

An investigation into challenges faced by teen mothers who re-entered school: A case of selected schools on the copperbelt province of Zambia

Gibson Mweemba¹, Maurice Moono², Judith Chishipula³, Crispin Maambo⁴

¹ Kitwe College of Education, Kitwe, Zambia

² School of Humanities, Department of Psychology, Chalimbana University, Zambia

³ Margaret Mwachiyeya Secondary School, Lusaka, Zambia

⁴ School of Education, Department of Special Education, Guidance and Counseling, Zambia

Abstract

Zambia has a policy in place to cater for the continued education of girls returning to school after giving birth. Despite the policy being implemented, many young girls continue dropping out of school due to challenges encountered in their pursuit of education. The purpose of this study was to establish the challenges faced by teen mothers in secondary schools on the Copperbelt Province, Zambia.

The study used an interpretative phenomenology approach (IPA). IPA is a data interpretative framework (inductive approach) that captures and explores the meanings that participants assign to their experiences. This study involved 15 participants, consisting of 5 teachers, 5 parents of teen mothers and 5 pupils from secondary schools. These were selected using purposive sampling. The rationale of using these groups is premised on the multi-dimensional nature of teen mothers' challenges emanating from the school, family and community. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and a voice recorder was used to record these interviews. The data was categorized according to emerging themes which were later subjected to IPA interpretation.

The findings of this study indicated that teen mothers, who returned to school, encountered challenges arising from the negative perception among fellow learners, and the lack of support from teachers and parents. It was also found that teen mothers experienced emotional instability due to lack of professional counseling, and faced a lot of withdrawal from the family and friendship. A few parents that understood the predicament of teen mothers gave holistic support towards their education. Results also show that the bond of attachment of the child gave teen mothers undue pressure and a great challenge of emotional stability. The study further established that there is no tracking system of teen mothers in the re-entry policy. It can be concluded that although the re-entry policy has given the girl-child a chance to return to school upon giving birth, the environment within the school and community remains unfavourable for the full implementation of the policy. The study recommended that there is need for the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational training and Early Childhood to adopt a holistic approach which does not dwell on changing girls' behaviours, but to change the attitudes in society so that girls are encouraged to stay in school. The Ministry of Education should reflect on and urge changes to the Policy to make it law to protect teen girls in schools.

Keywords: re-entry, stigma, teen mothers, policy and tracking

Introduction

It was a common trend in Zambia that many girls who got pregnant in school were expelled from school, forcing them to enter into early marriages and motherhood. This situation led to under development of women. In June 1995, the Zambia Association for University Women organized a conference on the situation of the girl child in Zambia. The conference which was held in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women proposed to government that girls who become pregnant should be re-admitted into school once care for the child was assured (MOE, 2005) [47]. This was the launch pad of the re-entry policy. However, starting 1997, the Zambian government allowed such girls to take leave and go on maternity and then continue with their education after delivery. The call for this policy came from various organizations including the civil society groups. When the influence of women's movement in Zambia grew, one of the issues they decided to fight for was justice for girls who were thrown out of school after getting pregnant.

In September, 1997, a conference on girl's education was held at Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, Zambia at which the Minister of Education then, Dr Syamukayumba Syamujaye announced that school girls who became pregnant would no longer be expelled and those who had been expelled in 1997 should be allowed to return to school (MOE, 1998) [11].

This policy is now being implemented in Zambia and with it, came the debate on its advantages and disadvantages. It faced some opposition in some sectors of the education system and the community at large. A report by the Centre of study on adolescents showed that the dropout rate of girls due to pregnancy was at 23% nationally. Few of these girls resume school despite the existence of the re-entry policy. The majority are unable due to stigma and ridicule from teachers, peers and the communities thereby missing out on the benefits that accrue from education (Sitali, 2009) [69]. According to Nkunyangi (2005) [60], the policy has not been internalized and mainstreamed in the education system. It

exists more at policy level than in practice. Besides, there is stigma associated with having teen mothers in schools. There is no doubt that such girls are a challenge to handle and therefore need special attention and rehabilitation. Nevertheless, teen mothers are considered to be immoral and there is fear that this vice would attract a bad name for the schools, giving them a bad image. Despite the policy being implemented, according to the Ministry of Education 2009 [51] Education Statistical Bulletin, 15,497 girls got pregnant in 2009 but only 6,679 were readmitted in school and as such reducing the chances of nearly 9000 girls completing their education (MoE, 2009) [51].

