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TEENAGE MOTHERHOOD. A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *This case study covers a pregnant teenager's decision to keep the child, despite the fact that she is a student at a prestigious national college and its appearance seriously alters her future plans regarding education. The pupil's decision pupil even more surprising as she keeps the pregnancy secret from her own mother and the father of the baby is a highschool mate. The case study consists of a semi-structured interview, an excerpt from the teenager's diary, the form teacher's characterization, her intervention in the classroom and a psychological profile. The interview had the following structure: Data on her own birth and the origin family, traditions and cultural context, social factors, education, love and pregnancy, life after giving birth, the vision of the future and what she would change if she started over. The purpose of this qualitative research approach is part of the desire to find answers to the following questions: Why do girls become pregnant? Why do they choose to give birth? How do pregnant adolescents feel in the role of pupils? How do teenagers who choose to give birth resist to social and family pressures? To what extent childhood influences have contributed to the state of pregnancy in adolescence? What can be done to prevent accidental pregnancies in adolescence? We do not claim that the study highlights these legitimate questions, but it certainly captures relevant aspects.*

Keywords: *adolescence, mother, decision, keeping the pregnancy*

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania is on the top of European countries in births to minors' indicator, with an upward trend especially in adolescents up to 15 years old.

Why does this happen? What are these teenagers' psychological profiles? Is sexual education of the young generation so deficient that even a student who comes from a top school is surprised by this reality? Is educational policy guilty of surprise pregnancies or is this about personality characteristics and family contexts that lead to accidental pregnancy?

This study is a qualitative approach to investigate this sad reality that post-revolutionary Romania experiences despite the

fact that our country has opened from the flow of information point of view and communication technology has reached high levels.

The hypothesis in this case is that the student's decision to keep the pregnancy is due to both sex education ignorance and the emotional problems resulting from failures of family that she grew in.

2. CASE STUDY

2.1 Semistructured interview. Anca. V., 17 years old, student at national college of computer studies, coming from an urban

environment, first pregnancy without abortion history, start of sexual life – at 15 years old, gave birth to a baby in the XIIth grade.

- Data on her own birth and the origin family:

A.V. comes from a dysfunctional family with two girls whose age difference is of 2 years. The family is dysfunctional because the father is an alcoholic and A. witnessed numerous acts of aggression up to 6 years old when her father disappeared from home.

He left home for work and never came back again. He left with the house documents in his pocket and the rest of the family lived for years in fear that someone will claim their apartment because they could not prove that it was theirs.

The police found a body in 2001 near the man's birthplace (somewhere in Moldavia) although he had been gone since 1999. This event did not traumatize her, she says, because she did not have pleasant memories about him.

- Traditions and cultural context

A. was born into a family with clear moral rules. The mother is deeply religious and she has internalized the idea that abortion is a sin.

- Social factors

Anca's mother made great efforts so that she and her sister have a sense of security in financial terms. She had always known that she can not afford much and had reasonable demands at home, always taking care to not burden her mother.

In the community, she is neutral. She did not want to get involved but did not feel that as a frustration and marginalization. She felt well being more secluded.

At home, the atmosphere was not really adequate with many quarrels, tensions between girls and the mother who never seemed to be satisfied.

- Love and pregnancy

The father of the baby is a high school classmate from a parallel class. The adolescence did not use proper protection and got pregnant. She claims that her sexual education was poor, although she attends a prestigious college. He was misled by the fact that she had menstruation two months after getting pregnant. The pregnancy tests she took misled her even more as half of them indicated that she was not pregnant.

The adolescence only realized that she was pregnant only when perceived fetal movements. Then she had a strange feeling. The father of the baby cut all ties with her. She felt disappointed by his reaction and isolated herself even more from everyone.

Time passed quickly and the teenage mother delayed telling her mother that another mouth to feed was expected to come into the world... She thought she had enough time to prepare her mother but she did not. One morning, while going to school, labour started. Only then she woke up to reality as if from a nightmare. Only then she realized that the inevitable had happened.

The teenager says she had a shock that morning, the day of birth of her child. She did not know who to call. She needed support.

After giving birth, the first text message was to the child's father saying following: „We have a boy, we need to talk ”.

Her mother accepted this situation, on the one hand because she could do nothing, on the other hand because she considered the baby as a gift from God and a reward for an abortion she was forced to do by her husband. Being a very religious person, her conscience had always reproved that abortion, and this child relieved the pain of that loss and compensated for it.

- Life after birth

A big shock for the teenage mother was finding a job. That she was only a school graduate without the baccalaureate made this process much more difficult. She discovered with amazement that there were standards even for distributing leaflets. After 6-7 attempts of getting a job, she had the chance to be hired by someone she knew.

Programming and English knowledge saved her. She works in a young team of software, only the third shift, offering advice and solutions to U.S. customers of the company. She loves what she does, although the wages are modest, but she knows that she has no other choice as she has become the head of the family, since her mother retired with a small pension.

