

## PopCom wants more legislation vs teenage pregnancy amid rising, alarming data

By: Gabriel Pabico Lalu - Reporter / @GabrielLaluINQUIRER.net / 09:20 PM August 12, 2020

MANILA, Philippines— A government organization is calling for more educational drives and legislation against teenage pregnancies, as data points out that 10 percent of Filipinas aged 15 to 19 years old have already given birth at least once.

According to the message of the Commission on Population and Development (PopCom) and the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD) for the International Youth Day, Congress must find a way to act on the issue quickly and decisively.

Both organizations believe that adolescent pregnancy is the most alarming reproductive health problem as not only does it involve psychological problems, but it also impacts the society, economy, and the country's overall development as it almost assures another cycle of poverty as minors are not yet fit for adulthood.

Such problems— like information that there are cases of 10-year-old girls getting pregnant— is only amplified by the restricted actions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“For us in POPCOM and the National Economic and Development Authority, teenage pregnancy still plagues the nation as a social emergency,” PopCom head and Undersecretary Juan Antonio Perez III said in a statement.

“Being in the midst of a pandemic complicates and worsens the problem, as there are unreported incidents of rape and incest. For instance, POPCOM Region 9 posted about 628 cases of teen pregnancy from April to June this year,” he revealed.

This is not the first time PopCom warned about the possible effects of the pandemic on the reproductive health of Filipinos. Last June, Perez also warned that 214,000 of the two million births in 2020 might be unplanned, and due to increased time between couples as stay-at-home policies were enforced to curb COVID-19 infections.

Then just this July, United Nations experts warned that the number of women being wed before they turn 18— because of teenage pregnancies— might increase as lockdowns brought by the health crisis remain.

PLCPD executive director Romeo Dongeto meanwhile noted that Congress can strengthen Republic Act No. 10354 or the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law by passing complementary bills.

This would include finding ways around the Supreme Court (SC) ban on providing contraceptives to minors— which Dongeto thinks puts children at a higher risk of unprotected sex and sexually transmitted diseases.

Last February 14— Valentine's Day— PopCom and PLCPD reminded minors not to be too hasty and instead think of their future before plunging into their sexual adventures. However, the SC ruling was not lost on their sights as they urged for a reversal of the ban on providing contraceptives to minors.

He also believes that there has to be a change in the way the public perceives teenage pregnancies—that it is supposedly, only a result of teenagers' consensual sexual relations.

“We need to make the public understand that adolescent pregnancy is not only a result of children's consensual sexual activity,” Dongeto stated. “That is why we are pushing for new laws that will address other serious concerns of adolescents, such as violent experiences like rape and incest.” [ac]

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