

De-Stigmatizing Teenage Motherhood: The Re Entry Policy Implementation in Kenya

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Abstract: - Studies reveal that educating girls have a multiplier effects that would benefit the family, society and nation at large and that it is the driving force behind any strong economy and a prerequisite for social and economic growth. However, in an effort to reduce the socio- economic impact of this phenomenon in young women who find themselves in teenage motherhood, the Kenyan government introduced the re-entry policy that made it possible for girls to re-enter school and start their education from where they stopped prior to pregnancy. It is in the light of this that, the study sought to establish ways of de stigmatizing teenage motherhood by implementing the re entry policy in public secondary schools in Eldoret West Sub County. The study was guided by the social integration theory on student retention in schools. The study adopted pragmatic world view, a mixed method research design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approach and employed stratified sampling, simple random and purposive sampling as its sampling techniques. The research instruments for the study were questionnaire, interview schedule and document analysis. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and was summarized using frequencies, percentages and tables. The findings revealed that, teenage pregnancy and motherhood is one of the major impediment to the educational success of girls in sub Saharan Africa however, the implementation re-entry policy of teenage mothers in Eldoret West Sub County was partially successful since there were presence of teenage mothers in school though in small numbers compared to those who dropped out due pregnancy. The study recommended that all stakeholders to be educated about the policy and the Ministry of Education (MOE) to establish monitoring and evaluation tools in order identify areas in the policy that need to be reviewed and improved for effective implementation. The study would provide important empirical basis for stimulating deliberate effort by the schools, education policy makers, curriculum developers and parents towards greater concern with regard to the implementation of re-entry policy on teenage mothers in schools.

Keywords:- De-Stigmatizing, Teenage Motherhood, Re Entry Policy, Implementation

I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a pivotal role in the social and economic development of any country in enhancing the quality of lives of its citizens (UNESCO, 2010). Gender equity in educational opportunities and outcomes has therefore emerged as one of the main areas of interventions and debates within global justice arena (Kane, 2004). The development of policy framework and programmes that allow teenage mothers to continue with the education are fairly recent in most cultures. This began out of the realization that teenage pregnancy is one of the inequalities between men and women educational

access and outcome (Llyod & Mensch, 2008). According to Mwansa (2011), re-entry policy of teenage mothers is a worthwhile and largely home-grown initiative that, in providing another chance to teenage mothers to complete their education, contributes to the attainment of the EFA goals and this is further supported by Mashishi and Makoelle (2014) that, the importance of education particularly for the girl child has long been cited as a critical factor in the development of nations, and in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals which place the achievement of universal primary education second only to eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. In the same vein Hubbard (2009) argues that, the social benefits of educating women in particular include improved agricultural productivity, improved health and reduction in infant and child mortality rates. Furthermore, on the African continent where the adage when you educate a woman you educate a nation holds so true, the repercussions of girls dropping out of school due to a school's policy on pregnancy are dire.

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

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

educating girls have a multiplier effects that would benefit the family, society and nation at large. However, there are gaps on the completion rates of teenage mothers as cited by Fergusson and Woodward (2000), that data is not available in many countries on the number of teenage mothers who go on to complete school or on their academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The positive and substantial relationship between education and earnings is a well-established empirical fact, and the fundamental goal of re-entry policy was meant to be a key step towards the attainment of basic education for teenage mothers and to improve the education of the girl child. The re-entry to school policy guidelines introduced in 1994, advocated that girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy should be readmitted after giving birth. However, despite the re-entry policy guidelines in place, the grim reality in public secondary schools in Eldoret West Sub County revealed that, there were fewer girls who had re-entered the schooling system after child birth at 387 while those who dropped out due to pregnancy were more with the total number of 1531 (T.S.C, County Director, 2019) as such the study sought to establish ways of de stigmatizing teenage motherhood by implementing the re entry policy in public secondary schools in Eldoret West Sub County.

