

**TEENAGERS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT
TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION***CONHECIMENTO DOS ADOLESCENTES SOBRE
A PREVENÇÃO DA GRAVIDEZ NA ADOLESCÊNCIA*

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to assess teenagers' knowledge about teenage pregnancy prevention. Since pregnancy during this period becomes a condition that increases the prevalence of maternal, fetal, and neonatal complications, as well as exacerbating existing socioeconomic problems. Therefore, nurses, through the School Health Program, should develop actions that promote prevention, autonomy, and self-care, encouraging adolescents to act in the name of their health and well-being, and in guaranteeing their rights. This is a descriptive study with a quantitative approach, involving students aged 15 to 17 from a public school in the city of São Luís Gonzaga do Maranhão, totaling 20 teenagers. Data were collected through the application of a questionnaire with 19 closed questions on the study topic to the students, which were then analyzed and organized into Excel 2016 spreadsheets using the statistical frequency calculation method and presented in tables and graphs. The results highlight that 70% of the participants are female; 25% reported being sexually active, and 85% demonstrated knowledge of contraceptive methods, with condoms being the most mentioned. It is concluded that the implications of this research may contribute to the reconsideration of many actions within the municipality, encouraging nurses to provide assistance beyond Basic Health Units, as well as to analyze more effectively the pregnancy rates and the attitudes being taken to address this problem.

Keywords: nurse's role; teenage pregnancy; school health program.

RESUMO

O presente estudo teve como objetivo avaliar o conhecimento dos adolescentes sobre a prevenção da gravidez na adolescência. Uma vez que a gestação nesse período se torna uma condição que eleva a prevalência

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de complicações maternas, fetais e neonatais, além de agravar problemas socioeconômicos existentes. Dessa forma, o enfermeiro, através do Programa Saúde na Escola deve desenvolver ações que promovam a prevenção, autonomia e autocuidado, incentivando o adolescente a agir em nome da sua saúde e bem-estar, e na garantia dos seus direitos. Trata-se de um estudo do tipo descritivo com abordagem quantitativa, tendo como participantes alunos, com faixa etária entre 15 a 17 anos de uma escola pública da cidade de São Luís Gonzaga do Maranhão, totalizando 20 adolescentes. Os dados foram coletados mediante a aplicação de um questionário aos estudantes com 19 perguntas fechadas sobre o tema de estudo, onde, em seguida, foram analisados e organizados em planilhas do Excel 2016 pelo método de cálculo estatístico da frequência e apresentados em tabelas e gráficos. Nos resultados, destaca-se que 70% dos participantes são do sexo feminino; 25% afirmaram ter vida sexual ativa e 85% demonstraram ser conhecedores dos métodos contraceptivos, sendo a camisinha a mais mencionada. Conclui-se que as implicações desta pesquisa possam contribuir para a reconsideração de muitas ações dentro do município, incentivando o enfermeiro a promover assistência para além das Unidades Básicas de Saúde, bem como, analisar de maneira mais efetiva os índices de gravidez e as atitudes que estão tomando para resolver este problema.

Palavras-chave: atuação do enfermeiro; gravidez na adolescência; programa de saúde na escola.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as the second decade of life, encompassing the period between 10 to 19 years of age, with pre-adolescence considered to be between 10 to 14 years, and proper adolescence from 15 to 19 years. This population represents about 16% of the global population, and in Brazil, it is estimated that this percentage is approximately 25% (BRASIL, 2007, UNICEF, 2019 apud MELO *et al.*, 2022).

During adolescence, individuals undergo a series of biopsychosocial transformations which can reflect in their behavior and social relationships, depending on the sociocultural context in which they are situated. Among the biological changes can be pointed out anatomical variations in the body, such as bone growth and the maturation of secondary sexual characteristics, which generate intense feelings of attraction and sexual desire in adolescents (AMARAL *et al.*, 2017). As a result, the onset of sexual activity tends to be imminent, leading to the adolescent's vulnerability to unintended pregnancy.

In this context, pregnancy during this period of life has a significant potential to pose risks to the health of both the mother and the baby, considering the physiological and psychological conditions of adolescence. Additionally, pregnancy causes various social changes in the lives of adolescents, often leading to the postponement or abandonment of studies and also to family conflicts, which in turn diminish the chances of these adolescents entering the job market in the future (DUARTE, PAMPLONA, and RODRIGUES, 2018).

