



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
Education Towers, No.5 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad

**Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services
and Public Administration:**

Request for Information

**Inquiry into the Prevalence of
Teenage Pregnancy and the
State's Capacity to Minimise
the Occurrence of Teenage
Pregnancy and Provide
Services and Assistance to
Teenage Parents**

Request for Information – re: the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and the State’s Capacity to Minimise the Occurrence of Teenage Pregnancy and Provide Services and Assistance to Teenage Parents

Findings (p 32):

- viii. The TTPS acknowledged challenges to data collection on the males involved in teenage pregnancies. For example, for the 592 perpetrators reported to the TTPS, approximately 46% of perpetrators could not be identified by age;**

Information regarding the males involved in teenage pregnancies is accessible for those who are students.

- xi. A miniscule fraction (2.48%) of teenage pregnancy cases resulted in arrest and prosecution of perpetrators between 2015 and 2019 (15 out of 606 cases of teenage pregnancy reported to the TTPS);**

Once a case of a teenage pregnancy is brought to the attention of the school personnel the requisite report is made to the TTPS.

- x. There appears to be a large disparity in the statistics captured by the MOE and MOH for the period 2014-2018/19. While the MOE recorded 169 pregnant student/student mothers, approximately 4,145 such girls received services in the RHAs. The Committee acknowledged that the MOE statistics may not account for girls whose pregnancies were not identified due to: dropping out of school, pregnancy after graduation, private school students and girls who had miscarriages or abortions. However, the Committee remained concerned about the reporting of teenage pregnancies in the public school systems;**

The MoE will strengthen collaborations amongst key internal stakeholders through the establishment of a committee and by so doing reinforce this approach. Additionally, there will be increased collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

Further, there will be increased vigilance in data collection so as to bring improvements in the public school system. The monitoring of pregnant students who drop-out of school, those who have abortions and those attending private institutions will be enhanced.

- xi. At least 6 stakeholders acknowledged the need to increase and enhance national data collection related to teenage pregnancy (MoH, MoE, FPATT, SFATT, MSDFS and TTPS). If not improved, this may hinder the Ministry’s capacity to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programmes;**

The MoE agrees that a National Plan is necessary to enhance data collection related to teen parents, which will augment each Ministry’s capacity to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of their intervention programmes. The MoE stands ready to collaborate with other Ministries under the leadership of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Additionally, the MoE recently launched the Education Management Information System (EMIS) which would facilitate greater efficiency in data collection.

Request for Information – re: the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and the State’s Capacity to Minimise the Occurrence of Teenage Pregnancy and Provide Services and Assistance to Teenage Parents

Recommendations

In light of the foregoing, the Committee recommends the following:

- iii. **That the MoE, through the SSSD, implement a system to track/monitor the female students whose pregnancy status is known to school personnel, and who withdraw/drop-out from school while pregnant or after giving birth;**

The SSSD utilises a multi-disciplinary team to track students who are pregnant and have dropped-out of the education system. SSSD will continue to enhance this tracking system to strengthen their data collection procedures and intervention strategies to provide support to students and their families.

Challenges to Service Delivery

Findings (p. 53)

Based on the preceding evidence, the Committee’s findings are as follows:

- iv. **The Committee was concerned about the implementation challenges of the HFLE in schools, given the access to accurate, holistic Sexual and Reproductive Health information equips students with knowledge to make wise sexual choices**

The Curriculum Division has provided a list of resource persons and civil societies to support schools in the implementation the SRH components of the HFLE curriculum in schools.

- vi. **There are several institutional challenges to the consistent and standardized delivery of HFLE education in government and faith-based schools, including teaching training, availability and religious/ cultural attitudes.**

The Ministry of Education continues to engage the respective Denominational Boards of Education in discussions on HFLE implementation in schools. The Curriculum Division has provided training in the delivery of HFLE curriculum to both government and government assisted schools.

Recommendations (p. 55)

In light of the foregoing, the Committee recommends the following:

- E. **That the MoE, in its response to the Committee provide an update on:**

- i. **The status of the curriculum review of the Health and Family Life Education**

The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago approved the *Spotlight Initiative* in 2020, which is a global partnership between the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) in support of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. Trinidad and Tobago was selected as one of six

Request for Information – re: the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and the State’s Capacity to Minimise the Occurrence of Teenage Pregnancy and Provide Services and Assistance to Teenage Parents

countries in the Caribbean to receive funding support for work in the area of family violence in all its aspects, with a focus on women and girls.

With support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), a curriculum review of the Health and Family Life Education curriculum and attendant teacher training were included under the *Country Programme Document* of the *Spotlight Initiative*. The review of the curriculum is scheduled for 2020, but this has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ii. Any plans for the training of secondary and primary school teachers in the delivery of HFLE for the new academic year (commencing September 2019)

The Country Programme Document of the Spotlight Initiative includes the training of teachers. Teacher training was scheduled to take place within the 2019/2020 academic year, but was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

iii. The status of recruitment efforts for additional School Social Workers in the SSSD;

There are currently nineteen (19) vacancies for School Social Workers out of a total of one hundred and forty-eight positions in the Student Supports Services Division. The Human Resource Division has put mechanisms in place to fill those vacancies. Interviews will be scheduled to take place after the restrictions to treat with the COVID-19 pandemic are lifted.

