

From Adolescence to Motherhood: Understanding the Plight of Teenage Mothers

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ABSTRACT: *Teenage motherhood continues to be a pressing societal issue because it significantly impacts lives of adolescent girls as they transition to motherhood. Using a qualitative transcendental phenomenology, this study explored the lived experience of senior high school teenage mothers in one of the schools in Bukidnon. Data were collected through phenomenological in-depth interview with strict adherence to ethical principles. The data were analyzed using Hyper Research software to determine the code, categories, and themes. For the participants, teenage motherhood can be summarized into three emerging themes such as grappling with motherhood, social dilemmas and support, and appreciating motherhood. Grappling with motherhood involved balancing family and student life, understanding the occurrence of pregnancy, and hurdling the challenge of teenage motherhood. Furthermore, the participants as a teenage mother have to face social dilemmas and such as various family-related struggles. However, they also received a lot of family support. In the long run, the participants have appreciated motherhood as they became aware of the joy of motherhood as they made their dreams and contentment of the life of being a teenage mother. Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. The lived experience of the teenage mothers provides valuable insights about the challenges these young mothers face, the positive learning experiences they gain, and their aspirations for the future. Understanding these aspects is crucial for developing comprehensive support systems, challenging societal stereotypes, and empowering teenage mothers to navigate their roles as parents and individuals successfully. It is recommended that future researchers may conduct longitudinal research on the long-term outcomes and interventions for teenage mothers.*

KEYWORDS: teenage pregnancy, grappling with motherhood, social dilemmas and support, and appreciating motherhood

INTRODUCTION

In the delicate tapestry of human development, adolescence emerges as a crucial chapter marked by both promise and peril. An important aspect interwoven throughout this narrative is the widespread issue of teenage pregnancy, which poses a significant challenge to society and has far-reaching implications for public health, education, and socio-economic systems (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). As we embark on this exploration, it is essential to acknowledge the profound implications of early parenthood on the lives of young individuals and the communities they inhabit.

The phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy is not merely a statistical error but a nuanced interplay of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors. The journey from adolescence to parenthood is rife with complexities, presenting a myriad of challenges that echo across generations. The repercussions of early childbearing extend far beyond the immediate impact on the young parents; they ripple through the fabric of society, influencing healthcare systems, educational landscapes, and economic dynamics (World Bank, 2022).

To comprehend the multifaceted nature of adolescent pregnancy, our investigation delves into a diverse array of scholarly perspectives. The seminal work of () illuminates the sociological underpinnings, emphasizing the role of socio-economic factors in shaping the trajectory of adolescent parenthood. Meanwhile, the psychological dimensions are explored through the lens of Piagetian theory, offering insights into the cognitive development of young parents.

In the realm of public health, World Health Organization (2023) provides a comprehensive understanding of the health outcomes for both adolescents and their offspring. This intricate web of research threads, intertwined with the socio-cultural tapestry, propels us into the heart of the issue, urging us to confront the challenges and explore innovative solutions.

Adolescent pregnancy is considered one of the world's trending escalating concerns, continues to have substantial societal repercussions, significantly impacting youth welfare across various demographic strata. According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescent pregnancy is defined as pregnancy before age 20 years. Adolescent pregnancy can have negative consequences for the health and well-being of both the mother and the child, as well as for their families and communities. Some of the possible health outcomes are increased risk of maternal mortality, complications during pregnancy and childbirth, low birth weight, preterm delivery, anemia, depression, substance abuse, and reduced educational attainment (World Health Organization, 2023).

In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a report which was a comprehensive examination of adolescent pregnancy uncovers a complex issue that extends beyond mere

statistics, weaving together societal norms, economic conditions, educational attainments, and health outcomes. The imperative nature of crafting comprehensive interventions to mitigate this escalating trend is undeniable, as the effective addressing and curbing of adolescent pregnancy significantly shape the future prosperity of younger generations (Larki, Sharif, & Roudsari, 2020).

Despite the existing wealth of literature on adolescent pregnancy, there remains a significant gap in the comprehension of its psychological, emotional, and long-term socioeconomic implications. A dearth of studies exploring the psychological and emotional experiences of early motherhood in the Philippines—encompassing aspects like anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and identity development—is noticeable. Concurrently, the long-term socioeconomic consequences of adolescent pregnancies, particularly with regards to economic stability, job security, and their contribution to generational poverty cycles, are largely unexplored (Jakubowski et al., 2023).

Furthermore, there is a notable insufficiency in research that scrutinizes the effectiveness and accessibility of community and societal interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of teen pregnancies (Mueller et al., 2019). Bridging these gaps is vital for a holistic understanding of adolescent pregnancy, thus paving the way for more targeted and effective intervention strategies. Such research endeavors will not only deepen the understanding of this multifaceted issue but also assist in the formulation of robust policies and interventions, ultimately contributing to the welfare of young mothers and the larger society. Therefore, these constructs provide a compelling rationale for conducting the present study.

