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INFLUENCE OF PARENTS ON THE SEXUALITY OF ADOLESCENT WOMEN IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES OF BOLIVIA

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Abstract. Introduction. Studies highlight the influence of the family on the sexuality of adolescents, since they could help delay sexual intercourse and promote safer sexual behaviors among adolescents, so this study will explore the role that parents play in sexuality and in the sexual experiences of adolescent women living in disadvantaged environments in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia. Methods. The data were collected as part of the Global Study of Early Adolescence, and were based on in-depth semi-structured interviews among 20 female adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14, who were studying at the “Gerardo Vargas Vidal” school, as well as with their selected parents. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and uploaded to the Atlas.ti Program. An ethnographic design was used for the analysis, within the interpretive paradigm. Results. The adolescent analysis of the influence that family composition has on sexuality and sexual health of women; The role that parents play, and especially the mother in addressing these issues, is also evident, so proper communication is important; on the other hand, domestic violence is perceived as something natural among adolescent girls and has a negative influence on the sexual development and behavior of adolescent women. Discussions and conclusions. It is important to consider the participation of parents, especially the role of mothers in the design of sexuality programs for adolescent women.

Keywords: sexual development, adolescent, sexual behavior.

INFLUENCIA DE LOS PADRES EN LA SEXUALIDAD DE LAS ADOLESCENTES MUJERES EN FAMILIAS DE BAJOS INGRESOS DE BOLIVIA

Resumen. Introducción. Estudios destacan la influencia de la familia en la sexualidad de los adolescentes, puesto que podrían ayudar al retraso del inicio de la vida sexual y fomentarían conductas sexuales más seguras entre los adolescentes, por lo que este estudio pretende explorar el papel que desempeñan los padres en la sexualidad de las adolescentes mujeres que viven en entornos desfavorecidos en la ciudad de Cochabamba, Bolivia. Métodos. Los datos fueron recolectados como parte del Estudio Global de Adolescencia Temprana, y se basaron en entrevistas semiestructuradas en profundidad entre 20 adolescentes mujeres comprendidas entre los 10 a 14 años, que cursaban estudios en un colegio público de Bolivia, así como con sus respectivos padres. Las entrevistas fueron transcritas textualmente y subidas al Programa Atlas.ti. Para el análisis se utilizó un diseño etnográfico, dentro del paradigma interpretativo. Resultados. El análisis reveló la influencia que tiene la composición familiar en la sexualidad y en la salud sexual de las adolescentes mujeres; asimismo se evidencia el papel que juegan los padres, y en especial la madre en el abordaje de estas temáticas, por lo que una adecuada comunicación es importante; por otro lado, la violencia doméstica tiene influencia negativa en el desarrollo y comportamiento sexual de las adolescentes mujeres. Discusiones y conclusiones. Es importante considerar la participación de los padres, destacando el rol de las madres en el diseño de los programas de sexualidad de las adolescentes mujeres.

Palabras clave: desarrollo sexual, adolescente, comportamiento sexual.

Introduction

Sex and sexuality are complex processes in the lives of adolescents, especially for the construction of their being (1), and are often considered taboo subjects in the Latin American population.

The study of early adolescence (10 to 14 years of age) is transcendental because it is a stage in which there is greater physical, cognitive, emotional, psychological and social development (2). It is a period in which adolescents seek their own sexual identities, influenced by interactions with friends, family and the media (3).

This makes this period the most vulnerable to high-risk behaviors (4), among which early sexual initiation stands out, exposing them to STIs/HIV, unplanned pregnancies and abortions (5); which especially affect female adolescents due to maternal conditions such as pregnancy and maternity (6), which could lead to obstetric problems that could even result in death.

Several studies suggest that the construction of sexuality is transmitted in the family system and in a society's culture (7), so the family and especially communication with parents about sexuality could help the health of adolescents by delaying the beginning of sexual life and the exercise of safer sexual behaviors (8), so studies have found that adolescents from married families with two biological parents are less likely to have unprotected sex and early sexual initiation compared with adolescents from single-parent families, cohabiting stepparents,

and married stepparents (9); however, adolescents and their parents are often hesitant to talk to each other about sex, and only half of adolescents report talking to their parents about this topic. (8)

It is known that adolescents who have a positive relationship with their parents are less likely to initiate early sexual relations (10). There is evidence that associates several dimensions of parenting such as connection, love, material support, behavioral control, follow-up and communication between parents and adolescents positively with the reduction of risk levels among adolescents (10), hence the importance of studying this influence in Bolivia.

