

First-Time Fathers' Experiences in Antenatal Care

Lady Marianne Reyes*, Jewelrie Mae V. Abainza, Shaina Claire A. Hernandez,
Anne Emmanuelle D. Urbano, Ian Justine B. Belista, Vivian P. Lajara, Marc Lester F. Quintana
Canossa College San Pablo City, Inc., San Pablo City, Philippines

*Corresponding Author Email: c-21000051reyeslm@canossacollegespc.com.ph

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Abstract. First-time fathers' involvement in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners is recognized as important for improving maternal and child health. However, engaging in this process can be challenging as they encounter different barriers. Their involvement in decision-making for seeking health care and obtaining health facilities can influence maternal outcomes, possibly affecting the maternal death rate. This study aims to provide information on what programs can be implemented to encourage more fathers to participate and support the antenatal care of their pregnant partners by exploring their lived experiences. This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 and 5, which focus on good health, well-being, and gender equality. The researchers employed a qualitative research design using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Data was gathered through self-made questionnaires from ten participants selected through snowball sampling, targeting first-time fathers aged 18 and above whose partner is currently pregnant and residing in the 3rd District of Laguna. The thematic and interpretative phenomenological analysis identified the major themes and sub-themes. The findings revealed four major themes: anticipating parenthood, embracing new roles, mutual support in pregnancy, and active engagement in prenatal care that exhibit the first-time fathers' state of preparedness and antenatal involvement during the pregnancy of their partners. Their willingness to be part of the antenatal care of their pregnant partners was seen. For them, antenatal care is a shared responsibility, not just for women. They demonstrated positive behavior toward antenatal care as they have a good perception of it. It is recommended to implement programs for first-time fathers that focus on pregnancy, helping reduce anxiety and enhance understanding of their responsibilities.

Keywords: Antenatal care; First-time father; Lived experience; Qualitative study.

1.0 Introduction

First-time fathers frequently mention that they appear purposeless, helpless, and worried because they do not know that being pregnant is hard. This study also agrees with Baldwin et al. (2018), who state that the most common problems a first-time father may have been anxiety and depression connected to mixed feelings as a result of their responsibilities. Global research recommends that involving first-time fathers in antenatal care, either through being part of antenatal care consultations with their partner who is pregnant or in antenatal education interventions, can be an efficient method for improving health during pregnancy (Sande, 2022). In 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized that male partners can play a part in a woman's favorable experience of being pregnant, giving birth, and the postnatal period. According to Gibore et al. (2019), the father's involvement can also have effects late in the decision-making process for seeking health care and obtaining health facilities, which are possible reasons for the increase in maternal death rate. The absence of paternal involvement

can be an issue and may lead to a mother's stress and emotional stability a few months after giving birth. This is due to a lack of education about the importance of paternal involvement during pregnancy (Hanapi, 2019).

Women feel empowered to surpass the challenges and trials during their pregnancy when their husbands support them. They bear the labor better and readily embrace having the baby after the delivery. Professionals believe that the involvement and effort of husbands in the antenatal care of their wives will increase their curiosity and help lessen pregnancy complications (Firouzan et al., 2018). The objective of this study was to know and explore the experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners. As a result of limited local studies regarding this topic in the Philippines, the researchers identified a knowledge gap. Recent quantitative studies urge future researchers to utilize a qualitative method to have an in-depth understanding of this topic, resulting in the identification of a methodological gap.

This study gives the healthcare system an advantage by providing them with knowledge and information on how to improve or what programs they can implement to encourage more fathers to participate and support the antenatal care of their pregnant partners. This study also aids first-time fathers in having an in-depth understanding of the importance of their participation in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners. Furthermore, this study provides knowledge and information to fathers about the laws and regulations enacted to aid them in supporting their partners' pregnancy. They will be enlightened that there are also laws and regulations for them and not only for women. The researchers also aspire that the result of this study will be helpful for first-time fathers, pregnant women, nurses or nurse-midwives, maternal and child nursing, birthing facilities, and as well as future researchers. This study aimed to explore the essence of the lived experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners in the 3rd District of Laguna.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative research design, which analyzes in-depth insight into reality and asks open-ended questions whose answers are difficult to put into numbers. This research took on hermeneutic phenomenological techniques to excavate into the primary encounters of novice fathers in supporting their pregnant partners during prenatal care. Hermeneutic phenomenology, a qualitative approach, lets the researchers scrutinize experiences, cultural influences, and routine behaviors. It enables researchers to describe how ordinary, everyday practices, childhood experiences, day-to-day challenges, and the resources that support them in raising their children. This method elicits stories from participants as a source of understanding.

