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## Teenage motherhood: dilemma or delight?

A study of the life world of adolescent mothers in Buenos Aires



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## **Abstract**

This thesis is based on six weeks of fieldwork in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the autumn 2009. It investigates the lived experiences of a group of teenage mothers who have grown up in institutions. Although biomedical literature states that pregnancy is risky in medical terms only at the very start of the teenage years, adolescent pregnancy is as a norm depicted as a public health problem, or even a ‘social epidemic’, by policymakers, public officials, the press and the public at large. Commonly, teenage pregnancy is understood as a cause of poverty, rather than the consequence of it. This perception is not necessarily in accordance with the opinions of the mothers themselves. While appreciating that every case is individual and that the circumstances under which my informants became pregnant is not subject for generalisations, the objective of this thesis is to explore the informants' experience of motherhood from the moment of conceiving to the present in an effort to understand their views on teenage pregnancy.

The theoretical framework of Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Erving Goffman and Howard Becker will be used to analyse the girls' perceptions of their own capabilities and notion of stigma. The study will be contextualised by drawing an overview of the legislative framework for pregnancies and abortions in Argentina and the available support system.

Key words: teenager, pregnancy, adolescent, institutionalisation, abortion, rights, reproduction, sexuality, capabilities, education, stigma, feminism

## Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven er basert på et seks ukers feltarbeid i Buenos Aires, Argentina høsten 2009. Oppgaven undersøker erfaringene til en gruppe tenåringsmødre som har vokst opp i institusjoner. Selv om medisinsk litteratur hevder at graviditet, sett fra et biologisk synspunkt, bare er risikabelt tidlig i tenårene, er tenåringsgraviditet en norm som er fremstilt som et offentlig helseproblem og en 'sosial epidemi' av beslutningstakere, politikere, pressen og offentligheten generelt. Ofte forstås tenåringsgraviditet som en årsak til fattigdom, ikke som konsekvensen av den. Denne oppfatningen er ikke nødvendigvis i samsvar med det mødre selv mener. Til tross for forståelsen for at hver graviditet er unik, og mine informanter ikke kan være gjenstand for generaliseringer, er målet for oppgaven å undersøke informantenes syn på mammarollen, fra det øyeblikket de ble gravide til i dag, i et forsøk på å forstå deres meninger om tenåringsgraviditet.

Det teoretiske rammeverket utviklet av Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Erving Goffman og Howard Becker vil bli drøftet i forhold til jentenes oppfatning av sine egne evner, samt begrepet stigma. Dette vil bli satt i kontekst ved å finne paralleller med det juridiske rammeverket for svangerskap og aborter i Argentina, samt tilgjengelige støtteordninger.

Stikkord: tenåring, graviditet, ungdom, institusjonalisering, abort, rettigheter, reproduksjon, seksualitet, evner, utdanning, stigmatisering, feminisme

## **Abstracto**

La tesis se basa en seis semanas de trabajo de campo realizado en otoño de 2009 en Buenos Aires, Argentina, y tiene por objetivo investigar las experiencias de un grupo de madres adolescentes que han sido criadas en instituciones. A pesar de que la literatura biomédica defiende que el embarazo conlleva gran riesgo solamente al principio de la adolescencia, tanto políticos y funcionarios públicos como la prensa y el público en general lo consideran un problema de salud pública, o incluso una ‘epidemia social’. El embarazo adolescente se entiende comúnmente como una de las causas de pobreza, en lugar de una consecuencia de ésta. Esta percepción, sin embargo, no es necesariamente compartida por las propias madres. Si bien cada caso analizado es único y las circunstancias en que mis informantes se quedaron embarazadas no son generalizables, el objetivo de esta tesis es explorar la experiencia de las adolescentes desde el momento de la concepción hasta el presente, en un esfuerzo por comprender sus puntos de vista sobre el embarazo adolescente.

El marco teórico aplicado se basa en las contribuciones teóricas de Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Erving Goffman y Becker Howard, para analizar las percepciones que tienen las niñas en cuanto a sus propias capacidades y a la noción de estigma. El estudio será contextualizado trazando una visión general del marco legislativo Argentino en tema de embarazo y aborto, así como del sistema de apoyos disponible. Suponiendo que el sistema jurídico es reflejo de la sociedad, se discutirá también la influencia de la religión en estas leyes.

Temas: adolescencia, embarazo, adolescentes, la institucionalización, el aborto, los derechos, la reproducción, la sexualidad, las capacidades, la educación, el estigma, el feminismo

## List of abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
DIY	Do It Yourself
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRW	Human Rights Watch
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Childrens Fund
WHO	World Health Organization





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## Chapter 1 Introduction

*[In the principal's office]*

**Mrs. Lichtenstein**: Hello, Clareese. Are you pregnant?

*[Clareese looks away]*

**Mrs. Lichtenstein**: You're 16; you're still in Junior High School; and you're pregnant with your second child. Is that correct?

*[No reply]*

**Mrs. Lichtenstein**: Are you pregnant, again?

*[Mrs. Lichtenstein huffs, exacerbad]*

**Mrs. Lichtenstein**: What happened Clareese?

**Clareece 'Precious' Jones**: I had sex, Mrs. Lichtenstein.

From 'Precious' – nominated to Best Motion Picture of the Year, 2010

'Precious', the 2009 movie based on the novel 'Push' by Sapphire, sums up the recurrent and cross-cutting themes of this research; teenage pregnancy, education and opportunities. From medieval Mary de Bohun and Sacagawea to Jamie Lynn Spears and Bristol Palin, the global average age for first child-birth is considerably lower than the current Norwegian average of 28 years old (Statistics Norway, 2010). History makes it hard to consider teenage pregnancy a straightforward deviation from the norm, yet UNICEF concludes the following:

Giving birth as a teenager is believed to be bad for the young mother because the statistics suggest that she is more likely to drop out of school, to have no or low qualifications, to be unemployed or low-paid, to live in poor housing conditions, to suffer from depression, and to live on welfare. Similarly, the child of a teenage mother is more likely to live in poverty, to grow up without a father, to become a victim of neglect or abuse, to do less well at school, to become involved in crime, to abuse drugs and alcohol, and eventually to become a teenage parent and begin the cycle all over again.

UNICEF, 2001 'Teenage births in rich nations'

Although cut from a UNICEF report on adolescent births in developed countries, the situation described above is transferable to the developing part of the world as well. Despite teenage pregnancy being the norm rather than the exception in many developing countries (WHO, 2010),

there are complications not only health wise, but socially, economically and educationally as well.

A voluntary work period in Guatemala in 2006, where I visited a small community in a poor rural area and saw the girls' challenges to obtain an education spurred my interest in girls' and women's access to human rights, in particular in relation to reproductive health and education. Through my current job in Kulturstudier<sup>1</sup>, I got in contact with the social organisation Amartya based in Buenos Aires in winter 2008, and when I briefed a colleague there about my prospective fieldwork he introduced me to the Doncel project (more information on Amartya and Doncel in the *Appendix*), an employment and educational training programme for marginalised youth. Doncel reported a high pregnancy frequency among the teenage participants and subsequent withdrawal from their programme. The project leaders were eager to acquire more knowledge about why pregnancy was so common among their adolescent participants, and what could be done to improve the situation.

As a result, this study has taken place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the aim of shedding some light on the lived experiences of teenage mothers growing up in institutions<sup>2</sup>, what influenced their pregnancies and what obstacles they face on the way to lead happy, healthy lives with their children.

## **1.1 Objective of the study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the life world<sup>3</sup> of adolescent mothers in institutions in Buenos Aires. I have drawn on adolescent mothers partaking in the Doncel work training programme as a case study. The research's aim is twofold. Initially, I would like to take a

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<sup>1</sup> A company helping Norwegian students study a semester abroad in Argentina, Ghana, India, Nicaragua and Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> There is an estimated 20,000 youths living in institutions or shelters in Argentina. Often, the alternative to living in an institution is homelessness. The youth has to leave the institution after turning 21.

<sup>3</sup> A person's life world is a socially contextualized totality in which experiences interconnect logically and meaningfully (Thompson, 1990).

step away from a dominating discourse where teenage pregnancy is seen as a catastrophe for the mother and child, and investigate the lived experiences of teenage mothers themselves. Secondly, the focus will be on the aspirations of the adolescent mothers in relation to education, employment and their future. To guide the research I have asked the following research questions:

- Which factors are in play when an Argentine teenage girl becomes pregnant?
- What prospects does a teenage girl have for herself and her child(ren) in relation to education, employment and the future?

The thesis is based on a small scale qualitative study of teenage mothers growing up in institutions in Buenos Aires. In addition to investigate some of the hypotheses around the high number of pregnancies, lack of contraception, denial of abortion and access to sexual health and reproductive rights education, I hope to assist Doncel in providing some insights into the lives and everyday support needs of adolescent mothers.

Before entering into the contextualisation, discussion around the theoretical framework, methodological issues and data analysis I will give a brief outline of the thesis.

## **1.2 Outline of the thesis**

Over the coming chapters this study will give the reader an insight into the challenges of being an adolescent mother growing up in institutions in Argentina. I will take the reader through important issues like human rights, stigma and control over own bodies, and look at some of these aspects in relation to relevant theory.

*Chapter 2 Contextualisation* will give the reader an insight into the dilemmas of adolescent pregnancy and look at the major aspects that surround the issue, both in relation to the Argentine context, and globally. The reader will get a brief introduction to Argentine history; see some of the issues around being a woman in Argentina be deconstructed, as well as be introduced to the global nightmare many call adolescent pregnancy. However, as we shall see, for some of the adolescent mothers themselves, parenthood was a positive change in their lives.

*Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework* discusses different theories relevant to the issue of teenage motherhood and pregnancy, including the role of stigma and labelling theory. I will also look into Amartya Sen's capability approach, where the central discussion will be about what these girls are actually capable of.

*Chapter 4 Methodology* looks at the methodological aspects of the research project and discusses and explains the research design, choice of methodology, sampling, reliability and validity, as well as a separate section looking at ethical issues and the role of the researcher.

In *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* the reader will get up close and personal with the informants participating in this study. Here they share intimate stories and thoughts about being a mother. Some of the accounts brought about fresh dimensions of being a young mother in a marginalised society, and regardless of past events, all the mothers were adamant that the future would be brighter.

In *Chapter 6 Bringing it to a close* I will bring my discussions to a close and sum up some of the lessons learnt through the fieldwork. I will tie the abovementioned chapters together and using the acquired fieldwork knowledge, present an answer to the research questions.

Before embarking on *Chapter 2 Contextualisation*, please bear the following clarifications and limitations in mind.

### **1.3 Clarifications and limitations of the study**

This study deals with six informants, whom I met on one or more occasions during a six week period in the autumn of 2009. The informants' native language is Spanish, whilst my Spanish is limited; hence an interpreter was present and aided the transcribing of the interviews. This will be further elaborated in *Chapter 3 Methodology*.

A classic limitation in fieldwork is the lack of time, and a typical question upon returning from the field is whether more interviews should have been conducted. I started my background research well before heading to Buenos Aires, and was efficient once in the field in relation to locating informants and organising interviews. Upon returning to Norway I felt I had enough material to support the discussion and analysis brought forward later in this thesis.

In a qualitative study like this, it is important to remember that the debate offered in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* is my own interpretation of the data. I have taken thorough measures to log and show the analytical steps in order to increase the validity of my findings, and although my conclusions are backed up by evidence from the findings and relevant literature; other researcher could arrive at a different result (Bryman, 2004).

As this study only deals with six informants, I cannot generalise my findings to the greater Argentine context, nor to a broader global context, however, I hope to add to the existing knowledge on the topic. As there are few specific studies conducted on this topic in Argentina, I will make use of previous studies from other countries in order to compare the situation, and attempt to look at the research questions from a meta perspective in order to get a clearer understanding of how my local Buenos Aires case fits into the bigger picture.

This study deals with young women aged 17-21 in September 2009, who were aged 11-19 when they gave birth to their first child. The teenage years cover a wide age range, and the term adolescent or teenage mother is used loosely by both policymakers and the media, in Argentina as elsewhere. In relation to adolescent motherhood, there is a tendency not to distinguish older from younger, married from unmarried, or self-supporting from welfare-dependent teen mothers. As a result, the term adolescent motherhood is understood to include all adolescent mothers regardless of marital or economic status. For this reason, the terms teenage and adolescent mother will be referred to throughout this thesis when referring to all young women who had their first child up to the age of 19. The teenage mothers will in addition be referred to as ‘informants,’ ‘respondents,’ ‘participants,’ ‘girls’ and ‘young women.’ I have the utmost respect for the lives these women have chosen or been forced into, and although referring to teenage pregnancy as ‘problematic,’ ‘challenging’ or ‘difficult’ at times, I do so from a broad perspective. I have no

intention of being derogatory or judgmental of their situations, and ask the reader to kindly bear this in mind.

Speaking in terms the Argentines are familiar with; it takes two to tango. Also meaning, it takes two to make a baby, however, this study will not encompass the male counterparts of these girls. Even with such a small number of participants, many severe topics worthy of looking into and investigating emerged, and I have had to hand-pick only a few to concentrate on in this research. So although I do not doubt that the men have their share of stories to tell, and perhaps a different perception of teenage parenthood, I leave that part to be uncovered by someone else.

As girls and women are my focus throughout this paper, I will consequently use *she* as the pronoun whenever applicable.

Unless otherwise stated, all facts and figures relate to Argentina.



## Chapter 2 Contextualisation

### 2.1 Argentina



Argentina is situated in the southern part of South America and declared its independence from Spain in 1816. The country's culture and population are heavily shaped by immigrants from Europe, in particular Italy and Spain. The influence from the Mediterranean area has resulted in the country being predominantly Catholic (92 percent), however less than 20 percent are practising Catholics (CIA Factbook, 2010). As the phenomenon of unmarried teenage mothers is quite common in Argentina, it demonstrates that there indeed is a gap between the devout Catholic who does not practice premarital sex and the reality.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, years of direct and indirect military interferences in subsequent governments were followed by a military junta that took power in 1976. During the dictatorship between 10,000 and 30,000 people (depending on the source) disappeared (BBC, 2007). Democracy returned in 1983 after a failed bid to seize the Falkland

Islands (Islas Malvinas). The world's attention turned once more to Argentina in December 2001 as its economy collapsed, sending protesters into the streets demanding new reforms and the President's resignation. The interim Government devalued the currency in early 2002, at the same time that Argentina announced the biggest foreign debt default in history. Price inflation was inevitable and incomes dropped. The number of people living under the poverty line soon increased from 29.4 percent to 53.3 percent<sup>4</sup>. The tumultuous conditions also led many women to

<sup>4</sup> Government estimates 13.9 percent of the population lived below the poverty line in June 2009 (CIA Factbook).

become politically active for the first time, sometimes engaging in previously unimaginable political actions. Many of the most pressing issues in the women's campaigns centred around control over one's body; food security and adequate health care, reproductive and sexual freedom, and protection from physical violence (Sutton, 2007). Argentina made strides in female political participation and economic independence, and women in Argentina have entered the formal workforce in stronger numbers than in most of its neighbouring countries. In 2001, Argentine women represented almost 43 percent of all paid non-agriculture employment. Women still tend to be in temporary jobs with little job security and lower pay than most men with similar jobs; however, the increasing economic independence has advanced women's rights in general (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Currently, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is president, and she has since her student days in the 1970s been committed to defend human rights (The Government of Argentina, 2010). In an interview with Time Magazine (2007), she stated "My hope is that Argentina becomes a human rights role model in the world." Despite the president having big plans for Argentina as a pioneering country within the field of human rights, an estimated 25 percent of all Argentine women suffer domestic violence on a regular basis. One in two women is estimated to suffer some form of gender-related violence at some point in their lives (Human Rights Watch, 2005). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women<sup>5</sup>, which monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, states: "Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men" (CEDAW, 1992). CEDAW (2004b) urges the Argentine State party to ensure a comprehensive approach is taken to address violence against women and girls.

In the next section I will look closer at some of the issues that particularly affect young mothers' rights and lived experiences in Argentina.

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<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, CEDAW. CEDAW is by different sources used for both the *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* and on the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. When referring to CEDAW, I refer to the Committee.

## **2.2 Argentina from a feminist viewpoint**

In a follow-up report from CEDAW (2004a) Argentina was commended for increasing private sector salaries, the initiation of negotiation towards collective agreements, the increase in the minimum wage, public sector pay and minimum pension, all measures that have a direct impact on women's situation. The 2001-2002 economic crisis in Argentina generated a multiplicity of organisations and forms of social participation, which became the channel for implementing various strategies in support of families, and making especially women more aware of their rights and equal opportunities (CEDAW, 2004a). CEDAW (2004a) commended the State party for its measures to increase the participation of women in public life, especially after two female judges were appointed to the Supreme Court of Justice, and women constituted 41.67 percent of senators, 33 percent of members of Parliament and 27 percent of deputies in legislatures outside the capital. CEDAW (2004a) urged Argentina to include women as participants and actors in its design and implementation of new programmes and strategies too. Its argument was that an approach where women are solely beneficiaries without having a say can perpetuate stereotypical views of the role of women and men, rather than effectively increase women's political and economic empowerment.

CEDAW (2004b) is concerned with poor working conditions for women in both formal and informal sectors. There is a discriminatory wage disparity between men's and women's wages, as well as women lacking many social benefits and services. Especially rural women are vulnerable and CEDAW (2004b) urges the State party to ensure they have full access to education, health services and credit facilities.

### **2.2.1 Facts and figures**

Over the past 50 years Argentina has doubled its numbers of inhabitants from 20 to 40 million. The number of children per woman has decreased from 3.09 to 2.25, and while the life expectancy for women has increased by over ten years to 79.1 years, the infant mortality rate has plummeted from 59.7 deaths per 1,000 live births to 13.4 (UN, 2009).

The adolescent fertility rate (age 15-19 years) is 62 births per 1,000. Annually around 100 000 children are born to teenage mothers in Argentina representing 15 percent of total births annually. For 32.5 percent of the adolescent mothers aged 18-19 this was their second child and 7.6 percent have three children or more (Gogna et al., 2008). The fertility rate is lower than the average rate for Latin America (72.4 per 1,000), however considerably higher than for instance Chile (43.6 per 1,000), which has a GDP per capita comparable to Argentina's<sup>6</sup>. The lifetime risk of maternal death is also considerably higher in Argentina than in Chile, with one in 530 compared to one in 3,200 in Chile (Save the Children, 2010). The high number of deaths could be related to the high number of teenage pregnancies (Gogna et al., 2008). CEDAW (2004b) expresses concerns about the high pregnancy rate among teenagers, resulting in a high rate of maternal mortality, one third of which is caused by illegal abortions.

In Africa and South Asia the norm is to marry off pregnant girls, often to older men, while in Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States, young mothers often stay unmarried. But whether married or not, young mothers tend to be isolated, their health or educational needs are rarely met, and they are not adequately prepared to deal with the challenges facing them and their children (Save the Children, 2004). Adolescent pregnancy became an issue in Latin America in the 1970s, about a decade later than in Europe and the US. The emerging of teenage pregnancy as a 'social problem' was the result of a series of factors: there had been an absolute and relative growth of the teenage population; there had been a smaller decrease in adolescent fertility than in adult women; and increased access to health care gave teenage girls greater social visibility as they came to make use of contraceptives (Gogna et al., 2008).

There has been a steady increase in premarital births in Buenos Aires, with a tripling of numbers from 1960 to 1999. Argentina lacks a nation-wide survey, so there is no comprehensive information about the use of contraception among youth; however a variety of smaller studies

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<sup>6</sup> In comparison, Norway has 11 births per 1000 teenagers (UNFPA, 2009).

