The Relevance of Mama Mkubwa Model in the Completion of Secondary School Education among Teen Mothers in Kalambo District – Rukwa Region, Tanzania

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Abstract

Globally, school dropouts due to pregnancy are on the increase despite numerous efforts employed by the state government and the international community to address the problem. To address the problem, this work focuses on the community's indigenous knowledge, called the Mama Mkubwa model, which is embedded in Ubuntu philosophy, where teen mothers are sheltered at the community-built structure. The study aimed at identifying the roles and significance of the model in supporting teen mothers with their secondary school education. The study adopted a pragmatic philosophy, which allowed the utilization of a descriptive case study design. Data was collected from 13 respondents who were selected using systematic sampling. Using SPSS version 26 and Atlas. TI, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed. This research has demonstrated the relevance of the Mama Mkubwa Model in supporting teen mothers to attain their secondary education. The findings indicate that protection from violence and abuse (32%) and provision of basic needs (26%) have more value and meaning when provided by the older women in tackling the specific challenges encountered by teen mothers. The model demonstrated its usability in enhancing retention and completion rates; nevertheless, its success depends on ongoing community aspiration and support. Policymakers and educational stakeholders must consider formalising the Mama Mkubwa Model to foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. From these findings, it can be deduced that future research may investigate the enduring effects of the Mama Mkubwa Model on the career trajectories and economic empowerment of teen mothers.

Keywords: Teen Mothers, Education, Mama Mkubwa Model, Secondary School, Shelter

1. Introduction

The phrase "*Mama Mkubwa*" denotes the Kiswahili language spoken in large areas of East and Central Africa, which means senior or elder lady. The history of the *Mama Mkubwa Model* can be traced to the era of the HIV/AIDS scourge, where the elders and children were

left alone in the community, which compelled older women to take care of the orphans and vulnerable children in the community (Hyera et al., 2014). Further, Kapinga and Hyera (2015) cemented this when they revealed that the model is deeply rooted in African Indigenous knowledge and aspiration, where older women provide guidance on maternal health, child-rearing, and life skills. The increasing number of teen pregnancies which leads to school dropout, cannot go unattended to; Mama Mkubwa Model with its strengths on providing emotional support and imparting numerous life skills to teen mothers, can be used as part of the solution, It is from this point of view, UNICEF (2019) noted that the senior ladies are very instrumental in supporting teen mothers to regain the lost confidence and self-efficacy. The significance of senior ladies in the community is further recognised when they impart entrepreneurial and vocational skills, which are useful in preparing teen mothers to lead independent and reliable lives (Save the Children, 2020). The imparted life skills remain useful to teen mothers even after secondary school education.

Exposing the magnitude of Teen Birth Rate ABR, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024) noted that it is approximately 41.3 births per 1,000 teens between the ages of 15 -19. The stated number had reduced from 64.5 births in the previous year. It is worth noting that despite the decline, it is a different case in the Sub-Saharan region, as it remained higher at the same age. It was estimated at 99.4 per 1,000 teens in the age of 15-19, while in the age of 10-14, it showed 4.6 per 1,000 teens. Teen pregnancies still bear the blame for school dropout, despite many states in this region introducing and implementing re-entry policies. It is from this end that it can be deduced that teen pregnancy remains detrimental to the realisation of inclusive education for girls in the region. Cementing the stated observation, the African Health Organisation (2019) revealed that in SSA, more than 17 million teens between the ages of 10 and 19 become mothers every year. Of these, roughly 41.6% discontinue their education due to pregnancy and childbirth, with the greatest impact shown in low- and middle-income countries.

