



## Strategies of integrating teenage mothers in the society: Case study of kasarani sub-county, Nairobi County, Kenya

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### Abstract

This paper investigated the relevant strategies of integrating teenage mothers in the society. It was a case study done at Kasarani Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following objectives: To establish the strategies the society is using to integrate the teenage mothers back to the society, determine the perceptions of the teenage mothers towards integration back to the society, the role of the agencies in integrating the teenage mothers and finally the factors leading to teenage pregnancies. Pregnant and parenting teenagers are faced with several difficulties, for example: social stigmatization, lack of emotional support, lack of access to quality healthcare; lack of experience in nursing their young or even dealing with their pregnancies. Thus, there is urgency in integrating them back to the society smoothly in order to adjust back to the normal life. Primarily the teenage mothers get little social support from most of the relatives; however, most of the support comes from the adolescent's mother, but where such mothers are busy, the support is compromised due to lack of adequate time or other resources such as money. The external family and male partners provide negligible support in the rearing of the child. With efforts to integrate the teenage mothers back to the society, it is possible for some of them together with their children to lead happy and fulfilled lives. However, the teenage mothers cannot go far without social support and integration. For example, they are less likely to finish their education and secure good jobs. They are therefore more likely to end up both as single parents and faced with all the social challenges of bringing up their children. Social integration is good for assisting the teenage mothers to parent their children properly, otherwise their children may end up running into much greater risks such as poor health, poverty or becoming teenage mothers themselves. The society must wake up to the fact that failure to tackle the social problem of teenage mothers may cost the teenagers, their children and the society huge problems.

**Keywords:** family, teenage mothers, integration; delinquency, employment, welfare-to-work, negative stereotyping, stigma

### Introduction

#### Background of the study

Teenage pregnancy is a great concern both globally and locally since parenting teens have unique needs as they are at developing stages of adolescence, in addition to the normal needs of all pregnant women (Gyesaw and Ankomah 2013) <sup>[10]</sup>. Garblah (2009) <sup>[11]</sup>, states that teenagers who are 15 to 19 years give birth to children yearly and these teenagers cannot afford to bring up their children well and as a result their children may get caught up in offenses while trying to survive due to unsupervised upbringing. According to Mothiba and Maputle (2012) <sup>[15]</sup>, a teenage mother is a woman of less than 19 years and the term teenage motherhood applies to those below the age of entry to legal adulthood while in United States adulthood starts at the age of 16 years. United States of America (USA) has the highest teens birth-rate per 1000 women (52, 1%) aged between 15-19 years when compared to other urbanized countries. This is followed by the United Kingdom in Europe (30, 8%), Canada (20, 2%) and Australia (18, 4%). In addition many social self-governing countries advocate for reduction of teen pregnancy by having programs and information focused solely on prevention (Vinnerjung, Franzen, & Danielsson 2007) <sup>[25]</sup>. At times they encourage well-being system, for example in the USA it has been reported that about one-half of teenage mothers set out on welfare within one year of birth and 77% within five years

of birth (Makiwane, Desmond, Ritcher & Udjo, 2006) <sup>[16]</sup>. World Health Organization, (2014) <sup>[27]</sup> asserts that the standard global birth rate among 15 to 19-year old is 49 per 1000 girls. There has been minimal emphasis on dealing with the challenges facing the teens that are already pregnant or have become parents (UNESCO, 2012) <sup>[24]</sup>.

In Africa adulthood starts at 18 years. It is approximated that one-third of population is between the ages of ten and twenty-four years of which most of them are teenage mothers (Ringheim and Gribble, 2010) <sup>[22]</sup>. As stated by Beguy *et al.*, (2011) <sup>[2]</sup> that every young girl undergoes the process of transition to adulthood and this period is full of colossal changes like biological maturation. Unfortunately before this change is over more than 50% young women especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) find themselves already initiated into motherhood. In addition, the situation is escalated by some cultures and disparities in income and education (Maryann 2007) <sup>[17]</sup>. Teenage motherhood not only contributes to high school dropouts and lowering completion rates among girls but it has a negative effect on the girl child in balancing parenting and education among other responsibilities.

