age and higher school grades (Clowes, D’Amant, & Nkani, 2012; Morrell et al., 2012b; Wekwete et al., 2016). Teenage pregnancy rates are higher in countries such as Zimbabwe, where 33% of adolescent girls aged 18 to 19 years old report ever having been pregnant (Wekwete et al., 2016). Girls who follow the combination model gamble on not losing out on completing their education as a result of pregnancy. At a personal level, pregnancy for school girls mean loss of educational opportunities as the responsibility for the labour of child rearing is largely left to women (Morrell et al., 2012b). At a policy level, countries in the region manage pregnant and parenting learners in school differently. Countries such as Namibia and South Africa have clear policies that support girls who become pregnant whilst at school: such girls are not expelled, but are instead helped and encouraged to resume their studies after giving birth (Gender Research & Advocacy Project Legal Assistance Centre, 2008; Morrell et al., 2012b).

Teacher unions in Swaziland and legislation currently under consideration in Zimbabwe support the same objectives (Zimbabwean Government Gazette, 2019). Regional policy reforms on re-entry and support of parenting learners through alternative non-formal education seem to recognise that early maternal careers can be a component of an oppressive praxis for adolescent girls and young women and attempt to rectify this (Wekwete et al., 2016). Beyond policy provisions, it is the attitudes and practices of school authorities, teachers and peers that pregnant and parenting learners have to deal with, and these are not always supportive of young women who fall pregnant (Devey & Morrell, 2012b; Shefer, Bhana, Morrell, Manzini, & Masuku, 2012). Although there is no blanket rejection of learner pregnancy, the treatment of pregnant learners and learner mothers could be much better.

For poorer adolescents, having a child without an income has a serious knock-on effect for girls, their children and their families. All sexually active adolescent girls who do not have access to contraception are at risk of falling pregnant but it would seem that girls in rural areas, those who are orphaned and those in the middle-quintile socio-economic level are at greater risk (Wekwete et al., 2016). Evidence of denied and disputed pregnancies, and lack of maintenance from fathers suggest that sometimes male partners are unemployed (Nduna & Jewkes, 2012). Teenage pregnancy, whether by choice or circumstantial, needs to be approached with great care lest it “limit[s] … life prospects”, especially in terms of education and employment opportunities (Morrell et al., 2012b, p. 11). The knock-on effects of learner pregnancies are also felt by families which have to mobilise additional resources. Society also feels the effects of early pregnancies as women’s entry into and prospects within the labour market are negatively affected by an early maternal role.

Pupils, learners and students take a chance that they will not fall pregnant, not only because of the inconvenience this poses in terms of interrupted schooling, but also because in terms of social standing it is not childbirth per se that grants respectable adult status, but rather getting married and starting one’s own nuclear family (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006). Pregnant adolescents also risk losing their boyfriends when they disclose their pregnancies (Nunn, 2012). Furthermore, early parenting may mean loss of earning power and limited career advancement in the long run because the young parents may need to take a break from employment or deviate from a career of choice in order to find a job that is convenient for their situation (Morrell & Devey, 2012). This diversion is captured in the quotation by
Shefer et al. (2012), where one of the participants regretted that “I wanted to be a lawyer, but now I can’t … I have to think about doing training for something while I am being paid” (p. 127).

This monograph examines conditions for the delivery of interventions based on assumptions behind the sequential model with the hope that the realities discussed here will inform improvements to interventions. Based on the author’s twenty-three years of experience in teaching, facilitation, research and advocacy with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), this monograph addresses two issues: (1) ways in which girls’ and young women’s vulnerability could be better understood within this context; and (2) the realities that should be taken into account when designing interventions. The monograph addresses various forms of inequality, and how these intersect to disempower girls and young women (GYW), and thus facilitate and promote vulnerability for GYW in Southern Africa (Ranganathan et al., 2018). The monograph uses both research and biographies to demonstrate the impact of factors such as violence of sexual expression and experiences.

Unpublished data from the AIDS Foundation of South Africa (AFSA) Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) study forms the basis of this monograph. Data was collected across six research sites in three provinces in South Africa. The data was qualitative, collected both through focus group discussions and via one-on-one interviews with key informants. Three research reports were submitted to AFSA: they are available on its website and on the Sex Rights Africa website, a regional learning and sharing platform (Nduna, 2016a, 2016b; Nduna & Ndhlouvu, 2016). These reports relate to processed data from Flagstaff in the Eastern Cape and from Eshowe and Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. Data from Estcourt, Underberg and Greytown/Umvoti (KwaZulu-Natal), and Ermelo, Secunda and Bethal, in Gert Sibande district (Mpumalanga) has not yet been published, and so merely forms a backdrop to this monograph.

In addition, four presentations by the author at Embassy of Ireland supported regional workshops in 2018, arranged by the University of Pretoria’s Centre for the Study of Sexualities, AIDS and Gender (CSA&G), were used to advance the conceptual framework of this monograph, and to create links to regional work on SRHR with girls and young women. In 2018 the author collaborated with the CSA&G and with other Embassy of Ireland partners, mainly in Zimbabwe, to engage project staff and fieldworkers in a series of discussions regarding the processes of knowledge and evidence production within the field of SRHR. These sessions focused on research regarding gender and using research as an advocacy tool for gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. The author gave presentations at various regional learning and sharing workshops. These presentations aimed to provide building blocks for partners to reflect on their work, and the presentations served as discussion tools that could help them refine their interventions. Further seminar presentations were delivered to the Medical Research Council’s Gender and Health Unit, AFSA and Gateway Health to afford opportunities for checking interpretations of the data, gathering reference material and developing a discussion framework for the data presented in this monograph.

It is hoped that the scholarly work and autobiographical information incorporated here will make a valuable contribution to understanding the responses of, and
interventions for girls and young women. A selection of biographies and other non-fiction genres reflecting girls’ and young women’s experiences of sexuality were consulted. Gaps exist in the body of published literature on girls’ and young women’s sexuality for various reasons, ranging from poor conceptualisation and weak study design, to epistemological and ontological misnomers. Where such gaps were found, information was sought from grey literature. Women’s stories from grey literature were used as data, analysed and interpreted against the backdrop of the conceptual framework of this monograph.

**Chapter conclusion**

Whilst not all girls who fall pregnant do so in gainful relationships, Mojola notes that girls who follow the combination model do so motivated by material gain. They thus need to act carefully in order to avoid falling pregnant, or their combination strategy fails. There is some research on the fate of pregnant learners in public schools since most research is conducted in these settings; this leaves a knowledge gap in terms of what happens in independent and private schools, where parents and children – even primary school children with limited understanding – are made to sign school conduct agreements which guide the school’s handling of disciplinary matters. Not much is known about the effects of pregnancy on young women engaged in post-secondary education, although it would be reasonable to conclude that pregnancy at that stage would negatively affect timeous completion of tertiary education.

Some adolescent girls who are sexually active do not fall pregnant for a number of reasons. Some girls use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy, in spite of the fact that access to effective contraceptives and to safe and legal abortion is a challenge for most adolescent girls and young women in the Southern African region, especially those in the lower-income groups, in rural communities, and in informal settlements and townships, ensuring that these girls are over-represented in studies of teenage pregnancy (Wekwete et al., 2016). This might, therefore, unfairly fix the gaze of researchers and policymakers on poorer adolescents and lead them to overlook those who belong to middle- or higher-income families. Other sexually experienced teenage girls may be in same-sex relationships. Although this monograph explores interventions aimed at cisgender and heterosexual females, it does not address the relevance of these models to girls and young women who are members of sexual minority groups.

Mojola’s data was collected in the context of vulnerability to HIV being a concern for young heterosexual females. To assume that the same concerns apply to all adolescent girls and young women would be to engage in cisgender and heteronormative thinking. There are adolescent girls who are in same-sex relationships and who, like their heterosexual peers, may choose the combination model, but with less concern about pregnancy and HIV infection. They may, however, share concerns regarding losing a (providing and older) partner if they are in transactional relationships.

Some progress has made in the Southern African region in terms of realisation of human rights. Yet, despite a number of well-founded sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) interventions, adolescent girls and young women’s vulnerability remains high. The weaknesses of some SRHR interventions aimed at girls’ and women’s empowerment are discussed in the next chapter on assumptions.
Chapter 3: Adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual socialisation

If it is true that adolescence “...is the time in which children move toward social and economic independence... [and] acquire skills needed to carry out adult relationships and roles” (De Lannoy, Leibbrandt, & Frame, 2015, p. 23), and is “a period of experimentation... when lifelong behaviour patterns are typically initiated” (Cooper et al., 2015, p. 60), as well as a phase during which young people “expand their social networks” (Ward, Makusha, & Bray, 2015, p. 69), then it is inevitable that this period will include formation of relationships that mimic adult life. The question thus becomes: how do adolescent girls learn about adult relationships? How do they make the choices that they make? What influences their behaviour?

Sexual socialisation of adolescent girls and young women in Southern Africa takes various forms. Adolescent girls’ and young women’s gender socialisation is deliberately and inadvertently shaped by multiple factors and social structures. Gender as a social and cultural construct in families, churches, schools and other community-based institutions informs the sexual experiences of adolescent girls and young women (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012; Parkhurst, 2010; Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). Whilst factors such as nationality, education, ethnicity, class, religiosity and culture and others are important to consider in understanding what shapes sexual experiences of girls and young women in Southern Africa, gender remains a transcendent factor (Gender at Work, 2010; Wielenga, 2018a). The fact that sexual experiences of adolescent girls and young women may be involuntary is discussed under assumption 1 in the next chapter as an important consideration regarding behavioural interventions. The sexual experiences of adolescent girls and young women are socially constructed and are influenced by others, notably men and other adults. These structural determinants are discussed further under assumption 2 in the next chapter as they affect decision-making regarding sequencing.

Other sources of social and structural inequalities that inform adolescent girls and young women’s experiences, such as race, form part of the lens in this monograph as race is considered to be a way of “seeing, defining, experiencing and ordering the world” (Gqola, 2015, p. 37). Race, race relations and racism were briefly introduced in Chapter 1 in the discussion about slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Further to the discussion regarding racialised social engineering of women in Southern Africa is recollection of the woman’s suffrage movement (see, Chadwick, 2006). Societies which were previously racially segregated have left Southern Africa with a legacy that post-slavery, post-colonial and post-apartheid societies have difficulty in redressing (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006; Spaull, 2015). Understanding racially informed socio-economic conditions of AG&YW is important for the discussion regarding assumptions 2 and 3 in the next chapter. For instance, the majority of African children in Southern Africa are reported to live in income poverty (Hall & Sambu, 2015). In South Africa the
two variables of interest in measurements of sexual risk – teenage learner pregnancy and HIV acquisition – also differ markedly by racial group (Morrell & Devey, 2012).

