

Determinants of Youth Pregnancy in Public Secondary Schools in Kiambu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest levels of teenage pregnancies in the world. In spite of that, there is the paucity of research on the causes of teenage pregnancies in African countries. Adolescence pregnancy and the eventual dropping out of school have been and still is a major problem bedeviling the education sector in many parts of developing countries. This study investigates the determinants of youth pregnancy in public secondary schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. The objectives will be: to establish the influence of family stability; assess the influence of peer groups; and determine the influence of government policies on youth pregnancy in public schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. This study will adopt two theoretical foundations namely: Ecological Systems Theory and Problem Behaviour theory. The study will adopt the descriptive survey design and it is a cross-sectional study. The study targeted 15 public girls' secondary schools. From these schools, 100 girls were sampled using purpose and stratified random sampling techniques. Data from students shall be collected using questionnaires while the principals will be interviewed. Data from interviews will be analysed thematically and the results obtained used to validate those from students' questionnaires. The findings of the study are bound to help adolescents in making better decisions. Parents and teachers will get an opportunity through open forums to educate adolescents on healthy decision making. The study will add to the existing body of knowledge on adolescent pregnancy. The findings shall be of immense benefit to the government and other education stakeholders to strengthen the existent measures aimed at checking adolescent pregnancy.

Key Words: Family Stability, Government Policies, Peer Group, Youth Pregnancy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fact that the world is faced with fast modernization and vague boundaries among societies leads to immense social problem among adolescents. These social problems, some of which include risky sexual behaviour, often lead to teenage pregnancy [1]. As adolescents approach 14 years, they get into a special developmental stage. In this stage, most adolescents are prone to fall prey to dangerous activities such as casual sex.

Kauppi in a study of the behaviour change models for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) risk reduction in sub-Saharan Africa is of the opinion that the propensity of a person to indulge in a particular behaviour, as expounded in the Health Belief model, is a subset of the anticipated consequences emanating from such behaviour [2]. Since adolescents in many African countries do not come from environments where one is adequately equipped to analyze the possible dangers associated with certain sexual behaviour, for example, the likelihood of their engaging in risky sexual behaviour increases.

Family stability is arguably one of the major factors influencing risky sexual behaviours, which could contribute to teenage pregnancy among girls [3]. As such, stable families are likely to check negative peer influences that often push teenagers into risky sexual behaviours [4]. This is due to the fact that a stable family atmosphere will provide consistent guidance to adolescents. Further, the family is the first environment in which adolescents grow. It acts as a strong buffer against risky taking behaviours such as unprotected sexual relationships that could lead to teenage pregnancy [5]. When the family is broken, teenagers are "left with a poor reference point for decision-making and making behavioural choices" [6].

In Kenya, Kabiru and Orpinas in a study on "the central role played by families in controlling adolescent sexual behaviour" shows that the emotional environment in which an adolescent grows is linked to their sexual behaviour [7]. Adolescents living with parents are less likely to have early sexual debut than those living away from parents [7]. It is thus clear that breakdown in family structure plays a pivotal role in encouraging adolescents' involvement in risky sexual behaviour and early pregnancy by extension.

Peer groups also influence the sexual behaviour of [8]. Although peer relationships play important roles in safeguarding teenagers from negative outcomes such as depression, they may also lead to the adoption of risky sexual behaviours in peer groups that have members with high risk-taking appetites. Brown posits that “peers indirectly influence the modeling of various decision making and goal setting styles of adolescents” [9]. Peers affect the decision making processes of their colleagues directly by giving advice. This could influence their sexual behaviours of adolescents.

The influence of peers on the sexual behaviours of girls can be explained by the Ecological Systems Theory (EST) as advanced by Bronfenbrenner [10]. The theory posits that the ecology of a person affects the behaviour of a person. The critics of this theory posit that “the person has to remain in the ecology continuously so as to be influenced by all the systems effectively” [11]. In this regard, it can be argued that the ecology in which an adolescent grows which includes peers, family, and national policies, will affect his/her behaviour.

The Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) was advanced by Jessor in 1977 [12]. The theory explains the adaptations to unconventional behaviour among adolescents such as risky sexual behaviours. The theory has been used to explain why students all over the world take to risk-taking behaviours such as risky sexual behaviour [13]. The theory posits that an individual will act based on the influence of the relationships they have. If the social relationships of an individual such as peers as in the case of this current study tolerate a particular behaviour, the individual is also likely to tolerate it and vice versa. In regard to this current study, it can also be postulated that the legal framework in which an adolescent grows in will influence their sexual behaviour. If adolescents are strongly guided to avoid some risky behaviour, they are likely to shun such behaviour and this could control teenage pregnancy.

