

Early marriage, pregnancy and girl child school dropout

Jenny Birchall

Independent researcher and consultant

October 2018

Question

What evidence is there – from any context in low and middle income countries – that early marriage and/or pregnancy increases rates of girl child dropout? In particular, what available evidence is there about laws, policies and practices that force pregnant girls or new mothers out of school?

Contents

1. Summary
2. Evidence availability and interpretation
3. Regional differences and distinctions
4. Policies around early pregnancy and education
5. Practices, attitudes and behaviours around early pregnancy and education
6. References

The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

Helpdesk reports are commissioned by the UK Department for International Development and other Government departments, but the views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, the UK Government, K4D or any other contributing organisation. For further information, please contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

1. Summary

Although early marriage and pregnancy are often linked to school dropout, evidence proving a direct and causal link is limited. This is because early marriage and pregnancy can be both the cause and consequence of dropping out of school. Girls certainly leave or are taken out of school because they are pregnant or married, but girls who have already dropped out of school are more likely to marry and/or become pregnant.

There is a significant body of evidence looking at the links between early pregnancy (often outside of marriage) and school dropout in Sub-Saharan Africa, and there are some studies that consider the relationship between early marriage (and resulting early pregnancies) and school drop out in South Asia. Key points emerging from this evidence include:

- There is a body of evidence to suggest that girls who become pregnant or are married early may already have been performing poorly at school, have started school late or have experienced barriers to academic achievement which increase the likelihood of an early marriage or pregnancy.
- Social and economic pressures on families and on girls themselves play a part. The majority of studies draw attention to a complex combination of factors behind girl child school dropout, including: poverty, pregnancy, early marriage, gendered social norms prevalent within communities, peer influence, parental influence, family size, lack of hygiene facilities and lack of trained teacher counsellors.
- Available evidence reflects important regional differences and distinctions. In South Asia, the majority of early pregnancies arise within marriage, whereas in Latin America and the Caribbean there are higher rates of early pregnancy outside of marriage. In Sub-Saharan Africa there are high rates of early pregnancy both within and outside of marriage (UNESCO, 2017).
- Evidence is readily available on policies that exclude pregnant students from school, and those that support new mothers' re-entry into school in Africa. 26 countries in the African Union have some type of law, policy or strategy in place to guarantee girls' rights to education during or after pregnancy. In a minority of countries, there are policies or laws that explicitly allow pregnant students and new mothers to be excluded from school (Martinez and Odhiambo, 2018).
- There are also a number of studies that examine the impact of more informal practices, behaviours and attitudes around and towards pregnant students – for example as displayed by teachers, other students, families and communities – on the likelihood of girls who are pregnant or new mothers dropping out of school. The majority of these studies are focused on countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The majority of the available evidence on this topic comes from Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly when looking at early pregnancy. Despite the fact that a large proportion of girls affected by child marriage live in South Asia, it was much more difficult to find evidence from this region on links between child marriage and school dropout. National data, such as those collected by the Demographic and Health Surveys, provide information on the number of girls and women who complete different levels of education. They also allow analysis of the proportion of girls aged 15-19 who have begun childbearing, and the percentage of women who were married before age 15. (Croft, et al. 2018). Datasets for some countries also have information on the number of girls and young women aged 15-19 who are pregnant with their first child, have had a live birth, or

have begun childrearing, disaggregated by level of education. However, they do not show whether girls and young women dropped out of education before or after they married or became pregnant. They also do not help us understand the experiences of girls under the age of 15. Another factor to consider around evidence is that many of the most commonly cited studies are a decade old or more. More recent studies have been produced in the last two years which shed fresh light onto the topic, although they come to similar conclusions about the non-linear relationships between early marriage, pregnancy and school dropout.

While it is clear that early pregnancy and marriage play an important part in girl child school dropout, the different perimeters of available studies, combined with a lack of robust, comparable national data, and the fact that early marriage and pregnancy, as well as school dropout, are so interlinked with socioeconomic inequalities and unequal gender norms, means it is difficult to make simple causal assumptions about exactly how early marriage and pregnancy influence school dropout.