According to Ortega (2022, p.1), "despite the rate having decreased in recent years, Brazil has an average of 400,000 cases of teenage pregnancy per year, one of the highest in the world." Therefore, the importance of the School Health Program (PSE) is understood, which among its goals, emphasizes: encouraging qualified training actions so that nurses can address the diverse situations related

to the sexual experiences of young people and adolescents, enabling a reduction in the incidence of unplanned pregnancies within this population (BRASIL, 2006).

According to Baroni and Silva (2022), the school is established as a powerful setting for intersectoral work and the development of learning that guides decisions and attitudes for a better quality of life. In this perspective, the School Health Program (PSE) serves as an entry point for the multiprofessional health team to engage in direct assistance and the development of strategies that address the adolescent population. Therefore, the nurse, as a member of the team, has been an essential professional in health actions, seeking to expand activities aimed at improving students' health and quality of life through actions focused on the promotion, prevention and care of health, in order to reduce the vulnerabilities associated with adolescence, such as unintended pregnancy (SILVA *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, considering the implications of teenage pregnancy and acknowledging that the lack of adequate information is the primary cause of its occurrence, the necessity and importance of addressing sexual education for adolescents become evident. It is the responsibility of nurses, especially in the school environment - where a large portion of the adolescent population is found - to appropriately guide them through the School Health Program (PSE). This leads to the following question: what is the level of knowledge among adolescents about preventing teenage pregnancy?

On that account, the main goal of the present study is to evaluate adolescents' knowledge on the topic of teenage pregnancy prevention in schools and to describe the importance of the nurse's role in the development and implementation of strategies in this context.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study with a quantitative approach. According to Gil (2002), descriptive research aims to describe the characteristics of certain populations or phenomena using standardized data collection techniques, such as questionnaires and systematic observation. Quantitative research focuses on objectivity, using mathematical language to describe the causes of a phenomenon, the relationships between variables, and so on. It employs standardized and neutral instruments to assist in the collection of raw data (FONSECA 2002 p. 20 apud SILVEIRA and CORDOAVA 2009 p. 31).

The population consisted of male and female students from a public high school in the city of São Luís Gonzaga do Maranhão, Brazil, aged between 15 and 17 years. The sampling was of the simple random type, resulting in 20 participants.

The data were collected through the application of a semi-structured questionnaire with 19 closed questions on the topic, which, in addition to sociodemographic data, included questions regarding the students' affective and sexual life, knowledge and use of contraceptive methods, consequences of teenage pregnancy, perception of pregnancy prevention activities at school, and knowledge about family planning.

After data collection was completed, the data were analyzed, organized in Excel (2016) spreadsheets, and presented in tables or graphs using the statistical frequency calculation method, which consists of a result based on the number of times each variable value is repeated in the sample or population relative to the total sample (PIANA, MACHADO, and SELAU, 2013).

The study followed all the guidelines contained in Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Health Council (CNS). The research was only conducted after approval by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) under opinion number 5.967.724. Each student who agreed to participate in the research signed the Free and Informed Assent Form (TALE), and the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE) was duly signed by the parents, through which they received the necessary information about the research.

RESULTS

In alignment with the study's objectives and based on the administered questionnaire, data were collected from a total of 20 students. The data collection occurred on April 24th, 25th, and 26th, 2023. Following collection, the data were organized, analyzed, and categorized. The variables presented in Table 1 indicate a higher prevalence of female adolescents, accounting for 70%, compared to 30% male adolescents. Regarding age distribution, there was a predominance of 16-year-olds (40%), followed by 15-year-olds (35%), and 17-year-olds (25%). In terms of educational level, the distribution was as follows: 40% reported being in the first year of high school, 25% in the second year, and 35% in the third year. These findings correspond with the data from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2018), which indicates that the appropriate ages for high school students are 15 years for the first year, 16 for the second year, and 17 for the third year.

Regarding race, marital status, and family income, the majority of participants self-identified as Black or mixed race (85%) and reported being single (95%). It was observed that 45% of the participants have a family income of up to one minimum wage, while 40% have a family income below one minimum wage, and only 15% reported that their families receive two or more minimum wages.