Moreover, in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), more than six million pregnant and parenting girls (aged 10–19) are not attending school due to elevated dropout rates and restricted opportunities for re-entry, resulting in a potential loss of up to 20 per cent of future wages for each year of lost schooling (UN DESA, 2022). Multiple factors contribute to school dropout rates among Primary Promotion and Attrition (PPA) worldwide, including stigma, stress, loneliness, guilt, and insufficient support from family, communities, and educational

institutions (Amod et al., 2019), as well as negative remarks and ridicule. Comparable findings have been documented in developed nations (Chase, 2019). It adversely impacts the wellbeing of teen mothers. Furthermore, the inability to continue education exposes teen mothers and their offspring to detrimental living conditions both presently and in the future, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Exposing the magnitude of teen pregnancy, a report by the World Population Council stated that 80 per cent of teenage girls in Kenya discontinued their education owing to motherhood. The survey suggested that the readmission rate among PPA in Zambia is reduced despite an increase in the number of pregnancies in the country (Bah and Odwe, 2024). The re-entry rate for girls is significantly lower than the school dropout rate in Tanzania. Chimkondenji (2022) attributes the difficulty to insufficient enforcement and inadequate monitoring and evaluation of educational policies. In Tanzania, pregnancy ranks among the top 10 causes of secondary school dropout (Tanzania Ministry of Education, 2023).

School dropout rates among Primary PPA predominantly arise from their inability to manage the responsibilities of pregnancy during their developmental stage and their struggle to adapt to the new role of motherhood (Sheehan et al., 2017). Adolescence is the phase during which the body experiences numerous psychological, biological, and social transformations. Pregnancy during this pivotal life stage is believed to disrupt the normal developmental processes of the human body. The practice consequently heightens the teens' physical and psychological susceptibility. The thread has been observed to correlate with increased depression rates among teen mothers. Pregnant and parenting teens experience societal changes that may impact their mental wellbeing. It was intensified by the adverse environments surrounding their habitation. The prevailing narratives of "the wrong girl" influence the public's perception of teen mothers. This perspective critiques and categorises PPA as deviant for engaging in early sexual activity, a decision that obstructs their adherence to the conventional life trajectory-graduation from school, employment, marriage, and procreation. Consequently, PPA is deprived of essential support and endures severe treatment (Mjwara and Maharaj, 2018). The outcome is predicated on the premise that punitive measures would dissuade potential offenders from committing analogous transgressions. Nevertheless, the practice adversely affects the wellbeing of teen mothers.

To ensure inclusive education for all the global states, through the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal, which pinpoint the increased accessibility and inclusive education

for all the Africa We Want by 63, which, among declarations, have prioritized education for girls and teen mothers. At the local level, the Tanzania Child Development Policy of 2004 and the Child Act recognize the role and obligation of the parents and community members to support the accessibility of all children to fundamental education. Despite these international, regional and local commitments, Tanzania has increasingly witnessed an alarming number of school dropouts among teens due to teen pregnancies. For instance, in secondary schools, roughly 2,338,457 students were registered in 2019. Of the enrolled students, 98,949, or 4.2%, dropped out. 1.6 per cent of them dropped out of secondary school (URT, 2020a). In addition, the number of secondary school dropouts in the Tabora region has increased. In 2019, there were roughly 80,883 pupils enrolled, but only 7212, or 8.9 per cent, were male (3,483 were boys and 3,729 were girls) (URT, 2020b). Form One enrolled over 23425 students in 2018, while the Form Four class of 2021 was completed with 15,655 students. Nine thousand one hundred ninety-two pupils, 4629 boys and 4563 girls, dropped out of secondary school between 2018 and 2021, making up 39 per cent of the students (URT, 2021).

In 2021, Tanzania passed the Re-Entry Policy, intending to allow teen mothers who had become pregnant a second time to continue their education after giving birth. The re-entry policy is valid and applicable when a female student, after-birth, can rejoin school within two years. However, UNESCO (2017) noted that teen mothers frequently encounter substantial obstacles in their pursuit of education, mostly stemming from shame, prejudice, and deeply rooted societal norms shaped by religious convictions. These obstacles may result in feelings of isolation and marginalisation, complicating reintegration into the school system. Alongside societal constraints, teen mothers sometimes face significant financial challenges while pursuing their degrees. Transferring to another school, frequently essential to evade local stigma, can incur supplementary expenses, including transportation, lodging, and childcare. These costs can be burdensome, particularly for families already experiencing financial difficulties.

