



PREGNANT TEENAGERS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF SOUTHERN BRAZIL: BODIES THAT VANISH FROM SCHOOLS!

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ABSTRACT

This article integrates the results of a qualitative study that aimed to characterize the practices related to sex education and profile the treatment received by pregnant teenagers in 30 state primary schools in the city of Novo Hamburgo, Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), with the intention of examining the processes of sex education in schools, as well as analyze the evasion and educational/social exclusion of these students. Theoretically, we have retrieved some contribution from gender studies. The results were obtained through interviews with the management staff of these educational institutions. We conclude that the stigmas surrounding teenage pregnancy marginalize the teenager, and the disregard towards this social issue is one of the enablers for the school dropout of the great majority of pregnant adolescents. In the study conducted, we confirmed the social/academic exclusion of these teenagers.

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INTRODUCTION

In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, precocious pregnancies have significant coverage, even if reference is made to a possible decrease in the number of teenage pregnancies. Pregnant teenagers represent 17,4% of total pregnancies, according to the 2008 balance sheets, and we can assume even larger numbers seeing as abortion is outlawed in Brazil. For this reason, the teenagers seeking private clandestine clinics when deciding to terminate their pregnancies may acquire health complications from often poorly-done abortions.

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These adolescents may end up dying from this procedures, on which, in most cases, the declared cause of death will be another due to the clandestine status of the abortion. A national survey from 2013 indicates that there are 5.2 million teenage women aged 15 to 17 years in Brazil. Of these women, 414.105 would have at least one child, and from that number, only 104.731 of them were in school; the other 309.374 would be out of school. It also points out that most of the young women do not work and/or study, and only a minority of 52.062 of them work (Moreno and Gonçalves, 2015). Early pregnancy is, undoubtedly, an issue of global concern, and occupies a place within the United Nations (UN) approved Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The fifth goal, regarding the improvement of maternal health, has an indicator on adolescent fertility and highlights its necessary reduction transcendence of this objective and its incidence in the fulfillment of the others. The concern about the maternity of women and teenagers, theme of the fifth MDG, establishes as a

goal to the verification of its compliance in Brazil the reduction of maternal mortality rate to 35 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015. In order to get an idea of the full picture of childbirth in Brazil, cesarean delivery represented, in 2012, almost 56% of births in the country. The births in children under 15 years present 39.8% of cesarean deliveries, a very intrusive intervention that presents serious risks to both the women and their children. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that this practice should not exceed 15% of deliveries (Republic Presidency - Secretariat for Women's Policies 2015). In Brazil, the Ministry of Health considers teenage pregnancy as public health problem. Since 2005, its research on motherhood has begun to be considered as a significant group of teenagers between 10 and 14 years old (IBGE 2009). The dimensions of this issue, clearly verifiable in our daily lives, present us teenage pregnancy as a concern that surrounds us and intertwines itself with our concerns and investigative motivations. In our first analyzes, we focused our attention on the experiences on gestation, the mother-daughter relationship, on how the processes of sexual identification with the significant other occurred and which nexuses were able to interconnect with the pregnancy (Quaresma da Silva 2007).

The complexity of the subjects and its multiple mediations highlight some questions that guide our studies: what is happening in schools in terms of sexual education? Are there targeted actions - both curricular and extracurricular - towards the prevention of teenage pregnancy? What is sex education for teenagers? How is sex education conducted in schools? What happens to the pregnant teenagers? What kind of treatment do they receive at the schools? What significance is given, at the school, to teenage pregnancy? How is the subject addressed? Are the schools truly prepared to do so? How does one fit sex education into pedagogical training? (Quaresma da Silva 2012). We believe that schools offer an unquestionable context for their significance in preventing teenage fertility, not forgetting the necessary coparticipation of other institutions/groups in the commitment on this topic. On the other hand, we acknowledge the importance of institutions and groups in the treatment of the aforementioned topic to overcome discourses that become harmful over their punitive, exclusionary and contradictory nature on sexuality.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed, on the whole, a quantitative-qualitative methodology, but specifically in this text, we highlight the results that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the research entitled "Geographies of the exclusion of pregnant adolescents in schools of southern Brazil: abject bodies". This research aimed to characterize the practices related to sex education and depict the treatment given to pregnant teenagers in educational institutions, as well as look into the school evasion of these students, with the intention of examining the processes of sexual education in schools. To achieve such goals, semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, pedagogical coordinators and educational supervisors in 30 state primary¹ schools in the city of Novo Hamburgo, Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), during the second half the year of 2014 and throughout 2015. For the data analysis process, the contributions of the content analysis method

(Bardin 2002) were considered. The development of this study was integrated with the compliance with the pertinent ethical and scientific foundations, according to the Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council. This resolution values the respect and dignity regarding the information to be collected, upholding the confidentiality of the data obtained. All participants who voluntarily consented to contribute to this study signed the Informed Consent Form (TCLE), and were informed about the purpose of the research and of the intent to safeguard the privacy of the confidentiality of participants' identities as a premise to be primarily respected by the Code of the Regional Council of Psychology (CRP) and the Declaration of Commitment of the Researcher.

