



Psychosocial Intervention Strategies for Stress Management among Student Mothers in Kenyan Public Secondary Schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

Teenage pregnancy is a significant international concern, with the lack of family support affecting the emotional well-being of pregnant teenagers and their babies, thus reducing the likelihood of student mothers returning to school. This survey, therefore, using William Glasser's Psychological Reality Theory on Maladaptive Behaviour adopted a cross-sectional research design. The target population was 5,069 female students in form three and form four in all the public secondary schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. Another population of the study composed of 23 school Guidance and Counselling teachers and 23 school chaplains. From the sample size table developed by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the target sample encompassed 381 girls from interviewed girls' schools and mixed schools, 19 Guidance and Counselling teachers and 19 school chaplains. Instruments for data collection were used to determine the level of validity and reliability; the Cronbach alpha value was used and it was higher than 0.7 indicating high reliability. It was made conspicuous that stress levels are positively associated with academic performance in a strong manner ($r=0.702$, $p<0.000$). The study thereby established that the level of stress determines the extent of stress in student mothers of the public secondary schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Kenya. This led to the recommendation that school focus and improve on the counselling service for student mothers to reduce stress.

Keywords: *Guidance, Counselling, Student Mothers, stress management, psychosocial intervention*

INTRODUCTION

In most of the European countries' secondary education students are assumed to be minors, unmarried, having no dependants and not traveling with children. However, teenage pregnancies are becoming very rampant and this leads to more female students in secondary schools becoming mothers (Mahaffey & Sill, 2015). Teenage pregnancy can be as a result of early unprotected sexual experiences or in certain sad circumstances rape (Ricco, Sabet & Clough, 2018). As stated by WHO (2018), three to four million teenage young women get pregnant each year and 10% for world pregnancies. Teenage pregnancy is highly likely to cause dropout and marriage among girls thus becomes education's biggest enemy, especially in low income countries as revealed by UNFPA (2013).

Lukasse et al. (2015) identified that in some European countries such as Belgium, Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, Norway and Sweden about 45% of all pregnancies are unintended and a quarter of them is unspecified; while Sedgh et al. (2014) demonstrated that women in the European coalition conceive about 45% of pregnancies unintentionally. In Namibia, MoE (2015) statistics recorded that 1,881 learners nationwide dropped out of school due to



pregnancy, with the Kavango West and Kavango East regions having the highest dropout rates, totaling 405 out of the 1,881 learners.

In Kenya, the return-to-school policy was developed in 1996 (MoE, 1996) which allows student mothers to return to school after giving birth, earlier studies by Wangui et al. (2015) reveals. The following policy seeks to help educate girls in Kenya. In terms of readmission, there is the National School Health Policy that was enacted in 2009 to guide school authority on the readmission of students who dropped out mainly because of teenage pregnancies to resume their studies (Ministry of Education, 2015). Additionally, the National Women's Law Center in Kenya aspired that student mothers should be encouraged to continue with the studies as much as they wish (National Women's Law Center, 2019).

Teenage pregnancy is a prevalent issue that cuts across many countries and tremendously affects the education of girl child especially in secondary school by making them drop out. The researcher observed that teenage pregnancy and the condition of being a student mother hinder educational achievements, as the shock of an unwanted pregnancy is emotionally traumatic for young mothers-to-be. Without emotional support, they experience increased anxiety and frustration, with some developing depression, rejecting their unborn babies emotionally, becoming alienated from life, breaking communication with family and ultimately dropping out of school. From a policy perspective, there is insufficient knowledge about the effects of the return-to-school policy and its implementation guidelines, as the existing provisions have not been fully enacted. Many school administrators resist implementing these guidelines, neglecting the importance of psychosocial support and spiritual intervention in reintegrating student mothers. They argue that allowing student mothers back to school encourages other students to engage in early sexual activity, assuming that the policy provides an opportunity to continue their education even after conceiving. Additionally, these administrators claim they cannot sustain the social support needed, including school feeding and post-natal health care for pregnant and student mothers. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a surge in teen pregnancies and motherhood in Kenya. The researcher notes a lack of knowledge about the effects of spiritual intervention by faith-based organizations through gospel teachings on moral behavior modification. As it is apparent from the research, the precise place of sex education in the curriculum is still ambiguous with more cases of teenage pregnancies and student mothers in school. As a result of these gaps in knowledge, the researcher undertook a study in a public girls' secondary school in Kimilili Sub-county, Bungoma County-Kenya. The research attempted to produce original knowledge, contribute to policy development and guide implementation to practice in secondary schools in Kenya and other parts of the world.

Objective of the study

To assess the rate of stress among student mothers in Kenyan public secondary schools in Kimilili sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya.



