

**THE POLICY AND BEHAVIORAL
DETERMINANTS AFFECTING THE
CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION: AN
ANALYSIS OF THE BARRIERS PREGNANT
GIRLS AND ADOLESCENT MOTHERS FACE
TO ACCESS EDUCATION**

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1. Background

The adolescent population of nine million makes up a quarter of Uganda's population.¹ However, this category of young people, especially girls, face a number of human rights issues including teenage pregnancy, limited access to education, school dropout, among others. The rate of teenage pregnancy is extremely high though still below the sub-Saharan rate of 28%.² In 2016, almost 25% of the girls gave birth before the age of 18 years.³ With the prolonged closure of schools as part of the plan to control the spread of coronavirus, children stayed at home, which provided relatively safer spaces for many children from contracting the virus. However, it also exposed many girls to an increased risk of violence, child labour, and child marriage. For adolescent girls especially, engagement in activities like petty trading and vending exposes them to sexual exploitation and rape, which often results in early and unintended pregnancies.⁴ As a result of school closures, teenage pregnancy rates skyrocketed in the country. Between January to

¹ The International Bill of Human Rights UNICEF, Adolescent development; Improving access to information, life skills and essential services to reduce their vulnerability at <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/adolescent-development> accessed on May 25, 2022.

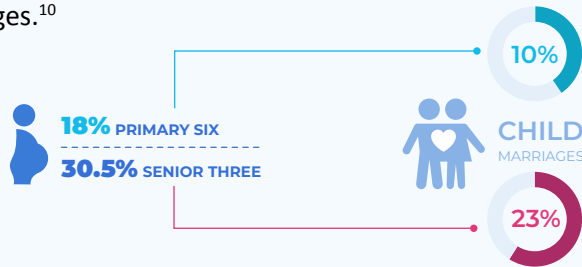
² Nabugoomu, J., Seruwagi, G.K. & Hanning, R. What can be done to reduce the prevalence of teen pregnancy in rural Eastern Uganda?: multi-stakeholder perceptions. *Reprod Health* 17, 134 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-020-00984-x> accessed on December 4, 2022.

³ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and ICF. 2018. Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016. Kampala, Uganda and Rockville, Maryland, USA: UBOS and ICF, p. 85 at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR333/FR333.pdf> accessed on December 4, 2022.

⁴ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit 13/20, July 2020, Kampala, p. 3 at <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/Publications/BMAU%20Briefing%20Paper%202013-20-COVID-19%20and%20Girl%20Child%20Education%20in%20Uganda.%20What%20are%20the%20Emerging%20Issues.pdf> accessed on December 4, 2022.

September 2021, 290,219 teenage pregnancies were recorded which is over 32,000 teenage pregnancies monthly.⁵ This represented a 49.3% increase in teenage pregnancies in 67 districts in the country.⁶ This was as a result of the long stay out of school during the local down. Studies indicate that adolescent girls out of school are more than twice more likely to get pregnant than those who are in school.⁷ Studies further indicate that adolescent learners who are out of school because of pregnancy are more likely to conceive a second time, get married, and drop out of school forever.⁸

During the phased reopening of schools in 2020, indications were that a significant number of learners, especially girls, did not return to school. In a National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Sports and conducted by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEb) in March 2021, it emerged that more than 18% and 30.5% of the learners in primary six and senior three respectively did not report back to school due to teenage pregnancy.⁹ While 10% and 23% of the girls in primary six and senior three did not report back to school due to child marriages.¹⁰



⁵ UNFPA, Factsheet on Teenage Pregnancy 2021 at https://uganda.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/teenpregnancy_factsheet_3.pdf accessed on May 25, 2022.

⁶ *Ibid*,

⁷ Kassa, G.M., Arowojolu, A.O., Odukogbe, A.A. et al. Prevalence and determinants of adolescent pregnancy in Africa: a systematic review and Meta-analysis. *Reprod Health* 15, 195 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-018-0640-2> accessed on December 28, 2022.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Uganda National Examinations Board (2021). The Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning at Primary and Secondary Education Levels in Uganda. (A research report) at <https://uneb.ac.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NAPE-2021-FINAL-REPORT.pdf> accessed on May 26, 2022, teenage pregnancy was the second barrier to learners return to school followed by teenage pregnancy and child marriages.

¹⁰ UNFPA, 2021 Supra.

Table 1. Proportion of S3 learners who returned to school after lockdown

	Category	Percentage
Overall	All	87.4%
Gender	Boys	87.4%
	Girls	87.4%

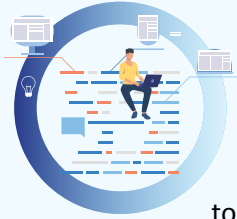
Source: Uganda National Examinations Board (2021). *The Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning at Primary and Secondary Education Levels in Uganda*.