The present study aptly captured the essence of the research endeavor, a notable research gap exists in the current literature. The existing body of work predominantly focuses on the challenges faced by teenage mothers during their journey into motherhood, offering valuable insights into the psychological, socio-economic, and health dimensions of their experiences. However, there is a conspicuous dearth of research that systematically explores the role of support systems and interventions in mitigating the adversities faced by teenage mothers.

In the Philippines, the pervasive impact of adolescent pregnancy reverberates across families, educators, healthcare professionals, and government institutions, underlining the need for immediate action. The country sets itself apart from other nations in the region with its alarmingly high rates of teen pregnancy, thus necessitating the implementation of robust, targeted interventions and policies (Aquilino, 2020; UNICEF, 2022).

Statistics illustrates the gravity of this situation. According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2020), the Philippines still has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates among the ASEAN member states, with over 500 adolescents becoming pregnant and giving birth every day. This figure is not a mere number but a reflection of the lives of countless young women whose trajectories are altered by the responsibilities of adolescent motherhood. The high prevalence of

teen pregnancy introduces substantial obstacles that could potentially hinder academic progress and constrain future employment opportunities

One alarming report by Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said that while the total number of adolescent births is decreasing, there is a significant slight increase in childbirths among mothers who are less than 15 years old which includes those birthing during the pandemic in 2020. In the years, 2016-2020, child-bearing among mothers who are under the age of 10-14 years has significantly increased by 11.0 percent. PSA Registration has reported an increase from 1,903 in 2016 to 2,113. That is, 0.14 percent among the registered childbirths in 2020. It is significant to note that 5 to 7 births every day, are from mothers who are 10-14 years old (Mapa, 2022).

Regional discrepancies within the Philippines add a layer of complexity to the issue. In Northern Mindanao, the Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM) has been working to raise awareness among teenagers and their parents about the risks associated with early pregnancy (Corrales, 2023). Compounding this situation is the persistent trend observed from 2017 to 2022, wherein Region 10 consistently exhibited high adolescent pregnancy rates, underlining the necessity for focused interventions (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023).

The Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes the gravity of the issue, prompting the issuance of directives such as DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2016. This order encourages educators to conduct research focused on child protection themes (Department of Education, 2016). Moreover, it represents DepEd's commitment to addressing adolescent pregnancy through the evaluation of existing interventions and exploration of potential new strategies to protect learners in schools.

Despite the existing body of research, there remains a significant gap. While numerous studies have investigated adolescent pregnancy in schools, many have primarily focused on statistical data and policy implications, neglecting the human aspect of the issue (Azevedo et al., 2021). Notably, there is a lack of research regarding adolescent pregnancy in schools within the district of Talakag, Bukidnon, highlighting the need for more localized studies.

Adolescent pregnancy presents a myriad of difficulties and challenges that span various domains of life, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and economic dimensions. Several researches have consistently highlighted the following aspects: a) health risks which includes maternal health; b) child health where babies born to adolescent mothers are at a higher risk of health issues; and, c) educational implications in which adolescent pregnancy often disrupts educational attainment, limiting future opportunities (Jakubowski et al., 2023).

Other difficulties and challenges encountered by teenage mothers include: d) psychological challenges which includes heightened stress, anxiety, and depression; e) social stigma and isolation; f) economic strain that includes economic hardships due to limited educational and employment opportunities; g) strained relationships, both with partners and family members; h) access to healthcare; and i) repeat pregnancies (Corrales, 2023).

Addressing this research gap becomes imperative for crafting comprehensive strategies that go beyond merely delineating the challenges. By scrutinizing the effectiveness of various support mechanisms, people's understanding on the complexities surrounding adolescent pregnancy would be enriched. Additionally, it would also provide relevant information on the development of targeted interventions, tailored to the unique needs of teenage mothers.

This research gap highlighted the necessity for a holistic approach through this research study which considered the broader ecosystem in which teenage mothers navigate the transition from adolescence to motherhood. In the tapestry of human experience, the phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy stands as a complex and critical thread, weaving its way through the lives of young individuals and the communities they inhabit. A robust exploration of the difficulties and challenges faced by teenage mothers are not merely an academic pursuit but a moral imperative and societal necessity. In essence, this research is not just an academic inquiry but a call to action—an imperative to illuminate the path forward for teenage mothers and to pave the way for a society that champions the well-being, resilience, and equitable opportunities for all its members, regardless of the circumstances of their journey into motherhood.

This qualitative study sought to address this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of adolescent pregnancy at a public high school. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study will examine the lived experiences, challenges, and societal impacts of adolescent pregnancy, fostering a comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted issue. The insights gleaned from this research are anticipated to enrich academic discourse on adolescent pregnancy and inform the development of more effective, tailored intervention strategies. This research study qualitatively investigated the context and impact of the lived experiences of teenage mothers. Also, it explored on the challenges and difficulties the participants encountered in relation to their experiences. Moreover, the study tried to determine how teenage mothers perceive their future.

Framework

The present study was anchored on the feminist and role theories to provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted challenges and experiences faced by teenage mothers. This framework aimed to unravel the intricate interplay of gender dynamics, societal roles, and support systems. One of its goals is to offer a nuanced perspective on the transition from adolescence to motherhood.

