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RESEARCH

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PATERNITY ON THE YOUNGER MEN'S: EXPERIENCES, CHANGES AND POSSIBILITIES

*Paternidade entre homens jovens: vivências, mudanças e possibilidades**Paternidad entre hombres juvenes: experiencias, cambios y posibilidades***Maria Beatriz de Assis Veiga¹** **Mayara Ribeiro Maciel**[https¹](#) **Bianca Pezzini Souza da Silva Klayn¹** **Cláudia Regina Ribeiro¹** **Adriana Lemos¹** 

ABSTRACT

Objective: present the perceptions of young men about the experience of fatherhood. **Method:** qualitative study, carried out by interviews with 12 young people aged between 18 and 24 years, captured by the snowball technique and the theoretical saturation. Data processing was performed by content analysis. **Results:** the younger fathers were in a disadvantaged socioeconomic scenario. Fatherhood was associated with isolation and losses, but also with renovations and new perspectives. The financial provide of the child was one of the aspects related to the demands of the current model of masculinity and paternity, which can be difficult to experience in the other ways of being a father. **Final considerations:** it is necessary to implement public policies that allow boys to manage their reproductive lives with health and responsibility, establishing discussions about gender and masculinity, to favor the experience of a fatherhood less grounded in the current norms of masculinity.

DESCRIPTORS: Paternity; Sexual and reproductive health; Gender and health; Sexuality.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: apresentar as percepções de homens jovens sobre a vivência da paternidade. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, realizado através de entrevista com 12 jovens de idade entre 18 e 24 anos, captados pela técnica de bola de neve e saturação teórica. O tratamento dos dados deu-se pela análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** os jovens pais encontravam-se em cenário socioeconômico desfavorecido. A paternidade foi associada a isolamento e perdas, mas também à renovação e novas perspectivas. O provimento financeiro do filho foi um aspecto relacionado a exigências do modelo de masculinidade e paternidade vigentes, o que pode dificultar a vivência de outras formas de ser pai. **Considerações finais:** é necessária a implementação de políticas públicas que possibilitem aos rapazes gerenciarem sua vida reprodutiva de forma saudável e responsável, estabelecendo discussões quanto a gênero e masculinidade, para favorecer a vivência de uma paternidade menos calcada nas normas de masculinidade vigentes.

DESCRITORES: Paternidade; Saúde sexual e reprodutiva; Gênero e saúde; Sexualidade.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: presentar las percepciones de hombres jóvenes sobre la experiencia de la paternidad. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, realizado a través de entrevistas a 12 jóvenes con edades comprendidas entre los 18 y los 24 años, captados por la técnica bola de nieve y saturación teórica. El tratamiento de los datos se realizó mediante análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** los padres jóvenes se encontraban en un escenario socioeconómico desfavorecido. La paternidad estaba asociada con aislamiento y pérdidas, pero también con la renovación y nuevas perspectivas. La provisión financiera del hijo fue un aspecto relacionado con las exigencias del modelo de masculinidad y paternidad actual, que puede dificultar la experiencia de otras formas de ser padre. **Consideraciones finales:** es necesario implementar políticas públicas que permitan a los jóvenes gestionar su vida reproductiva de forma sana y responsable, estableciendo debates sobre el género y la masculinidad, para promover la experiencia de una paternidad menos basada en las normas de masculinidad actuales.

DESCRIPTORES: Paternidad; Salud sexual y reproductiva; Género y salud; Sexualidad

INTRODUCTION

Youth is understood as the period from 15 to 24 years old, intersecting with the end of adolescence, but this period can extend until age 29 when we consider some milestones of independence, such as academic training and leaving home. In addition to marking the transition from childhood to adulthood, it is characterized by biological, psychological, and social transformations. The term can be used in the plural, "youths," to reflect the diversities and inequalities that mark the lives of young people.¹

Parenthood during youth is seen as a problem because it increases social, economic, and educational vulnerabilities, especially in settings where social inequalities are already present, such as the peripheries and slums of large Brazilian cities.²⁻⁴ While a more simplistic view believes teenage pregnancy to be a public health problem, a more complex approach understands it as a multi-causal social phenomenon.⁵

When seen as a problem, the perspective is the attempt to avoid or reduce it, so that health and educational actions are aimed at investments in reproductive control through access to contraceptive methods. This situation does not consider reproduction in this phase of life as a young person's right. But its broader view takes into consideration the complex aspects that involve the phenomenon in the perspective of better understanding it.