Limitations of the Study

Teenage pregnancy is a widespread phenomenon in the society and affects young women in all sectors of life but in the current study investigated secondary school students in public secondary schools and questionnaires were confined to the affected teenage mothers and guidance and counselling teachers only. The questionnaire were administered to teenage mothers back in school and this technique of data collection had some limitation in that, it evoked anxiety related to examination and the sensitive nature of this topic hence the researcher assured the participants that the questionnaire were not test but instruments of investigation about a certain phenomenon and assured the respondents of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were made to understand that the questionnaire only required honest responses that were not graded as right or wrong. However, the researcher could not rule out such a possibility in some participants. Since the researcher administered interview schedules to head teachers, some were hesitant to give information on facts about teenage mothers and the re-entry policy in their schools for fear of releasing their secrets and weakness. To counter this, the researcher assured the respondents of confidentiality and anonymity as the study findings would be used for academic purpose and to improve on the implementation re-entry policy of teenage mothers in schools. Further, in the current study, not all stakeholders were reached for comments on this sensitive issue especially the parents of the affected teenager

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Uasin Gishu County. It comprises three Sub Counties namely Eldoret West, Wareng and Eldoret East. Eldoret town 330 km North West of Kenya's capital city of Nairobi. The area has a cool and temperate climate that favors agriculture which explains why the Sub County is a major food basket for the country and it enjoys two rainy seasons with an annual rainfall ranging between 900 to 1200 mm and annual temperatures ranging between 8.4 °C and 27 °C. The study was guided by the social integration theory on student retention in schools. The study adopted pragmatic world view, a mixed method research design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approach and employed stratified sampling, simple random and purposive sampling as its sampling techniques. The sample in the study constituted, 59 head teachers, 59 guidance and counselling teachers and 196 teenage mothers back in school in public secondary schools in Eldoret West Sub County. The research instruments for the study were questionnaire, interview schedule and document analysis. The questionnaire was administered to the teenage mothers and guidance and counselling teachers while the interview schedule was administered to head teachers. Document analysis was used to establish the number of teenage mothers back in schools. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and was summarized using frequencies, percentages and tables. Content validity of the instruments was determined by seeking guidance and authentic approval from supervisors and other researchers so as to make necessary changes while reliability of the instruments ensured consistency of results or data after repeated trials. Ethical issues were considered in the study in order to protect the rights of the participants.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1: Awareness about re-entry policy

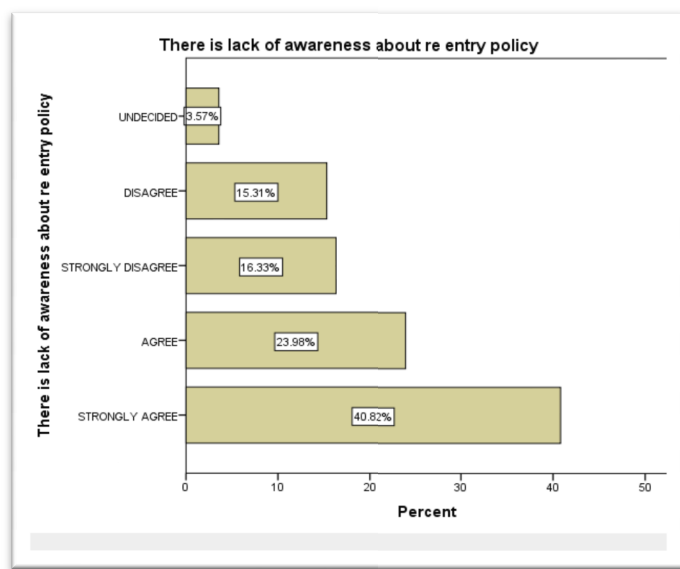


Figure 3.1: Awareness about re-entry policy

The respondents were asked whether there is lack of information about re-entry policy and it revealed that 80(40.8%) strongly agreed, 47(23.98%) agreed, (16.33%) strongly disagreed, (15.31%) disagreed while (3.57%) were undecided. The head teachers interviewed claimed that they were not aware of the policy and underscored that, puberty stage gets most of the teenagers unaware and by the time they knew about the changes in their bodies they are already pregnant. The head teachers attributed this to early maturing of girls and exposure to pornography in the internet, films, TV and absence of parents in the home due to demand at work leaving teenagers to explore on their own. Head teachers recommended that mothers should have open communication about sexuality with their daughters.