The government also plays a pivotal role in checking the risky sexual behaviours. Kruger found out that adolescents who live in extreme poverty and in slums are likely to engage in various risk-taking behaviours such indulging in unprotected sex, crime and, substance abuse among others [14]. The government could influence these behaviours by offering financial help to these adolescents and employing teachers who understand the challenges they face.

The government of Kenya undertakes, for example, undertakes education programs that aim at checking irresponsible sexual behaviour among young people [15]. The ministry ensures the accessibility of youth friendly services that have high level of acceptability among adolescents. These services enhance behaviour change and check risk-taking behaviour among such adolescents.

From the preceding discourse, it is evident that factors related to family stability, peer groups and government policies influence the sexual behaviours of girls. This could go on to affect the levels of teenage pregnancy among girls. However, most of the available literature is derived from studies undertaken in other parts of world or even Africa, some of which are not current. None of the studies in the plethora of existing literature focus on Kiambu County. This means that without studies such as this current one, it may remain a tall order taking stock of the level of influence of determinants of teenage pregnancy among in the county. This underlines the importance of this current study.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to: establish the influence of family stability; assess influence of peer groups; explore the influence of the society and determine the influence of government policies on youth pregnancy in public schools in Kiambu County, Kenya

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Kiambu County. The County borders Nairobi City, Machakos, Murang’a, Kajiado, Nyandarua and Nakuru Counties. The study adopted the descriptive survey design and it is cross sectional study with the study being undertaken in September 2019. The study covered 15 public girls’ secondary schools in the county. Data was collected from 100 girls from these schools using questionnaires sampled using purposive and stratified random sampling technique. Data from questionnaires was analyzed with the aid of a computer on the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and, frequencies were used to describe the data. The findings obtained were presented in form of Tables and Figures.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The researcher sought to investigate selected demographic characteristics of the girls studied. To begin with, most of them reported that they were aged between 17 and 18 years (41.9%). These were followed by those aged 15 to 16 years at 35.5%. The least were aged 19 or more years (2.2%). It is evident that the girls were at different years of their teenage and could adequately represent the study as shown in Figure 1.

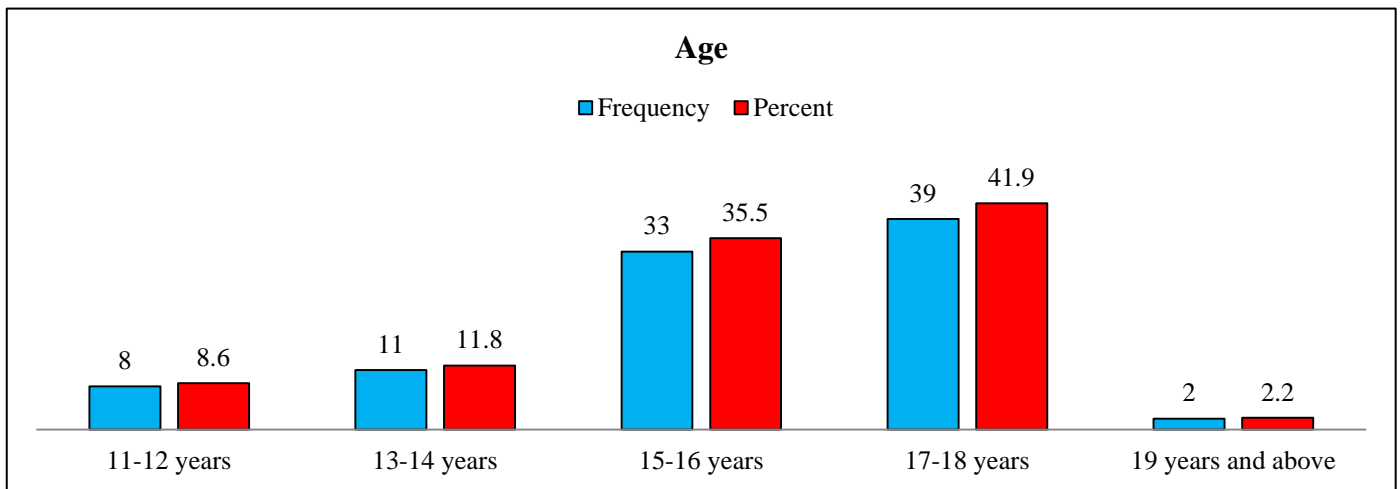


Figure 1 Age of Respondents

The girls were asked to indicate where their families lived. In response, two thirds of them (66.7%) pointed out that their families lived in urban areas. Since urban areas had a lot of negative influences, it was possible for teenage pregnancy to be very rampant among the girls in agreement with UNICEF [16] that showed that young people in urban settlements are prone to fall victim of early sexual debut and unwanted pregnancies among others.

