

## Original Article

# Pregnancy and motherhood as a paradoxical phenomenon in adolescence: Perception of pregnant adolescents in Haiti

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## Abstract

**Background:** In Haiti, the prevalence of pregnant adolescents is still high despite joint efforts to reduce it. We are unsure as to how hesitant adolescent girls perceive their experience of pregnancy. This article aims to explore the ambivalent perceptions of pregnancy and motherhood by Haitian adolescent girls.

**Methods:** To conduct this study, we used a qualitative research design developed from Dewey's social survey. To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 pregnant adolescents. Thematic analyses were conducted on this data entered into qualitative data analysis software (QDA miner, 6.0.5).

**Results:** The study showed that adolescent girls have a paradoxical and ambivalent perception of fatness and motherhood. Three themes emerged: pregnancy as a difficult time for some adolescent girls; the perception of the positive changes associated with pregnancy; and a positive vision of the unborn child. These themes were divided into nine sub-themes and 34 codes to describe the perception of pregnant adolescents.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights the double reality of the experiential experience of pregnancy and motherhood in adolescence in Haiti, either positive or negative. Pregnancy experiences were not negative for all adolescent girls. Some young pregnant girls have shared the positive changes their pregnancy brings. All adolescent girls expressed a sense of satisfaction with the birth of the unborn child. This discovery informs practitioners and researchers concerning the need to consider the phenomenon of pregnancy adolescents from a holistic perspective.

**Keywords:** Adolescent; Adolescent Mothers; Haiti; Gender Identity; Pregnancy.

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## Introduction

Adolescence is the transition period between childhood and adulthood (1). The idea of transition could refer to a negative or at least reductive conception of this stage of life, in particular by reducing it to a simple period of crisis that

accompanies bodily and psychic changes in individuals (2, 3). However, during this period of life, many adolescent girls are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, risky sexual practices, and sexually transmitted infections (4). In Haiti, adolescent girls face constraining situations that increase their vulnerability to pregnancy and motherhood. In addition, transactional sex is a means of survival for most Haitian

adolescent girls (5). These adolescents also confront low reproductive health literacy, as well as low contraceptive use (6).

Epidemiological data tell us that in Haiti, the pregnancy rate among girls aged 15 to 19 years is 55 ‰ (7). This type of pregnancy can have many consequences, including dropping out of school, poverty, social isolation, religious sanctions, single parenthood, family conflicts, low reproductive levels, and risk of death (6, 8). Despite these known negative consequences and the multiple intervention strategies deployed, the prevalence of adolescent pregnancies remains high in Haiti. We do not know all the reasons for this. However, pregnancy and motherhood play a role in building a woman's identity in Haitian society (9). In many cases, adolescent girls opt for pregnancy and motherhood, which contributes to this identity-building (6). Based on this observation, the occurrence of pregnancy adolescence in Haiti is far from being a negative event for some, and the reverse is also true. As a result, there are gaps in knowledge concerning the paradox of pregnancy and motherhood in adolescence in Haiti. As part of this research project, a literature review was conducted in several databases (PubMed, CINHALL, Cairn, LILACS, PsycNET, Google Scholar, and Érudit), but no study on adolescent pregnancy and motherhood in the North and Northeast departments of Haiti was identified. Yet these two departments have a similar prevalence of adolescent pregnancy and motherhood (11%), but higher than the national average (7). Considering this lack of existing data, but also the high prevalence of adolescent pregnancy and maternity in the two departments, this qualitative study was conducted. The choice of the qualitative method was made because of the sensitivity of the issue and also in order to explore the unique experience of each pregnant adolescent. To address this gap, the present article aims to explore the ambivalent perceptions of pregnancy and motherhood

among Haitian adolescent girls. The paper stems from a more extensive doctoral dissertation that seeks to understand the experience of pregnancy and motherhood in adolescence in this country.

