



# UNISA Engaging With Communities To Promote Positive Adolescent Lifestyle To Reduce Teenage Pregnancy And Other Challenges Faced By Teenagers And Youth in South Africa

***#Teenage pregnancy must fall***



## Introduction

According to World Health Organisation, 2022 adolescents aged 15–19 years in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) had increasing pregnancies each year, of which approximately 50% were unplanned and ended in abortions, which are often unsafe. Africa remains one of the continents with the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in the world with complicated birth some resulting in death. Teenage pregnancy has also remained a public health of concern in South Africa. Statistics South Africa (STATS) reported an increasing number of teens as young as 10-19 years failing pregnant especially in rurality provinces such as KZN, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Northern Cape, and Mpumalanga. Contraventionally, the focus is mostly on teen girls, where are the teen boys? Therefore, Preventing pregnancy among adolescents and pregnancy-related death and disease such as STI/HIV and AIDS and complications are foundational to achieving positive health outcomes across the life course and imperative for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to maternal and newborn health. Adolescent girls and Young Women (AGYWs) (15- 24 years) are vulnerable groups to contracting HIV due to several reasons and are twice likely to live with HIV than young men. Nearly 1,000 of AGYWs are infected with HIV every day and if nothing is done to change this, it might increase by 42% by 2030 going forth (Global Fund, 2019).

## What is Teenage Pregnancy?

Teenage pregnancy, also known as adolescent pregnancy, is pregnancy in a female adolescent or young adult under the age of 20. The WHO defines adolescence as the period between the ages of 10 and 19 years. A woman or teenage girl can get pregnant if she has vaginal sex with a man or teenage boy at any age after she's begun having regular monthly periods or menstruation.

## What are contributory factors to TP?

- Lack of individual agency due to peer pressure, limited decision-making powers and skills, sexual coercion, and lack of self-esteem and confidence.
- Cultural and religious factors, taboos and forced or coerced marriages.
- Desire to earn money and get out of poverty by engaging in relationships with older men or sometimes referred to as sugar daddies and deliberate intentions to fall pregnant to get a child grant or attention or continued financial support by the child's father.
- Dropping out of school and low educational level.
- Absence or poor parenting skills and guidance including poor or lack of communication between children and parents.
- Substance abuse which includes alcohol and drugs that compromise judgment and decision-making powers.
- Lack of role models in rural areas or villages.

- Lack or inadequate sex education in schools.
- Lack of psychological and emotional support.
- Gender inequity and -Gender-based violence,
- Abuse- Physical and sexual abuse, rape, incest which is sexual relations between people classed as being too closely related to marry each other. It is a crime of having sexual intercourse with a parent, child, sibling, or grandchild.
- Limited access to health care services such as sexual and reproductive health services and rights which include contraceptives, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, STI/ HIV, health promotion like education, information, and counselling.
- Lack or inadequate engagement of teenagers and youth in issues related to sexuality.
- Lack or inadequate involvement or engagement of traditional leaders, ward councillors, NGOs, CBOs, and other key stakeholders in the community to maximise teenage pregnancy awareness and deal with community challenges resulting in teenage pregnancy.

### How is pregnancy diagnosed?

Most supermarkets and pharmacies sell home pregnancy tests. These tests are designed to detect pregnancy hormones in your urine. They're most accurate if you use them more than a week after your missed period. Visit your nearest clinic for a test to confirm or buy a home pregnancy test at your nearest pharmacy.

If a home pregnancy test indicates you're not pregnant, wait a week, and take another test to make sure. If a home test shows you're pregnant, you need to make an appointment with your doctor or visit your nearest clinic. They'll confirm your pregnancy with a blood test and maybe a physical examination.

### What are the signs of pregnancy?

The first sign of pregnancy is when you skip a regular period. However, if you get a very light period around the time, you expect it, don't assume you're not pregnant. It's possible to have very light bleeding in the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Other signs of pregnancy include:

- Missed or very light period
- Breast tenderness
- Nausea, often in the morning
- Vomiting
- Feeling lightheaded
- Fainting
- Weight gain
- Feeling tired
- Swelling abdomen

### What are the implications of TP?

Teenage pregnancy has physical, emotional, psychological health, social, and economic implications or effects on the life of teenage girls:

#### Physical health implication

According to The National Institute of Health, teenage mothers had the poorest physical health of all categories of women studied, including women who

engaged in unprotected sex. Teenage mothers may neglect their physical health while caring for their babies. They may also not have access to or know about healthy foods and eating. They are also more likely to be obese. Adolescent mothers (aged 10–19 years) face higher risks of pregnancy complications such as eclampsia that can lead to death, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections than women aged 20–24 years. Preeclampsia can also harm the kidneys or even be fatal for mother or baby. Pregnant teens also have a higher chance of becoming anaemic. Anaemia is a reduction in the number of red blood cells (RBCs). This can make you feel weak and tired and can affect your baby's development. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Trusted Source complications during pregnancy or childbirth are the leading cause of death globally for girls ages 15 to 19. If you get pregnant as a teen, you might feel frightened and worried about telling your family and friends. Not talking to someone and not getting the help and support you need; can make you feel more isolated and depressed. This can lead to problems at home and school. Many pregnant teens drop out of school, and some never complete their education. That means a lot of mothers who get pregnant as teenagers live in poverty. A woman with little education and multiple children to care for will find it very difficult to earn a living.

### **Mental health implications of TP**

Teen mothers mostly experience a higher rate of depression. They also have higher rates of suicidal ideation than their peers who aren't mothers due to stigma, lack of support, feelings of regret, guilt, and loss of self-esteem and confidence. Teen mothers are more likely to experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than other teenage women, as well. A teenage pregnancy can change the course of a young mother's life. It puts her in a place where she's responsible not only for herself but also for another human being.

Carrying a baby and becoming a mother not only creates physical changes. Women also go through mental changes. Young mothers face added stress from:

- Sleepless nights
- Arranging childcare
- Making doctor's appointments
- Attempting to finish high school
- Starting adult roles at a younger age

While not all teenage mothers are affected greatly by mental and physical changes, many are. If you experience mental health changes after childbirth, it's important to reach out to others and seek professional help.

Researchers found that girls ranging from 15 to 19 experienced postpartum depression at a rate that was twice as high as women aged 25 and older. Another study reported that teen mothers face significant levels of stress that can lead

to increased mental health concerns. In addition to higher rates of postpartum depression, teenage mothers have higher rates of depression.

They also have higher rates of suicidal ideation than their peers who aren't mothers. Teen mothers are more likely to experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than other teenage women, as well. This could be because teen mothers are more likely to have gone through mental and/or physical abuse.

Teen mothers can experience mental health conditions such as Baby blues: The "baby blues" are when a woman experiences symptoms for one to two weeks after giving birth. These symptoms include mood swings, anxiety, sadness, overwhelm, difficulty concentrating, trouble eating, and difficulty sleeping, and can lead to postpartum depression if not attended to.

### **Financial implications of TP**

Teenage parents often don't complete higher levels of education. They often have more restricted economic opportunities than older parents. Around one-half of teen mothers have their high school diploma by age 22. Only 10 percent of teen mothers typically complete a two- or four-year degree. While there are certainly exceptions, high school completion, and higher education are typically associated with a greater ability to earn more throughout a lifetime.

### **Impact on the child**

Children born to adolescent parents face greater challenges throughout their lives. These challenges include getting less education and worse behavioral and physical health outcomes. Other effects on a child of a teenage mother include:

- greater risk for lower birth weight and infant mortality
- less prepared to enter kindergarten
- rely more heavily on publicly funded healthcare
- are more likely to be incarcerated at some time during adolescence
- are more likely to drop out of high school
- are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed as a young adult

These effects can create a perpetual cycle for teenage mothers, their children, and their children's children.

### **How does teenage pregnancy affect babies?**

A healthy pregnancy lasts 40 weeks. A baby that's delivered before 37 weeks of pregnancy is premature. Teen mothers are more likely to give birth to premature babies, and face higher risks of severe neonatal conditions, low birth weight, or Underweight babies and might have trouble breathing and feeding as infants. As adults, underweight babies are more susceptible to diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. Low birth weight also affects brain development. Children who were born underweight have been observed to have learning difficulties. Sometimes, these babies lack complete development in their bodies and brains.

Depending on how premature the baby is, this can lead to lifelong difficulties with health and development. In addition to having an increased risk of being underweight, infants born to teenage mothers are also at a higher risk of death due to complications

### **How does teenage pregnancy affect teen fathers?**

Fathering a child as a teenager can be a frightening and life-changing event. Teen fathers don't have to worry about the health implications of pregnancy and childbirth, but they could face similar difficulties staying in school and earning a living. State laws vary on the legal age for people to have sexual intercourse. An arrest or legal action against sexually active teens can have devastating effects. A young man may be required to register as a sex offender if he has reached the legal age (age 18 in South Africa) and his partner has not (age 17 or under).

