

POLICY BRIEF



**ASSESSING THE 2020 REVISED GUIDELINES
FOR PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF TEENAGE
PREGNANCY IN SCHOOL SETTINGS IN UGANDA.**

**[EFFECTIVENESS, DISSEMINATION,
AND IMPLEMENTATION GAPS]**

OCTOBER 2024

Background

Education empowers boys and girls to participate in decision-making to build a better future for themselves and their communities. The right to education is a fundamental human right. Every individual irrespective of race, gender, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or political preference, age and disability, is entitled to equitable and successful completion of education.

The right to education has been recognized as a human right in several international conventions to which Uganda is a signatory. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that respect the right to education, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognizes a right to free, primary education for all, an obligation to develop secondary education accessible to all with the progressive introduction of free secondary education, as well as an obligation to develop equitable access to higher education, ideally by the progressive introduction of free higher education. The 1995 Constitution for the Republic of Uganda, under Articles 21 and 33, 30 and 34, promotes gender equality and the right to education respectively.

A key restrictive factor to achieving universal access to education in Uganda is the expulsion of learners due to pregnancy, usually by conducting compulsory and impromptu tests (Maly et al., 2017). Pregnancy accounts for at least 22.8% of school dropouts among girls aged 14-18 years (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; UBOS, 2018).

Network for Community Development (NCD) and Women Rural Development Network (WORUDET) conducted a research on [Assessing The 2020 Revised Guidelines for Preventing and Managing Teenage Pregnancies In Ugandan Schools: Effectiveness, Dissemination, And Implementation Gaps](#). The research involved an extensive review of secondary data from a variety of reputable sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues under study. Academic databases, particularly

Google Scholar, were utilized to gather peer-reviewed articles and academic publications relevant to the research focus.

Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) took a bold step in developing the Revised the Guidelines for Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancies in School Setting in Uganda - 2020. Although the intervention by the Ministry is in place, only a small percentage of teenage mothers return to school.

Research Objectives

- To assess the extent to which the gaps in the Revised Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda - 2020 have affected the reintegration of teenage mothers in schools
- To assess the extent to which the gaps in the dissemination of the revised guidelines have affected the reintegration of teenage mothers in schools in Uganda.
- To assess the extent to which the gaps in the implementation of the revised guidelines have affected the reintegration of teenage mothers in schools in Uganda

Key Findings

1. The guidelines formalize at the national level the expulsion of pregnant learners through the mandatory 'maternity leave' when the learner is at least three months pregnant and 6 months after giving birth leading to a period of 1 year being out of school as highlighted on page 18 of the revised guidelines.

2. The guidelines state that girls should be regularly checked for pregnancy, at least once per term and at specified times. However, the guidelines only mention mandatory pregnancy testing without detailing how it should be conducted in a way that will uphold the respect, dignity, and privacy of the learners.
3. The revised guidelines lack provisions for maintaining the confidentiality of pregnancy test results. Instead, they mandate schools to inform the parents of any pregnant learner, regardless of potential negative consequences such as physical, verbal, or emotional abuse from parents, as evidenced by cases where pregnant girls endure mistreatment from their guardians.
4. The guidelines limit schools to the abstinence only strategy as highlighted in section 2.2 of the revised guidelines which has failed to provide adolescents with timely, comprehensive, and non-judgmental information that responds to their realities and their sexual and reproductive health needs leading to persistent high rates of teenage pregnancies.
5. The guidelines provide for sensitization of the public and especially foundation bodies on the guidelines. The 2022 Teenage Mothers' Survey reported that some respondents opposed school reintegration for teenage mothers, with a perception that it would increase the number of teenage mothers since the rest of the learners view this as a privilege.
6. The guidelines have No specified penalties for violation. Page 14 of the Revised Guidelines says that the Minister shall, by statutory instrument, specify penalties for default under each guideline after the approval of the guidelines. However, the penalties have not been put in place and specified. This has created a loophole for schools to openly violate the guidelines, especially on readmissions.
7. Pages 20 and 21 of the guidelines stipulate procedures that support the re-admission of teenage mothers into school. This has been openly violated by some institutions,

religious-founded institutions, which openly declare their unwillingness to allow teenage mothers to return to school.

8. While the guidelines mandate pregnant learners to sit for national examinations, they do not ensure the provision of adequate facilities for breastfeeding mothers, which are crucial for maintaining a supportive environment conducive to academic success of the teenage mothers.
9. Despite the guidelines assigning school administrators and teachers the task of protecting teenage mothers from discrimination and stigmatization and reassuring of their safety at school, negative attitudes from teachers, peers, parents and communities continue to be a stumbling block for teenage mothers and pregnant girls to realize their right to education.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education and Sports, through the Education Planning and Policy Analysis Department, puts in place the necessary measures, including administrative and budgetary, to review and amend the revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancies in School Setting in Uganda - 2020 to:

- Specify all penalties for default of provisions of the guidelines to hold institutions of learnings accountable for violation of readmission procedures of pregnant girls/ teenage mothers.
- Remove all provisions that allow forced pregnancy testing, mandatory leave for pregnant girls and a boy if he is father to the child.
- Include provisions for informed consent. This is highly important in pregnancy testing procedures. Learners and their parents/ guardians should be fully informed about the purpose, implications, and alternatives to pregnancy testing. Consent should be obtained freely and without coercion, respecting the rights and autonomy of the learners.

- Create a provision for a whole-school approach that involves and facilitates active engagement of non-teaching staff in the activities related to the prevention and management of teenage pregnancies
- Establish clear communication channels for disseminating information, provide for training and capacity building opportunities for key stakeholders at national, district, and local levels, create partnerships and collaborations with relevant organizations,

conduct regular evaluations of dissemination approaches and activities for the guidelines to measure their reach, relevance, and impact.

- Establish mechanisms for collecting feedback from stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of dissemination of the guidelines, identify areas for improvement, and encourage open dialogue, solicitation of questions, and provision of clarification to address any misconceptions or concerns.

