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VOICE OF HOPE: A LIVED ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF TEENAGE MOTHERS - A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to find out the demographic profile of an adolescent mothers; explore the lived academic experiences of senior high school teenage mothers, and, discover the coping mechanisms used in surviving their situation. The study used a phenomenological qualitative research to have an in-depth understanding of the communality and lived experiences of senior high school teenage mothers. Triangulation method such as in-depth interview, focus group discussion and observations were used to validate the respondent's responses. Respondents were Senior High School who got pregnant at aged between 10 -19 years old from Lantapan National High School-Senior High School. Results revealed that teenage pregnancy were influenced by their peers and it is evident in families with minimum income earners. Moreover, results showed adolescents experienced difficulty in fulfilling their role as a mother and a student, however, young mothers of today's generations were open and resilient. They have the strong will to bounce back to life, and have a great desire to finish their studies and hope for a brighter future for their families. To help alleviate the educational hardships of teenage mothers, there is a necessity to offer alternative delivery mode or alternative learning system in the school. To combat the ongoing increase of teenage pregnancy in the community, collaborative efforts of the school, local government and community is needed. Information dissemination, sex education, population control measures are advised.

KEY WORDS: *Educational Struggles, Resilience, Teenage Pregnancy, Transition to Parenthood*

I.INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy among teenagers is a serious global problem that causes both medical and social dilemma. This is a global issue that affects countries with high, middle, and low-income levels. Poverty, lack of education and work possibilities, and a lack of education and employment opportunities are all factors that contribute to teen pregnancy in marginalized areas. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Philippines has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in Asia, and it is the only country in the region where the problem continues to grow (World Bank, 2014). According to figures from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), teen pregnancy in the Philippines grew by 65 percent between 2000 and 2010, with an estimated 24 infants born to teen mothers every hour. Every day, 500 children are born.

Northern Mindanao is one of the Provinces that has alarming and increasing cases. According to the Press released by Region X Population Commission on February 26, 2021, pregnancies among adolescents in Northern Mindanao below 15 years old continues to rise. The highest number of adolescents who had given birth at a very young age was recorded in the Province of Bukidnon at 4,988 cases. Misamis Oriental also had one case of a 10-year old child pregnant and gave birth in 2014. Lantapan has 238 cases of teenage pregnancy and is continuously increasing (Press Release No.56, 2021).

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) early childbearing could be costing the Philippines PhP33.0 billion annually, or one percent of the country's gross domestic product in foregone incomes. Thus, UNFPA 2015 data as cited by Arceo (2015), teenage pregnancy is one of the many contributors and catalyst of intergenerational

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poverty. Early pregnancy reduced the probability of school completion, and therefore, reduced the likelihood of gainful employment, perpetuating the cycle of poverty (Norton, et.al, 2017).

Deped Order 40, s.2012 or DepEd Child Protection Policy issues the mandate and guidelines on protecting children in school from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying and other forms of thereof. The Department is committed to addressing reported incidents of teenage pregnancy and coming up with interventions or new approaches to better protection of learners in school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to systematically review the phenomenology of teenage mothers. The understanding of socio-demographic profile of the adolescent mothers, their lived academic experiences, and their coping mechanisms can help the Department of Education in crafting interventions to help these vulnerable groups in their academics and lessen the possible dropout rates in school due to early pregnancy. The result of this study will be beneficial as to strengthening the Child Protection Policy and programs that will be implemented in the department.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of the study is to delve into the lived experiences of teenagers engaging in early pregnancy and their relative academic experiences.

