

The Influence of Peers, Families, Community, Teachers and Back To School Programmes on Teen Mothers School Completion

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Abstract: *Teenage pregnancy remains a large problem worldwide, and it affect the economy of the country through health care service, high rate of poverty, low tax due to low education of the teen mothers. For every government to succeed it needs a lot of educated individual, that is why due to high rate of teenage pregnancy many countries introduced a back to school program inorder to give chance to these teen mother to proceed with their education and contribute to the growth of economy of their country. Since the introduction of this back to school program, teenage mothers who went back to school has to face so many challenges in order for them to complete their education. This research was conducted with an aim of finding out how Malawian teen mothers are able to stay and finish their education despite all the challenges, and also the role of peers, parents and community in the education of the teen mothers. Data was corrected through interviews and it was recorded and later transcribed and analysed qualitatively. This research has found out that teacher, peers, community and parents are not very much supportive to the teen mothers, and they contribute to the second drop out. Caring parents and peers and also the presence of the baby in teenage mothers have been found to be some of the resilience factor that is making teen mother to remain in school despite all the challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent and Teenage Fertility situation

All around the world, on daily basis 20,000 girls below 18 years put to birth, based on United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 27.4% of the 7.3 million adolescence who joins motherhood every year is composed of girls below 15 years. If this situation is not attended to, by 2030 an extra million girls will give birth before reaching 15years of age (United

Nations Population Fund, 2013). Certainly, adolescence pregnancy an increasing problem, especially in developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean.

Adolescent fertility and their school participation

“Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #4 calls for access to quality education and lifelong learning for all; while SDG#5 is to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.” Education for adolescent girls is critical in countries striving to reach these goals. To improve further access of girls to a good quality of education, is a global importance that is expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And in Malawi it is also a national priority. The vision drawn in Malawi’s National Girls’ Education Strategy (NGES), for instance is that “All girls in Malawi access, participate in, complete and excel at all levels of education that empowers them to effectively contribute to the country’s sustainable social, economic development by 2018” (MoEST, 2014c, p. 9).

Ongoing WBG/International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) analysis on the cost of child marriage suggests that child marriage has very large negative impacts on fertility, education and earnings, and child health among others. The rate of poverty reduced by 30% when lady’s involvement in employment increased by 15% just in one decade in Latin America. In a year the government of the United States spends almost 28 billion USD or an average of \$5,500 each on adolescent mothers. The money is used on health care, foster care, custody, and tax revenues losses due to low educational achievement and income among adolescent mothers (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008).

Much as there is good will to have educated girls in many countries there are still challenges that have to be dealt with. Half of the estimated 62 million girls worldwide who are out of school are adolescents. Sixteen million girls of the age range 6 -11 year at no time start school, in comparison to eight million boys. According to United Nations Population, over 140 million girls will enter child marriages over the period of 2011-2020. (UNFPA). and a lot of these girls will quit school. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are the two developing regions with the highest number of teen girls drop out of school. In 2012, South Asia, 12.6 million girls of junior high school age were out of school; while in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of the drop out in junior high school was 11.8 million. UNESCO attributes early and unintended pregnancy to unprotected sex and inaccessibility of services like current contraception and family planning methods. Due to the transition period from childhood to

adulthood (puberty) which is associated with new and complex emotions, sexual desires being one of them, adolescence are naturally and normally attracted to sex (UNESCO, 2014a). “Being sexual is an important part of many young people’s lives and can be a source of pleasure and comfort and a way of expressing affection and love” (UNESCO, 2009).

School readmission and Challenges faced

Even though many girls who become mothers before finishing their education appreciate educational qualifications, without sufficient support needed they may not finish their education successfully. Instead of getting support usually the teen mothers suffer misunderstanding and pressure. The adolescent mothers feel powerless because they are segregated and discriminated, and because of that they develop a kind of resistance that contributes to their failure as students most of the times. (Chigona & Chetty, 2008). Now teenage mothers are given a chance to continue with their studies after giving birth, but when they get back to school, they face a lot of difficulties as students and that makes it hard for them to excel with their education. Arlington Public School, (2004) reports that teenage mothers face challenges and they experience a lot of pressure from their guardians, friends and educators. They get less help from education institutions and also from their families and most of the time they are misinterpreted (Arlington Public School, 2004). Similarly, even though getting education is not a problem for a regular girl in Jamaica, it is a big problem for the adolescent who have a child. The community restriction and beliefs about adolescent pregnancy frequently leave the teenage mother extremely segregated and discriminated by the society. This results in their exclusion from learning and in a situation where spiritual norms are maintained and supported (endorsed), they are restricted from their old schools even after putting to birth to their babies.