Drawing from feminist theory, the framework acknowledged and examined the gendered power dynamics that shape the experiences of teenage mothers. It explored how societal expectations and stereotypes influence the choices available to young mothers, impacting their agency and autonomy. An intersectional feminist perspective was employed to recognize the diverse identities within the population, emphasizing how intersecting factors such as race, class, and ethnicity contribute to differential experiences of adolescent pregnancy.

The Feminist theory is a multifaceted framework that critically examines and challenges societal structures perpetuating gender inequalities. Key concepts within feminist theory include patriarchy, the social construct of gender, intersectionality, reproductive rights, and sexual liberation.

Patriarchy according to Hooks (1984) delves into the concept of patriarchy, emphasizing its role as a system where men hold primary power and societal dominance. Lorber (1994) argues that gender is socially constructed, challenging the notion that it is biologically determined. She explores how societal norms shape and reinforce gender roles. Here is where intersectionality comes into place. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduces intersectionality, highlighting the interconnected nature of various social categories such as race, class, and gender. This concept emphasizes the compounding effects of different forms of oppression.

Moreover, reproductive rights according to Firestone (1970), advocates for women's control over their bodies. Her work, "The Dialectic of Sex," calls for a radical reevaluation of gender relations. Meaning, women have the right to choose what each one wanted to be according to their personal discretion. Rich (1980) explored this issue by tackling on sexual liberation and challenges compulsory heterosexuality. In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Rich advocates for embracing diverse expressions of sexuality.

These cited authors have contributed significantly to feminist theory, offering perspectives that have shaped discussions on gender, power dynamics, and the intersectionality of oppression. Their work remains influential in ongoing dialogues within the feminist movement. This inclusion enhanced the study's sensitivity to the unique challenges faced by individuals with diverse backgrounds. Moreover, the framework incorporated the concept of reproductive justice. With this, the study was framed within the broader context of ensuring the right of teenage mothers to make decisions about their reproductive lives. It advocated for policies and interventions that respect the autonomy and well-being of young mothers.

The study was also anchored on the role theory (RT): On the perspective of social roles and expectations, RT guides the examination of societal roles assigned to adolescent mothers and the expectations placed upon them. It explores how these roles influence a) self-perception, b) identity formation, and c) the interactions of teenage mothers within familial, educational, and healthcare systems. Also, the framework delves into the role strain and conflicts experienced by teenage mothers, considering how societal expectations and norms contribute to these challenges.

Role theory is a sociological framework that explores how individuals navigate and enact various roles within society, emphasizing the influence of social expectations, norms, and structures on behavior. According to Biddle (1979), roles are sets of expectations and behaviors associated with a particular social position. Individuals occupy multiple roles simultaneously, and these roles contribute to their identity and influence their interactions with others. Role theory posits that

societal roles come with predefined scripts and expectations, shaping the way individuals perceive themselves and others. In the context of the present study, women also occupy societal role which affect their behaviors in connection to their social positions or occupancies (Hindin, 2007; Hindin, 2014; Hebert-Beirne, 2008).

Role strain, a concept introduced by Goode (1960), highlights the challenges individuals may face when trying to fulfill conflicting roles. For instance, an individual may experience role strain when the expectations of their roles clash, leading to stress or difficulty in balancing responsibilities. Role theory is applicable across various contexts, including family, work, and social institutions, providing a lens to understand how roles contribute to social order and individual identity.

The theoretical framework synthesizes these elements, recognizing the interconnectedness of gender dynamics, societal roles, and support structures. It explores how these factors interact and shape the experiences of teenage mothers, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face and the strategies employed to navigate the complexities of early motherhood. By weaving together feminist and role theories, this theoretical framework aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of adolescent pregnancy, informing policies and interventions that promote gender equity, acknowledge diverse identities, and foster supportive role transitions for young mothers.

According to Butler (1990), the Feminist Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the experiences of teenage mothers by highlighting the influence of gender roles, power dynamics, and patriarchal norms on their lives. This theory recognizes that societal expectations and stigma surrounding young motherhood are often shaped by gendered notions and power imbalances. Based on the concept of Reed (2002), who conducted studies on the role of gender and motherhood, the application of the Feminist and Role Theory to this study has enabled the research to examine how these societal expectations and stigmas impact the self-perception and coping strategies of teenage mothers. It acknowledged the potential challenges these adolescents may face due to the intersection of their gender and motherhood roles, as well as the external judgments they encountered.

The Feminist Theory prompts an analysis of the power dynamics that shape teenage mothers' experiences, including the influence of patriarchy and how it intersects with their identities as young mothers. By interrogating these dynamics, the study can shed light on the ways in which teenage mothers navigate and resist societal norms and expectations, empowering them to challenge oppressive structures and advocate for their rights and well-being (Hooks, 1984).

Several theories served as pillars for this research, guiding the exploration through the complex aspects of the study and substantiating its findings. These theoretical frameworks functioned as lenses, elucidating various dimensions of the experiences of teenage mothers. By doing so, they

not only reinforced the integrity of the research but also extended its significance within the broader academic discourse.

