

The Teenage Pregnancy. Choice or Incidental

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Abstract:

The occurrence of pregnancy among teenagers is a growing phenomenon in Romania in recent years, leading it to be placed, as a country, in an undesirable place in this field, following European statistics. 45% of births registered to girls under 15 in the European Union are in Romania, which places it in first place. Through this paper, I tried to identify some answers to the questions regarding the causes that lead to the occurrence of an early pregnancy, respectively the motivation of teenage girls to become mothers, the dynamics of their existence in the context of the appearance of a pregnancy at an early age, the image of these young women in Romanian society.

Keywords: Pregnancy, Choice, Motivation, Being A Young Mother, Responsibility

Introduction

Pregnancy "occurring" in teenagers has created a real phenomenon in Romania in recent years. Specialists (psychologists, doctors, sociologists, etc.) have tried to explain this phenomenon. Starting from the lack of education, or a deficient sexual education in certain categories of the population, and continuing with the pecuniary motivation¹ in the case of another segment of the population (money allocated for the birth of a child, according to Romanian legislation), an attempt was made to identify the true cause of the appearance a teenage pregnancy (considered still children up to the age of 18 according to the legislation in force²), having severe long-term implications, mainly due to the lack of taking responsibility for raising a child, mental and emotional maturity, or often, and by involving some medical causes. Beyond all these factors, the emergence of a criminal niche also led to the "motivation" of some young women to become mothers much too early, through the promise of a family, protection (both physical and financial/material), the acquisition of a status in society, and which in recent years has proven to be the first step towards becoming victims of human trafficking, or insertion into a harmful environment.

Teenage girls and the concept of pregnancy. Psycho-affective aspects

The evolution of the woman's condition in parallel with the advances in medicine, have transformed the experience of pregnancy into a desired and usually chosen act, here we are referring to families or individuals who fully assume the responsibilities arising from bringing a child into the world. However, referring to teenage girls, they, beyond certain unclear fears that often have a personal origin, such as the awakening of childhood conflicts (discovery of sexuality, Oedipal conflicts), there is also the desire to "see what it's like" or "feel good" through the "mother status" acquired and the attention received.

What is related to "circumstances such as the change in the rhythm of life, the attitude of the partner, material and moral problems"³ raised by the appearance of a new being, usually manifests itself chaotically in the case of young mothers (and here we are referring to very young ages 13-14 years old), they embark on an adventure in which they do not take into account the sequel of the chosen situation.

Whether they come from disorganized families, bordering on poverty, uneducated or having the medical component as the main factor (psychological conditions, liminal intellect, etc.), or they are at the time of conception of the child in a social settlement (where usually following school dropout, it seems to them that they have no other prospects), young teenagers choose the position of "mother", both out of the need for attention (specific to their age) and as a "source of income" following the birth (the legal provisions taking into account their financial support).

Most of the time, in the case of young mothers, the emotional vulnerability: the need for protection, the search for satisfaction, the dependence on the environment, leads them to request specialized support in a social center. The entourage (the family, if there is one, or the partner) is usually a source of stress and not a source of support, so that the problems that arise with the pregnancy (the need for medical and psychological treatment, sometimes hospitalization) invariably lead to dependence on the protection system

¹Government emergency ordinance no. 111/2010 regarding the leave and the monthly allowance for raising the child, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 830 of December 10, 2010, approved with amendments by Law no. 132/2011, with subsequent amendments and additions (2004), <https://lege5.ro>, accessed on september 2, 2024

²LAW no. 272 of June 21, 2004 (**republished**) regarding the protection and promotion of children's rights; ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENT Published in the OFFICIAL GAZETTE no. 159 of March 5, 2014, <https://legislatie.just.ro/>, accessed on September 2, 2024

³<https://www.sfatulmedicului.ro/>, accessed on September 2, 2024

(financial, material, moral), and which can be perpetuated in the following years, even by the appearance of a new pregnancy. The lack of specific education in the case of many teenage girls or the reluctance to any advice received from specialists in the field, is the main cause of the occurrence of so many pregnancies at very young ages. According to the data transmitted by the National Institute of Statistics⁴, Romania had, "in 2021, the largest number of underage mothers in the European Union, namely 8,024. Of these, 745 were between 10 and 14 years old, 11 more became mothers than in the previous year." Both governmental departments and non-governmental associations have proposed and run education programs at the level of this population segment - teenagers, taking into account the age-specific influence, the reluctance to adult advice and, unfortunately, the disinterest of many parents towards their own children.

