Challenges facing technical training institutes’ student mothers, coping mechanisms and support accorded

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Education is central to development as it empowers people, strengthens nations, and is thus critical to Kenya’s attainment of Vision 2030. Investment in education benefits the individual, society and the world as a whole. Teenage pregnancies have become more rampant among technical training institutes student in Kenya. This study highlights the challenges, coping mechanism and support accorded to student mothers in technical training institutes in Baringo County. The study used the ex-post facto research design. The target and accessible population constituted of student mothers and counseling officers in the office of dean of students in Eminging and Baringo technical training institutes. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were used to select a sample size of 64 respondents for the study. The major challenges highlighted by student mothers were economic (93.6%) while others comprised of socio-psychological problems which include; stigma and discrimination (90.6%), low self-esteem and guilt (84.1%) among others. This study concludes that there were a number of challenges student-mothers went through within the school environment. The student mothers had developed various coping mechanisms to complement the support that they receive from their parents, relatives, friends, lecturers, and school administrators to manage their conflicting role. This study recommends that lecturers need guidance with respect to how student-mothers can be encouraged and supported academically so that they do not make these students’ lives worse because of insensitivity.

Key words: Challenges, student mothers, coping mechanism, support accorded.

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a global problem with U.S.A., UK and Australia leading in rates of teenage pregnancies in the developed world (Quinlivan, 2006). In 2005, Pennsylvania had 26,047 teenage girls who faced the challenges of being young mothers. In the United States, nearly one million female adolescents become pregnant each year (Banda, 2015). This is twice the rate found in Great Britain and nearly ten times the rate in Japan. The rate of adolescent child bearing in the United States has fallen since the late 1950s from 96 births per 1000 women aged between 15 to 19 in 1957 to 49 births in 2000 (Mangino, 2008).

In Kenya, national figures on teenage pregnancy stand at 23% with an estimated 5.5 million girls between the ages of 15 to 19 giving birth annually. In Kenya, as in other African countries, childbearing trends vary based on regional and socio-economic status. Teenage pregnancy is highest in Nyanza Province where it stands...
at 29% compared to all provinces (CSA Report, 2008). In Kenya, just like it is in most Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, teenage pregnancy is a major contributor to school dropout among girls (Bunyi, 2008). Pregnancy at a young age is likely to curtail a young woman’s schooling and thus her economic potential (Okoth, 2015). Mpesha (2010) says that the Kenyan issue of school dropout because of pregnancy is as old as the school system itself. Despite the introduction of free primary and secondary education, fewer girls are joining technical training institutes due to teenage pregnancy while some are becoming student mothers when enrolled in the tertiary institutions.

At a time when more money and time is being spent on education than ever before, students’ drop out due to pregnancy has become an issue of great concern to the nation. When a girl drops out of technical training institute level, the cost is often higher than when she drops out in secondary school level due to the cumulative expenditure over the years and the fact that the student leaves without a certificate unless they return to complete training after delivery. Based on the per capita expenditure of Ksh 70,000 in technical training institute level, the government stands to lose up to 40 million annually due to pregnancy related dropout in Kenyan technical training institutes. This is because the recurrent expenditure once invested cannot be recovered if a girl leaves school half way through the school year (CSA Report, 2008).

The Ministry of Education, on recognizing the negative impact of teenage pregnancy on girl child education have put in place the return to school policy guidelines in the mid 1990s to ensure that girls who became pregnant while still in school get a second chance (Mpesha, 2000; CSA Report, 2008). This has been emphasized because education is considered a basic right in our society and world-wide to enhance productivity across sectors, increase economic growth and provides citizens with basic life skills. However, these students go through a lot of challenges in combining responsibility of being mothers and students at the same time. A recent research done by Centre for the Study of Adolescence (CSA) on teenage pregnancy revealed that despite the existence of return to school policy, at least 10,000 girls drop out of school every year due to pregnancy and only a few resume studies (Onyando and Omondi, 2008). Where the policy is implemented, it has had positive effects, with some girls proceeding to universities and other institutions of higher learning (CSA Report, 2008). However, student mothers face various challenges on resuming studies, one of which is to be a mother and a student at the same time. Fulfilling the challenging and sometimes demanding roles of being a mother and student concurrently can contribute to role overload and conflict, which can have a negative impact on her schooling as well as her overall wellbeing.

