

Barriers to Effective Parental Participation in Teenage Mothers' Education in Mixed Day Secondary Schools: A Case of Wareng' District, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The Government of Kenya has sought to address the challenges facing the education of the girl child through a range of policy initiatives. In spite of such policies, 13, 0000 girls are estimated to drop out of school annually due to pregnancy alone. All these efforts that support girl child education are devoid of a parent's participation who is a key stakeholder in the education of a child. Parent participation in Kenyan schools is still low. The purpose of the study was to examine the barriers to effective parental participation in re-admission of teenage mothers in secondary schools in Kenya. Data from teenage mothers and other targeted groups was obtained in a descriptive survey design. The sample was made up of 74 respondents with 23 teenage mothers, 23 parents of the teenage mothers and 28 head teachers. The study employed saturation sampling technique to select the 28 head teachers who are the major decision makers in teenage mother re-admission. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to enable the selection of both the girls who had recently dropped out of school and their parents in Kenya. The study findings revealed that barriers to parental participation were teenage mothers' unwillingness to return to school, the schools' failure to adequately sensitize parents of teenage mothers and lack of follow up on teenage mothers who were at home. Parents' attributes such as age, education levels, socio-economic status, negative attitude towards the girl child and parents' health status significantly influenced parental participation in teenage mother education. The study recommends deliberate actions to inform head teachers on the 'Re-entry Policy' and highlight on the role of parents in the re-admission process of teenage mothers. Parent should be advised on the importance of reconciling with their daughters and taking care of their babies. Mechanisms should be put in place for following up teenage mothers who did not return to school. This should translate to better employment opportunities for the girl child in the future. This study will help in developing policies geared towards active parental involvement in girl education to improve their quality of education.

Keywords: teenage mothers' education, readmission, parental participation.

INTRODUCTION

In Sub Saharan Africa, there has been an increase in enrolment for both boys and girls. In some countries such as Kenya, enrolment at primary level is almost the same for both boys and girls with the gap narrowing in recent years. The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in Kenya in 2003, led to a dramatic increase in enrolment rates for both boys and girls. At national levels, primary enrolment rose from 5.9 to 8.9 million (Ministry of Education, [MOE] 2007). In 2008, the Government of Kenya introduced Free Secondary Education (FSE). This policy saw enrolment in secondary schools rise from 1.4 million in 2008 to the current enrolment of 1.8 million. In response to the situation, Government of Kenya (GOK) took measures such as expanding the existing secondary schools to a minimum of three

streams, so as to enhance access, retention and completion at secondary school levels (MOE, 2008). In spite of the high enrolment, there are higher drop out and lower completion rates among girls (Gathigah, 2010). In the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) results of 2011, there were 46,927 male students who sat for the exam more than girls, with the national percentage ratio of boys to girls standing at 55.65:44.35.

Studies on the role of parents has shown a consistent, positive relationship between parents' engagement in their children's education and student outcomes, such as lower drop out and truancy rates (National Parent Teacher Association, [NPTA] 2000). According to National Centre on Secondary Education and Transition [NCSET] (2006), middle school and high

school students whose parents remain involved tend to, among other things, make better transitions, have increased motivation and better self-esteem, experience lower rates of suspension, have higher graduation rates and advance to post-secondary education. They also have decreased use of drugs and alcohol and fewer instances of violent behaviour. Engle (1989) suggests that students whose parents remained involved through high school were much more likely to complete college. Furthermore, research has also shown that parental attitude and support has a great deal of influence on girls' participation and level of success attained in education (FAWE, 2009). Unfortunately, parents face a number of challenges in their children's education. Dauber and Epstein (1993) state that the two most important obstacles to parents' ability to become actively involved in their children's education include school and teacher practices. Additionally, NCSET (2006) supports this argument that teacher attitudes may be an obstacle to parental involvement. These studies however focused mainly on obstacles to parental involvement in the performance and achievement of children who are in school. The current study focused on parental challenges in the re-admission of teenage mothers who have already dropped out of school. The current study however sought to find out whether teenage mothers who have already dropped of school and are at home, invite parental participation. Inadequate time in some developed nations such as America and Canada has also been cited as one of the obstacles to parental involvement in school (Roberts, 2005a). Many families are on a tight schedule that allows for few additions to the list of commitments. The current study however examined whether time is a factor in parental involvement in a teenage mothers' education in a district in an economy of a developing country. In this study, parental involvement entailed the following activities: taking care of the teenage mother's baby, reducing domestic chores to create study time for the teenage mother, paying fees, visiting schools, offering guidance and counseling, providing learning resources and a conducive learning environment at home, enforcing discipline, and being role models.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In an attempt to encourage girls' education, the Kenyan government has put in place some measures that could foster more enrolment and completion of studies at various levels by the female students. They include the introduction of the 'Re-entry Policy' in the mid-1990s, provision of free sanitary towels in schools, the school funding programmes such as Free Primary and Secondary Education, and increased availability of bursaries, through Constituency Development Fund (CDF). In spite of all these policies 10,000 to 13, 0000 girls are estimated to drop out of school annually due to pregnancy alone. All

