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Teenage Pregnancy: Its Effects and Their Coping Strategies

Wilma S. Madelo

Teacher, National High School, Department of Education, Philippines

Rael Christopher O. Plaza

College Instructor, Department of Social Sciences,
Surigaodel Sur State University, Tandag City, Philippines

Abstract:

Teenage pregnancy has been a societal problem over the last decades in various provinces in the Philippines. These incidents categorically hampered teenagers' lives as they affected their wellbeing on becoming the young mother of their children. The study utilized a qualitative research design specifically a phenomenological approach. The selected pregnant teenagers of Barangay Lucena, Prosper dad, Agusandel Sur served as the Key Informants.

The researchers used an interview guide questionnaire in the conduct of the interview. Then, it was recorded through an audio tape. Transcription and translation of the information were made. The information gathered was then interpreted through thematic analysis.

Furthermore, the study revealed that teenage mothers experienced humiliations and criticism among their family, peers and people in the community. Most of them resorted into dropping out from school and others asserted that they chose to stay at home and avoided their common friends. Consequently, most of these teenage mothers were able to overcome the situation by accepting the responsibility as parents. They have asserted that they were willing to do everything for the welfare of their children.

Indeed, one of the most emphasized factors was due to low family income. The families with low economic status were more vulnerable into teenage pregnancy incidents. Other factors were peer influence, lack of awareness on sex education and other family problems.

Keywords: Teenage pregnancy, effects, coping strategies

1. Introduction

The cases of teenage pregnancy are rampant and alarming in many nations of the world, including our country in the Philippines. This societal problem remains personally destructive in their moral, economic and social lives. According to the National Demographic and Health Survey (2013), the Caraga Region has 38% cases of teenage pregnancy. There were 14% of Filipino girls aged 15-19 are either pregnant for the first time or are already mothers more than twice the rate recorded (YAFS, 2014). Thus, because of the increase in teenage pregnancy, public agencies such as the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Works and Development (DSWD), Population Commission (PopCom) and other agencies find ways to reduce this problem. Hence, the researchers aim to investigate the significant effects of early pregnancy among teenagers. The study also explores how these teenagers manage to cope with this situation in their lives.

The PopCom has taken the challenge of reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy in Northern Mindanao through large information and education campaign about adolescent sexuality and reproductive health values. The PopCom conducted series of lectures or activities for the dissemination to the different secondary schools to achieve this objective (Regional DepEd Memorandum No. 176 s. 2016). However, these initiatives remained insufficient as the cases increased and currently many of the teenage mothers were experiencing or if not, but vulnerable into prejudices in some form of bullying, stigma, and rejection at school and in the community.

Some theories have attempted to explain the occurrence of teenage pregnancy. These theories explained the possible factors contributing to this problem and they also helped to justify how these variables affected the lives of these young mothers. First, is the Neo-cognitive Theory which was used to examine teens' personality and behaviour to look at the individual cognitive framework and feelings of self. According to Piaget (1972) cognition is the way in which a person learns to perceive and interpret the environment and die in which the person acts upon the environment. These theory further states that deviant youth like teenage moms view themselves in a negative framework in relations to social institutions. Youths who are at risk or who have experienced an early pregnancy often were reared in dysfunctional environments that may have resulted in learned insecurity. As a result, the youths may believe they are inadequate. This cognitive model of learning from the environment and experiencing increased degrees of alienation, thus; predicted school failure, delinquency and health-damaging behaviours.

The second theory which this study anchored is the Attachment Theory, by John Bowlby which viewed that early experiences in childhood had an important influence on development and behaviour in life. Bowlby believed that attachment had an evolutionary component. It aided survival. It was the particular way in which you relate to other people. It also clarified ways that you are emotionally limited as an adult and what you need to change to improve your close relationships and your relationship with your own children. Besides, one of the vital factors why many teenagers had engaged into sexual relationship due to their family upbringing. Thus, parents or guardians had an important role to guide and protect their children on these deviant incidents.

