EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICES

Reintegration of

Teenage Mothers into Formal Secondary Schools in Tanzania



hakielimu

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List of Abbreviations

CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CITC	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
Co-PI	Co Principal Investigator
DEO	District Education Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HoS	Heads of Schools
LHR	Legal Human Rights
MOEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
PI	Principal Investigator
PO-RALG	President's Office- Regional Administration and Local Government Tanzania
REO	Regional Education Officer
UDOM	University of Dodoma
WEO	Ward Education Officer
TFGA	Two Factor Generation Approach
UN	United Nations

Executive Summary

Tanzania introduced a Government Circular Number 2 of 2021 that allows teenage mothers continue schooling after delivery and students who dropped out from school due to other reasons. Like other sub-Saharan African countries implementation guideline in Tanzania was issued in February 2022. Regarding teen mothers, the initiative has revived their dreams to proceed with secondary education starting from where they dropped prior to pregnancy and subsequently enabled them to continued with other levels of education. Understanding how the re-entry initiative is implemented on the ground is crucial for further development of girls' education.

The study explored the implementation of school re-entry initiative in formal secondary schools in Tanzania Mainland, specifically it aimed to understand the experiences of pregnancy and motherhood for these teenage mothers as they returned to school. It also aimed to identify the childcare services available to safeguard their children's well-being during school hours. The significance of childcare services was emphasized due to their potential impact on the children's holistic development. Additionally, the study examined the experiences of school administrators and teachers in reintegrating teenage mothers into the education system, along with the strategies employed to support their academic success. It also investigated the perspectives and roles of parents and community members regarding the educational rights of teenage mothers. The study further explored strategies for ensuring teenage mother return and thrive in school. The study adopted a mixed method research approach (i.e., qualitative and quantitative). However, qualitative research was the most predominant approach, and to a certain extent the quantitative research approach served to enhance the quality of qualitative data. The study was underpinned by a two-generation framework. Data were gathered from six regions (i.e., Kigoma, Mwanza, Morogoro, Arusha, Mbeya, and Dodoma) in Tanzania Mainland. These regions were selected because they had a high number of girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy as compared to other regions. The participants for the study were drawn from 12 districts in the six identified regions. The sample population included heads of schools, Ward Education Officers (WEO), District Education Officers (DEO), teachers, teenage mothers, parents, and the President's Office-Regional Administration, and Local Government (PO-RALG). A total of 299 participants took part in this study. There were 24 (8%) heads of school, 24 (8%) ward educational officers, 12 (4%) district educational officers, 148 (49.5%) teachers, 28 (9.3%) teenage mothers, 59 (19.7%) parents, 1 (0.3%) officer from PO-RALG, and 1 (0.3%) legal human rights representative. The study targeted teenage mothers who dropped out of school and readmitted after giving birth, those who were not readmitted after delivery, and who were readmitted and then dropped out of schools.

The study used Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interviews to collect qualitative related data on the implementation of the school re-entry initiatives. Questionnaires were used to gather quantitative information about the perceptions of teachers in relation to the school initiatives, particularly the extent to which the guideline was developed, adopted, and implemented in different schools. Numerous national and international documents such as the Education Act of 1978, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Tanzania's Education and Training Policy of 2014, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 were also critically analysed. Findings from this study indicate some achievements of the implementation of the re-entry initiative. Some readmitted teenage mothers have achieved remarkable accomplishments, especially those who excelled in their form four national examinations and progressed to advanced secondary education. This success would highlight their potential to make meaningful contributions to their families and society as a whole. Despite these achievements, the study indicates that the school re-entry initiative was not successfully implemented due to inadequate preparation and dissemination that resulted into limited awareness and in turn, the school re-entry initiative was interpreted or conceptualized differently (multiple interpretation) by stakeholders. The study also revealed that monitoring of teenage mothers has remained problematic because of schools' unpreparedness. Moreover, the initiative faced implicit resistance, including discouragement and marginalization, with teenage mothers' return to school seen as contrary to moral values, leading to their rejection by school heads to prevent 'contamination' of other students. The absence of legal enforcement undermined the effective implementation of



the school re-entry initiative. Teenage mothers faced mistreatment, lacking support from parents, community, and peers, alongside stigmatization, social isolation, sexual harassment, and family abuse. .This hostile environment discouraged them from pursuing academic life, resulting in many not taking the school re-entry opportunity and others dropping out after readmission.

It was apparent from this study that teenage mothers prefer alternative pathways such as: Alternative Secondary Education Program (ASEP) mainly implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology through the Institute of Adult Education rather than the formal secondary education because of flexibility. Teenage mothers worried that their children would be at risk in terms of care and safety if they would return to formal school because the school re-entry initiatives put less emphasis on children's rights. The education officials, however, felt irresponsible and accountable about the health and safety of teenage mothers' children. The finding further revealed that there were limited mechanisms of capturing data at district and ward levels since tracking of teenage mothers who dropped out from schools was rarely done. This indicates that there is a great possibility of leaving behind a large number of teen mothers.

Some key recommendations have been highlighted below:

- The findings suggest that the school re-entry initiative implementation requires a collaborative effort between the government, parents, education officials, heads of schools, and other actors. Therefore, capacity strengthening and awareness creation will make a difference in the implementation of school re-entry initiatives.
- To address variation in interpretation of the guideline, there is a need of providing reasonable guidance for each aspect.
- The study also recommends giving great priorities to teenage mothers' child rights and protection, as well as strengthening counseling units in order to help these mothers have settled minds and concentrate or focus on their studies.
- There is a need to develop rules and regulations that protect the rights of teenage mothers for them to succeed academically.
- Teachers' endeavors around creating inclusive spaces that provide an opportunity for teenage mothers to feel empowered and recognized, would promote their enthusiasm to learn.
- Home-school partnerships would help to ensure that teenage mothers and their children are in a safe environment.
- Since alternative secondary education centers for teenage mothers in rural or remote areas are not easily accessible, it is important to strengthen the formal school systems because these schools are always available in diverse contexts.
- Introducing a tracking system of teenage mothers will enhance their returning to school.

This study concludes that the two-generation framework is relevant because it provides a basis through which the school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers is implemented. The framework also explains the struggle teenage mothers face in balancing the school demands and those of their children. The framework is provided in Figure 28.



1.0 Introduction

School re-entry initiative for girls who dropped out of school, especially at the secondary education level, have been institutionalized in many African countries (e.g., Senegal, Malawi, Namibia, Kenya, and Zambia) as one of their human rights (United Nations, 1948; Omondi-Adeitan, 2022; Kadzamira, 2007; Niboye, 2018). The particular focus of the school re-entry initiative is placed on allowing all students or pupils who dropped out of school, including young mothers, to return to the formal schooling system (World Bank, 2022). Despite policies allowing their return to formal schooling, teenage mothers in sub-Saharan Africa, such as in Zambia, encounter significant obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of school re-entry initiative. These challenges include a shortage of childcare options, adverse attitudes from teachers and students, financial constraints preventing fee payment, and widespread stigmatization.



Figure 1: Re-entry implementation Challenges from other countries.

These factors collectively undermine the initiative implementation and the ability of teenage mothers to resume their education successfully (FAWE 2002; Zuilkowski et al., 2019). Likewise, other countries such as Ghana has readmission campaigns, awareness creation, and psycho-social support strategies for pregnant girls and teenage mothers in both primary and secondary schools, but the policy is not adequately implemented due to lack of nurseries for teenage mothers' children (see figure 1). Despite these government's endeavors, only 10,869 out of 22,147 pregnant girls and teenage mothers returned to public schools in Ghana between 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 (African Educational Watch, 2022). This is an indication that the implementation of the school re-entry initiative in some countries is inadequate.

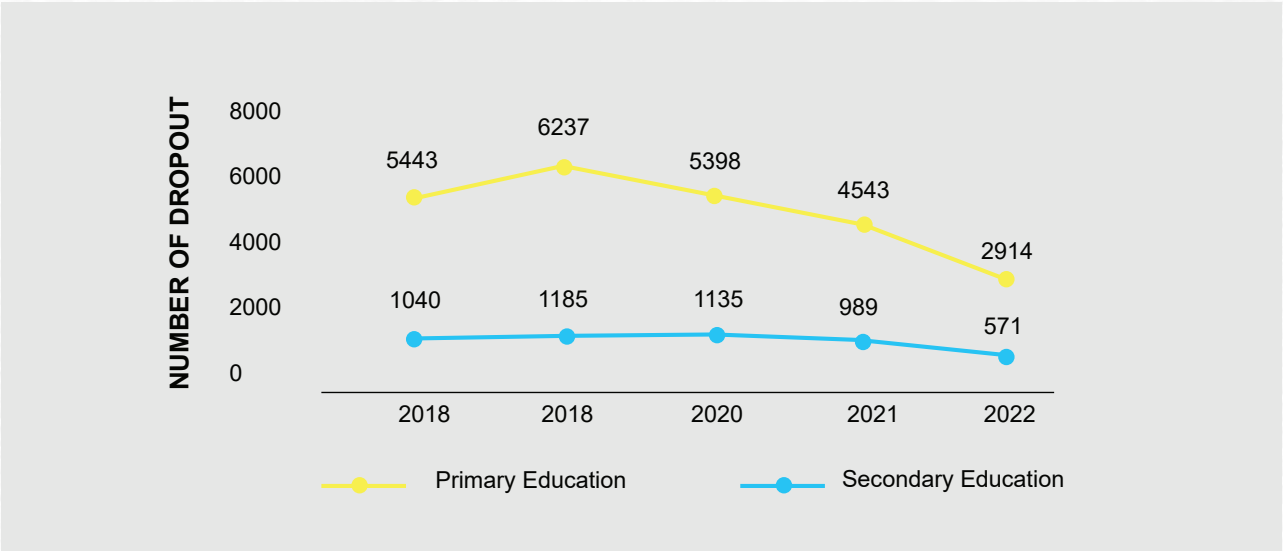


Figure 2: Drop out trends in Tanzania.

Tanzania, like other countries, implements the school re-entry initiative as a way of promoting inclusive and equitable learning environment to teenage mothers, but it remains unclear how far or to what extent the implementation has been achieved. Institutionalization of the school re-entry initiative for the teenage mothers in Tanzania was influenced by the high dropout of girls from school due to pregnancy. Evidence from the literature indicates that in 2021 alone, about 2,914 of girl students dropped out from secondary schools due to pregnancy (United Republic of Tanzania, 2022). Statistics further show that a total of 25,971 pregnant girls were expelled from school between 2017 and 2020 (HakiElimu, 2021). Similar evidence indicates that a total of 24,535 (URT, 2022) pregnant girls were expelled from secondary schools (See Figure 2). This alarming trend of teenage girls dropping out of secondary school due to pregnancy necessitated the need for school re-entry initiative. In providing opportunities for students who dropped out of school due to various reasons, the government established the re-entry initiative and facilitated the reintegration of 1,046 females into the formal education system in 2023 (URT, 2023). However, it remains unclear how many female students returned into the formal education system after delivery. Thus, the current study aimed to explore teenage mothers' experience and other potential stakeholders about the initiative.

1.1 Adoption of School Re-entry Guideline in Tanzania

There have been several measures taken to ensure that the school re-entry guideline is in place to enable teenage mothers to be readmitted in school across different years as indicated in figure 3. The figure illustrates that in 2009, the Tanzanian government introduced the school re-entry guideline which was neither adopted nor implemented due to inadequate preparation. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Science and Technology in 2015 developed an improved school re-entry guideline which was also not approved. In 2022, the government introduced another school re-entry guideline for all children who dropped out of school due to pregnancies and other reasons (as indicated in figure 3). The guideline requires school management and teachers to readmit teenage mothers into school, two years after delivery. It also provides guiding principles for school heads, teachers, parents, and communities in supporting these girls (URT, 2022). However, the guideline has some gaps which may hinder teenage mothers from returning to school. For instance, the guideline seldom specifies the roles of teachers in facilitating the school re-entry of teen mothers into the education system. Given that teachers are in constant interaction with these students both within and outside the classroom, delineating their roles could enhance the application of gender-responsive pedagogies. Consequently, the ambiguity in the guideline may lead to varied interpretations by teachers, who might then rely on their discretion or practical judgment. Such a scenario raises concerns that implementation could be swayed by discrimination, stereotypes, and personal beliefs.

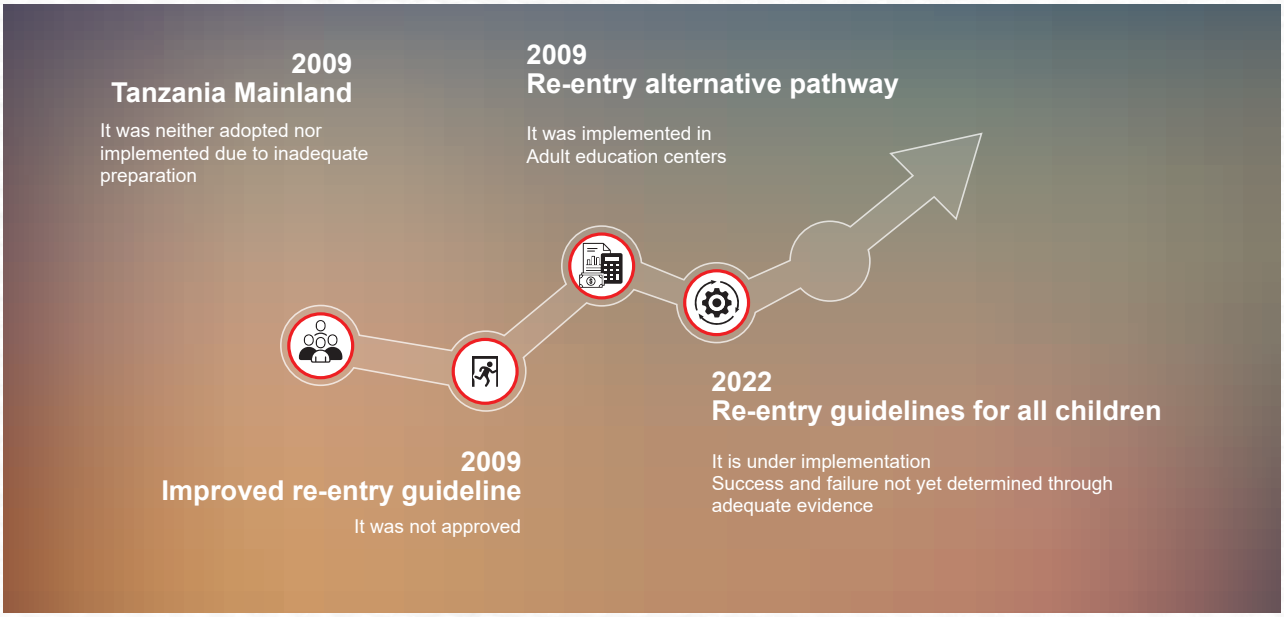


Figure 3: Adoption of the re-entry guidline in Tanzania Mainland.

The research at hand was conducted to generate evidence-based data that would inform policy improvement and implementation in the country and for the international community. So far, little is known about the extent to which the school community (teachers, students, and school management) contributes to such underachievement and the challenges that upkeep teenage mothers to profitably utilize the second chance given to them (Issa & Temu, 2023; Mgunda, Kano & Sungwa, 2023). Learning about its practice in the school and community will contribute to the global initiatives that emphasize inclusive learning (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022; Tang, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). To realize this objective, this study employs a two-factor generation framework to investigate the experiences and challenges that teenage mothers returning to formal education encounter, the support they receive from school and home, and the assistance provided to their children. Through these findings, a theoretical framework has been developed to guide the implementation of school re-entry initiative in Mainland Tanzania.

1.2 Study Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. Determine the policy gaps in implementing the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers.
2. Establish experience of pregnancy and motherhood among teenage mothers returning to school.
3. Identify childcare services that are put in place to ensure the safety of children while mothers are in schools.
4. Establish experiences of school administration and teachers in reintegrating teenage mothers into secondary schools.
5. Explore the roles of parents and community members and their perceptions regarding teenage mothers' right to education.
6. Develop strategies that can support the return of teenage mothers to school and ensure their success.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by two Factor Generation Framework. The framework holds that children (i.e., baby born child to a teenage mother) and families work in cooperation and influence each other for a family success (King et al., 2016). The framework places more focus on the role of parents in shaping their children's well-being (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2023). It also advocates that when necessary, support is provided to the family and the child in the area of education, economic, basic needs, social capital, and mental health, there is a likelihood to improve the whole family well-being and achieve the expected outcome (King et al., 2016). The framework aims to ensure that both parents and children are able to build their well-being when supported. In order to achieve this, child's development needs to be supported through appropriate parenting skills, food and nutrition, and health services. Teenage mothers also need appropriate support such as school materials, basic needs, guidance and counseling and learning in a safe environment which, in-turn, complement the child's development as well as readmission in schools.

It should be noted that successful completion of education for teenage mothers hinges on the support provided by the system, as evidenced by policies, curriculum, resources, and school leadership strategies. With these support systems in place, teenage mothers and their children are more likely to achieve higher education levels, better physical and mental health, meet basic needs, and enjoy higher income and employability opportunities (See Figure 4).

The core principle of the framework is that implementing the school re-entry initiative necessitates fostering connections and relationships that align with the goals of both the child and the parents, aiming for the welfare of the entire family. The framework is useful for this study as it advocates for the implementation of school re-entry initiative designed to enhance the well-being of both children and teenage mothers, thereby facilitating the mothers' reintegration into formal education.

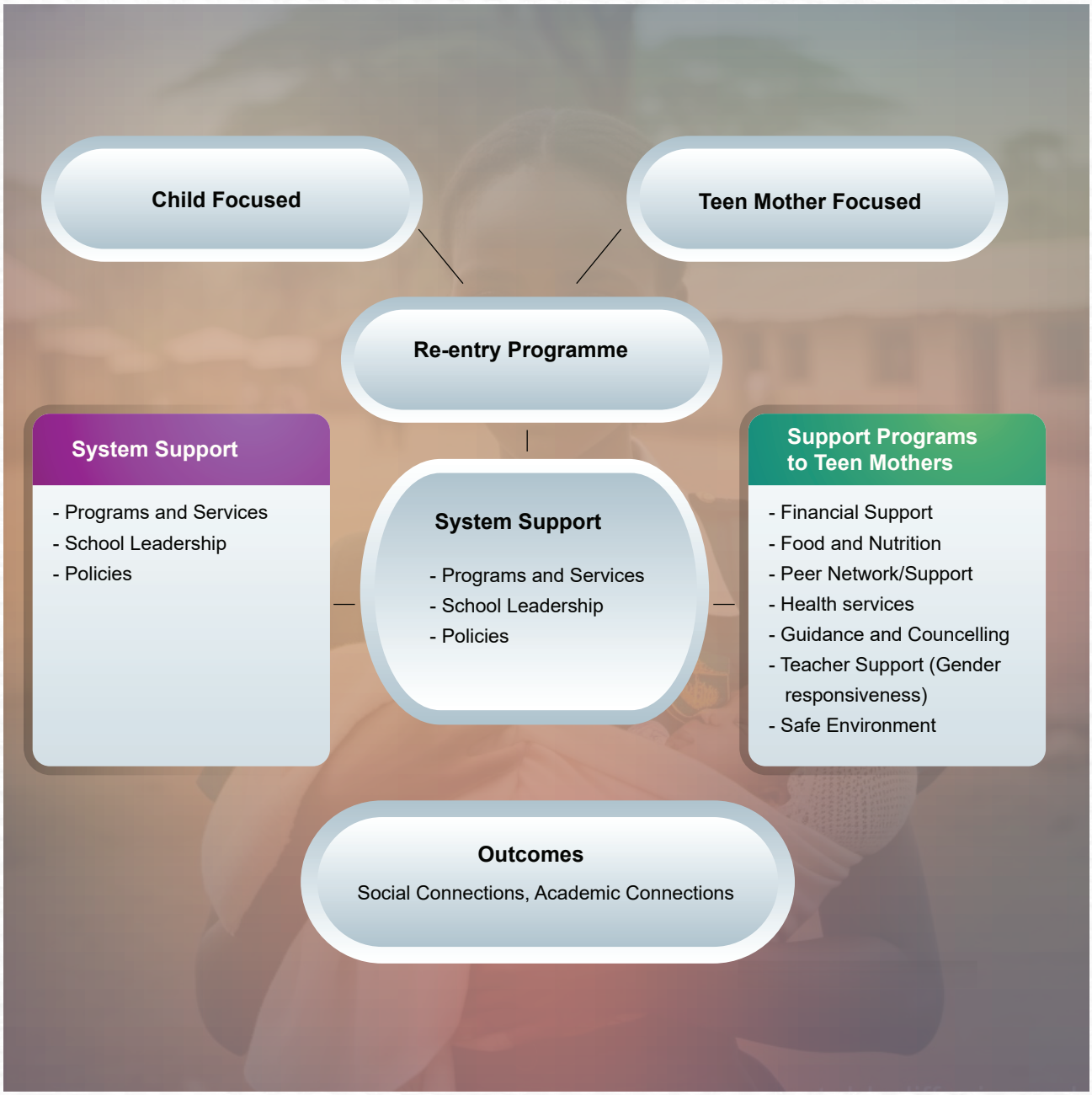


Figure 4: Conceptual framework.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Approach

The study used cross-sectional design. This design provided an opportunity for enumerators and research teams to collect evidence-based information from multiple groups or people across diverse geographical locations. In this case, the research at hand generated knowledge, attitudes and practices about how the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers has been implemented in different Tanzanian formal schools. It was through cross-sectional design where data with numerous characteristics was collected at a single point in time without actually directly influencing other variables. Typically, data in a cross-sectional study was collected from people across different demographic information (e.g., gender, socioeconomic classes, multiple age groups, and abilities and accomplishments). This design, therefore, is less time-consuming because data is usually gathered from a small part of the population to gain in-depth and better understanding of the phenomena under exploration.

