



## Difference in Retention Trends of Teenage Mothers in Public Secondary Schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties, Kenya

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### Abstract

*In Kenya, teenage pregnancy significantly threatens girls' education, often leading to high dropout rates and early marriages. Recent statistics reveal that about four in ten girls aged 15-19 have been pregnant. This study aimed to examine the retention trends of teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties, selected due to their high prevalence of teenage pregnancy, representation of rural and urban areas, and limited existing data on post-childbirth school resumption. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development offered a valuable framework for understanding teenage mothers' developmental challenges. The study employed an ex post facto survey design. The target population consisted of 32,597 girls, 79 principals from Nairobi County, 7,396 girls, and 16 principals from Samburu County. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling tables, a population of 39,993 should have a sample size of 380 respondents. Therefore, 380 girls were included in the sample. For principals, the sample was determined based on Gay's (2001) recommendation that a 10-40 percent sample size is adequate for representation. The researcher chose the upper limit of 40%, resulting in a sample of 38 principals. Data was collected using self-constructed questionnaires and interview schedules. A pilot study in four schools tested reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding a reliable score of 0.78. Data analysis using descriptive statistics and t-tests with SPSS version 22 revealed a significant difference in retention trends between the counties, though retention rates were low in both principals from Nairobi County,  $t = -5.477, p < 0.05$ . The study recommends continued efforts to support school re-entry for teenage mothers, as increasing their retention could significantly influence their educational attainment and future opportunities. Policies should particularly focus on aiding teenage mothers from rural and marginalized communities to return to secondary schools.*

**Keywords:** Teenage mothers, teenage pregnancy, retention, trends, re-entry policy

### INTRODUCTION

Early and unintended teenage pregnancies pose a significant threat to the educational pursuits of numerous girls worldwide. Global patterns underscore that teenage pregnancies and motherhood constitute a substantial psychosocial challenge, particularly prevalent in developing nations (Kiptoo-Tarus, 2020). The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF, 2018) has recognized the escalating incidence of teenage pregnancies as a pressing and escalating global issue. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024), an estimated 21 million girls aged 15 to 19 in developing regions experience pregnancy annually, with approximately 12 million giving birth. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2022) reported a teenage pregnancy rate of 73 per 1,000 among girls aged 15-19 in 2022. Disturbingly, there were approximately 28,932 pregnancies among girls aged 10-14 and 349,465 pregnancies among those aged 15-19. Girls in this age bracket are supposed to be in secondary school. Alarming, an estimated 13,000 teenage girls leave school annually in Kenya due to pregnancy (Mackatian, Mackatian, & Owino, 2022).



Evidence shows that teenage pregnancy and school dropout are intertwined in a complex web of socio-economic factors (Birchall, 2018). The burden of pregnancy at a young age can significantly disrupt a teenager's education, leading to an increased likelihood of dropping out of school. According to Issa and Temu (2023), challenges such as lack of adequate support systems, financial strain, and societal stigma can exacerbate the situation. For many teenage mothers, balancing the responsibilities of motherhood with academic demands becomes overwhelming, ultimately forcing them to leave school prematurely. Imbosa, Majanga and Ouda (2022) postulate that to encourage teenage mothers' successful return to and completion of formal education, school retention initiatives encompass outreach programmes, counselling services, academic support, vocational training, and other interventions tailored to the specific needs of each learner.