It is true that sexual experience and pregnancy are different for boys and girls, and these differences are inscribed in the body, but they are not merely biological events, since they are deeply marked by the conceptions of gender present in our

culture. Gender relations are hierarchical in terms of power, in which men are privileged to the detriment of women⁶, and this perspective must be present in discussions about maternity and paternity. With the arrival of feminist movements, these aspects have been emphatically debated and masculinities problematized, and their traditional form is no longer recognized and valued as the rule, but is open to criticism and invited to reconstruction.⁷

When dealing with masculinities and their implications in the experience of fatherhood, it is necessary to take into account that "masculinities mean different things to different groups of men at different times"^{8:106}, and it should be clear that there are different forms of masculinities produced in the same social context, which coexist in the same place and historical moment and are subject to conflicts.

When we address the issue of fatherhood, having the concepts of gender and masculinities as premises, it is possible to understand, for example, the social support for young men to have less responsibility for the care of their children, but more responsibility to provide for their finances.² The role of provider may be difficult for a young father to play fully, and his financial instability may end up keeping him away from the experience of fatherhood.

In this scenario, it is worth bringing to the discussion the concept of participatory fatherhood, which can offer this young man a new model of masculinity and the exercise of fatherhood, the latter being more linked to affection, pleasure, care, and the promotion of health for fathers and children, and less linked to financial provision, which can be difficult to be achieved by these young men at an early stage of life.⁹

This study is an excerpt from the master's thesis entitled "Fatherhood in the view of young fathers from a gender perspective" defended in 2014 in the Postgraduate Master's Program in Nursing of the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro. One of its objectives was to present the perceptions of young men about the experience of fatherhood, since understanding the male view of pregnancy during adolescence and youth is relevant to understand the implications of this phenomenon in this population.¹⁰

METHOD

This is a descriptive and exploratory research with a qualitative approach. The participants were 12 young male parents between the ages of 18 and 24. In the text, these young men will be identified by the letter E, for interviewee, and the sequential number in which they provided the interviews. These were carried out by the first author of this study (who, at the time, was a nurse and a Master's student in nursing), and had as settings the interviewees' homes, the homes of family members, and also public spaces of free choice of the participants.

To access the informants, the snowball sampling technique was used, which is characterized by non-probability sampling, in which the first members of the sample are captured by convenience, being asked to subsequently indicate other people who meet the eligibility criteria to participate in the study, until the desired number of interviewees is reached, which is established here by the data saturation technique.¹¹ After the indications, a presentation was made in person or by telephone by the main researcher, describing the objectives of the study, and the burdens and bonuses related to participation. All the nominees agreed to participate in the study, and then the interview was scheduled or carried out, according to the availability of the young people.

The data construction was carried out through semi-structured interviews (lasting between 30 and 58 minutes), occurring during the months of March to May 2014, being recorded on digital audio equipment and later transcribed. It was not necessary to repeat any interview, however, some young people were called afterwards to clarify some specific information. During the interviews, a field notebook helped in the annotation of details such as aspects of the environment where they were held, emotions and unspoken attitudes, and the presence and interaction of the interviewee with some family members who interrupted the interview at some point, such as wives and children.

For the treatment of the data, we used the Content Analysis in its thematic modality, from two pre-defined categories: "understanding the exercise of fatherhood in youth" and "the changes and repercussions arising from the phenomenon of fatherhood in youth", being the content of the present study contemplated in the latter.¹² After the floating reading of the material, a first spreadsheet was manually created with a cut of the speeches that identified the registration units, and from there, these were grouped, characterizing the thematic units, and a regrouping

allowed the emergence of subcategories, which were allocated to categories.