### **How can teenage pregnancy be prevented?**

The only way to be sure you won't get pregnant is to not have sexual intercourse or abstinence. However, there are many methods to reduce your chances of becoming pregnant if you're sexually active.

Communities should offer counseling and support programs that help prevent teen pregnancy this includes traditional leaders, religious or faith-based organisations, the church, CBOs, NGOs, local clinics, schools, the department of health, the department of social

development, police to reinforce laws. A strong partnership is needed at the community level.

These groups can provide information on birth control and help teens understand their sexual limits so they don't get into situations where they might have unprotected sex and get pregnant.

Some programs offer peer counselling since you might feel more comfortable talking to someone your age. Contact your health department for information on programs in your area.

Support for teenmothers by referral to CBOs or NGOs such as Love life for support groups, counselling, and parenting classes .

### **What prescription birth control methods are available?**

Prescription birth control is available through your doctor or a women's health clinic. Dual protection is highly recommended as it protects both pregnancy and STIs including HIV.

#### **Intrauterine device (IUD)**

An intrauterine device (IUD) is a device a doctor or nurse at your nearest clinic can implant in your uterus. The procedure is well tolerated, and hospitalization isn't required. The IUD prevents pregnancy by various mechanisms. It has a 99 percent rate of effectiveness, according to Planned Parenthood.

#### **Birth control implant**

Several birth control methods affect hormone levels in your body, so you're

less likely to get pregnant. The most effective is a birth control implant, also called Nexplanon.

This is a very small plastic stick that's inserted under the skin of your arm. Implants stay in place for up to three years. They have a 99 percent rate of effectiveness.

### **Hormonal methods: pills and injections**

Birth control pills, shots or injections, and patches also affect your hormone levels. They have an effectiveness rate of 91 to 94 percent. Examples of available brands include Pills - Nordette, Yasmin Triphasil, etc = Shots/injections: Petogen Nurlsterate and Patch- Ortho Evra.

The **diaphragm and cervical cap** are devices you place in your vagina when you're going to have sex. They block sperm from entering your uterus. The effectiveness of these devices is 71 to 88 percent.

### **Condoms**

Proper use of a condom can keep you from getting pregnant. When used correctly, condoms also protect you from many sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The effectiveness of condoms is 85 percent.

### **Morning-after pill**

Available from your nearest clinic or doctor or pharmacy, this medicine contains hormones that prevent your body from releasing eggs into your uterus and cause the lining of the uterus to shed, inhibiting implantation. This should be taken within 72 hours/ 3 days after engaging in unprotected sex. Eggs

have to come into contact with sperm for you to get pregnant and need to implant to start developing properly.

The morning-after pill might be a good choice for you if you think your regular birth control didn't work or you weren't using birth control. Women 17 and older do not need a prescription for the morning-after pill. The effectiveness of the morning-after pills is 75 to 89 percent if taken within three days of having unprotected sex, according to Planned Parenthood.

### **What are the Methods to prevent HIV acquisition?**

#### **Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)**

These are anti-retroviral medicine taken by HIV-negative people before exposure to HIV and prevents HIV acquisition ALL adolescent girls and young women, sex workers, and LGBTIQI plus in South Africa qualifies for free PrEP services, visit your nearest local clinic or doctor for more information.

#### **Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)**

This is ARV medicine taken shortly after exposure and continued for 28 days to prevent HIV. All AGYW and young men who were exposed to HIV including those who experience sexual abuse or violence such as rape or incest should visit their nearest clinic or doctor within 72 hours/ 3 days to access this service free. Report any form of police abuse.

**NB: Dual protection is key, use this together with a condom**



## **Antiretroviral therapy (ART) for teenagers who tested HIV positive**

This is a long-life ARV treatment for people with HIV or who tested positive for HIV infection, to minimise the effect of HIV, strengthen the immune system, reduce the viral load or amount of virus in your blood, and increase CD 4 count. Currently, there is no treatment for HIV but the therapy plays a major role in improving quality of life and preventing the spread of new infections as undetectable (U)= untransmittable (U), which means that people with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load—the amount of HIV in the blood—by taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) daily as prescribed cannot sexually transmit the virus to others. Thus, treatment for HIV is a powerful arrow in the quiver of HIV prevention tools. Know that being HIV positive is not a life sentence, it is a chronic disease like high blood and diabetes

