



Unplanned *Futures*

Adolescent Pregnancies
in Zimbabwe

Dr. Munyaradzi Chidarikire
Editor

Unplanned Futures: Adolescent Pregnancies in Zimbabwe

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Foreword

In the sprawling landscape of Zimbabwean education and social welfare, a quiet catastrophe unfolds daily—not in dramatic headlines, but in the empty desks of primary classrooms, the whispered confessions of primary, secondary schoolgirls and tertiary level, and the silent desperation of child-headed households. This book titled *“Unplanned Futures: Adolescent Pregnancy in Zimbabwe”*, does not flinch from that catastrophe. Instead, it dissects it with rigorous scholarship and profound humanity, offering the most comprehensive examination of this crisis that our nation has yet seen. What distinguishes this book is its breath-taking scope. The authors—drawn from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Primary and Secondary Education, Great Zimbabwe University, University of Zimbabwe, Bindura University of Science, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe Open University, Morgenster Teachers College, United College of Education and Hillside Teachers Colleges, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Justice, the University of Free State in South Africa, University of Stellenbosch and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa—represent an unprecedented coalition and multidisciplinary of national and regional expertise. Every page oozes of their enthusiasm for sexual abstinence, gender justice, children's rights and sexual reproductive health rights. Together they transcend dry facts and figures and try to understand the reality of daily life for the most disadvantaged: the primary school child in the small village with a disability, the orphaned girl/child leading a broken household and the university-going girl/young woman who struggles through drug abuse and with an unplanned pregnancy. The chapters here are not isolated case studies but interconnected interventions. They probe the academic wreckage left by early pregnancies at both primary, secondary and tertiary levels, while boldly confronting the policy paradox of "the right to return" versus "the right to belong"—asking whether our schools truly welcome back young mothers or merely tolerate their presence. Equally innovative is the exploration of modern solutions: mobile-phone-based counseling, the revitalization of ubuntu values, and the urgent link between online digital exposure and sexual vulnerability. Importantly, the book identifies what few have openly discussed – the increasingly sad link between adolescent suicide with early pregnancies in rural Zimbabwe and provides culturally informed recommendations for prevention and healing. This is no easy read and it shouldn't be. It is a challenge for all decision makers, educators, parents and community champions to shift from unintentional to intentional. These scholars, whose scholarship is carried on these pages, have done their part, research carefully and honestly, and resulting analysis and recommendations that are actionable. Now, the burden falls on us. For every "unplanned future" documented here is a real girl, a real family, and a real nation diminished. Let this book be the turning point—from unplanned futures to deliberate, dignified, and protected ones. The evidence is before us. The cure begins with our response.

By Professor Kudzai Chinyoka is an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at Great Zimbabwe University in Zimbabwe.

Preface

Early pregnancy among school-going children is, at its heart, an education crisis long before it is anything else. Every girl that drops out of class due to pregnancy—and every girl who is forced out of class due to stigma but not policy—is an unfinished investment in a country's future: This volume edited by Dr Munyaradzi Chidarikire collects seventeen qualitative studies that will not allow such disruptions to remain abstracted. Based on the stories of learners, teachers, counsellors, parents, social workers and community leaders from a range of primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe, the following chapters shed light, albeit with unique candour, on sexual abstinence, how unintended and unwanted pregnancy affects learners' attendance, attention, self-confidence and the eventual decision to keep attending school. When the editors asked me to write this Preface, I was not asked as a co-author – not even as an expert on adolescent health – but as a teacher educator, and it is from that perspective that I felt the book's significance was most great.