2.2 Research Locale

The research was executed in Laguna's 3rd district and nearby municipalities such as San Pablo City and Calauan. The researchers enlisted participants residing in San Pablo City and Calauan in Laguna.

2.3 Research Participants

The researchers gathered 10 participants from the 3rd District of Laguna, particularly in San Pablo City and Calauan, Laguna. The participants were first-time fathers aged 18 years old and above, and their partners were currently pregnant. Snowball sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used to select participants. Participation attracts a group of people with similar experiences or situations. Upon screening, the researchers eliminated participants whose partners had already given birth during the interview process.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researchers utilized a self-made interview guide to dig into and build up a broad-gauged understanding of the experiences of first-time fathers participating in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners in San Pablo City. This tool empowers the researchers to condense on relevant exploration pivotal to the study. The researchers developed an interview guide containing thoroughly self-made questions, which three experts validated thereafter. The interview guide consists of three sections. The first part, the demographic profile, covered participant details such as age, marital status, occupation, and religion. Part two, labeled as Set A, includes eight questions addressing participant preparedness. Lastly, Part Three, or Set B, contained nine questions about participant antenatal involvement.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers obtained approval to operate their study away from the school grounds and sought out participants who met the specific criteria of being first-time fathers. Employing a snowball sampling method, they purposely picked individuals for the study, resulting in ten male first-time fathers residing in the 3rd District of Laguna, particularly in Calauan and San Pablo. Using a set of self-made questions as an interview guide, the researchers accentuate key inquiries pertinent to their study. Before wrapping up one-on-one interviews, the researchers carried out a consent form. They presented it to the participants, outlining its terms and conditions and informing them of the audio recording of the interview. This approach guarantees data collection sticks to ethical standards and protocols. Governing detailed semi-structured face-to-face interviews allowed the researchers to comprehensively understand and analyze the participants' firsthand experiences as first-time fathers.

Amidst data collection, the researchers stumbled upon difficulties in finding participants. They sought guidance from their thesis adviser to expand the research to a broader area. The decision was made to shift the research locale from San Pablo City to the 3rd District of Laguna. Eventually, the participants comprised eight individuals from San Pablo City and two from Calauan, Laguna. To make sure the analysis of the gathered data is comprehensible, the researchers sought guidance from an intercoder. This teamwork developed a thorough interpretation, enabling the identification of both significant and sub-themes within the study. Applying interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researchers adopted a two-cycle coding approach. Initially, they recoded participants' responses to each question into representative words or phrases during the first cycle. Subsequently, the researchers organized and categorized these codes in the second cycle, resulting in sub-themes. Through further congregating, the researchers identified overarching significant themes.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researchers garnered consent from the participants before proceeding and ensured they were not coerced into participation. Participants were assured confidentiality of all collected information, which would solely be utilized for academic purposes. They were told about the study's importance and the terms of participation, listed in a consent letter provided to them. This document detailed the participants' voluntary involvement and their right to refuse at any point.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Anticipating Parenthood

Psychological and Emotional Readiness

Table 1 presents the codes and annotated exemplars on first-time fathers' experiences in antenatal care of their pregnant partners. It focuses on their preparedness under the significant theme "Anticipating Parenthood" and the sub-theme "Psychological and Emotional Readiness." These experiences offer crucial insights. A total of 39 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, occurring 11 times, is Psychological and Emotional Readiness, which generally encapsulates fathers' mental and emotional preparation for parenthood, highlighting the significance of being emotionally equipped to handle the challenges and responsibilities associated with impending fatherhood. On the other hand, the code Adjustment Phase was the least to appear, which appeared 3 times, reflecting fathers' experiences of adapting to their new roles and responsibilities during pregnancy.

Participant 6's response reflects the initial excitement and joy of impending fatherhood, capturing the anticipation felt by many expectant fathers. Participant 6 states,

"I am so happy as a first-time dad that... my wife is pregnant then... of course, everyone is happy because it is our first baby."

This response highlights the sheer happiness experienced by fathers upon learning about their partner's pregnancy, illustrating the emotional readiness and eagerness to embrace their new role.

Participant 9's reflection underscores the underlying apprehensions and uncertainties accompanying the transition to parenthood. Participant 9 expressed,

"So yes, I am happy, but there is still that thought in my mind that... as I am about to start a family... there are many changes within myself... there is a realization that I have limitations now... it is not like when I was single and could do whatever I wanted... now I am thinking about how I will survive this family life... so yeah..."

This response highlights the conflict experienced by fathers as they wanted to engage in prenatal care, but some factors prevented them from being part of it all the time.