Earlier studies by UNESCO (2012) <sup>[24]</sup>, mainly dealt with general phenomena of causes and avoidance of teen's pregnancy and strategies as well as programs to avert teenage pregnancy. Yet little is known about the experiences teenage mothers go through in Rescue Homes (Frost *et al.*,

1995, Manamela, 1994) [6, 19]. In effort to address this gap, this study sought to find out the challenges the teenage mothers go through in Rescue Homes and specifically Wings of Compassion Rescue Home in Kasarani Sub-county in Nairobi County.

### Literature Review

The study was guided by attribution theory. It was developed by Theory Fiske and Taylor, (1991). Its basic premise is that it deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. Teenage mothers may attribute the cause behind what happens in their lives to many things. Their search for a cause or an explanation is most likely to be provoked when unexpected or an important event ends in an undesired consequence such as when one becomes pregnant (Graham and Weiner 1996) [8]. The study established that it is important for local authorities to respond to local needs with an aim to drive “tailor-made” reforms more effectively to meet the need of the teenage mothers in Rescue Homes. This may be done through teenage motherhood micro policies which recognize the importance of accommodating the perception of teenage mothers. It is important to mobilize the stakeholders with a view of establishing a foundation for teenage mothers in Rescue Homes. Early intervention to this matter would reduce a number of grants from the government (Geddes and Bennington 2001) [9]. According to Kimu (2011) [13], another strategy that can be explored is formal school re-enrollment for those that are interested. As it is stipulated in international human rights law of which Kenya is a signatory, government and parents have different responsibilities towards their children. This includes the policy of re-entry of school for teenage girls after delivery. In spite of the introduction of the re-entry policy, there has been low enrollment of girl child in schools. Masese, (2007) [20] confirms the same and further states that the policy included the guidelines that the girls who become pregnant should be admitted to schools unconditionally. Earlier study carried by FAWA (2001) [7] in Kenya established that the re-admission strategy has been left in the discretion of head teachers and school boards. Additionally some of the head teachers are against school policies that encouraged pregnant teenage girls to be part of the school students.

Department of Basic Education, (2012) [4] accentuates that Life skill orientation curriculum should be emphasized in teenage mother’s Rescue Homes to help them learn personal hygiene, health eating, physical and career pathways. It should include a substantial focus on sexual and reproductive health issues. Furthermore, it should encompass wide-ranging information about transmission and prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, reproductive biology, contraception and pregnancy, domestic violence and sexual negotiation. Ladd *et al.*, (2002) [14], suggest that a number of strategies that have been proposed in improving social skills that can lead to more effective ways of dealing with some of the teenage mother’s challenges even within the Rescue Home set up. Use of conglomerate strategies also referred to as coaching which involves a combination of techniques rather than a single approach. The strategies consist of expression or modeling of suitable social skills like discussions and analyzing the social skills. They strengthen a teenage mother’s approval in actual social situations and improve

self-esteem. This is essential to teenage mothers because they require self-confidence and assurance which can be drawn from having a social support from significant people within the social circles.

Van Egeren, (2004) [26] asserts that those teenage mothers who may need support in their formal learning should be taken through counseling to assist them emotionally and help solve any behavior problems that they encounter.

The teenage mothers ought to adopt changes after understanding and acting upon what they have learnt and this will change their environment. Another intervention strategy is cooperative group training which involves teenage mothers and their infants working towards common goals, which holds promise for changing reputations. Slavin, Hurley and Chamberlin (2003) [23], denotes that most cooperative groups programs can be conducted in academic setting or in Rescue Homes but might be used in other contexts. For example, participation in co-operation games and sports increases sharing and feeling of happiness which helps the teenage mothers cope with some of the challenging moments. When teenage mothers and their infants get involved in a game it strengthens their bond leaving them more rejuvenated.

