



SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF PREGNANT ADOLESCENTS ABOUT MATERNITY

REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DE ADOLESCENTES GRÁVIDAS SOBRE A MATERNIDADE REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES DE ADOLESCENTES EMBARAZADAS SOBRE LA MATERNIDAD

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the social representations of pregnant adolescents about maternity. **Methodology:** it is a qualitative, descriptive research, based on the Social Representations Theory. Seven pregnant adolescents aged from 13 to 19 years old participated in this survey, they were all being attended with prenatal care in a Family Health Unit in a town in Bahia. The Data collection was done through recorded interviews, with the signature of the terms of free and clear permission, performed between March and April 2011, after the approval of the Committee of Ethics in Research of the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), Protocol number 022/2011. Through the analysis of the thematic content of the information obtained by semi-structured interviews, the following categories emerged: Adolescence; Is pregnancy an adolescent issue? and Maternity. **Results:** the adolescents represented maternity at that stage as something negative due to the privations in their personal, social and educational life; and as something positive associated with the responsibility of taking care of a child. **Conclusion:** the complete knowledge can enhance actions turned to the reception, sexual and reproductive education and prenatal care in order to improve the pregnancy planning as well as the responsible maternity. **Descriptors:** adolescence; pregnancy; adolescent pregnancy.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar as representações sociais das adolescentes grávidas sobre a maternidade. **Metodologia:** trata-se de uma pesquisa descritiva, qualitativa, fundamentada na Teoria das Representações Sociais. Participaram sete adolescentes gestantes com idade de 13 a 19 anos, em acompanhamento de pré-natal em uma Unidade de Saúde da Família de um município do interior da Bahia. A coleta de dados foi realizada por meio de entrevistas gravadas, com assinatura dos termos de consentimentos livre e esclarecido, realizadas entre março e abril de 2011, após aprovação o Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB) Protocolo nº. 022/2011. A partir da análise de conteúdo temática das informações obtidas por entrevistas semi-estruturadas emergiram as categorias: Adolescência; Gravidez é coisa de adolescente? e Maternidade. **Resultados:** as adolescentes representaram a maternidade nessa fase como algo negativo devido às privações na sua vida pessoal, social e educacional; e a algo positivo associado à responsabilidade ao cuidar do filho. **Conclusão:** o conhecimento desvelado pode municiar ações voltadas para o acolhimento, educação sexual e reprodutiva e acompanhamento pré-natal de forma a favorecer o planejamento da gravidez e a maternidade responsável. **Descritores:** adolescência; gravidez; gravidez na adolescência.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar las representaciones sociales de las adolescentes embarazadas acerca de la maternidad. **Metodología:** tratase de un estudio descriptivo, cualitativo, basado en la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales. Los participantes fueron siete adolescentes embarazadas entre 13 y 19 años en prenatal de vigilancia en una Unidad de Salud de la Familia de un municipio del interior de Bahia. La recolección de datos se realizó por medio de entrevistas grabadas, con firma de los términos de consentimiento libres e explicado, realizado entre marzo y abril de 2011, aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB) Protocolo N. 022/2011. A partir del análisis del contenido temático de las informaciones obtenidas por entrevistas semi-estructuradas surgieron las categorías: La adolescencia; ¿Embarazo es cosa de adolescente? y Maternidad. **Resultados:** las adolescentes representaran la maternidad en esa etapa como algo negativo debido a las privaciones en su vida personal, social y educacional; y algo positivo asociado a la responsabilidad al cuidar del hijo. **Conclusión:** el conocimiento revelado puede proporcionar acciones para la recepción, la educación sexual y reproductiva y prenatal de manera que favorezca a la planificación del embarazo y la maternidad responsable. **Descritores:** adolescencia; embarazo; embarazo en la adolescencia.

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INTRODUCTION

The term adolescence derives from the Latin word *adolescere*, which means to grow until maturity. It is interpreted by the authors in some different ways, however, they all corroborate that it is the period of transition from the infant to the adult stage of life and that it is full of enormous psychological, social and biological changes.¹⁻⁴ The adolescent goes through a search of their social role definition, experiencing several losses and achievements trying to know something new, and culture is a determining factor in the formation of this social role and also in the sexual life of this group of individuals, molding them according to their beliefs.¹

A long time ago it was believed that marriage was the expected social role for girls aged between 12 and 14 years old and consequently, at this life stage, pregnancy was something expected and socially accepted.⁵ However, nowadays the society attributes the schooling activity and the professional preparation to ages from 12 to 20 years old because it is believed that it is necessary to achieve adulthood, to finish the studies, to have a better job and salary, so that they can be in charge of having babies.⁶

