

THE IMPLICATIONS OF ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY

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Abstract: *Pregnancy among teenagers is a phenomenon with implications for both the young mother and the newborn, under aspects related to health, education, social position, and/or employment prospects. Romania is ranked second in the European Union regarding the maternity rate among teenage girls, a fact that highlights the need to address preventive and supportive measures for the target group. The purpose of this study was to investigate the degree of information on teenage girls regarding the problems that teenage mothers may face, aiming to evaluate their knowledge on the notions of sexual education and contraception. The investigation tool used was the sociological questionnaire, applied by self-administration on a sample of 50 persons, the subjects being girls aged between 14-19 years, in school students in Reșița Municipality.*

Keywords : pregnancy; adolescence; teenage mothers; family; newborns.

1. Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is a phenomenon with implications for both the young mother and the newborn. Among the aspects influenced by the occurrence of this situation, we may cite health, education, social position, and/or employment prospects in the field of employment (Habito et.al., 2019). This fragile stage in a woman's development represents the period in which the need for sustained and unconditional efforts is felt on the part of parents, as well as the school as an institution as well as governments. It is an issue present in all states, both in the most developed and in those that rank lower on the scale of economic progress; this problem require two necessary directions of action: on the one hand, measures to prevent pregnancies among young underage girls, and on the other hand supporting and streamlining support resources for young mothers and their babies. The increased incidence of this phenomenon at the level of a country or a region signals the need to improve the functioning of the educational system and the health system (Ursache et al., 2023).

A study carried out by Salvați copiii / Save the Children Organization points to the fact that Romania is home to approximately a quarter of young women who became mothers before the age of majority, among the countries of the European Union, i.e. a percentage of 23%, according to EUROSTAT data forwarded and updated in 2018. The National Institute of Statistics (INS) presents, in the most recent data, the fact that out of the 199,720 births in 2019, 749 came from mothers under the age of 15 and 17,933 from mothers between the ages of 15 and 9 (<https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/s-ro/>, 2021).

Romania is ranked second in the European Union (the first place being occupied by the neighboring country Bulgaria) in terms of the maternity rate among teenagers, teenage pregnancy having a multitude of adverse effects on young pregnant women, as well as socio-economic costs, according to a study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with the SAMAS Association of Romania (<https://www.unicef.org/>, 2021). The authors note a cyclicity of the phenomenon, a tendency to propagate within the same families from one generation to another, followed by negative economic, social and health effects. We can, however, remark a positive

perspective related to the dispersion of the percentage of teenage pregnancies: in 2019, 16,639 teenage pregnancies were registered, down by 9% compared to 2018.

2. The context of the teenage years

Adolescence is the stage preceding adulthood. It is considered the most important stage, because there are changes from all points of view: physical, psychological and social. Within it, the child's personality and identity develops, leaving its mark on his entire behavior.

In adolescence, the desire for the opposite sex appears, it is the period when the first love occurs, and teenagers can be inspired by movies, novels or other people's lives to manage events. (Adams, 2009: 35) During adolescence, there is also a development of sexual identity that involves the child's understanding and acceptance of his own body, but also the discovery of specific male and female attributions.

Sex has always been a taboo subject in society and within the family, and for this reason teenagers had relatively limited access to information. They are ashamed and feel guilty when they have certain questions or concerns related to sex, and often wait for the first experience to have the desired answers, and this leaves an emotional imprint on the teenager (Borten, 2001: 52).

All these changes appear suddenly in the child's life and for this reason the role of the family, especially the parents, is very important. They should be aware that teenagers need to express their opinions and thoughts without being ashamed, to feel loved, to feel that others give them attention and trust, to be involved in various activities (Adams, 2009: 37).

There are two defining factors: education and religion rule in some cultures. There are peoples who do not allow the beginning of sexual life before a certain age or before the most important step in a person's life, marriage, and those who do not respect these rules are punished (Borten, 2001: 57).

