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**Parental Support and Implementation of Re-entry Policy for Girls After Pregnancy in Public Mixed Secondary Schools, Athi River Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya**

By

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**Abstract**

This study investigated parental support and implementation of re-entry policy for girls after pregnancy in public mixed secondary schools, Athi River Sub-county, Machakos County. The study was based on the following research question; how does parental support influence the implementation of re-entry policy for girls after pregnancy in public mixed secondary schools of Athiriver sub-county? Social exclusion theory (SET), by Burchadt, Le Gradn and Piachaud (1999), guided the study, using a convergent research mixed method design. Two instruments were used to collect data; a questionnaire for students and teachers and interview guide for principals and parents. The target population was 540 while sample size of 100 comprising 4 principals, 4 guidance and counseling teachers, 8 parents and 84 students, participated in the study. Students were selected using simple random and systematic sampling, parents through convenient sampling, while guidance and counseling teachers and principals purposively. A pilot study was conducted among 30 form-three students from one public mixed secondary school to establish the validity and reliability of questionnaire and interview guide. The reliability of instruments was estimated at 0.7 Cronbach alpha threshold. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, using special packages for social science (SPSS) Version 23 and presented in tables and graphs. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that between 2017 and 2021, an average of 53, a total of 1016 girls in Athi River sub-county dropped out of school due to pregnancy related cases, despite of re-entry policy in place. There was lack of awareness of the policy among the parents. The economic status of the parents, their social class; level of education, career, religion and family type influenced implementation of the re-entry policy. The study recommends well organized sensitization workshops for parents, who are key players in successful implementation of the re-entry policy. The ministry of Education should distribute printed copies of the re-entry policy to schools, in order to create awareness to stakeholders especially the parents. The public should be sensitized on the importance of the policy, using social media, door to door, social gatherings, churches, seminars among other means.

**Key-words:** Kenya, Teenage pregnancy, Athi River sub-county, parental support, Re-entry policy, parent's career, parents' socio-economic status, drop out, child father's involvement

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**Introduction**

Education plays a pivotal role in the social and economic development of any nation (UNESCO, 2010). Gender equity in educational opportunities and outcomes has thus become an issue of global concern. In recent times, most countries have developed policy frameworks and programs that allow teenage mothers to continue with their education. This is out of the realization that teenage pregnancy is one of the causes of gender inequality in educational access and achievement (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008).

The challenge of teenage pregnancy among schoolchildren remains a great threat to girls' education since most of them end up dropping out and early marriages (Kirchengast, 2016). In developed countries, teenage birth rates are quite low, and teenage motherhood is discouraged, considered a public health problem and a societal challenge. Nevertheless, the majority of teenage mothers (60%) are accounted for by the United States (Sedgh et al., 2015). The teenage birth rate in the United States is about four times that of the European Union (EU) average (UNICEF, 2019). Within the EU, the highest teenage birth rates are found in the UK with 27% and the new European Union members Bulgaria (33%), Romania (34%), and the Baltic States (21-23%) (Socolov, Iorga, Carauleanu, Ilea, Blidaru, Boiculese & Socolov, 2017).

Numerous studies show that community involvement is important in the implementation of re-entry policy. In the USA, for example, Burdell (1998) found that the communities have their social and cultural obligations that hinder teenage mothers from attending school. The study further found that the community could not easily accept the new re-entry policy. The community is defined as the parents/guardians of pregnant girls and teenage mothers. They are supposed to allow their children to re-enroll in school. Thus, the communities need to change their conservative mindset and attitude towards the integration of teenage mothers and pregnant students in schools for effective policy implementation.

The challenge of teenage pregnancy among school girls is a cause for concern worldwide (Kirchengast, 2016). A study by World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that close to 16 million girls aged between 15 and 19 years and about one million girls younger than 15 years give birth every year (WHO Adolescent pregnancy, 2014). According to the World Health Statistics (WHS, 2014), the average global birth rate among 15-19 year olds is 49 per 1000 girls, whereas country rates range from 1 to 299 births per 1000 girls. Rates were highest in sub-Saharan Africa (Sedgh, Finer, Bankole, Eilers & Singh, 2015). The highest risk countries for teenage motherhood are Niger, Liberia, Mali, Chad, Afghanistan, Uganda, Malawi, Guinea, Mozambique and the Central African Republic. In these countries, teenage births rate (births per 1000 women aged 15-19) ranges from 233 in Niger to 132 in the Central African Republic. This is due to the fact that child bearing among teenagers is socially desired in some traditional societies and in developing countries (Kirchengast, 2016).

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A study by Maswuba (2017) maintains that pregnancy is among the most serious causes of school disruption, specifically at secondary school level. That is, in most cases the birth of a baby marks the end of schooling for the teen mothers (Chenane, 2018). Studies reveal that there are factors that influence whether or not a teen mother is able to continue schooling after giving birth to a baby (Kutalkova Prochaska & Matulnikova, 2018).