Its chapters move well beyond documenting prevalence. They trace the mechanisms of harm, from the observational learning through which younger girls internalise the fate of those who came before them, to the erosion of self-efficacy that follows stigmatisation in the classroom, to the structural entanglement of poverty, patriarchy and policy that keeps Circular 18's promise of re-entry more aspiration than practice in many rural schools. They extend the enquiry into terrain too often left unexamined in the pregnancy literature: the elevated risk of suicide among affected learners, the role of digital exposure in shaping adolescent sexual socialisation, the protective potential of Ubuntu-grounded community values, abstinence, the entanglement of early pregnancy with substance abuse in tertiary settings, the compounding vulnerability of learners with disabilities and those growing up in child-headed households, and the promise of mobile phone-based counselling as a low-cost intervention in resource-constrained settings. What distinguishes this collection is its insistence on listening. Rather than reducing pregnant and parenting learners to statistics, the contributors return again and again to the learners' own words, and to those of the teachers and counsellors who work alongside them daily. For teacher education that methodological commitment is of special importance, as it is not a policy that re-integrates a stigmatised learner back into a classroom, it is a prepared and empathetic teacher. There is still a need for building capacity for teachers in the region, through pre-service and in-service programmes, to address the very issues presented in these chapters: how to keep a pregnant learner on board without exposing her to ridicule; how to ensure catch-up learning post pregnancy; how to recognise early signs of psychosocial distress before it becomes a crisis; and how to interact with other livelihoods such as the counsellor, the parent and school leadership as a coordinated system of support, rather than in isolation. This book is therefore not just for policy makers' shelves but should be on the teacher education programmes' reading lists throughout Zimbabwe and beyond as the structural situation highlighted in this volume is not unique to the country alone, but is common to rural poverty, gendered vulnerability and limited guidance and counselling capacity.

Dr Chidarikire and his collaborators, drawn from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Primary and Secondary Education, Great Zimbabwe University, University of Zimbabwe, Bindura University of Science, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe Open University, Morgenster Teachers College, United College of Education, Hillside Teachers Colleges, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Justice, the University of Free State in South Africa, University of Stellenbosch and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, have produced a volume that is at once a record of harm and a working manual for repair. It is a privilege to commend it to the readers who will, I trust, be moved by it to act.

By Prof Kudzayi Savious Tarisayi

Associate Professor and Subject Group Leader: Geography and Environmental Education; School of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, Faculty of Education; North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

Authors Biographies

Dr. Munyaradzi Chidarikire the editor of this book holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Educational Psychology from the University of the Free State in South Africa. He was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and currently Extraordinary Research Fellow at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. Dr. Chidarikire holds a Master's degree in Educational Psychology, a Bachelor of Honours degree with Distinction (First Class), a Bachelor of Honours degree in Counselling, a Diploma in Education for which he was awarded Best Student, a Certificate in Education, and a Certificate in HIV and AIDS. Throughout his academic career, Dr. Chidarikire has been recognised with four Best Student Awards at both university and college levels. He has authored two books, edited one book, and written over 90 academic articles and conference papers. Dr. Chidarikire serves as a Senior Lecturer at Great Zimbabwe University and is a registered counsellor, bringing both academic expertise and professional practice to his work in educational psychology and counselling. Dr. Chidarikire has successfully supervised Diploma, Bachelor of Honours degree, and Master's degree research students, and is currently co-supervising PhD research students. He serves as a PhD and Master's degree research external examiner for the University of the Free State (South Africa), Central University of Technology (South Africa), and the University of North West (South Africa). His extensive research and supervisory experience span multiple institutions across Southern Africa. Dr. Chidarikire also serves as an external assessor for teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. Recently, Dr. Chidarikire, together with four other scholars, was assigned by the University of Zimbabwe and UNICEF to develop a Health Life Skills module for teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe, contributing to the enhancement of teacher education and curriculum development in the country.

Professor Alice Kuyayama is the Head of Teacher Development and Educational Materials at the University of Zimbabwe. She published extensively and she has supervised many research projects. Her scholarly work focuses primarily on Early Childhood Development, alongside other related areas in curriculum and teacher education.

Professor Moses Kufakunesu is a Lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations and a qualified educational psychologist. His research expertise lies primarily in educational psychology and mental well-being. He published extensively and he has supervised many research projects.

Dr. Theresia Kanyopa is a Lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of the Free State. She published extensively and she has supervised many research projects. Her research interests encompass educational psychology and gender studies.

