



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **South Africans should walk the talk when it comes to new policy on learner pregnancy in schools**

**Johannesburg – Tuesday, 28 December 2021:** The lack of outrage by the majority of adult South Africans when it comes to underage and teen pregnancies is outrageous at the very least. More action-oriented solutions need to be employed by South Africans as they condemn older men who continue to thrive in scourge of the sexual exploitation of children and teenagers.

The new loveLife Trust (loveLife) welcomes the new policy announced by the Department of Basic Education known as Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools. It is our considered view as an organisation that we should not only be welcoming, and tweeting about the new policy, but rather adult South Africans should also strive to see its full and practical implementation when it comes to addressing the scourge.

School governing bodies and school management should welcome the policy and see it as a great window of opportunity as they are now empowered to act against those that seek to sexually exploit underage and young learners. The two should be mindful of the consequences that come with lack of implementation and the continued protection of men, young and old, that see school-going young girls as their sex toys.

Pupils go to school to learn - they equally expect guidance and protection from their teachers within the school precinct. Some reported incidents at our schools, in some cases implicating educators, leave a lot to be desired and we do hope this new policy will act as a deterrent to potential perpetrators.

In a previous communication, loveLife has raised an alarm and condemned the high statistics of learners absent from school owing to teen pregnancy. We call on educators and communities as we have done before, to take more responsibility and report such pregnancies to the Department of Social Development, and the SA Police Service (SAPS) without passing the buck of who should do what.

“The new policy places a huge responsibility on schools as they will now have to be in communication with SAPS when a learner under the age of sixteen falls pregnant. That is



statutory rape, it's a serious crime that should be reported. There are fully grown men older than 16 impregnating younger girls. Civil and criminal charges must be instituted against these suspects," said Dr Linda Ncube-Nkomo, chief executive officer of loveLife.

Recently released statistics by the Department of Health showed that in the last four years, 14 176 aged between 10 and 14 fell pregnant. This is a staggering number of children having children that should enrage us. We need to see more action from the criminal justice system as there are criminals out there who should by now be wearing yellow overalls.

Ncube-Nkomo further said the abhorrent and patriarchal approach when it comes to rape in South Africa should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. She said if the letter of the law was followed when it came to the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act of 2007, we should now be seeing progress in prosecutions and less of sick men acting as predators when they see school-going girls. The Act should have the capacity, power, and action-orientation to deter these suspects, mostly older than the underage girl.

Pregnant girls, as should be the norm, must be allowed to attend school until they reach the eighth month of their pregnancy. Schools should be called to account when they deny these learners from attending classes. The policy calls on schools to adopt "reasonable steps to accommodate the pupil's basic education, health, and material needs." These should really be the norm, one that schools must be ready to adapt to and implement as they seek ways of accommodating young, pregnant learners. Denying pregnant learners an opportunity to an education to plunge into a cycle that will leave with limited options to be self-sufficient and provide for the unborn child in future years.

We have previously called on the Department of Basic Education to fully implement the Employment of Educators Act, a law allowing the department to act against teachers who are in sexual relationships with learners. As the Act states, such teachers should be dismissed from the employ of the department and banned for good. This new policy is a welcome addition that may now see some of these charged, jailed, and removed from societies.

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## **About loveLife**

The New loveLife Trust, also known as “loveLife”, is a South African non-profit youth organisation that was established in 1999. loveLife’s mission is to ensure that the South Africa’s youth is provided with safety, good health and opportunity using peer-led education model to address challenges they face. These challenges include: joblessness, rising suicide cases, mental health, home-related stresses, lack of access to education, poor education, lack of access to opportunities in sport or business, and a public health care system that is not designed to cater for the needs of adolescents and youth have been exacerbated by numerous factors in particular the COVID-19 pandemic and an ailing economy.