Population Situation Analysis (KPSA, 2013), pregnant girls quote the stigma of pregnancy, and discrimination by teachers and peers as the main reasons that force them out of school. According to Psaki (2015), learner pregnancy is seen as a barrier to gender parity and equality in education. In Kenya teenage pregnancy has been identified as one of the major causes of low enrollment of girls in school. Literature reviewed reveals that pregnancy is the main reason girls dropped out of school in developing countries (Sandøy, Mudenda, Zulu, Munsaka, Blystad, Makasa & Fylkesnes, 2016; Murphy-Graham, Cohen, & Montoya, 2020; Stoner, Rucinski, Edwards, Selin, Hughes, Wang, Pettifor, 2019; Mwenje, 2015). Data from Kenya Data and Health Survey (KDHS, 2014) show that 1 in every 5 girls between 15-19 years is either pregnant or already a mother. A study by the Global Childhood Kenya (GCK, 2019) reveals that Kenya has the third highest teen pregnancy rates with 82 births per 1000 births. According to the United Nations Population Fund Report (UNPFR), Kenya has recorded 378397 adolescent and teenage pregnancies for girls aged 10-19 years between July 2016 and June 2017, specifically, 28932 girls aged 10-14 and 349,465 girls aged 15-19 became pregnant. Recent media reports show that 449 girls are failing to sit for their national examinations while others write examinations in maternity wards. This is a red flag on the girl's education, health and opportunities not to mention a failure of the society as a whole.

Barmao-Kiptanui, Kindiki and Lelan (2015) states that a pregnant learner or teenage mother is faced by three possibilities: expulsion, re-entry and continuation. Expulsion policy violates the human rights of the young mothers and robs the country of possible resources and although the re-entry policy gives them an opportunity to come back to school, it is discriminatory as the young fathers are not asked to leave school and help young mothers with the caring of the baby. In Kenya, Re-entry Guidelines (1994) have been developed to provide procedures to be followed for teenage mothers to re-join school after the child has been weaned. However, the existence of progressive policy and law does not by itself ensure that pregnant teenagers and young mothers remain in school or experience as little disruption to their studies as possible. Therefore, the government should develop, implement and monitor policies and national guidelines to enforce these provisions. It however, remains to be seen, whether schools in Athiriver Sub-County are complying with these legal provisions and guidelines to assist young mothers to complete school.

In a related study, Tarus (2020) found that teenage pregnancy and motherhood is one of the major impediments to education success of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, the study established that the implementation of re-entry policy of teenage mothers in Eldoret West Sub-County was partly successful since there was presence of teenage mothers in school albeit in small numbers compared to those who dropped out due to pregnancy. She further found that the re-entry policy has not been clearly defined and clarified hence the study recommended that the policy be clearly defined and clarified in all school so that the roles of all those involved be known and the voices of teen mothers be heard. Therefore there is need for an assessment of the

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re-entry policy to identify areas that need to be reviewed and improved for effective implementation. Thus, this study aimed at filling this gap, by investigating the influence of parental support in the implementation of the re-entry policy.

While it is no longer a common practice to deny teenage mothers to continue their education, those who are admitted to school after the birth of their babies face several challenges as learners and make it difficult to successfully complete schooling. Okine, Dako Gyeke, Baiden and SaaTouh Mort (2020) states that adolescent mothers face difficulties and the girls undergo undue pressure from parents, peers and teachers. On one hand, they receive very little support from school and their homes; while on the other they are usually misunderstood.

On paper, Kenya has a very elaborate 'return to school policy' for teenage mothers introduced in 2001. In a nutshell, a girl that gets pregnant is really supposed to remain in school until she is about to be due. After delivery, she is supposed to be allowed back or be given support to get an admission into another secondary school where she feels comfortable and not stigmatized or discriminated against. The policy also states that pregnant school girls and their parents should receive counseling to enable them cope with their new situation of their teenage motherhood (Mark, Armstrong, Andrade, Penazzato, Hatane, Taing & Ferguson, 2017). It has been observed that girls drop out of schools or are expelled for becoming pregnant (Kilewo, 2018).

Despite the Kenya government policy to protect a pregnant girl's right to continue with her education, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 13,000 girls drop out of both primary and secondary schools each year due to pregnancy alone (Mwenje, 2015-quoted in APHRC, 2020). In an attempt to address discrimination against the girl-child in schools, the Kenya government formulated the re-entry policy framework in 1994. The policy of re-entry of teenage mothers demanded girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy should be readmitted (Tarus, 2020). By allowing pregnant teenagers to remain in school and return after giving birth is both considered significant in delaying a second birth and also in offering young girls another chance to fulfill their education aspiration and enhance the economic base (Tarus, 2020; UNICEF, 2017).

Parental support is an important aspect of the implementation of the re-entry policy. Raj Majesty (2019) shows that for many children, especially those from poor households, school fees and related costs of schooling such as electricity, water, teachers, books, cost of maintenance, and transportation among others put education beyond their reach. Thus, the combination of these costs often causes children to drop out of school, start late, or not attend at all. Karimi (2015) holds that the lack of much-needed financial, emotional, and social support was a challenge for young mother learners to go through their education successfully. In addition, parents/guardians' support influenced the re-admission of girls after early pregnancy.

For teenage mothers, parental factors allow the provision of critical support to young mothers in different forms among others taking care of the children while they were in school, financial support, and encouragement (Hatuugari, 2019). Thus, parents play a critical role in ensuring that teenage mothers return to school after delivery. Teenage mothers and pregnant girls whose parents are supportive will face no obstacles in their return to school. Other parents who are not supportive will find reasons and excuses not to, including depriving their children of the necessary support.

