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Social Economic Challenges Faced by Teenage Mothers in Roysambu Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT :

The phenomenon of teenage motherhood presents complex challenges. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teen mothers, focusing on their social economic struggles. Teenage mothers often face a multitude of obstacles, including societal stigma, financial instability, disrupted education, and limited access to healthcare. Despite these challenges, many exhibit remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. The objective of the study was to explore the social economic challenges among teenage mothers in Roysambu Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study employed phenomenological research design. Through purposive sampling the study employed a sample size of 16 participants. The data was collected using Interview Guide. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that teenage mother in Roysambu face the challenges of financial constraints, social stigma and poor access to the government services. The study recommends to the stakeholders working with teenage mothers to encourage and empower them towards having life skills that can help them to earn income for sustainability of their needs. In addition, the study recommends to mental health professionals to sensitize the society against discriminating the teenage mother but rather offer moral support to them. Finally, the study recommends to the government to provide a conducive environment where teenage mothers can be able to access the government resources without discrimination.

Key Words: Social economic challenges, Teenage mothers, Roysambu Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Teen mothers are at increased risk of poverty and financial instability compared to their peers (Kane et al., 2013). Limited educational attainment, lack of workforce experience, and the cost of childcare contribute to economic hardship among teen mothers (Mollborn et al., 2011). Economic insecurity hinders teen mothers' ability to provide for themselves and their children, exacerbating the challenges they face. Teenage pregnancy often disrupts educational attainment, limiting opportunities for economic advancement (Hoffman & Maynard, 2008). Many teens' mothers struggle to complete high school or pursue higher education due to childcare responsibilities, financial constraints, and social stigma (Kearney & Levine, 2012). Low educational attainment perpetuates the cycle of poverty and reduces teen mothers' prospects for economic independence. Additionally, access to healthcare and support services is crucial for the well-being of teen mothers and their children (Smith Battle, 2013). However, many teen mothers face barriers to accessing prenatal care, reproductive health services, and mental health support (Lanzi et al., 2009).

In Chinese society, teenage pregnancy is often stigmatized due to traditional cultural values emphasizing familial piety and family honour (Zhang & Miao, 2018). Teen mothers may face social exclusion, discrimination, and pressure to conform to societal expectations (Li et al., 2017). The stigma associated with teenage pregnancy can exacerbate social isolation and hinder teen mothers' access to support networks and resources. Teenage pregnancy disrupts educational attainment and limits economic opportunities for young mothers in China (Luo & Chen, 2019). Many teen mothers drop out of school or face barriers to continuing their education due to childcare responsibilities, financial constraints, and societal stigma (Zhu et al., 2016). Low educational attainment perpetuates the cycle of poverty and increases teen mothers' economic vulnerability. Access to healthcare and reproductive services is crucial for the well-being of teen mothers and their children, yet many face barriers to accessing quality healthcare in China (Liu et al., 2019). Teen mothers may encounter challenges in obtaining prenatal care, contraception, and reproductive health information due to cultural barriers, lack of awareness, and affordability issues (Chen et al., 2018). Limited access to healthcare exacerbates health disparities and contributes to adverse outcomes for teen mothers and their children.

Family dynamics play a significant role in shaping the experiences of teen mothers in China (Zhu et al., 2016). Positive support from family members can provide emotional and practical assistance to teen mothers, mitigating some of the challenges they face (Luo & Chen, 2019). However, strained family relationships, particularly with parents or in-laws, may exacerbate social and economic stressors for teen mothers, especially in cases of family conflict or abandonment. Addressing the social and economic challenges faced by teen mothers in China requires a multifaceted approach involving policy interventions, community support, and cultural sensitivity (Chen et al., 2018). Efforts to reduce stigma, improve access to education and healthcare, and provide social support services are essential for supporting the well-being of teen mothers and their children (Li et al., 2017). Policymakers should prioritize the needs of teen mothers and implement evidence-based interventions to address their unique circumstances. The social

and economic challenges faced by teen mothers in China are shaped by cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, and government policies. Comprehensive support systems that address stigma, improve access to education and healthcare, and strengthen social support networks are essential for promoting positive outcomes for teen mothers and their children. By understanding the unique needs of this vulnerable population and implementing targeted interventions, policymakers, healthcare providers, and community organizations can support teen mothers in building a better future for themselves and their families.

