

Pastoral Role in Addressing Teenage Pregnancy among High School Girls in Tigania Central Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Teenage pregnancy is one of challenges faced by society today. Consequently, there was a need to establish the utilization of pastoral programs by the church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancy. This study investigated the pastoral role of Church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancy in Tigania Central Sub-County, Meru County. The study used descriptive survey design, and was guided by Social Learning Theory. From a population of 258 Church leaders, 77 selected using random sampling technique, while 50 teenage high school girls were purposively sampled from a population of 500. Data from the Church leaders was collected using structured questionnaires, and Focus Group Discussions was used to collect data from the teenage high school girls. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics like percentages, means, and standard deviations, while the qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Results showed that attitudes towards marital sex (92.4%), cultural values and norms on sexual behavior (81.4%) and perspectives towards contraception utilization (82%) were the causes of high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. The study concluded that pastoral programs by the Church leadership were key in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania West Sub-County, Kenya. The recommends the Church leadership to appoint youth/teenagers patrons in the Churches, place chaplains in Church-sponsored schools, and include teenagers while drawing pastoral programs.

Keywords: *Pastoral, Church Leadership, Teenage Pregnancy, Tigania Central*

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1.0 Introduction

Teenage pregnancy has negative implications on both the teenage mother and baby. These consequences include dropping out of school, poverty, pre-term babies, and babies with low birth weight (Wall-Wailer et al., 2016). The risks associated with teenage pregnancy are a major cause of inequality between the girl-child and the boy-child. Failure to address this vice derails attainment of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Kenya's Vision 2030 (French & Katz'e, 2018). Wright et al, (2019) identifies Church as a central institution in addressing teenage pregnancy. The black Church in America highlights the significance of pastoral care in addressing teenage pregnancies. Pastors look at the Church as a good place to discourage the vice by training and encouraging parents to be the source of their teenage children's knowledge of sexuality matters as well as sex education. This role is contrasts sharply with the role of the church in some other parts of the world where the Church is silent on sex and sexuality issues. In Philippines, the Catholic Bishops acknowledge the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. In response, they blame the parents for failing to offer sex education to their teenage children. They feel that Church has no responsibility in sex education. In this region, the church has opposed government's proposal to introduce sex education in schools. They term it as an avenue to increase promiscuity among teenagers (Genilo, 2021).

World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are 21 Million cases of teenage pregnancy in Africa (Kassa et al., 2018). However, there are a number of pastoral interventions by the Church leadership. For instance, the church in Ghana trains young people on biblical ways of preventing teenage pregnancies, carries out pulpit advocacy against teenage pregnancy, and instituted

teen-focused activities addressing teenage pregnancy (Obiako, 2021). Banning pregnant teenagers from Church and doing away with night teen activities should be discouraged. A study done by Jibiliza (2022) in the Methodist Church of South Africa revealed the importance of Church leadership in putting up structures that can help in the sustenance of needy teenage girls in school. Some of teenage girls involve in irresponsible sexual activities in exchange of basic sanitary needs. Another study done in Uganda by Nabugoomu et al. (2020) revealed that there are in Uganda pastoral measures such as sensitizing young people through seminars and counseling for parents of teenage mothers to help deal with high prevalence of teenage pregnancies. In Kenya, teenage pregnancy has destabilized the gains achieved by the civil societies, NGOs and local/international women rights crusaders in their advocacy for gender equality (Omoro et al., 2017; Muturi, 2021; Kebaso, 202; George et al., 2020). Kenya is ranked the highest among the East African countries in social protection policies and programs. However, this glory is fading due to high prevalence of teenage pregnancies, HIV/Aids infections, and sexual abuse (Muturi, 2021).

The prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Meru County is quite alarming. Out of 34808 pregnancies reported in the County in 2022, 10561 (30%) were teenage pregnancies (Marete, 2023). According to Mutembei (2024), Tigania Central was one of the most affected sub counties, with 41% teenage pregnancy prevalence. Since the Kenyan government through the ministry of health and Education and the non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) have put in place a number of interventions in addressing teenage pregnancies, there is need to investigate the pastoral role of the Church in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls. There is literature on factors leading to high prevalence of teenage

pregnancy, the role of the faith-based communities in addressing teenage pregnancy, and the influence of the Catholic Church in assisting schools to address teenage pregnancies. However, there exists a knowledge gap on the pastoral role of the Church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central, Meru County.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the pastoral role of Church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya.