In Bolivia, the percentage of adolescents aged between 15 and 19 years who were already mothers or who have been pregnant for the first time in 2016 was 14.8% (11), so we can say that unplanned and early pregnancy affects the health of adolescent women and impacts the development of their potential; the complexity of this problem is based on a mixture of social, individual and legal-normative factors that affect maternal mortality in the adolescent population (12). Among the factors that predispose to early pregnancy we could mention poverty (12), lack of knowledge of contraceptive methods, lack of information on sexuality, sexual violence (13), family treatment, socioeconomic and cultural factors (14) and negatively affect female adolescents, since when an adolescent pregnancy occurs, mothers and fathers in many cases tend to expel adolescents from their homes or confine them to their homes, invalidating their human rights (12).

Several of these pregnancies that occur at an early age end in abortion, with the risk of it being performed in inadequate sanitary conditions, exposing adolescents to greater risks of morbidity, infertility and death (11), this being a fundamental public health problem in the country because it puts the lives of adolescent women at risk; on the one hand, the birth rate in women between 15 and 19 years of age was 116 per 1.000 pregnancies (15), on the other hand we must highlight the maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births which in 2011 was 160 (16), deaths resulting from misperformed abortion which, for the most part, are preventable.

Another problem is violence against women, which should be considered when analyzing the sexual health of adolescents since it constitutes a substantial problem of early unions, the rate of pregnancies due to sexual violence in children under 15 years of age is around 11.1% (17), which mostly occur in the family environment, registering 14 thousand cases of women raped every year, of which 60% have been victims of rape within their own homes (12).

According to the Demographic and Health Survey (2016), the knowledge of contraceptive methods that women between 15 and 19 years of age have is important, exceeding 90%, although the term "know" does not necessarily mean that the person has a good level of information about the method, it is enough that they can identify it (11), but only 9.4% of young women use some method of contraception (11). Therefore, despite the apparent knowledge of contraceptive methods, this situation is not reflected in their use and application (18), possibly

because they do not know how to use them, because they do not consider their use appropriate or because they are not easy to acquire.

In Bolivia, there are many myths and prejudices among parents who think that talking about sexuality with their children encourages early sexual initiation in adolescents (19), thus creating a distance. UNAIDS recommends intervening early, before adolescents become sexually active, and asks for an understanding of sexual and reproductive health communication between parents and adolescents to promote healthy sexual behavior (20).

For the present analysis, the "Multilevel Approach to Adolescent Pregnancy" (6) was used as a guide to examine more clearly how the family influences the Sexual and Reproductive Health outcomes of female adolescents.

Thus, this research pursues the following objective: (1) To explore the role of the parent/daughter relationship in the sexual experiences of female adolescents living in disadvantaged environments in Cochabamba.

Method

Study design and sample

Bolivia was part of the Global Early Adolescence Study (GEAS), which allowed examining how gender norms evolve and influence the health of early adolescents in 14 sites around the world. Between 2015 and 2016 the individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, the sample for this study was by convenience and 20 interviews were used with female adolescents aged 11 and 14 years, in order to have a diversity of the sample, obtaining the following distribution: 11 years (3), 12 years (9), 13 years (7), 14 years (1), all of them were students of a public school in the city of Cochabamba. We also obtained 20 interviews with their parents/guardians: mothers (19) and fathers (1).

Inclusion criteria included being between 11 and 14 years of age, being a student registered in a public school in Cochabamba, as well as having authorization to participate in the study from both the adolescent and the parents. The exclusion criteria were being outside the age range of 11 to 14 years, studying in another school in the area and not agreeing to participate in the research.

An ethnographic design was used for the thematic analysis, within the interpretative paradigm.

