

## **Does the Role of Social Workers matter? Reflecting on the Strategies to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy in Igunga District – Tanzania**

Johnas A. Buhori

*The Open University of Tanzania  
Department of Sociology and Social Work*

### **Abstract**

Does the role of social workers matter? Reflecting on the strategies to prevent teenage pregnancy in Igunga District, Tanzania" took into account the roles of various stakeholders in the context of girls' school education. At the same time, social workers remained at the centre of the study, guided by the structural functionalism theory. Embracing the pragmatic philosophy, the study employed a mixed method to collect data. Data for this study was collected from 145, including heads of secondary schools, Ward Executive Offices, Ward Education Officers, Ward Police Officers, and Social Workers. The quantitative data were analysed using a statistical package for social science (SPSS), and content analysis were utilised for qualitative data. The results showed that there were differences in the knowledge of the methods used to prevent teen pregnancy, even among the research subjects with different demographic characteristics. Social workers did not perceive the government's efforts to address the issue under investigation as equally important. In addition, secondary school stakeholders lacked sufficient knowledge about social workers' tasks and were unaware of the initiatives. There is a call for the government to increase implementors' knowledge of the strategies, which are still unknown. The government, therefore, should reconsider hiring social workers in educational settings, especially secondary schools, which calls for a thorough investigation into the advantages and disadvantages of the tactics already employed.

**Keywords:** Social workers, teen pregnancy, prevention, strategies, education.

### **Introduction**

Social workers are essential in educational settings globally; due to varying awareness of their roles, they are fundamentally hired in school systems, helping children succeed academically and feel better emotionally (Csók & Pusztai, 2022), commonly applicable in developed countries. School social workers conduct home visits and evaluations to identify the problems encountered by children at risk of quitting school. The presence of social workers at school helps students, families, and teachers deal with problems like risky behaviour, which leads to aggressiveness, drug abuse and teen pregnancy. They utilise a variety of tactics to deal with the problem that has

been identified. These tactics include working with multi-professional teams within the school and contacting socio-educational, legal, and health organisations to address the issue through follow-up counselling and helping students find a solution (Ream, 2020). However, in the context of the education system in Tanzania, the expertise of social workers to address the problem under study is still not recognised (Buhori, 2024), hence not hired in schools, particularly secondary schools.

Pointing to the magnitude of teen pregnancy in education setup, UNICEF (2021) revealed that, in 2020, 244 million teens worldwide dropped out of school between the ages of 6 and 18 due to teen pregnancy. In Europe, Cubero-Perez, Cubero, Matías, and Bascón (2023) noted that in 2018, 10.2% of enrolled students dropped out; in 2021, 16% and 16.4% dropout rates were recorded in Spain and Romania, respectively (Mashhad, 2021). In 2022, 11.4 per cent of students dropped out of secondary school, whereas 7.9 per cent did the same in 2021. Further, in North America, the rate decreased from 8.3% in 2010 to 5.1% in 2021 (UNESCO, 2019). Furthermore, 12 million students in Latin America and the Caribbean dropped out of secondary school in 2018 (6.3 million girls and 5.6 million boys). Additionally, in 2018, 24.6 per cent of upper secondary students and 5.4 per cent of lower secondary students dropped out of the 14 countries that make up Oceania. (UNESCO, 2019). The proportion of dropouts from secondary school varies by location in Asia. Two thousand eighteen rates for lower secondary students and youth upper secondary students were 5.2% in Central Asia and 26.7 % in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 9.7% in Lower Secondary Students and 20.6 % in Youth Upper Secondary Students, and 13.9 % in Lower Secondary Students and 29.8 % in Youth Upper Secondary Students in Northern and Western Asia (UNESCO, 2019). For instance, in New Zealand, social workers' assistance in helping families assess their children's needs and promote ongoing attendance at school has resulted in a decline in the dropout rate (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2020).

Highlighting the leading causes of teen pregnancy, Russell and Sun (2012) opined that the majority of students engaged in high-risk behaviours, such as early sexual activity, which can lead to early pregnancy, delinquency, criminality, violence, and drug and alcohol usage. In agreement with this view, Murrell (2022), Huxtable (2022), and Hong and Henry (2015) noted that school social workers in America, North America, Australia, the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific region are equipped with competencies that allow them to conduct assessment, data gathering, and interpretation at multiple levels, utilising various approaches to analyse the needs, characteristics, and interactions of children, families, and school personnel. Further, they can deal with crisis intervention, home visits for counselling and assessment, consulting and referrals, keeping an eye on attendance, and raising school attendance to

reduce absenteeism. In agreement with Murrell (2022), Huxtable (2022), and Hong and Henry (2015), Afolabi (2021) and Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre (2020) noted that the remarkable achievement in the reduction of teenage pregnancy in secondary schools in developed countries could be attributed to acknowledging the critical roles played by social workers from the moment a child is enrolled in school, where they undertake the continuous assessment of the child's needs and stay in touch with parents over the observed challenges affecting the child's education performance.