Teen mothers in Africa often come from impoverished backgrounds, exacerbating their economic vulnerability (Ganchimeg et al., 2014). Limited access to education, employment opportunities, and social support networks perpetuate the cycle of poverty among teen mothers (Mchunu & Peltzer, 2019). Economic insecurity hinders teen mothers' ability to provide for themselves and their children, contributing to poor health outcomes and intergenerational poverty. Teenage pregnancy disrupts educational attainment and limits opportunities for socio-economic advancement among young women in Africa (Peltzer et al., 2016). Many teen mothers drop out of school due to stigma, lack of support, and childcare responsibilities (Wamoyi et al., 2019). Low educational attainment not only reduces teen mothers' earning potential but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality within communities.

Access to healthcare and reproductive services is crucial for the well-being of teen mothers and their children in Africa (Rexwinkel et al., 2020). However, many teen mothers face barriers to accessing quality healthcare, including lack of transportation, financial constraints, and cultural beliefs (Sedgh et al., 2015). Limited access to reproductive health services contributes to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality among teen mothers in Africa. Teenage pregnancy is often stigmatized in African societies, leading to social ostracism and discrimination against young mothers (Mchunu & Peltzer, 2019). Cultural norms regarding premarital sex and traditional gender roles may exacerbate stigma and undermine teen mothers' social support networks (Wamoyi et al., 2019). Social stigma perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization, making it difficult for teen mothers to access resources and support.

Family dynamics play a significant role in shaping the experiences of teen mothers in Africa (Peltzer et al., 2016). Positive support from family members can provide emotional and practical assistance to teen mothers, buffering against the challenges they face (Rexwinkel et al., 2020). However, strained family relationships, particularly with parents or partners, may exacerbate social and economic stressors for teen mothers, leading to increased vulnerability and hardship. Addressing the social and economic challenges faced by teen mothers in Africa requires a multi-sectoral approach involving policy interventions, community support, and capacity-building initiatives (Sedgh et al., 2015). Efforts to improve access to education, healthcare, and social services for teen mothers are essential for promoting their well-being and socio-economic empowerment (Mchunu & Peltzer, 2019). Policymakers should prioritize the needs of teen mothers and implement evidence-based interventions to address their unique circumstances.

Teen mothers in Kenya often come from impoverished backgrounds, exacerbating their economic vulnerability (Ochako et al., 2015). Limited access to education and employment opportunities perpetuates cycles of poverty among teen mothers (Makayoto et al., 2013). Economic insecurity hinders their ability to provide for themselves and their children, leading to poor health outcomes and intergenerational poverty. Teenage pregnancy disrupts educational attainment and limits opportunities for socio-economic advancement among young women in Kenya (Eggers et al., 2018). Many teen mothers drop out of school due to stigma, lack of support, and childcare responsibilities (Njoroge et al., 2018). Low educational attainment not only reduces their earning potential but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality within communities.

Access to healthcare and reproductive services is crucial for the well-being of teen mothers and their children in Kenya (Sedgh et al., 2019). However, many face barriers to accessing quality healthcare, including lack of transportation, financial constraints, and cultural beliefs (Njoroge et al., 2018). Limited access to reproductive health services contributes to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality among teen mothers in Kenya. Teenage pregnancy is often stigmatized in Kenyan society, leading to social ostracism and discrimination against young mothers (Eggers et al., 2018). Cultural norms regarding premarital sex and traditional gender roles may exacerbate stigma and undermine teen mothers' social support networks (Ochako et al., 2016). Social stigma perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization, making it difficult for teen mothers to access resources and support. The current study was to explore the social economic challenges among teenage mothers in Roysambu Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The current study employed phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teenage mothers in regard to socio-economic challenges they face in their lives. The study was conducted in Roysambu Sub-County, a commercial and residential suburb in Nairobi County, within the larger Kasarani area, which is approximately 11 km northeast of the Nairobi Central business district off Thika road. This area was chosen for this study because recently, there has been an increase unwanted pregnancies among teenage girls. Through purposive sampling, the study employed a sample size of 16 participants. A small sample size was considered adequate for a qualitative study. The data was collected using Interview Guide. In addition, the demographic details of age, religion, level of education, and number of children were captured.

Before conducting the interviews the participants were given consent form to fill. The participants were asked to give consent to collect data. The participants were informed that the interviews were to take one hour and they were to be audio recorded for the purpose of the study only. At the end of the interviews the participants were thanked for accepting to participate in the study and were assured that the data collected was to be used only for academic purposes. The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study was to explore the social economic challenges among teenage mothers in Roysambu Constituency, Nairobi County, Kenya. The demographic details of the participants are presented followed by findings of the study. The findings are supported with verbatim from the participants and discussed with literature.