The situation in figures of the existence of mothers at the age of adolescence The source of the data published by the National Institute of Statistics is the result of the institution's own research and statistics, as well as the information published by Eurostat⁵. The number was slightly lower than in 2020, in which 8,276 underage mothers were registered. However, Romania still ranks first in the European Union, with the highest number of underage mothers, under 18, recorded.

Of these: "3,446 became mothers at the age of 17; 2,424 at age 16; 1,409 became mothers at the age of 15; and 745 minor mothers were between 10 and 14 years old (compared to 731 minor mothers of this age in 2020). The number of underage mothers decreased constantly in Romania from 2017 to 2021: "In 2017, 9,425 mothers under the age of 18 were registered; In 2018, 8,621 mothers under the age of 18 were registered; In 2019, 8,457 mothers under the age of 18 were registered and in 2020 – 8,276 mothers under the age of 18"⁶.

As can be seen from the published data, at a general level, "in the European Union, the number of underage mothers is decreasing compared to 2020. In 2021 there were 27,845 mothers aged 18, compared to 29,505, in 2020. For example, at the opposite pole there is Luxembourg, the state with the fewest underage mothers in 2021, namely 14 teenage girls. Other countries with a notable number of underage mothers in 2021 were France, with 3,479, Bulgaria – 2,976 and Germany – 2,830"⁷.

Prevention measures and education of adolescent girls

As for Romania, in November 2023, the Minister of Health, Alexandru Rafila, declared that "our country would evolve from the point of view of health status indicators if the discipline "*Education for health*" were introduced in schools, and would mandatory not optional."⁸

Edupedu.ro wrote that "*Education for health*" can be taught from the 8th grade "with the consent of the parents". At the same time, this new Law on Education⁹ also provides "the possibility of granting a financial incentive to underage mothers who return to school. In November 2023, there were 741 scholarships for underage mothers granted", according to information provided by the Romanian Ministry of Education.

In 2020, our country ranked first in the European Union in terms of the number of underage girls who gave birth: almost 45% of girls in the EU who gave birth before reaching the age of 15 are from Romania, according to final Eurostat data¹⁰. The same study shows that "Two out of 10 teenage mothers have more than one child, and 32% of them state that their mother was a minor when she gave birth to them, and one out of ten newborns in Romania comes from teenage mothers, which which exponentially increases the risk of prematurity and infant mortality"¹¹.

In order to contribute to the reduction of infant mortality, such humanitarian organizations have started to run programs to inform the population, such as the "*Mother and Child Health*" program, specifically intended for disadvantaged areas in several counties. Thus, "*integrated services*" (medical, social, educational) are provided at the local level for mothers, pregnant minors who receive socio-medical support by facilitating access to health, family planning and pediatric assistance services.

At the same time, the analysis carried out in the study on the territory of Romania, shows that "Access to medical services and health education is vital for the health of the mother and the newborn. Unfortunately, Romania remains a country of social disparities, and the vulnerable population, especially children and pregnant women, face situations of marginalization. That is why Organization *Save the Children Romania* goes to the communities and provides medical assistance to pregnant women"¹²

Following the investigations carried out by the National Federation of Associations of Family Doctors in Romania, it results that "53% of the localities in Romania do not have a family doctor and thus many of the pregnant women in the areas they do not have a medically monitored pregnancy, resort to self-medication and usually wait until their situation worsens, exposing themselves to

⁴<https://www.agerpres.ro/>, accessed on September 2, 2024

⁵<https://www.edupedu.ro/romania-ramane-tara-cu-cele-mai-multe-mame-minore-din-uniunea-europeana-in-2021-numarul-mamelor-sub-14-ani-este-in-crestere/>, article by Alexa Stănescu, February 22, 2024, accessed on September 2, 2024

⁶Ibidem

⁷<https://www.edupedu.ro/romania-ramane-tara-cu-cele-mai-multe-mame-minore-din-uniunea-europeana-in-2021-numarul-mamelor-sub-14-ani-este-in-crestere/>, article by Alexa Stănescu, February 22, 2024, accessed on September 2, 2024

⁸https://www.edupedu.ro, accessed on September 3, 2024

⁹Ibidem

¹⁰ <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/>, accessed on September 4, 2024

¹¹Ibidem

¹²Ibidem

great risk"¹³.

