The Plight of Young Girls: School Re-entry for Pregnant Schoolgirls and Young Mothers in Techiman, Ghana.

A Research Paper presented by:

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(Ghana)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

Human rights, Gender and Conflict Studies: Social Justice Perspectives
(SJP)

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The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2020

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List of Acronyms

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EFA	Education For All
GEU	Girls Education Unit
GES	Ghana Education Service
JHS	Junior High School
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHS	Senior High School
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Acknowledgement

I thank the Almighty God for making this academic achievement a dream come true. I would be forever grateful for the wisdom, love and strength granted to complete this paper. To my supervisor, Dr. Kristen Cheney, thank you for the immense support and guidance throughout the whole research journey. I would also like to thank my Second Reader, Dr. Nahda Shehada, for her great contributions and insights during my seminars. Your comments were much appreciated and beneficial to the success of this paper. To all the young mothers who made this study possible, by giving me the opportunity to dive into your personal experiences in life, I say a big thank you.

I also thank the Netherlands Government and Nuffic for the financial assistance throughout my study abroad. Also, to my two student Discussants, Winifred Amony and Michael Willy Patawala, I am very grateful for your presence during my seminars and your constructive feedbacks. I also thank my Research Assistant, David Adomako Baafi, and the close friends who supported me throughout this journey.

Final thanks go to my mum Yaa Achiaa for investing in my education to this far. Your continuous push to educate my siblings and I, despite the challenges, is amazing. God bless you with long life, and good health to reap the fruit of your labour.

Abstract

Despite the re-entry education policy which allows pregnant schoolgirls to re-enter school to continue their education as part of efforts to eliminate gender disparity in education, pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers' education have not been fully achieved. Young mothers are still out of school unable to complete their primary and secondary education due to institutional and socioeconomic factors such as poverty which intersect with discriminatory gender ideologies to make re-entry difficult. The empirical evidence was drawn from the experiences of young mothers, alongside the views of head teachers, parents, and officials of the Girls Education Unit under Ghana Education Service (GES) in Techiman, Ghana, to investigate the factors mitigating young mothers school re-entry. The study reveals how material and emotional conditions such as poverty, child-care support, parental support, and attitude, interact with institutional terrain barriers and gender ideologies in the community to hinder young mothers' education. The research findings refer to the need of the GES to adopt an intersectional approach to tackle socio-economic conditions such as poverty in the household, discriminatory gender roles and ideologies in communities, to promote young mothers' school re-entry.

Relevance to Development Studies

The paper contributes to the existing knowledge on gender disparity in education. Investigating issues of early pregnancy and early motherhood, helps to address obstacles to girl's education as a way of safeguarding the future aspirations and goals of young girls. This is important towards the realization of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal four (4), which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", and to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (SDG 5).

Keywords

Young mothers, re-entry policy, education, early pregnancy, childbirth, dropout.

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

1.1. Research Problem: The Plight of Young Mothers

Education is a fundamental human right promoted in national and international conventions and declarations like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). However, the attainment of equal access to quality education is still a challenge worldwide due to discrimination and gender disparity in, formal education settings, especially against pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers. Despite efforts to bridge gender disparities in education, gendered norms regarding early pregnancy and motherhood have contributed to low educational attainment for girls worldwide (UNESCO, 2003; Okwany and Kamusiime, 2017: 58).

Gender is one aspect of the experiences of discrimination against adolescent girls who get pregnant. The gendered identity and ideologies constructed around pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers contribute to their stigmatization. Okwany and Kamusiime (2017: 62) argue that "the pervasive construction in policy and practice of girls as 'sexual gatekeepers' who only have to say no, locate problems in young people ignoring the complex interplay between social-economic structures, and power relations in the social context within which individual and interpersonal sexual practices and behaviours are embedded". Pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers often drop out of school, unable to attain their basic education which limits their educational attainment to a higher level.

Early pregnancy is seen as a psychological, social, and health issue with less said about the phenomenon as an educational issue contributing to gaps and silences in national education policies (Pillow, 2004:4). In 2013, The African Union formulated a strategy for building Africa's human capital with sustained investments in education that included gender disparity elimination at all levels of education (Martínez & Odhiambo, 2018). African governments therefore formulated continuation and re-entry policies for student mothers. Ghana is among the many African countries who, in protecting education for pregnant schoolgirls, have adopted a re-entry education policy, allowing them to re-enter school after childbirth (Okwany and Kamusiime, 2017). However, despite the re-entry policy, young mothers in Techiman, Ghana, are still out of school unable to continue their primary and secondary education (GEU,2015b). The reintegration education policies for pregnant schoolgirls who leave school purposely for childbirth have not been realized as most of these girls remains home. This then triggers the question "Why is the re-entry education policy for pregnant schoolgirls not achieving its aim?" What accounts for pregnant schoolgirls not re-entering school after childbirth to complete their primary and secondary education?

Scholars suggest that stigmatization against pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers is a significant factor influencing the decision of young mothers never to return to school after childbirth (Birungi et al., 2015). This has been confirmed by the study, as the young mothers interviewed revealed their decisions to re-enter school after childbirth were centred on the emotional conditions through the experience of stigma in the community. Gender discriminatory ideologies and practices around young girls' sexuality make the school environment an inconducive place for young mothers' return. Drawing from empirical evidence gathered from interviews with young mothers, teachers, parents, and education officials, I argue that, despite the re-entry education policy for pregnant schoolgirls, young mothers in Techiman, Ghana are still unable to re-enter school to complete their education. This is due to policy gaps as well as material and emotional conditions such as poverty, childcare support, parental

attitude. These barriers are supported by the lack of financial backing of the re-entry policy, in the form of scholarships, to provide financial assistance to young mothers from the poor socioeconomic background. Even though the policy has been recommended as promoting educational inclusiveness, it has been blind to the cultural myths and practices perpetuating gender stereotypes, marginalization and exclusion for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers in their educational attainment.

1.2. Understanding Difficulties in Young Mothers' Re-entry

Pregnancy in many African cultures is a blessing; however, when it happens early to an adolescent who is still in school and under the control of her parents, it becomes an unwanted social abomination. According to Lambert, Perrino and Barreras (2012), and Tuwor and Sossou (2008), teenage pregnancy has been a considerable obstacle to girls' enrollment and completion of basic and secondary education in Ghana, with higher prevalence in rural than in urban settlements. The genesis of young mothers' continual struggle and low economic livelihood is their inability to continue their education due to lack of financial aid and social barriers. Early pregnancy and motherhood among schoolgirls in Techiman have ushered many young women from childhood to adulthood, pushing them to the private role of caregiving and to the informal sector. The international obligation to all governments is to provide all children with education without discrimination. However, many debates across Africa that emanate from individual opinions and wide-ranging religious teachings and interpretations often focus on morality arguments that, a pregnancy outside wedlock is morally wrong along with all spheres (Odimegwu & Mkwananzi, 2016). The effects of these discourses are what pregnant schoolgirls face, including discriminatory practices denying them their right to education; as little is done to educate these young girls on their sexual and reproductive rights. Formal education is therefore regarded as a privilege that can be withdrawn as a punishment to pregnant schoolgirls in some African communities; while the men who impregnate these young girls go unpunished.

The GES, in collaboration with key stakeholders, including development partners, came up with a re-entry education policy for pregnant students to enable pregnant schoolgirls to re-enter school after childbirth. This started in 2016 as a government directive to all public schools prohibiting the expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls from school (Baa-Poku, 2016). The implementation, adherence, and understanding of the directive vary across Ghana since little is specified. Also, the re-entry and withdrawal process, and availability of support structures in the schools and communities in the form of financial support for these girls to remain in school, are scarce. In this regard, the implementation and monitoring process of young mother's re-entry to school remains weak, despite government's directive. The policy fails to address the physical, social, and economic impact of pregnancy and childbirth on young mothers' living condition and the intersecting factors that shape their re-entry to school. The policy, therefore, lacks an intersectional approach in tackling social and institutional barriers contributing to young girls' pregnancy and inability to return to school after delivery.

1.3. Pregnancy, Re-entry, and Girls' Educational Attainment in Ghana

The impact of education has enormously found its way in different pieces of literature worldwide. As Nelson Mandela (1994) said "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". "Education is a teaching and learning system aiming to socialize individuals and maximize their development" (Nayara,2020). It has also been known as the means through which individuals can unearth their God-given potentials (Montessori, 2015). Sen (2003) also argues that education plays a crucial role in removing insecurities worldwide to development.

Girls education has been proven as an essential developmental strategy necessary to improve the lives of generations (UNICEF, 2003). However, the road to girl's educational attainment in the world, specifically sub-Saharan Africa is not an easy one. Girls encounter numerous barriers and challenges in the pursuit of their education career. The phenomenon of teenage pregnancy then becomes a significant obstacle to girls' education to a higher level in many African countries (UNESCO,2003). Early or unintended pregnancies among adolescent girls of school-going age have attracted many types of research in different fields. As some scholars link young girls' pregnancy to poverty (Gyan, 2013; Lambani, 2015), others also reveal a more comprehensive of the phenomenon as caused by lack of adolescent education on reproductive health rights, early marriages and sexual exploitation of girls (Ogori, Shitu and Yunusa, 2013).

Inclusive Education Policy and school re-entry directives have been the framework adopted to facilitate young mothers school re-entry in Ghana. The re-entry directive ensures that schoolgirls who get pregnant feel accepted in the school system, and free from stigmatization; yet very few girls participate in the process for eventual return to school after delivery. Girls' educational completion remains a challenge in Ghana, particularly at the primary level despite the country's constitution affirming children's right to equal and accessible educational opportunities (Baa-Poku, 2016). The country's commitment to getting rid of all obstacles against girls' education and the reinstitution of pregnant schoolgirls back to the classroom has not been realized. The girl's inability to manage the logistics associated with mothering and schooling contributes to their minimal return to school (ibid). Pregnant schoolgirls become endangered of child labour, early marriages, and a continued pregnancy cycle.

1.4. An overview of Ghana Re-entry Education Policy

The education system in Ghana is divided into three parts, namely: Basic, Secondary and Tertiary. (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo, 2016). Basic education has three different sections, which last for 12 years, and it's free and compulsory by law. Also, secondary education in 2017, through the current President Nana Akuffo Addo became tuition-free as part of the strategy to promote a more inclusive education among much Ghanaian youth (Forson,2017). The government of Ghana through GES Inclusive Education Policy and re-entry education policy aims at offering girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy, another chance to complete their education. The re-entry education policy, which started in 2016 as a government directive with no significant policy guidelines, has been updated to ensure effectiveness in the implementation process. The steps and protocols to be observed by schools in handling schoolgirls pregnancy have been documented in the GES "Guidelines for the

prevention of pregnancy among schoolgirls and Facilitation of re-entry into school after childbirth" (GES,2018).