### **Theoretical framework**

To guide this study, two theoretical perspectives were used: intersectional theory (10, 11) and social justice theory (12, 13). Intersectionality is relevant to this study, as it allows the issue to be examined beyond individual characteristics such as sex or gender with a greater focus on the influence of socio-structural factors and their interactions and synergies (14). Its relevance is also linked to Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional conception of social justice, namely recognition, redistribution, and representation (12) which forms a unique general framework that helps to explore and overcome social injustices. Given the multiple levels of analysis involved in Nancy Fraser's conception of social justice, this theory appears to be an essential relevant instrument for exploring the experience of pregnancy among pregnant Haitian adolescents, from the specific angles of recognition, redistribution, and participation. This dual theoretical anchoring will deepen the data and structure the analyses around the important determinants of the overall health of adolescent girls and the cultural, economic, and equity issues associated with the transition from adolescence to motherhood in Haiti. Such factors underlie the initial proposal that pregnancy and motherhood in adolescence generate an ambivalent response in the Haitian context. As a result of empirical experience, two other proposals have emerged, including the need to review the conceptualization of pregnancy in adolescence, which is often reduced to its epidemiological process, and second, that in the cultural context of Haiti, pregnancy can also be considered as an element of social ascension, to extricate oneself from poverty.

## Methods

Qualitative methodology makes it possible to explore people's experience, their representations, the personal conception of their actions, their history, and their interpersonal relationships (15). The methodology for collecting and analyzing qualitative data favored in this study is based on the social survey of John Dewey (16) which promotes the development of an abductive analysis of the experiential experience of adolescent girls from a pragmatic and critical perspective, making it a strategy of choice. In the process of social inquiry, the investigator of a given field uses the experiences of communities to construct knowledge about a phenomenon (16). Experience becomes the new anchor in the process of knowledge development. The social inquiry process is based on a radical constructivist paradigm that is pragmatic in nature. It offers the possibility of testing initial hypothesis in an iterative process in the field. The field study cases contribute to the emergence of meaning through an iterative process called abductive logic, referring to the circulation movement between inductive and deductive processes (16).

### *Field and study participants*

The study was conducted in nine health institutions in the North and North-East departments of Haiti. The selection of these institutions was made with the help of the departmental authorities. Health institutions have been selected in areas where the prevalence of pregnancy in adolescence is high (3), medium (3), and low (3). Thirty-three pregnant adolescents participated in this study. It is the saturation of the data that put an end to the recruitment of the participants of this study, after 33 interviews the researchers judge that there were no more new data that emerged.

### *Recruitment procedures*

The recruitment of pregnant adolescents followed the convenience process (17) and was carried out in the prenatal clinics of

both departments. Pregnant adolescents were informed of the study by clinicians during their prenatal visit. In most institutions (7 of 9 such facilities), the researcher and a research assistant (nurse by training) carried out on-site interviewing and recruitment. The interested participant was led by the clinician to a room to be met by the team. For two other institutions, the community health worker informed potential participants at their homes during a regular visit. The prospective participant informed the health worker of her interest, and the latter transmitted the information to the heads of the institutions as a prelude to their planning the recruitment and interviewing process. Because the student researcher is male, a nurse was recruited and trained to conduct the interviews at the nine health institutions.

In choosing the participants, whether the pregnancy was wanted or not, whether it was the first or the second pregnancy, were not issues considered. All pregnant adolescents living in one of the two departments during pregnancy were eligible for the study. However, pregnant adolescents under the age of 18 who did not bring the parental authorization form signed by their parents on the day of the interview were excluded. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were used as the primary data collection tool. The interview guide was built on five general themes: the socio-demographic profile of the girl interviewed; the participant's life pathway; her living conditions during pregnancy; her experience with sexuality before and during pregnancy; and her plan for the future. Interviews were conducted in Creole, the language spoken by all Haitians. The interview transcripts were systematically reviewed by the student researcher to ensure a thorough understanding of women's experiences and to identify emerging themes from the participants' testimonies in order to prepare for future interviews. All interviews were audiotaped.

### Data processing and analysis

The recordings were transcribed verbatim in Creole. The verbatim accounts were perused and proofread by the student researcher and finally coded in order to identify the relevant themes and sub-themes. In this process, the student researcher was supervised by his research supervisor. After the collaborative verification and validation of a number of transcriptions, the 33 verbatim accounts in Word format were exported to the QDA Miner version 6.0.5 software for coding by the student researcher.

