

Teenage Pregnancies and the Re-Entry Policy into Schools: Perceptions from the Education Stakeholders in Umguza District.

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.802028>

Received: 26 January 2024; Accepted: 31 January 2024; Published: 02 March 2024

ABSTRACT

Despite the ramifications of international protocols and conventions which spearheaded the introduction of the school's re-entry policy, gender disparities in accessing education continue to hinder the girl child from accessing education which is a fundamental right. Therefore, this research was triggered by the realization that there is continuous dropout of pregnant and mothering girls from school hence, the need to research on the perceptions of education stakeholders on the schools' re-entry policy. The theory of action was used to form the basis of the study and qualitative research methodology was utilized to capture both the views and perception of the community in tapping into the school's re-entry policy. This study was of significance to the Government of Zimbabwe in general, and to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in particular, as it offered an opportunity to get public feedback on the policy and recommendations on strengthening the enforcement of the policy. Purposive sampling was used in the study to target various girls who has fallen pregnant during their studies using the key informant guide and focus group discussions were used to gather the community perceptions on the school's reentry policy. A sample of 20 people was used to draw up the findings of the study. The research managed to reveal that communities are deeply entrenched in patriarchal systems that promote early child marriages. The education stakeholders have conflicted perceptions on the policy as they acknowledge the benefits of the policy but then these are overridden by the negative perceptions that view the policy as promoting promiscuity and delinquent behavior among young people. It was also revealed that communities are less knowledgeable about all the facets of the policy. The study revealed that pregnant and mothering girls fail to get support from the immediate family, community and friends hence perpetuating child marriages. It can be noted that the policy is a great initiative in promoting access to education for girls but there is need to create conducive environment for the pregnant and mothering girls to be supported in their studies. There is also a need for the government to strengthen community structures to ensure that it's mandatory for pregnant and mothering girls to go to school.

Keywords: teenage pregnancy, re-entry policy, mothering girls.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Teenage pregnancies are on the rise in Zimbabwe and continue to be a cause for concern for the physical, social, economic and educational development of young people in Zimbabwe and particularly adolescent girls and young women of school going age. Sweetman (2006) states that up to half of the girls in developing countries are mothers before they turn 18 years. The affected children experience a lot of problems ranging from social, psychological, educational, emotional and even physical challenges. Many of them usually die before they reach the age of 45 years (Sweetman, *ibid*).

For many years, girls who had fallen pregnant while at school would be dismissed from school with very little chance of returning to continue with their studies. This could be seen as a violation of the fundamental rights of girls and women. According to Moyo et al (2016) education is one of the facets of development which plays a key alternative and empowering role that encourages human rights ethics and is acknowledged as the way to gender impartiality and the empowerment of women. However, there still exists impediments to universal access to education especially for the girl child in rural Zimbabwe like Umguza district. In 2010, the government of Zimbabwe introduced the re-entry policy into schools in order to enable teenage mothers to continue with their studies.

Apart from the formulated policies, it has to be emphasized that there are social norms that shape the people's perceptions and behaviours more than gazetted laws and policies do. These norms function to provide order and predictability in society, thus this paper seeks to get an insight into the subject of teenage pregnancies and unravel the perceptions of the education stakeholders on the government's re-entry policy mainly focusing in a rural area such as Umguza where impeding cultural practices exist and information dissemination is often limited.

Education is not just a fundamental human right but the gateway for accessing other human rights. In developing countries, Zimbabwe included, teenage pregnancy is a significant impediment in attaining gender fairness. Schoolgirls falling pregnant are reaching crisis magnitudes in most African schools (Ncube and Mudau, 2017). There is currently fiery debate in the country on whether to lower the age of consent for adolescent girls to twelve years so as to enable them to access contraceptives without being accompanied by parents or guardians. Some civil society actors and parents think this could be part of the panacea to the scourge of teenage pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. According to the Ministry of Health, the National Teenage Pregnancy Rate stands at 22% that is to say one in every five girls between ten and nineteen years are expected or have already given birth. Such statistics are a cause of concern.

Despite the steps taken by the Zimbabwean government to improve the accessibility of education and the provision of policies to encourage pregnant girls to complete their education their applicability of the policy in the rural context has been questionable. Research by scholars like Muzira (2016), Mutanana and Gasva (2016) and Sifelani (2017) mainly focused on urban areas and in some rural Mashonaland areas on how the policy has improved access to education and factors that contribute to high school dropout levels.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study endeavored to assess whether the policy has yielded any positive results in rural Umguza District. This study sought to unpack the applicability and acceptability of the school's re-entry policy in the rural context as there is continuous school drop out by girls due to pregnancy who are failing to return to school, mainly focusing on the perspectives of education stakeholders on the school's re-entry policy. The study also aimed at finding out the factors behind the incidence of teenage pregnancy and the existing support systems if any for the pregnant and mothering girls so as to encourage them to continue with their studies. Focus was also made on various factors that are hindering the Umguza girls from tapping from the gains of the school's re-entry policy also aiming at finding out the perspectives of the players in the education sector with regards to the effectiveness of the policy within their area.

Objectives of the study

The study objectives were:

1. To assess the views of the education stakeholders on teenage pregnancy and the re-entry policy since its inception in Umguza district.

2. To assess the incidence of teenage pregnancy and support systems if any at home, the school and community for the girls who fall pregnant.
3. To determine the overall impact of the schools' re-entry policy in rural Umguza district.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of Umguza District education stakeholders on the schools' re-entry policy?
2. What support systems are there at home, school and in the community for girls who fall pregnant during their studies?
3. How effective is the schools' re-entry policy in Umguza district?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The re-entry policy towards promoting the education of the girl child has generated a lot of debate within academia and beyond. The movement towards gender equality in the education sectors is not a modern phenomenon but continues to develop around the world with other countries already benefiting from it and others still yet to benefit. The main cause of inequities between men and women's access to education and results is the development of frameworks and programs that gave pregnant teenagers the chance to complete their education. To fully understand the concept of education stakeholders' perceptions on the school's re-entry policy, this literature reviews global and regional instruments to promote women's education and how power dynamics through societal norms can hinder such instruments from promoting women empowerment. The section also examines the incidence of teenage pregnancy and causes.