The study revealed that there is lack of information about reproductive health leads to teenage pregnancy at 80(40.8%). This is further supported by Brooks and Goldstein (2001) that, lack of information is a situation when one is uninformed on how to cope with anything that can come one's way in life and that it is crucial for teenagers to be informed about issues such as sex, sexuality and pregnancy for them to be aware of reality. In the same vein Nemutanzhela (2007) asserts that, teenagers are not informed about sexuality and consequently, they involve themselves in sexual relationships with married men and because of ignorance regarding the traumatic experience and consequences of falling pregnant. In some of these cultures sex is a subject that is never discussed with teenagers. Teenagers encountering physiological and other changes in their bodies find it difficult to discuss such issues with their parents, so they turn to their peers for advice and this increases the chances of teenagers experimenting with sex, the outcome of which is sometimes an unwanted pregnancy (Sethosa, 2007).

According to Nicholas as cited by Macleod (1999), parents play a very small role in transferring information to their teenage children and are reluctant to discuss sex with their teenage children, including shyness, parents not receiving sexuality education at school themselves, religious reasons or fear that this may encourage early sexual engagement. Teenage pregnancy is a deeply embedded social phenomenon and while teenage motherhood contribute to shaping it, their attitudes and actions are critically shaped by the environment in which they are socialised and the relationships that they develop in reducing teenage pregnancy requires paying more attention to the gendered features of sexuality and the terms and conditions under which they have sex (Jewkes, Morrell & Christofides, 2009). Sexual activity among teenagers is a common and normal bridge to adulthood and it should not be stigmatised nor condemned but rather, teenagers should be recognised as moving into a period of sexual discovery and be supported to ensure they are informed (Flanagan et al., 2013).