Furthermore, as revealed by Malahlela & Chireshe (2013), the absence of accessible and cheap childcare services intensifies the challenges, constraining teen mothers' capacity to attend classes and achieve their educational objectives. From this point, it was revealed that 14,375 students dropped out of secondary schools in the Rukwa Region in 2023, and 55,711 students dropped out of school in 2024 (DHISS2, 2023 & 2024). It is from the identified

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challenges around the re-entry policy, which is compounded by the negative attitude of community members toward teen mothers, that the current study intends to interrogate the relevance of the Mama Mkubwa Model implemented in Kalambo district in Rukwa region, Tanzania.

Notwithstanding international and national commitment to uphold girls' educational rights, teen mothers in rural Tanzania, especially in the Rukwa region, persistently encounter substantial constraints in attaining secondary education.Policies such as the 2014 Education and Training Policy (ETP) of the United Republic of Tanzania and international frameworks like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emphasise the right to education for all children, including teen mothers.In actuality, numerous teen mothers encounter social stigma, financial difficulties, and insufficient support, compelling them to discontinue their education (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The reentry policy introduced in 2021 allows pregnant girls and teen mothers to return to school (World Bank, 2022).However, effective implementation remains a challenge due to inadequate supportive infrastructure, societal discrimination, and limited financial resources (UNICEF, 2023).In rural regions such as Rukwa, the absence of shelters or safe spaces exacerbates these challenges, making it nearly impossible for teen mothers to balance childcare responsibilities and education (Mwaba, 2020).

Proposing the solution, Plan International (2021) noted that the efficancy of building shelters to accommodate teen girls cannot be overstated; with the availability of senior ladies, the teen mothers can access services such as accommodation, childcare and psychosocial support and care, which can help them overcome the emotional challenges related to school concentration. It is worth noting, despite these facts, that there is still scarce and relevant literature which recognizes the significance of the Mama Mkubwa Model around the teen mothers' education at secondary school in Kalambo district, Rukwa, Tanzania. Thus, the current study aimed at examining the relevance of the shelter in supporting teen mothers to complete secondary school education while accessing the services provided by senior ladies.

It is worth noting that the existing empirical literature review has prioritized, for instance, Makwanya (2019), who focused on the challenges and effectiveness of re-entry policy; and Mmbaga (2013) focused on the determinants of female dropout rate. Further, Malula & Bali (2014) dealt with the experiences of pregnant and mothering in secondary schools; and Klepp

et al. (2016) dealt with teen reproductive health. Consequently, Mbise (2015) focused on the community attitude on re-entry policy. All the stated studies were conducted in Tanzania; however, none of them dealt with the community-based Indigenous model, which can be used to support the learning and completion of secondary school education among teen mothers. It is from this end the identified gap can be addressed by the study entitled "Examining the Relevance of Mama Mkubwa Model in the Completion of Secondary School Education among Teen Mothers in Kalambo District – Rukwa, Tanzania", which aimed at identifying the roles and significance of the Mama Mkubwa Model, in supporting teen mothers at the shelter, to complete their secondary school education.

1.1. Mama Mkubwa Model

The Mama Mkubwa Model (MMD) offers emotional support and life skills teaching to teen mothers. Studies demonstrate that guidance from senior ladies assists teen mothers in restoring confidence and self-efficacy (UNICEF, 2019). The provided psychosocial support reduces stress and enhances resilience, which is crucial for ongoing education. Emphasising the role of senior ladies at the community shelter, Save the Children (2020) noted that teen mothers have access to household management and entrepreneurial skills, which are fundamental in preparing for income-generating activities after completion of secondary school. Further, Mutesi (2021) states that it is well known that teen mothers have to shoulder the childcare responsibilities as well as concentrate on school obligations; however, the presence of senior ladies at the shelter provides childcare support and imparts to them parenting skills. Cementing on the significance of senior ladies, Nankunda et al. (2021) revealed that the presences of senior ladies at the community shelter promote maternal wellbeing and child health outcomes. Conventional storytelling, proverbs, and guidance from senior ladies cultivate values, accountability, and resilience in teen mothers (Mugisha & Diiro, 2022).

