

Social Causes of Pregnancies Among Secondary School Girls: Implication for Counselling in Pokot South Sub County of West Pokot County, Kenya

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Abstract

Pregnancies among secondary school girls are on the rise globally and in Kenya. As a social problem, it has adverse effects on the girls' academic performance, and career development as it results in girls dropping out of school and some are forced to early marriages. Despite efforts to prevent girls dropping out of school due to pregnancies, there is still evidence of high prevalence of pregnancy among girls in secondary schools. This study therefore sought to establish social, cultural and economic causes of secondary school girls' pregnancies: Implication for counseling in Pokot South Sub County of West Pokot County, Kenya. The researcher adopted *ex-post-facto* survey research design. There were 18 public Secondary Schools in Pokot South-Sub County which had target population of 2436, constituted 18 head teachers, 18 head teacher counselors and 2400 students. Six girls' schools were purposefully chosen with population of 462 forms twos and threes who were enrolled by March 2017. A sample size of 210 students, in addition of 6 head teachers and 6 head teacher counselors to a total of 222 who participated in the study. A similar questionnaire for all respondents and oral interview schedule for teacher counselors and head teachers was used to generate the data. Reliability value obtained was 0.82. The content validity of the instrument was ascertained with the assistance of the supervisor and experts from the Department of Psychology, Counseling and Educational Foundations of Egerton University. Data collected was analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program and presented in tables of frequencies and percentages. The study established Social causes of pregnancy in the area of study as peer influence, mass media and neglect by parents. Cultural causes as silence behavior, it is taboo to talk about sex and sexuality matters and preserving tradition and economic as poverty, unemployment and infrastructure as among the factors predisposing Secondary School girls to pregnancy. The researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education should emphasize the importance of school counselor by training more and employing them. School administration to ensure training peer counselors and together with the Board of management to support the counseling department in school by making sure they have necessary materials, rooms and personnel that will facilitate the implementation of guiding and counseling programmes and policies. It is further recommended that the Ministry of Education and the County governments should develop advocacy programmes like bursaries and community awareness that mitigates against the girl child pregnancies. The Ministry of Education should upscale the counseling programmes in the schools in order to assist students in making better decisions on education and careers.

Keywords: Pregnancies, adolescence, counseling, peer, teacher counselor

Introduction

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2013), states that children from poor social environment are affected by multitude of social factors such as teenage pregnancies, community violence, gang activity involvement, coercion, high rate of substance abuse as well as social pressure which increases the likely hood of the cycle of teenage pregnancy within the families. Honig (2010), asserts that, girls feel that they can only be accepted as women once they proved their fertility, thus self- affirmation. Currently there is a social stigma attached to parenting, whether the parents are single or married whereas in ancient time teenage pregnancy was not considered as a social problem when it involved teens who were married, although teenage pregnancy was viewed with concern when young single mothers raised their own children. A recent review of the literature on teenage pregnancy noted that out of 36% studies from US and UK examined teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood as very high without considering whether the pregnancy is intended or unintended.

Socially, evidence suggests that teenage childbearing may interrupt school attendance and damage young women's long - term communal and financial mobility. Similarly, given the lower standing of women in various African backgrounds, once expectant, young females might have an incomplete capability to discuss choices around the pregnancy as well as within their relationships (Hindin ,2012).

Further findings indicate that media freely shows sex on television and movies without displaying marital ties or good personal conduct. According to Weiss (2011), media displays sex as easy fun and glamorous and appears as if everyone is doing it. Many times, teenagers do not have knowledge needed to make informed and responsible decisions about whether or not to engage in sexual activity.

Some teenagers engage in risky sexual behavior due to influence of mass media. These are growing and are

more widely, readily available. Weiss (2012), states that media portrays influence on teen sexual behaviors. Glamorous television and magazine shots of “famous” pregnant teenagers influences them to engage in sexual activity and become pregnant themselves. Adolescents have more access to phonographic media which promote sex and glamorous pregnancy in movies, which depict pregnancy as something to be desired. This encourages teenagers to engage in reckless sexual activities which may result to pregnancies and abortion. Young teenage girls become more focused on their appearance and how their peer perceives them. They want to be seen as part of the group and be acceptable in their school, amongst their friends so they seek to become pregnant as a way of gaining social acceptance.

