

Effects of Parental Guidance and Supervision on Cases of Teenage Pregnancy among Girls in Public Secondary Schools in Homa Bay County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Teenage pregnancy continues to be a major public health and educational problem in Kenya, with Homa Bay County having some of the highest rates in the country. Parental guidance and supervision are widely recognized as protective factors against adolescent risk-taking. However, the extent to which their absence affect cases of teenage pregnancy among in-school girls remains inadequately documented. This study examined how the absence of parental guidance and supervision impact trends in teenage pregnancy among female students in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County. A mixed methods research design was used, including a quantitative cross-sectional survey with qualitative focus group discussions, and anchored on Social Control Theory, Attachment Theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The sample consisted of 385 female students aged 13-19 from 30,000 target students who had been selected through a multi-stage sampling process, and 332 questionnaires were returned (86.3%). Data were analyzed descriptively using SPSS and complemented by thematic analysis of qualitative data. Findings indicated that parental guidance and supervision were at a moderate level but inconsistent (overall mean = 3.67, SD = 1.12). While basic monitoring and behavioral guidance were relatively strong, communication about personal matters (mean = 3.45) and after-school supervision (mean = 3.41) were comparatively weak. Girls are affected by peer pressure, and having parents to guide them promotes responsible decision making, with a strong agreement from the respondents (mean = 3.89 and 3.97, respectively). Adequate parental guidance and closer parental supervision were acknowledged as factors that work towards reducing chances of teenage pregnancy (mean = 41.7 and 38.4, respectively). The study indicates that protection from risk behaviours is not achieved by just watching them; it is about a strong message and emotional connection as well. It suggests the improvement of parent-child communication, of structuring the supervision of children after school, and of facilitating the cooperation of schools, families, and communities to minimize girls' risk of engaging in risky sexual behavior and teenage pregnancy.

Keywords - Parental Guidance, Parental Supervision, Risky Sexual Behavior, Adolescent Girls, Teenage Pregnancy

INTRODUCTION

Despite decades of reproductive health interventions, adolescent pregnancy is still one of the biggest public health and developmental challenges faced by the world. According to the World Health Organization (2024;2025), about 21 million adolescent girls aged 15-19 years get pregnant every year in low and middle-income countries, and early pregnancy is linked to increased maternal and child health risks, school absenteeism, and lower economic productivity in the future. Family-level factors, and especially parental guidance and supervision, are consistently reported as factors that are protective against adolescent sexual risk-taking. However, there is

inadequate documentation in specific local contexts of how the absence of these protective factors impact sexual behaviors among in-school adolescent girls.

Despite the government's efforts to enlarge reproductive health education in Kenya, adolescent pregnancy is still a threat to girls' educational achievement. Homa Bay County, located on the southern shore of the Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria in the former province of Nyanza, has always been on the high side in terms of adolescent pregnancy compared to the national average (Samuels et al., 2020; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The county experiences high rates of poverty, substantial levels of labour migration related to its fishing industry and a large percentage of single-parent/guardian-headed households, all of which limit parents' ability to monitor and guide their adolescent daughters. Inconsistent or the lack of parental guidance and supervision can expose adolescent girls to peer pressure, unsupervised interactions, and decisions made without adult supervision, all of which can increase their risk of engaging in early and unprotected sexual activity.

Previous studies in Kenya on parental influence on adolescent sexual behaviour have generally targeted parental absenteeism without specifically examining the effect of different aspects of parental guidance and supervision, communication, monitoring, and after-school supervision on adolescent exposure to risk (Okigbo et al., 2015). This disparity presents schools, counsellors, and policy makers with constraints around being able to target interventions. The study, therefore, focused on the determinants of risky sexual behaviour among female secondary school students in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County, and concluded to support interventions that can be guided by theory and evidence using a family-school approach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental Guidance and Supervision as Protective Factors

Parent guidance and supervision are known to be important protective factors for risky sexual behavior in adolescence. Supervision includes tracking adolescent activities, understanding their friends, establishing behavioral standards, and modeling discipline, and guidance includes open communication, moral teaching, and emotional support (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). In the absence of these elements or where they are weak, adolescents are at higher risk of engaging in behaviours that lead to sexual and reproductive health risks.