During the interview guide applied to teenage girls, some of those interviewed stated that "*Money is given for girls who get pregnant and that it seems that these scholarships encourage the phenomenon*"¹⁴. Seen from another angle, this can benefit this population by encouraging young dropouts to return to school and complete their education. The phenomenon, however, can be looked at unilaterally, and the risk that appears, that some teenage girls who choose to get pregnant, drop out of school for good must be taken into account. In conjunction with the education law that approves school scholarships¹⁵, there are also social protection laws that entitle young women who were enrolled in school at the time they became mothers, to benefit from considerable amounts of "child-raising allowance", and which often proved enough for the young mother, so that she gave up school and implicitly the scholarship. It is necessary to identify the particular motivation that makes young mothers want to return to school and training in general. The scholarship for minor mothers was introduced in the 2023-2024 school year by the new Education Law, and is worth 700 lei/month (140 euros per month) for "supporting participation in education, preventing dropout and school failure"¹⁶.

Study on teenage mothers who request protection in a center for mother and child

The study I conducted in a maternity center (shelter) for mother-child couples in Romania, over a period of five years (2019-2023), focused mainly on the causes that led to early pregnancy in teenage girls, such as and on their motivation to become mothers. It took place by accessing the existing information in their personal files, data recorded personally by working directly with the beneficiaries, as well as by applying an interview guide and participatory observation. Through this study I sought to bring to the fore relevant elements regarding the evolution of the maternity center case study - as an alternative in preventing the abandonment of children, but taking into account the motivation of the beneficiaries and the lack of assuming autonomy, with direct reference to the former assisted beneficiaries of the protection institutions.

Out of a number of 152 mother-child couples (152 mothers and 228 children) admitted between January 2019 and December 2023, 27 of them represent the category of teenage mothers, which means 18% of the beneficiaries of the maternity center under study.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that only 5 of the mothers/minor pregnant women came from the community, the remaining 22 teenage girls were previously protected in a placement center, which underlines our opinion that due to the lack of specific instructional-educational programs, in the protection centers for children and minors, have led over the years to a dependence on the protection system of the beneficiaries of these centers, either by requesting accommodation in a residential type establishment (maternity center), or by the perpetual request to benefit from social services (material and financial in particular), refusing integration on the labor market or schooling (low level of schooling).

Thus, between January 2019 and December 2023, a number of 27 teenage girls between the ages of 14-17 were admitted to the maternity center, of which 16 were pregnant at the time of admission to the center, as follows:

- in 2019 – 7 teenage girls were admitted, 4 of them were pregnant (they came from social protection centers), out of a total of 29 mother-child couples admitted (29 mothers and 42 children);
- in 2020 – 7 teenage girls were admitted, 2 of them were pregnant when admitted to the center (they came from social protection centers), out of a total of 36 mother-child couples admitted (36 mothers and 9 children);
- in 2021 – 4 teenage girls were admitted, they being pregnant at the time of admission to the center (they came from social protection centers), out of a total of 30 mother-child couples admitted (29 mothers and 42 children);
- in 2022 – 5 teenage girls were admitted, 3 of them were pregnant at admission (they came from social protection centers), out of a total of 29 mother-child couples admitted (29 mothers and 55 children);
- in 2023 – 4 teenage girls were admitted, 3 of them were pregnant at admission (they came from social protection centers), out of a total of 28 mother-child couples admitted (28 mothers and 36 children).

Teenage girls' motivations for lack of preparation for life

The lack of *independent life skills*, survival skills in a setting outside an institution, left their mark on the entire existence of those who become mothers at the age of adolescence and who, in the majority, were assisted in special centers for abandoned children. These skills are formed gradually during the development of the child/young person, contributing to the formation of the personality, adapted from a social and cultural point of view.

