

Analysis of Adolescents Birth Rate in Zimbabwe: The Case of High Widening Gap between Rural and Urban Areas, Secondary Analysis from the 2022 National Population and Housing Census

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Abstract : Adolescent Birth rate (ABR) is an important indicator of both gender equality and equity in the country. This is the number of births to women aged between 15 and 19 years per 1000 live births. There has been a decreasing trend in ABR in Zimbabwe since 2014. However, the difference between rural areas and urban areas has continued to widen. A secondary analysis was conducted to assess the differences in ABR between the rural areas of Zimbabwe and the urban areas. This was also done to determine the root causes of high ABR in rural areas compared to urban areas and the impact this may cause to the economic development of the nation. The analysis was done according to geographical characteristics (provinces). A total of 69,335 females aged 10 to 19 years had live births among a total population of 791,914 females aged 15 to 19 years. The total Adolescent Birth rate in Zimbabwe is 87/1000 live births, while in rural areas, it is 114.4/1000 live births compared to urban areas, which is 49.7/1000 live births. A decrease in the ABR trends has been recorded since 2014 from 143/1000 live births among adolescents in rural areas to 97/1000 live births in urban areas. This shows that rural areas still have high rates of ABR compared to their urban counterparts, and the gap is still wide. High ABR is a result of early child marriages, teenage pregnancies as well as poverty. Most of these marriages (46%) are intergenerational relationships and have resulted in an increase in gender-based violence cases among adolescents, poor health outcomes, including pregnancy complications such as eclampsia, Cephalous Pelvic Disproportion (CPD), and obstructed labour. Maternal deaths among adolescence is also high compared to adults. Furthermore, the increase of school dropouts among adolescent girls is on the rise due to teen pregnancies. These challenges are being faced mostly by rural adolescent girls as compared to their urban counterparts. The widening gap in ABR between urban areas and rural areas is a matter of concern and needs to be addressed. There is a need to inform policy, programming, and interventions targeting rural areas to address the challenges and gaps in reducing ABR. This abstract is to inform policymakers on the strategies and resources required to address the challenges currently distressing adolescents. There is a need to improve access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Services by adolescents and reduce the age of consent to access SRH services should be reduced from 18 years for ease access to young people to reduce teenage pregnancies. Comprehensive sexuality education, both in-school and out of school, should be strengthened to increase knowledge among young people on sexuality.

Keywords : adolescence birth rate, live birth, teenage pregnancies, SRH services

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