Integrating the MMD into shelter programs for teen mothers fosters a comprehensive and community-oriented strategy to facilitate educational re-entry, offer mentorship, and mitigate stigma. This methodology harmonizes with cultural traditions while confronting contemporary issues of teen pregnancy and school attrition. Teen mothers who have discontinued their education due to pregnancy encounter obstacles to resuming their studies, such as inadequate childcare, financial difficulties, and societal stigma (Panday et al., 2009). The MMD can be incorporated into shelters for teen mothers.

Emphasizing the advantages offered by the shelter, UNESCO (2019) noted that it is the place where teen mothers find the opportunity for new hopes and for their future. It provides an opportunity to access secondary education without worrying about food, scholarly materials, and security. Basically, the shelter helps them deal with rejection and abandonment. Furthermore, the community shelter with the presence of senior ladies maintains the community aspirations and guidance to teen mothers, which can still enhance resilience (Evans et al.2020). In a real sense, Chilisa (2019) stated that the teen mothers have assurance of accessing stigma and stress support anytime from the senior ladies, which is very useful for them to remain focused on their education

Moreover, MMD supports and helps teen mothers in dealing with the denial and rejection from the family, peers, and community members (Mugyenyi et al., 2021& Mkhwanazi, 2019). The senior ladies with their lived experiences on child rearing, provide guidance on the child development and its requirements to teen mothers; at the same time emphasising the need to continue with education (Unterhalter et al., 2019). The life of teen mothers at school normally comes to an end, where they have to return to their families and communities. The senior ladies have to play their role of supporting them for reintegrating from the shelter to their families and communities Chigona & Chetty, 2008).

Teen mothers who discontinue their education due to pregnancy encounter social stigma, financial limitations, and childcare responsibilities (UNESCO, 2021). Although the shelter offers secure housing, the absence of structured mentorship may hinder their motivation and perseverance in academic pursuits. The MMD addresses the following: providing encouragement and motivation to remain in school despite societal obstacles; establishing a support network that enhances their confidence in re-entering formal education; and instilling cultural relevance by reinforcing Indigenous values of resilience and collective responsibility (Mtengeti & Lugalla, 2012).

The MMD is a community-oriented mentorship framework in which older, seasoned women offer guidance, emotional support, and life skills to at-risk teen girls, especially orphans and those susceptible to exploitation (Thurman, 2008). This strategy has been effectively implemented in several African contexts to assist teen females confronting social and economic difficulties. The execution of the MMD at the teen mothers' shelter establishes a "mother-figure" system for daily guidance, organizes life skills sessions centered on

parenting, health, and self-sufficiency, and partners with educational institutions to guarantee that teen mothers obtain essential support.

Senior ladies act as mentors, cares, and role models for teen women, especially those encountering vulnerabilities like early motherhood (Silberschmidt, 2001). This concept has historically been employed in communities to instruct teen girls on reproductive health, parenting, and life skills (Mokomane, 2012). Shelters function as transitional environments for teen mothers who have been estranged from their families or encounter financial difficulties (Bhana et al., 2010). Nonetheless, reintegrating them into the educational system necessitates mentorship and exemplary figures, wherein MMD can play a pivotal role. Numerous teen mothers in shelters contend with childcare obligations while pursuing their studies. The MMD exemplifies traditional African communal parenting, wherein older women collectively assume the responsibilities of childcare (Nsamenang, 2004).

2. Methods and Materials

As noted by the Tanzania Health Survey Report of 2022, the following regions were leading with teen pregnancies, where the leading region was Song we, which recorded 45%, 37% at Ruvuma, 34% at Katavi, 31% at Mara, and 30% at Rukwa. Further, the DHIS2 (2023 & 2024) noted that in 2023, 14,375 girls dropped out of secondary schools due to pregnancy; out of the stated number, 8,418 were recorded from Kalambo district; and in 2024, 55 711 were recorded to drop out of school, where 10 956 cases of teen pregnancies were from Kalambo district. Despite the fact that the Rukwa region is holding forth position as per the Tanzania Healthy Survey Report of 2022, this study chooses Kalambo district as its case study due to the community's indigenous knowledge of initiating the community shelter called "*Matai Open School*", which accommodates 39 teen mothers.

