

Information for the 87th Pre-Sessional Working Group of the Committee on the Rights of the Child:  
List of Issues Prior to Reporting - New Zealand – March 2020

## **Thematic report: young people and sexual and reproductive health and rights**

Realising sexual and reproductive health and rights is central to fulfilling the full range of human rights. All young people have a right to sexual and reproductive health and well-being including access to free, confidential sexual and reproductive health services and information and relationship and sexuality education. Young people should be empowered to exercise their human rights and evolving capacity and to live free from discrimination, abuse and coercion.

Young people's sexual and reproductive health can impact their health and well-being throughout their lives. Young people have particular reproductive and sexual health needs,<sup>1</sup> including health care services, information and education so they can make sense of their rapidly changing bodies and emotions, explore their identity, and develop the skills and knowledge to be healthy and safe. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has strongly advocated for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.<sup>2,3</sup> Other UN bodies, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR Committee) and the Human Rights Committee have also been clear that sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people are central to human rights.<sup>4</sup>

### **Sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in New Zealand**

There is currently inequitable access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services in New Zealand for young people and inequitable health and social outcomes.

For example:

- While declining, New Zealand still has high rates of teen parenting among similar countries. Based on 2017 data, New Zealand has an adolescent birth rate (15 births per 1,000 women age

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<sup>1</sup> Braeken, D., Rondinelli, I. (2012) Sexual and reproductive health needs of young people: Matching needs with systems. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*. 119, S60–S63.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Reproductive Rights (2014) Reproductive Rights Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. [https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/Wright\\_Glo%20Adv\\_7.15.14.pdf](https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/Wright_Glo%20Adv_7.15.14.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) General comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24)\*

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Committee (2018). General comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life\* Retrieved from: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/1\\_Global/CCPR\\_C\\_GC\\_36\\_8785\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CCPR_C_GC_36_8785_E.pdf)

15-19) which is higher than the OECD average (11.8 births per 1,000 women age 15-19 years).<sup>5</sup> Rates of teen parenting varies significantly by ethnic group. While there is evidence of cultural differences around the acceptability of teen parenting, which likely impact these rates, there is also evidence of lack of access to effective contraception.<sup>6,7</sup> A recent evidence brief on teen parents published by the Ministry of Social Development<sup>8</sup> offers recommendations to address teen parenting using a strengths-based approach. This includes improving access to contraception and destigmatising sex, contraception and parenting among teens.

- Sexually active young people are at high risk of sexually transmitted infection. For example, 2019 data shows young people age 15-17 had the second highest rate of chlamydia in New Zealand and the third highest rate of gonorrhoea.<sup>9</sup> Research shows low rates of consistent condom use among young people.<sup>10</sup>
- There is inconsistent relationship and sexuality education across New Zealand schools. A 2018 Education Review Office (ERO) report on sexuality education in schools found considerable variation in how this area of the curriculum is taught. The review determined that nearly half (47%) of schools are not teaching it to a high standard and that little has changed in the delivery of sexuality education in New Zealand schools since the last review in 2007.<sup>11</sup> The needs of students, particularly Māori and sexually and gender diverse students, were not being met.
- Statistics provide evidence of violation of sexual and reproductive health and rights among young people, particularly among girls and Māori, as well as transgender students. New Zealand research found that 20% of secondary school girls have experienced unwanted sexual contact, with higher rates among Māori girls (24%).

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<sup>5</sup> OECD (2019) OECD Family Database <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm> SF2.3: Age of mothers at childbirth and age-specific fertility.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, T.C., Moselen, E., Dixon, R., The Adolescent Health Research Group, & Lewycka, S. (2015). *Sexual and Reproductive Health & Sexual Violence among New Zealand secondary school students: Findings from the Youth'12 national youth health and wellbeing survey*. Auckland, New Zealand: The University of Auckland.

<sup>7</sup> Lawton et al. (2016) E Hine: access to contraception for indigenous Māori teenage mothers *Journal of Primary Health Care*, 8(1):52–59. Retrieved from: <http://www.publish.csiro.au/hc/pdf/HC15021>

<sup>8</sup> <https://orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Research/Latest-research/Teen-Parents-Evidence-Brief/Teen-Parents-Evidence-Brief.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> ERS (2020) Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) surveillance Dashboard. Retrieved from: <https://www.esr.cri.nz/our-services/consultancy/public-health/sti/>

<sup>10</sup> The Adolescent Health Research Group (2016). *Sexual and Reproductive Health & Sexual Violence among New Zealand secondary school students: Findings from the Youth'12 national youth health and wellbeing survey*. Auckland, New Zealand: The University of Auckland. Retrieved from: <https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets/fmhs/faculty/ahrg/docs/Sexual%20Health%20Report%20Final%209%206%2016.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Education Review Office (ERO) (2018) *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/promoting-wellbeing-through-sexuality-education/>

- Recent data shows high and inequitable rates of period poverty among adolescent girls, with 19% of Māori and Pacific (vs 9% of European) reporting that they have ever missed school because they did not have menstrual items.<sup>12</sup>

There have been some positive developments and signs of progress, including:

- Research has shown that young people in New Zealand, similar to international trends, are delaying sexual activity<sup>13</sup>.
- The Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet recently published the first national Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, which included a focus on supporting young people to make healthy choices around their sexual health and support for some sexual violence prevention initiatives.<sup>14</sup>
- In 2015, the Ministry of Education released the *Sexuality Education Guidelines*<sup>15</sup> to help guide and inform schools so they can effectively deliver relationship and sexuality education.
- PHARMAC, the national drug buying agency, recently decided to fund levonorgestrel intrauterine system (LIUS) for all people who want to use it, which means that there is a new contraceptive option for young people who want to prevent unintended pregnancy.<sup>16</sup>

Despite some progress, there have been very few government initiatives to support young people's sexual and reproductive health in the past decade. The few initiatives that have been introduced have been ad hoc. Policy and funding decisions are uncoordinated across government. There is no overarching national strategy for addressing the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people, nor are these issues meaningfully included in any other national strategies or policy statements.

### **Questions for the Committee to consider asking the Government:**

- How is the government working to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in New Zealand, including access to services, information and education?
- Does the government have a coordinated strategy across relevant Ministries (primarily Health, Education, Social Development) to address inequitable access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services among adolescents?

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<sup>12</sup> Youth19 investigators and the Adolescent Health Research Group (2020) Youth19 Period Poverty Fact Sheet. Retrieved from:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bdbb75ccef37259122e59aa/t/5e4c4b5f1a75040c0b0b8a13/1582058338650/Youth19+Period+Poverty+fact+sheet.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> The Adolescent Health Research Group (2016). *Sexual and Reproductive Health & Sexual Violence among New Zealand secondary school students: Findings from the Youth'12 national youth health and wellbeing survey*. Auckland, New Zealand: The University of Auckland. Retrieved from:

<https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets/fmhs/faculty/ahrg/docs/Sexual%20Health%20Report%20Final%209%206%2016.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

<sup>15</sup> <https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-guidelines/Sexuality-education-a-guide-for-principals-boards-of-trustees-and-teachers>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.pharmac.govt.nz/news/notification-2019-10-14-lius-mirena-jaydess/>