

High Teenage Pregnancy Rates in Uganda: A Call for Comprehensive Intervention in Kabarole District

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Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is a significant public health issue in Uganda, characterized by high prevalence rates and associated with various socio-economic and health challenges. The incidence of teenage pregnancies remains alarmingly high, particularly in rural and underserved regions. For instance, a community-based survey conducted in Agago District revealed a substantial prevalence of teenage pregnancy, underscoring the widespread nature of this issue across the country (Okot et al., 2023).

Several factors contribute to the high rates of teenage pregnancies in Uganda, including limited access to reproductive health services, lack of fertility awareness, and socio-cultural influences. Birungi and Izudi (2023) highlighted the lack of fertility awareness as a critical factor in rural western Uganda, where many teenagers are unaware of the implications of unprotected sexual activities. Furthermore, cultural norms and economic hardships often exacerbate the vulnerability of teenage girls, making them more susceptible to early pregnancies.

The health outcomes of teenage pregnancies are often adverse, affecting both the mother and the child. A study at a national referral hospital in Uganda reported that teenage mothers face significant risks, including higher incidences of complications during childbirth and poor neonatal outcomes (Kagawa et al., 2024). Additionally, teenage mothers in regions such as Kasese and Bundibugyo experience profound transitions to motherhood, often marked by limited support and socio-economic challenges (Ngonzi et al., 2024).

In urban settings like Luwero, unintended pregnancies among young people are prevalent, with narratives indicating that these pregnancies significantly impact the lives and futures of young women (Parkes et al., 2024). Furthermore, adherence to modern contraceptives among adolescents, especially in refugee settings in Northern Uganda, remains a challenge despite efforts to promote reproductive health services (Bakesiima et al., 2023).

Socio-demographic factors also play a crucial role in influencing breastfeeding practices among teenage mothers. Kimuli et al. (2023) identified several factors associated with exclusive breastfeeding across 77 districts in Uganda, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support systems for young mothers to improve health outcomes for their infants.

Overall, addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy in Uganda requires a multi-faceted approach, incorporating education, improved access to reproductive health services, and socio-economic support for young women. The complexity of the issue, influenced by

cultural, economic, and health-related factors, necessitates targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects on teenage mothers and their children.

Aim

The aim of the study was to evaluate the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in different subcounties and town councils within the Kabarole District, with a specific focus on comparing the rates between various age groups (under 15 years old versus 15-19 years old) and between different administrative regions (town councils versus subcounties). The study sought to determine if there were significant differences in teenage pregnancy rates between these groups and regions.

Methodology

Data on teenage pregnancies from the Karole District from July 2023-May 2024 was provided by The PLATFORM for the NEEDY. No other factors, such as demographics, socio-economics, behavioral factors, clinical factors or healthcare factors, among others, could be analyzed due to the lack of stratification of the data.

Data is of public consumption and is stored in The PLATFORM for the NEEDY and the research team analyzing the data of the current report.

Statistical analyses were performed using GraphPad Prism 5.0. The steps of the outbreak investigation followed the previously described guidelines (4,5). The nonparametric two-tailed Mann-Whitney U t test was used when two groups were compared Data are presented as Mean $\pm$ SD. Statistical significance was defined as $P < 0.05$.

Results

The study shows that the percentage of total teenage pregnancy in the subcounties and twon councils from the Kabarole Distric Data ranges between 16.19% in Kibasi Town Council and 29.85 in Kichwamba Subcounty (**Figure 1A**).