However, without promoting sexual activity among adolescents, there are information programs on existing contraceptive methods that encourage, in particular, the use of condoms. Contraceptive methods are not always at hand even in the case of adults, which proves that it is even more difficult among teenagers. Maybe they don't resort to contraception for reasons such as money, as teenagers do not having a stable income that would allow them to purchase such contraceptive means; in other situations the shame involved in purchasing a condom causes them to give up this gesture, being an uncomfortable moment even for adults, even more so for teenagers (Enăchescu, 2008: 40).

3. Conceptual clarifications regarding teenage motherhood

From a biological point of view, a pregnancy can occur between the ages of 8 and 63, but the period of adolescence as well as the period over 35 are considered exceptions because medical complications may occur.

Due to the age and the body, which is not sufficiently developed but still developing, the teenagers may face various problems and medical complications. These aspects lead to abnormal development of the baby, premature birth, abortion or the child it may die before being born. There are situations in which the teenagers did not have their first period but had sexual relations, in which case a specialist physician should be contacted. However, there are also teenage girls who, despite the unfavorable aspects mentioned above, complete a pregnancy without any problems and the child is born healthy (Șerban, 2001:79).

However, pregnancy during adolescence can predispose the mother to health problems such as anemia and sexually transmitted diseases, but also to psychological problems: depression or even suicide. Moreover, an additional risk may be represented by the large age difference between the mother and her sexual partner in the sense that it may increase the risk of domestic violence (Reyes et. al. 2022).

A pregnancy may occur at any time without taking into account the life of the mother who is going to carry the baby. For a teenage girl, the mother plays a very important role as a landmark in life and a role model. Some mothers openly approach any topic, but others consider certain things too shameful, too "adult-appropriate", therefore a child should not know them. This reluctance to prepare and educate the young adolescent for the natural course of life arises either from a faulty intention of prevention, with the thought that the lack of information or postponing the answers will have the effect of allaying the temptation, or even from the lack of education perpetuated by previous generations, so that the mother does not have the necessary knowledge to give answers. This may be the mistake that later leads to a pregnancy among teenage girls (Şerban, 2001: 86).

Poor education, poverty, violence, environmental conditions are other factors that can favor teenage pregnancies. At the same time, the children resulting from such pregnancies are also at risk of living in poverty, growing up without a father figure, failing at school and even accepting sexual initiation prematurely. Therefore, these children are more likely to become teenage parents themselves, due to the lack of authority from their mothers (Reyes et. al. 2022). On the other hand, functional families, harmonious relationships between parents, but also those between parents and children find their effectiveness in preventing unwanted pregnancies in adolescence (Diabelková et. al. 2023).

However, the reasons for pregnancy are more numerous and usually the main one is the lack of a contraceptive method because teenagers are sure that they cannot fail and nothing can happen. There are cases when teenage girls are aware of what they are doing and are sure that they want to get pregnant either to harm the family or out of jealousy to keep a partner close to them (Şerban, 2001: 87).

If a teenage girl becomes pregnant without planning it, there are several solutions that she and her partner can turn to, namely: to ask a doctor's opinion for terminating the pregnancy, something that is not recommended for women, and even less so for young women, because it may have serious consequences in the future; to keep the child and be responsible parents or entrust the child for adoption (Ştefan, 2006: 103). Thus, the immaturity of the mother causes the grandparents and other relatives to get involved in raising the children, these changes in the person of attachment increasing the risk of abuse or neglect of the child. All this is later projected into criminal behavior and school failure of the child (Diabelková et. al. 2023).

At such an age, none of these is an easy decision to make, because the young woman is anyway scared about the unscheduled pregnancy and such a decision implies seriousness, maturity, correctness. Even before having sexual contact and at the moment of learning that she is pregnant, the teenager girl asks herself many questions about what she should do, but which lose their effect when the people around her, especially her family, tell their opinion. The opinion of the parents matters so much that the opinion of the young mother, considered too immature to make decisions, is no longer taken into account. The reality shows, however, that adolescents choose to make their own decisions of a diverse nature, but without open coordination and the confidence to be able to turn to a responsible adult when they need guidance, there is a risk that they will make harmful choices (Ştefan, 2006: 104).

