



## Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and its Influence on Social Adjustment of Pregnant and Teenage Student Mothers in Secondary Schools in the Post-COVID-19 Period

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### Abstract

Prevalence of teenage pregnancy is a global challenge affecting both developed and developing countries, posing a threat to the teenage girl's health and academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to assess the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and its influence on the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools in Kakamega East sub-county during the post-COVID-19 period. The study was anchored on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory to understand the impact on self-esteem and Vygotsky's Social-cultural Theory to analyze social adjustment. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting 10,623 stakeholders across 36 secondary schools. A sample of 371 respondents, including deputy principals, guidance and counselling teachers, class teachers, mainstream learners, pregnant/parenting teenagers, parents, and a QUASO, were sampled using stratified random sampling, purposive sampling, and snowballing. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, and document analysis. The instrument's reliability was confirmed with an alpha value of 0.83. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26, utilizing linear regression. The findings indicated that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy had a strong negative effect on self-esteem ( $\beta = -.671, p < .05$ ), and a significant negative effect on social adjustment ( $\beta = -.781, p < .05$ ). In conclusion, teenage pregnancy negatively impacts both the self-esteem and social adjustment components of the students' social well-being. The study recommends that schools, guided by a focus on addressing the fundamental needs of the affected adolescents, embrace comprehensive social support systems, including mentorship and religion/support groups, to aid the re-integration and coping mechanisms of pregnant and teenage student mothers. The findings provide a reference basis for scholars and interventions aiming to improve academic progression and social adjustment globally.

**Keywords:** teenage pregnancy, social adjustment, self-esteem, social adjustment, Maslow's theory, Vygotsk's theory

### Introduction

This study focused on investigating the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and its influence on the social adjustment of pregnant and student mothers in secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya, during the post-COVID-19 period. The introduction provides an extensive context, synthesizes existing empirical evidence, and outlines the theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis.

### Teenage Pregnancy as a Global Public Health and Educational Crisis

Teenage pregnancy is a significant, multifaceted global challenge that transcends developmental status, leading to profound implications for the health, education, and long-term socio-economic well-being of young girls. The phenomenon presents unique developmental and socioeconomic risks, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where consistently high prevalence rates impact adolescent girls' future prospects and perpetuate intergenerational poverty (Darroch et al., 2016). Globally, incidence rates vary drastically, highlighting differences in social, cultural, and policy environments; for instance, India reports some of the highest incidences, while Japan records some of the lowest (Maheshwari et al., 2022). Despite various regional and global efforts to curb these rates, Sub-Saharan Africa remains heavily burdened, accounting for over 5.5 million pregnancies annually among young women aged 15–19, with nearly half of these pregnancies being unintended (Darroch et al., 2016). This high prevalence frequently disrupts educational pathways, limiting access to critical opportunities and contributing directly to increased school dropout rates.



## **The Kenyan Context and the Compounding Impact of COVID-19**

In Kenya, the prevalence of teenage pregnancy is a persistent and critical national concern. According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS, 2020), approximately 18% of teenage girls (nearly one in five) are either pregnant or have already given birth. The issue is regionally concentrated, with Kakamega County consistently recording rates surpassing the national average, reporting a prevalence of 19% in 2020 (Ministry of Health, 2020).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic severely exacerbated this situation. Global crises, such as the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone (UNESCO, 2020), demonstrate that prolonged school closures, economic instability, and the diversion of resources away from essential Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services increase the vulnerability of adolescent girls to early pregnancy (IPPF, 2020). During the pandemic in Kenya, data from the Kenya Health Information Management System (KHIMS) revealed a concerning surge, with approximately 152,000 teenage pregnancies reported between March and July 2020 alone (KHIS, 2020). Kakamega East Sub-County, the focus of this study, emerged as a disproportionate hotspot, reporting 1,731 cases between January and June 2020, reflecting an alarming prevalence rate of 22.3%, significantly surpassing both the county and national averages (Nyangaresi et. al., 2021; Imbosa, et. al., 2022). This surge created an urgent need to understand the immediate and long-term consequences on the social well-being and academic reintegration of the student population returning to school.