In addition to the above NAPE report, ahead of the nationwide reopening of schools in 2022, the National Planning Authority in August 2021, approximated that 30% learners are projected not to return to school forever largely due to teenage pregnancies, child marriages and child labour.¹¹ There are also inconsistencies in the management of teenage pregnancies among schools with differing political, religious and educationist positions.¹² This is in addition to the unfavorable policy environment and other factors as discussed in the next sections.

¹¹ National Planning Authority (2021), Towards Safe Opening of The Education Sector in Covid-19 Times (Technical Note) at <http://www.npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NPA-on-Reopening-of-Schools-AmidstCOVID19.pdf> (accessed on May 30, 2022).

¹² ISER (2022), Getting children back to school: Emerging human rights issues from the nationwide reopening of schools in Uganda, Kampala at <https://www.iser-uganda.org/-publications/policy-and-advocacy-briefs/552-getting-children-back-to-school-emerging-human-rights-issues-from-the-nationwide-reopening-of-schools-in-uganda> (accessed on May 30, 2022).

2. Project Description



AMEI will bring together local, national and transnational actors for positive change in girls' education by challenging policy, practices, and barriers to access to education for PGAM. AMEI will bring to bear data and learning the national level Right to Education Index research and local level social accountability approach- Citizen Voice and Action to inform and design, formulation, implementation and monitoring of right to education policies. AMEI will empower girls and communities as advocacy agents who will through a phased approach starting from the local level. It thus seeks to contribute to enabling pregnant girls and adolescent mothers to access, continue and complete free, safe, quality, and inclusive education.

The barrier analysis is intended to enable the AMEI project in Uganda achieve a number of outcomes. First, the communities, faith leaders, PGAM, service providers and local government authorities to have more positive attitudes and behaviours towards the continued education of PGAM and are capable to collaboratively formulate an agenda towards supporting PGAM. Secondly, the national level actors (civil society, (I)NGOs, Government actors, donor representatives) are able to engage and support the continued education of PGAM. Thirdly, to have national laws, policies, plans, and programs support the continued education of PGAM and are implemented. Fourth and lastly, increased transnational awareness, knowledge, learning and engagement around PGAMs' access to education.

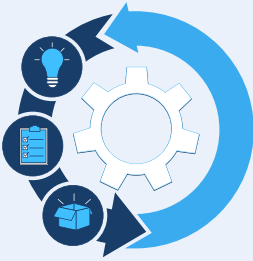


3. Purpose of the Barrier Analysis

The main purpose of the assignment is to identify barriers and enablers for PGAM in access, continuation and completion of education. This is in the sense that enablers are in positive whereas the barriers are in the negative. In this analysis while providing the barriers to PGAMs access to education that are coined in negative, in effect the enablers that are

positive in nature are also covered. It is expected that the research will generate evidence that helps ISER and its partners in advocacy work and design programme interventions for inclusive education for PGAM. Findings from the barrier analysis will also deepen the consortium's understanding of the operational context.

This report will focus solely on the behaviors of reenrollment, continuation and completion of PGAM in the conventional education system.



4. Methodology

This is a context analysis of the barriers and enablers to access to education by the PGAMs in Uganda. The data that informed this analysis has been obtained through review of the existing domestic, regional and international policies, guidelines and laws. This is in addition to research reports, briefs and other publications of the government, local and international organisations.

► Policy, Social, Economic, and Cultural Determinants Affecting the Continuity of Education for Adolescent Mothers and Pregnant Girls

i. Unfavorable Policy Environment Vs the Protective Legal Framework of Girls' Access to Education

Before the full reopening of schools, amidst a sharp rise in teenage pregnancy during the period of closure of schools, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued the Revised Guidelines for Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda (Guidelines) in 2021. The Guidelines are an attempt to give adolescent mothers and pregnant girls a chance to continue with education. A major policy shift in the Guidelines

was to allow pregnant girls in the first trimester of pregnancy to attend school. The Guidelines also provide for mechanisms that schools and parents should use to ensure that the teenage mothers' chances of returning to school and continuing with their education through guidance and counseling, as well as a school reentry plan, discussed and agreed between the three parties. The same policy position was emphasized to the school managers and administrators in the Guidelines for Safe Reopening of Education Institutions and Recovery of Lost Learning Time, which the Ministry issued in December 2021.

