



Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health

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KEYWORDS :

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines young people those aged 10-24 years, while adolescents are defined as those aged 10-19 years. This is a diverse group of individuals whose life circumstances and opportunities and obstacles to improve their lives vary considerably from country to country. Adolescence is said to be a period of transition. During this age physical changes is said to be drastic and the adolescent girls are unaware of the bodily changes. Adolescence has traditionally been considered as the most difficult period in an individual's development cycle. The changes that the adolescent undergo like psychological, physiological, hormonal changes that are not only stressful but also confusing since these changes occur simultaneously and rapidly in the absence of any kind of support and expert guidance to cope with the transition.

Overall health of adolescent girls is always said to be neglected and least importance is given to the changes that they undergo, physical changes with special reference to reproductive health, is also said to be one area of challenge to the growing adolescents. Reproductive health is defined as "A state of complete physical, mental, and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters related to the reproductive system and to its functions and process". This definition is taken and modified from the WHO definition of health.

Reproductive Health addresses the human sexuality and reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages of life and implies that people are able to have "a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so." Adolescence is a decisive age for girls around the globe. What transpires during a girl's teenage years shapes the direction of her life and that of her family. For many girls in developing countries, the mere onset of puberty that occurs during the adolescence marks a time of heightened vulnerability, child marriage early pregnancy, HIV sexual exploitation, coercion and violence

Reproductive Health Risks

Adolescent Reproductive Health is affected by pregnancy, abortion, STIs, sexual violence, and by the systems that limit access to information and clinical services. Reproductive health is also affected by nutrition, psychological well-being, economic and gender inequities that can make it difficult to avoid forced, coerced, or commercial sex. The term "Reproductive Health" is most often equated with one aspect of women's lives; motherhood. Complications associated with various maternal issues are indeed major contributors to poor reproductive health among millions of women worldwide.

Without proper health care services, this group (adolescents) is highly vulnerable to problems related to sexual intercourse, pregnancy, contraceptive side effects, etc. Death and illnesses from reproductive causes are the highest among poor women everywhere. In societies where women are disproportionately poor, illiterate, and politically powerless, high rates of reproductive illnesses and deaths are common.

Adolescent girls in developing countries and economically disadvantaged women in the cities of some industrial nations suffer the

highest rates of complications from pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and reproductive cancers. Lack of access to comprehensive reproductive care is the main reason that so many women suffer and die. Most illnesses and deaths from reproductive causes could be prevented or treated with strategies and technologies well within reach of even the poorest countries.

Early pregnancy.

The poorest and less educated girls are those most likely to be married earlier. Girls who get married at an early age face a serious health risks; being married, they are more likely to be exposed to unsafe sex compared to their unmarried peers, and hence they are more vulnerable to adverse pregnancy outcomes, HIV infection and violence. According to Population Reference Bureau (2013) adolescent girls and young women from the poorest households are also more likely to become pregnant or give birth than those from the wealthiest households.

According to WHO (2012) a link has been found between education and pregnancy. The more years a girl spends in school, the less likely she is to become pregnant at a young age. Girls who have early pregnancy are more prone to birth complications and also go for abortions. Complications during pregnancy and child birth 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 the age group of 15 years, compared to older women (WHO 2010). Delivery conducted by untrained professionals or local dais and unsafe environment are the contributing factors for the complications during delivery. Adolescent pregnancy bring detrimental socio economic consequence for a girl, her family, her community and her nation. Many girls who are pregnant at an early age drop out of schools and drastically limiting their future opportunities. A woman's education is linked to her earning potential, her health and the health of her children. Thus, adolescent pregnancy fuels the intergenerational cycle of poverty and poor health.

Abortion.

Abortion is more than a medical issue, or an ethical issue, or a legal issue. Due to lack of awareness and lack of knowledge about the consequences of abortion they do take a risk. Most of the procedures are performed under unsafe conditions due to:

- Lack of access to safe services.
- Self-induced methods
- Unskilled or non-medical providers
- Delay in seeking procedure

Adolescent unwanted pregnancies often end in abortion.

