Adolescent Pregnancy: A global perspective

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1. What is the magnitude of adolescent pregnancy?
2. What are the consequences of adolescent pregnancy?
3. What are the circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs?
4. What needs to be done to respond to adolescent pregnancy?
5. What is the relevance of adolescent pregnancy to the Millennium Development Goals?
About 16 million girls aged 15-19 years give birth annually. 90% of them are in developing countries.

The characteristics of young mothers are common across the regions of the world:
- Little education,
- Rural dwelling,
- Low income.

More than 1/5 of women in the poorest regions have a child by age 18.

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Greater likelihood of maternal mortality

- The risk of dying from pregnancy-related causes is twice as high for adolescents aged 15-19, as for older women.

Clinical causes of maternal mortality among adolescents – 1/3

• Unsafe abortion\(^1\)
  – Study from a teaching hospital in Nigeria (over a 10 year period) – abortion was the cause of 36.9% of maternal deaths in 10-19 year olds

• Obstructed labour\(^2\)
  – Strong indications of higher risk in mothers below 16 years since pelvis is still not fully developed
    • Many studies use caesarean section incidence as a proxy for obstructed labour – many studies in Africa and one in India found a greater likelihood of this in adolescents than in adults

Sources: 1. Ujah, 2005; 2. WHO, 2004
Clinical causes of maternal mortality among adolescents – 2/3

• Hypertensive disorders
  – Two studies – one in Turkey\(^1\) and one in Mozambique\(^2\) – found an increased incidence of hypertensive orders in adolescent mothers, when compared to non-adolescent mothers. However, other studies\(^3\) have shown no difference
  • But they did not standardize for parity

Clinical causes of maternal mortality among adolescents – 3/3

- Injuries – suicide and homicide
  - In a study in Bangladesh, violence-related injuries were highest among pregnant adolescents¹

Sources: 1. Ronsmans et al, 1999
Maternal morbidities in adolescents – 1/2

• Anemia
  – Large, high quality study in Latin American & Caribbean found that mothers below 16 years old had a 40% increased risk of anemia, compared to mothers age 20-24\textsuperscript{1}
    • There were no significant differences for older adolescents

Sources: 1. Conde-Agudelo, Belizán & Lammers, 2005
Maternal morbidities in adolescents – 1/2

• Malaria
  – In a recent study in Mozambique, malaria was the cause of death in twice as many adolescent mothers (26.9%) as non-adolescent mothers (11.7%)\(^1\)

• Obstructed labour – fistulae
  – Studies in Africa have shown that 58-80% of women with obstetric fistulae are under age 20, with the youngest aged only 12 or 13 years\(^2\)
  – 59% and 27% of fistulae cases occurred in women below 15 & 18 years respectively\(^3\)

Babies born to adolescent mothers face higher risks

- Adolescents are at an increased risk for pre-term labour & delivery, compared to older women.
- Babies born to adolescent mothers are more likely to be of low birth weight.
- Babies born to adolescent mothers are at an increased risk of perinatal & infant mortality.

Relationship between maternal age and perinatal outcomes

• Rigorous study in Latin American & the Caribbean showed that:
  – Adolescent mothers had higher risks of regular & very preterm delivery, & of giving birth to infants that were low & very low birth weight, as well as small for gestational age (compared to women aged 20-34)
  – Infants born to women below 16 years faced a 50% increase in risk of early neonatal death
  – All risks increased as maternal age decreased

Source: Conde-Agudelo, Belizán & Lammers, 2005
Potential risks to the adolescent mother's life prospects

• Pregnancy can bring status for a married adolescent in cultures where motherhood is the core aspect of a woman's identity.

• On the other hand, an unmarried pregnant adolescent may be driven away by her family, or abandoned by her partner & be left with no means of support.
Socio-economic deprivation: both a cause & consequence of adolescent pregnancy

"We young women are not prepared to become mothers. I would like to continue my studies. But since I have had my daughter, my options have changed because I have many more obligations now. I hope that this will not be a barrier for me to succeed in life."

Eylin 19, Honduras January 2006.

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1. First sexual activity occurs between 15-19 for the majority of adolescents; it is not occurring earlier than in the past. For many girls it occurs in the context of coercion & violence.

2. Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of adolescents girls marry (or are "married off") before 18.

Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs.

Sex within marriage

Intended pregnancy

Unintended pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy.
Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs.

- Sex within marriage
- Sex outside a recognised union

Intended pregnancy

Unintended pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy.
Pregnancy within & before marriage: Data from developing countries

Source: National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2005
Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs.

- Intended pregnancy
  - Sex within marriage
  - Sex outside marriage
  - Consensual sex
    - Within marriage
    - Outside a recognised union

- Unintended pregnancy
Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs.

- Intended pregnancy
  - Sex within marriage
  - Sex outside a recognised union

- Unintended pregnancy
  - Consensual sex
    - Within marriage
    - Outside a recognised union
  - Non-consensual sex
Levels of coerced sex & its association with age of first sex

Coerced First Sex, by Age at First Sex

% of women reporting coerced first sex among sexually experienced women, by site and by age at first sex

World Health Organization, 2005
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Choosing the right interventions.