The study employed a mixed method research approach. Data were collected concurrently for a better understanding of the school re-entry initiative implementation for girls who dropped out from school due to pregnancies. The strength of each approach was used to address the phenomena at hand. However, a qualitative research approach was largely employed to gain in-depth insights into teenage mothers in the formal schooling system. This approach facilitated the research team to understand how participants constructed and made sense of the school re-entry initiative, particularly concerning teenage mothers in and beyond schools (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Quantitative research approach was used to gather numerical information that enhances the quality of interview data (i.e., triangulation) regarding the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers who returned to school. Questionnaires were mostly used by a group of teachers and data of quantitative nature were analyzed through numerical procedures (Creswell, 2018).

2.2 Research sites

The study was carried out across six zones of Tanzania's Mainland to ensure geographical diversity and representation of various regions within the country. For this purpose, one region from each zone, specifically those with a notably high incidence of girls dropping out of secondary school due to pregnancy, was chosen. Within each selected region, two districts exhibiting significant dropout rates due to pregnancy were identified. From these districts, two secondary schools were sampled (See Table 1). District education officers, responsible for overseeing primary and secondary education, assisted the research team in selecting the schools with a notable number of girls returning to school post-pregnancy. The focus on formal schools was driven by the limited capacity of alternative educational centers to serve the widespread geographical needs of these students.

Zone	Regions	Local Government Authorities (LGA)	Number of secondary schools
Central zone	Dodoma	A. Dodoma City Council B. Kongwa	2 2
Coastal zone	Morogoro	A. Mlimba B. Ifakara Town Council	2 2
Lake zone	Mwanza	A. Buchosa B. Ilemela	2 2
Northern zone	Arusha	A. Arusha City Council B. Meru	2 2
Southern highland zone	Mbeya	A. Rungwe B. Mbeya City Council	2 2
Western zone	Kigoma	A. Kigoma B. Kasulu	2 2
Total			**24**

Table 1: Research sites

2.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the teenage mothers who were enrolled in schools from Form one to Four. The technique also involved teenage mothers who were readmitted, dropped out after being readmitted, and those who did not return to school. Additionally, heads of schools were specifically chosen for their supervisory roles in implementing the school re-entry guideline within their institutions. In addition, Ward Education Officers (WEOs) were selected purposely from each ward with a high number of girls who dropped out due to pregnancies in the respective zone. On the other hand, all teachers who taught or ever taught teenage mothers from each school were engaged in the study. The assumption here was that these teachers might have interacted with teenage mothers and therefore they knew a lot about the challenges these teenage mothers face.

Only parents of girls who were readmitted to school after delivery, dropped out due to pregnancy, or were admitted but later dropped out post-delivery were selected to share their experiences. In selecting these parents, gender was taken into consideration (i.e., female and male parents were at least equally sampled). Besides, the study also gathered evidence-based information from district education officers as they are responsible within their areas of jurisdiction to make follow-ups on teenage mother's learning. District Education Officers (DEOs) and key officials from the President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), specifically from the secondary education department, were strategically chosen to participate in this study due to their roles in policy-making and implementation concerning the readmission of teenage mothers.

The Education Commissioner and the secondary education department play pivotal roles in these processes. A representative from Legal Human Rights (LHR) was also strategically included to offer insights into legal

perspectives concerning the welfare of teenage mothers and their children. Additionally, snowball sampling technique was used to identify teen mothers who had dropped out of school, including those who did not return and those who were readmitted but subsequently dropped out. Through this method, the research team and school heads facilitated connections with these individuals to explore comprehensively their experiences. The study involved 299 participants, including 12 District Education Officers (DEOs), 24 heads of schools, 24 Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and 148 teachers, with 33 of these teachers participating in interviews and in filling the questionnaires. Additionally, 28 teenage mothers participated, comprising 16 who were readmitted, 9 who dropped out and did not return, and 3 who returned to school only to drop out again. There were also 59 parents, one officer from the President's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), and one representative from Legal Human Rights (LHR) (See Figure 5).

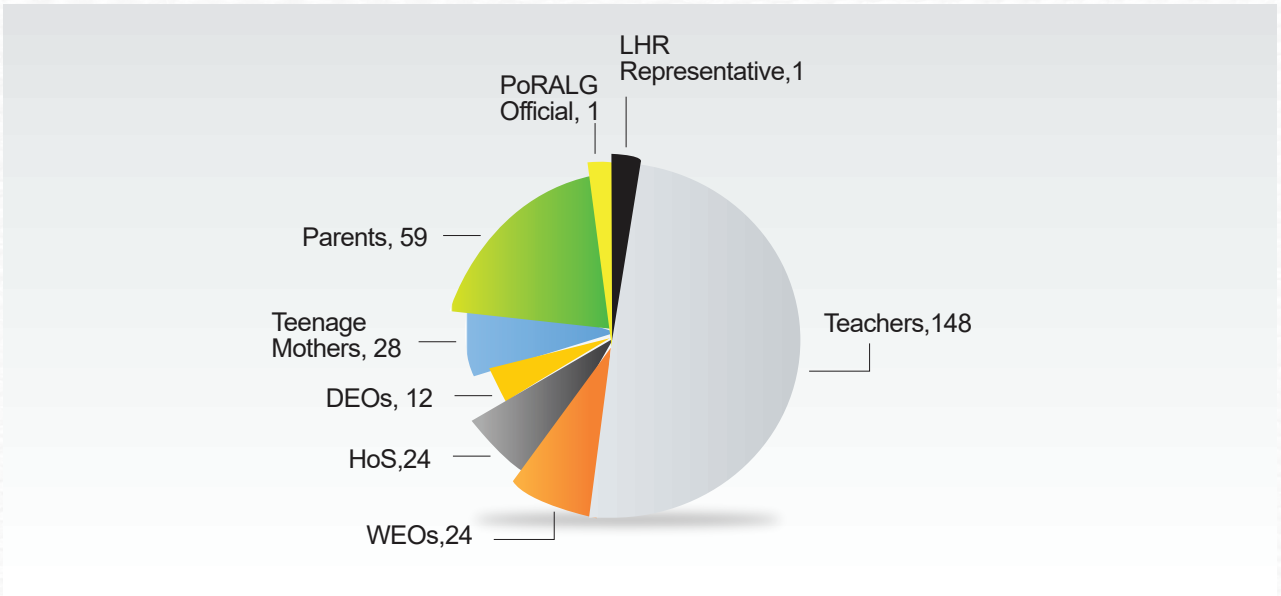


Figure 5: Number of Participants.

2.4 Methods of data collection

Key informant interviews and surveys were used for data collection. Ideally, the use of two methods of data collection aimed at generating information that was processed for a comprehensive understanding of the school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers who earlier dropped out of school. An interview guide was developed to collect qualitative data from key informants (i.e., teenage mothers who were readmitted to schools, who dropped after being readmitted and who did not return to formal schools, heads of schools, REOs, DEOs and WEOs). The use of interviews with these categories of respondents served various purposes. For the teenage mothers, the interviews enabled the research team to collect data on experiences after they were readmitted to school. With educational administrators, the conversation generated data on administrative experiences of the reintegration of teenage mothers in schools. The interviews were also used to collect data from teachers' experiences in teaching teenage mothers.

Also, questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers with the aim of assessing teachers' experience in interacting with teenage mothers at school. Through this questionnaire, teachers were engaged to share their pedagogical practices and responsiveness in teaching and interacting with teenage mothers outside the classroom. The questionnaire consisted of three major domains reflecting the two Factor Generation Framework with the aim of obtaining numerical data that informed about the practices that teachers used while interacting with teenage mothers. Data gathered through questionnaires were used to triangulate with one-on-one and group conversation-generated data.

On the other hand, a number of documents were analysed. These documents include educational policies (Educational act of 1978, Education and Training Policy (2014)) and school re-entry guideline of 2022), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995. The reviewed documents helped to understand the implementation of the school re-entry guideline and determine if the guideline was consistent with the set strategies and priorities. Systematic review procedures helped to generate evidence that informs the current and future planning as well as the implementation of teenage mothers' school re-entry initiative.

In addition, focus group interviews were conducted with parents regarding their role and perceptions on teenage mothers and their rights to education. Parents helped to identify the teenage mothers' concerns, needs, and barriers to effective implementation of the school re-entry initiative. Each group consisted of both males and females. The groups' conversation with participants were conducted in the school settings. Parents were provided with prior information about their participation before the data collection. The researchers and enumerators made sure that no one dominated the group conversation, rather they were all encouraged to air out their views. All data from FGDs were digitally recorded subject to participants' consent.

2.5 Data analysis plan

The interview data were inductively analysed. Initially, the gathered data were organized for easy retrieval. All interviews were then transcribed but before this, the research team repeatedly listened to the audiotapes to comprehend what was said by participants. This helped to produce interview transcripts ready for further analysis. Words were transcribed directly to avoid any potential bias in selection or interpretation that might occur with summarizing. During transcription, the team included annotations that added context and meaning, making deliberate efforts not to alter phrases for grammatical correctness to preserve the original intent and meaning of the responses. After completing the transcriptions, the research team engaged in multiple readings of the data to become thoroughly acquainted with its content. During this familiarization process, we documented additional insights through notes or memos. Annotations in the transcript margins highlighted central concepts, serving as a foundation for the development of a coding scheme. These margin notes were regularly reviewed, facilitating the systematic categorization of data. The research team then read and re-read the interview transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Following the initial review, the data underwent coding, a process that deconstructed the information into distinct segments. The team sorted the data by identifying units of meaning—elements like phrases, sentences, behavior patterns, events, and thought processes that recurred or held significance were grouped under specific codes. To ensure clarity, each code was defined in a way that its meaning was clear without needing additional information. This labeling facilitated the early stages of recognizing similarities and differences within the data. After coding, the data segments were amalgamated into broader categories, which were then refined through multiple revisions. Connections, threads, and patterns within these categories were meticulously identified and labeled, laying the groundwork for deeper analysis.

The categories were regularly reviewed to see how each of the information fitted best into the created groups and clusters (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2018). The research team then explored the patterns or relationships across categories to identify major themes. The integration of data into themes provided an understanding of the contexts and individuals being studied. Theme development was followed by interpretation of gathered information. This practice involved going beyond the descriptive data to extract insights and meaning from the data (i.e., developing plausible explanations). Personal feelings were avoided in the sense that any interpretation was supported by the data.



The analysis of quantitative data used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Tables were used to present descriptive data, including frequencies, percentages, and other summary statistics. Prior to analysis, basic demographic data were presented. Since the Likert scale was used in questionnaire items, internal consistency reliability was calculated to determine their potential for analysis. In practice, a higher coefficient of reliability is preferable, provided that the coefficient ranges between 0 and 1. Specifically, the coefficient greater or equal to 0 red 7 is considered appropriate. Inferential statistics on the other hand, was used on teachers and students' data to examine any potential association and/or relationship between different aspects and the study population's socio-demographic features.

For teachers' questionnaires, inferential analysis was employed to explore the relationships between three key aspects-creating a safe learning environment, fostering social impact, and implementing responsive pedagogy-and various demographic and characteristic features of the study population. The median score for each respondent across each of these aspects was determined and utilized as the dependent variables. These were then regressed against independent variables such as gender, education level, teaching experience, and geographic region of the participants. To analyze correlations among ordinal data, which inherently possess a natural ordering and may exhibit a skewed distribution, non-parametric statistical methods were applied.

On the other hand, the relationship between the five aspects in the students' questionnaire, which are services during pregnancy, services and care after delivery, child services, learning environment at school, and learning environment at home, were regressed with socio-demographic characteristics to see if any of the five or all of them were associated with socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population.

2.6 Credibility of the research instruments and data

Triangulation was implemented by utilizing various data collection methods, including individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentary reviews. Additionally, the instruments used for data collection were reviewed and validated by different team members, including representatives from HakiElimu, to ensure reliability and breadth in the collected data. The research team also built trust with the participants. Before actual data collection, the researchers introduced themselves to the participants and explained the aim of the research. During data analysis and interpretation, the research team put aside their personal feelings and perceptions about the implementation of the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers. Validity was assessed by comparing the results of different sources of data (interviews, FGDs, documentary, and questionnaires). The research instruments were also discussed with the technical team from HakiElimu before the actual process of data collection. The technical team further validated the data by reviewing various drafts of the report and providing insights that aimed to improve the quality of data.

2.7 Reliability of the research instruments

The internal consistency reliability demonstrated an optimal coefficient alpha (α=0.94), indicating a high level of consistency among items. The Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) varied from 0.19 for item 5 to 0.8 for item 12, suggesting a generally good correlation among items. However, item 5 fell below the minimum acceptable cut off of 0.30, indicating it may not align well with the overall scale.

2.8 Ethical issues

The study adhered to all ethical procedures. Research clearance was initially obtained from the University of Dodoma, which then allowed for the acquisition of a further research permit from the President's Office-Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), the authority overseeing primary and secondary schools. The research team was committed to upholding human and moral values by ensuring confidentiality with the information gathered from participants. Enumerators were provided with introductory letters, which were presented to institutional heads before beginning data collection. The study participants were also asked to fill in the consent forms so they can decide if they would like to participate or withdraw their participation. The informed consent forms contained the research project's purpose, proposed risks (if any) and possible benefits. Only those who agreed to participate by signing the consent form were allowed to participate in the research. The team ensured that no one violates the rights and freedoms of the research participants. All the gathered data in electronic form were stored in a computer with a password-protected file and only the research teams and the funder had access to it. The recruited data enumerators were people who respected the customs of respondents and maintained proper cooperation. Finally, the research team was expected to maintain honesty and strict adherence to government and funder's rules and regulations governing the proper conduct of research.



3.0 Study findings

3.1 Policy gaps in implementing the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers

One of the objectives in this study was to review different policies which support equal rights to education. Several policies were reviewed such as the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), school re-entry guideline, Educational Act of 1978 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995. Subsequent sections discuss these policies and legal aspect.

3.1.1 Policy context

Although, the Education and Training Policy of 2014, updated in 2023, emphasizes eliminating barriers to education, affirming it as a right (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014), expelling teenage mothers for pregnancy contradicts these policies and infringes on children's educational rights. Despite the government ratifying international and regional treaties advocating for human and child education rights, such as CEDAW, UDHR, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), all of which underline the unconditional right to education, pregnant girls still face expulsion from school (URT, 2022). There is also the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 which insists that girls who dropped out from school due to pregnancies should return to school and eliminate all barriers which may impede them to effectively participate in learning. By endorsing these agreements, the government of Tanzania verified its commitment to protecting the rights of girls. Therefore, the school re-entry guideline introduced by the government of Tanzania in 2022 requires all children who dropped out of school due to various reasons, including those who dropped out due to pregnancies, to be readmitted.

However, the Education Act of 1978 which was amended in 2002 prescribes the conditions of expulsion or exclusion from school for students on the ground of age, discipline or health, involvement in prostitution, immoral behavior or committing offenses against morality. In practice, some school leadership may turn a blind eye to a student's pregnancy, perhaps due to personal biases, cultural norms, or a lack of awareness about the rights of pregnant students to continue with their education. As a result, they are immediately expelled from school and permanently excluded from the education system without being afforded an opportunity to present their perspective or the choice to continue their formal education either prior to or after giving birth. Also, there may be misinterpretation of the Act as school leadership interpret that pregnancy is an offense and evidence of their involvement in immoral activities, or entered into a marriage (as allowed by the Law of Marriage Act, 1971, which permits marriage for girls as young as 14 and boys as young as 18). The Law of Marriage Act of 1977 contradicts the constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 which acknowledges the rights of children to education and protects them against early marriages and harmful cultural and social practices (URT, 1977). Allowing girls to get married at the age of 14 is questionable because it leads to dropout from schools and deprives their right to compulsory education. The Child Act of 2019 is also against the child torture or other cruel, or degrading treatment including any cultural practice which dehumanizes or is injurious to the physical, mental and psychological well-being of a child (URT, 2019). The argument here is that children should be protected since they are the victims from schools, community and at home.

Despite provision of school re-entry guideline by the government, there is still a mismatch between the Education Act of 1978 which was amended in 2002 and the guideline itself. This indicates that the implementation creates the dilemma as was noted by one of the respondents: *"This guideline has been introduced more as an announcement and lacks accompanying legislation" (WEO)*. In the absence of a specific policy mandating their return, the readmission of teen mothers to school often depends on the discretion of parents and school heads. This was verified by one of DEOs who commented that:



> *"There is no law that obligates the girl to return to school after giving birth. This lack of legal enforcement empowers lower-level officials to struggle in implementing the guidelines successfully. It can be seen as coaxing the girl to return, and if she chooses not to, there are no legal consequences". (WEO).*

The implication of the mismatch of the policy and school re-entry guideline may lead to confusion due to lack of clarity, conflicting requirements and inconsistent practices among the educational practitioners. During the interviews, some parents and teenage mothers reported to have been rejected by the heads of schools when returning to formal schools and were directed to join alternative pass ways. This suggests that the mismatch between policy and guideline can lead to dissatisfaction and confusion to parents, students, teachers and heads of schools who reject the teenage mothers. The implementers and supervisors of the school re-entry guideline may have varying interpretations of their roles, which may result into inconsistent practices and unequal treatment of teenage mothers who aspire to return to school.

Moreover, despite the mismatch between the school re-entry guideline and education Act, the school re-entry guideline inadequately provides clear readmission procedures on how teenage mothers will join the school after delivery. Lack of clear admission procedures may lead to social stigma and discrimination against teenage mothers from teachers or school leadership when required to be readmitted. Similarly, Msichana initiative (2023) noted that the school re-entry guideline is silent about the procedures for expulsion of girls who become pregnant while at school. This may lead to unequal treatment of pregnant girls and teenage mothers as one can make decisions based on their own discretion during re-admission. The school re-entry guideline also does not allow the teen mother to take their children with them to school. This was also ascribed by one participant who had this to say *"The guideline has minimally describes the support for the children who are born, and there is no funding to support the girl who returns to school in the formal system because many of the girls facing these challenges are poor".* The guideline focused much on the rights of the teenage mothers and has little attention to the rights of their born children. The guideline directed parents to support the child of teenage mothers when they are in schools, due to culture and morality some parents seemed to reject these mothers and given less support in taking care of their children as they were considered to deviate from social norms. As a result, children may lack proper nutrition, health care, and safety. Furthermore, the guideline lacks the flexibility on modes of delivery to support teen mothers, as they are treated like other students. This group may have special needs and requirements as a mother and student. The guideline also insists that if a teen mother gets a pregnancy again, she will not be allowed readmission in formal education. This violates the rights of teenage mothers to education. Since the guideline focuses on all children who drop from school due to different reasons, this may bring less emphasis on specific groups and teenage mothers who dropped from schools due to pregnancies in particular as this group may have special needs and requirements.

The school leaders' refusal of teenage mothers to readmit suggests a limited understanding of the school re-entry guideline. This can have detrimental effects on the teenage mothers' education and their overall well-being. The adoption of inclusive practices within the education system would promote the possibility of equal opportunities to education for the teenage mothers to re-integrate in formal schools. The analysis also indicated that the guideline rarely specifies when pregnant girls should be sent back home (e.g., soon after getting pregnant or after months before delivery. Furthermore, the guideline rarely clarifies whether a girl who becomes pregnant a few months before an examination will be allowed to participate, provided she is in good health and ready to sit for the examination.

