



But compared to the overall adolescent pregnancy rates in Southeast Asia, the average rate in the Philippines is almost twice as high. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some 4.5 percent of teenage girls in Southeast Asia have already given birth. In the Philippines, seven percent of teenage girls have already given birth at least once. This higher incidence rate may be indicative of a growing adolescent pregnancy problem in the country.

Regardless of the reason, this one percent difference isn't really that much of a hope when one considers the other data. For instance, there remains a clear connection between teenage pregnancy and education. The former is also considered by many experts to be a symptom of poverty. Of the teenage girls pregnant in 2017, 26.2 percent finished primary education, while only four percent had gone to college. Furthermore, there are more cases of teenage girls getting pregnant in rural areas than in urban centers.

These numbers echo the findings of the WHO: "Adolescent pregnancies are a global problem that occurs in high, middle, and low income countries. Around the world, adolescent pregnancies are more likely to occur in marginalized communities, commonly driven by poverty and lack of education and employment opportunities," the report reads.

Interestingly enough, the province of Davao has the highest percentage of teenage births at 15.9 percent, followed by the SOCCSKSARGEN region with 11.8 percent. At any rate, there is one thing that's undeniably obvious here: that there are still young Filipino women who are getting pregnant at such a young age. This translates to women who are forced to either stop their education and raise a child, or in what's arguably a worse case, find illegitimate means to terminate their pregnancies.

For Sen. Risa Hontiveros, teenage pregnancy is an issue that needs to be solved fast. Recognizing the problem early on, the National Youth Commission (NYC) had previously conducted a National Summit on Teen Pregnancy back in 2014. More recently, however, these youth gatherings that tackle the issue of adolescent pregnancy seem to have been limited to the regional level, with respective regional NYC offices working with the DOH. There is still a lot that needs to be done to address the issue.

"Because of this," the senator continued, "I filed a bill in the Senate that aims to solve the problem of teenage pregnancy. Senate Bill no. 1482, more commonly known as "An Act Providing for a National Policy on Preventing Teenage Pregnancies, Institutionalizing Social Protection for Teenage Parents, and Providing Funds

Therefor” seeks to decrease teenage pregnancy incidence. This bill will allow for the development of a comprehensive education for our youth. It should be age and development appropriate, and should be made mandatory in all schools. This education should be medically accurate and should not promote discrimination.”

On the contrary, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) does not take teenage pregnancies lightly. Its approach on the issue has always been more focused on character development.

“Common sense and rational thought demand that we address the issue of teenage pregnancy and HIV-AIDS rise with proper values education,” said Fr. Jerome Secilano, executive secretary of the CBCP’s Permanent Committee on Public Affairs.

If there is one thing that both sides agree on, it’s the value they put on the youth.