First, the policy prohibits headteachers' expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls from public and private schools. According to the guideline, schoolgirls who get pregnant are permitted to stay in school to continue their studies, unless their condition does not permit. This is to protect pregnant schoolgirls education and facilitates their easy re-entry. However, the policy fails to assist pregnant schoolgirls with their physical and health needs which arise as a result of the condition they find themselves at a tender age. There are no adequate health facilities in the school to provide medical attention to pregnant students. The community perception of pregnancy and motherhood as an activity fit for the private domain makes the pregnant schoolgirl's appearance in the public domain of teaching and learning contradictory, contributing to their stigmatization and ridicule. Most pregnant schoolgirls gain resilience and stay in school; however, the vast majority of them drop out. The experience of dropout of pregnant schoolgirls influences their return to school after childbirth.

Secondly, the pregnant schoolgirl goes for maternity leave lasting three months, approximately six weeks before and after delivery. The young mother is supposed to resume school immediately after the maternity leave. Due to the logistics involved in pregnancy and childbirth, a period of three months maternity leave is granted to the pregnant schoolgirl. Before they leave, the parents or guardian of the girl is invited to sign a bond or agreement to return the young girl to school after childbirth. This is a good practice; however, it is unclear whoever oversees the enforcement of this agreement. Young mothers tend to overstay their maternity leave which hurts their school re-entry. Many young mothers, as they stay home for an extended period, lose track of their academics unwilling to re-enter school. The guidelines also specify the steps that school authorities must follow in handling schoolgirl pregnancy to facilitate their re-entry after childbirth.

When a schoolgirl is suspected to be pregnant by teachers, the school is supposed to invite her parents/guardian to confirm her pregnancy from a health facility. Upon the confirmation of the pregnancy, the schoolgirl and her parents or guardian should send an official pregnancy confirmation note to the school authorities. The pregnancy case should then be documented and reported to the District Education Directorate. Teachers are given orientation on the need to refrain from negative labelling of the pregnant schoolgirl to avoid her stigmatization in the school environment. Peers, teachers and other school authorities are encouraged to provide support and assistance to pregnant schoolgirls in their academic endeavours. The provision of a formal confirmation note of pregnancy by the girl and her parents to the school sounds achievable in the guideline. However, no proper scrutiny is made to know the background of most of the young girls to access whether they can afford it. Many of the pregnant schoolgirls are from poor homes, with poverty being the main reason for their pregnancy. It is therefore difficult for most of them to acquire the money needed to pay for the medical report of their pregnancy. Natural and affordable means of detecting pregnancy are then adopted, making it impossible for them to get an official confirmation note of pregnancy to the school authorities. This then becomes a silence exclusion of pregnant schoolgirls in the school environment enforcing their dropout even after delivery.

The policy guidelines also highlighted steps to be taken if a schoolmate or a male teacher causes a schoolgirl's pregnancy. For instance, in case a school-boy impregnates a schoolgirl, the incidence must be documented, appropriate sanctions by the GES must be applied; and the girl's maintenance left for parents of both parties to handle (Quaye & Attom, 2019;

GES,2018). It is even worse for teachers who are found to be responsible for the pregnancy of schoolgirls. The GES sanctions such teachers for breaching the code and conduct of their profession, in addition to the state sanctions when the girl is below 18 years of age.

1.5. Research Objectives and Questions

This paper explores how the re-entry education policy for pregnant students facilitate or do not facilitate the educational attainment of pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers in Techiman. Using an intersectional approach, the study highlights young mothers' experiences in examining the material and emotional conditions that intersect to influence their re-entry to school. In order to achieve these objectives, the following questions were propounded.

Main Question

How do institutional policies and practices of the GES facilitate or do not promote the re-entry of pregnant pupils and young mothers in school?

Sub-questions

• What are the factors that contribute to pregnant schoolchildren and young mothers' failure to re-enter school to attain their formal education despite the re-entry education policy?

• What are the weaknesses of the re-entry policy that needed to be strengthened in order to address the factors hindering the young mothers from re-entering school to complete their education?

1.6. Justification

The study contributes to existing knowledge of development studies on girls' educational attainments. Investigating issues of early pregnancy and early motherhood will help to understand and address the gaps that exist, which helps in addressing the shortcomings of young girls' educational attainment.

1.7. Conceptual/Theoretical/Analytical Framework

The study investigates and analyses the experiences and inability of young mothers to re-enter school to complete their primary and secondary education using Gender from the lens of Joan Scott, the concept of Sexuality, and Intersectionality.

1.7.1. Gender

Scott in her work "Gender as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986), criticized feminist theorization of patriarchy as accepting binary categories (men and women) which focus on sex difference as the way of understanding the oppression of women, ignoring other systems of social organization (Scott, 1986). She argues the need to use the term 'gendered' as an analytical category to understand the influence of Gender on other social relations of power such as race, class, age, ethnicity, Sexuality, etc. (Scott, 1986). According to her, this is because gender is contextual, goes beyond men and women, and does not operate

in a vacuum. She proposed four interrelated concepts through which one can analyse any social process: identity, institutions, ideologies, and symbols (ibid). This paper uses two of the proposed concepts, namely ideology, and institutions.

Ideology is about the normative norms, values, ideas constructed around men and women to justify structural inequalities (Zarkov, 2020). Gendered ideology helped to deconstruct the perceptions around pregnant schoolchildren and young mothers. Emphasis was drawn from society and schools' attitudes of pregnant girls and young mothers to understand how those perceptions enforce discrimination and exclusion of young mothers and pregnant students from the school.

Institutions also talk about economic, social, and political-institutional knowledge, practice, and power (ibid). Using institutional and state policies analysis of Gender helped understand how school structures, rules and regulations, and family principles and practices shape the educational attainment of young mothers and pregnant pupils.

Massaut (2004) argued that the term 'gender' is used in the description of male and female features, responsibilities, and actions within social and cultural contexts. Gender roles are therefore socially constructed roles, expectations, and beliefs as well as differences in power as assigned to both sexes in their social and cultural contexts (Massaut 2004). Gender does not stand alone; it is implicit in the social world where it is constructed. Hence it is through the agency of human relationship that gender is constructed and reconstructed (Lorber 1994). For Giddens (1998), gender has a base; the base is the psychological, cultural, and social differences that exist between males and females

Gender is, therefore, a social construct which can be decoded in culture in such a way that future generations into that cultural realm become acquainted with the notions of Gender that dominate that society. It is at the micro-level, an interpretation brought to "maleness" and "femaleness" in a society at a specific time in history (Beneria et al., 2015: 59). This remarkable capacity makes gender and attributes of gender the matter of experience. The individual experiences become shaped by social institutions, subjective identity, observable cultural symbols. The combination of the factors that shape the gender experience becomes a social fact with inherent value in public and becomes an educational material for transmission to the next generation (Lober,1994). This makes it evident that the policymakers think and approach the problems from a given cultural frame of gender (Okwany, 2016). The entire fabric of the society perpetuates gender as the treatment of girls different from the treatment of boys in various spheres of life. Roles are, therefore burdened with gender, as boys and girls who receive different training in every sphere of public life (Massaut 2004).

With this notion of gender, as well as other concepts that align with gender, Intersectionality allows for the exposition of the likely factors that can inhibit re-entry in Ghana. The treatment of children in schools reflects society-wide notions of gender that allows for exclusionary devices meted out in a gendered lens.

1.7.2. Sexuality

Sexuality is a concept important to the study as adolescent girls are the focal interest with ramifications for theory, health care providers, the policymakers, educators, parents and the adolescents themselves. Welsh et al. (2000) posited that at the time of adolescence, the individual enters a critical period of physical, psychological, and social transformations. These changes are occurring within the social context with significant consequences for the girl

child. Girls at the point of adolescence develop "a sense of sexuality" (Welsh et al., 2000:11). Within the school environment, sexuality becomes integral in the schooling experience. Sexual identities emanate from the developing sense of sexuality, which is a product of negotiated encounters (Muhanguzi,2011). The development of the sense of sexuality interacts with the notions of gender. The view of girls as vulnerable and weak is a gender identity that can interfere with sexuality. On the other hand, the notions of aggression and other gendered attributes of maleness allow for the adventurous activities and expression from the males (Gentile et al., 2000; Tamale 2001). The society, therefore, suppresses the females as passive and allows for very active assertions of virility and masculinity around sexual encounters (Dixon- Mueller, 1993; Muhanguzi, 2011).

The sexual experience is something new to adolescents. At the point of the multi-layered transformations, they are exposed to an experience that is qualitatively different from what they are used to. The starting point to consider the problem of sexuality is to acknowledge this experience. Societies abound where sexuality discourse is off-limits to the public, such as in Ghana. Policymaking in Ghana on sexuality has a direct relationship to the education of the girl child and her fortunes in the system. Sexuality as a concept allows making sense of the policy of re-entry. That policy may either improve a lot of the female who is the target or may further marginalize that girl child from education. There is the need to account for the biases and double standards of the society that may have an undesired effect on female empowerment. Females who are silenced by society in sexual expressions may not offer information that is vital to addressing the problems unless their safety is assured (Tolman, 2002).

1.7.3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical perspective that explores nuances present in contentious social concepts. Intersectionality "is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and inhuman experiences" (Collins and Bilge, 2020:1). Intersectionality provides the analytical rigour that considers political, social and historical contexts, as well as the experience of the individual based on the intersections (Atayi, 2008) such concepts as gender, sexuality and adolescence, are charged with the historical, political, and social contexts which can be obscured without the reliance on intersectionality. Individuals have the remarkable capacity that translates events to experiences. There is a need to consider this experience of social facts when carrying out an empirical study. The intersectional approach uncovers multiple layers of factors that are effective in maintaining a social situation.

Intersectionality is thus an essential perspective in the critical analysis of the re-entry policy. It provides the analytical lens to examine the dilemma of adolescent motherhood and how it impinges on their access to education in Ghana. The approach can also uncover the obstacles that might frustrate the re-entry policy.

Intersectionality is a concept, unlike other concepts as it has the analytical power of exposing the nuances of social identity in a manner that reveals the domination and subordination processes within the analytical framework (Hankivsky et al., 2009). It also has a primary objective of pursuing social justice through Intersectionality and coalitions that are counterintuitive (ibid).

