

Investigating the Role of Local Community in Preventing Teenage Girls' Pregnancy in Nyandarua North Sub-County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the local community's role in preventing teenage girls' pregnancy in Nyandarua North Sub-county, Kenya. The study applied Social Cognitive Theory, using a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design; data was collected from a target population of 14 chiefs from the fourteen locations within the sub-county and 27,917 households. An accessible population of 569 households was identified to take part in the research-using cluster, purposive and snowballing sampling. All chiefs in the fourteen locations took part in the study. The data was obtained through interviews and questionnaires. The instruments were systematically assessed for validity through review by experts in the School of Education Kabarak University and by carrying out a pilot study comprising 30 households in Nyandarua Central Sub- County to ensure questionnaires gathered the information required by the study. Qualitative data was analysed descriptively, which was further analysed using version 24.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study also found that community-initiated projects for mentoring teen girls are present in the location from information gathered from chiefs, but most girls were not aware of this. In addition, it was noted that teen girls are dating older men, especially Boda Boda operators. The study recommended that Chiefs and members of the community should undertake a thorough awareness campaign through churches, chief barazas and schools and encourage collective parenting of all teenagers within the area.

Key Terms: Teenage girls' pregnancy, local community.

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INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a conception of pregnancy that ensues for girls between 13 and 19 years of age (Yohannes et al., 2018). Teenage pregnancy is widely considered a global crisis due to the social-economic and health risks associated with it and should not be treated insouciantly (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). WHO also states that Underage pregnancy is a worldwide societal issue that has a negative impact on adolescent girls' future. Findings by Thomas et al. (2019) revealed that about 16 million minors aged between 15 and 19 years are found to conceive per year. In addition, Thomas et al. (2019) continue to report that this number makes up about 11 per cent of all births worldwide. Therefore, adolescent pregnancy, births, and related negative consequences remain a challenge in several countries.

According to Steitieh (2021), during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, a surge in teen pregnancies was reported nationally were in excess of 152000 teenage girls in Kenya became pregnant between March and May 2020. Nyandarua North sub-county had more than 857 cases of girls aged from 10 to 19 years who were impregnated between January and June of the same year (National Council for Population Distribution report (NCPD), 2020). Notably, the statistics only included cases recorded in the health sector, so there could have been many more pregnant teenagers who did not go to the health facilities. Teenage pregnancy is a serious problem in Kenya, and it must remain at the top of the government's political agenda. It only comes up in public conversation when there is a surge in which it will be buried, and life goes on as usual. Teenage pregnancies may be ascribed to parental/caregivers', religious leaders, political leaders, and other stakeholders' resistance to sexual and reproductive health issues, despite rising evidence that young people are commencing sex earlier than in the past. Proven strategies such as comprehensive sexuality education are being omitted since they are perceived to encourage young people to engage in sexual activity. Pregnancy and health

issues, shame, alienation, and abuse by partners, parents, and classmates are severe consequences for pregnant underage females. Another consequence is increased cases of school dropouts. The surge in teenage pregnancies was reported at a time when teenagers were at home, and the government had directed that all schools and places of worship be shut down so that the effects of the pandemic could be mitigated. It is critical that evidence plays a vital role in identifying strategies that can solve the problem at its source. Against this backdrop, this research sought to investigate the efficacy of parental and community guidance in preventing pregnancy among teenagers in Nyandarua North Sub-County to come up with recommendations on how the challenge can be addressed in the area and the country at large.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Smetana (2017) argues that the local community is vital in teenage pregnancy prevention by mobilising all population segments. Smetana says that this can be accomplished by motivating community members and organisations to take steps to facilitate progress by mobilising energy, disseminating knowledge, attracting support, and encouraging cooperation between the public and private sectors. Solanke et al. (2019) view community as a vehicle for promoting knowledge, skills & behaviours among young people. Consequently, this assists the community in governance, promoting health, and reducing maladaptive behaviour amongst teenagers. Kemigisha et al. (2019), in a study, affirmed that effective guidance of youths on sexual matters requires a concerted effort by all members of the community. To achieve this end, cooperation from members of the community is imperative. Musyimi et al. (2020) agree with this by stating that community members should co-exist harmoniously. Nevertheless, this is a theoretical assumption and may not reflect the ideal situation in Kenyan communities or may not be what is happening on the ground.