The guidelines require that after the first trimester, the pregnant girl has to leave school and return six months after giving birth.¹³ Although the purpose of the mandatory leave is not provided anywhere in the guidelines, it can be inferred that it is intended to achieve various interests. First, to protect the pregnant learner or breastfeeding mother from bullying and stigma. Secondly, to again protect the PGAMs from the rest of the learners since they are viewed as bad influence on other learners. Thirdly, allow effective breastfeeding and baby care in a home and supportive environment since the schools lack breast-feeding facilities.¹⁴ However, the schools are required to exercise flexibility and allow pregnant girls or breastfeeding mothers to sit for their promotional examinations if they wish to. For the case of candidate classes (Primary 7, Senior 4 and Senior 6), it is mandatory that the pregnant girl or teenage mother sits for her national examinations.¹⁵ This means that the pregnant girl or breast-feeding teenage mother will only access school during that time of sitting exams.

The mandatory leave has been subject to critique by human rights advocates on the grounds that it perpetuates discrimination against

¹³ Guideline 3.2 (9), Revised Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting.

¹⁴ Denis Nsubuga "Ministers wants breastfeeding rooms for student mothers at school" New Vision, February 01, 2022 at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/articledetails/125852/minister-wants-breastfeeding-rooms-for-studen> accessed on December 4, 2022.

¹⁵ Guideline 3.2 (9), Revised Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Setting.

pregnant learners and is an infringement on the Pregnant Girls and Adolescent Mothers' right to access and participate in education.¹⁶ Rights activists have faulted the Guidelines for not going far enough. According to Human Rights Watch¹⁷, the Guidelines place numerous conditions on pregnant girls' attendance in school, including setting strict re-entry conditions.¹⁸ Human Rights Watch notes that some of these conditions, which require the girls to stay out of school for up to a year, constitute an effective barrier to their continuation with education.¹⁹ In effect, the guidelines do not permit pregnant girls to be in school.²⁰ Some governmental leaders have instead proposed that schools should provide breastfeeding rooms such that PGAMs can continue to access education uninterrupted.²¹

The current policy position, although imperfect, is under threat. There have been reports that Cabinet has since revised the position in the 2020 Guidelines. Going by the reports by the Minister of Education and Sports on the recent cabinet position, the policy position is even worse for the PGAMs²² and requires that once a learner is found to be pregnant to immediately be sent home and be put under close monitoring by the

¹⁶ For instance Human Rights Watch (2021), Africa: Rights Progress for Pregnant Students; Five More Sub-Saharan Countries Act to Protect Girls' Education; Barriers Remain at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/29/africa-rights-progress-pregnant-students> (accessed on June 6, 2022). Also, ISER (2022), Getting children back to school: Emerging human rights issues from the nationwide reopening of schools in Uganda at https://www.iser-uganda.org/images/downloads/Getting_children_back_to_school.pdf accessed on June 6, 2022

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Uganda (2021), Right to Education Index, Country Brief at [file:///C:/Users/Mugoya%20Musa/Downloads/Uganda RTEI 2021 Country Brief%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Mugoya%20Musa/Downloads/Uganda_RTEI_2021_Country_Brief%20(1).pdf) accessed on June 6, 2022.

²¹ Nsubuga, 2020, *supra*.

²² Perez Rumanzi "Pregnant students to resume school a year after giving birth" Daily Monitor, May 23, 2022 at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/pregnant-students-to-resume-school-a-year-after-giving-birth-3824634> accessed on December 4, 2022.

parents until she gives birth and upon delivery she will have to spend another year taking care of the new born child.²³ However, the Ministry of Education and Sports has never issued any official communication or addendum to the 2020 Guidelines that captures the recent Cabinet position.

This policy position appears to be in contrast with the national, regional and international human rights framework on access to education by the PGAMs such as the following provisions of the country's constitution.

Article 33 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda of 1995 as amended is on the rights of women, it guarantees equality and non-discrimination. Article 33 (3) states: 'The State shall protect women and their rights, taking into account their unique status and natural maternal functions in society.' The state of Uganda should simply with the obligations set out in Article 33 (2) and provide facilities that could enable PGAMs to continue accessing education instead of subjecting them to the unfair mandatory leave.

Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda of 1995 as amended, allows affirmative action measures to redress inequalities faced by marginalized groups, including women. Specifically, Article 32 (2) is to the effect that laws that are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or undermine their status are prohibited by the Constitution. Such can be either laws, policies or guidelines such as the current one that deny PGAMs opportunity to continued learning.

Further, Article 34 (2) of the Constitution entitles children to the right to basic education and this obligation rests upon both the state and the parents or guardians of the children. Denying pregnant girls access to education would amount to discrimination. The protection against discrimination and the guarantee for equal treatment of all people is a requirement under Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda requires that all persons should be treated equally and prohibits

²³ New Vision "Cabinet issues directive on pregnant students" June 5, 2022.

prohibits discrimination on the grounds of *sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, social or economic standing, political opinion or disability*’.

