

Influence of Social - Economic Status on Teenage Pregnancy among Secondary School Students in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

Joyline Mukwairu Njeru¹, Dr. Joseph Kirugua, Phd², Dr. David Kipkorir Kiptui, Phd³

^{1,2,3}Department of Education, Tharaka University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Girls denied the right to make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and well-being face psychological pressure to marry early and become mothers while they are still children themselves. Girls must be able to make their own decisions about their bodies and futures, understand the effects of teenage pregnancy and have access to appropriate health services and comprehensive health care services, and comprehensive sexuality education. It is therefore worth noting the importance placed on teenage pregnancy. Despite the numerous interventions put in place to address the challenge of teenage pregnancy among secondary school students, this problem continues to be witnessed in Kenyan secondary schools, particularly in Tharaka Nithi County. The low effectiveness in combating teenage pregnancy can be attributed to many factors among them parental influence. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate parental influence on teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Tharaka Nithi County. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Data was collected from a total of 15 secondary schools using the Cluster sampling procedure in the year 2023. Clusters were based on the school national ranking. Cluster sampling was used to draw 15 secondary schools of all categories as National, Extra County, County and Sub – County schools to participate in the study. The target population was 11,936 form three students in Public and Private secondary in schools in Tharaka Nithi, County. A sample size of 410 respondents comprising 30 teachers, and 380 students (300 girls and 80 boys) was used. The instruments for data collection used were structured questionnaires and personal interviews. Experts from the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences of Tharaka University validated the instruments and pilot testing was done in two schools in Meru County. The overall reliability coefficient of instruments using Cronbach's alpha obtained was 0.754. Data were analyzed by use of descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Chi-square).

Data analysis was undertaken with the help of the Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 software. The Chi- square analysis for both students and teachers $\chi^2(16, 405) = 26.620, p = 0.046$ obtained indicates that there is a positive significant social-economic status influence on teenage pregnancy among secondary school students. The study recommends that the National and Tharaka Nithi county governments should engage parents in workshops to train them on comprehensive sex education and provide them with educational materials and guidelines. In addition, the Ministry of national security needs to strengthen policy aimed at curbing cultural policies that predispose girls to teenage pregnancy. The research findings of the present study can shed light on secondary schools administrators, the Ministry of education policymakers, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders on teenage pregnancy among secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. This knowledge can inform appropriate measures to mitigate the influence of parental social-economic status on teenage pregnancies. The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge and act as a basis for further research.

Key words: Social –Economic Status, Influence, Teenage Pregnancy, Secondary School Students, Tharaka Nithi County.

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy is a pregnancy that occurs in a woman aged 14 – 20 years both married and unmarried teenagers. Globally teenage pregnancy is a significant challenge that do affect the psychological health and physical health of the teenagers. How we tackle the issue of teenagers determines the future of the generation. A family's socio-economic status is a crucial determinant of their access to health and education services, among other basic needs. Understanding the influence of social-economic status on teenage pregnancies is essential in developing effective strategies to prevent and reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancies in low-income communities. Teenage pregnancies are common among low-income girls because their family's socio-economic status determines their engagement in inter-generational and transactional sexual activities. Numerous American researchers have found an association between adolescent pregnancy and socio-economic status. Teenage pregnancy rates among Latinas are the highest in the country (Fite et al., 2014). Women in the United States from lower socio-economic status had the highest rates of teen pregnancy and the highest rates of unwanted pregnancies. The study also found out that girls from poor families are at higher risk of becoming pregnant than girls from rich families, the level of education of parents does not lead to teenage pregnancy and girls from poor families have an opportunity of going back to school even after dropping out due to pregnancy.

Akella and Jordan (2015) investigated the correlation between socio-economic status and teen pregnancy in the United States. Twenty neighbourhoods of African American teenagers were interviewed extensively. The researchers adopted a conversational tone to promote discussion and asked participants open-ended questions. The study's results showed a correlation between adolescent pregnancies and socio-economic status, level of education, and cultural norms among adolescents. Teenage pregnancy became rampant as this pattern was repeated from one generation to the next. Yet, the research was done in the United States, where the standards of living and cultural norms differ from those in Kenya.

