

The Lived Experience of a Filipino Teenage Mother

Abraham D. Cacay

Department of Education, Schools Division of Tarlac Province, Tarlac, Philippines
abraham.cacay@deped.gov.ph

Abstract: The momentous event of a woman's life is to become a mother, but the experience differs from a teenager while enrolled in high school. This case study sought to contribute to research that sought to understand the experience of an adolescent mother. This research aimed to understand the motherhood experience while learning a teenage student at San Felipe High School, San Manuel, Tarlac, Philippines. This study is qualitative and employed semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observation as data-gathering instruments. Interviews were manually recorded, transcribed, and data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The participant of this research was one of the students of the researcher at San Felipe High School in the school year 2019-2020. The respondent juggled between the responsibilities of being a mother and a student. She received help from her family to study, but sometimes she chooses to be a mother than a student. The participant reflects on the lives of other teenage mothers, making her decide to finish high school to establish a good family in the future.

Keywords: Teenage Mother, Lived Experience, Filipino, San Felipe High School, Philippines.

Introduction

Motherhood is a meaningful life event for every woman. However, the experience is different for a teenager who becomes a mother in the middle of the schooling process. Teenage people facing early motherhood may subject to conflict between being a mother and adolescent needs. A woman can experience vulnerability and extreme challenges when transitioning to motherhood (Mangeli, Targari, Cheraghi, and Rayyani, 2018). The transition to motherhood is worse for young mothers and can experience an increase of responsibility. The situation of being a teenage mother could affect their own family and their relationship to the community (Herrman and Nandakumar, 2012), because they were not prepared to become a mother (Aparicio, Pecukonis and O'Neale, 2015), and must endure the role of a mother and the developmental task of adolescence simultaneously (Riva Crugnola, Ierardi, Gazzotti and Albizzati, 2014).

In becoming a mother, a woman might experience a period of change, instability, and reorganization of life (Javadifar et al., 2016). Motherhood is the most challenging situation that a woman could ever have. Different challenges, selflessness, and sacrifices are all the concerns once become a mother, and for many women, motherhood is an essential aspect of life. The competency of a mother is affected by self-confidence, mastery in control of affairs, and attachment to her child (Mercer and Ferketich, 1994). Many parents are happy once their children reach adolescence. Dramatically, teenagers understand the actual image of life that separates them when they were younger. Youth is when a combination of hormonal changes, social challenges, and emotional volatility is difficult for most parents. During the development of adolescents, they often suffer from psychosocial problems (Kakkad, Trivedi, Trivedi, and Raichandani, 2014). Several of these problems are cannot quickly notice by their parents.

The World Health Organization defined adolescence as the age group of 10-19 years old. In the Philippines, it was projected that 1 in 10 Filipino teenagers get pregnant (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2018); this alarming rise of teenage pregnancy would lead the country to poverty, reflect the young mothers' family's financial status, and hinder the ability to attend school. Under these circumstances, losing opportunities for teenage girls can observe in both developed and developing countries, making it a global societal issue (Gatbonton, 2021).

The most challenging and remains public health concern is teenage pregnancy. The Philippines has one of the highest adolescent birth rates among the ASEAN member states; according to World Bank data, 57 births annually per 1,000 women aged 15-19 (UNFPA, 2020). Only the Philippines has no significant decline in adolescent fertility (Maravilla, Betts, and Alati, 2018). Moreover, 14% of Filipino teenage girls under 15-19 were reported to be mothers or had several children (Salvador, Sauce, Alvarez, and Rosario, 2016). Pregnancy is considered a critical time for teenagers' life. According to Watts, Liamputtong, and Mcmicheal (2015), the early start of sexual intercourse and the delay in marriage mean the adolescent period is more extended than ever, which increases the risk of early motherhood.

Social development is vital to all teenagers. Being in the early stage of motherhood, they can experience a lack of sufficient education and poverty, which results in single parenthood (Salvador, Sauce, Alvarez, and Rosario, 2016). Teen mothers experience different physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges,

including the inability to plan and decide and lack maternal skills. Taukeni (2014) argues that students in this situation might skip lectures, feel weak, exhausted, and lack consideration in classes. The difficulties of having a dual role can cause the women to leave one position for the sake of the other (Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid, 2008).

The starting point of improving a good life is education, and it is everyone's right despite their social status. The rights to education of young mothers are recognized in Philippine education. Performing the dual role and combining motherhood and learning without sacrificing either is difficult for a student mother (Behboodi Moghadam, OrdibeheshtiKhiaban, Esmaeili, and Salsali, 2017). Activities in every subject are challenging and might impose a significant burden on the student mother. Moreover, teenage motherhood contributes to the increase of high school dropouts because they feel embarrassed about the situation.

