SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT TRIGGERING ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY

CONTEXTO SOCIAL Y FAMILIAR DESENCADENANTE DEL EMBARAZO EN ADOLESCENTES

CONTEXTO SOCIAL E FAMILIAR DESENCADENADOR DA GRAVIDEZ EM ADOLESCENTES

Adriana Patricia López Benavides
Farlhyn Paola Bermúdez Moreno

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Objective: to understand the characteristics of the social and family context triggering adolescent pregnancy. Method: a study with a qualitative approach, by means of in-depth interviews with 15 teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18 years, either pregnant or with children under the age of one, in the period of May to July 2017. The selection and location of the participants was of the purposive and snowball sampling type. Results: four categories were established: relationship with the social environment, experience of pregnancy, relationship with family and with the partner. It was evidenced that the adolescents are in dysfunctional family relations, the relationship with the partner is unstable and unsteady, social environment is aggressive and degrading due to the pregnancy, nevertheless they expressed the experience of pregnancy as unique and marvelous. Conclusion: the social and family context is directly related to adolescent pregnancy, a complex and multifactorial phenomenon.


Objetivo: comprender las características del contexto social y familiar desencadenantes del embarazo en adolescentes. Método: estudio de enfoque cualitativo, mediante entrevista a profundidad a 15 adolescentes entre 14 y 18 años en estado de gestación o con hijos menores de 1 año, en el periodo de Mayo a Julio de 2017. La selección y ubicación de las participantes fue de tipo intencional en forma de bola de nieve. Resultados: se establecieron 4 categorías: relación con el entorno social, experiencia del embarazo, relación familiar y relación de pareja. Se evidenció que las adolescentes están en una relación familiar disfuncional, la relación de pareja es inestable e inconstante, su entorno social es agresivo y descalificativo por su embarazo, aun así, manifestaron haber vivido el embarazo como una experiencia única y maravillosa. Conclusión: el contexto social y familiar está directamente relacionado con el embarazo en adolescencia, que es un fenómeno multifactorial complejo.


Objetivo: comprender as características principais do contexto social e familiar da gravidez em adolescentes. Método: estudo de enfoque qualitativo, mediante entrevista em profundidade com 15 adolescentes entre 14 e 18 anos gestantes ou com filhos menores de 1 ano, no período de maio a julho de 2017. A seleção e localização das participantes foi intencional, sob a forma de bola de neve. Resultados: foram estabelecidas 4 categorias: relação com o meio social, a experiência da gravidez, relacionamento familiar e relacionamento com parceiro. Demonstrou-se
Social and family context triggering adolescent pregnancy

Introduction

Adolescence is an evolving phase of human development which occurs between childhood and adult age, approximately between the ages of 10 and 19 years, when countless psychological, environmental, social and biological changes occur, such as reaching sexual and reproductive maturity\(^1\)\(^2\). In this period a new independent status in which new responsibilities are undertaken and the adolescents begins the arduous path of recognizing their identity, compelling them to put into practice the values acquired during their childhood and develop new abilities and conducts leading them to become responsible adults\(^3\).

The experience of sexuality as a process of assimilation of changes and processes that the human body undergoes during this phase is no easy task, all the more so in the case of today’s adolescents, who have no awareness of the importance of a responsible sexual life. This has led to a situation whereby, at present, pregnancy in adolescence is a social issue, once pregnancy is an occurrence that requires a biological and mental\(^4\) effort for adaptation, in other words a physical and psychological maturity leading to the full experience of this phase, and the adolescents in general do not have such maturity\(^5\)\(^6\). It is for this reason that, when adolescents interrupt their daily lives, with relevant events such as a pregnancy, it transforms their present and future lifestyles on a long-term, often generating great trauma both to the lives of the mother and of the child. Nevertheless, in the case of some adolescents, maternity at an early age is a phase that can be fully experienced, either because they planned on becoming a mother or because they take on this new role in life as something positive that directly transforms their way of life\(^7\).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and Organización Panamericana de la Salud (OPS), around 16 million adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 and approximately 1 million girls under the age of 15 give birth annually, mostly in medium-sized and low income countries. The population between the ages of 15 and 19 years is more susceptible to produce complications during pregnancy and child birth, being the second cause of death on a global scale. It is estimated that approximately 3 million adolescents of this age group have abortions per year, leaving serious consequences, both physically and psychologically, and in the more serious cases leading to the death of the adolescent\(^8\).

