

## **Committee/Council: SPECIAL CONFERENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Issue: The issue of early pregnancy and childbirth**

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### **Introduction**

The issue of early pregnancy and childbirth among young people is an issue of vital importance with widespread impact on millions and one that demands immediate attention. Early adolescent pregnancies are mainly present throughout low and middle-income countries many of whose inhabitants are in impoverished conditions with little to no access to descent healthcare and/or education. Worldwide 16 million girls of the ages 15-19 give birth every year with approximately 1 million giving birth under the age of 15. Young/adolescent births amount to 11% of all births worldwide, 95% of which are in impoverished/developing countries. Although there is education and healthcare to various extents in many MEDC's, early pregnancy and childbirth are pressing issues in these countries due to great obstacles such as certain attitudes and beliefs. Complications during early, adolescent and child pregnancies have been a leading cause in deaths of adolescent and younger girls. Furthermore, every year 3 million girls aged 15-19 go through unsafe pregnancies. Another problem regarding the issue of early pregnancy is that babies born to young mothers have a much higher risk of dying than those born to older women. The reasons for the aforementioned statistics will be further explored throughout the study guide.

### **Definition of Key-Terms**

#### Pregnancy and the act of childbirth

It is important to distinguish between pregnancy and the act of giving birth. Pregnancy is understood as the state in which an offspring goes through stages of development inside the mother's womb. Giving birth describes the process in which the fully developed offspring exits the mother's womb.

#### Child and adolescent pregnancies

Another important distinction to make when discussing the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth is that between child and adolescent pregnancies. Thus, a clear distinction must be made between early pregnancies in which an adolescent gets pregnant and those in which a child who has not reached the age of puberty.

## Birth rates

Definition: The number of children born in comparison to the size of the population in a certain area at a specific time. (This will be further explored in the background information section).

## **Background Information**

### Causes of high birthrates among youth

There are various different causes for the high number of early pregnancies worldwide and in developing countries. Addressing the causes of high rates of childbirth and pregnancy among young people is key to solving the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. The main and most common reasons for the high rate of pregnancy and childbirth among youth are as follows:

- One of the leading causes in early pregnancy and childbirth is the lack of knowledge among youth about the repercussions of sexual intercourse and getting pregnant. Education is seen as a major protective force in preventing and aiding in the eventual elimination of early pregnancies. The extent of the lack of sexual education is exemplified by the fact that in low and middle-income countries only 36 % of male and 23 % of female youths between the ages of 15-25 are aware of the possibility of being infected by HIV/AIDS. It is also further exemplified by the fact that in Latin America, Europe and Asia only 42-68 % of adolescents in sexually active relationships have the necessary sexual education and use contraceptives. In Africa, the percentage of youths who use contraceptives is between 3-49 %. This may be due to a lack of availability of contraceptives, purchase or use of contraceptives being socially unacceptable, or refusal to use contraceptives as sexual intercourse may be forced upon adolescent/youths.
- Another leading cause of early pregnancies around the world is the cultural setting, in which practices such as child marriage is commonplace. 30 % of women in low and middle-income countries get married before turning 18 and 14 % get married before the age of 15. Such practices will place immense pressure on young girls and women to produce children, often oblivious to the consequences of doing so.
- According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists another leading cause of pregnancies especially in the western world is teenage drinking. 75 % of teens and youths in the United States between the ages of 14-21, who have been impregnated, have reported that they conceived whilst under the influence of alcohol.

- Another and perhaps more violent cause of early pregnancy among young people is the act of rape and sexual abuse. Sexual abuse and rape amounts to approximately 5 % of all pregnancies in the United States alone resulting in pregnancies. However, another form of sexual abuse, sexual intercourse between an adult and a teen (below the age of consent), amounts to 43-62 % of teen pregnancies in the USA alone.
- A cause that is, perhaps, going to prove one of the most difficult to address is the absence of parents. Birthrates among teens, whose parent(s) are in any way absent throughout a teen's puberty, tend to be extremely high. This is especially true among teens whose parent(s) have passed away.
- Another leading cause in the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth, which is perhaps the most significant cause, which needs urgent and immediate attention is the perception of abortion, rape resulting in pregnancy and contraceptives. Although it is important to address the issue is far more important to discuss solutions, namely attitudes of populations who will not permit the solutions for the pressing issue to be implemented. In some cases, rape victims who have been impregnated may be excluded from society if an abortion takes place.