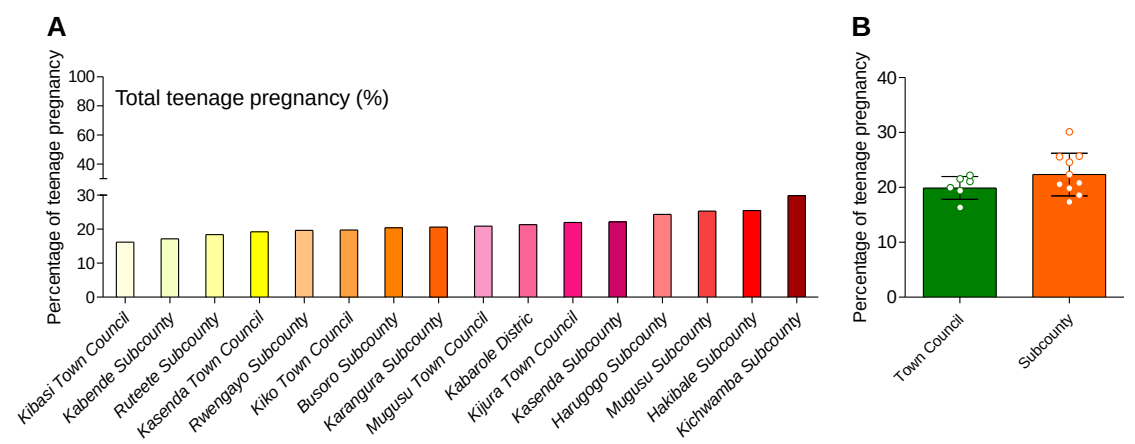


Figure 1. (A) Total teenage pregnancy in 16 town councils/subcounties in the Kabarolo District in Uganda. (B) Comparison of the teenage pregnancy between town councils and subcountis.

When the data was pooled and stratified between town councils and subcounties, no significant differences were found between groups in the percentage of teenage pregnancy (**Figure 1B**).

Teenage pregnancy in woman under 15 years old (Figure 2A) was generally lower in all town councils and subcounties as compared to the percentage of teenage pregnancy in woman between 15-19 years old (Figure 2B). On importance is to note that Busoro, Kasenda and Hakibale subcounties showed no teenage pregnancy at all in woman below 15 years of age. Thus, when pooling the data and comparing the percentage of teenage pregnancy between woman under 15 and woman between 15-19 years old, the later showed a significant increase in the percentage of the parameter evaluated as compared to woman below 15 years old (Figure 2C).

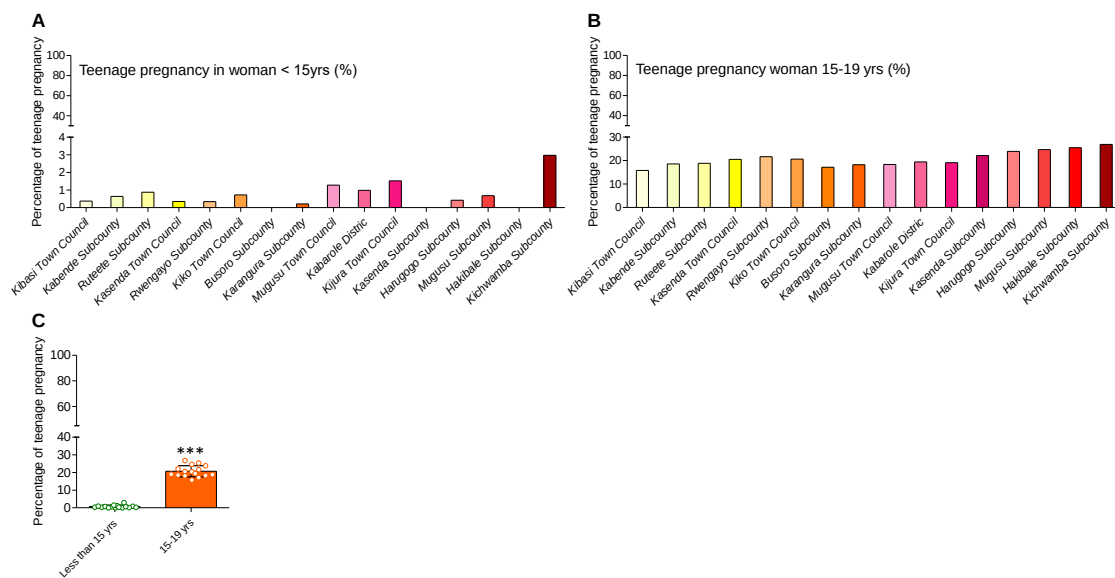


Figure 2. (A,B) Percentage of teenage pregnancy in (A) woman under 15 years old and (B) woman between 15-19 years old. (C) Comparison of the teenage pregnancy between woman under 15 and woman between 15-19 years old. *** $P < 0.001$.

Discussion

The study conducted in Kabarole District highlights the significant prevalence of teenage pregnancy across different administrative regions, with percentages ranging from 16.19% in Kibasi Town Council to 29.85% in Kichwamba Subcounty. The data reveals that teenage pregnancy remains a pervasive issue, consistent with the broader context in Uganda where similar trends have been observed. For instance, a community-based survey in Agago District reported substantial rates of teenage pregnancy, emphasizing the widespread nature of this issue across rural and underserved areas in Uganda (Okot et al., 2023).