METHODOLOGY

The study used a cross-sectional research design, subjects comprised 5,069 female students in form three and form four from the public secondary schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. It also comprised 23 school teachers in the capacity of Guidance and Counselling teachers and 23 school chaplains. Based on the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) proposed size of the sample, comprised 381 girl from girls' school and Mixed, 19 Guidance and Counselling teachers, and 19 school chaplains. Before the data was collected, the questionnaires, survey and interviews that were developed were tested for validity and reliability these having a Cronbach alpha of more than 0.7 indicating high reliability.

FINDINGS

The first objective of this study was to evaluate the rate of stress among student mothers in public secondary schools in Kimilili sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya. The prevalence of pregnancies among female students in public secondary schools in Kimilili sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya is 56%, with 44% having never been pregnant. Of the 56% who experienced pregnancy, 73% carried their pregnancies to delivery, while 27% lost their babies. The predominant age for pregnancy among students was 16 years (34%), followed by 17 years (27%). Additionally, 68% of the female students indicated that the fathers of their babies do not take any responsibility. Furthermore, only 36% have talked to their parents, guardians, or religious leaders about their sexual lives. A significant 92% of them reported feeling stressed about motherhood. The research question relating to the null hypothesis that stated that stress does not have a significance impact on student mothers in public secondary schools in Kimilili Sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya was tested. On the last part of the study, in view of the foregoing findings, the researcher tested for the correlation between stress levels and academic performance. The results indicated a strong positive correlation in the study ($r= 0.702$, $p < 0.000$) which made the researcher to reject the null hypothesis.

DISCUSSIONS

The first objective of this study was to evaluate the rate of stress among student mothers in Kenyan public secondary schools in Kimilili Sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya.

Prevalence of Pregnancy among Female Students

The students were asked if they have ever been pregnant and figure 1 summarises their responses.

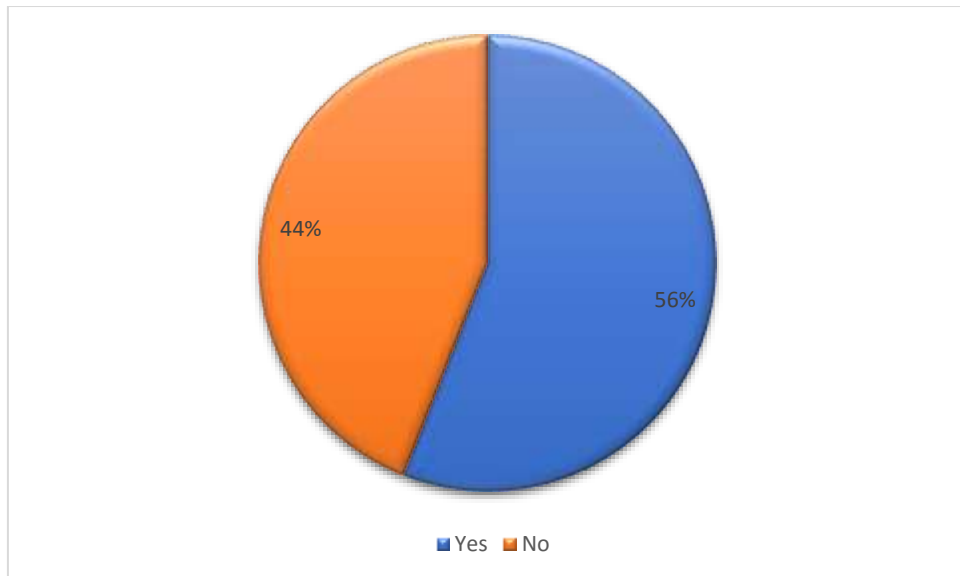


Figure 1: Prevalence of Pregnancies among the Respondents

Figure 1 shows that 56% of respondents have been pregnant before, while 44% have never been pregnant. These findings align with those of Kiarie (2015), who reported that 51.1% of students in Imenti South Sub-County indicated they had been pregnant or fathered a child, whereas 48.9% had not. From these findings, we can infer that most students have not received sex education in their schools. According to UNESCO (2016), the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in Kenya was recorded at 18%, indicating that approximately 1 in 5 teenage girls aged 15 to 19 has experienced childbirth or is currently expecting their first child. This prevalence increases significantly with age, starting at 3% among 15-year-old girls and reaching 40% among 19-year-olds.

These findings are also consistent with recent data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2022), which revealed that 15% of adolescent females aged 15-19 have experienced pregnancy. There are notable disparities in teen pregnancy rates across counties, ranging from 50% in Samburu to 5% in Nyeri and Nyandarua. The likelihood of teenage pregnancy in Kenya decreases with educational attainment, dropping from 38% among women with no formal education to 5% for those with education beyond the secondary level.

