



Photo: WRI doc

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS FOR THE YOUTH

ledge and adequate information sometimes lead them to seek ways to induce menstruation in unsafe ways. Stories abound of girls consuming herbs, drugs, or traditional potions to get their periods back. Some also use violent physical movement (hard jumping and running) to induce an abortion. Yet others undergo unsafe abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy.

An absence of counselling service for teens and young married women with an unwanted pregnancy coupled to the absence of safe abortion provided by the government has given rise to this practice of unsafe abortion. Unwanted pregnancies are rife with stigma from society and even medical caregivers. It is usually the girl that has to bear the brunt of this stigma. When observed deeper, inducing menstrual periods and unsafe abortions will for sure affect a girl's reproductive health in the future, and at the hands of an untrained person, it can lead to death. As a result, maternal mortality rates in Indonesia is high due to lack of adequate facilities for women to obtain reproductive health services.

Recommendations

It is imperative the government issues policies on providing facilities pertaining to reproductive health services for teens and women. Some recommendations for health services Post-2015 are as follows:

1. Issuing policies on reproductive health service as one of the indicators of the Minimum Standard for Basic Health Services, with Community Health Centres being made to actively provide reproductive health education at schools in accordance with the level of education.
2. Forming peer counselling for teens pertaining to reproductive health.
3. Providing facilities for consultations on unwanted pregnancy and safe induction of menstrual periods.

Fact Sheet

March 2013



WOMEN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Reproductive Information for Teens and Women Also Helps End Early Marriages

Poverty and Early Marriage in Gunungkidul

The poverty rate in the District of Gunungkidul, Central Java, still causes much for apprehension. In Feb. 7, 2005, the State Ministry for Underdeveloped Areas issued Decree No. 001/KEP/M-PDT/II/2005 stating that Gunungkidul was included as one of the 199 under-developed areas of Indonesia. Although there has been a decline in poverty since 2007 (28.90%), up to the end of 2010 the poverty percentage was still 22.05% of the total population.¹ The ultra-poor in the area have no access to basic needs such as education, health and jobs. Particularly young people, one of the vital components in any society, have been much affected by this

overarching poverty. They lack access to education, which directly affects their access to education and information on health; and so this is a pocket of youth that have no idea about the issues pertaining to reproductive health.

Schools in Gunungkidul do not provide comprehensive education on reproductive health. The local Community Health Centre, too, as the main provider of basic health services, only services married couples. Teens are reluctant to come with questions about sexuality or reproductive health issues for fear of getting stamped with the stigma of being wayward girls and boys experimenting in pre-marital sex and getting pregnant outside wedlock.² Teenagers in the area have very low knowledge levels about

¹ Presentation by Regency Deputy of Gunungkidul, Bpk. Immawan Wahyudi, delivered in Seminar and Film Screening at WRI, December 2012.

² Outcome of Pilot Project of Women Research Institute in Gunungkidul, in the Film "Reproductive Health for The Youth."



Photo: Sekar Pireno Ks

risks relating to sexual activity, resultant pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Curiosity about sex has of course driven some of them to the Internet to obtain more information on sexuality and reproductive health matters. This opens the way for all sorts of misinformation and misinterpretation when reading articles, looking at pictures and watching videos with sexual content. And so, it can be concluded that when they do experiment, some of them practice unsafe sex. To make matters worse, a myth is in place that maintains that having pre-marital sexual intercourse will keep their love alive.³ Accordingly, there has been an incremental increase of unwanted pregnancies in Gunungkidul.

The people in Gunungkidul tend to marry off their pregnant girl-children for the sake of preserving the family's good name, disregarding the fact that sometimes, based on the marriage law, their children are under-age (which is 16-years old for girls).⁴ A considerable number of cases have girls from 10-years

An absence of counselling service for teens and young married women with an unwanted pregnancy coupled to the absence of safe abortion provided by the government has given rise to this practice of unsafe abortion.