Table 1. Codes and annotated exemplars on Psychological and Emotional Readiness

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Initial Joy and Excitement	9	"Of course at first I was happy... I was happy because you can feel what it's like to be a parent ahh... to have your own family in one house and of course they became my inspiration ahh... to work harder in life and to prepare for the future of the child"
Initial Fear and Pressure	6	"That fear... I thought about it by myself... I was afraid that I might not be able to provide for the needs of my future child that was my fear."
Mixed Emotions	3	"We really didn't expect it to happen but we did have plans I guess... maybe it was a surprise a shock then there was happiness and at the same time there was... excitement and fear it was like a mix of emotions"
Age as a factor	4	"Yes... actually we thought about it... I'm already 38 and we're at the right age... it's like we want to settle down... if we wait a few more years it will be harder for us"
Adjustment Phase	3	"Ah, that... there was a time when since it was still new it was my first time so I was adjusting... it was something I wasn't used to... before, I could do everything but now there are restrictions... there are things I can't do anymore"
Sudden realization of unpreparedness	3	"It's like... we wanted it but at the same time we weren't completely ready for it it's like we didn't have a totally solid plan for the pregnancy"
Psychological and Emotional Readiness in general	11	"Well it's like this... when you're in that situation your mind really has to be ready and it's up to you how you're going to handle it...ah... how you're going to manage your wife's pregnancy"

Participant 5's response underscores the importance of perseverance and support, emphasizing the emotional challenges associated with pregnancy and the crucial role of paternal involvement in providing support to their partners. Participant 5 emphasizes,

"Also, you have to be determined... you need to stay focused on your wife and child... of course, pregnancy is tough... I experienced it with her... it is not tough... but she needs your support... that is all."

This response emphasizes the need for fathers to remain dedicated and focused on supporting their partners through the challenges of pregnancy, highlighting the importance of emotional readiness and active involvement in the journey to parenthood.

Based on the participants' responses, it can be noted from the study by Onyeze-Joe and Godin (2020) that first-time fathers aspire to be supportive and involved parents, providing practical and emotional support to their partners. These codes that have appeared from the participants' responses are also supported by the study of Franzen et al. (2021). It was mentioned that it can affect their mental health, which leads to stress, anxiety, or depression. First-time fathers frequently mention that they appear purposeless, helpless, and worried because they do not know that being pregnant is hard.

Financial and Practical Foundations

Table 2 presents the codes and annotated exemplars on first-time fathers' experiences in antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards the state of readiness under the significant theme "Anticipating Parenthood" and the sub-theme "Financial and Practical Foundations," revealing crucial insights. Nineteen responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The prevailing code occurs 10 times and is Planned and Anticipated Pregnancy. It summarizes fathers' approach and preparedness to become parents, emphasizing the importance of being prepared to face their new responsibilities as fathers. On the other hand, Lack of Prior Childcare Experience, with two occurrences, demonstrates fathers' lack of knowledge and skill in child care.

Table 2. Codes and annotated exemplars on Financial and Practical Foundations

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Financial Readiness	7	"Prepared? well I was ready... I already got ready... of course when I found out she was pregnant... I knew right away that financial support would be needed... that was already clear... so I started saving of course we weren't married yet... I really started saving."
Lack of Prior Childcare Experience	2	"I don't have much experience in taking care of children because I'm a man I never took care of my siblings' kids or anything like that... I never really had that experience, so it's a bit..."
Planned and Anticipated Pregnancy	10	"Mm we're ready because we really prepared for everything... it's not like... she just got pregnant out of nowhere we prioritized getting married first out of respect for her for her parents... and of course... for God it's more important to be blessed first so we prayed that after the wedding, we would have a baby and our prayer was answered and we got blessed with a child."

Participant 6 emphasizes the importance of financial stability, recognizing it as a cornerstone for building a secure future for their family. Participant 6 states,

"Yes, that is very important because no matter what situation we are in in life, we still need to be financially stable... we always need to have a backup. Even if we say we have money, we must still be prepared."

This response emphasizes the significance of financial preparedness in ensuring the well-being and security of the family unit, emphasizing the practical considerations that accompany parenthood.

Participant 3's response underscores the value of thorough planning and preparation, including financial savings and birth plans, to ensure a smooth transition to parenthood. Participant 3 states,

"How did it help?... we have been talking about this for a long time... about what our plans would be when she gets pregnant... we planned for everything to be ready... we already have savings, and we also planned for her childbirth... with her."

Regarding the participants' responses, Noh's study (2021) states that first-time fathers were overwhelmed by a strong sense of duty and fresh financial pressure.