Another theoretical guideposts where the current research endeavor is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST). EST offers a comprehensive framework for examining the intricate interplay between various environments —ranging from micro to macro levels— and their collective influence on the experiences of adolescent mothers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In Bronfenbrenner's model, the microsystem encompasses immediate surroundings like family, school, and peers, while the macrosystem refers to broader societal constructs, including cultural values and societal norms.

In the context of this study, Bronfenbrenner's EST assisted in the systematic exploration of how each environmental layer shaped the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of teenagers during their pregnancy journey. Through the lens of EST, the researcher was able to decipher the multifaceted dimensions of teenage mothers' lived experiences, analyzing how factors within each system either facilitate or hinder their ability to navigate through the challenges of adolescent pregnancy (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For instance, how familial support or lack thereof (a microsystem factor) or prevailing societal norms around teen pregnancy (a macrosystem factor) could impact the teenager's experience.

Furthermore, this study was also anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT). SLT underscored the significance of observational learning and modeling in shaping human behavior (Bandura, 1977). In other words, individuals learn by observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors, a process referred to as modeling. In the context of adolescent pregnancy, this theory was instrumental in discerning how teenage mothers' attitudes and behaviors were potentially influenced by what they observe in their immediate social environments (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Bandura's SLT can be applied to interpret how teenage mothers' responses and attitudes towards their pregnancies might be informed by their observations of immediate family reactions, peer group conversations, and the broader societal discourse (including media representations) around teenage pregnancy (Bandura, 1986). For instance, if a teenager observes in her family or through media narratives that teenage mothers are often stigmatized or disadvantaged, it could influence her own perceptions and attitudes towards her pregnancy. Thus, by utilizing Bandura's SLT, this study aimed to shed light on the influential role of social learning in shaping teenage mothers' lived experiences.

The Resilience Theory also offered an essential framework that supported this study. Resilience theory underscores the capacity of individuals to adapt positively despite adversity, trauma, or significant stress. This theory, while not discounting the serious challenges faced by individuals, offers an alternative lens, focusing on strength, adaptation, and recovery. Applied to the case of

teenage mothers', the Resilience Theory might help understand how these young women navigate societal stigma, economic hardships, and the pressures of early motherhood (Masten, 2014).

As posited by Ungar (2008), The Resilience Theory facilitates exploration into the strategies and factors that contribute to such resilience, including personal attributes, family support, and positive school and community environments. By incorporating this theory, the study could reveal valuable insights into the resilience strategies of teenage mothers, providing crucial information for developing supportive interventions and policies. In this connection, teenage mothers often confront a myriad of difficulties, ranging from societal stigma to economic challenges and the physical and emotional stress of early motherhood. Despite these adversities, many exhibited remarkable resilience.

The introduction of pregnancy during adolescence adds a layer of complexity to the identity formation process. Teenage mothers are confronted with the sudden imposition of additional roles and responsibilities associated with motherhood, potentially impacting their identity development (Shulman & Scharf, 2000). The experiences of pregnancy may either facilitate the resolution of identity conflicts, as the young mother begins to define herself in relation to her new role, or contribute to heightened confusion and uncertainty regarding her sense of self.

By applying the Feminist and Role Theory and Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development, this study aimed to gain insight into how the experiences of pregnancy influence the identity development of teenage mothers. Exploring the challenges, conflicts, and adjustments they encounter during this critical developmental period can provide a deeper understanding of the unique emotional struggles these young women face and inform interventions that support their identity exploration and development.

By integrating the insights gleaned from these diverse theoretical frameworks, this study endeavored to attain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate lived experiences of teenage mothers. The utilization of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Resilience Theory aimed to illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of their experiences. By drawing upon these theories, the study aspires to generate a rich and nuanced portrayal of the challenges, coping mechanisms, and strengths exhibited by teenage mothers.

The amalgamation of these theoretical perspectives contributed to a holistic comprehension of the factors that shape the lived experiences of teenage mothers. Moreover, this comprehensive understanding served as a foundation for the development of more targeted and effective interventions tailored to the unique needs of these individuals. By bridging theory and practice, this study has offered its potential to provide information for the design and implementation of interventions that would provide holistic support to teenage mothers, promoting their well-being, resilience, and overall development.

Objective of the Study

This study attempted to delve into the lived experiences of teenage mothers while prioritize on understanding the deeper meaning and significance of teenage motherhood, rather than just focusing on specific challenges or coping mechanisms.

METHODS

The study used a qualitative design employing transcendental phenomenology approach. In-depth one-on-one interview was conducted while strict ethical considerations were set beforehand and well-implemented with the help of the partner agencies, DSWD and BHW. The data gathered was translated to English, and Hyper Research software was utilized to interpret the collected data with the prompt coding processes to address the objective of the study. This study was conducted among the seven (7) senior high school teenage mother students, unwed, and are lowlanders who live in a rural community in the Philippines. Table 1 shows the profile of the participants.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

| Participants | Grade Level | Age | Strand |
|---------------|-------------|-----|--------|
| Participant 1 | 11 | 19 | TVL |
| Participant 2 | 11 | 18 | HUMSS |
| Participant 3 | 11 | 18 | HUMSS |
| Participant 4 | 12 | 18 | HUMSS |
| Participant 5 | 12 | 18 | HUMSS |
| Participant 6 | 12 | 18 | HUMSS |
| Participant 7 | 12 | 19 | HUMSS |

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are three themes that emerged from the data gathered. These themes are 1.) grappling with motherhood; 2) social dilemmas and support; and 3) appreciating motherhood.