Lastly, is the Maternal Role Attainment Theory which asserted that there was an interactional and developmental process occurring during which the mothers became attached to their infants. The process of maternal role attainment began at pregnancy and continued during the transition period. This event in life involved such a variety of experiences including pain, emotional stress, vulnerability, physical injury, role change, and acceptance of new responsibility (Rafii, et al., 2018). Therefore, motherhood can be considered as an important developmental event in a woman's life. In relation to this, teenage mothers experienced a significant shift in their lives which required a vital responsibility.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The study generally delved into the lived experiences among teenage mothers. Explicitly, the study answered the following questions.

- What is the effect of Teenage Pregnancy as to;
 - Self-Esteem
 - Sibling Relationship
 - Relationship to the Parents
 - Relationship with Friends
 - Social Stigma?
- What is the effect of Teenage Pregnancy to their schooling?
- What are the social constructs of Teenage Pregnancy to the students?
- What are the coping strategies of these teenagers?

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design specifically a phenomenological approach. Relatively, an interview guide questionnaire was used in gathering facts and information. It also utilized audio tape recordings and mobile gadgets. Furthermore, primary and secondary documents from the barangay and municipality offices were also analyzed and interpreted.

2.2. Research Locale

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Prosperidad, Agusandel Sur in the Philippines. The Key Informants were residents of Barangay Lucena where Teenage Pregnancy was rampant. It had a total of ten (10) Puroks and had only one (1) Secondary School –the Lucena National High School.

2.3. Key Informants

The participants of the study were the pregnant teenagers of Barangay Lucena, Prosperidad, Agusandel Sur. The following were the key informants of the study. Their names were represented with a letter symbol to affirm confidentiality.

	Age	Key Informant
1.	16-Year-Old	A
2.	18-Year-Old	B
3.	19-Year-Old	C
4.	17-Year-Old	D
5.	19-Year-Old	E
6.	19-Year-Old	F
7.	19-Year-Old	G
8.	19-Year-Old	H
9.	19-Year-Old	I
10.	19-Year-Old	J
	Total	10

Table 1: Key Informants of the Study

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers secured a permit from the Barangay Office of Lucena prior to the conduct of the study. An endorsement and a request letter were also secured and given to the identified key informants.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview with a research guide question. Then, researcher recorded the interviews after having gained approval of the key informants.

After the interviews of the ten key informants, the audio tape was decoded. Transcription and translation of the responses of the key informants were done. A line-by-line examination of the text was done to identify the themes. Also, the data were interpreted through thematic analysis.

2.5. Ethical Consideration

In conducting the semi-structured interview, ethical considerations were carried out. The letters of request were given to the key informants stating the aim of the research and the interview method. The researcher obtained a full consent from the participants before the conduct of the interview including the recordings through an audio tape. It ensured privacy and confidentiality of the information and anonymity of individual participated in the research.

2.6. Research Instrument

The researcher used a semi-structured interview to gather focused, qualitative textual data. An interview guide questionnaire in line with the objectives and research questions were utilized. The questionnaires were an open-ended question. It also included the demographic profile of the key informants to identify their age, age when pregnant, educational attainment, family monthly income, marital status, religion and ethnicity.

The statements in the questionnaire were constructed to obtain objective data from the respondents who had met the inclusion criteria. The questionnaire was formulated in English and translated into Bisaya (a local dialect in the Philippines).

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to Self-esteem

Interview Guide Question (IGQ): When you got pregnant, how does it affect your self-esteem, how do you feel about it?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
1. Felt Ashamed	5	1
2. Felt Regret	4	2
3. Frustrated	1	3

Table 2: Effects Encountered by the Key-Informants in Terms of Self-Esteem

Table 2 showed the common feelings among teenagers as to their Self-Esteem.

Key Informant A (KI - A): *'I felt ashamed since my boyfriend left me when I told him about it. I had no choice but to reveal it to my parents. Although, they were disappointed but eventually they accepted me.'*

KI - G: *'I felt ashamed to myself to my parents, neighbors and friends.'*

It revealed that most of the key informants were ashamed on their pregnancy. They had experienced criticism from their family and the people in the community. According to Heflick (2013), the feeling of shame, de-value the entire sense of self. This was felt when a person was disappointed of himself/herself.