Demographic Details of the Participants

The study captured the demographic details of the participants including age, religion, educational level and number of children. The results of the demographic details of the participants are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Details of the Participants

Respondents	Age	Religion	Level of education	Number of Children
R/001/2024	16	Christianity	High school	1
R/002/2024	18	Christianity	Class eight	1
R/003/2024	19	Christianity	Form four	1
R/004/2024	19	Christianity	Form four	1
R/005/2024	19	Christianity	Class eight	1
R/006/2024	19	Christianity	Form two	1
R/007/2024	19	Christianity	Form two	1
R/008/2024	21	Christianity	college	1
R/009/2024	17	Christianity	Form four	1
R/010/2024	16	Christianity	Form three	1
R/011/2024	18	Christianity	Form three	1
R/012/2024	17	Christianity	Form four	1
R/013/2024	19	Christianity	Form two drop out	2
R/014/2024	17	Christianity	Form three drop out	2
R/015/2024	15	Christianity	Form two	1
R/016/2024	20	Christianity	Class eight	1

The results showed that the youngest participant was 15 years old while the oldest participant was 20 years old. Majority of the participants were 19 years old. In regard to religion, all the participants were Christians. In terms of education, the highest participant had a college education while the lowest participant had completed class eight. Majority of participants had a secondary education. Almost all the participant had one child.

Social Economical Challenges Faced by Teen Mothers in Roysambu Kiambu Sub-County

A thematic data analysis was carried out and the following themes emerged as some of the social economic challenges by the teen mothers: Financial constraints; social stigma and lack of access to government services.

Financial Constraints

Majority of the respondents expressed deep concerns of lack of money to buy basic needs for their children and for themselves that made them look for casual jobs to help them survive. In situations where they did not get the job, some opted to sleep around with men to earn some money. Majority of the respondent did not have money to support their children. For some who are student opted to sacrifice their bus fare to buy their children something as one participant expressed;

I have to sacrifice some money because where I go to school is a little bit far. I have to live very early from home so that in the morning, I do not pay, fare. In the evening, I have to come very fast to breastfeed my child. And the money that I was given, I bring my child something. I have to sacrifice a lot (R012/2024).

Due to lack or limited funds and costly life some of the respondent would reduce food cooked so that they are able to afford diaper for their children as one respondent expressed; *'sometimes even I don't cook, much food. I buy small food so that I get money to buy diapers for my child'* (R013/2024).

Due to lack of job opportunities, majority of the respondent were forced to look for income a hard way doing all manner of jobs. Most of the respondent cited that lack of job opportunities is as of result of age and experience of teen mother as one respondent said, *'limited job opportunities due to their age and lack of experience. Many are still in school or have not completed their education'* (R007/2024). Even though the respondent were not of age, some of the respondents were forced to do jobs such as selling alcohol, bar attendant, and construction work to earn a living. To balance the work, school work and child care was challenging for majority of the respondent as one respondent was quoted *'I am a bar attendant. I usually work evening shifts after my vocational training classes during the day. It's difficult to balance my job, studies, and taking care of my son'* (R006/2024).

For some respondent when they didn't have something to do and the needs of their children were increasing, they opted to sleep with old men to get at least 200 hundred shillings. These men are harsh at them and at time they are do not pay this respondent as one respondent was expressed, Men want to touch you. Others want to have sex with you and pay you. You're forced to go and sleep with them because you have no money. Your child is unwell. You need this money. They sleep with you, and the only much they can give you is maybe 200. And you don't have that 200, so you take the 200 at time they do not pay you. (R014/2024).

The finding of the current study was consistent with the findings of Kane et al. (2013) who conducted a study in America and found that teen mothers are at increased risk of poverty and financial instability compared to their peers. Additionally, the current study confirms that limited educational attainment, lack of workforce experience, and the cost of childcare contribute to economic hardship among teen mothers (Mollborn et al., 2011). Furthermore, the findings were supported by the findings of Hoffman and Maynard (2008) who reported that when teen girls get pregnant, often educational attainment is disrupted, limiting opportunities for economic advancement. Many teens' mothers struggle to complete high school or pursue higher education due to childcare responsibilities, financial constraints (Kearney & Levine, 2012).

