



Reducing Teen Pregnancy¹

- Despite a slowly declining rate (relative to other regions), LAC continues to have the second-highest teenage pregnancy rate after Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Key determinants of early childbearing include low education, poverty, harmful social norms, and limited aspirations for the future.
- Teenage pregnancy constrains women's opportunities and agency. It is associated with a risk of health complications and maternal death, lower educational achievements and job opportunities, as well as intergenerational poverty. These associations imply that an adolescent mother will see her opportunities affected not only in the short term but also in the long term, reinforcing gender gaps.
- Examples of successful interventions to reduce teenage pregnancy include sexual and reproductive health policies; improving access to information on and use of contraceptive methods (among peers and/or school-based); increasing girls' agency and aspirations (soft skills training programs); boosting school attendance, time spent in school, and aspirations (CCT programs); and behavior change campaigns to reduce teenage pregnancy (peer education).
- The WBG is working to reduce teenage pregnancy through research and awareness-raising activities and by supporting innovative interventions and policies across sectors.

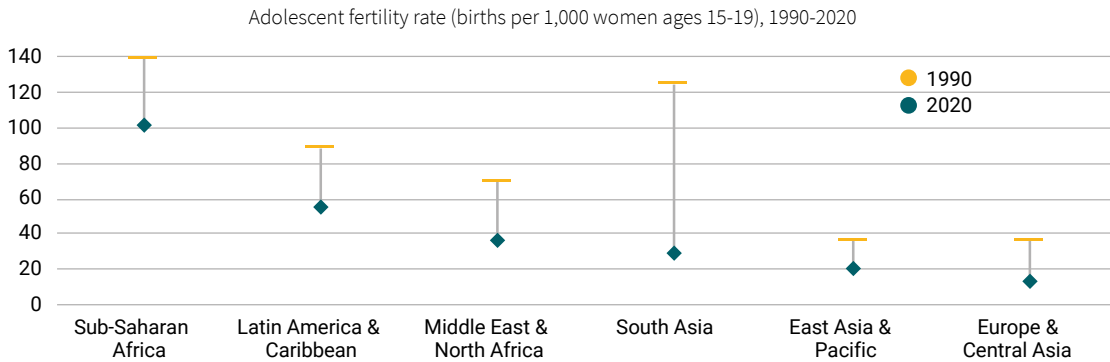
¹ This note was prepared by the LCR Regional Gender Coordination in the Poverty and Equity Global Practice. For more information, contact LCR_Gender_Coordination@worldbankgroup.org

THE CONTEXT

Among all regions of the world, LAC has the second-highest adolescent fertility rate with a rate declining at a much slower pace than in other regions (Figure 1). Most LAC countries maintain adolescent fertility rates above 50 births per 1,000 women ages 15–19 (Figure 2). According to the WBG study [Teenage Pregnancy and Opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), key determinants of early childbearing revolve around the thinking behind fertility decisions, behavioral issues, and social interactions and norms. Specific examples include limited aspirations for the future, poverty, low education, parental presence, and harmful social norms (Azevedo et al. 2012). Analysis for Mexico, suggests that adolescent pregnancy is associated with household well-being and has less to do with being indigenous or living in a rural area (World Bank, 2021).