With the intention to capture the socio-demographic information from the teen mothers, the study adopted a descriptive research design, and the case study was employed so that qualitative data could be adequately collected from 13 teen mothers. From this note, the study utilised systematic sampling to obtain its sample of 13, where the nth interval of 3 was determined to get the sample size (Creswell, 2014). Hence, using an unstructured questionnaire, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed using SPSS version 26 and Atlas. TI.

Ethical considerations were observed when the researcher obtained the clearance letter from the Open University of Tanzania and then from the Kalambo Executive Director. All teen mothers were informed of their rights to voluntary participation in the study and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher recruited three social workers to adhere to the do no harm principle. With adherence to the stated ethical considerations, the data were collected in October 2024, where each interview took ten to fifteen minutes.

3. Results

Table 1.1 contains five variables related to the relevance of the Mama Mkubwa Model (MMD) at the shelter that accommodates teen mothers. The variables are the awareness of teen mothers on the relevance of MMD, the age cohorts, the study levels, and parental status among teen mothers. Table 1.1 concludes by presenting the status of the most enjoyed services among teen mothers at the shelter.

Table 1.1 revealed three age cohorts: 13 -14, 15 -16, and 17 -18. The age cohort of 15 -17 recorded the highest with 39% against 7% on the relevance of MMD. Other cohorts, such as 17- 18, recorded 31%, and 13-14 noted 23, where the teen mothers in these two age cohorts acknowledged the relevance of MMD, respectively. Hence, the findings show that most of the teen mothers at the shelter were from the age cohort of 15 -16, which had a total of 46%, while the lowest age cohort was 13 to14, which recorded 23%.

Further, Table 1.1 noted the following from the study levels among teen mothers: informed with three levels, such as Form One, Form Two, and Form Three. The highest number was observed in Form Two, with 39% against 7% of teen mothers who were noted to be informed of the relevance of MMD at the shelter. The Form Three level recorded 31%, while Form One noted 23% respectively. The findings revealed that most of the teen mothers at the shelter, with a total of 46%, were in Form Two.

Table1.1: Variables related to the relevance of the Mama Mkubwa Model

Socio-Demographic Information of Teen Mothers at the Shelter	Informed of the Relevance of the Mama Mkubwa Model at the Shelter		Total (%)
	Yes	No	
Age Cohorts			
13 -14	23%	-	23%
15 -16	39%	7%	46%
17 -18	31%	-	31%
Total	**93%**	**7%**	**100%**
Study Levels			
Form One	23%	-	23%

Form Two	39%	7%	46%
Form Three	31%	-	31%
Total	**93%**	**7%**	**100%**
Parental Status			
With Father & Mother	31%	7%	38%
With only one parent	31%	-	31%
Not having any parents	31%	-	31%
Total	**93%**	**7%**	**100%**
Enjoyed the services among teen mothers at the shelter			
Availability of necessities (food, water, and hygiene facilities)			26%
Availability of teachers who provide tutoring and mentorship			22%
Psychosocial Support and Care			20%
Protection from violence and abuse			32%
Total			**100%**

Moreover, Table 1.1 revealed that there were three parental statuses among the teen mothers. Teen mothers with both parents comprised 38%; among them, 31%, against 7%, were knowledgeable of the relevance of MMD at the shelter. Another parental status was noted among teen mothers with one parent, and those without any were recorded at 31% each. The findings show that many teen mothers were from families with only one parent and without parents, which can be related to a lack of parental guidance and support among teen mothers.

Additionally, Table 1.1 shows the status of enjoyed services among the provided services at the shelter. 32% was recorded as the highest at the shelter, which indicated protection from violence and abuse among teen mothers. 26% was observed in the availability of fundamental necessities such as food, water, and hygiene facilities. Further, 22% noted the availability of teachers who provide tutoring and mentorship; 20% recorded the provision of psychosocial support and care. Generally, the findings noted 32% as the highest and 20% as the lowest among the services enjoyed at the shelter with teen mothers.