There is empirical evidence that connects low parental control to early sexual onset, numerous sexual partners, and an inconsistent or erratic use of contraceptives (Kirby, 2007). Limited parental monitoring has been associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in unprotected sex and experiencing unintended pregnancy, especially in sub-Saharan Africa contexts (Mmari & Sabherwal, 2013). Koumba et al. (2025) observed that parents' limited guidance on sexual issues led to misinformation and risky experimentation among adolescents, while the exposure of poorly supervised adolescents to peers increased the likelihood of them seeking sexual information from peers, which may promote unsafe sexual behaviors. Unstructured time, especially after school and on weekends, when unsupervised time with male partners is greater, also increases the likelihood of unsupervised interactions.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives. Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969) suggests that people do not engage in deviant acts when they have strong social bonds (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief). These bonds, especially the bond of attachment and monitoring, are weakened by parental absenteeism and poor monitoring, which lowers adolescents' adherence to social norms with regard to sexual conduct. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) complements this behavioral account with a psychological one: secure attachment, built through parental availability, responsiveness, and emotional support, fosters self-esteem, sound decision-making, and resilience to peer pressure, whereas weak or inconsistent parental engagement can leave adolescents seeking affection and validation from external sources, including sexual partners. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory situates the family within the microsystem, the environment with the most direct influence on adolescent development; when this microsystem is weakened by inconsistent guidance and supervision, external systems such as peer networks and community norms exert disproportionate influence over adolescent behavior. Parenting behavior and supervision can be understood as a "double-edged sword" that acts both behaviorally and emotionally to protect adolescent girls against engaging in risk behaviors, with the breakdown of this parenting shield leading to a greater risk of adolescent girls' engaging in risky sexual behaviors.

Even though this theoretical foundation appears robust, the majority of research in the Kenyan context has focused on parental presence alone or parental absence alone. It has paid less attention to the unique effects of parental behaviors, communication, monitoring, and after-school oversight on girls' vulnerability. This study seeks to fill this gap by directly exploring these dimensions with adolescent girls in school in Homa Bay County.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining a quantitative cross-sectional survey and qualitative focus group discussions (FGD) for a breadth of statistical data and a depth of contextual description (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The quantitative part examined the level of parental guidance/supervision among a representative sample of female students, and the qualitative part used Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to interpret and put the statistical patterns into context.

Study Area

The study was carried out in Homa Bay County, Kenya, which is one of the counties with high adolescent pregnancy rates in the country. The county is located on the southern shores of Lake Victoria in the old Nyanza Province. It has eight constituencies, which have a mixed socio-economic profile of people living in rural areas, urban areas, and by the lakeside, and whose livelihood is fishing, small-scale agriculture, and trade (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Target Population and Sampling

The population of interest included the 30,000 female secondary school students in public schools in Homa Bay County, aged 13-19 years. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used, with three sub-counties purposively selected to represent the urban, rural, and lakeside diversity in socio-economic characteristics. Schools within these sub-counties were stratified by type and then randomly sampled, and individual respondents were sampled systematically from the official enrolment list. The sample size of 385 was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, with $p = 0.5$ applied conservatively to maximize the sample size.

Data Collection Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire with structured questions was used to collect quantitative data, which included socio-demographic characteristics, parental guidance, and parental supervision (measured on the 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, respectively), and perceptions on teenage pregnancy. Qualitative data were gathered by using a semi-structured focus group discussion guide on students' lived experiences of parental support and supervision, peer influence, and community pressures.

Validity and Reliability

Both instruments were piloted with 20-30 students in a non-sampled school with a comparable demographic profile prior to the main data collection. Instrument validity was strengthened through participant feedback on item clarity and wording during piloting (Heale & Twycross, 2015), while reliability was reinforced through expert review by university supervisors and school guidance and counselling teachers, who assessed the cultural appropriateness and construct coverage of the items.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed in SPSS (Version 25) using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data from the FGDs were transcribed verbatim and thematically analyzed following the six-phase approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), comprising familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. Qualitative themes were used to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings on parental guidance and supervision.

FINDINGS

Response Rate

Of the 385 questionnaires administered, 332 were duly completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 86.3%, well above the commonly recommended 70% threshold for social science research (Table 1). The high return rate is attributed to on-site data collection within schools, prior authorization from education authorities, and assurances of confidentiality that encouraged honest responses to a sensitive topic.

Table 1. Questionnaire Return Rate

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Returned	332	86.3
Not Returned	53	13.7
Total	385	100

Source: Field Data, 2026

Demographic and Family Background of Respondents

The respondents were chosen from all four secondary school levels and age groups, and the majority (73.5%) were in the 15-18 age group, which is considered to be a very critical period of vulnerability and exploration of relationships. With regard to housing, less than a third (30.7%) of respondents were living with both parents, 37.3% with one parent, 22.9% with relatives or guardians, and 9.1% lived with their siblings alone or without both parents (Table 2). This means that a very large proportion of those contacted have had some non-conventional family background, which could influence the stability of guidance and supervision offered to them.

