Addressing early and unintended pregnancy

Early and unintended pregnancy is a challenge which affects both high and low income countries, impacting the lives of adolescents – especially girls – in terms of health, social, economic and educational outcomes.

Determinants of early and unintended pregnancy can also be social, economic and educational. According to UNESCO, the main determinants for high-income countries include socio-economic disadvantage, low education, family disruption and risky lifestyle, whereas there is no correlation between access to services (including family planning) and the reduction of adolescent pregnancy. In low- and middle income countries, lack of access to quality sexual and reproductive health services is seen as one of the main determinants of early and unintended pregnancy.

Consequences for young adolescent mothers include absenteeism and school dropout, disengagement and decreased quality of learning, poor academic performance, and lower educational attainment. This, in turn, has repercussions on future employment opportunities and income.

Pregnant adolescents may be expelled or excluded from school. Although many countries are adopting policies to facilitate the return to school for adolescent mothers, these policies are not always implemented at school level. In some cases policies have constraining conditions such as the obligation to apply to a different school, or the inclusion of a fixed period of time before re-entry. Girls who return to school can face stigma and discrimination both from other learners as well as school staff. Teachers may be unprepared and untrained to deal with pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in the classroom.

The education sector can make a significant contribution to addressing the issue of early and unintended pregnancy. It can do this by equipping adolescents with appropriate knowledge on how to reduce risky sexual behaviours, prevent early pregnancy or delay first pregnancy through comprehensive sexuality education, as well as by developing effective re-entry and continuation policies. It can also help promote access to services through the development and reinforcement of an effective referral system and counselling service in school. School health services have the potential to help prevent adolescent pregnancy and ensure that the education of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers meets their health and development needs. A World Health Organization review on preventing early pregnancy and poor reproductive health outcomes found that interventions combining curriculum-based sexuality education with contraceptive promotion to adolescents helped to reduce pregnancy rates before the age of 20 years. In addition, efforts to retain girls in school, both at the primary and secondary levels, reduced the risk of child marriage, which is also one of the determinants of early pregnancy.

The literature on boys’ perception of early and unintended pregnancy is scant. There is a need for more research on boys’ attitudes towards early and unintended pregnancy and their perceptions of the importance of involving them in pregnancy prevention in school.

Adapted from Developing an education sector response to early and unintended pregnancy (UNESCO, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adolescent Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa: 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean: 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia: 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa: 37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe and Central Asia: 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Asia and Pacific: 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013 Averages</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Average: 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income: 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Income: 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income: 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The World Bank: Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19) http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.17#
Country responses

Examples of national policy and practice to address adolescent pregnancy and ensure continued educational opportunities for pregnant learners and young mothers.

National strategies on adolescent pregnancy

National strategies may typically include the following provisions: emphasis on the provision of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to enable young people to make informed choices on their relationships and sexual health; a protective policy and legal environment; access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services including contraception; a holistic approach to addressing and supporting adolescent pregnancy and motherhood through joined-up service provision. Examples include:

- England: Teenage pregnancy strategy: beyond 2010
- Sierra Leone: Let girls be girls, not mothers! National strategy for the reduction of teenage pregnancy (2013-2015)

Education sector policies for pregnant learners and young mothers

Education sector stand-alone policies are generally developed with the aim of ensuring that pregnant adolescents and young mothers can remain in school and continue their education. These policies may focus on: continued education in a stigma-free, safe learning environment; monitoring trajectories to ensure young mothers complete their education; special services or provisions that the school should provide for pregnant adolescents and young mothers (for example feeding rooms or counselling services). These policies may also place emphasis on the issue of prevention through comprehensive sexuality education. Examples include:

- Jamaica: National policy reintegration of school-age mothers into the formal school system
- Namibia: Education sector policy for the prevention and management of learner pregnancy
- Tanzania: Guidelines on how to enable pregnant school girls to continue with their studies
- USA: Supporting the academic success of pregnant and parenting students under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

Education legislation including access and provision for pregnant learners and young mothers

In Latin America the right to an education for pregnant adolescents and young mothers is often enshrined within national education legislation. This is the case for example in:

- Argentina: Ley n° 26.206: Ley de educación nacional
- Chile: Ley núm. 20.370: Establece la ley general de educación

Equador: Ley orgánica de educación intercultural

A review of legislation on teenage pregnancy and early motherhood for countries in Latin America has been undertaken by the regional UNFPA Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (in Spanish) which looks in detail at legislation, country by country, on the right to sexuality education and access to health services.

Campaigns to prevent adolescent pregnancy

A number of countries have recently organized campaigns to raise awareness on the issue of adolescent pregnancy. Such campaigns are most effective through a multisectoral approach.

