

COMPLETION OF A DREAM: THE CULTURAL MEANING OF PREGNANCY FOR PREGNANT TEENAGERS

REALIZAÇÃO DE UM SONHO: O SIGNIFICADO CULTURAL DA GRAVIDEZ PARA GESTANTES ADOLESCENTES

REALIZACIÓN DE UN SUEÑO: EL SIGNIFICADO CULTURAL DEL EMBARAZO PARA ADOLESCENTES EMBARAZADAS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Understanding the cultural meaning of pregnancy for pregnant teenagers.

Method: This is a qualitative field study, conducted in a Basic Health Unit in the city of Santa Maria/RS, between February and May 2012. Eight teenagers pregnant who attended prenatal care in the unit participated in the research. The narrative interview was used to collect data. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Santa Maria under number CAAE 00554512.0.0000.5346. **Results:** From the data analysis emerged two categories: “Feelings experienced by adolescents in pregnancy” and “I prefer to be a mother”. Teenage pregnant consider pregnancy to be a dream come true.

Conclusion: Pregnancy at this stage of life can be an individual choice, and this reality must be understood and demystified by modern society, especially health professionals.

Descriptors: Nursing; Culture; Pregnancy in adolescence.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Compreender o significado cultural da gravidez para gestantes adolescentes.

Método: Trata-se de um estudo de campo, qualitativo, realizado em uma Unidade Básica de Saúde da cidade de Santa Maria/RS, entre fevereiro e maio de 2012. Participaram da pesquisa oito gestantes adolescentes que faziam pré-natal na unidade. A entrevista narrativa foi utilizada na coleta dos dados. O estudo foi aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Universidade Federal de Santa Maria sob o número do CAAE 00554512.0.0000.5346.

Resultados: A partir da análise dos dados emergiram duas categorias: “Sentimentos vividos pelas adolescentes na gravidez” e “Prefiro ser mãe”. As gestantes adolescentes consideram a gravidez como a realização de um sonho. **Conclusão:** A gravidez nesta etapa de vida pode ser uma escolha individual, e é preciso que esta realidade seja compreendida e desmistificada pela sociedade moderna, principalmente pelos profissionais da saúde.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Cultura; Gravidez na adolescência.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: comprender el significado cultural del embarazo para adolescentes embarazadas.

Método: estudio de campo cualitativo, realizado en una Unidad Básica de Salud de la ciudad de Santa Maria/RS, entre febrero y mayo de 2012. En la investigación, participaron ocho adolescentes embarazadas que recibían atención prenatal en la unidad. La entrevista narrativa se utilizó para recopilar datos. El estudio fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidad Federal de Santa María bajo el número CAAE 00554512.0.0000.5346. **Resultados:** del análisis de datos surgieron dos categorías: “Sentimientos experimentados por las adolescentes en el embarazo” y “Prefiero ser madre”.

Las adolescentes embarazadas consideran que el embarazo es un sueño hecho realidad. **Conclusión:** el embarazo en esta etapa de la vida puede ser una elección individual, y esta realidad debe ser entendida y desmitificada por la sociedad moderna y, en especial, por los profesionales de la salud.

Descriptor: Enfermería; Cultura; Embarazo en la adolescencia.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the age delimitations of adolescence, it is necessary to understand it as a historically constructed way of living, conditioned by the particularities of the different social and cultural media that are conformed to a multiple and complex reality.¹ Instead of looking at adolescence strictly as a "phase and field of risk", we should understand the concept of vulnerabilities, whereby risks are directly associated with individual, family, cultural, social, political, economic and biological factors.²

It is understood that when reaching adolescence, the human being undergoes several transformations to reach maturity, among them, we highlight, in this study, those related to sexuality that can lead to the emergence of pregnancy in adolescence. These transformations often generate conflicts, doubts and expose the adolescent by the vulnerability of this phase of life. In this, sex is discovered, but there is a lack of guidance and accompaniment that make the adolescent understand her sexuality, and to experience this stage of life safely.³

Teenage pregnancy is a reality in our society and is a consequence of factors such as the lack of a specific and effective care policy in this age group, the absence of sex education in schools, the lack of family planning programs in public health services, among others.⁴

In addition, some authors state that there are some imminent risk factors for the occurrence of teenage pregnancy, such as early onset of sexual life, low levels of education and socioeconomic partners and ignorance of the reproductive physiological structure, such as the ability to identify the fertile period.⁵

The desire to be a mother often drives the adolescent to experience this experience in her concrete, which causes her to plan her pregnancy, or do not take precautions to prevent her. Sometimes the emergence of having a child can be influenced by a partner, which makes it come to bloom at will, then was not planned for that moment.⁶

