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## **Effects of Teen Motherhood on Students Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Seme Sub-County, Kisumu County Kenya**

By

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### **Abstract**

Teen pregnancy among school girls is a worrying phenomenon in Kenya. The UNPFA notes that over 376,397 school girls got pregnant between 2015-2019 fiscal year. The Kenya Demographic Survey in 2015 revealed that about one out of five teenagers aged 15 to 19 were either pregnant or had given birth. The United Nations report for the same year believes that about 127 girls get pregnant every day in Kenya. As this happens, the numbers of teen motherhood in schools become a major concern for teachers, parents and students themselves at alarming rates. Through the re-entry policy, many teen mothers are caught up between academics and parenting. Despite the support the government has put in place to ensure teen mothers are protected, the re-entry of teen mothers into school system continues to demand attention as society's negative attitude towards pregnant girls and teen age mothers in schools persists. The aim of this thesis was to find out the impact of teenage motherhood on academic performance among secondary school learners in Seme Sub-County, Kisumu County Kenya. The study used Liberal Feminist theory by Naomi Wolf of 1993. A mixed method research paradigm with qualitative and quantitative strands was used in this study with Ex post facto research design. A total number of 35 schools made the target population for which 357 teachers and 1697 learners were targeted. The study employed stratified sampling, simple random sampling as well as purposive sampling for principals, deputy principals and one sub-county education director. The sample size included 26 schools with 16 principals, 35 teachers and 159 teen mothers from all the four classes. Both interviews and questionnaires were used for data collection as well as document analysis. Semi structured questionnaires were administered to the teen mothers and then closed ended interviews were used for principals, deputies and the one sub-county officer. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 22.0. Descriptive analysis was done using frequency tables, percentages and cross tabulations. Findings revealed that there was an impact of teenage motherhood on academic performance which included poor academic performance after the pregnancy and delivery, increased dropout of school because of student motherhood related issues and negative feeling on schooling especially after failing in exams for many school terms. The study recommended that counseling programs for teen mothers be intensified if schools require better performance from the adolescent mothers in secondary schools in Seme –Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya.

**Key Words:** Teen Motherhood, Academic Performance, Students, Seme Sub-County, Kisumu County, Kenya

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### **Introduction**

Teen pregnancy and motherhood among school girls is a worrying phenomenon in Kenya. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), notes that 378,397 girls aged 10 to 19 got pregnant between June 2016 and July 2017. Similar data by *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2014* indicates that about one in every five adolescent girls has either given birth, or is pregnant with her first child. Notably, in November 2018, Kilifi County Children Affairs department released shocking statistics. They recorded 13, 624 pregnancies among girls aged 15 to 19 years in the past one year. The worst according to the report was in 2019 when over 33,072 girls in Kisumu County gave birth with about 70% of that number coming from Seme Sub-County as compared to other sub-Counties in Kisumu County Kenya. This raised a concern among teachers' educational administrators and parents hence the need to investigate the teen motherhood on student performance in secondary schools in the Seme Sub-County, Kisumu County, Kenya.

According to Maluwa-Banda (2004), girls' education is an investment that serves as a way to achieve education for all children and a powerful tool for self-advancement and fulfilment of development outcomes for present and future generations of children. Chege and Sifuna (2006) noted that, getting and keeping young people in school, especially girls, dramatically lowers their vulnerability to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), leads to them having greater independence, equips them to make decisions pertaining to their lives and provides them with higher income earning potential. Bhana, Morrel, Shefer and Sisa (2010) concur that, allowing pregnant teenagers to remain in school and return after giving birth is considered significant in delaying a second birth and in offering young women increased opportunities to get an education and increase their economic standing. Although pregnancy and motherhood do not always interrupt a schoolgirl's education, they do introduce a new set of circumstances that influence future decisions related to the girl's education (Grant & Hallman, 2008).

Teenage mothers choose to continue their schooling because they consider academic qualifications as a ticket to participating in the labour market (Chigona & Chetty, 2008). However, the majority of teenage mothers have to repeat a grade when they return to school because of missed schoolwork, poor performance and failure in the examination for promotion to the next grade (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod & Letsoalo, 2009).

