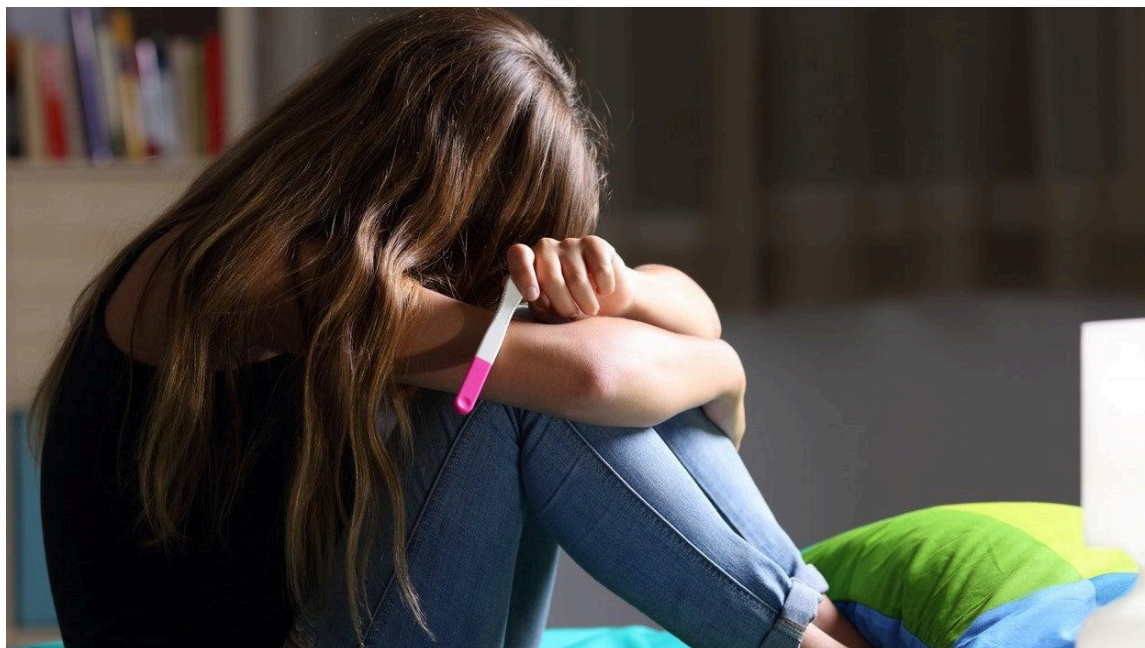


Forum: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Issue #1: Addressing adolescent pregnancy in the context of children's rights and education

Student Officer: Nathalia Ruiz

Position: Chair of The United Nations Children's Fund



Cadena, K., Buitrago-Hernandez, P., & Inchauste, G. (2022, April 13). Preventing teenage pregnancy: a priority for the well-being of women in Mexico. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/latinamerica/preventing-teenage-pregnancy-priority-well-being-women-mexico>

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in concerns regarding adolescent pregnancy, as it directly impacts the rights and futures of young girls. In most cases, risk factors leading to teenage pregnancy are living in poverty, lack of access to healthcare, and, unfortunately, sexual violence or coercion. The issue not only perpetuates the emotional and physical well-being of young mothers but also affects their future opportunities, access to education, and causes economic instability. Often,

these challenges young mothers face are attributed to limited access to resources and the denial of their rights as a result of stigmatization and moral judgment from society, or even their government (Thomas). Adolescent mothers often struggle to access legal support to help them claim child support or protect their parental rights, given that they face challenges such as being financially reliant on their parents, school obligations, being unmarried, and not having access to apartment leases or legal documents due to being underage (Almeter). Health-wise, young mothers are more vulnerable to experiencing complications given that they are physiologically and psychologically underdeveloped; therefore, prenatal and postnatal care play such a crucial part in the avoidance of these complications and the well-being of the baby. However, these services are often not provided to adolescent mothers due to social stigma, unfriendly health services, and limited social support from their families and communities (Javadi et al). As already mentioned, teen mothers commonly come from low-income backgrounds, and they are the ones who have to deal with the costs of taking care of the baby with little to no support from the father of the child, given that they often avoid legal responsibilities and abandon their duty as parents. Adolescent mothers are usually unaware of how to initiate the process of enforcing child support, and if they don't seek it, fathers can avoid payments without facing repercussions ("Common Reasons for Failing to Pay Child Support | IL").

