

MOTHERHOOD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEENAGE MOTHERS

A maternidade na perspectiva de mães adolescentes

La maternidad en la perspectiva de madres adolescentes

Original Article

ABSTRACT

Objective: To understand the repercussions of motherhood from the perspective of teenage mothers. **Methods:** Qualitative descriptive field study conducted in the municipality of Pato Branco, Paraná, Brazil in the period between November and December 2015. Participants were nine teenagers and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed and interpreted based on the operative proposal from which three thematic categories emerged. **Results:** The category The discovery of pregnancy and the relationship with the family highlighted feelings such as the fear of revealing to parents and the fear of disappointing them because of pregnancy; the category A relationship of affection demonstrates that despite all the changes and difficulties faced by teenagers, the affective relationship with the child is translated into feelings of love, care and devotion; and the category expectations for the future demonstrates adjustments in social, family and school life of the participants. **Conclusion:** The study revealed that the initial changes with the discovery of pregnancy cause emotional imbalance in the teenager, and over time there is an adjustment, showing the importance of family support. In this sense, it can be noted that the family is the mainstay, the safe haven and the support in the lives of teenagers.

Descriptors: Adolescent Health; Adolescent; Pregnancy in Adolescence.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Compreender as repercussões da maternidade na perspectiva de mães adolescentes. **Métodos:** Estudo de campo, descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa. Desenvolvido no município de Pato Branco, Paraná, BR, no período entre novembro e dezembro de 2015. Participaram nove adolescentes, e os dados foram construídos por meio de entrevista semiestruturada. Os dados foram analisados e interpretados por meio da proposta operativa, emergindo três categorias temáticas. **Resultados:** Apontam que a categoria a descoberta da gravidez e a relação com a família evidenciou sentimentos como o medo de revelar aos pais e o receio de decepcioná-los diante da gravidez; a categoria uma relação de afetividade demonstra que apesar de todas as transformações e dificuldades enfrentadas pelas adolescentes, o envolvimento afetivo com o filho é traduzido nos sentimentos de amor, carinho e dedicação; e a categoria expectativas para o futuro demonstra as adaptações na vida social, familiar e escolar das participantes. **Conclusão:** O estudo revelou que as mudanças iniciais com a descoberta da gravidez provocam desajustes emocionais na adolescente e com o decorrer do tempo há uma adaptação, demonstrando a importância do apoio familiar. Neste sentido, é perceptível que a família é o sustentáculo, é o porto seguro, o apoio na vida das adolescentes.

Descritores: Saúde do Adolescente; Adolescente; Gravidez na Adolescência.

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: Comprender las repercusiones de la maternidad desde la perspectiva de madres adolescentes. **Métodos:** Estudio de campo, descriptivo de abordaje cualitativo desarrollado en el municipio de Pato Branco, Paraná, Brasil, en el periodo entre noviembre y diciembre de 2015. Participaron nueve adolescentes y los datos fueron construidos a través de entrevista semiestructurada. Los datos fueron analizados e interpretados a través de la propuesta operativa de la cual emergieron tres categorías temáticas. **Resultados:** Los resultados señalan que la categoría, la descubierta del embarazo y la relación con la familia, evidencio sentimientos como el miedo de revelar a los padres y el miedo de su decepción delante el embarazo; la categoría una relación de afectividad demuestra que a pesar de todas las transformaciones y dificultades afrontadas por las adolescentes, la relación afectiva con el hijo se traduce en los sentimientos de amor, cariño y dedicación; y la categoría, expectativas para el futuro, demuestra las adaptaciones en la vida social, familiar y escolar de las participantes. **Conclusión:** El estudio reveló que los primeros cambios con la descubierta del embarazo causan desajustes emocionales en la adolescente y con el tiempo hay una adaptación que demuestra la importancia del apoyo familiar. En ese sentido, es perceptible que la familia es el amparo, el puerto seguro, el apoyo en la vida de las adolescentes.

Descriptor: Salud del Adolescente; Adolescente; Embarazo en la Adolescencia.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as the period of life from ages 10 to 19 that has biological, social and psychological aspects⁽¹⁾. In this life stage, the individual undergoes significant modifications which are reflected in their behavior and in their relationships with others and with themselves. Biological transformations include changes in the body and the development of secondary sex characteristics, which usually give rise to interest in sex and the beginning of sexual life. As for emotional aspects, changes involve the development of self-esteem and self-criticism, as well as questions about the values of their parents and adults in general⁽²⁾.