these efforts that support girl child education are devoid of a parent's participation who is a child's first teacher, counselor, among other responsibilities. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine barriers to effective parental participation in the re-admission of teenage mothers.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the challenges of parental participation in promoting the re-admission of teenage mothers in mixed day secondary schools. To address this issue, the following three specific objectives were formulated:

- i. To determine student-based factors that inhibits parental participation in the re-admission of teenage mothers in mixed day secondary schools.
- ii. To examine household factors that limit parental participation in the re-admission of teenage mothers in mixed day secondary schools.
- iii. To find out school-based factors that influence parental participation in the re-admission of teenage mothers in mixed day secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student-Based Factors and Parental Involvement

Student-based factors are likely to play an important role in teenage mothers' possibility of re-enrolment in school because once a teenage mother does not want to go back to school, re-admission may never be realized despite the parents' willingness to take them back to school and the school's readiness in accepting to re-admit her. Student-based factors entail gender roles, age and teenage mother willingness to go back to school. A study by Forum for Africa Women Educationists (FAWE) on parents' and community attitudes towards girls' participation in and access to education and science, mathematics and technology subjects, indicates that such gender roles as domestic chores done by girls in the long run inhibit their performance in education. The study which was carried out Ghana, Tanzania and Cameroon only examined the impact of gender roles on performance of science, mathematics and technology subjects. FAWE however does not assess the influence of gender roles on girls who have babies because they fall in the category of students with special needs and are in need of special attention (MOEST, 2006, Gender Policies).

Influence of Household Factors on Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is one of the most important contributors to school completion and success (NCSET, 2006). In the USA for instance, a new bill was introduced to the House of Representatives that recognizes the crucial role that families, and particularly parents, have on children's academic achievement. The goal of the Family Engagement in Education Act of 2011 is to provide incentives for schools and districts to engage parents in children's

education with the hopes of closing the achievement gap. However, The National Parent Teacher Association has developed a document that describes barriers that typically keep families from school involvement. They include inadequate time needed to establish effective partnerships, school organizations and practices that do not favour family participation, lack of information on how school staff and parents should work together, differences in educational level, language and cultural styles between parents and school staff, and finally lack of external support for family-school partnerships (NPTA, 2000).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework positions research in the discipline or subject area in which one is working and provides an orientation to a study (McMillan et al., 2006). This study was found on Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. The theory was applied in order to help show challenges of parental involvement in teenage mothers' secondary education in schools and hopefully show ways of improving the same.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was a descriptive survey using qualitative and quantitative approaches, where the quantitative approach utilized questionnaires whereas the qualitative approach utilized interview schedules. The interview was scheduled to take approximately two months.

Sampling Procedures and Size

Various sampling procedures were employed to sample the schools and the target population. First, stratified sampling was done to identify District Public Schools from among the Provincial and private schools. A current list of schools in the district was obtained from the District Education Office. The mixed day public secondary schools, also known as district public schools formed 80% of the total schools in the district hence providing an effective sample. The study then utilized saturation (census) sampling technique to select head teachers of the 28 mixed day secondary schools in Wareng District.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection was done using questionnaires and interviews. The personal interviews were appropriate when collecting material from the selected parents as the language of the interview could be adapted to the educational levels of the parents.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Qualitative data was analyzed qualitatively using content analysis based on analysis of meanings and implications emanating from respondents information. The analyzed data were presented as

readable narrative descriptions and their accompanying interpretations.