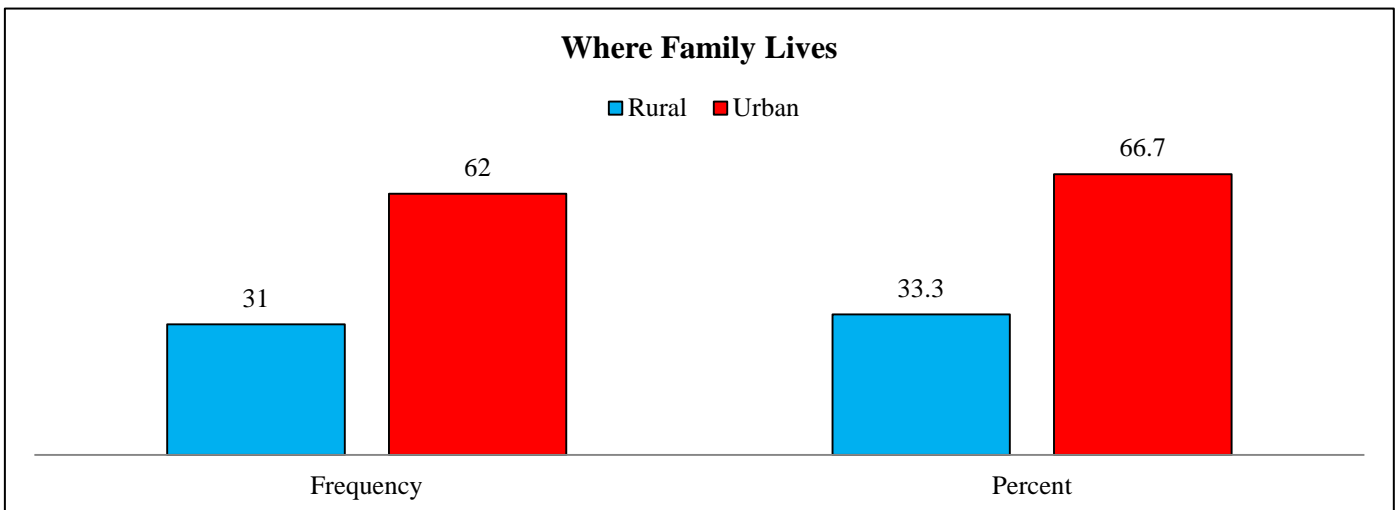


Figure 2 Where Family Lives

Lastly, the girls were asked to state who they lived with. The findings obtained show that most of the girls lived with both parents (49.5%). These were followed by those who lived with single parents (26.9%). This is indicative of the fact that more than 50% of the girls lived with single, separated or divorced parents or with guardians. This shows that family stability was weak in the study population and that this could lead to increases in teenage pregnancy as posited by Boyer [3].