Data collection

The adolescents were approached personally and in order to increase trust among the participants, the interviews were conducted in the same school, the researchers also explained the purpose of the study and two research methods were used at the beginning of the sessions consisting of: "Timeline" which was conducted in groups of four adolescents, and the "Venn

Diagram" which was conducted individually prior to the in-depth interview. The timeline consisted of drawing the important events in the life of a typical adolescent from birth to adulthood. The discussion focused on gender differences (events that might be different between males and females). For the Venn diagram, adolescents were individually asked to indicate the relationships they had with key people in their lives by drawing circles on a sheet of paper, with the larger circles representing the most important relationships, in addition they were asked to mark positive (smiley face) and negative (sad face) relationships. (21)

The categories were developed within the framework of the GEAS project and, for one part, the interviews with adolescents were organized into: a) becoming an adolescent, b) community influences, c) family influence, d) relationships among friends, e) gender norms, f) gender socialization and g) romance and sexuality, with the category of family influence being analyzed for the present study, in order to have a greater understanding and comprehension of the influence of parents on adolescent sexual behavior.

On the other hand, we have the categories developed with the parents, which in addition to the categories developed with the adolescents, the category of parenting was added, again the matrices of these codes were related to family influence on adolescent health and parenting that influence sexual behavior.

The questions were framed as stories about how interpersonal relationships change as they grow up and how they learned about certain "rules" and behaviors about adolescence. The semi-structured interviews lasted an average of 60 min.

Data analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and uploaded to Atlas.ti. A final set of "core" codes was developed with the consensus of all participants.

Ethical and safety considerations

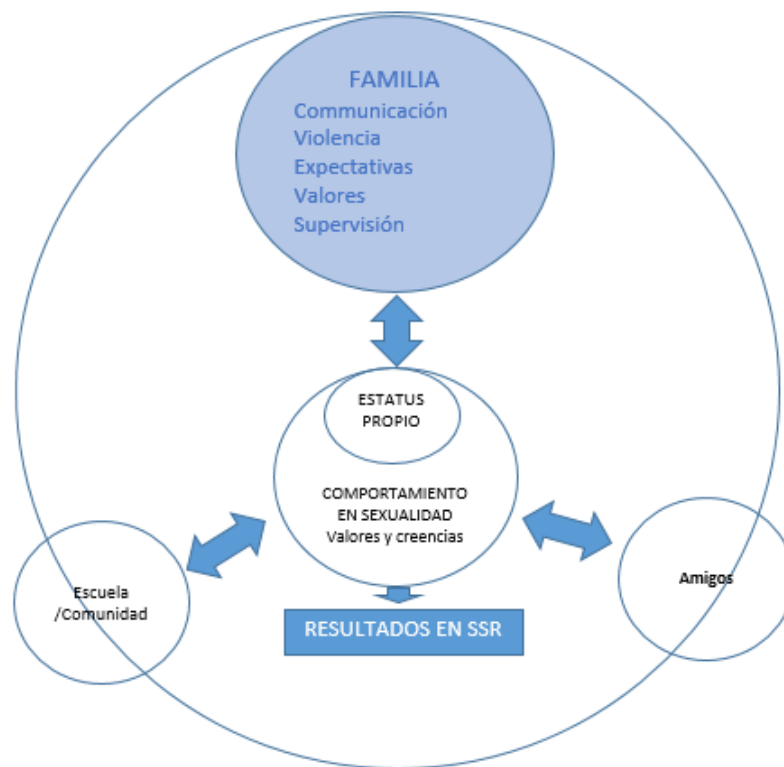
Written consent was requested from parents and female adolescents. At the departmental level, approval was obtained from the Bioethics Committee of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Results

Intermittent Fasting

According to previous studies it is important to know the role played by the family, taking greater interest in mothers and fathers to understand the influences on sexual risk behaviors among adolescent women from low-income households, the analysis of the findings was based on the multilevel approach to teenage pregnancy developed by Chung (2018), which takes into account family influence and the subsections: communication between parents/adolescents, the expectations they have of their daughters, the values they transmit, the supervision exercised by parents on adolescents and intrafamily violence.

Figure 1. Diagram to organize the results [Source: Own elaboration based on the Multilevel approach to adolescent pregnancy].



Parental communication with adolescent daughters

More than half of the parents/guardians interviewed consider their daughters of that age as children, so they do not consider it necessary to communicate and address issues of sexuality with their daughters, this influences the healthy decision making of adolescents regarding their sexuality and has an impact on the prevention of premature and unplanned pregnancies.