Retention of teenage mothers is crucial to their human capital development by providing the opportunity to continue their education, acquire knowledge and skills, and improve their prospects (Morgan, Ibrahim, Owusu, Awafo, Quartey, Aziire, Katsekor, Owusu & Katey, 2023). By promoting retention, we can ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, emphasizing the importance of promoting equal opportunities for girls in education. Achieving gender equity in education has seen significant progress, although the critical goal remains largely unattained Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] 4 (Mutua, Miriti & Mogeni, 2019). Nevertheless, a study by Evans et al. (2020) indicated that in 90 out of 126 countries worldwide, women's educational attainment lags behind that of men, highlighting a significant disparity in equity within education. A study by Adangabe, Emmanuella, and Tigtig (2021) found an inverse relationship between the achievement of educational goals and teenage motherhood for girls. Therefore, adolescent pregnancy occurs as a significant obstacle impeding the attainment of zero gender inequality in education across several countries worldwide. The limited educational opportunities available to girls impede their personal development, economic empowerment, and social mobility. Moreover, gender inequalities in education sustain cycles of poverty and inequality, affecting not only individual lives but also entire communities and societies. Failure to address these gaps undermines efforts towards achieving inclusive and sustainable development.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024) low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) bear the greatest burden of teenage pregnancy, with an estimated twelve million 15 to 19 aged girls giving birth annually, leading to adverse effects on their educational and economic accomplishments, as noted by Morgan et al. (2023). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to have the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy, with 99.4 births per 1000 women, despite a global decline in the rate from 64.5 births per 1000 women (15–19 years) in 2000 to 41.3 births per 1000 women in 2023 (WHO, 2024). Numerous factors contribute to the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), including limited access to and underutilization of contraceptives, alongside pervasive instances of sexual and gender-based violence. (Parida, Gajjala & Giri, 2021). Inadequate Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education is also a contributing factor to the rising rates of teenage pregnancies within the SSA sub-region. Moreover, societal pressures, including the expectation to marry and start families at an early age, further exacerbate the persistence of this issue in certain contexts (Gerbaka, Richa & Tomb, 2021). Moreover, the combination of low levels of education and limited employment opportunities for young girls may also contribute to the prevalence of teenage pregnancies. These intersecting factors form a complex landscape that sustains the issue of teenage pregnancies in the sub-region, with particular relevance to Kenya.



In Kenya, the teenage pregnancy and motherhood rate currently stands at 18%, indicating that approximately 1 in every 5 adolescent girls aged between 15 and 19 have either given birth or are expecting their first child (Obwaka, 2023). This rate escalates notably with age, from 3% among 15-year-old girls to 40% among those aged 19. Disparities exist among counties, with some experiencing a disproportionate impact compared to others. According to the KDHS report of 2022, teenage pregnancy and motherhood rates have stagnated since 2014, leading to continued challenges such as school dropout, health risks associated with childbirth and unsafe abortion, and instances of early marriage. Consequently, the prospects for girls to access decent economic opportunities are severely compromised, ultimately impeding the country's potential to capitalize on the demographic dividend.

Imbosa, et al. (2022) investigated the re-entry policy and retention of expectant students and teen mothers in public secondary schools in Vihiga Sub-County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and sampled ten guidance and counselling teachers, ten principals, one children's officer, one sub-county director of education, one county statistics officer, and fifty students who were selected using a purposive sampling approach. Data was collected using interview schedules, questionnaires, and document analysis. The findings of the study indicated that a majority of teenage mothers were retained in school to continue with their secondary education; at 83.3% (2017), 86.4% (2018), 88.9% (2019), and 81.8% (2020). The study pointed out that there has been a general increase in retention rates of teenage mothers in public schools over the past five years. The trend was attributed to several factors including increasing awareness of the importance of staying in school and the availability of free or discounted day-care services (Wekesa and Kitainge, 2022). The present study was conducted in Samburu and Nairobi Counties to find out the retention trends.

Adequate policies and laws have been established in Kenya to address the challenge of teenage pregnancy and motherhood. These include The Kenyan Constitution (2010); the Sexual Offences Act (2006); the Children's Act (2011); the National Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Policy (ASRH 2015), The Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS (2013), the National Reproductive Health Policy; and the Population Policy for National Development. In 1994, the Kenya Ministry of Education established a policy mandating that expectant students remain in school until delivery. In 1996, this policy was reviewed, leading to the formulation of National Guidelines for School Re-entry in Basic Education in 2020. The primary objective of these guidelines, as outlined by Imbosa, et al. (2022), was to enhance and facilitate the re-entry process for learners who had dropped out of school. However, girls' dropout rates in secondary schools are higher than the boys (Mackatian, et al., 2022). Factors affecting the success of the policy include critics who are always up to challenge its implementation. Also crucial is that little awareness of the policy among key figures such as school administrators, teenage mothers, teachers, and guardians also hinders the effective implementation of the policy.

