



Effect of Guidance and Counseling on Teenager Pregnancies in Public Secondary Schools

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess the effect of guidance and counselling on teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools in the Kyerwa district, Kagera, Tanzania. The study used a mixed-methods research approach supported by a convergent parallel research design. The participants in this study were 110 (i.e., 10 Heads of schools, 10 Teacher Counselors and 90 Girl students). Data collection instruments were questionnaires, focus group discussions and semi-structured interview guides. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program version 28.0 and interpreted in table forms using means and standard deviations while qualitative data were transcribed and thematically analyzed through quotes and narrations. The findings established that school-related risky behaviours leading to teenage pregnancies are sexual relationships with villagers, failure to use condoms, favours, and gifts. Students perceive that guidance and counselling help them in reducing unwanted pregnancies

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among them, sexually transmitted infections, and sexually transmitted diseases. It is also evident that the number of drop-outs because of early pregnancies dropped from 12 girlstudents in 2019 to 8 in 2020. Teacher-counsellors are challenged with other obligations which make them not available when needed, not trusted by female students for fear of the same being exposed and shy among female students. It is concluded that guidance and counselling reduce teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools. Recommendations for action and further research are suggested.

Keywords: Guidance; counselling; teenager pregnancies; public secondary schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy, in all countries across the world, is a challenge not only affecting schooling teenage girls but also those out of school. Teenage is a period of biological growth and development when adolescents transit from childhood to adulthood stage 1; WHO, 2019). It is a period aged from 10 to 19 years experiencing a series of social, physiological, and psychological changes [1]. These changes predispose them to unhealthy sexual behaviours such as unsafe sex, multiple sexual partners, transactional sex, intergenerational sex and an early sexual debut which further predispose them to social and life-threatening health problems that are associated with unwanted teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as dropouts from schools [2,3,4]. According to Nyangarika et al. [5], school teenage pregnancies are a result of early unprotected sexual practices because student girls are mentally immature and with little life skills [6]. Other effects that ensue from getting teenage pregnancies while at schools include expulsion from schools, financial dependency on their parents, abortions, and deaths [7]. Because they are unprepared young mothers, they often face post-delivery complications, poverty, and malnutrition of their children. In some cases, they are stigmatized mocked and/or rejected by their families and friends [8]. Therefore, they experience emotional, physical, and psychological torture, depression, and live hopeless lives [9,10]. Potgieter & Zuma, [11] noted that, such individuals are likely to have repeated pregnancies, and some engage in drug uses which further reduce their chance of being employed and even if employed performance is likely to be poor. School teenage pregnancies negatively affect girls' education, health, and future lives [12,13,14]. School teenage pregnancies harm not only individual student girls but also their families, communities, and countries [15].

Due to the negative effects of teenage pregnancies especially to girl child in schools, various governments have taken various measures to reduce the incidences [16-18]. These included establishing comprehensive sexual and health education on sexual matters and risky sexual behaviours, strict enactments of laws protecting girl children, and guidance and counselling services to school teenagers among others [19,20-22]. Due to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy cases in public secondary schools in Tanzania, empirical studies demonstrate that the government made several efforts to combat the same. For example, in 2002 guidance and counselling services in the secondary school system vide Government Circular Number 11 which instructed the provision of such services aiming at shaping students' behaviours. The introduction of those measures in schools was to help students gain skills and awareness on how to properly deal with risky behaviours about their biological growth and development [23,24]. Furthermore, to stimulates an understanding of an individual's learning, increases one's personal and intellectual development, improves career choices, reduces emotional and common mental health problems [25,26].

Despite various and strict legal measures taken by the global governments to combat teenage pregnancies in schools, the challenge has not yet been addressed among girl students [27,28,1]. For example, in Europe, statistics indicated that 29 out of 1000 secondary school students in 2017 were teenage pregnancy cases [29]. In India, between 2019 and 2020, the prevalence of secondary school teenage pregnancy cases was 8,333 [30]. In Rwanda, in 2018, statistics indicated that teenage pregnancy cases in secondary schools were 19,832 [31]. In Kenya, during the COVID-19 period in 2020, registered 6,197 secondary school teenage pregnancies [32]. Similar investigations were observed in Mali with (175.4438), Angola (166.6028), Mozambique (142.5334), Guinea (141.6722),

Chad (137.173), Malawi (136.972), and Cote d'Ivoire (135.464) cases [33].

Tanzania is no exception to the challenge of teenage pregnancies in her public secondary schools. This argument is supported by the Human Rights Watch-HRW (2017) where it was found that the problem of early pregnancy was high and related to dropouts among girls. Likewise, the study conducted by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund-UNICEF [34], established that, of 1,522,680 students drop-outs, at least 2 in every 5 aged 14 to 17 who were out of school, teenage pregnancy was one of the reasons. It is informed that only in the year 2020, about 5,340 schoolgirls dropped out of public secondary schools due to early pregnancies [35]. Makoye (2020) posited that 21% of girls aged 15 to 19 years got pregnant and they were forced to drop out of school. Despite the many efforts, the challenge of teenage pregnancies in Tanzanian public secondary schools is still rampant.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample size of 110 respondents participated in the study. These included: 10 heads of schools (HoSs), 10 teachers counsellors (TCs) and 90 girl students (GSs). Table 1 summarizes the total number of respondents who were involved in the study.