3.1.2 Legal support

Participants (educational officers) highlighted that the readmission of teenage mothers was a significant and positive step towards fulfilling the international human rights agenda. These education officials were concerned with the fact that the school re-entry guideline would not be successful if legal binding to enforce the effective implementation of the guideline is not in place. Examination of the school re-entry guideline in Tanzania showed



to lack enforcement law that would provide an obligation for teenage mothers to return to school. For this reason, the guideline implementers regard the readmission of teenage mothers into the formal school systems as an option. This prompts lower-level officials to face challenges in successfully implementing the guideline. Additionally, the implementers and supervisors of the school re-entry guideline may have varying interpretations on the guideline which may result into inconsistent practices and unequal treatment of teenage mothers who are enthusiastic to return to school. For example, the WEOs and DEOs associated the limited response of teenage mothers in the formal schooling with the lack of legal binding. They also emphasized that teenage mothers' readmission should be mandatory. With legal binding, both teenage mothers' and parents' resistance towards the school re-entry guideline would be avoided as one of the participants commented: *"If it is not included in the law, this guideline should be formalized to help other girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy to return." (Parent)*

The participants also maintained that sustainable guideline provide teenage mothers with an opportunity to take advantage of fulfilling their academic dreams in formal schools. In other words, the participants wanted the school re-entry guideline to be a permanent strategy so that many girls who have dropped out of school due to pregnancy can return to school after delivery. This will help to rescue teenage mothers from losing their right to education. It was, furthermore, reported that teenage mothers' children lacked direct security. This may have a far-reaching implication for their social and emotional development. The participants recommended that the school re-entry guideline would be sustainable if the government creates a best-fit environment for teenage mothers who feel their children are secured and supported. To a certain extent, the participants were of the opinion that the success of the school re-entry guideline requires a shared effort between the government and other educational stakeholders. One of the teenage mothers raised this concern:

> *"Being a teenage mother increases the cost of living in providing the services to the born child and taking care of myself and buying school requirements. It is not easy to administer in this situation" (Teenage mother not returned to school).*

One participant also commented that,

> *"We have already spoken to about three NGOs, but we are still awaiting their responses to see how they can help in ensuring the safety and health for these children" (DEO).*

The assumption here is that the government alone cannot cover all the personal needs of each teenage mother as many of them come from poor families. However, some participants argued that the government still has obligations to allocate funds, specifically to help young children so that their mothers can learn comfortably.

3.2 Experience of teenage mothers during pregnancies and after delivery

3.2.1 Mistreatment of teenage mothers and pregnant girls

Mistreatment of teenage mothers and pregnant girls was revealed to be a factor that contributed to the denial of reintegration into the formal education system. There were several reported incidences by teenage mothers which took form of stigmatization, social isolation, sexual harassment and family abuse as they will be elaborated in the subsequent sections.



Stigmatization

It was revealed that some teenage mothers were subjected to social stigma, including ridicule and contempt in their school contexts, home, and community level (see figure 6). As with other categories of teenage mothers, the readmitted colleagues felt humiliated when they returned to school. These teen mothers were abused by their families, neighbors, and their fellow students.

They were not always comfortable because their fellow students segregated them and even some other teachers and school heads spoke negatively about them. One of the teenage mothers narrated the incident as presented in *Voice 1* when she was found pregnant. The experience of teenage mothers being segregated by peers and teachers made them feel that they had limited acceptance in the community. Another teenage mother demonstrated how it was difficult to return to school after giving birth (see Voice 2). It makes sense to note that some heads of schools were not willing to accept teenage mothers who wanted to return to formal schooling after giving birth. Such kind of stigmatization can further hinder the government initiatives to ensure all students get opportunities for basic education.

A logical inference could be that some heads lacked proper understanding and orientation about the school re-entry interventions. The second inference could be the fear of losing reputation about the school in a sense that being a teenage mother is perceived to be against moral values of the society. The participants also reported that stigmatization triggered segregation and mistreatment. As a result, this led to low self-esteem, mental illness, a sense of hopelessness, shame, and loss of self-confidence to teenage mothers. The following quote supports this view:

… My mother started mistreating me again, in collaboration with her husband [step father]. After giving birth, the conflicts escalated because my mother did not want my child. My stepfather also refused to accept me and my child. Sometimes he would call me a witch and did not want to see me at home." (Teenage mother)

The implication from this quote is that stigmatization to teenage mothers can lead and perpetuate a cycle of marginalization, feelings of shame, stress, and low self-esteem which hinder teenage mothers' progress in education and overall well-being of teenage mothers and their children. Moreover, stigmatization can lead to an unsupportive learning environment as a function of social discrimination which in turn may affect their confidence and academic attainment.

Social isolation

Social isolation emerged as a significant barrier for teenage mothers upon readmission, as they faced difficulties in reconnecting and forming relationships with their peers. This means that it was difficult for them to interact with their peers because it took longer to be accepted into the student community –a situation that led to the teenage mothers failing to cope with their fellow students. Field data indicated that teenage mothers isolated themselves as they were away from the school for a while and when readmitted, they started their school lives afresh. Teenage mothers, however, blamed their teachers for not giving them proper guidance immediately after readmission so as to cope with their colleagues. This exacerbated them to drop out of school again (See Figure 6).



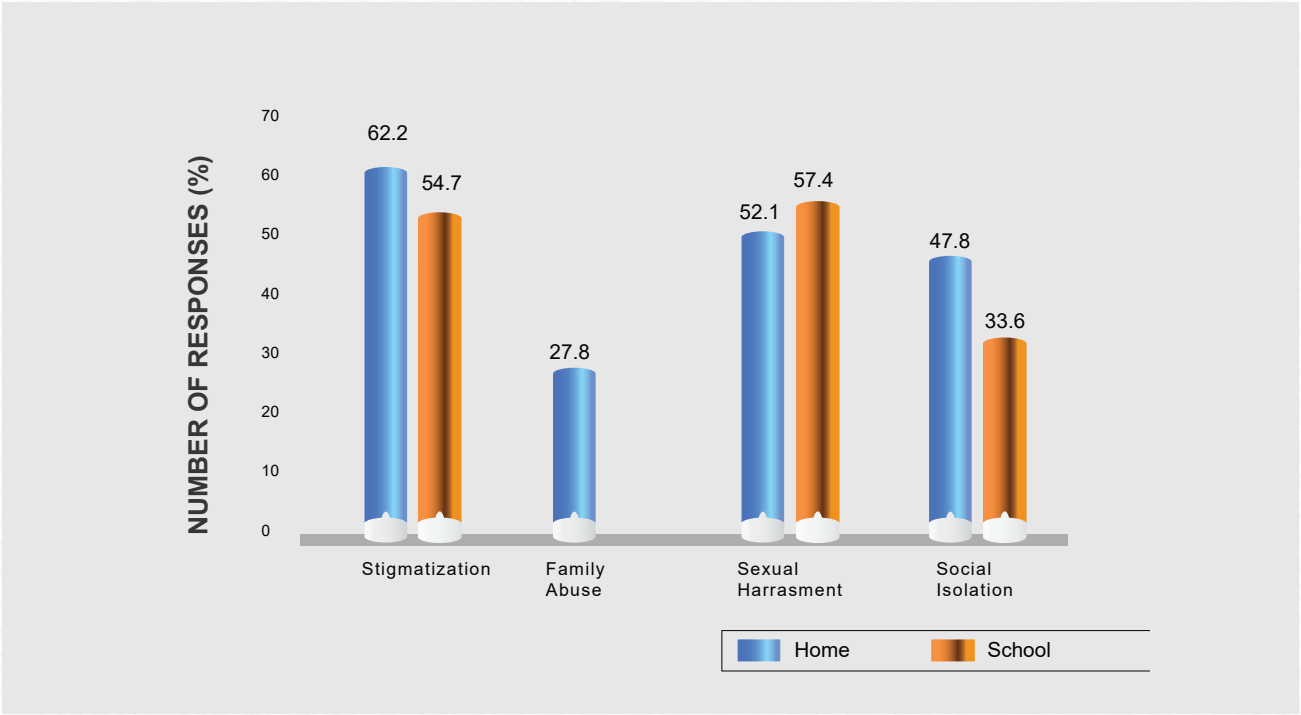


Figure 6: Mistreatment of teenage mothers and pregnant girls.

Teenage mothers also reported being isolated by their peers and disappointed by their teachers. Their fellow students isolated them because they considered them as moral deviants. This affected the confidence of teenage mothers to interact with their colleagues. For instance, one participant said:

> *"I could not return to school because my fellow students could laugh at me. So, if their laughter follows you, you may lose confidence in learning. For example, they could say, "She delivered and returned to school, don't interact with her" (Teen mother).*

The data analysis reveals that although teenage mothers were ready to return to school, social isolation remained to be a challenge to them. Similarly, School teachers noted that some students used harsh language or words, which resulted in teenage mothers to feel embarrassed, hopeless and even unaccepted. They further mentioned that teenage mothers who were returning to school were isolated and subsequently they felt ashamed. School teachers pointed further that their fellow students negatively perceived and teased them and they called them names which indicated that they were mothers since they had babies and hence discriminated against them.

Teenage mothers were also mocked and joked about by family members. For instance, a teenage mother stated, *"You may be at home studying, and someone comes and mocks you, asking since when can parents become educated. Sometimes I am abandoned. That makes me feel inferior and humiliated"* (Teenage mother). These negative perceptions could have a far-reaching effect on retention of the readmitted teenage mothers. Some teenage mothers also reported that they faced some difficulties in balancing academic demands and childcare responsibilities. They felt that there were no conducive childcare options at home, coupled with isolation that left them without support for their children, compromised their ability to prioritize readmission to school.

Sexual harassment

There were also cases of maltreatment such as sexual harassment by peers, relatives or teachers. Figure 6 indicates that teenage mothers (52.1% of responses) and (54.7% of responses) were sexually harassed by the family members at their homes and at school respectively. These practices were reported to affect teenage mothers to return and thrive in formal schools. One participant stated: "*I have been sexually abused by men from the community and family. They want me to have sex with me as they tell me that I am used to and grown up. When I refuse, they call me a prostitute. This situation discouraged me to proceed with studies after being readmitted"* (Teenage mother). Another claim was directed to step fathers in their families who demand sexual favours with precepts that they were grown up. One teenage mother had this perspective:

> *"When you talk to us as teenage mothers, we are facing many challenges. For example, my stepfather abuses me a lot. There was a time when I came to report that this stepfather, who is not my biological father, wanted me for sex... and refused to support my studies. I dealt with this case and achieved to some extent." (Teenage mother).*

Incidents of sexual harassment were also reported within the school context, where peers were found manipulating others into engaging in sexual acts against their personal will. The prevalence of sexual harassment among teenage mothers at schools may lead into difficulties in coping with the school system as they feel unwelcome and unsafe. One of the teenage mothers said:

> *"There are many challenges at school, especially from some boys. They see this as an opportunity to persuade teen mothers into romantic relationships, and if we refuse, they insult and humiliate us. Many boys disturb us and they call names such as "wazazi" (parents), "wamama" (mothers), "wahuni" (thugs), and other names of this kind. I have received numerous cases regarding boys and adult men harassing teenage mothers. This discourages teenage mothers from proceeding with studies". (Teenage mother).*

The quote above gives an impression that teenage mothers struggle to be re-integrate in formal schools which may lead to them to hate school due to sexual harassment. Even when they are readmitted, there is a high chance to drop out due to such uncomfortable conditions.

The implication of incidences of sexual harassment is that there is a moral deterioration in society. When stepfathers, teachers and other community members demand sex from teenage mothers, who could be their own daughters, which is an indication of a high level of moral deterioration in schools and it is against the cultural norms of the community. This indicates that, there is lack of cooperation in the community regarding the upbringing of children, particularly girls who face challenges from community, schools, and home. Child rearing is seen as the responsibility of individual families rather than a collective societal responsibility which makes even some adults dare ask for sex from teenage mothers. Ideally, families, schools, and the community seem to have a varied perspective towards fostering a moral climate among children which detrimentally affects teenage mothers to return to school. In the past, children were viewed as belonging to the community, with everyone having a role in disciplining them. However, this cultural practice is fading, as disciplining another's child is now often considered offensive and can result in conflicts between parents. Cooperation between the community and schools, if taken seriously, could help create a society with strong ethical and moral behaviors. Addressing and preventing sexual harassment in schools is also essential for promoting a safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environment for all students including teenage mothers. It requires holistic awareness strategies and supportive community structures to ensure well-being of all students including teenage mothers.

Family abuse

Teenage mothers also reported that parents victimized them and chased them away from home when they got pregnant. They reported that they felt lonely and embarrassed by their parents and judged themselves as people with no value in the family and society. One participant narrated that:

> *"My parents kicked me out of the house and told all our relatives, including my grandmother, not to accept me because I was pregnant. So, I ended up living on the streets, sleeping in alleyways. However, one day, a kind man found me in an unsafe environment with a big belly and felt sorry for me. He took me to his home. I was very grateful, but his wife did not receive me well. She often mistreated me and gave me difficult tasks. I could not share the mistreatment with anyone else because I felt that I had at least found a place to stay" (Teenage mother).*

The findings further revealed that teenage mothers who lived with step parents experienced more discrimination as compared to those with both biological parents. Teenage mothers complained being treated harshly with the assumption that they would negatively influence other children in the family. To support this, one participant remarked:

> *"I live with my mother and my stepfather. During pregnancy I was asked to reveal the name of the boy who impregnated me, and I did so. The boy's parents then paid some money to ensure their son would not be reported to the police. When the money finished, my mother started mistreating me again, in collaboration with her husband. After giving birth, the conflicts escalated because my mother did not want my child. My stepfather also refused to accept me and my child. Sometimes he would call me a witch and did not want to see me at home." (Teenage mother).*

Data analysis from the above quotes suggests that teenage mothers encounter harsh treatment from their own families –a situation that leads them to feel stressed and disappointed. Teenage mothers also felt receiving limited support from their own families which created fear of losing attachment to their children (See Figure 6).

Research findings further revealed that teenage mothers were affected emotionally and psychologically after discovering that they were pregnant. Some reported that some family members advised them to abort the pregnancy so that they can proceed with studies and avoid becoming a mother at an early age, especially when the men who made them pregnant disappeared and rejected them. One teenage mother stated:

> *"The man who impregnated me disappeared and couldn't provide anything for me. I sometimes received some help from relatives when they had anything to spare. My friends advised me to terminate the pregnancy, but I refused. This advice frustrated me and felt unwanted when the man rejected me" (Teenage mother).*

The implication of this quote is that a rejection by the man who made the girl pregnant exacerbated the feelings of stress and isolation which could lead to emotional and psychological anxiety and stress.

3.2.2 Implicit resistance of re-entry initiatives

This sub-theme highlights the experiences of teenage mothers who encounter rejection, marginalization, discouragement, and pressure to enter into early marriages. The subsequent sections explore each of these sub-themes in depth, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by teenage mothers and the impact of implicit resistance on their lives.

Rejection by Heads of Schools

Teenage mothers expressed various reasons that restricted their return to school after delivery. One of them was rejected by heads of schools. This was frequently reported as the key reason for them not to return to school. In this regard, heads of schools rejected them either by asking them to register into an informal system or being transferred to another school. The reasons for rejection were attributed to peer perception that they would spoil other students and may impair the reputation of the school. Thus, heads of schools claimed a negative image to other students and likely to accelerate other students to fall into the same trap of immoral behavior. To support this narrative, one teen mother reported that:

> *"I went to request that I be readmitted at the same school, but the headmaster rejected. Even my mother went there and was told that it wouldn't be right for me to return there, saying that other students could perceive me negatively" (Teenage mother not returned).*

Teenage mother's expression above is evidence that some heads of schools are ready for students to return to school but not in the formal system or at their former schools.

Marginalization

Despite some parents of teenage mothers being eager to support them if they would repeat the same level of schooling, these teen mothers were somewhat reluctant to be readmitted in the formal education system because of marginalization from the family and society members. Societal judgment played a substantial role in teenage mothers' lack of readiness to be readmitted to formal schools. One of the teenage mothers had this perspective:

> *"I was not ready to return to school because I do not have support from my family. Psychologically, I am not prepared at all to go back to school because of lack of close support from my family and my child will lose my attachment. My family humiliates me and considers me as a person who has no impact in the family. For now, I am not ready at all to be readmitted to school". (Teenage mother)*

Creating a more supportive environment by promoting a culture of inclusiveness both in schools and home is crucial in promoting teenage mothers' readmission. Although teenage mothers perceive a formal schooling as very important to them, the education and social systems seem to have limited support. Most of the claims emanate from limited access to resources and guidance necessary to overcome the challenges that limit their readmission after delivery.



Discouragement

While teenage mothers declared that some teachers in their schools encouraged them to study diligently, their colleagues (i.e., students) and the community discouraged them because they did not believe they would succeed academically. The community, instead, advised teenage mothers that it could be better if they stay at home and take care of their children. One of the participants remarked: *"Why are you bothering to go to school when you have already failed? What's the point? You failed to study early on, and now you think you can handle it while raising a child?" (Teenage mother)*. This suggests that some community members perceived readmission for teenage mothers as a wastage of time. Another participant stated, *"My neighbours consider me 'Msimbe', a term used to describe a girl who gives birth at home". (Teenage Mother).*

The teenage mothers in this study chose to leave school again because, upon their return, they were placed at a lower educational level than the higher level they had previously achieved as one of the teenage mothers remarked:

> *I decided to quit again because, upon my return, I was instructed to join Form One, even though I had left school when I was in Form Four. Honestly, going back to form one was a demoralizing factor for me. Previously, I understood that I would resume my studies at the level where I left off". (Teenage mother)*

> *I love the school, and even if I were told to go back today, I would do so. I only felt discouraged when I was told to return to Form One. I know that if I go back to school, I will have the opportunity to fulfill my dreams, which currently seem shattered. I feel disheartened at times, you know, in life, everyone has their goals, so I would like to continue with my education. (Teenage mother).*

These quotes confirm that school leaders were less aware of the school re-entry guideline and how it should be implemented. The findings further revealed that communities have a negative attitude towards teenage mothers who returned to schools as they discourage them from proceeding with studies as they perceive them to have unacceptable behaviors that could spoil innocent colleagues. This notion by parents suggests that teenage mothers returning to school are highly embarrassed and feel unsupported, hence discouraged to proceed with studies.

3.2.3 Unwelcoming learning environment

Teenage mothers identified some conditions that they encountered during their pregnancy and motherhood. They were also able to demonstrate how such conditions affected them as students and mothers both at home and their school contexts. This has been illustrated underneath.

Labeling

Teenage mothers who returned to school, dropped out after returning to school, and those who did not return to school were asked to provide their experiences on how they felt or were treated during pregnancy and motherhood. They identified a number of challenges they faced after being pregnant, which include mistreatment at home and school (See Figure 7).

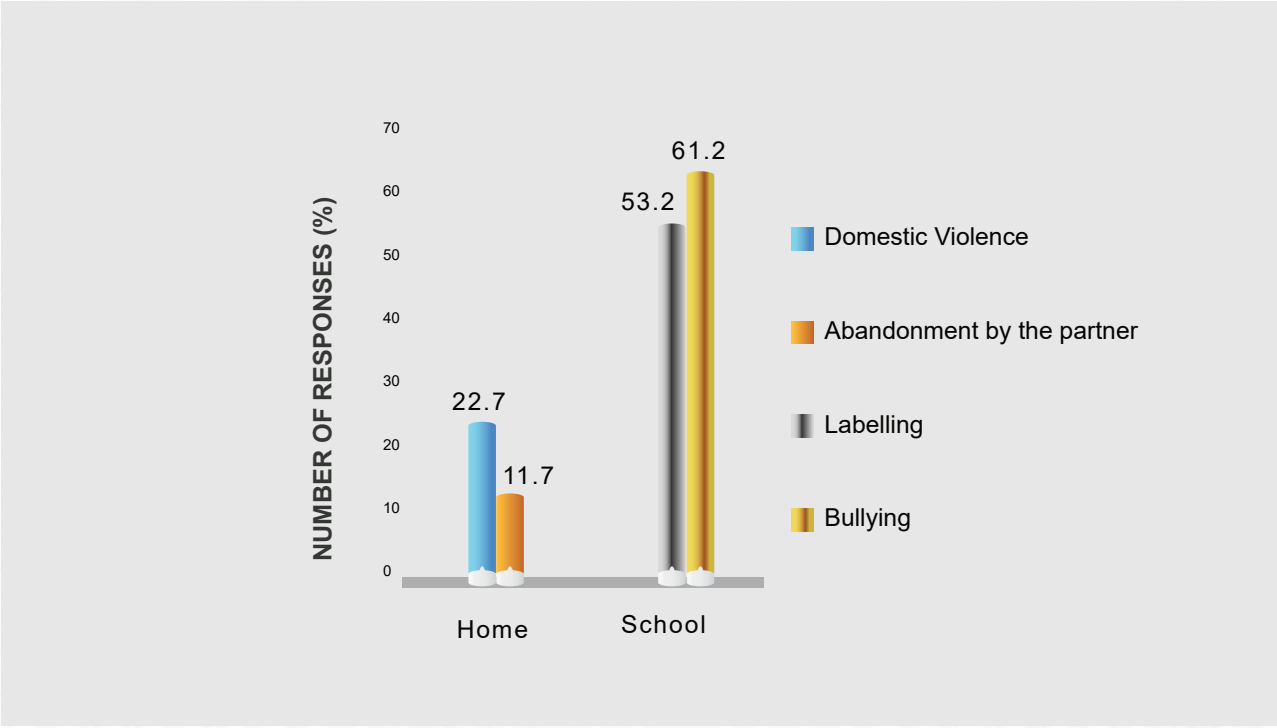


Figure 7: Teenage mothers' treatment at home and school.