The beneficiaries of the maternity center (previously assisted in other social centers) reasoned that:

- they were not allowed to participate in the current activities related to care, feeding (self-management);
- they were not encouraged in terms of income management, and apart from the school activities they were obliged to participate in, they were not allowed to have free activities from which to learn: shopping - not having their own money; to choose their clothing, food products, etc. – these being brought by suppliers strictly established by the institution;

¹³<https://www.edupedu.ro>, accessed on September 3, 2024

¹⁴<https://www.edupedu.ro>, accessed on September 3, 2024

¹⁵Government emergency ordinance no. 111/2010 regarding the leave and the monthly allowance for raising the child, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 830 of December 10, 2010, approved with amendments by Law no. 132/2011, with subsequent amendments and additions (2004), <https://lege5.ro>, accessed on september 2, 2024

¹⁶<https://www.edupedu.ro>, accessed on September 3, 2024

- they were not allowed to cook - invoking here the laws of sanitary hygiene, and the specially hired staff obliged to serve them. When they arrived at the maternity center, pregnant or with their child, the beneficiaries were outraged that there was no cleaning staff. Accustomed to people who performed these tasks, now in the position to perform them themselves, they objected citing the difficulty of the tasks due to the effort and time allocated to each activity and the fact that they do not have free time. Beyond the self-care capacity, as also provided in the Minimum Standards¹⁷ for maternity centers, the beneficiaries of the maternity center, former beneficiaries of the protection system, discover another kind of existence beyond the gates of the institution that had offered them protection, encountering special problems in regarding adaptation to a family environment.

The *Maternal Center* is a service for preventing the separation of the child from its parents, residential type, organized on a family basis, whose mission is to prevent the abandonment of the child/children and to maintain family ties, as well as to support the family to assume the role of parents, with all the responsibilities that are included in this role, in the situation of people who are temporarily unable to help themselves (victims of domestic violence, loss of living space, separation from a partner, etc.).

Without encouraging dependence on the system, the maternity center represents the organization of a life model that ensures the well-being of the mother-child couple, the physical, mental and material security of the beneficiaries, education, and which takes steps aimed at providing them with alternatives to social and family reintegration. All the principles mentioned in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* ratified by Law no. 18/1990, republished¹⁸, as well as the principles mentioned in Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights, are the basis of the activity carried out in the Maternal Center, previously mentioned documents.

As I noticed when analyzing the case study specific to the maternity center type establishment, the beneficiaries who requested over time the provision of specific social services, are mostly former assistants of the child protection system, and who needed assistance in a way periodically: either by being readmitted to a residential center, or by perpetually requesting financial support, repeatedly enrolling in programs run by NGOs or Local Councils, etc., getting used to migrating from one institution to another and refusing to assume responsibility for his own life or that of the resulting children. At the same time, bringing children into the world represents, for the majority of interviewed residents, the main source of income, with the mention that the allocated amounts (birth allowances, state allowances, financial support for single-parent families, etc.) are spent for the maintenance of the entire family, invariably for things considered necessary for the adult (smoking, alcohol), and not intended exclusively for the child's well-being (milk, pampers, etc.).

By associating with repeated failures, the existence of a lack of self-confidence, the lack of adaptation skills to unforeseen or created situations, the establishment of a clear goal or objectives to overcome the situation, these are manifested by deficiencies on all levels in everyday life. The complexity of the situation faced by the beneficiaries of the maternity center is also given by the reluctance to change, the transition to which they are subjected - and now we refer to the young women who were formerly assisted by the child protection system, from the status of resident in a residential center for children where they the minimum basic needs were fulfilled, in the autonomous life, in which beyond the assumption of responsibility for one's own person, there is the assumption of a much greater responsibility, that for one's own child.

In the case of those who apply for admission to the maternity center, invariably, the justification appears that "*the government is obliged to...*", throwing the responsibility of their own life on the shoulders of social workers, psychologists, etc.

According to the statements of the people interviewed, it follows that if they were still in the placement centers for minors, they would have gone through a process in which: to learn how to behave in certain situations, how to manage their emotions and build relationships balanced with those around them, to manage income, etc., it would have been useful for them later to find and keep a service that would ensure their existential costs without resorting to social services. Early intervention in this category of young people could contribute to the development of the necessary resources for defining goals and making choices in life. The traumas suffered, both by the former assisted beneficiaries, but also by those from the community, complicate the adaptation process or prevent them from overcoming difficult moments, without the requested help, developing over time defense mechanisms (impassivity in the face of their own children's traumas, lack of empathy towards others, abuse or neglect of one's own children, etc.).