The Department of Education (DepEd) released the DepEd Order No. 74, s. 2010 also known as the guidelines on mainstreaming the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP), aims to reduce the dropout rate associated with teenage pregnancy. DepEd Secretary Leonor M. Briones strongly discourage public schools from expelling the pregnant students that can cause them traumatic experience (Revita, 2017). Moreover, if students did not finish schooling, they are encouraged to enroll in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). In fact, according to DepEd Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Service and Alternative Learning System G.H. Ambat, 80% of students nationwide are females and drop out once they reach the age of 15.

Additionally, female students drop out of high school because some are pregnant and decide to marry early, then have difficulty juggling their studies and maternal duties (B. Miasco, 2019). Education is now flexible and accessible to everyone regardless of the students' vulnerabilities.

There are foreign studies regarding teenage pregnancy, and adolescent mothers' lived experiences. However, only a few available research focused on a Filipino teenage mother enrolled explicitly in a barrio high school. Understanding the lived experience of a teenage mother enrolled in a barrio high school can generate new insights for the health care providers and policymakers that can cause a proper response to the challenges of teenage mothers. The participant of this paper is a 17-year-old mother who was a student of the researcher enrolled at San Felipe High School, San Manuel, Tarlac, Philippines. The said participant is the only teenage mother of batch 2019-2020 of the said school who did not stop learning amid her situations. This study is a case study, and it is aimed to understand the lived experience of an adolescent mother of San Felipe High School.

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative data were transcribed and manually analyzed using thematic content analysis. The direct quotation of the participant and the relatives were used to complete the process of research. The quotations are incorporated into the analysis and are concerning the themes in the study. The direct quotes have been translated from Ilocano to English. Translation to English, the respondents' direct quotation, clarifies the analysis to produce coherent reading experiences without distraction (Dlamini, 2016).

This paper used the case study approach to understand the participant's experience of being a mother and as a successful student. A case study approach permits in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in real-life situations (Crowe et al., 2011). Similarly, Meriam (cited by Hung, Badejo, and Bennett, 2014) reported that case studies specifically examine an issue using multiple sources of information to provide an in-depth description of the situation.

Sampling

Deviant case sampling was used in choosing the respondent of this study based on her unique situation of being a mother and at the same time a student of batch 2019-2020 of San Felipe High School. A deviant Case Sampling emphasizes a participant with unique or special characteristics or situations (Glen, 2015).

Data Gathering

The researcher used in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method by using a semi-structured questionnaire. The researcher observed the actions of the interviewees and used field notes for the parents of the participant who did not agree to use any digital recording devices. The interviews were conducted through home visitation since the respondent is a resident of San Felipe, the same barangay where the school is located. The dates of the interview were set based on the respondent's availability and the parent's affirmation. The researcher listened to the interviewee and offered neither advice nor personal experience. The participant was allowed to have a support person throughout the interview.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were transcribed and manually analyzed using thematic content analysis. The direct quotation of the participant and the relatives were used to complete the process of research. The quotations are incorporated into the analysis and are concerning the themes in the study. The direct quotes have been translated from Ilocano to English. Translation to English, the respondents' direct quotation, clarifies the analysis to produce coherent reading experiences without distraction (Dlamini, 2016).

Result and Discussion

A 17-year-old student with a unique situation among the batch 2019-2020 of San Felipe High School, San Manuel Tarlac, was the respondent of this study. She is the eldest among two children and lives with her immediate family before giving birth, and now living with the father of her baby after giving birth. The participant shared her experiences as a mother while enrolled in high school.

Data from the interviews revealed four major themes: Parental Support, The value of education, Sacrifice, and Having her own family.

Theme 1: Parental Support

The participant realized while she was pregnant the parental challenges of her parents. The participant described how her parents' struggle to fulfil their responsibilities to her and her brother as a family. However, unlike the participant's situation, her parents were ready to get married and to have a family.

This explains that the participant was not ready to become a parent. Adolescent mothers are lack knowledge and self-confidence for their new-borns (Gbogbo, 2020). But since she gave birth to her child, she has no choice but to embrace the unexpected challenges of being a mother, knowing that her family and the child's father will support her.

"I don't know if I can be a mother to my child, but I am confident that they (parent and the child's father) will help me take care of my child".

The mother seemed to support her daughter even if everything was unexpected. The mother was smiling during the interview and said:

"I am happy to have a grandchild. I will take care of him (the baby) like how I take care of my daughter" (mother).

The respondent's mother accepted that her daughter is now a mother, which is the only way to make everything normal in their family. All necessities of the baby and the respondent were all paid for by the parents and the baby's father.

Parental involvement is essential to support a teenage mother's emotional vulnerability, knowing that the respondent is still under the transitional stage of adolescence. Strong bonding with parents can improve emotional development and behavioral problems (Salgado, González, and Yáñez, 2021). The parents in this situation also observe the respondent's behavior towards her role of being a mother. Time is the most luxurious parental involvement to distinguish the activities of their adolescent child (Kalil, Ryan, and Corey, 2012). Moreover, based on observation, the parents are sex-type when it comes to motherly involvement of taking care of the respondent and her baby.

