SWEDD & COVID-19: Considering adolescent girls during crises

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SWEDD & COVID-19
CONSIDERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS DURING CRISIES

May 19, 2020
“The Sahel is the youngest region in the world. As a source of innovation and creativity, youth is an asset that should not be underestimated. Young people and women play an immeasurable role in building the foundations of tomorrow’s world, and we should expect changes in the social norms and values that guide them. Access to education, healthcare, employment, and training will make more of a difference than ever if we want to see the Sahel countries progress towards shared, lasting, and sustainable growth. Harnessing the demographic dividend is an opportunity Africa can’t pass up.”

Mabingue Ngom
UNFPA Regional Director
West and Central Africa Regional Office
KEY MESSAGES

1. Adolescent girls (AGs) differ from children & women; need dedicated attention
2. Adolescence critical life phase for girls; girls at crossroads at puberty, with potential for lifelong consequences & benefits
3. Protective assets help safe transition to adulthood
4. AGs often overlooked despite tremendous domestic responsibilities & potential
5. Use adolescent programming ‘good practice’ principles to guide decision-making
6. Girl-centered perspective integrating evidence & AG’s unique experiences & point of view.
7. Not all AG experience risks the same; recognize heterogeneity between girl segments
8. Poorest girls often excluded from programming; social isolation exacerbates exclusion.
9. COVID-19 exacerbates social isolation; Social support key asset
COVID-19 affects everyone, everywhere. Why do adolescent girls merit special consideration?
Adolescence as formative life phase: Tremendous opportunity & risk

- Life phase dense with changes
- Also dense with responsibilities
  - Adolescent girls step into fill household gaps: for income, labor, water, etc.
  - Inequitable distribution of domestic labor disadvantages girls
- Potential *now* to contribute to COVID-19 response & resilience; building back better
- Potential *later* for safe transition to adulthood
  - Empowered girls become empowered women
  - Responsible for biological & social reproduction
Adolescence a critical phase of life

Percent of Guatemalan girls 10–19, by outcome

Girls may go off track after puberty: Threats with life-long consequences

A Girl is born

She turns 12

Child marriage
Early pregnancy
School drop-out
HIV
Protective assets can reduce risk, increase opportunity, enable safe transitions to adulthood.
We don’t reach age because we assume we have
They are not mini-adults or large children; we risk missing them without dedicated attention.

CHILD $\neq$ AG
YOUTH $\neq$ AG
WOMAN $\neq$ AG
Why is it a problem?
Increased domestic responsibilities

“In general the outbreak experience means that women’s* domestic burden becomes exacerbated as well, making their share of household responsibilities even heavier...”

UNFPA, COVID-19 A Gender Lens, 2020

* And girls’! Intentional efforts needed to overcome girls’ exclusion
Where girls spend the most time on household chores

Girls spend more time on household chores than boys


NOTE: Original data sources not confirmed.
The Need: Evidence-Informed Programs
Intentionally Designed with Girls at the Center

- Use **intentional design** to overcome exclusion
- Build girls’ **protective assets**
- Track **progress** at girl & community levels
Planning based on adolescents’ perspective of their communities: physical & social surroundings
Adolescents’ perspectives vary. Consider heterogeneity.

POOR GIRLS MOST EXCLUDED FROM OPPORTUNITIES & SERVICES

- Community-based Condom Distribution
- HIV Testing (HIV Centers)
- National Savings
- Playing Field
- Development Committee
- Roads and Market
- Youth Center
- School + School-based Programs
- Community Center

HIV Testing (HIV Centers)
National Savings
Playing Field
Development Committee
Community Center
School + School-based Programs
Youth Center
Roads and Market
Community-based Condom Distribution
Segmentation

FOR PLANNING TO OVERCOME EXCLUSION: BREAK “YOUTH” POPULATION OF INTEREST INTO SMALLER AGE, SCHOOLING, MARITAL, CHILDBEARING AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS SEGMENTS

COVID-19 exacerbates risk of exclusion

• Worst effects of COVID-19 along familiar fault lines; highlights existing inequity & vulnerability due to gender, age, other factors

• COVID-19 creates & reinforces exclusion & social isolation—priority challenge for adolescent girls
For all girls, social assets are vital

Fewer friends, greater risk: Less social connections, higher risk of forced sex

Ever been physically forced: 14-16 year-old South African girls

Social assets promote condom use

Trust in community, group participation, condom use at last sex
14-18 year old girls KwaZulu-Natal. Longitudinal analysis: FE logit

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