

Factors Leading to Teenage Pregnancy in Chepyuk Primary Schools in Mount Elgon Subcounty in Bungoma County in Kenya

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Abstract: *This study sought to investigate the factors leading to teenage pregnancy in primary schools in Mount Elgon Sub County in Bungoma County in Kenya. To ensure extensive and intensive investigation of the phenomenon under study, the study employed mixed research method. The study targeted class teachers, teachers in the counselling and guidance department and head teachers. Purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting informants. Data collection instruments were questionnaire and interview.*

Keywords: Factors, Teenage, Pregnancy, Primary schools

1. Introduction

Teenage Pregnancy is a world affair. Figures from the report postulated by World Health Organization (2011), over sixteen million girls become pregnant only in a single year worldwide. From these, about five million hail from Sub-Saharan Africa. Among the developed world, Bradshaw (2006) argues that United States of America (USA) and Russian Federation have recorded the highest teenage pregnancy rate. In the USA, most teenage pregnancies occur among young people who have low educational attainment. In addition to being pregnant and later having a baby, the education of young mothers is curtailed (Host & Henshaw, 2012). It is quite apparent from this, that education for girl child in Kenya faces oblivion due to teenage pregnancies and will certainly drag behind for a long time. Information from the Sub county director of education (SCDE), Mount Elgon Sub County, indicates that over one hundred girls fell pregnant in Mount Elgon in the year 2012. The figures were affirmed by Psirmoi (2013). In the report, more than 100 female pupils were put in the family way in the year 2012 alone. Most schools in Chepyuk location have seen a lot of incidences where female pupils have been put in the family way. In this locale, Psirmoi (2013) reported that eight girls in one school dropped out of school for being pregnant and four girls from another nearby school at the start of the year 2012. In addition, as Yego (2013) puts it, girls in the excess of eighteen in number and as old as 15 to 17 were put in the family way simultaneously in one school alone in the locale. The observations made above gave a greater qualification for the need of a research like this.

2. Literature Review

Unsafe environments

Some school girls are sexually harassed while at school in most instances as found by Tembon and Fort (2008). They argue that classroom sexual molestation was rife in Benin schools and that this comes with a price in that the girls that are affected may lose total trust in school altogether. They see that their safety is at stake. This was also brought forward by the six key informants interviewed, under study

conducted by Juvendi (2015) when he highlighted that three of them mentioned sexual abuse as a contributing factor to adolescent pregnancy. From the sexual harassment in schools, many girls have been put in the family way at a tender age.

The distance of the school

This is another aspect of unsafe environment as noted from Chege and Sifuna (2006). They argue that the length that the learners cover each day to school from home is of concern to parents. Many girls have been raped as they take the long journeys from or to school. This is prevalent in most of the nations in Africa, Kenya included, which have seen rampant case of conflicts.

Cultural practices and gender-based violence

Women and girls are given a low status and seen as lesser beings in the society as noted by Tembon and Fort (2008). They further said that girls are mostly seen as mothers in waiting and have nothing better than that to offer the society. Chege and Sifuna (2006) harbour similar sentiments where, culture is the tool that governs and determines what women are and how they participate in schooling. It is not uncommon in most cases to see parents hindering their siblings from accessing foreign way of life. A common belief is that well educated women may not find a man to marry.

Culture in Benin as seen from work of research by Tembon and Fort (2008), disregards women and girls giving no attention to their potential or any social position that they hold in the society. They also said that in Benin, education for girls is not well advocated for by the society. Here, discussing gender based violence is a taboo and there are many instances where girls are forced to marry early. There is evident segregation and sexual molestation meted on girls in learning institutions. This treatment on girls may leave psychological and emotional injuries to the victims, leading to health problems including HIV/AIDS, for instance, when sexual molestation occurs. The blame of school girls who get pregnant, as stated from research work by Chege and Sifuna (2006), is in most cases borne by teachers. They argue that it is tough for the girls that refuse to involve intimately with their teachers. Those girls are often told

Volume 8 Issue 6, June 2019

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point blank that they won't pass in their exams. Goodies are advanced to the girls that accept to have intimate relationship with their teachers. Good grades are given to them and the lucky ones have their fees paid. In support of this, Tembon and Fort (2008) found cases of some teachers indulging sexually with their pupils in Bennis schools. The teachers had their way by promising to make the girls pass in their tests if they oblige. Those girls who did not accept got dismal grades and were made to rewind in their current classes. In this regard, male teachers and male pupils seem to be the major offenders for schools girls who get pregnant.