Socio-economic class has emerged in post-colonial and post-apartheid societies as a relevant factor in analysing and understanding young people’s life experiences (Spaull, 2015). Across the region, class, race and location are sometimes regarded as proxies of one other. For example, in South Africa, poorer rural schools and townships report a higher incidence of learner pregnancy than middle-class, formerly white schools (cited in Morrell & Devey, 2012). The rural-urban divide in reports of sexual experience and outcomes for adolescent girls is also evident in Zimbabwean research (Wekwete et al., 2016).

In Southern Africa there is a common adage that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’, alluding to the important and influential role played by the community, including institutions such as the family, schools, churches, traditional courts and the media. This suggests that these institutions need to be targeted as intervention sites as they are critical in decision-making: they not only influence AG&YW’s decisions, but sometimes make decisions on behalf of AG&YW: consider for example the practice of *ukuthwala*. *Ukuthwala* is a traditional form of marriage that is not negotiated with the girl; family members may know about the suitor’s intentions, but the girl is often not included in the decision-making process about the marriage (Rice, 2018).

Families remain early sites of socialisation for young women regarding sexual relationships (Nduna & Jewkes, 2014). Girls observe how parents, older siblings, older girls and relatives carry themselves in relationships (Robertson, 2006). Without formal teaching, informal sexual socialisation is significant for its role in teaching girls and young women how they are expected to behave. There is extensive scientific and literary evidence about girls’ socialisation into gender and sexual roles early in life through social norms (Robertson, 2006). Yet for 12 formative years of basic schooling, girls are expected to maintain a distance from romantic relationships, until at least the age of 18 years, when they are expected to have completed grade 12. This sequencing preference is addressed under assumption 4 in the next chapter.

In rural communities matters such as intimate partner violence, pregnancy and rape may be brought to the attention of community courts (Mungwari & Stofile, 2019). Officials at these traditional courts are mainly men, although sometimes women play a role. Traditional court gatherings are intended to prevent formal criminal records developing, promote social harmony, and advance familial and social relations (Bae et al., 2018). Such relational values may conflict with pursuance of gender justice: young women who are victims of assault and other crimes and who seek justice may experience the achievement of community harmony occurring at a cost to them, as such courts compromise on securing justice. Community systems such as traditional courts may socialise girls and young women into accepting that women lack agency, since this is what is often displayed by adult women who officiate within restrictive patriarchal values in such settings.

As explained in Chapter 2, formal education is instrumental in enabling social mobility to achieve modernity. Yet the pursuit of education is fraught with problems for girls. Views influenced by theories such as social Darwinism discourage education of girls in favour of maternal careers (Chadwick, 2006). Proponents of these views suggest
that attainment of the highest levels of education is unnecessary and may in fact be damaging to girls. Whilst such a regressive view of women may appear to have been superseded by more modern views, this perception is still evident in the ways in which girls and young women are treated in the education sector. Evidence to support this view was presented in Chapter 1, which described the limited educational opportunities and options afforded women during racist and sexist colonial regimes (Driver, 1988). Education of black women has been difficult to achieve, and has always been policed and contested (Chadwick, 2006). Years after post-colonial and post-apartheid regimes announced the dawn of ‘equal opportunities’ for both men and women to advance gender and racial equality, allegiance to patriarchal views continues. For example, some school principals call on ‘the maternal instinct’, in order to insist that a young mother attending school has to meet all the dependency needs of her infant, and they thus discourage girls’ quick return to school following childbirth (Clowes et al., 2012). It is noteworthy that the parenting penalty applies only to girls. The expert gaze of school authorities on adolescent girls reinforces the oppressive praxis against female learners who parent and makes the notion of equal opportunity for male and female learners a pipedream. More modern and progressive views encourage girls to go to school, avoid pregnancy and facilitate the return of parenting learners to the educational system. These are the values which underpin sequential interventions such as the ‘keeping girls at school’ initiatives. This is discussed further under assumption 5.

The fact that literacy and education now form the backdrop of modernisation is important for girls and young women. Nevertheless, girls and young women need to work harder to catch up because the introduction of formal education in Africa initially excluded women. Education in Southern Africa was limited not just to males, but also to the sons of the local elite (Eisenstadt, 1965). The legacy of this practice is still felt by societies in Southern Africa, where quality education and decent employment in the formal sector is mostly accessible to males and members of elite groups. In addition to gender and class, apartheid laws in South Africa and Namibia ensured that only white people enjoyed access to quality education. Even today, the majority of white people in South Africa complete high school and many go on to higher education, whereas “only 18% of African youth and 24% of coloured youth have the same levels of schooling” (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 23). The inferior quality of Bantu education provided to black people during apartheid left these communities with pathetically inferior skills (De Lannoy et al., 2015). The intergenerational impact of racially segregated schooling has a particular impact on working class adolescent girls and young women, who are left to fend for themselves. Sometimes this means trying to access resources and various forms of capital in the hands of those in power (men and white people), which the powerful inherited from a system that favoured them. The double-edged sword represented by young women’s pursuit of modernisation through education is dealt with in assumption 2. Interventions such as She Conquers, Be Wise, She Decides, and Keeping Girls in School initiatives, which correctly promote schooling as the key to success, may overlook the historical context of unequal education and thus assume that boys and girls already enjoy equal opportunities for education. The concept of equal opportunities ignores adolescent girls’ greater family and social roles, feminine issues such as menstrual hygiene, and the influence of sexism at school and in the workplace. Gender inequality and practices that undermine women persist; they are institutionalised and reproduced in schools through the formal and informal curricula.
In Africa, modernisation is also equated with “western-centricity” (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006). This conflation creates tensions in terms of expectations regarding the sexual expression of adolescent girls and young women (AG&YW). Various expressions, experiences and systems are considered primitive, traditional and indigenous by some, and hence perceived as in conflict with the modern features of a developing society. Some view modernity as the pursuit of education and gendered western-centric personal grooming through consumption of a Eurocentric lifestyle. Somehow there is an implicit message disseminated by proponents of the sequential model that AG&YW should remain traditional and African, at least until they complete school and are ready to be consuming adults. This message to wait and refrain from consuming is communicated to girls while the rest of the society changes in form and exhibits elements of western life. In this respect the sequential model is limiting for adolescent girls and young women. The model takes on a policing role, evident in the rules of schools, university campuses and families regarding courtship, dress codes and hairstyles (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006; Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). Implicit in this model is the patriarchal myth (Chadwick, 2006) of a sequenced lifestyle with the school → marriage → children heteronormative matrix paired with moral discourse regarding parenthood as befitting a ready mother (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006). This monograph argues that education provides one of the most important channels of transition from traditional to modern life in Southern Africa (Eisenstadt, 1965; Mojola, 2014). Thus, the philosophy that underlies the sequential model may be in conflict with the very outcomes of schooling and education.

Although education may be empowering, it does not necessarily reduce the vulnerability of some young women because Southern African states face a challenge with “the modern occupational sector [that] does not expand” in the ways that are expected (Eisenstadt, 1965). Thus economic growth across Africa remains limited and economies fail to expand (Noyoo, 2015), which limits employment prospects for those who have recently qualified. In the context of patriarchy, the struggle of girls and young women to obtain and retain employment, and to be able to prosper in terms of career means that workplace sexism and sexual exploitation thrive and undermine the sequential model. For women, workplace sexism means that after completion of their education, young women have to continue using their sexualised bodies, rather than their educational accomplishments, in order to achieve modernity and prosperity. This is discussed under assumption 3.

Socially constructed gender roles support a moral classification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for men and women. When society views women’s behaviour as congruent with social expectations, it is reinforced and rewarded. When their behaviour is seen as transgressing acceptable norms, it attracts punishment. In their pursuit of modernity, many girls and young women find themselves moving away from some of the gender roles which feminine obedience demands. As a result, social backlash renders girls and young women powerless in various circumstances. The reverse is true for men. This social double standard informs gender power inequalities, in terms of which women are penalised for failing to dutifully demonstrate feminine obedience. Consider, for example, that adolescent girls and young women are expected to uphold sound morals. One of the areas in which double standards apply with regard to girls and women is in relation to the consumption of alcohol. Women who consume alcohol in public experience shaming and loss of status (Devey & Morrell, 2012a). In
the townships, some adolescent girls and young women may even be gang members or associates of street gangs, and may be exposed to recreational drugs early in life. Adolescent girls who take drugs are viewed as social deviants and are more likely to leave school early, and thus miss out on comprehensive sexuality education that is a part of the formal curriculum. Girls who are out of school are deemed unsafe to work with, as their lifestyles are often characterised by violence and illegal activities, including sex work. Out-of-school girls and young women may remain at the margins of society, invisible to the outside world. As a result of behaviour perceived as incongruent with gender norms, violations of women in the context of substance use receive less attention, women engaged in substance abuse are often blamed for their victimisation, and they may even engage in self-blame, seeing themselves as irresponsible and as having failed to take proper care of themselves (Gqola, 2015). Although many Africans pride themselves on being modest, traditional and moral, a Zimbabwean national study found that just over half of adolescent girls reported their first sexual encounters had occurred under the influence of alcohol (Wekwete et al., 2016). Female consent may be compromised in such encounters, with many of these sexual encounters effectively falling within the category of rape. Examination of expectations associated with being a good girl requires a fine-tooth comb, in order to grasp how double standards for men and women affect interventions for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy and HIV acquisition.

With reference to the earlier definition of adolescence as a period of transition towards some form of “economic independence” (Spaull, 2015, p. 23), some adolescent girls and young women appreciate having access to cash. When and where the cash comes from, and what it is used for, is determined by various factors. For various reasons, including both the need to obtain basic subsistence items and the desire to acquire luxury consumer goods, adolescents and young women may enter into transactional sexual relationships. While in many dating relationships giving and receiving of goods may be normal, once transactions become the primary motivation for a relationship, the girl who has entered into such a relationship is frowned at and judged harshly. While HIV prevention interventions may discourage modern-day transactional sex, transacting in sexual labour has been a feature of many historical eras and economic systems, and has been beyond the agency of individual young women. This is alluded to in chapter 1 in the discussion of slavery, a system that transacted in human beings, and colonialism, a system that transacted in British women who were considered to be ‘surplus’, and who were sent to the colonies. In Zimbabwean communities there is evidence that poverty contributes to the selling of girls by their families (Murambadoro, 2018). Systems of governance may have changed, but sexual socialisation remains unchanged, and so conditions of income poverty persist for many young women in Southern Africa. This legacy, together with western-centric modernisation, provides the necessary ingredients for permissive values regarding practices such as transactional sex.