3.2. Teenage Mothers be allowed join at the level they left

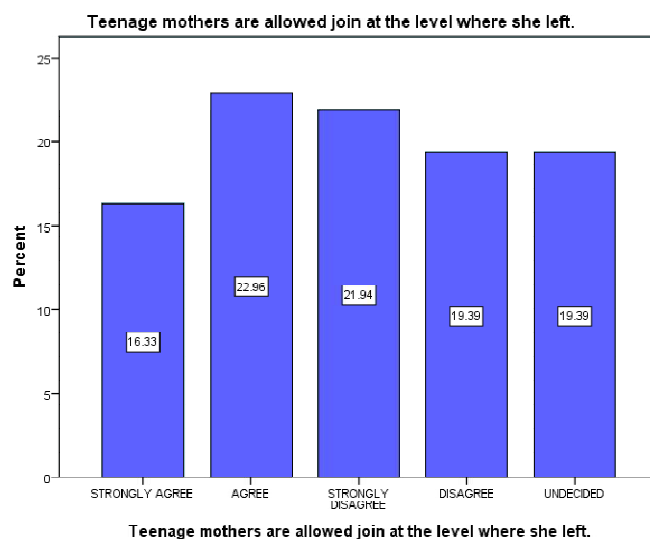


Figure 3.2. Teenage Mothers be Allowed Join at the Level they Left

The respondents were asked whether teenage mothers should be allowed join at the level where she left and it revealed that 45(22.96%) agreed, 43(21.94%) strongly disagreed, (19.39%) disagreed and undecided respectively while (16.33%) strongly agreed with the statement. The head teachers disagreed with the statement due to the fact that teenage mothers were often absent from school and to be re admitted back to school would be determined by the entry mark from exam done after child birth for placement in a particular form/class. The head teachers further stated that teenage mothers have to adhere to the school rules/regulation of not being absent from school for a certain period of time to determine their stay or face expulsion from the schools completely. The study revealed that teenage mothers should be allowed to join at the level where she left at 45(23%) despite objections from some head teachers. According to Morrell, Bhana & Shefer(2012), there are schools who view pregnant and young motherhood as a barrier for learners because they find themselves with the double load of being a learner and becoming or being a parent. In addition, the role of the teachers is, amongst others, to respond to the changing needs of these learners. In the same vein (Bloem as cited in Chigona & Chetty, 2008) assert that there is need to address perceptions of the wider public concerning the symbolic meaning of teenage mothers in the school and that teachers may need professional assistance in supporting teenage mothers in their school experience. Further, in-service training for teachers is important to keep track of the changes that society is facing in that, the absence of support personnel could be constructed as a critical problem when it comes to addressing the needs of teenage mothers (Clowes, D'Amant & Nkani, 2012). According to Chilisa, (2002) a pregnant schoolgirl meets with one of three outcomes; expulsion from school, re-entry, and continuation.

Each of the three options that face the pregnant schoolgirl has both principled and practical difficulties.

3.3 Lack of academic continuity during pregnancy

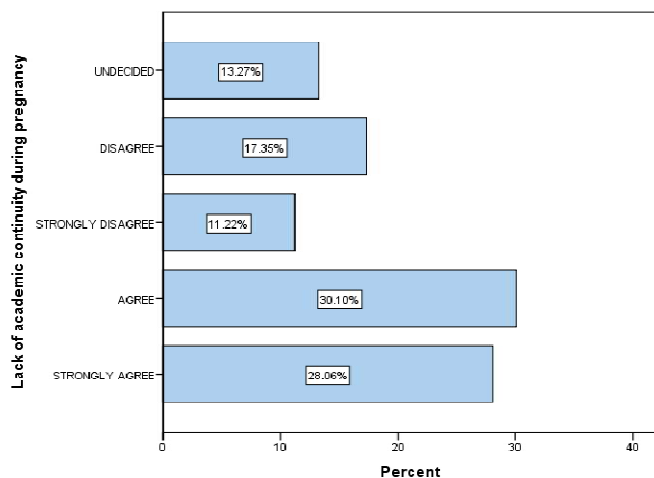


Figure 3.3 Lack of academic continuity during pregnancy

The respondents were asked whether lack of academic continuity during pregnancy and the year of waiting, leave the teenage mothers unprepared for the placement exams and it revealed that 59(30.1%) strongly agreed, 55(28.06%) agreed, (17.35%) disagreed, (13.27%) were undecided while (11.22%) strongly disagreed with the statement. The head teachers interviewed on this statement strongly agreed that complications that arises due to pregnancy and motherhood limit teenagers from being in school daily hence miss out on effective syllabus coverage in schools thus leaving them unprepared for the placement exams. The head teacher further claimed that teenage mothers miss school frequently due the issues of sickness of the babies or lack of caretaker at home leading them miss out on school work. The study finding revealed that, lack of academic continuity during pregnancy and the year of waiting, leave the teenage mothers unprepared for the placement exams at 59(30.1%).

According to Stephens, Wolf, and Batten (2003), teenage mothers and their children were both at critical points in their lives, when their life courses can be shaped toward healthy development, stability, and productivity, or toward life-long poverty and dependency. Efforts to improve outcomes for these young families must take advantage of every opportunity to connect them with the services and support that would help them move toward positive growth. According to Grant and Hallman (2008) pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood transform the context in which adolescents live and make decisions, particularly with regard to household and individual time allocation, including care-giving responsibilities. Pillow (2004) describes the discourse of contamination that develops from the perception that, the immorality of the teenage mother would set a bad example to

the student body at school, hence contaminating fellow innocent girls and that, many teenage mothers return to school because of their babies and were determined to complete schooling for the sake of their babies. However, the girls' difficulty in coping with schooling was attributable to their babies, and also to the fact that educators and parents often give up on them and fail to take their plans seriously once the girls had children (Schultz, 2001).

