

Administrative Support Factors Influencing Re-admission of Teenage Mothers in Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Case of Baringo County

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out the administrative support factors that determined the re-admission of teenage mothers in secondary schools in Kenya. The objectives that guided the study were: to determine the role of headteachers in implementing re-admission of teenage mothers, to determine the material support given to teenage mothers after re-admission and to find out the role of the guidance and counselling department in retention of teenage mothers in school. The findings indicated that the head teachers played a role by inviting girls who had dropped out of school due to pregnancy and gave them permission to go home whenever it was sought. Teenage mothers were encouraged to take part in games and the guidance and counselling department had counselling programs in place that provided the much needed psychosocial support to the teenage mothers. However, there was not much in terms of the material support that teenage mothers received in school apart from the provision of text books. The study recommended that there is need to strengthen the guidance and counselling department to improve retention of teenage mothers in school.

Keywords: Teenage mothers, re-admission, administrative support

1. Introduction

Education is everybody's human right. This simple fact is UNICEF's commitment to girls' education (UNICEF, 2004). It means that no girl however poor or desperate her country's situation is, is to be excluded from school. There is no acceptable excuse for denying her the opportunities to develop to her fullest potential. This is thus in full support of the convention on the rights of children that give every child, boy or girl a right to education irrespective of sex, religion, ethnic and social background, economic status or colour.

Maluwa-Banda (2004) argues that a girl, education is an investment that serves as a way to achieve education for all children. He adds that it has been broadly accepted as being a powerful tool for self-advancement and fulfilment of development outcomes for present and future generations of children. Chege and Sifuna (2006) noted that getting and keeping young people in school, especially girls, dramatically lowers their vulnerability to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), leads to them having greater independence, equips them to make decisions pertaining to their lives and provides them with higher income earning potential.

A UNICEF (1999) report confirmed that investing in girls' education leads not only to realisation of female educational attainment, but also benefits such as good mothers' and children's health, sustainable families, women's empowerment, democracy, income growth, and productivity. CREAW (2007) also reported that women who attain higher levels of education tend to marry later and prefer fewer children. Early marriage in Kenya is higher in rural areas and those areas are reported having lower levels of education. Moreover, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation could be brought to an end by increasing girls' access to education since educated women are less likely to allow their daughters to undergo "the cut" and are able to make their own choices.

Studies in Ghana between 1997 and 2002 indicated that the reason given for 70% of junior secondary school drop-outs was pregnancy (World Bank, 2008). It has been noted that an information gap among female students concerning sexuality and contraceptives is one of the factors resulting in pre-marital sex among adolescents. Teenagers are caught up in a vicious web of poverty, prostitution and misery as unplanned pregnancies rise. Waweru (2013, June 26). 2013 World Population Day's theme was 'Teenage Pregnancy' which meant to amplify the call to action to empower adolescent girls (10-19 years) with their rights to reproductive health services and education among others.

The Educator (2007) found out that pre-mature termination of girls' education has serious ramifications both at national and family level. It aggravates the problem of educational wastage. At family level it is found out that wastage of resources is apparent because by the time the girl drops out of school, she may not have acquired meaningful education. Further still the family is saddled with the responsibility of providing for both the adolescent mother and the baby. There is the social strain that result from the growing cases of abortion, observes Waweru in *The Standard*, 26th June, 2013. This not only hinders the effort to establish gender parity in schools, it also means more girls are edged out of the school system due to health complications or even death. There is also the high risk of these girls being infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, passed in July 1990, affirms in Article

11(6) that State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that girls who become pregnant before completing education are able to continue with their education.⁴ Pursuant to this a number of sub-Saharan countries including Cameroon, Madagascar, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia and Kenya, passed school re-entry policies allowing young mothers' return to schooling (Chilisa 2002). World Bank (2001) reported that early marriages and pregnancy can lead to girls dropping out of school. Countries including Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya have introduced policies which facilitate the re-admission of young mothers after giving birth. Its statistics shows that between January and June 2007, over 326 pupils in Malawi came back to school as a result of the re-admission policy and other countries however are still lacking behind. Kenya's school re-entry policy was passed in 1994, but despite the policy window of opportunity that allows the young mothers re-entry into education, it is acknowledged that very few of them do return to formal schooling (Lloyd and Mensch, 2008 and CSA, 2008).