Theme 2: Valuing Education

The teenage mother is a graduating student at San Felipe High School. Accordingly, when she was pregnant until she gave birth, the participant also describes their neighbourhood and her second cousin's hard life when they stopped learning the moment, they get pregnant.

"I do not want to waste the previous years of schooling. I took the opportunity of modular learning (distance learning) to continue my education despite my current situation".

"I am thankful to my mother, who constantly reminds me to finish answering my activities".

According to the mother, her brother (uncle of the teenage mother) was the one getting the learning materials from the school. The parents provided cellphone and laptop for an online class.

"Sometimes I help my sister by printing the activities sent by her teachers online because she was busy feeding my nephew. There are times I am helping my sister in her practical research. (brother)".

"I take care of my grandchild whenever she (respondent) needs to rush her activities, and her brother sometimes playing with him (the baby) (mother)".

The brother affirmed that the respondent always has difficulty balancing her role as a mother and as a student and hardly manages these roles. However, her immediate family members are finding time to help her by any means necessary.

The participant reflected on the value of education from her cousin and neighbour who had the same cases. This reflection motivates the participants to not wanting to have the same life as her neighbour and second cousin. Completing one's education is the motivation of teenage mothers, as they know how education can help them better adapt to life's challenges (Gatbonton, 2021). The respondent took advantage of the technological advancement of learning with online teaching and guidance from her teachers.

Having a simple motivation and actualizing life lessons to continue studying, the respondent has realized that education is the key to ensuring her child's welfare and improving her current state. Educational resilience is the key for the young mother to perform schooling despite the emotional, social, psychological, economic, and academic challenges (Duckworth and Gross, 2014).

Further, having people that are close to the teenage mother is crucial to managing her roles. Getting positive help from relatives can determine how well the young mothers cope with their experiences (Griffiths, 2002).

Theme 3: Sacrifice

Most of the time, the student mother did not find it easy to manage her academic and motherhood responsibilities simultaneously. Sometimes she could choose between the two, but sometimes she only chooses the motherhood responsibilities over the other. Despite the people around the respondents who are always ready to support her, there are times that she is alone to decide which is to address first, and the respondent always chooses the motherhood responsibility.

"Sometimes I do not have time to study..."

"There are times that I am not in the mood to accomplish answering my activities..."

"I even log out from the computer (online class) because we have an appointment to see the pediatrician..."

"Sometimes I submit my outputs late..."

"Sometimes I think of quitting (schooling) to take care of him, (respondent)".

"I must help her father support my children and my grandchild... sometimes, I could not help her... her brother is also busy in his study and hobby, (mother)".

"I cannot help my sister because I also have problems to deal with, (brother)".

"I have to work to provide for my child and wife (father of the child)".

Any student can experience educational struggles. However, the struggle can be doubled on the teenage mothers because of their role as a mother. The significant difficulty of an adolescent mother is the pressure of motherhood that divides their attention (Lidgard, 2004). Additionally, help from the family members is sometimes limited, making the respondent choose between her two roles. The respondent described the difficulty of her adjustment from being a student to mother, vice-versa. DeVito (2010) argued that if an adolescent mother spends most of her time taking care of her infant, it might cause frustration. Early childhood development studies found that teenage mothers are less likely to engage in emotionally supportive and responsive parenting (Urbanchildinstitute.org.,2021). This study affirms that adolescent mothers have less knowledge about child development and effective parenting, giving up other aspects of finding the time to raise a baby and learn responsible motherhood.

Theme 4: Having her own family

The respondent's family accepted that they have a new family member, and they need to work hard not only for the future of the adolescent mother but also for the baby. The respondent wants to get married soon to

the father of her baby, the parents support this decision, but they need her to be at the right age. The father of the baby is working on a farm as a helper.

"I have faith in the father of my child to provide our necessities now that we have him (the baby)..."

"I want to give a promising future for my child by finishing my study and land an excellent job since my parents love me and supporting me..."

"My parents want me to have a good future and now with my baby, (respondent)".

"We want our daughter to have a good life and have a family in the future..."

"We are ready to support her, for her dreams, and for my grandchild, (mother)".

The respondent realized her future of having her own family. The hardship of being a mother and a student molded the respondent to expect challenges in the future. The respondent can observe her family's union facing different trials as they live under the same roof. The support from the parents is essential to the teen mothers, and observing this can create a positive impact on their future parenting experiences, behaviors, and practices (Bunting and McAuley, 2004).

Recommendations

Based on the created themes through this study, the teachers of the institution should be well-trained in handling a special case like this. Topics concerning to teenage mother must include to the school-based seminars and training like Gender and Development and Learning Action Cell Sessions. Further, this paper recommends phenomenological research on teenage mothers' dual role in public schools in a remote area for an in-depth analysis of their struggles and needs.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any business or financial affiliations that may be perceived as a potential conflict of interest

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