(see e.g. Miranda, 2007; Gogna et al., 2008) covers some areas and suggests that knowledge of contraception is already very high among female adolescents of childbearing age living in the urban capital area. The use of contraceptives does not seem to have been affected either by the Catholic Church's opposition to birth control or public policy<sup>7</sup>. The recently released *State of the World's Mothers* report from Save the Children (2010) states that 64 percent of Argentines in a relationship use contraception<sup>8</sup>. Pantelides (2002) argues that the use of contraception is considerable among adolescents, however, this use will only continue until economic conditions make it too expensive to afford the contraceptives. The economic crisis in 2001 affected individuals' income as well as the purchase of medication for hospitals, causing a risk of unwanted births among the poor and the lower middle class served by those hospitals. Family planning and the use of contraception allow women to plan their pregnancies, and can help ensure that the women are physically and mentally prepared for the pregnancy and motherhood.

In October 2002 the Senate approved a bill creating the National Programme on Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation. For the first time in decades the government officially acknowledged that sexual and reproductive health issues were important, and supported actions to implement positive change in the field (Gogna et al., 2008). The much sought-after national program on reproductive health had aims of addressing poor women's economic obstacles in obtaining contraceptives, and the programme encouraged the distribution of certain contraceptive methods for free in public health clinics (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Nevertheless, several of my informants in Buenos Aires criticised the government for lack of action when it came to marginalized teenagers, especially unemployed, uneducated, unskilled adolescent mothers, adding to critique from CEDAW (2004a) regarding a thorough follow-up system that can evaluate the successfulness of the National Programme on Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation programme.

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<sup>7</sup> Except for the period of dictatorship (1974-1983) when it was prohibited to provide or recommend contraception.

<sup>8</sup> The numbers are not broken down further into age brackets to see how many of these are teenagers.

## **2.2.2 Being a young mother in Argentina**

This small scale study cannot claim to be representative of the attitudes or experiences of young parents in the wider Buenos Aires area, or more broadly. However, the interviews did reveal some compelling insights into how some teenage mothers experience the role of parenting, their concerns and options for the future. These insights challenge the dominant construction of the issue by the media or policymakers in general.

Argentina's reproductive health indicators are relatively low given the development of the country's public health system and the resources allocated to health (21.3 percent of GDP). Argentina's maternal mortality rate of 46 per 100,000 births, is higher than neighbouring countries like Paraguay and Uruguay, despite more expenditure on health care (Gogna et al., 2008).

It is argued by Alexander et al. (2010, p. 138) that "...The evidence presented by the government on teenage parenting represents a highly selective quantitative evidence base which overlooks the more complex qualitative picture emerging from teenage parents themselves." Although Alexander et al. are referring to the situation in the United Kingdom, there is little doubt it is a viable conclusion to draw across the pond as well, as the idea of motherhood as a valued social role is being grossly undermined – at least for poor and unmarried teenagers.

A large qualitative and quantitative study was conducted in Argentina in 2003-2004 with more than 1500 adolescent mothers participating (Gogna et al., 2008). The findings addressed connections between school dropout rates, pregnancy and poverty. The study also gave recommendations on how to tailor health care and sex education to meet local needs. The reasons given by young women for becoming pregnant differed, but the younger the girls, the higher the risk of the pregnancy being the result of non-consensual sex. In other situations, and despite the Government's attempt to implement strategies, a lack of sexual education or accessible health care services prevented adolescents from using contraceptive methods effectively, if at all (Gogna et al., 2008).

As four of the six teenage mothers participating in my study had been trying to become pregnant, and therefore actively wanting to take on the mother role, it is possible to argue that they also wanted to succeed in the role as a good mother who could provide for their children. The role of a “good mother” can however conflict with their role as students or employees. This is something which will be further looked into in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion*. But first, some insight into other factors that are in play when a teenager becomes pregnant.

## **2.3 Challenges to teenage motherhood**

Teenage pregnancy is a complex issue and before embarking on solutions to the problem it is important to understand that the issue is looked upon very differently depending on traditions. Although this research is a case study from Buenos Aires, I find it important to look at how teenage pregnancy is viewed in other parts of the world in order to demonstrate the great divide in opinions about this topic. For instance, in the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand, the normative perceptions of motherhood have shifted over the past few decades to position teenage mothers as marginalised and stigmatised. A reason for this is that adolescent mothers resist the typical life trajectory of their peers and the current governmental objectives of economic growth through higher education, and a higher number of women in the workforce (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). There is no right or wrong time to start a family. Research (see e.g. Alexander et al., 2010) suggests that although young mothers are not necessarily a homogenous group, there are patterns. For example, young mothers are often products of their own natural family configuration, where absent or emotionally distant biological fathers, and dysfunctional or broken homes, are recurring themes. People differ emotionally and physically, and the view on a suitable time for pregnancies is culturally defined. Social class and ethnicity are also aspects one must take into consideration when assessing the phenomenon. The arguments also differ from the policymakers and the teenage mothers’ point of view, as this study reports.

This study will look at two main schools of thought regarding teenage pregnancy – one where the teenager, although still young, has actively chosen to become pregnant, and the other where policymakers and the media suggests that adolescent pregnancy is a uniformly negative experience for the mothers themselves, their children and the rest of the society. Some (see Alexander et al., 2010; Milne, 2006) argue there is a ‘benefits culture’, which encourages young women to get pregnant at the expense of the rest of the society. The government and large international agencies working for human and women’s rights put forward an argument summed up in the following quote:

Children born to teenage mothers are more likely to live in deprived areas, do less well at school and disengage from learning early – all of which are risk factors for teenage pregnancy and other poor outcomes (DCSF, 2007, p. 3).

However, this view of teenage parents, portraying the situation as a downward turning spiral of poverty and hopelessness is not backed by all. Alexander et al. (2010) argue that many young parents find their situation positive and have uplifting attitudes towards parenthood – a situation where teenage parenthood may be seen as an opportunity. With the words of one of the informants, Rosana, “sometimes I feel so lonely, but having my daughter makes me feel good.” While realising there are severe global challenges with teenage pregnancy my findings lend support to the second school: teenage pregnancies are not solely a negative experience for the girls involved.

The sections below will back the first school of thought and address the structural difficulties associated with teenage parenthood in regards to physical and socio-economical challenges with adolescent pregnancy, then *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* will look at how some of my informants contest – or agree - with this view.



### **2.3.1 Physical challenges during the pregnancy**

In this 21st century no woman should die giving life. It is unacceptable that one woman dies every minute during pregnancy and childbirth when proven interventions exist. Millions of lives are at stake, and we must act now.

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA, 2007

From a meta perspective, sexual behaviour is part of the human condition, and like eating and drinking it is an inborn drive. Nevertheless many civilizations have stigmatised unmarried sex through both religious and legal parameters. Being a teenage mother adds some critical aspects to the equation as adolescent pregnancy can cause severe health problems for both mother and child. Despite the teenage years used to be considered an optimal time physiologically for childbearing (Walker et al., 1976), an estimated 70,000 adolescent girls die from pregnancy-related complications each year. In Latin America, the risk of maternal death is four times higher among teenagers younger than 16 years than among women in their twenties. Those teenagers who make it through delivery are subject to socioeconomic challenges in sharp contrast to the situation of many of their elder counterparts (Save the Children, 2004; WHO, 2010).

Due to high levels of early childbearing in many developing countries, pregnancy and childbirth are the worldwide leading causes of death among women aged 15-19. Compared with older women, adolescents are at higher risk for poor maternal and infant outcomes, especially maternal death and having an infant who has low birth weight or dies (Reynolds et al., 2006). Proper antenatal care can prevent, identify and treat iron deficiency and anaemia in teenage mothers; diseases which have been linked to maternal and child mortality. Antenatal care can provide an entry into the health system, and for many teenagers in particular, this can be one of the first proper health assessments they receive. Delays in seeking health care, in having access to adequate health facilities, and in receiving proper care at the facilities, are known barriers for women in many developing countries. This is especially the case for youth who may lack experience in seeking health care (Reynolds et al., 2006). In order to combat the problem of teenage pregnancy, controversial suggestions have been made to implant pre-teen girls with long term contraception, effectively sterilising them for a long period of time (Weldon, 2008).

The 16 million teenagers who give birth each year constitute around 11 percent of all births worldwide. Despite accounting for only 11 percent of the births worldwide, 23 percent of women who experience pregnancy and childbirth related diseases are adolescents. Worldwide, approximately 2.5 million teenagers have abortions each year; the world's total is about 40 million legal and clandestine abortions annually (Sedgh et al., 2007). Having children as a teenager is not only dangerous for the mother, but also for the child. The numbers of stillbirths and deaths in the first week of life are 50 percent higher in babies born to mothers younger than 20 years than in babies born to mothers 20-29 years old (WHO, 2010). There is also a higher chance of being exposed to risky antenatal behaviour such as unhealthy diets, smoking and drinking, and lower rates of breastfeeding once the baby is born. Young mothers are also claimed to be more prone to post-natal depression, which in turn can threaten the maternal bonding and have an effect on the baby's neurological and emotional development (Macvarish & Billings, 2010). In total, teenage parenthood severely poses a risk to the mother and child.

## **2.4 Socioeconomic challenges**

There is no doubt there are socio-economic challenges for teenage mothers having children. A high number of maternal deaths are not the only strain on a society with high rates of teenage pregnancy. A lack of education will, in addition to having an adverse impact the mother, also affect the rest of society (Alexander et al., 2010).

### **2.4.1 Quitting school without any career plans**

A situation where the school successfully provided teenagers with appropriate sexual education could contribute to reducing adolescent pregnancy. But, as underlined by CEDAW (2004a), this is easier said than done, and although a sexual education programme is in place in Argentina it does not mean it works satisfactorily. It is argued by Black et al. (2008) that if a compulsory schooling law is in place, this restricts the educational choice of some women and could lead

them to obtain more education than would have been the case otherwise. The claim is backed up by identifying minimum school requirements as significantly reducing the chance of having a child as an adolescent. Black et al. (2008) suggest that policy interventions to increase female education at the lower tail of the education system may be an effective means of reducing rates of teenage childbearing. This is regardless of the welfare structure in place, as school attendance decreases time available to engage in risky behaviour, for example having sex. One could of course argue that having sex does not necessary take a long time, but evidence from Argentina (see e.g. Pantelides, 2002) also supports the abovementioned claim that sexual activity is higher among adolescent girls not enrolled in school.

The stereotypical view of adolescent motherhood is that it causes early school leaving, no qualifications, poor employment or youth training, poor prospects of ever finding a good job and a family in poverty. However, a study similar to my research, conducted in Bradford, United Kingdom in 2006-2007, reported that the adolescent mothers were highly motivated to complete their education and gain employment after their pregnancy as a means to provide a stable future for their children. Despite the perception that teenage parents lack aspirations around education and work, one might be surprised to discover that the ambitions for future success are often triggered by the desire to fulfil the roles of a good parent (Alexander et al., 2010).

One of the big changes in teenage pregnancy rates since the baby-boom of the 1950s, especially in Europe, has been due to a shift in the social position of young women. Taking part in secondary and tertiary education has become more important to women, and more girls reach a high level of education. Although there are regional differences from southern Europe to Scandinavia, where the latter has a put a welfare system in place for expecting mothers, the trend goes more and more towards young women not only embarking on higher education, but also expecting a career after finishing their studies. Thus, increased career and educational opportunities have resulted in a falling teenage pregnancy rate (Tóth, 2005).

The situation is slightly different in Argentina, where an emerging new phenomenon is the number of adolescents who neither have paid work nor study, nor are active job searchers. Local sociologists refer to them as the “ni-ni” (neither-nor), and there are an estimated 750,000 of them,

of which three-quarters are girls between the ages of 15 and 24. In Argentina, 2.7 million adolescents are vulnerable due to their socioeconomic or family situations. Many come from female-headed households, and when the mothers find work their oldest daughters drop out of school to take care of the house and their younger siblings, causing an environment possibly prone to teenage pregnancy (Valente, 2009).

Research suggests (see e.g. Buvinic et al., 1992; WHO, 2010; Miranda, 2007) that adolescent motherhood unfavourably affects women's economic outcomes such as the level of completed schooling, workforce participation and wages. In a recent study on the effect of compulsory schooling laws on teenage births, Black et al. (2008) recognize that low-educated women are more likely to become adolescent mothers, and ask whether increasing mandatory educational attainment would encourage women to delay the onset of having children. In the research, Black et al. (2008) suggest that compulsory schooling appears to reduce the incidence of adolescent motherhood in both Norway and the United States, the sample countries. In Argentina, low education levels are closely associated with early childbearing. However, the link between pregnancy and school drop-out rates is not necessarily precise. Gogna et al.'s survey from 2003-2004 revealed that 44.5 percent of young mothers were already out of school when they became pregnant. The lack of school attendance was due to little motivation to stay in school, the schools' low capacity to encourage the students to stay, economic problems, or domestic responsibilities (Gogna et al., 2008). This phenomenon reinforces the idea that in situations where young women have limited expectations and possibilities, motherhood is considered a positive experience. Another Buenos Aires researcher, López (2006) suggests that for adolescent women from the lower socioeconomic classes motherhood is the primary source of social recognition, self-esteem and respect from family and community.

#### **2.4.2 Young mothers and their children growing up**

Teenage motherhood, especially out of wedlock, is assumed to have a social cost and to lead to the formation of mother-only households. Buvinic (1998) argues that teenage motherhood in the

Latin American region does not seem to carry a social stigma that affects the women's likelihood of finding a partner and marrying later in life (in contrary to for instance the United States where this has been reported as a disadvantage). However, it is associated with larger families and family arrangements such as female-headed households, fewer biological fathers present, and fewer fathers taking economic responsibility for maintaining the children. There is also prevalence in grandparents taking over responsibility for the children (Buvinic, 1998).

Little education and few future job prospects make it hard for the adolescent mothers and their children to lead happy, productive lives and for the girls to raise the next generation successfully. There are complicated causal links between the well-being of mothers and that of their children, and research (see e.g. Black et al., 2008; Buvinic, 1998) has consistently claimed that when mothers have access to health care, education and economic opportunities, this has a positive effect on both them and their children (Save the Children, 2004).

When young girls have children themselves, the economic consequences are not only severe, but can often be long-lasting. The mother's education has probably been limited, she is not qualified for jobs that could change her situation and her household responsibilities may limit the time and energy she could spend on a job. The link between poverty and early motherhood is mutually reinforcing – the poorest women are most likely to have children at a young age, and when having a child, the likelihood of remaining poor increases. Poverty is a recyclable situation (Wilson & Huntington, 2005; Alexander et al., 2010). Adolescent parents tend to have less education and poorer health than their peers, and will therefore bring on the poverty to the next generation. Their children are more likely to struggle economically, and it creates a negative cycle of children having children. It is argued (Save the Children, 2004) that education is the single most important measure to help children break the cycle of poverty and give them the confidence to make a better life for themselves. In addition to creating possibilities for better paid jobs, education prepares girls to be better mothers. Mothers with even basic education tend to have healthier pregnancies, safer childbirths and healthier children who are more likely to survive (Save the Children, 2004).

In addition to a higher prevalence of their children having children, adolescent mothers are associated with severe socioeconomic conditions and poor earnings prospects. Poor adolescent mothers seem to work more and earn less than other mothers. Their children's life chances are often tied to their mothers' life chances, especially among the poor (Buvinic, 1998). There is a general agreement that adolescent birth is an outcome of, or closely associated with poverty, disadvantage and a lack of opportunities. Even in countries like The Netherlands, which has one of the lowest rates of adolescent birth in the world, almost 80 percent of teenage mothers are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). A study on the social question of the young ("La Cuestión Social de los Jóvenes") indicated that adolescent mothers postpone their sense of failure. They admit to having failed if things do not go well for their children, but many problems lie years ahead, and after each of these girls will come a new generation of children who will be trapped in the same system of marginalisation, and the cycle of poverty will not be broken (Valente, 2009).

Group differentials in teenage pregnancy are a function of social disadvantage that indirectly places adolescents at risk of first intercourse at a younger age. Trent and Crowder (1997) argue that teenagers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds become sexually active at younger ages, are less likely to use contraceptives and are more likely to become pregnant and carry their pregnancies to term than other teenagers. They also claim there is a link between family structures and teenage pregnancy. They argue that children of divorced or single-parent households initiate sexual activity earlier than others and are more likely to become pregnant at an earlier age (Trent & Crowder, 1997).

With the argument presented above one can only wonder why the teenagers choose to become pregnant, when so many factors suggest postponing – at least until their twenties - to have children. For the girls who have not actively chosen to become pregnant, the prohibition of abortion could hold the answers.

## 2.5 Abortions in Argentina and the influence of the Catholic Church

Abortion is illegal in Argentina, yet statistics show there are still a significant number of abortions conducted each year, maybe as many as half a million (UNFPA, 2007; Valente, 2010). Abortion is conducted throughout the socioeconomic levels, but women in the lower income groups are, due to their lack of money, limited in their access to private, hygienic abortion clinics. An alarming 35.3 percent of maternal deaths among adolescents are due to complications with abortions (UNFPA, 2007).

In Argentina, the Law of Reproductive Health and Responsible Procreation in the National Territory seeks to prevent and eliminate factors that lead to child mortality, including the large number of unplanned teenage pregnancies. As well as providing information vital to reproductive health and responsible procreation, it gives information that aims to decrease the alarming number of abortions. In recent years abortions have been an important factor in mortality rates among young women as those unable or unwilling to complete an unwanted pregnancy have few options but an illegal and unsafe abortion (Miranda, 2007). The toll on women's health and lives is severe; effects of unsafe abortions are the leading cause of maternal deaths in Argentina today (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

The influence of the Catholic Church in Latin America has meant that abortion is illegal in nearly every country on the continent. The criminalisation of abortions has led to an associated stigma and a market for unskilled 'DIY'<sup>9</sup> practitioners for those who cannot afford to receive care at a private clinic<sup>10</sup> for the procedure (Granville-Jones, 2007). The ban on abortions comes with two exceptions; namely, when the woman's life or health is in danger and when the pregnancy is the result of rape of a mentally disabled woman. These exceptions are rarely applied (Granville-Jones, 2007). Medical professionals faced with a potential abortion which, by law, would not

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<sup>9</sup> 'Do it yourself'

<sup>10</sup> Abortion is illegal in Argentina (except for when the pregnancy is a danger for the mother or the result of a rape of a mentally disabled woman), however, abortion is still available at private clinics who can bribe the correct people in order to avoid prosecution.

attract a penalty, will regardless of the circumstances often ask for a judicial authorisation before agreeing to terminate the pregnancy. Even then, legal abortions are rarely carried out. This practice led Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to issue a joint statement earlier this year, expressing concern over the subsequent delay in reaching a decision to terminate. For some women this comes too late in the pregnancy for the abortion to be carried out. The two organisations urged the authorities to ensure women's rights to freely decide on issues of sexual and reproductive health (Gashe, 2010). It is also argued by Gogna et al. (2008) that abortion should be made legal, since it would contribute to a reduced number of deaths and injuries from unsafe abortions.