The Qualitative Findings captured during the Key Informant Interview Revealed the following.

The teen mothers aired their views on the significance of the shelter and the MMD around their studies, which are basically informed by the protection from violence and abuse, the provision of teaching services, the provision of psychosocial support and care, and the availability of basic needs. The qualitative findings were captured from the narration of teen mothers during key informants' interviews. One of the teen mothers began the session by reflecting on the emotional torture she was going through at home after the family became aware of her pregnancy status.

> "*Being pregnant while in secondary school changed my values completely, every time I was in tears of self-regret for falling pregnant. At the family level, she was seen as a prostitute who had betrayed the family. No one could have given me the opportunity to return to school as I couldn't afford to meet the indirect costs such as toiletries and the like*". One of the Teen Mothers, during a Key Informant Interview conducted in October 2024

Everyone at the shelter has a story to tell, though it may also depend on the status of parents and the family itself. For instance, teen mothers from traditional and religious families were exposed to more stigma and religious injustice because of pregnancy. Others were changed from home, while others were excluded from participating in the family socio-economic activities. The shelter has rejuvenated my life as the counseling provided here makes me feel very lucky. She narrated,

> "*The presence of the shelter has brought new hopes not only to me but to the rest of the teen mothers in the area. The emotional and physical abuse that we were going through is now history. The older lady provides a shoulder to lean on, as she provides counseling and emotionally related support*" One of the Teen Mothers, during a Key Informant Interview conducted in October 2024

The elderly lady is always by our side; she wants to see us very happy and concentrate on our studies. The shelter provides basic services, such as water and food, to ensure that we have no reason not to pass the examination. She narrated while pointing to the basic services provided at the shelter,

> "*At the shelter, fundamental services such as water, food, toiletries, stationery, and medical services are provided. We are not worried about these services; when we are here, we must study seriously so that we can get the best grades when sitting for the Form Four examination*" One of the Teen Mothers, during Key Informant Interview conducted in October 2024

The shelter's necessities have ensured that all the teen mothers can study without having to think of their past experiences. It was further noted that the community had hired qualified female teachers who taught them as per the set shelter schedule. It was narrated as follows,

> "*The community has hired female teachers who are very supportive during teaching; they ensure that the contents are covered and understood by all the learners. They also act as mentor as they talk of their own mistakes which they committed in their lives. They also shared with us the way they copied the situation:*" One of the Teen Mothers, during the Key Informant Interview conducted in October 2024.

For any learner to understand the taught content, it depends on the approaches used by the course leader or teacher. Having friendly female teachers not only encourages teen mothers to

study but also gives them an opportunity to ask them questions whenever they do not understand any of the content taught.

4. Discussion

The Discussion on the Relevance of Mama Mkubwa Model (MMD) at the Shelter accommodating Teen Mothers at Kalambo District – Tanzania

The examination of Table 1.1 reveals essential elements that reveal the significance of the Mama Mkubwa Model (MMD) in offering shelter and assistance to teen mothers. The variables encompass teen mothers' awareness of the relevance of MMD, age cohorts, educational attainment, parental status, and the status of the most favoured services at the shelter. The discourse rigorously assesses the findings of these characteristics and their importance for the shelter's significance in assisting teen mothers.

It is important to note that the descriptive statistics reveal that teen mothers' understanding of MMD's relevance differs among various groups. The huge segment of teen mothers recognizing the significance of MMD was observed in the 15 -17 age group (39%), against the lowest proportion of 7%. This finding implies that teen mothers at this age have a better understanding of the significance of the shelter in supporting their secondary school education and the provision of other services. In relation to minimum awareness in the age of 13-14, which scores 23%, it shows the limited accessibility to information.