During this period, she faces the fear that her son will attach more to her mother than to her because the grandmother takes care of him



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while she is gone. Meanwhile she realized that it was not so.

Her sister, who is two years younger, was long embarrassed by the situation created, especially in front of her friends and colleagues. She did not want to be asked about this situation and was always irritated.

Paradoxically, the ones that suffered the most were her relatives, who blamed her constantly that she had disappointed her mother and brought shame on their family.

Her classmates behaved normally with her and she is aware that this is mainly due to their hearmaster who knew how to manage this situation successfully and mediated her relationship with the teachers, especially since she returned to school immediately after discharge although missed classes to breastfeed.

The relationship with the father exists, but he has not taken any steps to change the child's name into his. He wanted an expertize for establishing the paternity (more to prove to his parents that he is his son) but his parents are hostile to the idea. They will have nothing to do with this kid.

- Vision for the future

The future looks increasingly bright but the teenager reports feeling chronically tired. She says that she got old, has troubles sleeping but knows that this job as it is, is the best place for her at this time.

Her greatest desire for the future is to resume her studies. The baccalaureate examination is not a problem, now that she pays for tutoring in mathematics, but she really wants to go to college.

She also believes in future she will rebuild her life with her son and another man. She does not see herself with the baby's father because he had hurt her very much through the way he had handled the situation.

- What would she change if she took it over?

The adolescent says that she would delay giving birth until after graduation because now this situation is very difficult for her. Also, she would choose to tell her mother because it turned out that she supported her. So she would not have to bear the burden of this secret.

Sexual education, says Anca, should start in the Vth grade and should be held at a steady pace. Incomplete information brought her to position to realize too late that she was pregnant. She did not have the information that menstruation may appear although being pregnant or that she could access free medical services.

2.2 From Anca's diary. "This is really happening to me and yet I do not believe it. I am holding the pregnancy tests in my hand and half of them create the illusion that I could get out of this situation but subconsciously I realize: I am pregnant and can not step back.

Months pass and my tummy is growing, and I put all the fear aside, tight somewhere deep inside, my nausea is gone; I do not behave like a lunatic anymore, trying to keep calm and go through this situation, whatever that means. It moves it legs gleefully, sometimes makes me forget everything around, but it's hard. The situation is quite difficult and I can not even tie my shoelaces anymore and time passes. Its heart beats, it moves, but how long it will have to pass to "see the light of day"?

On February 28th, at 10:50, I gave birth to a boy. Around me, everything seems chaotic, but I decided to call him Tudor, that because he's my miracle. The great battle begins now.

For the first time at my chest... He's so tiny and cute, I hear his heart beating and see him breath and I still can not believe it I had

him inside me so many weeks. The first time I try to hold him, I do not know how to do this, but as soon as I breastfeed him, we already know each other. Hence, together forever, at least in thought...

Months go by without realizing it, I not get enough time to rest, I think that expenditures will exceed again the budget that we had allocated. And that's when I have to share with my mother that I need to find a job. Searching is somewhat difficult, people look at me strangely when they hear I am a mother, but somehow I will managed to get a good job and hold on to it.

I work 12 hours a day to afford everything, I do not sleep well lately. I forgot when I went out with my friends for a walk, and time with Tudor has greatly reduced. Being a mother and having a demanding job is not so easy, although at first I thought it possible. Of course, I do not think about the fact that I will sleep 5 hours a week again, it is important for us to be healthy and be able to lead a decent life. Mothers who raise their children alone should be awarded for strength and for bravery, or maybe just I think so".

2.3 Form teacher's characterization. I learned that Anca V. gave birth only three days after the event. I did not suspect she was pregnant and probably for this reason I was shocked by this news. I was her form teacher and her psycho-pedagogical councillor at times when she asked me for help.

From ninth grade Anca had a contradictory behaviour: very good and conscientious at school, ambitious and enjoyable ran for class president and won the vote of her colleagues. On the other hand, she made a few surprises: the excessive makeup, a lot of black around the eyes, and during the first class trip she got so drunk that we had to call the ambulance and needed the paramedic intervention to recover.

Since the beginning of high school I learned that he did not have a father, who was declared missing. After all searches in hospitals, morgues and border customs for 2 years after the disappearance, while the mother went to see all unidentified bodies found in the city. Traumatic. The lack of money made them unable to initiate steps in court to declare the

man dead, which is why the girls did not have any of the orphans' rights.

Since ninth grade, Anca started missing classes pretty much, every time with medical exemption. Her mother confirmed to me every time she had been sick and insisted that Anca was a very sickly child, had a lot of allergies and stomach problems because of not eating well.

At the beginning of tenth grade I changed her from the position of class president, because I could not collaborate with her as long as she was missing from school 3 days out of 5. Also in tenth grade, she befriended a boy from a parallel class, Bogdan with whom she began a beautiful relationship. Unfortunately, Anca's habit of missing classes became permanent.