Unsafe abortions were made a priority public health issue in 2005 by the previous Minister of Health, González García. He also supported sexual education in schools and attempted to implement free contraception and condom distribution programmes. When he publicly backed the legalisation of abortion, the head military chaplain, Bishop Antonio Baseotto, responded with a suggestion to put a millstone around the Minister's neck and throw him in the ocean, an apt illustration of the strong sentiments involved over women's control over their bodies. The general public has also changed its views in recent years. The National Study of Public Opinion on Reproductive Rights found that 48 percent of Argentines were in favour of decriminalising abortion, up from 28 percent in 2004 (Granville-Jones, 2007). Human Rights Watch (2005) has argued that safe and legal abortions would be the most effective way to stop the loss of lives and other preventable health effects caused by the illegal, unregulated abortions in Argentina.

In the heated debate about abortion, one question that emerges is "what if"? Research conducted by Gruber et al. (1999) reports that the 'marginal child' would have been 40-60 percent more likely to live in a single-parent household, to be born into poverty, to receive welfare (where available) and to die as an infant. Access to abortion is one of the most debated public policy issues in USA today, but as Gruber et al. (1999) convincingly argues there seems to be a correlation between available abortion and a reduction in child poverty and welfare needs.



After deconstructing and problematising the issue of teenage pregnancy in Argentina, I will now take the reader to the next section, and introduce some theoretical perspectives that have been evident throughout my research.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework I have used to cast light on the issue of teenage pregnancy in this study are the capability approach, the labeling theory and Goffman's notion of stigma (1963). An important aspect of the debate on teenage pregnancy is whether the pregnancy came about as the girl's or couple's active choice or not, as these two alternatives correspond to different aspects of the theories. The active choice to become pregnant as a teenager may be interpreted as a display of the girl's capabilities and freedom to be and do what she desires. A pregnancy resulting from rape or abuse will inevitably be interpreted differently. The girl is often depicted as lacking the possibility of choosing freely and given the situation she may be labelled a 'victim' or be stigmatised in a different manner.

Regardless of cause, reproduction is, as elaborated on in the previous chapter, part of a bigger picture that includes education, employment opportunities, economic possibilities, class divisions, access to health care and birth control (Browner, 2000). I will argue that a girl's control over her own body is enabled and defined by the culture in which she lives. The boundaries of what is viewed as being normal are diffuse, and vary in strength and in magnitude. In any given society, the community will have a toolbox of sanctions for those breaking socially accepted norms and people who defect for the approved way of life and behaviour may be viewed as outsiders (Becker, 1963). Norms are however not static. What was considered socially acceptable behaviour 50 years back, may be seen as anti-social behaviour today. What may be considered publically accepted tomorrow depends to a large extent on the kind of pressure that is put on opinion-leaders and cultural leaders today.

The capability approach ties in with Goffman's (1963) theory on social stigma, which to a large extent is linked to labeling theory presented by Becker (1963). Labels are not reserved for groceries and fashion but are, in accordance with this view, used as a time-saving measure to label individuals according to previous or expected (deviant) behaviour. Labeling is a two-way street, where the labellers will try to interpret the behaviour in accordance with the label and the labelled will adjust their own expectations to the issued label (Becker, 1963). Applied to teenage

pregnancy, according to this theory, being labelled a teenage mother will change the surroundings' expectations for the respective girl's future prospects and the girl herself will adjust her behaviour accordingly. In this study, that concerns the lived experiences of adolescent mothers growing up in institutions in Buenos Aires, these theoretical approaches will help to understand the girls' own perceptions of their situation and their future aspirations. Undoubtedly, other theories may have compelling arguments that could have been of use to shed light on the issue, but due to the scope of this study, only the main parts of the abovementioned theories will be applied.

### **3.1 'A woman's gotta do what a woman's gotta do'**

In country after country women have demonstrated that when given the tools of opportunity – education, health care, access to credit, political participation and legal rights – they can lift themselves out of poverty, and as women realise their potential, they lift their families, communities and nations as well.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, HDI Report 1999

A capability may be defined as “a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; [it] represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be” (Sen, 1993, p. 30). In other words, capabilities refer to having both the liberty and opportunity to pursue individually defined goals and achieve these. The concept of capability is taken a step further and given a female angle by Martha Nussbaum. By and large, I will apply Nussbaum's approach in this study, due to my own feminist perspectives that have been present in this research.

Sen (1993, 1999) argues that a person's capabilities should be understood in relation to the person's freedom to make her own choice as to what is important in life. The capability approach was developed to assess human development and quality of life, in particular in relation to poverty reduction. It has been a paradigm for policy debate in human development, and the concept inspired the creation of UN's Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI takes into account some of the most fundamental aspects of people's lives and opportunities, and therefore provides a much more comprehensive picture of a country's development than other indicators

(Sen, 1993, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). In short, to have capability is to be free to be and do. The approach also emphasises ‘substantive freedoms’; such as the ability to live to an old age, being able to purchase commodities to sustain a minimal standard of lifestyle, and being able to enjoy political freedom.

The capability approach underlines that resources alone are not enough. Two people with access to the same resources can achieve different outcomes because their capabilities vary. Every student at one school will, in theory, have at hand the same resources for learning, i.e. access to classes, teacher guidance and lectures. However, their family situation, background, income, ethnic background or gender will, in different ways, affect how some students succeed more than others, and how some fail to achieve (Unterhalter, 2007). This relates to *functionings*, another of Sen’s (1999) core ideas correlating with the capability approach. Functionings are the achieved outcomes, while capabilities are the potential to achieve these functionings. The difference between the two is that the capability is the opportunity to achieve, while the functioning is the actual achievement. This distinction is very important, because if only evaluating the functionings (or outcome), it can give a distorted view as to how well people actually are doing (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Looking at my case study, a legitimate example is illegal abortion. In theory, women<sup>11</sup> do not have access to abortion in Argentina. In practice, up to half a million abortions are conducted each year (UNFPA, 2007). For those women with money to get proper health care at a private clinic, the abortion will not cause severe risk. However, for women lacking the financial capability to ensure adequate medical care, abortion poses a serious health risk. Another example is two girls who did not pass their high school exams. Both girls have in theory achieved the same functioning or outcome – a failed high school exam. However, when taking the girls’ different capabilities into consideration, one could see that one girl did not pass her high school exam because she decided to become pregnant and voluntarily left school. The other girl, however, was lacking information about contraceptives, and when becoming pregnant she was expelled from school - hence had no option of passing her high school exam. These

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from for the exceptions mentioned in section 2.5 *Abortions in Argentina and the influence of the Catholic Church*.

examples strengthen Sen's argument (1993) of the importance of considering capabilities when assessing a person's well-being.

In relation to the link between functionings and capabilities, Nussbaum (2002) argues that the capability approach must be seen in terms of *combined capabilities*. This includes not only a person who is ready to act on the chosen capability, but the material and institutional environment surrounding the person. This needs to be in place in order for the person to function. What led the informants to carry through the pregnancies is influenced by personal considerations combined with the available structural options. While not all took an active choice to become pregnant, the active choice to terminate the pregnancies was to a large extent curbed by the Argentine abortion law. On this matter, Nussbaum (1995) champions the issue of *choice*. She states that governments should not push citizens into acting in certain ways, but should instead ensure that all have access to the resources and conditions for acting in those ways. By making different opportunities available, the Government enables and enhances active choice.

The capability approach makes recommendations for political and social changes around the world. Nussbaum (1993) argues that especially the situation for women in developing countries bring about urgency to address many of the problems. She reports that women who have grown up thinking they should eat less than other family members will often report that their nutritional status and health are good, even when it is evident they suffer from malnutrition. She argues if this is the case with physical health, it could be even worse in regards to education and other capabilities, and women might underreport their quality of life as their desires and expectations have adjusted to prolonged deprivation. While Sen's approach (1999) is grounded in participatory human development, where he argues for the significance of public participation and dialogue in arriving at valued capabilities for each situation and context, Nussbaum takes a different angle. She (Nussbaum, 2000) proposes a list of ten capabilities as a basis for fundamental political principles: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reasons; affiliation; other species; play and control over one's environment. She states that a proper functioning government should make sure that every member of the community has "...the capability to choose and live a fully human good life, with respect to each of the major human functions included in that fully good life" (Nussbaum, 1993, p. 265). She argues that these

ten central human capabilities need to be present in order to live a fully good life (Nussbaum, 2000). In contrast, Sen's underpinnings are deliberately vague in order for communities themselves to decide what capabilities are valued as important for them (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Some of the capabilities on Nussbaum's list will be further discussed in relation to my informants' responses in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion*. Nussbaum (2004) realises that for instance 'free speech,' which is part of a person's control over her environment, is not a matter of life and death. However, she argues that it is crucial for the ability of poor women to pursue justice and for their voices to be heard, and therefore important on the list. It is clear that within certain parameters, different nations should handle Nussbaum's list of capabilities somewhat differently, taking the national and cultural history and other circumstances into account.

Consequently, a central question asked by Nussbaum in regards to the capability approach is 'what is the person actually able to be and do?' Is the person capable of the task she has set out to do? It not only concerns the person's satisfaction with what she does, but about what she does in addition to what she is in a position to do (Nussbaum, 2002). Nussbaum argues that people do not automatically inhabit a set of functions or the opportunity to perform in a fully human way. A person who suffers from starvation or lack of education may be closer capability-wise to animals than to humans. It brings about a notion that marginalised people do not necessarily have all the desired human capabilities.

Cultural traditions pose challenges to women's health and well-being. In many countries, women are seen as less valuable than men, less deserving of basic life support and of fundamental rights, and can be subjects of victimisation (Hamed, 2010). Sometimes these traditions are resisted by the women themselves, other times the traditions become embedded in the culture leading to an endorsement by the women themselves of their own second-class status (Nussbaum, 1995). Women occupy disadvantaged positions in traditional economic and social arrangements throughout the world, but the situation is acute in many parts of the developing world. Lack of support for fundamental necessities of a human life give women an unequal share of human capabilities. Women tend to be less well-nourished than men, have poorer health, and be more vulnerable to physical, sexual and verbal abuse. They face greater obstacles when entering the workforce, and in many nations women are by law not fully equal to men (Nussbaum, 2002).

Moreover, many women face a situation of 'double-work': both a full-time day-job and the main responsibility for the household and children. Hochschild refers to coming home to these domestic and family responsibilities as a 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1990). The 'double-work' provides for unequal social and political circumstances between men and women, which give women unequal human capabilities.

The *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 1999) states that there are no countries that treat women as equal to men. The unequal treatment is apparent in all areas, ranging from basic health and nutrition, to political participation and economic involvement. One area of particular inequality is the responsibility to provide care. Women by far outnumber men in hours spent caring for others. Nussbaum (2002) argues that women are the world's primary, and often only, caregivers for people who are completely dependent on others, be it children or the elderly. Spending many unpaid hours each day caring for the physical needs of others makes it difficult for many women to excel in other areas of life, including employment, schooling and play.

The capability approach is however not very concerned with the quantity or quality of resources. The important matter is whether the individual has the freedom to achieve what *she* values as important. Nussbaum (1995) sees a clear advantage of the capabilities approach over other approaches to assess quality of life. By only using GDP as a measurement, one fails to include other relevant aspects of human life; those that leads to quality, or lack of it e.g. infant mortality, access to education, racial and gender equality or the presence or absence of political freedoms. It omits the vital question of distribution of wealth and income. Countries high up on the list can exhibit massive distributional variances, in particular relating to gender, where a high ranking on GDP per capita can come hand-in-hand with a low score on adult literacy and high maternal mortality depending (UNDP, 1999; Nussbaum, 2002).

The main disadvantage of the capability approach is its inherent difficulty of measuring human capability. Nussbaum (2002) argues that anything worth measuring in human quality of life is by necessity difficult to measure. Nussbaum (2004) uses a 'narrative method' to get the reader to imagine problems, to see the human issues involved as more than just statistics. She uses this method to show a connection between one problem and another, for instance between getting a

loan and escaping domestic violence. On this matter, much research (see e.g. WHO, 2010; Save the Children, 2010) also states the connection between education and future capabilities, as next section will show.

### **3.1.1 Education and the capability approach**

Gender equality in education is important because it enlarges capabilities in general. Education is a so-called basic capability as it affects the development and expansion of other capabilities. It helps establish conditions where a wider set of capabilities is available to the pupils by way of teaching how resources can be achieved, as well as applied (Unterhalter, 2007). As the link between education and future prospects is so important, I will discuss this topic further in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* as my informants reported that they believed education could help them obtain a better job and career in the future, hence better opportunities for themselves and their children.

According to Walker (2006), education expands human freedoms by making people able to choose to be and do what they value. Not having access to education harms human development, by limiting the options of having a full life. Education has a redistributive impact on social groups; in households and families where better education is encouraged there is a lower rate of gender inequality. There is also worldwide statistical evidence based on comparisons between different countries that link women's education directly to lower levels of fertility (Black et al., 2008; Sen, 1999). Education is one of the most important ways of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence they need to participate fully in the development process for them, their children and the society (UN, 1994). Education also contributes to interpersonal effects where women are able to use the benefits of their own education to help others. It can be a crucial aid for poor families as it can offer a way out of low-paid jobs or chronic unemployment (Walker, 2006).

When attempting to resolve regional, national or global inequalities it is apparent that no size fits all. For instance, education for all cannot be implemented before the policymakers take into



consideration local variables that may make it easier or harder, more or less expensive, or more or less time consuming to implement the different strategies. Nussbaum (2002) argues that as women's lives are likely to raise certain obstacles, any approach that aims to change women's lives or opportunities must be able to deal with local variables. More resources will have to be devoted to those who encounter obstacles from traditional hierarchy or prejudice. Women's literacy will in many countries be more challenging to achieve than men's, due to external factors that influence women's capabilities and access to education. For instance, when I volunteered in Guatemala, I often experienced that my 12 year old host sister was kept home from school to work, while her brothers would attend classes. This could accordingly limit her capabilities, but a change would require structural modification in the local community in order to implement the impression that education is important, and should be equal for both boys and girls.

As outlined above, education have a significant effect on teenage mothers' development, also in terms of giving them self-confidence to be and do what they aspire in life. But what happens when the rest of the society questions the role the teenage mothers have chosen? The following section will look at how labeling theory applies to the informants and why it is important to take the notion of 'deviance' and 'deviant behaviour' into consideration when analysing the findings in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion*.

### **3.2 Being labelled a teenage mother**

All social groups make rules and attempt to enforce them (Becker, 1963). When a rule is enforced, people who do not live by it will be seen as someone who cannot be trusted, and they will be regarded as outsiders. However, the rule-breaker may not agree with the rule-makers. She might hold a different opinion of what the rule should be and may view the judges as the outsiders. This process of rule-breaking and rule-enforcement, and how some people come to break rules while others enforce them is a double-edged situation. It is not a surprise that different groups judge different things to be deviant, and "social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance" (Becker, 1963, p. 9). Turning to my research, whilst my informants are looked upon as rule-breakers by their schools, Catholic Church and the society at

large, the ones who chose to become pregnant do not coincide with the given 'deviant' label, as they see their situation as something positive, and thereby not conflicting with the norm.

In Argentina, premarital sex is largely seen as deviant behaviour. By extension, Argentine policymakers, Church representatives and the media look upon premarital sex and subsequent adolescent parenthood as a deviation. Teenage pregnancy is considered a direct result of risk-taking and is placed in the same 'deviant' category as substance abuse, family rebellion, gang violence, reckless driving and school dropout. Holgate et al. (2006) argue that deviant behaviour should be prevented as it constitutes a threat to society as well as to the health and well-being of the young people themselves. The view on what is deviant differs nevertheless from culture to culture. In some countries teenage pregnancy is looked upon as deviant behaviour, often associated with other risk-related activities such as promiscuity and risk of sexually transmitted diseases. In other countries, where for instance the marriage rate is higher in the young population, teenage pregnancy might be a natural progression and norm-following, as long as within the boundaries of marriage (Tóth, 2005).

In this study, deviant behaviour refers to behaviour which is viewed by a significant number of people as culpable and beyond the tolerance limit (Reiss, 1970). Clinard (1964) defines deviance as behaviour which is outside the community's tolerance norms. A large number of youth will normatively accept premarital sex, while the corresponding number of their parents will label such behaviour as deviant. This gives a situation where at least two groups in the same society differ distinctively in their labeling of these actions. The parental reaction can be understood in relation to the consequences of what may come after premarital sex. Regardless of such parental objections, the low visibility of this behaviour makes labeling difficult and unlikely (Reiss, 1970). As premarital sex often goes on unnoticed by parents, the main circumstance in which there is labeling of deviant behaviour is if the teenager becomes pregnant. One of the reasons adolescent pregnancy is viewed as deviant behaviour is because teenage fertility largely takes place outside of marriage, resulting in female-headed single households, and families with absent fathers. It is argued (Buvinic, 1998) that those who never lived with a father are less likely to disapprove of a pregnancy out of wedlock. Trent and Crowder (1997) also state that socialisation in single-parent families may make early or non-marital pregnancy more acceptable. Yet, there

is still widespread concern that teenage pregnancy, especially in single-headed families, results in undesirable consequences for the mothers and children and contributes to a reproduction of poverty and negative life aspects from one generation to the next (Trent & Crowder, 1997).

A large body of studies and research (see e.g. UNFPA, 2010; Save the Children, 2010) report negative impact of adolescent childbearing on young mothers and their children. Buvinic (1998) on the other hand argues that challenges exist to this opinion on methodological grounds. Firstly, the disadvantages of early motherhood may only be transitory and teenage parents may overcome these disadvantages over time. Secondly, the negative outcomes of early childbearing may be a result of other conditions, such as poverty and deprivation. Buvinic (1998) argues that these mothers probably would have been in the same poor conditions even if they had delayed childbearing, and that adolescent pregnancy cannot be viewed as the reason for poverty, but rather as a possible consequence. This will be further discussed in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* in regards to the mothers' perception of their pregnancy.

Labeling theory focuses attention on the way labeling places the person in situations which make it harder for her to continue the normal routines of everyday life, and this way provokes her to continue to act abnormally (Becker, 1963). In Becker's own words:

I will be less concerned with the personal and social characteristics of deviants than with the process by which they come to be thought of as outsiders and their reactions to that judgement. Becker, 1963, p. 10

When a deviant is labelled as such, her self-conception may be affected so as to start her on 'career deviance.' Becker (1963) is interested in the way the labeling occurs and how it affects the deviants, and believes the public labeling leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy where a deviant career is created. Deviance is in this view socially created and appears as a result of the issuance of the label. What is defined as deviant behaviour and what behaviour is accepted is socially contingent as it will vary from group to group and also over time within each setting. As Reiss (1970, p. 79) reports: "society chooses what rules to enforce, in what situations, on what people."

If society has certain expectations of a person's behaviour based on how it labels that person, for instance as a teenage mother, it is very likely the person will live up to these expectations

whether the person likes it or not. The situation can have very different outcomes depending on how society labels the person, and how the person herself views her options (Becker, 1963). In addition, Reiss (1970) argues there is another source of labeling which may affect premarital sexual permissiveness – labeling from within the peer group. Further, Reiss (1970) debates that if a girl who is labelled by the boys or other peers from her school or society as an easy target she may fulfil this prophecy and decide to continue with her sexual deviance because of such a group label. In effect, this could mean that what the society labels a person as – she becomes.

