

Policy brief

Addressing Teenage Pregnancy in
Kakamega County - 2023



Introduction

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights are fundamental human rights that encompass the right to make informed decisions about one's sexual and reproductive health. While significant progress has been made in recent years in Kakamega County with Kakamega County SGBV Policy 2020, challenges persist in ensuring access to sexual reproductive health and rights services and information targeting adolescents and youth in the county.

According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey Report (KDHS 2022), Kakamega County is one of the top ten counties in Kenya with high rates of teenage pregnancy, GBV, and new HIV infections (triple threat), with the county's recording of teenage pregnancy rates of 25%, and the county youth making up the bulk of new HIV infections with a total of 45,000.

The 2015 National Adolescents and Youth Survey report indicated that the county needs to harness the potential of its youth in preparation for a demographic dividend in three key sectors namely health, economics, and governance². However, the growing number of young people affected by teenage pregnancy and the triple threats will hinder the chance of achieving the goal if not tackled with youth-inclusive solutions.

Statement about the issue and justification of its importance

The youth demography in Kakamega presents a growing demand for essential services such as health and education, yet faced with new HIV infection, SGBV, and teenage pregnancy (Triple Threat) which hinders their socio-economic and health well-being.

While there have been past efforts by the county government of Kakamega County to empower the youth by funding registered youth groups, and training of youth on health issues, meaningful engagement of youth has not been fully exercised. The decisions and actions to address teenage pregnancies in the whole county do not involve the input of youth, especially the victims of teenage pregnancies.

Kakamega is one of the western counties in Kenya with the highest rates of teenage pregnancies. The matter of teenage pregnancies across the sub-counties of Kakamega county has greatly affected the development in terms of health, social and economic developments.

Recommendations

Policy and Legal Environment to Mainstream Youth Friendly Services Across the County:

There is a need to develop and disseminate a costed implementation plan for Kakamega County SGBV Policy 2020-2030 to support implementation of the policy which intends to reduce teenage pregnancy and advance YFS.

Enhance Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE):

To ensure focus on gender equality and empowerment of adolescents and youths to increase the decision-making capability on the uptake of contraceptive use, change of attitudes, gender dimensions and concerns, self-esteem, and sex negotiating power in terms of clear communication skills.

Multi-sectoral Collaboration:

Developing a coordination mechanism and monitoring and evaluation framework for national and county levels to tackle teenage pregnancy while ensuring meaningful youth participation in key decision-making around policy, advocacy, budgeting, planning, research, and implementation processes; and strengthening coordination of development partners and collaboration with key departments in the Ministry of Health.

Awareness creation to demystify the cultural aspect related to forms of SGBV:

Streamlining the judicial system to have victims get justice within the intended time and hence discourage out-of-court settlements where minors are involved. (Survivor & and witness protection is also key)

Promote the enforcement of laws and policies prohibiting marriage of girls below 18 years: including sensitization of communities on existing legislation and policies; reintegration to schools of adolescents in early marriage and teen pregnancy with the Provision of Youth Friendly Services

Call to action

Kakamega County government has passed the sexual and gender-based violence policy³ and one of the policy's objectives is to reduce teenage pregnancies. The Kakamega YACT youth advocates call the policy makers, especially the county assembly of Kakamega, to invest in the implementation of the policy by specifically allocating specified budget for policy implementation to allow technical officers to easily execute recommended activities in the county.

References:

1. Kenya Demographic Health Survey, 2022.
2. 2015 National Adolescents and Youth Survey
3. Kakamega county SGBV policy