Some also felt regret as to what happened to them:

- KI - F: *'I truly regret on my actions, because of this it is now hard for me to continue schooling'*
- KI - B: *'I really regret of what I did. But I have nothing to do about it. I have to accept what had happened.'*

Jackie (2012) conformed in his study that low self-esteem is among the effects of teenage pregnancy.

3.1.1. Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to their Parents Relationship

A. IGQ: When you got pregnant, what was your parents' reaction? How does it affect your relationship to one another?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
1. Hatred from the Parents	5	1
2. Regrets for lack of love, care and guidance to their daughter	2	3
3. Rejection	3	2

Table 3: Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to Their Parents Relationship

Most of the parents got angry and disappointed of what happened to their children.

- KI - G: *'My parents got angry and very disappointed with me. They don't want me to marry early, they really want me to finish college before getting married.'*
- KI - I: *'My father was very angry. He doesn't like my boyfriend to be my husband. When my boyfriend and his parents visited in our house to ask for my hand for marriage, my father walked-out.'*

The reaction of the parents conformed to the study of Visser and Roux (1996), which found out that many teenage mothers felt that pregnancy upset their parents. Fathers' tendered to be angered by their daughters' pregnancies. In some cases, this anger would even led to the father's rejection to chase their daughters out of the house.

3.1.2. Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to their Siblings Relationship

B. IGQ: When you got pregnant, what was your siblings' reaction? How does it affect your relationship to one another?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
1. Disappointed	2	3
2. Hatred	2	3
3. Rejection	4	1
4. Had accepted my situation.	2	3

Table 4: Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to Their Siblings Relationship

Most of the key informants revealed that after getting pregnant, they felt rejections from their own siblings.

KI-J: *My sister told me that they don't care anymore with my life. They told me that they did their part already to support me in my studies but I have wasted all of it and broke their trust.'*

KI-D: *'My brothers cursed me for what I have done. They were very mad. Although, they accepted it eventually but our relationship was already affected.'*

In the study of Ngabaza (2011), rejections impacted negatively on the social well-being of an individual. It could lead her towards languishing, struggling or floundering which can affect a mental health of a person.

3.1.3. Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to their Peer/Friends

C. IGQ: When you got pregnant, how does it affect your relationship with your friends?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
1. Felt ashamed of my friends.	5	1
2. Feeling rejected from the group.	1	4
3. Bullied.	2	2.5
4. Did not experienced any effects in friend's relationship.	2	2.5

Table 5: Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to their Peer/Friends

Teenage mothers tended to be ashamed on what had happened to them. Most of them revealed that they had chosen to hide themselves from their friends and preferred to stay at home.

KI-A: *'I felt ashamed. Then, I choose to hide myself to them.'*

KI - C: *'I felt ashamed to my friends, I just stayed home and not mingle anymore to them.'*

Some of these Teenage mothers were bullied by their peers and neighbours in their community.

KI - H: *'I heard my friends gossiping about me. They said I get pregnant early because I could not resist my sexual desires'*

KI- F: *'Other people condemned me for being so irresponsible. They said I forsaken myself.'*

It implied that the respondents were affected by isolation and rejection by friends. An investigation done by Mpetshwa (2000) focusing on several teenage mothers, found that community members had a wide range of pessimistic reactions toward pregnant teenagers. Some members of the community tended to react with shock while others would gossip about the parents of the teenagers. Some felt isolated and rejected by friends and community. The findings showed that the respondents felt ashamed of their situations. On the other hand, an observation also revealed that not all people rejected the pregnant teens from the society.

3.1.4. Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to Their Social Stigma

D. IGQ: When you got pregnant, how does it affect your social life?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
Being condemned and judge by other people.	3	2
Heard criticism / gossiping in the community.	2	3
Experienced humiliation from the group.	5	1

Table 6: Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to their Social Stigma

KI-B: 'Gossips about me is all around in our barangay. That's the reason why I stayed at home.'