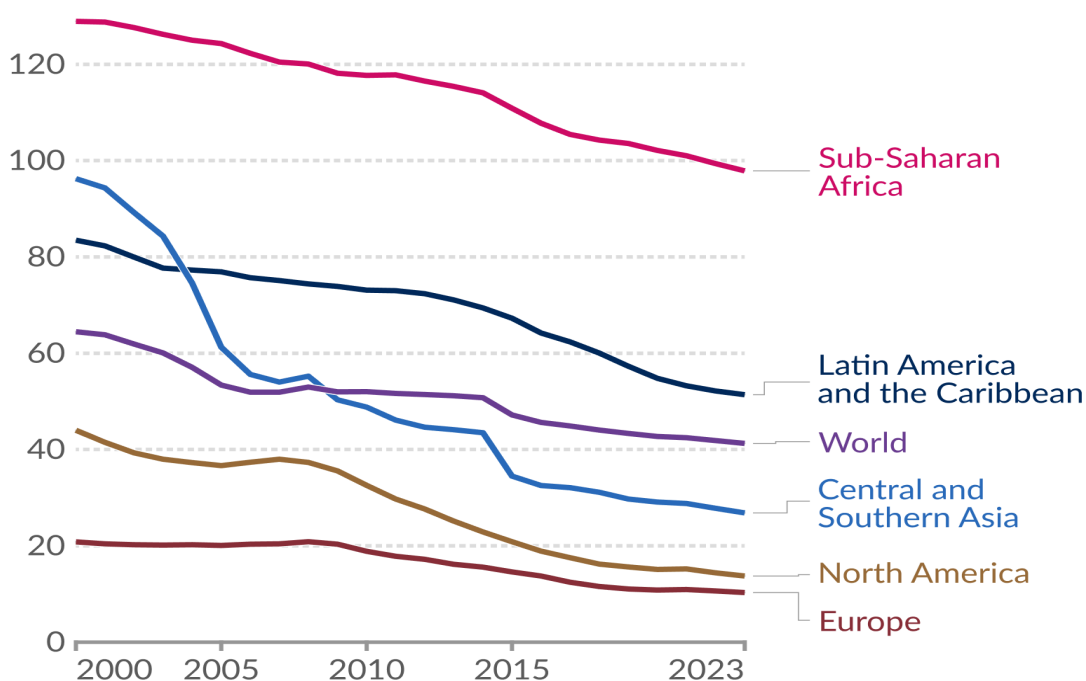
Adolescent pregnancy is not an issue of the present; it is a cycle that has been affecting young girls and their children for centuries. In history, women in their early teenage years were already expected to be child bearers and be married; it was usual for a girl to be a wife and a mother by age 15 or 16. Even into the 19th century, early marriage was not unusual. In the mid-1800s United States, 14-year-old girls getting married was common and rarely criticized ("Child Marriage, Common in the Past, Persists Today | Colorado Public Radio"). However, this began to change in the 20th century, when Industrialization and education reforms started spreading. The average age of marriage rose significantly, and adolescent childbearing became less normalized. By the 1950s, teenage girls' childbearing was not uncommon and was sensitized in the marital context. As decades progressed, particularly in more developed and industrialized nations, underage girls becoming pregnant became seen as a social issue instead of a normal stage in the life of a woman. And by the late

20th century, adolescent pregnancy, particularly without marriage, was viewed as a result of socioeconomic hardship.

Teenage pregnancy rates have been falling across the world

Our World
in Data

The number of live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years.



Data source: United Nations (2023)

CC BY

Ritchie, Hannah. "Teenage Pregnancy Rates Have Fallen across the World." Our World in Data, Hannah Ritchie, ourworldindata.org/data-insights/teenage-pregnancy-rates-have-fallen-across-the-world. Accessed 14 May 2025.

Definition of Key Terms

Adolescent Pregnancy: Pregnancy occurring during the stage of puberty typically occurs between the ages of 10 and 19. (Maheshwari et al)

Prenatal Care: Medical care and support are given to a woman during pregnancy to ensure the physical well-being of both the mother and the baby. In the context of

adolescent pregnancy, prenatal care is crucial, given that it detects complications such as preeclampsia and gestational diabetes. ("Importance of Prenatal Care for Teenage Mothers and Babies")

Postnatal Care: Medical care provided to the mother and the newborn after birth up to eight weeks postpartum. It typically involves monitoring possible complications such as infections, high blood pressure, and hemorrhages. As for the newborn, it involves immunization and health checks.

Sexual Coercion: When a young and vulnerable person is pressured or manipulated into doing any sort of sexual activity without full consent.

Intergenerational Disadvantage: When struggles such as financial instability, lack of education, and limited opportunities are passed down from parent to child.

Stigmatization: Negative attitudes and acts of discrimination towards certain individuals due to unusual characteristics, in the context of the issue, being a teenage mom.

Educational Exclusion: When educational systems such as schools push pregnant teens out, or acquire certain attitudes, such as bullying.

Economic Vulnerability: The state of being at high risk of financial instability.

Industrialized Nations: Countries characterized by having higher socioeconomic development, usually having broader access to education, healthcare, and overall social support systems. Industrialized nations tend to deal with lower rates of adolescent pregnancy than developing countries with lower economies.

Child Support: Consists of financial payments made by the parent who doesn't have custody of the child to provide support to cover the costs of raising the child. It plays an important role in teenage pregnancy, as mothers commonly do not have enough financial stability to fully cover the costs of the minor.