Analysis of emerging categories: results and discussion

The content analyzes of the interviews exposed categories that deserve to be commented and explored based on their political implications and the biopsychosocial development of teenagers.

Absence of a particular institutional project for the mainstreaming of sexual education

Albeit the professionals who make up the school's management team are aware of what is established in the NCP's, regarding the proposal to mainstream sex education, there is a misinterpretation that creates obstacles for the existence of an institutional project which should establish and define the particular procedures to be adopted by each school. It is a recurring situation in most of the surveyed schools, and there is a clear tendency to confuse the cross-cutting theme with something non-institutionalized, organized, or planned. It is known that educational actions can be a demand in any circumstance, but we cannot, therefore, disclaim the necessary planning and organization of educational work. We realize that schools assume that they should only talk about sex education when the concerns tackle the students or when a demand is made explicit to signal that it is time to talk about sexual relations or contraceptives and pregnancy, such as the announcement of a pregnant student in the school. Therefore, it seems to us that sex education acts as a "fire extinguisher" in an emerging situation and that, at the school, a critical moment is expected for there to be any discussion about sexuality. This removes the preventive nature of sexual education and emphasizes a circumstantial and interventional perspective before situations of "danger" or the explicit demand of adolescents.

Undoubtedly, it is very difficult to predict when teenagers will need the information on sex education that they should be given in order to make decisions in the circumstances of the new stages of their lives. This postponement puts them in greater vulnerability before pregnancy, transmission of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) or abusive situations. In the interviews, school directors repeatedly cite the lack of information as one of the facilitators for the early pregnancies of the students. This is exemplified by the information given by one of the interviewees: "In my opinion, I still think it is a carelessness due to lack of information, lack of knowledge, and the belief that it would never happen to their own self. By carelessness and lack of information, but most commonly for lack of information" (Educational Advisor, 2014). This understanding allows us to understand the inadequate interpretation that exists among teachers about the beginning

¹ Primary education, in Brazil, runs from the first to the ninth grade. A student who does not repeat any grade completes their primary education between the ages of 14 and 15.

of sex education for the students in school. Such interpretation is, very often, based on the fear of encouraging or promoting an early interest in sex when talking about it to children. The displacement of sex education to the adolescent stage acquires greater evidence in the schools that were part of the study and that host only up to the fifth grade - primary education 1 - and, therefore, have little probability of having pregnant teens among their students. The exception may occur with girls who repeat the year because of learning issues or other problems, who end up having the same risks of teenage pregnancy as girls in other elementary grades. Almost the entirety of the surveyed schools consider it somewhat unnecessary to work on sexual education among educational priorities. One of the interviewees reveals that "she had never thought about the importance of sex education" (pedagogical coordinator, 2015) and that only after being interviewed for the research she realized the existing gap about these subjects in schools. In this regard, we observe that schools do not treat teenage pregnancy as a theme to be worked on with students. The issue is only addressed as a consequence when a pregnancy occurs among its students, as if prevention should only occur in schools already dealing with this "problem". On the activities implemented, it often appears in interviews examples of lectures that are planned and carried out during the school year, yet the lack of articulation with other school processes - teaching, pedagogical preparation, research - reduces to a great extent its transcendence, systematization and support. It is also important to point out that there is no logic about which themes will be addressed in each lecture, since the priorities are not identified. Likewise, there does not appear to be a concern in line with the established normative principles which should support sex education, such as the promotion of full sexuality, gender equality and respect for diversity.

Absence of participative methodologies in the planning and elaboration of sexual education activities

The activities carried out during the school year in primary schools often emerge from the personal criteria of the staff responsible for the task, who establish the topics considered priorities and organize the lectures or workshops to be carried through. It should be stressed that the implementation of workshops was rarely mentioned. In general, for there to be a discussion on sexuality, an outside speaker is called upon, preferably someone from the health sector. There is talk about prevention, use of contraceptives and STDs, which is also important, but we cannot diminish sex education in its broad sense only to these lectures.

