

## **"Biographical Rupture without Dropping Out Of School: The Experience of Student Mothers in Public High Schools in Daoukro (Central-Eastern, Côte d'Ivoire)"**

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### **Abstract**

*The school system organizes and regulates the itinerary of the learners. While some follow the normal way, others follow atypical ways marked by interruptions and returns. This text focuses on the atypical paths of student-mothers in Daoukro high schools. It shows how these teenage girls manage to get back to school after pregnancy and how they reconcile their dual identity as student and mother.*

**Keys words:** *Biographical rupture, dropping out of school, student mothers, Daoukro, Côte d'Ivoire*

### **Résumé**

*Le système scolaire organise et régule le parcours des apprenants. Si certains respectent l'itinéraire normal, d'autres par contre suivent des parcours atypiques marqués par des interruptions, des transitions et des retours. Ce texte s'intéresse aux parcours atypiques des élèves-mères des lycées de Daoukro. Il montre comment ces adolescentes parviennent à reprendre le chemin de l'école après la grossesse et comment elles concilient leur double identité d'élève et de mère.*

**Mots clés:** *Rupture biographique, décrochage scolaire, élèves-mères, Daoukro, Côte d'Ivoire*

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### **Introduction**

Dropping out of school refers to students leaving the education system before completing secondary school (Bouchard and Saint-Amand 1993; Legendre 1993; Parent and Paquin 1994). In developing countries, poverty, distance from schools, failed exams, marriage, late enrollment, and pregnancy are generally cited as the main reasons why girls drop out of school (Diagne 2011; Esterle-Hedibel 2006; Numba 2008). According to the statistical analysis report of the Ivorian education system (2019-2020), this school phenomenon is worrying over the years since the dropout rate has been rising steadily, from 10.2% in 2007-2008 to 17.4% in 2018-2019. It is 19.2% for girls and 16.9% for boys. Among teenage girls, pregnancy is presented as the main factor for dropping out of school.

According to UNFPA (2013), 7.3 million girls under the age of 18 give birth, 2 million of whom are 14 or younger. These adolescent girls suffer the worst long-term consequences in terms of health, employment and social development.

From 2012 to 2019, the Ivorian schools recorded 21586 cases of pregnancy, according to data from the ministry in charge of national education.

In this context, various programs to support the enrollment and retention of girls in school have been implemented in the school system for several years. In 2014, combining sex education and access to contraception, the "Zero Pregnancy at School" campaign was initiated by the Ivorian government in the school environment. In Daoukro, in the central-eastern part of Côte d'Ivoire, the slogan "Close your legs and open your notebooks", developed as part of this campaign, had become a musical rhythm that students hummed daily in school as well as in their extracurricular environment. In the same vein, the installation of the Direction de la Mutualité et des Œuvres Sociales (DMOSS), in the premises of the school and university health service, for the supervision and social support of the actors of the school system was perceived as an essential asset for the students and the supervisory staff. It provides a support system to facilitate the resumption of the school year in case of obstacles in the academic process. This structure points out that more than a third of teenage dropouts are caused by pregnancy in the Iffou Regional Directorate. The city's modern public high schools recorded 59 cases of teenage pregnancy. Of these, only 28 teenagers put on the white dress and blue skirt to continue their schooling after giving birth.

Although the dropout rate is higher than the return to school rate, we chose to focus on the minority

who return to school after maternity to understand their experience and motivations. In fact, each school journey results from the articulation of several temporalities where the learner's subjectivity, family environment, and the school device interact (Doray et al., 2009; Gauthier and Montigny, 2014). This theoretical option allows us to consider pregnancy at school as an event from which to analyze the reflexivity of student-mothers and their investment in the construction of their life trajectory. As a general rule, the classic school career of learners is a linear succession of educational levels. Our approach claims a more subjective, non-ideal-typical dimension of the school career. It is based on a process of coherence by the student-mother, of the obstacles, the differences, the ruptures of her school career. The interest of this approach is to register pregnancy not as the end of the school career, but as a biographical break, a stage of redefinition of the social identity of the student-mother, of redirection and calibration of her school career and beyond.