3.2 Embracing New Roles

Building Partnership and Responsibility

Table 3 depicts the codes and annotated exemplars on first-time fathers' experiences in antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards the state of preparedness under the significant theme "Embracing New Roles" and the sub-theme "Building Partnership and Responsibility," revealing crucial insights. A total of 7 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 4 times, is Imbibing Responsible Parenthood, which captures fathers' approach to facing their new responsibilities during parenthood. The last code to appear in Joint Responsibility emerged 3 times, which reflects the first-time fathers and their partner's collaboration to accomplish their responsibility as a parent.

Table 3. Codes and annotated exemplars on Building Partnership and Responsibility

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Joint Responsibility	3	"As her belly grows... I could see it and as it got bigger I could also see our future together at the same time we were saving."
Imbibing Responsible Parenthood	4	"Hmmm... right now... I'm just practicing things like... changing diapers stuff like that that's where I'm adjusting I don't have any experience with those kinds of things... tasks for the baby like cleaning and bathing I'm still practicing it but I don't really have a guide..."

Participant 5 emphasizes that they would not hesitate to make a collaborative decision for the safety of their baby. Participant 5 states,

"So what I mean is that we... what do you call that... will not hesitate to do what is right.... if we know what needs to be done... we will do it right away for her safety and the baby's safety."

This response indicates that collaborative decision-making is significant, especially for the baby's safety.

According to the study by Levy and Kotelchuck (2021), first-time fathers showed an engaged attitude toward learning about their role throughout infancy and their baby's needs and emotions.

Navigating Healthcare and Support Systems

Table 4 shows the codes and annotated exemplars on first-time fathers' experiences in antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards the state of preparedness under the significant theme "Embracing New Roles" and the sub-theme "Navigating Healthcare and Support Systems," revealing crucial insights. Nineteen responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 10 times, is Medical Care Options, which encapsulates the fathers' decision about the medical assistance of their partners. Lack of exposure to childbirth education classes emerged 9 times, describing fathers' limited access to information, suggesting an action to address this concern.

Table 4. Codes and annotated exemplars on Navigating Healthcare and Support Systems

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Medical Care Options	10	<i>"It's all about where we can save money... because it's financial right... it's not just about the preparation for the phase of childbirth... once the baby is born it's not just about that single session of giving birth... it's continuous so we'll go with where we can save."</i>
Lack of exposure to childbirth education classes	9	<i>"It depends on the schedule of that day... because for now we only have Sunday as our day off from work since we work from Monday to Saturday... but if there is a chance or an opportunity we'll try."</i>

Participant 6 emphasizes the importance of seeking advice and feedback from their support system to know where to seek healthcare. Participant 6 states,

"I based it on... on our niece who gave positive feedback about the hospital, so we will just base it there because it seems good. Also, my wife was with our relative who gave birth there."

This response states that their support systems significantly affect the options for where to receive healthcare.

Participant 10 emphasizes that they lack knowledge and do not know if there are childbirth education programs. Participant 10 states,

"Nothing... I have not heard anything like that."

This response states that insufficient engagement in childbirth education classes is due to a lack of awareness that they exist.

According to Walsh et al. (2021), fathers emphasize several barriers to their access to antenatal care. They acknowledge that employment is one barrier to their participation in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners.

3.3 Mutual Support in Pregnancy

Understanding and Meeting Partner's Needs

Table 5 reveals the codes and annotated exemplars on the experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards the antenatal involvement under the significant theme "Mutual Support in Pregnancy" and the sub-theme "Understanding and Meeting Partner's Needs," revealing crucial insights. A total of 23 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 8 times, is Mood Swings during Pregnancy. This code encapsulates the fathers' experiences with the changes that their partners are experiencing. Intrinsic Fulfillment in Caregiving, which occurs four times, was the last to occur, underscoring the satisfaction that the fathers experience in taking care of their partner.

Participant 4's response reflects the care, concerns, and worries of impending fatherhood, capturing the anticipation felt by many expectant fathers. Participant 4 states,

"Hmm... when it comes to food, I do not know. She eats less when...when... now compared to before she got pregnant, so I worry about it... but I do not tell her because she might end up overeating... I do not mention it, but I worry... though her eating is still okay, just less than before."

This response highlights the worries and concerns fathers experience upon learning about their partner's pregnancy. It illustrates the importance of mutual support, understanding, and active involvement in ensuring the well-being of both partners.

