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### Attitudes of Selected Education Stakeholders Towards Teenage Mothers as a Determinant of the Support Provided for Teenage Mothers in Public Secondary Schools in Kathiani Sub-County, Machakos, Kenya

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**Abstract:** The attitudes that people have towards teenage mothers play a crucial role in promoting their education. This study intended to investigate attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. This study was based on Carl Rogers' unconditional positive regard (UPR) theory (1956). Convergent parallel mixed methods research design was used phenomenology design was used for qualitative data, while cross-sectional survey design as employed for quantitative data. The population was 430, including principals, heads of guidance and counseling department, and teachers from 33 public secondary schools. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were utilized to select 16 public secondary schools and a sample of 144 participants. Questionnaire and interview guides were used for data collection. A pilot study was conducted to pretest and validate the research instruments. These instruments were assessed for face and content validity with the help of supervisors. There was a 98% instrument response rate. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze quantitative data, using SPSS (version 22), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings showed that majority of principals, heads of guidance and counseling and teachers with attitudes such as empathy, understanding, encouragement, and motivation towards teenage mothers supported the re-entry policy implementation, while a few of them with attitudes such as stigma, discrimination, trauma, exclusion towards teenage mothers opposed it. The study recommends that there should be collaboration between the ministry of education, the church, school, and parents to ensure that no teenage mother fails to return to school or drops out of school after re-admission.

**Keywords:** Attitudes, Guidance and Counseling, Selected education stakeholders, Re-entry policy, School Drop-out, Teenage mother

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Teenage motherhood is a significant issue in many countries, including Kenya. Teenage motherhood refers to the phenomenon of young girls between the ages of 13 and 19, becoming mothers before reaching adulthood (UNFPA, 2016). The re-entry policy allows teenage mothers to return to school after giving birth, providing them with a second chance to education. When pregnancies occur among teenagers, they require support and assistance from their parents, community leaders, teachers, school administrators among other educators to ensure they receive proper prenatal care, necessary medical

attention, and continue with their educational career after delivery (Vanwesenbeeck, 2020).

Many countries in the world came up with re-entry policies to support parenting teenagers' education. Guyana & Suriname (2018) attests that before the re-entry policy was established by the ministry of education in South America, only 34 adolescent mothers re-entered the formal school system from seven regions from 2013-2016. A policy on the reintegration of adolescent mothers into the formal system that intended to help girls who had become mothers to enjoy their right to an education, which will provide them with the foundation to improve their lives and the lives of their children was officially established in 2017. However, in a study, Mangeli M et al. (2019) demonstrated that teen mothers in Iran faced many physical, mental, psychological and social challenges. A study by, Odrowąż-Coates and Kostrzewska (2021) in Poland suggests that it is very important to create strategies that can unveil, challenge and combat stereotyping views of the society toward adolescent mothers.

Many African countries have put in place different strategies to ensure the readmission of teenage mothers in schools after giving birth, though there are many difficulties in the interpretation of the policies. Kurevakwesu et al. (2023) found that there were efforts to bring teenage mothers back to school in the whole country in Zimbabwe. Some education stakeholders in Nigeria have demonstrated understanding and more positive attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. Salami and Ayegboyin (2015) attest that in some communities, people have other attitudes towards teenage mothers, including the perception among some that teenage pregnancy is a sign of "God's blessing". Others see it much more negatively as a "sign of poverty", "disobedience to God's counsel", "promiscuity" or as affecting lives negatively.