Through the notion of Intersectionality, I go beyond the gender scope and examine the gendered social arrangements that are justified through the sources of cultural and religious legitimating agents and sustain a cultural hegemony that props the ideology of gender (Lorber

and Farell, 1991). Intersectionality looks at the material and emotional conditions that shape the lives of pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers. I also consider overlapping and intersecting social identities such as class, ethnicity, family status, education, ability, age, religion, gender, sexuality, etc. and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

As argued by Audre Lorde, "there is nothing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (Lorde, 1982 cited in Erdman, 2018) hence the need to identify and understand the complexities in social issues. This indicates that adolescent pregnancy is multi-layered. There are related factors of social exclusion, gender, and sexuality. Fraser (2010:363) held the notion that "what may be less evident is the idea that some important injustices are best located not on anyone single scale but rather at the intersection of several scales." This calls for a multi-scalar approach to the social situation of interest. It also helps in recognition of differences in accessing resources and opportunities (Anthias, 2013). Intersectionality helps in the understanding of the structural elements that impact on aspects of people's lives.

1.8. Structure of the Paper

After reviewing the relevant literature from which I will draw in conceptualizing young mothers' dropout or inability to re-enter school, Chapter **III** discusses the methodological journey of the study. After that, I discuss my findings according to themes. Chapter **IV** argues that the re-entry education policy for pregnant students has not adequately facilitated the return of young mothers back to school due to the policy fails to address the intersecting socioeconomic conditions such as financial constraints, parental support and attitudes from the community and conflicting gender roles. Gender discriminatory ideologies and practices of young people's Sexuality, in Ghanaian society, embedded in the state structures do not favour young mothers in their quest to complete their education. Chapter **V** argues that the re-entry education policy is blind to profound socio-cultural and institutional barriers causing loopholes in the implementation process of the policy. The final chapter **concludes** with policy recommendations and implications for future research**.** I argue that promoting and protecting education for young mothers ensures Ghana's commitment to SDG five (5). Eliminating all forms of gender discrimination in education ensures equal opportunities for girls in the pursuit of their academic career and goals; and is the key to safeguarding the future of young mothers and their babies.

Chapter 2 **Young Mothers' School Re-entry and Related Literatures.**

This chapter will engage the critical concepts of the broader conceptualization of young girls' pregnancy and motherhood to reveal the obstacles in their educational attainment. It defines relevant concepts in the study, such as schoolgirl's pregnancy, young mothers, and re-entry.

2.1. Understanding School Girl's Pregnancy, School Motherhood, and Re-entry

Teen pregnancy and young motherhood are terms that attract age-related concerns. They are broad terms as their definition varies in accordance to what is regarded as socially accepted age for pregnancies and motherhood. While the ability to conceive is biologically defined as maturity among girls, there is a legal age with which nations define as the accepted age, when an individual is an adult. Farquharson and Stephenson, internationally renowned experts in research on teen pregnancy, in their book "Early pregnancy," define early pregnancy as conception and pregnancy of girls below the age of 20 (Farquharson & Stephenson, 2017). The legal age limit varies across nations with most ranging between eighteen to twenty years. For instance, a child is anyone below the age of eighteen according to Ghana's Children Act of 1998, and any pregnancy cases before the set age are termed as early pregnancy (Collins, & Bilge, 2020).

However, this approach based on age might exclude cases of women still in primary school but legally adults, especially in rural communities in Ghana due to late school enrolment. Thus, the terms with the prefix 'School' highlight a broader field that caters for many undermined perspectives. Therefore, School motherhood is an occurrence in the female gender that has not completed their core education regardless of age (Britwum et al. 2017). 'School motherhood' is a more encompassing term since it captures teenage girls and non-teenage women whose core schooling can be affected by childbirth. This renders the term School-mothers a better focus for Ghana's re-entry process since it covers pregnant schoolgirls, which are the basis for school motherhood.

School re-entry is a process that pregnant girls utilize to return to school after delivery. Countries put policies in place to facilitate pregnant girls' return to school after childbirth to reduce disparities in educational attainment and dropouts (Martínez, & Odhiambo, 2018). Martínez and Odhiambo (2018) argue that some African countries such as Malawi and Liberia have amended legislation and enacted policies to allow young mothers to return to school, although enforcement remains a problem. Also, Coughlin (2016) states that Ghana has gone beyond policy outlines to institute the implementation of strong structures that make the school environment supportive and protective of school mothers and pregnant schoolgirls to facilitate continuity of education. However, several factors make the re-entry process challenging which instigates a brief background check of the scenario in Ghana.

2.2. Social, Economic and Cultural Terrain for Re-entry

The decision for school mothers to go back to school to seek corresponding academic achievement is facilitated by significant social, institutional, economic, and cultural factors (Britwum et al. 2017). In their article, Britwum et al. state that the factors shaping the constructs of motherhood, female sexuality, and associated stigmatization coupled with the possible exclusion of pregnant pupils and school mothers by their community play a vital role in the re-entry of victims to learning institutions. The authors argue that a girl's resolution of going back to school and family acceptance to support her is a tiny drop in the ocean in addressing this issue. The article notes that socio-cultural factors influencing re-entry of school mothers are rooted in customary gendered practices. In addition, the authors cite widespread poverty, stigmatization, and exclusion as related matters to re-entry.

Similarly, Ahorlu, Pfeiffer, and Obrist (2015) argue that youthful pregnant girls are viewed as weak and at risk in society. In this regard, much support has focused on the girls' vulnerability and associated risks. The authors feel it should shift to concentrate on developing competencies of accessing economic, social, and cultural capital by the girls to tackle the threat of teenage pregnancies effectively. The authors state that adolescent pregnancies in Ghana contribute about 9% to maternal mortality that hinders their terrain to school re-entry. Logically, a young girl can hardly cope with early pregnancy and the result of a dead child. Many families and communities in Ghana attribute that to lousy omen, rendering re-entry impossible for these girls. The article highlights that young women are likely to experience complications during pregnancies within which, without proper support, exposes them to massive social, medical, and economic risks. These girls encounter social exclusion that results in poverty. The study findings revealed that parents are the most distinguished social actors consulted by adolescents for sexuality-related particulars and guidance in Ghana. This should not be the case since social, cultural, and economic factors are correlated in early pregnancies and the terrain for re-entry.

2.3. Institutionally Located Barrier

Britwum et al. (2017), in their research, highlighted that the school environment shapes female responses concerning motivating them to remain in school. The article outlines the school environment's significance as not only being a catalyst for re-entry but also as a vital component in schoolchild's pregnancy deterrence. However, a large amount of gender disparity amenities that address cultural benchmarks and standards that configure viewpoints to female sexuality is lacking in many institutions introducing a considerable barrier. The authors argue that most institutions comply with the cultural standards that dispose of girls to risk early sex without considering the consequences of unplanned pregnancies. In this regard, many institutional barriers in correspondence to Britwum et al. remain stigmatization, exclusion, and discrimination by both students and teachers who feel ashamed about relating with the victims. The article indicates that Ghana has no existing institutional re-entry policies. However, it derives directives from the national constitution that mandates the government to make sure that all school-going-age children accomplish primary education as the minimum. This situation has changed as the country through the GES has come out with a policy document, containing the guidelines to be followed by schools to curb teenage pregnancy and facilitate the re-entry of those who leave school for childbirth.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated on relevant literature and conceptualizations of girl's education, young girls' early pregnancy and motherhood, and the obstacles to young mothers' school re-entry. These pieces of literature have revealed that despite having a re-entry policy for young mothers, the terrain is not always easy due to multiple underlying obstacles. Poverty has been a significant cause of dropout, and girls' pregnancies become a significant obstacle to young mother's school re-entry. Policymakers should engage in proper checks to address the deep-rooted social inequalities and the impact on girl's education. Besides, school-going girls have minimal knowledge of sexuality-related matters, which undermines safe sex. Therefore, comprehensive sexuality education must be enforced in the education sector as well as eliminating all forms of gender discriminatory practices to promote and protect girl's education and young mothers' school return.

Chapter 3 **Methodological Journey in a Pandemic**

3.1. Process of Data Collection

The study was conducted in Techiman; the capital of Techiman Municipality in the Bono-East region of Ghana. The city is among the three cities with the highest adolescent pregnancy and girls' school dropout rates in Ghana (GEU, 2002:99; Adam, Adom and Bediako, 2016; Coughlin, 2016). A qualitative approach was employed using both primary and secondary data, which helps to collect in-depth and contextual data, delving into social complexities to be able to explore multiple perspectives and realities (O'Leary, 2017:272). Primary data was collected using online phone interviews and chats as well as regular phone calls. Qualitative data was collected, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. Secondary sources of data included; academic literature, journals, organizational reports, magazines and newspapers.

Even though Covid-19 pandemic was a significant hindrance to in-person fieldwork, recruiting a local research assistant helped to reach participants of the study for the collection of primary information through online phone interviews. The research assistant was trained on the selected topic of investigation, and the ethical consideration in reaching out to the target group to collect telephone numbers of participants identified and selected for the phone interviews. To avoid causing harm to the target population, the research assistant observed all the appropriate health measures such as social distancing, the wearing of face-mask, and the use of hand sanitizer. There was no outbreak in the study area during the identification of the participants by the research assistant.

The research findings are the situated knowledge of 15 participants interviewed through WhatsApp calls and chats. This consists of (8) young mothers, of which three (3) of them had successfully re-entered school; I call these one's student mothers for this study. Besides, three (3) parents, three (3) headteachers, and one (1) official from the GEU under GES in the study area. The selection criteria only included student mothers or young mothers who were out of school in the time of data collection, and in the age group between (13-20) years; parents whose children are out of school due to pregnancy; headteachers in primary and secondary schools and the director of the GES and GEU, all in the study population. These chosen numbers, even though small, helped to dig deeply into the complex experiences of young mother's school re-entry; thus, helped in achieving reflexivity.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

Researching on a sensitive topic like this requires the observation of individual ethics such as confidentiality, consent seeking, anonymity, etc. Given this, a consent form was distributed online to participants, including the young girls' parents, to explain that the research's goal and the objective were solely for the academic purpose; and to seek their consent to involve their children in the study. Participants were made aware of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The research also ensured confidentiality and anonymity to protect respondents by protecting the data collected and concealing the identity of participants. Because of this, the names that will be presented in the analysis are not the original names of the participants interviewed so far as this paper is a concern.

3.3. Scope of Limitations

As the Covid-19 crises make fieldwork impossible, my passion for engaging with my participants in a livelier conversation was shuttled. My earlier decision to adopt many data collection methods such as participant observation focus group discussions, in-person interviews in the form of storytelling, etc., were not accomplished. Relying on online phone interviews made it challenging to build a friendly relationship with participants and engage in a livelier conversation. Building rapport with participants took longer than expected, which prolonged the time frame scheduled for the data collection. The recruitment of a research assistant to engage with the target area and select participants for the interviews expanded the budgetary allocation for this research.

3.4. Research Methodology Rationale

As a researcher in a country where I have lived all my life, I was aware of the influence of power relations, and my position as a learner abroad and an insider will have on the knowledge production. However, the privilege was given to the voices of the pregnant schoolchildren and young mothers, considering their views alongside teachers and parents to analyse the young women's experiences in their educational attainment. The research findings are the situated knowledge of the respondents from the context under study.

