

EARLY PREGNANCY IN KENYA.

One in five girls aged between 15 and 19 in Kenya is either pregnant or has given birth already, a new report shows.

In some counties like Narok, two out of five teenagers are either young mothers or are on their way to parenthood, the latest survey by the National Council on Population and Development reveals.

The report lays bare the teenage pregnancy crisis, a prick in the conscience of a nation that prides itself as having made strides in education, child protection laws, economic growth and technological advances.

UNDERAGE SEX CRISIS



Old and young men alike continue to lure young girls to sex unabated despite efforts by the government, child rights activists and non-governmental organizations to arrest this shame that bodes badly for the health of the nation and the economy.

As at the end of 2019, these men had stolen the innocence of and made 379,573 girls, including 10-year-olds, miss their monthly periods.

Even disturbing is the fact that more than 20,828 minors that have been driven into parenthood are aged between 10 and 14 years.

The capital Nairobi, a city with more than four million people, has the biggest underage sex crisis with 2,432 girls aged below 14 years conceiving.

It is followed by Nakuru with 1,748, Kajiado (1,523), Kericho (1,006), Homa Bay (957) and Garissa (901).

On the other hand, only 14 teenagers in this age bracket from Isiolo County got pregnant, Lamu (22), Embu (25), Kilifi (53), and Elgeyo Marakwet (59).

The bad scenario from Nairobi remained the same as the report looked at older girls, with the city recording 24,106 pregnant girls aged between 15 and 19 years.

Nakuru was next with 17,019, followed by Meru (15,353), Narok (14,052), Bungoma (13,920), Kiambu (13,128) and Trans Nzoia (11,687).

Counties with the lowest numbers for pregnant teens aged between 15 and 19 were Lamu (1,285), Embu (2,126), Wajir (2,684), Isiolo (2,851) and Nyeri (2,508).

Overall, Narok County leads the list of shame with 40 per cent of young girls, the majority school children, being mothers or expecting babies.

It is followed by Homa Bay (33 per cent), West Pokot (29 per cent) and Tana River and Nyamira at 28 per cent.

At six per cent, Murang'a County has the lowest prevalence rate.

Nyeri (seven per cent), Embu (eight per cent), Elgeyo-Marakwet (nine per cent) and Nyandarua (10 per cent) also rank among devolved units with low incidence of the shame.

The data was collected using the Kenya Health Information System— an online reporting platform present in most local health facilities since 2011.

BACK TO SCHOOL

According to the report, teenage pregnancies are being fuelled by rape, defilement, poverty, early marriages, peer influence, drug abuse and lack of youth friendly health services.

“An estimated 26 per cent of teenagers in poor households are likely to experience teenage pregnancies compared to 10 per cent of teenagers in wealthier households,” the document reads.

Planning Principal Secretary Saitoti Torome, who presided over the launch of the report in Nairobi on Wednesday, said the country was in a crisis.

“Numbers don't lie and if it's true, then we are in a crisis,” he said.

Mr Torome said the government's policy is to return the underage mothers to school, “but only a few of them go back because of high stigma”.

The National Council on Population and Development blamed poor parenting and an education system that ignores sexuality.

The council lists some of the consequences of teenage pregnancy as depression, suicide, abortion, interruption of schooling, maternal ill-health or morbidity and death, birth-related complications like fistula and early marriages.

Assistant director of population Lucy Kimondo, who presented the 2019 figures, said many of the girls ended up severely depressed and some committed suicide.

“There is also a very high rate of fistula among these girls. Imagine a 10-year-old girl trying to push a baby during birth,” she said.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms Kimondo blamed sexual violence, saying a girl younger than 18 cannot consent to sex.

To stem the tide of teenage pregnancies, the council has recommended “the strict implementation of the sex offences Act”.

The law prohibits adults from engaging in sex with minors, with jail terms ranging from 15 to life for those found guilty of the offence.

The council also calls for provision of sanitary pads to school girls, an essential product that old men use to lure minors into sex.

A study entitled Menstrual Health in Kenya: Landscape Analysis published in May 2016 found that up to 65 per cent of women and girls are unable to afford sanitary pads.

Among some of the culprits identified as fuelling the teenage pregnancy crisis are boda-boda operators.

Parents have a duty to talk to their children about their potential to become parents if they engage in unprotected sex.

Parents must take their time to talk to their teenagers to counteract the influence of their peers and explicit content from the internet.

This is one of the ways to encourage the teens to take responsibility for their sexuality and avoid making wrong decisions.