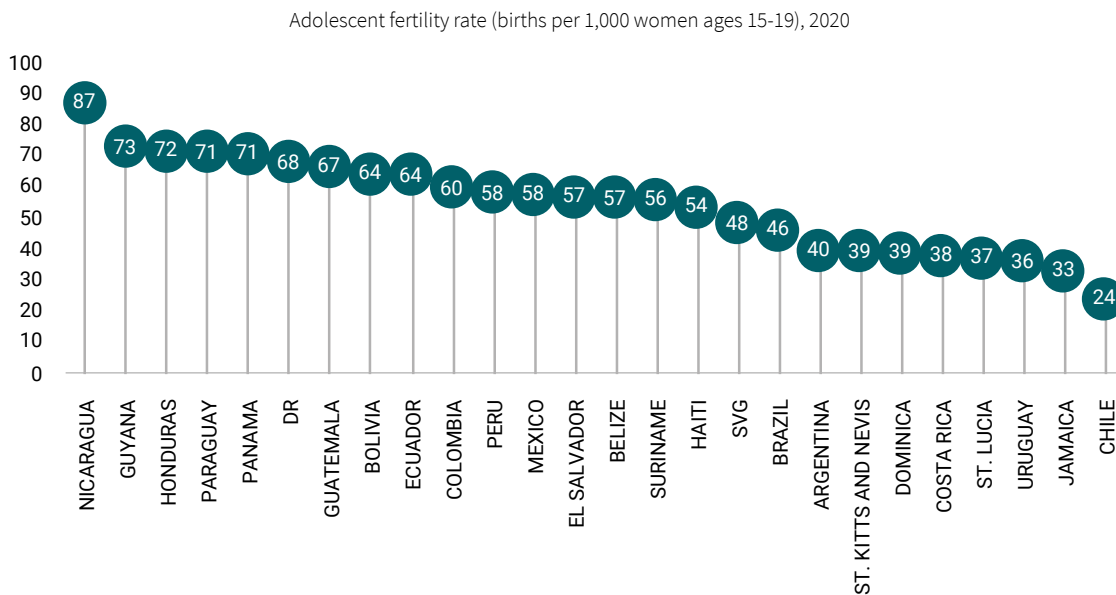
Teenage pregnancy is associated with a risk of health complications and maternal death. Early pregnancy and motherhood are also correlated with lower educational achievement and fewer job opportunities. As a result, adolescent mothers are exposed to situations of greater vulnerability and the repetition of patterns of poverty and social exclusion (Azevedo et al. 2012; UNFPA, UNICEF, and PAHO, 2016). Moreover, the children of adolescent mothers are themselves at high risk of long-term poor economic and social outcomes. Thus, the potential costs for the mother, the child and the other potential actors involved (e.g., partner who fathered, parents and/or siblings of the mother) call for an enhanced policy design with a multi-sectoral approach that takes into account the complexity of the phenomenon.

Figure 1. The Pace of Reduction in Teenage Pregnancy is Slow in LAC.



Source: World Bank Indicators

Figure 2. Most Countries in the Region Have High Rates of Teenage Pregnancy



Source: World Bank Indicators
Data available as of June 2023

EVIDENCE OF WHAT WORKS

According to Azevedo et al (2012), interventions to reduce teenage pregnancy can be classified into four categories: (i) programs that improve the information and access to/use of contraceptive methods (school-based, sexual and reproductive health policies); (ii) programs that improve adolescents' soft skills and increase girls' agency and future aspirations (soft skills training programs); (iii) programs that enhance school attendance or increase the time spent in school and potentially amplify aspirations (CCT programs); and (iv) behavior change communication campaigns to reduce teenage pregnancy (peer education).

The following interventions have been empirically tested in LAC:

- **Peer-led reproductive health education programs can improve sexual health knowledge.** The World Bank's [Latin America and the Caribbean Gender Innovation Lab \(LACGIL\)](#)² co-sponsored a randomized controlled experiment in **Brazil** to test whether peer health education can improve sexual health knowledge, increase contraceptive use, and decrease teenage pregnancy. The intervention was run at the school level (88 randomly selected schools in Salvador, Brazil) for which a team of peers served as educators or "mobilizers." These mobilizers (also pupils) organized dissemination activities focused on pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health and life aspirations. The results from the study (forthcoming) indicate that peer-led sexual health education can significantly increase contraceptive use and reduce teenage pregnancy, while increasing intended post-secondary school enrollment. Notably, the size of the treatment varies depending on the selection strategy of peers (e.g., chosen by the school or network-based).
- **Life skills training programs that promote goal-setting can prevent unwanted teenage pregnancies.** In **Argentina**, in partnership with the Mind Behavior and Development (eMBed) unit, the UFGE funded a socio-emotional skills intervention for teenage girls (13-15 years old) as part of the [Provincial Public Health Insurance Development Project](#) (2011-2019). Activities were designed to assess the effectiveness of socio-emotional development in increasing the aspirations and fostering decision-making skills of female adolescents in vulnerable communities, with the higher objective of promoting goal setting and preventing unwanted teenage pregnancies. An [evaluation of the program](#) estimated an increase of 7
- percentage points in school enrollment in the calendar year following the intervention as well as a 30 percentage point increase in both reported take-up of health services and use of modern contraceptive methods. The study also found positive effects on socio-emotional skills and more equitable beliefs around traditional gender roles. The intervention came at a relatively low cost of US\$8.30 a student per session.
- **Soft and vocational skills programs targeting youth can increase the opportunity cost of being a teen mother and reduce early pregnancy rates.** In the **Dominican Republic**, a [randomized impact evaluation](#) of the youth training program *Juventud y Empleo*, which includes both technical and soft-skills training,³ found that the program reduced the probability of teenage pregnancy by 20 percent. This effect was stronger among participants in the lowest economic quantile. Although it did not explicitly teach sex education, the program affected teenage pregnancy through improvements in soft skills and expectations, among other channels. In this sense, interventions targeted at increasing the opportunity cost of being a teen mother (for instance, through improvements in self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-control or enhancing life plans and perceptions about the future) are expected to reduce pregnancy rates.
- **Communication strategies linked to behavioral change can help prevent adolescent pregnancy.** In the **United States**, a [quantitative study](#) examined the effect of the MTV program "16 and Pregnant," a series of reality TV following the lives of pregnant teenagers during the end of their pregnancy and early days of motherhood. Results show that the TV series led to more searches and tweets regarding birth control and abortion, and ultimately led to a 5.7 percent reduction in teen births in the 18 months following its introduction.
- **CCT programs can reduce teenage pregnancy by increasing school enrollment and thereby changing opportunities and aspirations among young girls.** In **Colombia**, an [impact evaluation](#) of the CCT program *Subsidio Educativo* found that teenage pregnancy was reduced by 3.7 percentage points. The program gave \$25,000 Colombian pesos (equivalent to US\$12.9) to students in 6th to 8th grade and \$35,000 Colombian pesos (around US\$18) to those in 9th to 11th grade. Payments

2 LACGIL conducts impact evaluations which assess the outcome of development interventions in LAC to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets, and agency. LACGIL focuses on five thematic areas: (1) remove barriers to human capital investment and to the productive engagement of NEETs; (2) remove barriers to participation and productivity of women in paid work and entrepreneurship; (3) assess the role of social norms in perpetuating gender gaps in the region and assess interventions that drive changes, specifically for gender-based violence; and (4) better understand the role of agency in the promotion of gender equity. This section summarizes the results of impact evaluations of interventions and studies to improve the quality of female labor force participation in LAC.

3 The program offered a component of 75 hours of soft skills training plus a component of 150 hours of vocational training for a wide variety of jobs (such as providing administrative assistance, working in a bakery, or styling hair). The soft skills training included (i) planning skills; (ii) basic cognitive skills; (iii) social skills; (iv) skills for productive work; and (v) sensitivity to gender equality and respect of the physical environment. Training took place over an 8-month period, from February to October 2008.

are disbursed every two months over the 10 months of the school year. The cash transfer is conditional to a minimum daily attendance requirement.

- **Programs that extend school hours can reduce teen motherhood.** In **Chile**, a [study](#) analyzed the effect of a nation-wide education reform that extended the school day by almost 22 percent. Short-run results show that any effect likely arose from the greater number of hours

per day that students spent under adult supervision, limiting the possibility to engage in risky sexual behavior which can result in pregnancy. The results of the study reveal that female teens living in municipalities with greater access to full-day high schools had a lower probability of becoming mothers. The reform contributed to approximately one third of the reduction in adolescent motherhood in Chile.

HOW ARE WBG PROJECTS ADDRESSING THIS ISSUE?

The WBG is working to reduce teenage pregnancy through research and awareness-raising activities and by supporting innovative interventions across sectors. Building on the evidence put forward in the World Bank regional report "[Teenage Pregnancy and Opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean: on Early Motherhood, Poverty and Economic Achievement](#)," the WBG is supporting its clients in addressing the issue in the LAC region.