Theme 1. Grappling with Motherhood

The narratives of the participants, teenage mothers, walked this study through their lived experiences about grappling with motherhood. Grappling with Motherhood, in the context of this study, means the causes of pregnancy, hurdles in being a mother, and balancing family and student life. This indicates that these are the challenges and difficulties that the participants of this study have experienced of establishing a family at an early age.

Significantly, caring for an infant requires a significant amount of time and energy. Infants typically need to nurse 8 to 12 times a day, and each nursing session can take anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes, totaling over 2 hours of feeding time daily. Additionally, new mothers often experience exhaustion due to frequent awakenings during the night. On top of feeding, there are other tasks like changing diapers, bathing, and playing with the child, all of which demand considerable time and attention. Given these responsibilities, it becomes challenging for most new mothers to concentrate, find time to rest, and even complete their homework. It's worth noting that approximately 50% of teenage mothers do not graduate from high school or obtain an equivalent level of formal education by the age of 22, and even fewer enroll in or complete college. Therefore, it is crucial to consider one's life goals when contemplating the responsibilities of raising a child (Texas Adoption Center, 2020).

Category 1. Causes of Pregnancy

In the context of this study, Cause of Pregnancy means acquaintance with boyfriend, consequences, cultural marriage, curiosity, in love, intentional, lifestyle consequences drinking alcohol disco, need of companionship, outgoing lifestyle, peer influence, unwanted pregnancy, young and in love. This indicates that these are the instances which pushed the teenage mothers to get pregnant at an early age. It goes to show that one of the causes of teenage pregnancy is societal influence. Gabriela narrated:

Ang mga panghitabo nGa nagdala sa akooa to become a young mother kay sa paglaag-laag kay wala naman kaayo gabadlong tapos na mental block sa mga panghitabo sa pamilya og pag apil-apil sa grupo tapos uban-uban tapos naila dayon nako ang lalaki nga maoy amahan sa akong anak tungod sa disco-disco og inom-inom. (*“The events that led me to become a young mother were primarily due to my carefree nature, lack of guidance in my family, and involvement with a group where I eventually became acquainted with the man who would become the father of my child. This was a result of going out frequently, not paying much attention to the consequences, and engaging in activities such as partying and drinking.”*) (Gabriella, Transcript 5, p. 18)

According to the study of Fuller et al. (2018), the causes of adolescent pregnancy are rooted in the interplay of various factors, including family, peer, community, and societal influences, economic

and situational circumstances, level of formal education, parental involvement, aggressive behavior, substance abuse, and knowledge of contraception.

Additionally, the lack of parental monitoring, discussion between youth and their parents, and high-risk behaviors could expose adolescents to sexual and reproductive health problems (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Category 2. Hurdles in Being a Mother

The narrative of the participants shed light on the hurdles of being a mother. Hurdles in being a mother means the challenges, difficulty as a single mom, difficulty in budgeting daily needs, longing for complete family, medicines for children, no physical attachment with parents, peer discrimination, responsibility as the eldest of the family, sacrifices for my child, working students, sacrificial love for the child, single mom difficulties, provide family needs, unexpected miscarriages, difficulty in budgeting for the family. These all indicate the struggles faced by teenage mothers.

This can lead to feelings of helplessness and frustration, as they are unable to meet their child's immediate needs due to financial constraints. Access to affordable healthcare, social support, and financial assistance are crucial in alleviating the financial burden on teenage mothers and ensuring the well-being of both the mothers and their children. Sophie narrated that: “Usa pa finances kinanghangan man jud nato nato na labi nag mag daot ato anak og wla Tay kwarta murag kumoton ato dughan tungod sa kasakit Kay biskan palit tambal dli Nako kaya ihatag.” (*“Finances are another challenge that we need to face, especially when our child gets sick and we don't have enough money to buy medicine. It feels like a heavy burden on our hearts because even if we want to provide, we are unable to afford it.”*) (Sophie. Transcript 6, p. 22)

Moreover, on the effects, teenage pregnancy has significant implications physically, socially, and educationally. Physically, it affects the adolescent mother's body and the growing baby (Xavier et al., 2018). Socially, it leads to changes in family roles and community functioning (Epstein et al., 2018; Shpiegel & Cascardi, 2018). Educationally, teenage pregnancy poses challenges to students as parenting responsibilities can conflict with academic tasks (Glynn et al., 2018).

