



Challenges Facing Teenage Mothers in School, Teachers’ Perspective: The Case of WA West District

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ABSTRACT

Bearing children as a young teenager is normally connected with various interruptions for young ladies with regards to class participation. The young mothers’ who are in school are left to unwind the interruptions some of the time all alone. Denying them the help they have to seek after their schooling sentence them and their infants to an endless loop of neediness and obliviousness. In the event that society anticipates that the young ladies should be effective with tutoring, there must be arrangement that objectifies their exceptional instructive requirements. The study explored the perception of educators about the difficulties confronting adolescent moms in school in the WA West District. The purposeful sampling technique was used in selecting the teachers involved. A focused group discussion was used in gathering and data analysis was done thematically. While the results indicate that, majority of the teenage mothers in school are mostly tired even before they come to school, it further revealed that the majority of the teachers perceive teenage mothers having low self-esteem, poor time management, role conflict and how they are supported were among the things discussed. The recommendations to tackle these perceptions were made.

KEYWORDS

Teenage Mothers, School, Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Education is a light which can help to shape and brighten the lives of children. It is therefore the responsibility of all governments to ensure that everyone is given the chance to benefit from it. It is also in the fundamental interests of society to see that this happening, progress, since economic and social development depend upon it. (UNICEF 2004).

The success made after the post-Dakar period, from 2000 to 2009 notwithstanding, girls remain a majority of the many children who dropped out-of- school. The 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) indicates that, of an about 72 million out-of-school children, 54% out of these are adolescents (UNESCO, 2010).

UNICEF (2004) reports that, 'teenage girl's education bears more equitable fruits of national development, stronger families, better services, quality child health and effective participation in the governance process'. Upon all the obvious benefits of education for national development, research data show that more girls are in school than boys (UNICEF 2004). More so, the report estimates that girl's primary school completion rate was lagging behind that of boys, at 76% whilst that of boys stand at 85% (UNICEF, 2004). This gender imbalance means that more adolescent girls are out of school every year. UNICEF (2003) showed a worrisome report showing that over 20 million girls were out of school in 1990 and that figure rose to 24 million in 2002. The meaning therefore is that a lot more girls are out of school in most part of the world.

However, different girls in different parts of the world face different challenges in educational participation. Adolescent pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers face unique challenges in ensuring that their new mothering roles and identities do not lead to into premature exit from schooling (Chilisa, 2002).

In a study carried out by Chilisa (2002), it is identified that three things are likely to happen to an adolescent pregnant girl. She is either expelled from school, allowed to re-entry, and or allowed to continue her schooling. The expulsion policy violates the human rights of the girl and robs the country of a possible resource (Suleman & Mohamed, 2019; Suleman, Mohamed & Ahmmed, 2020). The expulsion policy has been criticised as one that is uncaring to the needs of the girls and that it tends to bracket the reasons for teenage pregnancy as a girl's problem and fail to look at the

factors that lead to her getting pregnant before completing her education. The re-entry policy on the other hand has been criticised for being discriminatory; for example, schoolboys who are fathers or fathers to be are not asked to leave school until the child is born. Although the continuation policy respects the human rights of the girl's education, it may well overlook other rights such as the right to support and comfort during pregnancy and after childbirth. (Chilisa, 2002). Women who become parents during adolescence and early twenties face significant barriers to life development. Younger mothers and fathers are more likely to come from low-income families with lower educational attainment compared to other parents (Kiernan, 1997). Compared to the majority of parents, younger parents are more likely to have unplanned pregnancies resulting in insufficient time for the development of parenting knowledge and skills; the arrival of a child is more likely to interfere with or block the attainment of educational, housing and career goals for this group (Donahoo, 2006). Common barriers faced by many young mothers include problems with literacy, lack of general knowledge and coping skills, inadequate family support and memories of negative, judgmental experiences with service providers (Loxton, Williams & Adamson, 2007).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe teachers' perceptions of the challenges faced by adolescent mothers in schools in the Wa West District.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers perceive adolescent mothers in schools in the Wa West District?
2. What support is available for teenage mothers in school in the Wa West District?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The perception of teachers about teenage mothers in school

Teachers perceive teen pregnancy differently (positive or negative). Most studies (Chigona and Chetty, 2007; Masuku, 1998; Fredericks, 2007; Mpanza, 2006; Masernola, 2007; Bibi & Javaid 2020; Mallanhanse, Alias & Bidin, 2020) emphasize the way teachers treat pregnant teens and teenage mothers in schools. Other studies (Macleod, 1999; Condon and Corkindale, 2002; Vexler and Suellentrop, 2006; Fergusson and Woodward, 1999 Corcoran, 1998) are concerned with the

negative consequences of pregnancy in adolescents. Such data is pertinent to this study as it sheds light on how teachers perceive teenage pregnancy and subsequently teenage mothers in school. Some teachers sympathize with teenage girls when they become pregnant at an early age. Teachers as parents are expected to know that pregnant teens/teenage mothers go through a lot of challenges and as such their perspectives on these teenage mothers in this study are very helpful.

