

Sexual Education and Adolescent Sexuality: Programs and Initiatives in Cuenca, Ecuador

Georgia Stahl
International Studies
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Surain Subramaniam

Abstract

Sexual education during adolescence is a crucial element to personal development, not solely for the purpose of reducing the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, but more importantly for the promotion of sexual awareness and overall empowerment. This paper explores the difficulties and contradictions faced by adolescents in Ecuador concerning the formation of a responsible sexual identity. The lack of comprehensive sexual education paired with cultural, social, and economic obstacles have led to an alarming rate of pregnancy in adolescence. Utilizing interviews conducted by the author in Cuenca, Ecuador and information collected regarding governmental proposals and initiatives, this paper highlights the importance of a rights-based approach toward adolescent sexuality and grassroots organizations as catalysts for social change.

1. Introduction

Sexuality is expressed in every aspect of life, not solely through sexual relations with others, but as an integral part of human identity. Adolescence is a complex time of growth and development during which a person is deeply influenced by the cultural beliefs, surroundings and experiences that contribute to the shaping of his or her own unique identity. However, adolescent sexuality is a subject that is often taboo, especially in many conservatively religious societies. Misinformation or the lack of reliable information in many areas of the world regarding human sexuality and sexual relations (for both adolescents and adults) contributes to the high level of unintended pregnancy and sexual-transmitted diseases throughout the world. This essay will discuss the high level of teenage pregnancy in Ecuador in regard to certain cultural factors and the inadequate level of sexual education, as well as current initiatives, organizations and volunteer-based programs in Cuenca, Ecuador that are working towards the promotion of sexual health among teens.

2. Sexuality in Adolescence

“La sexualidad es integradora, vinculante, creativa y procreativa. Integradora porque ayuda a formar la identidad, vinculante porque desarrolla las cualidades de género, afectividad y relaciones; creativa por la interacción de los sexos, y procreativa por la capacidad de generar vida.”¹ (Sexuality is all at once integrative, binding, creative and procreative. Integrative because it aids in the formation of identity, binding for its role in the development of gender, emotional well being and relationships with others; creative for interactions between sexes, and procreative for the capacity to generate life). The World Health Organization defines adolescence as the period of life between 10 and 19 years of age.² Adolescence is a critical stage of maturation during which one continues to develop physically, emotionally and socially. This development is intensely shaped by the culture and socioeconomic resources of the individual and the community. In the year 2010, adolescents accounted for 20% of the total population of Ecuador³

and the state has recognized the importance of this large group in the national Constitution: “**Artículo 44: Las niñas, niños y adolescentes tendrán derecho a su desarrollo integral, entendido como proceso de crecimiento, maduración y despliegue de su intelecto y de sus capacidades, potencialidades y aspiraciones, en un entorno familiar, escolar, social y comunitario de afectividad y seguridad. Este entorno permitirá la satisfacción de sus necesidades sociales, afectivo-emocionales y culturales, con el apoyo de políticas intersectoriales nacionales y locales.**”⁴ (Children and adolescents shall also enjoy the right to their integral development, construed as a process of growth, maturity, and deployment of their intellect and capabilities, potential and ambitions in family, school, social and community environments marked by affection and security. This environment shall make it possible to meet their social, emotional and affective, and cultural needs, with the support of national and local intersectoral policies that will allow for the fulfillment of their social, emotional and cultural needs, with both national and local political support). While the state guarantees these rights in writing, many adolescents in Ecuador face economic and educational challenges that can greatly hinder their potential. In the social context of Ecuador (as well as multitudes of other societies throughout the world), adolescence is a period of difficulty and contradictions, especially in reference to sexuality.

