



**RWANDA HEALTH INITIATIVE
FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN**

TEEN MOTHERS SUPPORT, EMPOWERMENT, AND WELL-BEING INTERVENTION

Objective

To improve the health, well-being, resilience, and socio-economic empowerment of adolescent mothers through comprehensive support services, life skills development, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education and service provision, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection interventions, parenting education, economic empowerment initiatives, and linkage to essential health, social protection, educational, and legal services.

Background

Teenage pregnancy remains a significant public health and social challenge, often resulting in school dropout, economic vulnerability, social stigma, gender-based violence, poor health outcomes, and limited opportunities for adolescent girls and young women. Many adolescent mothers experience social isolation, emotional distress, inadequate parenting knowledge, limited livelihood opportunities, and restricted access to essential health and social services.

Some adolescent mothers and their children are also exposed to neglect, abuse, poor nutrition, inadequate social protection, and barriers to accessing health insurance and other support systems. These challenges increase their vulnerability and can negatively affect both maternal and child health and well-being.

Recognizing these challenges, Rwanda Health Initiative for Youth and Women (RHIYW), in collaboration with its partners, established safe spaces and support groups for adolescent and young mothers at youth centers and within communities. The initiative provides a safe and supportive environment where young mothers can share experiences, support one another, build self-confidence, and strengthen their resilience.

Through these platforms, participants access comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services, including HIV testing services, sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening and treatment referrals, family planning information and counseling, basic antenatal care counseling, menstrual health education, and maternal health information. The program also provides mental health and psychosocial support, basic gender-based violence (GBV) counseling and referrals, child protection support, life skills development, and economic empowerment opportunities.

In addition, participants are linked to health facilities, social protection programs, legal assistance services, educational opportunities, health insurance enrollment mechanisms, and other specialized services based on their individual needs. Through this integrated approach, the program supports adolescent mothers in improving their health, protecting their rights, strengthening their livelihoods, and building pathways toward self-reliance and social inclusion.



STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS (2019–2025)

1. Establishing Safe Spaces and Peer Support Groups

RHIYW established dedicated safe spaces for adolescent and young mothers where participants meet regularly to share experiences, discuss challenges, and provide mutual support.

The support groups provide opportunities for:

- Peer-to-peer learning and mentorship
- Emotional and psychosocial support
- Building self-esteem and confidence
- Reducing stigma and social isolation
- Strengthening social networks and community support systems

These safe spaces promote a supportive and non-judgmental environment where teen mothers can openly discuss issues affecting their lives and well-being.

2. Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Education and Services

Teen mothers received age-appropriate and comprehensive SRHR education and services, including:

- Family planning information and counseling
- Prevention of repeat unintended pregnancies and awareness of sexual and gender-based violence
- Basic antenatal care counseling and referral for newly pregnant adolescents who choose to continue their pregnancies
- HIV and STI screening, treatment, prevention information, and referral
- Menstrual health and hygiene education
- Sexual and reproductive rights awareness
- Referral and linkage to antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care services
- Access to youth-friendly SRHR services through referral and linkage systems

This intervention strengthened informed decision-making and improved access to essential reproductive health services.

3. Life Skills Development and Resilience Building

Life skills training was provided to support personal growth, self-reliance, and social integration. Training topics included decision-making and problem-solving, goal setting and future planning, financial literacy, self-confidence and leadership, and resilience and stress management. Participants gained practical skills that support long-term well-being and personal development.

4. Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response

The program integrated Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention and basic response services to address violence, discrimination, and protection concerns affecting adolescent mothers.



Activities included:

- Awareness sessions on gender equality, human rights, and GBV prevention
- Basic GBV counseling and psychosocial support
- Identification and basic support to survivors of violence, including linkage to Isange One Stop Centres
- Referral to specialized health, legal, and protection services

These interventions increased awareness of available support systems and strengthened protection mechanisms for vulnerable young mothers.

5. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The program integrated mental health and psychosocial support services with alcohol and substance use prevention interventions to promote the overall well-being of adolescent and young mothers.

Activities included:

- Mental health awareness and psychosocial support sessions
- Individual and group counseling to address stress, anxiety, emotional distress, and social isolation
- Prevention strategies and risk reduction approaches for substance and alcohol use
- Healthy coping mechanisms for managing stress and life challenges
- Building self-esteem, resilience, and emotional well-being
- Strengthening positive social relationships and support networks
- Identification and referral of participants requiring specialized mental health services

These interventions improved emotional well-being, strengthened resilience, promoted healthier lifestyles, reduced risk behaviors, and enhanced participants' ability to cope with personal and social challenges.