2. Evidence availability and interpretation

When looking at the links between early and child marriage, early pregnancy, and girls' school dropout, it is important to recognise and take account of the different types of evidence and analyses available. Some research and data focuses on early and unintended pregnancy, some on early marriage, and some look at both together. While often these two topics are intertwined, they also need to be looked at separately in other circumstances. Around 90 per cent of adolescent pregnancies in low and middle income countries occur in girls who are married (UNFPA, 2013). This is due to married girls' higher exposure to sex, lower use of contraception, and pressure to conceive quickly after marriage (Psaki, 2012 p. 112). However, the risk of unplanned pregnancy is growing for unmarried girls as the legal age for marriage increases globally, having some – but not an automatic – impact on marriage practices (Psaki, 2012 p. 112).

There is a significant body of evidence looking at the links between early pregnancy (often outside of marriage) and school dropout in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the findings from these studies are not necessarily relevant for, or do not necessarily align with, studies looking at the relationship between early marriage (and resulting early pregnancies) and school drop out in South Asia (see section three below for more on regional differences). The different perimeters of available studies, along with a lack of robust, comparable national data, and the fact that early marriage and pregnancy, as well as school dropout, are so interlinked with socioeconomic inequalities and unequal gender norms, make it difficult to make causal assumptions about exactly how early marriage and pregnancy influence school dropout. This is discussed in more detail below.

The relationships between early marriage, early pregnancy and school dropout are not linear or simple

Although early marriage and pregnancy are often anecdotally linked to school dropout, evidence proving a direct and causal link is limited. This is because early marriage and pregnancy can be both the cause and consequence of dropping out of school. Girls certainly leave or are taken out of school because they are pregnant or married, but girls who have already dropped out of school are more likely to marry and/or become pregnant early (Brown, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). There is a body of evidence to suggest that girls who become pregnant or are married early may

already have been performing poorly at school, have started school late or have experienced barriers to academic achievement which increase the likelihood of an early marriage or pregnancy (Grant and Hallman, 2006; Naslund-Hadley and Binstock, 2010; Stobenau et al, 2015; Lloyd and Mensch, 2006).

Economic pressures on families and on girls themselves play a part; 19 per cent of the girls in Grant and Hallman's (2006) study in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, cited an inability to pay school fees as the reason why they had not returned to school after giving birth. A study looking at the reasons for dropout among girls at secondary school in Bayelsa state, Nigeria (Uche, 2013 p. 27) attributed school dropout to a complex combination of factors, including poverty in 89 per cent of cases, pregnancy in 74 per cent of cases and peer influence in 66 per cent of cases. An investigation into the reasons why primary school pupils dropped out of school in Nandi North District, Kenya indicated that teenage pregnancy, early marriage, peer influence, parental negligence, family size and a lack of trained teacher counsellors were the main causes of dropout among girls (Morara and Chemwei, 2013 p.6). A qualitative study, also focusing on Kenya, found that pregnancy was the most commonly cited reason for girls' dropout, but that menstruation and household labour were also common reasons. In this study, "pregnancy was considered the endpoint in a cascade of events driven by poverty, resulting in dropout" (Oruko et al, 2015 p.8). Early marriage was not cited in this study as a reason for dropout, with some girls noting that peers had got secretly married to working men or even teachers, and carried on at school.

The relationships between early marriage and school dropout are further complicated by time lags between girls leaving school and getting married (Myers and Harvey, 2011). For example, one study of community schools in Mali found that 22 per cent of pupils dropping out of school were doing so because of marriage, engagement or pregnancy. These pupils were all girls. A further 20 per cent had dropped out in order to leave their village to seek work. These pupils were a mixture of boys and girls (79 and 21 per cent respectively). Further analysis revealed that some girls in the group dropping out in order to leave their village were going to work in a city in order to save money for their marriage trousseaux, thereby creating an indirect link between leaving school and marriage (Laugharn, 2007, p. 69).

Psaki (2012, p. 113) argues that because of indirect links such as these, policies or programmes should not be based on assumptions that delaying marriage will automatically lead to lower school dropout, or that improved education for girls will automatically lead to delayed marriage. She notes the importance of remembering that the same factors cause both low school performance and child marriage, and that policies to address poverty may lead simultaneously to improvements in both education and age of marriage. It is also important to consider the intersectional factors that impact upon girls' likelihood of dropping out of school. A study looking at education and girls with disabilities in Zambia found that these girls were very unlikely to re-enter education after pregnancy (Lwiza, 2014 p. 8).