Women and girl's empowerment through policy reforms

After attaining independence, the country recorded impressive gains during the first decade and these were guided by a vision to promote equality when accessing quality education. During the evolution period, there are prospects for progression, going further than the realization of statistical equality at primary to accomplishment of gender parity and enablement at all stages of education. In 2010, the education sector in Zimbabwe issued a gender audit which was appointed by the UNICEF Eastern and Southern African Regional Office (ESARO), and it was one of the twelve undertaken in the region since 2007 under the authority of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). Like the others the Zimbabwe audit, focused at recognizing gender concerns in education, and instituting the scope and nature of discrimination based on gender that blocks the full involvement of girls in education.

Measured actions and good policy intent resulted in the positive results. Poverty issues, the HIV epidemic and the prevailing male-controlled philosophy that disregards girls the education system were addressed by the policies and interventions that were put in place. 2004 saw the amendment of the Education Act and was coordinated with the National Gender Policy, to ban gender-based judgement. The amendment allows that violators be prosecuted and punished by a fine and/or sentence of a period of twelve months.

The National Gender Policy of 2004 offers a comprehensive framework to mainstream gender into several sectors including education. This policy provided fourteen strategies in order to encourage gender fairness in education. Numerous strategies like the National Gender Policy Implementation Plan, the Zimbabwe National Plan of Action on Women and Girls and HIV and AIDS (2008-10), the National Gender-Based Violence Strategy and the National Strategic Plan for the Education of Girls, Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children were formulated to express priorities and categorize schemes targeted for specific challenges and to also deal with judgement against women and girls in education (Mo WAGCD, 2009).

According to the Nziramasanga Commission of Enquiry of 1999, there was a need for an increase in female enrolment at tertiary education and the enquiry also led to the introduction of the Affirmative Action.

Female scholars with lesser entry points were allowed in tertiary institutions by the adoption of the quota system. As a result, at high school level, girls are permitted to register into science subjects even if they have lower points than boys. As early as 1992, the public service announced the Affirmative action policy, however, it was substituted by “open” promotion policy which was grounded on excellence and credentials. The National Gender Policy, advocated for renewal of the affirmative action in public offices through the elimination of negative performances that “hamper parity and equity of sexes”, pushed for. However, in educational management, women still remain a minority.

The policy did not have the anticipated result given the near invisibility of women in educational leadership. Without hard data, one may assume that, to some extent, affirmative action led to the decline of the gender gap in tertiary education. However, implementing the policies of affirmative action met with opposition leading to low self-esteem and mockery of benefactors. (Chabaya et al 2009; Gordon et al, 2004; ZWRCN 2004)

In relation to sexual violence in schools, legislation and policies that prevent social violence, and the Education Act permits expulsion of educators for “wrong association” are provided by the act. Within the MOESAC (now Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education MOPSE), there is a lawful desk that handles sexual abuse and cases of “inappropriate relationship”. A set of procedures are followed, including reporting of occurrences to direct the work of the Legal Desk Officer. (GoZ, 2005) Despite the presence of legislation stipulating age of marriage at 16 for girls, child marriages and transactional sex are two major methods of sexual abuse that continue. Parents who are among the offenders, justify their actions to tradition, religion (for instance the Apostolic Church), and poverty. The practices are noted to be high along borders and in areas where mining activities are rife. The possible outcomes of “inappropriate relations” include HIV and AIDS, STIs and early pregnancy. Three months maternity and paternity leave for pregnant schoolgirls and boys who impregnated them were accorded by the MoESAC regulation. However, during the time of this research, it was discovered that it is too early to assess the effect of the new directive on the continuous education of girls and boys. Its benefit is that it permitted re-admission of pregnant girls into school soon after delivery. The re-entry policy was ridiculed by school authorities and communities and gender activists (Gweme, cited in Thabete, 2004, Chirimuta, 2005, FAWEZI, 2009).

The impact assessment of the policy implementation was challenging since it has not been systematically monitored. Girls who fall pregnant are given the option to stay at school after giving birth in tertiary institutions except for the health training institutions. As stated by the Ministry of Health directive, female health students who get pregnant are obliged to leave school and reapply after two years; and their re-enrolment is dependent on the obtainability of vacancies within the institution. (Thabete, 2009). Through the elimination of negative performances that “hamper parity and equity of sexes”, pushed for, however, in educational management, women still remain a minority. The policy, thus, did not have the anticipated result given the near invisibility of women in educational administration.

Prevalence of teenage pregnancy

The major cause for the growing awareness in the right to education for pregnant teenagers is the understanding that teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood continue to be major reason for the discrepancies in educational access, transmission, attrition and achievement between males and females (Richter and Mlambo 2005). Teenage pregnancy is an obstacle to the attainment of the global goals on eradicating gender discrimination at all levels that is primary and secondary education as indicated in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number 2 which endorses accomplishment of worldwide primary education and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4 which ensures comprehensive and equitable quality education and encourages permanent learning prospects.

According to WHO (2014) nearly 16 million girls between 15 and 19 years give birth every year. The global

birth rate among the 15- to 19-year-olds is at 44 in 100 (WHO 2017). Regardless of figures showing a total drop in adolescents' fertility proportions over the past decade WHO (2017) notes that teenage pregnancy still continues to be a problem in the world as it is both a health and social challenge. Studies by scholars like Seamark and Lings (2004) and Hawkes (2004) reveal that there is low teenage pregnancy prevalence in countries that are liberal on sexuality and reproductive health issues. For instance, such countries promote access to contraception and abortion services as compared to societies that keep traditional values on marriage and sex. Jackson and Abosi (2007) reveal that it is not uncommon for girls to wed or have their first birth before the age of 18 years as there are legal instrument that permit girls to consent for sex at the age of sixteen.

Changach (2012) notes that Sub Saharan Africa has the highest teenage pregnancy prevalence (143 for every 1000 girls) in comparison with the world's occurrence which is 44 per 1000 girls. Examination of the community's perspectives on the school's re-entry policy is paramount given that the coming and nationwide involvement of this impacted group is reliant on their attitudes.

Global and regional instruments on educational rights for pregnant teenagers

Educational right is one of the crucial human rights indicated in most global statements and treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, Education for All of 1990, the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals. These declarations explain education as a necessary human right and promote equality in accessing it. Ratifications of these declarations have accorded pregnant female students access to education. Gender equality policies that sought to integrate pregnant teenagers originated from the worry by female right activists. The recognition that equal right to, within and through education for girls is one unsatisfied vital human right, the requirements CEDAW, CRC, EFA, MDG and SDG all have requirements on gender equity and set aside methods to encourage equal access to and achievement of education by girls and women at all stages by 2030.

Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on Children's Right notes that state parties should acknowledge a child's right to education. It should gradually be accomplished and centered on equal occasion. Therefore, pregnant and mothering students should get equal prospects that are supposed to be provided for all learners.

Sustainable Development Goal number 4 offers for the comprehensive and quality education for all and the advancement of lasting learning. In a bid to fulfil this goal, member states are assigned to intensify access to education at all levels and to increase enrolment rates in schools especially for women and girls. More so, SDG 5 places importance on accomplishing gender equality and empowerment of girls and women. Hence, this gives the pregnant and mothering students the right to education.

The right to education and free essential elementary education is assured under article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). According to article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1966), states are obliged to identify the right of everyone to education which is focused to the full improvement of the human character, self-worth and reinforce the respect of human rights and central liberties. It also stresses on the need for countries to specifically make secondary education obtainable for all. The study recommends that all methods of biased trends and obstacles to education must be dejected, and secondary education rights must be endorsed and rendered to all, even pregnant girls and mothering students.

UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) advocates access to education of any type or level. Accordingly, pregnant girls as well as mothering students must gain access to quality education. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), article 28, state parties need to acknowledge

the right of every child to education by making primary education essential, available to all children and by encouraging consistent appearance at school and decline of dropout rates and make instructive and occupational knowledge and control accessible to all children. It can therefore be noted that at the global level there are united agreements that endorse access to education for all irrespective of gender or condition.

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) clearly distinguishes the right of a pregnant girl to education. Article 11(6) further necessitates states to ensure that before completion, should a student fall pregnant, they should be awarded the opportunity to complete their studies. However, parents and the community have a key part in guaranteeing that pregnant and mothering girls carry on with their studies by holding responsible the government and reassuring each other to support the education of the girl child.

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in Articles 11 and 14 adds that nations should implement programme, regulation, and special programmes to give girls equal entrance to education. Countries were also expected to endorse (by 2015) laws that encouraged identical access to and maintenance in primary, secondary, and professional exercise. Therefore, through allowing pregnant girls and mothering students to carry on with studies other than promoting child marriages, retention can be promoted.

Legislation in Zimbabwe on re-entry policy

Post-independence the government of Zimbabwe gave equal access to educational opportunities to both girls and boys. However, due to patriarchy, preference was placed on the boy child though the government encouraged the girl child to go to school even though most girls and their parents did not see the importance of education. School teenage pregnancies were detected in schools, which were not the case before obligatory education was announced in the country. The upsurge in the number of teenage pregnancies compelled the government of Zimbabwe to formulate an exclusive policy. This policy of elimination had a negative bearing on the girl child as established by the Ministry of Education (1993) which states that girls were to be expelled from school as soon as their pregnancy was discovered, and the boy child continued with his studies even if he was responsible for the pregnancy. Although the girl child was being deprived from pursuing her studies due to teenage pregnancy, there was need for the government to review its policy and promote inclusivity.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to both global and regional instruments that promote access to education for pregnant and mothering students. In a bid to induce its pledge, Zimbabwe domesticated and localised requirements of these mechanisms. The Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment number 20 Act of 2013 under section 20 states that the government need support unrestricted and obligatory basic education for all children. Moreover, the government should provide measures that afford girls the same educational opportunities as obtained by the boy child. Since the highest law of the country has aspects which offer the educational right to all kids, even pregnant girls and mothering children who are students are permitted this similar privilege.

Furthermore, Education Act of 1987 further states that all Zimbabwean children should be enrolled to any school or there should be no differentiation. Hence, the state should be dedicated to the delivery of education to all together with pregnant and mothering students.

Zimbabwe decreed the Secretary's Circular Number P35 of 1999 that handles pregnant and mothering students stated that in the unfortunate case that the pregnancy is a product of rape, the policy ensured that the girl is supported to stay in school before taking maternity leave. Upon request by parents or guardians, the student will be allowed to return to school after 3 months from delivery. However, the girl is allowed to return to school earlier if she is ready to do so.

Zimbabwe is a participant of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which acknowledges that pregnant girls have the right to education. According to Article 11 (3)(a) and (e), there should be realisation of educational rights, and these include regular school attendance and a decrease in school dropouts. Hence, the latest Education Amendment Act of 2020 stipulates that no child can be excluded from school on the basis of pregnancy. As such pregnancy cannot affect the decision to admit, suspend or expel a learner. The law applies to both government and public schools.

Awareness on the re-entry policy

Literature divulges that different stakeholders view the policy on pregnant schoolgirls in different ways. Some see it as a progressive policy meant to safeguard the interest of schoolgirls while others view it as a retrogressive policy which will spoil the innocent girls. Runhare (2010) states there is inadequate knowledge of national policies by educators, parents, and members of the communities. Mutshaeni et al (2015) and Omwanha (2012) indicate in their studies that educators, head teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders revealed that they have heard but not seen the pregnant learner management policy which is a section in the P35 policy. This means that the intended beneficiaries and implementers are not acquainted with the policy thus casting doubt on its proper implementation let alone success in achieving the intended policy objectives.

Generating awareness is essential in developing community support for the re-entry policy. However, scholars like Kodek (2012) revealed that awareness and opinion of the re-entry policy differed within and across the provinces. The existence of the policy was not known by any of the stakeholders, and they did not fully comprehend the aspects of the policy. Due to the misinformation of the policy among parents and students, many pregnant girls dropped out of school and did not pursue re-admission (Brynard, 2009).

As stated by Bhuyan et al (2010), it is vital for any policy that stemmed in new platforms, services, or functioning guidelines to be disseminated to and understood by the responsible people. Public awareness is required for the changes if they will draw several facilities or assistances brought about by the policy. Therefore, the Ministry of Education required embarking on increasing consciousness on the policy procedures to all patrons and this effort should be combined and thoughtful to raise awareness in schools and communities. The person's information, understanding and awareness affect their conduct and encourage change in their attitude to the re-entry policy.

Runhare and Vandeyar (2011) noted that in most educational institutions in Zimbabwe, there has been no sensitization on the guidelines of management of schoolgirl pregnancy to stakeholders. In the same vein, Chirimuta (2006) reveals that in Zimbabwe, teenage pregnancy is seen as a result of disobedience and immorality, therefore the girl is never understood. Though the policy gives room for re-admission of a pregnant schoolchild to continue with her education, the girl is hated and reprimanded for allowing her to be abused. The girl faces abuse and discrimination with all the scornful, giggling and laughing from other students (Chirimuta 2006).