General Overview

Context

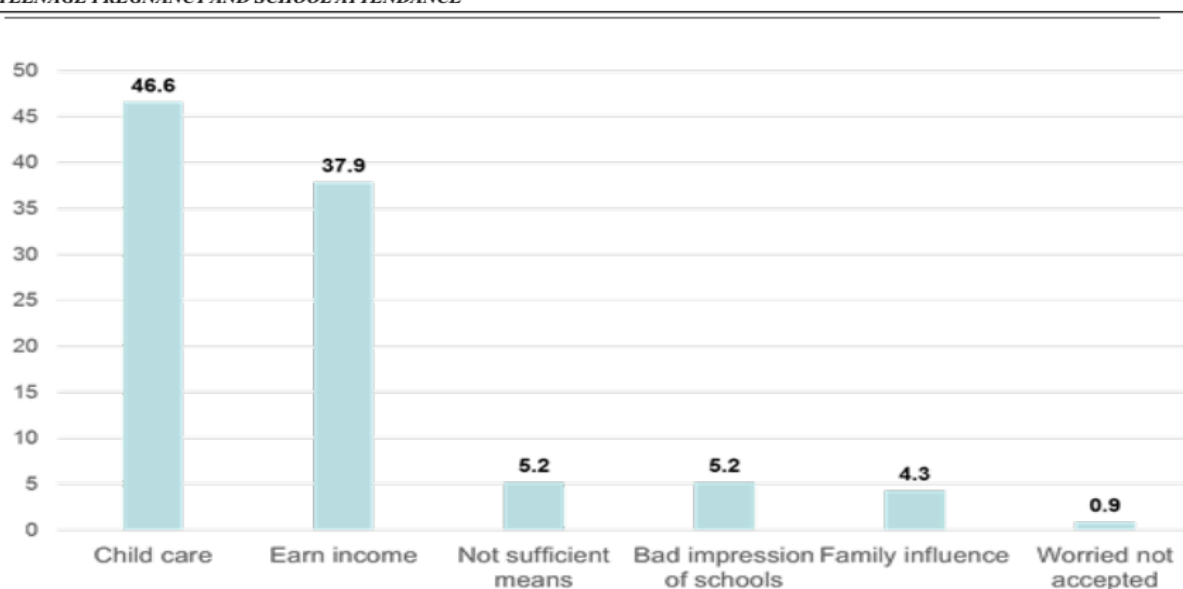
Adolescent pregnancy threatens several children's basic rights, especially their right to education, safety, and healthy development, as outlined in international agreements like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS under the CONVENTION on the RIGHTS of the CHILD). Young mothers, while carrying their babies and after giving birth, are presented with major challenges in school systems, such as being judged, excluded, or pushed out due to strict and discriminatory school policies. Forced marriage of young teenage girls, driven by cultural beliefs alongside financial pressure, is a significant contributing factor to high adolescent pregnancy rates and reflects a wider failure in protecting girls from carrying adult responsibilities prematurely. Many adolescent pregnancies are also a result of sexual abuse or pressure, showcasing how gender inequality and taking advantage of children's vulnerability affect their lives and ability to make choices. On the other hand, the absence of accountability from fathers through avoiding child support or direct abandonment further illustrates the socioeconomic vulnerability of young mothers. With all these circumstances added up, mothers are trapped in cycles of poverty that keep them from reaching their full potential.

Stigmatization and Exclusion in Education

Adolescent mothers often face intense social stigma and are frequently excluded from formal education. In 4% of countries around the globe, laws and policies have banned pregnant or married girls from attending classes or taking exams based on the fear that they might "influence" other students or depict a "wrong image" of the schools ("Pregnancy and the Right to Education | UNESCO"). Even where such restrictions don't exist, many pregnant girls endure bullying, shame, and a lack of support from the school, making it a major contributor to high school dropouts. This kind of exclusion worsens the impact of teen pregnancy by cutting off education and future laboral opportunities. Studies have shown that early childbearing oftentimes forces girls to leave school, raising health risks, increasing poverty, and reinforcing the stigma they already go through (Thomas). For example, in Latin America, teen pregnancy accounts for up to 36% of school dropouts among teenage girls (Miquilena). In 2019, the United

Nations found that in Mozambique, 70% of pregnant students drop out of school (Martínez). This denial of education also violates their human rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) says that all children have the right to education without being discriminated against. Human rights groups, including the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, have called on governments to end laws and policies that exclude pregnant students (The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) Legal and Human Rights Centre and Centre for Reproductive Rights (on Behalf of Tanzanian Girls) v United Republic of Tanzania Original-English).

TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

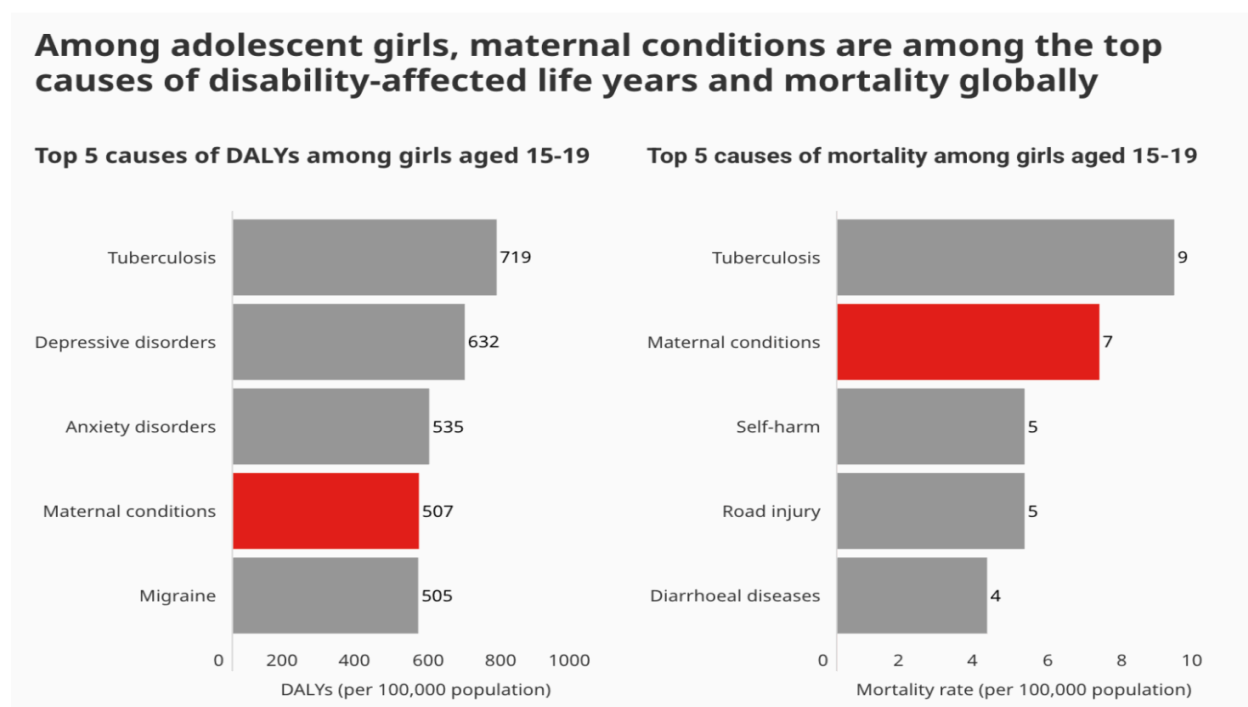


Sitthanan Thanintranon, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, Thailand. Teenage Pregnancy and Dropout Rate from School After ..., Feb. 2022, ebwhj.journals.ekb.eg/article_159953_c29b6715bb88efd5092e443646203df7.pdf.

Child Marriage as a Cause of Pregnancy

Each year, about 12 million girls are married before turning 18 years old, that's about one every 3 seconds (<https://www.facebook.com/HealthPolicyWatch>). In many lower-income countries, the majority of teenage pregnancies happen within marriage. About 90% of births of girls between the ages of 15 to 19 occur in a marriage. This is

because once a girl is married, she is expected to have children immediately. Most child brides face pressure to prove their fertility, given that in some cultures it is viewed as extremely valuable, and most cannot negotiate the use of contraception under any circumstances. These early pregnancies pose serious health risks to young girls. Due to not having fully matured bodies, adolescent mothers face far higher rates of pregnancy-related complications than adult women. They are more likely to suffer from conditions like obstetric fistula, give birth prematurely, or lose their babies.



Maternal conditions are among the top causes of disability-affected life years and mortality globally, according to UNICEF.

Anderson. (2025, April 24). Child Marriage Driving Adolescent Pregnancy Crisis, WHO Warns. Health Policy Watch. <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/child-marriage-driving-adolescent-pregnancy-crisis-who-warns/#:~:text=ImageOne%20in%20five%20young%20women,Saharan%20Africa>

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescent pregnancy often traps young girls in cycles of poor health and poverty, especially when it results from child marriage and lack of reproductive health access (World). Girls who are forced to marry young also tend to have little to no control over their own health decisions. They are

often under the authority of older husbands who limit their access to prenatal or postnatal care. Moreover, girls who are married before adulthood face a much higher risk of sexual and domestic violence, leading to a violation of their rights to health, safety, and bodily autonomy (<https://www.facebook.com/HealthPolicyWatch>).

Child brides: one every three seconds

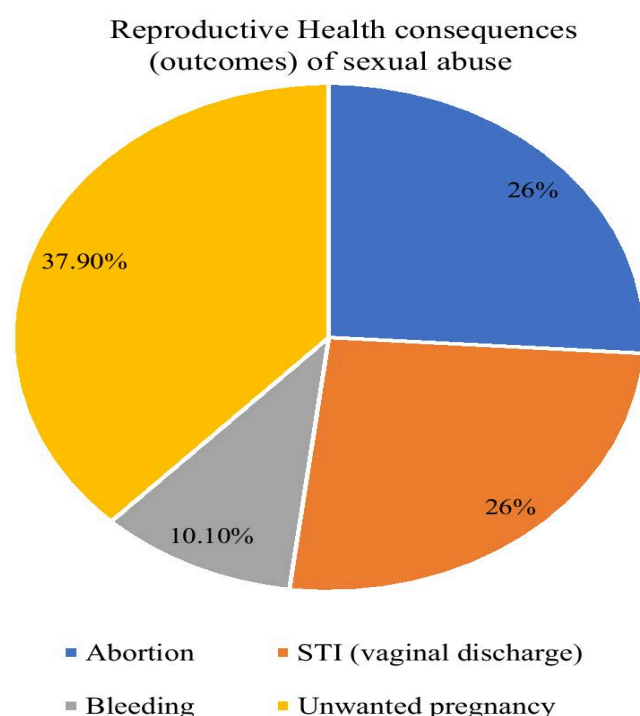


Anderson. (2025, April 24). Child Marriage Driving Adolescent Pregnancy Crisis, WHO Warns. Health Policy Watch. <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/child-marriage-driving-adolescent-pregnancy-crisis-who-warns/#::~:~:text=ImageOne%20in%20five%20young%20women,Saharan%20Africa>