KI-E: 'Other people speculates on my personality. They judged my sexual behaviours'.

KI-G: 'I felt humiliated, people are gossiping about me, about how I ruined my future and my familieshonour.'

The findings revealed that the respondents felt humiliated to face the community because of their current situation. According to Bezuidenhout (2013), the families of adolescent parents especially in small, rural communities, were often forced with stigmatization and judgment. The idea that supported this observation from Ngabaza (2011) that not feeling part of a community and not feeling accepted impacted negatively on social well-being and could contribute participants leaning towards languishing, struggling or floundering end of the mental health continuum.

The finding revealed that the respondents were able to face the challenges / effects of their wrong doings. As stated in Section 2 of the Republic Act No. 10354, also known as 'The Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012', that the state recognizes and guarantees the human rights of all persons including their right to equality and non-discrimination of these rights, the right to sustainable human development, the right to health which includes reproductive health, the right to education and information and the right to choose and make decisions for themselves in accordance with their religious convictions, ethics, cultural beliefs and the demands of responsible parenthood.

3.2. Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to Their Schooling

A. IGQ: How does your pregnancy affect your schooling?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
1. Drop-Out	6	1
2. Poor motivation in Schooling due to risk of pregnancy	4	2

Table 7: Effects of Teenage Pregnancy as to Their Schooling

KI-B: 'My schooling was affected when I got pregnant because nobody will support me and we are poor.'

KI-C: 'I stop attending school because of too much responsibility. I have to take care of my child.'

KI-G: 'I stopped schooling because it's too risky and stressful on my part because I am pregnant. I am also ashamed to my classmates and teachers in school.'

The findings also revealed that parents of the respondents were hesitant to support their plans to go back to school due to economic instability. The table showed that the respondents on the item statement, mother's health is at risk during childbirth. These findings were in line with the study of Geronimus (1996) observed that early pregnancies align to higher than a risk of morbidity during childbirth and high incidences maternal and prenatal deaths. It is because child bearing has been associated with many social and health risks that are sometimes very serious. Therefore, it needs targeting from both the curative and preventive health strategies.

Based on the statement above that one of the effects of teenage pregnancy was incomplete of education because it lost their motivation in their studies due to state above factors. According to Woerner et al., 2002 that 7 out of 10 females who became teenage mothers did not graduate from high school. Less than one-third of young females giving birth before age 18 ever completed high school and the younger the pregnant teenagers were the less likely they were to achieve high school. They lost interest at school, absenteeism from school resulting in low academic performance and finally preferred to stay home due to early pregnancy.

3.3. Coping Mechanism among Teenage Mothers

B. IGQ: How were you able to cope up with this circumstance in your life?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
Taking great responsibility in rearing the child.	5	1
Faced the situation with courage.	1	3
Looking forward towards the things that they could do to support their child's need.	4	2

Table 8: Coping Mechanism among Teenage Mothers

- KI-A: *'Even how difficult is the situation, I never loss hope. I pray to God to guide me in this trying times of my life until I found a job. I am willing to sacrifice everything for my child.'*
- KI-J: *'I already accepted my fate; I took my responsibility as a mother to my child. When my parents see how I work hard, they have supported me.'*
- KI-G: *'Though, we are in this difficult situation, my partner and I are working together. We are now building a family. I do the household chores and took care of our child while my partner is working for our living. Our parents were always there to help us in times of need.'*

It implied that adolescent mothers coped up in their depressing situation by looking forward towards the things that they could do to support their child's need. Their concerns were the welfare of their child and to give them a brighter future. They had different ways of taking responsibility as a mother. Others were looking forward to find job to support their children and have proceed in their studies.

As parents, they had big responsibility to face like providing proper care and needs of the child. It was supported from the study of Pogoy (2014) that rearing a child was a great challenge especially for teenage mothers because they were not yet prepared, but they faced it with courage. Although for them, they knew that they might be at risk, they were willing to give their sacrifices for the benefit of their child. To overcome student's failure, they gave giving their best support to their children and forget about regrets to strengthen the family relationship. Taking the risk was the best thing they have done for their children.