Household Factors That Limit Parental Participation in Teenage Mother Re-Admission

The success of a teenage mother's re-admission is strongly pegged on a parent's support and ability to do so. With the arrival of a baby, a parent's backing is very instrumental. Somebody has to be home and nurse the new born if the teenage mother has to go back to school. The interviews among parents of the teenage mothers revealed that failure to seek re-admission is caused, by among other factors, the lack of someone to take care of the baby. 70 % of the teenage mother parents- table 4.1 reported to be unemployed. This category includes manual laborers' and the dependent group who sometimes wait for their relatives and spouses to support them financially. The nature of a parent's occupation greatly determines how much time and resources they can avail for the nursing of the baby. This observation is consistent with Roberts (2005b) that in the developed nations such as America and Canada, inadequate time is a barrier in parents' involvement in their children's education. Nancy* a teenage mother's parent shared her experience on how her occupation deprived her daughter the opportunity to seek re-admission:

I was willing to take back to school, but one thing that could not allow me to sit at home and watch over her baby is that I had to go out so as to fend for the rest of the family... in fact I don't have a good job. I am a manual labourer. If I had enough money, I would have hired a house help to watch over this baby as the mother goes back to school.

It is evident therefore that economic hardships in families coupled with low levels of income contribute to a parent's failure to support teenage mother re-admission. This is an observation that is consistent with Alderman and King (1998) that girls' education is particularly sensitive to fees. This view is supported by teenage mothers who claimed to know others who managed to go back to school after getting babies because their parents have 'well-paying jobs'. Asked about their occupation, 66.7 % of the parents interviewed revealed that they were unemployed. Parental involvement in the education of teenage mothers gets more restricted when the family sizes are taken into consideration. In one special instance where the teenage mother could not be supported by her mother in nursing the baby, the mother had her own children - nine in number - to take care of and complained that she could not take more from 'another woman'. Family sizes also affected the amount of individualized attention that teenage mothers were accorded. Depending on the number of siblings a teenage mother had, this

determined how much support she could receive once out of school. To some, once admitted in school this is an opportunity that should be guarded zealously and should not be lost whatsoever. Beatrice* brought it out well:

*As much as I wanted to go back to school,
my mother kept reminding me that
there were other children to be attended to
in the family...that I had lost my
chance.*

Research has indicated that problems in parent-child relationship may alienate adolescents and encourage them to seek comfort, acceptance and consolation through sexual activity (Njau & Meme 1997). A parent's realization of the daughters' status became a serious problem that some could not forgive and accept their daughters thereafter and consequently failed to support their education endeavour. As revealed in this study, a parent's reaction when she/he realized that the daughter was pregnant was characterized with anger. Asked how they felt when they were informed of their daughter's status, 100% of the parents interviewed expressed disappointment. Milka's* father lamented:

*When I discovered that my daughter was
pregnant, I was very angry. I felt disappointed.
I wished I could kill her and forget that I
once had a child... I felt so much pain...
The news was unbearable...*

Different parents responded differently in as far as supporting re-admission of their daughters is concerned. Some parents were forgiving enough to support their daughters' re-admission, whereas others were too hostile and could not. Sarah*, a victim of a parent's intolerance and unforgiveness mourned:

*The reason I am at home today is because my
father could not forgive me...before
I dropped out of school he would organize
with his employer for my fees to be paid
And later be deducted from his salary...but
after I got the baby he stopped making
those kind of arrangements.*

This implies that parental participation in the education of teenage mothers goes beyond financial support. When parents expressed uncontrolled anger, some girl mothers got so scared that they chose to run away from their homes. This observation is similar to Twenge's (2002) that close family members of teenage mothers do not make it easier for them. Some snap a judgment of immorality on them. In the current study some had engaged in a kind of trial marriage with the father of the child, while others had gone to live with relatives. When asked about factors that could hinder teenage mothers from seeking re-admission, 65% of head teachers, agreed that unforgiving parents were to blame. Previous research has cited the failure by most parents in some modern

African homes to discuss sexuality matters with their children as a common practice. This has been blamed on the introduction of Western education and religion that has seemingly taken over the traditional way of disseminating this knowledge, which was mostly done through initiation ceremonies. Batwa, (1986) states that such customs have been abandoned and/or banned with no adequate substitute. As revealed in this study, minimal counseling was done by the parents even after the daughter's first pregnancy. Furthermore, for some parents, getting a baby is an indicator that their daughter is old enough to understand issues, hence the failure to counsel and recognize her as a child with special needs. The pregnancy therefore serves as a sharp departure from childhood as some parents now view their daughters as adults taking motherhood roles. These girls are expected to behave like 'mature' people far ahead of their actual ages. With this kind of perception, teenage mothers get very little social support which entails guidance and counseling from their parents, more so the fathers. There is a tendency, among the teen mothers to further engage in illicit relationships with the opposite sex as a way of finding solace. This partly explains why some of the teen mothers interviewed had more than one child.