Teenage motherhood is a complex issue with outcomes that involve and impact multiple biological, interpersonal, and environmental factors. In the literature, social support has emerged

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as an important multi-level factor with potential to improve outcomes in maternal depression, parenting and healthy child development, among other outcomes According to Patterson, & Rakestraw, (2005), the goal of this study was to systematically present and review the research literature available documenting the impact of teenage motherhood and parenting programs with a strong social support component. The background chapter of this thesis discusses teenage motherhood in the context of associated health risks, social consequences and influences, adverse psychological outcomes, and the role of social support.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of the most significant challenges to attaining the EFA goals, and which gravely affects the education achievement of girls is teenage pregnancy and subsequent dropouts. When these girls are unable to return to school, they lose their already low opportunity of continuing their education and eventually being gainfully employed. The dropouts also lead to great financial and material wastage with the nation losing billions of shillings annually in financial, policy and man power investment (MOE, 2005). According to Regional Center for Reproductive health (2016), teenage motherhood is a catastrophic, disempowering outcome in the life of a girl. More often than not it spells doom to the teenager's attainment of life's full potential and performance in academics. Teenage motherhood continues to be a common and complex phenomenon in the world. In South Africa, a study that was conducted in all the Counties revealed that the age for first sexual intercourse for urban women was a slightly older age than rural women because rural women get married earlier (Kaufman, de Wet & Stadler, 2017). This also applied to Kisumu County, Rural teenagers tend to start childbearing earlier than urban teenagers (21% compared to 13%). Research also shows that more than 35% of Seme sub-county teenagers became pregnant before they reached the age of 20 as compared to neighbouring Migory, Homa Bay, Siaya and Bomet. However Muranga has the highest rates of teenage motherhood followed by Homabay County (UN, 2017).

Worldwide, more than 10% of all births are to women 15 to 19 years of age. Young mothers are often unprepared for the tasks of parenting (Leadbeater, Bishop, & Raver, 2016), leading the young mother to doubt her own abilities and competence in nurturing her infant (Tarkka, Paunonen & Laippala, 2016). Depression often results in mothers distancing themselves from their infants, because they often experience negative perceptions of themselves or the baby (Heneghan, Silver, Westbrook, Bauman & Stein, 2018). Many teenagers have relatively high rates of depression and experience anxiety and confusion during this period thus making them perform dismally in secondary schools (Ex & Janssens, 2017). One of the reasons that make teenagers have very poor academic performance or drop out of school is pregnancy, especially in the absence of social support care, guidance and counseling, encouragement and general help extended to the especially when they return to school after giving birth.

Teenagers are faced with many challenges. Some of the challenges include transition from childhood to adulthood and scholastic engagement. Being a teenage mother may be even more challenging and posing a threat to academic performance in secondary schools. These

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challenges may result into teenagers becoming depressed and performing poorly in their examinations, especially if they do not get special. Little information exists regarding the influence of school teenage mothers on their academic performance in secondary schools. in Seme Sub County. Therefore, it was paramount to investigate the teenage motherhood and their influence on academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya so as to help administrators to come up with strategies of enhancing performance of these mothers in secondary schools.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

Objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To determine whether there is a relationship between acceptability of teen mothers in schools and academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya
- ii. To examine the extent of social support on teen mothers academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya
- iii. To determine whether marital status of teen mother has influence on academic performance of students in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the Liberal Feminist theory as adopted by Naomi Wolf 1993. Liberal Feminist theory owes its origin to Feminism which is an outgrowth of movements and ideologies aimed at empowering women worldwide by seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminist theories therefore emerged from feminism movements and their aim is to understand the nature of gender inequality in a variety of fields including education, sociology, economics by examining women's education, social roles, experience, interests, and feminist's politics in those fields. Liberal Feminist theory is an individualistic form of feminism theory which focuses on the women's ability to show and maintain equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal Feminists argue that our society's belief that women are by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men is false and tends to discriminate against women's educational attainment.

