

Experiences of Teenage Mothers in Chepyuk Primary Schools in Mount Elgon Subcounty in Bungoma County in Kenya

Yvonne Nanyama Chenane

Kenyatta University

Abstract: *This study sought to investigate the experiences of teenage mothers in Chepyuk primary schools in Mount Elgon Sub-county in Bungoma County in Kenya. To ensure extensive and intensive investigation of the phenomenon under study, the study employed mixed research method. The study targeted forty eight informants. Out of which 29 were female and 19 were male. They consisted of underage girls who were parents while still in primary school. The majority of these came from Class Six (6) to class Eight (8) and teenage mothers out of school, regular pupils (6 boys and 6 girls), class teachers, teachers in the counselling and guidance department and head teachers. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting informants. Data collection instrument was questionnaire.*

Keywords: Experiences, Teenage Mothers, Primary schools

1. Introduction

Teenage pregnancy often comes unexpected as put forward by Clemens (2002), various cases are treated differently in school and at home. They are highly victimized by their family at home and friends and tutors at school more so due to their tender age.

Stigma and discrimination

Pregnancy at a tender age as Argawal (2008) stated, is the greatest cause of stress. It could also turn ugly if not handled well such as suicide. Undue pressure is experienced by underage mothers from the teachers, their peers and the community that they hail from as Arlington Arlington Public School (2004) report. The school and society have shown a lot of non-committal tendencies towards the mothers by discriminating and keeping them at bay. The reason for this attitude is given by Pillow (2004). He says the mothers were seen as a discourse of contamination: their continued association with other pupils is highly forbade as they are presumed to be agents of bad behaviour and if not checked, they will pass it over to the good pupils. These restrictions did not auger well with some teenage mothers who saw quitting school as the only option. In fact, Oyaro (2008) alludes that the cases of drop out among teenage mothers results from discrimination and stigmatisation from educators and fellow learners.

Support from school

Anyon (2008) argued that the occurrences in schools serve to heighten the social patterns that already thrive in the society. That was so because as a matter of fact, schools need a foundation to exist, not in a vacuum, they face both internal and external challenges in imparting knowledge to young ones.

‘Some bodies that are in charge of schools put forward laws to be adhered to as elaborated further by Mwamwenda (1995). Most have been to the disadvantage of female learners that have been put in the family way. The policies put forward have to be followed by all and anyone who does not faces repercussions. Hence, even if there are teachers with good intention to help, they have their hands tied, thus a gap is created between tutors and learners. The teenage mothers bore all the consequences of their pregnancy as they are seen to have played a hand in what they have become. Pupils who are at the same time parents are tipped to fail in their academic endeavor due to double roles. Teachers and regular pupils showed dislike to teenage mothers as said by Mohase (2006), and this made them feel out of place and unwanted. As a result of this, teenage mothers viewed their kids as a bad omen. The way teachers and fellow pupils treated teenage mothers made them see school as a place of torture rather than a place for learning. Some were abused openly and called names by teachers and fellow pupils, for instance “Zali” to mean old lady by fellow pupils and teachers (Shaningwa, (2007). In seeking to know how tutors helped teenage mothers in school, it is discovered by Smith Battle (2007) that there exists a rift between teachers and young mothers. Therefore, a gap is felt in the way schooling young female parents are helped by their institutions. Educators need to be able to have a total turn around and embrace a new perception to female young mothers and realise that it upon them to give hope to them. This goes a long way in determining if they will quit school or push on.

Professional guidance and counselling

Research work by Chigona and Chetty (2007) showed that parents to the pregnant pupils stood aloof and took no part in any way in relation to their daughters. This they did so as to conform to the standing rules in the society that did not condone early pregnancies. The girls were therefore left to deal with this trauma on their own while learning. In addition,