#### Impacts on youths and infants going through early births and pregnancies

The causes that render teenage girls vulnerable to early pregnancy and childbirth should be the focus of any resolution, concerning the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore emphasis must also be placed on the aid of those who are already affected by childbirth and who are incapable of living out a dignified life. For the millions of girls who have been denied access to a descent education and a promising future, a solution must be delivered promptly. Here are some of the factors that are currently affecting teenage mothers worldwide:

- One of the biggest and most horrendous impacts of young girls and women going through childbirth is the number of unsafe abortions that take place, especially in developing countries. This is an pressing issue that demands immediate attention and urgently requires a solution for approximately 3 million girls between the ages of 15-19 who undergo unsafe abortions every year.
- A noteworthy fact that needs to be considered before addressing the issue of teen or early pregnancies is that such pregnancies have a high tendency of taking place in financially precarious situations or impoverished homes. Therefore, such circumstances present a serious threat to both the infant and the young mother herself. It has been reported that children born to a teenage mother have a 50 % higher chance of facing death than those born

to older women. Most often the circumstances under which teenage girls give birth have caused high infant mortality rates among teenage girls. In short, the younger the birth-giving mother, the higher the risks the new born will face.

- Another very significant issue that requires attention is the impact early pregnancies can have on teenage mothers. Teenage mothers are very unlikely to continue their education once they have given birth. Furthermore, their prospects of finding employment when they are older are likely to shrink. Furthermore, a teenage girl who is likely to remain in education is far less likely to enter an early marriage, than one who abandons her education. It has also been proven that a girl who completes her education has a far higher chance of ensuring a promising future for her children and for herself, than a girl who abandons her education after entering a child marriage and/or gets impregnated.
- One crucial factor that needs consideration is the factor of human rights. Forced adolescent marriages and pregnancies are obvious violations of human rights. This is a fact that needs to be considered as 9 out of 10 adolescent/early childbirths that take place in developing countries occur in adolescent marriage. A teenage girl being denied a descent education due to a marriage or pregnancy is a violation of human rights. An adolescent girl prevented from being able to use contraceptives against her wishes is a violation of human rights.

For more background information on this issue it is highly recommended that you read this pdf by the United Nations Population Fund:

<http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/2013REPORT.PDF>

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United Nations Population Fund

The United Nations Population Fund has been one of the most active organizations that has called for the addressing of the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. The United Nations Population Fund has been actively urging governments to aid in the education of teenage youth and the provision of safe and sanitary contraceptive and abortion facilities and products to prevent childbirth among youths. The United Nations Population fund has mainly focused on developing countries, as most early pregnancies and childbirths occur in highly impoverished or developed countries. The United Nations Population fund has focused on the key issues that cause pregnancies and childbirth among young people. Preventing child marriage and the galvanization of young adolescent girls has been an integral focus of the United Nations Population Fund.

World Health Organization

Much like the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization is one of the leading organizations that is actively addressing and combating the threat that early pregnancies and childbirth pose to young adolescent girls worldwide. The World Health Organization has actively encouraged and financially aided governments in combating the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. The World Health organization has developed several goals regarding the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. These goals include: 1. limit marriage before the age of 18, 2. ensure and spread education and awareness regarding pregnancy to combat childbirth and early pregnancy, 3. encourage adolescents to utilize contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies that will cause a great peril to an adolescent's future, 4. work extensively and actively to reduce and ultimately eliminate rape and thus prevent forced pregnancies, 5. initiate a decline in abortions that put the health and wellbeing of adolescents in peril and 6. secure optimal care for the already impregnated youths to ensure a healthy and sanitary birth and a successful post birth life. The WHO has also made a cooperative effort with the United Nations and the World Bank in tackling the issue of early pregnancies by allocating financial aid to all those who lack the funds to tackle this issue.

Niger

Niger is a country that has been most impacted by the crippling and pressing issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. The Republic of Niger has the highest rate of annual adolescent/teenage pregnancies. This can be attributed to the fact that Niger has the largest number of child marriages per year. A study has shown that 75 % of teenage adolescents in the country will be married by the time they reach the age of 18 and approximately 51 % of those who reach the age of 18 will have already been impregnated. As Niger has an extremely high rate of adolescent pregnancies, it is a country who is immensely affected and who must be committed to putting an end to the issue.

Chad

Another African country with a high rate of child pregnancy is the Republic of Chad. The Republic of Chad has an immensely high rate of premature births, a shattering 47 % of all women in the Republic of Chad give birth before the age of 18. The chance of a woman dying of childbirth in Chad is 1 out of 14. It is suspected that those most likely to die during pregnancy are adolescent teenage girls. The horrifying mortality and pregnancy rates among young people can be attributed to the extremely poor standard of living . Access to descent healthcare and sexual education are likely to be scarce, as 80 % of Chad's population live under the poverty line. Due to the country's crippling poverty, Chad is responsible to a large extent and must act cooperate with the international community to put an end to the increased rates of early pregnancy and child mortality.