Pregnancy during the adolescent phase is also considered a public health issue. Colombia presents indicators similar to those of countries in Central America and higher fertility rates than in most countries of South America\(^9\). On the other hand, pregnancy in adolescents in the city of Pereira, during the past 4 years, has revealed a decrease, from 1216 cases reported in 2014 to 960 cases in 2016, nevertheless, the means of verification is through live birth certificates, thus it is not known if the number of pregnancies in adolescents has actually reduced or only the number of live births for this age group\(^10\).

Owing to the fact that adolescent pregnancy presents a greater risk of mortality and morbidity, both for the mother and for the child, expenses in health are constantly increasing, once children of adolescent mothers have greater probability of premature births, being underweight, and the
The family, as first responsible and as a social origin, generates single-parent and dysfunctional families, problems with partners, problems with children and problems with the family of origin. Family has a fundamental role in dealing with sexual and reproductive education, and the type of decisions that adolescents will take when beginning their sexual activities will depend, to a great measure, on this education, which could lead to a considerable reduction in pregnancies, abortions and a decrease in sexually transmitted diseases. A good family education could also help against substance abuse and delinquency. The family, as first responsible and as a social institution should begin by recognizing its role as guide and tutor of the adolescents who are going through the most complex phase of their lives, a phase in which it is not enough only to understand, but also to discover and such discovery goes through an experimental period. It is necessary to understand the experiences of adolescent mothers as a nursing care chore, once it permits us to understand and investigate the viewpoint of the social actors, impacting in a direct and positive manner the health services, since understanding the experiences of others makes it possible to offer a more personalized attention and prone to improve the quality of life of the patients. The pregnancy phenomenon is, therefore, a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by many factors, such as: family, upbringing, society, school and use of free time. The present article has the aim of understanding the characteristics of the social and family context triggering adolescent pregnancies.

**Method**

A study of a qualitative approach was performed with the purpose of carrying out a descriptive analysis based on shared experiences, experiences and meanings attributed by the adolescents to pregnancy, to determine how the social and family context can trigger pregnancy in adolescents in the city of Pereira, Colombia.

The studied population comprised adolescents of ages between 14 and 18 years, belonging to the socioeconomic levels 1 and 2, pregnant or with children under 1 year of age, all of whom performed the interviews during the period between May and June 2017. The selection and location of the participants was intentional, using other strategies such as snowball sampling, where the initial connection was with pregnant adolescents attending the “De Cero a Siempre” strategy in the city of Pereira.

A semi-structured in-depth interview was designed with a duration of approximately 45 minutes, applied individually to pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers of children under the age of 1, in the communes of Villa Santana, Altagracia and in the sector of Cuba in the El Dorado and Salamanca neighborhoods of socioeconomic levels 1 and 2, for which the parents of the participating adolescents signed the informed consent form and the adolescents agreed to take part in the research. The interviews were performed in the houses of each participant.