To help teenage mothers, Kenya came up with a re-entry policy in 1994 which stipulates that all expectant teens should continue schooling until when due and be re-admitted upon childbirth to the same school or alternative school, to reduce psychological and emotional trauma. This is the most resounding government voice on re-entry of expectant learners and teen mothers in the history of this country (Runshare & Gwirayi, 2022). A study on the re-entry policy and retention of expectant students and teen mothers in public secondary schools in Vihiga Sub-County, attests that majority of expectant teens were retained to continue with their secondary education at 83% (2017), 86 % (2018), 88.9 % (2019) and 81.8% (2020) in public secondary schools in Vihiga Sub-county (Runshare & Gwirayi, 2022). However, in some schools in Kenya, some principals and teachers have negative perceptions and thoughts towards teenage mothers. In Kilifi county for example, a research showed that when it comes to school continuation, specific discrimination is directed at pregnant girls compared to those already parenting due to the perception that pregnant girls will be a bad example to other girls (Njoka, 2016). Although efforts have been gathered to encourage teenage mothers' return to school, it is clear that the rates of dropouts among teenage mothers keep increasing in the society, and in Kathiani in particular, where 65% of young mothers dropped out of school every year from 2014 to 2017 (Christine, 2020). This study intended to investigate attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for them in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-county, to inform the development of evidence-based strategies and interventions geared towards preventing and reducing negative consequences of teenage motherhood and promote the overall well-being of young mothers in the school community.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Some parents with negative attitudes towards teenage motherhood do not allow their daughter mothers to go back to school after delivery. An average of 65 adolescent mothers (67 in 2014, 59 in 2015, 62 in 2016, and 73 in 2017) dropped out of school annually, in the public secondary schools in Kathiani sub-county (Christine, 2020). This raises questions regarding the attitudes of education stakeholders towards teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-county. There is existing research on teenage pregnancy but some knowledge gaps still remain. Studies by Kimemia (2016), Omwancha (2012), Mutua et al. (2019), Christine (2020) have put their emphasis on some aspects of teenage motherhood. However, from the literature reviewed, there is no evidence of a study that has been carried out to explore attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County.

## 1.3 Research Objective

The following objective guided this study: To investigate attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-county.

## 1.4 Theoretical framework

This study anchored on Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) theory, which was developed by humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers in 1956. The theory is an expansion on the earlier work of Stanley Standal (1954). The UPR is a therapeutic technique that refers to the practice of accepting and valuing a person exactly as he/she is, without any judgement or condition. This means that the client feels fully understood and accepted regardless of their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours. The concept of UPR is based on the idea that individuals have an innate drive towards self-fulfillment and personal growth, and that they can achieve this growth when they feel accepted and support. The unconditional positive regard is the demonstration of complete support and acceptance of a person no matter what that person says or does (Gillon, 1959). To effectively implement the re-entry policy for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani sub-county, it is essential to involve and engage selected education stakeholders (principals, heads of guidance and counseling, and teachers) through unconditional positive regard, to help create a supportive school environment for teenage mothers, which can contribute to a successful re-entry policy implementation in public secondary schools in Kathiani.

## 1.5 Review of Empirical Studies

Despite the effort made by governments around the world, many teenage mothers still face challenges in continuing with their education. A study by Obeng, (2020) sought to explore how adolescent mothers living in institutionalized care in Portugal who experienced support in their life transitions. The study found that teenage mothers in care experienced institutional support, the presence of their estranged family, and social support from friends and partners.

In the African region, efforts to support parenting teenagers have been established. Chiyota, (2020) conducted a study on the implementation of a re-entry policy for teenage mothers in Zambian secondary schools. He found that the re-entry policy had notable achievements such as re-admission of teenage mothers after delivery, completion, awareness about the policy, strengthening of comprehensive sexuality education in schools and collaboration between schools and civil society organizations and

other government departments. However, the study established that even after the policy was introduced, many teenage mothers failed to go back to school after maternity leave, since some stakeholders did not have enough knowledge about the policy.

In some countries in Africa, some education stakeholders have demonstrated discrimination towards teenage mothers by offering poor service and care to the young mothers. Rukundo et al.(2015) found that there were general antenatal services in Mbarara municipality, southern Uganda, though very few teenage mothers could access and utilize them. In Kenya, the 1994 school re-entry provided guiding principles for educators, parents, and communities to support teenage mothers' return to school. The policy required school heads and teachers to unconditionally readmit teenage mothers into schools (Runshare & Gwirayi, 2022).

