

Enrolling Teenage Mothers in the Formal Secondary Education System: A New Policy Implementation Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This is an early assessment of a policy implemented to enroll teenage mothers in the formal secondary education system in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This important policy change allowing teenage mothers back to school is new. The actions taken are identified, and recommendations are made. The late Tanzanian President, Hon. John Pombe Magufuli, declared in a speech on June 22, 2017, that no pregnant students would be allowed to return to school during his presidency. However, after his untimely demise, a new head of state, a female president, changed the policy, and for the first time, directives were provided that teenage mothers should enroll back in schools. In this research, a purposeful random sampling was used to select the required number of respondents. Questionnaires and interviews were utilized to gather primary data, while secondary data were collected from various earlier research and other sources. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics for quantitative data using MS Excel and qualitative data through content analysis. The study findings revealed that there is currently no legal framework or policy for enrolling teenage mothers in formal education. Teenage mothers struggle to balance school and parental responsibilities, and face discrimination from their peers. To address these issues, the study recommends the development of a framework to guide formal education for teenage mothers, provision of financial resources, creation of a suitable learning environment, and moral support, including counselling.

KEYWORDS

Teenage mothers; education; social justice; policy change; Tanzania

INTRODUCTION

There is growing global concern over the persistent increase in teenage pregnancies and adolescent mothers. Annually, approximately 21 million teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth worldwide, with the majority residing in low and middle-income countries (WHO, 2019). World Health Statistics (2018) reports that approximately 132 out of every 1,000 live births result from adolescent mothers. Cultural norms and policies that force children into motherhood have contributed to the incidence of teen pregnancy (Odimegwu & Mkwanaenzi, 2016).

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the level of preparation made for enrolling adolescent mothers in the formal secondary school system. The specific objectives of the study were to determine whether there is a legal framework to guide their school enrolment, assess the extent to which the stakeholders affect the process, and identify the challenges that teenage mothers face in enrolling and completing school.

The issue of teenage mothers dropping out of school after giving birth is a current global concern. These girls often experience stigmatization and abuse from their parents, teachers, peers, and the wider community. Factors contributing to school dropout include the girls' cultural and environmental backgrounds, their level of awareness regarding sexual and reproductive health issues, psychosocial factors, and family support for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers (Karimi, 2015; Wekesa, 2010). According to the World Bank (2019), many girls drop out of school because they believe marriage and pregnancy are better options for their socioeconomic circumstances.

Research has shown that completing education can have positive long-term outcomes for both teenage and their children, protecting them from negative consequences (Kumar & Huang, 2021). Ending education early for teenage mothers limits their opportunities and can result in serious economic, social, and political losses for individuals and their countries. This burden also includes caring for their children, which can limit adolescent mothers' economic contributions to their communities and countries' development. Despite the gender disparities in education have been extensively discussed and documented in the developing world, insufficient attention has been given to studies on assisting teenage mothers to return to school after giving birth. In some countries, such as Tanzania a few years ago, teenage mothers were not given the right to continue with their education. Early pregnancies among adolescent girls are a major issue in Tanzania, as in other Sub-Saharan African countries. Since the 1960s, pregnant students were instantly dropped from school. In Tanzania, records show that the proportion of girls dropping out of secondary school is higher than that of girls dropping out of primary school (Niboye, 2018). Records from the President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) show that the proportion of girls dropping out of secondary school in 2019 is higher than that of primary school in Tanzania, with a 57% increase when compared to 2019 (Mwananchi Newspaper, April 25, 2021; Niboye, 2018).

