

By Vision Reporter

A significant number of men may find it hard to father children and continue their family posterities in the next 15 years, after recent studies portrayed worrying reductions in the number of potent sperms in many African males.

A new study found that men in Africa produced less than 72% as many sperms in 2015 compared to 1965. Equally alarming: the quality had worsened.

"This is a threat to the procreation of the future generations," Dr Pallav Sengupta, the head of physiology unit at the Faculty of Medicine, Lincoln University College, Malaysia, said.

"I was amazed at the magnitude of the problem. Seventy-two percent decline is a dangerous downward trend. This situation is scary," Uchenna Nwagha, a co-author and professor of Obstetric

# Decreasing sperm counts worrying experts

Biology and Reproductive Medicine at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology/Physiology, College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, said.

Dr Edward Sali, the founder and director, and resident physician at the Women's Hospital International and Fertility Centre in Ntinda, Kampala, said 50% of the patients they admit are male and cannot procreate. Not that they are sterile. But they have low sperm quality and concentration and they require to be artificially aided to have a baby.

"The vaginal environment can be quite hostile; it is acidic, whereas sperms and semen are alkaline," the physician said. So, any drop in sperm concentration and virility, may reduce a man's ability to make a woman pregnant.

The research, published

## BETWEEN THE LINES: What is causing it?

Paediatrics and child health professor at the Makerere University College of Health Sciences James Tumwiine said growing rates of obesity and sedentary lifestyles, poorly treated sexually transmitted infections and hormonal abnormalities, consumption of excessive alcohol and tobacco smoking can trigger sperm reductions.

last month in the *African Health Sciences Journal*, retrieved data from 14 studies, conducted during 1965 and 2015 on altering sperm concentration in African males.

Men aged 19 to 55 years from Nigeria, Tunisia, Tanzania, Libya and Egypt were analysed.

After analysis, a time-dependent decline of sperm concentration and an overall 72.6% decrease in mean sperm concentration was

noted in the past 50 years.

The idea of falling sperm counts has been controversial since it was first suggested about 25 years ago. Delores Lamb, the director of the Centre for Reproductive Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, still does not buy it. Counting semen can be tricky and is often unreliable, she said. Many factors might affect why a man's count could be off one day, including stress and time of year.

While she believes studying

the semen count is crucial, she says much more research is needed to confirm any trend.

If sperm counts are truly falling, what could be the cause? No one is really sure, but there are a lot of suspects.

Smoking, particularly by women pregnant with boys, might affect their sons' fertility decades later, Swan and others said. But that is not the full story.

Paediatrics and child health professor at the Makerere University College of Health Sciences James Tumwiine said growing rates of obesity and sedentary lifestyles may share some of the blame for any drop in sperm count, as could pesticide use.

He added that poorly treated sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and hormonal abnormalities, consumption of excessive alcohol and tobacco smoking can also trigger

sperm reductions.

While eating more fruits and vegetables promotes good health, the chemicals sprayed on them can reduce sperm count, another expert, Prof Peter Platteau from Brussels, who is visiting at the Ntinda Fertility Hospital, said.

Stressful life events, such as a move, job change or divorce, can reduce sperm count, too, he said.

To protect against a low sperm count, there are a few things men can do.

In some cases, exercise and losing weight can improve the count and boost fertility, Tumwiine said.

It is also possible to reduce chemical exposures by eating fewer canned foods and more organic fruits and vegetables, not microwaving in plastic and regularly opening windows at home, to allow chemicals to escape, Platteau explained.

In 1991, World Health Organisation estimated that almost 20-35 million couples were infertile in Africa.