- Sex within marriage
- Sex outside a recognised union

Intended pregnancy

- Advocate with families & communities
- Provide opportunities for study & work

Unintended pregnancy
Choosing the right interventions.

Intended pregnancy

- Sex within marriage
- Sex outside a recognised union

Unintended pregnancy

Consensual sex
- Within marriage
- Outside a recognised union

Enhance capacity to make well informed & judicious choices

Adolescent
- Provide information & education
- Promote individual responsibility & protective norms
- Provide health services & products
Work with young men within & outside the context of marriage or other recognised union.


Choosing the right interventions.

- Sex within marriage
- Sex outside a Recognised union
- Consensual sex:  
  - Within marriage  
  - Outside a recognised union
- Non-consensual sex

Intended pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy

Provide a safety net & a second chance.
Provide a safety net.

Making Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECPs) widely available & accessible.

Providing safe abortion services (where legal)
or
Providing effective post-abortion care.
Preventing subsequent pregnancies is key

Preventing second pregnancies by supporting adolescent mothers.
Choosing the right interventions.

- Sex within marriage
- Sex outside a Recognised union
- Consensual sex: - Within marriage - Outside a recognised union
- Non-consensual sex

Intended pregnancy

Unintended pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy

Break the silence against sexual coercion & fight it vigorously.
Break the silence against sexual coercion & fight it vigorously.

- Bring perpetrators to justice.
- Mobilize public opinion to be intolerant of it.
- Protect girls/women from sexual harassment & coercion in educational institutions, work places & in other community settings.
- Empower them to protect themselves, and to ask for & get help when needed.
Ensuring that young pregnant women get the health care & social support they need.
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The relevance of adolescent pregnancy to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- Adolescent pregnancy contributes to maternal mortality
- Adolescent pregnancy contributes to perinatal and infant mortality
- Adolescent pregnancy contributes to the vicious cycle of poverty.
The relevance of adolescent pregnancy to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- Adolescent pregnancy contributes to maternal mortality
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Addressing adolescent pregnancy is important for achieving the MDGs to reduce poverty, childhood mortality & maternal mortality.
Reducing maternal mortality in adolescents: Actions needed at three levels.

• Prevention of too early pregnancies – within or outside marriage.

• Prevention of unsafe abortions, and deaths due to abortions.

• Prevention of deaths during pregnancy and child birth.
Reducing infant & maternal mortality in adolescents: Actions needed at three levels.

- Prevention of too early pregnancies within or outside marriage.
- Prevention of unsafe abortions, and deaths due to abortions.
- Prevention of deaths during pregnancy and child birth.

These actions should be closed linked with actions to prevent HIV.
Contraceptive use in adolescents

Unmet Need for Contraception, by Age Group

- Sub-Saharan Africa
- South and Southeast Asia
- North Africa and West Asia
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Central Asia
- All Countries

% of married women with unmet need

Source: Demographic & Health Surveys, 2008
Use of maternal health care by adolescents – 1/2

• Use of antenatal care (ANC)
  – A systematic review of maternal health care use
    • Women under 20 years are less likely to receive ANC during the first trimester (high quality studies from Jamaica, Brazil, South Africa, India/Kerala, Ecuador)¹
    – In the Philippines, only 29% of mothers below 18 received ANC, compared to 81% of mothers aged 20-30²

• Use of facility-based delivery
  – Significant age differences in favour of older women (high quality studies from India, Morocco, Guatemala)¹

Source: 1. Say L, 2007 (unpublished data); 2. Dela Cruz, 1996
Use of maternal health care by adolescents – 2/2

• Use of skilled delivery assistance
  – No age-difference appears to exist (high quality studies from Bangladesh, India, Nepal)\(^1\)
    • Higher education (both woman’s and her partner’s), problems during delivery, living standards, and women’s autonomy are more significant in influencing the receipt of assistance from a skilled health worker during delivery
  – In an older review, mothers below the age of 19 were significantly less likely than mothers aged 19-23 to receive skilled childbirth care in 7 of 15 countries\(^2\)

Within a multifaceted approach, we need to ensure that every adolescent is able to obtain the health information & services she needs.

- We need to ensure that contraceptive services, antenatal services and skilled care at delivery are widely available.
- We need to ensure that these services are accessible to adolescents.
- We need to ensure that health care providers who provide these services are trained and support to respond to adolescents competently & with sensitivity.
"For too long, when an adolescent becomes pregnant, we have pointed the finger at her. It is time that we pointed the finger at ourselves. If a girl gets pregnant that is because we have not provided her with the information, education, training and support she needs to prevent herself becoming pregnant."

Pramilla Senanayake,
Former assistance Director
International Planned Parenthood Federation.
Assignment

- Is adolescent pregnancy a public health priority in your country?
- Please support your answer with 3 facts.
Assignment Story:

• Please hear the story
  WHO | Teenage pregnancies cause many health, social problems - Listen to this episode

– Based on the story, please respond to the following:
  • What are the three main factors that contributed to this?
  • What can be done by families and communities to prevent this happening to other girls?
  • What can the Ministry of Health do to reorient the health care system to meet the needs of girls such as the one who story you have heard?