“The study revealed that the pastoral role of Church leadership is central in addressing teenage pregnancy hence, a need for strengthening it”

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura’s (1925-2021) Social Learning Theory which was founded in 1960’s and officially published for use in 1977 (McLeod, 2023) guided this study. The theory indicates that behavior is learnt through observation (modeling). The theory states that children learn behavior from those perceived to be significant to them. Indeed, people learn behavior by observing the consequences of other people’s behavior (Cherry, 2022; Sutton, 2021). Consistent to this theory, teenage girls can learn the effects of teenage pregnancy by observing the lives of adults who have been victims of teenage pregnancies during their teenage lives. The

Church leaders should help parents with teenage children to become models for their teenage daughters. As such, the Church leaders should come up with teens-friendly programs in the Church, like counselling programs, teens’ rallies, and pastoral visit programs for teens to empower them to overcome teenage pregnancy.

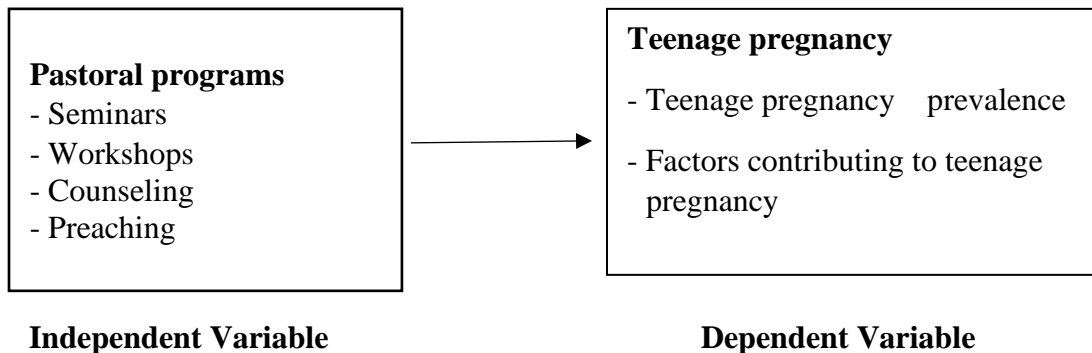
Empirical Literature

Worku et al. (2021) note that teenage pregnancy affects both developed and developing countries. The global prevalence of teenage pregnancy stands at 25%. Africa has a prevalence rate of 18%, where 19.3% is recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa. Eastern Africa carries the highest prevalence rate at 21.5%. Out of this high prevalence rates, it is recorded that approximately 3.9 million girls execute unsafe abortions. These abortions lead to high maternal deaths (Worku et al., 2021). In Kenya, one out of every five girls between the ages of 15-19 years fall victim of teenage pregnancy (KDHS, 2014). Out of 34808 pregnancies reported in Meru County in 2022, 10561 (30%) were teenage pregnancies (Marete, 2023). According to Mutembei (2024), Tigania Central was one of the sub counties which contributed the highest percentage of the cases with, 41% prevalence.

Ford (2022) looks at the church leaders as key prayers in guiding teenagers on ways to avoid unplanned teenage pregnancies. Pastors in the black church in USA noted that pastoral care is relevant to teens, teens’ parents and the general congregation (Wright et al., 2020). Obiako (2021) and Jibiliza (2022) note that training young people on biblical ways of preventing teenage pregnancies, counselling, pulpit advocacy and teens-focused activities addressing teenage pregnancy are effective teenage pregnancy mitigating measures.

Figure 1

Conceptualization



2.0 Materials and Methods

This study adopted descriptive survey design. Mixed research approach was utilized whereby numerical and analytical data were applied using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Roulston, 2015). In the guidance of Khan (2020) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) a sample size of between 20-30% is appropriate. A sample of 30% of the population of 756 respondents was selected using random sampling technique. 16 Pastors, 23 Chairpersons, 15 Catechists, and 23 youth patrons totaling to 77 Church leaders were selected. Fifty high school teenage girls were purposively sampled from a population of 500 to participate in five Focus Groups Discussion. All the study participants were recruited from Tigania Central Sub County of Meru County. Seventy (90.9%) participants successfully filled and returned the questionnaires, while 40 (80%) respondents participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGDs). The questionnaires were filled by the sampled Church leaders, while the FGDs comprised of teenage high school girls from the Churches sampled.