- In the **Dominican Republic**, the [Integrated Social Protection Inclusion and Resilience Project \(INSPIRE\)](#) (2023 - to date) includes a component that aims to enhance the employability of young women and men from poor households. The program offers comprehensive technical, vocational, and life skills training courses, apprenticeships, or internships in private firms. By enhancing youth employability, INSPIRE empowers youth to focus on personal and professional development, which is expected to reduce the likelihood of early pregnancies and overall provide them with more stable futures. The project will also provide technical assistance to assess the viability of a reform of the *Aprinde y Avanza* CCT program to provide incentives for girls to complete secondary education and to delay early pregnancies.
 - In **Brazil**, the [Second Bahia Development Policy Loan](#) (2014-2016) supported the preparation of a statewide action plan in Bahia State to prevent teenage pregnancy. Bahia has high levels of teenage pregnancy: almost one-fourth of live births are to women aged 15 to 19. A strong association was found between premature pregnancy and poverty as economic opportunities decline for young mothers and their children. The project funded mass media campaigns on teenage pregnancy prevention and measures to improve pregnancy care in 25 state maternity hospitals.
 - In **Nicaragua**, the [Social Protection Project](#) (2011-2017) implemented a conditional cash transfer program that required mothers receiving funds to attend workshops that educate them on avoiding behavior such as dropping
- out of school, promote positive patterns of parenting and family relationships, such as increased communication within families, and lead women to public services through referrals. The project assessment found that preschool and primary education attendance in targeted areas increased from 63 percent to 94 percent and child labor of children (ages 5-14) of beneficiary families was reduced by 6.6 percent.
- In **Honduras**, [Restoring Essential Services for Health and Advancing Preparedness for Emergencies Project](#) (2022-to date) addresses high teenage fertility rates and early parenthood in the country through a behavior change and capacity-building campaign to train health workers in the provision of adolescent friendly health services in regions prioritized by the Project. This campaign aims to provide adolescents with culturally appropriate, age-sensitive integrated health services, including sexual and reproductive health services. Training specifically addresses the challenges and bottlenecks in delivering sexual and reproductive health services to adolescents, focusing on social, behavioral, and organizational aspects. The project is framed under the National Strategy for the Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy (ENAPREAH).
 - In the **Dominican Republic**, the [Integrated Social Protection and Promotion Project](#) (2015-2022) aimed to increase employability among young women and men from poor households. The Project achieved this through technical, vocational, and life skills training, apprenticeships, and periodic employer training needs diagnostics. The training courses and internships can help to build self-confidence and empowerment, particularly among young women. This empowerment can lead to better control over their bodies and life choices, reducing the likelihood of early pregnancies. By increasing employability and self-employment opportunities for young people, the project can mitigate economic vulnerabilities that often contribute to early pregnancies.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

WORLD BANK RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC

Azevedo, Joao Pedro; Favara, Marta; Haddock, Sarah E.; Lopez-Calva, Luis F.; Muller, Miriam; Perova, Elizaveta. 2012. [Teenage Pregnancy and Opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean: On Teenage Fertility Decisions, Poverty and Economic Achievement](#). World Bank, Washington, DC.

Chong, Alberto; Gonzalez-Navarro, Marco; Karlan, Dean; Valdivia, Martín. 2020. [Do Information Technologies Improve Teenagers' Sexual Education? Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Colombia](#). World Bank Economic Review.

[Fostering Skills for Young Women in Argentina \(English\)](#). eMBED brief Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

Inchauste Comboni, Maria Gabriela; Isik-Dikmelik, Aylin; Rodriguez Chamussy, Lourdes; Cadena, Kiyomi E.; Jaen Torres, Martha Patricia; Avila Parra, Clemente; Steta Gandara, Maria Concepcion; Minoso, Maria Del Carmen; Gutierrez De Diaz, Yolanda; Sarabayrouse, Maria; Londono Aguirre, Diana Isabel; Gonzalez, Desiree Dalila; Islas Orduno, David Omar. 2021. [La Participación Laboral de la Mujer en México \(Spanish\)](#). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.

OTHER RECENT KEY REPORTS

Gliniski, Allie and M. Sexton, S. Petroni. 2014. [Adolescents and Family Planning: What the Evidence Shows](#). Washington DC: International Center for Research of Women (ICRW).

PAHO and UNFPA. 2020. [Adolescent Pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). Technical brief. Washington DC: PAHO.