At the end of the eleventh grade, she had failed math and without examination in Romanian and German. In the XIIth grade, she did not miss classes and the Maths teacher always kept me up to date with Anca's progress, she said that Anca was working seriously and that she was likely to catch up with the class, although being not very optimistic.

At the beginning of the school year I learned that Anca broke up with Bogdan, without knowing why. I only found out that the boy was very upset with her and that he did not want to have any relationship with her.

In the XIIth form, in March, Anca's mother called me one morning and told me that Anca had given birth to a boy. I was shocked and stirred because I had seen her in school a few days earlier and did not notice the pregnancy. Then I learned that even her mother did not find out until the day the baby was born, as well as Bogdan, who was the father; the only person who knew about the pregnancy was Anca's sister, to whom Anca had confessed that several months ago.

Anca's colleagues had a very interesting reaction: the girls were shocked and wondered what they would have done in her shoes, while the boys were very angry, because Anca told the father only when the baby was born and that she made on her own the decision to keep the baby. After a week from hearing the news, when students started to visit Anca, their opinions have changed: the boys relaxed,



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while remaining consistent with the idea that Anca that ought to have consulted her partner regarding the decision to keep the baby, and the girls became enthusiastic to the idea of having a baby. For fear of spreading of the phenomenon, we made an emergency partnership with a kindergarten, where I took my students in order to do all necessary work for taking care of a child for a few hours (taking him to the bathroom, feeding him, wiping his nose, witnessing some simple teaching activities). After this experience, the girls realized that having a child is not a game and reconsidered their position.

Regarding the fellow teachers, I urgently summoned the teachers of the class, because rumors and gossip had already started in the teachers' office about that „pregnancy will become a phenomenon in school”, that „the girl made us shame”, „we should expel her”, etc. In the council, I explained my colleague teachers that there was no restriction for student mothers. I mentioned that she wanted to return to school soon and she would need help to go home during the big break to breastfeed the baby.

Anca returned to school two weeks after birth, showing a completely normal behavior. Bogdan originally wanted to recognize the newborn boy, but at the insistence of his family he never did. However, he visits Anca and the baby constantly.

Anca's family was divided between condemning her and supporting her. The close ones, mainly her mother and sister supported her decision to keep the child and helped in its care. Anca's mother retired early so that she could support her when she was busy. Other relatives however, have stopped any relations with Anca and her mother, believing that she had made a foolish thing by keeping the child, given her family history and that, in her turn,

she had grown up without a father and in poverty.

Unfortunately, Anca failed to pass the baccalaureate exam in June and the one in August, too, but now she is seriously preparing not to fail the next session. Currently she is employed by a company that deals with providing telephone assistance to customers, she wishes to enroll in the Faculty of Letters after passing the baccalaureate exam. Her dream is to become a teacher.

2.4 Psychological characterization. We conducted a psychological assessment of Anca's personality, to identify her mechanisms of adaptation (coping), to identify the level of interpersonal relationships and its behavioural level.

There were administered two tests of personality, a verbal one (NEO FFI) and a nonverbal one (NPQ FF). Both are based on the five major personality factors postulated in the Big Five model (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness).

Summarizing, Anca can be described as a sensitive person, shy and calm. Inclined to negative emotions, Anca sometimes feels anger, guilt or sadness, although she has resources to cope with stress.

Quiet, shy, withdrawn, passive and reserved, Anca is rather distant and introverted.

She offers support and help to others, often assuming the role of support when needed, avoids confrontations with others and does not express aggression, either physically or verbally.

Anca is organized, disciplined, hardworking, serious and focused on the objectives, which makes her a good employee.

Regarding mental flexibility, Anca is tempted to analyze rules from a personal perspective.

Anca's interaction style is participatory, her learning her style is painstaking, oriented to tasks methodically, rather pessimistic, with a good impulse control.

Her defensive style is more maladaptive, frequently using dysfunctional defense mechanisms such as repression and denial. Often fleeing from reality, refusing to consider or think about her own problems, with difficulties in verbalizing her emotions, even when they are of high intensity.

Regarding anger management, Anca is rather shy, having problems in managing her own emotions. Her anger is directed inward rather than toward others.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The case study presented, that of a minor who decides to keep her pregnancy is unusual because the teenager was a student at a very prestigious school where students are selected based on their cognitive performance.

The incidence of pregnancy resolved in birth is rare in this context because these teenagers are more trained, and if they get pregnant they resort to abortion not to prejudice their career for which they work since high school.

Anca's case, analyzed from several points of view (the researcher's, her own's and her form teacher's) confirms the hypothesis of our study.

With an introverted personality, with intrapsychic conflicts arising from a difficult family situation she lived throughout her childhood, not knowing if her father is alive or dead, but that he had surely abandoned her family, Anca victimized herself, the debut of her adolescence being rebellious, as her form teacher had emphasized, with absences, drunkenness and harsh makeup to attract attention to herself.

This mental picture overlaps the lack of sexual information that made her made her aware of the pregnancy only when she perceived fetal movements.

The study is a warning regarding teenagers at maternal risk, even girls from the secure area of the elite schools.

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