## **1. Methodological**

This text is based on the biographies of student-mothers and the words of actors involved in the medical and social care of students. The interviews that made it possible to write this text took place during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years in the public modern high schools of Daoukro. Adolescents attending these schools generally present difficulties in entering sexuality associated with risky behaviors, particularly in relation to alcohol and the recent development of artisanal gold panning activities and cybercrime. In order to better understand their behaviors, we conducted in-depth interviews with about 20 student-mothers attending high schools and living in the city of Daoukro. Avoiding the trap of prejudice against them, we report without censorship the comments they were willing to give us. The testimonies of these teenage girls paint a picture of the life of the student-mother and show the impact of motherhood on their sexual life and their school career. They tell us about the pregnancy and the new life environment created by their social identity as student mothers. They explain in great detail how they assume their identity as student mothers and how they organize themselves to combine caring for the baby with studying.

The methodological approach is fundamentally inspired by grounded theorizing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This implies that, while relying on existing analyses and theories, we give precedence in this text to the data produced by the surveys, by highlighting the respondents subjective perceptions of their situations.

## **2. Results**

### **2.1. The occurrence of pregnancy**

#### **2.1.1 The paradox of sexual education.**

The approach to sexuality in the family environment is quite paradoxical. Parents prepare their offspring for a matrimonial life by depriving them of any knowledge in this area. Often, there is a silence between parents and adolescents about sexuality, although the former hope for the full development of the latter. This paradox of sexuality in the family is an obstacle to sex education for adolescents. Ignorance of the significance of the physiological changes that occur in their lives causes many adolescents to have "accidents" when they enter sexuality. In the face of this family silence, they learn about sexuality from friends, the media, and school courses on human reproduction. And very often, this learning outside the family universe comes a little late in the life of adolescents. This is what happened to Adjoua, a 15-year-old seventh grader:

«My parents never talked to me about sexuality at home, it was when I was in the sixth grade that I heard about sexuality for the first time, that day, people came to make us aware of the issue of pregnancy in schools and its consequences, and after the little talk, they shared condoms with the students. But I was already pregnant but I came to class».

Adjoua is originally from Daoukro, where she attended elementary school and lives with her parents. In Akan societies in general, the entry of the young girl into sexual life is sanctioned by a ritual, the *atonvlè* in the Baule. This takes place following the transformation of the adolescent's body (enlargement of the pelvis, growth of the breasts, appearance of menstruation). At the end of this nubility ceremony, the adolescent is declared pure and fit for sexual life. To do so, she is discreetly followed by the mother who observes her behavior and her company. For many adolescent girls, this ritual comes late in their lives. It occurs when the girl is already having sex. For Adjoua, a small purification ceremony was organized at home to prevent her from being nicknamed "téklé-bla," or prostitute.

While in the first case, parents were silent about sexuality, some adolescent girls benefit from the guidance of family members. This guidance is provided by older sisters or the mother, who share their experience with them. For these older women, these exchanges create a zone of trust between women while offering them the opportunity to assert their responsibility as elders, to learn new knowledge about sexual education and to dispel prejudices:

«With my children, both girls and boys, I exchange a lot about sexuality. I talk to them about the disadvantages of sexual practices, I accompany them with advice but with children we expect everything; I ask them to catch their hearts, to do their papers (study), boy or woman does not finish. If you

work tomorrow you will have better than those who are following you now», (Mother, 42 years old).

Recounting the circumstances of her pregnancy, Moyah, 17 years old, a student mother in her third year at LHKB, confirms the involvement of parents in the sexual education of children.

«It was my aunt who talked to us about sexuality; she asked us to send our boyfriends home so she could get to know them; she advised us to look for someone who can take care of us, the child is not a crime in your life; but please work well in school your studies first».