This is confirmed by a teacher cited in a Ferguson study (2001) entitled “The controversy over teen pregnancy”, in which she asserts that adolescent pregnancy is certainly a sensitive topic. The teacher's concern is that the stigma of pregnancy only affects the mother, whereas for many young men it is a mark of honour. Other teachers feel differently about teen pregnancy and teen mothers. Most of the time, teachers are sad and are not willing to help pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent mothers at school. They believe that their job is teaching and not engaging in midwifery and that school is for students not pregnant teenagers.

According to Masuku (1998) as cited in Mpanza (2006), teachers indicated that the school is for learners not for pregnant girls or mothers. Furthermore, adolescent pregnancy has been associated with low success rates and low occupational aspiration. This behaviour entices teachers to feel bad about teenage pregnancy as they reveal that it lowers the school's pass rate. Teachers cited in Masemola (2007) argue that it is difficult to teach when the needs of pregnant students and mothers must be constantly recognized. Teachers still say they are reluctant to deal with pregnant mothers because they are not trained for midwives and nurses. It seems to be the same as Ferguson (2001) refers to in the above paragraph.

Jones (1988) cited in Chigona and Chetty (2007), opines that teachers give less attention to some pregnant teenagers in class and argue that pregnant teenagers hamper them in covering the curriculum. On this basis, if a pregnant teenage girl does not come to school for a few days, when she comes back, a school principal quoted by Chigona and Chetty (2007) commented that "This is her own business". All he says to him is, "Listen, we did a lot of things last week when you weren't here, so asking other learners what we did and try to do your best." Nothing is going to be put in place (p. 8).

Mark (2001) found teachers to be sad about adolescents engaging in sexual intercourse at an early age. According to teachers, this happens because teens are impressionable, therefore they get

pregnant. Additionally, teachers report that adolescents do not take care of themselves with respect to protective measures, as a result of pregnancy occurs. A teacher points out that a grade five student in her class has a child. The girl is ten years old, implying that her son will start school before she even graduates. Another teacher said that pregnancy was a big problem for him and the question he asked was: Is it fair that teenagers get pregnant and have children who become their parents or the responsibility of the state? Moreover, is it normal for adolescents to have abortions like nothing happened? Clearly, adolescent pregnancy disturbs teachers to a great extent.

A teacher claimed that she is really worried and concerned about the failure of pregnant teenagers in her class. The teacher explains that it is depressing because pregnant teenagers do not perform well; she tries to assist one of them, but her examination grades are low and she is missing work. The teacher keeps on interpreting that once the pregnant teenager delivers, she is going to have even less time to devote herself to education. The worried teacher is debating whether it is wise to call a conference with the counsellor and parents or he should keep on pushing the issue. The worst part of this issue is that the girl does not stay with her mother (O' Malley, 2008:5).

Teachers cited by O'Malley (2008) reported that they were dissatisfied with the occurrence of teenage pregnancies in schools because most adolescents did not complete their education and were abandoned by their boyfriends and families. In addition, teachers also reveal that there are many children as young as 13 years old on the street who already have babies from one to two years old. Teachers' perceptions, based on literature, appear to be generally negative. The teachers appeared sad, unhappy and angry about the continued pregnancy and teenage mothers in school. Consequently, teachers prefer not to help pregnant adolescents in school. On the other hand, high-quality relationships between adolescent mothers and their teachers could in theory serve as protective functions as mothers try to balance the demands and challenges of school and parenting. These supportive relationships could help to establish the school environment as an “arena of comfort” (Call & Mortimer, 2001)

Support Available for Teenage Mothers in School

Pregnancy and being a young mother at school poses risks to school success (Grant & Hallman, 2006:46). This situation often ends schooling and disrupts the leap from education to employment, with negative consequences for young women. Teachers' support for improving the life chances

and educational aspirations of young women is central to the long-term development agenda. The support of teachers to pregnant adolescent girls and adolescent mothers can promote gender equality and mitigate the negative impacts attributed to early pregnancy.