Specifically, this study will answer the following research questions:

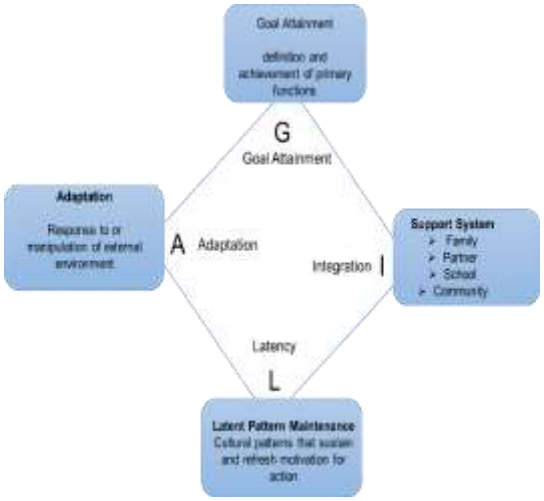
1. What are the socio-demographic profiles of Senior High School Teenage Mothers?
2. What are their lived academic experiences? and
3. What coping mechanisms use by teenage mothers in surviving their situation?

THEORETICAL LENS

The research is based on the AGIL's paradigm. In the 1950s, American sociologist, Talcott Parsons, devised a sociological plan. Parsons' theory, like Albert Bandura's Social Theory (Akella, et al 2015), is part of the sociological paradigm. The Social Learning Theory assisted in deconstructing the factors that impact and manipulate the youths' general behavior, causing them to prioritize early motherhood over school and profession. People pick up new behaviors by observing others in social situations, absorbing what they see, and then imitating it.

Parsons' theory is part of the structural functionalism sociological paradigm. Moreover, teenage pregnancy was part of the sociological issues. To understand this phenomenon, AGIL's paradigm helped in deconstructing factors and understanding adolescent's behavior towards teenage pregnancy. In this paradigm, society is defined as a social structure that meets the key functional requirements for long-term sustainability. The AGIL framework defines four fundamental functions that are organized systematically or structurally. Any system must adapt to its surroundings to some degree (Adaptation), achieve its goals (Goal attainment), integrate its components (Integration), and preserve its latent pattern (Latency Pattern maintenance) to live or maintain equilibrium with respect to its environment (Candra, 2012). The figure below shows the AGIL Paradigm.

Figure 1. AGIL's Paradigm is a structural functionalism sociological paradigm devised by Talcott Parson's in 1950.



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II. METHODS

A phenomenological type of qualitative research was used in this study to have an in-depth understanding of the problem. It is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon which is the teenage pregnancy. (Creswell, 2013). To enhance the validity of the study, the Triangulation method was used. Triangulation is a technique to analyze the results of the same study using different methods of data collection. It is used for three main purposes: to enhance validity, to create a more in-depth picture of a research problem, and to interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem (Nightingale, 2020). To accomplish this, methods such as in-depth interviews, focused group discussion and observations or school data were used in the study. The respondents of the study were adolescents who got pregnant at age of 10- 19 years old. There were (6) respondents who were purposively selected in the study. They were senior high school students from Lantapan National High School- Senior High School. All respondents were Grade 12 students from different strands. The researcher-made instrument used was validated by an expert for validity and reliability. The first part of the questionnaire was the socio-demographic profile and family background of the respondents. The second part, focused on the questions on the lived academic experiences, challenges they had encountered and the coping mechanism of the teenage mothers. The research instrument was contextualized to answer the research problem. The questions were translated to vernacular by the researcher during interviews to remove the language barrier and allow the respondents to express their story freely. The study strictly followed ethical considerations and protocols before administering the data collection. Rights and confidentiality were explained to the respondents and pseudonyms were used to protect respondents' identity. The qualitative information that was gathered from the study was transcribed to get the themes or set of codes, words or phrases that serve as label or tags for sections of data. The data collected were treated with utmost confidentiality.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Participants

The respondent's age conception is mostly at the age of 16. These teenage mothers belong to low income earners. Teenagers who got pregnant while studying ended up dropping out from their studies to focus on their pregnancy. They tend to leave the school mostly two years to look after their baby. This scenario supported the study of Mangel (2010), said that pregnancy is the number one reason girls drop out of school in the Hispanic community. Approximately 70% of teenage girls who give birth leave school. This is also true in the study of Miquilena, et. al (2021) stated that 36 percent of school dropout cases in Latin America can be attributed to teen pregnancy or motherhood. In Region X, early teenage pregnancy was also the biggest factor why young girls leave school, causing a 60% of drop out in the region. Secretary Leonor Briones cited data from Philippine Statistics Authority that school drop outs have reached more than 2.97 million, 61.9 % of whom are girls aged 16-24 who are forced to marriage or family matter, (Porcalla, et. al, 2019). In the case of the participants, their pregnancy doubled the demand for their financial aspect, so they chose to stop their studies and prioritized the needs of their baby and their families. Most of the respondents after being pregnant would undergo *Pamalas* or a tribal wedding practice in the province of Bukidnon