The KDHS (2022) report revealed that the highest percentage of pregnancies among girls aged 15-19 years is found in Samburu County, standing at 50%, followed by West Pokot at 36%, and Marsabit at 29%. These counties are predominantly rural, in contrast to Nairobi, an urban county with a significantly lower rate of 8.4%. Samburu County has also been identified as a region where only 15.4% of residents have attained a secondary level of education or higher, according to the Kenya National Adolescents and Youth Survey [NAYS] (2017). Teenage pregnancy, coupled with cultural practices such as moralism, female genital mutilation (FGM), and early marriages, have been mentioned as barriers preventing many girls and boys from accessing education in Samburu County, as reported by NAYS (2017). Comparatively, pregnancy rates are relatively lower in other areas such as Nyeri 4.5%, Mombasa 10.8%, Vihiga 7.7% and Laikipia



(9.1% (KDHS, 2022). It's worth noting that the ages of 15-19 years typically coincide with the secondary school age range for girls.

A study conducted in Samburu County by Odhiambo (2018) revealed that poverty and harmful cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages, negatively impact girls' enrolment in secondary schools. The study found that a majority of girls in rural schools have undergone FGM compared to those in urban schools, resulting in lower enrolment and retention rates in rural areas. Additionally, the study discovered that many parents prioritize educating boys, and early pregnancies cause many girls to drop out of school to get married. According to the Samburu County Nutrition Action Plan 2019-2023, only 31.2% of the adult population can read and write, and just 9.2% have secondary education. This is likely because Samburu County lags behind national averages for gross enrolment and net enrolment rates (MoE, 2020).

Teenage parenting brings with it problems of low educational achievement, low possibilities of employment, and a cycle of poverty for the teenage mother and the baby (UNICEF, 2022). The purpose of the National Guidelines for School Re-entry in Early Learning and Basic Education (MoE, 2020) by the Ministry of Education is to provide a background for enhancing re-entry for learners who leave school, especially teenage mothers. The guidelines are meant to improve transition, retention, and completion rates at all levels of education. A baseline survey conducted by UNICEF (2022) in Kenya in 16 counties indicated that teenage mothers who returned to the formal school system dropped out a second time. This is what prompted the researchers to carry out this study in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties to find out if there is a difference in the retention rate of teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties in Kenya.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey method with an ex post facto design to investigate the disparity in retention trends among teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties, Kenya. The target population included 32,597 girls, 79 teacher counsellors, and 79 principals from Nairobi County, as well as 7,396 girls, 16 teacher counsellors, and 16 principals from Samburu County. This study employed multistage sampling with both probability and non-probability sampling procedures. The first stage of the sampling involved stratified random sampling where the population was first categorized into girls-only schools and co-educational secondary schools. Thirty-eight (40%) of the secondary schools were sampled and proportionately distributed in the two counties as follows: Nairobi County for the girls' schools (17), mixed (14), Samburu County for the girls, schools (5), and mixed girls (2) schools. According to Gay (2001), a sample of 10% - 40% adequately represents a large population in descriptive studies. To get the number of students to be drawn from the sampled schools, the researcher used Krecjie and Morgan (1970) tables for the determination of sample size. According to these tables, a population of 39,993 is represented by a sample of 380 respondents, proportionately distributed in the 38 schools. Ten students were randomly selected from each of the sampled schools. Teacher counsellors and principals were purposively selected. Following Gay's (2001) observation that a sample size of 10-40 percent is adequate representation, the researcher chose the upper limit of 40%. Consequently, 38 teacher counsellors and 38 principals were included in the sample. Data collection was conducted using questionnaires and interview schedules. Table I below indicates the sample size.