Kurgat, (2016) conducted a study to determine the administrative support factors influencing re-admission of teenage mothers in mixed and girls' secondary schools in Baringo County-Kenya. The findings of the study indicated that the head teachers played an important role by inviting to school teenage mothers who had dropped out. Guidance and counseling department had counselling programs in place that provided the much-needed psychosocial support to the teenage mothers. Attitudes of education stakeholders play a crucial role in strengthening support systems for encouraging the education of teenage mothers in public secondary schools.

### **1.6 Methodology**

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed methods research design. The target population included principals, deans of studies, and teachers from public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-county, Machakos, Kenya, equal to 430. A sample of 144 (33.5%) was determined using internet sample size calculator, where the level of confidence is 90%, margin of error 5%, and population proportion 50%. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed to get the sample size. The data collection instruments were questionnaire and interview guides. Validity and reliability of data collection instruments were rigorously assessed with the help of experts in the field of research. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS (version 22), and presented in tables, frequencies, and percentages. while qualitative data were analyzed thematically and presented in form of direct quotes.

### **1.7 Study Findings**

This study sought to investigate attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. The findings from principals, heads of guidance and counseling departments, and teachers to this question is presented in the following sections.

**Table 1: Principals' response on attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County**

	SD	D	MA	A	SA	Mean	Std. dev.
Attitudes of selected education stakeholders as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)		
I spare more time to listen to teenage mothers to motivate them in school	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	3(20%)	6(40%)	5(33.3%)	4.00	.926
There is collaboration between the principal, teachers, and parents to ensure return of teenage mothers to school after delivery	0(0%)	2(13.3%)	0(0%)	10(66.7%)	3(20%)	3.93	.884
Support systems for addressing the needs of teenage mothers are adequate in my school	1(6.7%)	3(20%)	3(20%)	4(26.7%)	4(26.7%)	3.47	1.302
There are initiatives to create awareness about the challenges faced by teenage mothers	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	5(33.3%)	3(20%)	6(40%)	3.93	1.033
Mentorship programs are available to guide teenage mothers through their academic journey	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	6(40%)	5(33.3%)	3((20%)	3.67	.900
Teenage mothers receive regular guidance and counselling sessions	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	6(40%)	4(26.7%)	4(26.7%)	3.73	.961
I encourage teachers to give catch up lessons to help teenage mothers in various subjects	0(0%)	2(13.3%)	5(33.3%)	6(40%)	2(13.3%)	3.53	.915
Other students help teenage mothers by explaining lessons learned during when they are not in school	1(6.7%)	0(0%)	3(20%)	7(46.7%)	4(26.7%)	3.87	1.060
There are some measures to prevent stigma against teenage mothers within our school environment	0(0%)	0(0%)	5(33.3%)	5(33.3%)	5(33.3%)	4.00	.845
The school has a code of conduct to address instances of stigmatization against teenage mothers	0(0%)	3(20%)	4(26.7%)	4(26.7%)	4(26.7%)	3.60	1.121
The office of the principal is adequately responsive to the needs of teenage mothers	0(0%)	1(6.7%)	2(13.3%)	8(53.3%)	4(26.7%)	4.00	.845

Vali n (listwise)

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### Source: Field data, (2024)

The dataset in table 1 provides an insightful look into attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County. This analysis aims to dissert these attitudes across several categories of support provision, emphasizing the impact of school principals' support on the academic success of the teenage mothers.

The data reveals that education stakeholders in public secondary schools in Kathiani created a conducive environment for the learning to teenage mothers, by offering guidance and counseling, learning

materials, and other necessary support, with mean scores hovering between 4.0 and 3.5, and a standard deviation of approximately 1.1. These findings suggest that while most of the principals do provide essential resources, there is considerable variability in this support. This inconsistency may be attributed to negative attitudes towards teenage mothers among some education stakeholders, which impacts the implementation of the re-entry policy for teenage mothers.