The research was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro on February 25, 2014, under Opinion no. 541.474. It is interesting to note that the recommendations of Resolution 466/2012 were followed and guided the study, as well as that all interviewees signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF).¹³

RESULTS

Twelve young men who became parents between the ages of 15 and 23 were interviewed, all living in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Regarding race/color, 10 of them (83.3%) declared themselves black and/or brown.

With regard to their school life, only three had completed high school, and none of them was attending school at the time of the interview. Among the young parents, 10 (83.3%) attended public school. Of the nine (75%) interviewees who had not completed high school, five (55.5%) had dropped out of school before becoming pregnant. Of the four (44.4%) young people who had dropped out of school after becoming pregnant, three (75%) were already working before the pregnancy and all had a history of repeating school.

As for the insertion in the labor market, in seven cases (58.3%) it occurred through informal employment, and 10 young people (83.3%) already had a history of work activity before pregnancy. Regarding income, eight (66.7%) interviewees had a monthly income of up to two minimum wages.

Two data related to the family of the young people called our attention: the first was the history of paternity/maternity in youth or adolescence among their mothers or fathers, which presented itself as an intergenerational reality of the phenomenon, since 11 young people (91.7%) had experienced this same history.

The second finding was the recurrence in the speeches of the participants of the absence or separation of their parents: four young people (33.3%) had not lived with their parents since childhood, either because of their death or abandonment. And two interviewees (16.7%) – although they referred a good relationship with their father – reported a distancing in the father-child relationship since childhood due to the marital separation of their parents.

The first experience of paternity in the lives of young people corresponded to the average age of 18, occurring in a non-planned scenario for 11 parents (91.7%), and on this occasion, eight young people (66.7%) did not use any contraceptive method to prevent pregnancy. At the time of the interviews, nine parents (75%) had one child, two respondents (16.7%) had two children, and only one (8.33%) had three children.

The age of the children ranged from one month to four years old, and although nine young men (75%) claimed to have a marital relationship with the mother of their children, only four (44.4%) cohabited with them, and one lived with his mother-

-in-law at her home, which shows difficulty in maintaining an independent economic status.

In the youngsters' discourse, fatherhood brought attributes of demand and responsibility, however, some positive aspects were mentioned, such as the perspective of more assertive behaviors and better life habits.

DISCUSSION

To understand the experiences of young people regarding the assumption of fatherhood, one must understand that the attributes of a father are culturally influenced that define what is correct, acceptable or reprehensible. As Santos points out,¹⁴ the good performance of fatherhood was, some time ago, related almost exclusively to the material provision of the child and protection through the exercise of authority, punishment, and social protection of the family, attributes that were seminally linked to the exercise of masculinity as well. However, nowadays, an exercise of fatherhood that involves care and pleasure is accepted and desired.^{2,14,15}

Adolescent pregnancy is related to poverty and income inequality, and as a contributor to uncertain futures, since it can generate an early entry into the labor market and compromise student life.¹⁶ In the Brazilian scenario, this phenomenon can also be associated with black or brown skin color and low education,⁵ revealing the racism that crosses the Brazilian society and marks the social life of men and women by revealing itself in the spheres of education, health, income, and access to formal jobs.

Nass et al.¹⁰ state that the interruption of studies as a result of teenage pregnancy, the consequent difficulty in entering the labor market, and the subjection to low-paid jobs are fears associated with the phenomenon, especially among young people from the lower social classes. But most of the young people in this study already had a compromised academic history before pregnancy, so the occurrence of pregnancy can accentuate the negative outcomes in the academic life of the interviewees.

The low income of young people was similar to that found in another study with adolescent parents of both sexes,¹⁰ ratifying the link between adolescent fatherhood and unfavorable socio-economic conditions, although the greater or lesser link should not be analyzed from this aspect alone.

Some studies^{16,5} have observed that the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy/youth may be something repeated within families, and it is not uncommon for mothers, fathers, and siblings to have had this experience. With regard to the young fathers in this research, this cultural mark appeared in their family contexts and, although the young men denied planning a pregnancy, this "tradition" may have been relived intergenerationally, consciously or not.

