



## Understanding the Experiences of Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents in Blantyre, Southern Malawi

### BACKGROUND

This is a summary of the findings from a study conducted in Blantyre District, Southern Malawi by the Centre for Social Research (CSR), University of Malawi, and the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC). We examined how early and unintended pregnancy culminates in the social exclusion of adolescent mothers and explored interventions that could ensure their educational and economic empowerment.

### METHODS

We conducted a quantitative survey of 669 pregnant and parenting girls and qualitative interviews with 18 pregnant or parenting girls, 10 parenting boys, 16 parents/guardians, four teachers, three policymakers and six community leaders and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### Livelihoods

- Most girls were unemployed and had difficulty paying for their daily needs including personal hygiene products, food, and baby supplies. A married, 18-year-old girl explained how she relied on her partner for money and material supplies, particularly soap, to wash her baby's clothes. She stated:

*"... if things don't go well, he comes home without soap, so I end up washing the baby's nappies without soap (18-year-old PPA, EA 29, TA Lundu, Blantyre).*



QUANTITATIVE SURVEY



+669  
pregnant and parenting girls



10  
Parenting boys



18  
Pregnant or parenting girls

- Several PPAs experienced food insecurity during and after pregnancy. Some PPAs believed the main reason they fell sick during pregnancy was hunger.

### Childcare

- Most parenting adolescents reported they were taking care of their children alone. Those who received childcare support primarily received it from their mothers or grandmothers.
- Six out of ten girls received support from the child's father. However, they noted that the support was often not enough

“  
*He usually sends money, but it's always not enough to support the baby on the daily needs*  
 19-year-old PPA, EA 78, TA Kapeni, Blantyre  
 ”

### Schooling

- Nearly one out of every two (48%) girls had dropped out of school because they got pregnant. Most (94%) were out of school at the time of the survey.
- Three out of every four girls who were not in school (75.1%) reported that they would like to go back to school.
- Key barriers to school reentry include poverty, parental opposition to schooling, stigma, psychological distress, limited social support, and lack of child care support.



KEY BARRIERS TO SCHOOL  
**REENTRY**

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on consultations with study participants, key stakeholders from civil society organizations, and national and subnational government, we recommend the following:

- The Ministry of Gender, Community Development, and Social Welfare and stakeholders should extend the social cash transfer program to pregnant and parenting girls who are experiencing severe livelihood challenges. They could establish loan schemes and/or provide startup capital to support these girls to establish income generating activities.
- Relevant government ministries, teachers, mothers' groups, parents, NGOs, and developmental partners should work together to enable pregnant and parenting girls' re-entry in school, and their retention in school. This could be achieved by providing educational support (like school fees and other school materials) and child care support.

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**See full report:** APHRC and CSR 2022. Understanding the experiences of pregnant and parenting adolescents in Blantyre, Southern Malawi. APHRC, Nairobi, Kenya