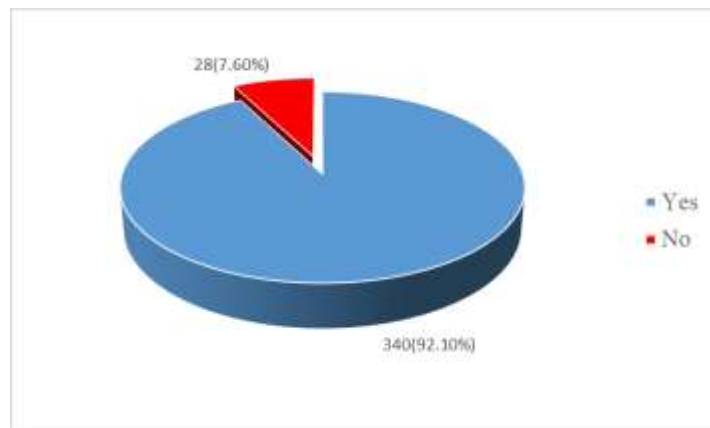


**Table 1: Sample Size**

| County  | School Category | No. of Schools | No. of Students | No. of Principals | No. of Counsellors |
|---------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Nairobi | Girls           | 17             | 170             | 17                | 17                 |
|         | Mixed           | 14             | 140             | 14                | 14                 |
| Samburu | Girls           | 5              | 50              | 5                 | 5                  |
|         | Mixed           | 2              | 20              | 2                 | 2                  |
| Total   |                 | 38             | 380             | 38                | 38                 |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To ascertain whether the female respondents reported instances of pregnancy occurring among students within their schools. The sampled learners were requested to say “yes” or “no”. The findings are presented in Figure 1



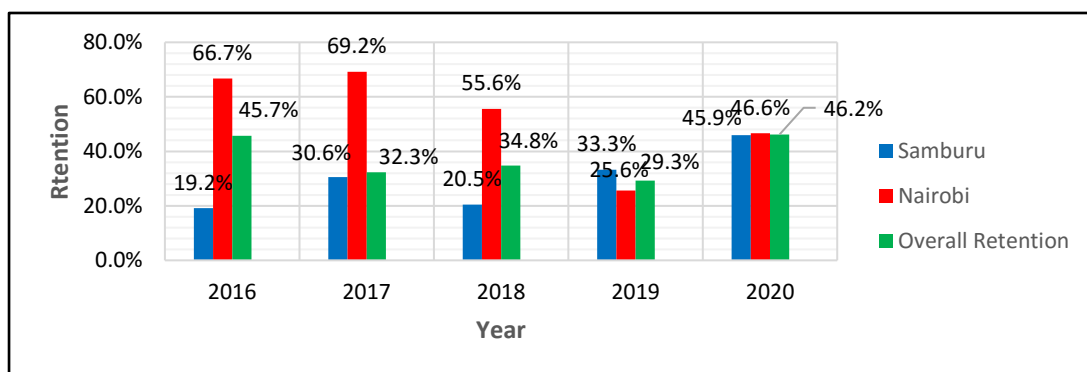
**Figure 1: Pregnancy in Schools**

The results shown in Figure 1 indicate that the majority of students, 92.10%, confirmed that girls do experience pregnancies, while only 7.60% disagreed. This suggests that pregnancies occur among girls while they are still in secondary school. A study by Undie, Birungi, Odwe and Obere (2020) conducted in Homa Bay county, reported that 66% of out-of-school teenage mothers reported that pregnancy was the main reason why they had left school. This was verified too by a similar proportion of their household heads, 69% who were mainly parents and guardians. Similarly, a study by Okumu (2020) found that three to five girls in secondary schools in Ukwala ward, Siaya County, Kenya were pregnant, with most of these girls being in form two and three. When respondents were asked if pregnant girls in their schools were re-admitted, 87.80%



indicated they were not, while only 11.90% said they were. These findings suggest that the readmission process for pregnant and teenage mothers faces numerous challenges in most schools. This aligns with a study by Issa and Temu (2023), which highlighted the lack of specific policies and legal frameworks endorsed by parliament to guide the re-admission of teenage mothers into the formal school system. It is crucial to support teenage mothers in returning to school.

