

Participation of Teenage Mothers' in Primary Education in Chepyuk Location in Mount Elgon Subcounty in Bungoma County in Kenya

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Abstract: *This study sought to investigate the participation of teenage mothers' in primary education in Chepyuk location in Mount Elgon Sub-county in Bungoma County in Kenya. The study focused on underage girls who were parents while still in primary school (majority were from class six to class eight) and class teachers. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting informants. Data collection instrument was interview schedule.*

Keywords: Participation, Teenage Mothers, Primary schools

1. Introduction

From the research work by Freeman and Rickels (1993), in comparison to regular pupils, teenage mothers have greater odds against them as they attend school. It can be noted that teenage motherhood has a great bearing on girls' participation in education. Most do not complete their studies while some of those who complete have a dismal performance.

Class in attendance

Teenage mothering often brings with it a host of occurrences that disrupt the pattern of being in school. The work of research from Chigona and Chetty (2007) established that they skip classes to attend to their ailing children for a considerable period. Nursing and studying proved to be a great challenge and in most cases they had no other option but to skip classes (Lloyd and Mensh, 2008). Teenage motherhood is majorly associated to failure hence as Theron and Dunn (2006) indicated that, teenage mothers have least hope of keeping up and coping with school. Their last resort therefore is quitting school. Most teenage mothers are forced to discontinue their education as cited by Zachry (2005) due to inflexible rules and regulations regarding to school attendance laid out by school authorities. In their expression, most teenage mothers lamented this school procedure terming it as very unfriendly. Therefore, in the point of view of the research, school policies contribute heavily to teenage mothers leaving school.

Performance

Dismal performance is portrayed majorly in teenage mothers from Chigona and Chetty (2008) research, as a result of being isolated by fellow pupils cum tutors. To support this study, Mulongo (2005) examined that often, teen mothers are taken as immoral and underperforming learners with unfocussed aspirations. Taking teenage mothers as underperforming learners reduces their performance in academics and low assistance is given to them by teachers since they are seen as incompetent. Stigmatization by peer mates and teachers really affects teenage mothers. In some schools, teachers constantly refer to them as failures because they have babies. They use all sorts of abusive words to those teenage mothers once they committed any mistake in

school. Some of the bad comments towards teenage mothers were why award them for the problems they brought upon themselves (Wanda, 2004). On one hand, Zachary (2005) said that pregnancy spelled an automatic exit from school. This comes with other factors, for instance, non-involvement in their work, while on the other hand, with adequate financial aid as Ehlers (2003) established, teenage mothers who resumed school showed an upward performance in their class work. Therefore from this, it can be rightly put that with good progress in class, teen mothers stayed and vice versa.

Involvement in class

Research studies by Chigona and Chetty (2007) indicated that not participating in class work leads to underperforming as one teenage mother said that giving full attention to class work is difficult more so, when the child is unwell. This was also brought forward by the school heads from the two schools under study conducted by Shaningwa (2007) when she highlighted that teenage mothers were often pre-occupied thinking of what might be happening to their children. The lack of concentration lowers their educational performance. The work of research by Kaufman et al (2001) stated that it becomes difficult for underage mothers who return back to school after delivery to juggle between class work and taking care of the child.

2. 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.

3. Results and Discussion

Teenage Mothers in Schools

The researcher sought to establish how the teenage mothers who resumed school were fairing on, that is, the time when they were regular pupils and after they became teenage mothers. This was categorized as follows;

Class attendance

The study sought to find out in most cases they have no how teenage mothers who resumed school were attending classes. The study observed the class registers of each of the teenage mothers from the sampled schools for the first term that each resumed school. Through observation, the researcher found that three quarters (75%) of the teenage mothers had irregular attendance. The study sought to find out from teenage mothers why they were not attending classes regularly. One teenage mother who was always absent on Monday and Friday, said that she leaves her baby with her mother, who is a business woman and she always goes to the market on Monday and Friday to sell her commodities and therefore she has to stay at home to nurse her baby. Another teenage mother said that her baby at times cries the whole night and she hardly sleeps overnight and hence the days her baby cries the whole night she doesn't attend school because she has to take her to the hospital for clinical check-ups. Another teenage mother stated, "I stay with my aged grandmother because I was chased away from home and most a times I am forced to remain at home to nurse my child because my aged grandmother has health issues and she can fall sick anytime". Two teenage mothers interviewed said that they sometimes miss to go to school when their babies fall sick and they have to take them to hospitals.

Concerning the irregular attendance, one class teacher had this to say,

In my class two teenage mothers have challenges of school fees and they are in and out of school because their parents have financial problems. (Female teacher, personal communication, October, 2016). In support of this, Lloyd and Mensch (2008) stated that nursing as well as handling class work proved to be a tricky affair and another option but to skip classes. Furthermore, Kaufman et al (2001) stated that it becomes difficult for mothers who return to school after delivery to juggle between class work and taking care of the child.