The process of thematic content analysis described by Paillé and Mucchielli (18) was followed. This method of analysis makes it possible to construct a thematic tree by considering the hierarchy of themes and sub-themes (18). The following steps were observed during the analysis: an identification of themes; their grouping; and their subsidiary and discursive examination. After a first division of the interviews, it was possible to merge, group, subdivide, and prioritize the themes and sub-themes (18). During the analysis, the themes and sub-themes of the thematic tree were grouped into a list of themes, and their competition was checked with the key concepts of the theoretical frameworks.

## Results

### Socio-demographic information

Participants in this study ranged in age from 14 to 19 years. Most of them had previous pregnancy experiences. All but one of the participants attended school. The arrival of pregnancy led all participants to drop out of school. One third of participants left school before their pregnancy, often for economic reasons. More than two-thirds (N=27) were unemployed and without a trade or profession. Table 1 provides more details on the characteristics of the participants. All adolescent girls were asked about their perception of pregnancy and motherhood based on a variety of dimensions, including economic, social, family, religious,

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of pregnant adolescents (ADO)

pregnant adolescents	N	%
Age (years)		
14 to 15 years	4	12.12
16 to 17 years	10	30.30
18 to 19 years	19	57.58
Marital status		
Single	9	27.27
Cohabitation	14	42.42
Common-law partner	9	27.27
Married	1	3.03
Occupational status		
Informal shopkeeper	4	12.12
Unemployed	27	81.82
Dressmaker	1	3.03
Hairdresser	1	3.03
Schooling		
Primary	24	72.73
Secondary	8	24.24
Out of school	1	3.03
# of pregnancies		
1st pregnancy	24	72.73
2nd pregnancy	9	27.27
Place of residence		
Rural	14	42.42
Urban	19	57.58

sentimental, cultural, and gender-related components. Three themes emerged from the discourse to explain the paradoxical and ambivalent perception of pregnancy among these adolescents: pregnancy as a difficult period for some adolescents; a perception of the positive changes associated with pregnancy; and a positive vision of the unborn child. These themes were divided into nine sub-themes and 34 codes to describe the perception of pregnant adolescents. Table (2) provides more details about the coding process.

### *Pregnancy: a difficult time for the majority of adolescent girls*

Two-thirds (22) of the participants revealed the multiple difficulties they associated

Table 2: Details on the coding process

Themes/Sub-themes	Types	# codes
Pregnancy as a difficult period for some adolescents	theme	
Consequences of continuing to pregnancy to term among adolescents	sub-theme	8
Period of regret and shame	sub-theme	2
Time of despair and uncertainty	sub-theme	2
Socio-economic difficulties	sub-theme	5
Perception of the positive changes associated with pregnancy	theme	
Socio-economic changes	sub-theme	6
Behavior changes	sub-theme	4
Improving love life	sub-theme	2
Positive vision of the unborn child	theme	
Perception of the unborn child as hope for tomorrow	sub-theme	2
Unborn child as a bulwark for parents	sub-theme	3

with the onset of their pregnancy. They perceived the following as problems: the consequences of continuing the pregnancy to term; a period of regret and shame; a period of despair and uncertainty; and socio-economic hardship.

#### ***The consequences of continuing to pregnancy to term among adolescents***

The majority of participants agreed to continue their pregnancy to term, despite the negative consequences associated with this decision. Several adolescent girls experienced family abandonment because they refused to give in to pressure from parents who were urging them to have an abortion. "My mother asked me to abort my baby; I told her, if my grandmother had aborted you, today you would not be on hand to help me give birth. Now she has abandoned me; she no longer speaks to me" (ADO 009). Another said, "... But it's not easy... my parents have turned their backs on me because I haven't agreed to abort the child. I would never agree to abort my baby; I don't know whether this will be the only child that God is going to give me" (ADO 015). Some adolescent girls prefer to be single mothers instead of having an abortion. One participant said, "When I told my partner that I was pregnant, he asked me to abort the baby. I refused and he no longer talks to me. He also denies being the baby's father" (ADO 025). Adolescent girls

are reluctant to have an abortion. They have therefore opted to live in forced family isolation or to become single mothers in order to continue their pregnancies to term.