Stress arises when the goal structures that an individual holds have the potential for conflict, especially when an individual is committed to two or more goals that cannot be easily attained at the same time. Thus, devoting efforts to attaining one goal can impede the attainment of another goal. This role conflict contributes to stress being experienced by the individual (Carver and Scheier, 2009). Stress is a particular class of experience and coping is the response that follows from these experiences (Carver et al., 2012). Coping is an effort to create conditions that permit the individual to continue moving towards a desired goal (or away from anti-goals) or an effort to disengage oneself from goals that are no longer seen as attainable (Carver and Scheier, 2009). The implementation of the return to school policy has enabled a significant number of student-mothers to get back to school with the aim of completing their technical training institute’s school education. Despite the existence of the re-entry policy, most student-mothers still find it difficult to fit back into the school system after delivery. However, some resume but they face numerous challenges as they try to fit back into the schooling environment. This situation makes it necessary for them to adopt certain coping strategies. The coping mechanisms employed by student-mothers when they resume studies have a great impact on how well they do and how far they will progress in the academic field.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study reviews literature related to return to school policy in Kenya which highlights issues associated with pregnancy and schooling.

**Return to school policy in Kenya**

Pregnancy has led to many girls dropping out of school in Kenya. A number of studies suggest that student pregnancy is associated with disruption of schooling, social disadvantage and an on-going cycle of poverty (Kaufman, 2011; Maeke, 2013; Okoth, 2005). Despite worldwide acknowledgement of the value of female education, a large number of girls in SSA continue to have their school careers cut short by unwanted pregnancies and as a result suffer the negative social and psychological consequences that are derived from this situation (Bayona and Murangi, 2012). The Kenyan government therefore put in place a strategy to help curb this situation by giving the young mothers a second chance to pursue their education through the inception and implementation of return to school policy. The government introduced the re-entry policy because technical training institutes are not able to give new teenage mothers appropriate facilities to care for their children while they continue with their studies. The policy permits girls to go home to deliver and nurse their...
children and thereafter they are free to rejoin their former technical training institutes without hindrance from school administration, parents or society (Oyaro, 2008).

Until 1990s, the trend in Kenyan technical training institutes was to carry out clinical check-up on school girls and eliminate pregnant ones. Things have since changed and the practice now is to allow the victim maternity leave and then allow her back to continue with school (Okoth, 2015). It has been held over the years by various communities and individuals that continuity in education for a girl terminates at the altar of pregnancy (Oyaro, 2008). Today, there is hope that such girls can continue with education after delivering. However, their dreams may be cut short if they fail to receive care and support to enable them handle their new situation with ease. Further, where ad hoc policies such as re-entry policy to enable girls who become pregnant while still in school to re-enter the system upon delivery are articulated, they have not been followed by strict implementation. More often than not, the implementation of such policies is not monitored. The lack of monitoring and follow-up procedures is making implementation of return to school policy difficult. The situation is made worse by the absence of penalties for non-compliances (Onyando and Omondi, 2008). Consequently, the policies have not addressed the relevant issues effectively (Bunyi, 2008).

