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Abstract

This study sought to determine the impact of social-cultural norms on the rise in teen pregnancy in Kilifi County. According to hospital records, Kilifi County has a high rate of female births. The study used a cross-sectional survey design based on the Psychosocial Theory of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. In Kilifi County, the target population consisted of 700 pregnant teenage mothers, 500 household heads, 300 nurses (midwives), and 70 sub-county children officers. A sample of 70 pregnant teenage mothers, 50 household heads, 30 nurses (midwives), and seven sub-county child welfare officers. The study employed questionnaires and interview schedules. Quantitative data was evaluated using descriptive statistical tools such as mean, percentage, and frequency. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect data from 70 pregnant teenage mothers, 50 household heads, and 30 midwives. Data from 7 child welfare officers was gathered using interview schedules. Tables, graphs, and charts were used to present the information. A thematic analysis was used to organize and compile qualitative data. For ethical considerations, authority was sought from Kenyatta University's graduate school, a permit was obtained from NACOSTI and the ethics committee, and information collected was kept confidential and anonymous. According to the findings, social-cultural norms, poverty, a lack of sex education, inactive child protection policies, and parental marital status (divorce) all had a significant impact on teenage pregnancy in Kilifi. The findings indicate that there is a high rate of teen pregnancy in the area. Empowering low-income families, conducting sex education, and demonstrating the consequences of negative social and cultural norms and practices are recommended.

Keywords: *Cultural Norms, Teenage, Pregnancy, Kilifi County, Kenya*

1.0 Background of the Study

Teenage pregnancy refers to the occurrence of pregnancy in individuals aged between 9 and 20 years. Annually, approximately 16 million adolescent females aged 15 to 19 experience childbirth on a global scale. This is concerning, as the majority of girls under the age of 20 are typically still attending school (Gwido & Alemu, 2015). Many adolescents who abandon their education face difficulties when attempting to reenroll due to their inability to provide for their offspring. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest incidence of teenage pregnancies worldwide. Odimegwu and Mkwanzani (2016) report that Niger has the highest rate of teenage female births, with 203 births per 1000 girls. This is followed by Mali (175), Angola (166), Mozambique (142), and Guinea (141 and below). Socio-cultural factors, such as early initiation ceremonies, contribute to teenage pregnancy in Tanzania by influencing sexual practices. The unaddressed socio-cultural practices in Africa are contributing to the prevalence of teenage pregnancies. According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Surveys (KDHS, 2008/2009), a study conducted in Kenya found that 14.8% of teenagers aged 15 to 19 were either pregnant or married with one or two children. It is preferable for individuals in this age group to be enrolled in secondary school. The rate of pregnancy in Kilifi is 21.8 percent, which amounts to 7050 cases in 2021. Girls were particularly vulnerable as they were unable to attend school due to the coronavirus pandemic. The most recent adolescent pregnancy report at the Kilifi County Hospital indicates that between January and May 2020, there were over 3000 teenagers who became pregnant in Kilifi County. Among them, 75 were between the ages of 10 and 14 (Oduor & Kithuka, 2020).

1.1 Problem Statement

According to the Kenyan Constitution 2010, the Big Four Agenda, and Vision 2030, every student has a right to quality education (UNESCO,2017). However, one of the hindrances to this has been the teenage pregnancies that are affecting girls between the age of 10-19 years of age. Kenya recorded approximately 266105 teenage pregnancies aged 15-19 and 13821 aged 10- 14 in 2023 alone. The prevalence rate of 28.9% indicates that 3376 young girls in Kilifi County have become pregnant, ranking among the highest in Kenya. Some of the consequences that have resulted from this include dropping out of school and maternal deaths(UNICEF,2018). Despite the high number of teenage pregnancies, there is less research that has been conducted on this.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To determine the effect of social cultural norms in the rise of teenage pregnancies in KilifiCounty.

1.3 Research Question

What are the social cultural norms leading to the rise in teenage pregnancies in Kilifi County?

