Prevalence of pedophilia in pregnant women under 15 years of age in Veracruz, Mexico: the role of health public servers

Original article

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SUMMARY

Introduction. Teen pregnancy occurs in 11% of pregnancies in the world; it has important medical implications, but it also has legal implications since in most of the country it is conceived as a crime rarely reported by the health personnel in charge of medical attention of pregnant adolescents.

Material and methods. We conducted a comparative analysis of the number of adolescent pregnancies in the Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII in the period 2010-2015 and the number of complaints of pedophilia reported by public servers.

Results: Of a universe of 661,530 inhabitants with a high degree of social marginalization, illiteracy and extreme poverty, 1418 adolescent pregnancies were reported during the period, of which 49% were attended in the health units of the Sanitary Jurisdiction; only one complaint of pedophilia was reported by a public server assigned to the Social Work area.

Discussion. There is a tendency towards non-reporting of adolescent pregnancies by the health personnel of the Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII, which is contrary to the legal obligations of reporting a typified crime in the corresponding Penal Code; this phenomenon can be multifactorial and the results should be studied in other geographical areas with different sociodemographic characteristics.

Keywords: Adolescent pregnancy, pedophilia, public servers.
INTRODUCTION

There are more than one billion adolescents in the world, which more than two thirds live in developing countries. It has been estimated that 10% of pregnancies occur in adolescents, with a rate of maternal morbidity and mortality higher than that reported in women older than 18 years (WHO, 2009). In relation to this, each year an approximate of 16 million women aged 15 to 19 give birth, which is equivalent to 11% of births in the world. In Latin America, the teen pregnancy rate has increased (OAS, 2009); Mexico is one of the world and regional countries with the highest birth rate among adolescents, although its prevalence is similar to that of Central American countries (León, 2008).

Adolescent pregnancy is a difficult experience that affects the overall health of both adolescent parents and their children, family members and society itself, and is currently considered a public health problem with hyperendemic characteristics (Beltrán, 2006). Adolescent pregnancy has a higher rate of obstetric and postpartum complications than those reported in the general population, especially preterm delivery, preeclampsia, eclampsia, intrauterine hemorrhage and others (Arce, 2012, Adell, 2011, Carach, 2017, Lagunes, 2011, Laterra, 2012). In the same way, adolescent women do not have an adequate state of maturity to be able to assume the responsibilities associated with the education of a minor, especially in cases where they must do so as single mothers (Martínez, 2014; Pacheco, 2015).

The frequency of pregnancies in adolescents is higher in areas of high marginalization, with lag in the educational and economic level of its population, domestic violence, family breakdown and low access to health and sex education programs (CNDH, 2015; Gilbert, 2003). It is evident that the sociodemographic factors mentioned reduce the possibility of access to preventive information, in order to have a controlled sexuality and reduce the possibility of transmission of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies (Gómez, 2015; Gottschall, 2003; Aine, 2003).

Little is known about the fact that any pregnancy in children under 15 years of age constitutes a crime according to the provisions of the Criminal Code of the State of Veracruz in its Title V, which establishes that to properly accredit the crime of pedophilia only it would require that the complaint exist, in which the mother was a minor and the father had any punishable age (Jiménez, 2010; Fraga, 2005). When a minor comes to the care of her pregnancy in any health unit, the medical and auxiliary personnel are forced to report the fact to the authorities of justice, as public servers. (Araujo, 2009).

It is clear that public servers who work in government health centers (doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, etc.) and who are linked to the delivery process or Cesarean section, are those who participate or should participate in the report of these events, even in cases in which the father of the baby is a minor and also in cases in which the pregnancy is a consensual act (Cantero, 2010, Carbonell, 2014, Colomar, 2013).

This is where the discrepancy falls between what the law establishes and what happens in practice. In some
epidemiological studies it has been observed that the prevalence of legal reports due to pregnancy in adolescents is extremely low (Cortés, 2006; Espinoza, 2016); this can be associated with the fact that many adolescent pregnancies are consensual acts and neither the minor pregnant nor their parents have the desire to legally proceed against the father of the product (Rodríguez, 2008, García, 2014). On the other hand, there seems to be a great ignorance in legal matters in the health personnel of public institutions, which reduces the possibility of making the corresponding report (Rodríguez, 2012; Sedletzki, 2016).

Therefore we decided to conduct a comparative analysis between the number of reports made by public servers in cases of pedophilia and the number of pregnancies in minors in the same period of time, with the purpose of determining if the health personnel of public institutions are reporting the aforementioned crime, in accordance with the provisions of the Mexican Law.