- Cote d'Ivoire: Zéro Grossesse à l’Ecole (Zero Pregnancy in School)

This campaign by the Government of Côte d'Ivoire with support from UNFPA forms part of the accelerated school pregnancy reduction plan implemented from 2013 to 2015. It includes access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, sexuality education in the curriculum, and student clubs to raise awareness on health issues. According to UNFPA, the campaign has contributed to a 20 per cent decline in youth pregnancies compared to the previous year. (School campaign aims to help Côte d’Ivoire reap demographic dividend, 29 May 2015)

- Rwanda: Nanze gutwita kw’abangavu (No to Teenage Pregnancy)

In early 2015, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion launched an eight-month campaign against teenage pregnancy under the theme ‘Nanze gutwita kw’abangavu’ (No to Teenage Pregnancy). The campaign is being conducted in partnership with other ministries, including health and education, and is set to involve more than 90 schools, mainly secondary ones.

Programmes targeting vulnerable adolescent girls

- Mexico: Promajoven

This Ministry of Education programme provides scholarships to young mothers and pregnant girls between the ages of 12 and 18 years and 11 months to enable them to remain in education. An analysis of the programme is available (in Spanish).

With thanks to the IIEP Office in Buenos Aires for their assistance with this review.
Selected resources

A selection of resources on early and unintended pregnancy. Further resources may be found on the HIV and Health Education Clearinghouse website.

Click on the title to access the document

Addressing early marriage and adolescent pregnancy as a barrier to gender parity and equality in education
Psaki, Stephanie, 2015

Adolescent pregnancy: a review of the evidence
UNFPA, 2013

Adolescent pregnancy in Eastern Europe and Central Asia
UNFPA, 2013

The case for addressing gender and power in sexuality and HIV education: a comprehensive review of evaluation studies
Haberland, Nicole, 2015

Co-designing the teenage pregnancy and young parent strategy
Young Scot, 2015

Girls decide choices on sex and pregnancy
IPPF, 2011

Factors associated with teenage pregnancy in South Asia: a systematic review
Acharya, Dev Rav, et al., 2010

International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators
UNESCO, 2009

Marriage and childbirth as factors in dropping out from school: an analysis of DHS data from sub-Saharan Africa
Population Council, 2006

Meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents in school-based health centers
Boonstra, Heather D., 2015

The miseducation of Latin American girls: poor schooling makes pregnancy a rational choice
Inter-American Development Bank, 2010

Motherhood in childhood: facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy. State of world population 2013
UNFPA, 2013

Teenage, married and out of school. Effects of early marriage and childbirth on school drop-out
FHI 360, 2014

National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (USA), 2011

WHO guidelines on preventing early pregnancy and poor reproductive outcomes among adolescents in developing countries
WHO, 2011
News and views

A snapshot of voices on how the education sector can respond to early and unintended pregnancy

Does getting pregnant cause girls to drop out of school?
This post by Stephanie Psaki on the World Education Blog looks at adolescent pregnancy as a factor causing school dropout but also asks whether other factors in a girl’s life make her more likely to become pregnant and more likely to leave school prematurely. It argues that different countries require different solutions, according to such factors as age of marriage, poverty and value placed on education.

Don’t Expel Them
“Don’t Expel Them” is a short documentary-in-the-making about teenage pregnancy in the Caribbean and the measures to help teenage mothers continue their education. Written and directed by award-winning author and journalist Alecia McKenzie, the documentary seeks to raise awareness about the challenges facing pregnant teenagers, as well the steps being taken to reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancies, including “prevention messages” that governments have promised to “integrate” into educational programmes. Key participants in the documentary include teenage mothers, parliamentarians, educators and activists. Additional filming will be done by Antonnette Smith, a freelance producer with France 24 and former producer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with photography and editing by J. M. De Clercq, a student. (The documentary makers are currently seeking sponsorship to complete the project.) More information at: http://aleciamckenzie.wix.com/home

Let pregnant schoolgirls back into the classroom in Sierra Leone
This article, by Scott MacMillan on the Guardian’s Global Development Professionals Network, highlights some projects being undertaken by BRAC in Sierra Leone and Tanzania to ensure continued learning opportunities for girls, including study clubs and radio schools.

Preventing teen pregnancy with sex education in Chile
This post by Yvonne Ivancse on the International Planned Parenthood Federation website looks at the work of the Asociación Chilena de Protección de la Familia (APROFA) in Chile which is working to increase young people’s access to sexual and reproductive health information by offering informational workshops. The blog is situated within the framework of Chile’s progress towards the 2008 Ministers of Health and Education Comprehensive Sexuality Education commitment in the region.

**COMING SOON**
A report on the education sector response to early and unintended pregnancy in six countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia) by UNESCO and the STEP UP (Strengthening Evidence for Programming on Unintended Pregnancy) Research Programme Consortium is due to be released in the autumn of 2015.

UNESCO and partners are also developing global guidance to help strengthen the education sector’s capacity to prevent and respond to early and unintended pregnancy. This will include the promotion of good policies and practices, building knowledge and skills, as well as reinforcing the links between schools and health services.

For more information please contact: Marina Todesco (m.todesco@unesco.org)

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: Our third thematic brief of 2015 will focus on the education sector’s response to substance use. We would be interested in hearing about your stories, news, events and publications to include in the brief. Contributions can be sent to hiv-health-clearinghouse@iiep.unesco.org by 30 September 2015.