

MWALIMU

Why Namayingo leads in teenage pregnancy

One school had 50 cases

While the rate of teenage pregnancies keeps dropping in many districts, the situation in Namayingo is alarming. The majority of schools have pregnant learners, some HIV-positive and as young as 13 years. Some schools have registered deaths due to failed abortions, yet boys too are dropping out of school to work in gold mines, writes **RITAH MUKASA**

Life for many children in Namayingo district is a struggle. And it is tougher for the teenage girls who have to dodge predators at every turn – from the lurking bodaboda men to chapatti sellers and market vendors. At home, a married neighbour can sneak into a girl's hut and defile her. The girls sleep alone because culture dictates that once they start menstruating, they leave the parents' house and move into their small hut in the compound.

A few parents keep an eye on their children at night. The situation at school is not any different because as she jumps over the trap of fellow students, she falls into that of her male teachers.

This picture partly explains the current 27% rate of teenage pregnancies in Namayingo, the highest in the country according to the Unicef.

SITUATION IN SCHOOLS

This island district has 100 private and 84 government-aided primary schools. It also has 10 private and seven government-aided secondary schools, but almost all these have pregnant learners.

Elizabeth Ajiambo, the district education officer in charge of counselling and guidance, says secondary schools conduct pregnancy

tests twice every term. However, on average, each school reports 15 cases for every test. The numbers usually go up in the first term, owing to the long third term holiday.

For example, at St Philip's Secondary School Lwango, the senior woman teacher reported 50 cases in the first term, all in O-level.

Because of the lenient education ministry guidelines, the school allowed the students to complete the term, but asked them to report with their parents in the second term. To their surprise, 75% of the learners returned without the pregnancies.

Upon interrogation, some of them disclosed that they had aborted, while the rest said they miscarried. Out of the remaining 25%, 20% either changed school or dropped out. Five carried the pregnancies to term, but one died in early October due to childbirth complications.

In the second term, they had 12 new cases; three in Senior Four and the rest in Senior One and Two. In third term, they discovered five; meaning the school has 17 pregnant learners, but some already have children.

James Myokos, the headteacher of St Philip's Secondary School Lwango, says the school serves Buyinja sub-county, Sigilu, Haama and Lolwe islands. Out of its 800 students, 323 are girls.



A pregnant girl at an antenatal clinic. The current 27% rate of teenage pregnancies in Namayingo is the highest in the country, according to Unicef

Myokos points out that some girls conceive intentionally. A 17-year-old shocked him when she said she conceived in order to keep her Senior Six boyfriend whom she wants to marry after exams.

At Banda Senior Secondary School in Banda sub-county, Violah Naluggwa, the senior woman teacher, puts the girls' dropout rate at 60%. Out of the 1,200 students, only 350 are girls and the number keeps dropping. Naluggwa says they admit more girls, but many conceive and dropout before reaching Senior Four.

"We do our best to bring them back, but some choose to get married after childbirth. Others move to Kenya or Kampala to work," she says.

Banda Senior Secondary School conducts abrupt pregnancy tests on girls twice in a term. In the second term, they tested 100 girls and 30 were pregnant; the majority in Senior Two, Three, and Four.

"We allow them to remain in school for up to four months, but follow up to ensure parents support them at home," she says.

Teachers also send the girls' notes

through their classmates to keep them on track.

At Buhemba High school in Buhemba sub-county, Joseph Ojiambo, the deputy headteacher, says last year, they had an average of 16 pregnancies every term. In the first term of 2025, they had 16 cases. The school has 412 boys and 272 girls.

Ojiambo says they realised being lenient was not helping. The majority of the girls were impregnated by their classmates and it had become a way of life. So, in the second term, they took a radical decision and expelled the pregnant girls and their boyfriends. However, they allow the girls back after delivering.

He says the expulsion helped because in third term; they have not registered any cases.

At Bulule Secondary School in Mutumba town council, Samson Odinga, the senior man teacher, says pregnancies are minimal, but this is partly because some girls abort. For example, in the first term, they tested all the 175 girls and found three pregnant but two; one in Senior One and another in Senior Two, had

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aborted. The third one delivered and resumed school the following term. There was no case in the second and third term, thanks to the weekly counselling sessions.

At Mutumba Seed Secondary School, Ajiambo says they had 21 cases in the second term.