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Community, cultural factors hindering teenage mothers' participation in education and learning include attitudes, prejudice, gender discrimination, and traditional customs (Rodgers, Kipkoech, and Kisilu, 2018). The authors have also identified factors limiting teenage mothers' participation in education and training. These factors include family, social and community obstacles such as lack of parental or familial support, the social construction of good mothering, cultural values, and feelings of stigmatization and exclusion. Thus, structural and institutional obstacles include exclusion from mainstream schooling, negative school experiences, childcare affordability, financial needs including secondary benefits, barriers to accessing existing alternative education and training opportunities such as age criteria, and lack of external counseling and support programs. Though some studies have examined the linked cultural factors and teenage mothers' dropping out of school (Mwenje, Macharia, & Kessio, 2015), they have not directly investigated parental support factors regarding the implementation of re-entry policy.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In an attempt to encourage girl-child education, the government of Kenya has put in place measures to encourage more enrolment and reduce dropout rates in secondary schools by female students. Most past studies have focused on family, social and cultural factors impeding successful implementation of re-entry policy of young mothers to school after delivery.

Girls dropping out of school due to early pregnancies, teenage marriages and parenting in Athiriver Sub-County, has remained high for many years. The number of girls on admission in Form One in a year is not the same number that exit form four, Athiriver Sub-County not exempted (SCEO, 2021). Therefore, there was an urgent need to look for empirical evidence to find out the influence of parental support on re-entry policy for girls after pregnancy in mixed day secondary schools, Athiriver Sub-County. This study was meant to identify areas that need to be reviewed and improved for effective implementation, hence the need for this study.

For instance, in the period (2017-2021) the sub-county had 1016 girls who had dropped out due to early pregnancy. In the same period, statistics reveal that out of this number of dropouts, only 178 (17.51%) had returned to school after giving birth. From the findings, even with the girls' reentry policy in place, the majority of girls (838) did not go back to school after delivery (Sub-County Director's Office, Athiriver Sub-County). These statistics imply that dropping out of school may threaten to reverse the gains made in enhancing the retention and education of pregnant girls and teenage mothers. This may lead to financial and material wastage where millions of invested money is lost hence loss of workforce in Athiriver Sub-County and the country at large.

Several studies have shown that parental support may influence the implementation of re-entry policy. In Kenya, most studies have concentrated on the challenges of teenage mothers only and not on how the re-entry policy is being implemented. Therefore, available literature on how this factor influences the re-entry policy is limited. Most of the existing literature has been conducted in other regions of the world, with samples drawn from primary schools, therefore, limiting the generalizability of results to secondary schools. To date, research carried out in Athi River Sub-County assessing how this support may hinder the implementation of re-entry policy



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is still scarce. Therefore, this study sought to assess how parental support influenced the implementation of the re-entry policy in public mixed secondary schools.

Therefore, the researcher of this study aimed at filling-in this gap by investigating how parental support influence implementation of the re-entry policy within Athi River Sub-County of Machakos County, Kenya.

### **Research Question**

How does parental support influence implementation of the re- entry policy for girls after pregnancy in Athi River sub-county?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted the social exclusion theory (SET), originated from the writings of Burchardt, Le Gradn and Piachaud in 1999. Being a social relationship theory, dealing with how people relate with one another and the effect of their relationship, it was found to be appropriate to this study. The theory is described in terms of the processes of exclusion, the people it could affect and the world that these processes and people inhabit.

By identifying this process, it is possible to address the underlying causes of exclusion. There is a consensus that social exclusion is multi-dimensional referring to the different sources of deprivation (Percy-Smith, 2000) and the different processes (social, economic, cultural, and political) that enabled it.

Here, social exclusion is either a process that stops people from participating in society (Beland and Hanson, 2000) or the inability to participate in society itself (Barry, 1998). Barry defined participation as the inability to participate in the normal activities of citizens or more specifically the inability to participate in institutions or economic growth and progress.

The factors could include poverty, employment, homelessness, family breakdown, educational failure, mental or physical health, and crime. Teenage pregnancy and early motherhood could be associated with social exclusion as reduced educational achievement, poor physical and mental health, social isolation, poverty, and related factors has caused the age group to gain attention from both the government and societies. There is also a growing recognition that economic disadvantage could be both a cause and consequence of teenage motherhood.

The social exclusion theory explains that a person could be socially excluded from participating in societal activities for reasons beyond their control while they would like to. Being pregnant and having a child are two major life events. For an adolescent girl (aged 10-19 years old), experiencing these events while at school often means facing harsh social sanctions and difficult choices that has life-long consequences. It could mean expulsion from home and school; being shamed and stigmatized by family, community members, and peers; increased vulnerability to violence and abuse, or greater poverty and economic hardship.

Re-entry which is determined by the economic status of the parents, the society and child father's involvement might go a long way to help young girls complete high school education. There is also a growing recognition that socioeconomic disadvantage can be both a cause and consequence of teenage motherhood.

Links across the dimensions or realms of everyday life where inequalities arise are taken into account by the model.