Vikat (2012) looked into economic disparities and teenage pregnancies in Finland. With a sample size of 217 participants, the study used a descriptive survey approach to gather quantitative and qualitative research data. In order to gather qualitative information from the respondents, the researcher used focus groups, while questionnaires were used to gather quantitative information. With the use of descriptive statistics and percentages, data were examined. The results showed a substantial relationship between teenage pregnancy and the fathers or guardians' profession and level of education. Ten times more girls from households engaged in unskilled physical labour than girls from professional backgrounds are likely to become teenage moms. By examining the causes and putting strategies in place to reduce adolescent pregnancies among secondary school students, the current study aims to close the gap.

Poudel et al. (2022) in Southern Asia reviewed 166 articles out of which 15 met eligibility criteria. The results showed that low social economic activity and more teens who are sexually active using birth control than in previous years. Factors identified are adolescent who feel connected to do well in school are less likely than are other adolescents to have children. At family level, youth who feel connected to and supported by their families are less likely to have sex and become pregnant. The probability of having birth before the age of 20 years is higher than whose mothers who have lower levels of education.

In Iran, Omani- Samani et al. (2018) to investigate socioeconomic factors influencing unintended pregnancy in Tehran, Iran carried out a study. The study was hospital based cross- sectional study. A target population of 5152 deliveries from 103 hospitals was involved. Assets based method and principal component analysis was used to calculate the household. Results revealed that unintended pregnancy is unequally distributed among Iranian women and is more concentrated between poor economic status and the most contributing explaining 27% of inequality in unintended pregnancy.

Akanbi et al. (2021) examined the socio-economic issues affecting pregnant women in Nigerian. A descriptive survey research design was used for the investigation. The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey sampled 8448 female pregnant teenagers (NDHS, 2018). According to the survey, 19% of girls between 15 and 19 had unplanned pregnancies in Nigeria. The study also showed that socio-economic status greatly influenced teen

pregnancy. Akanbi et al. (2021) advocated for the necessity of providing girls and women in Nigeria with a solid education that will provide them with the information they need to make educated decisions about issues about their sexual and reproductive health. The study examined the social and economic variables as the only variables that do influence teen pregnancy. The current study widens the scope by accessing other factors not included in the model such as social economic status of parents in various dimensions such as poverty levels.

In South Africa, Mkwanzani (2017) investigated any links between poverty and teen pregnancies. Females aged 10 to 19 from general household surveys conducted from 2011 to 2013 were used in the study. A sample of 25492 girls was chosen to participate in the study. By multilevel logistic regression, pregnancy was modelled. Data were presented as means and percentages. The study's results showed that teen pregnancies were independently correlated with social-economic status levels in households and communities. The study supports the theory that teen pregnancy is constructed in low-income South African homes and communities. However, the South African research does not show how social-economic status might be used to influence teenage pregnancies. This study aims to determine how socio-economic status at the family and local level influence teenage pregnancies among secondary school students.

Mang'atu and Kisimbii (2019) investigated the factors that lead to teenage pregnancies in Kilifi County. The study population comprised six thousand secondary school pupils from male and female schools. The researcher used a mixed methods research methodology. A random sample of 210 male and 174 female students from the participating schools made up the sample size. Interviews and questionnaires were the instruments utilized to collect the data. According to the study, incidences of teenage pregnancies may be caused by low social-economic status, which is demonstrated by a lack of fundamental needs. Most young females impacted by the practice have gotten pregnant due to trading sex for food, clothing, and gifts. These girls are readily seduced by people willing to pay them in cash or in-kind for sex since they come from families with low socio-economic status, deprivation, and moms who were also survivors of adolescent pregnancies. Some parents urge their adolescent children to leave the house and collect money for daily needs. The study sought to ascertain whether the connection could lead to pregnancy and negatively affect the participants' life.

A research study by Kimemia (2015) in Kenya further established that the kinds of job parents do significantly influence chances of their girls becoming teenage mothers. Kimemia established that most parents taking their children to the school are into business and therefore do not find time to talk to their children. The study also found out that girls from poor families are at higher risk of becoming pregnant than girls from rich families. The rising number of teenage pregnant girls in Tharaka Nithi is high despite adopting strategies suggested by research to alleviate this. Evaluating socio-cultural influences such as parental social-economic status on teenage pregnancy may reveal additional strategies to be adopted to reduce the escalating phenomenon. Despite the efforts put by the government of Kenya through Adolescent for Sexual Reproductive Health, Kenya Population Situation Analysis reveals that there has been dismal progress or improvement in averting teenage pregnancies. Previous research has focused on the country's overall prevalence of teenage pregnancy. Still, there is a scarcity of information on parental economic status influences contributing to high teenage pregnancy rates. This research seeks to bridge the gap by exploring selected parental social-economic status influences on teenage pregnancies among secondary school students in Tharaka Nithi County, among the counties with high prevalent rates