In 2010, the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) issued a statement announcing that there was no official policy mandating the removal of pregnant teenage girls from school or preventing them from returning to school after delivery and instructed schools to admit pregnant girls after delivery (UNICEF, 2014). However, despite this statement, pregnant girls are still prohibited from attending school in some cases due to concerns that their presence would set a bad example for their classmates, encouraging them to engage in early sexual activity and unfortunately, becoming pregnant themselves (Niboye, 2018). Notably, former Tanzanian President Hon. John Pombe Magufuli insisted in a speech on June 22, 2017, that no pregnant students would be allowed to return to school during his presidency. This statement was supported by high-level government officials and religious leaders. According to the Tanzanian constitution, President Magufuli could have ruled for another eight years. However, it was condemned by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for human rights both domestically and internationally. They observed that the move threatens pregnant girls' rights to education and equality, which is a violation of both Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977, which is still in use. With the coming to power of Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania's first woman head of state in 2021, there has been increased attention to the discrimination faced by teenage mothers in educational provision. In response to criticism from various internal and external organizations, Education Minister Joyce Ndalichako announced on November 24, 2021, in a press conference held in Dodoma, that girls who had been forced to leave school due to pregnancy would be allowed to return to school to continue with their formal education within two years after giving birth. This study is an investigation of the process that is used to enrol adolescent mothers in the official secondary school system and to address any shortcomings discovered for positive action. It is important to note that ensuring access to education for all is the responsibility of the government.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood, during which substantial biological, mental, and psychosocial changes occur. The age range for adolescents varies across societies, culture, other influencing factors, and it can have various consequences (Spencer, 2011). Many authors define teenage pregnancy and adolescent motherhood as the condition of a young girl between the ages of 13 and 19 becoming pregnant. Adolescent pregnancy can have severe consequences, with one of the most damaging being the difficulty in completing education (Maemeko et al., 2018). This jeopardizes girls' ability to achieve Tanzania's Development Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030, which aim to promote access to education, gender equality, and women's empowerment. When girls become pregnant during their teenage years, it limits their ability to continue with their formal education, making it difficult for them to secure decent work and grow economically to achieve SDG 8, putting them at risk of remaining poor throughout their lives.

To ensure a successful process of enrolling teenage mothers in formal education and providing them with the expected level of education, there is a need for the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of policies and regulations that clearly define the role of each education stakeholder at all levels (Aljazeera News, November 27, 2021). According to the Population Council (2015) and Aljazeera News (November 27, 2021), insufficient and inadequate policies and regulations in Sub-Saharan Africa make it difficult for adolescent mothers to return to school after giving birth. In Kenya, the policy on adolescent pregnancy lacks specificity on steps to be taken when a girl becomes pregnant, including how long she can stay in school while pregnant, how long she can return to school after delivery, or how to re-enrol adolescent mothers in school (Omwancha, 2012). Furthermore, the policy does not include provisions to assist adolescent mothers in catching up with the school curriculum after their return to the classroom (Birungi et al., 2015). Merely establishing a policy or framework to enrol adolescent mothers in a formal school is insufficient unless the policy is effectively communicated and understood by the stakeholders involved.

According to the Centre for the Study of Adolescence (2008), one of the major factors contributing to the limited success of Kenya's teenage mother re-entry policy is the negative perceptions and lack of awareness of the policy and its guidelines among school heads, teachers, parents, and students (Omwancha, 2012). Following establishing the policy and framework for teenage mothers, the government must implement mechanisms for enforcing and monitoring policy implementation at all levels (Niboye, 2018).

Teenage mothers need support from people around them to enrol and complete their formal education. The support needed by adolescent mothers includes but is not limited to educational, emotional, economic, and caregiving (Gatbonton, 2021). Supporting them will enable adolescent mothers to overcome difficult situations they have faced and are likely still facing (Challa et al., 2017; Derlan et al., 2018; Shahabuddin et al., 2017). While education officers, teachers, and classmates must provide academic support, families and communities must assist in caring for the babies of teenage mothers, particularly when their mothers are enrolled in school (Niboye, 2018).

The dual responsibilities of teenage mothers as both students and parents often have an impact on their academic performance (Almeida & Aquino, 2011; Glynn et al., 2018). These young mothers face the challenge of balancing their time and financial resources between completing their education, raising their children, and attending school sessions (Boehlke, 2018). Mistreatment by teachers or other students, as noted by Hosie (2007), contributes to teenage mothers disliking school.

Aside from the humiliation and discrimination they face from their teachers and peers, teenage mothers face additional challenges, such as missing school when their babies are sick, not having a responsible adult to care for their babies during school sessions, and having insufficient concentration in class due to a lack of sleep after suckling the babies all night (Maluli and Bali, 2014). Therefore, teenage moms struggle to balance their many competing obligations,

including parenting, maturing, finishing school, and taking care of a household's financial needs (Watson & Vogel, 2017). Failing to provide the necessary support for adolescent mothers to obtain an education will affect not only their immediate but also future families (Tang et al., 2016). The process of enrolling teenage mothers in the formal education system, the challenges they face, and its impact on their lives are described by two theories: the life course theory and the resiliency theory. According to the life course, women who started having children as teenagers would have better long-term health outcomes if they had levels of education development (Maslowsky et al., 2021). The resiliency theory, as explained by Perry (2002), suggests that individuals create resiliency to achieve their expected ambitions despite environmental factors. In the context of enrolling teenage mothers in the formal secondary education system, these theories are significant because when teenage mothers are enrolled and given assistance overcoming environmental factors, they can attain higher levels of education, leading to economic success and better long-term health.

In this study, the researcher developed their own conceptual framework based on the assumption that the process of enrolling teenage mothers in the formal secondary education system is dependent on various variables, including the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of policies and regulations governing the process; support in caring for the babies, the provision of financial resources to the teenage mothers; the availability of good teaching and learning environments; and the provision of moral and psychological support to them. The intervening variables include legislatures, education officials, teachers, parents, peer students, and community members who are expected to perform the aforementioned functions. The framework is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. *Summary of the Conceptual Framework Variables*

Objective	Required input (Independent variables)	Stakeholders (Intervening variables)
Availability of a legal framework	Formulation of policy and regulations Implementation of the policy Monitoring of policy	Parliament and central government Education officials and teachers Parliament and central government
Difficulties and support required for teenage mothers in enrolling and completing their formal education	Care for the babies Financial resources Teaching and learning environment	Parents and community members Parliament, central government, parents, and community members Parliament and central government

Moral and psychological	Education officials, teachers, parents, fellow students, and community members
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Source: The conceptual framework summary outlines the interconnectedness between variables related to the topic

DATA AND METHODS

The case study design is used as it is suitable for descriptive purposes and for determining relationships between variables at a specific point in time. The term "descriptive" is used in this research to describe the lived experiences of teenage mothers. This approach is most appropriate for researchers when it is important to understand the common or shared experiences of several individuals regarding an event (Creswell, 2012).

This research utilized qualitative methods, which are more commonly used in social science research, to enable the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. However, quantitative approaches were also employed to effectively address the study objectives and questions (Saunders et al. (2012). Some qualitative data were transformed into quantitative data to facilitate data analysis and provide more meaningful insightful.

The study focused on Dar es Salaam City Council, which is the largest city and commercial capital of Tanzania, with a population of six million (NBS, 2022). The City Council runs two Centres of Kitunda and Kinyerezi Secondary Schools, where teenage mothers were enrolled in the formal education system after the government's announcement in November 2021. The study focused on one centre in Kitunda where a larger number of adolescent mothers are enrolled in the formal education system.

This centre is preferred because it has a larger number of teenage mothers compared to Kinyerezi and more adolescent mothers who are re-dropping out of school for the second time compared to Kinyerezi. The total population under study was 76 individuals, including 31 teenage mothers and their 31 parents, three education officials at the city council level, and 11 teachers, including the coordinator of the centre where the teenage mothers are studying.

The study utilized purposive sampling to select and identify respondents for different categories based on the researcher's judgment (Creswell, 2012). The sample consisted of 48 respondents from various categories, including 17 teenage mothers, 17 parents, 11 teachers (including the coordinator), and three education officials. Selection criteria were based on two main factors: teenage mothers who become pregnant while still in secondary school and returned to school after giving birth, including those who dropped out for the second time, and respondents who have had frequent contact with adolescent mothers (parents, coordinator of the centre, and teachers) or whose work relates to issues surrounding adolescent pregnancy and/or adolescent mothers (education officials).

Data collection methods and analysis

Primary data collection methods used in the study included structured and unstructured interviews, as well as questionnaires. Secondary sources such as document reviews were also used. Participants for the study were purposively selected based on the research objectives and the researcher's judgment.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 11 teenage mothers at the school, while telephone interviews were used for three adolescent mothers who had re-dropped out for more than three months. Telephone interviews were also conducted with the 12 parents and guardians of adolescent mothers. The questionnaires were used to collect data from the education officials and teachers at the school where the teenage mothers were engaged. The data collected were processed before analysis. Data analysis involved using descriptive statistics for quantitative data through MS Excel and qualitative data for content analysis. The results were then presented using tables, charts, and percentages.

Ethical considerations

The researcher considers ethical issues by providing a detailed explanation to all participants, including asking for their consent to participate in the study and ensuring the confidentiality of the information they provide. To protect their privacy, fictitious names were used instead of their real names, as requested by the participants.

Study results

The researcher achieved an excellent overall response rate, as 39 respondents, approximately 81 per cent, actively participated in the study. This supports the assertion made by Kothari (2004) that a response return rate of 50% is adequate and that a rate of more than 70% is outstanding. In terms of participant demographics, the study found that 57% of the interviewed teenage mothers became pregnant before the age of 18. Among the 11 teachers in the research area, only two (18%) were females, while the majority, nine (82%), were males.

The key themes arose as per the literature and the developed conceptual framework. These themes that guided data collection and also guided the discussion of findings are as follows: (i) *Legal framework or policy support*; (ii) *Roles of the various stakeholders*; and (iii) *Factors affecting enrolment and completion of school by teenage mothers*.

Legal framework or policy to support teenage mothers to enrol in formal education

The study discovered a lack of specific policies or legal frameworks endorsed by parliament to be implemented by the government to guide the process of enrolling teenage mothers in the formal education system. This has posed a significant obstacle in implementing the government's announcement of the return of teenage mothers to study. According to the Coordinator of the Centre:

"The government's announcement shows the intention of helping the adolescent mothers, which is a good start towards ending discrimination against them in Tanzania's schools, but this should be backed by a written law or guidelines to support the move."

Roles of the various stakeholders in facilitating or impeding teenage mothers' return and completion of secondary education

The study's findings revealed that a majority of teachers (73%), including the coordinator of the centre where the teenage mothers were attending the schools, were dissatisfied with the lack of support provided to teenage mothers by the parliament and the central government. One education officer at the City Council level and the centre's coordinator acknowledged there is no existing mechanism to keep track of how many teenage pregnancies and adolescent mothers leave school to help them return.

The study found that there is a lack of a monitoring tool or instrument used by the government to monitor the progress of the schools where teenage mothers study. However, according to the centre's coordinator, though there is no documented procedure for school administration to monitor the progress of teenage mothers, they frequently counsel them on the importance and best utilization of this second chance they have been given to be at school again. The school also has direct interaction with the parents and guardians of adolescent mothers to guide them on how to help teenage mothers achieve their goals.

The interview findings revealed that 12 (86%) out of 14 adolescent mothers were satisfied with essential assistance from the teachers and fellow students, while two (14%) were not satisfied.

One of the teenage mothers (teenage mother, A) observed:

"When I encounter a difficult problem, I go to the teacher, who is my close friend and tell her about my problems. She always gives me nice advice not only for school-related issues but also for my personal family matters.

Another teenage mother (teenage mother, C) provided that:

"My baby suffers from asthma, and sometimes I miss the school sessions, especially when attending a clinic or hospital. Most of the teachers understood my situation and provided me with the notes and homework from the previous session that I did not attend".

While the majority of parents interviewed were appreciative of the government's efforts to ensure that adolescent mothers are returned to schools, they also expressed a need for further support. Parents insisted that the parliamentarians and the government should provide the necessary resources needed for their studies, as the majority of adolescent mothers come from low-income families.

Upon reviewing the current year's budget for the financial year 2022–2023, it was noted that the government is concerned about school dropouts for various reasons, including adolescent pregnancies. The parliament approved eight billion shillings through TASAF – Tanzania Social Action Fund to assist children from low-income families, including adolescent mothers who drop out of school, and build dormitories for girls. Nonetheless, the study found that teenage mothers are not yet direct beneficiaries of this initiative.

The research findings revealed that 72% of the teenage mothers and 83% of their parents expressed concerns that they were not adequately supported, either unsupported by the father

of the baby or their families. Only 28% acknowledged receiving support from the baby's father and their parents.

One of the parents (parent, X) was irritated and said:

"Since they refused to show me cooperation from the day I informed them about my daughter's pregnancy caused by their boy, I decided to keep away from them. I did not want anything from them. I decided to do what I had to and look after my daughter and grandson without depending on them."

Another parent (parent, Y) remarked with anger that:

"I don't even want to talk with the family that intends to destroy my daughter's life and future." She nodded, "The day my daughter informed me that she was pregnant, I decided to find the boy's parents to discuss the matter. They told me to have an abortion for the pregnancy, but I said no, a big no. Since that day, I don't even want to see them."

Further, the study observed that 79% of the interviewed teenage mothers acknowledged being assisted by their mothers, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, aunts, sisters, or neighbours to take care of the baby while attending the school sessions.

One interviewed mother (parent, W) of a teenage mother said:

"She normally wakes up earlier in the morning and feeds the baby, and I take care of and feed the baby the rest of the day while she is at school until she gets home in the evening. I had that responsibility because the infant is my grandchild, my blood, and I love him".

Most adolescent mothers' parents and guardians admitted to supporting them in caring for their baby because they understand tight schedules of school activities, including attending school sessions and completing assignments. Also, the parents believe that teenage mothers lack parental skills and require close assistance.

The factors that affect the enrolment and completion of formal secondary education for teenage mothers

The researchers noted that all 14 of the adolescent mothers interviewed said they were struggling with school activities, assignments, and projects while also being required to take care of their babies. One adolescent mother (teenage mother, F) recalled that:

"Sometimes you feel frustrated when you need to attend the school for tests or examinations; at the same time, your baby is sick, and you are supposed to give him/her extra care, including attending the hospital or clinic."

While many adolescent mothers received assistance from their parents, relatives, neighbours, and in-laws to care for their babies while they attended classes, the study noted three (21%) of these adolescent mothers failed to continue their education and dropped out of school again due to the absence of someone to care for their babies and financial constraints.

One adolescent mother who dropped out of school for the second time explained that she had no one to take care of her baby. She said that she had never seen her father since birth but lived with her mother and grandmother. However, her mother passed away four years ago and left her with her grandmother. When she got pregnant two years ago and gave birth, she

decided to return to school and left the baby to be cared for by her grandmother during school hours. However, her grandmother also passed away in early June of this year, leaving her without anyone to care for the baby during school hours or to help with other household tasks. Therefore, she was unable to manage her schoolwork and dropped out again due to the environmental challenges she faced.

The study found that nine (64%) out of 14 teenage mothers claimed that the financial support they received from the various stakeholders, including parents and other community members, was inadequate to facilitate their parental and school needs. Although the government provides funds in the current annual budget to support teenage mothers, the resources allocated are insufficient to cover their needs.

The coordinator of the centre and the teachers expressed that most teenage mothers who are not regularly attending school admitted to having financial problems, including a lack of bus fare and money to buy food while they are at school. In an interview with one of the teenage mothers (teenage mother, G) who returned to school and dropped out again due to financial difficulties, remarked as follows:

"I used to wake up early in the morning to prepare breakfast bits and snacks for sale to get the funds to support my family and baby. I reached a point where I couldn't manage to do both businesses and attend the school, so I decided again to drop out."

Another teenage mother explained in the interview that, after school hours, she works as a barmaid in one of the clubs near her residence to get money to support their babies and themselves. The participant (teenage mother, H) observed:

"I don't want to do such a job because people think it's unrespectable. I did it often for money. I hate doing it, but there is nothing I can do since I have no money to provide my child with food and care."

The study found that some parents were unwilling to support their daughters financially after they got pregnant and returned to school. However, the teenage mothers believed their parents were able to support them. During the interview, one of the teenage mother's fathers expressed disappointment, stress, and dissatisfaction because he did not expect his first daughter to become pregnant at such a young age. He insisted that he did not want to spend any more time or money on her, as she had already disappointed the family, and instead, he was focusing on the other three daughters. Although most teenage mothers are struggling financially, five (36%) acknowledged receiving adequate financial support for their babies and school expenses.

One of the adolescent mothers (teenage mother, I) explained that:

"My aunties support me financially to cover not only the costs for the baby but also school expenses, especially after I know my father is still mad at me because I become early pregnant." My uncle lives in Kenya and sends things for the baby and cash to help me in my studies."

The study found that 10 (71%) of the respondents face inadequate teaching and learning environments that do not cater to their special needs. They reported a lack of school facilities

such as childcare centres, breastfeeding spaces, and long distances from home to school. During the interviews, the coordinator of the centre noted that the school lacks essential teaching and learning facilities, like chairs and tables for teachers and teenage mothers.