It is regrettable that, despite the States' best efforts, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to have the highest secondary school dropout rate in the world, with 36.7 per cent of lower secondary school-age children (28.3 million) and 57.5 per cent of upper secondary school-age children (37 million) not attending school as of 2018 (Galal, 2024). Further, Huxtable (2013) provided additional evidence regarding the potential cause of the issue's continued existence: the state government's refusal to hire social workers in schools to lower truancy rates, absenteeism, school phobia, dropping out, or bad health. In Sub-Saharan Africa, social workers are underrepresented in private schools and are not employed in public schools. For instance, social workers are employed in educational settings in South Africa and Ghana to address student dropouts by implementing strategies such as boosting attendance, making house calls, and providing counselling to address various personal issues that students may be experiencing. Ensuring every student's needs are met will help them maximise their educational experience and complete their degree program (Huxtable, 2022). The South African government started the "Zero Dropout" programme to assist in these efforts to reduce the school dropout rate. To address difficulties with pupils, such as dropout rates, the Department of Social Development dispatches social workers from the community to visit schools within the district (South Africa Zero Dropout Campaign, 2020).

Citing Tanzania, for example, secondary school dropout rates remain a significant issue, especially in rural regions. In secondary schools, roughly 2,338,457 pupils registered in 2019. But out of the enrolled pupils, 98,949, or 4.2%, dropped out. The primary school dropout rate was 1.6% among them, with 48,440 boys and 50,509 girls (URT, 2020). URT (2018) highlighted that although social workers were not part of the educational system, they however, collaborate with parents, teachers, and school administrators to address issues like low attendance, student dropout rates, bullying, and aggressive behaviour. This is one potential solution to the problem described. A decision on the child's best interests, including access to schooling, is made by the social worker who receives the report and calls the individual against whom it was filed to discuss the issue about children. Another tactic is guidance and counselling for at-risk students and their parents, guardians, and relatives (URT 2019).

Social workers are also required to report incidents concerning abuses of student rights, such as dropout rates. They are addressing children's rights through different programs, events, and rituals, focusing on access to education in particular. Under the programs, social workers' duties include determining students' problems, providing guidance and counselling, and supporting the child protection system (URT, 2022). Even though the problem is still ongoing, Tanzania's government has made remarkable progress in lowering secondary school dropout rates by increasing access to secondary education in Tanzania through collaboration with Sectoral Ministries and other implementing partners. The government has lowered school dropout rates through several laws, policies, and initiatives. The Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP) is one such effort that seeks to eliminate the percentage of pupils who drop out of secondary school (Herman & Nestory, 2022).

To increase secondary education completion rates for both boys and girls, increase access to secondary education, and develop responsive learning environments for girls, the government launched a five-year program called "Secondary Education Improvement Programs (SEQUIP)" in collaboration with the World Bank. However, the identified efforts do not recognise the roles and positions of social workers in the prevention of teen pregnancy in secondary schools. The government has also started the implementation of a new tool called Dropout Early Warning Systems (DEWS), which tracks pupils at risk of leaving school (URT, 2022). Policies have been put in place to lower school dropout rates caused by teen pregnancy, but the issue is still concerning. For instance, URT (2022) reported 4,563, URT (2023) reported 4,149, and URT (2021) reported 3,729 girls who had dropped out of high school in the Tabora region due to teen pregnancy.

It's critical to remember that the three main pillars of social work practice are prevention (the focus of this study), restoration, and rehabilitation. Helping vulnerable people, groups, or clients stay well and reach their full potential to become optimally independent is the primary goal of preventive. It works to stop social problems from ever occurring in the first place by increasing people's awareness of potential social dangers, problems, and solutions (Kirst-Ashman, 2018). Depending on the social problem itself, the second function of social work deals with restoration. In social work, restoration is a comprehensive strategy for assisting individuals, families, and communities to recover from different types of trauma, misfortune, or disturbance. This complex process aims to get clients back to a stable, functioning state. These are the main elements of what social work practice calls restoration (Hepworth et al., 2016). Moreover, social workers typically conduct risk assessments, early identification of various social problems, public education, skill development, community capacity building, stakeholder engagement, programme design,

implementation intervention, resilience promotion, and psychosocial support and care when carrying out the preventive function, which aims to lower the risk of problems before they arise and promote wellbeing (Jansson, 2018; Zastrow, 2016; Teater, 2014; Munro, 2011).

