

# **Teenage Pregnancies in the Estate Sector**

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### Introduction

In general, during the last quarter century, there has been an overall decline in the teenage pregnancy rate in the world, perhaps reflecting the availability of contraceptives, and the increased awareness of the risks of unprotected sex brought about by the AIDS epidemic. Although the social stigma that once attended out-of-wedlock pregnancy may have diminished in western world, developing countries like Sri Lanka social stigma can be treated as a major factor related to teenage pregnancies or out of wed-lock conceptions. However, the risks of serious health consequences remain for babies born to mothers still in their teens. Children of teenagers are more likely to have low birth weights, and to suffer the associated health problems.

Pregnant teens themselves are also at greater risk of health problems, including, for example, anemia, hypertension, renal disease, eclampsia and depressive disorders. As well, teenagers who engage in unprotected sex are putting their own health at risk of sexually transmitted infections.

Teenage pregnancy also has economic consequences. Childbearing may curtail education and thereby reduce a young woman's employment prospects in a job market that requires ever higher levels of training.

Over 121,164 teenage pregnancies have been reported from Sri Lanka during the past six months, Healthcare and Nutrition Ministry sources said. Teenage pregnancies are a social and health problem which leads to other problems such as underweight births, the sources said. According to the sources, over 1.5 million persons use family planning methods while 33,401 deliveries have been reported and 38,205 pregnant mothers registered with the healthcare services during the past six months. The number of still births reported during the last six months was 20,609 and 3,097 infant deaths were reported during the same time period. Meanwhile, Healthcare and Nutrition Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva

has instructed health officials to carry out health service development activities in the North and East continuously despite interruptions by the LTTE. Vehicles worth Rs.400 million have already been provided to health institutions in the North and East and arrangements have been made to set-up 15,000 toilets in the estate sector. From the beginning of next year, the Healthcare and Nutrition Ministry will conduct awareness programmes in the North, East and Estate sector in Tamil to promote public health and prevent communicable diseases with the assistance of artistes and other resource persons.

### **Regional distribution of the sample**

The following table exhibits number of cases investigated from each region in order to gather information related to teenage pregnancies in the estate sector. Altogether we collected information from 401 cases, which can be regarded as a substantial sample to draw conclusion in relation to teenage pregnancies.

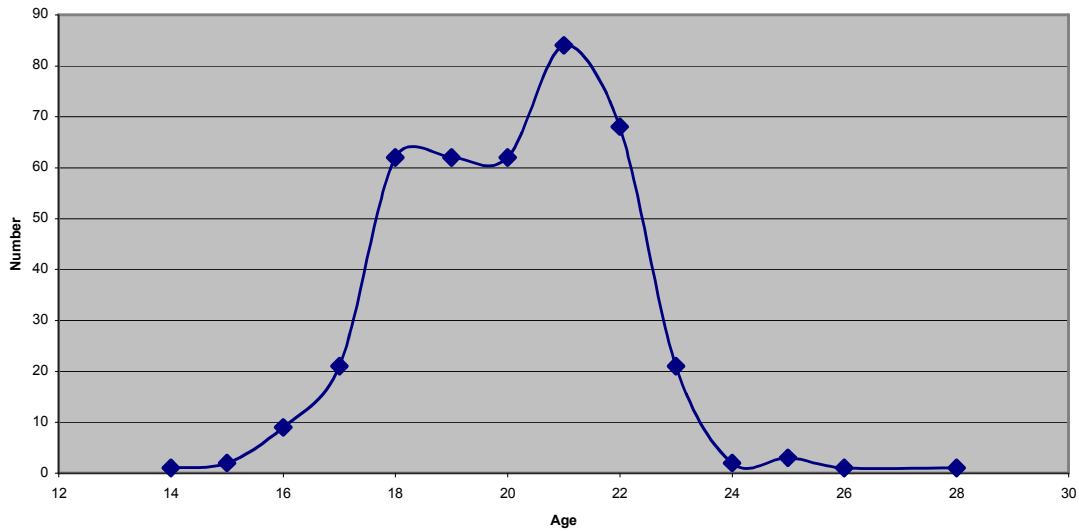
**Table : Number of cases investigated by region**

