

# The Relationship between Perceived Social Support and Life satisfaction: Evidence from a Cross-sectional Study among Teenage Mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

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## ABSTRACT

**Abstract:** Teenage mothers increasingly experience healthcare challenges, which may undermine significantly both their mental health and well-being. Although social support is theorized to buffer this relationship, empirical evidence in the context of research writings remains limited. This study aims to examine the relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

**Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 263 teenage mothers from five sectors of Gasabo district. Multistage and snowball sampling techniques were used for sample size. Data were collected utilizing validated scales for social support (MSPSS) and life satisfaction (SWLS), and analyzed using Pearson's correlation.

**Results:** The results revealed that perceived social support demonstrated a weak positive relationship with life satisfaction ( $n = 263$ ,  $r = .281$ ,  $p = .000$ ). These findings highlight the importance of subjective experiences in enhancing the life satisfaction of teenage mothers in Gasabo District. The government of Rwanda should implement support interventions that foster the holistic well-being of teenage mothers in order to enhance their overall life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Teenage mothers, interventions, wellbeing, life satisfaction, social support

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Social support has been described as a practical, appraisal, informative, and/or emotional support given to an individual by people in their social network. It is generally categorized in four main types, namely emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and appraisal support (Dadandi& Citak, 2023). Perceived social support refers to an individual's perception of support obtained from his environment such as family, friends, and significant others (Wu et al., 2022). It focuses on the quantity and quality of the given support. Recently, studies have established that perceived social support is an important predictor of life satisfaction in wide variety of population groups, such as the elderly, adolescent and pregnant women. Conversely, a lack of received support has been proved to decrease a sense of life satisfaction (Wu et al., 2022; Dadandi& Citak, 2023)

Dikilitas et al. (2023) investigated how perceived social support relates to life satisfaction among single adolescent mothers in İskenderun district, Hatay Province, southern Turkey. The study employed a correlational screening model (quantitative non-experimental). A sample of 115 high school student from grades 9–12 was selected to participate in the study. Data were collected using the personal information form, the Perceived Social Support Scale, and the Life Satisfaction Scale. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to test the relationships between life satisfaction and subscales of perceived social support, while Regression analysis assessed the predictive power of social support subscales on life satisfaction. The results of the study indicated statistically significant positive correlation between the average scores of the Life Satisfaction Scale and the Perceived Social Support Scale. The sub-scale scores for Family ( $r=0.649$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), Friends ( $r=0.227$ ,  $p <0.05$ ), and Teacher ( $r=0.247$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) showed positive associations with the mean values. The study reveals that the presence of perceived social support from family, friends and significant others has a favorable correlation with an individual's overall life satisfaction. These findings suggest that perceived social support significantly predicts adolescent mothers' life satisfaction and subjective well-being. However, the Correlational design employed could determine causality, but established only association.

Another study conducted by Koçoğlu et al. (2025) examined the association between perceived social support and maternal functioning among adolescent mothers from eight family health centers in Turkey. The study adopted a cross-sectional design. A total of 114 adolescent mothers between the 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> week postpartum was selected to participate in the study. Data were collected using a descriptive information form, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Barkin Index of Maternal Function (BIM). Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, independent samples t-test, and multiple linear regression analyses were employed for data analysis. The BIMF and the MSPSS total scores indicated a highly significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.726$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

This result indicates that higher perceived social support is strongly associated with higher maternal functioning among adolescent mothers. Additionally, multiple linear regression controlling for socio-demographic factors showed that perceived social support was an independent predictor of maternal functioning:  $\beta = 0.720$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Thus, social support significantly predicted maternal functional outcomes and well-being. For adolescent mothers, the perception of being supported has a robust predictive effect on postpartum functioning capabilities and life satisfaction. This would mean that teenage mothers reporting lower levels of perceived social support tend to exhibit greater difficulty in fulfilling maternal duties and lower functioning overall. However, self-report measures employed, in the study, relied on mothers self-reports which may introduce response bias.