According to Alhassan (2015), more than 29% of pregnant teenagers reported that they feel pressured to have sex by their peers to maintain friendship and fit in with them. Further, many a times, girls allow their friends to influence their decision to have sex even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. Some want to appear ‘cool’ and sophisticated, but in some cases the end result is unplanned teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and rejection. Alhassan(2012), adds that, cell phone usage promotes easy communication among peers and their partners as it gives them easy access to the internet which they use without regulations, to surf explicit content motivating early sex. It seems that relationship and atmosphere within the home can push teenagers to seek love and affection from their male colleagues which invariably makes them engaged in early sex which consequently lead to teenage pregnancy.

According to Gyan (2013), peer influence is also paramount during the period of adolescence. It was further found that adolescents in a suburb of Accra, Ghana, mostly engaged in sex as a result of peer influence, which may predispose them to early pregnancy and motherhood and HIV/AIDS infection supported by Christofides (2014). Negative peer pressure has been identified to be a contributing factor to teenage pregnancy. A study conducted to investigate patterns and determinants of entry into motherhood in two informal settlements in Kenya established that having negative models in peer were associated with early childbearing among females aged 15–17 years (DonatienBegy, 2013). Similar findings have been established in America where, even among friends, a friend’s childbearing increases an individual’s risk of becoming a parent (Nicoletta Balbo,2014). The influence works in such a way that such pregnancies are usually not anticipated. As Kabiru, (2014) noted, in most cases, lack of discouragement from friends not to have boyfriend predisposes teenagers to unplanned pregnancy.

A study on strategies and practices for managing the consequences of unintended pregnancy among young people show that boys usually face peer influence including validation of manhood regarding sexual activity and some sexual partners that one had (Mumah, 2014). The study further notes that boys without sexual partners or who did not show evidence of sexual activity were frequently treated disrespectfully by their peers. As one of the adolescent put it: —You find the other [boys] telling you that you don’t have a girlfriend...That you are not a man enough. Peer pressure does not only work with adolescents who might not have correct information themselves but also goes against what would have been considered wise decision among parents and health providers. For instance, asked what they thought were factors contributing to adolescent pregnancy, a parent said: —Youngsters fail to regularly admit the right facts we give them about their sexuality. When you inform them on their sexual conduct, they go back and repeat the wrong things that their peers taught them (Akwasi, 2014). These show the greatest impact peer pressure has on adolescents’ sexuality. The same can be said to teens with positive peer pressure where older adolescents with high levels of perceived peer orientation to or approval of pro-social behaviors are likely to delay childbearing (DonatienBegy, 2013).

Crichton, Okal, Kabiru and Zulu (2012), pointed that, most young girls in Kenya rely on parents, equally uninformed peers, and popular media for information on sexual maturation, pregnancy and sexuality, who often do not provide them correct and timely information, exposing them to sexual and reproductive health risks including unintended pregnancies. Crichton et.al (2012), states that parents and adults sometimes, knowingly, provide false information about sex to discourage their children from participating in sexual activities. Some parents make statement such as “boys and men are animals”. This makes teenagers more curious and wants to prove their parents wrong. Also, curiosity makes them engaged in sexual relationship to prove themselves, even when they are not ready for it. Girls fear to be ridiculed and jilted by their peers, they think that to keep their boyfriends, they have to give in to sex and maintain emotional intimacy, while boys belief that having sex gains them higher social status, therefore teenagers rely on their peers for information, which makes them prey to teenage pregnancy.