2.1 Forming a Sexual Identity

As a result of centuries of European domination and influence, Ecuador, like other Latin-American countries, is rooted in a patriarchal and conservative Catholic belief system. Sexuality, therefore, has long been considered a shameful, dirty and sinful topic that was exclusively associated with reproduction. In today’s world however, adolescents are bombarded with erotic messages through social media, entertainment and advertising. These contradictions between traditional belief systems and the current trend of highly sexualized media content deeply influence the formation of an adolescent’s sexual identity. According to authors of a study conducted by the University of Cuenca in Cuenca, Ecuador: “La forma como los y las adolescentes estructuran su sexualidad está en función del tipo de educación que han recibido de la familia, la escuela y el ambiente social en que se desenvuelven”⁵ (The way in which adolescents structure their sexuality depends on the type of education they have received from their family, their school and the social environment in which they develop). One can say, therefore, that to counteract the contradictory messages regarding sexuality, open dialogue between family members, educators and the adolescent is the best form of sexual education, and herein lies the problem. Surveys conducted among high school students in Cuenca demonstrate that the sexual information these students have received, if any, is most often through friends and other informal sources, and much less so through the school, parents, or other relatives. The study concludes: “...no hablar de temas sexuales es una forma de educar, es una manera de transmitir la idea de que la sexualidad es un tema tabú, peligroso, un tema del cual no se debe hablar. El silencio es una forma de represión por omisión, igual de destructiva y eficaz como la represión abierta y directa.”⁶ (To not speak about sexual matters is also a form of education. It is a way of transmitting the idea that sexuality is taboo and dangerous, a matter that should not be discussed. Silence is a form of repression through omission, as equally destructive and efficient as open and direct repression). This “silence” can be largely attributed to the limited information held by many Ecuadorian adults concerning sexual matters, due to the lack of a general education that often accompanies poverty.⁷

Yet as stated before, sexuality is a part of the innermost nature of human identity, and a matter unspoken is not a matter nonexistent, especially when sexual imagery aimed towards adolescents is unavoidable. According to Dr. Germán Montesdeoca, a gynecologist at the Espacio Joven de la Clínica Humanitaria (the Youth Space of the Humanitarian Clinic) in Cuenca, Ecuador: “Young people see sex everywhere. All throughout the media, there’s sex in the movies, sex in television programs, sex in the news. Yet they lack accurate information”⁸ (translated). This bombardment of sexually charged messages without proper education is problematic for many reasons. As most of the sexual imagery in the media is superficial, that is to say, lacks actual facts and consequences of engaging in sexual acts, it is more likely that adolescents will engage in sexual acts unprepared and unaware of the physical, emotional, social and psychological aspects surrounding sex. Acknowledging adolescence as an enriching time of developing one’s potential as a fruitful, thriving human being, individuals and organizations throughout Ecuador are working to improve the state of sexual education in the country and in turn, improve the lives of young people who will benefit from sexual awareness.

3. Sexual Education

“La falta de educación sexual o su deficiencia influyen en el inicio precoz de las relaciones sexuales en los/as adolescentes, que por lo general es antes de los 15 años de edad.”⁹ (The lack of or insufficiency of sexual education influences the early initiation of adolescents into sexual relationships, which in general is before the age of 15).

3.1 The State

In 1998, the interim president Fabián Alarcón Rivera signed the Law of the Education of Sexuality and Love (Ley sobre la Educación de la Sexualidad y Amor). The law was introduced with the following intention and understanding: “That sexuality is a human reality present from conception, subject to maturation processes that are key to the balance of the personality, so it is vital to issue an Education Act of Sexuality and Love, to allow the formation of generations of men and women of integrity and responsible sexual behavior for themselves and society.”¹⁰ The law stated that the Ministry of Education would be responsible for developing plans and programs based on the education of sexuality and love for private and public institutions and that all institutions should follow these publicly issued plans; that all teachers be trained and knowledgeable on the subject; that the Ministry of Education will monitor the quality of all educational programs, taking into consideration the impact of said programs on students, family, and the community; and that each program be specifically adapted to the cultural realities and morals of the population. The bill was published, yet in part due to government instability and changes within the ministry, the plans and goals remained unexecuted. Deisy Palomeque, a former coordinator of the bill and an official for the Division of Education in the Health Ministry considered that, as of 2004, the bill remained largely unheeded and unimplemented: “hasta ahora, se encuentra en letra muerta.”¹¹

