

Introduction

Adolescence is broadly understood as a period of physical, psychological and social maturity from childhood to adulthood. The World Health Organization defines adolescence both in terms of age between 10 to 19 years and in terms of phase of life marked by special attributes. These attributes include rapid physical growth and development, physical, social and psychological maturity but not all at the same time, sex and maturity and the onset of sexual activity, experimentation, development of adult mental processes and adult identity and transition from total socio-economic dependence to relative independence (*Mishra and Levitt-Dayal, 2003*).

Adolescents constitute a large and important segment of the population worldwide, as one in every five people in the world is an adolescent. Globally there are about 1.2 billion adolescents; 86% of them live in developing countries (*Abo-Elyazed et al., 2006*). In Egypt, adolescents constitute nearly one-quarter of the population (*Galal et al., 2001*).

Young women of all socio-economic statuses are often restricted to a life centered around the home, and at puberty girls are increasingly protected from the outside world with restrictions on their mobility and independent actions while for young men the world often expands after puberty as they gain autonomy, mobility, opportunity and responsibilities outside the home (*Hennink et al, 2004*).

Young people face a variety of reproductive health risks, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV infection, too-early pregnancy and childbearing with an increased risk of injury, illness and

death for mother and infant, and unintended pregnancy, often leading to unsafe abortion and its complications. Young people may know little about reproductive health and may have incorrect or misleading information about fertility and contraception. Many have negative attitudes about reproductive health. Thus, meeting the reproductive health needs of adolescents requires not only providing services, but also changing attitudes, overcoming community opposition, building understanding and educating adults about young people's reproductive health needs (*Jaffer et al., 2006*).

Reproductive behaviors during adolescence and young adulthood, whether within or outside marriage, have immediate and long-term consequences, many of which can be emotionally or physically harmful. Yet, in many countries, taboos about sexuality, and social norms such as child marriage and early sexual initiation, pose strong barriers to providing young people with the information and services they need (*WHO, 2004*).

The sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents differ from those of adults, and remain poorly understood and inadequately served in many parts of the world. Addressing the needs of young people, and promoting healthy sexual and reproductive development, maturation and behavior, undoubtedly represent a considerable challenge for many countries (*WHO, 2000*).

The majority of adolescents in Africa experience pregnancy, childbirth and enter motherhood without adequate information about maternal health issues. Information about these issues could help them reduce their pregnancy related health risks. (*Mushi et al., 2007*)

The nurse plays an essential role in promoting and improving reproductive health and women's rights not only as a health care provider but also as an administrator, as a manager, as an educator, as a researcher and as a counselor. (*Mohasseb, 2000*). The promotion of adolescent sexual and reproductive health involves equipping young people with the relevant, knowledge motivation, and behavioral skills to enhance sexual and reproductive health and avoid sexual and reproductive health related problems. (*McKay, 2004*)

The concept of adolescence as a distinct period in young peoples' lives is still relatively new in many developing country societies, particularly in research and policy terms. Girls in these societies have no period of adolescence as they are married soon after menarche, while for boys the period is traditionally longer as they need time to acquire assets before marriage. (*Khan, 2000*)

More multidisciplinary research is needed that examines young people's sexual and reproductive health problems as they relate to social, cultural, and economic conditions. Addressing young people's sexual and reproductive health needs is one of several crucial ways to enable young people to reach their full potential. Protecting young people's health supports their development in positive ways as they form their adult identities and start their families. (*DeJong et al, 2007*)
