

# Perceptions and Experiences of Educational Stakeholders' Regarding Teenage-Mothers' Readmission in Secondary Schools of Tanzania Mainland.

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## Abstract

*Readmissions of teenage mothers' in secondary schools has gained popularity and pave its way into many African nations' educational policies and Acts currently. However, Tanzania mainland has not yet taken a full step into that. This study explored the perceptions and experiences of educational stakeholders regarding teenage mothers' readmission in secondary schools in Iringa district, Tanzania. It sought insights into the initiatives done and experiences acquired while promoting teenage-mothers' schooling, the perceived challenges associated with teenage-mothers' readmission and the best ways to accommodate teenage mothers in secondary schools. The study employed qualitative research approach, using discursive (pure) phenomenographic design. The study, involves thirty six participants who were selected using snowball sampling technique. The findings of the study revealed that most research participants (61.0%) oppose readmission basing on the moral and traditional grounds. However, there those few (39.0%) who supported readmission based on the human rights and economic reasons. . This calls for ongoing public debate and discussions so that all stakeholders can see it in the same eye before policy changes and reformatations can take place. The government is urged to provide a clear formal communication to all stakeholders' explaining its current stand regarding teenage mothers' readmission in secondary schools.*

**Key words:** Access, Equity, Readmission, Teenage-mother

## 1.0 Introduction

In the field of Education, women lag behind globally. Out of 948 million illiterates in the world, two thirds are women (Meena, 1996). Existing data indicates that, women in sub-Saharan Africa have an average less schooling than any other region in the world that is just one year compared to a male average of two years (Hubbard, 2008). There are however variations among countries. Teenage pregnancies are among the top reasons for girls' school drop outs globally and in Sub-Saharan Africa countries in particular. In Tanzania for example; during 2010 alone, about 68,000 pupils dropped out of primary schools and 66,000 students left Secondary Schools early. In the

same year over 7000 girls dropped out of primary and secondary schools due to pregnancy (URT, 2010-2011).

Teenage Pregnancy is a major educational and social problem worldwide, and its incidences are kept increasing (Women's United Nations Report Network (WUNRN, 2007). The observed consequences include contribution to high school drop-out rates, socio-economic burdens and potential barriers to the development of the woman. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the world, as is reported that out of 1,000 girls aged 15- 19 years 143 drop school because of early pregnancies. (Wikimedia Foundation, 2015). Customs and traditions are condemned to be the major causes of the problem. Moreover, of adolescent sexual behavior, lack of safe sex education in schools and homes, peer pressure to engage in sexual activity, incorrect use of contraception and sexual abuses are mentioned to be reasons for early pregnancies. Hand in hand with these factors Maluli & Bali (2014) identify poverty, exposure to abuse, violence and family strife at home, low self-esteem and low educational ambitions and goals as also motives to teenage pregnancies.

Currently girls who become pregnant while in Secondary Schools in Tanzania are expelled from School with no provision to return. School administrators take a stand in this matter by pointing to the Regulation which is found in the 2002 amendment to the Education Act as a basis for the practice of expelling girls from Schools. The article in Section 4(b) it states as follows;

*"The expulsion of a pupil from a school may be ordered where:*

*(b) The pupil has committed a criminal offence such as theft, malicious injury to property, prostitution, drug abuse or offence against morality whether or not the pupil is being or has been prosecuted for an offence,"(Education Act 2002,Section4)*

The United Nations has been mobilizing countries through conventions and commitments to increase access and equity in education for women and Tanzania among many other countries has signed several of them. The right to education is guaranteed under the article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948. It provides for the right to education and free and compulsory elementary education. Under article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1976, the states are required to recognize the right of every one to education, which need to be directed to the full development of the human personality, sense of dignity and strengthen the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention on the rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989, insists on the states to recognize the right of the child to education by making primary education compulsory and available free to all and by taking measures to encourage regular attendance and reduction of school dropout rates. Also as a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW), (1979), Tanzania is committed to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education through:

*“The reduction of female student dropout rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who left School prematurely” (Article 10(f) of CEDAW, 1979)*

Despite these commitments and the stipulations there in, still pregnant girls are being expelled from school with no provision to return back after delivery, also there are no follow up programmes to teenage mothers to ensure that they receive other alternative education offered in the education system after delivery.