For instance, teenage mothers indicated that they were labeled. Teenage mothers perceived themselves as adults and believed that such an environment was not conducive and supportive for them. Although some participants emphasized that each school should emphasize respect to all regardless of their conditions, this was not the case in some schools. On this, one teenage mother said, *"I am mistreated with my fellow students, they always talk behind their back, calling me a mother. This is really disappointing to me to continue with my studies" (Teenage mother).* Some teenage mothers reported infrastructure such as lack of changing rooms to be a big challenge to them. This resulted into difficulties to cope with the school environment after the readmission.

Similarly, 62.8% and 77.9% of the responses respectively indicated that teenage mothers were exposed to unsafe environments at school and home. They included aspects such as unclean water, inadequate latrines and medical centers. In the respondents' views, a safe learning environment was seen in various dimensions which include the nature of the classrooms. One of the teenage mothers stated: "*The learning environments, such as classrooms, are not conducive, and should be attractive and conducive. As well all students should be allowed to be in the formal system without discrimination". (Teenage mother).*

Bullying

The teen mothers reported to experience bullying from their colleagues at school which affected them negatively on their wellbeing and education progress (see figure 7). They also experienced mockery and belittlement from their fellow students, as one teenage mother noted:

> *My colleagues when I pass through where they are in a group, they loudly mock me, saying, ohh look at a stupid teenage mother, she likes to perform things which are beyond her age and against our culture. (Teenage mother)*

This suggests that bullying can discourage teenage mothers from active participation in daily school activities, causing emotional stress and discouraging interactions with their peers and ultimately may lead to reluctance to attend school or cause absenteeism that can hinder their educational progress.

Domestic violence

The findings revealed that teenage mothers encountered domestic violence at home which hindered them to ask for help because they were mistreated by close family members and fear of being labeled or judged negatively and worried about the custody of their children and because of this some reported to have decided to drop out from school (see Figure 7). A teenage mothers reported,

> *"I was physically hated by my relatives when they discovered that I was pregnant, my step father sexually forced me to have sex with him. Sometimes when I asked for financial support what I got was abuse and harsh words. (Teenage mother).*

The analysis on the quotation above indicates that teenage mothers experienced domestic violence from family members and this can affect their ability to trust the family members as it affects them psychologically. The domestic violence also interferes with the teenage mothers' ability to take care of their children and may lead to re-dropout from school.

Multiple responsibilities

Some teenage mothers cited their inability to return to school, attributing it to the need to manage various household responsibilities, including child care and family support. There was a lot of concern that some teenage mothers left school after being readmitted because their schools, families, and communities did not provide adequate assistance, including offering childcare and safety (See Figure 8).

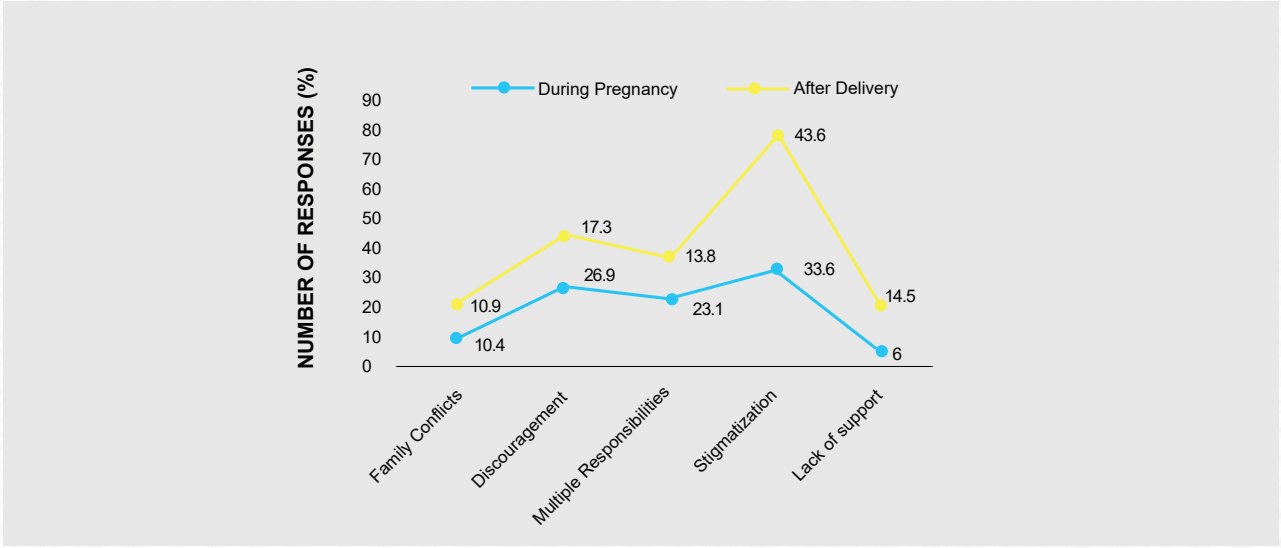


Figure 8: Experiences of teenage mothers re-admitted to school.

Teenage mothers were also noted to have engaged in petty businesses. These responsibilities could interfere with their studies. Other than engaging in multiple responsibilities, most of the teenage mothers did not have caregivers to take care of their children when they were at school or engaged in other business. Most of them were not able to afford paying for caregivers. In some cases, parents who were expected to take care of the children of teenage mothers refused to take such a responsibility. As a result, this situation could jeopardize both the children's well-being and the teenage mothers' ability to return to school. The following quotation by one of the teen mothers represents these sentiments: *"I don't have money to pay caregivers to take care of my child when I am busy with studies, so I face a challenge of balancing the two; academic and childcare responsibilities. (Teenage Mother)*

Family conflict

Alongside social stigma, family conflict emerged between teenage mothers and parents, especially when the former got pregnant (See Figure 8). Parents saw these teenage mothers as having committed serious mistakes and thus were perceived as prostitutes. Sometimes family conflicts emerged because the fathers of babies refused to take responsibility, particularly in terms of the provision of basic needs and other services. Parents felt overwhelmed with numerous responsibilities which included taking care of teen mothers and their children. There were also complaints that some parents were ready to leave the teen mothers with their mothers alone as remarked by one of the teen mothers:

> *"My father held grudges against the father of my child. He went to their family, resulting in threats and intense conflicts that eventually led the father of my child to flee from his home". (Teenage mother).*

On the other hand, some teenage mothers with their children sought employment far away from their homes as domestic workers in order to avoid any more conflict with their parents. However, when these teenage mothers faced difficulties, they returned home. While some parents assumed responsibility for caring for the teenage mothers and their children, conflicts increased for others, ultimately leading to the rejection of both the teenage mothers and their children. Other teenage mothers pointed out that when their parents were angry, especially during their pregnancy, they decided to go far away from their home villages for a while as they believed that engaging in arguments with their parents would intensify more conflicts.

3.2.4 Reasons for teenage mothers not returning to school after dropout

Teenage mothers provided a range of insights and experiences regarding the factors that deterred them from returning to school after childbirth. These factors encompass a variety of personal, social, and systemic issues, including:

Lack of awareness

Many teenage mothers were enthusiastic to return to school, but some of them were not aware of the school re-entry initiative (see Figure 9). Those who were not aware of the initiative said they knew the school rules did not offer them such an opportunity. For example, one said: *"What I know is that if you get pregnant, you can no longer continue with your studies. Because the school rules did not allow me to return to school after giving birth" (Teen mother not returned).* Some teenage mothers did not provide authentic justification for them not to return to school after delivery. For example, one said: *"I didn't have any reason to not return to school. It was my decision. I saw that my education ended here, and I will employ myself" (Teenage mother not returned).*

Poverty

Most of the teenage mothers came from poverty-stricken families. Due to poverty, teenage mothers were likely to face financial problems such as having inadequate money for transport to and from school, buying food and school supplies, and for taking care of their children. Consequently, this could also force them to engage in income generating activities such as running petty businesses and prostitution (See Figure 9).

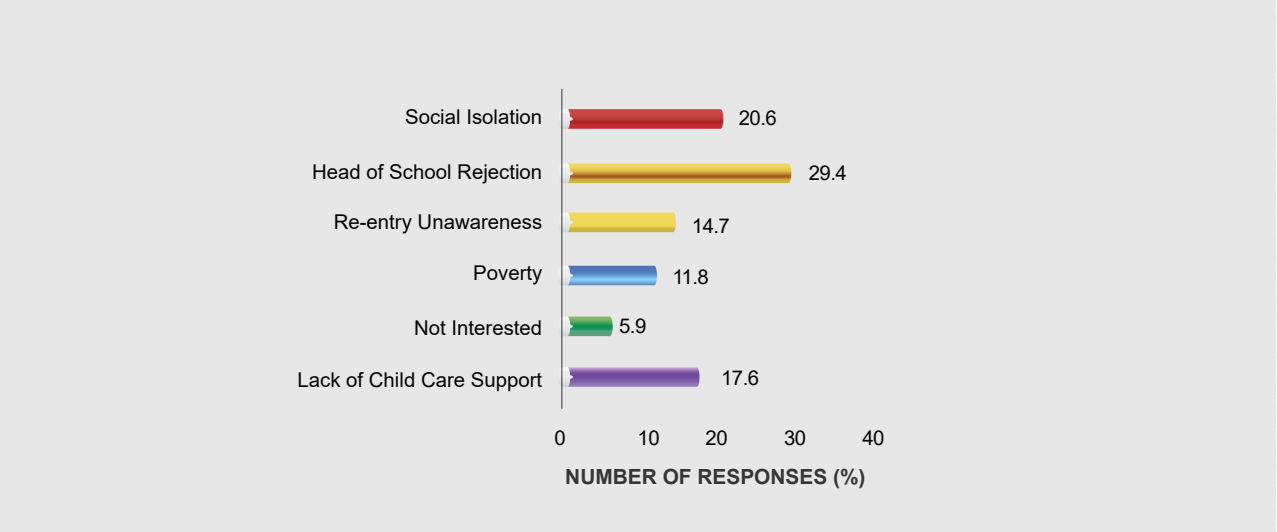


Figure 9: Reasons for failure to return to school.

These activities, among other things, could interfere with time for studying. Consequently, poverty can hinder teenage mothers from going back to school. The following quotations reflect these views. Although not adequately illustrated, some teachers were of the opinion that many girls who get pregnant come from economically disadvantaged families, and those responsible for the pregnancies often run away. Participants indicated that poverty plays a significant role in driving girls to leave school and resort into illegal means of survival at night, such as soliciting financial support from men to provide for their children and themselves. One teenage mother noted:

> *"I failed to go back to school because I lacked basic needs. Difficult life at home and lacking the necessary requirements for both my child and myself. My parents are poor and unable to buy school uniforms, stationeries, nutritious food for my child when I am away from school and other basic needs" (Teen mother).*

It was reported further that poverty affected teenage mothers because they had to take care of themselves and their children. One teenage mother remarked:

> *"I see that if I go back to school, then who will be in charge of taking care of my child at home, so I go to the street to find something to do to get money in order to be able to support the family" (Teenage mother).*

This means that if teenage mothers were supported financially, they would be in the position to readmit.

3.2.5 Support provided to teenage mothers to thrive in school

Guidance and counselling

Both school heads and teachers pointed out that they mostly provided guidance and counselling to their readmitted teenage mothers (See Figure 10).

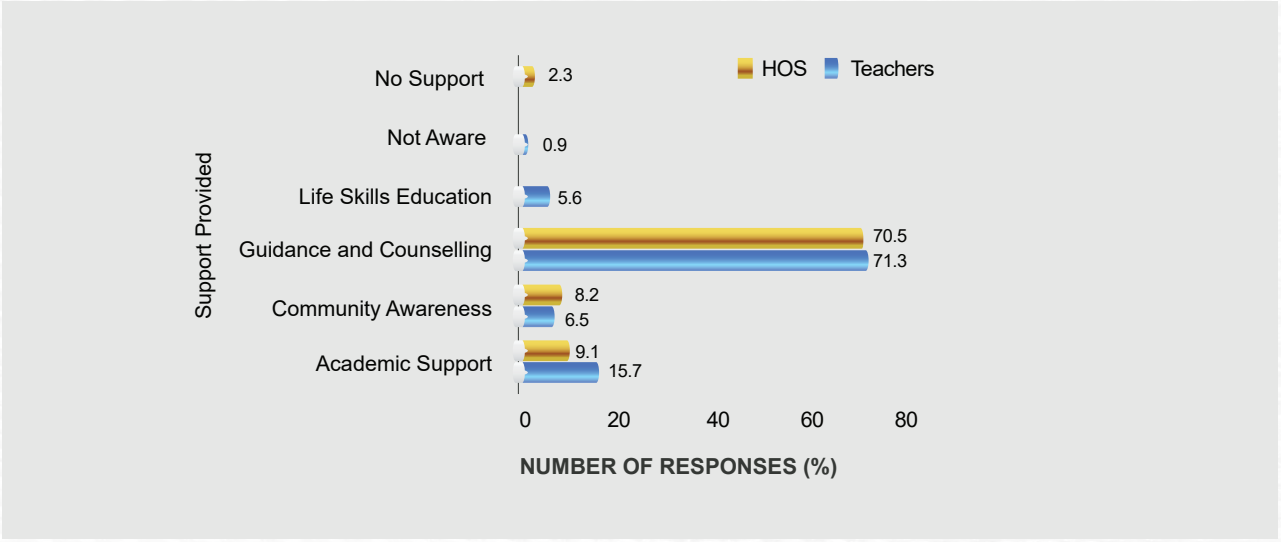


Figure 10: Support provided to teen mothers for adjusting to school.

Teenage mothers were given adequate time to be heard so that they do not feel excluded or isolated. The teachers asserted that teenage mothers were reminded to refrain from behaviors that would compromise them to succeed academically. One of the participants made this comment:

> *"We advise teenage mothers to collaborate with their peers while avoiding groups that may discourage them from pursuing their studies. We also encourage these mothers not to feel ashamed or inferior." (Teacher)*

Teenage mothers in schools offering guidance and counseling were found to develop more positive attitudes towards learning and feel safer compared to those in schools without such support.

The school heads believed that guidance and counselling mainly enhanced awareness creation between and among teenage mothers, and subsequently they developed self-confidence (See Figure 11).

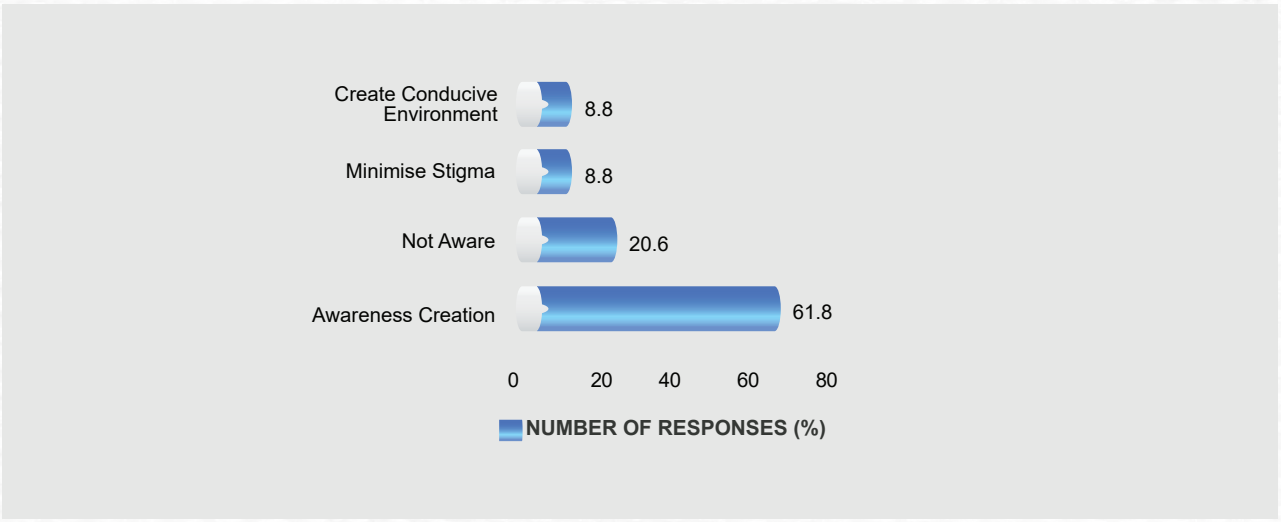


Figure 11: Ways teen mothers benefit from Guidance and Counseling

Life Skills

Participants identified a number of support mechanisms that are in place to help teenage mothers adjust and cope after they return to school. Whilst a certain percentage of teachers' responses indicated that schools offered life skills to teenage mothers so that they can have self-identity and gain confidence to fulfill their dreams,

the school heads rarely mentioned this particular aspect (See Figure 10). The teachers said that they teach entrepreneur skills to enable teenage mothers to be self-reliant upon completion of their studies. However, the teachers were unable to adequately establish a clear link between the identified skills and the ability of teenage mothers to adjust and cope with school context as can be noted here in the following excerpt.

> *"The first way we assist them is by teaching them life skills so that they can have self-identity and gain confidence to fulfill their dreams. This subject includes life skills such as cooking, tailoring, and other activities that upon completion, they can either pursue for self-employment or use to generate income to support their children and themselves." (Teacher)*

Academic support

Some school heads acknowledged that alongside academic support, their schools provided economic assistance in order to make them have settled minds in their learning practices (See Figure 12).

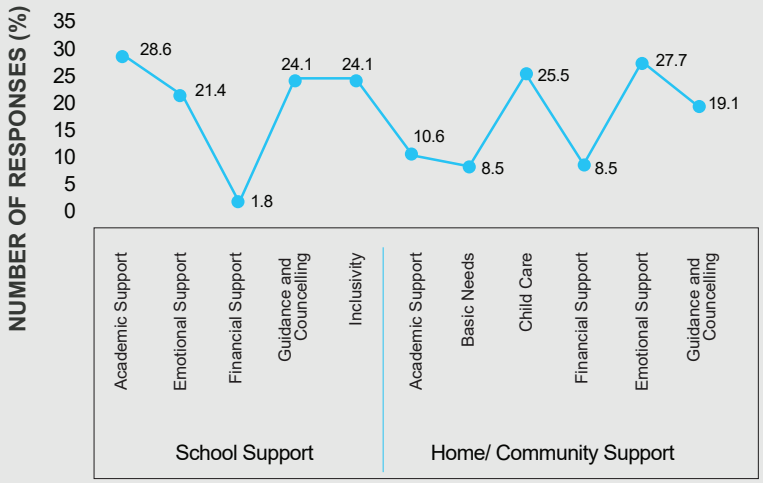


Figure 12: The support teenage mothers need.

While a certain number of school heads' responses indicated that no support was offered to teenage mothers in order to adjust and cope after they return to school, some teachers were not aware about whether or not their schools performed this particular role. To some extent, however, teachers and school heads claimed that they provided academic support to the readmitted teenage mothers. This support played a vital role in promoting academic success for a few teenage mothers who had such an opportunity. The following quotes reflect the benefits of the academic support teenage mothers received.

> *"Teachers give me good help, they teach me and counsel me every day that I should not give up, they insist me to have a determination of passing exams" (Teenage mother)*

> *"My fellow students offer me academic help. If I don't understand a certain subject, they help me to understand it, and they also provide me with study notes. Furthermore, they offer to stay with me and guide me while studying." (Teenage mother)*

Teenage mothers also reported that their teachers provided them with advice, learning resources for self-study, and even provided strategies for success. They were also guided in their lessons if they did not capture well

during classroom teaching. It was evident that some teachers granted teenage mothers with permission to leave after the sessions ended.

3.2.6 Support services that teenage mothers need

Schools learning support

Some teenage mothers' responses (27%) wished they could receive academic support while some responses (24%) expected to receive guidance and counselling and to be inclusively integrated in the school system. The other 21.4% of teenage mothers' responses expected to receive emotional support in terms of being loved, respected, trusted, accepted, forgiven, and being in a peaceful state of mind. Emotional support seemed to be necessary for them because they were harassed, scorned, and abused. On the other hand, only 2% of teenage mothers' responses expected to receive financial support. This finding is not surprising because data from the interviews revealed that schools hardly supported teenage mothers financially. Most of the school heads and teachers revealed that it was the responsibility of the parents to support teenage mothers. However, this study recommends that schools should establish mechanisms to provide financial support to teenage mothers.

Family and Community support

Teenage mothers also expected to receive support from home and the community. Some teenage mothers wished to receive emotional support (28% of responses) and childcare (26% of responses). The need for childcare support was significant because this could ensure the physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing of the children. To effectively take care of their children, most of the teenage mothers wished to have childcare centers at school or in the neighborhood. This would likely give teenage mothers more time for studying and concentrating in their learning.

