



growing up GLOBAL

YOUTH AND EDUCATION: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

Education helps young people prepare for adulthood. Learning occurs more intensely during childhood and adolescence than during any other phases of the life cycle. Education involves the development of physical or cognitive skills, the acquisition of knowledge, and the shaping of values, attitudes, and beliefs.

Young People Are Spending More Time in School

Young people in developing countries are spending more of their adolescence in school than ever before. Survey data representing 60 percent of the population of the developing world show that the mean number of grades of school completed has risen over the past two decades, from 6.0 to 7.4 for young men ages 20 to 24, and from 3.8 to 6.0 for young women ages 20 to 24. Furthermore, for youth ages 10 to 14, the percentage

who has never attended school has fallen from 21 percent to 11 percent for boys and from 39 percent to 18 percent for girls.

Variations in Attendance Rates Still Exist

Throughout the developing world, roughly three-quarters of 10- to 14-year-olds attend school. While primary-level education is high nearly everywhere, secondary and higher education are far less common. In the later teenage years, attendance rates fall off substantially, gaps between boys' and girls' enrollments widen, and regional differences become more pronounced.

Secondary Schooling Can Enhance the Reproductive Health of Young Men and Women

Schooling has important and mostly positive associations with young people's health. Both male and female students who remain enrolled during their teens are substantially less likely to have had sex than their unmarried nonenrolled peers. Along similar lines, levels of contraceptive use tend to be higher among youth who have been in school. In sub-Saharan Africa, contraceptive use among sexually active 20- to 24-year-olds with secondary school or higher education is four to five times the rate of people the same age with no education.

Reaching Adolescents Through School-Based Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs

Some of the most important reproductive health interventions for young people lie outside the health sector. Resources spent on expanding opportunities for secondary schooling could have a direct impact on the reproductive health of both young men and women. As school

Percentage Currently Attending School, by Region

Region	Weighted ^a Averages					
	Ages 10-14		Ages 15-19		Ages 20-24	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Africa						
Eastern/Southern Africa	74.1	70.6	52.2	39.4	16.4	9.1
Western/Middle Africa	66.1	57.6	48.1	34.3	24.2	12.2
Asia ^b						
South-Central/ Southeast Asia ^c	81.0	76.0	47.1	37.3	16.9	9.8
Former Soviet Asia ^d	98.4	98.9	56.1	54.4	13.2	11.7
Latin America/Caribbean						
Caribbean/Central America	80.0	77.8	50.9	44.2	21.3	16.5
South America	92.9	93.1	60.5	61.7	22.0	23.8
Middle East						
Western Asia/ Northern Africa	81.0	67.6	47.7	37.4	17.5	10.3
Total — All regions	79.8	74.6	50.4	41.2	18.7	12.2

^a Weighting is based on United Nations population estimates for year 2000 (*World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision*).

^b Eastern Asia not included; no DHS available.

^c India's DHS does not include current enrollment data for 18-24-year-olds and has been removed from this table.

^d Former Soviet Asia includes former Soviet Republics in South-Central and Western Asia.

Key findings taken from: National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2005). *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*. Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries. Cynthia B. Lloyd, ed. Committee on Population and Board on Children, Youth, and Families. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Copyright 2005 by the National Academy of Sciences. All rights reserved.

enrollment rates rise, sexual and reproductive health education programs in the schools have the potential to reach a large number of young people in many countries.

School-based programs generally share information on one or more of the following: sexuality, HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention, family planning, condoms, sexually transmitted diseases, and decisionmaking and refusal skills. Such programs have shaped attitudes and informed adolescents' health decisions. Although behavioral impact has been modest, outcomes among programs that have succeeded in changing behavior include increased condom use among sexually active youth; delay in sexual initiation; and decreased number of partners and episodes of unprotected sex.

Policy Recommendations

A panel of international experts convened by the National Research Council has made the following recommendations to improve access to schools, learning opportunities, and health programs for youth:

- Invest in school quality to ensure primary level learning is adequate, and create a stronger base for further expansion in enrollment at the secondary level.
- Address the needs of the poor. School fees are a barrier to sustained school attendance, and many families cannot afford to send their children to school even where schools are free. Increase enrollment and reduce dropout rates by giving grants to low-income families that require their children to attend school.
- Achieve universal on-time enrollment. Delayed age of entry is a significant factor in low-grade attainment and dropout prior to primary school completion.
- Ensure gender equality in the classroom.
- Reach the rising proportions of young people attending school with school-based sex education classes and health interventions.

Call to Action*

In order to achieve a world where young people can live healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives, governments, civil society, and young people themselves must promote policies and programs that support universal access to quality primary education, greater access to secondary education, and access to school-based sex education programs.

Governments Should:

- Include young people on local, state, national, and international decisionmaking bodies that directly affect policies and programs on education.

- Pass legislation and commit funds to support access to quality primary education through elimination of school fees and by providing financial support for low-income families.

- Support increased access to secondary education and comprehensive school-based sex education programs for youth.

Civil Society Should:

- Demand laws and funding to ensure access to quality, universal primary education; increased access to secondary education; and access to comprehensive school-based sex education programs.
- Sponsor young people as members of decisionmaking bodies affecting young people's access to education and school-based sex education.
- Involve young people in developing and implementing programs designed to improve access to education and school-based sex education.

Young People Should:

- Speak out for their right to quality primary education, secondary education, and comprehensive school-based sex education programs.
- Lobby governments to pass legislation and allocate funds that ensure universal access to quality primary education; secondary education; and comprehensive school-based sex education programs.
- Monitor and voice any problems with implementation of national policies supporting access to education as well as relevant commitments made in international agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals.

*Developed by Advocates for Youth, the Call to Action is based on the data and policy recommendations included in *Growing Up Global*.

Additional Resources

UNESCO's *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006*:

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.phpURL_ID=43283&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

The World Bank: *Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015-A Chance for Every Child* (Volume 1):

www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSCContentServer/IW3P/IB/2003/09/06/000094946_03082204005065/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf

Millennium Development Goals:

www.un.org/millenniumgoals