There are decisions in which courts of law have expanded the protections against discrimination beyond the grounds listed above and from their interpretation could cover the aspects of pregnant learners.²⁴ Though not related to teenage pregnancy, the case of *Ayikoru Gladys v. the Board of Governors of St. Mary's Ediofe Girls Secondary School, Civil Suit No. 0026 of 2016* offer broader meaning to discrimination. The applicant successfully challenged the defendant's decision for not registering her for the Uganda Certificate of Education exams on grounds of poor performance in the beginning of first term examinations, the court adopted a broad understanding of the concept of discrimination beyond the categories provided for under Article 21(3) of the Constitution. The court stated thus:

“

the concept of discrimination will not be limited to the nine protected categories or groups listed in that article, but will extend to situations of discrimination occurring on the basis of unwarranted stereotypical assumptions based on group identity, of groups that are recognizably different.

”

However, considering that court decisions are not always publicly known and even popularized, both the government officials and general the public are not always in knowledge of such decisions.

The more relevant case is at the African level. The recent decision of The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice, in *Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES) v. The Republic of Sierra Leone*²⁵ successfully challenged a policy banning pregnant girls from mainstream education as a violation of their rights. Although Uganda is out of the ECOWAS jurisdiction, the case was determined on the provisions of the regional human rights instruments such as; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights among others that Uganda is party to.

²⁵ ECW/CCJ/JUD/37/19

Such decisions should have offered guidance to the continent and specifically to policy makers and implementers in countries such as Uganda to offer the required guidance concerning designing inclusive education policies and laws that protect pregnant girls and adolescent mothers not to be expelled from school.

ii. Religious Leaders' Resistance against PGAMs Access to Education

Aside from the shortcomings of government policy, there has been resistance to allowing pregnant girls back in school, especially from religious leaders, but also from some school managers and teachers in religious founded schools. Studies undertaken before the issuance of the revised guidelines had established that certain head teachers including those in religious founded schools had opted to let pregnant back in school following the phased reopening after the long period of closure due to the COVID19 pandemic.²⁶

At the start of the annual school calendar, an influential Bishops from one of the main Christian denomination in the country that own a number of schools implementing the UPE and USE programs instructed schools under the ownership of the Anglican Church not to allow pregnant girls in school.²⁷ He directed teachers in such schools to send away pregnant learners and only allow them to report to school after giving birth.²⁸ He is quoted to have stated that:

²⁶ Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (2020), Leaving No One Behind: Barriers to Continuity of Education for Vulnerable Children Impacted by Covid-19 in Uganda, Kampala, pp 20 – 21.

²⁷ Paavo Riaz "Mukono Diocese Bishop asks teachers to block pregnant and breastfeeding girls from attending class" Matooke Republic, January 10, 2022 at <https://www.matooke.republic.com/2022/01/10/mukono-diocese-bishop-asks-teachers-to-block-pregnant-and-breastfeeding-girls-from-attending-class/> accessed on June 24, 2022.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

We shall not allow pregnant or breastfeeding girls in class. When all girls turn up, carry out the usual medical examination so that those found pregnant can go back and give birth. They will come back after giving birth.²⁹

This seems to have been a coordinated message among the religious leaders. Another Bishop from the western parts of the country was quoted in the media also campaigning against having pregnant and breastfeeding learners in school. He said it, “morally it disturbs other girls who are younger when they see their fellow girls pregnant, we want to advise the government, parents and pregnant girls that education has no age limit, let them be patient first, produce, breastfeed their child and come back to school when they are free.”³⁰

It is such conservative moral and social attitudes and behavior that pose insidious and psychosocial barriers to adolescent mothers and pregnant girls continuing with education. However, later on while speaking on the same matter at a conference, the leader of the Anglican Church indicated a soft instance on pregnant and breast feeding teenage mothers. Instead of adopting the moral ground for not allowing such learners in schools, he justified it on grounds of the school not having adequate facilities for pregnant and lactating learners in school.³¹ He committed that a religious institution would mobilize its members at the grassroot level, catechists, lay leaders, local pastors and imams into a response team to develop a framework for monitoring numbers of pregnant girls and their re – entry back in schools.³²

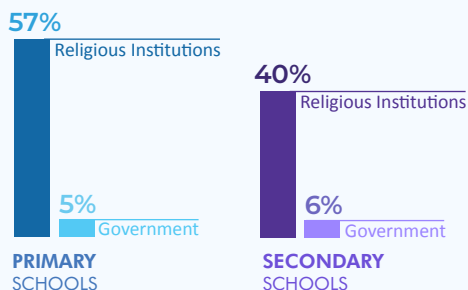
²⁹ The Independent Magazine, 24 January 2022.