Several factors contribute to the high rates of teenage pregnancy in Uganda, including limited access to reproductive health services, lack of fertility awareness, and socio-cultural influences. Birungi and Izudi (2023) identified a lack of fertility awareness as a crucial factor in rural western Uganda, where many teenagers are unaware of the consequences of unprotected sexual activities. Cultural norms and economic hardships

further exacerbate the vulnerability of teenage girls, making them more susceptible to early pregnancies. These findings align with the current study's context, where rural subcounties exhibit significant teenage pregnancy rates.

The health outcomes for teenage mothers and their children are often adverse. Kagawa et al. (2024) reported higher incidences of complications during childbirth and poor neonatal outcomes among teenage mothers at a national referral hospital in Uganda. Similarly, the study observed that teenage mothers in Kabarole District face considerable health risks, particularly in subcounties with higher pregnancy rates. The transition to motherhood for these young girls is often marked by limited support and socio-economic challenges, as noted in regions such as Kasese and Bundibugyo (Ngonzi et al., 2024). These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive support systems to improve health outcomes for both mothers and their infants.

In urban settings like Luwero, unintended pregnancies among young people significantly impact the lives and futures of young women (Parkes et al., 2024). This is reflective of the urban-rural divide observed in the Kabarole District, where town councils and subcounties exhibit varying rates of teenage pregnancy. Despite efforts to promote reproductive health services, adherence to modern contraceptives among adolescents, particularly in refugee settings in Northern Uganda, remains a challenge (Bakesiima et al., 2023). This suggests that access to and education about contraceptives are critical areas that need addressing to mitigate the high rates of teenage pregnancy.

Socio-demographic factors also play a crucial role in influencing breastfeeding practices among teenage mothers. Kimuli et al. (2023) identified several factors associated with exclusive breastfeeding across 77 districts in Uganda, highlighting the importance of targeted interventions to support young mothers. In the Kabarole District study, the comparison between different age groups (under 15 years old versus 15-19 years old) revealed that the latter group had a significantly higher percentage of teenage pregnancies. This indicates a need for age-specific interventions to address the unique challenges faced by younger versus older teenagers.

Overall, addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy in Uganda requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, improved access to reproductive health services, and socio-economic support for young women. The complexity of the issue, influenced by cultural, economic, and health-related factors, necessitates targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects on teenage mothers and their children. Comprehensive strategies that encompass fertility awareness education, cultural sensitivity, and economic empowerment are essential to reducing the high rates of teenage pregnancy and improving the overall well-being of young women in Uganda.

Conclusion

The study conducted in Kabarole District underscores the significant prevalence of teenage pregnancy, with rates varying between 16.19% and 29.85% across different administrative regions. Teenage pregnancy is notably higher among those aged 15-19 compared to those under 15. Contributing factors include limited reproductive health services, lack of fertility awareness, socio-cultural influences, and economic hardships. These factors exacerbate the vulnerability of teenage girls, leading to adverse health outcomes for both mothers and their children. The findings highlight the urgent need for

comprehensive interventions to address the high rates of teenage pregnancy and associated challenges in Uganda.

Clinical and Healthcare Recommendations

1. **Enhance Reproductive Health Services:** Improve accessibility and availability of reproductive health services, particularly in rural and underserved regions. This includes increasing the number of healthcare facilities and trained personnel.
2. **Fertility Awareness Education:** Implement comprehensive sex education programs in schools and communities to raise awareness about fertility and the implications of unprotected sex.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity Programs:** Develop and promote culturally sensitive programs that address socio-cultural norms contributing to teenage pregnancy.
4. **Economic Empowerment:** Provide economic support and vocational training to teenage girls to reduce economic hardships and increase their self-reliance.
5. **Contraceptive Adherence Initiatives:** Promote the use of modern contraceptives through community outreach and education programs, ensuring adolescents understand and have access to these options.
6. **Support Systems for Teenage Mothers:** Establish robust support systems, including healthcare, counseling, and social support, to assist teenage mothers and improve health outcomes for both mothers and infants.
7. **Targeted Interventions for Different Age Groups:** Design age-specific interventions to address the unique challenges faced by younger versus older teenagers, ensuring tailored support and education.

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