Additionally, school-based clubs that use the girls' guide and open suggestion boxes where students can post messages have been lauded by Rudolph et al. (2017). These are tactics that are frequently applied throughout the world to stop teen pregnancy. Further, considering the dilemma around social work practice and the invisibility of social work practices (Manyama, 2017), the government intervened by releasing a circular on re-entry policy, which is intended to allow re-admission of pregnant teens after child birth (MoEST, 2021, Education Circular No. 2 of 2021). Unfortunately among the stakeholders that were identified to be involved in the re-entry programme, social workers were not mentioned. Despite the good intention of the government to increase accessibility to secondary school education, social workers as the key players are still not allowed to use their expertise, skills and knowledge in the prevention of teen pregnancy. The current study, therefore, intends to examine the role of social workers in the teen pregnancy prevention strategies in Igunga district.

## **Method**

Pragmatic philosophy, which embraces mixed methods (such as quantitative and qualitative approaches) for data collection, was employed. Cresswell (2003) had earlier noted that cross-sectional descriptive designs make using quantitative and qualitative data more accessible.

### *Study setting and sampling*

The Tabora region is one of Tanzania's five regions with a high frequency of adolescent pregnancy, according to the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey (TDHS-MIS, 2022). In addition, out of the nine districts in the Tabora region, Igunga District Council has the highest percentage of female secondary school dropouts. Because of the high number of teen pregnancy in the Igunga district, this study was chosen to be conducted there. Furthermore, UNICEF (2020) disclosed the rates of teen pregnancy were recorded at 43% in the Tabora region, while NBS (2022) noted the youth population proposition at 55.4% in the Tabora region.

It is worth noting that, out of the seven districts in the Tabora region, Igunga district has the highest rate of teen pregnancy for three years, from 2020 to 2022. For example, in 2020, of the 3729 girls, 1262 were from Igunga; in 2022, of the 4663 girls, 1149 were from Igunga; and in 2023, of the 4156 girls who left the district's secondary schools early, 934 were from Igunga (URT Report, 2021, 2022, and 2023) accordingly. These records aided the researcher's choice of the

study region. Furthermore, the Igunga district is divided into thirty-five (35) wards, each with a single government secondary school. During the study process, purposeful sampling was utilised as it can be adaptable and adjustable, allowing for revisions depending on the perspectives, comprehension of the chosen individuals' perspectives, their definition of the world, and findings (Creswell, 2003). It is from this point the current study has employed purposeful sampling; the study selected 35 Secondary School Heads (SSH), 35 Ward Executive Officers (WEO), 35 Education Ward Officers (EWO), 35 Ward Police Officers (WPO), and five Social Workers.

#### *Data collection procedures*

The questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on the demographical information and awareness levels of teen pregnancy prevention strategies. Hence, the questionnaire was administered to a total of 145 respondents. On the other hand, the interview checklist was utilised to collect qualitative data based on the knowledge of the prevention strategies, roles of social workers around the strategies, the implemented strategies, the position of social workers and the challenges encountered by the prevention strategies; where the total of 25 participants purposeful selected from the 145 total sample sizes, informed this study.

Further, five focus group discussions were held, each with five members including the SSH, WEO, EWO, WPO, and SWOs to solicit qualitative information on the position of social workers and challenges encountered around the implementation of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies. Furthermore, each questionnaire was administered for 10 – 15 minutes, while the FGDs were held for 30 – 50 minutes. Generally, data was collected for three months, from July to September 2023, and the study was carried out across nine (9) months, from March to November 2023.

#### *Data analysis plan*

The quantitative data collected from 145 respondents using structured questionnaires, was analysed using SPSS and presented as displayed in Table 1 and percentages. Additionally, the qualitative content from 25 participants (SSH, WEO, EWO, WPO, and SWOs), were analysed using content analysis.

#### *Ethical consideration*

Data collection clearance was sought from the Open University of Tanzania after the review of the post-graduate studies board. The permission was submitted to the district commission for further consideration. All research subjects signed the consent form before data collection. The research observed

aspects of confidentiality and did not harm ethical principles during data collection.

### **Results presentation**

The section results presentation is guided by the following sub-sections, namely the demographic information, awareness of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies, knowledge level on the roles of social workers, implementing strategies, the position of social workers around the teen pregnancy prevention strategies and identified challenges in the implementation of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies, more details are provided,

### **Demographic information**

Regarding the respondent's demographic information, 111 (76.6%) of the 145 respondents were male, and the remaining 23.4 % were female (34). Also, according to the data, the age groups of 28 to 34 received 41.4% (60); 35 to 40 received 44.8% (65); 41 to 45 received 10.3% (15); and 46 and older received 3.4% (05). Forty-six years and older had the lowest percentage, at 3.4%. The majority of the workforce still has over 20 years in public service.