Category 3 Balancing Family and Student Life

The narrative of the participants showed their difficulties in balancing family and student life. Balancing Family and Student Life means balancing family time, determination in finishing studies, double time for my siblings as the eldest, missed school activities, overwhelming school activities, setting priorities, tight budgeting, time management, responsible sisters to my siblings. These can be overwhelming and leave little time for personal pursuits or self-care. The demands on these hurdles may be further compounded by pressures, as they need to work extra hard to provide for their families and accomplish their education at the same time. Maria mentioned:

Daghan man ang mga pagsulay na akong na encounter, time management kay mo eskwela ko sa hapon maam buntag trabaho panimalay, atimanon pa dayun nako ang akong partner para sa iyang gamit para sa partime kapoy kaayo sa tanan maam dagan didto pikas balhin nasad. Sa gilabhan para lang sa nahoman ang trabaho. Ang mga buluhaton sa eskwelahan dili na gakabuhat kay grabi ka daghan ang trabahoonon sa balay. Unya naa pa dayun koy gadawaton na labada sa sabado ug domingo. (*"I have encountered many challenges, ma'am. Time management became difficult because I attended school in the afternoon, worked in the morning, and took care of my partner's needs for his part-time job. It was exhausting for me, and we had to move to a different place. We had to work extra hard just to make ends meet. The schoolwork started piling up because there were so many household tasks to attend to. And on top of that, I still had to take care of the laundry on Saturdays and Sundays."*)(Maria, Transcript 1, p. 3)

Moreover, balancing school and family responsibilities can be a formidable task, especially for teenage mothers. The challenges they face as they take on multiple roles within her family dynamic. As a mother, older sister, and daughter, they carry the weight of ensuring that their family is not neglected, as they lack support from their parents. Juggling these responsibilities while attending school becomes even more demanding. Andrea mentioned:

Makaingun jod ko sa balancing school and family responsibilities kay kung sa akoa dili jod sayon gapaka mama, ate, papa para lang sa dili mapasagdan akong pamilya tungod kay wlaa samong abay akoang mama ug papa bali ako nay ga guide sa ila idungan pa ang akong pag eskwela atiman sa mga activities pag uli sa balay luto sud an atiman sa bata pero bisag ingani kalisud gihunahuna nako akong mga pangandoy ug para nis akoang pamilya tanan kahago. (*"Balancing school and family responsibilities is not easy for me because being a mother, an older sister, and a daughter is a challenging task just to ensure that my family is not neglected because we don't have any help from my mother and father. I am the one who guides them while also attending school, taking care of household chores when I return home, cooking, and taking care of the child. But despite the difficulties, I always think about my dreams and work hard for the sake of my family's welfare."*) (Andrea, Transcript 7, p. 26)

Significantly, research has shown that disrupted education is a common consequence of early parenthood, particularly for teenage mothers. The challenges of balancing parenting and education can be intensified by limited financial resources, which can affect access to educational opportunities and support services (The Professional Counselor, 2021).

Theme 2. Social Dilemmas and Support

The data collected from the participants' narratives suggests that teenage mothers face social dilemmas and seek support, particularly in terms of their family support system and the family-related struggles. The findings indicate that these young mothers often grapple with complex social

situations and conflicting expectations from their families and society at large. The narratives reveal that family support, or the lack thereof, plays a significant role in their experiences. Some participants may have received understanding, love, and assurance from their families, as demonstrated in the initial statement, while others may have faced family-related struggles, such as judgment, criticism, or a lack of support.

Category 1. Family Support System

The challenges of the family support system for teenage mothers can vary greatly depending on the specific circumstances and dynamics within each family. Family Support System means acceptance from family, big happy family, closer to in-laws, contentment in life, dearly loved, facing responsibility, family centered, good relationship to both parents, gratefulness, helping parents, meeting challenges, simple joys, simple living, contentment, strong family relationship, valued by in laws, and valued by mothers-in-law. However, while some teenage mothers may experience acceptance and support from their families, others may face obstacles in different aspects of their familial relationships. Sofia mentioned:

Sa una gyud is Palangga pa kaayo kay magulang nga anak karon Palangga gihapon pero Naa gyud nag bag o tungod kay wala naku Gi sunod ilang gusto nga dapat mag human sa og skwela ayha mo sulod sa mga PROBLIMA og mag pamilya. ("Before, I was dearly loved by my parents because I am the eldest child. And even now, I am still loved. However, things have changed because I didn't follow their desire for me to finish school before facing the challenges of starting a family"). (Sofia, Transcript 2, p. 6)

Significantly, an article on relationship problems and pregnancy discusses how pregnancy can affect relationships differently, causing emotional vulnerability and stress, and highlights the importance of a positive and supportive relationship during pregnancy (Australian Government - Department of Health and Aged Care, 2019). Pregnancy can have a significant impact on relationships, and it can affect each relationship differently. The emotional vulnerability and stress that come with pregnancy can put a strain on the dynamics between partners. The physical and emotional changes experienced by the pregnant person can lead to a range of emotions, including mood swings, heightened sensitivity, and increased vulnerability. These changes may require understanding, patience, and empathy from both partners. Hence, these social dilemmas and support systems within the family context are crucial factors influencing the lives of teenage mothers and their ability to navigate the challenges they encounter.