Currently, there is early first sexual intercourse stimulated by a determination of a society in which children are soon turned into adolescents. Early onset of sexual activity can have many consequences, such as unwanted pregnancies, which lead the adolescent to enter adulthood and change their way of life even without the appropriate psychological maturity⁽³⁾.

Understanding sexuality as an event that surfaces in adolescence is to reveal a universe full of desires,

excitements, discoveries, and feelings. However, the subject must be addressed in an appropriate way and mediated by sexual education in order to allow the adolescent to learn about the care with his/her reproductive life and with that of his/her partner and to provide them with opportunities to clarify their doubts, fears and desires⁽⁴⁾.

Nowadays, teenage pregnancy is considered a public health problem that has significantly increased worldwide⁽⁵⁾. In Brazil, it is a widely discussed phenomenon, and such a debate is driven by the consequences of gestation in this life cycle⁽³⁾. Its public health implications include social aspects such as school dropouts and, as a consequence, the difficulty in entering the labor market, problems in the family environment, and an increase in the possibility of continuing the cycle of poverty⁽⁵⁾.

In Brazil, the age-specific fertility rate for the age group between 15 and 19 years has decreased over the last years – from 98 per thousand adolescents who had children in 1990 to 78 in 2007⁽⁶⁾. On the other hand, data from the Department of Informatics of Brazil's Unified Health System (*Departamento de Informática do Sistema Único de Saúde – DATASUS*) show significant numbers of teenage pregnancies – 562,608 births to mothers aged 10-19 years in 2014⁽⁷⁾.

The experience of an early and unplanned pregnancy is often full of important transformations with implications for the family environment that lead to maladjustment and that force the family and the adolescent to reorganize their life projects, leading to school and work dropout⁽³⁾. However, motherhood in adolescence presents different perspectives as the meanings attributed to such experience depend on the family and social context in which the adolescent is inserted⁽⁸⁾.

The consequences of motherhood reflect more negatively on the biological and social aspects of the adolescent's life. At the same time, it provides feelings of happiness and acceptance of the new social role, instituting a new status and marking a new stage in the life of a woman⁽⁹⁾.

Given that, it is fundamental to understand teenage pregnancy and the different aspects involved in this phenomenon. In addition, the importance of addressing such issue lies in the need to provide support to health professionals, particularly nurses, so that they can provide adolescents with comprehensive care and guidance on the adaptations faced in this period.

Thus, the present study was driven by the following research question: What are the repercussions of motherhood in adolescence? In order to answer this question, the study aimed to understand the repercussions of motherhood from the perspective of teenage mothers.

METHODS

The methodological path chosen was characterized by a field study⁽¹⁰⁾ with a descriptive and qualitative approach⁽⁷⁾. The choice of the qualitative method was because it has been used in studies of history, relationships, beliefs, and judgments that result from men's interpretations of their way of life, their constructions, their feelings, and their thoughts. It is set within investigations of groups and delimited and focused segments of social contexts⁽¹¹⁾.

The study took place in a primary health care center in the municipality of Pato Branco, located in the southwest region of the State of Paraná – Brazil. Participants were nine adolescents who were experiencing motherhood. The inclusion criteria were as follows: adolescents who were first-time mothers of children between one and 19 months of life. Exclusion criteria were: pregnant teenagers or those who did not present psychological conditions to participate in the study. Mothers were selected by convenience, that is, those who attended the center were invited to participate.

Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews using an author-developed questionnaire. The interviews were divided into two stages: in the first, researchers obtained socioeconomic data (age, education, marital status, living conditions and household income); the second stage consisted of guiding questions developed according to the study objective: A) Tell me how did you feel when you discovered you were pregnant? B) Did you plan and want this pregnancy? C) Did you get support from your family? from your partner? from your school? D) Comment on the changes that have occurred after your child was born. E) What does motherhood/your child mean to you? The meeting was previously scheduled and the interview took place in the participants' house.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Data were analyzed and interpreted based on the thematic content analysis technique, the operational proposal, characterized by two operational moments: exploratory phase and interpretative phase⁽¹¹⁾.