Also, the research methodology was founded on several approaches capable of obtaining a wide range of evidence geared at securing a significant understanding through, qualitative, and disciplinary theory analysis. The methodology rationale was hugely based on incorporating both primary and secondary data sources since relying on one might become challenging in creating evidence-based research.

This field attracted enormous related searches that entailed massive attention. The principal objective was to acquire relevant data in this research. In this regard, the research methodology and designs coupled with data collection approaches needed to be inclusive and comprehensive. In addition, the subject study is of critical significance; thus, the more need to acquire massive data that creates heightened understanding and awareness of all surrounding circumstances and spheres. Therefore, the analysed data utilized the specified procedure for the presentation.

3.5. Positionality

The passion for this research topic is influenced by my encounter during my high school times in 2011. One day, the headmaster of the school called all the girls in the school for an emergency meeting. We were wondering why the urgency for the meeting would; only to find out we have been summoned for a compulsory pregnancy test. After the test, girls who were found pregnant were expelled right away. Their names were posted on all notice boards in the school announcing their expulsion on the grounds of pregnancy. This brought so much shame and stigmatization to us as schoolgirls in the community the school was located, and the country at large as the media took over to over-interpret the news to the general public. I just wonder to myself what will be the future of those young girls as they have been expelled from school.

However, this experience should not be used as the limitations of the study, rather an opportunity to deepen my knowledge on schoolgirls' pregnancy and dropout. My subjective

experience also served as a guide to explore deeper in the issue which helped to collect rich and in-depth information for my analysis. The sensitivity of the issue and the personal experiences shared by the young mothers of this study did not have much emotional effects on me and the paper. I addressed the data with no biasness to produce the situated knowledge of the respondents.

Chapter 4 **Factors that Inhibit School Re-Entry of Young Mothers**

4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of data collected from the interview sessions to answer the first research question that seeks to understand why pregnant schoolchildren and young mothers fail to re-enter school to attain their formal education, despite the re-entry education policy. I show financial constraint, parental support, and attitude, community discourses of shame deeply rooted in cultural norms, and the conflicting gender roles are the major factors that inhibit young mothers' school re-entry after childbirth. Poverty in the household, coupled with lack of scholarships or incentives and child support influenced young mothers' decisions to engage in petty economic activities to support themselves and their babies rather than re-entering school. Lack of day-care facilities in schools also causes young mothers with no childcare support, to abandon schooling to attend to the care responsibilities of their children. These factors are interconnected and relevant for young mothers to successfully re-enter school.

4.2. Financial Constraint

Various studies (Zuilkowski et al., 2019; Nyariro, 2018; Omwancha, 2012) have shown that poverty is a vital component as a contributor to early pregnancies and inhibitor to school re-entry for young mothers. The findings, therefore, prove financial constraint as an inhibiting factor to young mothers' school re-entry stemming from poverty in the household, inadequate financial support from child's father, and lack of financial backing of the policy through scholarships, motivational packages, and incentives. These conditions, when they intersect contributes significantly to the drop out of young mothers affecting their school re-entry. According to the findings of this study, many families in the district are lower-income earners who cannot afford to secure most of the girls' daily needs due to constrained budgets. One of the school heads revealed that most teenagers get pregnant while in school due to a lack of finances induced by poverty; as a result, they find it difficult to resume to school after delivery. He elucidates further:

> "returning to school after child delivery has never been a problem for children that come from well-to-do families, even if the mother is so busy to help in taking care of the child, they can quickly pay for day-care. It is only those that are from less-privileged families that are almost certain that they will never return because coming to school is a challenge for them. So, when they get pregnant, it is an excuse for the parents to hands off the girl's education" (Respondent 9, Interview: August 2020).

A young mother reveals her inability to return to school is due to financial constraint because of the limited financial support received from the child's father and the family lower economic income.

> ".... I could not go back to school when I got pregnant and even when I delivered my money became a big issue for me. The status of my family in the community could not help matters since we are poor. My pregnancy increased the family challenges through expanded humiliation from society. I had to leave school because my parents could not

afford to take care of me and my younger siblings" (Respondent 1, Interview: August 2020).

However, when these conditions are favourable, re-entry for young mothers are smooth without any barriers. All the young mothers interviewed admitted coming from a poor economic background, with no financial support from the father of their babies to fend themselves and their children which automatically results in discontinued schooling. The funds to hire a baby's nurse in case the girl's parents are busy grappling with making ends meet might be challenging due to poverty that reflects directly to the choice of dropping out of school.

"I was going to school, but the pregnancy came in when I was in form 2 (SHS 2), but I sent it to school till I was five months in my pregnancy then we went on vacation for about three (3) months. After my childbirth, things were tough, with no one to help me financially. I had no money to take my child to the day-care centre or even pay for some of the things I will need in school since there is free senior high school now. I had to stop school even though I know I am allowed to come back". (Respondent 2, Young mother, Interview: August 2020).

Money is a definite source of enticement for young girls, as they desire to satisfy the wants their parents cannot afford (Ahorlu et al., 2015). In this regard, money to facilitate the purchase of essentials can attract girls to their male partners—nevertheless, many romantic relationships of young mother's end before their pregnancy. Even though the men accepted the pregnancy, they refused to respond to their full responsibilities and duties. The additional finances to attend clinics and buy necessities for the baby become a burden forcing young mothers to source finances using other means such as working at the expense of their schooling. The additional monetary obligation complementing pregnancy and childbirth influences the re-entry strategy massively.

"I found out I was pregnant when writing BECE. The guy who got me pregnant was also an SHS graduate and now into tailoring. He did not have enough to provide for antenatal and upkeep. My parents could not help either because we are many. When I gave birth to my child, I had wanted to enrol in a different school to rewrite BECE, but there was no support from anywhere. I have now started some petty trade to cater for myself and my child" (Respondent 3, Young mother, Interview: August 2020).

The young girl's identity as a mother, student and a child in a poor household, and a school environment that provides no financial support for young mothers coupled with no child support from the child's father and the government of Ghana increase the possibility of dropout in young mothers. The economic status of families of young mothers as they interact with the inadequate financial backing of the re-entry policy due to lack of budget allocation by the state causes dropout for young mothers. As poverty has been revealed as a significant source of young girls' early pregnancy (Ahorlu, Pfeiffer, & Obrist, 2015), participants interviewed for this study appeals to the government of Ghana and the GES to provide financial assistant to young mothers to motivate and support their school re-entry.

From the experiences shared with the student mothers interviewed, the retention rate for young mothers is high for those coming from well-to-do families, with financial and childcare support from parents and other relatives. Thus, parents are being forced to return their children mothers to school to complete their education and maintain their societal status. Therefore, these aspects correlated and contribute massively to school re-entry failures for young mothers.

Being a child-mother from a poor home and a country with persistence inequalities in the society complicates the whole re-entry process. Children's sexuality is not encouraged because, as children, they are supposed to be innocent when the topic of sex is mentioned. A schoolgirl who gets pregnant despite the community's restriction on girls' sexuality, coupled with the low-income family background is left with no financial assistance towards school re-entry. This is one of the most unfortunate and gender discriminations that can affect generations and generations of not only the young girl but also a whole society. As by Kwegyir-Aggrey argues (cited in Jacobs, 1996), "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation". Young mothers' education due to poverty and financial constraint from the educational sector risks compromising. Logically, despite the high rates of poverty in the household, the idea of taking school mothers back to school is overshadowed by the provision of basic amenities for their babies. These young mothers are then forced to search for job opportunities to cater to the needs of their babies at the expense of their education.

4.3. Parental Support and Attitudes

The willingness and abilities for parents to provide childcare support for the girls are directly linked with re-entry choices (Baa-Poku, 2016). However, mothers of pregnant girls carry the more massive load of offering support in comparison to the fathers of the same girls. One of the young mothers interviewed seemed confident that she would return to school without interruption since her mother offered to assist in nursing for her baby.

> "I did not suffer during my pregnancy, childbirth, and going back to school because I received much support from my mum and the guy's mum as well. She always encourages me with hopeful words that this is not the end of my life, and I can still become great in life. I return to school one month after my delivery and was able to catch up with my classmates" (Respondent 6, Interview: August 2020).

One of the parents that were interviewed was determined to see his daughter through to school if his wife was available to take care of the child. He believed stopping a child education because she is pregnant is like destroying the life and future of that child. He explains further how he reacted two years ago when his daughter became pregnant at SHS 1.

> "The truth is I was furious when she got pregnant because that is not what I sent her to go and do in school. Everybody in the community started saying she has ended her future; we should send her to the boy's house and arrange for her wedding. I told myself, this is my blood and future, one mistake should not be the end of her dream, so I decided that her mother must be ready to assist her to raise the child. This year she wrote her final secondary school exam and came out in flying colours. She will be going to University next year. You can see how I would have destroyed her life if I had insisted that she is done with school" (Respondent 12, Interview: August 2020).

However, contrasting attitudes do exist in many families and cannot be underestimated. Family background and the norms of the family played a pivotal role in early pregnancies and young mothers' phenomenon. It is pertinent to note that certain variables are useful in the sexual and contraceptive behaviour of adolescents rooted in the structural characteristics of the family. The marital status of the parent, educational background and the economic profile of the parent, parenting style and the general family processes are influential in the reproductive trajectory of the adolescent (Miller, 2002:22). Some family traditions required the males to pay for girl's impregnated upkeep by taking full responsibility for the girls and

babies delivered. One critical interview with a headmaster highlighted that these arrangements eventually led to early marriages affecting the entire scope of perceptions and intervention procedures.

> "When we inform the parents about their children's pregnancies, they solve the issues in their homes without the consent of the school. By the time we realize, most of the girls have been compelled to move in with the man responsible for their pregnancies hence their inability to return to school even after childbirth" (Respondent 10, Interview: August 2020).

Another respondent who got pregnant last year corroborated the Head Teacher position. She said that if she has the power, she would have returned to school, but her parents said she must stay and take care of the child.

> "I was told that I had missed my chances so I should deal with the problem myself. That is why I am working and saving money so that by next year I can go back to school and able to pay for day-care services that would help me look after my baby" (Respondent 4, Interview: August 2020).

While there was no evidence that the young mothers involved in my research were being compelled into marriage, however, some revealed having a cordial relation with the persons behind the pregnancies that welcomed the situation and were amassing finances by themselves or through their parents. However, the authenticity of male participation in care and aid of young mothers, pregnant pupils, and their babies is absolved by cultural norms that protect the males from numerous childcare responsibilities. Therefore, females are overburdened with the schoolchildren carrying along with the more massive load of care irrespective of any arrangements.