Table 1 - Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Student Participants in the Study.

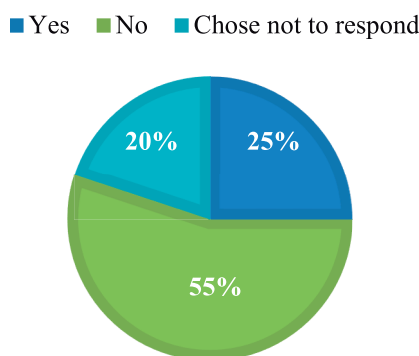
General Characteristics	Q	%
<i>Age</i>		
15 years old	07	35%
16 years old	08	40%
17 years old	05	25%
<i>Grade</i>		
1 ^a Year of HS	08	40%
2 ^a Year of HS	05	25%
3 ^a Year of HS	07	35%

<i>Sex</i>		
Masculine	06	30%
Feminine	14	70%
Non-binary	--	--
<i>Racial Self-designation</i>		
White	03	15%
Black/mixed race	17	85%
Indigenous	--	--
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	01	5%
Single	19	95%
<i>Family Income</i>		
≤ 1 minimum wage	08	40%
< 1 minimum wage	09	45%
≥ 2 minimum wages	03	15%

Source: The authors (2023).

Regarding the participants’ relationship status, 55% reported that they were not in a relationship, while 45% indicated the opposite. Although those in a relationship do not constitute a majority, this percentage is relatively high. Concerning sexual activity, 55% of participants stated that they were not sexually active, 25% reported having an active sexual life, and 20% chose not to respond, as illustrated in Chart 1.

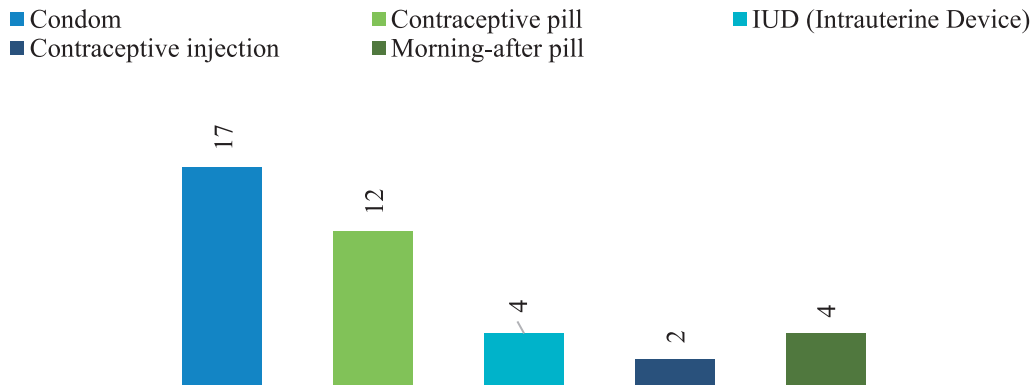
Chart 1 - Question 9: Are you sexually active?



Source: The authors (2023).

Regarding knowledge of contraceptive methods (Chart 2), 85% of the participants demonstrated awareness of some method, while only 15% stated otherwise. Among the contraceptive methods known to the participants, “the condom” was the most mentioned, with a total of 17 responses, followed by the contraceptive pill with 12 mentions, the Intrauterine Device (IUD) and the morning-after pill with 4 mentions each, and the contraceptive injection with 2 mentions, as shown in Figure 3. It is worth noting that some participants reported knowing two or even three methods simultaneously. Nevertheless, a reasonable level of knowledge is evident, considering the variety of existing contraceptive methods.

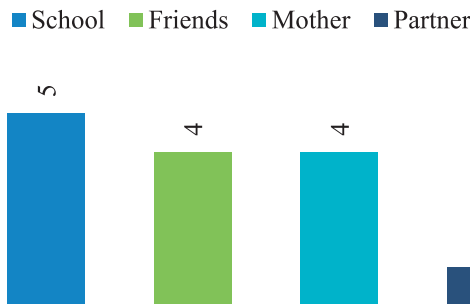
Chart 2 - Contraceptive Methods Known by the Participants



Source: The authors (2023).

