



IGT CONCERNED ON THE INCREASE OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS DUE TO PREGNANCIES

IThemba for Girls Trust (IGT) is concerned with a Sunday News Report¹ dated 27 October 2019, which stated that more than 6700 girls dropped out of school in the country last year after they fell pregnant and possibly entered into unintended marriages. This revealing fact was said by an official United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) officer during a workshop held in Mazowe.

IGT notes that in recent years, a nationwide concern over the "epidemic" of teenage pregnancy has developed. Explanations for this phenomenon have ranged from poor Sexual and Reproductive Education to the consequences of the declining socio-economic environment.

Consequences of childhood and teenage pregnancies are numerous encompassing health, economic and social problems. Disadvantageous prospects exist for teenage mothers including, lower educational attainment, school dropout resulting in low income-earning and an increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases including the contraction of HIV/AIDS.

To address the challenge of teenage pregnancy and school dropouts, the Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and community leaders must adopt various strategies that target adolescents educating them on sexual reproductive health and child rights. In line with the World Health Organisation guidelines on preventing early pregnancy, States must take proactive steps which involves the advocating of abstinence before marriage, keeping girls in school beyond primary school, preventing early marriage and coerced sex as well as increasing the use of contraceptives. Programs are needed in schools to deal with such areas.

With the current Education Act in Zimbabwe the future of girls who fall pregnant is bleak as majority of the girls who fall pregnant lose their opportunity to further their education. However, progressive steps have been taken to address this as the Education Amendment Bill which has been debated in Parliament seeks to allow girls to continue with their education after they give birth. It is our belief that pregnant girls' right to education should still be respected.

¹ <https://www.sundaynews.co.zw/7-000-girls-drop-out-of-school-due-to-pregnancy/>

IGT ultimately believes that girls should have the right to control their sexual and reproductive health. The decisions on their sexual and reproductive health must be educated decisions, respecting the principles of the best interests of the child.

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