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Teenage pregnancy and school dropout in Uganda

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to preview the implications of Teenage Pregnancy and its impact on social development. Girls' education goes beyond what meets the eye. It is about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in school, have the support to complete all levels of education, acquire the knowledge and skills to compete in the labour market, and gain social emotional and life skills necessary to navigate and adapt to the changing world. Both individuals and countries benefit from girls' education because better-educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition, and health care, marry at a later stage, have fewer children and choose when to become mothers. Educated women are more likely to participate in formal and informal labour markets to earn higher incomes. Teenage Pregnancy has straight implications for school dropouts and is a subsequent contributor to the disparities encountered in the learning of both female learners. A variety of researchers agree that most girls quit school as a result of pregnancy. However, there have been concerns raised regarding teen pregnancy and its subsequent impact on school dropout. This leads to premature marriage or becoming the head of a low-income family and her kids. Hence the study will investigate the relationship between pregnancy and school dropouts in Uganda. The research used qualitative design to get the findings about the causes of girls getting pregnant and dropping out of school and its implication on their future in society. The findings indicated that many girls leave schools due to pregnancies which affect their performance in school and the community. The study urges educators to incorporate the principles of teenage pregnancy and girl child production.

Keywords: teenage, pregnancy, school, dropout, poverty, culture

Introduction

There is compelling worldwide evidence that pregnancy and birth during teenage is a significant contributor to high numbers of girl school dropouts especially in developing Countries. Education continuity for teenage mothers can lessen the long-term negative consequences of teenage pregnancy and childbearing (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024)^[4, 18, 27].

Melton (2019)^[20] Says that teen parents who drop out of school and their kids suffer significant difficulties. Awena and Asiimwe (2024)^[4] Matte and Asiimwe (2024)^[18] Wehye and Asiimwe (2024)^[28] argue that pregnancy among girls is an international issue due to serious social and economic elements that affect education. Say that dropping out of school, scores lower on peer educational goals and dropout learners view the environment around them as hostile.

Hence learners that drop out record smaller household participation and much less count on their parents. Furthermore, Manlove (2020)^[17];

indicated that pregnancy among school girls has become international due to various socioeconomic elements that affect the degree of education and the problem is more acute in rural than urban schools.

According to Seith Yon, Parekh, Anderson, Huber, Rakorae and Mainck in their research in Malta, stipulate that there is a concerning problem of high rates of pregnancy-related to school dropouts. Female learner who conceives have lower chances of completing their learning after the birth of their first kid. They also have lower chances for social economic development (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28].

Neild, Stoner, Eby and Furstenberg (2018) [22] define a dropout as a learner who has terminated school before graduation without the intent of returning. Girls do not normally plan to become pregnant while at school therefore it is not deliberate. Pregnancy takes place as an accident as the majority of them are still under age yet teen pregnancy refers to girls under 19 years or less becoming pregnant (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

Kost and Maddow, Zimet (2020) [15], Wehye and Asiimwe (2024) [28] say that teen pregnancy compromises girls' development opportunities as dropping out of school prevents their formal learning and leads them to work and productive disadvantages that result in a risk of hardship, physical violence, criminal offences and social exemption (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

According to Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13], argue that early pregnancy and parenthood make it hard to complete studies and achieve other life goals as well as prospects for the born kids. They continue to say, that children of teen mothers begin school at a disadvantage which makes them fare worse than those of elder parents. The kids born by teen mothers start pre-primary schools with low levels of school preparedness related to those kids born to women in their twenties.

Adolescent girls' education ceases to be when they become mothers. Culture and school regulations often discourage girls not to returning to school after giving birth. Unmarried girls may be pressured to marry the father of the children. Married or not married, puts an adolescent mother under intense financial strain since going back to school may be impossible. Hence finding work could be the only way to provide for herself (Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [18, 27].

The issue of female learners' pregnancy might be much more serious than is generally thought. Hence there is a need for a continued increase in programs to minimize teen pregnancy and the need to attempt and enhance the variety of teen mothers that go back to school to complete their studies (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28].

Materials and Methods

The study adopted a literature review methodology as a method, and tool for collecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting information obtained from secondary sources. The information was obtained from journal articles, text books, discussion papers, opinion papers, and some university websites. The essence of adopting this approach

was to obtain a deeper understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of adult learning across contexts and time in a short time span, but in a systematic manner. Through this methodology, the researchers synthesized and evaluated relevant literature on adult learning to sift out, discuss, and explain the various views about the research phenomenon. From this exposition, the researchers suggest effective ways through which educators could facilitate teenage pregnancies.