In our view, this practice can also be a reasonable explanation for understanding the detachment and lack of involvement of some teachers with the need to turn sex education into a serious, organized, creative and ongoing work. When teachers are not involved in the dialogue about the project and the instrumentalization of sex education, they are being little active. Thus, the potentiality of teachers to question and analyze their practices and construct alternatives to overcome the existing gaps is being discarded. When we employ participatory methodologies, which privilege criticism through real processes of participation and involvement, we are accentuating the political compromise from a critical and emancipatory position. This will enable teachers to empower themselves and transform their practices. Thinking, projecting, instrumentalizing and evaluating sex education should actively involve all those who make up the directive and teaching staff of the school, as well as the students.

Practices permeated by gender stereotypes and exclusion of pregnant teenage girls

The majority of the surveyed teachers specifies that sex education should and is more targeted towards female students than male ones. Amongst the justifications presented is the fact that female students mature earlier than their male counterparts and must know more about sexuality, with them being the ones who actually become pregnant. In addition to that, they are the ones who might end up dealing with the consequences of pregnancy, as it can be noted in a report of the research: "it is a very complicated thing for the students, because it practically interrupts a whole natural process of things, making her have to care for a child, and often begin to work in order to feed them, since sometimes God only knows who the child's father is, or the father only "made" the child then disappeared, leaving the girl alone to truly face up to the pregnancy, and that changes that teenager's life completely." (Principa, 2015). For this reason, teachers fathom that girls need to be more knowledgeable about pregnancy prevention, reinforcing and perpetuating the assumption that the care of this child, and children in general, is a responsibility that belongs to the female sex. This points to the major issue of teenage pregnancy: it being an important gender matter. Evidently, we cannot deny that the way teenagers establish relationships is still steeped in stereotypes and myths that put females at a disadvantage and greater vulnerability.

This happens because they are immersed in a hegemonically sexist culture, as is the culture of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, where the *gaucho* figure prevails, making masculinities subjective on the state, where it is traditionally reserved for the woman the private space and the qualities concerning this position, such as being gentle, delicate, dependent, affectionate and caring, leaving their real intellectual and psychological potentialities and possibilities in a secondary plane. Their lives' essential core is built for others, deriving from this position their "specialization" in being a housewife, mother, wife and caretaker for the sick or elderly, which originates and determines the need and way of acting unconsciously with others. The meaning of life, of what to do in life, ends up being guided by others in such a way that the "self" only exists in the measure of what it does for others. This is the core of "captivity", or the absence of women's liberation (Fernández 2003, 60). From these matters, we can highlight some key points to consider whether teenage pregnancy is always an unwanted pregnancy and to question what demands and expectations may be hidden behind unprotected sexual intercourse with the risk of childbearing. Motherhood makes up an important dimension in the constitution of female subjectivity.

From birth, a girl learns that a woman's life's greatest aspiration is to become a mother. Perhaps this unconscious desire to be a mother may influence her to the point where she does not properly take care of prevention while engaging in sexual intercourse. We hypothesize that adolescents may be expressing a need to be recognized as "women", to be in the same social status as other mothers who surround them, with all the freedoms implied from the transition from adolescent to fully grown woman. What is, in women, repressed and sanctioned, is stimulated in men. The messages communicated to adolescents, according to their gender, are quite different. While, for the girls, the pleasurable experiences of sexuality are repressed, such experiences constitute an important source

of expression and reaffirmation of the male virility. In men, we observe an overdevelopment of the outside world -doing, having, acting- and repression of their emotional sphere (Montesinos 1999, 92). This might be the basis on which teachers consider that sex education, in the case of male teenagers, should be addressed to help define "normal" sexuality, while not taking into account their responsibility in the prevention of an early pregnancy and in assuming the paternity in these cases. Schools have been specializing in legitimizing and perpetuating attributes that have traditionally been designed to be male and female. On them, relations of exclusion, subordination and oppression between genders, including within the same gender, continue to be established, so much so that the discourse of many female teachers about pregnant girls is a moral judgment and contempt for the moral impurity that the pregnant body represents. The boys, as they do not present in their bodies the mark of gestation, symbolized by the growing belly, are not stigmatized and to some extent even applauded, for they are seen as "true males" after fecundating the teenager.

A certain trivialization is also noticeable over the dropout of a pregnant student. The occurrence is expected to happen, as is reported by one of the interviewees: "Two years ago, we had a sixth grader, just turned 13, who got pregnant, had a baby, stopped showing up to school and this year we learned that she is already in her second pregnancy" (Educational Coordinator, 2015). Another says: "What we see here, at school, is that girls abandon everything, drop out of school, because they have to dedicate themselves to the child, we have even received students whose mothers were girls that were pregnant during their teenage years, and those students usually come with many problems to be solved, so I see it as something that is not good" (Principal, 2015). In other words, the existing stigma over the adolescent mother as being someone problematic extends over their offspring.