In this perspective the pregnancy which occurs during adolescence is considered a social and public health care problem.^{1,3,9-10} And it is because it generates a very fast transition in the vital cycle in which the daughter/adolescent assumes the role of being a mother/adult too.¹⁰ We also have to consider the maternal-fetal risks such as: pregnancy hypertension sickness, anemia, hemorrhage and other labor complications and puerperium and prematurity^{9,11}, besides the interruption of their life plans and projects.^{1,8}

Differing from this negative idea of adolescent pregnancy, some researchers criticize the reductionist vision which treats such pregnancy as a 'problem', they see this idea as limiting and preconceptional, something that can cause conceptual restrictions and implications in the development of researches and also in the professional practice, especially the nursing ones during the planning and execution of the health care actions towards these individuals.¹²⁻⁴ This way the negative and pejorative idea of adolescent maternity can have conceptual interferences during the studies and also in the practice of the health care team towards this group of individuals.¹²

The challenges and overcoming situations experienced by adolescents in general, and by pregnant adolescents generate symbolizations

and meanings showed in representations that can be positive and negative as well. These representations constitute some elements which generate knowledge formed by these young girls together with their group of relations as a way of answering the discussions in order for the happenings to make sense, as well as the acts and themselves.¹⁵

According to the reflections above we can ask: How the pregnant adolescents represent the maternity at this stage? The knowledge of the adolescents' representations about maternity shows some socially built meanings that interfere the behavior and practice of this group, and besides this, it provides help which can orientate the practice of taking care.

So, this study aims:

- To analyze the Social Representations of the pregnant adolescents about maternity. Specifically.
- To understand the Social Representations about adolescence.
- To identify the Social Representations of adolescents about pregnancy.
- To verify the Social Representations of the adolescents about maternity.
- To describe the positive and negative aspects of the adolescent pregnancy.

METHODOLOGY

It is a qualitative, descriptive research, based on the methodological-theoretical support of the Social Representations Theory (TRS). Seven pregnant adolescents aged between 13 and 19 years old participated in this survey, all of them were going through prenatal care in a Unity of Family Health Care of a suburb located in a town in Bahia. This Unity was selected because it presented the highest number of pregnant adolescents in the town, during the period of July to December of 2010, according to some data collected through the System of Information of the Basic Attention (SIAB) and the System of Attendance of the Humanization Program in the Prenatal and Birth Care (SISPRENATAL).

Initially, we identified and approached the pregnant adolescents considering the age adopted by the World Health Organization, which is from 10 to 19 years old. The participants were met through some visits in their homes with the help of the health community agents (ACS), according to institutional authorization. After the acceptance and signature of the Term of Free and Clear Permission by the participants and their legal guardians, it was scheduled the day

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and time for the interviews at the Family Health Unity, scenery of the study.

The data was collected from March to April 2011. We used a form as a guide to apply the technique of the semi-structured interview. The interview was performed individually, audio recorded (20 minutes each, in average) and after, it was transcribed to guarantee the reliability of the data. It is important to highlight that to keep the anonymity, the interviewed girls had their names omitted and substituted by alphabetic letters.

The data collection was preceded by sending and having the approval of the project by the Committee of Ethics in Research of the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia (UESB), protocol number 022/2011, following the Resolution 196/96 of the National Health Council.

To treat and analyze the data we used the Bardin's Analyzes of Content which represents a group of techniques of communication analyzes that uses systematic proceedings and objects of content description of the messages.

Among the several techniques we selected a Thematic Analysis and performed the cutting, classification and grouping of the nucleus of the text meanings, we kept in mind the reaching of the results. The following categories emerged from such interpretations: Adolescence; Is pregnancy and adolescent issue? And Maternity, represented as follows.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

● Participants' Characterization

In this study three participants were attending secondary school, three of them stopped studying and are housewives and only one of them is attending high school. About the family income, six of them informed that they earn until a minimum wage and have a family income of one to two minimum wages. Concerning their race/color, two of them are brown, two are black, one is white and the other is Asian. Regarding their marital status, three of them are single, three live with their partner and one of them is married. In this group it is predominant first pregnancy adolescents who live at home with more than three people; only one is having their second baby.

The above adolescents' characterization matches the majority of researches which are performed in Brazil, focusing the adolescent pregnancy, something which is frequently associated with a profile of individuals who live in an environment where low education, dropout and bad economic conditions prevail.⁹

● Thematic Categories

According to the reports of the adolescents through the thematic analysis of the material three categories were shown and illustrated by the pertinent talks. The categories which emerged were: Adolescence, Pregnancy and Maternity. Two of them show subcategories that systematize and refine the understanding of the social representation of the interviewed girls about maternity.