Region	Number of cases
Ratnapura	54
Kandy	25
Hatton	87
Badulla	74
Nuwaraeliya	92
Kegalle	28
Galle	41
Total	401

### **Age distribution of the respondents**

The information was collected from the ages 14 to 28 years of aged women, but it is important to note that women who are aged 20 to 28 who are not teenagers were interviewed in order to gather information about the pregnancy related issues while they were at teens.

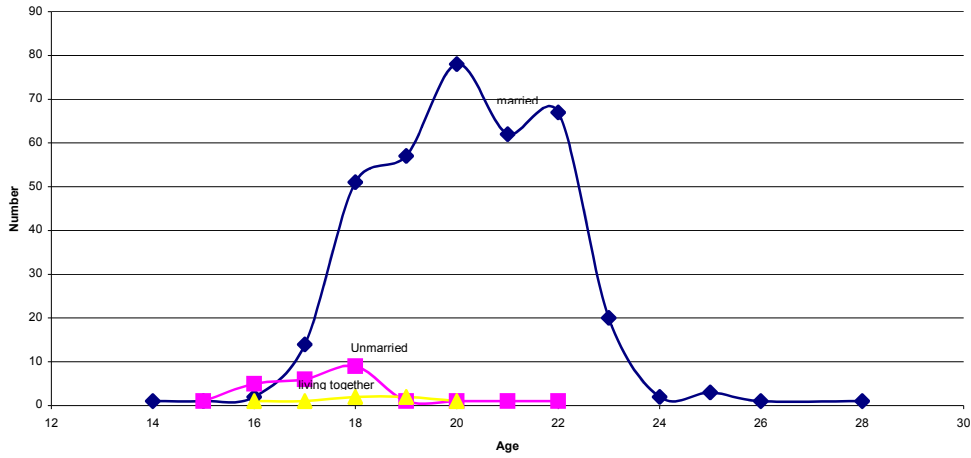
Figure 1: Age distribution of the respondents



### Marital status

Following figure shows the distribution of respondents by age and marital status. It appears that majority of the respondents are married but there is a minority group who are still living together. It also quite interesting to note that there is noticeable proportion who had teenage pregnancies but still are unmarried.

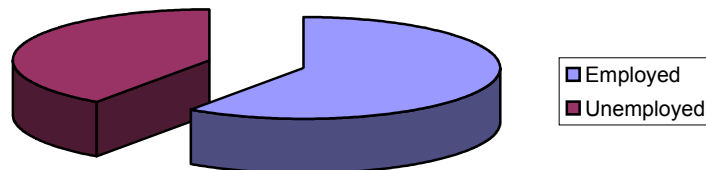
Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by age and marital status



### Employment status

Although the majority of the respondents are employed, there appears to be a 40 of the women who had teenage pregnancies are still unemployed (Figure 3). When we further analyze the employment status by their marital status, we find 88 percent are married while 8 percent are still unmarried. It is also quite interesting to report that 91.3 percent of the unemployed women are belonged the ages less than 22 years.

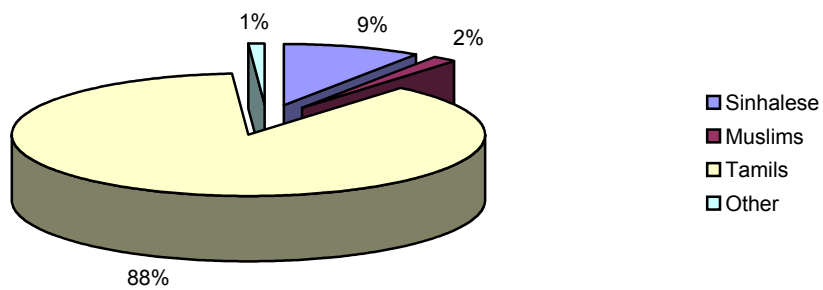
Figure 3: Employment status of the respondents



## Ethnicity

Following figure shows that the majority of the respondents are Tamils and the minority is Muslims.