To assess the difference in retention trends of teenage mothers over five years in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties, an interview item asked secondary school principals to report the number of students who became pregnant and those who continued their education either through re-admission or by transferring to other secondary schools after giving birth. The responses are summarized in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Retention of Teenage Mothers**

Figure 2 shows that the retention rate of teenage mothers in Nairobi County was higher than in Samburu County. In 2016, Samburu had a return rate of 19.2%, while Nairobi had 66.7%. Similarly, in 2017, Nairobi led with a 69.2% return rate compared to Samburu's 30.6%. The exception was in 2019 when Samburu had a higher return rate of 33.3% compared to Nairobi's 25.6%. In 2020, the retention rates were nearly equal, with Samburu at 45.9% and Nairobi at 46.6%, resulting in an overall retention rate of 46.2%. The notable increase in 2020 was largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused schools to close for most of the year. This trend is consistent with a study by Muga, Raburu, and Odongo (2022) in Ugenya Sub-County, Siaya County, which reported that teenage pregnancy rates increased from 17% in 2014 to 35% in 2020. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2022), the highest rates of teenage pregnancy were in Samburu at 50%, West Pokot at 36%, and Marsabit at 29%, with the lowest rates at 5% in Nyeri and Nyandarua. These findings suggest that secondary school-aged girls are at significant risk of becoming pregnant and dropping out of school early.

### Comparison of retention trends for Samburu and Nairobi counties

To determine if there were significant differences in the retention trends of teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties, the following null hypothesis was tested: There is no statistically significant difference in retention trends of teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties. This hypothesis involved examining the retention rate differences between the two counties. The null hypothesis was tested using the



t-test, and the results, indicating the statistical difference in retention trends of teenage mothers between the counties, are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: T-test on Retention Trends of Samburu and Nairobi Counties**

|                              |                             | Levine's Test |      | t-test for Equality of Means |         |                 |                 |            |                                                          |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------|------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|                              |                             | F             | Sig. | t                            | df      | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference<br>Lower Upper |
| Retention of Teenage Mothers | Equal variances assumed     | 4.392         | .037 | -5.805                       | 365     | .000            | -.51163         | .08814     | -.68495 -.33830                                          |
|                              | Equal variances not assumed |               |      | -5.477                       | 170.843 | .000            | -.51163         | .09341     | -.69601 -.32724                                          |

Table 2 indicates a statistically significant difference in retention trends between the two counties, with a p-value lower than the chosen level of significance .000 was less than of the  $\alpha$  - value (.05). Based on these results, hypothesis  $H_{01}$  suggests there was no significant difference in retention trends of teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Samburu and Nairobi Counties, was rejected  $H_{01}$  (at  $\alpha = .05$ ) and conclusion made that the retention trends of teenage mothers were higher in Nairobi County compared to Samburu County. This suggested that more teenage mothers' students were retained to continue with their secondary school education in Nairobi than in Samburu County. This difference could be attributed to several factors: a study by Kinyanjui (2022) on education in marginalized communities in Kenya, posited that among marginalized communities, like Samburu County several factors militate against the retention of pregnant and teenage mothers in secondary schools.