2.0 Literature Review

According to Goodman (2019), the idea was to make the point that culture is made up of a people's particular behaviors and has a dual role in unifying and, more crucially, directing them towards a common goal. This is where culture gets its name from: the unique customs of a particular group. Studies conducted in the United States reveal that among Hispanic immigrants, sexuality is frequently taboo and that parental communication around sexuality is frequently inadequate in Hispanic homes (Meneses,2016). Despite youth in Brazil accepting sex, a report reveals that talking openly about sex is still frowned upon. Contrarily, discussions about sexuality remain taboo in the family despite a changing environment in which sex is perceived by kids and adolescents as

acceptable activity (Souza, 2016). In Brazil, sexual education is a hotly debated topic and contraception is not freely mentioned in schools. In order to establish the effect of cultural factors on teenage pregnancies, Onyango (2017) undertook a study in Kenya. According to his outcomes, he concluded that archaic cultural practices and beliefs, such as early marriage, women inheritance, female genital mutilation, and the notion that all women are "breeding machines," have changed how men view ladies. According to studies conducted in Kenya, men in general and dads in particular avoid talking about sexual matters. The topic of sex is taboo. (Manu, 2015) investigated the issue of who informs children about sex and discovered that mothers were found to be substantially more inclined to do so than fathers. Kenyan schools and homes offer virtually little instruction on sexuality. Comprehensive sex education for adolescents is rare, and teachers frequently lack the necessary skills or knowledge.

3.0 Research Methods

The study used questionnaires and interview schedules for the respondents. Structured questionnaires were given to the pregnant teenage mothers, household heads, and nurses (midwives), and the interview schedules were given to the children's sub-county welfare officers. A sample size of 70 pregnant teenagers, 50 household heads, and 30 nurses (midwives) was chosen randomly and given the structured questionnaires. Data from 7 children sub-county welfare officers was also collected using interview schedules. The data was evaluated using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistical tools such as average or mean percentages and frequencies were used to assess quantitative data.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Out of the 70 distributed surveys, 65 were completed and submitted, representing 91% of all respondents. This completion rate exceeds the 50% threshold typically considered fair for survey participation. Regarding education levels, 88.57% of respondents had acquired basic education. Only 11.43% had completed college, while 7.14% did not provide a response. Education's Role in Teenage Pregnancy: Education plays a protective role in cases of teenage pregnancy. The study found that teenagers who completed secondary school had a lower chance of becoming pregnant (37%) compared to those who only finished primary school (40%). Additionally, the lack of parental support for girls' education was associated with early teenage pregnancies. These findings highlight the importance of education, as a student's educational level often mirrors that of their parents. The survey also examined religious affiliations. Proportions were as follows: Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) at 20%, Muslims at 26.15%, Catholics at 30.77%, and other denominations at 23.08%. Understanding religious affiliation is crucial in the context of teenage pregnancy. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the influence of proper religious guidance on early child marriages. Respondents highly trusted their religious organizations and assemblies for sex education. However, these gatherings often refrain from publicly advising teenagers to use contraceptives. Instead, they emphasize that sex is sacred and should occur within marriage. Unfortunately, this approach has contributed to teenage pregnancies. These observations resonate with a UNESCO report that analyzed literature and conducted a survey on teenage pregnancy in 2017. The negative messages received from religious groups regarding contraceptive use were identified as a significant factor in the prevalence of teenage motherhood.

4.1 Cultural Practices That Influence Teenage Pregnancies

The study's goal was to ascertain how cultural practices affect adolescent pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy has been linked to forced early marriages following female circumcision in some

families as a source of cash, according to Bungoma County research (Sharma, 2015). According to the study, some teens between 15 and 19 were married and had two or three children (Nyaboke, 2020). Kajiado County is home to a young population, with 42% of its residents under 25 (KNBS. IFC Macro. 2014). Furthermore, adolescents make up one in five people in Kajiado County. In Kajiado County, marriage happens at a young age. Fifty percent of women in the 25–49 age group say they were married before turning 21, furthermore, according to KNBS. IFC Macro (2014), 20% of teenage girls in Kajiado County between the ages of 15 and 19 have started having children. Adolescent females' reproductive health can be taught in schools, where 70% of students enroll in elementary school, and just 36% go on to secondary school (Koskei, 2020). This is much lower than the national average of 57% for secondary school transitions (AFIDEP and Norad, 2017).

