



## Introduction

Every day in developing countries, about 20,000 girls under age 18 give birth, this amounts to 7.3 million births a year<sup>1</sup>. Pregnancy can have immediate and lasting consequences for a girl's health, education, and income-earning potential as it often alters the course of her entire life. When a girl overcomes early motherhood, it is assumed that she is empowered socially to stay in school, and then economically to secure a more lucrative job or pursue other income-earning opportunities, according to a World Bank study.<sup>2</sup> This article discusses some of the sociological factors that leads to teenage pregnancy, the effects drawing insights from the World Development Report (2007) and the possible ways we can move forward from this wicked problem.

## Interrogating The Causes of Teenage Pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancies do not occur in a vacuum but are the consequence of inter-locking sociological factors, such as widespread poverty, lack of comprehensive sex education, rape among others.

- **Lack of sex education:** It can be observed that several schools shy away from teaching comprehensive sex education especially in secondary schools. This has resulted in inadequate understanding of the consequences of actions as young people undergoing puberty and biological changes. Availability of sex education in schools has proven less harmful to the sex

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Population Fund (2021). Adolescent Pregnancy. Retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022 from the website <https://www.unfpa.org/adolescent-pregnancy>

<sup>2</sup> Chaaban, J. and W. Cunningham. (2011). Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend. Washington DC: World Bank.



lives of teenagers as research found that adolescents who receive comprehensive sex education are significantly less likely to become pregnant than adolescents who receive abstinence-only-until-marriage or no formal sex education.

- **Rape:** Not all teenage pregnancies can be categorized as consensual. It was recorded that nearly 10 percent of adolescent or teenage girls get pregnant each year. Studies have found that between 20-30 percent of these pregnancies in teenagers are direct results of rape, while 60% of teenage mothers have unwanted sexual experiences preceding their pregnancies before 15 years when they were coerced by older males.<sup>3</sup> These rape cases do not occur in isolation; interestingly, young women in the abused group were also more likely to report that their own children had been abused which further perpetuates this unending violent cycle.
- **Poverty/early marriage:** Poverty is one of the major contributory factors to teenage pregnancy. The quest to meet financial obligations and provide for their basic needs has propelled young girls to have sexual relationships with men or boys who were able to shoulder those responsibilities.
- **Pandemic and Lockdowns:** In these unprecedented times, one of the unforeseen effects of COVID 19 was the rise in teenage pregnancy as the number of children born to teenage mothers increased by 60%. Secondary school closures aimed at limiting the number of infections and deaths due to COVID-19 may have amplified the negative sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and learning outcomes of vulnerable adolescent girls.<sup>4</sup>

## The Effects: Transitioning Gone Bad?

Adolescent pregnancy is a phenomenon that limits girls from transitioning to effective adulthood. The effects<sup>5</sup> can be categorized into five (5) key areas:

- **Education:** According to United nations, all girls have a right to education regardless of their pregnancy, marital, or motherhood status (Human Rights Watch, 2018: 5). However, schooling is halted and barely continued by teens, especially the girls when they get pregnant. Research also shows that adolescent girls who have had early and unintended pregnancies face many social barriers to continuing with formal education (Human Rights Watch, 2018:

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<sup>3</sup> National Campaign (2013). Teen pregnancy ;what works: curriculum based programs that prevent teen pregnant. Retrieved from National situational longitudinal study of 2002/2004. Washington. DC: The National Centre for Education Statistics

<sup>4</sup> Garazi et al, (2022) Impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on adolescent pregnancy and school dropout among secondary schoolgirls in Kenya. Available at: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/7/1/e007666>

<sup>5</sup> World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation. World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/5989> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO



3)<sup>6</sup>. These barriers can also be found in schools as they have zero tolerance policies for teen pregnancy. Another social barrier is the discrimination from school staff or other students. These, in turn, is one of the leading reasons why pregnant teens drop out before finishing school. Specifically, Adu-Gyamfi (2014) found that 96.25 percent of adolescent girls who dropped out of school in Ghana was as a result of teenage pregnancy<sup>7</sup>

- **Forming Families:** The endless cycle of poverty continues, and a proper family structure cannot be formed under these conditions as boys responsible for these pregnancies almost never stays. According to Govender et al, in their article published in 2020, the data analysis from a qualitative survey carried out portrayed various reactions which include the fathers were caring and supportive, some were abusive, others found it complicated, some had a non-existing relationship, others enjoyed the active involvement of the father, while most of these adolescent mothers were left alone as the father of the child abandoned them. This situation which occurs more often than all leaves the girls hopeless and left alone to act as both the father and mother to the child.<sup>8</sup>
- **Growing Up Healthy:** From research, it has been observed that both the mental and physical wellbeing of the girl child is compromised in adolescent pregnancies. The International Aid Organization states that there is cause for concern and warning of long-term consequences early pregnancies have on young girls. According to UNICEF, difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth is one of the leading causes of death among teens. Some of the inherent risks with teenage pregnancy include low birth weight or premature birth, anemia (low iron levels), high blood pressure, pregnancy induced hypertension and an increased chance of Obstetric fistula.<sup>9</sup>
- **Exercising citizenship:** Adolescents are shaping the present and future. Depending on the opportunities and choices they have during this period in life, they can enter adulthood as