When asked about the reasons why they became pregnant at an early age, most of the respondents' answers were peer influence, personal behavior or disobeying parents and curiosity about pre-marital sex. In the study of Kukundakwe (2021) in Mbarara Municipality, Uganda, demonstrated that negative peer interactions and unhealthy teen friendship increase the likelihood of teenage pregnancy. The same point was stated by Isuku (2015), Klein (2005), Ochen et al. (2019) and Kukln (2008). Direct from the respondents' experiences, they said that they had get to know their partners from the recommendation of their friends, text mates, and part of their circle of friends.

Moreover, curiosity coupled with lack of knowledge about the consequences of pre-marital sex, they tend to explore without using contraception. This eventually led to early pregnancy. Curiosity has been pointed out to be one of the determinant factors of teenage pregnancy and it was shown in the study of Simigiu, (2014) and Dr. Terhase (2020) asserted in her webinar organized by Family Planning association of India Nagaland Branch that curiosity and experimentation is the main cause of teenage pregnancy in Mainland India.

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Lived Academic Experiences of Teenage Mothers

Table 1. Summary of emerging themes, categories and subcategories

	Themes	Category	Subcategory
Lived academic experiences of teenage mother	Transition to Parenthood	Physical Stress	Difficulty in commuting due to growing baby bump
			Feeling tired and sleepy
			Experienced in vomiting and headache
		Mother vs. Student role	Hard time in managing studies and motherhood
Coping Mechanism	Educational Struggles	Less Focus	Difficulty in understanding my lesson
			Hard time focusing my study
			Can't focus when baby is awake
		Financial Concerns	Unstable job of partner
			Monetary expenses for activities
	Resiliency		Unstable job of partner
		Acceptance	Accepting the present condition
			No choice but to accept what was happened
			The situation is hard but I need to accept it
		Support from family and partner	Financial support
			Educational support
			Affective support
			Taking care of the child
	Valuing Education	Bright future	Give comfortable life for baby and my family
			Comfortable life for my family
		Better Job	Get a stable job for my baby
			Provide needs for my baby and family

Table 1 depicts the overview of the themes under different objectives. The study has four significant themes that were extracted from the in-depth interview and focus group discussion. The significant themes that were extracted from the study were the following: *transition to parenthood, educational struggles, resiliency and valuing education.* These themes capture the full meaning of the phenomenon

Theme 1: Transition to Parenthood

Transition to parenthood was the first theme extracted from the respondents' in-depth interview and FGD. Codes extracted from this theme are the physical stress and motherhood vs. student's role experienced by the teenage mothers. All respondents pointed out that their life turned 360 degrees when they became early mothers. Physical stresses were pointed out to be part of the transition to parenthood because pregnancy caused several physical changes to the mother's body. Respondents shared their experience during pregnancy:

Adolescents' health, economic prospects and quality of life may be gravely impacted by pregnancy. The risk of raising a life at a tender age will not only impose danger to the mother's health but also the baby. The unintended pregnancy experienced by young adolescents affects the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing of the adolescents

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(Parungo, et.al, 2014). Transition to parenthood in terms of mother vs. student role leads to a drastic change in a girl's life. Significant maternal effects were evident in the study of (Carey& Schulman, 2018; Socolov, et.al, 2017)

