

Upturn in Teen Fertility: A Rationale for the Emergence of a New Trend in Sri Lanka during the New Millennium

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Teen age is the period of life during which young boys and girls progress to adulthood. During this period young girls who progress to adulthood are biologically mature enough to participate in sex and to be pregnant at early years of life, although they may not psychologically mature enough to understand the responsibilities and cultural realities of pregnancy. Teen pregnancy is calculated in human females when the pregnant mother is below the age of 20 at the time that the pregnancy ends. Teen mothers are more likely to suffer from severe complications during pregnancy and childbirth. These implications mainly affect their health and survival of both mother and children. The study is to assess the recent upturn in teen fertility and attempts to identify possible contributors of that trend in Sri Lanka. The study primarily used data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and 2012 population census.

The teen fertility rate (age 15-19) of Sri Lanka had increased from 27 to 36 live births per 1000 females over the period 1995-2000 to 2011, and this increase is estimated to be as high as 33 per cent. In fact teen fertility of 2011, derived from 2012 census data is even lower than the corresponding value reported for the period 1982-87. It is important to note that both the lowest total fertility rate (TFR of 1.9 live births per woman) and the lowest teen fertility (27 live births per 1,000 teens) was reported during 1995-2000 period. Although the contribution of teen fertility to the TFR was only 6.7 per cent in 1982-87, by 2011 the corresponding figure had increased to 7.4 per cent.

In most of the developing countries when the prevalence of fertility within the age group 15-19 is considered, it is significantly low before 17 years of age but increases rapidly during subsequent ages. In Sri Lanka too at age 16 the age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) was only 15 live births per 1,000 females in that age,

while by age 19 it has jumped to 74 live births. Although ASFR at age 15 is significantly low, it demonstrates the risk of entering early reproduction.

During the period of 2000 and 2006-2007, the increase of the teenage fertility rate in Sri Lanka reported 3.7 per cent. Despite this up turn, the latest census data indicate a significant jump of teenage fertility, which is 12 per cent over the period of 2006-07 and 2011. Even though the teen fertility rate had declined in most of the developing countries, why Sri Lanka demonstrates an opposite trend during past 10-15 years. For a long time, mean age at marriage in Sri Lanka had been more than 25 years and 28 years for women and men respectively. However, as of census 2012, the mean age at marriage of female has declined to 23.4 years, which is equivalent to the level that was observed in the year 1971. Apart from the declining average age at marriage, conceptualization and dissemination of pronatalistic views, among the majority of couples, would have caused the effectiveness of contraceptive use to decline. By the beginning of the year 2006 the Sri Lankan government has initiated vigorous persecution of abortion centers functioned in many parts of the country. Therefore majority of women with unwanted pregnancies in the recent past did not have access to such services. Thus a sizable proportion of teen were forced to retain the unwanted pregnancy and deliver the child at the end of the gestation period. This new environment also might have contributed to a greater extent to the increase of teen fertility in Sri Lanka.

Key words: *Teen fertility, Total fertility rate, Age at marriage, Abortion.*