

**An exploratory qualitative study on
marriage and pregnancy of adolescent females in the
Hikkaduwa Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area**

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Abstract

Introduction: Marriage in adolescence before 18 years is prohibited in Sri Lanka. However, marriages of adolescent females are not rare in some areas in Sri Lanka.

Objective: To describe the factors associated with marriage of and pregnancy among adolescent females (14-17 years) in a village in the Hikkaduwa Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area.

Methods: This exploratory qualitative study was conducted in Angankanda in the Kalupe PHM division in the Hikkaduwa MOH area in November 2007. Data were collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews and analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Results: Fourteen females who had been married during adolescence (14-17 years) and five key informants participated in the study. Marriages of adolescent females have taken place following emotional relationships. Married adolescents have a low level of education and reduced awareness about health issues. Death or separation of a parent, poverty and lack of security within the family unit are important predisposing factors to adolescent marriages. Elopement is common following which parents or relatives from both parties collaborate to register the marriage to avoid litigation on the male partner. Most male partners are above 18 years of age at the time of the marriage. The age of the adolescent provided at registration of the marriage was false. Public health field staff of the area were aware of the problem and have taken preliminary steps to focus on this group. The services provided by the Public Health Midwife for married females are sought and acknowledged but not strictly adhered to, due to negative pressures or lack of motivation from the family. Delaying of the first pregnancy is not a common practice. Exposure to other modes providing awareness on health issues is limited.

Conclusion: Despite legislature, marriages of adolescent females are a common occurrence in this community. Targetted interventions to prevent these marriages and to upgrade the overall health of adolescent females are necessary in areas where this problem is prevalent.