Social stigmatization

Another challenge faced by teen mothers is social stigma and negative judgement. Majority of the respondents are assumed by the society as failures and persons who have made wrong choices in life. The society often looks at the teen mothers as evil person, and irresponsible people. This made most of the respondents to want to prove that they are good people in the society however that was all in vain as one respondent said, *'I feel judged, by the way people look at me when I'm out with my son or in the comments people make about my situation. I constantly have to prove myself and show that am capable of providing a good life for my child'* (R006/2024).

For some respondent with two children, the society was not fair to them also wondering how such a person could have two children as one respondent said, *'To me, the society, judges me because I'm young. They say, at my age of 17 years, I'm not supposed to have 2 children Yes. But it's not my fault. And then at the same time, the society looks at me like an evil person.'* (R015/2024). Most of the parents to the respondents were angry at their daughters, seeing them as failure in life. Their parents searched husband for them without their consulting them as one respondent expressed, *'They didn't accept that I was, pregnant. They searched many old men for me to get married to, but I didn't want to. When I refused, I couldn't face my mom also. So, I ran to a friend'* (R011/2024). Further, some people in the society and especially parents considered these teen mothers as a threat to their girls, some even warned their daughter been around them as one of the respond said,

Majority are not, happy about us. Even those who used to play together, we can no longer play. They just see us as dangerous. We can, spoil their children. And even our friends, those who are close to us before, they have isolated us now. They talk ill about me, and the worst are my neighbours. They see me as the worst person. They even tell their daughters not to be around me. I'm a bad person. I'm going to influence them. You know, she's bad. They talk all manner of words about me' (R014/2014).

The current study findings were supported by the findings of Zhang and Miao (2018) who conducted a study China and found teenage pregnancy is often stigmatized due to traditional cultural values emphasizing familial piety and family honour. Additionally, teen mothers may face social exclusion, discrimination, and pressure to conform to societal expectations (Li et al., 2017). The stigma associated with teenage pregnancy can exacerbate social isolation and hinder teen mothers' access to support networks and resources. The present study found that stigmatization and rejection is often from parents, school and community at large.

Lack of access to government services

Majority of the respondents reported lack of access to government service. Participants faced challenges of receiving dispensary and child registration services. At the dispensary, some respondents mentioned lack of immunization which is echoed by a participant who said, *'My child has not been immunized because there are no those immunizations in the dispensary. My mum is the one who help me to go to a private hospital around here.'* (R007/2024). When you go to the hospital, you take wrong before you are treated because there are so many people. Sometimes there are no medicines. You are told to go buy a certain immunization and bring. Our area here, we have only one dispensary and it only it only opens in only Mondays Tuesday. That day, you find all the medicines that was you know, for your children are not there. (R014/2024)

Some respondent argued that some of the services offered in government facilitates do not fully understand teen mothers need. They cite that there is lack of awareness about the needs of the teen mothers while there is lack information on services available for teen mothers as one of the respondents were cited saying; *'there is a lack of awareness about the specific needs of teen mothers, which can result in inadequate support and resources. There is lack of information about what services are available, and other times the process of applying for assistance is so complicated and time-consuming that it feels almost impossible.'* (R002/2024).

The findings were in alignment with the findings of Mchunu and Peltzer, (2019) who argued that many teen mothers in Africa face barriers to accessing quality healthcare, including lack of transportation, financial constraints, and cultural beliefs. In addition, the results were supported by findings of Sedgh et al. (2015) who argued that limited access to reproductive health services contributes to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality among teen mothers in Africa. The current study found that majority of the respondent had challenges accessing government facilities that put their children at risk of diseases and infections due to lack of immunizations in the local government hospitals. Finally, the current study findings was in agreement with findings of Njoroge et al. (2018) who reported that many teen mothers face barriers to accessing quality healthcare, including lack of transportation, financial constraints, and cultural beliefs.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the most social economic challenges facing teen mothers in Roysambu Kiambu County are financial constraints, social stigma and lack of access to government resources. Majority of the respondents expressed deep concerns of lack of money to buy basic needs for their children and for themselves that made them look for casual jobs to help them survive. In situations where they did not get the job, some opted to sleep around with men to earn some money. Majority of the respondents are assumed by the society as failures and persons who have made wrong choices in life. The society often looks at the teen mothers as evil person, and irresponsible people. Also, most of the respondents reported that some of the services offered in government facilitates do not fully understand teen mothers needs. They mentioned lack of awareness about the needs of the teen mothers. There is need to offer life skills to teen mothers that will help them to support their basic needs. Also, there is a need of mental health professional to sensitize the society against discrimination of teen mothers. Finally, there is a need of the government to make efforts of availing services needed by teen mothers without any discrimination.

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