**Table 1:** Demographic information of the study respondents

| Variables               |                 | Frequency  | Percent (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|
| Gender                  | M               | 111        | 76.6%       |
|                         | F               | 34         | 23.4%       |
| <b>Total</b>            |                 | <b>145</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| Age cohort              | 28-34           | 60         | 41.4%       |
|                         | 35-40           | 65         | 44.8%       |
|                         | 41-45           | 15         | 10.3%       |
|                         | 46+             | 05         | 3.4%        |
|                         | <b>Total</b>    | <b>145</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| Education level         | Diploma         | 15         | 10.3%       |
|                         | Bachelor degree | 90         | 62.1%       |
|                         | Master's degree | 40         | 27.6%       |
| <b>Total</b>            |                 | <b>145</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| Years saved to the post | 3-5 years       | 52         | 35.9%       |
|                         | 6-8 years       | 44         | 30.3%       |
|                         | 9-12 years      | 24         | 16.6%       |
|                         | Above 13        | 25         | 17.2%       |
| <b>Total</b>            |                 | <b>145</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Furthermore, the respondents were categorised into three groups according to their educational attainment: the majority, or 62.1% (90), had a bachelor's degree; the next highest group, or 27.6%, had a master's degree; and the lowest group, or 10.3%, had a diploma (15). Generally, the findings show that investing in preventive knowledge could positively affect teen pregnancy prevention strategies, especially given their ages; the education levels indicated excellent competence among the respondents.

### **Awareness of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies**

The findings on awareness of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies recorded by the heads of secondary schools, ward executive officers, ward education officers, ward police officers, and social workers officers are as follows. Of the 35 Heads of Schools respondents, 8(22.9%) were male, and 5(14.3%) female who were aware. Further, 12(34.3%) of the males and 10 (28.5%) of the females were unaware of the strategies.

**Table 2:** Awareness of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies

| Awareness | Research subject |      | Gender    |       |        |           |       |             |
|-----------|------------------|------|-----------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|-------------|
|           | HSS              | Male | Frequency | (%)   | Female | Frequency | (%)   | Total       |
|           |                  | Yes  | 08        | 34.3% | Yes    | 05        | 14.3% | 37.2%       |
|           |                  | No   | 12        | 22.9% | No     | 10        | 28.6% | 62.9%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>     |      | <b>20</b> |       |        | <b>15</b> |       | <b>100%</b> |
|           | WEO              | Yes  | 13        | 37.1% | Yes    | 4         | 11.5% | 48.6%       |
|           |                  | No   | 16        | 46%   | No     | 2         | 5.7%  | 51.4%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>     |      | <b>28</b> |       |        | <b>5</b>  |       | <b>100%</b> |
|           | EW0              | Yes  | 8         | 22.9% | Yes    | 3         | 8.6%  | 31.5%       |
|           |                  | No   | 20        | 57.1% | No     | 4         | 11.4% | 68.5%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>     |      | <b>28</b> |       |        | <b>7</b>  |       | <b>100%</b> |
|           | WPO              | Yes  | 20        | 57.1% | Yes    | 4         | 11.4% | 68.5%       |
|           |                  | No   | 10        | 28.6% | No     | 1         | 2.9%  | 31.5%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>     |      | <b>30</b> |       |        | <b>5</b>  |       | <b>100%</b> |
|           | SWOs             | Yes  | 3         | 60%   | Yes    | 2         | 40%   | 100%        |
|           |                  | No   | -         |       |        | -         | -     |             |

Moreover, 34.3% (12) males of Ward Executive Officers (WEO) knew compared to 8.6% (3) of females. Moreover, 45.7% (16) of males and 5.7% of females were not aware of the strategies for the prevention of teen pregnancy. Further, 22.9% (8) males of Education Ward Officers and 8.6% (3) of females indicated being aware of the strategies; furthermore, 57.1% (20) of males and 11.4% (4) female revealed their unawareness of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies. On the other hand, the Ward Police Officers recorded 57.1% (20) of males and 11.4% (4) of females' had awareness of the strategies; 28.6% (10) of males and 2.9% (01) of females were unaware of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies. Additionally, 60% (3) of male social workers and 40% (2) of females were conversant with teen pregnancy prevention strategies.

### **Knowledge level of HSSs, WEOs, EWEOs, and WPOs on the role of social workers in the prevention of teen pregnancy**

The findings on knowledge of HSSs, WEOs, EWEOs, and WPOs on the role of social workers in preventing teen pregnancy noted the following. According to the HSS results, 17.1% (6) males and 14.3% (5) were knowledgeable, while 40% (14) males and 28.6% (10) females were not knowledgeable of the roles of social workers in the prevention of teen pregnancy. Further, 57.1% (20) males and 14.3% (5) females revealed not to be knowledgeable.