One of the states in the USA has encouraged the incorporation of community-based guidance programs within the schools (Wodon et al., 2017). In South Carolina, the integrated society school strategies for reduction and minimising of teenage pregnancy that in 2019 rebranded to fact forward is an in-depth program (Laurenzi et al., 2020). The program has nine components, including teacher training, comprehensive learning on sex for 12-year-olds, availability of doctors to offer guidance on disease prevention and linking with churches in offering individualised guidance to the youth. The idea behind this strategy is to assist in curbing teen pregnancy. According to WHO (2018), earlier evaluation of the program indicated that it was effective in lowering teenage pregnancy rates, but the rates resumed to initial levels when the strategy was halted. Butler and Jenkins (2019) discussed the program that has been implemented in Hartford city, USA. A strategy that has linked the city with public schools has sought to eliminate teen pregnancy. The strategy incorporates promoting abstinence among the youth, conducting open dialogue on sex matters, and providing opportunities for teenagers to interact with guidance and counselling personnel. In addition, a comprehensive form of education is provided to teenagers addressing issues to do with sexuality and dangers that face those who engage in risky sexual conduct (Kemigisha et al., 2019). However, the way communities are organised in the USA could be dissimilar to the Kenyan context. While the role of the local community in the prevention of teenage pregnancy is well defined and managed, this cannot be assumed to be the case with local communities in Kenya.

State and community-based agencies have had to partner with local health centres to strengthen the application of evidence-based recommendations for teenage reproductive health care, and that is according to Wado et al. (2019). The use of relatively reliable contraceptives and youth satisfaction programs has been related to the application of these guidelines. As required, youth involved in evidence-based interventions were also connected to

participating health centres for sexual and reproductive health services.

According to Solanke et al. (2019), appreciation is growing among teenagers to community programs that aid them in making choices relating to their future. An example of such a program that aims at lowering sexual activity among adolescents is the Abstinence-Only Program. The strategy incorporates equipping knowledge and skills on sexuality to the youth, use disciplined youth as peer leaders, and linking with churches in offering individualised instructions to teenagers. The idea regarding this program is to have greater changes in the community to reduce teenage pregnancy. The program has been effective in lowering teenage pregnancy in areas where it has been applied. However, though the study demonstrates that local community strategy can be effective, this does not mean that this is working for Nyandarua County, and thus this study was carried out to establish this.

Nkata et al. (2019) argued that teenage girls' opportunities for education and jobs are dramatically reduced when they become pregnant and bears a child. A young father's chances will be harmed if he drops out of school to help support his family. Parents or guardians of adolescents may share the responsibility of caring for neglected children. Children born into such situations are more likely to have low birth weight, health complications, and a lower chance of achieving their maximum capabilities (Ajayi & Okeke, 2019). Ajayi and Okeke argue that many communities have responded to the task of reducing teenage pregnancy by implementing broad-based services that include a diverse range of people. Key neighbourhood leaders and grassroots organisations are involved in these projects. They put together people from colleges, faith-based organisations and other aspects of the city who are concerned about the problem or want to help solve it.

In Kenya, Miriti and Mutua (2019) observe that there are a variety of ways through which community partnership can

be fostered to prevent teenage pregnancy. According to Miriti and Mutua (2019), communal meetings can be set up where teens can meet to discuss sexuality education, violence, and drug abuse. Obiero et al. (2018) argue that local administrators, parents and caregivers can be incorporated within a program where they participate together with teenagers in assisting them in selecting activities that help them make correct choices and delay sexual initiation. The role of the local community is to encourage meeting educational goals by teenagers, foster responsible behaviour as well as alleviate challenges facing teenagers. The researchers here are stating what should be done but are not demonstrating if the local community approach has been employed and if it has been effective in the prevention of teenage pregnancy.

In many Kenyan cultures, teenage pregnancy is a serious issue, and the local community seems to have accepted this as an ordinary occurrence to live with (Mang'atu & Kisimbii, 2019). Often teenagers want to engage in sexual activity before committing to a loving relationship (Wado et al., 2019). In addition, Wado et al. note that many sexually active women do not utilise contraception, placing them at risk of undesired pregnancies and STDs. In their research, Langat et al. (2020) found that unsafe sexual behaviour has implications for teenagers, their families, children they may bear, and the general population. The researchers here appear to suggest that the local community is aware of teenage pregnancy, but little effort is being made to prevent it. It is important to find out whether this is the situation concerning the role played by the local community in Nyandarua North sub-County.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Effective guidance of youths on sexual matters requires a concerted effort by all community members (Kemigisha et al., 2019). According to Solanke et al. (2019), appreciation is growing among teenagers to community programs that support them in making choices relating to their future. However, according to the information provided by the key

respondents, community-initiated projects for mentoring teen girls with a view to preventing teen pregnancies in Nyandarua North sub-county are not there. On the other hand, most of the chiefs interviewed indicated that there were community-initiated projects based at the location level. However, the chiefs observed that several factors undermined the projects. These factors included inadequate funding of the projects; teens are not aware of the existence of the mentoring sessions as well a lack of properly trained persons to effectively implement the projects. As a result, most of the teen girls indicated that they have never attended the mentoring sessions, a factor that could contribute to the surge in teenage pregnancies within the Nyandarua North sub-county. According to the teen girls, for the mentoring sessions to be effective, several factors need to be put in place among them; empowering members of the community through the provision of adequate funds to enable them to carry out awareness campaigns on teenage pregnancy prevention, educating them on ways and means of handling teens through capacity building and educating teen parents/caregivers on how to support teenagers.