Dr. Juliet Kamwendo is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Gender Centre at the University of the Free State. Her areas of academic focus include gender studies and mental well-being. She published extensively and she has supervised many research projects.

Dr. Pinias Chikuvadze is a lecturer in the department of Curriculum Studies at Bindura State University and his research interest include gender studies, curriculum among others. He published extensively and he has supervised many research projects.

Dr. Lilian Chaminuka is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Department of Counselling at the Zimbabwe Open University and is a qualified high school English teacher who has been in Open and Distance e-Learning for almost 20 years. She holds a PhD in Counselling, Executive Masters' Degree in Peace and Governance, Master of Science in Counselling (Book Prize Award), Bachelor of Science in Counselling and has several other certificates from different institutions. She is presently the Head of Department of Counselling. She is also a registered Counsellor with the Allied Health Practitioners Council of Zimbabwe (AHP CZ) and is a member of the Zimbabwe Association of Family Therapists & Professional Counsellors (ZAFTPC). She is also a member of the Epilepsy Support Foundation (EFS) and a Life member of the Jairos Jiri Association in Zimbabwe. Her research interests include gender, water and sanitation, peace and governance and disability issues and is an advocate for counselling programmes. Dr Chaminuka has published more than 20 research articles in peer-reviewed journals, books, book chapters and modules on counselling courses. She has also reviewed several articles for various journals. She has presented several academic papers at different local and international conferences. She has worked with the university's alumni and has participated and continues to participate in various community and university service projects. Besides lecturing and heading the Department of Counselling, her current work also includes facilitating for workshops on drug and substance abuse management across Zimbabwe's ten provinces to assist the communities to reduce the drug and illicit substance abuse scourge that is affecting the communities in Zimbabwe.

Dr. Prudence M. Mavhemwa is an Information Technology lecturer at the Zimbabwe Open University and holds a PhD in Internet of Things (Embedded Computing Systems) from the University of Rwanda. With over 17 years of experience in higher education, research, and academic leadership, his multidisciplinary expertise encompasses Machine Learning, Internet of Medical Things (IoMT), mobile computing, and digital technology applications in public health and human behavior. His research broadly focuses on adaptive user frameworks, human-centric security models, and the sociological impacts of emerging mobile and web technologies. He has authored numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters exploring the intersections of technology, ethics, and community health.

Dr Shupikai Zebron is a Counsellor educator/lecturer at the Zimbabwe Open University and holds a PhD in Social Science Education from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. With over 19 years of experience in higher education, research, and academic leadership, her multidisciplinary expertise encompasses counselling psychology, mental health, trauma and resilience, gender-based violence, family and community wellbeing, and culturally responsive psychosocial interventions in African contexts. Her research broadly focuses on understanding how individuals and communities cope with adversity, with particular emphasis on trauma, gender-based violence, resilience, mental health, counselling practice, and culturally grounded interventions that improve wellbeing in African societies. She has authored numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters examining mental health, counselling psychology, trauma recovery, resilience, gender and wellbeing, educational development, and community-based psychosocial interventions, with a particular focus on African perspectives and contexts

Dr. Herbert Muradzikwa is an accomplished educator, counsellor, researcher, lecturer, and academic leader at Bondolfi Teachers' College in Zimbabwe, where he currently serves as the Cluster Chairperson for the Humanities and Social Sciences. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from Durban University of Technology (DUT), with his doctoral research focusing on "Sexual Harassment in Zimbabwe Teacher Education: Unheard Voices of Pre-Service Teachers in Selected Teacher Training Colleges." His scholarly and professional interests include counselling, education, student welfare, psychosocial

support, sexual harassment, and teacher education. Dr. Muradzikwa has published several scholarly papers and is committed to research that addresses contemporary educational and psychosocial challenges affecting students and educators. He has also contributed to national curriculum development through his participation in the drafting and writing of the Health and Life Skills module implemented across teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. In addition to his academic responsibilities, he serves as the Vice Chairperson of Higher and Tertiary Institutions Counsellors in Zimbabwe, contributing to the promotion of professional counselling practice, collaboration, and student support services within tertiary institutions. Through his teaching, research, academic leadership, counselling, and curriculum development work, Dr. Muradzikwa continues to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of teacher education and student well-being in Zimbabwe.

