

Module 4: Adolescent pregnancy - Adolescent health and development with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health - Assignment

Jefferson Sibley

Centro universitario per la cooperazione internazionale
Università degli studi di Parma, Parma, Italy

Is adolescent pregnancy a public health priority in Liberia?

Yes, adolescent pregnancy is a public health priority in my country, Liberia.

Liberia is a country emerging out of a long period (over a decade) of brutal civil crisis, which destroyed every fabric of the Liberian society. Some of the major effects of this devastating arm conflict on our country today are high rate of poverty in the society, high rate of unemployment, and an already high but increasing illiteracy rate. Unemployment and poverty contribute vigorously to increasing illiteracy because parents cannot afford the minimum fees to meet up with school requirements to keep their children in school.

In a society like this, the recipe is just as good to force adolescents, bulk of who are from the underprivileged class, to yield to the temptation of coercive sexual relationships, too early wives, and to a larger extend even becoming sex workers, in order to earn a living.

In the face of these complex problems is the lack of well-organized national adolescent health service to provide the requisite health services and information to buffer the huge socio-economic problems.

These facts are reflected by the rise in the number of teenage pregnancy in our society, the increase in the number of adolescent (especially girls) school drop-out rate, and the high rate of maternal and infant mortality among the younger age group.

Story assignment

The three main factors that contribute to unwanted adolescent pregnancy are:

1. Young adolescent girls who are coerced into sexual relations are most likely to have unwanted or unintended pregnancies.
2. Too early adolescent marriage, as is the norm in some societies, may lead to both intended and unintended pregnancy.
3. The lack of adolescent health services (sexuality education, contraceptive/family planning services, HIV/AIDS prevention programs, etc.) to provide the requisite knowledge and services to prevent them from getting pregnant when they are not prepare for such task.

What can be done by communities and families to prevent this from happening to other girls?

To prevent this from happening to other girls, communities and families must first support adolescents to get the requisite adolescent sexual health services (adolescent sexuality education, contraceptive services, HIV/Aids prevention services, encourage education and skill training for adolescents, etc.) they need.

They need to do away with norms (like getting adolescent girls into Early Marriage) that contribute to too early adolescent pregnancy.

They need to advocate against acts of social injustice against women such as sexual coercion, rape, and all forms of sexual violence, that have high tendency for adolescent pregnancy.

Moreover, communities and families must support already pregnant adolescents to making their pregnancy safe and thereafter support them in getting back on the road to becoming productive future leaders.

What can the Ministry of Health do to reorient the health care system to meet the needs of girls?

To meet the needs of adolescent girls with unplanned pregnancy, the Ministry of Health needs to reorient its adolescent sexual programs. To begin with, the ministry needs to institute a strong adolescent sexual health program that will address a wide range of adolescent needs. Such program should include services such as sexuality education, contraceptive services, prevention of HIV/AIDS, etc.). These services must not only be available but must also be of the best quality. For Liberia where abortion is illegal, the reality on the ground is worse. The laws have not succeeded in getting rid of abortion but rather created a corridor for unqualified individuals to carry out very unsafe abortions. The consequences are grave. As much as abortion is a very sensitive issue, it must be addressed properly by national governments to meet the reality on the ground. The Ministry of Health must take the lead in advocating and putting forward a safe plan of action to make sure that the laws on abortion are revisited and modified or changed. Safe abortion and post-abortion services must be made a part of National Health Service. The fact remains that if a young lady is desperate to secure an abortion, there is absolutely nothing that you can do to stop her from doing so.

In addition, the Ministry of Health should also make services available where subsequent unintended pregnancies can be prevented for adolescents who are already pregnant. Such programs must be available alongside other programs like skill acquiring programs that will prepare them to become productive future individuals.

Assignment document

1. [Camacho AV, Chandra-Mouli V. Adolescent pregnancy: a global perspective. Paper presented at: Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research; 2010 Sep 18; Geneva.](#)