

## **Unplanned Pregnancy And Risk Of Abortion Among Adolescent Women In Uttar Pradesh, India**

Pregnancy and marriage are closely associated in India. Contrasts exist between urban and rural settings. Despite the evidence of rising age at marriage, the majority of women age 20-49 in India are married at a very early age generally as soon as they reached menarche before they reach the legal minimum age at marriage of 18 years. Specifically, 61 percent of all women, 69 percent of rural women and 41 percent of urban women age 20-49 married before age 18. Earlier the primary purpose of marriage was to have children and early childbearing was greatly valued and desired. Early marriage and early childbearing shortened the period of adolescence so that young girls status changed to that of young mothers with little transition.

This traditional pattern of early family formation has been gradually eroded by profound social changes including urbanization. Though the women are married at a very early age but still they continue their education even after marriage particularly in urban areas. So recent advances in education available to girls, incidence of sexual activity within marital union, coupled with a low prevalence of contraceptive use have increased the number of unwanted pregnancies and induced abortions among the young particularly in urban areas.

Abortion procedure can be particularly dangerous for adolescents and young women, who are more likely than older women to resort to unsafe or self-induced abortions for reasons of secrecy and financial difficulty.

India is in the stage of demographic transition with declining fertility and mortality levels. India's current population is little over one billion, which is increasing rapidly by 18 million (aprox) a year. 2001 census showed a figure of 166 million people in the single state of Uttar Pradesh. The current contraceptive prevalence rate of 28 percent among married women in the reproductive age groups is one of the lowest among the major states of India though better than of Bihar and Meghalaya. Also women belonging to Uttar Pradesh have at least one unwanted birth. The study of unwanted fertility becomes more important when it is carried out in a populous state like Uttar Pradesh because there still exist high percent of unwanted births (29 percent) above than India level.

Using National Family Health Survey (NFHS II), 1998-99 data the present study tries to investigate the relationship between unwanted pregnancies and risk of abortions among younger and older women for both rural and urban Uttar Pradesh. It also examines the covariates of unwanted pregnancy keeping wanted pregnancy as a control group.

A question has been asked in NFHS, "At the time you became pregnant, did you want to become pregnant then, did you want to wait until later, or did you want no more children at all? The respondents for this question were women who were pregnant at the time of survey and the same question was asked to all the women about their last pregnancy: so out of 9292 ever married women 3762 women were pregnant, during the three years preceding the survey. The number of currently married women at the time of survey was 748. Out of the currently pregnant

women 368 were pregnant at the time of survey and also had last birth during three years preceding the survey.

In the following analysis, pregnancy is the unit of analysis, and the dependent variable of interest is whether a pregnancy ended in abortion. Bivariate analysis shows that 88 percent (3306) of women were older and 12 percent (456) were adolescent i.e. in the age group 15-19. Among adolescents 25 percent of pregnancies were unwanted and among them 60 percent had terminated their pregnancy. Among the women whose pregnancy was wanted 20 percent of them have terminated their pregnancy.

No major difference is found in the socio-economic demographic characteristics of women respondents who had abortions and who did not, except for contraceptive behaviour and son preference. Compared with rural women, urban women who had an abortion are more likely to be employed. Finally, women who have undergone an abortion have more pregnancies or completed their family size but do not differ substantially with regard to parity (the majority of female respondents had at least one child at the time of survey). The large majority of abortions described by women were unsafe i.e. women rely, however on unskilled practitioners to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. This finding demonstrates that although abortion is legal in India, pregnancy termination is unsafe. Further health complications were reported for about one-fourth of all abortions.

Several important results emerge from the present study. First, the research reveals a high prevalence of clandestine abortions among adolescent women in Uttar Pradesh. In a context where the practice of modern contraception remains low and son preference remains high, induced abortion seems, therefore, to play a major role in the postponement and regulation of childbearing among adolescents. The study further demonstrates that although abortion is legal, a significant proportion of abortions are still obtained from unskilled practitioners.

Consistent with the results for abortion motivations, the findings of the multivariate logistic analysis of abortion risk show a significant effect of low use of contraception, high sex preference on the odds that a pregnancy will be terminated. Further analysis is under process.

Unwanted pregnancies and clandestine abortions are common among women in Uttar Pradesh, a reality that must be undertaken into account when fertility and family planning research is conducted and reproductive health policies and programs are formulated.