The study used convenience, purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. A convenience sampling technique was used to select 10 public secondary schools from the area of the study. The criterion which was used to select these schools was all nearby schools in the nearby wards and those which were easily accessible in terms of transport and accommodation. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 HoSs and 10 TCs. HoSs were purposively selected because they were the

ones supervising all curriculum activities in their schools. TCs were selected to inform us to what extent the guidance and counselling prevented teenage pregnancies at their respective schools. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 90 GSs. This technique was useful because it gave a chance for each student to participate in the study.

2.2 Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis

Structured questions were used to collect quantitative data from 90 GSs. The respondents were asked to select alternative responses on a 5-Likert Rating Scale which covered all objectives of the study. This instrument was employed because it reduced bias and helped to collect information in a very short time within a large group of people. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also used to gather qualitative data from all the selected GSs. The instrument helped to draw up attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions of the participants on the effect of guidance and counselling in combating teenage pregnancies. Lastly, semi-structured interviews were also used to gather qualitative data from HoSs and TCs. This instrument was used to probe more information which would not have been collected from questionnaires.

2.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and presented in a tabular form. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was also used to analyse data. Qualitative data from focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were transcribed manually, sorted, and put together under specific themes, analyzed and presented in excerpts, direct quotes, and narrations.

Table 1. Sample of the study

Respondents' category	sample size
Heads of schools (HoSs)	10
Teacher-counsellors (TCs)	10
Girl Students (GSs)	90
Total	110

Source: Field Data (2023)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 School-Related Risky Behaviours Leading to Teenage Pregnancies

This section focuses on school-related risky behaviours leading to teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools in the Kyerwa district.

From the findings in Table 2, it is evident that sexual relationships with villagers 74.4% (67) is one of the risky behaviours practised by girl students at school. Also, the majority of TCs perceive that female students get early pregnancies because of having sexual relationships with villagers as evidenced in the following quotation from the majority of GSs:

“Most of our girl students have sexual affairs with boda boda and other villagers; sometimes with former students who completed several years back.....” (TC-A, 01 August 2023, 2:40 P.M).

Furthermore, quantitative data show failure to use condoms 66.7% (60) is also another risky behaviours. In support of this finding, GS views during focus group discussions commented:

“I think some of us get early pregnancies because we don’t use condoms with our counterparts simply because we fear to buy them from shops...” (GS-A, 07 August 2023, 3:00 P.M).

Quantitative findings continue to indicate that other school-related risky behaviours are receiving favours and gifts 30.0% (27). Also, the majority of HoSs perceive that female students get early pregnancies because of having sexual relationships with villagers due to receiving gifts as evidenced in the following quotation from the majority of HoSs:

“Most of our girl students come from poor families which cannot afford to pay some of the necessities to them. Scrupulous individuals use gifts as a way to lure girls coming from poor families...” (HoSs-A, 18 August, 2023, 2:30 P.M).

These findings are in line with those of Manzi et al., [36] who reported that school-related risky behaviours associated with contracting teenage

pregnancies in schools were due to failure to use condoms. The last school-related risky behaviour among female students was favours and gifts. This finding concurs with that of Hernandez et al., [37], and Ramadhani [38] who reported that school-related risky behaviours among others associated with teenage pregnancies were favours to partners.

3.2 Students’ Perceptions toward Guidance and Counselling

This section focuses on students’ perceptions toward guidance and counselling in combating teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools in the Kyerwa district.

Findings in Table 3 show that, girl students perceive that guidance and counselling help them not only to reduce depression among girls 65.6% (59) but also sexually transmitted infections and sexually transmitted diseases 63.3% (57). This observation is also supported by the majority of GSs who also perceive that, guidance, and counselling as beneficial in combating teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools because they provide students with opportunities to reduce teenage pregnancies as evidenced in the following quotation as was reported by the majority of the GSs:

“On my side, our teacher gives us various many ways in which we can escape bad intentions of bad peer pressures; these ways help us avoid contracting early pregnancies...” (GSs-B, 08 August 2023, 3:00, P.M).

In support of the finding above, one HoSs added:

“Guidance and counselling help these students to become aware and escape of sexually transmitted diseases...” (HoSs-B, 18 August, 2023, 2:35, P.M).