When parents make sex a topic of conversation with their teenage daughters, they see pregnancy (or a baby) as the horizon of sex education. Moyah's aunt is well aware that her daughters have already entered the sexual life. Advising them to introduce their sexual partner is a measure not to prevent a possible pregnancy but to avoid a pregnancy without an author and especially an additional burden for the parents. Such a provision implicitly shows the resignation of parents to the sexual life of children. In fact, in general, sex education is limited to the recounting of personal experience (or experiences known in the family environment) and advice supported by the social situation. This pedagogy of sex education is largely involved in the positioning of adolescent girls in sexual life. In Moyah's case, pregnancy is not presented by her aunt as an obstacle to her academic success. In fact, talking about sexuality is above all a matter of individual privacy, which requires parents to have a certain reserve. They are then confronted with the difficulty of approaching knowledge with reserve while keeping a certain distance from their own sexual choices, their personal opinions and sometimes even their sexual contradictions and difficulties.

### **2. 1. 2. I want my grandson before I die**

The attitude of some parents encourages students to become pregnant. Some of our respondents reveal this motivation in the relationship with parents. They report that some parents encourage them to become pregnant because of their advanced age. They want to see, our respondents say, "their grandsons before they die. These comments are generally made by grandparents who feel that children of equal age should have the same physiological development, have the same rhythm of life, without taking into account the specificity of the students' situation. In fact, some grandparents exert pressure on their granddaughters to them the order to have a child like their classmates who are not students. This paradoxical injunction from the parents is underlined by the words of these two student-mothers:

«My grandmother used to talk to me about sexuality. She used to tell me to have a child with her because I'm already grown up. All of my friends with whom I have graduated have had children» (Appiah, 16 years old in the 4th grade).

«We grew up with our grandmother in the village, she would sometimes talk to us about sex; she would tell me every time that she wants to see her grandson before she dies» (Grace, age 17, in grade 4).

### **2. 2 Misinterpretation of pregnancy awareness activities**

The various school-based pregnancy awareness activities often have undesirable effects. Some students unfortunately interpret them as an incentive to sexual activity.

"For me, it is the advertising campaigns and the sensitization that the NGOs (AIMAS, AIBF), the media, and in schools, etc. do that push us to get pregnant. The more they sensitize us on the phenomenon, the more they show us the prevention measures, and they distribute free condoms, the more we want to experiment, because at puberty we are very stubborn and we want to do everything we want».

In addition, a DEMOSS official said:

«The observation that I have made recently is that the more awareness campaigns and the distribution of condoms in the various schools, the greater the number of pregnancies in schools. To the point where I wonder if these means do not have an impact on children ...».

In view of these accounts, it is easy to understand that the various sensitizations have a harmful effect on children. Our respondents suggest another dimension to these measures.

### **2. 3 Early marriage**

Depending on their social background, adolescent girls experience different ways of entering sexual life. In the case of Tenin, a Muslim student, her entry into sexual life was through marriage. Regardless of her status as a student, her parents engaged in a process of negotiating her sexual partner, or rather, her husband.

*"I am a Muslim girl, I am married and I live with my husband. It is our culture, even if you go to school and you have to get married when the time comes, it is obligatory, my parents talked to my husband, that he is going to marry me but I have to continue school, and he understood my parents, after the wedding*

*I go to school, and also I have to fulfill my duty as a housewife, that's when I made the baby".*

In the case of Tenin, the occurrence of pregnancies in the school environment is not necessarily by accident. For some parents, the sexual life of their offspring must take place within the framework of a marriage whose purpose, beyond social reproduction, is to perpetuate a traditional family model.

On the other hand, the association of teenage girls with people of high social prestige is of great importance to some parents. For them, a financially independent man (civil servant, rich planter, rich trader, etc.) who covets their daughter, could support them in case of need. Thus, they turn a blind eye to their children's recurrent visits or sexual relations with these men. This tolerance is justified not only by the family's low income but also by the financial support that this "future son-in-law" could bring them. And it is all this family tolerance that leads the girl to become pregnant, like Sandrine, a 19-year-old girl-mother in her final year of high school: *«I live in a village in Daoukro with my parents, they are planters; and my child's parent is also a planter, he helps my dad pay for my classes».*

## **2. 4 School Holidays**

School vacations are the times when sexual activity is most common among young people. These are times of "reunion" for some, and it is during these times that young people use their "little experiments" on sexuality. Not having enough knowledge in this area leads some of them into a "state of pregnancy". This is what the DMOSS coordinator says here:

*«Generally, the cases of pregnancy are more detected in the months of December and January; it is during these two months that we face a lot of cases of pregnancy, there are some even that hide, it is thanks to our specialized educators that we manage to spot them in order to give them our support».*

What do we remember about the return to school life of these student-mothers?