³⁰ Alex Ashaba “Don’t allow pregnant girls in school, says Ruwenzori bishop” Daily Monitor, January 18, 2022 at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/don-t-allow-pregnant-girls-in-school-says-ruwenzori-bishop-3685684> accessed on December 6, 2022.

³¹ Kenneth Kazibwe “Kaziimba speaks out on blocking pregnant girls from church schools” Nile Post, January 12, 2022 at <https://nilepost.co.ug/2022/01/12/kaziimba-speaks-out-on-blocking-pregnant-girls-from-church-schools/> accessed on December 6, 2022.

³² *Ibid.*

Historically and up to date, religious institutions have played a key role in the provision of education in the country. Currently, religious institutions own 57% of the primary schools compared to the 5% by the government. For secondary schools, 40% of the schools are under the ownership of religious institutions with only 6% under ownership the government.³³ Majority of these religiously owned schools are also implementing both the universal primary and secondary (UPE & USE) programs. These schools are under a partnership called the grant – added arrangement under which the government finances the operations of their schools – infrastructure, recruits and remunerates staff, instructional materials and in turn the schools are required to enroll and educate the learners without charging them fees. Therefore, any comments and perceptions that seek to lock pregnant learners out of school by the religious leaders cannot be taken lightly. They have the effect of being implemented by the school administrators under the ownership of the religious institutions.



Because of the utterances by religious leaders, academicians in religious institutions also second the idea of barring pregnant learners from accessing school. C. Maraccho, Director of African Policy Centre and Senior Lecturer at Uganda Christian

University, argues that there is need to tell girls that getting pregnant at the wrong time will heavily cost them.³⁴ That by allowing them to stay in school will amount to sending mixed messages to the girl – child that has to be stopped and instead be helped to know that being in school is an opportunity to escape poverty and ignorance.³⁵ She therefore asserts that

³³ Ministry of Education and Sports, The Education Statistical Abstract, 2017.

³⁴ Emily C. Maraccho "Send correct message for girls to stay in school" Daily Monitor, January 24, 2022, p. 15. This argument is on assumption that girls who get pregnant have capacity to consent to sex. In most cases these girls are abused and defiled by adults.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

policy should be very clear that girls will be encouraged to return to school after giving birth and may be during that period when they are out of school, head teachers and teachers can check and keep track of them to ensure that they return to school upon giving birth.³⁶ This reasoning appears to be influenced by the belief that allowing PGAMs to continue accessing education send a wrong signal to other learners to also conceive. There is need for research to either confirm or refute such beliefs.

Notably, legislators especially female ones under their umbrella – Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA) as well as women educationists have aggressively supported the idea of having PGAMs in schools.³⁷ They instead call for the strengthening and enhancing of school capacities to be in position to handle PGAMs.³⁸

iii. Stigmatization of Adolescent Mothers and Pregnant Girls

a. Stigmatization by the community

Cultural practices and community attitudes regarding motherhood outside marriage are significant determinants of adolescent mothers or pregnant girls' continuation with education. In traditional societies, motherhood outside marriage is strongly frowned upon and in extreme cases severely punished. The extreme example in Uganda's past was the former practice among the Bakiga, living in southwestern Uganda. Then, girls who got pregnant before marriage would be thrown off cliffs to their sure death or

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See The Independent "Women educationists advise gov't on reintegration of teenage mothers in schools" May 6, 2022 at <https://www.independent.co.ug/women-educationists-advise-govt-on-reintegration-of-teenage-mothers-in-schools/> accessed on December 6, 2022 and Parliament Watch Uganda "MPs Want Pregnant Girls in School" February 2, 2022 at <https://parliamentwatch.ug/news-amp-updates/mps-want-pregnant-girls-in-school/> accessed on December 6, 2022.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

taken out and abandoned to die on tiny outcrop in the middle of Lake Bunyonyi, a deep crater lake.³⁹

While such horrendous punishments may have disappeared with time, there remains a strong sense of communal indignation towards young girls who get pregnant, regardless of the circumstances under which the pregnancy was acquired. They are perceived as being somehow guilty of the sins of immorality, having engaged in premature sexual activity. As Ellis-Sloan puts it, young mothers are presumed to be free acting agents who have failed to make the 'right' choices.⁴⁰ This perception presumes that choice for these young girls is not qualified by circumstance. In reality, however, their choice is heavily mediated by cultural and psychological factors. The community's failure to appreciate the mitigating circumstances for many of the teenage pregnancies leads to blanket condemnation and denial of opportunities.