The Ministry of Education made another attempt to increase the quality and quantity of sexual education programs throughout the country with the Plan Nacional de Educación para la Sexualidad y el Amor (PLANESA) in 2000, which evolved over the next three years to become the Programa Nacional de Educación Sexual y el Amor (PRONESA) in 2003.¹² However, it was not until 2008 that concrete goals and guidelines for the program were established as part of the “Plan Decenal” (Ten Year Plan), implemented in 2006 by the president and the Ministry of Education to reform the overall quality of the educational system throughout the country. As outlined by the *Plan Decenal*, in 2006 the state “institutionalized” sexual education within the education system, and according to the official governmental statement concerning the plan, “435 facilitators and 13,000 qualified teachers (at the primary and secondary grade levels); 32,000 books; 15,000 students; all incorporated into the Sexual Education curriculum.”¹³ In 2008, under current president Rafael Correa, Ecuador put into place its 20th constitution.¹⁴ This constitution decrees that sexual education be included in all educational programs throughout the country. “**Article 347:4 [The following shall be the responsibility of the State]: To ensure that all education institutions provide education in citizenship, sexuality and the environment, using a rights-based approach.**”¹⁵ These legal frameworks established the basis for programs like PRONESA to finally be implemented within the country’s basic education system. The intentions of PRONESA were to improve the overall state of sexual advocacy and awareness among children, teens and adults throughout the country with a focus on interpersonal development, gender equality, sexual and reproductive education, and human/children/adolescent/reproductive rights. Under PRONESA it would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to implement the comprehensive education of integral sexuality with an emphasis on the prevention of HIV/AIDS, to improve education for the prevention of teenage pregnancy, to work towards eradicating sexual crimes and gender violence in the educational field, and to work towards the eradication of sex-trafficking, sexual and labor exploitation, especially of women, children and adolescents.¹⁶ This new pedagogical focus on sexuality undertaken by state institutions allowed for significant steps forward towards the proposed goals, however, many obstacles have, and continue to, impede progress.

3.2 Obstacles

Traditionally, sexual education has been taught as an isolated subject, transmitting information solely concerning the biological aspects and possible consequences of a sexual relationship. It has been taught with the basic intention of reducing the rate of teenage pregnancies and preventing sexually transmitted diseases. While these are valid objectives, sexual education is an integral part of general education, an ongoing conversation that recognizes the importance of all aspects of human sexuality: the emotional, physical, social and cultural dimensions. Therefore a reductionist, isolating approach to sexual education does not properly transmit the necessary knowledge, attitudes

and behaviors that allow one to express their sexuality in a responsible, constructive, independent and enriching manner. Sexual education should involve the active and engaged participation between everyone involved: students, parents, educators, schools and communities. The influential Brazilian theorist and educator Paulo Freire remarked: “Ninguém educa ninguém, ninguém se educa a si mesmo, os homens educan entre si, mediatizados pelo mundo”¹⁷ (No one educates anyone, no one educates himself; men educate each other, as mediated by the world).

3.2.1 the catholic church

Lack of open communication is one contributing factor to the obstacles facing comprehensive sexual education in Ecuador today. This is in part due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church, which has a wide-reaching impact on politics and cultural identity throughout Latin America. Sexuality has long been considered a taboo subject, with sexual relations for anything other than reproductive purposes viewed as sinful. These views have long been ingrained into the mentality of many believers of the Catholic faith, and inhibit the discussion of sexuality between family and community members. Comments from the Vatican (Pope Benedict) created a worldwide uproar among the global health education community in 2009 when the pope condemned the use of condoms and stated that condoms “increase the problem” of AIDS.¹⁸ The church has long opposed any form of contraception as it claims that it breaks the link between sex and procreation. Such beliefs and public statements are extremely harmful to the advancement of women’s (and men’s) sexual rights, family planning, sexual education, and in turn, harmful to the well-being of the world population in general. Shame or embarrassment to discuss issues of sex and sexuality remain obstacles not easily overcome, as they are deeply rooted in the cultural customs of religiously conservative societies.

