

Nanay na si Nene (A Journey to Early Motherhood): Understanding Pregnancy Through the Lens of Teenage Mothers

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Abstract. Teenage pregnancy is considered one of the problems in the Philippines, which shows the necessity of understanding the frustrating implications. Employing a phenomenological research design, this research provides an overview of the emotional and social impacts that young mothers as teenage pregnancy may create, giving light on how it affects their psychological and life pursuits. This was achieved by utilizing semi-structured face-to-face interviews with eight (8) identified teenage mothers from Luzon, involving ten (10) self-developed and expert-validated questions designed to determine the impact of early motherhood on the emotional and social well-being of teenage mothers and the impact of early motherhood on aspirations and self-perception of teenage mothers. Their experiences and problems during pregnancy and the early phase of parenthood were analyzed. The findings highlighted the difficulties experienced by the youth, including their academic failure and the broad discrimination they face in society. Despite every mental, emotional, and investment difficulty, they also could reach strength from their families and partners. Inadequate comprehensive sex education, which creates a vicious circle, has a devastating impact on this issue. Albeit the adverse outcomes of teenage pregnancy, the results underline the importance of adequate sex education and support systems for teenage mothers. Such interventions are critical in averting unwanted adolescent pregnancies and ensuring healthier upbringing for future generations. Contrasting what teenage mothers go through and incorporating it into the policies, minimizes the kind of stigma faced by teenagers who fall victim to early pregnancies and creates a favorable and welcoming society for future generations.

Keywords: Adolescence pregnancy; Early motherhood; Sex education; Teenage mothers.

1.0 Introduction

In the Philippines, along with some developing countries, adolescent pregnancies remain to be a serious societal issue, despite efforts to minimize its prevalence. With many teenagers still having completely unintended pregnancies or intended with a lack of preparation and knowledge on how to handle it, this leaves high risks of health complications, emotional and mental instability, and social damages because of the stigma resulting from adolescent pregnancies and motherhood and carrying substantial physical, psychological, and mental ramifications for individuals impacted, in addition to a more significant chance of additional health issues among young women compared to later pregnancies, such as eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections (Pepito et al., 2021). This is especially true for those affected under the poverty line, having worse diets and

constrained access to obstetric treatment, increasing the risk and impact of prenatal complications (Marti-Castaner et al., 2022).

The psychological, mental, and social effects of the numerous obstacles and experiences adolescent mothers confront are substantial and long-lasting. They become physically and psychologically exhausted due to mounting duties, a persistent shortage of time and energy, and less time spent on self-interest. Most of the time, considering they are teenagers, they cannot cope with the workloads (Villarama et al., 2022; Mangeli et al., 2017). Further, it is well-recognized that, compared to adult mothers, teen mothers are much more vulnerable to struggle with postpartum depression; nonetheless, social support remains essential for the psychological and emotional well-being of all sorts of mothers (Villarama et al., 2022). Due to their early age, teenage mothers face several challenges associated with nursing, childbirth, conflicting emotions about caring for the child, a greater need for social support, and pressure on their income, healthcare, and educational opportunities (Villarama et al., 2024; Erfina et al., 2019).

The educational and professional paths of adolescent mothers in particular are challenging given that adolescent pregnancy negatively impacts their academic performance, which can result in school dropout. Adolescents who experience early pregnancy have a lower probability of finishing their studies, which results in low-paying, unfulfilled professions. Only those with adequate family financial support and financial standing can pursue their education and fulfill their life goals (Villarama et al., 2023). Among young Filipino women, no established path results in teenage pregnancy, each road to motherhood is defined by a specific set of adversaries and circumstances. Still, the main pathways that lead to teenage pregnancy are intended pregnancy from early unions, pure accidents in romantic and sexual relationships, and prior adversaries and difficulties in life (Harbito et al., 2021). Actions leading to teenage pregnancy are affected by many variables, including age, income and social standing, degree of education, and work situation (Rohmah et al., 2020).

