

## Youths' Lack of Knowledge Regarding Adolescent Pregnancy and Early Marriage

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### Abstract

**Background:** Adolescent pregnancy and early marriage are a fundamental global public health issue, for which comprehensive knowledge is identified as a key protective factor. A lack of knowledge is one of the main factors perceived to contribute to the high rates of adolescent pregnancy. A clear gap exists between adolescents' basic knowledge of risks and their practical knowledge of where and how to seek help. **Objective:** This study aims to obtain adolescents' knowledge regarding adolescent pregnancy and early marriage. **Methods:** This research used a qualitative approach conducted from March to November 2025 at the Public Health Study Program, Universitas Jambi. A total of 24 students from the 2023 cohort participated through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed using data reduction, matrix presentation, and drawing conclusions. **Results:** The majority of informants had good basic knowledge regarding the definitions and causes of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage. However, this understanding was not in-depth. A significant knowledge gap existed regarding the availability of reproductive health services or counseling specifically targeting adolescents, both at the university level and in health facilities. Their knowledge tended to come from limited information received in school (e.g., Biology subjects), which was often not detailed and not optimal because the topic was still considered taboo by teachers. **Conclusion:** Informants expect intensive promotion and socialization regarding counseling and adolescent reproductive health services, both in the university environment and in health facilities such as *puskesmas* (community health centers).

**Keywords:** Adolescent Pregnancy; Adolescent Reproductive Health; Early Marriage; Health Services; Knowledge Gap

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent pregnancy and early marriage are a fundamental global public health issue, for which comprehensive knowledge is identified as a key protective factor. Various studies in many countries consistently indicate that a lack of knowledge is one of the main factors perceived to contribute to the high rates of adolescent pregnancy. A study in Rwanda found that poverty and lack of knowledge were the two main causes most frequently reported by adolescent girls regarding their pregnancies (1). This knowledge gap is not merely limited to basic understanding but also encompasses practical awareness of available services. Research by Shrestha et al. (2024) indicated that only 14.6% of adolescents had good knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, and specifically, only 42.8% were aware of the availability of adolescent-friendly services (2).

Therefore, a clear gap exists between adolescents' basic knowledge of risks and their practical knowledge of where and how to seek help. This research is essential for bridging the knowledge gap regarding adolescent pregnancy and early marriage, particularly concerning service promotion and the utilization of existing support systems.

## METHODS

The aim of the research is to obtain ideas and notions about the perceptions of young people regarding current policies on adolescent pregnancy and early marriage; therefore, to achieve this goal, the research was conducted using a qualitative approach. Most qualitative research is interpretative and experience-based, as the main goal is to contextualize and understand people's experiences in the context of everyday life. The important thing about qualitative research is to develop inclusive practices and opportunities so that people can share opinions about health fields that may be important to them (3).

The research was conducted from March to November 2025 at the Public Health Study Program, Universitas Jambi. The informants in this study were students from the 2021-2024 cohorts. Data collection was carried out using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-depth Interview methods. Data analysis used data reduction, matrix presentation, charts, relationships between categories, and drawing conclusions and verification.

## RESULTS

The informants in this study were students from the 2023 cohort of the Public Health Study Program, Universitas Jambi. They consisted of two groups: students who were active in campus organizations (Public Health Student Association/HIMA) and students who did not participate in organizations. A total of 12 people (6 HIMA and 6 non-HIMA) participated in in-depth interviews, while 12 others (6 HIMA and 6 non-HIMA) were involved in Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The division of informants into two groups was intended to obtain more balanced data and describe the variations in student experiences. Of the total 24 informants, 20 were female and 4 were male.

Youth knowledge regarding adolescent pregnancy and early marriage

From the results of in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions, it can be seen that the majority of informants have good knowledge regarding adolescent pregnancy and early marriage. Adolescent pregnancy is understood as a pregnancy that occurs under the age of 18 or 19, either inside or outside of marital status. Early marriage itself is defined as a marriage conducted before the legal age in Indonesia (under 19 years).

There are differences in the causes of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage. Informants mentioned that adolescent pregnancy is caused by casual sex (pergaulan bebas), unhealthy friendship environments, and a lack of education. Meanwhile, early marriage is more often caused by economic factors as a reason to lighten the family's burden, traditions or customs, demands from parents, and as a last solution resulting from out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

*"In my opinion, ma'am, adolescent pregnancy is a pregnancy that occurs under the age of 18." – MPRL*

*"...marriage that is underage, like under 19 years old according to the Law." – ZMB*

*"For the cause, it could be... the cause could also be from casual sex, ma'am." - KHR*

*"In my area, early marriage... it's usually those who, after graduating from high school, don't go to college or they don't work, so their parents marry them off... they say it's better than them doing nothing." - AMA*

*"Maybe it could be from economic factors too, like... for example, they want to raise their status a little. For example, if they are poor, they are married off to someone richer, like that, ma'am." – KHL*

Although the informants' knowledge can be said to be good, the adequacy of the information obtained is still not very much. Formal education in Senior High School (SMA), especially in Biology subjects, is one of the sources from which informants get information about reproductive health. Occasionally, teachers also provide education about body anatomy, casual sex, menstruation, and adolescent pregnancy. However, this information is not detailed and in-depth. In addition, the topics of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage are still considered taboo by teachers, so the information conveyed is also not optimal. This situation indicates that although reproductive health education has been obtained at the high school level, it has not fully met the information needs that adolescents should get regarding adolescent pregnancy and early marriage.

*"Never. Even in high school, there was no counseling from teachers or health workers. Only limited to anatomy lessons in biology, not related to the future and the risks of adolescent pregnancy." – RD*

*"Yes, Ma'am. In elementary school, there was a 'little doctor' program that provided education about health, including menstruation and casual sex. Besides that, a team from the puskesmas (community health center) also came to the school to give counseling, but the material was not too focused on adolescent pregnancy and early marriage..." – RS*

*"Yes, since junior high school, I have received material about reproductive health, especially about menstruation. In high school, the education was broader, including the risks of early pregnancy." – SFA*

*"In high school, yes. The material was about reproductive health... keeping oneself clean and issues like social behavior..." - AMA*

## DISCUSSION

The research results show that informants have good basic knowledge regarding the definitions of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage, but this understanding is not in-depth and tends to come from limited information received during junior and senior high school. Informants were able to differentiate the causes of the two topics, where

adolescent pregnancy was more associated with casual sex, while early marriage was linked to economic factors, traditions, and a solution to out-of-wedlock pregnancies. This finding is in line with Mamo et al. (2021) who found that although the majority of adolescents had heard about adolescent pregnancy, their comprehensive knowledge was still very lacking and the sources of information obtained were inadequate (4). Furthermore, research by Ahinkorah et al. (2022) states that early marriage is often driven by social norms, poverty, and a lack of educational and economic alternatives for girls (5).

## CONCLUSIONS

Most informants had good basic knowledge regarding the definitions of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage. They were able to differentiate the causes of the two issues, where adolescent pregnancy was more associated with casual sex, while early marriage was more related to economic factors, traditions, and as a solution to out of wedlock pregnancy. However, this understanding was not in depth, and there was a significant knowledge gap. Many informants were not aware of or did not have sufficient knowledge about the availability of reproductive health services or counseling specifically targeting adolescents, either at the university level or in health facilities. The knowledge they possessed tended to come from limited information received in school (e.g., Biology subjects), which was often not detailed and not optimal because the topic was still considered taboo by teachers. Thus, informants expect intensive promotion and socialization regarding counseling and adolescent reproductive health services, both in the university environment and in health facilities such as puskesmas (community health centers).

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