

# Unsafe abortion in adolescents

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Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research  
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# Unsafe abortion in adolescents

**1. How many unsafe abortions occur in adolescents ? And where do they occur ?**



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# How many unsafe abortions occur in adolescents ?

- In 2008, nearly 22 million unsafe abortions occurred worldwide
- 15 % of them were in 15-19 year olds
- 26 % of them were in 20-24 year olds



Source: I Shah, E Ahman. Unsafe abortion differentials in 2008 by age and developing country region: High burden among young women. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 2012; 20 (39): 169-173

# Where do unsafe abortions occur in adolescents ?

Almost all the unsafe abortions occurred in developing countries

Of the estimated 3.2 million unsafe abortions in 15-19 year olds worldwide:

- 1.4 million were in Africa
- 1.1 million were in Asia (excluding East Asia)
- 670,000 were in Latin American & the Caribbean

Source: I Shah, E Ahman. Unsafe abortion differentials in 2008 by age and developing country region: High burden among young women. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 2012; 20 (39): 169-173



# What proportion of the total numbers of unsafe abortions are in adolescents ?

- 3.2 m of the estimated 22 m unsafe abortions worldwide were in 15-19 year olds :
- 22% of the abortions that occurred in Africa
- 11% of the unsafe abortions that occurred in Asia (excluding East Asia)
- 16% of the abortions that occurred in Latin American & the Caribbean

Source: I Shah, E Ahman. Unsafe abortion differentials in 2008 by age and developing country region: High burden among young women. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 2012; 20 (39): 169-173



# Unsafe abortion in adolescents

1. How many unsafe abortions occur in adolescents ? And where do they occur ?
2. What are the consequences of unsafe abortion in adolescents ?



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# Physical, psychological & social consequences



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.

G. C. Patton, C. Coffey, S. M. Sawyer et al., "Global patterns of mortality in young people. A systematic analysis of population data," *Lancet*, 374, 881-892, 2009.

# Unsafe abortion in adolescents

1. How many unsafe abortions occur in adolescents ? And where do they occur ?
2. What are the consequences of unsafe abortion in adolescents ?
3. Why do unintended pregnancies occur in adolescents & how could they be prevented ?



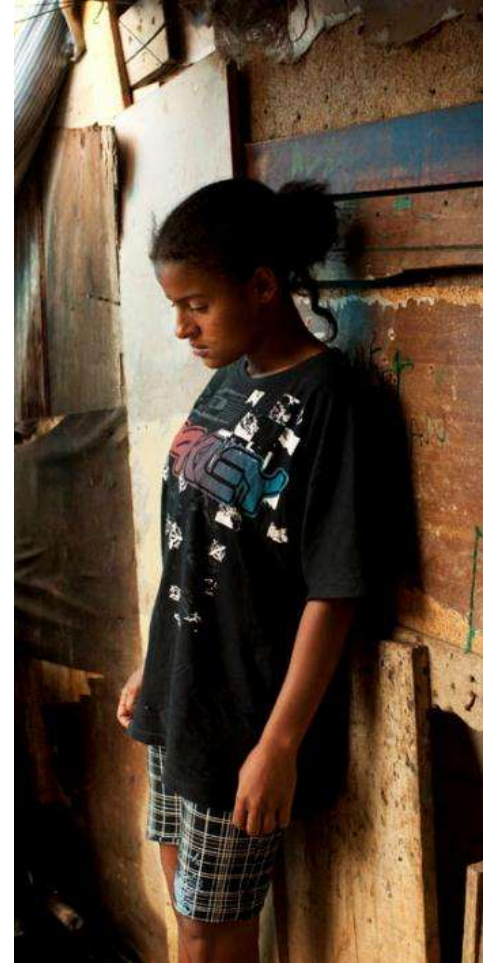
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# Unintended pregnancy in adolescents

## Why it occurs ?

- 1.The prevalence of sexual activity rises steadily from middle to late adolescence
- 2.Many adolescents do not have the knowledge & skills needed to avoid an unwanted pregnancy
- 3.Many adolescents are unable to obtain contraceptives (including emergency contraceptives) to avoid unwanted pregnancies
- 4.Even those adolescents who can obtain contraceptives do not always use them correctly and consistently
- 5.Many adolescents are unable to refuse unwanted or to resist coerced sex



"With little or no progress in meeting the unmet need for family planning, unintended pregnancies will continue to prevail, and where access to safe abortion is restricted legally or due to other barriers, including cost, or the quality of services is poor, women will continue to be forced to resort to unskilled providers, risking serious consequences to their lives and well-being "



I Shah, E Ahman. Unsafe abortion differentials in 2008 by age and developing country region: High burden among young women. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 2012; 20 (39): 169-173

# Preventing Early Pregnancy & Poor Reproductive Outcomes

among adolescents in developing countries

## OUTCOME 2

# Create understanding and support to reduce pregnancy before the age of 20 years



### 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

## OUTCOME 3

# Increase use of contraception



### 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

## OUTCOME 4

# Reduce 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

# Unsafe abortion in adolescents

1. How many unsafe abortions occur in adolescents ? And where do they occur ?
2. What are the consequences of unsafe abortion in adolescents ?
3. Why do unintended pregnancies occur in adolescents ? How could they be prevented ?
4. Why do unsafe abortions occur & why are they more likely to result in serious complications in adolescents ? How can they be prevented ?