Statement of the problem

Despite the existence of the school re-entry policy in Zambia from 1997, the challenges that hinder girls who re-enter secondary school appears not to have been pursued yet, leading to a continuation of a vicious cycle of high dropout cases among girls. These challenges seem to be one of the major causes of girls' dropping out of school. According to the Ministry of Education, Educational Statistical Bulletin (2009), 15, 497 girls got pregnant in 2009 but only 6, 679 were re-admitted in schools. It is important to know why such a number was unable to return to school. Therefore, this study aims at finding out the challenges that girls who re-enter school following a pregnancy face in selected secondary schools of the Copperbelt Province in Zambia.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to establish the challenges girls who re-entered school following a pregnancy faced in secondary schools.

Main objective

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the challenges girls who re-entered school following pregnancy face in secondary schools.
2. Establish the challenges faced by girls who have reentered school in the communities where they live; and
3. Establish the strategies put in place by schools to help girls who re- entered school following pregnancy cope with challenges.

Research questions

1. What challenges do girls face in schools after being readmitted into school following pregnancy?
2. What challenges do girls who have been re-entered into school face within the communities where they live?
3. What strategies are put in place for girls who re-enter school following pregnancy for coping with the challenges faced in the existence of the re-entry policy?

Literature Review

Advocacy for girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy and Challenges

The re-entry policy which was launched in 1997 advocates that girl who drop out of school due to pregnancy should be readmitted after giving birth. The Zambian government allowed such girls to take leave and go on maternity leave and then continue with their education after delivery (MOE, 2005; 1998) [47, 11]. This was after a number of advocacy groups pressed for the introduction of the re- entry policy. The growing problem of pregnant school girls and related

issues are not unique to Zambia. The United States of America for instance has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the developed world, twice as high as those in England, Wales, and Canada and nine times as high as the rates in the Netherlands and Japan (http://www.gutmacher.org/pubs/ journals/3201400.html, 1998).

A number of studies have been done in the United States of America to look at teenage parenting and school. One of the studies was done by Testa in 1992 [71]. He wanted to find out about the issues related to teenage parenting: challenges, interventions and programmes. The research established that girls between the ages of 10 and 14 years were the fastest growing group of parents, coupled with difficulties to cope with life when they gave birth. The trend indicated that many adolescent mothers did not marry and were in poverty. The study further established that teen fathers lacked involvement with their children and with the mothers of their children (Testa, 1992) [71].

The evidence from developed countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States of America and developing countries such as South Africa point out that teenage pregnancy contributes to poverty (Canada. Ministry of Education, 1998) [11]. In Australia, the evidence showed that teen mothers faced social problems because they had reduced their education and possibilities for employment opportunities which can lead to poverty and financial difficulties (Boulden, 2001) [9]. Berry and Lennon (1998) [7] further note that teen mother's face numerous challenges such as poverty, which considerably affects their ability to care for themselves and their children.

In Africa, The Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE, 1995) [23] estimated that 20% of the girls who drop out did so due to pregnancies. In Kenya it is estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 girls drop out of school every year due to pregnancy. This indeed poses a great challenge to the society and the re-entry policies are seen as a solution. People felt that some programmes to look into the affairs of young mothers be put in place so as to help them cope with life because of the permanent change they have undergone of parenthood, which often comes with great challenges that need maturity and adulthood. These challenges come in different forms and as such pose great risks of success for young mothers (Bayona & Kadji, 1996) [6].

Stigmatization of teen mothers

Stigma is a sign of social unacceptability: the shame or disgrace attached to something regarded as socially unacceptable. The stigma that comes with being a teen mother is alive and real. Advocates say that bias against teen mothers often results in cruel social stigmatization and are regarded as morally tainted and often placed in separate classes and sitting arrangement lest they contaminate others with teen sexuality (Gillham, 1997) [27].

Gillham (1997) [27] further contends that current and accurate statistics are difficult to find, but research by Fogell (1995), indicates that two thirds of teen mothers do not finish high school and a high percentage of them remain poor and have a second child because of fighting for social acceptance and social seclusion.

Banda (2005) [5] in his descriptive study alludes to the fact that in some mission school's teen mothers are turned away from their schools and shunted to public schools, inadequate home schooling or special programmes and as such too many teen mothers see themselves as having nothing to

strive for but shame and disgrace. This is further complicated by their chaotic family relationships and their friends shunning them and considering them as welfare mongers, unprincipled, immoral and unmotivated. Families may be torn apart, distant and unforgiving.

Goffman (1971) ^[28] further states that stigma is an attribute that is deeply discrediting, although it needs to be clarified that the real context of stigmatization revolves not around attributes, but rather around relations between the “stigmatized” person and the “normal” person. Because the stigmatized are not seen as fully humane people, the normal takes intentionally discriminating actions reducing the life possibilities of the stigmatized (Goffman, 1971) ^[28].