These are psycho-social skills that should be assimilated by each individual so that they can lead a normal life without requiring assistance from the community, having the ability to use the opportunities offered by life.

Regarding the children and young women assisted in residential centers, the development of these skills is a complex process, through which the beneficiaries of the protection system, through specific activities, progressive and coordinated experiences, should acquire the facility of social integration, to develop harmoniously on all levels: physical, emotional, moral, cognitive. In reality, in

¹⁷ORDER No. 81/2019 of January 16, 2019 regarding the approval of minimum quality standards for social services organized as maternity centers*, M. Of. of Romania, Part I, no. 111 of February 13, 2019.

(http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/2019/Ordine_standard/Ordin_81_2019.pdf); ORDER no. 101 of March 15, 2006 regarding the approval of the Minimum Mandatory Standards for the maternity center and the Methodological Guide for the implementation of these standards; M. Of. no. 458 of May 26, 2006 (<http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/act/ordin-nr-101-din-15-martie-2006-privind-aprobarea-standardelor-minime-obligatorii-pentru-centrul-maternal-si-of-the-methodological-guide-for-implementation-of-these-standards-issuer-72119.html>), accessed September 5, 2024

¹⁸<https://www.unicef.org/>, accessed on September 1, 2024

juvenile protection centers, these activities, which, in theory, are included in the steps taken to prepare young people to leave the protection system, are done in a superficial way, with most young people turning to services after being discharged from the center social, repetitively, postponing or totally excluding the idea of autonomy and independent life. In this way, system dependence is promoted, by not stimulating and informing the young people adequately from the time of assistance in the centers.

The social worker is the most involved in implementing and carrying out daily activities, taking into account what motivates young women to participate in such programs. However, the participation of young women in activities specific to personal development cannot be imposed, since the activities are not mandatory (the rights of the child being erroneously interpreted in this case) and thus the activities are carried out in a limiting framework, with few participants or those who are not willing to assume the responsibility of fulfilling of a drawn-out task, or which is carried out in a rigid manner due to the lack of interest and involvement of the beneficiaries.

The reality for these young women who, according to their statements, can't wait to leave the system, is different from the image they have built for themselves, the shock comes when they find themselves having to pay their bills, rent, food and keep a service, no longer provided (by the protection center) all these things that the young people did not take into account in their future plans. The road to failure is short in this case, the young woman, seeing herself alone, returns to the system she hated and wanted to separate from as soon as possible (according to the statements of many of the young women interviewed in my study), thus becoming dependent of system.

Dependence on the system is maintained by the fact that the young women in question demand their rights again and again, assuming the role of victim, often resorting to distorting their real situation, not assuming responsibilities arising from the choices they make (for example the choice of to bring a child into the world, this becoming a tool for gaining some benefits: admission to a maternity center, financial aid, etc.).

Beyond the challenges imposed by the application of existing legislation, attracting young women to projects that develop the positive side of their personality and reduce their contact with environments that generate harmful elements, remains a difficult thing to achieve, young women's inclinations following a long period of non-involvement in constructive activities (the time spent in one or more placement centers), being towards activities that offer them the easy obtaining of some benefits, but without involving the consumption of time, energy, effort, etc.

Unfortunately, these situations are not only valid for children raised in institutions, but also for children from biological families, or those entrusted to substitute families (fosters), and who may have gaps in independent life skills. And these teenagers may have gaps in terms of certain skills, they may face deficiencies in terms of socialization, or adaptation to the social life and culture of the community to which they belong. Acquiring the skills to develop autonomy, necessary to live independently, without the frequent request for support, is a long process. Preparation for independent life is a particular form of non-formal, participatory education and training, which also involves stimulation and focus on personal development.

Most of the children abandoned and assisted in social protection centers live in a state of uncertainty about their future and have difficulties and gaps in knowing their own personality. Most of the time, these young women find it difficult to relate on a peer-to-peer basis, to a person they perceive as an authority. This obstacle can be overcome if an open approach is used in communicating with adults and addressing topics related to their needs.