Studies delving deeply into the psychological and societal ramifications of teenage pregnancy remain fragmented; thus, this research examines the influences that adolescent pregnancy had on the psychological and social well-being of the teenagers who went through it, as well as the effects it had on the aspirations and self-worth of those teenage mothers. This study is significant as it dissects the experiences and challenges of teenagers transitioning into a parent and their effect on their being, through the lens of being a teenage mother. It seeks to shed light on its challenges, hardships, and lasting impacts. By understanding these, society and various sectors can vigorously promote sex education policies and form better ways and policies to care for teenage mothers' physical and emotional health.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Based on Critical Pedagogy and Social Contract Theory (Bernabe et al., 2022), the study utilized phenomenological research, a qualitative research method, to distill the essence of participants' experiences with concepts or phenomena (Creswell, 2007). This study examines, from a qualitative perspective, early motherhood's consequences on teenage mothers, the social issues that these mothers face, and how these issues impact their emotional and social well-being, self-worth, and aspirations.

2.2 Research Locale

This study took place in different provinces of Luzon, mainly in Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Rizal, and Pampanga, to give a more valuable representation of the teenage mothers in Luzon, Philippines.

2.3 Research Participants

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the individualized experiences of eight (8) Filipino teenagers, 15 to 19 years old, who gave birth and raised children throughout Luzon, Philippines. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique to guarantee that the study comprises an adequate and diverse sample of adolescent mothers, considering the participants' varying roots and circumstances. With the implementation of this approach, the researchers selected volunteers for the study according to predetermined standards including age, location, and life experiences.

2.4 Research Instruments

In the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, researchers prepared ten (10) validated self-developed guide questions, focusing on two parts: (1) impact of early motherhood on the emotional and social well-being of teenage mothers; and (2) impact of early motherhood on the aspirations and self-perception of teenage mothers. The instrument was reviewed and validated by three (3) experts: a language teacher, a psychologist, and a social science researcher.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedures

This research, approved by the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) Ethics Research Committee (ERC), with protocol approval code 2024-185, dated March 14, 2024, aims to delve into the experiences, challenges, and transformations faced by eight (8) teenage mothers from different areas of Luzon, Philippines, who became pregnant between the ages of 15 to 19. The researchers obtained consent forms and ensured the participants were well-informed and agreed to share their stories voluntarily. Interviews were scheduled within four weeks during the second semester of the academic year (AY) 2023-2024. A one-hour session of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews per participant was conducted following the ten (10) self-developed guide questions. The researchers conducted the interviews at locations convenient to the participants, either at their residences or nearby community centers. The participants' responses and experiences were analyzed, classified, and thematically interpreted. Colaizzi's Method (1978) was followed in the study. Data triangulation and cross-checking guarantee the findings' accuracy, reliability, and validity.

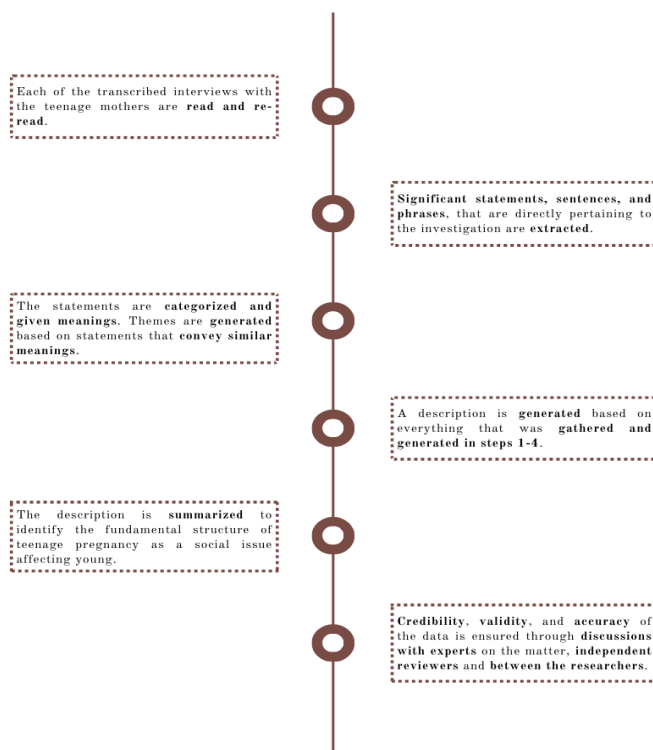


Figure 1. *Modified Steps of Colaizzi's (1978) Phenomenological Data Analysis*

3.0 Results and Discussions

3.1 Coping with Motherhood: Exploring Emotional Diversity on Teenage Mothers

Most teenage mothers experience mixed emotions as their initial reaction upon discovering that they are carrying a child. Some teenage mothers expressed various reactions such as happiness, excitement, nervousness, disappointment, extreme rage, regret, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Teenage mothers are often controlled by their relational strife and emotional highs and lows that often come after the fetus is born, which is commonly called

postpartum depression (Bah, 2016). Some of them were not ready for motherhood and had second thoughts about the pregnancy. Their only options are illegal abortion or carrying the baby.