Pillow (2004) discovered that a lot of teen mothers go back to school for the sake of their children, they are eager to finish their education only for them. Nevertheless, the teenage girls’ problems in managing their education is as a result of having children and because teachers and families have lost hope in them therefore their plan when they have children are not considered genuine (Schultz, 2001:598). Research by the US Department of Education (1992) shows that for girls dropping out of school both pregnancy and parenting are the main reasons.

Proceeding with school for these adolescent moms from time to time has shown to be a fruitless effort, particularly more for those teen mother staying in unbalanced home atmosphere. It is said that adolescent mother faces a lot of challenging problems. Understanding and support is less but peer and parental pressure is more. For the emotionally pressured teens, mature and adult decisions are needed. For teenage parents caring for the baby and at the same time having ample time for studies is a very big task for them to manage (Arlington Public School, 2004). The big problem for these teen mothers is the stigma that is attached to teenage mothering, and the consequences they have on their schooling experiences. For example, seeing education as an obligation (Pillow, 2004). They say for the teen mothers not to be a burden for the taxi payers and for them to pay back to the society they need to obtain education at all cost. Education is no longer a right for them (Pillow, 1994). Those girls who delay child bearing till their 20's rarely experience socio-economic difficulties than adolescent mothers who are at the high risk both socially and economically most of the times. Usually teenage mothers have a tendency to have large families and are less educated and also are at a higher level of having unwanted births outside marriage (McDowell, 2003). Pillow (2004) defines the "discourse of contamination" that emerges from thinking that the misbehaviour of the adolescent mother will give unpleasant example to other students in the school, by infecting other good student. Continuing with the same matter Wolpe et al. (1997) recorded that committees of other schools in South Africa for fear that pregnant mothers will influence and encourage other girls to become pregnant, they were unwilling to allow teenage pregnant girls to proceed attending classes.

Back to school programme.

Readmission policy in Malawi accepts a teenage mother to go back to school after giving birth. In 1993 the readmission policy was introduced in Malawi and to make its implementation more effective it was revised in 2006. Nevertheless, there are some challenges that have been noticed like some of the education stakeholder are not supporting the policy, also lack of monitoring and evaluation and implementation plans (McConnell & Mupuwaliywa, 2016). For instance, a research done by the (CSEC) Civil Society Education Coalition found that even though many teachers knew about the policy, a lot of them were not conversant with its implementation processes and have never seen or led the policy

(CSEC,2014). Gender audit report in 2013 acknowledged that there is need of strengthening the follow-up on the policy (Rugimbana&Liwewe, (2013). The 2018 readmission policy acknowledges that, the significant problem of learner pregnancies remained largely unaddressed and that there was a lack of clarity about the readmission procedures and processes, and where utilized, the process often proved to be lengthy and cumbersome for the learner seeking readmission.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were formulated in this study:

1. To find out the influence of peers, teachers and parents on the education of the teen mother.
2. The role of the community in the education of the teenage mother.
3. The effects of back to school programme (readmission policy) on the success of teen mother.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the importance of back to school programme?
2. What influences teen mother's success?

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The study is interested in exploring the influence of peers, teachers, community, parents and back to school programme on the teen mother's school completion. As such, the researcher collected and analysed both main and secondary information by means of qualitative approach. "Qualitative research is defined as the use of qualitative data such as interviews, documents and participant observation data to understand and explain social phenomena (Myers, 1997)." According to Myers qualitative research methods are intended to assist investigators appreciate people in their natural environment where they stay. In addition, Rubin and Babbie (1989) argue that the "qualitative approach as an inductive approach is eminently effective in determining the deeper meaning of experiences of human beings and in giving a rich description of the specific phenomena being investigated in reality".