Adolescent Pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy is a global issue but most often occurs in poor and marginalized communities. Many girls face considerable pressure to marry early in other societies, this makes them teenage mothers while they are still children themselves. Whenever girls are denied the right to make decisions about their reproductive health and well-being, teenage pregnancy increases. Hence girls must be able to make decisions about their bodies in future to reduce the effects of pregnancy in schools (Mugyenyi, Kobisingye, Matagi & Asiimwe, 2023; Kalonde, Asiimwe & Asiimwe, 2024) [21, 12].

The Adolescent Mothers Education Initiative (AMEI) 2024, stipulates that their project targets policy practice around the continuation of education of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in southern East Africa. They say that some of the obstacles that prevent young mothers from going back to school are closely related to attitudes of parents, teachers, faith leaders and community members schools (Mugyenyi, Kobisingye, Matagi & Asiimwe, 2023; Kalonde, Asiimwe & Asiimwe, 2024) [21, 12].

The Moslem fraternity in Buikwe Uganda has accepted the idea to allow teenage mothers back to school. This was in collaboration with Amina a head teacher in one of the schools, in Buikwe who fell victim as a teenage mother while she was at school. She used her experience when she was an adolescent to communicate to the sheikh along with her Deputy Head Teacher to allow teenage mothers back in school. She says some community members including parents continue to deny many pregnant girls the opportunity to go back to school. She says some girls get stigmatized but she encourages the senior women and men in her school and community to volunteer and teach girls basic skills in life including shaving the problem AMEI (2021), Asiimwe & Magunda, 2017; Asiimwe & Nabitake & Asiimwe, 2022; (Mugyenyi, Kobisingye, Matagi & Asiimwe, 2023; Kalonde, Asiimwe & Asiimwe, 2024) [21, 2, 3, 12].

The constitution of Uganda clearly states that the age of consent is 18 years and suggestions to introduce birth control methods among girls aged 15 years and above have been met with fierce opposition from the religious leader's community and fraternity. This means that (AMEI) 2021, Adolescent Mother Education Initiative cannot freely discuss contraception as a preventive option among children below 18 years (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

CAF (2021); Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13], argued that in Latin America and the Caribbean, teen pregnancy incidents are analyzed based on the relationship with the school system as a policy developed to complete the school cycle. Pregnancy and adolescent parenthood are being raised as one of the factors for dropping out of school yet other factors like poverty, Gender bias, and Violence among others should be

addressed. They also suggest that sex education, family planning and child care should be potential solutions to teenage pregnancy (Mugenyi, Kobisingye, Matagi & Asiimwe, 2023; Kalonde, Asiimwe & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [21, 12, 27].

Poverty

They continue to say that poverty is one of the most important factors for determining whether a girl can access and complete her education. Studies consistently show that girls face multiple disadvantages such as household low incomes, living in remote or under-served locations away from school or those with a disability find themselves failing to access and complete education (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28].

CAF (2021); Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13]; also talks about long distances walked by girls from home to school. This places them at increased risk of violence and sexual harassment while moving to school. Most recent data estimates that approximately 60 million girls are sexually assaulted on their way to school every year. This often has serious consequences for their mental and physical well-being while also to lower school attendance and higher dropout rates.

According to CAF (2021); Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13]; in their study, they say that teen pregnancy and parenthood are considered outside factors for school disengagement among secondary schools in Latin America, teen Pregnancy and early motherhood represent a cost of opportunity for women who are given an inadequate approach to the problem which results in interruption of formal education or drop out of the school by adolescent girls. They say 36 percent of school dropout cases in the region are attributed to Teen Pregnancy or motherhood.

They continue to say that in Latin America and the Caribbean, Teen Pregnancy compromises young girls' development opportunities as dropping out of school hinders their formal education, resulting in employment and productive disadvantages, while making them vulnerable to poverty, violence, crime and sexual exclusion (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

UNICEF, UNFPA, and PAHO/WHO, argue that Latin America and the Caribbean exhibit the second-highest teen pregnancy rates. 15 percent of all pregnancies are women under the age of 20 years. Central and Southern America show the highest rates, especially in Guatemala, Panama, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Venezuela. Pregnancy is also more common among Indigenous and rural teens, less educated women and those living in poor households.

Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13]; Stipulates that adolescent pregnancy can also have negative social economic effects on girls, their families and communities towards development. Unmarried Pregnant adolescents may face stigma or rejection by parents and peers as well as threats of violence. Girls who become pregnant before the age of 18 years are more likely to experience violence within a marriage or relationship.