Homelessness is a misunderstood phenomenon. Homeless people are generally judged as having made poor life choices. Homeless girls and young women are at particular risk of victimisation, in addition to having difficult and unsafe lives (Grootboom, 2016). Whilst some of the homeless may experience challenges such as chronic mental illness, others are only in need of equal opportunity in order to realise their potential, and to be able to thrive as well as their age-mates. Homeless AG&YW may utilise health, social and other services less than expected, owing to their ignorance
of institutionalised culture. Homes, schools, churches and clinics are all institutions governed by rules which the homeless may experience as unfamiliar and foreign, or even sometimes as intrusive and restrictive (Grootboom, 2016). As a result, girls and young women at the margins of the society are often unable to benefit from infrastructure meant to support healthy and safer sexual choice. Women migrants in the Southern Africa region differ not only in terms of their nationality and country of origin. Those who find themselves in precarious situations are mostly undocumented migrants and asylum seekers (Oliveira et al., 2016). This group includes adolescent girls and young women who illegally enter destination countries when they are as young as seventeen years of age (Oliveira et al., 2016). Some of them are accompanied by their parents but others arrive alone. Given their illegal status AG&YW who are undocumented are exposed to high-risk situations in destination countries. In the absence of higher educational qualifications or the possession of scarce skills, most young women migrants who enter South Africa end up seeking better economic outcomes in the informal sector (Oliveira et al., 2016).

Interventions aimed at addressing challenges faced by adolescent girls and young women predominantly assume a heteronormative matrix. The heteronormative script suggests that female-born bodies will assume a cisgender identity and expression as girls and later as women, and that they will remain cisgender and enter into heteronormative sexual relations at the right time. Marriage is expected to follow; they are subsequently expected to give birth to children, and the matrix is thus completed (Macleod & Morison, 2015). It is further assumed that such cisgender identity and expression naturally follow a heterosexual orientation. In many societies in Southern Africa, such a heteronormative script is supported by laws proscribing homosexuality, to the extent that sexual expression which diverges from cisgender heterosexuality is regarded as transgressive, attracting social and sometimes legal sanctions. In addition to sanctions, queer adolescent girls and young women find themselves at the margins of society, unsupported by sexual health interventions and all too often disregarded, as they do not neatly fit within the traditional heterosexual script. This happens despite evidence that not all persons born female are cisgender, and in studies of sexuality various forms of gender non-conforming identities have been recorded (Van der Merwe, Graves, & Nduna, 2017). Not all girls and young women enter into heterosexual relationships (Nduna & Jewkes, 2013). Even if they do, some may not marry. Others may become single parents, or they may not have children, irrespective of their marital status. Queer sexual expression is natural and normal (although in the minority) and these individuals require considerable and relevant interventions (Oliveira et al., 2016). Failing to take account of women in all their diversity in interventions regarding sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights neglects sexually diverse girls and young women. Most regional interventions with regard to gender and sexuality exclude queer adolescents and young women despite the fact that they also have sexual and reproductive health needs and require information (Kiguwa & Nduna, 2017; Nduna & Kiguwa, 2017). In the same way as cisgender and heterosexual girls and young women, some queer adolescent girls and young women may fall pregnant, have children or experience rape (Oliveira et al., 2016, p. 25 & 27). The exclusion of queer girls and young women from knowledge production breeds invisible identities and erases their sexuality and sexual expression; as a result, very little is known about lesbian, bisexual, intersex, transgender and other gender-nonconforming...
woman which can meaningfully inform evidence-based sexual health interventions. Whilst interventions should leave no one behind, these youth are often thoughtlessly excluded, since homeless people, drug users, sex workers, gang-affiliated girls, undocumented girls and queer women are often institution-averse. AG&YW programmes require a magnifying glass to identify this mishap for a frequently marginalised community and to address their needs. Critical examination of the assumptions made in conducting research and designing interventions makes visible the lives of marginalised girls and young women in Southern Africa and opens up research and intervention possibilities that are more inclusive.

### Girls’ and women’s sexual risk and vulnerability

This chapter demonstrated how inequalities produced by racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, gender-role stereotypes and other ideologies influence women’s positive or negative experiences in their journeys as young adults. The next section discusses three paradigms which seem to underpin most SRHR prevention interventions for girls and young women. These are: biological susceptibility, social vulnerability and contextual factors. All three are linked to prevention research in the field of SRHR: pregnancy prevention, HIV prevention, risky sexual behaviour and reduction of gender-based violence.

#### Biological susceptibility

To sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy is premised on the outcomes of heterosexual encounters for adolescent girls and young women. Girls’ and young women’s biological susceptibility is linked to the physiological structure of the female reproductive organs. It has been widely reported that persons born female are at greater risk of poor outcomes for sexual health, such as the acquisition of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Young women in Southern Africa are reported to be eight times as likely to become infected with HIV as young men (Cooper et al., 2015). The biological susceptibility model highlights the fact that two female sex organs – the vulva and the vagina – have a greater vulnerability to HIV infection via sexual intercourse than male sex organs do. One of the reasons for greater female biological susceptibility is the nature of the cells that line the cervix. These cells, as well as the length of time that semen stays in the vulva following sexual intercourse, the use of hormonal contraceptives, the risk of vaginal tissue injury and intercourse during menstruation all increase female susceptibility to infection. Across the Southern Africa region, adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexuality remains a concern, particularly risky sexual behaviour measured by biological outcomes such as STI prevalence, HIV infection and rates of pregnancy. In addition to their susceptibility to STIs and HIV, persons born female face the burden of another potential outcome of unprotected heterosexual intercourse: the risk of pregnancy. Whilst a genitor may desire to have a child, it is the female partner who actually carries the foetus and who gives birth to the child. Although this monograph is limited to social aspects, it is nevertheless important to keep in mind such biotic responsibility because it contributes to heightened female vulnerability. The increased sexual risk experienced by AG&YW has resulted in a plethora of studies, as well as interventions that target AG&YW for behaviour change, as agents for change, or as needing to be ‘sexually saved’. Whilst sexual risk has some biological causes, various SRHR interventions focus on biological susceptibility to inform interventions aimed at reducing AG&YW’s social vulnerability. Although times have changed and some
A magnifying glass and a fine-tooth comb: understanding adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual vulnerability

Mzikazi Nduna

and young women are at greater risk of poor outcomes for sexual and reproductive health because of their different status in terms of gender, gender role socialisation and gender inequality. Values and expectations underlying socialisation of AG&YW may result in women’s reduced sexual autonomy in relationships (Higgins, Hoffman, & Dworkin, 2010). Despite the diversity of best practice interventions such as Stepping Stones, Keeping Girls in School, She Conquers, She Decides, First Things First, Zazi, Dreams, and others, AG&YW’s social vulnerabilities may undermine the desired impact of such interventions. Mojola recognises this vulnerability in her ‘sequential and combination model’. Girls experience greater vulnerability to sexual risk at a young age, whilst still at school. However, the choice between the combination and sequential models ignores such vulnerability, as if adolescent girls and young women ‘choose’ to be socialised in particular ways. For some adolescent girls and young women such choices are beyond their control or unrealistic.

The vulnerability paradigm assumes that a good life and improved health are everyday and paramount objectives for girls and women. Yet scholarly work reveals that such objectives often compete with other life goals, such as completing an education, ensuring social mobility and achieving modernity. For instance, according to the ‘vulnerability paradigm’ women (but not men) ‘want to negotiate safe sex’ (Mojola, 2014, p. 91), want to prevent HIV, and want to use condoms, but lack the power to do so (Higgins et al., 2010). This paradigm positions girls and young women as more interested in disease prevention than their male counterparts. The vulnerability paradigm assigns a higher moral position to women: women are represented as more sexually responsible, as monogamous (rather than as promiscuous), as more emotionally attached to their
partners, and as motivated to avoid unwanted pregnancy. Based on studies of passive femininity, the vulnerability paradigm suggests that women are more likely to forgive, understand and accept a male partner who discloses that he is HIV positive, whereas the reverse does not hold true for men when their female partners disclose their HIV-positive status. The view that women are all sexually responsible and that men are sexual vectors needs to be treated with great caution, as it is illogical. For instance, there are reports that some women choose to not use condoms in their primary relationships as a token of intimacy and spontaneity (Dixon-Mueller, Germain, Fredrick, Bourne, & Kidwell, 2007). After decades of raising awareness about unsafe sex, some adolescent girls still believe that condoms are primarily for sex workers, and in order to prove that they are ‘good’, girls should refrain from using condoms with their boyfriends (Musizvingoza & Wekwe, 2018). This paradigm has been criticised for its representation of women as powerless victims or as repositories of infection, ignoring women’s possible power and agency.

The next paradigm considers contextual factors. This paradigm asserts that it is important to contextualise individual risk of HIV infection. Contextual factors include early (versus late) stage of HIV disease in the population, the viral load of the HIV-positive partner, the presence of genital ulcers in the HIV-positive or the HIV-negative partner, and the circumcision status of the HIV-negative male partner. At a population level, factors such as the stage of the HIV epidemic, the prevalence of other reproductive tract infections, the proportion of men who have been circumcised, permissible sexual practices, as well as sociocultural constructions of sexuality, relationships and marriage systems, all influence HIV prevalence and the rate of new infections. Such factors affect adolescent girls and young women differently (Christofides et al., 2014; Huerga et al., 2016). In countries with a mature HIV epidemic, such as South Africa, the risk of HIV infection is greater as the HIV prevalence in the general population is higher. In settings where there are challenges with regard to health service provision, untreated sexually transmitted infections increase vulnerability to HIV, especially for adolescent girls and young women, who may be asymptomatic for some STIs, and accessing health services may be challenging. Earlier sexual debut today may be a sign that the younger generation is less conservative and more sexually permissive (Willan, 2013). In previous eras, a gap clearly existed between young and older generations. In the current context there is early exposure to sexual risk, and women are generally sexually active for longer than men. This may apply particularly to South Africa, where marriage rates are lower, and a higher number of sexual partners is associated with earlier sexual debut. If contextual factors received greater attention, perhaps the combination model would not be associated with such alarming risks for young women.