### **Empirical Evidence on Social Adjustment**

The core concept investigated here is the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers, defined as the dynamic and complex process through which individuals adapt to profound changes in their psychological and social environments following early motherhood. For these young mothers, adjustment requires navigating intense societal stigma, increased maternal demands, and the pressures of continuing education. Empirical studies have strongly and consistently associated teenage pregnancy with numerous negative outcomes impacting social well-being (Vin et al., 2014). Research indicates that expectant teenage girls experience high levels of low self-esteem, poor interpersonal relationships, and symptoms of depression (Njuki, 2019; Geronimus, 2003). Pregnancy and parenthood are widely recognized as high-risk periods for mental health challenges, yet comprehensive evidence on best practices for preventive interventions for adolescents remains limited, especially regarding studies conducted in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) (Laurenzi et al., 2020; Elnagar et al., 2018).

The literature on mitigating factors is instructive. Studies confirm that strong supportive networks are critical for reducing the challenges faced by teenage mothers (VanDenBerg, 2012). Supportive social functions have been shown to increase parenting self-efficacy and reduce depression, acting as protective factors for functional parenting (VanDenBerg, 2012). Furthermore, school-based interventions like Guidance and Counseling Programs have proven effective in improving the overall adjustment of student mothers in Kenya (Opondo & Aloka, 2020). However, the same study critically noted that these students often register the lowest scores in academic adjustment, signaling that even with support, the equilibrium between education and motherhood remains an unresolved challenge (Opondo & Aloka, 2020). This highlights that while social adjustment is aided by existing structures, the underlying psychological and contextual disruptions are persistent.

### **Conceptualizing Disruption and Support Mechanisms**

The study is anchored on two foundational psychological theories to provide a robust conceptual lens for examining the intertwined psychological and social disruptions experienced by student mothers: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Vygotsky's Social-cultural Theory. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) asserts that human motivation is driven by the sequential satisfaction of basic needs. Early pregnancy systematically compromises lower-level needs (Physiological, Safety, Love, and Belonging), thereby directly impacting Esteem Needs. The widespread stigma, social isolation, and peer rejection associated with teenage motherhood severely damage the adolescent's self-perception, resulting in lowered self-esteem and reduced self-worth. According to



this framework, the failure to satisfy these core psychological needs creates a profound barrier to positive social adjustment, making it difficult for the student mother to engage with the educational setting and focus on higher-order needs like academic achievement upon returning to school. Vygotsky's Social-cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) complements this view by focusing on the external, social-contextual mechanisms. It emphasizes that cognitive and social growth are deeply rooted in social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), assisted by a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (e.g., teachers, counselors, peers). The COVID-19 crisis, followed by the stigma of pregnancy, drastically alters the student's social context, leading to social exclusion and limited access to these vital supportive systems (MKOs). The lack of a functional ZPD severely hinders the student mother's ability to develop the necessary coping and academic skills, making the quality and availability of institutional support a key determinant of their post-pregnancy social adjustment.

### Research Rationale and Focus

Despite the clear recognition that teenage pregnancy is a critical public health and social issue (Darroch et al., 2016) and the specific, alarming local data showing a 22.3% prevalence rate in Kakamega East Sub-County post-COVID-19 (KHIS, 2020), a significant research gap persists. Specifically, limited research quantitatively investigates the influence of this specific post-crisis prevalence surge on the measurable social adjustment outcomes of student mothers returning to secondary schools in this high-prevalence area. The disruptions caused by the pandemic further compounded challenges, limiting access to necessary support systems and heightening the risk of poor social outcomes, making this inquiry timely and necessary. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating these dynamics to inform strategies that will support the educational and social needs of these young mothers. Based on this compelling problem, the study objective is to determine the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and its influence on the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary school students in Kakamega East Sub-County during the post-COVID-19 period. By examining these variables, the research seeks to provide precise insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by teenage mothers, informing evidence-based policies and programs aimed at supporting their education and well-being. Furthermore, the study proceeds with the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya.