● Adolescence

The interviewed girls in this survey represented the adolescence as a moment of having fun (to go out, parties, dating) and planning the future (studying, being someone). These changes represent a special stage in the life of this group because it constitutes a positive moment, full of expectations, freedom and desires, as it is defined by one of the interviewed girls:

New way of living [...] we go out more often, you know, [...] we invest more, studying, that is the time of dating (B).

We realize that enjoyment is an important part in the lives of the adolescents, they leave the childhood games behind in order to do other things such as go out, date, go to parties. This moment of having fun is seen as a way of enjoying the life, exposing themselves to what is modern and fashion.¹⁷

The adolescence is also represented by the participants of this survey as the stage of setting their goals and searching for the fulfillment of their future dreams through the studies mainly.

Studying, playing, being someone [...], going ahead, [...], it is something and the adolescence is very good (A).

The adolescent has to study, they had to graduate [...] (D).

These speeches prove the finding that the adolescents consider education as a way of having a profession.¹⁸⁻¹⁹ Dadoorian and Marcelino et al add that when they do not finish school, most of the time the adolescents find in difficult to get financial and professional independence.¹⁸⁻⁹

For the adolescents who took part in this survey, planning the future, being recognized, included and having importance in life are all linked to the possibility of studying. This thought that relies upon the myth of social mobility in which if you have the individual merit of succeeding - through the studies in this case - then there is social ascension.¹⁹

This way people represent the stage of adolescence as a positive moment, not only by observing the fact that this is a stage of

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discoveries and changes of lifestyle, but also because this is the time for studying, planning and dreaming about the future, dedicating themselves to the personal and professional improvement.

● Is pregnancy an adolescent issue?

In this category we grouped the reports that highlighted the representation of the adolescent pregnancy, refined in the subcategories: Realizing a dream; No planning/acceptation of pregnancy; Premature and Doubt of (In) compatibility.

● Realizing a dream

In this survey three adolescents claimed having planned the pregnancy. This conscious and desired intention of having a baby constitutes, many times, these adolescents' dreams, as we can notice in the following speech:

It was [planned]. I'm happy every time He moves in my uterus. It's different because before my sister, she got pregnant earlier I always felt like being pregnant, I thought I would never be so.

I just kept wondering how it moved (D).

It was [planned]. I always wanted to be a mother (C).

The importance of maternity in the life of a woman recognizes that the female identity is kept by ideologies that determine places and choices of women, reassuring their role of ensuring the maintenance and continuity of life.^{10,20}

We also observed that these adolescents desire to have a baby, not as something isolated, but something associated with other factors such as their partner Will, as it is visible in the report below:

He wanted to be a father; I also wanted to be a mother, so we accepted all (B).

Happy [about the pregnancy], I told my boyfriend, he liked it too, we wanted to have a baby (C).

My mom loved it, it looks like my husband got kind of happy [he also planned the pregnancy with her], but he doesn't show it a lot (D).

The desire of having a baby stimulates the adolescent to fulfill such will and experience it fully, and it makes them plan their pregnancy; however, this choice considers not only a reproductive biological act, but also a social process which involves interactions with the family and their partner.²⁰

This way it is clear that for this group of adolescents who planned their pregnancy, the desire of having a baby is related to the gender social relations, understanding that the socially determined role of women, the

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procreation, is also linked to their partners' will and also to the social-cultural conditions of this woman.

No planning/acceptation of pregnancy

From the seven interviewed girls in this survey, four of them did not plan the pregnancy, and the first feeling was being surprised, the result of a magic thought "this will never happen to her" with an after acceptance expressed with the pregnancy, as we could observe in the following report, when she was asked about the conception planning:

No [planned], it happened. I got happy. It's been two years I'm married, then we used Condon, but after we stopped it, then it happened (F).

No [planned]. [...] I did na ultrasound exam, then I was pregnant, my boyfriend also knew it, He got scared, because it was sudden, he was worried, but now he's ok (G).