Teenage mothers who are in Rescue Home and Religious set up deserves a lot of counseling and supervision. As religion is a regulatory moral mechanism over human beings it offers a platform for reconciliation and integration for teenagers, who are a powerful social force that provides a moral framework for socialization (Assimeng 2010) [11],

### Findings

The study was based on descriptive design (Creswell, 2003) [3] focusing on the challenges faced by teenage mothers in a Rescue Home. In this regard, the study specifically intended to identify the strategies put in place to integrate teenage mothers back to the society. The study was conducted at Wings of Compassion Rescue Home in Kasarani Sub-County, Nairobi County.

The Rescue Home is situated in a village called ‘Marurui’ that is densely populated with many unemployed youths. It is characterized by high levels of poverty and low development. There is no main economic activity within the village and the people have engaged in small scale business for survival hence high levels of immorality and other crimes.

The population in the Rescue Home is comprised of 72 people who are in distinct categories of different sizes. These are 4 management staff, 44 teenage mothers, 8 house mothers and 16 supporting staff. Since the population was small to make a sample size the researcher utilized the total population (Mugenda, 2008) [18]. This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was gathered directly from the respondents. Secondary data was obtained from previous studies. The tools used for data collection were interview and questionnaires (Kothari 2014) [12]. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of computer packages and presented in tables. As shown in 4.2

### Teenage mothers’ age

The majority of the respondents who were pregnant in the Rescue Home were between 13-15 years a 62% of the total sample. While 16-19 years a 38% some were certain of their situation and others were not, but all of them were not sure of the next move in their lives.

**Table 4.2:** Teenage Mothers' Age

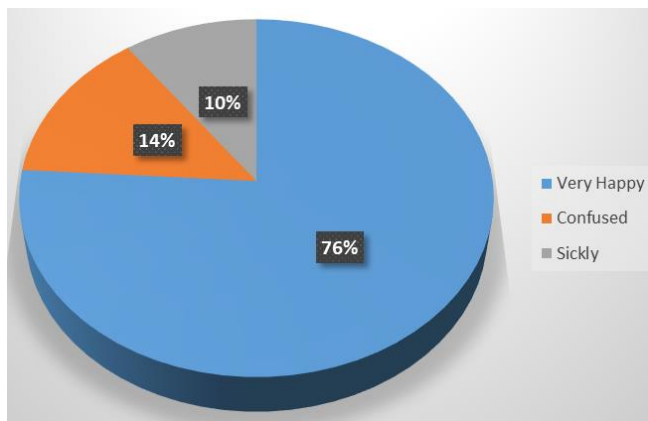
Scale of years	No. of respondents	Percentage
13-15years	26	62%
16-19 years	16	38%
Totals	42	100%

Source: Author 2019

The findings from Table 4.2 show that the highest number of teenage mothers was between 13-15 years who got pregnant at a very young age. This was as a result of ignorance or irresponsibility from them or the people concerned. This was confirmed by Erulker (2013) [5], who argues that many teen-age girls' first sexual practices are non-consensual because they are young and venerable. From the findings of the interview with those who were between 13-15 year, it indicated that most of them had sex for the first time and resulted to pregnancy. They further explained that they had not conceded. From the findings it was clear that some of those that were between 16-19 years, it was not their first time to have sex. After realizing that they were pregnant they escaped from their homes or they were chased away by parents or relatives.

The findings showed that most of the teenage mothers who were rescued changed their perception such that they were happy to find a place they can call home. Some were betrayed by their family members because most of the victims were raped by their fathers or close relatives and no one could intervene but chased them away. Then they found care and protection in the Rescue Home. It was a clear sign that being in a different place renewed their hope which was a part of emotional healing. These changes in perception helped them to integrate well in the society after they recovered as illustrated in figure 4.2

**The experiences the teenage mothers had in the Rescue Home that changed their perception as illustrated in figure 4.2.**



Source: Author 2019

**Fig 4.2:** Experience of Teenage Mothers in the Rescue Home

The study observed that 76% of the teenage mothers who were the majority were very happy to be in a place they can call home after having been chased away. While 14% could not express their feelings as they were confused but they felt save. Although they could not figure out what transpired,

they were bitter with the situation but they desired to give birth and go on with life. The other 10% had very intense psychological, emotional and medical issues. McMichael (2013) [21], highlights on how social connections promote better psycho-social outcomes for teenage parents, thus giving better settlement and well-being results. Teenage mothers in the Rescue Home had an adequate social support system to create a positive impact on their abilities. This would help them make essential decisions like re-engaging in education or self-employment thereby reducing the risk of continuing with social disadvantages.