**Table 3:** Knowledge level among education stakeholders

| Knowledge | Research Subjects | Males | Frequency | Percent | Female | Frequency | Percent | Total       |
|-----------|-------------------|-------|-----------|---------|--------|-----------|---------|-------------|
|           | HSS               | Yes   | 6         | 17.1%   | Yes    | 5         | 14.3%   | 31.4%       |
|           |                   | No    | 14        | 40%     | No     | 10        | 28.6%   | 68.6%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>      |       | <b>20</b> |         |        | <b>15</b> |         | <b>100%</b> |
|           | WEO               | Yes   | 10        | 28.6%   | Yes    | -         |         | 28.6%       |
|           |                   | No    | 20        | 57.1%   | No     | 05        | 14.3%   | 71.4%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>      |       | <b>30</b> |         |        | <b>5</b>  |         | <b>100%</b> |
|           | EWO               | Yes   | 07        | 20%     | Yes    | 02        | 5.7%    | 25.7%       |
|           |                   | No    | 21        | 60%     | No     | 05        | 14.3%   | 74.3%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>      |       | <b>28</b> |         |        | <b>07</b> |         | <b>100%</b> |
|           | WPO               | Yes   | 12        | 34.3%   | Yes    | -         | 0       | 34.3%       |
|           |                   | No    | 18        | 51.4%   | No     | 05        | 14.3%   | 65.7%       |
|           | <b>Total</b>      |       | <b>30</b> |         |        | <b>05</b> |         | <b>100%</b> |
|           | SWOs              | Yes   | 03        | 60%     | Yes    | 02        | 40%     | 100%        |
|           |                   | No    | -         |         | No     | -         | 0       | 0           |
|           | <b>Total</b>      |       | <b>03</b> |         |        | <b>02</b> |         | <b>100%</b> |

Only 28.6% (10) of males demonstrated knowledge of social workers' roles. Furthermore, 20% (7) of males and 5.7% (2) among EWOs were knowledgeable, while 60% (21) of males and 14.3% (5) of females were not knowledgeable of social work roles around prevention strategies. Contrary to the findings from *HSSs*, *WEOs*, and *EWOs*, males recorded 80% (28) and 8.6% (3) females among *WPOs*, knowledge; while 5.7% (2) males and 5.7% of females demonstrated not knowing the roles of social workers in the prevention of teen pregnancy in Igunga district.

### Implemented strategies to prevent teen pregnancy in secondary school

The findings on implemented strategies to prevent teen pregnancy for secondary school girls noted the differences in quantity; the comparison outcomes for males and females were provided (111 males and 34 females).

**Table 4:** Implemented strategies to prevent teen pregnancy in secondary school

| Implemented Strategies                      | Female<br>(frequency) | Percent | Male<br>(frequency) | %     |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|---------------------|-------|
| Community Outreach Campaign                 | 05                    | 14.7%   | 20                  | 18%   |
| School visitation                           | 03                    | 8.8%    | 20                  | 18%   |
| Counseling and Performance Assessment       | 08                    | 23.5%   | 15                  | 13.5% |
| Reproductive Health Education and Awareness | 02                    | 5.9%    | 3                   | 2.7%  |
| Reporting to Police Gender Desk             | 10                    | 29.4%   | 25                  | 22.5% |
| Call Toll Number                            | -                     | 0       | 6                   | 5.4%  |
| School Based Clubs                          | 06                    | 17.6%   | 2                   | 10.8% |
| Having Suggestion Boxes                     | -                     | 0       | 10                  | 9%    |

A community outreach effort, school visits by social workers and police, counselling, performance appraisals, public education on reproductive health

issues, reporting to the police gender desk, school-based clubs, and suggestion boxes in schools are some strategies employed. Interestingly, the most popular strategy among females (29.4%) and males (22.5%) was revealed to be the police gender desk. Further, males rated counselling services 13.5% (15) and females 23.5% (08). Furthermore, school-based clubs recorded 17.6% (6) females and 10.8% (12) among males. Furthermore, community outreach recorded 14.7% (5) females and 18% (20) among males. Other implemented strategies were relatively unpopular among the respondents.

### **Position of social workers around the teen pregnancy prevention strategies**

The findings on the position of social workers around the teen pregnancy prevention strategies, using focus group discussion, showed that social workers were aware of the strategies used in secondary schools in the study area. For instance, the school-based clubs, community outreach campaigns, school visits, reporting, and educating people about reproductive health. This was narrated by one of the participants as captured below,

For girls to complete the secondary school education, when allowed, we have to help schools to establish school-based clubs, where assessment, reporting and reproductive health issues are talked about; the students use this platform to share their intriguing stories related to the risk behaviour, which when dealt with, they can complete their education.