## **2. 5. A social environment and a school system favorable to the return to school**

### **2. 5. 1 A caring social environment**

#### **2. 5. 1. 1 Renewed financial and emotional support**

The support of the social environment of the student-mothers is essential and is a key element in the "success" of the motherhood/education gamble. When parents renew their financial and emotional support, they give them the opportunity to return to school. Even if pregnancy marks a halt in the student's career, it is not considered a reason for the parents to withdraw their emotional capital for their daughters.

*«If I continue at present it is thanks to my parents, because they are not disengaged from my studies despite my pregnancy, they encouraged me to persevere in my studies, my father told me that he is the one who pays for my studies as long as he does not tell me to stop school, I should not also say that I give up».* (Leopoldine, student-mother, 16 years old).

For Leopoldine, the support lies in the motivational words, in the renewal of financial and emotional support. The emotional and financial support of the father is joined by that of the mother. The girls' mothers are also particularly important in the process of returning to school. They accompany their daughters from the time of pregnancy and take care of the baby at birth. According to the interviewees, the following types of assistance can be identified: food, daycare, financial assistance, motivation to study, and assistance in taking care of the child. Also, some mothers take care of their daughter's child in every detail: they sleep with their grandson, change his diapers at night, and stay up at their grandson's bedside to let the young mother continue her studies. This is the case of Marilynne, a student-mother.

*«It is my mother who looks after the child; during my classes, she takes good care of him as her son. She doesn't give me any time with my baby, I only have 30min to give him the milk, otherwise it's her mom who takes care of him, she sleeps with him every day, morning and evening»* (Marilynne, 14 years old).

Adolescent girls receive help from other family members besides the mother. However, this help is ad hoc, and most of the time it is limited to childcare. The words of Rebecca and Marina attest to this: *«When I want to work (study lessons), I take advantage of the people who are in the house to help me with the child, and when I go to school it is my older sister who keeps the child».* (Rebecca, 14 years old).

*«When I'm in school, my mom's older sister takes care of the child, so she decided to come and watch the child until she (Marina's daughter) is one year 6 months old; my parents and my boyfriend contribute financially but it's my aunt who really takes care of the child: her bath, her laundry, feeds her...everything* (Marina, 17 years old).

#### **2. 5. 1.2 The friendship network**

If the family circle is a fruitful channel for some of them, the student-mothers we met keep emphasizing that the support of their friends was considerable in the resumption of their school life. Beyond simple companionship, the presence of friends was for the students interviewed a symbol of the renewal of the

friendship pact despite the break in their schooling. In addition, they do not hesitate to take care of the child: «*My friends were a great help because they encouraged me to go back to school and others would always call me on their way to class and those who didn't have classes would help my nanny when I went to school*», (Abiba, 15 years old). To these words are added those of Biba's aunt: «*She has friends who encourage her to go back to school. They often come to call her to go to class* ».

The student mothers interviewed all appreciated the support of their peers. Thanks to this support, some of them have managed to return to school.

### **2.5. 1.3 Spouse support**

Some perpetrators of student pregnancies take responsibility, with the support of their families, for caring for their child despite, at times, the hostility of the young mother's parents. The young mothers interviewed testify to the support they receive from their parents. They consider this act of great value because this support allowed them to resume their school life, which was not at all obvious insofar as their parents were not willing to keep their babies. This is the case of Leslie, 14 years old: «*It is my boyfriend's mother who takes care of the baby until the end of my classes, she takes care of him, she does all his needs, she does everything so that I have time to study*».

Unlike Leslie, whose boyfriend's mother had taken custody of her during her school year, Prisca 16 years old found it difficult to keep her baby before returning to school:

«*At first, my boyfriend's mother looked after the child when I went to school, but she had to go back to the village for her work in the fields so I go to look after him at one of my aunts' houses in another neighborhood before going to school and when I come back, I take him*».

It is not easy for some mothers of young fathers to leave all the activities and come to take care of a baby, especially when both individuals are students and the burden of the young mother comes back to the family of the young father who had to resort to household help.