#### ***The period of regret and shame***

Although these adolescent girls decided to have their babies, they experienced constraints. This decision does not prevent them from having regrets. One pregnant adolescent said, "I have a lot of regrets about being pregnant. I promised my mother that I would finish high school and become a nurse" (ADO 001). Some participants say they had their pregnancies too early. "I feel that it's not the right time for me to become a mother because I'm still too young" (ADO 021). Others live this period in the deepest disarray. One participant said, "I dropped out of school after getting pregnant. I hardly go out anymore because I feel ashamed when I cross paths with people from my area. So, I've moved to another neighborhood" (ADO 031). During the pregnancy, adolescent girls have feelings of guilt for not being able to keep their promises or achieve their dreams. Pregnancy leads adolescent girls to drop out of school. During this period, they experience constant shame generated by the baleful gaze of friends and neighbors.

#### ***A time of despair and uncertainty***

More than half (20) of the participants did not hide their despair after becoming pregnant. For some, pregnancy has only had negative impacts on their lives. *"I can see that this pregnancy is a step backwards because I've had to leave school [...]. Pregnancy brings me only despair"* (ADO 001). Despair is more glaring among single pregnant adolescents. One participant admitted that:

I have no hope for this child because I don't know what to do to look after him. Also, if my mother died, what would I do then? The baby's dad refuses to acknowledge the child as his own. I'm the living dead. I've lost all hope. Life has no meaning for me because I suffer so much. I don't see how the child will survive because I don't see any hope in this life. (ADO 022).

A few participants were uncertain about their financial ability to care for their unborn child. *"I worry about a lot of things. My parents are not well off. They didn't have any money to send me to school, so I've had to fend for myself. I'm thinking about caring for my baby, but I don't yet know how"* (ADO023). The arrival of pregnancy has led most of the adolescent girls in this study to despair. They have a negative perception of their own future and that of their unborn child. These pregnant adolescents often depend on their parents for survival. Sometimes the parents do not have the economic means to fully assume the burdens associated with their daughter's pregnancy and motherhood.

### ***Socio-economic difficulties***

This subcategory refers to participants' perceptions of the socio-economic difficulties experienced during pregnancy. Pregnant adolescent girls with unemployed parents appear to be more vulnerable to socio-economic problems. One participant described her situation as follows: *"Now I'm suffering; sometimes I can't find anything to eat. I have other needs because my dad is no longer working because of COVID [...]. Now everything is making me*

*suffer"* (ADO 031). Another participant told this sad story:

I have problems because my mother no longer has a trade. So, I have a hard time paying for food. Even getting to the hospital is difficult. Sometimes my mother can give 150 gourdes (US\$ 1.50). I can't afford medication. I don't feel comfortable. I need to buy things for the baby, but I don't have any money (ADO 022).

Parents' economic difficulties have negatively affected the survival of adolescent girls during pregnancy. Some have faced hunger throughout this period. Others cannot afford perinatal care. Overall, the majority of participants have experienced many difficulties during their pregnancy, leading to economic, social, family, and psychological problems for the girl and her relatives.

### ***Positive perceptions associated with pregnancy in adolescence***

The participants' speeches revealed positive changes that could be associated with the onset of their pregnancy. These changes are discussed under the following sub-categories: socio-economic change, change in behavior, and improvement in the romantic relationship.

### ***Socio-economic changes***

Some adolescent girls said that their pregnancy had a positive impact on their socio-economic situation. One participant revealed that

... my life has really changed with this pregnancy. For example, my mother wanted to practice her trade, but she had no money; now she can do so with the money that my partner gave me [...]. Since my pregnancy, the conditions of my life have changed a lot; things are getting better for me. I don't live the same way anymore; I don't suffer anymore. (ADO 011).