Also, in Shenyang City, in China, Yu et al. (2020) explored the relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction among pregnant women using a cross-sectional study. A sample of 290 pregnant women was selected to participate in the study. The Satisfaction with Life scale (SWLS), the Zung's self-rating Anxiety Scale (SAS), the Multidimensional Scale (MPSS), and the demographic questionnaire were used to collect data. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to explore the mediating role of perceived social support in the relationship between anxiety symptoms and life satisfaction. PROCESS macro for SPSS was utilized to examine the mediation model. The result indicated there was a positive correlation between the perceived social support (PSS) and the life satisfaction in pregnant women ( $r = +0.576$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). A higher perceived social support was strongly correlated with higher life satisfaction among the respondents. Thus, this means that higher levels of perceived social support are linked with higher life satisfaction. However, the cross-section design employed in the study could not allow causal inferences.

Laurenzi et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review to identify whether psychosocial interventions can effectively promote positive mental health and prevent mental health conditions in pregnant and parenting adolescents in three high-income countries in the region of the Americas: the United States, Canada and Chile. The review focused on randomised controlled trials of preventive psychosocial interventions to promote the mental health of pregnant and parenting adolescents, as compared to treatment as usual. The study included 17 eligible studies ( $n = 3245$  participants). The results of the study indicated that social support interventions had small to moderate, beneficial effects on positive mental health ( $SMD = 0.35$ , very low-quality evidence), and a moderate beneficial effect on school attendance ( $SMD = 0.64$ , high-quality evidence). Thus, this review provided evidence that well-designed psychosocial interventions can effectively improve mental health in pregnant adolescents and adolescent parents. Thus, the perceived quality of social support significantly influences life satisfaction among this population. However, this research is dominated by studies from high-income countries, leaving a critical gap in knowledge and effective strategies from populations in low- and middle-income countries.

Another similar cross-sectional study was conducted by Sabet et al. (2025) to examine the relationship between perceived social support and prenatal distress in pregnant women at Ayatollah Mousavi Hospital in Zanjan, Iran. A sample of 220 pregnant women was selected to participate in the study using a convenience sampling technique. Data were collected using Prenatal Distress and social support questionnaires. The results of the study indicated that social support was negatively correlated with parental distress ( $r = -0.355$ ) as well as childbirth the baby-related distress ( $r = -0.472$ ), and emotional/ related issues ( $r = -0.119$ ). This meant that as perceived social support increases among the population, prenatal distress decreases. In other words, an increase in perceived social support among pregnant mothers is associated with a reduction in parental distress, which in turn contributes to enhance life satisfaction. The findings suggest that social support functions as a protective buffer during pregnancy. However, the relationship is not strong enough to suggest that social support is the only determinant of prenatal distresses, other factors such as psychological and socioeconomic factors likely may contribute. Also, the study used across-sectional design which may not ascertain that social support causes lower distress only can show that they are associated.

Maravilla et al. (2025) examined the relationship between social support and mental health among adolescent mothers in Kenya, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The study employed cross-sectional analysis of nationally representative survey data from adolescents aged 10–17 years. A multi-stage household sampling technique was utilized to select participants. The association between social classes and mental disorders such as suicidal ideation and self-harm was assessed using the Block-Croon-Hagenaars method, adjusted for demographic characteristics and caregiver mental health. All estimates were weighted to respect the respective

country's population and presented with 95 % confidence interval (CIs). 3 latent social support classes were identified in Kenya, Indonesia, and Vietnam: caregiver- focused support, other support and limited support. The results indicated that adolescents in the caregiver- focused support class had lower level of mental disorder. In Caregiver-focused class: Kenya aOR = 0.31 (95% CI: 0.25–0.38);Indonesia aOR = 0.23 (95% CI: 0.17–0.31); Vietnam aOR = 0.39 (95% CI: 0.26–0.57).

These findings revealed that adolescents with stronger perceived social support profiles, especially caregiver-centered support had lower level of mental disorders, suicidal ideation, and self-harm compared to peers with limited support. It is noted that that adolescent mothers with limited social support may significantly experience low level of poor mental health outcomes. The study reveals that lack of social support correlates with compromised well-being or life satisfaction among this population. The study employed a cross-sectional research design which could not establish a causal relationship, whether limited support leads to poor mental health or vice versa.