Where some find family support, the help of the young father's family for the custody of their baby, others find no way out. Their boyfriend must necessarily hire a nanny to take care of the child so that the young girl can resume her academic life. The words of Florence mother-daughter, 15 years old, testify to this: «*My boyfriend found me a nanny who takes care of the baby and also the housework, which helps me a little; but it's not easy to reconcile studying and having a baby*». Léopoldine, 17 years old, say again: «*when I'm in class, my nanny takes care of the baby and helps me with the tasks. I study without worrying, I wash him and give him something to suck on, then his nanny takes care of him and I work intensely*».

It is understandable that young mothers whose spouses have a good social status do not have difficulties in looking after their children. Otherwise, the social status of young fathers influence their families to assist the young mother in her return to school.

## **2. 6 A stimulating school system**

### **2. 6 .1 The assistance of the educational actors**

We have identified a variety of individual and associative actors involved in supporting student mothers. The principals of the two public high schools in Daoukro, along with their colleagues, are involved in raising awareness among students to avoid academic failure. As for pregnancies in schools, school principals explain that they have driven many students out of public schools. Indeed, for them, there is no official text that excludes a student who contracts a pregnancy during her training, on the contrary, a ministerial decree organizes the resumption of classes after childbirth. However, in order to preserve the image of their schools, some officials excluded students who were pregnant. Today, in the high schools of Daoukro, the heads of public schools and their collaborators are working to raise awareness among students to avoid cases of dropping out of school due to pregnancy, One principal emphasizes: «*I call them in one by one for an interview to remotivate them to love school more in the face of their status as young mothers; school should be your first husband, I invite them to stop getting pregnant during their studies*».

In the classrooms, teachers continue this awareness-raising work. If the first mission assigned to teachers within a school is the transmission of knowledge, know-how and interpersonal skills, some teachers make the support of student-mothers a point of honor during their teaching. Justine a student in 1st grade, 18, years old tells us about the support of her teachers:

«*Some teachers encouraged me because I came every time I participated in class, there is my math teacher who always told me that I have to talk a lot in his class because I am two now, I have to manage to have the average or else I have problem with him. My French teacher also encouraged me, she is like my second mother. When she doesn't see me in class, she calls me in and I have to justify my absence with a good reason otherwise I get hot with her. She says that I do well in class so pregnancy shouldn't be a hindrance to my school*».

The coaching of the Association of Female Secondary School Personnel of Iffou is also reassuring for

the student-mothers. Composed essentially of women working in the educational field, it makes the supervision of cadets a priority action by organizing various awareness activities (conference, awareness campaign, etc.), notably within the framework of the "zero pregnancy in schools" project. It also works to accommodate schoolgirls from the surrounding villages of Daoukro who do not have a guardian. It justifies this action by the fact that girls without guardians in the city, living alone in rented rooms, are generally vulnerable and therefore more exposed to the advances of men. Also, the members of this association are involved in the girls' schooling by allowing them to study in peace and quiet and to be protected from basic needs. In addition, she shares her experiences during meetings with the cadets. Indeed, some members of this association have become pregnant during their school years but they have managed to reach their goals. For this reason, they are seen as reference points for their younger sisters. One student in the second year of high school, received encouragement from her French teacher, a member of this association:

«My French teacher encouraged me every time we saw each other; she told me to continue with the classes that it will be good for my child and myself. She even gave me her example that she came from a peasant family, and she had a child when she was in high school. And her parents were angry, her father told her to be on her own. For them, she should work to save the honor of their family and then she preferred her pregnancy. So during the vacations, she did holiday jobs to go to school when she returned, until one day her uncle decided to send her to school because she was moving forward, and that's how she succeeded in becoming a French teacher today, this testimony has been very edifying» (Léopoldine, 17 years old).

Another student also highlights the support of a female teacher.