Some rules are only enforced when they result in certain consequences. Vincent (1961) argues that premarital sexual relations seldom result in severe punishment for the offenders because it is seldom broadcast in wider circles. However, if a girl becomes pregnant the reaction of others is likely to be quite severe. In sum, deviance is not something straight-forward that is present in some types of behaviour, and absent in others. It is rather the product of a process which involves the responses of other people to the behaviour. The same behaviour may be breaking the rule at one time, but not at another, or may be a violation when committed by one person but not another. As a result, whether a given act is deviant or not depends partly on the nature of the act, but more importantly whether other people choose to react on it or not (Becker, 1963). Looking at teenage pregnancy from a worldwide view, one will find this is exactly the situation, making it impossible to generalise or draw wider conclusions, as a person's origin, cultural background and religion will heavily influence whether she thinks the pregnancy is a natural part of life or a downright catastrophe.

Many empirical studies (see e.g. Lanctôt & Le Blanc, 2002) demonstrate that exposure to defined deviant influences is a direct and proximal cause of deviant behaviour. Lanctôt and Le Blanc (2002) further argue that insecure economic conditions can cause difficult life events like sexual or physical abuse, parental negligence, school dropout, teenage pregnancy or single parenthood for teenage girls. Teenage girls living in these situations are seen to experience more difficulties in bonding to social institutions and their members, and subsequent low self-control adds to the difficulty of establishing solid relationships with others, resulting in a reduced receptivity to rules and social standards (Lanctôt & Le Blanc, 2002).

Lanctôt and Le Blanc (2002) debate whether the abovementioned factors are important aspects in understanding girls' pathways to deviance. They argue it can often be explained as a survival strategy to escape from abusive environments. Lanctôt and Le Blanc (2002) also argue that the belief of teenage girls in stereotypical gender roles acts as a moral barrier to deviant behaviour. As a result, the less teenage girls believe they should obey the gendered rules of society, the greater risk that they will behave in a deviant manner from the social norm. The ideas of 'survival strategy' and 'escape' are important to note, and will be discussed further in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* as some of my informants suggested having a baby as a means to escape from their previous challenging life worlds.

It is argued by Wilson and Huntington (2005) that motherhood is a favourite target with the good/bad mother dichotomy as a key feature of maternal discourses. Mothers who fail to meet the normative expectations of the role of mothering are positioned as the deviant 'other' and thought of as unfit to be a parent. These perceptions are historically and culturally specific, and previous conceptions of the deviant mother have been associated with poverty or illegitimacy. Current norms of femininity in Argentina construct the female body as a body for others, particularly of service to children and men. Women are encouraged to display a heterosexual feminine bodily appearance and character. Women are expected to dedicate their bodily resources for the well-being of the family or partner, even if this goes against personal needs or health. The maternal embodiment is upheld and supported by the Catholic Church with their staunch views on abortion and access to contraception. Social promotion of this maternal sacrifice is not unique to Argentina, but can be observed throughout the region (Sutton, 2007). Where religion has judiciary power or influence, it becomes a very important part of peoples' lives (Nussbaum, 2002), and although over 90 percent of Argentines are Catholics in name, religious practices (like for instance abstaining from premarital sex) have little impact on the daily lives of young teenage mothers.

### 3.3 The notion of stigma

Policies that attempt to alter the patterns of adolescent sexual activity and reduce the rate of adolescent pregnancy are based on the belief that adolescent pregnancy and motherhood are negative life events that can bring about social exclusion. When elected to power in the United Kingdom in 1997, the Blair administration adopted teenage pregnancy as the main focus point in order to tackle social exclusion. Teenage pregnancy was suddenly problematised in immoral terms by policymakers, where the mother's age was emphasised, and where her sexual behaviour was framed as negatively affecting her and her baby's chances at optimal life outcomes. The agenda put forward the existence of the 'outsider' as a problem for the rest of the society, threatening the economic and social standard of living of the 'insiders'. Within this context, adolescent pregnancy and motherhood was depicted as being bad for the teenagers, bad for their children and bad for the society (Macvarish & Billings, 2010).

The last section of this chapter will look at Goffman's (1963) theory on social stigma and how stigmatisation influences teenage mothers. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as a behaviour or reputation which is socially discrediting. Stigma refers to an invisible sign of disapproval which permits 'insiders' to separate from the 'outsiders.' This is done in order to distinguish the limits of inclusion into the insiders' group. In every society one will find boundaries between those considered part of the fellowship, and those who carry with them a stigma. Goffman identifies three types of stigma. Firstly, there is loathing of the body and various physical deformities. Secondly, there are imperfections of the individual character, for example weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, alcoholism, mental disorder and more. Thirdly, there is the tribal stigma of race, nationality and religion which, being hereditary, can contaminate all members of a family (Goffman, 1963). Falk (2001) distinguishes between two additional labels: 'existential' stigma, being stigma that derives from a condition which the person being stigmatised did not cause nor has control over, and 'achieved' stigma, referring to stigma being earned through different conduct, for instance choosing to become a teenage mother.

It is possible for individuals to fail to live up to the label society gives her, and yet be relatively untouched by her failure. Shielded by alienation and protected by own identity beliefs, it is

possible for a person to feel like a normal human being, and perceive the rest of the society as the abnormal (Goffman, 1963). This ties in with Becker's (1963) notion of deviant behaviour, where the rule-makers and rule-breakers may not agree on the actual rules.

Goffman (1963) argues that in most cases, stigmatised people will find sympathetic others; people who share their stigma. Knowing from their own experience what it is like to have this particular stigma, the group can share feelings and ideas on how to cope in their daily lives, find moral support and a feeling of being at home, at ease, and accepted as a person like any other normal human being. Among other stigmatised people, the individual can use her disadvantage as a basis for organising life and develop to her fullest within that group. In the institution where my informants live, such a group of otherwise stigmatised people could meet and share their stories. In the institution they were one pregnant girl among many, and were not singled out because of their huge bellies or crying babies. What is of course the challenge in such a place, is when they have to leave the comforting safe spot, and enter the real world, something the girls also proclaimed was a dreaded event. The fellowship of the girls and experiences of living in an institution will be discussed further in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion*.

I have now looked at several aspects of adolescent pregnancy in Argentina in relation to the theoretical framework. The next chapter will take the reader to the fieldwork in Buenos Aires, and give a detailed account of the methodology and research methods used during the weeks in Argentina.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

Much research in the field of adolescent parenting is one-dimensional quantitative studies, which fail to capture the thoughts and feelings of adolescent mothers. Wilson and Huntington (2005) argue that reliance on quantitative studies that overlook the contextual nature of human behaviour provides a distorted and limited understanding of the lives of these adolescent mothers. Alexander et al. (2010) has a similar view, arguing that quantitative studies may overlook the qualitative aspects due to their focus on measurement. My research is aimed at contributing to the increasing number of qualitative studies that highlights other aspects of adolescent motherhood than quantitative studies. Through qualitative interviews with teenage mothers, I have captured their stories and allowed their voices to be heard.

This chapter concerns the dissertation's research design, data collection and the fieldwork. In addition to commenting on the validity and reliability of the study, including my own role as a researcher, I will comment on the ethical considerations necessary for a study of such sensitive nature.

### **4.1 Research design**

The research project was developed and came into being as a result of Doncel's desired inquiry into why teenage pregnancy was prevalent among their programme participants. I have applied a qualitative method approach and made use of a case study during the fieldwork in Buenos Aires. My choice of qualitative research as a method gave me an opportunity to explain the processes involved in an adolescent parent's life with more attention to context and diversity than what a quantitative method would have allowed for.

The nature of the study made the qualitative method most appropriate. There are three main differences between qualitative and quantitative research: "(1) The distinction between explanation and understanding as the purpose of inquiry; (2) the distinction between a personal



and impersonal role for the researcher, and (3) a distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed" (Stake, 1995, p. 37). In my study, I have sought to understand human experiences and view uniqueness as an important piece of the bigger picture. Despite being labour intensive, qualitative research can be advantageous, and for the curious, the attraction of an intensive and interpretive study of an area of interest is ever apparent (Stake, 1995). This research was no exception.

As a small scale qualitative study, I have focused my research on the understandings and experiences of adolescent mothers of becoming a parent. By using qualitative research methods I was able to discover that some of the mothers expressed very positive attitudes towards motherhood, and that they, because of their children, felt stronger, more competent, more responsible and more ready to cope with challenges in their lives.

The applied case study method is widely associated with qualitative research and is suitable when looking for the particularity and complexity of a particular case (Bryman, 2004). A case study enables the researcher to dive deep into a social phenomenon and gain an extensive understanding. The relevance of the case study design is arguably correlated with this in-depth knowledge (Yin, 2009). A detailed analysis in this study was essential to understand the teenage mothers' understanding of their own situation and identity. The choice of method is also in line with Stake's arguments that cases should be selected, as time and access to fieldwork are of limited stock, for their accessibility, with possible respondents already identified, and from research interest (Stake, 1995).

A standard criticism of case studies is that the derived findings cannot be generalised (Bryman 2004). Stake (1995) agrees that qualitative research is subjective and new questions are produced more frequently than solutions to old ones. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers point out that the main aim is to understand the selected case, and while each case will be unique, some generalisations can be drawn or deduced. Refinements of the understanding evolve, patterns emerge that might be comparable to other similar settings and smaller generalisations can be

made throughout the research (Stake, 1995). The questions asked, or, as mentioned above, the newly produced ones, in a case study design can be picked up by other researchers and tested by means of different research designs. Regardless of a narrow research field, the findings will add to the topical knowledge and widen the discussion.

There are pros and cons also of conducting a single-case study instead of a multiple-case design. A single-case study provides for a more vulnerable design with the study dependent on one set of data (Yin, 2009). Yet, the potential to reveal more detailed information about the issue at hand, and with that, a more informed basis for changes in the Doncel programme to address the significant teenage pregnancy rate, gave solid grounds for applying this specific research design on the study.

## **4.2 Data collection**

Data collection, namely contextual information and that volunteered by the informants, can on paper seem straight-forward. It proved however to be a circular process, tying in with the data analysis and design review. There is no particular moment during the research when the data collection begins, as the gathering of background information, ensuring a familiarity with other cases and processing first impressions from the field all form part of the process. Much data is gathered informally during the researcher's initial process of getting acquainted with the case. New questions may spring up during the process, making it necessary to revert to collecting more data or revising the hypothesis or research question (Johnstone, 2004).

Data collection is almost always carried out on somebody's "home turf", and may in many situations tend towards an invasion of privacy to a smaller or larger extent. In general, people are cooperative and willingly share their experiences even though the research seldom benefits them personally. Researchers should therefore refrain from requesting information or access on the grounds that their study will solve a problem or increase social well-being for the informants (Stake, 1995). The increased knowledge could rather be useful to practitioners in the field, or in this case, for the Doncel staff.

Upon arriving in the field, the researcher needs to get familiar with the circumstances surrounding the case. Normally, the researcher faces a situation where one would need to balance one's eagerness to get off with a head start and the desire for a quiet entry that is as unobtrusive as possible (Stake, 1995). My fieldwork was planned with a relaxed entry into the field. I spent the first few weeks having meetings with Amartya, reading up on the situation in Argentina, learning more Spanish and getting to know the city of Buenos Aires. Although this was time consuming, it enabled me to take a friendly and familiar approach with the interviewees. The interviews were as a result conducted in a softer manner, as I could start off with small talk about the city, football or other daily topics that provided as ice breakers. Had I not taken the time to acquire this knowledge, I would not have been able to take this friendly, familiar approach with the interviewees that helped me gain their trust.

### **4.3 Qualitative research interviews**

Qualitative case studies seldom proceeds as a quantitative survey with the exact same questions asked for each respondent. It is rather expected that the different respondents have unique stories to tell, and an interview guide, with additional probes during the interview may be just as desirable. In qualitative research, yes- and no answers normally provide clarification, whereas a detailed description of an episode, an explanation of an event or an account of some sort is more sought after (Stake, 1995). I used semi-structured interviews in the study, and to make the analysing part of the process comprehensible and fairly straightforward I had good use of an interview guide during the interviews (see *Appendix*). I found that most of the interviews proceeded in a similar manner, with the need to probe on a few occasions to clarify different issues, but in general all interviewees answered the majority of the questions. My interview guide was a joint effort I undertook with Belén and Mariana, also of the Amartya, before commencing the interviews. We discussed both what questions would be the most relevant and what would be the best order of posing these, in order to firstly get the most comprehensive answers from the girls and secondly doing so without provoking or unsettling them. Although four of the six girls had actively tried to become mothers, they had different challenging issues in their lives. My aim throughout the interviews was to make them feel comfortable and secure so they could talk about

these difficult issues. Some questions were skipped if the interviewee had answered or indicated an answer to the question previously. One example is Michaela who was raped at age 11. It was apparent in her storytelling that she had not seen the father of her child after the ordeal and that she did not receive any financial support from him, therefore questions regarding this matter was skipped.

The researcher often has a great interest in getting the interviewee's point of view when conducting qualitative interviews and an interviewee who is rambling on or explaining different issues in detail is often encouraged (Bryman, 2004). This was the case with my interviews as well; I did not stop any of the interviewees if there were certain issues they wanted to focus particularly on. One notable example is Dafne, who talked more about her work situation and family situation than others. I found this information interesting and therefore I did not discourage her from telling me the story in her specific manner. After the fieldwork, when I was analysing the findings, I found many of Dafne's points concerning family issues very interesting and relevant for the upcoming discussion in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion*.

#### **4.4 Sample**

I am forever grateful to Belén and Amartya for their help during the sampling process of the study. This research could not have been conducted the way it was without the support of Belén and the contacts at Amartya. When conducting research and sampling, the ways you use to undertake the sampling depends on your study and whether you want to generalise your findings or not (Bryman, 2004). As my research design is a case study I had no intentions of generalising the findings to fit Argentina as a whole, nor even Buenos Aires, but I specifically wanted to look at teenage mothers who had been living in shelters during their upbringing. For such a narrow focus, one good method of sampling, and the one I used, is that of snowball sampling (Bryman, 2004). When carrying out snowball sampling, the researcher approaches the field through gateways and is aided or guided onwards from there, using a set of criteria. The informants I was searching for were women who had had children up to the age of 19, and who had lived in institutions at some stage during their upbringing. I made initial contact with Amartya via my contacts from work, and through Belén's work at Doncel she was able to arrange interviews with

teenage mothers who had lived in institutions. The sample size grew as the respondents connected or directed me within their network. With snowball sampling it is unlikely that the sample will be representative of the population (Bryman, 2004). As mentioned, this study does not seek to generalise as the focus is directly on the experiences of teenage mothers growing up in institutions in Buenos Aires.

Throughout my period in Buenos Aires I interviewed six teenage mothers, a Doncel employee and a government official who helped clarify some background information on how Buenos Aires deals with teenage pregnancy and homeless youth. My main interviewees, the teenage mothers, were (in alphabetical order, with date of interview, names have been changed):

Alejandra (October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009): 20 years old with two girls. Pregnant for the first time at 16. Wanted a baby. From Colombia and living without any official documents in Buenos Aires. Has lived 11 months in an institution.

Celeste (September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009): 19 years old with one boy. Pregnant at 15. Wanted a baby. Has lived 18 months in an institution.

Dafne (September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009): 20 years old with two girls. Pregnant for the first time at 15. Wanted a baby. Has lived 15 months in an institution.

Florencia (October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009): 17 years old with one girl. Pregnant at 15. Wanted a baby. Has lived ten years in institutions.

Michaela (September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009): 20 years old with one girl. Was raped and became pregnant at 11. Has lived seven years in institutions.

Rosana (October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009): 20 years old with one girl. Pregnant at 19. Did not want a baby. From Paraguay and living without any official documents in Buenos Aires. Has lived six years in institutions.

## 4.5 Validity and reliability

Some of the most important criteria for evaluating social research are the key issues of *reliability* and *validity* (Bryman, 2004). These two issues are firmly placed within the framework of quantitative research, and it has therefore been argued that they are inappropriate for use in qualitative research. Bryman (2004) suggest that alterations of the key issues may be more suitable for qualitative research, nevertheless, with the underlying reliability and validity in focus. Other good criteria for qualitative research can be *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *conformability*. However, as they are still relevant for qualitative research, I have chosen to apply the original concepts of validity and reliability, and below I have looked at how they are related to this research.

*External validity* deals with the issues of knowing whether it is possible to generalise your study's findings beyond the immediate case study. The external validity problem has been one of the major barriers for doing case studies, and the typical criticism of case studies often draws on the issues of the poor basis for making generalisations (Yin, 2009). Bryman (2004) also argues that it is difficult to apply external validity to qualitative research because of the tendency to use case studies or smaller samples. This type of criticism related to the validity of research is often adapted from survey research, where the aim is *statistical* generalisation, whereas case studies rely on *analytic* generalisation. Yin (2009) argues that in analytical generalisation, the researcher is aiming to generalise a particular set of results to a broader theory. While I do not intend for my research to provide for a generalisation, I hope to contribute to the existing research on the topic and be able to provide Doncel with some insight to what the situation for adolescent girls may be before, during and after their pregnancy, and what might be done to improve this.

*Internal validity* relates mainly to the issue of causality, whereby a conclusion that incorporates a causal relationship is legitimate (Bryman, 2004). A valid example here is whether teenage pregnancy is the cause of poverty. The situation could also be referred to as statistical analysis that needs to be controlled for selection effects. Becoming an adolescent mother may not cause the poor outcome in terms of education, employment and income, a situation experienced by many teenage mothers. Rather, both young motherhood and poor outcomes may be caused by

social disadvantages that were present pre-pregnancy. Adolescent motherhood may therefore be a part of a social disadvantage, rather than its cause. But if statistical studies do not control for these selection effects, they will not be able to recognise this. Taking selection effects into consideration and the researcher could find that being a teenage mother does not in itself lead to poorer outcomes either for the mothers themselves or their children. Rather, teenage motherhood often signals a life of exposure, for both mothers and children, to a range of social and economic disadvantages (Alexander et al., 2010). The question of internal validity is not highly relevant to my research as I have not drawn conclusions based on causal relationships. However, I have realised that the uniqueness of my qualitative findings are results of many different factors and I should therefore opt for a more individual consideration when analysing the findings.

In regards to reliability, the test aims to ensure that if researchers at a later stage followed the same procedures as described by an earlier researcher and conducted the same case study again, the later researcher should arrive at the same findings and conclusions. The goal of the reliability test is to minimise errors and biases in a study (Yin, 2009). Reliability is discussed among qualitative researchers, especially when it comes to *external reliability* which refers to whether a study can be replicated at a later stage. This is a difficult criteria to fulfil as it is impossible to 'freeze' a social setting and the circumstances of the initial study in order to replicate it later (Bryman, 2004). In relation to my study I think it is somewhat possible to replicate the study, however, the findings will naturally differ depending on who the informants are. I have based much of my discussion on the fact that many of the adolescents wanted to become mothers, hence a pro-teenage pregnancy angle, and although the results might have been different if Argentina for instance legalised abortion or were less conservative regarding contraception, I believe another research project would come to similar conclusions to the ones I have drawn.

*Internal reliability* refers to where there is more than one researcher and whether they experience and extract the same data out of what they see and hear during the fieldwork (Bryman, 2004). I was alone as a researcher in the field, however Belén assisted me on all the interviews as a translator, and she also helped me translate the interviews to make sure I had understood the girls correctly. As her role in the research was quite extensive she could be looked upon as a second 'researcher,' or at least one I could discuss the findings with afterwards. The subsequent chapter

on analysis, findings and discussion has been reviewed by her, and I have not received any contradictory comments. More on use of an interpreter in *4.7 The Role of the Researcher*.

