

Parental Conflicts As A Determinant Of Pregnancy Among Secondary School Teenage Girls In Igembe Central Sub County, Meru County, Kenya.

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Abstract

Parental conflicts within the family unit have increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of adolescents behavioral and psychosocial outcomes, including vulnerability to teenage pregnancy. This study examined parental conflicts as a determinant of pregnancy among secondary school teenage girls in Igembe Central Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 4,129 secondary school girls aged between 13 and 19 years, 18 guidance and counselling teachers, and 54 parent representatives of form two to form four students drawn from the secondary schools within the study area. A sample size of 312 respondents was selected to participate in the study. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods were used to select the respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires, focus group discussion and interview schedules guide. Piloting was conducted in one school in Igembe North to test reliability of the instruments. A Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered reliable. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings were presented using frequency distribution tables, bar charts and pie charts. The study established that parental conflicts are key determinant of teenage pregnancy among secondary school girls in Igembe central sub-county Meru County, Kenya. It is recommended that parents should receive counselling support to reduce conflicts and improve communication with teenage girls.

Keywords: Parental conflict, Pregnancy, Teenage Girls

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I. Introduction

Teenage pregnancy remains a major social, educational, and public health concern worldwide, particularly in developing countries. According to Hoffman, et, al, (2024) teenage pregnancy remains a significant public health concern worldwide often leading to long-term consequences for both young mothers, their children and broader community. Adolescent is a critical stage of development during which individuals are early influenced by their immediate social environments, especially the family. The family environments play a critical role in shaping adolescents' social behavior, emotional development, and life choices. In stable household, parents provide guidance, supervision, and emotional support that protect adolescents from engaging in risky behaviors. Kumar et al. (2023) cites that the absence of open communication about sexual health within families can hinder adolescent's ability to make informed decisions regarding their sexual behavior. Nonetheless, when the family environment is characterized by persistent parental conflicts, adolescent may experience emotional distress, insecurity, and weakened parental attachment, which can influence their vulnerability to negative outcomes such as early and unintended pregnancies.

Parental conflict refers to frequent, intense, and poorly resolved disagreement between parents or between parents and children. Exposure to such conflicts has been associated with poor emotional regulation, low self-esteem, and increased engagement in risky behaviors among adolescents. A study by Smith et al. (2023) found that teenagers from homes with high parental conflict were twice as likely to engage in early sexual activity compared to those from stable households.

In Sub Saharan Africa high levels of family conflict often linked to socioeconomic struggles, polygamous marriages and domestic violence contribute to teenage pregnancy. Research in Kenya and Nigeria has demonstrated that family dysfunction including parental separation and conflicts heighten the risk of early pregnancies among teenagers (Mwangi et al., 2022). A study in Korogocho, Nairobi County by African Population and Health Research Centre in 2023 revealed that constant parental conflicts compel teenagers to seek refuge with boyfriends leading to unintended pregnancies. In Kenya, teenage pregnancy continues to affect a significant number of girls while they are still in secondary school, resulting in school dropout, early motherhood, health complications, and long-term socioeconomic challenges. Although national policies and programmes have

been implemented to address adolescent reproductive health, the persistence of teenage pregnancy suggests that social and family-related factors require greater attention.

According to the Kenya demographic and health survey (2022), Meru County recorded a teenage pregnancy prevalence of 24%, indicating a significant reproductive health challenge among adolescents. Further, a nation media group (2023) report revealed that 10 out of the 45 wards in Meru County had notably high rates of teenage pregnancy. Particularly, Kangeta ward in Igembe central sub-county accounted for 53% of all adolescent pregnancies reported in Meru County in 2022, highlighting the severity of the problem in the study area. This indicates teenage pregnancy has remained a persistent challenge in Igembe Central Sub-County of Meru County.

Despite numerous studies examining factors such as poverty, peer influence, and lack of sexual health knowledge, limited empirical research has focused specifically on parental conflicts as a determinant of pregnancy among secondary schools' teenage girls in Igembe central sub-county. This study therefore sought to examine parental conflicts as a determinant of pregnancy among secondary school teenage girls in Igembe Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya with the aim of informing family, school, and community interventions to reduce teenage pregnancy.