Further, the age categories of teen mothers at the shelter are significant in understanding its composition. Many of the teen mothers were recorded between the age group of 15 -16, with 46% among all the teen mothers at the shelter. The finding shows the dominance of teen pregnancy among teen girls of this age group. Adding on, the age category of 13 -14 accounted for 23%, pointing to reduced cases of teen pregnancies in the group. From these findings, UNFPA (2020) asserts that teen pregnancy is linked with poverty and limited education among the family members of teen mothers, and the teen mothers themselves, particularly, sexual and reproductive health awareness.

Moreover, the results reveal that the predominant proportion of teen mothers at the shelter was in Form two (46%), followed by Form three (31%) and Form one (23%). The findings noted that many teen mothers at the shelter were enrolled in secondary school before dropping out due to pregnancy. The increasing number of pregnancy cases in form two shows

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the increasing peer pressure among teenage girls at this level of study. On the same note, it can be linked with the inaccessibility of sexual and reproductive health education among teens in form two (WHO, 2021).

The presence of shelter is considered the new hope for teen mothers' educational route, as dropping out entails the poverty cycle. Adding on, the teen mothers' status of having parents was an important element informing their lived experiences around MMD (UNICEF, 2019). The findings recorded 38% of teen mothers with both parents, while 31% were observed from the teen mothers with single parents and without any parents. Consequently, teen mothers with two parents (31%), as compared to 7% from single parents, indicated they were informed of the relevance of MMD at the shelter. These findings, as per Plan International (2020), recognize the importance of family support, where parents have to support their children's education. In contrast, teen mothers without parents, or with single parents due to a lack of parental support, find it challenging to cope with the outcome.

Moreover, Table 1.1 points out the services provided at the shelter. The teen mothers pointed to being more conversant with protection from violence and abuse, which was leading among other services (32%); while access to necessities such as food, water, and hygiene facilities was ranked in second position with a 26% score. Adding on, 22% pointed out teen mothers on the availability of teachers who provide tutoring and mentorship, 20% noted psychosocial support and care. The findings, which pointed to protection from violence and abuse, revealed the bad and pervasive exposure of teen mothers to an unfriendly living environment at the family and community levels, where the shelter becomes the only place which holds their hope for security and education continuity. These findings correspond with the Report of Human Rights Watch (2021), which noted that the availability of shelter in rural areas is significant in combating physical and sexual abuse encountered by females, teen mothers in particular. On the same view, the findings on psychological care and support (20%) may suggest a lack of popularity of the service among teen mothers. Despite the unpopularity of psychosocial support services among teen mothers, it is obvious they have experienced rejection, stigma and discrimination before coming to the shelter, which have caused mental health-related challenges, where psychosocial care and support were provided to enhance their wellbeing (WHO, 202). These findings therefore recognize the relevance of MMD, which has assisted teen mothers in accessing the necessities provided at the shelter. The presence of senior ladies at the shelter enables teen mothers to concentrate on their studies.

To this end, the studies undertaken by the Plan International (2020) and Human Rights Watch (2021) have illustrated the significance of shelter, and the fundamental services provided; both tangible (food and scholastic materials) and intangible services provided by MMD and teachers (psychical support and care, teaching and mentorship) are very instrumental into reducing school dropout among teen mothers.

Additionally, Table 1.1 shows the age categorization of the teen mothers, where many of them belonged to the age of 15 -16. Further, the findings have indicated that many teen mothers were in form two during the data collection for this study, indicating the demand for continued support for them to complete secondary school education. On the parental status, most of the teen mothers had both parents, as compared to those with single parents; though all teen mothers still need to be guided and supported. More emphasis has to be given on psychological support to assist teen mothers to focus and concentrate on their studies.