Class performance

Generally, the research established that the performance of teenage mothers in school is greatly affected, many of them recorded drastic drop in their class work as tabulated below.

Table 1: Class performances of the teenage mothers

Teenage mothers	Performance ($\times/500$)					
	Before pregnancy			After teenage motherhood		
	Term one	Term two	Term three	Term One	Term two	Term three
A	294	301	286	160	217	205
B	234	240	260	221	200	237
C	315	312	340	232	229	251
D	189	179	200	116	109	127
E	245	256	277	190	207	213
F	370	381	362	282	273	299
G	201	219	264	102	98	111
H	352	348	359	192	187	129
I	318	329	312	114	204	198
J	222	219	239	163	147	201
K	247	251	267	333	342	363
L	302	319	324	309	329	338

The study sought to find out how the teenage mothers were performing in class before pregnancy and after pregnancy. The findings were obtained from the mark books of the classes from the sampled schools through the assistance of the class teachers of the sampled teenage mothers. The tabulation above shows the performance of the teenage mothers before and after teenage pregnancy. The marks in the table are a total marks obtained by individual mother on a possible total of 500 marks. The study obtained the performance of teenage mothers for a period of three terms (one year) before each of the girls became teenage mothers and a period of three terms after each individual teenage mother had resumed school. From the tabulation above, the study found out that, about three quarters (67%) of the sampled teenage mothers in school showed a decline in their class performance. One quarter (25%) of the teenage mothers neither improved nor declined in their class performance as before they became pregnant and after they became teenage mothers. The research targeted to establish the trend in the performance of the teenage mothers. One of the class teacher from the sampled schools (a male teacher) said that the greatest contributing factor was absenteeism from school by the teenage mothers, lack of concentration in class and the anti-social behaviour of most of the teenage mothers too hindered their academic performance hence a big number of those who showed a decline in their class performance.

Another class teacher (a female teacher) said, the teenage mother in her class dropped in her performance because of her rude tendencies towards teachers and fellow pupils and whenever she is sent home to bring the parents for further guidance the parent does not show up and in addition she usually misses some examinations due to absenteeism.

For the teenage mother whose performance was lowest attributed this to the fact that she attends classes' scanty times, some of the regular pupils isolates her, for example, during group discussions and this makes her not to see a future in studying and contemptuous treatment from some teacher.

This qualifies Chigona and Chetty, (2008) who found out that dismal school performance is portrayed majorly in teenage mothers as a result of being isolated by fellow pupils and teachers. Supporting this, Mulongo (2005) examined that often, teenage mothers are taken as immoral and underperforming learners with unfocussed aspirations.

The performance of pupil L was observed by the researcher to have been relatively stable before and after teenage motherhood. In seeking to find out why her performance was stable, she said, "when I got pregnant my parents did not chase me away and when I gave birth my baby was well taken care of by my mother while I resumed school and because I knew my baby was okay, I resumed my studies as normal and put in more effort to improve my studies. The researcher observed that if a teenage mother has caring and understanding parents, she can still perform better in her academics.

However, one teenage mother who was performing fairly before she became pregnant showed a big performance in

her class work as a teenage mother. The research set out to unravel the reason behind this drastic improvement of the one sampled teenage mother and she said that,

I resorted to working hard in order to please my guardian who besides having a lot of financial commitments, went out of his way to ensure am in school, I also have to work hard for a good future for me and my baby who was rejected by his father. (Teenage mother, personal communication, October, 2016)

This finding support a research by Ehlers (2003) who established that with adequate financial aid, teenage mothers who resumed school showed an upward performance in their class work.

The study sought to find out how teenage mothers participate in classroom activities, for instance, in group discussions, answering general questions in class and working assignments on the chalkboard. The researcher attended classes in which teenage mothers were from the sampled schools. The researcher found through observation in one of the classes that, as regular pupils answered questions and engaged the teacher jovially, the teenage mother who was in the class just stared blankly at the teacher and whenever the teacher posed a random question, most of the regular pupils raised up their hands but the teenage mother remained disinterested. When the teacher picked on her, she looked down and just smiled at the teacher providing no reply. In another class, through observation, it was found that of the two teenage mothers in the class, one was more active than even the regular pupils and she would answer the questions posed to the class effortlessly. For instance, during a maths lesson she was given a chance to do a mathematics question and she did it impressively but the other teenage mother as was observed was rather passive, she never lifts up her hand and when picked on she would only mumble while biting at her finger nails. The research sought to find out how the active teenage mother happened to be so bright and she had this to say,

I usually study hard and do consultations with the teachers, I visit the library where I read story books to improve my language because I want to succeed in my education and become a medical doctor. (Teenage mother, personal communication, October 2016).