At the same time, a teenage pregnancy affects the mother's educational and employment opportunities, hence the financial difficulties. For teenage girls, early pregnancies can also have social consequences in the form of lower status in the community and in the family, stigmatization, abuse from family members, but also from the partner, and even forced early marriage (Diabelková et. al. 2023).

4. Socio-demographic aspects of fertility and motherhood

As for Romania's situation, according to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), in 2021, mothers aged between under 15 and 19 gave birth to approximately 9.1% of the country's live births (<http://insse.ro>, 2022).

Female fertility was comprised in 2021 between 44.5 live births per 1000 women of childbearing age in Suceava county and 27.5 live births per 1000 women of childbearing age in Caraș-Severin county. Low fertility rates (below 30 live births per 1000 women of childbearing age) were also recorded in Brăila, Gorj, Hunedoara, Neamț and Vâlcea counties. In rural areas, the fertility rate is higher than in urban areas (38.7 versus 32.0 live births per 1000 women of childbearing age). The birth rate was, in 2021, 8.2 live births per 1,000 inhabitants, higher in rural areas (8.9 live births per 1,000 inhabitants) than in urban areas (7.6 live births per 1,000 inhabitants)). Among the counties with a high birth rate (over 9 live births per 1,000 inhabitants) we may mention Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Iași, Ilfov and Sălaj. Low birth rates (below 7 live births per 1000 inhabitants) were also recorded in Brăila, Hunedoara, Mehedinți, Neamț, Olt, Teleorman, and Vâlcea counties.

During the last 15 years, there has been a decrease in the percentage of teenage pregnancies registered at the level of several countries, a fact resulting from intervention measures at the level of education, support for young people, contraceptive tools, as well as other strategies. (Hamilton et. al., 2015) This observation constitutes an argument for the deepening of studies on this subject, already located in the center of attention in the specialized literature, considering the progress made.

5. Methodological considerations

Considering the extent of this phenomenon and the implications of a social, economic, physical nature, etc. that teenage mothers and their families have to face in the short and long term, the study proposed brings to attention some clarifications regarding the thinking patterns of teenage girls, related to the risk of pregnancy during adolescence.

The aim of this study was to investigate the degree of information of teenage girls regarding the problems that teenage adolescent mothers may face, aiming to evaluate their knowledge regarding notions of sexual education and contraception. The investigation tool used was the sociological questionnaire, applied by self-administration to a sample of 50 persons, the subjects being girls aged between 14 and 19, high schools students in Reșița Municipality, Caraș-Severin county.

6. Data analysis and interpretation

As regards **the preferred activities**, the respondents cited a proportion of 30% going to school and related activities, 32% prefer going out with friends, 32% opted for "fun", and 6% chose other activities. Adolescence being a period of transit and change, in which young people try to integrate into society and choose their reference figures, the tendency to prefer going out in youth groups and fun activities is predictable.

Adolescents' relationships with their parents are considered to be predominantly healthy and supportive, which reveals the construction of secure attachments. 54% of teenage girls have a very good relationship, 34% have a good relationship with their parents, 11% define the relationship as neither good nor bad, and 1% did not want to answer. Some teenage girls may consider a "very good" relationship to be a permissive one, where the parents give them everything they want, while other teenage girls may consider it a simply normal relationship, where all members live in harmony and understanding.

The question related to the confidence relationship with mothers clearly divided the sample: 40% of the girls always consult their mothers, 33% ask for advice only sometimes, 17% would rather talk to a colleague/friend, and the remaining 10% say they never talk to their

mothers about intimate topics because they feel ashamed. The mother is the main support of a girl, regardless of the situation. The relationship between a mother and her daughter should be sincere, based on trust and safety.