Data gaps

National data, such as those collected by the Demographic and Health Surveys, provide information on the number of girls and women by country, and in some cases by state or district, who complete different levels of education. They also allow analysis of the proportion of girls aged 15-19 who have begun childbearing, and the percentage of women who were married before age 15. (Croft, et al. 2018). Datasets for some countries also have information on the number of girls and young women aged 15-19 who are pregnant with their first child, have had a

live birth, or have begun childrearing, disaggregated by level of education – the categories are no education, primary incomplete, primary complete and secondary+ education. For example, 2015-16 analysis of DHS data for Tanzania shows that 2.8 per cent of women age 15-19 who were pregnant with their first child had completed secondary education, and 7.2 per cent had completed primary education (DHS, 2016).

In India, a study on child marriage and pregnancy using National Family and Household Survey datasets found that in the state of Bihar, only 51 per cent of girls and young women who married before the age of 18 had completed secondary school. This was followed by 54 per cent of girls and young women in Delhi, and 57 per cent in Rajasthan (Young Lives, 2018, p. 9).

What these data and analyses do not show is whether these girls and young women dropped out of education before or after they married or became pregnant. They also do not help us understand the experiences of girls under the age of 15. Data gaps such as this mean that it is very difficult to accurately quantify the relationships between school dropout and early pregnancy and marriage. As Brown (2012, p. 20) points out, the illegality of child marriage means that there will be great under-reporting of the phenomenon. In addition to national level data constraints, school administrative data is also problematic; schools may not be sure of the reasons why girls drop out, and they may be reticent to record the sensitive issues of early marriage and/or pregnancy. Psaki (2016, p. 124) notes that despite the concern amongst policy makers in several Sub-Saharan countries on 'schoolgirl pregnancy', robust, nationally representative data on the number of students who become pregnant is lacking.

Diversity of findings within available evidence

The different approaches taken by studies looking at early marriage, pregnancy and school dropout, as well as the data gaps around the topic, mean that there are differences and distinctions emerging from available evidence, making it difficult to draw general conclusions. Some of the most commonly cited studies demonstrate this diversity. One study found that in Chile, becoming pregnant reduced girls' high school completion rates by up to 37 per cent (Kruger et al, 2009). Another study found that in Francophone Africa, marriage and pregnancy together were behind up to 20 per cent of school dropouts amongst girls, with pregnancy on its own attributed to up to 10 per cent of dropouts (Lloyd and Mensch, 2006). Research focusing on girls in Nairobi slums found that 14 per cent of out of school girls said they had dropped out due to marriage, and nine per cent had left because of pregnancy (Elrukar and Mathekar, 2007 p. 9). A study in Brazil found that of the women in its sample who reported having an adolescent pregnancy, 46 per cent had remained in school during the pregnancy, 37 per cent had left school after getting pregnant and 17 per cent had left school before becoming pregnant (Almeida and Aquilo, 2009).

More recent studies also show variation in findings. A sector review of girls' primary and secondary education in Malawi notes that pregnancy was thought to account for 27 per cent of school dropouts from secondary school. School fees also accounted for 27 per cent of drop outs, and early marriage for 16 per cent (Robertson, et al. 2017 p. 24). A study on school re-entry policies in Kenya for girls who are mothers states that girls' dropout rates due to pregnancy are 23 per cent nationally and 39 per cent in Emuhaya District (Wanyama and Simatwa, 2011 p.1371). A study in Uganda estimates that a quarter of secondary school dropouts among girls are due to early marriage, and more than half (59 per cent) are due to pregnancy (Watson et al, 2018 p. 83). Meanwhile analysis of DHS data from Tanzania indicates that the majority of early pregnancies occur with girls who are not in school at the time (UNICEF, 2011 p.4). Some of

these different findings can be explained as the result of context and variations between regions and countries. This is discussed more in section three below.

3. Regional differences and distinctions

The most recent analyses show that despite a decline in child marriage in South Asia in the last ten years, around 30 per cent of women aged 20-24 in this region were married before age 18. In West and Central Africa, the figure is over 40 per cent, and in Eastern and Southern Africa, it is around 35 per cent (UNICEF, 2018). In South Asia, the majority of early pregnancies arise within marriage, whereas in Latin America and the Caribbean there are higher rates of early pregnancy outside of marriage. In Sub-Saharan Africa, there are high rates of early pregnancy both within and outside of marriage (UNESCO, 2017). These distinctions are reflected in the available evidence on early marriage, pregnancy and school dropout.