Tanzania is also a signatory to several regional human rights instruments which ensure equity in educational provision including, The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the rights of women in Africa. In this regard the state countries are required to;

*“Promote enrollment and retention of girls in Schools and other training institutions and the organizational of programmes for women who leave school pre maturely” (The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, Article 12: 2 (c))*

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in Articles 11 and 14 require the state parties to adopt policy, law and special programmes to ensure girls have equal access to education. States are required to enact laws that promote equal access to and retention in primary, secondary and vocational training. This will enable pregnant girls to return to school.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), (1979) which explicitly recognizes the right of the pregnant girl to education, Article 11(3) (a) and (e) requires states parties to take measures to achieve the full realization of the right to education. This includes encouraging regular attendance at school and reduction of dropout rates. Also article 11(6) requires states specifically to ensure children who become pregnant before completing their education have an opportunity to continue with their education. Botswana, Guinea, Kenya, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zanzibar, Zambia, Malawi and South Africa are among the countries whose educational policies allows for readmission of teenage mothers in public schools, something which portrays their commitments and gender-sensitivities to girls education (Assey,2012).

Inadequacy of research studies regarding readmission of teenage mothers in schools in Tanzania, particularly on perceptions held by different Educational Stakeholders and experiences of teenage mothers who are in and outside schooling, this was a reason for this study that aimed at assessing the perceptions and experiences of Educational Stakeholders, regarding teenage mothers' readmission in Secondary Schools of Tanzania to fill the apparent gap.

### **1.1 Methods and Goals**

Predominantly, qualitative method was employed using the Discursive Phenomenographic design. The aim was to discover the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, realize and understand the aspect of teenage mothers' readmission in secondary

schools and the experiences thereof (Ornek, 2008). Phenomenography design was chosen due to its' suitability in studies related to exploring experiences and perceptions as this one (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012). The study was conducted in four secondary schools seriously affected with the problem of teenage pregnancies in Iringa District council. Given the sensitivity of pregnancy and mothering students, 36 participants were selected purposefully using the snowball sampling technique. The participants of the study included the District Educational Officer (DEO), head of schools, teachers of discipline, teachers of guidance and counselling, students, teenage-mothers and parents. Data were collected by using open ended interviews and focus group discussions, and were recorded using the voice recorder, then were verbatim transcribed and analyzed using the eight-step phenomenographic analysis process adopted from Creswell (2013) and Sjostrom (2002), and presented as variations which define the conceptions held by participants.

### 1.1.1 Results and Discussion

In fraction, 14/36 of the participants which is equivalent to 39% supported the idea of pregnant girls and teenage mothers being readmitted in secondary schools. This is say that pregnant girls and teenage mothers are to be allowed to continue with schooling. Holding that; education is the basic human right and all human beings need to be given equal opportunities in accessing education regardless of their status, gender or sexual roles. They also support readmission based on the economic benefits of educating girls versus the economic burden of having school-drop outs teenage-mothers in the communities:

“It is a good thing to readmit girls after pregnancy because most of the girls come from poor families and are dependent to their parents, when a girl become pregnant and have a baby she adds another dependent to the family, they lost all hope and dreams for a better future. But if they were given a chance for re-admission they can finish their education and be in a position to have a career later in life and support the baby and their parents” (Field notes on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016).

Stakeholders who oppose readmission were 22/36 of the total fraction which is equivalent to 61% and they are holding on the moral grounds and the traditional roles of mothers. They insist that teenage mothers' should be kept away from secondary schools lest they pollute other students morally and influence them to promiscuous behaviors. They also hold that teenage-mothers were meant to stay at home and take care of their babies:

“If a girl has decided to get pregnant, she has no right to go back to school because she is now a mother and the primary role of a mother is to stay at home and take care of the baby, secondary school is not her place. If we say she should be readmitted in school, so who will take care of the baby at home?” (Field notes on 29th February 2016).

