

REDUCING UNWANTED PREGNANCY

THE IMPACT OF INVOLVING YOUNG MEN IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

YOUNG WOMEN AT RISK

Young people in sub-Saharan Africa face several challenges related to the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). One issue of particular concern is unwanted pregnancies among young women. Without having the choice to decide if, or when to become pregnant, women and girls are not only denied their basic human rights – they are also at great risk for several reasons;

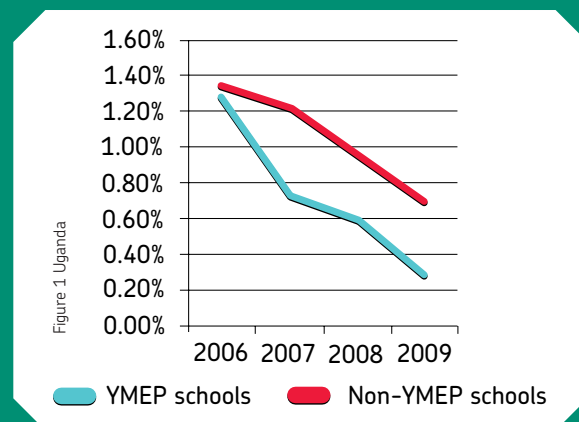
- ✓ Maternal mortality and morbidity are major causes of death and illnesses for young women in the ages of 15-24.
- ✓ Unsafe abortions related to unwanted pregnancies lead to serious health problems, or death.
- ✓ Unprotected sex exposes the girl to risks of sexually transmitted infections and HIV.
- ✓ The girl may have to pause, or drop out of school because of the pregnancy, which will limit her access to education and self-empowerment.

YOUNG MEN AS EQUAL PARTNERS

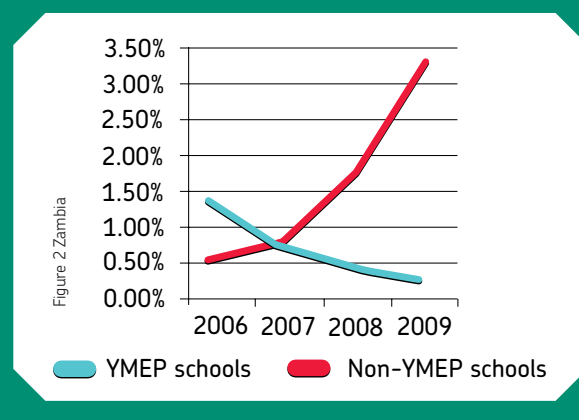
In order to achieve a sustainable change and improve young women's rights and access to SRHR, it is also important to involve men. Young Men as Equal Partners (YMEP) was a program developed to improve young men's health but also, critically, the health of their partners. The aim was to strengthen gender equality and increase male involvement in SRHR issues. The program was implemented between 2006 and 2009 in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia focusing on young men and women aged 10-24. YMEP targeted particularly young men as partners, clients and agents of change. The program addressed issues

YMEP RESULTS

UGANDA: Even in schools that did not take part in YMEP, – the control group – the number of unwanted pregnancies dropped over the 4 years of the program, in the YMEP schools the reduction in pregnancies was dramatically even higher.



ZAMBIA: The contrast between YMEP schools and non-YMEP schools was very noticeable. At the start of the program – the baseline for comparisons – pregnancy rates were actually higher in the YMEP schools. Over the course of the program, however, pregnancies in non-YMEP schools increased dramatically while in the YMEP schools the pregnancy numbers dropped by a three



The number of unwanted pregnancies dropped significantly in the 28 schools that were involved in the YMEP program.

around sexuality, masculinity and gender patterns that generate risk behaviour and restrict behaviour change. To strengthen young men's health, YMEP also mobilized and involved community leaders, teachers, health service providers and peer educators. The program also ensured that individuals and communities had frequent possibilities to receive information, ask questions, and to have access to SRH services and commodities such as condoms. Over the four years of the project in 10 project sites, there were over 2 million attendances by young people for gender and SRHR education at different events in the community. Nearly 1.25 million sessions of community-based SRH services were also provided to young people seeking counselling, consultation or treatment. YMEP supported and trained staff in public health facilities, who provided 400,000 sessions to young people. Over two million condoms were distributed to young people.

The drop in pregnancies in the YMEP schools was one of the most notable features in the project sites.

There are several factors that lead to a reduction of unwanted pregnancies. For instance, it is key to empower young girls to become more assertive about their health and rights, but also to support men to become more informed and responsible. By involving young men to challenge and change gender norms and behaviours that put both themselves and young women at risk, we take an important step to generate a sustainable impact and improve SRHR. It is also crucial that young people have a supportive environment in a community that listens to their needs and questions around their sexual and reproductive health. RFSU will continue to analyse the results of the programme to identify exactly what has proved most important in securing the reduction of unwanted pregnancies. This will be a particular focus for the new Tanzanian Men as Equal Partners (TMEP) project. Contact info@rfsu.se. (Write "Attn: TMEP" in the subject line.)

YMEP RESULTS

KENYA: Pregnancies in YMEP schools dropped from 1 in 29 girls in 2006 to 1 in 97 in 2009

TANZANIA: Research at the end of the project showed encouraging trends in many important areas of SRHR. Young men showed greater awareness of the risks of unprotected sex, much higher reported abstinence from sex before marriage, increased acceptance when young women rejected to have sex, more shared responsibility with women in SRHR decision-making, reduced involvement in gender-based violence, and far higher condom use.



With over 75 years of experience RFSU is the leading organization in Sweden in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. RFSU sees openness on sexuality as the point of entry of health promotion, prevention of STIs and HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. The organization also believes that the rights to sexual and reproductive health services and to sexuality education are key tools in the struggle for a healthier and more equitable society. The work is based on three freedoms that are fundamental preconditions for a persons ability to experience self-worth and self-esteem; The freedom to choose; The freedom to enjoy and the freedom to be oneself. An important condition to these freedoms is that one persons freedom may not infringe on another's.

The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU). www.rfsu.se