Based on this study, some cultural practices lead to an increase in teenage pregnancies in Kilifi County. The table below illustrates the findings:

Table 1: Cultural Practices that Influence Teenage Pregnancies

Cultural practices	Frequency	Percent	Rank
Disco Matanga	21	32.31	1
Traditional wedding ceremonies	16	24.62	2
Rape and child abuse	12	18.46	3
Taboos like FGM and forced early marriages	9	13.85	4
Child Prostitution (Beach girls) and brothels	7	10.77	5
Total	65	100	

According to the findings, 21 (32.21%), 16 (24.61%), 12 (18.46%), 9 (13.85%), and 7 (10.77%) of the respondents said disco matanga, traditional wedding ceremonies, rape and child abuse, harmful taboos like FGM and forced early marriages, child prostitution [beach girls], and brothels were common cultural practices in Kilifi County and contributed to teenage pregnancies. Notably, there was a high percentage of gender imbalance in primary schools due to social-cultural practices such as early marriage and FGM (Malelu, 2020). Men, women, girls, and boys mix freely at community gatherings like disco matangas and traditional wedding ceremonies. The positive atmosphere of these gatherings encourages boys and girls to mix and engage in premarital sex, which can lead to teenage pregnancies (Akiru,2023). Disco matangas are popular in some communities, including Luo, Luhya, and Tranzoia, and have resulted in a significant increase in adolescent pregnancies (Ogola 2015). The findings indicate that teenagers from low-income families engage in child prostitution as beach girls. Some teenagers who engage in prostitution receive support from their guardians or parents. They become beach girls to support their families and trade sex for money, putting them at risk of early adolescent pregnancy (Nzina, 2019). Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a cultural practice that represents the transition from childhood to womanhood (Koskei, 2020). Teenage pregnancy has been linked to cultural practices like FGM in the Turkana, Maasai, and Pokot communities (Akiru,2023). The questionnaires, in-depth

interviews, and key informant interviews all reflected this viewpoint. A girl is perceived to have transformed into a woman following the FGM procedure, and as such, she is socially acceptable to engage in adult activities such as sexual relations. In addition, adolescents are considered marriageable (Wanyonyi, 2018).

4.2 Discussions

Teenage pregnancies have increased as a result of societal norms and practices that discriminate against women while favoring men. The study's findings indicated that forced and early marriages are common in coastal communities. The majority of participants stated that early and forced marriages in the area were caused in part by poverty and many parents' desire to maintain close family ties with other families. Disco matangas promote dangerous sexual behavior and are an integral part of Muslim weddings, naming ceremonies, and funeral performances in the community. The study concluded that cultural norms prevent parents from discussing sex or contraception with their children or teenagers. It is believed that discussing sex with teenagers will encourage them to engage in sexual behavior. Further, it was discovered that discussing sexuality with children could "spoil" them. These findings are consistent with previous research that has shown the influence of taboos and culture on sexuality-related discourse. In the community, discussing sex-related issues is frowned upon. As a result, community elders and members avoid discussing sex in public.

5.0 Conclusion

Several sociocultural practices contribute to the increase in teen pregnancy. As a result, there is a need for sensitization programs and workshops to educate the community and their traditional elders about these harmful cultural beliefs, taboos, and practices, particularly regarding premarital sex. Government policies should be implemented to prevent traditional elders and community members from engaging in harmful cultural practices such as early and forced marriages, brothels and prostitution, disco matangas, and FGM in their communities. To raise community awareness of the importance of comprehensive sex education programs in schools and the return-to-school policy for young mothers, policymakers should collaborate with local leaders. Parents should be educated on the value of involvement and support in their teenagers' educational programs.

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