Table 2. Respondents' Living Arrangements

Living Arrangement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Both parents	102	30.7
One parent	124	37.3
Relatives/guardians	76	22.9
Alone/with siblings	30	9.1
Total	332	100

Source: Field Data, 2026

Level of Parental Guidance and Supervision

To evaluate the impact of lack of parental supervision and guidance on risky sexual behaviors, the respondents indicated to what degree they agreed or disagreed with seven statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. (Table 3)

Table 3. Parental Guidance and Supervision (n = 332)

Statement	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	SD
My parent(s) monitor my activities outside home	10.2	13.3	16.0	34.9	25.6	3.62	1.16
My parent(s) know where I am and who I spend time with	9.1	12.7	15.5	36.4	26.3	3.68	1.12
My parent(s) provide clear guidance on behaviour	7.8	11.5	14.8	37.1	28.8	3.68	1.10

I can discuss personal issues with my parent(s)	12.4	15.6	18.2	32.5	21.3	3.45	1.22
There is supervision after school hours	11.7	14.8	17.5	33.2	22.8	3.41	1.20
Lack of supervision exposes girls to peer pressure	5.9	8.4	11.6	38.7	35.4	3.89	1.05
Parental guidance helps girls make responsible decisions	4.6	7.9	10.3	39.5	37.7	3.97	1.01
Girls who receive adequate parental guidance are less likely to become pregnant	3.5	6.9	10.5	37.4	41.7	4.07	1.03
Girls whose parents closely supervise them are less likely to become pregnant.	5.1	8.0	12.6	35.9	38.4	3.95	1.01
Parental guidance has a significant influence on preventing teenage pregnancy	4.6	7.4	11.3	36.5	40.2	4.00	1.13
Strengthening family relationships can reduce teenage pregnancy	4.2	7.1	11.0	36.8	40.9	4.01	1.00
Overall Mean Score						3.67	1.12

Source: Field Data, 2026

The overall mean score of 3.67 (SD = 1.12) suggests moderate, but inconsistent, levels of parental guidance and supervision. Basic monitoring functions were relatively high, including awareness of respondents' movement (mean = 3.62), awareness of respondents' peer associations (mean = 3.68), and general behavioral guidance (mean = 3.68). Conversely, the least positive measures of parental involvement in the context of this study, emotional openness with parents (mean = 3.45), supervision during after-school hours (mean = 3.41), showed the lowest scores.

Respondents strongly agreed that a lack of supervision exposes girls to peer pressure (mean = 3.89) and that parental guidance helps girls make responsible decisions (mean = 3.97), the two highest-rated items in the scale. Such a trend implies that the amount of actual supervision is moderate. However, adolescent girls are well aware of the protective quality of parental involvement to prevent risk exposure and facilitate good decision-making. The focus group discussions confirmed these quantitative patterns, with the participants describing the assumption that after-school is a time when they are least supervised by adults, and exposed to the greatest pressure from older male partners and peers.

There was notable agreement on the statement that adequate parental guidance tend to reduce chances of teenage pregnancy among girls (mean = 4.07) while the impact of close supervision by parents on chances of teenage pregnancy had slightly less acknowledgement by the respondent (mean = 3.95). The findings imply the presence of moderate supervision while highlighting the critical role of building strong child-parent relationship in reducing teenage pregnancy (mean = 4.01). The implication is that mere parental supervision would have little impact on the children's sexual behavior if the necessary guidance is not provided. This stance was also confirmed through the focus group discussion where respondents emphasized the need for intentional discussions between parents and their daughters in the subject of sexual behavior and socialization.

Supervision Gaps and Exposure to Peer Influence

One of the major findings was the respondents' strong link between decreased parental monitoring and increased susceptibility to peer influence. Girls with less supervision were more likely to rely on peers for relationship and sexuality advice, which aligns with Social Control Theory's assertion that when families are ineffective in monitoring their adolescents' behavior, the adolescents conform to the norms of society (Hirschi, 1969). This implies that supervision is more than just being physically present, but involves a form of structured guidance when a youth is away from a parent, especially after school hours.

Role of Parental Guidance and supervision in addressing teenage pregnancy

There was a high level of consensus about the statement that 'parental guidance helps girls to make responsible decisions', which mirrored the protective nature of parent-child relationships highlighted by Attachment Theory as a support for emotional stability and responsible decision making (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978). Concurrently, the relatively low mean score for open discussion of personal matters suggests that, although parents are physically available and engaged in general monitoring, a significant proportion of adolescents may lack confidence in expressing personal matters openly with their parents. This information deficit could leave teenagers more susceptible to misinformation and risky choices regarding relationships and sexual health from their peers.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that parental guidance and supervision are a critical, although uneven, influence on adolescents' exposure to risky sexual behavior in Homa Bay County. Consistent with Dishion and McMahon (1998), effective parental monitoring involves more than tracking an adolescent's activities; it requires open communication and consistent behavioral guidance. Basic monitoring received relatively high scores, while communication and after-school supervision received relatively low scores, raising the question that, in the context of these families, many provide only partial monitoring, with some being vigilant about being aware of their adolescent's location but lacking emotional involvement or oversight outside of the school day.

