

Risk Factors and Consequences of Early Pregnancies in the Health Zone Of IDJWI: Case of Deliveries from the Kihumba Hospital Center in the Health Zone of IDJWI in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

In the Rural Health Zone of Idjwi in particular, in the province of South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the phenomenon of early pregnancy constitutes a real public health problem. Unfortunately the data is not well documented to date. This is why this phenomenon particularly caught our attention.

In view of this problem, we ask ourselves the following questions: what are the factors favoring the occurrence of early pregnancies in adolescents and what are the impacts? What about the Idjwi Health Zone in particular? We will limit ourselves to investigating only the ladies who gave birth at the KIHUMBA hospital center from June 2022 until June 2023.

For the realization of this work, we opted for a prospective, qualitative exploratory method. We conducted a survey of 3 health areas that deserving the Kihumba Hospital Center. These are exactly the mothers who come to give birth in our hospital, with an emphasis on those who gave birth under the age of 20. During the period of our study, which lasted one year, the Kihumba Hospital Center interned 743 women who gave birth, of whom 102 were under 20 years old (13.7%). Among the 743 who gave birth, 543 (73%) had had their first child before the age of 20. The average age of the first pregnancy of those giving birth under the age of 20 was 15 years ; most of them were in a common-law union with a low level of education.

The majority of our respondents had their first sexual intercourse at the age of 16 ; there are even those who had it around 12 years old.

The most cited risk factors are the desire to become responsible, ignorance of the menstrual cycle, the desire to become a mother, the search for money because of the irresponsibility of parents who are poor. We should also point out early pregnancies that occurred after cases of rape and sexual violence that were not reported for fear of being squandered.

Keywords: Early Pregnancy, Newborns, Risk Factors, Consequences, IDJWI, Kihumba Hospital Center.

Introduction

Today, early pregnancy remains a real public health problem. The phenomenon is true precisely in developing countries, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Early pregnancy should be understood as one that occurs at a young age, between 10 and 19 years old. The causes are multiple and the consequences very unfortunate not only on the future of the young girl, but also and above all on her relationships with herself and

with other members of the community. Hence the urgency to signal this social evil finally to seek palliative solutions.

Indeed, according to the report of the World Health Organization (2012), “nearly 16 million adolescent girls in the world, aged between 15 and 19, give birth to children each year. Statistically, it is estimated that one in five teenage girls has already had a child by the age of 18. In other words, 2 million girls under

the age of 15 give birth every year.” Unfortunately pregnancies are not without consequences on mother-child health [1]. 95% of births take place in low- and middle-income countries, more specifically among poor, poorly educated and rural populations. In these regions, complications related to pregnancy or child-birth is one of the leading causes of death for adolescent girls [2].

In fact, in low-income countries, the average adolescent birth rate is more than twice that of adolescents in high-income countries. The proportion of births that occur during adolescence is around 2% in China, 18% in Latin America and the Caribbean, and over 50% in sub-Saharan Africa. Half of all adolescent births occur in just seven countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, the United States of America, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo [3]. However, the proportion of young girls who are pregnant before the age of 15 varies enormously even within the region – in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the rate is 0.3% in Rwanda against 12, 2% in Mozambique [4].

Many authorities are still unaware of this scourge, to realize it, it has been shown in the Democratic Republic of Congo that 27% of girls aged 15 to 19 have had a pregnancy [5].

While it is true that teenage pregnancies are a serious concern throughout the world, the inventory of the issue also shows that there are no statistics in several countries to comprehensively identify the extent of the phenomenon. This situation is due to the absence of an information system on cases of teenage pregnancies, leading to serious consequences on their school performance. This is how we observe every year repetitions and school dropouts in the ranks of young girls.

It goes without saying that an early pregnancy has devastating consequences not only for the mother, but also for the child and the development of their community and an entire country. Given these multiple threats to the lives of women and babies, we want through this study to talk to mothers who have come to give birth at the Kihumba adolescent hospital center in rural Congolese areas, where humanitarian interventions are very limited, in order to know how they globally apprehend this recurring phenomenon of early pregnancies, to identify its causes and consequences and to propose preventive measures.