Some adolescent mothers acknowledged that they were unable to attend all of their required class sessions due to the long distance from their homes to school. When discussing her experiences, one adolescent mother (teenage mother, K) remarked:

"Because there are so few schools that can accommodate teen mothers, travelling a significant distance from school to the homesteads is a challenge. Sometimes it takes more than two hours to get to school and the same amount of time or more to return home."

In responding to the question of how the school ensures a flexible timetable that accommodates the special needs of teenage mothers, the coordinator of the centre commented as follows:

"It could be difficult for the school to have a flexible timetable that will accommodate every teenage mother's needs. However, we are doing our best to ensure those unable to attend the class due to parental issues are given notes and assignments from the previous sessions."

Even though most teenage mothers claimed a lack of supportive teaching and learning environments to enable them to learn well, most (86%) praised the efforts of the teachers and their fellow students while in their studies. The teenage mothers appreciated the group work approach applied by some of the teachers, who regularly assigned a student to help them catch up on lessons missed when they were absent from school.

Therefore, the problem of inadequate teaching and learning environments that favour teenage mothers needs to be addressed with higher authorities, particularly at the ministry level, while other education officials and teachers are reminded to continue playing a supportive role in ensuring a suitable studying environment for teenage mothers.

The study noted that all 14 teenage mothers interviewed appreciated and valued the encouragement they received from their teachers, parents, and a few community members. However, they expressed their disappointment about the bad treatment they received from their fellow students and some of the community members due to cultural beliefs still prevalent in most communities that distress them psychologically.

Some of the adolescent mothers explained that they experienced feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment from their society, including their fellow students who were associated with their earlier pregnancies due to their prostitution. These negative attitudes affect their mental health and reduce their motivation to participate in social gatherings and school activities.

In discussion with one of the mothers of the teenage mothers, she informed the researcher that, though her daughter was stressed out after getting pregnant, she had the good intention of going back to school after birth. The mother added that she supported her daughter when she decided to return to formal secondary education, but she doubted whether her dreams are going to be fulfilled because of the discrimination she faced. The mother continued

explaining her daughter's frustrations and thought she was going mad. She decided to seek counselling for her and encouraged her to pray to the Almighty, hoping that things would improve one day. Finally, the parent of the teenage mother observed:

"With the help of relatives and good friends who encouraged me, at least now my daughter can continue her studies."

The study conducted by Onyango G. et al. (2015) also found similar results. The researchers suggested that the government should impose harsher penalties for those who discriminate against adolescent mothers and educate society on motivating and supporting them.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study discovered a lack of specific policies or legal frameworks, which posed a significant obstacle in implementing the government's announcement of the return of teenage mothers to study. The findings are also affirmed by the Centre for Reproductive Rights (2013), arguing that, in nations where there are no clear policies, regulations, or guidelines for re-admitting teenage mothers to formal school after giving birth, there is virtually little chance of them continuing with their education. Therefore, efforts are required by the parliament and the government to ensure this policy or framework is in place to address the diverse needs and challenges teenage mothers face before and after returning to school and reduce the possibility of dropping out again. The policy or framework served as a guide for educators, parents, and communities in support of teenage mothers who wanted to return to school (Mutua et al., 2019).

A majority of the respondents (73%) expressed dissatisfaction with the support provided to teenage mothers by the Parliament and the Central Government as there is no mechanism in place to track the number of teen pregnancies and adolescent mothers who drop out of school and to provide assistance for them to return. Also, there is no documented procedure for school administration to monitor the progress of teenage mothers.

The research revealed that 72% of the interviewed teenage mothers and 83% of the teenage mothers' parents expressed concerns about the lack of support from the families of boys who impregnate them. This has hampered their return to formal education to complete their studies. These findings are similar to those revealed in the study conducted by Madiba and Nsiki (2017) who found out the following were the barriers for boys who impregnate school girls to be involved in the lives of their babies: the requirement above all else that the father to be the child's financial provider, lack of financial resources, and relationship issues with the child's mother.

All adolescent mothers acknowledged that they struggled with school activities, assignments, and projects while also being required to take care of their babies. However, they expressed gratitude for the assistance they received from their mothers, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, aunts, sisters, or neighbours in taking care of the baby while they attended school. The findings are consistent with a study conducted in Zanzibar by Niboye (2018), where

research revealed that most teenage mothers who returned to school less than three months after delivery had adequate support for taking care of their new born.