Results from the surveys were supported by findings from interviews, where principals emphasized that attitudes of selected education stakeholders determine the support provided for teenage mothers. One of the principals (No 3) mentioned that:

*“Trauma and discrimination towards teenage mothers can result in decreased access to support and resources in school. These attitudes can influence the way in which teenage mothers are perceived and treated within the school, which in turn discourage other people from providing any support to the teenage mothers. A school principal who views teenage mothers as a burden to the society may not provide learning material for the teenage mothers” (PI03, 2024).*

These findings agree with Yakubu and Salisu, (2018) who found that teenage mothers in Sub-Saharan Africa dropped out of school due to negative attitudes and lack of support from their parents and school administrations. Another principal (No 6) stated that:

*“Stakeholders with negative attitudes may not provide adequate support and resources like school fees, food, clothes, and others needs for school. There are some school principals also who refuse to re-admit the teenage mothers to their schools” (PI06, 2024).*

These findings concur with Chiyota, (2020) who showed that positive attitudes towards teenage mothers boosts the awareness of the re-entry policy and strengthens collaboration between schools and civil society organizations and other government departments, and therefore encourage support to the education of teenage mothers.

**Table 2: Heads of guidance and counseling departments’ response on how attitudes towards teenage mothers determine the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-county**

Head of guidance and counseling, and support provided for teenage mothers	SD F (%)	D F (%)	MA F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	Std. dev.
Some teachers do help by providing school fees for the teenage mothers	0(0%)	2(12.5%)	4(25%)	9(56.3%)	1(6.3%)	3.56	.814
I would prefer to spare more time to listen to teenage mothers to motivate them in school	0(0%)	1(6.3%)	0(0%)	11(68.8%)	4(25%)	4.13	.719
There is collaboration between the head of guidance and counseling department and	1(6.3%)	1(6.3%)	6(37.5%)	7(43.8%)	1(6.3%)	3.38	.957



parents to ensure return to school of girls after delivery							
There is insufficiency of Support systems for addressing the needs of teenage mothers	2(12.5%)	0(0%)	(25%)	7(43.8%)	3(18.8%)	3.56	1.209
It is good that some students make contributions to help needy teenage mothers	0(0%)	4(25%)	4(25%)	5(31.3%)	3(18.8%)	3.44	1.094
There are initiatives to create awareness about the challenges faced by teenage mothers	(6.3%)	2(12.5%)	3(18.8%)	7(43.8%)	3(18.8%)	3.56	1.153
Teachers do incorporate real-life examples in their teaching to make the curriculum more relevant and engaging for teenage mothers	(6.3%)	4(25%)	1(6.3%)	9(56.3%)	1(6.3%)	3.31	1.138
Teenage mothers receive regular guidance and counselling sessions	1(6.3%)	3(18.8%)	2(12.5%)	8(50%)	2(12.5%)	3.44	1.153
I encourage teachers to give catch up lessons to help teenage mothers in various subjects	1(6.3%)	1(6.3%)	3(18.8%)	6(37.5%)	5(31.3%)	3.81	1.167
There are some measures to prevent stigma against teenage mothers within my school environment	1(6.3%)	3(18.8%)	5(31.3%)	5(31.3%)	2(12.5%)	3.25	1.125
Emotional well-being of adolescent mother in my school environment needs some improvement	0(0%)	1(6.3%)	3(18.8%)	10(62.5%)	2(12.5%)	3.81	.750

