

## **Causes of Teenage Pregnancy in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Teenage pregnancy is a global concern with far reaching impacts on education and the health status of the girl child. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) reports about 21 million cases of teenage pregnancy are recorded annually with majority of the cases being reported in Sub-Sahara Africa. Kenya is among the countries in Sub-Sahara Africa affected the burden of teenage pregnancy. It is estimated that approximately 3000 girls drop out of school annually in Kenya due to teenage pregnancy. Among the Counties in Kenya, Kakamega is one of the most affected in terms of teenage pregnancies. Hence this study aimed at identifying the root causes behind the high cases of teenage pregnancies in Kakamega Central Sub-County. The study was conducted in the 17 secondary public schools in Kakamega Central Sub-County. Structured questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from principals, expectant teens and teen mothers, guidance and counseling teachers and class teachers. The collected data was analyzed on descriptive and frequencies using the statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) version 20. The analyzed data showed that peer pressure, poverty levels, parental negligence, drug abuse, ignorance among the adolescents and bodaboda riders are among the causes of teenage pregnancies in the region. The study showed that, Peer pressure among the adolescents, sexual violence, parental inefficiencies/ negligence and drug abuse were the most prominent causes of teenage pregnancies in the region. Bodaboda means of transport was also emerging as a new cause of teenage pregnancy in the region. As a measure to control or reduce the cases of experienced teenage pregnancies in Kakamega Sub-County and the entire Country, the study proposes frequent awareness of peer pressure and sexual education both in schools and in our homes so that the children are well exposed to the dangers of early sexual activities. The County government and the National government should empower the families below the poverty levels so that the parents are able to provide the basic and social needs to their adolescent girl children. The issue of bodaboda riders luring the young girls into sexual activities and resulting to early teenage pregnancies should be handled seriously by the court of law such that the culprits are dealt with by the full wrath of the law.

**Key words:** Teenage pregnancy; peer pressure; bodaboda (means of transport); drug abuse

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Teenage pregnancy is a global concern with far reaching impacts on education and the health status of the girl child<sup>1</sup>. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) reports about 21 million cases of teenage pregnancy are recorded annually with majority of the cases being reported in Sub-Sahara Africa<sup>2,3</sup>. Teenage pregnancy is not only hitting the developing countries mainly characterized by low income and poor health facilities but also affecting the developed countries though at low rates<sup>1</sup>.

Among the developed countries, the United States America (USA) is the leading in teenage pregnancy incidences with about 60% of the total cases which is about four times the cases reported in the entire European Union (EU)<sup>4</sup>. The high cases of teenage pregnancy in USA are attributed to inappropriate intervention measures and ineffective sexual educational approaches hence calling for the US government to put up policies prioritizing teenage pregnancy as an issue of national concern<sup>5</sup>. In the European Union, the worst hit countries include Ukraine, Macedonia, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, United Kingdom and Belarus<sup>1</sup>. Other countries outside European Union e.g. China have also reported high cases of teenage pregnancy. According to Wang *et al.*<sup>6</sup> teenage pregnancies in China has emerged as a public health concern with most cases being reported within the municipalities with cases having increased from 35.1% in 1996 to estimated 44% in 2006.

World Health Organization (WHO) reports indicates that Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has the highest cumulative prevalence of teenage pregnancy compared to other regions in the world<sup>2</sup>. This situation makes SSA countries to experience difficult moments in accommodating and addressing teenage pregnancy and pregnant

mothers at school<sup>7</sup>. Despite the existence of policies and strategies, in the region, teenagers still get pregnant and consequently terminate their education<sup>7</sup>. With the outbreak of the Corona Virus (COVID-19) the World Vision predicted that approximately one million girls across SSA region may fail to return to school due to teenage pregnancy as a result of COVID-19 school closure<sup>8</sup>. The closures of schools due to COVID-19 is a threatening phenomenon because this has led to an increase in teenage pregnancy cases among the sub-Saharan Africa region unless the governments and relevant stakeholders or partners act immediately<sup>2</sup>.