Psaki's review of literature on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and education in four countries across regions highlights some important differences and distinctions. Bangladesh has seen dramatic improvements in girls' education, reaching near gender parity in primary enrolment. However, girls continue to drop out of school at much higher levels than boys, and the country has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally; the highest of any South Asian country (Psaki, 2016 p. 116). Psaki comments that government education policies that pay stipends to families of girls who continue in education, in order to discourage dropout and early marriage, appear to have had more impact than legal changes to the age of marriage (2016, p. 117).

In Ethiopia, analysis of DHS data shows a decline (particularly in urban areas) in child marriage and the proportion of girls and young women giving birth before age 18. At the same time, access to primary education for girls has increased. Psaki argues, however, that while progress in Ethiopia shows the impact that a package of policies and programmes to delay marriage can have on educational outcomes, marriage may not be the primary reason behind girls dropping out of school, and that other factors such as financial barriers to completion of education, are important to consider (2016, p. 118).

Guatemala has the lowest level of primary school completion in Central America, and around 30 per cent of girls nationally are married before age 18, rising to 53 per cent of girls in rural areas. Dropout rates for primary education are high for both girls and boys (Psaki, 2016 p. 121). Indigenous girls face particular intersectional barriers to education, with only 40 per cent of girls from indigenous communities still in school at age 14, compared to 60 per cent of boys in the same communities. The reasons behind school dropout for indigenous girls in Guatemala are more often attributed to poverty and household labour than early marriage, with one study noting a gap of around five years between girls leaving school and marrying (Hallman et al, 2007 p. 170). However, it is still important to note that where finances are limited, parents may choose to invest only in their sons' education if girls are expected to marry earlier (Psaki, 2016 p. 123).

In Kenya, there has been a slow decline in child marriage and adolescent pregnancy (Psaki, 2016 p. 123). Data on the links between early marriage, pregnancy and girls' dropout is varied and inconclusive for Kenya, but Psaki notes that schoolgirl pregnancy has been the subject of significant policy and programme developments.

4. Policies around early pregnancy and education

A recent review of policies in African Union countries published by Human Rights Watch (Martinez and Odhiambo, 2018) found that 26 countries in the African Union have some type of law, policy and/or strategy in place around the rights of pregnant girls and those who are mothers to education.¹ These are discussed below, along with the policies in place in a minority of countries which explicitly allow pregnant students and new mothers to be excluded from school.

Policies that prevent pregnant students from continuing in education

Martinez and Odhiambo's review of policies in African Union countries found that Tanzania, Sierra Leona and Equatorial Guinea have laws or policies which allow pregnant students to be expelled from school (2018, p.37). Additionally, in some northern African countries such as Sudan and Morocco, pregnant unmarried girls can be charged with adultery, indecency, or extra-marital sex (2018, p.40).

In Tanzania, education regulations state that students can be expelled from school if they have committed an 'offence against morality' or 'entered into wedlock'. Pregnancy is often interpreted as one such offence (Martinez and Odhiambo, 2018 p. 38; UNICEF, 2011 p. 28). The Centre for Reproductive Rights (2013) estimates that between 2003 and 2011 in Tanzania over 55,000 adolescent girls were forced to drop out or were expelled from primary or secondary schools due to pregnancy. In 2018 the Tanzanian government has been developing guidelines around a parallel basic education system for young mothers. It is not clear what the standard of education offered will be, or what fees the students will have to pay (Martinez and Odhiambo, 2018 p. 38).

Policies that encourage pregnant students to continue in education and support new mothers' re-entry into school

Of the 26 countries in the African Union that have laws, policies and strategies in place to guarantee girls' rights to education during or after pregnancy, six have put legislation in place to allow pregnant students to continue their education, four have policies or strategies around 'continuation', which allow a pregnant student to stay in school and do not specify a time after giving birth when they must remain absent, and fifteen have conditional policies that require pregnant students to drop out of school but provide routes of re-entry if certain conditions are met (Martinez and Odhiambo, 2018, p. 30).

¹ These countries are: Benin, Lesotho, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania, South Sudan, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Rwanda, Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Burundi, Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia.