3.2.2 subject matter

These influences contribute not only to the mentality of the people, but also to how and what is taught as sexual education within familial and educational settings. The current curriculum for most sexual education courses in high schools and grade schools is based on biological processes and the physical aspects of sexual relations. In a study performed by the University of Cuenca, of the population of middle school and high school students questioned throughout the province, the content of all sexual education programs had a predominant biological focus. Passing on information regarding the sexual organs, the proper use of condoms and other contraceptive methods, and the prevention of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS is the primary objective of these sexual education courses taught through the school.¹⁹ According to Paola Hildalgo, a six-year volunteer at SENDAS, an organization that works to raise sexual awareness and promote gender equality within Cuenca and the surrounding areas, “Hay programas y clases que son parte del colegio sobre la sexualidad, pero no les dan mucha información a las chicas y los chicos. [Porque] el sistema de educación en el Ecuador no enseña los/las profesores/as bien los métodos para enseñar la sexualidad, sólo el nivel biológico”²⁰ (There are programs and classes about sexuality taught within the school, but they do not give much information to the students. [This is because] the educational system within Ecuador does not teach the instructors the proper methods for teaching sexuality, therefore only the biological level is taught). Under this solely biological framework of sexual education, young people are often presented with the possible negative consequences of sexual relationships (i.e. undesired pregnancy or sexually-transmitted diseases) as opposed to the full spectrum that human sexuality has to offer. Educators should not be blamed for this pedagogical framework, as it is a result of a much more complex system based on economic resources and implementation.

3.2.3 economic resources

The greatest challenges contributing to the inadequacy and inefficiency of sexual education in Ecuador are poverty and inequality. The poverty rate in 2011 was 28.6% (high, though still a significant decline from the 37.6% rate in 2006), with the extreme poverty rate reaching 11.6% (down from 16.9% in 2006).²¹ The poverty level is significant because, in general, people living in poverty have less access to quality education, to health care, and to the resources (such as contraception) that allow one to make their own choices regarding family planning. Despite legal declarations (Ley sobre la Educación de la Sexualidad y Amor, PRONESA, and constitutional articles) the reality of sexual education in Ecuador is that the majority of schools do not have the adequate economic resources necessary to train educators an integrative, comprehensive approach towards teaching sexuality. In 2007, President Correa declared a national state of emergency for the educational sector of the country and set aside 80 million USD (the

national currency of Ecuador) for infrastructure improvement.²² With a large sector of the population living in poverty, distribution of resources among communities remains one of the challenges faced by the government. According to Susana Araujo, an advisor to the Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Education in Ecuador, there are schools everywhere in Ecuador; the issue is the quality of education received. Basic education (between age five to fifteen) is obligatory and 97% of youth have access to education. The *colegio* (students age fifteen to eighteen) is also obligatory but in reality it is impossible to enforce, as many students leave school to work out of economic necessity. Araujo stated (in April 2011) that there were currently 2,600 schools throughout the country with one single teacher responsible for seven grades of students.²³ This type of learning environment is not conducive to accommodating the specific needs and learning capacities that vary from age to age, especially in terms of sexual education in which the subject matter should correspond to the age group and cultural background of the students. Araujo also cites inequality as one of the major issues within the education system. Schools with the fewest resources tend to receive the fewest resources, as is the same with communities and cultural groups, with *la mujer indígena*, the indigenous woman, receiving the lowest quality and lowest level of education within the country. A low level of education and social marginalization are two of the factors that contribute to the risks associated with adolescent sexual behavior, and as an integrative approach to sexual education promotes overall personal and sexual growth, reducing these risks is therefore a crucial aspect of any sexual education paradigm.