Furthermore, quantitative findings continue to show that, guidance and counselling reduce unwanted pregnancies among girls 57.8% (52) and early marriages among girls 57.8% (52). In addition, findings from interviews with the TCs indicate that guidance and counselling are beneficial because they help female students to reduce depression and early marriages as evidenced in the following quotation that was reported by the majority of the TCs:

Table 2. School-related risky behaviours leading to teenage pregnancies

Descriptive Statistics		
Activity	Frequency (%)	Percentage (%)
Sexual relationships with and students or villagers (for example, bodaboda)	67	74.4
Failure to use condoms	60	66.7
Favours and gifts	27	30.0
Drug and substance abuses	20	22.2
Raping	19	21.1
Watching of sexy films	18	20.0
Sexual harassment from teachers	18	20.0

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 3. Students' perceptions toward guidance and counselling in combating teenage pregnancies

Descriptive statistics		
Activity	Frequency (%)	Percentage (%)
Reduce depression among girls	59	65.6
Reduce sexually transmitted infections and sexually transmitted diseases	57	63.3
Reduce unwanted pregnancies among girls	52	57.8
Reduce early marriages among girls	52	57.8

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 4. Challenges facing teacher-counselors in controlling teenage pregnancies

Descriptive statistics		
Activity	Frequency (%)	Percentage (%)
Teacher-counselor is vested with other obligations, hence not available when needed	67	74.4
Girl students do not trust teacher-counselors for fear of being exposed	61	67.8
Faced with shyness among girl students	56	62.2
Bad relationship with a teacher-counselor	21	23.3

Source: Field Data (2023)

“Experience shows that, most of the girls and boys who have been guided and counselled by me, in most cases, have reduced depression during their future in schools...” (TCs-C, 01 August 2023, 2:45 P.M).

These observations agree with those of Shreyal and Ishita (2022) who reported that students had a positive attitude towards seeking guidance and counselling services because they believed in their counsellors for the services provided to them.

3.3 Challenges Facing Teacher-Counselors in Controlling Teenage Pregnancies

This section provides descriptive statistics on the challenges facing teacher-counselors in

controlling teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools in the Kyerwa district.

Quantitative findings in Table 4 indicate that, teacher-counselors are vested with other obligations, hence not available when needed 74.4% (67). This finding is supported by interview responses from the TCs which indicate that:

“In reality, as a teacher-counsellor in my school, I am vested with various obligations apart from guidance and counselling services. I believe that students lack some pieces of advice because I regard myself unavailable when students need me...” (TCs-D, 02 August 2023, 1:00 P.M).

In addition, counsellors are not trusted by girl students for fear of being exposed 67.8% (61)

and they are faced with shyness among girl students 62.2% (56). In support of the above findings, HoSs perceive that TCs are faced with mistrust from students because students believe that TCs act as discipline masters and can expose their risky behaviours to the staff as indicated in the following quotation:

“Students in this school perceive me as a discipline master and do not trust me as a teacher-counsellor. I think, the head of school must change my position and duties if need be...” (HoS-E, 21 August 2023, 02:40, P.M).

Majority of students from focus group discussions had this to comment:

“I don’t believe in my teacher-counselor because she is not confidential.....I cannot expose all my problems to her....” (GS-C, 07 August 2023, 03:10, PM).

Furthermore, TCs have indicated that, despite their being occupied by other obligations and for their being unavailable all the time for guidance and counselling sessions, their services have reduced early pregnancies in public secondary schools in the Kyerwa district. Findings further indicate that the number of girl students in public secondary schools in the Kyerwa district who contracted early pregnancies in 2018 was 12 and in 2019 the number was 8.

The observations above resemble those of Bella–Awusah et al., [39], and Kazimoto [40] who reported that teacher-counsellors were not trusted by girl students because they were not able to maintain confidentiality and were seen as judgmental. Teacher-counsellors also are faced with shyness among girl students. This finding is in support with that of Namoonde [41] who reported that teacher-counsellors were faced with shyness among learners.

4. CONCLUSION

This section provides the conclusions of the study. Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that:

Sexual relationships with villagers, failure to use condoms and receiving favours and gifts are the school-related risky behaviours leading to teenage pregnancies in public secondary schools. It is also noted that guidance and counselling reduces depression among girls,

sexually transmitted infections and sexually transmitted diseases; furthermore, guidance and counselling reduce unwanted pregnancies and early marriages among girls. In pursuing their obligations, teacher-counselors face some challenges. These include being congested with other obligations, not being trusted and shyness among female students.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings have shown that, guidance and counselling help girl students in combating teenage pregnancies. It is recommended that local government authorities should make sure that, guidance and counselling are provided from time to time to all students in public secondary schools because findings have shown that, they reduce unwanted pregnancies among them, sexually transmitted infections, and diseases. Furthermore, guidance and counselling also reduce depression among girls and early marriages among girls.

Teacher-counselors are found to have been vested with other obligations and, hence, not available when needed by girl students. It is recommended that heads of schools reduce some obligations on teacher-counselors so that they get enough time to help teenage students reduce risky behaviours which would to early pregnancies and ultimately spoil their future.

It is also recommended that all students be they boys or girls should from time to time face their teacher-counsellors for guidance or counselling whenever they encounter contradicting situations. This is because findings have shown that guidance and counselling are beneficial to them. After all, it reduces depression among students, sexually transmitted infections, and sexually transmitted diseases. In so doing, all students will be able to attain their future goals.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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