

TO EXPLORE VIEWS OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ON READMISSION OF TEENAGE MOTHERS IN THE FORMAL SCHOOLING SYSTEM IN TANZANIA

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore views of teachers and students on readmission of teenage mothers in the formal schooling system in Tanzania. The study was conducted in Songea municipality in Ruvuma Region. The population of the study comprises the head of schools, teachers and students from three secondary schools. The research used purposive and simple random sampling technique to select 60 students, 9 teachers, and 3 head of schools. The study used qualitative techniques through which data was collected using interviews, focus group discussion and documentary review. The study concludes that the government should make efforts to create awareness through counselling and prepare teachers and students to receive teenage mothers in their school. Furthermore, the study recommends a need for the government through the ministry of education science and technology to prepare a good school environment for the reception of teenage mothers. This can be achieved by preparing special counselling programme and classes or schools to accommodate teenage mothers.

Keywords: teachers, students, readmission, teenage mothers, formal schooling system.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, teenage pregnancy remains a great threat to girls' education since it mostly culminates in drop out and marriage; with the problem being graver in low-income countries (UNFPA, 2017). It has been asserted that 17 million teenage girls give birth every year globally with about 95% from low and middle-income countries; meanwhile 20,000 teenage girls give birth every day in developing countries, translating to 7.3 million teenage births in a year. The demand for education for all, quality education and completion of studies has been the essence of discussion regarding the perception of educational stakeholders towards the readmission of teenage mothers in secondary education (World Bank, 2018).

For quite some time it has been emphasized to all countries by the UN since 1948 through its article 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 2017). But there is evidence of high rates of teenage pregnancies in Sub-Saharan Africa coupled with ineffective policies of adolescent mothers to go back to school after giving birth (Population Council, 2017). In addition, it is noted that access and completion of secondary schools in third world countries specifically to girl-child is a complex phenomenon (HakiElimu, 2020).

In Tanzania it is reported that, drop out due to pregnancies increased from 6.8% in 2016 to 21.9% in 2018 and highest dropped out is in form four classes. Further, it has been noted that Tanzania is among the countries with highest adolescent pregnancy rates, with an estimated 23 percent of girls between 15-19 years old beginning childbearing. In this context evidences shows early child bearing places girls' health at risk as adolescents in 15 to 19 years are likely to die in child birth as well as being prone to seek unsafe abortion procedures which have caused death and disability (URT, 2018).

Tanzania adopted a new policy under the pressure from UNICEF and other civil organizations to change its 2015 educational policy on pregnant students to allow them to continue with studies during pregnancy and after giving birth. In October 2019, the government initiated the policy changes and pregnant students were allowed to sit for the national examinations in primary and secondary schools and developed new guidelines that would assist teenage mothers in returning to school after delivery, (URT 2018).

Tanzania adopted the re-admission policy in 2010 for the aim of allowing pregnant students to continue with their studies after delivery. Yet teenage mothers are not given an equal chance to complete their studies for decades, pregnant and teenage mothers have been forced to drop out of school. On November 24, 2021, the Ministry of education, science and technology through her Minister announced that girls who had dropped out of school because of pregnancy could return to school immediately, (Global Development the Guardian). This change allows girls to re-enrol within two years after giving birth. Furthermore, the adoption of educational training policy and subsequent launching of the education sector development programme (2010) were fundamental in reforming education in the country, (URT 2016). This paper therefore explored the views of teachers and students on readmission of teenage mothers in the formal schooling system in Tanzania

Statement of the Problem

Teenage pregnancies are alarming worldwide. 17 million teenage girls give birth annually worldwide with 95% of the pregnancies from mid and low-income countries where 20,000 teenagers give birth every day in developing countries, including Tanzania. Available literature indicates that girls' pregnancy in secondary schools is a serious and widespread problem in many developing countries (World Bank, 2018). In Tanzania, it has been reported that 7,000 primary and secondary teenage girls drop out of school due to pregnancy (URT, 2011). It is also estimated that 23 percent of girls between 15-19 years old begin childbearing in Tanzania where the reported age group is supposed to be in secondary schools. The impact of teenage pregnancy and motherhood on access to secondary education to the nation and the community is the regeneration of illiteracy, poverty and general underdevelopment of the nation, (URT 2018).

Although Tanzania has signed international charter on the right to education and more emphasis in the national constitution and internal education policies, but much has not been done to ensure teenage mothers' access and complete their primary and secondary education cycles, (URT 2018). A call for readmission of teenage mothers to access secondary education in public secondary schools recently is an issue that fuels more investigation after expansion of secondary education and the global demand for the right to education. Therefore, this study explored the views of teachers and students towards readmission of teenage mothers in the formal schooling system in Tanzania.