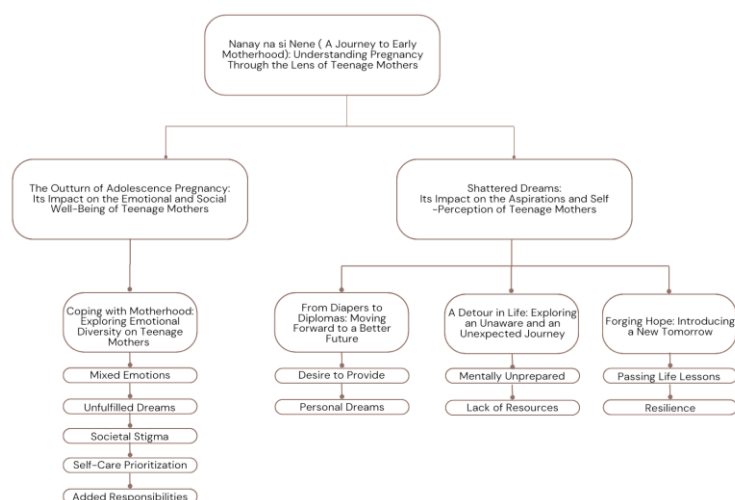


Figure 2. Research Findings

"I was nervous during that time and was reluctant if I should continue my pregnancy or result in a miscarriage. I continued it even if I was an overthinker who was considering all the responsibilities that come with it." (R2)

"I was very disappointed with myself during that time, especially because it was unexpected, the disappointment that I felt resulted in extreme rage and a mix of emotions." (R3)

"I felt that I got pregnant too early. At first, I was scared, of course, I did not know how to tell my parents and how to give my soon-to-be child a proper future." (R6)

Although several teenage mothers may argue that they faced a fair share of difficulties, two respondents revealed that happiness was their initial reaction when they found out about their pregnancy.

"I was delighted and shocked after knowing that I was pregnant. I cannot contain the excitement I felt." (R1)

"I found happiness in my heart as I felt contented even if I had encountered it at an early age." (R8)

Unplanned pregnancies among adolescents present a significant societal concern, as they abruptly interrupt the typical trajectory of teenage years and thrust young individuals into the realm of parenthood before they are emotionally, socially, and psychologically prepared (Okine et al., 2020).

"I was very discouraged by the people around me due to the things I have done, I always receive sermons and life lessons that they thought could make my life better but it affected my mental health more in a bad way, and I was kept reminded that it was my fault since I did not listen to my mother." (R2)

"When I look in the mirror, I see that so much has changed. It is like I do not even recognize myself anymore. It is hard to care about my health and appearance when I am juggling so much." (R3)

"I felt like my family dumped me; however, I had to continue life for my child." (R4)

However, the process of bringing babies into the world at such an early age is because of the additional problem that goes beyond the act of giving birth, which most mothers think of as the physical stress of childbirth. Teenagers, who are often ill-prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood, must navigate a complex landscape of emotions, relationships, and societal expectations as they embark on this journey (Tetteh et al., 2020).