During the FGDs, the social workers further revealed that when allowed to work in school, they can identify risky behaviour around girls early and provide the skills development that are very useful to help girls deal with pressure and risky behaviour. One of them narrated as follows,

Despite our competencies to conduct the risk assessment and identify a girl at risk, it is regrettable that we are only conducted when the girls are already pregnant; where the only role left for us is to prepare to child protection related report required by the police officers.

Generally, the presented qualitative findings captured from the FGDs with social workers show that despite their significant roles in the prevention of teen pregnancy and their awareness of the strategies, they are still not allowed to do so. They are only recognised when the girl is already pregnant.

### **Identified Challenges:**

The study identified two challenges namely:

#### **Inadequacy knowledge of social workers roles among secondary school stakeholders**

The study identified an inadequacy of knowledge of social workers' roles among secondary school stakeholders as a fundamental challenge in the study area. Within the study area, the results revealed a lack of clarity and awareness regarding the responsibilities of social workers in secondary school environments. The Heads of Secondary Schools (HSSs), Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), and Education Ward Officers (EWOs) believe that teachers in schools can effectively handle social worker responsibilities like counselling, managing risky behaviour, addressing social and emotional difficulties, raising awareness of reproductive health issues, and handling early pregnancy. One of them asserted that,

When undertaking education courses, you are also supposed to cover some core courses related to counselling and guidance; within these courses, the wellbeing and psychology of any human being are covered. The courses also expose teachers to stages of human development and the role of the environment in shaping human life. They further added that it is worth employing more science teachers.

The presented assertion shows that education stakeholders, such as the HSSs, WEOs, and EWOs, have inadequate knowledge of the role of social workers in the prevention of teen pregnancy. In disagreement with the HSS, WEOs and EWOs, one of the WPOs revealed the following,

The persistence of teen pregnancy is partly related to the ignorance among education stakeholders, where social workers are not hired in school's setup. The contribution will be visible until the government becomes aware of the significant roles of social workers in schools.

The findings, as presented, show that HSSs, WEOs, and EWOs do not have inadequate knowledge of the social workers' competencies; they prefer seeing more teachers of science subjects employed rather than employing social workers in schools. However, the WPOs, because most cases related to child violence deal with social workers, the reason to be aware of the roles of social workers in teen pregnancy prevention.

### **Little awareness of the implemented teen pregnancy prevention strategies among secondary school stakeholders**

During the FGDs, another challenge identified was the little awareness of the implemented teen pregnancy prevention strategies among Secondary School Stakeholders. Where nine strategies were identified by the study's findings, including school visits, counselling services, community outreach campaigns, reporting or disclosure of violence and early sexual abuse warning signs to the police or to 116 (a toll-free number), school-based clubs, suggestion boxes in schools, and parents/guardians spending quality time with their kids'

discussing matters that impact their welfare. The presented quote was captured from one participant during HSSs, WEOs, EWOs discussions,

The implemented prevention strategies for teen pregnancy just add more work on teachers' shoulders. It is not counted anywhere among the indicators set during the end-of-year evaluation. Though the teacher does some of them, it is not effective and committed.

Holding a different position with the HSS, WEO and EWOs position, the SWOs and WPOs narrated the following,

We cannot remain silent while seeing the rights of children are violated due to teen pregnancy; wherever allowed in schools, we normally conduct counselling, community outreach and back-to-school campaign, utilisation of school-based clubs, reproductive health awareness and the disclosure or reporting violence and sexual abuse warning signs.

The FGDs with HSS, WEO and EWOs shed light on the implementation weaknesses of the available strategies to prevent teen pregnancy. Due to confronting priorities and overwhelming teaching-related duties among teachers in secondary schools, I have no time to implement the strategies. It is these weaknesses that demonstrate their lack of awareness of the strategies. Moreover, SWOs and WPOs demonstrated their relevance with the implemented strategies to prevent teen pregnancy.

## **Discussion**

The section discussion of the presentation of the results is guided by the following sub-sections, namely the demographic information, awareness of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies, knowledge level on the roles of social workers, implementing strategies, the position of social workers around the teen pregnancy prevention strategies and identified challenges in the implementation of the teen pregnancy prevention strategies, mode details are provided, pointing to the respondent's demographic, Thriveni & Rama (2018) noted that the significance of demographic information cannot be overstated in any research study; it helps establish the study's population dependability concerning age cohorts, gender, employment experiences, and the topic of the study. According to this perspective, demographic data helps develop a systematic understanding of other variables related to the research problem. Furthermore, age, education level, and experiences were considered regarding the study's conclusions regarding demographic data. In this case, 86.2% of the population was between the ages of 28 and 40, while 62.1% was recorded for a bachelor's degree. The majority had 3 to 8 years of experience. In line with these findings, Lee et al. (2019) pointed out that to prevent crimes, teen pregnancy in particular, skilled personnel (Bachelor holders) with substantial experience (three to eight years) and an active age range of 28 to 40 are needed. Further, the demographic

information, as revealed by Manyama (2019), is significant in showing the development which is taking place around the noble profession of social work, from the time when the majority had diplomas to the current state where the majority are bachelors' holders with 3 to 8 years.