In total the study had 44 respondents. 24 teen mothers still at school, 10 teachers of schools (i.e. one teacher from each selected randomly from school that had teen mother students) and 10 successful teen mothers, were individually interviewed. All the selected girls were

contacted through the headteachers of the sampled schools who explained to them the research project. The data was corrected using structured questionnaires. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcribed information was written on the papers and main issues coming out from the interviews were highlighted to get the deeper meaning of the problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis, interpretation and discussion of the results have been done as a corrective response to the common questions but also individual question as for the case of the teachers.

- **Results pertaining the influence of peers, teachers and parents on the education of teenage mother.**
 - a. What are the challenges you face when you get back to school?

Table 1

Responses	Teen mother at school		Teen mother working		Teachers	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
Mocked, laughed at.	19	79.2	8	80	5	50
Discouraged	10	41.6	6	60	6	60
Harassed by male teachers	2	8.3	4	40	0	0
Raped	1	4.1	0	0	0	0
Lack of support	5	20.8	6	60	5	50

Interpretation

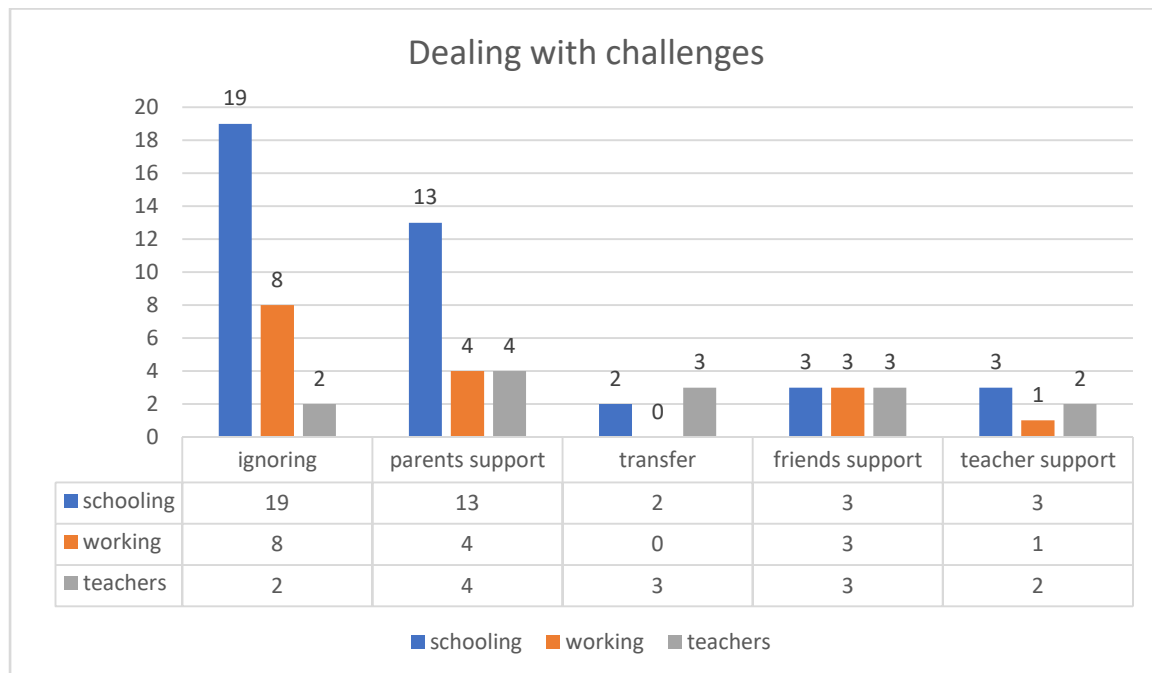
19 of the girls said that they were mocked, laughed at and called all sorts of names by their peers when they went back to school, 7 of the teenage mothers said in addition to being mocked they were also discouraged by their peers, one of the respondent even said that “*when I raise my hand in class to answer the questions the teacher is asking, some of the peers said don’t answer just go home and breast feed*”. The other respondent said “*when i pass the in class or get something right above them (peers) they say am doing well because am a*