In the Rural Health Zone of Idjwi in particular, in the province of South Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the phenomenon of early pregnancy constitutes a real public health problem. Unfortunately the data is not well documented to date. This is why this phenomenon particularly caught our attention.

In view of this problem, we ask ourselves the following questions: what are the factors favoring the occurrence of early pregnancies in adolescents and what are the impacts? What about the Idjwi Health Zone in particular? We will limit ourselves to investigating only the ladies who gave birth at the KIHUMBA hospital center from June 2022 until June 2023.

Materials and Methods

For the realization of this work, we opted for a prospective, qualitative exploratory method. We conducted a survey of 3 health areas that decervant the Kihumba Hospital Center. These are exactly the mothers who come to give birth in our hospital, with an emphasis on those who gave birth under the age of 20. Our sample is first reasoned, insofar as the choice of elements is based on the judgment of the researcher in relation to their typical or atypical character. It is then selective or intentional insofar as the selection is made according to certain predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria according to the research objectives. Finally, our sample is casual, that is, it includes study subjects as they present themselves until the desired sample size is reached.

The instrument used for our survey is the interview guide composed of questions divided into the following three sections : factors contributing to early pregnancy, consequences related to early pregnancy

Regarding the tools used, we have developed a correspondence table based on the concepts of the restricted problematic framework. This table allowed us to write the interview questions according to the objective of the research, to classify them by predefined categories and then sub-categories to be addressed in the interview guide [6].

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics

During the period of our study, which lasted one year, the Kihumba Hospital Center interned 743 women who gave birth, of whom 102 were under 20 years old (13.7%). Among the 743 who gave birth, 543 (73%) had had their first child before the age of 20.

The average age of the first pregnancy of those giving birth under the age of 20 was 15 years.

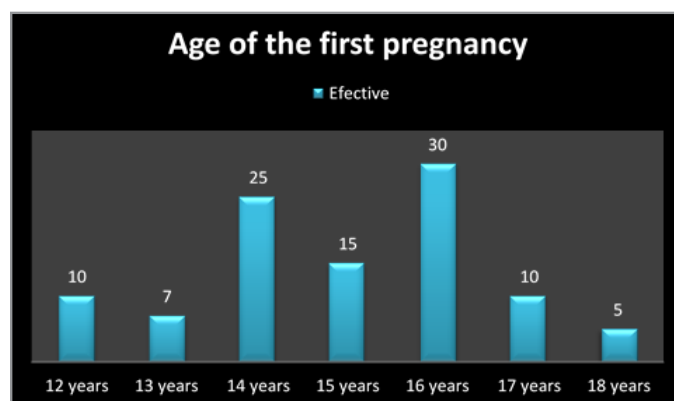


Figure 1: Average Age of First Pregnancy

Marital Status

Our women who gave birth under the age of 20 had varied marital status, dominated by single people followed by married people and then those in a free union.

