

A phenomenological study on pregnant and young mothers' experiences on second-chance education in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

While legal reforms are welcome to eliminate inequalities in schools, the study argues that there is little progress towards the reintegration of young mothers back into the education system. This paper interrogates the barriers to continued access to education for pregnant and young mothers in Zimbabwe's secondary schools against this backdrop. We collected data through in-depth and key informant interviews with 16 young mothers, 10 parents of young mothers, and 5 key informants (school authorities). A thematic approach guided the data analysis. The findings showed that, despite the Education Act (main education policy) giving young mothers the chance to continue their education, the 'blaming and shaming' strategy had an adverse effect on their efforts in the form of social exclusion, stigma, and discrimination. Through their experiential journey as young mothers, they were admonished by friends at school, labeled as 'bad apples', shunned by other learners, subjected to abuse by parents, a lack of parental support, and a shift in responsibilities. The concept of second education requires practical support that extends beyond legal reforms in the education sector, focusing on deeper work on harmful social and gender norms. The paper concludes that while legal reforms serve as a solid foundation, the success of second-chance education, which aims to address gender inequalities, requires society to eradicate deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that impede girls' access to education in developing countries.

Keywords: Second-chance education, young mothers, secondary schools, Zimbabwe