Poverty

Poverty is associated with increased rates of teenage pregnancy because some teenage girls become involved in the relationships with older men so that they can provide for them, they need a sense of security (McKay, 2007). In addition, Tembon and Fort (2008) found that poverty played a major role in female pupils cum teacher relationships. Some girls accept male teachers' advances for financial gains. For small items like clothes, body lotions, sanitary towels, some girls who can't get them from their parents have no alternative but to sleep with male teachers who promise to finance them. Male teachers have taken this advantage to satisfy their evil desires to the vulnerable pupils

Type and location of school

It is cited that girls who hail from district schools were likely from less privileged homes (Odaga and Heneveld (1995). Most of them lack academic focus, little or no self-drive, hence easily lured into sexual escapades. Village mixed primary schools posted higher dropout cases by girls due pregnancy cases. Very minimal cases of pregnancy were recorded in urban boarding schools as noted by Odaga and Heneveld (1995). The girls who operated from day schools located in rural areas faced more chances of sexual encounters which often led to pregnancies.

Ignorance, apathy and lack of action by authorities and administrators

Most rape cases are not given the attention that is required when they occur as noted by Tembon and Fort (2008). Most often; school authorities quash them while exonerating the offender of the heinous act. The teachers who are found culpable have nothing done to them or just given a transfer to another school.

The following were advanced by researchers Tembon and Fort (2008):

Biasness against female gender in school has thrived since there are no seriousness measures shown by the institution's management to keep this vice in check. Those that have had a test of this vice actually don't know that it should not happen to them. This is a total failure in the way information is shared by those that are supposed to protect this vulnerable group. Since victims of rape did not know how to go about their cases, they remained mum about their ordeal, partly because they wanted to be at peace with everyone since reporting such occurrences comes back to haunt the victim rather than being a solution. They will be ashamed and shunned even by their own families for bringing

dishonour. For those who managed to seek police assistance to apprehend the perpetrators, they got very minimal or no help at all. It is no secret that a female child has a long way to go in order to fully realize her potential. Qualified academic staff in both the developed and developing world is becoming the hardest segment of the teaching profession to attract and retain (World Bank, 2010). Thus, high turnover rate of the academic staff poses a major challenge to educational authorities as it hinders development and accomplishment of the institutional goals and objectives (Mayhew, 2016). A number of empirical studies indicate that demographic variables are relevant to understanding employee decision to stay or quit (Akpa & Asikhia, 2016; Bal *et al.*, 2011; Deumert, 2010). Similarly, Rouyn & Fuentes (2012) commented on the relationships of variables and identified that turnover intention and demographic variables are directly related. It means that every variable which is connected with turnover has some effect on the decisions of the workers' of the organizations that whether they have to stay or leave the organization. The influence of the demographic variables is varying from culture to culture and is very limited research is done at global level.

3. Research Methodology

Sample Size

This entails all the components included in the study at hand (Orodho, 2012). The study comprised of forty eight (48) informants. In selecting regular pupils; both boys and girls, simple random sampling was used whereas purposive sampling was employed to select schools, teen mothers, teachers and school heads. For the purpose of defining the characteristics of informants Purposive sampling was conducted in this study.

The schools

Six schools were sampled out from among the twenty primary schools in Chepyuk using purposive sampling. Schools with the highest number of female pupils were considered on assumption that the target population may be easily obtained.

Teachers

Twelve (12) teachers (both class teachers and guidance and counseling teachers) were sampled out using purposive sampling. Two teachers per sample school were chosen to form part of the sample on basis of the factors that lead to teenager pregnancies among girls in primary schools in Mount Elgon Sub County, Bungoma County.

4. Results and Discussion

Factors Leading to Teenage Pregnancy in Chepyuk Primary Schools in Mount Elgon Constituency

From Chepyuk location, the issue of teenage pregnancy is a topic that is not easily welcomed due to the cultural orientation of the locals. The study aimed at finding out why the girls went against this cultural abomination by indulging in early sex which sometimes led to pregnancy. The reasons for indulging in premarital sex and factors leading to teenage pregnancy are tabulated below.