Another participant said, *"My mother and I didn't used to have a place to sleep, but we do now! Because of this pregnancy, we live comfortably. It was humiliating to live*

*in others' homes, but now, thank God, my husband has offered me a house "* (ADO029). It would seem that pregnancy sometimes prompts more economic investment on the part of the participants' partners. Sometimes parents of pregnant adolescents' profit from their daughters' pregnancy. In a context of precariousness, the economic support provided by partners has, in certain circumstances, changed the living conditions of adolescent girls and their parents for the better.

### **Behavior change**

A few adolescent girls maintained that their pregnancies had brought about changes in their attitudes. One adolescent girl confessed that *"This pregnancy has changed my life. I will no longer depend on social programs. I will have a child in my care, so I must take my destiny into my own hands. Now I will be a sister of the church"* (ADO 016). Others contended that their pregnancy allowed them to break away from their lives as children and become more mature. *"This pregnancy has allowed me to become more responsible [...] I feel that I am an adult"* (ADO 029), or *"Well, it's another life; now I'm going to be a mother. I don't have the same childish thoughts that I once had"* (ADO 024). Some participants pointed out that their pregnancy has allowed them to become more responsible and competent in their daily lives. *"It's a period that allows me to become responsible because I'm going to have a child to manage now"* (ADO 023), or *"I once earned a living through my trade, so I'm not practicing what I do for the first time, but now I give more value to it"* (ADO 008). Pregnancy led pregnant adolescents in this study to change certain behaviors that they considered negative. It promoted the transition of pregnant adolescents from childhood to adulthood. Pregnancy represents a symbolic marker of passage to adulthood. As a result, pregnant adolescents seek economic, parental, and social autonomy.

### **Improving love life**

Some of the adolescent girls in this study claimed that their pregnancy fostered a closer romantic relationship with their partner, as well as a change in their parents' attitudes about when their love life should begin. For this adolescent girl, *"pregnancy allows me to have a closer relationship with the father of my child; our love relationship is no longer a secret "* (ADO 011). Another said, *"... this pregnancy has pushed my parents to accept my romantic relationship, whereas before they did not want me to have a boyfriend"* (ADO 023). One participant said, *"This pregnancy allowed me to get married, and my marriage bore fruit. I used to be homeless. Now God has given me a house. We have enough to eat and drink. My husband and I have no problems"* (ADO 014). According to the participants, pregnancy strengthened their romantic relationship with their partner and also created tolerance on the part of their parents. Some parents have accepted their daughter's romantic relationship, concerning which they expressed hostility before pregnancy. Often, pregnancy sparks a loving partnership that did not previously exist.

### **Positive vision of the unborn child**

Many adolescent girls had positive perceptions of the unborn child. These perceptions are discussed in the following subcategories: the child as hope and the child as a bulwark.

#### ***The perception of the unborn child as hope for tomorrow***

The participants saw the unborn child as hope for tomorrow. The following quotes are taken from two interviews with participants: *"My future child represents many things to me because tomorrow it is he who will take me out of misery. That's why when many people advised me to abort him, I didn't do it"* (ADO 011) or *"this child represents a lot of things for me. After his birth, at a certain age, I will give him advice and put him in school too [...] tomorrow I*

may find myself in difficult situations, and he'll come to my rescue" (ADO 016). Another participant believes that God will grant her child success in society: "I think God will help me take care of my child, and tomorrow he will be an important person in our world. I don't want him to suffer, so I pray a lot to the Good Lord to open a road for me, so that I can take care of my child" (ADO 031). Despite the difficulties, future mothers want to do everything to take care of their child and provide a good education. For these adolescent girls, the unborn child is a source of hope for tomorrow. They strongly believe that they should contribute to the success of their child.

### ***The unborn child as a bulwark for parents***

Some adolescent girls see the unborn child as a bulwark that protects them from certain stigmas reserved for childless women in Haitian society. One participant said, "I believe my child is a gift from God... I am happy because I am going to be a mother; after that no one will be able to insult me by calling me a barren lady, a mule, for I produced a child" (ADO 033). The child is seen as a bulwark for participants in their old age. This excerpt is taken from one interview: "I think tomorrow when I am old and I can no longer work, this child will take care of me, because all people have children for their old age, to provide for their parents" (ADO 032). Most participants believe that having numerous children is insurance for older parents. This participant said, "I think it's always good to have several children because you never know what the future will bring; maybe the children will take care of you. When you're old and bedridden, the children will do everything for you" (ADO 014). Culturally, infertility is frowned upon in Haitian society, and childless women are targets of opprobrium. Thus, the unborn child is seen by the participants as an important element in the construction of a woman's identity. The offspring also represents hope for these future mothers, because they believe that their security in old age is guaranteed, in a