Adolescent girls who are protected in institutions are often restrained from speaking about themselves, or participating in group discussions and analyzing the problems they face within a larger group. The resistance they display in terms of spontaneous, open verbalization is often determined by fear, and sometimes by the lack of exercise in terms of self-evaluation. I noticed that they can express themselves with difficulty, respectively make a decision regarding the professional future, the subject causing them emotional states with a negative charge, requiring the clarification of the assessment criteria and the encouragement of expression.

The *14-18 age group*, on which we focus our study, brings to the fore a special issue. Adolescence represents the moment of assuming individual responsibilities. Demanding reactions, certain states of dissatisfaction, suspicion and uncertainty regarding their future often appear. Working directly with these teenagers, I have observed in many cases that they encounter difficulties when they are in the position of relating to a person they perceive as an authority.

Establishing a relationship of trust can be achieved in a longer period of time in the case of these young people. Such fears can be overcome if they are encouraged to communicate openly with adults (specialists) about their needs and interests. The lack of habit and a self-evaluation exercise generates resistance to verbalization. Working with these teenagers, we found that it is difficult for them to make decisions about their personal and professional future, which causes them emotional states with a negative charge.

From the activities carried out with the teenage girls included in the project, we were able to outline certain important aspects regarding the acquisition and development of existing independent life skills in the 14-18 age group, grouped in a study, at the same time providing eloquent examples through which the young girls and they expressed their opinions.

Thus, the subjects identified and scored **the existing gaps in the current education and training program for young people for life**, and especially for the discharge from placement centers:

a. Eating habits

- teenage girls do not know all the basic foods or the composition of the dishes. In a state residential center, the children do not see the food to be prepared, in its raw unprocessed state, the prohibition being invoked here to enter the spaces specially intended for

the preparation of food according to the hygienic-sanitary standards included in the specific legislation in force (kitchen , food reception office, warehouses, etc.), let alone participating in food preparation (cleaning vegetables, meat, etc.), on the one hand to protect them from accidents, on the other hand to respect strict hygiene. Thus, an adolescent assisted in an institution does not have access to the same activities as a child growing up in the family, thus there are gaps in terms of adapting to a totally different environment upon discharge from the center, with the mention that the training of young people from institutions - from from this point of view, it is non-existent at the present time, with small exceptions being small groups of young women, who accidentally end up being taken into a family by staff, volunteers or a relative. They encountered difficulties when shopping in a grocery store, not being able to purchase the necessary food, not being able to appreciate how much they consume. They chose canned goods or sweets, exceeding the entrusted amount (the money for personal needs granted by the legislation in force)¹⁹.

b. Housing management and the use of community resources

- Each of the young women participating in the study stated that "they want to have their own home", but "they do not know the procedures for acquiring a social housing" and admit that "maintenance of the housing would not be their strong point". In the placement centers, the sanitization of the spaces are the attributions of the staff, in terms of the skills to use cleaning materials, and to take care of their living space, they may experience delays. Most of the teenage girls stated that having a home is a dream anyway, because "they are without a mother, without a father and the government has increased them". It should be noted that this topic is sensitive for children and young people in placement centers, most of them using these clichés as a protective shield when they are approached about their future, after discharge from the centers.

c. Money management skills

- "The pocket money" (an extremely small amount by the way - 150 lei = about 30 euros/month) granted according to Government Decision no. 838/2022 - for the beneficiaries of the residential centers, is usually spent on sweets or cigarettes, spending it quickly, without "to- and do the calculation or stop for later". It should be mentioned that young women do not have access to the shopping list, invoices or other expenses, notions that a child raised in a family gradually acquires. All maintenance in a state center (food, clothing, sanitary products, utilities payment, etc.) is provided by the social assistance department, subordinate to the City Council. In conditions of "austerity" - when they want a certain thing, children/young people tend to give in exchange, received gifts or value them for amounts below the initial value of the owned object (especially on holidays - Easter, Christmas, June 1). From observing the behavior of young women who have been institutionalized for a long period of time, I can point out that they have difficulties in planning expenses according to income, this also happens after community integration, often even in the case of those who have a job, they learn with difficulty to "schedule expenses", often ending up borrowing money from various people, thus entering "dead end situations" (prostitution, trafficking and consumption of hallucinogenic substances, criminality, etc.).