3.4 Teenage mothers provided with moral, emotional and spiritual support

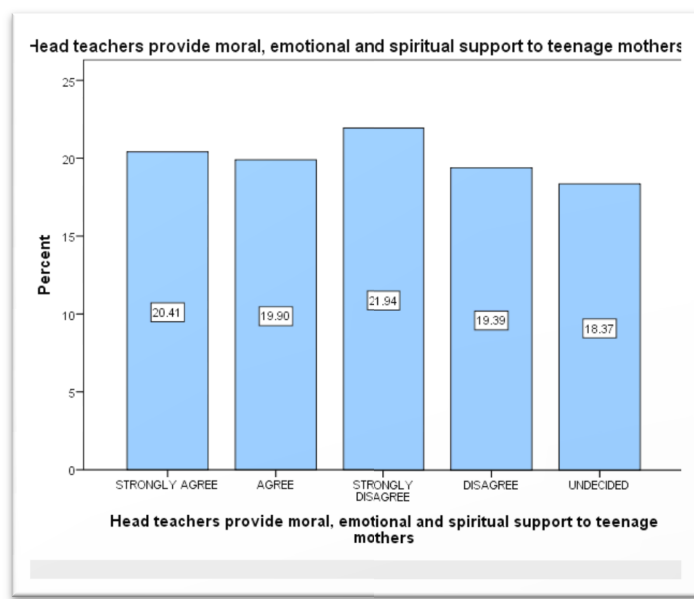


Figure 3.4 Teenage mothers provided with moral, emotional and spiritual support

When the respondents were asked whether head teachers provide moral, emotional and spiritual support to teenage mothers and it revealed that 43(21.9%) strongly disagreed, (20.41%) strongly agreed, (19.90%) agreed, (19.36%) disagreed, while (18.37%) were undecided concerning the statement. The head teachers interviewed on whether they provided moral, emotional and spiritual support to teenage mothers and they claimed that they are too busy with other important school issues and had no time for teenage mothers unless indiscipline cases. The study findings revealed that there was no moral, emotional and spiritual support from head teachers in the school at 43(21.9%). Stigmatisation of teenage mothers seems to be one of the factors impacting negatively on teenage mothers at school and the concept of stigma is based on understandings of social relationships wherein individuals or groups are signified as different, often on account of behaviours judged as failing to meet socially prescribed norms of morality (Stapleton, 2010).

According to Chilisa (2002), the re-entry policy has been criticized for being discriminatory in that schoolboys who are fathers or fathers to be are not asked to leave school until the child is born. While the continuation policy meets the

educational human rights of the girl, it may well be that it overlooks other rights such as those of having support and comfort during the pregnancy and after delivery. The problem of re-entry of teenage mothers into the school system continues to demand attention as society’s negative attitude towards pregnant girls and teenage mothers persists. Teenage mothers who do return to school suffer from stigmatisation, ridicule, and abuse from both teachers and other learners (Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2003).