It is important to note that the risk of teenage or adolescent pregnancy is related to family structure and contextual characteristics. This is the case as single parenting, and the presence of sexually active siblings may contribute to the onset of sexual activity and the usage of contraception (Miller, 2002). This study found that parental support and perspectives are central to re-entry, as either facilitators or inhibitors. The young mothers' re-entry to school is mainly their mothers' responsibility despite many fathers willingly supporting the re-entry policy, as revealed by one of the fathers interviewed. The key participants, mostly the parents, registered awareness of the possibilities for girls to carry on with schooling during pregnancy and eventual going back after childbirth. Knowledge of these possibilities influenced parental decisions to support their daughters' re-entry, with ignorance playing a pivotal role as an inhibiting factor. Therefore, parental viewpoints and perspectives determine the failure or success of school re-entry for young mothers.

4.4. Community Discourses of Shame Deeply Rooted in Cultural Norms

Culture remains a notable hindrance to the effective implementation of the re-entry policy. Issues of stigma and discriminations targeted at pregnant adolescents are rooted in the cultural system. This complicates the problem of combining the role of a student and a mother in the schooling environment. Having a child as an adolescent is problematic because there is an unfavourable view of the pregnant adolescent in society. Such pregnancy carries moral weights that are unfavourable to the mother (Shaw, 2010; Bhana et al., 2010). Stigmatization from community and peers as one of the primary reasons cited by all the respondents that

are enabling the failure to school re-entry. One of the headteachers argued that girls encounter all manner of ridicule such as name-calling from fellow age-mates and community at large that leads to soaring dropouts and limited re-entries. She said that:

> "the shame that these girls are subjected to is more than enough to keep them away from school. I have some girls in my school that got pregnant and return to school after delivery. Unfortunately, they eventually dropped out because of the shame, ridicule and name-calling are too much for them to take. I was able to visit two of them at home and plea to them to come back, but they could not withstand the shame and stigma, so they refused to come back" (Respondent 10, Interview: August 2020).

Many Ghanaians perceive young girls' pregnancy as a shameful act and a bad example for the rest of the young generation (Aidoo, 2017). Guardians, or parents of pregnant adolescents, get upset and disappointment in the pregnancy of schoolgirls despite the cause. This is because pregnancy, even though seen as a blessing from God, is only recognized among girls who are married. A schoolgirl is demanded to control her sexual feelings, concentrate on her studies, and not engage in any romantic relationship with a man who has not paid her dowry (Dixon- Mueller, 1993; Muhanguzi, 2011). Her pregnancy then becomes a shameful act to the family and community, contributing to the continual push of young mothers to the private sphere with not enough support systems to ensure their school re-entry (Muhanguzi, 2011: 713-714). This treatment melted out on many pregnant schoolgirls in attaining education is propagated by contamination discourses as mentioned in the findings report of Britwum et al. (2017), affecting pregnant schoolgirls retention. Thus, stopping young mothers school re-entry helps to avoid other schoolgirls from being contaminated. Discriminatory discourses of shame make it difficult for young mothers to acquire the support they need to return to school. One of the young mothers during the interview sessions, who is yet to go back to school, said:

> "I passed through many problems when I got pregnant as a schoolgirl at an early age. I felt the shame I have brought upon myself in the society I come from, and the ridicule my family received in the society that made me end up dropping out of school. It also made my mum go through some hard times in terms of finance because she was supposed to take care of me and the baby I was carrying in addition to my siblings" (Respondent 5, Interview: August 2020).

It follows, therefore, that the family with deeply entrenched views in cultural worldviews might enforce stigmatization and frustrate the re-entry policy for the student mother. According to one headteacher, the re-entry policy implementation is compounded by the cultural views irrespective of the trajectory of the student mother in life. Most people in the community still held on to that stigmatized identity and may not recommend her as a role model for younger girls even when she overcame the burdens of motherhood. She was once a teenage mother and shared her experience as follows:

> "I am a parent and a teacher. I had my first child when I was in high school III at the age of 17, so I can say that I am much aware of how the student mothers' feel about the whole situation. The only saving grace I had was that my pregnancy did not become evident until we finished the exam, yet I was stigmatized and frustrated by my parents and the whole community. I was sent packing from home because it was believed that I had dragged the reputation and honour of the family in the mud. Fortunately for me, the mother of the boy that got me pregnant accepted to take care of the child. Even though I had one of the best results in the school that year, and I won a full scholarship to further my education at the University, till now I still encounter discrimination to the

extent that some people don't want to have anything to with me in the community (Respondent 14, Interview: August 2020).

Student mothers arrive at the community spotlight through their condition. They consequently suffer the various social acts borne out of stigma when they decide to go back to school (Okwany, 2016: 5). The experience of stigma shapes the values in the life of the girl, which leads to a desire to quit schooling in the formal educational system. Those who decide to go through the system of schooling assume a stigmatized identity. They must bear the burden of being assumed as irresponsible, immoral and ignorant. The young fathers may get to be described as feckless" (Duncan et al. 2010: 3).

The role of the girl plays out within the context of the social mores of a society. The societal expectations of the girl child constitute the social concept of gender. Gender is, therefore, the societal ascriptions, expectations and notions of deviance that shape the life of the girl in society. Understanding teenage pregnancy is dependent on the understanding of the notions of gender. The pregnant teenager who gets to withdraw from school suffers as a result of the violations of the boundaries for pregnancy. Her withdrawal from school is a social sanction.

On the other hand, the boy who gets her pregnant is free from such sanction as his act conforms to the differential standards that shape social life. The situation of teenage pregnancy and sexual activities by adolescents are violations of the social norms (Okwany, 2016). This view of pregnancy and sexual activity may problematize a proper analysis of the biological and psychological elements of sexuality. People at the stage of adolescents are beginning to experience their sexuality differently. It is at his point in their life that these adolescents need to be engaged productively for desirable outcomes (Massaut, 2004).

4.5. Conflicting Gender Roles of Young Mothers

Pearson (1992:292) argues, "gender relations describe the social meaning of male and female, and thus what is considered appropriate behaviour or activity for men and women". This means different societies ascribe different meaning and roles to men and women. In Ghanaian society, household chores and responsibilities are shared among parents and children. In the study area of Akan, all children belong to the mother due to the matrilineal system of inheritance. However, male's own family possessions while women assume items of domestic functions. The father is known as the breadwinner and the head of the family; the mother takes the upkeep responsibility such as cleaning, cooking, washing, etc. As children sets in the family, the female child is trained by the mother to assume the domestic work, while the male child is left to play football and to focus on their education. A student mother living under the authority of her parents in the cultural and social structures are supposed to fulfil their socially prescribed roles of girls within the gendered division of labour. A young mother interviewed revealed that her role in the household increased before her childbirth, which makes it difficult to be punctual in school, causing her under-performance.

"I wake up very early in the morning to fetch water for family use before going to school. After that, I prepare breakfast for my child and do the dishes. School starts early, so I am normally late whereby mostly I miss morning studies and when the teacher on duty is strict, I get punished. In the evening, I must cook the evening meal for the family, which sometimes is hectic and consumes most of the study time. My sister helps me on weekdays, but on weekends, I have to do most of the household chores since my sister

complains she does a lot during the week when am in school" (Respondent 8, Interview: August 2020).

Ghanaian girl-child roles are to take care of family chores with limited or no obligation to demand any property belonging to their respective families, which becomes complicated when they are pregnant, elevating the possibility of forced marriage. A young mother who is still a child with no other sisters to continue with household chores has no choice but to continue her work in the house, coupled with the childcare responsibility and schooling, will end up dropping out due to her double role in the household as a child and a mother to a new-born baby. Being a mother, a student, and a child with household responsibilities becomes unbearable for the young mother enforcing her dropout.

Also, the gender roles in the household and community make young mothers the sole caregiver of their babies while the men or boys responsible for their pregnancy continues their economic livelihood or schooling. In most African countries, girls are socialized in the mothering and caregiving roles from a young age through observation and training in the various household chores by their mothers (Sarfo, Yendork, & Naidoo, 2020). The gendered cultural norms rest childcare to women while men are tasked other roles such as sourcing for income-generating opportunities to feed their family.

Despite the urge to be supportive, cultural beliefs and practices, hinder men from daily childcare activities. In this regard, the male gender is not obliged or compelled by society to take-up these distinct roles of women such as childcare and household management. The same way a boy is not obliged to wash dishes is the same way he cannot bath, dress, or feed a baby. These norms create a perceived notion that men responsible for the pregnancy of schoolgirls can only lend financial support to them, leaving the caregiving role solely to young mothers. Logically, a young girl is unable to bear the sole responsibility of taking care of their babies, in addition to attending to their responsibility in household chores while concentrating on their academics. The young mother is overburdened with so many responsibilities in the household due to her identity as a child and as a girl, which intersect with her new identity as a mother to make schooling unfavourable. Her triple identity becomes unbearable and a challenge to her retention in school when there is little support from the child's father because of the gender norms which pictures her as the primary care provider of her baby (Dawson and Hosie 2005; Chigona 2007; Wekesa, 2010; Pricilah et al., 2014).

According to Ngulube (2017), children are exposed to multiple factors that influence their behaviour and attitudes concerning gender roles as they develop to adolescence, with parents' guidance being most influential. Notably, the family actively influences passing on the roles overtly and covertly through direct means such as ideologies, norms, and values and indirectly through the choice's parents make that are not viewed (Stumbitz et al. 2017). However, as much as passing on these gendered roles by the family and society is beneficial to moulding children, it is problematic because it is governed by gender stereotypes, which eventually give birth to inequalities. For instance, young mothers are usually stereotyped by traits, such as being framed as deviant pupils who already perform poorly, have bad behaviour, or have no aspirations, meant to silence them by limiting their ability to make decisions and choices concerning their lives and those of their children. Social norms perpetuate ideologies of traditional gender roles that directly and indirectly limit young mothers' opportunities. Importantly, development initiatives continue to build on patriarchal structures, which deepens social and gender divides.

Nevertheless, despite all these gendered roles' intersection to hinder re-entry to school mothers, other findings have also revealed that the girl's educational aspirations are

addressing the obstacles. The vision, goals, and desires of young mothers determine their resilience towards achieving their dream regardless of the challenges induced by gender roles' intersections. School-going girls have varied future aspirations that can change positively or negatively when they get pregnant. The young mothers and pregnant pupils reported to be academically strong are ambitious to join varied careers that attract at least post-secondary education accomplishment. They easily recognize the essentiality of education in generating opportunities for their future. One of the young mothers interviewed stated that:

> ".....after my childbirth, I went back to school because I want to be a journalist. My return to school was challenging due to my extended stay at home to cater for my child. Studies became difficult for me, but I was determined. My parents supported me, especially my mum; she took care of my child to enable me to go back. I went to a different school very far from here for my re-entry to avoid my peers from stigmatizing against me as a student mother" (Respondent 7, Interview: August 2020).