Poor parenting constitutes 90% of teenage pregnancy according to Honig (2010), who established that parents play a pivotal role in curbing teenage pregnancy through proper parenting skills and parental attitudes. Ditsela and Van Dyk (2011), emphasize the importance of parental relationships with children as protective factors against teen pregnancies. Research has indicated that problems in parent-child relationship may alienate adolescents and encourage them to seek comfort, acceptance and consolation through sexual activity. Ditsela and Van (2011), continue to encourage parents to foster communication at home with their teenager about the topic of sex and sexuality despite many parents today having busy schedules. Weiss (2012), says that unfortunately,

parents resist talking about sex issues and sexuality and the strategies to prevent pregnancies due to busy schedules, culture-taboos, leave it to teachers and peers. Thus prevent them from providing the guidance and support to their young teenagers, who need to make good decisions on issues, such as sex and relationships. Teenagers may feel insecure to talk to their parents about sex because parents avoid sex talks. Most teenagers lack positive role models from absent parents.

According to Guttmacher Institute (2009), teenagers who are uneducated about sex are more likely to have an unintended pregnancy. World Bank (2012), stated that, teenage pregnancy in Latin America and developing countries, evidence showed a negative association related to the education and fertility relationship due to slight variation of reproductive patterns according to the education attainment of women; this could be associated with the belief of adolescents concerning their education; that is, it may not change their future so they take short term decisions such as early motherhood or pregnancy. Na-slund-Hadley and Binstock (2010), argued that, education was never a factor they thought could improve their opportunities in the future. They would still have dropped out of school anyway despite the fact that they were pregnant or not. Low levels of schooling in girls make pregnancy not a coincident but rather a rational choice. Some do not fully understand the biological and emotional aspects associated with having sex. They may get incorrect information from friends and social media which they want to implement thus getting pregnant. Others feel that pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases only happen to other people and so go ahead to having sex without protection. Weiss (2011) says that, exposure to hours of mass media plays a big role in the influence of teenagers' social behavior, especially when the sexual content includes pornography.

The Guttmacher Institute (2009), states that, between 43% and 62% of teenagers acknowledge that they were impregnated by their adult male who in relationships offer gifts such as money, clothes and other goods as an exchange for sexual favors. Two third reports that their babies' fathers are as old as 27 years. Approximately 5% of all teenager births are as a result of being victims of sexual abuse such as rape and incest. Teenagers who engaged in drinking and experiment with drugs can cause an unexpected pregnancy because they have no control of their sexual impulses. They contribute to 75% of teenage pregnancies between the ages 14 and 21.

Pregnancies among girls less than 19 years of age have irreparable consequences. According to World Health Organization, teenage girls who deliver every year have a far greater danger of dying from maternal reasons likened to females in their 20s and 30s. According to National Centre for Chronic Diseases Prevention (2009), report showed that, 48% of high school students had sexual intercourse that leads to contracting sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancies. They continue to say that teenage pregnancy is caused by misconceptions or myths related to pregnancy such as, "all teens are having sex", and you cannot get pregnant in your first time having sex". The ongoing intergenerational cycle of social disadvantage, unemployment and poor social functioning, suggest that family pathology may contribute to the situation of teenage pregnancy. Goicolea et.al., (2010), states that, social exposure to family violence, early parental divorce or separation, poor relationship with parents may contribute to teenage pregnancy, he continue to say that physical or sexual abuse, alcohol and substance abuse and low parental education may lead to teenage pregnancy.

Guttmacher Institute (2012), indicated that maternal role models of single parenthood, poverty, unemployment makes adolescents end up in the public care system. They recognized that, teenage pregnancy is high and there is good evidence to suggest that a sizeable proportion of teenage pregnancies occur out of an idealized belief that a baby provides unconditional love and reconnect family members. Bhana, Morrel, Shefer and Sisa (2010), indicated that, lack of educational achievement is a risky factor because the period of adolescence is full of curiosity, gullibility, and intense sexual drive. Some adolescents during this period become very experimental with sex, which may result in pregnancy. Peer influence is also paramount during the period of adolescence. Gyan (2013), found that adolescents in a suburb of Accra, Ghana, mostly engaged in sex as a result of peer influence, which may predispose them to early pregnancy, early motherhood and HIV/AIDS infection, this was supported by (Christofides et al,2014).