in order to establish if counselling was given at home to teen mothers, a school head confirmed to Chigona and Chetty (2007) that, parents in most cases avoided their pregnant girls because they are thought to have brought a lot of shame to the family. Thus gave no counselling at all. The researchers further examined that schooling girls with babies were not given any counselling and that was evidenced from the response of a teenage mother who responded that she did not receive counselling when she went back to school. Shawn (2012) in her study on 'Mothers and Graduate: Teen mothers who stayed in school' in the USA, Northeast Georgia found out that there seem to be a missing link between teen mothers and their schools did not advocate for teen mothers. The schools did not have a specified individual in place to act as a liaison between the school and teen mothers. The success of teenage mothers in schools, according to Lee Smith-Battle (2011), can only be realised when education stakeholders steps in and avail expertise assistance. Olivier (2000) expressed similar sentiments by arguing in the sense that parents and tutors ought to be many steps ahead in order that they are better placed to handle cases of teenage motherhood when they occur. Female learners in school that are put in the family way do not have a cost life in school. They therefore need any available means, for instance, counseling that can restore their hope and zeal in education.

2. Research Methodology

Research design

Babbie and Mouton (2010) states that, a research design is basically an array of activities that a given researcher bases on as he advances ideas to build up his work. This study was a mixed research in nature and employed descriptive research design. A design that Kothari (2010), gives a thumb up to it as an appropriate method and very vital in all manner while looking at the behaviour of a populous group and gives a room to the researcher to pose questions to the informants and relate with the variables. The descriptive research design was pertinent to this study because it allowed the exploration of the experiences of teenage mothers with regard to participation in education and allowed the researcher to draw causal relationships between variables.

This research was majorly qualitative in its scope so as to allow in depth data collection. In order to strengthen qualitative findings, quantitative evidence was also employed. (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). To describe and give an analysis pertaining a particular way of life and demeanour of certain people or their groups, it calls for qualitative research only for those being studied (Orodho, 2012). For this study, the researcher employed qualitative approach to exhaustively reveal the situations that teenage mothers encounter while in schools and how the experiences influence the involvement of the girls in primary education.

Teenage mothers out of school

The researcher sampled out six (6) teenage mothers who had dropped out of school using purposive sampling. Teenage mothers who had recently dropped out of school were

included in the study to help identify their experiences while in school before they became teenage mothers and after they became teenage mothers and also give the factors that led to their dropout from schools.

Teachers

Twelve (12) teachers (both class teachers and guidance and counselling teachers) were sampled out using purposive sampling. Two teachers per sample school were chosen to form part of the sample on basis of: that one was a class teacher, this was intended to provide performance records and other documents needed to understand the challenges of the teenage mothers. The other teacher was guidance and counselling teacher, to establish the experiences teenage mothers go through while in school. Of the 12 teachers that were sampled out, seven were male and five were female.

Research Instruments

To data was obtained through interview schedule. The interview schedules were administered to those taking part in the study because of their varied literacy levels to find out their experiences in participation in education in Chepyuk primary schools. The rationale for use of interview schedules in this study was that it enabled the researcher to collect in depth data, through flexible probing of questions to understand the experiences of teenage mothers as well as its influence as they attend school which is not possible with a questionnaire. The interview questions were in English but the researcher also translated some for slow learners into Kiswahili. This also enabled the researcher collect qualitative data for the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Experiences of Teenage Mothers in Chepyuk Primary Schools in Mount Elgon

During the research the teenage mothers gave various experiences that they were going through due to unprepared motherhood. The experiences are tabulated below.

Table 4.6: Experiences faced by teenage mothers

Experiences of teenage mothers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stigma and discrimination	4	22
Rejection by family	5	28
Inadequate support from school	2	11
Low self esteem	2	11
Inadequate concentration in class	3	17
Lack of freedom to fully participate in classroom activities and co-curricular activities	1	6
Withdrawal	1	6
Total	18	100

From the study, rejection by family (28%) and stigma and discrimination (22%) are the most prominent experiences teenage mothers face in sailing through their state of motherhood. Two teenage mothers who were no longer schooling said that they were rejected by their families and chased away from home when the parents discovered that

they were pregnant and in fact, one of them said her father called her a disgrace to the family and that is why she did not resume school. She lacked school fees and support in order to take care of herself and the baby. To make matters worse the person who had impregnated her rejected her and even told her to abort. This led her to have low self-esteem.