Further, the study set out to learn about the awareness of teen pregnancy prevention strategies among the Heads of Secondary Schools (HSSs), Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), and Education Ward Officers (EWOs), who were found to be ignorant of the strategies. For instance, among HSSs, only 37.2% recorded awareness compared to the majority, 62.9%, who were unaware of the strategies. Further, among WEOs, 42.9% were aware, while 51.4% were unaware of the strategies. Moreover, EWOs recorded 31.5% awareness compared to 68.5% unawareness of teen pregnancy prevention strategies. These results provide insight into the rationale behind the ongoing nature of the problem under study; in a situation where the government officials tasked with translating and implementing the strategies are unaware of them, there is still a long way to go before any meaningful changes can be achieved.

These results concur with Huxtable's (2022) observation that for the Sub-Saharan region to address the problem of teen pregnancy effectively, state governments must allocate funds and raise public awareness of the adopted policies. In other words, without investing in raising awareness among the stakeholders in education, implementing the prevention strategies alone would not yield the desired results. Considering the structural functionalism theory, the government should recognise the competencies among social workers as an essential component to create awareness to prevent and address teen pregnancy (Rudolph et al. 2017).

Further still, the WPOs and Social Workers (SWOs) reported 68.5% and 100% awareness of the techniques to prevent teen pregnancy, in contrast to the findings from the HSSs, WEOs, and EWOs. Despite not being hired in schools, they exhibit high levels of awareness due to their interactions and the demands of their jobs conversing with the strategies. These findings support the assertion made by Mussa (2019) that police officers are expected to be more aware of problems affecting minors in general and teen pregnancy in particular because of their employment, which is centred on crime prevention. Afolabi (2021) reinforced these observations by pointing out that because of social workers' everyday work, they must be aware of numerous government guidelines, procedures, policies and programmes to address social problems. These efforts are a working tool when dealing with vulnerable groups, especially teenagers. Using the lens of structural functionalism theory, Manyama (2017) has no government department or discipline that can work in isolation to prevent a social problem successfully. Hence, to achieve the

expected outcome of the available strategies, the education stakeholders should consider social workers as equal team players.

Moreover, the results show that 68.6% of HSSs, 71.4% of WEOs, and 74.3% of EWOs were not knowledgeable as compared to 31.4% of HSSs, 28.6% of WEOs, and 25.7% of EWOs who were knowledgeable of the roles of social workers in teen pregnancy prevention strategies. In line with the findings, two positions can be deduced, including the government's choice to classify social work practice as work that a layperson can do (URT, 2019). Moreover, a shortage of knowledge about social workers' obligations to prevent teenage pregnancy among HSSs, WEOs, and EWOs makes the intricate conditions surrounding the strategies that are available much clearer. Social work practice has remained relatively unknown compared to other human care disciplines. The fact that other fields are becoming acknowledged for their ability to offer social welfare services exacerbates the visibility and recognition of social work practices (Spitzer, 2019). The identified gap compromises the effective prevention of social problems, teen pregnancy in particular.

Pointing to implemented strategies among Secondary school girls, it was noted that despite the differences in the number of responses between the genders, the results indicate that both recognise the police gender desk and counselling programs as the most important means of preventing teen pregnancy. Other strategies that did not go over well with female respondents were school suggestion boxes and calling the 116 toll-free number. Additionally, the findings show that males have different opinions on the strategies that are readily available, with school visits and community outreach programs being the most popular. Moreover, since the scores among all the implemented strategies were below 50%, it can be deduced that no strategy is popular or famous among the education stakeholders. The findings are contrary to the studies of Huxtable (2022), Mussa and Fauzia (2017), and Williams (2010), who have acknowledged the popularity of the strategies when implemented to prevent teen pregnancy.

Moreover, despite little recognition of parental guidance and reproductive health education among teens, Buland and Jollah (2019) pointed to its significance wherever it is applied to prevent teen pregnancy. The implemented strategies depend on the government actors to play their roles effectively; the structural functionalism theory recognises that each part of the organism depends on the other. Hence, as the United Nations (1989) noted, failure to implement strategies that were identified can negatively impact teens' accessibility to basic education due to pregnancy.