At a very young age, parenting was out of its usual ways. They were supposed to be in the stage of their lives in which exploration, enjoyment, and learning should be of concern. Parenting should be the least of it. Adolescent moms have a variety of educational challenges, including difficulty studying, incapacity to continue schooling, and frequent absences. Teenage mothers' attention might be divided by the demands of motherhood (Almeida & Aquino, 2011; Glynn et al., 2018; Kleine, 2005), and not obtaining a diploma can have an influence on the immediate and future families of adolescent moms. Even though it can be broken via education, a vicious cycle is unavoidably generated.
Theme 2. Educational Struggle

Less focus and financial concerns are the sub categories extracted from this theme. In this theme, teenage mothers expressed their difficulty in understanding their lesson. All of the respondents magnified that becoming an early mother affects their focus on their studies. Their focus on their study became less due to other responsibilities they need to attend to.

This situation made an impact on the school performance of the student. Dual responsibility contributed to the disruption of focus by teenage mothers. Educators have noticed a drop in academic achievement when comparing a learner's performance before and after pregnancy (Beesham, 2000). In the study of Maemeko,et,(2018), this scenario was enhanced. According to the findings of the study, the influence of teenage pregnancy on the education of girl children, expecting mothers, and mothering teenagers at school level performs badly when compared to their previous performance. Multiple responsibilities of pregnant and mothering teenagers are among the reasons for poor academic performance.

Financial status added up to the educational struggles of teenage mothers in their studies. Education needs finances for fare in going to school, buying food, and spending on projects and outputs. Their financial needs were doubled to sustain not just their expenses in school but also in providing the needs of their family and for the baby as well. Thus, consistent with academic literatures, the participants' experiences show that adolescent mothers are vulnerable in the education setting, and need proper guidance to achieve their full potential (Gatbonton, 2021).

Coping Mechanisms of Teenage Mothers
Theme 3. Resiliency
In this theme, acceptance and support from family and partners are the subcategories. Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands (APA Dictionary of Psychology). In this theme, categories or codes were extracted such as acceptance, family and partner's support and feeling of ambivalence.

Most of the respondents stated that acceptance was the only choice that they have. Acceptance for them was letting the things that were happened and continue moving forward. They just accepted the fact that at their young age, they became early mothers and they already had their inspiration, which is their children.

Families, particularly mothers, were seen as crucial in times of crisis. Having someone in whom you can confide and who can help you provide comfort, and make life easier. Young mothers with family support recognized its importance and thought that it placed them in a better position. They were in a better situation than people who do not have it. Bell et al., 2013; Challa et al., (2017); Derlan et al., (2018); Shahabuddin et al., (2017) highlighted the importance of support systems in assisting adolescent moms to overcome tough conditions. Accepting things that would not change, maturity in one's viewpoint, and motivation for self-improvement were among the sub-categories of lessons learnt.

Ahorlu, et al. (2015), stated that adolescent girls, developed competencies to cope with pregnancy and childbirth effectively. Ngum Chi Watts, et al. (2015) amplifies motherhood brings increased responsibilities, social recognition, and a sense of purpose for young mothers.
Theme 4. Valuing Education

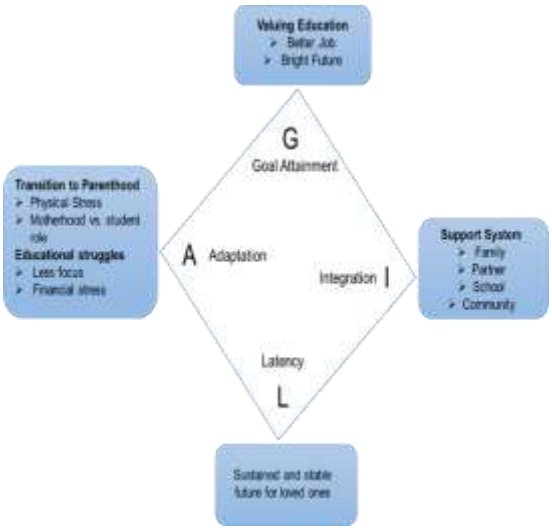
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The fourth theme extracted from the respondents is valuing education. Codes generated from this theme are bright future and better job. Most of the respondents valued their studies and that they've seen education as the key to finding a better job and a better salary that can alleviate their economic status in the future. It was evident from their experiences that becoming a teenage mother possesses multi-responsibilities yet they still pursued education.

