

Socioeconomic and health consequences of adolescent pregnancies in Ecuador in the period 2015-2021

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Abstract

In Ecuador, teenage pregnancy has become a social problem, affecting 2 out of every 10 women between 10 and 19 years of age. The possible causes of the increase in this figure are poor sex education and the taboo of sexuality in the family and social environment. For this reason, the Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador has implemented programs to strengthen the "Intersectoral Policy for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Girls and Adolescents Ecuador 2018-2025". A study was conducted using bibliographic, qualitative and theoretical methods, where the topic's information, results and conclusions were obtained. The objective is to determine the consequences of adolescent pregnancies from the health and socioeconomic point of view of the mother and child. It is concluded that the main causes of teenage pregnancies are misinformation about sexuality, reproduction and contraceptive methods, which have health and socioeconomic consequences.

Keywords: Adolescent pregnancy, socioeconomic, health.

Resumen

En Ecuador, el embarazo adolescente se ha convertido en una problemática social que afecta a 2 de cada 10 mujeres de 10 a 19 años. Las posibles causas del aumento de esta cifra se deben a la escasa educación sexual y tabú de la sexualidad en el entorno familiar y social. Por ello, Ecuador a través del Ministerio de Salud Pública implementó programas para fortalecer la "Política Intersectorial de Prevención del Embarazo en Niñas y Adolescentes Ecuador 2018-2025". Se realizó un artículo de revisión, mediante métodos bibliográficos, cualitativos y teóricos, donde se obtuvo información, resultados y conclusiones del tema. El objetivo es determinar las consecuencias de los embarazos adolescentes desde el ámbito de salud y socioeconómico de la madre e hijo. Se concluye que las principales causas de los embarazos adolescentes son la desinformación acerca de la sexualidad, reproducción y uso de métodos anticonceptivos que traen consigo consecuencias sanitarias y socioeconómicas.

Palabras clave: Embarazo adolescente, socioeconómico, sanitario.

1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), teenage pregnancy is defined as when it occurs in women aged between 10 and 19 years, being a health problem that puts the life of the baby and the mother at risk during pregnancy and

childbirth. Unfortunately, in Ecuador, the number of teenage pregnancies increases every year.

As a result, it went from being a threat to the personal health of young women and an economic loss for their families to becoming a social and public health problem with high repercussions on the country's economy. As a result, in the decade of

1990, the Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador developed the adolescent care program, which includes concern for the consequences of teenage pregnancies in the country.

Figures recorded by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) in Ecuador for 2019 - published in 2020 - show that in that year, there were 51,711 pregnancies of mothers under the age of 19. Of these, 1,816 correspond to mothers between 10 and 14 years of age and the other 49,895 to mothers between 15 and 19 years of age. In other words, 18.1% of this total are pregnancies of girls and adolescents; in other words, 2 out of every 10 women who give birth are girls or adolescents. It is worth mentioning that these data correspond only to registered births, without considering illegal interruptions of unwanted pregnancies under unsafe and unhealthy conditions (INEC, 2020).

These figures show the importance of understanding the causes of the increase in teenage pregnancies, mainly because it is associated with sex education and contraceptive methods, in addition to the taboo in the family and social environment on the subject of adolescent sexuality.

Adolescent pregnancy affects family dynamics because most of these pregnancies are unplanned and affect the personal and social life of the adolescent mother. There are more teenage pregnancies in rural and marginalized areas of society due to insufficient information on family planning and the lack of trust between parents and children, leading to unprotected sex, among others. One of the factors associated with this problem is the lack of information about family planning, sexuality and responsibility in initiating an active sexual life, which can be mainly associated with their family (conservative or macho) and social environment (Quesada, 2010). In addition, adolescent pregnancy is a social problem because it affects the development of the adolescent girl, such as access to education and other limited social and economic opportunities due to her condition.

From the health point of view, it can affect the mother and child during and after childbirth, such as malnutrition, delayed physical development of the mother, maternal and neonatal mortality, complications in the development of the fetus, and psychological problems, among others. On the other hand, from a social point of view, this leads to school absenteeism, difficulties in accessing job opportunities, and instability in the family and economic environment (Quesada, 2010).