This way the pregnancy discovering is a mixture of ambiguous feelings, first the adolescent shows surprise when they find it, and then they accept the pregnancy and feel happy about this happening. Other researches also point duality about the feelings the adolescents experience, which is initially negative, however they believe having a baby is a good thing.^{7,20}

The non planned pregnancy occurs because of the lack of knowledge of the adolescents about their body, sexuality, reproductive health, as well as of the contraception methods or about the correct use of them and because of a premature sexual initiation which has happened more often, leading several women to interrupt the pregnancy by aborting.^{6,21-2}

The issue of abortion was raised in this survey, when one of the interviewed girls told us she had thought about it as an initial solution for the unexpected and non prepared pregnancy, and she had only given it up because of the fear of the bad consequences of this attitude:

I was abort [fetus] [...] He almost bought the medicine for it [partner], but then I could not take it [...] because if I take medicine, there was the danger of dying, my daughter alone, so there are some kinds of medicine which can cause problems, contract, you have to do so many things! So I said never mind, let's leave it there (A).

The health education activities and the family planning are extremely important for the adolescents, because they provide necessary reflections and clarifications so that they can be protagonist of their lives.²³ The

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nurse and their health team must perform actions focused on the promotion, prevention and assistance to health, and the two firsts are more relevant for working with this group of people.¹

In the promotion of sexual and reproductive health, it is needed to understand the world conceptions and the behavior upon the matters of the sexual life of the adolescents focusing to provide them with much more than the simple access to the input and information about the contraception questions.²⁴

Regarding the non planned pregnancy acceptance by the adolescents, it is clear that the desire of being a mother is the determining factor in this situation; they believe their baby will be an affective company and a way of distraction with whom they will be able to rely and trust.²⁰ We can notice it as it follows:

[The baby] Will [bring], a lot of happiness, only like this she will have a company [the other daughter], because I only have her, to bring happiness, to be a company at home (A).

This way, although not having planned to have a baby, it is experienced by these adolescents as a moment of expectations translated sometimes by a group of positive feelings, because they believe this 'new being' will be an affective company in their lives.

● Premature

Most of the group of people understood the adolescent pregnancy as something premature, associated with immaturity for being a mother and the little responsibility, as it was observed in the reports:

[...] Too young, too young, she is more immature with the responsibility, she is not aware of what is happening (D).

Well, if she had got pregnant at 20 years old or more, it would be ok! Because when it happens at 18 years old we are too young for being a mother. And I think at 20 years old or more it is better (F).

The adolescent pregnancy is represented as an experience that should be avoided at this transitional moment from the childhood stage to the adult one, and the ideas and feelings expressed by these interviewed girls match the cultural values of a society that attributes the preparation of having a baby to the adulthood.

It happens because the present society attributes to the adolescence the moment of getting ready to adult life, with the studies improvement in order to have a better place

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in the work market and, only after this stage; women will be ready for pregnancy.⁶

In this aspect, getting pregnant during the adolescence is surrounded by negative representations, seen as immature, something which guide and build the adolescents' interpretations concerning the pregnancy, and it reverberates through the daily lives of these adolescents.

● Doubt about (in) compatibility

The condition of having a baby provides the majority of the adolescents of this survey with questionings about their stage of life, as it can be seen in the report:

[...] I think that I'm a teenager, it doesn't mean I'm not a teenager anymore because I got pregnant, isn't it? (G).

This way we realize a mixture of feelings experienced by this pregnant adolescent, who is in doubt about being an adolescent, or if she is in a new group, the mother-adult one. In this perspective we can notice a process of intense personal and social restructuring and readjustment, causing identity change and roles' redefinition, articulated with organic and psychic alterations.¹⁰

● Maternity

It is highlighted in this category, the social representation of maternity by the adolescents was identified through the privation and responsibility of being a mother subcategories. The maternity is seen as a moment of changes in the life of these adolescents, freedom privation, specifically of leisure and studies; and the personal maturation due to the new responsibilities which emerge: the house and baby care.

● Privation

The adolescents from this survey represented the adolescent maternity as an event which is surrounded by privations and negative aspects related to leisure, fun and studies. As it can be noticed in the speech below:

No, it's not good, it's a problem, a problem, because then you wanna study, do another thing, I wanna find a job too, do another thing and nothing goes well [...] sometimes there's a party, you can't go, you have to stay home. [...] I didn't use to stay home, only outside, party all the time [...] I studied, came back here, stayed here [...] we stayed out at the snack bar until late at night. Nowadays, I can't stay out, not even until six o'clock [...] (A).