Table 1: Laws, policies and strategies allowing pregnant students and new mothers to stay in school

Countries with national laws on pregnant girls’ and mothers’ rights to education	
Benin	Democratic Republic of Congo
Lesotho	Mauritania
Nigeria	South Sudan
Countries with policies on ‘continuation’	
Cape Verde	Ivory Coast
Gabon	Rwanda
Countries with policies on ‘re-entry’ that set out conditions for adolescent mothers	
Botswana	Burundi
Cameroon	Gambia
Kenya	Liberia
Madagascar	Malawi
Mozambique	Namibia
Senegal	South Africa
Swaziland	Zambia
Mozambique	

Source: Martinez and Odhiambo (2018, p. 31-32)

Conditional policies often contain problematic measures that increase discrimination and stigma against pregnant students and new mothers. For example, Martinez and Odhiambo note that in Malawi pregnant students are suspended for one year. They can apply for readmission after this period only by sending requests to the Ministry of Education as well as the school. In Senegal, girls must provide a medical declaration that they are healthy enough to attend school before they can return (2018, p. 32-33). While pregnant students are allowed to re-enter school after giving birth in Botswana, this is only after a year’s suspension. In addition, all girls in Botswana must agree to regular pregnancy testing at school (Birungi et al, 2015, p. 7).

Some policies stipulate that girls can only re-enter education after pregnancy if they attend a different school. One justification for such an approach is protection from stigma for teenage mothers, as this quote from a teacher in Birungi et al’s study shows: “The other children will say a lot, and this child will be stigmatized. So, the best thing is to transfer her where the problem is not known” (2015, p. 10). Another justification is that girls who are pregnant or are mothers will be a bad influence on other students: “She will be polluting the rest who will say, ‘Ah

ha! So, I can just play sex, get pregnant, and soon afterwards I can come back to school after delivery?’ We will be inviting prostitution, and that is risk behaviour” (Birungi et al (2015, p. 10). In Mozambique, a decree was issued stating that pregnant girls should be transferred to night school. While the aim of the decree was to challenge the custom of expelling pregnant students, allowing them to continue with their education during pregnancy and motherhood, it reinforces the message that pregnant girls should not mix with other students. There is evidence that the policy has in fact led to greater dropout, with girls finding it difficult to attend classes at night time due to lack of childcare and concerns around safety (Salvi, 2016 p.8).

Several studies emphasise problems in the implementation of policies designed to ensure access to education for pregnant students and new mothers. Kenya’s return to school policy, for example, is not accompanied by clear guidelines for teachers on implementation. It is therefore open to interpretation and the use of discretion, which means its implementation can be influenced by discriminatory attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes (Achoka et al, 2012; p. 887; Wekesa, 2011 p. 21). A study of three schools in South Africa’s Western Cape illustrated the ways that the 2007 guidelines on managing learner pregnancy in South Africa have been misinterpreted, resulting in exclusionary practices. The three schools implemented the policy completely differently; at one school learners were sent home as soon as their pregnancy became evident, at another they were advised to leave when six months’ pregnant, and in the third school the decision on when to leave and when to resume studies was left to students and their parents (Ngabaza and Shefer, 2013 p. 106).

A review of Malawi’s readmission policy for school aged mothers found that many teachers had not seen the policy and were unsure how to implement it (Robertson et al, 2017 p. 33). Qualitative research with 46 teachers in Anambra State, Nigeria, found that half of the teachers did not know about, or have access to a written policy on unintended pregnancy in their schools. Just under half of the teachers interviewed said that such pregnancies were dealt with by expulsion in their school (Onyeka, et al. 2011 p. 112). In Zambia, a re-entry policy for girls who leave school due to pregnancy has been in place for 19 years, but recent research looking at the experiences of students who become pregnant found that girls face a number of challenges in returning to school, including inability to pay fees, lack of childcare, hostile attitudes from teacher and peers, and schools failing to adequately implement the policy (Ntambo and Malvin, 2017 p.73).

5. Practices, attitudes and behaviours around early pregnancy and education

In countries where laws and/or policies are in place to promote education for pregnant girls and new mothers, or where there are no explicit policies and laws to exclude pregnant students from education, evidence demonstrates the ways that practices – in schools or local education authorities – serve to effectively block girls’ education and encourage dropout. Evidence from a range of countries also illustrates the impact of stigma, discrimination and stereotypes about and toward girls who become pregnant while at school. This stigma is inherently gendered in nature; several studies show that boys do not face the negative impacts that girls do when they become parents (UNICEF, 2011). Discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviours around early pregnancy and education have been observed amongst teachers, families and communities, and other students, as discussed below.