In the first phase, it was sought to understand the social and historical context of the social group investigated by analyzing the history of the group and the environment where the adolescents were inserted, characterizing the context in which the study was developed⁽¹¹⁾.

The second operational moment sought to identify the sense, the internal logic, the projections and the interpretations present in the statements. This phase consisted of two steps: data ordering – transcription of the material, re-reading, organization of the statements and data collected; and data classification: the horizontal and exhaustive reading of the texts and the transversal reading

followed by the categorization of codes searching for connections between them⁽¹¹⁾.

The final analysis consisted of a deep analysis of the empirical material obtained after the ordering and classification steps and is considered the starting point and the point of arrival of understanding and interpretation; the writing of the report exposes the synthesis and the communication of the data. Finally, the final report of this study was prepared⁽¹¹⁾.

As a final result, the content analysis resulted in three thematic categories: The discovery of pregnancy and the relationship with the family; a relationship of affection; and expectations for the future.

This study complied with the ethical precepts established in Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council – Ministry of Health, which provides for research involving human beings⁽¹²⁾. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under Opinion No. 1.309.634. The anonymity of the participants was guaranteed and they were identified using an alphanumeric system from A1 to A9 according to the order of interviews. Data collection began after parents or guardians signed the Free Informed Consent Form and upon written consent of the study participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socioeconomic data of the participants are presented as follows and characterize the group. Then the thematic categories that emerged after the content analysis of the adolescents' statements are presented.

Characterization of participants

Participants were nine adolescents who were first-time mothers – one of them was the mother of twins. The adolescents were between 14 and 18 years old, and three of them lived with a partner, three were single and had an affective relationship with the father of their children and three were single without affective relationships with the children's father.

Regarding housing, it was identified that seven of them continue to live in the same house with their parents, stepparents and siblings, and two live with their partners. The household income reported by most of the participants was between two to four minimum wages, and only one of them reported an income between five and six minimum wages. The majority were financially dependent on their parents and eight of the interviewees did not work. As for the care of the baby, only one reported that it was carried out by her father and stepmother. The others were assisted by their families, but were responsible for their children.

Regarding education, five participants reported completing elementary education and four completed secondary education. Four of the interviewees were not enrolled in school and five are still studying and consider completing secondary education and starting higher education.

The discovery of pregnancy and the relationship with the family

This category shows that the experience of pregnancy is a transition in the integral human development; however, when it occurs in adolescence, it can reveal complications that require restructuring and readjustments in several dimensions. Pregnancy itself requires special attention. When it occurs in adolescence, it presents singular peculiarities and is full of transformations that lead to a whirlwind of feelings, emotions and events⁽¹³⁾.

The discovery of pregnancy by the participants was revealed as a moment characterized by a mix of feelings such as the fear of disclosing it to the family, the fear of parents' disappointment, despair, doubts, and uncertainties regarding the situation, which are shown in the following statements:

For me, it was like I did not know what to do. Then I got used to it, but I had not talked to my mother yet. I got really despaired after I told my mother. My mother got very angry with me, and so did my father. I despaired. (A3)

My family got really frightened, but then they got used to it. (A4)

In fact, they always knew that I hid it for a long time. (A5)

Not so good. At first I was a little doubtful... (she gets pensive) (A7)

The findings corroborate other studies that demonstrate the conflicts experienced by adolescents in the discovery of pregnancy. When it is an unwanted event, there is fear to face what happened and tell the family or partner⁽¹³⁾. The discovery of pregnancy reverberates in the feelings – not only those of the adolescent, but also those of the family. The members react in different ways, expressing feelings of shame, despair, embarrassment, anger, revolt, among others⁽¹⁴⁾.

The family plays a key role in the event of teenage pregnancy as it allows to understand the phenomenon in its multiple forms and meanings. The understanding is conditioned upon their beliefs, customs and expectations drawn for the adolescent's future⁽¹⁵⁾.

