

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTHS SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (AYSRH)

Ensuring adolescents and youths to become productive members of society means positive future for our community. Help boys and girls live up to their full potentials without early pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

Why SRH for Adolescents and Youths?

Young people represent the promise and potential of Myanmar's future development. Yet for boys and girls, transitioning to adulthood means facing significant social, health and economic challenges.

These risks include loss of educational and economic opportunities due to early marriage, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV.

In Myanmar, **teenage pregnancy** rate is nearly 10 times higher than those in developed countries in Asia¹ and increasing². Lack of access to sexual and reproductive health information and contraceptive methods compels young people to take drastic measures. A number of **abandoned newborns** has increased³ overwhelming monasteries and orphanages around the country, prompting State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to take initiative in



Photo: The Myanmar Times

addressing the issue. Growing evidence also suggests that an increasing number of young women are compelled to choose **unsafe abortions**. Every year estimated 246,000 women resort to unsafe abortions, making it the third largest cause of maternal deaths.⁴ Even when young lives are not lost, delay in seeking help for complications often results in more complications and emergencies, as well as higher costs of care.

Sexual and reproductive education coupled with access to a variety of contraceptive methods and health services is the proven most cost-effective way of solving these problems. Myanmar government acknowledges the importance of increasing contraceptive use and has made a commitment to global FP2020 initiative to make this a reality. To achieve these goals, it is of a vital importance to engage **everyone in the community for positive social environment** including young people, parents, elders, religious and business leaders, health care providers, and other opinion leaders and policy makers. This **multi-level approach** is essential and a key to elevating the importance of sexual and reproductive health needs of young people and increasing their access to protective health services.



Photo: UNFPA Myanmar



Photo: Population Connection

¹ Singapore 3.8/1000; Japan 4.2/1000; (World Bank 2014 report); Myanmar 36/1000 (DHS 2016)

² 16.8/1000 in 2007 to 36/1000 in 2016 (World Bank 2007, DHS 2016)

³ <https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/yangon/20707-abandoned-babies-reveal-lack-of-sex-education-support-for-single-mothers.html>

⁴ Ipas Report, 2017; Maternal Death Review Myanmar, MOHS, 2013

Common Questions and Answers

Doesn't reproductive health education promote sex and lead to promiscuity?

Providing information about sexuality **does not** lead young people to experiment with sex. A World Health Organization review of reproductive health education programs found that the young participants were **not more likely to engage in early sexual activity**, nor did they show increased sexual activity compared to their peers. In fact, providing accurate information **before** young people begin to have sex has been shown to **help teens abstain from sex**. In the case of youth who are sexually active, accurate sexuality education helps them protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and other STDs by increasing the chances that they will use condoms. Studies consistently show that teens who receive accurate sexuality education are more likely to report using a contraceptive at first intercourse than are teens without sexuality education.

Why not just teach abstinence?

Reproductive health education begins with abstinence—the only completely certain way for youth to protect themselves against pregnancy, STDs, and HIV/AIDS. To successfully practice abstinence, **young people need skills, including decision making, communication, negotiation, and refusal skills**. When abstinence is taught as the *only* option for young people, youth do not receive **information and skills that will help keep them safe when they become sexually active either willingly or unwillingly**. Without information, young people are less able to make responsible choices and find solutions.

Don't programs for youth "push" contraceptives on young people?

Providing information and services to youth is about helping them stay safe, **not about encouraging them to have sex**. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) programs never push contraceptives on young people; rather, they include education about how to prevent STDs and pregnancy. **Young people need courage and skills to act responsibly** when faced with difficult situations in which they must make hard choices.

What will the community think of me if I support reproductive health information and services for youth?

When communities discuss youth issues openly for the first time, more support sometimes emerges for reproductive health programs than anyone would have imagined. People everywhere want young people to grow up healthy. Adults are concerned about unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and HIV/STI among young people in their communities, and they are often willing to discuss potential solutions when the problems are explained.

Most of the opposition to reproductive health education comes from **the fear that discussing sexuality will promote promiscuity** among youth. **Research shows that this is not true**; but, it takes time and effort to encourage the public to examine their long-held beliefs and values. **Educating the public, especially parents and elders, about the positive effects of reproductive health education and services can help allay fears and build public support** for adolescent and youths reproductive health programs.

Source: Excerpts from Advocacy for Youths. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/375-chapter-7-common-questions-for-advocates-talking-about-adolescent-reproductive-health>

AYSRH Program

Pathfinder International and MPPR support Myanmar government and township communities to make quality AYSRH services available and accessible to adolescents and youths. We engage [key stakeholders to come together to develop, implement and monitor interventions to catalyze social norm change and empower communities and young people.](#)

Goal

Adolescents and youths 10 to 24 years have access to quality SRH information and services they need in Myanmar.

Objective

By 2020, townships have AYSRH strategies and action plans developed and implemented with the engagement of community key stakeholders and youths.

Outputs

1. Township health care providers have awareness and strategies to promote adolescents and youth sexual & reproductive health
2. Health facilities in selected townships have AYSRH action plans
3. Communities and youth representatives have opportunities to hold dialogues with health care providers and provide their feedback in township AYSRH strategies and action plan developments
4. Youth and community groups in selected townships have a mechanism to follow on township AYSRH action plans and provide their feedbacks.



Key messages from youths

1. Young people's opinions count: Engage youths in the process of decision making
2. Marriage is not the answer to unwanted pregnancies, contraception is
3. Make pharmacies more youth friendly
4. Make contraceptive knowledge available in a variety of ways through the uses of media, social media, videos, billboards, comics, and pamphlets
5. Allow interactive discussions through peer outreach
6. Start at younger age through school health with SRH education
7. Don't neglect youths in rural areas

Program Components

**State Level AYSRH Bottleneck Analysis
Workshops with Townships**
Problem and cause identification
Strategy and action plan development
with youth participation



Township Action Planning
Follow up action planning
with community participation



Action Plan Monitoring
with community involvement and
feedbacks



Our Guiding Principles for AYSRH

- Support Myanmar's FP2020 goals
- Support public health system strengthening
- Promote a rights-based approach
- Encourage multi-sectoral and comprehensive approaches
- Mobilize and support partnerships
- Support stakeholder dialogue/community mobilization
- Ensure meaningful youth participation in defining a strategy and other decision-making processes