"I realized that no matter what has happened, may it be positive or negative, I could teach that to my son knowing that I could explain to him the consequences and the benefits of dealing with it even if it should not be done at a young age, due to the bulk of responsibilities it brings." (R2)

"I slowly learned what my parents were trying to say to me. It was hard to be a spouse, and it was clearly not the right time to do so. Here I'll learn how to be a strong and responsible mother." (R6)

"I cared for myself more as I knew that I had a child living inside me during that time; I started living healthier, as I continued to lessen my stressors, ate healthy foods on time, and made sure that I was able to get plenty of sleep than the usual to keep my baby healthy." (R8)

The journey to motherhood necessitates physical readiness and psychological, social, and cognitive preparation, elements many teenage mothers lack (Tetteh et al., 2020). While there are a lot of rainbows and bursts of sunshine, teen mothers simultaneously face a sea of unforeseen difficulties. These challenges include grappling with the sudden shift to adulthood, managing the criticism and disappointment of parents and relatives, contending with the disruption of their education (Villarama et al., 2024), and navigating the complexities of relationships with partners, friends, and relatives (Aparicio et al., 2015).

"My child having no father while he was growing up has the biggest impact on my mental health." (R2)

"I was being treated coldly by my parents since they believed that it is a sin to have premarital sex, knowing that I was at an early age when it happened." (R4)

"I was frequently tired and frustrated to the point where I could not sleep, eat, or function well." (R7)

Amid these uncertainties, teenage mothers shockingly demonstrate a lot of endurance and strength, which it takes them to manage both the pressure of motherhood and the compound problems of adolescence. Notwithstanding, the many difficulties they encounter on the way, many young mothers, whose objective is to lift the bar in their lives, decide to go forward. The experience that they describe is a mixture of diverse and sometimes, conflicting emotions, such as boundless joy and overwhelming love, on the one hand, and fear, worry, and a sense of loneliness, on the other.

"It was my choice to welcome him into my life; therefore, I take full responsibility to take good care of him throughout his life. Moreover, it struck me, how could I care for him if I could not even care for myself?" (R1)

"I continued life, and I still went out from time to time because I was just thinking about the good things, I had experienced." (R8)

Exploring the emotional diversity among teenage mothers provides observers with a deeper understanding of the myriad experiences associated with early motherhood. Through empathy, assistance, and understanding, it is possible to create a more supportive and inclusive platform for teenage mothers to navigate the joys and challenges of parenthood at a young age.

3.2 From Diplomas to Diapers: Moving Forward to a Better Future

The teenage years are some of the most important periods of a person's life regarding education and professional opportunities for the future. The participants expressed their stories of personal and professional aspirations pre-pregnancy, and how early pregnancy and motherhood prevented them from achieving those goals.

"Long before I became a mother, I wanted to be a professional chef as I love cooking and serving the people I love. However, as a teenage mother, I became skeptical about pursuing my dreams, especially due to the lack of time and financial resources." (R1)

Due to the financial and mental burdens of being a teenage mother, all the participants weren't able to finish college and gain a degree initially. This reflects the overall experience of being a teenage mother in the country, as in the Philippines, the rate of teenage mothers dropping out of school is as high as over 60% (Ruta-Canayong, 2020).

Despite the challenges, many of the participants expressed their desires to continue their pursuit of education to gain decent and stable jobs and better provide for their families through financial support from their families and their own strength and resilience (Suhardi et al., 2023).

"Even if I already have a two-year-old son, I could achieve the dreams I planned before. I continued my studies while raising my child, and I was not struggling too much financially. I know that all these things would not have been possible without

the help of my family.” (R2)

Some aim to continue their educational pursuits to provide a brighter future for their children and families, some aim to start businesses, and others completely focus on raising and helping their children grow and develop.

“I want to have a business that I could consider as one of my financial resources in supporting my family.” (R3)

“I want to conquer all the problems that life would throw at me, to continue to be strong for my family and to guide my children. I want them to grow up as smart, god-fearing, and respectful children.” (R7)

The mothers also shared their specific personal life goals and desires before and even after becoming teenage mothers. Many aspired to have fruitful professional careers, provide luxuries for their loved ones, and travel around the world.

“I dreamed of being a nurse in the US, as I have an aunt who was based there before. I know that life would be good if I could achieve my American dream.” (R4)

3.3 A Detour in Life: Exploring an Unexpected and Unaware Journey

Turning from a typical teenager and student into a mother is a significant transition. The participants shared their feelings of distress, shock, and uncertainty about their transitioning into young mothers. Many admitted how they were mentally unprepared, acknowledging that they initially lacked the knowledge, skills, and capabilities needed to carry the burdens and responsibilities of motherhood, as well as the lack of resources to provide the needs for raising and nurturing a child.