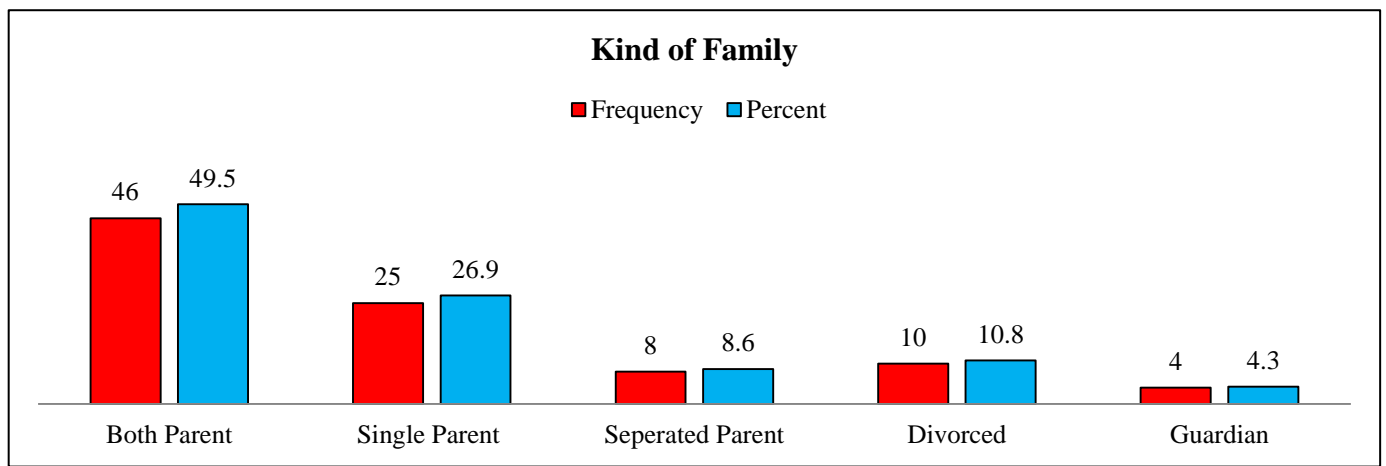


Figure 3 Kind of Family of Respondents

4.2 Influence of Family Stability

The first objective of the study was to establish the influence of family stability on youth pregnancy in public schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. Data was collected using a 5-point psychometric test in a scale of 5 to 1 where by 5-to a very high extent; 4-to a great extent; 3- to a moderate extent; 2-to a little extent and; 1-Not at all. To begin with, most of the respondents agreed to a moderate extent (35.5%) that they regarded their family as stable and that it always observed their behaviour. However, the girls agreed to a little extent with all other statements as follows: my parents/guardians guides me on how to avoid risky behaviours (28%); my parents/guardians gives me advice and guidance about the accepted behaviours (48.4%); my parents/guardians guides me on the risks associated with risky behaviours (44.1%) and; if I have a question on sexual related matters, my parents/guardians are always available to guide me (61.3%). These findings show that most of the families were not very stable [3] and did not put in place measures aimed at checking negative behaviours of their children which could lead to risky sexual behaviours and early pregnancies as posited by Tefferra, Arena, and Kabede [17].

Table 1 Influence of Family Stability

Attribute	Very High Extent		Great Extent		Moderate Extent		Little Extent		Not At All		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
(i) I regard my family as stable and always observe my behaviour	18	19.4	11	11.8	33	35.5	17	18.3	14	15.1	93
(ii) My parents/guardians guides me on how to avoid risky behaviours	21	22.6	22	23.7	11	11.8	26	28.0	13	14.0	93
(iii) My parents/guardians gives me advice and guidance about the accepted behaviours	18	19.4	11	11.8	11	11.8	45	48.4	8	8.6	93
(iv) My parents/guardians guides me on the risks associated with risky behaviours	13	14.0	18	19.4	12	12.9	41	44.1	9	9.7	93
(v) If I have a question on sexual related matters, my parents/guardians are always available to guide me.	10	10.8	9	9.7	12	12.9	57	61.3	5	5.4	93

4.3 Influence of Peer Group

The second objective of the study was to assess the influence of peer on youth pregnancy in public schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. Most of the girls agreed to a little extent (28%) with the statement, “My parents check the kind of friends I make and this influences the sexual choices make.” However, they agreed to a very great extent to all other statement presented to them as follows: “I have friends that often influence me to engage in risky sexual behaviours,” 25.8%; “some of my peers undertake unprotected sex and encourage me to do the same,” 41.9%; “I think my sexual choices are as result of the friends I keep,” 41.9%; “It is important to be recognized by colleagues so it is hard to stay away from peers irrespective of their sexual behaviour,” 34.4%; “it is considered cool to do some risky things like having unprotected premarital sex,” 40.9% and; “most of my friends are in sexual relationships,” 51.6%. These findings show that parents did not mount strong defenses on the kind of friends that the girls had as posited by Wood et al. who point out that “parents are able to control the type of peer relationships that their children form and keep” [4]. This predisposed them to negative peer group influences which contributed to risky sexual relationships and pregnancies. Indeed, peer influenced the sexual behaviours of the girls and contributed to pregnancies among them as argued by Brown [9].