This highlight the need to consider including the young mothers' voices in the re-entry process since their visions, desires, and aspirations can be a motivation to others in returning to school.

4.6. Conclusion

The factors exposing school pupils to early and unwanted pregnancies were found to influence the desire and ability to remain in school or re-enter after delivery. Financial constraints stood out as both a contributor to early schoolgirl pregnancy and a hindrance to young mothers' school re-entry. This stems from poverty in the household, lack of child's support from the child's father, and finally, lack of scholarship or grants to support student mothers. As these conditions intersect, young mothers desire to further her education is brought to a halt. Besides, the school environment is not free from gender ideologies propagating discriminatory stereotypes against young mothers, making their re-entry difficult. The conflicting gender role of the young girl as a 'mother', 'student' and 'child' overburden the young mother and influence her decision to quit school to assume care responsibility of her child. In the next chapter, I highlight that the re-entry policy is blind to the deep socio-cultural norms and institutional barriers, causing ineffectiveness of the policy.

Chapter 5 **Ghana Re-Entry Policy: A Policy Blind to Deep Socio-Cultural and Institutional Obstacles**

5.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the weaknesses of the Ghana re-entry policy for young mothers that withdrew from school due to pregnancy. The analysis is essential as it shows the flaws in the policy that required fixing. The chapter is divided into four central parts. The first part looked at the failure of the policy to prioritized community engagement to address the cultural myths that reinforced the stigmatization of pregnant girls in the society. The second part looked at the lack of policy direction that gave the headteachers to interpret or misinterpret the re-entry policy for the benefit or detriment of the young mothers that desires to return to school. The third part of the chapter focus on the effect of lack of uniformity in the implementation of the policy and how it denied some young mothers the chance of returning to school.

5.2. Policy Failure to Address the Cultural Myths Associated with Pregnant Schoolgirls

Pregnancies and other issues are symbolic aspects of the intangible aspects of culture. People are expected to conform to the social norms of the society as there is a social penalty for deviations to held norms. Therefore, two of the headteachers that were interviewed held the view that advocacy campaigns for awareness and sensitization are not sufficient for behavioural change in the stakeholders, essential for a successful implementation of the re-entry policy. The respondent argued that there had been several advocacy campaigns which target the parents and the broader community on the need to provide the much-needed material support to student mothers. However, long-held beliefs complicate the attempts by the stakeholders to effectively integrate the student mothers and follow through with the re-entry program. The respondent believed that significant behavioural change favourable to the student mother might rely on legislation that provides tough sanctions on the abandonment of a child because of pregnancy: One of the Headteachers had this to say:

> "I am not sure if the situation will change soon without the state has laws that prohibit parents from stopping their daughter from returning to school after delivery. It allows many parents to use pregnancy as an excuse to abandon their duty on the girl child since the male child is more adored in society. Secondary education is free and compulsory, so there is no reason for stopping the child to return to school, rather many parents will marry off the girls because of the family tradition of not having a child outside wedlock" (Respondent 11, Interview: August 2020).

There is the dominant view that those considered young people are delineated with chronological age. From this operational definition, certain groups of people in the population are considered young and enjoy certain rights on account of their position on the chronological scale. Young people are thus excluded from the full participation in the various areas considered to be the domain of adults until they have attained a defined age in the chronological spectrum (Melchiorre, 2004 as cited in Huijsmans, et al. 2014: 4). It is on this basis that certain activities are considered exclusive to adults. Sexual activity is one such domain. Where a child becomes pregnant at a time before the socially acceptable boundaries, they

may become objects of ridicule and abuse. Therefore, the re-entry policy ought to take into consideration the intersectionality of the different factors cumulated into the student's mothers withdrawing from school. One of the headteachers maintained that the re-entry policy only stopped the expulsion of pregnant girls from school and gave them the total rights to resume their education after delivery but failed to address the real issue that makes these girls to abandoned their education. She said that:

> "The most important factor that denies a girl child; I am not even talking about the pregnant ones is the parents cultural believes about a girl child. There is a need for a serious engagement with the parents and communities because when a parent made up their mind that their daughter will receive education, the girls would return to school. Even if it means to transfer to another school, you can imagine without pregnancy; the government must put in place different types of incentives and programs to get parents, especially those in the rural areas to send their daughters to school. Now we are talking about a girl that were considered to break the social norms by becoming pregnant. The government cannot just say come back to school without working towards the demystification of the bias against pregnant schoolgirls" (Respondent 10, Interview: August 2020).

In Ghanaian setting, a young unmarried girl who gets pregnant is commonly referred to as a 'wasted girl' with no dignity and purpose in life. Family preference for a male child to a female-child stems from this perception, and the education of the boy-child becomes more valuable to the education of a girlchild. This is because, it is presumed that a girl will eventually get pregnant, and for that reason, investing in her education is just a waste of resources. This resonates with Chilisa's findings in her article "National Policies on Pregnancy in Education Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: the case of Botswana" where a pregnancy girl is referred to as spoilt, damaged, defiled or deflowered (Chilisa, 2002). These negative perceptions, in addition to the gender, prescribe roles assigned to men and women, forms the socialization process of the girl child and an influential factor in young mother's school re-entry decision. The integration of the young mother to the school is greatly affected by the negative attitudes and perceptions by teachers, peers, and parents (Onyango, Kiolis & Nyambedha 2015). The responses of two of the young mothers that were interviewed when asked if they will be going back to school if they government provided monetary incentives that could help them to take care of their babies while they are away attending classes shed more lights on the need for the government re-entry policy to prioritized community engagement and take bold legal steps to protect young mothers from the harmful cultural practice. According to one of the respondents' statement;

> "I wish I can go back to school, but it is a shameful thing to become a mother at the age of 17, the pregnancy ended my dreams of becoming a Nurse. I have a new dream now, and that is my child, nobody but me will take care of him. Only a few people relate with me; the majority of my friends don't want to be associated with me because their parents already warned them to dissociate themselves from me. I have thought about relocating to Accra or Kumasi to start a new life. There is no hope for me in this community because I am being treated as if I committed murder or something unforgivable" (Respondent 2, Interview: August 2020).

Sexuality becomes the sphere where held notions of gender shape thinking and expressions. There is a script from which the sexuality of Boys and Girls are framed (Wiederman, 2005). "In this sexual scripting, girls are socialized into accepting their gendered position as sexually impotent; 'potency', in other words, is associated with masculinity. Such constructions influence how young people understand and live out their sexuality" (Muhanguzi, 2011:

713-714). At the level of the sexual encounter, boys and girls follow through the scripting. It also plays out at the level of policymaking. Policymakers respond to the problems created by the scripted sexual encounters with scripted notions of propriety. Girls who become pregnant in school bear the brunt of the blames that comes with the act of two parties. It is common to consider the girl who got pregnant as reckless and of a lower moral principle (Duncan et al., 2010: 3). The premarital sexual encounter is frowned upon as a violation of the social mores (Okwany, 2016). This moral position becomes the starting point of policymaking rather than objective sexuality.

> "Not a day passes by that I do not cry for messing up my life, I have tried many times to return to school. I even tried to transfer to another school thinking that my secret would be saved, but after two weeks, I started hearing gossips and negatives things that affected me mentally, so I don't have other options than to drop out from school because the shame won't stop" (Respondent 3, Interview: August 2020).

The testimonies of the two young mothers above echoes what Chilisa (2002) observed as she noted that the young mother begins to experience a sense of inferiority and may believe that she is impure on account of the projection of societal notions on her body. The girl who is now a mother although enjoys the inalienable rights of human dignity, association and expression, she may in many instances suffer the trauma that goes with the societal labels as a result of her route to motherhood. They will perceive that they have gone against the social norm and may live with that shame for a long time. It is this sense that informs the view held by Chilisa (2002) that the girl mother is socially transformed into a multifaceted identity; on the one hand, she is a provider, on the other, she assumes the identity of a stigmatized person. As a provider, she might be marked by a passiveness, helplessness and a lack of voice accompanied by the baggage of one whose value is diminished on account of childbearing. Both frames where she draws the sense of her identity becomes a means of social exclusion, a diminished sense of self that has implications for her esteem and integration in the schooling community.

The harsh attitudes from communities coupled with insufficient gender protection mechanisms and poverty undermine the struggles of young girls in attaining their education in Ghana according to the findings of Dormekpor (2016) and Yindol (2016). The causes of young girls' pregnancy are deep-rooted in these factors, which comes with a long-term effect on school re-entry. Therefore, more efforts should be put in delivering empowering programs to marginalized communities and families to eliminate structural poverty. Policies and programs that protect the female gender dignity and safeguard their overall well-being must be implemented.

5.3. Re-Entry Policy Success at The Mercy of Headteachers

The GEU official from the Ministry of Education that was interviewed revealed that there is a policy document issued by the GES to guide the implementation process and facilitate young mothers school re-entry. However, there is no clarity on the actors responsible for the implementation of the policy, leaving school heads and teachers the ultimate autonomy to decide on the favourable practice for student mothers' re-entry. In this regard, most institutional factors are shaped by the teachers to facilitate or inhibit re-entry strategies. Sadly, there is no part of the provision in the re-entry policy that is explicit enough on the consequences for headteachers or teachers that failed to implement provisions that protect the rights of the young mothers to continue education. She shared her experiences on the various reports on how teachers continue to subject the student mothers to different forms of subtle

discrimination and shaming because of their student's mother status in school. She revealed that some school heads bring on board their own rules that go a long way in making the school uncomfortable for the young school mothers and pregnant girls. According to her statement:

> "There is a popular saying that says, in a city where there is no law, there is no crime. The success of the re-entry policy depends on how the actions of the teachers and the school heads. A teacher can make the life of any student miserable in school, not to mention pregnant schoolgirls. Besides, some teachers ignore these girls when they return to school with a few passing negative remarks when opportunities present themselves, such as when the girl does not understand what is being taught in class. I had heard complaints of the teachers deliberately asking the students mothers in-class questions they knew that the students don't know and when they got it wrong, the teachers make mockery comments about the students to the extent that they become a laughing stock by the whole class. Comments like I know the question I asked you is not the area of your specialization when it is sex, how do I expect you to give a correct answer" (Respondent 15, Interview: August 2020).