1960	Worldwide birthrates of teenage adolescent girls between the ages of 15-19 start to decline.
1995	The general birthrate for adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 around the world dropped to 62.4 per 1,000 persons and saw steep decline directly afterward.
2007	The General birthrate of adolescent girls is 47.8 per 1,000 persons
2011	WHO publishes guidelines along with the United Nations population fund to limit the dangers of inadequate education and healthcare and to ultimately prevent the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth.

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### Millennium development goal 5

One main United Nations resolution that has been the basis of the United Nation's attempts to put an end to early pregnancies and childbirth is the Millennium Development goal 5. Millennium Development goal 5 includes the two targets 5A, to initiate a decline in the Maternal Mortality Ratio by 75 %, and 5B, to secure universal coverage of reproductive healthcare. These two targets are directly linked to addressing the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. Any future resolution must reflect on and build on the work that has been done with and since the passing of this specific resolution. It is through the passing of this millennium goal that the world has invoked a steep decline in in child mortality over recent years.

### Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

One previous attempt to solve the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth among adolescent youths was made in Britain. For more than 16 years a programme known as the teenage pregnancy strategy was implemented to tackle the problem of early pregnancy by providing extensive sex education and better access to contraceptive products for young people. The programme was a massive success as it cut the birthrate of teens under the age of 18 by half. At the same time the birth rate dropped from 47 per 1,000 persons to 23 per 1,000 persons. Its success was mainly attributed to the support the programme received from the government and the

time it was given to improve. It is due to this success that the WHO has requested the founder of the programme, Alison Hadley, to help the WHO implement the programme on a global level.

## **Viabale Solutions**

### Education

As was stated previously, education is an integral part of addressing the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. Although the causes of the pressing issue of early pregnancy and childbirth are abundant, access to education to improve the situation is likely to eliminate many of the causes of early pregnancy and childbirth. Lack of knowledge and awareness among youths, especially those in impoverished and developing countries, regarding sexual education is commonplace. Therefore, any solution that seeks to address this issue will need to address and ensure education of youths, especially on the topic of sexual education. Youths in developing nations need to be educated intensively on subjects such as sexual intercourse and its repercussions. Awareness needs to be raised on contraceptives and how they can be utilized in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Furthermore, education also needs to focus on human rights and gender equality. One of the main causes of early pregnancies and childbirth is the issue of child marriages which are, more often than not, forced upon the girl. Awareness needs to be raised among female adolescent youths regarding human rights so as to prevent forced marriages and unwanted pregnancies. By doing so women need to be empowered to complete their education and live out a dignified life.

### Healthcare and contraceptives

Another very crucial aspect with regard to the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth is to ensure that those who are already pregnant or are about to give birth are subject to the necessary care that is needed. Millions of unsafe abortions take place every single year. This is mainly due to a lack of safe and sanitary facilities in which abortions can take place. The same lack exists as it comes to contraceptives. Contraceptives are in many cases available for the use of adolescents. Any solution that seeks to deal with the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth must focus on those already affected and must ensure that they can live dignified lives with access to healthcare and education for themselves and their children.

### Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is an issue that any civilized society must address whether it has the aim of dealing with early pregnancy and childbirth or not. The right steps need to be taken to prevent sexual assault as much as possible and keep those who are vulnerable safe and secure from such crimes. Adolescents need to be aware that

they have the right to an abortion if impregnated by a rapist. However, the greater issue of beliefs and attitudes that may restrict a rape victim from seeking and attaining the necessary treatment must be taken into consideration.

### Child Marriage

Child marriage is a significant obstacle to solve the issue of early pregnancy and childbirth. Child marriage is often forced upon the female adolescent. The female adolescent is often deprived of her rights especially her right to education and a dignified future. Cultural and social reforms need to take place and governments in countries in which such practices are still carried out must be pressured to put an end to the practice, and those affected must be taken care of accordingly.

For more information on recommended action that needs to be taken to address the issue of early childbirth and pregnancy it is recommended that you view the following documents in which several recommended actions to reduce the rate of early pregnancy and childbirth are listed:

[http://www.who.int/immunization/hpv/target/preventing\\_early\\_pregnancy\\_and\\_poor\\_reproductive\\_outcomes\\_who\\_2006.pdf](http://www.who.int/immunization/hpv/target/preventing_early_pregnancy_and_poor_reproductive_outcomes_who_2006.pdf)

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