### Methodology

The study adopted both cross-sectional causal comparative survey and Linear regression model to establish the cause effect relationship of the variables. The study was conducted in Kakamega East Sub County, Kakamega County, Kenya, a hotspot in the county due to high prevalence in teenage pregnancies. In the year 2021, studies conducted on the causes of teenage pregnancies in Kakamega County, showed that teenage pregnancies in schools stood at 22.3% according (Nyangaresi, Injendi and Majanga, 2021; Imbosa, Majanga and Ouda, 2022)

The study targeted 36 secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County, with a population of 10,623 stakeholders which included teenage student mothers and pregnant teenage students, mainstream students, parents of the pregnant teenage students or teenage student mothers, guiding and counseling teachers, class teachers, Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QUASO) and deputy head teachers of selected schools.

The sampling procedures in this study included stratified sampling, purposive (Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young & Walker, 2020), snowballing (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019) and simple random sampling. A sample size of 371 respondents was selected from the study population guided by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size calculation formula. This constituted ten (10) public secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub- County which were selected using stratified random sampling design. Stratified sampling was based on category of school as well as gender. Ten (10) Deputy Principals, ten (10) G/C teachers and ten (10) class teachers were each selected purposively. 329 mainstream learners were selected using stratified random sampling. The stratification was based on gender as well as class. Twenty (20) pregnant and parenting teenagers as well as twenty (20) parents/guardians of the pregnant and parenting teenagers were sampled using snowballing. One (1) QUASO and matron were also sampled purposively.



This study employed questionnaires, interview schedule and document analysis guide as data collection instruments. They included the teenage pregnant girls, teenage student mothers, guidance and counselling teachers, parents or guardians to the pregnant and teenage student mothers, deputy principals, class teachers and guiding & counselling teachers in the selected schools as well as the Sub-County QUASO. The quality assurance checks on the instruments of data collection were done by conducting a pilot study, checking the validity and reliability of the instruments as well as the trustworthiness of the qualitative data that was collected. A pilot study was done in 5 schools to pre-test the questionnaires and the interview guides before the study to ensure that they captured data that answered the research questions. Content validity of instruments was tested by consulting supervisors, colleagues and several subject experts from the Department of Educational Psychology at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Content validity was determined using the content validity index in reference to the rating of each item on the scale. Cronbach reliability coefficient was also used for this study because it helps to establish the internal consistency of the responses. Split half is a coefficient of internal consistency used as an estimate of reliability and it ranges in values from 0-1. The coefficient of internal consistency exceeded the standard of 0.7, hence, the instrument is considered reliable (Yusoff, 2019).

All the gatekeepers were consulted before the process of data collection commenced. Social Science (SPSS) version 26 was used in the analysis of the quantitative data. Linear regression model, was used to establish causal effect of teenage pregnancy on self-esteem, social adjustment and academic achievement. F tests are carried out to examine the model significance while t-tests are carried out to establish whether a coefficient is significantly different from zero value. Qualitative data was analyzed by reporting in verbatim and discussing as well as transcribing in themes and drawing insights from the themes. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained consent from the respondents. The participants were further assured that the data collected was purely for research and thus will be kept confidential. Their identity was also kept anonymous since they were not required to disclose their identity. The researcher was accompanied by a trained counsellor in case the interviews with the pregnant teenage student mothers and or their parents became emotional.

## Results and Discussion

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The overall demographic characteristics of the respondents was sought. The findings are presented as shown in Table 1 that follows.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents Demographic characteristics**

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	99	30.93
Female	221	69.06
<b>Students Age Distribution</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Below 12 years	92	31.7
13-15 years	122	42.1
16-19 years	61	21.0
Above 19years	15	5.2
Total	290	100
<b>Deputy Principals, Class Teachers and G&amp;C Teachers age Distribution</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Below 30 years	3	10.0
31 - 40 years	10	33.3
41-50 years	13	43.4
Above 50 years	4	13.3
Total	30	100
<b>Whom they stay with</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Both Parents	138	47.6
Mother	43	14.8
Father	29	10.0
Grand Parents	23	7.9
Uncle	30	10.4
Aunt	27	9.3



Total	290	100
<b>Distribution of students by Class</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Form 1	70	24.1
Form 2	86	29.7
Form 3	64	22.1
Form 4	70	24.1
Total	290	100
<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Christianity	263	82.2
Islam	57	17.8
Total	320	100
<b>Length of Service</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than 5 years	04	13.3
6-10 years	10	33.3
11-15 years	10	33.3
16-20 years	06	20.1
Total	30	100
<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Deputy Principals	10	33.3
Guidance and Counseling	10	33.3
Class Teachers	10	33.3
Total	30	100

**Source: Field Data, 2022**

The findings from Table 1 indicates that out of the 320 mainstream students, 30.9% were male while 69% were female. This finding implied that there were more female participated in the study. Majority of study respondents were main stream female students which explains a bias towards the female which in essence accounts for the disparity between the male and female.

Study findings shows that 31.7 percent of the mainstream students were aged below 12 years 42.1 percent between 13 and 15 years, 21 percent were 16 and 19 years while only 5.2 percent was aged above 19 years. This implied that most of the students were aged 13 and 15 years. Distribution of Deputy Principals, Class Teachers and G&C Teachers by age results revealed that 10 percent of the Deputy Principals were aged below 30 years, 33.3 percent between 31 and 40 years, 43.4 percent were 41 and 50 years while the remaining 13.3 percent was aged above 50 years. This implied that most of the teachers were aged 31 and 50 years. From the results, 47.6 percent were staying with both parents, 14.8 percent with mothers, 10.0 with father, 7.9 grandparents, 10.4 uncle and 9.3 percent with aunt. Majority of the respondents were staying with both parents. Children who are brought up by both parents will appreciate the virtues of their father and mother. This is opposite to a situation of single parenthood where only the mother or father takes care of the children. Majority of the students, 138 which was equivalent to 47.6 percent stay with both parents. The results showed 43 students were staying with their mother, 29, were staying with their father, 23 were staying with their grandparents, 30 were staying with their uncles while the remaining 27 were staying with their aunts. Majority of the students were staying with both parents. This was important to ensure that each parent participates in shaping the behavior of their child. Findings of the study revealed that 24.1 percent of the respondents were in Form I, 29.7 percent in form 2, 22.1 percent in form 3 while the remaining 24.1 percent in form four. This implied that majority of the students were in form 2. The respondents were requested to indicate their qualification. Out of 320 respondents, 263 were Christians while the remaining 57 were Islam. Majority of the respondents were Christians. The study established the length of service of class teachers, Guidance and counseling teachers and Deputy Principals. Findings of the study revealed that 13.3 percent of the respondents had worked for less than 5 years, 33.3 percent between 6 and 10 years, 33.3 percent between 11 and 15 years while the remaining 20.1 percent between 16 and 20 years. Majority of the respondents had worked for over 10 years. Experience of the teachers was important to this study since it shows they had adequate information regarding the objectives of the current study. Findings of the study revealed that 33.3 percent of Deputy Principals, Guidance and Counseling and Class Teachers were working in the schools that participated under study. The availability of Deputy Principals, Guidance and counseling teachers and class teachers was important to this study since it shows the schools were well equipped to handle any challenges the students were going through.





### Effect of Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy on Social Adjustment of Pregnant and Teenage Student Mothers in Secondary Schools

The objective of the study sought to determine the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and its influence on the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary school students in Kakamega East Sub-County during the COVID-19 pandemic. By use of a tick (✓), the respondents were to indicate whether they Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) or Strongly Disagree (SD) with the following statements regarding the extent to which prevalence of teenage pregnancy affects the social adjustment of the pregnant and teenage student mothers. The scale used entailed a range of 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree indicating more strength towards value 5 while less strength on value of one. The findings from main stream students was as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Rating of Teenage Pregnancy and social Adjustment by main stream students**

Statements about the pregnant and teenage student mothers	Mean	Standard Deviation
Their relatives encourage them to face life positively	3.401	0.2133
Their relatives do not want to be associated with them	3.518	1.2091
They quarrel with their relatives over petty issues	2.981	1.0011
They live peacefully with their relatives	3.089	0.8991
They relate well with their schoolmates	2.901	0.7622
Their schoolmates give them moral support	3.000	0.8766
They like the company of their peers	3.213	1.9871
They freely talk about their pregnancy to their peers	1.981	1.7611
They get on well with their church members	3.102	0.9871
They freely talk about their pregnancy with their church Members	2.761	0.2311
<b>Composite Mean and Overall standard Deviation</b>	<b>2.9947</b>	<b>0.9928</b>

*Source: Field Data, 2022*

From the results in Table 2, the overall mean was 2.9947 while the standard deviation was 0.9928. The findings therefore implied that respondents were in disagreement with the statements regarding teenage pregnancy on psycho-social adjustment.

The rating of teenage pregnancy and social adjustment by deputy principals, class teachers and guidance and counseling teachers were also done. The Findings were sought on a scale range of 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree indicating more strength towards value 5 while less strength on value of one.

**Table 3 Prevalence of Teenage pregnancy and social adjustment by Deputy Principals, Class Teachers and Guidance and Counseling Teachers**

Statements about the pregnant and teenage student mothers	Mean	Standard Deviation
My students encourage themselves to face life positively	3.115	0.8713
My student's relative do not want to be associated with them	2.901	0.3331
My students quarrel with their peers over petty issues	2.761	0.4312
My students live peacefully with their peers	3.081	0.8999
My students relate well with their schoolmates	3.876	1.3210
My students give moral support to each other	3.122	0.5612
My students like the company of their peers	2.301	0.7761
My students freely talk about their pregnancy to their peers	2.001	1.0911
My students get on well with other church members	3.210	0.2311
My students freely talk about their pregnancy with their church Members		
<b>Composite Mean and Overall Standard Deviation</b>	<b>2.930</b>	<b>0.724</b>

*Source: Field Data, 2022*



From the results in Table 3, the composite mean was 2.93 with standard deviation 0.724. This implies that the respondents disagreed with the statements on whether teenage pregnancy influence pregnant and teenage student mothers' social adjustment.

The study sought to explain the relationship between prevalence of teenage pregnancy and social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub County. In order to explain the effect, the study tested the null hypothesis which was; There is no significant relationship between the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya.

To test the hypothesis, a simple regression analysis was performed and results presented in Table 4.9 and Table 4.10.

**Table 4: Coefficient of determination between Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and Social Adjustment**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.781 <sup>a</sup>	.609	.604	2.3092	.609	94.753	1	358	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Teenage Pregnancy

**Source: Field Data, 2022**

Study findings illustrated in Table 4 revealed the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicated that 60.9% of the variance in social adjustment, in the students was attributed to teenage pregnancy. The adjusted  $R^2$  indicated that 60.4 % of variance on social adjustment was explained by teenage pregnancy. The findings were also found to be significant as indicated by the overall model ANOVA results,  $F(1, 358) = 94.753$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Table 5: Effect of prevalence of teenage pregnancy on social adjustment**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	6.167	5.785		-1.409	.001
Teenage Pregnancy	2.377	.114	-.781	10.595	.000

a. Dependent Variable: psycho-social adjustment

a. Dependent Variable: psycho-social adjustment

**Source: Field Data, 2022**

Table 5 results indicates that teenage pregnancy has a negative and significant effect on social adjustment ( $\beta = -.781$ ). In the model, the p-value is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) implying that teenage pregnancy negatively explain variance in social adjustment of the pregnant and teenage student mothers. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya.