Stigma is a societal function, a process which occurs where identity norms exist (McGurk, 1993) ^[42]. Norms are also attached to sexuality and sexual behaviour, in consequence becoming a teen mother is one of the actions deviating from the norms and as such teen mothers in schools suffer from stigma. These are cultural bonds, it is a great challenge to these teen mothers who struggle to acclimatize and concentrate in schools and life (Helge, 1989) ^[30].

The study done by Canada, Ministry of education (1998) ^[11] on the challenges and choices of keeping teenage mothers in schools revealed that fellow learners and teachers use judgmental glances or mean remarks, and that other teenage mothers quit school because of pressure from school administration or teachers (Canada, Ministry of Education, 1998) ^[11].

According to Wanyama and Simatwa (2011) ^[80] many teen mothers assume their family responsibilities alone because the fathers of their babies often leave prior the birth. In the same futile the Canadian Ministry of Education (1998) ^[11] in its study further stated that teen mothers do not receive any support from the fathers who often do not show concrete commitment as fathers. Chilisa (2002) ^[13] contends that the re-entry policy on the other hand has been criticized for being discriminatory; for example, school boys who are fathers or fathers to be are not asked to leave school until the child is born while continuation policy meets the educational human rights of the girl, it may well be that it overlooks other rights such as those of having support and comfort during and after delivery.

However, not all girls experience the same challenges in their educational endeavors. Teen mothers face distinctive challenges in ensuring that their new mothering roles and identities do not turn into a premature exit from school. Evidence from the Demographic and Healthy surveys (DHS) in the United States of America point to the fact that early child bearing remains pervasive in developing countries and continues to constrain girls from participating in education (Eloundou-Enyegue, 2004) ^[21].

Chilisa (2002) ^[13] argues that such policies (as the re-entry policy) constitute a subtle form of violence on the affected girls as the reentry process is entrenched in ideologies of exclusion. However, evidence indicates that their endorsement has not been accompanied by related discursive shift in the way teen mothers are perceived within the education system and the society as a whole. They have had to contend with a hostile school environment, where they are isolated, humiliated and stigmatized by the fellow pupils; with hardly any effective interventions from teachers (Chigona & Chetty 2007) ^[12]. Furthermore, Chetty and Chigona (2007) ^[12] criticize the act as being punitive on the affected girls.

Rejection of teen mother by the family

Banda (2005) ^[5] noted that majority of young single mothers run away from home to live in rented small rooms in nearby places, others go round for shelter from well-wishers which lasts for only weeks or months. Others have suffered beatings from their brothers who believe unmarried girls should not be allowed to live in family land. Several teen mothers shared how they were abused by family members who threw them out of home and ended in nearby suburbs. The research further revealed that the family setup believes that unmarried young single mother is a disgrace to the family which if not punished other young girls would follow suit. In a study done by Shari Miller (1999) on “Motherhood during the teen years: a developmental perspective on risk factors for child bearing” using a case study, approved that the combination of rejection and aggression influenced the social environment of teen mothers and became associated with involvement with deviant peers, and in turn the peer context affected personal norms and beliefs related to behaviour (Coie & Jacobs, 1993) ^[14].

Role conflicts of teen mothers

Although teenage is viewed as a conversion period and preparation for adulthood (Phoenix, 1991; Nsamenang, 2002) ^[64, 61], adolescents are still perceived as jural minors and children as is evident in the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC) that defines a child as anyone below 20 years of age (often referred to as teenage mothers) are in an ambiguous status as they have taken on adult roles of mothering at a time when they are supposed to be in school and that they are not considered fully grown enough to handle such responsibilities.

In a study done by the Ministry of Education (1998) ^[11] on teenage mothers in Zambia, the evidence showed that teenage mothers face problems in organizing their new lives, managing their roles as mothers, and meeting the demands of school. The study further revealed that teen mothers ‘day to day problem in progressing with education lag or fall behind with school work and have to catch up during school holidays and weekends which is expensive in terms of tuitions and transport, but in some cases they are working very late in the evening to meet deadlines (MoE, 1998) ^[11]. De Boek and Honwana (2005) ^[20] argue that by taking on adult roles the young mothers blur the social divide between childhood and adulthood.

Chetty and Chigona (2007) ^[12] in their study in south Africa on returning to school after giving birth made known that it is not easy for teen mothers because of the hardship in organizing time for both studying and parenthood. Literature also points to the fact that since these teen moms have assumed new status, their roles are always in conflict because of some emergency frequenting issues pertaining to school, parenthood and wife (Kaufman *et al*, 2001) ^[39].