The research aims to identify the health problems that occur in the adolescent mother and the fetus at birth through the analysis of risk factors and the social, economic, family and health consequences for Ecuadorian adolescent mothers.

2. Methods

The study was conducted with a qualitative design of documentary type, with a literature review since data collection on websites such as Scielo, Ministry of

Public Health, National Institute Of Statistics and Census, and Google Scholar information related to the topic was obtained. Also, descriptive research was applied because it analyzed and identified issues related to teenage pregnancy and its consequences on health and society as well as data extracted from 2015 - 2021.

3. Results

Teenage pregnancy is considered a social phenomenon within the environment, commonly occurring in third-world countries. It is found that some of the main causes of teenage pregnancy in Ecuador are due to sexual aggressions, many exercised by the adolescent's family nucleus. According to data from INEC, in 2018, more than half of the cases (55%) were intrafamily sexual violence. In addition to misinformation about sexuality and everything that involves family planning, sexual and reproductive rights, and how to carry it out correctly. Among the causes are:

- Peer pressure: this is reflected in the psychosocial influence exerted by the sexual risk behavior of peers or friends, which can affect their decision-making or choices.
- Poverty: it can be a determinant for teenage pregnancy, or it can also be a consequence of it. Lozada (2019) revealed that teenage pregnancy is more frequent in young people who grew up in low-income families with few expectations of education or the labor market.
- Cultural beliefs about sexuality, as in some communities, a woman's right to enjoy a full and safe sex life is denied.

Health consequences

Adolescent pregnancy is a health problem that involves risk to both the child and the mother before, during and after childbirth; more common, for example, in the mother may occur:

- Maternal death: Due to hemorrhages, risks in cesarean sections, puerperal infections, and miscarriages, among others.
- Eclampsia: Seizures that occur in pregnancy or after childbirth, resulting from elevated blood pressure and excess protein.
- Anemia: It is associated with pregnancy disorders and malnutrition during pregnancy, causing fatigue, weakness and decreased resistance to infections.
- Spontaneous abortions: This is since the physiology of the reproductive system of the adolescent mother is not sufficiently developed.
- Premature births: Figures show that many teenage babies are born before 37 weeks of gestation.
- Post-partum hemorrhage: Blood loss greater than 500 ml after vaginal delivery or 1,000 ml after cesarean section during the first 24 hours after delivery.

- Psychological complications include social isolation, rejection of the baby, low self-esteem, and social insertion problems.

The consequences on the baby may be:

- Infant or fetal death: Generally, the infant mortality rate is twice as high in infants born to adolescent mothers under 17 years of age.
- Poor nutrition: Insufficiency of essential nutrients for the proper development of the baby, which can lead to low birth weight.
- Congenital malformations of the heart: children of girls under 15 years of age are more likely to suffer from it.

-Bacterial sepsis: Invasion and proliferation of bacteria, fungi and viruses in the bloodstream, usually manifest in the first 28 days of life.

Sometimes, adolescents seeking a solution to pregnancy have abortions in clandestine places or through misinformation provided by websites or social circles, which can cause infertility and, in the worst cases, death.

Social consequences

Teenage pregnancy has a social and economic impact on the family and the country. According to Molina Gómez (2019), 80% of adolescents who become pregnant are forced to abandon their studies and take on a new lifestyle for which they are not prepared, unlike adult women.

This means that with the total abandonment of their studies, exclusion, poverty and gender inequality increase, which contributes to an increase in the rate of violence. The gynecologist Jarquín in an interview (2019), expressed: that adolescents who were studying when they became pregnant stopped doing so, and since then, they had few opportunities to obtain a decent job; they had their children in an unstable and precarious environment, from which the children later fled at an early age. He adds that all these problems surrounding pregnant adolescents "reproduce the circle of poverty, malnutrition and disease in society."

In this regard, young women are often subjected to great pressures from the environment around them, have little chance of finding a well-paid job and are forced to interrupt their life plans. In addition, they must care for and educate their child in an unstable and often insecure environment, which can cause emotional instability, feelings of guilt and frustration, seeing all their academic and personal limitations.

Socioeconomic consequences

Teenage pregnancies have a very high economic cost to the state.