Teachers

In countries where there are no specific policies or legislation on pregnancy and education, decisions about whether a student is allowed to remain at school while pregnant or to return to school after pregnancy are often deferred to head teachers (Birungi et al, 2015, p. 8). Several studies have uncovered conservative attitudes amongst teachers, with teachers viewing teenage pregnancy and sexuality as a social problem, seen as shameful and disruptive to other pupils and the school (Bhana et al, 2010; Oruko et al, 2015; Ngabaza and Shefer, 2013). Teachers interviewed for a study on the attitudes of education stakeholders in Zimbabwe and South Africa commented that: "School girls who are pregnant do not pass. It can be just a waste of their parents' money in these difficult times", and: "A school with many teen mothers can lose its reputation in the community. I remember our next-door school was once nicknamed a 'maternity ward' by people because there were too many pregnancies there" (Runhare and Vandeyar, 2011 p. 4110).

In addition, when girls return to school after pregnancy they can find that teachers do not understand their situations, and will punish or humiliate them if they fall behind in class or take time off when their children are sick or no childcare is available (Oruko et al, 2015; Onyeka, 2011, Chigona and Chetty, 2008). This hostile environment will increase the risk of girls dropping out of school.

Families and communities

Pregnant girls and young mothers also experience stigma and discrimination from their families and communities, which inhibits their confidence to continue with their education as well as placing a range of practical barriers in their way.

Runhare and Vandeyar's study looking at attitudes around pregnancy in schools in South Africa and Zimbabwe found that the sociocultural beliefs within communities could have more impact on pregnant students' access to and participation in education than official school policies (2011, p. 4119). In Tanzania, a national opinion poll held in 2009 revealed that two thirds of Tanzanians believe that "the girl is to blame" if she gets pregnant while attending school (UNICEF, 2011 p. 28). In Uganda, the gendered social norms active among communities discourage allowing pregnant girls or new mothers to continue at school, as such girls would set a 'bad example' for other students (Watson et al, 2018 p. 94).

Chigona and Chetty's study of teenage mothers in South Africa discusses an example of a community who petitioned the local school not to allow pregnant students or those who were mothers to attend, as they would set a bad example to other students. When the school refused to comply with the request and insisted on implementing South Africa's policy guidelines on managing learner pregnancy, community members intimidated the girls during their journey to and from school, leading to them dropping out in any case (2008, p. 274).

Family support can make all the difference to whether students who are also mothers drop out or remain in/return to education. Social norms and gender power imbalances mean that frequently, the majority of child care and parenting falls onto the adolescent mother, rather than the father of the child. If girls have practical and financial support from their families, the chance of dropout is lessened (Ngabaza and Shefer, 2013). Chigona and Chetty's study of teenage mothers in South Africa found that a lack of support from home, in the form of: parental attitudes that reinforce the

stigma of teenage pregnancy; communication breakdown; and financial pressures, led to girls dropping out of school (2008, p. 273).

Peers

Several studies looking at the experiences of pregnant students and those who are mothers demonstrate the ways that negative reactions from other students can lead to dropout (Wanjiku, 2015; Runhare and Vandeyar, 2011). A study of teenage mothers in South Africa found that many reported being teased, bullied and isolated by their peers. The authors argue that the girls were, in effect, 'othered' and oppressed by this treatment, which led to them skipping school, and in some cases dropping out completely (Chigona and Chetty, 2008 p. 271). The following quote from a 17 year old Kenyan girl is used by Brown (2012, p. 24) to illustrate the ways that pregnant students can be stigmatised: "My classmates in my former school would laugh at me when they realised I was pregnant. They even drew cartoons to illustrate my condition on the blackboard just to ridicule me".

Ngabaza and Shefer's study of young mothers attending school in South Africa demonstrates the importance of peer reaction to pregnancy, with one girl saying: "I was too embarrassed to face my class ... so I quickly dropped out of school on my own before many people even noticed I was pregnant" (Ngabaza and Shefer, 2013 p. 109). The study also highlights how, for girls who remain in school or return after pregnancy, a combination of ridicule and moralistic attitudes from peers, as well as teachers, along with the pressures of finding childcare and the experience of financial hardship, can build up, resulting in girls dropping out (2013, p. 111).

6. References

Achoka, J., Njeru, S. and Muthoni, F. (2012). 'De-stigmatizing teenage motherhood: Towards achievement of universal basic education in Kenya' in *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 3 (6).