It is known that living with both parents is a protective factor for male adolescents in the exercise of sexuality, including increasing the chances of adherence to condom use, thus being less vulnerable to unplanned pregnancies and STIs.¹⁷

In this way, the father's absence can be related to a possible earlier sexual insertion, as well as a greater possibility of pregnancy during adolescence/youth, since the father represents for the young person a source of guidance and support, with whom he could discuss issues related to the sphere of sexuality, and thus problematize and reflect on its exercise.¹⁶

In the speech below, it is evident that the young man relates the father's absence to school dropout and fatherhood in youth:

Ah! Because he [the father] would talk... in the case, like this, he could have talked to me, something, said something and so on, I might not have had this girlfriend, I might have been studying, studying, studying, and this [pregnancy] might not have happened (E.11).

The young parents said that with the arrival of the baby they became more responsible, started to dedicate themselves more to work activities and to occupy themselves less with leisure activities:

It has changed. I am feeling more alone, I don't know. I don't talk to anyone like that anymore. I think that before I only felt like talking nonsense, nowadays I feel like talking serious things, and I did not create this relationship with anyone (E.7).

It is understood that, with the assumption of paternity and the social role of provider, young people have changes in their lifestyles, reorganization of their projects and relationships with family, partners and friends, and this can contribute to this social isolation referred by E.7. In a survey conducted in Colombia, with young university fathers, the revelation of pregnancy was followed by a demand for responsibility by families and young people themselves, in which they showed a concern focused on the material provision of the child, which can cause great tensions.²

The report "The situation of fatherhood in Brazil: time to act" launched in 2019 by Instituto Promundo18, described, after interviewing 1709 men and women, that changes in the conception of fatherhood are already evident, but that care is still perceived as primarily female, while providing for the family would be the main function of the man-father. The report also points out that men are very involved in the task of playing with the children, but not in activities such as cooking or bathing, for example. Therefore, "all indications are that this emerging 'new fatherhood' will continue to coexist with more conservative views of 'being a father' for many years to come.

In our study, the demands for responsibility and financial provision inherent in this new role came from the young man himself, but also from his family members and his partner, and in some cases proved to be too much. In general, they reported that they are demanded to be more serious and to take on their new family, especially with regard to the financial issue. These demands lead them to reduce the time they have to spend with friends and leisure activities, which seems to cause frustration and distance for some couples:

We did everything together, I could be honest with her, tell her everything I did, about my day. Nowadays I don't have the courage to tell her about the things I do. I don't know? if I get drunk, I won't tell her, she will be offended, say that I have to be responsible, that I am a father now, and so on. She changed, as soon as the baby was born, she was already a different person; I, no, I remained the same guy, so I couldn't have the same relationship with her, because she changed. She believes that she has to do this, she thinks she has to be another person, that she wasn't before [...]. The other day (after the birth), when she saw [the child], she decided that she was going to be an older person (E.7).

Before the birth of the child, the young mother's life and body begin to change. After the birth, she will have to assume tasks with determined schedules and deadlines, reduce the hours of sleep, being taken by the need to care for the baby and new responsibilities, such as breastfeeding,¹⁶ a reality different from that experienced by the young father, even if he is participatory. However, this young man showed incomprehension and little solidarity regarding this process, showing concern with the eventual consequences of this phenomenon in his own life. In this way, young people reveal that the arrival of a child is accompanied by negative feelings, as if they would be prevented from enjoying the benefits of adolescence and would have less time for leisure.^{10,16} Parenthood is thus described as a difficult task, an anticipation or a "leap" to a stage in life that they would live one day, but not at this moment, as we noticed in the statements:

I stopped going out, some things have changed, the responsibility is greater, send money to buy something if something is missing, that's it! [...] Everyone said that now I have to work, not to miss anything (for the baby) (E.5).

It was hard, you have to give up a lot of things, and... well I mean, you lose... you lose, no, you put a part of your life ahead, that's it (E.1).