"According to the teacher, they should always be treated as children, even if they are a little older, but they should always be told, they should be treated as children, so that they feel like children, so that they don't say that I am grown up and can do whatever I want. The teacher tells us they have to take it like a child, so that they continue to feel like children, not

*grown-ups". **Mother of female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia, MOMI_A_12***

*"So, if parents don't talk to them, how should we explain to them what is really going on with them. They can fail in life, that's why". **Mother of female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia, MOMI_A_38***

The lack of communication, according to the results found in this research, was especially present in disintegrated families, that is, in homes where adolescents live only with the father or only with the mother, the stepfather/stepmother, a situation that is very frequent among the participants of the study due to the migration that parents recur to in order to assume family economic responsibilities.

Almost all the adolescents interviewed mentioned having better communication with their mothers than with their fathers, which coincides with the opinion of the mothers. Something that is noteworthy is that none of the adolescent girls participating in the study mentioned communication regarding sexuality issues with extended family (considering among them: uncles, aunts, cousins, cousins, grandparents, grandmothers).

*"My mom is affectionate with me and my brother, she is affectionate, eh always when we tell her something, sometimes they say no see, our mom is our best friend they say no see, I always tell my mom my things, how I am doing at school, if something has gone wrong, when I have done well, or when something I can't understand, she explains to me, when I am already, when I was a child, when I was a child my mom, normal, she only bought me toys like that, Now when I'm a little older, a little bit older, she tells me that there are some girls that when they are starting to, others say rule, I don't know, when we are starting that, my mom knows how to explain, you don't have to be afraid, she tells me, it's normal sometimes, my mom knows how to tell me, she knows how to explain things, she knows how to support me, when I'm sad she tells me daughter what are you sad about, she gives me advice, she knows how to talk to me". **Female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia FI_13_A12.***

*"I have been this, my children's friend. Look at their father, he has dedicated himself more to work". **Mother of female adolescent, 11 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_16.***

*"Because sometimes a dad maybe, the strong hand of the house. So he is the one who supports us in that. Then with the girls, not much because I am the one who is most interested in my daughters. The father, not much, he is not interested. I don't make him take much interest in my daughters, because they see so many things". **Mother of female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_38***

Almost half of the interviewees indicated that the limited communication they have with their parents is due to the limited time they have for work reasons and sometimes because of their parents' temper.

“Sometimes he gets like that, he yells a lot, because he is always angry about something, and because of that, then he yells at me too, at my mom too, because he is always angry for some reason”. **Female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia FI_13_A14**

Parents who indicated talking with their daughters did not refer to having extended to a meaningful discussion about healthy sexual behavior, most of them referred that they gave information to understand the emotional and physical consequences of sexual initiation or early pregnancy telling many times their experiences, but they did not refer to talk about contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted diseases, so they would not be adequately providing them with information about healthy relationships and safe sexual practices.

“Of course, we have all known how to fall in love. I also almost at the age of 19 I got my husband, because I had no one to talk to me too, no; but now I tell my daughter, I talk to my daughter because of that, that if she wants to get married at least she should have a boyfriend when she is already in her 20s, something like that”. **Mother of female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_07**

On the other hand, all the female adolescents participating in the study are aware that unplanned pregnancy has a negative impact on them, because pregnancy develops in their bodies, putting them at a disadvantage, so they worry about not getting pregnant, but above all about not having a boyfriend, preferring to focus on their studies to increase their job opportunities, seeking greater social acceptance.

“But also as when you have these relationships, you run the risk of getting pregnant, and some men when they find out that their girl is pregnant, do not want to take responsibility and blame her, why you have not protected yourself, however he is also to blame for, because the two of you are together”. **Female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia FI_13_A14**

Domestic Violence

The interviews revealed that violence among adolescent females is a common practice; adolescent females are victims of different forms of domestic violence such as verbal, psychological and physical violence. Almost half of the adolescent girls perceive violence and disrespect as normal occurrences and even see it as acceptable behavior and this limits communication with adolescent girls in a transcendental way.

“Sometimes he gets like that, he yells a lot, because he is always angry about something, and because of that, then he yells at me too, at my mom too, because he is always angry for some reason”. **Female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia FI_13_A14**

Young adolescent girls talk naturally about the violence they receive from their parents, seeming that violence against women is part of their lives.