4. Teenage Pregnancy

One of the major reasons why both governmental and non-governmental organizations have undertaken the improvement of sexual education as a priority is the prevalence of pregnancy among adolescents. Based off statistics from the Ministry of Public Health and the National Plan for the Prevention of Pregnancy in Adolescence, a 2009 study by four researchers from Umeå University in Sweden states: “In Ecuador, the adolescent fertility rate is the highest in the [Andean] region and has increased from 84 per 1 000 in 1989 to 100 in 2004. Of all Ecuadorian women age 15 to 19, 20% get pregnant before age 20. Inequalities between adolescent girls of different educational levels, geographical regions, and household incomes are prominent. Of illiterate adolescents, 43% have been pregnant, compared to 11% with secondary education. Geographically, the Amazon basin shows the highest adolescent fertility rates in the country (121 per 1 000).”²⁴ On February 19, 2011, the Minister of Health David Chiriboga reported that over the last decade there has been a 74% increase of pregnancies among girls between 10 and 14 years old, which he described as “appalling.” In response to this statistic, President Correa stated: “No podemos aceptar que adolescentes se embaracen a los 14 años” (We cannot accept that adolescents become pregnant at 14 years old), and that while he assumes the risk of facing criticism from sectors of the Catholic Church, he nevertheless stresses the dire importance of birth control and education, especially for the poorest mothers and adolescents in areas with minimal economic resources, as these are the areas most concerning in terms of birth rates.²⁵ The Minister and President announced that the government will launch an aggressive family planning campaign that will include sexual education, free access to contraceptive methods and the creation of information centers.²⁶ These statistics demonstrate that social inequalities such as poverty and illiteracy put teens at a higher risk for pregnancy, but they are not the only factors that contribute to the alarming pregnancy rate in Ecuador.

4.1 Risk Factors

In 2008 faculty members of the University of Cuenca in Cuenca, Ecuador published a report investigating the theme of adolescent sexuality among students of the city’s schools, with a focus on sexual education, sexual practices, knowledge and attitudes, and risk factors of adolescent pregnancy. The report is titled “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes” (Sexual Health Promotion among Adolescents: The State of the Art of Sexual Education in Adolescents) and faculty members from the philosophy, medical sciences, psychology, and gender studies departments contributed to the research and publication. A section written by María Dolores Palacios from the psychology department outlines individual, familial, and social factors that contribute to teenage pregnancy. Risk factors in reference to the individual may include: truancy, difficulty in planning long-term life goals, low self-esteem, poor confidence in oneself, early menarche, antisocial behavior, substance abuse, insufficient knowledge concerning sexuality, and a low level of education. Familial risk factors include (but are not limited to): a dysfunctional family, the loss of a family member, relatives or mother with a pregnancy during adolescence, an isolated or emotionally inaccessible mother, and a father who is absent or a migrant. And lastly, social risk factors include: unfavorable economic conditions, recent migration of the adolescent,

unskilled labor, living in a rural area, early entrance into the workforce, myths and taboos about sexuality, social marginalization, contradictory messages regarding sexuality between the family and society versus the media, *machismo* as a cultural value, and low salary.²⁷ Many of these factors are cultural, social and structural forces that are beyond the control of an adolescent, yet nevertheless strongly affect the risk of pregnancy and therefore merit a more in-depth analysis.

One of these factors is *machismo* as a cultural value. *Machismo* implies excessive masculine behavior or a strong sense of masculine pride in regard to women. An aspect of this masculine identity is the power to control a woman's sexuality. "A sense of ownership over women also impedes their husbands' willingness to let them access health services."²⁸ In a feature story "Preventing Teenage Pregnancy in Ecuador" published by the United Nations Population Fund, Elizabeth Granda, an obstetrician from a clinic near Riobamba, reiterates how *machismo* remains an obstacle for women's reproductive rights: "Women have to ask their husbands or partners for permission in order to use contraceptives."²⁹ *Machismo* can also impact the initiation into sexual relations among adolescents in a negative or harmful manner. "Adolescent women also frequently experience men's unwillingness to be involved in family planning; among urban adolescents in particular, negotiating condom use is difficult. Societal norms dictate that sex should be spontaneous; being prepared with a condom in hand suggests an element of planning that people frown upon. Either the man or woman may be deemed promiscuous if he or she proposes using a condom."³⁰ This statement calls into consideration another risk factor listed in the University of Cuenca report, living in a rural area. In general, women in rural areas have less autonomy in terms of sexual and reproductive rights, as well as less access to education and public health services in contrast to women in urban areas.³¹ However, according to Gioconda Gavilanes, a national leader of the program for teenagers at the Ministry of Health, "the high-risk groups for teenage pregnancy are often rural and poor, but young people in large cities like Quito and Guayaquil are at equally high risk."³² This can be attributed to other factors previously noted (media influence, church and family influence, embarrassment, economic hardship, etc.). Cuenca is the third largest city in the country after Guayaquil and Quito, with a population of about 350,000 people.³³ At the Clínica Humanitaria, an important health clinic within the city, the *Espacio Joven* (Youth Space) is dedicated solely to the care and treatment of adolescents, including Gynecology, Obstetrics, Counseling, Psychology, Internal Medicine, and childbirth preparation services.³⁴ The presence of this space indicates that larger cities in Ecuador, not just rural areas, also experience high levels of pregnancy in adolescence. Dr. Germán Montesdeoca is a gynecologist in the *Espacio Joven*. He outlines the necessity of these services and the reality of adolescent pregnancy in the region in an interview conducted in April of 2011. In regard to sexual education he states: "No hay nada, eso es el problema. Una educación sexual mejor evitaremos la cantidad grande que vengan al espacio" (There is no sexual education, this is the problem. With better sexual education we would avoid the huge quantity that come to the space).³⁵ Dr. Montesdeoca performs consultations and prescribes contraceptives to the youth who visit the space, about forty each day (split between two gynecologists) between the ages of 12 and 20. These services are crucial, he states, because "vengan y vengan los embarazos" (the pregnancies keep coming).

