



Photo credit: Susan Warner/Save the Children

# Adolescent Sexual & Reproductive Health

## ADDRESSING THE COMPLEXITIES OF ADOLESCENTS' EMERGING SEXUALITY

Adolescence is one of life's most complex stages, when young people take on new responsibilities and experiment with independence. When engaged, adolescents thrive and contribute to communities and families. When encouraged, they have the potential to change negative social norms and pave a brighter future for themselves and their future families. Yet as adolescents around the world enter puberty, taboos, discomfort and fear prevent parents and other trusted adults from teaching relevant information to help adolescents navigate the complexities of their emerging sexuality. Global and national health indicators highlight the need to have a greater focus on adolescents. Complications from pregnancy, childbirth, and unsafe abortion are a leading cause of death for young women aged 15 to 19. Adolescents have one of the highest rates of unmet need for family planning. Young people are at high risk for contracting HIV with 40% of all new HIV infections occurring in 15 to 24 year olds. Sexual violence among adolescents, especially in humanitarian emergencies, also continues to pose significant risks to adolescents. Yet adolescents typically do not have access to high quality sexual and reproductive health information and services.

Save the Children's success in adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) programming lies in adopting evidence-based interventions which are designed to suit local social and cultural norms. Our global ASRH programs span the reproductive health lifecycle, with special attention to the needs of very young adolescents (ages 10 to 14), preventing early pregnancy, and addressing the needs of young mothers, who typically lack access to sexual reproductive health (SRH) services. Save the Children is also actively engaged in efforts to make ASRH information and services a routine part of the service delivery package in emergency settings — a critical and neglected gap in most emergencies. Moreover, our work is enhanced by addressing the gender and social norms that create barriers to SRH information and services for adolescents, leading to poor SRH outcomes.

### Global Reach for Adolescents

Through our global programs and research, Save the Children is contributing to improved sexual and reproductive health (SRH) for adolescents:

- ◆ In 2012, Save the Children had 18 active development programs and research studies in 12 countries which directly reached over 370,000 adolescents
- ◆ Save the Children has provided ASRH leadership and capacity building in emergencies in five countries
- ◆ Save the Children continues to increase visibility and mobilize resources for the needs of Very Young Adolescents (10 to 14 years old)

## OUR ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH FOCUS AREAS

### Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Very Young Adolescents

Save the Children is an emerging global leader in the health of very young adolescents. Almost invisible from global health programs, we focus on this age group through the following strategies: ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality education, strengthening menstrual hygiene management, delaying early marriage, improving access to health services, strengthening protective factors, such as communication with parents, and supporting the formation of positive gender norms. This compilation of program strategies fills a critical information and service gap and equips younger adolescents with the ability to navigate the challenges and opportunities during their transition through puberty.

### Delaying Pregnancy through Access to Contraception

Although young people may not be thinking of planning their families, they are thinking about planning their lives and how to achieve their hopes and dreams. Contraception is part of this life planning and adolescents need the knowledge and skills to delay and space pregnancies as they become sexually active and plan their futures. Save the Children has integrated family planning programming capacity within its long term programming for young people to ensure this key need is sustained in our work. Save the Children focuses on clinic and community based strategies to increase access to contraception for unmarried as well as married girls and boys.

### Improving Outcomes for Young Mothers and Delaying Second Pregnancies

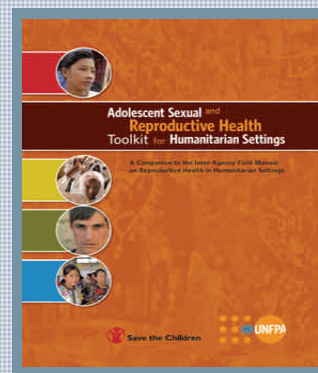
Around the world, early marriage has stripped millions of girls of their childhood and potential and has thrust them into early motherhood. Save the Children recognizes that married and unmarried young mothers less than 18 years old are still girls and need specialized support and services. Through our maternal, newborn and child health programs, Save the Children is in a unique position to address the SRH needs of adolescent mothers, linking them back to schools, increasing their access to family planning services, and engaging their male partners in reflections of power and involvement.

### Increasing Access and Quality of Sexual and Reproductive Health Services through Youth Participation

Save the Children's hallmark Partnership Defined Quality for Youth (PDQ-Y) approach engages youth and health service providers in jointly defining barriers to quality adolescent health services, and empowers youth and providers to work together to implement innovative and feasible solutions.

## BUILDING CAPACITY IN EMERGENCIES

Humanitarian emergencies can be a time of chaos where little attention is given to adolescents' needs. It is a crucial time when young people's vulnerability becomes multi-fold: their protective family, community, and institutional structures are fragile, there is a breakdown of social norms and they face a disruption in education, health and recreational services along with a loss of livelihoods. This puts them at an increased risk of sexual exploitation and vulnerable to high-risk sexual behavior. Save the Children provides global technical assistance, training and advocacy to emergency programs during and after periods of crisis. With Save the Children and UNFPA's ASRH Toolkit, humanitarian program managers and health care providers can be better prepared to deal with ASRH and meet the needs of this population during emergencies.



## PARTNERING FOR GREATER IMPACT FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES

**Youth Health and Rights Coalition (YHRC)**, which is comprised of advocates and implementers, meets monthly to work on issues regarding youth sexual and reproductive rights. Save the Children has been an active contributor to the coalition since its inception in 2009.

**Interagency Youth Working Group (IYWG)**, a USAID-funded initiative implemented by FHI360 to document and disseminate key resources and information for and among youth serving organizations, has been a key platform for sharing Save the Children's work and contributions in ASRH.

**Very Young Adolescent Alliance**, a new alliance formed by Save the Children, Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health, Plan International and The German Foundation for World Population (DSW) to increase visibility of this hidden population and augment programming and research on VYA health.