Chapter conclusions

This chapter highlighted some of the ways in which girls and young women are socialised into sexual roles. The discussion addressed role models and direct instruction received from institutions such as the family, the church and the school system. The discussion highlighted that such institutions do not act in isolation: they are also the products of history. This chapter revisited the trans-generational impact of women’s subordinate positions in society during slavery, colonialism and apartheid, and how these have produced and reproduced feminine obedience. The role played by feminine obedience in increasing girls and young women’s vulnerability in sexual relationships is linked to the gendered ways in which women are positioned
Chapter 4: Assumptions behind the sequential model

In Southern Africa education is seen as a means to an end for adolescent girls and young women. Girls are expected to sequence their needs, starting with education. The right to education is enshrined in the constitutions of the ten states that make up Southern Africa. Where there are additional resources, Southern Africa is able to offer a choice of government public schools, alongside the options of independent or private schools. Following independence, most countries in Southern Africa elected for basic education in some public schools to be free, or for such education to be offered at a low cost (Noyoo, 2015). The use of the word free in this context needs to be explained to the reader. Even when no school fees are levied, other costs incurred in sending a child to school still have to be borne by parents or caregivers. Transport to school, textbooks, uniforms, extracurricular activities, school lunches and stationery are unaffordable for many learners – even those who are provided with what is perceived to be a free education (De Lannoy et al., 2015). As family circumstances improve, some children are able to move from free or low-cost public education into private schools.

Choice is italicised in this discussion about education to remind the reader that this is not a choice for
many parents: only for parents who are financially well-off and who can afford to send their children to private or independent schools. Such families tend to represent the elite: some elite families had access to quality education during colonial times and during apartheid. The current generation continues to reap these benefits. With the shifts in economies, others are able to join them. Middle-class families who have no confidence in the quality of public education are faced with an unavoidable choice between public and private schooling. This is in contrast with working-class families, who can seldom afford private schooling. Working-class families rely almost entirely on government-sponsored public school systems (Spaull, 2015).

At school some girls are exposed to the desire to consume “the fancy things that my classmates have” (Khumalo, 2010). As Nobelunga relates, school “…is where the pressure was high, and it was hard to be an outcast… I had to find means and ways on how to be like my friends” (Khumalo, 2010). In the higher grades social pressure to consume luxury goods may increase, and at university this continues, so that inevitably some succumb to the consumer lifestyle (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). Increasing peer pressure to consume modernity is likely in the higher grades because children who can afford to stay at school are generally those with some social capital that supports them to remain in school and propels them to progress with their education. As learners move into higher grades the school-going cohort becomes smaller, the in-group shrinks, and the need to fit in becomes more and more pressing and apparent, because of the need to be both visible to, and to be accepted by, peers. When one examines reasons given by learners for dropping out (discussed later in this chapter), it becomes clear that learners who drop out of school earlier tend to come from poorer households, and thus face intense competition from peers with staying power. It is important to clarify the context if we are to identify correctly the role which education can play in protecting young women (or in perpetuating their vulnerability).

Parents play an important role in sending their children to school and in encouraging them to complete their education. Thandi Mtikhulu reckoned that her mother “encouraged us to study and be determined to win irrespective of the circumstances” (Mtikhulu, 2010). The circumstances Thandi referred to are the struggles faced by children from single-headed households with a working class background, and who attend public schools (Mabaso, 2017). Despite the difficult circumstances in which some learners are expected to study, young people from all classes speak positively of education. Education is viewed as a process that can “empower my mind so I can escape poverty” (Sambo, 2017, p. 57) and enable individuals to access “better lives” (Mthombeni, 2017, p. 44). Beyond the benefit to the individual, education is seen as part of the solution to the challenges of national post-colonial and post-apartheid societies as it is “education that will liberate the black child from the shackles of poverty” (Masilela, 2017, p. 78). Young people are taught to believe that diligence and perseverance in school and attainment of the highest qualifications will ensure that they will be able to “escape the pitfalls of poverty” (Mabaso, 2017). Such a perspective aligns with macro solutions to structural problems of poverty, since improving access to quality education is understood to be a major strategy in poverty alleviation (Spaull, 2015).

Young women who choose to first focus their attention on education prefer the sequential model, which affirms the priority of education, rather than dating. Various assumptions made by this model merit exploration in this monograph. Proponents of the sequential model assume that:
1. the choice to attend school is available to children, adolescents and young women, this choice delays sexual debut, and thus it is protective against pregnancy and HIV infection
2. education is available at a lower cost than costs incurred in addressing modern lifestyle needs, and education is a safer choice which protects girls from risky transactional sex
3. once achieved, education will provide young women with sufficient resources to enable them to access and consume the luxuries of modern life
4. the decision to engage in sexual expression before completion of education can, and should be wholly made by girls and young women, and lastly
5. education and family life are entirely separate spheres.

4.1 Assumption 1: Early sexual debut can and should be delayed

In modern society children are regarded as vulnerable and in need of parental protection until the age of 18 years. Thereafter young people are given the benefit of doubt to make mature adult decisions about their lives, i.e. it is believed that they have the capacity to weigh up different options and to choose wisely. Young people older than 18 years are believed to be able to exercise free will and to possess agency to make personal choices. There is a further expectation that they should live with the consequences of their actions, whether these are negative or positive. Whilst these ideas may seem convincing, it is important to remember that adolescent girls’ vulnerability begins long before they are able to make any conscious decisions regarding their sexuality. In the modern post-colonial and patriarchal world, masculinity has been defined as power over women (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). Reconstructing such ideas and ideals about masculinity need to be the basis of interventions to protect adolescent girls and young women. Toxic masculinities forged during slavery, colonialism and apartheid undermine women’s free will and agency, and their ability to protect themselves. The absence of women’s power and the failure to protect them is evident in the spate of indiscriminate violence directed at girls and young women. How then should the principle of delayed sexual debut for girls be understood in the context of violence experienced by children and young women?

Infants, toddlers, preteens and adolescents are all vulnerable to sexual violence long before they are even able to think about dating. Baby rape is a phenomenon with which South African society battles (Richter, 2004). According to South African news reports, the youngest case of rape reported to the police was that of an infant just two months old. Invariably, sexual crimes against infants are perpetrated by men who have close family ties with the victims or proximity in terms of residence. Research regarding child rape shows that the sexual vulnerability of girls begins in infancy and continues in the toddler stage. Scholars describe cases involving conviction of rapists in which the victims were girls as young as two and three years of age (Bae, 2018; Gqola, 2015). Owing to the paucity of research regarding children as victims of sexual violence, the extent to which such violations occur is unclear. Literary studies and grey literature provide accounts of sexual abuse, incest and rape. For example, Mmatsihlo Motsei describes her experience of rape at the age of six years (Motsei, 2017). Khombomuni’s account in ‘Women who change the world’ is commonplace for children who are victims of sexual violence. Khombomuni was raped at the age of nine years, a tragedy that she experienced again in grade five (Mashale, 2010). At the same age Griselda Grootboom and her friends
were gang-raped in Khayelitsha (Grootboom, 2016). A Zimbabwean national study reported the incidence of girls being sexual abused was as high as 11% (Wekwete et al., 2016).

The traumatic effects of early sexual violence are not reversed by education or by girls making wise choices about sex later in life. Victims of sexual violence experience sex which is unrelated to personal choice or behaviour. These girls never made the choice to be sexually penetrated. Their perpetrators’ criminal behaviour robbed them of the opportunity to make such an informed choice, meaning that the assumption that sexual debut can and should be delayed is misguided. Sex was imposed on them long before they were able to make informed decisions about sexual debut. This raises a further question regarding the meaning of sexual debut. Does it refer only to consensual sex, or can any form of forced sex also constitute sexual debut? Can girls ‘lose their virginity’ and experience sex, yet be perceived as not yet having had sex? Is sexual debut only recognised when a girl or young woman has a regular sexual partner? Is sexual debut possible for girls in the absence of any form of relationship? Although survivors of sexual violence may be able to retain their concentration at school, they are likely to experience shame and stigma as they advance through the educational system, and they will also carry psychological and often physical scars of their violation (Oliveira et al., 2016, p. 27). Their good behaviour and their retention in school may not be protective against poor outcomes in terms of sexual health, such as sexually transmitted infections. Some of those who experience sexual violence on multiple occasions may never recover from the impact and may eventually drop out of school (Oliveira et al., 2016, p. 27).

Gender-based violence directed at adolescent girls and young women includes incest, gender-based bullying, statutory rape, intimate partner violence and queer violence (Cooper et al., 2015; Matsimbe, 2018; Rumble et al., 2015). Sexual trafficking, rape and child prostitution, sometimes with the connivance of elderly women, is reported to involve girls as young as nine years of age (Gqola, 2015). Early exposure to sexual violence happens regardless of personal agency or engagement in self-protection (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012; Wekwete et al., 2016). New legislation has emerged to ensure the protection of AG&YW’s, and receives immense support across the SADC region (Wekwete et al., 2016). Even so, unacceptably high levels of victimisation of AG&YW continue to be reported, as well as an increased risk of negative outcomes as a result of non-consensual sexual acts.

Girls and young women are sometimes victimised within their homes by family perpetrators. For example, in her autobiography Thuli Nhlapo describes her persistence in a search for the identity of her biological father leading her (and the reader) to confront the harsh truth that she was the product of incest. Thuli discovered that she was conceived as a result of sexual violation of her mother at 17 years of age, at a time when her mother and her mother’s family lived in a rural part of South Africa. The sexual violation resulted in a pregnancy that the young mother detested: hence knowledge of her paternity was kept from the child (Nhlapo, 2017). Although incest is strongly sanctioned both socially and legally and is sometimes conveniently regarded as ‘a thing of the past’, Thuli’s narrative is a recent one. In her autobiography entitled Beyond South Africa, Sisonke Msimang writes about sexual violation in Lusaka (Zambia) at the age of seven years by a trusted male employee of her family, the family driver. Although Sisonke was born into a middle-class family, this did not provide any form
of protection against sexual abuse (Msimang, 2017). When incest takes place, the proximity of the perpetrator, the victim’s tender age and the blood relationship or relationship by marriage between the perpetrator and the victim’s parents may make it very uncomfortable for the family to address the violation. The exposure of children and young people to violations of a sexual nature is horrifyingly common. In fact, this was my personal experience in my family of origin. I cannot remember how old I was when I was invited to fondle an old man’s private parts. While he never attempted sexual penetration, I still experienced his behaviour as fundamentally traumatising because of the profound betrayal of trust that it represented. Such abuse sends confusing messages to girls, who are told publicly not to look at boys, to abstain from sex and to rather focus all their attention on their studies.

