

BY YOWERI KAGUTA  
& ALEX ASHABA

# Kasese leaders decry surge in unsafe abortions

**KASESE.** Parents and local leaders in Kasese District have raised alarm over a surge in suspected unsafe abortions following the discovery of about 10 fetuses dumped at garbage sites and in drainage channels across the district.

Residents link the trend to rising cases of teenage pregnancy, saying many girls who conceive shun antenatal care and instead resort to abortion for fear of stigma, parental reaction and community shame.

A mini-survey conducted by this publication found reported cases in Kisinga Town Council, Kanyughunya Village in Kisinga Sub-county, Mahango, Kilimu-Katadoba Cell in Nyakabingo II Ward (Central Division), and Saluti A.

Jane Biira (not her real name), admitted terminating a seven-month pregnancy and dumping the foetus in the Kamulikwizi drainage channel in Kisanga A Cell, Nyamwamba Division of Kasese Municipality.

Biira, 30, said she was arrested and detained at Kasese Central Police Station for two days before being released on police bond.

She told this publication that she was impregnated by a truck driver she met in Kasese Town last year.

According to her account, the man had travelled from Kampala, and the two met for the first time and had sexual intercourse. A month later, she realised she was pregnant.

"I am a mother of two children. I failed to take care of this pregnancy because I had no money. My firstborn is 16 years old, and the other is one-and-a-half years old. Each child has a different father," she said.

Mr Isaac Kalyabyuma, the parish chairperson for Nyakabingo II Ward, said two fetuses were discovered in the Kihalimu-Katadoba drainage channel over the past three months.

"The first foetus was discovered in November last year, and the second one early this month. We initially buried them here, but Central Division leadership later exhumed the bodies and reburied them at the cemetery," he said.

He added that those responsible appear to be targeting a deeply dug drainage channel in the area to dispose of the foetuses.

Officials say teenage pregnancy remains a serious and escalating health and social challenge in Kasese District, with rates reportedly higher than the national average. Data from the District Probation and Welfare Office indicates

## NATIONAL OUTLOOK

National estimates suggest around 300,000 induced abortions occur in Uganda each year, translating to roughly 54 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-49 – one of the highest rates in the region. Most of these procedures are believed to be unsafe, carried out outside regulated medical settings.

that Kasese is among the most affected areas.

Mr Ronald Kato, the Executive Director of Kasese Youth Link for Development, said at least five of the 10 cases reported in the past two months involved young girls, who were allegedly defiled.

"I am still analysing the cases, but so far, five out of the 10 reported abortions involved girls who were defiled. We need to establish what exactly forced these girls to terminate their pregnancies," Mr Kato said.

Mr Danes Bwambale, a medical officer at Rukooki Hospital in Kasese Town, cautioned girls against unsafe abortion, warning of severe health risks.

"If abortion is not conducted by trained medical personnel, post-abortion care is critical. If not properly handled, complications such as sepsis can occur," he said.

Several teenage girls who spoke to this publication on condition of anonymity cited fear, stigma and lack of support as the main reasons for terminating their

pregnancies.

One 17-year-old said she aborted after discovering she was pregnant by a fellow student who lacked the capacity to support her.

"I was scared to tell my parents because they are very strict. I feared they would chase me away from home or stop paying my school fees. I felt I had no one to turn to," she said.

An 18-year-old bar worker said she used local herbs to terminate her pregnancy after fearing dismissal from work. "My mother is a single parent and already struggling to feed us. I knew adding another baby would make life harder. I became desperate, and a workmate advised me to abort," she said.

The officer-in-charge of the Child and Family Protection Unit at Rwenzori East Regional Headquarters, Ms Jane Ngelese, said investigations have been launched to identify individuals aiding illegal abortions.