Discussion on the Significance of Shelter and MMD for Teen Mothers

The qualitative findings, as collected from the key informants, noted the significance of the shelter and the relevance of the Mama Makubwa Model (MMD) in supporting teen mothers to complete secondary school education. The shelter has proved to be instrumental in providing protection against violence and abuse, enhancing education accessibility, providing emotional and psychological services, and providing basic needs to teen mothers. These findings were in line with the empirical literature by UNICEF (2019) and WHO (2021), which pointed out the importance of safe shelter to teen mothers at risk of violence and abuse. Linking the findings with MMDs, it was observed that teen mothers were exposed to emotional and physical abuse due to pregnancy. The MMD provided security and counseling for the teen mothers to realize a new beginning of their journey to their secondary education. These findings were supported by UNICEF (2019) and UNFPA (2020), who recognized the role played by safe shelter in revitalizing the hope of teen mothers.

None can despise the relevance of the shelter in providing emotional support to teen mothers, who were victimized with rejection, discrimination, shame, and devalued by their own family members, peers and community. Numerous studies conducted by the Plan International (2020) and UNFPA (2020) illustrated the psychological torture which teen mothers have to endure due to pregnancy, where they are treated as a misfortune and cast out of their families. These findings were further echoed by Human Rights Watch (2021), which pointed out a society

dominated by a patriarchal system, where, due to cultural norms and religious beliefs, teen mothers are rejected as they are considered immoral and sinners. Using the lens of MMD, the presence of senior ladies at the shelter supports the teen mothers with counseling and emotional services, which significantly helps them to restore self-efficacy and esteem. These findings support the report of the WHO (2021), which noted the usefulness of counseling and emotional support for teen mothers at the shelter.

Moreover, the shelter offers fundamental needs such as water, food, and hygiene facilities to help teen mothers remain focused on their education. The provision of these necessities reduces the constraints of finances among teen mothers. These findings were reflected by UNICEF (2019) when it stated that the provision of scholastic materials and necessities is essential to help teen mothers concentrate on their studies. Furthermore, the provision of these fundamental needs would build confidence and self-esteem among teen mothers, which can help them realize their potential to complete secondary school education. On the same note, having female teachers who act as role models at the shelter helps teen mothers to realize the need to overcome the negative feelings and any other setbacks on their way to complete secondary school education (Plan International, 2020).

Pointing to physical violence and abuse, the teen mothers noted enjoying the security at the shelter and the support provided by Mama Mkubwa. The studies by UNFPA (2020) and Human Rights Watch (2021) acknowledge the role of the shelter in enhancing the security and wellbeing of teen mothers, where they can live freely from any form of violence and abuse. The shelter has employed qualified female teachers, who, apart from teaching, are also role models for the teen mothers, guiding them on the ways to overcome numerous challenges towards accomplishing their ambition. These findings reflect the report of UNESCO (2021), which stated that any educational initiative which involves community members to address the needs of marginalized individuals, such as teen mothers, promotes inclusivity and learning opportunities. The qualitative findings, therefore, reveal the central role played by the Mama Mkubwa model in supporting teen mothers in achieving their educational goals.

Conclusion

The study's findings have revealed the significance of the shelter, the services provided by Mama Mkubwa, and the female teachers in supporting teen mothers to complete secondary

school education at Matai Open Secondary School, in Kalambo – Rukwa region, Tanzania. The shelter provides services such as food, water, and hygiene facilities; on the same note, the Mama Mkubwa supports the teen mothers with counseling and psychosocial support and care; while the female teachers are involved in teaching and act as role models. The services provided are very instrumental to teen mothers to overcome apathetic feelings and emotional encounters. Further, the findings indicated that teen mothers with single parents or no parents face increased challenges of guidance; hence, the shelter remains their only place to attain their educational goals.

Recommendations of the Study

To yield a remarkable solution around teen mothers, this study recommends the following,

i) With good work done by the Mama Mkubwa and female teachers, they have to be capacitated with vocational training skills, so that the same is imparted to teen mothers

ii) The Mama Mkubwa Model should be considered as one of the approaches which can be used in other parts of Tanzania to support teen mothers achieve their educational goals

iii) The government have to consider supporting teen mothers who have joined Open School, such as Matai, by compensating the Mama Mkubwa and Female teachers.

iv) Conduct a comprehensive study of other indigenous models, geared towards protecting teen mothers in Tanzania.

Disclose Conflicts of Interest

This paper is free of conflict of interest.

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