Unsafe abortion is a global problem. Millions of women around the world risk their lives and health to end an unwanted pregnancy. According to WHO every day, 55,000 unsafe abortions take place 95 % of them in developing countries-and lead to the deaths of more than 200 women daily. Globally, one unsafe abortion takes place for every seven births. Many adolescent fail to seek treatment for abortion-related complications, leading to countless-and uncounted- deaths outside of health care systems. Unsafe abortion is, however, one of the

most easily preventable and treatable causes of maternal death and disability.

HIV/STI/RTI:

According to WHO in 2013, almost 60% of all new HIV infections among young people aged 15-24 occurred among adolescent girls and young women. Lack of awareness of contraceptives is also one of the major contributing factors for HIV. HIV/AIDS affects people during their most productive years, when they are responsible for the support and care of others; it carries profound social and economic repercussions for communities and societies. HIV/AIDS is the primary cause of disease burden in developing countries.

Heterosexual transmission is the primary mode of acquiring HIV in developing countries. Women, especially young girls, are more likely than men to become infected following heterosexual intercourse. Cases of HIV infection resulting from sexual abuse of children, and even infants, have been reported. Adolescents are increasingly at risk from unprotected sexual intercourse or the use of contaminated needles.

Prevention of major complications:

Providing reproductive and sexual health needs would protect their rights and help prevent girls from having too many children at an early age., this would also threaten the health of young mothers and children, which also strains young families limited resources. Education plays a major role in transforming the families well being, contributing to increased household income and savings. The following methods can be followed to prevent further complications.

Availability of Adolescent Health services

Adolescent health services are best provided by trained professionals to deal with specific adolescent health needs and to counsel adolescents about sensitive reproductive health issues and contraceptive use. While providing interventions, providers must consider adolescents' marital status, health status, and how much power they have in sexual activity. Adolescents often name the following characteristics as important to meeting their health needs confidentiality; convenient location and hours; youth friendly environment; open to men and women; strong counseling component; specially trained providers; and comprehensive clinical service.

Providing information

Providing appropriate and necessary information about reproductive health is essential for adolescent. Education and counseling are important methods used for creating awareness in school-based programs. Obviously, parents are a key source of information, although they may feel ill-informed or embarrassed to discuss these topics with their children, or simply may disapprove of young people expressing an interest in sexuality. Exercises, role-plays, and community visits, and other means to teach health skills, including how to avoid STDs, and improve communication with family and friends.

The perspectives of young people around the world are molded by the situations in which they grow. Girls with little, or no education, may view early marriage and childbearing as their only path in life.

Adolescent friendly environment:

It is clear, however, that human growth and development are profoundly influenced by the environment, particularly during the formative periods of infancy and adolescence. A healthy environment that is physically appealing and accessible, offering convenient working hours and location, as well as privacy in the examination or consultation room and one that is not perceived as stigmatizing. Staffs that are technically competent, willing to devote adequate time to clients, interested in, understanding of and considerate of needs, able to relate to adolescents and perceived as trustworthy should be made available. Providing adolescents with services that are of good quality and are provided in a client-centered manner is an enormous and difficult task, yet one that has huge public health implications for the prevention of health problems of adolescents and their prompt detection and management.

Conclusion

Young adolescent girls face a higher risk of complications or death from pregnancy and childbirth than do older women. Adolescents

typically do not have access to reproductive and sexual health information, and these services are not typically youth friendly in many countries, and particularly in developing countries. The reproductive and sexual health decisions they make today will affect the health and wellbeing of their communities and of their countries for decades to come. Thus, it is very much important to make the adolescents aware on their sexual health. The need for comprehensive sex education for adolescents is high and the discussion of sexual health and its problems must be part of their education and anticipatory guidance for all teenagers. Adolescents lack the services that respond to their distinctive needs. Interventions for children very often focus on the younger ages; adolescents 'age out' of pediatric health care and they are often unreached by programs for adults. Adolescents must be involved in designing, implementing and evaluating programs.

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