country where social assistance does not exist. The unborn child is highly valued by all pregnant adolescents. It is seen as a source of comfort and hope for future mothers.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study shed light on and described the participants' paradoxical and ambivalent perception of the experiential experience of their pregnancy and motherhood. They presented adolescent pregnancy as a contradictory phenomenon, either, for the most part, a negative reality, or for a minority, in a specific context, a positive one. Single adolescent girls and poor parents receiving less support reported negative perceptions of their pregnancy. These adolescent girls saw pregnancy as an additional obstacle in their lives. In contrast, some adolescent girls, who received partner and family support, showed positive perceptions of their pregnancy. They described adolescent pregnancy as a bridge to a better social and romantic life that they had never experienced before. Moreover, the participants expressed a positive vision of the unborn child.

Considering these results, adolescent pregnancy in the Haitian context is linked to issues of recognition and economic redistribution. In other words, the experience of adolescent pregnancy seems to be largely influenced by economic precariousness associated with a lack of social policies and structures and by the country's socio-cultural and religious norms. On the one hand, in order to ward off deprivation in a grossly unequal society, many adolescents prefer to experience pregnancy, perceived as a means of identity recognition and social and economic ascension. On the other hand, redistribution problems affect the majority of pregnant adolescents, and they recognize that their socio-economic conditions have deteriorated as a result of their pregnancy, while anticipation of motherhood also generates its own share of financial stress.

In addition, pregnancy and motherhood have a very significant cultural and symbolic importance in Haiti given their role in the construction of women's identity and the reverence attached to procreation. Since infertility is seen as a curse, pregnant adolescents perceived the unborn child as a protection against stigma.

With regard to the negative perception of adolescent pregnancy, the results of this study indicate that the intersection of several categories increases the vulnerability of young girls during their pregnancy. As a result, most of them see their pregnancy as a time of regret and shame. Several adolescent girls in this study experienced a pregnancy fraught with stress and fear. Despair and worry set in among these adolescent girls when they realized that they were pregnant. Most of the pregnant adolescents felt uncertain about their economic capacity to care for their child after birth. Studies in other countries have shown similar results: adolescent girls saw this period as ignominious and experienced it with worry, regret, shame, despair, and doubt (19, 20). The adolescent girls in this study often talked about having mortgaged their dreams and schooling. The study by Aziato and colleagues (19) indicated that pregnant adolescents became fixated on their life options, particularly schooling, which were at an impasse. The results of our study showed that parental poverty further complicated the situation of some pregnant adolescents. Previous results from a systematic review showed the adverse effects of poverty on adolescent pregnancy (21). The intersection of several socio-structural and individual factors, such as poverty, sexuality, gender, and living environment, has a further deleterious impact on the living conditions of adolescent girls during pregnancy. Sometimes they even face difficulties in providing for their own basic needs such as food or trips to prenatal consultations, a situation exacerbated when the father refuses to assume parental responsibility

for his future offspring. In the present study, some participants mentioned their food insecurity during pregnancy and their difficulty in paying for medical care. Previous studies have found that adolescent girls are more likely to confront undernourishment and poor prenatal follow-up (22, 23). Many adolescent girls who agreed to continue their pregnancies to term have experienced social and family isolation and in some cases the breakdown of their romantic relationship. In addition, adolescent girls have experienced a great deal of pressure from their loved ones (mothers, partners, friends) to undergo an abortion. A qualitative study indicated that pressure from family members to terminate their pregnancies is one of the challenges faced by adolescent girls who decide to have their baby (24).