*“My mom has always hit me and my dad once touched me, but he cried because he hit me, and since then he has not hit me, he just scolds me, that's all”. **Female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia FI_13_A15***

Expectations they have of their daughters

On one hand, most parents/guardians agreed with the importance of education in their daughters' lives, and revealed their fear of early sexual relations and pregnancy, so they prohibit their daughters from approaching adolescent boys, which does not result in an adequate solution.

*“Sometimes I am afraid to take care of a little woman, there are times, maybe if they don't get pregnant”. **Mother of female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_06***

*“Well, my daughter's goal is really just to study. Then she dedicates herself to having a profession. Afterwards, they have a house, or if you are going to do something that they see, they see it as something that will give them economic earnings. That's what my daughters focus on now”. **Father of female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia DADI_A_01***

*“When it has to be a boy, he has to take responsibility, not take a gamble, because I explain to you, right? Look how your father has left us, if he really can be a boy, he can be responsible for you, if he can love you too, I know that maybe he does not love you, that is why he has left and does not even talk to you, he does not know where you are or how you are, if you eat or do not eat, if you are bad or not bad, he does not ask you anything about you. So in order for this not to happen to you, you have to get ahead, I always tell you to study, every day you have to study, even if it is just for a little while, you have to study, not all day too, you have to have time to eat lunch, to play, to study, I also tell them, so they tell me yes mommy” **Mother of adolescent female, 13 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_12***

On the other hand, the social roles imposed on women could be seen in most of the adolescents interviewed, since they must perform domestic chores such as washing, cleaning, cooking and caring for the children, in other words, they have to prepare themselves to assume this responsibility in the future, another example is the role in the home where they have to serve food first to the men, perhaps responding to cultural or traditional values, reinforcing gender inequalities.

*“My mom used to tell me -little daughter if you are not going to learn to wash, cook, take care of your husband, you are going to do the talking for me, what your mother has taught you they are going to say- and that is what you have to do with daughters.”. **Mother of female adolescent, age 12, Bolivia MOMI_A_5***

"First we serve the food to my dad, just me, my brother, just my sister, just my sister, just my sister, me and my nephew last". Female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia FI_12_A01

"Women always suffer more than boys, because boys only know how to make babies, perfect. And women have to wash clothes, they have to provide for their children, they have to give them milk, everything, food. They have to send food to their husbands, wash their clothes, all that". Female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia FI_12_A06

Values they transmit to their daughters

Most of the parents/guardians interviewed emphasized the expressiveness of affection that their daughters should have, they said that they should be sensitive, tender and expressive and with good behavior, this becomes important in SRH because they learn to assume a passive and often subordinate role in romantic relationships, with submissive attitudes and little empowerment in relation to the decisions of adolescent boys, preventing them from freely choosing what they want to do with their own bodies and how to regulate their reproduction, highlighting cultural beliefs, family traditions and transgenerational inheritance. (22)

"I tell her sometimes, you don't have to be aggressive, you have to have a little patience, and you don't have to be, you have to behave like a little woman more than anything else, you have to be gentle, you have to have that self-esteem, not like other girls running around, making a fuss or pulling boys around, none of those things. I talk to her about those things". Mother of female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_12

"Ah, you have to be moderate, you have to help, that way you make people like you, and they say that girl is good, she helps you, you have to choose, while when you sit down and just look at her, and you don't help her, you make your mom and yourself look more, sometimes you don't teach your daughter anything, a woman has to know how to cook, iron, wash clothes, everything; For example, at home I make cakes, I know how to bake chicken, I make cakes, I do everything, my mother has taught me, that's what a woman and a man have, men mostly go on the internet, they don't do much, sometimes when they come to school they go on the internet, they play, they go to the tilines and so on". Female adolescent, 12 years old, FI_12_A05

This is also reflected in some of the adolescent girls' comments, as quoted below:

"Because men are always half, I don't know, they are other kinds or they don't want to be with you it's just for an annoying, for, to get you pregnant, whatever". Female adolescent, age 12, FI_12_A04

"mean, women always suffer more than boys, because boys only know how to make babies, perfect. And women have to wash clothes, they have to support their children, they have to give them milk, everything, food.