This finding confirms the understanding that the adolescent maternity brings some alterations in the family life interfering in the sleeping pattern, resting, eating habits,

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leisure and in some cases it stops the adolescents from improving themselves personally.²⁵

The adolescent maternity has a great social relevance because of the changes that occur in the personal, social and educational life which happen in the daily life of a teenager who gets pregnant, transformations that are concentrated in the psychosocial sphere, changing their schooling life most of the time, determining the dropout and making them leave their group of friends as well as their life projects.^{9,26-7}

Some authors claim that the educational scope is the most affected by maternity because it prevents the necessary mobility to go to school regularly, as well as the fact that they have little time to dedicate themselves to the studies.^{7,33}

• The Responsibility of Being a Mother

Being responsible means to be in charge of your own actions or of others', or even to be legally or morally in charge of somebody's life.⁹ According to this understanding we can note that, for the adolescents, the maternity can represent a transition to the adult life, when you get more responsibilities^{8,27} that together with the maternal preoccupations and the personal growth, determine the motivation towards the newborn baby's care.²⁸

This situation was evident in the speech of the adolescents when they stated maternity as responsibility that requires maternal growth to develop the new roles which are inherent in the mother's condition. As we can notice by the speech of an adolescent who is pregnant for the second time:

You have to take care, give bath, feed at the right time, put them in bed at the right time, organize the house, wash the house to be clean, not to have bacteria, be sick, ah, there's a lot of responsibility, it's a lot of thing, medicine, they get sick and you have to be there [...] (A).

This representation expresses the culturally established image that the maternity is associated with the responsibility with the house and with the baby's care.^{29-30,33} However, there are studies which point some social changes due to women's achievements in the society mainly, something which brings new family models, with a more flexible vision of the role of a father and a mother.³¹

During the interview, there were few adolescents who mentioned the participation of their partner or the baby's father in the pregnancy, and when they were asked about them, most of them represented the father

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figure as a distant, strict person, whose main role is to be the provider. This demonstrates a yet sexist and patriarchal conception of the family according to this group of people. This family system is based on the mother figure as understanding, a good companion, and loving; and the father figure as repressive, distant from the children and punitive.²⁹

This way, there is a great deal of values to be broken as the pregnancy is still seen as a mother's responsibility⁵, leaving the father away from the pregnancy process, maybe for being afraid of it, pressure, or exclusion, and many times it is not allowed for this adolescent (man-father) to demonstrate worry and care with their children.⁹

This definition of roles about what is male and female is noticeable since childhood when the child is submitted to stereotypes that during the socialization process determine their social role.¹⁰

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Studying the adolescents' social representations about adolescence, pregnancy and maternity has allowed us to go into some knowledge that values the psychosocial aspects involved in the process of pregnancy/maternity in adolescence. In this meaning, the results of this survey made it possible to explain the group of concepts and thoughts which came from the interviewed girls from their social context.

It was evident that the adolescents in this survey represent the adolescence as a moment of having fun and investing in their Professional improvement (study), what matches the new conceptions of the society for this stage of life.

The participants represented the adolescent pregnancy as the result of their desire to be mothers. There was also the association between the pregnancy at this stage and the fantasy idea that "it will never happens to her", but, with later acceptance, they considered the baby as the figure of affection and company. The occurrence of the pregnancy was symbolized yet as something precocious, associated with immaturity to be a mother and the little responsibility. It was also noticeable the appearance of doubts related to their life stages, something which came with all the process of transformation that the pregnancy brings to this girl-woman.

The maternity was represented by the participants as something negative because it imposes privation to go to parties, getting distant from friends and school on girls; however, some of them highlighted the

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positive aspect of the anticipation of responsibility acquirement, as for the baby's care and for their own lives.

The pregnancy/maternity process in adolescence is complex and it involves some peculiar characteristics to the situation of the group of adolescents, but it is not justifiable to generalize the understanding of this process as a problem, as it has been shown in other surveys. This way, it is important to understand the reason that motivated these women to get pregnant and offer them some help to deal with the biopsychosocial changes.

It is shown then, that the knowledge of the representations of this group about pregnancy, maternity and adolescence provides some tools, so that the nurses can evaluate the development of the health working process, the Professional practices and the health-illness process.³² making it possible to improve the assistance offered to these adolescents and the implementation of innovative strategies of sexual education, some improvements in the assistance and facilities in the reception so that there is a better attendance to prenatal care, a better pregnancy experience and some help for a responsible maternity.

The maturation to the wide experience of pregnancy and to the maternity demands Professional attendance and family involvement in the whole assistance with oriented actions to the psychosocial dimension in which some issues about the evolutionary pregnancy development are inserted and that interfere in the growth process of the individual.²⁸

So, it is concluded that the understanding of the process of getting an adolescent, values, ideas and desires of the life stage; as well as the different sides involved in the process of being pregnant at this period of life and their most important needs: the involvement of the baby's father, the adolescent's family and the performance of the health professionals can contribute to their sexual and reproductive health, and also, to the maturation for the wide experience of pregnancy and maternity when planned and desired at this life stage.

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