Research Tools

Independent variable, which was the pastoral role of Church leadership was measured using Likert scale. In the questionnaire, the

respondents (Church leaders) chose statements on a scale of 1-5; where strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Do not know (DNK) = 3, Agree (A) = 4 and Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. The results from the FGDs were presented in verbatim. Reliability of the data was ascertained by computing Cronbach alpha values comprising of the correlation coefficients of independent and dependent variables. The Cronbach alpha value obtained was 0.814. A Cronbach's value greater than 0.7 is deemed appropriate (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Data Analysis and Presentation

In doing data planning, the questionnaires were checked completeness. They were then coded. The quantitative data from the Church leaders' responses on the pastoral role of Church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancies among high school girls was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations. The qualitative data obtained through narrative questions and Focus Group Discussions were analyzed thematically. The quantitative findings were presented using frequency distribution tables and charts, while the qualitative findings were presented in verbatim.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Background Characteristics

The study sought to establish the demographic information of Church leaders, such as gender, educational qualification, the leadership position, and the length of service. Findings indicated that 42 (60.0%) of Church leaders were male, while 28 (40.0%) were female. 31(44.3%) had reached university level of education. 20(28.6%) had attained college education, 12(17.1%) had completed secondary school, while only 7(10.0%) had attained primary school education. 17(24.3%) were clergy, 20(28.6%) were Church chairpersons, 17(24.3%) were youth patrons and 16(22.9%) were catechists. 34(48.6%) had served between 6-10 years, 23(32.9%) had served between 1-5 years, 10(14.3%) had served for over fifteen years, while only 3(4.3%) had served for 11 to 15 years. This certified that the respondents

were well versed with the situation of teenage pregnancy. They also were able to read and understand the questionnaire and give relevant information.

Descriptive Findings on Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancies among high school girls in Tigania Central, Meru County, was the dependent variable. The data from Church leaders and teenage high school girls attending the sampled Churches in Tigania Central Sub-County, Meru County were evaluated to identify the prevalence of pregnancies among high school teenagers and the causative agents to early pregnancies. The Church leaders were asked to rate their responses on a 5 point Likert scale; where; strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Do not know (DNK) = 3, Agree (A) = 4 and Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. The responses from Church leaders were summarized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teenage Pregnancies among High School Girls

Sentiments on teenage pregnancies (N = 70)	SD(1)	D(2)	DNK(3)	A(4)	SA(5)	Mean	S. Deviation
There are cases of teenage pregnancy among high school girls	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(1.4%)	45(64.3%)	24(34.3%)	4.33	.503
Teenage pregnancy is prevalent in high schools within Tigania Central	2(2.9%)	2(2.9%)	6(8.6%)	46(65.7)	14(20.0%)	3.97	.816
Attitude towards pre-marital sex plays a role in increasing teenage pregnancy among high school girls	0(0.0%)	3(4.3%)	3(4.3%)	38(54.3)	26(38.1%)	4.24	.731
Culture and attitude towards sexual behaviour plays a role in increasing teenage pregnancy among high school girls	2(2.9%)	7(10.0)	4(5.7%)	39(55.7)	18(25.7%)	3.91	.989
Teenagers' view on contraception plays a role in increasing pregnancy among high school girls	0(0.0%)	4(5.7%)	9(12.9)	41(58.6)	16(22.9%)	3.99	.771

The leaders highly agreed with all the statements with a mean of 4.1. With a summation mean of 4.33 and a standard deviation of .503, there was an agreement that the rate of teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central was largely high. 69(98.6%) respondents confirmed the presence of teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central, Meru County. This agreed with finding of Muturi (2021) that teenage pregnancy especially for girls who were in secondary schools was rampant. This was further confirmed by the high levels of agreement 60(75.7%) that there was high prevalence of teenage pregnancies among secondary school girls in Tigania Central. The findings are in support of Kassa et al. (2018) who asserts that the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Africa is at 18.8%; with 21% prevalence rate in East Africa and the lowest prevalence rate of 9.2% in North Africa. Only Ten (14%) Church leaders disagreed that teenage pregnancy is prevalent in high schools in Tigania Central, Meru County. However, 60 (86%) of the respondents agreed that teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central is rampant. The results from teenagers who participated in the focused group discussion indicated similar findings. The five groups that participated had a consensus on the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy in Tigania Central Sub-County. Respondent number 30 noted that;

“In our school, about ten girls did not do their exams because some were pregnant and others nursing their newly born babies”.

In addition, respondent number 29 said that;

“These days becoming pregnant while in high school is almost becoming a normality. Very few people get surprised that a student became pregnant before completing high school studies”.