The challenge for pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers is to manage and negotiate the demands of schooling, pregnancy and parenting. In this negotiation, teachers' abilities to be sensitive to the needs of these young women have long-term implications (Kouyoumdjian, Romo & Nadeem 2007:56).

Adolescent motherhood has been a major concern and why the school was abandoned prematurely. As a result, it is important that schools, governments and the broader community provide programming to adolescent parents. These programmes would in essence keep the students in school until completion of high school education while simultaneously preparing them for their adult role as parents (Effinger, 1991).

According to Kirby (2000), student monitoring may be the most important step in starting a successful dropout prevention program. First, the needs and services of students must be identified. For the dropout cases, the Governments should be aware of the significance of the dropout numbers and of their implications for human capital development and support services. Arlington Public Schools (2007) address the needs of pregnant and parenting students through its Teenage Parenting Programs (TPP). The main mission of TPP is to provide comprehensive services to address the issue of adolescent pregnancy, which include educational needs, pregnancy prevention, teen parenting and healthy families. In this program in the United States of America, teenage mothers attend school throughout their pregnancy and also in the early stages of parenthood and they continue through to the completion of the school year however this is not the case in Ghana. According to Arlington Public Schools (2007), there are programmes targeting pregnant and out-of-school adolescent girls to facilitate their return to school or job training, and alternatives for teenage girls who are educated. According to Effinger (1991), it is significant to make sure that all parenting students have access to the full range of educational options through a school based teenage parent program.

According to Effinger (1991), in the United States, investments have been made to develop life skills such as the concept of self, support systems, learning access to childcare and other

supports. It also suggests learning to deal with the challenges of being a teenage mother, combining schoolwork and family roles, and learning to give and receive emotional support. networking for work opportunities and connections and improving people-to-people communications and relationships are essential.

Burgess (2005) demonstrated that adolescent mothers have different abilities and arrangements for providing a stimulating home-based learning environment and focused on training adolescent mothers to cope well with life's challenges. Martens (2011) also points to the support that the United States of America provides to adolescent mothers.

Martens (2011) makes reference to the fact that transportation and childcare problems in the past have prevented girls from returning to school during or after having a baby (Mittelstadt, 1997). Martens (2011) adds that today in Florida, students are offered transportation to their school or another school, as well as custody of their babies. These were the two biggest challenges or obstacles many teenage mothers had to overcome in order to get to school and focus on their education.

Rebmann (2006) traced how the acquisition of life skills in a group encouraged and empowered teenagers by offering them social support. Consequently, they were made to learn from each other how to identify their own strengths and weaknesses as well as resources available for them to use, such unique facilities allow the adolescent mothers to breastfeed at convenient times during the day under the supervision of professional caregivers who also care for the babies and offer guidance on motherhood and parent/child relationship (UNFPA, 2013).

Hanna (2001) reveal that, teenage mothers still have to cope with the fact that their development is that of adolescence and so during this adjustment phase, they still need to define their sense of self-worth and their own identity. Being a teenage mother forces them to assume responsibility. They have to look after not only their developmental needs, but their child's developmental needs as well. Teenage mothers are in the position of having to balance what works for them and their child.

Families are affected when a teenage daughter becomes pregnant and certain changes occur in the family when a daughter becomes a mother. The baby's arrival may be seen as a unifying force as it may bring the family together as a unity or as a replacement of a lost family member. In some

cases, the status of the young mother increases within the family, shifting from scapegoating to being a privileged child (Hudson & Ineichen, 1995:33). The family is the most cohesive sociocultural group to help deal with a pregnancy. Each family imparts skills for intimacy, self-assertion, small group life, friendships and economic survival. Pregnant adolescent girls from families in poor working condition may need assistance to access auxiliary or alternative networks.