Their husbands they have to send them food, wash their clothes, all that”.
Female adolescent, age 12, FI_12_A06

Supervision

Most of the parents/guardians interviewed referred to applying greater supervision to their daughters, likewise they give them less freedom of movement, establishing when and where they can go, although they said that this control is not always possible due to long working hours, this coincides with the interviews with adolescents who frequently noted that parents were often absent, and referred to lack of emotional support.

“I see some mothers instead of guiding them and other situations, they are more dedicated to the business”. **Mother of female adolescent, age 11, Bolivia MOMI_A_16**

“Sometimes the girls drink because their parents are not at home, they neglect them, they don't take care of them, that's why they dedicate themselves to other things”. **Mother of female adolescent, 12 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_05**

Likewise, most of them referred to the importance of friends among their daughters, so most of them indicated that they take control of their daughters' friends. What is reflected in the interviews with adolescents where more than half of the interviewees stated that they prefer to distance themselves from friends who have sentimental interests, this influences their behavior as a risk factor, it is clear that they avoid conversations about sexuality.

“Yes, I believe because every girl, every boy or every adolescent, both female and male, friendships influence a lot; for good boys, good girls, sometimes they are easily corrupted”. **Mother of female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_14**

“Sometimes there are bad friends and they divert them”. **Mom of female adolescent, age 12, Bolivia MOMI_A_07**

“My mom tells me that you shouldn't hang out with friends like that, with bad friends, who lead you astray”. **Female adolescent, 13 years old, Bolivia FI_13_A11**

Regarding control of technology, most of the parents/guardians interviewed indicated that they are unaware of the use of technology, but recognize the influence it has on their daughters' sexuality, especially through the use of pornographic pages, and spoke of television, which often transmits inappropriate messages that induce the initiation of premature sexual relations.

“They are more alert, they want now, for example, to get into technology, they want to go on the Internet, they want to meet new friends”. **Mother of female adolescent, 11 years old, Bolivia MOMI_A_16**

Discussion and conclusions

This research analyzed the influence of the relationship parents/adolescent daughters on the sexuality of their daughters and although many times, the family, is confused about how to deal with the sexuality of adolescents, it is not understood that they are sexually active and even less that they have the right to be so (23), as we could analyze in this research there is little communication between parents/guardians and daughters regarding sexuality, and although mothers express their experiences around sexuality, but there is no direct communication about contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted infections or HIV. A study conducted in Nigeria in 2017 recommended greater involvement of parents in communicating and monitoring the sexual behavior of female adolescents, taking into account the consequences of risky sexual behaviors on the health of adolescents and society in general (24); the solution to the problem of unwanted pregnancies, STIs, HIV / AIDS and abortions, is not in banning sex, but it is helping our young people to express their sexuality without risk (23). Another study conducted in Romania found that the family approach to sex education is positively associated with healthy sexual initiation (25).

Although the family influences the health behavior and well-being of adolescents, it is often interfered with by the corrective measures that are applied within the adolescent's family; these practices, often related to psychological violence, are very frequent and are often conceived as everyday practices in the home; one study highlights the influence that family formation has on violence in relationships (26). According to another study, violence may have contributed to a greater extent to female sexual experience in two-parent households (9).

In terms of expectations, parents want their daughters to develop in the academic field, but indirectly prepare adolescents to assume the role of caregiver at home, according to a study the lack of agency exposes them to get pregnant, by following existing norms, peer pressure, limited negotiating power in their relationship and poor acceptance of contraceptive use among their partners, impacting on the economic retribution of women.(27)

The values that parents transmit to their daughters regarding the expressiveness of their feelings and the experience of their sexuality respond to a transgenerational transmission as expressed by Neireitter (2017): "most mothers transmitted unfavorable and rejection messages regarding early motherhood. However, the intergenerational transmission of adolescent motherhood perpetuated a series of unfavorable variables in the daughters of these women.(28)

According to cultural beliefs and family traditions, when an adolescent becomes pregnant she suffers rejection by her partner and family; this coincides with a study carried out in Colombia where it was found to be common practice to abandon the partner after the first trimester; this male decision to abandon was linked to the position of his family of origin.(29)

Finally, we can conclude by highlighting the need for adolescent women to have the support of their parents/guardians in order to achieve a full and harmonious development of their sexuality.

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