In Southern Africa sexual violence is the common experience of countless girls and young women, and violations occur across the region irrespective of victims’ social class and nationality (Gqola, 2015). Older women may find themselves helpless to protect girls and young women from sexual violence. Sexual harassment in schools, workplaces and other public domains may be normalised and rationalised as a harmless attribute of traditional masculinity (Robertson, 2006). Since time immemorial, from slavery through to colonial times and during apartheid, violence directed at women in Southern African societies, particularly violence directed at black women, carried no major consequences for the perpetrators (Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Plaatje, 2007). There is a persistent absence of serious concern regarding violence against women, despite the pretence that girls and young women actually have control over their bodies. In the modern world the tenacity of girls subjected to such violence is demonstrated particularly by their determination to obtain a full education. Patriarchy supports male supremacy, heteronormativity and over-sexualisation of the feminine in women (Maldonado-Torres, 2016), all of which makes women’s bodies easily accessible for male sexual pleasure, without girls and women having given consent.

Children in Southern Africa are no strangers to adversity. In some parts of the region teenagers are unlikely to live with their parents (Wekwete et al., 2016). The failure of capitalism to improve the economic prospects of the vast majority, the persistence of male labour migration and lower marriage rates, especially in South Africa, are some of the reasons for parents not co-residing and for children so often not living with both parents (Ratele & Nduna, 2018). Parental absence from children’s lives compromises their safety and increases vulnerability to sexual violence. Poverty multiplies the challenges of parenting. Some parents who are unable to support the continuing education of their children may in desperation resort to harmful practices such as supporting child marriage or encouraging girls to drop out of school (Murambadoro, 2018; Ward et al., 2015). Across the region child marriage at a startlingly young age is still reported (Sigosa, 2010; Ward et al., 2015; Wekwete et al., 2016). Common features of child marriage include husbands who are older, poverty in the girl’s parental home and the men’s ability to earn meaningfully or regularly (Murambadoro, 2018; Sigosa, 2010). Child marriages are more likely to involve girls residing in rural villages or girls whose families belong to certain religious sects (Murambadoro, 2018; Sigosa, 2010). In such marriages there are often reports of forced marital sex, and sexual and physical abuse of girls. It is most disturbing that these practices occur with the connivance and awareness of family members (Sigosa, 2010). Child marriage is the nemesis of modernity since it
permits neither sequencing nor combination development. Young brides often drop out of school to start families. A Zimbabwean cross-sectional national study found that up to 19% of adolescent girls’ pregnancies took place in early marriages (Wekwete et al., 2016). Other study findings included that 30% of married adolescents had their first sexual encounter within marriage, with 8.5% reporting that someone chose their partner for them. These young girls are heavily reliant on their husbands’ status and income to achieve social mobility. Early marriage is a phenomenon that I have personally witnessed among friends. In the primary school which I attended some girls who obtained first-class grades were unable to continue with their education; they married and dropped out of school at junior secondary level or later in high school. They were not necessarily pregnant when they dropped out of school. The difference between these girls and myself was that I had a single-parent mother who was a teacher, whilst their mothers were generally factory floor workers. Income poverty at home meant that even if they wished to sequence, this was not a choice which was available to them.

This discussion suggests that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) interventions should always address incest, involuntary sexual encounters, abuse and exploitation, since these are critical points to promote sequencing amongst adolescent girls. The opening paragraph of this section suggested that sequencing was the ‘only choice’ for girls and young women during the period in which I grew up. When this was impossible, girls either dropped out of school to get married and start families at a young age if they were able to find husbands, or they dropped out of school to stay in their family homes. The assumption which the sequencing model effectively makes excludes these girls and young women.

4.2 Assumption 2: Delayed modern consumption delays transactional sex

Another assumption of the sequencing model for HIV, gender-based violence and pregnancy prevention is that an appetite amongst young people for luxurious consumption fuels transactional sex. This assumption is based on the proposition that if adolescent girls and young women are able to set aside their appetite for luxurious consumption, transactional sex will be averted, and this will result in protection against poor outcomes in terms of sexual health such as STIs (including HIV), pregnancy and gender-based violence. Whilst some transactional sexual relationships are motivated by consumption of luxurious goods, transactional sexual relationships also exist in support of the noble achievement of education, to facilitate access to income and livelihoods. Research regarding the reasons given by South African and Zimbabwean learners for dropping out of school found that learners report dropping out mainly for economic reasons (Shefer, Bhana, & Morrell, 2013; Wekwete et al., 2016). In South Africa some 50% of children have dropped out of school by grade 12 (Spaull, 2015). Some 35.7% of those interviewed in the study cited in Morrell and Devey (2012) provided economic reasons as their main motivation for leaving school. This was corroborated by the General Household Survey conducted by Stats SA in 2014 – see Table 2 below, which draws on https://businesstech.co.za/news/general/88810/8-reasons-why-kids-drop-out-of-school-in-south-africa/.
The top reasons why kids aged 7 to 18 drop out or do not attend school are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No money for school fees</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot perform academically at school</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have too many family commitments</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffer from illness and/or disability</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See education as being useless</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>完成了教育到他们想要的程度</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at home</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggle getting to school</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3% of individuals cited other, unspecified reasons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Reasons given for school dropouts in South Africa

When one examines the reasons cited above, reasons two to four possibly relate to financial challenges. Given access to financial support for educational and social services, learners who cite reasons such as performing poorly at school, suffering from chronic illness, living with a disability, or being expected to address family commitments should be able to continue with their schooling. However, if learners’ homes have no financial resources to cover the costs of such health and social services, these too may constitute an economic motivation for dropping out of school. Given access to funding, possibly more than 50% of learners could be prevented from dropping out of school if finance was available to support their remaining in school. In a national cross-sectional study conducted in Zimbabwe, only 4.8% of adolescent girls who dropped out of school cited pregnancy as their reason for doing so, compared to 44.7% who reported that they dropped out because they could not afford to pay school fees (Wekwete et al., 2016). The assumption made by the sequencing model, that consumption mainly involves luxury goods, is patently false. Other errors made by proponents of the sequencing model, who assume that transactional sex can be avoided by poorer young girls, include ignoring the impact of the state of the economy, conscious disregard of evidence that some families struggle to keep their children in school, and moralistic judgement of transactional sex. In the Southern Africa region neither basic education or higher education are provided free (or at a very low cost) to learners and their families. Hence without some form of transactional sex, education is inaccessible to some working-class adolescent girls (who are the most vulnerable sub-group). The questions then become rather:

- Which girls are most at risk of dropping out of school owing to finances?
- How do we keep girls from the lower socio-economic strata in school?
- Who should be lobbied to ensure that working class girls are kept at school?

It is possible that successful sequencing for some AG&YW is facilitated by transactional sex, a lifestyle which is seen as a choice with the primary objective of obtaining access to luxury goods. Such a blind spot is premised on the surreal presumption that girls and young women are never compelled to engage in transactional sex in order to meet their basic needs, the chief of which is education. Beginning in early childhood large numbers of girls enrol in school, and many stay the course. Yet retaining girls in school when they reach higher grades appears to be linked to
whether or not education is affordable. Even in the absence of an appetite for a luxurious lifestyle or consumption of luxury consumer goods, the costs of education mean that transactional sex remains a feature of some girls’ and young women’s lives. What is unclear is what proportion of girls and young women engage in transactional sex for substantive reasons, what proportion do so to obtain access to luxury goods, and what proportion engage in transactional sex for both reasons.

Despite girls being encouraged to stay in school, schools are not safe for poorer girls and young women, as too often they fall victim to male educators who take advantage of their economic vulnerability and their determination to remain in school and complete their education (Mojola, 2014). Economic vulnerability compels some adolescent girls to engage in relationships with older men who are employed, either within or outside school, in order to access some form of material support to enable them to remain in school. Poorer and vulnerable girls tend to be victims of male educators who promise gainful relationships. Such support may be essential for learners and sometimes also for their families, in order to meet the basic needs for survival, social mobilisation and modernisation. In some countries, laws exist that prohibit relationships between educators and learners. Even where such laws exist, implementation does not always take place. What this means is that even for AG&YW who may want to delay consumption and follow the sequential model, immediate survival needs and the offers of ‘caring’ educators may lure them to engage in consensual relationships in exchange for benefits.

One of the reasons why transactional sex is discouraged is because age difference and gender power dynamics give male partners much more power in relationships. Avoiding relationships characterised by gender inequity is meant to safeguard AG&YW. If what is discussed under assumption 1, i.e. the risk of family-based sexual violence, is eliminated, and if AG&YW are able to avoid older sexual partners, will this then make AG&YW safe? It is granted that girls may choose to avoid sexual relationships, and, in particular, may sidestep transactional sexual relationships with older partners. Will this choice keep girls from falling pregnant, experiencing gender-based violence or being infected with STIs (including HIV)? There is research evidence that girls and young women are also victims of violence. A Zimbabwean retrospective national survey reported that 33% of females who experienced sexual violence did so before the age of 18 years. This suggests that they were legally still children when they experienced such violations, and most of these girls had multiple experiences of sexual violation, with the first violation perpetrated by a sexual partner (Rumble et al., 2015). There are reports of violent sexual initiation of AG&YW across the region, since consent to being in a relationship is implicitly understood by male partners to encompass sexual consent (Cooper et al., 2015; Stockman, Lucea, & Campbell, 2013; Wekwete et al., 2016). Girls are made to feel that once they have accepted a proposition, sex inevitably follows. As a result, they may find themselves having unprepared and unprotected sex under duress or they are induced to grant ‘consent’ (Robertson, 2006). In some cases, girls do not fully understand what consent to sex constitutes. Therefore, interventions based on elements of the sequential model may fail to address the needs of AG&YW who are in romantic or sexual relationships with peers. Adolescent girls may also be victims of violence enacted by known male perpetrators who are not their partners (Robertson, 2006). A fine-tooth comb is needed to further examine the role of sexual violence, in and out of school, and how it undermines well-founded and well-resourced SRHR interventions.
While basic education may be free in some parts of the SADC region, education continues to have hidden costs. Such costs are unaffordable for lower-income families and prevent AG&YW from being able to exercise the wise choice to sequence. While the first post-apartheid decade saw significant improvements in access to education in South Africa, in 2003 it was reported that about 40% of the poorest learners still struggled to access education (Department of Education, 2003). Although South Africa spends a significant proportion of its national budget on education, there is a recurrent problem in terms of allocation of resources, i.e. ensuring that sufficient resources are provided and that these are translated into quality education for all learners. Sixteen years after the Plan of Action was drawn up (Department of Education, 2003), financial capacity remains a barrier to lower socioeconomic groups accessing education, owing to the legacy of racial separate development and segregation. Improved budgetary allocations have not resulted in “a more educated and better trained nation” (Department of Education, 2003, p. 7), as policymakers envisaged. Poverty-related barriers to education, such as school fees, school uniforms, learner support materials and access to nutrition, amongst various barriers which were meant to be tackled by the Plan, persist, and prevent the poor from accessing education.