In different contexts, it is evident that difficult family relationships limit the dialogue with the adolescent regarding sexual initiation and the experience of sexuality. Schools,

health professionals, parents and the community should provide spaces for dialogue with the adolescent in order to allow them to openly understand their sexuality. This is a very important tool in the social response to vulnerabilities involving sexuality during pregnancy, including early and unwanted pregnancy^(3,4,15).

However, it is extremely important to recognize the current state of teenage pregnancy and its implications for society and for the individual's life considering both cultural, physical, emotional and psychosocial aspects⁽¹⁶⁾. Changes in this scenario can be encouraged through the empowerment of the youth, knowledge about social mobilization, and the recognition of their rights to ethical and integral assistance⁽¹⁷⁾.

The impact of teenage pregnancy on the family is remarkable. It is an issue that affects the adolescent's mother more expressively and that is generally followed by positive effects that end up passing on to all family members, resulting in a good acceptance on the part of all⁽³⁾.

The interviewees' statements show that the confrontation of the family presents different facets. There is a prevalence of estrangement and disappointment with regard to early and unwanted pregnancy, there is a mix of feelings. However, family ties led the members to accept and encourage the adolescent to face this new reality and hence assimilate the new trajectory of family life.

The mother figure is revealed as the main element in the support network of the adolescent experiencing pregnancy. Although there is a feeling of estrangement in the beginning, mothers become – over time – an important reference for them to understand the problem experienced.

"I was alone and she (mother) supported me, you know?! She helped me not to get depressed, to raise my child all by myself, without his father or anyone else." (A5)

"Yes. She (mother) supported me in everything. They said they wanted to help the baby, to keep track of everything, a support that all single mothers would like to have, but not all of them are supported." (A1)

"My mother got angry at first, but then she got used to it. Without my mother I would not have been able to give birth because I had given it up when the moment came, I did not want to do it. If she was not by my side I would not have been able to do it, but she helps me a lot too." (A3)

The family's experience after the discovery of pregnancy is also part of the adolescent's experience. However, with family support and maternal responsibilities, this experience can contribute to their personal development⁽³⁾.

Family support is fundamental in the building of the concept of early pregnancy. The way the family deals with the context of pregnancy, its participation and support,

particularly the mother and daughter relationship, are important for the identification of the maternal role and the child's development⁽⁴⁾.

In addition to maternal support, reports of support from the partner and the family network emerged among adolescents, highlighting the emotional support in the experience of motherhood:

"I received support only from my boyfriend and a little from my mother" (A6)

"A lot of people think I am insensitive because my son lives with my father and my stepmother, but I know he is fine and well taken care of. So, I do not care about what others think, when I want to see my son I go there and that is it, I kill the homesickness. But as a mother I know that at this moment it is much better for my son to be there with them, he is being well cared for and it is much better for him to be there right now (she says it emotionally)." (A9)

Studies reveal the role that the mothers, the family network and partners play in the constitution of the support network in both affectively and financially terms^(8,18). The maternal role is not always played by the adolescents, who abdicate the responsibility for their child and delegate guardianship and care to their parents⁽¹⁹⁾. When the parents do not play this role, the grandparents take the responsibilities for their grandchildren and daughters as equals⁽²⁰⁾.

A relationship of affection

This category shows the relationship established between mother and child. When asked about the meaning of the child in their lives, the adolescents revealed a strong affective bond that had been established. They state that, despite all the changes and difficulties encountered during pregnancy, the arrival of the child helped them become more mature and aware of their responsibilities for the child development. They were aware of early motherhood, but the affective involvement was above all. They manifested feelings of love and care and are committed to take care of the baby.

During the interviews, the adolescents expressed satisfaction and joy regarding motherhood, even with the transformations that took place after the arrival of the child. They nurture a feeling of maternal love with intensity and pleasure, communicating unconditional love to their baby. They express the arrival of the child as a "gift from God", with feelings of thankfulness for the arrival and presence of the child.

"Without her, I do not know what I would do. If I could go back in time I would do something different. And if I could choose to be without her, I would choose to be with her." (A3)

"Wow, it is very good, it is the best thing in the world, the best thing that happened in my life was her. She is a gift from God, there is nothing to be said about it." (A2)

Of the nine interviewees, only one showed depressive characteristics and reported suicidal thoughts and feelings of insecurity about raising her daughter as she recognized her immaturity and the lack of financial resources. She said she was told to put her child up for adoption; however, the affective bond was already established and the love for the child spoke louder, so she decided to face the difficulties.