The study findings revealed that 9 (64%) out of 14 teenage mothers did not receive adequate financial support from various stakeholders, including parents and other community members, to facilitate their parental and school needs. Moreover, in two cases, parents refused to support their daughters financially, even though teenage mothers believed their parents were capable of supporting them. These findings are also consistent with the studies conducted by Tibasima (2017) and Walgwe et al. (2016), which argued that a lack of family support and the high cost of caring for their babies forced some teenage mothers to engage in income-generating activities instead of returning to school. Therefore, to enable teenage mothers to achieve their intended education level, they need support in caring for their babies and financial resources from various stakeholders.

The study found 10 (71%) of the respondents believed that there is a lack of suitable teaching and learning environments that cater to the unique needs of teenage mothers, such as childcare facilities, including space for breastfeeding. This is in line with a study conducted by Gatbonton R. (2021), which suggested that long-term programs, policies, and curricula should be flexible enough to accommodate the special needs of teenage mothers. Therefore, addressing the challenge of inadequate teaching and learning environments that are supportive of teenage mothers require action from higher authorities, particularly at the ministry level, while education officials and teachers should continue to play a supportive role in creating a suitable studying environment for teenage mothers.

The study found that some adolescent mothers experienced feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment from their society, including their fellow students who were aware of their pregnancies. These negative experiences can have a significant psychologically impact on them, reducing their motivation to participate in social gatherings and school activities. Similar findings were noted in a study conducted by Onyango G. et al. (2015), which concluded that the government should impose harsher penalties for those who discriminate against adolescent mothers and provide education to society on motivating and supporting them.

Areas for further research

This study was conducted solely at the Dar es Salaam City Council. To validate the study findings, further studies should be conducted in other councils in Tanzania. To the best of our knowledge, no research has been conducted in Tanzania to determine the proportion or percentage of teenage mothers who return to school and complete their secondary-level education versus those who do not. Therefore, further research is needed to find this out.

Furthermore, studies are necessary to examine the lives and economic performance of teenage mothers who completed their studies after returning to the formal education system as opposed to adolescent mothers who chose not to return to the formal education system and instead pursued alternative education pathways, such as vocational education training from other institutes or engaged in any other economic activities. Moreover, evaluating the academic

performance of teenage mothers who have returned to school by comparing their performance after giving birth with their previous performance in school before becoming pregnant requires additional research.

Limitations

This study aims to help more pregnant girls and teenage mothers in Tanzania return to formal secondary school and complete their studies. The study intends to draw the government and interested stakeholders' attention to ensure a legal framework or policy to guide the process of educating teenage mothers. It intends to help education stakeholders understand their roles and how they can help adolescent mothers return and complete their secondary education by evaluating the threats and weaknesses noted in the process to develop the necessary measures to ensure the achievement of the intended goals. Although the research was limited to a single council in Dar es Salaam City, the study encountered the challenges in record keeping regarding the statistical information about girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy.

Conclusions

Teenage mothers experience adverse psychological, emotional and social consequences due to the physical, emotional and social changes that come with motherhood, while also being expected to pursue their education. In order for them to successfully balance their dual responsibilities as parents and students, they require appropriate information, guidance, social support and counselling.

Although the process of enrolling adolescent mothers in the formal education system is challenging due to a lack of a legal framework and insufficient financial and moral support, it is crucial for relevant authorities, NGOs, and community members to initiate initiatives that ensure the intended objective of providing secondary education opportunity to teenage mothers is achieved.

Recommendations

The legal framework or policy guidelines for enrolling pregnant or adolescent mothers in formal secondary education should be developed in collaboration with the government, NGOs and individuals. Special funds should be established to support teenage mothers financially. A suitable teaching and learning environment should be provided to teenage mothers, including childcare facilities and space for breastfeeding. Teenage mothers require moral and psychological support, which can be provided through didactic initiatives to educate society and dispel harmful cultural stereotypes, imposing harsher penalties on those who discriminate against adolescent mothers, and educating society on how to motivate and support them. A student counselling unit should be established at the school level, and a matron or specific female teacher should be responsible for counselling the adolescent mothers when they encounter issues and concerns relating to their studies and non-studies. These measures will be critical to ensuring that the intended goals of providing secondary education to teenage mothers in Tanzania are achieved.

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