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From this perspective, clusters of poverty and disadvantaged places are implicated in social exclusion as they limit people's opportunities, and lead to area stigma, competition for jobs, and higher levels of conflict and dissatisfaction.

Radcliffe (1998) observes that at worst it labels, stereotypes, and stigmatizes minorities as part of the 'excluded' underclass. He warns that there is a danger that social exclusion could merely become a descriptive term rather than an analytical tool.

The social exclusion theory explains that a person can be socially excluded from participating in societal activities for reasons beyond their control while they would like to participate. Being pregnant and having a child are two major life events.

Pregnancy is a unique situation that is associated with extensive physiological and psychological changes (Yousefi, Moradi, Safari, Ghazi, & Amiri, 2011). Changes in appearance prevent many pregnant girls from having a positive image (Zolfaghari & Asadi Noghabi, 2011). Besides changes in appearance, most pregnant girls also have trouble communicating with others. In other words, girls' physical self and interpersonal self-deteriorate during pregnancy. These problems inflict psychological damage on pregnant girls, particularly during their first pregnancy.

Cunningham and Boulton (1996) asserted that teenage pregnancy has a lot of social consequences which include school drop-out or interrupted schooling, falling prey to criminal activity, abortion, ostracism, child neglect, school adjustment difficulties for their children, adoption, lack of social security, poverty, repeated pregnancy and negative effects on domestic life.

The study of such processes can be used to identify factors that lead to situations of decline and exclusion. Difficulties with school are accounted for in three inter-linked ways: firstly a strong dislike of school that leads to truancy, dropping out, or formal exclusion (Hosie & Selman, 2006), secondly a lack of educational attainment (Hobcraft & Kiernan, 1999), and thirdly low aspirations and expectations of the education system as being relevant for their future employment (Luker, 1996).

### **Review of Related Literature**

Sadler et al. (2007) studied a cohort of teen mothers and their children attending an urban high school with a parent support program and a school-based childcare center in the USA. The study involved a volunteer sample of 65 teenage mothers who were enrolled in the parent support program. The young mothers and their children were interviewed, surveyed, and assessed. Of the 65 teenage mothers, 53 mothers had their children enrolled in the school-based child-care center and 12 mothers had their children cared for by family members. The study found that about 33% of teenage mothers had mild to moderate depression and 39% of the sample had experienced transitional homelessness. Social support networks were small; in the past year, mothers experienced a mean number of  $13.2 \pm 11.9$  negative life effects. The study concluded that parental support programs and school-based child-care settings offered promising opportunities to assist teenage mothers with parenting, avoid repeat pregnancies, and stay engaged with school while their children are cared for in a close and safe environment. The study however focused on parent support programs and school-based childcare settings, which do not entirely address the social setting of public secondary schools in Kenya.

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Similarly, Hatuugari (2019) on the role of socio-economic factors in the successful completion of schooling up to matriculation level (matric), among young mothers in the Southpansberg West Circuit in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The researcher used the social capital theoretical framework. A questionnaire was administered to 128 young mothers, aged 18 and above, after a pilot survey had been carried out. The results showed that there were several socioeconomic factors that assisted teenage mothers to complete their studies among others were; family support, child support grants, intra-school environment and policies. They provided critical support to the young mothers in different forms among others taking care of the children while they went to school, financial support and encouragement. The study also found that the schools under assessment provided a significant amount of support to young mothers. The study observed a general trend of absentee fatherhood in the caring of children. This study sought to determine the kind of support given to teenage mothers in the success of their education.

Kilewo (2018) investigated the perception of education stakeholders on education of school girls after pregnancy in secondary schools in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. The study involved a total of 80 participants who were composed of 60 pupils, 6 heads of schools, 6 board members, 4 parents and 4 ward education officers. The study employed purposive sampling and simple random sampling to obtain participants. The study used a cross sectional survey design through qualitative approach and some sort of triangulation of data where semi-structured interview, focus group discussions and documentary review were employed for data collection. Data was analyzed by basing on the themes and resulted into emergency of different subthemes. The results showed that education stakeholders had varied perceptions on the education of pregnant school girls in secondary schools. On one hand, retention of these girls was a sign of indiscipline contempt and on the other hand, expulsion was seen as a denial of education right to these girls. Likewise the study found different socio-cultural factors influencing the expulsion of pregnant girls including presence of school rules and regulations, avoiding destruction of school reputations as well as fear of influencing immoral behavior (early sexual practices) to the rest of the girls in the schools. Moreover, the study revealed notable effects of the decision to ban school girl mothers from readmission in their lives such as loss of education right, humiliation and discrimination, prostitution and dependents as well as increase in poverty amongst these girls. Furthermore, it revealed different strategies which were relevant to the needs of pregnant school girls in the community.

Research by Karimi (2015), investigated challenges experienced by young mothers in primary school in the coastal region of Kenya. The study also looked at some ways that these teenage mother learners used to cope with these challenges. A qualitative research study was employed to gather information for the study. Four young mothers were interviewed. Additional information was sought from the head teacher or director of the schools where the young mothers were schooled. There was evidence that the lack of much-needed financial, emotional, and social support was a challenge for the young mother learners to go through their education successfully. This study used a mixed method design to find out whether parental support influenced the re-admission of girls after early pregnancy, a methodological gap.