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<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch (2017) Africa: Make Girls' Access to Education a Reality. Retrieved from the website on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/16/africa-make-girls-access-education-reality>

<sup>7</sup> Adu-Gyamfi, E. (2014). Assessing the effect of teenage pregnancy on achieving Universal Basic Education in Ghana: A case study of Upper Denkyira West District. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(17), 46-26. Retrieved from the website on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022 <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/viewFile/13910/14062>.

<sup>8</sup> Govender, D., Naidoo, S. & Taylor, M. (2020) "I have to provide for another life emotionally, physically and financially": understanding pregnancy, motherhood and the future aspirations of adolescent mothers in KwaZulu-Natal South, Africa. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 20, 620 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-03319-7>

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization (2018). Government and partners rally around adolescent pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022 from the website <https://www.afro.who.int/news/government-and-partners-rally-against-adolescent-pregnancy-and-unsafe-abortions>



empowered and active citizens, or be neglected and voiceless in poverty. There are barely opportunities for active citizenship for teen mothers. The “Right to vote” might be relative but the right to be voted for in a highly patriarchal society like Nigeria is almost non-existent.

- **Employability:** It can be agreed that all other transitions areas are directly related to employability. Teenage parenthood creates several economic and social disadvantages for young mothers. They are less likely to graduate from high school or attend college. They have a lower standard of living and are more likely to require public assistance. Their marriages are more likely to be unstable and they often have more children than they intended. The lack of educational achievement makes it more difficult for them to obtain adequate employment. Working conditions are most times not favorable to new mothers as they find it hard to keep up with the full-time schedule of work and looking after their child.

## A Way Forward

Insights drawn from the YOVEX (Youth vulnerability and exclusion) report that African youth are resilient. It goes further to explain that vulnerability and exclusion rarely translate to violent outcomes if there is constant intervention. In seven countries used for this case study, most youth strongly identify with one or more non-governmental institutions (NGO), religious bodies or community organizations. With this guidance, it is believed that the youth (adolescents in this case) would make informed decisions that would not be detrimental to their future. Even in the cases where pregnancy occurs, a great support system helps them navigate such challenging period.<sup>10</sup>

Research shows that addressing unintended adolescent pregnancy is considered a wicked problem. Hence, it requires a holistic approach, and because the challenges are great and complex, no single sector or organization can face them on its own. According to SDG Goal 17, working in partnership, across sectors, and in collaboration with adolescents themselves, can foster significant progress. Some examples include the efforts from the Federal Ministry of Health through the Gender Adolescent School Health and Elderly Care (GASHE) and non-governmental organizations like LEAP Africa.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Ismail W., Olonisakin .F., Bob Picciotto .B. and Wybrow D. (2009): *Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion (YOVEX) in West Africa: Synthesis Report*. UK by Russell Press Limited. King’s College London, 2009.[https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Youth-Vulnerability-and-Exclusion-\(YOVEX\)-in-West-Ismail-Picciotto/96f1a1ed362b516e362ba2becbb963989c75351b](https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Youth-Vulnerability-and-Exclusion-(YOVEX)-in-West-Ismail-Picciotto/96f1a1ed362b516e362ba2becbb963989c75351b)

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization (2018). Government and partners rally around adolescent pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022 from the website <https://www.afro.who.int/news/government-and-partners-rally-against-adolescent-pregnancy-and-unsafe-abortions>

# The Effect of Adolescent Pregnancy on Transition Outcomes For Girls

By Uzoma Pamela



GASHE programme successfully launched nationwide campaigns particularly in secondary schools to enlighten youths (13-18 years) on the dangers of engaging in unsafe sex.

In addition, interventions from non-governmental organizations like [LEAP Africa's](#) youth programmes developed to inspire and equip young people to realize better outcome for their lives will be useful in ensuring that they make smart decisions regarding sex. These interventions include Lead the Way (LTW) and iLEAD that was designed to empower teenagers in secondary schools to understand and achieve their full leadership potential. It provides them with safe spaces to support them to become complete and healthy human beings. These types of programmes should be incorporated in the curriculum of schools to help in teenage transitioning and to consolidate widespread efforts.

There is a need to ensure that young girls are enlightened and provided safe spaces to realize their agency as their employability is greatly affected by early pregnancy. This means that a consolidated approach that take cognizance of various stakeholders may be required to ensure better outcomes and positive transitioning for them.