The revelation above is an indication that the successful implementation of the government re-entry policy hinges on the shoulder of the headteachers and teachers. Their individual or collective actions can frustrate the re-entry policy rendering it ineffective. As posited by Amadu (2016:9), "when it comes to student's retention in school, the headteachers have a significant role to play". This is because they not just managers in the educational sectors, they are also considered to be the leaders with authority and power in the sector (Mwangi, 2014:14). Therefore, there is a need for the re-entry policy to be specific on the punishment that will be meted on teachers that floated and provision of the re-entry policy. This is because there are headteachers and teachers according to the findings of this study that have proven to be a vital facilitator in encouraging pregnant pupils and school mothers to remain in school. However, these teachers employ diversified approaches since there lack implemented guidelines. The young mothers are left at the mercy of teachers to decide the best channel for re-entry.

> "We sometimes go to some of the students who were serious when in school to inform their parents and themselves about the opportunity to come back to school. We motivate them about their chance to continue their education. We also encourage the parents to give these young girls a second chance by supporting them to return to school" (Respondent 10, Interview: August 2020).

Many of the young mothers interviewed acknowledged their guidance and counselling coordinators. One head of the school highlighted relaxing school time for school mothers allowing them to come to school late and leave to attend post-natal care or nurse their babies as there are no day-care centres in the schools of student mothers. The GEU official cited the best approach to advising teachers to minimize the girls' stigma is by banning name-calling and championing peer support. These aspects are vital facilitators, although no policy has been implemented to cater to them. The teachers have the option of hindering re-entry through the mechanisms they employ. In general, teachers' attitudes contribute immensely to the failure of young mothers to return to school despite the education policy championing for re-entry.

5.4. Lack of Uniformity in the Institutional Best Practices Facilitating Re-entry

Learning institutions have been applying best practices with reference to GES provisions to facilitate the re-entry of pregnant girls and young mothers in school. The frameworks are derived from the Ghanaian constitution, given that there are no implemented policies to guide the process. In this regard, some practices might work against promoting the process.

School management, in collaboration with various GES officials, adopts and applies varied and favourable practices to stimulate parties involved as much as is viable to welcome the situations as they unfold. The pregnant pupils until childbirth and re-entry allowance depend solely on the institutional frameworks that vary from one school to another across the district and the country.

> "I am fortunate that I am in my present school because I have friends in some other schools that are mothers also, but their schools make it impossible for them to resume back to school. But in my school, I am given special consideration, my teacher through the headteacher helped to arrange for a woman close to the school to assist in looking after my child since I could not leave him behind at home because my mother is late. The burden of how to look after my child while attending classes was lifted by the teachers. I was not the only one that benefited from this arrangement; we are three that they assisted with day-care support" (Respondent 8, Interview: August 2020).

The implication of the account of the respondents and others interviewed is that, while some pregnant school girls regardless of their situations are assisted through the removals of barriers that can hinder their re-entry into school, there are so many others that would not benefit from the re-entry policy, not because they are not interested in resuming schooling. However, they could not due to lack of clarity of the implementation process of the re-entry policy. Thus, the viewpoints of the education workforce in the manner they tackled pregnancy issues and return for school mothers were determined by individualistic impulses associated with socio-cultural prejudices (Manu et al. 2015). This explains the basis of why some teachers were passionate about facilitating re-entry, while others completely inhibited the efforts. Also, none of the headteachers interviewed received specialized training and counselling on how to handle these cases since the endeavour was government-driven.

Further, the Ghanaian constitution provides the impartial framework for all children to remain in school (Amoah, 2017). The pregnant pupils and young mothers, in this case, are not exempted. In this regard, it acts as the legal structure guiding the acquisition and application of favourable practices associated with pregnant students and school mothers. One headteacher during the interview's sessions revealed that at staff and PTA meetings, they make some directives to guide pregnant girls and mothers and encourage parents to return their children to school after delivery. Most rules revolve around punctuality and lateness to enhance flexibility for the comfort of the young mothers. These practices, founded on the constitution's spirit, promote the school re-entry process as an institutional endeavour.

Learning institutions employ mechanisms to enhance reproduction and sexual education programs. The study found that reproduction and sexual education curricula, which integrate prevention of pregnancies, were not given the deserved attention. Published related pieces of the literature revealed that parents were generally disturbed concerning teaching their girls on such subject matters (Manu et al. 2015). It was rather worrying when the research showed that to an extend some teachers feel uncomfortable when tackling such topics citing the content as encouraging promiscuity among schoolchildren.

A gendered protective mechanism for young girls in Ghana has failed due to inconsistencies in the age category for sexual activities. The age of consent in Ghana is 16 years;

however, the 1992 Constitution categorizes a child as someone below the age of 18 years (Article 28 Clause 5). Besides, lack of vibrant child registration centres in most remote communities do not help to determine how old or young some of these girls are, makes men who get them pregnant get away with their crimes. Lorber (1994:15) argues that "as a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives". Even though all the young mothers interviewed in this study confessed having a mutual relationship with their child's father which resulted in their pregnancy, little was done by the school authorities and other state officials to hold the older men who got the under-age girls pregnant. Young mothers after their childbirth due to their existence in a society where less value is given to girlchild education, only see the need to engage in some petty trade to fend for themselves and their children. Their continual relation with people in the household and community makes them submit to the domination of men, reinforcing gendered norms and stereotypes.

> "The men who get the girls pregnant, we take some of them on, but others become family issues, and I don't get to the root of it. Some even force the men to marry them. They are not thinking about their schooling, nothing" (Respondent 15, Interview: August 2020).

Also, when a schoolboy is responsible for the pregnancy of a schoolgirl, the school authorities invite the parents of both students. Their meeting is just to reveal what has happened to all parents and to get the boy's family to take responsibility for the pregnancy. No punishment is given to the schoolboy for getting a girl pregnant, but he is left to continue his schooling while the girl leaves to give birth.

> "The school has no punishment for the boy who gets a schoolgirl pregnant. However, it depends on the age of schoolboy, when he is more than 19 years, and the girl is in her teenage, then we will call the parents of each of the students on how to settle the case, aside from that, nothing" (Respondent 10, Interview: August 2020).

Most times, people share the assumption that the schoolboy, when allowed to continue his education, will be able to further to a higher level to take care of the baby and the girl in future. This assumption is a contributory factor to the gender disparity in education as it does not ensure schoolboys' accountability for schoolgirls' pregnancy. The education of the student mother is interrupted while the schoolboy responsible for her pregnancy continues his education with no interruption. Such ideologies propagated by gendered institutions of the family make men superior over women and push young mothers to the private sphere of caregiving which affects their school re-entry. After compulsory maternity leave, young mothers lose interest in their education aspirations:

> "Getting pregnant has worried me and has not helped me at all. Now I do not have much interest in schooling. I want to learn a skill rather than go back to school. I wish all my mates can abstain or protect themselves during sex to prevent unwanted pregnancy." (Respondent 4, Interview: August 2020).

> "Issues of teenage pregnancy are treated like the girls deserve whatever happens to them. We forget about the structural factors such as poverty that put most of these girls in the situation: the main cause of teenage pregnancy." (Respondent 15, Interview: August 2020).

An educated and healthy girl is a crucial contribution to the community's development, but young mothers face a challenge in their quest to continuing their education. Unfortunately, privileged males get away with claims of sexual immorality even in the arena of the public sphere of education due to the deep-rooted discrimination and biases of the education

sector and policies of the institutions of men. The cultural norms rooted in gender discriminatory ideologies make it way in the formal institution which manifests itself in the re-entry policy guideline, which side-lines young mothers in the decision-making of essential issues related to their education (Stumbitz et al. 2017). The primary revelation was deeply rooted in inequalities that affect girls' access to education because of inherent gender roles that emanate from male-dominated social structures. For instance, socially constructed gendered ideologies in the Akan community conform to dominant discourses of childcare as a feminine responsibility that can only be fulfilled by the woman while holding a permissive attitude towards the men. Therefore, while the inherent gender roles pressure the pregnant schoolgirls to disengage from learning and learn to take on motherhood roles, deeply rooted inequalities permit the child-fathers, in case they are learners and have been identified, to continue learning without disturbance. The ministry of education receives a limited allocation of budget to provide motivational packages to motivate young mothers towards their successful re-entry.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the re-entry education policy fails to address the cultural myths of schoolgirls, coupled with an overreliance on schools for the policy success and implementation, and lack of uniformity in re-entry best practices contributes to young mothers disengagement from school. Also, I argue that there is lack of clear sanctions to parents and teachers who make young mothers school re-entry complicated and unrealistic. This study highlights that there is a need for hastened action on these underlying factors for proper implementation of and adherence to the re-entry policy. I suggest several actions in the conclusion.

Chapter 6 **Realizing Young Mothers' Education**

6.1. Introduction

This research was to investigate how the re-entry education policy for pregnant students facilitate or do not facilitate the educational attainment of pregnant students and young mothers in Techiman. The study achieved this by delving into the material and emotional conditions that shape school re-entry possibilities for pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers. With the help of the concepts of sexuality, gender, and intersectionality as the analytical tools, the findings of this study shows that the policy fails to address the physical, social, and economic impact of pregnancy and childbirth on young mothers' living conditions and how they intersect to shape their re-entry to school. The policy turns a blind eye on the influence of household poverty on young mothers' school re-entry coupled with conflicting gender norms and community attitudes. The policy therefore lacks an intersectional approach in tackling the socio-economic conditions such as poverty, and the institutional or school-based challenges. These factors intersect to make young mothers re-entry to complete their primary and secondary education, and further to a higher level a dream. This concluding chapter highlights the implications of the research findings to policy makers and future research.

6.2. Achieving Pregnant Schoolgirls and Young Mothers' Re-entry

Despite the constitution of Ghana encouraging all children to continue and complete their school, the policies in place do not lay clear framework on the best practices to go about the entire scenario of young mothers' re-entry. From the findings as regards to the first questions that seek to understand the contributing factors that hinder the re-entry of young mothers to school despite the enactment of the re-entry policy, it was discovered that the decision for young mothers to go back to school to seek corresponding academic achievement is facilitated by important social, institutional, economic, and cultural factors. These factors shape the constructs of motherhood, female sexuality, and associated stigmatization causing the exclusion of pregnant pupils and school mothers from learning institutions by their community. The findings show that a girl's resolution of going back to school and family acceptance to support her is a tiny drop in the ocean in addressing this issue because the socio-cultural factors influencing re-entry of school mothers are rooted in customary gendered practices that reinforced widespread poverty, stigmatization, and exclusion as related matters to re-entry. Ghanaian population perceives early pregnancy as shameful to the community that sets a bad example for the rest of the young generation. Only few pregnant students who can overlook the stigma can push to complete their basic education. The stigmatization and the increase in vulnerabilities for these girls become a problem they must deal with, which informs their decision to go back to school after delivery.

