Preventing early & unwanted pregnancy & pregnancy-related mortality & morbidity in adolescents

Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research
Geneva 2012
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 prevent early pregnancy and pregnancy-related mortality and morbidity in adolescents?
About 16 million girls aged 15-19 years give birth annually (11% of births worldwide). 95% of these pregnancies occur in developing countries.

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

There are enormous regional differences


In most regions, adolescent pregnancy is declining. Sub Saharan Africa has seen the least level of decline.
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Greater likelihood of maternal mortality

In low and middle income countries, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death in women aged 15-19 years.

Early, unwanted pregnancies are associated with increased levels of induced abortion, which when carried out in unsafe conditions carries severe health risks, including death. In 2008, there were an estimated 3 million unsafe abortions in the world among 15-19 year olds per year.
Babies born to adolescent mothers face higher risks

- The adverse effects of adolescent childbearing extend to the health of their infants. Perinatal deaths are 50% higher among babies born to mothers under 20 years of age than among those born to mothers aged 20-29 years. Babies of adolescent mothers are also more likely to have low birth weight which increases the risk of ill health during infancy.

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

Poverty

Too early pregnancy

Loss of educational & employment opportunities

"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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Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs

Sex within marriage

Intended pregnancy

Unintended pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy
Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs

- Intended pregnancy
- Unintended pregnancy

Sex within marriage

Sex outside a recognised union

Adolescent Pregnancy
Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs.

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

Adolescent Pregnancy
Circumstances in which adolescent pregnancy occurs.

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

- Intended pregnancy
  - Consensual sex
    - Within marriage
    - Outside a recognised union

- Intended pregnancy
  - Non-consensual sex

- Unintended pregnancy
  - Adolescent Pregnancy
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World Health Organization
Guidelines on
Preventing Early Pregnancy and Poor Reproductive Outcomes
Among Adolescents in Developing Countries

World Health Organization
Complementary actions needed at different levels
The story of Zohra
Preventing early marriage

Policy-Level Actions:
– Prohibit early marriage

Individual, Family & Community-Level Actions:
– Inform and empower girls
– Keep girls in school
– Influence cultural norms that support early marriage
The story of Maha
Preventing early pregnancy

Policy-Level Actions:
- Support pregnancy prevention programmes among adolescents

Individual, Family & Community-Level Actions:
- Educate girls and boys about sexuality
- Build community support for preventing early pregnancy
The story of Galina
Increasing the use of contraceptives

Policy-Level Actions:
– Legislate access to contraceptive information and services
– Reduce the cost of contraceptives to adolescents (conditional recommendation)

Individual, Family & Community-Level Actions:
– Educate adolescents about contraceptive use
– Build community support for contraceptive provision to adolescents
– Enable adolescents to obtain contraceptive services
The story of Julie
Preventing coerced sex

Policy-Level Actions:
- Prohibit coerced sex

Individual, Family & Community-Level Actions:
- Empower girls to resist coerced sex
- Influence social norms that condone coerced sex
- Engage men and boys to critically assess gender norms
The story of Ayleen
Preventing unsafe abortion

Policy-Level Actions:
- Enable access to safe abortion and post-abortion services for adolescents

Individual, Family & Community-Level Actions:
- Inform adolescents about dangers of unsafe abortion
- Inform adolescents about where they can obtain safe abortion services
- Increase community awareness of the dangers of unsafe abortion

Health System-Level Actions:
- Identify and remove barriers to safe abortion services
The story of Priya
Increasing use of skilled antenatal, childbirth, and postpartum care

Policy-Level Actions:
- Expand access to skilled antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care
- Expand access to Emergency Obstetric Care

Individual, Family & Community-Level Actions:
- Inform adolescents and community members about the importance of skilled antenatal and childbirth care

Health System-Level Actions:
- Ensure that adolescents, families and communities are well prepared for birth and birth-related emergencies
- Be sensitive and responsive to the needs of young mothers and mothers-to-be.
Clinical Care for adolescents: What should be done differently?

Relatively little. But health workers should...

- **Antenatal care:**
  - Provide adolescents with an early start to antenatal care
  - Assist them with preparing for birthing and birth-related emergencies
  - Treat them for anemia, which is likely to be more of a problem in pregnancy.
  - Give special attention to counseling and nutritional supplementation
  - Give them special attention in treatment and management of malaria in pregnancy and access to PMTCT services
  - Prioritize hem for detection and management of violence.

- **Delivery care:**
  - Provide special attention during obstetric care to adolescents aged less than 16 years

- **Postnatal care:**
  - Give special attention to breastfeeding promotion throughout pregnancy and postpartum and to neonatal care more in general
  - Give special attention to preventing too-early second pregnancies
Ensuring that young pregnant women get the health care & social support they need.
"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.