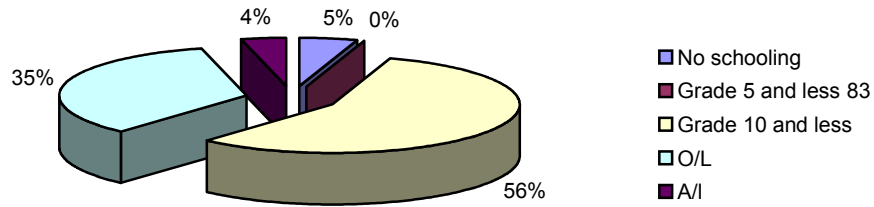
Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by ethnicity



## Educational attainment

The educational attainment of the respondents show that majority have attended only up to grade 10 as depicted in Figure 5.

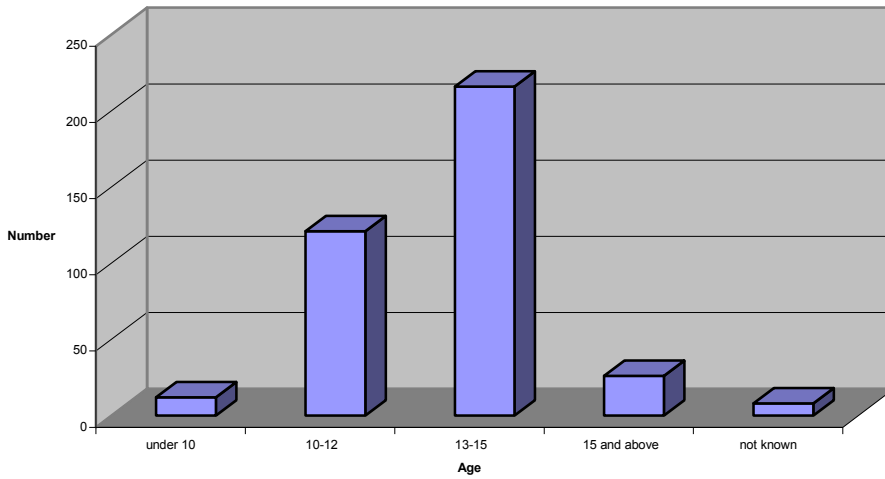
**Figure 5: Distribution of respondents by educational attainment**



### **Age at puberty**

Figure 6 shows that majority of women have attained their puberty between 13 and 15 years of age but it is important to note that there is noticeable proportion of women have attained their puberty at the ages below 10, and 15 and above.

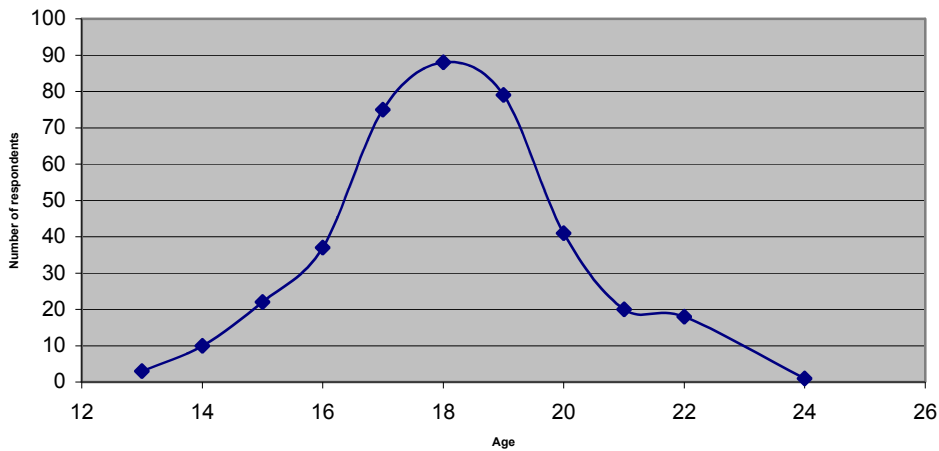
Figure 6: Age at puberty of the respondents