In Zimbabwe, the government conducted discussions before the presentation of the re-entry policy but not to the anticipation of citizens. As a result, the explanation and application of the policy preparation was defective and hence affected. This led to this disgruntlement each time the government of Zimbabwe tried to introduce the re-entry policy, (Gumbo 2010) assert that since there was mistrust from vital stakeholders like churches on the targets of the policy under study. The Catholic church and other traditional churches that have the same philosophies viewed the policy to be a result of donor community that meant to destroy the valued principles amongst students (Muzala, 2003). Gumbo (2010) posit that, when the policy was being created churches, traditional leaders, teachers, parents, and civil society organisations that deal with children were not consulted and hence the problems in implementing the policy.

Factors hindering re-entry into schools.

The World Bank Report (2013) and some scholars like Lopi (2009) have also attributed girls dropout trend to misplaced religious and traditional beliefs, poverty, early marriages, economic hardships, and the view that educating a girl child is a waste of resources as she would one day get married and benefit the other family. Thus, the girl-child in developing nations is part of the disadvantaged social groups in the world today. School dropouts have also been attributed to low earnings or household chores. The need for money and existence of household tasks results in girls ending up in waged child labour force or are required to perform household duties, watch over their siblings while their parents are at work. It would also appear that because of poverty, some girls are socialized to become child-bearers and home keepers, rendering their education less significant.

Early marriages for girls are widespread in most cultures in poor and developing countries including Zimbabwe and bride prices are enticements for parents for educating their girl children (Nicholas, 2003). It would also appear that children whose mothers do not have educational background are likely become school dropouts as matched to children whose mothers possess educational background. As such, Elisabeth and Ellen (2002) advise that it is important to get as many girls as possible into school and encourage them to stay on to complete their education as they are future mothers.

Studies have revealed that many policies surrounding pregnant schoolgirls are unclear, and this deprives beneficiaries of the chance to grasp it and poses a challenge in their implementation. Mashishi and Makoelle (2014) and Omwanha (2012) report that school authorities highlighted the ambiguity of the re-entry policy which made it hard for policy makers to successfully implement it. Issues that arise range from the different practices around the period that pregnant girls leave school for delivery, the length of the period for birth and subsequently their re-entry after delivery. This lack of policy transparency creates implementation encounter which could bring preconception to the projected beneficiaries.

More-so, there are few female educators, particularly in higher levels of education to offer the much-needed role modelling for young girls. In cases of pregnancy, official or formal educational policies used to ban married or pregnant girls from attending formal secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Therefore, once the girl got married or pregnant, her education was usually compromised or virtually stopped. Omwanha (2012) also observed that before the enforcement of the re-entry policy there was the emergence of backyard colleges and girls who would have dropped out of school in the urban setup were able to continue with their education in such colleges but those who resided in rural communities had no option but to keep out of school.

Furthermore, most schools in rural communities are located far from communities and the distance travelled to school usually forces them to drop out of school. As girl children, they may be affected physically and psychologically with some girls needing to be accompanied to and from rural schools due to the long distances. According to Omwanha (2012) and Sithole et al (2013), in Africa womanhood is recognised as soon as a girl gives birth, and it immediately calls for marriage of the girl child. This is done to deter social humiliation related to pregnancy before marriage; and this sets fear in the girl because of the realisation that her family and the girl, herself, are embarrassed. This is probably why some families do not publicize it to evade embarrassment until the girl is married. Therefore, the re-entry policy exposes the pregnancy and that is why families decide to marry off the girl to eliminate the shame and hence they do not consider the girl child going back for her studies (Omwanha 2012). What possibly hinders the effective re-entry policy can thus be attributed to socio-culturalism.

Unsupportive school environment is another factor that deters girls from tapping into the re-entry policy. It

can be noted that pregnant learners, just like any other students, require support and encouragement from their teachers, though some teachers do not involve themselves as far as pregnant girls are concerned (Chigona et al. 2008). The pregnant girls are deterred from continuing their studies as they are labelled by the teachers and jeered by other learners which makes it hard for them to concentrate on their studies. Moreover, the pregnant girls are stigmatised at school and as a result most prefer staying at home than continuing with their studies. Malahlela (2012) states that weakness complex, low self-esteem and lack of confidence is rife pregnant learners usually suffer and it is based on thinking that they are laughed at or gossiped about, and this limits their association with their peers.

Vincent (2009) and Malahlela (2012) further state that in their effort to complete their education, pregnant girls face some difficulties such as balancing child chores and studying. Educators view pregnant school children's poor performance, and in some cases, achievement below average as attributed to their emotional state, physical weakness and mothering responsibilities. As a result, the girl child quits school on focuses on motherhood. Malahlela (2012) also contends that regularly pregnant teenagers miss school due to pregnancy-related sicknesses, Ante-natal clinic consultations, unsafe feeling of pregnant teenagers at school as well as neo-natal clinic consultations and all these as a result affect their performance in their studies.

Analytical framework of the study

To understand and explore the education stakeholders' perceptions on the school's re-entry policy, the study employed the theory of action to explain the various factors behind human action within a social group. It falls within the phenomenological and social constructivist epistemological paradigm. The theory also states that connotations that are socially and culturally created during interaction constitute their action (Anderson, 1997). According to the theory, people give values to certain circumstances, and this influences their actions in a formal organisation through their social and cultural context more than the organisation's certified policy (Muncey and Redmond-Jones, 2002).