Ministry of Education (MOE) (1998) on giving the guidelines for re-admission of teenage mothers gives the head teacher the responsibility of assisting teenage mothers to join other schools. FAWE (2001) contents that head of institutions have a responsibility to ensure provision of adequate, secure, attractive and comfortable facilities for boarding, dining, learning, sports, recreation and sanitation for girls and staff. Furthermore they have to institute empowerment programs for girls to help them build confidence, enhance their self esteem and nurture assertiveness. Yungungu and Wambua (2006) found out that the government recognizes that the role of a teacher is not only imparting knowledge but helping students learn to become agents of life transformation. As managers, the head teachers ensure efficiency in performance and proper utilization of teachers under them, implementation of curriculum and prudent use of resources. Omulako *et al.*, (2011) found out that there is willingness on the part of head teachers and teachers involved to be more understanding in addressing the concerns of girls in relation to their growth and development and experiences of the same.

Bloem (2000) argues that teachers may need professionals to come and inform them about handling teens and their situations, and they need in-service training to keep track of changes that the society is facing. The assumption is that teachers should help teens under such circumstances; unfortunately, some teachers consider the teen mothers' situation a private matter and none of their concern (Olivier, 2000). Because there is anecdotal information that some normal learners who miss school are assisted with the lessons they miss, we can conclude that teen mothers are in this case marginalized.

Grant and Hallman (2008) reported that teen parents often experience lack of resources and support both at home and at school prior to the pregnancy and more so afterward. Gachukia (2003) notes that although financial support was also recommended in the re-admission policy, several years down the line, no financial aid has reached teen mothers in secondary schools. Schools are expected to provide textbooks, learning materials and bursary to those girls who return to school (Wanyama and Simatwa, 2011).

Schools should, through their guidance and counseling department receive such girls and change the perception of viewing them as mothers and offer support and acceptance (Wanyama and Simatwa 2011). Guidance enables girls to accept what has happened and therefore change their attitude and be positive in life and hence work hard to perform well in their academics. Guiding and counseling teacher should provide counseling to the affected girls, parents and teachers who are dealing with these teenage mothers in the process of teaching and in other school activities such as games. The counseling is provided by the concerned teacher, through peer counselors or through invited guest speakers addressing the plight of teenage mothers. MDG Report (2012) shows how one of the Millenium Village Projects (MVP'S) called Sauri in Western Kenya have strengthened guidance and counseling programs with deliberate focus on adolescent reproductive health issues with a view to addressing the problem of teenage pregnancies that cause girls to drop out of school.

According to MOE (1998), one of the guidelines on re-admission of teenage mothers is that girls who become pregnant should be admitted back to school unconditionally and that head teachers, sub-county and county education officers should be directed to assist such girls to join other schools to avoid psychological and emotional suffering. Omulako *et al.*, (2011) observed that many school head teachers were not willing to re-admit such girls back to school but could help them gain admission in other schools. However on the ground it was observed that head teachers rarely recommend these girls for re-admission in other schools.

1.1 Objectives

1. To determine the role of headteachers in implementing re-admission of teenage mothers.
2. To determine the material support given to teenage mothers after re-admission.
3. To find out the role of the guidance and counselling department in retention of teenage mothers in school.

2. Methodology

The research design adopted was descriptive survey involving the mixed method where both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. The study was carried out in Baringo County In the study the target

population was all head teachers, all guiding and counseling teachers and form three students in mixed and girls' secondary schools in Baringo County. The study adopted a stratified sampling technique whereby the strata in this case are the pure girls' schools and the mixed schools. The data collection instruments that were used in this study were questionnaire and interview schedules.

3. Findings

The study findings showed that majority (56.6%) of the students believed that head teachers invited girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy for re-admission. This implies that head teacher encourages teenage mothers to join schools after they drop out due to pregnancies. The government has a policy in place for re-admission of teenage mothers into the school system and therefore the head teachers are mandated to re-admit teenage mothers into the school system. Kenya is among a handful of African governments that have put in place policies on pregnant girls within the education system. The policies on schoolgirl pregnancy have been categorized as either continuation or re-entry policies (Chilisa, 2002).