According to the study "Socioeconomic consequences of teenage pregnancy in Ecuador" conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2020 determines that the annual costs of teenage pregnancy and early motherhood increased to 270 million dollars, which is equivalent to 0.26% of the nominal GDP.

The costs for the Ecuadorian state are very high, not only because of the health care but also because of the great loss of opportunities for the minor. Therefore, the total cost estimated for her is decided in two parts: the average cost for the whole society, which is equivalent to 187 million dollars, and this is related to the opportunity for productive activity for the young girl. The second average cost is 83 million dollars, which would correspond to the health costs of the Ecuadorian state, that is to say, the part that intervenes in the health of pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum of the adolescent mother and early motherhood.

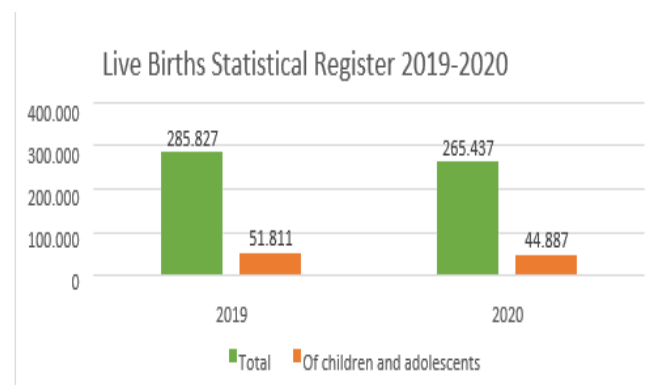


Figure 1. Statistical registry of Live Births 2019-2020.

Source: Statistical records of live births and fetal deaths (INEC).

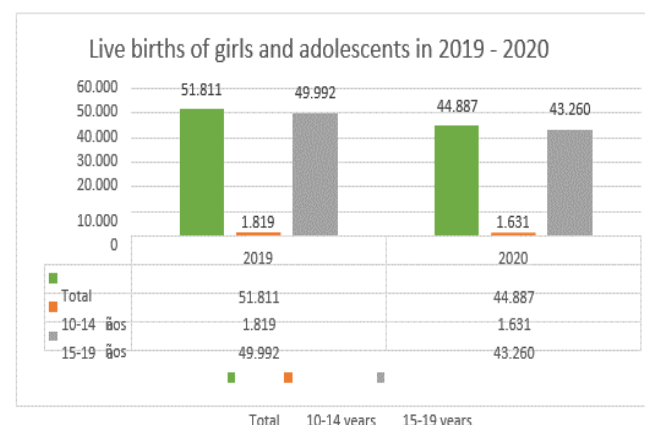


Figure 2. Statistical registry of live births of girls and adolescents 2019- 2020.

Source: Statistical records of live births and fetal deaths (INEC).

According to data collected by INEC, in 2020, 265,437 births were registered, of which 44,887 (16.9%) were children of teenage mothers, which is a lower figure than in 2019 when 51,810 births were recorded. In 2020, the highest number of births corresponded to adolescents between 15 and 19 years old, with 43,260 births. On the other hand, 1,631 cases considered rape were reported in girls under 14 years of age. According to the Código Orgánico Integral Penal (COIP), this corresponds to a rate of 2 per 1000 adolescents in the population of that age.

According to the National Health and Nutrition Survey (ENSANUT, 2012), it is registered that 39.2% of adolescents between the age range of 15 and 19 years have initiated an active sexual life. 7.5% had

their first sexual intercourse before the age of 15 years, while 30.1% had their first sexual intercourse before the age of 18 years. 89.9% of girls between 10 and 14 have had sexual relations with persons older than them. 67.7% of adolescent girls between 15 to 24 years old did not use contraceptives in their first sexual intercourse due to a lack of knowledge

and inaccessibility to contraceptive methods. The 7.5% of pregnancies in adolescents under 15 years of age ended in abortions. 44.3% of women who had a teenage pregnancy between the ages of 14 to 24 interrupted their studies (Public, Education, & Social, 2018). Table 1. Live births of girls and adolescents from 2015 - 2020 by age.