Kenya is among the countries in Sub-Sahara Africa affected the burden of teenage pregnancy<sup>2</sup>. It is estimated that approximately 3000 girls drop out of school annually in Kenya due to teenage pregnancy<sup>9</sup>. According United Nations Population Fund Report on global reproductive health, about 378, 397 teenage pregnancies case among girls who are aged 10-19 years between the month July 2016 to the month of June 2017 were recorded in Kenya<sup>10</sup>. A number of factors are speculated to be the reasons behind the high cases of teenage pregnancy in Kenya some being the poverty index and literacy levels as well as the cultural practices<sup>1</sup>. The outbreak of corona virus pandemic COVID-19 which lead to prolonged closure of schools worsen the situation as the cases of Teenage pregnancy with African Institute for Development policy (AFIDEP) in comparison with Kenya Health Information Systems (KHIS) statistics showing that cases of teenage pregnancy increased by approximately 41% (153000) cases between March to June 2020<sup>11</sup>.

Several counties have reported high cases of teenage pregnancy between the months of January and July 2020 with Kakamega County being the second most affected with 6686 cases of teenage pregnancies<sup>11</sup>. It further indicated that, approximately 8% of school going children in the County fall victim to teenage pregnancy and they are either pregnant or have delivered. Kakamega central having 17 secondary schools registered approximately 1,400 cases of teenage pregnancy between January and July 2020<sup>11</sup>. These statistics have rattled not only parents and teachers but also health workers, administrators and crime prevention agencies. The concerned bodies have tried to come up with measures to curb the situation with little success. This is attributed to the inadequate information on the real causes and factors contributing to the high teenage pregnancies. Hence this current study aimed at identifying the actual causes of high teenage pregnancy cases in Kakamega Central in Kakamega County.

## **II. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Study location**

The study was carried out in Kakamega Central Sub-County in Kakamega County. The area was selected because it has so far recorded the highest cases of teenage pregnancy in Kakamega County. Kakamega County as a whole is also hardly hit with teenage pregnancy cases coming second after Nairobi County.

### **Target Population**

The study targeted expectant and teen mothers (1400), principals (17) guidance and counselling teachers (17) from the seventeen (17) public secondary schools in Kakamega central.

### **Sample size**

A sample size of 40 respondents was selected from the study population. The sample size included, five principals, five guidance and counseling teachers, five class teachers and twenty-five expectants and teen mothers who were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling was used to select the respective principals, class teachers and guidance and counselling teachers because this group of respondents is considered to have critical information to answer the research questions in this study.

### **Data collection**

Open ended questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from the sampled respondents that included the principals, expectant teens and teen mothers, guidance and counseling teachers and class teachers. The expectant teens and teen mothers were subjected to interviews while the principals, guidance and counseling teachers and class teachers were subjected to questionnaires. The questionnaires and the interviews were skewed to the possible causes that could have led to the pregnancies.