### Age at first intercourse

Figure 7 exhibits that majority had their first intercourse during the age of 17 to 19. It also appears that the age at first intercourse increases with age from 13 to 18. The average age at first intercourse is 18.07 years in this sample. Older teens are more likely than younger teens to be sexually active.

Figure 7: Age at first intercourse





Our analysis suggests that 86.8 percent of the women in our sample had their first intercourse with the present spouse. In fact, these women had got married at the age of 18.28 years, on average.

Table 2: Pre-marital sex

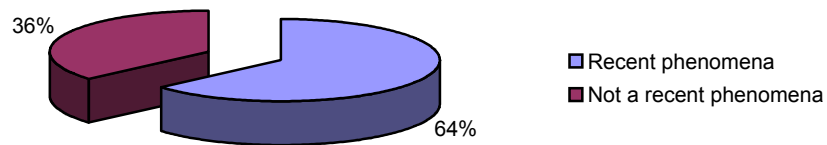
Age at marriage	Age at first intercourse							
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
14	1							
15		2						
16		1	2					
17			1	3				
18			1	5	9			
19	1				3			
20				1	1	1	3	
21				1				1

Table 2 shows that 37 respondents have had pre-marital sex at their teens. It is also quite interesting to note that 23.6 percent of the teenagers have had pre-marital sex in our sample. In fact, this can be regarded as a substantial proportion. In addition, as noted earlier, the average age at first intercourse .21 years greater than the average age at marriage. Our analysis also suggests that 7.7 women had partners before marriage and majority of them had only one partner. Among them 88 percent are boyfriends while others appear to be their family relatives. About 65 percent of women had become pregnant once before marriage and that appeared to happen between the ages of 15 to 19 years. When we asked the respondents how that happened , 5.4 percent said by force; 37.5 percent indicated with their wish and 57.1 have mentioned it was without their knowledge.

### Perception on teenage pregnancies

Following figure shows that the perception of the women on teenage pregnancies. It shows that 64 percent believe that this is a recent phenomenon but quite interestingly 36 percent have indicated that is not a recent phenomena.

Figure : opinion about teenage pregnancies



### Reasons for teenage pregnancies

Table indicates that majority believes that teenage pregnancies occur because of the love affairs taking place without parents wish at their adolescence ages and end up with a teenage pregnancy.

Table : Reasons for teenage pregnancies as a recent phenomenon

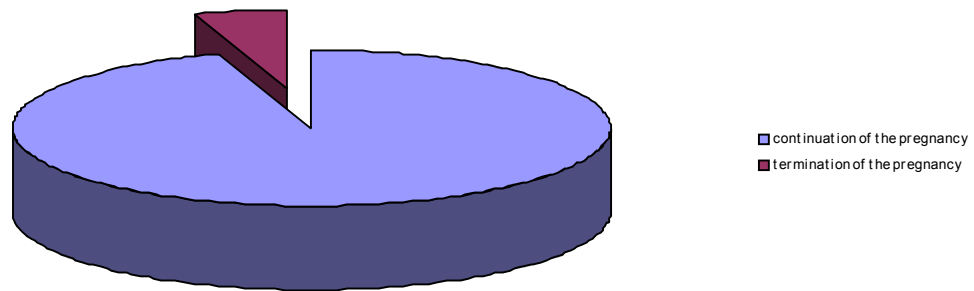
Reasons	Number
Marriages at adolescents ages	28
Sexual relationships at adolescents ages	13

Freedom to have pre-marital sex	6
Parents want their children to get marry at adolescents ages	51
Opportunities opened for adolescents	10
Love affairs without parents wish	94
Other	42