Table 5. Codes and annotated exemplars on Understanding and Meeting Partner's Needs

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Mood Swings during Pregnancy	8	<i>"A lot ... there were a lot of surprising things... like my wife's mood swings were one of the things that surprised me... she became very emotional... so I adjusted by avoiding saying things that will trigger her to be emotional."</i>
Adhering to Partner's Needs	8	<i>"Pregnant women can easily get stressed, so as much as possible I keep my wife happy ... I gave her all the things that she wanted hahaha... because if there is something that they didn't like they will keep thinking about it that will lead them to being stressed sometimes they don't even say what's bothering them... they tend to hide it and keep it to themselves."</i>
Personal Monitoring of the partner's health status	3	<i>"We... we monitor the progression of her weight and the growth of her belly... as per the doctor's advice and also... what she eats... to see if it's unhealthy or not."</i>
Intrinsic Fulfillment in Caregiving	4	<i>"As a first-time mom, what she's dealing with isn't easy so I make sure... everyday that she knows how much I love her... ahh... being a father it's like every moment feels important and meaningful everyday I believed in my thoughts especially as the baby continued to grow... it's such a fulfilling and wonderful feeling."</i>

Participant 5 emphasized the physical needs of his partner. Participant 5 states,

"When we found out we went for a check-up right away after a week she was also the one who said that we needed to get checked then...if there is a need to take medication she is also the one who decided how much to take even though the doctor prescribed them but we are very cautious with medications...we do not take anything unless the doctor prescribes it."

This response focuses on the importance of meeting and fulfilling his partner's healthcare needs.

According to the study by Levy and Kotelchuck (2021), fathers were fascinated by how to keep up with their wives and partners prenatally. They were more interested in the stages of pregnancy. They rendered a captivated attitude of learning about their part in infancy and their baby's emotions and necessities. Fathers also wanted to discover more about what they must do for their partners to have a good pregnancy and childbirth. Fathers express clearly and inform that they long for further parenting skills and comprehension, proposing they wish to participate more actively and judiciously in the pregnancy.

Coordinated Decision-Making for Pregnancy Health and Wellness

Table 6 presents the codes and annotated exemplars on the experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards the antenatal involvement under the significant theme "Mutual Support in Pregnancy" and the sub-theme "Coordinated Decision-Making for Pregnancy Health and Wellness," revealing crucial insights. Thirty-two responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 11 times, is Prioritizing the child and the partner, which encapsulates fathers fulfilling their responsibilities and giving importance to their pregnant partners and child. The least code to appear is Self-Funded Check-up and other Pregnancy Expenses, emerging 5 times. It underscores the fathers' initiative to provide financial needs regarding check-ups and other expenses for their partners' pregnancy.

Table 6. Codes and annotated exemplars on Coordinated Decision-Making for Pregnancy Health and Wellness

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Mutual Care in Pregnancy	8	<i>"I always prepare breakfast and dinner whenever she comes home because she always eats lunch her, hahaha so yeah... those are the things I do for her... and then I also take care of her before she goes to sleep like that."</i>
Communicating responsibilities	8	<i>"Of course there's a lot to it because... as partners we're both open about everything like what she wants what I want... and what needs to be fixed."</i>
Prioritizing the child and the partner	11	<i>"Well... actually ever since she got pregnant it's been almost... like I've been the one taking care of everything... I've been handling things and I don't go out much anymore so I can focus on helping."</i>
Self-Funded Check-up and other Pregnancy Expenses	5	<i>"Ahh nothing yet... like the expenses are all on us... the medicine... the milk."</i>

Participant 1's response underscores the importance of shared responsibility about the mutual care and prioritization of the child and the partner in pregnancy. Participant 1 accentuated,

"It should be 100% ... I am always with her for check-ups... like after the check-up, then if she feels anything, I immediately attend to it."

This response emphasizes the need for fathers to remain focused and goal-oriented regarding supporting their partners through their partner's needs during pregnancy.

In the study by Trinitade et al. (2019), the primary defense of the accusations regarding the need for help during pregnancy was the child's development occurring inside the woman's body, resulting in the realization that their partner was the one in need of support throughout pregnancy. According to the study by Warren et al. (2022), fathers require help or support from all facets of the ecosystem, including policymakers, spouses, families, coworkers, friends, and primary care physicians, above all else. To develop a partnership in parenting, the father and his partner should always cooperate on everything, especially in making decisions, no matter how big or small the decision is.