The study also showed that some of the teenage mothers (19% of responses) were expecting to receive guidance and counselling from the community. While others (11% of responses) indicated that teenage mothers were expecting to receive academic support, yet others (9% of responses) showed these mothers were expecting to get basic needs and financial support (See Figure 12).

The expectation of minimal basic needs and financial support from the community among teenage mothers can be linked to one main reason. Thus, many teenage mothers reported receiving limited basic needs and financial assistance from the community.



3.2.7 Reasons for dropout of teenage mothers after returning to schools

Financial limitations

To some extent, the responses from teenage mothers (2.2%) show that financial limitations is one of the reasons for their dropout after they returned to school (See Figure 13).

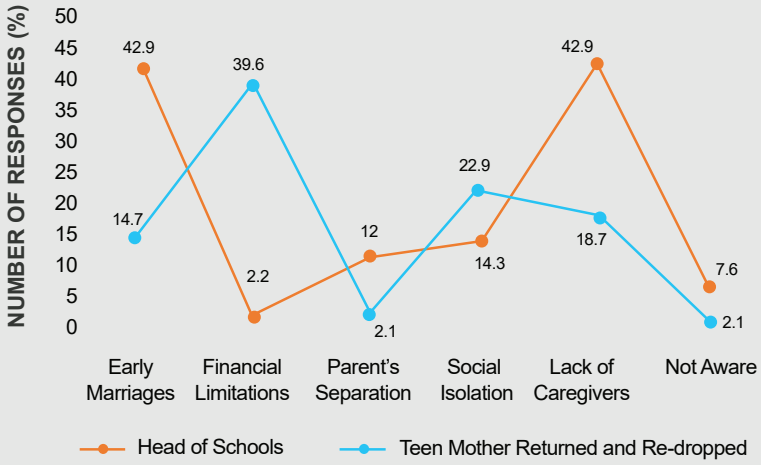


Figure 13: Reasons for dropout of teenage mothers after re-entry.

School heads, however, believed that teenage mothers somewhat did not return to school because of poor family economic status. One school head mentioned this:

> *"We had one student and was doing very well in class, but when her child fell ill, her mother told her that I don't have money to treat your child, so you have to work so that you can treat your child yourself, so the daughter had to leave school." (Head of school)*

Although it is reported that basic education is fees free, still, the financial limitations among teenage mothers make them fail to afford their personal and school needs such as study materials and transportation to school. This was attested by one of the education officials who noted that:

> *"Even though the government allows teenage mothers to return and study for free, the government cannot cover their personal needs such as clothing, shoes, ointments, medical expenses, etc., as many of them do not have health insurance. Most of the girls facing these challenges come from very difficult backgrounds. This prevents many of them from returning to school due to these challenges." (Education official)*

The financial limitations experienced by teenage mothers has lead to limited ability for mothers to balance their parental responsibilities with their learning goals in formal schools. Establishing better mechanisms to address these financial limitations among teenage mothers would enhance equal opportunities to be readmitted and to thrive in the formal education system.

Lack of caregivers

In order for teenage mothers to concentrate in studies they require childcare support from family members. However, this seemed to be different for most of them as teenage mothers expressed their sentiments on lacking caregivers whom they could leave with their children. Therefore, they opted not to return to school in order to take care of their children. Furthermore, lacking care givers resulted in teenage mothers' multiple responsibilities (child rearing, home chores and studies). This in turn affected their ambition to return to school as they could not manage to perform all these responsibilities as one teenage mother reported *"I decided to wait for my child to grow up a bit because my mother is busy with her business, maybe when the child grows up, they can stay with my mother-in-law" (Teen mother not returned).* However, this could be accommodated through employing a child caregiver. However, as reported by teenage mothers, financial difficulties within their families denied them this opportunity. Consequently, they were unable to hire a caregiver, leading them to decide against returning to school. One said: *"I don't have someone to take care of my child and parents have no money to employ a caregiver. It was not possible for me to continue with my studies" (Teen mother not returned).*

Evidence from this study also indicates that readmitted teenage mothers dropped out of school because they lacked individuals to take care of their children. The assumption here is that parents rarely took part in taking care of teenage mothers' children which is against the re-entry guideline. If parents would undertake this particular task, teenage mothers would remain focused on their studies. The opposite would have affected the psychological well-being of teenage mothers. Negative attitudes from peer students and the school community was a threat for teenage mothers as teenage mothers felt their learning environment was a challenge for them to succeed in academic terms. One of teenage mother remarked:

> *"The environment of the school when I entered was not good because I went there when I was studying, my classmates knew me well, so those who knew me were laughing at me and this is the main reason that led me to leave". (Teenage mother).*

It should be noted here that when teenage mothers have no one to take care of their children at home, they feel stressed which makes it harder for them to focus on studies as a result dropping out becomes inevitable.

Parents' separation

Although parents' separation was rarely mentioned, the study findings revealed that some of the readmitted teenage mothers dropped out of school because their parents did not live together or divorced after their daughters were identified to be pregnant. In light of this, teenage mothers decided to return home to take care of their children and perform other family responsibilities. One participant was quoted saying: *"My pregnancy caused conflict and separation. When my parents separated, often my father blamed the mother for failing to raise me properly, resulting in getting pregnant" (Teenage mother).* The participants went on to illustrate that parents' separation or divorce led to some teenage mothers losing confidence in returning to school because they lacked individuals to support them economically and emotionally.



3.2.8 Opportunities of school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers

Second chance for learning

The school re-entry intervention for teen mothers offers valuable chances that can positively influence their lives. Responses from teachers (51%) and teenage mothers (23.1%) revealed that school re-entry intervention provides teenage mothers an opportunity or second chance to continue with education and develop essential academic skills for future achievement (See Figure 14).

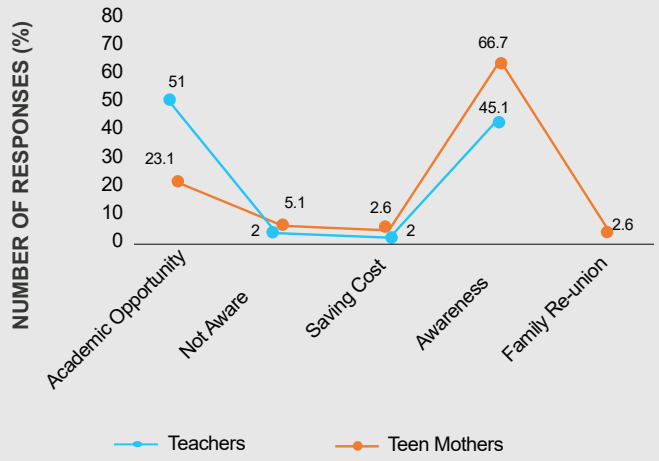


Figure 14: Opportunities provided by the re-entry program.

One of the teenage mothers exemplified this: "*This guideline has provided me an opportunity to return to school and continue with studies without paying fees. It is like a privilege because we only buy notebooks" (Teenage mother).* A teacher also noted that, *"It is an opportunity to reclaim the lost education opportunities. Returning to school is an opportunity already because if they would have been left, it would have been more challenging. Some become self-aware and study hard and succeed because they regret the mistakes they made." (Teacher).* School re-entry intervention has given the opportunity of changing positively the attitude of some community members towards these girls. Teenage mothers who returned to school were respected and valued, reunited with their family and some community members have been motivated to bring them back to school so that they can continue with their studies. In other words, the school re-entry initiative has revived their determination and goals for teenage mothers.

The responses from teenage mothers (66.7%) and teachers (45.1%) showed that they were aware of the opportunities for school re-entry. A few teenage mothers were, however, not aware of the opportunities that school re-entry intervention offered to them. Limited understanding of the school re-entry initiative by teenage mothers may result into missed opportunities for readmission to school after delivery.

Goal achievement

The study revealed that self-determination and social advice were among the opportunities resulting from the adoption of the school reentry guideline (See Figure 15).

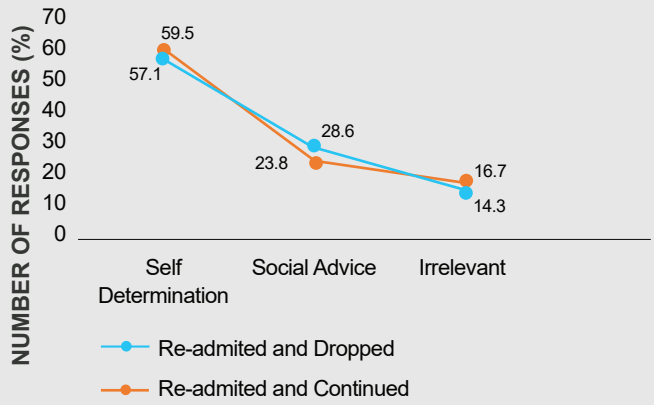


Figure 15: Motives for teenage mothers' re-admission.

Teenage mothers acknowledged that the initiative helped them to fulfill their life goals and their children as one stated: *"The school re-entry initiatives helped me to fulfill my dreams. In addition to that, it was for the sake of my child and for my own wellbeing" (Teen mother returned).* In addition, another participant added: "Life at home was very challenging, my relatives were pointing fingers at me, so I felt it was better to return to school" (Teen mother returned). These quotes suggest that after the adoption of the school re-entry initiative, teenage mothers were motivated to readmit in schools.

3.3 Experience of school administrators and teachers on school re-entry initiative

3.3.1 School system preparedness

School administrators and teachers provided diverse perspectives and experiences about school system preparedness on re-admitting teenage mothers in formal schools. The subsequent section presents the sub themes that emerged.

Limited awareness of the school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers

Heads of schools, teachers, and teenage mothers (who did not return to school) were asked about their awareness about the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers. The participants provided varied perspectives in relation to how they interpreted the school re-entry guideline. Some participants, for example, were of the opinion that the school re-entry initiative focused on integrating teenage mothers into the school systems. These participants seldom identified the category of schooling systems (e.g., formal or non-formal) in which teenage mothers should be integrated. In some instances, the participants pointed out that the school run-entry guideline for teenage mothers was about involving different stakeholders. Some participants related school re-entry initiatives with the education offered by adult education in the alternative pathways. They reported that alternative pathways provide flexible learning options where a teenage mother can get time to take care of her child. What appears to be surprising about these findings is that even some teachers and heads of schools were not aware of the school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers as the following quotations illustrate:

> *"I, as a teacher, have not understood that guideline but I just hear advertisements and government directives. We did not expect it, it is something new for our country." (Teacher)*

> *"Education should be provided to all education stakeholders so that they can understand the implementation of this guideline. This is because some students are being rejected in their schools and directed to alternative pathways/centers due to limited awareness." (Teacher)*

It was evident that some school heads had limited understanding of how the school re-entry guideline should be implemented. They only perceived that the school re-entry guideline is about allowing girls who got pregnant while at school to return so that they can realize their dreams. This was supported by the education officer who stated that:

> *"One of the challenges we have discovered is that despite our efforts to provide information and distribute documents quickly, when we visit certain areas, we find that some officials have a lack of understanding about this document and the implementation of the guideline" (DEO).*

In some instances, the school heads required the teenage mothers who were enthusiastic to be readmitted to write an application letter for consideration. In their interviews, the school heads declared that they advised teenage mothers to register through non-formal centers. To a certain extent, the school heads declared that it was important for them to learn more about the guideline requirements. It was further noted that although some participants were aware of the school re-entry guideline, the readmission procedures for teenage mothers remain problematic.

Coordination of the school re-entry intervention

When asked how the school re-entry intervention for teenage mothers was coordinated, the WEOs and DEOs had varied responses. Their responses indicate that monitoring progress was highly prioritized as compared to other mechanisms (See Figure 16).

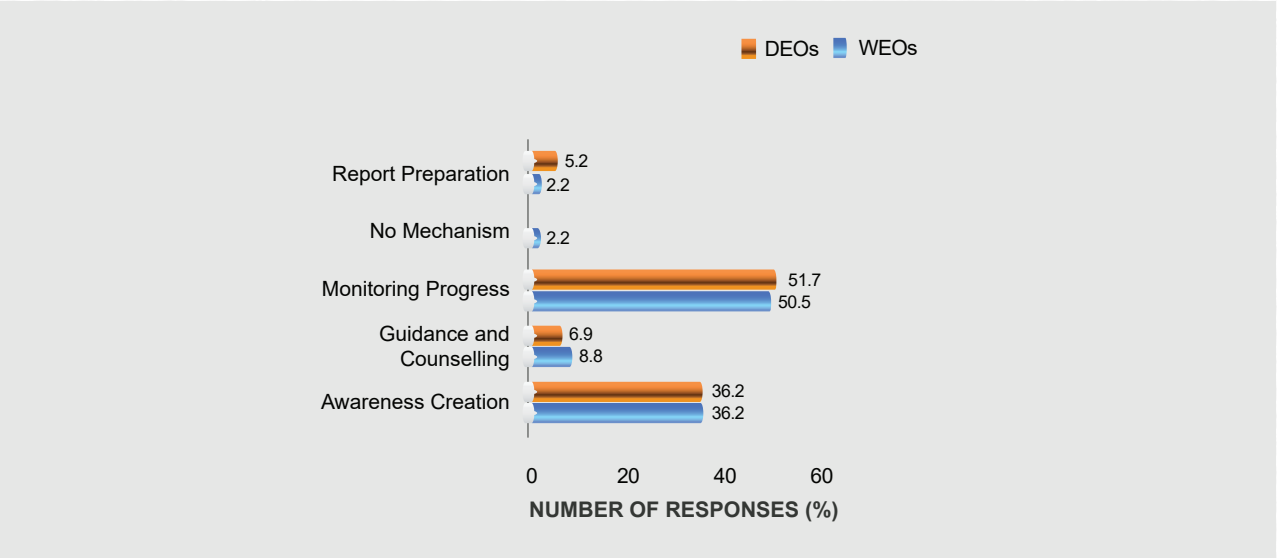


Figure 16: Ways to coordinate the re-entry guideline.

The WEOs and DEOs monitored and tracked teenage mothers who dropped out of school due to pregnancy and ensured that they return to school and attend lessons as one WEO noted:

> *"I also make sure that the girls attend classes as required. I actively participate in resolving challenges that may hinder the teenage mothers from attending classes" (WEO). Another WEO reported: "We track other students who unfortunately got pregnant and stay at home, feeling that their dreams have come to an end. Therefore, we follow up on them by identifying their situation through schools, so that they can return to school". (WEO).*

The education officials consistently asserted that strengthening monitoring strategies is crucial in attempting to ensure that teenage mothers return to school and perform well in their examinations.

Although the education officials monitored the implementation of the school re-entry guideline, they scarcely reported how they evaluated and provided feedback to the implementers of the school re-entry guideline. This may compromise the school re-entry guideline accomplishment as it was apparent from this study that the DEOs and WEOs coordinated the school re-entry guideline through awareness creation. They also emphasized the need to raise awareness about the significance and advantages of readmission, as well as the importance of preventing early-age pregnancies as one DEO noted, *"Towards the end of last year, we began conducting training sessions to raise awareness about the legitimacy of these girls returning to school and the impact of early pregnancies" (DEO).* Despite being important, the WEOs and DEOs demonstrated limited understanding of using guidance and counseling as a remedy to helping teenage mothers feel comfortable after their return to school. The DEO, for example, said:

> *"I provide guidance and counseling to students and their parents who have given birth. They receive advice on how to live with the child and the student who has given birth, ensuring that they are not burdened with stress and deteriorating the child's health, ultimately enabling them to continue their studies successfully".*

Guidance and counseling helped to avoid teenage mothers from getting into pregnancy temptation again as well as academic and emotional challenges.

It is possible that limited understanding among education officials can lead to variations in interpretations of the school re-entry guideline and offer inappropriate services to teenage mothers. As a result, some teenage mothers faced difficulties in being readmitted to formal schools. The DEOs and WEOs were, however, concerned that the school re-entry guideline monitoring endeavours were constrained by limited awareness and resources (See Figure 17).

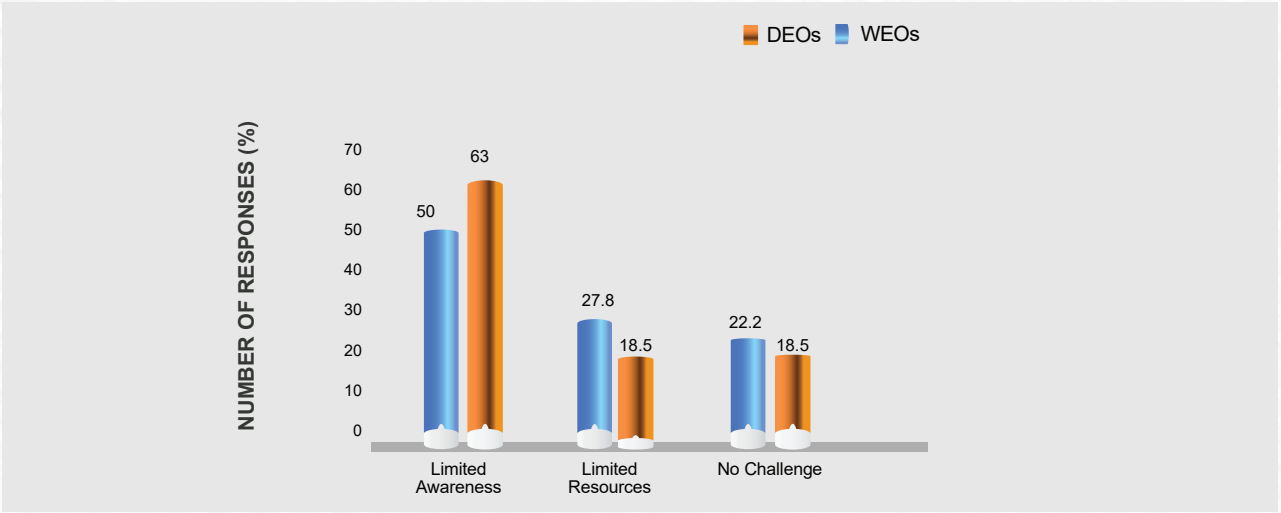


Figure 17: Challenges facing monitoring of re-entry program.

The community was reported to be reluctant in allowing the teenage mother to readmit due to negative attitudes as one of the DEOs reported: *"The biggest challenge on part of the community is the lack of interest in these guideline being in the school for fear of the children in the school that they might learn bad behavior from their peers" (DEO).* Another DEO illustrated that: *"A student needs food, notebooks, and transportation from home to school. All of these factors compel a girl to seek assistance outside of her parents' support, leading to an unexpected pregnancy or not returning to school". (DEO).*

It is possible that limited understanding among education officials can lead to variations in interpretations of the school re-entry guideline and offer inappropriate services to teenage mothers. As a result, some teenage mothers faced difficulties during readmission into the formal schooling system.

Inadequate training

Inadequate training among teachers and other education officials was noted as an obstacle in implementation of the school re-entry guideline. It was reported that most teachers and school administrators lacked adequate knowledge and skills in executing the guideline. On this, one WEO reported,

> *"Majority of people are not aware of the school re-entry. Providing education at all levels, including school administrators, parents, and students, is crucial. Sometimes these girls who have given birth face self-discrimination and are also discriminated against by others. If they receive sufficient education, it will help them build confidence." (WEO)*

> *"Nevertheless, there is still limited understanding about the importance of girls who have given birth returning to school. This lack of understanding exists at both the school and community levels. These girls are still not well received, and the stigma surrounding them is significant." (WEO)*

It was further reported that there were no specific preparations made to ensure that school counselors are in place and well informed about the school re-entry guideline as one teacher stated:

> *"The majority of stakeholders are not aware of the guideline due to inadequate awareness creation and dissemination of the guideline. Need training to councilors is crucial as they are important stakeholders in ensuring the implementation of the school re-entry guideline". (Teacher)*

Lack of specific counselors to implement the school re-entry guideline gives an impression that they lacked the necessary knowledge to provide the psychological support needed by the teenage mothers. This is potentially hindering the reintegration of teenage mothers into the formal education system.

Limited resources

Perspectives varied widely among district education officials (DEOs), ward education officials (WEOs), and officials from the Ministry of Education, President's Office - Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) regarding the resources available to support the school re-entry guideline. Unlike DEOs, other education officials (such as WEOs, heads of schools, and PO-RALG) believed that no specific resources were allocated for the effective implementation of this guideline. They argued that once teenage mothers return to school, they are treated as regular students, with the government continuing to provide capitation grants without additional support for their personal needs. One of the DEOs noted that:

"The capitation grants which each school receives were used for purchasing learning resources for all students including the teenage mothers. Other needs such as school uniforms are still the responsibility of parents".

In terms of human resources, the education officials said that teen mothers are taught by similar teachers (human resources) available in the formal secondary school systems. This means that no specific resources for teenage mothers were allocated.