The last issue in relation to research legitimacy is *triangulation*, which refers to the process of using more than one method or data source in the study of a social phenomenon. By using more than one method during the data collection, the findings may yield more confidence. Originally also a method for quantitative research, triangulation has been adopted by qualitative researchers. Especially ethnographers tend to double check their observations with interview questions in order to determine whether what they had seen was actually what they thought they had seen (Bryman, 2004). This research opts for the case study method as the main point of data gathering, however, participant observation and field notes have also added to the experience. A draft version of this paper was sent to the coordinators at Doncel in order for them to provide feedback before submitting, but as I did not received any contradictory suggestions, I presume that the conclusions I have drawn are plausible.

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations**

We are all confronted by ethical and moral questions and are forced to think about what is right or wrong of potential actions. As both *teenagers* and *pregnancy* are main topics in my research, ethical considerations have been an important aspect of the study. The Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities<sup>12</sup> has drawn up ethical guidelines for research and it has been my utmost desire to follow these guidelines and ‘do no harm’ throughout my research. NESH (2006) states the obligation to respect research ethics is part of the responsibility of research in general. Both individuals and institutions share this responsibility. Research is identified as something that can have a significant impact on society; it can provide information needed in order to make decisions in public or private sector; it can uncover circumstances worthy of criticism and help clarify alternative choices and the potential consequences. But while research can help promote the value of human life through these measures, it can also threaten it. It is the researchers’ main responsibility to show respect for

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<sup>12</sup> Hereafter NESH.



human dignity in designing, conducting and reporting on the research. For the matter of this research, I have done my best to ‘do no harm,’ by being a sensitive listener, providing the informants information about their participation, and treating their responses with respect and confidentiality.

Before starting any investigation, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggests the interviewer should have thought through the ethical dilemmas that might arise during the interviews in order to be prepared. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 62) discusses ethical considerations whilst interviewing, and state that “interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues.” Conducting social research should not only benefit scientific interest, but should serve human interest as well. In interviews, ethical issues can arise particularly because of “researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena” (Mauthner, 2002). One can encounter ethical issues throughout the interview process, and these ethical concerns should be dealt with immediately during the investigation. It is discussed by Miller and Bell (2002) that several ethical issues arise even before starting the research – during the recruiting of participants. They argue that gaining informed consent is problematic as it is often unclear when the participation period starts and ends. Although a consent form has been issued and ethics approval has been obtained, this does not mean ethical issues should be forgotten for the remainder of the research project. I informed my participants and obtained consent twice, first orally when arranging the interview, and secondly, on a written consent form before commencement of the interview when I also explained about the research project, the interviewee’s possibilities to withdraw and the course of the interview.

Nearly every case study presents the researcher with a choice regarding the anonymity of the case. Yin (2009) asks whether the case study and its informants should be accurately identified or whether the names of the entire case and its participants should be anonymous. The anonymity level may be raised in two ways: for the entire case or for that of individual people within the case. In my study there is such a split between anonymity. The names of Amartya, Kulturstudier, Doncel, Belén and Mariana have not been changed. I discussed it with the director of Amartya whether he preferred the organisation to be anonymous, but he said there was no harm in disclosing it. The same goes for Belén. She was of invaluable assistance during my fieldwork,

and as she had no problems with having her name in print I have chosen to refer to her as Belén. Disclosing her name also serves a purpose of validity, as facts and figures could be more easily verified by Doncel.

Nevertheless, anonymity is necessary in many situations. I saw a need to make part of the study anonymous as it deals with controversial topics like teenage pregnancy (Yin, 2009). Before commencing my interviews, I asked the girls to pick a nickname, and those names (Alejandra, Celeste, Dafne, Florencia, Michaela and Rosana) are the ones I have used throughout the thesis. It is only Belén and me who know their real identities. The girls were ensured confidentiality throughout the process of the research, and their nicknames are the only ones ever used when referring to them, both in the thesis and in communication between Belén and myself. The name of the institution where the girls live and their children's names wherever mentioned, are also changed. Although teenage pregnancy is a concurrent issue in many of the institutions Doncel work with in Buenos Aires, I felt I have described the girls' situation to such an extent that if the institution had been identified, so could they. In order to avoid this from happening, the institution's name had to be changed. This is in line with NESH's (2006) suggestions.

According to NESH's guidelines (2006) the research subjects should be given due information regarding their participation in the research. My informants were told they could withdraw from the interview at any time without providing a reason, and if there were questions they were not comfortable with answering they could skip to the next, without offering an explanation. Nevertheless, in my case, all informants willingly answered the questions during the interviews. When conducting a research project it is important to inform the participants about the overall purpose of the investigation as well as information about how the material will be used in the future (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Before starting the interview process, all my interviewees got a consent form where I had explained the purpose of the research (see *Appendix*). The informants were also ensured that the recordings of the interviews would be destroyed upon completion of the thesis. Moreover, I explained to them that there were no right or wrong answers, and that I was looking for their version of their own story. As several of the informants openly criticised the institution where they lived, it seemed like they trusted me with the information, and were not afraid of reprisals regardless of what they disclosed. The advantage of informed consent forms is

that the respondents are fully aware of the nature of the research and their participation. NESH (2006) also states that all this information should be given in a language understood by the participants, and NESH acknowledges the use of an interpreter in order to get this right. Consequently, the interview guide and consent form were translated into Spanish and the informants were provided with a Spanish version of the texts.

I interviewed the girls in places where they felt comfortable, in the institution where they lived, at Amartya's office where they felt welcome, or at their school. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and with my limited knowledge of the language I think the girls felt more relaxed as I was 'disarmed' by having only a beginners level of their native language, and they could have a laugh at me explaining about Norway or my research in stumbling Spanish, or roll their eyes when they realised I was 25 and still did not have children.

Given Belén's relationship with the teenage mothers prior to my arrival in Buenos Aires, it was not a problem getting the girls to talk when they first agreed to do the interview. On two occasions the interviewee did not show up, nor gave an explanation for their absence. This was however well into my stay in Buenos Aires and I had learnt that this could be an example of the Latin American way with time, and there was nothing I could do about it.

None of the interviewees withdrew during the interview; however Rosana, one of the girls who did not intend to fall pregnant, started crying as we were talking about the future and her options for herself and her child. The interview was then paused for Belén and me to comfort her. Kvale (1997) says that one of the criteria to become a successful interviewer is to be able to be a sensitive listener, and to be empathetic in dealing with the interviewees. I tried to be very conscious of the fact that my interviewees were not only statistics and figures, but real people facing challenging situations. Yet, it can be a challenge as a researcher to grasp the sometimes brutal reality that the respondents introduce you to. As mentioned, one girl was raped at the age of 11; yet freely spoke about her ordeal. She provided information from her life that was new to Belén too and after the interview Belén and me sat down and had a short debriefing about the discovery.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) warn that the openness and intimacy of much qualitative research can lead to participants revealing information they might later regret. A researcher might end up in a 'quasi-therapeutic' role, something most qualitative researchers are not trained for. This personal closeness between the interviewer and interviewee puts a certain demand on the researcher regarding how far one should push for answers to questions one might have. As Argentines are friendly people, Belén quickly became my friend and we would spend time together outside the scheduled discussions or interview sessions as well. Although there on some occasions came up questions whether the interviewees would join us for lunch or a coffee, I think it was best that we only met during the workshop or in the interview sessions. I understand well the issue Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) is raising, and I recognised the possibility for a blurred relationship between the participants and me. Another danger with getting too close to the participants is that in the end one can start reporting and interpreting the issues from the participants' perspective, or "going native" in anthropological language (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### **4.7 The role of the researcher**

I encountered the cultural phenomenon of 'machismo' whilst doing fieldwork in Buenos Aires. The term is used as a definition of Latino populations' gender roles, and although often presented as a unique Hispanic cultural phenomenon, the term is applicable to other male gender roles in non-Latino cultures as well (Kinzer, 1973). I aim for this research to give my female informants a voice and to balance out an already existing male-dominated perspective, in this case put forward by policymakers, religion and the media. During the fieldwork I undertook the role as a qualitative interviewer. Before going to Buenos Aires I had an idea of doing participant observation, but quickly realised this was not as easy as first imagined. Belén of Amartya was my interpreter, guide and help during the fieldwork, and she was also responsible for one of the teenage mother workshops initiated by Doncel. I came along to this workshop once to meet some of the girls before starting my interview round. It would have been favourable to attend more times, but it was only held every second week and two times I got feedback from Belén that none of the girls had showed up for the workshop. Although touching on other methods (triangulation),

see 4.5 *Validity and Reliability*, the data gathered for this research is mainly done through qualitative interviews with six teenage mothers.

Conducting research in a different country than one's own poses specific challenges for the researcher. The brief 'marriage' of an Argentine macho culture and a Norwegian researcher with a feminist upbringing makes for a particular challenge. Add blue eyes and long blonde locks to the equation, and the result is a required awareness to steer clear of interviewer bias. Realising and tucking away my own preconceptions and values for the time being made it possible to meet the informants with an open mind. This relativist approach in order to conceptualise the situation at hand does come with a small disclaimer. At the early stages of the study, during a discussion with a well-respected Argentine colleague about women's rights, I was faced with his stereotyping that, and I quote, "we look at women as a pair of tits". After six weeks in the country and a loss of count of how many times I have had kissing, hissing or smooching sounds trail after me in the street, I have to admit his comment touched a nerve. As a foreign 'pair of tits' it is difficult not to be influenced. But being aware of the potential influence of bias lessens the impact.

In regards to questions about who you, the researcher, are, the answers deserve some careful thought. These questions raise problems for social scientists, and makes fieldwork more complicated than just 'collecting' data. Agar (1996) argues that 'objectivity' is just a label, and the real problem is not whether the researcher is biased, rather it depends on what kind of biases that exists. Agar (1996) recommends a high level of awareness of such biases in order for the researcher to deal with them as part of the methodology, reflect upon how biases have influenced the fieldwork and draw conclusions on this in the analysis.

Further to the researcher's analytical 'glasses', the assumptions of and around an issue will influence the eventual research design. Teenage pregnancy invokes a knee-jerk reaction corresponding to ones thoughts about the role of a parent and, perhaps more importantly, of what age a girl becomes a woman. It quickly became obvious that I had to revisit my ideas in order to grasp the reasoning behind what was for the majority of the informants a clear choice to become pregnant at a young age. This was raised by a government employee in Buenos Aires, whose job was to locate institutions who would receive homeless girls, as a follow-up to her first question of

why I had chosen the topic. She stopped me mid-sentence when I tried to list statistics over national support systems in place to prevent teenage pregnancies. This simple question – 'are you sure they do not want to have these kids?' – sent me back to the drawing board. This circular process of conducting research and revising my accepted knowledge proved to be a recurring theme. Adapting the research design when necessary, be it the questionnaire or even the research question, should, as mentioned above, be seen as a natural consequence of the research and not as an error (Neuman, 2006).

It is a simple truth that fieldwork cannot be taught from the black board. There is a mystique about it and, in the words of Agar, it holds an “emotional aura of a rite of passage into professional adulthood” (1996, p. 54). There are few who have not been personally affected to some degree by their fieldwork. My six weeks in Buenos Aires was preceded by a four-month stay in Guatemala, which in many ways prepared me for the relaxed Latin American approach to time keeping and schedules. On substance, no amount of classes or books can prepare one for a meeting with a sixteen year old disabled girl who had been raped by her stepfather and due to conservative abortion laws had ended up carrying out the pregnancy<sup>13</sup>.

When assessing the tools that have been available during the research, it is of little doubt that Belén’s role as a translator, interpreter and door opener have both aided and influenced my research. Her background and experience helped me gain access to the field, and her interpretation made it possible to conduct the interviews in Spanish (Thomas, 2002). Despite a close connection to its European heritage, and a literacy rate of 99 percent, English is not commonly spoken in Argentina. Although able to keep a conversation on a basic level in Spanish, I needed a translator during my interviews. When translation is needed, the researcher runs a risk of the translator asking more direct questions than intended and, also, the translated responses could be influenced by the translator’s personal views. To reduce the risk, Belén and I had talked about the translation beforehand and had also translated the interview guide together to ensure that the intended questions were indeed those asked. The translations of transcripts from Spanish

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<sup>13</sup> Although abortion is legal when the pregnancy is a result of the rape of a mentally disabled woman, the girl I met had not been offered this option in due time, and had been forced to go through with the pregnancy.

to English have also been reviewed by a native English speaker fluent in Spanish and I am confident there are no major errors in the translation that could have affected the outcome of this research.

#### **4.8 The process of the fieldwork**

One of the issues researchers must deal with when they are out in the field is so-called culture shock. The 'shock' comes from the sudden immersion in the way of life of a group markedly different from your own background. The social rules are unknown and the underlying norms can be hard to detect. Expectations are unclear and undefined. Many of the ideas that form the backbone of your identity is suddenly awash, and the more you cling to them, the less you will understand of the people you are trying to study (Agar, 1996).

Two issues quickly spring to mind when I think about my challenges in the field. The first is on the comic side, and relates to the meeting and greeting of Argentines. When entering a room, it is customary to greet everyone present with a kiss on the cheek. Coming from a culture where a handshake is as close you will ever get to strangers and most members of your family for that matter, this intimacy was a bit unsettling in the beginning. Not necessarily because I mind kissing strangers, but, rather, the questions of when and who often arose. Was I supposed to greet the pizza delivery guy this way? What if the room had 15 or more people? Should I still spend a minute or so kissing and greeting everyone? But, as so often when you are out in the field, you learn by doing, and whatever Belén tended to do, I would copy and make a mental note of for the next time. By the time I met the interviewees, I had been accustomed to this process, and it seemed like they appreciated the familiar greeting of a kiss on the cheek instead of an impersonal, detached handshake.

Another issue that is different from Norway is the concept of time in Argentina. Half past ten does not necessary mean half past ten, it could be anything from quarter to eleven to twelve. My Norwegian inheritance has made me very time conscious, I do not like waiting, and I do not like when people have to wait for me. I spent quite some time waiting for different people during the fieldwork. Quickly realising there was nothing I could do to change the situation, I just had to

adopt and adjust to the situation. Belén felt sorry for me for waiting up to half an hour every time we had agreed to meet, as I would always be present at the initial time we had agreed upon, not adjusting to the possible Latin American time she was working on. In the end we agreed on two different concepts; Argentine time and Norwegian time. If we were going to meet at Amartya's office to discuss the process we would meet on Argentine time, and I should expect to occupy myself for up to an hour from the set time. Other times it was Norwegian time we were working on, and this was especially if we were going for interviews and had to be somewhere at a specific time. And even then, waiting for 15 minutes was not uncommon.

It is argued by Patton (1990) among others that one of the fundamental tasks of the researcher is taking field notes. Field notes should contain the description of things that have been observed and contain everything that the observer believes to be worth noting. Patton (1990, p. 239) states "If it's important enough to be part of your consciousness as an observer, if it's information that has helped you understand the context, the setting, what went on, and so forth, then as soon as possible that information should be put into field notes." Field notes should contain so many descriptions that by reading them the researcher can 'return' to the setting, and eventually this should be transferred to the reader of the study findings to experience the activities of the research. I had an amazing time in Buenos Aires, and came to meet many wonderful, friendly and helpful people, who introduced me to the wonders of the city, the well known Argentine wine and to beef barbeques that would make even the most devout vegetarian reconsider her religion. I took note of all the impressions from these encounters in a field diary, which I revisited during the writing process to return to the atmosphere that surrounded me and the people I worked with during the fieldwork.

There is a variety of challenges in doing fieldwork. The culture of fieldwork, professional face-saving, personal anxieties and a desire to look 'scientific' all influence the researcher's experience and preparations before heading out in the field (Agar, 1996). Before you actually start talking to people, there are certain preliminaries that must be taken care of. You need to have chosen an area of study and a specific group to talk with, a review of current literature should be done, and a network path that will help you gain access to the people you want to talk with, as well as funding must be taken care of (Agar, 1996).



Agar (1996) explicitly warns against just showing up in the field without prior notice. In some cases it could lead to unnecessary personal risks, in general it will just be inconvenient and time-consuming getting to know the field from scratch. To be introduced by a person or institution well thought of by the desired respondents is a good idea that can give you a head start. I am confident that I would not have been able to gain the same access without the introductions from Belén. The girls lived in an institution run by nuns, with strict rules of who could enter the compound, and I probably would not have been permitted inside, let alone located the place, without Belén functioning as a door opener. The insurance from a well-known person that the study would be conducted with the aim of causing minimal harm or discomfort to the respondents convinced the head of the institution to let me interview the girls.

Agar (1996) discusses the role of being affiliated with an organisation or a local project in the field whilst doing research. He gives an example of when he was doing research on drug addicts in San Francisco. He was amazed by the instant openness of the drug addicts, and the fact that they immediately took him in, answered his questions and introduced him to new possible informants. Agar gives credit to his affiliation with the local Free Clinic, a reputable organisation in the neighbourhood. His association with the clinic gave him a foot on the inside, which resulted in a positive change in respondent behaviour compared with his previous contacts with drug addicts. My connection with Doncel provided similar effects. The girls, despite not having met me before, had no issues with answering my questions or agreeing to do the interviews. Agar (1996) stresses the point of being affiliated with an organisation the respondents think fondly of. In my situation, where Doncel is a project that have helped over 250 street children through work training and jobs, it offered a positive impact on my contact with the respondents.

## 4.9 The coding process

After completing the fieldwork, the coding and processing of the data is ever apparent. There are different ways to analyse data, and Kvale (1997) describes one method which reflects the process I went through: the transcribed interview is interpreted by the researcher and further divided into three parts: 1) the large masses of complex data material are structured for analysis. 2) The researcher prepares the material for analysis. This includes deleting unnecessary or repeated material and eliminating digressions or redundant information. The researcher is left with a clear divide between useful and not so useful material. What is useful or not is of course depending on the aim of the study and the theoretical requirements. 3) The actual analysis and interviewees' opinions emerge. The interviewees' own perceptions of the topics are highlighted and the researcher presents new perspectives and ways to look at the data.

To create a clear analysis I have looked at some of the main concepts that came up during the interviews, and discussed each of these concepts in relation to the respondents' answers. I used my interview guide as a pointer for the main topics; however, I also followed Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) advice of focusing on what the respondents are emphasising as important. Some of the responses from the informants overlap, and could have belonged under several categories, nevertheless I have chosen to discuss them under the heading I found most relevant.

The main concepts that emerged from the interviews were:

- The teenagers' perception of pregnancy and motherhood.
- Their relationships with the father of the baby, current partners, peers and family.
- Their perception of living in an institution.
- School vs. pregnancy.
- Future prospects and plans.

There are several ways of doing the coding process. Some researchers use a computer to locate and cross-reference the themes and topics; however, due to the small number of participants, I found this best done by hand. It is a complex process, but to briefly describe it I used the transcripts of the interviews and followed Kvale's (1997) advice and edited out less important

data until I was left with one to five pages of block quotes from each participant. I then read through the notes numerous times, listed emerging themes in the interviews, and then gathered the same emerging themes from the different respondents together. In the following *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion* I have examined these findings.

## Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion

So far, this thesis has given the reader an introduction to the complex topic of teenage pregnancy, the relevant theoretical approaches and a presentation of the methodology and research methods. The next step is to look closer at and analyse the information gathered during the fieldwork. I aim to offer some insight into the lived experiences and to illustrate some of the factors that influence and shape the lives of adolescent mothers. Grinnell and Unrau (2008) argue that words are ‘fatter’ than numbers and often have multiple meanings. This makes analysis of qualitative research significantly different from quantitative ones. Words contain descriptive information and yet, through the available vocabulary, carry assumptions of how situations are to be understood. This ‘fatter’ meaning makes for rewarding analysis when patterns or interesting observations from the field work begins to take form.