Guidance and Support Systems

Table 7 reveals the codes and annotated exemplars on first-time fathers' experiences in antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards antenatal involvement under the significant theme "Mutual Support in Pregnancy" and the sub-theme "Guidance and Support Systems," revealing crucial insights. A total of 44 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 17 times, is Importance of Pregnancy and Childcare Knowledge. This code encapsulates the significance of being educated in providing care for children. Guidance of Health Care Providers was the least code to appear, emerging 6 times, capturing the complex array of experiences of first-time fathers from the support of the health care providers.

Table 7. Codes and annotated exemplars on Guidance and Support Systems

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Guidance of Health Care Providers	6	<i>"Ahh so when she had her check-up...ahm... she explained of course it's our first baby we didn't know what to expect... but when she had the check-up the baby was okay and we were reassured."</i>
Advice from other people about pregnancy and parenthood	7	<i>"It's just that...like if there's something we don't know or something we should be doing we just ask what's the best thing to do because it's our first time... we're not sure if what we're doing is right so we just ask during the check-up."</i>
Involvement of Parents in both parties	2	<i>"Actually our first plan was to let her parents know right away before we told my family, and we were able to do that. We were able to inform them."</i>
Support from family and relatives	8	<i>"My parents as well as her parents support us in everything that we need... because our house is here my apartment is far and it is in Sta. Rosa so we just stay there whenever she has a check-up."</i>
Support given by the government and NGOs	4	<i>"Ahm yes... we have like for medicine... yes those are free."</i>
Importance of Pregnancy and Childcare Knowledge	17	<i>"I'm just learning online so I don't have actual hands-on experience yet that's what is pressuring me because once the baby is here I'm not sure if I can handle it... like bathing the baby I'm not sure if the things I've learned online will really help..."</i>

Participant 3 emphasizes the importance and relevance of support from family and relatives, recognizing it as a foundation for creating an assuring and inclusive future for their family. Participant 3 states,

"Support? Of course, there is support... like her grandparents are there... whenever we need help."

This response stressed the significance of family support in ensuring belongingness and providing assurance to help manage any worries or concerns during pregnancy.

Participant 10 underscored the significance of the support given by other government and non-government organizations. Participant 10 states,

"In our work, for example, when your wife is pregnant, the company provides some help... like they give assistance, but most of the time it's just food packages they give." Participant 10's response indicates the value of receiving support from different kinds of organizations, including food, financial, or other types of support.

These codes, which appeared in the participants' responses, are supported by the study of Hodgson et al. (2021), which reported that first-time fathers seek help and support from health professionals and are grateful for the care their pregnant partners receive.

3.4 Active Engagement in Prenatal Care

Proactive Involvement in Check-ups

Table 8 depicts the codes and annotated exemplars on the experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards antenatal involvement under the significant theme "Active Engagement in Prenatal Care" and the sub-theme "Proactive Involvement in Check-ups," revealing crucial insights. A total of 24 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 18 times, is Active Involvement in Check-up. This code encapsulates the father's engagement in check-ups, showing the importance of consulting a doctor about their partner's feelings. The code Regular Check-up was the least to appear, emerging 6 times, underscoring the importance of fathers having a routine medical appointment to assess their partners' pregnancies.

Table 8. Codes and annotated exemplars on Proactive Involvement in Check-ups

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Active Involvement in Check-ups	18	<i>"Mmm... what... what I thought was to always have regular check-ups for my wife and the baby's health as well as hers... I want us to always attend the check-ups and consult the doctor about any issues my wife is feeling... as much as possible we should tell the doctor everything she's experiencing if there are any."</i>
Regular Check-up	6	<i>"Ahh we had a check-up... uhm our first step was to have a check-up... with her doctor which is her OB then uhm... after that... we were scheduled for monthly check-ups."</i>

Participant 4 states,

"Ahh.. as the baby's father, maybe 100% I should be involved."

These responses highlight the dedication of fathers to active participation.

Participant 5's reflection underscores the underlying barriers that hinder them from always attending to their partners' needs. Participant 5 expresses,

"Well, I cannot say that I am hands-on... all day because I also have work... but as long as I am here, I am with her... I am always... doing household chores, I do not rely on her... we are not allowed to stop working at the same time... so there is... her sister is there... we discussed who will be with her... I cannot promise that I will always be the one to accompany her."

This response highlights the limitations fathers experienced. Due to some constraints, they could not attend check-ups regularly with their partners.

Numerous fathers reported involvement in antenatal care as a deliberate affirmation to themselves and their pregnant partners that they are willing and will be a part of the pregnancy (Walsh et al., 2021).