Adolescent girls may also be victims of violence inflicted by known male perpetrators who are not their partners (Robertson, 2006). Gender-based bullying creates a hostile environment for cisgender heterosexual girls determined to pursue education to escape poverty and to develop a modern lifestyle. Various forms of violence are also directed at queer identifying young women, fuelled by prejudice against all gender-non-conforming women, including transgender women, lesbians, bisexual and intersex women, and these too undermine any well-intentioned interventions to keep AG&YW at school (CALS (Coalition of African Lesbians) & AMSHeR (African Men for Sexual Health and Rights), 2013; Gqola, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2011). Thus, young women’s ‘education power’ for safer choices needs to be examined with a fine-tooth comb in order to understand why AG&YW sometimes resort to risky behaviour that puts them at risk for HIV infection, pregnancy and gender-based violence.

There is no doubt that post-school education and training is important to upskill and to improve the employability of young people (Branson & Hofmeyr, 2015). However, for poorer adolescent girls and young women, the promise of post-school gains made by the sequential model are illusory when barriers regarding completion of secondary school remain. Although basic public education is more affordable, public higher education is “heavily commoditised and priced to be a privilege” (Sambo, 2017, p. 57). Bongi Zondi narrated that when she finished her basic education, she wished to study further but because her father “was already a pensioner” her wishes could not be fulfilled (Zondi, 2010). Zondi said that she had “no choice but to look for a job” (Zondi, 2010, p. 10). A similar situation is mentioned in Mojola’s study (2014): after losing both her parents, Jenny could not access post-school education owing to financial challenges (2014). Similar studies across the region suggest that young women choose to refrain from consuming modern commodities, and wish to continue their education (Mabaso, 2017), but may be compelled by circumstances to leave school in order to find a job and to start a family. Some Southern African households have no gainfully employed adults, and some survive entirely on the income provided by a single old-age pension or other forms of social grant (Khumalo, 2010; Nunn, 2012), thus making the choice to sequence
impossible. Education comes at a cost which is unaffordable for many pensioners and single parents (who are mostly women) (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). The sequential model seems to be a “long process which demands your commitment and preparation to face challenges” and for young women like Zondi, it is a route which is “not easy but it’s worth it” (Zondi, 2010, p. 11). Like Thandi Mtimkulu, Zondi seemed to have followed the sequential model. However, Zondi’s said ‘[my] problems started after I matriculated’, suggesting that this model is not fool proof.

In Southern Africa only a fraction of learners who finish high school are able to register for university studies (Branson & Hofmeyr, 2015). Racial and gender inequalities are evident in enrolment at various institutions of higher learning, with fewer Africans or coloured people, and fewer women at postgraduate level (Branson & Hofmeyr, 2015). In her reflections on the #feesmustfall movement at Wits University, Andile Mthombeni highlights some of the material challenges which students from a working-class background face (Mthombeni, 2017). Similar challenges in terms of high university fees and costs of living during term time which are unaffordable are reported by young women at the University of Zimbabwe (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). This partly explains why only half of all those individuals who register to study at South African universities graduate within five years (Branson & Hofmeyr, 2015).

During my post-secondary school education South Africa saw heightened protests about cuts to university subsidies. Most students in the lower socio-economic strata could not afford to attend university. Middle-class students were able to enrol at university but even they struggled to cover all the costs of their education. Access to the TEFSA (now NSFAS) and to other scholarships was limited. Some students financed their university education through sexual relationships with older employed men. Dropouts occurred as a result. Some 25 years later, this scenario is still the reality for many students in Southern Africa. Therefore, the assumption that girls and young women can easily be kept in school is undermined by the lack of financial support for education. Some young women who avoided dating at school find it unavoidable when they reach post-secondary school education, as they need to finance their higher education through gainful relationships (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012).

Young women at the University of Zimbabwe described various ways in which they felt unsafe, violated and bullied, both on and off campus (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). Male lecturers at universities, who are the educated elite, are well aware of the power that they hold. Students may reason that it is foolish to resist the sexual advances of their lecturers if this results in failing a course, and when repeating a year of study may cost R100 000 or more. Sexual violence at universities continues owing to the absence of harmonised national policies to respond to violence against young women in colleges and universities. Where policies do exist, implementation is inconsistent. There are sometimes negative consequences for those who take a stand against the victimisation of students. Some of the perpetrators remain protected and influential, and may be elevated to powerful positions within institutions, worsening the situation for women.

One of the factors contributing to learner pregnancies and girls’ acquisition of HIV at a young age is gender inequality (Willan, 2013). Promoting sequencing aims to narrow the gender inequality gap through education. However, when
schools and universities are sites where sexism, violations and abuse of girls and young women is rampant, keeping girls and young women in the educational system becomes risky. Therefore, a question that we need to ask is what risks girls are exposed to when they engage in relationships, and what risks arise from situations other than transactional sexual relationships? Is consensual transactional sex riskier than dropping out of school? Is consensual transactional sex riskier than sexual harassment and sexual violence enacted by teachers and lecturers? Interventions to protect girls and young women need to answer these questions. Terms such as ‘patriarchy’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ are misused even by educated perpetrators. Very few live the principles espoused in the liberation of women.

4.3 Assumption 3: Modern consumption is achievable and affordable post-school

The third assumption of the sequential model is that on completion of their studies, girls and women will be able to pursue a modern life. The model espouses that consumption will be possible for AG&YW who complete school as they will derive secure incomes from employment positions for which they were qualified by their education. This assumption is shaky since education does not guarantee an optimal return. At the age of 18, after 12 years of basic education, some young women exit the education system because they have no guaranteed access to higher education. Some girls and young women exit the education system with a secondary school certificate, which does not guarantee employment. Jobs are hard to find for qualified graduates, let alone for matriculants. Research suggests that almost half of all young Africans in South Africa “end up with a job that sits at the same level as their parents, which are … amongst the lowest skill levels in the country”, despite the fact that “the number of completed years of education have increased substantially across the generations from three years for grandparents, to five to six years for parents, and an average of 10 years for the current generation” (De Lannoy et al., 2015, p. 26). It would seem, therefore, that the job prospects for lower-income youth with limited education are poor, which denies them the choice of consumption, whether in the present or later. Spaull argues that poor children in South Africa, who make up the majority, are “starting behind and staying behind” as the education system fails to impart knowledge, skills and values that will provide an advantage to these learners in the labour market (Spaull & Kotze, 2015). AG&YW from this class are more likely to follow the combination model, otherwise they “face very few – if any – prospects for upward social mobility” (Spaull, 2015, p. 36).

Inferior basic education and a lack of skills result in a large number of young women who are not in education, not in employment, and not in training (NEET). Africa, particularly Southern Africa, has a youth bulge. Given a context of low levels of education and the lack of marketable skills, there is no real youth dividend apart from a demographic burden. In South Africa, for instance, about 51% of young people are NEET (Branson & Hofmeyr, 2015). Influenced by the sequential model, young women cite education, paid work and marriage as common aspirations, in this order of importance (Shefer & Fouten, 2012). It is possible that this is a middle-class lens, and that satisfying one or more of these conditions in reverse order could keep some young women out of poverty. The preferable order is unclear as marriage may take place before paid employment is secured and before completion of education, and a child may arrive before a marriage proposal. Young women gamble with these options.
4.4 Assumption 4: Romantic restraint is an ingredient for success

The fourth assumption of the sequential model is that sexual experience and expression should be controlled. Yet sexuality begins at birth. From as early as 13 years of age, girls feel love and experience romantic attraction (Oliveira et al., 2016, p. 65). This may be voluntary, as in peer romantic relationships (Wekwete et al., 2016). This belief may fuel sexual taboos and thwarts open discussion regarding sex and sexuality. The notion that romantic restraint is necessary to secure a better future sees romantic relationships as risky and thus promotes sexual abstinence. Abstinence is promoted at the expense of comprehensive sexuality education, including HIV prevention and prevention of pregnancy (Willan, 2013). Therefore, keeping adolescent girls and young women in school may not necessarily assist and support growth and development of positive sexualities. The assumption that adolescents can exhibit romantic restraint limits their access to health services, even outside school. Hence judgmental attitudes of health-care workers and inaccurate and inconsistent use of contraception are cited as contributing to early pregnancies (Willan, 2013). As a result of discussion about sexuality limited to abstinence and delayed sexual debut, adolescent girls may only have ad hoc exposure to comprehensive sexuality education, mainly through friends and the media. The assumption about sexual restraint is a barrier to adolescent girls’ empowerment and it undermines the development of skills necessary in making healthy choices.

A close look at AG&YW suggests a broad range of experience. Some girls in the Zimbabwean context who are not in a sexual relationship invite criticism, as they are regarded as ‘wakasara’ (Zimbabwean street slang for a backward person) (Musizvingoza & Wekwete, 2018). Some 22.8% of adolescent girls in Zimbabwe were primarily motivated by ‘love’ to have sex for the first time (Wekwete et al., 2016). Despite such voluntary expression of love and romance, a combination of dating and education are presented in HIV and pregnancy prevention interventions as opposed to one another. Some adolescent girls are romantically involved and sexually active, but not in gainful relationships (Wekwete et al., 2016). These girls mainly engage in relationships with their peers. They could also align with the social values associated with being a modern young woman. For instance, girls who are romantically involved with peers most often cite receiving gifts as the reason for their first sexual encounters. In subsequent relationships some may engage in transactional sex. However, a proportion of adolescent girls are coerced into having sex in or outside relationships, and this should not be overlooked (Wekwete et al., 2016). The motives for the ‘combination model’ as a means to an end may not apply to girls who date their age mates, yet the risks are there.