UNFPA, UNICEF, and PAHO 2016. ["Accelerating Progress toward the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean"](#). New York: UNFPA.

UNFPA. 2015. [Girlhood, Not Motherhood: Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy](#), New York: UNFPA.

GENDER STATISTICS, INDICES AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS

- [UNDP Human Development Gender Inequality Index](#)
- [UNDP Human Development Gender Development Index](#)
- [World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report](#)
- [OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)
- [World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)
- [World Bank World Development Indicators](#)
- [World Bank Women Business and the Law](#)

- [World Bank Global Index](#)
- [World Bank Group Enterprise Survey](#)

REFERENCES

Aguña-Rojas, K., Gallego-Ardila, A.D., Estrada Bonilla, M.V., Rodriguez-Nino, Juan Nicolas. 2020. "Individual and Contextual Factors Associated with Teenage Pregnancy in Colombia: A Multilevel Analysis." *Matern Child Health Journal* 24, 1376–1386.

Azevedo, J., M. Favara, S. Haddock, L.F. Lopez-Calva, M. Muller, and E. Perova. 2012. "Teenage Pregnancy and Opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean: On Teenage Fertility Decisions, Poverty and Economic Achievement." Washington, DC: World Bank.

Baumgartner, E., Breza, E., La Ferrara, E. Orozco, V, and Rosa Días, P. (Forthcoming). *The nerds, the cool and the central: Peer education and teen pregnancy in Brazil*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Berthelon, Matias E. and Diana I. Kruger. 2011. "Risky behavior among youth: Incapacitation effects of school on adolescent motherhood and crime in Chile," *Journal of Public Economics* 95(1): 41-53.

Cabezón C, V.P., Rojas I, Leiva E, Riquelme R, Aranda W, and García C, "Adolescent pregnancy prevention: An abstinence-centered randomized controlled intervention in a Chilean public high school," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2005. 36(1): p. 64-69.

Chong, Alberto, Marco Gonzalez-Navarro, Dean Karlan, and Martín Valdivia, 2020. "Do Information Technologies Improve Teenagers' Sexual Education? Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Colombia." *The World Bank Economic Review*, 34(2), 2020, 371–392.

Cortés, Darwin, Juan Gallego, and Darío Maldonado. 2015 "On the Design of Educational Conditional Cash Transfer Programs and Their Impact on Non-Education Outcomes: The Case of Teenage Pregnancy" *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 16(1).

Cuevas, Facundo, Marta Favara, Megan Rounseville, 2015. "Quito Text Me Maybe: Piloting a new intervention for teenage pregnancy prevention." *Impact Evaluation Report*, Washington DC: World Bank, shared by the author.

Dongarwar, D. and Salihu, H.M. 2019. Influence of sexual and reproductive health literacy on single and recurrent adolescent pregnancy in Latin America. *Journal of pediatric and adolescent gynecology*, 32(5), pp.506-513.

- Glinski, Allie and M. Sexton, S. Petroni. 2014. *Adolescents and Family Planning: What the Evidence Shows*. Washington DC: International Center for Research of Women (ICRW).
- Ikeokwu, A., Lawrence, R., Osieme, D., Funmilayo, J., Sadik, O.Z. and Okikiade, A. 2021. Trends on Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy and Age-specific Fertility Rates in a Caribbean Country: A Call for Regional Intervention. *Asian Journal of Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 4(3), pp.1-10.
- Kearney, Melissa S. and Philip B. Levine, 2015. Media influences on social outcomes: the impact of MTV's 16 and pregnant on teen childbearing. *The American Economic Review* 105, no. 12 (2015): 3597–3632.
- Novella R. and Ripani L. 2016. "Are You (Not) Expecting?: The Unforeseen Benefits of Job Training on Teenage Pregnancy", *IZA Journal of Labor & Development* 5 (19).
- UNFPA, UNICEF, and PAHO 2016. "Accelerating Progress toward the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean." New York.
- UNFPA. 2015. *Girlhood, Not Motherhood: Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy*, New York: UNFPA.
- World Bank 2018. *Implementation Completion Report Nicaragua Social Protection (Project)*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank.
- World Bank. 2020. *Fostering Skills for Young Women in Argentina (English)*. eMBed brief Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.