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*The “De Cero a Siempre” strategy was approved as a law of the Republic and sanctioned by the President of the Republic on August 2, 2016. Accordingly, comprehensive care to early childhood must be implemented throughout the country, progressing in real-life conditions in favor of the comprehensive development of boys and girls. The rights of boys and girls in early childhood are imperative; the family, society and the state are obliged to guarantee the protection, health, nutrition and initial education from the moment of gestation to the age of five. The “De Cero a Siempre” strategy will coordinate all of the institutions, public and private, in order to guarantee, on a long-term, comprehensive care to 2,875,000 boys and girls of the SISBEN (Social Beneficiary Identification Program) 1, 2 and 3. Working under a perspective of universalization of Comprehensive Care, “De Cero a Siempre” will give priority to the population of extreme poverty. Presently only 24% of boys and girls under the age of five receive comprehensive care, and “De Cero a Siempre” will aim to put into effect the right to comprehensive care of 1,500,000 boys and girls in situation of vulnerability, addressing a great national challenge requiring an interagency coordination to cover 100% of the population between zero and five years of age. Available from: http://www.decerosiempre.gov.co/QuieresSomos/Paginas/QuieresSomos.aspx*
which required going to each address indicated by the adolescents.

A total of 15 interviews were recorded, according to the number of participants, in order to have available a reliable registry of the material collected. Subsequently the interviews were textually transcribed, being careful to register everything that was said in the audio. The criteria for interruption of the interview were determined when covering the entire previously established questions necessary to gain in-depth knowledge of the criteria to be analyzed. The participants of the present investigation can be identified in the text with the letter E (Entrevista) and the number assigned to each interview.

The analysis of the information from the interview was based on the testimonies, due to the fact that these permit to extract useful meanings for the objective of the investigation. The categories of analysis were previously established, from bibliographical review of the elements that could best describe the family and social context, from which four categories emerged: family relations, relationship with the partner, relationship with the social environment and experience of pregnancy. Two categories were established to analyze the family context: family relations and relationship with the partner; and two categories for the social context: relationship with the social environment and experience of pregnancy.

Given that the present article complies with an institutional project, the ethical aspects are considered in the Research Committee of Universidad Andina, which guarantees the fulfillment of the ethical aspects of the research.

Results and Discussion

Adolescent pregnancy is a phenomenon with multifactorial causes, occurring in all socioeconomic strata; nevertheless it is in the lower socioeconomic levels where the risk of becoming pregnant at an early age is higher, and where undesired pregnancies and the lack of prenatal care are more frequent, increasing the possibility of early detection of risk factors, resulting in higher maternal and perinatal mortality and morbidity. In addition, most of the cases represent a social issue, which causes the mother to interrupt her school life to dedicate herself to the care of her child or to work in order to maintain herself and her child.

The categories of relationship with the social environment and pregnancy experience represent the core for understanding the characteristics of the social context and the categories of family relations and relationship with the partner permit the understanding of the family context and as triggers of adolescent pregnancy in the city of Pereira.

Relationship with the social environment

The present fast sexual and reproductive development of adolescents obliges us to attribute a greater importance to sexual education both in the family environment as well as in the school and social environment, explaining and clarifying doubts on sexuality, family planning methods, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, explaining all the implications both to the mother and to the child.

Maternity in the adolescent years implies in assuming at a young age a new social role, of a mother, and this role requires the adolescents to acquire a never imagined level of responsibility in relation to the child they are expecting or to the baby they are responsible for.

What can I say, it is not an easy task because I am a girl, not an adult mother, so it is difficult, but one commits mistakes and must face the consequences, and my mother and father have given me a lot of support, and because of them I did not take a bad decision.

The researches indicate that there is a strong link between cases of pregnancy and dropping out of school, once pregnancy and the early age increases the problems and difficulties in handing daily and eventual situations, such as those related to the school environment and working future; which conditions aggravate issues such as gender inequality. This reflects in the fact that the pregnant adolescents are obliged...
to abandon their studies, nevertheless, 10 of the interviewed teenagers are still studying, although only 2 of them on regular school days, the other 8 study at night or on weekends; it should be observed that many studied these hours before becoming pregnant. The other 5 youngsters presently dedicate themselves to housework and caring for their children; in turn they manifest their lack of will to continue their studies, once they were outside the school environment before becoming pregnant and they are embarrassed that people see their situation; because they are still incapable of understanding that remaining in school favors their personal growth and permits them to have social roles different to the ones offered by maternity\(^{(17)}\).