The pregnant girls are ostracized as 'delinquents, prostitutes, and generally a wasted lot', who have brought shame to their families. In the community, they are easily picked on as bad examples for young girls in the neighborhood, who are constantly warned to stay clear of them. In a UNICEF personal stories series, Night Stella Candiru reveals the tribulations of three pregnant girls living in a traditional rural community in the West Nile region of Uganda. The stigma in the community is dramatically captured in the disgusted outburst of one of the village mothers, just majority of the parents across the world, confesses not speaking to her own daughters about sexuality. When asked about the pregnant girls passing by, she retorts:

³⁹ Nii Ntreh, "Akampene Island: Where Ugandan girls who got pregnant were left alone to die" Face Africa, June 06, 2020 at <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/akampene-island-where-ugandan-girls-who-got-pregnant-were-left-alone-to-die> (accessed on June 30, 2022).

⁴⁰ Ellis-Sloan, Kyla (2014), Teenage Mothers, Stigma and Their 'Presentations of Self'. University of Brighton. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/reader/188253100> (accessed on August 12, 2022)

Those prostitutes are an embarrassment to our village and their families. They are such bad influences. I warned my daughter that if she goes near those prostitutes, I will kill her. Who do you think can marry such second hands girls?⁴¹

Some families living in urban centers choose to take their pregnant adolescents to the village to live with their grandparents, to avoid embarrassing stares from neighbors. This can complicate the chances of continued access to learning as in most cases the school facilities in urban areas are better than those in rural areas. Even when the learner is to adopt home schooling, the technology infrastructure in terms of access to internet is very low in the rural areas to facilitate the transfer of learning materials to the learner later alone access to electricity to power the gadgets.⁴² For capable families, the only option available is to hire private instructors for their pregnant girls. However, this is not achievable for every pregnant girl especially as teenage pregnancy is most prevalent in regions with high poverty levels.⁴³

In many cases, such children are forced to get married to the man who is responsible for the pregnancy, for exchange of bride price and see no value of returning the learner to school.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Chandiru, N. Stella, 2021. Three village outcasts and a hidden story: The silent tragedy of teenage pregnancy in Uganda. Retrieved from, Three village outcasts and a hidden story | UNICEF Uganda.

⁴² As of January 2021, Internet penetration in Uganda stood at 26.2%. See Data Reportal, Digital 2021: Uganda at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-uganda> accessed on July 1, 2022.

⁴³ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021. Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. Kampala, Uganda.

⁴⁴ See for instance UNICEF, at <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/stories/teenage-pregnancy-early-marriage-crush-mirias-dreams> accessed on December 8, 2022.

b. The stigmatization of Adolescent Mothers and Pregnant Girls

Stigma is an influential part of the experience of child motherhood. Amidst the social conditioning under the vast repetition of communal stigmatization, the adolescent mothers and pregnant girls experience shame and consequently often develop low self-esteem, self-doubt, distrust, feelings of powerlessness, and even self-hate. Constantly taunted as an embarrassment to the family, treated as outcasts, sneered at by members of the community, and demoted in status, the girls come to downgrade their self-assessment and ambitions.

These experiences can result in low self-esteem, inferiority complex, poor performance by some of the PGAMs in their academic work, and identity crises in the young mothers. Having acquired this level of low self-esteem, adolescent mothers will not fancy returning to school, let alone demand to be returned to school by their parents. They feel as if they have lost their right to parental support for education, especially where siblings are involved. To them, the brother, or sister who has not gotten pregnant, has more rights to the family's resources for education.

Where they would look forward to meet friends on a school day, they now dread the very prospect of meeting up with gossipy peers and sanctimonious teachers. According to one headteacher of a secondary school in Kampala, at times, the pregnant girls are more scared of being in school.

We might be willing to have the students come back but often it's them who hide and even avoid coming back. They are ashamed and would rather go to another school where they are unknown than coming back and continue studying while pregnant among their friends.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Asinja H. Mabatsi "New Pregnancy Policy Bears Twin Problems" The Independent Magazine, January 24 2022. Retrieved from, <https://www.independent.co.ug/new-pregnancy-policy-bears-twin-problems/> (accessed on August 12, 2022).

The option of changing school to avoid the stigma may on the face of it, sound plausible and achievable in some communities with a number of schools near homesteads and even among families that have the financial muscle. However, in a context of low family incomes and limited number of schools available in many communities, it is a tall order for a family to find alternative schools for the adolescent mother. Indeed, even where an option is found, it is usually a school of a lower quality.

Low self-esteem among a majority of adolescent mothers in school is associated with low academic performance to create a vicious circle.⁴⁶ In other words, because of the low self-esteem arising from social stigma regarding their pregnancy and the fact that they have to allocate time between class and childcare, the adolescent mother struggles to excel in the academic work; and because she is posting low grades in class, her self-esteem continues to plummet. This creates a self-perpetuating spiral that inexorably leads to a point where some adolescent mothers' continuation with education becomes untenable.

iv. Girls as providers of domestic labour and lack of childcare.