Managing Emotional Well-being Amidst Work and Prenatal Responsibilities

Table 9 presents the codes and annotated exemplars on the experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards antenatal involvement under the significant theme "Active Engagement in Prenatal Care" and the sub-theme "Managing Emotional Well-being Amidst Work and Prenatal Responsibilities," revealing crucial insights. A total of 29 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. The most prevalent code, which occurs 8 times, is Challenges in the Early Stages, which reflects the father's problems in the early stages of their partners' pregnancy. Less involvement due to work schedule emerged the least, occurring 6 times, stating that fathers' engagement is being lessened due to their work schedule.

Table 9. Codes and annotated exemplars on Managing Emotional Well-being Amidst Work and Prenatal Responsibilities

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Challenges in the Early Stages	8	<i>"During the first trimester it was hard for her because she felt dizzy every afternoon I would come home from work and the household chores were still up to me because she felt dizzy... We just faced the situation as it came and dealt with it."</i>
Handling the partner's pregnancy symptoms	7	<i>"She always has... I noticed that she kept asking me to buy what she wanted... she would feel dizzy and nauseous... something like that."</i>
Less involvement due to work schedule	6	<i>"Well, I can't really say that I'm hands-on the whole day because I also have work..."</i>
Sacrifices to Prioritize the partner's needs	8	<i>"I really had to take a leave... it's just that work had to be sacrificed to improve things if I stayed around more... especially during childbirth."</i>

Participant 2 emphasizes the struggles of how they handle their pregnant partners at the beginning of their pregnancy. Participant 2 states,

"Maybe it is just the cravings... her pregnancy... I do not think I was prepared for that... the first trimester was difficult because she felt dizzy every afternoon, and I would come home from work, so I had to take care of the household chores since she was feeling dizzy... I just faced it head-on... whatever the situation was... I just dealt with it."

This response highlights the significance of handling the challenges well to meet their partner's needs.

Participant 4's response underscores the value of being aware of the fathers regarding the changes in emotions at the beginning of the pregnancy. Participant 4 states,

"There were many surprising things... like my wife's mood swings. One of the things that surprised me was how emotional she became..."

This response highlights the father's response after they witnessed the changes during this period.

These responses agree with the study by Gibore et al. (2019), wherein they stated that employed fathers have a lower level of involvement in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners due to the time they spend waiting for their partners. Franzen et al. (2021) explain that pregnancy and childbirth are major family adjustments, with both parents facing significant changes. First-time fathers often experience emotional challenges such as adapting to their partner's physical symptoms (e.g., dizziness) and heightened emotions, including mood swings. These transitions require patience, understanding, and active involvement to navigate effectively.

Commitment to Medical Advice and Care

Table 10 shows the codes and annotated exemplars on the experiences of first-time fathers in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners towards antenatal involvement under the significant theme "Active Engagement in Prenatal Care" and the sub-theme "Commitment to Medical Advice and Care," revealing crucial insights. A total of 11 responses were coded, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sub-theme. Adherence to Doctor's Advice and Prescriptions is the most common code, occurring six times. This code states the importance of obeying the doctor's input and prescriptions. The code Advice from non-health professionals but experienced adults appeared the least, which emerged 5 times. This code indicates the significance of listening to advice concerning pregnancy. Advice from the elderly helped them to know more about the pregnancy, which guided them in having a safe pregnancy.

Table 10. Codes and annotated exemplars on Commitment to Medical Advice and Care

Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplar from the Interview
Adherence to Doctor's Advice and Prescriptions	6	<i>"If she had to take medicine she would decide how much to take even if the doctor prescribed it but we were very cautious with medicines... if it wasn't prescribed by the doctor we really didn't let her take it."</i>
Advice from non-health professionals but experienced adults	5	<i>"What the elders say we were able to apply as well... in that way we learned more about handling the situation and ensuring the safety of pregnancy and childbirth."</i>

Participant 5's response expresses that they seek consultations and consider advice from their doctors regarding medical prescriptions. Participant 5 states,

"The doctor reminded her about... what needed to be done and prescribed vitamins for her."

This response interprets that they trust their doctors when managing the mother and child's health.

In the study by Chawla (2023), the fathers actively participated in their pregnant partners' prenatal visits and took extra care of them regarding nutritional needs and physical support. The study highlights the role of antenatal care in supporting maternal and fetal health, emphasizing the importance of regular check-ups, guidance from healthcare providers, and prescribed supplements to ensure well-being (Ali et al., 2018).

The virtual representation of themes in Figure 1 coherently depicts the interrelationship between the major themes and their corresponding sub-themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in the transition to parenthood. Illustrated by a first-time father with his wife at the center, the depiction signifies the pivotal moment of entering parenthood. Surrounding them are circles representing the sub-themes, each connected to its respective central theme, facilitating a visual understanding of the thematic structure.