The results support Hirschi's (1969) Social Control Theory in this context, where adolescent attachment to and surveillance of parents are weak or inconsistent, resulting in adolescents seeking norms and guidance from their peers, in line with the findings from Koumba et al. (2025) and Mmari and Sabherwal (2013), whereby a lack of parental involvement in their lives in the context of sexual and relationship information puts adolescents at greater risk of adopting peer norms and guidance. Additionally, the findings support Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978) that having secure and communicative parent-child relationships, rather than simply being present, is critical for adolescents' ability for responsible decision making, as respondents gave higher ratings to the value of guidance for decision making than to actual levels of supervision.

From Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory perspective, the study findings of weak communication and lack of after-school supervision by mothers constitute a partial breakdown of the family microsystem, allowing for greater influence of peer networks and, according to the qualitative results, older male partners on adolescent girls' decision making.

This discovery brings a welcome nuance to previous Kenyan studies that have either conflated parental absence or monitoring as a somewhat homogeneous risk factor (Shanley et al., 2024). Specifically, the current results suggest that even when parents are physically present, deficits in communication and structured after-school oversight can still leave adolescent daughters vulnerable to risky sexual behavior. Interventions aimed at enhancing the amount of parent involvement in the home alone will thus have a limited effect unless they also improve the quality of parent-child interaction and supervision.

Limitations

This study faced two limitations including its reliance on self-reported data on a sensitive topic which may have raised the possibility of social desirability bias. Therefore, some respondents may have opted to over- or under-report the extent of parental guidance and supervision they receive.

However, this limitation was addressed by assuring the respondents of their anonymity and confidential treatment of the data. Secondly, the study was confined to female students in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County, and its findings should be generalized to other populations, such as out-of-school adolescents or other counties, with caution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Practice

School management needs to be more active in after-school supervision arrangements and mentoring programs, as these were identified as the most vulnerable time for being targeted by peer pressure, given less parental supervision. Good communication and emotional connection with parents/guardians were also identified as an area of weakness and should be addressed through school outreach programmes. Structured monitoring and referral systems should also be introduced for the identification and support of at-risk students in schools, particularly through the role of teachers and guidance and counselling departments.

Recommendations for Policy

Adequate policies by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the county governments, should be reinforced to increase structured parent-school engagement, including having regular parent forums and communication plans, to support regular parent involvement in adolescent welfare. Support policies for parents, such as flexible working policies and community parenting support programmes, should also be considered, given the socio-economic issues that limit parental supervision in Homa Bay County. Further, investment in work placement and training for school-based guidance and counselling would make schools better equipped to supplement the lack of parental guidance.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies should examine the perspectives of parents and guardians themselves on the constraints affecting their guidance and supervision practices, to complement the adolescent-reported data used in this study. Longitudinal studies will assist in determining if there are measurable reductions in risky sexual behaviour and teen pregnancy over a period of time that result from increases in parental communication and after-school supervision. In addition, there is potential for future research to examine the use of digital communication technologies to facilitate parent-child engagement in contexts where the children cannot physically attend.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the role of unsupervised and unguided parents on the risky sexual behaviour of female students in public secondary schools in Homa Bay County, Kenya. Findings reveal moderate, but uneven, levels of parental guidance and supervision: many parents engage in minimal monitoring and behavioral guidance, though there are significant deficits in afterschool supervision and open communication, which are the time and practices most strongly associated with adolescent risk. Parents' guidance was clearly perceived as protective, helping respondents to maintain a separation between themselves and the group, and encouraging responsible decisions, even if it did not happen consistently in a parent's day-to-day decisions.

The study, which spans Social Control Theory, Attachment Theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, shows that it is important to engage the adolescent girl emotionally and to communicate with her, whether it is formal or informal. More importantly, it is imperative to provide structured supervision during times of free time to ensure that adolescent girls are protected from risky sexual behavior. The findings indicate that enhancing communication, strengthening after-school supervision, and deepening the partnership between school, families, and communities are critical strategies for mitigating adolescent girls' vulnerability to risky sexual behaviors, which in turn lead to teenage pregnancy in Homa Bay County and similar environments.

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Ethical Approval Statement

Ethical clearance for the study was approved in accordance with the institution's ethics committee for research studies prior to data collection. Written informed consent was secured from parents/guardians and principals, and written informed assent was secured from all student participants; confidentiality and the right to withdrawal were provided throughout the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author does not wish to reveal any conflict of interest with regard to this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this manuscript are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author. Ethical considerations in the involvement of minors and the sensitivity of the material have prevented the data from being made public.

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