The study also intended to establish the position of social workers and teen pregnancy prevention strategies. The social workers' focus group discussion

results indicate they were aware of teen prevention strategies like school-based clubs, community outreach campaigns, school visits, reproductive health education and awareness campaigns, reporting to the police station, and calling the toll-free number 116. As this study shows, social workers possess competencies that are represented in their understanding of strategies, which differentiates them from other education stakeholders. Even with the government of Tanzania's conflicting stance, the Child Law of 2009, as amended in 2019, still acknowledges the social worker's role in guaranteeing and promoting the accessibility of education to all children. The African Child Policy Forum (2016) highlights the education stakeholders' stance in this study, perpetuating the denial of social workers' fundamental responsibilities to advance children's rights to education. This, in turn, leads to a rise in the number of teen pregnancy in secondary schools in Igunga district.

Highlighting the inadequate knowledge of social workers' roles among secondary school stakeholders as one of the challenges experienced was the lack of clarity and awareness regarding the responsibilities of social workers in secondary school environments. The Heads of Secondary Schools (HSSs), Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), and Education Ward Officers (EWOs) still see teachers as capable of handling teen pregnancy effectively. The study revealed that stakeholders, including Heads of Secondary Schools (HSSs), Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), and Education Ward Officers (EWOs), were not well-versed in the role of social workers in schools. Three key findings emerged from the data: teachers with training in psychology, counselling, and guidance can fulfil social worker responsibilities; science teachers should be given priority when hiring new staff members. In opposition to these opinions, the Ward Police Officers argued that hiring social workers in schools would relieve some of the workload currently assigned to police stations. The lack of awareness and clarity of social workers' roles and responsibilities in diverse settings, schools in particular, is a significant setback that worsens the visibility of social work practice (Manyama, 2017). Moreover, due to inadequate knowledge of social work practices, social workers face various challenges in the Sub Sharan region, including poor working environment, little priority of the social welfare activities budget, perceived as a burden and lack of office supplies. From the presented findings, it can be recommended that in line with the current study, comprehensive research should be undertaken while covering broad areas, including social workers' involvement in Tanzania's secondary school pregnancy prevention programs. Furthermore, while putting in longer hours and handling hefty caseloads daily, they are less paid, and their contribution to the prevention of teen pregnancy is less acknowledged (Rushwaya, 2022). Therefore, this constraint explains why they lack knowledge of the role of social workers in preventing teen pregnancy in Tanzania. Deduced from the findings, social workers should be recognised

by the government as equal and capable partners in the fight against teen pregnancy in educational settings.

Further, little awareness of the strategies implemented for the prevention of teen Pregnancy among Secondary school stakeholders was identified. Apart from the social workers who demonstrated awareness and knowledge of the nine strategies, education stakeholders such as HSSs, WEOs, EWOs, and WPOs had specific interests, where few strategies were known more than others. Considering the findings, it can be deduced that social workers, since they are well acquainted with all the strategies implemented, must be allowed to implement the education setting of Tanzania, Igunga district in particular.

Contrary to the study's findings, Huxtable (2022), Rosicky & Northcott (2010) pointed out that social workers are heavily involved in family welfare in America (USA and Europe), Asia (Hong Kong and Japan), and Africa (South Africa), where special attention is given to all issues affecting children's learning and development. Furthermore, according to Reyneke (2018), social workers have a significant position when given the opportunity and recognition. Teachers and other education stakeholders in developed countries, Tanzania in particular, knowing the strategies to advance and create a conducive learning environment for children does not guarantee the expected outcome, which is the prevention of teen pregnancy in secondary school (Rosicky & Northcott (2010). Additionally, Reyneke (2018) pointed out that social workers are very instrumental in raising awareness of reproductive health, which would decrease the number of teenage pregnancy in schools. There is no question that the Tanzanian government intends to make secondary school more accessible to females; nevertheless, this noble aim should be implemented in addition to considering the possibility of hiring social workers in educational settings.

Despite the remarkable intervention of the government to implement the teen pregnancy strategies, which intend to reduce the number of girls dropping out of secondary schools, it is worth noting that without building the capacity of all education stakeholders, the intended goal will remain a mockery. The achievement of the proposed strategies should be centered around the competencies of social workers and other practitioners who would equally create a friendly learning environment for both girls and boys.

## **Conclusion**

The study's conclusions highlighted two problems: the disparities in stakeholders' knowledge of teen pregnancy prevention strategies among secondary school educators. Moreover, like most of the Sub-Saharan region, Tanzania maintains the same stance despite social workers' critical role in preventing societal problems. These two paradoxes offer a more compelling

explanation for the persistence of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Tanzania, not just in the Igunga district but throughout the country. Furthermore, it was discovered that education stakeholders such as HSS, WEO, and EWO knew little about the plans. Without public knowledge of the systems in place, government measures to minimise adolescent pregnancy in secondary schools would be futile. As a result, the government needs to intervene to encourage stakeholders in secondary school education and the general public to become more aware of the strategies.

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