The study also sought to know the contributory factors towards the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy among teenagers in high schools. The findings revealed that attitude towards pre-marital sex plays a key role in increasing teenage pregnancy cases among high school girls in Tigania Central 64(92.4%). 5(781.4%) responded that teenage girls were also influenced by cultural aspects and norm on sexual behaviors into teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central. These results contradicted Kassa et al. (2021) findings that high pregnancy rate among teenagers resulted from factors such as rural residence, not attending school, no maternal education, no father’s education, and parents not communicating with adolescents about sexual and productive health. On the other hand, the results concurred with Worku et al. (2021) who stated that teenage pregnancy was caused by cultural norms, parental status, community-level contraceptives uptake, age at which sex is initialized, exposure to media, and the literacy level of families.

From the results provided in Table 1, the other cause for the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies among high school girls were deduced. In this instance, 57 (82%) of Church leaders confessed that teenagers’ view on contraception plays a role in increasing teenage pregnancy rates among high school girls. Only 4 (5.7%) disagreed and 9(12.9%) did not know about the effect of contraception. The results underscore that teenage pregnancy was majorly caused by attitudes towards marital sex, cultural values and norms, sexual behavior and perspectives towards utilization of contraception. This was in agreement with Ahinkorah (2021) who reported that knowledge on contraception and unmet need for contraception was a common factor which contributed to high rate of teenage pregnancies.

The study further sought to establish why the Church leaders felt that the Church leadership

had a role to play in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central Sub-County, Meru County. Respondent number 24 noted that;

“Church leadership is highly regarded in the society, especially by the teens. This gives them a higher position in modeling the younger generation in both character and career. Teenage pregnancies being one of the vices that have negative effect on life, it’s the responsibility of Church leaders to address the vice”.

Respondent number 14 said that;

“Members of the society believe that Church leadership is the custodian of social morality and guidance. They must take lead in bringing society to order and defining the destiny of the younger generation, especially in addressing issues of teenage pregnancy”.

All respondents were in agreement that there is need for involvement of the Church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancy. This is in agreement with Wright et al, (2019) who points out that Church leadership is key in addressing teenage pregnancy.

Descriptive Findings on Pastoral Role of Church Leadership in Addressing Teenage Pregnancy

The objective of the study was to describe the pastoral role of Church leadership in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central, Meru County. The Church leaders were asked to rate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale, where strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Do not Know = 3, Agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5. For interpretation and reporting, the respondents that chose strongly agree and agree were summed up as agreeing, while strongly disagree, disagree and don’t know summed up as disagreeing. In presenting the

descriptive findings, percentages, mean values and standard deviation for each statement in the table were computed and the findings presented in Table 2.

Concerning the utilization of pastoral programs, findings indicated an agreement level of 40(57.1%). The practice which had the highest level of agreement was pastoral care with teenagers, with 51(72.9%) agreement. The mean value for each indicator was above 3.9. Hence, there was high agreement that all aspects on pastoral role of Church leadership were playing a role in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central Sub-County, Meru County.

Other pastoral roles which had high agreement levels were: pastoral contributions towards changing teenage behavior (mean = 4.36), pastoral programs that discourage teenage pregnancy (mean = 4.30), pastoral care that aim to enable teenagers overcome peer pressure towards engaging in premarital sexual activities (mean = 4.29), mentorship programs for teenagers (mean= 4.29), instructing teenagers to avoid irresponsible sexual behavior (mean = 4.17), offering bible-based instruction on averting teenage pregnancy (mean = 4.10), conducting seminars, trainings and teenage workshops on teenage pregnancy (mean = 4.09) and developing discipleship programs which equip teenagers with information on teenage pregnancy. The only pastoral leadership role that returned the lowest mean was with regard to addressing teenage pregnancy was the offer of Sunday school programs that encourage Sunday school learners to delay their first sexual encounter (mean= 3.93).