*«When I came back, I had a big regret, because my friends already had their baccalaureate, and they left the high school. I am now in the Terminale class with students that I left behind in the première. One of our teachers advised me and congratulated me for having the courage to go back to school, and she also told me not to have any regrets. She told me that going back to school was already a good thing. Her assistance and advice motivated me. So I started to work. For the first term, I got an average of 11.84. But it wasn't easy at first. When I went back to school after my delivery, the students looked at me differently. I knew that so much was being said behind my back. But I faced it all. My dream is to graduate from high school and be a student next year. I am convinced that God will help me» (Edith, 18).*

These encouraging words from the teachers encourage the student mothers to stay in school and to take up the challenge, because they make them feel that school is important in their lives as student mothers. In addition to the assistance of administrative staff, teachers and associations, a specialized structure intervenes in the care of student-mothers.

## **2. 6. 2 The Directorate of Mutuality and Social Works in Schools (DMOSS)**

The students of Daoukro benefit from the social assistance of the Direction de la Mutualité et des Œuvres Sociales en milieu Scolaire (DMOSS) whose mission is to contribute to the improvement of the social, health and psychological conditions of the actors of the educational system. Since its installation in Daoukro, the Counseling and Support Center (one of the specialized centers of DMOSS) is regularly solicited for the care of students who contract a pregnancy at school. When the service is informed of the student's state of pregnancy, it starts the administrative procedure for her social care. This is a set of documents constituting the file of the pregnant student.

In addition to the administrative procedures, the service sometimes mediates between the families of the "pregnant" and the "pregnant woman". The facilitators of the service contribute to the management of disagreements that arise between the families concerning the schooling of the young girl after childbirth. Their involvement is part of the "Accelerated Plan to Reduce Pregnancy in Schools," put in place by the Council of Ministers on Wednesday, April 2, 2014. This plan Supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "provides for stronger disciplinary and criminal sanctions against the perpetrators of these pregnancies." Reminding this provision to the various stakeholders around the situation of the student-mother, he urges them to make every effort to return her to school.

## **2.7. Lived experiences and personal aspirations of the student-mothers**

### **2.7.1. Constraints of being a student-mother**

The occurrence of a pregnancy in the school environment is an obstacle to the schooling of any adolescent. However, it can promote changes in the life of the learner through awareness and the adoption of "mature" behaviors. The lessons learned from the shock of pregnancy have helped adolescents limit their risks by setting guidelines for their behavior and better organizing their school life. Aware of their responsibilities, they deprive themselves of certain leisure activities related to their young age in order to take care of their child and concentrate on their studies. This is how some women manage to reconcile school and motherhood.

*«I take care of my child every day; my aunt asks me to rest when I come back from school; I take advantage of this little free time to work (school homework) after that I take care of the child; there are days when she bothers and cries a lot at night, when I manage to get her to sleep and I'm not sleepy anymore I can still study; but it's not easy; I find it difficult to look after a child and go to school»*, (Prisca, 17 years old).

Leopoldine, 17 years old, for her part, observes that the arrival of the child has sharpened her sense of responsibility, and the abandonment of non-essential practices in her life. This is what she translates as : *«for me, things have changed a lot; I see things differently and I have become more responsible»*.

These young mothers generally report that they no longer have leisure time, they no longer go out as they wish, and they feel more preoccupied with their child's needs and studies.

Edith, another young mother, draws lessons from her experience as a student mother.

*«Being a young mother, I don't wish that on other young girls; it's hard, I can't go out when I want anymore, I don't sleep at the time I want, it's the baby that decides; I can't even manage my money the way I want to, before I spend, I have to think about her before I think about myself; I feel a little more responsible, I don't do things any more willy-nilly, I'm more aware than I was before»*.

The experience of student mothers highlights the difficulty of reconciling motherhood and school. They are teenagers at school, with their friends, but back home they become full-time mothers. This dual status of student and mother is not easy to manage, especially when they do not have a housekeeper. However, this dual status creates a sense of feminine responsibility. The child accelerates social maturity and also becomes a source of motivation for adolescent girls.

### **2. 7. 2 Motivation and personal aspiration**

Motivation is the driving force behind the decision to return to school. It is a set of forces that allows adolescent girls to organize their lives and discipline their behavior. In the process of returning to school post-maternity, motivation is seen as a primary decision maker for these student-mothers. There is also the determination and willpower that underlies their drive.