One of the main reasons many adolescent mothers are keen to complete their education is because it is a key to progress. It also helps if they have the support and encouragement of their loved ones (Copeland, 2017; Sycharuen et al., 2018;). Education can assist them in better adapting to life's obstacles (Lewin, 1947). Education also empowers women by giving them an equal opportunity to make their lives better, especially in countries where women are treated poorly (Child Hope Philippines, 2021). Moreover, people with higher levels of education have better job prospects (ECD, 2012).

Respondents decided to go back to school after a year or years of dropping out because they believed that having education or finishing a degree can help them get a better job and make an income for their families. Education for them is a scaffolding to reach their dreams. That dream is to finish and get a degree so they can find a better job that will give them a greener pasture. From their experiences, they highlighted the value of education

The AGIL Paradigm is reflected in the real academic experiences of teenage moms and the stages they went through. Transition to parenthood, physical stress, educational struggles, financial crises as well as the demands of motherhood and student role, are seen as circumstances to which responses must "adapt." These mothers' scholastic hardships and financial sacrifices have reinforced their educational viewpoint. The adolescent moms embraced the value of education and formed their "goals and aspirations" as a result of their life experiences, realizing that their lives were no longer focused on them, but on the welfare of their children. Adolescent moms "integrate" themselves into society by standing up and being strong for their family as they adjust to their new role. They envisioned a long-term, well-maintained future with unwavering commitment.



CONCLUSION

The study revealed that teenage pregnancy is mostly influenced by their peers and it is evident in families with minimum income earners. The themes generated in the study were transition to parenthood, educational struggles, resiliency and valuing education. In this study, teenage mothers had a hard time managing dual role and adapting their transition to parenthood. During pregnancy to raising their child transition to parenthood gave physical stress to these early mothers. Hormonal imbalances brought by pregnancy-related symptoms made them realized that pregnancy was not easy. Different symptoms like vomiting, headaches, tiredness, difficulty of breathing due to baby bump and feeling sleepy all the time were the symptoms experienced by these early mothers. Becoming a teenage mother had made their priorities shifted to a higher responsibility, which is parenting. Due to their young age, lack of maternal skills

was one of their concerns. In addition, time management was the skill they need to master. Motherhood vs. student role is not that easy for early mothers. Having two responsibilities needed sacrifices and time management skills.

Aside from the transition to parenthood, educational struggles were pointed out by the respondents in their experiences. Less focus and financial aspects were the most common concern of the respondents. They stressed that understanding their lesson was harder when they became teenage mothers compared to the time they were single. Difficulty in focusing to their lesson due to dual responsibilities was their reason. Early mothers struggled in their financial aspect because of the additional expenses bind to raising a child. The expenses for their studies, expenses for family, and for the baby's needs. The demographic profile of the respondents and their partners magnified that most of the respondents came from financially-challenged families and that their partners did not have a stable job due to a lack of education and skills. As a result, their partners mostly landed to being part-time laborers with minimum wage. Since raising a child and a family requires skills and finances, some of the respondents are still living in their parents' houses.

Despite the difficulties they faced as young mothers, they bounced back and expressed a great desire to finish their education. Teenagers of the new generation can easily adjust from their situation. They are resilient and that acceptance just follows in them. Furthermore, adolescent mothers valued education and that they considered it as their only way to get a good job and a passport in having a bright future for their families. They've understood that continuing their education is essential for advancement, independence, and a higher quality of life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.There is a necessity to open an Alternative Delivery Mode or Alternative Learning System in the school to help these teenage mothers perform their dual roles effectively. This is also to address the drop out incidence due to early pregnancy.
2. Strengthening population control programs and sex education to the school and community is needed.
3. Family planning, pre and post-natal education, nutrition education, breast feeding and maternal skill trainings should be given to teenage mothers by the community health workers to ensure that these early mothers have the capacity to raise their child properly and appropriately.

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