The Age of Female Student when they became Pregnant

The respondents were further asked to indicate the age when they were first pregnant. The findings were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Age of Female Student when they became Pregnant

Age	Frequency	Percentage
13 Years	19	6%



14 Years	29	9%
15 Years	48	15%
16 Years	108	34%
17 Years	88	27%
18 Years	16	5%
19 years	6	2%
Over 20 years	6	2%
Total	320	100

As shown in Table 1 above, the predominant age for pregnancy among students was 16 years (34%), followed by 17 years (27%). Additionally, students became pregnant at the ages of 15 years (15%), 14 years (9%), 13 years (6%), 18 years (5%), and a smaller percentage at the ages of 12 and 19, each representing 2%. As per the findings of Okondo (2022), Self Administered Questionnaire Study of Experiences of Teenage Mothers in Secondary Schools in Bondo Sub-County, Kenya, it was found that most often the participants which included teenage mothers were in the age bracket of 16 to 19 years. Also, four of them were in age bracket of 13-15 years while two of the respondents were above 18 years. The findings also concur with the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2022), which reported that 15% of adolescent women aged 15-19 have ever been pregnant.

School Factors that Influence Respondents' Educational Participation in School

To achieve the objective, a set of statements in form of five points Likert scale were posed to the trainers. The responses were coded such that 1-strongly disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4-Agree and 5-Strongly Agree. Table 2 shows the proportion of female students' respondents in various levels of agreement, the mean and standard deviation.

Table 2: School Factors that Influences Respondents' Educational Participation in School

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
I get discriminated by peers from participating in co-curricular activities	93	142	26	39	20	2.22	1.17
Student mothers are considered immoral by teachers or students	53	89	109	59	10	2.64	1.06
Fellow students isolate me from most of their activities	89	124	26	64	17	2.36	1.22
I get stigmatized while interacting with fellow students in school	53	66	43	127	21	3.65	1.28
Academically ungifted student mothers are not given proper attention in the school	60	124	48	77	11	3.46	1.15

With regard to Table 2, student respondents on the self-perception of discrimination by peers when engaging in co-curriculum activities had a disagreeing Mean of 2.22 and SD of 1.17. Predominate opinion of student Most students had no idea whether teachers and or students consider student mothers as immoral or not (Mean=2.64, SD=1.06). However, majority of students dispelled these beliefs by responding and disagreeing with the statement that their fellow students isolate them from most activities (Mean=2.36, SD=1.22). However, the



majority agreed that the student mothers suffer stigma while interacting with fellow students in school (Mean=3.65, SD=1.28), and the participant majority disagreed that academically ungifted student mothers fail to receive proper attention in schools (Mean=3.46, SD=1.15). Mpanza and Nzima (2010) asserted that adolescent mothers experience discrimination and prejudice because some teachers are not equipped to handle adolescent student mothers in class. Ramulumo and Pitsoe (2013) also discovered that some teachers' attitude is that adolescent mothers are adults who cannot be part of school system. Likewise, Asino, Mukadi, and Nyanga'ra (2023) examined the study which showed that the learner mothers in the public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya receive stigma that affects their academic performance negatively. From the interviews that Achieng, Rama & Asen (2021) carried out with the teachers and the teenage mothers in Seme Sub-County in Kisumu County, Kenya these teachers humiliate the teenage mothers for missing assemblies without the said permits. This mistreatment emanates from statuses people hold over other people with regard to re-entry status of these mothers and actions by the teachers that seeks to humiliate teen mothers in the company of others diminishes the academic potential of these mothers in secondary schools.

Inferential Analysis of Impact of Stress on Academic Performance among Student Mothers

None of the findings showed a positive relationship between stress and the student mothers in the public secondary schools in Kimilili Sub-County, Bungoma County, Kenya. In order to establish the association between stress levels and academic performance, a correlational analysis was performed through the use of Pearson's product moment technique. It is a positive sign relationship if correlation coefficient is equal to + 1 which show that the two variables are perfectly related. The figures that indicate coefficients of correlation are between 0.0 to 1.0 while the other two ranged between 0 and 0.20 and 0.39 was rated very weak, 0.40 and 0.59 considered weak, 0.60 and 0.90 described themselves as middle and 79 in terms of the moderation of their substance use. 80 to 1.0 considered very strong. The correlation coefficients derived from the above analysis are given in the following Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between stress levels and academic performance

		Effects of stress on academic performance	
Stress Levels	Pearson Correlation	1	.702**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	320	320

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results from Table 3 reveal a significant positive and strong relationship between stress levels and academic performance ($r=0.702$, $p<0.000$). This indicates a very strong and significant association between stress levels and academic performance. These findings are consistent with those of Rama, Achieng, and Asena (2021), who observed that teenage motherhood has repercussions on academic performance. These repercussions include diminished academic achievements post-pregnancy and childbirth, increased rates of school



dropout due to the challenges associated with student motherhood, and a negative impact on students' attitudes toward schooling, especially after repeated exam failures over multiple school terms. Their study specifically focused on the influence of teenage motherhood on academic performance in secondary schools within Seme Sub-County, Kisumu County, Kenya.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions to the study indicated that it is evident that stress levels among student mothers in public secondary schools in Kimilili sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya, are significantly and positively related to academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made recommendations that included public secondary schools in Kimilili sub-county Secondary Schools to prioritize and enhance counseling services for student mothers

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