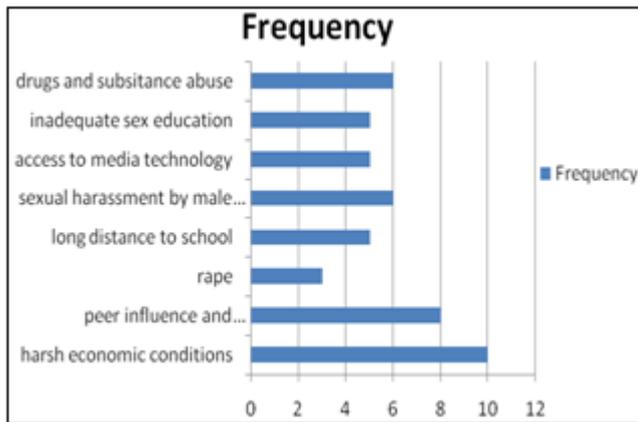


Figure 1: Factors leading to teenage pregnancy
Source: Informants

Poverty emerged as the most prominent cause of teenage pregnancy as seen from the chart above representing nearly a quarter of all the factors the research found out. From the study, ten (21%) of the informants attributed teenage indulgence in sex to poverty. For instance, one head teacher said that most parents are unable to feed and clothe their teenage daughters need and that this puts them in a vulnerable position such that many of them cannot resist the little gifts like money and food given to them by men and they are ready to give in to their sexual advances. Also one teenage mother said, *“life was smooth when my father was working in a telecom company and because of the new technology my father lost the job. Being the bread winner in the family things started to fall apart, money became scarce and affording basic needs such as food, clothing, sanitary towels, stationery for the five of us in school became a nightmare, we could go hungry on some days while on some other days afford only one meal a day. During this time I found myself in a relationship with my teacher who usually gave me some money and other little gifts, for example body lotion, sanitary towels and to return a favour I could not refuse to have sex with him and after about four months I discovered that my stomach which was swelling was now so big that I started tying it with a ‘rope’ and when my class teacher took me for a pregnancy test I was found to be pregnant”*. This study is in agreement with Tembon and Fort (2008) in a study on girls’ education in the 21st Century who found out that poverty was a major aspect that made pupils to have sexual relationships with teachers since they have money. They argued that poverty made girls prone to whatever ways of getting money to buy what they cannot get at home. The girls do this in order that they are not left behind by their peers in the fashion aspect.

Several informants (17%) said that peer influence and experimentation also led to teenage pregnancy. For instance, one informant (a class teacher) said that,

Most girls wanted to adapt the lifestyles of their peers such as expensive perfumes, eating of mandazi at break time, having nice shoes etc so that they don’t appear as left behind and want to be trendy and most of them cannot afford, so they turn to boys to provide for them. (Female

teacher, personal communication, October 2016)

Another informant stated that,

It happened that the young girls were always in the company of their friends who happened to have boyfriends and so to be accommodated in the group they had to accept to have boyfriends too and most they indulged in premarital affairs. (Male class teacher, personal communication, October 2016).

A few informants (13%) linked teenage pregnancies to drug and substance abuse. One teacher said that the effect of drugs is such that it makes the teenage girls intoxicated and sometimes lack self-control hence may easily indulge in sexual affairs which leads to pregnancy since intoxicated girls cannot remember to use protection such as condoms. The research sought to unearth some examples of drugs that are abused and one regular pupil (a boy) said, that he has on many occasions come across some pupils drinking local brews like ‘chang’aa’ and ‘busaa’ and also one day while attending a football match in his local village, saw two pupils from his school smoking marijuana, they warned him against telling anyone what he had seen or else they would beat him up.

Six (13%) of the informants said that sexual harassment by teachers through awarding good grades or leaking examinations to girls in return for sexual favours. For example, one regular girl from class seven said, *“my desk mate was a friend to one of the male teachers in our school and always surprised me most at times especially during exams, she never revised much as everyone else in class but she spend much of the revision time sleeping and when exams were out, she always got good marks even better than me, I became curious and sought to find out, one evening during games time, she hurriedly went out of the class leaving her desk open. I quickly sneaked in and certain papers got my eyes, I took them hurriedly and went to the latrine to check, I was amazed to find questions to the exam we had just done and another one for the next test I just took them back to her desk and kept quiet. After the exam I counter checked the paper and all the questions were similar. That’s when I realized that she was always given the questions in advance by the male teacher”*. These findings are therefore consistent with other studies. For instance, Tembon and Fort (2008) found that in Benin, male teachers sexually molest girls in school because of their gender. Often, teachers trick girls into having sexual relationships with them through promising them good grades to those who accepted to have sexual relationship with them.

On the same note, sexual harassment by male pupils also contributes to teenage pregnancy from the study. For instance, one of the pupils’ informants from the sampled schools said that;

I was being sexually harassed by the big boy in my class, he was touching my breasts and

my private parts forcefully and when I reported the matter to my head teacher, nothing was done to him. (Teenage mother, personal communication, October, 2016).