In some situations, the re-entry into school policy is considered a reactive rather than a preventive strategy for it does not spell out any measure or programmes for preventing technical training institute girls’ pregnancies. In fact, arguments have been advanced that the practice may be indirectly encouraging rather than discouraging school girls’ pregnancies because of the assurance that they can have a second chance after discontinuing due to pregnancies; also, girls may be inclined to undermine the consequences of irresponsible behaviours like sexual activities (Bayona and Murangi, 2012; CSA, 2008). This view is true especially if the student-mother herself, her peers and the rest of the school community is not guided on the benefits of implementing such a policy through sensitization.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed ex post facto correlation research design which is appropriate to behavioral science as independent variable cannot be manipulated. It attempts to investigate the causes or consequences of differences that exist between or among groups of individuals (Orodho, 2003). This is to say independent variable has already occurred (socio-psychological challenges) and the study examined the existing state of affairs (coping mechanism and support that student mothers receive). The study was carried out in Baringo and Emining technical training institutes in Baringo County. The institutions were selected as they had high cases of student mothers and lack mechanisms of dealing with this challenge. According to Chigona and Chetty (2007), the current situation of student mothers in the tertiary institutions of learning is a crisis not only due to degradation of the society’s morals but also as a result of poor parenting and lack of guidance of the youth in Kenya. Purposive and stratified random sampling procedures were used. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select 120 registered student mothers in both institutions. To ensure equal representation of each category of student mothers in terms of level of studies (first year, second year and third year), stratified random sampling using the lottery technique was employed to select 64 respondents for the study. All the respondents (64) complied with the study and gave their responses. Four trained Peer counselors were involved in the study. Data was collected using interview schedule for the trained Peer counselors and questionnaires for the respondents which were developed by the researcher. Data was analyzed using statistical package for social science and presented using frequency distribution tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges of student mothers

Several challenges were highlighted by respondents which included socio-psychological and economic. These challenges have affected student mothers desire to complete their technical training education despite the government's attempt to reduce wastage as a result of dropout rates among student mothers.

Socio-psychological challenges

The researcher sought to find out the socio-psychological challenges faced by student mothers and the results summarized in Table 1.

From the study results, the respondents highlighted several challenges that mainly touched on social and psychological life which affects student mothers in their attempt to pursue or complete their technical education. These challenges: stigma and discrimination (90.6%), low self-esteem and guilt (84.1%) and lack of concentration (75%) were the most highlighted challenges affecting student-mothers. The respondents reported that they experienced stigma from ridicule in front of classmates by both lecturers and fellow students. This occurred whenever they did not satisfy the class requirements making them suffer from low self-esteem, fear and loneliness at school. Low self-esteem and guilt was also reported since they become mothers whilst young and still in school and it made them feel out of place especially when other students felt that they were not fit to be within the school system. Student mothers reported that lecturers had a difficult time handling them as the lecturers were in a state of dilemma, to advocate for or not advocate for the use of contraceptives by such girls. According to FAWE (2015), lecturers have challenges of addressing emerging issues or even teaching certain units like social psychology and reproductive health that deal with aspects that the student mothers had, and at the same time keep the image of the student-mothers in their midst. Lack of concentration whereby student-
mothers were normally not fully settled while at school adversely affected their social and academic life. They lacked a great level of concentration in their academic work due to lack of ability to adequately manage parenting and schooling successfully at the same time.

**Economic challenges**

Figure 1 showed that 93.4% faced economic challenge, while 6.6% of the respondents reported that they did not face economic challenge. This indicates that majority of the student mothers had economic challenges.

From the study results, majority of the student mothers faced economic challenges which affected their desire to complete their studies and care for their siblings as most of them were not married. A few reported that they do not have economic challenge as they were married and their husbands were able to meet the financial obligations. Their husbands have enabled them achieve their dreams of attaining higher education in order to acquire employment and improve their families economic status. According to Chigona and Chetty (2007), greater percentage of student-mothers were daughters of parents who had nothing at all to do to feed for the new sibling and their daughter’s lives and fully depended on informal employment and sustenance farming. This great level of dependency on their parents may have put the girls at risk of dropping out of school due to lack of finances to see them through their education.

**Support student mothers received**

The researcher sought to investigate the type of support the student mothers received while in the technical training institutes and the responses summarized in Table 2.