Table 2 Influence of Peer Group

Attribute	Very High Extent		Great Extent		Moderate Extent		Little Extent		Not At All		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
(i) I have friends that often influence me to engage in risky sexual behaviours	24	25.8	21	22.6	11	11.8	18	19.4	19	20.4	93
(ii) My parents checks the kind of friends I make and this influences the sexual choices I make	15	16.1	15	16.1	22	23.7	26	28.0	15	16.1	93
(iii) Some of my peers undertake unprotected sex and encourage me to do the same	33	35.5	19	20.4	19	20.4	13	14.0	9	9.7	93
(iv) I think my sexual choices are as result of the friends I keep	39	41.9	11	11.8	11	11.8	14	15.1	18	19.4	93
(v) It is important to be recognized by colleagues so it is hard to stay away from peers irrespective of their sexual behaviour	32	34.4	18	19.4	15	16.1	15	16.1	13	14.0	93
(vi) It is considered cool to do some risky things like having unprotected premarital sex	38	40.9	11	11.8	14	15.1	13	14.0	17	18.3	93
(vii) Most of my friends are in sexual relationships	48	51.6	11	11.8	13	14.0	11	11.8	10	10.8	93

4.4 Influence of Government Policies

The last objective of the study was to determine the influence of government policies on youth pregnancy in public schools in Kiambu County, Kenya. Most of the girls (36.6%) agreed to a very high extent that the government supports education programmes on how to avoid premature pregnancy as recommended by Ministry of Health [15]. This could check youth pregnancies among the girls.

The girls also agreed to a moderate extent (23.7%) that the governments employ teachers with counseling experience on risky sexual behaviours and that guidance and counseling teachers control negative risk sexual behavior among adolescents in schools (28%). The majority (23.7%) also agreed to a moderate extent that, “the government gives financial help to students who are from poor backgrounds and this keeps them from risky sexual behaviours.”

The majority, a third of the girls (33.3%) went on to agree to a very high extent that the government employs teachers who understand the factors that contribute to early teenage pregnancy as posited by Amoaten and Long [18]. Most of the respondent agreed to a great extent (41.9%) that the government is engaged in numerous programs on risky sexual behaviours and HIV. Lastly, most of the girls (41.9%) agreed to a moderate extent that the government supports sex education in our school.

These findings show that the government had put in place various measures aimed at checking risky sexual practices and teenage pregnancy among teenage girls as posited by Wambua [19]. This could affect the level to which girls were guided to shun such behaviours [14]. As a result, this could check youth pregnancy in the study population.

Table 3 Influences of Government Policies

Attribute	Very High Extent		Great Extent		Moderate Extent		Little Extent		Not At All		Total
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
(i) The government supports education programmes on how to avoid premature pregnancy	34	36.6	19	20.4	12	12.9	17	18.3	11	11.8	93
(ii) The governments employ teachers with counseling experience on risky sexual behaviours	14	15.1	21	22.6	32	34.4	19	20.4	9	9.7	95
(iii) Guidance and counseling teachers control negative risk sexual behavior among adolescents in schools	17	18.3	19	20.4	26	28.0	17	18.3	13	14.0	92
(iv) The government gives financial help to students who are from poor backgrounds and this keeps them from risky sexual behaviours	11	11.8	11	11.8	22	23.7	16	17.2	33	35.5	93
(v) The government employs teachers who understand the factors that contribute to early teenage pregnancy	31	33.3	27	29.0	11	11.8	11	11.8	2	2.2	82
(vi) The government is engaged in numerous programs on risky sexual behaviours and HIV	23	24.7	39	41.9	8	8.6	14	15.1	9	9.7	93
(vii) The government supports sex education in our school	24	25.8	12	12.9	39	41.9	12	12.9	6	6.5	93

5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings make it clear that family stability influenced youth pregnancy. If the families were stable, they could guide girls me on how to avoid risky behaviours. This could enable girls come up with measures aimed at checking negative behaviours of their children which could lead to risky sexual behaviours and early pregnancies. Negative peer group influences which contributed to risky sexual relationships and pregnancies. The government also mediated the checked youth pregnancies by supporting education programmes on how to avoid premature pregnancy as well as hiring guidance and counseling teachers that could rightly guide girls. As a result, girls could be equipped on how to avoid risky sexual behaviours; leading to reductions in teenage pregnancy and vice versa.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the study findings and conclusions, various recommendations can be made. To begin with, the parents should be encouraged to be more active in rightly guiding their daughters against unsafe sexual practices. Effort should also be put in place to check negative peer influences among girls. There should be mechanisms in the society to guide girls Schools, parents associations, religious bodies, school counselors, chaplains, and civil society organizations should endeavor to put a strong defense against negative influences that face girls. The government should strengthen its programs that guide girl on the dangers of risky sexual behaviour and the dangers associated with early pregnancy. More guidance and counseling teachers should be employed so as to deal with the increasing needs for guiding the youth in the right direction.

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