### Outcome of the teenage pregnancies

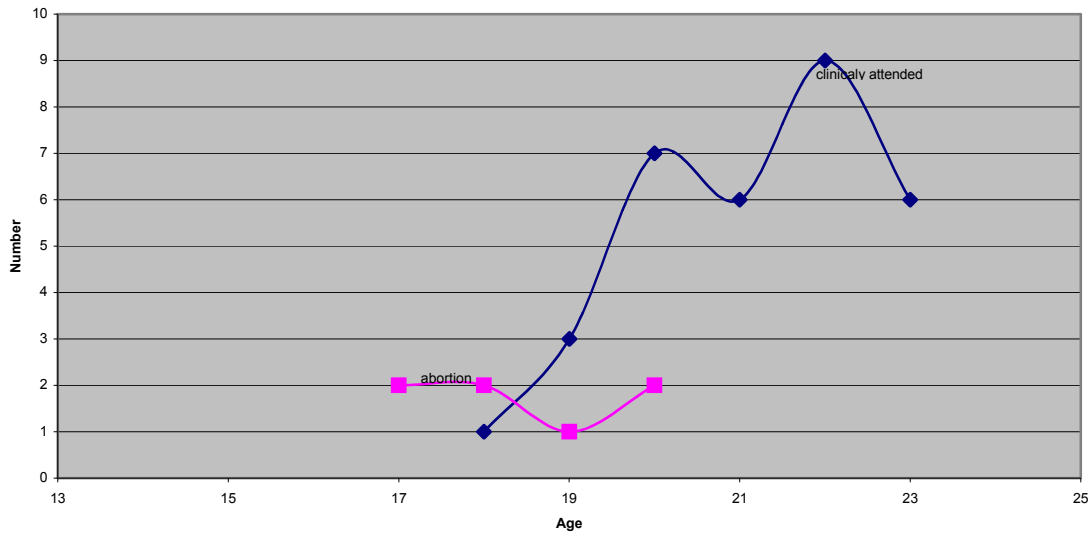
It is clear from the following figure that most teenage pregnancies end up with a live birth but still a substantial minority tends to terminate such pregnancies with a induced abortion.

Figure : Outcome of the teenage pregnancies



Following figure shows that termination of the pregnancies is occurring at the younger ages while older teens tends to continue with the preganancy.

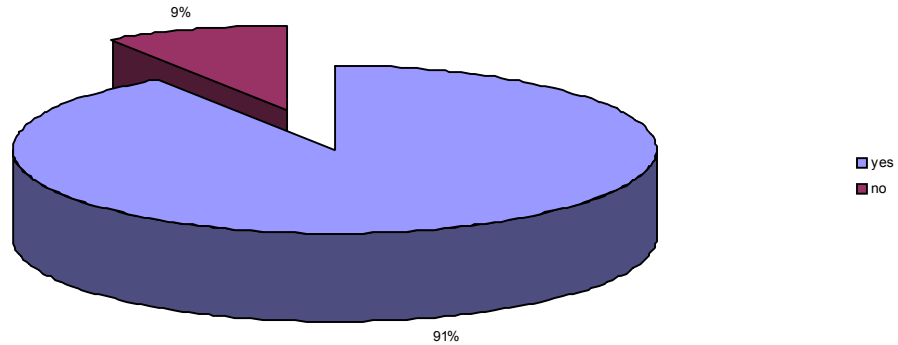
Figure : Outcome of teenage pregnancies by age



### Contraceptive knowledge

It appears 91 percent of the teenagers have fair knowledge on contraceptive methods. It is important to mention here that those who are in Ratnapura (27.8 percent) and Badulla (36.1 percent) show relative low awareness about contraceptive methods compared to other regions.