mother, I know everything already.” 2 of the respondents reported that the male teachers from their school took advantage of them, saying that since they are mothers they are grown up. And the teachers showed sexual advancement on the girls, and when they refuse, they start failing them in class and use them as bad examples. Apart from peers these teen mothers also face challenges from their families and communities. From this research 10 girls said they got discouraged by the people from the community, they tell them to stop going to school and get married. One girl said the people even said that she is just wasting money for fees, because she will not make it. 5 of the girls said their parents did not support them in anyway, like school fees, caring of the child or other school necessities because they are a disgrace to the family.

Other researchers also found that due to double responsibilities after giving birth teenparents are labelled by many teachers as unstable and always tired and drowsy throughout classes so they are more likely to fail or lag behind in school (Maluli& Bali, 2014). Pressure from the factors which distract learners from schooling. (save the children annual report, 2014,2015). The same save the children annual report 2014,2015 continues to say that the practice of other teachers of engaging in unlawful affairs with female students and / or of using negative reinforcement as an approach to teaching, create a negative environment for learning. Samati in her paper also found out that school girls are exploited or mishandled by their fellow male students or teachers. The international Centre for research on women also found that 85% of the community in Malawi are of the understanding that girls are abused sexually, mostly in or around schools, and that teachers are sometimes the culprits.

Form the findings it can be concluded that peers, teachers, parents and the community are major contributors of teenage mothers problems.

b. *How did you deal with these challenges mentioned above?*



Interpretation

From the graph above it can be observed that the girls developed different ways of facing the challenges, it should be noted that the girls use not only one way but several ways to still remain in school. 19 teenage mothers said the first thing they did to face the challenges especially being mocked, laughed at and called name is to ignore the peers who were mocking them. 13 girls said they are able to face the challenges because of the support from parents and 2 got help from their teachers. One of the respondents said, *“I don’t care whether people mock or laugh at me because my parents before my readmission they told me this will happen so I just ignore them and accept my situation.”* And another respondent also said *“because of the support I get from my parents it gives me strength to face anything and go on with my education.”*

2 of the respondents said because of the frequent mocking from peers they asked for transfer to another school. One of the respondents who transferred said she transferred because the male teacher was making advances on her and when she refused, she was maltreated. And the other respondent said the mocking was too much that she couldn’t take it anymore, she said her peers used to call her *tchembele* meaning someone who has a child. *“I could not concentrate in class, during break, my peers could even sing songs about me, each morning when I am preparing for school I had to think twice whether to go or to stay home, but when I see my child it gave me strength to go to school. But when I reach there mmmh it was too*

much, and I decided that I still want to go to school but I cannot continue at this same school so I asked for a transfer” she also said that “ *what made my situation worse is the boy who impregnated me was also at the same school so he used to mock me in front of his friends explaining to them what we used to do when we were dating, so I became a laughing stock.* ”³ of the teenage girls also admitted that not all the peers were mocking and laughing at them some were helpful and contributed to their resilience and their decision to go on with school. “*When I got pregnant, I told my friend that I want to abort, but she encouraged me not to and told me I have a chance to come back to school after wards.*” Another one even said that her parents did not accept her when she was pregnant, and they dishonoured her, they could not attend to her in any of her needs, she survived this trauma through the help of her friend, she helped her through all the things she was facing and even up to now when she is having any problem she confides in her friend. 2 other teen mothers also got help from the teacher, she said the teacher used to counsel her, and made her school life good.

Even the working teen mothers and the teachers involved in this study were of the same views that teen mothers do get through the challenges through friends’ support, parents support etc.

This is in connection to what Moore, (2014) found out in her research that family, peer support and informative education classes can help teen mothers build resilience required for them to finish school. To avoid stigma and discrimination some teen moms get married and some move to another school (Watson, 2014).

In conclusion few teen mothers are able to get support from friends, parents and teachers also for the them to proceed with their education.

Are you facing stigma and discrimination at your school or community?