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive research design was adopted in the present study. The design was employed because it enabled the researcher to examine phenomena without allowing for variable manipulation (Kothari, 2017). The researcher gathered and evaluated data as it was in the field without changing the variables, making the descriptive design acceptable for the study. A descriptive research design is acceptable when the study aims to describe phenomena comprehensively.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The study sample was drawn from a population of all public secondary schools in Tharaka Nithi County. The study took a period of four weeks. The units of sampling were students and not schools. Clusters were based on the school national ranking. Stratified sampling was used to draw counties with desired characteristics. The desired characteristic was regions with highest incidences of teenage pregnancy. One county was selected to purposively to participate in the study. Through a cluster sampling technique 15 secondary schools participated in the study based on schools of all categories as National, Extra County, County and Sub – County schools. The target population was 11,936 form three students in Public and Private secondary in schools in Tharaka Nithi, County. A sample size of 410 respondents comprising 30 teachers, and 380 students (300 girls and 80 boys) was used. Students who were more than twenty years and less than thirteen years were excluded in the study.

Instrumentation

Students and Teachers Questionnaires

Questionnaire were used to collect data from teachers and students. The questionnaires were administered for a period of four weeks. The items in the questionnaire were recorded, screened and coded for data analysis. The questionnaires comprised of 10 open-ended items. Questionnaire had sections three sections. Section A comprised of three items that sought for demographic information of the respondents. Section B had five items that focused on responses of students' on influence of Social-Economic Status on Teenage Pregnancies. Section C had five questions son responses of Teachers' on Social-Economic Status on Teenage Pregnancies. All the items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (5= Strongly Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 3=Neutral, 2= Agree, and 1= Strongly Agree). The participants were requested to honestly tick only once honestly based on their opinions the statement that describes their feeling or perception.

Interview Schedule Questionnaire

Interviews were administered to the heads of guidance and counseling because they were likely to have extensive knowledge and expertise in the educational system and the policies related to teenage reproductive health. The interview schedule comprised items categorized into areas on parental influences. All the responses was scored as either low. Moderate or high in terms of influence on teen's pregnancy.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the interview schedules was analyzed through an organized and classified thematic approach. Quantitative data was analyzed by descriptive statistics using measures of central tendencies, including mean, percentages and standard deviation. Inferential statistics was analyzed by Chi – square test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responds of students on influence of social economic status indicates that girls from low-income families are at higher risk of becoming pregnant than girls from rich families, a significant number, 34.4%, strongly disagreed, and 25.3% disagreed, indicating a major disagreement with this statement. Only 7.0% strongly agreed. The mean score was 2.38, with a standard deviation of 1.311, reflecting a general disagreement among the students on this correlation. The findings are in agreements with findings of other study by Kimemia (2015) who established that girls whose families are involved in unskilled manual labor are ten times more likely to become teenage mothers than girls from professional backgrounds are. Family economic disadvantage exerts indirect effects on child conduct problem outcomes through more direct effects on making it difficult to parent effectively. The results are in line with Agyeman et al. (2016) in a study involving a sample size of 400 teenagers established that parents and friends have a key role to play in influencing teenage pregnancy.

Regarding the statement girls who lack money to buy some of their basic requirements results in engaging in sexual relationships to raise the money, there was a considerable agreement, with 34.1% agreeing and 32.5% strongly agreeing. Only 3.5% strongly disagreed. The mean was 3.82, with a standard deviation of 1.106, suggesting a strong belief among students that financial constraints might lead to sexual relationships for economic reasons. The results of the study are in agreement with findings by Akella and Jordan (2015) in USA. Their findings indicated a strong positive correlation between socio-economic status, level of education and cultural norms and teen pregnancy in the United States. The study's subjects picked up notions of what is and are not socially acceptable by watching their parents, friends, and neighbours.

The statement girls from low socio-economic classes would get pregnant in an attempt to get cash from men also saw a high level of agreement, with 38.2% agreeing and 23.1% strongly agreeing. Conversely, 6.5% strongly disagreed. The mean score was 3.58, with a standard deviation of 1.169, indicating a consensus on this viewpoint. For the statement; girls from poor families would get pregnant in an attempt to get out of the bad economic state, 26.3% agreed, and 13.4% strongly agreed, while 20.4% strongly disagreed.