The findings of this study are supported by Chege & Sifuna (2006) who found that male pupils were major offenders of sexual harassment. They seduced their fellow female pupils, sexually molested and physically assaulted them. In support of this, using a case of Benise schools, Tembon and Fort (2008) found out that many girls had been sexually molested by their fellow male pupils. They further pointed out that, it was not taken seriously by school administrators that girls are molested hence; male pupils and rogue teachers who perpetuated that vice were not apprehended whether complaints were brought against them by the victims.

From the study, five (10%) of the teachers from the sampled schools said that the distance to school was also a contributing factor to teenage pregnancy in that it gave an opportunity to men with evil eye to follow them and entice them with gifts and take them to places to have sex with. Also they may be raped by even their fellow pupils or by men outside school, for instance, the bodaboda riders. The bodaboda riders have succeeded in doing so because most schools are located far away and many pupils have to trek for considerably long distance to reach school so a lift comes as a reprieve to the pupils and a snare for the bodaboda riders, for instance, one teenage mother said, *"while I was coming from the inter school legball match that dragged into late evening (7pm), I was given a lift by one middle aged bodaboda rider and I accepted because our home is far away from school despite the fact that my mother had warned me against accepting lifts from strangers. Half way along the journey, I was startled when the bodaboda turned to the opposite direction and I wanted to scream but the road looked bushy and out of too much fear I kept quiet, the bodaboda rider stopped after a few metres and he produced a knife and whispered to me in a threatening voice that he will stab me if I screamed, he told me to remove my panty and he raped me. After some time he told me to dress up and he drove me close to my village, dropped me and sped off. After about four months, I saw my belly growing and my mother found out that I was pregnant because of the big belly"*. These findings are therefore supported by Chege&Sifuna (2006) who argued that walking long distances to and from school, posed a greater chance for girls to be raped.

Furthermore, from the research, three (6%) of the informants said that rape has contributed to teenage pregnancies in the area especially when it happens to girls who have been threatened with death or harm by the perpetrators, for instance, one teenage mother said that she was raped while walking home from school and did not know the man who raped her and later she found out that she was pregnant.

From the research also, it was found that most teenage pregnancies arise from the fact that most teenagers have unlimited access to media including pornographic sites

and adult movies as elucidated by 8% of the informants. Teenagers tend to practice what they see from the media. One regular pupil (a boy) from one of the sampled schools said, *"I and my friends used to have phones and we would download pornographic videos from the internet and watch them after school when we met at the market place or hid in a friends room (a big boy who had dropped from that school and was now a bodaboda rider) to watch the videos. The bodaboda rider also supplied us with more pornographic 'cdis' and we used to watch them on his laptop. A neighbour discovered and reported the matter to the school and our phones were confiscated by the head teacher and we were sent to the counselling department for guidance."*

Finally, five (10%) of the informants said that inadequate sex education contributes to rampant teenage pregnancies since girls are inadequately taught on how to handle themselves among their peers and when faced with men who are seducing them to have sex with.

5. Summary of the Findings

First, ten of the teenage mothers who were interviewed in regard to why they indulged in sex at an early age and they all said poverty of their family was what made them indulge in premarital sexual affairs. They did so as to acquire material gifts, such as food, sanitary towels and clothing's and in return they had to sleep with their benefactors.

Second, eight of the informants attributed peer pressure and experimentation as another factor that led to them indulging in sexual affairs. It happened that the young girls were always in the company of their friends who happened to have boyfriends and so to be accommodated in the group they had to accept to have boyfriends too and most they indulged in premarital affairs. Third, drug and substance abuse was also a major reason for the girls to indulge in premarital affairs because some used to drink local brews and this left them intoxicated and unconscious of themselves putting them in precarious positions for marauding men to easily sleep with them without any resistance. Fourth, some of the informants pointed fingers to bodaboda riders in their villages as the notorious group in luring young girls into having sexual affairs. They achieved this through offering lifts teenage school girls which at times ended in the bush. The bodaboda riders have succeeded in doing so because most schools are located far away and many pupils have to trek for a considerable length of time and distance to reach school so a lift comes as a reprieve to the pupils and a snare for the bodaboda riders.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that factors such as poverty, peer pressure, drug and substance abuse and bodaboda riders lead to teenage pregnancy among the girls in primary schools in Mount Elgon Sub County in Bungoma county, Kenya.

7. Recommendations

- 1) The community should report to authorities any person seen having an affair with school children.
- 2) The school administrations should intensify guidance and counselling sessions where professionals are invited to talk to the teenage mothers.

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