**Valid n (listwise) 16**

**Source: Field data, (2024)**

Table 2 provides valuable insights into how heads of guidance and counseling departments view the attitudes of education stakeholders towards teenage mothers as a determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-County, which crucial for enhancing their learning experiences. These responses are segmented into several categories, each representing a different type of support provided to help in the education of teenage mothers. The findings from surveys have demonstrated high average of support and resources for teenage mothers through the provision of school fees, guidance and counseling sessions, financial support, catch up lessons, and measures in schools to prevent stigma against teenage mothers with the highest mean score of 4.13 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.71 in the data set. This indicates a nearest universal agreement from heads of guidance and counseling on the importance of attitudes of education stakeholders in providing the necessary support for teenage mothers in schools, reflecting a widespread acknowledgement of their role in the academic activities of teenage mothers. This concur with Howells, (1993) who states that by providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment, educators can help teenage mothers feel more comfortable opening up and discussing their experiences with them.

In addition to the above analysis of quantitative data, qualitative input offers a more detailed view from heads of guidance and counseling departments on attitudes of selected education stakeholders as a

determinant of the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani. One of the heads of guidance and counseling departments (No 2) interviewed remarked that:

*“School principals with understanding attitudes towards teenage mothers may raise funds to support the teenage mothers, strengthen guidance and counselling sessions for them and grant them necessary permissions to be able to take care of their babies” (GCT02, 2024).*

This is supported by Jochim, (2021) who asserted that in order to improve school-going mothers’ educational outcome, it may be essential to ensure their access to financial support for formal childcare. Another head of guidance and counseling department (No 8) pointed out that: *“Schools which value good academic future of a teenage mother may provide flexible schedule, accommodation, and financial support to help them success academically” (GCT08, 2024).*

Undie et al., (2015) made similar conclusions that teenage mothers, in Kenya, would like to go back to school and intend to do so. However, many teenage mothers do not go back to school because of an overwhelming non-support among principals, due to perceptions that including teenage mothers in the education system would prompt other students to get pregnant as well. Another head of guidance and counseling department (No 12) interviewed supported that: *“The act of establishing the re-entry policy for teenage mothers itself is a proof of positive attitudes towards teenage mothers. School have to collaborate with the ministry of education to achieve its implementation” (GCT12, 2024).*

These findings concur with Runshare and Gwirayi, (2022) who said that the re-entry policy is the most resounding government voice for expectant and teenage mothers in the history of Kenya.

**Table 3: Teachers’ response on how attitudes of selected education stakeholders towards teenage mothers determine the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani Sub-county**

<i>Teachers, and support provided to teenage mothers</i>	<b>SD</b> F (%)	<b>D</b> F (%)	<b>MA</b> F (%)	<b>A</b> F (%)	<b>SA</b> F (%)	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. dev.</b>
Teenage mothers receive regular guidance and counselling sessions	7(6.4%)	15(13.8%)	23(21.1%)	35(32.1%)	29(26.6%)	3.59	1.203
There are some measures to prevent stigma against teenage mothers within my school environment	9(8.3%)	11(10.1%)	30(26.6%)	41(37.6%)	19(17.4%)	3.46	1.143
Teachers are ready to be closer to teenage mothers to motivate them in school	5(4.6%)	9(8.3%)	18(16.5%)	49(44%)	29(25.7%)	3.87	1.382
There is collaboration between teachers and parents to address to ensure return to school of girls after delivery	6(5.5%)	11(10.1%)	28(24.8%)	37(33.9%)	28(24.8%)	4.10	5.048
There are initiatives to create awareness about the challenges faced by teenage mothers	8(7.3%)	19(17.4%)	30(27.5%)	39(34.9%)	14(12.8%)	3.28	1.123



The school has a code of conduct to address instances of stigmatization against teenage mothers	6(5.5%)	26(23.9%)	30(27.5%)	34(30.3%)	14(12.8%)	3.21	1.114
Mentorship programs are available to guide teenage mothers through their academic journey in my school	4(3.7%)	20(18.3%)	19(17.4%)	34(31.2%)	33(29.4%)	3.64	1.190
Teachers do incorporate real-life examples in their teaching to make the curriculum more relevant and engaging for teenage mothers	9(8.3%)	12(11%)	23(21.1%)	30(27.5%)	36(32.1%)	3.64	1.266
Other students help teenage mothers by explaining lessons learned during when they are not in school	10(9.2%)	17(15.6%)	28(25.7%)	41(36.7%)	14(12.8%)	3.28	1.155