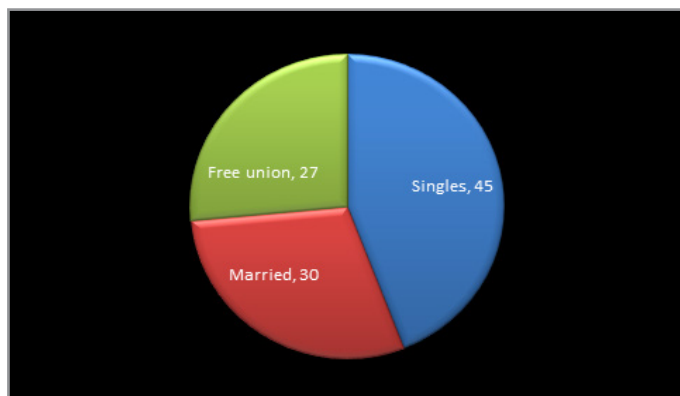


Figure 2: Marital Status

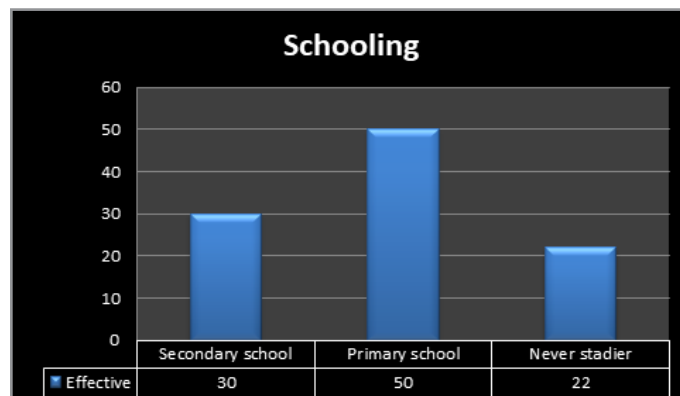


Figure 3 : Schooling Factors

Schooling

Most of the women who give birth under the age of 20 here at home have a very low level of education, of which only 30 have attended secondary school, 50 primary school and 22 have never had the chance to study.

Favoring Early Pregnancies

The Normal Age of Pregnancy

Asked about the knowledge of the normal age of pregnancy, teenage mothers gave us different answers.

The most cited age categories were for some, for the most part the age of 14 is ideal for others from 12 years old. Others still think that from 16-18 years old, the girl is big enough and can carry a pregnancy. Unfortunately a large category (22) has no idea about the ideal age to have her first pregnancy



Figure 4: Idea on ideal of first pregnancy

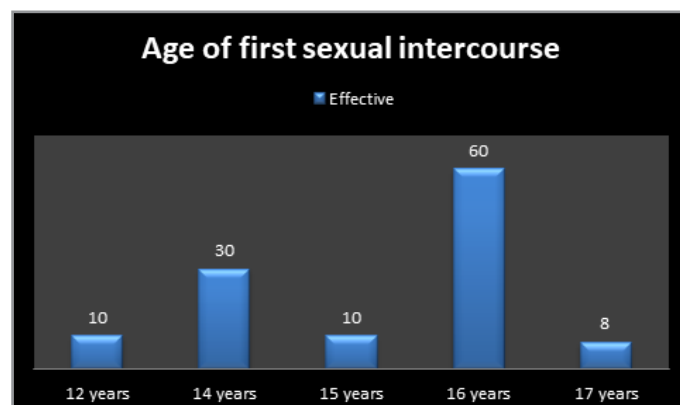


Figure 5 : Age of First Sexual Intercourse

Age at First Sexual Intercourse

We note that most of our mothers had their first sexual intercourse at the age of 16 (60), 30 respondents had their first sexual intercourse at the age of 14, 10 respondents at the age of 12 years; 10 interviewed at the age of 15 and 8 interviewed at the age of 17; with an average age of 14.8 years.

Elements Influencing the Occurrence of Early Pregnancies

By asking them about the factors that influence early pregnancy, they evoke several factors, including among others: the irresponsibility of the parents (20), the search for money because of the parents who are poor and irresponsible (40), and the search for pleasure (10), exchange sex-points at school (20), ignorance of the menstrual cycle (54), imitation of adults (33), pornographic films (5), bad company (50), the desire to become a mother (42), parental influence (14), abuse by stepmother (4), unreported rape (30), early sex, promiscuity (80), lack of parental guidance (40), rudeness (2), teenage girls who want to feel responsible (56).

We find after analysis that the most cited factors are the desire to become responsible, ignorance of the menstrual cycle, the desire to become a mother, the search for money because of the irre-

sponsibility of parents who are poor. We should also point out early pregnancies that occurred after cases of rape and sexual violence that were not reported for fear of being squandered.