3.5 Mechanisms to Ensure Teenage Mothers Complete Education

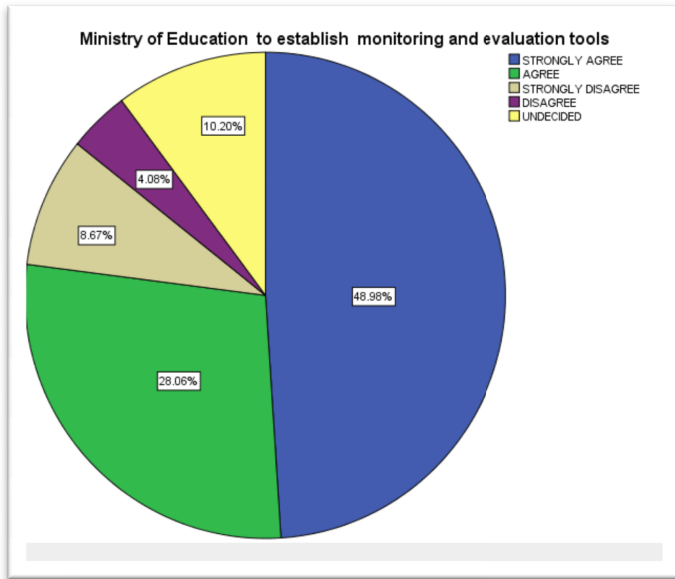


Figure 3.5 Mechanisms to ensure teenage mothers’ complete education

When the respondents were asked whether there should be mechanisms to ensure teenage mothers’ complete education and it revealed that (48.96 %) strongly agreed, (28.06 %) agreed, (10.20%) were undecided, (6.67%) strongly disagreed, while (4.06%) disagreed with the statement. The head teachers interviewed on this issue were of the view that monitoring mechanism be put in place on transition rates at all levels for all the learners so that there is retention and completion rate known from the school level to national level. The study findings revealed that there should be mechanisms to ensure teenage mothers’ complete education by use of class register at 100(51%). Class register was used to determine the number of teenage mothers in the school. Education is a basic human right and inclusion of teenage mothers in schools promotes principles of gender equity. Inclusion of teenage mothers in schools is also important to ensure that teenage mothers have equal educational rights, just like other learners (Runhare & Vandeyar, 2012).According to Muganda-Onyando and Omondi (2008), there is no monitoring mechanisms on the re-entry policy guidelines in place hence the Ministry of Education (MOE) has no way of knowing how successful the initiative is in promoting the right to education

of girl child. Pregnant and teenage mothers are still largely invisible in schools and a common institutional response is to quietly encourage them to leave school. Therefore, having a person in the schools who is an advocate for the adolescent parent population, who examines whether school policies and practices hinder the educational success of the teenage mothers population, and who keeps track of these students’ academic progress is vital to assuring that individual pregnant and teenage mothers receive the support they need to remain in school (Earle, 1990).

According to Ahikire and Madanda (2011), re-entry policy of teenage mothers remains the mix of various views and practices on pregnancy in schools that many times victimise the girl. However inadequate and lack of mechanisms to ensure teenage mothers’ complete education, denies them the right to education. The re-entry policy is a ‘silent policy’ that allows pregnant girls to return to school, but its enforcement by schools is questionable as by virtue of its silence, it is neither known to the girls, parents, or community leadership and as a result the girls are left at the whims of society/the parents, teachers and school head teachers.

The re-entry policy formulated in 1994 and later revised in 2009 allows pregnant girls to stay in school as long as they possibly can and resume as soon as they are strong. It also requires schools to establish centers where the teenage mothers can breast feed their babies as they go to school (Wekesa, 2010). The policy has a number of loopholes chief among them being its implementability. For example, the school administration is left to interpret how long the girl can be in school before she delivers. However, since the policy was passed, there has been minimal and consistent efforts in ensuring that schoolgirl pregnancy and teenage motherhood are looked at as educational issues (Wanda, 2006) and is still a major problem in many schools (Nyambura, 2000).