Sexual Violence and Coercion as a Cause of Pregnancy

Many girls become pregnant and unfortunately not by choice, but because of rape, incest, child marriage or other forms of abuse. Globally, around 1 in 20 girls (5%) between the ages of 15 and 19 have been forced to have sexual intercourse. In many cases, the abuser involves someone with an active role in the life of the girl, such as a family member, neighbor, or an authority figure, such as a teacher (World). Oftentimes, when these violations happen, girls have no other option but to seek unsafe abortions. The World Health Organization stated that 45% of abortions were done unsafely, 15% of

the abortions were done by underage girls, resulting in 13% of yearly maternal deaths (Koiwa et al.). Young mothers are also more exposed to sexually transmitted infections like HIV, which puts at risk the life of the mother and the life of the expected child. For example, studies in southern Africa have shown elevated HIV rates among pregnant teens, revealing how commonly sexual violence exposes girls to pregnancy and disease ("Baby Steps in Bringing down Teen Pregnancy"). The mental health impacts are also a severe consequence of sexual violence. Survivors of sexual abuse often suffer depression, anxiety, or PTSD, made worse by the stress of a pregnancy they didn't consent to. On top of this, in the majority of cases, girls are blamed and shamed by their communities for being pregnant, even if it is a result of abuse. Leading to suffering not only from psychological trauma, but also from social rejection and feelings of guilt. For example, in latin America thousands of young girls are raped and forced into motherhood, with an estimated of 2 million girls under the age of 15 giving birth every year as a result of sexual violence, simultaneously facing social marginalization and severe health risks ("They Are Girls, Not Mothers: The Violence of Forcing Motherhood on Young Girls in Latin America").



Dire Dawa University. (2021, November). Magnitude of child sexual abuse and its associated factors among high school female students in Dire Dawa, Eastern Ethiopia: a cross-sectional study. ResearchGate.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356107837_Magnitude_of_child_sexual_abuse_and_its_associated_factors_among_high_school_female_students_in_Dire_Dawa_Eastern_Ethiopia_a_cross-sectional_study

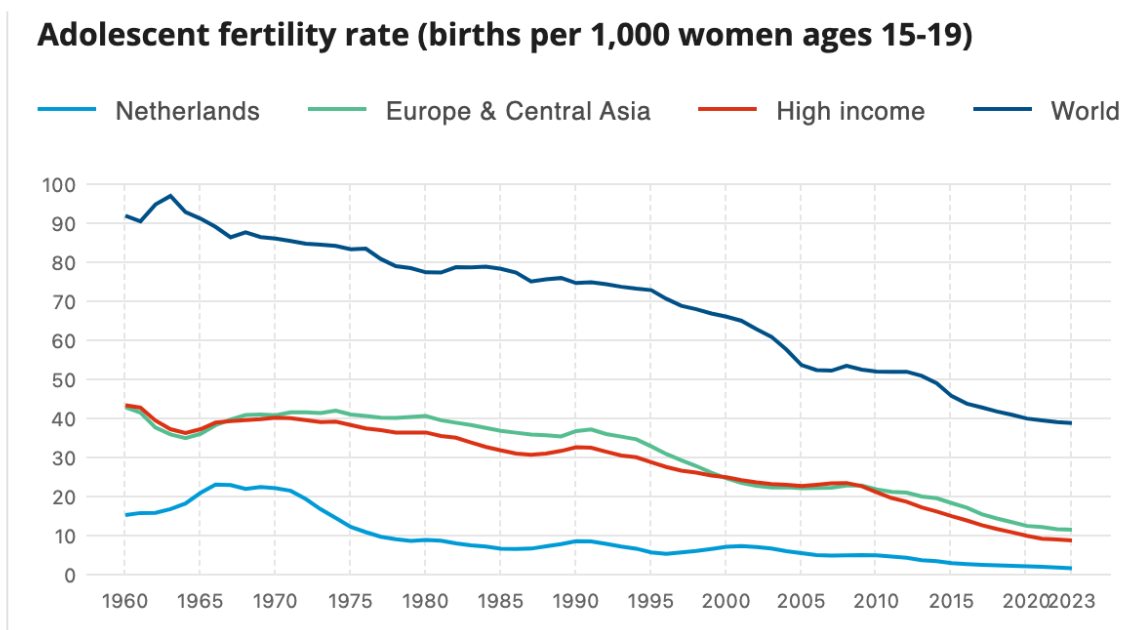
Avoidance of Child Support and Abandonment by Fathers

When fathers avoid child support or abandon the mother after an adolescent pregnancy, it makes life much harder for the young mother and her child. In many cases, the father, whether he is a teenager or an adult, refuses to take responsibility for child care. This can mean cutting off contact, denying paternity, or refusing to provide financial or emotional support to the mother. As a result, the burden of pregnancy and parenting falls completely on the mother, and oftentimes on her family as well. Reports from several countries demonstrate that many teenage girls become pregnant by older men who later disappear. In Botswana, for example, a social worker said every teen mother she counseled has been abandoned by the older man who got her pregnant. The health ministry then confirmed that few teen pregnancies involved boys the same age as the girl, and these men often denied responsibility and walked away, leaving the young mother to manage everything alone ("Baby Steps in Bringing down Teen Pregnancy"). This abandonment leads to greater socioeconomic challenges. Most teens have little to no income, and without the support from the fathers, they may not be able to afford food, housing, or medical care for the baby or themselves. After birth, many young girls have no option but to take low-paying jobs or rely on their families, who already struggle financially. In societies where unmarried motherhood is shamed, the father's absence can increase the stigma. The girl is exposed to harsh judgment, while the father faces no consequences and walks freely without confrontation. In many cultures, if the father disappears, the girl might be blamed or even punished. An example of this occurred in Tanzania, the case of a underage girl that was raped by her teacher and when the pregnancy was discovered she was expelled by her own family (Martínez).

