



International Confederation of midwives



International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics



International Pediatric Association

Joint Statement on Adolescent Reproductive Health and Adolescent Pregnancy

In 1994 the International Conference on Population and Development identified adolescents¹ as a particularly vulnerable group in terms of sexual and reproductive health. Adolescent pregnancy is common, with child marriage² being a significant factor. Child marriage³ is considered a violation of the human rights articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁴, which also states that each and every child has the right to the highest attainable standard of health (referring to the general health of children and adolescents and the survival of newborns).

Maternal mortality is doubled in adolescents aged 15-19⁵ and is at least five times higher in those under age 15⁶. Maternal morbidity, including obstetric fistula, is also more prevalent. Furthermore, newborn mortality constitutes 37 per cent of childhood deaths under age 5, and when maternal death occurs child mortality is doubled.⁷

The Millennium Declaration of 2000 set out Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that include a reduction of three quarters in maternal mortality and two thirds in child mortality by 2015 (MDGs 4 and 5). Adolescents were never originally mentioned in the health MDGs. In 2007 there was agreement to add MDG 5b: universal access to reproductive health. The indicators for MDG 5b are contraceptive prevalence rate, adolescent birth rate, antenatal care coverage and unmet need for family planning.

¹ Adolescents defined as 10-19 years of age

² Child marriage is a harmful traditional practice that weds young people, almost exclusively girls to men who are usually significantly older than their new bride. Source: www.icrw.org/childmarriage

Such marriages may be arranged between two very young children as a means of maintaining or ensuring social, economic or political ties between families. Source:

http://www.ecpat.net/EI/Csec_marriage.asp?action=set_language&language=en

³ Child defined as up to age 18

⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child. <http://untreaty.un.org/English/TreatyEvent2001/pdf/03e.pdf>

⁵ WHO Pregnant Adolescents : Delivering on Global Promises of Hope

http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2006/9241593784_eng.pdf

⁶ United Nations. 2001a. We the Children: End-decade Review of the Follow-up to the World Summit for Children: Report of the Secretary-General (A/S-27/3). New York: United Nations.

⁷ UNFPA State of World Population 2005 http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/english/ch5/chap5_page1.htm#fig4

Meeting the targets for MDGs 4 and 5 will require attention to the primary and secondary education of both girls and boys, which is vital to the health of adolescents. Where girls complete secondary education, it has been shown to delay the age of first pregnancy. The health of adolescents is compromised not only by lack of knowledge, but by infringements of their human rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The evolving capacity of children in autonomous decision-making includes the right to information and confidentiality. There is also a well recognized, unmet need for contraception to be available for married⁸ adolescents; this should invoke fewer societal concerns than when addressing unmet need for unmarried adolescents.

Programmatic approaches need to be culturally-appropriate, community-based and sensitive to the needs and preferences of young people. Youth development strategies cannot be effective in isolation and require links to skills development and job opportunities.

Improvements in maternal and newborn health worldwide require advocacy and action by obstetricians/gynaecologists, midwives and paediatricians. FIGO, IPA and ICM are committed to work with other organizations at the national, regional and international level, including the United Nations System and governments, to reduce maternal newborn morbidity and mortality and achieve universal access to reproductive health. In terms of adolescents, this requires concerted efforts to abolish child marriage, advocacy for the education of girls and boys to completion of secondary school, and the provision of sexuality education, counseling and contraceptive services to adolescents, while being respectful of the diverse values expressed in the ICPD Plan of Action.⁹

Unless these aims are met, MDG 5b will not be achieved by 2015.

⁸ UNFPA State of World Population. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm

⁹ ICPD Plan of Action. Chapter II principle Page (1):

[The implementation of the recommendations contained in the Programme of Action is the sovereign right of each country, consistent with national laws and development priorities, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of its people, and in conformity with universally recognized international human rights].