Dr. Nozinhle Ncube is a PhD graduate from the University of the Free State, Republic of South Africa, specialising in Higher Education Studies. She is a Principal Lecturer at a secondary teacher training college and holds a Master of Science degree in Counselling. She serves as Assistant Dean of Students and Women's Representative Officer at the national level in the College Lecturers Association of Zimbabwe (COLAZ). As a registered professional counsellor, she is committed to promoting student mental health, inclusivity, and women's empowerment in higher education. She is also a Patron of the Christian Union at her college.

Dr. Margaret Machingambi serves as a Lecturer in the Department of Inclusive Education and Special Needs at Great Zimbabwe University. She holds a PhD in Inclusive Education from the University of the Free State in South Africa. Her scholarly research is broadly centered on inclusive pedagogical practices, with a particular focus on visual impairment. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Dr. Machingambi is an experienced research supervisor and is actively involved in various community engagement initiatives aimed at advancing educational accessibility.

Dr. Joel Marashe is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Ethics, Philosophy, and Theology at the Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education in Zimbabwe. With a strong commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship, his research portfolio spans Religious Studies and the growing field of mental health, with a particular focus on the intersections between spirituality, cultural belief systems, and psychosocial well-being. His work critically examines how indigenous ethical frameworks can inform contemporary therapeutic practices, making significant contributions to both academic discourse and community-based interventions in the Southern African context.

Patience Marashe is a Lecturer in the Department of Languages and Humanities at the United College of Education in Zimbabwe. Her academic expertise lies in language studies, where she explores applied linguistics, multilingual education, and the preservation of indigenous languages within formal curricula. She is deeply invested in enhancing language pedagogy and literacy development among trainee teachers, advocating for communicative approaches that reflect Zimbabwe's rich linguistic diversity. Her research also touches on the broader humanities, examining how language shapes cultural identity and social cohesion in post-colonial educational settings.

Tinovimba Shumba is a Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Midlands State University, where she previously served as the University Counsellor. Her research interests centre on mental health, counselling psychology, and gender studies.

Miriam Masikati is a Law student at Great Zimbabwe University and also works professionally as an Assistant Clerk of Court, employed by the Judicial Service Commission. Her academic and professional

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Nkululeko Sibanda is a Counselling Psychology lecturer and researcher at the Zimbabwe Open University. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Psychology at the Zimbabwe Open University and holds an MSc in Counselling Psychology from Great Zimbabwe University and a BSc Honours in Psychology from the Zimbabwe Open University. He also holds professional certificates in Systemic Counselling, Active Listening, Drugs and Substance Abuse Management, and School Educators' Foundation Programmes. His research interests include counselling psychology, psychosocial wellbeing, adolescent mental health, substance abuse, family counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration, and technology-enhanced counselling interventions. His work focuses on contextually relevant counselling practice and community wellbeing.

Brenda Muchopa is currently completing her Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. She holds a Master's degree in Safety and Environment, a Bachelor of Honours degree in Geography, and a Diploma in Education. Her research interests encompass Geography, human settlement studies, and environmental safety, with a focus on understanding the relationships between human populations and their environments. Her interdisciplinary background informs her approach to research and academic practice.

Eugene Mabika holds a Master's degree, a Bachelor of Honours degree, and a Diploma in Teaching. She currently serves as the Head of Counselling Services at Midlands State University. Her research interests encompass mental health, counselling, and related areas. She is currently the Chairperson of Tertiary Institutions Counsellors in Zimbabwe, demonstrating her leadership and commitment to advancing counselling services within higher education institutions across the country.

Prince Chidarikire holds a Bachelor of Honours degree in Statistics and Research from Great Zimbabwe University and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Data Science. His research expertise spans qualitative, mixed methods, and quantitative studies, with a strong focus on applying statistical and analytical techniques to address complex research questions. He is dedicated to advancing research methodology and data science applications across various fields of study.