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**Source: Field data (2024)**

Findings in table 3 have indicated that high average of teachers enhanced the education of teenage mothers, by explaining teenage mothers the lessons learned during their maternity leave, incorporating real-life examples in their lessons to make it more relevant and engaging for teenage mothers, offering mentorship programs to guide teenage mothers in their academic journey, and collaborating with their parents to motivate them. This was supported by a high average score between 4.1 and 3.28 respectively, with the maximum standard deviation of 5.0, and the minimum standard deviation of 1.1. This might be due to positive attitudes that they hold towards teenage mothers, which encouraged them to create a conducive environment for teenage mothers in school. This complies with Vanwesenbeeck, (2020) who recommended that when pregnancies occur among teenagers, they require support and assistance from their parents, community leaders, teachers, school administrators among other educators, to ensure they receive proper care, necessary medical attention, and continue with their educational career.

Interview schedules with the teachers offered deeper input on how attitudes of education stakeholders determine the support provided for teenage mothers in public secondary schools. One of the teachers (No 7) asserted that: *“Due to the support from the principal’ office, weekly guidance and counselling sessions are offered to teenage mother. This helps them to feel welcomed and received in our school”* (TI07, 2024).

This concur with Cuberos et al., (2019) who put forward that there must be mechanisms, strategies, actions in the educational institution that help teachers to attract the adolescent mother to stay in school and motivates her to be the woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

Another teacher (No 11) stated that that: *“Educators who view teenage mothers as being incapable of succeeding academically hampered their access to services available, like guidance and counselling, learning material, making it difficult for them to complete their studies”* (TI11, 2024).

Mangeli M et al., (2019) had similar findings in Iran, where he found out that due to insufficient support, it was difficult for teen mothers to meet the multiple needs of child, housekeeping, and going to school. Another teacher emphasized that “*all educators ought to be informed that teenage pregnancy is not the end of life and schooling. The teenage mothers need to be accepted back to school into the education system without any hinderances*” (TI08, 2024). Undie and Birungi, (2022) agreed with these findings by reporting that awareness of policies that facilitate school continuation for teenage mothers or re-entry needs to be enhanced. Teachers, generally support that education stakeholders with positive attitudes encourage the provision of support services such as unconditional re-admission of teenage mothers in school, regular guidance and counselling sessions to help them overcome life challenges related to their situation, and material support. However, there are still a few who express concerns about the support provided to teenage mothers to help them in school. One teacher mentioned that: “*teenage mothers should be left to carry the consequences of their behaviour alone*” According to them, supporting teenage mothers may affect the behaviour of others girls in school. According to them no support should be provided to teenage mothers. This created discrimination and stigma against teenage mothers, hence discouraging them from studying.

### 1.8 Conclusion

Based on the existing literature reviewed and the findings of this study, it can be concluded that attitudes of principals, heads of guidance and counseling, and teachers determine the type of support provided to teenage mothers in public secondary schools in Kathiani. The different stakeholders provided positive environment for teenage mothers by being compassionate and encouraging. Principals, heads of guidance and counseling departments, and teachers with attitudes such as sympathy, understanding, encouragement, motivation towards teenage mothers promoted their re-admission to school, guidance and counseling services and a conducive learning environment for them. However, some teenage mothers are likely to face challenges to reintegrate into the school system due to lack of necessary support from educators who view them as a burden to the society. The government should provide teenage mother-students with the necessary learning resources and ensure that they are fairly distributed to them to discourage cases of school dropout among teenage mothers. Education stakeholders should organize workshops, seminars, and training sessions to equip stakeholders with the necessary skills and knowledge which may help in engaging the broader community in supporting teenage mothers.

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