Lack of sexual and reproductive health information or education is another predisposing factor of adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood in both developed and developing countries although it is more prevalent in developing countries as noted by Bankole, Biddlecom, Guiella, Singh, & Zulu(2007); Hindin & Fatusi,(2009); (Rondini &Krug, 2009). Adolescents in most part of the developing world are denied access to a comprehensive sex education as noted by (Asampong, Osafo, Bingenheimer, & Ahiadeke,2013). Therefore, these adolescents know little or nothing about their sexual and reproductive health; incomplete or lack of sexual and reproductive health knowledge predisposes adolescents to pregnancy in (Estonia, Asampong et al., 2013); (Haldre et al., 2009). Others only because of limited career and educational opportunity, which has co-relation with a lack of motivation and ambition and uncertain of a purpose in life or a career objective young people identify parenting as a future role.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teenage pregnancy globally is growing rapidly among school going girls in age bracket 13-19 years. These

challenges have made adolescent pregnancy a major policy concern. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) brought to the fore the significance of addressing adolescent pregnancy and underlining contributing factors to be targeted. Even after much advocacy on the girl child promotion in education, career, and equal opportunities and the efforts to promote the advancement of the female community in Kenya, there are still staggering evidence of negative impact of young girls' pregnancies which impacts on their life potentials and cause great concern to those who care for them. The high rate of girls drop-out from schools due to pregnancy issues is very much experienced in the area of study as shown by Kenya Statistics Bureau that the rate of pregnancy among teenage is 29% in West Pokot which is higher than the National 19%. Despite the efforts done by teacher counselors. and the ministry of youth and gender, the pregnancy rate in the county has remained high thus the need to establish the causes of pregnancies among secondary schools in Pokot South Sub- County, which has been so evident than other four sub- counties .

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish social, causes of Secondary School Girls' Pregnancies: Implication for counseling in Pokot South Sub-county of West-Pokot County-Kenya.

1.4. Objective of the study

The study was guided by the following objective:

To establish social causes of secondary school girls pregnancies in Pokot South Sub-County of West Pokot County

1.5. Research Questions

The following was the research question of the study:

What are the social causes of secondary school girls' pregnancies in Pokot South Sub- County West Pokot County?

Research Methodology

A descriptive survey research (*Ex-post factor*) was used with an aim to determine and identify cultural, social and economic cause of secondary school girls' pregnancies: Implication for counseling. There were 18 public Secondary Schools in Pokot South-Sub County which had target population of 2436, constituted 18 head teachers, 18 head teacher counselors and 2400 students. Six girls' schools were purposefully chosen with population of 462 forms twos and threes who were enrolled by March 2017. A sample size of 210 students, in addition of 6 head teachers and 6 head teacher counselors to a total of 222 who participated in the study.

The results of the research is as follows

The objective of the study was to establish the social causes of secondary school girls' pregnancies in Pokot South, sub –county in west pokot county, Kenya. A sample of 6 head teacher counselors, and 210 students responded to the questionnaire on social causes of Secondary School pregnancies. The analysis of the results is summarized in table 1 below

