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Investigating the views of civil society on early pregnancy through the focus group method

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Abstract

This paper is the synthesis of a qualitative study regarding the factors generating a sad fact of Romanian life, namely Romania is one of the leaders in EU as concerning the teenage pregnancy indicator. This study also aims to investigate individual and social consequences of juvenile pregnancy, especially how solutions to this problem are seen.

We organized five focus groups, three with teenagers and two with adults. The adolescents were divided into three categories: a mixed group, one of girls and one of boys, and the adults were grouped according to their professional experience as social workers and psychologists / teachers.

We inquire through this approach adults' and adolescents' opinion on this topic, with interest in finding differences in perception between the two categories.

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1. Introduction

The problem of teenage pregnancy is one of great concern. With 27,000 births to minors, 700 births to girls up to 15 years old and 14,000 abortions annually, Romania is in the top of European countries in this regard (NIS). The following study questions are raised: Why do teenagers become pregnant? Why do they choose to give birth? How

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do pregnant teenage schoolgirls feel in the role of a pupil? Is there a psychosocial context that favors the appearance of teenage pregnancy in Romania? How do teenagers who choose to give birth resist to social and family pressures? To what extent have childhood influences contributed to the state of pregnancy in adolescence? What can be done to prevent accidental pregnancy during adolescence?

2. Research methodology (objectives, participants, methods, description)

Objectives:

1. Identifying the factors and consequences of juvenile pregnancy
2. Identifying differences in perception between adults and teenagers on teen pregnancy
3. Discussing potential preventive solutions for teen pregnancy

We propose a qualitative research approach, through the focus-group method because this is very effective in determining people's views, feelings and opinions (Crueger, 2005). We initiated five focus groups, three consisting of teenagers and two of adults. The adolescents were divided into a group of girls, one of boys and a mixed group. The adults were grouped according to their profession: the social workers' group, of eight people, connected to the issues studied, being employed by the Local Council and the General Direction for Child Protection and the psychologists' group, of six people, working either in schools or in the Local Council or NGOs. The students selected for the focus groups attend the National College „Andrei Barseanu” Brasov, in the 10th form. In the focus groups there were 12 girls, 15 boys and 10 teenagers in the mixed focus group, 5 girls and 5 boys. There were two question guides, formulated according to Atkinson's principles (Atkinson, 2006), one for the teens and one for adults, but they pursued the same objectives and both consisted of 11 questions. At the beginning of the focus group, the participants introduced themselves and discussed the empirical and professional data (if any) to which they had access, on the issue of juvenile pregnancy (the first three questions). Then we moved on to identifying the factors (question 5), consequences (question 8) and the way they see prevention (question 9, 10).

3. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of results

3.1. Adolescent mixed group

Curiosity seems to be the key element that pushes adolescents toward sexual debut, but peer pressure and eccentricities also appear as determinant factors. Of course, there is a correlation between early sexual debut and teen pregnancy (Corkindale, 2009). Lack of information and their relationship with parents are a big minus that deprives adolescents of guidance. Discussing the options for a pregnant minor teenager, the participants, after showing that they do not fully understand the implications and mechanisms of the adoption process, discuss abortion as a solution to make problem disappear and the teenager to return to her normal life, but then argue for keeping the child. Teenagers are confused. Forced maturation, deterioration of relations with parents and social exclusion are the consequences presented by the participants, regarding teen pregnancy. Feelings of shame and desire of isolation are also mentioned. We must add to these the fact that a child born under these conditions will not be loved as a child born in a normal family and will not have a good relationship with his adolescent parents.

Sexual education returns in question, as the most important in the prevention of teenage pregnancy. Apart from discussions that should take place in family, there is a need for meetings with the school psychologist, at school, for students to be constantly informed and aware of both the risks they are exposed to and the methods of contraception. "I have just one class of sexual education in school, so far. It is not enough. I think we should have one each week so that we are more informed and more responsible" (O.V., 16 years old).

In the end of the discussion, the participants wanted to discuss the religious aspect of this issue. Abortion is called murder and sexual debut before marriage, a sin. Paradoxically, it is a sin that no one believes to be critical, a sin assumed by everybody and young people have no qualms in this regard.

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