3.4. Social Constructs on Teenage Pregnancy

A. IGQ: What are the social construct of teenage pregnancy?		
Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Rank
Due to poverty or low family income.	6	1
Bad Influence from peers/friends	1	3.5
Lack of awareness on sex education	1	3.5
Due to family problem	1	3.5

Table 9: Social Constructs on Teenage Pregnancy

- KI-A: *'I think these things happen to me because we are poor. My parents do not really support me in my education.'*
- KI-E: *'I was easily fall in love with my partner. We did not realize that our actions will lead in this situation.'*
- KI-J: *'This situation happened to me maybe because we have a broken family. I encountered a lot of struggles as I am looking ways to survive...'*

The thematic analysis implied that the parents' respondents had a low economic income to support their studies. According to Torres (2012) families with low economic status often had less success in preparing their young children for school because they typically did not have access to promote, support young children's development and provide them with everything they needed. Studies had shown that girls raised in poverty, in single-parent homes, and by parents with lower levels of education were more likely to be pregnant and to be teenage mothers. Since, the community where the respondents were situated was predominantly poor. Also, these teenagers were not given access to high school and college education. With parents who were busy in their livelihood, children especially young girls were left at home.

Also, it showed that teenage pregnancy was the result of lack of love, care and attention of parents. It implied that the lack of love, care and attention might lead to teenage pregnancy. According to the American College of Pediatricians (2013), parents provided the foundational role of support, nurturance, and guidance for their children. 'Such role of the parents toward their children is a fundamental right. This right is directed towards their welfare, and so that they might not be prone to abuses. In preventing teenage pregnancy, parents should observe different measures in providing guidance and directions to their adolescent children.

In the absence of family intervention, teenage girls usually were left with peers and vices resulting in indulging in sexual activities. The table also shows that the respondents that the majority of early pregnancy was a result of socio-economic background of the parents. Therefore, the highest respondents were in support of the above statement. Minnis (2013) stated that limited socioeconomic opportunities might play a big role in persistently high pregnancy rates among adolescents.

4. Summary of Findings

The study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences of teenage mothers of Barangay Lucena, Prosperidad, Agusandel Sur. The following were the results based on the thematic analysis:

Based on the effect of teenage pregnancy as to self-esteem, it was revealed that most of the key informants felt ashamed on their pregnancy, this was due to their experiences from criticisms within their friends, family and also people in the community.

As to the effects on their relationship with their parents. The teenage mothers and fathers got terribly upset on the matter. In some cases, the head of the family tend to chase their daughter out of their home.

As to the effect on their relationship with their siblings, they have experienced rejections which also caused mental pressures.

As to their peers, most of the teenage mothers chose to hide or avoid them. Then, they felt ashamed of what happened. However, some also asserted that their friends were supportive to them.

As to social stigma, most of the participants revealed that they felt humiliated due to gossiping and speculations in their barrios or community.

Based on the effects as to their schooling, the key informants resorted into dropping out of school, while others felt demotivated due to risk of pregnancy.

As to the teenage mothers' coping mechanism, it was revealed that they were able to overcome depressing situations by thinking of their children's needs. The young mothers had taken the courage to accept the responsibility as a new parent. Besides, they were willing to do everything for their children's sake.

Moreover, based on the social constructs on teenage pregnancy, one of the most emphasized factor was due to poverty of low family income. The families with low economic status were more vulnerable into teenage pregnancy cases. Other factors were, bad influence from peers, lack of awareness on sex education and family problems.

5. Conclusions

Teenage mothers were at risk of social, moral, mental and financial pressures. Prejudices and humiliations within family, friends and people in the community were usually experienced. Teenage pregnancy incidents also affects academic performances. Consequently, the factor of low family income group was among vulnerable into teenage pregnancy incidents in the country. Despite of the continuous support and intervention to address the teenage pregnancy cases, the government still has to exert more effort to eradicate or at least minimize the problem. In addition, teenage mothers must also be given support and guidance especially on their mental and financial well-being.

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