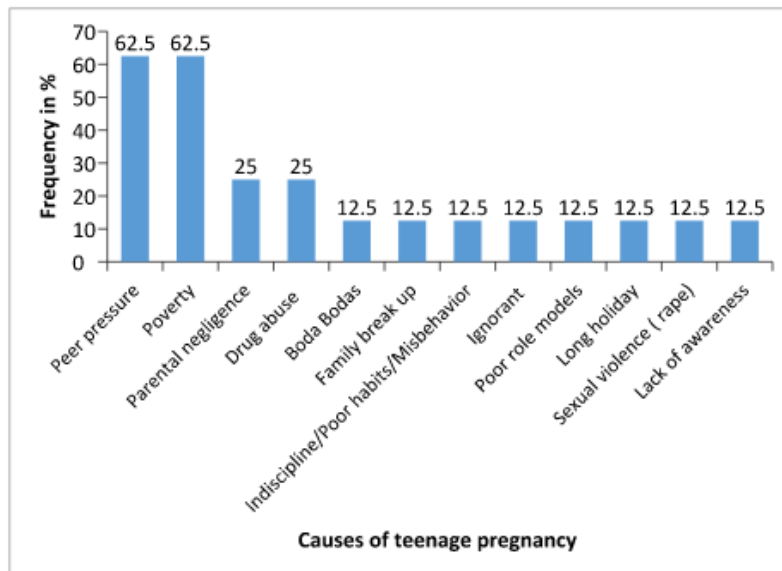
### **Data analysis**

The collected data was entered into excel sheet, cleaned, coded before calculating descriptive statistic and frequencies using the Statistical Package for social Sciences (SPSS) program version 20. The analyzed data were presented as bar graphs.

## **III. RESULTS**

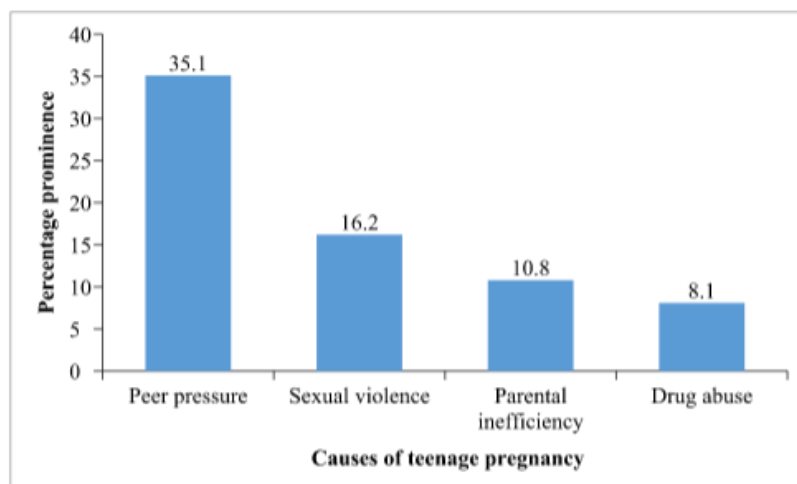
The study objective was to find out causes of the high teenage pregnancy cases and their possible intervention measures in Kakamega Central Sub-County, Kakamega County. Among the causes peer pressure and poverty were ranked top with 63% of the respondents agreeing to it. Other cause were parental negligence at 25%, Drug abuse (25%), unstable families and family breakups contributing to 12.5 % of the cases. Sexual violence (rape), ignorance and lack of awareness on sexual matters among the adolescent each contributed to about 12.5% of the cases based on the responses given by the respondents. Long holidays for instance, the

Corona virus (COVID-19) holiday also exposes the adolescent girls to early pregnancy (12.5%). Unique to the Kakamega County and Western region as a whole is the issue of bodaboda as they lure the young girls to sexual activities leading to unwanted pregnancies (12.5%). The franking was as shown in figure 1 below.



*Figure : General causes of teenage pregnancy in public secondary schools in Kakamega central Sub –county, Kenya*

The causes of teenage pregnancy listed above were ranked on their prominence and peer pressure still remained as the main cause with 35.1 percent of the respondents agreeing that it is the major cause, sexual violence from strangers and next of kin coming second with 16.2% while parental inefficiency and drug abuse coming third and fourth with 10.8% and 8.1% respectively as presented in figure 2.