5. Current Initiatives and Programs in Cuenca

The remainder of this report will focus on other current programs and initiatives related to the promotion of sexual education in Cuenca, Ecuador. In contrast to government proposals and initiative outlined in section 3.1, the following programs are independently launched initiatives through universities and grassroots organizations. These programs are important catalysts for social change, as they initiate from the bottom up and are driven by community members, as opposed to run by traditional power structures such as the state. These programs also take a rights-based approach towards sexuality, which is important for promoting personal empowerment. "Programs and policies targeting adolescent pregnancy should have a rights-based approach. Increasing girls' freedom and power to exercise their reproductive rights is necessary to enable them to take action in cases of sexual abuse and to help them maintain resilient attitudes when experiencing adverse events."³⁶

5.1 SENDAS

The organization SENDAS (translation: Pathways), is a privately funded organization founded in 1991 with the vision to: "Impulsar la vida, el ejercicio de derechos, la equidad social y de género y la soberanía desde transformaciones estructurales políticas culturales económicas ambientales y sociales" (Promote life, the exercise of rights, gender and social equity, and political sovereignty through structural political, cultural, economic,

environmental, and social transformations).³⁷ The volunteers at SENDAS, ranging in age from high school students to men and women in their fifties and sixties, represent a diverse spectrum of identities. In 2011, some of these volunteers included a 20 year old mother, a 40 year old graphic designer and widower, a 20 year old student of social communications and self-proclaimed crossdresser/proud homosexual, teachers, self-proclaimed “radical feminists,” community activists, university and high-school students, a computer tech, a local radio personality, and about a dozen married and single women from the province. Working together they develop long-term projects aimed at reducing social and gender disparities and promoting sexual health. One of their main objectives is to promote a society in which everyone has the right to live and express their sexuality without shame or discrimination, and above all with knowledge and respect.

As previously stated (section 3.2), many teachers, especially in economically poor regions, are not qualified to teach sexual education. Schools in Cuenca and the surrounding towns often contact SENDAS to conduct sexual education workshops for the students. On April 19, 2011, three members from SENDAS hosted a workshop for all the students at the Colegio Rafael Chico, a school for girls ranging from twelve to eighteen years old in Girón, a small town outside of Cuenca. The day consisted of two workshops, one for the younger girls and a second for the older girls. This framework demonstrates an approach based on age-appropriate content and discussion methods, an approach that many schools (including Colegio Rafael Chico) have neither the theoretical understanding behind nor the economic resources to implement. The workshops were an open discussion forum for the girls to voice questions, concerns and misunderstandings regarding sexuality. The discussions included information on HIV/AIDS (what is it and how it can be prevented), sexual violence and self-respect, the difficulties of teenage pregnancy, the influence of *machismo* in sexual relationships, oral sex, emotional well being, and a demonstration of proper condom use. Volunteers from SENDAS also lead small groups in after-school programs, with the intention to facilitate open discussion through the more intimate setting. In one such workshop, a group of nine girls and eight boys aged 14 to 17 participated in games, partner activities, and discussions concerning sexuality, social stigmas, love, and sexual and body rights. These workshops exemplify the typical frameworks utilized by SENDAS and demonstrate a rights-based approach through the promotion of responsibility, understanding, and personal empowerment among both girls and boys.