									19
1	12	79	443	1.901	5.215	9.199	12.077	14.907	16.351
0	24	27	456	1.639	4.620	8.772	11.137	13.290	15.351
2	9	91	415	1.781	4.623	8.710	12.164	13.949	15.269
6	11	61	421	1.600	4.462	8.148	11.604	14.660	15.294
1	6	59	362	1.391	3.813	7.466	10.493	13.009	15.211
4	10	43	338	1.236	3.269	6.290	8.786	11.371	13.544

According to the report "The power to decide. Reproductive rights and the demographic transition" by UNFPA in 2018, there are figures that evidence that Ecuador has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies among Latin American and Caribbean countries because 111 out of every thousand adolescents between 15 and 19 years old have been pregnant.

The intersectoral policy for the prevention of pregnancy in girls and adolescents 2018-2025 is aimed at strengthening the implementation of the National Development Plan 2017-2021, which specifies the reduction of the specific rate of teenage births, as well as the goals established in the 2030 Agenda, which are: to reduce from 76.5% to 63.5% the specific live birth rate for adolescent females between 15 and 19 years of age by 2021 and to reduce from 2.65% to 2.55% the adolescent birth rate for women between 15 and 19 years of age by 2021 and to reduce from 2.65% to 2.55% the adolescent birth rate for women between 15 and 19 years of age by 2021; 10 to 14 years of age per 1,000 women by 2021. In addition, it seeks to reduce the maternal mortality ratio, infant mortality rate, unplanned pregnancy, subsequent adolescent pregnancy, early unions of girls and adolescents, and sexual violence against children and adolescents.

have no formal or incomplete basic education, 34.7% have completed basic education, 5.5% have completed secondary education, 7.2% have had access to higher technical and university education, and only 0.3% have completed postgraduate studies. In contrast, 49.5% of women who had their children as adults have no formal or incomplete basic education, 29.1% have completed basic education, 1.8% have completed high school, 18.4% have had access to higher technical and university education, and only 1.3% of them have reached the postgraduate level.

Likewise, there is not much data at the level of Ecuador, but there are studies from nearby areas where there is a relationship between teenage pregnancies with obstetric and perinatal complications, where there is an increased risk of cesarean section, puerperal infection, preeclampsia, post-partum hemorrhage, gestational hypertension, preterm delivery, bacterial sepsis in the newborn, respiratory distress and congenital heart malformations (Martinez et al., 2020). Finally, it should be noted that the data obtained through various research studies show that teenage pregnancies are not only figures but also bring social, socioeconomic, family and health consequences for mother and child.

4. Discussion

Teenage pregnancy is not only considered a problem of the teenage mother; on the contrary, due to the increase in live births of girls and adolescents in Ecuador, it is now considered a health problem that affects the country economically, socially and other aspects.

In the mother's case, there is a strong relationship between adolescent pregnancies and obstetric and perinatal complications: maternal death, eclampsia, preeclampsia, anemia, spontaneous abortions, premature births, cesarean section risks, post-partum hemorrhage and gestational hypertension. As well as the mother, the child suffers consequences during and after the delivery process, such as infant or fetal death, poor nutrition or malnutrition, low birth weight, congenital heart malformations, bacterial sepsis and respiratory distress. Many of these consequences occur because the adolescent mother

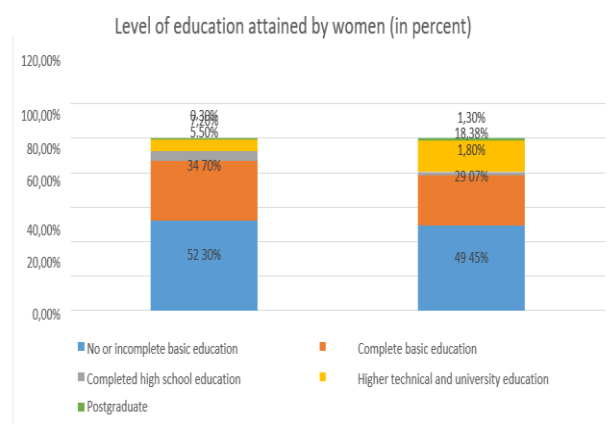


Figure 3. Level of education attained by women (in percent).

Source: National Institute of Statistics and Census, 2017.