From the study, the success of a student mother was contingent upon active contributions of all stakeholders in supporting them through their education process alongside motherhood demands. From the responses, spiritual support was mostly highlighted as the major support received by the respondents. This is the kind of support that is concerned with sacred or religious matters like prayer and meditation. The study established that student-mothers were supported by their parents, lecturers and other students who provided them with care and encouragements making them have confidence and trust as this encouraged their sense of personal value. They also took part in providing encouragement and ensuring that student-mothers’ learning environment was conducive. According to Bunyi (2008), parental education determined the ability of the girls getting a second chance to pursue their education even after delivery. According to Mpesha (2010), student-mothers at times are motivated to carry on with their studies as they were given examples of successful student-mothers. Parents often provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-psychological challenge</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of concentration</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries over marriage</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of professional counselling</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma and discrimination</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear and loneliness at school</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem and guilt</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of skills to handle student-mothers’ situation by lecturers</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Study (2016).
Table 2. Support student mothers received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support received</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Study (2016).

Table 3. Coping strategies by student mothers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial matters</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Problem focused coping strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make ups for the missed lessons</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-drive</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual support</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Avoidance coping strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Emotion focused coping strategies</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Study (2016).

the basic needs to both the student mother and her baby (their grandchild) and took full responsibility of bringing up the child as well as support the girl in school. Wanting the best for their children, the parents always did for them all that they could to enable these children attain their set goals. Lecturers too played a significant role in the provision of material support to the student mothers. Considering the needs and situation of student-mothers, lecturers were sometimes obliged to support them in various ways to help them cope with their situation by assisting them in their academic work to enable them catch up with ease.

Coping strategies of student mothers

Student-mothers were different and distinct in all components of psychological adjustment processes and varied in the way they responded to challenges. Psychologists like Di Vesta and Thompson (1970) and Mouly (1973) identify coping mechanism as a compulsory strategy in dealing with challenges and difficulties in our daily life experiences. Student-mothers got actively involved in trying to cope with their double role of being a mother and a student concurrently. They reverted to coping strategies which are summarized in Table 3.

From the study results, student-mothers were forced to look for finances to cater for their needs (personal and school) alongside the needs of their babies by getting involved in various activities and ways. They also tried their level best to fully utilize any free time that they could find to catch up with other learners in terms of syllabus coverage and also to do their personal study while at home or even in school. Sometimes the student-mothers went to school very early and stayed behind in the evening as others left for home to fully utilize their time at school to enable them get enough time to finish assignments and also study. When they missed lessons, they consulted their lecturers and fellow students for assistance. In some cases, student-mothers felt overwhelmed by their situations to the point of lacking what to do to improve on their condition; they therefore accepted whatever came their way. Some of the teen mothers just decided to be bold enough to take the insults from their surrounding and just develop their own psychological shock absorbers.

Conclusion

This study established that there were a number of challenges student-mothers went through within the school environment and sometimes when at home. Because of these challenges they go through, student-mothers opted to use various coping mechanisms to complement the support that they received from their parents, relatives, friends, lecturers, and school administrators to manage their conflicting roles with the
support from different individuals like parents, peers and lecturers. In as much as parents, relatives, peers, lecturers and technical training institutes administrators tried their best to support these needy students, their efforts were also curtailed by other factors like financial constraint, time limit, lack of set up programmes and means to be followed along with individual desire to set aside more time for personal and private study. The return to school policy is a noble idea to help girls who would have otherwise dropped out of school because of pregnancy to get a second chance to education. These girls need adequate support if they are to complete their technical training institute’s education and get access to higher education.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations could be considered for adoption and put into practice so as to support student-mothers to go through their technical training institutes' school education successfully:

1. Technical training institute administrators, communities and individuals need to be sensitized on the return to school policy to make them aware of its existence and thereby appreciate it.
2. Lecturers need guidance with respect to how student-mothers can be encouraged and supported academically so that they do not make these students’ lives worse because of insensitivity. This is necessary because the study found out that most lecturers did not know how to handle and offer advice to student-mothers.
3. There is great need to have the student-mothers transferred to other technical training institutes to avoid stigmatization. This should however be done only after conducting a series of counseling services both at the current school, before exit and the new school on readmission.

**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

**REFERENCES**