SENDAS strives to promote awareness and open communication that can lead to social change through the recognition of the diversity of gender, sex, age, socio-economic, ethnic and cultural rights that exist within Ecuador. Other projects include their radio station, radioequidad.com, which airs online daily with discussions covering the wide-range of human sexuality, annual events held in the city promoting gender equality, working with the regional government to implement comprehensive sexual education within the school system, and development projects for women of low socioeconomic backgrounds.

5.2 “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes”

This study (cited throughout this essay) was an investigative initiative undertaken by faculty members of the University of Cuenca in conjunction with the Center of Family and Sexuality Studies at Leuven University in Belgium. These investigations were published in two parts in 2009, “Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes” (The State of the Art of Sexual Education in Adolescents) and “Resultados de las investigaciones” (Results of the Investigations). Recognition of the many difficulties and lack of understanding regarding sexuality among adolescents was the catalyst for this investigation. The reports cover a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data describing the basic concepts of sexual education on national and regional levels, government initiatives to lower the pregnancy rate, risk factors for teenage pregnancy, and current regional projects regarding sexuality. This information was published by the university with the following objective: “desarrollar y mejorar la educación sexual en los colegios de la ciudad de Cuenca, basándose en un análisis profundo de los diferentes elementos sociales y culturales de la sexualidad”³⁸ (to develop and improve sexual education in the Cuenca school system, based on an in-depth analysis of the different social and cultural elements of sexuality). This investigation was a landmark for sexual education in Cuenca, as it was the first profound and multi-disciplinary study of sexuality and sexual education undertaken from a rights-based approach. After the publication of these investigations, the university established the Project for Sexual Health in Adolescence, in which faculty members and students are currently working towards the promotion of sexual health within their communities. These projects include workshops, public events, and the publication of posters and pamphlets that raise awareness of issues such as sexual violence, condom use, and STD and pregnancy prevention.³⁹

6. Conclusion

Sexual and reproductive health is a fundamental right for all humans, including adolescents who deserve the right to a sexual education that promotes awareness and empowerment in regards to sexuality. The lack or inefficiency of sexual education in Ecuador that has contributed to the staggering teenage pregnancy rate in the country is based on a complex system of socioeconomic, cultural and structural determinants. The government and its ministries have set the improvement of sexual education as a national priority, yet implementation, resource allocation, and deep-rooted cultural convictions remain obstacles to this task. The rights-based approach undertaken by independent programs and grassroots organizations such as SENDAS represent the most effective and enriching framework for treating adolescent sexuality.