On the other hand, in the level of education of women who were mothers in adolescence, 52.3%

has not yet completed the full development of her female reproductive system, which aids in the proper formation of the fetus. Many of these consequences also impact psychological health, especially on the mother's self-esteem due to social stigmas, which can often lead to suicide, social isolation or death due to a failed abortion when trying to find a solution to her situation.

Women who become pregnant in their adolescence usually completely change their lifestyle because they are forced to abandon their studies and goals they had in mind to achieve in the future because, at a young age, they acquire the responsibility of raising a child, which fully depends on them emotionally and economically, and for this, they are forced to get a job to cover the necessary expenses for both, which, if they manage to get it is very poorly paid, and could result in some violence against the teenage mother. All these aspects unleash the increase of poverty, malnutrition and diseases, which is a hard blow for the country, and receives a bad observation compared to other countries. According to the analysis of the results obtained in the socioeconomic consequences, it is evident that the country's economic development is harmed because it implies an increase in the public services budget to which the mother and child have access. In conclusion, many teenage pregnancies and early motherhood result in an annual increase in free services provided by the state to mothers and children.

On the other hand, discussing some very important aspects regarding the family consequences of teenage pregnancies is necessary. Such as the family environment greatly influences this type of pregnancy because it can cause the adolescent to feel a lack of family affection and curiosity about issues that are not considered at home, such as sexuality, among others. This leads them to make decisions without taking into account the consequences. The results show that there is not an adequate family relationship with the adolescents to talk about sexuality and reproduction in a free and trusting way.

An important point is the communication that adolescents should have with their parents, especially at this age, when they need the correct guidance to make responsible decisions and thus avoid erroneous advice from third parties, which can have consequences that affect the future of the adolescent, such as pregnancy. However, the lack of sexual and reproductive education is one of the main causes of teenage pregnancies, which is why teenage pregnancy prevention programs should be improved in the different educational institutions of the country to reduce these worrying figures.

After a thorough analysis of the significant consequences of teenage pregnancies in the lives of young women and the country, Ecuador, through the Ministry of Public Health, committed itself to the effective implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programs; the implementation of comprehensive, timely and

quality sexual and reproductive health programs for adolescents and young people; the implementation or strengthening of policies and programs to prevent teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers from dropping out of school; and to give priority to preventing teenage pregnancies. Adolescents and eliminate unsafe abortion through comprehensive sexuality education and timely and confidential access to contraceptive methods to strengthen the "Intersectoral Policy for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Girls and Adolescents Ecuador 2018-2022".

5. Conclusions

Due to the number of live births of girls and adolescents in recent years, Ecuador has been ranked as the country with the second highest number of teenage pregnancies in Latin America, showing that it has deficiencies in its various sexual and reproductive education programs, which makes it clear that teenage pregnancy is not only a personal problem of the young woman and her family, but a socioeconomic and health problem of the country, so it is concluded that:

The physical and psychological health of the adolescent mother and child is significantly affected, which is why obstetric and perinatal complications were observed, such as poor nutrition in both, anemia, fetal death, bacterial sepsis in the newborn, respiratory distress, maternal death, eclampsia, preeclampsia, growth disorders, hemorrhages during and after delivery, complications during cesarean section, gestational hypertension, spontaneous abortions, low self-esteem of the mother, social isolation, among others. Most of these are because the adolescent girl's body has not reached an adult woman's proper physical and psychological development.

In the economic sphere, we observed that there is a great loss for the mother, as well as for the state, since the great majority of pregnant adolescents go to public health services, abandon their studies, become part of the low-income population and in the future will not generate money for the country.

All these consequences are due to the scarce sexual and reproductive education that young people receive at home and in their academic environment, where they spend the first years of their lives, in addition to the taboo that exists when talking about sexuality and human reproduction, especially in rural areas of Ecuador, where the largest number of cases of sexual abuse are found.

Teenage pregnancies, with low economic resources as an additional cause. To reduce teenage pregnancies in Ecuador, the Ministry of Public Health, together with the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, should strengthen existing programs on teenage pregnancy, implementing in educational institutions subjects that talk about sexuality, constant talks and training on family planning, the use of contraceptives to avoid unwanted

pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, both in rural and urban areas of the country.

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