Family problems arise as a result of social gearing, disengagement, distortion, disorganization, rigidity or disintegration. Childbirth and child-rearing remain a major function of the family in any society and each pregnant woman requires love and support from her family within that society. The grandmother of the teenager, who ends up taking care of the offspring of her (little) daughter, is under increased stress in her role because she is also carrying out her tasks. They themselves lack financial, equipment and medical support» (Modungwa, Poggenpoel, & Gmeiner, 2000, p. 62). The lack of support from families and friends to encourage the teenage mother to stay in school and their own immaturity can make it hard for her to continue with her schooling, as she does not have the motivation from those near and dear to her. By not providing the necessary encouragement, she may feel unable to complete her schooling because she does not have the needed support structure in place.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A case study was used to obtain in-depth, valuable and unique information based on the ability to study things differently and, in some ways, better than what is possible through other approaches. (Denscombe, 2007). The population of this research was all teachers in the schools where teenage mothers were in the Wa West District. Ten (10) teachers were purposely selected using purposeful sampling technique. Focused group discussion was employed for the data collection for the study and the data gathered were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Research Question 1: How do teachers perceive adolescent mothers in schools in the Wa West District?

The following themes based on the analysis came out strongly;

The Perception of Teachers about Teenage Mothers in School

In identifying the perception of participating teachers about the challenges facing participating teenage mothers in school in the Wa West District, the participating teachers were asked about their experiences with the participating teenage mothers. The following were the themes that emerged;

- (a) Role conflict
- (b) Poor time management
- (c) Low-self esteem
- (d) Tiredness

Teachers perception about role conflict of teenage mothers in school

The focused group interview data gathered from the participating teachers revealed that the majority of the teenage mothers' grapple with how to combine their student life with their roles as mothers. They explained that one sometimes could clearly see that the teenage mothers seem not able to strike balance. These were some of the responses from the teachers;

When they come to school, they will be thinking of how to breast feed their babies and as such have divided attention. (PT-1)

In our school the teenage mother that is there has a husband. So, she comes from the husband's house to school. So, when she gets up, she has to fulfil her role as a mother and a wife as well as a student as such she often comes to school very late and it takes a toll on her education. (PT-3)

Observing the responses closely indicates that teachers perceive teenage mothers as being unable to balance their roles as mothers and students. The teachers' responses therefore affirm the position of Phoenix and Kaufman et al. According to Phoenix (1991) adolescent mothers are expected to meet the care needs of their children and fathers; these ideals are easier said than done for adolescent mothers and, given the expectation that they will be in school, it poses a major challenge to balancing those roles. The literature also highlights the fact that, since these adolescent mothers

acquired a new status, their roles continue to conflict due to some pressing issues related to school, parenting and being a wife (Kaufman et al., 2001).

Asked about how teachers perceived teenage mothers, it was revealed from the responses that it appeared many of the teenage mothers in school were not able to manage their time very well and as such it affected their studies. This were some of the responses from some of the participating teachers;

They are not able to manage their time well and it's one of the challenges; for example, one of them asked for extra time in the morning to attend to the child before coming to school. Sometimes they miss lessons because of lateness. (PT-3)

I have realised that before they got pregnant, they were doing better academically because they had time to learn. But for now, it looks like they do not have that time they had initially when they were not mothers. (PT-2)

Some of them come to school very late with the reason that they have to do some chores before coming. Some even come when lessons have started. Most of them in our school fail to do their homework almost all the time and when asked they usually say that they do not have time at home. (PT-4)

From the above responses it could be inferred therefore that teachers perceive teenage mothers in school as unable to manage their time and that accounts for the consistent lateness to school. This position agrees with Kaufman et al (2007) Returning to school after childbirth is not easy for teenage mothers because of the difficulty of arranging time for education and parenting. Meanwhile, Chetty and Chigona (2007) allude to the fact that teachers perceive that teenage mothers find it very difficult to combine school and other activities in the home because they cannot balance their time.

The teacher keeps on interpreting that once the pregnant teenager delivers, she is going to have even less time to devote herself to education. The worried teacher is debating whether it is wise to

call a conference with the counsellor and parents or he should keep on pushing the issue. The worst part of this issue is that the girl does not stay with her mother (O' Malley, 2008, p. 5).

The perception of teachers about low self-esteem of teenage mothers in school

In their perception about how confident teenage mothers in school were, the majority of the teachers revealed that most teenage mothers had low self-esteem. This was seen in the comments they made.

The one that is in school now is very, very quiet in the classroom. She does not talk. Even outside whenever she is walking, she is always alone she has no friends. In the class she will not answer any question unless you mention her name. (PT-3)

When we close you see her going home alone the other girls do not associate with her much. The girl herself does not talk; she is very reserved. Even in class when all the students are laughing, nothing has happened. The other day I overheard her saying to one of her mates that she knows that she is not a human being that is why they are treating her like that. (PT-4)

From the responses above it could be inferred that teachers perceive teenage mothers as people who have issues with confidence and self-worth and by extension low self-esteem. This is confirmed by Kernway, according to Kernway (1990) low self-esteem is an issue that prevents adolescent mothers from getting the most out of their schooling and life. Teenage mothers have little self-worth; they no longer believe in themselves. McCauley-Brown (2005) confirmed the low self-esteem of adolescent mothers when he explained that they had little confidence in themselves and were no longer certain of their ability to master school skills.