Another study by Wekesa (2014) on re-admission policy and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) performance in Bungoma North Sub-County, Kenya established



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that education needs of pregnant school girls and teenage mothers have received little attention despite the introduction of the re-entry policy in Kenya secondary schools. The objectives of the study were; to determine the extent of the implementation of re-admission policy in secondary schools, the involvement of stakeholders in the re-admission process, the effect of admitted teenage mothers on academic performance and challenges experienced by schools and students who return to school.

The study was guided by the production function theory advocated by Tinto Model on school retention. The sample included 774 respondents who were chosen. The experts in the department were consulted to ensure that the data collection tools instruments were valid, piloting was also done to ensure reliability questionnaires and the major data collection instruments supported was interview schedules and the observation schedules from the sample of population. Data was analyzed using SPSS and presented using tables. The results showed that the level of the implementation of re-admission policy was on average in most secondary schools. Further the study found that parents were not involved in the re- admission process. The evaluation also found that student-mothers performed poorly in school and this impacted on their final KCSE performance. The evaluation recommends that there be a holistic involvement of all stakeholders in designing, developing and implementing the re-entry policy. This current study attempted to find out the effect of stakeholders perception, especially the parents on implementation of the re- entry policy, in Athi River sub-county.

Opondo, Aloka and Raburu (2017) investigated the relationship between attitude towards guidance and counseling program and adjustment of readmitted teenage mothers in Kenyan secondary schools. The research employed ex-post facto research design. The target population of the study was 242 readmitted teenage mothers from selected schools in Ugenya Sub-County. The sample size comprised 138 readmitted teenage mothers who are integrated back to school after going through the bridge center program using simple random sampling technique. Questionnaires for readmitted for readmitted teenage mothers was used to collect data. Experts from the department ascertained the face, construct and content validity of the questionnaires. The finding indicated that the relationship between readmitted teenage mother's attitude towards guidance and counseling and adjustment was positive moderate and significant ( $r=.550$ ,  $n=166$ ,  $p<0$ ). The current study attempts to find out whether the teenage mothers and their parents have a positive attitude towards guidance and counseling in the schools under study or not.

Another study by Onyango, Kioli and Nyambedha (2015) on challenges of re-entry among teenage mothers in primary schools in Muhoroni district, Western Kenya found that gender disparities persist in many parts of the country. The study adopted cross-sectional descriptive research design while using both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collections. The data was collected from schools, teachers, pupils, parents/guardians and teenage mothers using questionnaires, structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions. It was found that a range of socio-cultural factors such as traditions, patriarchy, bride wealth transfer, early marriages, economic factors and religion constrained school re-entry of teenage mother. The current study sought to find out whether parental factors such socio-cultural stigmas, social taboos around teenage pregnancy challenged implementation of re-entry policy.

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### **Research Design and Methodology**

McCombes (2021), defined research design as a plan for collecting, analyzing and interpreting data to answer a research question. This study used convergent mixed methods design to assess parental support and implementation of re-entry policy. The researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, analyzed and then the results were merged to minimize the limitations, which could arise from both or either of the approaches (Creswell, 2018). Convergent design was preferred over alternatives because the researcher wanted to examine how parental support influenced implementation of re-entry policy in Athi River Sub-county, Machakos County. Quantitative data was gathered using a cross-sectional survey design from students and teachers, while qualitative data was collected from principals and parents using phenomenological design. This design enabled the researcher to obtain information that would have been missed by using one of the paradigms, and the study required a single phase of data collection because both types were gathered simultaneously.

### **Locale of the Study**

This research was conducted in Athi River sub-county, Machakos County. It is one of the eight sub-counties that constitute Machakos County which lies between  $1^{\circ} 27'27''S$  and  $1^{\circ}30'1''S$  Latitude and  $36^{\circ} 59'13''E$  and  $37^{\circ} 05'20''E$  Longitude. It is located around 30 Km South East of Nairobi CBD. Athi River sub-county has an approximated population of 322499, a population density of  $389.9/km^2$ , according to 2019 Kenya population and Housing Census, covering an area of approximately  $963 km^2$ . It is a semi-urban set up along Nairobi- Mombasa Highway the main activity is casual labor in the many industries in the Mavoko municipality. It borders Machakos town sub-county, Nairobi city, Makueni County, Kiambu and Kajiado counties. Although some parts of the sub-county overlap with the above-mentioned places the study did not step out of the administrative boundaries of Athi River sub-county.

### **Target Population**

Copper and Schindler, 2014 defined target population as the entire group of objects having common observable characteristics. According to Ndjama (2020), the subjects of a study can take the form of either people or things. Based on these definitions, the target population for this study included students, guidance and counseling teachers, principals and parents. The study specifically targeted twelve (12) public mixed secondary schools 436 form three girls, 12 guidance & counseling teachers, 12 principals and 80 parents.

### **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Martinez- Mesa et al (2015) defined a sample size as a finite part or subset of participants drawn from the target population, whereas sampling is the statistical method by which a subset is drawn,(Mill, 2022). This study used both probability and non- probability sampling techniques, including systematic random sampling and purposive sampling. Mugenda & Mugenda (2013) , recommended a sample size of between 10% and 30% of the population is sufficient to reflect a population which is not more than 10 thousand. Going by this, 4 guidance & counseling teachers, 4 principal, 8 parents and 84 students, a total of 100 participants took part in the study.

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Out of these 4 guidance & counseling teachers, 4 principal, 8 parents and 84 students, a total of 100 participants took part in the study.

### **Description of Research Instruments**

Munir, 2017 defined research instruments as fact-finding procedures and tools for collecting data. This study used structured questionnaires and interview guides, which the researcher believed would generate requisite data for large quantity of information, inexpensively from a wide range of participants (Cheung, 2021).

### **Validity, Pilot Testing and Reliability of Research Instruments**

This section presented how validity, pilot testing, and reliability of the research instruments were ensured in this study. Heala & Twycross (2015) defined validity as the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study. Both content and face validity were conducted on the research instruments before administering. The instruments were presented to research experts, in educational Research and Evaluation at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), to read and evaluate the degree to which they were relevant, appropriate and valid and whether or not they answered the research questions.

### **Pilot Testing of Research Instruments**

The advantage of pilot testing of instruments is the fact that, problems with question design are discovered early (Slattery et al., 2011). According to Academy and Academy, (2022), pilot testing is a small-scale study conducted before the actual research is carried out to test the research instrument, evaluate its applicability and make necessary improvements and corrections. The pilot study was conducted in one secondary school in Athiriver sub-county. The school was randomly selected and then a sample of 30 students was selected. The school was not involved in the actual study.

### **Reliability of the Questionnaire**

According to Christensen et al. (2011), reliability is the consistency or stability of the scores of the measurement instrument. Kathori and Gang, (2014), opined that Cronbach's alpha is the best test for internal reliability for questionnaires using likert scale, more than two choices to choose from. For this study, reliability of instruments was estimated at 0.7 Cronbach alpha threshold, which was found to be satisfactory level of reliability.

### **Determination of Reliability of Interview Guide**

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets. Detailed field notes can enhance reliability by using recording devices and by transcribing digital files. Trustworthiness of the interview guide was achieved by Apter (2004) used member checking, peer review, and triangulation.

### **Description of Data Collection Procedures**

Seeking ethical review and approval from the National Commission of Science and Technology (NACOSTI), is a well-established part of the research process. The researcher must prepare a

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research protocol that details all aspects of the research, including the type of participants she uses and the procedures employed in conducting the study. Therefore, the present researcher requested a permission letter from the Head of Department (HOD), Faculty of Education of The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). The researcher received a clearance letter from the Faculty of Education CUEA, which was used to secure a research permit from the National Commission of Science and Technology (NACOSTI).

The researcher further obtained approvals from; County Commissioner and County Ministry of Education offices, Machakos County, who alerted Athiriver Deputy Commissioner and sub-County MOE, respectively. The researcher then visited the schools to alert the administration of the data collection. The researcher administered the interview guides in person, recorded the interview on tapes, and transcribed them later for analysis. The researcher personally collected data from the participants by administering questionnaires after giving them oral instructions about the questionnaires. Then the researcher waited for them to be filled and collected the questionnaires immediately because of the nature of the information and to win the confidence of the participants.

### **Description of Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collected was interpreted using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics because they helped the researcher to get accurate and standardized interpretations. Christensen et al (2011) opined that the goal of descriptive statistics is to describe or summarize the research data. This allowed researcher to make sense of the set of data and to make the key characteristics easily understandable to others. The goal of inferential statistics, on the other hand, was to go beyond the immediate set of data and to infer characteristics of populations based on the sample data. After having collected the data from the field, the researcher coded the closed-ended questions and the Likert scale. The data was keyed into a computer using SPSS version 23 for analysis. The analysis was presented in tables and interpretations, conclusions and recommendation were made. As for the qualitative information, data that had been obtained through open-ended questions was analyzed in narrative form. The keywords obtained from interview that had similar meanings were grouped into themes regarding research questions. Then, the researcher coded them based on the word meanings, identified their patterns, and interpreted their meanings to make conclusions. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed.

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### **Ethical Considerations**

Ramanathan et al (2017) opined that ethics in educational research should focus mainly on creating awareness among researchers about how their daily decisions could potentially harm human beings and the environment. Researchers, who are representatives of powerful institutions such as universities, could misuse their power and exploit members of the society who seemingly hold less powerful positions, such as those who are poor, women, people of color, and children, among others. It is therefore imperative for all researchers, particularly those who work directly with human beings, to identify possible ethical risks and to take the necessary steps to reduce such risks. Thus, the researcher made sure that ethical consideration was observed in carrying out this study.

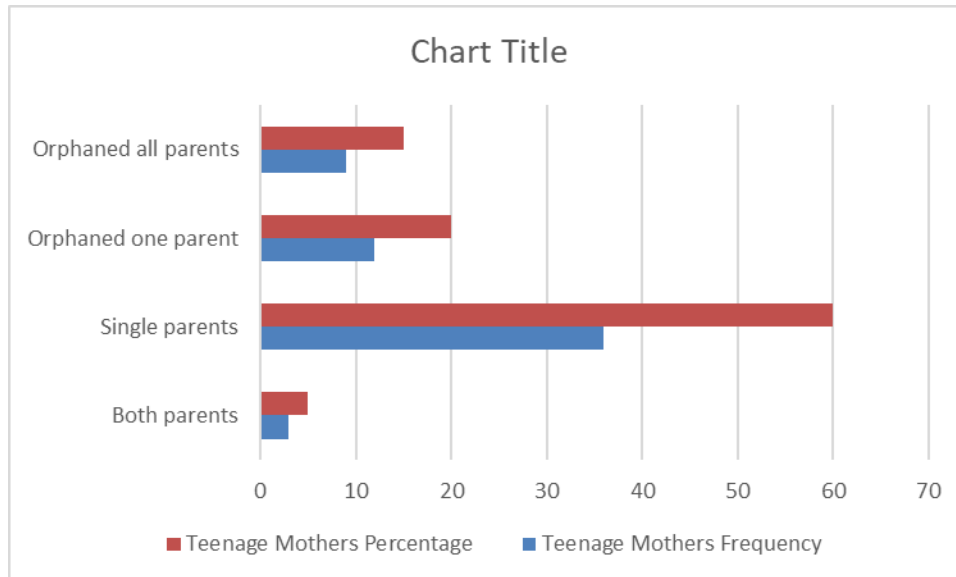
The researcher avoided asking respondents for personal or private information to respect their privacy. According to Christensen et al (2011), anonymity is an excellent way of protecting privacy because it ensures the identity of the research participants is unknown. Names of respondents and schools were not to be indicated in the questionnaires or the interview guide to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. “Confidentiality is the other means that researchers use to protect the privacy of research participants” (Christensen et al 2011, p.115). This helped them to respond freely to the questions without fear. The researcher also ensured that there was informed consent of the participants in conducting the research. This is because the researcher would like to ensure that participants were free to participate or to decline in the study. Christensen et al (2011) opined that gaining a participant’s informed consent is considered to be vital because of the sacredness of the principle that individuals have a fundamental right to determine what is done to their minds and bodies. The researcher ensured that participants were protected from physical as well as emotional harm. The respondents were not required to write their names on the questionnaire. The references were adequately acknowledged.

### **Findings and Discussions**

The research question sought to establish the support the parents were giving to their teenage mothers to return to school after delivering and also with school work including helping them to take care of their babies when they are in school. The researcher wanted to find out the type of family that allowed their daughters to return to school after delivering their babies. The researcher sought also to find out if there was a difference in the support given to teenage mothers by parents and guardians from different types of families. Figure 1 presents the types of families teenage mothers came from.



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**Figure 1: Type of families teenage mothers came from (Frequencies and percentages)**

Source: Field Data (2023)

All students agreed that parental support played a big role in encouraging adolescent mothers to go back to school. On which type of family arrangement most teenage mothers come from a vast majority (60%) indicated that single-parent arrangement. Similarly, the majority of teachers (75%) identified single-parent arrangements as a risk for adolescent mothers. The students identified the lack of moral guidance in single-parent homes where girls are free to do whatever they like. The students also pointed out poverty that is common in orphaned one-parent and orphaned-all-parents family arrangements can inhibit their effort to educate the girls and support the baby.

The principals reiterated the need for parental care and participation, which was lacking for most adolescent mothers. They noted that sometimes parents are the source of serious emotional torture on them due to castigation and acts of humiliation, a thing that results in a lack of concentration and failure in academic performance. Five out of eight parents interviewed showed a positive perception towards the policy while three called for revision of the policy.

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**Table 1: Responses of Teachers on the Type of Support provided**

Statements	Teachers		
	N	Frequency	Percent
Parents play a big role in supporting teenage mothers in school after delivering	4	3	75.00
Most teenage mothers get more support from single-parent families	4	1	25.00
Teenage mothers with both parents are well supported when they return to schools	4	3	75.00
Single-parent homes allow teenage mothers to do what they want	4	3	75.00
Poverty prevents parents from returning their teenage mothers to school	4	3	75.00
Parents humiliate teenage mothers and thus prevent them to go back to school	4	3	75.00
The level of education of the parent determines whether they will support their teenage mothers to go back to school or not	4	3	75.00
The professions of the parents determine how they will treat their teenage mothers when they return to school	4	3	75.00
Total		4	100.00

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 1; show that 75% of the teachers were of the view that parents played a big role in supporting teenage mothers in school after delivery. This finding suggests that adolescent mothers need support given their limited knowledge of motherhood as well as limited financial abilities. On the other hand, only 25% of teenage mothers got support from single-parent families. This implies that single families may be willing to take care of babies to allow their daughters to resume their studies. They, therefore, felt that teenage mothers from poorly functioning families might require help with ancillary or substitute networks. Single parents themselves might lack the financial material and health care support. Additionally, 75% felt that teenagers from both parents and nuclear families were well supported. This implies that adolescent mothers require support from everyone around them to go on with their education after delivery. This support must begin from both parents when they need a caretaker for the baby and finances for school fees. Pregnancies disrupt any family structure. Normal families are upset by changes but recover with time and support. Pregnancy may sometime occur when teenagers from these families seek intimacy outside these families.