Stigma and discrimination is another experience teenage mothers go through, from the research. For instance, two teenage mothers in one of the sampled schools stated that some pupils in their class were making fun of them by calling them names like 'mama', old woman, harlot and also the netball captain had refused to admit one of teenage mothers in her netball team and she told her that she was a bad influence to the regular pupils. These findings are supported by several studies. For instance, Mohase (2006) pointed out that, teachers and regular pupils showed dislike to teenage mothers and this made them feel out of place and unwanted. As a result of this, teenage mothers viewed their kids as an obstacle to their former life. They were for example, called "Zali" (elderly women) by fellow pupils and teachers (Shaningwa, (2007).

Another teenage mother who had terminated her education informed the study that she did so since her classmates had began to discriminate her in their activities. For instance, they could not involve her in their class group discussions and also when they went out to play in the field, they isolated her, when they discovered that she was pregnant because her belly was growing and she could no longer hide it in her school uniform because it was now visible and the uniform had become so tight on her, and when she reported the matter to her class teacher, nothing was done to her classmates and she ended up dropping out of school because of the discrimination she was going through. These findings are in agreement with those of Oyaro (2008) who pointed out that the major reason for termination of education by teenage mothers was associated with stigma and discrimination by teachers and fellow pupils

The study found withdrawal to be another experience teenage mother's face. For instance, one male class teacher from the sampled schools said that one teenage mother who resumed school and was in her class was so much withdrawn and anti-social, for example, in class she never answered any question, always looked down when a teacher asks a question, she also never participated in games and always sat in secluded places.

Lack of concentration in class and lack of freedom of association with regular pupils and teachers were also established as experiences that teenage mothers who resumed school face from study. For instance, one teenage mother said that she cannot freely associate with other pupils since her breasts oozed milk too much to the extent that her dress was so wet and smelly. This made her embarrassed and uncomfortable. Another teenage mother said that she never understands what the teacher teaches as she finds her mind drifting to her baby whom she always

leaves with her aged grandmother. She always finds herself worrying so much like, is she well or sick? Is she fed? bathed? among others. One head teacher interviewed said that teenage mothers do not perform very well as they do not fully concentrate while in class because they are usually thinking about their babies back at home. These findings are in agreement with research work done by Chigona and Chetty (2007) which argued that divided attention results to underperforming as one teenage mother in their study said that, giving full attention to class work is difficult more so, during the times when the child is unwell. Constant absentmindedness was also brought forward by two principals from the research work by Shaningwa (2007), from which she highlighted that teenage mothers were sometimes unsettled and always guessing about their babies' situation at home.

The views and reactions of teachers on teenage mothers

The study sought to find out how teachers viewed teenage mothers in school. Some views and reactions were positive and others were negative. For instance, one guidance and counselling teacher said that she was shocked because the girls who were found to be pregnant were well disciplined and better performing. Another teacher said that she did not relate well with the teenage mothers because she viewed them as a bad influence to the regular pupils. One head teacher from the sampled schools said that some teachers in his school usually view teenage mothers as failures because they see them as hopeless and 'mama's' who have to struggle to balance between taking care of their babies and schooling. Findings from this research are therefore consistent with other researches that found out that stigmatization by teachers has a great bearing on young mothers in school.

However, it can be noted that some views were positive, for instance, one class teacher said that she was so sympathetic, understanding and caring to the teenage mothers and always encouraged them to seek for extra coaching from the individual teachers on areas they have not understood or on those lessons they had missed. She viewed them as unfortunate pupils put in that state of motherhood by impeding factors like rape that they did not have power to control. Another class teacher from the sampled schools said that he treats them just like regular pupils, for example, he incorporates them in school activities like class discussions, drama, choir and doing manual work.

The reactions of the regular pupils towards teenage mothers

The study sought to find out the regular pupils reactions to teenage mothers. Some views and reactions were positive and others were negative. One third (33%) of the regular pupils from the sampled schools had negative views and reactions. For instance, one regular pupil (a girl) stated that she isolates and shuns the teenage mothers because she views them as being immoral since they slept with boys and men who impregnated them. Also another regular pupil (a boy) from the sampled schools said that he usually rebukes,

tease, ridicule and abuse teenage mothers because he sees them as outcasts, hopeless and people with loose morals.