Research with low income adolescent mothers who were interviewed through a focus group in Puerto Rico supports the view that there may be cultural differences between country types in terms of their tolerance of early childbearing. Garcia and Vasquez Garcia (1996) ^[26] demonstrated that early childbearing in Puerto Rican society was considered to be normal and was not necessarily associated with negative outcomes.

Low self- esteem of teen mothers

Low self-esteem is a problem for certain individuals as it prevents them from making the best of their schooling and their lives. Low self-esteem is a significant cause of low academic performance (Kenway, 1990) ^[41].

Many teenage mothers report feeling out of control, worthless or useless to their communities. This has been a major setback for them hence not realizing their potential in achieving their dreams. A study on Community challenges in Meru revealed that due to stress many end up in taking and involving themselves with illegal drugs. As a result, men of all age take advantage of them which has made many of them give birth to more than two children whose fathers they do not know. Others engage in crimes to earn their living, some are just living and do not know what they want in life as they believe their dreams are shattered (www.queensof africa.org/index.php).

Teenage mothers face depression, anxiety and feelings of low-self-esteem. UNESCO (1996) ^[74] contends that teen mothers need to be proactive in their emotional health and seek out ways to increase their resistance to depression and other emotional needs.

A study conducted by Zarina (2010) ^[88] in South Africa on Deconstructing teenage pregnancy: Teenage mama's talk about self, on eight teenage mothers using semi structured interviews and analyzed through thematic content analysis made known that dominant discourses in society played a pivotal role in teenage mothers' construction of self and their experiences of being marginalized from mainstream society. The study further revealed that despite some of the challenges encountered, the participants were able to persevere towards their goals and aspirations such as performing well academically and developing a clear sense of self.

Rejection of teen mothers the community

Wanyama and Simatwa (2011) ^[80] argue that teen mothers suffer discrimination as the community does not value or recognize them as they call them prostitutes. In a study on community challenges in Meru, it revealed that young teen mothers confessed that it becomes hard for one to get married as men would not accept someone else's child/children and sees it/them as burden. It further revealed that old men take them for granted and sexually abuse them for small favours and that men demand for unprotected sex just to punish them which in most cases lead to unwanted pregnancies and or infections e.g. sexually transmitted infections which has a high rate among this group.

Banda (2005) ^[5] furthermore adds that teen mothers are perceived as perverse and hence no man likes to associate with them or even to ask for a hand in marriage. This has been catalyzed by the cultural beliefs that girls are not meant for education or leadership hence no less effort is put to take teen mothers back in school or help upkeep to put them on track to finish school properly.

MoE (2003) ^[46] in a research carried out in Kalomo states that although the Ministry of Education had put in a Policy allowing girls to return to school after delivering, parents did not see its practicability nor did teachers help the parents understand the importance of returning to school. This entails a lot of challenges in this policy to the teen mothers. It has been commonly observed that teen mothers experience challenges in balancing the children's needs and school demands. With this, so many factors contribute

towards the problem to the pursuit of education.

In addition, findings from the situational analysis on girls conducted in Zambia (Kelly, 1998) ^[40] revealed the links with household income, gender and dropping out. The study indicated that girls from the poorest households were less likely to attend school in preference for boys. Thus, poverty is a probable explanation of school disturbance (Hunter & May, 2003) ^[37] for the majority of girls who drop out of school in Zambia. The direct and indirect costs charged by schools which include school fees, school uniforms and other PTA levies contribute to girls dropping out (Mwansa *et al*, 2004) ^[56]. The study further revealed that the failure to raise money to pay school fees and other needs contributed to the majority of the early or second pregnancy as some of those who failed to raise the high school fees were assisted by elderly men who demanded sex in return.

The main themes that emerged from most of the literature reviewed were advocacy for the teen mothers' schooling and challenges faced by teens. The review has showed that most of the research focused on the following areas of teen mothers: teenage parenting and school; teenage pregnancy in Australia; the challenges and choice of keeping teen mothers; girls education in South Africa; national policies on pregnancy in education systems in Sub-Sahara Africa; adolescent and parenthood; Testa, 1992 ^[71]; Boulden, 2001 ^[9]; Canada. Ministry of Education, 1998 ^[11]; Chetty & Chigona, 2007 ^[12]; and Coley & Lansdale, 1998 ^[15-16]; Chilisa, 1994. Pregnant related drop out and gender inequality in education;) parenting teenage pregnancies in rural America; adolescent pregnancy and parenthood in South Africa; education for all Eloundou-enyegue, 2004 ^[21]; Helge, 1989 ^[31]; Kaufman & Stadler. However, studies on challenges of teen mothers on the Copperbelt Province of Zambia in schools are not known hence creating a gap in our knowledge. There was, therefore need to establish the challenges of teen mothers.