A partially positive view associated with fatherhood in youth was the opportunity to launch oneself into the male universe, in which "becoming a man" is clearly associated with the ability to support one's child, even if not fully, as can be read in the account below:

Ah! I felt that more responsibility was coming. That the time had come to fall deeper into the work even more! To become a man! That responsibility of feeding my son, working, that's how I felt! (E.11).

However, the condition of "provider" may be more desired than actually achieved by individuals who are at an early stage of life, without financial stability, with low income, which as a consequence would not be possible for them to fully afford the expenses of this child.

Other positive aspects of the experience of fatherhood in youth seem to emerge, compensating its negative effects.¹⁰ This is an opportune moment to encourage young people to promote positive changes in their lives:

Before she was born, I was a drug dealer (E.2).

I took a little more responsibility, leaving a little more of my friendships that were not good, a little aside, so that I wouldn't end up losing my life, that's it! (E.5).

So I think he was very important for me, for my life, for my change that I don't see myself... suddenly I could be on a path that I wouldn't like to be on, but I am because I didn't have him, so I don't see myself like that, without being with him, if he wasn't born, how would I be? I can't see myself, understand? How would I be! (E.12).

It is perceived, with the above speeches, that the arrival of the child may represent a motivation for improvement in the quality of life of these young men, in which they invest in better lifestyle habits. This motivational moment seems very opportune for health professionals to act and apply the 4th step of the flow to be followed in the partner's prenatal care, in which relevant topics should be addressed with the man and guidance promoted to have healthier lifestyle habits.¹⁹

Assertive interventions can help him to quit drug trafficking, as reported above by E2, and also promote other more assertive habits, such as eating, physical activity, reducing or stopping the use of licit and illicit drugs, and protection against STIs. Thus, investments will be necessary in the training of health professionals to improve the welcoming of these young fathers, and in the adaptation of health units to the obstacles to the introduction of fathers, particularly in prenatal care.^{4,20,21}

Even though they are sensitive to the above-mentioned changes, the fact that these young men are immersed in a scenario that is not favorable to these changes cannot be forgotten, and attention must be focused on their social, economic, and cultural vulnerabilities, which were already present before the arrival of the child and are limiting factors of their expectations of change.

In this sense, public policies beyond the health sector need to be directed to this public, in which the young man-father-poor-worker is not seen as a "problem" due to the difficulty in supporting himself and his child, but as someone with potential that needs to be worked on and invested in, and thus aspire to a better future.

A future in which the intergenerational history of maternity/paternity in adolescence and youth can have a different outcome, not from the perspective of the violation of young people's rights, but from the perspective of their real power of choice: where in the future the children of the young fathers in this research find themselves in favorable social and cultural conditions to reflect and consciously choose when to reproduce, have access to quality education, and the right to live in a society with fewer gender inequalities, thus being able to exercise a more participatory fatherhood rather than a provider.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By desire, planning or "accident," these young people reproduce their family history – an important fact to be reflected upon and debated in the sphere of the fight for sexual and reproductive rights for youth, since they should not become parents simply because of their biological capacity to do so, or to reproduce what has been experienced in their social context, as if they could not have any other outcome for their lives. Because guaranteeing the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights implies giving these young people the conditions to make conscious, healthy, and responsible choices.

In this research, fatherhood during youth had both negative and positive repercussions in the lives of young people, in which the demand for responsibility and the obligation to financially provide for the child make it possible for feelings of frustration/abdication and happiness to coexist when taking on a new social role.

Being a father" seems to motivate young people to reflect on better habits and living conditions, but their social, economic, and cultural scenario, present before they become pregnant, is not favorable to these changes. That is why it is important to implement public policies that aim to reduce their social and economic disadvantage and still invest in their potential.

Fatherhood in youth was experienced through the strong influence of the social roles linked to men, which resulted in the valorization of a fatherhood that is a provider and less affective. We conclude with the certainty that this multicausal phenomenon, which is pregnancy in adolescence and youth, needs to be debated and actions must be directed to young fathers in order to promote other ways of exercising their masculinities and fatherhood, because meeting the financial demands of the child is necessary, but not to the detriment of loving and affectionate relationships.

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