Bryson (2003) in agreement suggests that women as individuals are equal to men and should therefore be given equal opportunities as men to pursue their own interests and academics. The liberal feminists believe that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women entrance to and success in the so called 'public world' and insist that gender equality should be achieved through the state and the systems existing within the society like political, economic and education. Their strategies in achieving equality of opportunity in education for both male and female involve altering socialization practices, changing attitudes and making use of relevant legislation. Wolf (1993) clearly states that, liberal Feminism is not a list of articles of beliefs, but actions and choices that can be used

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instrumentally and opportunistically by women to overcome female moral inferiority or passivity. Epure (2014) argues that liberal feminism has been a key theory in explaining and providing the society with nondiscriminatory laws and legal rights hence paving way for achieving gender equality. In this regard, governments have embraced the policy of re-entry into school by student mothers back to schools instead of leaving them out of school completely thus enhancing equality in education and development.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Multiple support sources appear to increase mother's perception of education and learning hence likely to performance well in examinations in secondary school thus improving academic performance, improve interaction, reduce depression and stress, and improve maternal confidence (Turner, & Ascher, 2015). Optimal adaptation to parenting may be fostered by supporting the relationships between teenage mothers and their own mothers or partners. Knowledge of infant development which may be imparted by professionals or "natural" network members such as family, partners, and friends could play important roles in teenagers' confidence in mothering schooling, completion and transition to other higher institutions of learning. However, most teen mothers report poor treatment from their parents, their former boyfriends or fathers of their children and the community. Others felt that they were not given full treatment by their teachers. The teachers and fellow learners put a good deal of pressure on them without really understanding what the girls were going through. For instance, teen mothers were sometimes ridiculed in front of classmates whenever they failed to meet class requirements.

Teenage mothers choose to continue their schooling because they consider academic qualifications as a ticket to participating in the labour market (Chigona & Chetty, 2008). However, the majority of teenage mothers have to repeat a grade when they return to school because of missed schoolwork, poor performance and failure in the examination for promotion to the next grade. Adequate social support has the potential to increase level of academic performance in secondary schools and reduce other negative emotions related to pregnancy and increase the potential to actively participate in learning in secondary schools as reported by Coffman & Ray (2012) in their study among adolescents in Spain. They found that, diminishing the risk of later substance abuse, adverse life events, and persistent mental health issues that have been observed in parenting teens may lead to dismal academic performance in secondary schools.

Teenage motherhood is therefore viewed as a disorder by the society and as they return to school, teen mothers already face despair after pregnancy and child birth and this leads to self-persecution that sometimes recurs even after re-admission in schools (Kegode, 2004). As a result, teen mothers are reported to have negative attitudes towards themselves, being unsatisfied and view themselves as bad and worthless people. In such situation, academic performance is likely to be compromised. Ramathesele, (2017) Carried out a study in Kenya in Muranga Sub county among teen age secondary schools. The purpose of the study was to investigate the rampant rates of teenage pregnancies in secondary schools in Muranga. The sample size

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comprised of 212 girls from 30 schools. Stratified random sampling was done to get the sample size. The study used descriptive survey and analyzed data descriptively using SPSS. The results revealed that many girls suffered psychologically and most of them had committed suicide due to depression. The study concluded that social support was vital in the lives of teen mothers since they were experiencing loneliness and frustrations. Their performance was recorded to be the lowest in the absence of social support both at school and at home, The study recommended that counseling be continuously done at community level as well as at school so as to reach as many youth as possible.

Statistics from the Ministry of Education in Kenya and Uganda suggested that a teenage mother was more likely to drop out of school, to have low qualifications and to be semi-illiterate. Education, training and potential for economic development were likely to end abruptly for young unmarried mothers. By dropping out, girls remained entrapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, missing the transformative and liberative aspects of education that would open up a better future for them (FAWE, 2014). They ended up un-employed or with low pay and living in poor housing conditions. They faced food problems, psychological distress, inadequate nutrition, health problems and insufficient medical care, being more vulnerable to poverty they may engage in prostitution. Studies showed that most of these mothers ended up with repeat pregnancies before the age of 20. The child was also likely to become a victim of neglect or abuse. S/He was also likely to live in poverty, to grow up without a father, to perform dismally at school, to become involved in crime, to abuse drugs and alcohol and to become a teenage parent and begin the cycle all over again. The pregnancy causes a crisis in the family systems. Other family members may view the pregnant teenager, as the individual who has caused a permanent crisis or strain in the family system, a failure in academics and in life.

### **Methodology**

The aim of the study was to investigate the effects of teen motherhood on academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya. The study used Liberal Feminist theory by Naomi Wolf of 1993. A mixed method research paradigm with qualitative and quantitative strands was used in this study with Ex post facto research design. A total number of 35 schools made the target population for which 357 teachers and 1697 learners were targeted. The study employed stratified sampling, simple random sampling as well as purposive sampling for principals, deputy principals and one sub-county education director. The sample size included 26 schools with 16 principals, 35 teachers and 159 teen mothers from all the four classes that is from form one to form four.