The fieldwork and subsequent research has shown that there is no average Argentine teenage mother. Particularly among the youngest girls, the pregnancy is often the result of non-consensual sex. For others, a lack of sexual education at school or home, or the lack of available health care services or knowledge about the correct use of contraceptive methods can be the reason for the pregnancy. A third and by no means insignificant reason is a welcomed desire to have a baby and where the teenage mother actively has been trying to conceive. The double blue line on the pregnancy test is suddenly not cause for despair, but rather the start of something wonderful (Gogna et al., 2008). As will be discussed in this chapter, the latter motive dominated among my informants. For pedagogical purposes, I have divided the teenage mothers into two groups: the A-girls who wanted to become pregnant and the B-girls who did not want to become pregnant.

After reading the transcripts of my interviews the data seemed overwhelming. First of all because there was so much text and I was drawn between two dilemmas. First, I was thinking *everything* was important, so I was afraid to leave something out. Second, I realised that the participants’ concerns had not necessarily been the same as mine before I set out to do the research. Uncovering some of the topics important to my informants helped me redefine the focus, find new literature and gain a new threshold to the issues of adolescent pregnancy. With the research

questions fresh in mind, I will throughout this chapter discuss and analyse the data from my fieldwork and put this in relation to the theoretical approaches discussed in *Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework*. When analysing the data it is important to use the theoretical framework in relation to the findings. The theories serve as tools to understand the material, a way for the researcher to position herself and it provides a backdrop and rationale for the research that is being conducted (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Social phenomena can be understood within the theoretical framework, and the research findings can be interpreted and absorbed (Bryman, 2004).

Qualitative research entails significant room for interpretation and different researchers, using the same findings, can reasonably draw different conclusions. When analysing my data, it is therefore vital to realise that my way of analysing is only one of several ways this could have been done. There is not 'one right way'. Others might interpret the data differently by focussing more or less on different themes than what I have done. Nevertheless, as discussed in *Chapter 4 Methodology*, it is important that each coder's interpretation is understandable to other coders to ensure internal reliability (Bryman, 2004). Throughout this chapter any claims made are supported with statements from the informants, put in a theoretical framework or looked at in a bigger context. In the final *Chapter 6 Bringing it to a close* I will look at the analysis from a meta perspective, and draw some concluding remarks. As mentioned in *Chapter 4 Methodology*, this study is limited both in relation to numbers and time span, however, I hope to contribute to the existing knowledge of this topic, particular in order to aid Amartya and Doncel in their work with this specific socioeconomic group in Buenos Aires.

Initially, before I began the field work, I expected to find a correlation between limited options available to women who got pregnant and high numbers of teenage pregnancies. As previously stated, access to abortion is limited in Argentina (and the Latin American region as a whole). Although unsafe abortions occur, at even an alarming rate in some areas, it cannot be looked upon as a readily available option. The expectation that lack of, or misuse of, contraception (or abuse) had caused the pregnancies coupled with denial of abortion opportunities as the final straw that left the adolescent girls with few choice was, however, not met. Tellingly, Alexander et al. (2010) argue that there is a public consensus around teenage pregnancy that assumes that it is on

the rise, that the increase is especially seen among younger teenagers, that all teenage pregnancies are unplanned, and more importantly, that all these unplanned pregnancies are unwanted. However, the social service representative, who was my first respondent in Buenos Aires, challenged this perception. The following section will look at and discuss my informants' views on pregnancy and motherhood, and, as will be uncovered, the situation may not have been as undesirable as first thought.

## **5.1 The teenagers' perception of pregnancy and motherhood**

It is argued by Alexander et al. (2010) that regardless of age, only a small number of mothers actively plan their pregnancy. Instead of planning the due date in detail, the majority of soon-to-be mothers are open to the idea of becoming a parent, and welcome this when it happens. Alexander et al. (2010) further debates it is important to distinguish between 'accidental' and 'unwanted' pregnancies, especially in the discourse around adolescent motherhood, as the latter is usually conceptualised a highly unfortunate accident. Alexander et al. (2010) disagree with what they see as the dominating discourse of irresponsiveness and underachievement tied to young mothers. This view tends to construe young mothers as a problem for their children and families, for policymakers and practitioners, as well as the society as a whole. What has been missing from this externally imposed view is how the adolescent parents position themselves in regards to their situation (Alexander et al., 2010). Many adolescents are positively ambivalent towards childbirth. While it is not planned, the parents would like a baby and stop using contraception for that reason. Few teenage mothers regret early childbirth, and many are optimistic that parenthood will shift them into a positive life trajectory (Alexander et al., 2010).

Only a couple of minutes had passed into the first interview when I realised that the view offered above fitted the description the girl in front of me was presenting. Her pregnancy had marked a turning point for the better, and she was now more likely to take up education and employment. Alexander et al. (2010) contend adolescent mothers do no worse, and often better than their peers, once pre-existing disadvantages are allowed for, as they suddenly have someone to live for and care about.

The pregnancy was beautiful! I loved going to the doctor, I was happy. It's really nice to be a mum. It's wonderful. To share what you know, to teach, to know that you are not alone. Celeste

Celeste was 15 years old when she got pregnant, and by the time she had conceived she was looking forward to becoming a mum. She cherished the pregnancy and the following maternity.

I wanted a baby. I wanted to have a child. Now if I think more about it, I think it was because I wanted to have something of my own. I knew I was young, but I was ready to be a mother. I was prepared. Celeste

Alexander et al. (2010) argue that despite the socioeconomic challenges adolescent pregnancies can cause for the mother, it is a mistake to equate this with an assumption that all adolescent pregnancies are unwanted.

Pregnancy is the best thing that exists. It's so nice, it changes you and your life. It's like you're another person when you have something growing inside you, that's going to be just like you. It's strange to think that one person comes out from another. It is in your stomach for some months growing, it feeds from you and it grows thanks to you. Dafne

Dafne was very excited about her pregnancy. She was also one of my two informants with two children, both of whom were wanted.

Getting over the initial discovery that the cause of pregnancies were not merely due to a conservative abortion law, but also an active choice on the teenagers' behalf, disrupted my hypothesis of the causal relationship between restrictive abortions and high teenage pregnancy rates. It made me enter the remaining interviews with a more open mind in order to discover what other issues in the girls' daily lives could be so influential that they decided to become parents because of it.

I wanted company. I wanted someone who called me mum, who gave me some limits, someone who could guide me. Florencia

Other studies (see e.g. Pick de Weiss et al., 1991) report that many adolescent mothers feel lonely prior to their pregnancy and the baby is perceived as a way of fulfilling affective needs. Focus groups from Gogna et al.'s (2008) research also stated that a major reason for wanting a child was loneliness. Florencia also said the baby calmed her life down, and gave her some boundaries

in an otherwise hectic and uncontrollable life. This idea Florencia had of her baby as a tool for a different life trajectory was visible in the other A-girls as well. But can an infant be given the responsibility of guiding the mother through her life? Nussbaum emphasises the importance of choice and capabilities and argues that governments should make sure their citizens have access to resources and conditions in order to make sound decisions. In regards to teenage pregnancy, I can identify two major areas where choice and capabilities play an impact. Firstly, was the pregnancy wanted? If not – does the mother have any choices to terminate? Secondly, what support systems are in place for the mother if she decides to have the child? Being Norwegian, it is easy to compare with the situation in Norway, where a pregnant teenager would have both the possibility to abort the pregnancy, and there would be a sufficient support system available if the mother decided to go through with the pregnancy. In Argentina on the other hand, as my informants made clear in the interviews, neither of these means are readily available, resulting in teenage pregnancy being a challenge for the young mother.

How my informants looked at the pregnancy is, surprisingly not, affected to a large degree by the circumstances around their pregnancy. When 11-year old Michaela was raped by her neighbour and became pregnant, it was a desperate situation.

I used to go to bed at night and cry and cry, hating myself. I couldn't talk to anyone, I was locked in my house, and I couldn't go out. And it was even worse when people in the neighbourhood started noticing. People looked at me with pity. I realised I was pregnant when I was five months on the way. I was a child. I was crying all day, I didn't want to realise it. The baby was moving in my belly and it was horrible. Michaela

She found nothing beautiful about her situation and struggled to accept her daughter, once born.

It was hard to accept my daughter because I didn't want her. She looked like her father. I didn't want her, I couldn't accept her. In my view, she was to blame for what had happened to me, and it wasn't like that, poor thing, she had nothing to do with it...neither had I...but in my head it reminded me of the horrible situation. Michaela

Michaela had clearly been through ordeals no woman or child should have to experience. Rape is not only illegal, the result is life changing and often devastating for the victim (Estrich, 1986). Argentina's strict abortion law, backed by the stronghold of the Catholic Church in the region,



offered no consolation and Michaela gave birth shortly before her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her rape was clearly a violation of one of Nussbaum's (2000) definite capabilities, namely *bodily integrity*. This is associated with freedom from violence, including sexual assault, and a choice in one's own reproductive matters. Michaela was denied these capabilities. Michaela also identified pity and stigma from her peers and community as a result of her pregnancy. It is a paradox that the stigmatisation comes from the same people that should have been there to protect her in the first place. Michaela was the only girl who reported sexual abuse, but others reported of abusive partners or family members.

Despite stigmatisation from the community, some of the girls were very clear on their choice to become a parent. But, during the interview, Celeste said the disapproval from others was a clear negative aspect of the pregnancy.

People think you're a young mother because of a drunken night or big party, they don't think that you are able to raise a child at that age. Celeste

At any first encounter, according to Goffman (1963) a person based on outer appearances forms an opinion of the social identity and ability of the other person. It takes a second round to actively ask ourselves if the perceived characteristics are apt and an awareness of our own expectations towards the person. Celeste said that people often got this wrong and were not aware of the desire many adolescents have to become mothers. Looking back at the discussion in section 3.2 *Being labelled a teenage mother*, this misperception is in accordance with some of the points highlighted there, for instance the social play of rule-makers and rule-breakers that often do not coincide. The Church and policymakers look at premarital sex as deviant behaviour that should be avoided, whilst the teenage girls who chose to become pregnant view the pregnancy as a positive incident and an inspiration.

Rosana, an immigrant from Paraguay, was the other of my informants who did not wish to become a mother at 19. Yet, despite not planning the pregnancy, she enjoyed the changes to her body and the attention she got from others during the pregnancy.

I had a big belly. I liked to hug it and lie in bed and feel my daughter moving from side to side. I loved that. When I was outside people would ask me about the pregnancy and what month I was in. Rosana

She used to live in an institution run by nuns, and was offered no sexual education prior to her pregnancy. She blames her pregnancy on her lack of awareness.

I was living with nuns, and we couldn't talk about sex because they felt uncomfortable. And well, I didn't know. My pregnancy was the result of lack of knowledge. Rosana

The adult community, represented by the Church, parents and policymakers view premarital sex and teenage motherhood as deviant behaviour, yet the National Programme on Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation, which was launched in 2003 with the aim of preventing unwanted pregnancies by distributing free birth control, has been criticised due to its low visibility and ineffectiveness (Valente, 2010; CEDAW, 2004a)<sup>14</sup>.

Rosana is struggling with the restrictions her daughter puts on her and, despite attending school every weekday while someone else look after her child, she feels having a baby limits her options.

Sometimes I can't even go out with my friends when they ask me. Sometimes on weekends I have to stay with my daughter because during the week I can't be with her. I have to spend time with her, take her to the park. I don't like going to the park, but I have to do it. Rosana

As Wilson and Huntington (2005) argue, by not wanting to prioritise her daughter, Rosana runs the risk of failing to meet normative expectations of the role of a good mother, and she may be viewed as unfit to be a parent. Rosana's situation is one with lack of choice to control one's own life output, and a situation where capabilities to take control have been absent. Referring to Nussbaum's (2000) list of capabilities, what has been lacking in Rosana's situation is the

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<sup>14</sup> A newly completed research project providing free contraceptives to women between 20-24 years old in two cities in Norway (Hamar and Tromsø) resulted in a halving of the abortion rate from 2008 to 2009. It is now discussed whether to expand this offer to other parts of the country (Strøm-Gundersen & Foss, 2010).

*practical reason*, where she has not been able to influence happenings in her life or plan it accordingly. Others had been longing for a child, and were thrilled when they found out about their pregnancy.

I had a friend whose mother told me “you have a face as if you were pregnant”. I was in my third month and didn't know it. So I did a test and it was positive. Everybody was crying happily and started to think about names. When I was pregnant the baby used to kick a lot from inside and it was the most beautiful thing. The ultrasound scans, when they made me listen to the heart, were beautiful. Dafne

Although painting a rosy picture of becoming a teenage mother, raising a child as a teenager poses particular challenges. Dafne's two daughters currently do not live with her because she does not have a secure place to stay. She said that her unstable economic situation made it very challenging to be a mother, especially as she received little support from her family.

I have two kids like I wanted, but what now? I don't have a house, I don't have my kids with me, and I can't teach them anything or see them grow. If you have a good economic situation, you can have all the children you want to. But if you don't and your family doesn't give you any support, it's hard. I don't have my girls with me because I don't have a place to live. I'm working on getting them back. If you don't have any money you can lose your children too. Dafne

Her economic capabilities are challenging and the lack of a stable income has made her lose her children for some time. A study conducted in the United Kingdom (Formby et al., 2010) suggests that although young parenthood is far from problem-free, the problems that arise are often associated with economic and social circumstances surrounding the mother and child, and not because of the age of which the pregnancy occurred. This concurs with what Dafne told me. Emotionally and physically she feels fit to be a parent, and loves her role as a mother, however, the lack of money makes the situation unbearable for her children. She doubted that a life without children at a young age would have changed her situation for the better. Rosana also expressed economic concern for herself and her baby, and was uncertain what would happen when she turned 21 and would have to leave the institution. As an immigrant with no official papers [they were being processed at the time of the interview], she felt she had limited opportunities and support.

Sometimes I'm sad, I get nervous, but when I ask my daughter to hug me and she does, it makes me so happy. Rosana

This last point made by Rosana was applicable to all the informants; how important they felt their child(ren) were in their lives today, and how, almost dependant, the informants were on them. Even Michaela, who had troubles accepting the situation in the beginning, said she would be nothing without her daughter Tamara.

Today, Tamara is the only thing I have, my support is my daughter, and she helps me go on. If it wasn't for her, I would be nothing. Michaela

The love and sense of affection the informants felt when being around their children could counter some of the stigma they might have experienced as adolescent mothers. For the A-girls, not having children provoked no stigma from the society, however, nor any positive emotions. Having the child at young age caused stigma, but gave larger returns in the form of love and affection, making it a worthwhile equation. Florencia said having a baby changed her as a person, and made her grow up.

It has opened my eyes. Before I was a little girl. I used to dress like a little girl, to have my hair as a little girl, I didn't know anything about anything, and I was very innocent. Now I am more like an adult, now I take care of someone, now I'm a mum and have to look after her. Florencia

For Florencia, being a mother clearly gave her some new, valuable meaning in life. The idea of 'care' suddenly becomes vital as the baby is entirely dependent on its care-taker(s). Nussbaum (2002) discusses the meaning and necessity of care, and argue that life is a never-ending circle, commencing and ending with care. During the course of a lifetime, most people encounter periods of extreme dependency, some relying on care from others every day throughout their lives. My informants seemed to enjoy this responsibility and the fact that their children were dependent on them. Growing up in broken families, my informants had felt as a burden on their relatives, but the baby was life dependant on them, and suddenly a meaningful reason to live emerged. They all made use of what Nussbaum (2000) calls the *affiliation* capability, referring to being able to live with others and to recognise and show concern for them. It seemed like the

girls' children played a vital part fulfilling this role, because as we shall see in the next section, the girls' relationship with their families, partners and peers was far from glamorous.

## **5.2 Relationship with former and current partners, parents and peers.**

The 2003-2004 study from Argentina mentioned in *Chapter 2 Contextualisation* reported that 41 percent of young women were living with their partners at the time of conception, while 55 percent became pregnant while dating. By the time the baby was born, 62 percent were living with a partner, suggesting that pregnancy triggers the various relationships to turn into marriage or cohabiting situations (Gogna et al., 2008). The situation for my informants was slightly different. It could be the socioeconomic background in addition to the challenge of becoming a young parent that strained the relationship, but none of the informants were together with the father of their firstborn. Dafne and Alejandra who have two children were both in a relationship with the father of their second child.

Growing up in institutions serve as a reminder that the family situations for these girls have not been ideal, and none reported good relationships with their biological families. The girls' relationships with their biological families have also influenced the relationship with their partners, and many have drawn from previous experiences and are affected by it.

A relationship scares me a bit. I don't trust anyone. My mother and father are separated. I never lived with them, but when I was 11 my mother was ill and I had to stay with her. We thought her new husband was a good man, at least he was when he was in the presence of my mother, but it wasn't like that. When my mother wasn't there he used to hit me, and I wouldn't like that to happen to my daughter. Rosana

Ceballo et al. (2001) states that not only direct experiences with violence can have a damaging effect on children's well-being. Living with an ever-present threat of random violence and the vicarious experiences of others' victimisation may also affect children's psychological functioning.

Youth violence is commonly thought of as a cyclical process (see e.g. Whitman et al., 2007), where exposure to violence during the childhood can contribute to aggressive behaviours and more exposure to new violent situations. The teenage mothers who have suffered from violent peers or family members in the past stand before big challenges in order to be able to secure a safe environment for their children, yet, it is not impossible. Rosana stated an eagerness to make sure her daughter does not experience the hostility she had to face when she was younger.

Alejandra's relationship with the father of her firstborn was complicated, and resulted in her refuge from Colombia.

My daughter's father was a drug-trafficker and he killed another drug-trafficker. The mafia was looking for him, and because he was hiding in my house they were looking for me too. Alejandra

She told me she eventually left her partner after prolonged physical abuse, and she is now in a relationship with the father of her second child. The new boyfriend gives her some financial support and Alejandra hopes to be able to be with him in a stable relationship, enjoy life and worry less.

I dream of the four of us living together in a home, where I can have a good relationship with my partner, and live like a family. Alejandra

Substance abuse is a big problem in Buenos Aires, where by-products of cocaine is mixed with rat poison and crushed glass, creating 'paco,' a highly addictive, but cheap drug that especially is targeted towards young users (Kelly, 2010). Dafne told me of drug abuse in her family, and the uncertainty of being with a partner who takes drugs.

My brother ruined his life with drugs, but when Beatriz was born he gave it up. Sara's father also used to do drugs, but when we started going out he quit. I can't live with a person who takes drugs. Dafne

Celeste also tells of arguments and quarrels with her daughter's father due to his drug use.

I used to argue a lot with my baby's father, he was aggressive and used to take drugs and run away. Celeste

The father is still in contact with Celeste's daughter, but she explains that he has a habit of suddenly disappearing without warning and just as suddenly appearing again to get back in touch. She on the other hand, is destined to look out for their child without his help.

I swear that my mother taught me since I was 11 years old how to take care of myself.  
Celeste

Dafne reported of an absent father of her firstborn too, and the challenges that come with being a sole parent to her daughter.

My daughter asks for her father every day, she asks me to call him and to look for him because she wants to see him. And it's difficult because I can't lie all the time. I've looked for him several times, but now I can't find him.  
Dafne

As Lanctôt and Le Blanc (2002) argue, girls' pathway to deviance, in this case, unmarried teenage pregnancy, can in many cases be explained as a way to escape or a means to survive. Dafne's first pregnancy was an attempt to get away from an unbearable home situation.