"My daughter is unbelievable. She is everything to me. I thought about killing myself, but now I do not even think about it, I have a daughter to raise and I want to see her big, really big, I want to see her graduate and I want to give the best for her." (A5)

The meaning of child care is evident among the teenage mothers as they report a pleasurable relationship that involves learning and strengthening the bond between the mother and the child, who is now the unique reason in their lives. Taking care, according to the adolescents, is to enable a healthy development and growth with affection, love and care, which are essential in the formation of the child's personality⁽²¹⁾.

Motherhood is also described in a study as a possibility of personal fulfillment for adolescents, who are proud of the development of their children and of being recognized as mothers by them. One of the meanings attributed to the children is the bond established between mother and child – an experience of love in its most genuine form that is sustained by the belief in a lasting relationship between them⁽²²⁾.

Expectations for the future

The present category reveals that the social life of the adolescents interviewed suffered many changes. They report that it was necessary to adjust to the new reality as the baby demands care and attention. It became necessary to give up some things that were part of their daily life, their routine. Although the school facilitated the provision of care to mothers and maternity leave, many adolescents dropped out; however, they said they want to go back to school after their children grow up. The only one who worked said she intends to return to work. Of the participants, six intend to continue their studies and start higher education in the search for a better life and better working conditions.

"I want to study, I want to go back to school and then work." (A4)

"The doctor said that if you do not study then your son will stop studying and you cannot say anything, right? My

mother stopped studying so I can do the same! You have to be an example.” (A2)

“I go to school and I intend to go to college. I have not chosen the course, but I will continue to study so that later on my son can be proud of being the son of a young mother.” (A9)

“So, I think about going back to school until he grows up.” (A6)

Among those who do not show interest in going back to school, it became evident that the social and economic reality has great influence on one's perspective of life and of social and economic ascension. However, it is through education that social mobility occurs.

“I do not want to go back to school because it is not worth it”.

“When poor people start making babies they do not stop anymore.” (A7)

The several changes that occur with early and unwanted pregnancy lead to transformations in the social and economic life of the whole family, triggering school dropout and lack of encouragement to seek new professional perspectives. This is corroborated by studies which demonstrate the rate of school dropout in the country among adolescents who experience motherhood^(3,23).

Some of the implications affect the adolescent's social projects, postponing the possibilities of development of the young woman. The experience of motherhood in adolescence requires a great amount of time spent on actions, which compromises the period dedicated to adequate preparation for the future⁽³⁾.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study leads to an understanding of the impact of teenage pregnancy on different dimensions – both social and emotional. The development of the study showed that the initial transformations with the discovery of pregnancy lead to emotional imbalances in the adolescent; however, there is an adjustment over time, which highlights the importance of family support. In this sense, it is noticeable that the family is the mainstay, that is, it is the safe haven, the support in the life of the adolescents. It is the family that transmits confidence in the experience of this phase as adolescents need financial and emotional support to face the changes in addition to support regarding the care with the baby.

It is noteworthy that, despite all the adversities of an early and unwanted pregnancy, the adolescents establish a strong affective bond with the babies. There is an identity conflict relationship in which adolescents need to grow

up early, take responsibilities and leave behind the natural experiences of adolescence. And in this context, the mother figure stood out as the main support provider for them, which had an impact on the maternal role developed by them.

In addition to the family, other instances need to be involved considering the specificities of their action in order to contribute to the adolescent's ability to continue the process of personal and social formation. Based on this parameter, it is essential that health, education and social assistance services carry out an effective work to provide support, referral and guidance on the present and future relationships of adolescents in social and professional life.

Teenage pregnancy is a reality. Therefore, it is necessary to develop public policies focused on prevention and comprehensive care targeted at adolescents and children. This should be a networked work in which the different spheres of care could establish a dialogue in the search for alternatives to meet the individual needs. Given that, the contributions of the present study may be relevant to nurses' practice considering the health care actions targeted at adolescents carried out by them. Additionally, though health education, these professionals can promote the experience and the exercise of sexuality in adolescence in a safe and conscious way.

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