Research Question

What are the views of teachers and students on readmitting teenage mothers in the formal schooling system.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

In this study cognitive dissonance theory best used to describe issues concerned with the views of teacher and students towards the readmission of teenage mothers in formal schooling in public secondary schools. Cognitive dissonance theory explains the relationships between the motivation, perceptions and cognitions of an individual (Festinger, 1962). Cognitive dissonance theory began by postulating that pairs of cognitions can be either relevant or irrelevant to one another. If two cognitions are relevant and concurring, there is consonance. However, if two cognitions are relevant, but conflicting, the existence of dissonance would cause psychological discomfort and motivate the individual to act upon this. The greater the magnitude of dissonance, the greater the pressure for the individual to reduce the dissonance. The existence of dissonance and the mechanisms that humans used to cope with it captured Festinger's interest in developing cognitive dissonance theory.

More specifically, the theory explains how rewards affect attitudes and behaviours and how behaviours and motivations affect cognitions and perceptions. Cognitive Dissonance theory made a major contribution to the concept of consistency (Cooper, 2017). The theory is different compared to other consistency theories as it defines dissonance and consonance in

relation to a specific cognition, which usually is related to behaviour, issues Cognitive Dissonance theory made it possible to identify the determinants of attitudes and beliefs, the internalization of values, the consequences of decisions, the effects of disagreement among individuals and other important psychological processes (Miller, 2006).

The existence of a dissonance will cause mental discomfort and motivate the individual to reduce the dissonance and restore consonance to reduce the dissonance, the individual will try to reduce it as well as avoid situations or information that are likely to increase the dissonance.

In simple terms, a dissonance is an inconsistency in cognitive elements, which can be knowledge, opinions, beliefs, or the behaviours of an individual. The existence of such inconsistency causes mental discomfort and motivates the individual to take some actions to reduce or eliminate it. We have millions of cognitions, many of which are in our awareness but most are not. Dissonance can arise from many sources, including, but not limited to, logical inconsistency, cultural differences, contradictions between specific opinions and their related general stand, and a disconfirmation of a past experience to a current situation (Festinger, 1962).

Empirical Literature Review.

Views of Teachers and Students on Teenage Pregnancy and Teenage Mothers

Teachers perceive teen pregnancy differently (positive or negative). Most studies (Chigona and Chetty, 2017); emphasize the way teachers treat pregnant teens and teenage mothers in schools. Some teachers assert that adolescent pregnancy is certainly a sensitive topic. The teacher's concern is that the stigma of pregnancy only affects the mother, whereas for many young men it is a mark of honour. Other teachers feel differently about teen pregnancy and teen mothers. Most of the time, teachers are sad and are not willing to help pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent mothers at school. They believe that their job is teaching and not engaging in midwifery and that school is for students not pregnant teenagers. Ferguson (2011)

According to Mpanza (2016), teachers indicated that the school is for learners not for pregnant girls or mothers. Furthermore, adolescent pregnancy has been associated with low success rates and low occupational aspiration. This behaviour entices teachers to feel bad about teenage pregnancy as they reveal that it lowers the school's pass rate.

Teachers cited in (Masemola 2017) argue that it is difficult to teach when the needs of pregnant students and mothers must be constantly recognized. Teachers still say they are reluctant to deal with pregnant mothers. (Chigona & Chetty 2017), opines that teachers give less attention to some pregnant teenagers in class and argue that pregnant teenagers hamper them in covering the curriculum. Teachers' perceptions, based on literature, appear to be generally negative. The teachers appeared sad, unhappy and angry about the continued pregnancy and teenage mothers in school. Consequently, teachers prefer not to help pregnant adolescents in school. On the other hand, high quality relationships between adolescent mothers and their teachers could in theory serve as protective functions as mothers try to balance the demands and challenges of school and parenting, (Masemola).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative research approach. Creswell (2009) asserts that, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to enter the respondents' personal world in order to gain deeper and clear understanding of their knowledge, experience and feelings. The study was conducted in Songea municipality in Ruvuma Region.

The population of the study comprises the head of school, teachers and students from three secondary schools which were selected. The research used purposive and simple random sampling technique to select 60 students, 9 teachers, and 3 head of schools. The data was collected using different data collection techniques like interviews, focus group discussion and documentary review. Data had been analysed by using descriptive words to bring meaning to the study. The qualitative information obtained from heads of schools, teachers and students by interview and focus group discussion and from documentary review. The researcher used qualitative content analysis to present qualitative information from the interviews and Focus Group Discussion.

Social researchers are bound to ethical considerations in their studies. Confidentiality was also highly observed by the researcher as data and all information collected from the respondents were not shared anywhere. Data from this study was used for academic purposes only and not any other purpose.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Views of Teachers and Students on Readmission of Teenage Mothers in Formal Schooling System.

The study explored the views of teachers and students on readmission of teenage mothers in the formal schooling system. In order to obtain relevant and accurate information in the field researcher applied interview and focused group discussion. The interview and focused group discussion questions based on the view of teachers and students towards the readmission of teenage mothers in the formal school system where participant were the heads of school, teachers and students. The findings have been presented and discussed under different subsections as follows:

Provision of Education

This study has investigated the provision of education as the views of teachers and students on readmission of teenage mothers in the formal schooling system. This is due to the fact that education is an important tool towards individual as well as community at large. In view of this point the head of school X commented that:

The government as well as organizations that support readmission of teenage mothers should provide education on the importance of readmission and the way to carry out the whole process. This education should be provided to teachers on how to handle this group of students, to other students to succumb to their fellows. Education should also be provided to victims, the teen mothers on how to cope with the situation of studying with their younger ones. This will create mutuality between these three important groups in the school premises. (Interview, Head of School X, July 2022)

In an interview with one teacher from school Y threw his complains to the government to establish this programme without consulting, seeking opinion and also educating teachers and the entire community on how to go about the readmission of teenage mothers by commenting that:

We do not know how to carry out this programme; we do not know why the government has agreed to run this programme, this will burden and increase the load to our carrier. This field is just pressed with what to do instead of being negotiated too. (Interview, Teacher from School Y, July 2022)

Therefore, the two quotations above indicate that provision of education to teachers, and students enable everyone to cope with the negative impact of teen mothers' readmission.

The present study finding concur with the previous study conducted which shows that there is a need to educate both teachers and student on the importance and the best way to help teenage mothers while in school. Teachers cited in (Masemola 2017) argue that it is difficult to teach when the needs of pregnant students and mothers must be constantly recognized. Teachers still say they are reluctant to deal with pregnant mothers. (Chigona & Chetty 2017), opines that teachers give less attention to some pregnant teenagers in class and argue that pregnant teenagers hamper them in covering the curriculum. Teachers' perceptions, based on literature, appear to be generally negative. The teachers appeared sad, unhappy and angry about the continued pregnancy and teenage mothers in school. Consequently, teachers prefer not to help pregnant adolescents in school. On the other hand, high quality relationships between adolescent mothers and their teachers could in theory serve as protective functions as mothers try to balance the demands and challenges of school and parenting. (Masemola 2017). All these show that there is a need of educating both teachers and students about readmission of teen mothers.

Establishment of Special Program

In this subsection, the researcher interviewed participants and the findings discovered that there is a need to establish a special programme for teen mothers instead of letting them back into the formal school system. This was firstly cemented by the head of school Z when interviewed as;

The teen mothers need to have special programmes that will enable them to receive different training for a specific period of time so that they can have a chance to serve their children effectively. (Interview, Head of School 2, School Z, July 2022).

Most studies show that teachers are not supporting teenage and pregnant mother back to school otherwise advising on having special programme for them. (Chigona and Chetty, 2017); emphasize the way teachers treat pregnant teens and teenage mothers in schools. Other teachers feel differently about teen mothers. Most of the time, teachers are sad and are

not willing to help pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent mothers at school. They believe that their job is teaching and not engaging in midwifery and that school is for students not pregnant teenagers. Ferguson (2011). According to Mpanza (2016), teachers indicated that the school is for learners not for pregnant girls or mothers to be readmitted.

Initiation of Financial Support

The findings from the field observe that financial support should be initiated to teen mothers addressed to be readmitted. It was observed that in most cases it is poverty that led girls to engage in affairs that resulted in their pregnancy. One among the teachers who was asked concerning his views on readmitting teenage students in secondary school formal system responded that;

‘It is a good to readmit girls after pregnancy because most girls come from poor families and are dependent on their parents, when a girl becomes pregnant and has a baby, she adds another dependent to her family, and they lose all hopes and dreams for a better future. But if they were given a chance for readmission they can finish their education and what is needed is financial support to them after delivery’. (Interview, Teacher 1, School Y, July 2022).

From the interview with a teacher, it is clear that financial support is necessary to teen mothers for them to come to school and attend lessons confidently. This will enable these teen mothers to facilitate their schooling as such they experience many challenges.

V. CONCLUSION

This study revealed the views of teachers and students towards the readmission of teenage mothers in the formal schooling system in Tanzania mainland. Interviews, documentary review and focus groups were the foundations of gathering data. According to their views it shows that many of them support the program of readmitting teenage mothers in formal schooling for the girl's betterment of their lives but they need the Government to involve all stakeholders in the preparation process of readmitting teenage mothers in formal secondary school by preparing counselling programm. Government and organizations should increase their efforts and campaigns in order to strength social awareness of the benefit of females' education to society as a whole and of adapting policies and practices in support of their equal right to education.

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