**Conclusion**

The study concluded that the different explanations from teenage mothers that led to their pregnancies could not be overlooked. These were the causes of all the challenges that the teenage mothers were experiencing. Being a teenage mother is not easy to adjust to the requirements of parenthood, personal development, need to acquire education and develop your talents. These are some of the things that teenage mothers look as part of their life though they face challenges.

From the findings of the study it can be concluded that parents' attitude/community and the economic status of the Rescue Home for the teenage mothers have an impact on their holistic life. Although the parents were reported to have become angry upon knowing that their daughters were indeed pregnant at their age, the study recorded the majority of teenage pregnancy in this Rescue Home was as a result of incest and the culprits and have never been punished.

The study also revealed that teenage mothers lacked enough financial support from the Rescue Home, school and the community. They felt that if the other stakeholders were strongly co-operating in supporting the Rescue Home they could become better even after acquiring their education and other self-development skills. This will also help them integrate well in the society. Lack of much desirable support was deterring them from bringing up their babies in the way they would want, completing school successfully and proceeding to obtain higher education that will allow them participate in employment sector. In addition, training in other self-development skill was limited due to the big number in the Rescue Home and limitation of space and time.

The study concluded that in some cases anger caused the girls to run away from the family home and find solace in Rescue Home. While others were rescued from the wrath of the rapist who were people they trusted (incest cases). The anger also caused communication breakdown to an extent that some of the teenage mothers have never had any association with their immediate family members and others families separated after the incidence. The Rescue Home has been able to engage the social workers, churches and the administration to re-unite the teenage mothers with their family members where possible. The study concluded that the challenges and experiences pointed out can be used perhaps by other Rescue Homes, Schools, Government and other stakeholders to address the flight of teenage mothers, as they balance between motherhood, personal development and school after child birth.

### Recommendations

This study recommends that different institutions and different forums such as churches, mosque, health centers and chief's Baraza etc. should be used as a platform of creating awareness on the issues pertaining teenage pregnancy, preventive measures like abstaining, giving the right information on sexual matters and avoiding places and actions that may lead to teenagers engaging sexually. They should also sensitize the community on integration of teenage mother. Any case of rape, incest, teasing and marginalization should be reported to the authorities. Teenagers faced with such situations should escape as fast as possible.

The study recommends that it is important to create awareness and sensitization among the government institutions, NGOs, communities and other stake holders to support the Rescue Homes either financially or material wise to ensure that they recognize the rights of the girls and appreciate the importance of helping them unearth their potential. Also knowing that teenage pregnancy is a global concern, our government should allocate space for these Rescue Homes that have taken the initiative to handle this insurmountable issue. Furthermore they should facilitate the Rescue Home with a kindergarten and other tertiary training courses for teenage mothers and their babies.

The study recommends that the policy makers can adopt the ideas in this study to enable them mitigate the problem of teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood which leads to poverty. It should also enlighten the policy makers to have clear policies relating to teenage pregnancy and teenage parenting in connection to helping them to re-construct their lives. They should ensure that such policies are adhered to especially in Rescue Homes, schools and health centers by conducting workshops and seminars. There is need to deal with teenage mothers issues in a way that it will yield positive results by changing teenage motherhood discussions, which are stigmatizing and insensitive by giving hope and lifting their self-esteem.

The study has shown that the responsibilities of parenting for the teenage mothers exhaust them physically, emotionally, economically, psychologically and even socially. Hence the result to the holistic challenges of the teenage mothers cannot be established in the events of a single individual or provision. Based on the findings of this study the explanations can be found through harmonized efforts of multidisciplinary and intersectional teams.

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