We find after analysis that the most cited factors are the desire to become responsible, ignorance of the menstrual cycle, the desire to become a mother, the search for money because of the irresponsibility of parents who are poor. We should also point out early pregnancies that occurred after cases of rape and sexual violence that were not reported for fear of being squandered.

Uses of Contraceptive Methods

The mothers interviewed speak of only three methods: abstinence, condoms and the use of the morning after pullula. Most don't even prefer to use contraceptives for the simple reason; exhaust the number of children provided by God.

Consequences of Early Pregnancy

Medical Risks for the Child

By questioning the adolescent girls, we noted 8 cases of neonatal and infant mortality, 6 cases of low birth weight and 11 prematurities.

Psycho-Social Risks for The Child

This graph shows that children from early pregnancies still had serious problems: 45 of the mothers reported that their first children were victims of neonatal diseases and infections, 35 reported malnutrition, 23 reported poor hygiene and 21 reported death in the first year of life.

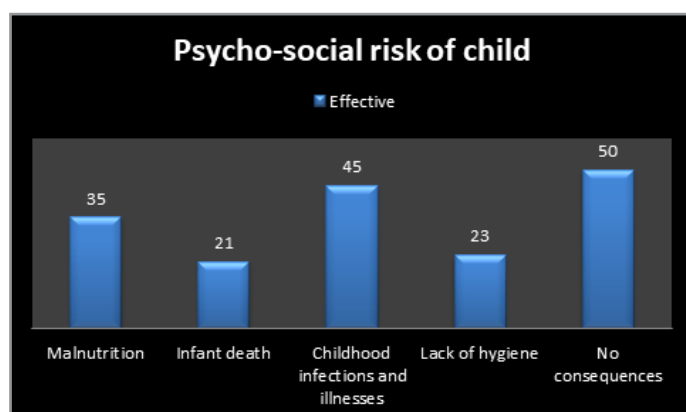


Figure 6: Psycho-Social Risk of Child

Medical Risks for the Mother

Among the adolescents interviewed, 30 mentioned difficult deliveries because of their small pelvises and 25 cases of postpartum hemorrhage following home birth, 40 voluntary abortion for fear of blame from society, the remains reported no risk.



Figure 7: Psycho-social risks of the mother

Psychosocial Risks for the Mother

From this graph we see that most of them after their first pregnancy had financial difficulties and others sought to leave their environment for the city or to neighboring countries. The others no longer continued their studies, the other victims of insults, nicknames and the risk of divorce from parents.

Discussion

1º) Sociodemographic Characteristics

After analyzing our results, we find that early pregnancies continue to increase significantly. During the study period, out of 743 deliveries, 102 (13.7%) were deliveries resulting from early pregnancies. In addition, out of 743 women who gave birth, 543 (73%) had their first child before the age of 20. This correlates with studies conducted in New York in 2020, which show 21 million young girls aged 15 to 19 become pregnant other studies conducted in Zambia (14.9%-42.5%) in 2018 and in the Philippines in 2017 (3.5-17.9%), show similar percentages to ours [7-9].

For our study, the average age of first pregnancy was 15 years, almost similar with a year older than the average age (14 years) in the study conducted in the Lomela Health Zone [2].

Most of our mothers were in a free union (45), unlike in this study conducted in the Lomela health zone where the majority of respondents were single with unfortunate consequences for both mother and child; this is why all the authorities should invest in the fight against this scourge.

The level of education of our study population remains too low with only 30 women who gave birth had the chance to go to secondary school, the others either did not have the chance to go to school (22) or they have only attended primary school (50). This would be contrary to the results of studies carried out in the territory of Lomela where it was found that the majority of adolescent girls still attended secondary school. (2) It would be due to the socio-comic level which remains low.

2º) Factors Favoring Early Pregnancies

According to the literature as supported by our surveys of adolescents who came to give birth at the Kihumba hospital center, it appears that there are several factors that promote early pregnancy, including environmental, psychological, socio-cultural and political factors.