Argyris and Schon (1974) state that, usually a split between an organisation's official policies, which they term adopted theory-of-action and theories-in-use is how the stakeholders of an organisation's perform. The socially and culturally attained range of theories, ethics, customs and philosophies people use to programme their actions in any given circumstance is what is referred to as theories-of-action (Smith, 2001). It suggests that the social, cultural and life experiences of people of a social group act as principal mechanisms restraining administrative stakeholders in their efforts to implement the authorised organisational policy. (Argyris and Schon, 1974). When justifying their actions, people refer to what is termed espoused theories-of-action but is not applicable in guiding their actions (Malen et al., 2002). In a school setting, it is stakeholders who tend to claim that they are implementing the official policy, but in reality, it is not always the case. In analysing and interpreting how the stakeholders perceive the re-entry policy, the theoretical proposition is relevant. The official school policies were theorized for pregnant learners in formal educational establishments as an intricate phenomenon as these are to be understood using a wider deliberation of the members' socio-cultural values and experiences in their homes and community. The selected approach helps in understanding the attitudes and responses of the study participants as far as the policy implementation of mainstreaming pregnant girls at formal schools is concerned. In a nutshell, the theory of action views people as socially and culturally based making it difficult for them choose the way they do things when faced with implementing an official policy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Saunders *et al* (2000) defines it as the concept of how research should be commenced, and this entails the hypothetical and philosophical supposition upon which the research is grounded and the inferences of these

for the method or methods adopted during the study. The researchers used a qualitative research approach during the study to allow production data that is contextual, descriptive, holistic and rich in detail. Ezzy and Rice (2000) note that the focal aim of qualitative research method is to attain in-depth explanation and an appreciation of movements, proceedings and communication of words. The qualitative approach was, therefore, useful in this exploratory study of revealing the education stakeholders' perceptions on the School Re-entry Policy in Umguza district. Clarke et al. (1999) state that the qualitative research methodology's relevance is the ability to understand, process, participant's experience, complexity and to address context, emotions, values and culture.

The study predominantly used the qualitative approach to allow for production of data that is all-inclusive, circumstantial, descriptive, and rich in detail (Neumann, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) posit that qualitative research approach in a study emphasizes the qualities of entities, procedures and meanings that are not experimentally observed or measured in terms of excellence, quantity, strength or frequency. The qualitative approach was helpful in this exploratory study in revealing the community perceptions on the school's re-entry policy. As qualitative research mostly deals with the attitudes, feelings and perceptions of the people which cannot be quantified but simply need to be expressed in words or through facial expressions which is mostly seen through observations and direct contact with the particular people are being researched this enabled the researcher to be very observant during the Focus Group Discussions.

The challenge for this approach was to make sense of the different comments, facts, perceptions and experiences collected from the participants. Through the recordings that were done during the FDGs the researchers managed to re-play the recording several times to really get an in-depth understanding of the comments. It has been noted that qualitative research is fully descriptive and cannot be easily reduced to numbers compared to quantitative which is numerical and can be reduced to numbers.

This study made use of a descriptive case study for its research design. Yin (1994) cited in (Gibbert and Ruigork, 2010) a case study is research of circumstances where the number of variables of interest far surpasses the number of data points. Flyrberg (2006) is of the view that case studies allow a researcher to study current singularities in a real-life situation, where restrictions between background and phenomenon tend to be unclear (Gibbert and Ruigork, 2010). The most important reason for using a case study as a research design is that it provides practical knowledge as opposed theoretical knowledge which social science has difficulty with, and it provides a qualitative leap in the learning process (Flyrblerg, 2006). Thus, Umguza District in Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe is a case in this study.

The population of this study comprised Umguza district education stakeholders and young women who had dropped out of school including those who managed to return to school. The population of this study, therefore, consisted of 30 educational stakeholders including young women and 6 girls who were impregnated during their studies. The total number of respondents reached in this study was 36 respondents. Purposive sampling was used in this study as the sampling method involved selecting certain cases which are grounded on a precise purpose rather than unsystematically selecting.

The study used two research techniques to gather the required data. These included vital participant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). They were chosen as they capture the feelings, perceptions, and emotions of the subjects under study and also provide an in-depth discussion with the key informants to get an insight from their personal experiences.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the participant interviews and the focus group discussions, flow the following findings capturing perceptions of stakeholders and presented according to identified themes.

Stakeholder perceptions Knowledge

It emerged during the focus group discussions from the participants that they are aware of the policy although they could not divulge all its facets. One of the participants in G3 reiterated that:

‘Thina siyakwazi ukubana abantwana abazithwalayo besasesikolo sebevunyelwa ukubuyela esikolo, kodwa asazi ukubana kumele bayekusiphi isikolo.’

(We know that now there is a policy that allow pregnant girls back to school, but we don’t know which school to take them to.)

Also, another respondent in G1 concurred by stating that:

“Uhulumende sewayenza kwabasobala ukubana abantwana bethu abangamankazana baqhubekele phambili ngezifundo zabo ngemva kokubeletha okuyinto enhle ngoba benikezwa ithuba lokubana balungisise impambeko zabo.”

(We are aware that the government now allows mothering girls back to school after giving birth. This is a good initiative as it provides the girl child with a second chance in her studies.)

Key informant (F1) also reiterated that:

“I am aware that there is a policy that allows pregnant and mothering girls to continue with their studies, but I do not know when one can do so”

This was buttressed by F4 who echoed that:

“Falling pregnant during one’s studies is a disgrace in our community, when I realised, I was pregnant I immediately stopped going to school and my family encouraged me to stop going to school because of the shame I had brought to them”

F7 responded:

“I once heard about that policy but have never seen its application.”

Perceptions

Perceptions determine how people will act when faced with a situation thus, one woman applauded the government for establishing this policy and revealed that:

“The introduction of this policy is a very good initiative as it will offer the girl child a second chance in life to pursue her career.”

Another from focus group discussion G2 buttressed this by stating that:

“I am a victim of child marriage due to lack of such policies thus the introduction of this policy will promote the retention of girls in schools.”

Of note was the lady in the G1 focus group discussion who commended the policy and expressed that:

“Our area is remote, and children stay with their grandparents hence accessing services especially post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and reporting rape cases is difficult. The court service system is also slow thus

at times the magistrate grants the termination of pregnancy whilst the window period has passed thus resulting in the raped young person becoming a parent. This policy, therefore, is a great motivator for girls under such circumstances.”

A member in the G6 echoed that:

“Women and girls have been marginalised for a long time hence this policy is a great initiative as it promotes the empowerment of girls by offering them another chance in pursuing their studies to become a somebody in life.”

This concurred with what one traditional leader stressed:

“Our area has a lot of mining activities that are taking place and due to poverty our young girls are taken advantage of by the artisanal miners who come from various parts of the country who impregnate them and dump them, hence this policy comes in handy in assisting the young girls who would have been befallen by such incidences to have a fresh start.”

One woman also concurred by stating that:

“This is not a generation where women are encouraged to be housewives but it’s a generation that needs someone who is learned, who is also able to bring something on the table to reduce chances of being abused. This policy therefore guarantees the girl child access to education to empower them.”