Category 2. Family-related Struggles

The challenges of family-related struggles can significantly impact the lived experiences of teenage mothers. Family-related struggles means to separate due to parents, beaten by parents, broken family, chaotic family, condition given to parents, destroyed relationship, discouragement, financial difficulties, heart attack of the mother, lack of time for and from parents, lacking maternal care, longing for mother's love, no communication with parents, not in good terms with parents,

only hope in the family, parents' unwillingness, parents' acceptance, parents going abroad, parents sour relationship, separated parents, sick father, sour relationship, very strict parents, and worsen health condition of parents due to the news of teenage pregnancy. These challenges encompass a range of difficult circumstances and dynamics within the family. Maria expressed that:

Ang akong relasyon sa akong ginikanan maam nahilayo ug ayo og mas napaduol ko sa akong ugangan, grab inga paghatag ug importansya sa akoo. Ang nahitabo na noon maam wala nako nag-ulian ila mama ug papa ug mas napadool akong dughan sa akong ugangan. Og tungod ato mas nilala ang gibati ni mama na sakit kay sa panahon na gipangita ko niya akong gipalabi akong pride maam. Ug nahimo kaning rason na wala ko tinggi nila papa ug mama sa isa ka tuig na lumalabay wala kami komunikasyon og wala ko naka pangumusta sa akong ginikanan tungod sa katas sa garbo na akong gibati maam. (*"My relationship with my parents, ma'am, grew distant and I became closer to the mother of my partner, who gave me more importance. What happened then, ma'am, I didn't go home to our house, and I became closer to my partner's mother, and that hurt my mother deeply because during the time she was looking for me, I prioritized my pride, ma'am. And because of that, it became the reason why I didn't talk to my mom and dad for a whole year. We had no communication, and I didn't check on my parents because of the overwhelming sense of pride I felt, ma'am."*) (Maria, Transcript 1, pp. 1-2)

On the other hand, the teenage mother participants shared their thoughts on their relationships with their parents, highlighting positive experiences and expressions of gratitude. Isabella expressed her happiness that her parents accepted her child despite her own mistakes. Gabriella described her relationship with her parents as still being okay, indicating a sense of stability and continuity. Sophie compared her relationship with her parents to a sturdy pillar, suggesting strength and support. Andrea shared that her current relationship with her mother is very good, emphasizing her mother's consistent forgiveness and unconditional love, regardless of her own faults (Terreri, 2018).

Theme 3. Appreciating Motherhood

Appreciating motherhood developed among teenage mothers after giving birth are evident among the participants in this study. Appreciating Motherhood means the awareness, fulfilled life, and dreams of the teenage mothers. Developing appreciation of motherhood among teenage mothers can be a challenging yet a rewarding experience.

Significantly, teenage mothers face various challenges, even including physical, psychological, social, and spiritual awareness, but they can also find happiness and a sense of appreciation in their new roles (Govender et al., 2020).

Category 1. Awareness

Appreciating motherhood means awareness among the teenage mother. Awareness, in the context of this study, and based on the narratives of the participants, means acceptance by parents, excited to become a mother, grateful for the supportive parents, life realization, seeing child as an inspiration, feeling rewarding and blessed to have a child, being able to realize the sacrifices of the parents, and being able to realize the love of the parents and care. One of the participants have stated how she is made aware of the blessing she received by having been given a child even at a young age. Sophie narrated: “Karon ang akong na experience usa ka batan-ong inahan lisud pero og Makita nimo imo anak maka ingon jud kog daghan salamat Lord sa imong blessings saako nga ni abot ako anak.” (*“Now, the experience I have as a young mother is challenging, but when you see your child, you can truly say, "Thank you, Lord, for the blessings you have bestowed upon me through the arrival of my child.”*) (Sophie. Transcript 6, p. 23)

Significantly, while some studies highlight the challenges and unpreparedness that teenage mothers face in assuming the maternal role, a study published in the Journal of Human Resources in 2021, conducted by Anna Aizer, Paul Devereux, and Kjell Salvanes (2021), examined the outcomes of children born to teenage mothers. The study found that while children born to teenage mothers often have worse outcomes, the age of the mother at the time of the child's birth is a significant factor. The study suggested that delaying childbearing until at least age 24 may be optimal, indicating that the experience of teenage motherhood can have a different impact on maternal maturity and child outcomes based on the age of the mother.

Category 2. Fulfilled Life

The narratives of the teenage mothers about their lived experiences showed a fulfilled life. Fulfilled Life in the context of the responses of the participants means contentment in life, fulfilling their role as a mother, sense of fulfilment having a baby, and sense of fulfilment as mother. One of the most important fulfilment of these teenage mothers is the ability to provide for their children. The provision of needs among teenage mothers is crucial for their well-being and that of their children. For Gabriella: “Ang akong kalipay isip usa ka young mother is makita nako nga nalipay akong anak og nakaprovide ko sa iyahang mga needs bisan pa sa kalisod.” (*“My happiness as a young mother comes from seeing my child happy and being able to provide for their needs, even in difficult circumstances.”*) (Gabriella, Transcript 5, p. 19)

Moreover, according to Anima et al. (2022), Teenage mothers have the potential to lead fulfilled lives, as demonstrated by the experiences of some individuals. While some teenage mothers may initially find their situation challenging, others seize the opportunity for personal growth and positive transformation. They take proactive steps such as pursuing new job opportunities or returning to school, displaying resilience and determination to improve their circumstances. These individuals recognize the importance of financial independence and work diligently to secure it for themselves and their children. Their efforts contribute to building self-confidence and a belief in their ability to succeed in life.