In this sense, the inclusion of adolescents in health policies, especially those focused on sexual health and reproductive health, requires new questions about the reality of these subjects. It is imperative that such questions be asked to them, respecting, and considering their views, opinions, proposals, and social conditions of the environment in which they live. Creative capacity and the potential for social participation must be protected and

promoted in health practices and policies, as well as by other social policies.⁷ Creative capacity and the potential for social participation must be protected and promoted in health practices and policies, as well as by other social policies.⁷

It is perceived, however, that there is much to be studied about issues related to teenage pregnancy, and it is necessary to understand this theme to contribute to the implementation of contextualized and effective strategies in the reality of health services. Similarly, the search for knowledge in this area may reflect on possibilities of empowerment of the subjects involved, representing the opportunity of these to become agents of transformation of their social reality.

This study aimed to understand the cultural meaning of pregnancy for pregnant adolescents.

METHOD

This is a field study, with a qualitative approach, developed from March to July 2012. Regarding the qualitative approach,⁸ it is believed that this allowed the support of this study, considering that it allowed beyond an interpretation with lenses enlarged to the singularity of the object of study - *experience of being an adolescent mother*, an insertion in the culture of the "other".

The participants were eight pregnant adolescents who underwent prenatal follow-up at the Basic Health Unit (BHU). Pregnant adolescents were invited to participate in the study in the prenatal consultation, since the sample was intentional, and the participants were determined by the objective of the study.⁸

The scenario chosen for the development of the study was the northern region of the city of Santa Maria/RS, where the Kennedy Sanitary Unit (KSU) is located. It presents a series of problems related to social inequalities, including high rates of unemployment, violence, drug trafficking, malnutrition, infectious diseases, precarious basic sanitation, and housing. The condition of poverty is the reality of most residents of the region.

Considering the methodological path, the narrative⁹ was the strategy used to conduct the interviews in the production of data, allowing us to approach the experience narrated by the adolescents so that they did not inform, but recount their experiences favoring the understanding of the cultural meaning of pregnancy in their lives.

Thus, narratives are revealed as a possibility to understand and communicate subjective human experience, emphasizing meaning, the process of producing stories, the relationships between the narrator and the other participants, the processes of

knowledge and the multiplicity of ways to capture and understand the experience.⁹ The narrative interviews were conducted individually, according to the appointment scans with the pregnant women at the time of their prenatal consultations, at a place and time defined by them, occurring both at home and at the BHU. Data collection was audiorecorded, according to the consent/consent of the participants, and then transcribed for analysis.

Thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis, which consists of discovering the *nuclei of meanings* that constitute a communication in which frequency or presence have some meaning for the analytical object. Thematic analysis consists of three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the obtained results and interpretation.¹⁰

The norms of Resolution NO 196/96 of the National Health Council of the Ministry of Health were observed, which provides for guidelines and regulatory standards of research involving the participation of human beings. The project of this research was submitted to the authorization of the Municipal Health Department of Santa Maria (SMSSM); registered in Plataforma Brazil, under CAAE n° 00554512.0.0000.5346, and forwarded for consideration and approval by the Ethics and Research Committee of UFSM (CEP). Participants were provided

with the knowledge and signature of the Free and Informed Consent Form, which was signed by the guardian in case of minors under 18 years of age. In these cases, the participant also signed the Consent Term.

RESULTS

The results are presented in the following categories and their components: *Feelings experienced by adolescents in pregnancy* and *"I prefer to be a mother"*.

The narratives demonstrate that pregnancy for many adolescents is a dream or a perspective of life, being natural, expected and planned. For these adolescents, motherhood appears to be a form of personal fulfillment, the life plan to which the adolescent meets.

Feelings experienced by adolescents in pregnancy

For these adolescents, motherhood appears to be a form of personal fulfillment, the life plan to which the adolescent meets.

I think about me and my boyfriend, it is something to stop the fights you know, because we fought a lot, I beat head-on, our geniuses are not easy. The good thing is that we talk a lot now. He always tells me that I am going to be a good mother, we made a deal, I thought I did not want the same thing as me, but we want the same thing (A7, 16 years old).

My life today is quite different than it was before. I think I am more responsible now, you think, my son or daughter, because I do not know if he is a kid or a girl, he is going to need me, and I do not want him to have an irresponsible mother. I do not miss class anymore, because Before I never went, stayed on the street late and killed class (A2, 18 years old).