Almeida, M. and Aquilo, E. (2009). 'The role of education level in the intergenerational pattern of adolescent pregnancy in Brazil' in *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 35 (3) p.139.

Birungi, H., Undie, C., MacKenzie, I., Katahoire, A., Obare, F. and Machawira, P. (2015). *Education sector response to early and unintended pregnancy: A review of country experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa*. STEP UP and UNESCO Research Report.

https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2015STEPUP_EducSectorResp.pdf

Bhana, D. and Morrell R. et al. (2010). 'South African teachers' responses to teenage pregnancy and teenage mothers in schools' in *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. Vol. 12, No. 8, p. 871

Brown, G. (2012). *Out of wedlock, into school: Combatting child marriage through education*. Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown. <http://educationenvoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Child-Marriage.pdf>

Centre for Reproductive Rights (2013). *Forced out: Mandatory pregnancy testing and the expulsion of pregnant students in Tanzanian schools*.

https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicaactions.net/files/documents/crr_Tanzania_Report_Part_1.pdf

Chigona, A. and Chetty, R. (2008). 'Teen mothers and schooling: Teen mothers and challenges' in *South African Journal of Education* 28 p.261.

Croft, T., Marshall, A. and Allen, C. et al. (2018). *Guide to DHS Statistics*. Rockville, Maryland, USA: ICF <https://dhsprogram.com/Data/Guide-to-DHS-Statistics/index.cfm>

DHS (2016). Demographic Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey 2015-15, DHS. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR321/FR321.pdf>

Elrukar, A. and Mathekar, J. (2007). *Adolescence in the Kibera slums of Nairobi, Kenya*. Population Council.

Grant, M. and Hallman, K. (2006). *Pregnancy-related school dropout and prior school performance in South Africa*. Policy Research Division Working Paper no. 212. NY: Population Council.

Hallman K., Peracca, S., Catino, J. and Ruiz M.J. (2007). 'Indigenous girls in Guatemala: poverty and location', in Lewis, M. and Lockeed, M. *Exclusion, gender and education: case studies from the developing world*. Washington, D.C., Center for Global Development.

Kruger, D. I., Berthelon, M. E. and Navia, R. (2009). *Adolescent motherhood and secondary schooling in Chile* (No. 4552). IZA Discussion Papers. <https://www.econstor.eu/dspace/bitstream/10419/36191/1/615362729.pdf>

Laugharn, P. (2007). *Negotiating 'Education for Many': Enrolment, dropout and persistence in the community schools of Kolondieba, Mali*. Create Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 14. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c05e5274a27b2000f19/PTA14.pdf>

Lloyd, C. B. and Mensch B. S. (2006). *Marriage and childbirth as factors in school exit: An analysis of DHS data from sub-Saharan Africa*. Policy Research Division Working Paper, 219.

Lwiza, F. (2014). *An investigation into the re-entry of learners with disabilities in selected schools in Lusaka Province, Zambia*. University of Zambia.

Martinez, E. and Odhiambo, A. (2018). *Leave no girl behind in Africa: Discrimination in education against pregnant girls and adolescent mothers*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/au0618_insert_webspreads.pdf

Morara, A. and Chemwei, B. (2013). 'Drop out among pupils in rural primary Schools in Kenya: The case of Nandi North District, Kenya' in *Journal of Education and Practice* 4 (19).

Myers, J. and Harvey, R. (2011). *Early and forced marriage and girls' education*. Plan. <https://plan-uk.org/file/breaking-vows-efm-3462225pdf/download?token=RIE5iobL>

Näslund-Hadley, E. and Binstock, G. (2010). *The miseducation of Latin American girls: Poor schooling makes pregnancy a rational choice*. Technical Notes N° IDB-TN-204, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). <http://publications.iadb.org/handle/11319/3699?locale-attribute=en>

Ngabaza, S. and Shefer, T. (2013). 'Policy commitments vs. lived realities of young pregnant women and mothers in school, Western Cape, South Africa' in *Reproductive Health Matters*. Vol. 21, No. 41, pp. 106–113.