The mean was 2.87, with a standard deviation of 1.364, showing a more divided opinion on this matter among the students. Lastly, the statement girls from low-income family are easily lured into engaging in illicit sexual relationships in exchange for money received a mixed response, with 25.8% agreeing and 22.8% strongly agreeing, contrasted by 19.6% strongly disagreeing. The mean of 3.17 and a standard deviation of 1.444 reflected diverse perspectives on this issue. The findings reveal that the girls affected by Teenage pregnancy among teenagers usually do so while trying to seek financial benefits from their male partners in exchange for sex. The findings are consistent with findings of Krugu et al., (2017) that showed that teenage motivation for getting into sexual relationships are mainly beyond love but seems to focus on financial gains.

The results of the study are in harmony with findings of Mang'atu and Kisimbii (2019) who investigated the factors that lead to teenage pregnancies in Kilifi County. The results indicated that most young females impacted by the practice have gotten pregnant due to trading sex for food, clothing, and gifts. These girls are readily seduced by people willing to pay them in cash or in-kind for sex since they come from families with low socio-economic status, deprivation, and moms who were also survivors of adolescent pregnancies. Some parents urge their adolescent children to leave the house and collect money for daily needs. Consistent findings by Izugbara (2015) revealed that poor households were mostly affected by early pregnancies as compared to wealthy households. The results that educated parents are likely to monitor their children and guide them on sexual related matters.

Overall, these responses suggested that students had varied opinions on the influence of socio-economic status on teenage pregnancies. While there was a strong agreement that financial difficulties could lead to sexual relationships for economic benefits, there was less consensus on the broader correlation between poverty and teenage pregnancy risk. The spread in responses indicated a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic factors influencing teenage pregnancies among students. Pearson chi-square test was performed to determine the influence of social-economic status on teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students according to students and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Chi-Square Test for Students

Test	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	22.501	16	0.128
Likelihood Ratio	24.135	16	0.087
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.838	1	0
N of Valid Cases	372		
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Table 1 data indicates $\chi^2(16, 372) = 22.501, p=0.128$ was obtained. Information in Table 1 shows that a p-value of 0.128 obtained is greater than 0.05 suggesting that there was no influence of social-economic status on teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students according to students. The survey exploring teachers' opinions on the impact of socio-economic status on teenage pregnancies provided detailed perspectives across five statements, with responses from 33 teachers.

Further analysis was conducted on opinions of the teachers and the results indicates that girls from low-income families are at higher risk of becoming pregnant than girls from rich families," 27.3% disagreed, and 21.2% strongly disagreed, showing a notable disagreement. However, 15.2% agreed, and 12.1% strongly agreed, leading to a mean score of 2.70 and a standard deviation of 1.311, reflecting a range of opinions among teachers on this issue. In the case of Girls who lack money to buy some of their basic requirements results in engaging in sexual relationships to raise the money, a significant number of teachers agreed (42.4%) or strongly agreed (18.2%), with only 6.1% strongly disagreeing. The mean was 3.58, with a standard deviation of 1.091, indicating a consensus that financial struggles might lead to sexual relationships for economic benefits.

Regarding the statement that Girls from low socio-economic classes would get pregnant in an attempt to get cash from men, 42.4% agreed and 24.2% strongly agreed. With only 3.0% strongly disagreeing, the mean score was 3.76, with a standard deviation of 1.032, showing a strong agreement among teachers on this viewpoint. For the statement; Girls from low socio-economic classes would get pregnant in an attempt to get out of the bad economic state, 39.4% agreed and 21.2% strongly agreed, contrasted by only 3.0% strongly disagreeing. The mean was 3.64, with a standard deviation of 1.055, reflecting a general agreement among teachers on the influence of economic hardships on teenage pregnancies. Lastly, the statement that Girls from low-income families are easily lured into engaging in illicit sexual relationships in exchange for money received a general agreement: 33.3% agreed and 24.2% strongly agreed, while 9.1% each strongly disagreed and disagreed. The mean of 3.55 and a standard deviation of 1.227 indicated a general agreement in opinions among teachers on this issue.