## **What's the takeaway for people affected by teenage pregnancy?**

Although teens can often safely deliver healthy babies, there are possible health concerns for both mother and child. If you become pregnant, you should see your doctor or nearest clinic as soon as possible to discuss your pregnancy. Teenage motherhood doesn't have to mean a young woman won't be successful in life. But they must consider what other young mothers before them have faced related to overall health, financial stability, and the health of their child. Seeking support from others can improve a teen mother's mental

health. This includes the support of parents, grandparents, friends, adult role models, physicians, and other healthcare providers

Many community centers also have services specifically for teen parents, including daycare during school hours. Participate in sporting or positive recreational activities

Teen mothers must seek prenatal care as early as recommended, usually in the first trimester within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. This support for your and your baby's health promotes better outcomes, both during pregnancy and afterward.

Teenage mothers are more likely to have positive mental health and financial outcomes when they finish high school. Many high schools offer programs or will make arrangements with a teen mother to help her finish her education. While finishing school can be an extra stressor, it's important for the future of a teen mother and her baby.

Talk to a school counsellor, Community Health worker, local clinic nurse, or social worker regarding services that can assist them in finishing school and living a healthier life. Use the available methods to help prevent pregnancy, including IUDs, birth control pills, and condoms.

### **What are the options for teenagers who are pregnant?**

Teens who become pregnant may be afraid to see a doctor or visit a local clinic, but it's extremely important for the safety of the mother and the unborn child.

Your doctor or nurse at your nearest clinic should discuss all options with you regarding your pregnancy, including abortion, or ending the pregnancy medically, adoption, or giving birth and legally permitting someone else to raise your child and giving birth and raising the child yourself

Ideally, the future father and family members of both mother and father will be involved in making the best decisions. However, this isn't always possible.

Birth control clinics and public health offices can provide counselling information to help you make the right choices for you and your baby.

DBE protocol for the management and reporting of sexual violence in schools and sections 110 and 150 of the Children's Act (38 Of 2005) requires that such incidence be reported to all designated child protection organisations, the provincial head of the department of Social Development (DSD) or South African Police Service (SAPS)

Report any GBV or sexual violence to police, educators, health care providers, parents or any one you trust

### **Is it possible for a teenager to have a healthy baby?**

Teen mothers can have healthy babies. Make sure you see your doctor or nurse at the nearest clinic as soon as you know you're pregnant and attend all your scheduled appointments.

Proper obstetrical care throughout your pregnancy is so important to the health and well-being of both the mother and the baby. Eat well, exercise, and confide in supportive friends and family members. Cigarette smoking during pregnancy has been shown to lower birth weight and cause babies to be born prematurely. You shouldn't smoke during pregnancy. Drugs and alcohol can have very damaging effects on a mother and her unborn child. Don't drink alcohol or use illicit drugs during pregnancy. If you think you might be addicted to drugs or alcohol, ask your doctor about counselling and treatment programs to help you quit.

Only take the medicines your doctor or nurse at the clinic has prescribed. Make sure your doctor or nurse knows about any over-the-counter (OTC) medicines you are taking.

All pregnant women need to get proper medical care regardless of how old they are. But because teens' bodies are still developing, seeing a doctor or nurse regularly is especially important for teen mothers.

### **What should you expect during prenatal visits?**

You'll visit the doctor or clinic regularly during your pregnancy. Early booking at your nearest clinic is very important at or before 14 weeks of pregnancy.

During the first six months, you will have an appointment at least once every month. In the last months of your pregnancy, you may see your doctor or nurse at the clinic every other week, ending with weekly visits in your final month. These visits are to make sure you and your baby are healthy.

At the doctor's office or clinic, you'll be weighed, your blood pressure will be taken, and your stomach will be measured. As your baby develops, the doctor will feel its position and listen for its heartbeat.

Your doctor will ask how you're feeling and if you have any questions. They'll usually then explain what you can expect during the upcoming weeks of your pregnancy.

Write down any questions or concerns you have so that you can remember to ask them during your appointment. Talk to your doctor about your health, the baby's health, and any emotional or family concerns you have.

### **Warning signs during pregnancy**

See your doctor right away if you have:

- Any vaginal bleeding
- Severe or continuous headache
- Dimness or blurring of vision

- Abdominal pain
- Persistent vomiting
- Chills or fever
- Pain or burning during urination
- Leaking of fluid from your vagina
- Swelling or pain in your legs

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