The chiefs interviewed pointed out that the main causes that have contributed to a surge in teen pregnancies within Nyandarua North sub-county were; teen girls dating older men, especially Boda Boda operators, idleness and lack of recreation activities, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic period when schools and places of worship had been shut down, inadequate sexuality information among teenagers, peer pressure, sexual experimentation, media influence, poverty, failure to use contraceptives, a parental absence where there is no monitoring or supervision of teen's activities, leaving in small rental houses where some parents expose their children to sex as well as increased substance abuse like alcohol by teenagers. According to chiefs, the consequences of the surge in teen pregnancies within the sub-county have been due to increased poverty among households since they do not have enough resources to care for the young ones, increased school

dropouts, and health problems to teen girls who become pregnant.

Chiefs further indicated that the government has embarked on measures to curb teen pregnancies within the area; some of the measures are the provision of sanitary towels to teen girls from poor backgrounds who may be vulnerable and chiefs ensuring that all teenagers are teenagers within their locations are going to school. In addition, the chiefs noted that the members of the community are key players in preventing teen pregnancies through being positive role models adopting collective responsibility in parenting teenagers within the community; some chiefs suggested the reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools and at home and indulging community members in youth participation programs such as sports and talent training of teenagers so that they can inculcate societal norms and values, offer guidance to teens as they make informed decisions about their future. The fourth question was to identify the role played by the local community in curbing teenage pregnancy, where it was established that members should undertake collective parenting and act as role models to the teens.

According to the information provided by teen girls, community-initiated projects for mentoring with a view to preventing teen pregnancies in Nyandarua North sub-county are not there. The chiefs interviewed indicated that there were community-initiated projects that were based at the location level. However, the chiefs observed that the projects were undermined by several factors that included inadequate funding of the projects, teens lacking awareness of the existence of the mentoring sessions, and a lack of properly trained persons to effectively implement the projects. Teen girls indicated that they have never attended the mentoring sessions in the community. On the other hand, they intimated that for the sessions to be effective, several factors need to be put in place, which includes empowering members of the community through the provision of adequate funds to enable them to carry

out awareness campaigns on teenage pregnancy prevention, educating community members on ways and means of handling teens through capacity building and educating teen parents/caregivers on how to support teenagers.

According to chiefs, the main causes of a surge in teen pregnancies within Nyandarua North sub-county were; teen girls dating older men, especially Boda Boda operators, idleness and lack of recreation activities during the Covid-19 pandemic period when schools and places of worship had been shut down, inadequate sexuality information among teenagers, peer pressure, sexual experimentation, media influence, poverty, failure to use contraceptives, a parental absence that leads to reduced monitoring or supervision of teen's activities, parents leaving in small rental houses where some children get exposed to sex as well as increased alcohol and substance abuse by teenagers.

Moreover, chiefs intimated those consequences of a surge in teen pregnancies within the sub-county are increased poverty among households, increased rate of school dropouts and health problems to the affected teen girls. The chiefs reported that the government has put in place measures to avert teen pregnancies within the Nyandarua North, which include the provision of sanitary towels to vulnerable teen girls and the government through chiefs ensuring that all teenagers within their locations are going to school. On the role of community members, the chiefs noted that they play a pivotal role in preventing teen pregnancies by providing positive role models and adoption of collective responsibility when parenting teenagers. On teen pregnancy prevention, several chiefs who were interviewed suggested the reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools and at home, engaging members of the community in youth participation programs and offering guidance to teens to enable them to make informed decisions about their future.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: The study established that community-initiated projects for mentoring teen girls are present in the location from information gathered from chiefs. However, most teen girls mentioned that they were not aware of their existence. This is an indicator of ineffective mentorship programs in the community, which may contribute to a surge in teen pregnancy. In addition, most teen girls indicated that they have never attended the mentoring sessions, a factor that could contribute to the surge in teenage pregnancies within the Nyandarua North sub-county. Chiefs noted that several effective factors should be put in place for mentoring sessions to be. These factors are; empowering members of the community through the provision of adequate funds to enable them to carry out awareness campaigns on teenage pregnancy prevention, educating community members on ways and means of handling teens through capacity building and educating parents/caregivers on how to support teenagers. The major

causes of a surge in teen pregnancy within Nyandarua North, as noted by the majority of the chiefs interviewed, were; teen girls dating older men, especially Boda Boda operators, idleness due to lack of recreation activities, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic period when schools and places of worship had been shut down, inadequate sexuality information, peer pressure, sexual experimentation, media influence, poverty, failure to use contraceptives, parental absence, leaving in small rental houses where some parents expose their children to sex as well as increased alcohol and substance abuse by teenagers.

Recommendation: Chiefs and members of the community should undertake a thorough campaign through churches, chief barazas and schools to create more awareness of the existence of the programs in the sub-county. Secondly, chiefs should encourage community members to adopt collective parenting of all teenagers within the area so that they act as role models.

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