F. That the MoE in its future delivery of training to teachers in HFLE, give attention to strategies to address teachers’ potential biases and apprehensions about Sexual Reproductive Health topics that may hinder their effective delivery to students;

The Spotlight Initiative provides training for teachers as part of its project plan. Teacher training will be in alignment with the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education which can assist the Ministry in treating with teacher’s potential biases and apprehensions about SRH curriculum delivery. Additionally, the Spotlight Initiative will be developing a toolkit for teachers to administer the HFLE curriculum which may assist in this regard.

G. That the MoE, in collaboration with the NPTA, increase its outreach to parents, for the purpose of sensitisation on issues related to teenage sexuality and teenage pregnancy, and the importance of parents reporting teenage pregnancy cases to school personnel.

Efforts should be made to foster a climate in which parents are empowered with knowledge on reporting requirements, procedures, and are encouraged to report so the students’ rights can be protected and needs addressed in a timely manner.

Request for Information – re: the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and the State’s Capacity to Minimise the Occurrence of Teenage Pregnancy and Provide Services and Assistance to Teenage Parents

SSSD supports parents through conducting Parenting in Education and psycho-educational programmes as well as through support groups and home visits. In so doing, the Division collaborates with the NPTA to provide support to parents.

- H. That the SSSD, MoE, continues to give attention to the provision of psycho-education to both male and female students in primary and secondary schools on the topics related to SRH, responsible sexual behaviours etc. Consideration should be given to partnering with the FPATT in this endeavour;**

The SSSD continues to provide psycho-education through Universal Classroom sessions, which are delivered by the Guidance and Counselling Unit, and Targeted Group Intervention programmes, which are delivered by the School Social Work Unit. This two-pronged intervention targets both male and female students at the primary and secondary levels. Students are engaged in topics related to SRH, responsible sexual behaviours, and other such topics.

Findings (p. 61)

Based on the preceding evidence, the Committee’s findings are as follows:

- iii. The Committee endorses the intention of the MoE to expand its policy to include teenage fathers.**

Present operations of the MoE already include attention to teen fathers when the issue of teenage pregnancy is addressed.

Recommendations (p. 62)

- B. That in its Ministerial Response, the MoE provide an update on the revision of its policy position on teenage mothers, to include attention to teenage fathers;**

The MoE’s policy position on teenage mothers includes attention to teenage fathers.

- C. The MoE review the National School Code of Conduct Revised (2018) to ensure that it accurately cites the current provisions of the Sexual Offences Act (1986) (re: repeal of sections 6-8) and the Children’s Act (2012). This exercise should be completed within four (4) months. Consideration should also be given to specifying the Ministry’s position/role/procedure with regard to reported cases that involve decriminalized sexual activity between students (re: Children Act Section 20);**

The MoE has no objection to the Revised Code of Conduct being amended to remove the repealed indictable offences and the MOE will take the necessary steps to do so.

The Romeo Clauses in the Children Act is considered to have decriminalised sexual activity between children/students in some cases. These clauses are stated in Section 20 of the Act. Furthermore, with respect to the Romeo Clause, the matter must still be reported to the Child

Request for Information – re: the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and the State’s Capacity to Minimise the Occurrence of Teenage Pregnancy and Provide Services and Assistance to Teenage Parents

Protection Unit of the TTPS in order to facilitate their investigations and to determine if the matter is in adherence to the Romeo Clause. It remains in the purview of the TTPS to decide whether the act was illegal or not.

The Procedural Guidelines in Student Support Services Division, Social Work Unit for all sexual offenses are as follows:

1. A School Social Worker conducts an interview with student
2. A report is to be made at Police Station. (Principal/Teacher/Guidance Officer/School Social Worker). The first person the student reports the information to is required to make the report.
3. Parents must be informed of the report by Principal/ School Social Worker/Police Officers.
4. Parent/Police to ensure that an examination of the pregnant teen is conducted by the District Medical Hospital/ Clinic
5. An incident report must be completed and submitted within two (2) hours after incident is known.
6. Referrals and supporting documents to be requested from school principal (for students who have not been referred to SSSD).
7. Follow up with School personnel, Police, Student and Parent the next day following the incident to ensure that protocols are followed.
8. Status report to be submitted after initial intervention with student. Depending on the severity of the case a daily verbal report must be made to the Senior School Social Worker and a weekly written update on status and School Social Worker’s intervention.
9. Social Work must continue therapeutic intervention with student
10. A follow up with medical report may be required and police are to ensure legal that proceedings are continuing.