In the event of getting another child, teenage mothers were squarely blamed by their parents. This was followed by withdrawal of any financial support which is very crucial in the re-admission of the teenage mother. John*, a parent to one of the teen mothers complained:

*I was ready to take care of her baby the very
first time, but before she could go
back, the mother informed me that she was
pregnant again...this came to me as a
shock. I thought she was old enough to have
learnt from her earlier experience...
I could not pay her fees anymore. This was
somebody's wife!*

In as much as teen mother re-admission requires the support of both parents, the study findings presented in figure 2 revealed that 66.67% of the respondents were females, while the males represented 33.3%. In households where both parents were present, the males were hesitant in participating in the interview; instead they preferred the female parents to be interviewed. Negative attitude that many male parents have towards the education of girls was evident, more so towards teenage mothers. Research has indicated that many parents and community members have the attitude that educating girls is a waste of time and money (FAWE, 2009). This can be clearly captured in a male parent's words:

*It is better to educate a boy because most
girls are very foolish, they get themselves
pregnant and bring more mouths to
feed...Why should I waste my money?*

This belief was also in the knowledge of the teen mothers as some of the parents would out rightly tell them that they could not be sent back to school for fear that they would repeat the same, hence wasting their money. It is worth noting that most African households being

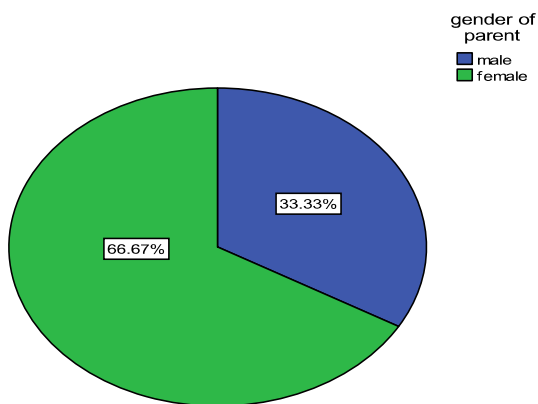


Figure 1: Gender of parents
Source: Author's own compilation, 2013

Patriarchal means that decision making and material support are directed and given by the male. Even where the mother is willing and able to support the teen mother, her decision and willingness is thwarted by the husband, whose word is always final

The effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic on families cannot be underestimated in affecting the education of a teen mother. In one special case, the parents' knowledge of their HIV status had pushed them into a state of hopelessness. With this, the teenage mother's education was no longer a priority. This situation was well captured in the mother's words:

As for my daughter, she can try her luck in her husband's home...In this situation, I have so much to worry about in life...

This resigned attitude is a clear indication of how the knowledge of HIV status can be an impediment in the education of teenage mothers who require maximum support from their parents. Regarding the age of parents, an examination of the results revealed that majority of the respondents were of the age brackets of between 46-55 years, constituting 42.9 % similar to those over 55 years which was also 42.9%. Age group of between 30 and 45 years old constituted only 14.3 %of the respondents. Considering the fact that the study was concerned with girl drop outs in secondary schools who were aged between 19 and 23 years old, this is a pointer that the expected age bracket of parents was interviewed

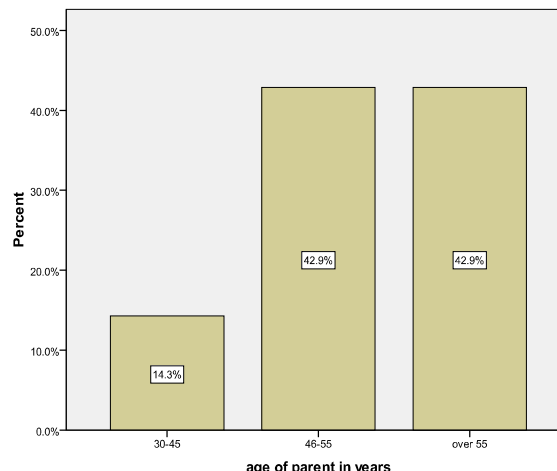


Figure 2: Age of parents
Source: Author's own compilation, 2013

A remarkable observation was made on the parents aged 55 years and above. Only 30% of them paid their children's fees. The remaining 70% had their older sons and daughters pay for the younger ones, who in this case comprised of the teen mothers who are of significance in this study. In one case where the teen mother's parent was willing to baby sit her daughter's child, the brothers who had been entrusted with the responsibility of paying her school fees were no longer ready to financially support the teen mother in her education endeavour. Purity*, a victim of her brothers' tussle mourned:

My parents are too old and they do not have a stable source of income.