Traditionally, the female gender especially girls are perceived as providers of labor for domestic work in most communities in Uganda.⁴⁷ This perception gained more prominence and further entrenchment during the Covid-19 pandemic. While some girls were able to access learning platforms during the lockdown, in most districts there were more female learners

⁴⁶ Kazooba et al, Research Proposal Submitted to Makerere University, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Institute of Psychology, for the Award of a Bachelor's Degree in Community Psychology. Makerere University, 2019.

⁴⁷ Oxfam International (2018), Gender Roles and the Care Economy in Ugandan Households, Oxford, P. 12 at <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620532/rr-gender-roles-care-economy-uganda-130818-en.pdf?sequence=4> (accessed on June 30, 2022).

than males who reported no access to learning.⁴⁸ Adolescent mothers and pregnant girls are doubly disadvantaged in these circumstances because the pregnancy will even qualify them further for undertaking a lot of care work especially to their young fellows in the home in addition to their own children.

According to the UNEB study,⁴⁹ home chores was the leading reason why learners did not study while at home during the lockdown. In line with cultural norms, girls are more acutely engaged in home chores compared to boys and, consequently, do not have adequate spare time to focus on home study. In the case of adolescent mothers and pregnant girls, there is added pressure from the family to assume duties traditionally assigned to mothers. For some households and persons, their motivation against having pregnant learners in school is simply to have these children provide family care and house chore labour in the homes.

Considering that care work is mainly provided by the adolescent girls, no one is expected to support them with taking care of their children such that they can concentrate on their school work. There is even no baby care services provided both at school and home. In the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancies 2022/23 – 2026/27, the government is also planning to intervene in terms of; Ensuring safety and protection of babies of teenage mothers and the teenage mothers themselves; Building the skills of adolescent mothers for parenting and resilience (caring for caregivers).⁵⁰ It remains unclear how the government intends to secure the safety of the babies of the teenage mothers. The plan to build the skills of the adolescent mothers may also simply suggest a continuation of the status quo where the teenagers are in fully in charge of their babies without baby care services.

⁴⁸ See for instance, Fawe – U (2021), Research Findings on the Situation of, and Impact of COVID- 19 on School Going Girls and Young Women in Uganda at <https://faweuganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/COVID-19-Impact-Study-on-Girls-and-Women-Report-2020.pdf> (accessed on June 30, 2022).

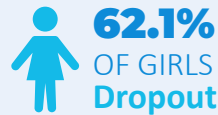
⁴⁹ Uganda National Examinations Board (2021), *supra*.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancies 2022/23 – 2026/27, 2022, p. 23.

v. The high cost of education amidst the absence of free public education

International human rights law that Uganda committed to requires the state to offer free and compulsory education and then take steps to progressively realise secondary education.⁵¹ When the government introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Primary Education (USE) programs, it outlawed the charging of tuition in schools implementing the two programs.⁵² The government would compensate the schools for the foregone tuition with the capitation grants.

However, over the years, it is clear that the capitation grants that are allocated and used in the day – to – day operations and running of the school are insufficient.⁵³ As a result, schools have no option but to charge parents non – tuition fees that is contributing to 62.1% of girls who drop out of school attributing it to unaffordability of education.⁵⁴ Particularly for the PGAMs, among other factors, their dropping out of home is closely related to two factors. First, the household poverty which makes families unable to meet the basic school needs of the girl and instead opt to marry the teenage mothers.⁵⁵ Secondly, deliberate failure by some parents to place value in the education of their



⁵¹ See Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights adopted in 1966 and came into force in 1976.

⁵² S. 9 of the Education (Pre – primary, Primary and Post – Primary) Act, 2008.

⁵³ National Planning Authority (2018), *Comprehensive Evaluation of The Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy*, Thematic Report 5: Financing and Costing of UPE, Kampala, p. iii at <http://npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Thematic-Report-5-Financing-and-Costing-of-UPE-080119.pdf> accessed on December 8, 2022.