**Figure : Contraceptive Knowledge**

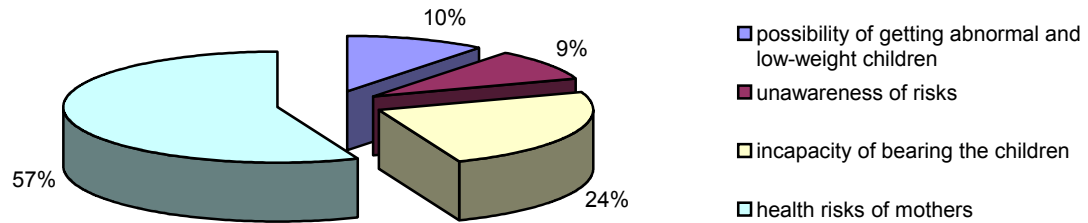


The knowledge of emergency contraceptive method is low because only 13.1 percent knew about this method. When this was analyzed further by taking into account the region of residence we find that the knowledge is higher in Hatton and Nuwaraeliya regions. However, the availability of contraceptives appears to be not a problem in general.

### **Opinion about teenage pregnancies**

Our findings suggest that health risks of mothers has been ranked as the major problem associated with the teenage pregnancies while about 24 percent have said the incapacity of bearing children by the teenagers also a significant problem. Teenage pregnancy is a major concern because of its impact on the overall health and well being of both mother and child. In particular, women younger than 18 years of age are at high risk for pregnancy related illnesses and death. Adolescents often report their pregnancies later than adult women. This behavior is associated with a lower level of psychological maturity and possession of fewer coping mechanisms. Maternal morbidity rates also tend to be high for adolescents.

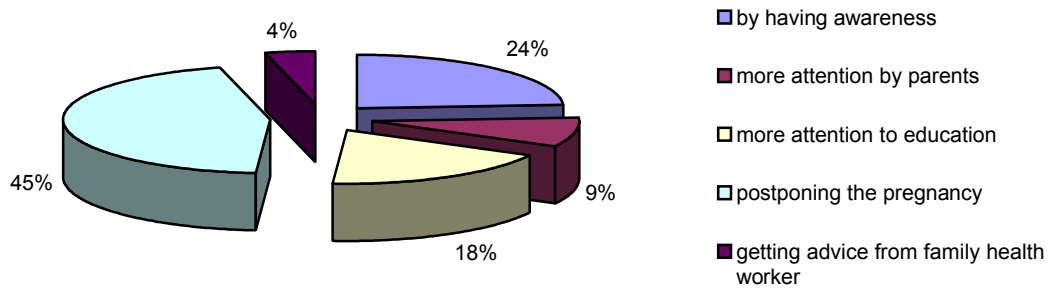
**Figure : Opnion about teenage pregnancies**



### **Prevention of teenage pregnancies**

When we gathered opinion from the teenagers themselves about the ways of preventing teenage pregnancies, majority who were married at teens said that it is better to postpone pregnancy when they are at teens. About 24 percent have said that they should have more attention to their education so they will not have any chance of getting unwanted pregnancies. In addition, it appears that awareness of the problems associated with teenage pregnancies is need ed so the authorities have to organize such awareness campaigns.

**Figure : Ways of preventing teenage pregnancies**



**Recommendations:**

It appears that a noticeable proportion that had teenage pregnancies is still unmarried and therefore, it is essential to carry out an awareness program on teenage pregnancies and associated health problems.

Some steps need to be taken by the educational authorities of the estate children as the respondents of the study have attended school only up to grade 10.

It is quite essential to find reasons for attaining puberty at the ages below and 15 years and above in the estate sector since a substantial proportion of girls in the estate sector have attained puberty during such ages.

Since the average age at first intercourse is about 18 years, carrying out a reproductive health campaign seems essential.

Teenage pregnancy in the estate sector seems to be tackled without any delay because its impact on the overall health and well being of both young mother and the child. Since adolescents often report their pregnancies very late, there is a high risk for pregnancy related illness and death.

Findings of this study showed that the knowledge on contraceptives is relatively low in Ratnapura and Badulla districts so it is essential to carry out an awareness campaign on the use of contraceptives, particularly among teenagers.