These findings resonate the sentiment reported in the existing literatures (Chege and Sifuna 2006; Maluli and Bali 2014; Assey 2012; Wekesa 2014; Bhana, Morrel, Shefer and Sisa 2010) that, allowing pregnant girls to remain in school and return after giving birth is considered

significant in delaying a second birth and offering young women increased opportunities to get education and increase their economic standing. The findings with regard to traditional conception agree with the findings of the study done by Wekesa (2014) which revealed that, majority of school heads viewed acceptance of teenage mothers in their schools as a taboo, and further unveiled that some of the school which accepted teenage mothers in Kenya have been reported to be stigmatized by the community members and mocking the schools as “maternity schools”. There have been noticeable gender and positional influence on the perceptions held by educational stakeholders. Female heads of schools and female teachers who participated in the study seemed to be supportive of readmission of teenage-mothers’ back to secondary schools, they seem to be more sympathetic and understanding of the situation that lead many school girls into pregnancy. They also seem to be more aware of the negative consequences that teenage-mothers do face for missing the opportunity to continue with secondary education.

**Table 1: Perceptions of educational stakeholders regarding teenage mothers’ readmission in secondary schools**

Conception	Responses	Fractions
1. Human Right	8	8/36
2. Moral	14	14/36
3. Economic	6	6/36
4. Traditional	8	8/36
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36/36</b>

### **Initiatives done and Experiences acquired while promoting teenage-mothers’ schooling**

The findings of the study unveiled that, the government of Tanzania has taken steps towards allowing teenage-mothers’ back to school. This has been done through politicians verbal campaigns after the official launch of the education and training policy of 2014, there have been verbal orders and campaigns from government officials to allow teenage-mothers’ back to schools. However there have been no official communications in writings to the district educational officers and heads of schools so as to formalize the practice. This was confirmed through the statement made by one of the participant;

“In essence since the launch of the education and training policy of December 2014 by the former president of Tanzania, His excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, he actually publicly announced that pregnant girls should not be expelled from schools and he ordered the local governments to ensure that all teenage mothers’ who dropped out of secondary schools have been followed up and readmitted back to school to continue with education. (Field notes on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2016).

The findings also uncovered that the NECTA Guidelines have provided the room for pregnant girls and teenage mothers’ to be allowed to sit for their final NECTA examinations, also evidences have shown that there are some NGOs which have conducted readmission of teenage

mothers in secondary schools in some parts of Tanzania mainland. Findings also revealed that heads of schools have been showing mercy and compassion for some of these girls to either continue with education after delivery or allowed them to sit for their final NECTA examination:

“When we discover the girl is pregnant we talk to her first before we talk to the parents, so that we can get the cooperation of the girl to know who impregnate her and have him arrested. There after we expel the girl from School. However NECTA guidelines dictate that if a girl is detected to be pregnant few months before sitting for NECTA exams, they are supposed to be allowed to sit for the exams, although as per school rules we would have the girl expelled from school for the remaining period and only allow them to come for exams” (Field notes on 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016)

The findings of the study also indicated that, there are pregnant girls who hide in classes until their due for delivery without being noticed by teachers or other fellow students and the presence of teenage-mothers both in public and private secondary schools without the knowledge of teachers, students and school administrators. The findings further revealed that, parents who are well off financially have been taking their daughters to private schools, after delivery. Also some parents have been collaborating with their daughters to do abortions so that they can continue with education in the public schools:

“I have joined another school this year (2016) on January and I have repeated a class, so I am in form one now. No one at my new school is aware that I have a 4months old baby at home, neither my new friends nor my teachers. I have just decided to keep it to myself. The only difference between me and my other students is that I often come to school late as I have to express the milk for my baby before I left for school, but sometimes I do manage to get to school on time. I have been punished for late coming very often too, but that doesn't bother me much” (Field notes on 4th March 2016)

This findings are similar to the findings of the study done by Maluli and Bali (2014) In Dodoma Tanzania, where by 95% Of the participants acknowledged the presence of quietly struggling pregnant and mothering students in secondary schools due to lack of clear policy to protect them. These practices render the lives of pregnant girls and teenage mothers in danger.