d. Choice of job/profession and integration on the labor market

- young women raised in foster care centers struggle with the mentality of employers, who most of the time do not want to hear from employees from orphanages, not giving them any chance, starting from the preconceived idea that "they will steal, because that's what the majority do to those like her". Most young women do not know how to write a C.V. or how to appear for an interview when they are approaching 18 and legally eligible for a job. Some "work in the dark", without employment contracts, and are often exploited through work or not properly remunerated (especially young women who have certain medical problems). It also happens that when they work somewhere, young women easily enter into conflicts (with colleagues or the boss), or they cannot adapt.

e. Social development

- Ever since childhood, they are labeled by their schoolmates and by those in the neighborhood (extremely frequent situations - they are called "dormists - children from placement center"), situations sometimes created and maintained, even by the parents of the other children in the community, the discrimination being especially ethnic and medical. In these situations, young women build a distorted identity, their self-image is strongly affected, it seems to them that everyone has something against them and, unfortunately, they can commit crimes with the same type of responses - *I'm from the placement center, it doesn't matter to me*

What is easy to notice about these young women is the fact that they look very superficially at their own lives without taking responsibility. A general belief is that "if they had money, they would easily solve any problem". The limited area in which they live (usually only going to school and the center), forms them in a way that gives them a defensive attitude towards things that would take them out of their comfort zone, generating insecurity.

Teenage pregnancy – indicator of system dependence

¹⁹ DECISION no. 838 of June 29, 2022 regarding the establishment of the amount of the minimum spending limits related to the rights to clothing, footwear, sanitary-sanitary materials, supplies/manuals, toys, transport, cultural-sports materials, as well as the amounts of money for personal needs, for children and young people for that a special protection measure has been established in a residential public service, as well as for mothers protected in maternity centers; ISSUER THE GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA, Published in the OFFICIAL MONITOR no. 662 of July 1, 2022

Looking at the situation also from the point of view of dependence on the (protection) system, there is also the appearance of an unwanted pregnancy, especially among teenage girls assisted in foster care centers, this creates a continuity in the provision of social services for the young women taken into account, respectively assistance in a specialized shelter (maternity center). It is, in a way, one of the dual symbolic meanings - the need to cling at all costs to the protection system, although this posture can also be associated with the need for independence by assuming the role of a parent in control of one's own life and implicitly over to a new life, coming totally from outside the criminalized system. In this way, the adolescent beneficiary invests her own child as her declaration of independence in front of the professionals, the parents (where they exist and visit their child at the orphanage), the cohabitant, or other people.

Changing the status of "an assisted person" to that of "a mother" appears to the young woman as an evolution and a step towards independence. The pregnant young woman needs someone to give her love. A child - at least virtually - carries the promise of unconditional love, which was denied to the mother. By taking proper care of the child, she takes care of herself and demonstrates to others how she should have been taken care of. Another explanation would be that the young mother (or potential mother) needs that something just for her. It sometimes happens that she gives up on the child's father, or questions whether he will contribute something to the child's care and upbringing.

For example, the situation in which four minor mothers (between the ages of 15 and 17), assisted in a placement center, become pregnant at the same time, tasks that they assume and want to let develop, only for the reason of "being like each other" (a kind of fashion or competition, knowing the kind of mentality of proving that "I can", often found in foster care centers) to have something only theirs and gain the "status of a mother" (as it appears from their statements). Paradoxically, they demonstrated after the birth of the child and admission to the maternity center, that they are responsible mothers, fully assuming the role of mother, constantly informing themselves about the development and growth of the child, taking care of themselves in parallel (so as they had not had before the pregnancy in the center where they had received assistance).

Moreover, the following year, when their children reached the age of 1, the minor mothers expressed their desire to resume their studies, the school that they had all abandoned when they became pregnant (thanks to the existence of the "*Second Chance Program*" implemented in certain community schools, they could be enrolled - according to their age they could no longer continue the original school program - and had the chance to complete the gymnasium cycle, having the possibility later to follow specialization courses, and implicitly to have a qualification that would allow them to earn a living upon reaching the age of 18 and leaving the maternity center).