Netsai Kumpewu holds a Bachelor of Honours Degree in Education in Early Childhood Development from Great Zimbabwe University, where she achieved a Distinction in her Research Project. Her research interests are centered on child development, with a particular focus on early childhood education practices and interventions that support the holistic growth of young learners. She is committed to advancing knowledge in the field of Early Childhood Development through research and practice.

Rosheen Mutimbu holds a Bachelor of Honours Degree in Industrial Relations from Great Zimbabwe University, where she earned a Distinction in her Research Project. Her research interests lie in human development, with a focus on understanding how individuals navigate personal, social, and workplace dynamics. She is dedicated to exploring the intersections of human behaviour, organisational psychology, and industrial relations to promote wellbeing and productivity.

Vongai Zivazvose holds an Early Childhood Development Degree from Great Zimbabwe University, where she achieved a Distinction in her Research Project. Her area of research expertise is child development, with a particular interest in early childhood education, developmental milestones, and the

factors that influence children's learning and wellbeing. She is committed to contributing to the field of early childhood education through research and practice.

Yolanda N. Tshuma, is holder of Bachelor of Honours degree in Inclusive Education at Great Zimbabwe University. Her research interests include disabilities, Rural schools, resilience among others.

Rational of the book

The intellectual genesis of the book titled: *Unplanned Futures: Adolescent Pregnancies in Zimbabwe* resides in an urgent dialectic between progressive legislative frameworks and the unyielding, regressive socio-economic realities that continue to truncate the educational trajectories of thousands of young Zimbabwean learners. The editorial impetus, spearheaded by Dr. Munyaradzi Chidarikire, emerges not from abstract academic curiosity, but from the harrowing empirical exigency laid bare by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Primary and Secondary Education's most recent data. With over 10,000 adolescent girls precipitously expelled from the formal education system between 2023 and 2025—a figure underscored by the chilling statistic that 102 primary school girls, some as young as eight years, have already succumbed to this cycle in 2025 alone—the volume positions itself as a critical scholarly intervention against the systemic effacement of female potential.

The pronounced urban-rural schism, wherein rural schools accounted for 3,942 of the 2023 dropouts, further accentuates the geographical and economic fault lines that render peri-urban and agrarian communities epicentres of this crisis. Central to the book's rationale is the sexual abstinence, the profound dissonance between *de jure* policy and *de facto* practice. Despite the ostensibly inclusive mandate of Circular 18, which theoretically guarantees pregnant learners the right to continue their studies, the statistical reality—evidenced by 2,433 secondary school dropouts in 2025 alone—exposes a catastrophic failure in policy implementation, community sensitisation, and institutional accountability. This chasm between the legislative ideal and the grassroots actuality constitutes the primary epistemological crux of the book. It compels the contributing scholars to move beyond mere documentation of attrition rates, prompting instead a rigorous forensic examination of the interstitial spaces where cultural stigma, economic precarity, infrastructural inadequacy, and pedagogical inflexibility converge to systematically exclude pregnant adolescents from the classroom.

The deliberate, multi-sectoral composition of the authorship—an interdisciplinary consortium encompassing Humanities, Ethics, Religion and Theology, Early Childhood Development practitioners, inclusive education specialists, educational psychologists, environmental safety experts, human rights lawyers, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education officials, and university and college researchers—is structurally imperative to the book's hermeneutic framework. This diverse coalition reflects the volume's foundational thesis: adolescent pregnancy is neither a monolithic pedagogical nuisance nor a purely moral transgression, but a complex, multi-variate social malady requiring an equally complex therapeutic response. Through integrating the pedagogical insights of ECD teachers with the forensic advocacy of human rights lawyers, and by synthesising the psychosocial perspectives of counsellors with the policy acumen of governmental administrators, the book eschews reductionist silos.

