

WAGGGS' Initiative on the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy

STATISTICS

1 in 5 people in the world is an adolescent (WHO definition – 10 to 19 year olds)¹

Out of 1.2 billion adolescents worldwide, about 85% live in developing countries¹

The World Health Organization has defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity⁴

60 out of every 1000 adolescent girls give birth each year, a total of 17 million babies. These babies run almost double the risk of dying during their first year of life than babies born to older mothers¹

Every year at least 60,000 adolescent women die from health problems related to pregnancy and childbirth¹

4.4 million women aged 15 to 19 undergo unsafe abortions¹

Early pregnancy is an important health risk for young women²

In many developing countries, at least 50% of all women give birth before reaching the age of 20²

Young women who become pregnant before their bodies are fully developed, especially under 17, face higher risk of diseases, injuries and death related to pregnancy, childbirth or abortion²

Many pregnancies are unwanted yet only 17% of the age group use any form of contraception³

Girls aged 10 to 14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy/childbirth than women aged between 20 and 24³

The number of adolescents without reproductive health information is estimated at 100 million³

Women aged 15 to 19 have up to 200% higher risk of dying during pregnancy or delivery than those who are older⁴

Young women who haven't reached full physical and physiological maturity are almost 3 times as likely to die from complications in childbirth as older women⁴

Babies of adolescent mothers have lower chance of survival. Low birthweight is more common in babies of adolescent mothers⁴



In many developing countries, at least 50% of all women give birth before reaching the age of 20²



OTHER STATISTICS

The World Health Organization estimates that each year, 1 in 20 adolescents contracts Sexually Transmitted Infections (e.g. HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia and herpes)²

Women now account for almost half of all cases of HIV/AIDS and in countries with high HIV prevalence, young women are at higher risk of contracting HIV than young men.²

33.6 million people are living with HIV/AIDS²

1.2 million children under 15 are living with HIV/AIDS²

Women account for 14.8 million of adults living with HIV/AIDS²

It is estimated that 100 to 132 million girls and women have been subjected to Female Genital Mutilation worldwide²

5 young people between 10 and 24 are infected with HIV every minute³

Every year an estimated 2 million girls between 5 and 15 are drawn into commercial sex³

QUOTATIONS

'Childbearing at a young age is profoundly disempowering. Especially for the unmarried young woman, childbearing cuts short her education, severely limits her income-earning capacity and impairs her ability to make well-informed choices about life'¹

'The lives of millions of adolescents worldwide are at risk because society does not provide them with the information, the skills, the health services and the support they need to postpone sex until they are physically and socially mature, and able to make well-informed, responsible decisions about their sexual behaviour'¹

'According to UNAIDS, sex education encourages young people to postpone their first intercourse thus helping to protect young people not only from early pregnancy, but also from becoming infected with HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections'²

'Whether or not a woman is married, having a child at a young age severely limits her education and employment prospects. In many countries of the developing world, marriage and the inevitable childbearing mark the end of schooling. The resulting lack of education limits women's ability to make informed choices and to find paid work'⁴



Women account for 14.8 million (46%) of 32.4 million adults living with HIV/AIDS².

Every year an estimated 2 million girls between 5 and 15 are drawn into commercial sex³.



'In developed countries, pregnancy for an unmarried teenager may lead to an economically and socially depressed future as a single parent, or to forced marriage before she is ready, with the greater likelihood of divorce⁴.'

'In youth organizations – because of the variety of activities commonly available, and because the atmosphere is much more one of participation than in school or the health services, it is often easier for a young person to raise sensitive subjects. Youth organizations also provide training in leadership and conduct campaigns for public health that both promote the social development of their members and provide education and training in public health issues⁴.'

'Children born to adolescent mothers are usually at a disadvantage, given the mother's physical and emotional immaturity and the fact that having a child usually puts a stop to her schooling. The risks are especially great for the child if its mother is a young teen (12 to 16), if she is unmarried, if she is poor, or if the child is unwanted. The burden of being born to an adolescent mother is greatest when all of these conditions prevail⁵.'

'When they become pregnant, school policies force them to drop out. When parents consider their daughters' future, they often see education as a hindrance, not a help, to successful marriage and motherhood⁶.'

'Without the benefits of an education, they risk being forced into early sexual relations, and thereby becoming infected. Thus they pay many times over the deadly price of not getting an education⁶.'

'It is often said that education empowers girls by building up their confidence and enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives... but for most of the world's girls, it is about something much more fundamental. It is about escaping the trap of child labour, or the perils of going into the labour of childbirth while still a child yourself; about managing pregnancies so that they do not threaten your health, your livelihood or even your life; about ensuring that your children, in their turn, are guaranteed their right to education⁶.'

UN TREATIES, CONVENTIONS, REPORTS

Taken from the Report on the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt September 1994

Information and services should be made available to adolescents to help them understand their sexuality and protect them from unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and subsequent risk of infertility. This should be combined with the education of young men to respect women's self-determination and to share responsibility with women in matters of sexuality and reproduction.



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Overall for young women, early marriage and early motherhood can severely curtail educational and employment opportunities and are likely to have a long-term, adverse impact on their and their children's quality of life. Poor educational and economic opportunities and sexual exploitation are important factors in the high levels of adolescent child-bearing.

Programmes for adolescents have proven most effective when they secure the full involvement of adolescents in identifying their reproductive and sexual health needs and in designing programmes that respond to those needs.

Countries, with the support of the international community, should protect and promote the rights of adolescents to reproductive health education, information and care and greatly reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies.

Taken from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

From Article 25

Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Taken from the Braga Youth Action Plan, Braga 1998

We recommend the formulation/review and implementation of an integrated national youth health policy addressing all major health issues including: sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, substance abuse, nutrition and hygiene, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, mental health, occupational and environmental health.

Taken from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Taken from Article 12

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.
2. ... States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

¹The Second Decade, World Health Organization


²United Nations- The World's Women 2000 - Trends and Statistics

³A Time Between Health, Sexuality and Reproductive Rights of Young People, UNFPA

⁴The Health of Young People, A Challenge and a Promise, WHO

⁵Women's Empowerment and Reproductive Health, UNFPA

⁶From Kofi Annan's address to the World Education Forum, Dakar, 26 April 2000



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