Leaders worry over high number of teen mothers

Officials attribute the trend largely to rising cases of sexual violence against minors, many of whom end up pregnant.

BY YOWERI KAGUTA & ALEX ASHABA

Authorities in Kasese District have raised concern over a high number of teenage pregnancies in the area.

Health workers report an increase in the number of young girls attending antenatal care and delivering in health facilities across the district.

Officials attribute the trend largely to rising cases of sexual violence against minors.

Dr Hebert Nzeeke, the head of the Maternal Perinatal Death Surveillance Response (MPDSR) system that monitors deliveries and maternal outcomes across the district, confirmed that several health facilities in the district, including Bwera Government Hospital, Rukooki Hospital, Nyabirongo, and Nyamirami, continue to record high numbers of teenage deliveries.

"Every week, we have an accountability platform as a district where each facility reports the number of teenage deliveries recorded that week. On average, a facility registers between 10 and 15 teenage deliveries, especially among girls aged 19 years and below," Dr Nzeeke said.

Dr Nzeeke, who is also the officer-in-charge of Nyabirongo Health Centre IV, warned that the growing number of teenage pregnancies poses serious health risks, particularly because many girls become pregnant before their bodies are fully developed.

He said some teenagers have pelvic bones that are not mature enough to allow safe delivery, forcing health workers to resort to surgical intervention.

"After surgery, a patient may experience post-surgery complications, infections from the wound, delayed healing, and in some cases tears and other complications," Dr Nzeeke said.

At Bwera Government Hospital in Mpondwe-Lhubiriha Town Council, Mr Clarence Bwambale, the senior administrator, said a significant number of mothers delivering at the facility are teenagers.

"In February this year, we received a total of 726 mothers who came to deliver, but more than 200 were young girls delivering their first or second babies," Mr Bwambale said in an interview at the weekend.

He added that the growing number of expectant mothers has overwhelmed the facility.

"If you reach the hospital, you will witness that we even have many patients sleeping on the floor because we are overwhelmed by the number of mothers coming to deliver," he said.

A similar situation has been reported at Rukooki Hospital in Kasese Municipality. A health worker at the facility revealed that out of 530 mothers who delivered there last month, 152 were teenage mothers.

Last week, *Daily Monitor* reported that parents and local leaders in Kasese raised alarm over a surge in unsafe abortions following the discovery of about 10 foetuses dumped at various garbage sites across the district.



Mothers at Rukoki Health Centre IV in Kasese District on March 25, 2023. PHOTO/ FILE

7,300 PREGNANCIES IN 2022

BY THE NUMBERS

- 726 mothers delivered at Bwera Government Hospital in February 2026.
- Over 200 of them were teenage mothers below 18 years.
- 530 deliveries were recorded at Rukooki Hospital last month.
- 152 of those were teenage mothers.
- Health facilities report 10–15 teenage deliveries every week.
- 7,329 teenage pregnancies were recorded in Kasese during the Covid-19 period and 2022.

Hopeful

In response to the rising cases of teenage pregnancies and violence against girls, the Rwenzururu Kingdom, with support from the International Justice Mission, has stepped up efforts to strengthen the justice system and protect vulnerable groups.

Last week, a dissemination and training workshop on gender principles and violence against women and children was held in Kasese Town.

Mr Emmanuel Emwamu, the Western Uganda regional manager for International Justice Mission, said the policy guidelines on family and gender relations under the Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu are aimed at strengthening the criminal justice system and ensuring protection for survivors of violence within the kingdom.

"Our focus has been on women and children because the numbers clearly show that it is a major problem affecting our society. Different studies in Uganda continue to show a high prevalence of violence against women and children," Mr Emwamu said.

The kingdom's Prime Minister, Mr Benson Kule Baritazale, said the guidelines will help educate the kingdom's structures on how issues related to cultural practices, values, norms, and beliefs should be handled.

"Clan chiefs are advised to strongly desist from mediating cases that fall outside their roles as custodians of customs. Any violation deemed criminal in nature must be referred to the relevant authorities," he said.

During the Covid-19 pandemic and in 2022, Kasese District ranked third among districts with the highest number of teenage pregnancies in the country.

Information from the office of the senior probation officer shows that a total of 7,329 cases of teenage pregnancies were recorded in Kasese during that period.

CamScanner