Instead, it architects a holistic, systemic lens through which the interplay of environmental stressors, psychological trauma, legal impunity, and educational marginalisation is critically deconstructed. Consequently, the overarching rationale for *Unplanned Futures* lies in its ambition to transcend academic theorisation and catalyse actionable, evidence-based praxis. It seeks to fill a lacuna in Zimbabwean scholarship, where fragmented reports and ministerial briefs frequently lack the nuanced, cross-sectoral interrogation that this volume provides. Through foregrounding the lived experiences of these girls against the stark backdrop of national statistical aggregates, the book endeavours to equip policymakers, educators, and community leaders with a robust, multidimensional toolkit for intervention. It is, in essence, a clarion call to reclaim the futures of Zimbabwe's adolescent demographic, transforming raw data into a compelling narrative for systemic reform, restorative justice, and the unequivocal vindication of every girl's inalienable right to education.

Dr. Munyaradzi Chidarikire *Editor*

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Unintended Early Pregnancies Harm Academic Performance of Zimbabwe's Primary Pupils.....	1
Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Brenda Muchopa-Chatira, Yolanda N. Tshuma	
Chapter 2: Unwanted pregnancies among secondary school learners in Zimbabwe: A qualitative inquiry into academic consequences.....	13
Margaret Machingambi	
Chapter 3: Early Pregnancy as a Primary Driver of Suicide among Learners in Rural Zimbabwe.....	23
Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Nozihle Ncube	
Chapter 4: Relationship between online digital exposure and early unintended pregnancies among adolescents in Zimbabwe.....	34
Shupikai Zebron, Prudence Mavhemwa	
Chapter 5: Revitalising Ubuntu Values for Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy and Strengthening Child Protection in Rural Zimbabwe.....	54
Abraham Maposa, Everjoy Masanjala, Mildred Kudzanai Chanhuwa	
Chapter 6: Exploring Drug Abuse in relation to Unintended Early Pregnancies Among Learners at a Selected Masvingo Tertiary Institution.....	69
Herbert Muradzikwa	
Chapter 7: Exploring Mobile Phone-Based Counselling Interventions for Preventing Early Unintended Child Pregnancies among Adolescents in Zimbabwe.....	83
Nkululeko Sibanda, Shupikai Zebron	
Chapter 8: Strong family support system enables pregnant female learners to overcome social isolation in Zimbabwe.....	97
Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Prince Chidarikire, Vongai Mazivazvose	
Chapter 9: The Right to Return, But the Right to Belong? Adolescent Pregnancy, School Re-Entry and Educational Inclusion in Zimbabwe: A Counselling Psychology Perspective.....	113
Kaila Olivia	

Chapter 10: Lived Experiences of Young Pregnant Rural Primary School Female Learners with Disabilities in Zimbabwe.125

Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Eugenia Mabika, Netsai Kumpewu

Chapter 11: Through Resilience I Decided to Go Back to School Despite being pregnant: Power of resilience.....140

Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Miriam Masikati

Chapter 12: Child-Headed Families as a Vulnerability Context for Early Pregnancies among Adolescent Girls in Zimbabwe.....155

Lilian Chaminuka

Chapter 13- “Sorry Parents, I Was Pregnant Unintentionally”: Apology Accepted, Parents Responded – A Case in Zimbabwe.....167

Tinevimbo Shumba, Munyaradzi Chidarikire

Chapter 14: Role of Siblings in Supporting Pregnant Family Adolescent Members in Zimbabwe.....182

Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Pinias Chikuvadze

Chapter 15: Phobia To Report Rape Cases Increases Unintended Pregnancies In Zimbabwe.196

Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Theresia Joakim Kanyopa

Chapter 16: No Access To Morning After Pills precipitates unintended Pregnancies among learners in rural Zimbabwe.....210

Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Juliet Kamwendo

Chapter 17: Abstinence the Best Pregnancy Prevention Method in Zimbabwe.....223

Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Alice Kuyayama, Moses Kufakunesu

Chapter 18: Socio-economic and Cultural Determinants of Adolescent Pregnancy in Zimbabwe.....236

Joel Marashe and Patience Marashe