Adolescent mothers are no longer well integrated into group discussions or activities because they feel they no longer have a place in school; this has a negative impact on the quality of their work or performance (Canadian Department of Education, 1998).

The Perception of Teachers on Tiredness of Teenage Mothers in School

When asked about the experiences they have had with teenage mothers in school, the data gathered from the interviews conducted among the teachers revealed that the majority of the teenage mothers are mostly tired even before they come to school. They say that the dual roles that these teenage mothers perform are possibly the result of their tiredness which goes a long way to affect their academic performance. Below are some of the responses from teachers;

I believe also that if the child is not well, she would be the one to take the child to the hospital for check-up that could possibly be the reason why she is not very regular in school. Sometimes the household chores, for instance, washing the baby's clothes makes her even tired before she comes to school, as she sits in the classroom when lessons are going on, she dozes off. (PT-1)

Some of them come to school already tired as the lessons progress, they sleep in class. It is not their fault because they have to play dual roles which to me are not easy at all. (PT-3)

You know nature cannot be cheated. These girls do not get the time to rest at home and yet they are not that matured to handle the stress that comes with being a mother and a student. So, the only free time most of them get is when they are in school. (PT-4)

Inferring from the responses above one could clearly see that teenage mothers mostly sleep in class as a result of tiredness from their combined chores at home Hopane (2008) argues that adolescent mothers "fall asleep easily in the classroom.". When they fall asleep in class it means that they do not concentrate well and obviously miss most of the teaching and as a result they perform really poorly.

Research Question 2: What support is available for teenage mothers in school in the Wa West District?

The following themes based on the analysis came out strongly;

Support Available for Teenage Mothers in School

Support available for teenage mothers in school comes in various forms in order to help them cope with the challenges they face. From the interview data it emerged that a number of support systems were available for teenage mothers. These are related to; a) family support b) support from the school

Support available in school for teenage mothers in school

When asked whether teenage mothers received any support, it was evident from the interview data gathered that teenage mothers received some form of support from their respective schools. This was what some interviewees had to say;

We organise extra classes for the students who are mothers so as to help them come up to the level that their friends are. (PT-2)

Most of the teachers in this school are not trained teachers and as such cannot offer counselling to the mothers in school. So, what they do is to give them guidance from time to time to reduce the effects of the challenges that they face as they go about their studies but that is just within the school, when we close what happens hereafter nobody knows. (PT-3)

Whenever most at times we encourage them to consult their friends when they are not able to come to school the previous day. We also encourage peer teaching. (PT-12)

The forgoing responses go without saying that teenage mothers in school do receive some form of support from their schools either from their teachers or from their colleagues either in further explanation of what is taught or assisting the teenage mothers to understand. This therefore is in sharp contradiction of Mpanza (2006) who points out that teachers indicated that the school is for learners not for pregnant girls or mothers. Furthermore, teen pregnancies are associated with low outcomes and low career aspirations. This behaviour encourages teachers to feel bad about teenage pregnancy by revealing that it lowers the success rate of schooling. Teachers cited in Masemola (2007) argue that it is difficult to teach when the needs of pregnant students and mothers must be constantly recognized. Teachers continue to say that they are reluctant to deal with expectant mothers because they are not trained as midwives or nurses.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As is consistent with all research studies, limitations existed for this study. The findings were context specific as well, and so are not meant to be generalizable, though there are likely lessons to be learned from the perspective of teachers about teenage mothers in school. The participants of the study were interviewed only once. Although, the majority of the interviews provided rich data for this study, having a second interview would have given teachers more time to reflect on their perceptions of teenage mothers in school. Finally, the study only sought the perspective of teachers about teenage mothers who were currently in school and not those who were out of school

CONCLUSION

It was clear from the interviews conducted that the majority of the teenage mothers in school are mostly tired even before they come to school. Also, the majority of the teachers revealed that most teenage mothers had low self-esteem. It was further revealed from the responses that many of the teenage mothers in school were not able to manage their time very well and as such it affected their studies. What is more, teenage mothers in school grapple with how to combine their student life with their new roles as mothers.

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