

Mother's Day in the Slums | When Children Have Children

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The Stolen Childhood

For Mother's Day 2026, we take a look behind the façade of the celebrations. In the narrow alleys of Korogogocho, motherhood is often not a late-blooming joy, but an early shock – and the start of a tough battle against poverty, shame and a system that all too often looks the other way.

On Mother's Day, flowers are sold, cards are written, photos are posted. The world portrays motherhood as a heart-warming image: breakfast in bed, hugs, gratitude. But in Korogogocho, a densely populated slum in north-east Nairobi, motherhood takes on a different hue for many girls. It smells of cramped rooms, irregular work, dropping out of school, fear of neighbours, and the attempt to hide a growing bump under a loose jumper.

WHO: 21 million girls become pregnant

Kenya has been aware of the problem for years. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022 shows that 15 per cent of girls and young women aged between 15 and 19 had already been pregnant; 12 per cent had already given birth to a child, and 3 per cent were pregnant at the time of the survey or had experienced pregnancy.

Globally, the WHO estimates that girls aged between 15 and 19 in low- and middle-income countries experience around 21 million pregnancies every year; about half of these are unintended.

In Korogogocho, statistics become everyday reality. A report published in 2025 by the Kenya News Agency refers to a survey of 594 pregnant women and young mothers in Korogogocho: 76.7 per cent reported that their pregnancy had been unplanned.

This is more than just a figure. It is a statement about a lack of choice.

Stolen Childhood:

The Reality of Teen Motherhood in Korogocho

THE SITUATION OF YOUNG MOTHERS



15%
Adolescent
Pregnancy Rate



Korogocho Slum

27%
Adolescent
Pregnancy Rate

77% Unintended
Pregnancies



School
Bans

Family
Eviction

Social
Rejection

PATHWAYS TO BREAKING THE CYCLE



Holistic Education Models

Successful schools integrate secondary education with on-site childcare and mental health support.



School Re-entry Policy

Strengthening national guidelines that legally mandate schools to readmit mothers unconditionally.



Youth-Friendly Health Services

Training providers to offer confidential, non-judgmental care to reduce maternal mortality risks.

THE BURDEN OF STIGMA & EXCLUSION



Abuse in Healthcare

1/3 of Teen Mothers Report
Verbal or Physical Abuse by
Medical Staff During Delivery

Systemic Social Rejection

Girls face "Two-in-One" school
bans and eviction from family
homes due to shame.



NotebookLM

The price of survival – and stigmatisation

Especially – though not only – on Mother's Day, the following holds true: for many girls in Korogocho, the journey into motherhood does not begin with a decision, but with deprivation. Those who do not know whether there will be food in the evening, those for whom school fees, sanitary towels, clothing or a safe home are not a given, live in an economy of dependency.

For some girls, closeness to older men becomes a dangerous survival strategy: a mobile phone, a plate of food, some money, help with school. The price can be a pregnancy.

This pregnancy is then blamed on the girl. Not on the man who abused his power. Not on the poverty that makes the body a bargaining chip. Not on an education system that offers too little protection. But on the child herself.

A mother, yes. But no longer a daughter.

A recent qualitative study from a poor neighbourhood in Kenya describes this social logic with bitter clarity. A father, a young mother recounts, insisted that she have the baby – but not in his house. The message is brutal: you are to be a mother. But you are no longer to be a daughter.

As soon as the bump becomes visible, the walls close in. Neighbours gossip. Classmates mock. Relatives remain silent or scold. Teachers often do not know whether to protect, tolerate or exclude. Motherhood, otherwise held in high social esteem, becomes a stain on a girl. The young mother is regarded as 'fallen', 'reckless', 'a disgrace'.

Yet she is often one thing above all else: defenceless.

School: The promised return – often blocked

On paper, Kenya has a clear answer. The 2020 National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Education are intended to enable girls to return to school after pregnancy and childbirth.

The guidelines were developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with partners such as UNESCO, UNFPA and the Population Council, and are intended to strengthen return, retention and completion in basic education.

But in Korogocho, there is a world of difference between the paper and the school desk. A young mother cannot simply return to class if no one is looking after her baby. She cannot buy a school uniform if the family is already stretching their food. She cannot study if she is breastfeeding at night, fetching water during the day and washing nappies in between.

She cannot walk into a classroom with confidence when her classmates treat her as a cautionary tale.



Click on the thumbnail to watch the video (in German)

A study on Korogocho published in 2024 succinctly summarises the key obstacles: poverty, childcare responsibilities and stigma prevent young mothers from returning to school after giving birth. This is precisely where the severity of the problem lies. A return-to-school policy without childcare is a promise with no door handle.

A healthcare system that can be off-putting

One might think that a 14- or 15-year-old would receive special protection during pregnancy and childbirth. Yet many girls experience the opposite: shame, harsh words, long waiting times, costs, unclear rules, and a lack of confidentiality.



There are some positive examples: young mothers at a school (photo generated by AI)

A qualitative study published in 2025 from a poor neighbourhood in Nairobi bears the telling title “Trying not to be seen”. It describes why pregnant teenagers avoid antenatal check-ups or start them late: out of fear of stigma, costs, judgement and negative experiences within the healthcare system.

A devastating spiral

This is dangerous. Those who hide away seek care later. Those who seek care later face a higher risk of complications. Those who have bad experiences may not return. This creates a vicious circle: the system that is meant to protect becomes itself a place of fear.

Kenya is trying to counteract this. In June 2025, Kenyan media reported that the government was rolling out special health cards for teenage mothers to ensure that girls and young mothers have access to antenatal care, postnatal care, vaccinations, family planning and psychosocial support. The Social Health Authority system is also intended to break down barriers. Yet reports from the field show that access often still depends on information, support, documents, registration procedures and the attitude of individual staff members. This is not reliable help, but arbitrariness.

*‘A system is only fair when a 13-year-old pregnant girl doesn’t have to be brave to get help.’
I Quote from a Community Health Worker in Korogocho.*

What remains: The gap between law and reality

All too often, this applies to families or friends as well. Sometimes it is the grandmother who takes the baby so that the girl can study. Sometimes it is a teacher who organises a second chance. There are also private schools that provide supervision for the girls’ babies during lessons. Sometimes it is a local association, a neighbour, an NGO. This help is invaluable. But it is not reliable enough.



Instead of being at school, at home alone with the baby. | Illustration generated by AI

And young mothers often fall through the cracks. They are children, but also mothers. Schoolgirls, but often no longer in school. Patients, but frequently without safe support. Victims of poverty or violence, but treated by society as the perpetrators of their own situation.

Government programmes are usually compartmentalised. Life is not.

Link: <https://korogocho.com/muttertag-im-slum-wenn-kinder-kinder-bekommen/>