

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| • Title: | The Program for Adolescent Mothers |
| • Institution: | Ministry of Health's Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation |
| • Country: | Jamaica |
| • Level: | National |
| • Contact: | Beryl Weir – womenscentre@cwjamaica.com |

For most Jamaican men and women, sexual intercourse begins during adolescence, and the mean age of first intercourse for women is 15.9 years. Teenage pregnancy poses a serious threat to a young women's education, and according to the Contraceptive Prevalence Survey, one of three pregnant women ages 15-24 became pregnant for the first time while still in school and only 38% of those women returned to school after giving birth. Children of less educated mothers are less likely to be enrolled in school, have lower levels of educational attainment, and poorer health, further contributing to the cycle of poverty.

The Program for Adolescent Mothers was established to address the individual and community problems of adolescent pregnancy in Jamaica among girls ages 12 to 16. The program now operates through seven main centers and 13 outreach stations that serve young mothers who cannot travel from remote areas. Each center serves as many as 120 women at a time. The Program for Adolescent Mothers offers new adolescent mothers academic instruction, personal and group counseling, and health service and family planning through referrals to local hospitals and clinics. Childcare is provided at the clinics. The goals of the program are to continue the education of the teen mothers, to put her back in the regular school system and get her to delay second pregnancy until she finishes her education, whether it is secondary or tertiary education.

Formal evaluations of the program show it has succeeded in reaching its goals. Fifty-five percent of program participants who became pregnant returned to school after giving birth, compared with 15 percent of non-participants. There was also an increase in program participants who reported using some form of modern contraception after the program, and women who participated in the program were more likely to use modern family planning methods more consistently and effectively. Additionally, among the program graduates interviewed, 14.6 percent had been pregnant a subsequent time, compared to 37% of teens in the comparison group.