

Background

In 1996, the UNICEF-funded Diphilana Initiative was created as a flexible learning pilot program at the Pekenene School enabling pregnant students to continue their education.^{1,2} Prior to the development of the initiative, only some girls were allowed to return to school, and those who were allowed to do so were required to wait one year post-delivery.¹

Description

"The Diphilana project requires that the father, if he is at school, shares the responsibility of looking after the baby at break and lunchtimes so that he can develop a sense of responsibility."¹

Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Transform family, school, and/or work arrangements so that women are not economically or socially penalized/disadvantaged for caregiving (*critical criterion*)
- Change or attempt to change an imbalance of power or otherwise level the playing field (*critical criterion*)
- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms (*critical criterion*).

This practice has gender transformative potential since requiring male parental involvement would change the discriminatory norm that only girls and women are responsible for caregiving. However, it is unclear from the documentation whether this component of the Diphilana Initiative was actually implemented. A 2001 UNICEF evaluation did find that students, whether or not they participated in the initiative, "were targeted and abused by some members of the community, notably working men, because their school was 'known to have a facility that takes care of their babies.'"² This finding was not specific to this practice. More documentation on the implementation and outcomes of this practice are needed.

Implementation lessons learned

Advocacy and outreach may help to create buy-in from the institutional and greater community for practices such as male parental involvement. The overall initiative encountered unsupportive attitudes from teachers, students, parents (especially men), and other community members.² There was also a lack of district leadership and ownership, possibly because of a sense that the initiative only benefitted one school.² While the government expected the community to sustain the initiative, community members viewed the initiative as a UNICEF activity.³

Summary conclusions

Although this practice has the potential to transform family arrangements and change discriminatory gender norms and beliefs, more documentation and evaluation is needed to understand its design, implementation, and effects on students' educational experiences, particularly for female students.

Reference(s) and source(s)

1. Hubbard, Dianne. 2008. School policy on learner pregnancy in Namibia: background to reform. Gender Research & Advocacy Project Legal Assistance Center. www.lac.org.na/projects/grap/Pdf/learnerpregnancyfull.pdf (accessed June 27, 2011).
2. Unterhalter, Elaine, Emily Kioko-Echessa, Rob Pattman, Rajee Rajagopalan, and Fatmatta N’Jai. 2004. Scaling up girls’ education: Towards a scorecard on girls’ education in the Commonwealth. Beyond Access Project, Institute of Education, University of London and Oxfam Great Britain. http://www.iiav.nl/epublications/2004/scaling_up.pdf (accessed June 1, 2011).
3. Chapman, David W., Emert, Holly, and Coyne, Botsalano. 2003. Evaluation of the African Girls’ Education Initiative. Country Case Study: Botswana. UNICEF. www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/Botswana_Case_Study.pdf (accessed June 1, 2011).