At the University of Dodoma in Tanzania, Millanzi and Shasha (2025) investigated the relationship between exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) knowledge, practice and maternal health outcomes among adolescent mothers in the Dodoma region. The study employed an analytical cross-sectional design. A sample of 193 participants was selected from both government and private schools to participate in the study. Data were collected using structured questionnaires adapted from previous studies. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyse data using SPSS, computer software program version 26. Multivariate regression analysis was employed, factors associated with EBF knowledge and practices were set at a 95% confidence interval (CI) and 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) significance level. The results of the study indicated that adolescents mothers from urban areas were twice as likely to have higher EBF knowledge ( $\beta=2.325$ ; 95% CI: 1.282-5.2741;  $p=0.014$  (weak positive correlation), and more likely to engage in better EBF practice ( $\beta=1.366$ ; 95% CI: 1.015-4.253;  $p=0.036$  (weak positive correlation) compared to those from rural areas. This study reveals that there is a positive association between perceived support and maternal functioning. This meant that perceived social support from family members and from school networks improved health outcomes or life satisfaction for both mothers and their infants. Thus, higher levels of perceived social support have the likelihood of improving life satisfaction. Participants were drawn from Dodoma region findings may not generalize to different cultural context of Tanzania.

Egbeyale and Arigbege (2025) examined the connection between social support systems and future aspirations among pregnant adolescents seeking maternal healthcare in faith-based maternity clinics in Nigeria. The study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach using structured questionnaires and focus groups. In the sample of 14 participants, the average age of the mothers was  $28.0 \pm 8.9$  years. To provide quantitative data, the questionnaire assessed demographic characteristics, social support and future aspirations. Focus group discussion explored pregnancy experiences, support systems, and future aspirations. Variables included social support, age, education status, marital status, and partner's employment status, employment status of the adolescent mother, current living situation, sexual history and social media exposure. Data were analysed utilising Chi-square tests with Fisher's exact counts ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) and thematic analysis using SPSS v26.0 and NVivo. The results of the study show that participants with stronger networks, particularly family support ( $\chi^2= 6.24$ ,  $p= .013$ . OR=4.82, 95% CI [1.78-13.06]), were significantly more likely to express intentions to continue education post-childbirth. Participants with married parents reported higher odds of expressing intentions for further education or career development ( $\chi^2=5.12$ ,  $p= .024$ , OR = 4.23, 95% CI [1.56-11.47]). Thus, perceived social support is associated with greater reliance and optimism, improving teenage mothers' satisfaction with life. The results of the study illuminate the complex interplay between social support systems and future aspiration among pregnant adolescents in Oyo State, Nigeria, and may not be generalised to the whole country.

Another study was carried out by Mabetha et al. (2024) to explore young women's social support networks during pregnancy in Soweto, South Africa. The study adopted an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach. Eighteen (18) young pregnant women aged 18-28 years were recruited using a purposive sampling approach. In-depth interviews were conducted, and data were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis coding approach, with MAXQDA software, version 20. The results of the study revealed that perceived support from various social networks contributed greatly to the young women having a greater sense of potential parental efficacy and increased acceptance of their pregnancies. Thus, pregnant young women who receive sufficient social support from immediate networks have increased potential to embrace and give attention to pregnancy-related changes. This means that social support reduce stress during pregnancy and increase the likelihood of positive subjective well-being and life satisfaction among this population. The study focused on young women aged 18–28 years in Soweto limiting its generalisation across other regions of South Africa.