Majority of teachers 75% felt that teenage mothers from single parents were allowed to do what they want. This implies that the family is the most consistent social group for help in coping with pregnancy. However, disorganized families and those that no longer work together

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as a unit may find it particularly difficult to convey to their children their own values about sexuality and cannot always help develop their children into sexually responsible individuals. Therefore, growing up with a single parent can lead to engaging in risky sexual behaviors. This is because, in a single-parent household, the adolescent has more responsibility for younger children, and hence becomes socialized into maternal roles early. Another reason for adolescents' risky behavior is the lack of both parents, especially the father to discipline and control them. The lack of control and guidance places them at risk for engaging in risky behaviors.

Similarly, 75% of teacher respondents agreed that poverty prevents parents from returning teenage mothers to school. Teenage childbearing is often associated with numerous disruptions for girls when it comes to school attendance. This implies that girls require a lot of support to untangle these disruptions. If support to complete their education is denied, teenage mothers and their babies are bound to enter into the vicious circle of poverty.

The teachers at 75% claimed that parents humiliate teenage mothers and thus prevent them from returning to school. This is due to insufficient family support. The adolescent mothers experience rejection, loneliness, and anxiety during pregnancy thus unable to return to school. Parents often become angry when they realize their daughter is pregnant. They may say things that are humiliating leading to pregnancy-related dropout as confirmed in this study. Of the teachers, 75% revealed that the level of education of the parent determine whether they will support their teenage mothers to go back to school or not. Parental education level determines the quality of interpersonal interactions between mother and child. The teachers suggested that parents with higher education exhibit more involved and supportive parenting practices such as interacting with children’s school environments, demonstrating positive discipline practices, and creating a supportive caregiving environment at home. Different work experiences may expose parents to positive parenting practices for better child development. More involved parenting, such as a higher level of parenting monitoring, in turn, can protect against some adolescent sexual risk behaviors such as young initiation of sex, unprotected sex, and having more sexual partners.

**Table 2**

P: Students’ View

Demographic Trait	Category	Students		
		N	Freq.	Percent
Family social-economic status likely to take teenage mother back to school	Financially unstable	60	0	0.00
	Financially stable	60	42	70.00
	Educated	60	6	10.00
	Uneducated	60	0	0.00
	Stable careers	60	6	10.00
	Religious	60	6	10.00
	Total		60	100.00

(b) Teachers’ View

Source: Field Data (2023)

Demographic Trait	Category	Teachers		
		N	Freq.	Percent
Family social-economic status likely to take teenage mother back to school	Financially unstable	4	0	0.00
	Financially stable	4	3	75.00
	Educated	4	1	25.00
	Uneducated	4	0	0.00
	Stable careers	4	0	0.00
	Religious	4	0	0.00
	Total		4	100.00

**Students and Teachers responses on the Support Provided by Parents: Tables (a) & (b)**

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The students (70%) and teachers (75%) also identified financial stability as an important aspect of family support that was likely to take adolescent mothers back to school. Other important family aspects included parental education, religion, and profession. The interview with principals revealed that they were the most important players in re-entry and they had a strong effect on the outcome. A teenage mother's readmission is strongly dependent on her parent's attitude, support, and ability. This implies that if parents are willing and able the adolescent mother will return to school but if they are not she will likely not. These results are in agreement with a study by Sulo et al. (2014), where three-quarters of the school heads agreed that unforgiving parents were to blame for the girls not returning to school.

The parents in the interview claimed that sometimes they are willing to take the girl back to school but the financial situation did not allow it. Some parents had to fend for the adolescent mother, her baby, and other siblings and some parents could not just afford to send the girl back to school. Other parents were unable to get someone to take care of the baby as the mother went back to school. Some of the parents interviewed were of the view that life became difficult after the pregnancy putting in mind the parents had to fend for other children. One parent confessed that she had to look after the baby (grandchild) and at the same time hassle to provide for the whole family and at the same time provide the basic requirement for all her children.

The interview with principals revealed that the family type was likely to encourage or discourage implementation of re-entry policy. The principals opined that adolescent mothers struggled when they went back to school without the help, support, and involvement of their parents. They believed that parents or families that send adolescent mothers back to school were those that were willing to take care of them and their children. Families are to have the financial resources to cover school fees and school-related costs (such as books and uniforms). The principals observed that adolescent mothers from poorer families were less likely to return to school.

## **Conclusion**

As evidenced, in the findings it is clear that re-entry policy may not be implemented without the involvement of the parent, in Athiriver sub-county. Their vital position cannot be overlooked and therefore it's now time to bring them on board.

## **Recommendations**

Following the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations; The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) should create awareness about the existence of the policy. The MOEST should distribute printed copies of the re-entry policy to schools. The public should be sensitized on the importance of re-entry. This could be done using media of wide coverage, social media, door-to-door, social gatherings, churches, seminars, and so on. The school principals should also continue talking about pregnancy and re-entry and facilitate conversations in schools.

The parents, school, and the larger community should address the dreaded subject of teenage sex. This practice not only leads to pregnancy but also may expose teenagers to other serious physical, emotional, and psychological problems. A conversation about the introduction of sex education in schools is timely.

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The MOEST should strengthen guidance and counseling in schools. The multitasking between teaching and counseling roles was not helping the program. Counseling should be offered to all parties concerned including the girl, her parents, the baby's father, and the entire school community where appropriate.



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