This study found that parents are the most distinguished social players. The parents and close relatives play a paramount role in encouraging the girls' personal disposition. On

occasions whereby the parents are supportive, the girls' re-entry is smooth with limited challenges. Also, inability to return to school due to financial constraint and lack of childcare support by their parents and the father of their babies are also contributing factors to the problem of re-entry. Many of the young mothers are coming from very poor economic background, with no financial support from the father of their babies to fend themselves and their children which automatically results to discontinued schooling. Finally, the funds to hire a baby's nurse in case the girl's parents are busy grappling with making ends meet might be challenging due to poverty. However, the re-entry policy comes with no financial backing in the form of cash transfers to empower households, and provide financial support needed by young mothers to ensure their successful return to school. Therefore, the government of Ghana and GES should provide scholarships/grants, motivational packages, and incentives to motivate young mothers to re-enter school after childbirth. This will serve as a financial relief to many young mothers entangled in poverty.

The lack of robust policy implementation blueprint placed the successful implementation of the re-entry policy at the mercy of the head teachers. Therefore, the re-entry of the young mothers to school lies solely on the shoulder of the head teacher who can decide to accommodate the student and make learning experience conducive for her or can make her stay in school miserable. This explains why some young mothers are back in school while others are not. Many schools lack mechanisms to track, control, and record pregnancy cases that can provide a platform of securing intervention programs going forward. These institutions lack trained personnel who can deal with the situation and procure a solution facilitating re-entry. In addition, schools receive no support in implementing programs that can help eradicate early pregnancies, thus declining the rates of young mothers. These programs are vital in facilitating re-entry once the numbers of young mothers are reduced. Finally, teachers feel uncomfortable discussing this issue with schoolchildren due to lack of training. There is therefore the need for intensive training of schools on the best practices of the policy towards the realization of young mothers' successful school re-entry.

Re-entry education policy should be free from gender discriminatory ideologies and practices that promote stigmatization, marginalization, and exclusion of young mothers, to safeguard their educational rights. the policy should therefore make provisions for the children of young mothers to be cared for by the schools by making day-care centres available in the schools.

6.3. Future Research

Researchers have found that girls most commonly consult parents for sex-related advice (Ahorlu, Pfeiffer, & Obrist, 2015). There has been continued emphasis on the vital capacity of parents in bestowing sexual education to their female children. However, the current society has experienced changing relationships between parents and their children. Despite the increased literacy rates in contemporary communities in developing countries, parent's provision for sexuality education and other reproductive support is attracting heightened concern. The young generation sees parent-child communication on sexual matters as authoritative and vague, while parents seem overwhelmed with these massive roles. In this regard, future researchers need to review the critical role parents play in sexually oriented

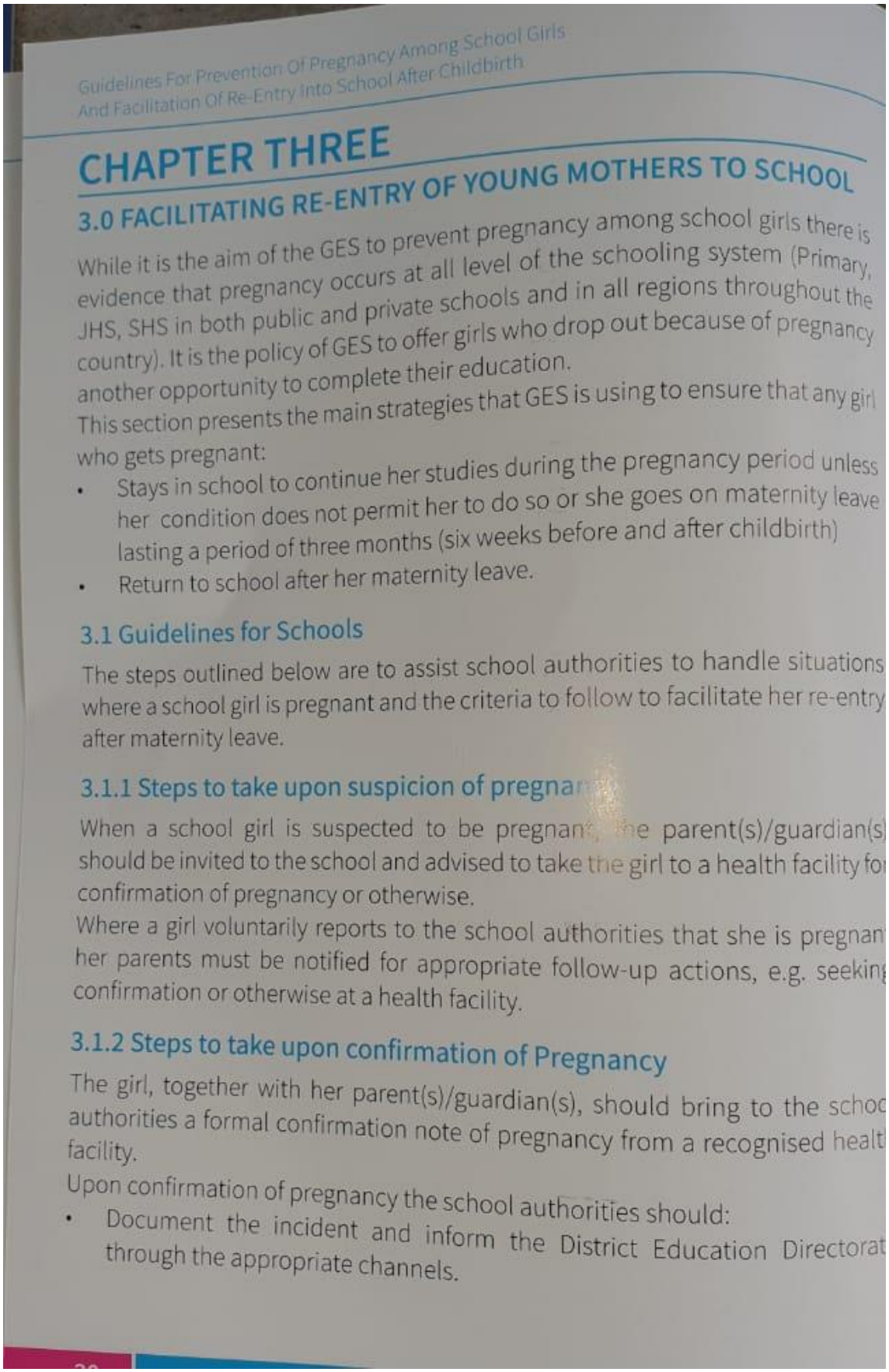
information to upgrade it with emerging severed kinship ties. This area is significant since the parent role cannot be substituted but only updated. This can only be done through evidence-based approaches geared at equipping present parents with the necessary information to mold their children, especially girls, to be responsible individuals.

Appendices

Appendix I: Profile of Interviewees

Name	Background	Interview Date
Respondent 1	16 years old mother and a dropout at the time of the interview.	August,2020
Respondent 2	17 years old mother and a dropout at the time of the Interview.	August, 2020
Respondent 3	15 years old mother and a dropout at the time of the interview	August, 2020
Respondent 4	18 years old mother and a dropout at the time of the interview	August, 2020
Respondent 5	16 years old mother and a dropout at the time of the interview.	August, 2020
Respondent 6	18 years old mother who had successfully re-entered school at the time of the interview.	August, 2020
Respondent 7	19 years old mother who had successfully re-entered school	August, 2020
Respondent 8	17 years old mother who had successfully re-entered school at the time of the interview.	August, 2020
Respondent 9	SHS Headmaster	August,2020
Respondent 10	SHS Headmistress	August 2020.
Respondent 11	JHS Headmaster	
Respondent 12	47 years old parent of a student mother	August, 2020
Respondent 13	52 years old parent of a student mother	August, 2020
Respondent 14	38 years old parent of a student mother.	August, 2020
Respondent 15	GEU Official under GES	August, 2020

Appendix II



CHAPTER THREE

3.0 FACILITATING RE-ENTRY OF YOUNG MOTHERS TO SCHOOL

While it is the aim of the GES to prevent pregnancy among school girls there is evidence that pregnancy occurs at all level of the schooling system (Primary, JHS, SHS in both public and private schools and in all regions throughout the country). It is the policy of GES to offer girls who drop out because of pregnancy another opportunity to complete their education.

This section presents the main strategies that GES is using to ensure that any girl who gets pregnant:

- Stays in school to continue her studies during the pregnancy period unless her condition does not permit her to do so or she goes on maternity leave lasting a period of three months (six weeks before and after childbirth)
- Return to school after her maternity leave.

3.1 Guidelines for Schools

The steps outlined below are to assist school authorities to handle situations where a school girl is pregnant and the criteria to follow to facilitate her re-entry after maternity leave.

3.1.1 Steps to take upon suspicion of pregnan

When a school girl is suspected to be pregnan[illegible]e parent(s)/guardian(s) should be invited to the school and advised to take the girl to a health facility fo confirmation of pregnancy or otherwise.

Where a girl voluntarily reports to the school authorities that she is pregnan her parents must be notified for appropriate follow-up actions, e.g. seekin confirmation or otherwise at a health facility.

3.1.2 Steps to take upon confirmation of Pregnancy

The girl, together with her parent(s)/guardian(s), should bring to the schoo authorities a formal confirmation note of pregnancy from a recognised healt facility.

Upon confirmation of pregnancy the school authorities should:

- Document the incident and inform the District Education Directorat through the appropriate channels.

- Inform the parent/guardian about GES Guidelines on Pregnancy and re-entry (see appendix A)
- If the pregnant girl is a boarder in a Senior High School the school authorities must discuss with parents/guardians the conditions for her continued stay in the school or the alternative agreements for her continued schooling, e.g. feeding, appropriate furniture, appropriate uniform, health needs, becoming a Day Student.
- Orient teachers to accept the pregnant girl without labelling her negatively, stigmatising her, shouting at her or making disparaging remarks about her in any way.
- Encourage the pregnant girl's peers and classmates to support her
- Counsel the pregnant girl on how to cope with the challenges and pressures presented by her condition.
- School authorities must encourage teachers and peers to support pregnant girls to catch up with their colleagues in their academic work.
- Provide regular counselling for the pregnant girl to attend antenatal clinic regularly and follow advice given
- Pregnant girl with Special Educational Needs and Disability should be accorded special attention relating to her specific condition

3.1.3 Steps to take if the Pregnancy is by a School Mate, Classmate or a Pupil/Student

- Document the incident and keep records of on file
- Appropriate sanctions prescribed by the GES should be made to apply.
- Where the action of the pupil/student contravenes national laws the appropriate sanctions under the law should be made to apply.
- Any further action such as maintenance of the pregnant girl should be left to the parents/guardians of both the girl and the boy to handle.

3.1.4 Steps to take if a male teacher is responsible for the pregnancy.

- Document the incident and keep records on file
- Appropriate sanctions prescribed by the GES and /or his professional association should be made to apply. The appropriate disciplinary action is irrespective of any criminal or civil action that may be brought against him

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