*«I am continuing to take classes because my goals were not to stop taking classes in 2nd grade. Pregnancy is a situation that has presented itself to me, so I must not let it weaken me, I must overcome it, in order to reach my dreams through school. My ambition is to become a lawyer, so I owe myself enough courage. My father was a teacher, he sometimes spoke to me about the benefits of school in his life, since I was a child and I promised him to study law to become a great personality like him»* (Justine, 18 years old).

To these words are added those of Léopoldine who plans to become a hostess at the end of her studies: *«I want to be a stewardess or a sailor, that's why I went back to school»* (Léopoldine, 17 years old). From these comments, we can see that school is the only path to success for the student mothers interviewed. However, what can we learn from the continuity of the school projects of the young mothers?

### **2. 7. 3. Personal and family challenge**

Poverty in families is a controversial issue in many families. This situation nourishes the hope of many parents to see their offspring succeed at the end of their education and especially to have an enviable job. Therefore, beyond the emotional shock of their daughters' pregnancy, they find the financial and moral resources necessary to put them back on the path to school. Very often, motivated by this project, they commit, with or without the contribution of the "pregnant person" or her family, to give back her chances to the student mother: *«After the death of dad, everything was upset how to go back to school, but my mother keeps finding ways to educate us despite her suffering. I wanted to go back to school hoping to get a job to make her happy»* (Raïssa, 16 years old).

Challenge is what characterizes the individual when faced with a situation. The student mothers interviewed said that they had a challenge to meet. For them, pregnancy was certainly an obstacle in their school career, but it should not divert them from their life projects. Justine, 18 years old, presents herself as an ambitious student who does not plan to abandon her studies because of her child. She wants to be a reference for her cadets by her perseverance and the completion of her studies to achieve social integration: *«Despite the child, I have good averages in school; I want to go to college, work and succeed in my life»*.

For her, the difficulties of pregnancy are more the result of anxiety which in turn induces psychological disorders that divert teenagers from school.

## **3. Discussion**

The inclusion of student mothers in the school system gives rise to passionate exchanges and debates both within families and among the actors of the school system. The content of these exchanges can be summarized in moral and religious principles and arguments according to which the contraction of a pregnancy in school, or out of wedlock in general, is reprehensible.

In some social environments, student mothers are victims of discriminatory practices that eject them from the school system and marginalize them, thus depriving them of the full enjoyment of their right to education.

Because of pregnancy, the sequences of schooling and family or religious events that open the door to adult life do not necessarily correspond with those of their classmates or previous generations. The boundary between adolescent and adult life, between being a student and being a mother, is not clear to student mothers (Galland, 2009). In light of their social experience, academic success and social maturity are processes marked by commitments and personal challenges, rather than a leap from one status to the other. Certainly, talking about oneself, recounting one's life implies, above all, efforts to *"not lose face"* (Goffmann, 1974). This implies the possibility of a willingness on the part of the student-mothers to make the errors and weaknesses of their life trajectory coherent, thus becoming "ideologists of their lives" (Bourdieu, 1986).

However, the school career of the student-mothers reveals a shift from the statutory paradigm to the contractual paradigm of the school career. The social environment and the school system in which the student-mothers evolve show a loosening of identity attributes and a relaxation of the conditions for resuming post-maternity classes. Family assistance to the student-mother is evidence of a decentering of the view of the student-mother. The school system, for its part, guarantees the student's right to return to school, taking into account her academic results and not her pregnancy. These two indicators, while contributing to the individualization of schooling and the empowerment of student mothers, also contribute to the institutionalization of heterogeneity in schooling.

## Conclusion

This study on biographical rupture without dropping out of school: the experience of student-mothers in public high schools in Daoukro (central-eastern Côte d'Ivoire) set out to analyze the atypical paths of student-mothers in high schools. The aim was to identify the strategies adopted by these adolescents to return to school after pregnancy and to determine the relationship between their dual identity as students and mothers. The data collection was based on the biographies of the student-mothers and the comments of the actors involved in the medical and social care of the students. We found that the occurrence of a pregnancy in the school environment is an obstacle to schooling. However, it can promote changes in the life of the learner through awareness and the adoption of behaviors.

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