



**Pan American
Health
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**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE **Americas**

Media Release

“No More Child Pregnancies!”

Bridgetown, Barbados, 20 October 2021 (PAHO/WHO) - The World Health Organisation estimates at least 777,000 girls under the age of 15 years give birth each year in developing regions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a modest approximation of 120 young girls give birth daily – this estimation is exclusive of pregnancies that end in abortion and miscarriage.

This is the focus of new research presented by Regional Adolescent Health Advisor, PAHO, Dr. Sonja Caffè, during the commemorative launch of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week on 18 October 2021, which is being observed for the second year in the Caribbean. Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week in the Caribbean calls for special attention to policy and legislation to end adolescent pregnancy especially among girls under 15 years old.

Dr. Caffè explained the concerning effects of early pregnancy on adolescent girls and their offspring which negatively affects them mentally, physically and psychologically, thereby making it an important global health concern.

The ongoing research, which utilises data from most Caribbean countries, aims to bridge the gap in existing studies that provide data for early pregnancies in girls aged 15 – 19, by contributing insights for girls under 15 years old. The research has to date revealed a reduction in early pregnancies from the 15 – 19 age group in Latin America and the Caribbean and an overall slower decreasing trend in pregnancies among girls under age 15 on the regional level, but alarming and unfortunate increases in pregnancies among girls under age 15 in some countries.

Presenters at the event echoed the urgent call for policies and programs that support and provide critical education to vulnerable girls in the Caribbean

region, particularly in the face of COVID-19 pandemic, that has increased cases of domestic violence and incest among young girls.

“Despite the aspirational and progressive 2014 Integrated Strategic Framework for the reduction of adolescent pregnancy in the Caribbean agreed on by CARICOM member states, adolescents in the Caribbean still face legal, societal, policy and health-system related barriers that limit their access to quality, integrated sexual and reproductive health services and information,” UNFPA Regional Director-Caribbean, Alison Drayton said during her opening remarks.

Department Director Family, Promotion and Life Course, PAHO, Mr. Andreas de Francisco reiterated, “We must start with the routine recommendation and monitoring of fertility of girls younger than 15 years old, but we must go beyond documenting them – addressing pregnancies in young girls requires that we stop covering up taboo issues such as incest, sexual violence perpetrated by fathers, uncles, stepfathers and neighbours.”

Mr. De Francisco went on to advocate for stronger legislation, policies and the establishment of mechanisms where girls who are subjected to sexual violence, can report the problems and find help.

The existing research aims to take a positive step in the direction of advocacy and evidence-informed policy planning as it analyses available data (from population – based surveys and vital statistics) and existing policies, strategies and plans to inform the robust development of new interventions to reduce occurrences of under 15 pregnancies in the region.

Director of Human Development at the CARICOM Secretariat, Helen Royer, provided insight into CARICOM projects that focus on the protection of youth across the Caribbean. These include initiatives under the ‘Roadmap for Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Adolescents and Youth in the Caribbean’, the reconstruction of the CARICOM Youth Development and Action Plan, as well as a youth development survey to ascertain challenges encountered and opportunities available for progress among Member States.

In his keynote address, Minister of Health and Wellness, Belize, the Honourable Michel Chebat, called for policy makers to institute policies that will help to educate and protect adolescent girls from sexual violence, incest and partner violence. He also provided an outline of initiatives in his country that have been successful in reducing child pregnancies and supporting young mothers and their children. He highlighted the inclusion of early pregnancy as

a priority in their strategic planning and assigning each young person a social security number, through which they can access healthcare screenings, literacy support, sexual reproductive health information and employment assistance.

Creative poems and spoken word were delivered by three young artistes - Brandon Singh Dillon Mathison and Ashley Anthony, and advocated for the protection of youth and prevention of early pregnancies.

The launch event, chaired by a member of PAHO's 'Youth for Health', Terez Lord, served as a roadmap to further re-ignite related activities and amplify youth voices, to bring to the forefront discussions about the provision of sexual reproductive health, protection and support for youth via policies and evidence informed programs.

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week is filled with insightful activities which are youth driven to encourage ideas from all the sectors of the region such as policy makers, youth directors, Ministries of Education and Health, as well as adults, on preventing early pregnancies. Links to this week's events are available via PAHO's social media platforms.

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The [Pan American Health Organization \(PAHO\)](#) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.

[The PAHO Sub-regional Program](#) is responsible for providing sub-regional technical cooperation and to strengthen PAHO's engagement with the Caribbean Sub-regional integration mechanisms, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its various bodies and organs; and to build synergistic partnerships with the sub-regional institutions such as the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), among others. PAHO's sub-regional technical cooperation specifically focuses on public health issues which would benefit from economies of scale and for which agreement on proposed collective responses and actions would produce a far greater impact rather than individual country responses. The Sub-regional Program also plays a role in coordinating among the different PAHO country offices.