Little treatment of issues such as abortion, maternity/paternity

Regarding abortion, the discussion of this subject is a very complicated one in Brazil due to the scope and extension of religious ideals that present the termination of a pregnancy as a "homicide", preventing the achievement of such an important aspect in sexual and reproductive rights. These ideas do not persist only with older people. A study with teenagers and young adults of both sexes showed that more than half of the interviewees manifested themselves against abortion, even in cases of rape or before a situation of risk to maternal health, which shows that these criteria are also strongly presented within the new generations (García, Abramovay and da Silva 2004, 226-228).

We know that abortion is ultimately sought by women in the face of an unwanted pregnancy. Patis (2000), when studying symbolic aspects of induced abortion and motherhood, mentions that there are children who are born and symbolically "aborted" in different ways every day, for it is not enough to only give birth to a human being biologically, but also necessary to psychologically welcome children when they are born. The theme of sexual and reproductive rights regarding teenage pregnancy is associated with connotations that often take a lot of time in debates of many scientific events, with topics that are certainly relevant, but we need to also problematize the right of the teenager to desire, conceive,

continue or terminate a pregnancy. The contradiction presented between legal discourse and psychological/medical discourse, which points to the absence of psychic structure and anatomical-physiological maturity in teenagers to take on a baby, needs to continue to be rethought, seeking a meeting between these perspectives. Just as we value abortion as an issue that urges itself to be included in the teenage sex education agenda, the perspective of male sexual education is regarded as a theme that should also be given a place within the debate on early pregnancy. This subject is viewed as a priority to be worked with teenage girls, since they are the ones who carry the conception with them, and their growing bellies promote in them the mark of the stigma of "sin".

Conclusion: what happens, in schools, with the pregnant teens?

This study, carried out in the state schools of Novo Hamburgo, southern Brazil, allowed us to identify situations and practices that have a significant political implication, not only due to their occurrence in public spaces such as state schools, but also because they oppose themselves to aspirations and ideals of inclusion, equality and respect for diversity defended by the Brazilian society. The teenage girl who, for various reasons, carries on with her pregnancy is not exactly the closest to the ideal of femininity built for this life stage, not even in the cases of a desired and planned teen pregnancy. The pregnant teenager, in a general way, begins to confront expectations on her gender for this phase of life, and to experience situations of clear exclusion and school withdrawal, and are subtly "invited" to stay at home to be more "protected", or simply disappear from school. We determine that the majority of pregnant adolescents who evade are not an object of investment by the schools, or of care by the entity responsible for their wellbeing, in an attempt to return them to the school community, namely the Tutelary Council. Unlike in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), the departure is given as normal and there is no concern with this fact, so much so that there is not even some sort of control of these occurrences in most surveyed schools, which denotes the neglect.

When there is some control in the school, and the referral of the dropout of the pregnant teenager is given to the Guardianship Council, through the completion and forwarding of the Infrequent Student Communication Form (FICAI), the interviewees revealed that they do not receive a response from this organ. On rare occasions, there is a visit of some tutor counselor in the school or home of the evading student. When this occurs, education, be it the informal and domestic-like, or the formal school education, is one of the bases of female exclusion and violence, often from subtle and almost imperceptible details that may even seem beneficial. The discourses, for Butler (2015), in truth inhabit bodies, accommodating themselves in them. These, in fact, carry speeches as part of their own blood. And no one can survive without somehow being charged for that speech. The stigmas surrounding teenage pregnancy marginalize the adolescent and limit the willingness of the staff in educational institutions and governments to design differentiated policies that facilitate the continuity of education during the pregnancy and after childbirth. Therefore, we found that only a few schools carry out follow-up for the continuity of the studies of the pregnant teenager at home, as per the disposition of the directive team and/or pedagogical department.

In this study, we attested the academic/social exclusion of teenagers who do not comply with the imposed social rule: only the "well-behaved" ones remain in school. Pregnant women are object bodies, inasmuch as they are bodies whose lives are not considered "lives" and whose materiality is understood as "not important" (Butler 2015). We can also conclude that the schools that were a part of this study have been playing a failed role in the sexual education of teenagers, boys and girls, and that the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in sexual education does not exist in these environments, where sexist education prevails and continues to reproduce models of hegemonic and excluding relations.

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