The education officials expressed their concern that lack of funding and transport compromised their ability to effectively monitor the school re-entry guideline implementation practices as it compromised the monitoring endeavours of the school re-entry guideline implementation. More essentially, these education officials lacked funds to purchase vehicles to visit schools in order to get feedback about the guideline execution. Absence of transport was also a challenge for education officials to make follow-up on the school re-entry guideline implementation, especially in remote areas. Although the school re-entry guideline was introduced for the sake of increasing access to education for marginalized groups including teenage mothers, most government officials reported that there were no specific resources allocated to implement the guideline in the formal education system as noted by one of the education officials who commented that:

"There are no specific funds set aside for this because it's not like a group of students is being isolated and studying separately, so they are not allocated their own budget. Because she returns to the classroom and enters the same official system. That means she receives all the services that a student should receive. So, we don't have a specific allocation because we don't have specific students of that kind." (Educational official)

Overall, limited funding was challenging for the education officials to effectively track the progress of the school re-entry guideline implementation. It would make sense that additional funding apart from the capitation grants be provided at schools so that teenage mothers benefit from the formal schooling.

Inadequate support

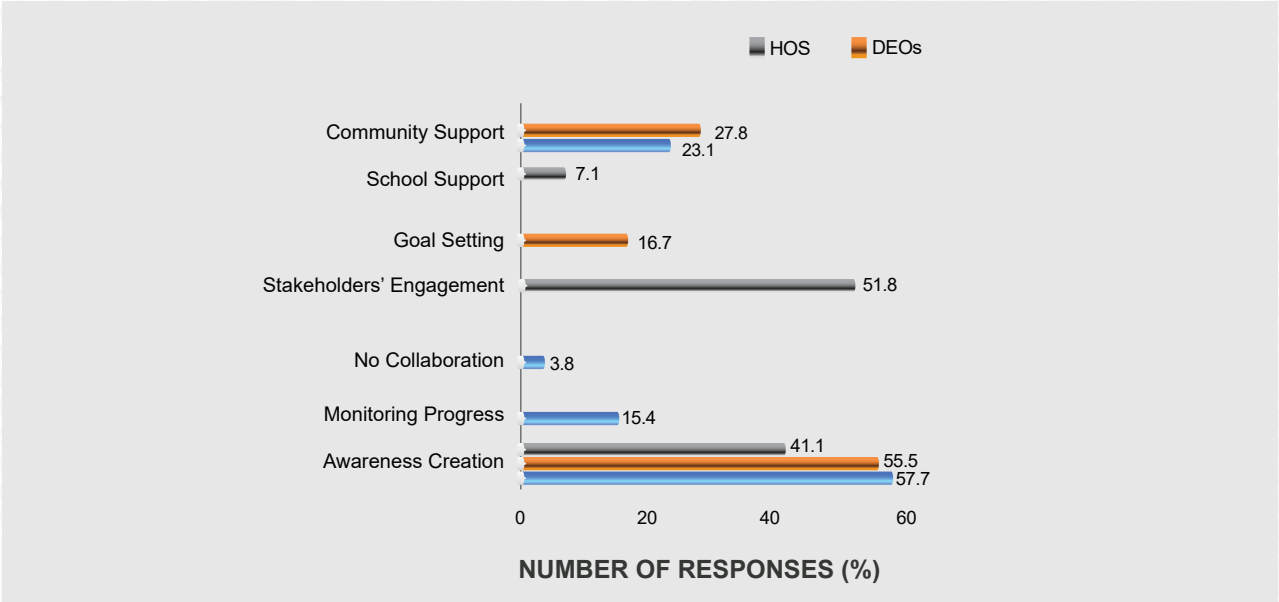


Figure 18: Ways of engaging stakeholders to ensure teen mothers are re-admitted.

Education officials used a number of ways to collaborate with various stakeholders in their attempt to ensure that all teenage mothers return to school after giving birth. Figure 18 indicates that school heads, district education officers, and ward education officer's work collaboratively with other stakeholders for the aim of creating awareness.

Some of the stakeholders who collaborated with these education officials include parents, teachers, social welfare workers, and non-governmental Organizations. The community and parents were made aware of the need to bring teenage mothers back to school. Despite these initiatives, the living conditions of teenage mothers' families remained challenging. There was also a recognition that through collaboration, education about avoiding more pregnancies for teenage mothers was prioritized for them to excel academically. Education about how to cope with the school environment was also offered. One participant, for example, stated: *"We advise teenage mothers that they may even face ridicule from their peers, but they should not worry about this. The most important thing is for them to focus on their studies and fulfill their dreams." (WEO)* Teacher-parent and school-community meetings were also undertaken to emphasize on positive handling of girls' pregnancy related challenges.

Whilst the WEOs and DEOs noted that they enlisted community support in order to help teenage mothers return to school, the school heads seldom mentioned this. The former reported that they persuaded stakeholders to support schools in terms of accommodation for girls, especially for the victim and vulnerable groups including teenage mothers. One of the DEOs illustrated, *"In collaboration with stakeholders, we create a peaceful and friendly environment that enables girls and teenage mothers to learn diligently and in a calm atmosphere".* Unlike the DEOs and school heads, a few WEOs' responses showed that no collaboration was done in relation to helping teenage mothers return to school after giving birth (See Figure 18). The heads of schools and WEOs were not adequately oriented by the education officials on how to implement the school re-entry guideline in their schools. Capacity building would, therefore, enhance WEOs and heads of schools' experiences to work collaboratively with teachers and school community in addressing the challenges facing teenage mothers.

Inadequate record on teenage mothers returning to schools

The study aimed to identify patterns and trends in the school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers across surveyed districts. However, obtaining data to discern these trends proved challenging due to the lack of specific records on teenage mothers being readmitted into the formal education system. Education officials at both district and ward levels did not maintain detailed records of dropouts and re-admissions. The documentation available was marred by inconsistencies and a general laxity in keeping accurate re-admission records. This absence of a systematic approach to capturing statistics on dropped-out and readmitted teenage mothers resulted in the unavailability of reliable data on the trends of their return to formal schooling. Instead, officials often depended on anecdotal information requested from school heads. It was also noted that, in many instances, teenage mothers were encouraged to join non-formal educational systems, perceived as more accommodating, rather than returning to the formal education system... This attracted a low readmission rate for teenage mothers who wished to study in a formal system. Thus, in some of the targeted districts it was not possible to access teenage mothers who are readmitted to the formal education system. The following statements reveal the problem of data documentation:

"We don't have records for drop outs due to pregnancy and re-admitted teenage mothers as we have not well documented them at district level "(WEO).

"…Therefore, not only that there were no clear records for school re-entry into the formal system, still there were no clear records for school re-entry into the informal system." (DEO).



The implication is that the government inadequately established procedures for recording systems when they introduced the guideline. Some girls were also hesitant to report to school leadership when they discovered that they were pregnant and dropout from school silently which led to lack of records. It was reported that pregnant girls fear judgment, humiliation, stigma and shame from their peers and teachers. In other instances, there was a perceived secrecy associated with the disclosure of information about the welfare of teenage mothers. Some heads of schools remained fearful of sharing the data. Some felt that the researchers who interviewed them were seeking the details about men who made them pregnant, a matter which was seen as a criminal offense and could lead to more problems for teenage mothers. Access to the respondents, particularly teenage mothers who dropped out of schools and never re-admitted as well as those who were readmitted and dropped was challenging. Some parents and teenage mothers refused to be part of the study participants.

In certain instances, teenage mothers showed reluctance to re-enter the formal education system, perceiving it as lacking the necessary flexibility to accommodate their unique circumstances. Consequently, many preferred enrolling in non-formal education centers, which offered greater adaptability to their schedules and responsibilities. However, this preference was not without its challenges; some teenage mothers faced difficulties due to the long distances they had to travel to access these centers. This issue was particularly pronounced in remote areas, where non-formal education centers were less accessible, significantly hindering their educational progress. Given these obstacles, this study underscores the importance of strengthening the formal education system to better support the re-admission of teenage mothers. Enhancing the flexibility and accessibility of formal education could provide a more viable and supportive pathway for their return, ensuring that educational opportunities are equitable and within the reach for all, regardless of their personal challenges. This sentiment was shared by one of the teenage mothers:

> *"You know, many alternative schools are located far away in rural areas, this makes it difficult to walk long distances for education. It would be great and we would greatly appreciate it if there were hostels available in those alternative schools. It would be wonderful if they could improve the existing formal schools that are present in every village or ward. Many girls would be able to return to school if these schools were improved and had flexibility for those of us who are breastfeeding." (Teenage mother)*

Therefore, the implementation of the school re-entry guideline in formal schools was inadequate due to few teenage mothers returning to school compared to those who dropped out due to pregnancies. Statistics show that in 12 visited districts there were 513 girls dropped out due to pregnancies (URT, 2022, however, it was only 16 girls who had returned in 24 formal schools visited. Probably some teenage mothers are returning to the alternative path or staying at home and getting married. This assumption may be due to lack of proper mechanisms of tracking girls who drop out due to pregnancies.

Teachers' perceptions by gender, education, experience, and age

Further analysis was carried out to ascertain if there were associations between teachers' perceptions and their gender, level of education, teaching experience, and age. In terms of gender and the level of education, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis H test respectively, revealed that there were no statistically significant differences. These findings can suggest that in dealing with teenage mothers and teaching them, the gender and the level of education of teachers do not make any significant difference.

However, there were statistically significant differences in terms of teachers' perceptions and their teaching experience and age (See Table 4). In terms of teaching experience, a Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed that teachers with less than two years of teaching were less likely to use responsive pedagogies compared to teachers with teaching experiences between 12 and 16 years ($H = 45.222$, $p = .046$) with mean ranks of 37.22 and 82.13 respectively. This finding suggests that teachers' teaching experiences matter a lot when teaching teenage mothers. More experienced teachers seemed to have more exposure in dealing with teenage mothers

than less experienced teachers. Similarly, experienced teachers are likely to have improved in their pedagogical practices as a result, they use inclusive pedagogies. In this case, it can be concluded that teenage mothers can learn better when taught by more experienced teachers.

With regard to age, the Kruskal-Wallis H test revealed that older teachers (aged 30-39) were significantly more likely than their younger counterparts (aged 20-29) to foster an inclusive environment for teenage mothers. Specifically, older teachers were more inclined to encourage respect towards teenage mothers as peers (H = 27.102, p = .023), employ interactive teaching and learning strategies to integrate teenage mothers into the classroom (H = 31.103, p = .004), and motivate teenage mothers to develop positive relationships with their peers (H = 28.123, p = .016). Furthermore, they were more attentive to arranging classroom setups that promote participation among teenage mothers (H = 27.426, p = .022), offering remedial classes for missed lessons (H = 33.402, p = .004), and utilizing gender-responsive instructional resources that prevent discrimination against teenage mothers (H = 28.674, p = .012). Taken together, these findings suggest that older teachers are more suitable to teach teenage mothers compared to younger teachers. Teachers' level of awareness in meeting the demands of teenage mothers can be attributed to the reasons such as their longer teaching experience, use of responsive pedagogies, and high level of socialization.

Question	Statements	Mean Rank of Age Groups		H	P-Value
5	I create a welcoming learning environment for all learners	54.39	81.49	27.108	023
7	I use interactive strategies to enable teenage mothers feel part of learning	53.49	81.60	31.103	.004
8	I encourage teenage mothers to form good relationship with peers	48.75	80.55	28.123	.016
9	I ensure that classroom setup does not isolate teenage mothers from learning	53.49	81.60	27.426	.022
12	I ask teen mothers to consult peers when they miss the class about the missed sessions	52.41	79.84	33.402	.004
19	I use gender-responsive instructional materials during teaching and learning that do not discriminate teenage mothers	48.55	81.95	28.674	.012

Table 4: Summary of statistically significant findings.

3.4 Parents and community members' roles and perceptions on teenage mothers' right to education

3.4.1 Cultural perspectives

In certain situations, parents and community members adhere to traditional or conservative viewpoints that cast teenage pregnancy in a negative light, treating it as a matter of moral failing or social disgrace. The results from the study indicated varied perspectives from the community being represented by parents. Some perceive teenage mother's education as less important or even unnecessary, focusing instead on the responsibilities of motherhood. One of the parents stated:

"In our community, girls are treated differently from boys. If a girl becomes pregnant, parents see it as an opportunity to marry her off rather than allowing her to return to school" (Parent).

While some parents felt that teenage mothers need to be supported to access education, some highlighted early marriage to be the priority (See Figure 19).

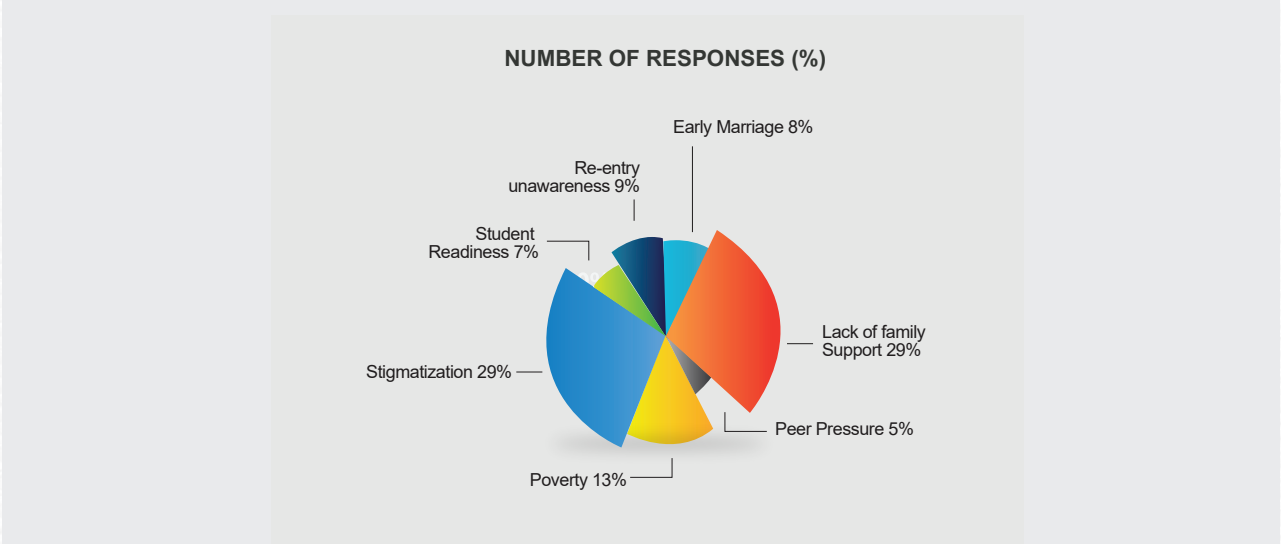


Figure 19: Community standpoints on teenage mothers.

Similar findings from parents' interviews indicate there are indicators of early marriages in their communities. The parents provided these perspectives:

"In many cases, it is observed that young girls who become pregnant often choose to get married and subsequently fail to resume their education. This phenomenon is rooted in societal norms and beliefs that dictate that a girl who becomes pregnant should not continue attending school, as it may have a negative influence on other girls" (Parent)

"Not all parents understand that teenage pregnancy is attributed to unfortunate circumstances and temptations. Such occurrences are viewed as a violation of our traditional values. Many parents hold the belief that if a girl becomes pregnant, she loses her right to pursue an education. She is perceived as having misbehaved societal norms. Furthermore, there is a prevailing belief within our community that even if the girl were to return to school, her behavior would remain objectionable and incompatible with our collective standards" (Parent)

These quotes give an impression that when girls get married at a tender age, they are often forced to abandon their education and miss out the opportunities for personal growth, empowerment, and future prospects that are associated with it. This perpetuates a cycle of limited opportunities and reinforces gender inequalities within a society. Further findings revealed that teenage mothers face great challenges from the community they live in which have a big impact on their lives. It was discovered that community support for teenage mothers to return to school and complete their education is markedly lacking. The findings indicated that the community often discourages teenage mothers from integrating into learning environments with other students, based on the perception that they possess low morals and could negatively influence their peers.

3.4.2 Psychological strain

During interviews, parents demonstrated diverse experiences and perspectives about how they felt when they found their daughters pregnant. It was observed that parents did not receive the pregnancy information of their daughters positively and thus they became psychologically affected. In most cases, parents said they felt pain because they had high expectations about their daughters' future academic endeavors (see Figure 20).

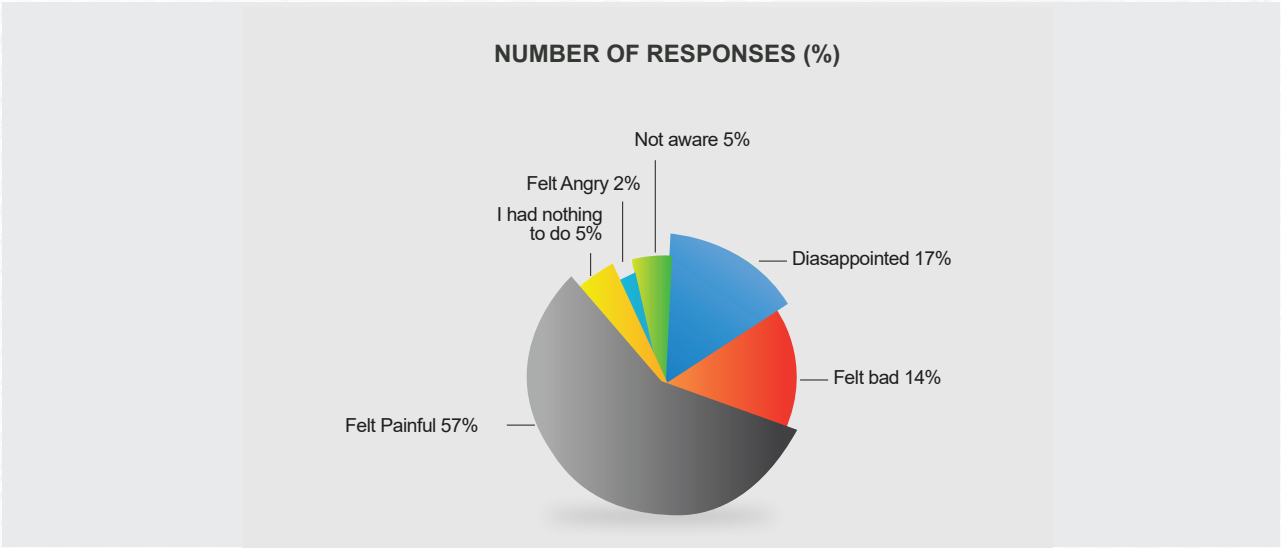


Figure 20: Parents' feelings about their daughters.

One parent expressed this concern: *"Frankly speaking, it pained me a lot because she was my only hope. I believe that she will help me after completion of her school" (Parent, Arusha City Council).* Another parent commented: *"For me and my husband we got sick when we received that information, we did not expect something like that" (Parent).* This means that the pregnancy issues disappointed parents given the trust they had on their daughters. Some individuals or community members advised parents to chase away their pregnant daughters, whereas others advocated for calmness and support towards their daughters. A few parents, upon learning about their daughters' pregnancies, experienced anger and sometimes remained unsure about how to respond.

The parents also felt less prepared to implement the school re-entry intervention as they did not see the importance of bringing teenage mothers back to school after delivery. One of the parents said:

> *"We have not received sufficient education about this guideline. Many parents were not adequately prepared to send their children to school. We have been refusing to allow our children to go to school because it was not our custom". (Parent).*

The parents were of the opinion that if they were oriented about the school re-entry guideline, they would be ready to send their teenage mothers back to school and provide all necessary support.

3.4.3 Parent assistance

There were varied perspectives in relation to the parents' roles in supporting the education of their daughters who are teenage mothers. Some parents reported to provide emotional support to their daughters as they believed that getting pregnant at an early age can be a challenging experience to teenage mothers. One parent noted:

> *I provide emotional and social support to my daughter who is a teenage mother. I encourage her to proceed with studies and create an environment which is nonjudgmental and safe for the wellbeing of the born child and the daughter. (Parent)*

Some parents showed to have taken proactive steps in supporting teenage mothers by encouraging them to express their problems, feelings, and concerns, which is crucial for their well-being and academic progress. However, these parents also noted their limited involvement in caring for their grandchildren. They acknowledged the significant challenge teenage mothers face in juggling academic responsibilities and motherhood but admitted to providing minimal assistance with childcare, both when the teenage mothers are at school and at home studying or completing homework.. The reason given was that if they assist them, they would encourage other girls to get pregnant with the expectation of parents' assistance. In light of this, one parent noted: *I rarely help my daughter to take care of her child because I want my young daughters to learn from a sister. It is a lesson to her young sisters.* Conversely, few parents acknowledged to provide full childcare support in order to give ample time for teenage mothers to study and do school activities, if any, without stress of child responsibilities. This was noted by one the parents who reported that:

> *I cannot leave my daughter without support. I really support her and provide all necessary requirements she needs. I take care of the baby when the mother is studying, and if I am busy, I ask for assistance from family members to take care of the child.*

The implication of the limited parental support in childcare for teenage mothers is multifaceted, posing additional challenges in both their personal and academic lives. Without adequate support, teenage mothers might struggle to understand and meet their children's needs while trying to keep up with their studies. This lack of support and guidance from parents can result in gaps in essential knowledge and skills needed for effective parenting. Moreover, the situation can have significant emotional and psychological impacts on teenage mothers, leading to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and stress. These factors not only affect their well-being but also their ability to engage fully in their education, potentially hindering their academic performance and future opportunities.