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# Adolescents who want to terminate their pregnancies tend to be more vulnerable than adults who want to do so

Compared with an adult, an adolescent seeking an unsafe abortion or for care for complications of an unsafe abortion is more likely to:

- Be unmarried & outside a stable relationship
- Be without a child
- Have sought abortion later in her pregnancy
- Have sought help from an illicit provider
- Have used an unsafe abortion method
- Have delayed seeking care when complications arose
- Have come to the health facility alone or with a friend, rather than a family member





# Barriers to the provision & use of safe abortion services by adolescents

## Laws & policies

- *Abortion laws* – Restrictive laws limit access
- *Third-party involvement* – Mandated notification and/or consent of a parent, guardian, psychiatrist or other adult is a significant barrier
- *Sexual violence* – Sexual violence is often a legal indication, but the process may not protect confidentiality, and may be difficult, slow & emotionally painful.
- *Interaction with other laws* – Providers or facilities may not know which law takes precedence & refuse care; confused clients may not seek care



# Barriers to the provision & use of safe abortion services by adolescents

## Health systems & health workers

### Health facilities:

- do not provide safe abortion care even when it is legal
- charge a lot for safe abortion care
- require tedious and time consuming processes (including questions to answer & forms to fill)
- do not guarantee privacy

### Health workers:

- do not consider adolescents mature enough to make decisions about using handing an unwanted pregnancy & do not accept their decisions
- are judgemental & disrespectful
- do not maintain confidentiality



# Barriers to the provision & use of safe abortion services by adolescents

## Social barriers – Family & Community

- Premarital sexual activity is not acknowledged or accepted
- Abortion is opposed & stigmatized



# Barriers to the provision & use of safe abortion services by adolescents

## Social & economic barriers - Adolescents

- They may not know where they could get obtain safe abortion care
- They may not be able to obtain safe abortion care because they do not have the freedom to move around independently
- They may not want to want to draw attention to their sexual activity because of fear of negative repercussions
- They may not be able to afford the cost of abortion care services and other costs e.g. transport



Barriers to the provision & utilization of safe abortion care by adolescents

CONSULTATION ROOM

How could you be so stupid?



WAITING ROOM



# Overcoming legal & policy barriers to safe abortion care for adolescents – 1/2

## Problem:

Legal & policy barriers hinder adolescents' access to safe abortion care



## Response:

Learn about the laws & policies on abortion in your country.

Inform public health managers, health facility managers & health service providers about the laws & policies.

Educate community leaders about these laws and policies i

Contribute to a public dialogue about making abortion laws & policies less restrictive.

# Overcoming legal & policy barriers to safe abortion care for adolescents – 2/2



## Response (continued):

Find out what guidelines & protocols for health care providers say about safe abortion care.

•If they do not contain any pertinent information:

Press for inclusion of clear guidance on what services can be provided, where, by whom, in what circumstances

•If they require actions inconsistent with the existing law/policy:

Press for their removal.

Ensure that adolescents receive safe abortion care to the fullest extent possible within existing eligibility criteria.

Provide adolescents accurate information about existing laws & policies.

# Overcoming social barriers to safe abortion care for adolescents

## Problem:

Prevailing beliefs & attitudes, values & norms hinder access of abortion care to adolescents.

## Response:

Social barriers need to be addressed by providing community leaders & members with accurate & update information, & stimulating discussion on:

- the benefits of providing adolescents with safe abortion care as part of an overall package of sexual and reproductive health services and
- the cost of not doing so.





# Overcoming health system barriers to safe abortion care for adolescents – 1/2

Clinical care in adolescents is similar to that of adult women. However, their psychological & social needs are different, Care must be tailored to this.

The beliefs, attitudes & values of health service providers affect the content & quality of care. *Abortion values clarification & attitude transformation* needs to be built into their capacity building.

With support, health service providers can provide care that is appropriate to the needs of adolescents & respectful of them.



# Overcoming health systems barriers to safe abortion care for adolescents – 2/2

When an adolescent requests an abortion, the health service provider needs to:

- Provide information on the options
- Help her consider the pros and cons of each option
- Counter misinformation and myths
- Confirm her understanding
- Help her reflect on the advice that she has received from others but to make her own decision
- Accept her decision
- Support her in carrying out her decision

## THIRD PARTY INVOLVEMENT:

- Is she obliged by law to get consent from a third party ?
- Does she want to involve a third party, even if she is not obliged by the law to do so ?

Help her consider the pros and cons and to make a decision.  
Support her decision.



# Post abortion contraception in adolescents

Adolescents' life situations are very different and so their contraceptive needs vary greatly.

Giving them a choice of all methods and responding to their questions and concerns about safety and efficacy will help them identify a method that meets their needs and use it.



# Reduce 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, where legal
- Increase community awareness of the dangers of unsafe abortion

## **HEALTH SYSTEM-LEVEL ACTIONS**

- Identify and remove barriers to safe abortion services