

Policy brief

Tackling Teen Pregnancies in
Nairobi County- 2023



Introduction

Teenage pregnancies in Kenya represent a pressing issue that not only jeopardises the fundamental human rights of young girls but also undermines their potential for socio-economic development. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS, 2022) casts a sobering light on this matter, revealing that 15% of women aged 15-19 have experienced pregnancy, with 12% giving birth at such a tender age[1]. These statistics, which worsen with age, from 3% among 15-year-olds to a staggering 31% among 19-year-olds, carry profound implications for a nation already grappling with healthcare, poverty, and educational challenges.

Of particular concern in Nairobi County, a significant percentage of adolescents, primarily residing in urban slums, face a disproportionately high risk of early and unplanned pregnancies. Shockingly, within the urban slums of Nairobi, 116 out of every 1000 girls aged 15 to 19 have either given birth or are currently pregnant, with approximately half of these pregnancies being unplanned. Even though the data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics reveal a declining trend in the number of pregnant teenagers seeking initial antenatal care (ANC) in Nairobi, many young girls refrain from seeking ANC due to societal stigmas and associated shame[2].

While Kenya boasts a set of commendable policies and laws designed to tackle teenage pregnancy and adolescent motherhood, including constitutional provisions and legislative acts such as Section 3[3], 8[4], of the Sexual Offences Act (2006) and Section 14[5] of the Children's Act (2018), their effective enforcement remains a challenge. Realising the full potential of these policies necessitates concerted efforts from relevant government bodies to ensure their thorough implementation.

Amidst these challenges, Kenya's National Reproductive Health Policy 2022-2032[6] emerges as a beacon of hope. The introduction is a significant step forward, especially as teenage pregnancy has remained a pervasive concern. By addressing the quality of care, providing comprehensive contraceptive and counselling services, and fostering mentorship programmes, this policy aims to enhance the support and guidance available to pregnant women and girls.

With societal demands to fit in Teenage pregnancy in Nairobi has become a norm that young girls are lured into by suitors who have the capacity pry on their naivety. This is not just a problem for girls who experience it but also significantly impacts fathers, families, the broader community, and society. Involving all stakeholders in the conversation and finding solutions is essential.



Root Causes of Teenage Pregnancy

Lack of Comprehensive Education: Inadequate access to comprehensive sexuality education in schools contributes to a lack of awareness about reproductive health and family planning among teenagers.

Poverty and Limited Opportunities: Economic challenges force some teenagers into early marriages and parenthood as they seek financial stability.

Cultural Stigmas and Gender Norms: Deep-rooted cultural attitudes and gender norms often restrict girls' access to reproductive health information and services to make informed decisions on pregnancy.

Inadequate Access to Healthcare Services: Limited access to youth-friendly reproductive health services hinders teenagers from seeking guidance and contraception.

References:

1. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022
2. Kenya's National Reproductive Health policy 2022-2032
3. World Health Organisation, The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030)
4. The Sexual Act 2006, Republic of Kenya
5. The Children Act, 2018, Republic of Kenya

Recommendations

Strengthen Referrals and Commodity Stock :

Enhance the referral systems between schools and health facilities to ensure easy access to timely reproductive health information, products, and services.

Social Protection :

Implement social protection mechanisms that encourage teen parents to space pregnancies and delay subsequent childbirth.

Age-Appropriate, Health and Human Rights Education :

Educate teenagers about their human rights and gender equity, empowering them to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health. Moreover, integrate age-appropriate health education into the school curriculum to equip teenagers with essential knowledge and skills.

Engage Boys and Men :

Promote discussions involving boys and men on responsible sexual behaviour to foster gender equity.

Media and Communication :

Maximize the use of media and communication channels for reproductive health promotion, reaching a wide audience.

Youth Responsive Services :

Establish high-quality, comprehensive responsive reproductive health services tailored to meet the diverse needs of teens, adolescents, and youth, including those with disabilities and HIV-positive individuals.

Interdepartmental Collaboration :

Foster harmonisation of efforts and strengthen partnerships with the Department of Children Services to take legal action against perpetrators and raise awareness by enforcing existing laws on the minimum age of marriage.

Call to action

The Nairobi Y-ACT youth advocates call for the localised implementation of critical policies such as the National Reproductive Health Policy (2022-2032) within Nairobi County. It is imperative that we align our local efforts with the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescent's Health (2016-2030), which aims to eliminate preventable deaths, ensure health and well-being, and foster conducive environments. To truly make a difference in the lives of our young population and combat teenage pregnancies effectively, we must push for the swift enactment and rigorous enforcement of these policies at the county level, specifically within Nairobi County. This will ensure that our strategies and actions resonate with the unique challenges faced by our local communities and enable us to drive meaningful change where it matters most.