Table 1.
Data of Marriage Dispensation Requests in Gunungkidul

	2009	2010	2011	2012/June
Number	90	120	145	79

Source: Religious Court of Wonosari, 2012.

to 14-years old being married off as way out for de-meaning poverty.⁵ Evidence of this is in the increasing numbers of requests for dispensation in the Religious Courts by parents wishing to marry off their under-aged children, in spite of Law No. 1/ 1974 governing Marriage.⁶ Data from the Gunungkidul Religious Court shows that dispensations increased from 90 in 2009 to 145 in 2011. Until mid-2012, there have been 79 requests for marriage dispensations. The applicants were brides aged between 14-years to 19-years old.⁷

High Risk Pregnancies Potentially Causes Maternal Mortality

Although early marriages affect both genders, female teenagers have to be seen as the main victims, since they undergo layers of violence conducted by their husbands, families and society in general. These young child-brides very rapidly lose their youth and have to quickly adjust their young selves into becoming wives and mothers, roles that they are not physically and psychologically ready to perform. In addition, marriages among female teens almost for certain bring about pregnancies at a young age, an age when the girl-child's reproductive system is not ready for pregnancy and child-birth. Prof.Dr.dr. Biran Affandi, Sp.OG. from the University of Indonesia said that a woman is ready for pregnancy and childbirth at the age of 23-25 years old. Pregnant girls under 20-years old are not ready physically, mentally and emotion-

⁵ Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, delivered in Seminar and Film Screening at WRI, December 2012.

⁶ Act 6 UU No.1/ 1974 on Marriage: "To establish a marriage, a person who has not reached 21 (twenty one) years old is required to obtain a consent from his/her both parents"

⁷ Religious Court of Wonosari, 2012.

³ Youth Forum Gunung Kidul, dalam Film "Reproductive Rights for The Youth" by Women Research Institute

⁴ Act 7 UU No.1/ 1974 on Marriage: "Marriage is allowed if a man is 19 (nineteen) years old and a woman is 16 (sixteen) years old."



ally.⁸ Immature reproductive systems among young girls who get pregnant and go through childbirth have become one of the causes of high maternal mortality rates. The District Health Office gave information that during 2009-2011, an increase of maternal mortality rates has occurred in Gunungkidul. There were eight cases in 2008, seven cases in 2009, nine cases in 2010, and 14 cases in 2011. The major cause of maternal mortality was usually unchecked haemorrhage. In 2011, there was a case of a 16-year old girl who died because of unchecked haemorrhaging after undergoing an unsafe abortion. She went through unsafe abortion under the pressure from her boyfriend who was still a school-kid and not ready to be responsible for the pregnancy. The Ministry of Health has stated that the causes of maternal mortality has been coined as "The Three Lates" — "Late to decide", "Late to arrive for a referral", and "Late to obtain medical services in a health facility"; and "The Four Too's" — "Too young to give birth", "Too old to give birth", "Too many children", and "Too short birth-spacing".⁹

These conditions are intertwined with poverty, limited education levels, early marriages and deaths

⁸ Delivered on World Contraception Day and 25 years of independent family planning (<http://health.kompas.com/read> (accessed March 5, 2012).

⁹ Public Communication Centre, Secretariat General of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia.

of young mothers in Gunungkidul. Youth living in dire poverty do not have access to education. To overcome this, parents take the initiative to wed them at very young ages. To make matters worse, the lack of education of these very young mothers make them ignorant of the need to have regular check-ups for their pregnancies. This very often leads to undetected factors of maternal mortality. The undetected risks appear during childbirth and labour, and often have which fatal consequences — maternal mortality — often due to too-late handling by a medical expert.¹⁰

Lack of knowledge about reproductive health among girls is directly related to the high rates of unwanted pregnancies in the area.¹¹ This lack of know-

Table 2.
Number of Pregnant Women at Risk in Gunungkidul Regency 2009-2011

	2009	2010	2011
Number of pregnant women	10,233	9,356	9,712
Number of pregnant women with chronic lack of energy	1,156	1,216	1,269
Number of Pregnant Women at High Risk	2,482	2,115	2,129

Source: Health Agency of Gunungkidul 2009-2011.

It is imperative the government issues policies on providing facilities pertaining to reproductive health services for teens and women

¹⁰ Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection.

¹¹ Research result of the Indonesia Family Planning Association, Facts of Women's Needs of Menstruation Recovery Service in 13 Cities during 2008-2011. Presented in the dissemination of research result conducted by the Indonesia Family Planning Association on December 18th, 2012.