Table 2
Pastoral Role of Church Leadership in Addressing Teenage Pregnancy

Statements on Pastoral Role (N = 70)	SD	D	DK	A	SA	Mean	S .Deviation
I use pastoral programs in discouraging teenage pregnancy	0(0.0%)	1(1.4%)	3(4.3%)	40(57.1%)	26(37.1%)	4.30	.622
I participate in pastoral care with teenagers in order to address teenage pregnancy	0(0.0%)	1(1.4%)	4(5.7%)	51(72.9%)	14(20.0%)	4.11	.553
I offer pastoral care to teen's parents in addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girl	0(0.0%)	5(7.1%)	5(7.1%)	40(57.1%)	20(28.6%)	4.07	.804
I use my pastoral role in helping teenagers change sexual behaviour	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	2(2.9%)	41(58.6%)	26(38.6%)	4.36	.539
I offer pastoral care to assist teenagers resist peer pressure towards irresponsible sexual behaviour	0(0.0%)	1(1.4%)	3(4.3%)	41(58.6%)	25(35.7%)	4.29	.617
I mentor teenagers as way to address teenage pregnancy	1(1.4%)	2(2.9%)	2(2.9%)	36(51.4%)	29(41.4%)	4.29	.783
I draw relevant programs that help in addressing teenage pregnancy	0(0.0%)	5(7.1%)	5(7.1%)	39(55.7%)	21(30.0%)	4.09	.812
I instruct teenagers on how to avoid irresponsible sex behaviour	2(2.9%)	2(2.9%)	3(4.3%)	38(54.3%)	25(35.7%)	4.17	.868
I offer discipleship programs in addressing teenage pregnancy	0(0.0%)	7(10.0%)	3(4.3%)	37(52.9%)	23(32.9%)	4.09	.880
I offer Sunday school programs that encourage delay the first sexual encounter among children /teenagers	0(0.0%)	11(15.4%)	5(7.1%)	32(45.7%)	22(31.4%)	3.93	1.012
I offer bible-based instructions in addressing teenage pregnancy	1(1.4%)	4(5.7%)	4(5.7%)	39(55.7%)	22(31.4%)	4.10	.854
I offer age- appropriate sex education to children/teenagers	0(0.0%)	6(8.6%)	5(7.1%)	46(65.7%)	13(18.6%)	3.94	.778
I use health professionals to offer education on teenage pregnancies	0(0.0%)	6(8.6%)	7(10.0%)	40(57.1%)	17(24.3%)	3.97	.834
I conduct seminars/workshops/home instructions on teenage pregnancies	0(0.0%)	7(10.0%)	4(5.7%)	35(50.0%)	24(34.3%)	4.09	.897

The high levels of agreement reveals that the Church leadership is positive about addressing teenage pregnancy among high school girls in Tigania Central Sub-County. They have created pastoral programs that help in addressing the vice. This is an indication that the Church leaders in Tigania Central were using their pastoral role to address teenage pregnancy among high school girls.

From the open ended question in Church leaders' questionnaire, respondents were asked to list some of the pastoral activities they have put in place in addressing teenage pregnancy. Respondent number 38 opined that;

“As part of pastoral care, teenagers need to be helped on how to resist peer pressure which leads to early sexual exposure, be mentored by the adults and be offered bible-based instructions, both in schools and Churches”.

In addition, leader number 17 said that;

“There is need to expose our teenage children through Church sponsored seminars, workshops and youth camps. This will help them get exposed to knowledge about causes, disadvantage and effects of teenage pregnancies and how to avoid being victims of the same”.

Pastoral programs aim to change teenage behavior, offer pastoral care assistance for teenagers to resist peer pressure to engage in irresponsible sexual activities and behaviors, provide mentorship programs for teenagers, offer bible-based instructions, seminars, trainings, and provide teenage workshops on teenage pregnancy and discipleship programs. These responses clarified that

Churches in Tigania Central had put in place mechanisms to avail pastoral care services to teenagers. The results support Cortes (2021) findings that Church leaders are shepherds who are at a powerful position to help young generation of teenagers to move in the right direction in their lives through education, mentorship, counselling, teaching and guidance. From the FGDs, with the study highlighted six themes out of the given suggestions; namely, home visits by Church leaders and parent education to meet feminine needs, mentorship programs, guidance and counselling, youth camps, and appointing youth patrons.

4.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that pastoral role of Church leadership is central in addressing teenage pregnancy. Pastoral activities such as home/pastoral visits, sermons on the need for purity, encouraging teenagers to avoid negative peer pressure, teaching parents on how to take good care of themselves, and being friendly and open to children, offering mentorship and counselling programs, and appointing chaplains to work with teenagers while in school are effective pastoral tools for addressing teenage pregnancy.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends Church leadership to involve teenagers in drafting church programs that teens-friendly. Parents also need to be sensitized on how to help their teenage children to handle challenging their sexuality issues. Further, the Church leadership should revisit the curriculum of the available pastoral programs in order to align them with the intended purpose of addressing teenage pregnancy. Church

leaders and parents should also give guidance to teenagers on responsible utilization of the

social media as a mitigating strategy for teenage pregnancy.

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