No, already before becoming pregnant I had left school, some three months before [...] No, I say that friendship, I was with my friends and my friends and I didn’t like studying, so it was because of that, it wasn’t because of the pregnancy, before the pregnancy, some three months before, I left school. (E2).

According to other researches, the adolescents who abandon their studies at an early age and dedicate themselves to housework have a greater risk of early pregnancy, in comparison to those who are occupied with academic activities, once a level of education is indispensable for decision making and it is frequently observed how in literature this variable is related to knowledge and the use of family planning methods and greater responsibility towards the onset of sexual activities\(^{(25)}\). The adolescents, without differentiation between those that are studying and those that abandoned their studies, manifested that after pregnancy and maternity they saw their life projects transformed.

Well, I think it hasn’t changed much, only that having a baby is already more responsibility, I had thought of a career that meant not having children, I wanted to be an airhostess, but I plan to study, at SENA or at a university. (E6).

Such results permit us to maintain that the social context in which the adolescent live directly influences their sexual and reproductive behavior, in the roles they play, in their sexual intercourses and in their sexual and reproductive decision making\(^{(22)}\), with a lower degree of discernment of the adolescents growing up in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, which has been reflected in other researches, where it has been concluded that there is an important relationship between poverty, inequity and inequality, with pregnancy before the age of 15 years\(^{(20)}\), which tends to heighten poverty, lack of opportunities and child malnutrition\(^{(5)}\).

**Experience of Pregnancy**

The offspring should be the members of the family that come to reinforce the bonds fomented by the union of the couple: man and woman, consolidating a new relationship: father and mother, with the aim of cementing the bases for social development, nevertheless, presently, and due among other issues to the phenomena of adolescent pregnancy, it is no longer so.

Well I didn’t suffer so much during the pregnancy. I always wanted to be a young mother, at the age of 20 or so, but it was at the age of 15, pregnancy was long-suffering because of the father of the child, because he left me when I was 2 months pregnant. (E7).

Adolescent pregnancy has relevant implications in public health, converting into an issue of concern from a psychosocial as well as a medical viewpoint, being a phenomenon of greater frequency among adolescents of a lower socioeconomic level, from dysfunctional families, affected by unemployment and violence\(^{(11,14)}\). Researches indicate a direct relationship exists between cases of adolescent pregnancy and difficulties of women to gain access to higher education, once it is during adolescence that the projection of a future life begins, and such projection is directly affected when the adolescents must work to care for a child\(^{(22-25)}\).

Among the adolescents 13 manifested having certain awareness of birth control methods, nonetheless, they stated that they didn’t use it for reasons such as weight gain or hormonal changes, others used condoms, but only occasionally believing that they wouldn’t become pregnant.

*Ab, ab – the method? Ab, no, the condom would many times tear [...] Yes, of course. They say that when one takes too many pills one can become sterile, and I had
It is possible to observe the confusion that exists among adolescents regarding birth control methods, this is evident in other researches where the use of contraceptives is almost null in adolescents under the age of 15, either due to family restriction, poor access to medical consultations and counseling on contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health.\

Despite most of them having manifested that pregnancy was accidental, they undertake the care and upbringing of their child as their own responsibility and say that they feel supported by their families.

Much happiness, at first very surprised because I didn’t imagine it, but in truth I have realized that a baby is a blessing from God, and has united my family, who have been very close to me. (E1).

The emotional ambiguity pregnancy brings to the adolescents is evident and to accept how their lives are transformed when they become mothers at such an early age, this is reflected in other researches where the adolescents indicate they should have waited longer to become pregnant, once a child requires many things they cannot offer, among other matters the economic factor, nevertheless, they take the responsibility as mothers in a conscientious manner and do not regret becoming a mother.

Well, it is something beautiful, but also means that it takes away many possibilities, for example, when I realized I was pregnant I was like four months pregnant and I was still going to school, since I wasn’t feeling any symptoms I continued going, so leaving a routine that I had, sometimes I would forget that I should not run. (E15).

