Very Young Adolescent (VYA) Sexual and Reproductive Health Resource Library

**Toolkit Purpose.** This toolkit is for program managers, educators, health workers, advocates, researchers and policy makers committed to making a difference in the lives of very young adolescents (girls and boys between the ages of 10-14). The toolkit offers resources which address the unique developmental, cognitive, and social opportunities and challenges facing this age group. It provides links to examples of successful programs, research results, curricula, advocacy materials and other resources useful for working with VYAs.

**What is the challenge?** There are about 1.2 billion adolescents in the world today, and 50% of them (around 600 million) are between 10-14 years old. So far, this age group—sometimes referred to as very young adolescents (VYA)?has been overlooked in most sexual and reproductive health programs and policies, which are often directed at older adolescents. Also, little comprehensive data exists for VYAs. Yet, this group faces unique challenges: they are beginning puberty, seeking information, developing attitudes, and experimenting with behaviors that will affect their current and future well-being. This life stage lays the foundation for young people to establish healthy behaviors and relationships, and avoid coerced or unwanted sex, which can lead to early pregnancy, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and intimate partner violence.

**This is when interventions are most needed.** Early adolescence marks the beginning of a transition from child to adult, setting the stage for future sexual and reproductive health and solidifying gender norms and attitudes. Interventions with VYAs can lay the foundations for lifelong healthy relationships, behaviors and practices. Although VYAs are beginning to form close relationships with their peers, they still need their family and community to establish boundaries, provide a sense of belonging, and support learning and skills development. But while caring adults seek to protect VYAs, many are ill-prepared to provide this support. VYA programs can equip adults with information on the issues girls and boys face during puberty, and provide the communication skills required to guide children safely through these transitional years.

**Solutions involve everyone.** Join with the VYA Alliance to support policies and programs that prioritize VYAs. This is an imperative step in our quest to achieve a healthy future for the world?s next generation.

**VYA ALLIANCE SNAPSHOT**

**OUR PURPOSE**
The VYA Alliance started as a consortium of members: Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung (DSW), Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University (IRH), Plan International USA, and Save the Children—who, since 2010, have been working together to catalyze action to meet the needs of very young adolescents (VYA) globally through their work and in a Community of Practice (CoP).

This K4Health VYA resource library was created by Save the Children and IRH on behalf of the VYA Alliance. As of 2015, the VYA Alliance has shifted over to the Very Young Adolescent Task Team under the 5-year, USAID-funded Passages Project. The Passages project is about transforming social norms for adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health, with VYA as a key population.

**OUR GOALS**

- Raise awareness of the importance of investing in VYAs.
- Develop and test innovative programs.
- Make program practices, tools, and guidelines widely accessible.

**OUR EXPERIENCE**

**DSW (Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung)** is an international development and advocacy organization. Our focus is on achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), which is fundamental to improving health and fighting poverty. DSW’s Youth-to-Youth Initiative and the Youth Adolescents Program guide communities to advocate for VYAs with governments and other stakeholders in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia. DSW, in close partnership with Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals, implemented the Young Adolescents Project (YAP) between 2009 and 2012 in three districts in Uganda. The aim of the project was to remove social and structural barriers faced by VYAs in accessing age appropriate SRHR information and services. Currently YAP program 2013-2015 is running in the Coastal region of Kenya in Kilifi County.

**Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH)** has been committed to generating and applying evidence to programming and advocacy for VYAs since we developed the My Changing Body puberty curriculum in 2005. Research-to-practice initiatives include formative research, program development and impact evaluation, as well as national and regional technical consultations with a focus on fertility awareness, body literacy and gender. Current intervention studies include the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation (GREAT) Project (Uganda), the CycleSmart menstrual management kit (Nepal, Burkina Faso), and GrowUp Smart and Twelve Plus (Rwanda). Research initiatives include a study with the Search Institute to assess whether developmental assets are significantly associated with SRH among VYAs, and ongoing technical input into the JHU/WHO Global Early Adolescent study.

**Plan International USA** is part of a global organization founded in 1937 that works with communities worldwide to end the cycle of poverty for children. Plan International's activities are centered on a Child-Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach, which is rights-based, holistic, gender-sensitive, and inclusive. Plan’s specific impact areas that affect VYAs include SRH/HIV, child protection, child participation, education, and gender and social inclusion. In 2012, the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) became part of Plan International USA. CEDPA's Better Life Options and Opportunities Model using the Choose a Future! Curriculum has proven effective in building the internal and external assets that VYAs need to make a healthy transition to
adulthood in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Save the Children is a global leader in VYA health with programs in 10 countries. SC’s innovative tools and programs build a life-long foundation for gender equality and SRH in early adolescence in order to improve broader maternal and newborn health outcomes. SC’s VYA programs encompass gender and sexuality education, puberty education and menstrual hygiene management, parent engagement, and access to age- and life stage-responsive health services. Current projects include the VYA Gender Norms Package including Choices, Voices, and Promises (now scaling up in seven countries; helps VYAs form positive gender norms at individual, household, and community levels), and the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (GREAT) Project in Uganda. Save’s previous work with this age group includes Protecting Futures (puberty education for girls to improve school attendance) and the Malawi Girls’ Education Project (promoted girls’ education by ensuring protection, psychosocial support and female role models).