Only mixed day Secondary schools were systematically sampled from the clusters under that category. Both interviews and questionnaires were used for data collection as well as document analysis. Semi structured questionnaires were administered to the teen mothers and then closed ended interviews were used for principals, deputies and the one sub-county officer. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 22.0. Descriptive analysis was done using frequency tables, percentages and cross tabulations. Additionally, biographical Information questionnaire,

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Duke-UNC Functional Social Support on academic performance and Beck Depression Inventory Scale on academic performance of teen mothers in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County were used to collect data. The data were analyzed by the researcher using Factor analysis, Correlation analysis, T-test analysis and cross tabulation, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In particular, unpaired or "independent samples" *t*-test was used to analyze data to test the hypothesis that had set.

### **Results and Discussion**

Participants in the study were drawn from 16 high schools in the Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya. The study indicates that 22 % (n = 44) of the participants were between ages of 15 – 16 years, while 78 % (n = 156) were 17 - 19 years old. The majority of the participants were 28% of the ages between 17 and 19 years. However, there were also participants between the ages of 15 and 16 years as shown in figure 2 This demonstrated that the teenage motherhood in secondary schools occur between the ages of 17 to 19 years although there were few between ages 15 and 16. This is a time when most of them are either in form two form three or form four with very few form twos and form ones being teen mothers. It was established that 95% of the participants who filled the questionnaires were unmarried while only 5% were married teen mothers but still had been allowed to be in school in order to complete their education due to the fact that all learners are expected to complete their education as per the Education for all policy. that the fewer participants (49 %, n = 49) were in forms 1 and 2 while the rest, the largest percentage were in forms 3 and 4. The study showed that 98 % (n = 148) of the participants have one child. While 2 % (n = 18) have two children as shown in the table above. This shows that most of the teenage mothers who had come back to school to continue with their studies were having only one child and seemingly they had decided to settle for studies in order to take care of the child they had already got in future.

The study demonstrates that the teen mothers were more likely to be depressed than the non-teen mothers meaning that academic performance was dismal among lower classes than upper. Findings revealed that parenting students face myriads of stressful moment that affect their academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya. This means that more education is needed so that depressive tendencies among teen mothers are curbed to enable them complete school despite having been mothers while in school. Results revealed that the mean score for non-teen mothers on Duke-UNC Functional Social Support Questionnaire was 46.8100 (n = 156). This finding shows that teen mothers who felt that they were given more social support were more likely to stay in school and complete studies unlike those who did not receive social support from the school as well as from home. Those who received social support showed excellent academic performance in secondary schools unlike those who felt that they were not supported by parents, teachers, peers and fathers of their children as shown by the Chi Square results at 330.7 with a sig level of 0.000 at a degree of freedom of 45 with the level of alpha set at 0.005.

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Teen mothers were found to experience depression due to lack of support from the fathers of the babies and family while non-mothers had other issues like stress due to adolescence and other developmental issues. This implies that student mothers do not concentrate in the class whenever they have domestic challenge hence poor academic performance in schools. Findings from focus group discussion demonstrated that teenage mothers who are unprepared for responsibilities of parenthood, often, live below the poverty level in disadvantaged environments and have higher levels of stress, less education, and fewer psychological resources than do women who delay childbearing. The schools therefore need to help these teen mothers through guidance and counseling offices to curb issues of depression so that the teen age mothers can complete school when they have the ability to deal with academics. Results from t-test indicated that there is no significance difference between married teenage mothers and those who are not married in terms of experiencing depression and poor academic performance ( $t = 1.091$ ,  $df = 98$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

Findings from interviews showed that some teachers embarrass teen mothers for being away without permission on the assembly because they have prejudice about their re-entry status. The embarrassment which the teachers cause on teen mothers by ridiculing them in front of their fellow learners seemed to have a big impact on the academic performance of mothers who are in secondary schools in Seme Sub County Kisumu County Kenya. It is also clear that teenage mothers absent themselves from school, in order to attend ante-natal clinics, this occasional disruption of schooling leads to underachievement. Therefore the low academic performance by teenage mothers is not surprising considering the double responsibility they are faced with. The study felt that there is need to address perceptions of the wider public concerning the symbolic meaning of teenage mothers in schools and that teachers may need professional assistance in supporting teenage mothers in their schooling experiences. Further, in-service training for teachers is important to keep track of the changes that society is facing in that, the absence of support personnel could be constructed as a critical problem when it comes to addressing the needs of teenage mothers and their pursuance of better academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya.