### **Perceived challenges that hinder teenage-mothers' readmission in secondary schools**

The findings uncovered that, educational stakeholders are skeptical about teenage mothers' readmission in secondary schools for fear of having double standards in schools especially when it comes to condemning bad behaviors and disciplinary matters. They also feared that the child care roles might cause teenage-mothers to report late to school in the morning and be absent from school for many reasons. Psychological pressure (stress) and stigmatization by fellow students and teachers was another challenge revealed in the findings. Financial constraints and lack of child care support were other challenges which were identified in the findings. The last challenge revealed was the negative influence of teenage-mothers' to other students:

“If we will allow readmission we will not be able to condemn sexual sin to our youths, they will find us contradictory because they will be aware that students are allowed to have babies while still in school and so why are we telling them to abstain, this will just create double standards in schools and societies as well” (Field notes on 29th February 2016)

These findings concur with the findings obtained in the study done by (Mweemba 2014; Maluli 2011) who mentioned that teenage mothers who returned from school encountered challenges arising from the negative attitude among fellow learners, lack of child care support, emotional instability due to lack of guidance and counselling services in schools, time pressure due to roles conflict (schooling and child care). A similar sentiment was echoed in the United States, where it was argued that managing to take care of the child and devoting to adequate time to school is not an easy task for teen mothers (Arlington Schools, 2004).

### **The best ways to accommodate teenage mothers in secondary schools**

Participants exposed several best ways to accommodate teenage mothers in secondary. Given the already perceived challenges that were stated in the objective number four above, these suggestions were mentioned by participants as a way to counteract the challenges and provide a way for teenage mothers to continue with education in environments that will cater for their unique status. According to the findings, the best ways to accommodate teenage mothers in education system of Tanzania mainland includes; Initiating special secondary schools for teenage mothers only, to Provide flexible timetable for teenage mothers in secondary schools and to improve the current schools with special facilities needed for teenage mothers and lastly is to register teenage mothers in vocational secondary schools instead of readmitting them back to the conventional secondary schools:

“The government should build special schools with extra care facilities for pregnant girls and teenage mothers, and we should not think of mixing them with other students in normal schools, to avoid double standards in disciplinary issues at school level. And these schools should be having only matured and grown up teachers who can be able to handle them well. Also these schools need to have special rules and regulations which are flexible enough to cater for the unique needs of the teenage mothers and their babies” (Field notes on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2016).

### **1.1.2 Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the view of the research findings the following inferences were made;

- The Government of Tanzania has to engage all educational stakeholders in intentional and continuous public debate throughout the country to discuss and dialogue on the issue of teenage mothers' readmission in secondary schools of Tanzania Mainland. These dialogues are essential so as to ascertain the country position with regard to increasing

access and equity in education as one of its central commitment in the national development agenda as well as the education and training policy.

- The government should provide a clear and formal communication regarding teenage mothers' readmission and expulsion of pregnant girls' policy so as to remove the confusion that is currently observed among key educational stakeholders.
- The government should embark into a thorough study from the neighboring countries such as Tanzania Zanzibar, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia to learn on the pros and cons of readmission policy to teenage mothers, other students, schools and the community so that they can be in a position to prepare themselves better for effective implementation of readmission policy if at all we want to do that.
- The government should consider all the options which will help teenage mothers to continue with secondary education without harming their health, considering the welfare of the newborn babies and the complexities of teenage mothers' influence to other students as a way to address the better way to accommodate teenage mothers in our education system.
- A comparative study should be done to other countries and also some regions in Tanzania which have already implemented readmission of teenage mothers in secondary schools so as to establish the perceived negative influence that teenage mothers' are thought to have on other students. Also a study should be conducted in the same areas where readmission has already been implemented to establish the academic performance of teenage mothers who return to secondary schools.
- Further studies are recommended in this area to establish the actual economic impact of the school-drop outs due to pregnancies in Tanzania.

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