These findings therefore concur with other researches that found out that those who return to school encounter hostile atmosphere through isolation, humiliation and stigmatization from other pupils while teachers do little to intervene. (Chetty, 2007).

However, it can be noted that more than a half (58%) of the regular pupils from the sampled schools involve teenage mothers in their activities, for instance, by playing with them, having group discussions with them, revising with them and providing love. For example, one regular pupil said, "I do not see teenage mothers as different from me because what happened to them can happen to anybody else, so I take them just like any other regular pupil in my class and therefore I revise with them and I eat with them during lunch time". Another regular pupil (a girl) said that we normally play together as girls during games time including a girl who has given birth from our class and we also have class discussion group as girls. This implies that some teenage mothers face a friendly school environment.

Challenges teachers face in regard to handling teenage pregnancy and motherhood in school

Table 4.7: Challenges teachers face

Challenges teachers face	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of freedom from the teenage mothers	9	50
Feel of maturity and rude tendencies among teenage mothers	6	33
Lack of link between parents and teachers	3	17
Total	18	100

The study sought to find out how teachers were relating with the teenage mothers in school and the challenges they were facing in handling teenage mothers in school. The challenges are tabulated in table 4.7 above. Prominently, a half (50%) of the teachers from the sampled schools said that some teenage mothers were so much reserved and always kept to themselves and hence were not free to associate with teachers and so it was hard to carry out guidance and counselling to some teenage mothers and this did not help in the improvement of the teenage mothers in their academic work. For example, one guidance and counselling teacher from the sampled schools said that it was hard for him to get any information from the teenage mother who he felt that she was not acting normally, for instance, she would not answer any question in class nor participate in class discussions during the lessons but when he called her for guidance to find out why she was acting that way and how he may be of any help, she could not say anything.

Feel of maturity and rude tendencies among teenage mothers was another challenge teachers were facing as the study established. One third (33%) of the teachers from the

sampled schools affirmed to this. For example, one head teacher said that teachers had reported to him of the unbecoming behaviours of two teenage mothers who were acting rudely, for example, they would come late to class and also leave class as they want and when teachers sought to find out why they were behaving so, one teenage mother just sneered at the teacher and walked out on her. Another teenage mother went to an extent of referring to a female teacher as an equal to her since they were all mothers. When the teenage mother was sent home to bring her parents, the parents did not show up hence creating the lack of link between teachers and parents in trying to instil good values in the teenage mothers.

4. Conclusion

To start with, the study interviewed teenage mothers both in and out of school from the sampled schools and they said that the most prominent experiences that they were going through. The findings were that some said that they were shunned by their parents who told them to leave their home when they realised that they were expectant and from then life has never been the same again. They did not resume school because they lacked school fees and support in order to take care of themselves and the baby. To make matters worse, some of the teenage mothers were also rejected by the men who had impregnated them.

Second, stigma and discrimination was also observed as another major challenge facing teenage mothers. In school, some of the regular pupils and some teachers did not want to associate themselves with the teenage mothers because they so them as a bad influence and this made the teenage mothers very lonely leading to withdrawal and thus they were not free to participate in the classroom and co-curricular activities. This usually contributed to low self-esteem and some teenage mothers who could not cope up with that treatment and had to quit school altogether.

5. Recommendations

- 1) Parents should neither violently attack their teenage daughters on discovering that they are expectant nor chase them away from home because this helps to ensure that the psychological state of the girls is not affected. They should embrace and accept the fact that there is hope after delivery and should not chase them away from home but rather they should take back the teenage mothers to school, provide school fees for them, help in nursing the baby and also advise and encourage their daughters on the need to work hard, in order in future to help their infants.
- 2) The government through the provincial administration should also issue stern warnings and also prosecute the parents who chase away their pregnant daughters and also those who refuse to pay the school fees to their teenage daughters. Severe punishments should also be imposed to

those men who sleep with and impregnate the schooling teenage girls. The punishment should be in terms of long jail terms, heavy fines and being forced to pay for the school fees for the teenage mothers and also cater for their babies.

- 3) Severe punishments should be meted on those Pupils found being disrespectful to the teenage mothers. The pupils should interact freely with the teenage mothers showing them love and care including, studying together with them, helping them on the challenging problems and assignments and talking to them politely.

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