The study noted that marginalization in education is linked to factors such as poverty, gender, politics, ethnicity and location. This is in agreement with a study by WHO (2018) in Asian-Pacific countries, where it was reported that rates of teenage marriages and early unions are higher among lower socio-economic groups and in rural areas across nations. In family settings, poorer households may arrange marriages for their daughters to shift the 'financial burden' to the husband's family. For example, financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic forced parents in Indonesia to remove their daughters from school and arrange marriages so the 'burden' of care becomes the responsibility of the husband and his family (UNICEF, 2022). Financial incentives may be greater in settings where a bride price is paid, by the groom's family to the bride in exchange for marriage, as has been reported in some communities in Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Vietnam (WHO, 2018). While families may gain economically in the short term, adolescent marriages further entrench the cycle of poverty in the long; because it disrupts a girl's education and limits her future employment opportunities. This could partly explain the lower retention rates in Samburu County than in Nairobi County.



Similarly, the findings also concur with a study done by Greene and Stiefvater (2019) that reported that rural areas typically have less access to schools and formal employment opportunities, which impacts on the perceived value of education compared to marriage. Compounding this, traditional social norms are generally slower to change in rural areas than in urban areas. The more limited access to technology, mass media, and the internet in rural, remote settings, the more adherence to traditional beliefs and the slower changes in social norms. Thus, teenage mothers are likely to be married off rather than going back to school. Additionally, in these smaller communities, an unplanned pregnancy out of wedlock may also be difficult to conceal, bringing great shame to the family, and may even result in the expulsion of an unmarried mother from the village and denied an opportunity to resume schooling. Also, Mackatian et al. (2022) concluded that the main cause of the decrease in girls' education was caused by early marriages, they pointed out that early marriages hurt teenage mothers' education.

A UNFPA (2023) report based on a household survey indicated that teenage pregnancy rates decreased to 15% in 2022, down from 18% in 2014. Higher rates of adolescent pregnancy were linked to poverty and lack of education, with about 4 in 10 women aged 15-19 without any education having ever been pregnant, compared to only 5% of women with more than a secondary education. Samburu is one of the counties in Kenya with low education levels among women and girls, leading to low retention rates for teenage mothers. Teenage pregnancies are more prevalent in poor communities, with 21% of women aged 15-19 in the lowest wealth quintile reporting having been pregnant, compared to 8% in the highest wealth quintile (UNESCO, 2021). A study by Jochim et al. (2022) found that poverty and unmet childcare needs are major factors affecting the return of teenage mothers to school. The study suggested that teenage mothers impacted by poverty need family support and better access to affordable childcare options to continue their education.

The principals were interviewed to find out the challenges the teenage mothers encountered that hindered their retention in schools. The results indicated that most of the challenges faced by teenage mothers were: a lack of basic school necessities like school uniforms, Stigmatization from peers and teachers, missing classes, and loneliness. This is in agreement with a study conducted by Wamahiu et al. (2020) in Samburu West Constituency that revealed that teenage mothers faced myriad challenges in returning to school. The study reported some of them being: poverty, low academic achievement, loneliness, and parents forcing them to get married. The challenges may contribute to the low retention rates, particularly in Samburu County.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that several girls got pregnant while in secondary school, others dropped out due to pregnancy, and others were readmitted after childbirth to continue with their education. Many teenage mothers still face barriers preventing them from re-entering the formal education system. The study also established that there was a statistically significant difference in retention trends of teenage mothers in public secondary schools between Samburu and Nairobi Counties, concluding that retention trends were higher in Nairobi County compared to Samburu County. This means more teenage mothers continued their secondary education in Nairobi than in Samburu. Therefore, the following recommendations were made; continued efforts are needed to support and facilitate school re-entry for teenage mothers, as increasing this percentage could significantly impact their educational attainment and future opportunities. Policies promoting re-entry should particularly focus on helping adolescent mothers from rural and marginalized communities. To ensure that every girl who becomes pregnant while in school has the opportunity to complete her education, national and county governments, along with other



stakeholders, should intensify awareness programs about the re-entry policy for teenage mothers, parents, and guardians. This study also recommends that the Ministry of Education and all stakeholders—parents, guardians, teachers, and the community—work together to allocate additional resources, raise awareness, and provide training for teacher counsellors to ensure effective implementation of the policy.

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