6. Economic Empowerment and Income-Generating Activities

To address economic vulnerability and strengthen self-reliance, the program supported adolescent mothers through skills development and income-generating opportunities.

Support included:

- Entrepreneurship orientation and business skills development
- Financial literacy training
- Savings and group income-generation initiatives
- Linkages to vocational training and livelihood opportunities

These interventions contributed to improved economic resilience, financial independence, and self-sufficiency among participants.

7. Peer Education and Mentorship

Teen mothers were linked with trained peer educators who provided ongoing mentorship, information, support, and referrals.



Peer educators contributed to:

- Community outreach and engagement
- Health information dissemination
- Follow-up support and mentorship
- Service linkage and referral
- Promotion of positive behavior change

This peer-led approach strengthened trust, participation, and continuity of support services.

8. Referral and Linkage to Essential Services

A structured referral and linkage system was established to connect adolescent mothers with specialized services beyond the scope of the program. Participants were referred for sexual and reproductive health services, maternal and child health care, mental health and psychosocial support, gender-based violence response services, legal and child protection services, social protection programs, as well as education, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities. This referral network ensured that participants received timely and appropriate support tailored to their individual needs, contributing to improved health, protection, well-being, and socio-economic outcomes.

9. Recreation and Social Well-Being Activities

To promote emotional well-being, social inclusion, and peer connectedness, support group sessions incorporated recreational and entertainment activities such as games and interactive learning sessions, sports and physical activities, music, and dance. These activities fostered positive social interactions, strengthened peer support networks, and enhanced participants' sense of belonging, confidence, and overall well-being.

UPDATED RESULTS ACHIEVED (2019–2025)

- Over **950 adolescent mothers** participated in structured support group sessions, receiving comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education and services, including HIV testing, STI screening and treatment, antenatal care support, and psychosocial counseling.
- Approximately **200 adolescent mothers** benefited from income-generating skills training, including tailoring and related vocational activities, supported with start-up tools such as sewing machines.
- More than **250 adolescent mothers were supported with community-based health insurance enrollment**, improving their access to essential health services for themselves and their children.
- In addition, **34 adolescent mothers completed formal tailoring training**, equipping them with practical vocational skills for employment and self-employment opportunities.
- A significant number of adolescent mothers received **dignity and hygiene support materials**, including sanitary pads and soap, promoting menstrual hygiene management, personal dignity, and improved health practices.
- The program supported household-level **economic strengthening through the donation of small livestock**, including **goats, chickens, and pigs**, enabling adolescent mothers to start or expand income-generating activities and improve household nutrition and financial stability.



KEY OUTCOMES

Improved Psychosocial Well-being

- Reduced isolation and stigma
- Increased confidence and dignity through hygiene support
- Stronger peer support systems

Improved Access to Health Services

- Increased access to health insurance and affordable care
- Improved utilization of maternal and child health services
- Strengthened SRHR knowledge and service uptake

Improved Economic Resilience

- Diversified income sources through livestock and skills training
- Increased household-level economic stability
- Improved financial independence and self-reliance

Improved Dignity and Well-being

- Better menstrual hygiene management
- Improved personal hygiene and self-esteem
- Enhanced quality of life for adolescent mothers and their children

DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

The intervention contributed to improving the health, protection, and socio-economic well-being of adolescent mothers by providing holistic support that addresses their multiple and interconnected needs.

Key impacts include:

- Improved quality of life for adolescent mothers and their children
- Increased access to essential health, social, and protection services
- Strengthened resilience, psychosocial well-being, and social inclusion
- Reduced vulnerability to gender-based violence, poverty, and repeat unintended pregnancies
- Increased opportunities for economic empowerment, skills development, and self-reliance

SUSTAINABILITY AND SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING

The program utilizes public community youth centers, peer educators, and referral networks to provide sustainable support for adolescent mothers. By strengthening local capacity and linking participants to existing health, protection, and social support systems, the intervention creates long-term pathways for improved well-being and empowerment beyond direct project implementation.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Safe spaces and peer support groups are highly effective in reducing isolation and improving psychosocial well-being among adolescent mothers
- Comprehensive support combining health, psychosocial, protection, and economic interventions yields stronger outcomes
- Peer educators play a critical role in building trust, increasing participation, and facilitating service uptake

