

# Policy Brief Pregnancy School Re-entry policy in Zambia

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## I. WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Teenage pregnancy is a global problem which interferes with the education of the girl child. This ends up perpetuating social injustice against females by making them vulnerable to poverty.

Promotion of social justice through gender equality is at the center of development. The ideology of women's empowerment through formal and non-formal education is a critical area of development which the United Nations has been championing.

Adolescent girls' education was amplified by the Beijing platform of action of 1995 which emphasized on the need to intellectually nurture the girl child as she grows into a woman (Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action, 1995).

Some African countries including Zambia introduced Re-entry policy as a strategy to enable teenage mothers to continue their education. It was assumed that teenage mothers would take advantage of the Re-entry policy to continue their education after childbirth. This has not been the case as teen mothers' re-entry across countries including Zambia established that significant number of teenage mothers are not re-entering (Nyariro, 2018).

## II. SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

- Cumulative statistics on teenage pregnancy amongst schoolgirls in Zambia from 2003 -2017 was 179071 with 67685 readmission of teen mothers accounting for a re-entry level of 38 % (Ministry of Education, 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006) (Ministry of Education, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010) (Ministry of Education, 2011; 2012; 2013) (Ministry of Education, 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017).
- The trend of teenage pregnancy and low readmissions is higher at primary school level than secondary school level.
- It is also more pronounced amongst school girls from low income groups.

## III. UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Recent statistics in Zambia show that 59% of adolescent girls in Zambia aged 15-19 years are either pregnant or are teenage mothers (UNICEF, 2019). The Ministry of Education in Zambia introduced the school re-entry in 1997. The Conditionalties on the Re-entry policy in Zambia are that; schoolgirls are supposed to get maternity leave, teenage

mothers are supposed to re-enter six months after childbirth. Teenage mothers are given two chances to re-enter. They can re-enter at their old school or transfer to another school.

Despite the existence of the policy in Zambia, re-entry of teenage mothers after childbirth is leaves much to be desired. Less than half of the school girls recorded to have fallen pregnant in primary and secondary schools in Zambia return to school ( Ministry of General Education, 2017). The problem is more pronounced at primary school level. This implies that failure to re-enter at primary school level disadvantages the teen mothers to further their education. Moreover, they end up not acquiring the basic numeracy and literacy skills to function in society.

## IV. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT SCHOOL RE-ENTRY BY TEENAGE MOTHERS IN ZAMBIA

Failure to re-enter school by some teen mothers has been attributed to many challenges. Apart from the top-down approach in its design (Mutombo & Mwenda, 2010), the outcomes of the Re-entry policy in Zambia have been linked to some policy implementation challenges. The Re-entry policy in Zambia was implemented without guidelines until 2004 (Phiri & Machila, 2019). There was no clarity as to how schools were to readmit the teen mothers in the first seven years of its implementation. This could have adversely affected the re-entry of some teenage mothers.

Schools are mandated to sensitise the learners, parents, and the wider community on the Re-entry policy. Several studies (Mwansa, 2020; Mwanza, 2018; Chulu, 2017; Mudenda & Mbewe, 2017; Moonga, 2014) concluded that there was lack of awareness about the Re-entry policy by teachers, parents, and teen mothers. Secondly, schools are supposed to offer guidance and counselling to pregnant girls and teen mothers. However, Mweemba, Moono, Chishipula, and Maambo, (2019); Mulenga & Mukaba, (2018); Moonga, (2014) show that guidance and counselling are not efficiently offered to pregnant girls and teen mothers. Thirdly, schools are supposed to follow-up on teen mothers to ensure that they re-enter. Mulenga and Mukaba (2018) established that there was poor record keeping of teenage pregnancies and re-entry of teen mothers. Moreover, teen mothers can re-enter at any government school of their choice. Some school administrators refuse to re-admit teenage mothers (Moonga, 2014; Mulenga & Mukaba, 2018). A study by Mweemba, Moono, Chishipula, & Maambo, (2019) concluded that there

is a negative perception towards the re-entry of teen mothers into the school system.

The Re-entry policy has been said to be lacking the voice of the key primary beneficiaries, that is, teen mothers in voicing their felt needs to facilitate their re-entry (Barcelos & Gubrium, 2014 ; Achoka & Muthoni, 2012; Chigona & Chetty, 2008). Teen mothers need to be engaged in a participatory approach to get their views on their re-entry. This was reaffirmed by the 2020 international day of the girl child commemoration theme of “my voice, our equal future” (UN Women, 2020). The challenges established in the previous studies (Mwanza, 2018; Chulu, 2017) on re-entry of teen mothers have also highlighted that teen mothers’ re-entry is also influenced by their parents and education professionals. Therefore, they also need to be engaged in the conversation on the re-entry of teenage mothers.

#### V. GUIDELINES ON THE RE-ENTRY POLICY IN ZAMBIA

- All government schools in Zambia, that is, public, church/mission, and community schools should implement the Re-entry policy.
- Ministry of education is mandated to distribute all education acts and policies to all schools in Zambia.
- The ministry of education officials is mandated to sensitise school administrators on the Re-entry policy.

Schools are supposed to sensitise the learners and the community on policy , guidance and counselling, and processing of maternity leave. (MESVTEE, 2012).

#### VI. CONCLUSION

The school Re-entry policy is vital for teenage mothers to continue their education. Its implementation is affected by the design of the policy. Research done so far has established that several challenges regarding awareness about the re-policy, readmission, guidance, and counselling hamper the re-entry of teenage mothers into the school system. Applied research to find solutions to these challenges requires a shift from top-down to bottom up approach through participation of teenage mothers, school administrators and teachers, as well as the parents/ guardians of the teenage mothers.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author is a PhD student at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Her study focuses on using a bottom up participatory approach in addressing challenges faced by teenage mothers in re-entry.

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