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has a highly progressive stance on adolescent pregnancy. Dutch policy highlights that teen sexuality is a common stage of development and emphasizes the importance of comprehensive sex education, and provides easy access to contraception ("Sex Ed Goes Global: The Netherlands – Global Reproductive Health at Duke"). These approaches have positioned the country amongst the lowest teenage pregnancy rates in the world, with a rate of 2 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19, which has remained roughly the same from 2010 to 2023 ("Netherlands | World Bank Gender Data Portal").



Netherlands | World Bank Gender Data Portal. (n.d.). World Bank Gender Data Portal.
<https://liveprod.worldbank.org/en/economies/netherlands>

Niger

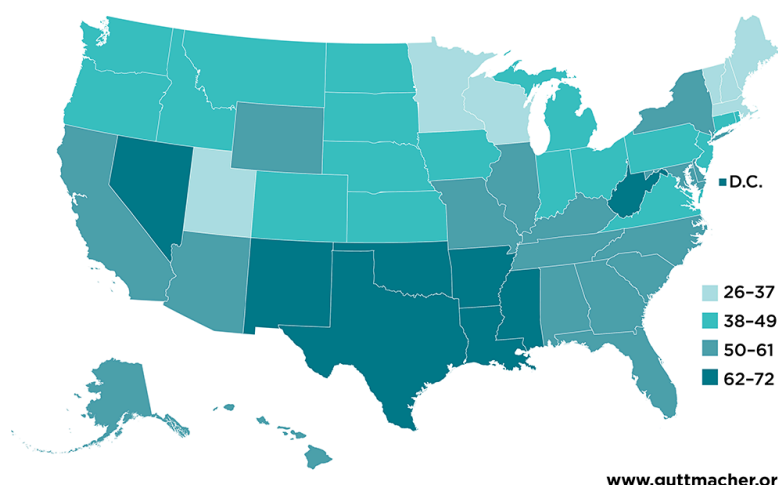
Niger has raised concerns globally due to its overwhelmingly high rate of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Its staggering birth rate of 203.6 births per 1,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 is what positions the nation amongst the world's highest proportions of teen mothers ("Teenage Pregnancy Rates by Country 2025"). This is a result of widespread child marriage due to the legal age for marriage in the country being 15 years old. According to the Demographic and Health survey in Niger (EDSN),

75% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 28% before the age of 15 years old (Soumana Diaouga Hamidou et al.). The majority of Nigerian girls, when getting married or childbearing, drop out of school permanently as a result of social pressure, school expulsion, or domestic responsibilities. The government of Nigeria has recognized the issue and, with the support of the UN agencies, has designed initiatives such as the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and policies to protect pregnant girls' education rights until at least 16 years old to combat the significant school dropout rate ("Ending Child Marriage in Niger").

United States

Lately, the U.S. has been presenting a contrasting stance with a mix of progressive and restrictive policies. The teen birth rate has declined by 78% since 1991, however, the nation remains with the highest rate amongst developed countries, with 12.7 births per 1,000 girls as of 2024-2025. The contrasting stances in the country are a result of some states emphasizing the importance of providing comprehensive sex education and easier access to contraception, while conservative states with strong religious beliefs emphasize abstinence-only education. In addition, conservative states with a lack of sex education are strongly linked to the highest teen birth rates in the country, such as Mississippi and Arkansas, with birth rates of 27.9 births per 1,000 underage girls. ("Teen Pregnancy Rates by State 2025").

Figure 1. Pregnancy rates per 1,000 women aged 15-19, by state, 2011.



Kost, K., & Maddow-Zimet, I. (2024, July 31). U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and

Abortions, 2011: State Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity. Guttmacher Institute.
<https://www.guttmacher.org/report/us-teen-pregnancy-state-trends-2011>

Tanzania

Tanzania has demonstrated a highly restrictive and conservative approach to adolescent pregnancy, particularly regarding education policy. Under the government of former president John Magufuli, the country imposed a ban on pregnant girls in public schools, with the argument that allowing teenage mothers in classrooms would promote “immoral” behavior (McCool). This strict policy meant that around 6,500 Tanzanian girls annually would have to interrupt their schooling temporarily during pregnancy or end it permanently due to struggles to reintegrate after giving birth (Group). According to the 2022 Demographic and Health survey, approximately 22% of girls aged between 15-19 have been pregnant at least once. A Major contributor is the limitation to contraceptives, with only about 10% of teen girls using modern methods (“Global Affairs Canada, UNICEF and UNFPA Join Hands to Support Adolescent Girls in Tanzania”). Fortunately, in 2021, Tanzania's new president aimed at solving the violation of the right to education by lifting the ban and allowing mothers to resume their studies after giving birth (McCool).