- Ntambo, A. and Malvin, K. (2017). 'The impact of re-entry policy on girls who fall pregnant and re-admitted back to school in selected schools in Mpongwe district' in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development* 4 (6) p66.
- Onyeka, I. N., Miettola, J., Ilika, A. L. and Vaskilampi, T. (2011). 'Unintended pregnancy and termination of studies among students in Anambra State, Nigeria: Are secondary schools playing their part?' in *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, Vol. 15, No. 2.
- Oruko K., Nyothach E., Zielinski-Gutierrez E., Mason L., Alexander K., Vulule J, et al. (2015) "He is the one who is providing you with everything so whatever he says is what you do": A qualitative study on factors affecting secondary schoolgirls' dropout in Rural Western Kenya' in *PLoS ONE* 10 (12)
- Psaki, S. (2012). 'Addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy as barriers to gender parity and equality in education' in *Prospects* 46 (1) p. 109-129.
- Robertson, S., Casserty, E. and Kunkwenzu, E. (2017). *Girls' primary and secondary education in Malawi: Sector review*. The Australian Council for Educational Research.
https://research.acer.edu.au/monitoring_learning/31/
- Runhare, T. and Vandeyar, S. (2011). 'Loss of learning space within a legally inclusive educational system: institutional responsiveness to mainstreaming of pregnant learners in formal education' in *Gender and Behaviour* 9 (2) p.4100.
- Salvi, F. (2016). 'In the making: Constructing in-school pregnancy in Mozambique' in *Gender and Education* 30 (4)
- Stoebenau, K., Warner, A., Edmeades, J. D. and Sexton, M. (2015). "Girls are like leaves on the wind": How gender expectations impact girls' education – A closer look from West Nile Uganda. Washington, DC. [http://www.ungei.org/141011_ICRW_MacArthur_Final_Web_\(1\).pdf](http://www.ungei.org/141011_ICRW_MacArthur_Final_Web_(1).pdf)
- Uche, R. (2013). 'Dropout syndrome among girls in secondary schools and human resources development in Nigeria' in *Journal of Education and Practice* 4 (2).
<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/viewFile/4065/4100>
- UNESCO (2017). *Early and unintended pregnancy and the education sector: Evidence review and recommendations*. UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002515/251509E.pdf>
- UNFPA (2013). *Motherhood in Childhood. Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy*. New York, UNFPA. <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP2013.pdf>
- UNICEF (2011). *Adolescence in Tanzania*.
https://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/TANZANIA_ADOLESCENT_REPORT_Final.pdf
- UNICEF (2018). *New global estimates of child marriage*. Available online:
<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/unicef-data-on-child-marriage-2018/>
- Wanjiku, E. (2015). *Challenges experienced by young mother-learners upon re-entry to formal primary school*. University of Oslo.

Wanyama, E. and Simatwa, E. (2011). 'Prospects and challenges in the implementation of re-entry policy of girls in secondary schools in Kenya: a case study of Emuhaya District' in *Educational Research* 2 (8) p.1373

Watson, C., Bantebya, G. and Muhanguzi, F. (2018). 'The paradox of change and continuity in social norms and practices affecting adolescent girls' capabilities and transitions to adulthood in rural Uganda' in Harper et al (eds). *Empowering adolescent girls in developing countries: Gender justice and norm change*. Oxon: Routledge

Wekesa, A. (2011). *Bending the private-public gender norms: negotiating schooling for young mothers from low-income households in Kenya*. International Institute for Social Studies working paper no. 515. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/22531/>

Young Lives (2018). *India child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Based on NFHS 4 (2015-16)*. <https://www.younglives.org.uk/content/india-child-marriage-and-teenage-pregnancy-based-nfhs-4-2015-16>

Acknowledgements

We thank the following experts who voluntarily provided suggestions for relevant literature or other advice to the author to support the preparation of this report. The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any of the experts consulted.

- Isobel Talks, Gender Researcher, University of Oxford
- Kanwal Ahluwalia, Women and girls' rights and gender equality consultant
- Vinita Sahasranaman, Children's Investment Fund Foundation
- Susy Ndaruhutse, Education Development Trust
- Stephanie Psaki, Population Council

Suggested citation

Birchall, J. (2018). *Early marriage, pregnancy and girl child school dropout*. K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

About this report

This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

K4D services are provided by a consortium of leading organisations working in international development, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with Education Development Trust, Itad, University of Leeds Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Birmingham International Development Department (IDD) and the University of Manchester Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI).

This report was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and its partners in support of pro-poor programmes. It is licensed for non-commercial purposes only. K4D cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this report. Any views and



*opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, K4D or any other contributing organisation. © DFID
- Crown copyright 2018.*