

## Why should I care about Sexual and Reproductive Rights?

You care about human rights, and you care about people... but what do sexual and reproductive rights have to do with this??

**Sexual and reproductive rights are human rights**—being able to make our own decisions about our bodies and our lives is a basic human right, but for millions worldwide, it's a right that is violated daily. Here's some reasons you should care about sexual and reproductive rights!

**SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS**

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**



### Because you care about Young People:

1. There are **over 1.8 billion** young people aged 10 to 24 in the world today, the largest generation of young people in history. Almost **90% of young people live in developing countries**, where they tend to make up a large proportion of the population.<sup>i</sup>
2. Complications during pregnancy and childbirth, gender-based violence and AIDS are among the **leading causes of mortality for young people**.<sup>ii</sup>
3. According to a 2001 UNICEF survey, in 10 out of 12 developed countries with available data, **more than two thirds of young people have had sexual intercourse while still in their teens**.<sup>iii</sup>
4. Yet, despite high sexual activity rates, gaps in laws and regulations, poor application in practice, inadequate enforcement as well as social and cultural taboos, gender discrimination and geographic and financial barriers **prevent many adolescents from reaching sexual and reproductive health information and services**.<sup>iv</sup>

### Because you care about people's rights to access information, education, and services:

5. According to UN estimates, the **vast majority of adolescents and young people still do not have access** to the comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and education that they need for a healthy life.<sup>v</sup>
6. **Contraceptive** use is relatively low among married young women aged 15-24. In Asia and Africa, for example, less than 25% of the married girls have used contraception.<sup>vi</sup>
7. An in-depth study of four sub-Saharan African countries found that more **than 60% of adolescents did not know how to prevent pregnancy** and more than 1/3 didn't know of a source for contraceptives. Unmet needs for contraception are due to the limited access to information, quality and affordable adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health services.<sup>vii</sup>

### Because you care about preventing HIV/AIDS

8. Young people aged 15-24 account for **41% of all new HIV infections** among the 15-49 age group. Nearly 3000 young people are becoming infected with HIV every day.<sup>viii</sup> And yet **only 34 % of youth** (24% of young women and 36 % of young men) in developing countries can answer correctly the five basic questions about HIV and how to prevent it, far below the global target of 95% by 2010.<sup>ix</sup>

9. **Young women are at a higher risk of HIV infection** than young men: there are almost twice as many young women living with HIV globally. In sub-Saharan Africa, young women make up 71% of young people living with HIV.<sup>x</sup>

### **Because you care about child marriage:**

10. **Child marriage is still widespread**, especially in least developed countries, where 30% of women aged 15-19 are married. If present patterns continue, in the next decade around 124 million girls will be married as children.<sup>xi</sup>
11. Across several regions, **girls** remain significantly more likely than their male peers to be **married as children** and to begin having sex at a young age.<sup>xii</sup>
12. Due to child marriage, unsafe and unprotected sex and inadequate care during pregnancy, **maternal deaths are 28% higher among adolescents** than among those aged 20-24. Most adolescent girls, whether married or unmarried give birth with insufficient information, health care or support.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **Because you care about sexual violence:**

13. Across all economic strata and across the world, adolescent girls and young women live under the threat of sexual violence and abuse, including from a family member or an intimate partner. **Approximately 150 million girls under the age of 18 are estimated to have experienced some form of sexual violence.** Up to 50% of sexual assaults are committed against girls under age 16.<sup>xiv</sup>
14. It is estimated that one in two adolescent girls in the Caribbean are **forced into sexual initiation**. Central American women also suffer high rates of violence. First sexual experience was non-consensual for a low of 2% of girls in Azerbaijan to a high of 64% in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>xv</sup>
15. The overwhelming majority of girls **pregnant as a result of rape or incest** in Nicaragua are young – aged between 10 and 14. The legislation that came into effect in 2008 criminalizes all abortion, including for survivors of rape and incest. Under this law, rape survivors must either carry the pregnancy to term, or seek an unsafe, illegal abortion and risk possible imprisonment if they are discovered. The law is denying these girls their human rights and putting their health and lives at risk from unsafe, clandestine abortion or pregnancy and childbirth at an early age.<sup>xvi</sup>
16. Studies in sub-Saharan Africa found that a partner's violence and the **fear of abuse stopped girls from saying "no" to sex** and jeopardized condom use.<sup>xvii</sup>
17. Between 100 and 140 million women and girls in Africa have been subjected to **Female genital mutilation (FGM)**. Although the proportion of girls undergoing FGM is decreasing in some countries, over 3 million girls worldwide remain at risk of the procedure every year.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **Because you care about preventing unsafe abortions:**

18. Many adolescent pregnancies are unintended and as a result the **rates of unsafe abortion among young women are high**, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where girls aged 15-19 account for one in every four unsafe abortions.<sup>xix</sup>

19. Adolescent girls and young women face **high levels of injury and death as a result of unsafe abortion**. In 2008, there were an estimated 3 million unsafe abortions in developing countries among girls aged 15-19.<sup>xx</sup> More than 90% of maternal deaths occur in the developing world.

## Because you care about all human rights!

20. Everyone has sexual and reproductive rights. Governments have an obligation to ensure that everyone can enjoy these rights freely, without fear, coercion or discrimination!

### You have the right to:

- Make decisions about your own health
- Ask for and receive information about health services
- Decide whether and when to have children
- Choose whether or not to marry
- Access family planning, contraception, legal abortion, and maternal health care, among a range of other health care services
- Live free from rape and other violence

The ICPD Programme of Action outlines following human rights principles (based on international human rights documents and other consensus documents):

- Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person. (Principle 1)
- Advancing **gender equality** and equity and the empowerment of women and **eliminating all forms of violence against women** are cornerstones of population and development-related programs. (Principle 4)
- Everyone has the right to enjoy the **highest attainable standard of physical and mental health**. All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so. (Principle 8)
- Everyone has the right to **education**. Education should be designed to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. (Principle 10)
- Every child has the right to an **adequate standard of living**, health and education and to be free from neglect, exploitation and abuse. (Principle 11)

Everyone has the right to have access to quality, comprehensive, integrated sexual and reproductive health services, counseling, comprehensive sexuality education and information. **Laws, policies, and other barriers to the services and information people need for a healthy life have to be removed.**

- **Visit our Website** for more information and to take action: [www.amnestyusa.org/mybodymyrights](http://www.amnestyusa.org/mybodymyrights)

**IT'S YOUR BODY  
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**

## Sources

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