

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

Teenage pregnancies Focus

Teenage pregnancies are one of the challenges Malawian girls are facing as poverty, peer pressure and other factors drive them into early marriage and relationships with older men.

According to a press release (May 2013) from UNICEF at least half of young women in Malawi are married before the age of 18 and that teen pregnancies contribute to 20-30 per cent of maternal deaths in the country.

The poorest and least educated girls are those most likely to be married earlier.

Girls who enter into marriage early face serious health risks; being married, they are more likely to be exposed to frequent, unprotected sex compared to their unmarried peers, and hence are more vulnerable to adverse pregnancy outcomes, HIV infection and violence.

According to the Malawi DHS (2010), overall, one in every four teenagers (26 percent) age 15-19 has begun childbearing; 20 percent have had a live birth and 6 percent are pregnant with their first child. A higher proportion of teenagers in rural areas (27 percent) have begun childbearing compared with teenagers in urban areas (21 percent).

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on teenage pregnancies in Malawi
- Find out from the community about the roles families and the whole community can play in supporting girls to prevent teenage pregnancies
- Raise awareness on the dangers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies and how they affect the development of the community
- Encourage openness between parents and their children, especially girls on sexual and reproductive health issues
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Teenage pregnancies

Teenage pregnancy is a health and social problem in Malawi as a result of physical, psychological and socio-economic consequences on the teenage mother, family and the society as a whole.

Complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death among adolescent girls ages 15-19 in low- and middle-income countries, resulting in thousands of deaths each year.

The risk of maternal mortality is higher for adolescent girls, especially those under age 15, compared to older women.

Adolescent pregnancy brings detrimental social and economic consequences for a girl, her family, her community and her nation. Many girls who become

pregnant drop out of school, drastically limiting their future opportunities.

A woman's education is strongly correlated to her earning potential, her health and the health of her children. Thus, adolescent pregnancy fuels the intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor health.

Other common issues prevalent among young mothers include; obstructed labour, obstetric fistula and permanent damage to reproductive organs.

Whether married or unmarried, young women are less likely than their older counterparts to use modern family planning methods and this leads to the young women having too frequent and too many childbirths.

Activities for Journalists

Use your community radio station to help your community understand that early marriages and teenage pregnancies lead to detrimental social and economic consequences for a girl. You should also offer some solutions to young girls on how they can avoid teenage pregnancies.

Most adolescents are aware that sexual activity puts them at risk of getting pregnant or contracting HIV. Their knowledge is not detailed, however, and myths are common. Young people would want the information they receive about sex-related matters to be reliable and to come from trusted sources, such as their parents.

Therefore, in this program encourage parents and children to talk about sex, pregnancy and relationships. Also encourage girls not to fall into the trap of thinking only a man can take care of them financially as long as they do as he says.

To empower girls to make their own reproductive decisions, there is a need for fundamental cultural shifts, including working towards:

- An end to child marriage, which risks locking adolescent girls into relationships in which they have limited voice to shape their reproductive health choices; and which may also subject them to gender-based violence, with its own reproductive health implications.
- Given that child marriage is often driven by poverty, parents need to understand the long-term reasons to delay marriage.

Young people are more likely to trust information on sex and relationships from their parents than from their peers. Teens are less likely to take risks if they have a good relationship with their parents.

Talk to a mother from your community who has never discussed reproductive health issues with her daughter and in the long run the daughter was impregnated.

- Ask her how the 'reproductive health' talk

with her daughter could have helped her not to be impregnated

- Ask her how the pregnancy affected her daughter emotionally and physically
- Ask her what role families and the community as a whole can play in preventing teenage pregnancies

Also ask the daughter the same questions.

Have another family of a mother and a daughter who discuss reproductive health issues. Ask them how this has empowered the girl to still stay in school without being impregnated.

Talk to a local health expert on the dangers of early marriages and pregnancies.

What are some of the dangers associated with early pregnancies?

What can teenage girls do to avoid early pregnancies?

How can parents help their teenage daughters in avoiding teenage pregnancies?

Community Engagement

Urge listeners to send SMS, call or stop by the radio station to talk about the dangers of teenage pregnancies and how parents and the community as a whole can play a role in preventing/curbing teenage pregnancies.

Useful Links

- Malawi Demographic Health survey 2010
<http://www.nsomalawi.mw/index.php/publications/malawi-demographic-and-health-survey/2010-malawi-demographic-and-health-survey.html>
- Ministry of Health-Reproductive Health unit; contact person: Jean Mwalabu- +265993210392
- http://www.unicef.org/media/media_68114.html
- PRB- Contact person; Sandra Mapemba: +265-99-921-9789
- <http://www.prb.org>
- Timothy Bonyonga-Safe mother hood initiative- +265992962914



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