### **Conclusions and Recommendation**

The study concluded that teenage mothers who lack social support from parents, teachers, fellow students, the community, the father of the teens' babies will experience depression and thus perform poorly in schools. Lack of social support increases the likelihood of disturbances leading to poor performance as a result of low concentration in class. Early motherhood creates stresses in the lives of teen mothers thus likely to make them not succeed academically in secondary schools in Seme Sub County. Another conclusion made was that married teenage mothers appear to suffer from depression as much as unmarried teenage mothers on account of looking after their babies and combining with studies hence reported poor performance in secondary schools. finally the study concluded that this study concludes that while from a feminist perspective, education is one key avenue for female liberation from male domination; it may not open all the

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doors of success for a bright future of teen mothers because of the many hurdles they face in the home, community and school. The double responsibility of teen motherhood and schooling was found by participants of this study to be too heavy to bear. The main factor that leads to deterioration of academic performance is that teenage motherhood comes with many responsibilities which make it difficult for these learners to concentrate on school work, studies, assignments, tests and academic performance in final examinations. Therefore the study concludes that the most important thing for teen mothers and their family members to do could be trying to be close to significant others. The study established that the importance for teen mothers to continue with their studies to improve their lifestyles is obvious, but the opportunity to achieve this goal is almost impossible. Clearly, the study revealed that teenage pregnancy and motherhood result in poor academic performance due the pressures associated with being a schooling young parent in schools in Seme Sub-county Kisumu County Kenya.

### **Recommendations**

Having analyzed the Teen motherhood among High School Teenage Mothers on academic performance in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County-Kisumu County Kenya and having made summary and conclusions, the researcher made the following recommendations:

Teenagers should attend parenting classes to help them better their parenting skills that will help them to cope with challenges of being both teen mothers and learners in secondary schools. If the government and other stake holders could provide such avenues for teen mothers to learn the skills of parenting and strategies of coping with study and teen motherhood then depression would be a thing of the past in the lives of teen mothers in schools and hence most of them will excel in academics.

It is further recommended that identified limitations of study be investigated, using a broader research science. The problem of the teenage mothers is a worldwide problem and Kisumu County is no exempt. It is necessary that a support system is created for these mothers so that they do not feel abandoned. Their being acknowledged will give them the confidence to continue with education in a more positive light and this will reduce the chances of them falling into depression and failing in their final examinations.

For effective implementation of guidance and counseling programme, the government through the Ministry of Education should come up with a national policy document, giving detailed guidelines on how guidance and counseling programme should be run in schools especially to help the teen agers from early pregnancy which is causing depression among teen mothers and eventual poor performance in academics in Seme Sub County Kisumu County Kenya. There is no policy document to guide the programme on teen mothers after re-entry in secondary school in Seme Sub County.

The Ministry of Education need to ensure that teacher counselors are given adequate professional training in guidance and counseling to enable them to deliver the services effectively. The Ministry should also organize free and frequent capacity building seminars, sex education and workshops particularly on emerging issues to enable the teacher counselors to

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handle students' issues and problems especially that of teen motherhood in secondary schools in Seme Sub-County Kisumu County Kenya as this is an issue of concern in the region.

Principals need to create awareness on the significance of guidance and counseling programmes in schools among all the stake holders. Once students understand the significance of the programme, they will have a positive attitude towards it and they will make maximum use of it. Then, teacher counselors should take advantage of the positive attitude of student mothers and enhance their availability to them in order to avoid issues of teen motherhood depression and poor academic performance.

Teacher counselors should ensure that the department of guidance and counseling which they head implement all the three aspects of guidance and counseling, that is, academic, personal (Sex Education) and career. No single aspect should be overlooked so as to prevent prevalent pregnancy and teen motherhood in secondary schools in Seme Sub County Kisumu County Kenya. It is recommended that social welfare should regularly visit schools and their families to provide the necessary assistance to teenage mothers, peers in schools, teachers, administrators and their family members. Professional counseling should be provided to teenage mothers before they return to school to prepare them to cope with academics as well as parenting as teen student mothers.

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