3.6 Re-entry policy be re-visited for the benefit of both schools and girls

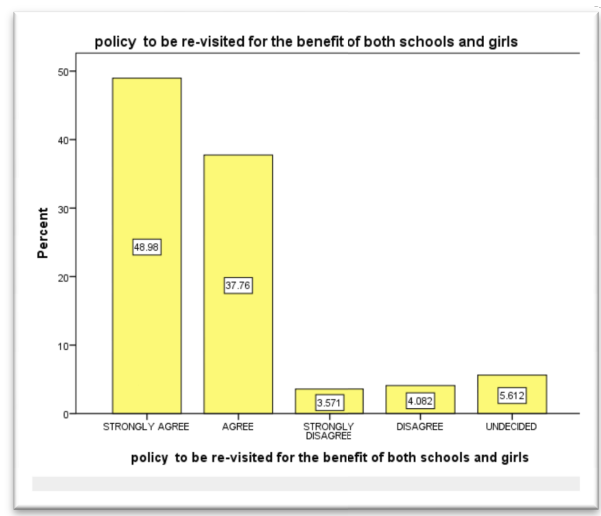


Figure 3.6 Re-entry policy should be re-visited

The respondents were asked whether re-entry policy should be re-visited for the benefit of both schools and girls and it revealed that 96(49%) strongly agreed, 74(37.8%) agreed, (5.61%) were undecided, (4.08%) disagreed while (3.57%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Head teachers interviewed were of the opinion that re-entry be reviewed to stipulate the roles of all the stakeholders including pregnant and teenage mothers in the school. The study findings revealed that re-entry policy should be re-visited for the benefit of both schools and girls at 96(49%) this was supported by Omwancha (2012) that, the policy needs to be re-written paying particular attention to the language used and that the policy should not be rigid, unrealistic and judgemental, but rather reflect its intent which is to encourage girls back to school and not to blame them. It needs to be reviewed and monitored regularly. According to Qand'elihle, Simelane, and Thuli (2013), re-entry policy practices vary from school to school, but generally a pregnant girl has to drop out of school although those who become pregnant may be allowed to return to write their exams at the same school or they may be advised to find another centre from which to write their exams.

According to Omwancha (2012), the failure by the Government to involve all stakeholders in designing, developing and communicating of the policy make it difficult to evaluate the impact of the re-entry policy of teenage mothers for the improvement purposes. The non-follow-ups on the implementation of re-entry policy means that the Ministry of Education (MOE) had no way of assessing the usefulness or effectiveness of the policy hence there were no ways of detecting schools that were not complying with the policy thus difficult to audit the policy (Omwancha, 2012).

3.7. All stakeholders be educated about the policy

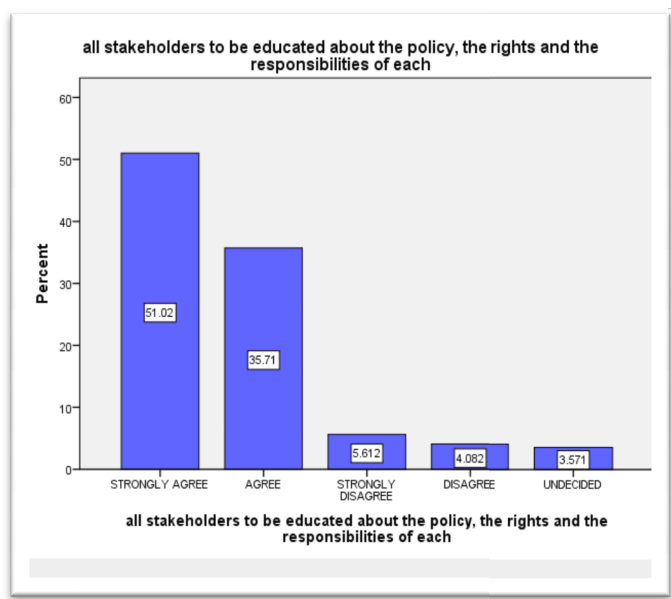


Figure 3.7 Stakeholders be educated about the policy

The respondents were asked whether all stakeholders should be educated about the policy, the rights and the responsibilities of each and it revealed that 100(51%) strongly agreed 70(35.7%) agreed, (5.61%) strongly disagreed, (4.08%) disagreed while (3.57%) were undecided concerning the statement. Head teacher supported this statement and claimed that the policy is very important to all hence educating all the stakeholders would help in ensuring that the re-entry policy is fully implemented. The study finding revealed that educating all the stakeholders would help in ensuring that the re-entry policy is fully implemented at 100(51%) and this was supported by Omwancha (2012) that, the voices of all stakeholders and especially the girls and teenage mothers are missing out from re-entry policy debates hence many of the solutions proposed would largely be ill-informed and unworkable thus public participation in the development.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teenage pregnancy and motherhood is one of the major impediment to the educational success of girls in sub Saharan Africa however, the implementation re-entry policy of teenage mothers in Eldoret West Sub County was partially successful since there were presence of teenage mothers in school though in small numbers compared to those who dropped out due pregnancy. The study recommended that all stakeholders to be educated about the policy and the Ministry of Education (MOE) to establish monitoring and evaluation tools in order identify areas in the policy that need to be reviewed and improved for effective implementation.

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