Further, majority (55.6%) of the students were of the view that head teachers readmitted girls who had dropped out of school due to pregnancy. This implies that head teachers in public secondary schools in Baringo County adhered to the government policy on re-admission of teenage mothers as indicated by MOE (1998).

However, majority (52.6%) of the students believed that head teachers usually gave permission to re-admitted teenage mothers to go home whenever they requested. This shows that head teacher gave support to teenage mothers and therefore encouraged re-admission. Similarly, majority (81.6%) of the students reported that head teachers encouraged re-admitted teenage mothers to participate in games. Participation in games could improve on the students' self esteem and therefore making them improve on other fields like academic performance and further enhance their retention in the school system. This supports the observation made by Sabo, Miller, Farrell, Melnick & Barnes, (1999) who indicated that athletic participation indirectly improved a young female's self-esteem. Further, 52.0% of the students were of the view that head teachers in their schools directed re-admitted teenage mothers to repeat their previous class. The students' views were found to concur with the findings of Omulako *et al.*, (2011) who found out in his studies that head teachers did not compel re-admitted girls to repeat their previous class. The study findings further showed that 62.5% of the students believed that their head teachers do not help re-admitted girls pay for their medical treatment. Further, majority (81.3%) of the students reported that their head teachers did not help re-admitted girls with money for their upkeep an implication that these students are not favoured over other students but instead are treated equally as other students.

Similarly, 66.4% of the students indicated that head teachers in public secondary schools in Baringo County did not help re-admitted girls raise funds for their school fees and uniform. However, about half of the students (49.7%) were for the idea that head teachers encouraged teachers to give textbooks to readmitted teenage mothers. This implies that in most of the schools sampled, head teachers usually encouraged teenage mothers to read more books to compensate for the time they lost during the pregnancy period. This finding is supported by Canada Ministry of Education report (1998) which indicated that teenage mothers also need to be informed of all the resources and options available to them so that they can find the best environment in which to continue their studies and to implement their plans. Similarly, majority (53.0%) of the students reported that head teachers encouraged readmitted girls to read more on dangers of engaging in pre-marital sexual relationships by providing them with reading materials. This implies that head teachers encouraged these teenage mothers to be focused in their education and avoid repeated pregnancies hence be retained in the school system up to completion.

Concerning the role of the guidance and counseling department in the re-admission of teenage mothers, it was found out that 75.0% of the sampled students in public secondary schools in the county reported that guidance and counseling department in their schools invited guest speakers to talk on unsafe sex with an aim of making girls in schools to avoid unsafe sex which could result to pregnancies hence hindering them from progressing in their schooling. This is one way of supporting teenage mothers to avoiding subsequent pregnancies while still in school. This concurs with Boulden (2001), who argued that one of the most effective ways to minimise the risk or difficulties of teenage mothers is to support them to stay connected to schooling. She further noted that in doing so, the possibility of repeat pregnancy during the teenage years can dramatically be reduced by remaining at school or in some other form of education.

On counseling programs, majority at 53.6% agreed that their schools had in place counseling programs for teenage mothers in their schools as an indication of psychosocial support to teenage mothers in school as a way of enhancing their well being and hence be retained in the school system.

The highest percentage of 59.5 agreed that their head teachers, guiding and counseling teachers and teachers advise teenage mothers to work hard in their academic work. This means that the teenage mothers are given moral support to work hard academically so as to perform well despite the fact that they have the additional responsibility of motherhood.

The Study Findings Showed that the strong administrative support factors that influenced re-admission of teenage mothers were; head teachers' invitation of girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy for re-admission, re-admission of girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy by the head teacher, head teachers' directing teachers to give text books to re-admitted girls, provision of reading materials for re-admitted girls that help in understanding more on the dangers of engaging in pre-marital sexual relationships and giving permission to re-admitted girls to go home whenever they request. Also the guidance and counseling department played a major role in the retention of teenage mothers in school upon re-admission.

It further emerged that there was statistically significant and positive relationship between administrative support factors and re-admission of teenage mothers in secondary schools an implication that increased administrative support factors leads to increase in the re-admission of teenage mothers in secondary schools and the vice versa.

The study recommended that there is need for the strengthening of guidance and counseling departments by head teachers in secondary schools to counter check on stigmatization of teenage mothers and therefore enhance their concentration on academic work and to increase the retention rate of teenage mothers in school.

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