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TEENAGE PREGNANCY BRIEF

WHAT WILL DESTROY FEMALE REFUGEE LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION FIRST: TEENAGE PREGNANCIES OR COVID 19?

Teenagers are a vulnerable population category because they do not have interventions specifically targeting them since they are torn between childhood and adulthood. They are either lumped up in child focused or youth focused interventions which do not address the in depth challenges they face. This explains the increased challenges of teenage pregnancies in sub-Saharan Africa because this population group is in a limbo. Over time teenage pregnancies have been one of the leading causes of school dropouts among female learners in Uganda and beyond. Among the teenage mothers are the learners living with disabilities, and the numbers have been increased due to COVID 19.

What does the evidence say?

- Teenage pregnancies are higher in developing countries than developed countries, and more so in sub-Saharan Africa with 28% of adolescents giving birth before the age of 18. In Uganda, more than one in four adolescents (15–19 years) become pregnant with the rates being higher in rural areas (27%) than urban areas (19%).[1]
- Across Uganda, eight out of ten citizens (79%) said the lockdown had increased cases of teenage pregnancy and sexual violence. In the six months before COVID-19, 593 girls under the age of 18 reported sexual violence compared to 860 girls six months into the pandemic.
- Each year, more than UGX 645 billion (\$182 million) will be spent by the government on health care for teen mothers and the education of their children.[2]
- At least 1 in 10 learners with disability's education has been affected by pregnancy. [3]

The Windle International Uganda (WIU)'s PSN education study[4].

There is a dearth of knowledge on how the COVID 19 pandemic increased teenage pregnancy among learner with disabilities – a key finding from WIU's PSN study. The study was conducted in Nakivale, Rhino Camp and Adjumani refugee settlements following the agency's geographical scope. It reached 70 participants through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and InDepth Interview (IDIs). This qualitative study found that teenage pregnancies intensified by COVID 19 have greatly affected female learners with disabilities' education in Uganda's refugee communities as well.

[1] https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/UGANDA_Case%20Study_Final.pdf

[2] <https://uganda.unfpa.org/en/news/act-collectively-end-crisis-teenage-pregnancy-uganda>

[3] <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/informit.160523066015845>

[4] Adaptation and Transformation in Covid-19 among Persons with Special Needs - Windle International Uganda (PSN Study).

Key Findings

- One of the COVID 19 prevention directives was lock down which led to the closure of schools including those that support PSN education. While at home the learners were exposed to violence including sexual rights violation. This was very common for female learners and some of them ended up getting pregnant. When the schools re-opened these learners could not rejoin because of the extra responsibilities that came with raising their children.
- Teenage pregnancy cases among the learners with disabilities was common for those that had difficulty in hearing, talking and seeing. The predators used their disabilities as an advantage which left them with unwanted pregnancy affecting their education.
- The teenage mothers with disabilities could not comfortably rejoin school because of the judgement and discrimination that came with it.
- Many of the girls we met that were sexually harassed did not feel the need to rejoin school. The reason being pregnancy and motherhood are still very alien in Uganda's education system. Even with the government directive for them to rejoin school, this was close to impossible because of history of education and pregnancy in Uganda.
- The constraining economic factors and living arrangements with in Uganda's refugee settlements leave teenage mothers with disabilities as primary care takers of their children. This greatly affects their learning continuity even when there is an opportunity to rejoin school.
- Parents to teenage mothers with disabilities are facing an extra burden of taking care of their children and grandchildren. They also suffer judgement and mockery from the community members.
- Parents to teenage mothers with disabilities expressed a fear of reporting the sexual violators. They highlight that the community will stand up against them and also remind them that their children receive more help compared to the "normal" children.

Implication for policy maker and humanitarian works

- As an immediate solution, refugee teenage mothers with disabilities should be provided with unconditional cash grants, and/or extra education support to catch up and manage.
- There is a great need for male involvement in campaigns tailored towards encouraging teenage mothers with disabilities rejoin school.
- For sustenance of life of teenage mothers with disabilities and their children, there is great need to diversify refugee and host community livelihoods beyond the agricultural sector. This will boost their gainful economic engagement with profit and inculcate the "Thrive vs. Survive" mentality.
- There is urgent need to create awareness on the referral pathways for assistance in cases of sexual harassment. This should be done for the general community and encourage them to report cases of this nature to the authorities.

Recommendations for future research

- Future research should include comparative studies on the depth of the relationship between teenage pregnancies, disabilities, awareness and behavioral change in the context of COVID-19.
- Other focus areas could be on alternative pathways to better livelihoods for teenage mothers with disabilities, parents and children's development milestones after these interventions registering.
- Focus should also put on relationships between male involvement and reduction in teenage pregnancies among learners living with disabilities in refugee and host communities.

CONCLUSION

More evidence based and community led interventions are required to address the impact of teenage motherhood on education. This study provides evidence that all teenage girls are at risk of ending their education pre-maturely whether they have a disability or not. And there is an immediate need to address these challenges together with the community members, teenage girls, men and other actor because they have lived experiences with this challenge and they are in the best position to provide actionable solutions.

PS. Extensive information on the policy matter is found in our PSN study report [here](#)

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