While most of the adolescent girls in this study did not hide the difficulties encountered after they became pregnant, other participants had opposite experiences. Several participants revealed that their pregnancy positively transformed their socio-economic situation and that they have not been in need since. According to one study, pregnancy helps some Haitian adolescents cope with the precarious socio-economic context because its occurrence encourages more investment from partners (6). Pregnancy sometimes provides an answer to precariousness by leading to an increase in certain resources. Moreover, some adolescents in our study group also stressed the importance of their partner's investment following their pregnancy as an antidote to economic inequality. In this regard, even if pregnancy does not always lead to life as a couple, the father is still obliged to provide child support for the young mother and the child. In short, the "return on investment" of a pregnancy is all the more important as young girls voluntarily commit to it. The results of this study revealed that some parents also benefited from the socio-economic changes brought about by their daughter's -

Generally speaking, pregnancy allowed these adolescent girls to become more responsible and mature. It helped participants move from childhood to adulthood. The results are consistent with several previous studies suggesting that adolescent pregnancy is a time when young girls gain more maturity and responsibility (24, 25). The results also indicated that pregnancy is seen as a factor promoting a change in the romantic relationships of adolescent girls. Several adolescent girls in the study group confirmed that their pregnancy improved the relationship with their partner. Others said that their pregnancy allowed them to have a life as a couple. Previous studies have highlighted that adolescent pregnancy can bring young girls closer to their partners and improve marital relationships (25, 26).

In this study, participants showed a positive attitude toward the unborn child. Even adolescent girls having experienced significant difficulties due to their pregnancy thought that one day this child would change their lives for the better. The child appears as a source of consolation and hope for these young women. For some, the child is also a source of pride and a bulwark for their old age. Culturally, fertility is recognized as an absolute imperative for women and infertility as a curse in Haitian society (9). Having a child protects adolescent girls from the taunts reserved for women who have not given birth. The child plays a role in the construction of their identity as a woman. Our results corroborate those of the study by Ellis-Sloan (27) which showed that motherhood played a central role in the construction of identity of many adolescent females.

The results of the current study underscore the paradoxical nature of adolescent pregnancy as experienced in Haiti. As such, interventions targeting this group should take into account their heterogeneous experiential experiences and opt for holistic and inclusive approaches for the benefit of all pregnant adolescents. Given the

difficulties in accessing care experienced by some adolescent girls, efforts should be made to facilitate access to clinical and psychosocial services. Similarly, the role of relatives should be highlighted in the programs. Further research is needed to better understand the role played by positive perceptions of adolescent motherhood in order to identify public policies that act on this set of factors. A systemic and structuring approach is encouraged. Future studies should also shed light on the issues of access to care and equity, and through longitudinal estimates, document the journey of motherhood over a few years.

This study confirmed the original proposals through the social survey process. First, the stories recounted by Haitian adolescents revealed an ambivalent perception of the experience of pregnancy. This study highlighted the dual reality of the experiential experience of adolescent pregnancy, namely negative and positive. Moreover, the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy cannot be understood solely from an epidemiological angle, particularly in the Haitian context. Pregnant adolescents are not a homogeneous population, as each adolescent pregnancy has its own context and journey resulting in unique life trajectories. Finally, adolescent pregnancy positively transforms the socio-economic conditions of some girls and their parents. The perception of ambivalence and of gender-related structural and social issues make it possible to understand the different realities related to exposure to adolescent pregnancy and could promote the implementation of policies and support interventions adapted to the needs and strengths of adolescent girls in Haiti, while taking into account socialization and culture. Since the majority of participants were recruited during their prenatal clinic visit, the stories of pregnant adolescents outside of healthcare institutions were not considered. In addition, the study was conducted in two departments of the

country, and a nationwide study could generate other results. Moreover, a longitudinal study covering the period of maternity would make it possible to draw up the life course of the perinatal period and to shed light on other issues.

### ***Author's contribution***

The authors made a significant contribution to the development and design or analysis and interpretation of the data to the development of the article or to the critical revision of its intellectual content.

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### ***Ethical consideration***

The study received approval from the Laval University Ethics Committee and the Haitian National Bioethics Committee. Participants aged 18 and over signed informed consent forms. Those under 18 gave their consent and their parent or guardian did so as well. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time before publication of the results.

### ***Conflicts of interest***

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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