Girls who get pregnant at teenage stage find it difficult to socially adjust themselves with other students in school. Their pregnancy affects their relationship with others negatively.

The interview schedule carried out on affected teenage pregnant mother, MIV (2021) portrayed the following scenario;

*"I have lost all my friends. Their parents feel I am a bad girl just because I got pregnant. Life has changed all over. Sometimes I feel like not going even to church or any family meetings. I prefer hiding myself because the going is difficult for me. Students in our class do not want to associate with some of us. I feel what goes on in their minds is that we are failures. However, that is not the case. The pregnancy only occurred by accident."*

Further interview on a parent of the affected teenage pregnant girl was also done. The parent respondent, P111 (2021) had the following with regards to social adjustment;



*“Initially, I used to see my girl with very many friends. Today, as we speak, you can even confirm that she does not move out of her house. All the peers who used to camp here are no longer there. She keeps a lot to herself. The pregnancy has affected how she relates with her friends in a negative way.”*

From the QUASO, Q01 (2021);

*“Girls who get pregnant disappear completely. I don’t know if they are hidden by parents or what. But given that I’m also a parent, I know their social interaction is negatively affected by the pregnancy. They no longer value themselves. In fact other students distance themselves. If you refer to a saying that if you want to know me, I show you my friends is the order of the day for pregnant teenagers.”*

These findings implies that teenage pregnancy can limit the social scope of pregnant and teenage student mothers. It makes them lose value and even distance from other students. This makes them lose value in themselves thus indicating low Social adjustment. This finding is supported by that of Mollborn and Morningstar (2009) who established that there is a positive correlation between teenage pregnancy and poor social adjustment. Further, this finding is supported by the conceptual framework which indicated that an increase in the prevalence of teenage pregnancy leads to social maladjustment among pregnant and teenage student mothers. From the results, the null hypothesis which stated that prevalence of teenage pregnancy does not have a significant effect on social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers was rejected. It was therefore concluded that prevalence of teenage pregnancy has a negative effect on the social adjustment of the pregnant and teenage student mothers.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established the influence of the prevalence of teenage pregnancy on the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County. The linear regression analysis provided robust empirical evidence that teenage pregnancy is a significant, negative predictor of poor social adjustment among the affected students. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) revealed that 60.9% of the variance in social adjustment was directly explained by the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. This relationship was found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating a strong and reliable association. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ): There is no significant relationship between the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and the social adjustment of pregnant and teenage student mothers in secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya, was rejected. It is therefore concluded that the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy severely compromises the emotional, social, and psychological adaptation of student mothers. This confirms that the crisis of early motherhood prevents these adolescents from fulfilling their core esteem, love and belonging needs, which are critical for positive social adjustment as outlined by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Based on the finding that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy has a statistically significant negative effect on the social adjustment of pregnant and parenting student mothers, the study proposes recommendations. To address the immediate psychological and social needs of the affected students, it is imperative that robust, mandatory social support systems are established. This requires school administrations, in partnership with the Sub-County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QUASO), to initiate confidential guidance and counseling services specifically for student mothers. These services should focus on rebuilding self-esteem, mitigating the effects of social stigma, and equipping students with effective coping mechanisms necessary for balancing their educational pursuits with motherhood. Concurrently, schools must actively facilitate peer and community re-integration. Given the documented isolation, peer-mentorship programs and sensitization workshops for parents and mainstream learners are essential to foster an environment of acceptance and inclusivity, aligning with Vygotsky’s social learning principles. For long-term reduction in prevalence, the Ministry of Education may consider Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Education. Implementation of a culturally sensitive Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) across all secondary schools could be a policy measure to reduce the future incidence of teenage pregnancy in high-risk areas like Kakamega East Sub-County.

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