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancies and child marriage, with about 30% of girls becoming mothers and 40% married before 18. Yet, historically, its policies have focused on punishing rather than protecting pregnant underage girls. In 2015, a government directive prohibited pregnant students from attending school, leaving thousands of schoolgirls without education and opportunities (Hodal). Reproductive rights are strictly and tightly monitored, abortion was outlawed under a 1861 law, which solely permits abortion to save the mother's life in case of emergency, and access to contraception and sexual education has been very limited due to cultural beliefs. After various human rights advocacy groups pressed for broader reforms, Sierra Leone lifted the education ban in 2020 and, in 2022, took a progressive step and approved a “safe motherhood” bill to enforce girls' rights. (Akinwotu)

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of Event |
|------|--|
| 1948 | The United Nations (UN) adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), affirming everyone's right to education and special protection for mothers and children. It also states that marriage must be based on free consent, implying that forced marriage must come to an end (Nations). |
| 1962 | The United Nations establishes the Convention on Consent to Marriage, which requires countries to set a legal minimum age for marriage and that they are all officially registered. ("Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages") |
| 1989 | The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) guarantees every child the right to education, health, and protection from discrimination ("Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages"). |
| 1990 | The African Charter on the Rights of the Child, treaty adopted by African leaders, is the first to explicitly state that pregnant girls must be allowed to continue their education ("Chapter One: Rights and Welfare of the Child ACERWC - African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child"). |
| 1994 | Kenya introduces one of the world's first national policies allowing teen mothers to return to school after giving birth ("Supporting Teen Mothers Return to School: Lessons from Kenya"). |
| 2003 | The Maputo Protocol, a treaty established by the African Union, requires countries to ban child marriage and protect women's reproductive rights ("9 Ways the Maputo Protocol Has Protected and Promoted the Rights of |

Women and Girls across Africa - Equality Now”).

| | |
|------|---|
| 2013 | The UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Child Marriage formally recognizes child marriage as a human rights violation and calls for global action to solve the issue (September). |
| 2017 | Tanzania enforces a ban on pregnant girls in school. President Magufuli says pregnant students will “never” return to their studies. |
| 2019 | Niger repeals a law that expelled pregnant schoolgirls. A new policy allows them to stay in school and punishes staff who block re-enrollment (News). |
| 2020 | Sierra Leone allows pregnant girls to stay in or return to school following the court ruling (AMA Press Releases). |
| 2021 | After former president Magufuli’s death, Tanzania’s new president lifted the school ban for adolescent mothers (AfricaNews). |
| 2023 | Teen birth rates fell from 65 per 1,000 girls in 2000 to 41 per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19 in 2023 (World). |

United Nations Involvement

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)(1989)

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. It guarantees every child’s right to education, health, and protection from discrimination (Articles 2, 28). Article 3 emphasizes the best interests of the child in all decisions, while Article 6 upholds their right to life, survival, and development (“Adolescent Pregnancy”).

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted by the United Nations’ General Assembly in 1979, CEDAW aims to end

discrimination against women and girls in all areas of life. Article 16(2) calls for the elimination of child marriage and requires a minimum legal age for marriage. Article 12 ensures equal access to healthcare, including services related to family planning and pregnancy (“Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights”).

United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 66/170

In 2011, this resolution established International Day of the Girl Child (October 11) to promote awareness of girls' rights and the challenges they face (Svanemyr et al.).

Human Rights 2023 Resolution

Adopted during the Human Rights Council (HRC) 53rd session, this resolution was titled “*Accelerating progress towards preventing adolescent girls' pregnancy.*” It calls for inclusive education for pregnant and married girls, recognizes the role of sexual and reproductive health services, and asks the UN human rights office to report on effective prevention strategies (on).

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (1994)

Agreed upon by 179 countries, this plan linked girls' education, reproductive health, and reduced adolescent pregnancy. It urged states to provide adolescents with the information and services required to avoid early marriage and childbearing (“UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund”).

Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016- 2030)

Led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), this strategy supports countries in keeping girls in school, expanding sexuality education, and improving healthcare for adolescent mothers (Kuruvilla et al.).

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Child Marriage Laws

Many countries have reformed laws and policies to protect girls from early pregnancy,

often by banning child marriage and allowing pregnant girls to return to school. Legal bans on marriage under 18, like Colombia's recent repeal of a law permitting marriage from age 14 (World), reflect growing alignment with human rights standard and have contributed to a global decline in child marriage, from 1 in 4 young women a decade ago to 1 in 5 today (Moumen).

School Re-entry Policies

School re-entry policies have also expanded, with at least 30 African countries now guaranteeing that pregnant girls and young mothers can resume their education. Sierra Leone's 2020 "Radical Inclusion" policy, which lifted a longstanding ban on pregnant schoolgirls and allowed flexible re-entry without conditions, is widely seen as a model ("Africa: Rights Progress for Pregnant Students"). However, these legal gains face serious implementation challenges. Enforcement is weak in many communities where informal unions bypass official laws, and in rural or conflict-affected areas, oversight is limited. The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that bans without community support can push the practice underground. Cultural pressure, stigma, and gender norms also undermine legal protections (World). For example, in Uganda, re-entry policies exist but require pregnant students to leave school early and wait six months before returning, causing discouragement in their education ("Africa: Rights Progress for Pregnant Students"). In Tanzania, a public announcement ending the ban on school for young mothers was not followed by legal reform or school-level instructions, delaying real change (McCool). These gaps between policy and practice highlight the need for follow-through, training, and community engagement.

