

Background

In some institutions or countries, pregnant students are required to delay their education. Girls at the Pekenene School in Botswana could only return to school after one year post-delivery¹ while Jamaican law requires that girls leave school during their pregnancy.² The University of the Free State in South Africa has also documented cases of students in its agricultural master's program missing several weeks of classes.³ In addition, pregnant and married female students often have little time to study at home.⁴ At Moi University, 21.3% of female students in the School of Medicine dropped out during the 1997-2004 period, as compared to 13% of male students.⁴

Description

At the Diphilana Initiative at the Pekenene School in Botswana¹ and the University of the Free State,³ pregnant students are allowed to undergo remedial work to make up the classes and schoolwork they miss during their maternity leave. The Diphilana Initiative arranged for schoolwork and other educational materials to be delivered to students' homes and developed distance education modules that pregnant learners could take at home.¹ The University of the Free State also considered an extension for two pregnant students to give them more time to complete the remedial work.³ Similarly, the Programme for Adolescent Mothers in Jamaica offers tutoring to pregnant students to "strengthen their academic capabilities and [prepare] them to return to formal schooling"¹ as well as to prepare them to take their final exams. Moi University in Kenya also offers remedial classes, with the aim of "encourage[ing] female students who find no time to revise at home to improve on their knowledge and skills."⁴

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*).

This practice changes school arrangements for pregnant students and female students with family responsibilities. Although remedial classes allow female students to continue in school, the practice does not necessarily challenge discriminatory gender beliefs. When implemented in response to policies that entirely exclude pregnant students from the education system, as the Programme for Adolescent Mothers did in Jamaica, the practice does change power imbalances. However, this is not an inherent feature of the practice.

Results of or evaluations on this practice were unavailable. A University of the Free State report noted that one of the two students who went on maternity leave failed two courses, though both students eventually qualified for the next level of examinations.³ The Programme for Adolescent Mothers in Jamaica found that program participants were more likely to complete their education and establish a career path, and only 1.4% of young women who participated in the program had a second pregnancy.² However, neither of

these results was specific to this practice nor were methods outlined. More documentation and evaluation on this practice is needed, including on possible cost-benefit findings. For example, the overall Programme for Adolescent Mothers was found to produce an estimated reduction of 323 births, with an implied savings to the health sector of J\$13,840,873 (equivalent to approximately USD 160,000 in today's dollars),² but no such analysis was available for this specific practice.

Implementation lessons learned

Program planners should consider outreach to the institutional community. The initiatives in Botswana and Jamaica found that teachers', students', and general attitudes were often unsupportive.^{5,2} In Botswana, community members may have felt that the initiative was merely a donor initiative that did not benefit them.⁶ In addition, the distance education modules developed by the Diphalana Initiative were never used, partly because some students returned to school quickly.⁶

Summary conclusions

More documentation and evaluation is needed on this practice. This practice has the potential to change school arrangements for pregnant students and, in certain situations, may have gender transformative potential if implemented to counter discriminatory practices, such as not allowing pregnant students to return to school.

Reference(s) and source(s)

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