It should be noted that these four minor mothers, although diagnosed with "a liminal intellect" through lack of appropriate stimulation (IQ with values between 78 and 90), due to prolonged institutionalization, did not present diagnoses that would prevent them from assuming the role of parent or endangers the life of an infant/child. At the same time, I noticed the repetition of the same phenomenon, when one of the mothers expressed her desire to go to school, then the other three minor mothers requested school reintegration, possibly also due to the additional motivation by the schools offering special (social) scholarships .

The shaping of their personality was finalized by assuming a new status - as a student and by the continuous encouragement and support of the support staff from the maternity center. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon of imitation, of having experiences in common, proved to be constructive by emphasizing certain behaviors that, adopted by other people in the group (the minors in question), led to a gain for those involved.

I believe that along with the pecuniary support and motivation (the granting of social scholarships within the school as according to the legislation in force they can be granted to people who are really in need) and the fact that all those involved - institutions and the human factor (workers from the social centers) have stopped considering these girls as having liminal intellect (implicitly being placed in a category that is no longer worth the effort), and they were given a chance despite any gloomy prognoses (example: "they will end up like the others", "they will be addicted of the system" or "they will do nothing in life", etc.).

The chance given to them and the results obtained, on a small scale, showed the fact that, once trust and efforts are invested in supporting those who want to get out of the disadvantaged situation, the image with which they are unfortunately identified today, young people and former assisted persons, can be radically changed from placement centers, considered "a problem segment of the population", and which is not given any chance (even if there is support for this at the legislative level).

Conclusion

The behavior of the young women studied is explained by the fact that they lack certain very early experiences, simple things in fact, which for children raised and cared for in the family have a different connotation (such as buying simple things, when the parent accompanies the child to buy a good consumption, putting the money in his hand, or other examples from everyday life that those raised in foster care did not have access to). It cannot be said that young women do not have skills, but only that they are limited considering the requirements of life as an independent person, producing long-term effects, such as: returning to a social institution, repetitive request for material and financial support, refusal of placement in work or maintaining a job, work consciousness, etc.

The small number of young women who state that they are really prepared for identifying and occupying a job is largely due to the postponement of the preparation of the appropriate information, but also to the non-involvement of the staff who serve them. Often the young women's avoidance of the instructional activities they should participate in in order to be adequately informed about their

alternatives upon discharge from the center are interpreted by staff in the outdated way of seeing him after he leaves the center, which he does not than to create a circuit that for these young people represents a sure path to failure and non-acceptance by society. These young women thus develop a strong feeling of social exclusion; their integration attempts end up, in most cases, in failures. It is, without a doubt, one of the causes of the increase in criminality at the level of this category of young women who have become adults; many of them without a stable residence and clear possibilities of survival - are exposed to the phenomena of prostitution, delinquency, abuse and consumption of hallucinogenic substances, etc. - phenomena that mainly affect the category of the homeless, known generically as "street children" and that mostly originate from the assisted minors of children's homes.

Following this adopted lifestyle, bringing a child into the world at an early age (under the age of 18), implies assuming the responsibility of another life, in addition to one's own, for which they are usually not prepared to meet, the happy cases in which the teenager permanently keeps the child with her, being relatively few, compared to those who at some point give up the child and request its placement with a professional foster carer. Of the 27 young women taken into account for the study presented above, 4 gave up their own children, choosing to entrust them to specialists for growth and care.

In reality, we can identify a series of deficiencies, both at the legislative level and at the level of resources available in the community: the lack of adequate schooling, the lack of work awareness on the part of young women, their refusal to work for a minimum wage or to withstand a work schedule (8 hours) imposed for longer, etc.

Obtaining social housing takes years, and young women find it impossible to pay rent, due to the lack of a stable job, respectively due to the faulty management of the earned income, due in particular to the lack of adequate education in this regard (yet) during adolescence and to emphasize to them the need to acquire vital skills for adapting to a new environment, social integration and avoiding their rejection by the community. At the same time, the young people's family (where it exists and could be contacted by social workers), or other organizations/institutions, cannot provide the necessary support expected, in order to integrate them into society, and thus the social assistance of young women is often insufficient to meet their needs.

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