

CHILDHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD

INVESTING IN VERY YOUNG ADOLESCENTS TO SUPPORT SAFE TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

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Early and rapid transitions

- In more than 30 countries, 10 per cent or more of adolescents have had sexual intercourse by age 15 (UNFPA SWOP, 2013)
 - ▣ Rates as high as 26 per cent in Niger
- Rapid cohort progression into marriage (and sexual activity) (UNFPA calculations, 2015)
 - ▣ Proportion married by age 15 (11%)
 - ▣ Proportion married by age 18 (34%)

Sexual activity and marriage

- In 22 of 36 countries with data available (mostly African and Latin American), sexual initiation before marriage is more common than within marriage (UN Population Division, 2013)
 - ▣ However, data on sequencing not of the best quality, and simultaneity/jointness of the decisions cannot be ruled out
- That being said, most childbearing happens within marriage or union – 9 in 10 (WHO, 2008)

Adolescent childbearing

- 19 per cent of young women in developing countries give birth before age 18 (UNFPA SWOP, 2013)

- A total of 7.3 million births each year
- That's 20,000 girls each day

- Adolescent Birth Rate, births per 1000 women 15-19 (UNFPA SWOP, 2014)
 - ▣ 50 (world)
 - ▣ 113 (least developed)
 - ▣ 21 (more developed)

Unintended and unsafe

- In high-ABR countries, a median of 30% of births to women under age 20 are unintended (UN Population Division, 2013)
 - ▣ Most are mistimed rather than unwanted
- 3.2 million unsafe abortions among girls 15-19 each year (Shah and Ahman, 2012)
- 70,000 adolescent deaths annually from complications from pregnancy and childbirth (UNICEF, 2008)
 - ▣ Second-leading cause of death among females 15-19 (WHO, 2014)

How young is “too young”?

- Three criteria for assessing extent to which timing of sexual, marital, and reproductive transitions among male and female adolescents could be considered “too young” (Dixon-Mueller, 2008)
 - physiological maturation of the body
 - cognitive capacity for making safe, informed, and voluntary decisions
 - institutionalized concepts of “old enough” for consent to sexual intercourse and marriage as reflected in legal frameworks and international standards

How young is “too young”? (cont’d)

- An application of these three adolescent development criteria to the timing of transitions observed in DHSs from 64 developing countries leads to the conclusion that
 - ▣ **boys and girls aged 14 and younger are universally “too young” to make safe and consensual transitions**
 - ▣ that 15–17-year-olds may or may not be too young, depending on their circumstances
 - ▣ that 18-year-olds are generally “old enough.”

What investments will it take to ensure safe and consensual transitions?

- Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks (including CSE)
- Enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls (including CCTs)
- Offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families (including UCTs)
- Making available quality, affordable health services (general/preventive, contraceptives, HIV and other STIs, maternal health)
- Laws on minimum age at marriage 18, and nondiscriminatory access to SRH services (including safe abortion where legal)

Making the right investments in early adolescence is critical

- Globally, 32% of girls of lower secondary school age are out of school (UNESCO, 2014)
- Primary school completion, and transition to secondary school occur around the same age as when puberty hits
- Investing in girls before puberty and school dropout occur is key i.e. investing in very young adolescents