3.4.4 Community perceptions to teenage mothers

Moral judgment

Study findings revealed that community members often passed moral judgments on teenage mothers, deeming their behavior unacceptable as it contravened cultural norms and morals. The community perceived that the return of teenage mothers to school will spoil the school environment as they could distract other girls and encourage them to behave in a similar manner. They also considered teenage mothers to have gone against the community norms and should not be supported and given the opportunity to proceed with education. This is demonstrated in an excerpt by one of the parents:

> *According to our culture, it is against morality to allow girls who have children to return to school. Many people are puzzled and have negative judgment on this kind of behavior since the African tradition and culture in Tanzania do not support it.*

The implication is that when communities refuse to support teenage mother education, society may reinforce gender inequalities. This finding suggests that embracing societal negative judgment in teenage mothers' education can increase the societal stereotypes and negative judgment and contribute to a more inequality and unprogressive society. Therefore, a supportive environment that respects culture and at the same time recognizes the potential benefits of education for all girls is of paramount importance.

Limited potential success

Other members of the community further revealed that teenage mothers would not be able to succeed in academics because they had the responsibility of taking care of their children as mothers which would hinder them from getting ample time for education as was commented by one of the parents:

> *When teenage mothers are allowed to return to school, they will not be able to perform well in their studies, because they have dual responsibility of studying and taking care of their child. Similarly, they are still young girls who need to play with their colleagues which I think will be very difficult for them to cope with.*

This finding implies that communities do not trust teenage mothers could perform well if readmitted to school as they struggled to balance the double responsibilities of academic pursuits and childcare. The balance between childcare responsibilities and academic activities may physically and emotionally impact their studies. For them to succeed in studies, substantial support is required from family, society and school in general.

3.5 Childcare services in place to ensure the safety of children while mothers are in schools

3.5.1 Less emphasis of child rights

Ensuring the safety and well-being of children while teenage mothers are attending school is crucial for their educational opportunities and the overall welfare of both the mothers and their children. While this is important, participants felt that they were less concerned with such support. Teachers' responses (63%) and heads of schools' responses (48%) indicated that no support was provided at the school. The study indicated that while some community members believe children of teenage mothers receive adequate care, a significant portion of responses revealed a lack of awareness regarding this issue (See Figure 21).

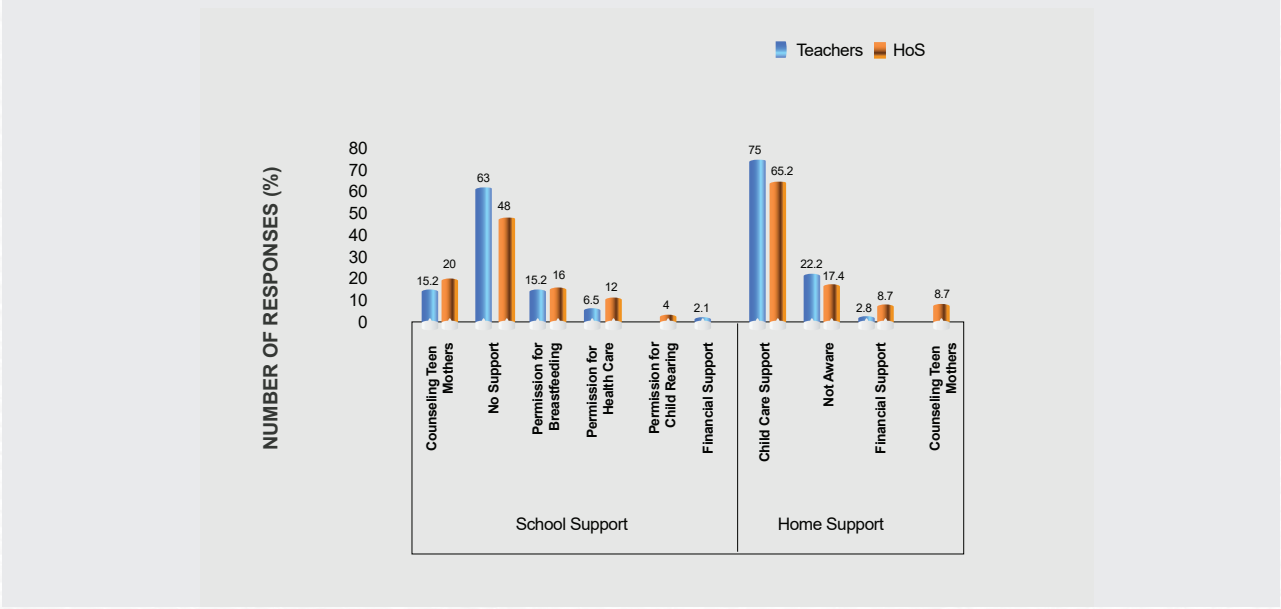


Figure 21: Teachers and HoS feelings about care provided to child at home.

Additionally, there is insufficient provision for breastfeeding and child-rearing support for teenage mothers. This shortfall suggests that teenage mothers may face challenges in fulfilling their maternal duties and providing the best possible care for their children, potentially impacting the children's overall development.

Data from the study revealed a mixed perception among teenage mothers regarding the care their children receive at home. While 46.2% of responses indicated that children's basic needs were met, 5.1% felt that no support was provided. Notably, emotional support, crucial for a child's development, was seldom mentioned by teenage mothers (See Figure 22).

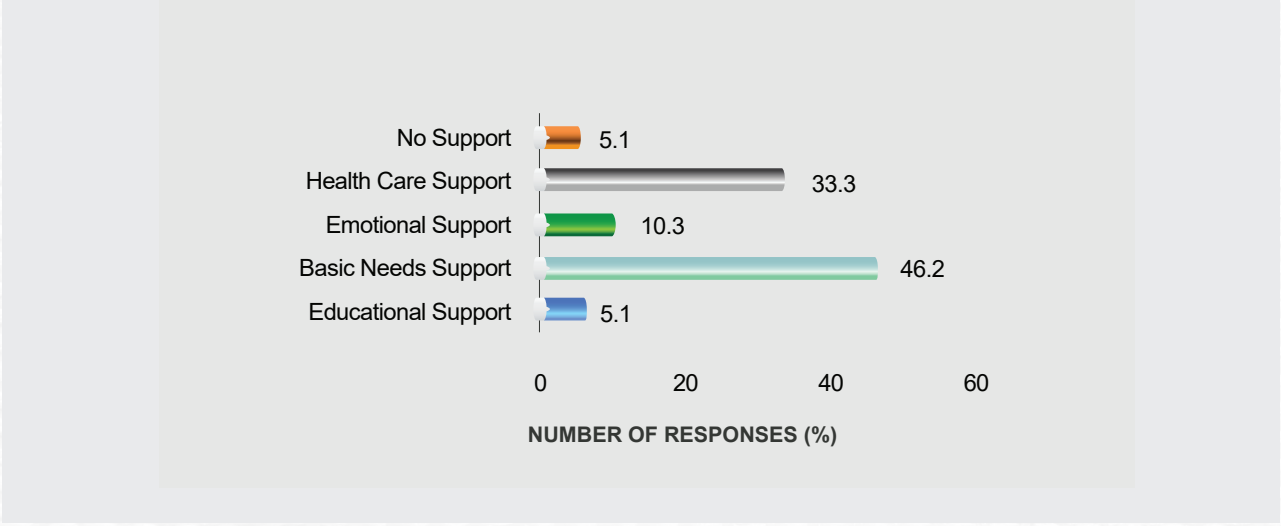


Figure 22: Teen mothers' perceived care and support for a child.

The absence of emotional support can lead to significant challenges for children as they grow, including difficulties in forming healthy relationships, struggles with emotional regulation, and an increased likelihood of mental health issues in later life. Similar concerns were cited by teenage mothers who did not return to school after dropout in a sense that there was no adequate support provided to their children at home. They also indicated that child safety, moral support and health care services were inadequately provided at home (See Figure 23). In addition, teenage mothers are affected psychologically when their children get sick and lack someone to take care of them or support them which leads to missing school for some days or weeks.

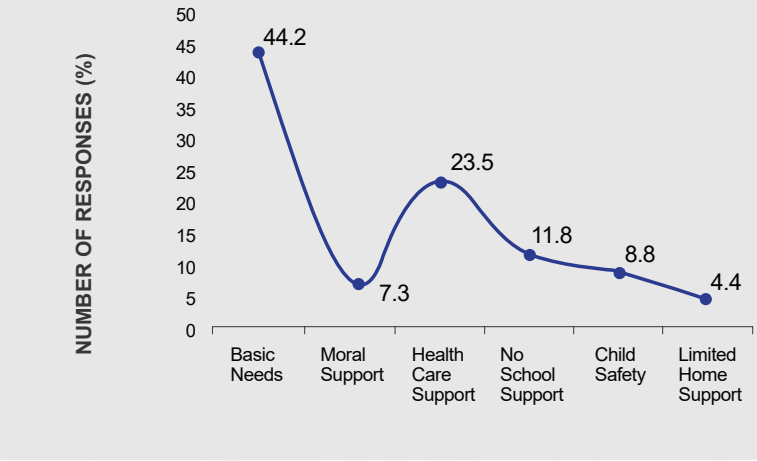


Figure 23: Child's support by teen mothers not returned to school.

Teenage mothers also reported that their parents, despite noticing their grandchildren were ill, often remained preoccupied with their daily routines. They advised the teenage mothers to seek assistance from the children's fathers for treatment, indicating a reliance on the fathers for support in health-related matters. One teenage mother noted, *"After giving birth I faced the challenge of rearing the child especially when he is sick. Once he suffered from yellow fever, I was confused due to lack of moral support" (Teenage mother).*

3.5.2 Child safety

Insufficient child safety measures and care at home can put children at risk of accidents, injuries, or exposure to harmful substances. Without adequate safety measures and close monitoring of the child, there is a likelihood for the child to be more vulnerable in holistic development. When parents were asked how they assist the child of teenage mothers to grow cognitively, socially and emotionally, they believed that to some extent, they support social interactions and education. It is expected that parents at home are responsible for supporting emotional development but they do so very rarely (See Figure 24).

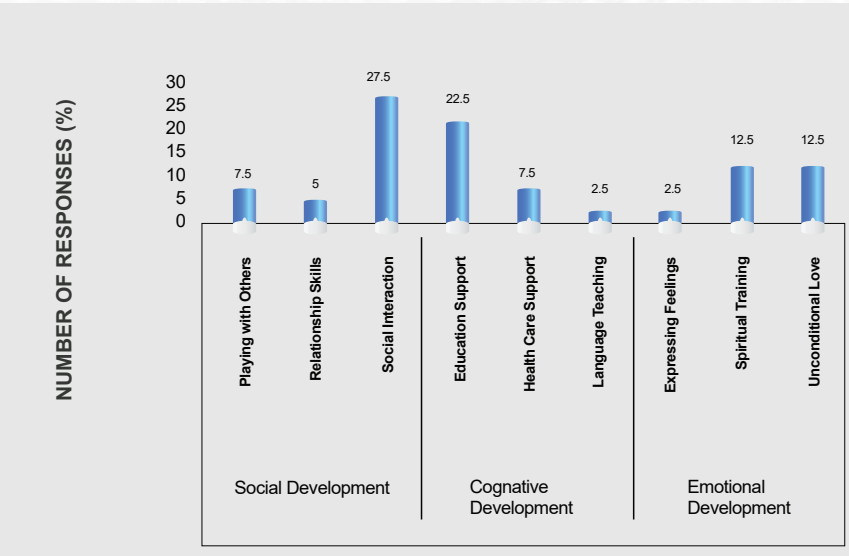


Figure 24: Parents support to child's development.

It makes sense to note that nurturing a child's emotional well-being involves providing love, care, and a safe environment where children feel valued, understood, and supported. This may help a child to develop self-confidence, resilience, and a positive self-image.

Child care and safety support provided by education officials

The successful reintegration of teenage mothers into educational systems necessitates robust support for both the safety and well-being of their children. District Education Officers (DEOs), Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and PO-RALG officers play crucial roles in providing this support, ensuring that teenage mothers can focus on their studies without undue concern for their children's safety. However, despite the critical importance of such support, data reveals a concerning gap: 40% of DEOs and 45.8% of WEOs reported that the safety of teenage mothers' children is not adequately prioritized (See Figure 25).

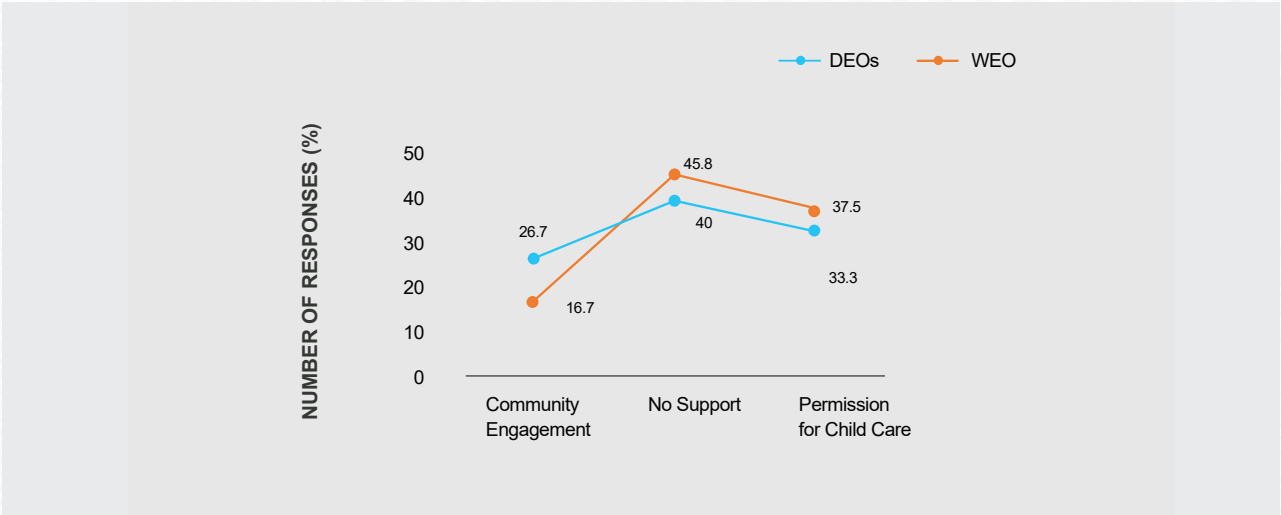


Figure 25: The ways safety of a teen mother's child who returned to school is ensured.

This oversight may stem from limitations within the school re-entry guideline, which primarily suggest that the children of teenage mothers should be cared for at home, typically by their grandparents or guardians, without offering concrete measures for their safety during school hours... One of the education official commented, *"It is beyond our control because the child is under the care of the girl's parents or family, who have accepted to take responsibility during the period when the girl is in school. We don't provide any support. (DEO).* Another education officer added: *"The safety of the child is the responsibility of the parent of the teenage mother. As even stated in the document, we provide two years for breastfeeding, which is where the safety of the child is ensured" (PO-RALG official).*

Whilst some education officials declared to support teenage mothers through granting permission for child care and breastfeeding, teenage mothers reported that this happened occasionally. They claimed to have limited time for breastfeeding because of being preoccupied with academic matters at home. One of the teenage mothers said: *"It was difficult to breastfeed the baby on time due to managing household chores and schoolwork. Doing homework became difficult because when I returned home, I had many responsibilities such as breastfeeding the baby, helping my mother with laundry and cooking. I returned to school for the benefit of my future child life" (Teenage mother).* Furthermore, one teenage mother said: *"Previously when I was living with my child at my parents' house, the care and support for my child was very poor. Sometimes I would find the child dirty, not eaten when I came from school" (Teenage mother).*

Lack of care and adequate time to fulfill children's requirements gives the impression that children's rights are compromised. These teen mothers rarely get the chance to attend clinics for their children. Teenage mothers expressed concern that ensuring a balanced diet for their children at home remains a significant challenge. This nutritional deficiency could have detrimental effects on the cognitive and emotional development of their children, potentially impacting their overall growth and well-being. One of the education officer commented that:

> *"For those in the formal education system, we do not allow them to bring their children to school. However, they are provided with the opportunity to go home for breastfeeding…also if the child falls sick, the student is granted permission to attend to their child. Although this may result in missing classes because the student cannot focus on studying while the child is sick" (DEO)*

Therefore, effective success of a teenage mother's education requires effective support, including addressing their childcare needs and safety. The findings indicated that District Education Officers (DEOs) and Ward Education Officers (WEOs) rarely instruct school heads to offer support specifically related to the childcare needs of teenage mothers. Some participants noted:

> *"We instruct heads of schools and matrons to engage in discussions with the parents and (grandparents) of the child to offer advice on how to care for the child and encourage them to share any challenge they may be facing with the school administration." (DEO)*

> *"We provide advice to the parents, especially their grandmothers. We discuss the safety of these children, and address issues related to their nutrition, such as milk and providing proper clothing" (WEO)*

The quotes above suggest that community involvement in fostering child safety when teen mothers are in school creates a supportive environment that promotes academic success of the teen mothers. Therefore, the safety of children of teen mothers who have returned to school is of utmost importance.

3.5.3 Prohibition of children in school

The heads of schools were positive about avoiding teenage mothers to readmit with their children for the reason that they could compromise their effective learning (See Figure 26).

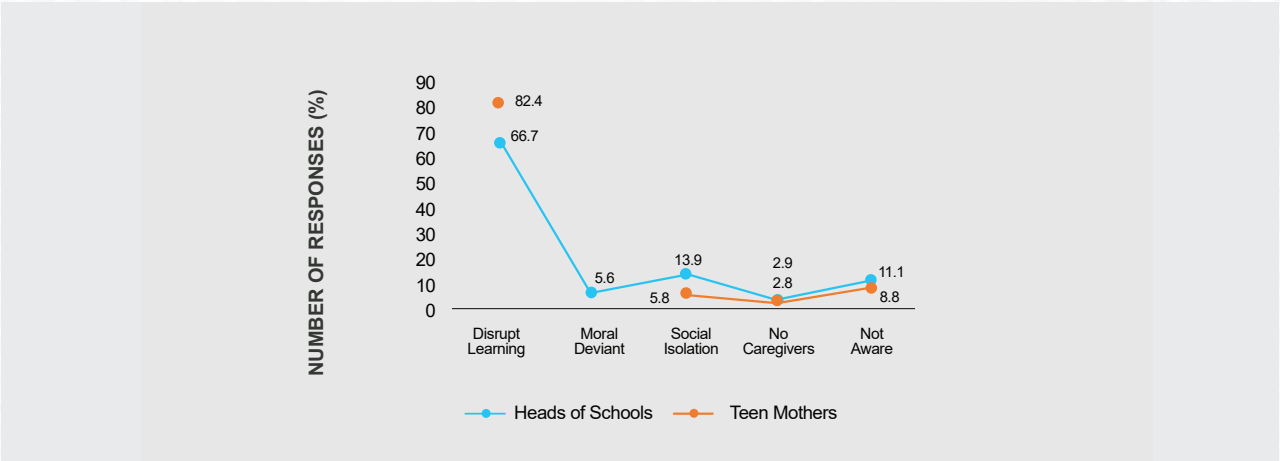


Figure 26: Reasons for prohibiting children to school.

The teenage mothers concurred that children would interfere with their learning. One of the teenage mothers had this to say, *"The restriction for attending school with a baby is good because it is not possible to concentrate in lessons when the baby is around. A mother will be concentrating on the baby's needs instead of lessons, hence failure to perform well" (Teen mother returned).* A school head also shared that, *"To me I see this restriction as good because having a child at school may disrupt the academic progress of the girls themselves. Instead of fully engaging in their studies, they may be occupied with caring for their children" (Head of School)*. Findings indicate that school heads and teenage mothers support the school re-entry guideline that prohibit bringing their children to school.

3.6 Strategies for ensuring teenage mothers return and thrive in school

The participants suggested a variety of strategies to ensure the effective implementation of the school re-entry intervention for teenage mothers. These include:

3.6.1 Awareness creation

The participants reported that awareness creation would be an inevitable attempt. The perspectives from the participants suggest that the school re-entry guideline was not adequately understood by the educational stakeholders and the teenage mothers themselves. Thus, awareness creation is expected to enhance teenage mothers' rights to education. In relation to this, one participant highlighted:

> *''I suggest that we should be properly educated about this guideline. For example, I don't understand whether these students are supposed to come to these designated centers or go to the schools where they were studying when they became pregnant" (Parent).*

Teachers also noted that educating other students not to isolate teenage mothers is indispensable for both their academic success and their social development Thus, awareness creation would facilitate their peers work together and learn from each other. Participants suggested that it would be significant if the community is informed and educated about the school re-entry guideline and allows these mothers to return to school after giving birth.