⁵⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021. Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. Kampala, Uganda; UBOS, p. 29 at https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/09_2021Uganda-National-Survey-Report-2019-2020.pdf accessed on December 8, 2022.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports et al (2016) A Study on Linkage between Pregnancy and School Dropout in Uganda: Study Report, Kampala, p. 12 at <https://faweuganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Study-report-on-Linkages-between-Pregnancy-and-School-dropout.pdf> accessed on December 27, 2022.

children – teenage mothers.⁵⁶ As a result of showing no value, the teenage mothers also lose interest in their own education and end up dropping out of schools.⁵⁷

All in all, the drop out of school by the PGAMs is mainly due to financial constraints. This means that both UPE and USE programs are not manifesting their characters of being public education programs. The National Planning Authority undertook an assessment of for instance the UPE program and observed “Uganda’s UPE should not be understood as free education for all but rather as subsidized education because the amount paid by Government is below the required amount for quality education.”⁵⁸ This calls for efforts to document the impact of the limited financing of UPE and USE programs on access to education by vulnerable groups of children such as PGAMs.

vi. Lack of sexuality education in schools

In Uganda just like the rest of other Subsaharan countries, the level of sexuality education and access to family planning services is very low resulting in a high rate of unwanted pregnancy.⁵⁹ In Uganda the modern contraceptive prevalence rate among adolescents aged 15–19 stands at 37%, which is still relatively low.⁶⁰ Despite research proving that improvement in contraceptive access, adolescent-friendly health services, and sexuality education is essential in reducing teenage pregnancy, many African countries such as



⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ National Planning Authority, 2018, Thematic Report 5, op. cit, p. xii.

⁵⁹ Mccurdy RJ, Schnatz PF, Weinbaum PJ, Zhu J. Contraceptive use in adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa: evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys. *Conn Med.* 2014 May;78(5):261-72. PMID: 24974559.

⁶⁰ Makumbi F et al., Access to Contraceptive Services Among Adolescents in Uganda During the COVID-19 Pandemic, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2021, <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/impact-covid-19-on-adolescent-srh-uganda>. <https://doi.org/10.1363/2021.33206> accessed on December 28, 2022.

Uganda are still reluctant to adopt such measures.⁶¹ The acceptance for use of contraceptives by women and girls is still low.⁶² It is even considered not good for girls to know about sexual matters because they will get spoilt.⁶³

It is important that the Uganda authorities should be pragmatic and accept to adopt some of these measures. These measures may not be adopted and implemented once but adopt one at a time. Considering that the Ministry of Education and Sports approved the Education Sexuality Framework, it should be implemented. Several studies have found that educational programs aimed at reducing sexual risk behaviors and prevention of pregnancy among young people can vital in reducing pregnancy rates among adolescents.⁶⁴ Equally, research has proved that programs aimed at abstinence-centered sexuality education are also effective in preventing adolescent pregnancy.⁶⁵ However, comprehensive sexuality education is broad beyond abstinence. It seeks to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.⁶⁶

⁶¹ WHO. Adolescent pregnancy fact sheet: World Health Organization; 2018 at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/> accessed on December 28, 2022.

⁶² Bukuluki, P., Kisaakye, P., Houinato, M. et al. Social norms, attitudes and access to modern contraception for adolescent girls in six districts in Uganda. *BMC Health Serv Res* 21, 1040 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-07060-5> accessed on December 28, 2022.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Karin C, Karen B-E, Douglas K, Guy P, Stephen B, Janet C, et al. Safer Choices: Reducing Teen Pregnancy, HIV, and STDs. *Public Health Rep.* 2001;116(1_ suppl):82–93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/phr/116.S1.82> accessed on

⁶⁵ Cabezon C, Vigil P, Rojas I, Leiva ME, Riquelme R, Aranda W, et al. Adolescent pregnancy prevention: an abstinence-centered randomized controlled intervention in a Chilean public high school. *J Adolesc Health.* 2005;36(1):64–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2003.10.011> accessed on December 28, 2022.

⁶⁶ UNESCO, et al International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence Informed Approach, 2018 at [International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach; 2018 - 260770eng.pdf \(unesco.org\)](https://unesco.org/publications/2018/01/international-technical-guidance-on-sexuality-education-an-evidence-informed-approach) accessed on January 24, 2023.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Uganda continues to maintain and even adopt more adverse and restrictive policies that deny and discriminate against pregnant students from continued access to learning. The current period for mandatory maternity leave for teenage mothers needs to be reviewed downwards as opposed to extending the period as resolved by cabinet. This is in addition to the deeply embedded social attitudes and practices that continue to impede effective and sustainable implementation of school reentry policies and guidelines:

- i. Undertake mapping of the religious and political leaders that are in support of the continued access to learning for PGAMs.
- ii. Relatedly, map out also religious and political leaders who are against PGAMs continued access to learning with a view of establishing the positions informing their stance. This would facilitate the development of targeted messages.
- iii. Undertake to engage with the cultural leaders. So far there is no clear or known position from the cultural leaders on continued access to learning by the PGAMs.
- iv. Engage CSO coalitions that support continued access to learning by the PGAMs and those advocating for adequate financing for public education.



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