Most of the adolescents reported normality during pregnancy, only one of them suffered complications, although these complications were easily controlled in the emergency services.

This differs from what was established by some researches, where it is common to find reports of complications in adolescent pregnancies, implying in high risks for the mother and baby, such as anemia, hypertension, abortions, threatened miscarriages and/or preterm births, urinary infection and vaginosis, low-weight newborns, neonatal morbidity and mortality, low Apgar, and other neonatal complications, including a new pregnancy. The awareness of the risks of pregnancy in the adolescent phase is indispensable in order to reduce the adolescent maternity rates and its complications.

**Family Relations**

The family should be the most important thing for human beings, but unfortunately many fathers and mothers do not consider it so and hide themselves behind their multiple occupations to justify the deterioration of the family. It was observed that, among the interviewed adolescents, the type of family that prevailed was of separated parents, where only 7 of the interviewees declare to have a complete home, formed by mother and father, of which only 4 have a harmonica family relation.

Ah, with my mother, my father, my nephews, and with, in other words, all of them give me support. (E2).

As a result of the above it is possible to state that children of divorced parents have greater probabilities of presenting problems with adaptation to social life; it is evidenced how the absence of one or the other parent can constitute a risk factor for adolescent pregnancy. Nevertheless, the negative psychological effects in the personality of the offspring are not only due to the separation of parents, factors such as poor relations within the family, unhealthy relationship with partners and interfamily violence also influence, once adolescents require affective and emotional stability, which is seriously threatened when they grow in the midst of dysfunctional families.

Jun., very tough because my parents separated and we were very small, so for almost all of my childhood we were sent here and there, a period of time with my father, another period with my mother, so that is always very difficult. (E4).

The adolescent period is a phase of periodic changes, reflected in the physical, psychological and social planes of the individual, generating tensions that affect social inclusion. This phase is considered as a transitive period between childhood and adulthood, and for this reason...
family dysfunction is a factor that predisposes the appearance of emotional and psychological disorders, expressed in harmful conduct such as drug addiction, dropping out of school, depression, suicide, early onset of sexual activities, sexually transmitted diseases and adolescent pregnancy, among others.\(^2,16-17\)

The family system provides the adolescents with varying cultural elements and social standards that permit their integration to society, therefore, it is possible to assert that adolescents that do not have good family relations or that come from dysfunctional families run greater risks of presenting early pregnancy, once their education in relation to sexual and reproductive matters is in most cases insufficient. Researches emphasize the existing relationship between upbringing and early sexual and reproductive lives; this is because the parents of the adolescents were inconsistent in the care of their daughters, because when caring for them they go through one of the extremes: either they take too much care or do not know how to care for them\(^19\) leading to incorrect experience of their freedom and their sexuality.

The lack of dialogue and trust with the family in terms related to sexual and reproductive lives and in other aspects of their lives, reflects in the low family interaction of the adolescents, who at the moment of deciding what to do with their pregnancy and faced with the abandonment of their partner, are obliged to look for support from third parties, whilst their parents do not show concern as to the activities of the adolescents\(^18\).

Ah, because I had many friends who told me they had aborted, and I, I was not able to, I went to my mother and I told her I wasn’t able to have an abortion, and she told me that I did not own the life of anyone to kill creature and that they would help me. (E2).

Nevertheless, the adolescents stated that despite their parents having disapproved of the news of their pregnancy, they ended up supporting them economically and socially, although this support was mainly on the part of the mother, who is an essential aid to compensate the lack of abilities to continue with the pregnancy adequately, for the child and as economic support\(^7\), once the families have a level of adaptability when faced with matters of situational stress, aiming always to improve their capacity for adapting and progressing in order to face these conditions\(^2,16\).

Well before be used to indulge me, I was his girl and now too. He is happy with the girl, and he still hasn’t stopped indulging me, and he adores the girl, and so does my mother. At first be didn’t care if I left, because he was angry, but when I came bone our relationship improved. (E15).