I want to give him a better life (baby), quiet, happy, I want to be close, give affection to him. I think it is going to be good for him, there is always going to be someone on my side and him. We are always going to be together. I already think about having other children, or this will be the last, I do not know, is in God's hand (A3, 19 years old).

Being a mother means a way of putting yourself in the world as social subjects. Before they were just girls, and they became women who have their partners fixed, their houses, their responsibilities, as seen in the statements, the following:

I would rather have the kid go around at night than the others. I prefer to be a mother, it is more responsibility (A5, 13 years old).

But I will try to work hard to be able to give her a better future, to give her a childhood that I did not have (A6, 17 years old).

Now I know I must take care of myself; I cannot go out dancing and drink like I did, I went out a lot, drank (A8, 19 years old).

It is also noticed that some adolescents demonstrated increased sensitivity and a certain ambivalence of feelings, a common fact in this period of life, full of physiological and emotional transformations, as perceived through these responses:

Then after it came back, I cried because I was a little scared, because of my father, and because I was happy too. I felt both (A5, 13 years old).

It was a fright for me, I felt it all at the same time. All possible feelings. I felt happy, I thought it was not true. I felt terrified. Everything you can imagine at the same time, because I was the one who advised others, said "watch your belly" (A7, 16 years old).

Other adolescents reported some difficulties at the time of pregnancy discovery, the feeling of new responsibility and of announcing the pregnancy to partners. It is also perceived the support of these and the feeling of relief for them:

I almost fell back, didn't I? I had a lot of pain in my belly. Then I went for an ultrasound, I was alone. I was nervous. I was not planning it; it was too early yet. We were renting house, still right? Then he was happier than me (A1, 16 years old).

So, with these two pharmacy exams that came back positive that I did at home alone, I sat down, talked to God, thanked you, but I cried a lot. When he found out, he was happy, so that is when I got happier, you know, gave a relief, I felt more comforted. Hence, I wanted to assume this pregnancy (A2, 18 years old).

I did not get the feeling of giving the news of saying "love sits I want to give you news": - "I'm pregnant". That is what I wanted to do the most, like a movie, a soap opera. It was boring that part; I suffered a lot. I am happy, sometimes it gives that thing so I could be enjoying my life in another way, but then I stop, Think, put my hand in my belly, feel it, I see it talking to her, it is something else. Then I already go into another reality and turn into another (A6, 17 years old).

It was hard, at first it was because I did not want to, it is a lot of responsibility, so I had to accept it, but now that is all I want. I think it is a joy, now I am happier. I was very shy before, very closed. Now I talk more, I have more to talk about, I feel happy. Having someone inside you is quite different. For me it was a great thing (A8, 19 years old).

“I'd rather be a mother”

One of the aspects evidenced is the fact that the adolescent, when she became pregnant, may be fulfilling a dream. And

this decision, which includes not only a reproductive biological act, but a social process involving interactions with their relatives, their partner, and the desire to become a mother and enter the adult world, as seen in the fragments of the narratives:

I feel more like a girl less girly; you know, it looks like I am another. I have been creating a feeling of mother that I cannot explain, it is something that I think only who a mother is knows. It is a strong and unconditional thing (A2, 18 years old).

It is not because I am young that I cannot be a mother (A4, 17 years old).

I would rather have the kid go around at night than the others. I prefer to be a mother, it is more responsibility (A5, 13 years old).

For some adolescents, pregnancy is permeated with good expectations, because since its discovery, mothers begin to plan.

My plans are to take care of my son, we are looking for another house to rent, smaller than the one that is large (A1, 16 years old).

But I want my mother around to help me, because I know it is not easy raising a child. And then you can come another one, you will know. Now we are there in the mother to get money and make our house (A4, 17 years old).

DISCUSSION

Positive feelings regarding motherhood predominated over negative ones, because the quality of life of these adolescents had improved. The feeling of emptiness that existed in relation to life, the incorporation of the maternal role, obtaining a reason to live, the feeling of self-confidence, the responsibility to continue living, and the feeling of belonging to a family, were some of the positive aspects mentioned by the adolescents.

Within this perspective, in their study, authors¹² emphasize that the representation of motherhood as something positive and socially valued prevails in our culture. Therefore, it is essential that, when seeking to know the representations about teenage pregnancy, we note the fact that the representations of the subjects are shown as a social product, that is, adolescents elaborate their representations about teenage pregnancy from their social context.

Many adolescents changed their lifestyle after incorporating the maternal role. They distanced themselves from their friends and left "life on the street" to pay more attention to their children. Changes were evaluated positively for them.