II. Objective Of The Study

The objective of the study was to examine parental conflict as a determine of teenage pregnancy among secondary school girls in Igembe Central Sub County, Meru County, Kenya?

III. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population was 4201 comprising of 4129 girls aged 13 and 19 years, 18 guidance and counselling teachers and 54 form two to form four parent representatives from the study area. simple random sampling was used to select 2 schools from the 17 mixed day secondary schools while the only girls boarding secondary was purposively selected. A sample size of 312 respondents comprising of 300 girls, 3 teacher counselors and 9 parents representatives participated in the study. Data was collected through questionnaires, focus group discussion and interview schedules. Piloting was conducted in igembe north sub county to test reliability of the instruments. A Cronbach coefficient above 0.7 was attained from all the study variables. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings of the study were presented using frequency distribution tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

IV. Results Of The Study

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

More than three quarters of the students' respondents (82.2%) were aged between the ages of 16-17 years while those aged between the ages of 14- 15 years score 17.2%. On the basis of school category, more than half of the respondents (66.4%) were in girl's boarding school while 33.6% of the respondents were in mixed public day secondary school. Class form showed that, majority of the respondents (53.2%) were in form two. Almost half of the respondents (40.4%) were in form three while 6.4% of the students were in form four. Based on parent type, majority of the students, 76.4%, reported living with both parents, 13.2% with single mothers, 6.8% with single fathers, and 3.6% living with guardians.

Parental conflict as a Determinant of Teenage Pregnancy

To determine parental conflicts as a determinant of pregnancy among secondary school teenage girls in Igembe Central Sub County, Meru County, respondents were required to respond to a Likert rating scale on the parental conflict as a determinant of pregnancy. A likert scale was used to measure the statements. Where 5 is Strongly Agree, 4 is Agree, 3 is Not Sure, 2 is Disagree while 1 is Strongly Disagree. The results obtained are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Responses on Parental Conflicts

| Descriptive Statistics | N | SD | D | N | A | SA |
|--|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| I feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics like relationships, sex with my parents or guardians | 250 | 42.4 | 20.4 | 13.6 | 3.6 | 20.0 |
| Teenage girls feel that their parents listen and understand their point of view on important issues on teenage sexual relationship | 250 | 17.2 | 9.6 | 16.8 | 26.8 | 29.6 |
| Parents and guardians provide guidance on making safe and healthy choices on sexual relationships | 250 | 23.2 | 16.4 | 20.0 | 23.6 | 16.8 |
| I always have open discussion on personal concerns or feelings with my parents or guardians n relationship | 250 | 22.8 | 6.8 | 10.4 | 22.8 | 37.2 |
| My parents ask how and know who my friends are | 250 | 6.8 | 3.6 | 10.0 | 16.8 | 62.8 |
| My parent provides accurate information about sexual health and relationship | 250 | 10.8 | 16.4 | 39.6 | 13.2 | 20.0 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|-----|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| Your parents set clear expectations about relationship and sexual behavior | 250 | 24.0 | 12.8 | 12.8 | 20.8 | 29.6 |
| Discussing personal issues including relationship with my parents makes me comfortable | 250 | 19.2 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 33.2 | 27.6 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 250 | 20.8 | 12 | 16.65 | 20.1 | 30.45 |

Table 1 shows responses by the students on parental conflicts. A large proportion of respondents (42.4%) strongly disagreed that they feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics like sex and relationships with their parents or guardians, while only 20% strongly agreed. On whether parents listen and understand their daughters' perspectives on sexual matters, 56.4% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed, indicating moderate levels of emotional responsiveness, although 26.8% disagreed or were unsure. When asked if parents provide guidance on making safe and healthy sexual decisions, responses were more varied: 39.6% agreed or strongly agreed, but 23.2% strongly disagreed revealing that a significant number of parents may not offer consistent guidance.