Maybe I unconsciously thought that having a child would take me away from my mother's house and free me from that.  
Dafne

With her second child, she admits that she used the pregnancy to stay in the relationship with her boyfriend. This is also reported from a study in Mexico City (Pick de Weiss et al., 1991), where many single women became pregnant with the intention of getting the father of the child to marry them.

I got pregnant to get my boyfriend to stay with me. I didn't want to lose him.  
Dafne

Nevertheless, although facing challenges with the father of her second child as well, she realised that she could not continue using pregnancies as a way to solve her problems.

I wanted him to be with me so I could escape from my family situation. It was the same as with my previous pregnancy, but I decided to stop doing that if not I'd have 200 kids and I'd still have problems.  
Dafne

At the time Dafne was pregnant with her first child her mother was pregnant as well, making her brother only two months older than her oldest daughter. Dafne says that before the pregnancy she could get along with her mother, but when they were pregnant they argued much. An interesting aspect is that not only is poverty often seen as being recycled to the next generation, but

adolescent parents are themselves often born to teenage mothers. In a survey from Mexico (Buvinic, 1998), two-thirds of the teenage mothers had mothers who had given birth in their teens as well, suggesting that adolescent motherhood is part of the socialisation process. Furthermore, Buvinic (1998) argues that teenage mothers are more likely than adult mothers to pass on their adolescent parenthood and poor life conditions to their daughters, almost as a birthright.

Economical and emotional support have been an issue in all the interviews, however, there is little to report as the support is close to non-existent. Dafne says her brother comforted her by just being there for her, but the other girls lacked support during their pregnancies.

Sometimes, my brother would give me money. He supported me emotionally too, seeing him and hugging him was enough for me. Then I made an effort to get things to work. I got a job and paid for a kindergarden for my kids. Dafne

Not having a stable family environment caused the girls to have no one around to admire them when they succeeded, and no one around to support them when they failed. Michaela received no emotional or financial support during her pregnancy, which, by normal standards, was discovered very late.

I got support from nobody. No one knew I was pregnant. My mother first got to know when I was seven months pregnant, because I was always quite fat. I never had medical controls and the first time I saw a doctor was when I started having contractions and gave birth. Thank God I never had any problems, and Tamara is healthy. Michaela

From previous research (Gogna et al., 2008) it is clear that there is a link between the circumstances around the pregnancy and antenatal care. Those who wanted to have a baby or were in a dating relationship were more likely to get the adequate number of antenatal check-ups than other teenager expecting mothers. Michaela spent two months in hospital after her pregnancy where she had to deal with kidnapping threats from her rapist.

I wasn't allowed to go out because Tamara's father wanted to take her away from me. It sounds like a movie, but it's true. A man who was dressed as a doctor told me he was taking my daughter for a check-up, but in that moment the real doctors arrived and they didn't know him, so they stopped him just in time. Michaela



With little hope of achieving a functioning family structure with their biological families, the girls have seen no other choice but to create this notion of ideal family themselves. With a stable job and education a happy, healthy life with their children seems to be achievable, however, when what they view as their home and support network consists of little family support and an institution they do not like, the obstacles becomes substantial. Aspects of the capability approach ties in with this dilemma, and Sen (1993, 1999) and Nussbaum (2000) discusses that the freedom to be and do what they want, applies here. Being deprived of that freedom influences the girls' possibilities in life.

A study conducted in Mexico City (Pick de Weiss et al., 1991) described 16-19 year old adolescent girls who did not engage in sexual activity, but accepted family traditions and societal norms, as a result of an open dialogue with their mothers about sexual health. These young women were expected to continue their education to a higher level than their peers who had sex. The idea that these girls accepted socio-cultural and parental rules, and at the same time discussed sex with their mothers, indicated families with strong parental authority coexisting with an openness to discuss intimate matters between mother and daughter. In this study, Pick de Weiss et al. discovered that girls whose mothers had been in a relationship when first pregnant provided a positive role model for their daughters to avoid pregnancy before marriage. Another aspect that had a positive influence on teenage pregnancy was peers. More communication with friends about sex, contraception and pregnancy was also reported as having a decreased effect on the likelihood of becoming a young pregnant (Pick de Weiss et al., 1991).

Looking at my informants, it cannot be claimed they have grown up or lived in families where the ties were strong or parents had much of an influence. Rather, they have all spent part of their lives in institutions with little or no family close by, where often distant staff members or other desolate teenage girls have been their only support network. My informants' perception of living in institutions is presented in the next section.

### 5.3 Teenage mothers' perception of living in an institution

My informants had lived in institutions between one and nine years, and none of the adolescents reported good relationships with their biological families, especially not with their mothers. For a teenager in Buenos Aires who due to family complications or other factors has no place to live, the most common alternative is to go through Defensoria, a state organ for placing orphaned children in institutions, and be relocated to an institution by them.

'Hope4all'<sup>15</sup> was one of these institutions, especially focusing on pregnant youth and teenage mothers. Run by nuns with a strict scheme on accepted behaviour, it was a difficult transition for some of the girls. My informants had various reasons for leaving their families, and for some, like Rosana who had grown up in an institution in Paraguay where she felt home, the shift to 'Hope4all', was far from an easy transition.

The girls at the institution in Paraguay couldn't have children. That's why they sent me here when I got pregnant. I loved the other place, it was my home, and the nuns there were like my mothers. Coming here was quite difficult. Rosana

The problem of unwanted children in many residences resulted in several of the girls having to move to 'Hope4all'.

I used to live with my grandparents in a hotel, but children were not allowed there, so as my baby was crying and playing it was noisy and I had to leave. It was horrible in the institution. It's not my kind of place, I don't like it. It's not my home, I don't feel comfortable there. Celeste

The challenges of living in an institution are many. Michaela reported of the difficulty of being the youngest among a group of teenage, emotional and frustrated girls.

In [Hope4all] it was hard because all the girls were older than me. I was 13 and the girls were 18 or 20. I was their toy. When I entered the first one, they made me do some bad

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<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym of the institution the girls lived in.

things because I was the new one and the youngest. It was difficult for me, I used to cry all day, I wanted to see my mum and she never came to see me. Michaela

The problems the girls encountered in the institution ties in with Nussbaum's (2000) *emotional capability*. She argues people should be free to have attachments to things and people other than themselves, including loving those who love us back, and grieve in their absence. She also argues the capability constitutes having one's emotional development free from fear and anxiety.

I don't agree with the fact that men work in an institution for girls. There was a bad mannered psychologist, he was terrible. The social assistant was a good person, I think she was the only nice one in the staff, she used to work hard for the girls. The director was terrible, she demanded that we set an example for the younger girls, but she was not a good example for us. Dafne

Michaela was also negative to the strict rules in the place, that every door had a lock on it, and that they could not enter and exit when desired.

Everything was indoor, also school. It was a bad time for me. At first it was horrible. I didn't know anything, I thought that institutions were nice places as in the movies, but [Hope4All] was full of teenage mothers with problems, and I was put there, it was horrible. Michaela

It seemed like the girls saw the constrictions of the compound as a burden. Especially the A-girls who had chosen to become mothers as a means to 'grow up' and take on more responsibility found being locked in every night uncomfortable and against their wish.

Suddenly I'm here with a lot of people, sharing things, with other rules. At 7pm they close the door until the next day. It's different when you are in your own house. Despite the fact that you normally don't go outside late, it's not comfortable knowing that you can't. Celeste

Some of the girls also felt that being put in the institution labelled them as a 'problem' for the society, something they had no intentions to be. They wanted an education, a job and a place to live for them and their children, where they could live happy lives. They felt the institutionalisation as an obstacle in order to achieve this, and were eager to get rid of the subsequent label.

Nevertheless, after an initial period adapting to the place, some of the girls found some comfort in having a place to live, and the emotional support the institution did set out to give.

Apart from the difficulties in the beginning, the institution taught me a lot of things, they helped me a lot. I didn't accept my daughter, I didn't want to give her my milk, but the psychologists helped me and made me do it. Michaela

The lack of financial and emotional support from other actors in the informants' lives, as mentioned above, was also partly fulfilled by the institution.

They gave me a place to live, that is kind of support, but not in the emotional way. The institution helps me take care of my baby when I'm working or studying, that's very good and helps me feel better. But not I'm one of the oldest living there now and I want to leave, it's not my home. Celeste

And having the institution's network to lean on in difficult times was valued by some of the girls.

The nuns and some of girls too, would be at your side whenever you'd need it. They'd help you. Rosana

As noted on in *Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework*, Goffman (1963) argues that stigmatised people can find comfort in other people who share their fate. Although not being fond of the institution where they lived, some of the girls found the comradeship among the young mothers supportive. Others found the constant attention too much.

I feel bad; it makes me sick, I'm so tired. If I could leave it would be better for me. It's very difficult to live in an institution. The worst thing is the people. The people who work here don't do it well. They're rude; they treat us as if we were nothing. They tell me all the time that I don't take care of my daughter, but that's not true. The thing is that I don't have time because I go to school. Florencia

One of the institution's challenges that emerged after talking to the informants was that the adolescent mothers were all treated the same way, and there was too little focus on the individual. As shown, although sharing some aspect of being a teenage mother, their experiences are unique and should be dealt with accordingly. It may not have been possible to deal with the individual needs of the many girls living in the institution. Michaela tells of her first encounter with another girl at the institution and how far apart the two young girls' situations were.

There was another girl aged 9 when I entered the institution. I used to see her playing with dolls and I had a real baby. Michaela

It is almost an ironic situation, where two pre-teen girls are playing, but one with a doll and the other with her own child. The ideal situation would have been much more support for Michaela when she arrived young and fragile at the institution.

Despite being a place of conflict and little privacy, the idea of having to leave the institution when turning 21 was also dreaded.

I'm afraid something bad is going to happen to Tamara, I'm not sure about things, because it's difficult outside. I've lived in institutions since I was 11 years, half my life. My daughter wants to leave because there she cannot watch TV, she cannot do what she wants. And me too, I'm sick of everybody giving me orders and timetables. But it's comfortable too, because I know when I am out, and if I come home at 3am, Tamara will be asleep in a warm, safe place. Michaela

Homelessness is a situation that threatens the girls as soon as they turn 21 and, by Argentine law, have to leave the institution. The stigma of being homeless is considerable. Because of inadequate support means, the society often views homeless people as thieves or shoplifters (Falk, 2001). Dafne told me she did not like to steal, and although admitting to have done so on several occasions, she would much rather have a proper job to provide her with income.

In this section I have showed how the girls' capabilities play a part in what are they able to do and create for themselves, and what options do they have. As was mentioned in section 3.1.1 *Education and the capability approach*, education has a profound ability to impact ones' life, as will be discussed next.

#### **5.4 School vs. pregnancy - restrictions or possibilities?**

A challenge with teenage pregnancy is that many girls leave school, either upon discovering the pregnancy or at the latest, shortly before the child is born. School dropout has long-term implications for the girls as individuals, but also for their children, their families and the

community (WHO, 2010). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2010) claims that delaying adolescent births can lower the risk of over-population; it can potentially generate broad economic and social benefits and improve the health of adolescents. The 'incarceration effect' is introduced to the debate around teenage pregnancy and schooling by Black et al. (2008). It is argued that girls who are in school do not have the desire, time or opportunity to engage in, for example, sexual activity. As a result they do not get pregnant as often as girls who are out of school (Black et al., 2008). Nevertheless, as my informants were in school when they became pregnant, Black et al.'s solution is not entirely fool-proof and probably requires other means of action that so.

What should rather be discussed is how to avoid attending school-girls from becoming pregnant. A national sexual health programme as well as free contraceptives in Argentina have been suggested or even implemented without much success. It is argued that better economic and social conditions would allow adolescents to remain in school and to foresee opportunities for employment and personal development other than becoming pregnant (Gogna et al., 2008). Gogna et al. (2008) is just one of many who claim that staying in school will keep adolescents out of the maternity wards.

Of those still at school when becoming pregnant, it is reported by another Argentine study (Gogna et al., 2008) that six out of ten girls dropped out in the first months after finding out about their pregnancy. The study reports of a small number (5 percent) of pregnant students being expelled, however, 40 percent of the girls continued school until the end of their pregnancy. This percentile reported of a flexible school environment which, despite lacking appropriate infrastructure, adapted to the girls' situation and needs. Although sporadic, the schools' support was appreciated by the respondents. The evidence from this study challenges the stereotypical assumption of a causal relationship between adolescent pregnancy and school dropout (Gogna et al., 2008). Focus groups (Gogna et al., 2008) also reported that schools were experienced as flexible environments when the mothers were met with understanding and allowed to bring their babies into the classrooms, and given acceptance to leave the room to breastfeed. Celeste expressed satisfaction of such a school environment.

When I got pregnant I abandoned school, but last year I started again. I decided to take up school because I wanted to finish it, to progress in life, to learn. I used to live near here a few years ago and I took a leaflet promoting the school. I started coming and I liked it. This is an anarchist house and they allow the school to have a place here. I'm not an anarchist, but some things caught my interest. Here we work in groups, there are no separate tables, instead we have a round table where we all work. And if my baby gets sick I can be absent, there's no problem in this school with that. Celeste

A school that was flexible to the girls' situation came highly valued. This recognition of the challenges tied to motherhood, such as tardiness due to illness with the child, while appreciated by the girls, were not always something the schools bore in mind. In contrast to Celeste's school, the schools of Rosana and Florencia showed no such flexibility, with the result that the girls left the classrooms shortly after discovering the pregnancy.

I dropped out when I got pregnant because I couldn't go anymore. And also last year, when my daughter got sick I had to take care of her. Florencia

A flexible school environment links in with the capability approach, by enabling the person to make use of her options and her actions to increase her wellbeing. On Nussbaum's (2000) capability list, it ties in with *senses, imagination and thought*, which promotes the use of one's senses, to imagine and think, including attaining education. Nevertheless, some informants did not feel their school was a safe place, and in addition to being a violent arena, there was also the matter of stigma from others.

I got pregnant at 15, so I didn't go to school anymore. I was the only pregnant girl at my school and it was uncomfortable. I was so embarrassed and afraid something bad would happen as the school was in a shanty town. There was much violence and I was frightened. Dafne

This sense of embarrassment is hardly a surprise, as her pregnancy suddenly made it visible that she was different from the rest of the students. Pregnant teenagers are more likely to cut their education short because they are forced to leave school. Yet, Reynolds et al. (2006) argue that from a social point of view, having a child at an early age may improve the woman's social status, as pregnancy is in many cultures is viewed as an important step towards marriage. For my

informants no such immediate social improvement followed their pregnancy, although it seemed like the girls at the institution supported each others' pregnancies. During the workshop with Belén, the mothers would cuddle each other's infants, happily pat their huge bellies, tease each other over bets whether their next child was a boy or a girl and play and laugh. *Play* is actually mentioned by Nussbaum (2000) as an important capability in life, and it was comforting to see the girls during their happy moments.

In general, the experiences of my informants varied, from some quitting school shortly after they became pregnant, to others staying put until the due date.

I dropped out of school on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and on May 3<sup>rd</sup> my child was born. Michaela

However, staying did not necessarily mean a friendly environment.

I thought it was horrible being pregnant at school. Everybody was looking at me. In the break time kids were playing and I had a big belly. I used to run away with other kids my age. Michaela

My informants all had a period away from school during and after their pregnancy, but they agreed that school is a good starting point for something better in life.

With a degree you can be someone. Without school I will be cleaning houses all my life. Michaela

It is widely argued (see e.g. Save the Children, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2005) that female education is one of the most important factors of economic growth and human well-being, possibly the most important opportunity available for investing in the well-being of inhabitants in the world's poorest countries. Investing in female education achievement will not only increase the well-being of their children's human capital per se, it can have potentially powerful positive lagged effects on economic growth besides the direct effects on current economic growth (Norton & Tomal, 2009). Black et al. (2005) also argues that having more educated citizens may have more long-term effect by improving the outcomes for their children. In addition it is argued that increased female schooling increases labour force participation, encourages later marriages, reduces fertility rates and improves nutrition. Subsequently, it is reported that investment in



female education should help relieve the burdens of poverty because women bear a disproportionate cost of poverty (Norton & Tomal, 2009).

Education is also widely linked to capabilities. It establishes conditions where they are available to students, and teach them how different resources can be achieved and applied (Unterhalter, 2007). Education makes people aware of their options, their rights and possibilities, and can, used constructively, ultimately lead to a better life. Having knowledge of one's rights increases self confidence, which again inspires people to follow their aspirations. The WHO (2005) has conducted a study that found that higher education (especially beyond secondary school) is associated with less violence in many settings. Previous research (WHO, 2010) also suggests that women with higher education have a greater range of choice in partners and are more capable of choosing whether to marry or not. Within the marriage, these women are more able to negotiate autonomy and control of resources.

But, even if the adolescent mothers obtain adequate schooling, do they stand a chance in a world where machismo rules and men are traditionally and culturally superior? The next section will look at how the teenage mothers look at their future prospects.

## **5.5 And the future, how about that?**

Children born to adolescent mothers are close to indistinguishable from their peers during infancy in intelligence and language, however, Lefever et al. (2007) argue that the gap widens as the children become toddlers and preschoolers. Failure to encourage optimal development at home and in preschool environments are blamed for adding to this gap, leaving at-risk children vulnerable to academic problems when they start school. However, Alexander et al. (2010) suggests it is not the mother's age at first birth which is the main driver of these disadvantages; rather it is the prior disadvantages experiences by the young mothers during their own childhood. By suggesting this, it is insinuated that policymakers run the risk of implementing policies that will be misdirected in its aims, using inappropriate instruments, and may be unhelpful to many teenage parents. As argued in *Chapter 4 Methodology*, the dominating debate around quantitative

research has caused a somewhat distorted view focusing on digits and numbers in relation to teenage pregnancy, instead of what the teenage mothers actually want.

The above point is illustrated by the fact that both my A- and B-girls informants to a certain degree made references to the positive 'turning-point' offered by their pregnancies: the opportunity to make new plans, including the beginnings of a strong family unit or renewed efforts to gain qualifications and secure more certain futures. This research has attempted to explore some of the issues around adolescent mothers growing up in institutions in Buenos Aires. What actions have they taken to get a job, an education and a safe place to provide for their children? They grew up without a stable network supporting them, something Dafne meant was highly relevant in relation to her current situation, much more than how old or young she was when becoming pregnant. It was also rewarding to see that many of these girls did not only want to secure the future of their children, but wanted to make the world a better place too.

I think I'll continue coming to this school although I've graduated, because it's a place I love and I feel comfortable here. I'd try to help the pupils not to use drugs. I want to be a social worker; I'd like to work with people in poverty. Here there are many teens that take drugs, but they're good people. Maybe they pay more attention when a friend gives them advice. In this school many of them change their mind. Celeste

Doncel, the Amartya run programme catering for marginalised youth, has given many adolescents a reason to get up in the morning, other than drugs and mischief.

I like what we do here in the Doncel courses. The meetings we have with other people. I would like to visit institutions, to help other people as a social worker. Dafne

Dafne actually sees her entry into the institution she hates so much as the starting point to something better.

I have done Doncel and Amartya courses. I did a lot of courses in Amartya that helped me to recover, I worked in different places. If I hadn't been in this institution I wouldn't have had this opportunity. Dafne

The girls are in general positive towards the work placements courses which give them job training and offer internships and other work experiences. A good, secure job is something they

see as a part of a good life. When asked what they would do at 25, they all answered, apart from 'battling old age', a stable job and quality time with their family as the most important.