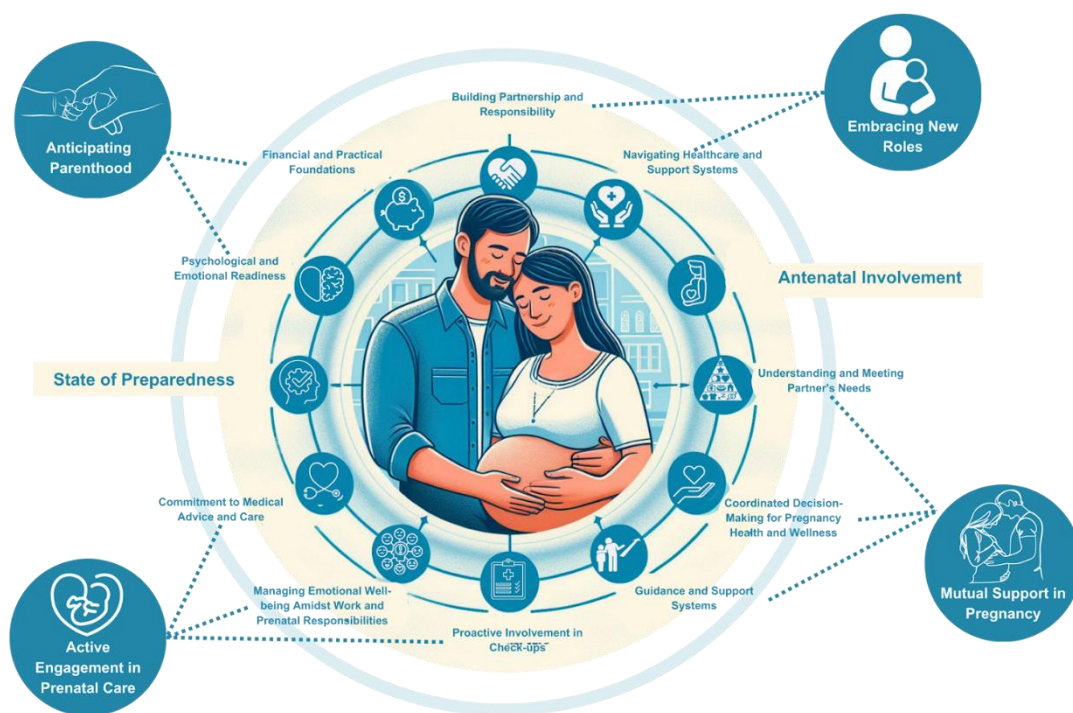


Figure 1. First-Time Fathers' Experiences in Antenatal Care

4.0 Conclusion

According to the study's findings, the researchers concluded that first-time fathers are willing to participate in the antenatal care of their pregnant partners because fatherhood gives them satisfaction and fulfillment. Even though some of the participants' experiences of pregnancy were unplanned, they still enjoyed and were excited about it. This led to another conclusion that fatherhood is a significant part of life for men, and even with anxiety and worry, they are still willing to face it. On the other hand, the researchers also concluded that first-time fathers do not think that antenatal care is predominantly for women because both of them are involved in this process. First-time fathers are also aware of the pressure that their partners experience in bearing a child, which leads them to understand that it is not easy and that they need to give their support and care for a successful pregnancy.

Based on the research findings, the researchers encourage the nurses and nurse-midwives to fulfill their role as educators during this period, not only for pregnant women but also first-time fathers. The researchers encourage them to implement programs for first-time fathers focusing on the process of pregnancy. Monitoring and having a list of first-time fathers could help them know who needs guidance about entering fatherhood. Future researchers should explore the experiences during antenatal, intranasal, and postnatal care. This will help uncover the genuine needs of first-time fathers and determine suitable strategies for meeting those needs effectively.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

This research paper results from a collaborative effort, with LR leading the team and contributing significantly to the Statement of the Problem, Assumptions, Theoretical Perspective, and Data Analysis. JA authored the Introduction and Research Design and contributed to Data Collection. IB focused on the significance of the study and the development of research instruments. SH designed the Theoretical Framework and ensured ethical standards. AU outlined the Scope and Limitations, contributed to the research context, and drafted the conclusion. All team members played an active role in data gathering. The success of this paper was also guided by the expertise of MQ, the Thesis Professor, who provided overall academic direction, and VL, the Thesis Adviser, who offered continuous mentorship and feedback throughout the process.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The study authors affirm that there were no conflicts of interest. Throughout the research process, no financial, personal, or professional affiliations influenced the study findings' design, implementation, or reporting.

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