Among the 24 teenage mothers still in school interviewed, 14 which is 58.3% said no they do not face any stigma and discrimination in the schools and communities. 10 which is 41,66% of the respondents admitted that they do face discrimination. A lot of girls reported that married women from their community do not want to associate with them in fear that they will snatch their husband away from them. “*I went to see my friend after school and her mother chased me away like a dog she said am pretending to see my friend when in actual sense am after her husband, she continued to say you young people with kids you have no fear men, go and never come close to my family again*”(from field work Mchinji July 2019).

2 of the girls who got married after being pregnant and then went back to school after the hardship they faced in their marriage report facing more discrimination. They said their case is worse and that they even considered dropping out of school again.

“When I started going to school, a lot of people from my community discouraged me, saying I will do nothing in school I better go back to my marriage. And when I want to chat with my peers they do refuse saying I am a mother I don’t belong to their group, and some even said I should not be going to their houses because their parents said am a bad influence. And also, when I try to join mother groups or clubs from my community they chase me away saying I don’t belong to mother group anymore since I went back to school then I belong to girls group, they said I abandoned the mother group by going back to school. So most of the times am alone, with not friends.” (From field work July 2019)

This is in agreement with other findings from other researchers, for example Watson (2014) said stigma is one of the challenges teen mothers face as they are trying to complete high school. Watson also reported in her research that one girl said when she was freshman at school and her peers said nothing but she could sense that they were looking at her and in a low voice saying she is pregnant. The bad part of this stigma and discrimination is that it does not come only from friends but also from teachers and community as a whole (Watson, 2014). In school nobody wanted to sit near her, even teacher did not involve her in the class, she felt like she has a contagious disease or that she has committed the worse crime of all. (Watson, 2014). People say a lot of things throughout the journey of adolescent mothers’ school, that you are not going to make it, they remind you that only a few makes it to collage. (Watson 2014).

It can therefore conclude that teen mothers do face a lot of discrimination and this affect them physically, psychologically, emotionally and in the end, it affects their education. The community is not helping at all in the education of teen mothers.

100% of the teachers and teenage mothers admitted that they know about back to school policy. And among the teachers 80% said they have never led the whole policy document neither have they seen it, they heard from meetings and radios about it, and they have no ideas on the processes to be done when re admitting the girls apart from that when a girl is

pregnant she has to be withdrawn for one year come back after delivery. 20% of the teachers said they have led part of it but not in details.

All the respondents said back to school programme is a very good initiative, and it gave chance to girls to lighten up their future. One of the teachers said *“back to school programme is a good idea, only that we need to have other trainings or programmes for these teen mothers, especially if we are there to re-admit them, they should be trained on what they can face and how to deal with them, so that their self-esteem should be boosted.”*(field work, 2019) The other teacher said back to school programme is good because she has witnessed a lot of girls successfully finishing up to university and they are now working as nurses, teachers, Politicians, lawyers etc.

50% of the teachers, 8.4% of teen mothers school schooling acknowledged the presents of some NGO's who help the teen mother in their education. They said these NGO's assist the girls with fees, learning materials, uniforms and shoes. The teachers also said there few organisations who help the teen mothers' child.

Teenage mothers do finish school despite the challenges they meet. (Cortina, 2010; Moore, 2014). Policies are not constantly applied in schools in learning institutions reason being lack of knowledge at district or school level and subjectivity and content specific decisions made about their application (Maluli& Bali, 2014). Teachers are not trained on how the policies work, or to make plan of action, support instruments or materials in the education institutions for the application of the policies (discussion for a global consultation, Nov, 2014).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from this research that most of the challenges teen mothers are facing are coming from peers, community, parents and even teachers. Teenage mothers are less supported in their studentship.

It can therefore be concluded that teen mothers who get support of peers, family and counsellor, have a high probability of finishing school successfully. Support from these people help to increase the resilience of teen mothers and also increase the academic achievement.

The programme of back to school is a good initiative and it gives a second chance to teen mother, but it only needs good implementation and follow up programmes and sensitisation.

Ad also it needs to look into and address the problems the teen mothers are facing after going back to school for it to be a successful programme.

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