

# The number of pregnant girls has declined from 600 to 200, according to data, writes Abdulkarim Ssengendo

## Sensitisation campaign curbs teenage pregnancy in Kanungu



More than 15 years ago, Kanungu district had an alarming rate at which girls got pregnant in their early and middle adolescent years. The problem had largely affected the education sector in the district, with an increasing number of girls dropping out of school due to unplanned pregnancies.

Many adolescent girls reportedly died as they gave birth. Their opportunities at a good life were cut short as many were forced into marriage.

A big number of girls suffered various risks, including health-related complications that led to conditions such as fistula. Fistula is a hole between the vagina and rectum or bladder that is caused by prolonged obstructed labour, leaving a woman incontinent of urine or faeces or both. Infant deaths were high among children born to mothers below the age of 20 years. This was because many children born to young mothers were delivered at home or by traditional birth attendants are not trained to handle birth-related complications.

### BETWEEN THE LINES:

UNFPA has supported Kanungu to combat teenage pregnancies through population dynamics, family planning and maternal health; gender and domestic violence, as well as reproductive health.

Poverty was a leading factor responsible for teenage pregnancy as parents forced their children into early marriage to gain wealth.

"I have worked in Kanungu for over 20 years and some years back, we had the highest rates of teenage pregnancy. Statistics given then indicated that the number had shot up to 600 girls every year," Dr Stephen Sebudde, the district health officer (DHO), says.

Joyce Mangyeri, a resident of Kinaba sub-county, disclosed that most young girls who got pregnant did not go to health facilities because society discriminates against them.

She explained that there were no reproductive health services geared at adolescents. Some lacked money to go to health facilities and feared to ask for it from their parents.

### UNFPA Intervenes

However, the tide on this worrying situation started to change in 2002, when the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) introduced a programme designed to reduce teenage pregnancies in the district. The programme supported the district, family planning/maternal health, gender and domestic violence and reproductive health.

The programme involved training midwives in the district. The first batch of midwives were trained and since then, the number has risen to



A nurse attending to a teenage mother at Kanungu health centre IV. Photo by Abdulkarim Ssengendo

### WHAT KANUNGU WOMEN SAY

**Miria Nuwabline, 25, UNFPA**  
Increased awareness among young girls. We now know the value of safe delivery in health facilities, which was not the case in the past because healthworkers never cared about us like they do now.



**Priscillar Asilmwe, 20**  
Currently, there are not many young girls getting pregnant in our villages as it was years ago. We believe if the UNFPA programme continues, things will be better.



**Francois Confidence, 20**  
I came to Kanungu Health Centre IV feeling a lot of pain, but I am now better. I dropped out of Primary Five after getting pregnant. I encourage young girls to abstain from sex; their future lies in education.



over 70. These are serving in various health facilities in the district.

UNFPA has built capacity in the communities to respond to the maternal and child health challenges through community structures.

"We are proud to have UNFPA as a development partner in health service delivery in our units. It has helped us in capacity-building training midwives, who are employed in our health units.

"We had a general challenge of teenage pregnancy before, but when UNFPA came on board, the percentage reduced because of increased awareness, youth corners in health centres, where young people are given health education and taught

family planning methods. Following these interventions, the number of teenage pregnancy has reduced," Moses Kinene, the Kanungu Health Centre IV clinical officer, says.

According to Sebudde, under the programme, the district was given motorcycles for health centre III's, particularly hard-to-reach areas provided ambulances. The office of the DHO was given a double cabin pick-up truck that strengthened their referral system.

Kanungu has also received emergency contraceptives and the referral system is efficient because there is easy access to transport.

The number of women delivering at health centres, that stood at 30%,

shot up to 55% and 96% live babies because mothers come to health facilities.

Antenatal coverage is 80% and the fourth antenatal visit, which was a big challenge reported at 20%, increased to 50%. Postnatal attendance was at 15% and now it is around 70%. Immunisation has improved to 99% and family planning has improved, from 20% to 60%.

Teenage pregnancy has drastically reduced to 200 from 600. This reduction has been attributed to awareness campaigns, family planning and community meetings.

Sebudde asked the leaders to embrace the UNFPA support and maintain the gains so far.

### Antenatal visit reminders

When a pregnant girl is identified in a certain village system that records details, her name is entered into the system that records details, ask whether she, a relative or any person near her home can access a phone.

They send a message to remind her of the antenatal day. If there is any new development, she is sent a message to alert her.

The 2016/17 statistics registered three maternal deaths of mothers dying during delivery. This was attributed to efficiency assimilation of information, increased awareness in the community and addressing the knowledge gap. Young girls have been encouraged to delay sex or have protected sex and keep in school. Those who dropped out of school have been encouraged to kick poverty out of their homes.

Jackson Saturday, the district population officer and UNFPA district coordinator, said on the aspect of early marriages, they are finalising the ordinance as district to ask churches not to wed any girl below the age of 17. He said they have also got sponsorship for girls to join university.

"Girls should keep in school until they finish education. That way, they will have better husbands who are rich. To the parents, when you keep your girls in school, you will earn better bride price and one day their daughters will be holding big positions in the country," Saturday said.

### Midwives' views

Annet Twiklirize, I am glad I was trained. We have used the skills to reduce teenage pregnancies and other health challenges in our workplaces.

Winnie Amanyamba We have given young girls health talks and some of them have listened, complied, while some have not, but we will continue sensitising them. I wish more funding could be availed to increase the number of midwives.

Immaculate Musimenta We visit schools and do outreaches to identify pregnant girls. When we get pregnant teenagers, we care for them like any other pregnant mother.