In summary, there is a paucity of empirical studies addressing directly the relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers (Laurenzi et al.2020; Maravilla et al. 2025). At the global level, while social support is widely documented, few studies explore the relationship

between social support and teenage mothers' mental health or maternal well-being without emphasising their life satisfaction (Yu et al. 2020; Koçoğlu et al. (2025); Dikilitas et al. 2023). This gap is further amplified at the sub-Saharan African level, where the existing literature tends to focus on social supports networks (Mabetha et al. (2024). There is a lack of similar studies in other African countries, particularly in Rwanda where this research was carried out.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teenage pregnancy is a major health concern because of its association with higher morbidity and mortality for both the mother and the child. Providing social support to these young mothers prevents pregnancy complications and adverse birth outcomes. For example, childbearing during adolescence is known to have adverse social consequences, particularly concerning educational attainment, as teenage mothers are more likely to drop out of school. However, studies report limited access to social support systems, which are critical for the psychological, social, and economic well-being of young mothers despite the overwhelming challenges they face as adolescent mothers. They are considered a vulnerable population because they face overlapping disadvantages at a critical stage in life.

Thus, it is imperative to understand how social support can enhance these teenage mothers' life satisfaction. Also, despite the Rwandan government's efforts to improve access to healthcare services, including sexual reproductive health (SRH), adolescent mothers still lack adequate resources and support. Furthermore, previous studies, including those conducted in Rwanda, have investigated prevalence, determinants and prevention of teenage pregnancy. Apparently, there are no studies supporting and enhancing the mothering capability of teenage mothers who choose to keep their babies. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to investigate how social support related to and enhanced these young mothers' life satisfaction in Rwanda, with a special focus on Gasabo District in Rwanda.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTION

The study sought to answer the following question:

1. How does perceived social support relate to life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District?

## IV. METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as a cross-sectional study, collecting data at a single point in time. A sample of 263 teenage mothers was selected from Gasabo District using multi-stage and snowball sampling techniques. The socio-demographic questionnaire collected data on teenage mothers' information such as age, religion, occupation, level of education and source of income. The social support received questionnaire was used to access social support received. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, and Griffin (1985) containing 5 items was used to access teenage mothers' life satisfaction, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) containing 12 items measured perceived social support.

## V. FINDINGS

### Demographic Information of the Respondents

The respondents were asked to identify their age group, gender, marital status, educational level, occupation, level of income and religious affiliation as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Social Demographics of Respondents*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
11 to 13	3	1.10
14 – 16	63	24.00
17 – 19	197	74.90
Religion		
Christianity	246	93.50
Islam	11	4.20
Others	6	2.30

Current Occupation		
School	13	4.90
Work	8	3.00
Neither School nor Work	242	92.00
Main Source of Income		
Father of the Child	17	6.50
Parents	121	46.00
Work	118	44.90
Other	7	2.70
Education Level		
Primary School	177	67.30
Secondary	69	26.20
Vocational School	12	4.60
Higher Education	5	1.90

As indicated in Table 1, the age distribution showed that the frequency of respondents aged 17-19 years was highest (n = 197, 74.90%), compared with 14-16 years (n = 63, 24.00%) and 10-13 years (n = 3, 1.1%). Regarding religious affiliation, Christianity had the highest number of participants, 243 (93.5%), followed by Islam, 11 (4.2%), and others, 6 (2.30%). Concerning current occupation, the data showed that those who had neither school nor work were the highest at 92% (n = 242), followed by those still in school at 4.9% (n = 13), and only 3% (n = 8) were working. Concerning the main source of income, 46% (n = 121) received financial help from their parents, 44.9% (n = 118) earned income from their work, 6.5% (n = 17) received financial help from the child's father, and 2.7% (n = 7) had income from other undisclosed sources. Finally, with regard to level of education, 117 (67.3%) had only primary education, 69 (26.2%) had completed secondary school, 12 (4.6%) had completed vocational school, and 5 (1.9%) had completed higher education.

### **Relationship between Perceived Social Support and Life Satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District**

The objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and the life satisfaction of teenage mothers of Gasabo District, Rwanda. Firstly, the scatter plot was used to see this relationship visibly through the spread of data points, and the outcome of scatter plotting was presented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Correlation between Social Support Received and Life Satisfaction*

Figure 1 showed the direction of the spread of data points, which was explained to mean that the points generally trended downwards from the upper-right to the lower-left corner. This was evident by the inserted fit line at the total, which at least crossed through some of the points of the graph. This meant that as the x-variable, which was social support, increased, the y-variable, which was life satisfaction, tended to increase as well.