7. References

- 1 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes,” Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 20.
- 2 Meeting Report, “The sexual and reproductive health of young adolescents in developing countries,” World Health Organization, http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2011/WHO_RHR_11.11_eng.pdf.
- 3 UNICEF, “Statistics,” http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ecuador_statistics.html#93.
- 4 *Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador*, 2008, Political Database of the Americas, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.
- 5 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes,” Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 14.
- 6 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes,” Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 15.
- 7 Interview with Fernanda Ramírez, April 27, 2011.
- 8 Interview with Dr. Germán Montesdeoca, April 25, 2011.
- 9 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes,” Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 5.
- 10 Official Record of the Ecuador Governmental Body, “Ley sobre la educación de la sexualidad y el amor,” <http://www.efemerides.ec/1/junio/sexual.htm>.
- 11 “La ley de la Sexualidad en ‘letra muerta’ por 6 años,” *Hoy*, April 1, 2004, <http://www.explored.com.ec/noticias-ecuador/la-ley-de-la-sexualidad-en-letra-muerta-por-6-anos-171100.html>.
- 12 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Resultados de las investigaciones,” Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 10.
- 13 Ministry of Education, “Plan Decenal de Educación del Ecuador: 2006-2015,” National Board of Education, p. 14, <http://es.scribd.com/doc/53039853/Plan-decenal>.
- 14 *Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador*, 2008, Political Database of the Americas, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.
- 15 *Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador*, 2008, Political Database of the Americas, <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.
- 16 “Programa nacional de la educación de la sexualidad y el amor: PRONESA,” Ministry of Education, http://web.educacion.gob.ec/_upload/PRONESA%20PARA%20LA%20WEB1.ppt.
- 17 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, 9th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1981), 79.
- 18 Phillip Pullella, “Vatican defends pope’s stand on condoms as criticism mounts,” *Reuters*, March 18, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/03/18/us-pope-africa-aids-idUSLI43220920090318>.
- 19 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, “Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Resultados de las investigaciones,” Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 16.
- 20 Interview with Paola Hidalgo, volunteer at SENDAS, April 20, 2011.
- 21 World Bank, “Ecuador Overview,” <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ecuador/overview>.
- 22 Ministry of Education, “Plan Decenal de Educación del Ecuador: 2006-2015,” National Board of Education, <http://es.scribd.com/doc/53039853/Plan-decenal>.
- 23 Lecture by Susana Araujo in Quito, Ecuador, April 1, 2011.

-
- 24 Goicolea I, Wulff M, Öhman A, San Sebastian M, "Risk factors for pregnancy among adolescent girls in Ecuador's Amazon basin: a case-control study," *Rev Panam Salud Publica*, 26, no. 3 (2009):221–8, <http://www.scielosp.org/pdf/rpsp/v26n3/06.pdf>.
- 25 "Correa anuncia campaña agresiva de planificación familiar en Ecuador," *El Universo*, February 20, 2011, <http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/02/20/1/1384/correa-anuncia-campana-agresiva-planificacion-familiar-ecuador.html>.
- 26 "Gobierno impulsará una agresiva campaña de planificación familiar," *Hoy*, February 19, 2011, <http://www.hoy.com.ec/noticias-ecuador/gobierno-impulsara-una-agresiva-campana-de-planificacion-familiar-459669.html>.
- 27 Jerves, Enzlin, Cárdenas, Castro, Jaramillo, Ortiz, y Palacios, "Promoción de la salud sexual en adolescentes: Estado del arte de la educación sexual en adolescentes," Universidad de Cuenca, (2009), 18-19.
- 28 Lara M. Knudsen, *Reproductive Rights in a Global Context* (Nashville:Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 73.
- 29 Trygve Olfarnes, "Preventing Teenage Pregnancy in Ecuador," *United Nations Population Fund*, August 26, 2001, <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/6533>.
- 30 Lara M. Knudsen, *Reproductive Rights in a Global Context* (Nashville:Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 74.
- 31 Lara M. Knudsen, *Reproductive Rights in a Global Context* (Nashville:Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).
- 32 Trygve Olfarnes, "Preventing Teenage Pregnancy in Ecuador," *United Nations Population Fund*, August 26, 2001, <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/6533>.
- 33 "Cuenca Overview," <http://www.incuenca.com/cuenca-overview/>.
- 34 Clínica Humanitaria, "Servicios," Fundación Humanitaria Pablo Jaramillo, <http://clinicahumanitaria.com/quehacemos1.html>.
- 35 Interview with Dr. Germán Montesdeoca, April 25, 2011.
- 36 Goicolea I, Wulff M, Öhman A, San Sebastian M, "Risk factors for pregnancy among adolescent girls in Ecuador's Amazon basin: a case-control study," *Rev Panam Salud Publica*, 26, no. 3 (2009):226, <http://www.scielosp.org/pdf/rpsp/v26n3/06.pdf>.
- 37 SENDAS, "Misión y visión," http://www.sendas.org.ec/sendas/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=266.
- 38 Monserath Jerves, "Investigación en Promoción de la Salud Sexual para adolescentes," *El Mercurio*, April 24, 2011.
- 39 Interview with Fernanda Ramírez, faculty member in the University of Cuenca in the Program of Sexual Health in Adolescents, April 27, 2011.