The class teacher of the two teenage mothers told the study that she was proud of the active teenage mother because of her tireless effort in seeking to improve in her academics day by day while on the other hand she said that she is trying hard to help the passive teenage mother to improve in her academics and class participation through guidance and counselling and she was positive that the girl would improve.

In another class from the sampled schools, the researcher observed a teenage mother leading the regular pupils in a group discussion during a mathematics lesson and was calculating sums on the chalkboard and the research was so impressed at her clarity and excellent steps she followed in solving problems on the board, there was hardly any pupil that was left behind. It was so impressive watching her take charge of the class. The research sought to find out more

from the subject teacher about the performance of the girl in mathematics and he said, "I have confidence in her because she is a hardworking and focussed girl, above all, she always tops in the subject". It can be noted that some teenage mothers who resume schools perform even much better than the regular pupils.

In another class from the sampled schools with teenage mothers the researcher found through observation that teenage mothers were participating in the cleanliness exercises whole heartedly, for instance, one teenage mother was found sweeping the class alone in the morning and when the researcher inquired why she was sweeping alone, she said, "I usually sweep the class every morning with or without the help of my classmates because when I attended post natal clinic I was told that hygiene is key to keeping diseases at bay".

Participation in co-curricular activities and interaction with others

The study visited the sampled schools on different occasions during games time to find out how teenage mothers indulged themselves during this period of the time table (games time). The researcher found through observation that eight (67%) of the teenage mothers in school were passive during this period, for instance, one teenage mother was found sleeping on her desk and in seeking to find out why this was so, she informed the study that she prefers to be alone than mingle with regular pupils since they called her names like 'mama' while others walked away whenever she joins their group. She continued to say that one day she reported to the class teacher about one boy from class five who used to constantly call her "mama" but the teacher neither reprimanded the boy nor warned him about it. Another teenage mother was found sitting under a tree while others played and her reason was, "I feel out of place running around with regular pupils because they usually refer to me as a big woman". One teenage mother was found in the class busy doing her homework and had this to say, "I always do my assignments during this games time because I hardly get time to do it while at home since besides nursing my baby, I also participate in home chores like fetching water and cooking, again I find it better not to mingle with the regular pupils because some of them always make fun of me by calling me names like "harlot". One day I reported two boys who had called me 'harlot' to my class teacher but she did not take any action against them. The findings of this study are therefore supported by Mohase (2006) who pointed out that, teachers and fellow pupils acted coldly towards teenage mothers hence denying them a chance to intermingle freely and feel at home as it was before. Two teenage mothers were observed leaving the school compound immediately when the bell for games rang and when the study sought to find out why they were going home early, they said that the teachers normally allow them to leave early because they have to go and take care of their babies as their care givers usually go to the market to sell vegetables. The finding of this study therefore disagrees with Zachry (2005) who found that most teenage mothers are forced to discontinue their education due to intolerable rules and regulations regarding to school attendance laid out by school authorities. However, three (25%) of the teenage mothers were observed to be active during games time and were participating in co-

curricular activities. One teenage mother was observed to be playing leg ball; another one was observed playing volleyball and another one jumping the rope with regular pupils and when the study interviewed the teenage mother who jumping the rope, she said that participating in games helps her maintain physical fitness, keep an alert mind and cement good relationship with regular pupils. Regarding the teenage mother who was playing volleyball, the captain of the team had a lot of praises for her; that she was a good team player and always encouraging the team to play with a good spirit and her inspiration leads the team into victories in the local competition

4. Conclusion

First, it was found that teenage mothers did not attend classes regularly as 75% of them had irregular class attendance. This was due to the fact that they had to skip classes to nurse their babies during the times their care givers were not available or unwell which were quite often. They also had to take their babies to the hospital when sick or for clinical check-ups and sometimes due to lack of school fees. This irregularity had a direct bearing on their overall academic performance where about three quarters (67%) of the sampled teenage mothers recorded a decrease in performance in comparison with the performance at the time they were regular pupils.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that teenage mothers' participation in school was also hampered by the fact that some of them were chased away from their homes by their parents and they had to seek asylum from relatives where the life was hard due to inadequate support from their hosts.

5. Recommendations

- 1) The school should take the centre stage towards fostering the improved performance by the teenage mothers in school. The school administration should come up with a way of keeping the teenage mothers in school rather than chasing them away for lack of school fees. The school administrations should intensify guidance and counseling sessions where professionals are invited to talk to the teenage mothers.
- 2) Role models from the society who were once victims of teenage motherhood would serve as a practical example for teenage mothers to emulate and work hard.
- 3) Teachers should always act in the interest of the teenage mothers, for instance avoid using abusive languages and showing discrimination towards teenage mothers.
- 4) 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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