Table 1
Social Causes of Secondary School girls' Pregnancy

STATEMENTS	RESPONSES (FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGE)									
	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1 Parents give teenagers freedom to mix freely with opposite sex	19	8.56	37	16.67	41	18.47	47	21.17	78	35.14
2 Teenagers have morals to guide them	79	36.07	62	28.31	41	18.72	25	11.41	12	5.48
3 There is influence from media	93	41.89	48	21.63	54	24.32	15	6.76	12	5.41
4 There is influence from peer(peer pressure)	103	49.76	56	22.22	21	10.14	3	1.45	24	11.59
5 Negligence from parent ,make teenagers look for alternative means appreciated	79	35.59	64	28.83	38	17.12	18	8.12	23	10.36
6 Use of drugs and alcohol abuse	63	28.37	49	22.07	24	10.81	26	11.71	60	27.03
7 Pregnancies as a result of rape	37	33.87			56	30.11	37	19.89	56	30.11
8 Pregnancies as a result of incest	22	9.91	28	12.61	71	31.98	33	14.86	68	30.63
9 Teenagers are offered sex education at school and home.	38	17.27	31	14.09	34	15.45	33	15	84	38.18
10 There is broken relationship in families	68	30.63	75	33.78	32	14.41	18	8.11	29	13.06
11 Teenagers have low self-esteem	69	31.08	61	27.48	54	24.32	24	10.81	14	6.30
12 There is poor performance in academics in school	48	21.72	45	20.36	37	16.74	37	16.74	54	24.43
13 Teenagers dating at an early age	81	36.65	59	26.69	32	14.48	21	9.50	28	12.67
14 Teenagers have self-discipline	53	25	48	22.64	45	21.23	31	14.62	35	16.51
15 Teenager having commitment to education	66	29.73	78	35.14	34	15.31	23	10.36	21	9.46
16 Parents do provide basic needs children	20	15.27	70	53.44	19	14.40	9	6.88	13	9.92
17 Teenagers feel loved or appreciated by parents, teachers or friends	59	28.50	59	28.50	64	30.92			25	12.08

From the above table 1 it is observed that peer influence is the highest factor that contributes to secondary school girls' pregnancies as indicated by 159 respondents 71.98 % supported by Kinaru (2015) & Kabiru (2014), that peer pressure and negative model in peers predisposes teenagers to early pregnancies. Influence of media. This is supported by Weiss (2012) and by Gyan (2013), which stated that; media displays sex as easy fun and glamorous and appears as if everyone is doing it. Many times, teenagers do not have the knowledge needed to make informed and responsible decisions about whether or not to engage in sexual activity. Weiss (2013), reported that, exposure to hours of mass media plays a big role in the influence of teenagers' social behavior, especially when the sexual content includes pornography. This is followed by teenage dating at an early age (68.71%) and neglect from parents hence making teenagers look for alternative means of appreciation (64.42%). This is supported by Honig (2012), that there is poor parenting which contributes to teenage pregnancy due to child neglect, poor school adjustments for children born to teenagers, lack of social security, poverty and repeated pregnancy which have negative effects on domestic life.

According to Guttmacher Institute (2012), maternal role models of single parenthood, poverty, unemployment makes adolescents end up in the public systems. 141 of the respondents (64.38%) strongly agreed that teenagers have morals to guide them. Broken family relationships (64.41%), low self-esteem on the part of the teenagers (58.56%) and use of drugs and alcohol abuse (50.44%) were also rated key factors for secondary school girls' pregnancies. According to Alhassan (2015), social exposure to family violence, early parental divorce or separation, poor relationship with parents may contribute to teenage pregnancy. Lack of this education and guidance in social life contributes to secondary schoolgirls' pregnancies. This was supported by the fact that parents do not give teenagers freedom to mix freely with the opposite sex where 125 respondents (56.31%) disagreed.

It is notable that parents provide basic needs to their children. 90 respondents strongly agreed to this fact. Binstock (2012), stated that when children needs are not adequately met, especially girls, they suffer low self-esteem which in turn have negative implications on their decision making, future relationships and lower their personal potentials. Mutai (2009), states that the ongoing intergenerational cycle of social disadvantage, unemployment and poor social functioning; suggest that family pathology may contribute to the situation of teenage pregnancy and cultural setbacks such as childhood marriages, engagement, domestic chore, diseases and

poverty. Also 144 respondents indicated that teenagers have commitment to education.

Conclusion

Based on the result of this study, the following conclusions were made:-

The head teachers, teacher counselors and students consented that, media influence, peer influence, low self-esteem as well as negligence of parents, dating early and broken relationships as the social causes of girls pregnancies in secondary school in the area of study. They disagreed that parents gave freedom to teenagers to mix freely with opposite sex, poor performance in academic and teenagers having commitment to education as the social causes of girls' pregnancies in secondary school.

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