Open discussions on personal concerns received a more positive response, with 60% of respondents agreeing and strongly agreeing that they could talk freely with their parents. A strong majority (62.8%) strongly agreed that their parents know who their friends are. However, when it came to providing accurate sexual health information, 39.6% remained neutral, and only 20% strongly agreed. Similarly, while 50.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their parents set clear expectations about sexual behavior, a significant 36.8% disagreed or were unsure. Finally, 60.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel comfortable discussing personal issues. The majority of the school counselling teachers reported that students from homes characterized by frequent parental conflict exhibited emotional distress and behavioral challenges. In severe cases, this emotional vulnerability pushes them into risky behaviors, such as unprotected sex or staying in toxic relationships, which can lead to teenage pregnancy. Further, majority of the Parents representative reported that, parents who are constantly arguing or emotionally unavailable may not have the time or emotional capacity to educate their daughters about relationships, self-worth, or sexual health.

V. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that parental conflict significantly influenced teenage pregnancy among secondary school girls in Igembe central sub-county. The results indicated that frequent parental disagreements were associated with emotional distress, reduced parental supervision, and weakened parent-child communication, which increased the vulnerability of teenage girls to early sexual relationships and pregnancy. The findings are in agreement with the findings of Kamau et al. (2020) who found that adolescents with emotionally distressed parents were less likely to receive parental guidance on sexual health increasing their vulnerability to risky behaviors. Parental distress often leads to poor supervision ineffective teen communication an emotional detachment, which in turn increase teenage pregnancy risk. In addition to that the findings were similar to Conger et al (2020) in his study found out that emotionally distressed parent's exhibit inconsistent discipline, reduced warmth and lower parental engagement all of which have been linked to adolescent behavior issues including early sexual activity. Parental emotional distress can negatively affect teenager's mental well-being leading to low self-esteem hence seeking validation through romantic relationship. Depression and anxiety developed may increase risk taking behaviors including unprotected sex adolescents may also develop substance use as a coping mechanism contributing to impaired decision-making regarding contraception.

Reports from the qualitative findings reveal that, parental conflicts in the households are a determinant to teenage pregnancy as the teenage girls sought peace from their romantic relationships. These findings concurred with a study by Brown et al. (2022) who examined the role of household instability in teenage pregnancy. The findings indicated that teenagers experiencing frequent parental arguments, domestic violence or separation had a higher likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviors. This implied that, conflicts reduce parental supervision and guidance leaving adolescence more vulnerable to peer influence and early marriage. In addition, the findings align with the study by Jonson et al. (2021), which indicated that, teenage girls from divorced families were more likely to experience an early pregnancy than that of intact families. The study suggested that the absence of one parent, particularly the father, contributes to low self-esteem and emotional insecurity, which may lead teenage girls to seek validation in romantic relationships, increasing their risk of early pregnancy. Similarly, the findings concurred to the research by Rivera et al. (2023) highlighted that teenagers from single parent household often lack adequate parental supervision, making them more susceptible to engaging in risky sexual activity. The study emphasized that the quality of parental relationship, post-divorce plays a crucial role in determining adolescent outcomes. Effective parent adolescent communication has been identified as a protective factor against teenage pregnancy.

VI. Conclusion

The study established that parental conflict contributes to teenage pregnancy by disrupting communication between parents and their daughters. The tension at home creates emotional barriers and prevents meaningful discussions on sexual behavior and values. As a result, teenagers may turn to peers or romantic

partners for guidance and emotional support, which increases their risk of early sexual involvement and pregnancy. Addressing family conflict and promoting peaceful, communicative home environments is essential in guiding adolescents toward safer life choices.

VII. Recommendations

- i. Policy makers to formulate rules that allow family disputes to be managed in ways that do not expose children to emotional harm or instability. Schools and other local institutions should establish links with family counseling services and support units to assist parents facing ongoing conflict.
- ii. Parents should receive structured training in peaceful conflict resolution and effective communication carried out through a collaborative approach involving school counsellors, community health workers and psychologists.

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