When we attempted to identify the existence of knowledge related to contraception, we found that 47% of teenage girls are well informed, 40% know about it "by hearsay", and 13% know nothing about this subject. Knowing about contraceptive methods "from hearsay" can have various consequences: the teenager girl could take contraceptives at random just because her friends take the type of pills that are not suitable for her, and this could have serious consequences. There are also teenage girls who at this age do not know anything about contraception, perhaps because they have other concerns and are not interested in starting their sexual life yet.

The next question was related to the initiation of sexual life : 30% of the teenage girls stated that they had begun their sexual life, 56% had not begun their sexual life, and 14% did not want to answer clearly.

When asked to name potential dangers that may arise in the context of starting a sexual life in adolescence, 56% answered that one of the dangers would be an unwanted pregnancy, 43% cited sexually transmitted diseases, and 1% considered that a danger would be "tarnishing the reputation" and the fear of abandonment by the partner.

Considering the fact that a considerable percentage of the respondents cited the occurrence of an unwanted pregnancy as a potential danger, we wanted to find out what knowledge they have about pregnancy termination. 49% of the teenage girls answered that abortion has serious consequences, 42% said that abortion is not a good thing, 9% do not know anything about it. Before resorting to this method, the woman must know very well all the aspects related to abortion, because multiple problems and complications can arise that can mark her whole life.

The respondents expressed their opinions regarding girls who get pregnant at a young age , and they are very varied. 21% considered that girls are losing their youth, 21% preferred to show reserve, 18% claimed not to think about the consequences, 13% do not have good opinions about teenage girls becoming mothers in general, 13 % believe that teenage girls should have protected themselves, 9% of the surveyed girls were of the opinion that the lack of information would lead to such an incident, and 5% confessed that they probably do not receive help.

In an attempt to see if teenagers formed their aforementioned opinions based on reality, we asked if they knew any teenage mothers . 77% said "yes", so they know teenage mothers, 20% don't know any teenage mothers, and 3% answered that they don't know.

Finally, we asked the young women to name or describe the main problems they observed teenage mothers face. 29% cited lack of life experience, 19% of young women answered that lack of income is a problem, 17% believe that "everything is difficult for teenage mothers", 16% identified dropping out of school as the most serious consequence, 11 % believe that mothers are helpless, and 8% think about the misunderstandings that will arise in the relationship with the parents.

7. Conclusions

Teenage pregnancy is a phenomenon present in all countries, regardless of the level of development. The incidence of this phenomenon outlines the need to develop strategies for prevention and help, for young mothers and children.

In the context of the quantitative research conducted by self-administering the sociological questionnaire to a group of 50 young girls, students in several high schools in Reşita Municipality, it can be noted that the girls are predominately concerned with activities specific

to their age: curricular activities and time spent with friends, school occupying a place of major importance in their lives, as an educational and socializing environment.

The relationship with the mother, the most important attachment figure for a child, highlights the fact that the possible communication problems between mothers and young girls create a vulnerability context and thus girls do not feel safe to turn to their mothers about matters related to their privacy, exhibiting the tendency to get information from other sources about aspects related to contraception and a healthy intimate life. This choice gave in the results the impression that the degree of information on these subjects is relatively low, either by the fact that the young women are completely unaware of the cause, or have vague or erroneous information.

As for the risks generated by the occurrence of a pregnancy at the age of adolescence, there is a fear of the impression generated at the community level, a fact that can be explained considering the psycho-emotional complexity of a teenager's concerns. It is an age when young people form an image of who they are, feel the need to impress through appearance and behavior in order to stand out in the community, and choosing healthy role models is essential to their development. Besides this perspective related rather to perception, the results also highlighted the awareness of the real consequences of those actions, which involve risks associated with material, physical, educational difficulties, etc.

Consequently, the subject covered has a large scope in the field of the literature, and the decreasing trend of this phenomenon, highlighted by current statistics, encourages research, prevention work and the development of relief measures for the factors involved in this context.

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