Argues that they are committed to talking about adolescent

pregnancy, especially those between the ages of (10-14) who are mostly at risk and are often overlooked. They also support girls who have already become mothers raising awareness of their sexual and reproductive health, rights protecting them from abuse and connecting them with education and health services.

Government Policy

Furthermore, they call on governments to strengthen national health systems, implement comprehensive education on sexuality and relationships in and out of school and provide affordable safe contraception to tackle the root causes of adolescent pregnancy. They too demand the government do more to support pregnant girls and young mothers to continue and complete their education (Mugenyi, Kobisingye, Matagi & Asiimwe, 2023; Kalonde, Asiimwe & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [21, 12, 27].

UNESCO (2017); Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] say that according to available evidence, it reflects on important regional differences and distinctions, in South Asia, the majority of early pregnancies arise within the marriage. Whereas in Latin America and the Caribbean, there are higher rates of early pregnancies outside marriage. Yet in Sub-Saharan Africa rates of early pregnancies are higher within and outside marriages (Mugenyi, Kobisingye, Matagi & Asiimwe, 2023; Kalonde, Asiimwe & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [21, 12, 27].

Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] Argue that there is available evidence of policies that exclude pregnant students from accessing school and those that support new mothers' re-entry into school. In Africa, 26 Countries of the African Union have some type of laws, policy or strategy in place to guarantee girls' rights to education during or after pregnancy. In Minority Countries, some guidelines or laws explicitly allow pregnant students and new mothers to be excluded from school.

According to the UN and CAF (2023) Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] this is done to comply with the sustainable development goals. They advocate for investment in actions to ensure that teen parents stay in school, to guarantee education for a segment with a high level of social vulnerability and to develop strategies that help to prevent adolescent pregnancy and parenthood as well as young people's skills for life and work to be compromised.

In their report states that more than 41,000 girls under the age of 18 years marry every day. If this practice can be put to an end, women's expected edutainment would increase and there would be potential earnings within it. According to the estimates in the reports, ending child marriage and early pregnancy could generate more than United States Dollars 500 billion benefits annually.

World Bank continue to report that girls who drop out of school when pregnant marry when they are young. They fail to complete their education than their peers who marry later. Those that drop out are likely to have children at a young age. They are exposed to higher levels of violence perpetrated by their partner. In turn, this affects the education and health of their children as well as their ability to earn a living. Indeed,

girls with secondary are up to six times more likely to marry than those children with little or no education and health of their children (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28].

Sex Education

According to the Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] report teenage pregnancy was due to early initiation of sex and sex coercion. 28 percent of girls were sexually active while still at school. 78 percent got pregnant and dropped out. 56 percent of the dropout still stay with their parents and 28 percent are married or cohabiting.

FAWE continue to say that factors that drive early sex initiation include, the need to satisfy material needs among girls that come from poor households was 38 percent. Then the ones wanting to start their own family was 4 percent, while girls that were limited to sex education were 4 percent, yet those with low esteem towards education were 7 percent and the girls that were either neglected by parents or guardians to give necessary support were 33 percent and other hardships such as walking long distance from home to school, failing to get school lunch, sanitary wear and family breakdown were reported. 36 percent of the girls that were sexually active used contraceptives. All these affected girls get pregnant and drop out of school (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

Cultural norms

According to Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] in their report, found that parents were not experiencing economic returns from the fees they paid to girls and other than boys. That was based on cultural norms and practices. They believed that spending on girls by paying fees was like watering another person's flower because they left their parents' homes after all that expenditure and went to different families for marriage. Hence, they chose to pay for boys and girls got frustrated, became pregnant dropped out of school.

In the study, culture and gender roles also affect girls to drop out of school. The heavy domestic household chores affect girls' regular attendance at 66 percent. This interfered with their schooling and led not only to losing interest but poor academic performance, giving a direct reflection on girls that they should prepare and marry early as per cultural norms and be good wives in the future (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28].

Furthermore, in some rural communities, men practised patriarchy as a cultural norm they made decisions without giving a chance to the mothers of the daughters and were the ones controlling financial resources to go to school and who to drop out that would lead girls to engage in early sex so that other men that were not their fathers could provide fees and scholastic needs and that left them pregnant and dropped out of school (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

Pregnancy and School Dropouts

Ahikires and Madada *et al* (2014); Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] report, stated that school completion rates for

primary and secondary are 60 percent and 40 percent respectively in both levels of learning. The factor that influences this is teenage pregnancy for girls dropping out. They continued to say that in these schools' 34 percent and 65 percent of teachers, cited that teenage pregnancy was the main cause. Teenage pregnancy in Uganda stands at 24 percent according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics Survey report in 2012.