United Nations Initiatives to Avoid Child Marriage and Educational Exclusion

Simultaneously, UN agencies and national governments have supported programs that bring these policies to action. Community based initiatives like girls' clubs, peer mentoring, and vocational training, which have been supported by the UNFPA and UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, have also proven to be effective in places like Ethiopia, Zambia, Brazil, Bangladesh, where safe spaces help girls delay marriage and stay in school (Phase III Summary Narrative). However, these efforts still face key challenges. Moving forward, these programs must be holistic and rights-based, combining education, health, and protection. They should involve youth in their

planning, engage families and communities, and build public systems that can scale and sustain these services (World).

Possible Solutions

Enforce Child Marriage Bans

As a way to tackle the situation, governments should set the legal minimum age for marriage at 18, without exceptions, and make sure this law is enforced. To do this well, they should set up local committees to monitor cases and help communities follow the rules. But laws alone aren't enough. If marriage is simply banned without support, the practice might continue in secret. And girls may be blamed or, in extreme situations, punished. That is why enforcement needs to go hand in hand with community counseling and legal aid, especially for girls who are already in underage marriages, to help them restore their rights.

Economic Incentives to Keep Girls in School

To reduce child marriage and teen pregnancy, governments can offer financial aid or scholarships to families who keep their daughters in school. Poverty is one of the main reasons why families marry off their girls early, and with financial support, they are less likely to see early marriage as the only solution. Also, keeping girls in school delays pregnancy and improves their future chances of earning a living.

Youth-Friendly Reproductive Health Services

Health services should also meet the needs of young people. Governments should create or expand youth-friendly clinics, without leaving behind remote areas. These services should be free and non-judgmental. They should offer access to contraception, pregnancy care, and STI prevention. Staff should be trained to support teens respectfully and keep their information confidential.

Education Guarantee for Pregnant Girls

Pregnancy should never mean the end of a girl's education. Governments should ban any policy that expels or segregates pregnant students. Instead of excluding adolescent mothers, schools should help them stay in regular classes or offer flexible

schedule options like evening classes or online learning. When girls are supported to finish school after giving birth, they are better prepared to support themselves and their child.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)

SDG 5, Gender Equality

Sustainable Development Goal #5, Gender Equality, is deeply tied to the issue of adolescent pregnancy, which both reflects and reinforces the unequal status of girls in many societies. Target 5.3 calls for the elimination of all harmful practices, including child, early, and forced marriage, one of the leading causes of adolescent pregnancy worldwide. In many communities, girls are married off as a means of social control or economic survival, often without their consent, and are expected to bear children immediately. These early unions strip girls of autonomy, disrupt their education, and expose them to sexual violence and reproductive coercion, all of which undermine their rights and affect their prospects. Target 5.6 adds that girls and women must have the right to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, yet millions of adolescents lack access to sexuality education, contraception, or safe abortion services, if these are even legal. When adolescent girls become mothers too soon, especially under coercive circumstances, they are often pushed out of school and into long-term poverty, while the men involved often face no consequences ("5.3 Eliminate All Harmful Practices, such as Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilations – Indicators and a Monitoring Framework").

SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being

Sustainable Development Goal #3, Good Health and Well-Being, focuses on ensuring healthy lives for all, and adolescent pregnancy presents a serious challenge to this goal. Target 3.7 specifically emphasized universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, yet many girls, especially those in rural or low-income areas, still face great barriers to accessing contraception, safe childbirth, or postnatal care. For girls aged 15-19, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death globally. Despite these risks, health systems are rarely equipped to offer youth-friendly, non-judgmental care. SDG 3 cannot be achieved without addressing the needs of

adolescents, particularly those who are pregnant or at risk ("SDG Target 3.7 Sexual and Reproductive Health").

Appendix

These sources offer important background information to understand the issue of adolescent pregnancy. They include data, expert analysis, and legal frameworks that explain how certain circumstances impact adolescent pregnancy. Additionally, these sources are of great use when looking at how the issue presents itself in particular cultural sectors of the world.

<https://healthpolicy-watch.news/child-marriage-driving-adolescent-pregnancy-crisis-who-warns/#:~:text=ImageOne%20in%20five%20young%20women,Saharan%20Africa>

Source A: This article explains how child marriage is a major cause of adolescent pregnancy, highlighting the health risks, educational setbacks, and inequality girls face. It shares new WHO data, expert insights, and global statistics.

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sp-ado-tfrt>

Source B: This website provides information about adolescent fertility rates around the world.

<https://www.hhrjournal.org/2019/12/09/they-are-girls-not-mothers-the-violence-of-forcing-motherhood-on-young-girls-in-latin-america/>

Source C: This article shows how girls under 14 are often assaulted, denied legal abortion, and forced into motherhood, particularly in Latin America.

https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Wright_Glo%20Adv_7.15.14.pdf

Source D: The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a crucial source for understanding children's rights under international law.

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