How depressive, I'd be old! Working and raising my daughter the best I can, being good.  
I want to be ok, I want to be happy. Michaela

Having completed school and university is important to get there.

I want to live with my daughter, finish my studies, continue work, relax, enjoy time with my baby. Celeste

To complete the circle, education attainment must be coupled with accessible and relevant job opportunities. Education without work chances leaves little to be desired. Doncel has traineeships included in the courses to run the education in parallel with relevant work experience.

Now my daughter is too young, but I would like to finish my course and find a good job to be able to provide for my daughter. Those three things; my daughter, my studies and my job. I would like to work in a kitchen, as a chef in charge of a kitchen, and do more cooking courses. Rosana

The girls reiterated stable relationships as something to be achieved. This is also linked with the *emotion capability* (Nussbaum, 2000) and one's feeling of self-worth.

To go live with my boyfriend in his house or another place, and take my daughter to kinder garden so I can work and give her what she needs. Florencia

The girls who participated in my study have all given birth to healthy children, despite being children themselves, and have not suffered from severe physical complications during their pregnancy. On a continent with strict laws (both political and religious), pregnancy, and especially the termination of one, is often with high risks. Deaths caused by complications during the pregnancy or birth are normal. The younger the teenage mothers are, the higher the risk and the poorer they are, the less follow-up is involved during the pregnancy. This coincides with tales of surprise when some of the girls discovered the, often late, pregnancy. Michaela had always been a little big, and both she and her mother explained the changes in her body as natural adolescent changes. She was five months pregnant when she first realised, and did not see a doctor until the day of the labour. Gogna et al. (2008) also talks of girls who have been labelled chubby, instead of realising they have in fact been pregnant.

Before going to the next, and final, *Chapter 6 Bringing it to a close*, I would like to briefly sum up the discussion and analysis in this chapter. No doubt, there are huge challenges facing teenage mothers who have been living in institutions, from physical to emotional ones, in the midst of schools, a society and peers who may not support their life choices. It has been valuable to learn how the girls experience the situation. The next chapter will tie the arguments presented so far together and conclude on the main research questions.

## Chapter 6 Bringing it to a close

The main objective of this study has been to investigate the life world of adolescent mothers growing up in an institution in Buenos Aires, and look at some of the aspects that influence their situation as young mothers. Teenage pregnancy is by some (see e.g. Miranda, 2007) labelled deviant behaviour and viewed as a social problem, whilst many of the adolescent mothers themselves welcomed the pregnancy. It is argued (see e.g. Gogna et al., 2008) that Argentina suffers from a considerable disconnection between the conclusions drawn in qualitative studies on the cause and effect of adolescent pregnancies and the opinions of policymakers, politicians and the general public. While the conducted studies show that a considerable number of adolescent pregnancies could be wanted, the public's view is more leaning towards labeling it as a 'social epidemic.' This concurs with the reports from the A-girls who saw motherhood as a positive change in an otherwise difficult situation where their expectations were low. My finding lends support to Gogna et al. (2008), who experienced a similar result for girls who did not attend school nor were working.

Birth by teenage mothers is associated with a wide range of problems for both mother and child, including a greater likelihood of dropping out of school, of lacking qualifications to obtain a well-paid job, being unemployed or living in poor housing conditions. It is, however, important to note that association is not the same as cause. There is no straight-forward correlation between the pregnancies and their ensuing situation. Many teenage mothers have grown up with the kind of disadvantage and poverty that would be likely to cause these negative consequences, and their socioeconomic situation would have been the same regardless of whether they had waited until their twenties before having a child. Becoming pregnant as an adolescent may increase the problems, but not becoming pregnant would not have made them go away (UNICEF, 2007). This chapter will draw some concluding remarks about the situation of teenage mothers living in institutions, and sum up the different perspectives presented in the previous chapters. I will make use of the main research questions presented in section 1.2 *Objective of the study* and use them as headlines in the following subsections in order to guide the reader in the argument.

## **6.1 Which factors are in play when an Argentine teenage girl becomes pregnant?**

Adolescent motherhood is often associated with particular socioeconomic and educational challenges on a general level, but qualitative studies, such as this one, makes an effort to expose the heterogeneity of individual lives. The different paths into adolescent motherhood among my informants were diverse and complex and therefore it has been a challenge to methodically capture and explain these.

When embarking on this research project, I expected to form an opinion on teenage pregnancy as something either positive or negative for the people involved. And although being swamped with the arguments in *Chapter 2 Contextualisation* as to why teenage pregnancy is detrimental for the mother and child and poses challenges for the society as a whole, what the majority of my informants were telling me did not fit easily with this picture. Four of the six informants in the study were actively trying to become mothers at the age of 15-16. As mentioned before, due to the small scale nature of the study, it is not possible to conclude that over half of Argentina's teenagers want children. However, the high number does suggest that there might be another trend among teenagers influencing their pregnancies other than a lack of contraceptives or access to abortion. The findings from this study can be picked up in a different research design, and tested further in order to acquire additional knowledge of the topic.

Indeed, I found a range of influences that affect the situation for teenage mothers and different factors are in play depending on the girl. I have not been able to compare the responses from my teenage mothers to those of teenagers without children, however, I will attempt to identify some of the factors that they presented as important when deciding to become pregnant. The factors that emerged relates to the cause of pregnancy, family situation, education and their socioeconomic condition.

First of all, the factors in play are highly related to whether the pregnancy was wanted or not. I will shortly come back to the B-girls who did not want their pregnancy. But firstly, the A-girls presented the positive emotional factors of becoming pregnant like a smorgasbord. They told me that with a baby they would no longer be lonely; they would have someone to care about and someone to guide them, someone they could create their own loving families with and someone who could help them get away from destitute biological families. They saw pregnancy as an inspiration to continue school and to get a good job. They felt needed, a feeling that seemed to be lacking pre-motherhood. Not every A-girl expressed all of the abovementioned features, but in general they had optimistic attitudes towards becoming a mother. And being 15 years of age did not seem to matter. Several of the girls expressed they felt ready to have a child; they had been looking after younger siblings and thought they were ready for what a baby would demand of them. The A-girls clearly employed their capabilities and took control over their reproductive lives and what to do with their *bodily health*, one of Nussbaum's ten capabilities.

For the B-girls the experience of motherhood was different. The negative emotional factors around their pregnancies related to the girls' capabilities and freedoms, and the pessimistic attitude was a result of the pregnancies not being voluntarily. One girl was raped and the other B-girl had no access to or knowledge of the correct use of contraception. When they became pregnant both were denied an abortion due to Argentina's strict abortion laws. Outer factors like rape or sexual abuse are difficult to suggest changes to, as it demands policy changes and action in different areas than what I had access to during my fieldwork. Certainly, policymakers and the legal system should strike down hard on such violations, but it is in the margins of this study, and I have therefore not pursued these outer factors in depth. As mentioned in section 5.2 *Relationship with former and current partners, parents and peers*, several of the girls had experienced physical abuse during their upbringing or in a relationship. It is argued (UN, 1994) that increased education leads to empowerment of girls and women, and greater equality and understanding between the genders. An increased focus on education for all could therefore lead to a reduction in physical abuse and sex crimes.

None of the girls reported good family ties and one finding is that this lack seems to have spurred the desire to have a baby. Recall that Nussbaum (2000) describes the *emotions* capability, the

ability to have attachments to people other than ourselves. The girls told of broken families where they currently had little or no contact. When they had wanted contact little was to be found; for instance just after Michaela had her baby and was living in the institution her mother did not come to see her. Dafne also told of her brother, and how much his presence meant for her when she felt down. The urge to fulfil an *emotional* vacancy in their lives could have impacted on the A-girls decision to become mothers.

Education did not seem to have an impact on the A-girls' decision to become pregnant. What they seemed to lack in their lives, education could not provide them with overnight. For the one B-girl who lacked knowledge of contraception, a functional sexual health programme for adolescents might have given her knowledge about how not to become pregnant, but for the majority of the informants, education did not play a major part. In retrospect, I do believe education could have deterred the decision to become pregnant, however, I do not see it as a sole factor. Successful education appears in cooperation with follow-up, supervision and encouragement from parents or guardians. Hence, to establish structural, functioning families that support the adolescents through school could be an effective mean. The A-girls mentioned a lack of loving environments as one of the factors influencing them to become parents. My suggestion is that in loving family environments, the role of the *emotions* capability is met by parents or siblings, and the urge to become a mother may be postponed a couple of years. This is backed up by other studies as well (see e.g. Pick de Weiss et al., 1991), where it is debated that many teenage mothers felt alone prior to their pregnancy, and a baby was a mean to fulfil these affective needs.

Ultimately, there are socioeconomic factors that influence the pregnancy. If not an issue for the teenagers pre-pregnancy, the economic burden of a child would certainly influence their economic position after the birth. One of the arguments against teenage pregnancy is that they often have to drop out of school. By cutting short their education, the prospects of a well-paid job in the future decreases. It did not seem that the socioeconomic factors had been thought through before the A-girls decided to become pregnant. Several of them experienced having to move from their current home, some even saw it as positive. The consequence of ending up in an institution was not overly appreciated, but some saw it as a launch pad to get their own place in the future.



Nevertheless, raising a child without a job creates certain obstacles. Dafne was facing a childless reality when I spoke to her, as she did not have a stable place to live, and her children had been moved elsewhere. She reported this as a regrettable part of her life, and was working hard to get her children back. This situation also made her feel stigmatised as a mother who could not fulfil her role as such.

As a result of the variable factors and influences, I eventually realised it is impossible to label a teenage pregnancy either positive or negative. It depends on the mother herself, her situation, the society around her, her networks, family bonds, policymakers and cultural traditions. And even then, as shown in *Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion*, both A- and B-girls found pros and cons with their pregnancies. To sum up, for the B-girls, the situation was somehow forced on them due to the lack of pregnancy termination options. But, for the A-girls, the overall decision to become a mother seemed to linger around the aspect of having someone of their own who they could lavish their unconditional love on, and who could unconditionally love them back.

## **6.2 What prospects does a teenage girl have for herself and her child(ren) in relation to education, employment and the future?**

Adolescent, unmarried mothers represent two schools of marginalised youth. They can either be seen as passive partakers who are placed at risk through their socioeconomic environments, or as young women who are actively making a choice based on their desires and beliefs. This section will give an overview and sum up how the adolescent mothers see their future for themselves and their children.

All my informants were living in an institution without any immediate family close by. It quickly became apparent that the girls did not come from stable family backgrounds, and hence, had never experienced a functional family situation. Nonetheless, what was apparent was that they were all clear that they wanted to be able to provide a nurturing family environment for their children in the future. None of the girls were with the father of their firstborn, but for those having a partner, a happy, healthy life with him and their children was a main priority. This

relates to Nussbaum's (2000) capability of *controlling one's environment*. The informants had a profound desire to be able to hold property, seek employment and enter into meaningful relationships with others. And as will be shown next – many saw school as a way to reach their dream.

Dropping out of school to give birth and raise their child had been a natural consequence for my informants, and it demanded a significant effort to return to school to complete their education. Nevertheless, all saw education as a major route to a future well-paid job. The girls had different experiences from school before they got pregnant; some having enjoyed it a lot, while others had been more careless and truanting. But they realised that through higher education and a firm place in the workforce comes independence and opportunity, something which they aspired.

The ability to work, earn money and pay for daily expenses is assumed to be primary prerequisites of social participation and recognition (Alexander et al., 2010). The adolescent mothers struggled to financially support themselves and their babies. As previous research shows (Gogna et al., 2008), adolescent mothers are statistically less likely to build stable economic opportunities for themselves and their children, possibly creating a circle of teenage pregnancy to which their own children will follow suit. Nevertheless, both the A- and B-girls were enthusiastic about creating exactly this, a loving and safe environment for their children. All had plans for the future, which included living in a secure place with their children and partner, having completed education and holding a stable job. In several of the cases, the job the informants wanted included helping others find a way out of destitute situations they were far too familiar with themselves. One of the A-girls reported that she saw herself as suitable to work with other marginalised children and youth. She said that through her own experiences as a teenager mother living in an institution she would be familiar with their situation, and not have the pre-occupied stigma many 'outsiders' (to their marginalised environment) might come to work with.

In general, the lack of a secure job seemed to affect the girls, and all mentioned this as a source to a better life. Although not having been too prominent so far in this paper, it is important to mention the work and effort of Amartya and the Doncel programme. All the girls had at some stage been part of the Doncel programme which offered training and work placements in order to

gain valuable experiences that could aid future employment. The training obtained through the courses offered at Doncel was mentioned by several of the girls as invaluable for getting a job.

An employee at Doncel blamed the Government for not providing adequate means for adolescent mothers. As she wrote in an e-mail to me during the fieldwork: “The Government should work for the rights of young people. They could provide teenagers with the possibility to live with their families instead of in institutions, and by giving the families employment the families could educate and feed their children.” She further identified institutions as a regrettable place to grow up, and urged the Government to work more with families in order to help them function, to avoid the huge scores of institutionalised youth that Argentina is facing today. This is in accordance with my suggestion that better family environments might reduce the A-girls’ desire to have children, and could possibly reduce teenage pregnancy. She stated that the Doncel programme is doing the Government’s job by providing work training for youth. It should be the Government’s responsibility. But, she says, as the Government provides little official training in this aspect, the only option is for Doncel to “work with people who are in vulnerable situations because of being young, poor, living in institutions, with little education and no work possibilities in the labour markets.” And as experienced during the interviews with my informants, they highly appreciated that effort, and saw it as a springboard to get a job in a pressured labour market.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

Throughout working on this study there has been suggested many reason for the prevalence of teenage pregnancy, from abusive environments, religious restrictions on contraceptives, to that of an active choice by the teenager herself. What I have come to learn is that cases are not equal, and therefore needs to be treated with individual respect and understanding. I came across two aspects of teenage pregnancy – that being wanted and unwanted motherhood. One school, that of postponing pregnancy until a woman is in her twenties, receives immense support from non-

governmental organisations<sup>16</sup> like the WHO and Save the Children. They perceive teenage pregnancy as a risk for the mother and child, and negative for the society as a whole. Then on the other side of the argument are the four Argentine A-girls I met during the fieldwork. They presented a sound argument for having children while still being teenagers, and although it has been challenging, they have a more positive life trajectory now than before they became mothers. The finding that motherhood represents a positive change is supported by other researchers (see e.g. Alexander et al.; Trent & Crowder, 1997), and suggests that individual considerations ought to be made, despite large organisations drawing mainstream conclusions.

Nevertheless, strategies that could help teenagers develop alternative, realistic goals without getting pregnant as the only viable option to gain social status or a partner should be looked into. I did not experience that my informants saw pregnancy as a tool for climbing the social ladder; rather it gave them some immediate comfort, consolation and company. I suggest that this kind of comfort could be provided by other people, for instance their own family members. But, in general, as I have tried to depict throughout this paper, there are numerous, correlating effects that can influence teenage pregnancy, and one must take the wider society into consideration before going in and deciding on how to provide change.

It was daunting to hear some of the experiences the girls had gone through in their teens. At the same time it was comforting to see that, despite all odds, the informants seemed satisfied in their current positions, and, especially the A-girls were happier with a child than what they thought they would have been without. As a firm believer in higher education as a tool for prosperity, opportunity and equality, I find it is difficult to argue unmitigated support for teenage pregnancy. Rather, I lend support to Nussbaum (2000) and her recommendation to governments to support human capabilities and lay a foundation for people to be able to make careful and thought-through decisions on matters that influence their lives. It is difficult as an outsider to come with recommendations to a dilemma that has been present for decades, especially as I believe it is vital to have the local ownership when trying to implement change. And change never comes easy, not in a culture with a traditional sexualised view on women, not in a Catholic region where the

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<sup>16</sup> And many governments for that matter.

Pope's preaching influences the politics, if not so much the population, not in a country where many abortions are conducted with knitting needles. Nevertheless, through improved, all-encompassing education on human rights, gender equality and sexual reproduction, it is possible to give the girls the tools they need in order to make active choices on matters regarding their own lives, regardless whether they see pregnancy as a dilemma or delight.

I hope this research can contribute to the growing body of qualitative research that supports the development of more humane and appropriate policies which take into account the teenagers' perspectives, needs and desires in all matters regarding teenage pregnancy.

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## **Appendix**

### **Amartya and Doncel**

Amartya promotes change through the development of social projects, on the basis that no individual sector, either governmental or social, can bring about economic, social or environmental sustainability all by itself. The projects run by Amartya are designed, developed and implemented by multidisciplinary work groups formed of professionals and representatives of the different social sectors (Amartya, 2008).

Amartya runs a social inclusion project, the Doncel programme, directed at youth under the age of 21 who live in institutions or so-called group homes. There is an estimated 20 000 youths living in institutions in Argentina, and at the age of 21 they are required to leave the homes. Family support, decent preparation or work possibilities are minimal.

## **Interview guide**

- How old are you?
- How long have you been living in an institution?
- What do you feel about living in an institution?
- How many children do you have?
- How many years of schooling do you have?
- Did you drop out of school when you became pregnant?
- How did you manage to continue studying during your pregnancy?
- Why did you decide to rejoin school?
- What do you think about maternity?
- What was the hardest part?
- And the best part?
- At what age did you become pregnant for the first time?
- How was your pregnancy?
- Did you want a baby?
- Did you get any support during or after your pregnancy? From whom?
- Would you have wanted support?
- Are you in a relationship now?
- Did you find any support in the institution?
- Did you attend any medical controls during your pregnancy?
- What plans do you have when you are leaving the institution?
- Do you know what you are going to do, where you are going to live and work?
- How do you imagine yourself at 25?
- How do you imagine the life of yourself and your child(ren)?

## Consent form

Consentimiento/aviso a las madres adolescentes

Soy estudiante de maestría en la Universidad de Oslo (Oslo University College), y llevaré a cabo un trabajo de campo en instituciones de Buenos Aires para realizar mi trabajo de tesis.

Para ello, necesito entrevistar a madres adolescentes que hayan vivido o vivan en una institución. El objetivo del proyecto es analizar la situación de las madres adolescentes y conocer cómo perciben su realidad y posibilidades. La participación de las jóvenes madres en este estudio es voluntaria, y sólo está planeado tomar una entrevista a cada una de ellas que decida participar. He preparado una guía de preguntas para orientar las entrevistas, y quienes deseen ver con anterioridad dicha guía sólo deberán solicitármelo.

Las entrevistas serán realizadas entre agosto y octubre de 2009, y serán utilizadas como una herramienta de recolección de datos sobre algunas experiencias de vida de una madre adolescente en Buenos Aires.

Cabe aclarar que como investigadora voy a trabajar con absoluta discreción. Toda la información que las madres adolescentes provean será tratada confidencialmente. La información que requiera ser publicada porque la investigación así lo amerite, será sin revelar la identidad de las madres, es decir permanecerá anónima.

En el material publicado, no aparecerán nombres de personas, ni de lugares o instituciones, nada que pueda identificar a las participantes. La información que aparece en las entrevistas no será divulgada a otras personas.

Los datos son anónimos y los audios se eliminarán al final del proyecto en mayo de 2010. Es voluntario participar y las entrevistadas se pueden retirar en cualquier momento sin dar una razón.

Pueden contactarse conmigo si surge alguna duda.

Saludos  
Maria Philippa Rossi  
Project Manager  
E-mail: mphrossi@yahoo.no  
Tel: +47 98693701

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He leído la información anterior y acepto participar en la encuesta.

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Lugar, fecha, firma de la entrevistada