*Figure : Teenage pregnancy causes ranking based on their prominence*

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Teenage pregnancy cases in Kakamega County and in the Country have been on the rise<sup>1, 12</sup>. Several studies have been done around the issue of teenage practices and their impact on girl child education and health status. This study aimed at identifying the actual causes of high teenage pregnancy cases experienced in Kakamega County specifically Kakamega Central Sub-county. The study results indicated that peer pressure among the adolescents, sexual violence cases, parental inefficiencies and drug abuse as the main causes of teenage pregnancy cases among the teenagers in Kakamega Central Sub-County. The study results were in agreement with the previous study on the factors contributing to high rate of teen pregnancy in Mtwara region, Tanzania by Makundi in 2010 which established that 24.2% of the teenagers are influenced by peer pressure, poverty and parental negligence<sup>13</sup>. A study by ThobeJane conducted in Matjitjileng Village South Africa also

categorized peer pressure as the main contributor to teenage pregnancy<sup>14</sup>. Peer pressure is the direct influence on people by peers, or the effect on an individual who is encouraged and wants to follow their peers by changing their attitudes, values or behaviors to conform to those of the influencing group or individual. Most of the adolescents do not have their own moral stands and many times they want to look like or do like what their friends do. It is at this stage that they engage themselves in romantic intimate relationships which end up in unplanned pregnancies. The youth at this stage also tend to involve themselves in drug abuse such as alcohol of which if ladies are involved they may end up engaging in sexual activities without their moral concept<sup>15</sup>.

Parental inefficiency has also been categorized as a contributor to unwanted teenage pregnancies by the study results corroborating the findings by Sekiwunga and Whyte in Uganda where they reported that poor parenting played a role in the experienced high teenage pregnancies<sup>16</sup>. This is highly attributed to our African culture where parents don't talk matters to do with their sexuality with their children. Some parents exhibit loose morals before their children hence they grow knowing that these things are normal and so they start engaging in them<sup>16</sup>. According to United Nation Population Fund report of 2013, family disorganization largely contributes to early teenage pregnancy in that there is little or no love offered to the children in such households hence they seek love elsewhere<sup>17</sup>. In some dysfunctional families' children are rejected by the parents and fail to provide for them hence subjecting them to sexual activities as they find solace in young men hands were they feel loved as compared to their families<sup>17</sup>.

The study results also showed that poverty levels contribute to early teenage pregnancy. This concurs with the study by Oke which showed a positive correlation between teenage pregnancy and poverty levels of the families<sup>18</sup>. High poverty levels in most family exposes the teenage girls to premature sexual activities with older men who are able to provide for their social needs which their parents cannot afford. Sekiwunga and White argues that teenagers born and grown in poverty are likely to engage in prostitution so as to meet their basic and social needs<sup>16</sup>. Most studies have been associating teenage pregnancy with other social activities such as engaging to illegal drug abuse but current study is showing that bodaboda riders are coming up as a new social factor contributing to early teenage pregnancy especially in the Western Kenya region where bodaboda is one of the means of transport. From surveys conducted, its coming out that the bodaboda riders lure your girls to sexual activities in return for free ride especially when they are going and coming from school findings supported by Ondiek et al.<sup>19</sup> in her study on Economic Determinants of Sexual Debut among In-School Adolescents in Rural Kenya.

## **V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Teenage pregnancy cases are on the rise in Kakamega Central Sub-County. A number factors which include; peer pressure, parental negligence, family breakups, sexual violence, drug abuse, poverty levels, lack of awareness on consequences of sexual activities and bodaboda riders have been attributed to be the causes contributing to the high pregnancy cases in Kakamega Central Sub-County.

Peer pressure among the adolescents, sexual violence, parental inefficiencies/ negligence and drug abuse were ranked as the major cause of high teenage pregnancy in Kakamega Central Sub-County.

Emergence of bodaboda as a major means of transport is coming up as another major cause of teenage pregnancy in the region.

### **Recommendations**

As a measure to control or reduce the cases of experienced teenage pregnancies in Kakamega Sub-County and the entire Country, the study proposes frequent awareness of peer pressure and sexual education both in schools and in our homes so that the children are well exposed to the dangers of early sexual activities.

The County government and the National government should empower the families below the poverty levels so that the parents are able to provide the basic and social needs to their adolescent girl children.

The issue of bodaboda riders luring the young girls into sexual activities and resulting to early teenage pregnancies should be handled seriously by the court of law such that the culprits are dealt with by the full wrath of the law.

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