The question regarding whether participants had discussed contraception with someone was answered affirmatively by the majority (60%), while 40% claimed they had not engaged in discussions on the topic. Among those who reported having dialogues about contraception, five indicated they received some information at school through a teacher, four mentioned having had such conversations with friends and their mother, and one noted having discussed this subject with his girlfriend, according to the data in Chart 3.

Chart 3 - Variables Mentioned by Students as a Source of Dialogue about Contraception

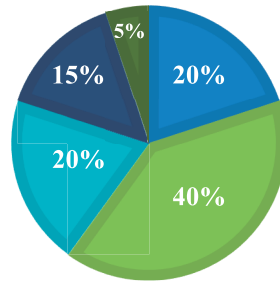


Source: The authors (2023).

Regarding the availability of contraceptive methods in the city where the research was conducted, most participants rated it as good (40%), while the other proportions were distributed as follows: 20% rated it as excellent, 20% as average, 15% as poor, and 5% chose not to respond or were unable to provide an opinion, as shown in Chart 4.

Chart 4 - Question 14: What do you think about the availability of contraceptive methods in your city?

■ Excellent ■ Good ■ Average ■ Poor ■ Chose not to answer

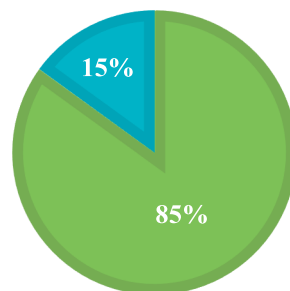


Source: The authors (2023).

Regarding educational activities related to sexuality and pregnancy prevention, the majority of students (85%) reported that such activities exist but are infrequent. Only 15% stated that these services are offered very frequently, while no respondents indicated that these services are entirely absent, as noted in Chart 5.

Chart 5 - Question 17: Are there activities to provide information about pregnancy prevention, for instance: lectures, dramatizations, among others, at your school?

■ No ■ Yes, not so often ■ Yes, very often

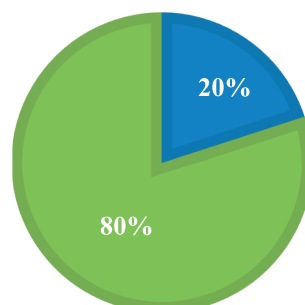


Source: The authors.

When asked if information alone is sufficient to prevent pregnancy, 80% of the respondents stated that it is not, while 20% affirmed the opposite, as shown in Chart 6.

Chart 6 - Question 18: do you think that information alone is enough to prevent teenage pregnancy?

■ Yes ■ No

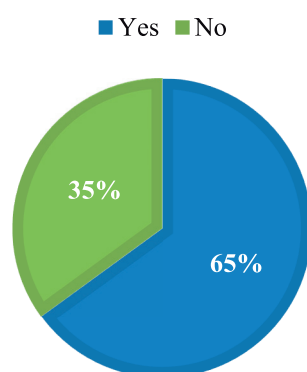


Source: The authors (2023).

In accordance with this study, Guedes *et al.* (2020) observed that, as discussions about contraceptive methods deepened, it was possible to conclude that the participants were knowledgeable about contraceptive methods, including condoms. The increasing number of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among adolescents was not solely due to ignorance or lack of information.

Finally, when asked about family planning, 65% of the respondents stated that they know what it means, while 35% indicated otherwise, as shown in Chart 7.

Chart 7 - Question 19: Do you know what family planning is?



Source: The authors (2023).

DISCUSSION

According to studies, inadequate education is associated with the early onset of sexual activity, which in turn increases the likelihood of teenage pregnancy and its recurrence (ASSIS *et al.*, 2022). The Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG, 2021) demonstrates that adolescents with lower socioeconomic status are five times more likely to become pregnant than their wealthier counterparts.

Of the 25% who stated they were sexually active, four responses were given by female adolescents, while only one was accounted for by a male adolescent. However, Cabral and Brandão (2020) assert that a study conducted with adolescent students aged between 13 and 17 years indicated differentiated behavior between the sexes: among the boys, 36% reported having had sexual relations at some point, whereas among the girls, the percentage was 19.5%.