Overall, these responses suggested that teachers generally perceived a significant impact of socio-economic status on teenage pregnancies. They tended to agree that economic difficulties could lead to teenage pregnancies, particularly in the context of seeking financial benefits. A chi-square test was performed to determine the influence of social-economic status on teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students according to teachers. Information of findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test for Teachers

Test	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	20.9	9	0.013
Likelihood Ratio	20.247	9	0.016
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.609	1	0.435
N of Valid Cases	33		

Table 2 indicates that $\chi^2(9, 33) = 20.900, p=0.013$ suggesting that there was an influence of social economic status on teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students according to teachers. The objective was to determine the influence of social-economic status on teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya Hypothesis stated that there is no statistically significant social-economic status influence on teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya. A chi-square test was performed to determine the influence of social-economic status on teenage pregnancy among female secondary school students in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya and information presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test for both Teachers and Students

Test	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	26.62	16	0.046
Likelihood Ratio	26.88	16	0.043
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.686	1	0
N of Valid Cases	405		

Information on Table 3 shows that $\chi^2(16, 405) = 26.620$, $p = 0.046$ indicated that there was a significant social-economic status influence on teenage pregnancy among secondary school students. The p-value being less than 0.05 and therefore the hypothesis was rejected and conclude that there is a statistically significant social-economic status influence on teenage pregnancy among secondary school students in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya.

The findings are agreement with those of Hamilton et al. (2014) who established that teen pregnancy imposes a considerable financial cost on society. A correlation and descriptive survey designs was employed. A sample size of 300 participated in the study. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview schedules, and document analysis guides. The results indicated that children face health and developmental problems, emotional and economic difficulties, and exposure to various high-risk behaviours.

The findings of the study are in harmony with reports of Vikat (2012). Vikat examined economic disparities and teenage pregnancies in Finland. A sample size of 217 participants was used. The results showed a substantial relationship between teenage pregnancy and the fathers or guardians' profession and level of education. Ten times more girls from households engaged in unskilled physical labour than girls from professional backgrounds are likely to become teenage moms.

Results of a study on Teenage pregnancy and its impact on secondary school education in Nigeria were examined by Amadi (2019) as cited in Chemutai et al., (2022) are in agreement with the findings of the study. The results reveals that drug misuse and low socio-economic status enhanced the likelihood of teenage pregnancy. A sample size of 151 female students was used. Semi-structured questionnaires were used as the data collection tool. The results suggests that various multi-agency support is required to mitigate the impacts of low social economic status; such programs can be full support of vulnerable learners within our Country.

The findings of the study are consistent with the results of Mkwanzani (2017) in South Africa involving females aged 10 to 19 from general household surveys conducted from 2011 to 2013. A sample of 25492 girls was chosen to participate in the study. Data were presented as means and percentages. The study's results showed that teen pregnancies were independently correlated with social-economic status levels in households and communities.

The findings of the study are in harmony with results of Olenja et al. (2020) in Kenya looked into the variables affecting the Maasai community's teenage pregnancy rates in Kajiado West County. The research design used for the study was qualitative.

The study's findings showed that a variety of risk factors, such as low socio-economic status, peer pressure, cultural customs (such as FGM), long commutes to school, and use of boda-boda transportation, all work together to increase a girl's chance of becoming pregnant as a teenager. Poor socio-economic status, inter-generational relationships, and transactional sex are three interconnected elements that make young females more susceptible to teenage pregnancies.

CONCLUSION

Objectives of the study was meant determine the influence of social-economic status on teenage. The statement regarding the influence of parents' jobs had a more divided response. A significant 52.4% disagreed while 31.5 % agreed in case of students. The mean of 2.62 and a standard deviation of 1.355 showed a broader spread in opinions and less overall agreement. Regarding the influence of parents' jobs, 42.5 % agreed while 45.4 % were in disagreement in case of teachers responses. The mean of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 1.422 suggested a more neutral perspective among teachers. Chi- square analysis for both students and teachers revealed that $\chi^2(16, 405) = 26.620, p = 0.046$ indicated that there was a significant social-economic status influence on teenage pregnancy among secondary school students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, the following are the recommendations made:

1. The Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should come up with policies that are aimed at supporting Teenagers to curb vices that results due indulging in premarital affairs due to social economic status of the family.
2. National and Tharaka Nithi county governments should engage parents in workshops to train them on comprehensive sex education and provide them with educational materials and guidelines.
3. The Ministry of Health through the department of Public Health at the county level should develop interventions to promote parental monitoring and supervision of teenage girls.

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