In fact they depend on my big brothers for their survival... The same

brothers used to pay my fees but they are not interested in my education anymore... though they are wealthy.

Purity's* case was even worsened by the fact that she was being supported by her brothers, and most African societies being patriarchal, the brothers' word seemed to be final. In fact one of the elder brothers had her own daughter who became pregnant while in school, but she managed to go to back to school after delivery of the baby because he was willing to support her. This implied that the likes of Purity who were at the mercies of their guardians, the moment they got children, they were now regarded as their parents' burdens, and hence their chances of being re-admitted got limited. The lack of goodwill by the brothers therefore meant the end of her secondary education. Another obstacle in teen mother re-admission was the parents' education level. The results showed that 47.6%, 26.6% and 9.5% of the respondents had primary, secondary and tertiary education respectively. 14.3% reported to have no formal education. It is evident that the majority of the respondents had primary school education as the

highest level of academic qualification, which was 47.6%. This gave an implication that the probability of parental participation in teenage mother education in the study area decreases as the level of education of the parent decreases

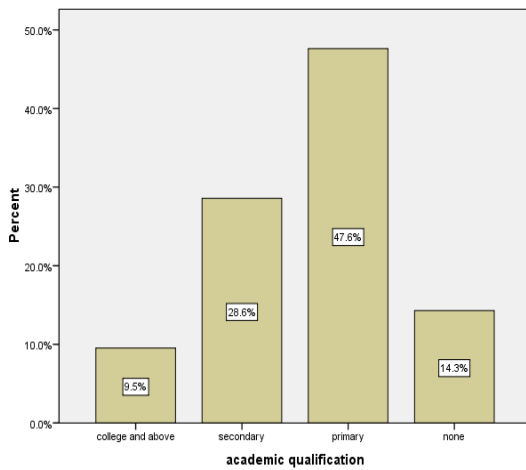


Figure 3: Parents' level of education
Source: Author's own compilation, 2013

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study investigated the barriers to effective parental participation in teenage mothers' secondary education in Wareng' District of Uasin Gishu County. The results of the data revealed that teenage mothers themselves discourage their parents from supporting them in the re-admission process. The decision to go away from home and stay with the biological father of her child, the fear to be embarrassed in school and the worries over once self-image are some of the factors that hindered parental participation. House-hold factors that were found out to inhibit parental participation were family's economic status, family size, parents' intolerance towards teenage mothers, parents' failure to counsel teenage mothers after getting baby, negative attitude held by male parents towards teenage mothers, HIV/AIDS, parents' ages and parents' educational levels. Schools-based factors that hindered parental participation included schools' failure to adequately prepare parents of teenage mothers, lack of follow-up by schools on teenage mothers who were at home and schools' failure to counsel students who were in school so as to be able to accept and accommodate teenage mothers when they were re-admitted.

Recommendations

The following policy recommendations were therefore made to improve parental participation in teenage mother secondary education if they are implemented or adopted:

1. The study recommends deliberate actions by The Ministry of Education to inform head teachers on

the 'Re-entry Policy' and highlight on the role of parents in the re-admission process of teenage mothers.

2. Head teachers should consider setting up gender responsive guidance and counseling programs to support teenage mothers from the time they are spotted through the time they will be released to go home. This should make them feel accepted and build a high self-esteem that should make them want to come back to school after the delivery of a baby.
3. Parents should be encouraged by head teachers, civil servants, churches, Non-Governmental Organizations and the government to forgive and reconcile with their daughters and consider taking care of their babies to allow girls to return to school. Thus an effort to improve adult education is paramount.
4. Schools should mitigate stigma by counseling the rest of the students on the need to accept teenage mothers so as to create a need for them to accept to return to school and continue learning.
5. The Ministry of Education should put in place mechanisms for following up teen mothers who for some reason did not return to school.

Baby-sitting services to be organized by the school to allow teenage mothers to come with their children to school, such that when it is time to breast feed them it is done with ease hence promoting their concentration while in class

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