

GIRLHOOD, NOT MOTHERHOOD

Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy



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Girlhood, Not Motherhood: Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy

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Cover photo caption: Portrait of Babli Maayida, approximate age 14, in a village outside of Banswara, Rajasthan, India. "I did not like it when they said they want to get me married. I said, 'I'm very young right now and I don't want to get married. I want to study. . . . I'm a child,'" said Maayida.

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Portrait of Carmen, 14, who is 3 months pregnant, "I was in school until 5th grade, when I got married. I have been raising my chickens to kill them when the baby is born."

FOREWORD

When a girl becomes pregnant, her present and future change radically, and rarely for the better. Her health is endangered, her education and job prospects abruptly end and her vulnerability to poverty and exclusion multiplies. Pregnancy before a girl is physically, developmentally and socially ready jeopardizes her right to a safe, successful transition into adulthood.

Seldom is the pregnancy a result of the adolescent girl's choices. Much more often it stems from her lack of choices or opportunities, and from discrimination and abuses of her human rights. A girl's pregnancy reflects the failure of those around her to protect her rights, including her right to protection from abuse, to an education that would provide her with opportunities, and to access sexual and reproductive health services and information.

Child marriage is a main contributing factor to adolescent pregnancy. Nine out of ten births to girls aged 15-19 occur within marriage. Just as these girls often have no say about whether, when, and whom they will marry, they also likely have no say about whether and when to begin childbearing.

In response to this situation, UNFPA has made girls' rights and the prevention of adolescent pregnancy a signature issue in its policy and programming efforts, so that each girl will grow up unencumbered by gender inequality and discrimination, and free to choose the path to a healthy, empowered life.

Towards that end, I am pleased to introduce *Girlhood, not Motherhood: Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy*, which presents the best available evidence and intellectual thinking on effective strategies and interventions to empower girls and reduce their vulnerability to adolescent pregnancy. Based on empirical evidence, the practical guidance presented here summarizes effective programmes that operate at multiple levels and with multiple stakeholders, including and most importantly, with the adolescent girl. The product of engagement with an Expert Advisory Group on Adolescent Pregnancy, this publication provides strategic thinking on how UNFPA can deliver on its commitment to promote the health, education and well-being of adolescent girls, especially to prevent early and unintended pregnancy.

A focus on girls is more important than ever if we are to realize the world's forward-looking Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030. It strives to provide adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities.

By investing in a young adolescent girl's education and health, and reducing the risk of early marriage and early pregnancy, she has greater opportunities to find a path out of poverty, lead a healthier life and become an asset to her family, community and society. When her chances of being engaged in formal work increase, she can contribute to the economic growth of her country.

In my country, we have a saying: *you cannot run on one leg*.

By protecting girls' rights and enabling them to avoid adolescent pregnancy, we can make it possible for girls to live in dignity and realize their full potential as equal partners with boys. And with girls and boys on an equal footing, we can run the race toward the inclusive, gender-equitable world we all need today and for generations to come.

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INTRODUCTION



Fifteen-year-old Destaye walks with her son near Bahir Dar. Destaye and her husband Addisu, 27, divide their time between working in the fields and taking care of their 6-month-old baby. Like many other young couples, she and her husband tend to the domestic, economic and personal demands of being young parents. At the time of their marriage, when Destaye was age 11, she was still in school and her husband expressed interest in letting her continue her education.

Adolescent girls are shaping humanity's present and future. Depending on their opportunities and choices, they can begin adulthood as empowered and active citizens, or become neglected, voiceless and entrenched in poverty.

In or outside of marriage, adolescent pregnancy risks derailing girls' healthy development and prevents them from achieving their full potential. Preventing too-early pregnancy is central in helping girls achieve their goals—so too, is respect for adolescents' rights.

Respecting and protecting adolescents' rights entails engaging them in the decision-making process from the individual to the policy level, assuring that they are fully informed decision-makers and have the skills to voice their perspectives and priorities, and that approaches are

non-coercive as well as evidence-based. Respect for adolescents' rights involves engaging the institutions charged with the protection and capacity-building of adolescents, such as health, education, social welfare, and labour.

Conversely, child marriage, coercive sexual practices, and gender-based violence are all violations of human rights. So is the denial of information, creating barriers to accessing effective contraception and safe abortion (to the extent of the law) because of a girl's age or marital status.

Adolescent pregnancy can prevent girls from exercising their rights, including the right to education and to the social supports they need for healthy development and a safe and successful transition to adulthood. The consequences of adolescent pregnancy reverberate throughout the girl's life and for generations after.

Thus, the focus of UNFPA's work to prevent too-early pregnancy is both with adolescents themselves and with the stakeholders who influence their healthy development overall, specifically their sexual and reproductive health.

This guidance note is prepared specifically for UNFPA country offices, but we hope it will be useful to everyone concerned with early pregnancy and its consequences. Developed as a companion to the 2013 *State of World Population* Report on adolescent pregnancy

UNFPA's vision is that every girl's right to make a safe, healthy and successful transition from adolescence into adulthood will be promoted, respected and fulfilled: that girls will grow up unencumbered by gender inequality and discrimination; violence; child marriage; adolescent pregnancy and its consequences. Girls will be empowered, educated, and healthy. They will be able to exercise their rights, including reproductive rights. They will live in dignity, with the ability and opportunity to make informed decisions about their and their communities' future.

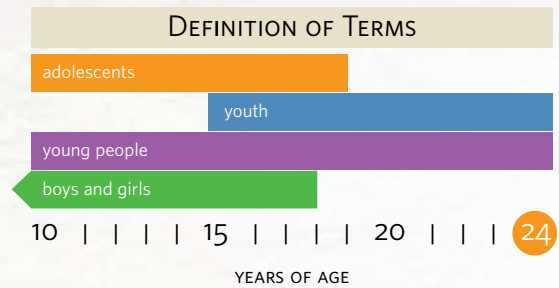
(<http://bit.ly/1FvJjxo>), it is not exhaustive, but provides a set of practical guidelines based on empirical evidence. The note summarises effective programmes and provides references for fuller descriptions. While the focus is on low- and middle-income country programmes, examples of effective programmes from industrialized countries are also included.

The guidance focuses on adolescent pregnancy prevention (primary and secondary). It does not address the maternal health and other needs of pregnant adolescents.

The guidance can also be used as a reference point for operationalizing components of UNFPA's global strategies on adolescents and youth and on family planning, *Choices not Chance* (<http://bit.ly/1Cmw16m>). The common aim is to empower girls to avoid pregnancy, reduce their vulnerability, and

provide sexual and reproductive health including contraceptive services in a confidential, private and respectful manner.

The guidance speaks directly to UNFPA's Strategic Plan and the organization's goal to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health, realize reproductive rights, and reduce maternal mortality, in order to improve the lives of adolescents, youth, and women. The adolescent birth rate is an important indicator of progress towards this goal: the programme interventions outlined here provide possible starting points to shape programme activities with national governments and other partners.



The interventions fit within the Strategic Plan's framework of Outcome 1 (Integrated SRH) and Outcome 2 (Adolescents and Youth), complemented by ongoing activities that will be undertaken through Outcome 3 (gender equality) and Outcome 4 (population and development).

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