“I was not prepared for it. I was shocked, unknowing what I would face upon accepting him.” (R1)

“As of the moment, I can admit that I am not financially stable without the help of my family. That is why I could not start my own life that includes only me and my son.” (R2)

Teenage mothers are highly vulnerable and face many challenges, due to their circumstances and young age. The participants’ experiences mirror that of many teenage mothers around the world, they face many physical, psychological, mental, and social challenges, which makes support extremely crucial (Mangeli et al., 2017). Teenage mothers are also more likely to be impoverished and disadvantaged economically, making the mother’s education and child-raising incredibly difficult, as such financial assistance from family members or the government is important (Hodgkinson et al., 2014).

3.4 Forging Hope: Introducing a New Tomorrow

Extreme challenges and problems can give significant life lessons that could be passed down to the younger generations so they would not make the same decisions that led to those situations. The challenges and problems given by early pregnancy and motherhood gave the participants important personal growth, development, knowledge that they pass down to their children, and the need to be strong and resilient in life despite any unexpected challenges.

“I will make her understand that it is so much better to study and have a decent job for her child's future, because it is hard to be a young mother, like me, who was not able to finish college and have a permanent job.” (R6)

“My experiences as a teenage mother have taught me the importance of adaptability, patience, and resilience in parenting.” (R5)

Teenage mothers initially lack the skills needed to raise a child properly. As such, they need guidance and instruction from those who have the knowledge to do so, from their parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives with parental experience (Watts et al., 2015). These mothers would give the same guidance and act as a warning to their children in order for them to make better life decisions.

The mothers emphasized continuously learning, improving, and developing as a mother. They also became better and more conscious decision makers, planning things out carefully beforehand, first thinking about how it could affect other people, especially their children.

"Being a mother, not only deciding for herself but also for the family she created." (R3)

"This experience has taught me to make more thoughtful and considerate decisions, taking into account the well-being of my child and myself." (R5)

The mothers aim to use their experiences of teenage pregnancy to develop their children into well-rounded and responsible people, who would not make the same grave mistakes and decisions they did, through sharing their experiences, instilling valuable lessons, and being open to communication about sensitive topics related to their pregnancy and life that led to it.

"As someone who got pregnant early, I want my child to be better than me in all aspects. I want to raise my son with the fear of God, including the conviction in all the actions that he will take." (R3)

"I aim to be an open and honest communicator, encouraging open dialogue and mutual respect." (R5)

4.0 Conclusion

This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach to delve into the outcomes of adolescent pregnancy, unraveling the emotional and social impacts on young mothers while analyzing the ways their aspirations and self-perception were affected. The findings showed many experiences, such as intense emotions and relentless hindrances in earning an education and careers. Related to historical times wherein children endure emergency circumstances to show a high level of human endurance and resolution to improve their lives regarding the generation to come. Further, the results revealed the need for sex education measures that would help to alleviate teenage pregnancies and provide support to teenage mothers, as they are much more likely to experience the consequences of early parenting, such as mental and psychological. The study renders the history of teenage pregnancy in the Philippines for decision and policy-making processes. This is a very crucial statement, and, understandably, teenagers' sexual knowledge should be comprehensive to eliminate negative impacts that may be due to wrong or insufficient sexual health knowledge. However, the study pointed to the significance of providing systems to be agitated and removing societal discouragement and stigmatism in the teenage matter. Future researchers, in this way, by raising the voices of teenage mothers and providing empathy-based systems, may contribute to building an inclusive society where every person feels heard and empathized with.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan, EJUSalazar, CIATeaño, JAVillarama – Conceptualization of the Study; CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan, CIATeaño, JAVillarama – Literature Review; CSMAldaba, JAVillarama – Research Design; CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan, EJUSalazar, CIATeaño, JAVillarama – Development of Guide Questions; CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan – Gathering of Data; CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan, JAVillarama – Data Interpretation; CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan, EJUSalazar, CIATeaño, JAVillarama – Results and Discussion; CSMAldaba, RCMMalasan, EJUSalazar, CIATeaño, JAVillarama – Writing and Editing; CSMAldaba, CIATeaño, JAVillarama – Formatting; JAVillarama – Supervision

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that they do not have any competing interests.

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