Post-school success in the modern world may mean different things for different young people. In the context of this monograph what seems to concern proponents of the sequential model is the ability to find, attract, marry and keep a suitable partner, after an acceptable time delay. The image below was captured on social media. It translates to asking for the whereabouts of the (female) educator who warned schoolgirls against dating and promised that they would meet sound male partners when they finished school. This message questions the viability of romantic restraint. In the experience of the author and sender of the message, such men are nowhere to be found.
I link such questioning to my personal encounters with gender-based violence against women, intimate partner violence and femicide. In 2004 I met a young black woman who worked for a health NGO. She and her male partner shared a flat in the inner-city area of Hillbrow/Yeoville, and they had a child together. I heard shortly after our meeting that she had been murdered by her boyfriend. They had apparently experienced conflict in their relationship, as a result of which he stabbed her. I felt numb and did not understand what had happened. In the context of this monograph she had completed some education, she had met a partner and yet she had not secured the type of successful relationship that women are expected to attain when they are older and employed. I recall this incident 15 years later.

As I wrote this monograph, I remembered that this was not my first encounter with femicide. In 1999, when I worked in Mount Ayliff (Eastern Cape) and lived in Kokstad (KwaZulu-Natal), one of my friends had a relationship characterised by violent conflict. I woke up one day to news that her male partner had stabbed her in their living room in the presence of her two children. She had completed school and had obtained employment in the Department of Education. In my more recent experience in 2017, a mother of three, who was married in her early twenties to a police officer, was shot dead by her husband, together with her oldest daughter. The husband then shot himself. All three died, leaving behind two young orphans. The woman had been my friend since 1987, when we first met in Mdantsane. There are countless other examples of young women who have completed their education and found partners, only to die at the hands of their chosen partners. In all these cases, education and employment status failed to protect women from intimate partner violence and femicide. The point to be made here is that refraining from dating the ‘good’ boy(s) at school is no guarantee of a good, secure, healthy and successful relationship post-school. There are many others where the wait bore positive results. However, it is clear that the sequential model is not foolproof against undesirable outcomes in a context of a high incidence of gender-based violence against women.

For many women the risk of dying at the hands of a loved one is real. Whilst society deplores femicide, women victims of intimate partner violence are sometimes blamed for choosing the wrong partner, for their lack of wisdom, for staying in abusive relationships and for other alleged misdemeanours. Ironically, women may be judged for transgressing accepted feminine norms of commitment when they leave abusive partners, when they speak out, or when they appear to be sexually smart. In what appear to be double standards and evidence of a backlash, women may be blamed for behaving in ways that invite abuse and violations (Gqola, 2015). Women in Mozambique are observed to teach their daughters to respect their husbands and to seek peace, in other words “women must always apologise even if the man is in the wrong” (Matsimbe, 2018, p. 65). Such a construction of respect, which imposes a burden on women and absolves men of accountability, is an example of sexual double standards common across society. It does not matter which position women take, they are still blamed. Being blamed is part of normal sexual socialisation of
AG&YW. In pursuit of gender equality, women improve their social status. Women’s participation in consensual sex in and outside of marriage leads to them being blamed for violations. Women and feminists who advocate gender equality write about what renders some women ‘unrapeable’ (Gqola, 2015). Such women are characterised as strong, empowered, powerful, bold, successful, competitive, manlike, fearless, independent, brave, opinionated, too public, Jezebels, slay queens, etc. Such women strive to match up with the ideal of the modern woman, and yet are vilified and dismissed by society for daring to transgress (Gqola, 2015). Connell writes about how female ex-combatants in Eritrea who were deemed unsuitable to marry post-liberation (Connell, 1998), and Bradford (1996) writes about how South African women who challenged patriarchal power and were viewed as unruly. These are the challenges that await women when they finish school and enter the adult zone.

Social norms regarding sexual scripts and women’s position in society, compounded by the young age of girls reinforce the culture of silence with regard to abuse. Various forms of gender-based violence directed at AG&YW and discussed here embody private shaming, and physical and psychological scarring, and have psychological sequelae, including reduced self-esteem and shattered self-confidence. Experiences of gender-based violence and the culture of silence may further undermine individual and collective agency and action. Lack of adequate, appropriate and efficient services for women in all their diversity mean that girls and young women are exposed to prejudice, discrimination and revictimisation. Regardless of what smart choices women make regarding their schooling and relationships, these roads [sequencing and combination] intersect at the point of violence directed at women.

4.5 Assumption 5: School is a public sphere and family is a private sphere

The last assumption of interventions based on the sequential model is that school and family are separate spheres. The sequential model suggests that adolescent girls need to focus on their schooling and postpone a lifestyle that may result in pregnancy. Pregnancy and childbirth are seen as an interruption of schooling and an obstacle to attainment of future goals (see Morrell, Bhana, & Shefer, 2012a). The issue which is not addressed in these interventions is how much education is sufficient. Is finishing primary education sufficient for an adolescent girl to begin life as an adult? Or is completion of secondary school, a college diploma or a university degree necessary for a full education? Does education end when a girl stops going to school, irrespective of the highest grade passed and her reason for leaving school? Should completion of education precede job-hunting and finding employment, getting married, becoming pregnant, being gainfully employed and developing a life of independence from parents?

In some pockets of Southern Africa adolescent girls get married as early as 14 years of age (Sigosa, 2010). Invariably husbands are older and gainfully employed. Families are central to young women’s decision making, since adolescent girls married through processes such as ukuthwala (marriage through deceitful or coercive arrangements) are not afforded an opportunity to ‘choose’. Since they start families as a result of coercion, these girls choose neither the combination model nor the sequential model. The absence of their agency is a result of the historically inferior social position occupied by their families. Young women not being afforded the right to choose whether
or not to marry should be historically and contextually located. In the period when slavery was legal, women were sold for their physical and sexual labour. Practices such as child sexual slavery, ukuthwala and British women who were sent to colonies as married governesses share similar transactional elements. During colonialism and apartheid, generation after generation of women were denied the right to choose. The migrant labour capitalist system entailed African men spending most of their adult working lives away from their families in mining, construction, textile and other industries. In economies across Southern Africa supported by migrant labour, women had no choice but to remain in villages and raise children single-handed. In post-colonial and post-apartheid society, some black African families find themselves in precarious circumstances: still faced with poverty and compelled to ‘sell’ their daughters to older working men. For these girls, neither the choice of consumption of education nor modernisation determines their fate. Rather, their fate is decided by the needs of other people, i.e. their suitors and their parents. For these adolescent girls, it is not their pursuit of a consumerist lifestyle through sexual transactions that puts them in a vulnerable position, but rather the precarious positions of their families. Even legislation which forbids marriage before the age of 18 years fails to protect these girls from the transactional institution of early marriage (Wekwete et al., 2016). This demonstrates that choosing between a combination and a sequential model requires some degree of agency, for in its absence the choice is made for girls by their parents and suitors. In fact, such a ‘choice’ is not made by parents or suitors if a magnifying glass is applied to how racialised and gendered labour patterns impact on societies. Men, women and children who live in such circumstances are set up for the practice of child marriage, ukuthwala and child sex trafficking. Victims of child marriage, ukuthwala and child sex trafficking are not the focus of behavioural change interventions, since interventions such as ‘ABC’ tend to assume that young women are able to make choices and engage in sexual decision-making, and they fail to acknowledge normalisation of the selling of sexual labour which may result in pregnancy, childbirth and the creation of families.

In contexts where completion of secondary school education does not guarantee the earning of a living wage, young women such as Grace Ngema who obtained a matric pass speak about not having an educational qualification (Ngema, 2010). Indeed, basic education is viewed merely as a foundation, with tertiary education necessary to equip young people with the skills needed to enter the job market. The sequential model requires the individual to stay in the educational system for 12 + 4 years in order to obtain a qualification; for some to be able to earn a living it may require as many as 12 + 6 years. This means waiting until 24 years of age or longer before being able to earn a living. What proportion of adolescent girls and young women in Southern Africa are able to support themselves and their families until 25 years of age before beginning to earn an income? Few options exist for those girls for whom 18 years of education without earning an income is non-viable. What options exist for working class AG&YW to safely combine their pursuit of an education and secure an income for themselves and their families? It is necessary to reflect on whether or not the delinking of education from family life is feasible, practical and sustainable.

Girls such as Nobelunga Khumalo, who lives with her single mother under conditions of penury, may opt for a life that combines education with relationships and the risk of falling pregnant (Khumalo, 2010). Nobelunga describes her
A magnifying glass and a fine-tooth comb:
understanding adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual vulnerability

boyfriend, a married man, as “loaded with money and… twice my age”. She acknowledges that her relationship is characterised by her partner’s controlling and abusive behaviour. Nobelunga is clear that if she refuses to engage in sex with him, “I am never going to get the money again” (Khumalo, 2010) – a statement that denies real consent. The constraints imposed by such reciprocal transactional relationships on young women’s choices and safety are recorded in Mojola’s study (2014). For Nobelunga, the material rewards of the sexual relationship operate in effect as a form of duress. However, material benefits are necessary to enable her to augment her mother’s meagre income and afford consumption of education, without putting school on hold, in order to go out and work. Nobelunga cannot separate her family’s dilemma from her need to continue with her education. In hindsight, Nobelunga appears to regret earlier decisions and wish that she had been wiser. Wisdom would have meant knowing that “good things come to those who wait”: those who make the right choice, who do not choose “short-cuts” and those who “put important things first” (Khumalo, 2010, p. 41). This narrative reflects assumptions behind sequential interventions such as Keep Girls at School, Be W’ise, Dreams and She Conquers, where schooling and deferring luxurious consumption are believed to be wiser choices which avoid making a “mistake” (Khumalo, 2010). Similar regrets are recorded by adolescent girls who became pregnant whilst at school (Shefer et al., 2012) or whilst at university (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). Such experiences lead one to ask whether or not it is possible for young women to pursue both education and income generation to support their families. Such an option would cater for AG&YW who struggle to remain in school whilst supporting their families. For some young women hustling seems inevitable to support the option of staying in school; the hustle is a necessary bridge into young adulthood for some girls and young women (Chinguno et al., 2017; Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). Given improvements in free basic education; improved life expectancy; and reduced numbers of orphans, child-headed and vulnerable households, it may be possible for some girls to complete their basic education without engaging in transactional sexual relationships to help pay for their education. However, whilst education may be taken care of, other family needs still require financial support. Between 2014 and 2015 youth unemployment in South Africa increased from 33% to 36% (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). African and coloured youth have a greater struggle to enter the labour market, and young women are reported to be even more vulnerable to unemployment (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). In a context of high unemployment, it is reasonable for some young women to wish to begin a combination of education, employment and family life in early adulthood. Tertiary education is disappointingly unaffordable and in young adulthood there are few opportunities to combine income generation, education and family life (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). This is mainly because of perceptions that school is a public sphere and the family is a private sphere: hence education systems fail to equip students who are also parents with the necessary parenting skills.

Whilst rates of teenage pregnancy in South Africa have declined, unwanted pregnancy is still a concern for adolescent girls. Research suggests that by 19 years of age, generally a year after completion of high school education, 30% of girls who have finished high school have given birth to at least one child (Morrell et al., 2012b). Most countries in Southern Africa protect the right of girls to continue with their education following teenage pregnancy and have policies to support their re-entry following pregnancy, but does this make it any easier for the girls themselves? The
answer is both yes and no, partly because implementation of such policies varies. The bottom line is what matters for school principals, as they are motivated by anxiety about the size of the denominator for their school grade 12 pass rates (Clowes et al., 2012). If pregnant learners are included in the denominator for grade 12 pass rates, and if these learners struggle to learn because of insufficient support with parenting, their school performances may deteriorate. In order to achieve a high pass rate, pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirls who are single parents and at risk of failing school are systematically excluded from school enrolment, a practice which conflicts with advocacy seeking to keep girls in school. Thus, school authorities inadvertently contribute to the vulnerability of adolescent girls and young women by depriving them of the support needed to stay in school or discouraging school readmission immediately after childbirth. Educator pushback against support for pregnant learners has been recorded. For example, in South Africa one educator took the hardline view that “if they have taken a decision to become parents then they must take on the responsibility to act as parents” (Clowes et al., 2012). Even when not expressed as bluntly, emotive language is often used by school authorities when they speak about pregnant learners: parents are represented as “acting responsibly [when they]… remove their pregnant daughters from school…” and are regarded as “…sensible parents who have taken them [learners] out of school” (Clowes et al., 2012, p. 40). Understanding the power dynamics and subtle coercion these parents face, such language reflects structural violence and the inferior position of older women in relation to school authorities, as well as mothers lacking agency to defend their daughters’ rights to an education. Principals interviewed in a South African study were clearly proponents of the sequential model and used their authority to advance such a point of view (2012). Sometimes this discourse was deployed by principals who pretended to support pregnant learners and yet applied pressure to pregnant girls to leave school. For instance, a participant in one study said:

“I tell parents that the biological mother must take care of the child … the child must know who the mother is … The thing that really annoys the staff and me and the secretary is when they’re given a note to say that the baby is sick and they had to take the baby to the clinic … Teachers have complained to me personally that they do not feel comfortable teaching women, as opposed to girls … It looked nasty you know, grade 12 learner with a big tummy in the school with small kids, the grade 8 learners, it does not look pleasant at all …” (Clowes et al., 2012, p. 45).

The sentiments communicated here, that schools should be ‘nasty-free’ zones (i.e. that it was undesirable for pregnant schoolgirls to stay in school), that educators knew what was in the best interests of affected girls and their babies, and that there should be a strategic division of care for girls and women, undermined efforts to keep girls in school. These discourses stigmatise learner pregnancies and intensify the anxiety of single mothers who attend school. Resistance by school authorities to implementation of progressive policy systematically excludes pregnant learners from school education, since learners are viewed as children and expected to demonstrate obedience, whereas pregnancy, evidence of early sexual activity, is seen as a sign of disobedience.

Chapter conclusions

In terms of assumption 1 behind the sequential model, the link between education, dating and HIV prevention excludes children born with HIV. As an examination of assumption 2 demonstrates, sexual violence undermines girls’ empowerment through education since as girls progress through the grades, their vulnerability also grows
Vulnerability extends from homes to schools and then to colleges or universities. Interventions based on the sequencing model are not foolproof that delaying consumption reduces vulnerability, since avoiding relationships with educators may put some AG&YW at risk of not finishing school owing to financial constraints. Regardless of the model that a young woman follows, young women continue to face challenges beyond their education. University students express anxiety about whether or not they will be able to “afford their lives after completing their degrees” (Masilela, 2017, p. 82). Gender discrimination in education and in the workplace also disadvantages women economically. Economic disadvantage is seen in lower-income groups, with on-going domestic responsibilities sometimes leading to expectations that young women should stretch their incomes even further, resulting in some cases in their economic dependence on male partners. Economic dependence increases the probability of transactional sex, within or outside marriage (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). Women without financial autonomy experience less negotiating power in sexual relationships. Lack of sexual agency is a high-risk situation for young women in a society where sexual double standards allow men to have multiple concurrent sexual relationships (Motsamai, 2010; Shefer & Fouten, 2012). The risk is sometimes evident when a married woman discovers that her husband has impregnated another woman, evidence that he has had unsafe sex outside the marriage (Motsamai, 2010). Sexual double standards undermine the choices available to adolescent girls and young women in relation to their education and relationships.

Little is known about the pregnancy rates of female university students. However, during research conducted in university settings disputed and denied pregnancies, loss of partners and abortions are mentioned (Wekwete & Manyeruke, 2012). The impact on female university students may be different to the impact on learners and merits investigation. Hence when we tease this out: the challenges faced by girls and young women are not entirely their own fault, but are also the responsibility of significant others, including duty bearers. For instance, research conducted by Wekwete and Manyeruke (2012) at the University of Zimbabwe refers to limited clinic services for sexual and reproductive health, thus contraceptives are erratic in terms of availability, and safe abortions are unavailable, putting young women at risk of unplanned pregnancies and childbirth. Yet the education system fails to align with the reality of parenting learners and students.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

This monograph discussed the assumptions made by interventions directed at adolescent girls and young women, and aimed at prevention of pregnancy, HIV infection and gender-based violence. The conditions in which adolescent girls and young women choose to sequence various goals in their lives have been discussed in terms of five assumptions. One conclusion emerging clearly in this monograph is that sexual violence undermines the sequential model. Personal agency is important in terms of enabling AG&YW to make choices, but women in societies with a high prevalence of gender-based violence are unable to exercise such agency. Exposure to sexual violence is an adverse experience with long-lasting and damaging impact. Furthermore, the conversation in this monograph points to the need to strengthen the educational system to make it more viable, feasible, practical and sustainable for girls and young women. Whilst movements such as She Decides are important in terms of fostering girls’ sense of agency, this monograph suggests that duty bearers should choose to invest in educational inputs which ensure better educational outputs for all, perhaps with a bias towards historically disadvantaged and poorer communities, to enable them to catch up.

This monograph suggests that socially constructed shame regarding rape, teenage pregnancy and HIV infection needs to be addressed to ensure effective responses. As long as interventions designed for young women operate under conditions of continuing social stigma regarding these issues, the efficacy of the interventions will be limited. This is clear, for example, in the case of learner pregnancy and parenting by young people: the governments of the Southern African region seem to agree, at least in terms of policy, that pregnant learners need to be supported so that education is accessible to those who are sexually active and become pregnant: stigmatisation by teachers and school management pushes them out of school. Linked to this weakness is the absence of consensus in communities regarding the value and transformative function of education for young women: some view education as an abomination of African tradition. Education is accepted with suspicion, with some expressing disdain that education “has spoiled our African way of thinking [and education] encourages us to go against our own culture … Education is like an insult to my tradition” (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006, pp. 207-208). Some young women reject university education because they feel that its core feature is a form of westernisation, because, for example, government officials in post-colonial Southern Africa continue to use colonial languages extensively (Bae et al., 2018). Some children in Mozambique have been prohibited from speaking their mother tongue. An example I found was a Mozambican female university student who could not speak Shangaan because she “grew up speaking Portuguese” (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006, p. 216). Some local people may, therefore, express ambivalence about education (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006). In apparent agreement with social Darwinism, even in the 21st century some parents distrust the influence of education on their daughters, and wish that they would rather “stop studying and get married” (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006, p. 207). It is unclear what level of education is regarded as necessary for a girl, yet not excessive, in order for her to still be regarded as honouring her traditions.
and yet benefitting from her education. There is little evidence of social mobility to show that enough has been achieved, beyond which point the ‘innocent African girl’ is regarded as ‘spoilt’. There is consequently no consensus on the appropriate age for girls to discontinue their studies, or the appropriate ages to consider marriage or to think about starting a family. Another recommendation linked to assumptions underpinning sequential interventions is that coupling education to future income generation is vital, to enable young women to attain the levels of education to which they aspire, whilst they are still energised to pursue modernity.

While society favours the sequential model because it is seen as more likely to produce women who are self-sufficient, self-sufficiency can never be guaranteed. Parents generally desire a young woman’s pregnancy to be delayed until certain conditions are met, yet such conditions may be unrealistic because of challenges like infertility, child mortality, as well as other problems with regard to pregnancy and parenting. Interventions to support girls and young women should aim to create a Southern Africa free of patriarchal shackles, decolonised and respectful of diversity. How do we create a Southern Africa that recognises multiple modernities? According to Wielenga’s definition, multiple modernities “encapsulate the complex ways in which ‘modern’ societies across the globe have emerged” (Wielenga, 2018a). Families are an integral component of human social organisation. SRHR interventions need to demystify pregnancy and reproduction: regardless of whether a girl or a young woman starts a family whilst she is still at school, when she has finished her school education, or many years after completing it, her decision should be supported. Young women leave families to obtain an education, and they return from school to their families. However, the SRHR sequential model dissociates reproduction from other aspects of life such as education and career. The assumption that schools are sites inherently free of sexuality is invalid, as is the view that young women’s educational aspirations contradict their involvement in family life.

**Recommendations for on-going research**

There is a need to conduct research on:
- The prevalence of early exposure to sexual violence, including rape, incest, human trafficking, *nkutlwala* and statutory rape
- Risk factors for early exposure to sexual violence, in order to develop prevention interventions targeting perpetrators
- Understanding children’s risk factors for exposure to sexual violence, in order to create safer families and communities, and
- Psychological sequelae of early exposure to sexual violence and its impact on educational achievement.

Research studies addressing these issues, together with their findings, should not be limited in terms of relevance to interventions delivered at schools, but should also be applicable to out-of-school youth interventions in the SADC region.
A magnifying glass and a fine-tooth comb: understanding adolescent girls’ and young women’s sexual vulnerability

References


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