Additionally, the strength of the relationship between the two variables revealed that the relationship, though positive, was weak since the data points were slightly dispersed or scattered. Moreover, a general trend of the data points was visible since the points tended to move from downwards, indicating that the relationship was consistent. The scatter plot, which was a graph or visual representation of data points, was able to a certain degree to establish visibly that the relationship between social support received and life satisfaction was a weak positive one.

To determine if there was a pattern among the data of the two variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed, and statistical data generated by that test were presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Life Satisfaction*

		PerceivedSocialSupport	Life Satisfaction
Perceived Social Support	Pearson Correlation	1	.281**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	263	263
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.281**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	263	263

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed).

Table 2 showed that, in terms of the correlation, there was weak positive relationship (n = 263, r = .281, p = .000) between perceived social support and life satisfaction of teenage mothers of Gasabo District, Rwanda. These results entailed that the increase in social support, which came from a close network of family members, brought about an increase as well in terms of life satisfaction. Thus, the correlation between perceived social support and life satisfaction was a positive relationship, though a weak one.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The results of the study were not consistent with the findings of Dikilitas et al. (2023) who investigated how perceived social support relates to life satisfaction among single adolescent mothers in İskenderun district, Hatay Province, southern Turkey and the results of the study indicated statistically significant positive correlation between the average scores of the Life Satisfaction and the perceived Social Support (r=0.649, p<0.01), Friends (r=0.227, p<0.05), and Teacher (r=0.247, p<0.01). Similarly, the findings of the current study was not supported by another study that was conducted in Turkey by Koçoğlu et al. (2025) to examine the association between perceived social support and maternal functioning among adolescent mothers from eight family health centres and results indicated a highly significant positive correlation (r= 0.726, p <0.001). This result indicates that higher perceived social support is strongly associated with higher maternal functioning among adolescent mothers. Additionally, multiple linear regression controlling for socio-demographic factors showed that perceived social support was an independent predictor of maternal functioning:  $\beta = 0.720$ , p <0.001.

Furthermore, the current findings were inconsistent with the findings of Shenyang Yu et al. (2020) who examined the relationship between perceived social support and life satisfaction among pregnant women in China and the result indicated there was a positive correlation between the perceived social support (PSS) and the life satisfaction in pregnant women (r = +0.576, P < 0.01). A higher perceived social support was strongly correlated with higher life satisfaction among the respondents. Likewise, the results of the current study were not supported by the findings of Egbeyale and Arigbege (2025) who examined the connection between social support systems and future aspirations among pregnant adolescents seeking maternal healthcare in faith-based maternity clinics in Nigeria and results of the study show that participants with stronger networks, particularly family support ( $\chi^2= 6.24$ , p= .013. OR=4.82, 95% CI [1.78-13.06), were significantly more likely to express intentions to continue education post-childbirth.

Participants with married parents reported higher odds of expressing intentions for further education or carrier development ( $\chi^2=5.12$ , p= .024, OR = 4.23, 95% CI [1.56-11.47). The current findings could have differed with earlier findings in terms of location of the study and difference of reality of the single mothers from one place to another. The results could also mean that there are other intervening variables could be affecting life satisfaction of teenage mothers in Rwanda. Since this was a correlational study and intervening variables were not controlled could explain the weak negative relationship between social support and life satisfaction of teenage mothers in Rwanda.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the above study on perceived social support and life satisfaction among teenage mothers in Gasabo District, Rwanda, it is therefore concluded that social support plays a significant role in enhancing the wellbeing of teenage mothers. However, its effectiveness depends on the perception of its availability, of being valued and understood within the larger community.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that improving the perception of support interventions and strengthening social support networks is crucial in shaping the psychological wellbeing of teenage mothers; this may increase teenage mothers' life satisfaction. Also, the study recommended that the government should develop and implement policies that address the psychosocial challenges faced by teenage mothers.

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