Category 3. Dreams

In the narrative of the participants, they remained hopeful of what the future will bring them – their dreams. Dreams based on the gathered responses of the participants means being determined to finish their studies, being a business owner in the future, setting great dreams for the family, to be a responsible parent, a provider, being successful in life 5 years from now, and establishing great hope in the future.

All of the seven (7) participants demonstrated hopes in the future by narrating what they dream for five (5) years from now, and none of them was ever disheartened of what is in store for them when they became teenage mother. Having dreams for the future is a vital mindset for teenage mothers as they navigate the dual responsibilities of being a parent and completing their education. By maintaining hope, they can envision a positive future both for themselves and their children. As good parents, teenage mothers strive to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for their children, instilling in them a sense of optimism and resilience. They understand that their own personal growth and educational achievements play a crucial role in setting an example for their children and creating a better future for their family. By finishing their education, teenage mothers not only expand their knowledge and skills but also open doors to greater opportunities for themselves and their children. Education equips them with the tools to overcome challenges, pursue fulfilling careers, and provide a stable and secure life for their families.

Moreover, one of the participants' narrative depicted the hope of being a good parent in the future. Being a good parent is a universal aspiration, regardless of age or circumstances. For teenage mothers, the journey of parenthood may come with unique challenges, but it also presents opportunities for growth, resilience, and the development of a strong bond with their child. Being a good parent as a teenage mother involves several important aspects. Maria mentioned: "Akong nakita sa akoang kaugalingon sa 5 ka tuig gikan karun, kay usa na ka maayo nga ginikanan ug akong mga muabutay pa nga mga anak". (*"I see myself five (5) years from now is that I will become a responsible parent and look forward to having more children in the future."*) (Maria, Transcript 1, p. 4)

Additionally, six (6) of the teenage participants have demonstrated their dreams of being a successful professional in the future despite their circumstance at present. The hope of teenage mothers to become successful professionals in the future is a powerful driving force that can shape their path and transform their lives. Despite the challenges they may face, teenage mothers often harbor aspirations for personal achievement and career growth. This hope stems from their desire to provide a better future for themselves and their children, as well as to break the cycle of adversity they may have experienced. By pursuing education and professional development, teenage mothers aim to acquire the knowledge, skills, and qualifications necessary to secure stable and fulfilling careers. They understand that being successful professionals can bring financial security, independence, and a sense of accomplishment. Gabriella expressed that:

I see myself 5 years from now kay usa na ka manager kung itugot sa Ginoo and I claim it og naa nakoy 5 years old nga anak. (*"I see myself 5 years from now as a manager, by God's grace, and I claim it. I also have a 5-year-old child."*) (Gabriella, Transcript 5, p. 20)

Moreover, teenage mothers recognize that their professional success sets an example for their children, instilling in them the value of education, hard work, and perseverance. The hope of becoming successful professionals gives teenage mothers a sense of purpose, resilience, and motivation to overcome obstacles and strive for their goals. Through determination, support, and a belief in their abilities, teenage mothers can transform their hope into tangible achievements, demonstrating that they have the strength and potential to thrive both as parents and professionals.

Significantly, one study, "The Lived Experience of a Filipino Teenage Mother," conducted by Abraham D. Cacay (2022), delves into the experiences of a teenage mother enrolled in high school. The study highlights the participant's struggle to juggle the responsibilities of being a mother and a student, often having to choose between the two roles. It also reflects on the participant's determination to finish high school to establish a good future for her family (Biddle, 1979; Hindin, 2007; Hindin, 2014; Hebert-Beirne, 2008; and Goode, 1960).

Some practical implications can also be drawn from the study beyond theoretical inferences. The study's implications can inform policies and interventions targeted at assisting teenage mothers. By understanding the role expectations placed on teenage mothers and the challenges they face, policymakers and social support organizations can develop programs that address their unique needs. For example, the findings may suggest the need for comprehensive support systems that cater to the educational, emotional, and financial needs of teenage mothers. Such programs can help alleviate the role strain and provide resources to empower teenage mothers in fulfilling their roles effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study presents significant findings on the lived experiences of teenage mothers. The first finding focuses on the challenges they encounter in motherhood, such as diverse causes of pregnancy and difficulties in managing daily needs and family responsibilities while pursuing education. The second finding explores the social dilemmas and support systems of teenage mothers, highlighting variations in family dynamics, financial struggles, and instances of acceptance and support. Lastly, the study reveals that teenage mothers appreciate motherhood in different ways, acknowledging their parents' sacrifices and finding fulfillment in their roles as mothers. Despite the challenges, they express determination to pursue their dreams and provide for their families.

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