General Resources

Welcome!

The general resources section is a compilation of resources relating to adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH); during times of crisis, the impacts of educating adolescents on reproductive health, the steps needed to create programs within communities resistant to teaching reproductive health, and what kind of information should be taught in reproductive health programs for VYA.
Noncommunicable Diseases in Latin America and the Caribbean: Youth Are Key to Prevention

Exploration of Gender Norms and Socialization Among Early Adolescents: The Use of Qualitative Methods for the Global Early Adolescent Study

Comparison of Overweight and Obesity Prevalence in School-Aged Youth from 34 Countries and their Relationships with Physical Activity and Dietary Patterns

It Begins at 10: How Gender Expectations Shape Early Adolescences Around the World

Adolescence: A Foundation for Future Health

Egypt's Adolescent Anemia Prevention Program: A Report on Program Development, Pilot Efforts, and Lessons Learned

Nutrition in Adolescence: Issues and Challenges for the Health Sector

The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Younger Adolescents: Research Issues in Developing Countries

GREAT Radio Discussion Guide

The Girl Effect: What Do Boys Have to Do with It?

Opportunity in Crisis: Preventing HIV from Early Adolescence to Young Adulthood

Prevalence and Severity of Malnutrition and Age at Menarche; Cross-Sectional Studies in Adolescent Schoolgirls in Western Kenya

Whose Turn to do the Dishes? Transforming Gender Attitudes and Behaviours among Very Young Adolescents in Nepal

In October 2010, ICRW, with support from the Nike Foundation and in collaboration with Plan International and Save the Children, addressed the need for increased awareness on comprehensive sexual education. It also pointed to the significant amount of work that is still to be done before these goals are achieved.

Equal Community Foundation (ECF) is based in Pune, India and has been working towards the singular goal of raising every child's potential. ECF focuses on the development of knowledge and skills through partnerships in order to influence widespread adoption of the approach.

The purpose of the manual is to teach girls and boys ages 10 to 14 years about the changes they experience as they reach puberty. The manual also explains the importance of gaining a positive self-image that contributes to their future sexual and reproductive health. The 2nd edition includes information on comprehensive sexual education.

Decision-making/Action: A sense that her decisions matter in her own life, that she can create opportunities for herself.

Anaemia due to iron deficiency is still a widespread problem. Among adolescent girls, it will bring negative consequences such as anaemia, weakened immune system, and decreased growth and development. A deficiency. The current iron-folate supplementation program for pregnant women should be expanded to adolescent girls.

Program Implementation

To review current evidence on the links between early marriage and health-related outcomes for young women and their children.

To review the evidence on the impact of access to education on health outcomes for young women and their children.

The Population Council’s Dating Matters parent programs provide parents and caregivers of 11- to 14-year-olds with positive parenting and communication skills while also helping them engage in a dialogue with their kids about healthy, safe relationships.

Strategies for programs, and research are offered based on the findings.

Ce manuel guide les chargés de programmes et les jeunes organisateurs à travers les « éléments essentiels » de la planification, la gestion et la formulation d’un plan de travail. Les fiches pédagogiques disponibles permettent de planifier son parcours en utilisant l’outil et le matériel qui conviennent le mieux à son travail.

In Nepal, Save the Children and Georgetown University’s Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) are piloting and implementing a program focused on reducing early marriage. These programs were developed by Save the Children in Nepal, where there are high rates of early marriage and gender-based violence.

Background:

Rheumatic heart disease (RHD) results in morbidity and mortality that is disproportionate among individuals in middle and low-income countries, particularly in Africa and Asia. The symptoms of RHD may include valvular dysfunction, heart failure, and arrhythmias.

Investments that promote keeping girls in school, particularly in secondary school, have far-reaching and long-term benefits for girls, their families, and their communities. Benefits of girls’ education extend beyond individual achievement to influence household economics.

Diet regulates blood pressure by influencing the autonomic activity as early as pre adolescent age group. Increased stress and diet also contribute to the development of cardiovascular disorders. Stressed individuals are more likely to develop diet-related diseases, including hypertension.

vulnerabilities

The full report and evaluation of Save the Children’s CHOICES program in Egypt.

Resources: