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Multicenter Study on the Epidemiology and Factors Associated with Unintended Pregnancies in Schools: The Case of the Central and Kara Regions, Togo

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Unintended pregnancies can occur during unprotected sex, contraceptive failure, or as a result of rape. They typically occur among adolescent girls, particularly schoolchildren, and are a worrying phenomenon that continues to crack down many African countries.

Objective : To describe the extent of unintentional pregnancies in schools in the two regions of northern Togo.

Method : This was a descriptive and cross-sectional study that took place from december 26, 2024 to July 3, 2025 in secondary schools in the communes of Kozah 1 and Tchaoudjo covering the current academic years from 2020 to 2025. The study population consisted of all students enrolled or having dropped out of classes in the targeted establishments, who had experienced pregnancy during their school career and students who were pregnant at the time of the study from the year 202 0 to 2025 who had given their consent. Data analysis was done using epi info 7 software and Microsoft Excel 2016.

Results : A total of 122 middle and high school girls from 31 schools participated in the study. The age group of 19 to 23 years represented 48.3% with extremes of 11 years and 23 years. Those who were between 15 and 19 years represented 43.4%. The average age of the students was 19 years. High schools located in the heart of the 2 cities had recorded more pregnancies. Girls in high school represented 63.7% (n = 116) and those in middle school represented 36.3% (n = 66). Students in the final year of high school represented 33% (n = 60). They lived in rural areas (54.9%) and in close quarters (59.3%) receiving less than €0.76/day from their parents. Among these students, 47.8% were more than 5 km from schools and walked there (81.9%). Most (96.1%) were informed about contraceptive methods and used them in 47.3% of cases. The perpetrators of pregnancies were pupils (34.6%), students (28%) and teachers (3.8%). Illegal induced abortions represented 19.8% and 9.3% of students dropped out of school.

Conclusion: The study on the epidemiology and factors associated with unintentional pregnancies in schools in these two regions has highlighted some associated factors linked to the occurrence of pregnancies among young girls in school.

Keywords

Epidemiology, Associated factors, Unintended pregnancies, Kara, Centrale, Togo.

Introduction

Unintended pregnancies are untimely pregnancies that occur earlier than desired, or when the woman has not planned to have children [1]. In schools, these pregnancies constitute a major public health issue. Adolescent girls are the victims in many countries, particularly in Africa, leading to harmful consequences. They most often lead to school dropouts, problems related to early motherhood or maternal deaths, often caused by clandestine abortions carried out in sometimes septic hygienic conditions. In addition, they limit the opportunities for these students to flourish, to succeed in their studies and to contribute through their activities or functions to the development of their community [2,3].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are 80 million unintended pregnancies each year. Sub-Saharan Africa, in addition to Latin America and the Caribbean, have the highest rates in the world, with 97.7 and 51.4 births per 1,000 adolescent girls in 2023, respectively [4].

Ivory Coast and Benin recorded 5,000 cases and 2,300 cases of school pregnancies respectively during the 2020-2021 academic year [5,6].

In Togo, more than 8,000 cases of pregnancies have been recorded in schools over the past three years. In 2022, 2,474 cases of teenage pregnancies were recorded in middle and high schools in Togo, with the Kara and Central regions among the top [7-9]. Beyond these numbers, there are factors that underlie this scourge. It therefore seemed necessary to us to conduct this multicenter study in these two regions of northern Togo, taking into account the most attractive municipalities with high population density: Kozah1 in the Kara region and Tchaoudjo in the Central region.

The overall objective is to describe the extent of unintended pregnancies in schools. More specifically, it was about:

- estimate the prevalence of unintended pregnancies in schools
- identify factors associated with unintended pregnancies in schools

Framework and Method of Study

Study Framework

The study focused on general secondary education institutions in two municipalities in northern Togo: Kozah 1 in the Kara region and Tchaoudjo in the central region. These municipalities are home to many educational institutions and constitute ideal settings for the occurrence of unintended pregnancies due to their numerous hotel complexes, inns, and bars and restaurants.

Method

Type of Study

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study.

Study Period

The study took place from December 26, 2024 to July 4, 2025.

Study Population

The study involved students enrolled in general education establishments between 2020 and 2025, who had experienced pregnancy during their school career and students who were pregnant at the time of the study.

Inclusion Criteria

The study included all students enrolled in or having dropped out of classes in a targeted general secondary education establishment and having become pregnant during their school careers during the last 5 academic years: 2020-2021, 2021-2022; 2022-2023; 2023-2024 and 2024-2025.

Sampling

Our sampling was exhaustive.

Data Collection Techniques and Tools

Collection Technique

Data collection was carried out through self-administration of the questionnaire to the target population. This involved firstly a face-to-face interview. For students who had dropped out of classes, we involved the school administration that had summoned them and we administered the questionnaire to them after their informed consent.

Ethical and Administrative Considerations

We obtained permission from the Regional Directors of Education of the Kara and Central regions to conduct this study. Data collection was carried out anonymously and confidentially.

Data Analysis and Processing

The tables and graphs were created using Microsoft Excel 2016 software. For word processing, we used Microsoft Word 2016 software. Data analysis was carried out using Epi info software, version: 7.2.2.6.

Results

A total of 182 students (middle and high school students) participated in the study (122 students in the Kara region and 60 students in the central region).

General Information

Establishment of Origin

Of the 31 establishments that constituted the study sites, high schools located in the heart of towns had recorded more pregnancies: Landa (22.1 %), Kara 2 (9.84%), Lama Kpédah (10.7%), Kpangalam (16.7%) and the modern high school of Sokodé (35%).

Level of Education

High school girls represented 63.7% (n=116) and middle school girls represented 36.3% (n=66).

Study Classes

Students in the final year class represented 33% (n=60), those in the third year class 24.2% (n=44).

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Age of Students

The 19-23 age group represented 48.3%, with extremes of 11 and 23 years. Those aged between 15 and 19 years represented 43.4%. The average age of the students was 19 years.

Marital Status

Among girls with unintended pregnancies in school, those in a dating relationship represented 59.3% while 33.5% of students claimed to have no relationship.

Residence

Of the 122 respondents, 54.9% (n=100) resided in rural areas. They lived alone (13.7%), with a guardian (24.2%), or with their parents (62.1%).

Distance from home to school and means of transport

Girls with unintended pregnancies in school who lived more than 5 km from the school represented 47.8% (n = 87). They walked to school in 81.9% of cases (n = 149).

Family and Economic Characteristics

Family Model

Of the 122 girls surveyed, 33.5% (n=84) came from a polygamous family and 66.5% (n=98) from a monogamous family.

Relationship with Parents

According to the study, girls with a bad relationship with their parents represented 15.9% (n=29).

Pocket Money and Daily Meals

As for daily pocket money, 84.1% (n=153) of the girls reported receiving less than 500 CFA francs per day (i.e. €0.76) from their parents or guardians. 34.6 % of them (n=63) ate fewer than three meals per day.

Financial Support

Of the 122 middle and high school girls, 42.3% (n=77) reported that their parents or guardians did not provide them with financial support. Among these girls, some relied on boyfriends and others on friends in 47.2% and 22%, respectively.

Knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health

Discussions on Sexuality

According to this study, 42.3% of girls who had unintended pregnancies at school said they did not discuss sexuality with their parents. 16.5% of girls discussed sexuality with their parents and 40.1% with their friends.

Information on Contraception

Girls who received information on contraception occupied 96.1%

(n=175).

Sources of Information on Contraception

Regarding contraception, respondents obtained information from friends (48.4%) and on social networks (34.6%). (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to sources of information on contraception.

Sources	Workforce(n)	Percentage (%)
Friends	88	48.4
Youth-friendly center	06	3.3
Social networks	63	34.6
Health Center	15	8.2
Parents / Family	10	5.5
Total	182	100

Uses of Contraceptive Methods

According to the study, girls who reported using contraceptive methods were represented in 52.7% of cases (n=96) and 47.3% never used a contraceptive method (n=86).

Pregnancy Events and Becoming Classes

Pregnancy authors

As perpetrators of pregnancies, the girls cited pupils, students and teachers in 34.6%, 28% and 3.8% respectively.

Pregnancy Outcomes

Of the 122 female students surveyed, the outcome of the pregnancy resulted in clandestine induced abortions in 19.8% of cases (n=36) and in childbirth in 80.2% of cases (n=146).

Reasons for Abortion

The reasons for induced abortion were: continuing classes (28%), refusal of the perpetrator of the pregnancy (17%), refusal of the parents (9.3%) and the view of society (28.6%).

From the Classes

The outcome of the classes was: continuation with success (31.3%), without success (28.6%), temporary cessation (20.9%) and definitive abandonment (9.3%).

Discussion

General Information

A total of 122 female students participated in the study. Schools located in urban areas recorded the highest rate of unintended pregnancies in schools over the past five academic years. These are the most urbanized areas with hotel complexes, bars, and restaurants, which are sites where economically poor female students might engage in sexual activity.

High school girls were the most represented (63.7%), particularly those in their final year of high school (33%). The same observations were made in Benin in the COUFFO department and in Senegal by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) [10,11]. Indeed,

several of these girls at the end of their second cycle of secondary school are sexually active and therefore engage in risky sexual behavior.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Of the 122 middle and high school girls who participated in the study, the most represented age group was 19 to 23 years old with an average age of 19 years. Koffi et al. found an average age of 17 years in the Kara region with a predominance of the 15 to 20 age group [12]. Akoha F. in her study on the prevalence and factors associated with pregnancies in schools in 2021 in Benin found an average age of 17.47 years [13]. This could be explained by the fact that at this period of puberty, the needs of the young girl increase and in the absence of satisfaction of these needs by the parents, she tends to resort to men causing pregnancies.

According to the study, 54.9% of girls with unintended pregnancies in school resided in rural areas, more than 5 km from the school and walking. A study conducted in the department of Collines in Benin found 66.67% of students residing in rural areas [10]. This could be explained by the fact that on the one hand, in rural areas adolescent girls do not have access to sources of information on sexuality to better learn about the consequences of risky sexual behavior. On the other hand, the question of sexuality remains a taboo in African families, especially in rural areas. In addition, the low economic level of parents, not allowing them to provide their daughters with a means of transport, could then encourage the latter to seek help from wealthy men.

In our study, some girls who had unintended pregnancies lived alone or with a guardian respectively. On the other hand, Mitongbé et al. found in their study on the prevalence and explanatory factors of unplanned pregnancies among adolescents in Benin that nearly 80% of the respondents lived in a household whose head of the family was either a direct relative or a guardian [14]. This highlights the fact that girls living with a guardian would often be victims of domestic violence, thus pushing them to seek refuge with friends causing pregnancies. On the other hand, those who lived alone would offer themselves a certain freedom which would have consequences on their sexual life.

Family and Economic Characteristics

According to the family model in which the students resided, polygamous families occupied 33.5% of the cases with a poor relationship with parents. Akinyemi J, et al., highlight in their study that young girls from polygamous families often have limited access to reproductive health services, which contributes to a higher rate of unintentional pregnancies [15]. Family structure plays a role in the dynamics of parenthood, in the education and supervision of adolescent girls, thus impacting their behaviors and choices regarding sexuality.

A poor relationship between children and parents could, on the one hand, lead to a loss of trust between children and parents, thereby preventing discussions on topics related to sexual and reproductive

health. On the other hand, this poor relationship could reduce the support of parents for their daughters, encouraging them to engage in risky sexual behavior in exchange for financial support.

In this study, 84.1% had less than €0.76/day as daily pocket money. This could be explained by the precarious economic situation of parents making them unable to meet the financial needs of their daughters as highlighted by Gbahoui JM N. [16] and Assoumanou [17] in their studies carried out respectively in Bouaké in Ivory Coast and in Mango in northern Togo. This is a factor exposing girls to having sexual relations with wealthy men in exchange for financial compensation.

Knowledge about Sexual and Reproductive Health

According to this study, 42.3% of girls said they did not discuss sexuality with their parents. They mainly resorted to friends. Questions about sexuality remain taboo subjects within our African families and communities [16,18,19]. These questions are seen as the responsibility of adults. This lack of communication between parents and children leads most young girls to fill this void with other sources such as friends and social networks. It is therefore necessary for fathers to spend more time with their daughters in order to create a climate of trust allowing them to discuss freely with them.

According to the study, the majority of girls (96.1%) had information about contraception. The sources of information were mainly friends and social networks. Our results are similar to a study conducted by Ajavon D. et al in 2018 which found that 91.98% of high school students in the city of Kara were informed about sexuality [20]. The impact of social networks on sexuality is no longer demonstrated nowadays, exposing adolescents to information that is sometimes erroneous, unverified and above all bordering on indecency. Furthermore, friends are also providers of false information leading to deviations in the respect of customs and traditions, as they say: "bad company corrupts good morals."

Pregnancy Events and Becoming Classes

The perpetrators of pregnancies were mainly students and teachers. Gbahoui et al. [16] had made the same observations in Bouaké in Ivory Coast. Our results could be explained by the lack of knowledge of the texts relating to the protection of learners in Togo by the perpetrators and victims. Indeed, according to article 19 of law n° 2022-020 of 02/12/2022 on the protection of learners against sexual violence in Togo: "whoever impregnates a learner, regularly enrolled in an educational establishment or in an apprenticeship or vocational training center, is liable to a prison sentence of one (01) year to five (5) years and a fine of one million (1,000,000) to five million (5,000,000) CFA francs" [21].

Pregnancies resulted in clandestine induced abortions in 14.7% with the main reason being the desire to continue classes. These results would be due to the psychological burden related to social and parental contempt. Since, in our communities when a young girl student is pregnant, she is perceived as a girl of loose morals

and is subject to stigmatization often leading to class dropouts. Néné J. in Senegal had found 30% of girls permanently drop out [22]. According to the UNESCO report, nearly 20% of young girls in Sub-Saharan Africa leave school prematurely due to early pregnancies [1,2,23]. These results highlight the negative consequences of pregnancies in school on the performance of young girls.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the factors associated with unintended pregnancies in schools. These pregnancies generally occur among girls who lack financial support from their parents and who come from polygamous families and have a poor parental relationship. Furthermore, the avenue of social networks, which sometimes conveys erroneous information, and the lack of knowledge of the law also impacts the sexual and reproductive health of young girls in school. Public ministry teaching curricula should integrate sexual and reproductive health programs to reduce this scourge.

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