Meanwhile, primary school girls are not safe either. In Namayingo Primary School, they had three pregnant candidates, but by the time *Mwali mu* visited the school, a few days to Primary Leaving Examinations, one had disappeared.

Claire Nafula, a teacher, says at the beginning of every year, they register many girls, but the number drops, owing to pregnancies and other factors such as gold mining and fishing.

When it comes to pregnancies, she says: "We test once a year and this time, we found three."

They also counsel the learners and their parents, encouraging them to resume school after childbirth.

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WHY NAMAYINGO HAS BECOME DEFILERS' DEN

PHOTOS BY RITAH MUKASA

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Nafula says the girls are impregnated by bodaboda riders, vendors, gold miners and married men.

Also, in the islands, Petwa Nandudu, a teacher at Sigulu Primary School, says HIV infections are rife.

STUDENT DIES WHILE ABORTING

March 2, 2025 will forever be a dark day in 45-year-old Christine Taaka's life. On that day, she lost her only daughter, Jennifer Auma, who would have turned 18 in November. She died while attempting to abort.

The Senior Three student at Banda Secondary School was a darling to many. With tears streaming down her face, Taaka said: "My husband died when Auma was three years old. I have been struggling to raise her and her four brothers."

Auma had big dreams and she always promised to complete school and change her family's fortunes.

A week before her death, Taaka says, she noticed her daughter had gained weight and become lighter in complexion, which was a red flag. She waited for her to disclose if she was pregnant in vain. On February 27, Auma admitted she was four months pregnant.

"I felt like my world was crashing down on me. I asked what she was going to tell the people," Taaka recalls.

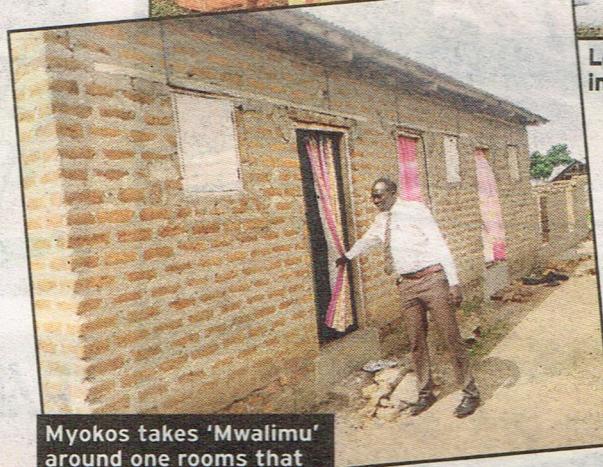
However, Auma regrets this confrontation, saying it must have pushed her daughter to abort.

Taaka says Auma left on a Friday and never returned. She last talked to her mother on Saturday, asking if her (Auma's) daughter was well.

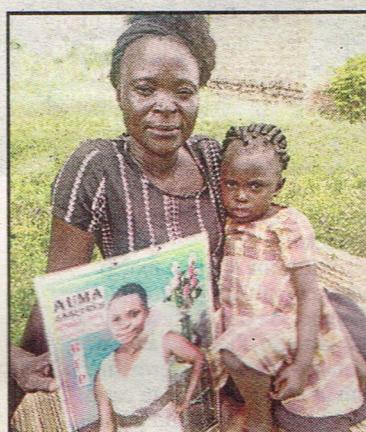
On Sunday, March 2, Taaka received a panic call from a relative, asking her to find her daughter at a hospital in Namayingo.

"I rushed but by the time I reached, she was lifeless, lying in a pool of blood. I heard that the man who impregnated her took her to a quack doctor and when her health deteriorated, they disappeared."

Elizabeth Ojiambo, an education officer, says some girls die while attempting to abort, but parents hide it. The lucky ones are rescued. For instance, at Banda Secondary School,



Myokos takes 'Mwalimu' around one rooms that students rent



Taaka with her granddaughter. In the portrait is the late Auma

teachers recently rescued a girl who was bleeding excessively after aborting.

Nicholas Eppa, a clinical officer at Santa Medical Centre in Namayingo

Peter Grace Putan, deputy headteacher, Budidi Secondary School

HIV is prevalent in our schools, especially in the islands. Sadly, some children live in remote villages and cannot easily access healthcare. As school heads, we have to do more to ensure these learners are safe.