Some of the people in the focus group discussions were of different views. One of the traditional leaders in G3 divulged that:

“Siyalubonga uhlelo lokubabisela ezikolweni kodwa uhlupho esilalo ngolokubana laba asebeke bazithwala sebengafundisela eceleni laba abangakazithwali. Ukuswelakala kwesijeziso kulabo abazithwalayo kwenza abantwana babone kuyinto enhle bengaboni ububi bakho”

(We appreciate the program of re-entry but however we fear that those who are pregnant might influence those who are not pregnant to indulge in sexual activities. This lack of punishment for the pregnant school going girls makes it seem as if it’s a good thing”)

Community members in G3 also reiterated that:

“Even in the Bible its written that bad company corrupts good morals, hence bad apples must. not be accommodated in schools as they will badly influence others...”

“The Bible teaches about being given a second chance hence the policy is a good initiative.”

In focus group G2 a religious leader was of the view that sex is a sacred act hence they cannot allow young people of school going age who have had sexual encounters to associate with their children. The man shared that:

“Young people are defiling themselves during their studies hence if they are allowed back to school our teachings as parents seem defeated and of no use as they will willy-nilly misbehave and not get any punishment but continue with their studies.”

Another member of the focus group discussion G3 stated that:

“The Christianity doctrine and our values as Africans are undermined by this policy, where belief lies in the fact that we have to account for our actions. This policy provides a lee way for the young people to do as they please and be granted a second chance without being accountable for their actions. Teachings on purity and virginity are then trivialised due to such leading to delinquent behaviour among young people”

A member of the G2 focus group discussion buttressed this by stating that:

“Going back to school, for someone who is already a mother is a burden as she needs to keep up with her motherly and wife duties on top of being a student. Rather, girls who get pregnant before completing their studies should engage in courses which do not demand much like school.”

Key informant F6 shared that:

“I fear being labelled by teachers and laughed at by other students hence it’s better to focus on being a mother than be judged for my mistake.”

Key informant F3 also pointed out that:

“Going back to the same school where everyone knows I have been pregnant before degrades my self-esteem, rather I start afresh elsewhere.”

During the discussion women were of the view that the policy is a good initiative but when further questioned on whether they could allow their daughter in law they quizzed and stated that:

“Who will take care of her child when she is at school...what of the chores that she is expected to perform?”

“What of her wifely duties?”

“Most of these young women who go back to school end up ruining their marriages as they look for other boyfriends at school or on their way.”

Support systems.

For one to excel in whatever they are doing psycho-social support is one essential thing that motivates one to achieve intended goal. One of the women during the focus group discussions said that:

“Umalukazana uyabe esesiya esikolo esithi ngubani ozamgcinela umntwana njalo” (Whom does the daughter-in-law want to take care of her child when she is at school)

Teenage mothers who were also interviewed expressed that Village Health Workers and Case Care Workers played a pivotal role in offering them psycho-social support. One of the respondents F5 expressed that:

“Main support was offered by the CCW who always visited me and encouraged my parents to continue paying for my fees... and also for me to continue with my studies as education is essential in the 21st century”

One religious leader also shared during the focus group discussion that:

“As a church we offer psychosocial support to the pregnant and mothering girls to enable them to confess their sins and accept the situation that they are in,”

One key informant F1 also shared that:

“Society is conditioned in a manner that made me feel like an outcast. During pre-natal and post-natal the health service providers always passed sentiments about how I’m an example of deviant behaviour and this greatly discouraged me in even going back to school as I feared being judged because of my mistakes.”

F6 responded that:

“For girl’s psychosocial support may be very limited because of the societal stigma. Even for me the one who would have impregnated her I find it difficult to empathise with her. It is really bad out there”

F8 reiterated:

“Support for the boy would be there. I was allowed to continue with my studies. I have heard in some cases the boy is dismissed from school together with the girl to sort out their mess but as for me nothing stood in my way. However, I felt bad for my partner then but there was little I could do to help her. She had her parents to fall on. Marriage was not an option back then.”

One of the key informant respondents F6 reiterated that:

“I felt isolated at school no one wanted to interact with me as I was viewed as a bad loose person who would contaminate their good morals”

Key informant F2 cemented this by stating that:

“Both teachers and students were mean to me, they always gossiped about me even during my presence I really felt out of place.”

In terms of financially supporting the pregnant and mothering girls’ participants shared that:

“ I am a poor man I struggled to pay her fees and now with the newly born child I cannot afford, as the burden has increased.”

“Most of these girls who fall pregnant during their studies when you take them back to school, they fall pregnant again hence it is better I save my hard-earned money and she stays at home or gets married as she wasted her opportunity to go to school”

One religious leader reiterated that:

“At our church the pregnant and mothering girls who engage in sexual activities out of the wedlock are expelled from the church as a form of punishment and to be allowed back one is required to re-baptised”

During the focus group discussion one CCW in G3 echoed that:

“Our traditional social systems have dismantled hence little support is offered to the pregnant and mothering girls by immediate family. Back in the days when the girl was befallen by such. She was taken by her aunt to continue her education there but left the child with her parents. This was mainly done to support the girl in terms of focusing on her education.”

Some of the parents expressed that:

“Although I was very disappointed, as a parent I continued to provide all the necessary support for my daughter as I focused on empowering her to be able to fend for her child.”

“The girl would have chosen boys over her books thus I would rather focus my limited resources in educating the younger ones.”

Effectiveness of the re-entry policy

The community members shared that only a few girls have managed to benefit from the re-entry policy. This is mainly due to child marriages, unsupportive home and school environment, cultural factors and poverty among many others. One of the CCWs during the focus group discussion stated that:

“Umthetho lowu awusebenzi kakahle ngoba abantu ezigabeni lokhu beqakathekisa ukuhlawulwa kwamalobolo le damage okwenza bacine besendisa abanwana besase bancane kulokuba bababisele ezikolweni.” (The policy is not effective as most people in the community still prioritise getting an income when one impregnates their child through the payment of lobola and damages instead of assisting their child to continue with her studies.)

One of the community members in G2 stated that:

“Abanye lokhu besaqhuba isintu sakudala njalo inkolo zabo ziyabavumela ukubana abantwana bayende besasebancane okuyikho okucina kubaphoqelela ukubana abantwana bangaqhubekeli phambili ngezifund zabo.”