Another relevant factor that explains the happiness of adolescents because they got pregnant, according to a study,¹³ is the

possibility of establishing a family, even in precarious conditions and at an early stage of life, because having a house to live in and control over the situation represented the possibility of freedom to do everything that was not possible to do, living in the home of parents or relatives.

In some societies, even, it is expected of the woman who has already left the house of the parents to live with the partner who, after a period of stable union, constitute a family with children, regardless of the economic conditions or maturity of the couple. The study of the Institute of Applied Economic Research¹² raises the possibility that motherhood, among Brazilian adolescents, would be a strategy to increase its social role, since motherhood is a valued social role.

In the narratives, this affective ambivalence is perceived in the oscillation between desire and non-desire for pregnancy, the desire and non-desire of the child. There is no total acceptance or total rejection of pregnancy, because as a study states,¹³ the opposite feeling will never be entirely absent.

However, it is noted that several associated events, such as the parents' ignorance about the beginning of sexual activity, emotional and affective dependence, the process of adult personality formation and other characteristics common to the adolescence

period, potentiate feelings, such as fear, insecurity, anguish, and anxiety.

When referring to the increase in responsibilities, it is perceived, as in another study¹⁴ in this theme, that there seems to be a search for stability revealed through the perception of the child as something proper, a good. This can reveal an attempt to obtain autonomy, reach maturity and realize their own competence to care for the child.

It is also perceived the lack of experience in playing the role of mother. Verbalizations refer to difficulties and insecurity in the childcare process. It is necessary to understand that issues related to the transition to the maternal role cannot be associated only with biological issues, but also with social and emotional issues, because the complexity of the transition phenomenon involves not only the adolescent, but her entire network of relationships.

To minimize the difficulties that motherhood brings, it is necessary for women to build supports based on knowledge, responsibility, creativity, safety, love, affection, understanding and synchronism, for their adjustment to motherhood.

When they are adolescents, with few financial conditions for planning professional growth, they can seek their personal satisfaction in what they consider

as a personal construction that can be realized. Thus, social recognition as a productive subject can occur through the conception of a child in motherhood.

The literature indicates that pregnancy in a woman's life does not occur randomly, but rather by pre-established priorities, that is, the elaboration of plans, projects, or the realization of sexual practice, since they know contraceptive methods to prevent pregnancy.¹⁵

The adolescents aspire to constitute a new home, characterizing an independence of their families of origin. However, one of the adolescents pointed out the need for her new home to be close to that of her family, demonstrating emotional dependence on her.

For the adolescent, the realization of the desire for a new home can mean the realization of her representation as an adult and autonomous individual, in addition to her ability as a mother to offer her child subsistence and an environment conducive to their development, regardless of the structural composition of her family of origin.

CONCLUSION

It is perceived that the adolescents construct their identity as a mother, from their gestational experience and the construction of an identity of a mother-woman. The study also demonstrates that

society has been undergoing changes over time and that these have influenced the representations about motherhood, evidencing the existence of elements such as the desire to be a mother, even though it is adolescent.

It is noted that both families and partners of adolescents are supporters of pregnancy, even if, first, the discovery of pregnancy causes doubt and anxiety to adolescents. Although teenage pregnancy is characterized, in the general sense, as an out-of-hours advent and tied to other constituents of negative connotation, it is also elaborated and perceived by adolescents as a generating event of positive conditions.

Thus, it is evident an inherent duality to being a female adolescent from more popular classes, who, despite repeating a social discourse of inadequacy and incompatibility between pregnancy and adolescence, has the pregnancy represented naturally. The meanings that pregnancy has, in the lives of these adolescents, were represented in the account of feelings that involved love, happiness and responsibility.

As limitations of the study, it is considered that the cultural meaning of the pregnancy evidenced represents the perspective of a group of pregnant adolescents, with specific characteristics and belonging to a sociocultural context, thus not being generalized to the entire

universe of individuals who experience pregnancy in adolescence. Therefore, it is proposed that further studies be developed, contemplating pregnant adolescents from other contexts and with other characteristics. In addition, it is emphasized that the reduced number of participants was due to the difficulty in accessing and capturing them for participation in the research, because pregnant adolescents had high abstention from prenatal consultations.

Nevertheless, it is understood that the interpretation of the collected data in this research can collaborate in the construction of subsidies that allow singular reflections on the experience of teenage pregnancy as an individual choice, allowing, in addition to the deconstruction and reconstruction of concepts, to remove prejudices and tensions that permeate this theme, although this still assumes stereotypes of social problem, behavioral disorder or irresponsibility. Furthermore, it is thought to contribute so that this theme, in the education of health professionals, is seen and perceived as a reality that must be accepted, understood, and worked on by all.

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