Literature revealed that, challenges such as discrimination, stigmatization, economic and poverty affected the smooth learning of teen mothers. Literature did also reveal that organizations, including local authorities can generally understand the Re-entry Policy and use it to take back to school teen mothers and avoid certain challenges that go with it. Literature further revealed that local authorities have failed lamentably to provide continuity and quality services to teen mothers due to lack of sufficiently qualified professional counseling to their personal challenges.

Methodology

The methodology employed was the interpretative phenomenological analysis which is purely qualitative. Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an experiential qualitative approach to research in psychology and the human and social sciences (Newman, 1994; Creswell, 2007) ^[19]. The aim of the phenomenological approach is to bring to light the 'lived experiences' of the phenomenon to a description which is universal to another person, then listen to that person's dialogue and interpret what he or she is telling in a written text. During this period, a researcher brackets or suspends past knowledge and tries to get new insights to enrich the description of the data being collected. Bracketing is the process of setting aside one's own beliefs, feelings and perception so as to become more open and faithful to the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978; Strubert and Carpenter, 1999 cited in Creswell, 2007) ^[19].

The sample was drawn purposively. This was so because of the group of people believed to be reliable for the study, the girls who were pregnant and had since returned to school after delivery under the reentry policy. This study involved a total of 15 participants, consisting of 5 teachers, 5 parents and 5 pupils from secondary schools. Larkin and Flowers (2005)^[25] argue that IPA has mostly been applied to small samples with numbers of participants no higher than 15. The rationale for using small samples in IPA is to regulate the researcher to have an in depth focus on phenomena under investigation through capturing the experiences of the individual research participants.

The reason for selecting parents was to get a clear picture and first-hand information and feelings of having a teen mother in the family and their day to day reflections about their daughter's condition. This was so because parents understand their daughters condition better. Furthermore, the parents are the primary care givers who face the challenges from their daughters on a daily basis.

Results

It was established in this study that the school, parents and teachers were at the core in alleviating or worsening challenges teen mothers experienced in school, community, and home. However, the study established that there was need to understand the situation of teen mothers and that a tracking system of teen mothers should be in place to avoid any dropout.

The study also established that teen mothers change their personality and develop insomnia due to pressure by crying baby in the night, worries and school work or sleeping too much due to tiredness and feelings of worthlessness.

It was established that most of the teen mothers dropped out of school due to economic, school related challenges and personal challenges they encountered for the second attempt into school and or second pregnancy.

The study also established teen mothers had emotional outburst and setbacks due to lack of counseling, teen mothers lacked information about support systems and experienced a lot of withdraw from the family and friends therefore, posing a great challenge of completing school. A few (parents, teachers and pupils) that understand the predicament of the teen mothers gave holistic support towards their education and that of the bond of attachment of the child gave girls undue pressure and a great challenge of emotional stability and anxiety.

Furthermore, it was established that at Ndeke Secondary, Hellen Kaunda Secondary and Chambishi Secondary Schools, (all located in Kitwe District) counseling is not done at professional level for the teen mothers from pregnant to birth and throughout the schooling period and there is no tracking system to monitor the challenges, setback of the teen mother.

Conclusion

The study established that teen mothers faced a lot of challenges in their pursuit of completing school. Teen mothers explained their challenges ranging from the school environment (such as stigmatization and discrimination, being tainted, less concentration, poor time management, role conflicts and irregular attendance to school because of baby needs, lack of counselling and bullying in school), Economic challenges (poverty and finances, lack of support) and personal related challenges (role conflicts, low- self-

esteem, rejection from the family, and community).

The challenges on teen mothers established in the study seem to have contributed to the high dropout rate of teen mothers as they are unable to meet the demands of their situation or the predicament they found themselves into.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. The Ministry of Education should ensure that they adopt a holistic approach which does not dwell on changing girls behaviours, but to change the attitudes in society so that girls are encouraged to stay in school.
2. The Ministry of Education must reflect on and urge changes to the Policy so that it can be transformed into law to protect a girl child from early pregnancy or marriage.
3. The Policy makers should attend to what teen mothers themselves see as the challenging issues.

Suggestions for future Research

1. A future research should focus on the challenges that the babies of the teen mother's experience in the absence of their mothers.
2. The bond of attachment to babies that teen mothers miss when they are in class.
3. The effectiveness of inclusive schooling of teen mothers.
4. A future research should also focus on adapting schools to some values of the community in case of teen mothers

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