(Others are still clinging to cultural practices; beliefs and their religion promotes early which hinder access to education but promotes child marriages)

This was buttressed by a village head in G3 who reiterated that:

“Our area is infested with artisanal miners and periodic droughts have pushed most parents to marry off their girls to these miners when they are impregnated...little thought or priority is placed on returning the girl child to school”

This was augmented by one leader in G3 who stated that:

“Poverty in the area has driven most people to prioritize having children in the neighbouring countries other than educating them to be empowered.”

One leader in G1 also echoed that:

“Only a few are benefitting from the policy as most young people drop out of school and due to long distances travelled to school the pregnant one can does not afford to walk the distances on a daily basis.”

A traditional leader in G3 also mentioned that:

“In the rural set, up where we have at most one school in the ward and in some wards nothing, it is hard to encourage the pregnant and mothering students to continue with their studies as in some instances they face stigmatisation and bullying from fellow students and also, teachers which makes schooling hard. One cannot transfer them to another school as it is further away...as a result they end up dropping out of school.”

Another leader also stated that:

“Most of these pregnant and mothering girls are not willing to go back to school and this is evidenced by some of them whom when you give a second chance to return to school, they are impregnated again either by the same person or a new someone”

Another traditional leader in G4 buttressed stressed out that:

“The policy is not effective as these young girls who fall pregnant during their studies, they usually run away from their families to stay with the artisanal miners who would have impregnated them.”

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Knowledge

The study revealed that Ungula community people had limited knowledge of the school's re-entry policy as they could not divulge exactly what the policy entailed besides that pregnant and mothering girls were now allowed to continue with their studies. Ncube and Mudau (2017) state that lack of policy clarity makes its application and implementation difficult. The responses during the focus group discussion concurred with this as responses signified that in terms of awareness on the policy the community was aware of the policy, however when probed further about the policy they were not clear on when the girl child could go back to school or whether they could be studying during the pregnancy or not. Such knowledge gaps revealed that there were some gaps in the policy implementation which make the girl child remain vulnerable and fail to tap into the re-entry policy.

During the focus group discussions, it was noted that the community members were knowledgeable of the policy and in unison that the girls were supposed to be allowed back to school but when further probed if they would allow their daughter in law to go to school and leave the child with them the interviewees who were mainly parents expressed that they would not do so. This augments the proponents of the theory of action which states that human action is constituted by meanings which are culturally and socially constructed hence cementing the fact that their actions are influenced by their socio-cultural background other than the official policy of allowing pregnant and mothering girls back to school.

Perceptions

Furthermore, it came out from the discussions that it is easier for the communities to state that they support the policy but fail to practise it as a lot of things come into play in implementing it. For instance, respondents were quoted prioritizing marriage other than promoting re-entry for girls who get pregnant during their studies. It also revealed that in practice the community did not value the re-entry policy as they shared sentiments which entailed that they would take their biological children to school and not allow the daughter in-law to further their studies as she is seen as a source of labour for the family to share the burden of care work. According to Vincent (2009) and Malahlela (2012) many pregnant schoolgirls face hardships in completing their education. This therefore, shows how patriarchy continues to instill its values in society and its victims continue to reinforce it. Due to such expectations the girl child, in most instances, is forced to drop her studies and resume motherly duties as opposed to the boys who are allowed to continue as if nothing has happened. Society allows boys to be the best that they can be despite the fact that they have disturbed the progress of others.

Zimbabwe is among countries which have school re-entry policy to support pregnant and mothering students, however, this does not interpret to the effective implementation, presence and sufficiently

supporting the girl child in her educational endeavours. Sithole, Manwa and Manwa (2013) noted that the apparent favourable legal framework is not coordinated by the activities on the ground. Only a few participants reiterated that they were able to return their children to school after falling pregnant most of them indicated that the girls were married off or dropped from school took care of their kids as infants then leave for greener pastures to fend for their children. This is true as society is patriarchal and favours male dominance hence issues that promote the girl child are usually trivialised by local leadership. This is further cemented by the women raised within such spaces who were never given the second chance in life in advancing their education but are made custodians of such practices. The theory of action augments this fact by stating that life experiences of people act as a governing variable that constrain people to implement the policy.

Most elderly men were of the view that the re-entry policy promotes deviant behaviour among the girls. They reiterated that not going back to school after falling pregnant was used in society as punishment for bad behaviour. The introduction of the re-entry policy which abolishes such and was noted as promoting delinquent behaviour among the girls. Chiweshe (2010) also cements this by stating that re-entry policy promotes promiscuity, removes the consequences of irresponsible behaviour and promotes a culture of experimental sex among the children.

Religious beliefs are part of culture which is also a determinant of perception as it detects views, feelings and actions. Chiweshe (2010) stated that church leaders consider the re-entry as a taboo. Most community members in Umguza were noted to value both cultural and religious values, these have played a critical part in influencing how the people react and perceive the re-entry policy. These beliefs value marriage thus in most instances when a school going child falls pregnant, they prefer settling the matter at local level, hence promoting early marriages which disadvantage the girl child. Marriage is valued more than education as it brings wealth to the family and also reduces the number of people that a household head has to fend for (girl child family) whilst on the other bringing cheap labour to the family (boy child family). It can thus be noted that such decisions disadvantage the girl child in achieving her aspirations and taking opportunities to enhance her life or career.

Support system.

For one to excel in whatever they are doing, psycho-social support is one essential issue that motivates one to achieve the intended goal. It can be noted that the government established a support system through capacitating Village Health Workers (VHWs) and Case Care Workers (CCWs) with case management, case follow up and offering counselling and support to the pregnant and mothering students. During the discussions CCWs and VHWs expressed that in their areas when they are informed of any schoolgirl pregnancy they reach out to the girls and encourage them to register for anti-natal care and to also continue with their studies. They also expressed that in most instances the young girls are usually shunned away by parents who fear reporting the cases to the police.

Concern was also raised on families that promote child marriages which in turn did not allow their pregnant girls to interact with the community structures as they usually fear that they might face arrest when it becomes known that they charged 'damages' or a bride price for the pregnant minor. As a result, the pregnant girl is denied her right to education.

Social influence plays a pivotal role in influencing one's perceptions. Although during the focus group discussions participants shared sentiments of supporting the girl child during her pregnancy by encouraging her to go back to school. It was noted that when further probed if they could not allow their daughters to tap into re-entry policy the support was withdrawn as they expressed that she will now be a family woman who needs to take care of her husband and kid. Failure to get support from the immediate family makes the pregnant and mothering girls fail to utilise the re-entry policy. This revealed that patriarchy is a strong

system that recruits its victims to be gate keepers of the system.

Falling pregnant at school is seen as a degradation to family, hence the girl child suffers both at home and at school because of the traditional culture which disapproves school attendance by pregnant girls. It has been noted that the seemingly unfavourable opinions and approaches against the education of the pregnant or mothering student is girl child is further deteriorated by the culture which promotes early marriages. The culture adopts the presence of a son syndrome which gives preference to sons over daughters (Gaidzwana, 2012). This concurs with findings by Ncube and Mudau (2017) that there is social stigma associated with teenage pregnancy and thus families opt to keep silent about it until the girl is married. They added that parents view re-entry as means of exposing shame hence focus on marrying off the pregnant girl to remove the shame. Therefore, these socio-cultural philosophies act as an obstacle to the effective application of the re-entry policy.

Stigma and discriminatory tendencies also hinder pregnant and mothering girls from receiving support from their fellow peers at school. This is mainly facilitated by bullying and teasing that the girls face at school from other students. Scholars like Malahlela (2012) noted that pregnant and mothering girls usually suffer from inferiority complex, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence based on the thought that others are laughing at them or gossiping about them. Actually, due to socialisation, most students, especially boys, tend to make schooling hard for pregnant girls due to the teasing which in turn results in emotional abuse. Whilst the young women do not want to associate with the pregnant and mothering girls as they fear being badly influenced and not being trusted by their parents. Sifelani (2017) concurs with this argument by stating that the unsupportive school environment poses as hindrance for the girls to tap into the re-entry policy. Hence, it can be noted that the school environment does not support pregnant and mothering girls which results in their dropping off during their studies.

Effectiveness

The study also revealed that Umguza community, as a rural community, perceive the re-entry policy as ineffective. This was noted from their contributions during the focus discussion as they indicated that only a few girls have benefited from the program. This is mainly due to child marriages, unsupportive home and school environment, cultural factors, and poverty in the area. The negative responses signify that people do not have trust in the policy and there are some implementation gaps in the rural areas which makes these communities fail to tap into the re-entry policy. This is contrary to the findings by Runhare and Vandeyar (2012) who posit that parents were of the view that education is key for pregnant and mothering girls to allow them to be independent.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that rural communities, in particular, as represented by Umguza community, have limited knowledge of the school's re-entry policy thus their perceptions are based on the amount of knowledge that they have. These findings are similar to what Ncube and Mudau (2017) discovered that lack of policy clarity makes its application and implementation difficult. Therefore, most affected stakeholders were making decisions based on the little knowledge that they had.

The study revealed that pregnant and mothering girls in rural areas continue to drop out of school due to perceptions by communities that are deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms. Community members reiterated that being pregnant is a choice of the young person hence they should be married off and not given a chance to go back to school. This was cemented by views that pregnant and mothering girls will be of bad influence on their peers. These findings are similar to the research results of a study conducted by Sifelani (2017) that revealed that parents are not willing to take back their children to school and also that

pregnant and mothering girls are faced with stigmatisation at schools which at times forces them to drop off.

The study also revealed that religious beliefs are part of culture which is also a determinant of perception as it detects views, feelings and actions. It was noted that most community members in Umguza value both cultural and religious values, these have played a critical part in influencing how the people react and perceive the re-entry policy. These beliefs value marriage thus in most instances when a school going child falls pregnant, they prefer settling the matter at local level, hence promoting early marriages which disadvantage the girl child. Child marriage is not viewed as a crime but is valued more than education as it brings wealth to the family and also reduces the number of people household head has to fend for (girl child family) whilst on the other bringing cheap labour to the family (boy child family). It can thus be noted that such decisions disadvantage the girl child in achieving her aspirations and taking opportunities to enhance her life or career. This is in line with a study conducted by Chiweshe (2010) which revealed that church leaders consider the re-entry as a taboo as it promotes delinquent behaviour and is not in line with the Christian values which cherish chastity (virginity and purity).

The study also revealed that lack of a proper support system hinders the pregnant and mothering girls from tapping into the re-entry policy. This is further worsened by stigma and discriminatory tendencies that they receive from both community and school. Scholars like Malahlela (2012) also noted that pregnant and mothering girls usually suffer from inferiority complex, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence based on the thought that others are laughing at them or gossiping about them. Actually, due to socialisation, most students, especially boys, tend to make schooling hard for pregnant girls due to the teasing which in turn results in emotional abuse. Whilst the young women do not want to associate with the pregnant and mothering girls as they fear being badly influenced and not being trusted by their parents. The study by Sifelani (2017) concurs with this argument by stating that the unsupportive school environment poses as hindrance for the girls to tap into the re-entry policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Policy implementation requires a multi-faceted approach especially in rural areas where patriarchal values are entrenched in the societal system and challenging them is viewed as fanaticism. Listed below are the strategies deemed necessary which can be employed to heighten the tapping into re-entry policy by pregnant and mothering girls during their studies:

- There is a need to ensure behaviour changes through sensitization programmes to raise awareness on the need to promote girl child education and do away with social norms that support child marriages. The VHWs and the CCWs should work hard in this regard.
- To scatter myths and suppositions commonly held by education stakeholders, awareness campaigns exposing all members of the community, especially community gate keepers, to the policy's dictates and rationale, should be conducted.
- The policy makers need to take into cognisance the unique needs of pregnant and mothering girls in the rural areas for them to continue with their studies.
- The policy is silent on financial support for the pregnant and mothering girls when being re- engaged to utilise the re-entry through payment of fees hence there is need to offer support in this regard.
- School environments are not friendly to pregnant and mothering girls hence there is need to sensitise both teachers and students on the importance of supporting returning students.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to strengthen the re-entry policy as gender disparities still remain in enrolment, retention and completion of primary and secondary education.
- Government to work with partners that will sensitise communities on the need for positive parenting skills and the need to promote sex education in schools.

- Government to make it mandatory for pregnant and mothering girls to continue or return to school after giving birth.
- Government to set up community structures that will ensure that child marriages are abolished and support who will also offer psychosocial support to the pregnant women and girls.

Areas for further research

This study presented was limited to four wards of Umguza district, it may be necessary to conduct a broader study focusing on a larger scale noting that the area under study is multidimensional. It is further recommended that an evaluation of the policy in the rural areas be done so as to necessitate adaptations that will promote the effectiveness of the policy.

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