Access to and Use of Family Planning among Young Mothers in Tanzania

Authors: Edwin Ernest, Annette Almeida, Feddy Mwanga, Mwemezi Ngemera, Maurice Hiza, Analee Etherenge, Caitlin Shannon, and Japhet Ominde Achola

SIGNIFICANCE

- In Tanzania, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, pregnancy-related complications, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV. While the government has established favorable policy and legal frameworks for addressing adolescent sexual and reproductive health (RH) needs, little data is available about adolescent access to family planning (FP) and RH services.
- EngenderHealth sought to generate evidence related to adolescent mothers’ access to and use of FP/RH services to help close this data gap and inform responsive programming.

METHODOLOGY

- The project used a cross-sectional design in two targeted districts with high teenage pregnancy and HIV prevalence rates: one rural (Nachingwea District in Lindi) and one urban (Temeke District in Dar es Salaam Region).
- EngenderHealth conducted structured interviews with 802 young mothers and in-depth interviews with a subset of 25 young mothers who had experienced poor pregnancy outcomes. Project staff then entered quantitative data into a central server and used Stata software for analysis; staff similarly recorded and analyzed qualitative data to identify themes.

RESULTS

- The findings highlight several differences between respondents in rural versus urban areas. Overall, respondents in urban areas were less likely to use an FP method to prevent pregnancy or STIs/HIV as compared to those in rural areas. Unsurprisingly, respondents from urban areas were more likely to report that their pregnancy was unintended than those in rural areas.
- Raising awareness around the importance of delaying sexual debut and using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy and STIs/HIV before adolescents engage in risky behaviors is a key challenge. Creating strong linkages between the education and health sectors to ensure accurate FP/RH information is provided in schools by health professionals could help address this challenge. Government authorities should ensure a conducive policy environment for delivery of comprehensive sexuality education in schools to support this work.
- Further, individual-level factors—including low risk perceptions, feelings of embarrassment, and ignorance of available services—often contribute to teenage pregnancies and STI/HIV infections. Targeted information, education, and communication campaigns within communities and at health facilities should address these particular issues to increase FP uptake and reduce risky behaviors.

IMPLICATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

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- Further, individual-level factors—including low risk perceptions, feelings of embarrassment, and ignorance of available services—often contribute to teenage pregnancies and STI/HIV infections. Targeted information, education, and communication campaigns within communities and at health facilities should address these particular issues to increase FP uptake and reduce risky behaviors.