They highlighted that teenage mothers often encounter judgment and criticism from their peers, underlining the need for community awareness to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. One participant offered this perspective: *"Fundamentally, we do not have significant challenges affecting our implementation as leaders. Perhaps the challenges related to the students themselves, such as fear, shame, or isolation" (DEO).* Participants highlighted the critical importance of empowering girls, especially teenage mothers, to build their self-confidence and effectively handle the adversities and discrimination they encounter. This empowerment is seen as a vital step towards ensuring their successful reintegration into the educational system and continuation of their studies. Additionally, they emphasized the necessity for capacity building among education officials (DEOs and WEOs), school heads (HOS), and teachers. This development is deemed essential for the effective implementation of the school re-entry guideline as well as facilitating a supportive and inclusive environment for teenage mothers wishing to resume their education.

3.6.2 Flexible education and child care

An establishment of a friendly learning environment was perceived to be significant in effective implementation of the school re-entry guideline. The participants explained that the learning environment allows teenage mothers to continue with their studies while fulfilling their roles as parents. It was emphasized that guidance and counselling services in schools will facilitate teenage mothers to address their psychological or emotional-

wellbeing for academic success. Teachers, parents, and WEOs believed that a flexible schedule for teenage mothers would help to accommodate their needs.

While WEOs emphasized on the flexibility of the timetable, other participants, especially teenage mothers, teachers and parents thought that special boarding schools for teenage mothers would help them to avoid sexual temptations that may lead them to become pregnant again. Commenting on this, one teacher remarked: *"The government should also consider constructing hostels to assist these girls in staying in boarding schools to protect them from temptations" (Teacher).* Establishment of childcare centers nearby schools was one of the proposed strategies. Alternatively, special rooms or centers for caring teenage mothers' babies are crucially important. The participants noted that special care rooms would allow teenage mothers to focus on their studies without worrying about the welfare of their children. At the same time, children would receive appropriate care and attention from caregivers.

3.6.3 Financial support

It was suggested by the participants that the school re-entry initiative needs to be financially supported for its effective implementation. Participants argued that given the challenging circumstances many teenage mothers face, financial support is crucial to sustain teenage mothers and their children's basic needs. They believed that providing financial assistance to these young mothers would not only help them care for their children but also enable them to pursue their studies without the added stress of financial insecurity, creating a more conducive environment for learning. (See Figure 27).

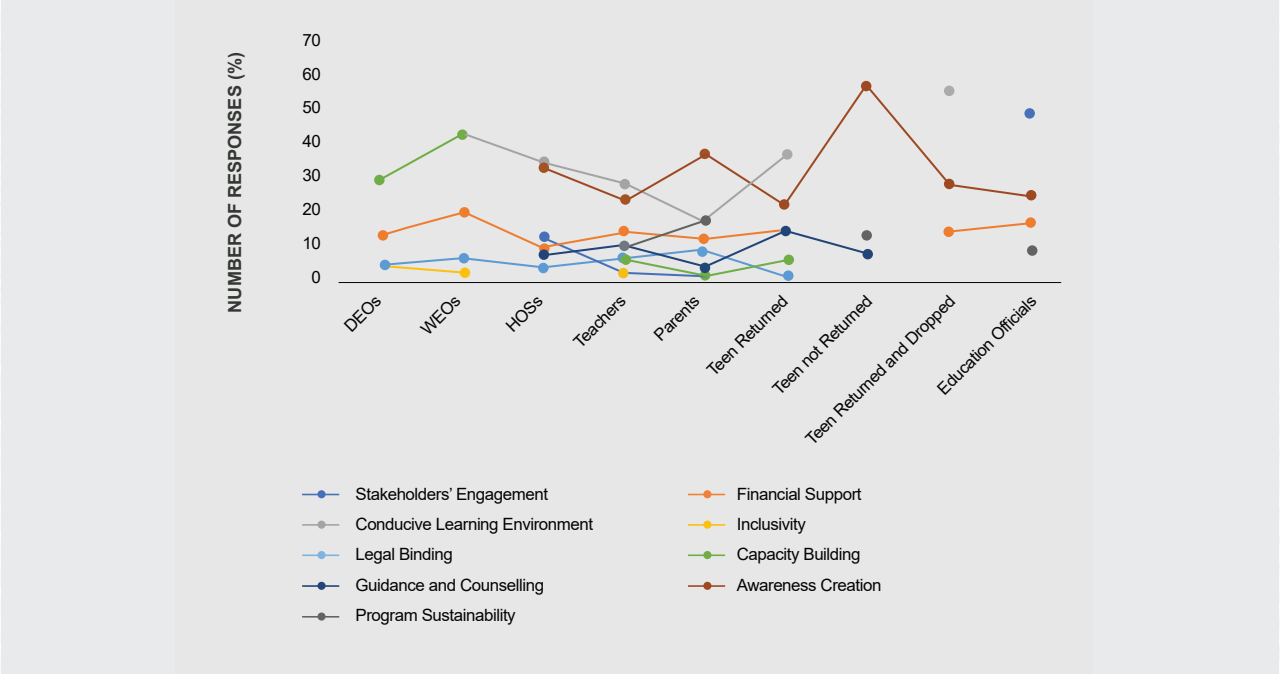


Figure 27: Strategies for ensuring teenage mothers return and thrive in school.

One head of school described: *"The Government should set aside a specific budget for the teenage mothers returning to school to support them" (HOS).* Another participant was quoted saying: *"We should continue seeking partners who can help cover the costs of supporting these young children, allowing the teenage mothers to study comfortably" (PO-RALG official).* The participants assumed that once teenage mothers were financially supported, they would be able to meet their academic needs and that of their children. One participant added: If possible, the government may set a special budget aside for supporting teenage mothers. The parents need to be supported for them to take care of teenage mothers' babies at their homes" (Parent). Teenage mothers claimed that this is essentially important because not all parents have the ability to support both the student and her child.

3.6.4 Gender-responsive pedagogy

Gender-responsive pedagogy became a central concern that the participants raised during the conversation. Teenage mothers noted they expected to be treated with respect during teaching and learning. They were anxious that some teachers discriminated against teenage mothers in the classroom teaching practices (See Figure 27) and they pointed out that treating them with respect creates a sense of equality with others as was noted by one of the teenage mothers:

> *"Many teachers are not gender-sensitive in the classroom. You find some teachers discriminating against female students with children and using discouraging and humiliating language. I suggest that teachers should be gender-responsive to all students, using appropriate language that does not stigmatize any student, especially teenage mothers and involve all children in the class regardless of our differences" (Teenage Mother).*

Despite being rarely mentioned, the participants believed that promoting inclusivity would help teenage mothers feel comfortable in the school environment. On their part, teachers maintained that it is worthy for them to encourage a better collaboration between teenage mothers and other students throughout the teaching and learning process. According to teachers, teenage mothers should be involved in all classroom and extracurricular activities rather than being discriminated against or isolated by any means.

4.0 Concluding discussion

This study explored the challenges of implementing the school re-entry initiative for teenage mothers in Tanzania mainland. The study was conducted in secondary schools across six regions and twelve districts, employing individual interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, and documentary reviews. The government's introduction of the school re-entry guideline is a significant step towards mitigating the educational barriers faced by teenage mothers who had previously dropped out of school. This initiative which allows them to rejoin the formal education system, reflects the government's commitment to fostering equitable and inclusive education in Tanzania. Notably, some readmitted teenage mothers have achieved remarkable success, particularly those who excelled in their form four national examinations and advanced to higher secondary education, signaling their potential to contribute meaningfully to their families and society. Despite these positive outcomes, the study's findings have revealed that the school re-entry initiative has not entirely met its objectives, as a considerable number of teenage mothers do not return to the formal education system. Instead, the majority opt for alternative educational pathways, such as the non-formal education system. In addition to that there were several key findings;

- ### Mistreatment of pregnant and teenage mothers

  It was revealed that the mistreatment was based on sexual harassment, family abuse, societal exclusion, and stigmatization. These types of maltreatment cause serious long-lasting effects to teenage mothers, including psychological, physical and emotional pains which led to dropout from school after readmission. The issue of mistreatment is extremely challenging and can be tackled through coordinated action by individuals, groups, organizations, and decision-makers.

- ### Implicit resistance of the implementation of the guideline

  The implementation of school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers encountered implicit resistance rooted in cultural and moral reasons. Both communities and some education officers exhibited opposition to this guideline, citing conflicts with prevailing cultural traditions and moral beliefs... This perception marginalizes and silences teen mothers, limiting their chance to be readmitted in formal schools. To address this resistance, it is crucial to raise awareness and promote open dialogue, bridging the gap between cultural or moral perspectives and the guidelines.

- ## Policy environment and legal issues

  The implementation of school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers encountered obstacles stemming from the absence of clear legal policies. Without legal enforcement mechanisms, the effective implementation of this guideline will be compromised, leading to a limited number of teenage mothers being readmitted into the formal education system. The school re-entry guideline also failed to adequately address the procedures for readmission and support for teenage mothers, leaving them at risk of discrimination, rejection, and social stigma. Additionally, there is lack of flexibility in the guideline to accommodate the unique needs of teenage mothers as both students and mothers. The focus on the rights of the adolescent mother often overshadows the rights and welfare of the born child, leading to potential discrimination and isolation of a child. It is recommended that teenage mothers' readmission be made mandatory and that legal amendments be made to address school flexibility, timetables, and provision of childcare services. In the future, it is crucial to involve legal authorities in preparation of this guideline so as to improve its effectiveness.

- ## Inadequate childcare services and safety

  It was discovered that safety and childcare were not given enough priority both at home and in schools. Neglecting safety and childcare was reported to have detrimental effects on children, particularly in contexts of insufficient caregivers, inadequate safety measures, low income, or poor nutritional practices. Such conditions compromised children's growth and well-being, as they lacked adequate care and attention. This situation strained teenage mothers, diverting their focus away from academics, and often led to school dropout. Moreover, children's health was put at a significant risk due to inadequate safety precautions which exposed them to hazardous environments and increased their likelihood of accidents, and sustaining injuries. Therefore, enforcing laws for child protection, promoting nutrition guideline, and balanced diet feeding, provision of quality and affordable childcare services and improving safety standards at home are of paramount importance.

- ## Lack of preparedness

  The implementation of school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers is hindered by several challenges. These include inadequate preparation among counselors, teachers, and school leaders, limited funds, insufficient monitoring and evaluation, and a lack of proper documentation. Lack of training and awareness among education professionals hampered their ability to support effective reintegration of students. Insufficient financial support also led to lack of essential services and limited access to counseling and guidance. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation practices were noted to hinder the assessment of the effectiveness of school re-entry guideline. Additionally, lack of detailed records on students who have been readmitted or dropped out due to pregnancies complicates the tracking of their progress and offering the needed support. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to focus on training and capacity building by allocating enough resources for professional development and counseling services and in addition to implement strong monitoring and evaluation systems as well as enhance documentation processes. These measures are vital for the effective implementation of school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers.



- ### Variation in interpretation of the guideline
  The findings also revealed multiple interpretations of the school re-entry guideline by education officers and parents as some understood that the school re-entry guideline has to be implemented through alternative pathways while others considered it has to be implemented through formal schools. This resulted into some heads of schools rejecting teenage mothers in their formal schools and directed them to non-formal education opportunities. In some schools, the school heads accepted teenage mothers considered to be higher achievers and rejected those who had low academic achievement. This was also attributed to a lack of re-entry guideline in some schools which could help them to effectively implement the guideline.

4.1 Recommendations for actions

Based on the challenges encountered in the implementation of school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers by the government, this study provides the following recommendations to address the existing gaps and improve the effectiveness of these initiatives:

- **Enhance understanding of School re-entry guideline among school heads:** There should be standardized training programs to ensure that heads of schools have a uniform understanding of the school re-entry guideline. This would minimize the variability in interpretations and decisions made at the discretion of individual school heads, ensuring a consistent approach to the re-admission of teenage mothers.
- **Improve the clarity of the guideline:** To address variations in interpretation of the guideline, there is a need of providing reasonable guidance for each aspect.
- **Combat community stigma:** Implement community awareness and sensitization campaigns to change the prevailing negative perceptions of teenage mothers. By educating the community on the importance of supporting the reintegration of teenage mothers into formal education, it is possible to challenge and alter the stigma that views them as moral deviants, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for their return to school.
- **Strengthen institutional commitments and advocacy:** Increase institutional support for the welfare of teenage mothers by developing and implementing clear policies that advocate for their rights and support their education journey. This includes providing necessary resources, counseling, and support services that cater to their specific needs by ensuring that they have the opportunity to continue their education without facing undue barriers.
- **Prioritize child rights and protection:** Enhance the focus on child rights within the school re-entry guideline to ensure that they comprehensively address the needs of teenage mothers and their children, emphasizing the importance of children's well-being and access to supportive resources.
- **Clarify support mechanisms:** Integrate clear directives in the school re-entry guideline regarding the support the school system should provide to the children of teenage mothers, including specific interventions to facilitate access to essential services.
- **Address caregiver shortages:** Develop initiatives to mitigate the lack of caregivers reported by teenage mothers, ensuring that children's safety is not compromised and teenage mothers are supported in their role as parents.
- **Facilitate educational engagement for teenage mothers:** Implement strategies to enable teenage mothers to fully participate in their education without the added burden of childcare during school hours, such as providing on-site childcare facilities or flexible learning schedules.
- **Promote quality care-giving and safety:** Advocate for and implement policies that promote quality care-giving, enhance attachment between teenage mothers and their children, and prioritize child safety, ensuring a nurturing environment for their development.
- **Increase fight against stigmatization:** Implement dialogues between various stakeholders to strengthen the school system with clear rules and regulations that safeguard teenage mothers' rights, addressing stigmatization and marginalization effectively.



- **Improve gender responsiveness training for teachers:** Support teachers in gaining a deeper understanding of inclusiveness and gender responsiveness. Strengthening their capacity will empower them to better support teenage mothers, ensuring these young women feel included, heard, and respected within the school community.
- **Advocate for curriculum reforms:** Push for reforms in the educational curriculum to introduce more flexible learning options, accommodating the unique needs of teenage mothers, such as parenting responsibilities. This would include self-paced learning materials that allow them to balance their educational and parental duties more effectively.
- **Strengthen counseling and support services:** Enhance counseling units within schools to provide necessary psychological support and assistance to teenage mothers, facilitating a safer and more supportive learning environment for their reintegration into formal education. It is essential to ensure the presence of dedicated school counselors in schools receiving these teenage mothers.
- **Foster home-school partnerships:** Develop stronger partnerships between homes and schools to ensure a safe environment both at home and within the school premises for teenage mothers and their children. Local partnerships and collaborations should be strengthened to support the re-admission process.
- **Implement a tracing system:** Introduce a comprehensive tracing system for accurate record-keeping of teenage mothers returning to school, ensuring those who do not return after giving birth are followed up and encouraged to rejoin the formal education system.
- **Legislative reviews:** Advocate for the review of the Education Act of 1978 and the Marriage Act of 1971. These reviews should aim to facilitate the operationalization of school re-entry guideline for teenage mothers and raise the minimum marriage age to 18 years, enabling girls to complete their basic education.

4.2 Suggestive model for implementing the readmission of teenage mothers

In the light of the study findings, the study suggests a model which is focused on key policy gaps and inefficiency of the social systems which lead to a number of challenges. The findings revealed that re-entry into formal education system among teenage mothers is compromised by several factors such as stigmatization, social isolation, abuse, sexual violence, mistreatment and limited child care support. Due to limited awareness and inadequate implementation of laws and policies, teenage mothers and child rights seem not to be well fulfilled as a result, readmission to school becomes a problem. Even those teenage mothers who were readmitted to the formal education system felt quitting the school due to fear of insecurity and safety of their children at home.

This model suggests that nurturing a teenage mother and her child needs strong institutional support, whereby social structures that are responsible for shaping and governing various aspects of the society should be strengthened. In society, there should be improved services for a teenage mother which include psychosocial support, parenting education, reproductive health education and exposure to an inclusive environment. Childcare support is also necessary in order to allow a teenage mother to cope easily with academic life after being readmitted into the formal school system. It should be noted also that a child needs closer attachment with parents, a safe environment, nutrition and closer health services. So, in order to achieve these, childcare services are crucial not only at home but also in the entire community including the school.

Reintegration of teenage mothers in formal school needs collaborative efforts between different actors including homes and schools. Deliberate actions for strengthening financial systems, mechanisms for monitoring the school re-entry guideline should therefore be well stipulated. The school curriculum should also allow flexibility in which teachers and school leaders can be more responsive to teenage mothers. If the teenage mothers receive adequate support from the community and school, it is likely that they will develop better academic and social connections (See Figure 28).

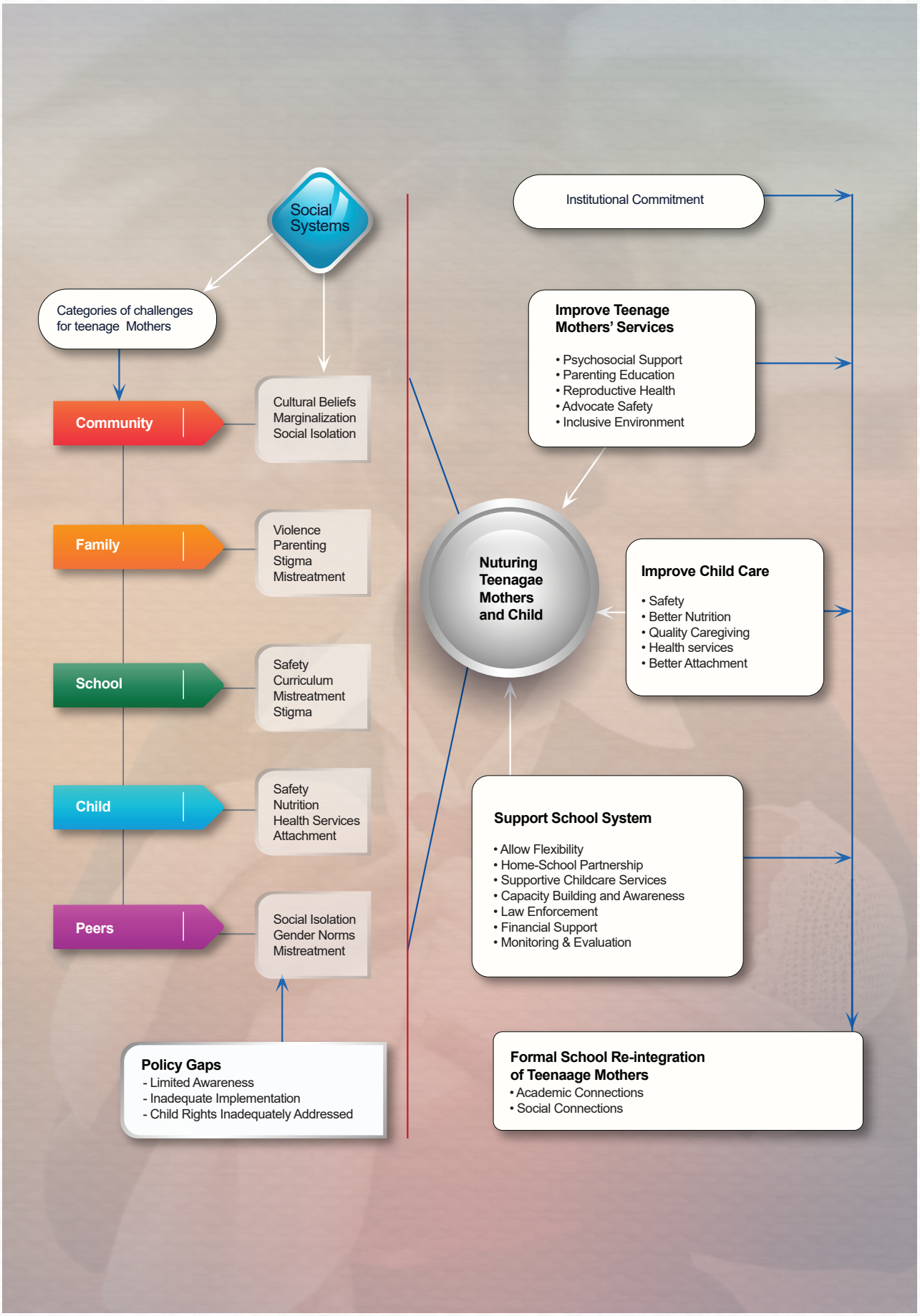


Figure 28: Suggestive model for implementing the readmission of teenage mothers.

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