200,000 children born premature annually - report

Justification. Major cause attributed to negligence of the parents, who indulge in dubious practices such as smoking and using illicit drugs.

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KAMPALA. A new report released by Save the Children, a non-governmental organisation, has revealed that 226,000 children born every year in Uganda are below the normal 37 weeks of gestation. This is an equivalent of more than 18 per cent of the total births.

The findings were revealed by Save the Children programmes manager Santa Engol during celebrations to mark the World Prematurity Day at Naguru Referral Hospital in Kampala last Friday.

Ms Engol said the increasing number of premature births is caused mainly by the negligence of the parents.

"The number of premature births is worrying. Parents ought to be very careful about it. The major cause is negligent parents who indulge in dubious practices such as smoking and using illicit drugs. Poor nutrition and problems with the uterus are some of the other causes," she said.

Emergency measures

However, Ms Engol said children born before their date of birth can live again if the parents keep them close to their bodies and provide the natural warmth, a phenomenon that is borrowed from the kangaroo.

"The kangaroo produces all their young ones prematurely, that is why they have the porch. All parents should borrow from the kangaroo and the deaths will reduce," she said.

> "The number of premature births is worrying. Parents ought to be very careful about it. The major cause is negligent parents, poor nutrition and problems with the uterus," SANTA ENGOL, PROGRAMMES MANAGER SAVE THE CHILDREN



Rising case. A nurse attends to premature babies in an incubator at Arua hospital recently. PHOTO BY FELIX WAROM OKELLO

According to Mr Emmanuel Batiirwe, the director of Naguru Referral Hospital, 38 per cent to 40 per cent of the births every year in Uganda are premature.

"This number has been escalating significantly but this change could be shifted if parents became more careful with their children," Mr Batiirwe said.

Statistics from the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that 15 million children who are born every year worldwide are pre-term cases. Most affected countries are those in sub-Saharan Africa.

WHO ranks Uganda 13th out of 184 countries for highest number of babies born prematurely and 11th for number deaths due to complications from preterm birth.

COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE

Peter and Catherine Otiang's first born twins were born premature five months ago, and the couple says it has not been easy.

"The hospital was very challenging because most of the children that had been taken there died. One of our children was born almost lifeless but we thank God she came back to life," Ms Otiang says.

The couple says they have since spent more than Shs1.5m on providing extra care to the two infants.

"We stayed in the intensive care unit for a month, a lot of money was spent but we had to take care of the situation. We had to use at least 10 pampers on each of the children every day, buying small towels because every time the child urinates, they have to be changed. They have to be in a warm environment always," Ms Otiang says.

CamScanner

Leaders clash over hospital administration

Voices

FROM PAGE 7

"We have come from very far and the health standards are improving by the day. Do not take those rumours [seriously]."
GODFREY BAVEKUNO MAFUMU, DISTRICT CHAIRPERSON

"Patients are at a great risk of contracting diseases because of the poor sanitary management at the facility. The government should intervene and do something at Gombe Hospital,"
MUHAMMAD MUWANGA KIVUMBI, BUTAMBALA COUNTY MP

"If you visit that hospital, you can visibly see that all the structures need repair .They are very old and require major renovations,"
PROF JOSEPH NSEREKO, , CHAIRPERSON HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

and cobweb, and a foul smell was emanating from some of the wards.

"Patients are at a great risk of contracting diseases because of the poor sanitary management at the facility. Let the government intervene and do something at Gombe Hospital." Mr Kivumbi said.

But Mr Mafumu, in his defence, however, says the situation at the hospital is not as threatening as portrayed by some local leaders.

"We have come from very far and the health standards are improving by the day. Do not take those rumors," he said.

He said the district is in the process of hiring a private security firm to monitor those who enter and move out of the hospital to curb drug theft at the facility.

Mr Mafumu also revealed that the district has constructed a modern waterborne toilet and they have also earmarked Shs700m for the renovation of the Out Patient Department ward.

"We are not seated, more than Shs300m will be injected in renovating the maternity ward, construction of a perimeter fence around the hospital. Besides that, we have already put up a water pump," he said.

Mr Mafumu added: "Our total budget is Shs20.6b and once we secure those funds, our hospital will become one of the best health facilities in the country."

When contacted, Dr Ssekamatte said: "My friend, I cannot tell you anything about Gombe Hospital. Do not put me in trouble."

Prof Joseph Nsereko, the chairperson of the hospital management committee, blamed the mess at the facility on financial constraints.

"If you visit that hospital, you can visibly see that all the structures need repair. They are very old and require major renovations," Prof Nsereko said.

Gombe Hospital, which has a bed capacity of 200, was constructed in 1969 and is the main public hospital in the Greater Mpigi area.

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