Learners during a counselling session at Banda Secondary School in Namayingo. A teacher says the girls' drop out rate is 60%

town council, says they always receive young girls who want to either test for pregnancy, terminate or have attempted to terminate and things went wrong.

"We counsel the girls to keep the pregnancies and treat those who have attempted," he says.

Eppa recalls a 15-year-old who went for medication last month. The scan showed she was six months pregnant.

"Her mother asked us to abort to save her from the husband's wrath."

Worse still, the girl revealed the married neighbour was responsible. He would sneak into her hut at night and defile her.

"We advised the mother to report to the Police, but she was hesitant. We later heard the perpetrator had settled the matter with the girl's father," Eppa says.

He blames parents for being negligent and greedy for bride price. Eppa implores law enforcers to arrest such parents plus the people who perform abortions.

THE ACCOMMODATION FACTOR

Because most schools in Namayingo lack accommodation facilities, learners who come from faraway places, including the islands, rent rooms or huts popularly known as 'estates' at a minimum of shs 15,000 per month. Most of these places have no fences or rules. You find big boys and bodaboda men sleeping next to

young girls. They also move in and out at leisure and are free to host whoever they wish at any time.

Headteacher Myokos says by mid-term, many run out of food, which pushes them to sleep with men to survive.

To curb this, Myokos started a boarding section which currently accommodates 60 girls out of the 400. He calls for support to build more facilities and have all the students closely supervised inside the school.

Unice Nabwire, a senior woman teacher, says some parents consider children to be a burden. When the girls conceive, such parents see that as an opportunity to get rid of them.

Ajiambo urges the Government to build secondary schools in the islands so that children do not have to travel long distances to the mainland. For example, she says, Lolwe is a big island, but it does not have a secondary school.

NIGHT EVENTS

While world over death evokes tears, funerals in Namayingo have increasingly become carnivals characterised by erotic dances and sex orgies. The phrase 'Disco Matang' or vigil fundraising is popular. Here, families, friends, neighbours and well-wishers gather to fundraise and all is done under the cover of darkness with music in the background. Also, students leave their rented rooms and teenagers sneak out of their parents' compounds to attend the discos.

Budala Mugoya, a businessman in

WORD FROM THE POLICE

Milly Labol, the officer in charge of child and family protection at Namayingo Central Police Station, blames the teenage pregnancy surge on irresponsible parenting, night markets and night events.

"Markets begin at 6:00pm till late in the night. Parents send children to buy or sell merchandise hence exposing them to predators."

Labol's office receives 10-20 teenage mothers aged 17-21 years per week.

On what the police are doing, Labol says: "We take up cases that have been reported and pursue them up to court."

"However, we sometimes fail to pursue cases in the islands because islanders are mobile and cannot be traced."

Namayingo, wants the Government to ban them to save children's lives. He says girls as young as 13 years dance with men who offer money for sex, usually without protection.

In the same way, Sowedi Hamisi, a resident in Namayingo town, says gold mining has pulled many boys out of school. Boys as young as 10 years are allowed to work in the mines, unregulated and once they get used to big money, they abandon school.

EDUCATION MINISTRY INTERVENES

On October 20, Ministry of Education and Sports officials in partnership with UNESCO and Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation met 175 headteachers, senior women and men, plus representatives from the school management committees at Namayingo Primary School to find a lasting solution to teenage pregnancies.

The group agreed to promote good health and wellbeing of the learners. They also agreed to create a safe learning environment for all, including the adolescent mothers and to reduce new HIV infections in schools.

Muhamadi Kasule, the technical advisor for health and HIV at the ministry, asked schools to equip learners with life skills and protect them against violence.

Joyce Atimango, executive director of Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation

We have worked in Namayingo for years. The situation is improving. We are now focusing on spreading knowledge and understanding of HIV, sexual reproductive health, and mental health as well as empowering schools to safeguard learners.



STAKEHOLDERS OFFER SOLUTIONS TO TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Nalongo Eva Kxesiga, RDC Namayingo

Disco matanga was banned here and we continue fighting it. Teenage pregnancy is still high, but I blame it on the high poverty rates. Gold mining has worsened the situation, but we are sensitising parents.

Sheikh Edirisa Musana, chairperson Buyinja village

Parental negligence is killing this district, especially on the side of polygamous men. You find a man with five wives and wants to marry more to have many children he cannot look after. Government should enact laws against negligent men.