We find after analysis that the most cited factors are the desire to become responsible, ignorance of the menstrual cycle, the desire to become a mother, the search for money because of the irresponsibility of parents who are poor. We should also point out early pregnancies that occurred after cases of rape and sexual violence that were not reported for fear of being squandered. Socio-cultural factors: teenage girls mention among other reasons: imitation of what they see in pornographic films and love shows; pressure from parents who challenge them by telling them that they are old enough and that we will not continue to take care of their needs, including friends who encourage them to be able to fend for themselves. Corele with data found in other studies [9-11].

Political factors: We are talking here about health policy, lack of accessibility and availability of means of contraception, sex education at school. All the adolescent girls questioned speak only of the condom, the morning after pill as a known means

of contraception and most are unable to obtain them, for lack of information, others think that once the first child is born, it is no longer useful to think about contraception. No sex education, sexuality being considered a taboo subject, parents do not talk about it with their daughters and they make their discoveries elsewhere with their friends who are sometimes also misinformed. Most don't even prefer to use contraceptives for the simple reason; to exhaust the number of children planned by God, exactly in a study made by Faucher in 2022 [12].

3°) Consequences of Early Pregnancy

According to the results obtained after our survey, we find that the consequences recognized by the respondents are consistent with the literature we have consulted, both in terms of medical risks and psychosocial and economic risks.

• Medical Risks for Mother and Child

At the mother's, teenage mothers are often poorly monitored and do not take the usual precautions (in terms of diet, physical activity).

In children, we note that the main medical risks of early pregnancy are low weight and complications at birth, illnesses, possible death, poor sanitary and food maintenance.

• Psycho-Social and Economic Risks

In the mother, we can note the perpetuation of the inferior status of women and their reduction to poverty, school drop-out, discrimination and marginalization. Many of them have been rejected by their families, insulted in their neighborhood.

All the teenage girls interviewed have no longer returned to school and are therefore condemned to do only work in the fields.

In children, according to the literature, early pregnancies lead to emotional deficiencies, abuse, abandonment, a difficult future, trauma. But our survey did not extend to the future of children born to teenage mothers. During our study, we found that indeed, very often it is the parents of these adolescent girls who take care of their grandchildren who sometimes consider their mothers as their big sisters. For most of these children, their future is bleak and they are out of school as their parents are often irresponsible and poor. These results are consistent with those of the literature in different regions of the world [13-15].

Conclusion and Recommendations

Early pregnancy, a real public health problem, has several negative consequences not only for the young girl, but also for the child's life and for the girl's parents. According to the WHO, nearly 16 million adolescent girls worldwide, between the ages of 15 and 19, give birth each year. Statistically, it is estimated that one in five teenage girls has already had a child by the age of 18. In other words, 2 million girls under the age of 15 give birth every year.

These statistics seem to be confirmed in the study that we conducted in the health zone of Idjwi at the Kihumba hospital center in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where we noticed that the average age of the onset of the first pregnancy is 15 years old.

From a qualitative point of view, we have noticed that the factors favoring early pregnancy are numerous, that is to say environmental, psychological, socio-cultural and political, leading to

dramatic consequences for the life of the child than for that of the mother. These include medical, psychosocial and economic risks. Hence the invitation that all social actors in education be involved in the knowledge and prevention of teenage pregnancies. These include young girls themselves, parents, state authorities, heads of health zones, churches and schools as well as international humanitarian organizations. Because, if all these social actors agreed to put in place all the means available to them in order to reduce the prevalence of teenage pregnancies, we could hope for some notable changes in a few years.

Thanks

- We first thank our God who continues to keep us alive despite the many threats of society and the environment
- We also say thank you to our dear parents (Papa Manegabe and Mama Mugezuza) who continue to fight for our well-being; live long dear parents
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Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest was found either with the various authors or with the company.

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