Cavalcante *et al.* (2021) state that according to studies, adolescents are increasingly informed about the different contraceptive methods. It is widely accepted that the male condom and the contraceptive pill are the most well-known methods among Brazilian youth.

However, according to Piantavinha and Machado (2022), a study found that students from private institutions reported knowing more contraceptive methods than those attending public schools, suggesting that young people with better financial conditions have access to more accurate information, although not always sufficient.

Furthermore, the contraceptive pill contains a high dose of hormones and is considered a “hormonal bomb.” Thus, Cavalcante *et al.* (2021) reiterate through their study that adolescents generally have limited knowledge about the contraceptive pill, knowing only of its existence without understanding how, where, and in what situations to use it. Many adolescents were found to use the method incorrectly, highlighting the need for better approaches from health services in this regard.

The IUD was frequently mentioned by the participants, and despite its recognized effectiveness, many myths still surround its use. One such myth is the possibility of it being abortive, which lacks any scientific evidence. In light of this, the utilization of contraceptive methods can be influenced by common misconceptions, potentially leading to their discontinuation (VIERA *et al.*, 2020).

Issues related to contraception have therefore become relevant since the efficacy of contraceptive methods depends, among various aspects, on adolescents’ knowledge about the types of methods and their proper (PIANTAVINHA and MACHADO, 2022).

According to Piantavinha and Machado (2022), research confirms the minimal involvement of health professionals as sources of learning about contraception, highlighting that friends, school, and family are the primary sources of information for young people.

Consequently, Castro *et al.*, (2023) assert that the lack of guidance on sexual and reproductive health in schools can negatively impact young people’s sexual lives. Studies show that the absence of such guidance is associated with a higher likelihood of sexual initiation and unprotected sex practices. Adolescents who attend school demonstrate a lower propensity to be sexually active, use condoms more frequently, and have fewer multiple and simultaneous partners.

Moreover, family support is reaffirmed as important for adolescents’ development, as it encourages autonomy, cooperation, and the organization of family rules. Parents can play a significant role in promoting healthy sexual (CASTRO *et al.*, 2023). However, discussions about sexuality often cause considerable embarrassment within families.

According to VIEIRA *et al.*, (2020), other sources, such as friends and the internet, can provide unsatisfactory quality guidance, diminishing adolescents’ correct perception of the subject.

Recent research showed that, in Brazil, approximately 71.4% of public school students received information about the free distribution of condoms in basic health units, while 65.4% of private school students were aware of this. This indicates that most adolescents acknowledge having been instructed by health authorities about condom provision, but they do not seek them out of fear of being reprimanded and judged (GUEDES *et al.*, 2020).

In light of this, besides the pedagogical team, nurses should collaborate with schools and education professionals to develop interventions in partnership with adolescents, families, and communities. They play a crucial role in educating adolescents about sexual health and family planning, facilitating access to available resources and means to address situations that commonly arise during this period (IZIDRO and VALE, 2019).

Despite many participants responding to questions related to family planning, many did not know what it entailed. On that account, Pedro *et al.*, (2021) affirms that the Department of Health, through Law 9.263/96, regarding the institution of family planning, establishes that health professionals are responsible for assisting with conception and contraception. They should inform individuals about the meaning and benefits of adhering to family planning, which among other objectives, promotes the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, prevents teenage pregnancy, and avoids unsafe abortions.

CONCLUSÃO

Therefore, it is concluded that a significant portion of the adolescents possessed knowledge about contraceptive methods and their usefulness; those who were sexually active even utilized some of these methods. Given the variety of contraceptive methods available today, a lack of comprehensive information was noted, as all participants could name a maximum of three contraceptive methods, with significant overlap among their responses.

Moreover, the majority of adolescents affirmed that information alone is insufficient to prevent pregnancy. This could be partly because no participant mentioned any health professional as a source of knowledge, indicating that the role of primary health care is insufficient in the municipality. Primary care professionals, especially nurses, should undertake assistive actions through existing programs, serving as the gateway for adolescents to access health services.

Thus, it is hoped that the implications of this research can contribute to the reconsideration of many actions within the municipality, encouraging nurses to extend their assistance beyond Health Center (Basic Health Units in Brazil). Additionally, there is a need for a more effective analysis of pregnancy rates and the strategies being implemented to address this issue.

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