However, evidence from the Sub-Saharan Africa setting suggests that the relationship between pregnancy and school dropout is not straightforward. In some incidents, pregnancy was chosen as an alternative for girls who came from well-to-do families but wanted to drop out of school. For example, a study in Kenya noted that many girls who want to drop out of school perceive early marriages as an escape route. Yet others get pregnant to escape from family poverty as one of the ways to get married hence drop out of school (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

Dangal (2018); Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] Argue that Pregnancy-related school dropout is an issue of public concern worldwide nowadays. Many studies have revealed that age at first intercourse is decreasing. Today, teens are becoming sexually active at an increasingly young age. Few girls use contraceptives and are at risk of getting pregnant. Although early marriage and pregnancy are connected to school dropout, direct proof is minimal.

Delprato, Akyeampong, Sabates and Hernandez (2018) [7] stipulate that early pregnancy can be the main reason for dropping out of school. Female learners leave or are taken out of learning institutions since they are pregnant or married. However female learners who have dropped out of school are more likely to marry and conceive. (Birchall, 2018) [6].

According to Melton (2019) [20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022) [13] they say that teen pregnancy decreased by 42 percent from its highest in 1990 and the United States teen birth rate is generally low. Despite this excellent progression, it is still the situation that almost 3 in 10 girls in the United States will undoubtedly be pregnant before the age of 20. The United States has the most significant rate of female learner pregnancies in the developed world, with roughly 750,000 pregnancies to teenagers yearly. Teen parents drop out of secondary school and kids of teen parents suffer significant academic difficulties.

Education Policy

FAWE reported that the school careers of girls are cut short because of pregnancy either by the girls dropping out of school themselves or through school expulsion from the education system. With little or no chance of reentry after giving birth social withdrawal after pregnancy is greatly influenced by societal norms. Pre-marital pregnancy among girls was stigmatized both in school and in most African communities mainly on moralistic grounds, without addressing causal factors that lead to pregnancy among school girls (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024) [4, 18, 27].

They continue to say that in Uganda there is no legal policy position that prohibits pregnant girls or young mothers from continuing with their education, the practice is that more girls

who become pregnant at school are expelled. Re-entry to school after birth also remains a silent issue in Uganda unlike in Ghana, Zambia, Botswana, and South Africa which have policies in place to ensure re-entry of girls none of these countries have achieved varying levels of success in development (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024)^[4, 18, 28].

Pradhan, Wynter and Fisher (2019); Melton (2019)^[20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024)^[4, 18, 27]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022)^[13] Argue that education and teen pregnancy in low and middle-income nations. Teen pregnancy discourages from accomplishing objectives and maximize their human capital. Furthermore, getting to higher levels of learning is hindered by teen pregnancy in low and middle-lower income nations for that reason. Community service policies and programs are out to target accessibility to education and school retention as a deterrence to teenage pregnancy.

Hallman and Grant (2006)^[11]; Melton (2019)^[20]; (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024)^[4, 18, 28]. Kayindu, Kazibwe and Asiimwe (2022)^[13] Argue that an alternative way would be to ensure the re-entry of pregnant girls and young girls and young mothers to school. This has been very successful in South Africa where pregnant girls are allowed to continue. However, this requires that girls are prepared and withstand the stigma and teasing from fellow children.

Furthermore, in Kenya some head teachers were not comfortable with pregnant girls staying at school due to the fear that society will view teachers who allow reentry as condoning sexual immorality, potentially, the parents can withdraw their children from such schools that condone sexual immorality. Thus, reentry is not a school issue but also requires community sensitization.

Further, reentry requires that the schools are prepared with well-trained teachers to provide guidance and counselling to receive such pregnant girls or young mothers and change the perception of taking them as mothers and offer support and acceptance. The schools should also be able to provide textbooks, learning materials and some form of child support to the mothers (Awena & Asiimwe, 2024; Matte & Asiimwe, 2024; Wehye & Asiimwe, 2024)^[4, 18, 27].

FAWE in their survey argues that the Pregnant Girls Association still caters to the babies' basic needs, offering basics such as baby potties, play materials, and mattresses in a daycare before class time. If some babies cry a lot, they can be taken to their mothers. Otherwise, the next reunion is at break time.

Conclusion

The government should put a policy to retain the girls in schools for the betterment of the community and the country at large. The universal primary schools should be compulsory to all school age going girls so that it can reduce on dropouts and family planning should encourage to girls who are above 18 years so that they can be in schools and qualify to complete their studies.

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