METHODS

The present study was conducted in the Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII of the State of Veracruz, which is made up of 28 municipalities, in the years 2010 to 2015. This region is made up of a population with a high degree of social marginalization with a percentage of illiteracy of 9.1 to 37.4% (average 25.6%) and a percentage of the population living in extreme poverty from 7.8 to 80.1% (average 52.3%).

It was a descriptive and retrospective study, based on the registry of medical attention of pregnant women of 15 years or less in the health units of Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII as well as the registry of legal reports made by public servers in relation to the crime of pedophilia in the database of the Access to Information Unit of the General Attorney of the State of Veracruz. We ask the authorities of the Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII about the number of patients under 15 years of age who were treated for pregnancy, regardless of whether it was a consensual act or not and the age of the father of the product. In the same way, we requested the Attorney General's Office the number of reports made for the crime of pedophilia in the 2010-2015 period and specifically those made by public servers assigned to public health institutions. We compared the prevalences and carried out the descriptive statistical analysis of the relationship between variables.

RESULTS

The universe studied was made up of 661,530 inhabitants belonging to 28 municipalities, most of them rural. The number of pregnant women under 15 years of age was analyzed during the 2010-2015 study period. As shown in Figure 1, a total of 1418 births were presented in pregnant women under 15 years of age in the period of analysis (National Institute of Geographic and Statistical Information).
In the same period a total of 165 inquiries initiated by the type of pedophilia were registered in girls aged 15 and under, of which only 1, in 2011, was initiated thanks to the notification of a public health official, in the municipality of Orizaba, which concentrates most of the urban-type population of this Jurisdiction (Figure 2).

Figure 2 does not discriminate if the notification was made by health personnel of a specific institution, such as the IMSS (Mexican Institute of Social Security), ISSSTE (Social Security Institute for State Workers), PEMEX health services (Petróleos de México) or SSA (Ministry of Health). The only reported case was made by a social worker from a medical unit belonging to the DIF (Integral Family Development) system.
DISCUSSION

Adolescent pregnancy is a phenomenon of increasing prevalence in our country, which is why, as it is an offense established in national and regional codes, it must alert health institutions to report, record and follow-up.

In previous studies it has been observed that the number of pregnancies in minors is considerably higher than the number of reports of cases of pedophilia, which leads to the conclusion that there is a trend towards non-reporting. This causes that the public servers are not fulfilling a legal obligation, either due to (1) ignorance or lack of interest in the subject, (2) it is frequent that they are consensual acts and accepted by the parents of the minor and (3) there is not any interest in making the corresponding complaint.

In the present study we observed that, according to the INEGI (National Institute of Geography and Statistics) there were 1418 births of mothers under 15 years of age in the period and region already mentioned. Based on data from the Sanitary Jurisdiction, doctors from health centers attended at least half of these cases, which is why they are aware of the existence of the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy and the medical implications that may arise. Although it was not the objective of the present study, it would be interesting to know the degree of knowledge of health personnel about the legal implications of teenage pregnancy in our country, which would improve participation they should have in this circumstance. The health personnel, in their capacity as public servers, must at least suspect the existence of a crime against the minor patients and not assume that it is a desired and consensual act in all cases.

The results of this study show, categorically, that at least in the Region of Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII and in the study period from 2010 to 2015, there is no culture of reporting in case of teenage pregnancies. The reasons for this can be diverse: the lack of interest to report on the part of the pregnant adolescent or those who take care of them, the predominant cultural ideas in a marginalized indigenous population, the excess in the workload of the health personnel (with the consequent decrease in the time available for making a complaint not requested in most cases), the indifference of health personnel assigned to public institutions and, finally, ignorance of the legal implications that this fact entails.

It is clear that our results should be a wake-up call for the authorities in charge of health care and the delivery of justice. Monitoring campaigns should be conducted to know the legal knowledge on the part of the health personnel; awareness campaigns should be carried out among health personnel and the vulnerable population to help understand that teenage pregnancies are a crime in Mexico, regardless of the age of the father or the consensual nature of some of these pregnancies.

We can not extrapolate our results to the whole country, given that the conditions of marginalization and poverty found in the Sanitary Jurisdiction number VII are particularly precarious, a fact that can magnify the phenomenon of non-denunciation; however, it requires the carrying out of similar studies in rural or urban populations in other areas of the country.
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