**Relationship with the partner**

Taking the decision to live as a couple or to get married amid the creation of a new family is not an easy task, it is a decision that should be the result of serious analysis, where the pros and cons are defined, after which a healthy family life can be attained, and despite normal difficulties, these can be overcome with mutual support. The results of this study demonstrate that adolescent pregnancy is not the result of a decision making process between the both of the partners, it is the consequence of lack of knowledge and not using any contraceptive methods, or using these incorrectly.

I was with him for around six months no more and during pregnancy for up to four months […] Well I planned with him the use of condoms, nothing else, and then I became pregnant. (E6).

However, adolescent pregnancies are not the result of sporadic sexual acts; they occur in previously established relations, in which the sexual activities began in a precocious manner\(^7\).

We are going to complete two years […] No, when we started living together, he and I wanted to have a baby […] After ten months I became pregnant. (E8).

Well, I wanted to finish my studies, but he wanted […] No we both wanted, but my idea was to finish school first and then become pregnant. (E9).

In literature living together or being married is associated to pregnancy, frequently the desire to have children during adolescence is associated with the couple, either in matrimony or common-law marriage\(^25\). Regarding the participation of the partner, initially it is an attitude of fear, followed by one of two conducts,
presence or absence; half of the participants stated that they had some support of the father of the child, despite not living together, and the other half stated that they were alone in their pregnancy, without any relationship with the father of their child.

We were close to one year together, he would come here, talk to my brothers, he is 19 years old [...] Yes, he left some four months ago, he knows I am pregnant [...] He is a healthy guy, but in turn he doesn't like to work. He was working when I met him, in construction work. He used to help me, give me money, but not anymore. (E14).

The support received from the partner is very important for the adolescents, once they consider that social acceptance to their pregnancy depends, in a great measure, to their relation with the father of their child(7). Nevertheless, one of the most significant factors in the relationship as a couple of the adolescents who are taking the responsibility of maternity without the support of a father figure, is that such relationships do not last more than one year.

Limitations and strengths of the study: during the performance of the study it was possible to observe on the part of the adolescents and of their parents a certain reluctance to participate of the research, besides some of the young girls approached for the study manifested feeling embarrassed of their state of pregnancy. The means of verification of adolescent pregnancy is the certificates of live birth, which hinders deeper knowledge on the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy in Pereira, Colombia.

Conclusion

Adolescent pregnancy is a complex multifactorial phenomenon, which among its many causes emphasis is given to homes with dysfunctional families, lack of sexual education, damaging social contexts and exploration of sexuality at an early age.

There are elements both of the social context as well as of the family context that are reflected in the testimonies of the adolescents that could be triggers for adolescent pregnancy. In the social context, there is a broad relationship between abandoning studies and cases of pregnancy at an early age, once the level of education is imperative for decision making and a responsible sexuality. On the other hand, the roles played by adolescents that become pregnant at an early age tend to increase the gap between poverty and wealth, once these young girls, due to the need for their own upkeep and of their child, are obliged to accept underpaid jobs.

In the family context, among the triggering factors of adolescent pregnancy, emphasis is given to dysfunctional families, composed mainly by a single parent. Another factor influencing the early start of sexual activities and adolescent pregnancy is the lack of trust and lack of dialogue with parents.

Limitations and strengths of the study: during the performance of the study it was possible to observe on the part of the adolescents and of their parents a certain reluctance to participate of the research, besides some of the young girls approached for the study manifested feeling embarrassed of their state of pregnancy. The means of verification of adolescent pregnancy is the certificates of live birth, which hinders deeper knowledge on the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy in Pereira, Colombia.

Collaborations:

1. conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Adriana Patricia López Benavides and Farlhyn Paola Bermúdez Moreno;
2. writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Adriana Patricia...
López Benavides and Farlhyn Paola Bermúdez Moreno;
3. final approval of the version to be published: Adriana Patricia López Benavides and Farlhyn Paola Bermúdez Moreno.

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